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# A “PREHISTORY” TO CHINESE DEBATES ON THE SURVIVAL OF DEATH BY THE SPIRIT, WITH A FOCUS ON THE TERM *SHISHEN* 識神 / *SHENSHI* 神識

MICHAEL RADICH

*Victoria University of Wellington*

*In fifth- and sixth-century China, one set of debates between Buddhists and their opponents famously focused on the Buddhist claim that “the spirit survives [death]” 神不滅. Prior scholarship has tended to focus on the development of relevant concepts only beginning in the early fifth century. However, building on work by Kawano, Itō, Nattier, Zacchetti, and Park, this paper argues that important predecessors to the concepts deployed by Buddhist participants in those debates can already be found in the translation literature of the third and fourth centuries. The present paper is part of a larger study of antecedents to the doctrine of \*amala-vijñāna (“taintless consciousness”) in the works of Paramārtha 真諦 (499–569), and therefore focuses in particular on terms relating to “consciousness” to label the transmigrating entity. In concert with prior and parallel studies, this study forms part of a larger argument that \*amala-vijñāna had important background in both India and China.*

KEYWORDS: “consciousness”/vijñāna, debates on survival of the spirit, transmigration, “sinification” of Buddhist ideas, Chinese Buddhist translations, \*amala-vijñāna

## INTRODUCTION

As is well known, the Chinese Buddhist world in the fifth through early sixth centuries was the scene of debates about whether or not some part of the sentient being does or does not survive death, to transmigrate and reap karmic rewards. A significant thread running through Buddhist contributions to these debates is the use of terms meaning “consciousness” for the transmigrating entity. In earlier work,<sup>1</sup> I reexamined those debates, with a particular focus on the role played in them by terms for consciousness. The aim of the present study is to show that both the general ideas at

<sup>1</sup> Michael Radich, “Ideas about ‘Consciousness’ in Fifth and Sixth Century Chinese Buddhist Debates on the Survival of Death by the Spirit, and the Chinese Background to \*Amala-vijñāna,” in *A Distant Mirror: Articulating Indic Ideas in Sixth and Seventh Century Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Chen-kuo Lin and Michael Radich (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2014), 471–512.

play in the debates, and specific conceptions of consciousness seen in them, have a longer prehistory in China than is generally recognized.

This study is part of a larger project in which I am examining possible antecedents to the *\*amalavijñāna* (阿摩羅識, “taintless consciousness”) doctrine of Paramārtha 真諦 (499-569) in both India and China. Through this research, I hope to address possible relations between *\*amalavijñāna* and the so-called “sinification” of Buddhist concepts. Consequently, I will make a few preliminary remarks in the present paper about the significance of my findings as part of the background to *\*amalavijñāna*.

The debates on the survival of death, themselves, have also sometimes been taken as part of the process of so-called “sinification” of Buddhism. On the basis of the examination of the long history of ideas in those debates, including especially conceptions of consciousness, I hope to show that this way of reading the debates is probably simplistic.

Before beginning my discussion, I should note that I also regard as misleading the most common English label for the issue at stake in these debates: “the *immortality* of the *soul*.” I will speak instead of the “survival of death” by the “spirit.” My reasons for this caveat are laid out in the companion study to this one.<sup>2</sup>

The present paper falls into two parts. First, I briefly reexamine the reported doctrines of some of the “six houses and seven schools” of Prajñāpāramitā exegesis of the fourth century. This examination is motivated by the fact that these ideas are sometimes taken as part of the background to the “survival of death” debates, though I will argue that there is little basis for this interpretation; and that they also contain possible very faint anticipations of *\*amalavijñāna* doctrine. Second, the bulk of the paper will comprise a study of anticipations of claims that the spirit survives death as early as the third century, focusing in particular on the emergence and history of the term *shishen* 識神 (“consciousness-cum-spirit”)/*shenshi* 神識 (“spirit-cum-consciousness”).

## “CONSCIOUSNESS” (*SHI* 識) IN FOURTH-CENTURY CHINESE BUDDHIST “SCHOOLS”

Among the reported doctrines of two of the so-called “Six Houses and Seven Schools” (*liu jia qi zong* 六家七宗) of exegesis of Prajñāpāramitā doctrine, which were current in the South in the fourth century,<sup>3</sup> we find faint outlines of some notions that bear broad resemblances to *\*amalavijñāna* doctrine. Furthermore,

<sup>2</sup> Radich, “Ideas about Consciousness,” 473. Briefly, I believe that the issue at stake in the Chinese debates is whether some element in the person survives beyond death, but not whether the person is *immune to or exempt from* death, or lives *forever more*, both of which seem to me to be implied by “immortality.” Further, in the context of these debates, I believe that *shen* 神 connotes mainly the mental constituent in human being, but it seems to me that “soul” has further metaphysical overtones that are not immediately necessary or helpful.

<sup>3</sup> The most important source for information about these “schools” is Tanji’s 曇濟 (411-475) (*Liu jia qi zong lun* 六家七宗論). This text only survives in later quotations in such works as the Tang monk Yuankang’s 元康 *Commentary on the Zhao lun* 肇論疏 T1859; Anchō’s 安澄 (763-814) *Chūron so ki* 中論疏記 T2255; Jizang’s 吉藏 (549-623) *Zhongguan lun shu* 中觀論疏 T1824; and the *Ming seng zhuan* 名僧傳 biography of Tanji as quoted in the *Meisō den shō* 名僧傳抄 X1523 (LXXVII) 354c9-23.

these ideas occur in contexts suggesting something like “consciousness only” doctrine in general, but surprisingly early.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the name for one of these schools, *shihan* 識含 (see below), is commonly said to derive from Zong Bing’s 宗炳 (375–443) *Ming fo lun* 明佛論.<sup>5</sup> For all of these reasons, it seems worth our while to briefly examine the doctrines of these schools here. However, the main lessons of such an examination are: Very little information survives about the doctrines of the schools, so that their positions remain shadowy; and such information as we do have only allows for speculative connections, at best, to either the “survival of death by the spirit” debates, or to the eventual doctrine of *\*amalavijñāna*.

One of these early schools is the *Shihan zong* 識含宗 (also sometimes *hanshi zong* 含識宗) or “view [that all is?] contained in consciousness.”<sup>6</sup> We have very few

<sup>4</sup> These indications are early in that they predate, or are at best contemporaneous with, the formation of the Yogācāra school as defined by the Maitreya-Asanga-Vasubandhu corpus, in India, and prior to all but a few hints of such positions in the Chinese translation literature. Of course, forerunners of Yogācāra proper were present in India much earlier, and in some texts that also reached China at an early date, such as the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthisamādhi-sūtra*, which contains the famous line, “Whatever belongs to this Triple World is nothing but thought,” *cittamātram idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukam, khaṃs gsum pa ’di dag ni sems tsam mo* (Skt. is known from a DBh parallel); Paul Harrison, *The Tibetan Text of the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Sammukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra, Critically Edited from the Derge, Narthang, Peking and Lhasa Editions of the Tibetan Kanjur and Accompanied by a Concordance and Comparative Table of Chapters of the Tibetan and Chinese Version* (Tokyo: Reiyukai Library, 1978), 36; Harrison, *The Samādhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present: An Annotated English Translation of the Tibetan Version of the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-sammukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra with Several Appendices Relating to the History of the Text* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1990), 42; in *\*Lokakṣema*, cf. 三處—欲處、色處、無想處—是三處意所為耳, T418 (XIII) 905c29–906a1; also cf. other notions about the power of the mind to produce a vision of the bones of the dead for contemplation, or the vision of the Buddha (upon which the text hinges), discussed in Harrison, *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthisamādhisūtra*, in Harrison and John McRae, *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthisamādhisūtra and the Śūrangamasamādhisūtra* (Berkeley: Numata Center, 1997), 20–21; also *\*Jñānagupta*, 今此三界唯是心有, T416 (XIII) 877b4. Outside the *Pratyutpanna*, a parallel passage occurs in DBh 6E, *cittamātram idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukam*; Kondō Ryūkyō 近藤隆晃, revised and edited, *Daśabhūmīśvaro nāma mahāyānasūtram* (Kyoto: Rinsen, 1983 [1936]), 98.8–9; Johannes Rahder, *Daśabhūmikāsūtra* (Leuven: J.-B. Ista, 1926), 49; Honda Megumu, “Annotated Translation of the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*,” in *Studies in South, East, and Central Asia: Presented as a Memorial Volume to the Late Professor Raghu Vira by Members of the Permanent International Altaicist Conference*, ed. Denis Sinor (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1968), 189; already found in Dharmarakṣa’s DBh, 又復思惟、其三境界、心之所為 etc., T285 (X) 476b7–10 (see below p. 117), and in Kumārajīva, 三界虛妄、但是心作, T286 (X) 514c25–26. Cf. also Lambert Schmithausen, *Plants in Early Buddhism and the Far Eastern Idea of the Buddha-Nature of Grasses and Trees* (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2009), 141–148. We also must not forget the possibility of oral transmission of a given doctrine before we see evidence of knowledge of that doctrine in our preserved written record. For another early expression of a rough “idealism,” see Kang Senghui (Jan Nattier, *A Guide to the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations: Texts from the Eastern Han 東漢 and Three Kingdoms 三國 Periods* [Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, 2008], 149), 夫心者、眾法之原, T2145 (LV) 46b20. Early translations of the *Dhammapada* verse discussed in n. 30 below were alluded to by a number of later Chinese authors in the debates that concern us here.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007 [1959]), 368 n. 314; Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbeichao Fojiao shi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1991 [1933]), 265.

indications of the content of this doctrine. Jizang 吉藏 (549-623) reports that Yu Fakai 于法開 (ca. 310-370) claimed, “The three realms are [merely] a lodging in the long night, [wherein] mind and ‘thought/consciousness’ 心識 is the protagonist of the great dream [of existence]”;<sup>7</sup> upon awakening, “delusory consciousness 倒惑識 is extinguished, and the Triple World is [realized to be] empty. At that time, there is nowhere whence [one] is born, and yet nowhere [one] is not born.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, the world is presented as a dream produced by “delusory consciousness” 倒惑識 (*shi* perhaps for \**vijñāna*),<sup>9</sup> from which we awaken to the realization that all is in fact empty. Anchō’s report begins with the same words, but states that for one who awakens to the emptiness of the three realms, such “consciousness” comes to an end, and he attains the tenth stage (of the *bodhisattva* path, i.e., buddhahood).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 142-143; Tang, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbeichao Fojiao shi*, 263-265.

<sup>7</sup> 三界為長夜之宅、心識為大夢之主。This phrase may be a variation on a slogan in circulation in this era; see Xie Zhenzhi 謝鎮之 (d.u.), letter to Gu Huan 顧歡 (420-483) (where “sentient beings” 有生 are the protagonists of the great dream), HMJ 42a15-16; Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮, ed., *Gumyōshū kenkyū* 弘明集研究 (Kyōto: Kyōto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1973-1975), 3:379; Huijiao’s 慧皎 (497-554) essay to the “Self-Immolators” chapter of GSZ, 406a5-7; James Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 247. Cf. Lushan Huiyuan 廬山慧遠 (334-416), letter to Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369-404): 於是甘寢大夢昏於所迷、抱疑長夜所存唯著...問、主之居宅、有情耶、無情耶, etc., HMJ 33c16-17, 33c26-27 ff.; Makita, *Gumyōshū kenkyū*, 2:313-314.

<sup>8</sup> 三界為長夜之宅、心識為大夢之主。今之所見群有皆於夢中所見、其於大夢既覺長夜獲曉、即倒惑識滅三界都空。是時無所從生而靡所不生; *Zhongguan lun shu* 中觀論疏 T1824 (XLII) 29b3-7; translation (modified) from Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 142; also translated in Whalen W. Lai, “The Early *Prajñā* Schools, Especially *Hsin-wu*, Reconsidered,” *Philosophy East and West* 33, no. 1 (1983): 69.

<sup>9</sup> The “phrase” *daobuoshi* 倒惑識 here is a *hapax legomenon*. *Daohuo* 倒惑 appears from the early fifth century onwards, in works ascribed to Guṇabhadra, Kumārajīva, and Faxian, e.g., 若能斷此倒惑想者, T189 (III) 651a29; 於彼九十五種邪見倒惑無有果報, T201 (IV) 268c22-23; 愚癡倒惑而起淨想, T376 (XII) 883b8-9; and especially in the \**Buddhāvataṃsaka* ascribed to Buddhābhadra, where it appears twelve times, e.g., 心無倒惑, T278 (IX) 699a29; 於一切行不生倒惑, T278 (IX) 783a19. (In some instances, it is difficult to be sure where “word” boundaries fall, e.g., 顛倒惑網, T278 [IX] 636c17; 顛倒惑亂, 641b14; 世間顛倒惑, 682c15.) Intriguingly, the phrase becomes very rare in translation literature after this period. I am grateful to an anonymous JCR reviewer for drawing these instances to my attention.

*Huoshi* 惑識 alone is also unusual, though the phrase appears to have enjoyed some currency in the sixth century: see Liang Wudi, HMJ 54c11; Makita, *Gumyōshū kenkyū*, 3:480; Whalen Lai, “Emperor Wu of Liang on the Immortal Soul, *Shen Pu Mieh*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101, no. 2 (1981): 173; an unnamed commentary to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* cited by Jizang, T1744 (XXXVII) 72a28-29; a reply by Huichao 慧超 (?-526) to a question from Liang Prince Zhaoming 梁昭明 (i.e., Xiao Tong 蕭統, 501-531) about the two truths, T2103 (LII) 248a4; the *Xiang xuan fu* 詳玄賦 by Huiming 慧命 (531-568), T2103 (LII) 340b14. Prior to this, it is mentioned very briefly (as 迷惑識) in \*Dharmakṣema’s translation of Aśvaghōṣa’s *Buddhacarita*, T192 (IV) 45c1; and otherwise occurs only in Dharmakṣema’s *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*, which passage is therefore significant as a possible source of the term, T403 (XIII) 604a16-19; there, however, the term is not matched in the much terser Tibetan; see Jens Braarvig, *Akṣayamatīnirdeśasūtra. Vol I: Edition of Extant Manuscripts with an Index; Vol II: The Tradition of Imperishability in Buddhist Thought* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1993), 1:116, 2:446.

<sup>10</sup> T2255 (LXV) 94c22-25: 于法開著『惑識二諦論』云：「三界為長夜之宅、心識為大夢之主。若覺三界本空、惑識斯盡、位登十地。」今謂：其以惑所觀為俗、覺時都[read: 觀]空為真。

We can discern little from these brief reports.<sup>11</sup> For our purposes, the main interest lies in three points: 1) In some sense, *shi* 識 “consciousness” is being posited as the (causal) ground of *saṃsāric* existence; 2) it is remotely possible that a mind purified of delusion is understood to survive (and experience) liberation;<sup>12</sup> 3) as Zürcher observes, the theory figured here seems to echo common Mahāyāna tropes illustrating the illusory nature of all *dharmas* (including the dream), but also the notion of life as a dream, which Zürcher speculates refers back to the *Zhuangzi*’s “butterfly dream.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Huijun/Hyegyūn 慧均 (d.u., fl. 574-580s?) reports that Emperor Wu of the Liang 梁武帝 (r. 502-549) espoused a similar doctrine; X784 (XLVI) 584b21-23; Tang, *Han Wei liang jin Nanbei-chao Fo jiao shi*, 264. On Huijun, see Michael Radich, “The Doctrine of \*Amalavijñāna in Paramārtha (499-569), and Later Authors to Approximately 800 C.E.,” *Zinbun* 41 (2008): 121-122 n. 330.

<sup>12</sup> The last phrase of the quote is identified by Zürcher, probably correctly, as a quote from Dharmarakṣa’s *Lalitavistara* (LV); Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 368 n. 311, referring to 無所從生靡所不生, T186 (III) 507c26-27 (no corresponding Skt. exists). I cannot see any grounds for Zürcher to translate, as he does, “[the mind, fully enlightened,] has nothing from which it is born . . .,” i.e., his grounds for assuming enlightened mind is the subject of the phrase (the words “fully enlightened” are also Zürcher’s silent addition). For this same phrase, cf. also Xi Chao 郗超 (336-377), HMJ 88c24-25; Huiyuan, T2145 (LV) 66a9-10 (= T618 [XV] 301b7-8); Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 174, 380 n. 113.

It is perhaps suggestive that the LV passage in question portrays the *bodhisattva*, as he goes forth from the palace to his life of renunciate striving, encountering a god named “Runaway Consciousness 奔識,” who literally disarms himself before the *bodhisattva* as a result of a teaching he is given. The teaching “traces [the rebirth destinies] to their source” 源所從來 in certain moral acts; Nirvāṇa, by contrast, consists in not yearning for any of the five rebirth destinies. One who does this neither exists in *saṃsāra* nor dwells in Nirvāṇa, is unregressing (\**avaivartika*), and receives the “*bodhisattva* prophecy” (that his future buddhahood is assured). Here we reach the sentence quoted by Yu Fakai: such a one is “born from nowhere, and yet nowhere unborn; [for him,] in all states of birth (arising, etc.), there is nothing that is born” 無所從生靡所不生, 於諸所生悉無所生. An ambiguous phrase caps the LV story: “Runaway consciousness is/was liberated in mind, and, pacified, spins no longer/did not retrogress” 奔識心解逮不退轉 (the latter phrase probably referring originally to *avaivartika* status) (T186 [III] 507c17-508a1; for parallels, see also T185 [III] 475c20-26, cf. Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, *The Life of the Buddha: Ancient Scriptural and Pictorial Traditions* [Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1992], 72; T188 [III] 619b22-29, where this figure is called 賁識).

Jihyung Rhi, “How Does Iconography Work or Not Work? Questions in Reading Visual Depictions of the Great Departure from Gandhara and Andhrapradesh” (unpublished conference presentation, 16th IABS Congress, Dharma Drum College, Taiwan, June 24, 2011), notes that this episode is not preserved in any versions of the “great departure” outside the Chinese translation record (including LV in other languages), so that it is difficult to identify the deity in question. However, he cites the suggestion of Karashima Seishi (in a personal communication) that *benshi* is for “\*Vaiśramaṇa,” an old form of “Vaiśravaṇa.” If this is the case, then of course, any connection to the idea of a “runaway consciousness” may not have been very close to the surface in underlying Indic versions of the episode (Karashima does suggest etymological links; see Prof. Rhi’s forthcoming published version of his paper for details). However, it seems possible that the final ambiguous sentence could have been taken, in Chinese, either as describing the effect of the *bodhisattva*’s words on the god “Runaway Consciousness”; or as allegorically figuring the final state of liberation as a non-dualistic suspension at a midpoint between existence and non-existence, because knowledge of the origin of existence in the world has unbound “runaway consciousness” so that it no longer functions. It may in part be this larger context that led Yu Fakai to allude to this passage in expounding a theory of liberation as the cessation of delusory consciousness. If this speculative scenario holds any water, it considerably enriches the anticipations of \**amalavijñāna* doctrine in the *Shihan zong* position.

<sup>13</sup> Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 141-143.

The term *shihan* 識含 itself, used as a label for the school, is commonly said to derive from Zong Bing's *Ming fo lun* 明佛論 (for which see below).<sup>14</sup> It would indeed be interesting if there was a more substantial connection between *shihan zong* and Zong Bing. However, it is difficult to see the exact connection between the relevant passage in Zong Bing and the reported doctrine of Yu Fakai. In Zong Bing, *han . . . shi* seems to mean rather that spirit 神 contains consciousness 識, as an organ or vehicle of awareness (primarily moral awareness?) and memory, through multiple incarnations;<sup>15</sup> whereas in Yu Fakai, as we have just seen, it seems rather to mean that all phenomena are in fact contained within consciousness, as its figments.

The other "school" of interest to us is the *xinwu zong* 心無宗 or "doctrine that mind is empty."<sup>16</sup> Modern scholars basically agree that where opponents<sup>17</sup> held that objects were empty and mind real, *xinwu zong* held the opposite – that objects were real, but that the enlightened mind should be "empty," i.e., free of attachment, with regard to them. As Zürcher argues, then, for this school, emptiness denotes a state of mind rather than an ontological state. It recognizes the objective existence and reality of external objects (matter; *rūpa*), but holds that the mind of the Sage, insofar as it is free from attachment and conscious thought, partakes of the realm of "non-being" (*wu* 無).<sup>18</sup> Our sources tell us little more than this about the doctrine.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 368 n. 314; Tang, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbeichao Fojiao shi*, 265.

<sup>15</sup> 知堯惡亡之識常含於神矣 . . . 向者神之所含知堯之識 etc., HMJ 10b11-15; Walter Liebenthal, "The Immortality of the Soul in Chinese Thought," *Monumenta Nipponica* 8 (1952): 386; Makita, *Gumyōshū kenkyū*, 2:91.

<sup>16</sup> We might also translate "emptiness is a state of mind." This is the earliest of the "Six Houses and Seven Schools." The position bearing this label was reportedly propounded primarily by Zhi Mindu 支愍度 (fl. ca. 326), Zhu Fawen 竺法溫 (Fayun 法蘊), Daoheng 道恆 (346-417) et al. On the doctrines of this school, see T1858 (XLV) 152a15-16; T1859 (XLV) 171b22-c12; T1824 (XLII) 29a25-b1; T1825 (XLII) 183a17-21; X866 (LIV) 59a24-b3; T2255 (LXV) 94b9-21; Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, *Shi shuo xin yu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 859, trans. Richard B. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World, by Liu I-ch'ing, with Commentary by Liu Chün* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 447; and, among secondary studies, Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 100-102; Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy: Vol II, The Period of Classical Learning (from the Second Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.)*, translated by Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 252-256; Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, "Zhi Mindu xueshuo kao 支愍度學說考," reprinted in *Chen Yinke wenji* 陳寅恪文集, 2, *Jinming guan congkao* 金明館叢稿 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 141-167; Tang, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbeichao Fojiao shi*, 266-272; Walter Liebenthal, *The Book of Chao* (Beijing: Catholic University of Peking, 1948), 149-152.

<sup>17</sup> Lai argues that the opponent was *benwu zong* 本無宗. Although Lai relies heavily on Tang, Tang argues that the implicit opponent was the *huanhua zong* 幻化宗. Both build these arguments on interpretations of the comment of Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 (462-521) about the "old theory" 舊義. Tang, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbeichao Fojiao shi*, 271-272; Lai, "Emperor Wu of Liang," 62-63.

<sup>18</sup> Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 100-102, 353 n. 88. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for reminding me that the substance of Sengzhao's characterization of this "school" is similar: 心無者, 無心於萬物, 萬物未嘗無。此得在於神靜, 失在於物虛, T1858 (XLV) 152a15-16. Lai claims that because the *benwu zong* restricted its critique of apparent existents to phenomenal objects, it was a kind of *ātmavāda*, which was predicated on the notion of an "immortal soul"; by contrast, *xinwu* was the first true "[\*]anātmavāda school" in China; Lai, "Emperor Wu of Liang," 62, 64-65. Zürcher, by contrast, asserts that "Zhi Mindu's theory has nothing to do with

On the basis of a speculative but plausible link between Zhi Mindu and Kang Sengyuan 康僧淵 (d.u.),<sup>19</sup> Chen Yinque has tried to trace *xinwu* ideas to interlinked passages in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā*, the Larger *Prajñāpāramitā*, and the *\*Viśeṣacintibrahmapariṣcchā* (T585),<sup>20</sup> which advance the idea that “mind is not [itself] mental, and the nature of mind is aboriginally luminous.”<sup>21</sup> Chen argues that *xinwu* doctrines can be ascribed to a combination of such passages (which he argues were probably incorrectly parsed in the process)<sup>22</sup> with Lao-Zhuang doctrines current in the *qingtan* 清談 milieu of the time.<sup>23</sup> Thus, on Chen’s reckoning, *xinwu* doctrine was a complex product of partial Indian antecedents, errors of translation and interpretation, and pressure from native Chinese philosophical systems.

For our purposes, the main interest of this “school” is that it might be interpreted as propounding a theory of the identity of mind and emptiness as/or *tathatā*,<sup>24</sup> and would, I think, be relatively early in this regard. In very broad outline (only), this echoes one dimension (only) of *\*amalavijñāna* doctrine, and thus might be regarded as its distant precursor. Further, Chen’s reading of the background of the doctrine is suggestive, since it may show a link to the notion of *\*prakṛtiprabhāsvaracitta*, which I have argued elsewhere was also an important piece of the Indian background to *\*amalavijñāna* doctrine;<sup>25</sup> and because it suggests a complex dynamic, in which “sinification” *stricto sensu*, i.e., the influence of native Chinese ideas, is only one of several factors.

#### EARLY USE OF THE TERMS *SHISHEN*/*SHENSHI*, AND EARLY ANTICIPATIONS OF THE IDEA THAT THE SPIRIT DOES NOT PERISH AT DEATH

In a companion study to the present work,<sup>26</sup> I examine the use of terms for “consciousness” in famous Chinese debates on the survival of a constituent of the

the Buddhist dogma of the non-existence of a permanent ego”; Zürcher 353 n. 87. These discrepancies in interpretation are perhaps most pertinent as a cautionary tale against drawing firm conclusions on the basis of so little information; but so far as our information goes, I am inclined to agree with Zürcher.

<sup>19</sup> The *Shi shuo xin yu* 世說新語 account of Zhi Mindu’s migration to the south says he did so in the company of a nameless “monk of the North” 僧道人; Liu, *Shi shuo xin yu*, 859; Mather, *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*, 447. Sengyuan’s biography in GSZ states that he traveled south with Zhi Mindu; 347a1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Chen, “Zhi Mindu xueshuo kao,” 145-148. The force of Chen’s argument derives from the juxtaposition of these circumstances with the GSZ account of Sengyuan’s doctrinal expertise and interests in these three texts; T2059 (L) 347c29-a1, a15-16.

<sup>21</sup> *cittam acittam prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvarā*. For the (chronologically) most important passages Chen argues from, see P. L. Vaidya, ed., *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1960), 3; Edward Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary* (San Francisco: The Four Seasons Foundation, 1995), 84; T224 (VIII) 425c25-27; T225 (VIII) 478c21; T223 (VIII) 233c23; T585 (XV) 15b24-26. Some of these Chinese texts contain such phrases as 有心無心, 無有心 and 心無心. Some of (the Indic versions of) these passages are briefly discussed as part of the Indian background to *\*amalavijñāna* in Michael Radich, “Pure Mind in India: Indian Background to Paramārtha’s *\*Amalavijñāna*,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (forthcoming): n. 91, 92, 95.

<sup>22</sup> For example, he suggests that 有心無心 for *cittam acittam* (for which see n. 21 above) might have been parsed 有「心無」心, “There is a mind in which mind does not exist,” yielding the *xinwu* 心無 of the eponymous doctrine; Chen, “Zhi Mindu xueshuo kao,” 148.

<sup>23</sup> Chen, “Zhi Mindu xueshuo kao,” 148-154.

<sup>24</sup> *Tathatā* was often rendered 本無 in early Chinese translations.

<sup>25</sup> Radich, “Pure Mind in India.”



person after death through the fifth and sixth centuries. However, the ideas at issue in these debates, and the use of terms connected with “consciousness” in connection with them, in fact stretch back to a little-known “pre-history” to the debates themselves, that is, to texts earlier than scholars usually trace the controversy. Where earlier scholars, like Zürcher and Tang, have tended to follow traditional doxography in seeing roots to the debates, and especially the position of Zong Bing, in the fourth-century “Prajñāpāramitā” “schools,” in fact, the most important antecedents of the usual Buddhist positions in these debates are found largely in translation literature, or literature associated with translation groups; and in that context, the claim that something in the person survives death may initially have been necessitated by the requirement to lay groundwork for Chinese audiences to understand the plot premises of *jātaka/avadāna* literature. Moreover, terms relating to “consciousness,” and particularly *shenshi/shishen*, can be shown to constitute an important strand in this prehistory to the debates.

We should note, before discussing the Chinese materials, that important aspects of ideas about *viññāna* and related concepts traced below, and their relation to theories about mechanisms of reincarnation, were demonstrably directly foreshadowed by a significant body of comparable ideas in India. Detailed demonstration of this claim is beyond the scope of the present paper,<sup>27</sup> but requires us to seriously reexamine the idea that the positions taken by Buddhists in the “survival of death” debates themselves are necessarily indications of a so-called “sinification” of Buddhist ideas.

In recent and ongoing work, Jan Nattier, Stefano Zacchetti, Itō Takatoshi, Kawano Satoshi, and Jungnok Park have begun tracing some tantalizing, very early antecedents of these debates in works of the early third century.<sup>28</sup> “Consciousness” features as part of the problem of the transmigrating entity, the question of the

<sup>26</sup> Radich, “Ideas about ‘Consciousness’.”

<sup>27</sup> See Radich, “The Doctrine of \**Amalaviññāna*,” 95-97, and studies cited there; to which should be added Tilmann Vetter, *The ‘Khanda Passages’ in the Vinaya-piṭaka and the Four Main Nikāyas* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 66-73, and the studies he cites at 68-69; and Radich, “Pure Mind in India.”

<sup>28</sup> Kawano Satoshi 河野訓, “Kan’yaku Butten ni okeru ‘shin’ no kenkyū 漢訳仏典における「神」の研究,” *Shintō shi kenkyū* 神道史研究 49, no. 1 (2001): 2-20; Kawano, “Fu yō kyō ni okeru ‘shin’ no gainen 『普曜經』における「神」の概念,” *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 印度学仏教学研究 51, no. 2 (2003): 278-283[L]; Kawano, “Koyakuki ni okeru shikishin to jōju 古訳期における識神と常主,” *Higashi Ajia Bukkyō kenkyū* 東アジア仏教研究 4 (2006): 19-31[L]; Jungnok Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2012), especially chapters 7 and 8, and appendix; for references to Nattier and Zacchetti, see below. For criticisms of Park’s general thesis, and the assumptions underlying it, see my review in *The Journal for Asian Studies* 72, no. 2 (2013): 457-458. In contrast to Park, I restrict my focus here almost entirely to the use of terms relating to “consciousness” to label the transmigrating entity. Note that even the very phrase “spirit does not perish [at death]” (神不滅), which is the basis of most common appellations given to the debates and even appears in the titles of many key tracts, dates back to an earlier period, where it first appears in texts associated with Zhi Qian; Nattier, *Guide*, 127 and n. 42.

My discussion here centers on *shishen/shenshi* only. However, as a JCR reviewer points out, *shen* 神 on its own may already have been legitimated in Buddhist contexts by An Shigao’s *Yogācārabhūmi* 道地經 T607; see Stefano Zacchetti, “Some Remarks on the Authorship and Chronology of the *Yin chi ru jing zhu* 陰持入經註: The Second Phase in the Development of Early Chinese Buddhist Exegetical Literature,” in *Buddhist Asia 2: Papers from the Second Conference in Buddhist Studies Held in Naples in June 2004*, ed. Giacomella Orofino and Silvio Vita (Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian

“survival” of the “soul” etc., as early as the third-century *Yin chi ru jing zhu* 陰持入經註 T1694 (a commentary on the *Yin chi ru jing* 陰持入經 T603).<sup>29</sup> This text already contains what Lai aptly labels a “moral idealism,” taken from the *Dhammapada*: the idea that the mind is the root of all morally significant (good and bad) *dhammas* 心為法本.<sup>30</sup> Against this background, it is noteworthy that Zacchetti finds that “the most conspicuous...peculiarity” of T1694 “is perhaps the theory of a spiritual core in living beings,”<sup>31</sup> in a context in which “the content of the basic Buddhist teachings . . . is largely represented as a drama whose protagonist is this soul/spirit, in a very distinctive and unifying vision of the entire process of existence”;<sup>32</sup> and that the most frequent term for this “spiritual core” is *shishen* 識神.<sup>33</sup>

Zacchetti comments that *shishen* seems to have been a neologism in its time. It would seem reasonable, from contexts in which it was used, to assume it was already coined as an equivalent for Indic *\*vijñāna* etc. (as indeed Liebenthal and Lai assume).<sup>34</sup> The ideas the term is used to articulate have a number of features that anticipate *\*amalavijñāna*.<sup>35</sup> The “main function” of the term in the text is to label a spiritual entity that transmigrates;<sup>36</sup> this is confirmed by passages in which

Studies, 2010), 176 n. 95; and that there may be a link back to pre-Buddhist discourse, as in Wang Chong’s 王充 *Lun heng* 論衡 62 “Lun si” 論死, for which see Tang, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbeichao Fojiao shi*, 90.

<sup>29</sup> On the authorship and date of this text, see Zacchetti, “Some Remarks,” esp. 181.

<sup>30</sup> T1694 (XXXIII) 10a12-14; Whalen Lai, “The Early Chinese Buddhist Understanding of the Psyche: Chen Hui’s Commentary on the *Yin Chih Ju Ching*,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 1 (1986): 87. As Lai points out, the *Dhammapada* had already been translated (according to tradition, by Weiqinan 維祇難 = “\*Vighna”; on this name, see Nattier, *Guide*, 113 n. 1; but perhaps more likely by Zhi Qian, for which see Nattier 114-115, 134-135). The phrase 心為法本 appears twice in successive verses, T210 (IV) 562a13-16, corresponding to *Dhammapada* 1.1 and 1.2, *manopubbaṅgamā dhammā* (Skt. *manahpūrvāṅgamā dharmā*); those verses are the same in their gist as T1694 here; see Mizuno Kōgen 水野弘元, *Hokku kyō no kenkyū* 法句經の研究 (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1981), 1:82-83.

<sup>31</sup> Zacchetti, “Some Remarks,” 172.

<sup>32</sup> Zacchetti, “Some Remarks,” 175; Zacchetti briefly traces this central motif through the exposition of many of the doctrines most central to the text.

<sup>33</sup> Other terms used with “essentially the same meaning” are *shen* 神, *shenling* 神靈, *hunling* 魂靈, *youshi zhi ling* 有識之靈, and *ling* 靈; Zacchetti, “Some Remarks,” 174.

<sup>34</sup> Zacchetti notes, however, that in rare situations where it is possible to confirm Indic equivalents to use of the term in (often later) Chinese texts, the actual situation is more complex: for early instances of the term there is no clear parallel attested in an Indic language; in later instances in DĀ, it corresponds to *jīva*; in SĀ (perhaps only once), to Pāli *viññāṇa*; and in EĀ, to Pāli *gandhabba* (Skt. *gandharva*) in the context of an explanation of the process whereby a living being takes up its situation in the womb of its mother-to-be. Zacchetti, “Some Remarks,” 173-174, n. 87.

<sup>35</sup> Zacchetti argues suggestively that the emergence of these ideas may have been related to specific features of the third-century Southern Chinese religious milieu in which the author(s) of T1694 probably worked. In so doing, he admirably avoids the temptation of too easily seeing “sinicization” here: “Rather than seeing . . . soul-language [in the YCRJZ] . . . as an instance of generic ‘sinicization’ (a notion that I think should be thoroughly reconsidered, if not altogether abandoned), it would perhaps be more fruitful to interpret it as a sign of the interaction of Buddhist texts and doctrines with the specific – and indeed very distinctive – environment of 3rd-century south-central China”; Zacchetti, “Some Remarks,” 178. He supports this suggestion by noting that such “soul language” is almost unknown in Han texts, 37-38 and n. 96; and with reference to Irisawa’s study of possibly related archeological evidence from the South; Irisawa Takashi 入沢崇, “Butsu to rei: Kōnan shutsudo Busshoku konbin kō 仏と霊—江南出土仏師魂瓶考,” *Ryūkoku daigaku ronshū* 龍谷大学論集 44 (1994): 38 ff.

*shishen* is discussed in a manner that clearly maps it onto *vijñāna* as a link of the twelvefold chain of dependent origination, in which capacity it serves as the bridge from one lifetime to another.<sup>37</sup> This process, further, is likened to the way that the same “primordial *qi* 元氣” manifests itself through the growing seasons in the forms of cereals, grasses, and trees, retreats underground and hides latent through the winter, only to emerge again in new forms at the next round of the cycle; on this analogy, consciousness—specifically, the six sense consciousnesses—is said to be a “seed” of the five *skandhas*.<sup>38</sup> Implicitly, consciousness is here treated as the existential ground of all (sentient) being, which is reminiscent of the *Dhammapada* passage cited above. These ideas echo the “return to the origin” theme, which arguably also forms a dimension of \**amalavijñāna* doctrine.<sup>39</sup>

It is important to note, as Itō has argued, that in the Chinese context, it may have been necessary to explain to audiences that it was possible for a single being to be “the same” across multiple lifetimes, in order to clarify the premises of the *jātaka/avadāna* genre, and thereby make the plots of such stories comprehensible.<sup>40</sup> This might explain the timing of the introduction of this motif into the Chinese textual tradition. Certainly, there are many passages in the *jātaka* genre in which interesting related views are expressed.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Zacchetti, “Some Remarks,” 173. See also T1694 (XXXIII) 13b20-21; 13c21-22 (Zacchetti 174 n. 90); 14b18; 14b28; 14c10-14. At 14c15-17, similar things are said of the 神靈.

<sup>37</sup> T1694 (XXXIII) 13c1-25, Lai, “Early Chinese Buddhist Understanding,” 88, 89. Here, “consciousness” (*vijñāna*; *shishen*, or just *shi*) is the subject of ignorance, as well as moving between incarnations. Cf. also 14a20-22; “*shishen* is bound by the twelve[-fold chain of] causes and conditions” 識神縛在十二因緣, 17c23; and a passage discussing Nirvāṇa as the consummation of the reversal of the twelvefold chain, 14a2-7. Note that *shi* alone is also used for *vijñāna* as it features in the scheme of the five *skandhas*. See, e.g., 9c24-25, Lai 91 (where, moreover, the gloss 「識」、知也 is the same as that given for *vijñāna* among the twelve *nidānas* at 13c6).

<sup>38</sup> T1694 (XXXIII) 10a20-b2; translated in part in Lai, “Early Chinese Buddhist Understanding,” 92.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. 群生未有、厥本自空, T1694 (XXXIII) 10b8, Lai, “Early Chinese Buddhist Understanding,” 93 (concluding, as Lai shows, a reference to *Yi jing* cosmology); death spoken of as a return of the four great elements comprising the body to their origin, 身為四大、終各歸本, 10b9-10, Lai 93. An anonymous JCR reviewer has generously provided references to a cluster of Wu Kingdom sources similarly “centered on the idea of causing the *shen* 神 to revert 還 to ‘original non-being’ 本無.” For example, in the *Liu du ji jing* 六度集經: 將導三界還神本無, T152 (III) 14c22, 將導眾生還[var. 逮 SYM]神本無, 38c17; 還神於本無長存之寂, 42b21; 止欲空心還[var. 逮 SYM]神本無, 51b12; in the anonymous commentary to the first chapter of Zhi Qian’s Larger *Prajñāpāramitā* 大明度經: 由言證已, 當還本無矣, T225 (VIII) 478c3; 神還休, 480b3; 滅十二因緣, 還乎本無, 480b29; and in the commentary to the *Yin chi ru jing* 陰持入經註: 三界還本無。謂之道, T1694 (XXXIII) 11b3; 聚會也, 謂與同志尚偕[var. 偕 S]三界欲學還本無之聚會也, 22a7-8. I can do no better than to cite my reviewer directly: “Although the exact relationship between these various sources remains to be investigated in detail...the fact that similar imagery occurs” in these several sources “suggests that the complex of ideas centered on notions of 還/神/本無 may have attained a certain degree of ideological coherence in Wu Buddhist sources, and played a role in their soteriological discourse as an important trope.”

<sup>40</sup> Itō Takatoshi 伊藤隆寿, “Ryō Butei *Shinmyō jōbutsu gi* no kōsatsu: *Shin fu metsu ron kara Ki shin ron e no ichishiten* 梁武帝『神明成仏義』の考察: 神不滅論から起信論への一視点,” *Komazawa daigaku Bukkyō gakubu kenkyū kiyō* 駒沢大学仏教学部研究紀要 44 (1986): 219-200[L].

<sup>41</sup> See the *Taizi rui ying benqi jing*, 太子瑞應本起經, T185 (III) 475a1-3, noted in Itō, “Ryō Butei *Shinmyō jōbutsu gi*,” 235 n. 6; 472c6-9 (where the transmigrating entity is *jingshen* 精神), 478b3-6 (*hunshen* 魂神), 479c17-23 (where, pivotally for our purposes, “mind is the *jingshen*” 意為精神 and rebirth is explained by the arising of consciousness [and *sanjñā*?] 識想); Itō 219-200. See also, for

A further provocative link in the history of the term *shishen*, and the apparently roughly interchangeable *shenshi* 神識, is found in the Chinese Āgamas.<sup>42</sup> For example, in the “Alternate” *Samyuktāgama* no. 30 (SĀ, T100, translated in 385-431<sup>43</sup>), *shenshi* is used to refer to the spirit (“consciousness,” \**viññāna*) of the dead Godhika, which Māra searches for in vain.<sup>44</sup> *Shenshi* is used in another version of the same narrative motif in the \**Ekottarikāgama* 26.10 (EĀ, translated in 383<sup>45</sup>) parallel to the *Vakkali-sutta*.<sup>46</sup> In *Ādībhāgama* 7 (DĀ, translated in 412-413), the term is used to label the invisible soul (corresponding to Pāli *jīva*).<sup>47</sup> In SĀ 930 (T99, translated 435-443<sup>48</sup>), the Buddha promises Mahānāma that because of his practice of virtue, upon his death, his *shenshi* (Pāli *citta*, “mind”) will “go upwards, to a peaceful and pleasant place, and in future, will be reborn in a heaven.”<sup>49</sup> In EĀ 39.5, *shenshi* is used for the seven “stations of consciousness” (Pāli *viññāṇaṭṭhiti*), in a short *sūtra* which describes various reincarnation destinies

example, Kang Senghui’s *Liu du ji jing* 六度集經, where the transmigrating entity is *hunling* 魂靈, which in one instance is explicitly said not to perish 魂靈不滅; T152.76 (III) 39b21-23; 40c10-12 (neither of these passages is translated by Édouard Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues extraits du Tripiṭaka chinois et traduits en français*, Tome I [Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1910]; see his 267 n. 1); Itō, “Ryō Butei *Shinmyō jōbutsu gi* no kōsatsu,” 220; in addition to passages pointed out by Itō, cf. 1a24-25, Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes*, 1:6; 2a3, Chavannes 1:11; 2a13-14, Chavannes 1:12; 11c15-16, Chavannes 1:61; 17a25-26, Chavannes 1:101; 20a12-13, Chavannes 1:124; 23a25-26, Chavannes 1:148; 37c11, Chavannes 1:256; 51c22-26, Chavannes 1:344; 52a7-8, Chavannes 1:345; also, using the term *lingpo* 靈魂, 37c13, Chavannes 1:256; *shen* 神 23a21, Chavannes 1:148.

<sup>42</sup> I have not attempted to be exhaustive in this survey of *shenshi/shishen* in the Āgamas. These terms are also found in Chinese Āgama texts without known parallels in other versions (or in passages with parallels, where *shenshi* does not correspond exactly to any parallel term): e.g., T103 (II) 500a29-b3; EĀ T125 (II) 581a22-26, 671a11-b4, 720a28-b6. However, the selection discussed here should suffice to give a sense of the usage of the term.

<sup>43</sup> Marcus Bingenheimer, “The Shorter Chinese *Samyukta* Āgama: Preliminary Findings and Translation of Fascicle 1 of the *Bieyi za aban jing* 別譯雜阿含經 (T.100),” *Buddhist Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2006): 21; Bingenheimer, *Studies in Āgama Literature: With Special Reference to the Shorter Chinese Samyuktāgama* (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2011), 1.

<sup>44</sup> T100 (II) 383a11-15, Bingenheimer, *Studies in Āgama Literature*, 118-119, 141-142 and n. 75, 76; so too *shishen* in parallels in T99 (II) 286b11-17, 347b8-11.

<sup>45</sup> On the correct ascription of T125 to Zhu Fonian, see Michael Radich and Anālayo Bhikkhu, “Were the *Ekottarika-āgama* 增壹阿含經 T 125 and the *Madhyama-āgama* 中阿含經 T 26 Translated by the Same Person? An Assessment on the Basis of Translation Style,” in *Studies in the Madhyama-āgama*, ed. Dhammaddinā (forthcoming); Radich, “On the Ekottarikāgama 增壹阿含經 T125 as a Work of Zhu Fonian 竺佛念,” *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies*, forthcoming.

<sup>46</sup> T125 (II) 642c24-643a11, S 3:124, Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya* (Somerville MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 941; Pāli *viññāna*. In this connection Bingenheimer notes, “The Pāli commentary (SNa I 184) glosses *viññāna* with the abhidhammic notion of *paṭisandhicitta*, ‘the relinking consciousness’ that connects two lives”; Bingenheimer, *Studies in Āgama Literature*, 141 n. 75. Cf. also a similar notion in Buddhābhadda 佛陀跋陀羅 and Faxian’s 法顯 *Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya* (translated in 416), T1425 (XXII) 479a21-22.

<sup>47</sup> T1 (I) 44a22-24, D 2:333-334, Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995 [1987]), 358; 44b7-9, D 2:339, Walshe 360-361; 44c12-14; 44c29-45a3, D 2:336, Walshe 359.

<sup>48</sup> Bingenheimer, *Studies in Āgama Literature*, 1.

<sup>49</sup> 神識上昇，向安樂處，未來生天，T99 (II) 237c6-7; cf. S 5:370, Bodhi, *Connected Discourses*, 1809.

in Buddhist cosmology.<sup>50</sup> In the *Yanluo wang wutian shizhe jing* 閻羅王五天使者經 corresponding to the *Devadūta-sutta*, rebirth is described as “the *shishen* being reborn.”<sup>51</sup> In EĀ 21.3, in a list of reasons that conception can fail because of defect or absence of either mother, father, or the germ of life from a prior rebirth, the germ of life is called *shishen*, where Pāli has *gandhabba*.<sup>52</sup>

In sum, then, in these Āgama passages, *shishen/shenshi* corresponds most frequently to *viññāna*, but also, occasionally, to \**gandharva* and *jīva*. Taken together, these Āgama passages alone would amply suffice to give Chinese Buddhists of the fifth century and onwards reason for thinking of *viññāna/shishen* as a part of the person that somehow survives death and makes the transition to the next incarnation.

Outside the Āgamas, too, both terms are plentiful in early translations (or texts presented as translations). *Shishen* is, generally, found in works ascribed to a wider range of translators, and somewhat earlier: for example, in “An Shigao” 安世高 (fl. ca. 148-168+?);<sup>53</sup> Zhi Qian 支謙 (fl. ca. 229-252);<sup>54</sup> Kang Senghui 康僧會 (fl. ca. 249-280);<sup>55</sup> “\*Vighna” 維祇難 (fl. ca. 224);<sup>56</sup> Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (230?-316);<sup>57</sup> texts (other than EĀ, already discussed) translated by Zhu Fonian

<sup>50</sup> T125 (II) 730c22-731a3, A 4:39-40, F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings* (Anguttara-Nikāya), or *More-Numbered Suttas* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995 [1932-1936]), 4:22-23, Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 1025-1026; so too EĀ 46.8, 779b25-c8, A 5:53, Woodward and Hare 5:36, Bodhi 1375. Cf. a similar passage in EĀ 44.11, 769a17-27, another text which discusses reincarnation destinies, where the “dwelling-places of sentient beings” 眾生居處 (Pāli *sattāvāsa*) are referred to in one case as “stopping/resting-places of the *shenshi*” 神識所止, a phrase not paralleled in Pāli, A 4:401, Woodward and Hare 4:269, Bodhi 1280-1281.

<sup>51</sup> 識神出生. This phrase, and the figure in which it features, are not exactly paralleled in Pāli, M 3:178, Nāṇamoli and Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 1029; A 1:138 ff., Woodward and Hare, *Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 1: 121 ff.; Bodhi, *Numerical Discourses*, 217 ff.

<sup>52</sup> T125 (II) 603a2-14; cf. M 1:265-266, Nāṇamoli and Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses*, 266.

<sup>53</sup> Describing the torments of a spirit (*shenshi*) in hell, T492b (XIV) 756b8-9. Nattier, *Guide*, does not regard this text as a genuine work of An Shigao; if the text is not by him, there is no reason to regard *shishen* as earlier than the third century. Identical verses are found in T495 (XIV) 759c13-14, ascribed to Fajian 法堅 (= Shengjian 聖堅) (fl. ca. 388-408).

<sup>54</sup> T581 (XIV) 965c16-17. In this passage, it does not appear to me that *shenshi* is used for *viññāna* as a technical term, but rather, as a general word meaning “mind”; T198 (IV) 179a12. I cannot find anything corresponding to *shishen* here in the parallel in the Pāli *Aṭṭhakavagga* 6, *Jarā-sutta*.

<sup>55</sup> T152.41 (III) 23a9, 24a19-20; T152.90 51b11-12.

<sup>56</sup> T210 (IV) 574a22-23. Nattier regards this translation as by Zhi Qian; Nattier, *Guide*, 115, 122-124, 134-135. In these loci, once more, *shishen* is clearly *viññāna* as the transmigrating entity; moreover, one instance is in a verse stating that “consciousness creates the three worlds and the five good and evil rebirth destinies (\**gati*)” 識神造三界/善不善五處, repeated verbatim in T211 (IV) 606b6. These verses do not correspond to anything in the *Dhammapada*; Mizuno, *Hokku kyō no kenkyū*, 2:297.

<sup>57</sup> For example, T154.55 (III) 107b23-24; T182b (III) 457b28-29; and Dharmarakṣa’s LV 普曜經, but with no exact correspondence to Skt.: T186 (III) 527c28-528a2, cf. LV 24.2, P. L. Vaidya, ed., *Lalita-vistara* (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1958), 286; 527c28-528a2, cf. LV 24.8, Vaidya 287; 530a25-28, cf. LV 26.35, Vaidya 304 (cf. Kawano, “*Fu yō kyō*,” on *shen* more generally in LV). See also discussion of DBh below.

竺佛念 (fl. ca. 383-412);<sup>58</sup> Tanwulan 曇無蘭 (fl. ca. 389-395);<sup>59</sup> and Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅 (394-468).<sup>60</sup> *Shenshi* is even more plentifully attested, but by and large somewhat later, and especially frequently (over a hundred times) in Dharmarakṣa and Zhu Fonian.<sup>61</sup> Passages featuring the term are too numerous for exhaustive study to be practicable or profitable,<sup>62</sup> but a few are particularly striking for our purposes.

For instance, the entirety of the *Jianzheng jing* 見正經 T796, ascribed to Tanwulan, is concerned with developing a series of extended analogies for the rebirth process to explain why the *shishen* cannot return to its former state (from a previous lifetime): The analogies include clay formed and fired into tiles; the wood of a living tree chopped down and crafted into various objects; ore smelted into iron and forged into iron implements, and so on; in other words, various products of irreversible processes of transformation. Throughout, *shishen* is used to refer to the entity that undergoes “transfer” 轉徙, 徙 or “transformation” 轉易 from one lifetime to the next, through various rebirth destinies, in a manner that corresponds loosely to (but is not identical with) the place of *viññāna* in the twelve *nidāna* schema (the text also uses *shi* 識 alone for *viññāna* in this sense).<sup>63</sup>

Another striking passage in chapter 6 of Dharmarakṣa’s *Daśabhūmika* (DBh) develops an extended analogy between the process of death and rebirth and the generations of plants (once again).<sup>64</sup> In the Skt., mind is the seed (*bīja*), *karma* is the field (*kṣetrālaya*), the conceit of self (*asmimāna*) is “moisture” (*pariṣyandana*), body-mind (*nāmarūpa*) is the sprout (*aṅkura*), and so on, in a treatment that (yet again) is clearly based upon the twelve *nidāna* scheme.<sup>65</sup> In Dharmarakṣa’s translation, the term *shenshi* is used for *citta*: “*shenshi* is the

<sup>58</sup> Relevant texts are too numerous to list in full, but see, e.g., T212 (IV) 712b9, 773a28; T309 (X) 972c17-973a1, 985b23-24 (in both these passages, again clearly corresponding to *viññāna* in the twelve *nidāna* schema, and an account of rebirth), 1040a17-18 (in an interesting passage describing how the *viññāna* can travel to a *buddhakṣetra* in dreams and receive teachings), 1040b1 (again in connection to conception in the mother’s womb).

<sup>59</sup> Again describing the suffering of a spirit (*shishen*) in hell, T741 (XVII) 548a18-19.

<sup>60</sup> In Guṇabhadra’s *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* 過去現在因果經, the *bodhisattva* Śākyamuni’s charioteer defines death (in the story of the “four sights”) in part by saying “the *shenshi* has departed” 神識去矣, T189 (III) 631a5-7.

<sup>61</sup> In Zhu Fonian’s *Chu yao jing* 出曜經 alone, for instance, *shenshi* for *viññāna/viññāṇa* T212 (IV) 622c13-14, *Dhammapada* 41 (3.9), Mizuno, *Hokku kyō no kenkyū*, 1:98-99, 2:397; also (in prose sections) 614c16; 642b14-15; 647b8-11 (paralleling the story of Godhika already mentioned above, n. 44); 658a24-25; 681a8-9; 684c25; 691b1-2; 692b29; 693a16-17; 705a6; 716a12; 725c4; 729a16; 729b19; 729c7; 743c8-9; 744a19-20; 760a25-26.

<sup>62</sup> See Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul*, “Appendix.”

<sup>63</sup> The text also features a somewhat idiosyncratic application of the notion of the mind as a mirror, obscured by filth, by contrast with which the Buddha’s mind is clean and clear. The Buddha explains to his audience that it is because of their defilements that they cannot see beyond their present lifetime, whereas he sees sentient beings coming and going through multiple incarnations very clearly, T796 (XVII) 742a3-16; they too should practice Buddhism “in order to eliminate the defilements of your minds, eliminate the three poisons” 以除意垢。消滅三毒 etc., “and then you will see clearly and purely, and obtain the Buddha’s mind of gnosis, whereupon you will know both past and future as clearly as if you were looking in a bright [i.e., clean] mirror” 便見清淨。得佛慧意。便知去來之事。如視明鏡, 742a19-21.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. above p. 114.

<sup>65</sup> Kondō, *Daśabhūmīśvaro nāma mahāyānasūtram*, 97; Rahder, *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, 48; Honda, “Annotated Translation of the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*,” 187.

seed” 神識是種 (clearly showing that the *nidāna* scheme made the translator think of *viññāna*, and that *shenshi* once more corresponds to it).<sup>66</sup> The immediately following section works through the twelve *nidāna* scheme again. Correspondence between Dharmarakṣa and Skt. is imperfect at best throughout this passage; but in one utterance whose relation to Skt. is shaky, Dharmarakṣa then reads approximately, “The actions (*\*karmāṇi*) of ignorance, which are *aboriginally pure*, produce conditioned formations as their [karmic] fruits.”<sup>67</sup> Immediately following, we read (translating now from Skt.), “The initial state of mind based on *saṃskāras* is consciousness; the four aggregates as [objects of] clinging which are produced together with consciousness are *nāmarūpa*”; once more, in Dharmarakṣa’s Chinese, consciousness is *shenshi*, clearly corresponding to the *viññāna* of the twelve *nidāna* scheme.<sup>68</sup> Shortly afterwards follows DBh’s declaration that everything in the three worlds is only mind.<sup>69</sup> This famous statement is explained further by saying that all twelve members of the chain of *pratītya-samutpāda* are dependent upon the mind, because consciousness, defined as a state of mind wedded to passion arising in relation to a given object, is the basis of ignorance and thence of the entire chain.<sup>70</sup> Once more, the term used

<sup>66</sup> T285 (X) 476a14-15.

<sup>67</sup> 無明之業、本為清淨、成行報應, T285 (X) 476a26-27 (my emphasis). The apparent recourse to the notion of *prakṛtiprabhāvara* in Ch. here may have been partially conditioned or triggered by Skt. *avidyāprakṛtasya karmaṇo vipākaḥ saṃskārāḥ*, “*Saṃskāras* are the coming to fruition of acts *produced* by ignorance.” The form *prakṛta*, etymologically related to *prakṛti*, may at least give us a clue how someone might have thought of aboriginal purity, and inserted it erroneously, or perhaps because they saw a chance. Kawano Satoshi 河野訓, *Shoki Kan’yaku Butten no kenkyū: Jiku Hōgo o chūshin to shite* 初期漢訳仏典の研究: 竺法護を中心として (Ise: Kōgakkan Daigaku Shuppanbu, 2006), 112, 120-216, 251-255, 277-278, discusses numerous phrases or passages in Dharmarakṣa’s works without parallel in other versions of the same texts; and he has argued that several such passages show a marked interest in the notion of “aboriginal purity” (including purity of the mind), 253-256, 278. See also Stefano Zacchetti, *In Praise of the Light: A Critical Synoptic Edition with an Annotated Translation of Chapters 1-3 of Dharmarakṣa’s Guang zan jing 光讚經, Being the Earliest Chinese Translation of the Larger Prajñāpāramitā* (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, 2005), 14 n. 36; 16 and n. 48; 260 n. 136; 340 n. 87; 342 n. 96; 354 n. 146. I am grateful to an anonymous JCR reviewer, who saved me from a misleading expression of my ideas here, and suggested additional references.

<sup>68</sup> *saṃskāraṇīśritam prathamam cittam viññānam | viññānasahajāś catvāra upādānaskandhā nāmarūpam*, Kondō, *Daśabhūmīśvaro nāma mahāyānasūtram*, 97.14-15; Rahder, *Daśabhūmīkasūtra*, 48; Honda, “Annotated Translation of the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*,” 188; 所行以[*var.* 已]成, 神識在先, 神識之侶, 有受四陰, 則致名色迷惑之事, T285 (X) 476a27-29. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for helping me improve my translation.

<sup>69</sup> 其三界者, 心之所為, T285 (X) 476b9-10; *cittamātram idam yad idam traidhātukam*, Kondō, *Daśabhūmīśvaro nāma mahāyānasūtram*, 98.8-9; cf. Rahder, *Daśabhūmīkasūtra*, 49; Honda, “Annotated Translation of the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*,” 189.

<sup>70</sup> *yāny apīmāni dvādaśa bhavāṃgāni tathāgatena prabhedaśo vyākhyātāni tāny api sarvāṇy ekacittasamāśritāni | tat kasya hetoḥ | yasmin vastuni rāgasamīyuktam cittam utpadyate tad viññānam | vastu saṃskārāḥ | yaḥ saṃskārām [saṃskāre Tatsuyama] saṃmohah sāvidyā etc.*, Kondō, *Daśabhūmīśvaro nāma mahāyānasūtram*, 98.10-11; Tatsuyama Shōshin 龍山章真, *Bonbun Wayaku Jū ji kyō* 梵文和訳: 十地經 (Nagoya: Hajinkaku Shobō, 1938), 121 n. 1; Schmithausen, *Plants in Early Buddhism*, 143 n. 397; cf. T286 (X) 514c27-28; T278 (IX) 558c11-12; T279 (X) 194a15-17; T287 (X) 553a12-14; Rahder, *Daśabhūmīkasūtra*, 49; Honda, “Annotated Translation of the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*,” 189. An anonymous reviewer pointed out that this passage contains considerable textual problems, which, however, I will not endeavor to solve here.

for *vijñāna* is *shenshi*.<sup>71</sup> In this passage, then, we see a close conjunction of several elements that recur repeatedly throughout our materials: *vijñāna* as a key link in the chain of rebirth, expressed through the twelve *nidāna* scheme; the idea that all that exists is ultimately mind; and (in Dharmarakṣa but not Skt.) the idea of aboriginal purity.

In Zhu Fonian's *Zuisheng wen pusa shizhu chu gou duan jie jing* 最勝問菩薩十住除垢斷結經,<sup>72</sup> the Buddha is depicted discussing the way imbalanced relations between *\*vijñāna*=*shishen* and the four *mahābhūtāni* can lead to sickness; the text specifically says that on death, when the four elements “return” 歸, the *shishen* is not diminished 減; moreover, this *shenshi* is “immaculate/without taint” 無垢.<sup>73</sup> Even more strikingly, another extended (and obscure) passage in the same text<sup>74</sup> says that *vijñāna* is comprised by the *dharmadhātu*-cum-emptiness, but the combination of *\*vijñāna* (*shi*) and the four *mahābhūtāni* creates the body comprising the five *skandhas*.<sup>75</sup> [A *shishen*]<sup>76</sup> that is “quick” (on the uptake, i.e., a person of “sharp” faculties) identifies itself with emptiness, and “does not come into this world, [but rather] enters into the unconditioned *nirvāṇadhātu* without remainder and attains extinction”; whereas a *shishen* that is “dull” is reborn into one or another rebirth destiny, as its moral actions deserve.<sup>77</sup> The text then describes a “contemplation of emptiness” 思惟空觀 in which the *bodhisattva* enters into the *nirvāṇadhātu* without remainder by conforming his thoughts to the nature of emptiness (the “element of space,” *ākāśadhātu*); this has the same effect of exempting him from coming into this world and taking a body of the five *skandhas*, etc.<sup>78</sup>

This leads into discussion of an “empty *shenshi*(?)” (“*shenshi* [like?] space”? 虛空神識, *\*ākāśadhātu-vijñāna*?), which is the topic of further exercises in thought.<sup>79</sup> The doctrine (or perhaps meditation practice) here centers on three ways the

<sup>71</sup> T285 (X) 476b12-13.

<sup>72</sup> Jan Nattier, “Re-evaluating Zhu Fonian's *Shizhu duanjie jing* (T 309): Translation or Forgery?” *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University* 13 (2010): 231-258, shows that this text was probably composed in China on the basis of other Chinese source materials, but probably by Zhu Fonian himself. The ascription to Zhu Fonian is overwhelmingly confirmed by work I have in preparation on stylistic markers distinctive of his translation (or composition) style. Cf. also Unebe Toshihide 畛部俊英, “Jiku Butsunen no kenkyū: Kan'yaku *Zōitsu agon kyō* no yakushutsu o megutte 竺仏念の研究——漢訳『増壹阿含經』の訳出をめぐって,” *Nagoya daigaku bungaku bu kenkyū ronshū* 名古屋大学文学部研究論集 17 (1960): 27, 32; Okayama Hajime 丘山新, “Jiku Butsunen 竺仏念,” *Bukkyō bunka* 仏教文化 19 (1984): 29; Nattier, *Guide*, 97-98.

<sup>73</sup> T309 (X) 1043b25-c6. The language of this passage alone might have made us wonder if T309 was at least partially composed in China (see once more Nattier, “Re-evaluating Zhu Fonian's *Shizhu duanjie jing*”).

<sup>74</sup> T309 (X) 1013c12-1015a2. The language of this passage is difficult, and the remarks that follow are tentative.

<sup>75</sup> 菩薩當觀識為空性法界所攝、有識四大五法相應成五陰身, T309 (X) 1013c13-14.

<sup>76</sup> This sentence does not explicitly state that its subject is *shishen*, but discussion of *shi* immediately preceding, and the presence of *shishen* in the sentence immediately following (as the subject of the contrasting predicate “dull”) indicates that it is understood; see the footnote immediately following below.

<sup>77</sup> 捷利速疾即於空界、識自覺。．．即自開寤於虛空中不來此世、入無為無餘泥洹界而取滅度。若彼識神遲鈍不利．．因形受對當趣生門、遇善則善、遇惡則惡, etc. T309 (X) 1013c15-21.

<sup>78</sup> T309 (X) 1014a19 ff.

<sup>79</sup> T309 (X) 1014b1.



“empty *shenshi*” can relate to its reincarnation destinies (? *zhongzhi*).<sup>80</sup> 1) It can have its own special mode of existence separate from the five ordinary *gatis*, in which it is “limpid, formless and invisible.”<sup>81</sup> 2) It can find itself in an ordinary incarnation destiny(?), but it conceives of an aversion to it, is awakened to its Buddha-nature by Buddhist teachings, and attains *parinirvāṇa* in the *nirviṣeṣanirvāṇadhātu*.<sup>82</sup> 3) It can exist in a kind of “both-and” mode, in which it “does not linger in the realm of the unconditioned/non-action, but holds back and does not fully enter into human existence.”<sup>83</sup> The broad lineaments of such a paradoxical state are familiar from other doctrines of the existential status of the *bodhisattva*. This third state is described as one in which “the consciousness has its existence in the element of space [that is] *dharmatā*, and its substance and form is like that of a reflection or of light.”<sup>84</sup> Understandably enough, the text then proceeds to puzzle over what difference there can be between such a “space consciousness” and “incarnation in space,” and *nirvāṇa*;<sup>85</sup> astonishingly (or not?), the Buddha declares that the state of *nirvāṇa* does indeed also have a *shenshi* and a state of existence (*zhongzhi*, \**āvāsa*?),<sup>86</sup> and proceeds to discuss the differences between *nirvāṇa* and other states of existence and consciousness, saying, among other things, “We may say that consciousness (*shi*) perishes forever, but in fact it *does not perish* forever 亦不永滅; we may say that consciousness is reborn, but in fact it is not born. . . .”<sup>87</sup> “The *shishen* of the Tathāgata is no different from the *shishen* of *nirvāṇa*.”<sup>88</sup>

<sup>80</sup> *zhongzhi* 中止 (\**āvāsa*?): the use of the term here is rather unclear, and very unusual. In two versions of \*Saṃgharakṣa’s *Yogācārabhūmi*, the term *zhongzhi* is used, fairly clearly, to refer to the *antarābhava*; T606 (XV) 186a30-187a10, cf. (in lesser detail) T607 (XV) 233b26-c10; Paul Demiéville, “La *Yogācārabhūmi* de Saṃgharakṣa,” *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient* 44, no. 2 (1954): 401. This usage of *zhongzhi* is itself unusual enough; but in the present text, it seems almost as if it has been generalized (or misunderstood?) to mean any reincarnation destiny as a “state of existence” (= \**āvāsa*?): for instance, the text speaks of consciousness combining with the four elements to come into a *zhongzhi* 識合四氣來趣中止, T309 (X) 1014b5, or “the *zhongzhi* of the five \**gatis*” 五道中止, 1014b7-8.

<sup>81</sup> 虛空神識一趣, T309 (X) 1014b2-3 ff.: 入五道中止已 . . . 天化中止 . . . 地獄餓鬼畜生亦有中止、各各不同空識中止、澹然無形而不可見, 1014b8-11.

<sup>82</sup> 虛空神識 . . . 二、悔: . . . 諸佛世尊以化佛性、住教尋時得寤於無餘泥洹界而般泥洹 etc., T309 (X) 1014b13-26. The presence of the term *foxing* 佛性 in this passage is very striking. This compound occurs very rarely before about 416-418 CE, and perhaps never in what was to become its standard meaning of so-called “Buddha nature.” The appearance of this term here may thus warrant further investigation as a possible clue about a *terminus post quem* for at least parts of T309, and if all of T309 was indeed composed by Zhu Fonian, may also give us an important clue about the earliest possible end date for his activity (cf. also T656 [XVI] 12b18).

<sup>83</sup> 不逮無為之境、退不及人間之有, T309 (X) 1014b29-c1. Again, the diction here sounds more like something composed in Chinese than “translationese.”

<sup>84</sup> 空界法性識處其中中止、形質如影如光, T309 (X) 1014b28-29.

<sup>85</sup> 彼泥洹界及第一義、亦當有神識、亦當有中止。設有識有中止者、彼泥洹界與虛空識及空中止有何差別, T309 (X) 1014c5-8.

<sup>86</sup> 彼泥洹界及第一義、亦當有神識亦有中止, T309 (X) 1014c13-14.

<sup>87</sup> “. . . and as for its state of existence, it takes eternal quiescence for its state of existence” 言識永滅亦不永滅。言識更生亦復不生。彼中止者以永寂為中止; T309 (X) 1014c17-18.

<sup>88</sup> 如來神識泥洹神識則無有異, T309 (X) 1014c24-25. More specifically, the text explains this in part by a highly idiosyncratic reference to the notion, which was gaining broad currency in the Mahāyāna around this time, that the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa* was merely a docetistic show (for which see Michael Radich, “Immortal Buddhas and Their Indestructible Embodiments: The Advent of the

In these passages, then, Chinese readers would have found ample grounds, once more, for seeing in *shenshi/shishen*/*\*vijñāna* a thread of continuity between incarnations, or a vehicle or subject of rebirth. This much, moreover, is not a Chinese invention, but well grounded and documented in Indian materials. Chinese readers would also have had sound reason, and textual support, for holding that this *vijñāna* does not “perish” 滅, in exactly the terms that were to be disputed in the well-known debates that ensued in the fifth and sixth centuries; more occasionally, for associating it with purity and absence of taints, which might be original; and even (though rarely) for holding that the liberated state and being also has a special type of *shenshi/vijñāna*. Moreover, this complex of ideas, as Nattier, Zacchetti, Itō, Kawano, and Park have already begun to show, goes back much further than Chinese debates about the “immortality of the soul” are usually traced. It is little wonder that, in later authors, consciousness, and more specifically *shishen/shenshi*, was to play an important role in those debates.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I have argued that the fifth- to sixth-century Chinese debates about the survival of death by the spirit have a longer prehistory than is usually recognized. Contrary to the understanding of scholars like Zürcher and Tang, the best place to look for the early roots of these debates is not in the “Prajñāpāramitā” exegetical “schools” of the fourth century. Rather, the notion of a constituent in the makeup of the person that survives death, and explicit assertions of its survival and transmigration, date back to at least the third century and the Southern milieu around translators like Zhi Qian and Kang Senghui. In this context, the assertion that a constituent of the person survives death to transmigrate may have been initially motivated by the necessity of making comprehensible to Chinese audiences the plot premises of *jātaka/avadāna* literature. Already from this very early period, moreover, concepts related to “consciousness,” especially as understood in the context of the twelve *nidāna* schema, played a pivotal role in the presentation of this idea in numerous contexts.

However, as I have argued elsewhere, such understandings of *vijñāna* also had substantial precedents in India,<sup>89</sup> which must undermine simplistic understandings that the positions assumed by Chinese Buddhists in the “survival of death” debates were necessarily evidence or part of a process of so-called “sinification” of Buddhist ideas.

Concept of Vajrakāya,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 34 [2011/2012]: 227–290): “Ever since the Tathāgatas of all three times have had names(?), I have never seen [any of them] enter into *nirvāṇa*, and even if the Buddhas of the future should manifest [themselves in] the *dharmadhātu*, [they will only] dwell in *nirvāṇa* with remainder, and will not enter the element of *nirvāṇa* without remainder” 三世諸佛世尊有名號以來、吾未見有入泥洹者。正使將來諸佛出現法界、周旋止住有餘泥洹、不入無餘泥洹之境, T309 (X) 1014c22–24 . . . . “The only [difference is that] the *shenshi* of *nirvāṇa* has no shape nor shadow, neither does it have any characteristics of light(?), and it does not move and is immovable, whereas the consciousness 識 of the Tathāgata does move and is moveable; [otherwise,] the former consciousness and the latter consciousness are identical and no different, only differing in the presence or absence of movement” 但為泥洹神識、無形無影、亦無光相、不動而不可移。如來識者、有動有移。彼識此識、一而不異、唯有動不動而有異耳, 1014c25–28.

<sup>89</sup> Radich, “Pure Mind in India.”

In the latter part of the present paper, I focused on tracing one particularly rich vein in the development of these ideas about consciousness in the direction of the better known fifth- and sixth-century debates – the concept of *shishen/shenshi*. As I show elsewhere,<sup>90</sup> the notion of “consciousness” was eventually taken up by a second wave of Buddhist apologists, who grounded their arguments more firmly in the new waves of Buddhist scripture introduced during the translation boom around the turn of the fourth-fifth century. First, around the middle of the fifth century, Zong Bing 宗炳 (375-443) introduced the generic notion of “consciousness” into his defence of Buddhist transmigration doctrine; then, in the early sixth century, *shenshi/shishen* is deployed in the same capacity in the interlinear comments of Shen Ji 沈績 (d.u.) on Liang Wudi’s 梁武帝 (r. 502-549) *Shenming chengfo yi* 神明成佛義; and this use of *shenshi/shishen* is paralleled in the scholastic works of Sengzong 僧宗 (438-496) and Baoliang 寶亮 (444-509). Thus, a direct line can be traced from the early developments studied here to the more scholastically informed positions assumed by Buddhist apologists in the later debates.

As I mentioned at the outset, this paper is part of a larger project to study possible background to Paramārtha’s *\*amalavijñāna* doctrine in both India and China. Some of the ideas treated here could perhaps be regarded as remote antecedents, in the Chinese tradition, to the eventual elaboration of that doctrine. Some of the “Prajñā-pāramitā schools” ideas have very broad resemblances to *\*amalavijñāna* and its contexts, including a rough idealism (the claim that all phenomena actually exist only in the mind); that “consciousness” is the ground of *saṃsāra*; and that liberation somehow hinges on a transformation in “consciousness.” Other ideas examined here treat of a *vijñāna* comprising the thread of continuity through multiple incarnations, in a manner often mapped onto the *vijñāna* of the twelve-*nidāna* schema, where *vijñāna* is sometimes redolent of a ground of *saṃsāric* existence itself. These ideas, too, have overlaps with some parts of *\*amalavijñāna* doctrine and its contexts.

However, as I have already noted, many approximately analogous ideas were also common in Indian Buddhism. Moreover, many important aspects of *\*amalavijñāna* doctrine—especially the idea of the aboriginal purity of mind/consciousness, and the idea that consciousness (specifically) might serve as a “subject” of liberation—are only very faintly anticipated here, usually in obscure texts. For both these reasons, there is relatively little here that we could point to as specifically Chinese background to *\*amalavijñāna* doctrine. As I show elsewhere, this situation was to change markedly in the directions taken by concepts of consciousness in the debates on “survival of death by the spirit” in the fifth and sixth centuries.

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<sup>90</sup> Radich, “Ideas about ‘Consciousness’.”

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- A *Āṅguttara-nikāya*  
 DĀ *Dirghāgama*  
 DBh *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*  
 D *Dīgha-nikāya*  
 EĀ *\*Ekottarikāgama*  
 GSZ *Gao seng zhuan* 高僧傳 T2059  
 HMJ *Hong ming ji* 弘明集 T2102  
 LV *Lalitavistara*  
 M *Majjhima-nikāya*  
 SĀ *Samyuktāgama* T99, T100  
 skt. Sanskrit  
 S *Samyutta-nikāya*  
 T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 (CBETA [2008]). References to the Taishō follow the order: Text number, (volume number, roman), page, register and line number. Thus, e.g., T225 (VIII) 483b17 is text number 225, volume 8, page 483, second register, line 17. I omit text numbers when using abbreviated titles, e.g., GSZ, HMJ.  
 X *Shinsan dai Nippon zokuzōkyō* 卅新纂大日本續藏經. References formatted as for T.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Michael Radich is a Senior Lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard (dissertation: “The Somatics of Liberation: Ideas about Embodiment in Buddhism from Its Origins to the Fifth Century C.E.”). He has authored two monographs: *How Ajātaśatru Was Reformed: The Domestication of ‘Ajase’ and Stories in Buddhist History* (Tokyo 2011), and *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine* (Hamburg 2015). He spent 2015 at the Numata Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Hamburg, with the support of an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Fellowship for Experienced Researchers.

Correspondence to: Michael Radich. Email: Michael.Radich@vuw.ac.nz.