

# 6 Modern Insights Into Chinese Buddhism

Some new directions in Chinese Buddhism  
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## 6.1 CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES

**Robert Sharf**, in his important “Prolegomenon to the study of medieval Chinese Buddhist literature” (2002:1-27), raises some vital issues in the study of Chinese Buddhism, which is often riddled with historical and hermeneutical problems. Some of his observations are summarized here. Firstly, the claim that Kumārajīva’s translations were more “accurate” than those of his predecessors is problematic. The popularity of Kumārajīva’s translations was not due to their fidelity to the originals, but rather to the elegance and accessibility of his prose. As such, Kumārajīva’s translations continued to be favoured long after the more technically accurate translations of Xuánzàng were available (2002:12).

The various so called Chinese “schools” of Buddhism are not really discrete entities. Such traditions as *Sānlún* (三論) (the “Three-treatise” of Madhyamika), *Dilún* (地論) (the *Yogācāra, bhūmi* school) and *Shèlún* (攝論) (the Mahāyāna, saṅgraha school) are better regarded as “organizational categories applied after the fact by mediaeval Buddhist historians and bibliographers” (2002: 7). The notion that the Táng dynasty was the golden age of Buddhism in general and Chán in particular turns out to be the product of Sòng Chán polemicists:

there is little evidence that the major Ch’an figures of the T’ang viewed themselves as belonging to an independent tradition or school. And despite its rhetoric Ch’an was no less dependent on the written word, on formal monastic ritual, and on state and aristocratic patronage than was any other Buddhist tradition in China. Pure Land never existed at all as an independent exegetical tradition, much less as an institution or sect, in T’ang or Sung China, and the same appears to be true of Tantra or Vajrayāna. (Sharf 2002:8)

Unlike in Japan, where Buddhism, from its inception, was subject to a degree of autocratic state control, in China, despite efforts by the state to regulate the Sangha, such efforts were tempered by geographical, cultural and political contingencies. Chinese monastics, however, irrespective of their ordination lineage, were unified by their adherence to *a more or less common monastic code, a common mode of dress, a common stock of liturgical and ritual knowledge*, and so on. As such, Chinese monks could easily wander from monastery to monastery in search of new teachers and teachings. Such peregrinations were the norm that contributed to the consolidation of the Chinese sangha across the empire. (Sharf 2002:9)

Above all, the Chinese looked to Buddhism for answers to questions that they found relevant. They approached Chinese translations of Buddhist texts *not as glosses on the Indic originals*,

but as valuable resources that addressed their own immediate conceptual, social, and existential concerns. Accordingly, in order to understand the answers they found, we must first deduce the question they were asking, questions, whose historical, linguistic, and conceptual genealogy was largely Chinese. (R Sharf 2002:12)

## 6.2 TRADUTTORE TRADITTORE

**6.2.1 Popular translations of the Platform Sutra.** “The translator is a traitor,” says the Italian aphorism. Language, to a great extent, is the experience of *a people*, or even of *a person*. The translator may be able to change the words of one language to another, but even the best translators often have difficulties trying to convey the full meaning and intention of the original passage to the intended audience. Even if this were possible, when that same passage is read in another place or at another time far removed from the original context, the meaning and purpose of the passage may not always be fully understood.

**Bielefeldt and Lancaster** in an article (1975) on the Platform Sutra (*Tán jīng* 壇經) provide an insight into the problem of translating sacred texts, using the translating of the Platform Sutra as an example.<sup>1</sup>

In recent decades, Chán/Zen Buddhism has been very popular, judging from the number of English books published on it, “not all of it bad” (203). In fact, modern research on Chán Buddhism in China and Japan is gathering momentum since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. “For better or for worse, the Western view of Ch’an and Zen remains largely mythological; and this state of affairs is reflected in most of the translations of the T’an ching available in English” (id). Here follows a critique of the various translations of the Platform Sutra.

**WONG MOU-LAM**’s (1930) pioneer translation is based on the Ming canon edition,<sup>2</sup> and was later incorporated into Dwight Goddard’s anthology, *A Buddhist Bible* (1932).<sup>3</sup> For three decades this was the translation known and read by Westerners.

**WING-TSIT CHAN** (1960) based his translation on the Dunhuang edition, using the Koshoji print to make editorial changes in the text.<sup>4</sup>

**DT SUZUKI** (1960) published a partial translation of the Sutra in his *Manual of Zen Buddhism*,<sup>5</sup> based on his edition of the Dunhuang text, in which he also relied heavily on the readings of ancient Japanese manuscripts. This was the beginning of a revival of interest in the Platform Sutra.

**CHARLES LUK K’UAN YU** (1962) used the Ming edition and published it in his *Ch’an and Zen Teaching*.<sup>6</sup>

**PAUL AND GEORGE FUNG** (1964) worked on a retranslation of the Ming version.<sup>7</sup>

**PHILIP YAMPOLSKY** (1967) did a scholarly study and retranslation of the Dunhuang text.<sup>8</sup>

**HENG YIN** (1971) provided a translation based on the Ming canon version, with an interesting commentary by master Hsuan-hua.<sup>9</sup>

**6.2.2 Need for a variety of translations.** **Bielefeldt and Lancaster** note that two general statements might be made about these English translations of the Platform Sutra, “First, it is apparent from a perusal of these works that their general level of scholarship and application of scholarly skills is by no means on a par with works of scholars such as Ui, Hu Shih, and Yanagida—Yampolsky’s translation being the major exception to this statement. Consequently, for the reader of the translations, there is little available to correct the distortions of legend and tradition.”

Second, though certain of the translations are clearly more readable than others, taken as a whole they present a fascinating spectrum of the translator’s art. A major text like the Platform Sutra, central to Chinese religiosity and culture, naturally attracts the attention of translators. It is not surprising, therefore, nor is it inappropriate, that we should have a considerable number and variety of English versions of the Platform Sutra. (1975: 204)

**6.2.3 The translator’s attitude.** Yet it should be noted, say Bielefeldt and Lancaster, that, while translation from the Chinese inevitably involves much interpretation, the Platform Sutra does not present the kinds of problems that one faces in such classical philosophical works as the *Dàodé jīng* 道德經, or in many other Chán writings. Compared to such texts, the style of the Platform Sutra is remarkably clear and

<sup>1</sup> The rest of this section is a reflection on and summary of Bielefeldt & Lancaster 1975: 205-209. Quotes from the paper are put within quote marks followed by the page.

<sup>2</sup> “The Sutra of Hui Neng” (4th ed), in *The Diamond Sutra and the Sutra of Hui Neng*. Berkeley: Shambhala Publications, 1969: 76-114.

<sup>3</sup> “Sutra Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch,” in Goddard (ed), *A Buddhist Bible* [1932], Thetford, VT: Goddard, 1938: 497-558. Also published in *Bilingual Buddhist Series: Sutras and Scriptures*, vol 1, Taipei: Buddhist Cultural Series, 1962. Accessible at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/bb/index.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> *The Platform Scripture*, NY: St. John’s University Press, 1961.

<sup>5</sup> *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, NY: Grove Press, 1960: 82-89.

<sup>6</sup> *Ch’an and Zen Teaching*, Series Three, Berkeley: Shambhala Publications, 1973: 19-102.

<sup>7</sup> *The Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch on the Pristine Orthodox Dharma*, San Francisco: Buddha’s Universal Church, 1964. This tr has not been included in the Bielefeldt/Lancaster evaluations.

<sup>8</sup> *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, NY: Columbia University Press, 1967: 123-183.

<sup>9</sup> *The Sixth Patriarch’s Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra and Commentary by Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua*, San Francisco: Sino-American Buddhist Association, 1971.

straightforward, especially since it is mostly narrative in style. Consequently, differences in translation here tend to depend more on *the translator's attitudes toward, and abilities in, their art rather than on serious differences in their interpretation of the content of the text*. Briefly, here follows an instructive critical evaluation by **Bielefeldt and Lancaster** (1975) of the major translators and translations of the Platform Sutra:

**Wong, Luk, and Heng Yin** are apologists for the teaching and the traditional interpretations. As such, the aim of their translations was to make the text and teachings available to the general reader.

**Yampolsky**, on the other hand, falls into the category of translators whose interest is purely scholarly, and whose work is intended to provide a study based on the philological and historical evidence.

**Wing-tsit CHAN** may be called a cultural “informant” in that he has spent a long and productive career engaged in the introduction of the classical culture of China to the West.

**DT Suzuki**, in his English publications, belongs in part to this “informant” classification, but since there is no real separation in his writings between his Japanese heritage and his Buddhism, he functions both as a cultural “informant” and an apologist for the ideas.

**Wong, Luk, Chan, and Suzuki**, being all educated in and knowledgeable of the tradition about which they write, show a somewhat *free* translation style which, “on the one hand, provides the reader with a smooth and flowing text, but on the other, has the danger of departing from the original so as to distort its meaning. At times this freedom of style represents an unacknowledged reliance on the traditional commentaries, and the translation of a term may be the commentary’s remark rather than a literal equivalent for the text.” (See **Bielefeldt & Lancaster** 1975: 205 for translation samples.)

**Luk’s** translation, although in many ways better than the earlier one by Wong, is not generally supported by the academic community, and his work has been criticized for being too free in interpretation and for its glaring errors, including careless typos, even of grammar.

**DT Suzuki**, another of these free translators, aimed his work at a popular audience, and uses no footnotes or other obvious scholarly apparatus. When we compare this translation of the Dunhuang text with **Yampolsky** or Chán, we get the following results (as examples) (with native paginations):

**Suzuki (1960)**

“You are equal to the Buddha” (83).

“If there were not people in the world” (86).

“All sutras and writings are said to have their existence because of the people of the world” (86).

**Yampolsky (1967)**

“Your Dharma body will be the same as the Buddha’s” (148).

“If we were without this wisdom” (151).

“All sutras exist because they are spoken by man” (151).

These differences do not imply that Suzuki has mistranslated the passages, but they are an indication of the importance of the edition work he has done. In these examples, Suzuki has relied on the Koshoji and Daijoji texts, and the result is a translation closer in some ways to these documents than to the original Tun-huang manuscript. . . . Only when Ch’an texts are treated as Buddhist documents will we begin to see Ch’an thought as a part of, rather than an aberration of, basic Mahāyāna doctrine. (Bielefeldt & Lancaster, 1975: 207 f)

In contrast to the free-style translators mentioned, we have the example of a Westerner, **Heng Yin** (her Dharma name)

who is caught in an over literal interpretation of the Chinese. This literalness results in awkward phrasing and often fails to make the meaning clear for the English reader. Thus we find the sentence, “Just then suddenly return; obtain the original mind” (133), which in English syntax implies an imperative. **Luk** reads this as, “Instantly the Bhiksus obtained a clear understanding and regained their fundamental minds” (35). Richard Robinson has translated the same passage in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* as, “Immediately they wholly regained their original thought.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> RH Robinson, “The Sūtra Of Vimalakīrti’s Preaching” (MS), 25.

This type of translation style employed by **Heng Yin** results in some unfortunate compounds which carry little meaning for the reader: “Nature Dharma Door” (145), “responding function” (164), “still extinction” (272), and “dust fatigue” (196). Translation must be more than a mere matching of equivalents between the original and target language: it must employ the artistry of combining accuracy with a pleasing style; and it must above all communicate to the reader the meaning of the original. (Bielefeldt & Lancaster 1975:207)

**6.2.4 Accurate translations.** The most accurate of the Platform Sutra translations, both of the Dunhuang text, are by **Chan** and by **Yampolsky**, which provide us with a complete version of the text as well as annotations and study. Each of them approaches the same material in very different way, which gives “some insight into the way in which a translator by his choice of terms and his exercise of editorial license can give the material a totally new impact.” (Bielefeldt & Lancaster 1975: 207)

The translations by **Luk, Chan, and Yampolsky** in terms of the nature of the Platform Sutra clearly represent three stages in the development of scholarship on the text. **Luk** ignores all recent scholarly research and uses the Ming canon version because the Dunhuang is shorter and, surmises, “therefore incomplete.”

In this assumption he is following the traditional Chinese solution to the problem of variation in length and content between different versions of the same text. As missionaries came into China over the centuries bringing with them ever-expanding versions of the Mahāyāna sutras, these larger and more elaborate forms of the text were received with pleasure,<sup>11</sup> for it was assumed that the longer version of a sūtra was the complete and therefore earlier one, while the shorter was thought to be a later abbreviation and hence of less value.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Luk’s assertion is in line with a well-established tradition in China. (Bielefeldt & Lancaster 1975:208)

**Chan**, in his preliminary remarks, gives a description of the well known legend of the rise of Chán, mentions discussion of the research of his fellow countryman, Hu Shih, which clearly accepts the fact that the text has undergone changes over the centuries. However, he still holds uncritically to the idea that the Platform Sutra records Huineng’s words (op cit 23).

**Yampolsky**, following the lead of Hu Shih and recent Japanese scholarship, questions whether Huineng has a central place in the Platform Sutra or whether he has any role in it at all. “It is this last approach which promises to have far-reaching implications for Buddhist studies as well as for religious studies in general.” (op cit 209)

A useful translation of ancient texts such as the Platform Sutra should not only be complete but also have a critical and comparative study of all, if not at least the major, canonical versions of the text. The language of the translation should be clear, idiomatic and consistent, and reflect the author’s original intention as far as possible. Having done that, the translator, especially if he is also a Dharma practitioner, may also express his own sentiments on the significance of the text to his own time.

Accurate translations by themselves are only useful and beneficial with regards to what they are accurate about, that is, the Buddha’s true teachings (at least, for those seeking awakening). Such textual translations heavily depend on the linguistic skills and insight of scholars, and if they are spiritually inclined towards Buddhism, we are usually blessed with very good translations of the texts.

There is another kind of translation—“spiritual translation”—where we *must* have spiritual inclination and some level of spiritual maturity. This is the presentation of the Dharma as a living experience. While textual translation is usually a *laissez-faire* enterprise, with a *descriptive* study of Buddhism, a spiritual translation is a *prescriptive* act of concern, compassion and wisdom. Such translators can only arise from amongst those who have love, faith, and understanding in the Dharma, and who are sensitive to patterns of deviance in Buddhist living, and who direct much of their energies and wisdom in bettering our attitude

<sup>11</sup> See Dào’ān’s 道安 thoughts on this in T2145-52bc, where he attacks what he considers to be abbreviation.

<sup>12</sup> For the significance of this to Japanese scholars, see R Hikata, *Suvikrānta-vikrāmi-pariprechā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, Fukuoka, 1958: xxiv.

to the Dharma, so that our lives are generally better. It is to a study of such special Chinese Buddhists that we now turn to.

### 6.3 TÀIXŪ AND MODERN BUDDHIST HUMANISM

**6.3.1 A humanistic Buddhism.** During the modern period (in simple terms, after the imperial era) especially after the Chinese Revolution of 1911, Buddhism in China was characterized by revival and reform. In reaction to the long dominant Chán, which placed a low value on intellectual pursuits, there was a new intellectual upsurge amongst the Chinese Buddhists (mainly through the influence of the progress of oriental studies in Europe) that largely rejected what was conservative and traditional. This development climaxed in the 1920s with the infusion of Marxist ideas into the Chinese “cultural renaissance.”



6.3 Tàixū

It was during this period that there arose a remarkable Chinese Buddhist monk, named Tàixū (太虛 1889-1947), who introduced the concept of a “**humanistic Buddhism**” (*rénshēng fójiào* 人生佛教) to carry out a series of Buddhist reforms.<sup>13</sup> Two events strongly motivated Tàixū’s reformist ideas. The first was the revolution of 1911 that toppled the Manchu dynasty and established the Republic of China. At this point, he was dismayed at the state of Buddhism and the disunity of the Sangha. The clergy generally neglected education and practice, and relied heavily on the performance of funerals rites and other rituals.

The second motivating factor behind Tàixū’s reformist ideas was his dialogue with a Christian evangelist, the Norwegian Lutheran missionary, Karl L Reichelt (1877-1952), who founded the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre.<sup>14</sup> Tàixū criticized Christian theism and believed that Buddhism could give to Christianity what it desperately needed: *a religious spirit that was not in opposition to modern science and that could be the foundation for trust and community.*<sup>15</sup>

Tàixū emphasized the international character of Buddhism and initiated contacts between Chinese Buddhists and those of other Asian countries, especially of Sri Lanka, Thailand and Japan. He did this, convinced that

Buddhist doctrine is fully capable of uniting all existing forms of civilization, and should spread throughout the world so that it may become a compass, as it were, for the human mind.<sup>16</sup>

Institutes for the training of large number of Buddhist religious leaders were set up in various parts of China, with the aim of reforming the Sangha.<sup>17</sup> Buddhist texts were studied in a way that had not happened for a very long time. A notable feature of Tàixū’s revival movement was the appearance of an increasing number of Buddhist periodicals devoted mainly to *hermeneutics* (the exposition of Buddhist thought) and *apologetics* (the rebuttal of criticisms against Buddhism). Between 1920 and 1935, there were a total of 58 such periodicals. Tàixū’s reform efforts, however, produced only patchy results, and he failed to unify the Chinese Sangha.

**6.3.2 An international Buddhism.** In the 1920s Tàixū initiated a series of meetings with the World Buddhist Federation (an organization that existed only on paper). He helped organize the East Asian Buddhist Conference on 1925, and in 1928, convinced the Nationalist Government of China to send him on a nine-month tour of Europe and America. Although this tour failed to impress many westerners (mainly due to lack of preparation and of competent interpreters), it established his reputation at home as an international figure. In the 1930s he tried to establish an exchange programme with the Theravāda Buddhists of Sri Lanka. He met G P Malalasekera to discuss the need for an international Buddhist organization. After the Second World War, in 1950, Malalasekera set up **the World Fellowship of Buddhists**.

<sup>13</sup> Chan Wing-tsit, *Religious Trends in Modern China*, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1953:56. Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism*: T’ai-hsü.

<sup>14</sup> *Dào fēng shān jī dū jiào cóng lín* 道風山基督教叢林. See Burnett 2003:281.

<sup>15</sup> See for example “Science and Buddhism” in Donald Lopez (ed), 2002:85-90.

<sup>16</sup> Qu by CH Hamilton, “Buddhism” in *China*, ed HF MacNair, Berkeley: Univ of California, 1946:297.

<sup>17</sup> Ch’en 1964: 456 f.

The success of Tàixū's revival was especially evident in two areas of Chinese Buddhism:

- (1) A rediscovery of the monistic philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the awakening of interest in Buddhist philosophical ideas amongst young intellectuals.
- (2) A revival of religious life in Pure Land Buddhism (Amidism), with a growth of new societies which not only encouraged religious practice but also social services.

In the 1930s between 60-70% of China's lay Buddhists were Pure Land Buddhists (Ch'en 1964: 460). In 1929, he organized **the Chinese Buddhist Society**, which by 1947 had over 4½ million members.<sup>18</sup> His work continued and evolved through Yinshùn's effort [6.4].

**6.3.3 Evaluation of Tàixū's work.** Tàixū was not very successful as a Buddhist reformer, but his innovative ideas pointed in the right direction for his progeny to model after. The idea of a *humanistic Buddhism* (*rénshēng fójiào* 人生佛教) was clearly meant to redirect attention from the death-centred Buddhism (*sǐfó* 死佛) and ghost-centred Buddhism (*guǐfó* 鬼佛) of the Míng and Qīng periods to a Buddhism that is more socially engaged and spiritually relevant to contemporary society. Such ideas of his in due course influenced the Vietnamese Buddhists, especially Thich Nhat Hanh, and inspired organizations such as the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) founded by Sulak Sivarakas of Thailand in 1989.<sup>19</sup>

According to Tàixū, “humanistic Buddhism” (*rénshēng fójiào* 人生佛教):

- (1) focusses on the development of humans;
- (2) stresses on the Mahāyāna idea of benefitting others with great wisdom and great compassion; and
- (3) the conviction that we can progress harmoniously and progressively to perfection based on Mahāyāna teachings.<sup>20</sup>

In shifting the emphasis from death-centred and ghost-centred Buddhism to a human-centred Buddhism, Tàixū gave a new definition to “human life” (*rénshēng* 人生). He explained that:

- (1) human beings and ghosts were both sentient beings;
- (2) death was another form of life; and
- (3) by living the human life, we can realize what this life means and be a virtuous person.

In doing so, we also realize what “death” and “ghost” really are. With this understanding, Tàixū hoped to improve human life and discard the negative traditional practices.<sup>21</sup> Tàixū's human-centredness implies a this-worldliness of spiritual effort, which Theravada reformer monks like Buddhadasa (1906-1993)<sup>22</sup> taught. In fact, Tàixū went on to propose that we should work towards building the Pure Land here in this world itself, that is, *rénshēng jìngtǔ* 人生淨土.

Although a majority of the Chinese monastics remained unmoved by Tàixū's ideas, they continue to influence and inspire us with a socially-relevant Buddhist vision. One important result of Tàixū's work was the phenomenal increase in the number of followers of Pure Land Buddhism, the teaching that he promoted. In the 1930s between 60-70% of China's lay Buddhists were Pure Land Buddhists (Ch'en 1964:460). In 1929, he organized **the Chinese Buddhist Society**, which by 1947 had over 4½ million members.<sup>23</sup> Although Tàixū's ideas did not bring about significant reforms or changes in Chinese Buddhism in his own time, his ideas inspired future generations who wish to see a reformed and relevant Buddhism. One of the best known of such persons was Yinshùn, to whom we shall not turn.

<sup>18</sup> The first modern Buddhist Society in China, however, was founded in 1900 (Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968: 10).

<sup>19</sup> See eg INEB 2007 Taiwan: <http://blog.taiwan-guide.org/2007/09/ineb-conference-in-taiwan/>.

<sup>20</sup> Taixu, “*Rénshēng fóxué de shuōmíng*” 人生佛學的說明 [The Explanation on Buddhism for Human Life],” in Huang Xia-nian (ed), *Jìnxìàndài zhùmíng xuézhě fóxué wénjí* 近現代著名學者佛學文集 [The Collection of the Buddhist Articles of the Contemporary Famous Scholars], Beijing: Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxué chūbǎnshè, 中國社會科學出版社 1995: 228.

<sup>21</sup> Op cit 223 f.

<sup>22</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhadasa>.

<sup>23</sup> The first modern Buddhist Society in China, however, was founded in 1900 (Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968: 10).

## 6.4 YĪNSHÙN'S VIEW OF *TATHĀGATA, GARBHA*

**6.4.1 Two-pronged approach to reassert *sūnyatā*.** As a living religion, Buddhism, is ever evolving, adapting and innovating to revitalize itself. In every generation and age, there will be those who expound the True Teaching and those who exploit it. When the true practitioners and wise teachers outshine those who abuse Buddhism, it will reach out to benefit a greater number of people. An important task of the Dharma-driven teacher or translator is that of straightening wrong views and clarifying the original and true purpose of the Buddha Dharma. We will now briefly examine how a famous practising Mahāyāna master, in living memory, had done this.

**Master Yinshùn** (Yinshùn Dǎoshī 印順導師) (1906-2005) was a well known Mahāyāna reformer monk and scholar.<sup>24</sup> Yinshùn was not Tàixū's ordained disciple, but studied at one of his Buddhist seminaries, where he quickly rose to be a precocious pupil and, after only a year, began teaching at Tàixū's seminaries. Yinshùn saw himself merely as a researcher of ancient texts and an intellectual reformer, seeking the roots of his faith.

His research formed an important basis for the ideal of Humanistic Buddhism, a leading mainstream Buddhist philosophy studied and upheld by many Chinese Mahāyāna practitioners. His work regenerated the interests in the long-ignored Āgamas among Chinese Buddhists society, and his ideas have been welcomed and echoed by Theravada teachers such as Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Sujato<sup>25</sup> and laymen scholars involved in comparative Buddhism.<sup>26</sup>

By the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, leading up to the Communist takeover of China, which effectively ended religion as a social structure in China, progressive Chinese Buddhist intellectuals such as **Ōuyáng Jingwú** 歐陽竟無 (1871-1943) and **Tàixū** (1889-1947) [4.4], shared the understanding that Chinese Buddhism had declined significantly. They claimed, for example, that monastic training for monks and nuns was no longer adequate, as it ignored doctrinal exposition and textual analysis, and instead focussed on memorization of texts for ritual purposes. They denounced the common practice amongst monks of conducting funeral rites for money since it perpetuated superstitions about ghosts amongst the people, and encouraged greed and materialism as it had become the primary source of income for the monasteries (Welch 1967).

Yinshùn thought that the root of the Chinese monastic problem lay in its erroneous interpretation of doctrine. As such, any positive transformation of Chinese Buddhism would require a critical reassessment of its fundamental teachings. In his critical analysis, Yinshùn examined the doctrinal foundation of Chinese Buddhism, that is, the theory of *tathāgata, garbha* (*rúláizàng* 如來藏) [4.1.1]. Since at least the 8<sup>th</sup>



6.4 Yinshùn

<sup>24</sup> On Yinshùn, see **NG Zhiru**, “Chinese Master Yinshun’s Study of Indian Buddhism: Significance of Historical (Re)construction for a Contemporary Buddhist Thinker” (MA thesis, Univ of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1993); **TIEN Po-Yao**, “A Modern Buddhist Monk—Reformer in China: The Life and Thought of Yinshun” (PhD diss, California Institute of Integral Studies, 1995); **Scott Christopher Hurley**, “A Study of Master Yinshun’s Hermeneutics: An Interpretation of the Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine” (PhD diss, Univ of Arizona, Tucson, 2001); & **Marcus Bingenheimer**, “Der Mönchsgelehrte Yinshun (PhD diss, Julius Maximilian Univ, Würzburg). See also **Charles B Jones**, “Stages in the Religious Life of Lay Buddhists in Taiwan,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 20,2 1997: 113-139. Yinshùn’s views on Humanistic Buddhism are more widely circulated through the 24-volume series titled *Miàoyún jí* (妙雲集). For his defence of Humanistic Buddhism, see **Shì Zhāohuì** 釋昭慧, *Rénjiān fójiào de bōzhǒng zhě* (人間佛教的播種者, “The Sower of the Seeds of a Humanistic Buddhism”) Taipei: Dongda, 1995. For a write-up on Yinshùn by his disciples, see <http://taipei.tzuchi.org.tw/tzquart/2002su/qs5.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> As a contemporary master, **Yinshùn** was most popularly known as the mentor of the nun Zhèngyán, the founder of Cǐjì Buddhist Foundation, as well as the teacher to several other monastics. Although closely associated with the Cǐjì Foundation, Yinshùn has a decisive influence on others of the new generation of Buddhist masters such as Shèngyán of Dharma Drum Mountain and Xīngyún of Fóguāng shān, who are active in humanitarian aid, social work, environmentalism, academic research, and missionary work.

<sup>26</sup> For an instructive study of Yinshùn, see **Scott Hurley**, “The doctrinal transformation of twentieth-century Chinese Buddhism,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 5,1 2004: 29-46, on which this section is critically based.

century, Buddhist sects such as the Huáyán 華嚴 have regarded *tathāgata,garbha* as the authoritative expression of truth and reality.

However, says Yinshùn, their interpretations of this doctrine *contradicted the basic Buddhist teachings of not-self and dependent origination* by suggesting the existence of both a permanent, underlying ground to reality and a stable, unchanging aspect of sentient nature. Yinshùn argues that these views lead to false practice which in turn hinders the practitioner's ability to attain awakening due to an enduring-self-view, the root of suffering. Instead, he proposes that the doctrine of emptiness is the definitive articulation of ultimate truth; for, it effectively deconstructs all notions of permanence, underscores the impermanent nature of the self, indicating the futility of self-grasping. Only in this way can the practitioner awaken.

Yinshùn regards these two ideas—the *tathāgata (rúlái 如來)* and the theory of “the selfhood of the *tathāgata,garbha*” (*rúláizàngwǒ 如來藏我*)—as playing crucial in the evolution of the *tathāgata,garbha* theory. Yinshùn's main approach to inculcating right view in Chinese Buddhism is the reassertion of the doctrine of emptiness (*kōng 空*, Skt *sūnyatā*) as the definitive expression of Buddhist truth, and relegating the *tathāgata,garbha* teaching to the category of skillful means. The study here is mainly based on Yinshùn's *A Study of the Tathāgata,garbha (Rúláizàng zhī yánjiū 如來藏之研究)*, his most exhaustive statement on the *tathāgata,garbha* and related doctrines.

**6.4.2 The nature of *sūnyatā*. Emptiness (*kōng 空*, Skt *sūnyatā*)** was a central teaching in Chinese Mahāyāna, but which was later overshadowed by the *tathāgata,garbha* theory. **Nāgārjuna** (Lóngshù 龍樹 c150-250 CE),<sup>27</sup> the founder of the Indian **Mādhyamika** (*Zhōngguān pài 中觀派*)<sup>28</sup> school, was highly regarded by Mahayanists in both India and China. In his most important work, the *Mūla,madhyamaka,-kārikā (Zhōngguān lùn 中觀論)* or *Kārikā* for short, he presents emptiness in three distinct, but related, ways, which can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The emptiness of self-nature (*svabhāva*). There is no separate independent existence: there is no *own-being*. Things are not only constantly changing, but exist only in dependence on other conditions, that are themselves composite and impermanent. This interdependence can also be expressed or understood by way of dependent arising (*yīnyuán 因緣*, Skt *pratītya,samutpāda*), which is really emptiness by another name.
- (2) The emptiness of views. All views are empty, that is, verbally and mentally constructed, referring to a dichotomy of either exist or not existing, being or nothing. Since all is interdependently conditioned, it all depends where we are looking, as the Buddha declares in **the Kaccāyana,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15):

...for one who sees *the arising of the world* as it really is with right wisdom, there is no notion of non-existence regarding the world.

And for one who sees *the ending of the world* as it really is with right wisdom, there is no notion of existence regarding the world. (S 12.15.5/2:17) = SD 6.13

Nāgārjuna opens his *Mūla,madhyamaka Kārikā* by alluding in verse to this canonical teaching:<sup>29</sup>

<i>anirodham anutpādam</i>	不生亦不滅 <sup>30</sup>	Not ceasing, not born,
<i>anucchedam aśāsvatam</i>	不常亦不斷	not annihilated, not eternal,
<i>anekārtham anānārtham</i>	不一亦不異	not distinct, not indistinct,

<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.iep.utm.edu/n/nagarjun.htm> & <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagarjuna>.

<sup>28</sup> See [http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id\('b4e2d-89c0-6d3e'\)](http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id('b4e2d-89c0-6d3e')).

<sup>29</sup> Nāgārjuna cites this sutta in *Madhyamaka Śāstra* 15.7. This verse can be taken as the essence or a summary of the teaching of **Kaccāyana,gotta S** (S 12.15/2:16 f) = SD 6.13.

<sup>30</sup> The last 2 line are not exactly cognate, with the pinyin, thus: (1) bù shēng yì bú miè; (2) bù cháng yì bú duàn; (3) bù yī yì bú yì; (4) bù lái yì bú chū; (5) néng shuō shì yīn yuán; (6) shàn miè zhū xì lùn; (7) wǒ qǐ shòulǐfó; (8) zhū shuō zhōng dì yī.



<i>anāgamam anirgamam</i>	不來亦不出	not coming, not going,
<i>yaḥ pratītya, samutpādam</i>	能說是因緣	the dependent arising,
<i>prapañcōpaśamaṁ śivam</i>	善滅諸戲論	the stilling of <i>prapañca</i> <sup>31</sup> that is happiness,
<i>desayāmāsa sambuddhaḥ</i>	我稽首禮佛	to the Self-awakened One who taught this,
<i>taṁ vande vadatām varam</i>	諸說中第一	I pay homage to that noble Speaker.

(Mūla, madhyamaka Kārikā 1.1; 中論觀因緣品第一;<sup>32</sup> T30.1564.1b10-17)

- (3) The emptiness of emptiness. Even the notion of “emptiness” only serves as a tool for letting go of attachment to views and notions of entity, so that we are established in the understanding that all things and thoughts lack self-nature. In the end, even the concept of emptiness has to be abandoned: it is, after all, a *concept*.

**6.4.3 Influence of *śūnyatā* on Chinese Buddhist philosophy.** The *śūnyatā* (emptiness) doctrine had a great impact on early Chinese philosophical thinking. As early as the 4th century, both the lay literati and gentry monks discussed *śūnyatā* in the context of “pure conversations” (*qīngtán* 清談).<sup>33</sup> Monks like Zhīdùn Dàolín 止頓道林 (314-366), Zhī mǐndù 支愍度 (fl 325-342), and Huiyuǎn 慧遠 (d 433) interpreted *śūnyatā* as it appeared in translations of the *Prajñā, pāramitā* literature in terms of a contemporary trend of “dark learning” or “mystery study” (*xuánxué* 玄學), which emphasized the relationship between “fundamental non-being” (*běnwú* 本無) and “final being” (*mòyǒu* 末有).<sup>34</sup> [5.2.4.6]

An appreciation of Nāgārjuna’s teaching on emptiness in its own right did not occur in China, however, until the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of Kumārajīva (344-413), a proponent of Mādhyamika thought. Kumārajīva’s first disciple was Sēngzhào 僧肇 (384-414) [4.1.2.9], who demonstrated in his various doctrinal expositions, namely,<sup>35</sup>

- (1) 般若無知論 “Prajñā Has No Knowing” (T45.1858.153a07-154c23) (c405),
- (2) 不真空論 “The Emptiness of the Non-Absolute” (T45.1858.152a01-153a06) (c409),
- (3) 物不遷論 “Things Do Not Shift” (T45.1858.151a08-151c29) (c410-411), and
- (4) 涅槃無名論 “Nirvana is Without Conceptualization” (T45.1858.157a12-157b26) (c412-413),<sup>36</sup>

giving a complete understanding of the “orthodox” (that is, Indian and Central Asian) view of *śūnyatā* and dependent arising (Robinson 1978).

<sup>31</sup> P *papañca*, ie mental proliferation: see **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18/1:108-114) esp SD 6.14 Intro (2).

<sup>32</sup> *Zhōnglùn ‘guān yīnyuánpīn dìyī*.

<sup>33</sup> *Qīngtán* was a social practice that began with Daoism during the Wèi-Jīn 魏晉 period (220-420) of the Northern dynasties *Běi cháo* 北朝 (386-577). The most prominent of these groups were the bohemian Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (see foll n). See Zürcher 1959: 117-119 & index: *Ch’ing-t’an*; see also Zürcher 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 1972 & Jong-in KIM 2002.

<sup>34</sup> The *Xuánxué* movement started around the time of the fall of the Later Han (25-220), and lasted for some two centuries. It served the literati as an escape from the troubled times, as well as a reaction against the dry scholasticism that had come to characterize Confucian thought, some of whom turned to the works of the ancient Daoist philosophers and the *Yijing* (Book of Changes). The escapist tone expressed itself most strongly in the “pure conversations,” involving most famously the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, a mostly fictitious sagely group famed for their care-free unconventional, even anarchist and amoral, behaviour. However, the *xuánxué* proper is properly represented by the writings of the Neo-Daoist philosopher Wáng Bì 王弼 (226-249), one of the founders of the movement, and Guō Xiàng 郭象 (252?-312), which was to prove the most significant. Their comys on the *Dàodé jīng* and the *Zhuāngzi* respectively, became the most influential written, while some of the terms and concepts they introduced were to inform much of later Chinese metaphysical thought. At the end of the Chin dynasty (265-420), the movement died out only to permeate the emergent Chinese Buddhism, leading esp to the rise of the *gōng’àn* 公案 [5.1.2.7]. After Zürcher 1959: 46, 87, 92, 137 f, 191 f; Dumoulin 1988: 65 f. See <http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/taoism/hsuan.html>.

<sup>35</sup> The pinyin of the titles are as follows: (1) *Bōrě wúzhī lùn*; (2) *Bù zhēn kōng lùn*; (3) *Wùbùqiān lùn*; and (4) *Nièpán wúmíng lùn*.

<sup>36</sup> T45.1858, where the sequence is (3), (2), (1), (4).

Despite the influence of the *sūnyatā* doctrine on the development of Buddhist philosophical speculation in China, in the late 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a fundamental shift in the Chinese Buddhist world-view, expressed by way of the uniquely Chinese schools of Buddhism, the Tiāntái and the Huáyán traditions [2.3.2]. This shift turned away from the negative dialectic of Nāgārjuna and focussed on the development of positive language for describing truth and reality.

Such thinkers as **Tiāntái Zhìyǐ** 天台智顓 (538-597) [2.6.4] and Huáyán's 3<sup>rd</sup> patriarch **Fàzàng** 法藏 (643-712)<sup>37</sup> understood or interpreted *tathāgata, garbha* in a fundamentally different way, merely as an expedient in their philosophical exposition. In early *tathāgata, garbha* texts, such as the *Tathāgata, garbha Sūtra* (*rúláizàng jīng* 如來藏經) [4.2.2.3], the concept signified the inherent capacity of sentient beings to attain Buddhahood. Later, it came to refer to an original pure essence intrinsic to all beings. This essence, known as Buddha-nature (*fóxìng* 佛性), becomes polluted by external defilements. Enlightenment occurs when these defilements are destroyed, thus uncovering the pure Buddha-nature (Ruegg 1969) [2.2.3]. The Chinese philosophers had smuggled the eternal-soul-view into their Buddhism.

**6.4.4 The dominant influence of *tathāgata, garbha*.** With the introduction of the **the Mahāyāna-śraddhōtpāda Śāstra** (大乘起信論)<sup>38</sup> into China, the *tathāgata, garbha* takes on a cosmological dimension: it is the substratum of samsara and nirvana, an immanent essence that pervades both the unawakened and the awakened states. Identified with the “one mind” of the *Awakening of Faith*, the *tathāgata, garbha* encompasses all aspects of both the phenomenal and transcendental. The Chinese Buddhists were drawn to the cosmological aspects of the theory because it resonates with indigenous Chinese religious and philosophical discourse, such as the Daoist idea of the “original pure essence” [2.2.3] and Confucian concepts like the “innate goodness of man.”<sup>39</sup> [2.3.2]

In the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Chinese Buddhist theologians merged the *tathāgata, garbha* doctrine with certain of their philosophical predispositions, resulting in a range of positive discourses that describe truth and reality: theories like the “Middle-way Buddha-nature” (*zhōngdào fóxìng* 中道佛性) of the Tiāntái and the “non-obstruction of principles and phenomena” (*lǐshì wúwù* 理事无碍) of the Huáyán.<sup>40</sup> “In its more hypertrophic expressions,” notes Scott Hurley, “such positive language perhaps led to the Japanese Buddhist theory of ‘original enlightenment’ (*hongaku shiso* 本覺思想), which insisted on the inherent (uncultivated and uncultivable) enlightenment of all things.” (2004: 32)

**6.4.5 *Tathāgata, garbha* and *ālaya, vijñāna*.** From the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries in China, the *tathāgata, garbha* idea underwent some challenges before it became fully accepted by the Chinese Buddhist elite as their definition of true reality. A dispute that arose at the start of the sixth century took the Chinese Buddhists more than two centuries to settle.<sup>41</sup> Two translator monks—the Indian Tantric master **Bodhi, ruci** (Pūtīliúzhī 菩提留支 d 527) and the Central Asian monk, **Ratna, mati** (Lènāmóti 勒那摩提 fl early 6<sup>th</sup> cent)—collaborated on a translation of Vasubandhu's *Daśa, bhūmika Sūtra Śāstra*.<sup>42</sup> The *Śāstra* described the ten stages through which a *bodhisattva* proceeded on the way to nirvana, and Vasubandhu's exposition of it highlighted aspects that were accorded most with the tenets of the Yogācāra school.

During the translating, an irreconcilable difference of interpretation arose between the two translators. Bodhiruci's reading followed a orthodox Yogācāra line, while Ratnamati's interpretation favoured the Buddhist ideology just beginning to receive attention in China, that is, the *tathāgata, garbha*. **Bodhi, ruci** and his camp advocated an “orthodox” interpretation of Yogācāra, basing himself on the Mādhyamika teaching of *sūnyatā*. The system postulated a storehouse consciousness (*ālāyē shì* 阿賴耶識 Skt: *ālaya, vijñāna*) [4.1.3.2] that acts as a repository of karmic seeds or impressions generated by past actions. The seeds then produce or influence new experiences. This consciousness, however, although fundamental to

<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.iep.utm.edu/f/fazang.htm> & [http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?6c.xml+id\("b6cd5-85cf"\)](http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?6c.xml+id().

<sup>38</sup> *Dàchéng qǐxìn lùn*, “the Mahāyāna Awakening of Faith” attr Aśvaghōṣa (T32.1666.575b-583b).

<sup>39</sup> See Williams 1989: 96-115, esp 109-112.

<sup>40</sup> See Faure 1993: 60.

<sup>41</sup> See <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/G002SECT4>.

<sup>42</sup> *Shídìjīng lùn* 十地經論, “Treatise on the Ten Stages Sutra,” or *Dìlùn* for short.

experience, is in a state of constant flux, continually regenerating and strengthening itself in response to attending conditions. As such, it has no independent, unchanging self nor is it an eternal entity. And, since the storehouse consciousness is the basis for continual rebirth in samsara, it must be eliminated in order to awaken.

**Ratna,mati**'s faction, on the other hand combined the concepts of the *ālaya, vijñāna* and the *tathāgata, garbha*, arguing that awakening consisted in purifying the *ālaya, vijñāna* rather than eliminating it. As with the *tathāgata, garbha*, one attains awakening by removing the defilements from the storehouse consciousness in order to uncover its pure and original nature, much like how one would remove dust from a mirror, thereby exposing its clean, reflecting surface.

Bodhi,rucci went on to translate some forty other texts, which were later embraced by both the Huáyán<sup>43</sup> and Pure Land traditions<sup>44</sup> as one of their early influences. Ratna,mati later collaborated with several other translators on a number of other texts. Both sides attempted to ground their positions on interpretations of key texts, especially the *Dilùn*. The Yogācāra versus Yogācāra-*tathāgata, garbha* conflict was one of the critical debates amongst 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century Chinese Buddhists.

**6.4.6 Challenges to the *tathāgata, garbha* theory.** In the late 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were two major philosophical trends within Chinese Buddhist thought: the first, according to **Dan Lusthaus**, is “the substantialistic non-dual metaphysic whose eternalistic ground was variously labelled Buddha-nature, mind, *tathāgata, garbha*, *dharmā, dhātu*, and suchness (Skt *tathatā*; Chin *rúlái*)” epitomized, for example, by Fāzàng and Ratna,mati's ideas [6.4.5]. The second philosophical trend, represented by Bodhiruci's views, was “an anti-substantialistic critique that eschewed any form of metaphysical reification, emphasizing emptiness as the absence of permanent selfhood or independent essence in anything” (Lusthaus 2000).

By the 8<sup>th</sup> century, however, the *tathāgata, garbha* tradition in its various forms (eg the Buddha-nature theory) had become the normative expression of Buddhist truth and the philosophical foundation of East Asia Buddhism. Mādhyamika philosophy, along with its teachings about emptiness and dependent arising, was subsumed under *tathāgata, garbha* thought.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Huáyán patriarch, **Zōngmì** (780-841) [4.3.3.1], for example, following the *Śrīmālā Sūtra*, regarded the *tathāgata, garbha* doctrine as the definitive teaching of Chinese Buddhism. The *śūnyatā* doctrine presented in the Perfection of Wisdom sutras did not emphasize the positive qualities of the *tathāgata*, but instead utilized negative language to refer to the absolute. As such, Zōngmì regarded the doctrine of *śūnyatā* as presented in the Perfection of Wisdom to be only provisional and therefore incomplete. For him, the *tathāgata, garbha* (that is, the absolute) described in the *Śrīmālā Sūtra*, both empty of defilements and full of Buddha qualities, is the perfect expression of reality.

Nevertheless, despite the privileged status held by the *tathāgata, garbha* theory in East Asia after the 8<sup>th</sup> century, it continued to face challenges in, for example, the debates in Japan in the 9<sup>th</sup> century between Saicho and Tokuitsu over whether or not all beings are destined for awakening (Swanson 1997). Even today, challenges are being made by scholars in Japan of a radical movement known as **Critical Buddhism** (*hihan bukkyo*), championed by the respected Japanese Buddhologists, Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō (Swanson 1997). These scholars argue that *tathāgata, garbha* thought advocates the existence of an objectively and palpably real fundament or essence—variously called *dharmā, dhātu*, *dharmā, kāya*, *tathāgata, garbha*, or Buddha-nature—which generates the plurality of experience.

Both Matsumoto and Hakamaya regard such traditions as fundamentally opposed to the Buddha's teachings of not-self and dependent arising (Swanson 1997). They insist that the true Buddhist teachings are those that Shākyamuni Buddha himself has taught, although the Mādhyamika presentation of emptiness is acceptable as well. Such concepts as the *tathāgata, garbha*, they contend, constitute the object of the Buddha's criticism and therefore should be rejected (Matsumoto 1997).

**6.4.7 Yinshùn's foresight.** Outside of Taiwan, Yinshùn is hardly known, especially since there are very few English translations of his works, and which are not easily available. Apparently, his works are

<sup>43</sup> [4.3.1]. See also <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/G002SECT8>.

<sup>44</sup> [3.4.4.4]. See also <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/G002SECT10>.

given only lip-service at best by Chinese readers—despite the fact that his works deal with some of the most vital Buddhist issues of our times. The point is that Yinshùn had already raised the key questions of “critical Buddhism” decades before his Japanese counterparts had done. However, Yinshùn, unlike the proponents of Critical Buddhism in Japan, has raised similar issues about the *tathāgata,garbha* theory *without* entirely abandoning it. Much like Hakamaya and Matsumoto, Yinshùn has taken a critical stance toward the *tathāgata,garbha* and Buddha-nature teachings in his writings. His inspiration comes from an in-depth study of Indian Buddhism, especially Mādhyamika philosophy and the doctrine of emptiness as interpreted by Candra, kīrti.

Yinshùn advocates the Mādhyamika teaching of the “fundamental emptiness of all things” as the definitive expression of Buddhist truth:

It [Nāgārjuna’s *Mūla, madhyamaka Kārikā*] certifies dependent origination, emptiness, and the Middle Path as the basic and profound meaning of the Buddhist teachings ... It takes the orthodox view of the Buddha Dharma and establishes it as the foundation for dependent origination and the Middle Way. (Yinshùn & Xu 1992)

Yinshùn explains that *tathāgata,garbha* is a useful provisional teaching, an expedient means (*fāngbiàn* 方便, Skt *upāya*). According to the doctrine of skillful means or expediency, the Buddha determines what he teaches his audience based on their level of wisdom and spiritual maturity. Only the most exceptional practitioners are able to directly and at once comprehend the truth fully directly. Since most would not see the truth at once, or even after a few times, the Buddha teaches them *provisional* truths, which would guide their practice until their mental and spiritual capacities are developed sufficiently to directly see true reality and win self-liberation.

Yinshùn contends that the Buddha teaches that there is the potential for Buddhahood—the *tathāgata,garbha*—found in all sentient beings, so as to ease their fears and concerns about emptiness and to encourage them to practise the Buddhist path (Yinshùn 1998). In other words, the *tathāgata,garbha* theory is a skilful means for correcting a specific problem faced by certain types of practitioners.

Those perceiving the abundance of their defilements or spiritual weakness may see *sūnyatā* as a very daunting view of reality. The *tathāgata,garbha* doctrine provides hope for such people it teaches that everyone has the potential for Buddhahood (Yinshùn 1992). The *tathāgata,garbha*, then, is a means to a spiritual end—that of truly seeing the ultimate truth of emptiness. As such, Yinshùn’s stand on the *tathāgata,garbha* theory differs from traditional Chinese interpretations. Instead of subsuming *sūnyatā* to the *tathāgata,garbha* teaching (as Zōngmì had done, for example) [6.4.6], Yinshùn does just the opposite and interprets *tathāgata,garbha* as being instrumental into bringing one to truly see emptiness.

**6.4.8 Yinshùn’s insight.** That Yinshùn regards as *sūnyatā* at the ultimate truth is not new to Chinese Buddhism. Kumārajīva and Sēngzhào championed this teaching as early as the 4th century [6.4.3]. But by the time of the Táng dynasty, the popular view was that the *tathāgata,garbha* was the ultimate reality, while emptiness was merely a provisional teaching, an expedient means (the reverse of Yinshùn’s view). According to this interpretation, *sūnyatā* or emptiness applied only to the moral and spiritual hindrances, not to the *tathāgata,garbha* itself.

In other words, defilements were regarded as empty of any permanent and independent existence, and as such were adventitious to the *tathāgata,garbha*, which is pure, joyful, permanent, and the true self. The goal of spiritual practice, then, was to abandon these defilements to uncover the *tathāgata,garbha*. From the Táng dynasty onwards, this was the dominant view in Chinese Buddhism.

Yinshùn, applying classical Buddhist hermeneutics, distinguishes between explicit [definitive] (*liǎoyì* 了義, Skt *nītārtha*) and implicit [indefinitive] (*bùliǎoyì* 不了義, Skt *neyārtha*) truth when discussing the relationship between the *tathāgata,garbha* and emptiness. Explicit teachings are those that present ultimate truth directly and precisely, “whose meaning is inherent,” that is, no elaboration is necessary. On the other hand, implicit teachings do not express ultimate truth explicitly, that is, “whose meaning needs to be drawn out.” They are useful for helping the mature practitioner overcome views that obstruct his progress on the Buddhist path, and expedite a more direct seeing the ultimate truth. [5.1.3.6]

As illustrated in the famous parable of the raft,<sup>45</sup> once they have served their purpose, they are discarded—once we have used a raft to cross a river, we leave it behind. According to Yinshùn, the *tathāgata, garbha* is a non-definitive teaching for the purpose of allay our fears about emptiness. However, he admits that important Buddhist texts such as the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, the *Tathāgata, garbha Sūtra*, and the *Śrīmālā Sūtra* present the *tathāgata, garbha* as undefiled and immutable. Indeed, he does not deny these teachings—he simply rejects that they are definitive statements of ultimate truth.

Yinshùn's presentation of the *tathāgata, garbha*, as such, differs not only from that of the post-Táng Chinese Buddhist philosophy, but also from that of the Critical Buddhism scholars in Japan. True to a monk's training, Yinshùn has taken a conciliatory approach to solving a sticky doctrinal problem. As **Scott Hurley** had noted,

While Yinshùn agrees that the emphasis on *tathāgata, garbha* theory as the definitive expression of Buddhist truth has serious problems and adamantly opposes any attempt to construe it as the ontological ground of phenomena, he is unwilling to regard it as a heterodox teaching. Rather, he only wishes to assert what he considers to be the appropriate interpretation of the doctrine, thereby focusing on its *soteriological* significance as a way for liberating beings incapable of understanding the doctrine of emptiness as taught in the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* and Mādhyamika treatises. (Hurley 2004:45)

### **6.4.9 After Yinshùn**

6.4.9.1 POST-YINSHÜN ERA? A very long monograph (in German) on Yinshùn was done by a Sino-Buddhologist, **Marcus Bingenheimer** (2004).<sup>46</sup> Beginning from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the pioneering works of Holmes Welch in the 1960s and 1970s, we see more scholars researching into modern Chinese Buddhism and the modernization of Chinese Buddhism. Taiwan had been a refuge for those monastics who fled mainland China in 1949, and soon became a fertile ground for developments towards a modern Chinese Buddhism. The visions and directions are as many as there are the monastics initiating them, the major ones being **Xīngyún** 星雲 (1927- ), **Wéijué** 惟覺 (1928- ), **Shèngyán** 聖嚴 (1930-2009), and the nun **Zhèngyán** 證嚴 (1937- ).<sup>47</sup> They are the founders of the Four Great Mountains (*sìdàshān* 四大山), that is, the four largest and most influential Buddhist organizations in Taiwan.<sup>48</sup> [7.5.1.6]

By the 1990s, the phenomenal successes of these leading figures and their organizations in revitalizing and redefining Taiwanese Buddhism began to attract the attention of a growing number of scholars (mostly western). There were studies on major figures such as **Tàixū** (1889-1947) [6.3], the inspiration of many of the Taiwanese Buddhist modernizers,<sup>49</sup> and **Xīngyún**, the founder of the *Fóguāng shān* (Buddha

<sup>45</sup> See **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22.13-14/1:134 f) = SD 3.13.

<sup>46</sup> Bingenheimer, “Der Mönchsgelahrte Yinshun (1906\*) und seine Bedeutung für den Chinesisch-Taiwanischen Buddhismus des 20. Jahrhunderts,” his philosophical diss at the Julius-Maximilians University, Würzburg, Germany. Eng title given in the abstract is *The Scholar-Monk Yinshun (\*1906): His Relevance for the Development of Chinese and Taiwanese Buddhism*. This section is based on Bingenheimer's abstract and Philip Clart's review (2005).

<sup>47</sup> The last-named is the founder of the Ciji Compassion Relief Foundation, *Ciji jījīnhui* 慈濟基金會. The official title of her organization is *Fójiào ciji gōngdéhuì* 佛教慈濟功德會 (The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Association), but the movement functions under many other names.

<sup>48</sup> For Buddhism in Taiwan, see **Charles Brewer Jones**, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990*, 1999, which focuses on key Chinese Buddhist thinkers and institutional history in relation to the state; see also his “Buddhism and Marxism in Taiwan: LIN Qiuwu's Religious Socialism and Its Legacy in Modern Times,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 1 2000: 82-111.

<sup>49</sup> See eg Gotelind Müller, *Buddhismus und Moderne: Ouyang Jingwu, Taixu und das Ringen um ein zeitgemäßes Selbstverständnis im chinesischen Buddhismus des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993; & Don Alvin Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, Honolulu: Univ of Hawai'i Press, 2001.

Light Mountain).<sup>50</sup> Overviews of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Taiwanese Buddhism were contributed by Marcus Günzel, by Charles B Jones, and by André Laliberté.<sup>51</sup>

Yinshùn, closely and systematically studied by **Bingenheimer** (2004), is not as prominent in the public view of Taiwanese Buddhism as Tàixū [6.3], but Yinshùn's impact on Chinese Buddhist scholarship and education is undeniable. A surrogate disciple of Tàixū [6.4.1], Yinshùn propagated his teacher's version of engaged Buddhism using the slogans, "humanize the Buddhist teachings and bring the bodhisattvas into this world,"<sup>52</sup> or "At all times do everything for Buddhism, everything for all sentient beings!"<sup>53</sup> and the catchword, "Buddhism for the Human Realm" (*rénjiān fójiào* 人間佛教) [3.4.4.5]. Bingenheimer's assessment of Yinshùn is, however, rather surprising:

Contrary to the opinion of most Buddhists on Taiwan, this dissertation [2004] argues that Yinshùn should in this respect be [296] seen rather as an epigone of his teacher Tàixū than as an original thinker. While Yinshùn has made a significant contribution to the Buddhist self-perception regarding history, he has only slightly changed the trajectory of Tàixū's ideas on a modernization of Buddhist practice. This is also attested by the fact that the emergence of a socially engaged Buddhism is a widespread phenomenon in the Buddhist world since the 19th century. Engaged Buddhism has many causes and variations; Yinshùn's contribution here is only a small part of a much larger story.

Yinshùn is a traditionalist and accepts in a conservative way the challenges of modern historiography to his tradition. Through his *implicit* reception of eg historicism or internationalism he has opened his tradition towards modernity. With his way of asking perhaps more than with his answers, Yinshùn has helped Chinese Buddhists to reinterpret as well as preserve their religion.

(Bingenheimer 2004 abstract)

Understandably, a good dissertation, or any academic paper—at least, presenting the academic truth—should hold a surprise or two, especially an opinion against the flow of popular view. Nevertheless, a scholar's opinion is necessarily subjective, at least until another scholar (or he himself) debunks it. My point here is that as a Chinese monk, Yinshùn, had obviously chosen to widen and deepen the well that he had drunk from, rather than colour himself more green than his teacher is blue (as the popular Chinese sayings go).

In fact, Yinshùn did have some "greenness," showing clearly against the "blue" of Tàixū. While Tàixū was deeply moved by the social trauma of the birth of a Communist China and the inner rot of the Chinese sangha, Yinshùn searched the scriptures for its remedy. Yinshùn saw himself merely as an intellectual reformer, seeking the roots of his faith, for ideas and inspiration to move others to Dharma-minded action.

<sup>50</sup> On Fóguāng shān, see **Stuart Chandler**, "Establishing the Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization" (PhD diss, Harvard Univ, 2000), Honolulu: Univ of Hawai'i Press, 2004; "Globalizing Chinese Culture, Localizing Buddhist Teachings: The Internationalization of Foguangshan," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 3 2002: 46–78.

<sup>51</sup> Marcus Günzel, *Die Taiwan-Erfahrung des chinesischen Sangha*, Göttingen: Seminar für Indologie und Buddhismuskunde, 1998; Charles B Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1600-1990*, Honolulu: Univ of Hawai'i Press, 1999; & André Laliberté, *The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan, 1989-2003: Safeguarding the Faith, Building a Pure Land, Helping the Poor*, London & NY: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

<sup>52</sup> See editorial: "Act like the bodhisattvas," *Tzu Chi Quarterly* (summer 2000: 1); cf Zhengyan, *Three Ways to the Pure Land*, tr LIN Senshou, Taipei: Tzu Chi Cultural Publishing, 2001: 58.

<sup>53</sup> *Shishikèkè wèi fójiào, wèi zhòngshēng* 時時刻刻為佛教，為眾生. These words were spoken by Yinshùn in 1963 to Zhèngyán to the self-renounced Wáng Jinyún 王錦雲 at refuge-taking ceremony, in Wisdom-Sun Lecture Hall (Huirì jiāngtáng 慧日講堂 Taipei): in full: "既然出家了，你要時時刻刻為佛教，為眾生" (*Jirán chūjiā le, nǐ yào...*, "Since you have left home [renounced], you must ..."): *Cìjì yǔhuì*, 慈濟語彙, ch 1 (*Guānniàn piān yī* 觀念篇一), series *Tán shī wén kù* 檀施文庫, *Cìjì wénhuà zhìyè zhōngxīn* 慈濟文化志業中心 1999. See also CB Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan*, 1999: 202; Jones' tr.

Yinshùn's original contribution lay in his *historical scholarship*. He had produced numerous studies on the historical development primarily of Indian Buddhism, which he saw as culminating in Nāgārjuna's *Mādhyamaka* philosophy. As early as in the 1930s and 1940s, Yinshùn had taken a broad non-sectarian view of Buddhist history, trying to locate and evaluate Chinese Buddhism within that broad perspective and bringing Chinese Buddhism back to the well, as it were. His methodology, as noted by **Philip Clart**, was

an interesting mix of Western historiographic approaches and traditional Buddhist models, which allows him to go beyond the received truths of tradition, even while harnessing the insights thus gained for very traditional purposes. For him, the knowledge gained through historical inquiry and text-critical scholarship is never an end in itself, but always a means to achieve deeper insight into the “Buddha dharma” (*fó fǎ*). (Clart, review of Bingenheimer, 2005: 1)

This point is clear in his seminal 1954 essay, *Yī fó fǎ yánjiū fó fǎ* 以佛法研究佛法 (“Studying Buddha Dharma by Means of Buddha Dharma”), which Bingenheimer has fully translated into German.<sup>54</sup> Here, we see Yinshùn at his canonical best, fervently responding to the Buddha's admonition to “practise the Dharma in keeping with the Dharma” (*dharmānudhammāṃ paṭipajjati*).<sup>55</sup> He did not take scholarship for itself, but as “spiritual theory” (*pariyatti*),<sup>56</sup> serving as a tool for attaining true wisdom. As an admirer of Nāgārjuna, Yinshùn regarded *wisdom* as the primary path towards awakening, superior to other methods, such as Pure Land devotion or Tantric rituals, which operate only at the level of “skilful means” (*upāya*) at best. Here we clearly see Yinshùn's originality in promoting wisdom, whereas his teacher, Tàixū, promoted the Pure Land school.

In Bingenheimer's systematic overview of Yinshùn's life and work, he focusses on his methodology and hermeneutics. Yinshùn, we are told, grew up intellectually in institutions inspired by Tàixū and honed his skills in the lively debates characteristic of the mainland Chinese in the 1930s and 1940s. After he had moved from Hong Kong to Taiwan (1953), he established two educational centres: the Fuyan Vihara (*Fúyán jīngshè* 福嚴精社) in Hsinchu and the Wisdom-Sun Lecture Hall (*Huìrì jiǎngtáng* 慧日講堂) in Taipei. In 1980, he founded a publishing house, the *Zhèngwén chūbǎnshè* 正聞出版社. As **Clart** notes,

The size of these institutions is very modest when compared to the facilities of the Four Major Mountains, but this just serves to demonstrate further that Yinshùn's real influence is in the realm of ideas rather than that of organizations. And his ideas certainly have made themselves felt, directly through Yinshùn's publications and lectures, and indirectly through his very active disciples who have been inspired by them to strike out on their own in various directions, in the process often going beyond the positions of their master. (Clart 2005: 2)

Bingenheimer mentions the debate about the Eight Rules of Respect (*bājìngfǎ* 八敬法),<sup>57</sup> which codify the subordination of nuns to the monks.<sup>58</sup> In an unprecedented move, several of Yinshùn's female stud-

<sup>54</sup> Bingenheimer 2004: 284-301 (app).

<sup>55</sup> Numerous citations, eg D 2:214 (×2), 215; M 1:512 (×2); A 1:36 (×2), 3:176 (×2), 4:392 (×2); Sn 317, p218.

<sup>56</sup> This is the first of the threefold “true Dharma” (*saddhamma*), namely, the true Dharma of study (*pariyatti*), *saddhamma*), the true Dharma of practice (*paṭipatti*, *saddhamma*), and the true Dharma of realization (*paṭivedha*, *saddhamma*) (VA 225; AA 5:33). Cf the twofold teachings, viz the teaching as study (*pariyatti*, *sāsana*) and the teaching as practice (*paṭipatti*, *sāsana*) (Nm 143).

<sup>57</sup> These are the “eight heavy rules” (*aṭṭha, garu, dhamma*) (V 2:253-256; A 8.51/4:274-279): see **Dakkhiṇa-vibhaṅga S** (M 142) = SD 1.9 Intro (2.4). The feminist activism is significant in at least two ways: (1) Buddhism in Taiwan is seeing itself breaking away from the immanence of Confucian values within Chinese Buddhism; and (2) the nuns are responding to the worldliness of the monks, very common today (see eg **Money and Monastics** = SD 4.19 (9.3) on the monks Mingyi and Meow Ee, taken to court over money issues). However, the abrogating of these rules is a great controversy in itself, as they are said to be instituted by the Buddha himself. On the other hand, Mahāyāna, as a religion (or sub-family of a family of religions) in its own right, can make its own decision without affecting other Buddhisms.

ents, led by the activist nun Zhāohuì, are extremely vocal in calling for the abolition of these rules, thereby going much further than Yinshùn would in such a bold and public manner.<sup>59</sup>

Yinshùn's birthday is annually celebrated with major scholarly symposia, one of which Sinologist **Philip Clart** attended in the spring of 2002 at the Academia Sinica in Taipei, where he reports that

some scholars are speaking of the dawn of a “post-Yinshun era.” However, I suspect that Yinshun would see the fact that his work is slowly being superseded by the efforts of a new generation of nuns and monks as proof of his ultimate success. If scholarship and mental effort are the path to awakening, then he could never wish to have his findings enshrined as final, sacred truth. True disciples will show their mettle by taking the master's ideas and going beyond them, much as Yinshun did in his relationship with Taixu. (Clart 2005: 2)

6.4.9.2 FORGETTING THE WELL? Past teachers are deeply respected by Chinese Buddhists, and ancestors are universally venerated. Perhaps because of such a sentiment is so universal that those with great ambition or in high places, see this as an effective tool for propagating their own ideas. We see consistent evidence in Chinese Buddhist history for such *a pattern of how the past is used, usually modified, even fabricated, to promote the present.*

While **Xuánzàng** (600-644) and **Kuījī** (632-682) lived, for example, the great master's ideas were popular, or at least respected, but with the passing of the two masters, the Mere Consciousness school rapidly declined and was practically pushed aside [4.1.3.2]. Another great master, **Huìyuǎn** (334-416) promoted his own ideas to supersede those of his predecessor [4.1.3.3].

Similarly, **Yuánwù Kèqín** (1063-1135), in his own life-time, taught, following early Buddhist principles, that the “feeling of doubt” (*yíqíng* 疑情) was a hindrance to spiritual growth. But, after him, his disciple, Dàhuì Zōnggǎo (1089-1163) turned his own master's teaching on its head, and taught that doubt was the principal force for enlightenment [5.1.3.1].

Both Shénhuǐ and Dàhuì had no qualms over quoting and alluding to scripture, stringing them conveniently together, without identifying their sources, and used such words as if they were their own words to impress their followers and audience. Or, they would only quote the sources when they apparently supported their views. Understandably, such an exploitation of scripture meant that they were often not only quoted out of context, but also misquoted. Their idea was not to teach or preserve the ancient texts, but to use these texts at their convenience.<sup>60</sup>

This vicious cycle is still going on, especially amongst those of us with a great zeal for success (insert your own goal here) without sufficient Dharma training or lacking Dharma inspiration. A common habit that is insidious to Buddhism prevalent even today is that of Buddhist pirating. For example, we have the habit of “quoting” Buddha, or a teacher, or “a sutra,” without exactly citing the source. Or, when we like a term, passage, idea or work of someone else's, we often simply use them without any acknowledgement, using it as if it is our own. There are even occasions when a book or recording is reproduced for general distribution with the author's name deleted, and bearing only the temple or group name.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> I think here it is more relevant and liberating to discuss what really constitutes a legitimate “monk” so that society is not misled by external appearances, and that false monastics be treated for what they are, and also be subjected to the law, such as being liable for taxation, etc.

<sup>59</sup> Elise A DeVido, “Buddhist nuns in Taiwan and Sri Lanka: A Critique of the feminist perspective—by Wei-Yi Cheng,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34,4 2007: 640-645.

<sup>60</sup> See Mario Poceski, “Attitudes towards canonicity and religious authority in Tang Chan,” 2002: 10-12.

<sup>61</sup> In June 1978, a small group of Malaysian youth leaders (led by Charlie Chia) from the Sunday Dharma school of a very well known foreign Buddhist mission in KL approached me requesting permission the use of my Integrated Syllabus (with 31 mimeographed textbooks, covering 3 stages). Chia told me the mission had run out of ideas for Buddhist education, but was instructed by the Sinhala monk principal that the Syllabus could only be used if the author's name is completely omitted! I agreed to it: see Piyasilo, *Buddhist Culture*, 1988g: 185 f; *Total Buddhist Work*, 1983: 184-221. Some years later, the same mission reproduced a Great Compassion Mantra audiotape (recited by some of his lay followers and myself), that is, after removing the original labelling, pasted their own on it, and sold it. For examples of copyright laws, see <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/>.



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Then, there is the notorious case of Hézé Shénhuì (688-762) [5.2.3], who, jealous of the empress Wǔ Zétiān's patronage of **Yùquán Shénxiù** (605-706) and the East Mountain School [5.2.1.2], fabricated a "history" of Chán around Huinéng (638-713), proclaiming him as the sixth patriarch (to promote his Southern School), and successfully knocked Shénxiù out of the Chán scene for centuries, that is, until our times [5.2.4.1].

The teacher had put himself above the teaching! Buddhism had become a fashion, modified and fabricated at the whim of the master, and the masses simply followed like sheep led by a shepherd.

Master Yinshùn was painfully aware of such developments and cycles in Chinese Buddhist history. As such, he took pains to skilfully remind us to look at Buddhism as a living spirituality, not as fashionable innovations or mere worldly "skilful means." The great Mahāyāna master reminds us to remember our spiritual roots, or remember the well we all, knowingly or unknowingly, have drunk from. In his important work, *Fófǎ shì jiùshì zhī guāng* (佛法是救世之光 *The Dharma is the Light that Saves the World*), Yinshùn remarks:

若不學小乘 而修學大乘， 自行教他， 自己與佛教， 都要走入岔道了！	<i>ruò bù xué xiǎochéng ér xiūxué dàchéng zì xíng jiāo tā zìjǐ yǔ fójiào dōuyào zǒurù chàdào le</i>	If we do not study the Hīnayāna, but cultivate and learn Mahāyāna (only), then teaching others by yourself— you yourself and Buddhism— both will surely be lost on a side-road!
學大乘法的， 容易走此邪道。 這是離開聲聞、 緣覺法 而學大乘 所起的過失。	<i>xué dàchéngfǎ de róngyì zǒu cǐ xiédào zhè shì líkāi shēngwén yuánjué fǎ ér xué dàchéng suǒ qǐ de guòshī</i>	Those studying Mahāyāna easily go the wrong way. This is to divert from Śravakayāna <sup>62</sup> (and) dependent arising: studying Mahāyāna this way is a mistake. (Yinshùn, <i>Fófǎ shì jiùshì zhī guāng</i> , 1973: 88 f)

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<sup>62</sup> "The path of the disciples," ie the direct (arhat) disciples of the Buddha, and by extension, the saints of the path.