

# The Synchronicity of Preaching-Hearing-Enlightenment: Buddhist Preachers' Performing “[At] One Time” (*Yishi* 一時) in Late Medieval China<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines how Buddhist preachers in late medieval China expanded the meaning of the temporal register of an oft-used phrase “[at] one time” (Ch. *yishi* 一時, Skt. *ekasmin samaye*, Pāli *ekaṃ samayaṃ*) in the opening formula of Buddhist scriptures. Through an analysis of the “sutra lecture texts” (*jiangjingwen* 講經文) found in the Dunhuang manuscripts, this study explores how these preachers broadened the interpretation of “[at] one time” to encompass a wider transtemporal and transhistorical context. During their popular sutra lectures for the laity, Buddhist preachers emphasized the synchronicity of preaching, hearing, and enlightenment, drawing upon the concept of “sympathetic resonance” (*ganying* 感應) from Chinese indigenous cosmology. By using metaphors and analogies,

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the preachers interpreted “[at] one time” as any moment when a teacher imparts the Dharma and a disciple receives it, thereby surpassing the constraints of a specific historical setting. Ultimately, this paper argues that through their imaginative and skillful oratory, the Buddhist preachers in late medieval China transposed the scriptural concepts of “[at] one time” and “Dharma-realm” to the present moment of preaching, thus transforming timely preaching into a timeless practice aimed at facilitating the salvation of their audience.

Keywords: Buddhist preaching, sutra lecture text, late medieval China, “[at] one time” (*yishi*), “sympathetic resonance” (*ganying*), “Dharma-realm” (*fajie*), synchronicity, performance, ritual, salvation

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- BD Beijing Dunhuang manuscript, National Library of China (parenthetical designation refers to the order in Qianziwen 千字文).
- CBETA Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association: <https://tripitaka.cbeta.org/>.
- F. Flug Dunhuang manuscript, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Saint Petersburg.
- P. Pelliot Dunhuang manuscript, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
- S. Stein Dunhuang manuscript, British Library, London.
- T. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經目錄. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭. 85 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932.
- X. *Shinsan dainippon zoku zōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經 (*Wan xinzuan xuzang* 卅新纂續藏). Edited by Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照 et al. 90 vols. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1975–1989.

#### INTRODUCTION

**H**ow a sutra begins matters. A single pause or an emphasis can shift the meaning and set up radically different relationships among the speaker, the listener, and the Buddha. Consequently, the traditional opening phrase of Buddhist sutras, “Thus have I heard, at one time, the Buddha was staying at...” has been the subject of heated debates among many translators, commentators, and scholars from the premodern to the present time. The dispute has focused on whether to punctuate before or after the adverbial phrase “[at] one time” (*yishi* 一時), for different choices lead to different understandings of the entire opening phrase. When punctuated before the phrase “[at] one time,” the text focuses on a particular historical time when Śākyamuni

Buddha delivered his sermon (“Thus have I heard. At one time, the Buddha was staying at...”). On the other hand, when punctuated after the phrase “[at] one time,” it emphasizes an occasion when “I” (i.e., Ānanda, who is represented as the transmitter of the Buddha’s words) listened to the Buddha’s sermon (“Thus have I heard at one time. The Buddha was staying at...”). However the punctuation is made, scholars have heavily relied on sutras and commentaries for their interpretations. This paper extends the discussion by introducing late medieval Chinese “sutra lecture texts” (*jiangjingwen* 講經文), a relatively neglected genre, to the ongoing debates of the introductory phrase.

Sutra lecture texts found in the Dunhuang cave library known as Cave 17 provide written records of Buddhist “popular preaching” (*sujiang* 俗講, or “preaching for the laity”) in China from the seventh to the tenth centuries. This practice of preaching Buddhist sutras emerged soon after Buddhism had been introduced to China, and by the fourth century, lectures on a single sutra could span several weeks.<sup>2</sup> During the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907 CE), popular sutra lectures became widespread, and renowned lecturers like Wenxu 文淑 (c. early ninth century CE) and Facheng 法稱 (fl. 565–605 CE) received imperial support for their preaching activity.<sup>3</sup> Ennin 圓仁 (794–864 CE),

2. “The lecture continued for twenty-three days, from the beginning of the lecture to the end of dispersing of seats” (凡講二十三日, 自開講迄於解座). Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667 CE), comp., *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (Expanded Collection on the Propagation and Clarification of [Buddhism]), *juan* 19, T. no. 2103, 52: 236a21–22.

3. Zhao Lin 趙麟 (fl. 836–846 CE), comp., *Yinhua lu* 因話錄 (Records of Hearsay) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), 94–95; Ennin 圓仁 (794–864 CE), comp., *Nittō guhō junrei gyōki* 入唐求法巡禮行記 (The Record of A Pilgrimage to Tang China in Search of the Law), in *Ru Tang qiufa xunli xingji jiaozhu* 入唐求法巡禮行記校注, ed. Ono Katsutoshi 小野勝年, Bai Huawen 白化文, Li Dingxia 李鼎霞, and Xu Denan 許德楠 (Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, 1992), 369; Duan Anjie 段安節 (fl. 880 CE), comp., *Yuefu zalu* 樂府雜錄 (Miscellaneous Notes on Songs from the Music Bureau) (Beijing: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), 40; and Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667 CE), *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Supplement to the Biographies of Eminent Monks), T. no. 2060, 50: 701b25–29. For general introduction to “popular preaching,” see Xiang Da 向達, “Tangdai sujiang kao” 唐代俗講考, *Yanjing xuebao* 燕京學報 16 (1934): 119–132; Fukui Fumimasa 福井文雅, “Tōdai no zokkō keishiki no kigen” 唐代の俗講形式の起源, in *Nihon Shūkyō Gakkai* 日本宗教学会 41, no. 3 (1968): 142–143; and Fukui Fumimasa, “Tōdai zokkō gishiki no seiritsu o

a Japanese Buddhist monk, described a lecture at the Chishan Cloister 赤山院 in Shandong peninsula in 839 CE, where popular sutra lectures were conducted as devotional or commemorative rites sponsored by local lay donors during seasonal festivals.

There are twenty-nine surviving manuscripts of sutra lecture texts, encompassing the content of eleven different Mahāyāna sutras and Chinese indigenous or “apocryphal” scriptures.<sup>4</sup> These texts are

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meguru sho mondai” 唐代俗講儀式の成立をめぐる諸問題, in *Taishō Daigaku kenkyū kiyō bungakubu Bukkyō gakubu* 大正大學研究紀要・文學部・佛教學部 54 (1968): 307–330.

4. “The Sutra Lecture Text Preached on the Emperor’s Birthday in the Zhongxing Hall in the Fourth Year of the Changxing Era [933 CE]” (*Changxing sinian Zhongxingdian Yingshengjie jiangjingwen* 長興四年中興殿應聖節講經文, P. 3808); “The Record of Double Kindness” (*Shuang’en ji* 雙恩記, F. 96); “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Diamond of Perfection Wisdom Sutra* [Skt. *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā sūtra*]” (*Jin’gang bore boluomi jing jiangjingwen* 金剛般若波羅蜜經講經文, P. 2133 verso); “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Amitābha sūtra* as Spoken by the Buddha” (*Foshuo Amituo jing jiangjingwen* 佛說阿彌陀經講經文, P. 2931, S. 6551 verso, P. 2955, P. 2122, P. 3210, BD09540 [yan 殷 62], F. 131); “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma*” (*Miaofa lianhua jing jiangjingwen* 妙法蓮華經講經文, P. 2305, P. 2133, F. 365, BD07849); “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*” (*Weimojie jing jiangjingwen* 維摩詰經講經文, S. 4571, S. 3872, S. 2122, P. 2292, P. 3079, F. 101, BD05394 [guang 光 94], F. 252, Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉, *Dunhuang lingshi* 敦煌零拾 [0684]); “The Sutra Lecture Text on Ten Auspicious Signs” (*Shi jixiang jiangjingwen* 十吉祥講經文, F. 223); “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Sutra on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Maitreya’s Ascent to Rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven as Spoken by the Buddha*” (*Foshuo guan mile pusa shangsheng doushuaitian jing jiangjingwen* 佛說觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經講經文, P. 3903); “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Sutra on Impermanence* [Skt. *Anityatā sūtra*]” (*Wuchang jing jiangjingwen* 無常經講經文, P. 2305); “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Sutra on the Deep Kindness of Parents*” (*Fumu enzhong jing jiangjingwen* 父母恩重經講經文, P. 2418, BD6412 [he 河 12], F. 133); and “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Ullambana sūtra*” (*Yulanpen jing jiangjingwen* 盂蘭盆經講經文, D. no. 8701, vol. 3). For a transcription of the manuscripts, see Huang Zheng 黃徵 and Zhang Yongquan 張涌泉, *Dunhuang bianwen jiaozhu* 敦煌變文校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997). For general introduction to these manuscripts, see Hao Chunwen 郝春文, *Dunhuang Manuscripts: An Introduction to Texts from the Silk Road*, trans. Stephen F. Teiser (Diamond Bar, CA: Portico Publishing Company, 2020), 159–160; and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, *Eighteen Lectures of Dunhuang*, trans. Imre Galambos (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 400.

invaluable sources that shed light on how medieval Buddhist preachers explained Buddhist scriptures to both laypeople and the ordained. Sutra lecture texts typically consist of three subgenres performed by three practitioners. The first monk, known as the “chief cantor” (*dujiang* 都講), would recite passages from a given sutra, followed by the “Dharma master” (*fashi* 法師), who would expound the meaning of each scriptural passage and provide elaborations in prose. The third monk, called the “leading chanter” (*changdao* 唱導, lit. “chanting and leading”), would then chant verses (*gāthās*) summarizing the Dharma master’s explanations. The third monk would conclude his verses with the formulaic expression “Now, please chant [the next section]” (*chang jianglai* 唱將來), signaling the first monk to read aloud the next passage of the sutra. The first monk also served as a discussant, posing questions about the sutra and allowing the audience to ask questions, to which the Dharma master would then respond.<sup>5</sup> According to Ennin, the audience of sutra lectures included “the clergy and the laity, the old and the young, as well as the noble and the common” (*daosu laoshao zunbei* 道俗老少尊卑).<sup>6</sup>

Proselytizing monks disseminated Buddhist teachings to laypeople through the interpretation, performance, and adaptation of Buddhist sutras. The exegetical techniques employed in the sutra lecture texts provide insight into how medieval Chinese preachers orally transmitted

5. Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 399–340; Wilt L. Idema and Lloyd Haft, *A Guide to Chinese Literature* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1997), 143. Sometimes sutra lectures were performed by two monks, “chief cantor” (*dujiang*) and “Dharma master” (*fashi*). Refer to a passage in “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma*” (*Miaofa lianhua jing jiangjingwen* 妙法蓮華經講經文, F. 365): “In order to listen to a true sutra, one should rely on Dharma master and chief cantor” 若要聽得真經, 須籍法師都講. For a transcription of the text, see Huang and Zhang, *Dunhuang bianwen jiaozhu*, 742.

6. Ono and Bai, *Ru Tang qiufa xunli xingji jiaozhu*, 190. Hirano Kenshō 平野顯照 points out that the term *su* 俗 (“secular”) denotes the ordinary lay believers, counterposed to the term *dao* 道 (“the Way”) or *seng* 僧 (“the clergy”), which denote the serious Buddhist practitioners or the clergy. He also argues that sutra lecture texts from Dunhuang were mainly aimed at the ordinary lay believers. See Hirano Kenshō 平野顯照, “Kōkyōbun no soshiki naiyō” 講經文の組織内容, in *Tonkō to Chūgoku Bukkyō* 敦煌と中国仏教, ed. Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮 and Fukui Fumimasa 福井文雅 (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1984), 333.

Buddhist scriptures and how the audience acquired knowledge of the scriptures through listening to sutra lectures. Preaching played a crucial role in introducing Buddhist ideas to laypeople, as far more laypeople likely heard sermons than read sutras or commentaries. Daniel M. Veidlinger has argued that reading was “the exception rather than the rule.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is worth exploring whether Buddhist preachers’ interpretations of the introductory phrase differed from earlier commentators and how this may have influenced the audience’s experience of the performance and their understanding of the Buddha’s teachings.

This paper consists of three parts. Part 1 briefly reviews how previous studies of Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese Buddhism punctuated and interpreted the introductory phrase. Part 2 examines the interpretations of the term “[at] one time” found in medieval Chinese commentaries on scriptures written by such Buddhist scholar-monks as Zhiyi 智顓 (538–597 CE), Jizang 吉藏 (549–623 CE), and Kuiji 窥基 (632–682 CE). The aim is to explore their hermeneutical endeavors to accurately understand the Buddha’s words. Part 3 compares the understanding of the term by anonymous late medieval Buddhist preachers with the interpretations of earlier commentators. It traces the extent to which these preachers inherited the interpretations of “[at] one time” from earlier commentators and how they further developed these ideas. Furthermore, it analyzes the distinct literary and performative qualities that late medieval Buddhist preachers attributed to the phrase “[at] one time.” Examining the specific interpretations of temporality by these preachers will provide fresh insights into the ongoing debate regarding the meaning of the introductory phrase and reshape our understanding of how the audience experienced preaching.

#### PART 1. THREE DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF “[AT] ONE TIME”

Sometimes a simple punctuation mark can make a considerable impact on the interpretation of the meaning of scriptures. In previous studies of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, the introductory phrase has been

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7. Daniel M. Veidlinger, *Spreading the Dhamma: Writing, Orality, and Textual Transmission in Buddhist Northern Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006), 9.

punctuated in three different ways.<sup>8</sup> First, all the editions of the Pāli Text Society and most of the Sanskrit editions punctuate before “[at] one time.” For Sanskrit, the manuscripts themselves are unpunctuated. Modern published print editions and translations of the Sanskrit work, typically published by European editors, add punctuation to make the phrase read: “Thus have I heard. *At one time* the Blessed One/Buddha was staying at...” (Pāli *evaṃ me suttaṃ: ekaṃ samayaṃ bhagavā...viharati*; Skt. *evaṃ mayā śrutam: ekasmin samaye bhagavān/buddhaḥ...viharati sma*).<sup>9</sup> This type of “preaching-centric” punctuation interprets “[at] one time” as a specific historical time when the Buddha was dwelling at a place while preaching a sermon to his audience.

In contrast to the “preaching-centric” interpretation, several scholars, including Alexander von Staël-Holstein, John Brough, Yuichi Kajiyama, and Mark Tatz, argue for punctuating the phrase by placing the punctuating mark after “[at] one time.” This reading would render the phrase as: “Thus have I heard *at one time*. The Blessed One was staying at...” (Tib. *ḥdi skad bdag gis thos paḥi dus gcig na: bcom Idan ḥdas...*).<sup>10</sup> This “hearing-centric” interpretation emphasizes the occasion when Ānanda heard the sutra. Brough’s argument rests on several factors: the Pāli and Sanskrit punctuation is not in the manuscripts but

8. Regarding the different ways of punctuating the opening phrase in the Pāli, Sanskrit, and Tibetan editions, see John Brough, “Thus Have I Heard...,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13, no. 2 (1950): 416–426. For the same issue for Chinese sutras, see Funayama Tōru 船山徹, “‘Nyozegamon’ ka ‘nyozegamon ichiji’ ka—Rikuchō Zui Tō no ‘nyozegamon’ kaishakushi e no shin shikaku” 「如是我聞」か「如是我聞一時」か: 六朝隋唐の「如是我聞」解釋史への新視角 (“Thus Have I Heard” or “Thus Have I Heard at One Time”? New Perspectives on the New Exegetical History of “Thus Have I Heard” in the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang Periods), *Fagu foxue xuebao* 法鼓佛學學報 1 (2007): 241–275. I will return to it below.

9. Brough, “Thus Have I Heard...,” 416.

10. For a wealth of scholarly literature that opts for the “hearing-centric” punctuation, see Alexander von Staël-Holstein, *A Commentary to the Kāṣyapaparivarta* (Peking: The National Library of Peking and the National Tshinghua University, 1933), esp. xii–xiv; Brough, “Thus Have I Heard...,” 416–426; Yuichi Kajiyama, “Thus Spoke the Blessed One...,” in *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems: Studies in Honor of Edward Conze*, ed. Lewis Lancaster and Luis O. Gómez (Berkeley: Regents of the University of California, 1977), 93–99; and Mark Tatz, “Thus I Have Heard: At One Time,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 40, no. 2 (April 1997): 117–118.

has been added by modern European editors; the punctuation mark (the *shad*, Skt. *daṇḍa*) preserved in some of the Tibetan manuscripts separates “[at] one time” from the following words;<sup>11</sup> and most of the Buddhist commentaries attributed to Indians regard “[at] one time” as belonging to the preceding terms “thus have I heard.”<sup>12</sup> Brough further contends that the punctuation found in Tibetan manuscripts and xylographs is likely “a calque on the syntax of the original” Sanskrit, which was still preferred in India until the ninth century CE, even though it appears unusual in Tibetan syntax.<sup>13</sup>

The third interpretation of the phrase “[at] one time” introduces a modification to the previously discussed punctuations. It establishes the phrase as a “pivot word” that connects both to the preceding verb, “to hear” (Skt. *śrutam*), and to the following verb, “to stay” (Skt. *viharati sma*). This interpretation is found in Sylvain Lévi’s French translation of *Mahākarmavibhaṅga*, a Sanskrit manuscript discovered by Lévi during his second visit to Nepal in 1922. In Lévi’s translation, the unpunctuated preamble in the Sanskrit manuscript is rendered as follows: “C’est ainsi que j’ai entendu—une fois—le Très Saint était

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11. John Brough highlights a distinction in the punctuation of the introductory phrase within different editions of the Tibetan translation of Buddhist scriptures. Specifically, Brough notes that the sNar-thang (Narthatang) edition, a xylographic version created between 1730 and 1732, lacks any punctuation in either position of the phrase. Brough suggests the possibility that the punctuation mark, known as *shad*, after the phrase “*dus gcig na*” may have been broken off the printing block. On the other hand, the sDe-dge (Derge) edition from 1733 (held at the Cambridge University Library) punctuates the phrase after the words “at one time.” See Brough, “Thus Have I Heard...,” 416n1. For the history of various versions of the bKa’-gyur (Kanjur) edition, including sNar-thang and sDe-dge, see Helmut Eimer, “A Note on the History of the Tibetan Kanjur,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 32, no. 1/2 (1988): 64–72. For a discussion on Tibetan xylograph manuscripts, see Orna Almogi, ed., *Tibetan Manuscript and Xylograph Traditions: The Written Word and Its Media within the Tibetan Culture Sphere* (Hamburg: Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2016).

12. John Brough examines the interpretations of Buddhaghosa (c. fifth century CE) and Haribhadra (c. late eighth century CE) regarding the phrase in their commentaries. See Brough, “Thus Have I Heard...,” 419–421.

13. Brough, “Thus Have I Heard...,” 418–419.



à Śrāvastī, au jardin d'Anāthapiṇḍada."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Paul Harrison and Jeffrey D. Schoening propose an approach that can be characterized as ambiguous or “double-jointed,” drawing a parallel to the *apo koinou* construction found in Greek grammar, to interpret the standard opening formula of Buddhist sutras.<sup>15</sup> According to their modified reading, the formula would be understood as: “Thus have I heard at one time when the Blessed One was staying at....”<sup>16</sup> Harrison bases his argument on the evidence that previous Indian commentators, including Kamalaśīla (c. 740–795 CE), Buddhaghosa (c. fifth century CE), and Haribhadra (c. late eighth century CE), acknowledged the possibility of interpreting the phrase in at least two aforementioned manners. This “double-jointed” interpretation suggests that the act of hearing the Dharma by Ānanda (or other transmitter) and the Buddha’s act of preaching the Dharma occurred simultaneously, as if happening “[at] one time.” Interestingly, Jonathan Silk has highlighted an additional aspect of interpretation. He observes that the phrase “[at] one time” is often absent in numerous Dunhuang manuscripts, suggesting that the two components of the standard opening formula in Buddhist scriptures were regarded as independent.<sup>17</sup>

In modern editions of Buddhist scriptures in China, Japan, and Korea, it is customary to employ a “preaching-centric” punctuation style for the opening formula, which reads as follows: “Thus have I

14. Sylvain Lévi, *Mahākarmavibhaṅga (La Grande Classification des Actes) et Karmavibhaṅgopadeśa (Discussion sur le Mahākarmavibhaṅga)*, Textes Sanscrits rapportés du Népal, édités et traduits avec les textes parallèles en Sanscrit, en Pali, en Tibétain, en Chinois, et en Koutchéen, Illustré de quatre planches: Le Karmavibhaṅga sur les bas-reliefs de Boro-Boudour, à Java (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1932), 107.

15. Paul Harrison, *The Samādhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present* (Tokyo: The International Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1990), esp. 5n3. Jeffrey D. Schoening, *The Śālistamba Sūtra and Its Indian Commentaries*, vol. 1 (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 1995), esp. 200n2. Both John Brough and Jonathan Silk suggested this possibility in passing. See Brough, “Thus Have I Heard...,” 417; Jonathan Silk, “A Note on the Opening Formula of Buddhist ‘Sūtras,’” *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 12, no. 1 (1989): 158.

16. Paul Harrison translates the preamble as follows: “On the one occasion when I heard the following the Lord was staying at....” See Harrison, *The Samādhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present*, 5.

17. Silk, “A Note on the Opening Formula of Buddhist ‘Sūtras,’” 161–162.

heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at...” (*rushi wo wen, yishi fo zai...* 如是我聞, 一時佛在...). Funayama Tōru 船山徹, however, has provided compelling evidence demonstrating that the aforementioned three different interpretations were also present in premodern East Asian traditions, particularly between the fifth and tenth centuries in China.<sup>18</sup> While Funayama extensively explored the three distinct punctuation styles found in Chinese Buddhist texts, my primary focus will be on the key hermeneutical issues raised by Chinese exegetes, specifically pertaining to the relationship between the following three entities: the Buddha (i.e., preacher), the congregation (i.e., hearers), and the transmitter of sutras (i.e., “I”).

#### PART 2. “[AT] ONE TIME” IN MEDIEVAL CHINESE COMMENTARIES

Park Boram 박보람 has brought attention to a significant oversight in previous scholarship, where the focus has been exclusively on either “the time when the transmitter (‘I’) hears the sutra” or “the time when the Buddha preaches” when discussing the meaning of “[at] one time.”<sup>19</sup> However, as Park argues, a focal point of contention among Chinese Buddhist exegetes during the Northern and Southern

18. The three different ways of punctuation in Chinese translations are as follows: (1) “Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at...” 如是我聞, 一時佛在...; (2) “Thus have I heard at one time. The Buddha was staying at...” 如是我聞一時 [or 聞如是一時], 佛在...; and (3) “Thus have I heard at one time when the Buddha was staying at...” 如是我聞一時佛在.... Funayama, “Nyoze-gamon’ ka ‘nyoze-gamon ichiji’ ka,” 241–275. For a discussion on various Chinese renderings of the opening formula, especially the phrase “Thus have I heard,” in translations produced during the Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms periods (prior to the time of Kumārajīva), see Jan Nattier, “Now You Hear It, Now You Don’t: The Phrase ‘Thus Have I Heard’ in Early Chinese Buddhist Translations,” in *Buddhism Across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual, and Cultural Exchange*, vol. 1, ed. Tansen Sen (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Manohar Publishers, 2014), 39–64.

19. Park Boram 박보람, “Yōsi amun ilsi pulchae’ ūi ‘han ttae’ (ilsi) nŭn nugu ūi ōttōn ttae in’ga? Nam-Pukcho, Su-Tang sitae ūi ihae rŭl chungsim ūro” 如是我聞一時佛在”의 ‘한 때’ (一時)는 누구의 어떤 때인가?-남북조, 수당 (南北朝 隋唐) 시대의 이해를 중심으로 (Whose and What Kind of Time Is “One Time” in “Thus I Have Heard at One Time the Buddha was Staying in...”? Focusing on the Understandings of the Southern and Northern Dynasties and the Sui and the Tang Dynasty), *Bulgyo hakbo* 불교학보 84 (2018): 45.

dynasties (420–589 CE) as well as the Sui (581–618 CE) and Tang (618–907 CE) periods revolved around the question of whether the three distinct times—(1) “the time when the Buddha preaches,” (2) “the time when the congregation (*dazhong* 大眾) hears the sutra,” and (3) “the time when the transmitter, i.e., ‘I’ (wo 我), hears the sutra”—coincided or not.<sup>20</sup>

The main concern for medieval Chinese exegetes was not solely the placement of a punctuation mark within the phrase, but rather the understanding of the relationships between the Buddha and the hearers, and between the actions of “speaking” and “hearing.” To elucidate the meaning of “[at] one time,” they drew upon the indigenous Chinese concept of *ganying* 感應, “sympathetic resonance,” or “stimulus-response,” the cosmological notion of which strongly influenced various aspects of premodern Chinese thought.<sup>21</sup> *Ganying* is a binomial expression combining the term *gan* 感, with connotations such as “to feel, sense, touch, affect, stimulate, or move (a person’s mind),” and the term *ying* 應, implying meanings like “to respond, react, or accept.”<sup>22</sup> The *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (*Master of Huainan*; c. 139 BCE), a philosophical and cosmological treatise compiled by Liu An 劉安 (c. 179–122

20. Park, “Yōsi amun ilsi pulchae’ ūi ‘han ttae,’” 41–68.

21. I follow Robert H. Sharf’s translation of the term *ganying*. For a comprehensive discussion on the relationship between the Chinese cosmology of sympathetic resonance and Chinese Buddhism, see Robert H. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), chap. 2, 77–133. For a discussion of *ganying* as one of the philosophical underpinnings for Bodhisattva Guanyin’s (Skt. Avalokiteśvara) ability to respond effectively to sentient beings’ sufferings, see Sarah A. Mattice, *Exploring the Heart Sutra* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), 90–96. For a comprehensive account of the expression of *ganying* in Chinese indigenous Buddhist tales, see Robert F. Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012); Chiew Hui Ho, “Sinitic Buddhist Narratives of Wonders: Are There Miracles in Buddhism?,” *Philosophy East & West* 67, no. 4 (October 2017): 1118–1142; and Chiew Hui Ho, *Diamond Sutra Narratives: Textual Production and Lay Religiosity in Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

22. Charles Le Blanc, “From Cosmology to Ontology through Resonance: A Chinese Interpretation of Reality,” in *Beyond Textuality: Asceticism and Violence in Anthropological Interpretation*, ed. Gilles Bibeau and Ellen Corin (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 57–78; Ho, “Sinitic Buddhist Narratives of Wonders,” 1128; and John Major et al., trans., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of*

BCE) during the reign of the Huainan Kingdom, illustrates the concept of mutual response: “Things that belong to [the same] category respond to each other.”<sup>23</sup> According to Robert Sharf, *ganying* represents “a mode of seemingly spontaneous response (although not in the sense of ‘uncaused’) natural in a universe conceived holistically in terms of pattern and interdependent order. Resonance is the mechanism through which categorically related but spatially distant phenomena interact.”<sup>24</sup> In simpler terms, as Charles Le Blanc describes it, *ganying* is “the power of things to affect and to be affected in such a way as to bring about harmony. This power is based on the persistent affinity and attraction of things that were originally one, but that became scattered when the world began.”<sup>25</sup>

*Ganying*, originating from musical and acoustic contexts during the fourth century BCE, is characterized by the concept of sympathetic resonance. Metaphors such as musical instruments and bells have frequently been employed to depict this phenomenon. The *Huainanzi* provides a well-known illustration of *ganying*, describing how the vibration of a string with a certain tone elicits a corresponding response from another string of similar tone on a different instrument.<sup>26</sup> This

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*Government in Early Han China*, by Liu An, *King of Huainan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 210.

23. *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解 (The Vast and Luminous Book of [the Master of] Huainan, with Collected Annotations) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 6.194 (“Lanming xun” 覽冥訓): “物類之相應。” For a comprehensive discussion about the philosophical notion of *ganying* as a mechanism for cosmological, social, and psychological harmony, focusing on *Huainanzi*, see Charles Le Blanc, *Huai Nan Tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought—The Idea of Resonance (kan-ying) with a Translation and Analysis of Chapter Six* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1985), 66 and esp. chap. 6 and conclusion, 191–210.

24. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 82. The same passages are also quoted in Ho, “Sinitic Buddhist Narratives of Wonders,” 1127.

25. Le Blanc, *Huai Nan Tzu*, 209.

26. *Huainan honglie jijie*, 6.200: “Now, when a person who tunes a *se* plays [the note] *gong*, [another] *gong* [string] responds; when he plucks a *jue* [string], [another] *jue* responds. This is the harmony of notes that are the same.” 今失調弦者，叩宮宮應，彈角角動，此同聲相和者也。 The translation is from Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 6.4, 220. A similar analogy also appears in *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Collected Commentaries on Zhuangzi) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju,

mutual resonance is described as the harmony of identical notes. Another example can be found in the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World), a collection of stories and discourses of literati during the second to the fourth centuries CE, where a conversation between the Buddhist monk Lushan Huiyuan 廬山 慧遠 (334–416 CE) and the contemporary literatus Yin Zhongkan 殷仲堪 (d. 399/400 CE) highlights the correspondence between a collapsing bronze mountain and the responsive bell:

Yin Zhongkan, [the regional inspector of] Jingzhou, once asked the monk Huiyuan: “What is the substance of the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes)?” Huiyuan replied, “[Stimulus-]response 感 is the substance of the *Yijing*.” Yin said, “When the bronze mountain collapsed in the west, and the numinous bell responded 應 in the east, is that [what you mean by] the *Yijing*?” Huiyuan smiled without answering.

殷荊州曾問遠公：「易以何為體？」答曰：「易以感為體。」殷曰：「銅山西崩，靈鐘東應，便是易耶？」遠公笑而不答。<sup>27</sup>

This passage implies that *ganying* entails the concept of sympathetic resonance among entities of the same nature or category (*lei* 類), sharing a fundamental essence. Analogous narratives found in the “Biography of Dongfang Shuo” 東方朔傳<sup>28</sup> and the “Complementary

1982), 8B.24.839: “When one strums [the note] *gong*, [another] *gong* [string] responds; when one strums a *jue* [string], [another] *jue* responds” 鼓宮宮動，鼓角角動。

27. *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋 (A New Accounts of Tales of the World, Collation and Commentary), comp. Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444 CE), annot. Xu Zhen’e 徐震堦 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 1.4.61.132 (“Wenxue” 文學); the translation is from *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Richard B. Mather (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 131; and Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 82, with modifications.

28. During the reign of Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (r. 140–187 BCE), a palace bell rang by itself for three days and nights without ceasing. In response to the emperor’s inquiry, Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (c. 160–93 BCE) said: “Bronze is the child of the mountains, and mountains the mother of bronze. Speaking in terms of the *yin* and *yang*, the child and mother are responding to each other. I’m afraid some mountain is about to collapse, and that’s why the bell is first crying out.” 臣聞銅者，山之子；山者，銅之母。以陰陽氣類言之，子母相感，山恐有崩弛者，故鐘先鳴。 “Dongfang Shuo zhuan” 東方朔傳 cited in the commentary in *Shishuo xinyu*, see *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋,

Biography of Fan Ying” 樊英別傳<sup>29</sup> further develop the connection between mountains and bells, expanding it to the relationship between a mother and her child. In later sections of this study, I will delve into a more detailed exploration of how both medieval Chinese exegetes and late medieval Chinese preachers incorporated and utilized these acoustic and parent-child metaphors within their commentaries and sermons.

Medieval Chinese exegetes focused not on punctuation but rather on understanding the interplay between the Buddha and the hearers, utilizing the concept of *ganying*, which signifies a harmonious response based on a persistent affinity among interconnected entities or phenomena. How, then, did medieval Chinese exegetes interpret the relationship between the Buddha and his hearers? Did they perceive a shared essential nature between the Buddha and his audience? And how does this relate to the meaning of “[at] one time”?

*“Sympathetic Resonance” between the Buddha and Hearers*

Medieval Buddhist exegetes such as Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414 CE), Bodhiruci 菩提流支 (?–527 CE), Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597 CE), Jizang 吉藏 (549–623 CE), and Kuiji 窺基 (632–682 CE) hold the view that the phrase “[at] one time” in Buddhist scriptures refers both to the period when the Buddha delivered his teachings and the moment when the congregation received his sermon. When analyzing the introductory passages of sutras, these premodern Chinese scholars posit that the subject who hears (*wen* 聞) the Buddha’s teachings is the narrator of the sutra texts, often represented by “I” or Ānanda, rather than the original congregation of the Buddha’s sermons. However, these exegetes

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1.4.61.132 (“Wenxue” 文學). For the translation, see Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü*, 131. Robert H. Sharf presents the aforementioned story and the following (see n. 29) and provides his own interpretation of them in relation to the concept of sympathetic resonance. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 82–83. 29. During the reign of the Later Han Emperor Shun 漢順帝 (r. 126–144 CE), a bell below the emperor’s hall sounded by itself. In response to the emperor’s inquiry, Fang Ying replied: “Min Mountain in Shu (Sichuan) has collapsed. Mountains are mothers in relation to bronze. When the mother collapses, the child cries. It is not a calamity for this sagelike dynasty.” 蜀嶠山崩，山於銅為母，母崩子鳴，非聖朝災。 “Fan Ying biezhuān 樊英別傳” cited in the commentary in *Shishuo xinyu*. See *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋, 1.4.61.132. For the translation, see Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü*, 131.

replace the first-person narrative with a larger assembly of hearers when interpreting the meaning of “[at] one time.” They assume that the narrator of the sutra was present with the congregation during the Buddha’s sermons. Sengzhao, in his work *Zhu Weimojie jing* 注維摩詰經 (A Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*), elucidates the significance of “[at] one time” by implying the sympathetic resonance between the Buddha and his congregation:

[Regarding the meaning of] “[at] one time” (*yishi*), Kumārajīva said: “It refers to the time when [the Buddha] preached scriptures.” Sengzhao said: “It refers to the time when the Dharma King (i.e., the Buddha) commenced his teachings and when there was an auspicious gathering.”

一時。什曰：說經時也。肇曰：法王啟運嘉集之時也。<sup>30</sup>

In his work *Renwang huguo bore jing shu* 仁王護國般若經疏 (Commentary on the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra for Humane Kings Protecting Their Countries*), Zhiyi expands upon Sengzhao’s interpretation of the phrase “[at] one time” by introducing a subject of the gathering that was absent in Sengzhao’s exposition. Zhiyi states, “Regarding the meaning of ‘[at] one time,’ Sengzhao said: ‘It refers to the day when the Dharma King (i.e., the Buddha) commenced his teachings and the moment when *the assembly* (*dazhong*) experienced an auspicious gathering’” 釋一時者，肇云：法王啟運之日，大眾嘉會之時 (emphasis mine).<sup>31</sup>

In the introductory section of his commentary on the *Lotus Sutra* (Skt. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*), known as *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義 (Profound Meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*),<sup>32</sup> Zhiyi provides a more detailed analysis of the phrase “[at] one time” that commonly

30. Sengzhao, *Zhu Weimojie jing*, T. no. 1775, 38: 328a24. All translation is my own unless otherwise noted.

31. Zhiyi, *Renwang huguo bore jing shu*, T. no. 1705, 33: 257a10–11.

32. This commentary was originally delivered orally by Zhiyi and later transcribed by his disciple Guanding 灌頂 (561–632 CE) in 593. Mochizuki Shinkō 望月信亨, *Bukkyō daijiten* 佛教大辭典 (Great Dictionary of Buddhism) (Tokyo: Bukkyō Daijiten Hakkōjo, 1931–1936), 5:4807a; Robert F. Rhodes, “Tiantai Hermeneutics: Zhiyi’s Interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* Presented in the *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*,” in *The Buddha’s Words and Their Interpretations*, ed. Takami Inoue and Imre Hamar (Kyoto: The Shin Buddhist Comprehensive Research Institute, Otani University, 2021), 140.

appears at the beginning of Buddhist scriptures. Zhiyi's primary objective is to elucidate the concept of *ganying*, which is associated with this particular phrase.<sup>33</sup> Zhiyi approaches the interpretation of *ganying* from multiple perspectives throughout the subsequent sections of his commentary. One of the angles he employs involves the illustration of the remarkable interplay between buddhas and sentient beings through the analogy of the moon reflected on water. By employing this analogy, Zhiyi aims to shed light on the intricate and profound dynamics at play in the interaction between enlightened beings and ordinary individuals:

Water does not rise, nor does the moon descend, yet *in a single moment* the one moon is manifest in manifold [bodies] of water. [Similarly] buddhas do not come and sentient beings do not go. The power of the good roots of compassion should be perceived in this way. Therefore, it is called the wonder of stimulus-response.

水不上升、月不下降，一月一時普現眾水；諸佛不來、眾生不往，慈善根力見如此事，故名感應妙。<sup>34</sup>

Zhiyi's usage of the analogy of the moon's reflection in numerous bodies of water "in a single moment" (*yishi* 一時) serves to elucidate the correlation between the impetus generated by sentient beings and the instantaneous response of the Buddha. It is worth mentioning that the English translation of *ganying* as "stimulus-response," which implies a temporal sequence between the two terms, can be somewhat misleading in the context of Zhiyi's intended meaning, as they occur simultaneously.

A more explicit explication of the concept of *ganying* by Zhiyi can be found in the text titled *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 大乘四論玄義記 (On the Profound Meanings of the Four Treatises of the Mahāyāna), compiled by Paekche monk Hyegyun 慧均 (fl. late sixth to early seventh centuries CE). In this work, Zhiyi delved into the interconnectedness between a sage and sentient beings by examining their fundamental nature.<sup>35</sup> Hyegyun quotes Zhiyi's definition of the term as follows:

33. Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, T. no. 1716, 33: 682a5–6.

34. *Ibid.*, 697c15–19. The translation is from Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 124, with modifications.

35. Choe Yeon-Shik 최연식 claims that the *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* was written in the Korean peninsula by the Paekche monk Hyegyun, who studied in China under the master Falang 法朗 (507–581 CE) of the Sanlun school 三論



The term “stimulus” 感 refers to the act of attracting and invoking a response, while response 應 signifies the state of receiving and meeting [the stimulus] without any disparity. The ability to elicit a stimulus lies within sentient beings, whereas the capability to respond rests solely in a sage.

所以名感者，懸相扣召為義也。應者逗適無差，以為義也。為感之功在於眾生，為應之能必在聖人也。<sup>36</sup>

Zhiyi employs the Chinese indigenous concept of *ganying* to analyze the dynamic between a sage, such as buddhas or bodhisattvas, and sentient beings, emphasizing their fundamental sameness in essence. Regarding the inquiry into the correlation between impetus (*ji* 機) and response (*ying* 應)—which pertains to the capacities of living beings and the corresponding reactions of the Buddha towards them, as well as to the matter of whether they are identical or different<sup>37</sup>—Zhiyi elucidates this connection through a metaphorical comparison to the relationship between a father and son. By incorporating the well-established parental metaphor often employed in earlier texts to illustrate *ganying*, Zhiyi sheds light on the nature of this relationship:

Answer: They are neither identical nor different. Discussed in terms of principle, they are the same and cannot be differentiated. Discussed in terms of phenomena, there is both impetus and response, and hence they are not identical. It can be likened to the natural relationship between father and son. One cannot say that the

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宗 (“Three Treatise” school). See Choe Yeon-Shik 최연식, “Paekche ch’ansul munhŏn ūrosŏi *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi*” 백제 찬술문헌으로서의《大乘四論玄義記》(On the Identification of the *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* as a Buddhist text from Baekje), *Han’guksa yŏn’gu* 한국사연구 136 (2007): 1–27. For a study of the significance of the text in early Korean Buddhism, see Jörg Plassen, “On the Significance of the *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi* 大乘四論玄義記 for Research on Early Korean Buddhist Thought: Some Initial Observations Focusing on Hwajaeng,” *Han’guksa yŏn’gu* 한국사연구 136 (2007): 29–56.

36. Hyegyun, *Daeseung saron hyeonui gi*, X. no. 784, 46: 587c13–15.

37. Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, T. no. 1716, 33: 747b3–5: “Question: As for the impetus of sentient beings and the response of the sage, are they identical or different? If they are identical, there is neither impetus nor response. If they are different, how is it that they are related to each other and that they are discussed in terms of impetus and response?” 問：眾生機，聖人應，為一為異？若一則非機應，若異，何相交關而論機應？ The translation is from Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 124, with modifications.

body of flesh and bones passed down [from father to son] is different, and yet were they the same, the father would be none other than the son and the son none other than the father; hence they cannot be called the same. Therefore, being neither identical nor different, they are discussed in terms of father and son. The essential nature of living beings and buddha cannot be distinguished, and therefore they are not different. Yet [this nature] is concealed in the case of living beings and manifest in the case of the *tathāgata*, and therefore they are not identical. Being neither identical nor different, they are discussed in terms of impetus and response.

答：不一不異。理論則同如，是故不異；事論有機應，是故不一。譬如父子天性相關，骨肉遺體，異則不可；若同者，父即子，子即父，同又不可；祇不一不異而論父子也。眾生理性與佛不殊，是故不異；而眾生隱如來顯，是故不一，不一不異而論機應也。<sup>38</sup>

Zhiyi's analogy, drawing from the relationship between a father and a son, serves as a reference to the parable of the "beggar son and rich father" found in chapter 4 of the *Lotus Sutra*. This parable highlights the Buddha's adept employment of skillful means (Skt. *upāya*) to address the varying capacities of sentient beings.<sup>39</sup> The concept of skillful means is closely associated with the doctrine of multiple buddha-bodies, particularly the "resonant-body" (*yingshen* 應身), also known as the "transformation-body" (*huashen* 化身) or the "resonant-transformation-body" (*yinghuashen* 應化身).<sup>40</sup> The "resonant-body" represents a temporal form assumed by buddhas or bodhisattvas for the purpose of teaching sentient beings. It dynamically adapts and transforms according to the specific capacities of those being taught. Building upon the portrayal of *arhats* as "resonant-bodies" in the apocryphal Chinese

38. Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, T. no. 1716, 33: 747b5–11. The translation is from Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 127–128, with modifications.

39. Father-son motifs are featured frequently in Buddhist discourse. For example, the *Lotus Sutra*, *Vimalakīrti sūtra*, and *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* have a few parables in which the father represents a buddha, and the son represents his disciples or sentient beings. Alan Cole has argued that the *Lotus Sutra*, one of the most influential Mahāyāna sutras, offers legitimacy to the reader by calling all readers by "sons" of the father. Here, the father, argues Cole, refers to a buddha or the sutra itself. Alan Cole, "Who's Your Daddy Now? Reissued Paternity in the *Lotus Sūtra*," in *Text as Father: Paternal Seductions in Early Mahayana Buddhist Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 48–98.

40. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 128.

*Śūraṅgama sūtra* (*Shou lengyan jing* 首楞嚴經), Robert H. Sharf argues that within Chinese Buddhism, not only buddhas or bodhisattvas but also the *arhats* (i.e., the Buddha’s disciples as fully enlightened individuals) possess the ability to manifest countless “resonant-bodies.” This capacity enables them to effectively respond to the diverse capacities and needs of living beings.<sup>41</sup>

The father-son metaphor also illustrates Zhiyi’s understanding of buddha-nature and the principle of stimulus-response. All buddhas and sentient beings are identical in terms of their essential nature (*lixing* 理性) or Dharma-nature (*faxing* 法性), but they are distinguished only because the buddha-nature is hidden in the case of sentient beings, whereas manifest in the case of buddhas. In Zhiyi’s work *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀 (The Great Calming and Contemplation), initially a series of lectures on meditation and soteriological theory delivered in 594 CE and later compiled and edited by his disciple Guanding 灌頂 (561–632 CE),<sup>42</sup> he emphasizes the significance of “simultaneous interaction between stimulus and response that accords with the impetus” (*suiji ganying* 隨機感應) in the arising of thought (of aspiration for enlightenment) (*faxin* 發心, Skt. *bodhicitta*). Zhiyi’s explanation of this concept is reflected in a question-and-answer excerpt from the *Mohe zhiguan*, which clarifies the right moment when a practitioner generates the mind of enlightenment:

Question: Does the practitioner arouse the thought [of enlightenment by oneself], or is the thought aroused through another’s teaching?

Answer: It is not possible either by oneself, or through another, or together, or separately; *it is only through the interaction of stimulus [on the part of a sentient being] and response [of the Buddha] that one can speak of the arising of the thought [of enlightenment].* It is like a child who falls into water or fire—the parents [would forsake everything else and] frantically rescue the child. The *Vimalakīrti sūtra* says, “When a child becomes ill, the father and mother also become ill.” The *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* says, “When a father and mother have a sick son, their attention is deeply inclined [toward him].” [Buddhas and bodhisattvas] enter the sea of samsara [for the sake of saving sentient beings] and mobilize the [immovable] mountain of Dharma-nature

41. *Ibid.*, 111.

42. Mochizuki, *Bukkyō daijiten*, vol. 5, 4723c; and Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., eds., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 546.

(*dharamatā*), thus engaging in the practice of [healing] disease 病行 and the practice of a [mother toward her] child 嬰兒行.<sup>43</sup> This is called arousing the thought [of enlightenment] [through the interaction] of stimulus and response. A *Dhyāna sūtra* says, “The Buddha uses four appropriate methods [in accordance with the capacities of sentient beings] to preach the Dharma, that is, in accordance with their desires, in accordance with what is appropriate, in accordance with therapeutic reasons [for healing the diseases that need to be healed], and in accordance with the truth.” [First,] carefully considering the predilections [of his listeners, the Buddha] preaches [the Dharma accordingly] and makes their hearts rejoice. [Second,] recognizing their previous worldly [karmic] habits, [the Buddha] makes it easy for them to take on practices. [Third,] perceiving the lightness or severity of their disease, [the Buddha] dispenses the appropriate dose of medicine. [Fourth,] when their capacity for the path has matured, they hear [the preaching of the Dharma] and immediately attain the path of awakening. Certainly this [preaching of the Dharma] according to the capacities [of sentient beings] is a benefit [of the operation] of stimulus and response.

問：行者自發心他教發心。

答：自他共離皆不可。但是感應道交而論發心耳。如子墮水火。父母騷擾救之。淨名云：其子得病父母亦病。大經云：父母於病子心則偏重。動法性山入生死海。故有病行嬰兒行。是名感應發心也。禪經云：佛以四隨說法。隨樂隨宜隨治隨義。將護彼意說悅其心。附先世習令易受行。觀病輕重設藥多少。道機時熟聞即悟道。豈非隨機感應利益。<sup>44</sup>

According to Zhiyi, the thought of enlightenment arises through the interaction between the stimulus of a sentient being and the response of the Buddha. This interaction is compared to the efforts of parents rescuing their child, as illustrated in the *Vimalakīrti sūtra* and

43. The practice of [healing] disease 病行 and the practice of a [mother toward her] child 嬰兒行 are the fifth and fourth practices in the set of “five practices” given in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* (T. no. 374, 12: 432a and 673b). See Paul L. Swanson, *Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight: T’ien-t’ai Chih-i’s Mo-ho Chih-kuan* (Honolulu: The University of Hawai’i Press, 2017), 148–149; and Neal Donner and Daniel B. Stevenson, *The Great Calming and Contemplation: A Study and Annotated Translation of the First Chapter of Chih-i’s Mo-ho chih-kuan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1993), 148n43.

44. Zhiyi, *Mohe zhiguan*, T. 1911, no. 46: 4c13–22. The translation is from Swanson, *Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight*, 147–149, with modifications.

the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*. Buddhas and bodhisattvas, driven by compassion, immerse themselves in the cycle of samsara to save sentient beings, utilizing the unwavering foundation of Dharma-nature. They engage in practices to heal and nurture, ultimately leading to the arousing of the thought of enlightenment. The *Dhyāna sūtra* exemplifies the Buddha's preaching methods, tailored to the capacities and inclinations of sentient beings, bringing them joy and facilitating their progress towards awakening.

Zhiyi's explication of the theory of *ganying*, the concept of the same essential nature shared by buddhas and all beings, and the immediate correspondence between them provide the theoretical foundation for understanding the meaning of "[at] one time" as interpreted by medieval Chinese exegetes. According to Zhiyi, the arousing of the thought of enlightenment, which guides practitioners toward salvation, "involves a combination of self-effort and help from others."<sup>45</sup> Only through the simultaneous operation of stimulus and response can one traverse the path to enlightenment.

However, Jingyingsi Huiyuan 淨影寺 慧遠 (523–592 CE) challenges the assertion that the phrase "[at] one time" also encompasses the time when Ānanda listened to the Buddha's sermons by presenting historical evidence to the contrary. In his commentary on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*, titled *Weimo yiji* 維摩義記 (Record of the Meaning of the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*), Huiyuan disputes this interpretation on the grounds of historical accuracy. Huiyuan argues that Ānanda was not present to hear the Buddha's teachings prior to his ordination as a monk due to the following chronological considerations: Ānanda was born when the Buddha achieved enlightenment; he entered monastic life twenty years after the Buddha's enlightenment; and he began serving as the Buddha's personal attendant thirty years after his enlightenment. Based on these historical facts, Huiyuan concludes that the phrase "[at] one time" exclusively refers to the period during which

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45. For Paul L. Swanson's annotation on the term, "interaction of stimulus and response" (*ganying dao jiao* 感應道交), coined by Zhiyi, see Swanson, *Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight*, 147. For a discussion of the spread of Guanyin devotion in the Six Dynasties (220–589 CE) and Zhiyi's interpretation of the "stimulus-response" theory, see Fukushima Kōsai 福島光哉, "Chigi no kannōron to sono shisōteki haikai" 智顛の感應論とその思想の背景, *Ōtani Gakuhō* 大谷学報 49, no. 4 (1970): 36–49.

the Buddha expounded the sutras to his assembly, with Ānanda not being among the audience.<sup>46</sup>

Both Zhiyi and Jizang challenge Huiyuan's assertion by referencing passages from the *Da fangbian fo bao'en jing* 大方便佛報恩經 (Great Skillful Means Sutra on the Buddha's Repayment of Kindness, T. 3, no. 156) and the *Pusa chutai jing* 菩薩處胎經 (Sutra When the Bodhisattva Was in the Womb, T. 12, no. 384).<sup>47</sup> These passages document the Buddha's reiteration of his earlier sutras specifically for Ānanda in response to his special request.<sup>48</sup> In addition to the historical context mentioned earlier, Zhiyi presents two additional pieces of evidence supporting his claim that Ānanda indeed heard the Buddha's sermon. Firstly, he asserts that Ānanda, having attained the power of the *samādhi* of Buddha's awakening, possessed the ability to hear the Buddha's teachings as if he were present during the original sermon.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, Zhiyi contends that Ānanda, having received the assurance of future enlightenment and recollected his past vows, retained the Buddha's earlier teachings as if they were just heard in the present moment.<sup>50</sup>

Continuing the thread of challenging Huiyuan's historical claim, Kuiji contributes a divergent viewpoint in his commentary on the *Lotus Sutra*, titled *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanzan* 妙法蓮華經玄贊 (The Glorification of the *Lotus Sutra*). In this work, Kuiji builds upon the interpretations of Sengzhao, Zhiyi, and Jizang, offering further insights into the multifaceted meanings encapsulated within the phrase “[at] one time”:

The [*Lotus*] sutra [says], “[at] one time.” The Commentary says: “Second, it refers to the time of teaching. It has two meanings: first, the Buddha began his teachings, and those who had the capacity to

46. Huiyuan, *Weimo yiji*, T. no. 1776, 38: 424c18–425b26.

47. The full title is *Pusa cong doushuaitian jiang shenmutai shuoguang pujing* 菩薩從兜率天降神母胎說廣普經 (The Vast Scripture on the Descent of the Bodhisattva's Consciousness from the Tuṣita Heavens into His Mother's Womb).

48. Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing wenju* 妙法蓮華經文句 (Textual Explanation of the *Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law*), T. no. 1718, 34: 4b5–8; Jizang, *Renwang bore jing shu* 仁王般若經疏 (Commentary on the *Humane Kings Wisdom Sutra*), T. no. 1707, 33: 316b21–c14.

49. Zhiyi, *Miaofa lianhua jing wenju*, T. no. 1718, 34: 4b4–5.

50. *Ibid.*, 4b8–9.

accept the Buddha's teachings (*jīqī* 機器) were gathered, so the event of speaking and hearing had finished [at one time]—[these] altogether refer to “one time.” Second, the speaker and hearers were all gathered together without any temporal discrepancy, so [the sutra] says, “[at] one time.” It is because there is no distinction between the time when the impetus (*jī* 機) was stimulated and the moment when [the Buddha] manifested himself in response [to the impetus].

經：「一時」。贊曰：第二說教時分也。此有二義：一法王啟化，機器咸集，說聽事訖，總名一時。二說者聽者，共相會遇，時分無別，故言一時，機感應化，時無別故。<sup>51</sup>

Kuiji offers a comprehensive interpretation of the phrase “[at] one time” by presenting two distinct understandings. First, he asserts that the actions of speaking and hearing occurred simultaneously, without any temporal gap between them. Second, Kuiji suggests that the Buddha and his congregation gathered spontaneously and concurrently, driven by a shared resonance. These interpretations find support in the theory of *ganying*, as Kuiji argues that the Buddha responded to those individuals who possessed the capacity to receive his teachings.

In the commentaries by Zhiyi, Jizang, and Huijing 慧淨 (b. 578 CE), a deeper exploration of the concept of “one time” is presented. They expound on three interconnected temporal dimensions associated with this phrase. These dimensions encompass the moment of the Buddha's sermon, the simultaneous attainment of enlightenment by sentient beings through the Buddha's teachings, and the specific occasion when Ānanda heard the Buddha's sermon.<sup>52</sup> Through their analyses, these exegetes intertwine historical and metaphysical perspectives to probe the meaning of “[at] one time.” They consider both the sequential unfolding of events, as well as the underlying metaphysical principles

51. *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanzan*, T. no. 1723, 34: 664a9–12. Identical passages also appear in Kuiji's commentary on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*, see *Shuo wugoucheng jing shu* 說無垢稱經疏 (Commentary on the *Scripture of Impeccable Reputation*), T. no. 1782, 38: 1004c5–6.

52. Zhiyi, *Weimo jing lüeshu* 維摩經略疏 (Abbreviated Version of the Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*), T. no. 1778, 38: 569c14–570a5; Jizang, *Jin'gang bore shu* 金剛般若疏 (Commentary on the *Diamond Sutra*), T. no. 1699, 33: 93a17–b6; and Huijing, *Amituo jing yishu* 阿彌陀經義述 (Commentary on the *Amitābha sūtra*), T. no. 1756, 37: 0308a3–5. For a more detailed discussion on this topic, see Park, “Yōsi amun ilsi pulchae' ūi 'han ttae,” 52–58.

that inform these events. By exploring the multifaceted nature of “one time,” these commentaries offer a nuanced understanding of the temporal dynamics within the Buddhist discourse.

As outlined earlier, the predominant interpretation among medieval Chinese commentators regarding the phrase “[at] one time” pertains to a specific historical moment. This moment signifies the occasion when the Buddha expounded the Dharma, and when his assembly, including the transmitter of his teachings (i.e., “I”), such as Ānanda, listened attentively. The commentators placed significant emphasis on the synchronicity between the act of speaking and the act of hearing, which they sought to explain through the application of the Chinese indigenous theory known as “sympathetic resonance.” The theory of *ganying*, central to Chinese culture, provided a framework for comprehending a variety of phenomena in premodern China ranging from cosmological cycles, political transformations, and moral consequences, to even interactions between devotees and buddhas or bodhisattvas.<sup>53</sup> It also informed the understanding of fundamental concepts within Chinese Buddhism, including the buddha-nature and the karmic interplay between cause and effect. Moreover, the *ganying* theory shed light on the interpretation of the phrase “[at] one time” at the opening of Buddhist scriptures. These hermeneutic endeavors by medieval Chinese commentators to reconcile the concept of “[at] one time” with the *ganying* theory foreshadowed the manner in which later preachers in the late medieval period and beyond would engage with Buddhist scriptures. The subsequent section will delve into how these preachers enriched the significance of the opening phrase and how they established inseparable connections between the Buddha’s original sermon and their own sermons through their performative imagination and utterance.

### PART 3. BUDDHIST PREACHER’S ROLE-PLAYING DURING ORAL PERFORMANCE

#### *“Sympathetic Resonance” between the Preacher and Hearers*

In the context of late medieval China, Buddhist preachers not only inherited the exegesis of earlier scholarly commentators but also expanded upon these interpretations by incorporating their own

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53. Ho, “Sinitic Buddhist Narratives of Wonders,” 1118–1142.



perspectives on the dynamics between the preacher, the audience, and the act of performance. While building upon the foundations laid by their predecessors, they offered new insights into the meaning and significance of the phrase “[at] one time.”

In their exploration of this phrase, these preachers continued the trajectory of earlier exegetical traditions and aligned themselves with the interpretations of previous scholarly commentators. Surviving manuscripts, such as “The Sutra Lecture Texts on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*” (*Weimojie jing jiangjingwen* 維摩詰經講經文, S. 4571), provide valuable insights into the multifaceted meanings embedded within the phrase “[at] one time.” This manuscript, believed to have been copied around the tenth century CE, consists of lectures on the preface (*xufen* 序分; Skt. *nidāna*) and the first chapter of the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*, titled “Buddha Lands” (“Foguo pin” 佛國品). It offers a glimpse into the understanding and interpretation of the phrase “[at] one time” during that period as follows:

The [*Vimalakīrti*] sutra says, “[at] one time.” The use of “[at] one time” serves to distinguish [this particular moment] from others, therefore [the sutra] says, “[at] one time.” Another interpretation suggests that both the speaker and the hearers were all gathered together, eliminating any notion of before and after. [This can be likened to a chick] pipping from within the eggshell while [the mother hen] pecks from the outside simultaneously. Therefore, [the sutra] says, “[at] one time.”

經曰：「一時」。一時者，諫(揀)異餘時，故曰一時。又解云：說者聽者，共相會遇，更無前後，啐啄同時，故曰一時。<sup>54</sup>

The expository prose delivered by a “Dharma master” (although the specific identities of most Dharma masters remain uncertain) provides an interpretation of the phrase “[at] one time” as denoting a particular occasion of preaching that is distinct from other preaching occasions. This interpretation aligns with the earlier scholarly exegesis, particularly Kuiji’s understanding of the phrase as presented in his commentary on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*, titled *Shuo Wugoucheng jing shu* 說

54. “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*” (*Weimojie jing jiangjingwen* 維摩詰經講經文, S. 4571). For a transcription of this manuscript, see Huang and Zhang, *Dunhuang bianwen jiaozhu*, 757.

無垢稱經疏 (Commentary on the *Scripture of Impeccable Reputation*).<sup>55</sup> A similar and more concrete interpretation can also be found in the commentary on the *Avataṃsaka sūtra* by Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839 CE), an exponent of the Huayan school (Huayan zong 華嚴宗). According to Chengguan,

[The term] “*shi*” 時 (“time”) conventionally designates time in accordance with worldly conventions. [The term] “*yi*” — (“one”) serves to differentiate [this particular time] from other times. The occasions when the Thus Come One expounded sutras were too numerous to be individually enumerated. [Therefore] “*yi*” (“one”) denotes an approximate occasion. Hence, [the sutra] says, “[at] one time.”

時者，亦隨世假立時分。一者揀異餘時，如來說經時有無量，不能別舉，一言略周，故云一時。<sup>56</sup>

The initial interpretation of “[at] one time” provided by the Dharma master aligns with the exegeses of Kuiji and Chengguan, emphasizing a specific historical occasion when the Buddha delivered a particular sutra at a specific location. However, the Dharma master expands upon this understanding by proposing an additional meaning of “one time” that relates to a shared moment between the preacher and the audience. This interpretation draws upon the Chinese indigenous theory of “sympathetic resonance,” a concept widely embraced by numerous Chinese Buddhist commentators.

The lecturer advances the discussion by highlighting the simultaneous occurrence of parallel actions, specifically the act of speech and listening happening “[at] one time.” To illustrate this point, the lecturer introduces an expressive acoustic and visual metaphor absent from contemporary commentaries—“[A chick] pips from within the eggshell while [the mother hen] pecks from the outside simultaneously” (*cuizhuo tongshi* 啐啄同時). This acoustic and hen-chick imagery utilized in the lecture brings to mind the metaphors found in the *Shishuo xinyu* that was used to elucidate the concept of *ganying*. These

55. *Shuo Wugoucheng jing shu*, T. no. 1782, 38: 1004c5–6. See previous discussion on Kuiji and n. 51.

56. Chengguan, *Dafanguang fo huayan jing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏 (Commentary on the *Buddha's Flower Garland Sutra of Great Expansive Teachings*), T. no. 1735, 35: 529b25–28. Zongmi 宗密 (780–841 CE), who synthesized Huayan doctrinal studies with Chan, uses similar phrasing in his *Yuanjue jing da shu* 圓覺經大疏 (Commentary on the *Sutra of the Perfect Enlightenment*), X. no. 243, 9: 338a11–12.

metaphors, such as mountains and bells or a mother and her child, served as vehicles for explaining the intricate meaning and dynamics of *ganying*. This material imagery serves as an intriguing example of the interaction between exegetical tradition and popular practice during public preaching.

“The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*” (*Weimojie jing jiangjingwen* 維摩詰經講經文, S. 4571) provides further elucidation of this metaphor, explaining that it symbolizes the assembly’s collective presence at the Buddha’s sermon, akin to a mother hen pecking from the outside while the chick pecks from within during the process of hatching.<sup>57</sup> Notably, prior to the Song dynasty (960–1276 CE), “The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*” (S. 4571) and the *Fahua jing xuanzan yaoji* 法華經玄贊要集 (Essence of the Glorification of the Lotus Sutra, X. 34, no. 638)<sup>58</sup> by the Tang monk Qifu 栖復 (n.d.) from Jingshui Temple 鏡水寺, composed in 877 CE, are the only extant Buddhist materials that employ this hen-chick metaphor to explain the meaning of “[at] one time.” Qifu’s commentary explores the relationship between preaching and hearing, focusing on the capacity of sentient beings to comprehend the teachings of the Buddha:

Second, it discusses [the relationship] between speaking and hearing. If sentient beings’ [spiritual] capacities have ripened, they yearn to listen to the Buddha’s teachings. Thus Come One preaches teachings to nourish the wholesome roots of others. The acts of speaking and hearing occur simultaneously, without any temporal distinction of before or after. It is precisely during the time when the capacities of sentient beings have ripened that the Thus Come One delivers his teachings. Just like when a hen hatches an egg: [A chick] pips from within the eggshell while [the mother hen] pecks from the outside simultaneously.

57. Huang and Zhang, *Dunhuang bianwen jiaozhu*, 757: “當初佛會，欲擬說經，無前後而趨筵，盡一時而赴會。如雞附卵，啐啄同時，所以經云，故曰「一時」。” This metaphor later became widespread in the genre of Chan master’s recorded sayings (*yulu* 語錄) in the Song dynasty (960–1276 CE). There, however, the context or application of the metaphor is different; it refers to the mutual relationship between a master and a disciple.

58. The *Fahua jing xuanzan yaoji* 法華經玄贊 (The Glorification of the Lotus Sutra, T. 34, no. 1723) is Kuiji’s commentary on the Lotus Sutra (T. 9, no. 262). The hen-chick metaphor does not appear here.

言二說聽等者。約眾生根熟，欲得聞法。如來利他善根為說。說聽同時，無前無後。正是眾生根熟時，便是如來說法時。如鷄附卵，啐啄同時。<sup>59</sup>

The explanation of the mutual resonance between the Buddha's preaching and sentient beings' reception of his teachings, as reflected in "The Sutra Lecture Text on the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*" (S. 4571) and the lesser-known commentary by Qifu on the *Lotus Sutra*, aligns with the interpretations by Zhiyi and Kuiji of the term "[at] one time" based on the theory of *ganying*. Furthermore, these texts not only inherit but also expand upon the acoustic and parent-child metaphors found in the *Shishuo xinyu* for elucidating the concept of *ganying*. However, the aforementioned sutra lecture text and commentary present a more popularized version of the interpretation of "[at] one time," blending previous doctrinal understandings with vernacular and literary metaphors.

These texts employ metaphors drawn from everyday life, vividly depict the scene of preaching, and provide additional explanations on the relationship between preaching and hearing. These elements suggest the efforts of preachers and commentators to present the doctrinal terms of the sutras to their audience in a more intuitive manner. For instance, the chick-hen metaphor captures elements of organic nature and comprises the nuanced characters of *cui* 啐 and *zhuo* 啄, which respectively convey the actions of the chick spitting out and sucking in within the eggshell, and the hen pecking the eggshell from the outside. Remarkably, this metaphor encompasses the nature of thinking, persuasion, logic, and enlightenment in Buddhism. The commentaries and sutra lecture texts underscore the synchronicity, immediacy, and all-at-onceness of enlightenment, transforming the process of preaching, hearing, and understanding into a sudden flash of awakening.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, this serves as a compelling critique of gradualist Buddhist conceptions of cognition.

59. X. no. 638, 34: 334b4–6.

60. This illustrates what Natalie Gummer calls "a process of ontological transformation from listener (*śrāvaka*), to bearer (*dhāraka*), to speaker (*bhāṇaka*), to bodhisattva, to buddha" through practices including "memorizing, bearing in mind, reciting, and performing." Natalie Gummer, "Speech Acts of the Buddha: Sovereign Ritual and the Poetics of Power in Mahāyāna Sūtras," *History of Religions* 61, no. 2 (2021): 186.

*Transposing the Buddha's Sermon to This Current Sermon*

During the tenth century in China, Buddhist preachers sought to forge a strong connection between their audience and the Buddha (i.e., preacher), assuming the role of the Buddha himself during their oral performances. By doing so, they aimed to elevate their present sermons to a level equivalent to those delivered by the Buddha. To achieve this, they employed various techniques, one of which involved transposing the scriptural phrase “[at] one time” to the current moment of preaching. As discussed earlier, previous scholarly commentators primarily interpreted “[at] one time” within the historical context of the Buddha’s original sermons, focusing on the relationship between the Buddha as the speaker and the congregation as the hearers. However, “The Sutra Lecture Text Preached on the Emperor’s Birthday in the Zhongxing Hall in the Fourth Year of the Changxing Era (933 CE)” (*Changxing sinian Zhongxingdian Yingshengjie jiangjingwen* 長興四年中興殿應聖節講經文, P. 3808) explores the concept of “[at] one time” within the context of a present sermon delivered to celebrate the birthday of Emperor Mingzong 明宗 (Li Siyuan 李嗣源, 867–933, r. 926–933 CE) of the Later Tang (Hou Tang 後唐, 923–936 CE).<sup>61</sup>

This manuscript is a refined version of a sutra lecture text specifically focusing on the “preface” of the *Renwang jing* 仁王經 (*Humane King Sutra*, T. no. 246, 8),<sup>62</sup> which is one of the influential Chinese apocryphal

61. The “Annals of Emperor Mingzong” (Mingzong ji 明宗紀) in the *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 (Old History of Five Dynasties) mentions a Buddhist ceremony held at the Jing’ai Monastery 敬愛寺 in Luoyang on the emperor’s birthday, with Buddhist monks delivering sermons in the Zhongxing Hall 中興殿. See *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史, juan 36, “Tang shu” 唐書, 12, “Mingzong ji” 明宗紀, 2. For a study of the historical context of Jing’ai Monastery and its connection to Dunhuang Cave 217, see Eugene Wang, “Pictorial Program in the Making of Monastic Space: From Jing’aisi of Luoyang to Cave 217 at Dunhuang,” in *Buddhist Monasticism in East Asia: Places of Practice*, ed. James Benn (London: Routledge, 2010), 65–106. For a comprehensive study on P. 3808, see Changchun Pei and Wei Li, “A Humane Kings Convocation Held in the Zhongxing Palace: A New Study of the P. 3808 Sutra Sermon,” *Religions* 14, no. 6 (2023): 718.

62. Cheng Xingli 程興麗 and Xu Song 許松 have raised the possibility that Li Congrong 李從榮 (d. 933 CE), the Prince of Qin 秦王, and scholars in his service polished the draft of this text, which was first authored by the celebrated scholar and literati-monk Yunbian 雲辯 (d. 951 CE). See Cheng Xingli 程興麗 and Xu Song 許松, “Changxing sinian Zhongxingdian Yingshengjie jiangjingwen xingzhi zuozhe yu yong yun yanjiu” 《長興四年中興殿應聖節講經文》性質、作者與用韻研究, *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 3 (2015): 61–66. The

scriptures in East Asia. Unlike many other scriptures that are primarily intended for either the monastic community or lay practitioners, the *Humane King Sutra* specifically addresses rulers.<sup>63</sup> The main text of P. 3808 commemorates the emperor's birthday, while a collection of nine appended poems tells a tale of ingratitude akin to the fable of "The Wolf of Zhongshan" (Zhongshan lang 中山狼).<sup>64</sup>

In this manuscript, the preacher skillfully draws a parallel between two distinct scenes. On the one hand, there is the portrayal of Śākyamuni Buddha delivering his teachings to his disciples on Vulture Peak, as described in the *Humane King Sutra*. On the other hand, there is the scene of the present sermon, where the emperor attentively listens to the Dharma master's discourse.<sup>65</sup> Through this juxtaposition, the preacher establishes an intangible but potent connection between teacher and disciple, effectively transcending the constraints of time and space. The Buddha is cast in the role of the preacher, while the emperor assumes the position of the listener, thereby fostering a profound, invisible bond between these two figures across different temporal and spatial dimensions. A section within the chanted verse illuminates this parallel:

At that time, the "Tamer" (i.e., the Buddha) was preaching the sutra  
at Vulture Peak;  
Today, the king is listening to the Dharma at the treasure hall of the  
dragon palace.

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original title of the sutra is *Renwang huguo bore boluomi jing* 仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經 (Perfection of Wisdom Sutra for Humane Kings Protecting Their Countries).

63. Charles D. Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

64. Yang Mingzhang 楊明璋, "Dunhuang ben Changxing sinian Zhongxingdian Yingshengjie jiangjingwen mowei jiu shou shi xingzhi kaobian" 敦煌本《長興四年中興殿應聖節講經文》末尾九首詩性質考辨, *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 21, no. 2 (2003): 391–402. These verses were employed as a means of satirizing Li Congke (885–937, r. 934–937 CE), who served as an adoptive son of Emperor Mingzong and eventually ascended to the position of the last emperor of Later Tang. This satirical expression reveals the underlying political tensions that existed between Li Congke and Li Congrong, the latter being one of Emperor Mingzong's biological sons and widely speculated to be the author of the sutra lecture text in question.

65. Huang and Zhang, *Dunhuang bianwen jiaozhu*, 618.

當時調御說經，居靈就(鷲)高山；  
今日君王聽法，在龍宮寶殿。<sup>66</sup>

The Dharma master who delivers the sermon skillfully assumes the persona of the Buddha through an implicit projection. This is achieved by skillfully juxtaposing the scene of the Buddha preaching his teachings with the emperor's attentive reception of the sermon. Through the careful use of syntactical and lexical parallelism within the couplets, a profound and inseparable correlation is established between these two scenes. Table 1 highlights the distinctive features of this correlation.

The grammatical parallelism employed in the couplets aligns the roles and actions of the Buddha and the emperor. The syntax and structure of the verses are deliberately constructed to emphasize this correlation. By using similar grammatical patterns and parallel phrasing, the Dharma master evokes a connection that binds the Buddha's preaching to the emperor's act of listening. Furthermore, the lexical parallelism present in these couplets serves to reinforce the correlation between the two scenes. The deliberate choice of words and imagery used by the Dharma master creates a striking resemblance between the teachings of the Buddha and the discourse being delivered to the emperor. Through the skillful selection of lexemes, the Dharma master draws upon the shared thematic elements and concepts present in both scenarios, further accentuating their inseparability.

Building upon the established correlation between the scenes of the Buddha's preaching and the emperor's attentive listening, the Dharma master proceeds to elucidate the significance of the term "[at] one time." This explanation sheds light on the interconnectedness of the teachings and the listener's experience:

The two characters *yishi* 一時 signify the establishment of a specific moment in time. When the World-Honored One preaches [his teachings], the disciples listen. It highlights the absence of distinction between the doer 能 and the recipient of the action 所. It reveals the inherent unity between teacher and student. When people yearn for [the Buddha's teachings], he [readily] expounds upon them. It is like the blossoming of flowers in response to the spring breeze or the reflection of the moon on clear autumn water. Similarly, it is also like our emperor holding a special banquet on the "Holy Emperor's

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66. *Ibid.*, 619.

Table 1. Use of syntactical and lexical parallelism in P. 3808

adj.	noun	noun	noun	verb	noun	prep.	adj./noun	noun	adj.	noun
At that 當	time 時	tame(r) 調	rule(r) 御	was teaching 說	sutra 經	at 居	numinous 靈	vulture 就(鷲)	high 高	mountain 山
Present 今	day 日	ruler 君	king 王	is listening to 聽	Dharma 法	at 在	dragon 龍	palace 宮	treasured 寶	hall 殿
		noun phrase: the "Tamer"; the king					noun phrase: "Vulture Peak"; the treasure hall of the dragon palace			



Birthday” every year. (...) As [the Dharma master] arrives at the national altar for performance and lecture, it is also the [manifestation of] the Dharma-realm in the context of “[at] one time.”

一時兩字時成就者。即世尊才說，徒眾便聞，表能所之無差，顯師資之一相。人心渴望，佛口宣揚，如春風至而花開，似秋水清而月見，亦如我皇帝每年應聖，特展花筵。(...)得過萬乘之道場，亦是一時之法界。<sup>67</sup>

The Dharma master skillfully establishes a parallel between the roles of the Buddha as the preacher and the emperor as the hearer, as well as between the Buddha as the teacher and the emperor as the disciple. Through this parallelism, the present moment in which the emperor listens to the Dharma being expounded by the lecturer in the palace is transformed into the very moment of “[at] one time” when the Buddha imparts teachings to his disciples in the “Dharma-realm.” The lecturer not only draws a physical analogy between the emperor’s national altar for performance and the Buddha’s Dharma-realm, but also alludes to metaphysical and cosmological implications inherent in this performance.

This juxtaposition reveals the salvific dimensions of the preacher assuming the transformation of the Buddha. In Buddhist scriptures, it is often emphasized that those who directly hear the Dharma from a buddha have the potential to attain buddhahood.<sup>68</sup> These soteriological

67. *Ibid.*, 618–619.

68. For example, see the ending part of the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (*Yuanjue jing* 圓覺經, full title: *Dafanguang yuanjue xiuduluo liaoyi jing* 大方廣圓覺修多羅了義經 [Great Corrective Extensive Perfect Enlightenment Sutra of the Complete Doctrine]), which was probably composed in China around the early eighth century CE and was extremely influential within Chinese Chan, Huayan, and Korean Sōn Buddhism, T. no. 842, 17: 921c28–922a4: “Good sons, say for example there was a man who taught sentient beings as many as a hundred times the amount of the grains of sand in the Ganges River such that they all attained the level of *arhat*. This man’s merit would not be equal to someone who explicated a half of a *gāthā* of this scripture. If there is any person who hears the name of this sutra and believes in it fully without a shadow of a doubt, then you can know that this person has not only sown the seeds of blessings and wisdom with one buddha or two buddhas, but has cultivated his roots of goodness with countless myriads of buddhas, listening to this sutra-teaching.” 善男子。假使有人教百千恒河沙衆生得阿羅漢果。不如有人宣說此經分別半偈。善男子。若復有人聞此經名信心不惑。當知是

implications extend to the emperor and the other audience members who listen to this sermon, as the preacher, embodying the role of the Buddha, opens up salvific possibilities for them. The sermon becomes a conduit for their own spiritual awakening and liberation, aligning them with the transformative power of the Buddha's teachings.

In the following chanted verse, the chief cantor states and reinforces the interpretation provided by the Dharma master, emphasizing the recurring message that whenever the emperor attentively listens to the Dharma, that very moment is none other than the "[at] one time":

The Buddha shows great kindness whenever he preaches;  
 May humans and celestial beings dispel doubts by following [his  
 teachings].  
 If one pays homage to the [Buddha's] upright countenance within a  
 flower,  
 The nectar-like words (i.e., the Buddha's teachings) will be heard by  
 our ears.  
 The Buddha perceives his disciples with his divine mind;  
 And people will see Śākyamuni Buddha with their physical eyes.  
 As there is no distinction between speaking and hearing in terms of  
 time,  
 Hence, the sutra says, "[at] one time."

The smoke of burning incense dances in the palace hall, carried by  
 the wind;  
 People pray for the words of Emperor Yao.  
 The king ascends the dragon seat with joy;  
 And the Buddha's disciple enters the phoenix courtyard.  
 The sage master gazes at the moon-like face of [the Buddha] with a  
 pure mind,  
 While ordinary people behold Emperor Yao's eyebrows with clear  
 eyes.  
*Year after year, on this day, hearing the path to buddhahood,  
 It is precisely what the sutra refers to as "[at] one time."*

佛每談揚演大慈，人天隨從願除疑。  
 花中既禮端嚴相，耳裏還聞甘露詞。

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人。非於一佛二佛種諸福慧。如是乃至盡恒河沙一切佛所種諸善根聞此經教。The translation is from Charles Muller, *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism's Guide to Meditation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 283-284.

佛以聖心觀弟子, 人將肉眼見牟尼。  
直緣說聽無前後, 所以經文號一時。

風慢香煙滿殿飛, 人人盡有祝堯詞。  
君王樂引昇龍座, 釋子宣來入鳳墀。  
聖主淨心瞻月面, 凡人洗眼見堯眉。

每年此日聞佛道, 也似經中號一時。<sup>69</sup>

In this chanted verse, the Dharma master skillfully projects himself as the figure of the Buddha by carefully juxtaposing the scenes of the Buddha's preaching and the emperor's reception of the sermon from the Dharma master. The concluding couplets in both sets of verses highlight the essence of "[at] one time" as the simultaneous occurrence of preaching and hearing. Moreover, the final couplets in the second set portray the preacher as the embodiment of the Buddha, symbolized by the moon-like face. This portrayal emphasizes the transformative nature of the preacher, who embodies the Buddha himself. Thus, the poem asserts that the present moment, in which the preacher assumes the role of the Buddha, is indeed the very moment referred to as "[at] one time" in the sutra.

#### CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the extent to which Buddhist preachers in late medieval China incorporated and expanded the earlier commentators' interpretation of the concept of "[at] one time." It further examines the narrative techniques employed by these preachers to contextualize and reconstruct their understanding of the term. The argument put forth is that in late medieval China, Buddhist preachers imparted unique literary and performative qualities to the phrase "[at] one time" through the use of metaphors and analogies. Consequently, these preachers not only spoke on behalf of the Buddha but as the Buddha, effectively making the Buddha's words present in their own time. This approach put their audience in a position to establish a stronger resonance with the Buddha and his teachings.

The narrative techniques employed by Buddhist preachers played a crucial role in transforming and transcending time and space, thereby reshaping the temporal and spatial dimensions experienced by the audience. The preachers redefined the concept of "[at] one time," expanding its significance beyond a historical event in the Buddha's life.

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69. Huang and Zhang, *Dunhuang bianwen jiaozhu*, 619.

Instead, any instance where the Dharma was spoken by a teacher and heard by a disciple constituted a manifestation of “[at] one time.” By repeatedly juxtaposing the Buddha’s sermon to the sixteen kings, as depicted in the *Humane King Sutra*, with their present-day sermon for Emperor Mingzong of the Later Tang, the preachers sought to convince their audience, particularly the emperor, that the present moment was indeed what the sutra calls “[at] one time.” The use of an acoustic metaphor such as “[The chick] pips from within the eggshell while [the mother hen] pecks from the outside simultaneously” (*cuizuo tongshi* 啐啄同時) served as a performative utterance that evoked the notion of “[at] one time” in the minds of listeners. This metaphorical expression alluded to the moment when individuals attained enlightenment by listening to the Dharma master’s sermon.

Through the employment of metaphors and juxtapositions in poetry and “parallel prose” during ritual performances, the preachers transposed the scriptural concepts of “[at] one time” and the “Dharma-realm” into the present moment of preaching. They emphasized the synchronicity between the processes of preaching, hearing, and enlightenment. Moreover, their narratives went beyond mere recollections of past events. As Natalie Gummer asserts, “the narration is event” during performance and preaching, and

in the moment of narration, the distinction between the tongues of the buddhas and the tongue of the *dharmabhāṅka* completely collapses. The Buddha’s vital essence and true body, his speech, manifests whenever someone recites it: the superlong tongues of all the buddhas in the cosmos stretch forth whenever the sutra is uttered and consecrate all those who hear it (with joy, that is).<sup>70</sup>

Late medieval Chinese preachers persuaded their audience to imagine themselves as physically present at the Buddha’s sermon through their exegesis on the meaning of “[at] one time.” The simultaneous nature of narration and event and the implication that the audience is hearing the Dharma being preached by “all of the buddhas in the cosmos,” not only evoke joy but also create an ideal environment for enlightenment. Through their performative imagination and utterance, Buddhist preachers in late medieval China transformed timely preaching into timeless preaching, ultimately aiming to facilitate the salvation of their audience.

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70. Gummer, “Speech Acts of the Buddha,” 186.