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THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE GIVEN: REPRESENTATIONS OF MERIT AND EMPTINESS IN MEDIEVAL CHINESE BUDDHISM

Medieval Chinese Buddhist merit discourse and donor practices constitute a diverse and fertile field that awaits comprehensive study. In this article, I take up several quite different examples of representations of merit in order to elucidate relationships among notions of gift, emptiness, salvific images, and commemoration of the deceased. Let me first summarize the Buddhist soteriology linking these concepts. One of the fundamental tenets of Buddhism is the notion that good deeds earn "merit" (*puṇya*) that will negate the effects of past evil deeds and lead to beneficial future conditions, especially good rebirth. Generous giving (*dana*), especially giving support to monks and nuns, is the paradigmatic merit-gaining practice. In terms of the Mahāyāna (Greater Vehicle) doctrine of the Two Truths, the practice of generosity and the accumulation of merit belong to the truth of "provisional means" relative to the absolute truth of emptiness/interdependence. At the same time, in Mahāyāna contexts generosity is construed as one of the perfections practiced by bodhisattvas on their path to ultimate Buddhahood, and both lay and ordained devotees can aspire to this path.[1]

[1] This ideal picture has been readjusted somewhat since the publication of Jan Nattier's study of the exclusionary and extremist tendencies in some early Mahāyāna scriptures; see *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path according to "The Inquiry of Ugra (Ugraparipṛcchā)"* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003).

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In Chinese Buddhism, the soteriology of representations of salvific figures also reflects the Two Truths doctrine of provisional/absolute truth and duality/nonduality. On the provisional level of apparent duality, devotion to Buddhas and bodhisattvas and to images representing them elicits a response, moving the salvific figure to deploy the power of his/her merit as *upāya,* skillful means, in order to relieve the sufferings of the devotee. The ultimate aim of *upāya* is to bring all beings to the realization of emptiness/nonduality, the lack of inherent self-identity, and the interdependence of all phenomena. According to this soteriology, images and the salvific figures they represent are similarly virtual—they are conditional and ultimately illusory manifestations created for the sake of illusion-bound "virtual" sufferers. However, the apparently localized and provisional nature of images and merit refers to their nonlocalized, absolute nature, and vice versa. This recursivity is what makes merit transfer possible and desirable. Giving a gift to the Buddhist Saṅgha (community of the ordained) and then dedicating the merit for the benefit of others, the donor compounds provisional merit into inexhaustible merit. This is accomplished through appealing to the meditation of a Buddha or bodhisattva, who enables the devotee to sow seeds of individual merit in the universal merit field, and also deploys the inexhaustible universal merit field in order to benefit the devotee and his/her family.

Merit practice is concerned with giving bodies in various ways. It sustains the deceased and their fortunate rebirth, and it is the substance and function of the salvific bodies manifested by Buddhas and bodhisattvas. In Chan (Zen) discourse, merit is the *Dharmakāya* (body of the law, ultimate reality) and its realization in Buddha nature. In relation to images, merit is the power inherent in the Buddhist image as well as the desired product of its creation. To explore this family of traces, I make use of widely disparate materials: Pali scriptures, a Chinese exegetical treatise, Chinese Buddhist paintings and inscriptions, a Chan memorial eulogy, and also a eulogy written by the late Jacques Derrida.

In the first section of this article, "Merit and Gift," I discuss the tension between the foundational Buddhist teachings of no-self and nonattachment and the equally foundational teaching that the laity gain merit by supporting the Saṅgha. The next section, "Mahāyāna and Merit Transfer," explores a Chinese synthesis of doctrines of merit and merit transfer in key Mahāyāna scriptures. Compiled by the Buddhist exegete Huiyuan 慧遠 (523–592), this synthesis is a good example of ways that merit practices were both upheld and circumscribed through reference to the authoritative Mahāyāna doctrines of emptiness and the Two Truths. "Merit and Images," the third section, concerns donor inscriptions on three painting scrolls that were recovered from the hidden storehouse at Dunhuang, in northwest China. In a subsection, "Economies of Merit," I discuss the re-

lationship between Buddhist economic practices and merit, with reference to the mediating function of the clergy and the notion of "symbolic capital." The fourth section, " 'No-Merit' and Portrait Dharma," concerns the representation of a human figure as a manifestation of merit; I focus on a portrait-eulogy for an eighth-century Chan master that evokes the power of the master's realization of emptiness and presents the image of the master as a salvific manifestation.

In the last section, "The Image and the Work of Mourning," I discuss the representation and memorialization of the Chan master in relation to Derrida's reflections on the nature and functioning of the "work of mourning," image, and gift. The notion of "the gift" has attracted much theoretical attention in the fields of sociology and religious studies and has been taken as a topic of deconstructive analysis by Derrida and others. Merit, the quintessential "gift that keeps on giving," is clearly a good place to start thinking about connections between Buddhist and poststructuralist or postmodern discourse on giving. A simple structural opposition animates my ongoing inquiries into poststructuralist discourse on the gift: for Buddhists, merit/gift is sustained by emptiness, while for Derrida, giving is lost in aporia. Derrida argues that the gift, like immediate experience or "self-presence," is annulled by recognition of it as such.[2] Pure giving is impossible because of the giver's awareness of him/herself as giving.

In terms of Derridean *différence,* the Buddhist experience of the nonduality of subject and object would be held to be similarly impossible and self-delusional. In other contexts, he deconstructs the Heideggerian notion, possibly Buddhist influenced, of the experiencing of pure Being or self-presence as itself. For Derrida, experiencing and what is experienced can never be united in a self-identical essence—experience and meaning are possible only because of differentiation and deferment, the endless opening of signification to otherness and what is in excess of itself, and therefore the lack of essence, center, or totality. Derridean deconstruction at times appears to resemble the methods of certain Buddhists, particularly the Mādhyamika dialectician Nāgārjuna. However, according to the terms of deconstruction, the liberative experience of the totality of the simultaneous interdependence and relativity of all things is impossible.

Derrida's meditation on this impossibility is related to his questioning of writing and memory. As experience can only be grasped in the act of auto-inscription referring to its own gesture of reference, likewise memory is a trace, not of some "one" but of absence of one, a reference to the ongoing differentiation of self from others. But it also refers to differentiation from oneself, from other selves that are actively forgotten. In

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12.

considering various writings and images that were created to commemorate and benefit the living and the dead, I have tried to elucidate the interplay of the impossible and the given in these traces of emptiness and merit.

The apparent analogies between Buddhist emptiness and the Derridean "impossible" invites mutual appropriation and mutual deconstruction, and this invitation has inspired a small but growing body of scholarship.[3] Deconstructive analysis of the work of misrecognition and desire in the functioning of gift and memory does, like Buddhist analysis of emptiness, point to the lack of any self-identical gift-act, giver, or recipient. However, postmodern aporia cannot point to a safe place for one's deceased parents, teachers, children, or siblings, while Buddhist affirmation of the ultimate nonduality of merit and emptiness creates the adamantine given upon which donors can confidently inscribe their names and the names of their loved ones. In other words, deconstruction and various types of Buddhist analyses may bring one to realization of the self-contradictions inherent in the epistemological structures that create one's lived reality. Though both may demonstrate that there is no reality corresponding to one's experience, Buddhists can assert that the merit and compassion of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas enables them to create a provisional afterlife "realm" or effect. (As lived reality is also an effect, there is no ontological divide—indeed, no ontology.)

Robert Glass comments on those who see postmodernism and Buddhism as allies in providing insight into the interdependent or relational nature of self/reality: "They have moved away from independent existence only to rest in mutual existence. However, there is no resting place or mutuality in the endless deferral of deconstruction, and this is the whole point. Whether the place is 'words beyond words' or 'images beyond images,' both are illusions which bar honest acknowledgment of the infinite negation of negation. For Indra's Net to be postmodern, there needs to be a rip or tear in the net."[4] I agree with Glass that the difference between Derridean impossibility (endless deferral) and Buddhist emptiness (mutuality) is irremediable, and yet once it has been put into play this difference is itself a trace deferring to the mutual reference of aporia and merit as much as to their irreconcilability.

[3] Examples include Bernard Faure, *Double Exposure: Cutting across Buddhist and Western Discourses,* trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Robert Newman Glass, "Splits and Gaps in Buddhism and Postmodern Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 2 (1995): 303–19; David Loy, ed., *Healing Deconstruction: Postmodern Thought in Buddhism and Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 196); and Robert Magliola, *On Deconstructing Life-Worlds: Buddhism, Christianity, Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[4] Robert Newman Glass, review of *Healing Deconstruction,* by David Loy, and *On Deconstructing Life-Worlds,* by Robert Magliola, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 5 (1998): 62.

MERIT AND GIFT

Let me begin by considering the more conventional interdependencies involved in donor inscription. Commissioning the production of Buddhist images, bells, *stūpa*s, and shrines; commissioning, copying, and reciting scripture; and supporting the community of the ordained—all these gain merit for the donor, mitigating future conditions in this life and the next. Activities centered on objects, scripture, and support are said to sow the "merit fields" of Buddha, Dharma (teaching/law), and Saṅgha, respectively. In subsequent sections I will focus on activity of the first type, the making of images, but in early Buddhist scriptures the most typical donor activity depicted is support of the monastic community.

The relationship between individual donors and the collective Saṅgha has been a major factor in the development of Buddhism, carrying its ways and means through many centuries and countries, and yet it has frequently been a target of criticism from Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. At the heart of this powerful and contested relationship is the problem of the personal. The fundamental Buddhist teachings of no-self and nonattachment, and later the Mahāyāna teaching of the emptiness of gift, giver, and recipient, are conveyed through scriptural settings in which the tension between personal relationships and liberation are resolved in favor of liberation. However, in some scriptures and in the Vinayas (rules of conduct for the ordained), it is acknowledged that monks' and nuns' dependence on gifts for survival can create personal ties with the donors, which are to be annulled by repaying the debt with the universal and impersonal currency—merit.

In the *Dakkhiṇāvibhanga-sutta* (The exposition of offerings) we find Ānanda arguing with his cousin the Buddha that he should accept a personal gift from their aunt: "Venerable sir, let the Blessed One accept the new pair of cloths from Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī has been very helpful to the Blessed One, venerable sir. As his mother's sister, she was his nurse, his foster mother, the one who gave him milk when his own mother died. The Blessed One too has been very helpful to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, venerable sir. It is owing to the Blessed One that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha."[5]

To this the Buddha replies, "That is so, Ānanda, that is so! When one person, owing to another, has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma,

[5] *Dakkhiṇāvibhanga Sutta* (The exposition of offerings), *Majjhima Nikāya* (hereafter MN) III 253, 3, in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya,* trans. Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 1102–6.

and the Saṅgha, I say that it is not easy for the former to repay the latter."[6] Note that the Buddha claims that the balance of obligation is on the side of Mahāpajāpatī, for he has repaid the transitory "milk debt" that sustained his infant body with the inestimable Triple Gem, which offers liberation from rebirth.[7]

The Buddha then expostulates on personal offerings to an individual versus offerings to the Saṅgha. Regarding individual offerings, it is said that the rewards of making an offering to an animal repay a hundredfold, and so on up the chain of beings to offerings to a stream entrant, which repays immeasurably. Beyond the level of stream entrant and up to the final level of a gift to a Tathāgata, the incalculable reward is inexpressible: "What should be said about giving a gift to a Tathāgata, accomplished and fully enlightened?"[8] However, gifts to the collective Saṅgha are extolled in a passage that concludes with the assertion, "And I say that in no way does a gift to a person individually ever have greater fruit than an offering made to the Saṅgha."[9]

Thus the merit gained from personal gifts to the Tathāgata is inexpressibly incalculable, but this immeasurability is yet somehow less than the results of giving to the collective Saṅgha. Moreover, the recipient of the Dharma cannot repay the obligation incurred by having received the gift of refuge and the ending of suffering, for that debt is also incalculable. Rather, the individual donor to the Buddha and Saṅgha receives the opportunity to sow the seeds of future incalculable reward. While it is too simplistic to reduce this to the calculus of institutional self-interest, neither can one convincingly defend the Buddhist rhetoric of merit and debt as transparent and benign.[10]

Oliver Freiberger, in his "Profiling the Saṅgha: Institutional and Non-Institutional Tendencies in Early Buddhist Teachings," points to a countervailing soteriology of merit in certain Pāli scriptures, in which the individual dispositions of both donor and recipient determine the efficacy

[6] MN III 254, 4, in Nāṇamoli and Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* 1103.

[7] The notion of the Buddha-Dharma as a repayment for the "milk debt" owed to mothers by their children is discussed by Alan Cole in his *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[8] MN III 255, 6, in Nāṇamoli and Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* 1104.

[9] MN III 256, 8, in Nāṇamoli and Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* 1105.

[10] For examples of studies that stress institutional self-interest in medieval Chinese Buddhism, see Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries,* trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); and Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism.*

of the gift.[11] The recipient qualifies as an ideal merit field due to his/her own ascesis and not to his/her status as a representative of the Saṅgha, and there are even passages that recommend the efficaciousness of gifts to non-Buddhist ascetics. Freiberger cites an *Aṅguttara Nikāya* passage regarding the "sixfold-endowed offering," which stresses the individual merits of the giver and recipient over their differential religious roles: "What is the giver's threefold part? Herein, *bhikkhū*s (monks), before the gift he is glad at heart; in giving the mind is calmed; and he is delighted when he has given. And what is the recipients' threefold part? Herein, *bhikkhū*s, the recipients are free from craving, hatred, and delusion, or they strive to put an end to craving, hatred, and delusion."[12]

Freiberger's observations are supported by James Egge's recent book, *Religious Giving and the Invention of Karma in Theravāda Buddhism.*[13] Egge argues that the Pāli scriptures contain two distinct rhetorical patterns regarding gift giving, which he characterizes as being based on theories of sacrifice (*yañña*) and theories of karma, respectively. He demonstrates that these discourses were antithetical enough to require later exegetical effort in order to establish the ascendancy of karmic soteriology. The above passage from the *Dakkhiṇāvibhanga-sutta* illustrates a karmic ideology: giving to the Saṅgha is categorically the most karmically rewarding, and the donor's intention to give to the Saṅgha automatically carries a karmic result. Conversely, discourse based on sacrifice is reflected in the above passage from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya,* in which the dispositions of both donor and recipient affect the degree of reward. Works that retain traces of sacrificial ideology also tend to lay more stress on the dedication of the offering (*dakṣiṇā*) and the practices of abstinence of both donor and recipient.

In considering the significance of institutional categories and individual dispositions in the soteriologies of merit, it is important to keep in mind that the individual donor was just as likely or even more likely to have been a monk or a nun, both in India and in China.[14] Theoretically, the

[11] Compare *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (hereafter AN) I 161,13–16; MN I 379,16–18; AN IV 185, 22–24; cited in Oliver Freiberger, "Profiling the Saṅgha: Institutional and Non-institutional Tendencies in Early Buddhist Teachings," *Marburg Journal of Religion* 5, no. 1 (2000): 1–6.

[12] AN III 336,16–22, in Freiberger, "Profiling the Saṅgha: Institutional and Non-Institutional Tendencies in Early Buddhist Teachings," 5. See also AN III 57.

[13] James Egge, *Religious Giving and the Invention of Karma in Theravada Buddhism* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2002).

[14] For Indian examples, see Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997); for Chinese examples, see Hao Chunwen 郝春文, "Guanyu Tang houqi wudai Song chu Shazhou seng-su de shishe wenti" 關於唐後期五代宋初沙州僧俗的施捨問題 (Alms donations by monks and laymen in Sha prefecture during the Later Tang, Five Dynasties, and Early Song), *Tang yanjiu* 3 (1997): 19–40.

Buddhist gift and its impersonal reward, merit, circulate in a system that consists entirely of individual donors and no individual recipients or reciprocators. Therefore, even giving to an unworthy monk is efficacious, because he is resolved (and absolved of obligation) into the collective Saṅgha. This extreme, though itself problematic, is a logical result of the need to pull the Buddhist gift out of the matrix of personal obligation that was both its model and its antithesis.

However, from the perspective of studies of social identity, the desire both to uphold the law of obligation and to be absolved of debt is one of the driving forces of social organization, in relation to which the Buddhist escape route is mere epiphenomenon. Studies of gift-giving practices in a wide range of social contexts (such as the studies by Malinowski, Mauss, and their heirs and critics) show that the personal quality is recognized to be both necessary and dangerous to the functioning of the circuit of giving. Recognition of the danger of the personal is evident precisely in its "misrecognition," its transmutation into collective representation. Let us consider Mauss's now-classic statement on the system of the gift: "Material and moral life, and exchange, function within it [i.e., the system of the gift] in a form that is both disinterested and obligatory. Moreover, this obligation is expressed in a mythical and imaginary way or, one might say, symbolic and collective. It assumes an aspect that centers on the interest attached to the things exchanged. These are never completely detached from those carrying out the exchange. The mutual ties and alliance that they establish are comparatively indissoluble."[15]

Mauss's essay on the gift revolves around the conundrum of free and obligatory exchange, on the power by which things circulate through "total" or undifferentiated social phenomena (at once religious, political, moral, familial) that characterize so-called primitive societies. Although his work has come to symbolize his simplest proposition, namely, that what goes by the name of gift is really exchange, throughout his essay it is the intermingling of self-interest, collective interest, and disinterest that provides a motivating force for both the social dynamics that he interprets and for his interpretive quest.

His evocation of a "power in the object" (the Maori *hau*), that (impersonally) impels reciprocity, was criticized by Levi-Strauss as recourse to mystification and uncooked indigenous theory.[16] Nevertheless, let us look once more at Mauss's intuition that "souls are mixed with things; things

[15] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift,* trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Norton, 1990), 33.

[16] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss,* trans. Felicity Baker (London: Routledge, 1950), 47–50. See also Marshall Sahlins, "The Spirit of the Gift," in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity,* ed. Alan Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 70–95.

with souls"[17] in an incalculable social, economic, and sacred flux of exchange: "In all this there is a succession of rights and duties to consume and reciprocate, corresponding to rights and duties to offer and accept. Yet this intricate mingling of symmetrical and contrary rights and duties ceases to appear contradictory if, above all, one grasps that mixture of spiritual ties between things that to some degree appertain to the soul, and individuals, and groups that to some extent treat one another as things."[18]

In a Buddhist rendering of this economy, the spiritual ties between things, between gift and merit, yields personal benefits (including salvation) for oneself and one's loved ones. The Saṅgha, on the other hand, is reified as a receptacle of offerings so that the donor may exercise his or her right to generate merit. However, donors and Saṅgha, treating each other as things and dealing with things that are tied to the soul, depend on karma rather than obligation to maintain balanced scales. The challenge for the scholar of sacred objects and sacred rhetoric is to see with a kind of double vision both the ideally balanced and the personally weighted scales.

MAHĀYĀNA AND MERIT TRANSFER

Gregory Schopen, working with early Buddhist inscriptions and Vinayas, has demonstrated that merit dedication for the benefit of deceased family members by laypeople, monks, and nuns was a flourishing aspect of pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism.[19] Nevertheless, here I will focus on practices grounded in Mahāyāna soteriology, as this was the prevailing context in which merit practices were received in China. Key Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and the *Avataṃsaka,* promoted the notion that the cosmic Buddhas and bodhisattvas use the power of merit gained through eons of good deeds in order to save beings—which earns them further merit. Their merit is thus inexhaustible, and this enables them to deploy *upāya,* skillful means, adapting the salvific Dharma to the receptive capacities of various kinds of beings. According to this schema, merit, including the merit gained by copying and spreading such scriptures, was foremost among the conventional skillful means through which beings were ultimately saved. Furthermore, as propounded in the *Nirvāṇa* and *Avataṃsaka* sūtras, the perfection (*pāramita*) of generous giving enabled the devotee to make progress on the bodhisattva path.

An excellent compendium of key Mahāyāna tenets, including merit and merit transfer, was compiled by Huiyuan 慧遠 (523–592), a monk who lived during the Northern Zhou 北周 and Sui 隋 dynasties. His *Dasheng*

[17] Mauss, *The Gift,* 20.
[18] Ibid., 14.
[19] Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks,* 56–71.

yi zhang 大乘義章 (Chapters on the meaning of Mahāyāna)[20] draws on the translations of Dharmakṣema 曇無讖 (385–433) and others, and he categorizes Mahāyāna doctrines according to principles such as numerical groups and the structure of the bodhisattva path. He was especially influenced by the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra,* and a number of his sections are abstracts, with explications, of various portions of that sūtra.

Through Huiyuan's work we may thus understand something of the hermeneutics through which concepts of merit and merit transfer were received in early medieval China. Huiyuan follows time-honored Chinese exegetical practice, selecting and organizing source passages according to an overall schema modeled after authoritative texts and made intelligible through the author's commentary. This approach can also be seen in two better-known medieval compendia of Buddhist practices, the *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀 (The great cessation and insight), *T.* 46 (1911), and the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (Jade grove of the Dharma garden), *T.* 53 (2122). Much of Huiyuan's work consists of outlines of scriptural sources and is full of technical terms and doctrines, as we will see. However, his commentary often appears to address a lay or mixed audience, as he argues for the effectiveness of Mahāyāna practices in addressing immediate as well as ultimate concerns. Here I will give abridged accounts of his sections on merit and merit transfer. First I will outline the sections on merit in the fourteenth fascicle, which is concerned with doctrinal tenets that are comprised of ten items, following the numerical principle of organization used in some early Buddhist scriptures. Then I turn to sections on merit in the ninth fascicle, which are organized according to the Two Truths hermeneutic.

In his preface to the section on merit in the fourteenth fascicle, Huiyuan gives an explanatory abstract of the ten merits discussed in the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra.*[21] He glosses the term "merit" (*gongde* 功德) into two parts: *gong* is *gongneng* 功能, the function or power that enables beings to attain nirvāṇa, and this power derives from practice of the virtues, *de* 德, the *pāramitā*s or perfections cultivated by bodhisattvas. He then goes on to detail the ten kinds of merit, as follows: (1) the entrance to wisdom, which is the merit of hearing the teachings and being able to cultivate them to the level of realization of Buddha nature; (2) the arising of powers, constituting the superknowledges and supernormal powers; (3) the immeasurable, unconditional compassion of the bodhisattvas, benefiting all beings; (4) the "ten benefits and results," a lengthy sublist of karmic results that first establishes the bases of the path—a bodhisattva's "root" or karmic

[20] *T.* 44 (1851) = *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 太正新修大藏経 (Taisho Buddhist canon [hereafter, T.]), 85 vols. (Tokyo: Daizō shuppan kai, 1922–33), vol. 44 (no. 1851).

[21] *Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經 ([*Mahāpari*]*nirvāṇa-sūtra*), *T.* 12 (374), trans. Dharmakṣema 曇無讖 (385–433).

disposition, and the bodhisattva vow—and then enumerates the types of actions and results. The principal types of actions and results that are presented are cultivation of the field of merit through giving with equanimity, maintenance of the precepts, practice of the ten virtuous acts and avoidance of the ten evil deeds, retribution causing births in lower realms (including hell), understanding that cause and effect are ultimately empty, the eight kinds of intolerable demons, and the repudiation of karmic proclivities.

The list of ten merits then continues with (5) the five rewards (of which we might note especially the fourth, "reverently making offerings on behalf of all beings, human and divine"); (6) the mind that is spontaneous and self-present (*zizai* 自在), also called the *vajrasamādhi* (adamantine meditation); (7) cultivation (of the path) as the appropriate treatment (of the illness of existence): (8) the eight prescriptions for successful treatment, including six mindfulnesses (one of which is mindfulness of generosity), five *dhyāna*s (meditative absorptions), the mind of bodhi,[22] and ultimate truth; (9) the correct path of cultivation—this section includes a definition of belief (*xin* 信), with "belief in the rewards of generous giving" listed as one of the definitive types of belief, along with belief in the Triple Gem, the Two Truths, and skillful means. The last type of merit listed is (10) "the culmination of the correct path," for which Huiyuan refers us to an overview given in a subsequent chapter.[23]

The corresponding passage on merit transfer in the fourteenth fascicle discusses the ten designations of merit transfer from the *Avantaṃsaka-sūtra*.[24] Merit-transfer, *huixiang* 迴向, is glossed as follows: *hui,* to return to reverse direction (to nirvāṇa) is what the good Dharma tends toward (*xiang*). The ten designations of merit transfer are (1) the merit transfer that delivers beings from the tendency to return to rebirths—it is merit transfer that enables bodhisattvas practicing the perfections to free beings

[22] In context, "the mind of bodhi" (*puti zhi xin*) should not be regarded as *bodhicitta,* the initiation of the path. Rather, it is number five in a list of eight cultivations, as follows: "the 'one thing to be guarded,' known as the mind of *bodhi*" (*shouyishizhe, wei puti zhi xin* 守一事者謂菩提之心). Furthermore, regarding the term *shouyi,* in other sections Huiyuan discusses it and *jianxing* 見性 (seeing the nature) within their scriptural contexts as items in the classification of the elements of the bodhisattva path. In the eighth century, both of these terms would be used to represent the timelessness or simultaneity of practice and ultimate realization. However, in Southern School Chan polemics they were made into oppositional symbols: *shouyi* was said to be an instance of the deluded gradual view of practice, while *jianxing* was said to be the correct "sudden" practice/realization. Huiyuan also discusses "sudden and gradual," interpreting them, in accord with the Two Truths hermeneutic, as two perspectives of the same "path" rather than two different types of approach; *T.* 44 (1851) 643b. The refashioning of these terms in polemical Southern School discourse parallels the creation of a polemical context for the notion of merit, which will be further discussed in the final section of this article.

[23] *Dasheng yi zhang, T.* 44 (1851) 751b–753b.

[24] *Da fangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 ([*Buddha*]*avataṃsaka-sūtra*), *T.* 9 (278), trans. Buddhabhadra 佛馱跋陀羅 (359–429).

from the sufferings caused by defilements and establish them in bodhi; (2) the merit transfer of incorruptible faith; (3) the bodhisattva's vow to perfect merit transfer equal to that of all Buddhas of past, present, and future. The next two items are particularly pertinent for donor practices. Item (4) is the universal efficacy of the power of merit transfer, which causes good roots to "reach everywhere," that is, to be like reality, omnipresent. The bodhisattva's cultivation of good roots functions as merit transfer, and the power of merit transfer causes good roots to extend. This is what enables inexhaustible offerings to extend to Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, complete cultivation to extend to all paths, complete fulfillment to extend to all karmic results, complete adornments to extend to all Buddha lands, complete conversion to extend to all beings, and complete understanding to extend to all dharmas (constituents of reality). Item (5) is the inexhaustible store of merit, *wujin gongde zang* 無盡功德藏: by soliciting the inexhaustible merit of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, one is able to accomplish the good roots of inexhaustible merit. The list of types of merit transfer continues with (6) furthering the firm establishment of good roots, whereby the good roots initiated by the cultivation of giving, and so forth, are made obdurate due to the protection of the Buddhas; (7) equally furthering all beings, whereby the merit of the bodhisattva's good roots equally benefits all; (8) the characteristics of suchness (*ru* 如, *tathatā*), whereby all kinds of good roots and merit transfers are grounded in the characteristics of ultimate reality; and (9) "nonbound, nonattached, liberation"—that the mind of all dharmas is nongrasping is called nonbound and nonattached, that the Dharma is spontaneous and self-present is called liberation. Bodhisattvas do not waste good dharmas; by nonattachment, and so forth, all good dharmas are transferred, so (for example), when one solicits the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, the entirety of the merit of Samantabhadra is available. Finally, item (10) extols the immeasurable merit transfer of the Dharmadhātu (realm of the Dharma), that which is ultimately sought and the reason that bodhisattvas transfer their good roots. This completes the discussion on the ten designations of merit transfer. The designations are followed by the division of merit transfer into three categories of efficacy (i.e., resulting from the good roots of beings and bodhisattvas, and from the good Dharma of ultimate reality). The section ends with a visualization sequence focused on the bodhisattva Jin'gangchuang 金剛幢 (Gaganagañja) in Tuṣita heaven.[25]

[25] *Dasheng yi zhang, T.* 44 (851) 748b–749b. Jin'gangchuang is one of the sixteen great bodhisattvas, enumerated in the *Siyifantian suo wen jing* 思益梵天所問經 (Viśeṣacintā-brahmaparipṛcchā), *T.* 15 (586) (cf. 585 and 587), and other scriptures. Jin'gangchuang also designates one of the forms taken by Kṣitigarbha (Dizang 地藏) to save beings in the six paths, but in this case parallel visualization sequences in other sections make it clear that Huiyuan was referring to the sixteen bodhisattvas scheme.

In both of these sections from the fourteenth fascicle, we see merit and merit transfer presented in the context of the bodhisattva path, which provides the background for an appealing portrayal of the inexhaustible benefits of the cultivation of good deeds and the practice of merit transfer, with just a few dark hints of the consequences of bad deeds. Especially in items (4) and (5) in the section on merit transfer, we are shown the capitalization economics of inexhaustible merit: by drawing on the inexhaustible merit store of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, one is able to produce one's own "good roots" of merit, which can be dedicated for the benefit of others and thereby compounded and extended.[26] Thus, "merit" represents the ideal of perpetual increase of the good (and goods) through circulation, the principle of "yield" or productiveness that Marshall Sahlins claims is the real significance of the Maori *hau.*[27]

However, in the ninth fascicle of the *Dasheng yi zhang,* the ultimate background of the bodhisattva path becomes the foreground, and the worldly benefits and protections afforded by the system of merit are explicitly relegated to a subordinate position. In this fascicle, outlined below, Huiyuan discusses merit and merit transfer according to the Two Truths hermeneutic, emphasizing that the only real benefit of merit practice is realization, ultimate truth. I have reversed the order of Huiyuan's chapters (which are not necessarily related) by presenting the karmic benefits in the fourteenth fascicle first and the ultimate perspective in the ninth fascicle second, because the question of the ultimate meaning of merit will be taken up in a subsequent discussion of the paradigmatic Chan position on merit.

In the ninth fascicle of the *Dasheng yi zhang,* the discussion of merit occurs in the section on "the two kinds of adornment (*zhuangyan* 莊嚴)." The "two kinds of adornment" are the Two Truths, conventional and ultimate, in this case merit (*gongde* 功德 or *fude* 福德), and wisdom (*zhihui* 智慧, *prajñā*). The terms *fude* and *gongde* indicate that good deeds have the efficacy (*gongneng* 功能) to enhance the welfare (*fuli* 福利) of the practitioner, and that welfare is the intrinsic virtue (*jiade* 家德) of good practices. The term *zhihui* indicates the two aspects of wisdom: the functioning of awareness (*zhaojian* 照見) and also the knowledge (*zhi* 知, *jñāna*) of conventional truth are called *zhi,* while complete apprehension (*jieliao* 解了) and also illuminating or experiencing (*zhao* 照) ultimate truth are called *hui.*

Huiyuan analyzes the path schemes in four scriptures[28] and endorses that of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra,* which assigns the first five perfections (*pāramitā*s)—

[26] *Dasheng yi zhang, T.* 44 (1851) 748c 12–24.

[27] Sahlins, "The Spirit of the Gift," 81–83.

[28] Three of these works are translations attributed to Dharmakṣema: the *Youposaijie jing* 優波塞戒經 (*Upāsakasīla-sūtra*), *T.* 24 (1488); the *Pusadichi jing* 菩薩地持經 (the

generosity, discipline, vigor, forbearance, and meditation—plus the phenomenal aspect of wisdom, the sixth *pāramīta,* to the category of merit, all on the conventional level. To the category of wisdom proper belongs only the absolute aspect of wisdom, direct seeing of ultimate truth. Huiyuan correlates the two levels with several other two-tiered rubrics, concluding with a discussion of essence (*ti* 體) and function (*yong* 用). Essence refers to verifying nirvana, that is, experiencing ultimate truth, and function refers to practices that accord with cause and effect in the world, that is, worldly benefits or merit Huiyuan quotes a *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* passage stating that the latter, the adornment of merit, is conditioned, produces outflows, karmic results, and hindrances, and is impermanent, while the adornment of wisdom is the opposite. Further along, Huiyuan quotes another *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* passage asserting that from the initiation of the path up through the ninth *bhūmi* (stage) of the ten-stage bodhisattva path the aspirant does not directly perceive Buddha nature, and that all this is "merit"—only direct perception is "wisdom." Repeating a formula he uses in other sections, Huiyuan concludes this section by saying that it is not that ordinary practitioners of the two lower vehicles[29] are without wisdom, but it is hidden and not manifest. And it is not that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are without merit, but it is hidden and not expounded.[30]

The ninth fascicle also has its corresponding section on merit transfer, which is construed as seeking absolute truth and not worldly benefits. Merit transfer is discussed according to three rubrics: bodhi (enlightenment), beings, and reality. "Merit transfer of bodhi" refers to the mind that seeks wisdom, motivating one to transfer the good dharmas one has cultivated and seek the virtues of bodhi. "Merit transfer of beings" is the mind of profound mindfulness of beings, motivating one to transfer the good dharmas one has cultivated and give them to others. "Merit transfer of reality" refers to the mind that loathes the conditioned and seeks ultimate reality. Huiyuan then makes a tripartite argument for the necessity of each category of merit transfer. Without merit transfer of bodhi, the good dharmas one cultivates would not be able to transcend the triple world,[31] would be impermanent, and good deeds could not be increased limitlessly.

"Bodhisattvabhūmi" section of the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*), *T.* 30 (1581); and the abovementioned *Daban niepan jing, T.* 12 (374). The fourth is the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra,* probably the twenty-seven fascicle version, the translation of which is attributed to Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–413), *T.* 8 (223).

[29] According to Mahāyāna soteriology, there are two vehicles inferior to that of the bodhisattva: (1) the *śrāvaka, shengwen* 聲聞 "hearer," a designation for disciples of Hīnayāna, and (2) the *pratyekabuddha, yuanjue* 緣覺, "self-enlightened Buddha."

[30] *Dasheng yi zhang, T.* 44 (1851) 649c–650c.

[31] "Triple-world" refers to the three levels or qualities of the mundane (including the heavens): desire, form, and formlessness.

Without merit transfer of beings, beings would be attached to pleasure and would be unable to adapt to conditions and benefit other beings; they would seek extinction in nirvāṇa and would be unable to bear staying in the world to be merciful and beneficial to other beings; and the limited benefit of their good deeds could not be limitlessly extended. Without merit transfer of reality, beings would be attached to the good roots they cultivate and would be unable to let them go; as the intrinsic nature of dharmas is impermanent, the good produced does not abide until it is made secure by accordance with the absolute. Cultivating the good for superficial reasons is limited in scope, but through practicing in accord with the absolute, good roots become boundless.[32]

Thus, Huiyuan maintains the hierarchy between the two levels of truth, a conservative approach that is consistent with the message of the authoritative Mahāyāna scriptures he summarizes. However, over time the influence of the nondual hermeneutics of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom) resulted in an ever-more pervasive and confident use of recursivity in Chinese Buddhist discourse on conditional and ultimate. In a recursive view of the merit wisdom hierarchy, merit practice is the function or immanence of the unconditioned, and wisdom and merit produce each other, are empty/interdependent and inseparable. Moreover, as this emptiness is the intrinsic Buddha nature of reality and individual beings, the notion that the fulfillment of the path was thus immediately given to realization would become the foundation of Chan/Zen soteriology. In the eighth-century *Platform Sūtra,* the Chan sixth patriarch Huineng 慧能 (638–713) is said to have preached, "Merit is in the Dharmakāya, not in the field of blessings (*futian* 福田). In Dharma-nature itself there is merit (*gongde* 功德). [Seeing into your own nature is *gong*]; level and direct mind is *de.* [Inwardly, see] the Buddha-nature, outwardly, practice reverence."[33]

In the sudden-enlightenment understanding, maintained in Chan, everything and nothing is merit. However, even the *Platform-Sūtra* retained conventional Buddhist forms ("practice reverence") and avoided the antinomian patch of quicksand on the shore of nonduality, where there appears to be no distinction between good and evil. In the eighth and ninth centuries, several Chan schools explored the edges of this dangerous area in order to lay greater emphasis on recognition of innate Buddha nature and claimed that all practices, including practices aimed at gaining merit, were

[32] *Dasheng yi zhang, T.* 44 (1851) 636a–637b.

[33] Philip Yampolsky, trans., *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 156, with minor modifications. The portion in the first bracket is Yampolsky's emendation based on the *Kōshōji* text; the portion in the second is an addition considered necessary by D. T. Suzuki and subsequent editors.

a form of delusion. Thus, emphasis on the nonduality of merit and emptiness created a polemical rhetoric, according to which conventional merit practices had no value whatsoever.

The "no merit" polemic will be taken up again in the fourth part of this article, but let us return to Huiyuan's treatise and conventional merit practices. In the ninth-fascicle section on merit transfer, Huiyuan addresses an issue that was central to the popular practice of inscribing prayers for merit transfer on donated objects, namely, "how does it work?" In order to explain this, under the category of "merit-transfer of beings" Huiyuan stages a hypothetical dialogue:

> "The Buddha-Dharma holds that others do not receive the recompense of what one has done, and one does not receive the fruition of what others have done. How can the bodhisattvas transfer their own good dharmas and give them to others? If they cannot be given, then how can others obtain the benefits?" The Buddhist answers: "Although (what you say is true), it is not that 'this' and 'that' do not have a relationship of mutual aid; because of mutual aid, it is possible to transfer one's good [dharmas] to give to others. Because of merit-transfer, in the future age one will not be abandoned. Benefiting beings also helps [the bodhisattva] cultivate the good. Therefore, merit-transfer is necessary. Furthermore, merit-transfer is what enables one's family to be converted. Because of the power of merit-transfer, in the future age, beings who have seen will reverently receive the Dharma. This is the fruition of enabling one's family to be converted. Because one takes it upon oneself to practice and receive the Buddha-Dharma, one needs merit-transfer in order to successfully enable one's family to convert."[34]

This point was clearly an important one for Huiyuan and for the audience he had in mind. Though he alludes to the conventional scriptural assurance that merit transfer is what maintains the bodhisattva's inexhaustible storehouse of merit for the benefit of all beings, it is the benefit of conversion of one's own family that he repeats three times. In the following sections on donor inscriptions in Dunhuang paintings, we will see that the doctrine of merit transfer and its inclusion of one's family in a beneficial circle were the foundations of a flourishing practice. The custom of including inscriptional and visual representations of the donor's family in a work of art was among the most widely disseminated of Buddhist practices, and in these portable paintings we enjoy the rare privilege of seeing how donors who were not of the noblesse had themselves portrayed.

MERIT AND IMAGES

Buddhist images marked with donor inscriptions are in some ways analogous to an important type of artifact of pre-Buddhist China, namely,

[34] *Dasheng yi zhang, T.* 44 (1851) 636c28–637a9.

Zhou bronze ritual vessels inscribed and dedicated with records of sacrifices and achievements in complex patterns and textures. Both types of work derived their value from their function within an intricate system of patterned gifting. Though the systems were different, both types of object were intended to include the living and the dead in the circuit of merit and memory. Moreover, the conjunction of writing and sacred object was integral to the aesthetic merit that earned a transcendent "countergift."

I have selected three examples of donor-inscribed paintings from among the many resplendent ninth- and tenth-century paintings in the Stein collection at the British Museum and the Pelliot collection at the Musée Guimet.[35] These materials were taken from Mogao 莫高 cave 17 at Dunhuang 敦煌. Paintings of Buddhist images were given to temples in order to commemorate and benefit deceased relatives, and both living and deceased family members were often depicted in the paintings. Inscriptions on the scrolls include prayers to transfer the merit that the donor had gained through donation of the painting; this popular form of commemoration was carried out by devotees of varied ethnicity, social status, and degree of Buddhist affiliation, including monks and nuns. Commonly, these paintings have a main image or images of salvific Buddhas and bodhisattvas (often Avalokiteśvara and Kṣiṭigarbha), with representations of the principal donor and family members in a separate register at the bottom of the painting. Representations of the donors range from unidentified stylized images of a lay couple flanking the central image and holding offerings to an array of figures with names and relationships inscribed in cartouches adjacent to their images. Male and female donors are separated, but their placement to the right or left of the image is not consistent. Longer inscriptions, if included, are usually in a central cartouche.[36]

KṢITIGARBHA AS THE LORD OF THE SIX WAYS

The first image I will discuss is a painting of Kṣitigarbha as the Lord of the Six Ways, dated 963 (see fig. 1).[37] The bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha is shown seated, wearing the distinctive patterned head kerchief that appears frequently in Dunhuang representations of him in his role as afterlife mediator. He is flanked by two attendant bodhisattvas, with scenes of the

[35] Reproductions are found in Roderick Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia: The Stein Collection in the British Museum,* 3 vols. (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982–85); and Jacques Giès, ed., *Les arts de l'Asie centrale: la collection Paul Pelliot du musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet,* 2 vols. (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1995–96).

[36] For a general description of the arrangement of donors in these paintings, see Michel Soymié, "Les donateurs dans les peintures de Dunhuang," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 11 (1999–2000): 1–24.

[37] Stein painting 19, in Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, pl. 22; Arthur Waley, *A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang by Sir Aurel Stein, K.C.I.C.* (London: British Museum, 1931), 34.

FIG. 1.—Photo of Kṣitigarbha as Lord of the Six Ways (Stein painting 19, Stein Collection, British Museum). © The Trustees of The British Museum. Used by permission.

beings in the six realms of rebirth (hell-being, hungry ghost, animal, human, *asura* [demigod], and *deva* [god]) in the background.[38]

At the bottom of the painting there are two male donor figures on the right, and two women on the left. These are members of the donor's family, living and dead, who are represented as sharing in making the gift while, at the same time, they are recipients of the merit of the gift made on their behalf. The cartouches read: (1) "the son Xingtong 幸通 dedicates wholeheartedly (*yixin gong yang* 一心供養)"; (2) "the deceased Dun[huang] (illegible) bin 賓 "(perhaps the donor's father)"; (3) "the deceased mother madame Yin 陰 dedicates wholeheartedly"; (4) "the Tenth Daughter dedicates wholeheartedly. Married into the Yin family."[39]

The central inscription identifies the main donor and his motivations:

> The one who caused this to be painted is the disciple of pure faith Kang Qingnu 康清奴.[40] His body lodges in the Burning House and he fears to fall into the Five Evil Ways. Fortune and disaster are inconstant; his heart longs to be among the ranks of the emancipated. Now he is again attacked by sickness and pain and cannot obtain relief. He desires that his small afflictions should rapidly retreat from his body and all misery from his constitution. May his merit cause [Kṣitigarbha's] staff to shake so that in hell lotus buds grow; and may his radiant gem shine forth in the Dark Ways, till they be turned into the semblance of the Pure Land. Also he desires that his parents and relations by marriage and all his connections may rest in health and security and that his brothers, cousins, and all the collateral branches of his family may be moistened with the dew of a prosperous portion. Qianlong 4th year (963), a *guihai* year, 5th month 22nd day (June 16).[41]

This somber plea for salvation and release from pain is well matched with the painting's subject, the bodhisattva who rescues loved ones from hell, surrounded by figures representing the "dark ways" or undesirable rebirths. The prayer for relief from suffering is thick with Buddhist allusions that link the personal and the universal. Weakness and affliction is complemented by the image of the power of the sufferer's merit to activate the salvific mercy of Kṣitigarbha, such that there is a sense of the supplicant's individual connection with the bodhisattva. The final part of the prayer expresses a conventional wish for family health and prosperity

[38] *Asura*s are beings that are more powerful but also more passionate and violent than humans, and *deva*s are gods, also subject to eventual death and rebirth. For a study of popular beliefs about the six paths in medieval Chinese Buddhism, see Stephen Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[39] Translation adapted from Waley, *A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang,* 34.

[40] The "Kang" surname indicates Sogdian origins.

[41] Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, 318; translation adapted from Waley, *A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang,* 34.

without alluding to a Buddhist context or to merit transfer. The soteriology evoked is thus closer to the "sacrificial" than the "karmic" mode; the purity of the supplicant is stressed over his sins, and he appeals directly to Kṣitigarbha without visual or textual reference to the mediation of the Saṅgha.

THE ADVENT OF MAITREYA

Contrasting with this evocation of illness and the sufferings of saṃsāra, the next image I will discuss is one of the ideal donor in the ideal world. Both textually and visually, the prevailing tone of the second example, a tenth-century image of advent of the future Buddha Maitreya, presents a "bright" counterpoint to the darkness of the painting of Kṣitigarbha and the six realms (see fig. 2).[42] Scenes in the painting illustrate passages from the *Maitreya-sūtra,*[43] focusing on King Saṅka and his consort Śyāmavatī as ideal devotees and donors.

Inscribed in the painting's cartouches, passages from the *Maitreya-sūtra* portray a paradise on earth, where there is no pain and nothing to fear. Beings are still subject to death, but it is said that "in those days the people of the land when their span of life is over, will go of their own accord to the tomb and die there."[44] Although the sūtra and the painting evoke an idyllic time when everyone is freed from suffering and the world is made beautiful, they also tell us that in the midst of this bounty people realize that "even if for a thousand million years I escape the Three Evil Ways, the world is impermanent and life cannot be preserved forever."[45] The painting shows scenes of the future when Maitreya will finally leave his own Tuṣita heaven to be born on earth, and myriads of his devotees will be reborn with him and become monks and nuns. First the king and then the queen and their son Devarūpa will take the tonsure.[46] The meditating power of the Saṅgha is amply represented in the figures of monks who attend the central figure of Maitreya, the monk and possibly nun who accompany Maitreya as he visits an elderly couple in the city, and the clergy who assist in tonsuring the king, queen, crown prince, and their retinues.

[42] Stein painting 11, in Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, pl. 12.

[43] *T.* 14 (454) 423–25, trans. Kumārajīva.

[44] Top right, first cartouche, in Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, 309. See *T.* 14 (454) 424a.

[45] Fourth cartouche, four men by central courtyard, in Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, 310. See *T.* 14 (454) 424c.

[46] Cartouche next to the king's tonsuring, in Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, 311. See *T.* 14 (454) 424c. Cartouche next to the tonsuring of the queen and prince, in Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, 312. See *T.* 14 (454) 424c.

FIG. 2.—Detail of photo of Paradise of Maitreya (Stein painting 11, Stein Collection, British Museum). © The Trustees of The British Museum. Used by permission.

In the city where Maitreya is born the earth is gold sand, and heaps of gold and silver lie about.[47] This lack of necessity is the ground on which the offering table is set up and laden with precious vessels, and the king's jewelled throne is set forth to be dismantled and given to Maitreya.[48] Two copyist errors provide food for thought regarding donation. At the end of the scriptural passage about the heaps of gold and silver, the copyist has added the superfluous phrase "will make offering" (*gongyang shi* 供養時). This phrase occurs as a standard code to subsequent passages detailing the offerings of *deva*s and brahmans, but in the sūtra itself the precious ground is not offered, it is simply the given.[49]

[47] Fifth cartouche, four women on opposite side of central courtyard, in Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, 311. See *T.* 14 (454) 424a.

[48] Representing the utopian end of kingship associated with Maitreya, the symbolism worked both ways, inspiring proscription of Maitreya cults by Emperor Wen 文 of the Sui (r. 581–604), and embrace of Maitreya worship by Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 684–705). See Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in the Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1991); Antonino Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the 7th Century: Inquiry into the Nature, Authors, and Function of the Tunhuang Document S. 6502 Followed by an Annotated Translation* (Naples: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1976).

[49] This recalls the motif of Aśoka "giving the earth" in a former life and at his death; see John Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

The second error also occurs in conjunction with an offering, an offering that does not occur in the sūtra but is described in the cartouche next to the offering table. This inscription tells of Brahmans who will leave their homes and will "build a *stūpa* (reliquary edifice) and make an offering of it."[50] In the scripture, Maitreya gives the Brahmans the throne given to him by the king, and they then dismantle it.[51] In the painting, however, the inscription in the cartouche refers to building a stūpa while the visual representation shows the dismantling of a throne. This scribal disjunction results in an echo of Mauss's "total prestation" of both sides of the gift—the creation of an object of sacred power through the destruction of an object of secular power, a potlatch in the court of Maitreya.[52]

THE BODHISATTVA AVALOKITEŚVARA, THE NUN YANHUI, AND HER BROTHER ZHANG YOUCHENG

The last inscribed painting that I will discuss is an image of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin) flanked by portrayals of the deceased siblings of the unnamed donor, dated 910 (see fig. 3).[53] The figures of the siblings Yanhui and Zhang Youcheng are called portraits and are handled more individualistically than the majority of standardized donor figures seen in these paintings. We cannot assume that they look like the deceased, but it is clear that they were intended to reflect the high quality of painting associated with portraits. The three inscriptions on the painting itself are similar in format to dedications on other ninth- and tenth-century paintings in the Dunhuang collection, but this painting is notable for having two additional inscriptions on paper attached to the back. In considering these inscriptions, I would like to draw attention to the various ways that the figures are identified and relationships of offering and "mutual aid" are established.

1. Upper right green cartouche:

Praise to the great merciful, great compassionate savior from hardship Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, in perpetual offering. Offered in the hope that the

[50] Green cartouche between table and throne, in Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, 312. See *T.* 14 (454) 424c.

[51] Waley, *A Catalogue of Paintings recovered from Tun-huang,* 18.

[52] Though the notion of the Northwest Indians' destructive potlatch inspired much creative speculation, most notably in the work of Marcel Mauss and Georges Bataille, subsequent anthropological reassessments indicate that the destructive potlatch was an anomaly caused by population decline and breakdown of traditions in the wake of European contact. See Philip Drucker and Robert F. Heizer, *To Make My Name Good: A Reexamination of the Southern Kwakiutl Potlatch* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Margaret Seguin, *Interpretive Contexts for Traditional and Current Coast Tsimshian Feasts* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1985); Aldona Jonaitis, ed., *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

[53] Stein painting 14, Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, pl. 7.

FIG. 3.—Photo of Avalokiteśvara (Stein painting 14, Stein Collection, British Museum). © The Trustees of The British Museum. Used by permission.

empire may be peaceful and that the Wheel of the Law may continually turn therein. Secondly, on behalf of my elder sister and teacher, on behalf of the souls of my deceased parents, that they may be born again in the Pure Land, I reverently [had this image of] the Great Holy One made, and dedicate it wholeheartedly.[54]

[54] The cartouche should be read from left to right; see Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, 301.

The "perpetual offering" of devotion is represented in the words of the inscription, by the fact of having had the painting made, and by the portraits of the two deceased represented in the attitude of offering worship to Avalokiteśvara. Following a pattern found in a number of other such paintings, transfer of the merit of this perpetual offering is first dedicated for the sake of the welfare of the empire, linking this with the practice of the Dharma, and then turns to personal dedications. The parents and the elder sister-nun who are to receive the merit are identified not by name but by their relationship with the donor (who might be either male or female). They appear to be set apart for special respect, and the nun, identified as the donor's teacher, is mentioned before their parents. This sister-teacher of the donor is portrayed in the painting, but the parents are not. Also on the painting itself is the following identification by name of the younger brother portrayed in the painting, who is not mentioned in the above inscription.

2. Lower right white cartouche:

[On behalf of] my late younger brother the Probationary Chamberlain Zhang Youcheng 張有成, dedicated wholeheartedly.

Also on the face of the painting, above the portrait of the nun, is a large cartouche of prayers for the deceased, with the dedication date.

3. Left, darker white cartouche:

All things born are unstable as a lightning-flash;
They perish as soon as their karma is exhausted, for they have no permanence.
But the compassionate Avalokiteśvara rescues creatures of every sort;
with love, how painstakingly he builds a bridge [to salvation]!
Giving insubstantial wealth (*sheshi foucai* 捨施浮財) to make a portrait (*zhenxiang* 真像),
the beams of his light flash and glint in the splendor of a colored painting.
I only pray that the dead may be born in the Pure Land,
that they escape the pain of the Three Ways and mount to the Heavenly Halls.
Tianfu 10th year, a *gengwu* year, 15th day of 7th month finished and inscribed.[55]

Here the fundamental Buddhist theme of salvation from impermanence is evoked, though the soteriology is inconsistent with classic Buddhist soteriology, which holds that it is the continual accumulation of karma that causes death and rebirth, and exhaustion of karma is liberation. However, the notion that impermanent good karma/good deeds will be exhausted unless transmuted by compassion echoes Huiyuan's explanation

[55] Translation adapted from Waley, *A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang,* 27.

of merit transfer as a function of the nature of reality. As described previously, according to the rubric of "merit transfer of reality" the intrinsically impermanent nature of all dharmas, including good deeds, is "made secure by accordance with the absolute" through the practice of giving away merit for the sake of others. In this prayer the donor alludes to his or her offering of the painting on behalf of the dead. At the same time, the donor appeals to Avalokiteśvara's compassion, which is extended to "all sorts" of beings, implying that even those who may not be worthy according to the universal laws of cause and effect may still hope for rebirth in the Pure Land through faith in the bodhisattva.[56]

Moreover, in the line "the beams of his light flash and glint in the splendor of a colored painting," we see a reflection of the notion that images have individualized numinous powers.[57] This was a repeated theme in both Indian and Chinese Buddhist popular stories, and its Chinese manifestations were also influenced by indigenous metaphysical notions of the relationship between natural sympathetic resonances (*ganying* 感應) and supramundane powers (*gantong* 感通). The eighth century also saw the beginnings of a sophisticated discourse playing on the idea of the virtual nature of all things, body and image alike. References to the mutually resonating qualities of physical bodies, natural phenomena, salvific manifestations, and artistic representations were developed in the discourses of Chan Buddhism, literati poetry, and art appreciation. By the Song, we see playful and witty references to the notion that representation was the "true form" of emptiness, because it directly embodied virtuality, other-dependence, and illusory self-referentiality drawing attention

[56] Avalokiteśvara is known as the attendant and mediator for the Buddha Amitābha, who presides over the Western Pure Land. According to popular beliefs based on the Pure Land scriptures (*T.* 12 [360], [365], and [366]), while still a bodhisattva Amitābha vowed to dedicate his merit in order to create a special realm wherein beings could be reborn with ideal conditions for practice of Dharma and swift liberation. See Luis O. Gómez, *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light: Sanskrit and Chinese Versions of the Sukhāvatīvyūha Sutras* (Honolulu and Kyoto: University of Hawai'i Press and Higashi Honganji Shinshū Otani-ha, 1996); and Fujita Kotatsu, "The Textual Origins of the Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching: A Canonical Scripture of Pure Land Buddhism," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha,* ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), 149–73.

[57] There are many stories of images with powers in Chinese lore, and I will cite two that are readily at hand. The first is a story from the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Song biographies of eminent monks) of an image with powers derived from the physical substance of its subject; it was said that a clay image of the Chan master Wuxiang 無相 that had been mixed with his ashes was responsible for performing a miracle; *Song gaoseng zhuan, T.* 50 (2061) 832c24–833a3. Another story in the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 shows that the devotion or qualities of the maker of an image could also give it numinous power. It was said that Yongjing 永敬 temple in Chang'an had a stone image five *chi* (Chinese feet) tall that was made by the fourth daughter of King Aśoka; the image was crudely made but had great numinous efficacy. *Taiping yulan,* fascicle 657, cited in *Zengding Tang liangjing chengfang kao* 增訂唐兩京城坊考, ed. Li Jianchao 李健超 (rev. and expanded *Study of the City Streets of the Two Capitals of the Tang*), originally compiled by Xu Song 徐松 (Xian: San Qin 三秦, 1996), 72.

to its illusory nature.[58] Although the Dunhuang painting inscription does not partake in this style of discourse, it does evoke analogy and contrast between the "lightning flash" instability of the physical body and the beams of the transcendent that are made present in the painting by the power of the bodhisattva's salvific merit.

Turning the painting over, we find two inscriptions on the back:

4. Identification on paper attached to back:
   Identical with number 2.[59]

5. Inscription on paper attached to back:

Praise to the figure of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara,[60] respectfully offered on behalf of the deceased nun who was Dharma-Vinaya Ordination Admitter (Falu lintan 法律臨壇) of Paguang 普光 monastery, the Worthy Yanhui 嚴會, and on behalf of the Probationary Chamberlain Zhang Youcheng. These two portraits (*maozhen* 貌真) are dedicated wholeheartedly, with the following gāthā-appreciation (*hezan* 偈讚):

Great indeed is the Law-King, his manifestations boundless;
he roams through the Six Ways, and wherever suffering is, he is there first.
When he is evoked he arrives at once, rescue is assured;
he takes on the sufferings of beings who dwell in Jambudvīpa.
Mysterious, hard to discern, yet always at one's side;
according to the minds of beings, he has transformations innumerable.
The delusions of those who worship him are extinguished; the lives of those who make obeisance to him are lengthened.
May departed loved ones not experience the slough and scalding [cauldron];
may they be the beneficiaries of the Bodhisattva's vow, and in his shadow enter the Western [Paradise],
and may living loved ones' days be prolonged for endless eons.

Color painting, of the figure of the Great Holy One and the portrait of the nun Dharma-Vinaya [Ordination Admitter], [on such a day] finished and inscribed.[61]

[58] For a discussion of these developments, see Wendi L. Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming), chap. 7.

[59] Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, pl. 8.

[60] *Namu Guanshiyin pusa yiqu* 南无觀世音菩薩一軀. *Qu* is body, form, and is the standard word used to itemize images. For an example of a merit record of images, see the lists of groups of images in the Dunhuang ms. Pelliot 2641; the eulogy at the end praises the images as having the thirty-two major marks in brilliant array and the eighty minor marks of "completely perfect bodies" (*zhoubian shenqu* 周遍身軀). In Zheng Binglin 鄭炳林, *Dunhuang beimingzan jishi* 敦煌碑銘贊輯釋 (An annotated compilation of Dunhuang memorial inscription eulogies) (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu, 1992), 521–22.

[61] Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, pl. 8. Translation adapted from Waley, *A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang,* 28–29. The fifth inscription, with its preface identifying the subject followed by a gāthā appreciation (*hezan*), is very similar in format to a

In these eulogies and identifications on the front and back of the painting, the interplay of redundancies and omissions create the impression of overlapping symbolic hierarchies. The donor's brother and even her or his parents appear to be farther down the chain of reverence than her or his sister, but the brother's name and rank appear three times, while the nun's name and title are given only in the preface to the eulogy on the back. In the painting itself, however, the image of the nun is larger than that of her brother, and almost as large as that of the bodhisattva.

Hierarchy was essential to the maintenance of the system of reciprocal benefit between clergy and lay believers. The clergy, on a level above the lay devotee but below the bodhisattvas, functioned as a "merit field" because they collectively represented the aspiration to liberation and ultimate truth, the matrix within which "merit seeds," on the level of cause and effect or conventional truth, were actualized. At the same time, the mediating role of monks and nuns was a function of proximity, to human suffering on the one hand and to the bodhisattva's merit on the other. The bodhisattvas were likewise mediators between the human realm and the Pure Lands of the Buddhas.

In the painting, the proximity of the three figures gives the impression that the deceased have immediate access to the bodhisattva, which in turn serves to bring the viewer closer to Avalokiteśvara. As noted, the figures of the nun Yanhui and her younger brother are carefully rendered, and rather than kneeling at the foot of the painting they stand upright. Seen in three-quarters view, the deceased flank the front-facing main image, in the manner of personal attendants. In other paintings, this is a treatment usually reserved for ideal bodhisattvas, *deva*s, guardian deities, and monks, while the donors and deceased are usually portrayed kneeling or standing in a lower register. However, there are other Dunhuang paintings that portray identified monk or nun donors in the same register or on the same scale as the central image.[62]

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portrait eulogy, *zhenzan* 真讚, of which there are numerous examples in the Dunhuang cache. See Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, ed. in chief, *Dunhuang miaozhenzan jiaolu bing yanjiu* 敦煌邈真讚校錄并研究 (Critical edition and study of Dunhuang portrait eulogies) (Taibei: Xinwenfeng, 1994); and Zheng Binglin, *Dunhuang beimingzan jishi*. We will examine a Chan *zhenzan* in the next section.

[62] For other examples of conspicuous depictions of donors, see the following Dunhuang paintings in the Pelliot collection of the Musée Guimet: (1) MG. 17665 in Giès, ed., *Les arts de l'Asie centrale,* vol. 1, pl. 72. In this tenth-century image of Avalokiteśvara, the nun Xinqing 信清 is the daughter of the donor, and both kneel at the feet of the main image. (2) MG. 17778, in ibid., vol. 1, pl. 92. Kneeling in the lower register of this early tenth-century painting of Eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara, the donor, the administrator Cheng Enxin 程恩信, faces his deceased older sister, the nun Miaoda 妙達. Her image is also identified as a *maozhen,* a portrait. (3) MG. 25486, in ibid., vol. 1, pl. 93. In this painting of Twelve-faced Avalokiteśvara dated 959, only the monk Fayuan 法員 (the uncle of the donor) kneels at the feet of the image, while the other deceased and living family members, including the principal donor Zhang Baozhi 張保支, are in the separate register at the bottom. Interestingly, there is no

The colophon recording the completion of the painting reinforces the sense of connection between the transcendent and the human merit fields and mediators, for it identifies the image of the painting as the figure of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara along with a portrait of the nun Yanhui.[63] In the soteriology of skillful means, the image of the bodhisattva is as real (and as illusory) a site of salvific manifestation as any other form, as evoked in the verse above: "mysterious, hard to discern, yet always at one's side; according to the minds of beings, he has transformations innumerable." Through the pairing of Avalokiteśvara and Yanhui in the colophon and the idealized attitude of Yanhui's image, she appears to take on a pivotal role as both supplicant and mediator. The donor refers to Yanhui as her or his teacher, and she is identified as a ranking member of the clergy. The prayers dedicate the merit of the donation for the sake of deceased family members' entry into the Pure Land in Avalokiteśvara's "shadow," but the manner of pictorial representation could suggest that the donor also hopes for Yanhui's continued aid and intervention on behalf of "living loved ones" once she is successfully reborn in the Pure Land. Furthermore, the image of the younger brother is reminiscent of images of the "boys of good and evil" who flank Avalokiteśvara or the Kings of Hell in other paintings.[64] Given these echoes, I would argue that this painting might reflect something of the older, pre-Buddhist belief in deceased ancestors as mediators for living family, translated into Buddhist iconographic and inscriptional idioms.

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image to go with the cartouche opposite Fayuan, which marks the dedication of the daughter of Zhang (Bao)zhi. Jean-Pierre Drège speculates that this cartouche should correspond to the image of the little girl beside Zhang's wife and notes that this elevation of the cartouche without an image is curious; see ibid., vol. 1, notes to pl. 93. I am wondering if this might mean that the family had decided that she would become a nun in the future.

[63] There is also overlapping and redundancy at work in the identifications of the type of image to which the figures belong. On the front, the painting of Avalokiteśvara is referred to as a *zhenxiang* 真像, while in this inscription on the back his figure (*qu* 軀) is grouped with the *maozhen* 貌真 of the nun and her brother. Jiang Boqin 姜伯勤 demonstrates that both *zhenxiang* and *maozhen* were used for portraits and Buddhist images, though here there appears to be a distinction. See his *Dunhuang yishu zongjiao yu liyue wenming* 敦煌藝術宗教與禮樂文明 (Dunhuang arts, religion, and "rites and music" civilization) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1996), 84–85. As noted above, the inscription on MG. 17778 also identifies the image of a deceased nun (dedicated by her brother) as a *maozhen;* see Giès, ed., *Les arts de l'Asie centrale,* vol. 1, pl. 92. See also Soymié, "Les Donateurs dans les Peintures de Dunhuang," 13 and 19.

[64] Shan'e tongzi 善惡童子; these boys or twins of Daoist origin attend all persons throughout life, recording good and bad deeds that will determine one's future incarnations. I do not know of other research suggesting that donors may have had themselves or loved ones portrayed as one of these attendants, but this may be a topic worthy of further exploration. Regarding the background and iconography of these figures, see Giès, ed., *Les arts de l'Asie centrale,* vol. 1, pl. 52; see also Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 184–93, 203.

ECONOMIES OF MERIT

I would like to draw some attention to the economic ramifications of the notion of monks and nuns as mediators for their families. Regarding the painting of Avalokiteśvara, the nun Yanhui, and her brother Zhang Youcheng, Roderick Whitfield suggests that the lavish inscriptions and the portrait style, which would have been considerably more expensive than generic donor images, may have been due to the ostentatious Buddhist giving discernible in other artifacts of this period, corresponding to the period of ascendancy of the Cao 曹 family.[65] We could thus take the reference to "giving insubstantial wealth" (*sheshi foucai* 捨施浮財) as a means to draw attention to the expenditure while at the same time gaining merit for nonattachment.[66] However, this phrase also usefully points to concrete economic distinctions between landed and liquid wealth.

Jacques Gernet, in his magisterial *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries,* explicates and often excoriates the connection between Buddhist monasteries and the volatile loan markets and money-making enterprises that expanded in the ninth and tenth centuries to the detriment of the hereditary manorial economy.[67] Dunhuang, independently administered by prominent local clans who came into power upon the expulsion of the Tibetans in 860 and maintained their position until the Xi Xia takeover in 1036, reflects this trend. Indeed, the social and economic documents found in Dunhuang provide some of the most concrete remaining evidence of a medieval mercantile middle class, and surviving examples of its portable and mass-produced art also attest to the growing economic power of this sector.

Drawing on the insights of Pierre Bourdieu's *The Logic of Practice,* I would like to briefly examine this economic trend in terms of the workings of "symbolic capital." Symbolic capital refers to the accumulation of wealth, authority, and goodwill that enables its possessors to mediate the misrecognition or masking of exploitative or asymmetrical economic relationships in traditional societies.[68] This collective misrecognition converts starkly economic relationships into social interdependencies in a world where "scarcity of time is so rare and scarcity of goods so great."[69]

When we look at Dunhuang art, manuscripts, and social documents, we could say that "everything happens as if" symbolic capital was also

[65] Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia,* vol. 2, 301.

[66] Here one could draw analogies with Derrida's discussion of the "counterfeit coin," but I do not want to further tax the reader's goodwill with an excursus within an excursus and therefore refer those interested to the second part of *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money.*

[67] Regarding Gernet's work, *Buddhism in Chinese Society,* see n. 10 above.

[68] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 112–21.

[69] Ibid., 17.

being transformed by processes of rationalization, capitalization, and specialization, reflecting the social and economic pressures attendant on expansion of trade and financial markets. And it is through the notion of merit that we can see these processes working. Merit would seem to be symbolic capital par excellence, and while it does perform the local social sublimating function of symbolic capital, it also evokes the power of impersonal universal law, Dharma. Consider, for example, the rationale provided by Huiyuan in the *Dasheng yi zhang* discussed above. He explains that through merit transfer (i.e., continual reinvestment of merit), one is able to turn good deeds into permanent assets that increase limitlessly and "transcend the triple-world." Through circulating rather than stockpiling the merit they gain, beings are able to make their spiritual good/s secure through "accordance with the absolute."[70] By implication, this economy dwarfs the aims of traditional symbolic capital—mere worldly prestige, family honor, and prosperity.

In the traditional manorial system, family interests were bound to the costly and time-consuming "circuit of giving" necessary to the maintenance of symbolic capital. Rituals of reciprocity between host and client naturalized their asymmetry, converting the raw power differential into a mutually (though not equally) beneficial relationship that, like land and debts, could extend through generations. Gernet shows that from the fifth century onward the growing Buddhist economy copied the traditional land-bound economy in many ways, but it was also porous to the more liquid mercantile economy. Monks and nuns could function as mediators in many ways, for while they were symbolically independent and to varying degrees economically independent of traditional family ties, they also, as Hao Chunwen shows, continued to be part of their natal families and networks.[71] In their dual function as members of a family and members of an entity independent of family, the clergy were ideal agents for the processes of capitalization.

Thus it is no anomaly that the clergy were so instrumental in developing protocapitalist sectors of the medieval Chinese economy, so that temples functioned as early banking institutions. They offered loans at interest, maintained a storehouse of liquid assets (donated objects of silk and metal, pawned items, and cash), and held goods and cash on deposit for traveling merchants. The clergy were also actively engaged in industry, commerce, services, and the arts. Those who had "left home" were able to mediate

[70] See above, *Dasheng yi zhang, T.* 44 (1851) 637a–b.

[71] Hao Chunwen 郝春文, *Tang houqi Wudai Songchu Dunhuang sengni de shehui shenghuo* 唐後期五代宋初敦煌僧尼的社會生活 (The social life of Buddhist monks and nuns in Dunhuang during the Late Tang, Five Dynasties and Early Song) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1998).

between the traditional clan system and the economic forms that threatened that system. The Saṅgha was a medium of transfer between two systems of wealth production, and the notion of merit and merit transfer is an ideal representation of this conduit function. The circulation of portable wealth through the more mobile and liquid aspects of the Buddhist economy was also backed by the traditional "gold standard" of land, imperial honors, and metal wealth bound up in the large monasteries. These monasteries in turn became centers for other forms of social fluidity and professional specialization—printing, the arts, public education and welfare, and alternative employment for those unwilling or unable to enter into civil service.

A darker side of economic fluidity may also be reflected in the Dunhuang prayers for relief from disease, such as we saw in the donor's lament in the painting of Kṣitigarbha. Although treatment of illness is clearly a major focus of religious practice in most premodern societies, we could speculate that the networks of travel and cultural exchange sustained by merchants and monks may have facilitated the spread of infectious diseases from one region to another. Again at a nexus between traditional categories and the new interstices, the monasteries served as both inns and hospitals, offering care for the afflicted that was not dependent on family connections. Michel Strickmann gives us a glimpse of the vivid array of treatments for disease contained in Buddhist and Daoist mantic scriptures and manuals produced in China between the fifth and twelfth centuries.[72]

Visual and textual representations of heavens and Pure Lands were the crowning glory of Buddhism's symbolic capital. "The potlatch in Maitreya's court" reflects the utopian vision of the benefits of the traditional economy, which depended on strict hierarchies, impossibly transformed into wealth for all alike. Images of tonsuring are symbolic of transfer into this utopia. However, at the other extreme lay the Buddhist hells, also vividly evoked in Dunhuang manuscripts and paintings. The balance-sheet approach to moral accountability, reflected in the "boys of good and evil" who keep track of one's deeds, can be traced through centuries of mutual influence between Buddhist and Daoist notions of the afterlife. We may also see this obsession with moral accounts as a response to the frightening aspects of a market economy, in which the circulation of goods extended beyond the control of the local clans and defaulters and charlatans might hope to escape the gaze of local and imperial authority. Popular Buddhist works such as the *Scripture on the Ten Kings* could assure devotees that lack of accountability on earth would be taken care of in

[72] Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

Yama's court, yet they could also pledge that aid would be extended to those who ended up in hell.[73]

In Huiyuan's treatise, bodhisattvas as a class function as mediators for the universal cause-and-effect laws of the transmutation of good and goods into merit, while in the Dunhuang paintings paradigmatic bodhisattvas function as personal saviors of the faithful. Kṣitigarbha could deliver even the unworthy from hell, Maitreya could welcome devotees into his own heaven to await induction into the ideal Saṅgha of the future, and Avalokiteśvara could aid those praying to be reborn into the Pure Land, where ultimate liberation is swiftly achieved. The mediating function of monks and nuns was also due to both collective and personal identities. Collectively the Saṅgha represented guidance and intercession for the laity, and individual monks and nuns served as links connecting various kinds of spiritual, economic, social, and family relationships.

The status of nuns is particularly expressive of the pivotal functioning of clerics, mediating between universal and personal salvation and between clerical and household spheres. Unlike daughters and sisters who left home to be absorbed into their husband's household economy, nuns could remain part of their natal family's system of interests and at the same time provide access to the beneficial networks of the Saṅgha. Normative notions of Saṅgha authority centered on male lineages of master and disciples, and, while nuns were not privileged in this alternative kinship structure, their identities were also not as thoroughly transmuted by it. From the evidence provided by Dunhuang paintings and documents, and also by memorial inscriptions from other areas of China, we are able to discern that nuns' relationships with their natal families often formed an important part of their Saṅgha identities.[74]

In the system of circulation of symbolic capital, living and deceased nuns had a unique status. They were owed nothing by the family, and yet, unlike unmarried daughters, they were a credit to the family. Through the Saṅgha a nun could even be a creditor to the family, but she was safely "outside" (*chujia* 出家) even if she still lived in the family compound and ate family grain—which counted as a gift to the Saṅgha and earned merit. By virtue of being outside the family, she was not someone who could lay competing claims to autonomous deployment of clan resources. By virtue of being in the family, she was someone who could deploy the merit of belonging to the clergy for the benefit of the family. Therefore, she was in a unique position as a childless daughter, sister, and aunt

[73] See Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism.*

[74] This observation is based on Hao Chunwen's *Tang houqi Wudai Songchu Dunhuang sengni de shehui shenghuo* cited above and also on my current research on memorial inscriptions for Buddhist nuns.

whose accomplishments and services could be acknowledged and even celebrated. Furthermore, as I suggested in connection with the portrait of Yanhui, a deceased nun or monk could be seen as an otherworldly mediator for living and dead family members.

According to Bourdieu, cultural practice and symbolic structure are not in a simple relationship of avowed significance over and against unconscious motivation, and it is not that the relations of practice and symbolic structure must then be unmasked and interpreted by the theorist to reveal their true nature as facilitating rational economic and social interests. In Bourdieu's analysis, "misrecognition" points precisely to the agents' recognition of the necessity for conscious manipulation on dual or multiple levels. In medieval Chinese negotiation of these levels, the Buddhist notion of merit, and the function of the Saṅgha as agents of merit, were valuable additions to the repertoire of representations through which necessary misrecognition functioned. Buddhist practices contributed to socially destabilizing economic activities, but they also offered new spheres of cultural and social activity. I suggest that among other functions explored in this article, the notion of merit offered a symbolic reconciliation between systems in tension between the manorial and market economies. Merit represented the utopia of unlimited wealth, honor, and status within a system that was designed to protect these resources from overuse and depletion. Merit transfer afforded the possibility of satisfaction of social and familial debts *and* spiritual capitalization—not just the "keeping-while-giving" of traditional exchange, but also unlimited return on investments.[75]

"NO-MERIT" AND PORTRAIT DHARMA

In a well-known scene in the annals of Chan/Zen, the legendary first patriarch of Chinese Chan, Bodhidharma 菩提達摩, meets Emperor Wu 武 of the Liang 梁 (r. 502–49) and brusquely dismisses his meritorious activities. The episode was probably created by the "Southern School" advocate Shenhui 神會 (684–758), but it enjoyed many subsequent retellings.[76] The following version is taken from the *Lidai fabao ji* 曆代法寶記

[75] Annette Weiner analyzes Pacific systems of exchange that revolved around various forms of "inalienable" possessions, a system that she calls "keeping-while-giving." See *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[76] The encounter is found in Shenhui's *Putidamou nanzong ding shifei lun* 菩提達摩南宗定是非論 (Treatise determining the true and false about the Southern School of Bodhidharma); in Hu Shi 胡適, *Xinjiaoding de Dunhuangxieben Shenhui heshang yizhu liangzhong* 新校定的敦煌寫本神會和尚遺著兩種 (A new collation of two Dunhuang manuscripts authored by the Venerable Shenhui) (Taibei: Hu Shi jinian guan, 1970), 261–62. See also Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山, "Goroku no rekishi" 語録の歴史 (A history of the "Recorded Sayings" genre), *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方学報 57 (1985): 379–81.

(Record of the Dharma-Jewel through the ages), a late eighth-century work that was roughly contemporaneous with the *Platform Sūtra* and was associated with the antinomian tendency of Chan.[77] It is said that the Indian prince-turned-monk Bodhidharma had just disembarked in China when he was met by the emperor: "Emperor Wu of the Liang came out of the city to welcome him personally. He had [Bodhidharma] ascend to the audience hall and asked him, 'What teachings to convert beings has the Venerable brought from the other country?' The Great Master [Bodhi]-dharma replied, 'I have not brought a single word.' The emperor asked, 'What merit have We gained in building monasteries and saving people, copying scriptures and casting statues?' The Great Master responded, 'No merit whatsoever. This is contrived goodness, not true merit.' "[78]

Disciplies of Chan Master Wuzhu 無住 (714–774) of the Bao Tang 保唐 (Protect the Tang Dynasty) school that produced the *Lidai fabao ji* took the words "no merit" quite literally, perhaps more literally than their original proponent Shenhui had intended, and gave up conventional Buddhist works.[79] Above, in Huiyuan's glorification of merit in the *Dasheng yi zhang,* the self-perpetuating and permanent merit field is sustained by the limitless multiplications of even the smallest act of merit transfer of a good deed, and this is precisely the conventional soteriology that the Bao Tang rejected. However, the eighth-century Chan experiment with "no merit" did not supersede the sixth-century merit field. As traces of the Bao Tang faded, the exegete Zongmi 宗密 (780–841) argued that they had misinterpreted the doctrine of sudden awakening. Zongmi upheld the view that true practice is possible only after realization of Buddha nature, and thus he was, doctrinally speaking, on the same ground as Huiyuan, the merit field wherein all practices and paths are the subordinate function of ultimate wisdom.[80]

During the Bao Tang's brief antinomian moment, however, how did they apply the doctrine of "no-merit"? Elsewhere I have considered the

[77] *Lidai fabao ji* texts and fragments were preserved only among the Dunhuang materials; the complete or nearly complete texts are P. 2125, S. 516, P. 3717, and Jinyi 304. (P. = Dunhuang manuscripts in the Pelliot collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale, S. = Dunhuang manuscripts in the Stein collection of the British Library, Jinyi = Dunhuang ms. in the collection of the Tianjin Museum of Art.) My translation is from S. 516, with reference to Yanagida Seizan's annotated redaction of P. 2125 in *Shoki no zenshi II: Rekidai hōbōki* 初期の禪史 II: 歷代法宝記 (Early Chan history II: *Lidai fabao ji*) (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1976). I cite the page and line numbers in the *Taishō* edition because it is the most readily available, but its *Lidai fabao ji* is not the best redaction.

[78] *Lidai fabao ji, T.* 51 (2075) 180c19–23.

[79] Wuzhu and his disciples were later designated the "Bao Tang" lineage, derived from the name of the temple they occupied, the Dali Bao Tang si 大曆保唐寺 in Chengdu 成都, Jiannan 劍南 (modern-day Sichuan). The *Lidai fabao ji* was probably composed sometime between 774 and 780 at the Bao Tang monastery by an anonymous disciple or disciples of Wuzhu.

[80] See the discussion of Zongmi's map of the path in Peter Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 173–223.

background of Bao Tang practices at length, but here I will focus on the portrait-eulogy, *zhenzan* 真讚, commemorating the portrait of the deceased Chan Master Wuzhu.[81] This eulogy is included at the end of the *Lidai fabao ji,* which is the sole remaining relic of the Bao Tang; the fate of the portrait is unknown.

The author of the *Lidai fabao ji* portrait-eulogy expresses his devotion to Wuzhu by praising the life breath infused into the portrait by the artist's skill and the subject's intrinsic virtue:

> Accordingly we summoned the fine artist, secretly he made the painting. [The artist] brandished his brush and produced the characteristics, and gazing at the majestic response-body (*yingshen* 應身) separate from characteristics and emptied of words, we see the expansive vessel of the Dharma. His attainments are like Heaven's gifts, his bones (i.e., intrinsic qualities) are not like those of this world. How silently mysterious and fine! [The portrait] seems to be truly breathing, the face quivers and wants to speak, the eyes dance and are about to see. "I look up and it is ever loftier, I venerate and it is ever more dear."[82]

Wuzhu's portrait is called a response body, a salvific manifestation and a "vessel of the Dharma." A few lines before the passage quoted, the eulogist also claims: "Those who gaze at the portrait are able to destroy evil, those who rely on the Dharma are able to attain the mystery."[83] Wuzhu's portrait is thus evoked as having the qualities of an image of a Buddha of bodhisattva, the image itself becoming a focus of devotion and a site of aid. We recall that the eulogy portion of the inscription on the image of Avalokiteśvara, above, also praised the bodhisattva's salvific transformations, conceptually analogous to the notion of *yingshen:* "Mysterious, hard to discern, yet always at one's side; according to the minds of beings, he has transformations innumerable. The delusions of those who worship him are extinguished, the lives of those who make obeisance to him are lengthened." In the *Lidai fabao ji* eulogy, this power of salvific manifestation is attributed to both Chan Master Wuzhu and his portrait.

Buddhism has a long history of relic veneration, and stūpas that were said to enshrine the relics of the Buddha, his disciples, and subsequent exemplary monks were important sites of devotional offerings made by both clergy and laity. In China, the relics of eminent monks were sometimes fashioned into images such as lacquered mummies and clay statues mixed with the ashes of the deceased, and tales of wonder-working were

[81] See my study and translation of the *Lidai fabao ji* (entitled *The Mystique of Transmission*).

[82] *Lidai fabao ji, T.* 51 (2075) 196a22–26. The last phrase is an adaptation of Yan Hui's praise of virtue in *Lunyu* 論語 9.10; see Arthur Waley, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), 140.

[83] *Lidai fabao ji, T.* 51 (2075) 196a11–12.

frequently associated with such images. However, the notion that the painted image of a recently deceased Buddhist monk was a kind of responsive manifestation of the Dharma appears to have been uncommon.[84]

Wuzhu, moreover, does not simply represent the power of ordinary Buddha-Dharma. It is the distinctive Chan Dharma of sudden awakening that is evoked in the eulogy: "Just so did our Venerable ground his teachings and transmit his Dharma. He displayed the meaning of no-thought, not moving and not still. He expounded the teaching of sudden awakening, no-recollection and no-thought. He often told his disciples, 'The Dharma is just this, not something verbal explanation can reach. Our Ancestral Master Dharmatrāta (Bodhidharma) transmitted these essentials of the Dharma, passed from legitimate heir to legitimate heir. It is the secret teaching of the Buddhas, it is the Prajñāpāramitā.' "[85]

Sudden awakening (*dunwu* 頓悟) and no-thought (*wunian* 無念) were by then established as the hallmarks of Southern School Chan, and for sheer number of repetitions of the term "no-thought" in a single text, the *Lidai fabao ji* surely has no equal. Bernard Faure has cast a searching light on the vivid array of ritual and representational innovations, appropriations, and contradictions generated by Chan subitist rhetoric.[86] We may see a manifestation of the paradoxical effects of this "rhetoric of immediacy" at work in the Bao Tang evocation of their teacher's portrait. On the one hand, Wuzhu's disciples commemorated him in a conventional manner—they commissioned an image and wrote an inscription expressing devotion to the teacher and his image. At the same time, they identify the focus of that devotion as the doctrine of no-thought, the subitist teaching that both cultivation and culmination of the Buddhist path were fulfilled in the nonconceptual realization of Buddha nature, without dependence on the mediation of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, clergy, or rituals. In Song dynasty Chan, the play of identity and difference among representation, ritual, and nondual Buddha nature would become a sophisticated game in the Chan paradoxical repertoire, but here devotion to the image is not ironical and the paradox is not intentional.

Let us consider the pairing of the teaching of no-thought with "no-recollection," *wuyi* 無憶. This is one of the "three phrases" Wuzhu claims to have inherited from his putative master, the Korean monk Wuxiang 無相 (684–762). Wuxiang and Wuzhu are portrayed as being connected in thought, and in the following passage Wuzhu receives his first trans-

[84] This claim is based on initial examination of Dunhuang *zhenzan* (see Rao Zongyi, ed., *Dunhuang maiozhenzan jiaolu bing yanjiu*), but I hope to make a more comprehensive study of portraits and portrait eulogies as part of my research on donor practices.

[85] *Lidai fabao ji, T.* 51 (2075) 195c27–196a5.

[86] See particularly Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

mission of Wuxiang's essential teaching in the form of "three phrases," without having ever been in his presence. Wuxiang and Wuzhu are identified as sharing a mysterious resemblance, like "transformation bodies" (*huashen* 化身), and it is their mutual resonance as related salvific manifestations that enables this long-distance, instantaneous transmission:

> It happened that there was a merchant [named] Cao Gui who came to pay his respects [to Wuzhu] and asked, "Has the Venerable ever been to Jiannan? Do you know the Venerable Kim?" [Wuzhu] answered, "I don't know him." Gui said, "Your features are exactly like those of the Venerable Kim. You [both] have a mole above the bridge of your nose, and the shape of your face so resembles that of the Venerable in our locale that one could even say there is no difference. It must be a transformation-body (*huashen*)."
>
> The Venerable asked Cao Gui, "So the layman has come from Jiannan. [Tell me], what doctrine does that Venerable preach? Cao Gui replied, "No-recollection, no-thought, and do not be deluded (*wuyi wunian mowang* 無憶無 念莫妄. . .)."[87] When the Venerable heard this teaching he understood clearly, and from afar he met the Venerable Kim face-to-face.[88]

Here we see the "three phrases" that are partially repeated in the allusion to Wuzhu's teachings as "no-recollection and no-thought" found in the portrait eulogy discussed above.[89] The *Lidai fabao ji* authors claim that Wuxiang taught "no-recollection is the precepts, no-thought is meditation, and 'do not be deluded' is wisdom."[90] The phrase "No-recollection is the precepts" illustrates the antinomian "formless practice" for which the Bao Tang disciples were infamous. Particularly, they were criticized for not maintaining a well-cultivated merit field fertilized by observation of the precepts, daily prayers, dedications, and scriptural recitations. They chose to disassociate themselves from the cycle of offerings, and it is said that they sometimes went hungry and cold as a result. The Bao Tang radical reduction of all Buddhist practice to *wunian* and *wuyi* did not survive, and Wuxiang's other followers were more famous for promulgating

[87] The last character is the focus of a controversy, and a possible copyist's error in one of the mss. does not help matters. S. 516 has 忘, "to forget," while P. 2125 has 妄, "false" or "deluded." In the next section of the *Lidai fabao ji,* Wuzhu makes a vehement claim that Wuxiang meant 妄, "deluded" and not 忘, "to forget" (189a14–21), so use of 忘 in S. 516 points either to an editing error or is meant to show that Cao Gui misunderstood.

[88] *Lidai fabao ji, T.* 51 (2075) 186b8–17.

[89] The phrase that is omitted in the eulogy, *mowang* 莫妄 (not being deluded) is disputed, as noted above. The Chan scholar Zongmi 宗密 considered the use of 妄 to be Wuzhu's mistaken understanding of Wuxiang's own usage *mowang* 莫忘 (do not forget); see *Yuanjue jing dashu chao* 圓覺經大疏鈔 (Subcommentary to the scripture of perfect enlightenment), ZZ. vol. 14; 278d. ZZ. = Nakano Tatsue 中野達慧, ed., *Dai Nippon zokuzōkyō* 大日本続藏経, 150 vols. (Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin, 1905–12).

[90] *Lidai fabao ji, T.* 51 (2075) 185a14.

his special style of vocalizing *nianfo* 念佛 (recitation of the Buddha's name), also mentioned in the *Lidai fabao ji*.

Indeed, the tension and complementarity between *wunian* and *nianfo* is at the crux of the question of Wuzhu's Dharma as embodied in his portrait. *Wunian* is usually translated as no-thought, while *nianfo* also points to a related meditative aspect of *nian* and is often translated "Buddha recollection." This is one of the most basic types of meditation, *buddhaanusmṛti,* the practice of recalling in detail (*yinian* 憶念) the merit and marks (*xiang* 相) of the Buddha. While in Japan *wunian* and *nianfo* would become hallmarks of a sectarian division between Zen and Pure Land practice, in China and Korea many masters advocated both, and Wuxiang (a Korean) was apparently one of the early proponents of this trend. However, though Wuzhu and the Bao Tang placed exclusive stress on the *wunian* aspect and did not overtly advocate *nianfo,* in effect Wuzhu's portrait eulogy exhorts the viewer to *nianshi* 念師 or *shiyi* 師憶, that is, to recollect the merit and marks of the master.[91]

This apotheosis should not be understood in the later tantric sense of guru veneration, but rather with reference to the related concepts of *huashen,* transformation body, and *yingshen,* response-body. In the context of Chinese Buddhist discourse on the *trikāya,* the three bodies of the Buddha, *yingshen* sometimes denotes the *Saṃbhogakāya,* the marvelous "merit body" or "reward body" that is the emanation of the *Dharmakāya,* the absolute/emptiness body of the Buddha. However, both *yingshen* and *huashen* are also used to refer to the *Nirmāṇakāya,* the "teaching body" or "transformation body" of the Buddha that manifests in the world to aid suffering beings. Robert Sharf shows that by the eighth century, notions of *yingshen* and *huashen* were integral to a lively and complex debate on the nature of the Buddha, a debate in which there was little consensus and no clear derivation from Indian sources. However, Sharf argues, Chinese Buddha body theories clearly reflect indigenous philosophical and cosmological theories of *ganying* 感應, stimulus-response or sympathetic resonance.[92] This centuries-old protean theory of natural resonance between like essences was one of the many factors that contributed to an era of Buddhist experimentation with received notions of image, *Dharmakāya,* Buddha, master, mind, and merit.

It is this idea of sympathetic resonance—and the mysterious resemblance that is its visible mark—that allowed the *Lidai fabao ji* authors to claim that Wuzhu received Wuxiang's transmission without being in his presence. Because they are identified as *huashen,* as analogous salvific

[91] These are neologisms and are not actually used in the text.

[92] Robert H. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the "Treasure Store Treatise"* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 77–133.

manifestations, they can be understood as continually present to each other. Their shared *wunian,* no-thought, which is also Buddha-nature, allows them to connect with each other in thought. This notion that master and disciple share a mysterious connection is not a new one, and it was deployed similarly in the *Platform Sūtra* story of Dharma transmission between the fifth and sixth patriarchs. The *Lidai fabao ji* authors go further than most would dare, however, in claiming that mind-to-mind resonance was the sole means through which Wuzhu was given the transmission that established him as the single legitimate heir of the true Dharma. Moreover, the authors also tell an alternative version of the story, one that they wish to refute. Yet it is due to the *Lidai fabao ji* narrative that the need to deny a "false" version is still, twelve hundred years later, as much a part of the Bao Tang identity as their claim to the true Dharma of "no-recollection."

In his article on the dice-playing epic hero Nala, David Shulman playfully comments on the desire for a self: "All in all, one would probably prefer to have a self. Something minimally integrated and not wholly discontinuous, where memory, or its more powerful and personal multiform, forgetting, could reside."[93] Shulman's insight that forgetting is "more powerful and personal" than memory as a matrix of identity helps elucidate the Bao Tang community's commemorative portrait. On the conventional level, the Bao Tang were concerned to establish an identity through a history of their master, set in the context of the history of the Chan school. Much of the *Lidai fabao ji* is taken up with defending Wuzhu's highly dubious claim to Wuxiang's lineage, and, as noted, this defense itself preserves for us the traces of what the Bao Tang wanted everyone to forget. Through Wuzhu's portrait-eulogy, and the text in which it is enshrined, the Bao Tang community hoped to establish the symbolic capital that would empower their "personal multiform," their force of forgetting, to become history.

Though the *Lidai fabao ji* authors fashioned their polemical claims with utmost seriousness, these conventional means were implicitly justified by their portrait of the ultimate. On the absolute level, no-thought does not erase the unthinkable history (i.e., that Wuzhu did not actually inherit Wuxiang's Dharma); it simply makes it irrelevant. No-thought is both the self-present truth of inherent Buddha nature and the talismanic symbol of investiture of those entrusted to teach this truth. The virtue of Wuzhu's Dharma of no-thought is then said to be manifested in his portrait after his death, and the viewer is urged to look to Wuzhu's image as a direct source of aid in his or her own realization. This is both a departure from

[93] David Shulman, "On Being Human in the Sanskrit Epic: The Riddle of Nala," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22 (1994): 1.

and an appropriation of previous models. Wuzhu's merit as manifested in his image is not claimed to be a source of miracles, but rather a source of the immediacy of Buddha nature. He is not represented as an ancillary mediator between the human and bodhisattvic realms but as a response body of the Dharma. His image does not symbolize the collective merit field of the Saṅgha but rather the no-merit of an antinomian and iconoclastic Saṅgha. Later, in the Song, the latent paradoxes in Wuzhu's portrait-eulogy would be deployed more deliberately, and Chan iconoclasm and Chan rites of devotion to a lineage of deceased masters were assimilated into a comprehensive institutional and ritual structure. The notion that the merit of the salvific image manifests as no-merit and no-thought thus appears at a curious nexus in the annals of the Buddhist soteriology of the image.

THE IMAGE AND THE WORK OF MOURNING

In order to draw out further implications of the relationship among no-thought, no-recollection, and no-merit, I am going to turn now to discussion of an issue raised in the introduction, namely, the possibility of interplay between the discourses of Buddhist emptiness and Derridean "impossibility." Taking up an inquiry into the ontology of the image that emerges from a eulogy by Derrida, I will draw out some resonances and contrasts between this inquiry and the Buddhist soteriology of no-thought evoked in Wuzhu's portrait-eulogy. Each of these forms of commemorative writing plays on the themes of the merit of the virtual and the virtue of the image.

In a recent and perhaps prescient work, *The Work of Mourning,* Derrida collected his writings commemorating departed friends and colleagues. Among his eulogies for the pantheon of major contemporary philosophers he numbered among his close friends, Derrida's engagement with Louis Marin's work on the work of mourning, *Des pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses,* is a key to the collection as a whole and is provocative in the present context.[94] In considering the self-deconstructive nature of the "work" of mourning, Derrida evokes the "law of mourning"—that a work of mourning succeeds only in failing. Elsewhere he elaborates the impossible choice between inevitable infidelities to the dead; to appropriate the voice or effect of the loved one is a kind of narcissism, and to refrain is a betrayal of the relationship—"How to leave him alone without abandoning him?"[95] This is a variation on a key Derridean theme: the impossibility

[94] Louis Marin, *Des pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993).

[95] Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning,* ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 225.

and absoluteness of response to death.[96] Mourning is this aporia, "working at its own unproductivity," work that has to work at getting over its own force.[97]

In this light, commemoration and amnesia—the double work of the *Lidai fabao ji*—can be seen as trajectories of the Bao Tang community's self-affirming or self-interested force of mourning, force that is "in bad taste" because it attempts "to draw from the dead a supplementary force to be turned against the living."[98] However, "bad taste" and the faithful work of mourning are intimately related, even inseparable—both depend on absorption in the absence of the departed. The likeness of vulgarity and fidelity is perfectly captured in the iconography of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa,* in which the ludicrously grief-distorted faces of the disciples expose their failure to realize no-self and their failure to obey the last injunctions of the Buddha whose departure they are mourning, yet this self-forgetful infidelity is also a sign of their fidelity. The Bao Tang eulogy shows signs of both self-abandonment and self-interest, claiming that "without our master, this Dharma will sink," but also defending his lineage in the strong terms of a group whose survival depended on acknowledgment of these claims by the Buddhist community.

The *Lidai fabao ji* eulogy also shows signs of what Derrida terms a "psychoanalytic" understanding of mourning as interiorization, "an idealizing incorporation, introjection, consumption of the other." For Louis Marin, Derrida confides, the paradigmatic mourning interiorization is the transfiguring consumption of the eucharistic body.[99] The *Lidai fabao ji* is clearly a work of idealizing incorporation, urging the reader to partake of Wuzhu's Dharma and full of the remembrances of those who accepted the gift. However, intriguing as the notion of an eucharistic Wuzhu may be, in the terms of his subitist creed of "no-merit" the gift cannot be sacrificial, nor even karmic (to recall Egge's terminology). Interiorization of the other here demands no-interiorization, but rather a recollection of one's own Buddha nature/emptiness, a recollection that is no-recollection, *wuyi.*

For Derrida/Marin the question of the "force" of the work of mourning points to the paradox of death as absolute force that is thereby the place of utter helplessness, the defenselessness of the dead and of the survivors in the face of death. Derrida, speaking for Marin, brings his questioning of "force" to the fore, emphasizing its provocative disturbance of the

[96] See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death,* trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
[97] Derrida, *The Work of Mourning,* 144.
[98] Ibid., 51.
[99] Ibid., 159.

authority of the ontological question. To ask "what is?" of this force that makes one other to oneself, and makes all others as oneself, is to confront the breakdown of the logic of being.[100] And it is the power of the image that most troubles the authority of the logic of being, logic that would distinguish the image as an inferior being: "To submit the image to the question 'what is?' would thus already be to miss the image and its force, the image in its force, which has to do perhaps not with what it is or is not, with the fact that it is not or does not have much being, but with the fact that its logic or rather its dynamic, its *dynamis,* the dynasty of its force, will not submit to an onto-logic."[101] This leads him/us to the shift in perspective that enables us to suspect ontology or philosophy to have been constituted precisely in order to mistake the power of the image, to oppose it, to assert power over and against the image.[102]

Derrida notes that Marin links *dynamis,* force, and the virtue of the image, a linkage that extends to the notion of the virtual. We are told that in thinking this *dynamis* (without reference to "being") it is not necessary to think of actualization, the virtue of the image, as the destruction of its potentiality or potency.[103] In the context of Buddhist discourse on emptiness, of course, there is no Platonic tendency to short-circuit, so this assurance—or warning—is not needed, for it is orthodox to not think of actualization as the destruction of potentiality.[104] The force of the image and the force of the person, who is also virtual/empty, are not ontologically divided. The virtue of the image that is given in the notion of the transformation-body or of the response-body is in fact a compounding of potentiality, for it is a manifestation of merit that produces further merit.

Derrida goes on to reflect on the force of the Resurrection and the image of Christ in Marin's thought. In particular, it is the image of absence that lends itself to Marin's meditation on the power of the virtual, an emptiness, we may say, that allows the power of "imaginal transfiguration" to work: "and it is in this that its pragmatic and historical force resides, its foundational efficacity—the absence of the founding body."[105] Derrida draws attention to and supports Marin's gesture toward "an intuition of a

[100] Ibid., 145.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 145–46.
[103] Ibid., 146.
[104] Buddhist exegetes of emptiness have had skirmishes with various forms of onto-logic, but this history (which has a recent manifestation in the Critical Buddhism controversy) is too complex to address here. For examples of studies of encounters between emptiness discourse and medieval Chinese notions of being, see Robert H. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the "Treasure Store Treatise";* and Richard H. Robinson, *Early Madhyamaka in India and China* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978).
[105] Derrida, *The Work of Mourning,* 151; direct quote from Marin, *Des pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses.*

general essence concerning the nature of representation or imagination in general, beyond the Christic space."[106]

Derrida's reading of Marin thus appears to pay tribute to his friend's thought at the cost of sacrificing his own. At the expense of *différence,* he commemorates his friend's intuitive enshrining of this "image of absence" as its own source and transcendence. Regarding this source, this "general essence" (which is a functioning), how can the absence of Christ's founding body—or the absence of Wuzhu's founding body—support an intuition of the essential nature of representation without sacrifice of those particularities, differentials, and deferments that keep their virtues in play? How can we think the nature of representation as distinguishable from representations without becoming subject once more to the authority of ontology—or phenomenology?

In contrast to Marin's gesture, the nature of representation that animates the portrait eulogy for Wuzhu was never subject to "onto-logic" and thus has no need to subvert it. The Bao Tang were subject to different master discourses and invested in different subversions. In this particular Chan "space," which one must acknowledge is provisionally constructed, the theoretical and efficacious spheres, or the descriptive and performative work, are not separate. Evoking the image of their deceased master as a *yingshen,* a response body or manifestation of the *Dharmakāya,* the Bao Tang eulogist acts as both philosopher and ritual master. The living force of the image of the departed loved one ("the face quivers and wants to speak") invites the reader to contemplate the nonduality—or nontriplicity—of being/nonbeing/image. At the same time, the *Lidai fabao ji* eulogy actualizes the virtue of the image, just as painting on the eyes of a Buddhist statue is a ritual empowerment bringing it to life—"the eyes dance and are about to see." And what the image sees/empowers is the returning of the gaze, redoubled in force: "I look up and it is ever loftier, I venerate and it is ever more dear."

The forces at work in the portrait-eulogy for Wuzhu reflect the paradox of the "impossibility of the given" alluded to at the outset. In *Given Time,* Derrida argues that the donor's recognition of the gift entails a symbolic return or gift of equal or greater value, the recognition of oneself as giving—or, as we might say, gaining merit. Recognition of the gift as such is its destruction. For there to be gift, it is necessary that gift itself not appear to recognition, for there to be an absolute forgetting—"in such a way that this forgetting, without being something present, presentable, determinable, sensible or meaningful, is not nothing."[107] The gift is

[106] Ibid., 152.
[107] Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money,* 17.

thus a *huashen* of the work of mourning, they are analogous representations. Recognition both destroys the gift and makes it impossible not to give, just as recollection of the departed loved one is a force of destruction and consumption that is impossible to separate from fidelity. Wuzhu's teaching of no-recollection is also marked with this aporia: "At the time of true no-thought, no-thought itself is not."[108] And how do we know this no/self-presence of Wuzhu? We know because his disciples were faithful, because they commemorated his refusal of the link between practice and the gift of merit through their practice of the meritorious work of mourning.

CONCLUSION

I do not intend to suggest anything like an evolutionary model of offering and commemorative practices. Rather I have aspired to present scriptural, representational, and literary examples in order to highlight relationships and disjunctions among notions of merit and merit transfer, the soteriology of emptiness, the creation of commemorative images, and the practice of deconstruction. I have attempted to view these practices as supplements rather than displacements of one another, without erasing their contradictions.

In the context of the early Buddhist scriptures, the problems presented by the potentially personal nature of meritorious gift giving (i.e., gifts given by a layperson to a monk or nun with whom he or she had a personal relationship) were addressed by construing the benefit of liberation as far greater than any conceivable offering made to the Saṅgha. This appropriation and reworking of the social and sacrificial system of obligatory circulation of gifts was ultimately rationalized as the impersonal law of karma. However, it is important to recognize this foundational tension at work in further permutations of the Buddhist soteriological understanding of merit and generosity.

Huiyuan's sixth-century compendium gives us a starting point from which to appreciate the reception of Mahāyāna notions of merit and merit transfer in Chinese Buddhism. From the selections in the fourteenth fascicle, we can understand the tremendous allure of the image of the inexhaustible productivity of the field of merit. However, turning to selections from the ninth fascicle, we can also discern the tension between the imaginative appeal of the notion of merit transfer and the need to affirm the doctrine of the Two Truths, in which the inexhaustible field of merit is subordinate to the absolute both/neither of emptiness. Though Huiyuan

[108] *Zheng wunian zhi shi wunian bu zi* 正無念之時蕪念不自. For one of many examples, see *Lidai fabao ji, T.* 51 (2075) 192a22.

presents an orthodox account of merit as provisional, he also takes pains to support the culturally valued practice of merit transfer to benefit family members.

In the Dunhuang paintings we see a range of representations of the dedication and transfer of merit, from the stylized rendering of supplicant donors at the foot of the painting, to the rich evocation of Maitreya's heaven, to the individualized inscriptions and portraits on the painting of Avalokiteśvara. In the latter example, the portraits of the nun Yanhui and her brother Zhang Youcheng are especially vivid. The inscriptions and visual representations evoke the deceased siblings, especially Yanhui, in such a way that they appear to function as mediating figures who both supplement and propitiate the central image.

The eighth-century portrait-eulogy for the Chan master Wuzhu articulates the notion that the portrait of a deceased master is a manifestation of the Chan Dharma, offering immediate access to realization of one's true nature. But at the same time, Bao Tang iconoclasts rejected the traditional practice of making offerings to Buddhist images in order to gain merit and relieve worldly suffering. In the Song period this paradox would become institutionalized; portrait-eulogies developed into witty inscriptions written by the subjects themselves, while Chan monasteries maintained offerings to Buddhist images in their main halls, and offerings to deceased masters in their lineage halls. This is analogous to the contrast and coexistence of literary representations of Chan antinomian antics with the fairly traditional style of practice maintained in Chan monasteries.

Derrida's sacrifice of *différence* in order to pay tribute to Louis Marin's intuition of essence is a gift and a fidelity that he himself would no doubt have deconstructed with pleasure. One could say, however, that the sacrifices required in the practice of deconstruction are also a kind of *upāya,* skillful means. Sacrifice of intuitions of a "nature in general," or sacrifice of notions of pure experience or pure gift, are also offerings and "provisional means" through which the lack of inherent self-identities emerges. However, as Glass put it, there needs to be a rip in Indra's net. One also sacrifices the soteriological intuition of this lack, this image of absence, as a means to liberation and ultimate truth. Yet there is undeniably a difficult fidelity required in attempting to trace interdependence, differential self-referentiality, and nonclosure at work in a set of representations, while at the same time continuing to recognize the inevitable infidelity and self-interest involved in the construction of subjects and relationships. It is an expression of this challenge that although one may practice these provisional means of deconstruction via Derridean *différence* and/or Buddhist emptiness, in order to "give them up without abandoning them," they must remain irreconcilable.

Merit and no-merit, *nianfo* and *wunian,* and commemoration and deconstruction can provisionally be made to supplement each other, to refer to each other, and to refer to the irreconcilable distinction of a given practice over and above any other. Images of the deceased supplement and refer to the images of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, which supplement and refer to the emptiness of giver/gift/recipient and to the aporia of the gift of merit. Such ideal excess recalls the soteriology of the *Dakkiṇāvibhanga–sutta,* in which there is a surplus of types of offering that result in more immeasurable merit than any other type of offering. However, this utopia is a sign of its impossibility—wherein we may find Wuzhu's "At the time of true no-thought, no-thought itself is not," and Derrida's "this forgetting, without being something present, presentable, determinable, sensible or meaningful, is not nothing."

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