

# PACIFIC WORLD

Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies

Third Series Number 5  
Fall 2003

**TWO SPECIAL SECTIONS:  
IN MEMORY OF MASATOSHI NAGATOMI, AND  
JAPANESE BUDDHISM IN AMERICA**



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## **Masatoshi Nagatomi, In Memoriam**

This issue of *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* is devoted to the memory of Masatoshi Nagatomi. For years, as a member of the Institute of Buddhist Studies Advisory Board, he provided us with valuable advice and support. In conversation with his widow, Mary Nagatomi, we learned that he had intended to devote more of his precious time and energy to the Institute. Unfortunately, his final illness made it impossible for him to fulfill this wish. In recognition of his intent, Mrs. Nagatomi has very generously donated his personal library to the Institute. This contribution will form a special and permanent part of our research collection. In recognition of the importance of this contribution, the Board of Trustees of the Institute of Buddhist Studies has established an endowment for the maintenance of this collection.

During his years as a professor at Harvard University, he taught many students, several whom are today leading figures in the field of Buddhist studies. Many of those students have contributed essays to this issue, and the reverence in which they hold the memory of Prof. Nagatomi is evident in their contributions. (Please note that the contribution by Duncan Williams in memory of Prof. Nagatomi appears in the section on “Japanese Buddhism in America” later in this issue. Otherwise the contributions simply appear in alphabetical order.) It is an honor for us to be able to bring these essays together here, and we wish to express our thanks to Mrs. Nagatomi and to all of the contributors.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, I would like to also express my personal appreciation for the support and encouragement Prof. Nagatomi gave me at an early and key point in my career. We all feel a deep loss at his passing, and hope that this collection serves as an appropriate tribute to his contribution to the field of Buddhist studies.

**Richard K. Payne**

Dean, Institute of Buddhist Studies





# The Dead as “Personal Buddhas”:<sup>1</sup> Japanese Ancestral Rites as Healing Rites

**Paula Arai**

Carleton College

EVEN A CURSORY LOOK AT modern Japan reveals that rituals involving interaction with the dead are common. The role and dynamics of these rituals in helping Japanese Buddhist women integrate loss into their lives is the focus of this study. The rhythms and contours of the grieving and healing process are examined within the context of their worldviews and conceptions of self, suffering, and healing. The findings are based upon in-depth ethnographic data gathered about devout Japanese Buddhist women who all have some active connection with Sōtō Zen Buddhist practice.<sup>2</sup> With their collaboration, I began to see the intimate relationships they carry on with deceased loved ones. It is in the intimacy of these relationships that the healing power of the rituals are revealed.

The dominance of funerary, memorial, and ancestral<sup>3</sup> rites in the ritual landscape of contemporary Buddhism in Japan is so pronounced that scholars and lay people commonly refer to the phenomenon as “Funeral Buddhism.” Most people even state that their primary engagement with Buddhism is when someone passes away. In addition, the biggest national summer holiday, O-bon,<sup>4</sup> is a Buddhist rite of honoring ancestors. This indicates the exigency of understanding what these Buddhist rituals mean to people. Although scholars have researched the topic of Japanese ancestor worship,<sup>5</sup> the question of whether funerary, memorial, and ancestral rites offer forms of transformation and healing for those living in modern Japan has not been thoroughly explored. Through this study the positive roles mortuary and ancestral rites play in contemporary Japan become clearer, especially in the lives of mature Buddhist women.

Researching home rituals offers a glimpse of the dynamics of identity cultivation and transformation in the face of loss. It also provides a rare view of how the dead can function in the healing process. In the privacy of the home, ancestral rituals are often performed at the family *butsudan* (Buddhist home altar) on a daily, monthly, and annual basis. Outside the home visiting the gravesite or *o-haka-mairi* is also done on monthly and annual intervals. A poignant rite that is not widely per-

formed is the Jizō Nagashi. Depending upon the relationship of the participant in the ritual to the deceased, it can be experienced as a memorial rite, ancestral rite, or both. It is distinctive, for it includes participants riding in a large boat on a lake. Examining a large public memorial/ancestral ritual gives insight into the role of the greater community and environment in the healing process. Although there are many more memorial and ancestral rites, large and small, local and national, home rituals and the Jizō Nagashi ritual are the focus of my analysis. They will provide the basis for illuminating how upon death one becomes a "personal buddha" to the loved ones still living.<sup>6</sup> Exploring memorial and ancestral rituals from this perspective sheds new light on the power these rites have in the healing process, leading us to recognize both the centrality of the dead in Japanese Buddhist religiosity and that these ancestral rites can serve as healing rituals.

When people are in need of healing, they can find rituals that guide them through the process. There are rituals that people with a broad spectrum of pain find helpful, including in times of personal emotional crisis, in the face of serious illness, while struggling with family discord, and learning to living with loss. The concept of healing here is based on the Buddhist worldview where everything is understood to be interrelated and impermanent. Combining this context with the Sōtō Zen Buddhist development of according the deceased with the status of Hotoke-sama or Honorable Buddha,<sup>7</sup> distinctive rituals have emerged and become the fabric of many Japanese Buddhist healing experiences.

Recognizing that someone has attained enlightenment upon death has had significant ramifications for the development of Japanese Buddhist rituals. Among other possibilities, this elevated status is critical to the grieving and healing process of the survivors. Intensive interviews with contemporary Japanese Buddhist laywomen reveals the nature of the relationship of the living and dead and the rituals that facilitate the transformation of their relationship. The rituals are designed to make the deceased loved one remain a part of the living people's lives, yet not in the same way as in life. The exalted status of death makes them more powerful and they are understood to have the capacity to help with their new wisdom.<sup>8</sup>

These new buddhas play a vital role in Japanese Buddhist rites. One of their roles is regarded as the source of healing. This is in contrast to the role of ancestors in Reiyukai where those receiving healing is reversed. Hardacre explains that in Reiyukai "healing is believed to have the soteriological function of saving the ancestors."<sup>9</sup> For my Zen Buddhist collaborators, it is only in seeing how the rituals affect a person, usually over an extended period, that it becomes evident that the ritual is indeed part of their own healing process. Key factors in the

analysis of this phenomenon include the identity constructions of the dead and the seeker of healing and how this relationship bears upon the healing process.

### Methodological Concerns

The primary information for this study is based on field research I did in Nagoya, Japan in 1998–1999. The research focused on the healing process of twelve women in their fifties, sixties, and seventies. They are all engaged in some form of Buddhist practice and rituals; eleven women are lay Buddhists and one is an ordained nun. Among the collaborators, eight have married and raised children. They are either currently married or are widowed. All but one of the married women have given birth to the children they raised (one adopted a sister-in-law's child). Three have spent the majority of their adulthood as mothers and housewives. Five have worked while caring for their house and family. Four are single, having never been married, given birth, or raised a child. They each have had jobs and support themselves. Each woman invested at least a dozen hours of formal question and answer time, but total interaction time with most women is hard to calculate. Several exceed eighty hours. In addition to formal interview sessions, this includes activities like attending rituals held at temples together; going to museums or visiting artists together; eating sandwiches, rice balls, and exquisitely prepared traditional Japanese cuisine (*kaiseki ryōri*); and taking walks to view autumn foliage, plums in bloom, and cherry blossoms. All relationships with my collaborators are actively ongoing. Indeed, human relationships are at the center of this project, for it is in wrestling with being human that healing is sought.

Linda Barnes' "Integrated Model of Healing and Illness"<sup>10</sup> helps clarify how the dead participate in the healing process of Japanese Buddhists. Her model is designed to facilitate cross-cultural understanding and communication among people working and living with diverse concepts of healing. The model consists of seven foci.

1. Understandings of Ultimate Human Possibility
2. Understandings of Affliction and Suffering
3. Understandings of Self
4. Understandings of Illness/Sickness
5. Understandings of Healers

6. Understandings of Nature of Intervention
7. Understandings of Efficacy or Healing

Barnes' "Integrated Model" foregrounds the infrastructure or building blocks of a healing tradition. In other words, it asks people to be critically conscious of fundamental concepts of self and worldview and to place the various dimensions of healing and illness into their larger context. Doing so facilitates discussions with those with different understandings. It helps clarify the differences and similarities in specific ways. Although this study does not extend to comparisons with other traditions, delineating the collective understandings of my collaborators for each of these foci will illuminate important aspects of their views and practices.

Until I began doing field research, I had thought about the project in academic English. After initial conversations with collaborators, I quickly discovered that my original concepts did not resonate with them. The ideas did not translate well into conversational Japanese. Because this is an ethnographic work where I am trying to understand how *they* experience the world, I let them define the terms. The meaning of healing to them is not about finding a cure nor is it framed in terms of a direct cause and effect relationship. It is a worldview or way of living and facing all kinds of challenges of the non-bifurcated body and mind, a central factor in their "Understanding of Self."

Their "Understanding of Healing" is in part revealed in the vocabulary used to discuss the matter. It is notable that the word they all used to refer to "healing" was a different conjugation of the word I had initially tried out. My use of the equivalent of the gerund form of "heal" (*iyashi*—"Have you ever experienced a healing?") only elicited blank stares. On the contrary, using what I call the "gratitude tense"<sup>11</sup> of "to heal" (*iyasaremashita*) yielded enthusiastic nods of understanding. They could comprehend the meaning of being "a humble and grateful recipient of healing." The difference between these two ways of talking about healing is fundamental and has far-reaching implications. *Iyashi* implies that healing is a discrete phenomenon. It stands alone and apart. *Iyasaremashita*, however, sets healing in a specific relationship. For these women the relationship is with the universe. Although they do think of the universe as a vast network of interrelated phenomenon, in their daily lives, most of the women do not usually think of the universe in terms of its grand expanse. Rather, the universe is experienced in more direct and intimate ways: in the dew at dawn, ducklings swimming in their mother's wake, and the sun drying the laundry. It is something that one receives, humbly and gratefully. The source from

which healing comes is not explicitly stated in the term itself, but in its deepest meaning the source of healing is the universe.

As is indicated by the preferred verb conjugation among these women, they are oriented in a Buddhist understanding of things. This includes the assumption that we are born with a longing for good things to be permanent and seek the fulfillment of our desires. This is the primary condition from which we must be healed. Therefore, healing involves transformation of habitually deluded ways of looking at the world through the lenses of desire and aversion. For these women, then, all of life is a process of healing or transformation of the way life is viewed and experienced. This tells us something about several aspects, including their "Understanding of Affliction and Suffering," "Understanding of Ultimate Human Possibility," and "Understanding of Healers." Suffering is caused by one's own deluded thinking, but it is possible to stop suffering (though not necessarily sickness). The "Healer" of this condition is the self.

My first task, then, was to learn how these women viewed and experienced themselves. Considerations of how research methodology relates to distinctive cultural formations of self are central to this aim, so I examined the connections between the Japanese relational construction of self-identity and the ramifications for field methodology. In Japanese culture, *tatemae* (public face) and *honne* (private face) are clearly delineated,<sup>12</sup> especially among the generation of women I was interviewing. In this cultural context, people are adept at sincerely expressing their public face, making it difficult to discern how much their public and private faces might differ. Moreover, it is considered improper to express your private face or *honne* to someone with whom you have only a public relationship. Although I tried to make it clear that the women were collaborators in this study, at first they perceived our relationship in terms of the standard interviewer–interviewee relationship, which falls into the "public" category. Therefore, it was difficult to access their "private face" (*honne*).

Since the information I sought lies deep in their hearts, minds, and bodies, I decided that keeping an objective observer's distance would yield little about the highly personal and private dimensions of their lives. In the Japanese cultural context, it is only fair that I make myself vulnerable before I expect them to open up about their most intimate and often painful experiences. Therefore, I made the carefully considered and deliberate decision to share my own personal emotions and experiences with each of the women. In return for exposing my shortcomings and difficulties, I not only received valuable and helpful advice, but I also received a bounty of details that are essential to understanding their concepts, experiences, and feelings about the role

of the deceased in their rituals of healing. As we cultivated intimate relationships, we broke through the socially scripted facade of efficient tidiness and impeccable self-control and delved into the excruciating, infuriating, and terrifying realms where healing and transformation take place.

### “Personal Buddhas” in the Home Altar

Most collaborators in this study of healing rituals tend to their Buddhist altars with care. They consider the home altar (*butsudan*) to be the anchor of their home. Its weight helps maintain stability in times of turmoil. It is a physical location for the heart (*kokoro*) of the family. Whether the altar is an elaborate gilded one in a designated Buddhist altar room (*butsuma*) or it is a picture on a bureau with just a simple cup of tea offered, it can be effective in helping the healing process.

Devoting precious space to an altar is clearly an indicator that having a designated sacred space in the home is valued. In a standard *butsudan* there is a central Buddha image, usually based on the family sect affiliation. If someone has passed away in the family, there is usually a mortuary tablet (*o-ihai*) with the Buddhist name (*kaimyō*) of the deceased written on it. The date of the death is also recorded on it. These mortuary tablets also vary in size and ornamentation, from four inches in simple black to twelve inches with gold leaf and intricate carving. A picture of the deceased is usually placed at the altar in a prominent location. This helps foster the sense that the deceased person is still part of the family and community. Having ancestors “present” provides depth to the family structure and relationships.

Aoyama Shundō, abbess of the Zen nunnery Aichi Senmon Nisōdō, has noticed in her many years of working with the bereaved that when someone passes away in a family it makes the Buddha closer and more intimate. This occurs because the deceased is now understood to be a buddha. People become more actively devout and feel the Buddha in their lives. This indicates that the deceased is not merely referred to by the appellation “Buddha,” but that many people actually experience their deceased loved one as enlightened, attaining the perfection of wisdom and compassion through death.

The home altar centered on the dead as a “personal buddha” is a physical presence that cultivates relationships and healing. Indeed, the altar’s very physicality facilitates facing difficult situations, because it helps people focus their attention in a place where they feel understood and supported. The support and understanding is experienced, according to most of my collaborators, because the Buddha in their home altar

is a family member. In many ways, understanding itself is the Buddha's healing balm. The Buddha in the home altar is not thought to be omniscient, but this buddha is thought to know all that is important to any family member. This "personal buddha" knows one's deepest level of *honne* or private self. When both were alive, it was not possible for one person to know another's *honne* in regard to all things. The vantage point of death, however, enables the deceased to know completely. Furthermore, becoming a buddha means that the deceased has become a wiser and more compassionate version of his- or herself. In life, shortcomings, idiosyncrasies, and various tensions and misunderstandings make it difficult to see another clearly. But, in death, the family member can become a "personal buddha" to the survivors. One woman even confessed—after over a dozen hours of interviews—that she gets along better with her mother now that her mother is dead!

The transformation of the relationship between the living and the dead is fostered through offerings, chanting, prayer, and conversation made at the home altar. Offerings are made by the most devout twice a day, morning and evening. The offerings typically consist of five elements as listed in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*: light (candles), flowers, incense, water or tea, and food (rice and/or fruit). In homes where rice is made for breakfast and dinner, rice offerings to *Hotoke-sama* are made first, then rice is served to others. Some women, however, only offer a cup of tea in the morning and reserve the full compliment of offerings for special occasions. Such occasions are the annual or monthly death anniversary and O-bon. In addition, people who give the five types of offerings regularly usually give more elaborate offerings on special occasions, often including favorite foods of their "personal buddha."

After the offerings are made, those who are busy and perfunctory may just ring the bell, put their hands together in prayer, and just say, "Good morning," with a bow of the head. The fuller ritual often includes ringing the bell after the incense is lit, holding prayer beads (*juzu*), and chanting some scripture. The most commonly chanted one is the *Heart Sūtra*. *Kannon-gyō* or one of its shorter versions, *Jikku Kannon-gyō*, is chanted by those with more time. If there is something on the mind of the person, it is often during this time that they will talk about their concerns with their "personal buddha," beseeching their advice, assistance, or forgiveness. Expressing gratitude and making promises to improve on something is often articulated at this time as well.

Being able to interact with deceased loved ones in the familiarity of their own home helps them maintain a sense of intimacy and continuity. Being in the home, it facilitates transforming the relationship of the living and dead in a manner that integrates the loss in a life-affirming

manner. Family members continue to interact, so the divide between life and death is transcended.

Many women explained how in times of need they turned to their loved ones at the altar, for they are the ones who understand them most. The women added that they had an even greater expectation for help now that their loved ones are dead, because they are buddhas. Updates on developments in problems usually accompany the morning or evening greetings. Of course gratitude is duly expressed when it is clear that their "personal buddha" has helped solve the problem.

Laughter and joy are also part of this transformed relationship. Several women said they looked forward to summer so they could offer watermelons or autumn when the persimmons would be ripe, because their loved ones especially enjoyed those fruits. In this way they could continue to feel connected through the passing of time. Or, when out shopping, many women said that seeing a special sweet that a loved one favored reminded them of pleasant times together, so they would get the confection to offer on the altar in the evening "for dessert." Such simple gestures provide the living with a warm wash of fond memories that buoys them along in their lives.

At first, after the funeral, just caring for the deceased through food offerings sometimes even spurs a bereaved person to start caring for herself. If you have to make rice for the Buddha, then one is more likely to eat oneself, especially if living alone. Preparing food takes on a meaning that extends beyond oneself. Furthermore, daily offerings of food and water, or tea, are an opportunity to greet the deceased in the morning. Fresh flowers also offered on the altar bring beauty and closeness to nature into the home.

Another woman explained that she had associated the smell of incense burned at a Buddhist altar with things old and gloomy. But after her mother passed away, she found that the smell of incense reached into the interstices of her heart and connected her with her mother. The smell of incense helped her through the grieving process. She was twenty-five when her mother passed away, and now at fifty-six when she burns incense, she feels her mother's presence. The incense enables her to transcend the gap between life and death.

This woman, who I will call Ms. Honda, also weaves a ritual interaction common in nearly every home across Japan. It is a pair of words that are said as someone leaves and returns home. "*Ittekimasu*: I'm leaving and will be back" is said as one leaves. The one who remains says in a formal conjugation not used in regular conversation, "*Itterashai*: I respectfully send you off." Upon returning, the person who was away says, "*Tadaima*: I'm home now." Those who are home respond, "*Okairinasai*: Welcome home." Since these are reserved for places that



are considered home, saying them oneself and receiving the responses generates a warm sense of belonging and intimacy. Each time Ms. Honda comes back to her studio apartment, although she lives by herself, she calls out, "*Tadaima*, I'm home," to the photos on her Buddhist altar of her long deceased parents. In so doing she knows she is not alone.

This is a healing ritual. It is not commonly performed or recognized as such, but in the case of Ms. Honda, it helps her heal. If it were not for doing collaborations in the women's homes, I would never have known it had occurred. Ms. Honda did not think of using these ritualized words as a conscious part of her healing process. Nonetheless, it is a powerful way that she has integrated her loss into her everyday life. Her "personal buddhas" make her feel at home.

As the dead are transformed into "personal buddhas," they enable the healing of the survivors. Through engaging in memorial and ancestral rituals, the living can find support and understanding in a way that is not readily available through other means. For these "personal buddhas" in the home altars are specifically focused on taking care of them in a direct and intimate way. These buddhas know all the secrets and idiosyncrasies. There is nothing hidden and nothing for which to be ashamed. They allow a person to *amae*,<sup>13</sup> that is, one can be purely dependent on her "personal buddha" with no need to calculate how much is being received versus how much is being offered (past, present, and future). The relationship with one's "personal buddha" is liberating, for you also do not need to consider that what you say, do, or think might have negative ramifications due to things being taken out of context and used against you in the future (a possibility when dealing with living people).

These mundane rituals belie the profound insight that grieving never ends, it just changes with the seasons. They also illustrate how healing is available in the home through the dead as "personal buddhas."

### Jizō Nagashi

The second ritual is called the Jizō Nagashi. Jizō is an enlightened being (a bodhisattva) who guides people in the different realms of existence. The ritual is done annually on the seventh of July. Although participants readily recognize the beauty and power of the ritual, it is not a common ritual. Currently only Sōtō Zen nuns lead this ritual. Both men and women are invited. Usually about four hundred fifty women participate along with a few men. Fourteen chartered buses are typically needed for transporting. Busses numbered four and nine are not

included, however, for these numbers are homonyms for “death” and “suffering,” respectively. People from the greater Nagoya area ride in these luxury buses that are impeccably timed to arrive simultaneously at the designated temple and lake where the formal parts of the ritual occur. Some years they go to Lake Biwa and others to Lake Hamana. It is a one-day mini-pilgrimage where people bond together in laughter and pain. *Communitas* is fostered by the treats that are passed around the bus along with stories of new aches and pains, new babies, and new deaths.

The formal ritual involves two main parts. The first part is held in a Sōtō Zen temple. The focus of this aspect of the ritual is the reciting of posthumous Buddhist names or *kaimyō*. When one registers to participate in the ritual, the names of the dead that one would like to be remembered during the ritual are requested. The nuns then write each name with brush and ink onto a wooden tablet. In July it is always hot and humid, yet the laity sit in tight formation around the center of the worship hall. The silence as abbess Aoyama Shundō makes the incense offering conceals the presence of over four hundred fifty people. After chanting and ceremonial music of cymbals and bells, each nun receives a stack of the tablets. Raising one tablet at a time to the forehead in a gesture of respect for the buddha represented, they intone each name, some voices loud, others soft, all overlapping.

Although it is a group activity, as the nuns chant each individual deceased’s name, the women with whom I collaborated expressed that they heard the calling of the name in their hearts in a way that made the dead feel present. Furthermore, in the context of hearing the name of your loved one chanted among hundreds of others, the connection between your loss and others’ loss makes one feel that one is not alone, but in a community of people living with loss. Being part of a community of grievers is healing, because it makes it clear that you are not singled out in your pain. Death is a condition of life.

The second part of the ritual takes place at a lake with all participants riding on a large boat chanting and singing Buddhist hymns (*go-eika*). Jizō Bosatsu’s *shingon* or *darani* is chanted quietly: “*on kaka kabi sanmane sowaka*” over and over. The chant is like the musical ground over which the melancholy melodies of the pilgrimage songs ride. The beauty of the natural setting and the mixing of the sounds of chanting, singing, and the wind are conducive to experiencing a blurring of the realms of living and dead. This is a grieving ritual where people feel the connections between themselves, lost loved ones, and the natural world. Upon boarding the boat, each person is handed seven slips of rice paper about three inches by an inch and a half with an image of Jizō Bosatsu stamped in red. After the boat has reached the center of the lake, each

person finds a place—whether among close friends or off to a quiet corner—to send off the slips. With the mournful melodies as accompaniment, each slip is raised to the forehead before it is let go on its journey to flutter in the breeze and swirl into the lake. When the rice-paper Jizō that symbolizes a lost loved one dissolves into the water, the women spoke of experiencing a visceral sense of interrelatedness. In other words, in death one is transformed and liberated into the universe that supports all. In this moment many people experience a keen awareness that one and all are what constitute the universe. This experience is what heals.

The Jizō Nagashi ancestral rite brings those living with loss together as a community. It affirms the lives of the living as it honors the lives of the dead. In that affirmation the ancestral rite functions as a healing rite. Publicly honoring your “personal buddha” in a community ritual is part of the healing process of many of these women.

## Conclusion

These rituals offer a glimpse of the way in which the living interact with the dead in a manner that helps the living heal. After the careful collaborative effort of the twelve women in this project, it has become clear that ancestral rites function as healing rites for them. Indeed, in their healing process several rituals are employed that are not usually recognized as healing rites. It is only in seeing how a ritual is used and how it affects someone in the context of her life story that this becomes visible.

Following Barnes’ “Integrated Model of Healing and Illness” will help further clarify the contours of these Japanese Buddhist women’s healing process. In the case of the Japanese Buddhist women who collaborated on this study, (1) their “Understandings of Ultimate Human Possibility” includes the possibility of enlightenment in daily life, but it is guaranteed in death. (2) “Affliction and Suffering” are understood to be relatives. They are not enemies. They are part of one’s life, and no matter what, they must be interacted with. *How* one interacts is the key. (3) Their “Understanding of Self” is that they do not bifurcate the mind and body. They are interrelated to everything in the universe. Therefore, the realms of life and death can interact. (4) Their “Understandings of Illness/Sickness” is that they need to take care of themselves with nutrition, exercise, and stress management, but “even if you don’t call sickness, it will come.” They do, however, see themselves as having the power to respond positively or negatively to illness. Positive and negative here do not refer to valuations of good and evil, but rather

weaving the illness into living versus trying to reject it. Weaving leads to healing and rejecting leads to greater suffering. (5) As for the category "Healers," these women consider allopathic doctors and acupuncturists as healers, but these women also stress how they see Zen Buddhist nuns as healers. The nuns are the ones who guide them in how to have better relationships with their illnesses. The most intimate healers, however, are the dead loved ones, the "personal buddhas" who know them best and who are with them everywhere all the time, no longer restricted by the forces of gravity or the limitations of space and time. (6) In regard to the "Nature of Intervention," beyond medical treatments, the nature of the care that these women turn to is a transformation of perspective. Whether it is in healing from the loss of a loved one or dealing with the residence of cancer in one's body, it is in being aware of how one is internally related to everything that helps. The "Nature of the Intervention" is to cut out the delusion that one is an isolated, independent entity. (7) "Efficacy or Healing" oftentimes is not addressed directly, because experiencing and expressing gratitude is one of the key components of healing for these women. After all, if one is related to everything, then the only reasonable response is gratitude for everything. The gratitude may or may not help arrest the development of cancer cells, but it makes each breath of air sweeter, every load of laundry lighter, and committee meetings feel like a slice of heaven.

The key to all the women's healing processes is to transform their perspective. Although the details vary, they all indicated that they try to cultivate an attitude of being grateful. This requires learning from whatever happens and seeking what goodness, wisdom, or strength can be gained, especially from the loss of a loved one. To do this requires focusing on the larger picture. The fundamental assumption is that they think that they are not living independent lives based solely upon their own power and effort. They see that they are alive because the myriad interconnections in the universe work together to generate and support life. Rituals in honor of their dead facilitate this awareness, for there is an intimacy found in their relationship to the dead who are now "Hotoke-sama" or "personal buddhas." The various ancestral rituals unleash the healing power of their "own" buddhas by creating an experience of direct interrelatedness with everything in the universe. That is why they say, "I am in humble and grateful receipt of healing [by the universe]" in the "gratitude tense" (*iyasaremashita*) and not in the "lonely" form of "I am healed" (*iyashita*).

The art of healing, like scholarly inquiry, is a creative process of transformation, one in which views of the world open a vision of everything being interrelated in a perpetual dance of change. Women use Buddhist rituals in this art of healing. These rituals facilitate a direct

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experience of interrelatedness which gives rise to gratitude—a place where they can feel at peace and intimately connected. Connected to family and friends—living and dead—connected to nature and the cosmos. The rituals involving the “personal buddhas” illuminate the reality that, even in death, no one is alone.

## NOTES

1. I count Nagatomi Sensei among my "personal buddhas." I am deeply grateful for all his assistance and support.
2. I am currently working on a book manuscript, *Polishing the Heart: Japanese Buddhist Women's Healing Rituals*, in which I will present a much fuller analysis of the material including more direct quotes from the women collaborators.
3. Traditionally a person becomes an ancestor thirty-three or fifty years after passing away. By this time few, if any, of the people continuing to perform the rituals would have actually known the deceased. At the final memorial ritual, the deceased is formally recognized as an ancestor. From thereon a person is not ritually referred to by their Buddhist name (*kaimyo*), but is an "ancestor" (*go-senzo-sama*).
4. O-bon is an annual ritual that usually takes place in August or July. It is a three-day period when ancestors return for a visit. The living also often return to their hometowns at this time.
5. See the following: Helen Hardacre, *Lay Buddhism in Contemporary Japan: Reiyukai Kyodan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Robert J. Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974); Yangida Kunio, *About Our Ancestors*, trans. by Fanny Mayer and Ishiwaraya Yasuyo (Kyoto: UNESCO, 1970).
6. Hardacre observes that in Reiyukai, "ancestors are simply a category of deities on a par roughly with Buddhas and kami" (*Lay Buddhism in Contemporary Japan*, p. 66). She adds that worship of other families' ancestors is distinctive to Reiyukai and not typical of most Japanese ancestor worship practices.
7. For more detailed explanation of this practice, see Yanagita Kunio's *About Our Ancestors*, p. 107.
8. Yanagita explains that a Shintō-based understanding of ancestors holds that "ancestors have the power and pleasure to help us under any circumstances" (*About Our Ancestors*, p. 146). The nature of the relationship of this Shintō-based and my Buddhist-based concept of ancestors is beyond the scope of this study. One would also need to consider the Confucian influence on ancestor worship rituals that entered Japan from China. There do seem to be distinctions among these different impulses to commemorate ancestors, but there is undoubtedly influence from and in many directions.
9. Hardacre, *Lay Buddhism in Contemporary Japan*, p. 229.

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10. Linda Barnes, Vanderbilt University presentation, spring 2001.

11. This conjugation is the passive tense (here in past form), but the meaning of it as used by my collaborators includes an expression of gratitude. The gratitude is implied in that one is not alone but there is support from beyond oneself.

12. Based upon extensive anthropological field research in *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), Dorinne Kondo gives a detailed analysis of Japanese construction of identity.

13. For further elaboration of the concept of *amae*, please see Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, trans. by John Bester (Tokyo, New York: Kodansha International), 1973.





# Kiyozawa Manshi and the Path to the Revitalization of Buddhism

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## Introduction

IN THIS PAPER WE PROPOSE to survey the life and teachings of Kiyozawa Manshi for the role he played as a resource and inspiration for the modern revitalization of Buddhism. Observing this year the centennial of his death in 1903, we take particular note of his significance for our own time as we look for ways in which Buddhism may be relevant to contemporary society which is also marked by rapid change, and conflicting and competing religious ideologies. Kiyozawa was a foremost scholar, educator, priest, and reformer. His influence has endured to the present time, particularly within the Ōtani sect of Shin Buddhism. However, though he is not as well known outside that sect, his personal struggles, his understanding of Buddhism, and his efforts to reform Buddhism deserve wider recognition.

## I. Meiji Japan: Buddhism's Encounter with the West and Modernity

The background for our study of Kiyozawa Manshi (1863–1903) is the Meiji period (1868–1912), a time of great upheaval and change as Japanese society confronted and adapted to Western culture. Japanese society in attempting to catch up to Western powers experienced a confusing *mélange* of change with a samurai rebellion, abolition of the traditional class system, political parties, the importation of Western ideologies and religion, industrialization and the emergence of capitalism, and finally a series of wars. The relentless pressure of modernization called for resourceful leaders in all areas to respond to its inevitable repercussions throughout the society and culture.

Japanese Buddhism was strikingly affected by the many changes, social, political, economic, and religious, brought about by the encounter with the West. Consequently, there were numerous calls for reform and renewal as Buddhists attempted to respond especially to the challenge of

Christian missions and their educational institutions. Christianity was a significant element in the encounter between Japan and Western culture, since Western governments pressed the Japanese for toleration and religious freedom, demanding the abolition of the designation of Christianity as an evil religion and the policy of prohibiting its practice.<sup>1</sup> Toleration of Christianity became a major stipulation in granting Japan equal treaty recognition.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, despite persistent restrictions on the spread of Christianity among the Japanese populace, it gradually penetrated Japanese society through the freedom of religious practice granted to foreigners.<sup>3</sup>

Together with the various external challenges Buddhism was also faced internally with decadent conditions, resulting from government support under the Tokugawa and the policy of enforced membership in temples. Through the *danka* or parish system, priests virtually became government representatives. Scholarship was formalized and confined within sectarian boundaries because the Tokugawa regime prohibited religious conflict.

Attacks on Buddhism came from several angles. In addition to Christian disparagement, there were Confucian and Shintō criticisms. The Shintō National Learning (*kokugaku*) school stressed the foreignness of Buddhism and its otherworldliness as incompatible with Japanese culture. The Confucians pointed to its economic drain and its contribution to the decline of the nation in the encounter with the West.

The Meiji government promoted the disestablishment of Buddhism which had been a virtual state religion under the Tokugawas. They endeavored to separate it from Shintō, in order to employ Shintō as the basis of nationalism.<sup>4</sup> The hostile attitude of the government inspired destructive violence against temples resulting in the loss of priceless treasures of Japan's Buddhist heritage through the indiscriminant destruction of temples, texts, and images. The slogan *haibutsu kishaku* (排佛毀釈 Destroy Buddha, cut down Śākyamuni) and the numerous destructive incidents reflect the intensity of the pent-up hostility toward Buddhism that attended the restoration of Emperor Meiji in 1868.

In order to demonstrate their loyalty Buddhist sects and priests at first supported the government-sponsored Daikyōin (大教院 Academy of Great Teaching) which aimed to make Shintō the state religion. The Shin Buddhist denominations later withdrew in opposition to the Shintō domination, followed by other sects.<sup>5</sup>

Increasing Westernization led eventually to a nationalistic reaction which benefited Buddhism. Outstanding Buddhist exponents such as Inoue Enryō (1858–1919) and Murakami Senshō (1851–1929), both members of the Ōtani sect, defended Buddhism. They were dedicated to countering the growing strength of Christianity.

Inoue Enryō (1858–1919) established the Philosophical Institute in 1887, later called Tōyō University, to promote Buddhism, initiate reform, and refute Christianity. As an intellectual leader he attempted to integrate Western psychology and Buddhism. Considered the forerunner of modern humanistic and transpersonal psychologies, Inoue and others stressed the role of intuition, viewing the Buddha nature as one's true self.<sup>6</sup>

Murakami Senshō studied with Kiyozawa as a student while teaching at the Sōtō Zen University in the late 1880s. He was also influenced by Inoue Enryō. According to Kathleen M. Staggs, Murakami's "greatest concern was with sect disunity and rivalry that needlessly prevented Buddhism from fulfilling its potential." He spelled out his view in his noted book *Bukkyō ikkan ron* (仏教一貫論 *The Consistency of Buddhism*) which held that no sect of Buddhism possessed the final truth.<sup>7</sup> In a later work, *Bukkyō tōitsu ron* (仏教統一論 *On the Unification of Buddhism*), he advocated the unification of Buddhism beyond sectarianism as a means to oppose Christianity. Buddhist scholars maintained strongly that Buddhism had benefited Japanese society and culture through many centuries. They also argued that Christianity was unsuitable for Japan, employing resources drawn from modern, Western critics.

Yet others such as Nanjō Bunyū (1849–1927), influenced by Western critical methods in the study of religion, engaged in scientific research on language, texts, translation, and the history of ideas. Another approach can be seen in Kiyozawa Manshi, who sought to revitalize Buddhism as a living, personal faith by integrating it with modern knowledge.

## II. Life of Kiyozawa Manshi: The Search for Religious Authenticity

Kiyozawa was born in a low-ranking samurai family as Tokunaga Manshi. The family was rooted in Confucianism, Zen, and Shin Buddhism. His mother was a devout Shin Buddhist. Though he was not from a priestly family, Manshi decided for the priesthood in 1878 when he was just fourteen years of age. Because of his low status he had little hope for advancement in Meiji society. However, the priesthood, supported by the temple, offered an opportunity to study unburdened by financial considerations. He was always conscious of his mixed motivations for pursuing a career in religion which, in turn, stimulated him to be a good priest and ardent student. However, he was different from ordinary priests and has been described as a person with a "defensive and aggressive attitude based upon his inferiority complex."<sup>8</sup> His complex personality, derived from his low status, non-priestly family, led him to desire to be a true priest and expand Shin Buddhism. He was constantly aware of his debt to the sect, stating

One should not forget feeling obligation (恩 *on*). Many people say that we have four important on, but few really understand the true meaning of on and return the obligation.... I feel on not only to the nation, to the parents, but also to the Head Temple for I owe what I am to the Temple entirely; I was born in a lay family and chosen by the Temple to enter clerical life.<sup>9</sup>

Recognizing his potential, the Higashi Hongwanji sect sent him to Tokyo for study in 1882. At the Imperial University he studied Western philosophy intensively, graduating in philosophy as a student of the noted Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908).<sup>10</sup> Here Kiyozawa studied the dialectical philosophy of G. W. Hegel, while also being greatly influenced by numerous Western philosophers such as Spinoza, Fichte, Schelling, Leibniz, Spencer, and Lotze. He graduated in 1887.

While he advanced intellectually, fast becoming an influential leader, Kiyozawa was summoned by the sect to return to Kyoto in 1888 to become principal of the Kyoto Prefectural Middle School, administered by the Higashi Hongwanji sect. Responding to their request, Kiyozawa was always mindful of his obligation to the sect for its support, so that despite his sense of insincerity, he was quite sincere.

As a Shinshū priest, over the years he loyally served the Ōtani branch of Hongwanji in various educational roles, beginning with his tenure as principal of the Kyoto Prefectural Middle School. Soon after assuming this position he married into the priestly Kiyozawa family, which served the Saihōji temple in Ōhama in Aichi-ken. He also lectured on Western history of philosophy at the Takakura Daigakuryō, the seminary for training priests, in Kyoto. As the product of these lectures he authored the famous *The Skeleton of a Philosophy of Religion* in 1892, which was then translated into English and distributed at the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago in 1893.

In this early period Kiyozawa has been described as maintaining good social relations, and while severe in manner, he had few friends who were mostly intellectuals.<sup>11</sup> In his bearing he was reported to be “young and modern...a very up-to-date, fashionable and smart person with a scent of French perfume.”<sup>12</sup>

However, while mourning the death of his mother, he also realized that he had not attained a living faith within himself. Thereupon in 1890 he resigned from his position as principal and began a life of severe asceticism, though he continued to lecture at the Middle School and the Hongwanji seminary. He transformed himself from a modern, intellectual gentleman to a monk-like individual with stubble hair, coarse robes, *geta*, and by eating only meager food. Following a Self Power (*jiriki*) path of “the minimum possible” life, he tried to experience the spirit of Buddhism.

After four years he ended the experiment when he learned the meaning of Other Power. He contracted tuberculosis and reached the end of his physical and spiritual resources through the failure of his health and the tragic deaths of his wife and two sons, together with the failure of his reform movement. In his extremity he had to rely on the Buddha, which he termed the Infinite, and on the support and care of his friends for the outcome of his life.

With the deepening intensity of his religious life, Kiyozawa became disillusioned with the spiritual state of the sect and determined that he would struggle for reform. His intense quest for religious authenticity led Kiyozawa to recognize the need for change in the sect if it were to realize its spiritual meaning in modern society. He believed that the feudal character of the sect limited its capacity to guide people in tumultuous times.

For a period of three years he pursued strenuously the reform of the sect, ending in failure and excommunication. Kiyozawa together with some six highly educated friends formed the Shirakawa Party, or Faction. The name derived from the neighborhood in east Kyoto neighboring the Shirakawa River. The group published the *Kyōkai jigen* (教界時言 *Timely Words for the Religious World*). They made numerous demands on the sect of which the most contentious was the call for democratic elections of deacons. Ultimately the effort failed because of the strength of the conservative members of the administration. Kiyozawa and his cohorts were banished from the sect.<sup>13</sup>

Despite Kiyozawa's disagreement and conflict with the sect authorities, he was still held in high esteem for his seriousness and capabilities. In 1899 at the age of thirty-seven he was commissioned by the sect to re-establish the Shinshū College in Tokyo as a modern university compliant with the educational reforms instituted by the Meiji government under the influence of Western precedents. Opening in 1901, it was the precursor of the present Ōtani University.

Kiyozawa's ideal of education was to enrich human life and build self-confidence and self-reliance through the study of Buddhism.<sup>14</sup> In his speech at the opening of the school, he noted that this school was different from others in being a religious school based on Shin Buddhism, particularly faith in the Other Power of the Primal Vow. He advocated the spirit of *jishin kyōninshin* (自信教人信), Shinran's motto which means to share one's faith with others. The school was to nurture individuals who can propagate their faith. The students would study not only their own sect doctrine but also the teachings of other traditions, while they would work together with the faculty to fulfill the purpose of the school. For Kiyozawa education had the purpose to prepare students to participate effectively in the modern world.<sup>15</sup> He desired the school to be the number one Buddhist university.<sup>16</sup>

However, while Kiyozawa had the opportunity to fulfill his goals in education, he was confronted with tragic misfortune. First his eldest son became ill and passed away, which was followed by the death of his wife. He was still in mourning when students struck the university calling for the resignation of the superintendent. Kiyozawa resigned also, declaring that whatever the official had done was also his action. The students recognized their error and pleaded for him to remain, but he refused.<sup>17</sup> During this time Kiyozawa was also the tutor for the young abbot-to-be (Kubutsu Shōnin) who was then studying in Tokyo.<sup>18</sup>

During this time, Kiyozawa attracted a number of students who studied with him. He acquired a house which they named Kōkōdō, which means roughly “Den of Expanding Freedom.” Among the notable disciples who became leaders in the Ōtani sect were Nanjō Bunyū, Sasaki Gesshō, Tada Kanae, Akegarasu Haya, Soga Ryōjin, and Kaneko Daiei. This association became one of the best known religious movements of the time, publishing the periodical *Seishinkai* (精神界 *The World of Spirituality*) which was read well beyond the boundaries of the Ōtani sect during the Meiji and Taisho periods.

Days before his death Kiyozawa wrote the famous essay *Waga Shinnen* (*My Faith*) and also experienced the death of his third son. This text expressed his final, complete reliance on the Buddha to carry him through his sufferings. In his final letter to Rev. Akegarasu Haya he reflects on the turbulence of his life expressed in his final adoptive pen name Hamakaze, meaning “Seacoast Wind,” because it suggested Ōhama where the winds blow strong as they had in his life. Ōhama was the location of Saihōji, his wife’s family temple in Mikawa. He had recuperated there also before going to Tokyo for the opening of the Shinshū University in 1899, and where he returned after his resignation. He wrote:

It is a suitable pen name for a ghost-like person such as myself, half-dead and half alive. It is amusing to think how this pen name neatly caps all my past pen names: *Kenhō* [Rising Peak, an allusion to Mt. Fuji, which Kiyozawa saw during his university days], used in Nagoya; *Gaikotsu* [Skeleton], used in Kyoto; *Sekisui* [Stone Water], used in Maiko [i.e. Tarumi]; and *Rosen* [December Fan] used in Tokyo. Now it’s time for *hyūdoro* [the ghost to disappear].<sup>19</sup>

Resting in his confidence in Other Power expressed in *My Faith*, Kiyozawa passed away without giving any final word. He remarked that his friends would not arrive while he was alive when told that they had been informed of his condition. He died on June 6, 1903.

### III. Kiyozawa's Religious Perspective

Following Kiyozawa's death his legacy as scholar, priest, educator, and reformer endured. He left a challenge for future Shin Buddhist leaders, as well as other Buddhists generally, to take up the cause of reform by his example. His combination of spirituality and intellectuality stimulated modern interpretations of Shin Buddhism, exemplified in the work of his associates in the Seishin shugi movement mentioned above. All his close followers became major teachers in the Higashi Hongwanji sect, many of them teaching in the university. His influence transcended the boundaries of the Ōtani sect to such later notable thinkers in the Kyoto school as Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime. He has also been compared to the Danish Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) in his efforts for reform the Church and his view of spirituality.<sup>20</sup> The impact of Kiyozawa's seriousness, determination, and insight have influenced generations of followers far beyond his limited lifespan, extending to our own time.

Throughout his life Kiyozawa constantly advocated high Buddhist ideals which he attempted to fulfill in his own life. Even in his asceticism, rather than becoming a cloistered monk away from society, he followed the example of Śākyamuni, combining a practical approach to Buddhism with an active life in society. Awakened to religious faith, he sought authenticity through exploring the depth of his own psyche and the field of religious experience. Not being a person given to halfway measures, he experimented with extremes of self-denial and austerity.

Kiyozawa's efforts at reform all failed to achieve their desired goal in transforming the sect. However, he was guided in his activity by the enduring principle that the awakening of personal religious consciousness or subjectivity involved a commitment to the teaching of Shinran beyond institutional forms and rituals. Such a personal faith was a requirement for Buddhism to respond adequately to contemporary, Western philosophical currents.

We can generally discern two phases in Kiyozawa's spiritual development. The first phase was the path of self-effort (Self Power) which motivated him to engage in a severe ascetic lifestyle in the pursuit of authentic religious experience. The second phase was the way of Other Power which commenced when Kiyozawa reached the limits of his own capacity to understand reality and to determine or control the course of his life.

In his spiritual evolution he regarded three texts as important for his development. They gave him a spiritual standpoint from which to approach life. As a group they were his three sutras (三部經 *sanbukyō*) similar

to the pattern of the traditional three Pure Land sutras or threefold Lotus complex, providing a basis of authority for his spirituality.<sup>21</sup>

On the side of self-effort are the *Āgama*-s (Jpn. *Agon*) and the teachings of Epictetus (ca. 55–135 C.E.), a Greek slave in the Roman era. For Other Power Kiyozawa focused on the *Tannishō*, which is an important, though up till then obscure, text of Shin Buddhism. Kiyozawa discovered in Epictetus an attitude that fit his own. We should distinguish clearly what is undesirable from what is desirable and put our strength into realizing the desirable. The undesirable refers to external things, while the desirable is spiritual self-awareness. This is the path to spiritual freedom. Though this is a Self Power approach, Kiyozawa believed it led to Other Power.<sup>22</sup>

The *Āgama*-s correspond to the *Nikāya*-s of the Theravāda tradition. Originally Sanskrit texts of the Sarvastivāda tradition, they were translated to Chinese as part of the Chinese Canon. They represent the spirit of Śākyamuni in the early tradition of Buddhism generally termed Hīnayāna. Though it is not stated, Kiyozawa may have been attracted by the generally unadorned, realistic image of Śākyamuni presented in these texts in comparison to the glorified, mythic images described in Mahāyāna Buddhist sutras. According to the short biography by Tada Kanae, Kiyozawa, who did not cry on the death of his mother or son, often tearfully recalled the renunciation of Śākyamuni, seeing before him the sacred manifestation of the Buddha shining like fire.<sup>23</sup>

Kiyozawa was impressed by the spirit of practice in the Self Power tradition, as well as the warrior spirit he inherited from his ancestors. His attraction to the *Āgama* sutras is also evidence of his desire for the renewal of Buddhism. In a letter to Inoue Hōchū, Kiyozawa, commenting on Śākyamuni's renunciation, describes Śākyamuni's calm and intense bearing when he, the Buddha, declared that though mountains move and the sea dries up his resolve will not be diverted. Reading this declaration, Kiyozawa was moved to tears. He exclaimed, "Ah! The Great Dharma of the Last Age is not prospering! I wonder whose fault that is?"<sup>24</sup>

Kiyozawa quoted frequently from the Stoic philosopher Epictetus in the two-volume *Rōsenki*, the *December Fan Diary*.<sup>25</sup> He considered Epictetus's book the best Western book. Epictetus was significant for Kiyozawa for his philosophy of endurance, contentment, and spiritual peace, freedom, and happiness. Essentially it was a philosophy that distinguished between what we can control or change and what we cannot and to know the difference. He saw everything under the control of divine Being which is the basis of order and design in the Universe and guides the destiny of all beings. Epictetus's philosophy must have appealed greatly to Kiyozawa as he tested his own fortitude while encountering numerous crises. An interpreter of Epictetus, Gordon L. Ziniewicz, states:



God is reason or soul or principle within Nature. Human beings ought to imitate the reasonableness of God and leave external fate up to providence (acceptance or resignation). God is the detached calm of reason within ever-changing nature; the human soul should remain calm in the midst of active ethical and political involvement.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps of all the Western philosophies Kiyozawa encountered Epictetus appeared the closest to the spirit of Buddhism. Epictetus's view of God corresponds to Kiyozawa's understanding of the Infinite which we will take up below.

The *Tannishō* represented the standpoint of Other Power faith, the central point of Shin Buddhism and Kiyozawa's final refuge. He spelled this out in his teaching of spirituality (精神主義 *seishin shugi*). Because of Kiyozawa's elevation of the text as an expression of Other Power faith, the *Tannishō*, long obscured in Shin history, has become world famous and influential in arousing interest and commitment to Shin Buddhism among modern people, East and West. Despite various criticisms of the text among scholars, the *Tannishō* stresses Other Power and the universality of salvation. The tenor of the text expresses Shinran's spirit which Kiyozawa strove to revive in modern times.

Kiyozawa Manshi stressed the fundamental importance of personal religious experience for the survival of a tradition. His understanding of religious faith is relevant not only for Shin Buddhist followers, but for all Buddhists who struggle to make it meaningful in modern society. His perspective offered a basis for the rediscovery of true individuality. His interpretation of the significance of individual awareness of the Infinite implied that clergy and lay are equal and one's religious life is a matter of choice. He believed that the focus of religious faith was on the development of the human spirit as a present subjective reality and not merely a matter for after death.

The basis for his thought may be found in *The Skeleton of a Philosophy of Religion* which he wrote on the occasion of the World's Parliament of Religion in 1893. His text was translated into English and disseminated at the conference. Though the impact of the text is not known, it is significant for showing Kiyozawa's concern to integrate Buddhism into the modern intellectual and spiritual environment by placing it in a universal context and interpreting it without using the traditional terminologies unfamiliar to non-Buddhists.

In this text Kiyozawa distinguishes sharply between the Infinite and the finite. The Infinite, which is an abstract term, reflects Amida Buddha whose name also means infinite. The Infinite or Absolute is not something

separate from everything else, but as Infinite, it must include and be the essence of all things. Thus he took issue with the Western concept of God and theories of monism, such as those taught by Spinoza, as inadequate for spirituality. The relation of the individual and the Infinite was based on correlation, not identity as in monism. Further, the subject-object distinction cannot be avoided in thought but must be accounted for in relation to reality. While everything is known through a mind, knowledge is subjective or known by the mind. However, both the subjective realm and the objective exist in an organic unity within the context of the universal subjectivity of the Infinite Absolute.

In the process of religious awakening one moves from attachment to ordinary views of objectivity to awareness of the subjective, inner realm, and finally transcends both objectivity and the subjective (small self) to awareness of the Absolute (large Self) which embraces and transcends the subject-object dichotomy. This process provides a rational basis for the principle of Other Power. Thus the person cannot find true satisfaction by only pursuing things in the objective world such as money, possessions, power, etc. Rather, it is found through the discovery of the inner world and one's connection to the Infinite. But the assurance of salvation and contentment is not reached simply through restraining the self. Finally, after exhausting one's efforts to attain the goal by cultivating various practices, one becomes aware of the Infinite as the source of contentment and spiritual peace. This process mirrors Kiyozawa's own experience.

It also means that the individual is not locked into his own subjectivity, but finds his relation to the whole. This is important in our modern mass society where people are likely to feel isolated. It fits well with the contemporary ecological perspective that we are all connected and we must respect and support each other and the environment.

Kiyozawa was, in large measure, reacting to the growing dominance of the principle of scientific objectivity in the modern world which claims that only objective knowledge is true. However, he also rejected any thought which stressed subjectivity while dismissing the objective world as simply delusion. Kiyozawa believed that Buddhism could be integrated with scientific thought. Where science and religion conflicted, religious thought would have to be revised to harmonize with science. Further, he held that religious reality could not be verified by appeal to objective facts, since religious faith is a subjective reality. His effort anticipates much of modern thought in trying to harmonize faith and reason, religion and science. His solution provides a basis for a vital religious faith, while maintaining a critical scientific perspective.

With respect to religious subjectivity or religious consciousness, Kiyozawa does not mean mere subjectivism in which only what I experience is true. Rather, beyond the ordinarily understood subject-object

dichotomy, true subjectivity means the discovery of the Infinite as my True Self, thereby linking myself to all other beings. Behind his expression is the Mahāyāna Kegon philosophy which teaches that we are all one as the manifestation of the Buddha-mind. Attaining the experience or awareness of this truth becomes the basis for religious faith and commitment.

Because of his emphasis on religious subjectivity and the individual, Kiyozawa came under criticism by more pro-active Buddhist leaders. He appeared to ignore society and was too individualistic. At that time a leading Buddhist movement for social change appeared in the Neo-Buddhist Movement (*Shin Bukkyō undō*). Through its publication *Shin Bukkyō*, it advocated the liberation of religion from government interference and rejection of militaristic nationalism. It criticized Buddhism because, despite its principle of non-injury and precepts concerning killing, it did not oppose war.<sup>27</sup> Though not specifically socialist, it associated with socialists and supported laborers. The movement also made pronouncements on various issues of public morals, such as opposition to licensed prostitution, drinking, and smoking.

However, in contrast to the Neo-Buddhist Movement, rather than addressing specific social issues, Kiyozawa was concerned with the general morality and the welfare of society, and focused primarily on bringing about reforms in the Higashi Hongwanji. From Kiyozawa's perspective, if the Hongwanji or Buddhism was truly religious, there would be a beneficial effect in society. In his essay on why Buddhist priests lack self-esteem, he stresses that the clergy have become subservient to the state, much in line with Shinran's criticism in his time that they were lackeys of the powerful in society.<sup>28</sup> Kiyozawa laments:

What about clergymen today? They curry favor before governors and local functionaries, constables, village officials, wealthy merchants—anyone wealthy or slightly important in this world. Unfortunately their intent is not simply to be courteous to everyone alike, they are in fact, fawning and obsequious.<sup>29</sup>

Despite his severe criticism, Kiyozawa remained hopeful that with renewed interest in the practice of Buddhism, the clergy would "reflect on their great responsibility, get out of their servile frame of mind, and earnestly put Buddhist teachings into practice."<sup>30</sup>

In his "Discourse on Religious Morality and Common Morality," written during the last year of his life, Kiyozawa rejected the then current interpretation of the distinction of transcendental truth (真諦 *shintai*) and mundane truth (俗諦 *zokutai*).<sup>31</sup> The transcendental truth is the truth of reality expressed in Shin Buddhism as the realm of salvation based in the Eighteenth Vow and Amida Buddha or the Infinite and the secular truth of

society which is the sphere of morality defined by society for the sake of good citizenship and social tranquility. This distinction was employed by Buddhist sects to justify their role in society in support of the government.

According to Professor Ama Toshimaro, Kiyozawa is significant because "he succeeded in going beyond the doctrine of Two Truths" in proclaiming the absoluteness of religious values.<sup>32</sup> Ama shows that Kiyozawa interpreted the distinction in a totally religious way, maintaining that the two dimensions of truth are equal or like two sides of the same coin. That is, the mundane truth was a means to make people aware of the transcendent truth of Other Power. The morality expressed in the mundane sphere had the purpose of realizing the truth of salvation through Other Power by revealing our inability to achieve moral perfection required for realization of enlightenment in traditional Buddhism. It was a completely religious understanding. The nurture of religious subjectivity, that is, religious experience within the religious community, provides a standpoint for the individual to deal with the issues of the time. Kiyozawa did not advocate monastic existence but remaining in the world, embodying, however imperfectly, the values inherently expressed through relation to the Infinite.

The significance of this shift in Kiyozawa's interpretation of the Two Truths lies in its denial of the subservience of the sect or Buddhism to the state and support for the autonomy of religious institutions in society. The purpose of religious faith was not to create the basis for good citizenship or acquiescence to the state, but to bring its members to a fuller understanding of their true selves which would have social implications. Through the transformation of its members society would be renewed by their spiritual influence.

Unfortunately, Kiyozawa did not live long enough to test his views in the context of developing Japanese society. His approach suggests that society changes as each individual changes. He does not deal with the structural evils in modern society that require more direct opposition. Generally, his thought does not question the existence of the given order of things. Things are as they are either through the operation of karma or the manifestation of the Infinite. Emphasis is placed on achieving contentment within oneself, though our interconnection with all beings in the Infinite offers a starting point for socially relevant morality in seeking the welfare of all beings. Nevertheless, he established the foundation of true individuality in modern Japanese society.

It is not a mark against Kiyozawa that his thought did not foresee every problem that might arise. What is important is that he offers a basis for further thinking which can address those questions. In our modern times we have seen the destruction and degradation brought about by social

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ideologies lacking in fundamental respect for human life and the equality of all people as embodiments of the Infinite Spirit. Kiyozawa's stress on the Other Power spiritual foundation of all life and reality offers a more positive Buddhist alternative for striving not only for personal spiritual fulfillment but also for social justice and peace. His thought can contribute to the revitalization of Buddhism by broadening its spiritual, social, and cultural engagement with contemporary issues.

## NOTES

1. Notto R. Thelle, *Buddhism and Christianity in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 13.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–22.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
6. Muramoto Shoji, "Historical Reflections for the International Development of Japanese Humanistic Psychology," paper presented at the Old Saybrook 2 Conference: Coming Home to the Third Millennium, State University of West Georgia, May 11–14, 2000. Available online at <http://www.sonoma.edu/psychology/os2db/muramoto1.html>.
7. Kathleen M. Skaggs, "In Defense of Buddhism: Essays from the Meiji Period by Inoue Enryō and Murakami Senshō" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1979), p. 287.
8. Wakimoto Tsuneya, "Manshi Kiyozawa and the Otani Sect of Shinshu Buddhism: A Study of His Early Life," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 3 (1968): p. 80.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
10. "American Orientalist, educator, and poet, b. Salem, Mass., grad. Harvard, 1874. A pioneer in the study of Asian art, he lived much of his life in Japan. Besides teaching at Tokyo Univ., the Tokyo Academy of Fine Arts, and the Imperial Normal School, he was manager of the fine arts department of the Imperial Museum in Tokyo. His works include *East and West: The Discovery of America and Other Poems* (1893); *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (2nd ed., 1912), compiled by his widow, Mary McNeil Fenollosa; and two works on Japanese drama (ed. by Ezra Pound, 1916)." See <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/F/Fenollos.asp>.
11. Wakimoto, "Manshi Kiyozawa and the Otani Sect of Shinshu Buddhism," p. 76.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
13. Skaggs, "In Defense of Buddhism," pp. 288–291.
14. See <http://www.otani.ac.jp/en/history.html>.
15. Otani University Editorial Committee, *Ōtani daigaku hyakunen shi: Shiryō hen* (Kyoto: Otani University, 2001), p. 469.

16. Nishimura Kengyō, "Kiyozawa Manshi," in *Gendai Bukkyō kōza*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1955), p. 190.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
19. Haneda Nobuo, trans., *December Fan* (Kyoto: Higashi Honganji Publication Dept., 1984), p. 90.
20. Bruno Van Parij, <http://www.akshin.net>
21. Hashimoto Mineo, "Seishin to reisei: Bukkyō no kindaika no nitenkei," in *Kiyozawa Manshi, Suzuki Daisetz*, Hashimoto Mineo, ed., *Nihon no meicho* vol. 43 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1970), p. 28.
22. Nishimura, "Kiyozawa Manshi," pp. 189–190.
23. Tada Kanae, "Kiyozawa sensei shōden," in *Kiyozawa Manshi zenshū*, vol. 6 (Tokyo: Yūkōsha, 1935), p. 132.
24. Nishimura, "Kiyozawa Manshi," pp. 188–189. We should note that in this version the term for "fault" is given as 遇 (*gū*, or *tamatama*) which means to meet or opportunity. However in *Kiyozawa Manshi zenshū*, vol. 5 (pp. 180–181) published in 1935 it is given as 過 (*ka*, or *ayamachi*) which means "error" or "fault."
25. See partial translations in Tajima Kunji and Frank Shacklock, *Selected Essays of Kiyozawa Manshi* (Kyoto: The Bukkyo Bunka Society, 1936) and Haneda, *December Fan*.
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28. *Collected Works of Shinran* (Kyoto: Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, 1997), pp. 421–424.
29. Haneda, *December Fan*, p. 62.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
31. Mark Blum, trans., "Discourse on Religious Morality and Common Morality," in *An Anthology of Modern Shin Buddhist Writings* (Kyoto: Otani University, 2001), pp. 19–34. For discussion of the traditional concept of the Two Truths and its role in Japanese history see Michio Tokunaga and Alfred Bloom, "Toward a Pro-active Engaged Shin Buddhism: A Reconsideration of the Teaching of the Two Truths (*shinzoku-nitai*)," *Pacific World*, Third Series, no. 2 (2000): pp. 191–206.
32. Ama Toshimaro, "Towards A Shin Buddhist Social Ethics," *Eastern Buddhist* 33-2 (2001): p. 43.





# Identity in Relation: The Buddha and the Availability of Salvific Truth<sup>1</sup>

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WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THE BUDDHA, one meets a historical figure, in this case a human being—but, in a sense, much more—and a focal figure in one of humankind’s great religious traditions. From one point of view, the Buddha refers to a person who really lived, an objective referent in space and time. From another point of view, for centuries now and even presently, this person has been acclaimed as the Awakened One. Were this not to have been the case and to have continued to be merely a recorded event, the Buddha would have been forgotten and probably would be of little interest today. This epithet, *Buddha*, “the Awakened One,” has been extended to the Buddha because of what people have found to be true in his teachings, and in the collective memory of his life and testimonial accounts of that life. From the beginning, then, to speak of the Buddha is to speak in human terms. However, it is also to speak in terms of relation—not merely between and among human beings, but with the preexistent salvific truth that he rediscovered. It is this rediscovery that constitutes his being the Awakened One at the time he lived and subsequently in the lives of men and women. People do not affirm that he is the Awakened One only because they were taught this—at least not if they are reflective persons. Nor do they propose it because everyone around them is doing the same. Both occasions are important, of course, in shaping a cumulative religious tradition. But both are not sufficiently foundational for the living of one’s life in the world as one knows it to be.

A personal realization is required to anchor a reflective person’s life. And, for centuries and through many cultures, men and women have had a realization that the truth made accessible through the Awakened One’s teachings, is, indeed, salvific. Those teachings do, certainly, enable life to be lived with purpose and meaning—both in relation to one’s own life and in relation with others—by affirming that the natural human physical process into death is a noble human experience.

As one finds one’s *identity* in relation—for an example, as a man might be a son, a husband, a father, a friend, and so on—so, too, the Buddha’s identity is found in relation: surely with *dhamma* as salvific truth, but also as teacher of *dhamma* as the reliable expression in words that will lead one,

if followed conscientiously, to that salvific truth. And further, the Buddha's identity through the centuries is in relation with countless men and women who have averred that the Buddha is indeed the Awakened One because they have confirmed the availability of salvific truth in the living of their lives.

Of numerous possibilities that one might choose to investigate, or themes to pursue, one of the most engaging has to do with a delicate and profound shift in perspective symbolically communicated by means of a bodily activity, in this case, the act of seeing. Now, of course, the notion of seeing yields an immense field for interpretation: seeing, perceiving, discerning, realizing, knowing, and understanding, to name a few. Particularly interesting is the way a change—let us say, a change in fundamental orientation—occurs in people's lives that enables them to see with insight what otherwise they had only noticed. The pivoting on this delicate soteriological point is subtle and a consideration of a related dialectic will be instructive for people seeking to understand a dimension in human religiousness. We may consider here the Pāli term *passati*, which literally means "one sees," but which implicitly carries meanings of "to know" or "to find."<sup>2</sup>

## I.

One of the most celebrated passages in the Theravāda canonical literature is an exchange between a *bhikkhu* named Vakkali and the Buddha.<sup>3</sup> Our story begins with the Auspicious One (*bhagavan*) living in a grove near Rājagaha. At that time, Venerable Vakkali was not at all well, in pain, considerably ill. Vakkali asked his attendants to go to the Buddha with a statement and a request. The statement and the request communicate what the tradition considers to be a quality of faith (*saddhā*). Vakkali makes the following request of his attendants:

Having approached the Bhagavan with my words, show obeisance with your heads at the feet of the Bhagavan, saying "The fellow monk Vakkali is not well, is in pain, and is very ill. He does obeisance at the feet of the Bhagavan." And say also, "It would be well, indeed, were the Bhagavan, out of compassion, to come to the fellow monk Vakkali."

Vakkali was sick and in considerable distress. He wanted to communicate this to the Buddha *and* he wanted the Buddha to come, to be present in person by his bedside, as an expression of the Buddha's sympathetic consciousness of Vakkali's poor condition and a desire to alleviate it. And note, too, the presence of the notion of showing obeisance (by literally

paying homage with the head at the Bhagavan's feet) which is mentioned three times in the narrative before the Buddha signals, in his customary way of remaining silent, his agreement to visit Vakkali.

It appears that upon seeing the Buddha approaching from afar, Vakkali, out of anxiety about propriety in showing due respect for the presence of the Buddha, tossed about on his bed.<sup>4</sup> The text is already setting up an engaging dynamic with some degree of tension. A sick monk longs for the physical presence of the Buddha, seeking healing of his illness—all understandable, ordinary human wishes. His veneration of the Buddha is framed for us by ritual acts of obeisance and his aspiration is for improved physical health. The dramatic plans are in place and, with Vakkali perturbed about failing in hospitable deference, the conversation begins.

Advising Vakkali not to fret about not providing an appropriate seat, the Buddha takes an available seat and asks how Vakkali is fairing, whether he is improving, whether his aches and pains are decreasing. Vakkali replies that he is not managing very well and that his pains are, indeed, increasing. Then a somewhat surprising turn in the conversation occurs: there is no question about food and water, the possible cause of the illness, or whether attendants are rendering suitable care. The Buddha asks, rather, whether Vakkali has remorse, whether he has any regret. Vakkali replies that he is not troubled and has no remorse. The Buddha then asks whether Vakkali blames himself regarding his own moral virtue. To Vakkali's reply that he does not, the Buddha inquires again, this time whether some remorse and regret remain.

And then the dramatic issue emerges. Vakkali puts it this way: "For a long time, I have been desiring to approach the Bhagavan for a *darśana*, but there has not been enough strength in my body that I might approach the Bhagavan for a *darśana*."<sup>5</sup> The problem is that Vakkali really wanted to see the Buddha—this is ocular perception but not without a heightened sense of the significant presence of that looked upon—but had been too weak to make the journey.

It is at this point in the story that the Buddha speaks words that have echoed through the centuries.

Pull yourself together, Vakkali! What is there for you with seeing this putrid body. Indeed, Vakkali, the one who sees dhamma sees me. The one who sees me sees dhamma. Indeed, Vakkali, the one seeing dhamma sees me; the one seeing me sees dhamma.<sup>6</sup>

The Buddha immediately turns Vakkali's attention to the five aggregates that constitute the empirical individual and acknowledges Vakkali's recognition of their transitoriness, concluding, "Seeing it so, one knows that one does not go to such [current] state again." The Buddha then departs.

Vakkali is subsequently carried to a place for the night, in the very early morning of which two *deva*-s appear before the Buddha. One *deva* announces that Vakkali indeed aspires for release (*vimokkhāya ceteti*). The other *deva* says, "Surely he will attain release completely." At dawn, the Buddha requests that some *bhikkhu*-s go to Vakkali to inform him of the announcements by the *deva*-s and with words of profound consolation the Buddha adds, "Fear not, Vakkali, do not fear, Vakkali. Your dying will not be detrimental, your death will not be bad." When Vakkali hears all of this, he affirms, "I have no doubt that there is no desire, passion, or affection in me for that which is impermanent, painful, of the nature of change." Shortly thereafter, Vakkali takes up a knife and kills himself.<sup>7</sup> The story ends with metaphorical power. Dark clouds move here and there covering the sky in darkness. The tumbling, churning, dark clouds represent Māra searching for but not finding the consciousness of Vakkali, who has attained final *nibbāna* (*parinibbāna*).

The paradigm shift provides a new context for understanding a sick *bhikkhu*'s physical pains and his predominant disposition toward the efficacy of devotion in ritual acts. There is a more fundamental order of truth—not in contradiction, but in ever expanding and inclusive supportiveness. The body, as well as the other four aggregates which cluster to form an empirically discernible individual, is fleeting, is not stable, and will dissolve, decaying in the process—the jolting assertion the Buddha made when he referred to *his own body* as "putrid." The foundational truth is the reliability of this regular process of impermanence. Vakkali came to see this, but also much more. All that comes together to form an individual—physical form, feeling, perception, synergetic process, and consciousness—is fleeting and, because of this, it is awry and of the nature of withering. Upon seeing this point, obviously in the sense of understanding,<sup>8</sup> Vakkali gives a testimony that there was neither delight nor passion nor love for any of these aggregates nor doubt regarding this truth about these things. A change of orientation to the entire setting has now occurred. The longing of a sick man to see the body of the Buddha has become the acknowledgment by a wise man of the abidingness of salvific truth.

## II.

Let us turn to some important terms to catch a glimpse of subtle and profound affirmations of what Theravāda Buddhists have seen. And the sight is spectacular, like a majestic waterfall with both a cumulative force of tradition and the alluring quality of rainbows appearing now here, now there in the mist. The approach for, or procedure of, our reflections, is not to trace upstream to find a tiny spring of origins, nor to trace the meanderings

of brook, stream, and river, but to see the collective efforts of people discerning, responding, and remembering the conceptual structure of what has been passed down and the truth thereby disclosed. Usually, interpreters of the Vakkali passage move quickly on with a passing comment that *rūpakāya* refers to the Buddha's material or physical body and *dhammakāya* means the body of teaching or doctrine. One does well to reflect more carefully on this old and frequently repeated passage.

To return to the "seeing" passage, the point is to focus on the relation of the physical presence of the Buddha and the abiding salvific truth which his teachings have made accessible. This is no easy matter, for the relation is not posited as though it is an objective impersonal fact, but requires an engaged response on the part of persons to the truth of that relation. The tradition offers categories for understanding the truth of the relation: material or form body (*rūpakāya*), dhamma body (*dhammakāya*), one who has become dhamma (*dhammabhūto*), who has become the best or the highest (*brahmabhūto*). The key point that is being underscored is the salvific continuity in the figure of the Buddha, a man among men and women, the paradigm for integrity, the illustrious one whose teaching (dhamma) converges consistently and reliably in his life with the salvific truth (dhamma) which he rediscovered. Were there to be any distortion whatsoever between what he taught and the truth about which he spoke, there would remain at the core of the Theravāda tradition a soteriological gap, so to speak, that would have to be addressed, filled, for there to be clarity and continuity in doctrinal formulations about the possibility of personal realization of salvific truth in this very life.

What is the truth about the physical body that is being observed? What kind of seeing is taking place in the one who "sees dhamma"? What is the relationship of this person and dhamma, rather, the integral, contiguous completeness of the realization in his awakesness, his qualities as an auspicious exemplar, and the teachings? What is seen? What might be a few consequences of this seeing?

Over three decades ago I was inside the main inner hall of the Kelaniya Temple in Sri Lanka at the beginning of the dramatic final evening of its extravagant *perahera*. The great doors were shut behind us and worship in sound (*śabdapūja*) began. The shrill, piercing sound of the *horāna* and the concussion felt from the sounding of many drums in the presence of a veiled Buddha image was a marvelous sight to behold. The cacophony of drums, the images and paintings lit by flickering torches, the smell of flowers and incense, the presence of other people all converged to provide a "feast for the eyes."

In Anurādhapura there is a stature of the Buddha in meditation posture (Sinhala: *samādhi budu pilime*). It is a serene place where, even on Poson Poya when the coming of Mahinda to Sri Lanka is commemorated by many thousands of pilgrims arriving at the memorable sites at this

ancient capital city, the area around this statue remains quiet. It is a place for calm, of peace. This, too, is a *sight* to behold.

How much more would be a sight of the Buddha in our midst! The ordinary, average person is not a simpleton! The ordinary sense of seeing is the customary mode by which average persons sort out visible objects in form and color, in movement and distance, and in spatial dimensions.<sup>9</sup> The ordinariness in this sense is placed in perspective by the extraordinariness of salvific truth and the profound change appropriating that truth has on people's lives. Seeing a physical body is by means of the ordinary "eyes of flesh" (*maṃsacakkhu*), while seeing dhamma involves the "eye of knowledge" (*ñāṇacakkhu*).<sup>10</sup>

What do the commentaries tell us about what is being seen in this and related passages? Certainly it is not "doctrine," although this term is often used in English interpretations of this matter. Nor is it "teaching." Doctrines and teachings do not transform people. It is the activity of becoming engaged with that to which doctrines point, to that about which the teachings teach, that enables one to discern wherein and how one can become, or has become, other than what one was. Any interpretation less than this would fail to heed a Buddhist admonition to avoid clinging to views, that is, to doctrines, to teachings.

Having learned of Vakkali's desire to engage in acts of devotion, of his longing to see the Buddha, one's expectations are flanked by the Buddha's poignant comment about the true condition of the human body—Vakkali's as well as his own. The cumulative tradition preserves this story, replicated at numerous places. The story presents a lively dialectic in which one understands the true condition of all materiality in light of reality—*rūpakāya* in light of *dhammakāya*—the former is seen by discerning the latter, understood through a realization of the latter. The dialectic this coincidence of opposites provides moves through the developing tradition toward correlation.

The adjective used by the Buddha to describe his physical body, the body that Vakkali longed to see, at the feet of which he wished to place his head in obeisance, is *pūti*, akin to the Latin base for the English word "pus."<sup>11</sup> There is a radical shift here, a reorientation to the physical body *sub specie aeternitatis*, under the form of eternity, a recognition of the universal principle that defines the body—odious, offensive to the senses. Yet this is just the opposite of a standard description of the Bhagavan, the auspicious exemplar, the Lord. "And he has glory of each and every limb, perfect in every way, which is able to bring about a delicate sense of composure (*pasāda*) in the eyes of persons which are bedecked with a *darśana* of his physical body."<sup>12</sup>

The *Visuddhimagga*, a great scholastic compilation of the literary heritage by Buddhaghosa in fifth century Srī Lan̄ka, provides interpretations of *rūpakāya* that cluster around commentarial glosses for the epithet

*bhagavan*, “fortunate one,” “auspicious exemplar,” “Lord.” In doing this, he shows the pair *rūpakāya* and *dhammakāya* in correlation rather than in contrast.

By his state of fortunateness (*bhāgyavatā*) is illustrated the prosperity of his material body which bears a hundred [auspicious] marks of virtuous achievement [*puñña*: merit], and because of [his] state of having defects destroyed [is depicted] the prosperity of [his] *dhammakāya*.<sup>13</sup>

The *Paramatthamañjūsā*, commenting on this passage in the *Visuddhimagga*, elaborates,

“The prosperity of his material body,” because of the fact that it is the root and the basis for bearing fruit on the part of those [others mentioned in the text]. “The prosperity of his *dhammakāya*” [is so because of the fact that it is the root and the basis] for the attainment of knowledge (*jñāna*) and so forth, because of the fact that it is preceded by the attainment of illumination (*pahāna*).<sup>14</sup>

When the *Visuddhimagga* considers that great and persistent human issue of death in its extended discussion about mindfulness on death (namely, that death, indeed, will come), *rūpakāya* and *dhammakāya* appear. There, the Buddha’s physical body is described as being adorned with eighty minor marks and the thirty-two marks of a great person. The passage says of the *dhammakāya*, his “magnificent *dhammakāya* [is] by means of precious gem-like qualities of the group of moral virtue, etc. [concentration, insight-wisdom, release, and knowledge combined with wisdom], made pure in every way.”<sup>15</sup> The commentary on this passage adds, “and because he has destroyed all defilements together with [their] mental traces.”<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere the pair of terms appear with *rūpakāya* interpreted in light of the thirty major and eighty minor marks of a great person while his *dhammakāya* is glossed as being adorned with the ten powers and four confidences.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere a commentary explains “the glory of Sakyaputta” as being due to the splendor of both the *rūpakāya* and the *dhammakāya*.<sup>18</sup>

The commentary on the *Khuddaka-pāṭha* offers considerable insight into the dynamic of an identity in relation. A complementary parallelism is maintained, in an extended gloss on *bhagavan*, when, on the one hand, the Buddha’s *rūpakāya* is designated by “one hundred marks of merit (*puñña*)” while his *dhammakāya* demonstrates his destruction of defects.<sup>19</sup>

And further, in considering the customary beginning of discourses, *evaṃ me sutam*, “Thus have I heard,” or, “Thus it has been heard by me,” one makes apparent the *dhamma-sarīra* of the Bhagavan and causes to be

resolved the disappointment people have in not seeing him. When one teaches dhamma as it was heard, the heritage avers, “This is not the proclamation of a departed teacher. This, indeed, is your teacher.”<sup>20</sup> In considering another standard introductory phrase to the discourses, “At one time the Bhagavan,” the *Paramatthajotikā* draws attention to the Bhagavan’s not being present at the time and notes that this indicates the complete extinction of his *rūpakāya* (*rūpakāyaparinibbānam*).

Even the Bhagavan, teacher of the noble dhamma, whose body, carried the ten powers and was like a cluster of diamonds, became fully extinct [*parinibbuta*], so how is it that one, with this knowledge, would engender a desire for life. So he causes somber emotion in those people intoxicated with life and he engenders effort regarding dhamma true.<sup>21</sup>

A splendid example of the complementariness and cumulative convergence of these two dimensions of the Buddha as they become integrally fulfilled in the life of a sincere person is reflected in a passage in the commentary on the *Sutta-nipāta*:

Then Dhaniyo, having seen the *dhammakāya* with the eye of wisdom, with thoroughly established faith, well-rooted and with unshakable serenity in the Tathāgata, having a heart reproved, thought, “The bonds are severed. There is no reentering a womb for me. Having put an end to Avīci and to whatever other limit of existence, who else other than the Bhagavan will roar the Lion’s roar. My teacher has come.”<sup>22</sup>

The commentary continues,

There, because Dhaniyo, with his wife and children, having seen by the world-transcending eye the *dhammakāya* through a penetration (attainment) of the noble path, having seen with the customary eye the *rūpakāya* acquired the attainment of faith, and hence he said, “Indeed, it is no little gain for us that we have seen the Bhagavan.”<sup>23</sup>

We see that the two bodies are held together in the figure of the Buddha, the Tathāgata the Bhagavan, and that the *dhammakāya* is without exception the primary, foundational element. When the focus is on the *rūpakāya* of men and women, in light of dhamma, the reality of the material body’s inherent nature of decay and passing away is seen—not in despair but in a calming, supportive sense. When the *rūpakāya* of the Buddha is seen, in light of *dhammakāya*, it is also celebrated for its beauty and attractiveness



as a metaphorical example of virtuous living, i.e., living completely in accordance with dhamma.

There are several strands of the Vakkali narrative, all relating Vakkali's longing to see the Buddha, or wishing ever to remain in his presence, and the popular exchange between the two. These narrative strands differ in the subsequent development of the story. One account has Vakkali achieving arahantship upon rising in the air.<sup>24</sup> Another has him jumping down safely from a considerable height.<sup>25</sup> In still another he attains arahantship upon the visit of the Buddha.<sup>26</sup> The use of the knife in our *Samyutta-nikāya* account provides, for Vakkali, the occasion for great pain which brought him to the point of recognizing his ordinary situation (*puthujjana*) and, with considerable focal concentration, of acknowledging his transformation into the condition of arahantship. Vakkali, the tradition avers, is remembered as being preeminent among those who are zealous in faith (*saddhādhimutta*).<sup>27</sup>

### III.

The themes of our passage also enable us to see an example of how the developing tradition addresses the relationship between the person of the Buddha and salvific truth. In our narrative, the focus now shifts from the physical, a particular human being with stress placed on the form of a human being, to a particular person, the Buddha, with emphasis placed on a complex of distinguishing characteristics indicating identity in relationality. Concerning the term "*dhammakāya*," a commentary asks, "Why is the Tathāgata called *dhammakāya*?" The passage continues, "The Tathāgata, having reflected on the *tepiṭaka* Buddha-word in his heart, sent it forth in words. Therefore his body is dhamma because he himself consists of dhamma."<sup>28</sup>

In dealing with this delicate theme of integral relationship of the person of the Buddha and salvific truth, a parallel expression was found to be useful: *dhammakāya*, *brahmakāya*; *dhammabhūta*, *brahmabhūta*,

because he himself consists of dhamma so is he *brahmakāya*. Dhamma is called Brahṃā here in the sense of "best." He has become dhamma [*dhammabhūta*] in the sense of being one who has dhamma as inherent nature. He has become Brahṃā in the sense that he himself is the best.<sup>29</sup>

The parallelism appears elsewhere.<sup>30</sup>

He has become dhamma because of setting in motion dhamma that is to be learned [the authoritative teaching] without distortion or

in the sense that he, having reflected in his heart, consists of dhamma that was expressed in words. He has become Brahmā in the sense of “the best.”<sup>31</sup>

One meets the standard phrasing *dhammabhūta* and *brahmabhūta* again with one suggestive but unelaborated addition:

...become dhamma, in the sense of one whose condition is not unfavorable [*aviparīta-bhāva’atthena*] or consists of dhamma that was expressed in words or because of setting in motion dhamma to be learned [the authoritative teaching] having reflected on it in his heart. *Brahmabhūta*, in the sense of “the best.”<sup>32</sup>

And elsewhere the integral identity in relation is communicated as “the one who has become dhamma,” which means “the one who has dhamma as inherent or essential nature (*dhammasabhāva*). *Brahmabhūta* is glossed, in parallel, as “the one who has the best (or the highest) as inherent or essential nature.”<sup>33</sup>

The sense of identity *in* relation, closer than identity *by* association, appears in a late utilization of our Vakkali passage, extending the sense in going to the Buddha as refuge by indicating that when one goes for refuge in the Bhagavan, one also goes to dhamma as refuge.<sup>34</sup> And one who teaches dhamma as it was heard, with the words “Thus I have heard (*evaṃ me sutam*),” sees the dhamma-body (*dhammasarīra*) of the Bhagavan.<sup>35</sup>

Different formulations of the teachings are offered for dhamma in the compound, *dhammakāya*. The entire collection of utterances by the Awakened One(s) is frequently noted<sup>36</sup> as is the spectrum of salvific truth presented as the authoritative teaching,<sup>37</sup> and also as the ninefold world-transcending dhamma,<sup>38</sup> or phrased as paths, fruits, and nibbāna.<sup>39</sup> The commentary on the *Udāna* utilizes the exchange as recorded in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and glosses dhamma with “noble truths.”<sup>40</sup>

#### IV.

The later tradition inherited much that had gone before providing both flashes of insight along the way and structured scholastic analyses. The quality of faith becoming fulfilled in Vakkali’s attainment of arahantship echoes in the words describing his “having an abundance of faith by means of the [Buddha’s] incomparable physical body, having an abundance of insight-wisdom by means of [his] profound body of teachings...”<sup>41</sup> The subsequent heritage reveals a continuity with what went before. Writers provide several informative glosses for the term *dhammakāya*. It is the instruction in the teachings written in books,<sup>42</sup> even as the entire three

baskets of the canon are also written down,<sup>43</sup> and which can be spoken and heard.<sup>44</sup> The distinction between *rūpakāya* and *dharmakāya* is maintained, with the *rūpakāya* considered in light of the exceptional physical qualities of the Buddha. When these qualities are expressed in the homiletical etymological elaboration of the word “*bhagavan*,” in the standard phrasing “*iti pi so bhagavan*,” the “body of dhamma,” *dharmakāya*, is utilized.<sup>45</sup> Also, the interpretation of *dharmakāya* as that which was taught by the Buddha, particularly in the classic threefold analysis of that which is to be learned (the authoritative teaching), practiced, and penetrated or attained, is maintained.<sup>46</sup> The wealth of the *dharmakāya*, we learn, as the tradition has continued, is attained by means of the eye of knowledge.<sup>47</sup>

The identity in relation of the Buddha and the body of dhamma *dharmakāya* is expressed with an alluring metaphor. The Buddha, we learn, caused “the nectar of dhamma true to overflow from the vessel of his body that was filled with the ambrosia of dhamma just as honey in a filled bowl overflows and falls outside when there is no space inside.”<sup>48</sup>

Insofar as one today might consider the current English usage or sense of “believing,” “to believe,” suggests holding a position one is oneself incapable of persuasively demonstrating or, for another person, a position about which he or she is not really certain.<sup>49</sup> Seeing, in spite of the cliché, *is far more than believing*.

In religious discourse, metaphors and analogies abound, levels of discourse operate. We see this in the metaphorical use of “eye” (*cakkhu*) to communicate insight, penetrative vision, and understanding. As pertaining to the Buddha, we see it designating his knowledge of everything that can be known in space and time, of all knowables (*sabbadhamma*), forming an epithet of the Buddha (*cakkhumant*), “one having vision.”<sup>50</sup> The received tradition is aware of the force of “eye” in the sense of insight. “Eye of dhamma’ (*dharmacakkhu*) in the sense of eye [vision, insight] with regard to knowables, or eye made of, consisting of dhamma. In other places [in the texts] it is a synonym for the three paths, but here just the path of stream entrance.”<sup>51</sup> In offering this interpretation, the literary tradition is no doubt also fully aware that the texts, elsewhere, put into words what the insight of *dharmacakkhu* discloses: “Whatever has the inherent nature of arising, all that has the inherent nature of cessation.” This phrasing regarding the dhamma-eye occurs in canonical texts<sup>52</sup> and one notes its applicability to the insight of Upāli, a householder.<sup>53</sup> There are alternative and complementary ways of illustrating the metaphorical eye, the eye of dhamma. One reads, “‘*Dharmacakkhu*’ in the sense of vision of the path of stream attainment or entrance, which is the comprehensive acquisition of the teaching of the four [noble] truths.”<sup>54</sup>

*Rūpakāya* and *dharmakāya*, when held together, bring into focus the life and ministry of the Buddha, the latter undergirding the majestic

resplendence of the former. The pair, working together, provide a continuity between the religious practices of devotion through ritual and joy of faith *and* the religious attainment of salvific knowledge through insight yielding a clarity and a sense of composure. *Rūpakāya* enables one to visualize through metaphor the just deserts of a singularly virtuous life. *Dhammakāya* suggests the profound basis on which a virtuous life can be established. Both *rūpakāya* and *dhammakāya* bring together into a focal aperture an extremely broad perspective drawn from narratives from the past and stories of the present, teachings remembered and elaborated through the centuries into our today. It is only *dhammakāya* that simultaneously and integrally relates salvific truth that abides with human words uttered from a perceptive, wise, and undivided heart in such a way that one's thorough penetration of the truth of the words is assured of being fully integrated with that abiding salvific truth. *Dhammakāya*, the body of teaching with which one can become engaged, is also that with which the Buddha himself also became (*dhammabhūta*), having himself reflected on it in his heart.

There is a delicate hesitance in the Theravāda tradition to append terms or designations for anything that might be sensed as having unchanging ontological reality, as truly, lastingly, existent. Having a hesitance in making this move, a quiet continuity in refraining from making it is not the same as saying there is absolutely such an eternally existing, ontological something. It seems that as soon as one makes such an assertion, freedom is, to some degree, curtailed—so Theravāda Buddhists have known for centuries the salvific quality of this freedom to be.

## NOTES

1. Nearly four decades ago when I entered the doctoral program in the Study of Religion at Harvard, Masatoshi Nagatomi, freshly tenured in the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, was away in India on his first sabbatical leave, polishing up his Tibetan. Upon his return he asked me, "What do you expect to learn at the Center [for the Study of World Religions] that you cannot learn in the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies?" In his case, he provided a memorable answer through his years of remarkable collaboration with Wilfred Cantwell Smith and many students in the expanding program at the Center. My answer, as he probably anticipated, is still in process. Over those years "Mas" demonstrated his authentic commitment to his appreciative students in several programs at Harvard, pushing himself to become a superbly reliable scholarly resource in their broad and increasingly variegated subjects. He excelled in this with integrity all along as a rigorous academic and, as we later came to learn and also to appreciate deeply, as a conscientious Jōdo Shinshū Buddhist.

2. Grammatically, this form is the weak present tense of *dassati*, also "to see," which is the dominant form for non-present tense primarily meaning "saw," "to be seen," "to point out," "showed," and there is the notion of looking at something (*pekkahti*), "one looks at," a less frequently occurring etymological form.

3. *Samyutta-nikāya*, parts I-V, ed. M. Léon Feer (London: Luzac & Co., 1960; hereafter abbreviated as *S*), III.120; see also *Iti-vuttaka*, ed. Ernst Windisch (London: Oxford University Press, 1948; hereafter abbreviated as *I*tv.), p. 91, and John Ross Carter, *Dhamma: Western Academic and Sinhalese Buddhist Interpretations: A Study of a Religious Concept* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1972), p. 93 and related notes.

4. The *Sārattha-ppakāsinī: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Samyutta-nikāya*, 3 vols, ed. F. L. Woodward (London: Oxford University Press, 1929 [vol. I], 1932 [vol. II], 1937 [vol. III]; hereafter abbreviated *SA.*), on this passage, interprets the tossing about as due to Vakkali's deep concern about not rising to salute the Buddha and providing an appropriate seat. The Pāli phrasing, *addasā...dūrato āgacchantam*, the Venerable Vakkali "saw the Bhagavan coming from afar," is parallel to *addamsu kho pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū bhagavantam dūrato 'va āgacchantam* (*The Vinaya Piṭakam*, 4 vols., ed. Hermann Oldenberg [London: Luzac & Co., 1964; hereafter abbreviated as *Vin.*], I.10), where the ensuing discussion among the group of five was whether to offer a seat.

5. *S*.III.120. It is unlikely that the more familiar notion of *darśana*/*darśan* in Hindu theistic traditions, where one is uplifted joyously and/or with

awe upon viewing the deity and also gratefully receives the gracious gaze of the deity, was at play during the time reflected in the Pāli canon. It is likely that the term in the particular semantic frame here (*bhavantam dassanāya upasankam*<sup>o</sup>), and as will be mentioned later in this chapter in the context of *pasāda*, with reference to *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosācariya*, ed. Henry Clarke Warren, rev. Dharmaranda Kosambi (Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. XLI. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950; hereafter abbreviated as *Vism.*), VII.61, is not totally without some convergence in meaning. Utilizing the activity of the senses in acts of devotion—seeing, hearing, smelling, touching—has been long a part of Indian religiousness such that keeping *darśana* in our translation tends to underscore the depth and quality of the activity of the eyes in religious acts. This is hardly an act of “looking at” or of merely noticing.

6. S.III.120. Carter, *loc. cit.*

7. Vakkali is well known in canonical and commentarial literature. His final demise is variously recorded, whether in apparent suicide as the *Samyutta-nikāya* account presents it, or while arising into the air at the instruction of the Buddha, according to the commentaries on the *Theragāthā* and the *Dhammapada*. See G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1960 [1938]), II.799–800, and F. L. Woodward, *The Book of the Kindred Sayings* (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1954 [1925]), III, pp. 103–104, n. 4. Woodward refers to the commentary on our passage and says that it was at the point of dying that Vakkali was able to attain release. The commentary on the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* notes that Vakkali jumped down from a considerable height but alighted safely in the presence of the Buddha. Vakkali is held as an exemplar of a person who is characterized as being devoted through faith.

8. *Papañcasūdanī Majjhimanikāyaṭṭhakathā of Buddhaghosācariya* (parts I–II, ed. J. H. Woods and D. Kosambi, London: Oxford University Press, 1922 [part I], 1923 [part II]; parts III–IV, ed. I. B. Horner, 1933 [part III], 1937 [part IV]; abbreviated hereafter as *MA.*), I.22 (on *Majjhima-nikāya* [vol. I, ed. V. Trenckner, London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac and Co., Ltd., 1964; vols. II–III, ed. Robert Chalmers, London: Luzac & Co., 1960; hereafter abbreviated as *M.*], I.1) draws a contrast between *cakhuṇā dassanam* and *ñāṇena dassanam* and quotes our key passage from S.III.120. The ordinary person puts emphasis on the customary activity of the eyes and seeks for the physical presence of the Buddha, while the person of admirable bearing sees with insight. *MA*’s reference is considering the case of an average person (*puthujjana*). *Paramattha-Dīpanī Udānaṭṭhakathā (Udāna Commentary) of Dhammapālācariya*, ed. F. L. Woodward (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by the Oxford University Press, 1926; hereafter abbreviated *UdA.*), 310–311 (on *Udāna*, ed. Paul Steinthal [London: Oxford University Press, 1948; hereafter abbreviated as *Ud.*], 58)

draws attention to Soṇa, who, as an average person, longed for the presence of the Buddha that he might be seen directly.

9. The human eye is a remarkable organ in its own right, and for some Christian theologians, conservative and liberal, on both sides of the Atlantic, in the past fifty or so years, the development of the organ of the eye has become a focal point for inferring divine intervention in the erstwhile natural evolutionary process.

10. *Paramattha-Dīpani: Iti-Vuttakaṭṭhakathā (Iti-Vuttaka Commentary) of Dhammapālācariya*, Vols. I–II, ed. M. M. Bose (London: Oxford University Press, 1934 [vol. I], 1936 [vol. II]; hereafter abbreviated as *ItvA.*), 116 (on *Itv.*90–91), where reference to S.III.120 is included. *MA.I.22* (on *MI.19*) notes the distinction between seeing (*dassanam*) with the eyes (*cakkhunā*) and with knowledge (*ñāṇena*), also referring to the account recorded at S.III.120.

11. *Sv. pūti* in *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (London: Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1966).

12. *Vism.*VII.61 (with reference to the *The Visuddhi-magga of Buddhaghosa*, vol. I, ed. C. A. F. Rhys Davids [London: Oxford University Press, 1920]; hereafter abbreviated as *PTS.*), I.211.

13. *Vism.*VII.60, *PTS.*I.211.

14. *Paramatthamañjūsā of Bhandantācariya Dhammapāla Thera: Or the Commentary of the Visuddhimagga*, vols. I–III, ed. Morontuḍuwē Dhammānanda Thera (Colombo: Mahābodhi Press, 1928 [vol. I], 1930 [vol. II], 1949 [vol. III]; hereafter abbreviated as *Pm.*), 210 (on *Vism.*VII.60, *PTS.*I.211). The received tradition regarding this gloss is drawn from the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (vol. I, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter, London: Published for the Pali Text Society, Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1947 [vol. I], 1949 [vol. II]; vol. III, ed. J. Estlin Carpenter, London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Messrs. Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1960; hereafter abbreviated as *D.*), III.142–179, with its magnificent poetic depictions of an ideal life and its metaphorical casting of marks of an auspiciously great person. See also *M.II.133–146*, and the engaging exchange with the *brahmaṇa* Brahmayu.

15. *Vism.*VIII.23, *PTS.*I.234.

16. *Pm.*239 (on *Vism.*VIII.23, *PTS.*I.234). The commentator indicates that in this case, the Buddha, having such dhamma-body, will not return to existence as we know it. All defilements are entirely destroyed as well as all of their samsaric oriented traces or impressions.

17. *Paramattha-Dīpani Theragāthā-Aṭṭhakathā: The Commentary of Dhammapālācariya*, vols. II–III, ed. F. L. Woodward (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Messrs. Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1952 [vol. II], 1959

[vol. III]; hereafter abbreviated *ThagA.*), II.121–122 (on *The Thera- and Therī-gāthā: Part I, Theragāthā [Stanzas Ascribed to Elders of the Buddhist Order of Recluses]*, ed. Hermann Oldenberg and Richard Pischel, 2nd edition with appendices by K. R. Norman and L. Alsdorf [London: Luzac & Co., 1966; hereafter abbreviated as *Thag.*], verse 288). The four, presented at *M.I.*71–72, are (1) being fully awakened to all that there is to know, (2) knowledge that for him all defilements are destroyed, (3) the confidence of having described accurately obstacles that hinder one in religious living, and (4) that dhamma as he taught it leads reliably to the destruction of *dukkha*.

18. *ThagA.I.06* (on *Thag.* verse 94).

19. *The Khuddaka-Pāṭha: Together with Its Commentary Paramatthajotikā I*, ed. Helmer Smith from a collation by Mabel Hunt (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1959; hereafter abbreviated *Khpa.*), I.108 9 (cf. *Sutta-Nipāta*, new edition by Dines Andersen and Helmer Smith [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1948; hereafter abbreviated *Sn.*], 258).

20. *Sutta-Nipāta Commentary: Being Paramatthajotikā II*, vols. I–II, ed. Helmer Smith (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1916 [vol. I], 1917 [vol. II], reprinted, 1966; hereafter abbreviated *Pj.*), I.110 (cf. *Sn.* 258). See also *SA.I.12; Manorathapūraṇī: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Anguttaranikāya* (vol. I, ed. Max Walleser [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by the Oxford University Press, 1924], vol. II, ed. Max Walleser and Hermann Kopp, 1924, vol. V, with indexes to vols. I–V, ed. Hermann Kopp [London: Published for the Pali Text Society, 1956]; hereafter abbreviated *AA.*), I.14; cf. *Sumaṅgala-vilāsini: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dīgha-Nikāya* (part I, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1886], parts II–III, ed. W. Stede [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, the Oxford University Press, 1931 (part II), 1932 (part III)]; hereafter abbreviated *DA.*), I.34. It is likely that in the context of considering the case of the Buddha's no longer being present in his ordinary body (*kāya*) that *sarīra* might have carried the added sense of relic-body, i.e., the dhamma-body of one no longer with us.

21. *Khpa.*110 (cf. *Sn.*258).

22. *Sutta-Nipāta Commentary: Being Paramatthajotikā II* (vols. I–II, ed. Helmer Smith [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1916 (vol. I), 1917 (vol. II)]; hereafter abbreviated as *SnA.*), I.41 (on *Sn.*30).

23. *SnA.I.42* (on *Sn.*31).



24. *Itv.*91.

25. *AA.I.140ff.* (on *The Anguttara-nikāya* [part II, ed. the Rev. Richard Morris (London: Luzac & Co., 1955), parts III–V, ed. E. Hardy [1958]; hereafter abbreviated *A.*], II.465ff.).

26. *ThagA.I.420.*

27. See Malalasekera, G. P. *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* (vol. II, London: Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1960 [1938]), *loc. cit.*

28. *DA.III.865* (on *D.III.84*).

29. *DA.III.865* (on *D.III.84*).

30. Wilhelm and Magdalene Geiger have made a very impressive, but incomplete, study of dhamma, restricting their work particularly in the canonical texts, with occasional interpretations provided by a few Pāli commentaries. They were fully aware of some of the significance of the meaning of *dhamma* in the highest sense. They wrote, “*Mit voller Absicht hat der Buddha den Begriff dhamma an die Stelle von brahman gesetzt, an die Stelle der ewigen unveränderlichen Weltseele die Idee des ewigen Entstehens und Vergehens, an die Stelle der Vorstellung von der Substanz die von der Nichtsubstanz*” (*Pali Dhamma: vornehmlich in der kanonischen Literature* [Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften; Philosophisch-philologische und historische Klasse, Band XXXI, 1. Abhandlung (vorgelegt am 1. Mai, 1920), München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1920], p. 7). It is doubtful whether the Buddha himself interpreted his activity as deliberately placing a concept in a particular systematic position.

31. *MA.II.76* (on *MI.111*). One should note that *-maya*, “made of,” “consisting of,” used in the commentaries, is the suffix most closely rendering a sense of identity.

32. *SA.II.389* (on *S.IV.94*). *Saddhamma-ppajotikā: The Commentary on the Mahā-Niddesa* (vols. I–II, ed. A. P. Buddhadatta [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1931 (vol. I), 1939 (vol. II)]; hereafter abbreviated *Sdpj.*), II.295 (on *Niddesa I: Mahāniddesa*, ed. L. de La Vallée Poussin and E. J. Thomas [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1916 (vol. I), 1917 (vol. II)]; hereafter abbreviated as *Nd1.*], I.178 [on *Sn. 834*]) reads *aviparitasabhāvathena*, “one whose inherent nature is not unfavorable,” or “one whose inherent nature is not distorted or perverted.”

33. *AA.V.72* (on *A.V.226*). The parallelism appears numerous throughout the canon. One notes, for example, *MI.111* (cf. *MA.II.76* on this), III.195; *A.V.226* (cf. *AA.V.72*). Another set of parallels is *dhammajāla*, “net of dhamma,” and *brahmajāla* (*DI.46*). The commentary takes the former in

the sense of “the teachings spoken in many strands.” *Brahmajāla* here refers to the analysis of knowledge of omniscience in the sense of its being “superior” or “the best” (DA.I.129). We find *dhammayāna*, “dhamma-vehicle,” and *brahmayāna*, “best vehicle,” both referring to “the noble eightfold path.” S.V.5 (cf. SA.III.121). Regularly *brahma*° in compounds is taken as “best” or “highest” or “superior,” as in *brahmadeyya*, “best gift,” (MA.III.415 [on M.II.164]), as “best” or “highest” world or realm, *brahmaloka* (DA.II.663 [on D.II.240]). *Brahmabhūta*, “who has attained the highest or the best,” can stand alone as a synonym for one who has realized the extinction of all defilements, who has realized the ease of meditative absorption (*jhāna*), paths, fruits, and nibbāna (so MA.III.10 [on M.I.341]). And one living the higher life (*brahmacārin*) refers to one living the noble path in the best sense unendingly (cf. DA.III.737 [on D.II.283]). Interesting variations appear at MA.III.418 (on M.II.165) where *brahmavaccasin* is glossed by “one having the best color,” which means “one endowed with the best golden color among the pure castes.” Also here one finds *brahmavaccasin* glossed by “one endowed with a body like the body of Mahābrahmā.”

34. *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī: Commentary on the Mahāvamsa*, vols. I–II, ed. G. P. Malalasekera for the Government of Ceylon (London: published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1935; hereafter abbreviated as *MhvT.*), I.45–46.

35. DA.I.34; SA.I.12.

36. DA.III.865 (on D.III.84).

37. MA.II.76 (on M.I.11); SA.II.389 (on S.IV.94); *Sdpj*.II.295 (on *Nd1*.I.78 on *Sn*.834).

38. *ThagA*.II.20 (on *Thag*.49); *ItvA*.116 (on *Itv*.90–91).

39. *ThagA*.III.70 (on *Thag*.1174).

40. *UdA*.311 (on *Ud*.58).

41. *The Mahā-Bodhi-Vamsa*, ed. S. Arthur Strong (London: Oxford University Press, 1891; abbreviated hereafter as *Mbv.*), 83.

42. *Saddharmāvavāda Saṃgrahaya*, ed. Vēragoḍa Amaramoli Thera (Colombo: Ratnākara Mudraṇalayaya, 1956; hereafter abbreviated as *ŚsdhAv.*), 263, 285.

43. *ŚsdhAv*.300.

44. *ŚsdhAv*.300, 302, 304.

45. *Saddharmalaṅkāraya*, ed. Kiriāllē Ñāṇavimala Thera (Colombo: M. D. Guṇasēna, 1954; hereafter abbreviated *SdhAl.*), 2.

46. *ŚsdhAv*.249.

47. *SdhAl*.370.

48. *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriāllē Nāṇavimala Thera (Colombo: M. D. Guṇasēna & Co., 1965; hereafter abbreviated as *PūjāV.*), 190.
49. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998 [first published as *Faith and Belief*, Princeton University Press, 1979]).
50. *Sn.*992–993.
51. *DA.I.237* (on *D.I.86*). The same specificity of reference occurs at *DA.I.278* (on *D.I.110*). At *DA.II.467* (on *D.II.38*) reference is made to the knowledge of the three paths. However, *SA.II.392*, no doubt led by the context of *S.IV.107*, takes *dhammacakkhu* as the four paths and the four fruits.
52. *M.I.380*; *Vin.I.16*; *Ud.49*, for example.
53. *M.I.380*. The commentary here makes a similar observation, drawing attention to another sutta where *dhammacakkhu* refers to the destruction of the “outflows” (*āsava*) related to the three paths, but here, at this place, it refers only the path of stream entrance. See also *UdA.283* (on *Ud.49*) and *Dhammapāla’s Paramattha-Dīpanī, Part IV, Being the Commentary on the Vimāna-Vatthu*, ed. E. Hardy (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1901; hereafter abbreviated as *VvA.*), 317, where it is stated succinctly, “*dhammacakkhu ti sotāpattimaggam.*”
54. *AA.II.356* (on *A.I.242*). *M.III.92* (on *M.I.380*), commenting on *ditthadhamma*, in association with *dhammacakkhu*, takes the former to refer to the four noble truths, and the latter to understanding the arising and cessation of all things.



# Defining a Usable Past: Indian Sources for Shin Buddhist Theology

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THOSE OF US WHO WERE fortunate enough to work with Professor Nagatomi in his years at Harvard knew him first as a scholar of the written text. His office was dominated by a well-used copy of the Chinese Buddhist Canon, and it overflowed with the dissertations of his students, communications from colleagues, and the trappings of serious Indological scholarship, to say nothing of the bands of students who sat attentively around him, with their Pāli, Sanskrit, or Chinese in their laps, puzzling over the meanings of difficult Buddhist terms. We learned, more slowly perhaps, that his love of the written word came with a passionate concern for Buddhism as a living tradition.

This concern came into focus for me in the mid-eighties when we shared the responsibility of organizing a theological encounter between the faculty of Harvard Divinity School and a group of scholars from Nishi Honganji in Kyoto. Through our work together on this conference, I learned to appreciate his affection for the Shin Buddhist tradition and to share his fascination with its fundamental values. As was true for many of Professor Nagatomi's students, this fascination led me back into the historical sources of the Mahāyāna tradition in India. *To See the Buddha*, my book on the concept of the Buddha, was an exploration of the Indian themes and patterns of thought that came to such striking fruition in Japan in the life of Shinran. The unspoken assumption behind this book was that the Japanese variants of the Mahāyāna tradition, including Shin Buddhism, could be understood best if they were seen not as isolated regional peculiarities, but as a way of working out issues and themes embedded in the structure of the Mahāyāna itself.

Looking back on that book and on the process that led to its creation, I can see how much it was indebted to Professor Nagatomi, not just in its turn toward historical sources, but in its conviction that the historical sources have something to say to the present. Professor Nagatomi was a comparativist at heart: he embodied the truth of Max Müller's dictum that "he who knows one knows none." He was persuaded that to *know* any Buddhist tradition was to know it not only in relation to the traditions of the

West, but in relation to its sources and to its internal variants in the tradition that gave it birth. When the history came together with the concerns of the present, something new happened. There was space to imagine the tradition in a new and authentic way.

The essay that follows is meant to honor Professor Nagatomi's legacy in a way that I believe he would have recognized, in the aspiration, at least, if not in the execution. It attempts to locate the contemporary reconstruction of Shin Buddhist tradition in a creative encounter with its Indian past. Whatever success this project may have is due, in no small part, to the example Professor Nagatomi set as a scholar of the Mahāyāna.

### Why "Buddhist Theology"?

No matter how many times we hear the word, it is still impossible not to be startled by the mention of a Buddhist "theology."<sup>1</sup> There are at least two reasons for this reaction. The first is that the word seems to mark a deliberate shift from the "objective" study of Buddhism toward a more passionate, committed engagement with Buddhist values. In the academic study of religion, where scholars pride themselves on the way they hold value commitments at a distance, this move seems fraught with danger.<sup>2</sup> There probably is no religion professor in America who has not had to explain to a colleague from another department: "No, the Religion Department is not trying to convert anyone. If you want conversion, you can go to the chaplain's office (if there is such a thing). And never, I mean NEVER, confuse us with the chaplain's office." Many scholars of religion would say that the study of religion should analyze, describe, and in some cases compare, but should not advocate one position over another. To do otherwise, they say, would forfeit the claim of scholarly objectivity that makes the discipline a respected part of American academic life.

Another reason for surprise has to do with the word "theology." There is an old story about the Hindu philosopher Udayana, who came to a temple one day for his morning worship and found that the door was locked. In his frustration, he addressed the deity and said: "Drunk with the wine of your own godhood, you ignore me; but when the Buddhists are here, your existence depends on me."<sup>3</sup> Udayana was a key figure in the long-running dispute between Hindus and Buddhists in India over the existence of God. Many Hindus, Udayana included, claimed that there was a God who created the world. Udayana's Buddhist opponents said no. And therein lay the source not only of much learned commentary but of many passionate debates. To put the word "Buddhist" together with the word "theology" suggests that Buddhists have a positive word to say about the concept of God. On the face of it, this is a deliberate incongruity. There is

too much contrary evidence in Buddhist history for these words to sit together comfortably on the same page.

Why would anyone want to formulate Buddhist theology at all? There are as many explanations for this phenomenon as there are Buddhist theologians. Some point out that the concept of value-free scholarship is largely a myth, and, if scholars must make some judgments of value, no matter how carefully masked or how deeply concealed, then it is better for them to be explicit about their commitments from the start. Others point to a change in the sociology of the field of Buddhist studies. There are more Buddhist professors in America today than there used to be—not just more scholars of Buddhism, but more scholars who think of themselves as Buddhist—and it is natural for Buddhist voices to make themselves heard in ways they would not have been heard before. An important part of this change has been the addition of Buddhist professors to theological faculties that once were predominantly Christian. When someone is asked to teach as a Buddhist in a theological school, what better way to define the agenda than to articulate a Buddhist theology, and articulate it not just in an academic way, but in a way that mirrors the important and often extremely creative projects of criticism and reinterpretation that are now taking place within the Buddhist communities themselves?<sup>4</sup>

The rise of Buddhist theology can also be seen as part of a broader change in the way American scholars understand their role as public intellectuals. It is not that scholars of Buddhism have suddenly become eager to get on their soap boxes and play politician, but if professors of economics can express opinions about problems in the tax code or professors of sociology can hold forth about the virtues of affirmative action, why should professors of Buddhism be afraid to enter public discussion on a range of public issues? How a professor tackles these issues depends to some degree on the nature of the audience. Unlike other fields in the humanities, the study of religion has a ready-made public. If scholars of religion want to speak out on public issues, or if they want to shape the values of particular communities, they have a network of temples, mosques, churches, or Dharma centers where the issues of scholarship are just one step away from the issues of life. Many people are suspicious about the role of religion in public life, but few doubt its importance altogether.

The most basic reason to develop a Buddhist theology, however, may be the easiest to understand. In spite of all the academic expectations about the distance between scholars and the objects they study, many scholars of Buddhism think the tradition has something important to say, not just about events that happened hundreds of years ago, but about issues that trouble people today. And they are not content simply to restate old truths: they want to look critically at the foundations of the tradition, correct old flaws, and bring the Buddhist tradition to bear on a host of perennial problems. There is no question that these new voices bring energy, vivid-

ness, and controversy to a field where the paths of scholarship had become heavy going for all but the most devoted practitioners of the art.

Fine, you might say, it seems reasonable to let Buddhist scholars speak out about what they think is important in Buddhist tradition, but why should they burden their efforts with the word "theology"? One reason is practical. If Buddhist students and Buddhist professors study or teach in divinity schools and schools of theology, it is natural to speak of the Buddhist intellectual tradition as a form of theology. If theology is the word to use when someone appropriates religious values in a critical way and then applies those values to issues of contemporary life, then the critical appropriation of Buddhist values might just as well be considered theology. The term occupies an honorable place in American theological schools, and it brings Buddhist scholars into conversation with people who share the same intellectual methods and interests.

There also are more substantive reasons to use the word. One of these is based on the similarity between some sophisticated Christian approaches to ultimate reality and approaches associated with the Buddhist tradition. The concept of *theos* in Western theology is malleable and elusive enough to invite even the most critical Buddhist reflection. As a Christian theologian, devoted to the concept of ultimate reality as a plenitude of being, Paul Tillich was surprised by the Mahāyāna concept of emptiness, but he recognized that it bore enough kinship to his own theology to start a deep and probing conversation. That early encounter has provoked at least a generation of Buddhist and Christian scholars to look more closely at their assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality.<sup>5</sup>

Another reason is based simply on difference. Sometimes the best words for critical investigation are not the ones that make the most comfortable fit. It often is better for a word to pose a question or leave a gap to be filled in by the listener, the reader, or other writers or speakers who pick the word up and use it for their own particular ends. This is true for academic life in general, and it is particularly true for Buddhist philosophy. To capture a Buddhist philosopher's skeptical attitude toward language, you could write every word in a philosophical text as if it carried an implied question mark. You would not just say "self" or "Buddha" but "self?" or "Buddha?" The same point applies to Buddhist uses of the word *theos* or God. To say "God" in a Buddhist context puts the word itself in doubt: it leaves a question to be answered and a gap to be filled. In this respect it is like a metaphor. It crosses or "carries over," as Aristotle said, from one sphere of meaning to another.<sup>6</sup> But it is not a metaphor that settles down comfortably on another side. The reality to which it points is, at best, fluid; perhaps it is even nonexistent. What is ultimate about this reality is not the reality itself, but the way this apparent reality is approached, and the mode of approach inevitably involves a process of questioning and criticism. Buddhist theology functions best when it puts words under



pressure and does not let them settle comfortably into established meanings. By putting the word "Buddhist" together with the word "theology" this process of questioning is simply distilled and brought to a point of fine critical intensity.

What kind of criticism does Buddhist theology suggest? One possible approach is to scrutinize religious claims to see whether they can be justified by rational criteria. For Buddhists, this possibility has strong precedent in the Indian tradition. Unlike their Hindu opponents, Buddhist philosophers in India refused to give scripture or tradition (*āgama*) the status of an unquestioned authority. The Buddhist logicians who traced their lineage to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti accepted only two authoritative means of knowledge: perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*). Even the teachings of the Buddha had to be tested against these two sources of authority before they could be accepted as true. One reason for this, of course, was the questionable status of words themselves. The rational critique of received truths did not stop at the level of the sentence; it included the words and conceptual distinctions that provided the raw material for any authoritative claim.

Different schools had different techniques for questioning the meaning of words, but all seemed to share a few basic features. One common feature was simply to ask whether a particular word refers to a real thing. There is a well known episode in *The Questions of King Milinda* where King Milinda challenges the monk Nāgasena's claim that there is no self. Nāgasena responds by asking the king about the chariot that brought him to their meeting. He asks what the word "chariot" refers to.<sup>7</sup> Nāgasena names the parts of the chariot and asks whether any of them constitute the chariot. The king says no. Finally they agree that no object can be "grasped" or "found" (*upalabbhate*) as the reference of the word "chariot." The word, they say, is a conventional designation, a mere name. Here the process of analysis involves a search for reference and an acknowledgment that reality has two aspects: the objects that *seem* to be designated by words, and reality as it actually is. From this basic distinction comes the doctrine of two truths: conventional truth, which is associated with words, and ultimate truth, which is beyond or inaccessible to words.

The style of Nāgasena's analysis had tremendous significance in the Indian tradition. It was not just a philosopher's game or a literary device to poke fun at a slow-witted king. It was a way of freeing the mind from the illusions that blocked the path to nirvana. Nāgārjuna formulated the connection quite precisely: "No one attains nirvana without understanding ultimate [truth]."<sup>8</sup> But the negative, liberating aspect of this critical process does not express the full complexity of the Indian Buddhist attitude toward the verbal distillation of tradition. Indian Buddhist philosophers were never willing to discard tradition completely. Dignāga, the founder of the tradition now known as Buddhist logic, opened his

*Pramāṇasamuccaya* with homage to the Buddha as the “embodiment of the authoritative means of knowledge” (*pramāṇa-bhūta*).<sup>9</sup> Other Buddhist thinkers also made formal acknowledgment of the Buddha’s authority, not just as a gesture of reverence but through the substance of their arguments. They filled their texts with quotations from scripture and insisted that arguments—their opponents’ as well as their own—be consistent with tradition (*āgama*). Criticism was crucial, but it was ambivalent, and so also was reverence for tradition.<sup>10</sup>

Much has changed from the philosophical milieu in the Indian monasteries at the end of the first millennium C.E. to the intellectual milieu in American Buddhist studies today. But it is not likely that anyone is going to fashion a successful Buddhist theology without coming to terms with this basic Buddhist ambivalence toward tradition: tradition commands respect, but it would not be a *Buddhist* tradition if it were exempt from critical analysis.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it would not be a Buddhist tradition if it did not actively encourage some form of critical analysis.

In this paper I would like to step into the middle of this Buddhist ambivalence toward tradition and suggest a new way of appropriating Indian sources in contemporary Buddhist thought. To say that my approach has never been tried before would involve a large dose of hubris and an even larger dose of naïveté. I am sure that in the long history of Buddhist thought outside the boundaries of India, there is precedent for any conceivable interpretive stance toward the Indian tradition. But my approach is meant to add a new element to contemporary discussion of Mahāyāna theology. Put simply, it involves two components. The first is to read the early sutras of the Mahāyāna, particularly the *Lotus (Saddharmapuṇḍarīka)* and *Pure Land (Sukhāvativyūha) Sūtras*, in the context of the Indian intellectual tradition as a whole, not as sectarian documents but as examples of a fundamental religious problematic that belongs to the Mahāyāna tradition as a whole. The second is to read these sources less as authorities to be revered than as sources of critical insight in the constant Buddhist process of examining tradition and making it new. When they are read this way, I am convinced that they can become part of a *usable past* for a new generation of Buddhist theologians.

Rather than beginning with the Indian sources, I will begin with three concepts that have figured prominently in recent discussions of Shin Buddhist theology: the concepts of the Primal Vow, shinjin or the Trusting Mind, and the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. I will then move back into the sources of the Indian Mahāyāna tradition and suggest ways these concepts can be connected not only to the canonical sources of the Pure Land tradition, but to other crucial Indian texts, including the *Lotus Sūtra* and the works of the Mahāyāna philosophers.

## The Primal Vow

In the *Tannishō*, one of Shinran's disciples reports that the master is fond of saying: "When I ponder on the compassionate Vow of Amida, established through five *kalpa*-s of profound thought, it was for myself, Shinran, alone. Because I am burdened so heavily with karma, I feel even more grateful to the Primal Vow which is made decisively to save me."<sup>12</sup> When someone comes to Shin Buddhism for the first time, knowing a bit about the language of the Indian Mahāyāna, perhaps, but unfamiliar with the distinctive flavor it acquired in Japan, it is hard not to notice the emphasis that falls again and again on the concept of the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha. Shinran insists throughout his writings that salvation comes through the agency of the Vow. It is the vessel of Amida's Vow that carries a person across the ocean of birth-and-death, and it is the Vow that elicits a person's deepest feelings of gratitude. Why does the Vow take on such primary importance? Why does Shinran not attribute the agency of salvation directly to Amida Buddha and dispense with the Vow altogether?

One way to answer these questions is to step into the story of salvation as it appears in the two *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtras*, the Indian texts that served as the source of the Pure Land tradition.<sup>13</sup> An abbreviated version of the story might sound like this: Śākyamuni, the Buddha of this historical era, was staying near a city in India, surrounded by a large group of disciples, and he began to tell a story. Far away in the west, he said, there is a pleasurable (*sukhāvati*) land, designed to delight all the senses; presiding over this land is a Buddha named Amitāyus (Immeasurable Life) or Amitābha (Immeasurable Light). How did this land come to be? In the distant past, he said, a bodhisattva named Dharmākara made a series of vows, promising that he would not become a buddha until he could preside over a land that had certain characteristics. When his vows were ready to be fulfilled and the land created, Dharmākara achieved full, perfect awakening and became the Buddha Amitāyus or Amitābha. The distinctive content of the vows gave the land its distinctive features, including a vow that established the mechanism of salvation. Among other things, Dharmākara promised that if someone hears the name of Amitābha Buddha and remembers him with a trusting mind (*prasannacitta*), Amitābha will stand before him at the moment of death and relieve his fears. Another vow establishes similar conditions for rebirth in the Pure Land.<sup>14</sup>

This story of salvation, leading from the career of the bodhisattva Dharmākara to the land of Amitābha Buddha, helps explain why Shinran felt such gratitude for the Vow. He felt that his own life history had been infused and transformed by the power of Dharmākara's promise. But this

still does not explain why Dharmākara himself chose to rely on the mechanism of the vow to establish the pleasurable land. Why not say simply that Dharmākara aspired to function as a buddha, and when the time came to fulfill his aspiration, he created a land and acted as a buddha to save anyone who called on his name? In other words, why does the tradition attribute active agency to the Vow rather than to the Buddha himself? If we look beyond the two *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtras*, to the commentarial and philosophical literature of the Indian Mahāyāna, it is possible to give clear answers to these questions. Buddhas like Amitābha have passed completely beyond conceptual distinctions and cannot initiate particular forms of action. They only appear to act, based on the needs of the believers who come to them for help and on the lingering effect of the aspirations that conveyed them to buddhahood in the first place. In the Indian tradition, these aspirations are referred to as a Buddha's previous vows (*pūrva-praṇidhāna*).<sup>15</sup>

The philosophical significance of the Vow is evident in a short passage from Śāntideva's *Introduction to the Practice of Awakening (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*, a work that has become one of the literary classics of the Mahāyāna. This passage occupies a distinctive place in traditional accounts of the composition of the text. According to the legend of Śāntideva's life, Śāntideva was perceived as a lazy monk and seemed to have little interest in his studies.<sup>16</sup> Challenged to show how much he actually understood, he sat down and began to recite the *Introduction*. When he came to a crucial verse about emptiness, "When neither being nor nonbeing are present to the mind, and there is no other option, [the mind] has no object and is at peace," he rose into the sky and disappeared.<sup>17</sup> The monks who were listening to Śāntideva's recitation went to his cell and found that Śāntideva was gone, for reasons that seem quite clear. The verse that ended his recitation represents a particularly definitive and negative formulation of the doctrine of emptiness: there is no entity (*bhāva*), there is no absence (*abhāva*), and there is no other possibility. Not only does this leave the mind at peace, but it leaves very little more to say. We might imagine that Śāntideva's listeners went looking for him not just to find out where he had gone but to see whether this verse actually constituted the end of the text. After this statement of emptiness, what more could someone like Śāntideva say? The legend tells us that the monks found their answer in Śāntideva's cell in a continuation of the text. The next three verses say simply that the form of the Buddha appears, based on the needs of his disciples and on the strength of his previous vow:

The form of the Buddha is seen, like a wishing jewel or wishing tree that fulfills desires, because of a previous vow and because of those who need to be disciplined. When a snake charmer consecrates a pillar and then dies, the pillar cures snakebite, even when [the

snake charmer] is long dead. A Buddha is like the pillar: he is consecrated by following the practice of awakening, and he does everything that needs to be done, even when the bodhisattva has ceased.

Here the vow makes a bridge between the awareness of emptiness and the Buddha's salvific activity: it serves as the active agent that makes it possible for the Buddha's form (*bimba*, literally "reflection") to be visible to a potential disciple.<sup>18</sup> As in the *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtras*, the vow involves a sequence of actions: the bodhisattva set the vows in motion before achieving buddhahood, and the vow comes into effect when the bodhisattva becomes a buddha. But there is more to the vow than a sequence of events, as the comparison of the snake charmer makes clear. The problem with the snake charmer is that he dies. If he wants to have some effect after his death, he has to leave a powerful object behind to act in his absence. The bodhisattva does not die, exactly, but he does reach a state that the text refers to as "cessation." The commentator Prajñākaramati explains that this "cessation" is another word for nirvana, and it is a word that puts emphasis on the idea that the bodhisattva has to stop for the Buddha to come into being.

This way of modeling the activity of the vow solves a number of important doctrinal problems. Mahāyāna sources say, for example, that a buddha acts without making any effort and yet is able to satisfy all the needs of sentient beings. How can a buddha act without making any effort? Candrakīrti, a seventh-century Madhyamaka philosopher, explains that the Buddha's actions come from the power of the vow. He makes this point by comparing the Bodhisattva Vow to the motion of a potter's wheel. Once a potter spins a wheel and sets it in motion, Candrakīrti says, the wheel keeps on turning, and the potter seems to produce pots without expending any effort.<sup>19</sup> Mahāyāna sources also say that a buddha has no concepts and yet responds in different ways to different situations. Again it is the vow that makes this possible. Śīlabhadra, a Yogācāra commentator on the *Buddhabhūmi Sūtra*, makes the point this way:

The Tathāgata has no concept of effort, either with regard to himself or with regard to something that belongs to himself, but because of a previous vow, he generates insights and manifestations and accomplishes the needs of sentient beings.... The Tathāgata does not distinguish what he will do from what he will not do, but he still does what needs to be done, just as someone who is in a state of concentration rises from concentration because of a previous vow. As is said in "The Chapter on the Ocean of Wisdom Bodhisattva," [the Buddha] is like a monk who stays in a state of concentration until a bell is rung. Even though he does not hear the bell ring, he still rises from concentration at the appointed time.<sup>20</sup>

There also is a problem about the differences between different buddhas. If buddhahood is defined as the understanding of emptiness, and emptiness means that there are no distinctions between things, why are there different buddhas? The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* answers this question by comparing a buddha to a piece of tie-dyed cloth. The knot in the cloth is the Bodhisattva Vow, and the dye is emptiness. The dye is all the same color, but when the cloth is dipped into the dye at the moment of buddhahood, each individual vow gives each individual buddha distinctive characteristics.

I have argued elsewhere that these problems are aspects of a more fundamental problem in Mahāyāna thought.<sup>21</sup> For lack of a better word, I call it simply the problem of absence. There is the absence of the bodhisattva who has to cease for there to be a buddha, and there is the absence of the Buddha, who is the perfect embodiment of the nonconceptual awareness of emptiness—an emptiness so complete that it involves not just the absence of any entity but the absence of any absence. These two types of absence have a distinctively Mahāyāna flavor, but they are not far removed from a problem that manifested itself in the early years of the Buddhist community. During the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, followers could look to him directly for guidance. When he died, they had to compensate for his absence with some other source of authority or with some other way to sense his lingering influence. This influence could be embodied, perhaps, in his teaching, in the monastic community, or in the physical relics that had been made powerful by his presence. One of the concepts that emerged from this problematic period was the concept of the Buddha's "sustaining power" (*adhiṣṭhāna*), a power that could be distilled particularly in his relics.<sup>22</sup>

As time went on and the Mahāyāna tradition began to evolve, the Buddha's *adhiṣṭhāna* became disconnected from the physical artifact of a relic, as it became disconnected from the concept of a single buddha, and it was associated with a group of words that designated aspects of what we might call the Buddha's (or buddhas') "grace." One of these words was *anubhāva*, the Buddha's might.<sup>23</sup> Another was *parigraha*, the Buddha's helping or holding. Another was the Buddha's vow. Sometimes groups of these words could be combined, suggesting that they functioned, for all intents and purposes, as synonyms in the salvific logic of the early Mahāyāna. A good example from the Pure Land literature is a passage in the *Longer Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Sūtra* where the Buddha says that those who live in Sukhāvāṭī can serve a vast number of buddhas and then return to Sukhāvāṭī in the time it takes to finish a morning meal, "because of the help of the sustaining power of the previous vows" (*pūrva-praṇidhāna-adhiṣṭhāna-parigraheṇa*) of the Buddha Amitāyus.<sup>24</sup> Read with these words in mind, even the texts of the Perfection of Wisdom literature take on a surprisingly

devotional flavor, particularly in passages where the text insists that the actions of bodhisattvas are made possible, sometimes unwittingly, by the sustaining power of the Buddha.<sup>25</sup>

The significance of the vow in the larger world of the Indian Mahāyāna has important implications for Shin Buddhist theology. The first is so obvious that it almost does not need to be said, if it were not so widely overlooked. It is clear from these examples that the devotional logic of the vow is a fundamental part of Mahāyāna speculation about the nature of the Buddha. It is not a small, isolated doctrine, and it is not confined to a small group of texts. It is part of the intellectual and religious legacy of the Mahāyāna as a whole. This presents challenges as well as opportunities for Shin Buddhist theology. Pure Land Buddhism is often presented as if it involved a radical break from other forms of the Mahāyāna.<sup>26</sup> Certainly there are ways in which this is true. But exclusive emphasis on the *distinctiveness* of Pure Land teaching overlooks the important lines of connection that sew the Pure Land tradition together with the rest of the Mahāyāna. It also overlooks the way other Mahāyāna literature can serve as a resource for Pure Land theology. If the concept of the vow is not a sectarian notion but a significant feature of Mahāyāna thought as a whole, as it is in the works of thinkers like Candrakīrti, Śāntideva, and Śīlabhadra, then there is no reason why Shin Buddhist theologians should not use the whole Indian tradition as a resource for their critical reconstruction of the tradition, and there is no reason why they should not be full participants in any contemporary effort to rethink the meaning of the Mahāyāna.

In the process, however, Shin Buddhist theologians will have to confront aspects of the Indian tradition that seem to resist their traditional understanding of Pure Land Buddhism. It is customary, for example, to translate the word “previous” (*pūrva*) in the formula “previous vow” (*pūrva-praṇidhāna*) as “primal.” The editors of *The Collected Works of Shinran* explain that “the Sanskrit original, *pūrva-praṇidhāna*, implies that the Primal Vow, as the manifestation in time, from ten kalpas ago, of that which is timeless, existed prior to (*pūrva*) the earliest being, and that is the basis and foundation of each being, leading to its self-awareness from the bottomless depths of life.”<sup>27</sup> This may be an accurate account of Shinran’s understanding of the primacy of the Vow, but there is no indication in the Indian sources that the Vow is timeless or existed prior to the earliest being. The examples from the Indian philosophers indicate simply that there is a sequence of causes. First there is the snake charmer’s consecration, then there is the consecrated pillar. First the potter spins the wheel, then he makes the pot. First the monk enters concentration, then the monk gets up. First there is a Bodhisattva Vow, then there is a Buddha. Śāntideva’s commentator Prajñākaramati makes this point explicit by using a traditional Buddhist causal formula: “When the state of the cause ceases, one

attains the state of the result."<sup>28</sup> The cause in this formula is not a primal or original cause, it is simply one element in a beginningless chain of causes and effects: it is the bodhisattva that precedes the appearance of a buddha.

By locating the Vow prior to the earliest being and beyond the flow of time, the Shin Buddhist tradition has introduced an element of paradox that would not have been necessary in the classical Indian context. If the Buddha Amitābha exists, as Luis O. Gómez has said, in "an eternal present," then there is no need for the chronological sequence of the Vow.<sup>29</sup> If the chronological sequence is real and describes something important about the process leading from bodhisattva to buddha, then there was a time when Amitābha Buddha was not. There was only the bodhisattva whose vows eventually, in time, produced the Buddha, just as ordinary causes produce ordinary effects. In the Indian tradition the paradox disappears when the vow is understood as a way of explaining how something that no longer exists can continue to have an effect.

This does not mean, however, that the concept of the Buddha is completely free from paradox, either in India or elsewhere. In India the idea of the vow was meant to explain how the Buddha can appear to act while he is completely free from action, just as the Buddha appears to speak, even though he remains silent.<sup>30</sup> The paradox of action and inaction is part of a more fundamental Buddhist paradox about identity. If there is no self, how can someone act? If buddhahood is defined as the perfect awareness of emptiness, how can the Buddha seem to choose one action over another? And if everything is empty, how can the sequence of action leading from bodhisattva to buddha make any sense? To bring these paradoxes to a resolution requires some concept of two truths, as the conversation between Nāgasena and Milinda has already suggested.<sup>31</sup> I will have more to say about the resolution of these paradoxes when I take up the relationship between emptiness and the doctrine of two truths in the last section of this paper.

### *Shinjin* or the Trusting Mind

While Shinran insisted that the Primal Vow provided everything necessary for salvation, he also felt that the Vow had to elicit a response in the heart and mind of the believer: it had to be accepted with a sense of confidence and trust before it could save someone from the world of birth and death. In this respect Shinran stood on strong scriptural foundation. The text of Dharmakāra's Eighteenth Vow (in its Sanskrit version) clearly presupposed a response on the part of the believer:

Blessed One, may I not awaken to unsurpassable, perfect, full awakening, if, after I attain awakening, those living beings in other



world spheres who conceive the aspiration to attain unsurpassable, perfect, full awakening, hear my name, and remember me with serene trust, will not be met by me at the moment of death—if I should not stand before them then, surrounded and honored by a retinue of monks, so that they can meet death without anxiety.<sup>32</sup>

The key term in this passage is “serene trust” (*prasanna-citta*). A more literal translation of this term would be “serene” or “trusting mind.”<sup>33</sup> In recent works on Shinran, this term is often represented simply by its Japanese equivalent, *shinjin*, without translation. Looking elsewhere in the text of the two *Sukhāvātivṛyūha Sūtras*, it becomes clear that “trusting mind” is related to a number of other important Indian words that express some sense of confidence, trust, or faith. The most notable of these is the Indian word *śraddhā* or “faith.” Taken altogether, these words raise a series of important interpretive questions. Do the words have distinctive meanings? Is there anything distinctive about their use in the early Mahāyāna? And how do these terms help us understand the continuing dilemmas of Shin Buddhist theology? The best way to answer these questions is to begin in the canonical tradition that preceded the appearance of the Mahāyāna.

In the early years of the Buddhist tradition, the concept of faith (*śraddhā*) played a clear but circumscribed role in the discipline that led to nirvana. It is understood best, perhaps, as an access virtue, a state of mind that a person needs to cultivate in order to get started on the Buddhist path. Eventually, however, faith has to give way to something more permanent and more deeply transformative. This more permanent virtue is wisdom, a person’s own understanding and appreciation of the truths that constituted the Buddha’s awakening. According to this model, faith is not entirely dispensable—a person needs to trust the Buddha’s teaching and believe that it can be effective before practicing it with conviction—but faith in the Buddha’s teaching is not enough. Faith eventually has to give way to wisdom. Once you have followed the Buddha’s path and understood the Buddha’s teaching for yourself, there is no longer any need to have faith in it. The old proverb may say that seeing is believing, but in classical India seeing is more than believing. Once you see something for yourself, there is no longer any need to take it as a matter of faith.

In the Abhidharma tradition, this understanding of faith is expressed in the list of five faculties (*indriya*): faith (*śraddhā*), vigor (*vīrya*), mindfulness (*smṛti*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*). According to Vasubandhu’s commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*, the five faculties function as the foundation (*āśraya*) of nirvana: faith is their source, and the practice of the five faculties leads eventually to nirvana.<sup>34</sup> In this respect the early Buddhist tradition is similar to the tradition that manifests itself in the seventeenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*:

Without faith (*aśraddhayā*), any offering, gift, austerity, or action is called nonexistent (*asat*), O Pārtha; it does not exist here, and it does not exist in the world to come.<sup>35</sup>

For any action to be effective, it has to be done with faith, as the etymology of the word itself suggests. You have to “put” (*dhā*) your “heart” (*śrad*) into something before you can expect success.<sup>36</sup> Otherwise, the action might as well never have taken place.

In the early Mahāyāna sutras, the word *śraddhā* continued to have the same meaning, but its role changed dramatically. There were passages that echoed the old usage, like the Buddha’s comment, in the third chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, about disciples who “go with faith in me, but do not have knowledge of their own.”<sup>37</sup> But there are also many passages where the central drama of salvation turns on the issue of faith. The fifteenth chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, for example, begins with the repetition of a simple refrain: “Trust me, sons of good family, have faith (*abhiśraddadhvam*) in the true teaching delivered by the Tathāgata.”<sup>38</sup> The chapter itself then elaborates a parable about faith: A physician goes away on a trip and finds, when he comes home, that his children are sick. He offers them medicine, but only some of the children are willing to accept it. To persuade the others, the physician tells them that he is about to die, and he leaves for another part of the country. Stunned by grief, the children take the medicine out of respect for their absent father. When they have been healed, the father reappears. The issues of truth and manipulation, as well as the issues of the presence and absence of the father (as a representation of the Buddha), are similar to issues raised elsewhere in the text,<sup>39</sup> but the key to this passage is simple: to be healed the children have to have faith in their father. Later in the text, this point about faith is distilled into a salvific formula where faith itself guarantees that a person will become irreversible from supreme awakening:

O Ajita, any son or daughter of good family who hears this Dharma-teaching about the lifespan of the Tathāgata and generates even a single moment of resolution (*adhimukti*) or has faith (*abhiśraddadhāna*) will have an immeasurable accumulation of merit, and, equipped with this accumulation of merit, this son or daughter of good family will become irreversible from supreme, perfect awakening.<sup>40</sup>

The *Lotus Sūtra* is not unique in the significance it attributes to *śraddhā*. Similar passages in both the *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtras*<sup>41</sup> show that *śraddhā* played a much more powerful role in the economy of salvation in the early Mahāyāna than it did in previous traditions. How did it come to

carry such weight? Given the historical and textual uncertainty that surrounds so much of the early Mahāyāna, it is hard to do more than suggest a possible scenario. The change in the weight of *śraddhā* seems to be related, however, to basic changes in the Mahāyāna approach to the path that leads to awakening. As the ideal of the bodhisattva developed in Mahāyāna literature, the goal of nirvana no longer had the same central significance. The point of the bodhisattva path was not to achieve awakening in this life but to return in the cycle of death and rebirth to bring others to awakening. Nirvana and buddhahood were still long-term goals, but in a practical sense buddhahood was postponed far into the future. The more immediate goal was to cultivate the six perfections so that a bodhisattva could function as a more powerful agent of salvation for others. With this change in the shape of salvation came a change in the relationships that tied practitioners together on the path. In the earlier tradition, practice was largely understood as a solitary discipline: nirvana could be achieved only for oneself. The bodhisattva path made it possible, however, for someone to benefit more clearly and more explicitly from a network of salvation. Bodhisattvas not only worked for the salvation of others; they could rely on the help of other bodhisattvas and buddhas who had gone before them.

Both these changes, the postponement of buddhahood and the possibility of a network of salvation, gave new significance to the concept of *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* still functioned as the trust that got someone started on the path, but it was more important to get started than it had been before. With the goal so far in the future, merely to be on the path became a substitute for the goal itself; and entry into the path gave access to a vast network of salvation, extending back into the distant past and carrying the believers forward in ways that would have been impossible for them to generate on their own. The only thing necessary was faith—to accept that this network of compassion was available and trust that it would be effective. The meaning of *śraddhā* did not change—it still signified a form of trust—but its function was transformed so radically that it became possible to speak, for the first time, of a Buddhist “salvation by faith.”

Strangely enough, the concept of *śraddhā* does not seem to have retained its importance in the later history of the Indian Mahāyāna. In the formal discussions of the bodhisattva path that eventually dominated the literature of the Mahāyāna—works like Bhāvaviveka’s *Flame of Reason* (*Tarkajvālā*), Candrakīrti’s *Introduction to the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāvatāra*), and Śāntideva’s *Introduction to the Path of Awakening*—faith yielded its primacy to the “mind of awakening” (*bodhicitta*).<sup>42</sup> The hallmark of a bodhisattva was understood as the successive “generations” (*utpāda*) of the mind that aspired to awakening for the benefit of others. *Bodhicitta* was a more complex concept than *śraddhā*, and its complexity contributed to its appeal. It had a moral dimension in the sense that it began as an aspiration (*praṇidhi*), like the vow (*praṇidhāna*) of a

bodhisattva, and then manifested itself in initiative (*pravṛtti*) toward action.<sup>43</sup> The *bodhicitta* also had an epistemological dimension. As an aspect of the mind (*citta*), it involved awareness, so that the cultivation of the *bodhicitta* was never far away from the development of insight and the study of philosophy. But its most important dimension lay in the realm of ontology. For the authors of the classic Mahāyāna, as for many others, the mind was not just what a person *knows* but what a person *is*: the *bodhicitta* was not just an aspiration or a thought but an expression of a person's being. Finally, the *bodhicitta* pervaded every aspect of the path to awakening. It was a beginning and an end: at the start it may have been nothing more than the first stirring of desire to follow the path to awakening, but even this first aspiration participated in the Buddha-mind to which it aspired. It was often compared to a jewel, not just because it was precious but because it represented, in its own infinitely faceted way, just about every aspect of the life and thought of a bodhisattva.

While the concept of the *bodhicitta* had not reached anything like its full elaboration at the time of the *Sukhāvativvūha Sūtras*, the texts contain a hint of the complexity that lay ahead. The Sanskrit text of the Eighteenth Vow is not concerned about *śraddhā*. That appears elsewhere in the text. The vow calls instead for the mind of awakening (*bodhicitta*) and for a trusting mind (*prasanna-citta*): "...may I not awaken to perfect awakening, if living beings...who generate the mind of awakening (*bodhau cittam utpādyā*), hear my name, and remember me with a trusting mind (*prasanna-citta*) ...." It is not surprising that Shinran's commentary on the experience of *shinjin* (the Japanese equivalent of *prasanna-citta*) should share many of the complexities of the *bodhicitta*. Like the *bodhicitta*, Shinran's view of *shinjin* has a cognitive component: it involves an *awakening* to one's fathomless evil.<sup>44</sup> It is just a beginning, but it anticipates the highest good: "To be transformed' means that evil karma, without being nullified or eradicated, is made into the highest good, just as all waters, upon entering the great ocean, immediately become ocean water." Finally, *shinjin* represents the Buddha-mind at work in the mind of the believer: "The person who attains shinjin and joy / Is taught to be equal to the Tathagatas. / Great shinjin is itself Buddha-nature; / Buddha-nature is none other than the Tathagata."

The intellectual and religious kinship between *shinjin* and the *bodhicitta* is close enough to provide rich intellectual resources for Shin Buddhist theologians, and it makes it possible to pursue their implications, once again, in the sophisticated and critical style of the classical Indian Mahāyāna. The concept of the *bodhicitta* had deep resonances in Mahāyāna ritual; it was woven into the narrative tradition of the Mahāyāna; and it was capable of elevated philosophical expression.<sup>45</sup> All the riches of this tradition would be available to Shin Buddhist theologians, were it not for a percep-

tion, it seems, that *bodhicitta* and *shinjin* stand on opposite sides of an unbridgeable religious divide. Hōnen, Shinran's predecessor, drew heated criticism when he excluded the mind of awakening from the Pure Land path,<sup>46</sup> but Hōnen felt that people in this degenerate age simply could not achieve the mind of awakening. The only possibility for salvation, as he saw it, was to rely on the power of Amida. It is important to realize, however, that *bodhicitta* involves more than a one-dimensional reliance on one's own efforts. Traced through the full range of Mahāyāna literature, it brings together the same complex combination of grief and elation, humility and pride, repentance and self-abandonment that resonates through many of Shinran's most affecting passages about *shinjin*. Reading the early chapters of Śāntideva's *Introduction the Practice of Awakening* next to Shinran's *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'* or the chapter on *shinjin* in *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way* makes one aware that the complex currents of Mahāyāna devotion do not flow only through a single tradition.<sup>47</sup>

### The Buddha of Immeasurable Life

The account of Amida Buddha in Shin Buddhist tradition plays back and forth between two points of paradox: the paradox of form and formlessness and the paradox of time and timelessness. On the subject of form and formlessness, Shinran says:

Buddha-nature is Dharma-nature. Dharma-nature is dharma-body. For this reason there are two kinds of dharma-body with regard to the Buddha. The first is called dharma-body as suchness and the second, dharma-body as compassionate means. Dharma-body as suchness has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it. From this oneness was manifested form, called dharma-body as compassionate means.<sup>48</sup>

The paradox of time and timelessness is reflected not just in exegetical statements about the Primal Vow, which the editors and translators of Shinran's *Collected Works* have described as "timeless" and "prior to the earliest being,"<sup>49</sup> but also in statements about Amida himself. Amida is said to be "the primordial Buddha who embodies the essence of all Buddhas." And, while Amida's origins are spoken of as if they belong to a sequence of historical time, "the inconceivable lengths of time that are described place them beyond our ordinary notions of time."<sup>50</sup> Clearly the Shin Buddhist tradition works with two contradictory points of view and insists that each expresses something important about the nature of Amida Buddha. What can we make of these paradoxes in the context of the Indian

Mahāyāna? Are they unique to the Shin tradition, or do they grow out of problems that are common in the Mahāyāna tradition as a whole?

A good way to consider these questions is to look closely at one of the most startling claims in the Mahāyāna, the claim that the Buddha can be eternal (*nitya*) or have an immeasurable span of life (*aparimitāyuh*).<sup>51</sup> There are many Mahāyāna doctrines that have an odd ring to more traditional ears, but none sounds more peculiar than the claim that a Buddha can last forever. This claim violates the doctrine of impermanence (*anitya*), one of the most basic of Buddhist doctrines. The Indian philosopher Bhāvaviveka acknowledged that the concept of the eternal Buddha was problematic when he included it in a list of objections raised by traditional Buddhists against the Mahāyāna.<sup>52</sup> Much can be learned from the way this master of debate framed his response. For Bhāvaviveka a Buddha could be considered eternal in two different ways. At the moment of a Buddha's awakening, the Buddha acquired the ability to manifest bodies, known in the Indian tradition as "manifestation-" or "illusion-" bodies (*nirmāṇa-kāya*). These could continue to serve the welfare of sentient beings "eternally," as long as there was anyone who needed the Buddha's help. At the moment of awakening, a buddha also realized the Dharma-body, or achieved perfect awareness of the emptiness of all things, in a way that transcended time altogether. The Dharma-body was eternal, because all things were and always will be completely empty. Bhāvaviveka expressed these two types of eternality by saying: "[A buddha] is called eternal because [as the Dharma-body] he is completely free from concepts ..., and because [as the manifestation-body] he always accomplishes what is good for others."

Clearly Bhāvaviveka was working with concepts that were similar to the concepts used by Shinran and the later Shin Buddhist tradition. For Bhāvaviveka the Dharma-body was formless, while the manifestation-body had a particular shape and form, and the Dharma-body transcended time, while the manifestation-body acted within the flow of time to serve the needs of sentient beings. Bhāvaviveka would have been puzzled, I suspect, by the precise form of Shinran's distinction between the Dharma-body as suchness (or emptiness) and the Dharma-body as compassionate means, but he made a comparable distinction between two kinds of ultimate reality, one that was nonconceptual and effortless and another that was conceptual and subject to various kinds of human effort.<sup>53</sup> The similarities between these two widely separated thinkers was not accidental. As different as they may have been in the details of their doctrine, Shinran and Bhāvaviveka shared a similar set of problems. There were differences in terminology, but the basic paradoxes were the same: a buddha had form and it had no form, and a buddha acted as part of a sequence of historical events while it also transcended the sequence of time altogether.

What is the source of these paradoxes, and how can they be resolved, if they can be resolved at all? In my discussion of the Primal Vow, I mentioned the Buddhist paradox of identity. This is a paradox that any students of Buddhism confront when they begin to ask questions about traditional Buddhist views of reality. If everything changes and there is no permanent self, who is it who acts? If there is no self, who remembers yesterday's events or the events of a previous life? And if there is no self, who practices the path and hopes some day to achieve nirvana? The same problems apply to the concept of the Buddha, but with even greater force, since a buddha is a being who has perfectly realized and perfectly embodied the awareness of no-self. If buddhahood is defined as the awareness of no-self or (in Mahāyāna terms) emptiness, how can a buddha choose one action over another? If everything is empty, how can the practices that lead from a bodhisattva to a buddha make any sense? There are many ways to understand the idea of no-self, of course, but the problems remain remarkably constant in different schools of Buddhist thought. Buddhists want to be free from attributing any permanent identity to things, yet they also want to count on a predictable sequence of events, along with the possibility that whatever they do today will bear some fruit tomorrow, no matter how much they may have changed.

Karl Potter gave a useful, if rather abstract, explanation of this dilemma when he said that every Indian philosophical school has to avoid two problems: fatalism and skepticism.<sup>54</sup> Fatalism means that things will always be the way they are and nothing can be done to change them. Skepticism means that, while things may change, there is nothing I can do to change them or benefit from the change. You might say that a fatalist thinks that the chain of causation is too tight and everything is predetermined. A skeptic thinks the chain is too loose and actions have no predictable effect. To avoid these two problems, an Indian philosopher has to show how things can be free to change but also how the change can be sufficiently predictable that a person can do something today and hope to get some result from it tomorrow. In other words, there has to be an element of freedom in a system and also an element of predictability. If either freedom or predictability is missing, it is impossible to make choices that have any meaning, from buying the morning newspaper to seeking nirvana.

Given this set of choices, the classical Buddhist tradition opted decisively for freedom. Buddhist thinkers said that reality ultimately involved no self. By no self they meant not only that there was no continuous reality from one moment to the next, but, in the more radical interpretation of the Mahāyāna, no reality even in the individual moments themselves. Heraclitus may have said that you cannot step into the same river twice, but the philosophers of the Mahāyāna took the point a step further and said that you cannot step into the same river once. This choice, of course, left the

problem of predictability: they had to explain how they could be confident that their actions had any meaning when they had no self. Their answer was to approach things from two perspectives: *ultimately*, things have no self, but *conventionally*, according to the rules and expectations that govern ordinary human life, there is a self that can engage in action and experience the results.<sup>55</sup> A proper and balanced approach to life holds both these truths together.

Much more can be said, of course, about the controversies that surrounded this doctrine of two truths. Here it is enough to say simply that these two truths are not only contradictory, they are inseparable. The first of these points is easy to grasp; the second is more difficult. It is easy to see that whatever is true from the conventional perspective cannot be true from the ultimate perspective. If I say that I have a certain identity, that is true conventionally, but it is not true ultimately. If I say that I am not a self, that is true ultimately but not conventionally. The two perspectives are opposite and contradictory. In what sense are they inseparable? The Madhyamaka philosophers who elaborated this doctrine in India insisted that the truth of each perspective depends on the truth of the other. If something can come into or go out of existence conventionally, it cannot exist ultimately, and if something exists ultimately, with a permanent identity, it cannot come into and go out of existence conventionally. Sometimes people mistakenly say that Madhyamaka philosophers affirm the conventional reality of things *in spite of* the fact that they are ultimately unreal. Actually they say that it is precisely *because* things are unreal ultimately that they are real conventionally. Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Madhyamaka tradition, made this point by saying, "Everything is possible for someone for whom emptiness is possible; nothing is possible for someone for whom emptiness is not possible."<sup>56</sup>

With the distinction between the two truths in mind, the paradoxes involved in Shinran's account of Amida Buddha become far less problematic. Form and formlessness, and time and timelessness are simply ways of speaking about the Buddha from different perspectives. Conventionally the Buddha results from certain vows, has form, and initiates action. Ultimately the Buddha is identical with emptiness, beyond words, beyond form, and beyond action. The contradiction between these two perspectives constitutes a paradox, but it is far less mystifying than it seems. The word "paradox" often is used as an easy way to avoid difficult thought, especially in writings about religion. But careful definitions of paradox insist that it involves an appearance of contradiction or absurdity that can be resolved when it is investigated or explained.<sup>57</sup> Shinran's paradoxes involve deep contradiction, but they are founded on the basic paradox of identity in the Mahāyāna, and they are capable of determined resolution, as long as one is prepared to grapple with the difficulties of the two truths.



This does not mean that difficulties simply disappear. Gordon D. Kaufman has posed some pointed questions for Shin Buddhist theologians, not just about the relationship between Amida Buddha's form and formlessness, but about the way Amida Buddha acts through the power of the Vow.<sup>58</sup> The idea of a previous vow, set in motion in the distant (but real) past, made good sense according to the traditional Indian worldview, where it was assumed that every person and every buddha were the results of decisions made in enormous numbers of previous lives. This Indian worldview conforms rather uneasily, however, with a modern, scientific worldview. To find a satisfactory, contemporary explanation, the traditional Indian philosophers may be both a hindrance and a help. They relied on presuppositions about the prehistory of the buddhas' activities that are even more difficult to translate into the world of modernity than into the world of thirteenth-century Japan. But the critical method they used to resolve the basic contradictions of Buddhist thought has a modern ring. The precision of this critical method is thoroughly Buddhist and should be one of the most important tools for contemporary Mahāyāna theologians.

## Conclusion

In his book, *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History*, William J. Bouwsma quotes a line from Henry James: "To be an American is an excellent preparation for culture.... It seems to me that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of them, we can deal freely with forms of civilization not our own, can pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically, etc.) claim our property wherever we find it."<sup>59</sup> To say that picking and choosing is a distinctively American trait now seems hopelessly antiquated. Modernity, post- or otherwise, has made all of us shoppers in the marketplace of culture, discovering and appropriating traditions wherever we find them.

In this essay I have argued that Buddhist theologians, particularly in the Shin Buddhist tradition, can find useful and powerful resources in the intellectual world of the Indian Mahāyāna. I have made this argument because I am convinced that the Indian intellectuals gave a precise and challenging account of some of the most basic ideas in the Pure Land tradition, from the Primal Vow to the trusting mind and the Eternal Buddha. But I also am convinced that they embody a salutary attitude toward tradition itself. Tradition was important to the Indian intellectuals. They quoted from scripture, argued about its interpretation, and used it as an authority in their analysis of reality. But they recognized that tradition was unstable. It could not serve as an authority in its own right without the support of critical argument. In this respect they embodied the ambiguity that characterizes theology today, especially the academic theology prac-

ticed in American universities. What better way for Buddhists to test themselves against a renewed and revived tradition than with traditional sources that were also critical and uneasy about tradition? To say that sixth-century Buddhist intellectuals were crypto-moderns would not do justice to them or to us, but they shared just enough of the ambiguities of the modern world to be intriguing foils in the contemporary struggle with tradition.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2000).
2. Ray L. Hart gave an vivid account of the ambivalence many professors of religious studies feel toward the practice of theology in his study of the field published as a special issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. I have discussed many of the same issues in "The Ghost at the Table: On the Study of Buddhism and the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (1995): pp. 1085–1110. For a trenchant critique of theological agendas in the study of religion, see Donald Wiebe, *The Politics of Religious Studies: The Continuing Conflict with Theology in the Academy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
3. Aiśvaryamadamatto 'si mām avaiñāya vartase / upasthiteṣu bauddheṣu madadhīnā tava sthitiḥ // quoted by George Chemparathy in *An Indian Rational Theology: Introduction to Udayana's Nyāyakusumāñjali* (Vienna: Indological Institute, University of Vienna, 1972), p. 28.
4. One project that has received wide attention is the movement known as Critical Buddhism. This movement has been ably documented by Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson in *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm Over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997). Another important project is the Shin Buddhism Translation Series, culminating in *The Collected Works of Shinran*, trans. Dennis Hirota, Hisao Inagaki, Michio Tokunaga, and Ryushin Uryuzu (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), and including Yoshifumu Ueda and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989).
5. The energy generated by this dialogue is best represented, perhaps, by the long-running conversation between Masao Abe and John Cobb. See particularly Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, ed. William R. LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1985); John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, eds., *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990); and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).
6. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), book 3.

7. T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda*, Sacred Books of the East 35–36 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890–1894; reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1963).
8. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.10.
9. Masaaki Hattori, *Dignāga On Perception*, Harvard Oriental Series 47 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).
10. Paul J. Griffiths made this point about Hakamaya Noriaki's practice of Critical Buddhism in "The Limits of Criticism," in Hubbard and Swanson, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, pp.145–160.
11. Robert Cummings Neville made a similar point about his own theology when he said that tradition functions as a source but not as a norm. See *A Theology Primer* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), ch. 2.
12. Taitetsu Unno, trans., *Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic* (Honolulu: Buddhist Study Center Press, 1996), p. 33.
13. The Sanskrit text of the sutras is found in *Mahāyānasūtrasaṃgraha*, vol. 1, ed. P. L. Vaidya (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1961). Both sutras have been translated by Luis O. Gómez in *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).
14. I am basing this summary of the key vows on the text of the Sanskrit version. One of the most crucial problems in the study of the Pure Land sutras has to do with the text of these two vows (numbers 18 and 19 in the Sanskrit version). The Chinese translation differs not only in the order of these two vows but in the conditions set for Amitābha's compassionate intervention. See Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, pp. 71 and 167–168, with notes on pp. 231–232 and 247–248.
15. Here and in subsequent paragraphs, I follow the account of the vow found in part 2 of my *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (HarperCollins: San Francisco, 1992; reprint ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
16. J. W. de Jong, "La légende de Śāntideva," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 16 (1975): pp. 161–182.
17. Verse 9.34 in *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts Series, no. 12 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960).
18. On the devotional and philosophical significance of this act of vision, see *To See the Buddha*, part 3.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., part 2.

22. For examples of the use of this concept, see *To See the Buddha*, pp. 90–94.

23. As in the Longer *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*: “Furthermore, Ānanda, it is the power [*anubhāva*] of the Tathāgata that causes you to question the Tathāgata about this point.” Vaidya, ed., *Mahāyānasūtrasaṃgraha*, p. 222; corresponding to Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, p. 64.

24. Vaidya, ed., *Mahāyānasūtrasaṃgraha*, p. 246; corresponding to Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, p. 99.

25. As in Edward Conze’s translation of *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* (Bollinas: Four Season Foundation, 1973), p. 159: “Sariputra: It is through the might (*anubhāva*), sustaining power (*adhiṣṭhāna*), and grace (*parigraha*) that the Bodhisattvas study this deep Perfection of Wisdom, and progressively train in Thusness? The Lord: So it is, Sariputra. They are known to the Tathagata, they are sustained and seen by the Tathagata, and the Tathagata beholds them with his Buddha-eye.”

An important example of the word *adhiṣṭhāna* in the *Lotus Sūtra* occurs in the chapter on “The Manifestation of the Stūpa” (chapter 11). Here the meaning of *adhiṣṭhāna* comes close to the meaning of *prañidhāna* (vow): “Then, Prabhūtaratna, the Tathāgata, Arhat, and Perfectly Enlightened Buddha had this *adhiṣṭhāna*: ‘Let this stūpa, containing my physical form, arise in any Buddha-fields, in any world systems in the ten directions, wherever there is a revelation of this Dharma-teaching, the Lotus of the True Dharma....’” See P. L. Vaidya, ed., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960), pp. 149–150. Burton Watson translates *adhiṣṭhāna* in this passage as “vow.” See *The Lotus Sūtra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 171. A similar point is made in the chapter on “Peaceful Practices” (chapter 13 in the Sanskrit and chapter 14 in Burton Watson’s translation of Kumārajīva’s Chinese): “O Mañjuśrī, this Dharma-teaching has been sustained (*adhiṣṭhita*) by all the Buddhas. O Mañjuśrī, it has been eternally sustained by the Tathāgatas, Arhats, and Perfectly Enlightened Buddhas of the past, present, and future” (Vaidya ed., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, p. 176). Here Watson translates the Chinese of *adhiṣṭhita* as “protected by supernatural power.” This is not incorrect, but it loses the parallel with the previous passage and with the concept of the vow.

*Adhiṣṭhāna* comes closest to a concept of grace in the *Lotus Sūtra* when the object of *adhiṣṭhāna* is not the teaching but the people who hear the teaching, as in the beginning of the chapter on “The Life-Span

of the Tathāgata” (chapter 15 in the Sanskrit, chapter 16 in Watson): “Sons of good family, you should listen to the following application of the power of my *adhiṣṭhāna*” (Vaidya ed., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, p. 189). What follows is an account of the Tathāgata’s life as Śākyamuni Buddha.

The common element in all these passages is the idea of a power that, once it has been set motion, continues to work its effect without the need for any further action by the original agent. I call *adhiṣṭhāna* “sustaining power” to suggest that it gives support and also continues in existence, force, or intensity, but no single word or phrase can do justice to all its uses in the literature of the Mahāyāna.

26. Yoshifumu Ueda and Dennis Hirota, for example, say, “The Pure Land path is distinctive in presenting a way by which all people may realize awakening, whatever their moral or intellectual capacities,” in *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought*, p. 104. Gordon D. Kaufman has commented on a tendency to rely on sharp contrasts or radical forms of dualism in Shin Buddhist thought in his “Shin Buddhism and Religious Truth: Some Questions,” in *God, Mystery, Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 138.

27. *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 2, p. 201.

28. *Hetvavasthānivr̥ttau phalāvasthāprāptau: Bodhicaryāvatāra*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, p. 200.

29. Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, p. 37.

30. On the Mahāyāna understanding of the Buddha’s silence and its relationship to the concept of the vow, see *To See the Buddha*, part 2.

31. Most contemporary definitions of a paradox insist that it involves an apparent contradiction that can be shown, often in a surprising way, to be true. See, for example, Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). This meaning corresponds to the second definition of paradox in *The Oxford English Dictionary*: “A statement or proposition which on the face of it seems self-contradictory, absurd, or at variance with common sense, though, on investigation or when explained, it may prove to be well founded.” *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). The challenge for the philosopher or theologian is to show how these apparent contradictions or absurdities nevertheless make sense.

32. Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, p. 71. The Sanskrit text corresponds imperfectly to vow number 19 in the Chinese version (Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, p. 168).

33. As Gómez does in his glossary entry on “faith.”

34. Prahlad Pradan, ed., *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu* (Patna:

K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975): commentary on verse 2.6.

35. *Bhagavad Gītā* 17.28: *āsraddhayā hutam dattam tapastaptam kṛtam ca yat / asad ity ucyate pārtha na ca tat pretya no iha //*.

36. *Śraddhā* in this sense is attested as early as the *Rig Veda* and has a long history in Hindu religious literature, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith has demonstrated in *Faith and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), ch. 4.

37. Vaidya, ed., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, p. 65: *ete 'pi śraddhāya mamaiva yānti / pratyātmikam jñānu na caiva vidyate //*.

38. Chapter 16 in Watson's translation.

39. As in the parable of the burning house in chapter 3.

40. Vaidya ed., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, p. 199. The degree to which the merit is immeasurable has been abbreviated.

41. Vaidya, ed., *Mahāyānasūtrasaṃgraha*, pp. 249 and 257; corresponding to Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, pp. 104 and 21.

42. A good way to observe the relationship between *śraddhā* and *bodhicitta* in the formal accounts of the bodhisattva path is to study the transition from *śraddhā* to *bodhicitta* in the first few pages of Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya* ("Compendium of Teaching"). The second verse reads: "Anyone who wants to bring suffering to an end and wants to achieve final pleasure should solidify the root of faith (*śraddhā*) and solidify the mind for awakening (*bodhau matir*)." Śāntideva elaborates this verse by quoting several passages from the Mahāyāna sutras in praise of faith, then moves on to a lengthy exploration of the mind of awakening. Faith does not reappear as a significant topic until he discusses the recollection (*anusmṛti*) of the three jewels in chapter 18, where faith functions as the initial item in two lists of good qualities: one consisting of faith, respect, humility, and courage, another consisting of the five faculties (*indriya*). The Sanskrit text can be found in P. L. Vaidya, ed., *Śikṣāsamuccaya of Śāntideva* (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1961). An outdated but still useful translation can be found in *Śikṣhā-Samuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine Compiled by Śāntideva*, trans. Cecil Bendall and W. H. D. Rouse (reprint ed., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971).

43. As Śāntideva explained in the first chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

44. The references to Shinran's thought in the remainder of this paragraph are taken from *Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 2, pp. 107–108.

45. Luis O. Gómez has commented on "the richly textured and complex world of imagery and religious hope" shared by the two Pure Land sutras and the larger world of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but he has been reluctant to use what he calls "scholastic Buddhism" to make that larger world avail-

able to interpret Pure Land tradition (*The Land of Bliss*, p. 115). This position imposes unnecessary limitations on what could be a richer and more open-ended process of interpretation.

46. *Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 2, p. 17.

47. Compare, for example, the alchemical metaphor (“I can make bits of rubble turn into gold”) in *Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1, p. 459 with *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 1.10 (“The idea of the mind of awakening takes this impure image and changes it into the priceless image of the jewel of the Buddha; grasp it firmly and work with it as if it were an elixir of mercury”). Compare also the confession of faults in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* chapter 2 with Shinran’s confessions of his own unworthiness.

48. *Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1, p. 461.

49. *Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 2, p. 201.

50. Ueda and Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction*, pp. 121 and 117.

51. There are many examples of this doctrine outside the Pure Land tradition, such as the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra*, trans. R. E. Emmerick as *the Sūtra of Golden Light*, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, vol. 27 (London: Pāli Text Society, 1970; reprint ed., 1979). The *locus classicus* of this doctrine must certainly be the chapter on the lifespan of the Tathāgata in the *Lotus Sūtra* (chapter 15 in Vaidya’s edition of the Sanskrit text).

52. For this and other references to the idea of the eternal Buddha, see *To See the Buddha*, pp. 109–113.

53. The distinction between the conceptual and non-conceptual ultimates is discussed in Malcolm David Eckel, *Jñānagarbha’s Commentary on the Distinction Between the Two Truths* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 112–113.

54. Karl Potter, *Presuppositions of India’s Philosophies* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963; reprint ed., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972).

55. This outline of the two truths is a simplified version of the doctrine that was elaborated with much greater complexity in the Madhyamaka school. More detailed accounts of the two truths can be found in my *To See the Buddha*, ch. 2, and *Jñānagarbha’s Commentary*. See also “The Satisfaction of No Analysis: On Tsong kha pa’s Approach to Svāntarika Madhyamaka” in *The Svāntarika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction*, ed. Georges B. J. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), pp. 173–203. The distinction would be stated differently if one followed the terminology of the Yogācāra, but the distinction between two perspectives, the perspective of emptiness and the perspective of conventional duality, remains.



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56. *Madhyamakakārikā* 24.14. For a discussion of this verse and the issues it raises, see *To See the Buddha*, ch. 2.

57. See note 30 above.

58. *God, Mystery, Diversity*, p. 138.

59. William J. Bouwsma, *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 4–5.



# The Nature of the World in Nineteenth-Century Khmer Buddhist Literature

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REFLECTIONS ON HISTORY, NATURE, AND THE HISTORY OF  
“NATURE” IN THE THOUGHT OF MASATOSHI NAGATOMI

THE BUDDHIST HISTORY I learned in classes at Harvard from Mas Nagatomi was rooted in the understandings of people and communities. “Buddhism” moved, crossed borders, was reinterpreted, changed—but never as an abstract “-ism”; Buddhist ideas, texts, images, values, and practices were carried across Asia and through historical moments by different individuals who found these ideas and practices meaningful within the context of their own political, spiritual, literary, and aesthetic circumstances. With his colleague at the Divinity School, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Professor Nagatomi viewed “religion” as a cumulative tradition that was constantly being reinvented. From the standpoint of Mas’ many students, most of whom were trained in the languages and cultures of one particular Buddhist historical complex, what was most staggering about this perspective on the shifting contours of the Buddhist tradition was its breadth, moving through Buddhist histories in India, Nepal, China, Tibet, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and translating between Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, and Pāli.

During his final years at Harvard and before his death, Professor Nagatomi had begun studying Buddhist conceptions of nature. The project responded both to current scholarly work in the field of Buddhist studies and to more activist concerns about the role of religion in global ecology movements. Characteristically, his approach was a wide-ranging historical examination of shifting Buddhist understandings of “nature” in particular Indian, Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese texts and contexts. My essay on representations of the nature of the world and of individual identity in late nineteenth-century Cambodian literature grows out of Mas’ influence as a historian of religion concerned with transmissions and reinterpretations of Buddhist values and ideas, and more particularly out of his own

scholarly inquiry into the Buddhist history of “nature.” In his lectures on Buddhist conceptions of nature, Mas Nagatomi insisted that there was not a single Buddhist view of “nature” but rather a series of changing reinterpretations. It may be that his historical methodology, examining the shifts and flows of Buddhist ideas and images across borders and his rejection of “essentialist” formulations of Buddhism, was informed by his own Buddhist intellectual apprehension of the nature of impermanence and reality.

As his student, besides being shaped by this approach, I appreciated his bodhisattva-like kindness and compassion, and his delight in (at least some of) the ideas and interpretations of his students. I particularly recall his appreciation of the unnamed student in the 1960s who had turned in a blank paper for his exam on “emptiness,” a story he related to his students before every exam and which my students now enjoy. I know that I cannot hope to pass on Mas’ broad command of Buddhist histories to my students, but I hope that I can make them aware of the shifting contours of Buddhist ideas and interpretations—which will perhaps also help them to recognize a little of the impermanent nature of the world.

In this essay, I examine the intertwining concepts of merit, power, Buddhist virtue, and the moral rendering of the physical universe apparent in late nineteenth-century Khmer vernacular texts. I argue that literary preoccupation with these themes during this period of heightened French colonial presence in Cambodia represented a Khmer intellectual scrutiny of modern identity in Buddhist terms. The modern absorption with the identification and demarcation of peoples, races, and nation-states, and with the “disenchantment” of traditional religious and social expressions was part of the currents of Buddhist thought in colonial Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> As Buddhist thinkers turned their attention to these issues, they persisted in constructing literary images of the world in moral terms. Even when the cosmological, temporal, and physical representation of the world that dominates these texts was downplayed in subsequent decades by modern Khmer Buddhists, the centrality of the law of karma and the moral nature of the universe seen in these literary images remained important to the construction of the new Buddhist orthodoxy that emerged in the twentieth century.

In nineteenth-century Khmer religious literature, the person of the Buddha was regarded as the central figure in the past and future narrative of human beings in the world. That is, the Buddha was not simply an exemplary moral figure; his cosmic biography also demonstrated and made sense of how reality worked. The identity of individuals was determined by action or karma, and the benefit or harm it created. The physical formation and temporal framework of the world itself, in this conception, was linked to the moral development and decline of individuals living in the world, and of the rise and gradual purification of the subsequent Buddhas who taught the Dhamma or Truth in different eras.

## THE MORAL COSMOS

Khmer literati, trained and educated during the nineteenth-century in Buddhist monastic schools, learned texts that articulated a vision of a morally constructed universe existing in a cosmic timeframe. The cosmos, with its multiple worlds, moved through continuous cycles of decline and regeneration that mirrored the continuous decline and regeneration of the Dhamma, or Truth, among beings. The identity of individuals was morally derived as well, determined by their kammic status as they moved through a hierarchically ordered cosmos of levels of rebirth, or *gati*,<sup>2</sup> depending on their accumulated stores of “merit”—derived from good or beneficial actions in past lives. The Cambodian literary scholar Lī Dhām Ten<sup>3</sup> has commented on the number of prominent texts from this period that depict similar events and themes, concerning

wicked, savage *yaksa* exacting retribution from humans, and humans who are just persons constantly undergoing cruel and terrible torments from those who are evil. But the evil do not prevail, because in accordance with Buddhist theory, *adhammic* persons always fall prey to the karmic fruits of their (own) wrongdoing, following the laws of nature that require people whose actions are good to realize benefit and find happiness.<sup>4</sup>

Well-known religious texts of the period, some of which were best known outside monastic circles in their oral and visual forms, reinforced and reduplicated a vision of time and world as morally structured. These included versions of the *Trai Bhūm*, a cosmological text, and the *Jātaka*, along with other related Buddhological biographies such as the *Paṭhamasambodhi* and *Bimbānibbān*. In 1848, a new king named Ang Duong was elevated to the Khmer throne through Siamese military patronage. He had been educated in part in Bangkok, where he had spent part of his life as a hostage “guest” of the Siamese monarch. An author of Buddhist literary works himself, one of his early acts as king was to convene a gathering of Khmer religious and literary scholars in order to reconstitute the Khmer literary heritage lost during the preceding decades of social tumult and warfare.<sup>5</sup> The king reportedly sent to Siam for copies of texts that had disappeared from Khmer monastic libraries, including the *Trai Bhūm*,<sup>6</sup> which according to French accounts of the period remained a highly influential text throughout the rest of the century.<sup>7</sup>

The *Trai Bhūm* defines human beings in respect to their place in the morally-ordered structure of the Buddhist cosmos with its thirty-one hierarchical levels of existence. Likewise, the development of human communities is described in relation to their inhabitants’ observance of the

Buddhist Dhamma. Because of their inability to control their cravings and desires, human beings are forced to organize their societies under the leadership of kings, the best of whom are known as *cakkavatti*, kings who promulgate and uphold the Buddhist teachings. Implicit in this vision is the notion that the righteousness of kings determines the prosperity of their subjects as well as the abundance of agricultural production and the regular, harmonious functioning of the seasons and other natural phenomena.<sup>8</sup>

Temporally, the three worlds of the text are situated in a universe characterized by continuous cycles of development, destruction, and regeneration, which are divided into temporal periods known as *kappa*, an almost immeasurably long period of time that constitutes the lifetime of the world.<sup>9</sup> The two major divisions are referred to in Khmer sources as the *kappa*-s of decline and prosperity. The *kappa* of decline, *saṃvaṭṭakappa* or *kappavinās*, is the “devolving” or diminishing *kappa*, in which the human life span grows increasingly shorter as the ten kinds of bad or non-beneficial actions (*dasa akusalakammaṭṭhā*) are introduced. The list of ten actions includes: theft, murder, lying, malicious speech, improper sexual behavior, harsh speech, frivolous speech, jealousy, malice, and wrong view.<sup>10</sup> At the *kappa*’s end, human life becomes desperately short and violent, all moral values are lost, and the world is destroyed by means of fire, water, and wind.<sup>11</sup> The *vivaṭṭakappa* or *kappacammaṅ* is the period of time in which the world regenerates, just as it was before. A long while after the destruction of the world, when the universe is still filled with water, a *brahma*-being who has escaped the destruction in the highest levels of the universe looks down into the water. If the being sees one flower, the *kappa* will have one buddha, and is called a *sāraṅkappa* (“excellent *kappa*”); if the being sees two flowers, the emerging *kappa* will witness the enlightenment of two buddhas, and is called a *maṇḍakappa* (i.e., “superior *kappa*”), and so on.<sup>12</sup> Shortly after this, other luminescent *brahma*-beings converge and very gradually evolve (or devolve, as the case may be) into solid-bodied, gendered humans living in social groups, who must—as a result of cravings that lead them away from the Dhamma—develop shelters, communities, agriculture, and a system for designating rulers.

The world in which these beings develop has Mount Meru standing at its center, surrounded by a ring of mountains and four continents inhabited by different classes of humans, of which human beings inhabit the Jambu continent. The larger universe containing this realm is divided into three morally hierarchical worlds containing thirty-one realms of varying levels of experience, perception, and formlessness. The lowest realms are the experiential ones, in which beings are reborn into hells, the human and animal world, or the heavens, experiencing the combinations of pain, sorrow, and happiness that are their karmic due. At higher levels, more

spiritually advanced beings, those with material remains and those without, advance toward the cessation of the cycle of birth and rebirth. The conditions, events, and places of past worlds are reduplicated, as different bodhisattvas are born, perfect themselves, become enlightened, and preach the Dhamma, which other beings embrace. Again, in this regenerated world, the ten non-beneficial actions gradually emerge, with poverty giving rise to theft, theft giving rise to a need for weapons, the possession of weapons giving rise to murder—until human life expectancy has devolved once again to an individual life span of ten immoral and violence-filled years.

Even this brief description of the *Trai Bhūm* cosmology makes clear the extent to which the nature of the world, its inhabitants, and its temporal cycles reflects the moral behavior of human beings in this nineteenth-century conception. This interplay is clearly represented, for example, in the image of the Bodhi tree, always the site of enlightenment for buddhas, which is the first physical element of the new world to spontaneously regenerate after the frothy waters from the end of the last *kappa* gel and harden again into earth. Resuming its place at the very beginning of the new *kappa*, the re-emergence of the Bodhi tree anticipates the perfection of one or more new buddhas.<sup>13</sup> The inter-identification between corporeality and morality is also evident in the physical evolution of the world's inhabitants from luminescent *brahma*-beings into hard-bodied humans, a progression that is clearly correlated with their development of cravings, first for food and then for sex, and which ultimately motivates them to erect shelters, build communities, and elect a king.

The movement of time is likewise inscribed in moral terms, with cycles of *kappa* that correspond to the establishment and loss of Dhammic ideas and values. The temporal and spatial progress of human beings through the world, as they are born and reborn into the various *gati* or realms of existence,<sup>14</sup> is determined by the ripening of their *kamma*, the result of beneficial and non-beneficial actions performed in the past. Ultimately, what identifies and differentiates individual human beings from each other and from the many other classes of sentient beings with whom they share this world, including animals, ghosts, deities, demons, as well as the more morally-perfected beings who inhabit the other three continents of the universe, is their capacity to escape the incessant death and rebirth of *samsāra*, to move beyond morally-constructed, conditioned temporality to *nibbāna* through moral perfection, a state that only humans are able to attain.

The *Trai Bhūm* construction of the nature of the world, time, and the individuals inhabiting it functioned as an idealized conception dominating the religious imagination of nineteenth-century Cambodia. Its influence is evident in popular *Jātaka* (birth stories) from the end of the nineteenth-century that convey individuals living and progressing through

the three-tiered cosmos. While some *Jātaka* texts are explicit about reduplicating this cosmology, in others, the three tiers and thirty-one realms of the morally-structured universe remain as the setting or background for stories that focus their main attention on chronicling the moral development of various righteous and malevolent characters.

### THE MORAL WORLD OF THE JĀTAKA

The *Trai Bhūm* representation of the world as morally structured and hierarchically organized is borne out in other texts of the period that follow the same broad outlines of its assumptions about cosmology, temporality, and morally-constructed identity. Many popular stories from the period are concerned with the theme of individual development as characters progress toward either moral perfection or kingship (and in some cases both). Joseph Guesdon, a Catholic missionary who surveyed and studied Khmer language and literature at the turn of the twentieth century, commented that Khmer were obsessed with depicting the cosmic biography of the Buddha to the extent that “authors represent only characters in which the Bodhisat (or future Buddha) is the hero.... It is always a bodhisat who is reborn, suffers and who triumphs over all with miraculous aid.”<sup>15</sup>

Canonical and non-canonical vernacular *Jātaka* were in general the best known and most widely-collected texts in monastic schools and libraries in nineteenth-century Cambodia.<sup>16</sup> These texts construed identity in terms of the cosmic cycle of the Buddha’s births, rebirths, and moral development. Especially ubiquitous in Khmer collections were the stories of the last ten births, detailing the Buddha’s cultivation of the ten *pāramī* or perfections: generosity, moral behavior, freedom from passion, wisdom, energy, patience, truth-telling, self-determination, loving-kindness, and equanimity.

*Jātaka* existed in a variety of literary forms and included recognizable versions of the birth stories from the *Khuddakanikāya* of the *Suttantapiṭaka* of the Pāli Canon, versions of the Khmer *Paññāsajātaka* (*Fifty Birth Stories*),<sup>17</sup> and stories only loosely connected to one or both of these collections. One *Paññāsajātaka* story that was well-known at least at the end of the nineteenth-century (and probably before, since it was composed at the end of the eighteenth century) was the *Pañāsā Sīrasā*.<sup>18</sup> It relates the story of two youths (one of whom is a prince and bodhisatta) who are banished to the forest and later, after numerous travails, become the kings of two different kingdoms. As kings, they make visits to various realms on earth and in the heavens.<sup>19</sup> An excerpt of the original text offers descriptions of the physical landscape and human inhabitants of the three other continents in the earthly realm, similar to those appearing in the *Trai Bhūm*. The text tells of the “majestic Mount Sūmairu,” encircled by seven oceans and seven



mountain ranges, whose slopes in all four directions are “gilded with gold, studded all over with shining and shimmering...precious gems” or “shining with the splendor of inlaid sapphires.”<sup>20</sup> Outside the rings of concentric oceans and mountains, the four continents of Jambu, Āmakoriyā, Udarakaro, and Pūdsīdī are inhabited by beings of different types. Aside from our continent, Jambu, the other three lands are “so beautiful they resemble the realms of heaven” and are inhabited by beings whose lovely visages reflect their moral purity:

Āmakoriyā, Udarakaro, the continent of Pūdsīdī,  
are so beautiful they resemble the realms of heaven,  
and all the men and women who inhabit them  
are as lovely as *devadā*.

[In Pūdsīdī] the men and women have round faces  
like full moons,  
clean and pure, without defects,  
their life spans are one hundred years.

The faces of the inhabitants of Āmakoriyā,  
the continent to the west,  
are like crescent moons,  
and they live five hundred years.

The people inhabiting Udarakaro  
have vividly beautiful faces  
with four equal sides,<sup>21</sup>  
and they live one thousand years.

All of the sentient beings in these three continents,  
the men and the women alike,  
follow the five precepts, always guarded,  
never faltering, never taking the lives of other beings.

They are [all] happy,  
lacking the troubles associated with farming;  
they know nothing of business or trade  
[but] only of gathering together for enjoyment and pleasure.

Their bodies never experience pain, illness, or injury;  
there are no mosquitoes, wasps, flies, or centipedes at all;  
[since] anger does not exist,  
their hearts and minds are free of suffering.<sup>22</sup>

As this passage from the *Pañāsā Sīrasā* makes clear, the beauty, ways of life, and life spans of the inhabitants of the other continents are more desirable in many ways than the conditions in the human world of Jambu, particularly during its periods of declining prosperity. It seems, however, that in these worlds of greater perfection and purity, the absence of suffering is tied to a lack of corresponding moral development. By contrast, human beings in the Jambu continent, like the heroes of the *Pañāsā Sīrasā*, have to endure exile, countless battles with magical creatures, mistaken identities, and separations from loved ones before finding happiness or peace. Along with the entertainment value provided by these narrative episodes, the struggles of characters such as the Bodhisatta-prince move them farther along on the path toward purification. The other continents provide a Buddhist vision of felicity, as Steven Collins has termed it, but the conjoined sorrows and happiness of human experience in the Jambu continent make sense in light of the *Trai Bhūm* assertion that only through birth as a human do beings have the opportunity to become enlightened and escape the whole cycle of rebirth.<sup>23</sup> If human identity necessarily entails suffering, so does nibbāna.

While the *Pañāsā Sīrasā* draws on the spatial landscape of the *Trai Bhūm*, the *Nemirāj*,<sup>24</sup> another of the most important *Jātaka* of the period, vividly depicts its moral hierarchy of graded levels of heavens and hells. This text is one that makes particularly clear the nineteenth-century theme of moral cultivation as central to the formation of human identity.<sup>25</sup> The *Nemirāj* story of one of the last ten human rebirths of the Bodhisatta, was widely-known by lay persons as well as literate monks, and besides being read or chanted by monks, its contents were depicted on one of the gallery panels in the royal palace in Phnom Penh as well as in numerous temple murals.<sup>26</sup> This *Jātaka* story focuses around the journey of a virtuous king named Nemi through the hells and heavens, where he graphically learns the lesson that all kamma or actions bear fruit—which eventually ripen.

King Nemi is part of a long line of kings whose custom it was to abdicate their thrones to their sons in order to become world-renouncers on the day on which each discovers his first gray hair. One day, when King Nemi wonders out loud which is more beneficial, generous giving of alms or world renunciation, Braḥ Indra (the god Indra) comes to reassure him that while the latter is ultimately greater, the combination of moral behavior and generous alms-giving in lay persons is both meritorious and indispensable to the well-being and further development of oneself and the Sangha. When Indra returns to heaven, the other gods long to meet this moral king as well and hear him preach. When Indra sends his charioteer Mātali to fetch Nemi, the driver offers to show Nemi the heavens and hells, leading him on a journey that also serves to clearly illustrate the importance of moral behavior and generosity. Nemi's journey through the multiple levels of hell and heaven is elaborated in great detail. Several short excerpts

convey both the representation of a hierarchical universe structured by merit and the imagery of the ripening of good and bad actions, particularly (in the passages below) in connection with the exercise of power and authority.

The journey begins in the hells, where Nemi witnesses the torturous ripening of the fruits of wrong actions:

[King Nemi]: Driver Mātali, charioteer of the gods; will you please guide me along both roads: the road belonging to beings who have performed acts of wrongdoing,<sup>27</sup> as well as the road belonging to beings who have performed good actions.<sup>28</sup>

The Teacher then said: Mātali, charioteer of the gods, showed the king a river named Vetaraṇī, which few beings can cross, filled with painful, boiling, churning water hot as tongues of flame.

King Nemi watched beings falling into the River Vetaraṇī, a river that very few beings can cross, and asked Mātali, charioteer of the gods, “Driver, Son of Gods, now I am afraid, after watching [these beings] fall into the River Vetaraṇī. Driver Mātali, charioteer of the gods, I ask you: what acts of wrongdoing have been performed by all of these beings falling into the River Vetaraṇī?”

Mātali, charioteer of the gods, of whom the king asked this question, described [the ripening of] the fruit of wrong actions, which is already understood, informing the king of what he did not yet know, saying, “they were beings who possessed power [but] whose ways of exercising it were disgusting.<sup>29</sup> They oppressed, criticized, and derided beings less powerful than themselves. In worldly life, that group of beings performed these disgusting actions, accumulating demerit,<sup>30</sup> and now they must endure falling into the River Vetaraṇī.<sup>31</sup>

After witnessing more scenes of this sort, King Nemi is transported to the levels of the heavens, where his sensations become markedly more pleasant and where he learns of the wonderful celestial rewards experienced by people who have given generously and created benefit for others:

King Nemi: This palace, with the appearance of meritorious actions,<sup>32</sup> splendid with glittering walls made of diamonds and crystals, divided into symmetrical sections! It resounds with celestial music for dancing, with drums and tambourines, accompanied by singing [so exquisite] that to hear it transports one to glad-heartedness. This music is so beautiful that until arriving here, I

had never before heard anything comparable. Heavenly driver, such delight I am experiencing because of coming here! ... [W]hat kind of beneficial acts<sup>33</sup> did these sons of gods perform so that they reached this level of heaven and now dwell so happily in this palace?

Mātali, charioteer of the gods, of whom the king asked this question, described [the ripening of] the fruit of meritorious actions, which is already understood, informing the king of what he did not yet know, saying, "These were all people who behaved morally.<sup>34</sup> During their lives in the world they were *upāsak* [lay Buddhists] who built gardens, lakes, wells, and bridges; with pure-heartedness, they supported all serene monks, they respectfully offered robes, food, beds, and chairs, and the requisites of medicine to all genuine and true monks. These people all observed *uposath* [the holy day], taking eight precepts every fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth days and at celebrations and [other] holy days as well. Concentrated in moral behavior, these were individuals who directed their comportment toward generosity and almsgiving, and as a result, they now dwell so happily in this palace.<sup>35</sup>

These passages are embedded in longer, similarly evocative descriptions of torture-ridden hells and glittering heavens replete with jeweled palaces and lovely celestial handmaidens. Analyzing sources from the period, it is difficult to know exactly how this graphic imagining of the world in terms of moral rewards and retribution was understood in the minds of end-of-the-century individuals, whether literally, symbolically, or both simultaneously. The extent to which the imagery of a multi-tiered, morally-constructed universe and the meritorious individual pervaded everyday life, however, is suggested in ritual performances that reduplicated the *Trai Bhūm* cosmology. The representation of beings moving through a hierarchically-structured moral cosmic time frame was articulated in various ritual contexts, including the daily act of providing support for monks, which transferred merit to the donors. Rituals of merit-transference to ancestors performed at funerals and on many other occasions as well also emphasized the place of the person in the moral cosmological scheme.

One text that was widely recited at funerals and often used in sermons connected with merit-making was the *Vessantara-jātak*, the narrative of the Bodhisatta's penultimate birth as a human being. Writing from the turn of the century, French sources report that the *Vessantar-jātak*<sup>36</sup> was one of the "most highly esteemed" of all Khmer texts, not only the "most important" and "most beautiful" text, but also "the most popular of Cambodian books," one that was known by everyone, through recitations at temples,

through murals that filled numerous temple walls, and through theatrical productions. Well-known and important throughout Theravādin South-east Asia in addition to Cambodia, the story concerns the birth of the Bodhisatta as a prince of the Sivi kingdom named Vessantara (Vessantar in Khmer versions), son of King Sañjaya (in Khmer, Sañjay) and Queen Phusatī. A radiant and virtuous youth dedicated to giving alms, he is married to the *almost* equally beautiful and virtuous Princess Maddī. Vessantar and Maddī have two children, variously known in Khmer texts as Jāli and Kresna or Jāli and Kaṇhājīnā. When the prince gives away his magical rain-making elephant to the neighboring kingdom of Kāliṅga, whose inhabitants are experiencing a drought, his angry subjects banish him to the forest. Because their love for each other is so great, Maddī and the two children make the fateful decision to accompany Vessantar into exile. Meanwhile, an old brahmin named Jūjaka, who is married to a beautiful, conniving, and much younger woman, is instructed by his young wife to go and obtain Vessantar's children as slaves. Jūjaka travels to find the Bodhisatta, and making sure that Maddī is absent, asks Vessantar to give him the children as alms—to which Vessantar readily assents.

After giving the gift, Vessantar must struggle to transform his pain at the suffering of his children into equanimity. He eventually informs Maddī of the gift, and through his example, she too moves from inconsolable grief to insight and acceptance. While Vessantar also gives away Maddī (and she is subsequently returned to him), it is the gift of the children that furthers the substantial moral development of Vessantar. As a result of the gift, Vessantar is understood to have finally perfected the *pāramī* or virtues necessary for future rebirth as a buddha, an enlightened teacher who can spread his Dhamma or Teaching of the Truths to others, and thus lead them to enlightenment and the cessation of future births.

For those who knew the trajectory of the Bodhisatta's perfection of giving, as Khmer audiences of the period would have, this moment in the text is not simply the climax of one story, but of many. Other *Jātaka* stories reveal the Bodhisat's many gifts of alms, wealth, food, his eyes, other body parts, or his entire body; others depict the Bodhisat giving away himself and his wife as slaves. As Vessantar, he has also given away his auspicious rain-making white elephant. While in various *Jātaka* stories these gifts of body parts, wealth, and possessions are often given quite blithely, the gift of the children is by contrast portrayed as far more difficult—because “children are the very best gift.”<sup>37</sup> In a Khmer verse version of the story<sup>38</sup> the depth of Vessantar's grief is conveyed with the line,

Then, Prince Vessantar the Ksatriya, having given his gift, went  
inside the leaf hut, and sad, pitiful weeping could be heard.<sup>39</sup>

Another prose vernacular manuscript of the story<sup>40</sup> expands on the allusion to Vessantar's grief in this passage, drawing out the description of his pain and detailing the development of his emotions and thoughts before and after he gives the gift of the children. For instance, in one passage Vessantar is shown caressing his children and saying,

Oh my precious children, you do not know your father's heart. If he gives you as alms to the brahmin, it is for nothing less than the aspiration to be one day the Lord Buddha himself. Oh my children, if your father can become a Buddha, he will deliver the condemned who are in the hells and he will give them the means of taking birth in the heavens.<sup>41</sup>

As he finishes this speech, Vessantar takes the hands of his two children and stretches them out to place them in the hands of Jūjaka, the brahmin. Then he picks up a container of water and sprinkles some of it on the earth. At this moment, the earth quakes, trees tremble, the waters of the oceans churn, form into whirlpools, and rise up in the air, and Mt. Sumeru bows down, touching its summit to the peak of Mt. Vongkot (near to where Vessantar and his family are living).<sup>42</sup> As he listens to the laments of his children being led away and beaten by Jūjaka, Vessantar then cries:

Alas! I am like a great fish, caught in a net, like a fish that cannot come or go, cannot advance or retreat. Now that I have given my children as alms, I can not take them back. I cannot....

The suffering in my heart is immense. I cannot aspire to become Lord Buddha now, because my suffering is too great. I will shoot an arrow at this brahmin, I will kill him, and I will retrieve my children and bring them back here.<sup>43</sup>

As he considers this course of action further, Vessantar reflects on the giving of gifts, and then recalling the four kinds of gifts that every buddha in every *kappa* has given—the gift of his person, the gift of his life, the gift of his children, and the gift of his wife—he is able to collect himself and calm his mind, finally becoming “beautiful like a true Lord Buddha.”<sup>44</sup>

Several pervasive identity themes emerge from Khmer versions of this story: the moral construction of individual and world; the model of moral cultivation as a key component of who a person is; the morally hierarchical structure of the world's spatial landscape; and a perception of power as tied to moral virtue. The climactic moment in the text in which Vessantar gives away his children brings to the forefront a nuanced conception of identity in which all beings in the three realms, and even the “world” itself, are

shown to be joined by moral action. Within the text, Vessantar's act of moral purity triggers a response of awe and astonishment with its imagery of the earth shaking, a reaction that it also wants to project onto its audience:

Then the Bodhisat who had brought prosperity to the kingdom of the Sivis gave his two children, Jāli and Kaṇhājīnā, to the brahmin. Then, the prince, with his heart glad, gave his two children, Jāli and Kaṇhājīnā, to the brahmin, for children are the very best gift. Because of this, you should feel awestruck; your skin should be crawling and your hair standing on end because of that moment in which the prince gave his two children as a gift and the earth trembled and shook. The reason why you should be awe-struck with your skin crawling and your hair standing on end is because the prince who brought prosperity to the kingdom of the Sivis, with his hands together [in a gesture of respect], offered his two thriving and happy children as a gift to the brahmin.<sup>45</sup>

The enormity of this moment, with its cosmic reverberations, is reiterated again in terms that extend to and include the celestial world of the *Trai Bhūm* cosmography as well, delighting the gods, as Vessantar's wife Maddī recounts:

My Lord [Brah̄ Aṅg] has caused the earth to reverberate, your fame<sup>46</sup> reaching all the way to the *deva*-world, unusual lightening spreading across the sky of the Hemavānt Forest, an echoing voice resounding as if from the mountains [themselves].

Gods in both realms, Nārada and Pabbata, together with Brah̄ Indr and Brah̄ Brahm, Pajāpati and Soma, King Yama and King Vessavāṅ, all rejoice because of you; all the gods who were born in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven, together with Brah̄ Indr, rejoice.<sup>47</sup>

Again, in this scene, in which Vessantar's perfection of *dāna* causes the celestial beings to rejoice and the earth itself to quake and rumble, the images employed by the text offer a glimpse of its assumptions about the underlying nature of reality: Vessantar's act has moral reverberations for all other beings, because moral action gives meaning and order to the universe. Because the practice of Dhamma (the teaching that Vessantar will give once he is a buddha) shapes the nature and passing of time, the implications of this moment extend into and influence beings in the future and the past as well.

## POWER AND IDENTITY

The representations of the morally-constructed universe and individual progression through its cosmic time frame were joined by a third identity-related theme: the intertwining of merit and power. To examine the importance of this theme during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century period, I will return briefly to my consideration of the *Vessantar-jātak*, and then move to a reading of portions of a vernacular poem on the enlightenment of the Buddha, composed at the close of the century by Ukñā Suttantaprija Ind, which exemplifies this theme.

Returning then to the *Vessantar-jātak*, the prince's sojourn in the forest had come about after his angry subjects had banished him for giving away his auspicious rain-making elephant to a neighboring drought-stricken kingdom. After the gift of the children is given, Vessantar continues to live in the forest with his wife Maddī. Meanwhile, his children are discovered and redeemed by their grandfather, King Sañjay, who with the children and a large retinue of followers travels to the forest to find Vessantar and Maddī. When Vessantar is reunited with his parents and children, accompanied by the roar of the earth and a rain shower from the *deva*-s, his subjects become aware of his virtue and implore him to come back and take his rightful place as their king:

When the royal family was reunited, a loud thundering sound arose, all the mountains made a noise, the entire earth trembled. At that time, the very moment when Prince Vessantar was reunited with his family, rain was compelled to fall in a shower. The reunion of the grandchildren, daughter-in-law, the prince, and the king and queen at that point in time would make your skin crawl and your hair stand up. All of the townspeople who had come together into the forest arranged their hands together [in a gesture of respect] toward Prince Vessantar, weeping, their faces awe-struck, and implored the royal Vessantara and Maddī. The entire populace of the kingdom spoke all together, saying "Brah̃ṅ, our Lord and Lady. Please, both of you, rule over our kingdom."<sup>48</sup>

Here again, the earth quakes and the mountains roar (causing everyone's skin to crawl) as a testimony to the store of merit required to reunite the royal family. Realizing their past mistake—their inability to recognize Vessantar's merit—the same townspeople who caused him to be exiled beg him to become their king. The recognizable superiority of his power is clearly linked to his asceticism, purity, generosity, and merit.

Vessantar, it is clear, is not only filled with merit (signified by the roaring and quaking of the natural phenomenon) but is also indifferent to



worldly kinds of power. If Vessantar can give away his precious children, his rain-making elephant, and live serenely in the forest, he is obviously impervious to the means through which power can corrupt. His indifference, his merit, and his recognition of the higher truth of Dhamma makes him an ideal ruler.

Aspects of this same logic about merit, power, and kingship pervade many other texts of the period. *Ryān Jinavaṇṇa*<sup>49</sup> and *Ryān Rājakuḷ*,<sup>50</sup> for instance, both provide models of the kind of highly vernacular adventure story in which a bodhisatta-prince is lost or exiled or has his identity otherwise obscured. After many travails in which he always prevails because of his merit and virtue, he is returned to his kingdom to take his rightful place as ruler. When his life is threatened, he always survives, he always wins the beautiful, virtuous princess, he is always dutiful, respectful, and wise, and furthers the cause of justice. The *Devadatta-sutta*, another well-known text, presents similar values concerning power and merit, drawing on personages and stories from the life of Gotama-Buddha.<sup>51</sup> This text is a compilation of several *Jātaka* excerpts concerned with the character of the Buddha's heretical cousin Devadatta who gains influence over the young son of the Buddha's great lay supporter King Bimbisāra. He corrupts the prince, foments his patricide of his father, and obtains his aid in assassination attempts on the Buddha. Prince Ajātasattu's moral decay under the tutelage of Devadatta is contrasted with his father's moral purification under the spiritual guidance of the Buddha. Bimbisāra, who gave generously to the Sangha and brought about the ordination of 110,000 of his subjects, "had attained the highest degree of perfection that can be attained by a lay person."<sup>52</sup> This text ends, of course, with all of Devadatta's efforts to harm the Buddha coming to nothing. He is swallowed by the earth and, according to the prediction of the Buddha, spent the next 100,000 million years being tortured in Avici Hell.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps the most highly idealized vision of power and merit is found in the biography of the Buddha in his last birth as Siddhattha, born into the Sakyān Gotama clan, in which he finally attains moral perfection and the knowledge of awakening. A Southeast Asian rendering of the biography is found in the *Paṭhamasambodhi*, a text composed in Bangkok by the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Sangha in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>54</sup> The Khmer translation of this biography appeared in various versions in Cambodia, at least by the end of the nineteenth century. One French ethnographer of the period referred to the *Paṭhamasambodhi* as "the principal text of religious education" among the Khmer,<sup>55</sup> and as in the case of the *Vessantar-jātak*, noted the enraptured silence of the audience, including children, as they listened to recitations of the text.<sup>56</sup>

One Khmer version of the *Paṭhamasambodhi* is an epic poem entitled the *Ryān Paṭhamasambodhi*, written between the 1880s and the early part of the twentieth century by Ukñā Suttantaprijā Ind. The text offers a

distinctive Khmer verse elaboration of scenes from the life of the Buddha. Like some of Ind's other poems, the *Ryān Pathamasambodhi* was intended as a literary work but seems to have circulated in oral as well as manuscript (and later printed) forms. The poem's intertwining notions of merit, kingship, and buddhahood—with the the three worlds cosmography as its backdrop—illustrates the Buddhist literary engagement with depictions of identity and power at the close of the nineteenth century.

The text opens with a brief description of the kind of magnificent worldly (*lokiya*) power possessed by the Buddha in his life as Siddhattha, a prince of the Sakyān tribe:

We will illuminate from the beginning  
the time in which our Lord and King of the World  
experienced the peace and wealth of a *khattiyā*  
in the great city of Kapilabastu.

His royal lineage  
conferring glorious, noble and exalted position,  
he [conferred] glorious and delightful paternal joy  
on the *Mahā Purus* [king] ruling the city.

Tranquilly, he slept with his concubines,  
occupied with playing music;  
his royal consort  
was a princess called Bimbā.

The chief of women was a jewel of a maiden,  
her body endowed with beauty;  
she had a flourishing son  
whose name was Prince Rāhul.

Noble merit, glorious merit without end,  
splendid beyond compare in all respects;  
one hundred and one in his entourage  
offering tributes to the precious prince.

In ten directions there was awe of his great power,  
there were none whose power could rival his;  
the prince who ruled from the palace,  
little more than twenty-nine years old.<sup>57</sup>

In the poem, Siddhattha quite suddenly leaves his royal palace and position behind after apprehending the inevitable suffering of human existence in the form of illness, aging, and death. The rest of the text is

devoted to a depiction of the Bodhisatta's progress toward attaining "bodhi-knowledge"<sup>58</sup> or enlightenment. While the poem presents Siddhattha as one who never waives from his goal of "seeking out the fruit of his own path, a Noble Way / to the peace of *nibbāna*, which is happiness,"<sup>59</sup> the jealous god Mārā attempts to deter him with threats, force, and reminders of the wordly pleasures, emotions, and powers he will have to renounce. Once it becomes clear that the Bodhisatta will soon become awakened, a crowd of "large and small gods" gather to observe him. Mārā, informed of the Bodhisatta's impending achievement, vows to prevent him from attaining purification. He leaves the *deva*-realm to confront the prince in the forest and tries to cajole him back to his palace:

"Oh Prince Siddhattha, son of Sudhodan,  
don't be stupid, leading a renouncer's life!  
In seven more days, a gem-wheel<sup>60</sup> will appear  
signifying that a *cākkavattin*<sup>61</sup> will arise.

"This is why you should return to your kingdom;  
don't go falling in love with the *Buddha-cakra*.<sup>62</sup>  
It is far more fitting that you love your position and rank;  
a *mahācakra*<sup>63</sup> is a great power in the world!"<sup>64</sup>

At that, Lord Glorious and Splendid Prince of Men,<sup>65</sup>  
He who was to be Enlightened,<sup>66</sup>  
after hearing Mārāmāyā speak,  
gave this reply:

"Hail Mārāmāyā; do not come here to obstruct me;  
I will not follow your advice.  
I have no desire to become a *mahācakra*  
as [impure as] saliva and urine."<sup>67</sup>

I have come here desiring *bodhi*-knowledge<sup>68</sup>  
as a bridge for other beings to cross over;  
Mārā, don't come here to try and tie me  
with a fetter that can never be joined.

Will you please get away from me, Mārā;  
my cart of impurities<sup>69</sup>  
has only one broken axle remaining,  
I will soon open a pathway for beings to tread."<sup>70</sup>

Mārā's speech evokes well-known episodes of the Buddha's biography that are left out of this poetic version of the story but which the Khmer

audience knew from other accounts. Here, the passage alludes to the prophesy given to Sudhodan upon Siddhattha's birth that his son was destined to become either a world-renouncing Buddha or a wheel-turning world emperor. Preferring the latter destiny, Sudhodan had, as the well-known story recounts, sequestered him away behind palace walls and surrounded him with the lavish beauty and comfort that his son had now sought to renounce. The gem-wheel to which Mārā refers in the poem is connected with the iconography of the *cakkavattin* king. According to the *Trai Bhūm* and the *Cakkavatti-sihanāda-sutta* (from the *Dīgha Nikāya*), the *cakkavattin* is accompanied by seven signs, including a jewel-encrusted gem-wheel that rises into the sky glowing like a second moon.<sup>71</sup> In this latter text, studied and translated by Steven Collins, the *cakkavattin* is depicted in alternating terms of his greatness and righteousness. On the one hand, he is a world-conquering hero, with his armies, seven emblems of power, and one thousand virulent sons, "crushing enemy armies." On the other hand, he will rule the world "without violence," relying on the power of the Dhamma rather than that of a sword.<sup>72</sup>

The righteousness of a wheel-turning king is dependent on his understanding of, practice, and propagation of the Dhamma or, as Collins has translated it, "what is right":<sup>73</sup>

Depend on what is right (Dhamma), honor and respect it, praise it, revere and venerate it, have Dhamma as your flag, Dhamma as your banner, govern by Dhamma.... Let no wrongdoing take place in your territory; if there are poor people in your territory, give them money.<sup>74</sup>

The sutta goes on to admonish the king to seek out teachings on what is right from brahmins and ascetics, and follow their teachings, and then concludes,

Avoid what is bad....; you should take up what is good and do that. That is the noble turning of a Wheel-turning king.<sup>75</sup>

As Collins has pointed out in his analysis of Buddhist felicities, different inter-related texts evoking the *cakkavattin* imagery make somewhat different claims about the relationship between *cakkavattin* kings and the appearance of buddhas.<sup>76</sup> In the *Trai Bhūm*, for instance, a *cakkavattin* is said to arise only in *kappa*-s in which there are no buddhas.<sup>77</sup> According to the *Cakkavatti-sihanāda-sutta*, however, the Buddha Metteyya will arise *during* the reign of the *cakkavattin* king Saṅkha, who, under the influence of his teaching, will give up his throne and become a world renouncer himself.<sup>78</sup> While kings in Buddhist literature are often depicted as possessors of almost unlimited power, righteous kings like the future Saṅkha and

King Nemi of the *Nemi-jātak* recognize the intrinsic limitations of worldly power and the superiority of the path of world renunciation. Righteous kings, in this idealized conception, always defer to buddhas.

It is this relationship between kings and buddhas that the poet of the *Ryān Paṭhamasambodhi* wants to convey. The struggle between Siddhattha and Mārā that forms the dramatic action is over possession of an emblem of kingship, the jeweled throne spontaneously generated in one of the Bodhisat's past lives, when already "filled to the brim with perfections,"<sup>79</sup> he made a vow to teach others a path toward nibbāṇa. Yet while the poem takes pains to accentuate the majesty of kingship, even the immense splendor and power of a great king who is destined to become a *cakkavattin* appears as repulsive as "saliva and urine" when compared to the power generated by a buddha through the cultivation of moral purity. The full contrast between these two forms of power is strikingly rendered in the last dramatic stanzas of the poem, which again evoke the inexorable connections in this world conception between human action, merit, and the nature of the world itself. In this poem, as in other central texts examined in this chapter, the imagery of the world and the three-tiered cosmos is deployed to indicate significant moral revelations in the texts. When the earth shakes and quakes, the mountains roar, the earth wrings out ritual water from her hair, or the unseen heavens, hells, or other continents are on view, these are always the moments in which the text is working to reveal the underlying nature or identity of the world: its moral construction, its cosmic temporality connected with the gradual cultivation of perfection by buddhas, and the rebirth of individuals according to their accumulation of merit. In this case, Mārā appears as a king at the head of his forces, but as a deity, his power as a king is hyperbolized even beyond that of a human king. His soldiers are not mere soldiers, but *yakka*<sup>80</sup> who have the ability to transform themselves into monkeys, *nāga*,<sup>81</sup> *garuḍā*,<sup>82</sup> snakes, and savage tigers in order to "display the power of all the three worlds;"<sup>83</sup> their mounts are not mere horses and elephants, but the offspring of mythical beasts and wild animals.<sup>84</sup> As they surround Siddhattha, Mārā begins his campaign to unseat Siddhattha from his jeweled throne:

Thinking, "Siddhattha possesses merit.  
Seeing an enemy with merit is very strange indeed;  
that being the case, the only course for me is to distort the truth,  
to accuse him of seizing my throne."

Thinking thus, Prince Mārā readied his speech,  
and processed to the royal prince named Siddhattha;  
"You there, sitting upon the jeweled throne;  
it is not at all suitable for you to be seated there.

“The jeweled throne is mine  
and exists to elevate me in the world;  
why have you come to take as yours a throne  
unsuitable to the level of merit you possess?”<sup>85</sup>

At that time, all during that time,  
the Lord Buddha endowed with Royal Rank<sup>86</sup>  
listened to his enemy Mārā-māyā accuse him  
and lay claim to the Throne reserved for One who Possesses the  
Qualities of a Teacher.

Then a smile lit his lovely royal face  
and in a friendly manner toward the *yakkha*, not at all perturbed:  
“Greetings, Mārā; why are you negotiating,  
falsely claiming ‘this jeweled throne is mine’?”

“This throne arose by means of the merit  
I firmly established in previous lives.  
Why, Mārā, have you appeared to reprimand me?  
I have only to call forth a witness.”<sup>87</sup>

Menacingly, Mārā draws his forces closer and challenges him to produce  
a witness. The text continues:

At that time, that very time,  
the Lord Prince of Men Supreme in Wisdom<sup>88</sup>  
answered Mārā so as to bar him from seizing the throne,  
“I call upon Dharaṇī [Goddess of the Earth] as my lovely *yāna*.<sup>89</sup>

“When I established holy perfections  
I took the earth as my authority,  
pouring water to commemorate celestial knowledge,  
I then received this very throne.”

Having spoken, the prince called forth Nān Dharaṇī  
the earth goddess as his truth-teller.  
“Please arise quickly and come forward  
to give witness concerning my *bodhi*-knowledge.”<sup>90</sup>

When Mārā realizes whom the Buddha has called as his witness, he  
switches tactics and begins to make rude insinuations:

Prince Mārā spoke derisively  
mocking and leering at the Lord Supreme Master of the Three,<sup>91</sup>

“Hey Siddhattha endowed with moral behavior<sup>92</sup>  
Why are you taking a woman as your witness?

“Aren’t you One who has Established Progress?  
And you have a woman as such a very close friend  
that you’re willing to depend on her as your witness,  
to set up a woman as your representative?!”

At that moment, that very moment,  
the lovely celestial maiden Nān Dharaṇī,  
hearing Mārā’s lewd mockery,  
to Mārā quickly directed her reply.

“Hey Mārā, you worthless heap of shit!  
If you are going to speak don’t be vulgar.  
You yourself are calling on your army to witness;  
since when do demonesses comply with ancient law?

“Yes, I am the Lord’s woman witness  
and I support that he has cut passion away;  
as he gained *bodhi*-knowledge bit by bit,  
I knew of each action he made.

“One time, filled to the brim with perfections,  
he sprinkled water on the earth and solemnly [vowed]  
once enlightened, to become a Teacher  
and the jeweled throne clearly arose [from that vow].

“And you, have you not established something  
to which any dare testify?!”  
Having spoken thus, she untied her long tresses  
and taking them up [with her arms upright], handful by handful,  
wrung them out on Mārā’s horde.

The power and force of Nān Dharaṇī  
flowed out magnificently [from her hair],  
arising immense as an ocean  
engulfing entirely the army of Mārā.

Pity the forces of Mārā drowning in the River Ganga;  
such suffering and misery is beyond compare.  
Some die by drowning, others’ bodies slashed apart by swordfish,  
some, contorted and dismembered by the force of the water,  
simply disappear.

Others are trampled by horses and elephants,  
 legs and arms broken off, stomachs pierced through;  
 some become victims of *nyak*,<sup>93</sup> *nāga*-s, and sharks,  
 their blood flowing across the surface of Lady Water and  
 Lady Earth.

Flood water reaching up to the level of the atmosphere,  
 the dead soldiers of Mārā spread across the earth's globe,  
 only the king of the *asura*-s himself remained  
 with Father Mountain and Mother Sea.

During the time these events unfolded  
 Mārā King of the *Asura*-s,  
 understood his forces were utterly spent  
 as he watched the horrible suffering of his army 200,000-strong.

Fearful he grew that the Lady of Water  
 would unleash the flood against his life [too];  
 the *asura* became soft-hearted toward the Bodhī,  
 his powerful aggression toward the Teacher all gone.

“Please younger brother, I press my hands together in earnest  
 in front of [Father] Mountain and Mother Sea;  
 I will write a sutra enumerating the qualities  
 of the Jewel-Lord, the Fully-Enlightened *Arahant*.”

Thus, Prince Mārā, defeated by merit,  
 established respect for the Buddha-*gūṇa*,<sup>94</sup>  
 accepted going-for-refuge<sup>95</sup> [as the means] for bringing an end to  
 existence,  
 and returned to the dwelling-place of the gods.<sup>96</sup>

This scene in the poem, visually well-known from its many artistic representations in Southeast Asia,<sup>97</sup> presents the final test of the Bodhisatta's single-minded concentration on his goal of purification. Having already tried and failed to tempt the Bodhisatta with seductions by his three lovely daughters, Mārā, who is jealous, has turned to the use of force and deception to unseat the Buddha from the jeweled throne, even though, as the poet has him note, “seeing an enemy with merit is very strange indeed.”

The last portion of the poem exemplifies conceptions of the two-tiered structure of power, the intertwining of power and merit, and the nature of the world as inexorably shaped by human action. The linking of religious and royal authority in these passages is quite clearly articulated, first with the dual possibility of world domination or world renunciation, joined in



the figure of Siddhattha, and second, with the contest for power between the two princes. Like a worldly king—but again to a hyperbolized extent—Mārā is himself a morally ambivalent figure who is at once powerful, potentially malevolent, duplicitous, and selfishly jealous. In Khmer vernacular usage, he is understood abstractly as an “obstacle to progress or movement” or as death itself; he is also referred to as “the enemy of the Lord Buddha” and one who actively prevents others from “allowing merit and benefit to arise.”<sup>98</sup> Yet he is also clear-sighted enough to be able to recognize the superior merit of the Bodhisatta and he is sufficiently intelligent and merit-filled to concede defeat and take refuge in the spiritual power of the Buddha.

The Bodhisatta rejects Mārā’s offer to become a *cākravartin* because “it is impure, like urine and saliva.” A Buddha’s power, derived entirely from merit and purification, is far more potent than a king’s power, overwhelming the kind of violent force (even in its hyperbolized form) that kings are able to generate. But in spite of the clear hierarchy in this two-tiered conception of power, the inter-linking also ends up affirming the meritorious identity of kings, as scholars of the Theravāda have long noted. Kings may have to undertake some nasty actions in order to fulfill their duties as kings, but they are still regarded as meritorious beings in order to have taken rebirth as kings.

The poem’s depiction of the comparative rankings of worldly and spiritual power asserts the “traditional” mores of Theravādin ideas concerning kingship, authority, and merit. Worldly power was supposed to be exercised, albeit reluctantly, by a virtuous prince who ruled according to Dhammic principles. His rule was just and created harmony and prosperity for his kingdom’s inhabitants. Dhammic power, greater than any form of worldly power, was the ultimate authority, giving order and meaning to existence. The harmony and prosperity of individuals in the world thus depended on the Dhammic linking of merit and power to create justice.

Nineteenth-century Khmer representations of the world privileged a depiction of the individual, world, and time itself as interconnected, morally charged, and created by moral action. Embedded in a social and political context in which the map of a world containing the inverted Mount Meru was being contested by the introduction of new colonial geographies of identity,<sup>99</sup> works like the vernacular poem *Ryāñ Pathamasambodhi* and the *Jātaka* surveyed in this essay served as literary sites in which Khmer intellectuals and scribes could articulate a vision of modern identity inscribed in Buddhist terms. The poem *Pathamasambodhi* affirms the image of a world that makes sense according to Buddhist theories of how reality functions, with the present, past, and future determined by moral actions that predictably but unexpectedly ripen and bear fruit, much like the spontaneous generation of the jeweled throne formed

through the Buddha's enormous accumulation of merit. At the same time, the ephemeral image of the jeweled throne—representing *bodhi*-knowledge—that Mārā claims but is unable to capture, also conveys what Buddhists have, in different times and places, and through varying methods and language, sought to teach. This jeweled throne of *bodhi*-knowledge can only be attained through recognition of the impermanence of existence and of identity as the true nature of the world, a knowledge that cannot be represented at all, since it is beyond the grasp of human imagination.

## NOTES

1. Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, and Kenneth Thompson, eds., *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 175.
2. I follow the transliteration system originally developed by Saveros Pou (Saveros Lewitz, "Note sur la transliteration du Cambodgien," *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, vol. LV [1969]: pp. 163–169), and slightly revised by Franklin Huffman (Franklin E. Huffman and Im Proum, *English-Khmer Dictionary* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press: 1978], p. 685).
3. Sometimes transliterated as: Ly Théan Teng.
4. Lī Dhām Teñ, *Aksarsāstr Khmaer* [Khmer Literature] (Phnom Penh: Sen Nuon Huot, 1961), p. 121.
5. Lī Dhām Teñ, *Aksarsāstr Khmaer*, p. 147.
6. Judith Jacob, *The Traditional Literature of Cambodia: A Preliminary Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 49. I refer to the Reynolds and Reynolds translation of the Thai text (Frank E. Reynolds and Mani Reynolds, trans., *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang* [Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, Motilal Banarsidass, 1982]).
7. Joseph Guesdon, "La littérature khmère et le Bouddhisme," *Anthropos*, vol. I (1906): pp. 92, 94–96, 101–103; Adhémard Leclère, *Le Bouddhisme au Cambodge* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899). See also Khing Hoc Dy, *Contribution à l'histoire de la littérature khmère: littérature de l'époque "classique" (XVème-XIXème siècles)* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1991), pp. 47, 205; Judith Jacob, *The Traditional Literature of Cambodia*, pp. 36–41, 49; George Coedès, "The *Traibhumikatha*, Buddhist Cosmology and Treaty on Ethics," *East and West*, vol. VII.4 (1957): pp. 349–352; Frank E. Reynolds, "The Many Lives of the Buddha: A Study of Sacred Biography and Theravāda Tradition," in *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, eds. Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps (The Hague: Mouton, 1976); Forrest McGill, "Painting the 'Great Life'," In *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. by Juliane Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), pp. 200–202.
8. Reynolds and Reynolds, *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, pp. 135–172. A version of the story is found in Suñ S'iv Siddhattho [Brah Paḷāt' Uttamalikhit], *Kappa-kathā* (Phnom Penh: Pannāgār Pīo Híat, B.E. 2495/C.E. 1952), pp. 24–34, which was composed in the 1940s, using older versions (apparently) of the *Visuddhimagga*, the *Cakkivattisutta*, and

other unspecified sources. See also Thongchai Winachakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 20–36; Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 357–375, 414–496.

9. A complete listing of the divisions of a *kappa* into categories of two, three, four, and six are found in *Suñ S'iv, Kappa-kathā*, pp. 17–19.

10. *Adinnādāna, pāṇatipāta, musavāda, pisuṇāvācā, kāmesumicchācāra, pharusavācā, samphappalāpa, abhijjhā, byāpāda, micchādītthi*. *Suñ S'iv* alternates uses of Khmer and Pāli in his list of the *dasa akusalakammāpatha* and in his narrative; I have given the Pāli here. *Suñ S'iv, Kappa-kathā*, pp. 40–42. In most cases, I follow Collins' translations of the terms, which appear in different order in Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 488 (which he describes as the “normal order” of the list), but in the same order as pp. 606–609, in his translation of the *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Sutta*. *Suñ S'iv* refers to the *Cakkavatti-sutta* from the *Dīgha Nikāya* (*Suñ S'iv, Kappa-kathā*, pp. 34, 44) as one of his sources.

11. *Suñ S'iv, Kappa-kathā*, pp. 17, 19–24; Reynolds and Reynolds, *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, pp. 305–327.

12. *Varakappa* (splendid *kappa*) with three buddhas, *sāramaṇḍakappa* (superior and eminent *kappa*) with four buddhas, *bhaddakappa* (auspicious, glorious, fortunate *kappa*) with five buddhas. An epoch with no buddha at all is termed a *suññākappa*. *Suñ S'iv, Kappa-kathā*, pp. 25–26; Reynolds and Reynolds, *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, pp. 312–313.

13. Reynolds and Reynolds, *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, p. 317.

14. I.e., in the *gati* or realm of hell-beings, animals, ghosts, humans, *asurā*-s (a category of lesser, somewhat malevolent deities), or *devā*-s (celestial beings). Rhys Davids suggests that earlier texts delineate five *gati* (omitting the *asurā*), while later texts differentiate six (T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, eds., *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* [London: Pali Text Society, 1921–1925], pp. 242–243). See also L. Feer, ed., “*Pañcagatidīpana*,” *Journal of the Pali Text Society* (1884), pp. 152–161, and translator, “*Pañcagatidīpana*,” *Annales du Musée Guimet* vol. V (1884), pp. 514–528.

15. Guesdon, “La littérature khmère et le Bouddhisme,” p. 101.

16. Guesdon, “La littérature khmère et le Bouddhisme,” pp. 101–103. Leclère's presentation of Khmer Buddhism gives great prominence to the *Trai Bhūm* in particular, but he refers to the *Jātaka* as the most valued, popular, and well-known texts to Khmer monks and lay audiences (Leclère, *Le*

*Bouddhisme au Cambodge*, pp. 188–189, 193, 213–214, and *Les Livres Sacrés du Cambodge* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1906), p. 117. The extent to which versions of *jātaka* and the Buddhological biography dominated the Khmer literary imagination is made evident in Jacob’s discussion of literary plots and themes in *The Traditional Literature of Cambodia*, pp. 36–41 and 148–181, and Margaret Cone and Richard F. Gombrich, *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara: A Buddhist Epic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. xv.

17. This text (or texts, since it existed in multiple versions) was connected with the *Paññāsa-jātaka* found in Laos, Siam, and Burma, but by the nineteenth century, the texts in all of these regions had developed into distinct versions, and these versions also developed variations. A Khmer prose *saṃrāy* version of the first twenty-five of the Khmer *Paññāsa-jātaka*, drawn from a palm-leaf version of a text that had been previously deposited in the Buddhist Institute library, was edited and published by Braḥ Dhammalikkhit Lvī Em, Braḥ Uttamamunī Uṃ Sūr, and Braḥ Ñaṇavīriyā Luṅ, apparently beginning in the early 1940s (*Paññāsa-jātakasaṃrāy*, 4th edition, volumes 1–5 [Phnom Penh: Buddhist Institute, B.E. 2504/C.E. 1961], pp. 1–12). A Khmer Pāli version was edited by an Acary S’uman at the École Supérieure de Pāli in 1942 (*Paññāsa-jātakapāli*, 2nd edition, vol. 1 [Phnom Penh: Buddhist Institute, (1942) B.E. 2495/C.E. 1953]). Still other variations of the stories were published separately, also copied from earlier manuscript texts, such as the 1968 poetic version of the *Ryaṅ Braḥ Sudhanakumār*. The editor of this latter text explains that it was copied from a manuscript found in 1962 at Vatt Nigrodhārām in Kampong Cham province (*Ryaṅ Braḥ Sudhanakumār* [Phnom Penh: Buddhist Institute, B.E. 2512/C.E. 1968], pp. vi–vii).

18. Guesdon’s manuscript gives the title above but Jacob cites other manuscript titles: *Paññāsār Sīrsā* and *Sāstrā Puññāsār Sīrsā* (Jacob, *The Traditional Literature of Cambodia*, p. 122).

19. Guesdon, “La littérature khmère et le Bouddhisme,” pp. 278–295; Jacob, *The Traditional Literature of Cambodia*, pp. 167–168; Khing, *Contribution à l’histoire de la littérature khmère*, pp. 166–171.

20. Guesdon, “La littérature khmère et le Bouddhisme,” pp. 280–282. Guesdon reproduces the Khmer text of the manuscript.

21. Here, the Khmer text is obscure, suggesting both that they have triangular faces and square faces: “three *jrūncatura*-s.”

22. Each stanza in the Khmer manuscript is divided into seven strophes, which translates too awkwardly. My translation is literal rather than poetic. Guesdon gives an alternate French translation which differs from mine in some details. Guesdon, “La littérature khmère et le Bouddhisme,” pp. 283–285.

23. Reynolds and Reynolds, *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, p. 135.
24. Pāli (hereafter P.) Nimi. Buddhist Institute, “Nemijātak,” *Brah Traipiṭak Pālī nyñ Seckdībrae Khmaer, Suttantapiṭak Khuddhakanikāy Jātak*, vol. 62 (Phnom Penh: Buddhist Institute, 2503), pp. 67–101.
25. In notes to his translation of a nineteenth-century manuscript version of the story, Leclère reports comparing the manuscript he used to that of a *Trai Bhūm* text. He found its descriptions of various levels of hells to be identical to those in the *Trai Bhūm*, while its accounts of the heavens were more highly embellished. Leclère, *Les Livres Sacrés du Cambodge*, p. 221.
26. Leclère, *Les Livres Sacrés du Cambodge*, pp. 120, 221. See also Jacob, *The Traditional Literature of Cambodia*, p. 51.
27. Khmer (hereafter K.) *pāpakamm*.
28. K. *puññākamm*. BI 2503, vol. 62: 73 (stanza 143).
29. K. *mān kaṃḷāṃṇ mān t’a lāmak*.
30. K. *pāp*.
31. Buddhist Institute, “Nemijātak,” p. 74 (stanzas 146–148).
32. K. *puññākamm*.
33. K. *kusalakamm*.
34. K. *mān sīl*.
35. Buddhist Institute, “Nemijātak,” pp. 90–91 (stanzas 184–185).
36. P. Vessantara; K. Vessantar.
37. Cone and Gombrich, trans., *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara*, p. 74.
38. The Khmer *Tripitaka*, containing Pāli and Khmer on alternate pages, was published in its entirety in the 1960s, but many of the editions and translations were produced much earlier. The printed *Tripitaka* was largely based on Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts collected during the nineteenth century (many from Siam), and edited and translated under the auspices of the Royal Library and later the Buddhist Institute from the 1920s through 1960s. Many of the *Jātaka* texts were edited and printed as separate texts prior to the 1960s.
39. Buddhist Institute, “Vessantar-jātak,” *Brah Traipiṭak Pālī nyñ Seckdībrae Khmaer Suttantapiṭak Khuddhakanikāy Jātak*, vol. 63 (Phnom Penh: Buddhist Institute, B.E. 2503 / C.E. 1959), p. 166 (stanza 343).
40. This was a nineteenth-century manuscript version translated by Leclère, (*Le Livre de Vésandâr, le roi charitable* [Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1902]).
41. Leclère gives only his French translation of this text. Leclère, *Livre de Vésandâr*, p. 62.

42. Leclère, *Livre de Vésandâr*, p. 63. The earth quake appears in other versions of the text as well, one of which I quote later.

43. Leclère, *Livre de Vésandâr*, p. 65. A similar passage appears in the Khmer canonical version of the story. Leclère's manuscript version of the text follows the canonical version of the story closely, but in general expands on the canonical verses.

44. Leclère, *Livre de Vésandâr*, p. 66.

45. Buddhist Institute, "Nemijātak," p. 166 (stanza 338). I use the standard Khmer translation, part of a corpus of work produced, edited, and printed from the 1920s through 1960s in Cambodia. Later editors often relied heavily on manuscript versions of the texts carried from Bangkok beginning in Ang Duong's reign.

46. Note that the Khmer word *kittisabd*, "fame" or "good repute," contains the word "abd," or "sound," "voice," "word." This type of poetic allusion appears often in Khmer literary writing but is not easily translated.

47. Buddhist Institute, "Nemijātak," p. 188 (stanzas 367–368).

48. Buddhist Institute, "Nemijātak," p. 210 (stanza 424).

49. Jacob, *The Traditional Literature of Cambodia*, pp. 37, 156–59; Khing, *Contribution à l'histoire de la littérature khmère*, p. 121; Lū, *Aksarsāstr Khmaer*, p. 118. Lū says the story was composed in 1856; he includes it among a list of well-known literary works of the late Middle Period in Khmer literature.

50. Guesdon suggests that is a long popular story, "particularly in the north of Cambodia" (Guesdon, "La littérature khmère et le Bouddhisme," p. 813). He gives a French version on pp. 804–813. See also Khing, *Contribution à l'histoire de la littérature khmère*, pp. 121, 193–95; Jacob, *The Traditional Literature of Cambodia*, p. 170.

51. Leclère places the *Devadatta-sutta* among the most well-known texts. Whether he means that in reference to the different individual *Jātaka* stories of which this text is composed or as a composite is not clear. He received a manuscript of the sutta from a monk at Vatt Bodumvadey in Phnom Penh who had studied previously in Bangkok. Leclère, *Les Livres Sacrés du Cambodge*, pp. 1–2.

52. Leclère, *Les Livres Sacrés du Cambodge*, pp. 121–144.

53. Leclère, *Les Livres Sacrés du Cambodge*, pp. 141–42.

54. Reynolds, "The Many Lives of the Buddha," pp. 51–53. This Siamese text appeared in different versions in the nineteenth century, and was in turn connected to an older northern Thai biography of the Buddha, probably composed in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Donald Swearer, *The Buddhist World of South-east Asia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1995), p. 182, n. 70.

55. Leclère, *Les Livres Sacrés du Cambodge*, pp. 7–8.
56. Leclère, *Les Livres Sacrés du Cambodge*, pp. 9–10.
57. Ukñā Suttantaprijā Ind, “*Ryañ Paṭhamasambodhi*,” *Kambujasuriyā* (1934): 5–6 (stanzas 1–6).
58. K. *bodhiñāna*.
59. Ind, “*Ryañ Paṭhamasambodhi*,” p. 6 (stanza 9).
60. K. *cākra-ratan’*.
61. K. *cākra-batra*.
62. I.e., the wheel of the Buddha, or the *Dhamma*.
63. “Great king.”
64. K., P. *lokiya*.
65. K. *Braḥ camanarind ryañ rañsī*.
66. K. *Cakri ka’ trās’*.
67. I.e., with the connotation of “necessary but impure.”
68. K. *bodi-ñāna*.
69. K. *asubā*. I take this as P. *asubha*, or “impurities,” or possibly more specifically, *asubha-kamma hāna*, or “objects of meditation impurities,” which may refer to meditation exercises on decomposing bodies in a cemetery.
70. Ind, “*Ryañ Paṭhamasambodhi*,” p. 11 (stanzas 45–50).
71. Reynolds and Reynolds, *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, pp. 140, 160–170; Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 612. It remains difficult to document how well individual *Tipiṭaka* texts such as this latter were known during this period but I include this text under the general rubric of *Trai Bhūm* cosmology that becomes evident in other texts. A version of this text is later used by Suñ S’iv in the 1940s (Suñ S’iv, *Kappa-kathā*, pp. 34, 44).
72. Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 612.
73. Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 604.
74. Collins’ translation. Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 604.
75. This is Collins’ translation. Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 604.
76. Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, pp. 373–374.
77. Reynolds and Reynolds, *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, p. 139.
78. Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, pp. 612–613.



79. Ind, "Ryāṅ Paṭhamasambodhi," p. 36 (stanza 255).
80. Demons or ogres.
81. A kind of water serpent.
82. A kind of giant, mythical bird.
83. Ind, "Ryāṅ Paṭhamasambodhi," p. 31 (stanza 210).
84. Ind, "Ryāṅ Paṭhamasambodhi," pp. 31–32 (stanzas 206–211).
85. P. *puññādhikāra* or K. *puñña-adhikār*.
86. *Brah Buddha paṅs damraṅ sakti*.
87. Ind, "Ryāṅ Paṭhamasambodhi," pp. 34–35 (stanzas 235–240).
88. *Brah camanarind bin muni*.
89. I.e., "vehicle" or "means of transport."
90. Ind, "Ryāṅ Paṭhamasambodhi," p. 36 (stanzas 244–246).
91. I.e., the three worlds. *Brah Aṅg Cam Trai*.
92. K. *Sil*.
93. A kind of sea creature that feeds on human blood. Robert Headley, ed., *Cambodian-English Dictionary*, vol. II (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1977), p. 455.
94. The qualities of a buddha.
95. K. *Saraṇa-gamaṇa*.
96. Ind, "Ryāṅ Paṭhamasambodhi," pp. 36–38 (stanzas 250–264).
97. Elizabeth Guthrie, "Outside the *Sima*," *Udaya: Journal of Khmer Studies* 2 (November 2001): pp. 7–12.
98. Buddhist Institute [1938] 1970: p. 883.
99. Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1994), pp. 37–80.



# Paradigm Change in Meditation on Selflessness in Tibetan Buddhism: The Progression from Space-Like Meditative Equipoise to Deity Yoga

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## INTRODUCTION

ACROSS THE VAST REACHES of the Tibetan cultural region in Inner Asia—stretching from Kalmuck Mongolian areas near the Volga River (in Europe) by the Caspian Sea, Outer Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, the Buriat Republic of Siberia, Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, parts of Nepal, and what is currently called the “Tibetan Autonomous Region” but also most of Qinghai Province, and parts of the Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces that were included in greater Tibet before the Chinese Communists remapped the area—Buddhism is practiced in many forms by a plethora of sects and sub-sects. Though their systems vary widely, they agree on dividing their practices into basically two styles of meditation, Sutra and Mantra (also called Tantra), and all schools put forth reasons why the Mantra system is superior. Based on Indian expositions of the greatness of Mantra, many scholar-practitioners catalogued and creatively developed these explanations, which came to be the means through which they perceived and ordered the otherwise overwhelmingly diverse forms of practice inherited from Buddhist India and elsewhere.

Most of the presentations of the distinctiveness of Mantra employ multiple formats for demonstrating its greatness, but one Tibetan scholar boils these down into a single central distinguishing feature—deity yoga, the meditative practice of imagining oneself to be an ideal being fully endowed with compassion and wisdom and their resultant altruistic activities. Whether or not one accepts that deity yoga is *the* central distinctive feature of Mantra, it is an important feature, and since meditation on emptiness is said to be the “life” of the Sutra and Mantra paths and thus also of deity yoga, this essay initially presents how Sutra and Mantra describe the practice of reflecting on emptiness and then how this understanding is related to appearances. As a basic theme of Great Vehicle Buddhism, the compatibility of emptiness and appearance offers a window through

which Sutra and Mantra can be not just glimpsed but felt in imagination. Using a meditation manual by the Fifth Dalai Lama, "I" explore the process of this central meditation with an emphasis on its implications with regard to the relation with appearances after realizing emptiness. Then, "I" present a tantric model of meditating on oneself as an ideal being, a deity, through the example of a particular Action Tantra.

These two models—Sutra and Mantra—are viewed by some Tibetan scholars as progressively more profound techniques of spiritual development in what, by the style of presentation, seems to be a *harmonious* development, much as histories of science often present developments as rational, step-by-step acquisitions of wider perspectives rather than a shifting of perspective. The gradualistic, harmonious approach, while being valuable in showing the continuity between the two traditions, tends to obscure the innovative profundity of tantric meditation that may find one of its *raison d'être* in personal crisis. It strikes me as likely that the Sutra model of meditation on emptiness, when it is implemented in effective practice, induces a problem-situation that is resolved in the tantric model of meditation.

In order to discuss this possibility, "I" explore the Sutra and Mantra models of meditation in considerable detail so that the discussion does not become an exercise in mere abstraction, for my points are founded not in abstract conceptualization but in practical implementation. Therefore, after the Sutra model of meditation on selflessness and subsequent experience of appearances is given, "I" present in detail the tantric model of meditating on oneself as an ideal being, a deity, through the example of a particular Action Tantra.

For comprehending the distinctiveness of the tantric practice of deity yoga, the theory of paradigm change—as enunciated by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*<sup>1</sup> and adapted by Hans Küng for theology<sup>2</sup>—offers insights that help to distinguish Sutra and Mantra models of meditation by calling attention to a possible personal crisis to which the Sutra model may lead. My aim is not to use the data of this Asian tradition to support Kuhn's model but to use his model to make more accessible facets of the tradition that could easily be missed. The Sutra and Mantra models of meditation are investigated with the aim of exposing a possible crisis that *requires* an individual to move to the Tantric model; the analysis is "historical," not in the sense of charting and reflecting on centuries of development in schools of Buddhism, though undoubtedly such happened, but of an *individual's* progress in one life or over many lives.

The Ge-luk-ba (*dge lugs pa*) order of Tibetan Buddhism, founded in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, views these two models as progressively more profound techniques of spiritual development rather than as alternative ways. "I" shall attempt to show that this profundity may

remain obscure (despite extensive explanation) until an individual meditator passes through the crisis induced by the “lower” model when experiencing its implementation in practice.

The essay is based, to a large extent, on the writings of the Tibetan scholar and yogi, Ḍzong-ka-ba (*tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa*, 1357–1419) and those in his lineage. Specifically, for exposition of the Sutra model of meditation on selflessness “I” synopsizes the concise and lucid explanation of the perfection of wisdom in the Fifth Dalai Lama’s *Sacred Word of Mañjushri*.<sup>3</sup> For exposition of the procedure of meditation on selflessness and on appearance in tantra “I” shall use short explanations of Action Tantra yoga by two of Ḍzong-ka-ba’s students:

- Dül-dzin-drak-ba-gyel-tsen (*‘dul ‘dzin grags pa rgyal mtshan*, 1374–1434) in his *Presentation of the General Rites of Action and Performance Tantra and Their Application to the Three Lineages, Set down by Dül-dzin According to the Foremost [Ḍzong-ka-ba’s] Practice*<sup>4</sup>
- and Ke-drup Ge-lek-bel-sang (*mkhas grub dge legs dpal bzang*, 1385–1438) in his *Extensive Expression of the Presentation of the General Tantra Sets*.<sup>5</sup>

Ḍzong-ka-ba’s own exposition of the difference between Sutra and Tantra in general and the procedure of Action Tantra in particular—found in his *Great Exposition of Secret Mantra*<sup>6</sup>—are very much the foundation of these works, even if not cited.

#### SUTRA MODEL OF MEDITATION ON SELFLESSNESS AND SUBSEQUENT ILLUSORY-LIKE APPEARANCE

The Fifth Dalai Lama presents the process of cultivating the perfection of wisdom in two parts: “the practice of the selflessness of persons and the practice of the selflessness of [other] phenomena.” He frames both practices around four essential steps:

1. ascertaining what is being negated
2. ascertaining the entailment of emptiness
3. ascertaining that the object designated and its basis of designation are not inherently one
4. ascertaining that the object designated and its basis of designation are not inherently different.

### First Essential: Ascertaining What Is Being Negated

The first step in this meditation is to gain a clear sense of the reified status of the "I" as inherently existent. Even though such a misconception is subliminally always present, a condition of its obvious manifestation is required. Therefore, the meditator remembers a situation of false accusation that elicited a strong response or a situation of happiness that did the same, trying to watch the type of "I" that manifested and how the mind assented to its ever so concrete appearance. Since watchfulness itself tends to cause this gross level of misconception to disappear, the first essential is said to be very difficult to achieve. One has to learn how to let the mind operate in its usual egoistic way and at the same time watch it, keeping watchfulness at a minimum such that the usual conception of a concrete and pointable "I" is generated. The Fifth Dalai Lama compares this dual functioning of the mind to simultaneously watching the path and your companion when walking. The demand for watchfulness is mitigated by the need to allow what is usually unanalyzed to operate of its own accord; thus, the activity of introspection must be done subtly.

When success is gained, the meditator has found a sense of an inherently existent "I" that, far from seeming to be non-existent, is totally convincing in its trueness. As the present Dalai Lama said while lecturing to Tibetan scholars in Dharamsala, India in 1972, one has such strong belief in this reified "I" that upon identifying it, one has the feeling that if it is not true, nothing is. It would seem, therefore, that the first step in developing the view of the Middle Way is the stark and intimate recognition that for the meditator the opposite of that view is true.

In the face of this particular consciousness, mind and body are not differentiated and the "I" is not differentiated from mind and body. However, the "I" is seen to be self-established, self-instituting, under its own power, existing in its own right. It is not that one has the sense that mind, body, and "I" *cannot* be differentiated; rather, for *that* consciousness, mind, body, and "I" simply are not differentiated. For instance, for a consciousness merely apprehending a particular city, say, Taipei, the ground, buildings, and people of that city are not differentiated. These are the bases of designation of Taipei, which seems inextricably blended with these and yet has its own thing.

Recognition of such an appearance with respect to the "I" and recognition of your assent to this appearance constitute the first essential step in realizing selflessness, emptiness. With this identification, analysis can work on that object; without it, analysis is undirected. From the viewpoint of the scholar-practitioners of the Ge-luk-ba tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, most attempts to penetrate emptiness fail at this initial step, tending either to assume that the phenomenon itself is being refuted or that a

superficial, philosophically constructed quality of the phenomenon, rather than one innately misconceived, is being refuted.

### Second Essential: Ascertaining Entailment of Emptiness

Whereas in the first step the meditator allows an ordinary attitude to operate and attempts to watch it without interfering with it, in the second step the meditator makes a non-ordinary, intellectual decision that must be brought gradually to the level of feeling. Here, one considers the number of possible relationships between a phenomenon designated and its basis of designation.

Phenomena designated are things such as a table, a body, a person, and a house. Their respective bases of designation are four legs and a top, five limbs (two arms, two legs, and a head)<sup>7</sup> and a trunk, mind and body, and a number of rooms arranged in a certain shape. The meditator considers whether within the framework of inherent existence these two—phenomenon designated and basis of designation—must be either inherently the same or inherently different, or whether there are other possibilities. If there seem to be other possibilities, can these be collapsed into the original two—being inherently the same or being inherently different?

Nāgārjuna lists five possibilities:

1. inherently the same
2. inherently different
3. the object designated (the I) inherently depends on the basis of designation (mind and body)
4. the basis of designation inherently depends on the object designated (the I)
5. the object designated (the I) possesses the basis of designation either as a different entity in the way a person owns a cow or as one entity in the way a tree possesses its core

Chandrakīrti adds two more:

6. the object designated (the I) is the special shape of the basis of designation
7. the object designated (the I) is the collection of the bases of designation.

The last five can be collapsed into the first two as refinements of them: the third and fourth are forms of difference; the first aspect of the fifth is a form of difference; the second, a form of sameness of entity; the sixth and seventh

are variations of sameness. Hence, it is held that all possibilities of inherent existence can be collapsed into the original two.

Conventionally, however, it is said that the “I” and its basis of designation are different but not different entities and that they are the same entity but not the same. This is technically called being one entity and different isolates<sup>8</sup>—essentially meaning that conceptuality can isolate the two within their being one entity. Why not consider this an eighth possibility?

The answer is that if the relationship of being one entity and different conceptually isolatable factors is within the context of inherent existence, then this possibility is internally contradictory since within the context of inherent existence whatever is inherently the same is the same in all respects, making different isolates impossible. However, if the relationship of being one entity and different conceptually isolatable factors is within the context of conventional existence, then there is no need to include it here in this list of possibilities within inherent existence.

The list, therefore, does not include all possibilities for the mere existence of a phenomenon designated—such as an I—and its bases of designation—such as mind and body—because the examination here is concerned only with whether the “I” exists in the *concrete* manner it was seen to have during the first essential. If it does exist so concretely, one should be able to point concretely to it when examining it with respect to its basis of designation. Since this decision—that inherent existence involves the necessity of the phenomenon designated being either one or different from the basis of designation—is the anvil on which the sense of an inherently existent “I” will be pounded by the hammer of the subsequent reasoning, the second essential is not an airy decision to be taken lightly, despite its intellectual character. It must be brought to the level of feeling, this being done through considering that anything existent is either one or different. A chair is one; a chair and a table are different; a chair and its parts are different; tables are different, and so forth. The yogi must set standards that limit the possibilities so that the subsequent analysis can work, eventually causing disbelief in such an inherently existent I.

Upon coming to this decision of logical limitations, one begins to question a little the existence of the self-instituting “I” identified in the first essential. The late Geshe Rabten, a Ge-luk-ba scholar who served as abbot of a monastery in Switzerland,<sup>9</sup> compared the effect of this step to having doubts about an old friend for the first time. The emotionally harrowing experience of challenging one’s own long believed status has begun.

### Third Essential: Ascertaining that the “I” and the Aggregates Are Not One

The next step is to use reasoning to determine whether the “I” and the mental and physical aggregates could be inherently the same or inherently



different. In this context, reasoning is a matter not of cold deliberation or superficial summation but of using various approaches to find one that can shake yourself to your being. The seeming simple-mindedness and rigidity of the reasonings suggested must be transcended through gaining intimate experience with them.

The Fifth Dalai Lama lays out a *series* of approaches through reasoning, rather than just one, on the principle that certain reasonings would not work for some people. The first is a challenge from common experience: If “I” were one with body, how could “I” speak of “my body”? If “I” were inherently one with mind, how could “I” speak of “my mind”? Should we also speak of body’s body? Or my I?

If the “I” inherently exists, then oneness with its basis of designation would be one of two exhaustive possibilities. The reference is not to ordinary misconception but to a *consequence* of inherent existence, such concreteness requiring a pointable identification under analysis.

The rules for inherent existence, therefore, are not the rules for mere existence. Within the context of inherent existence, sameness of entity requires utter oneness in all respects. Thus, the issue that is central to evaluating the soundness of this reasoning is not whether beings ordinarily conceive of such oneness (since it is not claimed that we do), but whether the logical rules that have been formulated for concrete, pointable existence are appropriate.

### More Reasonings

The mere presence of the reasoning is clearly not expected to be convincing, and thus the Fifth Dalai Lama continues with permutations of the same reasoning. For these further reasonings to work, the meditator must have gained belief in rebirth. They are: If the “I” and the body are one, after death when the body is burned, so the “I” also would absurdly be burned. Or, just as the “I” transmigrates to the next life, so the body also would absurdly have to transmigrate. Or, just as the body does not transmigrate, so the “I” also would absurdly not transmigrate.

From meditating on such reasonings, one might come to think that probably the “I” is not the same as the body but is perhaps one with the mind; then, one is instructed to consider the following fallacies: Since it is obvious that the suffering of cold arises when the “I” is without clothes and it is obvious that the sufferings of hunger and thirst arise when the “I” lacks food and drink, these would—if the “I” were merely mental—be mental in origin, in which case one could not posit a reason why the same suffering would not be experienced in a life in a Formless Realm. Also, since the mind would be one with the “I,” it would absurdly still have to make use of gross forms such as food and clothing which do not exist in the Formless Realm.

These absurd permutations of oneness will have prepared the mind for reaching a conclusion upon reflecting on a few more reasonings. First, the selves would have to be as many as mind and body, that is to say, two; or, put another way, the selves would have to be as many as the five aggregates (forms, feelings, discriminations, compositional factors, and consciousnesses), five. This reasoning may seem extraordinarily simple-minded, but the requirements of such pointable, analytically findable existence—not the requirements of mere existence—are the anvil. The meditator is attempting through this analysis, not to describe how he or she ordinarily conceives such an inherently existent “I,” but to subject it to the hammering of reasoning based on *consequences* of such inherent existence. Because the ordinary sense of concrete selfhood is the object on which the analysis is working, the experience is fraught with emotion.

The second additional reasoning revolves around the entailment that the “I” would have inherently existent production and disintegration, in which case it would be discontinuous. The third additional reasoning also depends upon a belief in rebirth; for me, it reflects the type of reasoning, in reverse, that many use against rebirth. Its concern is not explicitly with the “I” and the mental and physical aggregates that are its bases of designation but the relationship between the “I” of this life and the “I” of the last life. It is: If they were one, then the sufferings of the former life would absurdly have to be present in this life.

The last additional reasoning expands on the fault of discontinuity between lives, suggested earlier in the second reasoning but not pursued. If they were different, which by the rules of inherent existence would make them totally, unrelatedly different, (1) remembrance of former lives would become impossible; (2) moral retribution would be impossible; and (3) undeserved suffering would be experienced. Such difference would make a mere-I, the agent that travels from lifetime to lifetime, engaging in actions and experiencing their effects, impossible. Oneness of the “I” and its bases of designation—the mental and physical aggregates—is impossible.

#### Fourth Essential: Ascertaining that the “I” and the Aggregates Are Not Inherently Different

The meditator has been so disturbed by the analysis of oneness that he or she is ready to assume difference. However, the rules of inherent existence call for the different to be unrelatedly different, again the assumption being not that persons ordinarily consider the “I” and its bases of designation to be unrelatedly different but that within the context of inherent existence, that is, of such pointable, solid existence, difference necessitates unrelatedness. If something seems to be found separate from

mind and body, would this be the “I” that goes to the store? Would this be the “I” that desires? Hates?

Still, the question is not easy to settle, and it does not appear that easy answers are wanted. Rather, the Fifth Dalai Lama emphasizes that deeply felt conviction is needed:

It is not sufficient that the mode of non-finding be just a repetition of the impoverished phrase, “Not found.” For example, when an ox is lost, one does not take as true the mere phrase, “It is not in such and such an area.” Rather, it is through searching for it in the highland, midland, and lowland of the area that one firmly decides that it cannot be found. Here also, through meditating until a decision is reached, you gain conviction (see n. 3).

### Realization of Selflessness

With such conviction, the decision reached is that the “I” cannot be found under analysis. The decision is not superficially intellectual but a startling discovery of a vacuity when such an “I” is sought. This vacuity shows, not that the “I” does not exist, but that it does not inherently exist as it was identified as seeming to in the first essential. This unfindability is emptiness itself, and realization of it is realization of emptiness, selflessness.

Incontrovertible inferential understanding, though not of the level of direct perception or even of special insight,<sup>10</sup> has great impact. For a beginner it generates a sense of deprivation, but for an experienced meditator it generates a sense of discovery, or recovery, of what was lost. The Fifth Dalai Lama conveys this with examples:

If you have no predispositions for emptiness from a former life, it seems that a thing that was in the hand has suddenly been lost. If you have predispositions, it seems that a lost jewel that had been in the hand has suddenly been found (see n. 3).

The perception of this vacuousness, the absence of inherent existence, carries emotional force—first of loss, since our emotions are built on a false sense of concreteness, and then of discovery of a lost treasure that makes everything possible. From a similar point of view, the emptiness of the mind is called the Buddha nature, or Buddha lineage, since it is what allows for development of the marvelous qualities of Buddhahood. However, unless the meditator has predispositions from practice in a former life, the first experience of emptiness is one of loss; later, its fecundity and dynamism become apparent.

### Space-Like Meditative Equipoise

The realization of the absence of inherent existence needs to be increased through a process of alternating analytical meditation and stabilizing meditation. If the meditator has developed the power of concentration of the level of calm abiding, the analysis of the status of the "I" can be done within the context of this highly stable mind. However, too much analysis will induce excitement, reducing stabilization, and too much stabilization will induce an inability to analyze. Thus, analytical and stabilizing meditation must be alternated until the two are in such harmony that analysis itself induces even greater stabilization which, in turn, enhances analysis.

At the point when meditators have not yet reached the level of special insight but are close to it, they attain a similitude of special insight and a space-like meditative equipoise. This meditative equipoise is called "space-like" because just as un compounded space<sup>11</sup> is a mere absence—a mere negative—of obstructive contact, so emptiness is a mere absence, a mere negative, of inherent existence. Such steady reflection on emptiness, therefore, is called space-like meditative equipoise. At the point of harmony and mutual support between analysis and stabilization, special insight, which necessarily also involves a union of calm abiding and special insight, is achieved. Brought to the level of direct perception, it gradually serves as the antidote to both the artificially acquired and innate afflictive emotions.

The Fourth Paṅ-chen Lama, Lō-sang-bel-den-den-bay-nyi-ma,<sup>12</sup> describes the mind of space-like meditative equipoise from two points of view—in terms of appearance and in terms of ascertainment. To that consciousness only an immaculate vacuity—an absence of inherent existence—*appears*, and that consciousness *ascertains*, understands, comprehends, and realizes the absence of inherent existence of the I. Although reasoning has led to this state, the mind is not now reasoning; it is experiencing the fruit of reasoning in a state of continuous, one-pointed ascertainment of emptiness; the only thing appearing is an utter vacuity—an absence—of inherent existence. In space-like meditative equipoise only an immaculate vacuity that is a negative of inherent existence appears—nothing else. What is ascertained, understood, is also an absence of inherent existence. The same is also true for direct realization of emptiness, though any sense of duality, knower and known, has vanished.

### Appearances Subsequent to Meditative Equipoise

When the state of one-pointed concentration on selflessness is left, that is, when the meditator takes to mind any object other than emptiness, the object is viewed as *like* an illusion, appearing one way but existing another.

Just as a magician's illusory elephant appears to be an elephant but in fact is not, so forms, sounds, and so forth appear to exist inherently but are understood as not existing inherently. The meaning of being like an illusion is not that the "I" or forms, sounds, and so forth appear to exist but actually do not; rather, their mode of existence appears to be concrete but is understood not to be so. The same is true for the I. Mere realization that a magician's illusions or dream objects are not real does not constitute realizing phenomena to be like a magician's illusions, nor does realization of phenomena as like illusions mean that one merely desists from identifying appearances. The essential point is that the meditator first must realize that these objects do not inherently exist; there is no other method for inducing realization that phenomena are like illusions. Realization of the emptiness of inherent existence is said, in this system, to be the *only* method for gaining the subsequent realization that phenomena are like illusions.

The Fourth Paṅ-chen Lama speaks similarly but also addresses the issue of the substance of those appearances that are left over. He calls for viewing them as the sport<sup>13</sup> of emptiness.<sup>14</sup> Since the emptiness of inherent existence makes appearance possible, phenomena are, in a sense, the sport of emptiness. It even may be said that their basic substance is emptiness. However, emptiness is a non-affirming negative, a mere absence or mere elimination of inherent existence, which does not imply anything in place of inherent existence even though it is compatible with dependently arisen phenomena. Hence, emptiness is not a positive substance giving rise to phenomena, even if it is their ground. Emptiness is what makes cause and effect possible; the emptiness of the mind is called the Buddha nature, the causal lineage of Buddhahood, even though it is not itself an actual cause. As a mere negative of inherent existence, it makes enlightenment possible.

### Summation of the Sutra Model of Meditation on Selflessness and Appearance

Including the steps of setting the basic motivation for meditation on the selflessness of the person as well as the subsequent state of realizing appearances to be like illusions, we can distinguish seven steps in the Sutra process of meditating on the selflessness of the person:

1. adjustment of motivation: taking refuge and developing an altruistic intention to become enlightened
2. ascertaining what is being negated—inherent existence
3. ascertaining entailment of emptiness
4. ascertaining that the "I" and the aggregates are not inherently the same

5. ascertaining that the "I" and the aggregates are not inherently different
6. realizing the absence of inherent existence of the "I" in space-like meditative equipoise
7. emerging from space-like meditative equipoise and viewing all phenomena as like a magician's illusions.

All activities are to be done within realization that phenomena are like illusions, understanding that space-like meditative equipoise negates only a false sense of *inherent* existence and not the very existence of objects.

The Sutra model of meditation on selflessness and subsequent relation with appearance is built around an analytical search for the seemingly concrete existence of an object, such as oneself, the existence of which has hitherto been uncontested. Though the mode of search is analytical, the examination of the object is intensely emotional since emotions such as desire and hatred are built on a perceived status of objects that is now being challenged. Thus, the analysis is neither cold nor superficially intellectual but an expression of the intellect in the midst of the clatter of emotional rearrangement and unreasoned re-assertion of the concrete findability of the object. The analysis is by no means a rote run-through of a prescribed ritual, nor is it merely aimed at refuting other philosophical systems; rather, it is aimed at the heart of one's emotional and intellectual life, at the ideational underpinnings of our self-conceptions, our relations with others, our conceptions of subject and object, and our ideologies.

At the end of successful analysis, what is experienced is merely a non-finding—a void, a vacuity—of the object in which one originally so intensely believed. That very object, in all of its seeming concreteness, has literally disappeared from mind; the very type of mind that believed in it has now sought for it according to rules of analysis that have been seen to be not just appropriate but binding. It has not found that object, even though so many emotions have been built in dependence on its seemingly verifiable status. The experience of not finding this previously reliable object is earth-shattering.

The meditator does not immediately rush back to perception of appearances but remains with this vacuity, a mere absence of such an inherently existent object, appreciating its implications, letting the ramifications of the analytical unfindability of the object affect his/her mind, letting it undermine the emotional frameworks of countless lives in a round of suffering induced by ignorance of this fact. After such immersion, the meditator again returns to the world of appearance, at which point objects dawn as like a magician's illusions, seeming to exist in their own right but being empty of such concrete existence. The world—oneself, others, and objects such as chairs and tables—is seen in a new way,

falsely seeming to have a status that it actually does not have, but now unmasked.

But what do objects appear from? What is their substance? What is its relation with one's own mind? These are issues that the tantric model of meditation goes on to face, not so much through conceptual presentation but through a mode of experiencing objects, after realizing emptiness, that bridges the gap between emptiness and appearance in an even more vivid way. Let us turn to the Mantra model of meditating on emptiness and subsequent relation with appearance.

### The Tantric Mode of Meditation

Deity yoga, according to D̄zong-ka-ba's lengthy treatment of the difference between Sutra and Tantra in his *Great Exposition of Secret Mantra*,<sup>15</sup> is the distinctive essence of tantric meditation.<sup>16</sup> It provides a unique combination of method (compassion) and wisdom (realization of selflessness) in one consciousness and thus an additional mode of meditating on selflessness. Let us consider the process of cultivating deity yoga in meditation through the example of Action Tantra as explained by D̄zong-ka-ba's students, D̄ül-dzin-drak-ba-gyel-tsen and Ke-drup-gay-lek-bel-sang. The process is structured around successively more profound stages of meditative stabilizations of exalted body, speech, and mind. Our concern here is with the first.

In Action Tantra the process of imagining, or generating, oneself as a deity is structured in six steps called six deities, which supply a basic tantric paradigm for meditation on selflessness and subsequent relation with appearance. This process is referred to but not described in the *Concentration Continuation Tantra* and is known from the *Extensive Vidāraṇa Tantra*,<sup>17</sup> available only in citation in Buddhaguhya's commentary, which is extant only in Tibetan. The *Extensive Vidāraṇa Tantra* says:

Having first bathed, a yogi  
Sits on the vajra cushion  
And having offered and made petition  
Cultivates the six deities.  
Emptiness, sound, letter, form,  
Seal, and sign are the six.

The six deities are:

1. ultimate deity (also called emptiness deity or suchness deity)
2. sound deity (also called tone deity)

3. letter deity
4. form deity
5. seal deity
6. sign deity.

Let us consider these six steps in detail, using the commentaries mentioned above.

### Ultimate Deity

Dül-dzin-drak-ḅa-gyel-tsen describes the ultimate deity very briefly:<sup>18</sup>

The ultimate deity is meditation on emptiness:

*Oṃ svabhāva-śuddhāḥ sarva-dharmāḥ svabhāva-śuddho 'haṃ* (*Oṃ* naturally pure are all phenomena; naturally pure am I). Just as my own suchness is ultimately free from all the elaborations [of inherent existence], so is the deity's suchness also. Therefore, in terms of non-conceptual perception [of the final mode of subsistence of phenomena] the suchness of myself and of the deity are undifferentiable like a mixture of water and milk.

The brevity of his description of this initial and crucial step of meditation on emptiness is due to the fact that although realization of emptiness is obviously integral to Tantra, descriptions of how to do it, though present in tantras such as the *Concentration Continuation Tantra*,<sup>19</sup> are found in far more detail in the Sutra systems.<sup>20</sup> The meditator is expected to bring such knowledge to this practice.

The description of the ultimate deity by Ke-drup in his *General Presentation of the Tantra Sets* speaks to this point directly:<sup>21</sup>

Meditation within settling well—in dependence upon a Middle Way reasoning such as the lack of [being] one or many and so forth—that one's mind is empty of inherent existence is the suchness of self. Then, meditation [on the fact] that the suchness of whatever deity is being meditated and the suchness of oneself are undifferentiably without inherent existence is the suchness of the deity. That twofold suchness is the suchness deity from among the six deities. It is the equivalent of meditating on emptiness within saying *svabhāva* [that is, *oṃ svabhāva-śuddhāḥ sarva-dharmāḥ svabhāva-śuddho 'haṃ*: “*Oṃ* naturally pure are all phenomena; naturally pure am I”] or *śūnyatā* [that is, *oṃ śūnyatājñānavajrasvabhāvātmake 'haṃ*: “I have a nature of indivisible emptiness and wisdom”] in higher tantra sets.



A Middle Way reasoning such as the lack of being an inherently existent one or an inherently existent plurality is used for the sake of realizing first that oneself (or, alternately, one's own mind) does not inherently exist. Thus, this first step in imagining oneself as a deity incorporates the Sutra style meditation described in the previous section as steps two through six. Since Dzong-ka-ba and his followers emphasize over and over again that the view of emptiness in Sutra<sup>22</sup> and in Tantra is the same,<sup>23</sup> these five steps are to be brought into the Tantric meditation *in toto*.

The difference is that in tantra, after meditating on their own lack of inherent existence, practitioners proceed to reflect on the emptiness of the deity as whom they will appear and then reflect on the sameness of themselves and the deity in terms of their own and the deity's ultimate mode of subsistence, an absence of inherent existence. The ultimate reality of oneself and the deity are viewed as like "water and milk" which mix so completely that they cannot be distinguished. Thus, the first step in meditating on oneself as a deity is to realize that, from the viewpoint of the perception of suchness, oneself and the deity are the same; this realization serves to break down the conception that either oneself or the deity inherently exists.

Dzong-ka-ba refers to the conception of sameness of ultimate nature as "pride."<sup>24</sup> That the meditator takes *pride* in ultimately having the same nature as the deity suggests that the meditator develops a conscious *willingness* to identify himself or herself with the deity in terms of their final nature. The word "pride" suggests the boldness of making the identification—a force of will being required to overcome the reluctance to make such a grand identification in the face of the analytical unfindability that is commonly associated with diminution in a beginning stage, since the initial experience of unfindability is of losing something (see above).

This additional step of conscious identification that the final nature of oneself and the final nature of the deity are the same drastically alters the space-like meditative equipoise, which is a state of concentration solely on a non-affirming negative, a mere absence of inherent existence. Here in Tantra one comes to meditate on an affirming negative<sup>25</sup>—that is, on the *sameness* in final nature of oneself and the deity as being without inherent existence. Even though this is done through the route of an initial space-like meditative equipoise meditating on the non-affirming negative of first one's own and then the deity's inherent existence, the conclusion of the first step in self-generation is a positive affirmation of the *sameness* of oneself and the deity in terms of a pure final nature, itself a mere absence of inherent existence.

The relation between the emptiness realized and the being who appears subsequent to space-like meditative equipoise is made more explicit through this conscious identification. The passage from space-like meditative equipoise to taking cognizance of other objects is now no longer, as in

the Sutra system, a matter of merely letting other objects appear to the mind. The meditator now consciously takes the ultimate deity as the basic stuff of the appearances yet to come. A bridge is made between emptiness and appearance—going beyond mere realization of their compatibility as in the Sutra systems. Appearances are no longer just *allowed* to re-appear; instead, the meditator deliberately reflects on his/her own final nature as being the stuff out of which they will appear.

The fact that emptiness (and the mind fused with it in realization) is called a deity is similar to calling the emptiness of the mind the Buddha nature, Buddha lineage, or naturally abiding lineage<sup>26</sup> in that it is all-powerful in the sense of being that which makes everything possible. As Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle*<sup>27</sup> says:

For whom emptiness is possible  
For that [person] all is possible.

Due to the emptiness of inherent existence, change and transformation are possible, whereas, without it, everything is frozen in substantial existence. Here in this first step of deity yoga the meditator identifies himself or herself, in terms of ultimate nature, with this basic stuff.

### Sound Deity

In the second through fifth steps the wisdom consciousness, fused with and realizing emptiness, is used as a basis of emanation—the mind itself appearing in form. Rather than merely letting phenomena appear as is done after space-like meditative equipoise in the Sutra system, the yogi uses the wisdom consciousness as the stuff out of which and within which first sounds and then visible forms and so forth will appear. Within continuously realizing the emptiness of inherent existence, the wisdom consciousness itself first appears as the sounds of the mantra of the deity as whom the meditator will become, resounding in space. Ke-drup indicates that the sounds of the mantra are, in entity, the deity. Out of emptiness comes mantra—word—which itself is the deity. One is clearly not to think of the deity as only appearing when the god with a face, arms, legs, and so forth manifests. Everything that appears from this point on is made from the ultimate deity and is essentially the deity.

### Letter Deity

The meditator's mind realizing the sameness of ultimate nature of oneself and the deity transforms into a white, flat moon disc shining in space on which the letters of the mantra appear standing around its edge (facing inward, according to oral explanations). Ye-shay-gyel-tsen<sup>28</sup> com-

compares the sounds of the *mantra* to mercury that mixes with grains of the gold, the written letters. Hence, in his stimulating exposition, the upright letters are not just color and shape but are fused with their respective sounds. This mixture of sound and visible form strikes me as an important connecting link in the gradual controlled evolution from emptiness to sound, to visible form.

### Form Deity

The next step is the transformation of this moon disc with upright letters into the usual physical form of the deity with a face, arms, legs, and so forth. Prior to that, however, there is an intermediary step of emitting from the moon a multitude of compassionately beneficent forms of the deity, through which active compassion is established as the precursor of one's own bodily appearance. The moon and mantra letters transform such that a hand-symbol—a *vajra* or wheel, for instance—also appears on the moon. Then, from all of these emanate rays of light from which myriad forms of the deity emerge. These deities, in turn, emanate great clouds piled with offerings that they offer to already enlightened beings. The deities also emanate great clouds from which a rain-stream of ambrosia descends, cleansing and satisfying all other beings. The Dalai Lama movingly describes this phase of the meditation:<sup>29</sup>

Imagine that from the moon and the mantra letters light rays are emitted, from the points of which emerge forms of the deity to be meditated. These deities emanate clouds of offerings to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and so forth, as well as clouds with a rain of nectar. It falls on the beings in cyclic existence and purifies them, giving a good body to those who need it, coolness to those suffering from heat, the warmth of the sun to those suffering from cold, food and drink to the hungry and thirsty—emanating to each just what he or she needs, affording beings the basis for practicing the path as well as teachers to instruct them in the essential paths of the four truths, the two truths, and so forth. They are caused to ascend the paths and attain the final happiness of Buddhahood.

The activity of offering to high beings fortifies the basic motivation toward enlightenment by associating the purpose of worthwhile material things and pleasures with buddhahood. The activity of cleansing those trapped in suffering makes the very essence of physical appearance be compassionate activity for the welfare of the world. Psychologically, the meditator must confront and transform many untamed contents of mind which appear as the deprived and depraved beings who receive the bountiful blessings of the rain of ambrosia. One can speculate that a prime reason for the vivid

descriptions of the hells and other unfortunate existences found in other texts<sup>30</sup> is to make manifest to oneself unconscious tendencies of mind and spirit so that such meditative confrontation and transformation can be enacted.

According to Tibetan explanations, imitating the deeds of buddhahood through raining down this ambrosia establishes patterns and predispositions to be fulfilled after one's own enlightenment. In addition, an internal transformation is enacted in a process that begins with a step much like Jung's description of assimilation of unconscious complexes, not through identification, but through confrontation. Jung says:<sup>31</sup>

The supreme aim of the *opus psychologicum* is conscious realization, and the first step is to make oneself conscious of contents that have hitherto been projected.

Recognition of the needy and unpleasant beings to be helped by the beneficent rain constitutes confrontation with one's own tendencies and predispositions. It is interesting to note that the transformation is not an instantaneous transmutation into divinity but begins with first *satisfying* the needs of the deprived and depraved contents.<sup>32</sup> Also, oral explanations from lamas indicate that the rain of ambrosia *gradually* leads these beings (psychological contents) to higher and higher levels through providing opportunities for practice, teachings, and so forth. The sense of quasi-otherness under the guise of which this practice is done has, as its basis, the same wisdom as Jung's warning to assimilate unconscious contents through confrontation, not through identification, in order to avoid being taken over by them. The step of healingly transforming these contents after recognizing them proceeds a step beyond Jung's confrontational assimilation in that these forces, once confronted, not only lose much of their autonomous power but also are transformed.

Although it is said that only Highest Yoga Tantra mirrors in its deity yoga the afflicted processes<sup>33</sup> of (1) death, (2) intermediate state, and (3) rebirth by (1) mimicking the eight signs of death,<sup>34</sup> appearing (2) as a seed syllable, and then (3) as a deity with a physical body, it strikes me that these stages of gradual appearance as a deity in Action Tantra mirror in pure form an ordinary, uncontrolled process of appearance—the imitation being for the sake of gaining control over it. Given the selfishness of ordinary life, there must be a phase in the process of awakening after sleep corresponding but opposite to the compassionate emanation of myriad helpful forms. In ordinary, selfish life, the corresponding psychological structuring of one's relation to the environment would be the emanation of forms similar to ourselves for the sake of warding off anyone who would interrupt our pleasure, making sure that disease visits others and not ourselves, wreaking havoc on others for the sake of control, and so forth.

It also may be that this process, in ordinary life, is so out of control that one emanates forms that destroy one's own welfare much like a paranoiac's attackers or dream beings that pursue us.

In this transmutory practice, after the enactment of such compassionate activity the rays and deities return with actualized (not just potential) compassion to dissolve with all their power and experience into the moon, letters, and hand-symbol which turn into the deity. The meditator now could not view the deity as just a neutral appearance of light in a certain form but must see and feel it as an active expression of compassion and wisdom. The rays of light emitted from the moon, which itself is a manifestation of the mind realizing the ultimate deity, are endowed with compassionate potential for appearance in forms that work the weal of sentient beings. One has appeared in divine form, the essence of which is the wisdom of emptiness and active compassion

### Seal Deity

Still, self-generation is not complete. The imagined deity must be further enhanced, this being accomplished through uttering mantra at the same time as physically touching important places on one's imagined divine body with a hand gesture called a seal.<sup>35</sup> The one pledge seal of the particular lineage may be used or individual seals for each of the places may be used. Ke-drup speaks of touching not five (counting the shoulders as two) but nine places (crown protrusion, hair-treasury [one coiled hair in the middle of the brow], eyes, the two shoulders, neck, heart, and navel). With each mantra and touch the meditator imagines a heightening of the particular area of the divine body in terms of its brilliance and magnificence. This is a further sanctifying of an appearance already sacred through being a manifestation of wisdom and compassion.

### Sign Deity

Now that all the signs of a full-fledged deity are present, the meditator, based on clear appearance of pure mind and body, can gain a sense of divine personhood or selfhood. Two types of meditation are used, *analytical* which involves particular attention to details or brightening of the object and *stabilizing* which is one-pointed attention on just one aspect.

For deity yoga to succeed, two prime factors are needed—clear appearance of a divine body and pride in being that deity. With success in visualizing the deity, both mind and body appear to be pure; hence, the sense of self that the meditator has in dependence upon purely appearing mind and body is of a *pure self*, a *divine self*. Divine pride itself is said to harm or weaken the conception of inherent existence, which is at the root of all other afflictions in cyclic existence including afflicted pride. Due to

the initial and then continuous practice of realizing the emptiness of inherent existence, the meditator realizes that the person is merely designated in dependence upon pure mind and body and is not analytically findable among or separate from those bases of designation. Thereby, divine pride itself serves as a means for eliminating exaggerated conceptions of the status of phenomena including the person; this is how it prevents afflicted ego-inflation.

With success at deity yoga, the practitioner has the factors of wisdom and compassionate method in one consciousness at one time. The “ascertainment factor”<sup>36</sup> of this consciousness realizes the emptiness of inherent existence at the same time as the “appearance factor”<sup>37</sup> appears in ideal, compassionate form acting to help beings. This is said to be superior to the Sutra version of the union of method and wisdom in which method (cultivation of compassion) merely *affects* wisdom with its force and in which wisdom (realization of emptiness) merely *affects* compassionate activities with its force, the two not actually being manifest at one time. In tantra the presence of compassionate method and wisdom in one consciousness is said to quicken progress toward Buddhahood—a state of non-dual realization of the nature of phenomena within spontaneous dualistic appearance for the benefit of others.

A profound development has occurred when a practitioner becomes capable of deity yoga. After realizing emptiness, appearances are no longer just *allowed* to re-emerge within understanding that there is a conflict between how they appear to exist in their own right and their actual lack of such concreteness; rather, one’s own mind realizing emptiness and understanding that one’s own and a deity’s final nature are the same becomes the stuff out of which phenomena appear. The relation between emptiness and appearance, the gap between an experience of unfindability and re-emergence, is bridged.

#### THE PARADIGM CHANGE: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Is the progression from the Sutra to the Mantra model of relation with appearance a smooth transition, a harmonious, incremental putting together of two models, or could it also be fraught with tension? Dzong-kabā and his followers present the Perfection and Mantra Vehicles as an integrated progression; the very foundations of Perfection Vehicle practice, altruism and wisdom, are reformulated in the Mantra Vehicle in the practice of deity yoga. He stresses the *continuity* between the two vehicles, two models or paradigms of the relation of the fundamental emptiness (or the wisdom realizing emptiness) with appearance.

In preparing for a Buddhist-Christian Encounter conference in Hawaii in 1984 in which Hans Küng’s adaptation of theology of Thomas Kuhn’s

theory of paradigm change in the sciences was used as the focus, I was struck by Kuhn's and Küng's emphasis on *crisis* in the development and movement from one paradigm to another. For me, Küng's description of a critical period during which inadequacies and discrepancies of the old paradigm lead to uncertainty such that conviction in the adequacy of the old paradigm is shaken rang true with my own experience of the transition from sutra practice to tantric practice. I have found it helpful to use the language of paradigm change—of an initial period of crisis, then a new formation, and finally a sense of continuity with the old paradigm—to appreciate the distinctiveness of tantric deity yoga and the issues remaining from the Sutra model of meditation that it resolves.

My suggestion is that an individual practitioner's change from the Sutra to the Mantra model may not be mere harmonious and gradual acquisition of a new technique but may be fraught with psychological crisis. Despite the structural harmony that Dzong-ka-ba presents with such brilliance and clarity, the history of a particular practitioner's personal incorporation of this paradigm change may not be a smooth transition. I recognize the autobiographical nature of these reflections and offer them only as a stimulus to appreciation of the profundity of deity yoga.

### From One Model to Another

In that the content to be understood through the meditations of both the Sutra and Tantra models is the nature and basis of appearance, we are dealing with two macro models, for they are both experientially oriented explanations of the very phenomena of life. Despite being taught by the same school (in this case, the Ge-luk-ba order of Tibetan Buddhism), they are purposely kept distinct, not just to preserve schools of teachings from India, but, I would contend, to induce—through initial practice of the Sutra model of meditation on selflessness—the crisis that will lead to appreciation of the Tantric. Some Ge-luk-ba scholar-practitioners choose only to follow the Sutra model, resisting the change to the Tantric model. This can occur (1) by refusing to engage in tantric practice, (2) by engaging in tantric ritual but not believing it, or (3) by incorporating an external show of the practice of both Sutra and Tantra but actually not penetrating either.

The change, or evolution, from the Sutra to the Tantra model cannot actually be made until one learns in meditative *experience* to use the mind understanding emptiness and the emptiness—with which it is fused—as a basis of imaginative appearance, in imitation of a Buddha's ability to do this in fact. Thus, the change cannot be made superficially merely through using the tantric descriptions or through sitting through a ritual that incorporates this process.

However, a somewhat successful Sutra practitioner, who is able to experience at least something resembling space-like meditative equipoise, may arrive at a point of hiatus during which he/she is not satisfied with merely letting objects re-appear after reflecting on emptiness. The question, the crisis, of comprehending the stuff of appearances may be sufficiently pressing that he or she becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the break between the space-like realization and the subsequent plethora of appearances, despite their being marked with realization of the emptiness of inherent existence through the force of the earlier cognition. For there is a retraction of mind when moving from space-like meditative equipoise—in which the mind is fused with the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena—to a condition in which the meditator's mind only affects those appearances in the sense of marking or sealing them with this realization.

The problem of the relation of one's own mind to those appearances can assume crisis proportions, creating openness to drastic change. There can be a period of transitional uncertainty during which the sūtra model is challenged for its inability to address the problem of the relation of this deep mind realizing emptiness to appearances. The breakdown of the Sutra model at this point and the crisis, induced not only by this breakdown but also by the difficulty of comprehending the Tantric model despite its availability, leads to new thinking seeking a way to solve the puzzle, a withdrawal of sole commitment to the Sutra model even though the practitioner might not express it this way. The crisis—the breakdown of the available rules—cracks and softens the rigidity of the devotion to the old model.

The new paradigm candidate, the Tantric model, was in a sense always at hand in the form of lectures and ceremonies but was hardly available since only through considerable experience with (1) searching for objects, (2) not finding them, and then (3) practicing illusory-like appearance can the additional technique of using that mind realizing emptiness as the basis that itself appears in physical form be appreciated. This is partially due to the general Buddhist analytic tendency, breaking things down to basic parts and those, in turn, to smaller and smaller units since, in the face of this basic perspective, such a grandly synthetic view as is presented in the Tantric model seems even non-Buddhist. A version of the synthetic view is present in the Sutra system in that all appearances are viewed as the sport of emptiness in the sense that the emptiness of inherent existence makes them possible; however, this does not take account of the relation of mind to those appearances as the Tantric system does.

The change to the new paradigm constitutes a revolution in outlook, lending an entirely new sense to the meaning of mind-only<sup>38</sup> beyond the one rejected earlier, as a "lower view," in the progress toward the view of the Middle Way School. The practitioner's orientation toward the world of



appearances has undergone a fundamental re-organization; the model of understanding appearance has changed. As I have suggested, this is not done without opposition and struggle both from within and from without, the latter being from concern with teachers and members of the monastic community in the old camp. A period of doubt, loss of faith, and uncertainty due to the pressing inadequacy of the old model is passed beyond through conversion to a model that copes better with the relation between mind and appearance on an experiential, practical level. The conversion could be prompted by attending a rite where the Tantric model is used or by one's own daily rehearsal of a rite that previously did not have much meaning.

The new Tantric model absorbs the old, preserving in its procedures an important place for the space-like meditative equipoise in the first phase of cultivation of deity yoga, the ultimate deity. Hence, the meditator experiences, after the conversion, a continuity with his or her earlier practice through enactment (which is usually done at least six times daily) of a ritual that also incorporates the old model. Due to the continuing, and even essential, importance of realization of the absence of inherent existence and of altruism, a *fundamental continuity* is experienced; the very structure of the old model, wisdom and compassion, is literally reshaped to appear in ideal form, wise and compassionate.

## CONCLUSION

Tantra, in this light, can be seen as a *new formation* of the Buddhist tradition, not a new invention of a tradition; the primordial importance of wisdom and compassion remains the basis. The process of moving from one model to the other, at least for some persons, may not be a simple matter of the incorporation of a new technique, deity yoga, as the Ge-luk-ba tradition in its emphasis on the integration of two vehicles gives the impression that it is. Crisis and shift may better describe the person's progression from the Sutra vehicle to the Tantra vehicle; nevertheless, from the new perspective the continuity can be seen. Perhaps, the deity yoga that constitutes the difference between the two vehicles according to Dzong-ka-ba and his followers is not merely a distinctive, important factor of the tantric path not found in sūtra but also a difficult one, the comprehension of which is fraught with developmental crisis.

## NOTES

1. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
2. See "Paradigm Change in Theology and Science," in *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), pp. 123–169.
3. Nga-wang-ġo-sang-gya-tso (*ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, 1617–1682), Dalai Lama V, *Instruction on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, Sacred Word of Mañjushri* (*byang chub lam gyi rim pa'i khrid yig 'jam pa'i dbyangs kyi zhal lung*) (Thimphu: kun-bzang-stobs-rgyal, 1976), pp. 182.5–210.6. For an English translation, see Jeffrey Hopkins, "Practice of Emptiness" (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1974). Ġzong-ka-ba's five main texts on the Sutra realization of emptiness form the background of the discussion even though not cited. In order of composition these are his *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (*lam rim chen mo*); *The Essence of the Good Explanations* (*legs bshad snying po*); *Explanation of (Nāgārjuna's) "Treatise on the Middle": Ocean of Reasoning* (*dbu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba'i rnam bshad rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*), *Medium Length Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (*lam rim 'bring*); and *Extensive Explanation of (Chandrakirti's) "Supplement to (Nāgārjuna's) 'Treatise on the Middle'"*: *Illumination of the Thought* (*dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rgya cher bshad pa dgongs pa rab gsal*).
4. *bya spyod kyi spyi'i cho ga'i rnam par bzhas pa rigs gsum la sbyor tshul rje'i phyag bzhes bzhin 'dul ba 'dzin pas bkod pa*, *Collected Works of Rje Tsoñ-kha-pa Blo-bzañ-grags-pa*, vol. 17 (*na*), pp. 437–449.6.
5. *rgyud sde spyi'i rnam par gzhas pa rgyas par brjod pa*; Ferdinand D. Lessing and Alex Wayman, *Mkhas Grub Rje's Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), pp. 158–163; see the same range of pages for their translation.
6. I have translated these respectively in H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1977; reprint Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion, 1987), and in H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *The Yoga of Tibet* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981; reprinted as *Deity Yoga* with minor changes, Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1987).
7. In a culture, such as that of pre-modern Tibet, where people think in their chests, the head is a limb and not an integral part of the trunk as it is often depicted elsewhere. Thus, here in this exposition there are *five* limbs and a trunk.
8. *ngo bo gcig la ldog pa tha dad*.

9. For an account of his life and a sample of his teachings, see *The Life and Teachings of Geshe Rabten*, trans. and ed. by Alan Wallace (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982).
10. *lhag mthong, vipaśyanā*.
11. 'dus ma byas kyi nam mkha', *asaṃskṛtākāśa*.
12. *blo bzang dpal ldan bstan pa'i nyi ma*, 1781–1852/4. See Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Cutting Through Appearances: The Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1990), p. 98.
13. *rnam rol, lila*.
14. Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Cutting Through Appearances*, p. 98.
15. See H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, pp. 81–169.
16. There are basically two types of deity yoga, generation in front and self-generation—imagining a deity as a visitor in front of oneself and imagining oneself as a deity. The practice of visualizing an ideal being in front of oneself and making offerings and so forth, although a form of deity yoga, is not the deity yoga that distinguishes Sutra from Tantra. The distinctively tantric practice is *self-generation*, imagining oneself as a deity.
17. *rdo rje rnam 'joms kyi rgyud rgyas pa, \*vajravidāraṇāvaiṇavya*. For the citation, see Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Hopkins, *Deity Yoga*, p. 109.
18. Collected Works of Rje Tsoṅ-kha-pa Blo-bzan-grags-pa, vol. 17 (*na*), 447.2–447.3.
19. Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Hopkins, *Deity Yoga*, pp. 104–106, 168–171.
20. See Gung-tang (*gung thang dkon mchog bstan pa'i sgron me*, 1762–1823), *Beginnings of a Commentary on the Difficult Points of (Dzong-ka-ba's) "Differentiating the Interpretable and the Definitive": Quintessence of "The Essence of Eloquence"* (*drang nges rnam 'byed kyi dga' 'grel rtsom 'phro legs bshad snying po'i yang snying*) (Guru Deva: Sarnath, India, no date), 21.7–21.11.
21. The text is Lessing and Wayman, *Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras*, pp. 158.16ff; for their translation, see the same.
22. Preferably as described in the Middle Way Consequence school (*dbu ma thal 'gyur pa, prāsaṅgikamādhyaṃika*).
23. See Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet*, p. 110.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
25. *ma yin dgag, paryudāsapratīṣedha*.
26. *rang bzhin gnas rigs, prakṛtiṣṭhagoṭra*.
27. XXIV.14ab.
28. Ye-ṣhay-gyel-tsen (*ye shes rgyal mtshan*, 1713–1793), *Illumination of the*

*Meaning of Action Tantra (bya rgyud don gsal)*, Collected Works, vol. 9 (New Delhi: Tibet House, 1976), p. 487.3.

29. Dalai Lama, Tsong-ka-pa, and Hopkins, *Deity Yoga*, p. 23.

30. See, for example, Khetsun Sangpo, *Tantric Practice in Nyingma*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Hopkins (London: Rider, 1982; reprint, Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1983).

31. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, second printing 1974), vol. 16, p. 471 (the reference is to the paragraph number, which is used for coordination between editions).

32. See the description of a similar practice done in the Vajrasattva meditation and repetition of mantra in Khetsun Sangpo, *Tantric Practice in Nyingma*, pp. 149–150.

33. Dzong-ka-ba gives this opinion in his explication of Yoga Tantra in the *Great Exposition of the Stages of Secret Mantra (sngags rim chen mo)*, Collected Works (Guru Deva edition), vol. *ga*, 177.2:

Cultivation of deity yoga in the pattern of the stages of production of [a life in] cyclic existence [mimicking the process of death, intermediate state, and rebirth]—the thoroughly afflicted class [of phenomena]—is not set forth in any reliable text of the three lower tantra sets; thus, such is a distinguishing feature of Highest Yoga Tantra. However, [in the three lower tantras] there is cultivation of deity yoga in the pattern of the very pure class [of phenomena], for the cultivation of the five clear enlightenments [in Yoga Tantra, for instance,] is said to be meditation within assuming the pride of the particular [stage] in accordance with the stages of full purification [i.e., enlightenment] of Bodhisattvas in their last lifetimes.

34. Mirage, smoke, fireflies, burning butter lamp, mind of vivid white appearance, mind of vivid red or orange increase, mind of vivid black near attainment, and mind of clear light. See Lati Rinbochay and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Rider, 1979; reprint, Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1980), pp. 15–19 and 32–46.

35. *phyag rgya, mudrā*.

36. *ngeś cha*.

37. *snang cha*.

38. *sems tsam, cittamātra*.

# The Century of the Holy Man in Chinese History (316–439): The Death of Hsuan-Kao<sup>1</sup>

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The rise of the holy man to such eminence in the later Empire had long been attributed, in the sweeping and derogatory perspective of many classical scholars, from Gibbons onwards, to the decline of Greek civilization in the Near East.... This impression was reinforced, at the turn of the century, by the influence of a Darwinian theory of evolution that dominated the anthropological study of religion. 'Popular' belief was treated as the belief of populations at a lower stage of moral and intellectual evolution.<sup>2</sup>

THE CHINESE HAN DYNASTY collapsed in 220 C.E. Civil war followed. The Three Kingdoms period ended when Chin united China in 265, but that was followed by the fratricide of the eight Chin princes. To help fight their private war, Central Asian nomads were drafted into battle. Not always well-treated by the Han Chinese (who considered them "barbarians"), the tribes shook off their sense of inferiority, repudiated the pledge of allegiance, and, seizing an opportunity, mutinied. In quick succession they sacked the twin capitals of Loyang and Ch'ang-an in 311 and 316. What was left of the Chin court moved south to the Yangtze region and took refuge in what was then still regarded as the aboriginal backwaters. China entered the Northern and Southern Dynasties until the Sui ruler united China in 589.

The present essay looks into the early part of the Northern Dynasties, the period between 316 when the nomads invaded China and 439 when the To-pa Wei finally reunited the North. This is the "century of the holy man." Hierocrats or holy men in office dominated northern rule in ways unknown to the contemporary Chinese south and to degrees that would not be seen again in Chinese history. Until recently, this phenomenon has been badly understood. What Peter Brown said of the derogatory interpretation of the role of the holy man in late antiquity applies as well here. With additional Han prejudice, it is still said in many books that Fo-tu-teng, the

first of such holy men, “used magic to bewitch the barbarian Shih Lo,” and gained political influence thereby—as if what Teng did was some slight of hand and as if Shih Lo was as naive as a child. Too often a narrow reading of the Buddhist tradition also leads to the common practice of referring to Northern Buddhism as State Buddhism, and northern hierocrats as some kind of military advisors. All that is said because at one point, the leader of the Sangha, Fa-kuo, supposedly bowed to Wei Emperor T’ai-tsu as the Tathāgata. And that act is judged to be contrary to the monastic rule—as if there is only one way to read the principle of the two Wheels of the Dharma. After what Tambiah has done in reassessing the dialectics of the two wheels—and Mahāyāna is bolder in this regard than the Pāli tradition—we need to take a closer look at the actual workings of state and Sangha relationship in history. We will see how the rendering unto God and the rendering unto Caesar is never that simple. Even the same record remembers how Emperor T’ai-tsu had to lower his head when he visited Fa-kuo at the latter’s hermitage—the gate *just happened* to be too low to receive his royal carriage.

The holy man, Peter Brown finds, was *repraesentio Christ* and deserving of imperial respect. In Syriac Christianity, he especially acted out the role of a rural patron. In this century of the holy man in China, the holy man was a *repraesentio Buddhi* (T’ai-tsu actually used the expression “exemplar of the Way”) who also played a key mediative role easing the tension between the barbarians and the Chinese. The holy man had such preeminence in this period in part because the full Buddhist institution was not yet in place. Once the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha had objective embodiments, the holy man tended to recede into the background. He who had helped to build them would also then defer to their authority. For the moment though, the holy man as personal preceptor to ruler and people might help to hold the community together. This social drama began with Fo-tu-teng in 316 in the North.<sup>3</sup> It came to an end in 439 when the North was united under the rule of the To-pa Wei. The death of the monk Hsuan-kaio in the Buddhist persecution of 444 only underlined it more. The present essay retraces that century through a number of key landmarks along the way and highlight the career of Hsuan-kaio at the end.

## 1. The Myth and the Reality: The First Holy Man, Fo-tu-teng

The life of Fo-tu-teng—his biography has been translated by Arthur Wright—is so paradigmatic of the lot of holy men that Teng is rightly credited with setting the style of Buddhist inculturation in the North. It is only that his life told in the *Lives of Eminent Monks* under the prime category of the *shen-i* or miracle-workers is told with such a mix of fact and fiction, myth and ideology, classical prejudice and medieval piety that we

must tease the various strands out—not to throw out the myth (you cannot and should not) but rather to go behind the myth-making process and make the myth reveal the history.

Teng was a regular Moggallāna (the disciple of the Buddha typifying magical prowess). He could produce rain, ease drought, make a dry stream flow again, bid *nāga* dragons to do his will, order gods and ghosts, look afar, and receive divine messages from Brahma or Indra. He made use of such powers to save a village from fire or a general from capture. These feats served the needs of farmers and warlords, the ruler and the ruled. He also alleviated suffering, cured the sick, and raised the dead—a repertoire befitting a Buddhist charismatic. Some of these myths are facts clouded by fiction. For example, it is said that Teng could take out, wash, and then put back into his body, his intestines; this he did by removing some cotton swab from this small hole found under his left breast; from that same hole an inner light would shine to help him read the holy scriptures in the dark. Now a Chinese metaphor for rebirth is “changing bones and renewing embryo.” This plus the metaphors of the Buddha’s “inner (i.e. self-) enlightenment,” his painless birth from out of “the right side of his mother’s body,” and Teng’s own ability to recite sutras at night have been blended together into what we read above. Right had been incidentally substituted with left because the Chinese found the right side to be inauspicious.<sup>4</sup>

For history-making myths though, we should turn to Teng’s political career. He arrived in China at the time of the barbaric revolt and witnessed the massacre of the population at the capital. To aid those suffering, Teng decided, as any monk would, to “civilize the barbarian (Shih Lo of Later Chao [328–352]) with feats of magic.” Towards that end, Teng first attached himself to a general serving Shih Lo, soon proving himself such a flawless war prophet that Shih Lo eventually asked for him. At their first meeting, Teng awed the bloody warrior by drawing magically a dazzling blue-green lotus from out of a bowl of water. Appointed the Great Reverent of the state, Teng indeed “halved the massacre” the Shih’s could have committed. So we are told.

So it has also been repeated in textbooks. Upon scrutiny though, the above reportage can be shown to be distorted. To begin with, Chinese needed converting to Buddhism; Shih Lo did not. Most Central Asian nomads were Buddhists already. What Shih Lo saw was not some magic show but a symbolic reminder, a buddhophany. The lotus rising from the water represented the Buddha; that the water was in a basin (read: the monk’s begging bowl) is noting how the Dharma had long since been entrusted to the Sangha. “Blue-green” (*ch’ing*) lotus should be emended into “pure” (untainted) lotus. In other words, in a classic confrontation between Power and Authority, Shih Lo was not fooled by magic; rather in deference, he bowed to the authority of the Three Jewels. The narrative

gives the impression that Teng sought out Shih Lo, but that is meant to credit him with a proactive compassion. In any Buddhist culture, it is as much the Buddhist general seeking out Teng. Teng was his personal confessor. Now no general would like to part with his personal counsel, but when Shih Lo asked for Teng, it was an offer that the general could also not refuse. We will see later what might happen when such an offer from a ruler was turned down.

As to the war prophecies Teng offered so flawlessly to all his patrons, we should note that all the holy men of this century—Fo-tu-teng, Tao-an, Seng-lang, Kumārajīva, Dharmakṣema—were remembered as war prophets. This is so despite the fact that any Buddhist monk with a minimum knowledge of the monastic rules would know that a monk was prohibited from even being near a battlefield. Yet all the lives of the monks above (except Seng-lang's) read like a mini-history of war efforts. Every time the warrior heeded the holy man, he won his battle. Every time he did not, he lost. For example, Tao-an advised Fu Chien of Former Ch'in (351–394) not to invade the South in 383. Fu Chien, however, ignored his advice, and he was routed at the Fei River. For that, his reign collapsed. All Tao-an probably did was to counsel against such a barbarian invasion of the emigré Chinese court in the South. More fantastic military foresights, however, have been attributed to these holy men. And a critical historian has a right to ask: what is really going on here?

The answer is that these holy lives are “retrospectives” written by Buddhist historians to alert potential ruling patrons to the benefit of the Dharma, not that unlike the compilation of the Hebrew Bible that credits its chosen prophets a near perfect record of foresight and has a lesson to impart thereby. As Tao-an recognized, “In times like this, the Buddhist Law cannot be established without the support of the king.” Not spoken but implied is the reverse: kings could not rule long without compliance with the Dharma either.<sup>5</sup> Although the Buddha was no warmonger, yet by the time Buddhism spread into northwest India, the Buddha would so deputize old Hindu gods, i.e., the Four Heavenly Kings, to protect his faithful flock. This theme was canonized in the “Four Heavenly Kings” chapter of the *Golden Light Sutra* (ca. 150 C.E.). This occurred around the time of the reign of the Kushan King Kaniṣka III.

The situation in northwest India was not all that different from the Hebraic experience at the time of the rise of the prophets. That is to say, as nomadic tribes rose to becoming kingdoms and were caught up in international conflicts, wars, prophets, and war prophecies rose as royal institutions. Whether it rose more justly (YHWH was a god of war) or less justly (the Buddha was a man of peace), the line of what is just or proper was blurred in the Buddhist case because northwestern India was invaded by foreigners who, not being Indians, did not know or did not observe the late Vedic custom of respecting the *śrāmaṇa*-s as not to involve the renunciate



in wars. The Persian religion did not recognize such exceptions. Holy men were expected to be at and were regularly drafted into royal courts. Northwest India inherited this pattern. And King Kaniṣka was happy to have captured Aśvaghōṣa from his enemy and have this monk serve as his court poet. (Aśvaghōṣa would be remembered later as a Mahāyāna bodhisattva, and well armored Mahāyāna bodhisattvas were regularly featured as counsels to Dharma kings.) Two hundred years after Kaniṣka and further east on the Silk Road, Fu Chien in China would be just as proud that he had captured—freed and released unharmed—the Chinese monk Tao-an whom he would keep close to his side to the very end. (Tao-an, who sent some of his disciples to the Chinese south would die hostages to his patron.)

Now it is doubtful whether Teng ever was a war prophet. As the Great Reverent of the state, Teng did what any chaplains would do: seek divine protection for his flock before it went into battle. Since all victories were attributed to the Buddha's protection—and all losses to the fault of men—so Teng was retroactively credited with a nearly flawless record of war prophecies. Of course, the holy man was holy not because he had the power to work miracles. As Peter Brown would put it, he had such powers because he was holy. Or because as he was perceived as holy, those powers resulted from such acquiescing. And where popular perceptions rule, it really does not matter if the holy man himself *disclaimed* all such powers. They would be attributed to him no less. Tao-an for one was a Confucian literati turned Buddhist who never in any of his writings boasted of having such powers; yet, he was credited with them nonetheless. The case of Seng-lang is even more clear and more telling. To flee from the chaos in the Central Plain, this erudite monk led a remnant of Han elite to find refuge at Shan-tung, himself retiring to a valley at T'ai-shan. He judiciously declined all offers of office. Yet petitions from barbaric rulers kept coming, with all these warring "men of destiny" thanking him for his "divine help" and "prophetic predictions." It is not that Seng-lang ever aided any one of these pretenders to the Chinese throne; it is only that he had such symbolic authority and high standing among the Han people that a nod from him could legitimize a barbarian ruler in the eyes of the Chinese. For that he was courted and honored as a king-maker that he never truly was.

In his role as hierocrat, Fo-tu-teng never forsook the doctrine of the Two Wheels of the Dharma. After all, he tutored Tao-an, who saw rightly that the two wheels needed one another. The two were never meant by the tradition to be utterly separate (or for that matter, unequal). They were to be like the two wings of a bird, ideally coordinated and mutually reinforcing. Even when Teng was supposedly prophesying the fortunes of war, he did so always using a "Twin Wheel" bell (possibly some kind of a *vajra*; this point is missed by Wright's translation). The "double wheel" referred to the dual principles of Righteousness and Rule. So when Shih Hu assassi-

nated the heir apparent to succeed Shih Lo, Teng noted that only one of the bells was ringing, implying that the other had been treacherously silenced or interrupted by the bloody deed. Such subtle hints were not lost to his audience. And Shih Hu was no fool.

Educated by monks since his childhood, Shih Hu, I think, baited Teng by asking about the first rule in Buddhism—knowing too well it was “to not kill”—in order to see how Teng could respond to his need to stage bloody wars. Teng gave a very judicious answer: not any more than what is just and necessary. On another occasion when no amount of prayer to the Buddha apparently helped Shih Hu to win a battle—Shih Hu was hemmed in by enemies on three sides—he openly declared the Buddha to be “no god.” Teng went into hiding to avoid his murderous wrath. The war prophet failed. But as usual, crisis brought out the best from the holy man. Not magic but common sense, for the next day when tempers cooled, Teng held Hu off by saying, “Why blaspheme the Buddha for a [temporary] setback, a daily fare in any war?” And more than common sense, there was karmic theodicy. Teng also knew how to bait Shih Hu—with carrot and stick and a moral truth. Shih Hu was assured that he was destined to be a ruler of China because in a previous life when he was a merchant (a layman), he feasted sixty *arhant-s* (i.e., supported the Sangha). He should continue in that pious way. Teng also chastised Shih Hu by noting an interim rebirth for Shih Hu as a rooster. The rooster, used in cock fights, served as punishment for Shih Hu’s violent ways. With moral authority and popular support on Teng’s side, Shih Hu had enough sense to back off.

## 2. The Blessed Peacemaker: The Invincible Hui-shih

By his intercession, Fo-tu-teng supposedly halved the massacre that the two Shihs could have committed. That might be cold comfort to the other half, but it does show how, within limits, a Buddhist man of peace did work miracles in taming the man of war. With the same hyperbole, the records would report that overnight half of the population or even nine out of ten households would be so converted by such holy men. This led to the North having a monk Sangha that overall in this period of disunity was ten times the size of the one in the South. Obviously these could not all be true monks. And it is unlikely that these overnight converts knew much about Buddhism and all had a sudden change of heart. Common sense demands that we ask again: what truly happened?

The case of Hui-shih may provide us with the most telling cue to what actually transpired. Hui-shih was a famous yogin, a wayfarer who literally walked the Silk Road from one end to the other: from Tun-huang to Korea. He walked barefoot and was given one of the major extraordinary marks

of the Buddha. His soles stayed lily white, unsoiled by the dust or mud of the world. Master White Feet (as he was known) visited Kumārajīva but, as a true ascetic, stayed outside the endowed community and rested under a tree instead. Kumārajīva was the reigning holy man at Ch'ang-an, a pillar of the state to his patron Yao Hsing, the National Preceptor upon whose war prophecies the affairs of the state—primarily war then—depended. Unlike the holy man as rural patron in Syria, the holy men in North China in this period led such precarious lives that a cult rarely grew around their graves—until Hui Shih's death later. Most rose and fell with the rise and fall of their warring patrons. Warfare so destroyed their physical remains that Kumārajīva's grave was unrecoverable and his descendants—Kumārajīva was forced to pass on his seed—could not be traced.

After Kumārajīva Ch'ang-an suffered a number of sieges. When Ho-li Po-po and his hoard were about to attack this city, more bloodshed was expected. Po-po was the first barbarian ruler to claim to be a living Tathāgata, but in his piety, he had actually observed a Buddhist etiquette of war: he granted safe passage to the monks in the city who were allowed to leave the scene of battle. Po-po became enraged though when he discovered that the citizens had betrayed him. They had allowed his enemy, masquerading as a monk, to escape. For that, his army took revenge upon the citizenry by slaughtering monks and lay alike. What happened next became one of the most retold legends of the time, one known to Korea and Japan too. The Wei dynastic record reported it: a soldier then plunged his sword into his body but it came out leaving Hui-shih unharmed. Surprised, the matter was reported to Po-po. Po-po came and struck Hui-shih with his jeweled blade but it too came out leaving hardly a mark. In fear, he asked for forgiveness and the massacre ended. So it appears that the monks as victors over "life and death" (samsara) were literally immune to the sword.

The story has hagiographical precedents. The Buddha in his past life had withstood the pain of torture with no complaint. All bodhisattvas are to perfect the same superhuman "perfection of patience or forbearance." Myths of severed heads and limbs growing back on the slain bodies are part of this folklore. Master White Feet as *repraesentio buddhi* was only living out his role. He was holding up the Dharma Wheel of Righteousness against the ruthless power of the killer. And in this confrontation of Right against Might, Right won. Behind the hyperbole, there is a simple truth. All Buddhist monks should face death unflinchingly. The first monk of note in China, the Parthian prince turned renunciate, An Shih-kao did. He forgave—attributed it all to karma—a young robber who waylaid him and threatened to take his life. The first Chinese Zen patriarch, Hui-k'o, would later lose an arm that way impassively. At Ch'ang-an when the rest of the world stood in fear of the barbarian's sword, Hui-shih was the one man who was unintimidated. As "exemplar of the Way," the monk is a living

testimony to nirvanic freedom. For that, the holy man also became a one-man institution of peace.

The power of myth lies in the myth of power. The truth is that the Buddhist holy man played an indispensable role as peacemaker in this era of war. The bare fact of ritual is that Ho-lin Po-po felt betrayed while the citizens of Ch'ang-an felt justified to protect one of their own kind. Immovable barbaric force met immovable Chinese resistance. Neither race could trust the other in this impasse. But Po-po could no more afford to kill off all the Han Chinese than the citizens of Ch'ang-an could afford to resist to the last man. Po-po the conqueror needed to be a ruler over living men; and the Chinese needed to live to return and fight another day. Into that world of mutual mistrust and a political vacuum stepped Hui-shih, a Central Asian, foreign yet sinicized, the one man whose renunciate standing both sides could trust. Through him, the two sides could negotiate a settlement. We may never know exactly what happened, but inferring from other patterns in this period, this is what likely happened.

Basically Hui-shih offered himself up as a ransom and as a guarantor who received pledges from both sides. The barbarian promised to be merciful as a Buddhist ruler would; the people promised to be compliant as Buddhist laymen would. The holy man became the ruler's personal counsel ("war prophet" is a misnomer) and functioned as a pillar of state (National Treasure, etc.). The people indebted to his intercession (he stopped the massacre) became in effect his flock (thus the "mass conversion"). The result was peace. Of course, hagiography embellished it more dramatically. From the side of the rulers, we have these tales of flawless war prophecies. From the side of the people, these incredible legends of holy men standing up to a killer and literally defying and surviving death barehandedly—or, in this case, barefoot.

### 3. Battling over Holy Men: The First Casualty

The story did not end there and not always happily or peacefully ever after. The holy man as the pillar of the state, so indispensable in a three-way pledge as to be unslayable, also became, however willingly, a hostage, a hierocrat who could never resign from office. Tao-an lost his freedom thus. Hui-shih's wayfaring days were over. And as the glue of community and symbol of rule, the holy man also became the prized booty of war. Capture the holy man and you subordinate the ruler that owned him before and you have the allegiance of whole populations pledged to him. Wars were fought over the holy man. Rulers sought out, captured, monopolized, and collected these symbols of rule as they fought for universal control. While all that happened, China did not initiate this practice; she merely inherited it from northwest India through Central Asia. King Kaniṣka had so

captured Aśvaghōṣa in his day and indications are that Kumārajīva could have served as a holy man honored by and mediating Kucha and Kashgar.

It is not necessary—it would take up too much space—to recount the whole history of wars waged over holy man in the North. We have seen how Shih Lo had asked for and got from his general the prized Fo-tu-teng. (The general could not refuse. It was from this general that Teng sought refuge when Shih Hu in his rage wanted to kill him.) After Teng died, his leading Chinese disciple became the prize. Fu Chien developed a huge army to sack Hsiang-yang in 379, and he boasted of capturing only “one and a half men”—Tao-an and an eminent Confucian erudite. (The “one and a half” count is taken from the war with the Tamils recorded in the Sinhalese chronicle: only “one and a half” men were inadvertently killed—a monk and a layman; dead Tamils did not count.) Then Tao-an heard of Kumārajīva’s fame and Fu Chien dispatched a still larger force all the way into Central Asia to seek his release. His general Lu Kuang kidnapped Kumārajīva before Kashgar could send aid to stop it. By the time he brought him back to China, Fu Chien had died. So Lu Kuang kept Kumārajīva to himself at Liang-chou. And it was left to Yao Hsing of the Later Ch’in (384–417; r. 393–410) to again ceremonially “release” the saint. It was alleged that Lu Kuang had abused Kumārajīva. But no sooner was Kumārajīva brought to Ch’ang-an in 401 that the same abuse—forced concubinage—was perpetuated again. But judging from the fact that Kumārajīva was captured along with a Kuchan princess, that concubinage might have started in Central Asia already. Of all the holy men in the North, only Seng-lang managed to stay out of harm’s way by wisely refusing all offers of office. He was a rural patron since a number of villages were fiefed to him to help support his community but this ended after his death when Shan-tung fell to the Wei.

Shortly after Kumārajīva was taken to Ch’ang-an, Dharmakṣema made his home in Pei Liang. The biography of this holy man is nearly as lengthy and as detailed as Kumārajīva’s, written up again as a testimony to his war prophetic power at sustaining the power of the state. There is also an allegation to his being knowledgeable about the secret arts of the male and the female, a possible reference to some early proto-Tantric teaching coming through this prolific translator. But Dharmakṣema would be the first casualty of this warring over holy men. The record is muddled at this point, but this is what I see as having happened. The To-p’a reign was on the ascendancy, and Emperor T’ai-wu had already defeated Yen in the east and acquired the yogin Hui-shih. He was targeting Pei Liang and was putting pressure on its ruler Meng-sun to deliver to him Dharmakṣema. Meng-sun tried to resist and procrastinated. Dharmakṣema had had relative freedom of movement and had left for India before. Possibly as an excuse, T’ai-wu was told that Dharmakṣema had left for India to retrieve the last section of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. Regarding this as

a defiance of his order, T'ai-wu demanded the head of the escapee. Meng-sun was pressured to dispatch soldiers after Dharmakṣema and bring back his head.

The saint saw his pending death. When he was killed, Meng-sun lamented his and confessed that "As Dharmakṣema is my preceptor master, it is proper that I should die with him." A Buddhist owes his new life to his preceptor. T'ai-tsu was not placated for long. He took the capital Liang-ch'eng by storm in 439, and was opposed by three thousand monks helping defend the city. Even as the triumphant Wei army returned home with its booty, another monk led a revolt and had to be put down anew. The battle for Liang-chou boded ill for the holy man. Caught in a political tug-of-war, Dharmakṣema died an unsaintly death. This was the beginning of the end of the century of the holy man.

#### 4. The End of an Era: The Strangling of Hsuan-kao

With the fall of Liang-chou, the North was reunited. In 444, Emperor T'ai-wu would accept as true a prophecy offered him by a Taoist hierocrat, the new Heavenly Master K'ou Ch'ien-chih, that he was the True Lord of the Great Peace who had been prophesied to come from the north. The imperial year was changed into the first year of the Great Peace. This was followed by the proscription of Buddhism during which the monk Hsuan-kao was killed. As a yogin, Hsuan-kao was then second to none. He so perfected the meditation on death that even tigers stood in fear of him. But no amount of yogic power saved him from the sword. His death marks the end of the century of the holy man even as his reported resurrection signals a new development. His biography is translated below.

#### The Biography of Hsuan-kao: A Translation

Shih Hsuan-kao from the Wei family was given the name Ling-yu. He was a native of Wan-nien County, Fung-yu commandery [Shansi province]. His mother, Madame K'ou, followed initially [the Taoist teaching]. After marrying into the Wei family, she bore first a daughter, elder sister to Hsuan-kao. From birth, the baby girl was devoted to the Buddha. On behalf of her mother, she prayed that one day the whole family would believe in the Great Dharma. In the third year of Hung-shih under the barbaric Ch'in rule [401 C.E.], Madame K'ou had a dream in which Indian monks scattered flowers all over her room. When she woke up, she noticed that she was with child. On the eighth day of the second month of the fourth [Hung-shih] year, a baby boy was born. [On that day,] a strange fragrance filled the room and a bright light danced on the wall, not dispersing until the sun rose.

Seeing how the babe was born to such auspicious signs, the mother named him Ling-yu [Miraculously Conceived]. People of the time revered him so highly that he was called Shih-kao [Held in High Regard by the World].

Hsuan-kao already had the aspiration to leave home at age twelve and enter the mountain, but for a long time, he could not secure his parents' permission to do so. One day, a scholar who stayed over at the Wei residence mentioned how he was planning a retirement at Mount Chung-ch'ang. Hsuan-kao's parents then entrusted him to this scholar's care. That night, villagers dropped by to bid him farewell. The next morning, they came again, though. The parents could not help but wonder aloud: why, having come already last night, would you be here again? The villagers asked in turn: "Since we did not know his departure, how could we have come last night?" The parents then realized that the night visitors were divine men. When Hsuan-kao first arrived at the mountain, he asked to be tonsured. The monks of the mountain denied his request, noting that he had not received any permission from his parents who were not yet converted to the Dharma. Hsuan-kao returned home hoping to change his parents' minds. But it was not until he was twenty could he have his wish. Because he had so turned his back to the mundane and gave up everything worldly, he was called Hsuan-kao [Yuan-kao: Originally Aspiring for Heights].

Intelligent and gifted with wisdom, Hsuan-kao learned by direct intuition. At fifteen he was already giving lectures at the monastery. After receiving the full precepts, he devoted himself to precepts and meditation. Hearing that Buddhahadra from Kuan-yu [west of Han-ku pass] was teaching at the Shih-yang temple, he journeyed there to study. Within just ten days, his understanding of meditation so impressed Buddhahadra that the latter said, "Excellent! So deep is your awakening that I would beg to withdraw and not presume to receive your homage as your teacher." Afterwards Hsuan-kao went off alone to western Ch'in and secluded himself at Mount Mai-chi. More than a hundred flocked there to receive instruction from him, admiring his understanding and following him in meditative practice. At the time, an eminent monk in the Ch'in domain, Shih T'an-hung of Ch'ang-an, had also secluded himself at the mountain. They became good friends sharing one calling. By this time, [the Hsien-pei ruler] Ch'i-fo Ch'ih-p'an had occupied Lung-yu, the western border of which touched the domain of [Northern] Liang. There the foreign meditative master Dharmakṣema had come to guide the native, Chinese students in the ways of yoga. As the true teaching of *samādhi* was profound and subtle, few monks at Lung-yu could master it. Hsuan-kao had hoped to bring along his followers to study with Dharmakṣema. After ten days, Dharmakṣema was as much inspired by him in understanding.

At the time there were two monks who were renunciates only in name. At heart these two hypocrites schemed and sought power. With passions

yet untamed, they broke the monastic rules, and were envious of monks with true learning. After Dharmakṣema had turned West to live with the barbarians, they vilified Hsuan-kao, telling [Ch'i-to] Man, the eldest son of the Prince of Honan, that Hsuan-kao was gathering a multitude to the detriment of the state. Trusting the rumor, Man plotted to do Hsuan-kao physical harm but, prevented by his father, he [only] had Hsuan-kao expelled to Mount Lin-yang-t'ang in Hopei. According to ancient legends, this mountain was the home of many immortals. Hsuan-kao and his community of three hundred dwelled there and kept up their practice as before. Their meditation and wisdom further spurred, their sincerity touched off mysterious responses. Many miracles were reported. Mysterious melodies were heard; fragrance of incense rose from out of nowhere; true men and immortals came frequently to visit; and wild beasts were tamed and poisonous insects became harmless. Among Hsuan-kao's disciples, those fluent in mastering the six gates [the senses] numbered more than a hundred. Among them was Yuan-shao from Lung-yu county, Ch'in-chou commandery, who so excelled in meditation and gained such supernatural powers that clear mountain water could sprout freely from his palm, ten times more fragrant and clear than any water in nature. He would offer it to Hsuan-kao for cleansing and rinsing. Yuan-shao could also conjure up flowers and incense not of this world with which he would honor the Three Jewels. There were eleven disciples like him who had such magical powers. Yuan-shao himself later retired to Mount T'ang-shu and freed himself from his body like a cicada shedding its cocoon.

Before this time, Master T'an-hung of Ch'ang-an had retired to the area of Mount Mien and Shu [Szechwan] and propagated the Way at Ch'eng-tu. Hearing of his renown, the Prince of Honan sent an envoy to invite him to come. Knowing how Hsuan-kao had been exiled, T'an-chung decided to clear his name. Despite the danger of journeying through a precipitous trail, T'an-chung accepted the invitation. Following a formal introduction to the Prince of Honan, he told his host: "Your majesty possesses thorough understanding and far-reaching insight. So why would you heed such defamatory remarks and expell the worthy [Hsuan-kao]? I, this poor man of the Way, came a thousand miles in hope of just offering these words of advice." The prince and his son felt ashamed and expressed regret. Acknowledging their fault, they dispatched an envoy with a humble request for Hsuan-kao's return. Ever magnanimous and compassionate, Hsuan-kao bore no anger and accepted the invitation. But when he was about to leave the mountain, wind and storm suddenly rose. Trees were uprooted. Boulders fell. And the way was blocked. Hsuan-kao uttered an incantation, saying, "It has been my vow to spread widely the Way. Can that vow be stopped this way?" The wind stopped and the road was cleared. As Hsuan-kao made his way slowly back, royalty, ministers, and common people waited upon him along the way. Within and without the



court, he was revered as the National Preceptor. After he had proselytized and changed the custom of Honan, he turned to civilizing the Liang domain. Tsu-ch'ü Meng-sun [the ruler of Northern Liang, r. 397–439] deeply revered Hsuan-kao. He gathered a host of talents to listen to his superb teaching. At the time there was among his disciples, a Fen-hui monk from Hsi-hai named Ying. Limited in understanding, he had made some progress but thought that he had realized the full amount. He considered himself an enlightened *arhat*, one who suddenly and totally penetrated the meditative wisdom. In secret Hsuan-kao let Ying see in a trance the various Buddhas of the boundless worlds in all ten directions, and see how all the many teachings of the Buddha could be different. For a whole summer Ying tried to understand fully all that he was made to see. Unable to exhaust it, Ying finally realized the bottomless nature of the sea of *samādhi* and was greatly shamed and awed.

Meanwhile, T'o-pa T'ao of the Wei had seized power and occupied P'ing-ch'eng and was invading the kingdom of Liang. The uncle of T'ao, Tu Ch'ao, Prince of Yang-p'ing invited Hsuan-kao to the Wei capital P'ing-ch'eng. There Hsuan-kao spread the Tao far and wide. The crown prince T'o-pa Huang revered him and served him with devotion as a disciple would his preceptor. Because the prince had once been maligned [by his enemies], he was held suspect by his father. He asked Hsuan-kao for advice: "The charges against me are baseless. How can I extract myself?" Hsuan-kao instructed him to observe the *Golden Light* fast and sincerely confess his transgressions for seven days. [He did.] Consequently in a dream T'o-pa T'ao saw his grandfather and father holding swords in majestic regalia; they inquired: "Why do you believe in the rumor-mongers and suspect the loyalty of your own son?" T'ao woke up suddenly. He summoned his ministers and related the dream to them. They replied: "The crown prince is blameless. The truth is as revealed by the commands sent down with the royal spirits." Thereafter T'ao no longer suspected the crown prince, all thanks to the power of Hsuan-kao's sincere vow.

An edict was issued by T'ao [which read]: "I have inherited the glorious legacy of my ancestors, and have the intention to enlarge that great foundation so it might prosper for ten thousand generations more. Although my military achievement shines bright, I have yet to spread learning and culture, an omission that is hardly the way to uphold the Era of Great Peace. Now that there is peace in the land and prosperity among the people, it is time to set up the institutions that would be the norm of ten thousand generations to come. As there is alternation of Yin and Yang, there is the succession of the seasons. To appoint my son as heir, to select the virtuous to office, and to entrust them with the country's welfare—these are the ways to render rest to the weary. That has been the good rule that is unchanged for ages. My ministers, having worked long and hard, deserve rest and the boon of peace, to live well, nurse their energy, and

enjoy longevity. They still may counsel and petition but they should be spared the hardship of office. So hence let the crown prince be the head of the myriad departments, administer all affairs of state, appoint the righteous, and promote or demote according to merit. As Confucius says: "The young deserve our respect, for who is to tell they would not do better than we?" Thus the officials and the people all pledged their loyalty to the heir apparent and sent memorials to him, separating them from other documents by using white papers.

[The Confucian prime minister] Ts'ui Hao and the [Taoist] Heavenly Master K'ou [Ch'ien-chih] had won the imperial favor from T'o-pa T'ao before. Now they worried that if and when the crown prince Huang was to ascend the throne, they would lose all their influence. With malice they memorialized and alleged that in that affair [of the dream], the crown prince plotted against the ruler; with the help of Hsuan-kao, he had engineered the magical appearance of the imperial ancestors in his majesty's dream. If such machination is not eradicated, they charged, it would result in immeasurable harm. Enraged, T'o-pa T'ao ordered the immediate arrest of Hsuan-kao. Prior to this Hsuan-kao had secretly told his disciples, "The Buddha dharma will soon decline. Master [Hui-]Ch'ung and I will be the first to suffer the consequence." At the time, those who heard that duly grieved. Hui-ch'ung, a monk from Liang-chou, was then the personal preceptor to Han Wen-te, the Imperial Secretary of the Wei state. Second in virtue only to Hsuan-kao he too came under suspicion. In the ninth month of the fifth year of the T'ai-p'ing [Chen-chun] era [444], Hsuan-kao and Hui-ch'ung were arrested and imprisoned. On the fifteenth day of the same month they were executed at the eastern corner of the capital P'ing-ch'eng. Hsuan-kao was forty-three. That happened in the twenty-first year of the Yuan chia era of the Sung Dynasty (concurrent in the South; 444). The day Hsuan-kao was executed, his disciples were unaware of what was happening. At the third watch of the night, a bright light was suddenly seen circling three times the tower that Hsuan-kao used to live in. Then it entered the meditative grotto itself and a voice from within the light announced: "Thus have I died." The disciples then knew that their master had passed away. They wept sorrowfully as if unto death. Later they gathered the body at the southern suburb of the capital. They bathed it and entombed it. Hui-ch'ung's body was similarly taken care of in a different place. The monks and the lay people of the capital without exception grieved in fear.

At the time, Hsuan-ch'ang, a disciple of Hsuan-kao, was at Yun-chung, some six hundred miles away from P'ing-ch'eng. That morning some figure appeared out of nowhere and informed him of what had happened and offered him a horse that could run six hundred miles [a day]. Hsuan-ch'ang flourished the whip and reached the capital that very night. When

he saw the body of Hsuan-kao he could no more control his grief. In tears he addressed his fellow disciples: "The Dharma has suffered a fall. But instead of an eventual revival, better it is that there be a renewed prosperity now. Master [Hsuan-kao], pray sit up, for as your virtue is like no one else's, you can shine forever."

Before the words had died, Hsuan-kao's eyes opened slightly; his pleasant complexion returned; and his body was covered with a sweet perspiration. In no time he sat up and addressed his fellowship: "The Great Buddha dharma undergoes momentous changes according to changing conditions. But the rise and decline affects only the mundane traces. The transmudane Principle remains always the same. I anticipate that most of you would [be persecuted] just like me, except for Hsuan-ch'ang, who should depart for the South. After your deaths, the Dharma would be revived anew. It is best that you all cultivate your minds and not suffer any regret [in facing the dark days to come]." With these words, he lay down again and finally departed. The next morning the disciples were hoping to move the coffin to a crematory site. But because state policy [urged on by the Heavenly Master] had prohibited cremation, the body was buried in a tomb [outside the city]. Monks and laymen wept till their hearts broke.

There was a monk by the name of Fa-ta who was a clerical official. He had long admired Hsuan-kao but had never received any personal instruction from the master. Hearing of his passing, he lamented: "The sage is gone. On what may I hence depend?" For days he would not eat as he pleaded aloud to Hsuan-kao: "Superior Sage, who can thus come and go at will, why would you not show yourself to me?" Hearing the pleas, Hsuan-kao did appear. He was seen floating down from high. Fa-ta bowed deeply and begged to be delivered [from this world] but Hsuan-kao noted, "The weight of your karma is heavy; it is difficult to lift as yet. You should know that from now on, you should practice the Vaipulya [Mahāyāna] rite of penance. If you do so, the karmic retribution [for past evils done] would be lightened." Fa-ta said: "I pray that you can help me so that I may be so delivered from the painful punishment." Hsuan-kao said: "Just do as I instruct and do not forget about it; everything ultimately depends on you."

Fa-ta further inquired: "May I know where you and Master [Hui-] Ch'ing have been reborn?" Hsuan-kao answered: "Because I want to return to this evil world in order to aid all sentient beings, I have already been so born. Master Ch'ing has always longed for peace and quiet (nirvana); he has gained his wish." Fa-ta asked further: "May I know to what level of the bodhisattva stages you have attained?" Hsuan-kao answered: "Among my disciples, there is one who would know." Upon that, Hsuan-kao disappeared. Later Fa-ta secretly visited the various disciples of Hsuan-kao and they all agreed that Hsuan-kao is the Bodhisattva who has attained the stage of perfected forbearance [emptiness wisdom]

that lets the nonarising of reality be, i.e. *anupattika dharmakṣānti*. In the seventh year of the T'ai-p'ing era, T'o-pa T'ao persecuted the Sangha and destroyed the Dharma, just as Hsuan-kaio had predicted.

## 5. In Retrospect: On the Passing of the Holy Man

The death of Hsun-kaio closed the age of the holy man. No longer was the holy man so indispensable that mythopoetically he could not be killed. He could be. And the reason has to do in part with the changing times. In 335, when the sinocentric Confucian minister Wang Tu foolishly advised his barbarian ruler Shih Hu that a Son of Heaven should not worship a *hu* or barbarian deity, he was rebuffed soundly by Shih Hu who noted that he, Shih Hu, being a *hu* himself, would only be too glad to honor a *hu* god (the Buddha). Buddhism might seem barbaric to the Chinese, but in Central Asia it had been a major civilizing force. It offered the nomadic tribes then emerging into kingdoms an ideology of royal rule their simpler tribal religions could not. It probably also provided these tribes the legal compact—a basic function of *religio*—for creating a multi-tribal confederation. They could easily have used the model set forth in the *Golden Light Sūtra*. Eight or sixteen princes could come together and form what would be known as a “Golden Light Congregation” whereby the members would all pledge to jointly uphold the Dharma and to oppose their common enemies (these were always seen as enemies and violators of the Dharma). The members of the congregation would be protected naturally by the Buddha; their enemies would be justly repelled by his deputies, the Four Heavenly Kings. We have seen how Fo-tu-teng had special access to the Hindu gods. That in the biography of Hsuan-kaio above we see the crown prince making use of the *Golden Light* confessional (a rite of penance) to verify his truthfulness and seek protection from his court enemies only attests to the prevalence of Buddhist ideology and practice among the Central Asian nomads.

It is a truism among Sinologists to hold that barbarian conquerors seeking to become permanent rulers of China must adopt the Chinese ways and that the Confucian bureaucracy would prove indispensable—more so than any institution of the holy man. If so, then indeed the days when holy men could be king-makers were numbered. But that is really putting things too simply. The three religions of China and their institutional forms were ever-evolving. Chinese minds and society were changed by the foreigners even as the foreigners were being so-called “Sinicized.” Now of the two religions or traditions in China, Taoism proved to be the one more receptive to Buddhist influence and more accepting of foreigners. K'ou Ch'ien-chih who headed the “new” Way of the Heavenly Master befriended the Buddhists (he interceded on behalf of and saved the three thousand monks

of Liang-chou whom T'ai-wu would have put to death for opposing his conquering army) and he truly considered To-p'a Emperor T'ai-wu to be the True Lord of the Great Peace, a Taoist messianic ruler prophesied by the *T'ai-p'ing-ching* to rise in the North. Compared with him, Ts'ui Hao the Confucian prime minister was the one less receptive of Buddhists and in his heart of hearts still regarded the T'o-pa's to be "uncivilized." (For writing up an official history of To-pa's that was not very flattering, he would be put to a horrible death by T'ai-wu later.) T'ai-wu was initially sceptical of the Taoist prophecy but Ts'ui Hao convinced him of its plausibility. And it was within that context—the T'o-pa's shift to a Taoist ideology of kingship and the increasing influence of Confucianism at court—that the proscription of Buddhism came about and the death of Hsuan-kao ensued. In both matters Ts'ui Hao was the key instigator.

The biography of Hsuan-kao above however tells of the more complicated details of those changing times. His life was told after the model of the life the Buddha. The holy man is an *imago buddhi*. Hsuan-kao was "miraculously conceived" like the Buddha and was called one "highly respected by the world" (the World-Honored One). His mother followed previously an *ai-tao* (heresy) which we can assume means Taoism. Hsuan-kao was originally given the name Yuan-kao, but Yuan became a taboo word when the ruling To-pa clan later adopted Yuan as their Chinese surname. Since then, the records refer to him as Hsuan-kao. Like the Buddha, Hsuan-kao studied with two leading meditative masters before striking out on his own. And after he died, there was a disciple who despaired of having nothing to rely on—something that also occurred after the death of the Buddha.

Upon a closer look, Hsuan-kao belonged to the category of what the Buddhist tradition would recognize as the "forest monks." Caves can be substitutes for forests, and Hsuan-kao's cave site was at Mt. Mai-chi. This is a spectacular outcrop of a hill. It rose solitarily above the surrounding lowlands and its shape looked like a domed heaven to Taoists and a *stūpa* reliquary to the Buddhists. This desolate hill with bare vegetation on top and sheer cliffs all around still houses bands of cells in its mid-section, a venerable haunt perfect for hermits and immortals. Hsuan-kao's career from that point on illustrates well the fortunes of a forest monk. He was impeached by two city monk types—worldly monks who adjusted to the politics at the center, jealous of his power and influence among the people. Exiled to Hopei, his fame was undiminished and he was recalled when another mountain hermit came to his defense. Forest monks who devoted themselves to meditation and kept pure lives were more loved by the people, and could represent the voice of the periphery in a harsher criticism of the power at the center. This pattern has been detected in the monastic reform movements in the medieval Latin Church; it is still visible today in the politics of Thailand. Hsuan-kao's trip home, made treacherous by

uprooted trees and falling boulders, tells as much about the desire of the locals hoping to keep him in Hopei. But the “center” called and Hsuan-kao would accept the invitation to return. Deference to the holy man had kings always leaving their capitals to welcome the saint. Aśoka so welcomed the Great Tissa and Upagupta. T’ang T’ai-tsung so welcomed Hsuan-tsang.

The century of the holy man passed with the passing of Hsuan-kao. The confrontation of the Lion and the Lamb—ruthless killer and selfless saint—looked increasingly out of place now that court intrigues instead of the exigencies on the battle field seemed to determine political outcomes. The roving warriors were being turned into landed nobility. Conquerors by the sword were becoming rulers by the brush. Peace had, as the edict of T’ai-wu said, replaced war. Culture and not conflict should be the rule of the new era. This is, however, not to say that there were no more holy men after this century of the holy man. There were—but they were holy men of a different style. We cannot go into the next page in the history of Chinese Buddhism here, but we may reflect on the post-mortem miracles reported in the biography above. No such miracles were reported of previous holy men. And no one before Hsuan-kao is known for a reported bodhisattvic rebirth. His resurrection and final entrustment is also exceptional. They are indeed of “biblical” proportion.

The resurrection of Hsuan-kao bespeaks of the survival of his community and a renewal of its faith. As the saint himself prophesied, after the dark days of the persecution, there would be a revival to come. But it is Hsuan-kao coming back to life to assure Fa-ta that truly proved that he was enlightened. He could “(thus) come and go at will” (as a *tathāgata*, the thus-come or thus-gone would). And it is noteworthy that Fa-ta was not present at the initial “pentecostal,” but yet like the outsider Saul that became Paul, Fa-ta had the stronger private vision. There is this hint dropped that a disciple of Hsuan-kao was “in the know” but the text does not identify who this person—this Peter of the Rock—was. Judging from subsequent Buddhist history, it has to be T’an-yao. T’an-yao led the Buddhist revival in the 460s after the persecution was lifted (452). And in one the caves he sponsored at Yun-kang, the martyrdom of Hsuan-kao was graphically depicted.

T’an-yao represented a different stage and type of leadership from the holy men of the 316–439 period. The holy men of old were miracle workers, powerful and singular hierocrats who were companions to and counsels of warrior kings. T’an-yao was not particularly known for any miracle. In an age of peace and prosperity, war prophecies had little or no place. And T’an-yao was no prophet. He worked with committees instead of by some lone charisma or unique power. He ordered men, not gods or ghosts. He was the patient architect that rebuilt the Three Jewels and furnished them with unprecedented glories in an age that the circle of T’an-yao recognized with moderate realism was the time of the Semblance Dharma. And

until renewed crisis in the mid-sixth century led to the rise of the new apocalyptic prophets expecting the End of the Dharma, the rebuilding of objective institutions in the second half of the fifth century was how it should be. That is because in normal times the Buddhist tradition rested on—not some singular holy man; not the person but always in conjunction—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

## NOTES

1. An abbreviated version on the “Century of the Holy Man” is in a section of the chapter “The Three Jewels in China,” in *Buddhist Spirituality: Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, Early Chinese*, ed. Yoshinori Takeuchi (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993), pp. 275–342; the Hsuan-kao material is a recent addition and appended here; nearly all the raw data for the various holy men in this study can be found in Hui-chiao’s *Lives of Eminent Monks* (*Taishō*, vol. 50, no. 2059).
2. Peter Brown, “The Rise and the Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 107.
3. The South had its own new crop of Taoist holy men but they had a different function, and that is another story.
4. In an early Chinese translation of the Bible, Christ is said to be standing to the left side of God instead of the right.
5. It is a common Christian belief too that a God-fearing nation like the U.S. would be so favored by God—and a God-forgetful nation would be duly punished.



# Are Friendship *Bonshō* Bells Buddhist Symbols? The Case of Oak Ridge

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IN FEBRUARY OF 1998 Robert Brooks, a citizen of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, a town of twenty-seven thousand, brought suit in the Federal Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee against the City of Oak Ridge, Tennessee.<sup>1</sup> He alleged that the “Friendship Bell” erected in a public park on the fiftieth anniversary of the city’s founding is a Buddhist symbol whose presence results in an endorsement of the Buddhist religion. Such endorsement by a city, he argued, violates the Establishment Clauses of the U.S. and Tennessee Constitutions. The district court granted summary judgment to Oak Ridge. The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati, finding no constitutional violation in the city’s use of the Friendship Bell, affirmed the lower court’s ruling. But it also ruled that the bell was a Buddhist symbol.<sup>2</sup>

## History

In 1990 the Oak Ridge Community Foundation sought a project to help the City of Oak Ridge commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. They announced a competition for a “living memorial,” and let it be known that they could contribute three hundred thousand dollars to the project—a promise that could not be fulfilled.

The proposal to erect in Oak Ridge for the commemoration a Japanese *bonshō* (“Brahmin bell”) “Friendship Bell” was developed and submitted by two Oak Ridge citizens, Dr. Venkanta R.R. “Ram” Uppuluri, an Oak Ridge National Laboratory mathematician born in India, and his wife Shigeko Yoshino Uppuluri, a teacher of Japanese born in Kyoto and educated at Doshisha University. The Uppuluris had met as graduate students at Indiana University, had been working in Oak Ridge since 1963, and had raised their son there. Neither of the Uppuluris was a Buddhist in the North American sense of the term. That is, neither was a member of any Buddhist organization in the U.S., nor actively a member of any Buddhist organization abroad. Shigeko’s grandfather’s family in Fukui supplied rice to Higashi Honganji, the head temple of one of the Jōdo Shinshū organizations. Through that connection Shigeko’s grandfather was able to move to

Kyoto. Her grandfather was devout and active; when Shigeko was small, she went with her grandfather every day to the temple. But after her grandfather's generation, Shigeko's family in Kyoto was Jōdo Shinshū in the rather inactive way that many Japanese families belong to temples. "Buddhism is almost gone in Japan," Shigeko observed. "It is like a fine mist."

The bell was paid for through contributions raised by the Community Foundation through the tireless efforts of Shigeko Uppuluri and two retired Directors of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the eminent nuclear scientists Herman Postma and Alvin Weinberg. It turned out that the Foundation had not begun the project with any money to fund it. Nakamachi, Oak Ridge's sister city of thirty-eight thousand inhabitants where Japan's nuclear fusion project is located, donated \$23,000 early. Sōtetsu Iwasawa, a bell-maker in Kyoto, cast the bell at cost, and the Honda Motor Co. plant at Suzuka shipped the bell to Oak Ridge for free. The nuclear scientists of both the United States and Japan contributed money.

Several Oak Ridge citizens associated with the bell project traveled to Japan to observe the casting ceremony, including city councilman Ed Nephew.<sup>3</sup> In his deposition testimony, Nephew described the ceremony as follows:

There was a—some kind of person, a monk, they said, in kind of an orange cape who was chanting all the time, and at certain points when they thought the metal content had been suitably adjusted, they undertook some ceremonial symbolic gestures of putting in artifacts [such as manuscripts, dogwood twigs from Tennessee, and lotus blooms] into the molten metal.

Nephew also testified that he was told that the ceremony was a cultural tradition that was necessary to impart "soul" to the bell. At one point during the ceremony, he said, he was told to pray to whatever god he wished. Indeed, Shigeko reported that at the bell casting a Shingon Buddhist priest purified the fire in which the metal would be melted by chanting mantras and sutra passages and throwing a hundred or so handwritten portions of Buddhist texts into the fire.<sup>4</sup>

Once the bell arrived in Oak Ridge, the Foundation arranged for a professor of Architecture at the University of Tennessee in nearby Knoxville, Jon Coddington, to design a pavilion to house it. He incorporated both Eastern and Western architectural styles, most notably roof elements from the Shinto shrines at Ise and shapes inspired by Tennessee's cantilevered barns.<sup>5</sup>

A bitter opposition to the City's accepting and endorsing the bell developed in 1993. Many opponents felt that the bell was meant as an apology by Oak Ridge to Japan, or Hiroshima, for making the uranium for the Hiroshima bomb. After a compromise brokered by the City Council's

Bell Policy Committee, the City of Oak Ridge accepted ownership of the bell and pavilion, and held a dedication ceremony in May of 1996.

### Formal Elements

Weighing more than four tons, the bell measures approximately six and one-half feet tall and four and one-half feet in diameter. It is traditional *bonshō* shape: a hemisphere on top of a barrel that is slightly wider at the bottom than at the top. On the exterior of the bell are “nipples,” bosses or knobs—described in court documents as numbering 108 but in fact numbering 132. A frieze of lotus leaves and blossoms runs along the bottom border. The surface of the barrel of the bell is divided into four panels. The bell is hung from a dragon-shaped hanging loop. It is struck from outside on a chrysanthemum medallion with a palm-log striker.

Japanese visitors would no doubt associate the bell thus far described with Japanese Buddhist temples. But a historian of Asian bells would have to note that all of these design features were present and combined in Chinese bells tuned as musical instruments for royal courts prior to the introduction of Buddhism into China, much less the rest of East Asia.<sup>6</sup> Such bells were commonly used as city clocks in Chinese walled cities. Even in Japan such bells can also be found at Confucian temples, Shinto shrines, and, in the Tokugawa period, as city clocks. For example, a bell of similar size, shape, materials, and decoration hung in the Osaka Castle during the Tokugawa period. A second bell of similar size, shape, materials, and decoration hung in a municipal bell tower in Osaka as an “announcer of the hours.” That bell was cast and hung to express the city’s gratitude to the third Tokugawa *shōgun* (military ruler) of Japan for his favors to the city. One might argue that bells of this general size, shape, and décor have for sixteen hundred years been the pan-Asian bell, just as the Liberty Bell shape and design is the pan-Western bell, used in fire halls and school-houses as well as churches.

Bells hung in Buddhist temples in Japan often have inscriptions and reliefs on the panels that tie the bell to Buddhist cosmology and practice. In particular, reference is often made to the core belief of premodern Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Buddhists about temple bells: that the sound of the Buddhist temple bell is the voice of the Dharma, and has power to free permanently or temporarily those reborn in the hells or other bad forms of rebirth from their sufferings. Four stories from China and India support the practice of tolling the bells to give temporary or permanent relief. One is a story about the Indian king Kanishka of the Kuśana Dynasty who for his sins is reborn as a fish with a thousand heads. A wheel of knives slices off his heads one by one. When he hears the tolling of a bell in a Buddhist temple, the wheel stops and he gets temporary relief.<sup>7</sup> A second story concerns a

man who, when traveling on the road, dies and falls into a hell. There he tastes endless sufferings and pain, but when he hears the tolling of a monastery bell by the T'ang Dynasty monk Chih-hsing (588–632), he is suddenly released and attains rebirth in the Pure Land. He asks his wife in a dream to give the monk's temple a thank offering of ten bolts of silk. His wife, who has not heard any bad news about her husband, does not believe the dream. More than ten days later the bad news reaches her and she understands that the dream was truthful, so she does as her husband instructed. When asked why the ringing of the bell had caused such a response to manifest itself, the monk replies that because of the story of the Indian king Kaniṣka, he had set out to toll the bell to relieve the sufferings of those in the hells.<sup>8</sup> The third and fourth stories tell of Chinese figures whose sufferings are relieved: Emperor Wu of Liang and Li Wang of the Southern T'ang.

There are references to these four stories in the inscriptions found on a number of bells made for use in Buddhist monasteries in traditional Japan.<sup>9</sup> In some Buddhist monastic rulebooks it is stated that a server should toll the bell 108 times morning and evening for the sake of relieving the suffering of beings.<sup>10</sup> Before tolling, the server should chant the following verse: "When they hear the tolling [of the monastery bell], [those beings] of the Three Lowest Forms of Rebirth and those born into the Eight Difficult Circumstances [i.e., those who are unable to see the Buddha or hear the Dharma] are relieved of their sufferings, and all sentient beings in the Dharma realm attain awakening."<sup>11</sup> Inscriptions also make an analogy between a bell that wakes people from sleep and a bell that wakes beings from the dream-like illusion caused by desires and ignorance. Combining both of these emphases is the belief that on hearing the sound of the bell, a denizen of the hells would leave the sufferings of the hells and immediately reach the Pure Land, as demonstrated in the second story above.

The panels of the Oak Ridge bell do not contain these Buddhist references. Two of the panels present paired scenes. The East Tennessee scene shows the Tennessee mountains, a mockingbird (the state bird), irises, and dogwood flowers. Over them all is a rainbow with an atom on the end. The Japanese scene shows Mt. Fuji, cherry blossoms, flying cranes, and over all a rainbow with an atom on the end. The scenes are full of natural beauty, calm and peaceful. "Beauty, peace, and atoms for peace, in Oak Ridge and in Japan," the panels seem to say.

On one of the panels on the back of the bell, the words "Hiroshima" and "Nagasaki" are paired, accompanied by the dates "August 6, 1945" and "August 9, 1945." On the other panel the dates of Pearl Harbor and VJ Day are paired. On one side the words "International friendship" runs vertically between the panels; on the reverse is the word "Peace."

### The Oak Ridge Friendship Bell as Japanese and Buddhist

Despite the non-Buddhist content of the inscriptions and reliefs on its panels, the Oak Ridge bell is in form strongly reminiscent of an East Asian bell that in Japan or the United States would be recognized by every knowledgeable person as a Japanese, Chinese, or Korean Buddhist temple bell. Buddhist monastic and temple practice, Buddhist art, peace of mind, non-harming, detachment from the passions of the world which motivate conflicts—all these things are evoked by the sound of the bell. Those knowledgeable about Japanese Buddhism would know that the ringing of the temple bell has the power to alleviate the sufferings of the dead, of those in the hells. Yet hearing the sound of the temple bell is also a part of every rural Japanese person's intimate childhood experience whether he or she identifies as Buddhist or not. City dwellers no longer hear the sound of the bell daily, as temples don't add to noise pollution by ringing them. But whether city dwellers are "Buddhist" or not, they ring bells on visits to temples or listen to them being rung, particularly at the New Year. The *bonshō* bell thus strongly symbolizes "Japaneseness" as well as Buddhism. And thanks to the recent Japanese practice of donating such bells to cities and organizations abroad, bells of this kind that appear in Europe and North America have also come to symbolize a wish for friendship and peace.

#### The Bell and Peace

Shigeko and Ram Uppuluri could not have created the bell without the help of a host of others. But it is also true that they were able to create the bell because others were inspired by their vision. The core of that vision was an affirmation of and longing for peace.

The visions of Shigeko and Ram were not exactly the same. What moved Ram was the contrast between the Oak Ridge portrayed in the August 6 Hiroshima Day demonstrations every year, the Oak Ridge that built "the bomb" in the 1940s and builds bombs today, and the Oak Ridge of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory where Ram worked. The meaning of Oak Ridge continued to be defined for most who did not live there by the story of the past, the story of the creation of the Hiroshima bomb. It was important to Ram that others in the future understand that Oak Ridge's story was that of a community working in nuclear science on peaceful uses of atomic energy. Ram got the idea that there needed to be a monument in Oak Ridge that would last a thousand years and convey the message to future generations that Oak Ridge in the post-war period had really been

about peace. Ram's son Ram Y. Uppuluri, called "Rami" by his parents, recalls his father's interest in such a monument:

We had free-ranging discussions for several years over our kitchen table. Dad talked about installing a Nandi (a peaceful Hindu cow who is usually shown sitting at the feet of Shiva) after installing a Japanese bell in Bissell Park. He emphasized that all major religions have symbols of peace, and hoped to include them all. I (Rami) had not yet studied law, but I already had qualms about the separation of church and state. Dad didn't worry about things like that.<sup>12</sup>

A large Japanese bell in a temple high above the seacoast near Tokai-mura, seen on one of the couple's visits to Japan, inspired in Ram a desire for a *bonshō* bell in Oak Ridge. He appreciated the deep peace that shrines and temples in Japan made him feel, particularly those with tall trees and the deep tones of large bells. And he understood that such a bell would meet his three criteria for a monument: that there be no maintenance, that it carry a meaning, and that it last a long time. When the priest at the temple near Tokai-mura told him that a bronze bell should last one thousand years, Ram became committed to his project.

Ram felt that the potential significance of the bell went far beyond commemorating the events of fifty years ago, and making a statement about Oak Ridge's longing for peace. He wanted to build bridges between Japan and East Tennessee, between East and West.

Shigeko had her own reasons for liking Ram's idea. In the 1970s and 1980s, Shigeko had made herself useful to the young Japanese scientists and engineers and their families who came to Oak Ridge from Japan's nuclear laboratories and installations. These families stayed in Oak Ridge for at most two years, and then went back to Japan. Over the years Shigeko and Ram made many friends in the Japanese nuclear industry. They also returned regularly to Japan to visit Shigeko's family.

Shigeko and her Japanese friends in Tennessee thought Oak Ridge needed a bell, a Japanese *bonshō* bell. Japanese were now coming to Tennessee in greater numbers as Matsushita, Nissan, Toyota, and their suppliers built factories in the non-union South. In 1988 Japanese business investment in Tennessee totaled \$1.2 billion in capital and planned investment, with forty-five Japanese businesses in the state employing over eight thousand people. As Shigeko and her friends foresaw, these numbers have grown. As of July, 2003, Tennessee was home to one hundred forty-six Japanese-owned companies. These businesses invested \$7.88 billion in the state and employed just over thirty-seven thousand Tennesseans.<sup>13</sup> Japanese in Tennessee to help run these companies needed a bell they could ring 108 times at the New Year, at Obon on August 15, the day of the ancestors,

and on the anniversary of the ending of World War II. They needed the deep sonorous tones of the bell to go forth as they always had done in Japan to free the souls of their ancestors from the hells and assure their rebirth in the Pure Land. And perhaps, given Oak Ridge's history as a secret city founded in 1942 to enrich the uranium for the Hiroshima bomb, Oak Ridge itself needed a bell to help the souls of all the dead of World War II.<sup>14</sup> It needed a bell to pacify the unsettled spirits of the place so that it was safe for present residents. But most of all, Shigeko and her friends wanted a *bonshō* bell to ring for peace, and for enduring friendship between Oak Ridge and Japan. And they felt that Japanese in Tennessee would too. To Shigeko it was self-evident that the bell would be a *Jōdo shō*, a Pure Land bell.<sup>15</sup>

Shigeko and Ram did not speak of these motives that could be called "religious," but rather sought community support in Oak Ridge for a Friendship Bell to promote tourism. "The purpose of the friendship bell is to attract the tourism of the Japanese in Tennessee to the natural beauty of the area, and to symbolize friendship of the two countries. It is something unusual. There are enough Oprylands and Dollywoods; we need to enhance the beauty of our area," the Uppuluris are quoted as saying in 1988.<sup>16</sup> "We hope not only to unite the Japanese in the area, but to perform colorful celebrations on the days the bell will ring, that will attract people from all over."<sup>17</sup> Community leaders hoped for funding from Japanese companies.

As it happened, Japanese companies in Tennessee gave little support to the bell project. Rather, Shigeko found support in Japan and the United States. Shigeko's sincere longing for peace, and her hard work on its behalf, moved Sōtetsu Iwasawa to offer to cast the bell at cost when Oak Ridge fundraising flagged. Shigeko's devotion to peace, her courage in tackling such a large fundraising project on behalf of a very small town, and the amazing fact that Oak Ridge, birthplace of "the bomb," should reach out on its own initiative to express friendship toward Japan by commissioning a *bonshō* bell—these three elements brought the project attention in Japan.

All who see the Friendship Bell in Oak Ridge will ascribe meanings to it. Most will assume that it was donated by a Japanese group, as is true of other *bonshō*-style bells in North America and Europe. Some of those will see it as a marvelous accomplishment of medieval Japanese (indeed, East Asian) technology, one reason, no doubt, why Buddhists have drawn it into their web of sacred meanings.

Some will see the bell as part of Japan's effort to achieve moral respectability in the world community by declaring itself a "peace nation" after having been led to defeat by a militarist government and fought an imperial war. Rhetorically embracing peacemaking as the meaning of modern Japanese life is a startling shift for a nation long ruled by *samurai*. The Japan Association for the United Nations' donation of a Peace Bell to the United Nations in 1954 was the beginning of Japan's many offerings of

tokens of peace and friendship to former enemy nations to emphasize its new aspirations.<sup>18</sup>

Some will see the implanting of Japanese peace and friendship bells around North America and Europe as an effort by a militarily weak country, forbidden to rearm after World War II, to build safety for itself in a dangerous world. Some will see the Oak Ridge bell as part an effort of Japanese-Americans, interned in camps by the U.S. government in 1942, impoverished by the internment, and reviled after the war, to bid for friendly relations with the dominant Euro-American population.

Those who know that the bell is primarily the creation of the Oak Ridge Community Foundation and not a Japanese group may see it as an apology by Oak Ridgers to the Japanese for the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. In 1993 and 1995 many Oak Ridgers opposed the project because they read it as an expression of guilt and shame about something that was in fact a proud accomplishment. For example, William J. Wilcox, former Technical Director of the Oak Ridge nuclear weapons plants K-25 and Y-12, wrote to the City Council's Bell Policy Committee in 1995: "For months now . . . I've sat around hating the Bell. . . . A lot of us think its message and usage will officially change Oak Ridge *from* a once proud Atomic City and major part (for 50 years) of our Nation's nuclear defense *to* a city perpetually remembering with sadness the horror of Hiroshima and endorsing the political agenda of Banning-the-Bomb."<sup>19</sup>

Some may see the bell, with its inscription of the dates of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, as a rallying point for those who see atomic weapons as engines of atrocity, and those whose slogan is "Never Again." Some in Oak Ridge feared in 1993 and 1995 that the Friendship Bell, if erected in a city park, would give the Oak Ridge Environmental and Peace Alliance (OREPA) a symbol through which to attract further media attention. OREPA, a group of non-violent peace activists who demonstrate regularly outside the gate of Oak Ridge's atomic weapons plant, is studiously ignored by Oak Ridgers. Some saw this "ban the bomb" attitude as indistinguishable from the view of Alvin Weinberg, a Manhattan Project scientist who played a crucial role in the design and engineering of the "Little Boy" bomb. Weinberg chaired the Oak Ridge Community Foundation Friendship Bell Committee at the time that the inscription of the names and dates on the bell was chosen, and they reflect what he hoped viewers would see in the bell. Weinberg wanted the bell in Oak Ridge to strengthen the "tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons," a desire that some might see as similar to the "Never Again" movement. He believed that "the eternal commemoration" of the Hiroshima bombing and its effects "is needed to make forever taboo any further use of a nuclear bomb in warfare by any nation."<sup>20</sup> He viewed the "sanctification" of Hiroshima, the conversion of an historical event of great suffering and terror into a religious event which he saw happening in that city on the anniversary of the bombing, as a good



thing. It would be a means by which a powerful religious taboo against the use of nuclear weapons could be erected. He wrote: "I think Oak Ridge as well as Hiroshima should be sanctified. We produced the uranium-235 that went into the Hiroshima bomb . . . . The Oak Ridge Friendship Bell ought to acquire the same kind of transcendent, religious character as the Hiroshima Bell. It will forever symbolize Oak Ridge's recognition that the nuclear holocaust at Hiroshima should never be repeated."<sup>21</sup> These views were not widely shared in Oak Ridge, and certainly were not endorsed by the Oak Ridge Community Foundation or the City Council, but Weinberg was a respected, prominent citizen, he chaired the Foundation's Friendship Bell Committee, and he argued for them in public every chance he got.<sup>22</sup> Some may read its inscriptions of dates as morally equating the "sneak attack" on Pearl Harbor, an act of aggression, with the wartime bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that ended the war.

All these readings fueled the controversy that ended in a lawsuit accusing the city of Oak Ridge of endorsing Buddhism by hanging a *bonshō* bell in a city park. As it turned out, the opposition focused most strongly on the names and dates on the bell. As proponents pointed out, those names and dates reflect the city's early history. They also, as Rami Uppuluri mentioned recently, touch the "third rail" of the Fiftieth Birthday celebration and its motto: "Born of War, Living for Peace, Growing through Science." The third rail, touched on by that motto but unstated, was the reference to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>23</sup> The bell project was chosen from among others because it best expressed the motto of the birthday celebration. But a number of Oak Ridgers reacted negatively when the bell's inscriptions explicitly drew attention to the dates of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings.

All of these readings miss what Ram and Shigeko Uppuluri meant to do. Ram was willing to stir up controversy. According to his son, Ram Uppuluri expected opposition to the idea of erecting objects symbolizing peace in an Oak Ridge city park. "People really struggled with the idea of the bell," Rami observed.

It was truly a symbol of Oak Ridge. At the core of our being here. There were a lot of senior citizens still alive in 1991 and 1993 who believed that the bell refuted the reasons why scientists, technicians, engineers and workers are in Oak Ridge. My father often said: "In Oak Ridge, peace is a four-letter word." By saying that, he was pointing to the general mood of Oak Ridge, its intolerance of any deviation from [approval of] the reasons for which the town was created. Dad regretted the opposition to the bell, but he took a certain delight in the controversy. He thought a dialogue about Oak Ridge was long overdue.<sup>24</sup>

To Shigeko, the meaning of the bell was fully expressed in the two relief panels by artist Susannah Harris. No inscriptions were necessary. Freedom, natural beauty, well-being, and peace—and atoms in the service of those goals in both countries. It was their intent that a thousand years hence, this is the message that future generations who saw those panels would come to understand.

The City of Oak Ridge, with the decision whether to accept or reject the bell locked in a bitter fight, faced a problem. The City Council decided to accept the bell and hang it in the city park on the condition that there also be a plaque to foreclose at least some of the readings that so angered its opponents. The plaque composed by the City Council's Bell Policy Committee read:

FRIENDSHIP BELL

THIS BRONZE BELL WAS DESIGNED IN OAK RIDGE AND CAST IN JAPAN IN 1993 TO SERVE AS A SYMBOL OF THE BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP AND MUTUAL REGARD THAT HAVE DEVELOPED BETWEEN OAK RIDGE AND JAPAN OVER THE PAST 50 YEARS.... FRIENDSHIP MADE SO MUCH MORE MEANINGFUL BECAUSE OF THE TERRIBLE CONFLICT OF WORLD WAR II WHICH OAK RIDGE PLAYED SUCH A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN ENDING. THIS BELL FURTHER SERVES AS A SYMBOL OF OUR MUTUAL LONGING AND PLEDGE TO WORK FOR FREEDOM, WELL-BEING, JUSTICE AND PEACE FOR ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD IN THE YEARS TO COME.

1996

GIVEN TO THE PEOPLE OF OAK RIDGE ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR 50<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY BY THE OAK RIDGE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION AND FRIENDS IN THE UNITED STATES, JAPAN AND OTHER NATIONS.

OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE  
BORN OF WAR, LIVING FOR PEACE,  
GROWING THROUGH SCIENCE

In this statement there is no apology to Japan, no expression of shame and guilt. No mention is made of "Never Again." Instead, the plaque expresses pride in Oak Ridge's role in ending the war and dedication to work for freedom, well-being, justice, and peace. In that plaque, in the selection of whose wording they were given no role, something of Shigeko and Ram Uppuluri's deeper motives is preserved.<sup>25</sup>

### The Court Case Revisited: Is It a Buddhist Bell?

The District court concluded that the Friendship Bell display was constitutional under the test laid out by the Supreme Court in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), and under Tennessee law. But as a threshold matter prior to applying the *Lemon* test, the court first considered whether the Friendship Bell is a religious symbol at all. "If the bell is not actually associated with Buddhism, its display cannot convey the message that the government endorses Buddhism," the Court wrote.<sup>26</sup> The Court cited an affidavit for the Plaintiff by scholar Steven Heine, and did its own research into the written works of a number of scholars. Based on these, the court concluded that the Oak Ridge Friendship Bell is a Buddhist bell, and that the bells in question "are clearly tied to the Buddhist religion as ritual implements invested with symbolic significance."<sup>27</sup>

Under the test laid out in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, a public display of a religious object must meet several requirements:

- (1) a statute or governmental practice must have a secular purpose;
- (2) its primary effect must be neither to advance nor to inhibit religion;
- (3) it must not foster excessive governmental entanglement with religion.

When evaluating (2), the effects prong, the Court applied the "endorsement test." Under this test, the Court considered whether a reasonable observer would conclude that the government endorses religion by allowing the practice in question. The endorsement test is particularly concerned with whether governmental practices create a "symbolic union" of church and state.

Clearly the City of Oak Ridge had accepted the bell and allowed it to be erected on public property for a secular purpose, as outlined in the plaque inscription and in a number of other places. It was to be a Friendship Bell. Its primary effect was to express the desire for friendship. And there were no organized groups of "Buddhists" in Oak Ridge with whom the City could become entangled. Shigeko Uppuluri, who did not in any case think of herself as a Buddhist, had never talked with reporters or with the Bell Committee of the Oak Ridge Community Foundation about any Buddhist meanings the bell might carry for Japanese people. She had talked early on about Japanese customs and the bell, about the bell and Japaneseness, but never about Buddhist meanings. She never spoke of the bell as a *Jōdo shō*, a Pure Land bell, never mentioned how for Buddhists the sound carries the ringer's intention or vow.<sup>28</sup> It was fine with her that the

bell would mean different things to different people, who would ring it for whatever was in their hearts.<sup>29</sup>

The Court considered Brooks' argument that "the bell was intended in part to symbolize atonement to Japan for Oak Ridge's role in World War II, and that this purpose was tantamount to a religious purpose, because the bombing of Hiroshima has acquired a religious significance for many people."<sup>30</sup> The Court commented: "We decline to read the Establishment Clause so broadly. We believe that the Establishment Clause regulates governmental conduct involving religion only, and not the official expression of sentiments that may have religious counterparts, such as sorrow and repentance, toward historical events like the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki."<sup>31</sup> The court explicitly addressed the matter of Alvin Weinberg's desire to use the bell to "sanctify" Oak Ridge. It wrote: "The newspaper articles written by private individuals allegedly imputing quasi-religious (but not particularly or uniquely Buddhist) significance to the bell would not, we believe, change the reasonable observer's understanding of whether the government was endorsing Buddhism."<sup>32</sup> Thus the Federal Court of Appeals, like the Federal District Court before it, found that the City in accepting the bell did not endorse Buddhism.

Surely scholars of religious studies can agree that Oak Ridge in accepting the Friendship Bell from the Oak Ridge Community Foundation had no intention of endorsing Buddhism, and did not do so. According to a definition of the concept of religion currently popular in religious studies, a religion comprises a variety of discourses (including the symbolic discourses of spectacle, gesture, costume, edifice, icon, musical performance, and the like), or "practices of everyday life" that are characterized by an orientation to speak of things eternal and transcendent with an authority equally transcendent and eternal.<sup>33</sup> The inscriptions on the bell and the content of the plaque make it abundantly clear to any viewer that it was not intended to speak of the eternal and transcendent, but rather of local, historical matters and human aspirations. It was not intended to speak of those matters with a transcendent and eternal authority, but only with the authority of the City of Oak Ridge. In other words, by current scholarly definitions of religion, this bell was intended as a thoroughly secular bell. And it is primarily of mundane, temporal matters and with mundane authority that the bell speaks.

But what do we make of the court's decision to declare this bell a Buddhist symbol? The *bonshō* bell, as the court wrote, was in Japan used in temples as a Buddhist ritual implement invested with symbolic meanings, as well as to signal the time for gatherings. It is certainly associated with religion. But to what degree and in what way is it a religious symbol? It is not a central religious symbol, like a statue of the Buddha, a cross, or the person of Jesus. It has never been revered or focused on in worship as the *gohonzon* of a Japanese temple or sect. It does not have a large place in

the elements of the Buddhist discourse of the eternal and transcendent. To erect a bell is not to have a temple, or even a central element of a temple or altar. Apart from the daily ringing morning and evening, which often does not occur anymore, and the centrality of the bell in New Year's ceremonies, the *bonshō* bell in Japan is not a central ritual implement. It is not used in offerings to buddhas and bodhisattvas. In fact, having a *bonshō* bell is such a long way from having a temple that the dream of Shigeko and her friends that Japanese in Tennessee would come to ring it at the New Year seems likely to be unfulfilled. As one Japanese resident of Tennessee told me, a *bonshō* bell by itself, without the temple, the Buddha images, and the monks, would not give one the feeling that one seeks out at the New Year. The City of Oak Ridge would have to bring into play a great many more Buddhist symbols and ritual activities to accompany it before this bell could sustain a Buddhist discourse of the eternal and transcendent in Oak Ridge.

Further, there is now around North America and around the world, a secular or quasi-religious use of the *bonshō* bell: to express friendship and a longing for peace. To feel and express a longing for peace and friendship need not be to take part in a discourse referencing culturally defined symbols of the eternal and transcendent. However, it is significant that Japanese and people of Japanese descent living outside Japan have chosen the *bonshō* bell for peace and friendship bells around the world. This must not merely be because *bonshō* bells symbolize Japaneseness, but because of what Buddhism brought to Japanese culture: the recognition of the universality of suffering, the value of the compassionate intention to end it, and the intention to realize freedom, well-being, and peace. These values and intentions, Buddhist but by no means limited to Buddhism, as the court discerned, are not so different from those secular intentions proclaimed on the plaque by the City of Oak Ridge.

In my view, there is no doubt that in Japan the pan-Asian *bonshō* bell is associated with Buddhist temples. The absence in Japan of walled cities meant that these pan-Asian bells were not used often for secular time-keeping purposes, or for ringing out warning that the gates were about to be closed, as they were in China. But it is also clear that no Buddhist temple would want to display and use the Oak Ridge bell. The bell is covered with non-Buddhist reliefs and inscriptions which convey its meanings in its context, the context of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. This bell belongs to the new genre of peace, friendship, and commemorative bells, not to the genre of temple bells. It speaks of Japaneseness, of building bridges between nations and cultures, of peace that has grown up following a war, and of the desirability of working for international peace.

## NOTES

1. I offer this essay in memory of Professor Masatoshi Nagatomi, my mentor in things Buddhist at Harvard Graduate School. It seems appropriate because, like his own life story, it is in part the story of a transnational Japanese person sharing knowledge of the deepest aspects of Japanese culture with non-Japanese Americans in the hope of bringing about understanding, friendship, and peace.

2. I want to thank my friend Edward W. Lollis for sharing my enthusiasm for this project and investigating with me the history of the Oak Ridge Friendship Bell.

3. Shigeiko Uppuluri led a trip to Japan that summer through the University of Tennessee. She, Ram Uppuluri, Herman Postma, and Pat Postma, a University of Tennessee Professor of Business, were on the trip, along with ten others who were not Oak Ridgers. Ed Nephew and his wife went to Japan separately, but joined with the University of Tennessee group beginning with their visit to Nakamachi. So the Uppuluris, the Postmas, and the Nephews were present together at the bell casting. Interview with Shigeiko Uppuluri, 21 August, 2003.

4. Interview with Shigeiko Yoshino Uppuluri, 6 June, 2003.

5. It is my interpretation that the roof forms remind one of the shrines of Ise. Professor Coddington says rather that the design is a blending of the ideal forms of both cultures: the golden rectangle of Greece, and the 2:1 ratio rectangle of the *tatami* mat in Japan.

6. On such bells in China, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Suspended Music: Chime Bells in the Culture of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). The leading historian of Japanese bells writing in English is Percival Price. He published a paper called "Japanese Bells" as number 11 in the *Occasional Papers of the Center for Japanese Studies* at the University of Michigan in 1969, using no written Japanese sources. He repeated much the same information, with the same European and American citations, in his book *Bells and Man* published in 1983 by Oxford University Press. Price asserts, erroneously, that *bonshō* were not used in Japan outside of temples. The leading authority in the world on Japanese *bonshō* (large bronze bells, "Brahmin bells") is Tsuboi Ryōhei. His most important books are *Nihon no bonshō* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1971), and *Nihon koshōmei shūsei*, also published by Kadokawa Shoten in 1978. The latter has a complete transcription of a large collection of the inscriptions recorded on Japanese *bonshō*.

7. This story is recorded in a text attributed to Tao-hsuan (596–667 C.E.), the *Fu-fa-tsang yin-yuan chuan*. See T.50.317a.
8. This story is recorded in the Hsu Kao-seng chuan, T.50:695b-c. For more on this, see Yifa, “The Rules of Purity for the Chan Monastery: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qinggui” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1996), p. 275.
9. See Tsuboi Ryōhei, *Nihon Koshōmei shūsei*.
10. Yifa, “The Rules of Purity,” pp. 46–47, 273f and 320–21.
11. Yifa, “The Rules of Purity,” p. 321, my paraphrase.
12. Telephone conversation, 31 December, 2003.
13. Exact figure is 37,024 according to “Japanese Investment in Tennessee,” Department of Economic and Community Development, State of Tennessee, 10 July, 2003, [www.state.tn.us/e cd/japan\\_invest.htm](http://www.state.tn.us/e cd/japan_invest.htm).
14. Interestingly, according to Shigeko Uppuluri it was Manhattan Project scientist Alvin Weinberg who voiced this idea in public.
15. Interview with Shigeko Uppuluri, 4 June, 2003.
16. Dollywood, owned by country singer Dolly Parton, and Opryland, developed by the radio show the Grand Ol’ Opry, are theme parks based on Tennessee regional music and culture.
17. Audrey Siemens, “Friendship Bell Is Planned for Oak Ridge Area,” *The Oak Ridger*, 14 July, 1988.
18. Akiko Hashimoto, “Japanese and German Projects of Moral Recovery: Toward a New Understanding of War Memories in Defeated Nations.” Presented at the Japan Forum of the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University, 16 October, 1998.
19. Memo from William J. Wilcox to Ms. Diantha Pare and [the Oak Ridge City] Council’s Committee on the Bell, 27 September, 1995, p. 1.
20. The Rev. Dwyn Mounger’s summary in personal correspondence with the author, 1 August, 2003.
21. Alvin Martin Weinberg, “Guest Column: Friendship Bell Could Be an Important Symbol Here,” *The Oak Ridger*, 18 October, 1991. Also Alvin Martin Weinberg, *The First Nuclear Era: The Life and Times of a Technological Fixer* (New York: American Institute of Physics, 1994).
22. The Oak Ridge Community Foundation did write that though the bell was not intended as an apology, the Foundation’s members did feel sadness for the loss of life and the hope that nuclear weapons will never have to be used again. This is of course not the same as a simple-minded “Never Again” position. See “Basic Information on Bell Issues,” approved for use by ORCF Board of Directors, August 1995.

23. Phone interview with Ram Y. Uppuluri, 31 December, 2003.
24. Telephone interview with Ram Y. Uppuluri, 10 February, 2004.
25. The plaque's wording and message was drafted by William J. Wilcox. Its content is outlined in the memo cited above.
26. Robert Brooks v. City of Oak Ridge, Opinion, 21 July, 2000, p. 5.
27. The works consulted by the Appeals Court were the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987), Dietrich Seckel, *Buddhist Art of East Asia* (1989), M. Anesaki, *Buddhist Art in Relation to Buddhist Ideals* (1915), H. Dumoulin, *Understanding Buddhism* (1994) and H. Hackmann, *Buddhism as a Religion: Its Historical Development and Its Present Conditions* (1910).
28. Interview with Shigeko Uppuluri, 4 June, 2003.
29. Shigeko Uppuluri, "Guest Column: The Bell is for Everyone, the Young and the Old," *The Oak Ridger*, 7 August, 1995.
30. Robert Brooks v. City of Oak Ridge, Opinion, p. 5.
31. Robert Brooks v. City of Oak Ridge, Opinion, p. 5.
32. Robert Brooks v. City of Oak Ridge, Opinion, p. 5.
33. I have adapted slightly the definitional thesis proposed by Bruce Lincoln in "Theses on Method," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8, pp. 225–277; reprinted in Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), p. 395, with modifications made by Willi Braun in "Religion," in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion*, London and New York: Cassell, 2000), pp. 10–11.



# The Indian Roots of Pure Land Buddhism: Insights from the Oldest Chinese Versions of the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha*

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MASATOSHI NAGATOMI WAS a panoramic thinker. Raised in a Jōdo Shinshū family, he chose the distant world of Indian Buddhism as his research field. Educated at Kyoto University, he went on to complete his doctorate at Harvard University, spending time studying in India as well. When thinking about Indian Buddhist literature he could call upon analogies from East Asia; when discussing Buddhist rituals in China he could draw upon his knowledge of Tibet. In sum, for him Buddhism was not a regional or sectarian entity but a worldwide and multi-faceted tradition, and no student of his could fail to be impressed by the broad range of his perspective.

Most students of Pure Land Buddhism, by contrast, have approached their topic within a far narrower frame. Generally this form of Buddhism has been treated as an East Asian phenomenon, and indeed it is often studied (with, one should recognize, many valuable results) within the parameters of a single school or sect. This paper, however, is intended as a small attempt to emulate Professor Nagatomi's sweeping cross-cultural vision of Buddhist history by examining the evidence for Pure Land Buddhism not in East Asia, but in India.

To understand how Amitābha was viewed by Indian Buddhists, however, requires beginning with a sketch of the circumstances within which scriptures devoted to this figure emerged. I will begin, therefore, with a brief overview of some of the key developments that preceded—and indeed, may have elicited—the composition of scriptures devoted to Amitābha.

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Early Indian Buddhism, as best we can reconstruct it from existing sources, was a “one-vehicle” religion. The vehicle in question was not, of course, the “one vehicle” (Sanskrit *ekayāna*) found in texts like the *Lotus Sūtra*, where the Buddha recommends three distinct paths to liberation, though only one of these—the bodhisattva path leading to buddhahood—

is ultimately real. On the contrary, the “sole path” advocated in early Buddhism was the path to arhatship, a path followed (though of course at varying speeds) by all those who devoted themselves to the Buddha’s teachings. This path was believed to lead to *nirvāṇa*, i.e., to final liberation from the cycle of *saṃsāra*, the same liberation that had been attained by Śākyamuni Buddha himself.

This is not to say, of course, that Śākyamuni Buddha was not viewed as superior to his followers. But what was seen as special about him, in this early period, was not the quality of his enlightenment, nor even of his compassion (for in early Buddhism, as in the Theravāda tradition today, arhats also teach). What was unique about the Buddha was the fact that he was the first person in recent memory who had discovered on his own, without the help of an awakened teacher, the way to escape from rebirth.<sup>1</sup> Like the grammarian who compiles a description of a previously unknown language, Śākyamuni’s explication of the path to *nirvāṇa* made it dramatically easier to attain for those who followed in his footsteps. In sum, it is clear that in the earliest days of the Buddhist religion the awakening experienced by Śākyamuni was understood as a model to be emulated by his disciples. The fact that Śākyamuni was described, in the well-known list of “ten epithets of the Buddha,” as an arhat (among other things) demonstrates the continuity that was perceived between his own achievement and that of his followers.<sup>2</sup>

#### EARLY MAHĀYĀNA IN INDIA: THE PATH OF THE BODHISATTVA

Perhaps a century or two before the beginning of the Common Era, however, the gap between descriptions of buddhahood (the awakening experienced by a person who has discovered the path for himself) and of arhatship (the awakening experienced by women and men who followed the path the Buddha had taught) began to widen. More specifically, as the Buddha came to be portrayed in increasingly glorified terms, the status of actual living arhats, whether of the present or the past, began to decline. In such an environment it became possible to speak of arhatship as a lesser spiritual goal, one far less admirable than the supreme and perfect awakening (*anuttarasamyakṣambodhi*) experienced by a buddha.

Not surprisingly, as the status of arhats declined some Buddhists began to consider the possibility of choosing a higher goal: that is, of attaining buddhahood rather than “mere” arhatship. By re-enacting in every detail the path that the bodhisattva who was to become Śākyamuni Buddha had traversed—not only in his final life but in countless lives before—an exceptional devotee might succeed in becoming a world-redeeming Buddha himself.<sup>3</sup> Not only would he then experience the

superior awakening of a buddha (an experience which, according to some later texts, would entail complete omniscience), but he would be able to help countless others to reach nirvāṇa, just as Śākyamuni Buddha had done.

The background to this idea was not only the increasingly exalted status of the Buddha, but the traditional idea that “all compounded things are transitory”—a category within which Buddhist thinkers, with admirable consistency, included the Buddhist religion itself. While the truths embodied in the Buddha’s teachings were of course viewed as an expression of the nature of things-as-they-are (*dharmatā*) and thus not subject to change, the Buddhist teachings (formulated in human language) and the Buddhist sangha (understood as a humanly constructed community) were both considered subject to decay. Most important of all, the life span of any living being—including a fully awakened buddha—was viewed as finite. Thus after the death of Śākyamuni Buddha (as was the case with other buddhas before him) it was only a matter of time before the memory of his life and teachings would fade away.<sup>4</sup>

Given this scenario it is clear why Buddhists came to believe that at least one disciple of every buddha must do more than simply strive for nirvāṇa, but must vow to become a Buddha himself. If the future Buddha, Maitreya, had not done so, when Śākyamuni’s Dharma eventually disappears it would never be discovered again. In Śākyamuni’s own biography the story of his vow made in the presence of the ancient Buddha Dīpaṅkara (though not included in the earliest collection of stories of the Buddha’s previous lives, or *Jātaka Tales*) came to be a powerful model for what was expected of a buddha-to-be.

Other *Jātaka Tales*, however, suggested that the path to buddhahood was far from easy, for they contained stories of the *bodhisattva* (Pāli *bodhisatta*)—that is, of Śākyamuni prior to his attainment of buddhahood—giving up not only his possessions and his family but parts of his body and even life itself.<sup>5</sup> In one widely circulated *Jātaka Tale* the future Buddha is cut to pieces by an angry king;<sup>6</sup> in another, he donates his body to feed a hungry tigress and her cubs.<sup>7</sup> There is no miraculous rescue in either tale; instead, the future Buddha simply dies—attaining, however, a tremendous store of merit in the process.

For rank-and-file Buddhists the *Jātaka* tales seem to have served primarily (as they still do today) as an account of the greatness of Śākyamuni Buddha. But for the very few who, in the early days of “three-vehicle” Buddhism, opted to become bodhisattvas, the *Jātakas* served another purpose as well, for they could be read as a manual filled with specific instructions on how to emulate Śākyamuni’s career in every detail.

In light of the severe challenges that a prospective bodhisattva would have to endure over the course of countless lifetimes, it is clear that the path leading to buddhahood was by no means viewed as easy; indeed, it was far

more demanding than the pursuit of arhatship. It is no exaggeration, then, to suggest that the vocation of the bodhisattva was viewed, by those pioneers who first embarked on it, as suitable only for “the few, the proud, the brave.”<sup>8</sup>

### ONE COMMUNITY, TWO VOCATIONS: PROBLEMS WITH THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

Early Mahāyāna scriptures often speak of “three vehicles”: the vehicle of the disciple (*śrāvaka*), the vehicle of the candidate for pratyekabuddhahood, and the vehicle of the bodhisattva. Although there was considerable overlap in the practices carried out by the members of these three categories, they were viewed as three distinct paths leading to three distinct goals: arhatship, pratyekabuddhahood, and buddhahood, respectively (in ascending order of superiority). Of these three theoretical options there seems to be no evidence that members of living Buddhist communities actually took the middle one—the path of the solitary Buddha or pratyekabuddha—as a genuine option for practice; indeed, there is not even a name parallel to the terms “disciple” and “bodhisattva” for persons who are pursuing, but have not yet completed, the pratyekabuddha path.<sup>9</sup>

There is considerable evidence, by contrast, that by the beginning of the Common Era a small minority of monks, belonging in all probability to a number of different monastic ordination lineages (*nikāya-s*), had chosen to devote themselves to the attainment of buddhahood. Most of their fellow monastics, however, were still dedicated to the pursuit of the traditional arhat path, and the introduction of the new bodhisattva ideal seems to have brought with it a number of problems. Some Buddhists seem to have rejected the very possibility of living Buddhists becoming bodhisattvas in the present; others questioned the legitimacy of this “new vehicle,” since it was not recommended by the Buddha in scriptures preserved in the traditional Buddhist canon (*Tripitaka*). And the status of the new scriptures known as Mahāyāna sutras remained a contentious one for centuries, with many Indian Buddhists rejecting their claim to be the word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*).

Beyond questions concerning the legitimacy of this new path and the scriptures that recommend it, bodhisattvas faced yet another potentially divisive issue: that of social status. Those pursuing the path to buddhahood were attempting to reach a goal that was universally acclaimed as the most exalted of spiritual destinations, yet most of these early bodhisattvas’ monastic fellows were content to “settle” for the lesser goal of arhatship. One can well imagine the tensions that could erupt in Buddhist communities where the choice by an individual or a small group to become bodhisattvas rather than *śrāvaka-s* introduced a two-tier hierarchy of

spiritual vocations. The warnings found in early Mahāyāna scriptures that bodhisattvas should not disparage or disrespect those who are on the path to arhatship offer concrete evidence, I would suggest, that such conflicts were actually taking place.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to such challenges as these, all of which were related to issues of community life, there were also difficulties facing the individual practitioner, problems rooted in the very structure of the bodhisattva path. First was the amount of suffering it would surely entail: rebirth in saṃsāra is said to be pervaded by suffering even under the best of circumstances, but candidates for buddhahood would have to endure the particular sufferings described in the *Jātaka Tales* as well. One can well imagine a potential bodhisattva wavering as he considered the fact that—following the script presented in many of these tales—he would surely be dismembered and killed in life after life.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the difficult acts of self-sacrifice that characterized the bodhisattva's path, there was the additional problem of its sheer duration. While arhatship could, at least in theory, be achieved in this very life, buddhahood took far longer to attain. Standard accounts of the bodhisattva path (in both Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna scriptures) hold that an unimaginable amount of time is required—a common figure is “three incalculable eons (*asaṃkhyeyakalpa*) and one hundred great eons (*māhākalpa*)”—to attain the amount of merit (*puṇya*) and the knowledge (*jñāna*) necessary to become a buddha. This would mean spending thousands if not millions of additional lifetimes in saṃsāra, rather than pursuing the possibility of experiencing the bliss of nirvāṇa in this very life.<sup>12</sup>

Both merit and knowledge could best be acquired, of course, in the presence of a living buddha, for by serving and making offerings to such a being one could make merit in vast quantities, and by listening to his teachings one could quickly acquire the requisite knowledge necessary to teach the Dharma in the future oneself.<sup>13</sup> In our own world-system, however, ever since the final nirvāṇa of Śākyamuni, no buddha has been present to serve as such a “field of merit” (or, to coin a parallel phrase, a “field of knowledge”) for his devotees. Bodhisattvas thus had to resign themselves to laboring slowly, over the course of eons, to gradually accrue these two prerequisites for buddhahood.

In addition to the amount of time required to attain these prerequisites for buddhahood, another problem—what we might call a structural or even cosmological problem—presented itself as well. In early Buddhism (and indeed, for most advocates of the Mahāyāna throughout its history in India) it was axiomatic that only one buddha can appear in the world at a time. It was also taken for granted that the appearance of a buddha is exceedingly rare, and thus that there are immense intervals between the appearance of a given buddha and his successor. Between the final nirvāṇa of Śākyamuni and the appearance of Maitreya, for example, some 5.6 billion

years (five hundred sixty million years according to other texts) are expected to pass.<sup>14</sup> Not only would a bodhisattva have to continue his self-cultivation over this long expanse of time without the support of a Buddhist community, he would also have to wait until Maitreya's attainment of buddhahood and, after his final nirvāṇa, the disappearance of every trace of his teachings. Only then—when the memory of Buddhism has long been forgotten—can the next candidate in line awaken to enlightenment himself. In sum, the expanse of time that separated the ordinary bodhisattva from his eventual realization of buddhahood was immense. Ironically, the greater the number of devotees who had undertaken the path to buddhahood, the longer a particular bodhisattva's wait would be.

Bodhisattvas were confronted, in sum, with an extremely attractive ideal, on the one hand—that of becoming the kind of heroic being who could rediscover the Dharma in the future for the benefit of all—and a daunting timetable and set of requirements for its accomplishment on the other. It is thus little wonder that early Mahāyāna scriptures abound in recommendations for techniques, ranging from acquiring a certain *samādhi* to reciting a certain scripture to viewing the world from the perspective of the *prajñāpāramitā*, that will help the bodhisattva to “quickly attain buddhahood.” That in this context “quickly” (Sanskrit *kṣīpam*, Chinese 速 and related expressions) generally means attaining buddhahood in millions rather than billions of years only underscores the immensity of the challenge that these early bodhisattvas faced.

#### OTHER BUDDHAS, OTHER WORLDS: NEW VISIONS OF THE BUDDHIST UNIVERSE

Around the beginning of the Common Era, however, a new idea appeared in India that was to radically alter this understanding of the bodhisattva path. Certain bodhisattvas emerged from deep meditation with tales of visions they had experienced, visions of a universe far more vast than had previously been supposed.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the ten directions, they claimed, were other world-systems like our own, each with its own hierarchy of gods and human beings. Most important for aspiring bodhisattvas, however, was the news brought by these early visionaries that in some of these world-systems buddhas were currently living and teaching. Thus while our own world-system is currently devoid of a buddha (though the Dharma itself is still present and accessible), other buddhas were now held to exist in the present, albeit in world-systems located (to use contemporary scientific parlance) many millions of light-years away. These new visions thus introduced the dramatic possibility of encountering a living buddha in the near future—indeed in one's very next life, through being reborn in his realm.

That the idea of the existence of these “buddhas of the ten directions” was the result not of scholastic speculation but of intensive meditational experience is amply attested in early Mahāyāna scriptures.<sup>16</sup> But what is particularly noteworthy is that this new view of the universe seems to have emerged not among śrāvakas practicing traditional meditation but among devotees of the bodhisattva path. This idea seems to have been formulated, in other words, by precisely those Buddhists who most needed to acquire merit and knowledge in the presence of a living buddha in order to accelerate their own progress toward the goal.<sup>17</sup>

These newly discovered worlds were not, at least at the outset, referred to as “pure lands” (in fact this term seems to be of East Asian, not of Indian, origin).<sup>18</sup> But there is no question that these world-systems were viewed as far more attractive than our own. Indeed, their features are regularly compared to those of the traditional Buddhist heavens, a fact which appears to have made them an attractive destination even for those who did not hope to become bodhisattvas themselves.

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF PURE LAND BUDDHISM: THE EASTERN PARADISE OF AKṢOBHYA

The earliest extant scripture to articulate this view in detail may well be the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, which describes the career of the bodhisattva whose intense ascetic practice led to his becoming the Buddha Akṣobhya.<sup>19</sup> According to this sutra, after a long period of preparation during which the man who was to become Akṣobhya became a monk in life after life and carried out stringent acts of self-denial, he attained buddhahood in a world far to the east of our own. This world, known as Abhirati (“Extremely Joyful”), had a number of features that are described in the *Akṣobhyavyūha* as the by-product of Akṣobhya’s bodhisattva practice: the climate is delightful, food and drink are plentiful and easy to obtain, and women and their infants suffer from no pain or defilement in the course of pregnancy and birth.<sup>20</sup> But more than this: Abhirati is an ideal place to make progress on the Buddhist path, for it is extremely easy to attain arhatship there. Some devotees attain awakening on the first occasion when they hear the Buddha preach; others require as many as four such lectures before attaining nirvāṇa, advancing one step at a time through the four stages of sainthood, from stream-enterer to arhat. The fact that members of the latter group are considered “slow learners” in Abhirati makes it clear that arhatship is within the reach of everyone who is reborn there.

Bodhisattvas, too, can make rapid progress toward toward buddhahood in Akṣobhya’s presence, yet none are described as attaining their objective in his realm. On the contrary, the scripture reiterates the doctrine that each bodhisattva must carry out over many lifetimes all the ascetic practices that

the Buddha (in this case, Akṣobhya) performed before becoming a buddha himself. Only in his final life, when the bodhisattva born into a world-system (with no knowledge of Buddhism) of his own, will he attain supreme, perfect awakening (*anuttarasamyaksambodhi*) and become the presiding buddha there.

The views embodied in the *Akṣobhyavyūha* thus belong to a relatively early period of the Mahāyāna in India, for buddhahood is presented as a spiritual option for some, but is not recommended for all. The understanding of buddhahood found in this sutra is also quite traditional, for Akṣobhya's life—though far longer than that of Śākyamuni Buddha—is clearly patterned on canonical biographies of the latter. Like Śākyamuni, at the end of his long preaching career Akṣobhya enters into final nirvāṇa, in this case with a spectacular act of self-cremation in the sky. And again like Śākyamuni, Akṣobhya confers a prophecy on his successor, a bodhisattva named Gandhahastin, who will attain buddhahood at an unspecified time after Akṣobhya's death. After becoming a buddha named "Golden Lotus," Gandhahastin will preside over a buddha-field equal in every respect to that of Akṣobhya's Abhirati.<sup>21</sup>

The *Akṣobhyavyūha*, then, portrays a scenario that is in many respects quite traditional. The "job description" of a buddha is still—as it was in the time of Śākyamuni—to lead his followers to arhatship, though (in harmony with the early Mahāyāna teachings of the "three vehicles") some may choose to pursue buddhahood instead. The appearance of a buddha is still relatively rare, and a buddha (like an *arhat*) necessarily enters into complete extinction at the end of his final life. Only then is his designated successor reborn, in his own final life as a bodhisattva, to rediscover the Buddhist Dharma and lead his followers to nirvāṇa in turn.

Akṣobhya is described by Śākyamuni, who appears as the narrator of the *Akṣobhyavyūha Sūtra*, as living and preaching in the present—that is, during the time of Śākyamuni's discourse on Abhirati (and, given Akṣobhya's long lifespan, well into the future as well). Yet this scenario does not violate the cardinal principle (found in early Buddhism and still assumed in the period of "three-vehicles Buddhism") that there can be only one buddha in the world at a time. For Akṣobhya's realm of Abhirati is not located within our own world-system, but on the contrary is located far to the east, comprising an entire world-system complete with its own set of heavens (though it is said to lack the hell, ghost, and animal realms) of its own. Thus we might rephrase this principle, as understood in texts like the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, to say that there can be only one buddha *in a given world system* at a time. While there cannot be another buddha in our world until Śākyamuni's teachings have died out and have been rediscovered in the distant future by his successor, the Buddha Maitreya, there is no longer any barrier to the appearance of other buddhas in the present, as long as they are located in world-systems elsewhere in the universe. Such a view—



which would eventually be extended to refer to buddhas currently living and teaching in all of the ten directions—dramatically shortened the length of time that a Buddhist practitioner could expect to spend cycling through *samsāra* before encountering a buddha again.

The requirements for rebirth in Abhirati also seem quite traditional, for—as in the case of the Buddhist heavens, on which most of the features of Abhirati are clearly patterned—a tremendous amount of merit is required. Conversely, however, there is no requirement that the practitioner engage in any particular devotional acts directed toward Akṣobhya in order to ensure his or her rebirth there. Again, as in the case of the various Buddhist heavens, a woman or a man who has made sufficient merit in this lifetime may simply awake, after dying in this world, to find that he or she has earned a place in Akṣobhya's realm.

The scenario described in the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, in sum, is that of the traditional biography of Śākyamuni writ large: after many lifetimes of striving, Akṣobhya awakens to buddhahood, after which he teaches countless followers and inspires them to attain arhatship. Akṣobhya's biography differs from that of the historical Śākyamuni, however, in that his religious community includes bodhisattvas as well, who will eventually attain buddhahood rather than arhatship, each in a world-system of his own.<sup>22</sup> They do not attain buddhahood in Abhirati, however, for in the worldview set forth in the *Akṣobhyavyūha* the idea that there can be only one buddha per world system at a time is still in force. Akṣobhya's bodhisattva disciples must thus wait their turn, being born into worlds that know nothing of Buddhism in order to experience their final awakening. One of these future buddhas is singled out for special attention: the bodhisattva Gandhahastin, who will receive a prophecy from Akṣobhya and thus becomes his "heir apparent," who will succeed him in attaining buddhahood but (like a crown-prince in a secular setting) only after Akṣobhya's death.<sup>23</sup>

The story of Akṣobhya, in sum, exhibits great continuity with the life story of Śākyamuni, differing from it only in the heaven-like qualities of his world, the long lifespans of beings there, and the ease of attaining arhatship (or of making progress toward, but not yet attaining, buddhahood) in his presence. Reading the account presented in the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, it is easy to see the description of such a figure could have evolved step by step from canonical accounts of the lives of Śākyamuni Buddha himself.

#### FROM AKṢOBHYA TO AMITĀBHA: THE EVOLUTION OF PURE LAND THOUGHT

Scriptures describing the career of Amitābha, by contrast, are generally viewed by modern Buddhists as presenting a far different scenario. Amitābha's lifespan is said to be unlimited (as indicated by his alternate

name, Amitāyus), and rebirth in his realm is viewed (especially in the Jōdo Shinshū school of Buddhism) as due not to one's own merits but to Amitābha's grace.<sup>24</sup> All practitioners are assimilated to the category of "bodhisattvas," while the possibility of attaining arhatship—whether in Sukhāvati or elsewhere—has faded from view. Moreover, the understanding of the bodhisattva career differs significantly from the rigorous and often bloody path of self-sacrifice described in the *Jātaka Tales* and presupposed in early Mahāyāna scriptures. No longer is the bodhisattva path viewed as appropriate only for the few hardy individuals capable of carrying out extreme ascetic acts; on the contrary, it is now seen as accessible to all, and virtues such as gratitude to Amitābha and kindness to other living beings—rather than renouncing one's family and suffering from death at the hands of evil kings and hungry tigresses—are brought to the fore. Finally, the idea that thousands (if not millions) of lifetimes are required in order to attain the goal of buddhahood has also disappeared from view. Rather than anticipating a drawn-out spiritual pilgrimage, for most Pure Land Buddhists the focus is on living a good life in the present, and (at most) in the next life as well.

The fact that such a scenario is so different from the outlook of early Buddhism—and indeed, from the worldview presented in relatively early Mahāyāna scriptures such as the *Akṣobhyavyūha*—has led some critics to question whether such "pure land" beliefs should be described as Buddhist at all.<sup>25</sup> Some have appealed to foreign (notably Iranian) influences or to the "contamination" of Buddhism by local (notably Hindu) ideas to explain what seems to be a radical departure from mainstream Buddhism. Yet the content of the *Akṣobhyavyūha* as described above suggests that a far different historical process was at work. Specifically, it points toward the likelihood that so-called "pure land" Buddhism emerged gradually as the result of insights formulated within Buddhist communities themselves rather than as the product of alien elements absorbed from without. But can the same be said of scriptures dealing with Amitābha? It is to those works that we will now turn.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF THE AMITĀBHA TRADITION: THE LARGER SUKHĀVATĪVYŪHA

The Buddha Akṣobhya—despite solid evidence that he was an important figure in early Indian Mahāyāna—is relatively little known today, appearing mainly as the Buddha of the East in certain tantric texts. The Buddha known as Amitābha or Amitāyus, by contrast, has been the object of devotion of countless East Asian Buddhists for centuries. References to Amitābha occur in a wide range of Buddhist scriptures composed in India, some devoted primarily to this figure and others in which he makes only

a cameo appearance.<sup>26</sup> There is no question, therefore, that Amitābha has been one of the most popular figures in all of Buddhist history.

Whether devotees of Amitābha in India ever grouped a set of scriptures together as an “Amitābha canon” we do not know. For Buddhists in East Asia, however, three scriptures concerning this figure have long held pride of place: two sutras entitled (in Sanskrit) the *Sukhāvativyūha*, popularly known as the “larger” and “smaller” versions, respectively, and a third scripture known in the West by the reconstructed Sanskrit title of \**Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra*. Of these the third—the *Guan wuliangshou fo jing* (Jpn. *Kan Muryōjubutsu kyō*; *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 365)—is now widely considered to be an apocryphon composed in China (or even in Central Asia, though the evidence for this is extremely weak).

The two *Sukhāvati* sutras, by contrast, are considered genuine Indian compositions, and indeed both versions are among the very few non-Theravāda scriptures that have been preserved in an Indian language. Since our concern in this paper is to try to understand the emergence of devotion to Amitābha in India, only the latter two will be considered here.

In East Asia, of course, these two texts were read not in Sanskrit but in Chinese, and indeed some of the Chinese translations of these works predate the surviving Sanskrit manuscripts by several centuries.<sup>27</sup> The earliest Chinese translation of the shorter *Sukhāvativyūha* appeared in the early fifth century C.E., when the renowned Kuchean captive Kumārajīva produced a version of the text entitled the *Amituo jing* (Jpn. *Amida kyō*; *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 366). This text is devoted mainly to a description of the features of Sukhāvati itself, and contains relatively little information about Amitābha himself.

It is in the larger *Sukhāvativyūha* that we find by far the most detailed account of the career of Amitābha, beginning with his first resolution to attain buddhahood when he was still a bodhisattva named Dharmākara. The translation most used in East Asia, the *Wuliangshou jing* (Jpn. *Muryōju kyō*; *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 360), is credited to the third-century monk Saṃghavarman in late medieval Chinese catalogues, an attribution followed by the editors of the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*. This attribution has not, however, withstood scholarly scrutiny. On the basis of information found in earlier catalogues (notably the *Chu sanzang jiji* produced by Sengyou in the early sixth century C.E.; *Taishō*, vol. 55, no. 2145), most scholars now assign this text to Buddhahadra and Baoyun, two translators who were active in the early fifth century.<sup>28</sup> Thus the most popular Chinese version of the larger *Sukhāvativyūha* is thought to date from approximately the same time as Kumārajīva’s translation of the shorter text.

There are, however, two considerably earlier Chinese translations of the larger *Sukhāvativyūha*. The first goes by the unwieldy title of *Amituo sanyesanfo saloufodan guodu ren dao jing* (Jpn. *Amida-san’yasambutsu-sarubutsudan-kadonindō-kyō*, often abbreviated as the *Dai amida kyō*;

*Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 362), produced by Lokakṣema (Jpn. Shi Rukasen) in the late second century C.E. The other, translated in the early to mid-third century by Zhi Qian (Jpn. Shiken), is the *Wuliang qingjing pingdengjue jing* (Jpn. *Muryōshōjōbyōdōgaku-kyō*; *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 361).<sup>29</sup> Not only are these Chinese translations earlier than that contained in the *Muryōju kyō*, their content makes it clear that their translators were drawing on an earlier stage in the life of the Indian scripture itself. In the following section, therefore, I will focus on these two early Chinese translations, for they provide our best means of access to early traditions concerning Amitābha in India. In most respects these two translations are quite similar, so I will treat them in conjunction here (noting any important differences as we go). All references given below to the “larger *Sukhāvativyūha*,” unless otherwise indicated, refer to the two slightly different Indian recensions reflected in these early Chinese texts.

As in the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, the larger *Sukhāvativyūha* begins with an encounter between a buddha and a monk. In the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, inspired by the grandeur of a buddha named “Great Eyes” (the Sanskrit counterpart of this name has not been preserved), the future Akṣobhya makes his initial resolution to become a buddha. In the *Sukhāvativyūha*, by contrast, it is in the presence of the Buddha Lokeśvararāja that the future Amitābha, a monk named Dharmākara, sets out on his quest. Already at this point in the story, however, we can discern an important difference in perspective between the two texts. The Buddha “Great Eyes” initially tries to discourage his young devotee from becoming a bodhisattva, pointing out that the path to buddhahood is difficult indeed. In the larger *Sukhāvativyūha*, by contrast, the Buddha Lokeśvararāja makes no attempt to dissuade Dharmākara from his objective, and nothing is said about the difficulty of the bodhisattva path. For the author of the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, in other words, the bodhisattva path is a challenging (indeed daunting) option for Buddhist practitioners; for the author of the *Sukhāvativyūha*, by contrast, such a choice seems to be a matter of course.

This distinction is underscored when we examine the content of the vows made by these two bodhisattvas, for in the *Akṣobhyavyūha* the future Akṣobhya vows to undertake ascetic practices in life after life. The beauty of the realm of Abhirati is presented as the by-product of the merit he has acquired by engaging in these activities, not as the result of a conscious plan. In the larger *Sukhāvativyūha*, by contrast, Dharmākara’s vows (here only twenty-four in number, in contrast to the forty-eight found in the fifth-century version of the text) deal primarily with the features of his future buddha-field and with the means by which his devotees will gain access to rebirth there. The future Akṣobhya’s vows, in sum, refer to traditional elements of the bodhisattva path, while the future Amitābha’s vows focus on the creation of a “pure land” itself.

A second difference between these two texts can be seen in the means by which Buddhist practitioners come to be born in these two delightful worlds. In the *Akṣobhyavyūha*, as we have seen, rebirth in Abhirati is not the result of devotion to Akṣobhya himself, but of the generalized acquisition of merit.<sup>30</sup> In the *Sukhāvativyūha*, by contrast, knowing about Amitābha and bearing his name in mind have come to play a central role. To put it another way, rebirth in Abhirati (like rebirth in the various Buddhist heavens) is attained through one's own religious merit, and it does not require even an awareness of the existence of Akṣobhya himself. In the larger *Sukhāvativyūha*, by contrast, access to Amitābha's world is associated with knowledge of him and with personal reliance on his name—the beginning stage, it seems quite clear, of what would become the broadly popular cult of Amitābha in East Asia.

Third, both women and men, as we have seen, can be born in Abhirati. Indeed, beings who arrive there to take birth there are physically born from mothers (albeit without sexual intercourse as a prerequisite). In the two earliest versions of the larger *Sukhāvativyūha*, by contrast, it is explicitly stated that all of the beings reborn there are male. In Lokakṣema's translation the absence of women from Sukhāvati appears as the second of Dharmakara's vows; in Zhi Qian's version this same statement is made elsewhere in the sutra.<sup>31</sup> In both versions of the text, however, it is clear that the early Mahāyāna assumption that one must be reborn as a male before becoming a buddha has been generalized to include all of the inhabitants of Sukhāvati as well. Given the absence of women in Sukhāvati, birth cannot take place by the normal means, and indeed we are told that all beings who are reborn there appear apparitionally, arising spontaneously within a lotus flower.

Not all of those born in Sukhāvati are bodhisattvas, for (as in the *Akṣobhyavyūha*) there are copious references to the presence of arhats in Amitābha's world as well. Once again the fact that they are referred to as arhats (and not merely *śrāvaka*-s en route to arhatship) makes it clear that Sukhāvati was considered, at least in the texts reflected in these two early translations, to be an optimal locale for the attainment of this goal.

The *Akṣobhyavyūha* and the larger *Sukhāvati* also agree that the rule of "one buddha per world system" is still in effect. Indeed, for readers familiar with later "pure land" traditions the most striking passage in Lokakṣema's *Sukhāvativyūha* is the one describing how, after the final extinction of Amitābha, the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (here given in an ancient transcription which probably goes back to an older form such as \*Avalokaśvara) will take his place. After the death of Avalokiteśvara, in turn, Mahāsthāmaprapta will succeed to the position of presiding buddha.<sup>32</sup> In this early recension of the larger *Sukhāvativyūha*, in other words, we can see that the basic principle that Amitābha must die before his successor (in this case, Avalokiteśvara) can become a buddha is still fully in force. Once

again there is no mention of any of Amitābha's disciples attaining buddhahood in his presence, while there are copious mentions of arhats in his world. At this early stage in the development of the *Sukhāvativyūha*, in sum, the thread connecting the story of Amitābha to earlier ideas about the path to buddhahood (including those found in the *Akṣobhyavyūha*) is still quite clearly visible.

SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS:  
THE *WULIANGSHOU JING* (*TAISHŌ*, VOL. 12, NO. 360)

When we now turn, with the above observations as background, to the version of the larger *Sukhāvativyūha* that is best known in East Asia, we can observe several developments that separate it from the two earlier translations (based on earlier Indian recensions) of this text. First, references to arhats (or for that matter, to *śrāvaka*-s en route to arhatship) have become far less common, while hyperbolic descriptions of the qualities of the bodhisattvas in Amitābha's world occur in great profusion.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the authors of this recension of the larger *Sukhāvativyūha* seem to understand the bodhisattva path as something that is accessible to all, a vision far different than that presented in the *Akṣobhyavyūha* or for that matter in the earlier Chinese translations of the *Sukhāvativyūha*. Second, the statement that everyone born in Sukhāvati must become male has disappeared, a development which is congruent with, and quite likely was elicited by, the apparent universalization of the bodhisattva path. Third, though Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprapta are still present, their role now seems vestigial, and there is no explicit mention of their inheriting Amitābha's role as presiding buddha after the latter's death. Fourth—and surely most significant—there is no longer any mention of Amitābha's death at all, a fact which has allowed centuries of commentators to conclude that he is (as his epithet Amitāyus "limitless life" would seem to suggest) indeed immortal.

This being said, there are still a few features in the *Wuliangshou jing* that hark back to older "pure land" understandings. First, disciples (*śrāvaka*-s) are still mentioned occasionally, though their role is clearly ebbing away. Second, despite the sutra's effusive descriptions of the bodhisattvas in Sukhāvati, it never states that any one of them will actually become a buddha in Amitābha's presence, thus adhering to the rule of "one buddha per world-system at a time" discussed above. Finally, though the sutra no longer refers to the death of Amitābha (while, on the contrary, it makes much of the incalculable duration of his lifespan, as well as that of the other inhabitants of his realm), it never makes the claim that he is immortal. Thus the idea that all living beings—including all living buddhas—must eventually pass away, however distant that date may be, is left in place.

In sum, by reading the earlier and later versions of the larger *Sukhāvativyūha* in conjunction, we can observe a clear process of development: from the *Akṣobhyavyūha* to the early *Sukhāvativyūha* translations (produced by Lokakṣema and Zhi Qian in the second and third centuries) to the fifth-century translation by Buddhahadra and Baoyun. By placing these texts in their chronological order we can thus discern the gradual emergence of devotion to Amitābha within Indian Buddhism, prefiguring his central role in East Asian Buddhism today.

### CONCLUSIONS: THE EMERGENCE OF “PURE LAND” BUDDHISM IN INDIA

Based on the materials reviewed above, it is now clear that there is no need to appeal to “foreign influences” or “non-Buddhist borrowings” to explain the rise of devotion to Amitābha in India. On the contrary, we can see the emergence of his cult as the result of an ongoing process of reflection—heavily informed, to be sure, by an ongoing series of visions reported by certain religious virtuosi—taking place within the Buddhist community itself.

More specifically, we can now see ideas about other buddhas and other worlds as a response to difficulties inherent in the practice of the bodhisattva path as understood in early Mahāyāna. With the introduction of the notion of other buddhas presently living and teaching elsewhere in the universe—first Akṣobhya in the East, then Amitābha in the West, and subsequently countless buddhas throughout the ten directions—vast new horizons, in a quite literal sense, were opened to Indian Buddhist devotees. No longer did aspiring bodhisattvas have to wait for the appearance of Maitreya, followed by the eventual disappearance of his Dharma—and then followed by the appearance and disappearance of the Dharma of other future buddhas who were ahead of them in the queue—before they could finally attain their goal. The vastly expanded universe envisioned in these new scriptures offered both the possibility of being born in the presence of a buddha in one’s very next life, and thus of accelerating one’s accumulation of the necessary prerequisites of merit and knowledge, and of finding a world with no knowledge of Buddhism (a “Buddha-free zone,” as it were) in which one could attain awakening and become a Buddha oneself. The content of these new pure land scriptures, in short, offered an alluring new scenario in which a devotee currently striving for buddhahood could hope to reach his goal in the very near future.

Reading these texts in conjunction we can also see how the popularity of devotion to Amitābha was able to surpass Akṣobhya’s cult. Akṣobhya’s world, while quite attractive, was still difficult to reach; it required a great amount of merit, and there is nothing in the *Akṣobhyavyūha* to suggest

that admission was assured.<sup>34</sup> In the larger *Sukhāvativyūha*, on the other hand (in both earlier and later recensions), the possibility of reaching Amitābha's realm is presented as far easier, a development which paved the way for the view later expressed by Shinran that admission to the pure land is due to Amitābha's grace alone. In light of the description conveyed in the larger *Sukhāvativyūha*, ordinary Buddhists could thus place their faith in the certainty of encountering Amitābha after death. That such believers were (and are) described as "bodhisattvas" involved radical new developments in the concept of what a bodhisattva is, a fact that is particularly evident in the text of the *Wuliang shou jing*.

As these "pure land" notions made the prospect of becoming a bodhisattva less daunting, they paved the way for the sweeping universalism of the "one vehicle" doctrine set forth in the *Lotus Sūtra* and other texts, according to which the bodhisattva path is appropriate to every Buddhist man, woman, and child. In a sense, then, one could see the Japanese Buddhism of today—which, regardless of sect (*shū*), takes ideas found in the *Lotus* as a central interpretive framework—as having come full circle, returning to the idea found in early Buddhism that "one vehicle" is appropriate for all.



## NOTES

1. An early (quite likely pre-Buddhist) tradition holds that other buddhas had existed in the past. According to one widespread tradition, Śākyamuni is the fourth Buddha of the present “good eon” (*bhadrakalpa*), having been preceded by others who lived and taught long before. On the buddhas of the past (and subsequent traditions concerning future ones) see Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), pp. 19–26, and Jan Nattier, “Buddhas,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Robert E. Buswell, Jr., ed., pp. 71–74 (New York: Routledge, 2003).
2. On the ten epithets of the Buddha, and in particular the ways in which they were interpreted by early Chinese translators, see Jan Nattier, “The Ten Epithets of the Buddha in the Translations of Zhi Qian,” *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2002*, vol. 6 (2003): pp. 207–250.
3. The masculine pronoun is chosen advisedly, for during the initial period of formulation of the bodhisattva ideal only men seem to have been viewed as capable of pursuing this path. For a discussion of attitudes toward women in some of the first Mahāyāna scriptures to be translated into Chinese see Paul Harrison, “Who Gets to Ride in the Great Vehicle? Self-Image and Identity Among the Followers of the Early Mahāyāna,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10-1 (1987): pp. 67–89; for a detailed discussion of the place of women in one of these texts, the *Fajing jing* (*Ugraparipṛcchā-sūtra*, *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 322), see Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path According to The Inquiry of Ugra* (*Ugraparipṛcchā*) (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2003), especially pp. 96–100.
4. On traditions concerning the decline and repeated disappearance of Buddhism, which are found in a number of Buddhist canonical texts, see Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*. In some Indian Mahāyāna circles the idea that the Buddha had entered extinction was modified, with the formulation of ideas such as the “three bodies of the Buddha” (*trikāya*), suggesting that there is a permanent entity (the *dharmakāya*) of which all buddhas who appear in the world are mere manifestations. Since these developments postdate the sources with which we are concerned here we need not deal with them in detail. It is worth noting that not all occurrences of the term *dharmakāya* in Buddhist scriptures have this meaning; see Paul Harrison, “Is the Dharmakāya the Real ‘Phantom Body’ of the Buddha?” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15-1 (1992): pp. 44–94.

5. On this motif see Reiko Ohnuma, “*Dehadāna: The ‘Gift of the Body’ in Indian Buddhist Narrative Literature,*” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1997.

6. See the *Khāntivādi Jātaka* (no. 313 in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection).

7. It is often said that the “Hungry Tigress” story (which is not included in the Pāli *Jātaka* collection) is quite late, appearing for the first time in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra*, a Mahāyāna text which probably dates from the Gupta period (fourth to sixth century C.E.). This is not the case, however, for a version of the story was translated into Chinese by Kang Senghui in the mid- to late third century CE (in his *Liudu jijing, Taishō*, vol. 3, no. 152, Story #4, p. 3.2b). The story is also referred to in passing in an even earlier text, a biography of the Buddha assigned to Kang Mengxiang (early third century CE; see *Taishō*, vol. 3, no. 184, p. 463a19–22). Two additional mentions of the story appear in Chinese texts which, though difficult to date, are probably not later than the early fourth century and may be considerably earlier; see *Taishō*, vol. 17, no. 778 (p. 714c19ff.) and *Taishō*, vol. 15, no. 1507 (p. 35a29ff.).

8. On the idea of that the bodhisattva path (that is, the Mahāyāna) began as a kind of Buddhist marine corps seeking to recruit only “a few good men” see Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, especially pp. 193–197.

9. Various definitions of the *pratyekabuddha* are found in Buddhist texts, but one of the most common characterizations is that this figure becomes enlightened without the aid of a teacher and does not teach what he has discovered to others (a “no-input, no-output Buddha,” as it were). By this definition no member of a living Buddhist community would qualify as a candidate for this type of awakening (not in this present life, at any rate), since he or she would have access to the teachings of the Buddha, which *pratyekabuddha* candidates do not. For further discussion and additional references see K. R. Norman, “The Pratyeka-Buddha in Buddhism and Jainism,” in *Buddhist Studies Ancient and Modern: Collected Papers on South Asia*, Philip Denwood and Alexander Piatigorsky, eds. (London: Centre of South Asian Studies, University of London, 1983), pp. 92–106; Steven Collins, “Problems with Pacceka-Buddhas” review of *Ascetic Figures before and in Early Buddhism* by Martin G. Wiltshire, *Religion* 20 (1992): pp. 271–278; and Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, pp. 139–140 and n. 6.

10. For a recent discussion of this issue see Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, especially pp. 84–89.

11. Such fears were still echoing in the eighth century CE, when Śāntideva in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* refers to the bodhisattva fearing that “I shall have to sacrifice a hand or a foot or something” or “I shall be cut up, split apart, burned, and split open for innumerable billions of aeons” (§ 7.25); see the English translation in Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton, trans., *Śāntideva:*

*The Bodhicaryāvatara* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 69. Cf. Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, pp. 144–145.

12. It is important to emphasize that this does *not* mean that bodhisattvas purposely postponed their own awakening. On the contrary, there are countless passages in Buddhist scriptures that refer to the desirability of attaining buddhahood as quickly as possible. Rather, the issue here is that the bodhisattva path simply takes more time to complete than does the path to arhatship—rather like the difference between the time required to fulfill the requirements for a M.A. vs. a Ph.D. degree. A person who has chosen to pursue a Ph.D. will have to remain in school (i.e., in *samsāra*) much longer than the candidate for a M.A. degree, but this does not mean that she has chosen to “postpone” her graduation. For further discussion of this issue see Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, pp. 142–143.

13. The idea seems to have been that, because the teachings of all buddhas are identical, a bodhisattva must learn all of the teachings (i.e., all of the “eighty-four thousand scriptures”) preached by Śākyamuni Buddha before he will be qualified to become a teacher (i.e., a buddha) himself.

14. See Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, pp. 24–26, and Jan Nattier, “The Meanings of the Maitreya Myth: A Typological Analysis,” in *Maitreya, the Future Buddha*, Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

15. The pioneering discussion of the importance of visionary experience in early Mahāyāna by Stephen Beyer, “Notes on the Vision Quest in Early Mahāyāna” in *Prajñāparamitā and Related Systems: Studies in Honor of Edward Conze*, Lewis Lancaster and Luis O. Gómez, eds. (Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1977), should now be read in light of the perceptive comments by Egil Fronsdal, “The Dawn of the Bodhisattva Path: Studies in a Religious Ideal of Ancient Indian Buddhists with a Particular Emphasis on the Earliest Extant Perfection of Wisdom Sutra,” Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University (1998), pp. 133–147.

16. Two of the earliest scriptures to present this scenario are the *Pratyutpanna-buddhasaṃmukha-avasthita-samādhi Sūtra* (*Taishō*, vol. 13, no. 418, translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema in the late second century CE) and a short sutra corresponding to part of the later *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema in the late second century CE (*Taishō*, vol. 10, no. 280, 282, and 283) and by Zhi Qian in the early to mid-third century (*Taishō*, vol. 10, no. 281). On the former see Paul Harrison, trans., *The Samādhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present* (Tokyo: The International Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1990); on the latter, see Jan Nattier, “The Proto-History of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*: The *Pusa benye jing* and the *Dousha jing*” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the*

*Academic Year 2004*, vol. 8 (forthcoming 2005), which includes evidence that *Taishō*, no. 282 and 283 were originally parts of *Taishō*, no. 280, and thus that this entire group of texts (originally comprising a single Chinese translation) is the work of Lokakṣema.

17. It is particularly noteworthy that this vastly expanded cosmos seems to have been specific to Buddhists (for it has no counterpart in contemporary Hindu or Jain texts), and more particularly, to Mahāyāna Buddhists, in India.

18. This was pointed out long ago by Fujita Kōtatsu; for a brief discussion in English see Fujita Kotatsu, "Pure Land Buddhism in India," Taitetsu Unno, trans., in *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development*, James Foard, Michael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne, eds. (Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1996), p. 20. For a discussion of how the term "pure" might have come to be associated with the realms of Akṣobhya, Amitābha, and others in India see, Jan Nattier, "The Realm of Akṣobhya: A Missing Piece in the History of Pure Land Buddhism," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23-1 (2000): pp. 73–74, n. 6.

19. The *Akṣobhyavyūha* was translated into Chinese already in the late second century C.E.; see *Taishō*, vol. 11, no. 313 (pp. 751b–764a). The translation is credited to Lokakṣema, though on stylistic grounds the attribution seems unlikely; at the least, it would appear that—if this was originally Lokakṣema's work—it has subsequently been revised. For a detailed discussion of the contents of this sutra see Nattier, "The Realm of Akṣobhya"; on the attribution of the text to Lokakṣema see Paul Harrison, "The Earliest Chinese Translations of Mahāyāna Buddhist Sūtras: Some Notes on the Works of Lokakṣema," *Buddhist Studies Review* 10-2 (1993): pp. 135–177, and Erik Zürcher, "A New Look at the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Texts," in *From Benares to Beijing: Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion in Honour of Prof. Jan Yün-hua*, Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Schopen, eds. (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1991), pp. 277–304.

20. Though birth in Abhirati takes place by the normal means—that is, children are physically born to mothers—it differs from birth in our world in several ways. First, in Abhirati (a realm where only beings with little desire are reborn) there is no sexual intercourse; the Tibetan translation of the *Akṣobhyavyūha* specifies that when a man looks at a woman and experiences a modicum of desire, he immediately goes into *samādhi*, where his desire is extinguished; as for the woman who was the object of his gaze, she immediately conceives a child. Pregnancy lasts only seven days, and mother and child suffer from none of the pains ordinarily associated with birth. For further discussion see Nattier, "The Realm of Akṣobhya," pp. 81–82.

21. This bodhisattva, while relatively unknown today, was evidently quite widely recognized in the early centuries of the Common Era as Akṣobhya's

designated heir. It is this same figure, for example, who appears in this capacity in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* and several other perfection of wisdom sutras as well as in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*.

22. The requirement that a bodhisattva be reborn as a male before attaining buddhahood is maintained even in scriptures that appear to date from long after the composition of the *Akṣobhyavyūha*. On the necessity of attaining a male body before becoming a buddha as described in a number of Mahāyāna sutras see Jan Nattier, "Gender and Enlightenment: Sexual Transformation in Mahāyāna Sūtras," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 27 (forthcoming, 2004).

23. The analogy to the succession from a king to his son, the crown prince, is made explicit in the discussion of the necessity for a buddha to designate a successor—i.e., to confer a prediction to buddhahood (*vyākaraṇa*) on a bodhisattva—is made explicit in the *Da zhidu lun* (Jpn. *Daichidoron*; see *Taishō*, vol. 15, no. 1509 [pp. 284c29–285a9]; for a French translation see Étienne Lamotte, tr., *Le traite de la grande vertu de sagesse* (*Mahāprajñāparamitāśāstra*) IV (Louvain: Institut orientaliste, Université de Louvain, 1991). I owe this reference to Stefano Zacchetti, who discusses this passage in his work-in-progress on Dharmarakṣa's Chinese version of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* (*Taishō*, vol. 8, no. 222).

24. This is, incidentally, an important difference between Chinese and Japanese understandings of Amitābha's world, for attaining merit (through performing good actions and avoiding negative ones), as well as reciting Amitābha's name, is still viewed as an important prerequisite for rebirth there by most Chinese Buddhists today.

25. One of the most widely circulated of such statements is that made in the late 1920s by Sir Charles Eliot, who suggested (in a work on Japanese Buddhism published posthumously) that "the process of development resulted in such a complete transformation that one can no longer apply the same name to the teaching of Gotama and the teaching of Shinran." Charles Eliot, *Japanese Buddhism* (1935. Reprint. London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1959), pp. 389–390. On Eliot's comments and the perspective they represent cf. Nattier, "The Realm of Akṣobhya," pp. 71–72.

26. On the appearance of references to Amitābha (or Amitāyus) in scriptures devoted mainly to other topics see Gregory Schopen, "Sukhāvati as a Generalized Religious Goal in Sanskrit Mahāyāna Sūtra Literature," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 19 (1977): pp. 177–210.

27. For a discussion of the earliest known Indic-language fragments of one of these texts see Paul Harrison, Jens-Uwe Hartman, and Kazunobu Matsuda, "Larger Sukhāvativyūha," in *Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection, III: Buddhist Manuscripts*, vol. 2 (Oslo: Hermes Publishing, 2002), pp. 170–214.

28. The unreliability of late medieval Chinese catalogues (many of which reflect the spurious attributions introduced in the late sixth century C.E. by Fei Changfang in his *Lidai sanbao ji*, *Taishō*, vol. 49, no. 2034) was not yet recognized at the time the *Taishō Tripitaka* was compiled. As a result, a substantial number of the attributions contained in the *Taishō* addition of the canon—some have estimated upwards of 25%—are wrong. The solution to this problem is to check each attribution in the earliest (and far more reliable) catalogue, the *Chu sanzang jij*.

29. The attribution of these two translations to Lokakṣema and Zhi Qian, respectively, is the result of recent research by Paul Harrison; for details see Paul Harrison, “On the Authorship of the Oldest Chinese Translation of the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra*,” unpublished paper presented at the International Association of Buddhist Studies meeting, Lausanne, Switzerland, 1999, and Harrison, et al., “Larger Sukhāvativyūha.” A major study of these two texts by Harrison is now in progress, which should contribute greatly to our understanding of the Pure Land tradition in India.

30. At the end of the text, in what seems clearly to be a later addition, devotees are offered an additional means of access to rebirth in Abhirati through veneration of the *Akṣobhyavyūha Sūtra* itself.

31. See *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 362, p. 301a27–28 and *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 361, p. 283a20–21, respectively. On this topic see the discussion in Paul Harrison, “Women in the Pure Land: Some Reflections on the Textual Sources,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 26 (1998): pp. 553–572.

32. For this scene (which has not, to the best of my knowledge, been discussed in any Western-language publication to date) see *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 362, p. 309a14–24 (for Lokakṣema’s version) and *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 361, p. 291a3–13 (for that of Zhi Qian).

33. Two of the most remarkable statements in the sutra, in this regard, are (1) that all beings born in Sukhāvātī will possess the thirty-two marks (marks which are ordinarily acquired by bodhisattvas, not *śrāvaka*-s, and by the former only at the very end of their careers), and (2) that all bodhisattvas born there will have just one life remaining before the attainment of buddhahood, with the exception of those who have taken vows to save other beings (*sic!*). These two statements occur in close proximity to one another at two different points in the sutra; see *Taishō*, vol. 12, no. 360, p. 268b6–7 and 8–10 (the twenty-first and twenty-second of Dharmakara’s vows) and p. 273b19–21 and 27–28; for an English translation see Luis O. Gómez, *Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), pp. 168 and 193, respectively. Both of these claims imply that radical changes have taken place in the understanding of what a bodhisattva is. Indeed, the second of the two statements given above—which seems to say that only a subset of those in

the category of “bodhisattva” take vows to save living beings, while other bodhisattvas do not—suggests that a significant disintegration in the concept of the bodhisattva career had taken place in the locale where this recension was produced.

34. The sole exception to this statement is the “book cult” section appended at the end of the text, which suggests that devotion to the scripture itself can offer such a guarantee. As I have argued elsewhere (Nattier, “The Realm of Akṣobhya,” pp. 91–92); cf. Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, pp. 184–186, this portion of the sutra is surely a later interpolation, reflecting the popularity of the book cult (for which see Gregory Schopen, “The Phrase ‘sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet’ in the *Vajracchedikā*: Notes on the Cult of the Book in Mahāyāna,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 27 [1975]: pp. 147–210) as such in a wide range of Mahāyāna-oriented circles.





# Advayavajra's Instructions on the *Ādikarma*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES the course of training for a newly initiated Buddhist practitioner contained in the collection of works by Advayavajra (ca. 1007–1085<sup>1</sup>) known as the *Advayavajrasaṅgraha*. The prescriptions for this training, called the *ādikarma* (literally: preliminary practice), is contained in the first text of the collection, the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*<sup>2</sup> (*The Refutation of False Views*). The article is divided into two parts. The first provides some context for the ritual prescriptions, the translation of which constitutes the second part. My contention is that Advayavajra, in prescribing the *ādikarma* in the rhetorical manner that he does, is aiming to accomplish several aims. These can be grouped under two broad concerns. The first is institutional in nature, the second, ritual. First, Advayavajra seems to be creating a bridge between the antinomian, extra-monastic forms of Buddhist practice that were gaining influence in his day, and the established institutional structures that had, for centuries already, represented the norm for Buddhist learning and practice. This reconciliatory project required him to argue for the legitimization of certain ritual and doctrinal innovations that were, in fact, divergent from established practices and views. Second, in his prescriptions for the *ādikarma* itself, Advayavajra aims to establish a clear relationship between preliminary training and expert accomplishment. He connects this concern with the first by founding unconventional expertise on conventional training. The strategy employed by Advayavajra in this regard is to prescribe the *ādikarma* not merely as “preliminary,” as is generally the case, but as “primary,” in the sense of a continuously constituted foundation. In so doing, Advayavajra presents what he holds to be the necessary conditions for ritual efficacy. Finally, in the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*, Advayavajra shares the basic twofold concern of all liturgicists: to define a world, and to create a blueprint for the formation of a specific type of practitioner, the person who inhabits that world. The *ādikarma*, as both text and practice, is the place where world and person become mutually constituted.

The Author: Advayavajra

Advayavajra stands among the medieval Buddhist figures known to later generations as the *mahāsiddha*-s or *siddhācārya*-s.<sup>3</sup> These were men (and in several cases women) who lived in India from the eighth to the twelfth centuries teaching a form of Buddhism that, in spirit, doctrine, and practice, defied and challenged the traditional, monastically oriented Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna institutions that dominated the landscape of medieval Indian Buddhism. Although Advayavajra is not explicitly included in the cycle of texts relating the stories of the Indian *mahāsiddha*-s,<sup>4</sup> he is nonetheless bound to these figures in several ways: through his association with Nāropa (1016–1100) and Mar pa (1012–1097), two of the most renowned of the *siddha*-s; through the tenor of his teachings; and through the course of his career. To elaborate briefly on each of these points, first, Nāropa was one of Advayavajra’s teachers, and the Tibetan Mar pa, the guru of Mi la ras pa (1040–1123) and renowned translator, was, for a time, one his students.<sup>5</sup> (Both of these *siddha*-s figure prominently in the lineage of the modern-day Tibetan Bka’ brgyud school.) Second, the teachings of the *mahāsiddha*-s are perhaps most succinctly characterized by their emphatic insistence that the surest, if not only, way to the human awakening known as buddhahood is the path of what John Makransky calls “nondual yogic-attainment.” Although each of the *mahāsiddha*-s uses particular vocabulary to transmit his teachings, I think that the following verse by Tilopa (988–1069), Nāropa’s teacher, expresses this general, and shared, *siddha* notion captured in Makransky’s phrase:

Watch without watching for something. Look  
 From the invisible at what you cannot grasp  
 As an entity. To see and yet to see no things  
 Is freedom in and through yourself.<sup>6</sup>

As we will see when we turn to Advayavajra’s instructions for the newly initiated practitioner below, this capacity to “watch without watching”<sup>7</sup> requires considerable preparation and sustained training. Nonetheless, what is being expressed here is a stance within a debate that has spanned, in one form or another, the history of Buddhism. The terms of this debate as it was being waged during the late medieval period have been treated in detail, and with great subtlety, by John Makransky.<sup>8</sup> As a way of summarizing both this perennial Buddhist issue and the tenor of Advayavajra’s practice in response to it, it will be useful to quote Makransky at length. The poles of the dichotomy that lies at the heart of this issue are termed by Makransky as the “nondual yogic-attainment” and “analytical-inferential” perspectives.

The nondual yogic-attainment perspective in India, with its increasing emphasis upon Buddha-nature (and cognate doctrines such as innate pure mind), was the primary organizing perspective of tantric practice traditions of late Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. First, resonant with the nondual yogic-attainment perspective... and unlike the analytic-inferential perspective, tantric praxis takes the nondual perspective of Buddhahood (or at least a symbolic facsimile of it) at the point of view from which it is to be approached: nonduality of samsāra and nirvāṇa, appearance and emptiness, etc. Secondly, tantric praxis has involved, at its core, an immediacy of identification with Buddhahood made possible by the increasing centrality of the doctrine of Buddha-nature: One can identify with [Buddha-nature] only insofar as one understands it to be one's actual nature in the here and now. The legendary quickness of the tantric path (full enlightenment available even in one lifetime) has assumed this very understanding, permitting a rapid progression on the path by revealing the intrinsic purity of deity and maṇḍala as the actual, primordial nature of oneself and one's world.... The differing perspectives have some sociological implications as well. If ultimate awareness is believed to be accessed exclusively through analytic-inferential procedures accomplishable only after long periods of study, monastic study institutions become the sole mediators of enlightenment. If other possibilities of access to ultimate awareness are also permitted (e.g., immediate entry triggered by vivid encounter between master and student, by practices of guru yoga, or by forms of meditation that do not necessarily rest upon years of scholastic study), then nonmonastic social institutions, such as lay communities of disciples gathering around a tantric master in a village or mountain dwelling, may be viewed as equally significant or more central.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Buddhist vision of Advayavajra falls easily into this description of the "nondual yogic-attainment perspective," and while it can be shown, on the basis of his biography, that Advayavajra promoted methods and teachings that were at odds with the institutional norms of the day, the course of *ādikarma* that he advocates is in itself non-controversial. This is, in fact, an aspect of his larger rhetorical strategy of placing controversial practices on traditional foundations, thereby bridging the two dichotomous options identified by Makransky.<sup>10</sup>

Versions of Advayavajra's biography have been preserved in several Nepalese, Sanskrit, and Tibetan sources. These have been treated in some detail by Mark Tatz,<sup>11</sup> and so will not be repeated here. I will just briefly mention the following aspects of his life story, however, since they provide

some background pertinent to Advayavajra's overarching concern in the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*. The course of Advayavajra's career follows a pattern similar to that of certain *mahāsiddha*-s (and, with some adjustment, of the Buddha himself). He was born to a high caste family, received a superior education, both secular, heterodox (*tīrthika*), and Buddhist, and then settled into a monastic life.<sup>12</sup> Mastering the monastic curriculum (consisting of grammar, logic, Buddhist philosophy, medicine, and crafts) and receiving numerous tantric initiations and practices, he establishes himself as an eminent scholar. Nonetheless, his understanding is still deficient, and he lacks realization. As the Tibetan historian Tāranātha (1575–1634) succinctly puts it:

[At the monastery] his capabilities had become measureless, yet he had but little comprehension of reality. Following the prediction of an obligational deity, he proceeded to Śrīparvata to seek [the teacher] Śabari.<sup>13</sup>

Although tantric teachings had become commonplace in the monastic establishments of Advayavajra's day, a recurring theme in the *mahāsiddha* literature is the inadequacy of those institutions for leading the practitioner to the realization of a buddha, even if the institutions were in possession of the suitable teachings and methods. Redressing this perceived failure of the Buddhist establishment is a primary aim of the *ādikarma*; and, given the course of his life and practice, Advayavajra was perfectly situated to accomplish this.

### *Ādikarma* and *Puraścaraṇa*

The term employed by Advayavajra to denote the initial phase of practice is *ādikarma*. Normatively, this has the sense of a beginning (*ādi*) act or endeavor (*karma*).<sup>14</sup> More technically, it refers to an initial or a preliminary practice that precedes more advanced ones. While Advayavajra certainly employs this usage, he adds a dimension to it that plays somewhat on the term. The initial endeavor remains first, primary, chief (*ādi*), even after the initial stage of practice (*karma*). The *ādikarma*, for Advayavajra, thus stands perpetually at the beginning, in the sense of "ground."<sup>15</sup> (Details of this usage are given below.) This having been said, it will nonetheless be useful to examine the more common understanding of *ādikarma* as "initial endeavor" or "preliminary practice."

In many ways, *ādikarma* functions in a similar manner as *puraścaraṇa*, also meaning "preliminary practice." This is a term used widely in the early medieval period by both Hindu and Buddhist communities.<sup>16</sup> Both *puraścaraṇa* and *ādikarma* denote a series of ritualized activities per-

formed at the initial stage of a formalized practice. Though activities vary somewhat from community to community, they generally involve such exercises as *mantra* recitation (*jāpa*), daily ablutions (*snāna*), oblations (*homa*), meditation (*dhyāna*), devotional worship of buddhas and bodhisattvas (*pūjā*), *maṇḍala* offerings, and occasional alms begging (*bhikṣā*). These are carried out under a vow (*vrata*), during an extended period of training. The execution of both the *ādikarma* and the *puraścaraṇa* follows formal initiation into a cult, but precedes the performance of advanced ritual practice. A common characteristic of these terms is the emphasis placed on elements that are generally considered emblematic of a tantric milieu, namely, the prerequisite of initiation (*abhiśeka* or *dikṣa*) by a qualified guru, the employment of two- or three-dimensional diagrams (*maṇḍala* or *yantra*) in several categories of rituals—appeasement, possession, attraction, fixation, hostility, destruction, and death<sup>17</sup>—the use of sculpted (*pratimā*) or painted (*paṭa*) images of deities and revered beings in devotional rituals, and the implementation of hand-gestures (*mudrā*) in “sealing” the efficacy established by means of practice. Of paramount importance to these groups’ ritual programs, furthermore, is the linguistic instrument known as *mantra*. The central role played by the *mantra* in such groups during this period is reflected in the indigenous terms *mantraśāstra*, *mantracaryā*, and *mantrayāna* as synonymous with both the texts and practices of tantra. Indeed, the term employed by Advayavajra to characterize the type of Buddhism that he is advocating is not what might be expected—Mahāyāna, tantra, Vajrayāna, Mahāmudrā—but *mantrayāna*.<sup>18</sup>

### Legitimizing the Teaching

Advayavajra states at the outset of the *Kudrṣṭinirghātana* that his intention in producing this work is to refute false views, and to do so in accordance with the precepts for the primary practice that he subsequently prescribes in detail.<sup>19</sup> What exactly are the “false views” that Advayavajra has set out to refute? Since the entire first section of the *Kudrṣṭinirghātana*<sup>20</sup> is concerned with establishing as non-controversial the rituals that follow, it seems that the views being countered here concern the status of the practices as legitimately Buddhist. The biographical statements on Advayavajra reported by Tāranātha (b. 1575) may provide a clue to this interpretation when he writes:

The professor promulgated Nonattentiveness<sup>21</sup> in the Middle Country. Some people did not believe in it; for them, he expounded the detailed commentary to the textual source, the *Dohā*.<sup>22</sup> When they said, “this is not the thought of the tantras,” he proved that it was with accepted scriptures, chiefly the *Hevajra* and the

*Guhyasamāja*.<sup>23</sup> To the question, “from whom did you receive these?” he composed the *Elucidation of Initiation*,<sup>24</sup> which Tibetans consider to be the oral instructions of the mountain man<sup>25</sup> who taught from his own experience.<sup>26</sup>

This statement suggests that it is not only the non-controversial nature of the *ādikarma* that is at stake in the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*, but the acceptability of Advayavajra’s teachings as a whole. The concept of “non-attentiveness” (*amanasikāra*) mentioned here, for example, constitutes a principle doctrine of Advayavajra.<sup>27</sup> Because of the outright contradiction of *amanasikāra* to the term *manasikāra*, a concept of utmost importance and unquestioned exactitude in the earliest Buddhist literature, Advayavajra’s teaching sounds, to the conventionally trained ear, scandalous, not to mention controversial, as a Buddhist doctrine. But by refuting this view of his central teaching’s problematic nature “in accordance with the prescriptions for the *ādikarma*,” Advayavajra is practicing an ancient prerogative of Buddhist teachers: establishing an innovation on the foundation of tradition.<sup>28</sup> As we will see, the *ādikarma* consists largely of the cultivation of the six perfections as known from the *Prajñāparāmitā*, by means of a daily practice known from the *tantra*-s, i.e., involving rituals employing *mantra*-s, *mudrā*-s, *maṇḍala*-s, and so on. In its blending of ideas and rituals stemming from mainstream Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, Advayavajra’s *ādikarma* thus conforms easily to the *mantrayāna* form of Buddhism that was being taught in the educational-monastic institutions of late medieval India. The less transparently Buddhist notions of *amanasikāra*, *mahāmudrā*, *sahaḥa*, and *yuganaddha*, founded as they are on the *ādikarma*, are thus rendered more acceptable as Buddhist doctrines.

The audience being addressed by Advayavajra in the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*, following this interpretation, is the skeptical ones referred to by Tāranātha as those who “did not believe him.” The very fact that Advayavajra recorded his teachings in written form at all is a significant clue in this regard. A shared feature of the assorted group of teachers classed as *mahāsiddha*-s is the insistence on direct, extra-linguistic, pre-conceptual realization, and doubts concerning the value of the “analytical-inferential” approach informing the writing, reading, and debate of texts. An additional divergence from the spirit of the *mahāsiddha*-s’ teachings is the fact that Advayavajra wrote the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana* in scholarly Sanskrit rather than the Apabramśa of the *dohās*. All of this, in brief, points to the *ācārya*-s of the monastic-educational institutions as the targeted readers of the text. As a former *ācārya* himself, with its concomitant mastery of all the marks of learning, Advayavajra served as an ideal link between the “mountain man” and the “professor.”

Advayavajra begins his argument by stating that the prescriptions for the *ādikarma* apply, as would be expected, to those who are presently

undergoing training (*śaikṣa*). But he then adds that practitioners who have completed their training (*aśaikṣa*) should abide by these rules as well.<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere in the text, he will explain how the *ādikarma* even applies to practitioners engaged in “the vow of the madman” (*unmattavrata*), that is, to those who are training in advanced, though manifestly extra-monastic and debatably non-Buddhist, practices.<sup>30</sup> So, while the *ādikarma* enables the practitioner to collect the two requirements (*saṃbhāra*; these are *puṇya* [merit], and *jñāna* [wisdom]) that presuppose ritual efficacy, accomplishment in meditation, and buddhahood itself, the *ādikarma* also constitutes a perpetual grounding in conventional Buddhist practice. Advayavajra begins the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana* as follows.

There are two types of people: those undergoing training (*śaikṣas*) and those who have completed training (*aśaikṣas*).<sup>31</sup> The meaning of this is that [the *śaikṣa*] is one who intently applies himself to [the stage] of aspiration and [then] to the realization of the stages [of the bodhisattva]. For those *śaikṣas*, who abide in a condition of cause (*hetu*),<sup>32</sup> up to the attainment of the powers [of a buddha],<sup>33</sup> collect the two requirements<sup>34</sup> necessary for complete awakening, perfect awakening by means of the precept for the complete, perfectly purified *ādikarma*. For the non-*śaikṣas*, too—i.e., those who have dispelled and countered doubt concerning the fruition of truth by strenuously uniting with (*yuganaddha*)<sup>35</sup> spontaneity (*anābhoga*)<sup>36</sup>, possessing a strength, force, and application like that of Śākyamuni's—the *ādikarma* involves continual engagement with that which is characterized as activity for the sake of other people.<sup>37</sup>

There is, of course, no better way to assert the orthodoxy of a Buddhist practice than to claim that Śākyamuni himself engaged in that practice. The *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana* thus continues with an homage to the Buddha that simultaneously places the *ādikarma* within the framework of his teachings. The Buddha is said here to be the initiator of the *ādikarma*. Because he was ethically perfected, wise, and deeply compassionate, the *ādikarma* similarly possesses these qualities. Advayavajra makes a point here that he will repeat throughout the text: namely, that the practice that he is prescribing is grounded on the conventional Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal of striving for awakening for the sake of others.

Not, oh lord [Śākyamuni], are you with conceit, uncertainty, or blame. Through spontaneous power (*anābhoga*) you [abide] in the world, automatically engaging in the actions of a buddha.<sup>38</sup> The fruit of perfect awakening for others' sake is the foremost doctrine. Buddhahood for a reason other than that

is not considered the [chief] fruit.  
 It is like a wish-fulfilling jewel  
 that is caused to tremble by the winds of volition,  
 yet still fulfills the wishes of all beings.  
 There are those who are adverse to the results of this truth  
 because they have abandoned and are separated from the precepts.  
 The perfectly wise one, the auspicious one, is awakened.  
 The *ādikarma* practices indeed follow from that fact.<sup>39</sup>

Advayavajra next lays out his argument that the *ādikarma* constitutes the development and fulfillment of the six perfections.<sup>40</sup> Specifically, he says that “the five perfections are designated by the term *ādikarma*; the perfection of wisdom, which is the essence of these, will then not fail [to be realized].”<sup>41</sup> Advayavajra seems to be either countering a view, promulgated by others (the *nāstika* at 1.14.2?), that an understanding of emptiness or void (*śūnyatā*) is sufficient in itself for awakening, or defending himself against an accusation that he holds such a view.

Surely, the prescription for the *ādikarma* is practiced by the *śaikṣas*. But why do even non-*śaikṣas*, who [have realized] the lack of nature of existents, undertake the *ādikarma*? This [realization] is, in itself, just a golden fetter. This is true on account of their [the non-*śaikṣas*] want of mastery of the perfection of wisdom. For, the essence of the five [other] perfections is the perfection of wisdom. For this very reason it is said that *śūnyatā* makes present the most excellent aspect of everything. And, as was spoken by the Blessed One: “[When] the five [other] perfections are devoid of the perfection of wisdom, the practice of the perfections is not obtained.” As it says in the noble *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*:

“Separated from wisdom, means is fettered;  
 separated from means, wisdom is fettered.  
 Accompanied by wisdom, means is liberated;  
 Accompanied by means, wisdom is liberated....”

Therefore, the *bodhisattva* must delight in the perfectly pure *ādikarma*. And, in countering addiction to the doctrines of those who do not affirm (*nāstika*) [our doctrine], this has been said:

“Even though good and bad are devoid of self-existence,  
 good should be done, not bad.  
 The ways of the world are at best as a reflection in a drop of water.  
 Happiness is held dear, perpetual suffering is not held dear.”<sup>42</sup>



Concerning the relation of the *ādikarma* to the *unmattavrata*, Advayavajra next asks, "How is the *ādikarma* to be practiced confidently and unwaveringly by those disciples who have taken the vow of the madman?" He then gives a brief gloss on each perfection ("morality derived from self control of body, speech, and mind [is undertaken] for the sake of all beings...wisdom, with respect to realizing the ungraspable characteristic of all things," etc.). Following this, he adds the kind of provocative statement against which he is presumably defending himself: "For him who pierces the essence of spontaneity, all the other perfections come to pass." If this appears to remove the *ādikarma* from the conventional foundation that the text is ostensibly circumscribing, he quickly adds that, "the *ādikarma* is also practiced by those who are abiding by the vow of the madman. Out of propriety, under no circumstances should the doctrines of the materialists and of other-worldly nihilists be declared."<sup>43</sup>

## Initiation

The next section shifts from an apologetic to a prescriptive tone. The prescriptive section of the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana* commences with a brief section on the *poṣadha* undertaken by the practitioner prior to the daily fulfillment of the *ādikarma*. The passage, formulaic in nature, gives the declaration of the practitioner to fulfill certain obligations.

Take heed, O honorable master! I, the novice so-and-so, go to the Buddha, *dharma*, and *sangha* for refuge until the seat of awakening is reached.... Take heed, O master! I, the novice so-and-so, from now until the rising of the sun tomorrow undertake to desist from harming all sentient beings, from stealing from others, from unworthy behavior, thus from divisive speech, from generating false [notions] of selfhood, from drinking spirituous liquors, from eating in the afternoon, from engaging in singing, dancing, adornment, and jewelry, from sleeping on raised beds.

For a lay practitioner,<sup>44</sup> the *poṣadha* is a day of intensified practice. It is meant to reaffirm one's commitment to the Buddhist teachings through the recitation of texts summarizing doctrines and providing protection, the practice of abstinence, etc. An ancient Indian practice, attested as early as the *Brāhmaṇas*, is to prepare for a significant ritual by fasting and other forms of abstinence the day or days prior to the ritual.<sup>45</sup> It is thus possible that the *poṣadha* ceremony in the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana* is performed in preparation for an initiation ritual (*abhīṣeka*). One reason for this conjecture is that Advayavajra wrote a relatively detailed work on the subject of initiation.<sup>46</sup> This indicates that he viewed the ritual as an important, even

necessary, feature of the *mantrayāna*. Such a view is, of course, in keeping with the common understanding of the *mantrayāna* as an esoteric teaching; that is, as one requiring initiation by a guru who is established within a community of practitioners. In further support of this conjecture is the fact that a nearly identical passage appears in another eleventh-century work, the *Ādikarmapradīpa*.<sup>47</sup> After a passage that is virtually identical to that of the *Kudrṣṭinirghātana* quoted above, the *Ādikarmapradīpa* suggests that this is followed by an *abhiṣeka*. It states that, following the formulaic declaration of the practitioner, the master says, “the preliminaries (*aupayika*) are well done”; and the commentary adds, “completing this with [recitations from or study of?<sup>48</sup> several texts<sup>49</sup>], he should confer (*anugraha*) [the initiation] with aspersions of water.”<sup>50</sup> Now, on the other hand, perhaps we should take the *Kudrṣṭinirghātana* at face value and not ignore the fact that it contains no explicit mention of an *abhiṣeka*. In this line of argument, we could conjecture that part of Advayavajra’s strategy for making the *mantrayāna* more acceptable to conventional Mahāyāna is to forego the usual esoteric rite of initiation. In either case, the passage indicates that the practitioner of the *ādikarma* must make a formal commitment before a community of fellow practitioners to fulfill obligations well beyond those of a casual adherent of Buddhism.

With the following prescriptive section of the *Kudrṣṭinirghātana*, Advayavajra provides us with a picture of daily practice in medieval India. As with all such manuals, the presentation is, of course, of an envisioned and ideal practice. Nonetheless, because of its close conformity to subsequent, historically documented forms of Vajrayāna practice, including modern-day forms deriving from the Tibetan communities that originate in such Indian formulations of practice, it is not difficult to appreciate the following instructions by Advayavajra as an important social-historical document of Buddhism.

## II. TRANSLATION: THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PRIMARY PRACTICE

[*Preparatory Rituals*]<sup>51</sup>

[16.15<sup>52</sup>] The householder bodhisattva,<sup>53</sup> together with taking refuge in the three jewels, abstains from the five acts of abusing sentient beings, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, false speech, which is by nature blameworthy, and drinking intoxicants. Endowed with discriminating knowledge, the householder bodhisattva, who avoids the ten non-virtuous acts but refrains from non-action, who practices virtuous action, rises early in the

morning. After washing his face with clean water, he recalls the three jewels. By reciting *oṃ āḥ hūṃ* he binds protection to himself. He should then engage in such things as [reciting verses of] praise, recitation of *mantra*-s, meditation, and study. He should also recite the *Nāmasaṅgīti* three times a day.

[18.3] After this, he quietly intones *oṃ jambhalajalendrāya svāhā* and must then offer to Jambhala<sup>54</sup> one hundred and eight handfuls of water. Then, he recites this *mantra* seven times: "Beholding all the *tathāgatas*, homage to all buddhas. *Oṃ sambhara sambhara hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ svāhā.*" With drops of ghee dripping off of the five fingers of his stretched out right hand, he should see that strings of food and water offerings, purified and filled with a *drona* of anise, are placed at the bottom of the door. Leaving a triple portion in the vestibule for *preta*-s and *piścāca*-s, he makes a food offering to the bodhisattvas.

[18.13] Now, he is to clearly realize [the following]: loving kindness toward all people, the kind of love that one feels toward an only son; compassion that has the nature of a longing to remove [all people] from the ocean of *samsāra*, caused by both what is unpleasant and what is not unpleasant; joy, which is the majesty of the mind bursting forth from going to refuge in the triple jewel; and equanimity, which is the quality of being completely unattached.

[*Imaginative Creation (Bhāvana) of the Maṇḍala*]

[18.16] On a section of the ground where a circle has been consecrated with pure cow dung, clean water, [and by reciting the *mantra*] *oṃ āḥ vajrarekhe hūṃ*, he whose mind is employed in zealous engagement on behalf of all beings makes a *maṇḍala* of four sides, a square, or however desired. He then imagines [the following]. In the middle of the *maṇḍala*, which has a border of eight lotus petals of several different colors, on a sun disk, arising completely out of the form of a blue *hūṃ*, is Akṣobhya. He is black in color and forms the "touching the earth" gesture. Then, on the eastern side, arising out of the form of a white *oṃ*, white in color, forming the "requisite of awakening" gesture, is Vairocana, [20.2] Then, on the southern side, generated from the form of a yellow *trām*, yellow in color, forming the "generosity" gesture, is Ratnasambhava. Then, on the western side, generated from the form of a red *hrīḥ*, red in color, forming the "contemplation" gesture, is Amitābha. Then, on the northern side, generated from

a black *kham*, black in color, forming the “fearless” gesture, is Amoghasiddhi. Consecrating this with the *mantra om āḥ vajrapuṣpe*, he should then approach all those who are most cherished. These five *tathāgata*-s are wearing saffron robes and turbans, their heads and faces are shaven, and they are situated on sun disks. [20.10] Vairocana, facing Akṣobhya, has a four-sided crown; Akṣobhya is facing the *sādhaka*. [The practitioner] should make these visible, and, in front of them, [recite] the verses for the triple refuge. The verses for the triple refuge are as follows.

*The Prescription for Worshipping the Maṇḍala*

[20.14] Homage to the Buddha, the teacher.  
Homage to the *dharma*, the protector.  
Homage to the great community.  
To these three, unceasing homage!

To my refuge, the triple jewel,  
I confess all wrongs.  
Rejoicing in the merits of the world,  
[my] mind is fixed on the awakening of buddha.

I go for refuge to awakening,  
to the Buddha, *dharma*, and supreme community.  
I create the mind of awakening,  
accomplishing this for the sake of others and myself.

[20.20] I generate the supreme mind of awakening.  
I invite all beings.  
I will pursue this sought [-after goal],  
coursing toward the supreme awakening.

By confessing all wrongs committed,  
by rejoicing in virtues,  
I will practice as one who has performed the *upavāsa*,  
[i.e.,] the *poṣadha* for maintaining the noble eight precepts.

Then, [the following is recited]:

Those who are anointed with the perfume of morality,  
who are covered in the robe of meditation,  
who proclaim the lotus flower of the limbs of awakening—  
may you all dwell happily!

Having recited this, he should utter [the *mantra*] *oṃ vajramanḍala muḥ*. He should then worship Mañjuśrī, and so forth, as has been taught.

### *Verses in Praise of the Maṇḍala*

[22.11] Generosity is the cow dung mixed with water,  
and morality is the cleansing.  
Equanimity is removing small red ants;  
effort is maintaining the ritual practice.

Meditation is creating one-pointed thought in an instant of time.  
Wisdom is a luminous line of beauty.  
He acquires these six perfections,  
having created the *maṇḍala* of the silent sage (*muni*).

He becomes one who is golden, freed from all diseases,  
distinguished from gods and humans,  
possessing splendor like that of the shining moon.  
He is born to a royal family, possessing abundant gold and wealth,  
having performed [these] bodily actions in this supreme house of  
the Buddha (*sugata*).

### *The Praising*

[24.1] Creating the *maṇḍala* daily  
using water, cow dung, and flowers,  
offering something to the teacher at the three appointed times,  
he should honor [him] with worship.

Contented by a mind [turned] toward others,  
he should turn away from thoughts of himself.  
Happy, pleasant, fortunate,  
he is born in the Land of Bliss (*sukhāvātī*).

He should be one who fulfills the six perfections,  
empowered by those such as the Buddha.  
He who creates the *maṇḍala* is endowed with infinite virtues.

### *The Precept for Worshipping Painted Icons and Books*

[24.9] After reciting the *Prajñāpāramitā*,  
he should perform worship according to the prescriptions

for the entire *maṇḍala*, etc.,  
continually plunging deeply into its meaning.

Concentrated wholly on the aim  
through employing the single-syllable [*dhāraṇī*]  
or a *dhāraṇī* consisting of two verses, one verse, four verses,  
or that of the six-faced Bhadracaryā,  
[he should worship] three times of day.

Possessing unbroken absorption, fully concentrated,  
he should recite as long as he desires.  
He should perform worship to a statue,  
book, or painting, etc., of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

### *The Prescriptions for Smiting All [Objects of Worship]*

[24.17] Now, the prescription for smiting all [objects of worship]<sup>55</sup>  
is further explicated by reference to the *Mahāmaṇḍalavyūhatantra*.

Homage to all buddhas!  
*oṃ vajrapuṣpe svāhā*—this is the *mantra* used when grabbing earth.  
*oṃ vajrodbhavāya svāhā*—the *mantra* for strengthening the image.  
*oṃ araje viraje svāhā*—the *mantra* for protecting the oil.  
*oṃ dharmadhātugarbhe svāhā*—the *mantra* for casting the *mudrā*.  
*oṃ vajramudgarākoṭana svāhā*—the *mantra* for the shaping.  
*oṃ dharmarate svāhā*—the *mantra* for attraction.  
*oṃ supraṭiṣṭhītavajre svāhā*—the *mantra* for erecting.  
*oṃ sarvatathāgatamaṇiśatadīpte jvala jvala dharmadhātugarbhe svāhā*—the *mantra* for the dedication.  
*oṃ svabhāvaśuddhe ā hara ā hara ā gaccha ā gaccha dharmadhātugarbhe svāhā*—the *mantra* for dismissal.  
*oṃ ākāśadhātugarbhe svāhā*—the *mantra* for taking leave.

### *The Great Dhāraṇī of Praise*

[26.15] *Oṃ*, homage to the Blessed One, to the Sovereign who shines forth as Vairocana, to the *Tathāgata*, to the Worthy One, to the Completely Awakened One. The [*dhāraṇī*] is this: *oṃ sūkṣme sūkṣme same samaye śānte dānte samārope anālambe tarambe yaśovati mahāteje nirākulanirvāṇe sarvabuddhādhiṣṭhānādhiṣṭhite svāhā*. Through reciting this *dhāraṇī* twenty-one times, he should create a *caitya* of earth or sand.<sup>56</sup> As many atoms as there are in the city of Avantī, [so many] tens of millions of *caityas* are [thereby] created. He acquires virtues as numerous as the number of atoms,

becomes one who has mastered the ten levels [of a bodhisattva], and quickly gushes forth supreme, perfectly realized awakening. The blessed *tathāgata* Vairocana said this.

*The Precept for Making a Caitya out of Materials Such as Earth or Stone*

[28.5] Whatever phenomena are produced by a cause, the *Tathāgata* revealed the cause of those. The cessation of those, too, the great *śramaṇa* has revealed.<sup>57</sup>

Consecrating [the *caitya*] with this verse, he should worship the *caitya* by employing [the following *dhāraṇī*]: *oṃ namo bhagavate ratnaketurājāya tathāgatāyārhatē samyaksambuddhāya*, and *oṃ ratne ratne mahāratne ratnavijaye svāhā*. By worshipping a single *caitya* with this *dhāraṇī*, tens of millions of *caityas* are thereby worshipped.

*The Prescription for the Transference of, and Rejoicing in, Merit*

[28.14] By means of the thorough fruition of all of that, I transfer [the merit accrued from it] without any personal pride. The fruit [of the merit] becomes thoroughly reaped.

[The practitioner] should transfer [the merit] by means of the “great transference” spoken of in the *Prajñāpāramitā*, as follows.

Just as the *Tathāgata*-s, the Worthy Ones, the Perfectly Awakened Ones, by means of awakened knowledge, by means of the eye of awakening, know and see the root of good, whose character, mark, sort, sign, and nature exists by means of the *dharmatā*, just so does the root of good [exist] in the act of rejoicing [in the merits of others]. Just as the *Tathāgata*-s, the Worthy Ones, the Perfectly Awakened Ones, consent, I transfer without personal pride the root of good in unsurpassed, perfect awakening; just so, I cause this transference.

By means of this virtuous action,  
may I quickly become awakened in the world.  
May I teach the *dharma* for the welfare of the world.  
May I liberate all beings, oppressed by so much suffering.

[*Concluding Ritual*]

[30.8] Of all possible forms of sustenance, [the practitioner] should procure that which is pure.

He should consider that to be like medicine for creating equanimity and pacifying<sup>58</sup> illness.

Consequently, when food [offerings] are being prepared [he should recite the following]:

*oṃ akāro mukhaṃ sarvadharmāṇām ādyanutpannatvāt*  
*oṃ āḥ hūṃ phaṭ svāhā*—with this, he should offer the *bali*.  
*oṃ āḥ sarvabuddhabodhisattvebhyo vajranaivedye hūṃ*—  
 with this, he should offer the *naivedya*.

*oṃ hārīti mahāyākṣiṇī hara hara sarvapāpān kṣiṃ svāhā*—  
 having recited this, he should offer two rice balls  
 in devotion to Hārīti.

[30.20] Following this [he recites]: *oṃ agrapiṇḍāsibhyaḥ svāhā*—  
 the gift of an *agra* of rice ball.

Afterwards, having arranged his own eating bowl for use in worship [while reciting] *oṃ āḥ hūṃ*, and having first washed it with his ring finger and thumb in order to alleviate the bad consequences of poisons, etc., he should eat. Then, having eaten the remaining food to his content, [and, reciting] *oṃ utsrṣṭapiṇḍāsanebhyaḥ svāhā*, he should present the remaining rice balls. He should discard<sup>59</sup> the remaining food without bestowing a blessing.

Thus:

One should offer the *bali*, the *naivedya*,  
 the *hārīti* offering, the *agra* of rice.

One should offer the fifth, the *utsrṣṭa*  
 in order to eat from the great fruit.

[32.9] After having sipped water, he should recite this three times for the happiness and welfare of all beings, who are endowed with supreme happiness and completely purified intelligence:

Thus:

May the kings, and householder patrons,  
 and those others who belong to the masses of beings  
 always obtain happiness, long life, good health, and fulfillment.

[32.14] Afterwards, he should spend as much time as he desires doing exercises that purify his body, speech, and mind. As soon as he settles down [in the evening], he should spend time, day after day, together with companions or fellow practitioners to discuss



[episodes, etc.] from the *Jātaka*, *Nidāna*, and *Avadāna*. Thus, at evening's twilight, he should perform meditation, *mantra* recitation, and hymns of praise, etc., with an unwearied mind, just as taught. He who has offered the oblation should sleep in a meditation sleep reciting a *mantra* beginning with the syllable *a*.<sup>60</sup>

\* \* \*

This concludes the *ādikarma* per se. However, as if symbolizing the project of the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana* as a way of harmonizing established understandings of Buddhist teachings with historically innovative ones, Advayavajra continues his work with a modification of the meaning of the term *upāsaka*, or lay practitioner.

[*The Meaning of "Upāsaka"*]

[32.20] Now, how is the word *upāsaka* to be understood?

*u* [signifies]:<sup>61</sup>

He should become one who is zealously active  
in the worship of buddhas,  
who has a predilection for tranquility,  
who is endowed with an understanding of skillful means  
in order to help living beings.

*pā*:

He should abandon evil always,  
as well as companionship with evil people.  
He should avoid evil people,  
pointing out evil everywhere [it is found].

*sa*:

He who has mounted liberation,  
perfectly well-concentrated in meditation,  
always rejoicing in the highest [good],  
the wise one should accomplish perfect awakening.

*ka*:

Always, he exerts himself;<sup>62</sup>  
always, he should maintain compassion.  
Even towards [another's] injurious action  
he does nothing undesirable,  
but extends the utmost kindness.

[34.12] Hence, from these statements [the following should be understood]: this *upāsaka*, who, endowed with [the qualities signified by] these four syllables, has abandoned evil actions and possesses an abundance of the requisite accumulation of merit,<sup>63</sup> performs good deeds even in sleep, as if he were awake, because of his determination to practice consistently.

Seeing everything as a reflection,  
the world [becomes] pure and clear.  
Like a person engaged in magic,  
he should always act [with a view to the]  
baselessness [of all phenomena].

[34.18] He carefully reflects that from this point, there is no regression. Thus, day and night, continually engaged in acquiring the requisite of merit, he should remain until he has reached the seat of awakening, for the sake of the welfare of living beings.

The classic definition of *upāsaka* is found at *Anguttaranikāya* VIII. 25. There, a lay follower asks the Buddha to explain the actions and virtues that constitute an *upāsaka*. The answer given by the Buddha is not fundamentally different from that provided by Advayavajra throughout the *Kudrṣṭinirghātana*: an *upāsaka* is one who takes refuge in the Buddha, *dharma*, and *saṅgha*; who fulfills the five precepts (abstaining from the destruction of life, etc.); and who “lives for the welfare of both himself and others” (i.e., he possesses particular virtues, such as faith and generosity, and assists others in gaining them; he examines the teachings and reflects on their meaning, and encourages others to do so, and so on). Like the *ādikarma* section of the *Kudrṣṭinirghātana*, the section on the *upāsaka* combines conventional notions known from both the Theravāda and Mahāyāna, with less accepted ones emerging out of Vajrayāna and *mahāsiddha* milieus. Indeed, the *Kudrṣṭinirghātana* is an important work precisely because it contributes to our understanding of this historical process whereby the latter is integrated into the Buddhist mainstream of the former.

## NOTES

\* I would like to thank John Makransky for reading this piece with such care, and offering valuable advice on crucial technical points.

1. On the dating of Advayavajra, see Mark Tatz, "The Life of the Siddha-Philosopher Maitrīgupta," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 107.4 (1987): pp. 695–711 (pp. 696–698 on the dates). Advayavajra is also known as Maitrīpa, Maitrīpāda, Maitrīgupta, and Avadhūtipāda. Tatz (p. 699) shows that certain of these and other names are related to particular periods of Advayavajra's life.

2. My treatment of the *Kudrṣṭinirghātana* is based on the critical edition of the Sanskrit version, published in the *Annual of the Institute for the Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism, Taisho University* 10 (March 1988): pp. 255–198 (note Japanese reverse pagination). This edition consults three manuscripts in the National Archives of Nepal and three Tibetan editions (see *Annual*, p. 233, for details). All variant readings are given, and, in the cases where a meaning is unclear, the Tibetan is provided. For these reasons, this edition is preferable to H. P. Shastri's earlier transcription of a single (?) manuscript (*Advayavajrasaṅgraha*, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, vol. 40 [Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1927]). The entire work is published in several installments of the *Annual*, as follows. (I would like to acknowledge Ulrich Kragh for providing me with this and other helpful bibliographical information on Advayavajra, including his thesis [Ulrich Kragh, "Culture and Subculture: A Study of the Mahāmudrā Teachings of Sgam po pa" (University of Copenhagen: M.A. thesis, 1998)]. I would also like to acknowledge Kurtis Schaeffer for generously sharing his data on Advayavajra with me.) No. 10, March 1988, pp. 234–178: (1) *Kudrṣṭinirghātana*; (2) *Kudrṣṭinirghātanavākyatippinikā* (this is a gloss on the first paragraph of the previous text); (3) *Mūlapatti*; (4) *Sthūlapatti*; (5) *Tattvaratnāvalī*; (6) *Pañcatathāgatamudrāvivarāṇa*. No. 11, March 1989, pp. 259–200 (note that the text numbering, which represents the ordering of the *Adv.*, is not consecutive from here on): (8) *Caturmudrānīścaya*; (9) *Sekatātṭparyasaṅgraha*; (10) *Pañcākāra*; (23) *Amanasikārādhāra*; (24) *Sahaṣaṣṭaka*. No. 12, March 1990, pp. 317–282: (11) *Māyanirukti*; (15) *Yuganaddhaprakāśa*; (16) *Mahāsukhaprakāśa*; (17) *Tattvaviṃśikā*; (18) *Mahāyānaviṃśikā*; (21) *Premapañcaka*. No. 13, March 1991, pp. 291–242: (7) *Sekanirdeśa*; (12) *Svapnanirukti*; (13) *Tattvaparakāśa*; (14) *Apratiṣṭhānaprakāśa*; (19) *Nirvedhapañcaka*; (20) *Madhyamaśaṭka*; (22) *Tattvadaśaka*.

3. Several of the *mahāsiddha*-s initiated lineages that were carried to Nepal and Tibet from the eleventh century on, thereby protecting these traditions

from the fate of their Indian counterparts. Today, the primary preservers of the medieval *mahāsiddha* traditions are the Tibetan *Bka' brgyud pa* schools. Although the different sub-sects of this school have varying versions of the lineage tree, Advayavajra is generally agreed to have been a teacher of Mar pa, who in turn was the teacher of Mi la ras pa and the first patriarch of the *Karma Bka' brgyud* lineage. To a lesser extent, the *Rnying ma pa* and the *Sa skya pa* also derive teachings and practices from the Indian *mahāsiddha* traditions. On the history of the *Bka' brgyud pa* schools, see E. Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Tibetan Plateau* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), pp. 39–96, and Khenpo Könchog Gyalsten, *The Great Kagyu Masters: The Golden Lineage Treasury* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1990).

4. The best known of these is the *Caturaśītisiddhapravṛtti* (*History of the Eighty-four Siddha-s*). This is extant in Tibetan translation as *Grub thob brgyad cu stsa bzhi'i lo rgyus*. This version has been translated by James B. Robinson as *Buddha's Lions* (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1979); and Keith Dowman, *Masters of Mahāmudrā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985). For an account of the textual sources for the *mahāsiddha* "legends," see Dowman, *Masters*, pp. 384–388.

5. See Tatz, "Life," pp. 699–700.

6. Translated by Herbert Guenther, *The Life and Teaching of Nāropa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 42.

7. This calls to mind Advayavajra's notion of *amanasikāra*, or non-attentiveness (discussed below).

8. See John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

9. John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied*, pp. 365–367.

10. Cf. Kragh, "Culture and Subculture." Although Kragh's main concern is to trace the Mahāmudrā system of Gampopa (1079–1153), his thesis provides a mine of data on the role played by Indian and Tibetan teachers from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, including Advayavajra (called Maitrīpa in the thesis), to synthesize controversial tantric teachings and practices with those of conventional Mahāyāna. Kragh, in fact, sees the writings of Advayavajra as the "watershed" event that enabled his Tibetan successors to separate Mahāmudrā practices from their problematic tantric subculture origins. This separation, Kragh argues, entailed a rare but successful fusion of "culture" (the high ethical standards and models of ideal humanity nurtured by the monasteries) and "subculture" (the "fresh wind of vision and provocation" unleashed by tantric innovators such as Advayavajra) (p. 78). See, in particular, pp. 56–62.

11. Tatz, "Life." On the difficulties of determining the nature of biographical data on the Indian *siddha-s*, as well as an illuminating example of such

data, see Kurtis Schaeffer, "The Religious Career of Vairocana-vajra: A Twelfth-Century Indian Buddhist Master from Dakṣiṇa Kośala," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 28 (2000): pp. 361–384.

12. At Vikramaśīla in Magadha, the center of tantric studies in medieval India; see Tatz, "Life," pp. 699 and 700, footnote 23.

13. Tatz, "Life," p. 701.

14. A common term for Brahman in the sense of creator is *ādikarma*. The German term *Urschöpfer* nicely captures this correspondence to *ādikarma*.

15. This sense of *ādi* as "basis, foundation" is attested in the Turfan texts. See Michael Schmidt, ed., *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht), s.v. *ādi*, where the sense *Basis, Grundlage* is cited.

16. On the basis of Buddhist works such as the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* and Hindu works such as the *Pañcarātra* literature, this term was widely used in the technical sense of a structured "preliminary practice" by the eighth century C.E. See, for instance, Gudrun Bühnemann, "On Puraścaraṇa: Kulānavatantra, Chapter 15," in Teun Goudriaan, ed., *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism, Studies in Honor of André Padoux* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 61–106; Sanjukta Gupta, "The Pañcarātra Attitude to Mantra," in Harvey P. Alper, ed., *Understanding Mantras* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 224–248; H. Daniel Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pañcarātrāgama*, volumes I and II, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, nos. 158, 168 (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1975 and 1980).

17. These are commonly called *śānti*, *vaśikaraṇa*, *ākaraṇa*, *stambhana*, *vidveśana*, *uccaṭāna*, and *māraṇa*, respectively. See, for example, Ariane MacDonald, *Le Maṇḍala de Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1962), p. 24, footnote 1.

18. For references, see Mark Tatz, "Philosophic Systems According to Advayavajra and Vajrapāṇi," *Journal of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies* (1994): 65–121. Tatz's article also gives a valuable account of Advayavajra's views on the philosophical schools of his day.

19. *Adv.* 1.10.2: *vakye kudrṣṭinirghātam ādikarmavidhānataḥ*. The numbering refers to the text within the *Advayavajrasaṅgraha*, consecutive pagination of the *Annual* edition (in parentheses in the header), and line(s) (although this is not provided in the edition).

20. *Adv.* 1.10.4–1.16.4.

21. The term for one of Advayavajra's principle concepts, *amanasikāra* ("Nonattentiveness" in Tatz's translation), is an important technical term in the Pāli tradition. See footnote 26 below. On this term, see also S. K. Pathak, "A Comparative Study of the Amanasikārādhāra of Advayavajra,"

in V. Raghavan, *Proceedings and Transactions of the All-India Oriental Conference* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Volume II, Part I, 1961): pp. 93–107. Pathak's article includes a brief discussion of Advayavajra's usage of *amanasikāra*, as well as a Sanskrit and Tibetan edition of the *Amanasikārādhāra* (*Adv.* 23).

22. This is the *Dohākosapañjikā*, O 3101-2; see Tatz, "Life," p. 709, footnote 66.

23. Advayavajra cites the *Hevajratantra* at *Adv.* 1.16.5, 6.54.7, 6.56.2, 9.114.3, 23.138.5, 23.142.4, and 23.142.11. Advayavajra, in fact, cites, quotes, or mentions numerous works and authors throughout the texts gathered in the *Advayavajrasaṅgraha* (in alphabetical order): *Avadāna* (at *Adv.*, 1.32.15) (see footnote 2 above for the text title corresponding to the numbers); *Bhagavadgītā* (7.54.1); *Candrapradīpa* (6.52.13); *Dākinīvajrapañjara* (6.54.17); *Devīpariprcchāśivanirṇādatantra* (7.50.1); *Jātaka* (1.32.15); *Laṅkāvatara* (6.54.1); *Mahāmaṇḍalavyūhatantra* (1.24.17); [*Mañjuśrī*] *Nāmasaṅgīti* (1.18.1, 23.142.8); verses of Nāgārjuna (does not specify which text; 6.56.2); *Nidāna* (1.32.15); *Prajñāpāramitā* (1.28.15); *Sarvabuddhaviṣayāvatārajñānālokālaṅkāramahāyānasūtra* (23.136.8); *Ucchuṣmatantra* (7.50.8); *Vajrasekara* (6.48.6); Pāṇini (23.136.3); *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* (1.12.10); *Vedāntins* (7.52.1); *Yogādhyāya* (7.50.11). I have not been able to locate a reference to the *Guhyasamāja* in the *Advayavajrasaṅgraha*.

24. Although this appears to be translating the *Sekanirdeśa* (or its variant °*nirṇaya*; *Adv.* 7), this work does not concern the *abhiśeka*. This is, rather, dealt with in detail in the *Sekatātparyasaṅgraha* (*Adv.* 9).

25. The name of Advayavajra's initial guru is Śabara. Tatz writes that he is called "Śabara 'mountain man,' because he dwells among a southern tribe of that name," and that "this 'lord of śabarās' (śabareśvara) possesses a set of teachings deriving from other siddhas, including the 'great brahman' and author Saraha" ("Life," p. 695).

26. Tatz, "Life," p. 709.

27. Along with other principal concepts employed by Advayavajra, such as *mahāmudrā*, *yuganaddha*, and *sahaja*, *amanasikāra* appears to be emblematic of the medieval *siddhācāryas* and *dohā* authors in general. Presumably, because of its importance and, perhaps, its contentious tone, Advayavajra devotes a substantial text to this concept, the *Amanasikārādhāra* (*Adv.* 23). Much of this work is devoted to showing, on a combination of grammatical and doctrinal grounds, that the term is not "offensive" (*apaśabda*; *Adv.* 23.136.7). Nonetheless, the normative Buddhist understanding of *manasikāra* is that it refers to a disposition crucial to realizing the Buddha's teaching, namely, *yonīṣu manasikāra*, thorough attention, the ability to fix one's attention where it should be fixed (see *Dīghanikāya* 33.1.11 [XIII]). In the *Saṅgītisutta* (*Dīghanikāya* 33.1.9 [X]) for

example, it is said that one of the Buddha's "perfectly proclaimed" teachings is "skill in [knowing] the [eighteen] elements [i.e., six senses, their six objects, and the corresponding consciousness of each], and skill in fixing attention [on each instant of the process] (*dhātukusalatā ca manasikārakusalatā ca*)." Advayavajra seems to play directly on this when he quotes another work as stating: *amanasikārā dharmā kuśalāḥ, manasikārā dharmā akuśalāḥ*: "non-attentive states are skillful, attentive states are unskillful" (*Adv.* 23.136.10–11). At first glance, this seems to mean the opposite of what the Buddha intended. On closer examination, however, Advayavajra is employing a similar rhetorical strategy here as in the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana* as a whole. He does this insofar as he reinterprets the seemingly contradictory notion of *amanasikāra* to harmonize with the basic tenets of both Mahāyāna and Theravāda. In short, Advayavajra argues that the initial "a" (*akāra*) in *amanasikāra* is to be construed not as a negative prefix (*nañarthaka*), as appears to be the case, but as the seed (*bīja*) of *nairātmya*, *anātman*, and *asvabhāva*. Understanding *amanasikāra* as "non-attentiveness," would be erroneous according to Advayavajra. The proper meaning is in fact in perfect accord with the premier doctrine of the Buddha: thorough attention (*manasikāra*) to the nonsubstantiality (a) of phenomena (*Adv.* 23.142.1–20).

28. This license derives both from the Buddha's insistence that any word that is "well spoken," i.e., that leads to the overcoming of sorrow, lamentation, etc., is the *dharma*, as well as from the general notion of *upāya*.

29. This is made explicit later at *Adv.* 1.12.16: *ādikarma yathoddiṣṭaṃ kartavyaṃ sarvayogibhiḥ* ("the *ādikarma*, as mentioned, is to be practiced by all practitioners").

30. *Adv.* 1.14.8. The *unmattavrata* is mentioned in the *Tattvadaśaka* (*Ten Verses on Reality*; *Adv.* 22.94.7). In verse 9 of that work, Advayavajra seems to indicate that the vow, put simply, involves a rejection of social norms of behavior, values, etc., and a concomitant reliance on one's own determination of what constitutes proper living. The verse reads: *lokadharmavyatīto 'sau unmattavratam āśritaḥ / sarvaḥ karoty anālambaḥ svādhiṣṭhānavibhūṣitaḥ* ("deviating from worldly norms, he depends on this vow of the madman. He does everything free from supports, adorned with his own basis of power"). The term *adhiṣṭhāna* (basis of power) is complex. In its general sense it means "foundation." In Mahāyāna literature, it is used technically to denote particular kinds of power ensuing from buddhas' and bodhisattvas' determination to work for the welfare of all beings. Both the mental basis and the supernatural abilities (of transformation, multiplication, "grace," etc.) stemming from this are referred to as *adhiṣṭhāna*. As such, *adhiṣṭhāna* is sometimes synonymous with, and sometimes a complement of, *ṛddhi* (extra-normal mental and physical powers) and *vikurvaṇa* (physical transformation). The term *anālambana* is

sometimes used technically to mean exclusively “without mental supports,” i.e., free from conceptuality.

31. This distinction is established already in the Pāli suttas. In a statement reminiscent of Advayavajra’s, the *Sanḅtīsutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* (33.1.10 [36]), for instance, reads: *Tayo puggalā. Sekho puggalo, asekho puggalo, n’eva sekho nāsekho puggalo* (“there are three types of people: the person who is training, the person who is no longer training, and the person who is neither training nor no longer training”). The qualities of the *śaikṣa/sekha* are defined at *Aṅguttaranikāya* 1.63, 96, 219; 2.87, 90, 362, 3.15, 116, 329, 4.24, 6.331; and the *āśaikṣa/asekha* at 1.63, 162, 3.271, 5.16, 326, 222, to give a few examples. See also the *sekhiyā* section of the *Suttavibhaṅga*. The early Mahāyāna systematizers accepted this division as standard. Lamotte, in his translation of the *Sūraṅgamasamādhisūtra*, gives a list from the *Madhyamāgama* of the eighteen types of *śaikṣa* and the nine types of *āśaikṣa* as well as additional references. See Étienne Lamotte, *Sūraṅgamasamādhisūtra, The Concentration of Heroic Progress* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998), p. 205, footnote 4.

32. Advayavajra elaborates on this point in a work, termed a “gloss” (*tippinikā*), called the *Kudrṣṭnirghātavākyaṭippinikā* (*Adv.* 2). This short work consists entirely of an explanation of the term “condition” (*avasthā*). It explains this roughly as follows: “There are three conditions. [The first] is called ‘the condition of cause’ (*hetvavasthā*) which pertains from the arising of the mind of awakening until one sits down on the seat of awakening. [The second] is called ‘the condition of result’ (*phalāvasthā*) which is the condition of arriving at the cessation of all defiled qualities during the arising of complete knowledge of awakening. [The third] is called ‘the condition of performing rituals for the sake of living beings,’ (*sattvārthakriyāvasthā*) which pertains from the first turning of the wheel of the teaching until the disappearance of craving. The condition of cause is threefold: the condition of intention (*āśayāvasthā*), the condition of practice (*prayogāvasthā*), and the condition of power (*vaśitāvasthā*). The condition of intention is the fervent desire to liberate living beings.... Practice (*prayoga*) is twofold. There are seven perfections of mental application; there are ten perfections of ethical application: generosity, morality, equanimity, effort, meditation, wisdom, expediency (*upāyatā*), determination, strength, and knowledge—these are the ten perfections.... The *ādikarma* is to be carried out entirely by persisting in the condition of cause. The *ādikarma* is engaged in spontaneously (*anābhoga*), as was the case with Śākyamuni, who persisted in a state of action so that living beings [might arrive at] the condition of result.”

33. For the conventional list of *vaśitā* (powers) of the bodhisattva enumerated in classical Mahāyāna literature such as the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, see



Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Sanskrit Buddhist Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970 [1932]): pp. 140–141.

34. Namely, merit and wisdom.

35. The *Yuganaddhaprakāśa* (*Adv.* 15) states: *naiḥsvābhāvyād ajātatvaḥ pratyayād aniruddhatā / bhāvābhāvāv ato na sto yuganaddham tu bhāsate* (“Because of the absence of inherent existence, there is non-arising; because of co-operating cause[s], there is lack of obstruction. For this reason, being and non-being are destroyed, and union becomes manifest” [*Adv.* 15.58.5–6]).

36. See footnote 37.

37. *Adv.* 1.10.4–10.

38. Derived from the root *bhuñj*, to eat, to enjoy, an early usage of the term *anābhoga* carried the sense of non-engrossment, or, more literally, non-imbibing, in the objects of sense. In Mahāyāna, it comes to signify the capacity of an awakened being to act without conceptual contrivance and, hence, automatically, spontaneously, and effortlessly. Sthiramati (ca. 400–500 C.E.) says that this ability is like that of the heavenly gongs referred to in Indian legends: “Like the [gongs] in the analogy, the Tathāgatas, dwelling in the undefiled realm (*anāsravadhātu*) carry out the various explanations of dharma for sentient beings, without any premeditated thought, ‘I will teach the dharma,’ and without any effort or striving on their part. Rather, the teaching of the dharma arises in utter spontaneity.” Translated in John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied*, p. 94. I would like to acknowledge Professor Makransky for pointing out to me this and other references that reveal the development of the term *anābhoga* from the passive earlier usage (“non-engrossment”) to the pro-active later one (“automatic activity” or “spontaneous power”).

39. *Adv.* 1.10.12–19.

40. The customary list of these is given at *Adv.* 1.12.22: generosity (*dāna*), morality (*śīla*), equanimity (*kṣamā*), effort (*vīrya*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā*).

41. *Adv.* 1.12.16–17.

42. *Adv.* 1.12.1–12; 1.14.1–5.

43. *Adv.* 1.14.8–16.

44. In the *Kudṛṣṭinirgātana*, the practitioner is referred to as a “householder” (*gṛhapati*, *Adv.* 1.16.15) and layperson (*upāsaka*, 1.16.6).

45. At, for example, *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* 1.6. For this and other references, see Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899), s.v. *upa + vas*.

46. This is the *Sekatātparyasaṃgraha* (*Adv.* 9).

47. See *Ādikarmapradīpa*, edited by Louis de La Vallée Poussin, in *Bouddhisme, Études et Matériaux*, pp. 177–232.

48. The verb that I am translating as “completing” is *saṃskṛtya*. La Vallée Poussin understood this to refer to a period—whether immediately following the *aupayika*, or extending into months or years, as in Brahmanical systems of training, is not clear—of education or initiation into certain texts. He writes: “Le maître continue l’éducation (*saṃskāra*) du disciple en lui enseignant diverses disciplines résumées dans des manuels connues: le *Daśākuśalaparityāga*, la *Ṣaḍgatikārkā*, le *Sattvārādhana* [the text of the *Ādikarmapradīpa* itself reads *Satv*°], le *Gurvārādhana*” (La Vallée Poussin, *Études et Matériaux*, p. 208).

49. These are listed in the previous footnote.

50. The text reads: *sasekair anugrahaḥ kuryāt* (literally: “he should perform a conferral with [water] sprinklings”). This is perhaps a play on *abhiṣeka*, i.e., consecration by means of aspersions of water. The following line makes it clear that an initiation is taking place: *evaḥ labdhopāsakanāmadheyena*. As this indicates, the conferral continues with the standard bestowal of a new name, etc. (La Vallée Poussin, *Études et Matériaux*, p. 189).

51. From this point on, I bracket topic headings that are not given in the text.

52. The numbering refers to the text within the *Advayavajrasaṅgraha*, consecutive pagination of the “Annual” edition (in parentheses in the header), and line (although this is not provided in the “Annual”). See footnote 2 for full bibliographical information.

53. For a discussion of the *gr̥hapatibodhisattva*, the householder bodhisattva, as a Mahāyāna ideal, see Richard Robinson, “The Ethic of the Householder Bodhisattva,” *Bhāratī: Bulletin of the College of Indology* 9 (2): pp. 25–56.

54. Jambhala is a benevolent *yakṣa*, who, as the epithet Jambhalajalendrāya indicates, is the “lord of waters.”

55. The “Annuals” text reads *sañcaka* (= *caka*, i.e., leaves [for writing, etc.]?). This would point to the technical meaning of *tāḍana*, namely, the practice of throwing water at the leaves on which are written the particular *mantra*-s that are employed in a given ritual activity. This sense of “smiting” is described succinctly in a text called the *Sarvadarśana* (quoting another called the *Śāradātilaka*): *mantravarṇān samālikhya tāḍayec candanāmbasā / pratyekaḥ vāyubijena* [variant: *vāyunā mantrī*] *tāḍanaḥ tad udāhṛtam* (“having written the letters of the *mantra*, he should smite them with sandalwood water, [while] consecrating each with the [intonation of the] seed-source of the vital wind [i.e., that which constitutes the efficient force of the *mantra*]: this is called the smiting”). This is given by La

Vallée Poussin, *Études et Matériaux*, p. 218, fn. 4. However, several texts, both Tibetan and Sanskrit, have the variant of *sarvaka* for *sañcaka*. La Vallée Poussin quotes a manuscript called the *Caityapungava* as being exclusively concerned with the explication of the *sarvakatādana* (*vakṣyāmy ahaṃ sarvakatādanākhyaṃ*) (p. 219). The *Ādikarmapradīpa* also reads *sarvakatādana* (p. 193). And, following a section on *mantras* that is virtually identical to that in the *Kudṛṣṭinirgātana*, the *Ādikarmapradīpa* adds: *tatas tac caityādikam anupahatapradeśe niveśayet* ("then, he should erect the *caitya*, etc., on an unused portion of the ground") (p. 194). La Vallée Poussin comments that "we find here an enumeration of a series of rites that are indispensable, not only for the *caityakaraṇa* [construction of the *caitya*], but also for the *liṅga*° or the *pratimākaraṇa*" (p. 220). (It is perhaps for this reason that La Vallée Poussin conjectures *sajjaka* [preparing, equipping] against the *Ādikarmapradīpa*'s reading of *sarvaka* [p. 218].) Therefore, it is not altogether clear to me whether (1) the *mantra*-s given here are meant to be used in the *caitya* ritual that follows the next section, and perhaps in the previous section on worshipping books and paintings as well; (2) *tādana* is being used in the sense employed in the contemporaneous Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra ritual manuals; namely, as one of the five means of purifying objects used in *pūjā* (see, for example, H. Daniel Smith, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Pāñcarātrāgama*, volume I, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, no. 158 [Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1975], p. 11), or (3) the term is being used technically, in which the *mantra*-s are being written on paper and then "smitten" with water to ensure efficacy in the actual making of the votive *caitya*.

56. The Tibetan reads *tsha tsha* (see the Annual's apparatus, p. 25, note 2), i.e., a votive relief image of a *caitya* or *stūpa*. For an example of the preparation and use of these in Tibet, see Martin Boord, *The Cult of Vajrakīla* (Tring: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1993), pp. 215ff. As Boord mentions there, see also Li Jicheng, *The Realm of Tibetan Buddhism* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors, 1986), pp. 170–176 for photographs of the production of *tsha tsha*. Also, an illuminating cultural-historical note is cited by La Vallée Poussin (*Études et Matériaux*, p. 219, note 1); the source is Rājendralāla Mitra quoting the *Caityapungava* in his *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1971 [1882]), pp. 277–279: "The *caitya* is to be made of pure clay mixed with the five products of the cow, the five nectars (*pañcāmṛta*), the five jewels and the five aromatics. The mixture is to be kneaded seven times while repeating the *samantaprabhamaṅtra*. The shape is to be a rounded one with a tapering top. The figure, being then anointed with oil, is to be placed in the center of an altar, duly worshipped, and then cut across in a slanting direction. From the womb of the bisected figure, the light of *caitya* (*caityabimba*, what this is I know not) is to be extracted, and placed on a

jeweled throne, and there worshipped.... The six Pāramitās are to be duly observed during the time of worship." Elsewhere (p. 273), Mitra quotes this from the *Vratāvadānamālā*: "He should take an early bath, gather from the field different kinds of clay, temper them with milk, curd, *ghī*, cowdung, and cow's urine. The clay should be purified by the repetition, twenty-one times, over it of the mantra called Virochaṇadhāraṇī. Then it should be shaped into a solid sphere with a tapering spire. The sphere should be opened in the middle and grass, rice, and five jewels placed into it. Such models should be worshipped to the extent of one hundred thousand, or any less number that may be convenient."

57. As the following statement indicates, this formula is commonly recited as a way of effecting a consecration. For another example, see Stephan Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1973), p. 146.

58. I am following the several variants that read *kṣānti* (Tibetan *shi bya*) for *kṣuti* (see the apparatus, p. 30, note 6).

59. On the practice of "abandoning" food, see Patrick Olivelle, *Rules and Regulations of Brahmanical Asceticism*, p. 116, fn. 54.

60. I am following the Tibetan, which reads "the syllable *a* (*yi ge a*)" for *yuga* (see apparatus, p. 32, note 15).

61. Each of the four verses contains as its key terms words that begin with the syllable being defined. For example, the first verse, *u*, reads: *udyukto buddhpūjāyāṃ upaśāntopaśāyakaḥ / upakārāya sattvānām upāyenānvito bhavet*; and so on with *pā*, *sa*, and *ka*.

62. The Tibetan reads "effortless" (*ḥbad med*)! The *Annals* edition, and, apparently, all of the other editions collated by the editors, reads *yatnaṃ* (preceded by *sarvadā*: ms. *sarvadāyatnaṃ* <*ḥbad med*?). This is but one of numerous discrepancies between the Sanskrit and the Tibetan. (It was outside the scope of this article to examine and explain these discrepancies. Such a careful philological analysis remains a desideratum of the Advayavajra corpus.)

63. In this and the following verses, Advayavajra is returning to a statement made in the opening paragraph of the *Kudrṣṭinirghātana* concerning the centrality of the two "accumulations" (*saṃbhāra*) of merit and knowledge.

## **Editorial Note: Japanese Buddhism in America: Shared Issues, Common Concerns**

In conjunction with the 2003 annual meeting of the Buddhist Churches of America held in Los Angeles, the Institute of Buddhist Studies organized a conference on the topic of "Japanese Buddhism in America: Shared Issues, Common Concerns." The presentors were Prof. Duncan Williams (University of California, Irvine), Ms. Tara Koda (University of California, Santa Barbara), Prof. Jane Iwamura (University of Southern California), and Prof. Mark Unno (University of Oregon). Discussants were Prof. Helen Hardacre (Harvard University) and Prof. David Matsumoto (Institute of Buddhist Studies). The following articles are revised versions of the conference proceedings, together with Prof. Hardacre's comments, which are given here as an introduction.

The conference program was split over two venues. During the day, the full papers were presented on the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles. In the evening, summaries and discussion of the papers were conducted at the Japanese American National Museum. The conference received support from the Research and Propagation Committee of the BCA Ministers Association, the UCLA Center for Buddhist Studies, the UCLA Center for Japanese Studies, the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, the Japanese American National Museum, and the Institute of Buddhist Studies' Japan Foundation Endowment. We would like to also thank the following individuals for their support of this project: Rev. Marvin Harada, Prof. Robert Buswell, Jr., Prof. Fred Notehelfer, Prof. Don Nakanishi, and President Irene Hirano.

**Richard K. Payne**

Dean, Institute of Buddhist Studies



# “Japanese Buddhism in America” Reflections on the Symposium

**Helen Hardacre**

Harvard University

THE SYMPOSIUM ON JAPANESE BUDDHISM in America presented four aspects of current scholarly work from a new field of inquiry. Within the growing area of Asian American religions, recent years have seen a growing focus on American Buddhism, and important works have begun to establish significant topics of inquiry. The symposium represents a further development: defining Japanese Buddhism in America as a significant subfield. As one of the presenters, Professor Mark Unno, noted, the phrase “Japanese Buddhism in America” raises the question whether the object is to inquire into the relation between Buddhism as practiced in Japan and in America, or whether the issue is to ask “how Japanese” is Buddhism practiced in America. As the query suggests, issues of religion, identity, and ethnicity are central to this new area, and each presented brought out a different facet of a complex relationship.

In a study of the religious lives of early Japanese immigrants to Hawaii at the turn of the twentieth century, Ms. Tara Koda stressed that it would be inadequate to think of Buddhism’s establishment in Hawaii as a mere transplantation. Emphasizing that most early immigrants came from western Japan, where Jōdo Shinshū is very strong, she focused on the significance of these origins. Both time and place set a stamp on Buddhism in Hawaii. While immigration followed only a few decades after the 1868 edict for a separation of Buddhism from Shintō in Japan, Ms. Koda found that the two remained intertwined for the Hawaiian immigrants, and that it was common for them to observe New Years at Shintō shrines, alongside promoting Buddhist rites at plantation temples. In addition, Hawaiian and Filipino elements were absorbed, creating a Buddhism matching the experience of the immigrants, irreducible neither to Japanese Buddhism as defined by government mandate nor to practice on the American mainland.

Professor Duncan Williams gave a very moving presentation on Buddhism as practiced during internment. Based on a huge quantity of data, including declassified U.S. government documents, diaries, memoirs of camp survivors, and interviews, he showed how the F.B.I. and other

government agencies compiled lists of Buddhist and Shintō priests, regarding them as especially prone to espionage, interning them under the heaviest security and most miserable conditions. Unlike Japanese Christians, who were also interned, but who could look to Christians outside the camps for some assistance, Japanese Buddhists had almost no one to help, save for a tiny handful of Caucasians who had been ordained. But they could do nothing to stop the ransacking of temples where the Japanese had stored their belongings, nothing to stop the sell-off of their land. In these conditions, Buddhism and those few Buddhist ministers working in the camps were an invaluable spiritual center, representing continuity with the past and hope for the future. Internees created beautiful *butsudan* and other devotional items out of the few materials the desert provided, and they held *obon* festivals on a camp-wide scale. One priest sought religious meaning in his internment by reflecting on Hōnen's exile. The experience of Buddhist life in the camps is particularly salient as the U.S. government takes refuge behind the veil of "national security" to justify widespread surveillance of American Muslims as part of its preparations for a second war against Iraq.

Professor Jane Iwamura examines the significance of *butsudan* in the lives of four generations of Japanese-Americans. While the temple is a focus of communal life and ethnic identity, the *butsudan* is the focus of personal religious devotions. The *butsudan* for some is also a symbol of Japanese-American life, and in that sense it seems as important to own one as to tend it regularly. Professor Iwamura also pointed out the significance of generational differences in *butsudan* practice, saying that *nisei* sometimes feel a great diffidence in approaching the *butsudan*, fearful that they may fail to conduce worship "the right way," that is, as their parents thought proper. *Sansei* and *yonsei*, by contrast, seem to feel freer to innovate and to adapt the *butsudan* to the contours of their personal religious lives, rather than feeling that they must replicate a pattern of correct performance. In all cases, however, it is clear that the *butsudan* symbolizes the continuity of Japanese-American Buddhist life, linking those in America to Japan, as well as standing for a sense of connectedness, a link to the future, and personal responsibility to the past, present, and future.

Professor Mark Unno's talk highlighted the combination in Japanese Buddhism in America of aspects of immigrant and convert Buddhism, and he noted tensions between the two, based on ethnicity and generation. He spoke also of the twin tendencies towards commodification or commercialization, on the one hand, and inclusivity and self-transcendence, on the other. He developed three examples, or "moments" to show how deeply implicated in the global economy all religious transactions necessarily are, including those of Japanese-American Buddhism. While the moments



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each emphasized the inescapability of being caught up in increasingly globalizing webs of power and influence, each one also contained the possibility of transcendence. Thus no moment lacks the potential for liberation. This is a message from Japanese-American Buddhist experience that is universal, never more relevant than in the present.

In sum, these four presentations exhibited remarkable clarity and insight, as well as humanity, in addressing a coming area of inquiry. I am deeply indebted to Professor Payne and the Buddhist Churches of America for this deeply meaningful and moving occasion.



# Aloha with Gassho: Buddhism in the Hawaiian Plantations<sup>1</sup>

Tara K. Koda

University of California, Santa Barbara

KATSUMI YAMASAKI, A NISEI living in Hawaii in 1930 stated, “In most of the Buddhist temples of Hawaii, Buddhism in its ritual and formula is an exact replica of the system in vogue in Japan.”<sup>2</sup> It seems to be a simple statement, but, in fact, recent advances in scholarship on Japanese religious history show it to be problematic, and we must ask, What kind of Buddhism was transplanted to Hawaii, seemingly without significant change? We now know that precisely at the time of Japanese immigration to Hawaii and California, Buddhism was being radically transformed in each and every aspect ranging from institutional configuration to ritual practice. The Japanese governmental policies separating Buddhist and Shintō groups between 1868 and 1875 in effect created what is now the “modern” Buddhist “tradition,” a tradition that is so thoroughly different from what it had been prior to 1868 that one must seriously question its very name.

When Buddhism came to Hawaii, it came into contact with the Caucasian-dominant society which further altered its appearance, form, and composition. A new “Buddhism” in Hawaii was created, one that David Matsumoto argued was “no longer Japanese but not yet American.”<sup>3</sup> It also becomes unlike that which will be seen on the mainland as well. This new Buddhism still had traces of its heritage from Japan, for Buddhism in Hawaii was still intertwined with Shintō in the minds and hearts of the immigrants. Once in Hawaii, however, it immediately came into contact not only with the dominant Christian society but also the traditions of many others in Hawaii—native Hawaiians, Chinese, Filipinos, and Portuguese.<sup>4</sup> The general spirit of accommodation, of *aloha*, by the Hawaiian monarchy enabled Japanese Buddhism to find its own niche in Hawaii. While initially hesitant over its welcome and later feared because of its strength, Buddhism in Hawaii became the tradition its practitioners needed: one that brought the comfort of the homeland and the dynamic spirit of its new home in the islands.

Although the Japanese *shinbutsu bunri* (Shintō-Buddhist separation) edicts of the late 1800s greatly affected Buddhism and Shintō in Japan, the Buddhism and Shintō imported by Japanese laborers to Hawaii did not seem to be as affected by these laws. As a result, Hawaiian Buddhism and

Shintō became forged more by its existence and interaction in Hawaii. While no one theory can explain Japanese religion in Hawaii, theories such as acculturation,<sup>5</sup> assimilation,<sup>6</sup> Americanization,<sup>7</sup> and cultural pluralism<sup>8</sup> all have roots in the Japanese American religious story. The immigrants' "flexible" approach to religion (i.e., being Buddhist, Shintō, and, in some cases, Christian at the same time) created its own theories. While finding their identity in the islands, the Japanese borrowed from those already there to find their place within the Hawaiian culture.

Ultimately, these theories fall short of completely describing the Buddhism that was created. Buddhism came to Hawaii under great persecution and change. Immediately, it was challenged as "pagan" because it was thought to render the Japanese unable to become true to their new land. Americans and others grouped it with Shintō and questioned Japanese loyalty. Despite this, Buddhism continued to adapt to its new surroundings, taking an active role in defining itself, its people, and its future in the islands. Ties to Buddhism became stronger with the immigrants than it had been in Japan.<sup>9</sup>

The Japanese brought a tradition that was unlike the dominant Christian tradition. As Harry Kitano noted, "Religion, in the American sense of Sunday School attendance, belief in a single faith, and relative intolerance of other faiths, is alien to the Japanese. In general, they are tolerant of all theologies and have not institutionalized religion to the extent that most Americans have."<sup>10</sup> During crises or uncertainty, it was not unusual for the Japanese to participate in many different traditions in order to receive the most blessings or good fortune.

Undoubtedly, the Buddhist church was in flux prior to its arrival in Hawaii and continued to change through its contact with other religions, primarily Christianity, in Hawaii. Because it never completely molded to any of these theories, Buddhism in Hawaii continued to become its own entity, borrowing from Shintō, Christianity, and native Hawaiian culture in order to strengthen and support its tradition and its followers.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Prior to the Meiji era, Shintō and Buddhism had been interrelated by a series of associations of rituals, deities, and beliefs. While Buddhism tended to dominate the relationship, Shintō's association with Buddhism in many ways "validated" this foreign religion's existence in Japan. In general, the leaders saw in Buddhism a way to control the population, and they ruled that all Japanese people must register with a temple in their area, where all family members were listed under the heading and belief system of the father. The people, on the other hand, were attracted to Buddhism because of its rituals and funerary practices. Jōdo Shinshū was especially

popular due to its simple belief system that did not require extensive schooling, meditation, or monetary contributions. Through the long-lasting and systematic interactions that led to the integration of Shintō and Buddhism, a mixed religious life was formed, one that encompassed rituals, deities, and institutions in the minds of the people. The needs of the people were realized by one aspect or another in this system of localized combinations while new ways of looking at life and death were created through these interactions between Shintō and Buddhism.

During the Tokugawa Period, Buddhism had been elevated to the position of a state religion. When the Meiji Restoration started, Buddhism was removed from this position. The government tried to further weaken Buddhist power by enacting the policy of *shinbutsu bunri*. "This withdrew government support from Buddhism and officially ended a syncretism which had existed for centuries."<sup>11</sup> At the same time, however, the xenophobic sentiments first caused by European missionary activities in the sixteenth century, and further fueled by the "black ships" of America fifteen years prior to Meiji, rose to a climax which, paradoxically, took the form of Westernization of Japanese mores. The Japanese people began reinventing themselves. In government, economics, religion, and culture, every aspect of past society was completely re-shaped in order to create a "new" Japan, one that could compete with the rest of the world. Japan started a massive program of industrialization, and factories emerged all over the country. In the cultural sphere, a whole new system based on education, ethics, and an Emperor-based morality was enacted. The Meiji ideologues working in the Bureau of Shintō Affairs hoped Shintō could become a cohesive unit comprising a national hierarchy of shrines, thus creating an orthodoxy which was taught to all in the mandatory educational system. While there were many problems with this approach, the end result was a new focus on Shintō and a bias against Buddhism. Hirochika Nakamaki argued that although the Restoration created a "modern Japan" and *shinbutsu bunri* and *haibutsu kishaku* (the persecution of Buddhism) were seen as symbolic of that change to modern society, there probably wasn't a large change in the religious lives of the people.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of the "rediscovery" of Shintō and reaction against Buddhism, several laws were passed separating Shintō from Buddhism. *Shinbutsu bunri* had, however, a number of unexpected effects. First and foremost, it created a thoroughly new Shintō as a separate, autonomous entity. Many problems emerged with the new "Shintō."

"Shintō" in the Meiji context refers to a very recently developed complex of ideas from various sources whose main defining characteristic was a rejection of Buddhism. However, since Buddhism in Japan had previously been thoroughly integrated with Shintō,

the “Buddhism” that was being rejected was not Buddhism *as it really was* but a Buddhism newly presented as “foreign” and “not-Shintō.”<sup>13</sup>

Since Shintō had been the subordinate partner in the relationship, what did the dismantling of these “syncretic Shintō sanctuaries” really entail? All Buddhist images, texts, and priests were removed from the shrines and destroyed. While the government insisted (sometimes after the fact) that this was in no way a persecution of Buddhism, Buddhist temples were ransacked, burned to the ground, and their monks harassed and defrocked. In some anti-Buddhist fiefs, the entire Buddhist community was destroyed. One estimate claimed that over two-thirds of the Buddhist temples in Japan were destroyed over the course of five years. However, this mass destruction was not uniformly distributed in the country. In areas of strong Buddhist support such as the modern Hiroshima prefecture which was a strong Shinshū area, Buddhism fared much better with very little destruction. Because the extermination of Buddhism was not widespread or uniform, the effect of *shinbutsu bunri* on the Japanese people and state varied according to region.

After the early Meiji edicts of *shinbutsu bunri* were passed, with the new emphasis of *haibutsu kishaku*, Shintō and Buddhist deities, practices, and beliefs were irreparably dismantled. Or were they? While in the capital, Edo, and other urban centers, Buddhism was being destroyed and Shintō exalted, how did the rural populations fare? The pro-Shintō factions sent “missionaries” into the rural areas to elevate Shintō practice over Buddhism, but how much of an impact did they have on the people? For instance, in the case of my maternal grandparents (who migrated from rural Tōyama in Western Japan) and the majority of other Buddhists in Hawaii who migrated during this early period, Shintō and Buddhism were still interrelated. While they attended weekly services at the Hongwanji and went to many picnics and other activities sponsored by the Buddhist church, one holiday in particular stands out because it is inherently not Buddhist. Every New Year’s Eve while my brother and I were lighting fireworks with my cousins, my aunts, grandmother, and mother were preparing the foods we needed to eat at midnight to purify our bodies and make us strong and blessed for the New Year. Most of these recipes were folk traditions rooted in Shintō. Shortly after midnight, my father would have to take my grandparents to the Shintō shrine near the canal in Honolulu. No one looked askance at their behavior and, indeed, many of my grandparents’ friends from the Hongwanji were also at the shrine which was only a few blocks from the temple. This was common practice, also noticed by historians of Hawaiian religions, such as Louise Hunter who stated (only in a footnote!), “Buddhism had been officially divorced from Shintō at the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, but the Japanese

continued to profess and to practice both religions simultaneously. Members of the American community, ignorant of both Buddhism and Shintō, had no reason to assume the existence of any clear lines of distinction between the two."<sup>14</sup> While Americans seemed interested in Japanese culture and activities insofar as they could control the immigrant population, the pervasiveness of both Shintō and Buddhism in Hawaii implies that, perhaps, the edicts were not very effective in the minds of the Japanese who came to Hawaii. Since many of the Japanese who ventured from Japan were from the rural areas of Southern and Western Japan where Shinshū belief was strong, how pervasive was this edict of *shinbutsu bunri*? Both Louise Hunter and Dennis Ogawa report that the Americans in Hawaii had difficulty distinguishing between the two faiths of Buddhism and Shintō because the people participated in both at various times of the year.

Buddhism in Hawaii, therefore, looked very different than what was being "created" in Japan. However, after coming in contact with the diverse peoples in Hawaii, it started to look very different from any other Buddhism, even the California version—borrowing from its Hawaiian hosts to create a religion for the Japanese that had a Shintō-Christian-Hawaiian-Buddhist feel.

#### PLANTATION LIFE

Although a lone fisherman landed in Hawaii in 1804 after drifting from Japan, the real immigration of Japanese did not officially occur until 1868 when a hundred fifty immigrants arrived in Honolulu. In order to get hard-working laborers for the Hawaiian plantations, the government recruited rural farmers from Japan's agricultural prefectures.<sup>15</sup> In 1885, nine hundred forty-three laborers arrived and were contracted to work on sugar plantations for three years. They called Hawaii "Tengoku" or "Heaven." As early as 1896 the Japanese were arriving in the islands at the astounding rate of approximately two thousand workers a month.<sup>16</sup> Life was hard on the plantations. The Japanese were dispersed throughout the islands to the various sugar and pineapple plantations. Salaries were low and morale quickly declined. These new immigrants realized that the "land of Tengoku" had a lot of hard labor and very little gold.<sup>17</sup>

The Japanese who came during this time had several things in common. Those who came to Hawaii with a three-year contract planned to earn substantial amounts of money in Hawaii and return home; therefore, they never intended to remain in the islands permanently. For most of these men, good jobs in Japan were hard to find. They were second or third sons in agricultural families.<sup>18</sup> Many of the Japanese who ventured to Hawaii considered themselves fortunate to have escaped Japan at that time. When the Japanese government privatized property in 1872, the peasants were

devastated by newly established burdensome land taxes, unstable rice prices, and bad harvests. "Between 1883 and 1890, 370,000 peasants lost their lands because they were unable to pay taxes."<sup>19</sup> As a result, twenty-eight thousand people had volunteered in response to the initial Hawaii recruitment, a staggering figure in view of the fact that the Japanese government had expected only six hundred applicants.<sup>20</sup>

Most of these men came from the peasant classes from Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, and Kumamoto prefectures. This area of Japan was known as the "stronghold" of Shinshū Buddhism. As a result, when Buddhist priests and temples came to Hawaii, Shinshū was the strongest. Some argued that it possessed "almost dominating power among the Buddhists of these islands."<sup>21</sup>

The immigrants lived in Japanese camps outside or on the plantations. The work on the plantations was brutally hard. Life outside of work was unorganized and chaotic. With little spending money and a male to female ratio of 5:1, morale was low and gambling and alcohol abuse high. Sanitation and living conditions were deplorable. In addition, with long, exhausting working conditions, alcohol, and humid weather, many workers fell ill or died. "Except for all-night weekend gambling sessions arranged for young men by Japanese gangsters from Honolulu, the Japanese plantation laborers had little occasion to engage in boisterous recreation. Oshogatsu, the Obon festival in midsummer, the Emperor's birthday in early November, and family weddings and funerals were among the few events that broke the monotonous routine of the daily lives of the Japanese plantation workers."<sup>22</sup>

Initially, the immigrants did not need to have shrines or temples. Many even found it easier to just concentrate on what they found around them, worshipping as they saw. While in Hawaii, they focused on their surroundings, such as the sun and nature. "The sun [gave] them the light which [was] essential to their existence. The sun [took] care of the crops. They [said] that the pious men and women [worshipped] the sun at the sunrise to ask for his day's blessing and [worshipped] the sunset to give him thanks for his days' protection."<sup>23</sup> The native Hawaiian religion easily identified with Shintō because it also placed an emphasis on nature and spirits. However, when beliefs dealing with the "non-visible" spirits of the ancestors arose, something had to be created. Concrete items like the *butsudan* became necessary. Shintō and Buddhism differed in this respect. Since Buddhism placed its emphasis on future salvation rather than the comfort and happiness of the everyday honored by Shintō, the two could co-exist rather easily in Hawaii.

When any tradition enters a country, it is met with several reactions. It can be embraced by those who wanted it to come, reviled by those who opposed its power potential or feared its sweep, or treated with indifference. For the Kingdom of Hawaii, all three reactions were felt when



Buddhism and Shintō entered. During the nineteenth century Hawaii had already undergone a major religious upheaval. In 1819, King Kamehameha II abolished the old pagan laws and taboo practices, opening the door for Christian Protestant missionaries who arrived in 1820. These missionaries were wildly successful, converting the royal family, members of the nobility, and some commoners as well. These missionaries were invited to stay and many of the early Caucasian plantation owners were descendants of these early missionaries. By 1826, the country was considered Protestant and, despite encouragement by the French government, other religions, particularly Catholicism, were discouraged.<sup>24</sup>

From this perspective, it's easy to see why the Hawaiians hesitated to allow another religion to enter, particularly another "pagan" one, which was how they regarded Buddhism. The Americans initially encouraged this view and, since this was the time when Christianity grew in the islands, King Kalakaua hesitated to do anything new.<sup>25</sup> The Japanese government and Buddhist headquarters in Kyoto aided in this ambivalence by not sending any Buddhist or Shintō priests with the first immigrants.

### HAWAIIAN BUDDHISM

Much of the old beliefs from Buddhism and Shintō made the voyage from Japan to Hawaii with the immigrants. However, the modes of worship, rituals, and practices changed or were lost. What they needed was a common meeting place and a leader (read minister) to lead them through the events which occurred in everyday life. Most of the Japanese felt the need to have something in their lives. "On Sunday, the Sabbath Day for their Christian brothers, they had no place to go for their spiritual nourishment. Without religion, some of them acted almost like beasts."<sup>26</sup> They were unable to hold memorial services. No spiritual guidance was available. The priests were the only members of the society able to bring comfort, joy, and hope to the community during crises.<sup>27</sup>

Through monetary donations and labor, the Japanese were willing to help support these services when they came. They needed someone to tend to their religious life; this needed to encompass not only what they had brought with them but also integrate their Hawaii experience. The Japanese definitely aligned themselves with the Buddhists and sought ministers from Japan who could shape the temples and shrines into centers of Japanese sentiment.

Their faith kept the Japanese hopes alive until 1889 when Reverend Soryu Kagahi, a Shinshū Buddhist priest, arrived. He was enthusiastically received by the Japanese who then numbered around eight thousand.<sup>28</sup> A month after his arrival, a small temporary mission was built on Emma Street in Honolulu.<sup>29</sup> Reverend Kagahi held the first formal Buddhist

service in Honolulu on March 15, 1889 and later visited the Japanese on the island of Hawaii as well.

While the headquarters in Japan were in complete agreement with Kagahi's assessment that a mission needed to be started in Hawaii, they disagreed on the way it should be installed. Kagahi argued that "it was necessary to adopt a compromise theory for Hawaii which would extend recognition to the God as exemplified in Christianity as not being in conflict with Buddhism and Shintōism."<sup>30</sup> He asserted that this compromise was necessary due to the fact that Christianity was gaining popular support among the Japanese in Hawaii. He also hoped to avoid any opposition by the Hawaiian government, which was leery of accepting an alien religion. Hence, he argued that the "Christian God and the Buddhist image are identical concepts, that they are viewed or worshipped differently only because of the diverse cultural and historical backgrounds. With this bold and imaginative but expedient explanation, he was eventually regarded with approval."<sup>31</sup>

However, Reverend Kagahi overestimated his support. He had his advantageous explanation published in one of the leading religious journals and was quoted in religious magazines.<sup>32</sup> In essence, he stated that "if Buddhism was to be propagated successfully in Hawaii, its teachings must acknowledge the existence of a deity; otherwise, the Hawaiian Kingdom would not recognize it as a legitimate religion. Consequently, he concluded, Japanese Buddhism should assert the identity of the Christian God and the Buddha."<sup>33</sup> As a result of his indiscretions, the Kyoto headquarters and other religious leaders in Japan refused to give support to Kagahi's theory and his hope of establishing a mission in Hawaii did not materialize.<sup>34</sup>

Shinshū did not try to establish a mission again until 1897 when priest Keijun Miyamoto arrived to survey the situation. He found that "unofficial priests, not confirmed by Kyoto headquarters, had been filling the vacuum by performing religious rites for the Japanese. He also noted a situation where some unscrupulous 'self-styled' priests had been fraudulently soliciting donations and contributions from the immigrants."<sup>35</sup> In 1897, Hongwanji headquarters officially designated Hawaii a mission site and sent Honi Satomi as director. In 1900, he was replaced by Yemyo Imamura who was very successful among the Shinshū believers.

The first Buddhist temple was established in Hilo on the Big Island in 1889. Of the thirty-six temples<sup>36</sup> initially established, three-quarters of them were located in rural, agricultural areas and the rest in the "urban" areas such as Honolulu and Hilo. The reason the majority of the temples were built in rural areas was two-fold. Primarily, that was where the majority of the Japanese resided. Secondly, in many cases, the Buddhist tradition was encouraged by the plantation owners. The owners felt that the importation of the rituals and customs of Shintō and Buddhism would

overcome the sense of isolation for the Japanese and might encourage them to work harder.<sup>37</sup> It also helped bring about stability to the plantation communities. As a result, the plantations donated land on the plantation property for the Japanese to build their temples and language schools. "In 1901 the Waipahu and Kahuku plantations started subsidizing Buddhist temples and schools; Ewa, Aiea, Waialua, and Waianae plantations followed in 1903, and Waimanalo plantation in 1904. All major plantations on the other islands also rendered similar assistance, either through the grant of rent-free lands or monetary subsidies. Such subsidies and assistance continued until the 1920 plantations strike."<sup>38</sup> In general, the plantation owners' faith in the initial comforting aspect was well-placed. For instance, in Waialua, "the partnership [between the Waialua Sugar Company and the Japanese workers] has been mutually beneficial because the Buddhist virtues of patience, thrift, industry, loyalty, and courtesy, provided good workers for the plantation. The Waialua Agricultural Co., Ltd., provided lease-free land where the temple, classrooms, and minister's residence were built."<sup>39</sup>

Jōdo Shinshū was extremely popular among the Japanese for many reasons. This religion was given to the Japanese and was able to keep its adherents by adapting itself to any new situation which was demanded. As one scholar noted, "This Shinshū of the Jōdo Buddhism has a vitality which is rather unique among the rest of the Buddhist sects in Japan. Unhampered by any metaphysical or ceremonial systems, it seems to be able to adjust itself to the great changes—political, economical, and social—...and to continue its comparatively strong hold upon the people of this generation."<sup>40</sup> Interestingly enough, Jōdo in Haleiwa in 1912 was founded by Reverend Murayama among the Chinese residents.<sup>41</sup>

Buddhism received a strong acceptance of legitimacy when Queen Liliuokalani attended the Birth Ceremony of the Buddha on May 19, 1901. Her attendance caused a tremendous amount of interest in Buddhism and her participation was reported throughout the world. It was an unprecedented event in that a non-Japanese had participated in a Japanese group activity.<sup>42</sup>

By 1920, the Census recorded a hundred ten thousand Japanese out of the total population of two hundred fifty thousand in the islands. Four daily Japanese language newspapers and more than eighty Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines were now located in Hawaii.<sup>43</sup> These numbers both encouraged and unnerved the larger population, especially the leaders in the islands who were concerned over the large Japanese minority population. These facts brought two big changes in the immigrant's way of life in Hawaii. First, once they left the plantations, a variety of jobs, both in the city and on the farms, was more available.<sup>44</sup> Second, they were no longer looking at Hawaii as a temporary home to earn money but rather as a place to live and raise families. As a result, as early as 1909, they were no

longer sending wages back to Japan but, rather, were using them to maintain and strengthen ties in Hawaii.

Picture brides began arriving in 1905. Approximately nine thousand five hundred came between 1911 to 1919 and continued arriving until all immigration was stopped in 1924. Many of the bachelors decided their stays in Hawaii were going to be longer than they expected so they asked their parents to find them suitable wives. Parents worked with go-betweens and, if the prospective couple had not known each other, photographs were exchanged. If all agreed, the bride's name was transferred to her future husband's family records in Japan and the *shashin kekkon* ("photograph marriage") was legal in the eyes of the Japanese government. Then the wives departed for Hawaii. Marriages were that simple in Japan. In Hawaii, however, immigration authorities refused to accept the legality of the *shashin kekkon* and required that the Japanese couples be joined in matrimony by exchanging Christian vows as soon as the "picture brides" arrived in Hawaii. The assembly-line Christian marriages performed at the immigration compound were unpopular among Hawaii's Japanese. Fred Makino, editor of the *Hawaii Hochi*, wrote, "The freedom of choosing an appropriate religious service...should be allowed the individual if there is freedom of religion."<sup>45</sup> Noting that the majority of Japanese were Buddhists and not Christians, the *Hochi* called for either an immediate end to the wharf marriages or permission for representatives of all religious faiths to enter the immigration compound and perform marriages. As a result of this and other protests, mass Shintō or Buddhist ceremonies were held instead. In 1917, the practice of mandatory wharf marriages was formally abolished. New couples generally headed to the Shintō shrine<sup>46</sup> closest to their new home.

As men and women married, started families, and moved off the plantations and into other jobs around the islands, religion and other activities became more important. Many Issei left the sugar cane and pineapple fields and went to work for companies or established small businesses of their own. They used this newfound monetary and labor freedom to start and support institutions that enabled the family and community to foster cultural ties and maintain identity. These institutions included not only churches and temples but also language schools, newspapers, and social clubs.<sup>47</sup> These institutions served the Japanese as places which supported them in the face of covert and overt racial discrimination.

Temples were built in the Japanese style and helped ensure stability. They gave the Japanese not only a place to worship but also a place to express themselves. "At the temple they are in a sense, 'free'. They may converse, laugh, and think together in Japanese. If the temples can somehow make them feel comfortable, then Buddhism has accomplished its greatest good in Hawaii."<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the temple was a place of festivity. Worshippers chanted their prayers loudly. They entered the temple with

celebration and community. This they sum up as being *arigatai* (appreciative or thankful).<sup>49</sup> In the Japanese community, the temple fulfilled a need, not just spiritually but also economically and socially. "In the rural areas where farmers populated, a temple played a role of a 'community center' as such. The priests were expected to be not only spiritual and religious leaders but also a sort of counselor who dealt with many other secular things as well."<sup>50</sup>

The temples and ministers finally gave the Japanese a means of burying their dead, something that was very important to the Japanese workers as many immigrants died due to accident or illness. With no way to perform proper services, crude methods had been applied. The roommates of the deceased (the bachelors usually lived four or five to a room in the camp house) were permitted to leave work thirty minutes early to arrange the burial. "The body was placed in a crude box and carted away to a cemetery site by mule and lowered into a hastily dug hole. No temples were there, nor priests to administer the last rites to the forgotten souls passing away on foreign soil."<sup>51</sup> As a result, the arrival of the ministers was met with great joy.

Buddhist-style funerals were very comforting to the immigrants. As one Issei woman noted, "It just doesn't seem final without the smell of the incense, the temple gong, and the chanting of the prayers at funerals. These haole services are so incomplete and cold. There almost seems to be no respect for the dead."<sup>52</sup> Most of the immigrants felt that a Buddhist minister was necessary for a proper burial. It never occurred to them that the Christian services could be as comforting. Furthermore, rituals associated with the *butsudan* and departed relatives still had meaning. One girl, remembering the rituals associated with her sister's memory stated, "Any delicacy which the family partakes is shared with my deceased sister; that is we place some of it on the altar."<sup>53</sup> Buddhist rituals, while not always clearly understood by the Nisei, were important.

One of the greatest changes in the role of Buddhism in Hawaii was the role of the priest. Initially sought for rituals for the sick and dead, the minister found himself taking a much more active role in the islands. The main temple had a resident priest who officiated at all events, journeyed to the different rural temples on important ceremonial days, and performed funerals. The minister was usually young, sent from Japan after finishing his training, and was expected to live with his wife and family on the temple grounds. "In his living quarters are many signs of his Japanese origin—a portrait of the great Emperor Meiji, a map of Asia. An American touch is a radio. Instead of Japanese tea, the priest's wife frequently serves Kona coffee to guests."<sup>54</sup> He usually spoke little English. While that did not hamper him in his dealings with the Issei, it did hinder his efforts to minister to the second generation.<sup>55</sup>

As in Japan, many more families were affiliated with each temple than attended each week. It was not unusual for a minister to conduct a funeral for someone he hadn't met. In addition to the more traditional functions such as presiding over funerals, the role of the minister expanded into areas previously covered by Shintō priests or done only through government records. The most radical change was the Buddhist priest officiating at weddings because of the law requiring a minister to perform the ceremony for the picture bride weddings.<sup>56</sup> "A wedding officiated by a Buddhist seldom occurs in Japan but in Hawaii it is a common practice today. 'Priest for funeral; wedding by Kannushu—the Shintō priest,' is a common saying in Japan. It would be regarded as a bad omen even to have a Buddhist priest at a wedding feast. But in Hawaii such feeling does not exist."<sup>57</sup> The minister made hospital rounds and did marriage counseling. The minister also performed rituals for babies when they reached one hundred days old. House and business dedications were also performed. "These services, as well as funerals and weddings, are not always in accordance with Shinran's true teachings. Some services are similar to Christian or Shintō services. Nevertheless, they are carried out, because they conform with people's expectations."<sup>58</sup>

Other ways in which Buddhism changed was in its appearance and terminology. Temples became churches, priests became ministers, and, in some cases, the Buddha became God, especially by the young people. Examining the reaction of her parents to the accidental death of her older brother, a young girl wrote, "They [did not] curse against God for taking away a member of our family. Instead they prayed very hard and tried to make themselves and the rest of the family understand that God wanted it that way, that Brother Fred had only been loaned to us, and that it was the day set for his return to God's land."<sup>59</sup> Regardless of her terminology, she regarded her family as "true Buddhists." By following the proper services, they hoped to help his spirit reach "heaven."<sup>60</sup>

The use of the word "church" became more appropriate because, in Hawaii, the Buddhist places of worship bore a remarkable resemblance to Christian churches. Although still Japanese in design with the Buddhist symbols in the altar, these buildings added pews for sitting as opposed to the customary sitting on the floor. Hymn books with hymns newly created or altered from Christian ones and sermons became common. The "churches" adopted Sunday as the day of worship with Sunday school for the children. Choir and young men's and young women's Buddhist associations adapted from the YMCA and YWCA were created. Sermons and talks at the services were not only given on various aspects of Buddhist doctrine but also themes about how to live life in Hawaii as a good Buddhist. As a distinctly Hawaiian touch, leis, both floral and non-floral, were given to guests at services.

Despite the similarities, fundamental differences continued between Christianity and Buddhism. The Buddhist churches were by no means suggesting an adoption of Christianity, only modes of worship and vernacular. While some asserted that "Buddhists have not given a second thought about abandoning Buddhist customs and embracing Western frills,"<sup>61</sup> most realized that Buddhism was not diluting its message, but rather strengthening its position. As one Buddhist practitioner argued, "Well, you think the adoption of organ music and singing seems to digress from the original Buddhist practice. Of course, in Japan, we use the gong and wooden clapper. But in Hawaii we just make our service suitable and understandable to the young people. Buddhism brought with it Indian music and other Indian rituals of worship but when it came to Japan, most of it was altered to suit Japanese believers."<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the Japanese in Hawaii did not feel there was a conflict between the belief and the practice.

In most towns in Hawaii, the festival calendar consisted of both Buddhist and Shintō holidays. New Year's (Shintō) and Bon (Buddhist) were the most popular, but also Boy's Day and Girl's Day as well as some seasonal agricultural festivals survived as well. New Year's, a traditionally Shintō holiday, consisted of purification rituals. Houses and businesses were cleaned, special food was eaten and offered to the gods, and a trip to the shrine was taken to purify the body and to purchase talismans to protect the home and person. Another major aspect of Japanese religion, the Bon festival, was also altered in Hawaii. Bon was the season to honor the ancestors. The *butsudan* was more elaborately decorated and special foods and flowers were offered.

The *bon-odori*, the dance held at the end of Bon season, became very popular in Hawaii; however, for many Nisei, it became more of a social event, rather than a religious holiday. "He [participated] in the Bon-odori more for the pleasure and fun he [derived] from it than for the religious significance attached to it, namely, to entertain the spirits of the dead."<sup>63</sup>

Many of the elaborate rituals surrounding life changes have been altered in Hawaii. For instance, the celebration of *yakudoshi* (the "good luck" celebration given during the "bad luck" years of one's life) had become a big party in Hawaii rather than an elaborate series of rituals, with aspects of all walks of Hawaiian life interspersed.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, previously Japanese-only events were adopted into the larger Hawaiian society. "The fine arts of the Japanese have found their way into the life of Hawaii and have in some instances become an integral part of the cultural life of the islands....Kite day, boy day with its great suspended gaily colored cloth fish flying in the air, and girl day or doll day are all festivals that Hawaii looks upon as its own."<sup>65</sup>

Buddhism's journey was similar to the immigrants who brought it to Hawaii. It left Japan during a time of upheaval when its position was threatened and, in some places, destroyed. However, when it came to

Hawaii, it was embraced by the immigrants and encouraged by the plantation owners. While Christians opposed the spread of Buddhism in the islands, Buddhism borrowed aspects of Christianity in order to help it fit into Hawaiian society. Finally, its association with Shintō, discouraged in Japan, continued in Hawaii as a means for the Japanese to complete their spiritual lives. For plantation Hawaii, the Buddhist church provided stability, organization, and peace of mind for the Issei, ideals which undoubtedly led to the strengthening of the Japanese community in Hawaii.



## NOTES

1. This is part of my doctoral dissertation: "Meiji 'Buddhism' in America: A Study of the Effect of *shinbutsu bunri* on Jōdo Shinshū in Hawaii and the West Coast" (University of California Santa Barbara, forthcoming).
2. Louise H. Hunter, *Buddhism in Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971), p. 162.
3. David Matsumoto, "Japanese Buddhism in America: Shared Issues, Common Themes," Buddhist Churches of America National Council Meeting, University of California, Los Angeles, February 21, 2003.
4. While somewhat isolated initially on the plantations, Japanese did have contact with ethnic groups besides the Caucasian owners. Filipinos often worked on the same plantations, living in "Filipino Camps." Native Hawaiians often filled the role of plantation *luna* (foreman). Therefore, their exposure to these different ethnic groups on the plantations and in the cities strongly influenced the shape of their lives in the islands.
5. Acculturation refers to the "adaptation of a group to American middle-class norms" while keeping ethnic traits (Eileen H. Tamura, *Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity* [Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994], p. 52). However, in explaining the experience of early twentieth century America, assimilation was used more than acculturation (Tamura, *Americanization*, p. 49).
6. Assimilation has been used interchangeably with Americanization to imply that immigrants would adopt dominant Caucasian traits and eliminate all of their native culture (Tamura, *Americanization*, p. 49).
7. "Americanization entails the complete adoption of American institutions and the elimination of all aspects of their native culture" (Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1964], pp. 100–101).
8. Cultural pluralism argued that aspects of the cultures of immigrants would persist through the immigrants' integration into American society (Gordon, *Assimilation*, pp. 85–86).
9. Perhaps just as it had when it entered Japan in the first place (i.e.: strong patronage, ability to adapt to lifestyle of practitioners, etc.)?
10. Harry H. L. Kitano, *Generations and Identity: The Japanese American* (Massachusetts: Gin Press, 1993), p. 105.
11. Hideo Kishimoto, ed., *Japanese Religion in the Meiji Era* (Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko), pp. 4–6.

12. Hirochika Nakamaki, "Religious Civilization," in Tadao Umesao, Helen Hardacre, and Hirochika Nakamaki, ed., *Japanese Civilization in the Modern World*, v. 6 (Osaka: Museum of Ethnology, 1990), p. 121.
13. Brian Bocking, "Fundamental Rites? Religion, State, Education, and the Invention of Sacred Heritage in Post-Christian Britain and Pre-War Japan" *Religion* 25 (1995): p. 246, 56n.
14. Hunter, *Buddhism in Hawaii*, p. 103, n.
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28. James H. Okahata, *A History of Japanese in Hawaii* (Honolulu: The United Japanese Society of Hawaii), p. 228.
29. *Glimpses of Japanese in Hawaii (Including What They Eat and What They Wear)*, (Honolulu: The Nippu Jiji, 1928), p. 6.
30. Okahata, *A History of Japanese in Hawaii*, pp. 228–229.
31. Yamamoto, *Origin of Buddhism*, p. 2.

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34. Okahata, *A History of Japanese in Hawaii*, pp. 228–229.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
36. Five of the main forms of Mahayana Buddhism in Japan (Shinshū, Jōdo, Soto Zen, Nichiren, and Shingon) came to Hawaii between 1894 and 1918. When they came, Buddhist temples made their way next to Chinese temples, Hawaiian *heiaus*, and Christian churches.
37. Their beliefs proved true when Shinshū priests were essential in helping end plantation labor strikes before they started.
38. Okahata, *A History of the Japanese in Hawaii*, pp. 229–230.
39. Waiialua Hongwanji Mission, *75th Anniversary*, p. 31.
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41. Haleiwa Jōdo Mission and Haleiwa Taisho Gakko, *50th Anniversary Celebration: November 1, 1964* (Hawaii: n. p., 1964), p. 8.
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43. Albert W. Palmer, *The Human Side of Hawaii* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1924), p. 104.
44. Hoshino, *Some Characteristics*, p. 7.
45. Kotani, *The Japanese in Hawaii*, p. 59.
46. Many of the “traditional” services provided by Shintō priests such as weddings and coming-of-age ceremonies were not originally performed by priests. They were either business propositions by two families or informal family celebrations. It is only after Meiji begins that priests assumed these duties (Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989], pp. 110–111).
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48. Margaret Miki, “Mother and her Temple,” *Social Process in Hawaii* 12(1948): pp. 21–22.
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62. Bernard L. Hormann, "The Revival of Buddhism in Hawaii," *What People are Saying and Doing*. Report No. 12. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, December 1, 1947), p. 4.
63. Katsumi Onishi, "'Bon' and 'Bon-Odori'," *Social Process in Hawaii* 3(1937): 49–53.
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65. Ladenson, *The Japanese in Hawaii*, p. 191.

# Complex Loyalties: Issei Buddhist Ministers during the Wartime Incarceration<sup>1</sup>

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December 7, 1941: A Jōdō-e Ceremony to Remember

The Southern California Coastal Region's Young Buddhist Association had planned a Jōdō-e ceremony, so I drove thirty miles to in Guadalupe. When I got there, Rev. Todoroki of the San Luis Obispo Buddhist Temple said to me, "This will really be a Jōdō-e ceremony to remember." Unsure what he meant, I replied, "Why? What's going on?" "War has begun!" he said, "I just heard on the radio that Japan has attacked Hawaii." [...] I thought the planes must surely have been German, but then I heard a radio broadcast from Japan that began with the harsh words "As the Pacific is now at war,...." With its military marching music in the background, that broadcast left no doubt that war had indeed begun.

There we were, 5,000 miles from our country, living in America at a time when we would be seen as enemy aliens. So at that memorable Young Buddhist Association Jōdō-e ceremony that evening, I said, "When we Buddhists look west, we ordinarily think about returning home to Japan. But now, we must look even further west, to the Pure Land, and be prepared to return there instead. With a mind as firm as the Diamond Seat upon which the Buddha is seated, let us live each day with this immovable Diamond Mind."

Despite this declaration, my own mind thoughts were troubled as I returned home along the mountain roads that night. Although while in Guadalupe I had called home ordering them to destroy the documents, I was worried that the American authorities had gotten there before me. I was anxious that anything that might cause trouble for my fellow Japanese in America be destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

The above is a diary entry by Rev. Daishō Tana. Tana was a Nishi Honganji minister in California whose immediate reaction to Pearl Harbor gives us a sense of his disbelief about the attack, his resignation to his

situation as an enemy alien, his faith in Pure Land Buddhism in the face of possible death, and his concern about certain documents at his Buddhist temple that might have been construed as anti-American. Although immigrant Japanese Buddhists and their American children had assimilated considerably by 1941, Rev. Tana recognized that however Americanized the Japanese had become, the perception of the Japanese community and their Buddhist heritage held by the United States government and the public-at-large was tainted with suspicion and fear.

Rev. Tana's instincts were correct. Even before Pearl Harbor, the FBI, ONI (Office of Naval Intelligence), and Canadian Intelligence had been investigating Buddhists in Hawaii, California, and Canada. By means of surveillance teams assigned to temples including the Shingon sect Los Angeles Kōyasan Temple and intelligence reports filed on suspect Buddhist priests, the names of Buddhist priests were compiled in what later became known as the "ABC" list, a list of those to be arrested if war was declared. At least three years prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, intelligence units had commissioned studies on the "Americanization" and "potential loyalty" of Buddhists versus Christians in the Nikkei community. The studies had concluded that Buddhists were more likely than their Christian counterparts to identify with Japan and less able to properly "Americanize." One such report by the Counter Subversion Section of the ONI (which shared information with the FBI and Army Intelligence), declassified at my request from the National Archives, states:

Affiliated with Buddhist and Shinto temples are Japanese Language Schools, welfare societies, young people's Buddhist societies, and Buddhist women's associations. They provide excellent resources for intelligence operations, have proved to be very receptive to Japanese propaganda, and in many cases have contributed considerable sums to the Japanese war effort. Japanese Christian Churches are much less closely affiliated with the Japanese Government, and there is considerable evidence to indicate that their major concern outside of religious matters centers on improving Japanese-American relations and the restoration of peace in Eastern Asia. At the same time, it is true that some individuals and groups among Japanese Christians are working against the interests of this country.<sup>3</sup>

Here, while particular Christian persons or churches were suspect in the minds of the U.S. government, Buddhists and "Shintoists" were suspect as a category. Indeed, under Hoover's FBI, the final ABC list categorized Buddhist priests along with Shintō priests, unlike their Christian counterparts, as "known dangerous Group A suspects," a group which

also included members of the Japanese consulate, Japanese language instructors, fishermen, and martial arts teachers—in other words, those whose arrest should be of immediate priority in the event of war.

While it would have been reasonable for intelligence agencies to keep their eyes on a particular person or a specific temple suspected of subversive activity, the wholesale categorization of all Buddhists as inherently suspect reflected the government's fear of social elements that seemed foreign and un-American. Indeed, the authorities' readiness to lump whole groups of people together, rather investigating individual suspects on a case-by-case basis (as done with the German- and Italian-American community), reflected the addition of racial discrimination to religious discrimination as all persons of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast of the United States and Canada were incarcerated during the war.

The wartime incarceration of nearly 120,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans has been explored by many scholars from legal, political, social, economic, and literary viewpoints, but research on the religious life of those incarcerated has received relatively little attention.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the experiences of Issei Buddhists (both ministers and regular temple members) during the war have undergone little scholarly investigation. This essay attempts to focus on the complex feelings of the Issei Buddhists, whose wartime experiences and loyalties were somewhat different from those of their Nisei American children.<sup>5</sup> I draw primarily from previously unexamined Japanese-language letters, diary entries, and sermons that I have translated. As this issue of *Pacific World* is dedicated to the late Professor Masatoshi Nagatomi, I have also included several letters and sermons composed by his father, Rev. Shinjō Nagatomi, the well-known Jōdo Shinshū minister who served the Buddhist population in Manzanar, California, one of the ten Wartime Relocation Administration (WRA) camp.

#### December 8, 1941: The First Arrests

At 7 a.m., I received a telephone call informing me that Mr. "T," who had ridden back [from Guadalupe], had been arrested by the FBI immediately upon his return home. As I was still new to this post, I hadn't made a thorough account of all the documents. But I thought that I would most immediately need to deal with all documents related to the Japanese embassy, the Japanese Association, and the Women's Association. I put aside the Emperor's photo as my personal property and, aware that I would assume full responsibility for any consequences, I started burning everything. That's when a call came from Mr. "I," warning me to get rid of all

the receipts from our donations to the Japanese military. I told him I was dealing with other materials at that moment. [...]

After this, all the children began to arrive at the temple's Japanese-language school, just as usual. I thought that the continuation of the Japanese-language school would be misunderstood by the American officials. So, after telling some folk tales to the first and second year students, we went to the Buddha hall to hold the Jōdō-e ceremony and a school closing ceremony. I told the students to be good Americans, as the children of Japanese parents, and to keep up their regular attendance at the white people's school.<sup>6</sup>

Rev. Tana's next diary entry further illustrates the anxiety among Buddhist priests that, with the outbreak of war, Buddhist temples would be deemed subversive by the U.S. government because of their association with Japanese culture, Japanese schooling, and the Japanese military campaign in China. At the same time, his advice to the children to "be good Americans as the children of Japanese parents" reflects the ambiguous situation of the Issei, who wanted to educate their children about Japan, but who also knew that their American children held the key to the entire community's future in the United States. It was with these complex loyalties that the Issei faced this critical moment: on the one hand was their Japanese heritage and on the other were their Japanese-American children and the adopted homeland where many Japanese would live out their days. (We should recall that under racially biased laws, the Issei, unlike European immigrants, could not acquire American citizenship.) Their loyalties would be severely tested on all sides, both within the Japanese-American community (for example, by Japanese-American Christians encouraging Buddhists to convert to Christianity to display loyalty to America) and outside it by the U.S. government (the most well-known example being the "Loyalty Questionnaire," which deeply divided individual families and the entire community).

The government's fear of a Japanese "fifth column" that could emerge from a strongly "disloyal" Buddhist community often approached the irrational. A diary of another Nishi Honganji priest, Rev. Bunyū Fujimura, described the events of December 8, 1941:

The next day, the 8th, the sun shone through the clouds. Early that morning, the Salinas Chief of Police came and ordered me to take down our temple gong. He said that the people of Salinas were frightened that if the Japanese Imperial Navy sailed into Monterey Bay, our gong could be used to signal them. He said if we did not take our gong down, he would burn the tower containing it.

The sound of our temple gong could hardly be heard upwind in the city, and only a few miles downwind. How ridiculous to



even think that its sound could be heard in Monterey, 19 miles away. And how much more ridiculous to think that sounding it would be any help to an invading army. But this is an indication of the hysteria among some people in Salinas about the Japanese Imperial Navy.

I was not sure how to comply with the Police Chief's order, because most Japanese were so frightened they did not dare step outside their homes. Fortunately, the Osugi Garage was located just in front of our temple. I asked Mr. Osugi if he would bring a chain hoist used to raise cars. With the help of Mr. Kihei Yamashita, a member of our temple, I cut a hole in the platform of the tower, and used the hoist to lower the gong to the ground.<sup>7</sup>

While there was no doubt that loyalty to Japan and pro-Japanese military sentiments were common among many Issei, who felt a sense of pride that their country was rising as an Asian power while they faced harsh racial discrimination in their adopted homeland, most Issei simultaneously felt a strong kinship and sympathy with America, especially after the Pearl Harbor attack. Attempts by Buddhist leaders to demonstrate loyalty to America (for example by denouncing the Japanese military, promoting U.S. war bonds, or encouraging blood donations to the Red Cross) nevertheless ran up against wartime hysteria as exemplified by the Salinas police department's demand to dismantle the temple bell.<sup>8</sup> The identification of Buddhism as the "religion of the enemy" was further strengthened in the public imagination by articles including one entitled, "U.S. Uproots Jap Aliens" in the March 9, 1942, issue of *Life Magazine*, which was accompanied by a photo of the Salinas Buddhist Temple's bell platform minus the bell.<sup>9</sup> What would today be called "hate crimes" were also directed against Buddhists, such as an incident in which local white boys took their shotguns to the Fresno Buddhist Temple and used the front entrance of the building for target practice. Their potshots were particularly aimed at the ancient Buddhist symbol called the *manji*, which represented an aerial view of a *stūpa* and which adorns many Buddhist temples around the world. An ancient Indian symbol, the *manji* coincidentally—and unfortunately—resembles a German Nazi swastika (though reversed, and predating the swastika by thousands of years). But the weeks and months in the wake of Pearl Harbor were no time for the Issei to try to educate their non-Buddhist neighbors about the difference between a *manji* and a swastika. Trying to convince their neighbors of their loyalty to the United States would only prove fruitless for Buddhists at a time when many Americans, including the U.S. government, viewed their faith as inherently suspicious and foreign. To America they were still Japanese, and so the enemy.

## Incarceration

Within days or weeks of Pearl Harbor, Buddhist priests of all sects were rounded up by the FBI in Hawaii, the United States mainland, and Canada. Although the larger Japanese and Japanese-American population in Hawaii did not experience incarceration in camps, as was the fate of those who happened to live to on the West Coast of the United States and Canada, nearly every Buddhist priest and all Shintō priests on the Hawaiian islands were quickly apprehended. A Jōdo sect priest from Hawaii, Rev. Kyokujō Kubokawa, described his experience in a letter to his headquarters in Japan:

[...] Early morning last December 7th, along with priests from various Buddhist sects [in Hawaii], I attended a Jōdō-e Ceremony at the Nishi Honganji Betsuin hosted by the various sects' Young Buddhist Associations. I returned at around 8 a.m. Just after 9 a.m., the Sunday School children had arrived as usual and it was then that we heard that war had begun. All kinds of rumors were circulating, but we didn't know if any of them were true or not. At around 4 p.m., the military police came to interview me and I realized for the first time the gravity of the situation. [...]

From then and until mid-February, all Honolulu-based Shintō, Buddhist, and Christian ministers, as well as people associated with the Japanese language schools and other Japanese associations, have been living in tents on a small island [Sand Island].

It was as if I was having an experience just like Hōnen Shōnin's when he was exiled. On January 15th, we held a Memorial Service for our sect founder, Hōnen Shōnin, despite not having a scroll with the sacred words [Namu Amida Butsu]. Being locked up in a remote place where we couldn't prepare any incense, flowers, or candles, we gathered all [Jōdo sect] members together and gave gratitude to the teaching simply by placing our palms together and reciting Buddhist scriptures.

The Jōdo Mission of Hawaii Betsuin in Honolulu was occupied by the U.S. Army. [...] The priest who was looking after the temple in our absence, Rev. Kōshin Yamane, was investigated and so Mrs. Nago, the wife of Rev. Masaki Nago, and who was not under investigation, took care of the temple. Although she was not allowed to live there, we got a letter from her that she received permission to clean the Buddha altar and conduct ceremonies there once in a while.

There are a total of "XX" Jōdo Mission priests from the various islands of Hawaii who have already been captured and sent to the U.S. mainland. The priests have been dispersed to various internment camps, but I do not know who and where they have all been

taken. I don't know the whereabouts of the five [Hawaiian] priests nor of Revs. Nozaki and Mukuhon of Los Angeles.  
[...]

Because there is a quota on the number of sheets of paper that we can use, let me end here. Both my body and mind are sound, so please do not worry.

May 13, 1942, Superintendent [of the Hawaii Jōdo Mission],  
Rev. Kyokujō Kubokawa<sup>10</sup>

Buddhist priests like Rev. Kubokawa were initially rounded up and held in local police custody or at secured army locations. While a few priests from Hawaii remained on the islands for the duration of the war (for example at the Honoliuli Camp), most were sent to internment camps on the mainland to join mainland-based priests. In Canada, Buddhist priests were treated in a similar fashion as the general Japanese-Canadian population, which meant some of the younger priests were sent to forced labor camps and others to so-called "ghost towns" in isolated mountainous settlements.

Rev. Kubokawa's censored letter reveals his lack of knowledge of the whereabouts of other Buddhist priests. It was a deliberate tactic of the FBI and Department of Justice (DOJ) to split up internees, move them from camp to camp, and deny them information about what was going on; the censored "XX" in the letter demonstrates that the United States military police determined that the number of priests should not be made public for national security reasons. Below, I summarize basic data that I have gleaned from temple histories, diaries, and oral histories as to the number of temples and shrines in 1941; the sectarian affiliation of Buddhist priests at that time; and where those priests were sent during the war:<sup>11</sup>

#### Temples and Shrines in 1941

##### BY STATE / AREA

- (1) California 133
- (2) Hawaii 114
- (3) Canada 20
- (4) Oregon 9
- (5) Washington 7
- (6) Colorado 4
- (7) Utah 3
- (8) Arizona 2
- (9) New York 1

##### BY SECT

- (1) Nishi Honganji 134
- (2) Shintō shrines 48
- (3) Shingon 40
- (4) Jōdo 19
- (5) Sōtō Zen 16
- (6) Higashi Honganji 11
- (7) Konkōkyō 10
- (8) Tenrikyō 6
- (9) Nichiren 6
- (10) Independent 1
- (11) Kurozumikyō 1

(Total 292 Temples/Shrines)

## Issei Priests (Total = 234 Priests)

Nishi total (100): Abe; Akahoshi; Abiko; Aoki; Asaka; Aso; Fujii; Fujikado; Fujimura; Fujinaga; Fujitani; Hayashima; Hida; Hino; Hirabayashi; Hirahara; Hirayama; Hōjō; Ichikawa; Ikeda; Ikuta; Itahara; Iwanaga; Iwao; Kai; Kanda; Kashima; Kashiwa; Katatsu; Kawamura; Kawasaki; G. Kimura; Kō; Kōno; Kosaka; Kuchiha; Kuwatsuki; Kyogoku; Maebara; Masunaga; Masuoka; Masuyama; Matsubayashi; R. Matsuda; T. Matsuda; Matsukage; T. Matsumoto; I. Matsuura; Matsubayashi; Mayeda; Miura; E. Miyake; Miyazaki; Mizutani; Mori; Motoyoshi; Murakami; K. Nagatani; S. Nagatani; Nagatomi; Nagoya; Nakafuji; Nagatani; Naitō, Nishie, G. Nishii; K. Nishii; Nishinaga; S. Odate; Okayama; Okita; Ōno; Onoyama; Ūchi; Sakow; Sanada; Sasaki; Seki; Shibata; Shigefuji; H. Shimakawa; T. Shimakawa; Shirasu; Sugimoto; Tachibana; Tada; Takezono; Tamai; Tamamaha; Tana; Tatsuguchi; Terakawa; Terao; Todoroki; Tsuruyama; Umehara; Unno; Yamamoto; Yasumitsu; Yonemura

Sōtō Zen total (28): Fujisawa; Ikeda; Itō; Kokuzō; Komagata; Matsuoka; G. Matsuura; Morita; Muroga; Nakayama; Nishizawa; Ochi; Ōkawa; Osada; Ozawa; Shida; Suzuki; R. Tachibana; R. Takahashi; Tanaka; Toda; Tottori; Tsuda; Uejima; Ueoka; Yamasaki; Yamashita; Yoshizumi

Jōdo total (22): Ekūan; Fujihana; Hanada; Hayashi; Hino; Ikejiri; T. Imamura; Kaminoyama; R. Kitajima; S. Kitajima; Kobayashi; Kubokawa; Kubota; Masaki; Mamiya; Miyamoto; Mukushina; Nago; Nozaki; Ōta; Shiratori; Yamane

Shintō total (19): Akizaki; Ikigu; Ishibe; Kawasaki; Kanemori; Kimura; Kobayashi; Kudō; Matsumoto; Miyao; Sakai; K. Satō; T. Satō; Y. Satō; Shimada; Tahara; Takema; Tsuchisaki; Ueda

Konkōkyō total (14): Y. Fukuda; Gotō; Hideshima; Hirayama; Kodama; Nishida; Ōtsubo; Suzuki; Takahashi; Tatsuno; Toshitsugu; Tsuyuki; Yamada; Yasumura

Higashi total (12): Izuhara; Izumida; Kuroda; Kusuda; S. Matsumoto; Mori; Nanda; Chikau Odate; T. Tachibana; Tamayose; Tsufura; Yoshikami

Nichiren total (10): Arakawa; Iijima; Ishihara; Kobayashi; Kurahashi; Mukushima; Murakita; Oda; Okihara; Ōi

Shingon total (6): R. Fukuda; Gikan Kimura; Satodaira; Suetomi; S. Takahashi; Yasui

Tenrikyō total (4): Hashimoto; Higashida; Matsuda; Ueno

Rinzai total (1): Senzaki

Independent total (1): Hata

Unknown total (18): Ama; Fujio; Higa; Higashi; Hirohata; Hotta;  
Iwasaki; Katoda; Kawamoto; Kawatsuki; Kobara; Kōchi; T. Miyake;  
Okimoto; H. Taira; K. Taira; Takiguchi; Tsuha

Nisei and Sansei Priests (Total = 13 Priests)

Nishi total (6): Imamura; Ishiura; Kumata; Tsuji; M. Tsunoda; S.  
Tsunoda

Shintō total (3): Akizaki; Arimoto; Fujino

Shingon total (2): Matsuda; Sogabe

Sōtō Zen total (1): Ueoka

Higashi total (1): G. Kubose

What this data reveals is that in December 1941, there were nearly 300 Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines—located primarily in California (133) and Hawaii (114)—with 134, or just about half, of the temples affiliated with the Nishi Honganji Buddhist Mission of North America (BMNA, later known as Buddhist Churches of America). There were also a substantial number of Shintō shrines (48) and temples of the Shingon (40), Jōdo (19), Sōtō Zen (16), and Higashi Honganji (11) sects. More than 90% of the nearly 250 priests were Issei (234), compared with just 12 Nisei and 1 Sansei priest. The sectarian affiliation of these American-born priests was also primarily with the BMNA, but with substantial numbers of Sōtō Zen and Jōdo priests as well.

The vast majority of these priests were arrested prior to the mass incarceration of the wider Japanese-American community in the United States that began following President Roosevelt's Executive Order No. 9066 issued on February 19, 1942. This executive order led to the designation of restricted military zones on the West Coast and the subsequent removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from those areas. Those in the restricted zones had between a week and ten days to sell or store their property. They could only take what they could carry by hand to the camps, first "evacuating" to one of the fourteen "assembly centers" where the Nikkei were initially incarcerated for several months before moving on to one of the ten euphemistically-named "relocation centers" run by the Wartime Relocation Authority (WRA). Since most Buddhist priests were initially rounded up by the FBI, many of them spend their initial war years apart from the larger community in the WRA camps.

Incarceration in Camps (in Descending Order of the  
Number of Buddhist Priests)

MORE THAN 20 PRIESTS

- (1) DOJ Santa Fe: 87
- (2) WRA Tule Lake: 34
- (3) Army Lordsburg: 26

MORE THAN 10 PRIESTS

- (4) Army Sand Island: 17
- (5) WRA Poston: 17
- (6) WRA Gila River: 16
- (7) DOJ Crystal City: 14
- (8) WRA Jerome: 13
- (9) WRA Heart Mountain: 13
- (10) Army Fort Missoula: 11

MORE THAN 5 PRIESTS

- (11) WRA Topaz: 9
- (12) WRA Minidoka: 8
- (13) WRA Rohwer: 7
- (14) Army Camp Livingstone: 6

3–5 PRIESTS

- (15) WRA Manzanar: 5
- (16) Army Bismark: 5
- (17) Army Camp McCoy: 5
- (18) Army Fort Sill: 5
- (19) Assembly Santa Anita: 5
- (20) Army Camp Forest: 4
- (21) Assembly Pomona: 4
- (22) Assembly Portland: 4
- (23) Assembly Fresno: 3
- (24) Assembly Stockton: 3
- (25) Assembly Turlock: 3
- (26) Army Volcano Army Barracks: 3
- (27) Canada Ghost Town Sandon: 3

2 PRIESTS

- (28) WRA Granada
- (29) Assembly Marysville
- (30) Assembly Sacramento

- (31) Assembly Tanforan
- (32) Army Honouliuli
- (33) Army Kooskia

#### 1 PRIEST

- (34) Canada Army Angler
- (35) Canada Ghost Town Bayfarm/Slocan
- (36) Canada Ghost Town Coaldale
- (37) Canada Ghost Town Lemon Creek
- (38) Canada Ghost Town New Denver
- (39) Canada Ghost Town Tashme
- (40) Canada Road Camp
- (41) Army Fort Sam Houston
- (42) Assembly Merced
- (43) Assembly Puyallup
- (44) Assembly Salinas
- (45) Assembly Tulare
- (46) Ellis Island
- (47) George Meade (MD)

#### NO PRIESTS

- (48) Canada Ghost Town Greenwood
- (49) Canada Ghost Town Kaslo
- (50) Army Hot Springs
- (51) Army San Antonio
- (52) Army Seagoville
- (53) Assembly Mayer
- (54) Assembly Pinedale

The overwhelming majority (81 priests) of Issei Buddhist priests were imprisoned in the DOJ-run Detention Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico for at least part of the war. Living in the various DOJ, INS, or Army-run camps with Japanese and German prisoners of war, the Buddhist priests were treated as “enemy aliens.” After sustained interrogation, they were then divided into two groups. Those who were deemed safe enough were allowed to join the general population in the WRA-run camps or otherwise join their family in the DOJ’s “family camp” at Crystal City, Texas. The others, deemed dangerous, remained in the DOJ and Army camps, or were repatriated to Japan on one of the prisoner-of-war exchange ships, or were sent in 1943 to the WRA “segregation camp” at Tule Lake (34 priests), where those considered pro-Japan or who had expressed an intention to return to Japan were incarcerated.

## Buddhist Teaching and Practice in the Camps

Whether it was in an Assembly Center at a former racetrack such as Tanforan, a WRA camp in the desert such as in Poston, Arizona, or an Army or DOJ camp, Buddhists quickly turned to their faith for sustenance in a difficult time. Buddhists had to be ingenious to create or re-create Buddhist life within this new environment.

A passage from Rev. Bunyū Fujimura's recollections about his days in the Bismark camp, North Dakota, reveals this resourceful nature when the Buddha's birthday, the first major Buddhist holiday since internment began, occurred in April 1942:

April 8th is the day on which the Buddha was born. In the U.S., we call this day Hanamatsuri, Flower Festival. The other Buddhist ministers and I decided to make the most of our circumstances and to celebrate this sacred day for us Buddhists. We petitioned the camp commander for permission to celebrate Hanamatsuri, and surprisingly, were allowed to do so. Everyone's face seemed to brighten at this news. Four Buddhist ministers were incarcerated at Bismark: Revs. Hoshin Fujikado, Ryūei Masuoka, Issei Matsuura, and myself. We did not, of course, have a single religious implement to use for Buddhist services. We did not have a tanjobutsu [baby Buddha statue], butsu-gu [Buddhist ritual implements], flowers, incense, or any implements used in the Hanamatsuri celebration.

Fortunately, we were with many people who were very clever with their hands. Arthur Yamabe 'borrowed' a carrot from the kitchen and carved a splendid image of the Buddha. Others made imitation flowers and all the other things used in our Hanamatsuri service, from the tissue used to wrap oranges and other fruit, and anything else they could get their hands on. With the carrot image of the Buddha in the center, we conducted the most impressive and moving Hanamatsuri service that I have ever participated in. The intense cold and the anxiety of being a prisoner of war was temporarily forgotten, and our minds and hearts were set at ease by a ritual that transcended time and space. I still celebrate Hanamatsuri every year, but that Hanamatsuri Service in Bismark is one that stands out in my memory.<sup>12</sup>

The Bismark "carrot Buddha" had counterparts in other camps: homemade Buddha statues crafted from desert wood, family Buddhist altars (*butsudan*) made from spare crate wood, and rosaries (*ojuzu*) strung together from dried peach pits that a Sōtō Zen priest collected over several months. It was here within these camps, surrounded by barbed wire and



armed guards, that Buddhist priests did their best to bring order to chaos, to create meaning in a seemingly senseless situation, and “to make the most of our circumstance” as Rev. Fujimura suggested. In the large WRA camps, Buddhist life revolved around barrack “churches” (some in mess halls or recreation buildings) that held religious services and offered religious education, particularly on Sundays.

Especially for the Issei, the Buddhist barrack church became a meaningful gathering place not only for the inspirational aspects of religious practice, but also because it was a place where their Japanese heritage was affirmed. For some Issei Buddhists, whose association with the Buddhist temple had been casual on the outside, camp became a place where such ties were strengthened, despite pressure from all sides to convert to Christianity as a means of demonstrating loyalty to America. A priest of the Kōyasan Shingon Buddhist mission, Rev. Ryōshō Sogabe, wrote from the Heart Mountain camp, Wyoming to fellow Shingon followers:

More than 100,000 fellow countrymen are now inevitably suffering from the evils of war and are compelled to lead a life which we had never imagined was possible. However, when we stop to think we will realize that this may be the real way of life. If we are to take into consideration the principle of uncertainty and transmigration of life and to repent for our sins and reflect on ourselves anew, we will see that now is the best moment to challenge ourselves.<sup>13</sup>

This optimistic approach to incarceration, as an ideal time to reflect on Buddhist teachings on the nature of life, was a consistent theme in many Issei Buddhist sermons.

In contrast to the long days of hard labor that many Issei fishermen and farmers had endured on the outside, having plenty of time and nothing to do contributed to high attendance at the barrack churches. But at the same time, it also reflected a loss of Issei status and leadership in the community. Leadership was increasingly assumed by English-speaking Nisei because the camp authorities preferred to deal with them. Depression was especially common among Issei men who lost their farms and businesses in the evacuation. It was to these Issei that the Nishi Honganji minister, Rev. Shinjō Nagatomi, directed his sermons, including this one from a Sunday service at the Manzanar Buddhist Church:

In one of the barracks, the residents thought it might be a good idea to pound rice cakes (*mochi*) for the New Year. This is a thought that surfaces which in Buddhist terminology we call “Vow” (*Gan*). However, for a thought to be actualized, action is necessary. This second condition is, in Buddhist terminology, called “Action” (*Gyō*). It is when thought and action come together that for the first

time, something can be accomplished.... For example, if one merely thinks, "I'd like some money," or "I want some food," while lying around in bed, money won't accumulate nor will one's stomach fill up. If you want money, you need to work. If you want some food, you need to take action and walk over to the mess hall. Only with action can one receive the \$16 monthly wage or fill one's stomach.... The great work that is Amida Buddha's salvation of all beings in this world is also something that is actualized through the coming together of "Vow" and "Action."<sup>14</sup>

Rev. Nagatomi's sermon urged those assembled at the Manzanar Buddhist Church to make the best of the difficult circumstances in which they found themselves. Rather than just "lying around in bed," he encouraged Issei to find a routine to help them pass the day and even earn a small amount of money by working. At the time, WRA monthly wages were \$12 for unskilled labor; \$16 for skilled; \$19 for professional work.

In addition to holding regular Sunday services and Dharma sermons, Buddhist priests focused on organizing the community around annual services such as Hanamatsuri (the Buddha's birthday) and the Obon (the summer ancestral memorial festival) with Bon Odori dancing. These traditional Japanese Buddhist celebrations were occasions for internees to celebrate not only their Buddhist heritage but their Japanese ethnic heritage as well. In respect to the observance of traditional Japanese Buddhist services, the tradition served as a source of moral and cultural resistance to the simplistic Americanization process encouraged by the WRA. The government's view of being American meant learning more English, converting to Christianity and joining organizations like the YMCA/YWCA, and emphasizing "American sports" like baseball and basketball over traditional "Japanese sports" like *sumō* and *jūdō*.

In addition to hosting community events, another major function of the barrack churches was in officiating life-cycle rituals, such as weddings and funerals, as the priests tried to give closure to the deaths and blessings to the new arrivals for families. Just as on the outside, funerals and memorial services in particular were occasions that brought Buddhist families together to remember their Japanese ancestral heritage. Funerals were common in camps such as Manzanar, especially in the first year among the very young and the very old (those most vulnerable to the harsh new conditions which were endured without adequate health care). Rev. Nagatomi oversaw most of these funerals and as a way of commemorating the lives of the departed, a non-sectarian campaign (which included Christians) was undertaken at Manzanar to build a memorial (an "Ireitō") by the 1943 Obon season. Fundraising for the monument was successful (at ten cents per family), and a white obelisk was constructed by Ryōzō Kado from concrete and placed in the Manzanar cemetery. The obelisk was inscribed by Rev.

Nagatomi with the three characters, "I-Rei-Tō" (A Monument for the Spirits of the Deceased). By the summer of 1943, this monument stood in memory of both ancestors and those who died in camp.<sup>15</sup> In these ways, Buddhist priests provided not only a spiritual refuge for internees during these hard years, but also the social function of maintaining family and communal cohesion through ancestral, life-cycle, and traditional Japanese rituals.

In Rev. Tana's description of one Obon service held in the Army Lordsburg Detention Camp, we can again note how Buddhism as a vehicle for Japanese heritage produced complex loyalties among some Buddhist priests:

July 12, 1942: Bon Ceremony in the Desert

Not knowing how long the Japanese soldiers [captured after their boat was sunk off the coast of Alaska] interned here would remain, it was decided that we would hold this year's Bon ceremony [a little early] on the 12th. That a Bon ceremony (the annual summer ceremony for the ancestors) is being held here in the middle of [this American] desert with twenty-nine Buddhist priests and several hundred Japanese Buddhist laymen is surely a historical first. The saying *bukkyō tōzen* (the eastward transmission of Buddhism) has never seemed as apt as it does today.

This morning, I wrote out the words to the Buddhist hymn for later. The *sumi* ink that Mr. Oda Masami had sent came in handy. After setting up the Buddhist altar, we all recited the *Heart Sūtra* and the *Jūnirai*. Mr. Tega Yoshio served as the representative for the nine Japanese Navy prisoners of war and offered incense to the Buddha. That a Japanese military man could offer incense at our Bon ceremony in America was a true honor.

What must have gone through the mind of this navy man, Tega, who was offering incense at the first Bon ceremony (*Nii-Bon*) for a dozen or so of his fallen comrades, as well as for the spirits of all the imperial soldiers who had died to protect their country during the past five years of war? Observing Mr. Tega praying at the Buddha altar brought tears to my eyes. I will never forget this Urabon ceremony, and the fact that I was able to help in some small way will always be with me.

The Buddha altar was adorned simply with sagebrush and some artificial flowers [made from paper] donated by someone in a nearby barrack. Though it wasn't much, a new altarpiece was made just for the event. No one showed off and everyone sang in a selfless spirit accompanied the Buddhist hymns. This Bon ceremony in the desert gave me a glimpse of how Buddhism might shine at the end of the war.<sup>16</sup>

The importance in Buddhist practice of honoring the dead, especially within the first year of their death at the "Nii-Bon," can be seen here in Rev. Tana's diary entry. His emphasis on the participation of fellow prisoners who were imperial Japanese soldiers also highlights the high regard in which many Issei held the Japanese cause. The complex functions of loyalties toward Japan and America made clear by the fact that some of the very same priests who exhibited pro-Japanese tendencies also encouraged young Nisei to volunteer for the 100th Battalion / 442nd Regimental Combat Unit, the all-Nisei American unit in the European theater that earned the distinction of being the most highly decorated unit for its bravery in battle. For many Nisei joining the 100th/442nd or the MIS (the Military Intelligence Service operating in the Pacific theater), volunteering was understood as a chance to prove their loyalty to America and their "Americanness." In contrast, for some Issei, the fact that their children were volunteering for U.S. military service was an expression of what they understood to be the traditional Japanese sentiments of a samurai warrior's courage and loyalty in the face of adversity.

When news of the combat deaths of 442nd unit member Sgt. Kiyoshi Nakasaki and Pfc. Sadao Munemori reached their Buddhist parents imprisoned in Manzanar, it was Rev. Nagatomi who consoled the grieving parents and who later delivered the main address at the two soldiers' memorial service at the Manzanar Community Auditorium. He articulated conflicting feelings of loyalty and identity in his address. The translation here by Manzanar staff member Margaret D'Ille served as the official English version of the Japanese speech.

We are brought forth into this world as mankind and during this life it is better for us to sacrifice our living in attempt to accomplish a duty rather than to remain idle thru the countless years. If this sacrifice should occur at an early age in one's life and in the meanwhile it is considered a valuable accomplishment, death would not have been in vain. Death in this case would be like the beautiful and precious emeralds and diamonds that were broken into a thousand pieces. To those who are descendents of the Japanese race, but by birth citizens of any other nation, this duty of sacrifice has long been a traditional heritage and teachings of the Japanese people. [...] Today, we are gathered here at this Memorial Service being held in the honor of Sgt. Kiyoshi Nakasaki and PFC. Sadao Munemori under the sponsorship of the Manzanar USO and the residents of Manzanar. These two honored heroes of 25 and 22 years of age died in action on the battlefield of Italy on April 5, 1943. Although the lives of Sgt. Nakasaki and PFC. Munemori were brief (young and in the prime of their life) their struggles and sacrifices were dedicated to the teachings and traditions of the

Japanese people. We are gathered here without distinction of an Issei or a Nisei, but in behalf of the 110,000 Japanese people. [...]

We pray and trust that this small measure of deed contributed by the Nisei Servicemen to assist the American people in understanding and accepting our SPIRIT AND TRUTH for which WE stand. It is like one precious wheat seed sown to multiply itself into thousands and millions of good seeds. May this be the foundation for our future generation so that their children and their children may live in the United States of America having all the privileges and freedom of the democratic government—of the people, by the people, for the people—for which the brave Nisei soldiers have so unselfishly contributed their lives. [...]

To you, the family members and relatives of the deceased: Since the first day of the call for service of your sons and brothers I am sure you must have prepared yourself for this ill tiding news of your loved ones. With the official notices of their death, along with their enlarged pictures which enshrine at the altar taken while they were in active duty, you cannot help but recall the many childhood passing years of your beloved sons and the numerous memories left behind by them for you to cherish. It is repeatedly said that the last words of a dying soldier is "Dear Mother," which must have been the very same words your sons may have cried. However, when you picture that moment, it must be harder for the Mothers to bear those words and scene than for the last moments of the soldier. Your sons' life was a short one, but their holy and symbolic spirit of sacrifice now guide and help to preserve the nation's freedom and justice. When the roar of guns cease and the fighting men come home once again, with your strong and determined belief let us continue to keep alive their dedication to the cause: "May the People of the world enjoy everlasting freedom and peace."<sup>17</sup>

Rev. Nagatomi's encouragement to those serving in the U.S. armed forces was counterbalanced with a gentle reminder to the Nisei not to forget their Japanese roots. Misue Nakamori Tamura remembers the words in a different sermon delivered by Rev. Nagatomi: "Nani shite mo/Doko itte mo/Nani atte mo/Kaeru no ko wa kaeru," or "Whatever you do/Wherever you go/Whatever happens to you/Remember that a child of a frog is a frog."<sup>18</sup> While clearly encouraging the youth to explore the wider world in whatever way they desired, he hoped that they would remember that, just as a child of a frog was still a frog, the child of a Japanese person was still Japanese or—as he put it in his memorial service address—the children are "descendents of the Japanese race, but by birth citizens of any other nation." Yet ultimately, for Rev. Nagatomi, the future of the Manzanar

Japanese lay in the United States, a future for which the Buddhist soldiers had sacrificed their lives.

When the war ended, many priests and their temple members returned home to the West Coast only to discover that many of their temples had been broken into or vandalized. Despite these immediate difficulties, Buddhist priests, younger Nisei, and their Caucasian friends helped to set up Buddhist temples as temporary hostels for the thousands of Japanese Americans returning to the West Coast without work or housing. The wartime experience was a serious blow to Japanese-American Buddhist temples as well as to the larger Japanese-American community. However, the lessons of the camps—endurance through hardship, creativity in scarcity, and courage in face of danger—served the community well in the post-war period.

## NOTES

1. I would like to acknowledge the generous funding from the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program for the research on this project. Many thanks to the Nagatomi family for sharing manuscripts belonging to the late Rev. Shinjō Nagatomi and to Eiko Masuyama for sharing information from her “Memories: The Buddhist Church Experience in Camp” project. My appreciation also goes to Victoria James, Anna Ress Campbell, and Michelle Chihara for help editing this article.
2. Daishō Tana, *Santa Fe, Lordsburg yokuryūjo nikki, Vol. 1* (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1976), pp. 1–2. The translation is mine.
3. Office of Naval Intelligence, Navy Department. Report to all Navy Districts, FBI, State Dept.: “Japanese Intelligence and Propaganda in the United States During 1941,” Dec. 4, 1941, pp. 23–24 (National Archives, A8-5).
4. The only studies by other scholars are: Susan Davis, “Mountain of Compassion: Dharma in American Internment Camps,” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 2/4 (1993): pp. 46–51; Stephen Fujita and Marilyn Fernandez, “Religion and Japanese Americans’ Views of World War II Incarceration,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 5/2 (2002): pp. 113–137; Akira Ichikawa, “A Test of Religious Tolerance: Canadian Government and Jodo Shinshu Buddhism During the Pacific War,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 26/2 (1994): pp. 46–69; a section of Testuden Kashima’s *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Institution* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); Eiko Masuyama, *Memories: The Buddhist Church Experience in the Camps, 1942–1945* (Los Angeles: Nishi Honganji Betsuin, 2003); Tara Ogden, *Gambarimashō! Religion Among the Japanese in America during World War II* (M.A. Thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1995); Gary Okihiro, “Religion and Resistance in America’s Concentration Camps,” *Phylon: Review of Race and Culture* 45/3 (1984): pp. 220–233; Lester Suzuki, *Ministry in the Assembly and Relocation Centers in World War II* (Berkeley: Yardbird Publications, 1979); Kenneth Tanaka, “BCA: The Lotus that Bloomed Behind Barbed Wire,” *Turning Wheel* (Spring 1993): pp. 41–42; a section in David Yoo’s *Growing Up Nisei: Race, Generation, and Culture Among Japanese Americans of California, 1924–49* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).
5. Duncan Ryūken Williams, “Camp Dharma: Japanese-American Buddhist Identity and the Internment Experience of World War II,” In *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 191–200.

6. Daishō Tana, *Santa Fe, Lordsburg yokuryūjo nikki Vol. 1*, pp. 2–3.
7. Bunyū Fujimura, *Though I Be Crushed: The Wartime Experiences of a Buddhist Minister* (Los Angeles: The Nembutsu Press, 1995), pp. 45–46.
8. See, for example, proclamations issued by the Buddhist Mission of North America headquarters representative, Rev. Kenryū Kumata: “Register for Civilian Defense” on serving the country against Axis powers (Dec. 12, 1941; BCA Archives, Box 1B); “For Defense, Buy United States Savings Bonds and Stamps” which condemns the Pearl Harbor attack and shows solidarity with President Roosevelt (Dec. 15, 1941; BCA Archives, Box 1B); and “Your Red Cross Needs You” encouraging loyalty to the United States (Jan. 13, 1942; BCA Archives, Box 1B).
9. As cited and accompanied by a copy of the article in Bunyū Fujimura, *Though I Be Crushed*, p. 53.
10. Jōdoshū Kaigai Kaikyō no Ayumi Henshū Iinkai, ed. *Jōdoshū kaigai kaikyō no ayumi* (Tokyo: Jōdoshū kaikyō shinkō kyōkai, 1990), pp. 200–201. The translation is mine.
11. I only list the family name of the Buddhist priests here except in the cases where there is a need to distinguish repeated surnames.
12. Bunyū Fujimura, *Though I Be Crushed*, p. 64.
13. Kōno Kawashima, ed., *Kōyasan beikoku betsuin gojushūnenshi: Koyasan Buddhist Temple, 1912–1962* (Los Angeles: Kōyasan beikoku betsuin, 1974), pp. 183–84.
14. Shinjō Nagatomi, “Sunday Sermon” at Manzanar (n.d.), p. 5 (Nagatomi Family Collection). The translation is mine.
15. For more on the “Ireitō” campaign, see Eiko Masuyama, *Memories: The Buddhist Church Experience in the Camps, 1942–1945*, p. 33.
16. Daishō Tana, *Santa Fe, Lordsburg yokuryūjo nikki Vol. 1*, pp. 269–70. The translation is mine.
17. Found in Eiko Masuyama, *Memories*, pp. 75–77.
18. See Eiko Masuyama, *Memories*, p. 53. My translation differs slightly from the one found in the volume.



# Altared States: Exploring the Legacy of Japanese American *Butsudan* Practice<sup>1</sup>

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*Scene One:* On a remote Hawaiian plantation, a Japanese picture bride—young and alone—receives a precious gift from her husband: a small *obutsudan*. The wife is touched by her husband's gesture, and as a photo of her parents is carefully placed next to the modest shrine, the couple bows in appreciation.

*Scene Two:* Three sisters return to their home in Stockton, California after the war. After having been interned in Rohwer, Arkansas, they arrive to find their property looted and vandalized. Despite the obvious destruction, they find the family's *obutsudan* intact. The sisters take a moment before the altar to remember their parents and the precious bond that links them one to the other, as they gather the resolve to go forward.

*Scene Three:* A small shrine sits on top of an old dresser at the end of the narrow hallway. Although the young girl does not understand the full significance of her grandmother's *obutsudan*, she does comprehend that it is a special place where Obachan ponders Amida Buddha and brings her memories, gratitude, and hope.

THESE THREE SCENES FORM an arc of memory that spans three generations of Japanese Americans. The first two are re-creations of Issei and Nisei life taken from Kayo Hatta's 1995 film, *Picture Bride*, and Philip Kan Gotanda's play, *Sisters Matsumoto*, respectively. These artists' symbolic use of the shrine speaks of its significance not only for Issei pioneers and their Nisei progeny, but also as something that is deeply embedded in the cultural memory of Japanese Americans.

The third scene is a personal recollection. Looking back on my own experience, the lives of my Issei grandmothers present a compelling dilemma about the "spiritual center" of Japanese American life. The temple, although important,<sup>2</sup> was certainly not the primary locus from

which they drew spiritual strength. If any “place” was significant, it would have to have been my grandmothers’ *obutsudans*,<sup>3</sup> or home altars, to which they were highly committed.

The majority of first generation Japanese Americans or Issei who migrated from Japan to the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were Jōdo Shin Buddhists. As they became more settled, Jōdo Shin ministers were sent to America to attend to the religious needs of these burgeoning communities. Local associations were formed and temples eventually built.<sup>4</sup> But homage to Amida Buddha did not take place solely within the confines of the church. Outside the temple walls, the *butsudan* functioned as a small altar that provided a dedicated space for devotion within the home. These shrines were built by individuals, or for those who were able to afford it, commissioned from local carpenters or purchased from Japan.

The *butsudan* also provided a site for ancestor veneration and held the Buddhist name placards or *hōmyō* of deceased family members, as well as the family death register. Loved ones who recently passed away were memorialized with photographs placed before the shrine. *Obutsudan* practice consisted of not only *gassho* (meditation/thanksgiving/chanting), but also the offering of incense and food (rice cakes, *manju*, tangerines) to Amida Buddha and in commemoration of the ancestors.

At the family’s request, a minister would visit the household and come before the *butsudan* to perform certain rites. But the adults of the household would attend to the day-to-day rituals (maintenance of the *butsudan*, *gassho*, offering), and children would occasionally participate when they were allowed to place food before the altar. These rituals were done without much fuss and were a part of everyday life.

While *butsudan* practice was an integral feature of Issei religious life, it seems to hold increasingly less significance for subsequent generations of Japanese Americans. As Jōdo Shin Buddhists adapted their religious worldview to American standards, participation in temple-centered activities became the measure of religious devotion, and the demands of modern life chipped away the time set aside for home-based rituals. Although there have been attempts by the BCA to reinvigorate interest in *obutsudan* practice, these efforts have not been met with overwhelming success.

From where I stand now, the *obutsudan* appears as a familiar yet distant phenomenon—an object made precious because of my religious and cultural past. However, to view the *butsudan* so nostalgically precludes us from investigating the spiritual legacy of this most significant practice. The questions that drive this study are linked to discovering such a legacy: How do different generations of Japanese Americans relate to the *butsudan*? Has *butsudan* practice had any influence on the religious sensibility and spiritual outlook of Japanese Americans today? What can

we say about these practitioners' spirituality and their relationship to the institutionalized church/temple? If Sansei, Yonsei, and Gosei maintain their own altars, how do they compare with their parent's, grandparents', and great-grandparents'? In other words, how have different generations altered the practice to fit their own needs and circumstances?

Since this research represents a first step in a larger project, I decided to start local and speak with individuals who I knew had some type of shrine in their homes. At the time, I assumed that each of my subjects grew up within or had some affiliation with the Buddhist Church—usually the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA). I attempted to interview individuals who came from different age groups (Issei, Nisei, Sansei) to see how the practice had been carried on from generation to generation—what elements of the practice had changed, which ones had endured, how each of these individuals negotiated the practice as well as their affiliation with the larger social institutions of the temple and the BCA. I sought out altars that differed greatly from one another, but expected continuity in the meaning that the altar and altar practice held for these individuals. What I discovered was surprisingly rich and diverse.

## ELEMENTS AND INTERACTIONS

Before I examine particular case studies, it is first necessary to get a sense of what *butsudan* practice entails—its primary elements and interactions. Here, I will not be examining the family altar in detail, nor reviewing the symbolic meaning of its ritual adornments. Masao Kodani and Russell Hamada provide an excellent overview and useful descriptions of the family altar in their publication, *Traditions of Jodoshinshu Hongwanji-ha*.<sup>5</sup> As their presentation suggests, the *obutsudan* boasts a complex architecture that utilizes three-dimensional space to encourage spiritual insight. First of all, the central image of reverence—*myōgō*, picture or statue of Amida Buddha—finds its place on the highest tier of the shrine; in simpler versions of *butsudan*, this image still enjoys an elevated position in relation to the other ritual objects and usually in relation to the practitioner. As such, Amida Buddha calls upon the practitioner to focus and *reflect*; it “serves as a mirror to see [one’s] true self and to fully awaken one’s religious consciousness.”<sup>6</sup> Secondly, the flowers and the candle that respectively adorn each side of Buddha/*myōgō* remind the practitioner of the two states of her existence: the impermanence of this life and the elemental truth of Amida’s wisdom and compassion. Finally, there are the photos, flowers, and offerings that are placed before the *butsudan*, outside of its walls. While the adornments that reside within the altar are fairly standard, dictated by the larger institutional tradition, the ones that surround the *butsudan* itself are highly personal. As such, the shrine’s spati-

ality seems to suggest that the particular path by which the practitioner enters into a higher understanding of her existence is through the particularities of her everyday life. Indeed, the *butsudan*, by its very design, encourages the devotee to make a series of associations (impermanence and Truth) and reciprocal exchanges (rice offering as both an expression of gratitude and in recognition of our own need for Amida's sustenance) that are meant to help her recognize the profound co-existence of the sacred and the mundane.

Undoubtedly, an awareness of these details may help heighten one's experience of the *butsudan*. However, I would argue only the most knowledgeable of practitioners possess such an understanding. This is not to say that the practice of those who do not understand the symbolism of the shrine's adornments is any less significant; while she may not fully comprehend the altar's symbolism, she has usually developed a highly functional sense of its meaning. In respect for such practitioners, I would like to offer an alternative framework.<sup>7</sup>

There are three main *elements of butsudan practice* (see diagram): the individual, the family network or ancestors, and the larger tradition (Buddhism). These are meant to refer to not only physical objects that occupy the shrine space, but also to particular historical narratives, myths, and stories within the cognitive space of the practitioner.

First of all, the individual brings his life story and the events that he finds most significant to the altar space. Second, there are the lives of deceased family members and ancestral network represented by photographs, the family death register, and *hōmyō* cards. Jonathan Z. Smith writes about the relation between the individual and the ancestors in the following way:

The transformation of the ancestor is an event that bars, forever, direct access to his particular person. Yet through this very process of metamorphosis, through being displaced from his 'self' and being enplaced in an 'other'—in an object, person, or mark—the ancestor achieves permanence. He becomes forever accessible, primarily through modes of memorialization.<sup>8</sup>

While the deceased are no longer with us, ritualized objects ensure their memory and help us continually recall the significance of their lives. Third, there are the narratives of the larger tradition—Buddhism in general and Shin Buddhism in particular—that give shape to our faith. These are embodied in the statues and images of the Buddha or *myōgō*.<sup>9</sup>

All three elements "condense within themselves two forms of temporality—...the 'then' and the 'now'—and are thus freed from specific historical location....a time sequence...is transposed into a spatial sequence."<sup>10</sup> The "now" is represented by the individual's presence in front

## Elements of Butsudan Practice

Individual

Ancestors

*hōmyō* cards  
family death register  
photographs

Larger Tradition(s)

statues or painted  
images of Amida  
Buddha and the  
patriarchs, written  
scrolls (*myōgō*)

now



then

*Interactions of butsudan practice*

*(re)creative*  
shrine construction

actual construction  
installation  
emplacement of objects  
arrangement

*(re)orienting*  
shrine maintenance

adornments  
candles/candle holders  
flowers/vase  
incense burner  
bell  
food/food holders

acts  
*gassho* (thanks and reverence)  
meditation (attention and remembrance)  
chanting/reciting the nembutsu  
(*namoamidabutsu*)  
expressing personal appeals and concerns  
food and gift offerings



of the home shrine. The “then” is encapsulated in the ritual objects within the *butsudan* (ancestor’s name, image of the Buddha). Hence, in the household ritual space of the *butsudan* the duality between “then” and “now” is radically bridged melding together the different narratives through the shrine’s material objects.

Connections between these objects are further articulated through particular *interactions* (of *butsudan practice*). I have divided these into two types: (re)creative and (re)orienting. These interactions are associated with shrine construction and shrine maintenance, respectively. As the individual participates in the active configuration of the shrine, she does so in oftentimes highly particular ways. The practitioner forges her own creative energies and desires into the *butsudan* through actual construction and arrangement. The shrine comes to physically embody these acts of (re)creation. (Re)creative interactions for a Jōdo Shin practitioner who possesses a conventional *butsudan* are minimal since the organization of the altar is already laid out. Yet, they are still worth noting since it is often through these interactions that the same practitioner develops his own unique sense of practice and makes the shrine space his own.

(Re)orienting interactions are achieved through the shrine’s maintenance. The adornments call forth certain relationships between the individual and the shrine’s main figures (i.e., ancestors, Buddha). Traditionally, each adornment has a unique significance: the incense speaks of purification; the candle, wisdom and compassion through enlightenment; the flowers, impermanence and beauty; the bell, announcement; and the food vessel/offering, gratitude and compassion.<sup>11</sup> Although the accessories possess these dominant meanings, their significance and function can vary a great deal from practitioner to practitioner.

These adornments assist the practitioner in particular acts associated with the altar. The individual comes before the *butsudan* to give thanks, meditate, remember, focus, contemplate, offer, and communicate. These acts establish a relationship between the individual and that which is enshrined. I hesitate here to say that the relationship is *necessarily* between the individual and Amida Buddha or between the individual and her ancestors; such a schema is too simplistic. Oftentimes, these acts allow the practitioner the occasion to think through everyday happenings and events within different frames of reference (suffering, connectedness, compassion, etc.) and ethically, culturally, socially, and spiritually reorient him/herself. This (re)orientation helps the practitioner reframe the events of his everyday life.

The *butsudan* or home altar allows the individual a means by which to make sense, make significant, and make good one’s life through a ritual space and practice. It calls forth the individual to work out one’s personal story in relation to the narrative and mythic frameworks of one’s ancestors and the larger religious tradition.<sup>12</sup>

A SLICE OF CONTEMPORARY  
JAPANESE AMERICAN HOME SHRINE PRACTICE<sup>13</sup>

Thus far, I have talked about the *obutsudan* in more formal terms. Now, I would like to provide several case studies that demonstrate the concrete realities of the practice. The following four vignettes offer representative examples of contemporary Japanese home shrine practice. Again, in my pursuit of understanding the *legacy* of the practice among Japanese Americans, I did not limit my study to individuals who possessed more standard *obutsudans*, but also interviewed ones who had constructed more unconventional altar sites.

Mrs. Hamamoto

Mrs. Hamamoto did not want to meet in person (explaining that she has become quite a recluse and does not even go to temple anymore), but was willing to talk over the phone. She comes from a prominent Jōdo Shin family that boasts several BCA ministers and has lived her whole life in and around “the church.” Her current *butsudan* was inherited from her mother who used to keep the altar in a special room (*butsuma*), but it now resides in Mrs. Hamamoto’s bedroom. The family *butsudan*, which was used before she received her mother’s, was housed in the living room and actually was portable enough for her husband to carry around with him on his ministerial duties. She decided to put her mother’s *butsudan*—which is larger and a little older than her previous one—in the bedroom because it is quiet and allows her to meditate before she goes to sleep.

At the beginning of our interview, Mrs. Hamamoto stressed that Jōdo Shin is “really in the heart” and not necessarily tied to any altar or ritual. This said, however, the *butsudan* is still a “reminder of all the teachings.” She said, “It’s nice to have a place where you can think about things and reflect...transcend a little bit.”

For Mrs. Hamamoto the *butsudan* is quite useful in another way: it contains the *hōmyō* cards of deceased family members. She often refers to these to recall the exact date of her husband’s death, which she admits she has a hard time remembering. For her the *hōmyō* drawer or family dimension of the *butsudan* is not only practical, but also allows one to remember that one is “connected to ancestors and to descendants. It reminds one that one is not alone and must be responsible to others.”

In these ways, the *butsudan*, for Mrs. Hamamoto, functions as a space that offers broad reflection about life and how that life is lived out as a Buddhist. “Life is not simply the ordinary...eat, sleep, and fight, but there’s something transcendent about it.” Being reminded of this in relation to the Buddha’s teaching and in relation to others (ancestors *and* descendants) helps “root.”

The *butsudan* represents a space to which Mrs. Hamamoto can come and (re)orient herself in relation to a Buddhist worldview. The opportunity to look back upon the events of the day, realize suffering, interconnectedness, and hope, and give thanks helps her put her life in perspective. She accomplishes this by reflecting upon Amida Buddha in relation to the concrete realities of her own life and her family. Although Mrs. Hamamoto does not consider the *butsudan* sacred, her home altar and the rituals associated with it act as a physical and spiritual reminder of a larger framework by which the “ordinary” and “everyday” gain significance, meaning, and direction.

### Edith and Akira Okada

Edith and Akira Okada, a Nisei couple, obtained their *butsudan* about ten years ago when their son, Steve, was working towards the Boy Scout Sangha Award.<sup>14</sup> One of the requirements for the Sangha Award is to understand the *butsudan*, maintain or “take care” of the altar, and perform small services before it. Besides this practical incentive, the Okadas felt that they should have a *butsudan* for their home “since we go to church and it was better to get one.” A man was selling *butsudan*-s at the church so they purchased one from him—handcrafted in natural wood—for about a hundred dollars. Throughout the interview, Mrs. Okada expressed her dissatisfaction with their purchase. She now wishes she had bought a more traditional *butsudan* of black lacquer with gold trim.

The *butsudan* was closed, as it is most of the time according to Mrs. Okada. Surrounded by pots of artificial and dried flowers, with their daughter’s pink fuzzy slippers and boxes shoved under the cabinet on which it was placed, the shrine appeared as simply another knickknack in their home. (Of course, when I asked to take pictures of the altar, they insisted on clearing much of the clutter away.)

I asked Mr. and Mrs. Okada about their experiences with their parents’ *butsudan*-s. Mrs. Okada’s mother had a *butsudan* especially commissioned about ten years after internment, and she devoutly maintained the altar. Her father and siblings did not seem to interact with the *butsudan* in such a regular fashion. The *butsudan* was just something that was always there, a natural part of the household. Mrs. Okada remembers food and fresh flowers in front of the altar; edible gifts (such as *manju*—sweet bean cakes) were also brought before the *butsudan* before the family partook of them.

In Mr. Okada’s case, his father actually built their *obutsudan*. It was constructed from wood and adorned with black and gold paint. It was maintained regularly, and the first rice of the day was always set before the shrine. He vaguely recalls that the rice offering was supposed to be eaten by family members, but oftentimes was not because of the hot Central Valley weather (which would make the rice spoil quickly).



Mr. and Mrs. Okada have been highly active in their local temple. Mrs. Okada served as the Church's treasurer; she was part of the Fujinkai (Buddhist Women's Association) and once served as a Sunday school teacher. Mr. Okada attended church for eight years. However, because of age and ailing health, both have stopped going to temple on regular basis.

In the Okada's case, the *butsudan* seems to be something they feel is important to have: it symbolizes their commitment to the BCA and to Jōdo Shinshū. But beyond this symbolic connection, it does not appear to hold much significance. Ritual interaction is minimal, if not totally absent. Rather, ownership is what is important as a committed expression of affiliation. It seems as if they have yet to fully integrate their own personal narratives and the memories of their parents' religious practice with their possession of the altar. Rather, the continuity between these elements is expressed and supported most strongly through their relation to the institution of the church.

Another couple I interviewed had purchased their *butsudan* a few years ago in order to hold *hoji* or memorial services in their home. The husband remarked, "You know as you get older, you think about these things more." This couple is about a decade older than the Okadas. It will be interesting to see if the Okadas' *butsudan* will hold greater significance as they age.

### Helen Kitayama

Helen's home shrine is most interesting. It sits atop a bookshelf in the open kitchen area. There are old photographs of her and her husband's parents, as well as an assortment of small objects—dolls, stones, and bells. On the right side are two photographs of her deceased father—one a headshot, the other a picture of him performing Noh drama. On this side, one also finds a small bronze Buddha, an Ojizōsan figure (creatures that look after the unborn), and an Amaru Indian doll. Above this assortment of objects hangs a sculpted head of Amida Buddha. On the left side of the shrine, one finds an old photo of her husband Min's family. Next to it on the far left are smooth black stones and an assortment of Japanese bells. On the wall above is a small abstract print of an angel. Between the two sides is a vase, which holds a handsome piece of dried acorn branch that shades the entire shelf.

Helen, a late-issue Nisei, is an artist by profession, and her altar reflects her improvisational style: every object that is a part of her shrine has been carefully selected and placed, but this often happens quite spontaneously. For instance, the Amaru doll on her father's side comes from her experiences with the Amaru tribe in South America, with whom she feels a deep spiritual connection. The angel print above Min's side of the family and the sculpture of the Buddha above her own accurately reflect their respective

religious backgrounds; he grew up in a Protestant Christian household, whereas her family is Jōdo Shin Buddhist. Although many elements endure, the act of (re)creation is a very important aspect of Helen's home altar as she places, replaces, takes away, and rearranges. This strong creative dimension is also witnessed by the fact that Helen is not sure if she would reconstruct the same shrine if she were to move: an altar must arise spontaneously in relation to the physical space and her own spiritual state.

Helen speaks of shrines that have emerged within her household and without, e.g., she created one during her recent visit to Japan. She explains the spiritual outlook that informs this ritual:

It's not about religion, but [a] need to be close to and incorporated in your life—an ongoingness—it's a way of keeping you connected, and it's a way some of us need to be fed...to realize that I can't exist by myself—I need that kind of spirit coming from other things—so it's people, things, and nature.

Helen's interactions with her shrine offer a viable means of (re)creation. Her altar is woven together by invisible threads that link her family, religious sensibilities and expressions, and her own experiences which make these connections meaningful. The narratives expressed through the shrine are fluid and unfold in an improvisational process that is a blend of willfulness and chance. Although her childhood was conventionally Buddhist, her approach to shrine practice is not. But there is something carried over in her renovation of the practice. She remarks:

So it's about spirituality that gets connected through the inner place of, soul of a person as opposed to a mind of a person...that's talking about what get transferred and translated...and the legacies are really much more of an internal thing than something that necessarily follows from a ritual, *but* the ritual becomes part of that internal thing.

Helen's words seem to mirror those of Kodani and Hamada, who describe the function of the *butsudan's* adornments in the following manner:

Adornments are essentially only symbols or external emblems of Ultimate Truth or Reality. This Truth is ineffable. It is void of taste, color, or thought. But yet, these adornments are relative expressions of Truth and are a means to bring us closer in understanding Truth as the Wisdom and Compassion of Amida Buddha.<sup>15</sup>

While Helen's (re)creative ritual may depart a great deal from traditional *obutsudan* practice, it is still informed by a similar sensibility that values inner reflection and reemphasizes the interconnectedness of life.

### Fumiko Wong

Fumiko, a Japanese / Chinese American in her early thirties, has a small shrine to her cat (Gumby) on the mantel of her fireplace. The shrine consists of an incense burner, bell (*rin*), and a photo of Gumby hand-crafted on fine paper into an altarpiece. Fumiko made the altar when her cat died. She admits embarrassment over the fact that a picture of her cat adorns her shrine, and not a photo of her deceased grandmother, but she explains that Gumby (and brother Pokey) had been faithful pets, whose companionship had outlived many of her actual human relationships.

Fumiko's shrine becomes the occasion to retell the story of Gumby's demise and how she went through a range of emotions after his death (guilt, anger, grief, etc.). She spontaneously set up the altar, and its construction served as an act of healing. When she first installed the shrine, her and son Wil would burn incense, ring the bell, and bow. She explained to Wil that the ritual was a time to remember Gumby, and he seemed attuned to this.

Fumiko's background is most interesting. Before I interviewed her, I had always assumed that she had grown up Buddhist since the adornments of her altar—the bell and incense burner—were traditionally inspired. I found out that Fumiko actually was raised in a liberal Christian household; she attended an Episcopal church until she was about eleven or twelve, and her parents have been active in the congregation for over thirty years. Her break from Christianity occurred when she felt that she could no longer live by the tenets of her faith and her church. A significant event was the bombings by "revolutionaries" in the early seventies: her pastor asked the congregation to pray for the bombing victims, but Fumiko felt this totally ignored the other side of the picture. (At the time, Angela Davis was a revolutionary hero of hers.)

Throughout her education, Fumiko learned of the abuses of Christianity, which further alienated her from her Christian upbringing. Now, she prefers to involve her own son in Buddhist rituals and events (e.g., festivals, temples) that she feels resonate more deeply with her own religious outlook.

Fumiko's shrine, like Helen's, draws a great deal of its significance from the (re)creative process. But the (re)orienting function is also present as she participates in the shrine-centered rituals with Wil. Her altar not only (re)orients as it helps in a healing process and allows Fumiko to share her spiritual sensibility with her son, but also serves as a means to work out the relationships she has with her own family (e.g., grandmother) and

continually fashion her own religious path from the various religious traditions to which she has been exposed. In speaking with her, one comes to see her committed struggle to bring her own life in tune with the lives of those close to her and the larger social forces that shape her world.

## CONCLUSION

Each of these examples demonstrates the wide variety of contemporary *butsudan* and home shrine practice among Japanese Americans. In Mrs. Hamamoto's case, where one has a strong religious institutional affiliation, the interaction with the shrine serves primarily to (re)orient. In the cases of Fumiko and Helen, who feel more alienated from the institutions of the larger tradition(s), the home shrine offers an occasion for (re)creation. Although for the Okadas the shrine does not seem to fulfill either function, their case is instructive because it compels us to consider ways in which *obutsudan* practice is not simply a matter of religious (re)orientation or spiritual (re)creation, but rather how the shrine as a material object becomes a marker of a Japanese American Buddhist identity.<sup>16</sup> Collectively, these examples also suggest that individuals do not necessarily interact with their altars on a steady and regular basis but rather age and critical events greatly influence one's practice.

While Fumiko's and Helen's improvisational altars may share interesting and undeniable connections with their traditional predecessors, they are also significantly different as well. Each woman has chosen to fashion her shrine in highly personalized ways, with limited regard to traditional practice. One could argue that their altars are equally informed by a California "New Age" influence as they are by their Japanese American *butsudan* practice. While Fumiko's and Helen's emphasis on personal spirituality and their highly individualized quest for religious connection fit comfortably within American "seeker" spirituality,<sup>17</sup> the embrace of (re)creative, improvisational shrine practice (and the concomitant waning interest in conventional *obutsudan* practice) is further buttressed by the unique pressures of their Asian American identity. On the one hand, the religious consciousness of many Japanese Americans, who grew up with little or no access to *butsudan* practice, is informed by a Western suspicion of home-based rituals, especially those that are institutionally linked to a non-Judeo-Christian religion. On the other hand, the Japanese Americans who I interviewed often did not feel "Japanese" enough to claim the practice as their own. Plagued by a high standard of religious and cultural authenticity, they felt they did not possess the "right knowledge" to engage in proper *butsudan* practice and expressed anxieties about their abilities to pass on the tradition.

The root of these unfounded views stem from a racist perspective—one that defines religion in its own terms (Judeo-Christian, church-based) and views a hybrid Japanese American identity as fundamentally inauthentic. While the Buddhist Churches of America seeks to ameliorate this situation by educating its members and American society about Buddhist thought and practice, they, too, sometimes fall prey to such biases. Such is the case when one considers the discussion of death and ancestors in BCA literature. Death is, of course, implied in the ancestor component of the *butsudan*. The BCA, realizing the “negative” impressions created by such an emphasis, continually attempts to place more stress on the Buddha rather than on the ancestors to counter this view. In one piece of literature, the author writes:

Portraits of our deceased loved ones are often placed in or around the shrines. I understand the reasons for this practice, but it can contribute to perpetuating the image of Buddhism as a religion for the dead and the after-life. So, I prefer to place portraits of the deceased farther away from the shrine, and certainly not within the shrine itself so as to block our view of Amida Buddha. I have come across youths who found the Buddhist shrine “creepy.” This perception must be changed!<sup>18</sup>

Although this perception is obviously real especially given the way death is viewed in the Judeo-Christian society in which we live,<sup>19</sup> my research suggests the opposite solution: encourage the ancestors (and descendants) to remain a lively part of *butsudan* practice. In almost every case, the ancestor dimension allowed the practitioner an access or means by which to better comprehend and understand the abstract tenets of Buddhism. The ancestor’s presence symbolizes a structured narrative that mediates between the individual’s own personal story and Buddhist doctrine. This intermingling constructs a “channel” through which home shrine practice becomes more reflexive and real.<sup>20</sup>

Meaning and significance are words that are often invoked when speaking about the role religion and spirituality plays in people’s lives. In this paper, I demonstrate how a particular ritual tradition enacts such meaning and significance for contemporary Japanese Americans through the elements of self, ancestors, and the larger tradition that materialize within the shrine space. The individual interacts with the *butsudan* or home shrine interchanging spatial and temporal relations in order to (re)create and (re)orient him/herself.

I also have hinted at the linkages between more conventional, institutionally sanctioned *butsudan* practice (Mrs. Hamamoto, the Okadas) and what can be viewed as secondary, “improvisational” forms (Helen Kitayama, Fumiko Wong). By including the latter and bringing them into

conversation with more conventional examples, we are able to discern a connection between the two—the influence of the larger tradition, as well as the continuity that the improvisational forms provide. In the past, the *obutsudan* offered a valuable spiritual resource for Japanese American Jōdo Shin practitioners; today, it is still able to serve as a potent means by which Japanese American Sansei, Yonsei, and Gosei may be able to fruitfully embrace their Buddhist heritage and construct their own “spiritual home.”

## NOTES

1. Portions of this paper have been presented at the following conferences: The Twelfth Annual Conference of the Association for Asian American Studies (Oakland, California, 1995); The Asian and Pacific Americans & Religion Research Initiative Conference, "Revealing the Sacred in Asian America: Theories and Methods" (Santa Barbara, California, 2000); and "Japanese Buddhism in the United States: Shared Issues, Common Themes" (Los Angeles, California, 2003). The author would like to thank the following individuals for their feedback and support: Rudiger V. Busto, Elizabeth Goodstein, Helen Hardacre, David Kyuman Kim, Kwok Pui-lan, David Matsumoto, Sandra S. Oh, Young Mi Angela Pak, Richard Payne, Paul Spickard, and Desmond Smith.
2. The relationship of Japanese American women to the religious institution of the temple can be recognized through their participation in the National Federation of Buddhist Women's Association, local *Fujinkai* groups (Buddhist women's associations), Buddhist Dharma schools, music development, and as church members who generally attend services and support BCA organizations. The extent of such participation of Issei, Nisei, and ensuing generations of Japanese American women in BCA churches needs to be explored.
3. The 'o-' prefix in the Japanese language is used to denote an honorific relationship to the signified. *Butsudan* (without the prefix) is usually employed in academic studies of Japanese Buddhist altar practice (see David Reid, *New Wine: The Cultural Shaping of Japanese Christianity* [Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1991]; H. Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity*, 3rd ed. [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982]). However, I will be using both the prefixed and non-prefixed versions to mark my multiple commitments to the practice.
4. For a history of Jōdo Shin in the U.S., see Tetsuden Kashima, *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Institution* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987); and *Buddhist Churches of America: 75 Year History*, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: Norbart, 1974).
5. Masao Kodani and Russell Hamada, "The Family Altar (*Obutsudan*)," in *Traditions of Jodoshinshu Hongwanji-ha* (Los Angeles: Pureland Publications, 1995), pp. 64–71. See also: *Jodo Shinshu Handbook for Laymen* (a translation of *Jinsei No Toi*), 2nd ed. (Kyoto, Japan: Hongwanji International Center, 1983).
6. Kodani and Hamada, p. 64.

7. Presenting such a framework first is misleading, for I did not go into the study “armed,” so to speak, with a theoretical configuration. Rather, the framework emerged through reflection upon the home shrine practice of the various practitioners whom I interviewed.
8. Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 112.
9. Most *butsudan*-s only include the central figure of the Buddha, but more elaborate versions also contain images of Shinran Shonin and Rennyo Shonin.
10. Smith, p. 113.
11. For more extensive descriptions of these adornments, see Kodani and Hamada.
12. For a compelling alternative framework, see Kate Turner, *Beautiful Necessity: The Art and Meaning of Women’s Altars* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999). Turner speaks about the “generative and regenerative powers” these altars hold that is much in line with the (re)creative function of which I speak.
13. All names have been changed.
14. See Phillip Karl Eidmann, *Young People’s Introduction to Buddhism: A Sangha Award Studybook for Shin Buddhist Scouts* (San Francisco, CA: Buddhist Churches of America), p. 132. The Boy Scout Sangha Award program was officially established in 1956 in order to “give the scouts of Buddhist faith a practical guidance in achieving the spiritual pledge made in the Scout Oath and Law, thereby developing a boy whose views and actions in life would stem from the highest Buddhist thoughts” (*BCA 75 Year History*, p. 100). “The Award is presented by the temple to a Buddhist Scout in recognition of his spiritual growth as shown by his fulfilling the Award requirements” (p. 129).
15. Kodani and Hamada, p. 66.
16. Here, the shrine participates in what Herbert Gans calls “symbolic religiosity”—the consumption of ethno-religious symbols for the purposes of securing a particular identity. These symbols are abstracted from their original cultural context and become substitutes or “stand-ins” for actual practices and ways of life. See Herbert J. Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity and Symbolic Religiosity: Towards a Comparison of Ethnic and Religious Acculturation,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17-4 (1994): pp. 577–575; and “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2 (1979): pp. 1–19.
17. According to Wade Clark Roof, such spirituality is distinguished from previous generations’ patterns of belief by the following characteristics: (1) the reemergence of spirituality, (2) religious and cultural pluralism, (3)



multilayered belief and practices, and (4) transformed selves (*A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* [San Francisco: Harper, 1993], see esp. pp. 241–262). See also Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (New Haven: Princeton, 1999). For a discussion of GenX spirituality, which shares notable features with its Boomer forerunner, see Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

18. Ken Tanaka, *Parents Sharing the Nembutsu Teachings with Their Young Children* (San Francisco: Buddhist Churches of America, 1995), p. 20.

19. The ambivalence toward the ancestor dimension of the *butsudn* can perhaps be traced to a number of interlinking influences and causes: (1) competing worldviews (Shinto versus Jōdo Shin Buddhism), (2) the view of death and the deceased in U.S. society, (3) the dominant understanding of “religion” that embraces a “world religions” framework and views syncretic practices that err from this framework as “less pure.” Another reason is linked to the language that is available to talk about this religious phenomenon. In his discussion of terminology, Jonathan Huoi Xung Lee writes: “I have preferred to use the term ‘veneration’ and not ‘worship’ in my discussion of ‘ancestral veneration.’ I consciously did this because ‘worship’ connotes a Christian-centric bias, as well as a tone of judgment. ‘Veneration’ is a better, more respectful way of illustrating the rituals and beliefs in ancestral veneration. It is a sign of love and commitment on the part of living to remember and care for the spirits of the dead” (“Ancestral Veneration in Vietnamese Spiritualities,” *Review of Vietnamese Studies* 3-1 [2003]: p. 14).

20. See Jane Naomi Iwamura, “Homage to Ancestors: Exploring the Horizons of Asian American Religious Identity,” *Amerasia Journal* 22-1 (1996): pp. 162–167.



# The Voice of Sacred Texts in the Ocean of Compassion: The Case of Shin Buddhism in America<sup>1</sup>

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*Exactly to the same extent as art and science, though in a different way, physical labour is a certain contact with the reality, the truth, and the beauty of the universe and with the eternal wisdom which is the order in it.*

*For this reason it is a sacrilege to degrade labour....*

*If the workers felt this, if they felt that by being the victim they are in a certain sense the accomplice of sacrilege, the(ir) resistance would have a very different force from what is provided by the consideration of personal rights. It would not be an economic demand but an impulse from the depth of their being, fierce and desperate like that of a young girl who is being forced into a brothel; and at the same time it would be a cry of hope from the depth of their heart.*

—Simone Weil

## PREFACE

WHEN I FIRST LEARNED of the theme for this symposium, I was both intrigued and a bit puzzled. What did this mean, “Japanese Buddhism in America”? Did this refer to a Japanese Buddhism that now found itself in America? A Buddhism in America that was somehow Japanese? The study of Japanese Buddhism by Americans? Whatever it might mean, this theme seemed to signify something different from other such phrases, less equivocal, as “Japanese Buddhists in America” or “Japanese American Buddhism.” It was difficult to know what to present for such a symposium when the theme itself seemed to be ambiguous. Eventually, however, I came to realize that the very ambiguity in the theme held a possible key to its significance.

The ambiguity, of course, lies beyond the merely grammatical problem of how to parse the phrasing of this theme. It lies in the juxtaposition of

"Buddhism," a religion with universal claims; "Japanese," with specific cultural, ethnic, and political characteristics; and its locus "in America," an idea, a concept, a land of contradictions. There are many permutations to the combination of these ideas; thus, there are many dimensions to this ambiguity.

This paper, however, focuses on a particular dimension of this ambiguity, namely, the function of sacred texts, which is central to Japanese Buddhism in America as it is in most religions. The discussion of sacred texts, however, requires further contextualization. Since Buddhism makes universal or global claims, issues of Buddhist life and practice, including those involving sacred texts, must be placed in a larger or global context. Thus, this paper examines sacred texts in the context of the global culture and global economy. As the author is most familiar with the case of Shin Buddhism, the function of sacred texts in American Shin Buddhism serves as the case study of this examination of Japanese Buddhism in America. Some of this may be particular to Shin Buddhism, but much of it is applicable to other forms of Japanese Buddhism that have become part of the story of Buddhism in America.

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In 1852 Commodore Matthew Perry was sent by the United States to engage in "gunboat diplomacy," to force Japan to open its doors to diplomatic, cultural, and economic "trade." From the latter nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries, waves of Japanese immigrants were at first brought into Hawaii, and then a few decades later, the West Coast of the United States, as part of a labor agreement between the governments of the United States and Japan. The demand was for middle-class farmers who would work hard and adjust to the needs of the American labor pool. The Japanese government "agreed" to send laborers, at first from the Kanto area, and later from the southern precincts of Japan in Kyushu and Hiroshima, strongholds of Nishi Honganji, the largest branch of Jōdo Shinshū, or Shin Buddhism.

Due to these historical circumstances, the majority of Japanese immigrants to the United States belonged to Nishi Honganji, and as the population of immigrant male laborers increased and eventually Japanese women were allowed to join them, the need for religious community increased. In 1899, the first priests were sent by Nishi Honganji to minister to the Shin Buddhist communities in San Francisco.<sup>2</sup> In the ensuing years, North American Shin Buddhist organizations were established in Hawaii, Canada, and the United States as Honpa Honganji of Hawaii, the Buddhist Churches of Canada (BCC), and the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), respectively. During the century that constitutes the history of Shin Buddhism in America, these Shin Buddhist organizations collectively came to

form among the largest communities of Asian religions outside of Asia. My own life is inextricably tied to this history: my grandfather Enryo Unno and grandmother Hana Unno arrived in 1935 to serve as minister and “temple protector” (Jpn. *bōmori*) in a series of small congregations in California, eventually concluding their careers as the minister and *bōmori* of Senshin Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles.

This paper seeks to elucidate some of the key dimensions of sacred texts as they have come to function within North American Shin Buddhism. The narrative is presented in two parts, the first a conventional outline of the major forms that these sacred texts have taken and the second an examination of the notion of “sacred text” in the context of the global economy.

### SACRED TEXTS IN AMERICAN SHIN BUDDHISM: A CONVENTIONAL OUTLINE

#### Canonical Texts: India to Japan

Traditionally, sacred scripture in Buddhism is identified with the sutras, the purported words of the Buddha Śākyamuni. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Buddhism of Tibet, Nepal, China, Japan, and Korea, the sutras were all composed at least five centuries after the passing of Śākyamuni, but they are also attributed to him. In Shin Buddhism, the so-called Three Pure Land Sutras constitute the orthodox sutras: The *Sūtra of Eternal Life*, the *Meditation Sūtra*, and the *Amida Sūtra*. In addition, there are key commentaries identified as the authoritative interpretations of the sutra literature. Shinran, the putative founder of the Shin tradition, identifies seven key Indian, Chinese, and Japanese commentators. They are akin to the Pauls and Aquinas of Christianity.

Within Shin Buddhism, Shinran himself is identified as the most important commentator, and as has often happened in Mahayana Buddhism, his commentaries and treatises have been raised to the same scriptural status as the sutras themselves, even superseding the latter as sources of religious authority. In addition, he composed hymns, his disciples compiled his sayings, and there are other documents such as Shinran’s letters which were compiled into anthologies and which he himself clearly intended to be vehicles of religious dissemination. The two most important works of Shinran’s own statements in present-day Shin Buddhism are the *Kyōgyōshinshō* and *Tannishō*. The first is a large six-fascicle work that articulates Shinran’s self-understanding in relation to Pure Land tradition doctrinally, historically, and personally. The *Tannishō* is a short collection of statements in two parts, the first those of Shinran himself, the second containing both Shinran’s statements and commentaries on them by

Shinran's follower Yuien, widely regarded as the compiler of the *Tannishō*.

After Shinran, the commentaries and other writings of the subsequent heads of Honganji continued to be treated as sacred texts, but none have attained the same status as Shinran's own words, much in the same way that the gospels have never been superseded by later interpreters in Christianity, and Jesus is regarded as the highpoint of Biblical religion over the entire span of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and subsequent Christian literature.

There is, however, one other figure who is seen as crucial to the history of Shin Buddhism in Japan, second only to Shinran, and that is Rennyo. He was the seventh-generation Abbot of Honganji, referred to as "the Patriarch of Revival" (*Honganji chūkō no so*), and is credited with establishing the institutional base of Honganji, the organizational source of all of the major Shin denominations in Japan and the West. His treatises, letters, and other writings have also been canonized as sacred scripture.

In the twentieth century, additional commentaries have achieved considerable prominence, but for our purposes it is more significant to note that new hymns were composed using Shinran's own words and set to Western-influenced melodies. In addition, in 1921, letters by Shinran's wife Esshinni were discovered and made public, identifying her as his wife for the first time, and establishing her letters as part and parcel of the sacred canon.

### Canonical Texts: North America

As missions were first established in the United States and eventually the semi-independent Hawaii Honganji, BCA, and BCC were created, Japanese priests were sent from Nishi Honganji and the other Shin denominations in Japan to serve the American congregations. Eventually, most of the Japanese canon, including all of the above-mentioned sources, were translated into English. Earlier translations tended to be rendered in somewhat stilted English and Christian-influenced conceptions. Most recently, the critically acclaimed *The Collected Works of Shinran*, translated by a team headed by Dennis Hirota, was issued by Nishi Honganji in Japan, and copies were distributed to all of the temples of the BCA.<sup>3</sup>

In the twentieth century, American Shin Buddhist hymns were at first commissioned by the Hawaii Honganji and BCA. The earliest hymns were in fact composed by Christian hymnalsists and then later on by members of North American Shin sanghas. Both the melodies and words reflect these varying influences. The early hymns could almost be mistaken for Christian songs in terms of both lyrics and melodies. More recent hymns reflect a conscious intent to be more Buddhistic, although this itself remains problematic. No authoritative commentaries or works have yet been written by American Shin scholars or priests, which is also generally the

case with other forms of Buddhism. The work that has achieved the closest to canonical status in American Buddhism is perhaps *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, the recorded sermons or Dharma talks of Shunryu Suzuki, the founder of San Francisco Zen Center.<sup>4</sup>

### Ritualization of Text

All of the Pure Land texts mentioned above continue to be important to American Shin Buddhism. They are objects of study, sources of inspiration, and the basis of the rituals that form the foundation of institutional practice. The manner in which the ritualization of text has shaped the contours of the Shin sangha in American religion follows closely what Catherine Bell calls the redemptive hegemony of the ritual order.<sup>5</sup> That is, the ritual tradition is constituted in terms of a top-down hierarchy of economic, social, and ideological capital that draws on the past and continually reinvents itself through the ritualization and re-ritualization of the established canon as well as new additions to it. It is hegemonic in relation to the individual insofar as the structure of tradition as ritualization perpetuates itself as a social body.<sup>6</sup> It is redemptive insofar as one is able to rise in the hierarchy through increasing mastery of the ritualized canon of behavior (where ritual mastery is to be construed broadly), and tradition, bound by the terms of ritualization, affords the individual a certain degree of protection from those outside of the ritual circle of mastery and literacy. Within the ritual hierarchy, moreover, one can gain various forms of power including economic means and even emotional satisfaction. Yet, no matter how high one rises within the hierarchy, one cannot attain any ultimate redemption since the corporate interests of the ritual body always outweigh those of the individual.

Bell's model of ritualization is particularly apt when applied to the case of Shin Buddhism. At the pinnacle of the ritual hierarchy stands the Abbot of Nishi Honganji, and he accrues a certain degree of social, ideological, and emotional empowerment through the reverence and symbolic power attributed to him, all of which is demonstrated and embodied through ritualization. In the case of the Abbot, institutional reforms set in place in the early part of the twentieth century largely removed his economic leverage on the institution. This correlates well with Bell's model insofar as it was not in the interests of the institutional or corporate body to place an undue proportion of economic capital in the ritual office of the Abbot. In terms of the daily, annual, and other periodic cycle of symbolic rituals, moreover, it is not always clear whether the Abbot controls the rituals or the rituals control the Abbot.

The divinity schools, seminaries, ritual offices, offices governing ordination, propagation, international affairs, and the like catalogue, train,

reproduce, and disseminate the tradition through rituals large and small, defining daily liturgy, events commemorating the life and death of Shinran, Rennyo, and other major figures of the tradition, and above all, funerals and memorial services which take place with a frequency and importance beyond what one finds in, for example, Christianity. A common complaint among both the priesthood and the laity is the physical and economic strain of memorial services that take place on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis following the death of a congregant for ten years or more. For this reason, traditional Japanese Buddhism as a whole is often described as "funerary Buddhism" (*sōshiki Bukkyō*).

The ritual protocol or orthopraxy of North American organizations such as the BCA is defined in Japan by Honganji. A majority of the priesthood in American Shin Buddhism have been trained in Japan, and even though the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), for example, is defined in its charter as largely independent of Nishi Honganji in Japan, it is doctrinally, canonically, and ritually still largely under the influence of the mother organization in Japan. Even today, much of the chanting of scripture, the centerpiece of Shin Buddhist liturgy, is carried out in classical Japanese and Sino-Japanese, even though increasingly, English translations are being used in parallel or in place of the Japanese versions.

The ritual hierarchy is reinforced by the fact that while learning, and therefore doctrinal and ritual mastery, is emphasized for the priesthood, it tends not to be so emphasized for the laity. However, Shinran himself tended to emphasize the virtues of the simple, illiterate farmer as being above those of the learned priesthood. This reversal of views has been ritually inscribed into the tradition, and into the minds and bodies of its practitioners in such a way that the gap between learned priesthood and silent, ignorant congregants has even increased at times. Even the Shin tradition of *monpo*, "hearing the Dharma," can illustrate this reversal when learned priests expound and lay congregations simply listen; thus, many Shin followers are unable to give even a simple coherent account of their own faith, partially because they are never expected to articulate it.<sup>7</sup>

Despite what from one perspective appears to be a largely hegemonic hierarchy, there is another side to this story. The entire ritual corpus including funerals and memorial services that commemorate institutional figures and deceased family members provide comfort, solace, a sense of belonging, and hope for the future. The sense of solidarity, social and cultural activities, recognition given for contributions, and consolation during difficult times are all integrated through the ritual activities of the temples. In this sense, ritual is not an instrument of control or power but an expression of community, connection, and compassion.

At the cynical or negative end of the spectrum, one might note that the very same congregants who complain about the expense of so-called



“funerary Buddhism” are not infrequently the same people who fret and worry over whether the funeral for their family member is sufficiently lavish and stately. At the laudatory or positive end of the spectrum, there are many occasions for genuine celebration and poignant appreciation, from the simple yet deeply felt liturgy of a funeral in a small, rural temple to the centennial celebration of the BCA attended by approximately three thousand participants from Japan and North America.

Furthermore, there have been ritual innovations unique to North American Shin Buddhism. These include the Bon festival involving traditional Japanese dance and food bazaars, and the performance of traditional Japanese musical forms including *gagaku* and *taiko* drumming. *Taiko*, in particular, has moved beyond the temple and Japanese American communities and become a larger cultural phenomenon, much the way that martial arts and Zen Buddhism entered the cultural mainstream in previous decades. The *taiko* phenomenon began in two places about thirty years ago: the Kinnara Taiko group was founded by Rev. Masao Kodani of Senshin Buddhist Temple along with younger members of the temple, and the San Francisco Taiko Dojo was founded about the same time by Master Seiichi Tanaka who came from Japan with no connection to Buddhism. Such has been the popularity of *taiko* that it has been reimported back into Japan where it has attained a level of popular participation that was previously unavailable to the general populace.

It is important to note that there are a growing number of non-Japanese Americans who participate as both ministers and lay followers of Shin Buddhism, largely white Americans. While the percentage tends to be around five to ten percent of the congregation, in some temples the majority are non-Japanese Americans. This increase in non-Japanese American participation has at times given rise to friction and contention between groups, but much of it has been energizing and helped to create a positive sense of diversity. This, too, has implications for the meaning of sacred texts.

Finally, one must not forget that unwritten yet implicit within this entire ritual structure is something like what Kathleen Norris has called “theology as gossip” with respect to the Christian congregations in which she has participated in the Dakotas.<sup>8</sup> Shin Buddhism, both in Japan and in North America, has one of the largest associations for religious women, known as the Fujinkai or Buddhist Women’s Association, its tutelary head being the wife of the Abbot of Nishi Honganji. There are relatively few women ministers, yet the women of the Fujinkai, led by their own woman president for each temple, are responsible for a large number of activities, including the organization of conferences and workshops, musical performance, teaching and running Sunday schools, religious counseling, cooking, and serving. The women form their own sense of community whether it is in choir practice, in the kitchen, or at national and international Fujinkai conferences attended by thousands. In fact, the Fujinkai conferences are

consistently the largest gatherings within Shin Buddhism around the world. It is possible, even probable, that the BCA would not have survived without the Fujinkai.

Within these more and less formal settings, the women speak with one another about their deeper spiritual and personal concerns which may or may not blend with the larger ritual structures defined by the male-dominated hierarchy. Men also engage in some degree of "theology as gossip," but it is apparent that this is much more the province of women, and women are more adept in this regard.

At an individual level, however, ministers and lay leaders do provide pastoral and personal counseling to members. There is not much in the way of a formal setting for these one-to-one encounters although there are times set aside for such sessions at weekend retreats and study sessions that are held at a number of temples. When there are issues of pressing individual concern, revolving around some personal crisis or questions of faith, it is often in individual consultations that meaningful breakthroughs occur. These intimate encounters often occur outside the boundaries of formal ritualization, but they may provide some of the most vivid and creative moments in which the words of sacred texts come alive.

The system of ritualized and canonized text is hierarchical and hegemonic, from the headquarters in Japan down through the Office of the Bishop of BCA, the male-dominated priesthood, and lay leadership, yet it has nevertheless formed the basis for the continual reinvention and cultural adaptation of Shin Buddhism in its American context. Thus, it is also redemptive, and perhaps at its most intimate, the realization of Shin experience is liberative in a manner that transcends the limitations of the redemptive hegemony as defined by Bell.

#### "SACRED TEXT" AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

In considering the theme of sacred texts, two important questions must be pursued further: What is the scope of the term "sacred text," and what is the relevance of elucidating this notion with respect to Japanese Buddhism in America?

When this paper was first presented in Toronto, the panel organizers provided a starting point for the first of these questions, namely, that broadly construed, "text and textuality include various forms of expression, from the literary to the rhetorical to the political to the bodily." At first glance, this seems overly broad as it appears to include almost everything in human culture. It is reminiscent of the Derridean notion that there is nothing outside of text. Yet, it may turn out to provide just the point of entry necessary for considering the sacred function of text in Japanese Buddhism in America, in particular the case of Jōdo Shinshū or Shin Buddhism. That

is because it allows us to include the entire range of sacred expression as indicated in the foregoing outline.

As for the second question, one must begin with the problem of the relevancy of "Japanese Buddhism in America" as such. In the case of Shin Buddhism, in its North American context, this problem of relevancy is particularly important. The Buddhist Churches of America, the largest of the Shin organizations in North America, boasts a nominal membership of approximately one hundred thousand, making it one of the largest Asian religious institutional bodies outside of Asia. Yet its active membership most likely ranges in the twenty thousand to twenty-five thousand range, hardly a drop in the bucket of American religious life. This smaller number, moreover, represents at most a static population and more likely a gradually declining one, one that tends to be socially and politically retiring. On what basis shall we expend our scholarly resources on such a marginal religious grouping?

One obvious answer lies in the historical significance of Shin Buddhism as a moment in the pluralistic context of American religions: no matter how great or small, all voices must have their place if we are to piece together an adequate picture of American religious life. The first part of this paper may be construed in these terms. The more compelling response, however, may turn out to be that the life of Shin Buddhists has something important to tell us about the sacrality of American religious life as such. Not only can we learn something about how sacred texts work in Buddhism in America through an examination of Shin Buddhism, we may also learn something about the sacred through the study of Shin Buddhist textuality.

In general, "the sacred" or sacrality may be understood in two senses: as one commodity among others within the larger cultural discourse or as something that cannot ultimately be reduced to the terms of cultural discourse as a component of social, economic, or political capital. Of course, it may function as both a commodity within culture as well as something beyond or encompassing it, but this dual function can only be fulfilled if there is a dimension of sacrality beyond the finite bounds of culture. It goes without saying that any discourse is a cultural commodity, subject to the terms of negotiation and manipulation as well as serving to invoke and evoke the sacred. It is not the purpose of this paper to answer whether the sacred exists *sui generis*.<sup>9</sup> Rather, it is to help clarify the conditions for the possibility of the sacred function of text beyond merely that of a cultural commodity. It is not necessary for the purposes of the present inquiry to establish the existence of the sacred as such.<sup>10</sup> Yet, elucidating the sacred function of text is necessary for answering the question of Shin Buddhist sacred texts' contribution to the study of religion.

Although text can be defined broadly, we can see the value of defining the culture of Shin Buddhism through the lens of "sacred text." First, it

brings into focus the problem of the sacred—its cultural and religious significance—and its expression through text. Whatever else it might be, text has to do with articulation, in this case, the articulation of the intersection between the sacred realm and human culture. For it is through the clear articulation of this intersection that the significance of the sacred becomes explicit in our culture.

Shin Buddhism is a small minority tradition in a culture religiously dominated by Christianity; the majority of Shin Buddhists are Japanese Americans, making them a minority culturally and ethnically as well. The survival of Shin Buddhism in its North American incarnation depends on its ability to articulate its sacred or religious significance, certainly a major task. Yet, there is something in the corpus of its sacred textuality that speaks to this very situation. Historically, in its Japanese origins Shin Buddhism began with a small minority community led by Gutoku Shinran, an outlaw priest who gave voice to illiterate farmers and fisherman. In its early American history, its members were almost all illegally herded into internment camps during the Pacific War, forbidden even to congregate after they were initially released, virtually penniless. Today there are approximately one hundred temples and lay sanghas or communities in Canada and the United States, yet their members have become established in American society—as farmers, businessmen, professionals, teachers, and the like. Thus, the discourse of cultural marginalization and survival in its wake is integral to the Shin Buddhist narrative in Japan as well as North America. Many religious traditions have replicated in their American settings narratives of marginalization articulated during their formative periods, including, for example, the Puritans and their self-understanding as believers in Christ. This is certainly true for American Shin Buddhists who looked back to Shinran for sustenance in the face of great difficulty in a highly prejudicial culture.

The comparison with Puritans is apt at more than one level. Although the Puritans had previously experienced prejudice against their own faith, they became deeply implicated and involved in the persecution, exploitation, and eventual genocide of Native Americans that continues today. The story of the role played by Christian churches, both Protestant and Catholic, in the oppression of Native Americans has yet to be fully told. Similarly, although Japanese American Shin Buddhists have suffered tremendous injustice at the hands of the dominant culture, they have not always extended their awareness of prejudicial treatment to a compassionate understanding of the plight and experience of other religious and ethnic groups such as Native Americans and African Americans. Their courtship of outsiders has been largely restricted to the world of white America. As Japanese Americans became more and more successful economically, they have tended to migrate out of lower-income neighborhoods to more affluent areas. Lower income African Americans, Latino Americans, and

other less affluent populations have tended to move into the neighborhoods vacated by Japanese Americans, and Japanese Americans in some parts of the country have tended to identify with policies that disadvantage the lower income strata of society.

There have, however, been important exceptions, just as there have been Christian groups that have become the allies of Native Americans and civil rights movements involving various ethnic and racial groups. Recently, Kinnara Taiko of Senshin Buddhist temple performed together with Native American drummers on reservation land, and Shin Buddhist temples have been largely tolerant of diverse sexual orientations and views on social issues ranging from abortion to assisted suicide.

The story of survival in the face of marginalization is embedded in the earliest Indian scriptural traditions on which Shin religious thought is based, and is invoked time and again through the development of the tradition in China, Japan, the United States, and now in small sanghas in Europe, Africa, and even India to which it has returned via its outcaste classes. Yet, this fact alone tells us nothing about the sacred status of its texts beyond or outside of their transmission and evolution within culture, as commodities and sources of capital for social, economic, and cultural survival. If we are to inquire into the possibility of the sacred beyond culture, another approach is necessary. And that is to place the expression of the sacred within the context of the global economy, for that is ultimately the umbrella under which all commodification currently takes place, including the commodification of sacred texts.

The global economy governs the function of sacred texts insofar as the existence of religious organizations depends upon their economic viability. To state the matter more concretely, as long as the members of religious organizations are unable or unwilling to call into question the possible implications of the global economy for the financial operations of their own lives and their own religious communities, all talk of the "sacred" and "sacred texts" remains bound to the terms of the global economy. Historically, whether in medieval or modern Europe or Japan, constitutional, legal, and institutional safeguards have been put into place to ensure the non-profit and non-corporate status of religious organizations, yet the actual operations of religious communities are often economically bound.

While this has always been true to a certain extent, the pervasiveness of technology, the interrelatedness of the global economy, and the invasiveness of ecological destruction makes it difficult to find a foothold of spiritual and communal independence and resistance against the negative aspects of the global economy. I recall one conversation with a former BCA temple president that addressed this issue.

He wanted to discuss the prospects for younger generations to provide spiritual leadership within the Buddhist temples and lamented

their preoccupation with economic success. This was not merely a criticism of greed but took into account that they have been raised in a time when the entire culture conspires to wed them to their finances, from the skyrocketing costs of health care to the need to plan for retirement accounts. He said, "You know, I think it's TV! When we were young, we were poor, but we didn't care. Now, the kids watch TV, and they think they have to have everything."

This exclamation is, of course, both naive and profound. In my response to him, I pointed out that being impoverished even fifty years ago was not the same as it is today. Even if one was poor, the global economy had not yet infiltrated the ecological system and the social structure to such an extent that one was oppressed by the pressures it exerted on body, mind, and spirit to the same degree as today. Perhaps it is not yet all-pervasive, but in many parts of the globe, to be poor means to suffer under the weight of the polluting effects of the global economy, a pollution that invades all dimensions of life.

Any discourse on the sacred that takes place under the sway of the global economy is like the text of the salesman's pitch that is uttered with a fake smile. The outer ritual and language of the sacred are there, just like the salesman's friendly pitch, but they lack the power to transcend the cycle of commodification. Of course, within the redemptive hegemony of the global economy, one might enjoy the goods offered by the salesman or the sacred texts at some level, and the salesman and priesthood may also be gratified by a pitch well-made, a deal closed effectively. But though tears may be shed, and laughter shared, there is a difference between a transaction carried out with sacred texts purely as a cultural commodity versus as a means of bringing to light the difficult intersection of the realm of the sacred beyond measure or commodification and the culture of the global economy. Even when resistance is catalyzed, in issues involving class, race, ethnicity, gender, ecology, sexual orientation, and religious pluralism, as long as this resistance is not based on an awareness of the insidious insinuation of the problematic dimensions of the global economy, these efforts at resistance remain within the commodified terms of the economy and become co-opted by it.

In a hegemonic system, those at the bottom of the oppressive hierarchy are often the ones who most clearly see and feel the depths of the hegemonic structure. They are in an advantageous position to catalyze resistance against the commodification of all life, including that of religion. Shin Buddhist religious thought and the experience of Japanese American Shin Buddhists offer possible venues for the articulation of this hegemony, of reading into the depths of the global economy and of evoking the voices of the sacred that originates beyond this world.

Yet, while this potentiality may exist within the sacred texts of Shin Buddhism, inscribed in the bodies of Japanese American Shin Buddhists

through such experiences as the internment, many Shin Buddhists have turned away from this dimension of their religious lives in order to seek assimilation into the dominant mainstream American culture, the culture that is most deeply implicated in the problematic aspects of the global economy. Japanese Americans inherit the legacy of the two most powerful, and thus potentially most oppressive, economies in the world.

Shinran lived in twelfth and thirteenth century Japan, a time when he and many of his contemporaries saw as the most spiritually and socially degenerate era of Buddhism known as *mappō*. It was a time when he felt it impossible to see the truth, since everything was filtered through the corrupting lens of the “degenerate age.” Similarly, it can be argued that we live in a time when it is difficult to see whether there is even the possibility of a sacred unfolding beyond the bounds of commodification. Such was the poison of the age that Shinran felt the corrupting influences viscerally, saying that they were “like snakes and scorpions” within his own belly. Yet, it is said that precisely in seeing himself for what he was, he was able to hear the call of the sacred, the voiceless voice of boundless compassion, of *muen no daihi*, unfolding from beyond the limits of culture, coming to him as the voice of the Buddha Amida, the voice that moved him to abandon the priesthood, respond to the authenticity of the peasants and fisherman who moved him out of the fake discourse of the sacred that he found and detested in the aristocratic and intellectual cultures of his time.

In many religious traditions, there is the idea that one must look into the depths of the problematic dimensions of human existence, both personally and socially, in order to tap the power of the sacred to liberate spiritually as well as culturally the life of all beings. In Christianity, there is the awareness of human sinfulness that is inseparable from redemption, in Taoism the recognition of disharmony that leads to harmonizing with the Tao. In Buddhism generally and in Shin Buddhism in particular, there is a focus on the awareness of destructive behavior, of karmic evil, which awareness enables the light of liberating compassion to penetrate into the depths of life as we live it.

Shinran’s own sacred texts from the thirteenth century by themselves are not sufficient to address the multitudinous dimensions of global culture today, and there are limitations to his own self-expressions due to the cultural parameters within which he conceived his own religious life. Conversely, there are sacred texts distinctive to American Shin Buddhism upon which its adherents may draw to articulate the intersection of cultural life and sacred empowerment. These texts are not merely passively received by and inscribed in the bodies, hearts, and minds of Shin Buddhists. Individual human beings are not merely passively socialized into a hegemonic hierarchy, however redemptive. Each person bears responsibility to articulate his or her self-understanding and to manifest this in daily life. It may be possible that the sacred text of Shin Buddhism utters itself in the

single blow of a *taiko* drum, a subtle hand extended in a moment of gossip as the Dharma, in an invisible movement of the heart in a one-to-one encounter. As an integral part of these moments, it may be necessary for American Shin Buddhists to reflect even more deeply on their own cultural history, to create a more diverse community within its sanghas—in ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation, and other cultural factors, and even in some basic elements of its religious thought which may have been for too long filtered and interpreted for the corporate interests of its institutional hierarchies.

The difference between a purely political or socio-economic approach to the problematic dimensions of the global economy and one that is inspired by an awareness of the sacred lies in the resources and means of cultural transformation. The former draws solely upon what can be found in the visible world of culture; the latter may make use of cultural forms of expression but seeks to be inspired by something beyond the available cultural commodities. If it is true that the global economy, while remarkable in many ways, is headed in a deeply troubling direction, then it will take something more than the finite terms of cultural life itself to move against the tide. Only something like the sacred articulation of unhindered voices will be true to the terms of Shin Buddhist thought, of boundless compassion and indestructible life.

Whether there really is some sacred reality beyond the global, cultural processes of commodification remains an open question. However, this paper will have succeeded if it has stimulated reflections on what “sacred text” might mean within Shin Buddhism from the perspective of Japanese Buddhism in America. For in a sense, the reality of the sacred as articulated through Shin Buddhism depends not on the ability to substantiate in any intellectual sense ontological or theological claims. Rather the authenticity of the sacred depends upon the depth and awareness expressed by Shin Buddhists in their own self-articulation of “Great Practice,” where the text of this self-articulation is broadly construed to include all dimensions of life—of body, heart, and mind.



## NOTES

1. This paper was first delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Toronto, Canada, November 25, 2002, as part of a panel on "Asian and Asian American Sacred Texts in a Pluralistic Context," co-organized by the Asian North American Religion, Culture, and Society Group and SBL's Asian and Asian-American Hermeneutics Group. It also formed the basis for a new paper, "Buddhist Self/Global Culture," at the symposium, "Japanese Buddhism in America: Shared Issues, Common Themes," co-sponsored by the Buddhist Churches of America and UCLA, February, 21, 2003. The present paper incorporates some of the ideas from this latter paper.
2. See Kenneth Tanaka, *Ocean: An Introduction to Jodo-Shinshu Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: WisdomOcean, 1997), pp. 89–90.
3. Dennis Hirota et al., trans., *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. I and II (Kyoto, Japan: Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, 1997).
4. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1970).
5. Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 114.
6. Ritual activity is structurally communal or corporate even when performed in isolation.
7. There are other reasons, however. In the dominant American culture, articulacy concerning one's own religion often assumes mainstream Christian notions of dogma and practice. As Shin Buddhism does not follow these conventions, problems of cultural and religious differences are also significant.
8. Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993).
9. In fact, such a question may not even be appropriate vis-à-vis Buddhism.
10. Which many have tried but where none have succeeded conclusively, to say the least.



# Going beyond Tradition and Striving for the Future: Challenges and Tasks Faced by the Korean Buddhist Community in American Society

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## I. Introductory Remarks

FIRST OF ALL I WOULD LIKE to congratulate Kwanum-sa temple in Los Angeles for its thirtieth anniversary of the establishment. Kwanum-sa's importance in the Korean community in L.A. and its place in Korean Buddhism in America cannot be overemphasized, and in that sense it is my honor to be invited here and contribute my small thought in this meaningful moment.

This is a precious occasion joining together scholars with the respectable members of the sangha for the purpose of sharing their understanding, prospects for, and expectations about the role of Korean Buddhism in the United States. While reflecting on the thirty-year history of Kwanum-sa temple as well as its founding mission and its significance in the context of the Korean-American Buddhist community, we would like to ponder over the broader theme of Korean Buddhism in America. By doing so, we would, furthermore, like to identify future directions in which Korean Buddhism should attempt to move, so that the consensus and the ideas brought up in this symposium will therefore serve to help the members of the Buddhist community come up with concrete and practical ideas to promote Kwanum-sa's mission and that of Korean Buddhism in this country.

With this purpose in mind, that is, to develop meaningful and practical tactics to strive for the future, I would like to begin this talk by paying attention to the unique combination of diverse Buddhist traditions and other religions that are practiced in the United States, so as to broaden our understanding of the position of Korean Buddhism in the age of religious diversity.

As someone who is teaching about Korean Buddhism at a university in this country, I am used to questions such as: What made Korean Buddhism in particular relevant to a non-Korean or a Western audience? There are already so many kinds of Buddhism that are being taught here in the United States—Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese Zen, many different Tibetan schools, and Theravāda traditions. There are already so many traditions and they are already claiming their truth and advocating their most effective way to Buddhahood, why do we need to add Korean Buddhism here? What makes it special such that we should learn about it? In discussing and trying to answer these types of provocative questions, you may quickly realize that nationalist presumptions about why Korean Buddhism is important and what characteristics make it unique and relevant here in the United States cannot work. In other words, saying, “Korean Buddhism is good because we are Korean” cannot work for those students who are neither Korean nor Buddhist. I have my own candid answers to this question as a scholar, but I would like to toss this question to the audience as a question to ponder, so as to aid your future efforts preparing for upcoming demands and challenges, both from within and without, and to determine the tasks required to promote Korean Buddhism.

## II. Korean-American Buddhism as a Part of American Buddhism

The question can be paraphrased in another way: How is Korean Buddhism relevant to the already well-established American Buddhism? In this question there are two types of Buddhisms being supposed: Korean Buddhism and American Buddhism. Some may say, “Where is American Buddhism?” Buddhism started in India and spread to the south and the north. The former transmission resulted in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, and the latter so-called Mahāyāna tradition was transmitted through Central Asia to China, Korea, and Japan, such that “Chinese” Buddhism, “Korean” Buddhism, and “Japanese” Buddhism were established as national traditions. But American Buddhism has never existed as such a historical entity. Might Buddhism in America be a more correct term, instead of American Buddhism? Especially for those who come from countries where Buddhism is regarded as a national religion, the appellation of American Buddhism might even be threatening, undermining their own long history and tradition: “Even if the Buddhism currently practiced in America can be called ‘American Buddhism,’ the origin and root of Buddhism belongs to us, therefore American Buddhism should always refer to ‘us’ and ‘our Buddhism’ as its origin. Everything comes from us, so we should be in a position of authority.” In response to such a critique, I

would briefly point out that the term American Buddhism makes no claims to represent any one such national tradition as does such a term as Korean Buddhism. In fact, American Buddhism refers specifically to a plurality of traditions, and beyond that, the blurring or transformation of all these traditions. However, within that blur, stark contrasts remain in the pigmentation of American Buddhism.

"American Buddhism" has been getting a lot of attention from scholars lately, with its more than a hundred years of history and a unique identity emerging from the individual ethnic Buddhist traditions that it has grown out of. Rick Fields, the author of *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, distinguishes two types of Buddhism in his article contained in *The Faces Buddhism in America*.<sup>1</sup> These two types started separately and have more or less existed separately: the first is the construction of America's first Buddhist temple in San Francisco Chinatown in 1853 by a Chinese company; and the second begins with the taking of the Three Refuges Vow by a New York businessman, Charles Strauss, from the Sinhalese Anagarika Dharmapāla in the aftermath of the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. On one hand, an Asian ethnic community builds a temple to protect and preserve its values as well as to minister to the spiritual needs of its members. On the other hand, a mostly white and middle-class group adopts and adapts a Buddhism taught by a charismatic missionary. These two very different beginnings symbolize the dual development of American Buddhism.

Today, more than a hundred years later, Buddhism in America has proliferated wildly. There remain communities of Asian Buddhist immigrants, or their descendants. At the same time, groups of mostly white, middle-class students continue to organize around missionary teachers from Japan, China, Korea, Burma, Śrī Laṅka, Vietnam, and Tibet. While the former has come to be called "ethnic Buddhism," the latter has garnered the title "American Buddhism."

In light of this development of different Buddhist communities in America, two types of Korean Buddhism in America can also be identified: that which is derived from Korean sources and taught in English primarily within an environment of non-Koreans, and the community of immigrants and their re-creation of their native religious tradition. I would call the former "American Korean Buddhism" as one of those American Buddhisms, and the latter "Korean American Buddhism," or "immigrant Buddhism" or "ethnic Buddhism." The reason that I articulate these artificial terms to distinguish those two streams is to acknowledge the difference that exists between the two as well as to identify both the resonance and discord that these communities share. By doing so it is hoped an environment can be established that could be mutually stimulating, compensating, and beneficial, even while acknowledging the present distance that separates these two groups.

### III. Trends and Differences

If we might consider ourselves in a situation trapped by the cultural and ethnic boundaries of our own tradition and we wanted to try to overcome the boundaries by opening the scope and vision of our own traditional way of practice in Korean Buddhism, the first thing we would have to do is identify those major cultural differences that lay between us. Here I would like to list a few areas of differences.

#### (1) Monastic Versus Community Life

One of the most conspicuous differences is the American Buddhist's preference for ministry-focused Buddhism over monastic practice. The temples are the places where those ethnic or American Buddhist leaders teach and train new, incoming practitioners, after having done their own training and practices elsewhere. Traditional Korean monasteries perform both functions of teaching disciples as well as training their own monastic members while deepening their own religious practices. However, as the case in a Christian church where ministers who have done their theological training elsewhere and are then dispatched to perform their pastoral work, the central role of an American Buddhist temple lies in teaching and training lay disciples.

This preference also has a significant impact on the expectations that shape the role of clergy, not only in terms of how they relate with the lay population, but also in regard to the mode of administrative and operational control of their religious communities. Korean Buddhism is quite practice-oriented, and the emphasis on religious practice strongly dominates the minds of the Buddhist followers. They are generally expected to be great practitioners, and have more alternatives to select from if they are not interested in running a temple. In other words, even the monks and nuns who seclude themselves from society and make no "concrete" contribution to humanity earn respect and support from the Buddhist followers. In that scheme of expectations for themselves, the majority of monks and nuns in Korea rely mainly on donations coming from lay members of the temple, especially those major and important supporters, who donate as a means of accumulating merit.

In contrast, the degree to which American Buddhist monastics rely on lay members or disciples for their own support and spiritual development is relatively much less than in ethnic Buddhism. Instead, they earn their means of support by providing religious services to the members, such as offering meditation courses and seminars, or engaging in fundraising activities, which are more like an earned income at the cost of their labor.

As we know, in Western society it is quite unusual for someone to live the isolated life of a monastic. It is also not quite plausible for those who have been taught to live independently to become a monk and live on others' donations. Reflecting this social milieu of the West, many monks and religious leaders do not require their aspirants to make monastic vows of leading a complete life of renunciation, leaving family or any secular ties.

Contrary to the situation, in Asia where meditation is largely limited to monks and nuns and lay people dedicated to meditation training, in American temples meditation is practiced as part of their regular program for all members, even though the degree to which meditation is emphasized within an individual regimen of practice is different depending on their traditions. An American temple's activities include a diverse array of ongoing programs as well as annual events. A typical temple would be a place where men and women gather and do meditation together as well as have occasional retreats. Rather than a locus of practice for monks and nuns, the temple is a place for practice and training for the lay members. In this respect, American Buddhism is a movement of lay people. The foremost role of the monks and nuns is that of a dharma master who guides and trains lay practitioners. The first generation of lay disciples learned Buddhism from the "pioneer dharma masters," so they also assume that they themselves will eventually take on the role of their dharma master and devote their lives to training disciples when their generation later takes over the leadership role. They wanted to be both practitioner and teacher, but perhaps most of all, a respected dharma master.

This type of self-identification explains the unique tendency emphasizing pedagogy. In Korea, "dharma pedagogy" is not something you would learn or devise, but rather a skill that would automatically come to you as your level of religious attainment rises. There is another reason for American Buddhism's emphasis on pedagogy: many students of meditation and members of a temple approach Buddhism basically as a type of psychology, a way to appease your mind, or even a technique for you to improve your concentration level. In other words, religious commitment would not be considered as the first category to identify them as Buddhist. Accordingly, the degree of your respect for your teacher is less related to how accomplished he or she is as a practitioner (though this is, of course, still important) as it is to whether or not he or she is a charismatic teacher with a unique pedagogical skill.

The Dalai Lama of Tibet and the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh are the most prominent and celebrated religious leaders in this country. Thich Nhat Hanh describes this characteristic of American Buddhism in this way: "Buddhism in America may be mostly lay Buddhism. The family should become a field of practice, and the Buddhist center should be a center for families to come and practice. That does not mean that monastic Buddhism should not exist. But it should exist in a way that has a very close

link to other kinds of Buddhism. Democracy, science, and art should contribute as well. We should build Buddhism with the local materials.”<sup>2</sup>

## (2) Issue of Women and Family

The ever-present issue of acculturation is a significant area of discord between ethnic Korean Buddhists and their American counterparts. Common social concerns that Americans grew up with in their churches and elsewhere, specifically regarding the role of women and families in religious communities, bring a sort of challenge to traditional ways of practice in Korean communities. As identified in Thich Nhat Hanh’s quote, Buddhist centers should become a center for families to come and practice, which means that religious leaders should put themselves in a position of providing their advice and wisdom to those issues that many families go through, such as child-rearing and better ways of educating children. They are expected to provide their advice to those in need, and help the parents lead wholesome lives and become better parents. Holding a seminar focusing on those issues would be one way of addressing this concern. As we might expect, to a celibate monk or nun, this might not be an issue of much interest. This scenario shows clearly the kind of cultural differences that Korean Buddhism would have in this country.

Attitudes towards the role of women is also an area of interest. It is important for us to understand that feminist ideas have been central to the development of American Buddhism. Female Buddhist leaders and practitioners have played and continue to play a major role in shaping new attitudes and practices. Buddhism is almost the only major religion in the world that has recognized a community of female monastic practitioners, *bhikṣuṇī-s*, as equivalent to their male counterparts, *bhikṣu-s*. This contrasts sharply with the experience of Protestant female ministers who have only recently been accepted, and then only within some sects. In addition, Catholic nuns cannot be considered an equal partner of male priests. Compare this to Buddhism, where the female sangha was formed at the very beginning by the founder of Buddhism, the Buddha. This is not to say that Buddhism has been a feminist religion. However, in spite of a lot of deliberations and hesitation, and even though historically female practitioners have suffered from an unjust status and inferior treatment from male practitioners as well as from the society, it is equally important to understand that fundamentally, they are the equal partners and full-pledged members of the monastic community.<sup>3</sup> The fact that traditionally women have been more ardent in religious affairs than men and that about seventy to eighty percent of the lay members of Korean Buddhist temples are women should be taken into account, as well.<sup>4</sup>

American female Buddhists are keenly aware of Buddhist egalitarian ideas and expect their masters to behave according to them. During the



1980s many complaints were brought to masters who are mostly from East Asia for their patriarchal perspective and authoritarian ideas. Some of those complaints are still relevant to Korean Buddhist society in America. In American Buddhist dharma centers we now see increasing numbers of women masters, and they also talk about a special regimen and ways of practices especially for women, such as holding retreats only for women or changing the wording of traditional chants to include more gender neutral language.

### (3) Moral Concerns

Korean Buddhist temples in Korea as well as in America now face the demand to develop new interpretation of existing precepts and rules as well as to provide Buddhist morals and interpretations toward the Western society. Regarding the former point: scholars have observed that in comparison with Taiwanese Buddhism, Korean Buddhism is marked by a relatively lax application of precepts. This is seen for example in such matters as vegetarianism and other requirements found in the monastic rules. There are other examples. It is oftentimes the case in a Korean monastery (in which rice is the major food item) that they set mousetraps or some other means of killing mice. In this case, if there is a need to redefine the no-killing precepts it should take into consideration those who would be shocked by such inconsistencies and might lose faith in the integrity of the Buddhist rules. A clarification in the application of precepts so as to prevent possible confusion or the appearance of being evasive can only help in the task of bringing trust to Buddhist institutions.

American Buddhists teach not only about focusing on your own spiritual progress or your own enlightenment, or transcending this worldly life, but also about how to lead your everyday life in a "Buddhist" way, the latter of which is not regarded as a central message of Buddhist teaching in Korean tradition. Thus in the American dharma centers we can see classes and seminars offered exploring how to do your business in Buddhist ways, how to perceive material accumulation or your commercial activities, or how to live a simple and frugal life.

### (4) Social Concerns as One of the Areas with Which a Religion Should Be Involved

Social engagement is another area that Korean Buddhism has been criticized for having traditionally paid insufficient attention. Their passive attitude towards political and social issues is contrasted with the fact that social engagement has traditionally been a major locus of Christian concern. The rationale of Buddhist social welfare and relief work should come directly from Buddhist teaching, according to the idea of "*gongjeop*,"

common responsibilities and consequence of common actions. As a point of comparison, we can look to the development of a movement labeled “engaged Buddhism” which advocates a Buddhist understanding of “universal human responsibility” based on the central notion that “nothing can exist by itself.” Among the concerns of engaged Buddhism are the opposition to the use of violence and advocacy of peaceful solutions based upon tolerance and mutual respect, concern for environmentally sound development, anti-racist/sexist/homophobic activism, and activities aimed towards economic and social justice.

Samu Sunim, the Korean master who has been teaching Korean Buddhism in Toronto, Chicago, Ann Arbor, and other places in North America, is one of the leading and most active masters practicing American Korean Buddhism in this country. After seeing the tragedy of 9/11, he resumed *Spring Winds*, a Buddhist magazine that had been dormant for many years because of financial difficulties. I remember him as the first Buddhist leader in this country who issued a message as a Buddhist that reacting to physical violence with more violence, no matter what the reason, would be simply wrong—as taught in Buddhism. As stated clearly in Buddhist scripture and also taught by the Buddha and other previous masters, violence will bring more violence. While this may seem like a very clear-cut interpretation, Samu Sunim’s advocacy for non-violence is especially important when contrasted to the more ambiguous responses to 9/11 that came from other quarters of American Buddhism.<sup>5</sup>

There is really no limit to the number of issues that Buddhists can address. I was glad that one of the Korean Buddhist temples in California was providing a lunch for the homeless. Within the capacity of our purpose and resources, we should think deeply about the gradual development of similar programs.

#### IV. Entering into Diversity

So far we have identified some areas of difference that have prevented a greater intermingling of Korean Buddhism in America. This separation has been a key element in preventing Korean Buddhism from taking its place as a full-fledged member of American Buddhism and in being a more active participant in the diversity not only of Buddhist traditions, but of all the myriad religions practiced in this country.

Nevertheless, even after acknowledging the differences between Korean and American Buddhists, with the right effort, ethnic Korean Buddhists can seek to meet the interest of those Americans practicing Korean Buddhism in America, directing them towards the abundant opportunities for contact with Korean cultural and spiritual resources that exist within the ethnic Korean tradition in America. At the same time, these groups can

also take a more active role in introducing Korean culture and traditional religious values as a means of adding to the richness of American cultural pluralism. Such activities would of course only benefit from an increased interaction with sympathetic American interlocutors.

However, with this in mind, I am not proposing to have both communities merged or bridged into one, nor do I think that there is only a unilateral way of Korean Buddhist advancement to the West. I rather propose that the real change should come from the Korean Buddhist community to become a part of this greater American Buddhist community, and that the two communities sustain their own identities and ways of practices. The point being made here is that each should remain open to the other, so that each can utilize the resources and strengths of the other. I would predict, however, that eventually, when the younger generation takes up an initiative in the affairs of the Korean Buddhist community, gradual and progressive change will come in the ways Korean Buddhism is practiced, so that present gaps existing between the two communities will be narrowed with the center shifting away from a closed ethnic tradition towards the direction of American Buddhism.

#### V. Concluding Remarks

There are many points remaining to be addressed, such as the issue of whether one's own practice can be simultaneously achieved while dedicating oneself to proselytizing and training others. I would rather conclude with my rather candid suggestion that I wanted to toss to the leaders of Korean Buddhist communities in America by introducing you to this anecdote of the Dalai Lama on the future of American Buddhism, quoted from Rick Fields' observations.

When a reporter asked him if he had any observations to make about the future of Buddhism in America, His Holiness scratched his head in his characteristic way and seemed momentarily stumped. "Difficult question," he said, and thought some more. "I think that any person is the same human being, and has the same problem," he began, "birth, old age, and internal attachment. As far as the teaching aspect is concerned, it will always remain the same because the origin is the same. But the cultural aspect changes. Now you see Buddhism comes to West. Eventually, it will be Western Buddhism. That, I think, is very helpful—that Buddhism become a part of American life."<sup>6</sup> So, it is still in the process of becoming, it's still carving its own image.

Korean Buddhism should be contributing first as simply one of many forms of "Buddhism," and then add the cultural aspect of being specifically Korean Buddhism. With its diverse ethnic cultural backgrounds, ethnic Buddhism has been and will continue to be an important transmitter of

culture to American society. With the addition of their unique cultural patterns, not only American Buddhism but Americans will become more diverse and beautiful. Bearing that in mind, it should be more important and fruitful for us to participate in the efforts of other Buddhist traditions in America to establish and spread Buddhist teachings and practices in general, rather than always emphasizing our own unique patterns and their being more beautiful than others. While participating in those common and communal efforts of American Buddhism, the cultural color and personality of Korean Buddhism will be naturally established.<sup>7</sup>

## NOTES

1. Rick Fields, "Divided Dharma: White Buddhists, Ethnic Buddhists, and Racism," in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, edited by Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: UC Press, 1998), pp. 183–195.

2. Re-quoted from Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala Books, 1992), p. 377.

3. Rita Gross lists the following points that she identifies are common in Buddhism and feminism. (1) Preference of experience over theory, (2) thus you are encouraged to move forward and practice to achieve the goal, (3) both Buddhism and feminism are interested in how the human mind works.

Sandy Boucher's theory: (1) Buddhism does not assume an absolute god, nor a submissive relationship between omnipotent Father and me. Buddhism teaches how to trust one's own experiences. (2) In terms of methodology, Buddhism questions any existing hypothesis. Feminists question patriarchal hypotheses and their norms. Buddhism teaches meditation to reveal the reality of feelings and ideas. Feminism is neither dogma, nor creed or faith. (3) Buddhism presupposes Buddha nature which is covered by the veil of ignorance. It teaches us to take away the veil and realize our own beauty and potential. The purpose is to obtain freedom out of limited ideology and conditions.

4. On the contemporary religious landscape of Buddhism, nuns are equal and indispensable partners for monks in many senses, regardless of whether or not they are acknowledged. Like monks, they receive full ordination (Korean and Taiwanese are the only two traditions that maintain full ordination for nuns). In the past, Buddhism was almost entirely a man's world. Nowadays, radical changes have been taking place. Nuns are not only equal in numbers with monks, but have also proven themselves to be active participants in the tradition in various capacities: as avid meditators, compassionate caretakers for the needy, organized administrators of social welfare facilities, attentive and powerful leaders for city-based Buddhist centers, and organizers and demonstrators in rallies demanding democracy, whether within the Chogyo Order or against prejudices in the media and government policy.

5. A not so insignificant number of American Buddhists supported war after 9/11; I was really disappointed to see a large number of American Buddhists publicly express a very extreme ambivalence about "non-violence." While those such as Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama have maintained non-violence in the face of decades of horrible trauma, all it

took was one tragedy for many American Buddhists to turn to violent retribution. It was truly shameful in my opinion and kind of laid bare the relative superficiality of American Buddhism. In light of such lack of integrity, Samu Sunim's position is even more valuable.

6. Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, p. 379.

7. For example, a tradition of Zen practice, liveliness, flexibility, etc.

# A Cybernetic Approach to Dzogchen

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**DZOGCHEN** (Tib. *rdzogs-chen*)—usually translated “Great Perfection”—is a philosophical and meditative tradition of Tibet. Many Tibetan Buddhists consider it to be the most advanced form of Buddhist practice.<sup>1</sup> Dzogchen is distinguished from other forms of Tibetan Buddhism by its unique doctrines and meditative approach. For example, Dzogchen posits innate and natural perfection as the individual’s “ever-present” and permanent condition and maintains that the simplicity of immediate awareness, unconditioned by any concept, symbol, practice, etc. constitutes a direct path to realizing this perfection.<sup>2</sup> From a Dzogchen perspective, “Everything is naturally perfect just as it is, completely pure and undefiled.... With no effort or practice whatsoever, enlightenment and Buddhahood are already fully developed and perfected.”<sup>3</sup>

Though the meaning of these doctrines is apparently straightforward, their significance as part of a lived religious path is less clear. Among other things, there is no necessary or obvious correlation between a doctrine’s meaning and its function in the psychological life of a practitioner: what a doctrine means and how that doctrine affects the practitioner’s consciousness—are different issues. Since familiarity with doctrinal formulations does not necessarily entail understanding their cognitive effects, an adequate approach to Dzogchen must address both areas—it must combine a descriptive account of doctrines and practices with an analysis of how both affect the consciousness of the practitioner and potentially generate the mystical<sup>4</sup> states valorized by the tradition. It must also include a third element: an explicitly formulated theory or model of mind or consciousness. In order to investigate Dzogchen’s cognitive and experiential effects, one first needs a model of what is being affected, i.e., consciousness itself. This model functions as the indispensable interpretive framework for addressing the specifically psychological processes at stake.

This article is an interpretation of Dzogchen using the approach outlined above. Accordingly, it addresses the cognitive and experiential effects of Dzogchen doctrine and practice based on a specific model of consciousness. The article is divided into three major parts. The first presents a cybernetic theory of mind or consciousness—the interpretive framework for a psychological analysis of Dzogchen. Part two is a descrip-

tive overview of Dzogchen doctrine and practice (the data to be interpreted<sup>5</sup>). The final section of the article applies the cybernetic theory discussed in part one to the doctrines and practices presented in part two. This analysis provides new insights into Dzogchen by showing in explicit psychological terms how its doctrines and practices affect, and ultimately transform, the consciousness of the practitioner.

### A CYBERNETIC MODEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Cybernetics is a subfield of systems theory concerned with identifying general principles governing the regulation and evolution of system steady states. The application of cybernetics to mind naturally inspires some suspicion and controversy. Cybernetics seems to stand well outside the mainstream of current psychological discourse. How is a cybernetic approach to mind justified?

The psychological and methodological issues raised by this question are, however, beyond the scope of this article. Despite this, the value of a cybernetic approach to mind (and then Dzogchen) is indirectly demonstrated by its results, i.e., the insights it generates about the tradition. Nevertheless, in defense of a cybernetic approach to mind, two specific points are worth noting. First, the impression that cybernetics is radically non-conventional is somewhat misleading. Cybernetic-type thinking is implicit in some traditional psychological theory.<sup>6</sup> The theories of personality of Sigmund Freud, Henry Murray, and Karl Menninger are all "cybernetic" in nature, particularly the emphasis on maintaining and restoring mental (egoic) equilibrium in the face of internal and external conflict.<sup>7</sup> Freud's pleasure principle functions as a "hydraulic," equilibrium-seeking process that is essentially homeostatic.<sup>8</sup> The concept of equilibrium is at the heart of psychoanalysis in general, where "regulatory mental mechanisms" are explained as "equilibrium-seeking systems."<sup>9</sup> Second, a significant number of psychologists and cognitive theorists currently (and explicitly) advocate systems-based theories of mind (i.e., theories that draw upon general systems theory, cybernetics, dynamical systems theory, and chaos theory). These psychologists and cognitive scientists find systems-based approaches attractive because they seem best suited to modeling the apparently "systemic" nature and behavior of the mind.<sup>10</sup>

The credibility of a cybernetic approach to mind automatically lends it some validation as a theoretical framework for interpreting religious and mystical experience. But given the existence of more mainstream psychological and epistemological theories, why choose cybernetics over the alternatives? In response to this question I will make only one point. Two approaches currently dominate theory about the nature and causes of mystical experience: perennialist philosophy and psychology, and



constructivism (or contextualism). Both approaches have been subjected to extensive critiques in the philosophical literature on mysticism; both have been shown to be fundamentally inadequate.<sup>11</sup> In this context, new, even controversial, approaches deserve serious consideration, especially when they may avoid or resolve the very issues that render other approaches problematic.<sup>12</sup>

Before addressing the details of the cybernetic model itself, it is best to begin with a few stipulative definitions of terms central to any psychological discussion: awareness, consciousness, and mind.<sup>13</sup> The term *awareness* is used here to connote sentience itself (or “sentience-as-such”). *Consciousness* is awareness constrained by a system of cognitive and emotional variables or events. This system as a whole may be referred to as *mind* or the *cognitive system*. *Consciousness*, then, refers to a specific mode of awareness (i.e., a *state* of consciousness) supported by an interdependent network of cognitive and affective factors or events (the cognitive system or mind). In slightly different terms, awareness is constrained by mind, creating a particular state of consciousness. Note that these definitions make a distinction between sentience-as-such—awareness as “primary and irreducible”<sup>14</sup>—and sentience as it is expressed according to specific sensory, neural, cognitive, and environmentally conditioned constraints (i.e., a state of consciousness).

A state of consciousness (what Charles Tart calls a d-SoC, “discrete state of consciousness”) is not to be confused with the immediate and changing content of consciousness but represents an overall pattern of stabilized psychological organization that abides regardless of fluctuations in psychological subsystems or environmental input. Though a state includes such fluctuations, a state of consciousness is the abiding frame of reference that constitutes the implicit, semantic background within which such fluctuations occur. For example, the essential characteristic of the state of consciousness identified with ordinary experience is duality, which is expressed on two levels: perceptual and spatial (a self situated in a world of apparently real and distinct objects) and evaluative (the content of experience viewed as either attractive, i.e., “good” or repellant, i.e., “bad”<sup>15</sup>). This duality, as an abiding context of experience, persists with greater or lesser degrees of intensity regardless of whether or not one happens to be angry, joyful, distracted, etc.

The mind is the entire system of mental, emotional, and behavioral variables that construct and defend such a state, both at the level of unconscious cognitive processes and conscious, fluctuating phenomenal experience. In the case of ordinary experience, these variables include: (1) a ceaseless, self-oriented, and only partially controllable internal narrative; (2) the absorption of attention on this internal narrative (phenomenologically experienced as an “abstraction” of experience out of the stream of felt sensation or perception); (3) distraction-seeking and addictive behavior; (4) both unconscious and conscious concepts and beliefs encompassing

substance-based ontological presuppositions, self-image, conditions of worth and belonging, and linguistically-constructed conceptual categories; (5) the mediation of experience according to such concepts and beliefs; and (6) defense mechanisms to preserve and protect the self-image. These variables themselves represent fluctuating and mutually reinforcing processes, all constrained within a critical range in order to maintain the integrity of the system as a whole.

Since a state of consciousness is generated by a particular cognitive system (or mind), the cognitive system and its corresponding state are functionally interdependent. In other words, a change in state necessarily implies a change in the cognitive system, and vice versa. Furthermore, the relation between system and state is not one way. The cognitive system constrains awareness (generating a state), but a state in turn reinforces the system of variables that created it. For example, the underlying presuppositions of an emotion like anger tend to depend on, as well as support, a dualistic perspective on life (feeling "one" with others would tend to promote empathy and so undermine getting angry at them). As will be discussed below, Dzogchen doctrine and practice initiates a transformation of consciousness as both system and state in the specific sense described here.

This cybernetic model of mind entails a normative claim about states of consciousness: particular states of consciousness constitute more or less veridical attunements to Reality<sup>16</sup> as such. In other words, some states are more transparent "windows" on Reality than others. The state of consciousness associated with ordinary experience constitutes a particularly opaque or obscured "window." This obscured or deluded quality is reflected in the intuitive ontology of ordinary experience, where "substance" is taken for granted as an object of experience when in fact "substance" is never experienced at all (an insight of Kantian epistemology). Rather, we experience an ongoing stream of sensations (color patches, tactile resistance, etc.) that, because of certain patterns of regularity in their occurrence, support the formation of a perceptual construct of "substance." "Substance" is a mental construction or interpretation.

The fact that ordinary experience is so fundamentally linked with the presupposition of substance confirms Herbert Guenther's observation (inspired, it would seem, primarily by Heidegger and Dzogchen) that human beings have radically strayed from any sensitive appreciation for their own experience. The ongoing "mind-body" problem of philosophical and cognitive discourse is a good illustration of this experiential and existential insensitivity. The only incontrovertible fact of our predicament is experience itself. Yet many philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists consider "matter" to be the basic given of our experience and see "consciousness" as a problem to be explained in relation to matter. The extreme, almost perverse outcome of this view is the claim that consciousness is an

epiphenomenon of material processes. A phenomenologically sensitive appreciation of our predicament suggests a different conclusion: sentience is the given (though still a mysterious given) while “matter” is a cognitive construction and ontological fallacy.

These reflections on the primacy of experience and the constructed nature of substance lend some support to a monist understanding of Reality, in opposition to the dualistic, Cartesian model suggested by ordinary experience. From this perspective, Reality may best be described as a single, meaning-saturated, “energetic”<sup>17</sup> field, which devolves through processes of mental reification and objectification into the subject and object poles of experience. The “objects” of experience are best explained as “objectified meaning,”<sup>18</sup> though the process of objectification constitutes an extreme impoverishment of the semantic dimension of experience. This model provides an elegant solution to the mind-body problem, in the sense that it negates the presuppositions that create the problem initially. From a monist perspective, there is no mind-body problem, since the dualism of “mind” and “body” is an erroneous interpretation of a single, dynamic field.

### Processes of Mind

In the context of the ordinary state of consciousness, the diverse processes of mind together perform two basic functions. First, the mind constructs ordinary experience and interprets that experience as a world.<sup>19</sup> In particular, it constructs the two forms of dualism that characterize the fundamental structure of ordinary experience: perceptual and evaluative. Second, the mind homeostatically maintains and defends that state of reference in the face of stresses and perturbations. Because the constructive processes of mind result in the intelligible world of ordinary experience, perception and mentation are generally described in information-processing terms, i.e., the mind synthesizes a perceptual whole (our experienced world) and constructs meaning out of a chaotic melange of sensory inputs. An alternative position is suggested by the recognition that the intelligibility of ordinary experience does not necessarily entail that sense data (the raw input processed by the mind) is inherently unintelligible or meaningless. Intelligibility in the context of ordinary experience may actually constitute a radical loss of potential meaningfulness. Rather than synthesizing a meaningful whole out of chaotic multiplicity, the mind may instead collapse an inherently meaningful Unity (the Real) into the meaning-impoverished dualistic perspective that characterizes ordinary consciousness. From this perspective, meaning is a given, not a construction.

The constructive processes of mind (the processes that generate ordinary experience) depend on the set of cognitive categories, maps, concepts

and beliefs<sup>20</sup> that function as the template for our ordinarily experienced world. This map is comprised of (1) those constructs that establish the background and focal dimensions of the perceptual field (i.e., concepts of substance, inherent existence, temporality, spatial orientation, etc.,<sup>21</sup> as well as the linguistic and conceptual inventory of the “things,” qualities, and experiences comprising the world), and (2) the evaluative associations linked to every thing and experience within that perceptual context—the conditions that define desirability versus undesirability (I will refer to these as perceptual and evaluative constructs respectively). The first category of constructs functions to reify or objectify experience and construct perceptual duality.<sup>22</sup> The second generates the evaluative interpretation of experiences and objects as attractive, i.e., desired or aversive, i.e., repellent, providing the basis for our essentially dualistic, affective responses to life.

These levels are functionally interdependent since evaluative associations only occur in relation to a self (i.e., what the self wants and does not want) and a localized self in turn presupposes the perceptual duality of self versus object. In addition, the localization of awareness as a self (one pole of perceptual dualism) is in part constructed by a network of identity-defining concepts bound together because of the evaluative associations linked to those concepts. For example, I may define myself as “nice” because of the positive, evaluative associations linked to that concept (i.e., the correlation between being nice and feelings of safety, belonging, and love), and this in turn functions as one factor within a larger system that defines or constructs the boundaries of personal identity that localize experience and so perpetuate a dualistic perceptual context.

Perceptual and evaluative constructs are also mutually reinforcing, since an evaluative response to some “thing” first requires being able to experience or perceive that thing, while the judgment about it reinforces relating to life in terms of things. Evaluative judgments as a whole reinforce the self-concept and therefore the duality of self versus object: all inputs are processed in terms of how they affect the self, reinforcing the self as the organizing locus of mental life. The sense of being a “self” in turn generates some degree of attendant vulnerability, and therefore a need to manipulate people and the “objects” of one’s world and mind (thoughts) to be safe. This strengthens an object-oriented engagement with the world (internal and external) and objectifying thinking in general. Self and object become further “solidified,” perpetuating efforts to “deal with life” based on this dualistic perspective. In general, these interconnected variables hold our attention within a dualistic perceptual context, which in turn reinforces the mind’s categories and concepts.

Evaluative responses occur on two levels: (1) those that are derived from innate drives or needs (survival, food, safety, etc., are innately good; death, pain, abandonment, etc., are bad) and (2) those learned through socialization and empowered through their association with innate needs.<sup>23</sup>

The following example illustrates this connection: I may strive to own a red Corvette (because a red Corvette is good), but the motivating power of that image is based on a learned association between it and more basic drives, e.g., for sex or belonging. In general, the second, learned level comprises a complex system of images and concepts that carry emotionally charged, positive or negative associations.

Once established, these conditions set up a semantic context in which inputs become potential signals of safety and belonging or abandonment and death. This context generates the continuous “dis-locating” processes of ordinary consciousness. Once the desirable is defined in terms of a specific set of conditions, the mind has to continuously “seek” the desirable, straying from the immediacy of awareness as it grasps at thoughts, feelings, and circumstances. Depending on environmental conditions, this ongoing “dis-location” may be accompanied by a close and obsessive monitoring of self-image and environment. According to Paul Gilbert, “All stimuli must be evaluated for the degree of threat or potential reward present in a situation.”<sup>24</sup> For example, when interacting with others,

individuals are very sensitive to how others *attend and regard them*.... The sense of self... is constantly in tune with the degree to which one is able to elicit investment from others and find an acceptable and secure place in relationship. Put simply, we live more than one life. We live our own lives in our own heads, but also we wish to live a positive life in the minds of others.<sup>25</sup>

The motivation to live “a positive life in the minds of others” is egocentric, however, and therefore orients attention back on the self. In this sense, attending to the other is self-referential, as suggested by Harold Sackeim and Ruben Gur’s observation that “in normal conversation individuals can be said to be continually self-monitoring.”<sup>26</sup>

Since evaluative associations all concern the well-being of the self, they exercise their strongest cognitive effects in relation to creating and maintaining a self-image. Evaluative conditions define an ideal self-image and then constrain cognitive processes to support that image. For example, any aspect of the self that matches negative associations is experienced as a threat and must therefore be repressed. Functioning in a somewhat analogous way to Jung’s shadow, this repressed material is projected, making any aspect of the environment that represents the shadow equally threatening. In other words, external threats mirror internal denial. In systems terms, Glenn Perry describes this projection as psychic “waste,” which accumulates in the environment leading to eventual toxicity.<sup>27</sup> Such external representations of the shadow have the power to generate intense states of anxiety and fear, though in many cases these emotions are suppressed in the wake of the anger at what is perceived to be the “cause” of discom-

fort. This "cause" must then be attacked, in either subtle or overt ways. Attacking the external representation, however, in fact expresses efforts to maintain denial within the self. In general, "Projective and transference distortions operate in such a way that one's core assumptions about the nature of the self and reality remain relatively intact into adulthood, even in the face of mildly threatening conditions."<sup>28</sup>

### The Homeostatic Processes of Mind

Because conceptual constructs constitute the template for how the cognitive system experientially manifests, system homeostasis depends on preserving and defending those concepts through an array of cognitive and psychological processes. What is the nature of these processes? To some degree, homeostasis is a function of the inherently self-reinforcing nature of the system itself. As Allan Combs explains, consciousness is stabilized by the "tendency of the whole experience to support its constituents, and for them in turn to create the whole."<sup>29</sup> The perceived world automatically confirms the system's structure since it is to some degree constructed by the system.

At the perceptual level, the mind's self-reinforcing nature means that anomalies are rarely, if ever, experienced. We may encounter an unidentifiable object, for example, but this object is still intelligible as a substantial "thing" existing within the larger context of a sensible world. In general, the "reality" of what we experience as "the world" is taken for granted and seldom if ever challenged. In this context, homeostasis does not require negotiating anomalies (except perhaps during extreme drug-induced experiences) since perceptual constructs, experience, and world generally interact as a seamless, self-reinforcing process.

The requirements for homeostasis shift at the evaluative level. Evaluative responses to particular qualities, experiences, things, and circumstances are a quite different type of process than establishing the global parameters of experience itself. As illusory as appearances may be, they are continuous with the Reality that supports them (the construction of appearances actually depends on this continuity),<sup>30</sup> and emerge as a hermeneutically circular frame of reference that in ordinary circumstances is immune to perturbations. This is not the case with evaluative constructs—a person's overarching categorization of appearances as desirable or repellant. Here homeostasis requires processes aimed at maintaining ideal images of "the desirable" (to feel safe and experience positive affective states) as well as avoiding negative images of "the repellant" (to avoid negative affective states, especially feelings of abandonment). This demands unique cognitive processes compared to those associated with perceptual constructs, since evaluative judgments are correlated with

specific conditions, yet actual conditions change. Matching (or not matching) inputs with constructs is therefore a continuous effort to hold a set of static patterns against a continuously transforming flow. The human psyche is essentially an ongoing locus of resistance requiring continuous maintenance and monitoring.

Any discrepancy between static, ideal images (evaluative constructs) and internal and external conditions constitutes a threat to the system. Such threats represent perturbations or fluctuations in the system that may destabilize its structure by contradicting positive evaluative associations (accompanied by varying degrees of emotional stress).<sup>31</sup> If sufficiently intense, such threats may precipitate a crisis of meaning—the world becomes “unintelligible” in terms of its felt capacity to support and nurture one’s life, expressed as one of a variety of mild to extreme psychological disorders (from low self-esteem, depression, or debilitating anxiety to psychotic breaks with “reality”). The intensity of the threat or stress is determined by both the quality and quantity of the stress itself and by how experientially open or closed the system is. These three factors are interdependent, and ultimately, system openness is most important, since the conditional perspective intrinsic to ordinary consciousness (i.e., clinging to idealized, static images) sets up a corresponding unlimited number of potentially perturbing inputs (since the actual conditions of life are never static).

Rather than adjust or evolve its structure to accommodate perturbing inputs, the cognitive system, as homeostatic, tries various strategies to preserve its conceptual constructs—especially constructs defining the self-image. Generally speaking, homeostasis or “self-stabilization” is maintained through negative feedback. The content of the experiential stream (a blur of both thought and sensation) is monitored by the system in terms of its correspondence with system constructs (i.e., its confirmation of positive evaluative associations). Inputs that contradict evaluative constructs (expressed as values, attachments, desires, etc.) initiate processes to adjust the content of the input so that it matches those constructs. The “essential variable” of this process “is the *difference* between an ‘observed’ or ‘recorded’ value of the maintained variable and its ‘ideal’ value. If the difference is not zero the system moves so as to diminish it.”<sup>32</sup> Applied to cognitive systems, the mind seeks to match experiential content (the “recorded value”) with system constructs (the “ideal value”). Through this process constructs are confirmed, stabilizing the system’s structure.

Matching constructs with experience is achieved in two basic ways: (1) by acting to change the self, the environment, or both, (2) by regulating the experiential stream (independent of the environment). Cognitive homeostasis is generally realized through both strategies. Acting to change one’s self and one’s environment may be considered the psychologically healthier response, though it can never be adequate by itself since circumstances and

self (as ego) will never be "perfect" (and even if they are, they are bound to change). Psychological health (as ordinarily understood) is more accurately a balance of both, with the first predominating. More commonly, however, the second predominates, since direct manipulation of experience (through fantasy, addiction, etc.) is an easier and safer way to cope with dissonance and pain than acting to change one's self and environment.

"Regulating the experiential stream" itself includes a whole range of processes which together function to manipulate the "stream of experience to stabilize itself in the steady state of its actual cognitive organization."<sup>33</sup> This experiential regulation takes two basic forms: (1) the active shaping of internal experience to confirm concepts, and (2) the inhibition of inputs that contradict concepts. In the first case, "self-stabilization... involves the use of conations to structure the stream of percepts to progressive correspondence with the set of constructs already evolved in the system."<sup>34</sup> For example, the internal narrative functions as a reinforcing mechanism, by continuously "telling the story" of self and world as defined by our conceptual constructs. This involvement in the internal narrative simultaneously accomplishes the second function, reducing dissonance by inhibiting awareness of contradictory or threatening inputs (from either internal or external sources). For example, mental reiteration of the self-image may be used to suppress input contradicting that self-image. Kicking one's dog in a fit of anger might be followed by a flash of discomfort at being confronted with information that conflicts with one's self-image (i.e., "I am nice" or "I am an animal lover"). This discomfort may in turn be followed by a variety of responses functioning in some way to suppress the threatening input. For example, attention may be diverted to some other activity (distraction) or substances may be ingested to numb or distract awareness. Conflicting input may also be rationalized away (the dog was bad and therefore deserved to be kicked) or suppressed through attempts to reinstate the self-image by obsessively replaying the event over and over in one's mind as it "should have happened."

The unspoken rules of appropriate social behavior may also function as a mechanism of denial maintenance—in this case, a preventative measure to minimize image-threatening inputs before they occur. A covert agreement of polite, adult interaction is to avoid making excessive demands on others. One possible reason for this is an unconscious understanding that asking too much of another forces her to experience the dissonance between her naturally selfish impulses ("I don't want to do it") and her self-image of being good or nice. Asking too much threatens the other's denial. For the person experiencing the discomfort of such dissonance, the source of the request is experienced as the cause of this discomfort, and therefore becomes a threat who must be attacked (subtly through judgment, or not so subtly through more overt forms of aggression). *Not*



asking too much of others may in turn reflect an unconscious request to enter into a covert agreement, i.e., "I won't threaten your denial if you won't threaten mine." "Niceness" in general may function in a similar way: a strategy to provoke reciprocal responses in others in order to confirm one's self-image.<sup>35</sup> The ultimately egocentric nature of this behavior surfaces when the other does not respond as desired. He or she then becomes a threat, initiating a range of potential responses depending on the intensity of that threat (ignoring, judging, verbally attacking, physically attacking, and in the most extreme cases, murder).

Since the circumstances of one's predicament rarely coincide with idealized images, these types of constructive and inhibiting processes are not limited to specifically threatening inputs. As Combs points out, "Anyone who is awake and alive is regularly treated to demonstrations of the inadequacy of their formulas and protocols, whether these concern specific skills or life in general."<sup>36</sup> More specifically, we are continuously confronted by information that challenges our concepts of belonging, acceptance, and love—information either about the self specifically, or about the environment that reflects back on the self. The fact that there is always some degree of discrepancy means that the system is always subject to some degree of stress: when acceptance and abandonment becomes tied to conditions, life itself becomes a threatening input. For example, the inherently egocentric nature of ordinary consciousness is a continuous threat to the ideal image most of us hold about ourselves as being "good or nice."<sup>37</sup> Homeostasis therefore requires *continuous* denial, correlated with a tendency to increasingly withdraw from life and immerse attention in the internal narrative.<sup>38</sup> In such a state, experience becomes "abstracted" out of the unpredictability of external sensation and into the more manageable world of fantasy.<sup>39</sup> By disassociating from sensory input, experience becomes more malleable and therefore easier to conform to one's constructs.

In general, constructive-type processes involve focusing attention on fantasized, desired conditions or circumstances, either internally (through the internal narrative as described above) or externally (e.g., by seeking out confirming inputs through popular entertainment). Such processes are simultaneously inhibiting and may therefore be distinguished from those processes that function solely as inhibitors. This latter type may take two basic forms: (1) numbing and distracting consciousness to dampen awareness of dissonance and the pain associated with that dissonance, and (2) selective attention and other types of perceptual "filtering" or mediation. The first would include any type of substance reliance, substance abuse, or addiction (including the "benign" substances and distractions that help many people get through their day: alcohol, tobacco, sugar, caffeine, and television). Regarding the second, James Miller lists several cognitive mechanisms that inhibit information input, which may also—extending

Miller's analysis—function to help stabilize the cognitive system in the face of perceived threats:

- Omission:* failing to transmit certain randomly distributed signals in a message
- Error:* incorrectly transmitting certain signals in a message
- Queuing:* delaying transmission of certain signals in a message, the sequence being temporarily stored until transmission
- Filtering:* giving priority in processing to certain classes of messages
- Abstracting:* processing a message with less than complete detail
- Escape:* acting to cut off information input
- Chunking:* transmitting meaningful information in organized "chunks" of symbols rather than symbol by symbol<sup>40</sup>

To escape threatening inputs, for example, we may simply ignore (consciously or unconsciously) information that contradicts our beliefs or self-image. Some degree of filtering also seems to be built into the cognitive system, since inputs that do not fit cognitive maps will tend to simply go unregistered.

Important in the functioning of all the above homeostatic processes is object-oriented attention. Homeostasis involves a defensive posture towards life, and as Gilbert points out, "The attention structure in defense is focused rather than open."<sup>41</sup> This "focusing" correlates with an object-oriented engagement with the world, reflecting the cognitive system's attempts to manipulate "things" in order to maximize safety. Such attention may be directed either externally (on "objects") or internally (on thoughts). It takes the form of a non-reflective immersion in a world of objects that rarely focuses on anything in particular (i.e., it is not concentrative). Instead, it involves a rapid shifting of attention among objects. Fluctuating between the mental and the external and driven by whatever egocentric agenda is at the forefront of consciousness, object-oriented attention is accompanied by a loss of any felt, existential appreciation for the moment.

Directed externally, this type of attention reinforces perceptual dualism and the presumption of an ontological distinction between subject and object. As discussed above, one of the self-reinforcing aspects of the mental system is the perceived world itself—being a construction of conceptual constructs, it reflects those constructs back to the system. Object-oriented attention is a central factor supporting this involvement in a constructed world. In doing so, it also operates in conjunction with conceptual con-

structs that define the “objects” of attention, thereby reinforcing those constructs and the dualistic mode of experience they help generate. Directed internally, it involves attention on the internal narrative (and the forms this narrative may take, such as fantasy) and becomes one of the primary mechanisms regulating evaluative constructs and the self-image in particular.<sup>42</sup>

Integral to all of these various processes is an overriding self-obsession,<sup>43</sup> reflecting once again the self-reinforcing dimension of the system: the concept/experience of self creates an inevitable sense of vulnerability, which encourages self-obsession and the need to protect the self through the processes described above. This in turn reinforces a “self,” exacerbating the sense of vulnerability and therefore strengthening attempts to defend the self in a continuous and self-perpetuating cycle.

### Evolution through Positive Feedback

To the extent that safety / meaning is construed according to a conceptual system, disconfirmation is inherently threatening and therefore will tend to be suppressed. However, if disconfirmation (stress) crosses a critical threshold, the cognitive system’s ordinary homeostatic mechanisms may be inadequate to suppress the threat. System organization therefore becomes dysfunctional (felt as some form of emotional discomfort) since it is no longer able to maintain a sense of safety or belonging in relation to self-image or environmental circumstances. In response, the system may take one of two courses. Typically, the system will intensify efforts “to rigidly adhere to dysfunctional patterns in an attempt to accommodate the crisis without having to actually change.”<sup>44</sup> To preserve its constructs, the system may dissociate and close its boundaries even more, either by intensifying constructive processes to support a sense of “personal grandiosity” or by intensifying inhibiting processes (such as increased “emotional withdrawal”).<sup>45</sup> This initiates the devolution of the system into what may eventually become psychopathological states. The other option is to change constructs—specifically, to evolve one’s understanding of life toward a less conditional, less dualistic perspective.<sup>46</sup> This takes place through positive feedback, which reorganizes “the existing construct sets to fit the actual stream of sensory experience.”<sup>47</sup> As Ervin Laszlo explains, “Negative-feedback stabilizing cycles give way to positive-feedback motivated *learning* cycles when the input fails to match the constructs of the system, or matches then insufficiently.”<sup>48</sup>

Through positive feedback, constructs are allowed to deviate from their steady state in an attempt to evolve a conceptual model that can accommodate threatening inputs. This deviation may increase chaos and stress within the cognitive system, yet ultimately it makes it possible for

new “cognitive organizations [to evolve] which map the relevant states of the environment with increasing precision and range of prediction.... They enlarge the horizons of the system and provide it with increasingly wide ranges of progressively more refined meanings.”<sup>49</sup> Such new constructs simultaneously represent the release (to some degree) of evaluative conditions, accompanied by less defensiveness, more openness, and therefore an enhanced sensitivity to one’s environment.<sup>50</sup> Knowing becomes less conceptual and more felt/intuitive while emotional upset subsides as fluctuating external conditions no longer carry the same semantic associations.<sup>51</sup> From this perspective, learning is not simply the incorporation of new data within an existing set of constructs, but involves the reorganization of conceptual maps, experienced on an existential level as a deeper and more satisfying appreciation of life’s meaning. As Erich Jantsch explains, an evolutionary, systems perspective suggests that learning is not simply “adaptation to a specific form into which knowledge has been brought..., but [represents] the formation of new and alive relationships with a multifaceted reality which may be experienced in many forms—learning... become[s] a creative game played with reality.”<sup>52</sup> Learning, in this sense, represents a *qualitative* change in one’s engagement with life.<sup>53</sup>

### Summing Up the Model

From a cybernetic perspective, mind is as an interdependent network of cognitive variables or events that functions to (1) constrain awareness within the dualistic frame of reference represented by ordinary consciousness and (2) defend that state of reference against any perturbing influences. The first is a constructive process in two senses: perceptual and evaluative. The second function—defending the dualistic state once it has been constructed—reflects the homeostatic nature of mind. As described above, this encompasses a whole range of mental and behavioral strategies and behaviors that serve to reiterate and reinforce established constructs and processes or dampen threatening input.

In addition to these two functions, the cybernetic approach recognizes a third: the mind’s capacity to “self-organize” or evolve its structure. In this case, cognitive variables may be disrupted, boundary conditions may change, and the entire cognitive system may evolve toward more aware, more environmentally adaptive, and more existentially satisfying modes of experience. The contrast between ordinary and evolving states of consciousness highlights the normative claim of the cybernetic model of mind described here. The ordinary state of consciousness represents an impoverishment of awareness, a loss of one’s felt sense of life’s meaningfulness, and a denial of one’s full, human potential (often in association with a variety of unpleasant affective states).<sup>54</sup> The self-organizing

processes of mind, on the other hand, constitute an increasing realization of one's human potential and an enrichment of emotional and semantic appreciation.

## AN OVERVIEW OF DZOGCHEN DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE<sup>55</sup>

An investigation of Dzogchen's cognitive effects requires the interpretation of its doctrines and practices based on a model or theory of mind—in this article, the cybernetic model of mind described above. It also requires a familiarity with the data to be interpreted, i.e., the doctrines and practices themselves. The section below addresses this second topic through an overview of Dzogchen view (doctrines) and path (practices). Due to the complexity of the tradition, my comments here are necessarily selective.<sup>56</sup> Dzogchen has been practiced in Tibet for at least eleven hundred years. Its views and practices evolved over time, while at any particular time the various groups and lineages that identified themselves with Dzogchen did not necessarily present or interpret its doctrines in identical ways. This complexity is exacerbated by the fact that in actual practice Tibetan traditions are never insulated entities. In a traditional Tibetan context Dzogchen is never practiced in isolation. All forms of Tibetan Buddhism are thoroughly integrated with what Tibetans refer to as the Sūtrayāna (stressing renunciation, compassion, and emptiness) and the intricately ritualized complexities of tantric practice. Still, alongside this variation and complexity certain key themes have remained more or less constant throughout Dzogchen's history, and it is these that are focused on here.

### Introductory Remarks on Dzogchen

The historical origins of Dzogchen are obscure. According to the tradition's own sources, Dzogchen originated as a fully articulated Buddhist teaching in Uddiyana (in some sources, Oddiyāna) or India and was transmitted directly from India to Tibet late in the eighth century primarily by Padmasambhava and, to a lesser degree, by Vairocana and Vimalamitra. Scholars tend to reject the traditional account, viewing Dzogchen as an indigenous Tibetan movement that emerged sometime between the eighth and tenth centuries through the combined influences of Indian Mahāyoga tantric traditions and Ch'an, with secondary contributions from Bön, Indian Mahāsiddha traditions,<sup>57</sup> Yogācāra and *tathāgatagarba* theory,<sup>58</sup> and perhaps even Hindu Śaivism and Gnosticism.<sup>59</sup>

Among Tibetan Buddhists, Dzogchen is primarily associated with the Nyingma school, where it is considered the most advanced of the "Nine Paths" or Yānas (Tib. *theg-pa*) of Buddhism.<sup>60</sup> The Nine Paths are a

hierarchical systemization of Buddhist paths arranged according to soteriological efficacy and level of spiritual capacity required by the practitioner. Listed in order from “lowest” to “highest” they are: Śravaka, Pratyekabuddha, Bodhisattva, Kriyātantra, Caryātantra, Yogatantra, Mahāyogatantra, Anuyogatantra, and Atiyogatantra.<sup>61</sup> In general terms, the first two (“Hearer” and “Solitary Buddha” respectively) are based on the Nikāya sutras and emphasize renunciation and a realization of non-self with respect to persons. The third refers to the sūtra-based path of the Mahāyāna, emphasizing purification in association with the Six Perfections (*pāramitā*-s) and placing particular stress on compassion and analytical reflection on emptiness (*śūnyatā*). The next six paths represent progressively more advanced levels of tantric practice, culminating in Atiyogatantra, another name for Dzogchen.<sup>62</sup>

Within this framework, Nyingmapas describe and define Dzogchen in different (though usually overlapping) ways. As stated above, it is claimed to be the highest path, with respect to either its view or its practices. In the first sense, Dzogchen doctrines are considered the ultimate expression (possible in words) of the true nature of Reality, the individual, and the state of awakening. In the second sense, “highest” refers to the special directness or uncontrived nature of Dzogchen “practice.” In the context of the Nine Paths, Dzogchen is also described as (1) the culmination of all Buddhist paths, (2) the “essence” or “condensation” of all previous paths, or (3) the culminating stage of a single path or awakening process. In this final sense, the first eight “paths” are considered preliminary stages of realization leading to an ultimate state of realization called “Dzogchen.” In addition, some presentations of Dzogchen describe it as an “all inclusive” path—a tradition that includes all Buddhist paths as means of “provok[ing] ... the awareness (Tib. *rig-pa*<sup>63</sup>) of the true nature of reality in its ultimate purity and perfection.”<sup>64</sup>

In many of these formulations, Dzogchen is identified with the goal of Buddhism, i.e., the enlightened state, nirvana or buddhahood. This view underlies Namkhai Norbu’s claim that Dzogchen is the “essence” of all Buddhist paths. As he puts it, Dzogchen is “The recognition of our true State and the continuation of its presence,” and as such, “really is the essence of all paths, the basis of all meditation, the conclusion of all practices, the pith of all the secret methods, and the key to all the deeper teachings.”<sup>65</sup> In general, “Dzogchen” may be used as a term for ultimate Reality (identical with the true nature of the individual) and the ultimate experiential state that realizes Reality. As a term for the Real, Dzogchen “connotes a natural and effortless unity underlying and pervading all things,”<sup>66</sup> often described as an empty, yet luminous “Ground” (Tib. *gzhi*) out of which all phenomenal appearances arise. As a label for the realization of the Real, Dzogchen indicates “a higher-order level of thought, ... the peak of a person’s endeavor to fathom the depth of his being [and] gain an

unobstructed view."<sup>67</sup> Dzogchen constitutes "the direct introduction to and the abiding in [the] Primordial State of enlightenment or Buddhahood,"<sup>68</sup> or, as Sogyal Rinpoche puts it, "the primordial state of...total awakening that is the heart-essence of all the buddhas and all spiritual paths."<sup>69</sup>

From the above perspectives, some Dzogchen teachers deny that Dzogchen is either a school, a path, or an articulatable set of doctrines. As John Reynolds notes, "the Nyingma Lamas do not regard Dzogchen as just another set of beliefs, or a system of philosophical assertions, or a collection of texts, or some sect or school."<sup>70</sup> They point out that if Dzogchen is already ineffable enlightenment as well as the "primordial state of the individual,"<sup>71</sup> it cannot also be a "path" for attaining enlightenment. Sapan Kun-dga' rgyal-mtshan (1181–1282) states: "The theory of Atiyoga is Gnosis, not a means. To make a subject—that can not be expressed in words—an object of discussion, is not a thought of the learned."<sup>72</sup> These points notwithstanding, Dzogchen texts and teachers do attempt to explain through language the nature of Reality, and they recommend a particular type of contemplative approach. It is in this sense that Geoffrey Samuel characterizes Dzogchen as "a formless and nonconceptual system of meditation conceived of...as the final stage of Tantric practice,...going beyond the transformational techniques of Tantra itself to the goal of the Enlightened state."<sup>73</sup> Though Dzogchen may ultimately be much more than a view and path, these categories are still legitimate and helpful ways of approaching the tradition.

Dzogchen's placement as the final of the Nine Yānas raises an additional issue. Is Dzogchen essentially tantric (as the name Atiyogatantra suggests), or does it constitute a distinct, non-tantric tradition? Even though the framework of the Nine Yānas locates Dzogchen as the highest tantric path, it is common for both Tibetan Buddhists and scholars to contrast tantra and Dzogchen as being fundamentally distinct in approach. For example, tantra may be described as a path of "transformation" based on highly ritualized, structured, and symbolically rich meditative practices, in contrast to Dzogchen, which aims at "self-liberation" (Tib. *rang-grol*) through the "formless" practice of "letting be."<sup>74</sup> While this distinction is valid (and will be elaborated on below), it would not seem to override the fundamental continuity between tantra and Dzogchen, and the sense in which Dzogchen is the completion or culmination of tantric practice. Like tantra (and Mahāyāna Buddhism in general), Dzogchen stresses the unqualified continuity of Absolute Reality and mundane appearances, though tantra represents this continuity symbolically through the forms of the maṇḍala while Dzogchen tends to subvert (at least as an ultimate ideal) any form of symbolic representation (especially in the context of meditative practice). Dzogchen also shares one of tantra's fundamentally defining characteristics: the identification of path and goal.

In advanced tantric practices, one visualizes oneself as already being a tantric deity, fully enlightened with all attendant buddha-qualities. In Dzogchen, inherent perfection or buddhahood is considered one's primordial condition from the very beginning. Again, this common theme takes either a symbolic or non-symbolic form depending on the path: in tantra the identification is accomplished through symbolic visualization while Dzogchen bypasses symbols altogether (one's current predicament *is* the maṇḍala). Put another way, both tantra and Dzogchen are means of "tuning in" to the here and now, one through symbols and one non-symbolically through the experience of immediate presence. This non-symbolic approach is directly correlated by Nyingmapas with Dzogchen's ultimate superiority as a path, since from the Nyingma perspective any type of condition imposed on experience is necessarily an obscuration of one's true, primordial nature.<sup>75</sup>

### Dzogchen View: Ultimate and Conventional Reality

Reality, according to the Indo-Tibetan Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, may be understood from two different perspectives: "ultimate" (*paramārthasatya*) or "conventional" (*saṃvṛtisatya*). Conventional reality is usually identified with the ordinary cognition of things as "inherently existing." Ultimate Reality, on the other hand, refers to emptiness (*śūnyatā*): the absence of inherent existence in any "thing" and therefore the ultimate illusoriness of "reality" at the conventional level.<sup>76</sup> In the Tibetan context, however, the meaning of ultimate Reality is more complex. Tibetan Buddhism is essentially tantric. And though an apophatic understanding of emptiness (associated with Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamaka) represents the official position on ultimate Reality held by many Tibetan Buddhists (especially Gelugpas), the pervasively tantric character of Tibetan Buddhist practice lends itself to a more cataphatic approach. From the tantric perspective, emptiness is "a radiant presence full of vivid imagery" that constitutes "the source of [the] ... primordial energy that brings all possible forms, even the universe itself, into manifestation."<sup>77</sup>

Tibetan Buddhism is also influenced by other, more cataphatic forms of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as Yogācāra and the concept of *tathāgatagarbha*—the innately pure and luminous Buddha-nature residing within all sentient beings. Yogācāra has been particularly important for the Nyingma school. According to Samuel, Nyingmapas have historically tended to emphasize "Yogācāra [i.e., positive] conceptualizations of the path" rather than the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamaka approach of strict negation.<sup>78</sup> The result is that Tibetan, and particularly Nyingma, presentations of ultimate Reality often sound much more positive than the term "emptiness" suggests.



This willingness to describe Reality in more positive terms is particularly evident in Dzogchen. In the Great Perfection, ultimate Reality is referred to as *gzhi* (literally, “ground”), variously translated as “Ground,” “Base,” “Foundation,” “Primordial Basis,” and “Being.” In its most general sense, *gzhi* refers to an eternal, pure, and luminous Reality that is the source of all phenomenal appearances. *Gzhi* is considered equivalent in meaning to standard Mahāyāna and tantric terms for the Ultimate, such as “dharma-body” (*chos-sku*, *dharmakāya*), “intrinsic-nature” (*chos-nyid*, *dharmatā*), or “drop” of subtle energy (*thig-le*, *bindu*).<sup>79</sup> It is used more or less interchangeably with the terms the nature of mind (*sems-nyid*) and the great universal Ancestor (*spyi mes chen-po*). *Gzhi* is also equated with terms associated with qualities or states of realization that contact Reality: intuitive awareness born of oneself (*rang-byung-gi ye-shes*), non-conceptual (*rtog-pa*), intrinsic awareness (*rig-pa*), and intuitive awareness (*ye-shes*). In Dzogchen, Reality and the state of consciousness that realizes Reality are identical.<sup>80</sup> Ontology, epistemology, and realized experience ultimately become indistinguishable, in the sense that the experience of awakening is pure, experiential identification with Reality itself.

The nature of the Ground is generally described as ineffable. From a Dzogchen perspective, language is “a deviation from the principle [i.e., the *gzhi*]” and a “lie.”<sup>81</sup> Any attempt to predicate something of pure Being constitutes a “going astray” from Being itself. For this reason, “the Absolute (*dharmatā*) has, from the beginning, never been pronounced.”<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, it remains nameless.<sup>83</sup> This ineffability, however, did not prevent Dzogchen thinkers from describing it, beginning with the unequivocal insistence that it *does* exist.<sup>84</sup> Though it is invariably described as “empty,” this is the positive emptiness inspired by tantra, Yogācāra, and possibly the Jonangpa school.<sup>85</sup> In Dzogchen, emptiness is anything but an “inert void.”<sup>86</sup> As Guenther explains, Being’s nothingness “is not some abstracted and lifeless emptiness, but an utter fullness that ... is vibrant with energy and hence a meaning-mobilizing potential (Tib. *nyid*).”<sup>87</sup> And because it exists, it naturally has qualities. Among other things, the Ground is described as unchanging, invulnerable, indestructible, authentic, perfect, complete in itself, non-modifiable, incorruptible, unborn, eternal, atemporal, non-localized, one, non-dual, unobstructed, all-pervasive, invincible, permanent, pure from the beginning, spontaneous, luminous, and motionless. In addition to these abstract qualities, Dzogchen texts use more personalized, symbolic, or tangible representations of the Ultimate. The *gzhi* is referred to as a “cognitive being” or “subject” (Tib. *yul-can*), symbolically represented as the “primeval grandmother,” the “mother of all Buddhas,” and the “great universal grandfather.” It is often identified with Kun-tu bzang-po (Skt. Samantabhadra), the tantric personification of the *dharmakāya* who assumes the role of teacher or Buddha in many

Dzogchen and Nyingma tantras. In some sources, the *gzhi* is described in even more concrete terms. As Karmay explains, “in tantras chiefly associated with Dzogchen, the *gzhi* is conceived as having a form which resembles a vase and its intellect is likened to a butter-lamp. The overall presentation of the three components, viz. the body, its intellect, and light, is in the form of a ‘light ball’... [with] the components [being] on top of each other.... This effulgent body knows no old age, hence its name ‘The Young Vase-like Body’.”<sup>88</sup>

In more technical language, the qualities of Being may be explained with reference to what Guenther calls the “triune dynamics of Being”: essence or facticity (Tib. *ngo-bo*), nature or actuality (Tib. *rang-bzhin*), and energy, compassion or resonance (Tib. *thugs-rje*).<sup>89</sup> Guenther describes the first as “the [non-material] ‘stuff’ the universe including ourselves is made of,” considered by the tradition to be both “diaphanous” (Tib. *ka-dag*) and “nothing,” or “empty” (Tib. *stong-pa*). Dzogchen discussions of Being’s essence usually emphasize emptiness as its decisive characteristic, though again this emptiness is never simply a void. According to Guenther, Longchenpa’s (Klong-chen rab-byams-pa) explanations of Being’s essence use *stong-pa* as a verb, and so nothingness, “far from being empty or void, is a voiding.”<sup>90</sup> Longchenpa also states that “nothing exists” in the Ground’s essence only in the sense that “nothing is distinguishable.”<sup>91</sup> Nothing exists as a distinguishable entity—an entirely different claim than “nothing exists at all.” The positive nature of Being’s essence is emphasized by Dilgo Khentse’s translation of *stong-pa* as “openness,” referring to the “open,” “unobstructed,” and “mutually interpenetrating” nature of everything in the universe.<sup>92</sup>

The term *rang-bzhin*, the Ground’s “nature” or “actuality,” literally means “own itself,” “continuance,” or “face,” implying that Being’s nature is the “lighting up” (Tib. *gzhi-snang*) or “showing its face” (emptiness).<sup>93</sup> This “lighting-up” is suffused with the qualities of spontaneity (Tib. *lhun-grub*) and luminosity or radiance (Tib. *gsal-ba*) and represents an intermediate phase between pure potential and actuality (what Guenther characterizes as a “becoming-an-actuality”).<sup>94</sup> At this level, the Ground is described as a “primordial glow”: the “utmost subtle appearances” of Being’s qualities as a rainbow of “lights, forms, [and] rays... in the ultimate sphere” of its expression.<sup>95</sup>

The final of Being’s “triune dynamics,” *thugs-rje*, is variously translated as “energy,” “compassion,” or “resonance.” According to Reynolds, *thugs-rje* is simply the unity of the above two facets (i.e., Being’s essence and nature).<sup>96</sup> Guenther’s choice of the term “resonance” evokes a richer sense of what this unity involves: a coordinated, vibrational harmony between all levels and facets of Being’s energetic expression or play. In other words, one of Being’s fundamental qualities is its own resonance

with itself.<sup>97</sup> Describing *thugs-rje* as “ceaseless,” Jigmed Lingpa further considers it “the basis of [Being’s] various manifestations.”<sup>98</sup> It is associated with two basic qualities: *kun-khyab* (“all-encompassing”) and *rig-pa* (“excitation”).<sup>99</sup> The second quality refers to the excitation or cognitive intensity of Being as a whole that “breaks away from Being” and becomes the “seed” for Its consequent evolutionary options.<sup>100</sup>

### The Four Kāyas

Another framework for describing the multilevel processes of Being is the four kāyas<sup>101</sup> or “buddha bodies”: essential-nature body (Tib. *ngo-bo-nyid-kyi sku*, Skt. *svabhāvakāya*), dharma-body (Tib. *chos-sku*, Skt. *dharmakāya*), enjoyment body (Tib. *longs-sku* Skt. *sambhogakāya*), and transformation body (Tib. *sprul-sku*, Skt. *nirmānakāya*). The four kāyas are a tantric and Dzogchen elaboration of the standard three kāyas of Mahāyāna Buddhism: *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmānakāya*. As generally explained in Mahāyāna sources, the ultimate “Dharma Body” of the Buddha is identified with Reality, i.e., emptiness. The *sambhogakāya* is the compassion-motivated manifestation of the *dharmakāya*, symbolically represented as a celestial form of a buddha enthroned in his Pure Land and surrounded by hosts of bodhisattvas and other divine figures. The *nirmānakāya* is identified with any “physical” form the *sambhogakāya* may take in order to aid sentient beings, Śākyamuni Buddha being the foremost example.

According to Guenther, these standard explanations utterly fail to convey the intended meanings of these terms, at least as they are used in Dzogchen. He translates *sku* (“body”) as “gestalt,” explaining that “a gestalt is an unbroken whole, a complete pattern that cannot be arrived at through an accumulation of parts, but rather imbues the parts with meaning.... In the Buddhist context gestalt refers to the wholeness of experience where the subject-object split has not yet occurred and the field of experience has not been dissected into isolatable units of interest.”<sup>102</sup> The kāyas, then, are a way to understand Being’s varying levels of expression in relation to (or as) an individual’s experience.

The first level, *svabhāvakāya*, Guenther describes as “the gestalt of Being-in-its beingness,” referring to the ultimate, ontological Ground of experience.<sup>103</sup> According to Longchenpa, the three other kāyas “are all incorporated into this [fourth kāya], which is permanent, all pervasive, unconditioned, and without movement or change.”<sup>104</sup> The next three kāyas all represent experiential manifestations of this ultimate ontological Ground. The *chos-sku* (Skt. *dharmakāya*) refers to “Being’s meaningfulness” or “meaning-rich gestalt”—the *svabhāvakāya*’s “excitation” as self-under-

standing.<sup>105</sup> The epistemological connotations of *chos-sku* are specifically suggested by its synonyms, *rig-pa* (“ec-static intensity” or intrinsic awareness) and *ye-shes* (pristine or primordial awareness).<sup>106</sup> Its basic characteristics are emptiness and radiance, as well as “primordial purity” due to its freedom from any trace of “reflexive representational thinking.”<sup>107</sup> This ec-static intensity manifests as Being’s “autopresencing,” giving rise to *long-sku*: “Being’s coming-to-presence as a ‘world’-engagement” or “gestalt as a world-spanning horizon of meaning.”<sup>108</sup> *Long-sku*’s “manifold ... projections” in turn constitute *sprul-sku*, i.e., “Being’s presencing as cultural guiding images.”<sup>109</sup> Guenther elaborates on the three experiential kāyas in the following passage:

The triple gestalt experience [represented by the three kāyas] ... shows the connectedness of what might be spoken of as focal settings within the gestalt experience of Being. These gestalt experiences account for the embeddedness of the individual in the multidimensional reality of which he is both a particular instantiation and the expression of the whole itself. Within the field of experience these gestalt settings range from the holistic thereness of Being’s sheer lucency as the proto-patterning of the contextual horizon of meaning [*dharmakāya*] to the presencing of the cultural norms and guiding images that express and serve the individual’s aspiration for meaning [*nirmānakāya*]. Yet though these gestalts are spoken of as if they existed independently, they are interconnected inasmuch as they are all of one fabric—roughly, they are all experience.<sup>110</sup>

In other words, the “gestaltism of Being” represents “a process of ‘embodying’ the meaningfulness of Being in its multiple nuances.”<sup>111</sup>

In Dzogchen thought, these four kāyas are correlated with the three aspects of the Ground discussed above (though how they are correlated may vary depending on the source). As Dudjom Lingpa explains, the Ground’s “essential nature as emptiness is dharmakaya; its inherent nature as lucidity is sambhogakaya; its innate compassionate responsiveness as natural freedom is nirmanakaya; its pervasiveness and extension throughout all of samsara and nirvana are svabhavikakaya.”<sup>112</sup> Longchenpa links the aspects and the kāyas in a similar manner, though he is not entirely consistent. Being’s essence (or “intensity ‘stuff’”) is identified with either (or both?) the *svabhāvakāya* or the *dharmakāya*, as well as with *ye-shes* (pristine cognition or primordial awareness).<sup>113</sup> *Sambhogakāya* and *nirmānakāya* are identified with Being’s third aspect (energy or resonance), both emerging through Being’s nature or actuality (i.e., emptiness “lighting up”).

## The Gzhi as “Creator”

The relation of *dharmakāya* to *sambhogakāya* and *nirmānakāya* is often presented as a process of emanation, corresponding with the general understanding of Being as the primordial Source or Creator of all phenomenal appearances. The *gzhi*, metaphorically speaking, “gives birth.”<sup>114</sup> In a general sense, It emits a radiance that congeals into the phenomenal universe as its own “adornment,” displaying through this process such qualities as intelligence, compassion, primeval spontaneity, creativity, and playfulness. In the *Kun byed rgyal po'i mdo*, the universe is considered to be “an outflow of the primordial ground,”<sup>115</sup> personified as the “All-Creating King.” As asked in the text, “Who else if not the Mind of Pure Perfection (*byang chub sems; bodhicitta*<sup>116</sup>) would create the entirety?”<sup>117</sup>

The ultimate source of creation is commonly referred to as the “youthful vase(-like) body”: a symbol for Being’s essence as pure, unconditioned, and unmoving. It is called “vase-like” because “its outer covering ... is not (yet) broken”—it has “not appear[ed] outwardly”<sup>118</sup> but is still “contained” within its own freedom from conditions or distinguishable characteristics. But as stated above, it is the nature of the Ground to “light up.”<sup>119</sup> As Guenther explains, “the whole’s ec-static intensity ... prevents it from ever becoming static and constantly seems to push it over the instability threshold into the world of actuality.”<sup>120</sup> Metaphorically, the “vase breaks” and manifests as the “externalized glow” of Being’s qualities as “lights” and “rays.”<sup>121</sup> This ultimate sphere of Being’s activities in turn sets the stage for two possible evolutionary trajectories. The first trajectory—Being’s “emancipatory mode” (Tib. *grol-lugs*)—is initiated by the self-recognition of all appearances as nothing other than the Ground itself. This, from a Dzogchen perspective, is *nirvāna* or buddhahood, understood as a return to one’s Source.<sup>122</sup> The second—Being’s “errancy mode” (Tib. *’khrul-lugs*)—is the failure to make this recognition, being the fundamental ignorance (Tib. *ma-rig-pa*) that initiates a process of “going farther astray” (Tib. *’khrul-pa*) from the authenticity of Being.<sup>123</sup> This dimming of Being’s pristine intelligence is poetically described in the *ITa ba klong yangs* as follows:

The immovable moved slightly,  
 The unquivering quivered slightly.  
 Although there is no motion in the Basis,  
 The motion comes out of the versatility of the Intellect [*rig-pa*].  
 This versatility is called the Mind.  
 It is also that of spontaneous compassion.  
 Just like the wind of the breath of a small bird.  
 Or the movement of the unborn cock.

Or one hundredth part of a hair from a horse's tail split into a hundred,  
Such is the quivering which joins intellect to mind.  
This is called the Innate Nescience.<sup>124</sup>

In other words, ignorance is the "joining" of Being's pristine intelligence and the dichotomizing, obscuring processes of ordinary mentation (Tib. *sems*; Skt. *citta*), a joining in which *sems* is privileged and Being is occluded. In the more technical accounts of the *gzhi*'s errancy mode, ignorance establishes the "ontic foundation" or "site" (Tib. *kun-gzhi*<sup>125</sup>) for the limiting/obscuring thought processes (Tib. *sems*; Skt. *citta*) more directly associated with human experience. Mind itself is constituted by eight "perceptual patterns" (Tib. *rnam-par shes-pa*; Skt. *vijñāna*) and the fifty-one "co-operators" (Tib. *sems-byung*; Skt. *caitta*), the latter including a variety of cognitive and affective "pollutants" (such as passion, conceit, jealousy, etc.) that "specify processes of wandering farther and farther away from that which existentially matters, of a continual being off course, and of straying deeper and deeper into obscurantism and self-deception."<sup>126</sup> In this context, *sems* is described as a "lost child" who has strayed from his mother's (i.e., the *gzhi*'s) side.<sup>127</sup>

As indicated above, ignorance is generally identified as the cause of the errancy mode. Based on his own personal visionary experience, Dudjom Lingpa attributes these words to Vajradhara: "The obscuring of the ground of being by non-recognition of intrinsic awareness is indisputably the ground of all ordinary experience (*kun-gzhi*)."<sup>128</sup> But ignorance is also a general and pervasive characteristic of the entire "straying" process, including its end product, the person.<sup>129</sup> Mind (Tib. *sems*) and ignorance are functionally equivalent in Dzogchen.<sup>130</sup> And because ignorance constitutes the experiential alienation from Being, it is in turn identified with duality: a localized subjectivity (the "I") over against the object. The close association of all these aspects means that any or all may be described as the "basis" of samsara. In some sources, samsara is "rooted" in subject-object duality.<sup>131</sup> Others may emphasize that duality is founded on the "I,"<sup>132</sup> which may in turn be considered to include the concept of "self-nature" in general. According to Dudjom Lingpa (reporting, he claims, the words of Śrisimha experienced in vision), "Just as water, which exists in a naturally free-flowing state, becomes frozen into ice under the influence of a cold wind, so the ground of being exists in a naturally free state, yet the entire spectrum of cyclic existence is established solely due to the underlying conception of an individual self and a self-nature of phenomena."<sup>133</sup>

It is important to emphasize that, from a Dzogchen perspective, the unfolding of the errancy mode never compromises Being's essentially pure nature. With respect to the individual, this invariant purity is referred to by various terms: the nature of mind (Tib. *sems-nyid*), the awakened mind (Tib. *byang-chub-kyi sems*, Skt. *bodhicitta*), Buddha-nature (Tib. *bde-*

*gshegs snying-po*, Skt. *tathāgatagarbha*),<sup>134</sup> etc. All express the idea that regardless of how far one strays, one's primordial nature remains Being itself. *Sems-nyid* in particular is used to signify the view that our own "innermost being" is itself Being's "lighting-up," and as such has lost "nothing of its connectedness with the 'wider ownmostness' of Being."<sup>135</sup> In other words, our "innermost being" is nothing other than the *gzhi* in its utter completeness: "As the *garuda* when still in the egg has already developed its wings and other parts of its body so is *chos sku* in us."<sup>136</sup> *Sems-nyid* goes unrecognized because *sems* (ordinary mind) "creates ... the world of illusion and through its activities it has obscured its own real nature (*sems-nyid*) from time immemorial."<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, the "'real nature' of the *sems*" (i.e., *sems-nyid*) remains "immaculate ... and luminous."<sup>138</sup> Within this framework of *sems* and *sems-nyid*, buddhahood is described as their reuniting, symbolically "described as the meeting between the mother and her lost child."<sup>139</sup> It is also described as the liberation of *sems-nyid* from the obscuring power of the *sems*, or as "the return of the *sems* to the Primordial Basis" (Tib. *mas ldog*, or "return from below").<sup>140</sup> Whichever metaphor is used, the general sense is that "one arrives back where one has been originally and was from the [very] beginning."<sup>141</sup>

Being's invariance is not only identified with a person's true nature (Tib. *sems-nyid*) or the pure state of consciousness that realizes this nature. In addition ignorance, mind, and subjectivity are considered continuous with Being as well, such that even the mind's "pollutants" are nothing but the "concrete presence" of pristine modes of awareness (Tib. *ye-shes*).<sup>142</sup> The errancy mode itself is correlated with Being's essence, nature, and energy "metaphorically described in terms of 'resting' and 'surging'."<sup>143</sup> So whereas Being's essence at rest is *chos-sku*, when "surging" it "becomes the closed system potential of one's primordiality-(constituted) existentiality," i.e., the *kun-gzhi*.<sup>144</sup> As surging, Being's nature or actuality is identified with the mind's unconscious cognitive and affective propensities (Tib. *bag-chags*; Skt. *vāsanā*) while energy or resonance is expressed as the joining of *kun-gzhi* with these propensities.<sup>145</sup>

This implies that in "going astray," self and world have "never departed from the vibrant dimension of (Being's) originary awareness mode."<sup>146</sup> As Shabkar Lama puts it, "No matter how large or violent the rolling wave, it cannot escape the ocean for a moment."<sup>147</sup> Though a person's finiteness does represent the dimming of Being's radiance or intelligence, this dimming is itself viewed as part of Being's "play of obscuring and clearing."<sup>148</sup> Dzogchen therefore proposes the "grandiose idea ... that Being conceals and obscures itself by 'immersing' itself in us as a kind of camouflage, but also reveals itself through us; and what is so revealed is Being itself that is our humanity."<sup>149</sup> This in turn becomes the basis for Dzogchen's basic claim that the "spiritual domain ... is nowhere

else than in an individual's body as experienced in the immediacy of its lived concreteness."<sup>150</sup>

Being's invariance extends to the world of phenomenal appearances. In Dzogchen texts, the *sems* (rooted in ignorance, duality and ego) is often identified as the immediate cause of illusory phenomenal appearances. This "illusoriness," however, does not mean that appearance is hallucination. Rather, ordinary appearances represent a fundamental misperception of Reality, especially the failure to recognize and experience the unbroken continuity between appearances and Ground. Dzogchen texts tend to assert that all phenomena are nothing but the *gzhi*. As Longchenpa puts it, "know everything thought or attended to be the substance of the unborn ordering principle itself."<sup>151</sup> Or, as the *Kun byed rgyal po'i mdo* states, "each individual [phenomena] is in some respect My nature, My identity, My person, My word, My mind."<sup>152</sup> In other words, creation only "appears to be distinct from its origin."<sup>153</sup> The "ontological ground" is both "immanent and transcendent at once," and "not essentially different" from its creations.<sup>154</sup>

Being, then, remains invariant both as an abiding presence immanent within all things and as the things themselves (the expressions of that presence). Even though Being has in some sense "gone astray" as mind and the phenomenal world, It "has never parted from the vibrant dimension of [its] originary awareness mode"; what has been "built up" by mentation is still considered "perfect and complete."<sup>155</sup> Everything is, as Dzogchen teachers often express it, primordially pure and enlightened from the beginning.

## Dzogchen Practice

Dzogchen practice is a direct extension of its view. Since we, as well as everything else, already are Being, to know Reality and attain buddhahood is nothing other than being naturally and spontaneously present in a state of "immediate awareness." As Longchenpa advises, "Seek for the Buddha nowhere else than in ... the pure fact of being aware right now."<sup>156</sup> Though the means of doing this may include the cultivation of specific types of mental attitudes such as non-discrimination and non-attachment, generally speaking, Dzogchen "practice" is described as an effortless non-striving, letting be, relaxing in the natural state, or even "doing nothing" (Tib. *bya bral*). Since one's true nature is unfabricated and already perfect, "there is nothing to correct, or alter, or modify."<sup>157</sup> And since the Ground is "spontaneously present from time immemorial," there is no need to seek It.<sup>158</sup>

This implies the remarkable proposition that to do anything—such as a spiritual practice—is to stray from Reality. Why? Because seeking auto-



matically imposes a condition on one's experience, and therefore represents an inherent betrayal of the nature of Reality itself. According to Dudjom Lingpa (he attributes the statement to Hungchenkara, heard in visionary experience), "to think of the goal as gaining freedom in some other place or realm ... is to think that the pervasive, extensive panorama of space is an object or agent of coming and going. What an extremely bewildered and deluded state of mind!"<sup>159</sup> Since one already *is* the Ground, "aiming at something" through an activity or practice is like "the sun look[ing] for the light of the glow worm."<sup>160</sup>

In general, the conditions inherent in structured contemplative practices—or in even trying to "look for" something—are considered a limiting and obscuring influence.<sup>161</sup> The immediacy of awareness is "beyond all mental constructs and fixation"<sup>162</sup> while structured contemplative practices simply "feed ... [the *sems*] with the mental discursiveness (*rtog pa*) for creating its own delusion (*khrol ba*) still further."<sup>163</sup> As one early Dzogchen source puts it, "The activities of accumulation of merit, both physical and spiritual, the practice of contemplation, and purification of samsaric traces, all are a 'fixing stake.'"<sup>164</sup> Being goal-oriented, such practices perpetuate a dualistic frame of reference by specifying a "doer" on the way to some destination; all promote the localization of consciousness within the "bounded domain" of egocentric mentation.

Understanding what Dzogchen means by "letting be" or "doing nothing," however, depends on understanding the mind in its ordinary condition (usually through some type of structured meditative or contemplative practice). As discussed in part one above, experience is shaped by unconscious and conscious beliefs that define an essentially conditional and dualistic relationship to life. In a subtle or not so subtle way, the background assumption of every moment is that there is something, somewhere better than the here and now. Driven by this assumption, the ordinary mind tends to be engrossed in an internal narrative and abstracted out of the immediacy of felt sensation. The mind tends to grasp and identify with passing thoughts and emotions in an almost frantic effort to capture a "somewhere else" that corresponds with our concepts and conditions of acceptance, safety, and survival. In this way, the ordinary mind is a deeply habitualized and generally unconscious process of constant "dis-locating" from the present moment. In the terminology of Dzogchen, *sems* has "through its activities ... obscured its own real nature (*sems-nyid*) from time immemorial."<sup>165</sup>

This understanding of mind is the basis for appreciating the cognitive and experiential significance of Dzogchen's view and practice. The concept of *gzhi* encourages a perspective on the world that stands in direct opposition to the ordinary point of view and the dualistic concepts that support that view. Rather than the conditional "good" of ordinary experience, the Good as *gzhi* is unconditional, entailing that there is nowhere to go and

nothing to accept or reject. In addition, the practice of “doing nothing” as a resting in the immediacy of the moment is diametrically opposed to the mind’s habitual tendencies of grasping and distraction. It requires constant, non-wavering mindfulness, and therefore involves a very *active* and *effortful* “holding” to the immediacy of present awareness.<sup>166</sup> “Doing nothing” turns out to be an extremely difficult psychological feat.<sup>167</sup>

Given the difficulty of the practice, Dzogchen texts emphasize that it is a path only suitable for advanced practitioners. Telling a beginner to simply “let the mind be,” with no prior training in mental quiescence and no acquaintance with a sense of presence, does nothing but encourage the habitual, non-present processes of the mind. According to Longchenpa, without the preliminary use of at least some “meditative references (*dmigs pa*) or specific icons such as visualization (*mtshan bcas*) ... one will not have the slightest meditative experience and thus will not be able to stabilize one’s mind.”<sup>168</sup> He therefore emphasizes “the importance of beginning with meditative objects, and only subsequently releasing them into non-referential (*dmigs med*) meditation.”<sup>169</sup> Longchenpa, in fact, characterizes those “who [attempt] ... to directly meditate on the [Dzogchen] path without ... [certain] preliminaries ... as deviant or mistaken.”<sup>170</sup> In a general sense, preliminary practices are considered necessary for the “energization of ... [Dzogchen’s] contemplative techniques.”<sup>171</sup> More specifically, they serve to refine and pacify consciousness to the point where “letting be” functions as a means of settling even deeper into the here and now, rather than as a sanction for ordinary, egocentric mentation. In all phases of Tibetan Buddhist history, these preliminaries<sup>172</sup> are subsumed by practices and attitudes associated with mainstream Mahāyāna and tantric traditions—practices that a student would have already mastered before ever being initiated into Dzogchen by his or her lama. By Longchenpa’s time at least (fourteenth century), some of these preliminaries (especially tantric practices) were also incorporated within Dzogchen itself. Either way, these preliminaries and Dzogchen proper are functionally inseparable.

### Dzogchen Preliminary Practices

Longchenpa specifies three types of practices that need to be performed before one should engage in Dzogchen practice.<sup>173</sup> These three are “correlated to the three vehicles: the general preliminaries on impermanence and renunciation of cyclic existence (the Lesser Vehicle); the special preliminaries on compassion and ... engendering a compassionate motivation (the Great Vehicle); and the supreme preliminaries, which are identified as the generation phase, perfection phase and guru yoga [associated with tantra, or Vajrayāna].”<sup>174</sup>

The nature of these preliminaries can only be touched upon here. Briefly, all Tibetan Buddhist practice is founded on an understanding of the pervasiveness of suffering (the First Noble Truth) and a concomitant attitude of renunciation toward all things in the world. The practices associated with this are generally sustained contemplations on suffering in all its variegated and wide-ranging forms, not only in this human realm, but also in the other five realms of existence into which a sentient being may be born. By establishing an evaluative orientation of pervasive unsatisfactoriness, an attitude of renunciation helps to disengage attention from the ordinary concerns of the ego and thereby pacifies the mind by weakening the attachments that formerly preoccupied it. Associated with this practice is reflection on the inexorable law of karma (the cause-effect relationship between one's present thoughts and actions and one's future circumstances), designed to encourage ethical (i.e., ego-subverting) behavior (or else face the consequence of possible rebirth in one of the many different hell realms).

Having realized some degree of renunciation, further preliminaries are specifically associated with the Mahāyāna and take various forms. Perhaps the most important involves the cultivation of compassion and an altruistic motivation for enlightenment (*bodhicitta*). A common practice for generating *bodhicitta* begins with the premise that all beings have been one's mother in a previous lifetime. With this in mind, one reflects on all of one's "mothers" in their present conditions of suffering. By sustained meditation on this "fact," strong feelings of compassion arise toward all beings followed by the desire to relieve their suffering. This desire then becomes one's motive for striving for enlightenment, since enlightenment is a state of power and omniscience best suited to help others. Included here are practices associated with the bodhisattva path: basic virtues such as giving, patience, etc. (the *pāramitās*) as well as other thematized contemplations which seem to encourage compassion by cultivating attitudes and behaviors that counter any tendency to protect a self. For example, in any circumstance in which one would be inclined to assume a defensive posture, bodhisattva practice requires action or attitudes directly counter to one's natural inclinations. According to Ngulchu Thogme, "if, in the midst of a large gathering, someone exposes your hidden faults in an insulting way, perceive him as your spiritual teacher and bow to him respectfully."<sup>175</sup> More generally, one imaginatively seeks to embrace the suffering of others rather than erect protective boundaries against it, based on the insight that it is the very tendency to protect the self against suffering (and the dualism inherent in that posture) that is the basis of suffering. Essentially, this attitude functions to uproot deep-seated conditional associations of acceptance and rejection that drive the egocentric processes of ordinary mind.

Additional Mahāyāna practices (“preliminaries” from the Dzogchen perspective) include meditation focused on calming and pacifying the mind (Tib. *zhi gnas*; Skt. *śamathā*) and analytical contemplation aimed at gaining first a conceptual and then a non-conceptual insight into emptiness (Tib. *lhag mthong*; Skt. *vipāśyana*).<sup>176</sup> For Longchenpa, insight meditation “involve[s] no specific techniques beyond analytical or poetic shaping of a preexisting contemplative state, with a focus on directed inquires into emptiness.”<sup>177</sup> By undermining the concepts of inherent existence of both subject and object, insight practice may not only weaken evaluative associations (since there is nothing to evaluate or cling to), it may, with enough practice, weaken perceptual dualism as well. Longchenpa also presents two practices integrating *śamathā* and *vipāśyana*. David Germano’s description of these practices hints at what they involve. The first he describes as a “thematic type of contemplation focused on finding the valorized state of awareness while sitting in the standard posture” while the second (“an ‘enhancer’ ... to the first”) utilizes “specific postures and gazes to contemplate a lucent cloudless sky... ”<sup>178</sup>

Tantra introduces the next level of preliminary practices.<sup>179</sup> The core of tantric practice is meditative visualization. Usually this involves visualizing oneself either residing in a tantric deity’s pure realm, or (in more advanced tantric practices) as the deity in his or her pure realm, with the aim of awakening in the practitioner an awareness of whatever “energy,” aspect of Reality, or aspect of one’s own mind the deity represents.<sup>180</sup> Other aspects of tantric practice include (1) embracing one’s embodied situation (particularly all associated feelings and passions) as the vehicle of awakening, (2) de-conditioning dualistic evaluative associations by imaginatively superimposing the maṇḍala over ordinary appearances, and (3) gaining control of the subtle energy (Tib. *rlung*; Skt. *prāna*) of the body through nadi-prāna yoga.<sup>181</sup> More generally, tantra seems to serve the additional function of beginning (through symbols) to acquaint the practitioner with the experience of immediate presence.

Though these practices may be quite structured and formalized, they tend to become less so as preliminary methods of Dzogchen. As Germano notes, most of the preliminary practices described by Longchenpa involve “no techniques beyond the standard lotus posture, and are ... poetically thematized styles of contemplative inquiry attempting to evoke and/or pinpoint such key dimensions as emptiness, clarity, awareness and primordial freedom.”<sup>182</sup> Most of the “practices” outlined by Longchenpa in his *Sems-nyid ngal gso*, for example, remain “technique-free, exhortatory and evocative in nature.”<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, the structured practices that are utilized are modified according to Dzogchen ideals: “though they draw upon tantric practices and other normative Buddhist meditative techniques, the guiding principle is extreme simplicity (*spras bral*), and always priority remains on the mind’s state, not the imported practice’s specific

details.”<sup>184</sup> Tantric practices in particular are simplified, with focus being on “the generation of concentration rather than any quality of the technique in and of itself.”<sup>185</sup>

### Dzogchen Practice Proper

The various preliminary techniques of Dzogchen are generally considered essential means of turning the mind from its habitual egocentric tendencies, and as Dzogchen evolved historically (especially from the eleventh century onwards) they became increasingly important based on the recognition that holding to simple awareness requires prior practice in stabilizing the mind.<sup>186</sup> From the perspective of Dzogchen, however, at some point in one’s spiritual maturation such practices stop being an aid to awakening and instead become an obstacle. Reality (the Ground) is unconditioned, while these practices are themselves conditions that by definition must conceal the Ground, through both the structures of the practices themselves and the dualistic presupposition of path and goal. From a Dzogchen perspective, an additional “practice” is necessary: “a technique free immersion in the bare immediacy of one’s own deepest levels of awareness,”<sup>187</sup> transcending the dualistic conditions of “path and goal,” “meditation and non-meditation,” and “quiescence and activity.”<sup>188</sup> In a sense, the “method” becomes liberation itself, since the only way to realize a non-dual state is through non-duality itself.<sup>189</sup> At this level, practice becomes non-practice. As Dilgo Khentse states, “One must realize that to meditate is to pass beyond effort, beyond practice, beyond aims and goals and beyond the dualism of bondage and liberation.”<sup>190</sup> Paradoxically, this non-dual, non-practice constitutes the complete severing of one’s ties to the mundane through the radically non-ordinary state of uncontrived presence.

Dzogchen rhetoric notwithstanding, its rejection of practice (at least as an ultimate ideal), valorization of goallessness, and entire cosmology turn out to function *as* practice. The Dzogchen view constitutes an orienting frame of reference that actively shapes contemplative (and non-contemplative) experience and uproots the more subtle levels of conceptual duality (the persistent sense that one is a “practitioner” going somewhere) that are still active as one approaches the threshold of enlightenment: the point where practice leaves off and pure awareness is realized. As noted above, to existentially embrace the idea that everything, including ourselves, represents the presencing of Being and is therefore primordially perfect and already enlightened has direct implications on one’s relationship to life and one’s own experience. First, it encourages a non-discriminating attitude toward the world of phenomenal appearances. Since “whatever arises has arisen as the play (*Rol-Ba*) of the ultimate nature,” one

neither has to grasp or reject, but can simply “enjoy all phenomena” without discrimination.<sup>191</sup> Second, by identifying all standard Buddhist terms for the Absolute (buddhahood, *dharmakāya*, *dharmatā*, etc.) with one’s own mind or experience, the Dzogchen view functions to constantly redirect attention back to the here and now. Holding the view of oneself as already a buddha, one does not stray from immediacy. And this “non-straying” (or non-duality) *is* buddhahood. As Longchenpa explains, “By first having the certainty that one’s Mind is spontaneously the real Buddha from primordial time, later one realizes that there is no need of aspiration for Buddhahood from any other source. At that very time one dwells in Buddhahood.”<sup>192</sup>

The practice of “letting be” has a pacifying and purifying effect on consciousness (another apparent paradox); if one simply allows thoughts (neither accepting or rejecting them), thoughts are “liberated.” Again, view plays a central role in this process. According to Longchenpa, “by saying that this present mind is the buddha itself [contemplating the view], and by attending to its intrinsic clarity, incidental conceptualizations are clarified in the dimension of mind as-it-is, just as we clear up muddy water” (i.e., by doing nothing but letting the water sit).<sup>193</sup> A mind that has developed some familiarity with the state of immediate presence (supported by the Dzogchen view) remains undistracted.<sup>194</sup> In this state of presence, “allowing” undermines the dualistic and conditional framework that generates thought. And so “without having to be eliminated, [thought] is released. Remaining with that state of contemplation, the thoughts release themselves right away like a drawing on water.”<sup>195</sup> The “stains” of mentation (Tib. *sems*) being removed, the Ultimate is then automatically realized.<sup>196</sup> This meditative approach contrasts with the more conventional attempt to suppress thoughts, which some Dzogchen sources claim has exactly the opposite of its intended effect. As Shabkar Lama explains, “Trapped by the thought of desiring thoughtlessness, conflicting thoughts multiply, and in mounting frenzy you run aimlessly hither and thither.” To quiet the mind, one must instead relax, and “merge into the primal space of knowledge.... Cut loose and just let it be.”<sup>197</sup>

The element of “calming” that can be found in these types of practices echoes standard *śamathā* practices, and Germano asks if there is any significant difference between the two approaches.<sup>198</sup> As he points out, the Great Perfection argues that there is a difference, in that “its [own] meditations are not fixated or exclusionary as calming practices generally are—instead they allow a vibrant and ceaselessly active type of awareness to come to the fore, which is then integrated into everyday life.”<sup>199</sup> Though *śamathā* and certain Dzogchen practices appear similar in some respects, Dzogchen’s “‘formless’ contemplations cultivate not only an alert, vigilant, eyes-open awareness, but are also shaped in [distinctively Dzogchen] styles of psychological inquiry by poetic thematization.”<sup>200</sup> Guenther also

points out that Dzogchen practice promotes a “self-centering” process fundamentally different from ordinary *śamathā/vipāśyana* practices, which are “object-oriented” and therefore perpetuate a dualistic frame of reference.<sup>201</sup>

## CYBERNETICS AND DZOGCHEN

As noted above, an adequate understanding of Dzogchen requires more than a descriptive approach to its doctrines and practices. It requires an additional step: its doctrines and practices have to be interpreted in order to understand how they impact and possibly transform the consciousness of the practitioner. This final section of the article focuses on this issue using the cybernetic model of consciousness described in part one. It reviews in turn various processes and variables of the cognitive system, and then considers how specific aspects of the Dzogchen path might effect those variables.

A core variable of the cognitive system is the set of unconscious perceptual constructs that provide the template for the “world” as ordinarily experienced—both the background dimensions of experience (for example, spatial and temporal orientation and the concept of substance) as well as the focal aspects of the perceptual field, e.g., “objects,” “persons,” and “self.” Certain aspects of Dzogchen doctrine and/or practice may function to undermine these constructs and so destabilize the cognitive system by presenting views of the world that counter the taken-for-granted assumptions and perceptions of ordinary experience. This may occur in one of two basic ways: (1) by internalizing concepts that conflict with the constructs of the cognitive system, and (2) analytical methods intended to directly deconstruct reifying projections. In the first sense, Buddhism has a long tradition of considering this world (especially the self and “things” in the world) as illusory, in direct opposition to the presupposition of ordinary experience that the objects of perception are real. In the second sense, Buddhism also encompasses philosophical traditions (abhidharma and Madhyamaka) that seek to analytically deconstruct the mind’s ordinary reifying tendencies. For the Mahāyāna, this is particularly reflected in the doctrine of emptiness, which Dzogchen (as a Mahāyāna tradition) inherits.

Evaluative constructs are another important aspect of the conceptual inventory that generates ordinary experience. The experience of an “object” as either desirable or repellant is ordinarily caused by the semantic overtones of safety and belonging, or abandonment and death associated with that object and rooted in unconscious evaluative constructs. Dzogchen doctrine and practice constitutes a sustained challenge to evaluative constructs, thereby undermining the cognitive system as a whole. In terms of

doctrine, Dzogchen is founded on the concept of an unconditioned Good (Tib. *gzhi*) that constitutes the Real itself (in fact, the only “thing” that is Real). The concept of Ground (Tib. *gzhi*) in Dzogchen entails that the Real (and therefore, the Good) is unconditionally present, in the world and as a person’s own being. This view not only contradicts the concepts that define the Good in conditional terms, it also encourages a re-orientation of awareness to the present moment that directly opposes the continuous dislocating processes of ordinary consciousness. The Dzogchen understanding of the Good as unconditioned—in conjunction with contemplative and meditative practices aimed at immediacy or goallessness—functions to counter the dualizing grasping intrinsic to ordinary consciousness. View and practice function together to redirect awareness back to a state of non-dual immediacy in radical opposition to the dualistic structure of ordinary cognition.<sup>202</sup>

Evaluative constructs are also undermined by attitudes and practices emphasizing detachment. As discussed above, evaluative constructs are the basis for the emergence of attachment and aversion, as well as the highly charged emotional reactions that operate in the wake of attachment. Based on evaluative constructs, cognitive and psychological processes become oriented around an ongoing attempt to regulate experience in order to satisfy positive images (representing safety, etc.), avoid negative ones (representing abandonment), and numb or distract consciousness in the face of the inevitable dissonance between ideal images of the desirable (in relation to both self-image and environmental circumstances) and actual conditions. This entire process is inextricably associated with the construction of a self (the self-image is defined based on evaluative associations) and maintenance/protection of a self (evaluative conditions link self-image to a semantic/affective context of safety or abandonment). For the Dzogchen practitioner, this conditional and self-referential way of experiencing life is undermined by simply believing in a “Ground,” understood as unconditional Goodness (in an evaluative sense). To the degree this idea is internalized, it has radical repercussions on consciousness because it conflicts with the evaluative conditions that define the self and support attachment, aversion, and much of a person’s ego-generated, emotional life. In this context, deep and abiding belief in the Ground becomes a transformative or mystical practice. On the other hand, to *live* according to the conditions that ordinarily distinguish the desirable from the undesirable becomes a form of radical ignorance or alienation from the Ground, regardless of a person’s intellectual convictions.

Dzogchen addresses the problems of selfhood and attachment (the most immediate expressions of duality and alienation from the Ground) in other ways. Like all Buddhist traditions, Dzogchen insists on the self’s lack of inherent existence—a direct attack on this central manifestation of the cognitive system. In addition, meditative practices tend to involve some



detachment from self: calming the internal narrative undermines the self, since the self is to some degree an ongoing construction of that narrative.<sup>203</sup> Attachment is directly opposed by the general Buddhist emphasis on detachment. In the case of Dzogchen, however, detachment is a natural by-product of the Dzogchen view; the more deeply one internalizes the conviction that everything constitutes the unconditional presencing of Being (Tib. *gzhi*), the more this subverts the discriminating tendencies that support attachment and self. In Dzogchen, detachment is not just a matter of trying to “be detached” (though this is part of it), but of constructing a conceptual framework that reorients attitudes and behaviors in ways that deconstruct the ordinary, conditional perspective that is at the root of attachment. On the bodhisattva path, for example, the suffering of being publicly insulted (generated by one’s attachment to a self-image) is reframed as a precious opportunity to practice one’s bodhisattva vows toward the achievement of enlightenment. The entire bodhisattva path encourages (among other things) an attitude of embracing the discomfort created by dissonance, which ultimately functions as a way to deconstruct the conditions and attachments that cause dissonance. The Buddhist (and therefore Dzogchen) emphasis on compassion may also function as a means of undermining evaluative conditions. Because evaluative conditions are externally represented by judgment and hostility toward others (through the projection of the shadow), to cultivate compassion toward those persons is to undermine one’s own evaluative conditions, and in the process allow the re-integration of repressed material back into the psyche.

An important variable of the cognitive system is the internal narrative. By continuously reiterating various aspects of the mind’s conceptual inventory, it helps to construct the self-image as well as our perception of “things” in a “world.” The internal narrative also functions as a homeostatic process by regulating dissonance in order to preserve cognitive constructs. In this respect, the internal narrative inhibits awareness of dissonant inputs, or may function to “load” (to use Charles Tart’s term) consciousness with images and concepts to counteract dissonant inputs. Both processes are aspects of the more general tendency to be mentally abstracted, i.e., removed from the immediacy of the present moment and engrossed in fantasy and the ongoing plots and plans of the ego. Dzogchen meditation directly undercuts this cognitive variable by involving efforts to pacify and empty the mind and reorient attention to the present moment.

Another element of the Dzogchen path functions to further subvert homeostatic processes. A common dissonance-reduction strategy is to “numb” awareness or dampen the pain associated with dissonance through distraction-seeking behaviors, or ingestion of mood-altering substances. The ideal lifestyle of a Dzogchen practitioner would tend to minimize, if not eliminate, both these strategies. Subverting dissonance avoidance in turn increases dissonance or stress on the cognitive system. In other words,

undermining the processes or variables that constitute the system is not only a process of direct subversion. It is also a process of increasing awareness of stresses already at hand. Either directly or indirectly, Dzogchen tends to encourage enhanced awareness of one's current condition and the pain inherent in a dualistic approach to life that limits the desirable to a narrow range of egocentrically defined conditions (in contrast to an unconditioned appreciation of Reality or the Good itself). This awareness may be cultivated in meditative practice, or it may be an outcome of minimizing ordinary distractions. Given the distinction between awareness and consciousness introduced above, being fully in the moment ("resting" in awareness) through meditation bypasses the mind. But the initial stages of cultivating this state often involve the discomfort of encountering the more or less constant subliminal pain associated with the ongoing dissonance between our dreams, ideals, fantasies, etc., and actual conditions (both internal and external).<sup>204</sup> This enhanced awareness of dissonance and pain adds yet another factor to the totality of system-subverting processes initiated by the Dzogchen path.

According to John Collins, "The great variety of spiritual disciplines practiced in the various religious traditions have at least one thing in common—the intentional stressing of the organism."<sup>205</sup> As the above discussion shows, this statement applies to Dzogchen. Dzogchen encourages attitudes and practices that function in direct opposition to the ordinary processes of the cognitive system. Since ordinary experience is essentially marked by dualism, Dzogchen's doctrines and practices "stress the organism" by deconstructing the most important manifestations of this structure, i.e., "self" and "object" related through attachment (the desirable) and aversion (the repellant). The Dzogchen path introduces fluctuations into the egocentrically-organized cognitive system and so undermines the variables that constrain awareness into the dualistic frame of reference of ordinary experience. Since, from a cybernetic perspective, "instability" is the occasion for "new structure,"<sup>206</sup> upsetting the cognitive system has transformative implications. By destabilizing the mind's structure, Dzogchen creates the conditions for the emergence of new patterns of cognitive organization, experientially manifested as new states of consciousness<sup>207</sup> and a deepening attunement to the interconnected dynamics of life.<sup>208</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Dzogchen constitutes a sustained assault on the system of factors and processes that construct ordinary consciousness. This assault is founded on the doctrine of the *gzhi*. As the ultimate and only Good, *gzhi* entails the concept of spiritual goal (even if realizing this goal ultimately requires

goallessness). The two concepts (the Real and the goal) are linked since the goal is nothing other than experiencing or knowing the Real (also identified with knowing one's true nature). The identification of the Real as goal entails a specific way of interpreting any aspect of one's perceptual, mental, and emotional life that manifests duality—since the Real is unconditioned Unity, all forms of duality represent separation from the Real. If one's goal is to realize the Ground, the concepts, behaviors, attitudes, etc., that support duality must be eradicated. The goal, then, establishes a context for defining a "path": the active cultivation of certain attitudes (i.e., "virtues") and the performance of certain practices and behaviors that function to deconstruct the duality and separation that opposes experiencing the Real.

Dzogchen's assault on the cognitive system begins with its preliminary practices, which initiate the process of deconditioning the mind of its dualistic constructs. Calming and insight practices make the practitioner aware of the nature of ordinary mind—an essential achievement given (1) the difficulty of seeing beyond one's ordinary, taken-for-granted perspective and (2) the necessity of a firsthand understanding of the problem to affect a final solution. Through calming the meditator acquires some capacity to still the mind, upsetting the constructive and homeostatic functions of the internal dialogue, while tantric practice redirects one's attention from the abstract attitude of ordinary consciousness to an aesthetically rich, symbolically-mediated experience of the immediacy of Reality. Dzogchen view and practice completes this destabilization process by undermining dualistic constructions inherent in the path itself.

According to Dzogchen, the Buddha is one's own mind, and recognizing this mind requires only that one "effortlessly" reverse the direction of all one's ordinary cognitive and emotional tendencies and settle into the immediacy of one's experience here and now. The result is an automatic or spontaneous recognition of Reality. Dzogchen's view functions to encourage this settling in the here and now (when everything is the *gzhi*, there is nowhere to go). But understanding the transformative value of the view depends on some appreciation for the larger Buddhist context that Dzogchen presupposes. Inherent in the concept of *nirvāṇa* is the view of ultimacy as Other. The Mahāyāna approach, on the other hand, undermines that Otherness (epitomized by Nāgārjuna's statement that *samsāra* is *nirvāṇa*). Dzogchen would seem to be an extension of the Mahāyāna approach, expressed in more cataphatic language (and without the rigorous analytical method of Madhyamaka). The important point to recognize, however, is that this identification is not an attempt to reduce the Ultimate to the level of the mundane. Rather, Otherness and Identity stand as two conceptually irreconcilable poles, and it is the tension between them that generates the transformative potential of Dzogchen contemplation. The Ultimate as here and now encourages a "non-straying" from immediate awareness, countering all evaluative dualism and deconstructing conditional constructs of

the desirable. "Otherness" counters fixation on anything within the known, undermining the mind's tendency to "grasp" and thereby set up a dualistic experiential context. The result is a state of presence that in its openness stands poised to go beyond itself—a state so diametrically "other" than ordinary mind as to constitute the ultimate destabilization of the cognitive system. Destabilized and open,<sup>209</sup> the cognitive system evolves and a new state of consciousness emerges, one that resonates with the open or empty dimension of Being and its meaning-saturated field. In Dzogchen, the more one is here, the more one realizes the Other. Relative to ordinary consciousness, complete hereness *is* the Other, which is only realizable through the "antidote" of doing nothing and going nowhere.

## NOTES

1. Dzogchen is not exclusively Buddhist; it is also practiced in Tibetan Bön. Some Tibetan Buddhists claim that Dzogchen is not Buddhist—that it is really a disguised form of Hindu theism. While Dzogchen is a departure from more conventional Buddhist teachings associated with Nikāya and Mahāyāna Buddhism, and may even have elements interpretable as theistic, this is completely irrelevant to the fact that Dzogchen has been (and is) practiced by Buddhists as a Buddhist tradition.

2. Dilgo Khentse Rinpoche, “Maha-Ati,” in *Psychology 107 Class Reader*, compiled by Eleanor Rosch (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1993), p. 379; John Myrdhin Reynolds, trans., *The Golden Letters: The Three Statements of Garab Dorje, the First Teacher of Dzogchen* by Garab Dorje, with a commentary by Dza Patrul Rinpoche entitled, “The Special Teaching of the Wise and Glorious King” (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), p. 22.

3. Dilgo Khentse, p. 379.

4. Scholars have yet to agree on a definition of *mysticism* and its cognates *mystical* and *mystic*. The definition I propose here more or less follows that of Denise and John Carmody and William Alston: *mysticism* and *mystical* refers to those experiences and aspects of religious traditions which are claimed by members of the traditions (generally, the mystics themselves) to reflect or constitute “direct” experience or knowledge of “Ultimate Reality” (however that “Reality” might be construed by a given tradition). It is important to note that this definition is based on identifying a cross-cultural commonality in religious *claims*; it presupposes nothing with regards to the veridicality of these claims, the ontological status of any given tradition’s “Ultimate Reality,” the phenomenological similarity or dissimilarity of mystical experiences across traditions, or the epistemological plausibility of “direct” experience (these are issues best addressed within the context of fully developed theories of mysticism). Those traditions may be described as “mystical” which facilitate the occurrence of this experience, either as the goal of a self-consciously pursued path or as the unsought result of extreme paths of self-abnegation. The term “mysticism” therefore includes all the various doctrines, practices, rituals, etc., encompassed by such traditions as well as the experiences realized through those practices. A “mystic” may be defined as a religious practitioner who deliberately seeks and has an experience of “Ultimate Reality” (the exception being individuals who have spontaneous mystical experiences).

5. Even though the distinction between “data” and interpretation is hermeneutically problematic (the mere perception of data already involves some

degree of interpretation), the distinction still seems justified since interpretation varies by degree, from relatively weak to explicit and strong.

6. Linda E. Olds, *Metaphors of Interrelatedness: Toward a Systems Theory of Psychology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 87–8; Jeffrey Goldstein, “Unbalancing Psychoanalytic Theory: Moving Beyond the Equilibrium Model of Freud’s Thought,” in *Chaos Theory in Psychology and the Life Sciences*, eds. Robin Robertson and Allan Combs (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995), p. 242ff; Ludwig von Bertalanffy, “General System Theory and Psychology,” in *Toward Unification in Psychology*, ed. J.R. Royce (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 222; Günter Schiepek and Wolfgang Tschacher, “Applications of Synergetics to Clinical Psychology,” in *Self-Organization and Clinical Psychology: Empirical Approaches to Synergetics in Psychology*, eds. W. Tschacher, G. Schiepek, and E.J. Brunner (Berlin; New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992), p. 4.

7. James G. Miller, *Living Systems* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1995), p. 457.

8. Goldstein, p. 245; Goldstein considers this a symptom of “physics envy” by early psychologists (Goldstein, p. 243). See also Roy Ginker, ed., *Toward a Unified Theory of Human Behavior: An Introduction to General Systems Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 1967), p. vii.

9. Goldstein, p. 240.

10. In the field of cognitive science, for example, strong arguments are now being made in favor of dynamical rather than computational models of cognition. See, for example, Tim van Gelder, “What Might Cognition Be, If Not Computation?” *Journal of Philosophy* 91 / 7 (1995): pp. 345–81; Timothy van Gelder and Robert F. Port, “It’s About Time: An Overview of the Dynamical Approach to Cognition,” in *Mind as Motion: Explorations in the Dynamics of Cognition*, eds. Robert F. Port and Timothy van Gelder (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 1–44.

11. One of the most cited and forceful critiques of the essentialist or perennialist approach to mysticism is Steven Katz’s “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 22–74. See also Katz’s “Mystical Speech and Mystical Meaning,” in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 3–41; “The ‘Conservative’ Character of Mystical Experience,” in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 3–60. Other persuasive critiques of essentialism or perennialism are Hans H. Penner’s “The Mystical Illusion,” in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 89–116 and Robert M. Gimello’s two essays,

"Mysticism in Its Contexts," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 61–88; and "Mysticism and Meditation," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 170–99. For an entire anthology of essays critical of the constructivist or contextualist approach, see Robert K.C. Forman's, ed., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). See also Randall Studstill, "Systems Theory and the Unity of Mystical Traditions: A Comparative Analysis of rDzogs-chen and Rhineland Mysticism" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2002), pp. 48–109.

12. Peter Fenner uses a cybernetic approach to interpret Madhyamaka in his *Reasoning into Reality: A System-Cybernetic Model and Therapeutic Interpretation of Buddhist Middle Path Analysis* (Sommerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1995). For in-depth discussions of all these points, as well as extensive references to the relevant literature, see Studstill, pp. 34–42 and 132–48.

13. These definitions are stipulative because at present there is little consensus about their meaning. "Consciousness" alone has been construed in many different ways, even within specific disciplines like cognitive science. See Harry T. Hunt, *On the Nature of Consciousness: Cognitive, Phenomenological, and Transpersonal Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 13ff; Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, and Güven Güzeldere, eds., *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 8–9.

Among cognitive scientists consciousness is variously described as (1) non-existent, (2) "an incidental by-product of computational capacity" (Hunt, p. 26; see also p. 59), or (3) "a formal system or capacity involving the direction, choice, and synthesis of nonconscious processes" (Hunt, p. 26). Hunt defines consciousness as (among other things) "a capacity for sensitive attunement to a surround" (Hunt, p. xiii), while for Steven Pinker the real problem of consciousness is the fact of immediate sentience or subjective awareness. Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: Norton, 1997), p. 135. Echoing Pinker, Allan Combs describes consciousness as "perfect transparent *subjectivity*" that is (almost) always intentional. Allan Combs, *The Radiance of Being: Complexity, Chaos and the Evolution of Consciousness* (Edinburgh, UK: Floris Books, 1995), pp. 19–20. On the claim that consciousness does not exist, see John R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 4–5 and 7.

Hunt claims that "consciousness is not a 'mechanism' to be 'explained' cognitively or neurophysiologically, but a categorical 'primitive' that defines the level of analysis that is psychology" (Hunt, p. xiii). I would agree, though I consider this statement to apply more properly to awareness. It is sentience-as-such that is the true mystery—as Pinker puts it, "a

riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" (Pinker, p. 60). On the other hand, the forms that sentience takes as consciousness can, to some degree, be "explained" by the particular factors that support and maintain them.

"Mind" I will use in the broad sense (more or less synonymously with "cognitive system") to refer to both the conscious and unconscious aspects of the personality/ego, encompassing "all those inner processes and conditions that shape and color consciousness, producing the unique landscapes of experience that characterize each moment of our lives" (Combs, *Radiance*, p. 23).

14. See Hunt, p. 51.

15. In Buddhist thought, human affective response includes a third, neutral category. I would argue that this is more a symptom of ordinary consciousness than indicative of a cognitively active category of associations. In other words, anything not labeled "good" or "bad" becomes neutral by default. An interesting (and existentially tragic) consequence of this is that most of life becomes irrelevant.

16. Following John Hick, "Reality" and "the Real" (with a capital "R") are used to refer to reality *as it is* (Kant's noumenal), as opposed to as it is experienced from the perspective of ordinary consciousness.

17. I use the term "energy" not in a scientific sense, but simply to refer to "whatever is" viewed without conceptual projections identifying it as a particular thing imbued with substance.

18. See Herbert V. Guenther, *From Reductionism to Creativity: rDzogschen and the New Sciences of Mind* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989), p. 203.

19. Describing the world as "construction" is not meant to imply that it is mere projection or hallucination. As Daniel Dennett points out, the mind does not have the information-processing capacity to generate an illusion as richly nuanced as the world of ordinary experience. Daniel Clement Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991), p. 7ff. In addition, pure solipsism is difficult to reconcile with the uncontrollable, unpredictable, and unpleasant aspects of life. Perception *is* radically misleading, but at the same time it is constrained by a noumenal Reality ("noumenal" from the perspective of ordinary consciousness). Perception primarily functions to "skew" (through objectification, or reification) the experience of that which is already given.

20. Below I use "concept" or "construct" as inclusive categories for all these terms.

21. These more or less correspond to Kant's categories. See Combs' comments on L.R. Vandervert and the construction of our sense of "space/time" (Combs, *Radiance*, p. 66).

22. "Perceptual duality" refers to the experience of a spatially localized



subject distinct from spatially localized objects, and includes the implicit presumption that this dualistic mode of experience is ontologically grounded. See Ben Goertzel, *Chaotic Logic: Language, Mind, and Reality, from the Perspective of Complex Systems Science* (New York: Plenum, 1994), p. 108. On the linguistic component of perceptual construction, see Goertzel, *Chaotic Logic*, pp. 90, 96–7, 105–6.

23. According to Paul Gilbert, “Learning theory shows clearly that previously neutral stimuli can come to trigger defensive responses.” Paul Gilbert, “Defense, Safe(ty) and Biosocial Goals in Relation to the Agonic and Hedonic Social Modes,” *World Futures* 35 (1992): p. 37. Culture may “tag” stimuli with positive associations of safeness as well—what Gilbert refers to as “social attention holding power” [SAHP] (Gilbert, pp. 61, 41).

24. Gilbert, p. 35.

25. Gilbert, pp. 49, 57.

26. Harold A. Sackeim and Ruben C. Gur, “Self-Deception, Self-Confrontation, and Consciousness,” in *Consciousness and Self-Regulation: Advances in Research and Theory*, vol. 2, eds. Gary E. Schwartz and David Shapiro (New York: Plenum Press, 1978), p. 166.

27. Glenn A. Perry, “A Systems/Perennial Approach to the Evolution of Psyche,” *World Futures* 36 (1993): p. 239.

28. Perry, p. 238. The “high stakes” of self-image maintenance (survival versus death) may explain the autonomic and affective arousal caused simply by hearing one’s own voice or watching a videotape of oneself in an innocuous interview. See Sackeim and Gur, pp. 152–5.

29. Combs, *Radiance*, p. 69.

30. Elsewhere I have attempted to explain this continuity, inspired by Herbert Guenther’s presentations of Dzogchen: “At the ultimate level, all that exists is Being’s dynamics, which have nothing to do with ‘things’ or ‘substances.’ Yet within the context of an hypostasized self that somehow separates itself off from Being, these dynamics take on certain meanings. These meanings [are] concretized by the mind, becoming at that point symbols of Being’s qualities and dynamics. In our current situation, however, these symbols have lost their meaningfulness through the mind’s activity of labeling and its tendency to interpret the entire field of experience in terms of completely taken-for-granted concepts, these symbols have become reduced to the status of things.” Randall Studstill, “Being and the Experience of Being in Heidegger and rDzogs-chen,” (unpublished paper, 1994), p. 19.

31. See Michael R. Bütz, “Chaos, An Omen of Transcendence in the Psychotherapeutic Process,” *Psychological Reports* 71 (1992): p. 830. It should be emphasized that most “threats” are defined in relation to prior

conditions of worth and belonging. In other words, most inputs are not inherently threatening, but become threatening by contradicting internalized standards.

32. Kenneth E. Boulding, "General Systems Theory—The Skeleton of Science," in *Modern Systems Research for the Behavioral Scientist*, ed. Walter Buckley (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968), p. 7; see also Charles T. Tart, *States of Consciousness* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1975), p. 5; Arnold Powell, Joseph R. Royce, and Burton Voorhees, "Personality as a Complex Information-Processing System," *Behavioral Science* 27 (1982): pp. 345–6; K.H. Pribram, "The Role of Analogy in Transcending Limits in the Brain Sciences," *Daedalus* 109/2 (1980): pp. 22–3.

33. Ervin Laszlo, *Introduction to Systems Philosophy: Toward a New Paradigm of Contemporary Thought* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1972), p. 127.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Hunt would extend this analysis to the culture at large. As he puts it, "much of 'everyday' and 'high' culture can be seen as a socially endorsed, communal attempt to contain and control this potential for unexpected openness and novelty"—in other words, as a way to maintain the status quo (Hunt, pp. 29–30).

36. Combs, *Radiance*, p. 272.

37. See Sackeim and Gur on the inherent, anxiety-producing dissonance associated with self-confrontation. They state, "In every study that we are aware of arousal levels were higher after presentation of the self.... The [experimental] evidence indicates that feedback of the self leads to autonomic arousal, negative self-evaluations, defensive reactions, and constrictions on ideational content" (Sackeim and Gur, pp. 153–4, 159). This may reflect an inherent dissonance between the egocentric reality of the self and the idealized self-images most of us hold. Paradoxically, positive self-image tends to coexist with low self-esteem. In Twelve-Step Programs, this paradox is often expressed by the remark, "We're all egomaniacs with an inferiority complex."

38. As Pope and Singer report, "A recent unpublished study by Catherine McDonald indicated that subjects averaged 43% of reports of stimulus-independent or daydreamlike thought during a given day." Kenneth S. Pope and Jerome L. Singer, "Regulation of the Stream of Consciousness: Toward a Theory of Ongoing Thought," in *Consciousness and Self-Regulation: Advances in Research and Theory*, vol. 2, eds. Gary E. Schwartz and David Shapiro (New York: Plenum Press, 1978), p. 131. See also Arthur J. Deikman, "Deautomatization and the Mystic Experience," in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. Richard Woods (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1980), p. 248. On the "abstract attitude," see Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson,

and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 24–5.

39. Pope and Singer point out that the demands of perceptual processing “can monopolize channel space and severely attenuate if not interrupt entirely, the processing of private material” (Pope and Singer, p. 113). I would argue that the general predictability of our routine external environments makes this kind of interruption rare.

40. Miller, *Living Systems*, p. 123. See also pp. 61, 121ff, 149, and 152. Contra Miller, I would argue that in many cases, stress is not caused by the information overload itself, but by anxiety created by dissonance between task performance and self-image.

41. Gilbert, p. 36.

42. See Tart’s discussion of attention and self-awareness (Tart, p. 15) as well as Deikman’s distinction between the “action mode” and “receptive mode.” The action mode specifically overlaps what I have described as object-oriented attention. As Deikman points out, the goal of such attention (manipulating the environment) makes the “reference point” of such attention “the experience of a separate, personal self” (Deikman, pp. 261, 267). To some degree, these processes also correspond with what Tart calls *loading stabilization*, i.e., “keeping attention/awareness and other psychological energies deployed in habitual, desired structures by loading the person’s system heavily with appropriate tasks” (Tart, p. 5). My emphasis is not on the “task,” but on the objectifying mode of attention itself, which may be internalized as well as externalized.

43. As Varela, et al. observe, one of “the first insights of the meditator who begins to question the self [is] the discovery of total egomania” (Varela, et al., p. 62).

44. Perry, p. 238; see also p. 239.

45. Hunt, p. 24.

46. Hunt states that, if “we are willing to entertain the idea that conscious awareness in itself is a ‘system,’ and that that system can be selectively impaired, we ought to be prepared to consider the possibility that it can be selectively enhanced and developed as well” (Hunt, p. 34).

47. Laszlo, *Introduction to Systems Philosophy*, p. 127.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 132; see also Fenner, p. 104; Perry, p. 224.

50. Inputs are not innately threatening, but become threatening by contradicting system conditions. Letting go of conditions therefore involves a reintegration of formerly repressed or denied aspects of the self and environment. Perry seems to make the same point when he explains that as the cognitive system evolves, “That portion of the environment which per-

turbed the system and drove it beyond its stability threshold quite literally in-forms the system. This, in turn, allows new properties to emerge which enable the system to process information previously exported as waste" (Perry, p. 240).

51. On cognitive reorganization and anxiety reduction, see Perry, p. 238.
52. Erich Jantsch, *The Self-Organizing Universe* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980), p. 284.
53. Tart, p. 55.
54. As R.D. Laing puts it, "The *ordinary* person is a shriveled, desiccated fragment of what a person can be." R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), pp. 25–6.
55. In the discussion below, identical Tibetan terms may appear somewhat differently due to the different transliteration styles of the authors being quoted.
56. For a comprehensive scholarly discussion of Dzogchen, see Samten Gyaltzen Karmay's *The Great Perfection (Dzogchen): A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching in Tibetan Buddhism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988). See also David Germano, "Architecture and Absence in the Secret Tantric History of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*)," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 17/2 (Winter 1994): pp. 203–335.
57. See Reynolds' comments on Tucci, in *Golden Letters*, p. 220. The case for Dzogchen's origins being in the Indian Mahasiddha traditions is strengthened if Anuyoga is considered part of Dzogchen, as Dargyay maintains. Eva K. Dargyay, *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), pp. 38–43.
58. Mañjuśrīmitra's *rDo la gser zhun* ("Gold Refined from Ore") is cited by Reynolds as one of the primary indications of Yogācāra influence on Dzogchen. Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, pp. 205–6.
59. Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, pp. 215, 205, and 220.
60. The esteem accorded Dzogchen is by no means universal among Tibetan Buddhists. Some non-Nyingmapas (i.e., members of either the Kagyupa, Sakyapa, or Gelugpa Schools) have been highly critical of Dzogchen, claiming that it is either not really Buddhism or that it is a covert form of Ch'an. Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, pp. 218, 220, and 263; see also Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), p. 463. On the other hand, some of Dzogchen's greatest advocates have been non-Nyingmapas. See Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, p. 280; Samuel, pp. 463–4.
61. Non-Nyingma schools list four tantric paths: *kriyātantra*, *caryātantra*, *yogatantra*, and *anuttarayogatantra*.

62. Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, pp. 30–1. Atiyoga in turn encompasses three sub-categories of teachings, translated by Eva Dargyay as the Section of Mind (*sems-sde*), the Section of the Unending Dynamic of Being (*klongsde*), and the Section of Instructions (*man-ngag-gi sde*). See Dargyay, *Esoteric Buddhism*, pp. 43–4. The nuanced distinctions between these three divisions of Dzogchen will not be addressed here. On this topic see Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, trans., *Buddha Mind: An Anthology of Longchen Rabjam's Writings on Dzogpa chenpo*, Buddhayana Series (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1989), pp. 47–76.

According to Dargyay, the final three *yāna-s*—the *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga*, and *atiyoga* tantras—are subcategories of *yogatantra*, and all three together comprise levels of The Great Perfection (*atiyoga* simply being the highest of the three) (Dargyay, *Esoteric Buddhism*, pp. 17, 43). Non-Nyingma Schools list only four tantric paths: *kriya*, *carya*, *yoga*, and *anuttarayoga* tantras. In this list, Dzogchen is not formally recognized as a path, though non-Nyingmapas may still practice it (See Samuel, p. 463). In addition, Anuttarayoga tantra is often considered to culminate in *Mahāmudrā*, which has close affinities to Dzogchen; see Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, p. 221; Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche, *The Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen* (Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1986) and Karma Chagmé, *Naked Awareness: Practical Instructions on the Union of Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000).

63. Other translations of *rig-pa* (Skt. *vidyā*) include “intrinsic awareness,” “knowledge,” “intellect,” “pristine cognition,” “pure presence,” or “intelligence.” Guenther variously translates *rig-pa* as “ec-static intensity,” “cognitive intensity,” or simply “excitation” in order to specify *rig-pa*'s expression through the individual as an “ongoing” existential pressure to transcend “all limits set by the prevalent ‘unexcited’ state of one’s everydayness...” Herbert V. Guenther, *Meditation Differently: Phenomenological-Psychological Aspects of Tibetan Buddhist (Mahamudra and sNyingthig) Practices from Original Tibetan Sources* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), p. 27. Along these lines, Longchenpa describes *rig-pa* as “[one’s] mind intending and suffused by (the whole’s) pellucidity and consummation” (quoted in Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. xv).

64. Samuel, pp. 541, 550. Samuel associates this understanding of Dzogchen with the Rimed movement (See Samuel, p. 535). This inclusivist approach may be directly contrasted with the sectarian, clerical (i.e., non-shamanic) systemizations of Buddhism by the Gelugpas (Samuel, p. 543).

65. Namkhai Norbu, *The Mirror: Advice on the Presence of Awareness* (Barrytown, NY: Barrytown, Ltd., 1996), pp. 32–3.

66. Gareth Sparham, trans., *Dzog Chen Meditation* (Delhi, India: Sri Satguru Publications, 1994), p. 1.

67. Guenther, *Reductionism*, p. 185.
68. Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, pp. 21–2.
69. Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 151.
70. Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, p. 21.
71. John Myrdhin Reynolds, trans., *Self Liberation Through Seeing with Naked Awareness* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1989), p. 4.
72. Quoted in Karmay, p. 147. See also Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, vol. 1., trans. and ed. by Gyurme Dorje (Boston: Wisdom, 1991), pp. 300, 907.
73. Samuel, p. 464.
74. See Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, 31; Kennard Lipman, preface to *Dzog Chen and Zen* by Namkhai Norbu (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin Publishing, 1984), p. 9.
75. As I will explain below, tantra exercises such a pervasive influence on all forms of Tibetan Buddhism that in actual Dzogchen practice symbolic and non-symbolic approaches tend to be inseparably enmeshed. Nevertheless, a tendency to undermine symbolic representation is in most cases still discernable even in the more tantric expressions of Dzogchen.
76. Properly speaking, emptiness is not “emptiness of” anything, since in the cognition of emptiness no “thing” has ever existed to be negated. Ultimately, emptiness neither affirms nor negates anything, the basis for the Madhyamaka claim to be the “middle way” between the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism.
77. Lipman, p. 8; Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, p. 281.
78. Samuel, p. 465.
79. Karmay, pp. 108 and 118. See Samuel on the conflation of terminology for the Ultimate in *The Tibetan Book of Great Liberation* (Samuel, p. 504). *Bindu* is generally translated as “drop” in tantric contexts, though in Dzogchen, Karmay argues that “(Great or Single) Circle” is closer to its intended meaning. The first two terms of this list—*dharmakāya* and *dharmatā*—are common to Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole, though the Dzogchen understanding of these terms may be somewhat different from that found in other Mahāyāna traditions. *Dharmatā*—literally “Dharma-ness”—is generally translated as “Reality,” “Ultimate Reality,” or “the Absolute.”
80. Dilgo Khentse, p. 379; *Kunched Gyalpo tantra*, in Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, p. 95.
81. Commentary to *Tun-huang Manuscript 647*, in Karmay, p. 54.

82. Ibid., p. 55; see also Karmay, pp. 65 and 72.

83. Karmay, p. 118.

84. Karmay, p. 177; see also p. 215 and Eva K. Dargyay, "The Concept of a 'Creator God' in Tantric Buddhism," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 8/1 (1985): pp. 44–45.

85. The Jonangpas distinguished two types of emptiness: "self-emptiness" (*rangtong*) and "emptiness of other" (*shentong*). The first represents the standard Madhyamaka negation of inherent existence, applicable to the phenomenal appearances of ordinary, samsaric consciousness. The second, "emptiness of other," applies to Reality itself, which is "empty" only in the sense that it lacks anything other than itself. In other words, emptiness in the shentong sense affirms that there is a positively existing, pure and luminous Reality that is "empty" of adventitious obscurations or defilements. For more on the Jonangpa school and the shentong approach to emptiness, see S.H. Hookham, *The Buddha Within: Tathagatagarbha Doctrine According to the Shentong Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhaga* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1991). See also Keith Dowman, trans., *The Flight of the Garuda: Teachings of the Dzogchen Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1994), p. 199.

86. Dudjom Lingpa, *Buddhahood without Meditation: A Visionary Account Known as Refining Apparent Phenomena (nang-jang)*, trans. Richard Barron (Junction City, CA: Padma Pub., 1994), p. 91. See also Samuel, p. 510; Guenther, *Reductionism*, pp. 228–9; Longchenpa, *The Four-Themed Precious Garland: An Introduction to Dzog-ch'en, the Great Completeness*, with explanation and oral commentary by Dudjom Rinpoche and Beru Khyentze Rinpoche, trans. and ed. Alexander Berzin in conjunction with Sherpa Tulku and Matthew Kapstein (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, [c1979] 1993), p. 33.

87. Guenther, *Reductionism*, 203. Emptiness is often explained specifically in relation to mind, where it is again emphasized that it is not a mere vacuity or void. Though emptiness involves the "complete cessation of all [mental] elaborations," this is a positive state "with all the auspicious attributes of knowledge, mercy, and power spontaneously established." Khetsun Sangpo Rinbochay, *Tantric Practice in Nying-ma*, trans. and ed. by Jeffrey Hopkins; co-edited by Anne Klein (London: Rider, 1982), p. 191; see also p. 186. As Shabkar Lama states, "The emptiness of the mind is not just a blank nothingness, for without doubt it is the primal awareness of intrinsic knowledge, radiant from the first" (Dowman, p. 95). Chetsangpa Ratna Sri Buddhi describes the "emptiness" of mind as "clear, shining, fresh, sharp, lucid.... In the real nature of emptiness, clarity is present like a manifesting essence" that is "pure and all-pervading." In James Low, trans., *Simply Being: Texts in the Dzogchen Tradition* (London: Vajra Press, 1994), pp. 62, and 56. See also Low, pp. 77–78; Samuel, p. 535.

88. Karmay, p. 185.
89. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, pp. 25–26. I have juxtaposed conventional translations with Guenther's translations as a way to better evoke the meaning of the original Tibetan terms.
90. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 26.
91. Longchenpa, in Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, p. 61.
92. Dilgo Khentse, p. 379.
93. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, pp. 25–26.
94. *Ibid.*, pp. 25–27.
95. Longchenpa, in Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, p. 61.
96. Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, p. 282.
97. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 27.
98. In Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, p. 52.
99. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 26.
100. Guenther, *Reductionism*, p. 22; Longchenpa, in Guenther, *Reductionism*, p. 196.
101. Sometimes five are listed. See Dudjom Lingpa, who adds a fifth *kāya* transcending the *svabhāvakāya*: the “unchanging vajra *kāya*.” Dudjom Lingpa, *Buddhahood without Meditation: A Visionary Account Known as Refining Apparent Phenomena (nang-jang)*, trans. by Richard Barron (Junction City, CA: Padma Pub., 1994), pp. 119–120. Longchenpa adds a fifth *kāya* at the other end of the spectrum, so to speak, the “gestalt experience of mystery” (*gsang-ba'i-sku*), corresponding with ordinary deluded experience (Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 45).
102. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 37.
103. See *Ibid.*, pp. 44–47; Longchenpa, *Four-Themed Precious Garland*, pp. 57–58.
104. Longchenpa, *Four-Themed Precious Garland*, pp. 57–58; see also Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 44.
105. Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, p. 239; Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, pp. 37–38 and 45.
106. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 45; Herbert V. Guenther, *Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective* (Emeryville, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1977), p. 238.
107. Guenther, *Western Perspective*, p. 39; Reynolds, *Golden Letters*, p. 239.
108. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, pp. 37 and 40; *rDzogs-pa-chen-po lta-ba ye-shes gting-rdzogs-kyi rgyud*, quoted in Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 45.



109. *rDzogs-pa-chen-po lta-ba ye-shes gting-rdzogs-kyi rgyud*, quoted in Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 45; Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 37.
110. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, pp. 37–38.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
112. Dudjom Lingpa, p. 89; see also Shabkar Lama, in Dowman, p. 107.
113. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, pp. 36–37 and 44.
114. Karmay, p. 190.
115. Dargyay, “Creator God,” p. 41; see Samuel, p. 465.
116. In this text, *bodhicitta* (Tib. *byang chub kyi sems*) and *gzhi* are used synonymously. (On the identification of *bodhicitta*, Samantabhadra [Tib. Kun-tu bzang-po], *dharmakāya* [Tib. *chos sku*], *gzhi*, and *sems-nyid* in Dzogchen, see Karmay, pp. 45–46, 128, 131 and 176.) Dargyay argues that *bodhicitta* is used here as a synonym for mind (*citta*) in the Yogācāra sense. The problem with this interpretation is that “mind” as the creator of the phenomenal world for the Yogacarins is essentially defiled. The “Creator” as identified in this text, on the other hand, represents a pristine and absolute principle, which may be identified with “awakened mind” (*bodhicitta*) or *gzhi*. Though Dzogchen texts may echo Yogācāra by describing the illusory appearances of ordinary experience as mental constructions, from the Dzogchen perspective, mind and objects are ultimately the presencing of a pure Ground.
117. Dargyay, “Creator God,” p. 43.
118. Longchenpa, Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, p. 60.
119. Guenther, *Reductionism*, pp. 189–191.
120. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 29.
121. Pema Ledral Sal, in Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, p. 58. For more on the emanation from the Basis, see Guenther, *Reductionism*, pp. 189–91.
122. This “return” is purely experiential, since ontologically, “straying” is impossible.
123. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, pp. 30 and 36–37; see also Longchenpa, in Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, p. 62; Chetsangpa Ratna, in Low, p. 57; Guenther, *Western Perspective*, p. 153.
124. In Karmay, pp. 189–190.
125. The term *kun-gzhi*, the “ground of everything,” is borrowed from Yogācāra, and in the sense used above (following Longchenpa) refers to the Yogācāra concept of *alāyavijñāna* (Tib. *kun-gzhi rnam-shes*): the “container” of all cognitive/affective habitual tendencies, the basis of the deluded mental processes associated with *citta* and therefore the basis of

samsaric experience in general (Karmay, pp. 179–180). The difference, of course, is that in Dzogchen, *kun-gzhi* is grounded in an inherently pure basis (*gzhi*), an idea that is not as explicitly articulated in Yogācāra. It should be pointed out, however, that some Dzogchen sources use *kun gzhi* as a synonym for the *gzhi* (Karmay, p. 178), in which case its meaning departs significantly from the Yogācāra sense (Karmay, p. 179). Longchenpa rejects this position since his view of *kun gzhi* follows Yogācāra. From this perspective, *kun gzhi* can not be equivalent to *gzhi* (as *chos sku*) since “*kun gzhi* is the root of *samsāra* contain[ing] the samsāric traces (*bag chags*)” while *chos sku* is free of all samsāric traces. (Karmay, pp. 178–180). See also Longchenpa, in Guenther, *Reductionism*, pp. 214–215 and 217; Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, pp. 210–211.

126. Guenther, *Reductionism*, p. 225; see also pp. 209, 227.

127. Karmay, pp. 175–176.

128. Dudjom Lingpa, p. 97.

129. Guenther, *Reductionism*, pp. 195, 199, 216.

130. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

131. See Vimalamitra, in Guenther, *Reductionism*, p. 211; Shabkar Lama, in Dowman, pp. 96–7.

132. Dudjom Lingpa, p. 29; Chimed Rigdzin Lama, in Low, pp. 43, 45.

133. Dudjom Lingpa, pp. 157, 159; see also p. 29.

134. Literally, *tathāgatagarbha* translates as “the womb (or embryo) of the thus gone one.” Guenther translates it as “Being’s optimization thrust.”

135. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 28.

136. Karmay, p. 185.

137. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

138. *Ibid.*

139. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

140. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

141. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

142. Guenther, *Reductionism*, p. 320.

143. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, p. 35.

144. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

145. *Ibid.*

146. Longchenpa, in Guenther, *Reductionism*, p. 187; see also p. 234.

147. Shabkar Lama, in Dowman, p. 114.

148. Guenther, *Reductionism*, p. 243.

149. Ibid.
150. Ibid., p. 227.
151. Longchenpa, *The Jewel Ship: A Guide to the Meaning of Pure and Total Presence, The Creative Energy of the Universe*, trans. Kennard Lipman and Merrill Peterson under the title *You Are the Eyes of the World* (Novato, CA: Lotsawa, 1987), p. 43.
152. In Dargyay, "Creator God," p. 41.
153. Ibid.
154. Ibid., pp. 41–42.
155. Longchenpa, in Guenther, *Reductionism*, p. 187.
156. Longchenpa, *The Jewel Ship*, p. 47.
157. Namkhai Norbu, foreword to *Naked Awareness* by Reynolds, p. x; Namkhai Norbu, *Dzog Chen and Zen* (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin Publishing, 1984), p. 27.
158. Longchenpa, *Four-Themed Precious Garland*, p. 39.
159. Dudjom Lingpa, p. 113.
160. Sangs-rgyas ye-shes, in Karmay, p. 113.
161. See Dudjom Rinpoche, p. 900; Shabkar Lama, in Dowman, p. 121. This rejection of formalized practices is particularly emphasized in early Dzogchen, though even here it may have been somewhat rhetorical. See Germano, p. 239; Karmay, p. 213.
162. Germano, p. 229.
163. Karmay, p. 175.
164. *Tun-huang* Manuscript 594 (v.9–11), in Karmay, p. 72; see the *bSam gtan mig sgron* on the same page and also Karmay, p. 84.
165. Karmay, p. 175.
166. See Hanson-Barber's comments on *rig-pa* as non-straying or "no-movement" from "pure awareness." A.W. Hanson-Barber, "No-Thought" in Pao-T'ang Ch'an and Early Ati-Yoga," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 8/2 (1985): pp. 67–70. See also Chetsangpa Ratna, in Low, p. 58.
167. See Low, p. xxiii. In Zen, "just sitting" (*shikan taza*) is so strenuous that after "half an hour you will be sweating, even in winter in an unheated room...." Hakuun Yasutani, in Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 54.
168. Germano, p. 259.
169. Ibid. See also Longchenpa, in Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, pp. 282–283. In at least one source, Longchenpa does state that one can skip

preliminary practices if one has no difficulty quieting the mind or if one simply finds such practices too difficult (Germano, p. 225). Since few practitioners meet the first criteria at least, this did not significantly call into question the importance of preliminary practices.

170. Germano, p. 255.

171. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

172. The practices below are described as “preliminaries” from the perspective of Dzogchen. Depending on the school or tradition, these preliminaries may be viewed as the central and ultimate practice itself.

173. Germano, p. 260.

174. *Ibid.*, p. 255; material in brackets my addition. See also p. 260.

175. Precept 15 of Ngulchu Thogme’s *Thirty-Seven Precepts of the Bodhisattva*. I have been unable to identify the translator. For other translations of the *Thirty-Seven Precepts*, see Geshe Sonam Rinchen, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, trans. Ruth Sonam (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997), p. 47; Geshe Jampa Tegchok, *Transforming the Heart: The Buddhist Way to Joy and Courage* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1999), p. 211.

176. Generally, *śamathā* is considered a prerequisite for *vipāśyana*.

177. Germano, p. 253.

178. *Ibid.*

179. Longchenpa lists tantric practices as calming techniques. Germano, pp. 252–253.

180. In some presentations (particularly Gelugpa), this awareness is considered a more direct means of realizing emptiness.

181. These include practices in which one visualizes energy flowing along various channels (*nadi*) in the body as well as practices of breath retention or alternate-nostril breathing.

182. Germano, p. 253.

183. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

184. *Ibid.*

185. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

186. On Dzogchen’s shift from an early rejection of all formalized, structured practices to an increasingly structured (especially tantric) approach, see Germano, pp. 205–209, 216, 234, and 266.

187. Germano, pp. 254 and 240.

188. In the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, the concept of emptiness seems to have also been an attempt to refer to or evoke an unconditioned approach to

enlightenment, though the Tibetan Buddhist tradition has tended to emphasize the analytical, Madhyamaka method of realizing emptiness.

189. See Lipman, p. 7. The non-duality of uncontrived awareness is itself buddhahood. As is stated in the *All-Accomplishing King*: "The realization of the buddhas of the three times is gained in the sole determination that two are not seen." In Dudjom Rinpoche, p. 897.

190. Dilgo Khentse, p. 379.

191. Lochen Dhamaśri, in Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, p. 86.

192. Longchenpa, in Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, p. 282.

193. Longchenpa, *The Jewel Ship*, p. 50.

194. Reynolds, *Naked Awareness*, pp. 39 and 56.

195. Longchenpa, *The Jewel Ship*, p. 37. On the "self-clarifying" nature of mind, see also Mathew Kapstein, "The Amnesiac Monarch and the Five Mnemic Men: 'Memory' in Great Perfection (Rdzogs-chen) Thought," in *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Janet Gyatso (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 244.

196. Longchenpa, *Four-Themed Precious Garland*, pp. 56–57; Dudjom Rinpoche, p. 907; Longchenpa, in Tulku Thondup, *Buddha Mind*, p. 289.

197. Shabkar Lama, in Dowman, p. 121.

198. Germano, p. 225.

199. *Ibid.*

200. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

201. Guenther, *Meditation Differently*, pp. xii–xiv.

202. The Buddhist emphasis on the unsatisfactoriness of "worldly" life helps support this process as well. See Deikman and Forman on the deconstructive effects of renunciation. Deikman, 251; Robert K.C. Forman, "The Construction of Mystical Experience," *Faith and Philosophy* 5/3 (1988): pp. 262–263.

203. See Jack Engler, "Therapeutic Aims in Psychotherapy and Meditation," in *Transformations of Consciousness: Traditional and Contemplative Perspectives on Development*, eds. Ken Wilber, J. Engler, and D.P. Brown (Boston: Shambhala, 1986), pp. 21–22, and 42.

204. On the stress-inducing nature of meditation, see Mark Epstein and Jonathan Lieff, "Psychiatric Complications of Meditation Practice," in *Transformations of Consciousness*, pp. 54–55.

205. John Collins, *Mysticism and New Paradigm Psychology* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991), p. 197. See also Short's

analysis of mystical practices as ways to "'crash' our linguistic system" leading to an experience of the "non-linguistic." L. Short, "Mysticism, Mediation, and the Non-Linguistic," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63/4 (1995): p. 665.

206. Jantsch, *Universe*, p. 73.

207. Janstsch, *Universe*, p. 73; Erich Jantsch, "From Self-Reference to Self-Transcendence: The Evolution of Self-Organization Dynamics," in *Self-Organization and Dissipative Structures*, eds. William C. Schieve and Peter M. Allen (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 347. See also Combs, *Radiance*, p. 251.

208. On meditative experience as a realization of interconnectedness, see D.P. Brown, "The Stages of Meditation in Cross-Cultural Perspective," in *Transformations of Consciousness*, pp. 256, 269.

209. The "openness" inherent in the Dzogchen approach is particularly emphasized in this passage by Dilgo Khentse: "When performing the meditation practice one should develop the feeling of opening oneself out completely to the whole universe with absolute simplicity and nakedness of mind, ridding oneself of all 'protecting' barriers" (Dilgo Khentse, p. 379).

## BOOK REVIEWS

***Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara with Commentary by Jamgön Mipham.*** Translated by Padmakara Translation Group. Boston and London: Shambhala Publications, 2002. xiv, 409 pages, includes glossary. Hardcover, \$34.95; paperback, \$29.95.

***The Svātantrika–Prāsaṅgika Distinction: What Difference Does a Difference Make?*** Edited by Georges B.J. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003. 396 pages, includes bibliography and index. Paperback, \$34.95.

### Richard Payne

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The *Introduction to the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāvātāra*) is a translation of one of the key works of medieval Indian Buddhist thought. Candrakirti is considered to be the founder of the Prāsaṅgika interpretation of Madhyamaka, which claims that the Madhyamaka should not make any claim, but rather only demonstrate that the arguments of his/her opponent are self-contradictory or lead to absurd conclusions. This is distinguished from the Svātantrika interpretation, which is considered to have been established by Bhāvaviveka, and which is described as allowing the Madhyamaka to assert claims of his/her own.

The *Madhyamakāvātāra* is central to understanding the origins of Prāsaṅgika perspective. Organized in terms of the ten stages (*bhūmi*) of the bodhisattva path, this work leads from the initial stages of practice to the full awakening of buddhahood. Of the eleven chapters, one for each of the ten stages and a concluding one on “the ultimate ground of buddhahood,” by far the greatest attention is given to the sixth—that devoted to the perfection of wisdom. Indeed, the discrepancy between the length of the sixth and the other chapters is so great as to make it clear that the ten grounds simply provide a vehicle for focusing on what is often presented as the most important of the perfections, that of wisdom.

The text of the *Madhyamakāvatāra* is itself relatively brief, being only fifty-four pages in this translation. In this work, however, the translators have also included a translation of Jamgön Mipham's commentary. This is a detailed and extensive commentary, covering two hundred thirty-nine pages in translation.

The translator's introduction provides a valuable placement of Candrakīrti and his thought in medieval Indian Buddhism. It should be noted that this introduction is informed both by the Tibetan scholastic understandings of the history of Buddhist thought, and by modern scholarship. Specifically, treating the distinction between Prasaṅgika and Svātantrika, and the identification of these two interpretations with Candrakīrti and Bhāvaviveka as their founders, is the kind of systematization that only comes about by later scholasticism. As the translators note:

It is important to realize that the Svatantrika–Prasangika distinction, as such, is the invention of Tibetan scholarship, created as a convenient method for cataloging the different viewpoints evident in Madhyamika authors subsequent to Chandrakīrti's critique of Bhavaviveka. There is no evidence that these two terms were ever used by the ancient Indian Madhyamikas to refer either to themselves or to their opponents (p. 35).

There are other aspects of the introduction that are, however, philosophically more problematic. For example, from Śākyamuni Buddha's "rejection of futile theorizing," the translators assert that this means that there is "a truth that lies beyond the ordinary mind and becomes accessible precisely when theories are laid aside" and that there is "a reality that transcends ordinary thought processes but is nevertheless still knowable" (p. 9). To this reader at least, such an interpretation is not obvious. "Futile theorizing," "theorizing," and "ordinary mind" are not, after all, simply synonyms, and without further definition claims about a transcendent reality are vacuous. While the interpretation given certainly requires substantial additional justification, we should note that the introduction, like the translations themselves, is intended for the general readership.

There are two other translations of Candrakīrti's text. First, there is C.W. Huntington, Jr., with Geshé Namgyal Wangchen, *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989). While the Padmakara translation is intended for the interested lay Buddhist, Huntington's is intended for the scholarly audience. The Padmakara translation is much smoother and easier to read, while Huntington's is more specific, detailed, and annotated. It is particularly informative to read the two translations in parallel, as each reveals different aspects of the original text. There is also a translation and commentary by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Ocean of Nectar*:



*Wisdom and Compassion in Mahayana Buddhism* (London: Tharpa Publications, 1995). While the Padmakara translation draws on both traditional, Tibetan scholastic interpretations and modern scholarship, Gyatso's is fully committed to the traditional scholastic understandings. This work provides a valuable insight into these understandings, but it should be noted that this is one particular, sectarian interpretation.

The collection by Dreyfus and McClintock provides a valuable historical examination of the creation and significance of the distinction between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, a distinction that is usually traced back to Candrakīrti. Comprising nine papers by leading contemporary scholars, this is an essential work for study of Candrakīrti's place in medieval Indian Buddhist thought and the ways in which the distinction he is considered to have established has been understood through the lens of Tibetan, particularly Tsong kha pa's, attempts to systematize the wealth of philosophic texts and issues inherited from India. This collection is of specific value in allowing the reader of the Padmakara translation of Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* to evaluate its approach to the text as well as placing it and Candrakīrti's thought into a broader intellectual context.

The collection is divided into two parts. The first, of five papers, focuses on the Indian origins of the distinction. This includes essays by William L. Ames on Bhāvaviveka, C.W. Huntington, Jr., on Candrakīrti, Tom J.F. Tillemans on metaphysics, Sara L. McClintock on the "given," and Malcolm David Eckel on Tsong kha pa's understanding of Madhyamaka. The second part, of four papers, turns its attention to the Tibetan developments. This section includes essays by Helmut Tauscher on Phya pa chos kyi seng ge, Chizuko Yoshimizu on Tsong kha pa's understanding of Candrakīrti, José Ignacio Cabezón on fourteenth-century interpretations of the distinction, and Georges B.J. Dreyfus on 'Ju Mi pham.

While the distinction between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika forms the unifying topic of the collection, the theme developed by the editors in their introduction is doxography, that is, the writing about beliefs. This is a critical dimension of all Buddhist thought, and was as much a central part of the development of Buddhism in East Asia as it was in Tibet. For this reason, the value of the collection extends far beyond the study of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism.

***Traité sur l'Inépuisable Lampe du Zen: Tōrei (1721–1792) et sa vision de l'éveil.* By Michel Mohr. Two volumes. *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*, vol. XXVIII. Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1997. xxii, 867 pages (two volumes paginated consecutively). Index includes Chinese characters for entries.**

## Richard Payne

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This is a study of the most important work by one of the most important early modern Rinzai Zen teachers, Tōrei Enji. He was one of the leading disciples of the much more widely known Hakuin, and published his *Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp of Zen* (the “*Traité sur l'Inépuisable Lampe du Zen*” of this publication’s title) in 1800. Standing as it does at the turning point between the premodern and modern periods of Japanese religious history, this work is a key to understanding both the development of Rinzai Zen in the modern period and of modern Japanese Buddhism more generally.

Mohr’s work is an exemplary instance of a detailed textual study. The work is divided into three parts. The first part is a general introduction, the second part is the translation *per se*, together with notes to the translation, and the third part is appendices. (The first volume contains the introduction and the translation, while the second contains the notes and appendices.)

The introduction provides the reader with the information needed to understand the place of Tōrei and his work in Japanese religious history. The first chapter discusses the origin of the Rinzai school of Zen, which was constituted as an independent school in the middle of the Kamakura era, at the end to the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century. Mohr, however, goes back to introduce the precursors—such figures as Kakua and Dainichi Nōnin. Greater attention is paid to Myōan Yōsai, who has been raised to the status of founder of the Rinzai tradition in Japan. Yōsai travelled to China where he studied under a Linji master and received certification to teach the school when he returned to Japan. This is followed by an examination of major figures of the Rinzai school following Yōsai. Mohr then goes on to discuss the foundations of the early modern period of Japan, and the key role of Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa.

In this section Mohr introduces the political and social history of premodern Zen. He discusses issues of legitimacy and recognition by the *bakufu*, as well as the role of Buddhism in the conflict with Christianity. In the seventeenth century, various efforts toward reform were initiated,

including the conflict over use of *nembutsu* recitation by Ungo Kiyō.<sup>1</sup> This section closes with a discussion of Hakuin.

The next section opens with the biography of Tōrei himself. As was not uncommon in the premodern periods, Tōrei did not narrowly constrain his studies to one particular sectarian perspective. In addition to studying Zen under Ryōzan, he also studied esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō*). He eventually became recognized as the successor to Hakuin, receiving a robe and certification (*inki*) in the beginning of 1750. In 1759 Hakuin appointed him to head a temple which had been neglected, Ryūtaku-ji at the foot of Mount Fuji. Tōrei was active there for about twenty years, during which time he both restored the temple and wrote works on the history of what is now known as Hakuin-Zen, making his master the founder of this lineage within Rinzai.

Mohr follows this with a discussion of the relation between Tōrei's Zen and the school of Shingaku, founded by Ishida Baigan (1685–1744), which developed on the basis of neo-Confucianism. Tōrei's lineage and his successors are next discussed, leading us right up to the beginnings of the twentieth century. Mohr then has an interesting discussion of the problem of the transmission of the Dharma. As he notes, transmission of the Dharma may have an institutional significance, "and does not necessarily reflect an actual confirmation of the awakening of the disciple" (p. 63).

The balance of the introduction focuses attention on the *Discourse* itself. Following an examination of the textual history, Mohr examines the contents of the text and its significance in understanding Tōrei's conceptions of Zen and its relation to Buddhism more generally.

The second part of this publication is a translation of the text of the *Discourse*. This is a very detailed and scholarly translation, and while this means that it is perhaps not a smooth read, the annotations provide such a wealth of information that one is well-rewarded for the effort involved. The only other Western-language translation of the text takes a very different tack. This is the *Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp of the Zen School*, translated by Yoko Okuda (Boston, Rutland, Vermont, and London: Charles E. Tuttle Co., and London: The Zen Centre, 1989), which includes a commentary on the text by Master Daibi originally produced in the 1930s. As is all-too-frequently the case with sectarian works of this kind, the work is presented in a very opaque fashion, due to the total absence of any scholarly paraphernalia such as explanatory notes, or characters for key terms, names, and texts. In addition, the work does not appear in its entirety—absent is the final chapter "in which Master Torei gives specific advice how this attitude in training may be practiced also by followers of the Pure Land school, by adherents of Shinto and of the Confucian way, etc. This seemed gratuitous and detracting rather than helpful to Western readers of today" (p. 6). The same attitude is found in the introduction to the section on Shingon, where the editor comments that this section of

Tōrei's text "seems at first glance somewhat irrelevant to us, the Shingon school not being part of our Western cultural inheritance" (p. 110). This evidences that the intent of this translation is not actually to present Tōrei's thought, but rather to propagate Zen by giving it a privileged position within contemporary Western culture. In other words, rather than informing the reader, the Zen Centre translation seeks to guide readers by means of its selectivity and opacity.

In contrast, the extensive annotations and scholarly paraphernalia presented by Mohr, particularly in the second volume, offer the interested reader the opportunity to seek to understand Tōrei's text on his or her own. This is the appropriate goal of scholarly work, and Mohr has attained that goal, and done so at the highest level of academic excellence.

## Note

1. For further information on this conflict, see Richard M. Jaffe, "Ungo Kiyō's *Ōjōyōka* and Rinzai Zen Orthodoxy" in Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds., *Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitābha* (Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism, vol. 17. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), pp. 202–235.

***The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture.* By John Kieschnick. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. 343 pages including text, index, and images. Hardcover, \$65.00; paperback, \$24.95.**

### **Jonathan H.X. Lee**

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Why do Chinese monks dress in sleeved robes? Why did members of the Qing court adorn themselves with Buddhist rosaries? How do bridge building and innovations in paper production and printing relate to Buddhism? What does the chair have to do with Buddhism in China? What about sugar? Tea? These questions guide the scope of this book. Kieschnick offers a collection of the histories of particular objects, considers the attitudes toward them, and the ways in which they were used over time that, taken together, reveal the complex and subtle ways in which Buddhism changed the material life of a civilization, in this case, China (p. 14). Buddhism altered the Chinese material world by introducing new sacred objects, new symbols, buildings, ritual implements, and a host of other objects, large and small, as well as new ways of thinking about and interacting with these objects (p. 1).

Kieschnick identifies the various schools of thought on material culture, some focusing on the objects themselves, others on their symbolic capital. His main focus, however, is on the *making* of the object, not in the object itself. He asks, "What negotiations were involved in *making* Buddhist objects? What were the objects used for? What were people's attitudes toward these objects?" (p. 16, emphasis added). Kieschnick places an importance on the origin of the object because it was of great significance in the way the object was used and treated (p. 18). Kieschnick notes that traditionally scholars of religions, in this particular case Buddhologists, have focused on texts and ideas, ignoring either accidentally or purposefully, how material objects may contradict scriptural pronouncements. This resulted in "convoluted explanations for the objects rather than [acceptance] that doctrines laid out in scriptures may not reflect the way Buddhism was practiced" (pp. 20–21). Furthermore, the preoccupation with text and ideas ignores the intimate relationship between religion and the material cultural world.

Material culture, as Kieschnick argues, will provide invaluable insights into the history of a religion. "A focus on material culture also reveals the extent of the impact of religious movements on culture" (p. 22). Kieschnick notes that China provides an abundance of data for the study of Buddhist material culture. There is a large body of artifacts and writings

about the artifacts from before the first century C.E. when Buddhism began to influence Chinese society, making “it possible in many cases to determine what came to China with Buddhism and what originated in China independently” (p. 23). Hence, the great challenge for Kieschnick and readers alike is the issue of data interpretation. His examination of material culture attempts to debunk the view that Indian Buddhism was more pure than its Chinese counterpart, but more importantly, reveals that they too struggled with the contradiction between meaning and language itself—just as the Chinese did. Instead, he stresses the “centuries of persistent contact” that were necessary for an object to take root in Chinese society (e.g., the chair over a period of seven centuries). He says, “More commonly, however, changes happened only very slowly under constant cultural pressure from Buddhist individuals and institutions. In other words, the persistent presence of Buddhist practices and ideas provided the resources as well as the vast stretches of time needed for the spread and development of particular forms of material culture” (p. 284). Furthermore, “material objects at once reflected a monastic identity that transcended the boundaries confining the behaviors and attitudes of other types of people, and at the same time gradually, persistently, introduced to outsiders new objects and new approaches to them” (p. 286).

In chapter one, Kieschnick explores the notion of sacred power in sacred objects, primarily in relics and icons. He notes that this notion was not new to China and existed prior to the entry of Buddhism. However, the types of objects associated with sacred power were new, in addition to the complex and vast apparatus used to produce and disseminate them (p. 29). This apparatus included monks, rich liturgical tradition, and a rapidly expanding lay following in the early centuries (p. 29). Buddhism introduced new icons into China, relics—bits of bone, teeth, and ash—imbued with sacred power. In China, relics were important for several reasons: relics were used as symbols for prestige and power, they had economic implications in that they attracted pilgrimage and patronage, and were of diplomatic value (pp. 37–43).

Kieschnick examines the impact of Buddhist icons on Chinese material culture. Monks used images for the confession of their faults and as tools for visualization. Soon after the introduction of Buddhism into China, “Buddhist images became an integral part of the devotional life of all Buddhists—monks and nuns, lay people, patrons rich and poor” (p. 55). The main question that Kieschnick explores on image worship is: “What was the nature of this sacred power, what function did it serve, and how did icons get it?” (p. 57). He continues by saying we can “at least assert that sacred icons were an important part of Buddhism at the time when Buddhism began to have a major impact on Chinese civilization” (pp. 57–58).

In chapter two Kieschnick examines the symbolism embedded in the images, which explains how Buddhism entered and permeated Chinese

material culture (p. 83). Kieschnick notes that early Buddhist iconography might not represent Buddhist symbolism at all, but rather, a vague association of the symbol with auspiciousness. Hence, during the early Han, “elephants, relics, and haloed figures may have been more lucky charms than indexes to episodes in the life of the Buddha and the doctrines inherent in the biography” (p. 84). However, by the Six Dynasties Period, there is firmer evidence of the self-conscious use of Buddhist symbolism on tombs. The author grapples with two main issues of iconography in this section: “the origins of symbols and the travails of their subsequent interpretation” (p. 84).

Kieschnick suggests that in discussing the emergence of Buddhist symbols in China, we need not confine ourselves to the symbolism in Buddhist arts (e.g., painting and sculpture) but should extend our examination to Buddhist objects of liturgy, as well as the personal articles of monks and nuns. He then focuses his discussion on a number of portable objects that were invested with symbolic significance: the monastic robe, the alms bowl, the rosary, the ring staff, and the *ruyi* scepter. The iconographic properties of these objects were never really fixed, nor were they fundamentally symbolic. “Yet, all are examples of objects whose symbolism was discussed at length over the course of the history of Buddhism in China and illustrate that symbolism was important for the way many Buddhist objects were understood” (p. 86). Furthermore, “the opportunity Buddhist symbols provide us for understanding this curious mechanism of interpretation and influence [is], I think, ultimately the most interesting aspect of the history of Buddhist symbols in China” (p. 86).

In chapter three Kieschnick explores the link between the production of Buddhist material culture and the theology of merit. He notes that the idea and system of merit-making and transfer was introduced into China with the entry of Buddhism. This discussion examines the underlying impact of the notion of merit in the production of Buddhist material objects in China (e.g., the book or *sutras*), in combination with the consequent innovations and developments in the production of the material itself (e.g., paper making and printing) (p. 167). Hence, the history of printing in China has many “Chinese firsts,” which almost always are related directly to Buddhism (p. 181). One impact of book-making and distribution for merit is seen in the genre known as “morality books (*shanshu*)” which continues today with the massive production of morality books in Taiwan and mainland China (p. 185).

In addition to book-making, monastery construction and support were important merit-making activities. Donations to monasteries were often recorded and made public, hence associated with social and class distinctions. More importantly, monastic donation was often set against the backdrop of the potential for prestige, philanthropy, and intricate social relations. Ultimately, these forces dictate the flourishing and fall of a

monastery (p. 198). Additionally, Kieschnick notes bridge making as another major merit-making activity that included multiple social relationships—local polity, monks as structural engineers and trustful donation collectors, and ultimately, the local inhabitants who will use the bridges.

Overall, Kieschnick argues that the theology of merit fueled the production and innovation of Chinese material culture: from the donation of silk for the sleeved monastic robes, to the constructions of stupas and icons, search and production of relics, support of monasteries, bridge-building, book production, and the paper-making and printing innovations. The main thesis of this chapter, which is successfully argued, is that there are multiple motivations for the production and innovation of Buddhist material artifacts in Chinese culture, primarily driven by the preoccupation with merit-making.

Chapter four explores objects that are tangentially religious and/or Buddhist, such as the chair, sugar, and tea. These may be traced back to Indian origins, although there is proof that tea already existed in China before the entry of Buddhism. In this section, Kieschnick examines the role monks played in the dissemination and propagation of these new objects in China. He illustrates how the “monastic community served as a conduit along which knowledge of how to manufacture and use these things spread” (p. 221).

Kieschnick begins his discussion on tea by stating that “unlike most of the objects seen to this point, the relationship between Buddhism and Chinese tea has little to do with India, despite the controversy that raged from the early nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth over the origins of the tea tree” (p. 262). He notes that although tea was not the preferred drink, most scholars now agree that tea manufacturing, the cultivation and harvesting and use of tealeaves, originated in China (p. 263). During the Six Dynasties Period, milk was the drink of choice in the north, while in the south, tea was the drink of preference, but only among the literati (p. 264). However, by the tenth century tea had become established as the national drink of China.

As with the consumption of sugar, the monastic community consumed tea in the afternoon to avoid the hunger from fasting in the evening. Tea was also used in meditation to assist the monks in staying alert (p. 267), and further, for medicinal purposes (p. 269). More importantly, Kieschnick makes a point that tea became commonplace through the network of routes taken by monks traveling from one monastery to another. He writes, “it is not surprising, then, that in their travels, monks who had acquired the habit of drinking tea in the south spread it to the north. Extending this hypothesis a step further, once tea was established in northern monasteries, it spread from monks to literati along the same paths of influence we have already examined with the spread of the chair and of sugar” (p. 269).



Interestingly, Kieschnick argues, “skeptics can reasonably argue that even had Buddhism never entered China, sooner or later tea would have become China’s national drink” (p. 274). One must wonder why Kieschnick would conclude that tea would inevitably conquer Chinese culture, but contends that the up-right chair would not? (p. 248). Since the tea that is known in China today first appeared during the twelfth century, we must wonder, What tea is Kieschnick referring to? Overall, Kieschnick’s argument is straightforward—monasteries and monks are key players in the transmission of the use of the chair, techniques for refining sugar, and the nationalization of tea in Chinese material culture.

In his concluding chapter Kieschnick acknowledges the shortcomings of his book: (1) He notes that he has not discussed nuns (p. 282); (2) he admits that Daoists have been overlooked (p. 282); (3) he admits to being preoccupied with India as the “sole source of foreign influence on Chinese material culture, as if Buddhism had leaped directly from a uniform, monolithic India to China without passing through Central or Southeast Asia” (pp. 282–283) and; (4) the issue of temporality and the use of the word “impact” which may suggest a sudden meeting of objects and subsequent transformation. Instead, he stresses the “centuries of persistent contact” that were necessary for an object to take hold in Chinese society (e.g., the chair over a period of seven centuries) (p. 283). Hence he says, “More commonly, however, changes happened only very slowly under constant cultural pressure from Buddhist individuals and institutions. In other words, the persistent presence of Buddhist practices and ideas provided the resources as well as the vast stretches of time needed for the spread and development of particular forms of material culture” (p. 284). Furthermore, “material objects at once reflected a monastic identity that transcended the boundaries confining the behaviors and attitudes of other types of people, and at the same time gradually, persistently, introduced to outsiders new objects and new approaches to them” (p. 286).

Kieschnick returns to the theological contradiction in the relationship between material culture and Buddhist teachings with its tendency to renounce the material world. He asks, “How did the doctrines of the evanescence and ultimate lack of inherent existence of the material world affect the way monks related to objects? And what of the austere ideal of restraint and renunciation?” (p. 287). Kieschnick suggests that the case studies he examined reveal that this tendency toward the material was not a stark sign of hypocrisy or bad faith because there is ample doctrinal support for the justification and use of all objects (p. 288).

In addition to his four critiques of his own work, I would add that not only did he overlook Daoists, but also Confucians. Plus, although he mentioned the role of the merchants in passing on page 33 in reference to the Silk Road, the role of the merchant in propagating and popularizing

Buddhism and its material culture into China must be more significant. While there are some minor editorial problems, the overall content was exciting—a model of multi-disciplinary, multi-methodological investigations of Buddhism—not only in China, but anywhere else Buddhism has been implanted. The book is recommended for general readers interested in Buddhism, historians of material culture, Buddhologists, sinologists, cultural anthropologists, and students and scholars of religious studies.

## **BDK ENGLISH TRIPITAKA SERIES: A Progress Report**

In 2004, three new titles comprising the Tenth Set of the BDK English Tripitaka Series will be published (see below for list of forthcoming volumes).

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The following volumes are scheduled for publication in 2004–2005 (publication not necessarily in the order listed):

**THE TREATISE ON THE ELUCIDATION OF THE KNOWABLE [Taisho 1645] and THE CYCLE OF THE FORMATION OF THE SCHISMATIC DOCTRINES [Taisho 2031]**

*The Treatise on the Elucidation of the Knowable* is a translation by Ses-rab dpal (1259–1314) (Ch.: Shaluoba) of a text by the Tibetan 'Phags-pa (1235–1280) written as a primer of Buddhism for the Mongolian crown prince Cinggim (Ch.: Zhenjin) (1243–1285). Drawing on Abhidharma teachings from the viewpoint of the Sarvastivada tradition and from Vasubandhu's important treatise, the *Abhidharmakosa*, to provide an outline of fundamental Buddhist concepts, the text begins with a description of the animate and inanimate worlds according to Buddhist cosmology and discusses key elements of the Buddhist path and teachings. Translated by Charles Willemen. *The Cycle of the Formation of the Schismatic Doctrines (Samayabhedoparacanacakra)*, by the Sarvastivadin scholar-monk Vasumitra (ca. first century B.C.E.) is an account of the unorthodox and schismatic doctrines within the Buddhist sangha that began to arise soon after the Buddha's lifetime, and which led to the formation of several different schools. The text concisely enumerates the differing points of doctrine held by these various schools. Translated by Keisho Tsukamoto.

**APOCRYPHAL SCRIPTURES: The Bequeathed Teaching Sutra [Taisho 389]; The Ullambana Sutra [Taisho 685]; The Sutra of Forty-two Sections [Taisho 784]; The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment [Taisho 842]; The Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love [Taisho 2887]**

This volume contains five brief yet important scriptural texts of the Chinese Buddhist canon. The *Bequeathed Teaching Sutra (Yijiaojing)* is presented as the Buddha's last teaching, in which he instructs the monks that after his *parinirvana* they should rely on the monastic discipline, or *pratimoksa* ("liberation in all respects"), to remain free from potential entanglements and develop good qualities. In the *Ullambana Sutra (Yulanpenjing)*, the disciple Maudgalyayana petitions the Buddha for a means to liberate his mother from a lower realm of rebirth; the Buddha teaches that making food offerings to the sangha at the completion of the summer retreat generates merit sufficient to liberate one's ancestors for seven generations. This text is the doctrinal basis of the Japanese *Obon* ceremony. The *Sutra of Forty-two Sections (Sishierzhangjing)* is a compilation from various sutras of brief,

independent sections on ethical teachings intended for practice by Buddhist followers. The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (*Yuanjuejing*) presents the teaching of intrinsic enlightenment, which became the basis of the development of uniquely East Asian forms of Buddhist belief and practice. The *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love* (*Fumuenzhongjing*) is considered the Buddhist book of filial piety, to be based on the aspiration to attain enlightenment; the text describes how one should honor and help one's parents in order to repay one's indebtedness for their support and care.

**ZEN TEXTS: Essentials of the Transmission of Mind [Taisho 2012-A]; A Treatise on Letting Zen Flourish to Protect the State [Taisho 2543]; A Universal Recommendation of True Zazen [Taisho 2580]; Advice on the Practice of Zazen [Taisho 2586]**

This volume contains four texts of the Chan/Zen tradition. *Essentials of the Transmission of Mind* (*Chuanxinfayao*), translated by John R. McRae, is based on the teachings of the ninth-century Chinese Chan master Huangbo Xiyun (Duanji) on the nature of the enlightened mind. *A Treatise on Letting Zen Flourish to Protect the State* (*Kozengokokuron*), translated by Gishin Tokiwa, was written by the Japanese Tendai priest Myoan Eisai (1141–1215) to advocate the establishment of Zen as an independent school; the text draws from one hundred Buddhist sources to offer a comprehensive exposition of the Zen teachings. *A Universal Recommendation of True Zazen* (*Fukanzazengi*), translated by Osamu Yoshida, is a brief but important text by Eihei Dogen (1200–1253), founder of the Japanese Soto Zen school, on the foundations, meaning, and practice of *shikantaza* (“pure sitting”). Translated by Steven Heine, *Advice on the Practice of Zazen* (*Zazenyojinki*), by the Fourth Patriarch of the Soto lineage, Keizan Jokin (1268–1325), draws from a variety of key philosophical doctrines and practical recommendations from Dogen's teachings on *zazen* (seated meditation) practice.

**THE SUTRA OF QUEEN SRIMALA OF THE LION'S ROAR [Taisho 353] and THE VIMALAKIRTI SUTRA [Taisho 475]**

This volume contains two important texts from the Indian Mahayana tradition. *The Sutra of Queen Srimala of the Lion's Roar* (*Srimaladevisimhanada-sutra*), translated by Diana M. Paul, concerns the story of Queen Srimala, a lay bodhisattva who possesses the “lion's roar” of great eloquence. In the form of teachings delivered by Srimala in the Buddha's presence, the text discusses the doctrines of the *tathagatagarbha* (“womb of the Buddha”) and

the One Vehicle (*ekayana*). *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (*Vimalakirtinirdesa-sutra*), translated by John R. McRae, also features an accomplished lay bodhisattva. Engaging in lively dialogue with the great bodhisattva Manjusri, the householder Vimalakirti displays the depth of his knowledge of the core Buddhist principles of nonduality and emptiness, culminating in his “thunderous silence”—understanding beyond verbal/conceptual frameworks.

### **THE BAIZHANG ZEN MONASTIC REGULATIONS [Taisho 2025]**

Translated by Shohei Ichimura, this text (*Chixiubaizhangqinggui*) is a comprehensive account of the rules and regulations, offices, rituals and practices, and daily-life requirements established as the standard for Chan/Zen monastic life by Baizhang Huaihui (720–814). Though Baizhang’s original *Regulations* are extant only in fragments in works of later periods, this Yuan period revised text, compiled by Chan Masters Dehui and Dasu, represents a unified code of monastic regulations for the Chan/Zen community.

### **THE ALL-PLEASING: A COMMENTARY ON THE RULES OF DISCIPLINE [Taisho 1462]**

This text (*Shanjianlüpiposha*) is a commentarial work dealing with the monastic rules of the Theravada Buddhist tradition, based on the *Samantapasidika*, a Pali commentary on the *Vinaya-pitaka* ascribed to the fifth-century monk Buddhaghosa. Translated by Sodo Mori and Toshiichi Endo.

### **THE AWAKENING OF FAITH [Taisho 1666]**

This text, the *Mahayanasraddhotpada-sastra* (*Dachengqixinlun*), composed by Asvaghosa (ca. 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> centuries), presents a concise synopsis of both the theoretical and practical aspects of the central ideas of Mahayana Buddhism. Though brief, this work has been of considerable influence on various schools of East Asian Buddhism, including the Huayan, Tiantai, Chan, and Pure Land traditions. Translated by Yoshito S. Hakeda.

These volumes can be purchased through most bookstores, online at Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble’s BN.net or directly from the Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research.

The Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research and the Editorial Committee of the BDK English Tripitaka Project look forward to continuing to publish volumes of the English Tripitaka Series. Through this work we hope to help to fulfill the dream of our founder, Reverend Dr. Yehan Numata, to make the Buddhist teachings available to the English-speaking world. *Gassho.*

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## **The *Pacific World*—Its History**

Throughout my life, I have sincerely believed that Buddhism is a religion of peace and compassion, a teaching which will bring spiritual tranquillity to the individual, and contribute to the promotion of harmony and peace in society. My efforts to spread the Buddha's teachings began in 1925, while I was a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley. This beginning took the form of publishing the *Pacific World*, on a bi-monthly basis in 1925 and 1926, and then on a monthly basis in 1927 and 1928. Articles in the early issues concerned not only Buddhism, but also other cultural subjects such as art, poetry, and education, and then by 1928, the articles became primarily Buddhistic. Included in the mailing list of the early issues were such addressees as the Cabinet members of the U.S. Government, Chambers of Commerce, political leaders, libraries, publishing houses, labor unions, and foreign cultural institutions.

After four years, we had to cease publication, primarily due to lack of funds. It was then that I vowed to become independently wealthy so that socially beneficial projects could be undertaken without financial dependence on others. After founding the privately held company, Mitutoyo Corporation, I was able to continue my lifelong commitment to disseminate the teachings of Buddha through various means.

As one of the vehicles, the *Pacific World* was again reactivated, this time in 1982, as the annual journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies. For the opportunity to be able to contribute to the propagation of Buddhism and the betterment of humankind, I am eternally grateful. I also wish to thank the staff of the Institute of Buddhist Studies for helping me to advance my dream to spread the spirit of compassion among the peoples of the world through the publication of the *Pacific World*.

Yehan Numata  
Founder, Mitutoyo Corporation

### **In Remembrance**

In May of 1994, my father, Yehan Numata, aged 97 years, returned to the Pure Land after earnestly serving Buddhism throughout his lifetime. I pay homage to the fact that the *Pacific World* is again being printed and published, for in my father's youth, it was the passion to which he was wholeheartedly devoted.

I, too, share my father's dream of world peace and happiness for all peoples. It is my heartfelt desire that the *Pacific World* helps to promote spiritual culture throughout all humanity, and that the publication of the *Pacific World* be continued.

Toshihide Numata  
Chairman, Mitutoyo Corporation