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The Buddhist Interpretation of the Confucianist Concept of Family: Filial Piety as Universal Compassion

After Buddhism had spread into China in the first century AD from India and Central Asia, it went through a number of essential modifications due to the conflicts with Chinese indigenous thought, religions and socio-political order. By the time Buddhism entered China, Confucianism, with its family-based value system, had become the mainstream ideology of China. The ideal of Confucianism is the *junzi* 君子 who is loyal to his ruler, upholding Confucianist values such as benevolence (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), proper behaviour in society (*li* 禮), and filial piety (*xiao* 孝). The maintenance of the Confucianist social hierarchy based on the family model was essential for keeping the harmony and order in society. The *junzi* was greatly concerned about public welfare, as through his efforts to practice the Confucianist virtues he sought to establish harmony in society. This harmony was also sought in family life through well-defined family relations, ensuring the prosperous future of the family by begetting offspring.

When the first Indian and Central Asian Buddhist monks arrived at China along the Silk Road around the first century, their appearance with their robes and shaven heads, and their way of living in communities and observing celibacy, must have seemed unusual for Chinese people. Probably because it differed so strongly from Chinese social norms, even at the end of the Han dynasty (202 BC – AD 220), Buddhism was mainly a religion of foreigners, and was not able to infiltrate Chinese culture and society.¹ When the social interaction between Buddhist followers and Confucianist literati started, several apologetic works were written by both sides, often revolving around filial piety, the cornerstone of Confucianist philosophy. In order to show that Buddhism was originally concerned with filial piety at least fourteen texts directly addressing the importance of this

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¹ Zürcher 2007: 24.

virtue in Buddhism and thirty-one closely related texts were translated between the Han and Tang (619–907) dynasties. These texts either directly reveal the teaching of filial piety in Buddhism, or narrate stories showing how filial piety was practiced by Buddhist followers.² In addition to translating Indian Buddhist texts and composing polemical essays, Chinese Buddhists also composed texts that resembled original sūtras ostensibly preached by the Buddha. These forged sūtras, traditionally designated dubious sūtras, and called apocryphal sūtras by modern Western scholars, reflect the Chinese Buddhist interpretation of filial piety.³

It would be difficult to deny that Buddhism runs counter to the requirement of filial piety stipulated in the Confucian *Classic of Filial Piety*, which says that “the body, hair and skin are received from our parents, and one should not dare to injure them” 身體髮膚，受之父母，不敢毀傷。 However, the text also adds that this is only the beginning of filial piety; it becomes complete if somebody can establish himself by his virtue and through his fame his parents will also be known. The idea that virtuous activity is more important in practising filial piety than preserving the body intact provided an ideal escape route for Buddhists wishing to show that through their work for the welfare of all living beings they are also filial.

Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416), the famous monk of early Chinese Buddhism who advocated the autonomy of the Buddhist community in his essay ‘A monk does not bow down before the king’ (*Shamen bu jing wang zhe lun* 沙門不敬王者論), argues that those followers of Buddhism who live in a family follow the proper rites in serving the ruler and respecting their elderly relatives. However, monks leave household life behind, and since their ambition is to understand the cause of suffering and to seek the highest principle they cannot be confined by the rites of secular life. “Only this way they are able to save the drowning world from the deep stream, to pull out the hidden roots (of existence) from the successive eons, far-away to wade through the ford of the Three Vehicles, broadly to open the way to manhood and divinity.”⁴ 夫然，故能拯溺俗於沈流，拔幽根於重劫，遠通三乘之津，廣開天人之路。⁵ He emphasized in his letter to Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404) that monks support imperial authority by promoting virtue in the world.⁶

² Guang Xing DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.559.

³ For an introduction to the topic of apocryphal sūtras in Chinese Buddhism, see Buswell’s Introduction to a book about the Chinese apocryphal sūtras. Buswell 1990.

⁴ For Zürcher’s translation of a passage from Huiyuan’s treatise, see Zürcher 2007: 258.

⁵ CBETA, T52, no. 2102, p. 30, b14–15.

⁶ CBETA, T52, no. 2102, p. 30, b14–15.

The argument that Buddhists were able to carry out beneficial acts for the whole of society is grounded in the Buddhist theory and practice of merit transfer (*pariṇāmanā*). This is an essential part of Mahāyāna practice as the bodhisattva who initially takes the vow to dedicate himself to the cause of liberating all living beings from their sufferings gladly offers all the merits accrued by his spiritual cultivation to all living beings. This practice is attested by an inscription at Pauni as early as the second or first century B.C.E where the donor Visamitra presented her gift “for the happiness of all beings.” In Sri Lanka we find several similar inscriptions dated between 210 and 200 B.C.E, one of which records the wish of princess (Abi) Tissā to give her cave to the Saṅgha of the ten directions for the benefit of her mother and father.⁷

Based on the possibility of merit transfer large numbers of sūtras were copied and many Buddhist artefacts were made in China in order to benefit the deceased parents or other relatives by securing their liberation from suffering in their next lives. Usually, specialised copyists and artists were commissioned to do this work on behalf of Buddhist followers who wished to fulfil their filial piety after their parents died. It is important to emphasize that in the process of merit transfer the meritorious deed does not have to be performed by the donor whose relatives are supposed to profit by it. The actual merit-generating activity is carried out by an agent, artist or copyist, or by monks who recite the scriptures for the benefit of the deceased relative.

The following story is recorded in the *Miraculous stories about the Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Dafangguang fo huyanjing ganying zhuan* 大方廣佛華嚴經感應傳), which includes reports on the miracles related to this sūtra. The protagonist, Deng Yuanying 鄧元英, was informed by a good friend who died but returned to life after seven days that Deng’s father was about to be pursued by the guardian of Hell. In order to save his father from this fate he decided to collect some merit by copying the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. He bought paper and ink in the market, and asked a Chan monk and a copyist to complete the assignment.

“In the Zhengsheng 證聖 period (695) Deng Yuanying (in other version Yuanshuang) of Huayin had a friend who suddenly died, but after seven days he returned to life. He told Yuanshuang: ‘I saw that the guardian of Hell was about to go after your father, and the official document was almost complete. You should hurriedly cultivate merit to redeem him.’ Yuanying was frightened, and asked: ‘What kind of merit should I cultivate in order to save him speedily?’ That man replied: ‘You should quickly copy the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. Do not be delayed, for

⁷ Schopen 1997: 7. For more Indian inscriptions about merit transfer to parents, see Schopen 1984. Gombrich argues that the introduction of the transfer of merit into Buddhism took place around the time of the Buddha, close to 400, or soon thereafter. See Gombrich 2006: 127.

time is pressing.’ Yuanying immediately went to the market to buy paper, and visited a Chan master and a famous copyist from a Chan temple of a Buddhist monastery in his neighbourhood. They kept the [rules] of purity, and started to copy momentarily. They finished copying the sūtra in less than ten days, and he held a feast to celebrate it. Afterwards he was able to avert this calamity. Yuanying had finished mourning for his mother, yet he was deeply affected. In the eleventh month of that winter, the stems of [the flower] he had planted on his mother’s grave and which had already withered, started to blossom and grow leaves. The grave was covered with fragrant and colourful flowers. It must have been the response to his [filial act of] copying sūtra. The official of the district submitted a memorial about the event. Empress [Wu] Zetian sighed with admiration and bestowed a gate of filial piety upon him and issued an edict praising him”

證聖年中，花陰鄧元英(有本名元爽)有一親友，忽染時患，死經七日却蘇。謂元爽曰：「見冥道宮吏將追君父，文案欲成。急修功德以禳之。」元英驚懼曰：「修何功德，而疾獲免？」彼人云：「急寫大華嚴經一部。若遲，大期不遠。」元英乃遽市買紙，向隣寺伏禪師院，請禪師與名召經生。如法護淨，一時書寫。未旬日，經已周畢，辦齋慶之。於後遂免斯厄。元英仍依母服免切在懷。至其冬十一月中，於母墳所舊種寒枯之莖，忽生花葉，芳[廿/(麩-夫+玉)]榮艷，五彩含英。斯蓋寫經之感也。洲縣以之聞奏。則天嗟異，賜立孝門，降勅旌表。⁸

A classic example of merit transfer for the benefit of parents is the *Ullambana-sūtra*, which became the locus classicus for filial piety in Chinese Buddhism and the basis for the Ghost Festival held after the retreat of the rainy season on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. The festival was widely observed not only in China but also in other East Asian countries.⁹ It has been a topic of debate whether this scripture, which was first allegedly translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa (265?–311) under the title *Fo shuo yulan pen jing* 佛說盂蘭盆經 (T 685) and paraphrased under the title *Fo shuo baoen feng peng jing* 佛說報恩奉盆經 (T 686) by an unknown person, is a Chinese apocryphal work or an authentic Indian scripture. Several studies have refuted the idea that Chinese Buddhists started to emphasize filial piety only in order to conform to Chinese social norms; in fact, filial piety also played an important role in

⁸ CBETA, T51, no. 2074, p. 177, a10–21.

⁹ For a very detailed study on the Ghost Festival, see Teiser 1988. Based on the *Ullambana-sūtra* and other apocryphal sūtras related to filial piety, Alan Cole suggests that Buddhism, by emphasizing the mother-son relationship, redefined the concept of filial piety in Confucianism which is predominantly concerned with the father-son relationship. See Cole 1998: 2.

Indian Buddhism, which is reflected in *avadāna* literature and *vinaya* rules.¹⁰ We can be quite certain that *Ullambana-sūtra* has an Indian antecedent that was paraphrased and further elaborated in China.¹¹

The *sūtra* tells the story of Mulian 目連 (or Maudgalyāyana in Sanskrit), who being Buddha's disciple has acquired the six supernormal powers, and searches for his mother in various realms after her death. He is frightened to see that his mother is suffering in the realm of hungry ghosts, and cannot eat the food he offers her as it is burnt before she can eat it. Buddha tells Maudgalyāyana that his merit alone is not enough to save his mother: the only way to relieve her suffering is to make an offering of *ullambana* (rice bowl) to the Buddhist community that is going to pray for her.¹² The joint efforts of the monks save not only his mother but also all of his relatives up to seven generations.

“O son of good family, if there are *bhikṣus*, *bhikṣuṇīs*, kings, crown princes, ministers, prime ministers, head officials, various civil servants, or tens of thousands of commoners who are devoted to their present parents and their ancestors of the past seven generations, they should, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, a joyous day for the Buddha and a day after the retreat, offer a meal of various tastes on a tray to the monks who participated in the retreat. They should then ask [the monks] to pray that their present parents will have a lifespan of one hundred years, free of illness and all kinds of suffering, and that their parents of the past seven generations may be free from the suffering of the realm of hungry ghosts and be born in the realm of heavenly beings (*devas*) which is accompanied by infinite happiness and pleasure.”¹³

善男子！若有比丘比丘尼、國王太子、王子大臣宰相、三公百官、萬民庶人行孝慈者，皆應為所生現在父母、過去七世父母，於七月十五日——佛歡喜日、僧自恣日——以百味飲食安盂蘭盆中，施十方自恣僧。乞願便使

¹⁰ For an early study of filial piety in Indian and Chinese Buddhism, see Ch'en 1968. Ch'en gives the examples of *Śyāma jāta* and *Ullambana-sūtra* as proofs that filial piety was important in Indian Buddhism. In fact, not only the *Ullambana-sūtra*, but also *Śyāma jāta* was very influential in Chinese Buddhism, as is attested by mural paintings depicting *Śyāma jāta* in Dunhuang and other Buddhist caves along the Silk Road. The story of Shanzi 睺子, who served his blind parent, even affected Confucianist tradition, as it was integrated into the twenty-four examples of filial piety (*ershisi xiao* 二十四孝). See Galambos forthcoming. For further study on filial piety in Indian Buddhism, see Guang 2005, 2016; Schopen 2007; Strong 1983.

¹¹ See Guang 2011, Karashima 2013.

¹² Karashima tries to find the Sanskrit origin of the word *ullambana* which was misunderstood for centuries as “hanging upside down”, but finally he identifies it as ‘rice bowl’ from the Sanskrit *odana* based on the context of the *sūtra*. See Karashima 2013: 300–302.

¹³ Bandō 2005: 22–23.

現在父母壽命百年、無病，無一切苦惱之患，乃至七世父母離餓鬼苦，得生天人中，福樂無極。¹⁴

An important apocryphal sūtra on filial piety, *The Sūtra on the Parents' Great Kindness* (*Fumu enzhong jing* 父母恩重經, T 2887), which was relatively widespread in popular religion, as is attested by the over sixty manuscripts found in the Dunhuang library cave, refers to the Ullambana offering as a way to repay the parents' kindness.¹⁵ This work was compiled on the basis of an authentic scripture, *The Sūtra on the Difficulty in Repaying Parents' Kindness* (*Fo shuo fumu en nan bao jing* 佛說父母恩難報經, T 684), allegedly translated by An Shigao 安世高 (148–180), including materials from other authentic sūtras such as the *Antarābhava-sūtra* and *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*.¹⁶

Even if *The Sūtra on the Parents' Great Kindness* was modelled on the earlier translation of an Indian scripture, the content was considerably modified in view of the Chinese sensitivity over the concept of filial piety originally defined in the Confucianist context and standardised by Chinese society before the arrival of Buddhism. The only common point in the two works is that the parents have to overcome many difficulties to bring up a child, and that is the reason why a child has to find a way to repay this kindness. The Indian version, however, emphasizes that a child should correct the parents' ignorant, unbelieving, immoral, greedy behaviour, and teach them to respect Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha. It would have seemed quite odd and unacceptable to the Chinese, who required obedience from a child, to correct the parents' behaviour. Thus it is no wonder that the Chinese version dropped this argument, and simply recommended the following way to repay the parents' kindness.¹⁷

“The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Listen attentively to my words and think them over carefully. I will explain it to you in great detail. As the parents' favours are like the vastness of the sky, how can we repay them? If a child full of affection and filial piety toward his parents accumulates pious acts, copies Buddhist sūtras, produces an *ullambana* tray on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and offers it full of food and drink to the Buddha and his disciples, then he can attain numerous merits and repay his parents' kindness. Moreover, if someone makes copies of this holy sūtra and disseminates it among the people, at the same time

¹⁴ CBETA, T16, no. 685, p. 779, c6–14.

¹⁵ Ma 2001: 467–480.

¹⁶ Guang 2008, Ogawa 1984.

¹⁷ Guang 2008: 138–139.

keeping it for himself and reciting it, then he is a person who repays his parents for their favours.”¹⁸

佛告阿難：「汝諦聽，善思念之，吾當為汝分別解說。父母之恩昊天罔極，云何可報？若有孝順慈孝之子，能為父母作福造經，或以七月十五日能造佛槃盂蘭盆，獻佛及僧得果無量，能報父母之恩。若復有人，書寫此經。流布世人，受持讀誦，當知此人報父母恩。」¹⁹

In the preceding discussion we have shown that filial piety was an important topic during the transmission of Buddhism, as it was debated in the apologetic literature whether Buddhism was able to live up the standards of filial piety defined by Confucianist society, and Indian sūtras related to filial piety were translated and indigenous sūtras were forged in order to prove that Buddhism was much concerned with filial piety. However, filial piety and the Confucianist moral standards influenced not only popular Buddhist religion, but also the Buddhist practice and scholarship of the elite. We will now examine a few examples from specialised Buddhist literature which shed light on how the Confucianist concept of family was incorporated into Buddhist practice and theory.

There are six apocryphal sūtras that form a group of texts known as visualisation sūtras (*guanjing* 觀經).²⁰ These scriptures are extant only in Chinese: they cannot be traced back to any original Indian scriptures, and the attribution of translation is dubious, thus they were probably compiled in Central Asia or in China; they may even be hybrids, originating in both China and Central Asia.²¹ They describe meditation and repentance practices mostly related to one of the celestial bodhisattvas, providing guidelines for the visualisation of the bodhisat-

¹⁸ Arai 2005: 123–124.

¹⁹ CBETA, T85, no. 2887, p. 1403, c8–13.

²⁰ Yamabe 1999: 40. For a recent study on these scriptures, see Mai 2009.

²¹ 1. *The Sūtra on the Ocean-Like Samādhi of the Visualization of the Buddha* (*Guanfo sanmei hai jing* 觀佛三昧海經, T.643), 2. *Amitāyus visualisation sūtra* (*Guan Wuliang shou fo jing* 觀無量壽佛經, T.365) 3. *Visualisation of Maitreya bodhisattva's birth in Tuṣita heaven sūtra spoken by the Buddha* (*Fo shuo guan Mile pusa shang sheng doushuaitian jing* 佛說觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經, T.452), 4. *Ākāśagarbha visualisation sūtra* (*Guan Xukongzang pusa jing* 觀虛空藏菩薩經, T.409), 5. *Visualisation of two bodhisattvas Medicine King and Medicine Supreme sūtra* (*Fo shuo guan Yaowang Yaoshang er pusa jing* 佛說觀藥王藥上二菩薩經, T.1161), 6. *Samantabhadra visualisation sūtra* (*Guan Puxian pusa xingfa jing* 觀普賢菩薩行法經, T.277). David Quinter suggests that the *Fo shuo wenshu shili banniepan jing* (佛說文殊師利般涅槃經 (T. 463) also belongs to this group of scriptures, although the title does not include the word 'visualisation'. See Quinter 2010. Another probably lost scripture, the *Guanshiyin guan jing* 觀世音觀經 was also a visualisation sūtra, though Greene argues that this work has survived under a different title. See Greene 2012: 83.

tvās and their realms. As these scriptures were probably written in China, Chinese concepts also percolated into the texts.

The most well-known text of the six visualisation sūtras is the *Amitāyus visualisation sūtra* (*Guan Wuliang shou fo jing* 觀無量壽佛經), which, describing the Western Pure Land, the Sukhāvātī, the land of Amitābha Buddha, became one of the central scriptures of the Pure Land school in East Asia. The sūtra declares that if an ordinary being wishes to be reborn in Sukhāvātī he has to perform three kinds of acts. The first group of acts, which lists basic moral requirements, includes having filial piety and taking care of one's parents (*xiaoyang fumu* 孝養父母) as the first requirement, suggesting that all the other virtuous deeds are based on filial piety.

“Whoever wishes to be born there should practice the three acts: first, caring for one's parents, attending to one's teachers and elders, compassionately refraining from killing, and doing the ten good deeds; second, taking the Three Refuges, keeping the various precepts, and refraining from breaking the rules of conduct; and third, awakening aspiration for enlightenment (*bodhicitta*), believing deeply in the law of causality, chanting the Mahāyāna sūtras, and encouraging people to follow their teachings. These three are called pure karma.”²²

欲生彼國者，當修三福：一者、孝養父母，奉事師長，慈心不殺，修十善業。二者、受持三歸，具足眾戒，不犯威儀。三者、發菩提心，深信因果，讀誦大乘，勸進行者。如此三事名為淨業。²³

In this sūtra Buddha states that people who will be born into the Western Pure Land can be divided into nine grades (*pin* 品). There are highest, middle and lower grades, and each grade is divided further into three levels (highest, middle, lower). In the lower grade we find living beings who are responsible for all kinds of vicious deeds, and do not follow the Buddhist teachings on proper behaviour. In the higher and middle grades there are people who perform virtuous deeds, but up to the middle level of the middle grade the people are all Buddhist practitioners with various kinds of achievements. However, the last level of the middle grade is reserved for non-Buddhists who complete the duty of a *junzi* by their filial piety toward their parents (*xiaoyang fumu* 孝養父母) and their benevolent (*ren* 仁) and righteous (*yi* 義) acts in the world. Even if a Confucianist cannot reach the level of a Buddhist at the lowest level, yet his moral behaviour is certainly acknowledged by this sūtra.

²² Inagaki 2003: 68.

²³ CBETA, T12, no. 365, p. 341, c8–13.

“Those who attain birth on the lowest level of the middle grade are good men and women who are dutiful to and care for their parents and do benevolent deeds for others. When such a person is about to die, he may meet a good teacher, who fully explains to him the bliss of the land of Amitāyus and the Forty-eight Great Vows of Bhikṣu Dharmākara. Having heard this, he dies; and in as short a time as it takes a strong man to bend and straighten his arm he attains birth in the Western Land of Utmost Bliss. Seven days after his birth there, he meets Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, rejoices at hearing the Dharma from them, and so reaches the stage of stream-winner. After one smaller *kalpa*, he becomes an *arhat*.”²⁴

中品下生者，若有善男子、善女人，孝養父母，行世仁義，此人命欲終時，遇善知識為其廣說阿彌陀佛國土樂事，亦說法藏比丘四十八大願。聞此事已，尋即命終。譬如壯士屈伸臂頃，即生西方極樂世界。生經七日，遇觀世音及大勢至，聞法歡喜得須陀洹。過一小劫，成阿羅漢。²⁵

Another visualisation sūtra, *The Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha on the Visualisation of Two Bodhisattvas, King of Medicine and Lord of Medicine (Fo shuo guan Yaowang Yaoshang er pusa jing 佛說觀藥王藥上二菩薩經)* relates that the two bodhisattvas who used to be brothers in their previous lives a long time ago, and vowed that they would cure living beings from all kinds of diseases when they became Buddha. Whoever can see these bodhisattvas, hear their names, or recite their dhāraṇīs, can get rid of all of the sins of their past lives and can be reborn to a Pure Land. To be able to hear the names of these bodhisattvas the sūtra requires practitioners to keep the Buddhist moral conduct, including filial piety and taking care of one’s parents, to have a calm mind, to read the Mahāyāna sūtras and to believe the eternity of the Buddha.

“Beings in the future may hear the names of the two Bodhisattvas King of Healing and Supreme Healer by achieving five prerequisites. What are the five? (1) One’s mind should unceasingly radiate loving kindness.²⁶ One should perfect the Buddha’s moral precepts, never breaking the principles of majestic conduct. (2) One should see to the filial care of one’s parents, and should practice the ten wholesome precepts of life in the world. (3) One’s body and mind should be peaceful and quiescent, with thoughts bound to that which is free of disorder.

²⁴ Inagaki 2003: 83.

²⁵ CBETA, T12, no. 365, p. 345, c1–7.

²⁶ The correct translation would be “his mind is benevolent and does not kill (*cixin bu sha 慈心不殺*)”. The same expression appears in the Amitāyus visualisation sūtra. See CBETA, T12, no. 365, p. 344, c14.

(4) One should listen to the vaipulya sūtras (the “expanded,” Mahāyāna texts) without harbouring suspicions and doubts, neither drowning [in emotions] nor backsliding [in spiritual progress]. (5) One should believe in the eternity of the Buddha, and the mind should unceasingly flow like a running stream towards the ultimate truth.²⁷

未來眾生具五因緣，得聞藥王藥上二菩薩名。何謂為五？一者、慈心不殺，具佛禁戒，威儀不缺。二者、孝養父母，行世十善。三者、身心安寂，繫念不亂。四者、聞方等經，心不驚疑，不沒不退。五者、信佛不滅，於第一義心如流水念念不絕。²⁸

The Samantabhadra visualisation sūtra (Fo shuo guan Puxian pusa xingfa jing 佛說觀普賢菩薩行法經) gives a very elaborate depiction of the appearance of Samantabhadra bodhisattva riding on a six-tusked elephant. The sūtra requires five practices of repentance from the kṣatriya and lay followers of Buddhism, mostly related to the support of Buddhist community and Buddhist practice, but the second repentance is “to be filial and caring toward their parents and respectful toward their masters and seniors (*xiaoyang fumu gongjing shizhang* 孝養父母、恭敬師長).²⁹ In order to have a clear vision of Samantabhadra the practitioner must purify his six sense-organs by performing a repentance ritual; however, the sūtra emphasizes that the real repentance is reading the Mahāyāna sūtras and understanding the concept of emptiness. The practitioner must see all people as Buddha and all living beings as his own parents. Here, Buddhist practice extends the meaning of the traditional Confucianist filial piety by redefining it as universal love toward all living beings.

“Then the follower makes this vow: ‘Had I [received] some blessings through my former destinies, I could surely see Universal Virtue. Be pleased, honoured Universal Fortune, to show me your form and body!’ Having thus made his vow, the follower must salute the buddhas in all directions six times day and night, and must practice the law of repentance; he must read the Great-vehicle sūtras and recite them, think of the meaning of the Great-vehicle and reflect over its practice, revere and serve those who keep it, see all people as if he were thinking of the Buddha, and treat living beings as if he were thinking of his father and mother.”³⁰

²⁷ Birnbaum 1979: 118.

²⁸ CBETA, T20, no. 1161, p. 661, a26–b1.

²⁹ T09, no. 277, p. 394, a24–b5.

³⁰ Kato 1975: 216.

發是誓言：「若我宿福應見普賢，願尊遍吉示我色身。」作是願已，晝夜六時禮十方佛、行懺悔法、誦大乘經、讀大乘經、思大乘義、念大乘事、恭敬供養持大乘者、視一切人猶如佛想、於諸眾生如父母想。³¹

Another very important apocryphal sūtra in East Asian Buddhism is the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (often mentioned under its reconstructed Sanskrit title: *Brahmajāla-sūtra*), which is said to have been translated by Kumārajīva in 406 but it is regarded as a Chinese composition from the middle of the fifth century.³² The sūtra has become famous for its bodhisattva precepts introducing ten major and forty eight minor precepts that can be taken not only by nuns and monks but also by laywomen and laymen. This scripture also teaches that all living beings should be regarded as our parents because they could have been our parents in one of our former lives. Here it is not only a mental practice to generate general kindness toward other living beings, but this concept also creates a moral obligation to save animals that are to be slaughtered and to release captive animals into the wild.

“My disciples, you should compassionately engage in the practice of releasing captive animals into the wild. All men have been our fathers, and all women our mothers. In our numerous past lives there is no one who has not been our mother or father. Therefore, sentient beings in all six destinies have all been our fathers and mothers. If we were to slaughter and eat them, it would be the same as slaughtering and eating our own parents, as well as slaughtering [and eating] my own former body.”³³

若佛子，以慈心故行放生業。一切男子是我父，一切女人是我母。我生生無不從之受生。故六道眾生皆是我父母。而殺而食者，即殺我父母亦殺我故身。³⁴

The importance of filial piety is shown by the passage introducing the bodhisattva precepts which says that Śākyamuni Buddha after his enlightenment first preached about the precepts that were meant to make people pious toward their parents, masters and the Three Treasures. The scripture regards piety as the principle of the ultimate path (*zhidao zhi fa* 至道之法), and quite surprisingly identifies piety with moral discipline. This way the text very clearly associates the most important terms of Confucianist ethics and Buddhist practice. Later

³¹ CBETA, T09, no. 277, p. 390, b7–11.

³² Buswell 1990: 8.

³³ Muller–Tanaka 2017: 55.

³⁴ CBETA, T24, no. 1484, p. 1006, b9–12.

on, the text repeatedly defines breaking Buddhist precepts as unfilial behaviour, underlying the interrelatedness of the two concepts.

“At this time Śākyamuni Buddha first sat beneath the *bodhi* tree and achieved peerless enlightenment. [After this] his first act was to establish the *Prātimokṣa*, [encouraging his followers] to piously obey their fathers and mothers, honoured monks, and the Three Treasures. Filial piety and obedience is the principle of the ultimate path. “Filial Piety” is synonymous with “moral discipline,” and also means “restraint.”³⁵

爾時釋迦牟尼佛，初坐菩提樹下成無上覺。初結菩薩波羅提木叉，孝順父母、師僧、三寶。孝順至道之法。孝名為戒，亦名制止。³⁶

Chinese Buddhist scholar monks made great efforts to understand and interpret various Indian Buddhist scriptures, composing lengthy commentaries to sūtras. Commentaries became a special genre in Chinese Buddhist literature with its own characteristics and structure, and this kind of literature evolved gradually and finally reached its apogee under the Tang dynasty (618–907).³⁷ One of the greatest representatives of commentary writing is Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839), the fourth patriarch of the Huayan school, whose major contribution to the Huayan school is his commentary and its subcommentary to the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*.³⁸ Although Chengguan was brought up in the monastery he thought secular writings were also important in spreading the Buddhist teachings, thus he also mastered the Chinese Classics that are quoted in his commentaries along with more than five hundred Buddhist works. He was on good terms with high officials and served as imperial preceptor, thus it was essential for him to be able to refer to the Confucianist Classics while explaining abstruse Huayan tenets. Although in terms of philosophical views Chengguan was critical toward Chinese indigenous philosophies and was opposed to the idea of harmonising the three teachings, he was much indebted to Chinese philosophy in formulating his Huayan doctrines.³⁹

The eleventh chapter of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, the Purifying Practice (*jingxing* 淨行), describes the method a bodhisattva should follow while carry-

³⁵ Muller–Tanaka 2017: 42.

³⁶ CBETA, T24, no. 1484, p. 1004, a23–25.

³⁷ For an introduction to commentary-writing in Chinese Buddhism until the Tang period, see Kanno 2015.

³⁸ For Chengguan’s biography, see Hamar 2002.

³⁹ Chengguan levelled ten points of criticism against Confucianism and Daoism based on the different ontological and soteriological views of Buddhism and Chinese indigenous philosophies. See Hamar 1999.

ing out his practice under various circumstances.⁴⁰ A lay or a monk bodhisattva, whatever activity he is engaged in, whether being at home, serving his parents, being with his family, leaving his family to join the Buddhist community, meditating, eating, going to the toilet, etc., should always wish that all living beings could have the chance to practice Buddhism in different ways and realize the Buddhist truth. If somebody is devoted to his parents and serves them, he should wish that all living beings serve the Buddha. The sūtra makes it very clear that the practitioner's primary concern should be the well-being of others, even when he expresses his filial piety toward his parents.

Enlightening beings at home
 Should wish that all beings
 Realize the nature of "home" is empty
 And escape its pressures.
 While serving their parents,
 They should wish that all beings
 Serve the Buddha,
 Protecting and nourishing everyone.
 While with their spouses and children,
 They should wish that all beings
 Be impartial toward everyone
 And forever give up attachment.⁴¹

菩薩在家，當願眾生：知家性空，免其逼迫。
 孝事父母，當願眾生：善事於佛，護養一切。
 妻子集會，當願眾生：怨親平等，永離貪著。⁴²

Explaining this passage, Chengguan points out that if somebody understands the nature of emptiness, he will not feel any pressure while staying at home. He stresses that there is a reason why filial piety is mentioned first in the text, as it is the most perfect merit: all activities originate from this. In his subcommentary he refers to the *Classics of Filial Piety* as a source for stating that filial piety is the most perfect merit.⁴³ Next, he quotes an unfortunately unidentified sūtra which says that serving our parents is identical with serving the Buddha.

⁴⁰ This chapter of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* is part of the proto *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*, thus it belongs to the early strata of the sūtra. See Nattier 2005.

⁴¹ Cleary 1993: 313.

⁴² CBETA, T10, no. 279, p. 70, a4–8. An early version of this text found in *Fo shuo pusa benye jing* 佛說菩薩本業經, CBETA, T10, no. 281, p. 447, b25–29.

⁴³ CBETA, T36, no. 1736, p. 264, b13–19.

He says that all living beings used to be our son, and all men and women used to be our father and mother, thus we must protect them. Here Chengguan extends the framework of the sūtra, referring to the concepts of classical Chinese philosophy and the apocryphal Chinese sūtras.

“If you understand the emptiness of human nature, then even if you live in a family, you do not feel the pressure of family life. Next is the wish to perform filial piety at home, as it is the most perfect merit, the origin of all activities, it is explained in the beginning. *The Sūtra of Great Collection* says: ‘If there is no Buddha in the world, you must serve well your parents. If you serve your parents, it is identical with serving the Buddha, as the parents became enlightened earlier than me.’ Now, on the other hand you serve Buddha, you grow the dharma-body. ‘Protecting and nourishing everyone’ [in the sūtra] means that all living beings used to be my son [in previous lives] thus I must protect them. All men and women used to be my father and mother [in previous lives] thus I nourish them. There is no living being which did not live as [my parent], I equally respect them as dharma-kāya Buddha.”

若了性空，則雖處居家，家不能迫。次一在家行孝願，以是至德行本故，首而明之。大集經云：「世若無佛，善事父母。事父母者即是事佛，父母於我為先覺故。」今翻令事佛者，生長法身故。護養一切者，一切眾生皆我子故，護之。一切男女皆我父母故，養之。生生無不從之受身故，平等敬之法身佛故。⁴⁴

Chengguan’s main disciple was Zongmi 宗密 (780–841), who became the fifth patriarch of the Huayan school, but, in addition, he was also the patriarch of the Chan school, thus one of the major characteristics of his teaching is the synthesis of the doctrinal teachings and Chan meditation. Zongmi was greatly indebted to his master not only for incorporating Chan elements into Huayan school but also for his references to Chinese Classics. He was well versed in Chinese Classics since before renouncing the lay life he had studied the Classics in order to take part in the national exam to become an official.⁴⁵

His debt to Chinese Classics is reflected in his classification of teachings (*panjiao* 判教) which was a Chinese hermeneutic innovation to interpret and harmonise the various Buddhist teachings.⁴⁶ The third patriarch of the Huayan school, Fazang 法藏 (643–712) established a scheme of five teachings

⁴⁴ CBETA, T35, no. 1735, p. 616, a8–15.

⁴⁵ Gregory 1991: 27–32.

⁴⁶ For the various classifications of teachings in Chinese Buddhism, and especially in the Huayan school, see Gregory 1991: 95–135.

(Hīnayāna, elementary teaching of Mahāyāna, final teaching of Mahāyāna, Sudden, Perfect) which included all Buddhist teachings starting from the basic teachings of Hīnayāna Buddhism, through the Mahāyāna teachings of Yogācāra, Madhyamaka, the Tathāgatagarbha, to the Huayan teaching representing the highest level of Buddha's teaching.⁴⁷ Although Chengguan confirmed Fazang's legacy by preserving his five teachings, his disciple Zongmi made radical changes in arranging various teachings. In his seminal work, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity* (*Yuan ren lun* 原人論, T 1886) he provides a very detailed explanation of his five categories of teachings: 1. teaching of humans and gods 2. teaching of the Hīnayāna 3. teaching of phenomenal appearances 4. teaching that refutes phenomenal appearances 5. teaching that reveals nature.⁴⁸ His most important contribution is the inclusion of teachings of men and gods as the first level of teachings, which refers to the five Buddhist precepts (*wujie* 五戒) that lay practitioners are required to keep according to the Buddhist scriptures. Here Zongmi related the five precepts with the five constant virtues (*wuchang* 五常) of Confucianism, emphasizing that both of them can result in avoiding birth in hell and the realms of hungry ghosts and as an animal by securing birth as human or god.⁴⁹

“Not killing is humanity, not stealing is righteousness, not committing adultery is propriety, not lying is trustworthiness, and, by neither drinking wine nor eating meat, the spirit is purified and one increases in wisdom.”⁵⁰

不殺是仁；不盜是義；不邪淫是禮；不妄語是信；不飲噉酒肉，神氣清潔益於智也⁵¹

Even if Zongmi belonged to the elite Buddhist circles with his exceptional erudition in Buddhist scriptures and Chinese Classics, he was much concerned with the ritual of the Ghost Festival, as is attested by his writing a commentary on the *Ullambana-sūtra* (*Fo shuo yulanpen jing shu* 佛說盂蘭盆經疏, T 1792). At the beginning of the commentary he confesses that he must have committed a sin as he lost his parents when he was young, and he was sad that he could not look after them. He regards Ullambana as a wonderful practice (*miaoxing* 妙行)

⁴⁷ For a very detailed study of Fazang's life, see Chen 2007. For a very good summary of his teachings, see Liu 1979.

⁴⁸ For an English translation, see Gregory 1995.

⁴⁹ The correlation between the five precepts and the five constant virtues first was put forward in the Chinese apocryphal scripture, *The sūtra of Trapuśa and Bhallika* (*Tiwei Boli jing* 提謂波利經) composed by Tanjing 曇靖 (?-?) in 460. See Gregory 1991: 281–282; Sheng 2004.

⁵⁰ Gregory 1991: 284.

⁵¹ T45, no. 1886, p. 708, c18–19.

which he himself had recourse to every year. He emphasises that filial piety is a shared value of Buddhism and Confucianism.

“Beginning in formless chaos, filling all of heaven and earth, uniting men and spirits, connecting noble and poor; Confucianists and Buddhists both revere it – it is the Way of filial devotion. Responding to filial sons’ sincerity, saving parents from distress, repaying broad heaven’s kind virtue – it is the teaching of *yulanpen*.”⁵²

始於混沌，塞乎天地，通人神，貫貴賤，儒釋皆宗之，其唯孝道矣。應孝子之懇誠，救二親之苦厄，酬昊天恩德，其唯孟蘭盆之教焉⁵³

As we have seen, since Buddhism began to spread filial piety as a principal value of Confucianism played a very important role in the process by which Buddhism was adapted to the Chinese world. In the beginning it was an easy target for Confucianist scholars, who could attack Buddhism for celibacy, which prevented monks from fulfilling a man’s most important filial obligation: to produce an heir for the family. However, Buddhists were able to point out how Buddhism can help to ensure a harmonious society, and argued that this service can overshadow the shortcomings of celibacy. Although Indian Buddhism also emphasized the importance of filial piety, it would be hard to deny that Chinese Buddhists made great efforts to show that through merit transfer Buddhist practitioners have effective methods to take care of their parents not only in this world but also in the nether world. The *Ullambana-sūtra* inspired the establishment of the ritual of the Ghost Festival which became the primary religious occasion in East Asia for making offerings to deceased relatives.

The topic of filial piety was also incorporated into the indigenous sūtras which underlined the importance of filial piety in Buddhist practice, and in addition, proposed a new understanding of the concept of filial piety which was radically different from the traditional Confucianist view. Based on the Buddhist idea of endless rebirth, Chinese Buddhists argued that all living beings could be our parents in our former lives, thus we must take care of them as if they were our parents. Undergoing a kind of paradigmatic change in the way it is understood, filial piety becomes universal love or compassion toward all living beings, which is the most important drive for all Mahāyāna practices. This way filial piety is regarded as the most essential Buddhist precept which all bodhi-sattva should practice. Chengguan even emphasises that respecting our parents is identical with respecting the Buddha. Finally, Zongmi regards filial piety as

⁵² Teiser 1988: 93–94.

⁵³ CBETA, T39, no. 1792, p. 505, a6–8.

a seminal moral value in both Confucianism and Buddhism, and this shared moral basis enables him to include Confucianism as the first level of his system of Buddhist teachings.

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