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Conclusion: Going back to the source

Contemporary developments in Chinese Buddhism
by Piya Tan ©2008 (2nd rev), 2009 (3rd rev)

7.1 HOW BUDDHISM CHANGED THE CHINESE LANGUAGE

So far we have examined Buddhism in Chinese from its beginnings to today, not so much in a historical sequence, as by way of social themes and historical patterns. Here, by way of conclusion, we shall look at Buddhist presence in Chinese culture (especially language), the inherent resilience of Buddhism as a religion (surviving religious plagiarism, persecutions and political challenges). We will close with an overview of the preceding chapters, and finally reflect on the purpose behind this book.

The renowned Sinologist **Victor H Mair**, in his monumental edition of *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, writes of Buddhism's contribution to China in these words:

With the advent of Buddhism in China, however, a sea change occurred in language and literature. The remarkable linguistic and literary transformations precipitated by Buddhism can be subsumed under the following rubrics:

- (1) partial legitimization of the vernacular;
- (2) enlargement of the lexicon by at least thirty-five thousand words, including many that are still in common use (eg *fāngbiàn* 方便) [convenient; from Sanskrit, *upāya*, skill-in-means] and *chànà* 刹那 [“instant, moment,” from Sanskrit, *kṣaṇa*];
- (3) sanctioning of literature for its own sake;
- (4) promotion of literary theory and criticism;
- (5) advancement of phonology as a type of linguistic science and as applied to prosody (eg direct involvement in the rise of *lǜshī* 律詩 [regulated verse];
- (6) promotion of new modes of thought, in particular, ontological presuppositions that permitted unabashed fictionalizing;
- (7) the prosimetric (chantefable [*táncí* 彈詞])¹ narrative form; and
- (8) stage conventions that became pervasive in the theater. (Mair 2001: 56 f)

In short, Buddhism contributed richly to Chinese society, especially her culture and language. In an overview of the work of Victor H Mair, who specializes in early vernacular Chinese, his students, **Boucher, Schmid and Sen** write:

In his article “Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia: The Making of National Languages,”² Victor [Mair] develops in full a theory of how Buddhism helped to legitimate a written vernacular and how that evolution was circumscribed by, among other factors, the dominance of the character as found in literary Sinitic (*wényánwén* 文言文).³ Buddhism's impulse to spread the word of the Buddha in the demotic mode was instrumental in fostering China's written vernacular. Victor argues that the foreign or peripheral was also central, indeed doubly so,

¹ The *táncí* is a ballad usu in a south Chinese dialect, often accompanied on the *sānxián* 三弦 (3-stringed lute,) or the *pípá* 琵琶 (4-stringed lute). It is a type of *shuōchàng wénxué* 說唱文學, narrated and sung literature, eg, LU Gong 路工 (ed), *Liáng-Zhù gùshì shuōchàng jí* 梁祝故事說唱集 [Collection of prosimetric narratives of the Liang-Zhu story], Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1955; Zhōu Jìngshū 周靜書 (ed), *Liáng-Zhù wénhuà dàguān* 梁祝文化大觀 [Compendium of Liang-Zhu culture], 4 vols, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000. A “chantefable” is a narrative (usu a mediaeval tale) of alternating sections of sung verse and recited prose.

² In *Journal of Asian Studies* 53,3 Aug 1994: 707–51.

³ In his ch entitled, “Language and Script,” in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001: 56 f, Mair outlines seven major areas where Buddhism permanently altered China's language and literature.

to the formation of China's written vernacular as a national language (*guóyǔ* 國語) [simplified 国語]. Although Buddhism brought with it a concept of the valorized local language (*deśa-bhāṣā*) which legitimated the creation of a written vernacular, the domination of literary Sinitic with its grounding in sinographs impeded this process in China. In the early-twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals turned to the examples of written vernaculars that did develop in East Asia, notably in Japan, for inspiration in the formation of China's own official written language.

(Boucher, Schmid & Sen 2006:4; diacritics normalized)

7.2 POSITIVE CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHINESE

7.2.1 A sinless language. There is no human culture without language, which provides the communication and cooperation possible for civilization to occur. But language is more than just a means of communication. Language not only influences our culture, but shape our thought processes and colour our perception. Language is also the mirror of a culture, wherein we see our true image, especially when it is our mother tongue or first language.

Our language is the only common tool we have for expressing, recording and perpetuating our cultural experiences. The Chinese language, as we have seen, is *pictorial, practical, and positive* [2.6.1]. In fact, so positive is the Chinese language that it has no word of “sin,” a term used mainly to describe an act that violates a moral rule or commandment decreed by a divine entity, a God. This linguistic strength of the Chinese has frustrated and despaired sin-mongering evangelists who have failed to introduce sin into China. CHUANG Tsu-kung, an active itinerant evangelist in North America, once wrote of the difficulty of conveying the Biblical notion of sin to the mainland Chinese, since their language and culture lack a suitable word for “sin.”⁴

The advent of Buddhism into China was serendipitously prepared by the positive richness of Daoist philosophy, and the pragmatic structuralism of Confucian ethics. But it is on account of the “sinlessness” of the Chinese language that positive and pragmatic ideas of Buddhism were very easily accepted by the Chinese. That understanding allowed them to successfully indigenize Buddhism as social exigencies and political realities demanded. All this led to Buddhism becoming the most successful religion, albeit an imported one, in China.

7.2.2 A centralized culture. Unlike in Japan, where Buddhism was from its inception 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 monks, 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) [4.3.3.5]

Above all, the Chinese mostly looked to Buddhism for answers to questions that they found relevant. They approached Chinese translations of Buddhist texts *not so much 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)

An important indicator of how well Buddhism has been indigenized and how well the natives accept Buddhism is how they address the monastic Sangha, who are religiously and socially the best representative of the faith. Honorific titles associated with Mahāyāna monastics typically include, in Chinese, *fāshī* 法師 (Dharma master) or *chánshī* 禪師 (Chán master); in Korean, *sunim* 스님 (venerable monk), or *seon sa* 선사 (Chán master); in Japanese, *osho* 和尚 (venerable monk), *roshi* 老師 (teacher), or *sensei* 先生

⁴ Chuang Tsu-kung, “Communicating the concept of sin in the Chinese context,” 1996.

(master); and in Vietnamese, *thầy* (teacher). It should be noted however that many of these titles are not specific to Chán or Zen but are used generally for Buddhist priests, and that some, such as *sensei* are not even specific to Buddhism.

7.3 SKILLFUL MEANS

7.3.1 Manichaeism. The Buddhism that was transplanted into China through the early centuries came from India, Iran and Central Asia. The Chinese soil nourished it with local nutrients so that Buddhism was no more exotic but grew into a Chinese tree and flowered richly. China was not alone in borrowing from Buddhism and making all things new. Ancient **Manichaeism** (*Móníjiào* 摩尼教)—a Gnostic religion founded by Mani (c210-276), living in Babylon—borrowed heavily from other religions, especially Buddhism.⁵

The Manichees, for example, called their founder, “Buddha” Mani. They accepted the notion of rebirth (but with a soul). The fourfold structure of the Manichee community, divided between male and female monks (the “elect”) and lay followers (the “hearers”) who supported them, are clearly based on that of the Buddhist sangha.⁶ Mani’s death was referred to as his “nirvana.”

Such comprehensive borrowings did not cause any identity crisis in Manichaeism mainly because the Manichees gave allegorical interpretations of their own to the borrowed ideas, terms and stories. These ideas were used in their teachings and given their own interpretations.⁷

Manichaeism was clearly popular among the Sogdian merchants and there were attempts to win Chinese converts. In 731, a Manichean priest in China was asked to provide a summary of the main tenets of his religion. Interestingly, the version of the summary (the *Compendium of the Teachings of Mani the Buddha of Light*) which was found among the Dūnhuáng documents brought back by Aurel Stein, shows clear attempts to depict Manichaeism as a form of Buddhism, since Mani was presented as an avatar or reincarnation of **Lǎozǐ** [1.1].

On the other hand, some Daoists claimed that **Lǎozǐ** did not die but had gone west (to India) where he reappeared as the Buddha. The response of the Táng government to the *Compendium* was Xuánzōng edict of 732, which restricted Manichaeism to the foreigners in China but preaching it to the Chinese was proscribed. By then, a substantial number of Manichee texts had already been translated into Chinese from Parthian and Sogdian, a practice forbidden after the reign of empress Wǔ.

7.3.2 Assimilation through translation. We have taken a panoramic view of the spread of Buddhism in China, looking in some detail at a few important foreign and Chinese monks, the problems they faced and their successes, the process and problems of translating Indic texts into Chinese and how Buddhism became an important part of Chinese culture. One of the key reasons for Buddhist growth beyond India was the Buddha’s injunction that his Teachings should be taught and learnt in “one’s own language” (*sakāya niruttyā*, V 2:139), without any preference of a “sacred language.” The translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese was a vital factor in the Chinese successful assimilation of Buddhism [2.6.1].

With the exception of Kumārajīva and a few thoroughly sinicized masters, the term “missionary” can hardly be applied to them: they had very little in common with the Christians (who controlled the whole process of Bible translation, editing and publishing, and interpretation of dogmas). With only a few exceptions, the foreign Buddhists were involved only in the first stage, the furnishing of raw materials. All the rest was initiated by the Chinese, and digested by posterity.

The difference is significant, for it may go part of the way toward explaining why the Jesuit mission failed, and Buddhism was to stay in China. (Zurcher 1993:59)⁸

⁵ See eg David A Scott, “Manichaean views of Buddhism,” *History of Religions* 25,2 Nov 1985: 95-115.

⁶ See Richard Foltz, “Religions of the Silk Road,” London & NY, 1999.

⁷ See MN Walter 2006: 54 f.

⁸ It is instructive to have some understanding of the “Chinese rites controversy” that, by a papal faux pas, or we might say, serendipity, abruptly and virtually ended Catholic influence in pre-modern China:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesuit_China_missions.

7.4 ANTI-BUDDHIST COUNTER-CURRENTS

For Buddhism to have an effective presence in a culture or community, its followers must, most importantly, be able to adapt themselves socially, that is, reach out to the common people as well as the intelligentsia (the educated elite). Buddhism cannot afford to be politicized. Throughout Buddhist history, we see that whenever Buddhism joined hands with the powers that be, it would invariably pay a very high price, even at the cost of its own social death. However, equipped with true Buddhist spirituality, Buddhism has greater chance of growing and benefitting the country.

7.4.1 Persecutions of Buddhists. Buddhism in China suffered four imperial persecutions. The first three were, ironically, perpetrated by emperors whose temple or posthumous names bore the character Wǔ武! As such, they were known as **the Three Wǔ Calamities** (*Sānwǔ zhīhuò* 三武之禍). These persecutions were followed by a fourth calamity in the Later Zhou period.

7.4.1.1 THE FIRST CALAMITY OF Wǔ began in 446, when emperor **Tàiwǔ** 太武 (408-452) of Northern Wei (Běiwèi 北魏), a devout Daoist follower of the Northern Celestial Masters (*Tiānshīdào* 天師道)⁹ was fighting the Xiōngnú 匈奴 rebel Gěwú 蓋吳. During the campaign, weapons were found in Buddhist temples, which led him to believe that Buddhists were against him. With encouragement from his prime minister, Cūihào 崔浩 (d 450), also a devout Daoist, Tàiwǔ ordered Buddhism abolished under penalty of death, and slaughtered the Buddhists in the Guānzhōng 關中 region,¹⁰ the center of Gai's rebellion. The ban against Buddhism was relaxed in the emperor's later years, and officially ended after his grandson, emperor Wénchéng 文成 (440-465), a Buddhist, ascended the throne in 452.

7.4.1.2 THE SECOND CALAMITY OF Wǔ was carried out on two separate occasions, one in 574 and one in 577, when **emperor Wǔ of Northern Zhōu** (Běizhōu Wǔdì 北周武帝 543-578) banned both Buddhism and Daoism, whom he believed had become too wealthy and powerful. He ordered the monastics of both religions to return to lay life, to increase military manpower supply and boost the economy. It is uncertain when exactly this relatively bloodless suppression officially ended, but was probably over by the time that his son, emperor Xuān 宣 (559-590) ascended the throne in 578.

7.4.1.3 THE THIRD CALAMITY OF Wǔ was carried out by the 13th Táng emperor, **Wǔzōng** 武宗 (r 840-846), a zealous Daoist. He was one of the last Táng emperors, who tried to consolidate his empire during a long period of decline. From 841 to 845, the emperor persecuted the followers of Nestorian Christianity, Islam, Judaism,¹¹ Manichaeism [7.3.1] and Zoroastrianism¹² so that they never again played any significant role in Chinese religious life.

In 843, his armies won a decisive battle against the Uighur tribes, but almost bankrupted the country. For the last 20 months of his life, the emperor launched the Huìchāng or “Great Anti-Buddhist” Persecution,¹³ reaching its height in **845**, in an effort to build his war funds by seizing the great wealth accumulated by the Buddhist monasteries that had been enjoying tax-exempt status, and also to drive foreign influences from China. Wǔzōng forced all Buddhist monastics to return to lay life, while others went into hiding.

The proscription allowed only two Buddhist temples in the main capital Cháng'ān and the subsidiary capital Luòyáng, and the large municipalities were each allowed to maintain one temple with no more

⁹ Greatly influenced by Buddhism, the Northern Celestial Masters adopted monasticism and a special diet. The art in areas dominated by them also show Buddhist influence (such as the use of Buddha statues). The Xīshēng jīng 西昇經 (The Scripture of Western Ascension), one of the school's most important texts, recounts **Lǎozī**'s emigration to India: see Livia Kohn, “Xisheng Jing,” in Fabrizio Pregadio (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, London: Routledge 2008: 1114-1115. For refs, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Northern_Celestial_Masters.

¹⁰ Covering central Shaanxi and the extreme west of modern Henan. The capital of Shaanxi is Xi'an (ancient Cháng'ān).

¹¹ See Tiberiu Weisz, *The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions: The Legacy of the Jewish Community in Ancient China*. NY: iUniverse, 2006.

¹² Interestingly, Chinese records of the times regarded Zoroastrianism and Christianity as heretical forms of Buddhism!

¹³ *Huìchāng fèifó* 會昌廢佛; for refs, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Anti-Buddhist_Persecution.

than 20 monks. More than 4,600 temples were destroyed through the empire, and more than 260,000 monastics were forced to return to civilian life.

Several reasons led to the persecution of the Buddhists, or more correctly, the Buddhist monasteries, which lasted right through the Sòng dynasty. These institutions had accumulated great wealth and as such attracted many people to join them, many of whom did so to escape conscription (military service) or evade taxation. The rise in the number of temples and monastics put economic pressure on the state (especially through loss of manpower and land). A third reason was the rise of the Neo-Confucians, who wrote manifestos against Buddhism, which they viewed as a foreign religion, believing that the Buddhist egalitarian philosophies destroyed the social system of duty and rights of the Chinese class system.

Despite his reforms, even resorting religious persecutions to cut down the power of Buddhism and other religions, he was unable to strengthen the empire.¹⁴ The Buddhist persecution ended with the emperor's death in 846. The new emperor, **Xuánzōng** (r 846-859, Wǔzōng's uncle), was more tolerant of Buddhism and even helped revive it by issuing a toleration edict. Wǔzōng's persecution (prior to the infamous Cultural Revolution of 1966-69), was the worst, from which Chinese Buddhism never really recovered.

7.4.1.4 THE HUÁNG CHÁO 黃巢 REBELLION of 875-884 seriously weakened the once mighty Táng dynasty. Its leader, **Huáng Cháo** 黃巢 (d 884), was an intelligent and ambitious young man who, after failing in the government examinations, turned to illegal salt trading. When in the 870s, a severe drought and famine struck northern and central China, most of the starving populace formed or joined criminal gangs. The main actors of the uprising were the salt traders Wáng Xiānzhī 王仙芝, Huáng Cháo 黃巢 and Shàngàng 尚讓 in the region of Hénán 河南, in central China (especially the first two). Their combined peasant army was far larger and stronger than those of previous rebellions.

It was Huáng Cháo who, becoming the rebel confederation's leader, emerged the strongest, and within a few months of 878-879, he controlled the whole northern region, conquered the capitals Luòyáng 洛陽 and Cháng'ān 長安, and even advanced far south to Guǎngzhōu 廣州. In 881, when Huáng Cháo proclaimed himself emperor of the new Qí dynasty 齊, emperor Xīzōng 僖宗 (like emperor Xuánzōng 玄宗 some 125 years before) had to flee to Chéngdū 成都 in Sichuan. The remaining Táng troops, under Zhèng Tián 鄭畋 and Zhūwēn 朱溫 (852-912, later called Zhū Quánzhōng 朱全忠) and Turkish troops under Lǐ Kèyòng 李克用, liberated Cháng'ān and drove the rebels back to the east. Huáng Cháo, however, was very tyrannical, and rapidly lost all support. He was dislodged from Cháng'ān in 883, and was killed in 884.¹⁵

Although the Huáng Cháo rebellion occurred on a comparatively smaller scale than the An Lushan rebellion [5.2.3.4], it subsequently led to the downfall of weakening Táng Dynasty. In 907, Huáng Cháo's former general, **Zhū Quánzhōng** (Zhūwēn), a *jiédùshǐ* (節度使, military governor) at the end of the Táng dynasty, overthrew the Táng dynasty, and established the Later Liáng Dynasty (Hòuliáng 後梁 907-923), ushering in the tumultuous era of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (*Wúdài shíguó* 五代十國 907-960). The Huáng Cháo rebellion was of great sociopolitical significance as it devastated north China, not only causing political turmoil, but also destroying the social infrastructure on which institutional Buddhism depended for its existence.¹⁶

7.4.1.5 THE FOURTH PERSECUTION OF BUDDHISTS IN CHINA occurred in 955, when emperor **Shìzōng** 世宗 (r 954-959) of the Later Zhou Dynasty (Hòuzhōu 後周, 951-960),¹⁷ needing copper to mint coins, issued an edict ordering Buddha statues be smelted for their copper. There was also a death penalty for anyone illegally possessing more than five *jīn* 斤 (roughly 2.5 kg) of copper, with lesser weights entailing lesser penalties. However, it is unclear how many Buddhist monks, nuns, or lay persons were executed as

¹⁴ Interestingly, a similar move in Tokugawa Japan (1600-1867) succeeded in weakening the Buddhist influence in Japan, so that it was never again as powerful as before. See Piya Tan, "Buddhism in Japan," in *History of Buddhism*, 2004 §12: see <http://pali.house.googlepages.com/historyofbuddhism>. See also James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and its persecution*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ Press, 1990.

¹⁵ *Cambridge Encyclopedia of China*, 2nd ed 1991: 173.

¹⁶ See Weinstein 1987: 147; FW Mote, *Imperial China 900-1800*, Harvard Univ, 1999; McRae 2003: 111 f.

¹⁷ Simplified 后周 HòuZhōu,

a result of such edicts. Although the traditional records did not mention any massacre, they gave conflicting accounts on whether there was any suppression of Buddhist doctrines or practice.

The *Zīzhì Tōngjiàn* 資治通鑑¹⁸ and the *Xīn Wǔdài Shǐ* 新五代史¹⁹ suggest the lack of suppression of doctrines and practices, although the *Xīn Wǔdài Shǐ* indicated that people who had dependents were disallowed from becoming monastics.²⁰ The (Old) *Wǔdài Shǐ*²¹ indicates that there were destructions of temples, and forced return to lay life of monastics whose vows were not approved by their parents.²² According to the *Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism*, emperor Shizōng destroyed 3,336 of China's 6,030 Buddhist temples.²³

7.4.2 Resilience of the Buddhists. Except for occasional fragmentation, China had mostly been a centralized state. Chinese Buddhism might be said to progressively grow over the centuries and reached a cultural peak in the early Táng period with **Xuánzàng** 玄奘 (602?-664). However, as early as the 5th century, Buddhism was officially persecuted in Northern Wei, and then in the 6th century in Northern Zhou. The worst imperial persecution of the Buddhists was in late Táng (845) [7.4.1.3], which effectively and permanently weakened Chinese Buddhism. Weak as it was, Buddhism was further persecuted in Later Zhou (955). The common and main reason for all four imperial persecutions was *economic*. Under such terrible calamities, many would have lost faith in the religion, while those who remained faithful were left wondering why they were persecuted and how to regain their strength as Buddhists.

Buddhists in **Japan** were persecuted during the Tokugawa era (1600-1867), when it became nationalized as part of the state apparatus to maintain internal stability and keep out Christianity. The Japanese Buddhists were further weakened during the Meiji era (1868-1912), when Shintoism became the state religion. Then came a national calamity, when Japan surrendered at the end of World War II (1945), which also marked the end of emperor-worship: the Japanese psyche was uprooted.

The post-war period was followed by the rise of many “new religions” (Shinshūkyō or Shinkō shūkyō), all of which tried to provide some kind of self-empowerment and quick solutions to immediate problems. On the positive side, the old monasteries, by then fully secularized, turned themselves into Buddhist colleges and then into universities well known to this day.²⁴

In **Korea**, Buddhism was totally devastated during the Yi²⁵ dynasty (1392-1909), which adopted Confucianism as the state ideology. In 1424, the Korean king, Sejong, allowed only 36 monasteries, and two orders (the contemplative Sŏn and the doctrinal Kyo). In 1623, king Injo banned Buddhist monastics from entering the capital, where all the monasteries were turned into Confucian halls, and also banned ordinations. In 1765, king Yongjo ordered all ancestral tablets to be removed from the remaining monasteries.

During the Japanese Occupation (1910-1915), the two orders were merged into one, the Cho-ke-jong (1911). Shintoism was forced onto the populace. The Japanese Buddhist missionaries who came, in turn,

¹⁸ **The *Zīzhì Tōngjiàn*** 資治通鑑, simplified 资治通鉴, lit, “Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government” was a pioneering reference work in Chinese historiography. Emperor Yīngzōng 英宗 of Sòng ordered Sīmǎ Guāng 司馬光 (1019-1086) and other scholars to compile this universal history of China in 1065 CE and was presented to his successor, emperor Shénzōng 神宗, in 1084. In 294 volumes (*juǎn* 卷) and about 3 million characters, the book chronologically narrates a history of China from the Warring States period in 403 BCE to the beginning of the Sòng Dynasty in 959 CE.

¹⁹ ***Xīn Wǔdài Shǐ*** 新五代史, “A New History of the Five Dynasties,” is a history of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period of Chinese history, written by the Sòng Dynasty official Ōuyáng Xiū 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and completed in 1053. It is one of the official “Twenty-Four Histories” (*Èrshísì Shǐ* 二十四史) of China: for full list, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-Four_Histories.

²⁰ *Zīzhì Tōngjiàn* 292nd *juǎn* 資治通鑑 第 292 卷 & *New History of the Five Dynasties*, vol 12.

²¹ ***Wǔdài Shǐ*** 五代史 composed by Xuē Jūzhèng 薛居正 in 974.

²² *Old History of the Five Dynasties*, vol 5.

²³ See http://www.sgilibary.org/search_dict.php?id=765.

²⁴ See Piya Tan, “Buddhism in Japan” in *History of Buddhism*, 2004. Accessible at <http://pali.house.googlepages.com/historyofbuddhism>.

²⁵ Kor ㄱ, Chin 李.

tried to introduce their version of non-celibate priesthood. By the beginning of the 20th century, Korean Buddhism was too weak and fragmented to respond to Western presence, which opened the flood-gates of the Christian missions. Korea gained independence from the Japanese in 1945, but the north came under Communist domination and South Korea had become widely dominated by Christianity. The Koreans, lost deprived of Buddhism, were left with a Hobson's choice of Christianity and like hungry orphans, they lapped up the sugared lollipops. By the 1960s, there were 8,650 churches but only 1700 Buddhist temples in South Korea. An important reason that made South Korea the Asian country with the largest number of Christians was their use of the "**Nevius method**."²⁶ They were as follows:

- (1) Each Christian should "abide in the calling wherein he is found." The convert would continue to remain in his local community and support himself.
- (2) The church organization is to be developed only so far as the Korean Church is able to take responsibility for it.
- (3) The church is to appoint and support full-time national pastors.
- (4) The church buildings are to be built in Korean style.

This attempt to establish an indigenous church removed much of the anti-foreign feeling in China that prevented Christian growth there.²⁷

In the case of China, when the Communists took over in 1949, Buddhism was as good as non-existent or practised in secret. Beginning in late 1978, the Chinese leadership under Deng Xiaoping reformed the economy from a Soviet-style centrally planned economy to a more market-oriented economy but which was still rigidly under Party control. Since then, modern China is growing more liberal towards Buddhism, but much work still remains to revitalize Buddhism there.

7.4.3 Buddhist growth in Indonesia. Communism as a rule is against all religions, including Buddhism. We will now look at a converse situation, where religion rejects Communism. Or, at least, religion is used as a means of rejecting Communism. Let us look at Buddhism in Indonesia where Buddhism was challenged to prove itself as a religion that was not favourable to Communism.

Buddhism has been in Indonesia since the ninth century, when Buddhist temples were built in Java, the most famous of which is the Borobudur, built by the Śailendra kings (750-850). In **144**, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Fāxiān (c337-c422), caught in a storm, landed in Yava,dvīpa or Java Island, where he stayed for five months. The Buddhist pilgrim Yìjìng (671-695) visited Srivijaya in Sumatra on his way to India (**671**, when he studied Sanskrit) and again on his return voyage (**689**). During Yìjìng's second visit, Srivijaya was a centre of Buddhist learning with scholars like Śākya,kirti, Dharmapāla (rector of Nalanda), and the South Indian Buddhist Vajrabodhi (671-741). Many ancient Buddhist ruins and stupas are also found in Java and Bali. Two important Buddhist Javanese texts are the Sang Hyang Kamahaanikan and the Kamahayanan Mantranaya.

In **1945**, facing the need to pull together the diverse archipelago, the future President Sukarno (1901-1970) promulgated the *Pancasila* (the five principles) as "Dasar Negara" (the foundations of the nation). The ideology was announced in a speech called "The Birth of the Pancasila," in which Sukarno gave to the Independence Preparatory Committee on 1 June 1945. With this, he helped resolve the conflict between Muslims, nationalists and Christians. The 1945 Constitution then set forth the Pancasila as the embodiment of basic principles of an independent Indonesian state.²⁸

In **1965**, as a result of an attempted Communist coup, the Indonesia government outlawed all organizations that doubted or denied the existence of the one and only God (*ketuhanan yang maha esa*), through their national ideology called *Pancasila* ("Five Principles"),²⁹ which ironically is a Buddhist term. This was, of course, a problem for "non-theistic" Theravada Buddhism.

²⁶ John Nevius. *Methods of Mission Work*. London: Morgan & Scott, 1898.

²⁷ See <http://pali.house.googlepages.com/historyofbuddhism>.

²⁸ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pancasila_%28politics%29#cite_note-SAAFROEDIN6384-1.

²⁹ See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pancasila_\(politics\)#.281.29_Belief_in_the_one_and_only_God_.28-Ketuhanan_yang_Maha_Esa.29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pancasila_(politics)#.281.29_Belief_in_the_one_and_only_God_.28-Ketuhanan_yang_Maha_Esa.29).

Ashin Jinarakkhita,³⁰ a Buddhayāna (that is, eclectic) monk and founder of Perbuddhi (Indonesian Buddhist Organization), however, proposed that the Buddhist supreme deity was Sang Hyang Adi Buddha, that is, the **Ādi-Buddha**, the primordial Buddha of Mantrayāna that had existed in the region. Jinarakkhita tried to legitimize this uniquely Indonesian version of Buddhism by invoking ancient Javanese texts, and even the shape of the Buddhist temple complex at Borobudur.

The orthodox Theravadins, however, were determined to keep to the early Buddhist teachings. They explained that **nirvana**, the “unborn, uncreated, unconditioned,” was their “God.” Another response, personally communicated to me, was the interpretation of *Tuhan* (“God”) as **Ketuhanan (Godliness)**, which was more acceptable to Buddhists since it reflected a quality rather than a being, such as the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*).

In the years following the 1965 abortive coup, when all citizens were required to register with a specific religious denomination or be suspected of communist sympathies, the Buddhist population swelled and some ninety new monasteries were built. In 1987, there were seven schools of Buddhism affiliated with the Perwalian Umat Buddha Indonesia (Walubi): Theravada, Buddhayana, Mahayana, Tridharma, Kasogatan, Maitreya, and Nichiren.

According to the official 1987 estimate, there were roughly 2.5 million Buddhists, of which a million were Theravadin and about half a million Buddhayana followers of Jinarakkhita. Other estimates counted the Buddhists as comprising only 1 percent of the population, that is, less than 2 million. The reason for the smaller Buddhist estimate was that Confucianism, although officially tolerated by the Department of Religious Affairs, was not regarded as a religion, since it was a system of ethical relations.³¹

Provinces with relatively high percentage of Buddhists are Jakarta, Riau, North Sumatra, and West Kalimantan (Borneo). The majority of Buddhists now follow Theravada. Two of the larger Buddhist monasteries are located in North Jakarta (Sunter) and West Java (Pacet). The Indonesian Buddhists today are mostly Chinese and some indigenous groups.

Buddhism in Indonesia did not go through any persecution for a number of reasons. Firstly, Buddhism was already entrenched in ancient Indonesian history, such as the Srivijaya empire (3rd-14th centuries) and the Sailendra empire (8th-9th centuries). As the Buddhism did not have to contend with other organized religious system (as in China) and these empires were relatively stable while they existed, Buddhism never faced persecution from the state. Even when in the mid-20th century, when the God-idea was used as an anti-communist ideology, the Buddhists were able to adapt themselves theologically to be acceptable to the authorities. The Theravada Buddhists’ uncompromising stand in presenting the conception of “Ketuhanan” in the spirit of the *brahma, vihāra* is a wise skilful means that in due course attracts a growing number of Buddhists.

7.5 THE PURPOSE OF THE BUDDHA DHARMA

7.5.1 Overview of the chapters

7.5.1.1 THE MOST SUCCESSFUL FOREIGN RELIGION IN CHINA. **Chapter 1** (“Buddhist growth in China”) is about the arrival and rise of Buddhism as the most successful foreign religion in China. The early Chinese at first generally mistook Buddhism as a form of Daoism and that the Buddha was a Daoist deity (*shén* 神). The early rulers saw Buddhism as a magical system that could strengthen their power, and this would climax in empress Wǔ’s exploitation of Buddhism to legitimize her imperial status [5.2.2]. Another important reason for the rise of Buddhism in China was the political disunity, social chaos and natural disasters—but they can also work against Buddhism [7.4.1].

³⁰ Jinarakkhita wore the brown Burmese robes. The sapling of Bodhi tree at the Melaka Buddhist Association in Malaysia was brought by him. I met him at the Assoc when I was a still a young schoolboy (the early 1960s), and remember him going to the small provision store and bringing back some pieces of tofu. When I asked him about it, he said that no one had offered him any almsfood.

³¹ See <http://www.depag.go.id/index.php?menu=page&pageid=17> & <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/-nationprofiles/Indonesia/rbodies.html>.

Buddhist spirituality provided the ancient Chinese with new, and more powerful, images of hope. Guanyin, for example, liberated women from patriarchal social conditions and restrictions, and Kṣiti,garbha liberated suffering beings even from the depth of hell itself. Even Buddhist rituals and festivals, such as the Ullambana, were so popular and effective, that even the Daoists copied them. But then the influences were also mutual: the Buddhists in fact benefitted more from Daoist philosophy and terminology, so that Buddhism became more palpable and digestible to the Chinese.

7.5.1.2 CONVERTING BUDDHISM INTO CHINESE? **Chapter 2** (“Chinese challenges to Buddhism”) examines the conditions in Chinese society that welcomed Buddhism. Far from handicapping Buddhism, the social and political conditions actually helped Buddhism to indigenize itself, to adapt itself into a Chinese religion. For example, Buddhism expressed itself *mystically* through Daoist terminology, and *socioethically* through Confucianist ideas. To understand the novel and profound Buddhist philosophy, the early Chinese Buddhist resorted to the use of *géyì* (concept-matching) [2.3.3]; but it misfired: they actually confused Buddhism with Daoism, and the idea was quickly abandoned. Buddhism had to be understood on its own terms.

The early Chinese monks found the Indian Vinaya systems counter-cultural and culturally shocking, but on account of emperor Zhōngzōng, they officially followed **the Dharma,guptaka Vinaya**. This however was only the beginning of the problem, as later, when the Chinese Sangha was perceived as being too wealthy and powerful, and China became more centralized, various imperial limitations were placed on the Sangha, such as the banning of Vinaya ceremonies. As a result, the innovative Buddhists created new preceptive texts, especially the Bodhisattva Precepts, and even self-ordained themselves [4.3.3]. It was imperial initiative that promoted ritual Buddhism (Tantrism) over Vinaya formalism.

Although the Buddha left behind a number of important safeguards giving the highest priority to the Dharma-Vinaya and to protect it against the whims and fancies of an aberrant teacher,³² famous teachers like Dàoshēng, interpreted these guides as giving them a free hand for religious self-expression and modifying Vinaya rules as the saw fit. As they were monks of high status, lesser monks followed their bad examples.

7.5.1.3 BUDDHIST UTOPIA. **Chapter 3** (Cosmic Buddhas and paradises) shows how as the early Chinese Buddhists become more familiar with traditional Buddhism, of them became contemptuous of it, as it were, and made changes, or cannibalizing what they wanted and rejecting other teachings, or even wrote their own “sutras.” But they were not merely being cavalier, as their apparent hubris was mostly a result of a lack of self-control and of sociopolitical conditions. Their loci of control or refuge were outside of themselves—in the imperial court and the Chinese gentry. They were simply a rung in an hierarchical ladder of a feudalistic society, quite high up but nevertheless often stepped upon by those higher up.

So used were the feudal Chinese to a *living* monolithic and absolute power-figure (such as the emperor), they had great difficulty reconciling with a foreign Buddha who was *dead*. So they brought him to life in the form of various cosmic Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and deities, and they met him in their dreams and meditations, and wrote sutras on such experiences. The dreamless philosophers who had difficulty meditating, too, wrote new texts in the image of the old, to legitimize their pet views. (This is not new of course: even today, especially in urban Buddhism, there are those who speak as if they were the Buddha.)

Their detractors, the Daoists, feeling the threat of Buddhist success, too, wrote their own sutras, such as claiming that **Lǎozi** did not die, but went west to India and manifested himself as the Buddha there! In the spacious distance of the pre-industrial and pre-internet world, information moved quickly within the closed community that was China, but little that is true was really known about the barbaric outside world.

The Buddisms that reached China were almost exclusively Mahāyāna. In so far as such texts and teachings were bent on *bigness* (*mahā*) and the *book* (the written word), they were highly attractive to the intellectual and creative Chinese mind that up to then only had the extreme choices between a rigid socio-

³² The best known is the set of 4 “great references” (*mahāpadesa*): see **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16.4.7-11/2:125 f & also SD 9 Intro (11), & **Mahāpadesa S** (A 4.180/2:167-170).

ethical and elitist Confucianism (which discounted the otherworld) and a magical, escapist Daoism bent on seeking the elixir of life. Buddhism entered the scene as the welcomed *middle way*.

The Chinese Buddhists successfully countered Daoist and Confucianist challenges by adopting what they see as good in these systems and Buddhicized such borrowings, such as the Daoist notion of immortality and the Confucian ethical teachings. In a sense, they were *not* borrowing such teachings, but were parallel ideas, and the Buddhists were *sinicizing* what they as being Indian and foreign, so that the native Chinese could relate better to.

This kind of sinicizing in fact paralleled what happened in India with early Buddhism itself. The Buddha, himself often adopted and adapted various brahmanical notions and rituals—such as dharma, brahmin, karma, upavasatha, preta and nirvana—giving them a liberating meaning and purpose free from the notions of God, soul, sin and oppression.³³ All these were skillful means for promoting mental training leading to inner stillness and clarity. As long as these goals were evident and experienced, the practitioner does not backslide or mistake the finger for moon.

The third chapter also discusses academic scholars' general attitude towards Buddhism. A successful scholar is often one who is able to defend his thesis or theory—for the sake tenure—that is, until he is debunked by another scholar. British philologist, **KR Norman**, is instructive in reminding us of the nature of philology in particular, and Buddhist Studies in general:

I will repeat my statement yet again: “Everything that has not been done needs to be done. Everything that has been done needs to be done again.” So everything that I have said about the achievement of philology, every suggestion I have made of other scholars, all need to be kept permanently under review to see if new evidence can help to prove or disprove what has been proposed.
(Norman, *A Philological Approach to Buddhism*, 1997: 172)

Similarly, where Buddhism is concerned, we need to do what has not been done to understand and experience it. And having done that, we need to do it again and again, until we have a direct experience of true reality and thereby liberated.

7.5.1.4 BUDDHIST BEHAVIOURISM? **Chapter 4** (The soul of Chinese Buddhism) discusses how the early Chinese Buddhists struggled with important early Buddhist concepts, such as the progressive training, the mind, not-self and the nature of awakening and nirvana. It is not difficult to appreciate, even sympathize, the predicament of the early Chinese Buddhists. The Buddhist texts they received—their primary source of Buddhism—and translated had already lost touch with the early Buddhist spirit, and were more of a mostly philosophical—and what we might today say, of an academic and professional—nature.

Not all the foreign monks who came to China were great spiritual masters like Kumārajīva. Many, like Bodhi,ruici and Mañi,cintana [5.2.2.1], were tantric magicians. Upright, industrious, and wise monastics like Xuanzang [1.3.2.1, 4.1.3], Huiyuan [3.4.4] and Zongmi [4.3.3.1] were as rare as mandarava flowers from heaven. With the imperial decree in promoting ritual Buddhism over scriptural or contemplative Buddhism [4.3.3.8], the common people had a Hobson's choice, but due to their daily samsaric grind, they took to such quick-fix Buddhism quickly and easily, enriching and empowering their benefactors.

Two ideas that the Chinese simply could not abandon were those of *the abiding soul* and *filial piety*: the former due to the strong influence of Daoist monism, and the latter due to the socially dominant Confucianist socioethical ideology. While religious Daoism was popular with the masses, behaviourist Confucianism was the staple of the ruling elite. The early Chinese Buddhist elite had to win the support of both these pillars of Chinese society to survive and prosper as an institution.

Despite such challenges some Chinese Buddhist thinkers harmonized their soul-view with the notion of Buddhahood, giving rise to the openly compassionate conception of Buddha-nature or *tathāgata, garbha*, one of the most important Chinese Buddhist ideas [4.2.1]. Like the Lutheran Protestants of latter days, the early Chinese Buddhists put love above the law. The Bodhisattva precepts they introduced were open to all and sundry who wished to live a monk-like life even as laymen. As long as they were in touch

³³ See eg **Dhammapada 97** = SD 10.6.

with the “precept substance” (*jiètǐ* 戒體), inherent in the Buddha-nature, they need not bother with legalistic precepts.

The question now is: to which had they given a higher priority: *the letter or the spirit of the Dharma*? Such practices as the Bodhisattva precepts were all *scripture-based*. Indeed, Chinese Buddhism was mostly a *chanting* religion. That is to say, the written word *is* its reference: what you see *is* what you get. Such a universal notion of the power of the word has a great advantage of holding together a whole nation of diverse Buddhists, surely more effectively than the contemplative stillness of individuals seated in deep meditation! The Chinese had succeeded in indigenizing Buddhism to their world as a living faith.

7.5.1.5 LIGHTS THAT BLIND? **Chapter 5** (“Transmission outside the scriptures?”) deals with how Chán struggled to create its own sectarian identity, based in the notion of patriarchal lineage, the *gōng’àn*, and a new literary genre (the recorded sayings, *yǔlù* 語錄). All this involved power and change, and we see how power corrupts, especially those in the highest places, both religious and secular, and in such cases, power corrupts absolutely. The dramatic stories of the evangelical preacher and spin-doctor Shénhuì [5.1-5.4] show how wealth and power can re-define religion and distort history. Dàhuì [5.1.3.2], too, through his epistles and *kānhuà chán*, knocked down the Cáodòng school when it threatened to divert funds and influence away from his own Línjì school.

Beginning in the 8th century, the Chán schools were vying one another to gain the financial and social support of the elite and the rulers. Each school tried to legitimize and promote itself by fabricating their own ancestral lineage as going back through the sixth patriarch and Bodhidharma, and right back to the Buddha himself. First, they fabricated “lamp records” (*dēnglù* 燈錄) and then “recorded sayings” or hagiographies (*yǔlù* 語錄) of their patriarchs and heroes. This legitimation strategy is commonly seen today in the practice of printing booklets and books for free distributions by organizations. Such literature not only promotes the group’s ideas and prestige, but also reaches farther afield to attract more funds and followers.

HISTORY, FAITH AND TRUTH. The Chán spin masters like Shénhuì or Dàhuì of the Sòng period are not the only ones fabricating grand myths of their lineages and loud rhetoric of their views. It is a practice found in all the world religions, but for our own spiritual growth, it is more beneficial to examine our own backyard and clean it, to count our own cows rather than those of others.³⁴ Take for example the ancient Sinhalese traditional claims of **Asoka** being “the first king to adopt Buddhism as a state religion”³⁵ and in whose account Buddhism spread throughout the ancient world, even to the west. Scholars have found no historical evidence whatsoever for such claims.³⁶ Furthermore, the Sinhala chronicles (*vamsa*), such as the *Dīpavamsa*³⁷ and the *Mahāvamsa*, are usually unreliable as Buddhist history, as they were compiled to glorify the rulers, the monks who supported them and the Sinhala as a race—just as the *dēnglù* and *yǔlù* were compiled to legitimize the Línjì school and put down other schools.³⁸

By the time of the Sòng dynasty, Chinese Buddhist history was only tenuously connected with the ancient sutras, if at all.³⁹ The best the creative Chinese minds did was perhaps to find scriptural support for their highly innovative philosophical ideas and theories. Any cooption of a sutra, such as **the Lañkāvatāra Sūtra** by the Chán school, was as a legitimate symbol for their dharma transmission. Even then, such a text could be demoted or replaced, such as when Shénhuì replaced the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra* with the *Diamond Sutra*, claiming that it was *this* sutra, not the former, that Bodhidharma had bequeathed!⁴⁰ Even

³⁴ Cf **Dh 19**, which advises us to “count our own cows, not of others,” & **Dh 252**, against hiding our own faults.

³⁵ W Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 1956: 54 f.

³⁶ See esp AK Warder, “A philological approach to Buddhism,” 1997: 113-129 (ch 7).

³⁷ “The *Dīpavamsa* is a strange undisciplined text. It obviously represents a conglomeration of source material bundled together uncritically, so that there are often two versions of the same event, and sometimes three.” (Norman 1997: 123.

³⁸ This is not to say that Buddhism did not spread widely during Asoka’s time, but that it was the work of the Buddhists themselves, “more likely it was a result of the peace which he [Asoka] established, leading to greater prosperity and the expansion of trade” (Norman 1997: 129), and Buddhism followed the trade routes (1997: 22-24).

³⁹ See Paul L Swanson, *Foundations of T’ien-t’ai Philosophy*, 1989: 123-156 & M Poceski, 2002: 2.

⁴⁰ See Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra*, 1967: 149.

ancient patriarchs were pushed around like pawns. Jingjué 淨覺, in his *Record of the Teachers and Disciples of the Laṅkāvatāra* (*Lèngqié shīzī jì* 楞伽師資記),⁴¹ for example, traces the beginning of the Chán lineage to **Guṇabhadra** (the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra translator) rather than Bodhidharma,⁴² but he was later rejected and replaced by the latter.

To say the least, any concerned Chán teacher or follower of today would be embarrassed to know that much of their religious history consists of fabrication, bowdlerization and politicization. Or, they could slip into psychological denial or rationalization. US Zen master, Robert Aitken, for example, remarks that Zen students “seek out religious themes...[for] resolving life-and-death questions,” not historical facts.⁴³ While it is true that such myths and legends as those of Bodhidharma and the sixth patriarch formed the bases for Chán identity, but would this not distort a practitioner’s view of his practice, so that it leads to frustration and disillusionment. “Truth should not be hidden nor faith be based on illusion,” remarks Keremidschieff.⁴⁴

Myths, legends and stories are common in early Buddhism, too, but they do not play any role in religious lineage as the Chán stories do. Aitken’s remark on “religious themes” apply to early Buddhism rather than Chán because the early Buddhist stories have moral and psychological values, often bringing home a Dharma teaching beyond the intellectual level. There is a clear difference between spiritual myths and politicized fabrications.

TICKET TO SUCCESS. During the Sòng period, being part of a Chán lineage means a ticket to high office in the leading public monasteries of metropolitan Buddhism. **Fouk** notes, that “there was naturally an increase in the number of powerful monks who had a vested interest in upholding the historicity of the accounts in the genealogical histories” (1999: 223). This enhanced their wealth, social status and political power, which in turn propelled the continued retrospective and competing fabrication of Chán histories. The rich and powerful tend to create their own Buddhisms and fabricate history, and those who admire or follow them effectively project themselves onto an outside refuge: they have externalized their locus of control.

Or, worse, we may try to consciously or unconsciously emulate the worldly success of a Shénhuì or a Dàhuì by promoting a watered-down or trumped-up Buddhism that is deceptively attractive, such as associating it with “management,” “science,” or worldly success; in short, re-defining Buddhism to attract a following. We can see the would-be Shénhuìs or Dàhuìs of our time canvassing with their business cards overprinted with titles and connections. One wonders, being so socially engaged and busy, how they completed their monastic tutelage (*nissaya*), or ever find time to meditate, or keep their monastic vows!

What really is their purpose in hobnobbing with society, instead of becoming truly accomplished in their spiritual training, wisdom and awakening. They often belittle the Three Jewels and lack spiritual vision. We see monks being taken to court over money issues and dishonesty, and engaged in various worldly pursuits (like buying lotteries, etc).⁴⁵ These are the people that the Buddha warns us of, that is, “the spiritually empty people (*mogha, purisa*) who arise right here (in this religion) who cause the True Dharma to disappear.” (S 16.13)⁴⁶ Let us heed the Buddha’s warning by avoiding such people⁴⁷ and protect Buddhism from them.

THE INTERNET. This lesson in history is even more relevant today where we have free access to printing and information technology. Anyone with surplus funds or an evangelical zest could flood society with books and literature promoting their ideas and ideologies on glossy paper and attractive covers,

⁴¹ T2837.85.1283-1291.

⁴² See McRae 2003: 8 f, 26, 162. The reason for this rejection could be that Guṇabhadra (394-468) was merely an industrious and competent translator, but lack the charisma and mystery attributed to Bodhidharma. The former was too *real* a person, unlike the latter *mythical* figure.

⁴³ In *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan (Mumonkan)*, tr with comy by Robert Aitken, 1990: 151.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Keremidschieff, “Legends in Ch’an,” 2005: 1.

⁴⁵ On the cases of the monks Mingyi and Meow Ee, see eg **Money and Monastics** = SD 4.19 (9.3).

⁴⁶ **Saddhamma Paṭirūpaka S** (S 16.13/2:224 f) = SD 1.10 (5c); also **Ovāda S 3** (S 16.8/2:210) = SD 1.10 (4).

⁴⁷ The **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 16) says that such people are enemies in the guise of friends, and are to “be avoided from afar like a dangerous path” (D *31.20/3:187) = SD 4.1.

either for free or for a fee. For those who are caught up by the notion that success is measured in numbers and things, such media speak for themselves. Or they could use information technology (IT), by setting up websites, which can disseminate their views—right or wrong—on Buddhism globally. Everyone has become an expert.

There was a time long past when the local markets were filled with people from other villages selling their goods and services and those looking for cheap buys and bargains. Now the internet is such an open market, but on a global scale, attracting anyone from anywhere who has an internet connection. But it is a very wild unregulated electronic wilderness “out there,” haunted by predators, ego-mongers, and the idle.

Yet, in the hands of those who are trained in IT and the Internet, *and* who have proper Dharma training and practice, these technological tools are very cheap and effective ways of disseminating the benefits of the Buddha Dharma. It becomes *not* Māra’s net for fishing unwary beings, but Indra’s jewelled net.

7.5.1.6 LIVING CHINESE BUDDHISM. **Chapter 6** (Modern insights into Chinese Buddhism) deals with the continuities and changes that Chinese Buddhism underwent right to the end of the 20th century. By the middle of that century, Buddhism was becoming popular in the western and westernized world. But the kind of Buddhism that was widely available were mostly the *book Buddhism* of pioneers like DT Suzuki and Charles Luk. The translated Buddhist texts lacked academic standards, but to the eager new world of Buddhist readership, it was exciting armchair reading and fashionable chat.

By the close of the 20th century, the academic scholars had already, or almost, taken over Buddhism. Understandably, professional scholars, being full-time researchers and teachers, have to earn a living, and Buddhism is a valuable and still untapped academic oasis. As each new generation of scholars correct and refine the findings and opinions of preceding ones, we have an ever clearer picture of Buddhism in society. So Buddhism becomes a field of systematic and scientific research, where hypotheses and theories are formulated and debunked, reformulated and re-debunked, generation after generation—all, of course, mainly for the scholars’ benefit.

However, Buddhism, like any religion, cannot be reduced to mere social phenomena, especially those aspects of Buddhism that are inwardly liberating. Scholarship becomes less bookish and more valuable in human terms when it give space to that inestimable, often ineffable, mental aspect of Buddhism called mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). This affair of the heart can never be felt if a scholar is a heartless word-peddler like an evangelical telepreacher or commercial philosopher. The advantages of this sentiment have been unequivocally expressed at the dawn of the new millennium, by those who had the courage to declare that they are *both* scholars *and* practising Buddhists—their heads and hearts are in the Dharma.⁴⁸

The best contributions from academic scholars of religion are their careful, balanced and detailed analyses and exposés on religion and Buddhism. The recent scholarship on Sòng Buddhism, for example, is instructive in giving us a better understanding of the vicissitudes of Buddhism in an ancient Chinese feudal society. Such an understanding is useful for us to look at Buddhism anew so that Buddhism is socially engaged, and rightly guide Buddhist practitioners and thinkers in their reforms and revitalization of Buddhism.

Out of the Chinese Buddhist ocean rose the rare turtles of reform-minded monks like Tàixū 太虛 [6.3] and Yīnshùn 印順 [6.4], who inspired internationalist and mission-minded monks like Xīngyún 星雲 of Buddha’s Light Mountain (*Fóguāng shān* 佛光山, Kaohsiung), and Shèngyán 聖嚴 of Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fǎgǔ shān* 法鼓山, Taipei). Even Chinese nuns, such as Zhāohuì 昭慧 (a pupil of Yīnshùn), were speaking loudly, such as proposing to abolish the eight strict rules introduced by the Buddha himself [6.4.9]. In short, there was the rise of **Buddhist individualism**.

The reality of the situation was more complicated. During the early 21st century, for example, there were these “guardians of the four directions,” each overseeing their own territory, as it were, thus:

- North (Jinshan, Taipei): Shèngyán (聖嚴), Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fǎgǔ shān* 法鼓山).
- South (Dashu, Kaohsiung): Xīngyún (星雲), Buddha Light Mountain (*Fóguāng shān* 佛光山).

⁴⁸ See esp Roger Jackson & John Makransky (eds), *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, London: Curzon Press, 2000.

- East (Hualien): Zhèngyán (證嚴), Tzu Chi Foundation (Cíjì jījīnhuì 慈濟基金會).
- West (Nantou): Wéijué (惟覺), Chung Tai Shan (Zhōngtái shān 中台山).

As the Chinese generally have excellent business sense in both secular and religious matters, these groups had been successful in harmoniously enjoying their respective fair shares of the generosity and loyalties of the faithful. However, just as in ancient China, personal differences and rivalries run deep. The outspoken activist nun Zhāohuì, for example, accused Wéijué of extravagance, opulence and false claims of supernatural powers.⁴⁹ Interestingly, Zhāohuì and Wéijué, although working on totally different platforms, both nevertheless declared Yīnshùn as their Dharma teacher! Zhāohuì also criticized Zhèngyán's Cíjì (Tzu Chi)⁵⁰ charitable organization of idol worship: it had, for example, introduced the Sahā Triad, which was innovative. [1.3.1]

Elise Anne Devido has questioned whether that the Yīnshùn-inspired group was actually *not* one of “engaged Buddhists,” but a sort of parochial and communal effort involving almost only the overseas Chinese.⁵¹ For example, they were not working with such “engaged Buddhist” groups as the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), until only lately.⁵² Interestingly, **Jonathan Watts** of the INEB, too, is not too sure if social work such as those of Zhèngyán can be called “engaged Buddhism,” which is more about dealing with social issues at their roots, rather than merely treating their symptoms. This article was also published in the E-Renlai internet magazine of the Taipei Ricci Institute.⁵³

7.5.1.7 MONASTICS, WOMEN AND MONEY. In Taiwan, Singapore and other urbanized societies, even by the early 21st century, Chinese Buddhist monastics were amongst the most affluent members of society, and many of them were millionaires. The early Vinaya is unequivocally against monastics having money or indulging in any kind of economic dealing—about which I have discussed in some detail elsewhere.⁵⁴ Suffice it here to say that *there is no need for money or worldliness in a Buddha-land!*⁵⁵

During the 8th century, Shénhuì and his followers, through the manipulation of public funds and sheer serendipity, succeeded in promoting an image of Chán that we are familiar with to this day, but which is beginning to unravel [5.2.3]. **Yīnshùn**, whose inspiration was rooted in early Indian Buddhism, was clearly sensitive to such history; for, he writes, in his vision of “the Buddha Dharma as saving light of the world,” thus:

⁴⁹ Elise A Devido, “Mapping the trajectories of ‘engaged Buddhism’ in Taiwan and Southeast Asia,” 2004: see <http://www.erenlai.com/index.php?aid=399> (report by Dài Àilián 戴愛蓮)

⁵⁰ Zhèngyán is famous for her charitable hospital and health care missions, and was awarded the Magsaysay (1991). Although, inspired by her teacher Yīnshùn's teachings, her own vision, despite having clear parallels, goes further in incorporating a Confucian model of family ethics.

⁵¹ See <http://www.erenlai.com/index.php?aid=399>.

⁵² INEB was founded 1989 in Bangkok, Siam (Thailand), at a conference of 36 concerned ordained and lay people from 11 countries organized by Sulak Sivaraksa, Maruyama Teruo and other thinkers and social activists Buddhists and non-Buddhists. One of its expressed aims is “understanding, cooperation and networking among inter-Buddhist and inter-religious social action groups.” See <http://www.inebnetwork.org/>.

⁵³ This is one of the many (Catholic) Ricci Institutes, keeping in touch with Asian socio-religious realities and using “soft approaches” to evangelise Asia, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taipei_Ricci_Institute.

⁵⁴ Suffice it to note here that the monk Xingyun is considered to be one of the world's richest men, and the collective wealth of Zhèngyán's charitable organization is more than that of a small nation. I am not against their good works, but we need to rethink how this can happen in a more Dharma-centred way. One of the reasons for the Turkish marauders' targeting the Buddhist monasteries in 11th-century India was that they were very wealthy institutions. See **Money and Monastics** = SD 4.19, esp (9.3) on the Singapore monks Mingyi and Meow Ee, taken to court over money issues. On Mingyi, see http://www.straitstimes.com/Free/Story/STISStory_257701.html; on Meow Ee, see <http://www.asiaone.com/Business/News/Office/Story/A1Story20080521-66279.html>.

⁵⁵ “Religious business” is becoming global and cuts across all major religious groups. For studies “religious retailing” of Christianity in America, see Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, New Haven: Yale Univ Press, 1995: 222–69; R Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, NY: Oxford Univ Press, 1994.

總之，佛法一是淨化身心的聲聞教，
 守住自己的崗位，不失自己的立場，
 從旁面去影響社會，
 不去從事正面的經濟等活動；
 它深刻不能廣及。
 二是以世間而達到清淨解脫的大乘佛法，
 可以正面地去從事經濟政治等活動。
 出家人應以聲聞佛教為立腳點，
 而在家佛教徒則可本著大乘佛教的精神，
 正面的去從事政治經濟等活動。
 這政治經濟等，就是佛法。

In short, the Buddha Dharma, firstly, purifies the body and mind of the Śrāvaka,yāna [Hīnayāna], keeping to their livelihood, without losing their own conviction to indirectly influence society without engaging directly in economic and other activities. It is profound, not easily disseminated. Secondly, the Mahāyāna Buddha Dharma seeks full purification and liberation within the world itself, by directly engaging in economic, political and other activities. Renunciants should apply the Śrāvaka,yāna Buddhism as their foundation, while lay Buddhists should, keeping to the spirit of Mahāyāna Buddhism, directly engage in political, economic, and other activities.

These politics, economics, etc. are the Buddha Dharma.

(Yīnshùn, *Fófǎ shì jiùshì zhī guāng* 佛法是救世之光 1973: 408)

Surprisingly, many in the post-Yīnshùn generation seem to have rejected or watered down such a Dharma-inspired vision, just as Xuánzàng’s teachings were generally and tacitly rejected after his own passing [4.1.3.3]. The point seems to be, if it is not *Chinese* enough, the Chinese Buddhist would reject it. The true miracle, as such, would be to turn “Chinese Buddhist” into “*Buddhist* Chinese,” that is, to take Buddhism as a transcultural, even global, teaching. There are signs of this, but it will take some time to realistically make any meaningful effect by way of a Buddhist ecumene or unified global community of Buddhists.

Like Dàhuì Zōnggǎo and his controversial nuns, Miào dào and Miào zōng [5.1.3.2], Yīnshùn, too, had a radical nun in Zhāohuì (otherwise, the two monks were very different). There is really no way of knowing now what Yīnshùn really thought about Zhāohuì’s very involved social engagements. Zhāohuì’s thoughts and work should be discussed separately, as the issue of nunhood is a very complicated one.⁵⁶ The point remains, however, that Yīnshùn’s reformative vision is still valid today, especially so too because he was himself an exemplary monk.

In the (Abbha) **Upakkilesa Sutta** (A 4.50), the Buddha warns renunciants against four things—taking intoxicants, indulging in sex and sense-pleasures, using money, and wrong livelihood—for, just as cloud, fog, haze and eclipse hide the sky, these activities effectively destroy the monastic life.⁵⁷ The fate of those who are *generous* (including being socially engaged, etc), says **the Jāpussoṇī Sutta** (A 10.177), but *do not keep the precepts* is not good either: they are reborn as well-loved elephants, horses, cows, chickens (that is, as mascots or pets), who would be recipients “of food, drink, garlands and various adornments”!⁵⁸ Regarding such teachings as “inferior” (*hīna,yāna*) does not change the truth an iota: if karma does not catch up with us, the law will, as clearly evident in Singapore in our own days.⁵⁹

The point should be clear that *whatever activity a monastic indulges in, no matter how noble or compassionate, it should never be an excuse for belittling or banishing the Vinaya rules*. The Vinaya defines the monastic and his relationship with the laity: the monastic’s aim should be to awaken here and now, or at least work towards becoming an arhat or a bodhisattva—and not merely giving lip-service to a grand

⁵⁶ See eg Bingenheimer 2004.

⁵⁷ A 4.50/2:53 = SD 4.20.

⁵⁸ A 10.177/5:271 f = SD 2.6.

⁵⁹ On the cases of the 2009 monks Mingyi and Meow Ee, see **Money and Monastics** = SD 4.19 (9.3).

vision and printing free booklets about it. It would be very painful to fall from the high horse of monasticism.⁶⁰

7.5.2 Descriptive and prescriptive approaches to Buddhism

7.5.2.1 VOCATION VERSUS PROFESSION. Before the Industrial Revolution in western Europe, the words “vocation” usually meant “a calling,” as in the commitment to *a religious calling*, and “profession” usually referred to the commitment to religious vows or, at least, *the declaration of one’s religious faith*. However, here I take *vocation* as “calling” (a commitment to religious work out of deep faith) and *profession* as an occupation (something for which one is commensurately paid)

The professional scholar is characterized by two things. Firstly, his work is often a virtual reality constructed *with his academic tools and from his perceptions* of his subject. In this sense, he is like a scientific researcher who studies a disease or a plague, gives an academically accurate description of the situation, but feels that it is not his task to change anything. Secondly, he earns his living by his work, and if the field is competitive, he may have to show his genius by presenting a new angle on his subject (the disease or plague)—even argue that there is no disease or plague, in the first place—or come up with new theories, proving his forbears wrong, and so revise our store of academic knowledge or understanding of the subject—and he gets paid for it and even gains fame.

Understandably, academic scholars are unlikely to be interested in what is “pure,” or “essential,” or “true” Buddhism. This is not academically profitable as those who stand by such claims are often inconsistent, contradictory and ideological. The academic might even claim that spirituality itself is an idealized construction. Ironically, such a theorizing is itself an academic construction, too: it is “a Buddhism of the scholars.”⁶¹

The spiritual Buddhist would feel horrified at academics and experts who look at victims of a famine and declare that to feed the famished or end the famine is an “idealized construction,” and that it is enough to merely describe the situation and not change a thing! If a scholar works for his own benefit, the spiritual Buddhist works to benefit *both* himself and others, especially when he has tasted Buddhist spirituality for himself.

The point is: *what is our purpose in studying or teaching Buddhism?* Is it to earn a living or take it as a religiously lucrative venture (Buddhist books can be very expensive but sell very well)? Are we taking Buddhism as history (studying what “really” happened during a specific period in Buddhist history based on bones, ruins, and artefacts)? Or, are we seeking a workable spiritual system for self-awakening and liberation—that is, if we truly believe in and commit ourselves to such a potential at all?⁶²

The Buddhist teacher, scholar, practitioner, and especially those who take Buddhism as a vocation, while valuing the *descriptive* approach of the professional academic, is moved to better the situation by a *prescriptive* approach. If the academic scholar points to archaeological ruins, epigraphic records and ancient artifacts, and pontificate, “See, we have clear proof that the real situation is like this, no matter what your sacred texts say. You have to accept the actual and not the idealized conceptions!” The spiritual teacher would thank the academic for his valuable work, which only proves that the spiritual task of ridding the religious plague and healing the intellectually sick still needs to be done. Spirituality sees and seeks to heal.⁶³

7.5.2.2 TOOL VERSUS TOTEM. One of the most valuable lessons to be learnt from this survey of how Buddhism became Chinese, is that of how religion and religious symbols are used in a personal and social manner. From the very start, the Buddha and his saints have used, and Buddhist teachers are still using, skillful means (*upāya*) to teach the Buddha-Dharma, that is, to sugar-coat the teachings or deliver them in

⁶⁰ MA 4:165 has a simile: falling from training in a non-Buddhist system is like falling from the back of a donkey: one is, at worst, covered with dust; but falling from monastic training is like falling from the back of an elephant, ie, because one has freely taken up the rules of training but fails to keep to them. On the 4 ways of living on alms—as a thief, a debtor, an heir and an owner—see MA 5:32, SA 2:199.

⁶¹ See eg interesting remarks on “normative Buddhism” by Sharf 2002: 12-17.

⁶² For an insightful discussion on a *philosophical* approach to Buddhism, see Siderits 2007: 10 f.

⁶³ For further instructive reflection, see Jonathan Z Smith 1982.

sizeable installments, appropriate to the audience and ambience, with the purpose relieving immediate pains and weaknesses, and to gain spiritual liberation in due course.

Buddhism is like a collection of spiritual power tools: they bring their users to self-awakening. But there are those who merely *collect* these tools or simply *admire* them, without ever using them. Indeed, they may even seem to know in great detail the various versions of these tools, and how they work, and speak profusely to admiring audiences without end. They become tool-peddlars entrancing their wide-eyed and gaping audiences with amazing presentations of facts, figures and figments. These audiences begin to crowd around such salesmen unendingly looking for the best or latest tools, imported versions, and hands-free versions. The *tool* has become a *totem*.⁶⁴

Andrew Skilton, in his article “The letter of the law and the lore of letters,” makes a helpful comment in this connection:

The Buddhist tradition has utilized its scriptures in two ways. On the one hand there have been those who have handled texts as literary items, to be read, understood, expounded and if necessary corrected. On the other hand, there have been communities where the text is utilized as part of a system for the generation of religious merit, and in this sense a text is not apprehended primarily as an intelligible document, but rather as a powerful totem which must be ritually and magically manipulated. (Skilton 2000: 23)

Anthropologist **David Gellner** (quoted by Skilton) discusses the ritual recitation of the Aṣṭa,sāhasrikā,-prajñā,pāramitā, where he points out that even “recitation” does not necessarily mean “reading aloud for the edification of the listeners,” but rather an unintelligible chorus as the text is divided into ten sections which are recited aloud simultaneously by ten vajra-masters or Tantric priests (*vajrācārya*)!⁶⁵

The Buddha-Dharma is like medicine, and its teachers are like doctors, nurses and paramedics, who give instructions to us on how to use it, and tips on how to allow the medicine to give the best, even quickest, effect. But we have to take the medicine ourselves, and keep up a regular regime of hygiene, and healthy diet and exercise—that is, cultivating moral virtue and mental focus.

7.5.2.3 BEWARE OF THE DEFENCE MECHANISM OF COMPENSATION. We must never lose sight of the true purpose of Buddhist monasticism, that is, as the Buddha originally intends it to be. The Vinaya is unequivocal about the importance of monastic training. The Mahāvagga records the Buddha as stating, “I allow, bhikshus, an experienced and competent monk to live five years in dependence (*nissaya*) (on a preceptor or teacher),⁶⁶ but an inexperienced one all his life” (*anujānāmi bhikkhave vyattena bhikkhunā paṭibalena pañca vassāni nissāya, vatthum avyattena yāvajīvam*, Mv 1.53.4 = V 1:80). In other words, a capable person (such as one being well schooled, knowing the Dharma, elderly, etc) must still spend at least five years under the spiritual tutelage of a qualified preceptor or teacher, so that the “new monk” (*navaka bhikkhu*) truly imbibes the life of a monastic and leaves behind his old worldly ways.

If such a candidate leaves the order during his dependence (that is, within the first five years of ordination as a monk), he has not fully lived the monastic life. Informed Buddhists are likely to become suspicious of someone who leaves the order, say, after only a year, gets ordained in a few other orders in due course, and then claims that he has been a member of all these orders!⁶⁷ Or, worse, declare that they are “neither lay nor ordained,” that is, neither fish nor fowl.

Such a renegade would often go on to talk about the unimportance, even irrelevance, of Vinaya rules, of “modernizing” Buddhism, and so on. In fact, such self-propelled people are so busy with themselves

⁶⁴ This colourful passage is simply trying to say: “Rely on the teaching—by practising it; if you admire the teacher, practise the good teachings that he teaches.”

⁶⁵ David Gellner, “The Perfection of Wisdom—a text and its uses in Kwā Bahā, Lalitpur,” in Siegfried Lienhard (ed), *Change and Continuity in the Nepalese Culture of the Kathmandu Valley*, Turin, 1996.

⁶⁶ That is, *upajjhāya* or *ācāriya*, respectively: Mhv 1.25.6 = V 1:45 f; 1.32.3 = V 1:60 f.

⁶⁷ I do not see any problem where a bona fide seeker has stints with various Buddhist orders, say, studying their meditation methods, and then following up their experiences in an academic or open manner, as a number of our better laymen specialists in Buddhism or meditation have done.

that they really have no time for their spiritual development. It is vitally important that the laity constantly and compassionately reminds such renegades to find a good teacher and complete his dependence, so that he becomes a mature Dharma-centred monastic or lay worker.⁶⁸

For monastics who wish to be academically proficient (as in studying for an academic degree), he or she should only do so after having fully and properly completed the monastic dependence (*nissaya*). Even then, the academic field he or she intends to take up should not be against the spirit of Buddhism. The notion of academic qualification should not suggest a lack of spiritual confidence, hinting at an unconscious defence mechanism of *compensation*.⁶⁹ Then, the quest for becoming a “Ven Dr” could be because the “Venerable” alone is felt to be unsatisfactory. We should not wear the robe for attracting charisma, nor attach an academic sticker to it for respectability: we might be merely trying to fill an emptiness within, or put up appearances. We are likely to end up as an extension of our old self, like old vinegar in new wine bottles!

In fact, it is better that a monastic aspirant spend his lay life in academia and excel in it, and then, after graduating, join the order, so that he or she can fully focus on spiritual training and live as a true monastic working for awakening in this life itself. Or best of all, if we aspire to the monastic life, we should totally focus on it, be a good meditator, awaken to some spiritual level in this life itself, to become a virtuous guide and awakened teacher to others. This is the true purpose of renunciation. After joining the order, monks like **Acela Kassapa** would go into solitary meditation, and in due course attain arhathood, as this stock passage shows:

Then Acela Kassapa received the going forth and the ordination from the Blessed One.

And, not long after he was ordained, the venerable Kassapa, dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute, realizing it [liberation] for himself through his own direct knowledge, here and now, entered and dwelt in that unsurpassed goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

He directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more of this state of being.”⁷⁰

And the venerable Kassapa became one of the arhats. (S 12.17.19-21/2:21 f) = SD 18.5

As the passage clearly shows, the purpose of renunciation is the attainment of direct knowledge (*aññā*), that is, arhathood.

7.5.3 Self-criticism is the beginning of self-healing and wholesome growth.

7.5.3.1 CHÁN QUESTIONS. Chán training during the Sòng centred around doubt, which we have already dealt with both in some detail [5.1.3.1]. Here we shall, by way of a reminder, briefly look at the usefulness of questions, as they are an effective aspect of overcoming doubts in learning. Let us here look at this anecdote from the *Wúménguān* 無門關 (The Gateless Gate) [5.1.3.5], that is, **Case 41** “Bodhidharma’s Mind-stilling” (*Sìshíyī Dámó ānxīn* 四十一 達磨安心):⁷¹

達磨面壁。	<i>Dámó miàn bì</i>	Bodhidharma (sat) facing the wall.
二祖立雪。	<i>ér zǔ lì xuě</i>	The Second Patriarch stood in the snow.
斷臂云、	<i>duàn bì yún</i>	With arm cut off, said,
弟子心未安、	<i>dìzǐ xīn wèi ān</i>	“Your disciple’s heart still has no peace!
乞師安心。	<i>qǐ shī ān xīn</i>	Please, master, still my mind!”
磨云、	<i>Mó yún</i>	Bodhidharma replied,
將心來爲汝安。	<i>jiāng xīn lái wéi rǔ ān</i>	“Bring me your mind, I will still it for you.”

⁶⁸ An interesting case in point is that the “hippie” monk, Abhinyana: see **Wanderers of Today** = SD 24.6b.

⁶⁹ See **Gadhabha Samaṇa S** (A 3.81) = SD 24.10b Intro (2.2).

⁷⁰ On this para and the next (attainment of arhathood), see **Soṇa (Kolivīsa) S** (A 6.55.2a/3:376) & SD 20.12 n.

⁷¹ *Sìshíyī dāmó ānxīn*. See [5.1.3.5] for citations; also <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/zen/mumonkan.htm>.

祖云、	<i>zǔ yún</i>	The patriarch replied,
覓心了不可得。	<i>mì xīn liào bùkě dé</i>	“I’ve looked for my mind, but I can’t take hold of it,”
磨云、	<i>Mó yún</i>	Bodhidharma said,
爲汝安心竟。	<i>wéi rǔ ān xīn jìng</i>	“(Now) your mind is fully stilled.”

(*Wúménguān*, case 41)

A very similar case is the encounter dialogue between Dàdiān Bǎotōng (大顛寶通 d 819) and Shítóu Xīqiān (石頭希遷 700-790) [5.3.2]:⁷²

When Dàdiān Bǎotōng first met Shítóu, Shítóu asked him,
 “Can you show me your mind?”
 Dàdiān said, “That which distinguishes your words is my mind.”
 Shítóu started shouting at him and drove him away. Ten days later, Dàdiān approached Shítóu and said,
 “If what I said the last time wasn’t my mind, then what is it?”
 Shítóu said, “Without raising your eyebrows or blinking your eyelids, show me your mind.”
 Dàdiān said, “I don’t have any other mind to show you.”
 Shítóu, “Originally you do have a mind, so why say you don’t? If you deny it, it’s the same as lying.” Dàdiān understood.

Piya’s verse comment

Coming east, wandering,	with nothing to teach,
The ignorant listen, not understanding:	you sit and laugh; the world suffers.

The Theravada contemplative forest monk, **Brahmavamso**, in his talk on “Human rights in Buddhism,” makes an instructive observation here:

To question is a right for people. That’s why I say, “Whatever question you have, come and ask it. I may not know the answer. It may take me a while, and sometimes you may not be satisfied with my answer, but always ask the question.” Often when people ask questions and I reply, I ask them if the answer is okay. “Did I answer the question satisfactorily?” “Did I understand the question?” That’s respect for the person who had the guts to put their hand up and ask.

I act like this because of my own past experience. Sometimes I’ve asked a question and because the person hasn’t really understood it, or because the question is simply a bit too hard for them, or it’s showing them they’ve made a mistake, they skirt around it or make a joke of it.

I remember Krishnamurti, the teacher—I was quite interested in his teachings for a while. Later I heard a recording of one his talks given in the New York Library. It was quite a famous talk. I’ve seen the audio cassette in public libraries. I was really interested in the talk and at the end there were a lot of stupid questions. Krishnamurti answered those questions reasonably well, but then someone asked a really good question, which was very deep and challenged much of what he had said.

I was disgusted when the answer was, with a very condescending and superior voice, “Do I have to answer everything?” The audience laughed. But this poor man was ridiculed even though it was the best question of the session. Krishnamurti just skirted around it with humour, and I thought that was really wrong.

I tell people that if lecturers at universities really know their stuff, if they are really experts at their subjects, they can answer any questions. If they skirt around questions or are afraid of ques-

⁷² See Liuzǔ tán jīng 六祖壇經 [T 2008.48.345c21](http://www.dharmafarer.org) & <http://home.att.net/~sotozen/html/shitoudisciples.htm>.

tions, it's a good sign that they don't know what they are talking about. I told the people in Malaysia and Singapore, and I give the same advice to you: there are so many teachers and Gurus, monks and nuns and goodness knows whatever, floating around the world today; you should ask them difficult questions. That's the only way to find out if they know their stuff. Ask them the hardest questions, the most probing questions, and see if they answer them with a sense of equanimity, with a sense of respect—not like a politician avoiding the issue but like someone who knows what they are talking about.

If you know, you are not afraid of questions. This is a good way for people to check on teachers, on Gurus, on monks, or nuns who go around the world teaching. There is a huge danger in believing charlatans. So ask deep questions. (Brahmavamso 2007: 152 f; digital pp125 f)

7.5.3.2 NOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND DIRECT EXPERIENCE. You might have noticed that some Chán speakers are very good at making puzzling statements and giving evasive answers, but when we look deeper, they are useless, even disrespectful of the audience, especially those who have come seeking answers for some personal issues. It is likely that if you go to a Chán teacher and tell him you have a problem, he would say, “Show me your problem!” “I can't,” you reply. “Then, you have no problem,” he triumphantly replies.⁷³ [7.5.3.1]. *But your problem is still there*, plus an insult to that injury. In this sense, Chán is not meant for everyone.

As **ZONG Desheng** has clarified, such a Chán exchange reflects the difference between “notional” meaning (which is theoretically *semantic* or word-understanding, at best) and “direct” understanding (which is *experiential* or first-person experience). In the above koan, the student has a problem because he does not really know what a problem really is. The common mistake here—we can call it “the Zen master's error”—is to assume that listener understands what you have said.

Zong gives a useful illustration: suppose you hear someone in the next room say: “You are to blame!” Assuming that you understand the language, then you understand, *in a notional sense*, that what the remark says is that the addressee is to blame for something that has happened. However, unless you know *who* the addressor and the addressee are, and *what* the blame is about, you would not have a direct understanding of the remark. Your belief is merely *notional*. (Zong 2005: 11 digital)⁷⁴

It is very easy today, with a profusion of information and paper qualifications, for anyone *with* some kind of academic or socioeconomic status, but *without* any Buddhist commitment or realization, to write or talk about Buddhism as if they had a *direct experience* of the Buddha Dharma. Such people only have a *notional* understanding of Buddhism at best, and they are often highly self-opinionated people (which may or may not point to other psychological issues).

This is not to say that only those of a special class are the legitimate representatives of Buddhism, but rather that we must at least have a clear view of the true purpose of Buddhism. It is not about giving talks, but about *what the talk really wants to give*. Buddhism is at heart about self-healing and other-healing, or in short, about *true happiness*. Sharing knowledge can be ego-boosting, but sharing happiness is truly charitable. Or, at least, we should find a wise and happy teacher, and reflect his happiness to others.

Generally, Chán meditation and encounter dialogues will not work in Buddhist counselling; in fact, they will only make matters worse, even causing a breakdown in the client, or at best leave the problem unresolved. However, after the initial stages of counselling (open questioning and feedback, and exploring alternative self-healing paths), such replies may hit home some important points or highlight insights uncovered earlier in the session. The Buddhist counsellor should, of course, be familiar with such encounter dialogues and how to appropriately apply them. [5.1.3.5]

⁷³ This simple case-study is an example of the “Bodhidharma gambit” (or “Bodhidharma method,” as Zong calls it), mentioned above, based on the famous story of a meeting between Huikē [5.2.3.1] and Bodhidharma [7.5.3.1]. See also Desheng ZONG, “Three language-related methods in early Chinese Chan Buddhism,” 2005 & Dale Wright, “Rethinking transcendence,” 1992: 14-16 (§4) digital.

⁷⁴ What Zong is describing here is actually “paratactic distortion,” a term first used by US psychiatrist, Harry S Sullivan: see **Gadhabha Samaṇa S** (A 3.81) = SD 24.10b Intro (2.1.4).

7.5.3.3 WAS BUDDHISM REALLY ACCEPTED IN CHINA? In a sense, *Buddhism was never accepted in China*;⁷⁵ at least, not the early Indian form. Early Buddhism is a teaching of not-self (*anattā*), but the ancient Chinese Buddhists generally could not let go of the soul-belief [4.1.3.1]. This belief continues today to fuel superstitious beliefs in such things as luck, ghosts and death. A wholesome remedy to such ailments is *a humanistic Buddhism*,⁷⁶ but it remains to be seen how far it will be able to an effective inspiration and reality, considering that in our society, it is common for a monastery, temple, group or person to be an “I-pod”⁷⁷ of busyness, lost in their piety or lack of it, competitively propelled by their own lack, wants and biases.

Under such circumstances, “Sòng metropolitan Buddhism” is still alive and thriving amongst us today. We must lift up our eyes away from worldliness and gaze directly at the Buddha Dharma, so that Buddhism becomes truly socially engaged, mentally stilling and spiritually liberating. We must constantly question ourselves: *How Dharma-centred am I?* How well we answer this vital question will decide the quality of our spiritual growth.

The purpose of this historical study is not to claim that any one Buddhist tradition is more authentic than another, but to appreciate how human knowledge grows and evolve over time and space. Buddhism has always profoundly enriched whichever individual, group, religion or culture it pervades. After the Buddha, we see Buddhism reaching great heights as *philosophy* and *humanism* in the Mahāyāna tradition, and as *mythology* and *magic* in the Tantrayāna. Throughout northern and eastern Asia, we see Buddhism playing significant roles in the culture, economics and politics of the society that has adopted it.

It is profoundly interesting to study Buddhism as history, philosophy, architecture, art, sociology, and psychology, that is, Buddhism as *civilization*. However, strictly speaking, these are *academic* fields, that is, they are taken as merely study subjects which invariably become a basis for a profession. An academic, however, need not be a Buddhist (not that he must), and as such, he is an outsider looking into the fascinating Buddhist world.

Beginning around 2000, we see the emergence of academicians who are also practising Buddhists, who openly declare their faith and professionalism, that as Buddhist scholars, they enjoy greater advantages as insiders studying their discipline both as a *profession* (as a specialty and a job) and as a *vocation* (in the old sense of “calling,” that is, as personal practice).⁷⁸

7.5.3.4 WE NEED TO IMPROVE OURSELVES, NOT THE DHARMA. An interesting development in recent times is that of “**Critical Buddhism**” (Jap: *Hihan Bukkyō*), a movement among Japanese academics that highlights the doctrinal incompatibility between east Asian Buddhism and early Indian Buddhism. The leading scholars in this field, namely, Noriaki HAKAMAYA and Shirō MATSUMOTO of Komazawa University, have raised controversy by highlighting how later east Asian teachings, notably those of Zen Buddhism, and doctrinal concepts, such as that of *tathāgata, garbha* (the Buddha-womb) lack foundation

⁷⁵ See Linda Brown Holt, “From India to China: Transformations in Buddhist philosophy,” 1995.

⁷⁶ **Humanistic Buddhism** (*Rénjiān Fójiào* 人間佛教) is, in fact, the dominant modern Buddhist philosophy of the Chinese Mahayanists worldwide. Its success lies mainly in its integration pragmatic materialism of the Chinese with practical religious values, especially the effective accumulation and use of wealth in social work, education and other this-worldly enterprises. Chinese Mahayāna monks Master Yinshùn (Yinshùn Dǎoshī 印順導師, 1906-2005) and Master Hsingyun (Xīngyún Dàshī 星雲大師, 1927-) are the best known modern pioneers of Humanistic Buddhism as a movement [6.3.1].

⁷⁷ That is, an exclusive “pod” of self-promoting activity.

⁷⁸ See Jackson & Makransky, *Buddhist Theology*, 1999. **Jose Ignacio Cabezon**, argues that the use of “theology” is appropriate, because “I take theology not to be restricted to discourse on God...I take ‘theology’ not to be restricted to its etymological meaning. In that latter sense, Buddhism is of course atheological, rejecting as it does the notion of God.” (“Buddhist Theology in the Academy” in Jackson & Makransky 1999:25-52). So here we *Buddhist* scholars re-defining “theology,” which previously refers to “the study or science of God, His nature and attributes, and His relations with man and the universe (Hooker); divinity” (OED), which now becomes more broadly *the study of religion from a religious perspective*.

in early Indian Buddhism. Such notions are therefore, they argue, fundamentally incompatible with early teachings that deny any enduring entity.⁷⁹

All this implies our natural desire for the real thing, the true source of spiritual liberation. If our desire is a plan for social wellbeing and self-liberation, then we must emerge from the dense jungle of religious chimaeras, frankensteins and dead bones of religious materialism. The freshest and clearest waters are of course at the wellspring itself. For, what we will find there is the sweetest of waters and the most quenching, and most of all it gives us the taste of freedom, that is, true spiritual liberation. We must liberate the Buddha from the scholars, from the preachers, from the missionaries, and above all, from ourselves.

A clear trend runs through pre-modern Chinese Buddhism: it was characterized by indigenous inventiveness—it was more *Chinese* than it was *spiritual*. The tendency towards “fabricated Buddhisms” was most common among the “metropolitan” monastics [5.2.3.1], especially of the Sòng period, which, because of endorsements of the ruling elite and literati of the day, have come down mostly unquestioned as the Chinese Buddhisms we see today. *These are the Buddhisms invented by the high and mighty, the rich and powerful, for the purpose of dominating the scene.* Metropolitan Buddhisms are still with us.

The fabricating, re-packaging and plagiarizing of Buddhism continue unabated even today: we see this in the ubiquitous free booklets, the popular public talks by titled speakers, internet Buddhism, and corporate monastics. If there are those who think I am being cynical, it only reinforces my case—these “skillful means” are *very* effective. They especially work for those seeking a ready-made stick-on Buddhism that needs almost no self-effort but *merely* the personal endorsement of a Zen master, a high lama, a chief high priest, a chaokhun, a PhD monastic, or some modern urban Buddha—or anyone with a “purple robe” [5.1.3.2]. The teacher has been enthroned above the Dharma; the Dharma has been turned on its head. The best way to burst this “Buddhist” bubble is to reflect on the nature of not-self (*anattā*) or to enjoy the inner stillness of our being so that we see more truly and clearly. This would immunize us from any chicanery or tartuffism, and direct our minds and efforts to the real issues.

Singapore and Malaysia Buddhism are going through a *formative* period, where we are mastering all that is good from foreign Buddhisms and foreign Buddhist missionaries. The process of **indigenization**, too, has begun, but a lot of commitment, industry and spirituality are needed from local Buddhists so that the Buddha Dharma becomes even closer to our daily lives and society. Only when we are *Buddhist* first, and then Chinese, Sinhala, Myanmarese, Thai, Malaysian, Singaporean, Australian or Western, can we become more global.

We must see our historical and social realities in the light of spirituality. For the sake of greater spiritual fellowship, Singapore Buddhists need to express themselves just as they are: as Singaporeans and Singapore residents. Malaysia Buddhists and those of other societies, too, need to express themselves in terms of spiritual fellowship.

Spiritual fellowship nurtured on a common and local level then easily connects with the spiritual fellowship of another country or society. We are united by our commonalty and we learn from our differences, and we celebrate them both. For they provide the rich conditions for a better understanding and experience of what brings us all together: the Buddha Dharma.

It is significant that the stock passage describing those who directly see the Dharma reminds us of our own spiritual task, thus:

“Excellent, Master Gotama! Excellent! Master Gotama! Just as if one were to place upright what had been overturned, were to reveal what was hidden, were to show the way to one who was lost, or were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way, in numerous ways, has the Dharma been made clear by master Gotama.

We go to master Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks. May master Gotama remember us as lay followers who have gone for refuge, from this day forth, for life.” (**Veḷudvāreyya Sutta**, S 55.7/5:356 = SD 1.5; etc)

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⁷⁹ See esp Hubbard & Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, 1997.