

Guest Editor's Preface: Festschrift Honoring James Sanford

Charles D. Orzech

University of North Carolina, Greensboro

In a hidden lair, in these clouded woods
I lay my head beside a moonlit stream.
Pine boughs brush the great, flat stone
sweet springs reach up, gentle, chill.

I sit, motionless, before such beauty,
lost in the misted darkness of empty hills.
I am content in this desolate spot
pine shadow, stretching before a setting sun.

云林最幽栖，傍涧枕月谿。松拂盘陀石，甘泉涌凄凄。
静坐偏佳丽，虚岩矇雾迷。怡然居憩地，日斜树影低。¹

—Attributed to Shide

Translation by James H. Sanford

THE CHOICE OF THE ABOVE POEM, attributed to the famous Tang eccentric and Chan poet Shide (拾得) and translated for this volume, seems to me an altogether appropriate opening for a celebration of Jim Sanford's work on his retirement from teaching. Though his house is in the woods in Orange County, North Carolina, and one might find some semblance in the pines to the "hidden lair" mentioned above, visitors will find Jim and his wife Pat surrounded by a variety of adopted animals, from peacocks and emus to koi, all the result of a life of compassionate action in animal welfare projects.

Jim Sanford grew up in Gunnison Colorado, did an undergraduate degree in linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, then in 1961 studied Mandarin at the U.S. Army's language school in Monterey, followed by a stint in Taiwan. Returning to the West Coast he studied Japanese literature and language at the University of Washington from 1963 to 1965, at which point he went to Tokyo for further training at the

Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies. On his return he ventured to the East Coast where he received a PhD from Harvard in 1972. From 1972 until his retirement he taught in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

I don't remember when I first met Jim, but it must have been sometime in 1982. I was just back from a year living in Hong Kong and doing research for my dissertation, research that compelled me to make the hour's drive to Chapel Hill to use the UNC and Duke libraries. Once having met it was clear that we shared many interests, including those of Chinese Buddhism, esoteric Buddhism, and Chinese literature and poetry. Coffee breaks from research led to the exploration of mutual interests in esoteric Buddhism and the establishment of the Society for Tantric Studies. In 1984 the study of the tantras was still associated either with sectarian interests or with non-academic pursuits. Jim's idea for the society was to create an international forum for the academic study of tantra that would help scholars reach beyond their area-specific training and enable them to share their research. Under his leadership the society has flourished and has held several national and international conferences. Jim was also instrumental in the establishment of a five-year American Academy of Religion Seminar on Tantra, and then a Consultation. Tantric Studies now has formal group status at the AAR, in large part through Jim's efforts and leadership.

How did a specialist in Zen become the key player in the promotion of the scholarly study of the tantras in North America? Perhaps Sanford had taken seriously Takakusu Junjirō's maxim that "in Japan the whole of Buddhism became the living and active faith of the mass of the people."² Whatever the value of Takakusu's argument, it is certainly true that specialists in Japanese Buddhism ignore the impact of India, Korea, and China at their peril, while it is considerably easier for a scholar of Indian Buddhism to ignore its incarnations outside of the subcontinent.

Jim Sanford's research has had three enduring foci: the Zen and Chan traditions of Japan and China; poetry, especially the Chan-inspired poetry of Hanshan, Shide, and their emulators; and esoteric Buddhism in its varied manifestations in China and Japan. While the East Asian impact of the Buddhist tantras have clearly been one of Sanford's primary interests, a closer look at his work reveals an uncommon eye for the incongruous and offbeat that have led him to probe things that transgressed sectarian taxonomies. As I got to know Jim better I

came to understand that his attraction to the offbeat was more than scholarly eccentricity. Indeed, as his works demonstrate, this interest in anomaly or *difference* constituted a theoretical stance, though Jim's interest in theory was not for the theory itself but for what theory can help us to see.

Jim's first publications were indeed, a bit offbeat. "Japan's 'Laughing Mushrooms,'" published in *Economic Botany* in 1972, explored an odd tale from the eleventh-century *Konjaku monogatari* (今昔物語集) about *waraitake* (笑い茸).³ This was followed by his exploration of the mythology and historical roots of the iconic Komusō (虚無僧), the martial monks whose identity is cloaked by distinctive beehive headwear and who can turn their flutes into cudgels.⁴ Sanford demonstrates in this meticulously researched article that in religion fact may be stranger than fiction. Despite widespread belief of the ancient Zen roots of this tradition, the Komusō is surprisingly modern (dating from around the beginning of the Tokugawa) and had little, initially, to do with Zen.⁵

A keen sense of the importance of incongruity (and humor) must have drawn Jim to the fifteenth-century Japanese Zen master Ikkyū Sōjun (一休宗純, 1394–1481). His now classic and well-written monograph, *Zen Man Ikkyū*, explored Ikkyū's flaunting of Zen orthodoxy as seen both in Ikkyū's own works and in his later transformation into the "type" of the mad Zen master of Tokugawa tales.⁶ Yet Jim's interest was not a gratuitous one—here as in everything else he wrote Jim sought out the offbeat as a clue to the larger human condition, a condition too often obscured by pre-interpretive expectations and orthodoxies. Ikkyū's attitude toward orthodoxy, readily apparent in his poetic assaults on his contemporaries in the Rinzai lineage, is made more poignant and human in his late life love affair with the blind singer Mori. Ikkyū's lament, that it was unfortunate that the Buddha saved Ānanda from the clutches of a courtesan, underscores a maturity of understanding and a wry humor:⁷

I Heard the Crow and Was Enlightened

Anger, pride, I knew the passions.

Twenty years before, just like now.

A crow's laugh; I tasted the *arhat's* fruit.

Whose dappled face do I sing today?⁸

Written some twenty years after his initial enlightenment, Ikkyū now sees that achievement was partial—"the *arhat's* fruit." But this enlightenment, by implication much more profound, has been made possible by different passions than anger and pride.

In addition to the poetry translated in *Zen Man Ikkyū* Sanford translates the prose works "Skeletons" (一休骸骨), "The Buddha's Assault on Hell" (仏鬼軍), and "Amida Stripped Bare" (阿弥陀裸物語).⁹ Here we can see indications of Ikkyū's—and of Sanford's—abiding interests, interests that transcend sectarian boundaries and through the uncommon and uncanny reveal something of the human. Sanford's discussion of these prose pieces sets them in the context of Ikkyū's life and fifteenth-century Zen. Although he initially regarded "Amida Stripped Bare" as "a fairly original Zen critique of Pure Land ideas," Sanford later came to view the work as "directly dependent on the ideas of Kakuban and Dōhan."¹⁰

Jim's interests in medieval Japanese religion and the role of Buddhism and poetry in it led to his co-editing (with William R. LaFleur and Masatoshi Nagatomi) of *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan*.¹¹ The book, based on a set of conferences supported by Harvard University and the National Endowment for the Humanities, used *honji suijaku* (本地垂迹) or the idea that the *kami* are the "manifest traces" of the "original ground" (i.e., the buddhas) as its organizing theme. Speaking in the introduction to the volume, the editors argue that "flowing traces suggests . . . almost effortless movement between and across conventional boundaries . . . that is precisely what we see happening again and again in the arts studied here."¹²

Indeed as Jim's research progressed he realized that there was a substantial and unstudied undercurrent of esoteric ideas and practices in Japanese religion and that these practices often transgressed sectarian boundaries. While Japanese scholars had worked this field, much of that work was inspired by sectarian agendas and was thus marginalized. Under the auspices of the Society for Tantric Studies, the Association for Asian Studies, the American Academy of Religion, and the Seminar for Buddhist Studies (Denmark), Sanford presented a series of papers illuminating aspects of this esoteric undercurrent. These included, "The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual,"¹³ "Literary Aspects of Japan's Dual-Gaṇeśa Cult,"¹⁴ "Breath of Life: The Esoteric Nenbutsu,"¹⁵ and "Wind, Waters, Stūpas, Mandalas: Fetal Buddhahood in Shingon."¹⁶

These essays constitute a significant body of work that highlights religious phenomena marginalized by sectarian taxonomies.¹⁷

Poetry, both Asian and contemporary, has been an abiding interest of Jim Sanford. His first published translations (with Jerome P. Seaton), “Four Poems by Shih-te,” appeared in 1980 in *White Pine Journal*.¹⁸ His study of Ikkyū included extensive translations of the master’s poems, and the epigraph at the front of that volume is a quote from Kenneth Patchen’s *The Journal of Albion Moonlight*: “The greatest masters foster no schools. / They imitate themselves until the matter is ended.”¹⁹ The same year that saw the appearance of *Zen-Man Ikkyū* also saw the publication of *The View from Cold Mountain: Poems of Han-shan and Shih-te* (co-authored with Arthur Tobias and J. P. Seaton).²⁰ Poetry and comparative discussion of death come together in Jim’s study and translation, “The Nine Faces of Death: ‘Su Tung-po’s’ *Kuzōshi*.”²¹ Throughout his career and right up to the present Jim has continued to translate and publish poetry. Recent works have appeared in *The Literary Review*, the White Pine Press, and *Norton’s World Poetry*, and he is currently engaged in the translation of Daoist alchemical poetry.²²

As in Zen, so too in academia we are enmeshed in “the karma of words.”²³ The eleven essays presented in this volume are from former students, friends, and colleagues, all in one way or another influenced by Jim’s work. The arrangement is roughly chronological and according to geographic situation, with essays dealing with the earliest South Asian material first and American material last. A look at the titles shows the broad range of Jim’s impact. Not surprisingly, we find here essays on Japanese and Chinese materials, but also, notably essays on Indian material ranging from the Vedas to modern folk tantra and an essay on the American appropriation of Daoism.

The first essay by Bruce M. Sullivan explores the implications of Jim’s use of the term *tanteroid* for the study of early, ostensibly non-tantric Indic literature. Taking inspiration from Sanford’s “The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual,” David B. Gray traces the use and meaning of skulls in the *Yoginī* tantras. Glen Hayes’s essay on the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās has grown out of presentations and discussions at Society for Tantric Studies and American Academy of Religion Tantric Studies Seminar meetings. Hayes has adapted recent methodologies developed by conceptual metaphor and blend theorists to probe notoriously difficult and anomalous Sahajiyā traditions. Still in India, but now among contemporary Bengali folk practitioners, McDaniel looks at Kali

temples—and skulls. Henrik H. Sørensen details the Chinese translation and appropriation of the cult of Mahāmayurī. Roger Corless, who spent many years as Jim’s colleague at Duke University, directs our attention to the earliest Chinese treatise on Pure Land practice, Tanluan’s “Annotations to the Treatise on Going to Birth [in the Pure Land].” Inspired by Jim’s attention to what has been marginalized, Charles D. Orzech’s essay challenges the standing assumptions that the later tantras did not circulate in Song China. Shifting to Japan, Jacqueline I. Stone’s essay on “A” syllable practice follows Sanford’s lead in nuancing the dominant picture of Japanese deathbed practices by examining minority practices connected with esoteric Buddhism. Blurring the boundaries set up by dominant discourses, Richard K. Payne details Shingon *homa* dedicated to Amida. Contemporary understandings and practices and the effect of cultural adaptation are the topic of the last two essays. Helen Crovetto analyzes the use of the Bhairavī Cakra by present-day Ānanda Mārgiis and in traditional sources. Julia M. Hardy, once one of Jim’s students, completes the volume with a discussion of misplaced critiques of American “Daoism.”

NOTES

1. The poem is found in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐詩 (Shanghai: Xin hua shu dian, 1990), 801. The Song edition is missing the last four characters, which Ye Zhuhong 葉珠紅 supplies. See his *寒山詩集論叢* (Taipei: Showwe Technology Limited, 2006), 304.
2. Takakusu Junjirō, *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1975), back cover.
3. James H. Sanford, "Japan's 'Laughing Mushrooms,'" *Economic Botany* 26, no. 2 (1972): 174–181.
4. James H. Sanford, "Shakuhachi Zen: The Fukeshū and Komusō," *Monumenta Nipponica* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1977): 411–440.
5. *Ibid.*, 412.
6. James H. Sanford, *Zen Man Ikkyū*, Harvard Studies in World Religions 2 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).
7. "Portrait of an Arhat at a Brothel" appears in Sanford, *Zen Man Ikkyū*, 156.
8. *Ibid.*, 166.
9. These also appeared separately in James H. Sanford, "Mandalas of the Heart: Two Prose Works by Ikkyū Sōjun," *Monumenta Nipponica* 35, no. 3 (1980): 273–298.
10. James H. Sanford, "Breath of Life: The Esoteric Nenbutsu," in *Esoteric Buddhism in Japan: Selected Papers from Two SBS Gatherings on Esoteric Buddhism*, ed. Ian Astley (Copenhagen and Aarhus: The Seminar for Buddhist Studies, 1994), 88. Sanford's discussion of the influence of Kakuban and Dōhan on Ikkyū is on pp. 87–89.
11. James H. Sanford, William R. LaFleur, and Masatoshi Nagatomi, eds., *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
12. *Ibid.*, 4.
13. *Monumenta Nipponica* 46, no. 4 (Spring 1991): 1–20.
14. Robert L. Brown, ed., *Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1991), 287–335.
15. Ian Astley-Kristensen, ed., *Esoteric Buddhism in Japan*, Society for Buddhist Studies Monograph Number 1 (Copenhagen and Aarhus: Society for Buddhist Studies, 1994), 65–98, reprinted in Richard K. Payne, ed., *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005).
16. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24, nos. 1–2 (Spring 1997): 1–38.

17. Along with the published essays there are several as yet unpublished that are directly related to this theme. Most important are “The Pure Land Visions of Kakuban and Dōhan,” presented at the University of Copenhagen and University of Aarhus, Conference on the Esoteric Buddhist Tradition, Samsø Island, Denmark, 1989; “The Many Faces of Matara,” presented at the Object as Insight Symposium on Buddhist Art and Ritual, co-sponsored by Amherst College and the Katonah Museum of Art, 1996; and “Shinran’s Secret Transmission to Nyoshin: Esoteric Buddhism in a Pure Land Context,” presented at the Society of Tantric Studies Meeting, University of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff, AZ, 1997.

18. *White Pine Journal* 24–25 (1980): 9–10.

19. Kenneth Patchen, *The Journal of Albion Moonlight* (New York: New Directions, 1941; 5th ed. New York: Padell, 1946), 219. A most apt quote given Ikkyū’s reputed destruction of his *inka*. The line following the quote is not without interest: “Oh! The noise the skeletons make trying on new bodies.”

20. Buffalo, NY: *White Pine Press*, 1981.

21. *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 21, no. 2 (Autumn 1988): 54–77.

22. Further translations include two poems by Wang Chi (sixth century BCE) and three poems by Ikkyū (1394–1481) in *The Literary Review* 32, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 357–358; translations of thirty-six Chinese Chan poems (ten with J. P. Seaton) in J. P. Seaton and Dennis Moloney, eds., *A Drifting Boat: Chinese Zen Poetry* (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1994); translations (with J. P. Seaton) of two poems by Shih-te and three sets of Shih-te harmony poems, in *The Literary Review* 38, no. 3 (1995): 376 and 335–337; three poems of Shih Shu in *The Literary Review* 41, no. 3 (1998); two poems of Shih Shu in Katharine Washburn, John S. Major, and Clifton Fadiman, eds., *World Poetry: An Anthology of Verse from Antiquity to Our Time* (New York: Book-of-the-Month Club, 1998), 849.

23. To borrow the title of a book on Buddhism and the literary arts in Japan by William R. LaFleur. See Sanford’s review of it, “Paradigms and Poems: A Review of LaFleur’s, *The Karma of Words*,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1984): 124–133.