

## Attentively Dwelling in “Cliff Meditation”

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“Cliff meditation” translates *bi guan* 壁观. One often translates this as “wall contemplation,” meaning one contemplates facing a wall. The term occurs in the brief *Discourse about Two Accesses and Four Behaviors*, *Er ru si xing lun* 二入四行论, which contains the core of Bodhidharma’s teaching.<sup>1</sup> One finds it mentioned in more than one text, e.g., in Daoxuan’s 道宣 (596–667) *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 续高僧传, *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, T. L 2060, fasc. 16, 551c 8–23, completed in 645, namely 551c10. One also finds it later in Daoyuan’s 道原 famous *Jingde chuan deng lu* 景德传灯录, *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp of Jingde*. T. LI 2076, fasc. 30, 458b21–c24, namely 458b24, completed in 1004. Bodhidharma later became the twenty-eighth patriarch of Chan, the first one being Mohe Jiashe 摩诃迦叶, Mahākāśyapa.<sup>2</sup>

In 2003 the late John McRae, much missed in the scholarly world, proposed the interpretation: “Fixed in *śamatha* or concentration meditation, without allowing the eight winds of good and bad fortune to influence one at all.”<sup>3</sup> One is walled off, as it were, from the eight winds that trouble the mind. The eight winds, also known as eight worldly factors or *dharmas*, are: gain and loss, eulogy and defamation, praise

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1. Charles Willemen, “Guṇabhadra and Bodhidharma: Remarks about Their School Affiliation,” *Pacific World*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 15 (2013): 33–52. The text was translated long ago in Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (Kyoto: The Eastern Buddhist Society, 1935), 87–90.

2. As pointed out to me in 2015 by a graduate of the University of Beijing, the right pronunciation is not *Jiaye*, as so often given, but *Jiashe*, an old pronunciation that makes better phonetic sense. I hereby correct my past mistake.

3. John McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 31.

and ridicule, happiness and suffering (Skt. *aṣṭau lokadharmāḥ: lābhaḥ alābho nindā praśamsā yaśaḥ ayaśaḥ duḥkhaṃ sukhaṃ*).

This author noticed the relation between the text and traditional *samatha*, tranquility, and *vipaśyanā*, insight. Tranquility and insight are the same as *samādhi*, concentration, *zhi* 止, and *prajñā*, wisdom, *hui* 慧, also rendered as *guan* 观 *vipaśyanā*. One namely distinguishes the *dharma*s, in this case, the four behaviors. The terms *samatha* and *vipaśyanā*, *zhi guan*, are found in the *Udānavarga* and in its Chinese version *Fa ji yao song jing* 法集要颂经, T. IV 213, namely in Chinese I 38 (Uv.42), III 10 (Uv.8), etc.<sup>4</sup> This text is a non-Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika Sarvāstivāda (from the end of the seventh century also called Mūlasarvāstivāda) *Dharmapada*. The terms *zhi* and *guan* are traditional Sarvāstivāda terms. McRae has shown that one may find them in Bodhidharma's meditation method too.

On 20 November 2015 I heard the Venerable Sik Hin Hung explain in the National Museum in Delhi that *bi guan* should be understood as *bi shang guan* 壁上观, contemplation on a wall rampart, wall gazing, as in the dictum *zuo bi shang guan* 作壁上观, words found in the *Shi ji* 史记, *Record of the Historian*, fasc. 7, in the *Annals of Xiang Yu* (*Xiang Yu benji* 项羽本纪). The text was completed by the Chinese Thucydides, namely Sima Qian 司马迁, ca. 109 BCE. In the text we read: *Ji Chu ji Qin, zhu jiang jie cong bi shang guan* 及楚击秦诸将皆从壁上观 (When Chu attacked Qin, the commanders all looked on from high on the ramparts). In this passage *bi* means *bilei* 壁垒, rampart, and *guan* means *panguan* 旁观, to look on. *Panguanzhe* 旁观者 is a bystander, an onlooker. The dictum conveys the meaning: Not to really intervene, to be an onlooker. Sima Qian's words became a dictum, which may also, in a way, apply to Bodhidharma's *bi guan*.

In December 2015 I visited Song Shan 嵩山 in northern Henan 河南, and I saw Bodhidharma's cave, *Damo dong* 达摩洞. It is situated beyond the Shaolin Temple 少林寺, up a cliff. It may rightly be described as a cave, a cavern, up a cliff, *yanbi shang dongxue* 岩壁上洞穴. The meaning of *bi* in *bi guan* actually is *yanbi*, a cliff. *Yandong* 岩洞 and *yanxue* 岩穴 (Skt. *guhā*) is a cave up a cliff.

4. Charles Willemsen, *A Collection of Important Odes of the Law. The Chinese Udānavarga* (Berkeley: Institute of Buddhist Studies and BDK America, 2013), 32, 46, etc.

The meaning of *guan* is intriguing too. It, of course, means “to observe, to look on, to gaze.” In that case *bi guan* means “observing from a cliff.” But *guan* also means Sanskrit *bhāvanā*, “mental development, cultivation; contemplation.” One finds this meaning in the explanation of the four behaviors. As has been explained,<sup>5</sup> Bodhidharma’s practice is Sautrāntika based. It may be understood as a form of *wu men chan* 五门禅, five gates *dhyāna*, a non-Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika Sarvāstivāda practice. Five exercises of an abhidharmic path of preparatory application, *prayogamārga*, stabilize, control one’s thoughts, allowing the practitioner to enter the first meditational stage, the first *dhyāna* in the realm of form, *rūpadhātu*.<sup>6</sup> *Men*, gate, means Sanskrit *dvāra*, or *vāra*. *Vāra* means “restraining,” and consequently also “gate; wall, *qiang* 牆.” The expression *wu ting xin guan* 五停心观, five contemplations to stabilize, to stop, to restrain thoughts, is also used for *wu men chan*. *Ting xin* is a term that already occurs in this context in the oldest systematic *Abhidharma* manual, Dharmasreṣṭhin’s *Abhidharmahṛdaya* T. XXVIII 1550, translated to Chinese in 391 by Saṅghadeva and Huiyuan 慧远 on Mount Lu 庐山. It occurs in *Chapter V: The Noble (Ārya°)*, T. 1550, fasc. 2, 818a14.<sup>7</sup> This text was composed in the first century BCE<sup>8</sup> in the area of the River Vakṣu, in the Badakhshan area, an area of Bactrian non-Vaibhāṣika Buddhism.<sup>9</sup> So, *guan* may also mean *bhāvanā*, contemplation, mental development, a term to be expected in the expla-

5. Willemen, “Guṇabhadra and Bodhidharma,” 42–45. Also the *Laṅkāvatāra*, composed by Guṇabhadra, is Sautrāntika (and *ekayāna*); Charles Willemen, “Guṇabhadra to Bodhidharma: The *Laṅkāvatāra-Sūtra* and the Idea of Preaching without Words,” *Pacific World*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 16 (2014): 24. By the way, p. 26, note 12, line 2 should read: “...Buddhist schools (T. 2033), and also the...” Furthermore, p. 26, note 12, line 8: “About T. 2033, did he...”

6. Charles Willemen, *Outlining the Way to Reflect* 思维略要法 (T.XV 617) (Mumbai: Somaiya Publications, 2012), 4–5. Different *dhyāna* masters offer different exercises.

7. Charles Willemen, *The Essence of Scholasticism. Abhidharmahṛdaya. T.1550* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006), 119.

8. E. Frauwallner proposed this period in 1971. See Willemen, *The Essence of Scholasticism*, 3, 6, 13–14.

9. It would be quite naive to think that Bactrian Buddhism stopped at the border of Bactria. One may see it to Bactria’s east, in the Badakhshan area, and to its west, in Merv. For a brief development of Sarvāstivāda Buddhism: Willemen, “Guṇabhadra and Bodhidharma,” 33–34.

nation of the four behaviors of Bodhidharma's method of practice. Bodhidharma's second behavior is about *pratīyasamutpādabhāvanā*, contemplation of the chain of dependent origination, remedying *moha*, delusion, confusion.<sup>10</sup> *Bi guan* then means: meditation, contemplation up a cliffside cave.

*Guan* may convey still more meanings, such as *prāsāda*, a high terrace from where one may observe the surrounding area. The view (*guan*) from a cavern on high is similar.

The passage in Bodhidharma's practice literally says: *ning zhu bi guan* 凝住壁观, attentively dwelling in cliff meditation, contemplation. This contemplation seems to take place dwelling up a cliff, in a cave (*zhu bi* 住壁). The *samatha*, meditation, takes place up a cliff, in a cavern. *An xin* 安心, the common interpretation for this passage, may translate *vyupaśama*, appeasing. One appeases the afflictions in five gates *dhyāna*. With this meditation one contemplates, visualizes (*bhāvanā*) four behaviors, reminding us of the practice of *wu men chan*, five gates *dhyāna*. *Guan*, *bhāvanā*, reminds us of *guan*, *vipāśyanā*. In *bi guan* the *guan* seems to have all meanings of *guan* (to observe, to contemplate, insight).

So, *bi guan* means: Contemplation up a cliff, cliff meditation. *Bi* is *yanbi* 岩壁, cliff, namely a cavern, *yandong* 岩洞 up a cliff. *Guan* means "to observe." It at the same time also means insight, *vipāśyanā*, namely *prajñā*, wisdom, distinguishing factors, *dharmas*, i.e. the four behaviors. It also means *bhāvanā*, contemplation, an activity of the four behaviors, well known in five gates *dhyāna*.

10. Willemen, "Guṇabhadra and Bodhidharma," 44–45. Practices, behaviors 1-2-3 of Bodhidharma's practice deal with *dveṣa*, hatred or anger, *moha*, and *lobha*, desire. For practice 2, contemplation (*bhāvanā*) of causality, one reads: *Sui yuan xing* 随缘行, the practice of going along with the conditions (*pratīyaya*).