

Buddhist Scriptures

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before she would do so. After staying at home for a month, she returned to the convent, and from this time on practised with even greater vigour.

On the night of the twenty-ninth of the seventh month of the eleventh year of the Republican period [1922], after burning incense to the *bodhisattva* Dizang, she suddenly felt a headache and went directly to bed. The next day when she arose, her disciple Yuechan brought her some porridge, but Lianzhen said 'That won't be necessary. Prepare a bath for me. When I have bathed, shave my head. Then bring me clean garments and a *kāśyā*. This would be appropriate.'

When the nuns in the assembly heard the news, they all came. Lianzhen pressed her palms together and bowed three times to her master Yuanxin, saying, 'Master, I am departing.' Then she bowed to the other nuns in the assembly and said farewell. When she had finished speaking she closed her eyes and passed away. This was in the third hour of the afternoon on the first day of the eighth month of the *renxu* year. She was forty years old and had passed twenty-four years as a nun.

Translated by John Kieschnick. The biography of Bo Sengguang is from the 'Practitioners of Meditation' (*xichan*) section of the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 11, T 2059, vol. 50, p. 395c), compiled at the beginning of the sixth century by Huijiao (497–554). The biography of Daojian is from the 'Wonderworkers' (*gantong*) chapter of the *Song Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 18, T 2061, vol. 50, pp. 824c–825c), completed in 988 by Zanning (919–1001). The addendum at the end of the biography was probably composed by Zanning himself. The biography of the nun Zhisheng is from the *Biographies of Nuns* (*Biguni zhuan* 3, T 2063, vol. 50, pp. 942c–943a), compiled c. 516 by Baochang. The biography of Lianzhen is from the *Further Biographies of Nuns* (*Xubiquni zhuan* 6), completed in 1939 by Zhenhua (1909–1947), Zhenjiang Zhulin si edition, reprinted in *Gaoseng zhuan he ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1991), p. 1011.

THE NINE PATRIARCHS OF THE EAST

For a tradition that traces its origins to an enlightened master, the notion of the transmission of the master's teachings is crucial. What is the route whereby the master's teachings made their way to the present? And how can the authenticity of that route be assured? Has the line of transmission ever been interrupted or tainted by subsequent interpolations? Such questions have been central to Buddhist traditions across Asia, each of which seeks to trace its origins back to the Buddha himself and his original circle of disciples. Numerous traditions approach these questions in the language of lineage, a line of teachers and disciples that stretches back to the Buddha and forward to the present. Sometimes, as in Tibet, this line may be that of the incarnations of a single teacher, dying in one lifetime to be reborn and identified by his disciples in the next, over the generations. More commonly, both in Tibet and elsewhere in the Buddhist world, the lineage is represented as an ancestral lineage, not a bloodline of fathers and sons, but a spiritual line of teachers and students. Although laypeople appear in these lineages, they are typically made up of monks.

In order for these lines to be regarded as authentic, they must pass unbroken across mountains, oceans and centuries, and survive famines, wars, droughts and the competing claims of other lineages. The various schools of Buddhism have, therefore, devoted much energy and many words to recounting the history of their own lineages. One of the most famous such accounts is that of the Chan and Zen schools, which look back to a moment when the Buddha silently held up a flower. Only his disciple Mahākāśyapa understood that at that moment the Buddha was

making the 'mind to mind transmission'. Yet the Chan accounts are careful also to describe how this mental transmission was physically transported from India to China by the monk Bodhidharma.

The passage below is drawn from a lineage history of the famous Tiantai school of China entitled Comprehensive Record of the Buddhas and Patriarchs (Fozu tongji), compiled by the Tiantai monk Zhipan in 1269. It is a massive historical and hagiographical compendium that traces the trunk and branches of the Tiantai school, as envisioned in the late Song Dynasty. Adopting the familiar Chinese language of ancestral lineage, it begins with a description of twenty-three or twenty-four (depending on the reckoning) Indian 'patriarchs', beginning with the Buddha himself and ending with a figure named Simha. This is then followed by biographies of the so-called 'nine patriarchs of the East', that is, of China: the major Chinese figures responsible for founding and bringing to maturation the teachings of the Tiantai school. The preface to the latter set of biographies and the biography of the greatest of the nine Chinese patriarchs, the third patriarch, Zhiyi, is translated here.

The lineage of twenty-three Indian patriarchs is drawn from a sixth-century translation of an Indian work known as the Circumstances of the Transmission of the Dharma Treasure (Futazang yinyuan zhuan), which includes many of the most important figures of Indian Buddhism, including Nāgārjuna (regarded as the founder of the Madhyamaka tradition) and Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (regarded as founders of the Yogācāra tradition). But unlike that of the Chan school, the continuous 'face-to-face' succession comes to an end in India with Simha's untimely death; no patriarch transports the lineage from India to China. The Tiantai school was famous for its dedication to study and exegesis. It is therefore perhaps appropriate that the question of lineage focuses on the transmission of the Buddha's received word – that is, the scriptures and their interpretation – rather than on the more personal lineage of enlightenment.

It is the conviction that scripture is the authoritative ground of tradition that bridges the gap between the Western patriarch Simha and the Eastern patriarchs, the historical founders of the

Tiantai school in China. The lineage history below describes how, although far removed from the age and homeland of the Buddha, the Chinese founders of the Tiantai school, through a combination of extensive scholarship and meditative genius, recovered the 'original mind' or intention of the Buddha from a baffling array of texts. As masters of both the received and transcendent dimensions of the Buddha's wisdom, they were able to bring his words back to life, reconstitute the broken patriarchal succession, and establish the true dharma in China. It is said of Huìwén, the first of the Chinese Tiantai masters, 'Although he did not know Nāgārjuna in person, he knew his mind.'

Zhipan's Preface to the Biographies of the 'Nine Patriarchs of the East'

The enlightenment of the buddhas and patriarchs is transmitted from mind to mind. Why should it further wait for verbal explanations? Even though sanction may take place at the moment of the enlightening encounter, there still must be [a tangible] act of bestowing and receiving as a formal protocol for transmission of the way. Thus the twenty-four saints of the golden-mouthed patriarchal transmission all personally received verbal determinations [from their masters] and relied on them to express [to others] the marvel of the mind transmission [in the form of teachings]. This practice of leaving behind verbal discourses can be justified by the need to bring unity to antiquity and the present, to differentiate right from wrong, to clarify wisdom and its object, and to distinguish the essential teaching from its [manifest] applications.

From the time the *sūtras* and commentaries first made their way to the East [i.e., China], their teachings have always been replete with the elixir of absolute truth. But the masters of this land of ours, lamenting people's inability to apprehend it, concentrated their efforts exclusively on lecture and exegesis as the means for eking out the central thesis [of the tradition]. In the process, they became preoccupied with its minor points and lost sight of the major ones, seized on partial [truths] and

neglected the perfect or complete [picture]. Thus the means to reveal and disseminate the marvel of mind-transmission were never made available, and those who would pursue the path [to enlightenment] were left yearning for the birth of a saint [to guide them].

Through spontaneous manifestation of his endowments from former lives, and without relying on personal transmission from a teacher, the venerable [Huiwen] of the Northern Qi awoke mysteriously to Nāgārjuna's teaching of the mutual identity of [the truths of] emptiness, provisional existence and the middle way. Making it the core of a method for contemplation of the mind, he taught the procedure to Nanyue [Huisi; 515–577]. Master Nanyue practised it and realized purification of the six sense faculties. He in turn transmitted it to Zhiyi [538–597]. By applying this technique, Zhiyi became enlightened to the [profound meaning of the] *Lotus Sūtra* and went on to open anew the great enterprise [of the Buddha], giving his name to this particular school of ours.

[Zhiyi] devised a saying to the effect that, 'Transmission of the way lies in practice as well as in preaching.' Consequently he sketched out the five periods [of the Buddha's career] and elaborated in detail the eight teachings. [On the basis of this system of doctrinal classification] he synthesized the miscellaneous treatises [of the Buddhist canon] and grounded their essential design in the *Lotus Sūtra*. [In his treatise on the *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sūtra* (*Fahua xuanyi*)] he laid out the five divisions in order to elucidate [the deep meaning of the *sūtra's*] title; and [in his *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sūtra* (*Fahua wenji*)] he distinguished the fourfold [system of] exegesis to synthesize [the meaning of] its individual lines and paragraphs.

Having brought full clarity to [the Buddha's] doctrinal preachings, the principles of meditative practice still required clarification. These he also addressed through his singular treatise on [the *Great Calming and Contemplation*], in which he expounded the practices [that he had applied] to his own mind. He introduced the work with six chapters that set forth the conceptual understanding of meditative calming and conten-

plation, and followed them up with [additional chapters] that established concrete practice on the basis of this understanding. The twenty-five methods serve as the [preparatory] expedients [for calming and contemplation], while the ten modes of discernment constitute the main practice. In his discussion of the simultaneous inherence of the three thousand [realms], [absolute] principle and phenomenal affairs [within a single instant of thought], [Zhiyi] refuted the hundred schools [of his age] and surpassed both ancient and contemporary [interpretations]. Thus [the *Great Calming and Contemplation*] is the basis from which the world at large illumines the [Buddhist] teachings.

At that time there was the great *dhyaṇa* master Zhang'an [Guanding]. He was extremely erudite, a quality which also owed its inspiration to sublime enlightenment. Attending [Zhiyi's] lectures he took up the brush and recorded his words, [after which] he compiled them into treatises and commentaries in order to [convey] their lucid insights to future students. However, worldlings who delighted in unusual theories – such as the five teachings and three periods – concentrated exclusively on their particular [biased] interests. Even though each occasion for [the Buddha's] preaching of the *dharma* had its particular aims and reasons, in the long run [their individual study] is not adequate for comprehending the entirety of [the Buddha's strategy for] training others or for reaching the ultimate design of the *Lotus [Sūtra]*. One should know that the rolls of the eternal *dharma* fill [our continent of] Jambudvīpa, and the followers who wear the mendicant's robe are more numerous than sprouts of [spring] bamboo. And yet, if Tiantai [Zhiyi] had not been born, if the [classificatory system of the five] periods and [the eight] doctrinal teachings had not been disseminated, and if the path of meditation not been clarified, then we must surmise that the Buddha's *dharma* would have long since disappeared.

Zhang'an [Guanding] therefore took up this great tradition and, in turn, transmitted it to Fahua [Huiwei]. Fahua during his day had more than seven hundred followers who became lecturers, but only Tiantong [Zhiwei] truly continued his legacy.

Countless numbers of persons sought the way at Tiangong's gate, but Zhuoxi [Xuanlang] alone inherited his mantle. Zhuoxi was a prolific teacher, and his students were even more numerous [than those of his predecessors], flocking to his door and crowding his room from distant lands and nearby districts alike.

The three generations descended from Fahua all continued [the school's] essential [teaching] and preserved its texts, but focused their efforts on nothing more than [superficial] lecturing. By the time of Jingxi [Zhanran], [the tradition] had fallen into decline and was under considerable duress. When traitors stealthily came forth [to deprecate the Tiantai teachings], [Zhanran composed] the *Diamond Sceptre* [Jingang bei] and the *Meaning of [the Great] Calming and Concentration* [Topically Arranged] [Zhiguan yili] [to counter them], so that they were compelled to take them as a basis of discussion. When students differed over the wording [of the Tiantai texts], [the master composed] his sub-commentaries to the school's key treatises, so that they had no recourse but to look to them for guidance. [In this way] he clarified the orthodox teaching [of our school] to provide a model for later generations. By comparison, his contribution to the propagation [of our school] exceeds that of Zhang'an [Guanding].

The Summary Epilogue states: There is a saying attributed to Zhang'an [Guanding] to the effect that 'Zhiyi says in his *Treatise on Contemplating the Mind*, "I entrust my life to the master Nāgārjuna." This proves [that he regarded] Nāgārjuna as the master who was our high ancestral progenitor.' Zhanran's [Treatise] for *Assisting the Practice* [of the Great Calming and Contemplation] explains this passage saying, '[According to secular conventions of genealogy] Zhiyi should speak of Nāgārjuna as the grand ancestral master [since the Buddha himself would properly be the high ancestral progenitor]. But, if one takes "high" to signify eminence and esteem, then [Zhiyi's original usage] becomes like that of the ruling houses of the Han and Qi, who all designate the founding ancestor [of their dynasties] as their "high [ancestor]". It simply means that his merit is unsurpassed, for which he is posthumously called "high". The [Tiantai] school of the present day still regards

Nāgārjuna as its founding patriarch. Hence, [it is fitting that] Zhiyi designate him the "high ancestral patriarch".'

Now, the school that advocates transmission of the Buddha-mind [i.e., the Chan school] popularized the idea of a continuous lineage of the way. Taken with this idea, later people have applied the term 'patriarchal ancestor' generically [to the masters of our own school]. As such, the twenty-four sages of the golden-mouthed patriarchal transmission are all honoured with [the title] of 'ancestral patriarch'. Coming down to [the masters of] this land, the 'succession of nine patriarchs' also has this idea behind it. But here one should realize that our use of the term 'high [ancestor]' is actually in keeping with Jingxi's [Zhanran's] idea of 'one's merit being unsurpassed'. It is not the same as the use of the titles 'high' and 'grand' in secular traditions [of genealogy].

Biography of Tiantai Zhiyi

At age twenty Zhiyi stepped forward to receive the full precepts, after which he first studied the *vinaya* and learned the [rite for the] *vaipulya* [repentance] under [master] Huikuang. Later he went to Mount Daxian (in the southern reaches of Hengzhou) to recite the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Sūtra of Illimitable Meanings* and the *Sūtra for the Contemplation of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy*. Within the space of twenty days he memorized the three works perfectly. Then he took up practice of the *vaipulya*. All the most sublime omens appeared to him. The retreat sanctuary [daochang] took on the image of a vast and magnificently adorned altar, even though it was crammed with a confusion of scriptures and images. His body remained firmly on the high seat [for ritual recitation] and his feet entwined in [lotus] posture on the rope couch [for meditation], while his mouth engaged in constant recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra* and his hands remained poised in reverence before *sūtra* and icon.

Having become fully versed in the *vinaya* and [having] tasted constant delight in the joys of meditation, Zhiyi began to lament the fact that there was no one in the Hengzhou area who was fit to consult [for spiritual guidance]. During the first year of the

Tianjia era of the Chen emperor Wen [560 CE], the *dhyaṇa* master Huisi settled at Mount Dasu in Guangzhou. Learning of this fact, Zhiyi went there to pay him homage. [Huisi said to him, 'In former days you and I listened to the *Lotus* [*Sūtra*] together on Vulture Peak [where the Buddha originally taught it]. In pursuit of this connection from former lives, you have come to me once again.'

Thereupon he showed Zhiyi to the sanctuary for *bodhisattva* Universal Worthy and taught him the method of the four easeful practices [of the *Lotus samādhi*]. Day and night Zhiyi laboured painfully at the practice, disciplining his mind as he had been instructed. He chopped up cedar wood to use as incense. When the cedar was gone he continued his offerings using millet. [At night] he rolled up the curtains to allow moonlight [into the sanctuary]; and when the moon set, he burned pine wood for light. Fourteen days into the retreat, while reciting [the *Lotus*] *sūtra* he came upon the line that reads, 'Such pure zeal as this is as the true offering of *dharma* to the *tathāgatas*.' His body and mind suddenly became quiescent and he slipped into meditative absorption. Powers of *dhāraṇī* [magical spells], in turn, manifested from this condition of tranquil *samādhi*. He luminously comprehended the [whole of the] *Lotus Sūtra*, like a high beacon that shines over a dark valley; and he penetrated the true nature of the *dharma*, as a long wind sweeps freely through the void.

When he went to seek confirmation of [his enlightenment] from his master, Huisi helped him to extend it further. Through the combination of his own inner enlightenment and what he received in additional instruction from his teacher, Zhiyi's progress in the space of four nights exceeded what would ordinarily take a lifetime of a hundred years. Nanyue praised him saying, 'If not for you there would be no realization; if not for me, there would be no one to recognize it. The *samādhi* that you have experienced is the preparatory expedient to the *Lotus samādhi*. The *dhāraṇī* that you have manifested is the *dhāraṇī* of the first turning [that is mentioned in the *Lotus Sūtra*]. Even if a crowd of a thousand masters of the written text were to come to test your eloquence, none would be able to exhaust it. Truly you are the foremost among preachers of the *dharma*!'

Translated by Daniel Stevenson from Zhipan's *Fozu tongji*, T 2035 vol. 49. The preface is found at pp. 177c17-178b10; the biography of Zhiyi at pp. 181b1-c9.