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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

EXPLORATORY OBSERVATIONS ON SOME WEEPING PILGRIMS T.H. Barrett

Despite the overtly secular complexion of Chinese thought which has impressed Western writers since the time of Origen, a glance at the works preserved in the Chinese Buddhist and Taoist canons is sufficient to establish that China also possessed men and women of a deeply religious cast of mind. Yet Chinese religious literature is disappointingly impersonal in tone: the late development of religious autobiography in China, the relative blandness of most religious poetry—even though poetry was the most personal and intimate medium used by the Chinese—means that we have no Chinese St. Augustine, no one who speaks to us across the centuries in his or her own voice.¹

This is particularly disappointing in the case of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, men like Fa-hsien (died c. 422), Hsüan-tsang (600–664) and I-ching (635–713) whose heroism in making the arduous journey to the Indian heartland of Buddhism was justly remembered by later ages in China long after that heartland had itself ceased to exist. It is customary, and necessary, to caution against depicting their journeys as pilgrimages in the conventional sense: the principle motive which impelled these three to risk an early death in a foreign land was an ardent desire to bring back more of the Buddha's word to China, in order to alleviate spiritual darkness in their own home country. But although their immediate purposes were to become translators, so that their journeyings relate in some ways more to those of the colporteur rather than the pilgrim, the underlying problem which they were addressing rendered their geographical destination a place of far greater spiritual attraction than the average library.

For, flying in the face of a predominant Chinese cultural chauvinism, these men insisted on accepting Indian rather than Chinese claims to the title of 'Central Kingdom'. This was no easy transfer of allegiance: as one of Hsüan-tsang's

¹ For religious autobiography in China see Pei-yi Wu, "The Spiritual Autobiography of Te-ch'ing", in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, Ithaca, NY, Columbia University Press, 1975, 67–91. For religious poetry, note the remarks of Burton Watson on page 11 of his *Cold Mountain*, Ithaca, NY, Columbia University Press, 1970, and that Han-shan, the subject of his translation, is only partially exempted from his strictures. Cf. also Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981, 282, on the lack of religious poetry among poet-monks. The sayings of the great Ch'an (Zen) masters certainly speak to us on occasion with an extraordinary directness, but here fragments of conversation, rather than literary compositions, are usually involved.

contemporaries makes clear in discussing the controversial question of the (to the true Buddhist) peripheral position of Chinese civilization, it entailed an acceptance of an implicit spiritual inferiority for all Chinese, since personal karmic forces were held to determine not only one's own station in life but also the whole environment in which one found oneself.² To have witnessed the Buddha's own preaching in India was a sure sign of past spiritual effort; to live in China a millennium later (to say nothing of London in A.D. 1988) was in itself an indictment for past failings.

Thus the journey from the borders of Buddhist civilization to the very sites which generations of pilgrims associated with the activities of the Buddha was one fraught with spiritual significance. No wonder, then, that the sustained impersonality of the narrative of their travels does briefly break down once at the climactic point of Fa-hsien's journey, and twice in the case of Hsüan-tsang: once where he reaches his first major Indian pilgrimage site, once where he visits the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. Three times in all we find our pilgrims unambiguously moved by what they see to the point of tears.³ These records are not strictly speaking autobiography, since even Fa-hsien's recollections, though apparently relatively unadorned, did (as their final page shows) pass through the hands of an unknown literary man, while Hsüan-tsang's life was written up by a disciple. Yet here at last, one might think, we find a personal touch.

On the contrary, these rare glimpses of human emotion, far from increasing our sensation of familiarity with these men, only makes them appear more alien once we realise that these were not tears of joy and relief at having achieved a goal much sought for. East Asian Buddhists were surely not incapable of such feelings—we may in all likelihood find them in the tears of Ennin, the Japanese pilgrim, in A.D.

² Cf. Tao-hsüan, *Shih-chia fang-chih* 1, 948c–950c (in Taishō Canon, vol. 51), which provides a seventh-century presentation of the Buddhist case, referring back (page 949a) to earlier debate in Fa-hsien's time; on page 950b, col. 1, he uses the term *i-pao* to express the karmic determination of environment. A recent survey of the debate is Yoshikawa Tadao, "Chūdo, hendo no ronsō", *Shisō* 579 (September, 1972), 70–86; cf. also E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, Leiden, 1959, 266. Note that particularly numinous Buddhist localities in China were sometimes deemed to be fragments of India transported thither by magical means, and for an updated retelling of one such legend see Wang Hui-ming, *Folk Tales of the West Lake*, Peking, 1982, 27–32; cf. also E. Reischauer, *Ennin's Diary: The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*, New York, 1955, 240.

³ For Fa-hsien's journey I refer to James Legge, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, New York, 1965 repr. Oxford, 1886, and for Hsüan-tsang's travels I use Hui-li's biography in the translation of Samuel Beal, *The Life of Hiuen-tsiang*, Westport, Conn., 1973, reprint of London, 1911, but have checked these against the editions in the Taishō. In the latter case, and in the case of the Hsi-yü chi, I have also made use of the annotated editions published in Peking in 1983 and 1985 respectively. Samuel Beal, Si-yu ki, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Delhi, 1981, reprint of London, 1884, translates the *Hsi-yü chi*, though this imperially-sponsored report by Hsüan-tsang on India and the way thither in no sense approaches autobiography. A fourth passage from Fa-hsien might in my opinion be added to the three discussed below: see Legge, *Buddhistic Kingdoms*, 57–8. Here, however, there is, to judge by the text, some possibility that the melancholy experienced by the pilgrim was influenced by his recollection of the companions who had died on the journey or turned back, so I leave it aside from now on.

840 on first catching sight of the Wu-t'ai mountains, a famous Chinese pilgrimage site which had cost him months of wrangling with bureaucrats before he could reach it.⁴ But at any rate the biographers of Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang do not depict relief and joy; far from it. They do not even suggest that the pilgrims' sorrow could have been due to feelings of human inadequacy when confronted with a particularly numinous environment—at least no emotions after the fashion of Isaiah's "Woe is me! for I am undone."

Rather, the tone of their remarks suggests a surprising negativity and pessimism, so much so that one scholar has adduced Fa-hsien's experience to prove that as pilgrims the Chinese travellers found that they had wasted their time utterly.⁵ There are, indeed, stronger echoes of *Ozymandias* than of the more triumphal pages of *Pilgrim's Progress* in the comments on sacred places attributed to Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang; I shall even argue that I-ching's remarks as well suggest that he was deliberately keeping a stiff upper lip. Why? If ordinary pilgrims in India or China (and there were clearly plenty) all found pilgrimage sites so distressing, surely the practice of pilgrimage would have died out. Then how could men who were outwardly virtuosi of the pilgrim world turn out to be inwardly such failures? The answer is not obvious.

What is obvious is that the more general experience of Chinese pilgrims must be examined carefully for unique features without trying necessarily to reconcile it with patterns of pilgrimage elsewhere. It has already been pointed out by Raoul Birnbaum that the categories established by Victor Turner for discussing pilgrimage as such do not work well in China, and in particular a distinction must be drawn for China between pilgrimages performed by groups and those undertaken by individuals.⁶ Since our three travellers do not seem always to have kept company with a group of companions nor to have proceeded from station to station along some regular route between pilgrimage sites, but to have come and gone in a more random fashion, it may be presumed that they must be treated as individuals. Even leaving aside the matter of their bibliographic preoccupations, rather than call their tours of holy places pilgrimages at all the label of 'quest' may be more appropriate—such was the construction placed upon the exploits of Hsüan-tsang by later imaginative literature in China, in the view of some scholars.⁷

⁴ Cf. Reischauer, *Ennin's Diary*, 214.

⁵ Viz. K.M. Schipper, on pages 338–39 of "Les pèlerinages en Chine: montagnes et pistes", in Anne-Marie Esnoul, *et al.*, eds., *Sources Orientales III, Les Pèlerinages*, Paris, 1960, 303–42. On page 191 of Claude Jacques, "Les pèlerinages en Inde", *ibid.*, 157–97, will be found a statement of the positive benefits held by Indian Buddhists to accrue from pilgrimages to key sites connected with the Buddha's life.

⁶ Raoul Birnbaum, on pages 10–11, and in notes 7 and 8, pages 22–3, of his "Thoughts on T'ang Buddhist Mountain Traditions and their Context", *T'ang Studies*, 2, Winter, 1984, 5–23. Birnbaum himself draws the distinction somewhat differently (at note 8), but in note 8 itself gives a Mexican analogy concerning distinct communal and individual pilgrimages and applies the latter to his Chinese investigations.

⁷ Cf. James S. Fu, *Mythic and Comic Aspects of the Quest: Hsi-yu Chi as seen through Don Quixote and Huckleberry Finn*, Singapore, 1977. The novel *Hsi-yu chi* (*Monkey*, to readers of Arthur Waley) has also been compared with the *Odyssey*. Pilgrimages and quests do not sort themselves out neatly into separate categories—Birnbaum (see preceding note) uses both terms for the same thing—but it is possible to suggest criteria that may be relevant in distinguishing them. Thus the pilgrimage even of a single individual replicates other pilgrimages, past or future, by other individuals or groups, whilst the quest remains an event of unique significance, even if undertaken by several different people at different times. Pilgrimage tends to emphasize the process; the quest emphasizes the goal.

But Chinese attitudes towards holy places as they appear in literary sources are yet more significant than any peculiarities in their interpretation of the pilgrimage phenomenon taken as a whole. The words used in Chinese accounts of Indian pilgrimage sites vary: we read of *i-chi*, ‘remaining *chi*’; *ku-chi*, ‘ancient *chi*’; or *sheng-chi*, ‘holy *chi*’. *Chi* was a key term in the thought of mediaeval China, and in its widest meaning it embraced all the phenomenal world.⁸ But its basic meaning was more limited: it meant a footprint, especially animal tracks or spoor which revealed the existence somewhere of something alive and moving but not present and visible to the naked eye. With such an etymology it is no surprise that the Indian cult of the Buddha’s footprints had no trouble in establishing itself in East Asia.⁹

From an early stage, however, the word became associated with written materials—one is reminded of Marc Bloch, in *The Historian’s Craft*, writing “what do we really mean by *document*, if it is not a ‘track’, as it were—the mark, perceptible to the senses, which some phenomenon, in itself inaccessible, has left behind.”¹⁰

The Chinese association was in fact originally quite literal: ancient sages were alleged both to have been inspired by the patterns formed by animal tracks to invent the mystic trigrams of the *Book of Changes* and to have devised the Chinese writing system itself after observing the footprints of birds: ‘bird-*chi*’ became in mediaeval times an elegant synonym for ‘writing’.¹¹ As a result some of the terms used in the pilgrim accounts are actually ambiguous: ‘remaining *chi*’ can be used of literary remains as well as more substantial antiquities.¹² What the pilgrims saw, then, might be termed an ‘archaeological record’, except that such a translation would have none of the heavily emotive overtones of the original Chinese.

For the word *chi*, an effaceable and perhaps fragmentary ‘trace’, closely associated with the written word, denoted a key element in the process of

⁸ Cf. Yoshikawa Tadao, on pages 138–39 of his “Rikuchō shidaifu no seishin seikatsu”, in *Iwanami kōza sekai rekishi*, 5, Tokyo, 1970, 123–55, and Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 91, 133, 266.

⁹ Cf. Sakazumi Shūichi, “Bussokuseki reihai yōtai kō”, *Risshō Daigaku Daigakuin kiyō* 1, 1985, 57–69, and the earlier research cited therein.

¹⁰ P. Putnam, tr., M. Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, Manchester, 1955, 55. Bloch states that he is borrowing this metaphor from François Simiand.

¹¹ Cf. Vincent Yu-chung Shih, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, Hong Kong, Chinese University Press, 16–17, 336–7.

¹² See e.g. K’ung Ying-ta, in *Ch’üan T’ang Wen*, 146, Palace edition, 1814, 4a.

remembrance, the axis around which the whole cosmos of the Chinese high cultural tradition revolved. To try to describe the crucial importance of recalling the past for all Chinese educated in that tradition cannot easily be done in a few sentences. But fortunately a short and very brilliant book entitled *Remembrances* has recently been published by Stephen Owen which explains with admirable lucidity the Chinese experience of the past as part of mankind's wider experience. Here the book's opening paragraphs will have to stand for the whole:

“Classical Chinese literature made a promise, early in its history, that it would be a means to perpetuate the self of the good writer. Such promises of literary immortality are, of course, not unfamiliar in the Western tradition; but through its long history the Chinese tradition increasingly stressed a grand and quixotic qualification of that promise: it would transmit not simply the name but the very ‘content’ of the self, so that the later-born might truly know the person by reading the work. It was a promise fraught with anxieties and difficulties in proportion to the powerful hopes it raised.

One consequence of this potent lure was that classical Chinese literature internalized its hopes, made them one of its central topics, and everywhere concerned itself with intense experience of the past. The fundamental rule was the reaffirmation of a contract made with the past and future: “As I remember, so may I hope to be remembered”. In this way classical literature constantly doubled back on itself, inscribing the form of its hopes on its own internal actions and seeking in the past the repetition of those doublings in the actions and writings of predecessors. Yet every strong hope is mated to a corresponding fear. Thus the fear of loss and of some illegible fading away was always present to darken the hope of some permanent ‘writing the self’.

In the tradition of Western discourse on literature there continually recurs, as the emblem of literature, the figure of Truth wearing a veil. The text is a vestment, opaque or transparent, outlining for the imagination, yet at the same time concealing, the sweet body within. There is always a gap, a space between the text and its meaning, between surface appearance and truth. The master figure for this mode of knowing is metaphor, the word that conceals and reveals, the word that tells truth and tells lies.

This mode of knowing does occur commonly in Chinese classical literature, but it is secondary to another mode of knowing. Here also we find a gap, but of a different sort, a gap of time, effacement, and memory. The master figure here is synecdoche, the part that leads to the whole, some enduring fragment from which we try to reconstruct the lost totality. It has a ritual counterpart in the necessity of having some article of clothing of the dead person when performing the ceremony of summoning the soul. In this tradition the experience of the past roughly corresponds to and

carries the same force as the attention to meaning or truth in the Western tradition.”¹³

Owen is, of course, not the first to have noticed the importance of the past in Chinese literature, but he is the first to give a general account of it not tied to specific genres overtly dealing with the past, such as the *huai-ku shih* or ‘poem recalling antiquity’, which has prompted the following remarks:

“This kind of poetry is of course by no means unique; one comes across similar examples in Western poetry. But where a Western poet might moralize about the frailty of human achievements in contrast to the eternal power of God, a Chinese poet is usually content to lament the former and leave it at that. Some agnostic European poets, however, come very close to the Chinese attitude. Shelley’s *Ozymandias*, for instance, would pass admirably for a ‘poem recalling antiquity’...”¹⁴

The immediate precursor of Owen’s book is, however, an essay by his teacher, Hans Frankel, entitled “The Contemplation of the Past in T’ang Poetry”, which was published in 1973. This moves beyond poems clearly labelled as dealing with the past in their titles to other examples marked more by associated topoi such as ascending to a high place than by overt statements of purpose. Summarizing his findings, he writes:

“Mountains, besides being symbols of durability, are also the sites where history is recorded and remembered, and climbing a mountain is one of the topoi conventionally associated with our category... The physical scene often contains visible reminders of the past, such as ruins, tombs, or inscriptions... The descriptive passages tend to operate with the contrast between what is visible and what for various reasons remains invisible, and this contrast becomes another reason for lamenting the general law of decay: the remaining vestiges of the past are characterized as ‘few’, ‘empty’, and ‘vain’.”¹⁵

His full list of topoi has been expressed even more succinctly:

“(1) ascent to a high place; (2) looking into the distance in conjunction with viewing the past; (3) the durability of rivers and mountains as a contrast to human transience; (4) reference to historical personalities and

¹³ Stephen Owen, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1986, 1–2.

¹⁴ James J.Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1962, 53.

¹⁵ Hans Frankel, on pages 364–5 of his “The Contemplation of the Past in T’ang Poetry”, in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the T’ang*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973, 345–65.

extant relics of the past; (5) description of a landscape devoid of historical association; and (6) tears.”¹⁶

Am I suggesting in the light of this type of poetry that the traces of the past found by Chinese pilgrims at Indian pilgrimage sites were considered by their biographers under item (4) and hence produced item (6)? That the descriptions of their experiences simply lapsed at these key points into literary cliché, and that they do not necessarily record personal emotion at all? No, the matter is not quite so simple. But it is now necessary to turn to the documents themselves to elucidate fully the various factors involved. Earliest is Fa-hsien’s visit to the hill known as Vulture Peak, so called because

“...Ānanda was sitting in meditation when the deva Māra Piśuna, having assumed the form of a large vulture, took his place in the front of the cavern where he was, and frightened the disciple. Then the Buddha, by his mysterious, supernatural power, made a cleft in the rock, introduced his hand, and stroked Ānanda’s shoulder, so that his fear immediately passed away. The footprints of the bird and the cleft for the Buddha’s hand are still there, and hence comes the name.”

After toiling up to this place, Fa-hsien found little else besides these marks:

“The hall where the Buddha preached his dharma has been destroyed, and only the foundations of the brick walls remain. On this hill the peak is beautifully green, and rises grandly up; it is the highest of all the five hills... He felt melancholy, but restrained his tears and said “Here the Buddha delivered the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra*. I, Fa-hsien, was born when I could not meet the Buddha; and now I only see the footprints which he has left, and the place where he lived, and nothing more.”¹⁷

Some of the themes touched upon here have already been clarified; others are less apparent. “I was born when I could not meet the Buddha” looks like a statement of the obvious, but is actually an item on the list of ‘eight sad conditions’ blocking apprehension of the Buddha’s message,¹⁸ along with items

¹⁶ Elling O. Eide, on page 387 of his “On Li Po”, in Wright and Twitchett, *Perspectives on the T’ang*, 367–03.

¹⁷ Cf. Legge, *Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, 83. The standard hagiographic account by Hui-chiao in his *Kao-seng chuan* emphasizes different elements in describing Fa-hsien’s excursion up the mountain, such as his calm reaction to the appearance of ferocious lions: cf. Robert Shih, *Biographies des moines éminents (Kao Seng Tchouan) de Houei-kiao*, Louvain, 1968, 110–11. The mountain as a source of occult knowledge surrounded by fearsome hazards is a theme well established prior to Fa-hsien: see e.g. James Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion in the China of A.D. 320*, Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1966, 279–300.

¹⁸ This list is a commonplace of Chinese Buddhist texts, and is mentioned in passing in such well-known works as the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, the *Kuan P’u-hsien p’u-sa hsing fa ching* etc. See e.g. Charles Luk, *The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sutra*, Berkeley and London, 1972, 11.

such as living in a peripheral land. Unease about the amount of time that had passed since the death of the Buddha increased rapidly during the period separating Fa-hsien's visit from those of Hsüan-tsang and I-ching, overshadowing by far sensitivity about China's peripheral position. In the sixth century these fears were given new shape by the translation of texts outlining the stages whereby the influence of the Buddha's teaching were destined to decline.¹⁹

The scheme most commonly adopted by the Chinese was threefold. It asserted that for five hundred years true Buddhist doctrine would survive; for a further one thousand years only a semblance of that doctrine would remain; for ten thousand years after that the merest residue would persist; and thereafter nothing more would be heard of Buddhism until the advent of the next Buddha, Maitreya, after a total interval of 5,600,000,000 years had elapsed.²⁰ What was worse, earlier efforts by Chinese Buddhists aimed at placing the date of the Buddha's life at an impossibly distant point in time so as to confer upon him even greater antiquity than Confucius meant that by their reckoning the third period was already upon them.²¹

The pervasive influence of this disturbing notion during the seventh century of our era may be detected in Hsüan-tsang's account of his visit to present-day Hadda in Afghanistan, then part of the kingdom of Nagarahāra. The area was well endowed with relics, including footprints of the Buddha.²² But most famous of all was a "Cave of the Buddha's Shadow", which had been celebrated in China even before (the completion of) Fa-hsien's travels,²³ and which had been visited both by him and by later Chinese pilgrims.²⁴ According to local legend the Buddha had left his shadow upon the cave wall in response to a request from a dragon-king, who felt utterly dependent upon the beneficial presence of the Buddha to restrain his more violent impulses and worried about what might happen after the Buddha's departure from this world. The shadow apparently constituted an effective substitute, and could even preach. In Fa-hsien's day it does not seem that any difficulty was encountered in discerning it, but a text rendered into Chinese at this time does speak specifically of the phenomenon enduring for one thousand five hundred years.²⁵ In the light of the subsequent calculations mentioned above this

¹⁹ David W. Chappell, "Early Forebodings of the Death of Buddhism", *Numen*, 27, 1980, 122–54.

²⁰ The most famous Chinese statement of this doctrine may be found in the "Vow of Hui-ssu", a work produced in the sixth century: cf. the translation in Paul Magnin, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Huisi*, Paris, 1979, 206–7.

²¹ Cf. Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, 273, for a date commonly accepted from the sixth century onwards, and the reasoning for it.

²² Cf. W.J.F. Jenner, *Memories of Loyang*, Oxford, OUP, 1983, 270, for a translation of one description of the area by a Chinese visitor. French and Japanese archaeological surveys of the surviving antiquities have also been published.

²³ See Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, 224, 400.

²⁴ Fa-hsien's account is in Legge, *Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, 39; see the two preceding notes for some references to other visits.

²⁵ Cf. Buddhahadra, trans., *Kuan-fo san-mei hai ching*, 7, 681a, in the edition of the Taishō Canon, vol 1, 15.

figure began to look distinctly sinister. Hsüan-tsang's biography suggests that seeing the shadow was no longer regarded by him at any rate as a mere matter of course. After risking his life at the hands of brigands, he had to prostrate himself well over four hundred times, reciting scriptures and psalms and tearfully reproaching himself for his past misdeeds the while,²⁶ before he was vouchsafed a vision of the holy trace.²⁷ Only in his official report on the site does he record the confident prophecy of the Buddha that "When the true dharma disappears, the shadow will suffer no change".²⁸

His official report on Gayā, where he saw not only the tree under which the Buddha achieved his enlightenment but also a depiction of the scene miraculously provided for the edification of later ages by Maitreya, the Buddha to be, gives by contrast a palpable hint of his own experience there: "Those who see these sights feel a spontaneous surge of sorrowful emotions".²⁹ This is, however, a relatively bland summary of what seems to have been for him a protracted bout of profound emotional turmoil. According to his best-known biography, after throwing himself to the ground and grieving most sorrowfully, he sighed in his distress:

"When the Buddha achieved his enlightenment, in what realm of existence was I swirling, drowning? Now I have reached this place at last when only a semblance of his teaching survives, I think on how heavy my past burden of bad *karma* must be, and my eyes fill with tears of sorrow."³⁰

Even this is restrained by comparison with his biography in a contemporary *Who's Who* of eminent clerics, which has him swooning right away, regaining consciousness long enough only to reproach himself for having been born in a degenerate age and having lived his earlier life in outer darkness before collapsing again. Yet more poignantly, he recovers eventually only to regret that for all the earnestness of his approach to these relics, he was rewarded with no miracle.³¹ All this insecurity and self-doubt, all this seeking for a sign, seems qualitatively far removed from the decorous melancholy of the poetry studied by Frankel, Owen and others concerned with secular literature.

The key difference here, as only Owen appears to have realised, is that any gesture towards the past in Chinese literature is simultaneously a gesture towards the future. One does find in poetry of this type expressions of despair over the

²⁶ Beal's "shortcomings" (see next note) translates a phrase referring to the burden of karma: *cf.* the translation in The Chinese Buddhist Association, *The Life of Hsuan-tsang*, Peking, 1959, 61.

²⁷ Beal, *Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, 61–2.

²⁸ Beal, *Si-yu ki*, 94.

²⁹ Beal, *Si-yu ki*, 122, under-translates as 'religious emotions'.

³⁰ Beal, *Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, 105, and Arthur Waley, *The Real Tripitaka*, London, 1962, 44.

³¹ Tao-hsüan, ed., *Hsü Kao-seng chuan*, 4, 451a, in the edition of the Taishō Canon, vol. 50.

futility of human existence which are dramatic, even violent: “I slash the river with my sword: the river flows right on”.³²

But such apparent cries *de profundis* are not in secular poetry addressed to any unseen observer of all our actions such as stands in the background of European literature³³ rather, it is part of the creation of an image of the self which may find a response among readers of a later age.³⁴ To Chinese Buddhist monks brought up in this literary culture, Indian pilgrimage sites both aroused and denied any such expectations. In the case of the Buddha’s shadow there was even a fortuitous overtone to the conflict, since in one of the most famous philosophical poems of Fa-hsien’s era ‘shadow’ stands for posthumous reputation.³⁵ Yet, as Owen observes, the Buddhist religion, in rejecting the existence of the self, ruled out a personal response to the past predicated upon future reactions to one’s personality.³⁶ Even if it had not, their pessimistic outlook on the future of the faith left Buddhists with little hope of vindication by others as yet unborn by comparison with the secular writer, for whom an equally strong sense of decline since a Golden Age of antiquity was mitigated by the belief that the processes of cyclical change such as those described in the *Book of Changes* might soon (and not after aeons of time) restore the *status quo ante*.

But perhaps the most striking difference between these pilgrims and their lay contemporaries in China is the way the doctrine of karma forces them to turn upon themselves when faced with the gap between past and present. Many educated Chinese from Confucius onward felt themselves to have been born in evil times, but in their case it was the times (or maybe a vague providence, ‘Heaven’) which deserved the blame, not themselves; indeed their failure to accord with the age simply confirmed for them their own spiritual nobility.³⁷ A visit to an ancient site could (and did, provide an excellent opportunity to declare such feelings, perhaps even in an inscription for future visitors to read.³⁸

³² The full text of this famous poem does not entirely adhere to the conventions discussed by Frankel, since the poet ascends not a mountain but a tower associated with a fellow-poet of earlier times; the sentiments of the poem nonetheless conform loosely to the pattern already described. Cf. François Cheng (tr. Donald A. Riggs and Jerome P. Seaton), *Chinese Poetic Writing*, Indiana University Press, 1982, 178.

³³ I have in mind a study by A.D. Nuttall, *Overheard by God*, London, 1980.

³⁴ Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry*, 137–8.

³⁵ See pages 178–9 of R. Mather, “The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness during the Six Dynasties”, *History of Religions*, 9.2–3 Nov., Feb., 1969–1970, 160–80.

³⁶ Owen, *Remembrances*, 15.

³⁷ This is also a familiar literary theme, for which see e.g. Hellmut Wilhelm, “The Scholar’s Frustration: Notes on a Type of Fu”, in J.K. Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1957, 310–19. Cf. also Owen’s discussion following pages 56–57 in *Remembrances*.

³⁸ I have in mind in particular a piece by the eighth/ninth-century thinker Li Ao, on whom I intend to publish a monograph shortly, to be found in his “Collected Works”, *Li Wen-kung chi*, 5.31b (*Ssu-pu ts’ung-k’an* edition): the final chapter of the monograph will explicate the significance of this.

For the Buddhist there was only one legitimate hope, and that we find articulated with exemplary persistence by I-ching. I-ching was certainly well aware of the way in which secular Chinese culture viewed traces of the ancient past. On the occasion of an excursion with a fellow-Chinese to Vulture Peak he even composed a lengthy poem of formidable erudition which initially conforms precisely to the norms established for the recall of times past. The opening lines of his composition even prompt his translator, Chavannes, to anticipate Frankel's type of analysis: "L'intention de ce premier paragraphe me paraît être d'opposer le déclin de la religion bouddhique et le délabrement de ses lieux saints à la nature toujours jeune et immortelle".³⁹ Following this passage I-ching permits himself to regret his having been born too late to meet the Buddha. But he then turns to a lengthy encomium on the Buddha's virtues before coming back to his own mission, for which he disclaims any motive other than a pure desire to spread the Buddha's word: he seeks no present advantage, no fame in the eyes of posterity. After a final poetic survey of the landscape he concludes with a statement of his ultimate goal: to attend the great assembly under the Dragon-flower Tree when Maitreya will bring the truth of Buddhism back to this world of ours, millions of years hence.⁴⁰

This earnest wish not only concludes his poem, but also reappears at the close of the collection of pilgrim biographies in which it occurs,⁴¹ at the end of his account therein of his own visit to Gayā,⁴² at the conclusion of his biography of the only other pilgrim to whom emotions of sorrow on seeing the relics of Gayā are attributed⁴³ and in the final lines of an emotional eulogy on his own teachers which is found in another work of his.⁴⁴ 5,599,998,500 years was in Chinese eyes rather a long time to have to wait, but though it is quite possible to find examples of monks who succumbed to the secular pattern of thought, to the rigidly orthodox believer there was simply no alternative but to set one's sight on that distant horizon.⁴⁵

This deliberate adherence to a stern orthodoxy, however, was not necessary for ordinary pilgrims, even Chinese pilgrims who had no contact with the values of Chinese high culture: the problem lay precisely with the virtuosi of the Chinese pilgrim world, those educated enough in the classical tradition to produce fluent translations in a passable literary style. For these exceptionally well-educated and culturally aware visitors a simple faith in the beneficial effects of pilgrimage had

³⁹ E. Chavannes, trans., *Mémoire composé à l'époque de la grande dynastie T'ang sur les Religieux Eminents qui allèrent chercher la loi dans les pays d'Occident*, Paris, 1894, 149, n. 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 124–5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15–16, 25.

⁴⁴ J. Takakusu, trans., *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago*, London, 1896, 213.

⁴⁵ Cf. the close of the preface by Huai-hsin (c. 843) to his *Shih-men tzu-ching lu*, 802c in the edition of the Taishō, vol. 51, for one good example of the secular pattern of thought asserting itself in a Buddhist context.

during their upbringing been irreversibly replaced by a much more questioning, or even ‘historically-minded’ attitude—not towards the authenticity of these sites but towards the possibility of preserving something of value against the ravages of time. The Chinese high tradition which raised their questions had also worked out some form of resolution to the problem for them, but it was a resolution that ran plain counter to their most central beliefs. All they had to fall back on was a particular tenet concerning the future appearance of Maitreya which was (to adopt a crudely mechanistic metaphor) never designed to bear the weight of so much anxiety.

I should perhaps apologise for having brought the reader so far, only to revert in the end to the most well-worn cliché of Sino-Indian comparisons: the historically-minded Chinese baffled by the timelessness of Indian thought. Perhaps all that has gone before is simply a comment on the consequences of this cultural clash. But to Arthur Waley the contrast seemed at times almost comic, as in his account of an incident earlier in Hsüan-tsang’s stay in Nagarahāra:

“It was here that hundreds of thousands of years ago Śākyamuni Buddha, in a former existence, met Dīpaṅkara the former Buddha and, in a manner recalling the story of Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth, spread his deer-skin mantle on the muddy ground, that his great successor might not dirty his feet. He then, going one better than Sir Walter Raleigh, knelt down and let his long hair fall across the mantle, so as to make a softer carpet. Tripitaka was the sort of sightseer who is a trial to vergers. When the old monk in charge of the sacred site told him this story, Tripitaka at once asked how the place where this event happened could still be in existence. Several cosmic cycles had passed since then, and it is well known that at the end of every cycle the universe is destroyed by fire. Even Mount Sumeru is completely burned out. The verger was equal to the occasion. ‘No doubt’, he said, ‘when the Universe was destroyed this holy site was also destroyed. But when the Universe came into being again, the site reappeared in its old place. We all know that Mount Sumeru is still there; so why should this holy site not also be in its own place? Bear that in mind, and you won’t be bothered with any further doubts.’⁴⁶

I would only observe that at other times the consequences for these pilgrims, caught in a vice-like grip between their culture and their religion, came far closer to tragedy. I can believe that they shed tears.

⁴⁶ Waley, *The Real Tripitaka*, 26.