



INDIA IN THE CHINESE IMAGINATION

MYTH, RELIGION, AND THOUGHT

EDITED BY

JOHN KIESCHNICK AND MEIR SHAHAR

India in the Chinese Imagination

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PENN

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In Memory of
John R. McRae

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Chapter 8

Is Nirvāṇa the Same as Insentience? Chinese Struggles with an Indian Buddhist Ideal

Robert H. Sharf

Certain forms of perplexity—for example, about freedom, knowledge, and the meaning of life—seem to me to embody more insight than any of the supposed solutions to those problems.

—Thomas Nagel

Preamble

What makes an animate thing animate? How do we know if something is sentient? Is consciousness ultimately material or immaterial? Or is it neither—perhaps an “emergent property” that cannot be reduced to or disaggregated from a physical substrate?

These are big, complex, and conceptually muddy questions about which philosophers, biologists, and ethicists have had much to say over the millennia. Recently, cognitive psychology has gotten into the act as well, producing hundreds of empirical studies on the cognitive foundations of the conceptual distinction we make between the animate and inanimate. Studies show that very young children have markedly different predispositions (or cognitive intuitions) with regard to animate versus inanimate things, intuitions that cannot be explained as the result of language acquisition and socialization alone. Newborn infants, for example, respond to animate objects differently than they do to inanimate ones: animate entities sustain their attention for significantly longer periods of time. And young

children have markedly different intuitions about the unseen interiors of objects depending upon whether said objects are registered as animate or inanimate.¹ The growing literature on the subject, representing various disciplinary and methodological perspectives, suggests that the animate/inanimate distinction is innate rather than acquired.²

“Animacy” or “agency” is not the only cognitive category that appears to be hardwired, but it certainly has garnered the lion’s share of attention to date. This is owing to the role agency-detection is presumed to play in “theory of mind” on the one hand, and in the cross-cultural belief in supernatural agents on the other.

“Theory of mind” refers to the cognitive capacity or insight that allows young children to relate to others as conscious subjects rather than mere objects. The early acquisition of theory of mind is, according to the “theory-of-mind” theory, essential to human empathy and social bonding; a deficiency or impairment in this capacity may be responsible for autism spectrum disorders.³ It would seem, then, that humans have evolved to distinguish, virtually from birth, animate from inanimate things, and as a species we are neurologically predisposed to regard animate entities as centers of sentient experience—in Nagel’s terms, “there is something it is like to *be* that organism.”⁴

Evolutionary theory offers a ready explanation for our innate neurological capacity for agency-detection: the ability to instantly register the presence of predators in the wild would have had considerable survival value for our prehistoric ancestors. But this selective advantage is gained only insofar as the agency-detection mechanism errs on the side of caution. *Is that a tiger I see in the bushes?* In such ambiguous situations, those who are biased toward false positives rather than false negatives are more likely to survive. Our agency-detection circuit explains, according to some scholars of religion, the widespread but erroneous belief that the natural world is populated by spirits, ghosts, ancestors, gods, and other supernatural agents. The evolution of a trigger-happy agency-detection neural module has become a popular naturalistic explanation for the emergence and persistence of religious belief.⁵

Does the distinction we make between “animate” and “inanimate” correspond to an objective fact—something “out there” in the natural world? Or is it merely epiphenomenal, a somewhat accidental byproduct of our cognitive evolution? The tendency, I believe, is to assume that our agency-detection circuit affords us a selective advantage precisely because it attunes us to a natural state of affairs. But the relationship between our percepts and what exists in the noumenal world is, as philosophers since the “axial age” have pointed out, a complex one, and there is reason to suspect that our perception of agency may be epiphenomenal in

the same sense that our perception of color or taste or sound is epiphenomenal. That is to say, the relationship between the experience of “red” or “bitter” or “euphonious” on the one hand, and the physical and biological conditions that occasion such experiences on the other, is not mimetic in any simple sense; *qualia* such as “red” and “bitter” and “euphonious” do not inhere in the physical, mind-independent world.⁶ In the same way, our visceral apprehension of things as animate or inanimate may have survival value for our species, and it may remain essential to our interactions as social animals, but this does not in itself warrant the distinction as an inherent property of the world.

There is, as it turns out, considerable evidence to support the *unnaturalness* or epiphenomenal status of the animate/inanimate distinction. The world is filled with what, borrowing from Bruno Latour, we might call “hybrids,” that is, things that don’t fall neatly on one side or the other of the animate/inanimate divide.⁷ As our understanding of biological processes advances, the lines between mineral, plant, and animal have come to blur: should acellular agents like viruses or prions be considered forms of “life”? Are sponges or fungi or yeasts best classified as “plants” or “animals”? And where along this complex evolutionary spectrum might we draw the line between sentient and insentient? Our evolutionary development, which predisposes us to perceive things as either animate or inanimate, may help us elude predators, but it may be misleading when it comes to understanding the natural world.

The existence of hybrids that threaten taxonomic order is not the only reason to question the naturalness of the animate/inanimate distinction. Introspective reflection quickly reveals the conceptual ambiguity of terms like “mind,” “self,” “agency,” and “consciousness.” There is little consensus among psychologists, philosophers, or cognitive scientists as to the ostensive referent(s), if any, of these terms. Social scientists from Durkheim to Marx to Weber to Freud have argued that our sense of ourselves as authors of our thoughts, desires, and goals is, to a significant extent, a fiction. Many anthropologists would claim that our notions of self and identity are in large part culturally and historically determined; at the same time philosophers and neuroscientists have argued that we are not, in any simple sense, unified and self-determining agents.⁸

In working through these issues, philosophers have been drawn to various “thought experiments” (*Gedankenexperimente*). Descartes famously used the image of the “evil demon” to undermine our certainty about the veracity of the sensate world—since we know things only indirectly, through the senses, how do we know that what we perceive is real? Times have changed, and science fiction has come to replace theology as a source for puzzling but productive “intuition

pumps.” Philosophers now ponder “brains in vats” to evoke many of the same epistemological puzzles that preoccupied Descartes. They discuss “brain transplants” in order to hone their thinking about selfhood, identity, and embodiment. The “Turing test”—a test of a computer’s ability to perfectly emulate human behavior—serves as a reference point in debates over behaviorism, determinism, and free will. (“Philosophical zombies”—fictional creatures indistinguishable from humans except that they lack subjective experience—are used to the same effect.) In the fraught debates over *qualia*, Daniel Dennett has considered a “brainstorm machine” that wires the subjective experience of one person into another, while Ned Block discusses an “inverted earth”—a planet exactly like the earth except that colors are reversed.⁹ Block has also assayed the “China brain,” a thought experiment in which each person in China assumes the role of a distinct neuron such that, connected by walkie-talkies, they collectively simulate the activity of a single brain.¹⁰ (Can this collectivity be said to be “conscious”?) In each case, scholars contrive fantastic, entertaining, but implausible scenarios to help think through conundrums associated with mind-body dualism, self-identity, determinism, and the ontological status of consciousness. One can imagine scholars, some hundreds of years hence, struggling to make sense of earnest tracts on brain transplants, philosophical zombies, and the China brain.

In this chapter I examine some medieval Buddhist doctrines that, at least on the surface, seem similarly strange and implausible. Indeed, some of the Buddhist notions to be examined below were perplexing to audiences in their own day, much as discussions of brain transplants are perplexing to us today. On the Indian side, I will begin with the notion of *nirodha-samāpatti*, a meditative state akin to a vegetative coma in which all consciousness has ceased. I will then turn to a class of beings known as “beings without conception” (*asaṃjñīka-sattvāḥ*), denizens of a celestial realm who are devoid of sentience, thought, and consciousness. In both cases, an insentient state seems to be followed by (or gives rise to) a sentient state, which poses serious challenges to the classical Buddhist understanding of karma. On the Chinese side, we will consider the debate over the buddha-nature of insentient objects—can an insentient thing such as a wall or roof tile attain buddhahood and preach the dharma? This doctrine too could be (and was) seen as a threat to the coherence of Buddhist teachings.

Modern scholars tend to approach such doctrines as the products of intelligent but misguided scholastics struggling to make sense of the universe, all the while hobbled by the dictates of tradition, scripture, and a prescientific understanding of the cosmos. They are the proverbial schoolmen calculating how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. But I would suggest another perspective. Such

theories, I argue, serve as frames of reference for pondering issues of personal identity, ethical responsibility, sentience, and death. Given that we ourselves are still far from clarity on these issues, and given that we too devise fanciful thought experiments to help gain a conceptual toehold, perhaps it is time to look afresh at what the Buddhists might have been up to.¹¹

Nirvāṇa, *Nirodha*, and Insentience

In our earliest surviving Buddhist texts, the notion of *nirvāṇa* seems pretty straightforward: *nirvāṇa*, which means literally “to blow out” or “extinguish,” refers to the permanent cessation of the defilements (*kleśa*), and the final end to suffering and rebirth (*saṃsāra*).¹² There are two kinds, or better yet moments, of *nirvāṇa*: “*nirvāṇa* with remainder” (*sopadhīśeṣa-nirvāṇa*) and “*nirvāṇa* without remainder” (*nirupadhīśeṣa-nirvāṇa*).¹³ The *nirvāṇa* attained by Siddhārtha as he sat under the *bodhi* tree is *nirvāṇa* with remainder, meaning that even though his defilements, and with them all grasping and pain, are forever extinguished, his body continues on its natural course. *Nirvāṇa* without remainder (sometimes called *parinirvāṇa*) refers to the final death of a buddha or *arhat* from which there is no further birth. With this final *nirvāṇa* the buddha or *arhat* is finished, annihilated, extinct. Indeed, in early texts this *nirvāṇa* looks much the same as death looks to a modern atheist who does not believe in an afterlife: it is simple annihilation or, if you will, eternal insentience.¹⁴

Given the mores of the day, the early Buddhist view of *nirvāṇa* as cessation would have seemed rather austere, grim, stoic. Despite the protests of the Buddhists, their rivals, many of whom were drawn toward a liberation more akin to eternal bliss, accused the Buddhists of being nihilists. In the *Alagaddūpama-sutta* the Buddha says:

I have been baselessly, vainly, falsely, and wrongly misrepresented by some recluses and brahmins thus: “The recluse Gotama is one who leads astray; he teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing being.” As I am not, as I do not proclaim, so have I been baselessly, vainly, falsely, and wrongly misrepresented by some recluses and brahmins thus.¹⁵

Similarly, the *Yamaka-sutta* opens with the Venerable Yamaka musing: “As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, a bhikkhu whose taints are

destroyed is annihilated and perishes with the breakup of the body and does not exist after death.” This time it is Sāriputta’s turn to refute the charge. Sāriputta explains that it is not the Tathāgata or *arahant* per se that is annihilated, but rather it is the aggregates—all that is impermanent and suffering—that have “ceased and passed away.”¹⁶ Indeed, the notion that the Buddha taught the “middle path”—one of the cornerstones of Buddhism—can be seen in part as a strategy to diffuse the charge of nihilism. Again and again the scriptures insist that the Buddha’s middle path rejects both nihilism (*uccheda-vāda*) and eternalism (*śāśvata-vāda*). But in claiming, first, that there is no abiding *ātman* but only a karmically conditioned psycho-physical continuum (*santāna*), and second, that the goal is the final extinction of this karmic continuum, Buddhist apologists were left without much wiggle room.

But wiggle they did. One strategy lay in simply insisting that the Buddha’s nirvāṇa does not necessarily entail his eternal absence. Nirvāṇa, it was argued, only looks like cessation to the unenlightened. In truth, it is beyond thought and comprehension. This strategy is put to work in the ten (or fourteen) “undetermined” (*avyākṛta*) questions—questions on which the Buddha refused to take a position. Four of these questions bear on the Tathāgata’s existence after death, viz.: Does the Tathāgata exist after death? Or does he not exist after death? Or does he both exist and not exist after death? Or does he neither exist nor not exist after death?¹⁷

Much has been written about the undetermined questions. Did the Buddha know the answers but refuse to reveal them because they were unnecessary distractions not conducive to liberation? Or was the Buddha incapable of answering? And if incapable, was it because he did not know the answers? Or because the questions themselves were conceptually flawed and thus unanswerable? Or because his benighted audience did not have the wherewithal to comprehend them? Various rationales have been offered, but one of the motives behind the doctrine may well have been apologetic: to defend against the charge that the Buddha was not omniscient. (That the Buddha intentionally remained silent on a number of key cosmological issues did not, in other words, bespeak his ignorance of said issues.) In any case, the Buddha’s alleged refusal to comment on the possibility of post-nirvāṇic existence was one response to the charge of nihilism, since it implies that, contrary to appearances, nirvāṇa is *not* simply annihilation.

There were other wiggles as well, the most salient of which involved positing a state that so resembles nirvāṇa that the two are easily confused. This advanced meditative state, called *nirodha-samāpatti* (attainment of cessation) or *nirodha* for short, is insentience pure and simple.

Nirodha, which simply means “cessation,” is an old concept that may have been widespread in the *śramaṇic* culture of the Buddha’s day. (In the later *Yoga-sūtras* attributed to Patañjali, *nirodha* refers to the final goal of yogic practice: the eradication of the defilements and the end to the illusion of separation between self and absolute.)¹⁸ As part of his quest for enlightenment, the Buddha is said to have mastered the highest yogic techniques then available under the teachers Ārāḍa Kālāma and Udraka Rāmaputra.¹⁹ Later Buddhist exegetes organized the meditative attainments associated with these masters into a system of eight stages of trance or equipoise, four associated with the material realm (*rūpa-dhyāna*) and four immaterial absorptions or “attainments” (*samāpatti*). Ārāḍa Kālāma is said to have taught Siddhārtha the first seven stages, culminating in the “sphere of no conception” (*akimcanyāyatana*), while Udraka Rāmaputra taught him the eighth, “neither conception nor non-conception” (*naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana*). The Buddhist scholastic tradition is generally clear that these rarified states of trance may be useful, particularly for those who aspire to supernormal powers, but they are not essential to the Buddhist path. It seems that one of the motives behind the systematization of these meditative states was to assimilate and subordinate, at one and the same time, the practices and teachings of rival ascetic traditions.²⁰

In early Buddhist materials the term *nirodha* is more or less synonymous with *nirvāṇa*; *nirodha* regularly appears as a shorthand for the third noble truth (*duḥkha-nirodha* “cessation of suffering”), for example.²¹ But as the tradition develops, *nirodha* takes on a second, more technical meaning; it now denotes an extraordinary state of meditative absorption, a ninth trance (or fifth *samāpatti*) set above the “sphere of neither conception nor non-conception,” in which, according to most accounts, all conscious activity is extinguished. In this state the ongoing continuum of mental factors is not merely inhibited or suppressed but, more radically, ceases altogether, if only temporarily. The only thing that distinguishes this state from death is that the physical body remains alive, sustained by the dharmas of “heat” (*uṣman*) and “vitality” (*āyus*).²²

Having distinguished *nirodha* from *nirvāṇa*, scholiasts were free to contrast the two; they could argue that those who see the Buddha as preaching annihilation mistake the state of *nirodha-samāpatti* for *nirvāṇa*. Apparently, the mistake is easy to make: Buddhaghosa himself seems to consider *nirodha* phenomenologically close to, if not identical with, *nirvāṇa*. In his *Visuddhimagga*, in response to the question why an advanced practitioner would aspire to *nirodha*, he writes: “Being wearied by the occurrence and dissolution of formations, they attain [*nirodha*], thinking ‘Let us dwell in bliss by being without consciousness here and now and reaching the cessation that is nibbana.’”²³

Much has been written about *nirodha*, notably the fine study by Paul Griffiths (which builds on the work of Lambert Schmithausen).²⁴ I will, therefore, forgo an extended treatment here, and simply confine myself to some of the conceptual puzzles entailed by this rather peculiar state.

There is no minimizing the philosophical and doctrinal problems that attend the notion of *nirodha*. The central teaching of Buddhism is precisely that all things arise due to causes, and that *samsāra* is sustained by—or better, coextensive with—the psycho-physical continuum (*santāna*) of dharmas. Once the continuum of mental events ceases—once the chain is broken—it is difficult to account for its reappearance at a later point in time. (The insentient yogi certainly cannot *will* himself out of *nirodha*.) And what happens if someone dies in *nirodha*? Logically, you cannot be reborn, since there is no final moment of consciousness to impel a future birth. Thus death in *nirodha* should be tantamount to *nirvāṇa* without remainder. But the tradition is clear that *nirodha* is *not* *nirvāṇa*, and besides, *śamatha* practices and states such as *nirodha* are not supposed to yield, in and of themselves, final liberation.

Different exegetical traditions responded to these conundrums in different ways. As to how one emerges from *nirodha*, Buddhaghosa states that the yogi, prior to entering *nirodha*, resolves to emerge after a specified period of time, typically seven days. (Buddhaghosa notes that the prudent yogi will take additional vows to emerge earlier should he be needed by the community or summoned by the master, lest he inconvenience anyone by his absence.)²⁵ But the Theravāda commentaries fail to explain, from the standpoint of karma theory, how the vow works; it would appear that the effective force of the vow is extrinsic to the psycho-physical continuum of the yogi. Meanwhile, some Sarvāstivādin exegetes such as Saṅghabhadra solve the problem through the signature Sarvāstivādin theory that dharmas exist in all three periods of time, a theory that allows for causal continuity across the temporal gap. Since past dharmas continue to exist in the present (and future), and since there are no intervening moments of consciousness during *nirodha*, the last moment of consciousness prior to *nirodha* can be said to be the “contiguous” or “proximate” (*samanantara*) condition for the subsequent arising of mind that marks the end of *nirodha*.²⁶

There were other theories as well. The Sautrāntikas, for example, held to the “mutual seeding” of mind and body, meaning that the karmic seeds of mental activity lie dormant in the physical body during *nirodha*. Advocates of the seed theory insist that this is, in principle, no different from the situation of the inhabitants of the formless realms, who eventually will be reborn in one of the lower realms of form or desire. Beings in the formless realms don’t have physical

bodies, so in order to give rise to one in a subsequent birth the “seeds” of the physical aggregate (*rūpa-skandha*) must have remained dormant in their mental continua during their formless existence. The Yogācāras appear to have built on this seed theory with their notion of the *ālayavijñāna* (store-house consciousness).²⁷ The unmanifest or noumenal *ālayavijñāna*, which persists during *nirodha*, stores all mental and physical karmic seeds, thus effectively eliminating the problem. Finally, Dārṣṭāntikas such as Vasumitra simply assert that conscious activity is not completely eliminated in *nirodha*; rather, some kind of “subtle thought” (**sūkṣmacitta*) or “unmanifest thinking consciousness” (*aparispṛṇamano-vijñāna*) persists throughout the comatose state.²⁸

As for the problem of dying while in *nirodha*, various ad hoc solutions were proffered. Buddhaghosa says that before entering *nirodha*, the yogi must use his preternatural powers to determine the time of death, so as to ensure that he emerges before his allotted lifespan is up. Some commentators also hold that *nirodha* renders the body indestructible, and thus it is simply impossible to die while in *nirodha*. (Buddhaghosa cites the story of Mahā Nāga, who sat immobile in cessation while the building around him caught fire and burned to the ground. Mahā Nāga is embarrassed when he emerges several days later and is accused of being a “lazy monk”!)²⁹ Finally, some traditions, including the Sarvāstivāda, hold that only noble ones (*ārya*) or an elite subset thereof are capable of attaining *nirodha*; spiritually undeserving worldlings (*prthagjana*) could not, therefore, use *nirodha* as a shortcut to nirvāṇa.³⁰

It is clear that the concept of *nirodha* spawned a number of complex and somewhat exotic theories to account for the return of consciousness following its cessation. But putting such theories aside, I would ask: *why did the Buddhists need such a nirodha in the first place?* Why contrive a state that (1) seems so similar to nirvāṇa as to invite confusion, and at the same time (2) seems to violate, or at least threaten, the Buddhist understanding of cause and effect?

Might the uncanny similarity to nirvāṇa be precisely the point? The Buddhists were, in effect, saddled with a notion of nirvāṇa—extinction—that, however attractive it may have been to an early tradition of forest-dwelling ascetics, appeared to later audiences distressingly like an end to conscious existence. By devising a state that was almost, but not quite, identical to nirvāṇa, the Buddhists could argue that the desire for nirvāṇa was not, despite appearances, a desire for annihilation.

Insentient Beings

In the *Pāṭika-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*, in a discussion of various theories of creation, we find the following curious passage,

There are, Bhaggava, some ascetics and Brahmins who declare that the beginning of things was due to chance. I went to them and asked them if this was their view. “Yes,” they replied. I asked them how this came about, and when they could not explain, I said: “There are, friends, certain devas called Without Conception. As soon as a perception arises in them, those devas fall from that realm . . . remembering nothing they think: ‘Now from non-being I have been brought to being.’ That, Reverend Sirs, is how it comes about that you teach that the beginning of things was due to chance.”³¹

The “devas without conception” (*asaṃjñika-sattvāḥ*, *asāṃjñika-deva*, Pali: *asañña-sattā-nāma-devā*) mentioned here are a class of celestial beings that have no cognition or consciousness or sentience at all; Theravāda commentators consider them “one-aggregate-beings” constituted by the material aggregate alone.³² These rather odd creatures abide in one of the seven (or eight or nine) heavens of the “fourth *dhyāna* sphere” (*caturtha-dhyāna-bhūmi*), the highest of the four spheres of the realm of form (*rūpa-dhātu*).

Rebirth in the heavens of the fourth *dhyāna* sphere comes about through mastery of the fourth *dhyāna*. While there are varying enumerations of the heavens of the fourth sphere, one common scheme places the Heaven of the Gods Without Conception together with (or as a subdivision of) the Heaven of Extensive Rewards (Bṛhatphalāḥ) in the lower strata.³³ These two abodes are available to *prthagjanas* (ordinary persons who have not yet attained the stage of *ārya* or noble ones) who may or may not have been followers of the Buddha-dharma. The remaining five heavens—Avṛhā, Atapā, Sudṛṣā, Sudarśanā, and Akaniṣṭhā—are collectively known as the Pure Abodes (*śuddhāvāsa*) since, unlike the lower two, they are reserved for Buddhist non-returners (*anāgāmin*). The beings of the lower two heavens live for five hundred eons (*kalpa*), while those in the higher heavens live for anywhere from one thousand eons to, in the case of the gods of the Akaniṣṭha Heaven, sixteen thousand eons.³⁴

The notion of an entire heaven consisting exclusively of mindless zombies, all of whom had previously mastered the absorption of non-consciousness (*asaṃjñi-samāpatti*), raised similar issues to those that dogged the idea of *nirodha*: once

the continuum of consciousness has been severed, how does it get going again? And how is rebirth out of such an existence possible? Thus it is not surprising to find these states discussed together in the major compendia of the Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra schools, including the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, *Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra*, *Nyāyānusāra*, and *Cheng weishi lun*.

Such texts contain, for example, extended exchanges about whether the gods without conception are devoid of consciousness altogether, or whether, as some claim of *nirodha*, there is some residual or subliminal consciousness that persists some or all of the time. This issue constitutes one of the controversies addressed in the *Kathāvatthu* (3.11), where the Andhakas claim that some consciousness must exist, if only for a short time, at the beginning and end of one's existence in the Heaven of the Gods Without Conception.³⁵ In fact, most commentators agree that it is the eventual reappearance of consciousness in a mindless god that triggers, almost but not quite immediately, rebirth back into the realm of form (*kāma-dhātu*). The alternative scenario, namely, that of a god dying while still mindless and being reborn as a sentient being, would have engendered the same conundrum as death while in *nirodha*. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, for example, explains,

Question: Are the Non-Conscious Ones called this because they are always non-conscious, or are they sometimes conscious? Answer: They are conscious at birth and at death; they are called non-conscious because their consciousness is suspended for a very long time. When, after this long time, they produce a consciousness again, they die. As it says in the *sūtra*, “When they produce consciousness again, they die, like a person awakening after sleep.” Dying in the non-conscious heaven, they are necessarily reborn in the realm of form and nowhere else. In fact, the force of *asaṃjñi-samāpatti*, by which these beings are born among the Non-Conscious Ones, is exhausted; they have not been in a position to practice *asaṃjñi-samāpatti*: hence they die, as arrows fall to the ground when their impetus is spent.³⁶

This image of the arrow falling back to earth after its inertia is spent is also found in Buddhaghosa's analysis of the mindless gods in his commentary to the *Dīghanikāya*.³⁷ This analogy may have been widely employed in attempts to escape the karmic conundrum, but it does not address the underlying problem, namely, in the absence of the conscious stream—in the absence of any aggregate other than that of form (*rūpa-skandha*)—what sustains or transmits this inertial mental energy?

That others insisted on alternative mechanisms, such as the persistence of some subtle consciousness while still in a mindless state, is evidence the problem is not ours alone.

While there was some agreement among Sarvāstivādin exegetes that there must be some moments, however brief, of consciousness at the beginning and end of one's sojourn in this realm, the precise duration of these moments became a topic of some debate.³⁸ But the Sarvāstivādins had another problem as well, namely, how to account for a state that is characterized primarily by an absence. The Sarvāstivādins held that *all* phenomena result from the interactions of discrete and irreducible dharmas that persist through time, and thus if the existence of gods without conception is characterized by "mindlessness," this mindlessness must, they reasoned, be the defining property of a unique dharma. So they were obliged to posit one.

Among the beings who take birth among the Non-Conscious Ones, i.e., the non-conscious gods, there is a dharma that arrests the mind and its mental states, and which is called "Non-consciousness." By this dharma, the mind and future dharmas are, for a certain time, hindered from being produced and do not have the power to arise. This dharma is similar to what arrests the water of a river, that is, to a dike. This dharma is exclusively the retribution of non-conscious absorption (*asaṃjñi-samāpatti*).³⁹

Such a mechanism or dharma was required to account for (1) the state of "non-conception" (*āsaṃjñika*) of the mindless devas, (2) the "absorption of non-conception" (*acittaka-samāpatti*, *asaṃjñi-samāpatti*) that gave rise to it, as well as (3) the attainment of *nirodha*. All three phenomena are characterized by mindlessness, and all are grouped together by Sarvāstivādins in the category of "conditioned factors dissociated from thought" (*cittaviprayukta-saṃskāra*).⁴⁰ In each case, the Sarvāstivādins (or at least the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣikas) associated the absence of cognition or mindlessness with an irreducible ontic entity; as Saṅghabhadra writes, "apart from the moment of thought just prior [to cessation], there definitely exists a discrete dharma that is capable of obstructing mind."⁴¹

While these three states would seem to be identical with respect to their content, namely mindlessness, they are each associated with their *own* individual dharma. Collett Cox explains,

These factors all do the same thing—they obstruct thought—but they are "distinguished by their location, the practitioner who produces them, their

intended purpose, and so on . . .” For the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣikas, this activity entails the obstruction of both the single thought factor (*citta*) that demarcates each moment of the mental stream and the simultaneous and associated thought concomitants (*caitta*) that represent the various mental events operating in each moment.”⁴²

Logically, these rather unusual dharmas belong neither to the domain of mind nor to the domain of form, which is why they end up placed among the aforementioned “conditioned factors dissociated from thought.”

Many Buddhist scholiasts found this an unwarranted reification. Mindlessness could be explained adequately, they felt, by reference to what happens immediately preceding such a state—there was simply no need to associate the ensuing *absence* of conception with a discrete dharma. Thus Vasubandhu regarded all three states of mindlessness as simply “provisional designations that describe the condition of the non-operation of thought (*apavrṛttimātra*); they do not exist as real entities.”⁴³

Putting aside, once again, these rather involved debates, we are prompted to ask, *why did the Buddhists need the mindless gods in the first place?* Were there not enough Buddhist heavens already? Why complicate things with a heaven that would further rattle their understanding of karma and rebirth?

As for the origins of the Heaven of the Gods Without Conception, the *Pāṭi-ka-sutta* cited above suggests one theory, according to which the mindless gods are invoked to explain the heterodox belief in *creatio ex nihilo*. As creation from nothing is, according to the Buddhists, *prima facie* irrational (“I asked them how this came about, and . . . they could not explain”), the notion must persist due to the testimony of those who, in their previous life, were mindless gods and thus cannot recollect their previous state: “‘There are, friends, certain devas called Unconscious. As soon as a perception arises in them, those devas fall from that realm . . . remembering nothing they think: ‘Now from non-being I have been brought to being.’ That, Reverend Sirs, is how it comes about that you teach that the beginning of things was due to chance.” This ingenious if fanciful explanation for the heretical belief in *creatio ex nihilo* suggests an early association, at least in the minds of scholiasts, between mindlessness on the one hand, and simple inexistence (*nihilum*) on the other. I will return to this below.

Whatever the origins of this cosmological oddity, the exegetical tradition was drawn to the mindless gods not because of their role in perpetuating a spurious creation myth, but rather by the question of how they lost their minds in the first place. As mentioned above, the denizens of the fourth *dhyāna* sphere were all

previously masters of the fourth *dhyāna*. But the fourth *dhyāna* sphere is comprised of multiple heavens; why are some born in one heaven and some in another?

The answer lies in the differences in the *manner* of their yogic attainment—the use of different meditation objects or techniques, for example, or differences in the practitioners’ intentions or motivations (*chanda*). We have seen that only *prthagjana*—yogis who have not yet attained the stage of the noble ones—are reborn among the mindless gods, while the higher heavens are reserved for Buddhist *ārya*. But there is another thing the mindless gods have in common: they were all motivated to attain *dhyāna* by an aversion to sentient experience, and hence they intentionally cultivated the “absorption of non-conception” (*asaṃjñi-samāpatti*). Due to their erroneous belief that conception is itself the cause of all suffering, and that the ultimate goal of yogic practice is a state in which there is no cognition, they engaged in practices designed to arrest all conscious activity and experience.

This explanation is found in works associated with virtually all of the major scholastic traditions. Buddhaghosa’s commentary to the *Dīgha-nikāya*, for example, explains rebirth among the mindless gods as follows:

Someone who has gone forth in a non-Buddhist school does the preparatory work [for *jhāna*], achieves the fourth *jhāna*, emerges and sees the fault in consciousness; he thinks, “When there is consciousness there is the pain of hands being cut off and all sorts of fears; enough of consciousness, only the unconscious state is peaceful.” Once he has seen the fault of consciousness in this way, if he dies without having lost the *jhāna* he is reborn among the unconscious beings. With the cessation of the death-consciousness his mind disappears from this world and only the physical aggregate appears there [in the world of unconscious beings].⁴⁴

The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* provides much the same account:

The ascetic falsely imagines that non-conception (*āsaṃjñika*), the non-conception that constitutes the result of the absorption of non-conception, is true deliverance. . . . This absorption is cultivated only by *prthagjanas*, not by *āryas*. The *āryas* consider this absorption as a precipice, a calamity, and do not value entering it. On the contrary, *prthagjanas* identify non-consciousness with true deliverance; they have no idea of “going out” with respect to it; hence they cultivate the absorption that leads to it.⁴⁵

The *Cheng weishi lun* concurs:

As for the unconscious gods, they are born into that heaven through the power of their aversion to profane thought that attends their cultivation of the absorption [of non-conception]. Since the principle is the obstruction of the mental factors that are not perpetually active [i.e., all conscious activity except that of the *ālayavijñāna* and the *manas*] as well as the cessation of all conscious thought, they are called unconscious gods. Therefore, all six consciousnesses have been eliminated in them. . . .

The absorption of non-conception belongs to ordinary people (*prthagjana*) who have subdued the craving of the Śubhakarṣna [Realm—the highest heaven of the third *dhyāna*], but who have not yet subdued the defilements of the higher [realms]. Since their primary motivation is liberation from conception, this causes the cessation of the mental factors that are not perpetually active as well as the objects of mind. Since the cessation of conception is foremost, it is called “without conception,” and since it renders the body serene and harmonious, it is also called “absorption.”⁴⁶

This gets to the crux of the difference between the absorption of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*) on the one hand, and the absorption of non-conception (*asaṃjñi-samāpatti*) and the beings without conception (*asaṃjñikasattvāḥ*) on the other. *Nirodha* is reserved for noble ones (*ārya*) who, while free of aversion to consciousness, nevertheless seek a temporary respite from it. Although *nirodha* is not inimical to the Buddhist path, it is not essential either. In contrast, the mindlessness of the mindless gods comes about through a profound error: ignorantly believing that insentience is the goal, their meditation practice was directed toward the cessation of consciousness rather than the cessation of *saṃsāra*.⁴⁷

In short, Buddhist scholiasts needed not just one kind of mindlessness to contrast with nirvāṇa, but two: one (*nirodha-samāpatti*) which is acceptable if not laudable, and another (*asaṃjñi-samāpatti*) which is baneful.⁴⁸ In both cases, a clear distinction was drawn between non-conception or insentience on the one hand, and true liberation on the other. But in conjuring states that look like nirvāṇa but are not, the tradition gerrymandered the soteriological landscape. The gerrymandering is evident in the topographical confusion that resulted. Note, for example, that *asaṃjñi-samāpatti*—the fourth-*dhyāna* absorption of non-conception that leads to birth as a mindless god—is, for all intents and purposes, phenomenologically identical with *nirodha*; both entail the cessation of all conscious

activity. As we have seen, the similarities were appreciated by the exegetical tradition. But this created a problem, namely, where to locate *asaṃjñi-samāpatti* among the hierarchy of dhyānic states, and where to locate the heaven of mindless gods in the hierarchal cosmology of the three realms.

There is a natural progression among the *rūpa-dhyānas*, with each successive absorption marked by the elimination of certain factors present in the previous stage. Thus in the first *dhyāna* the factors of investigation (*vitarka*), observation (*vicāra*), joy (*prīti*), happiness (*sukha*) and concentration (*samādhi*) are all active. The second *dhyāna* is characterized by the elimination of investigation and observation, leaving only joy, happiness, and concentration. In the third, joy drops away, leaving happiness and concentration, and in the fourth concentration alone remains. These *rūpa-dhyānas* are succeeded, in turn, by the *arūpa-dhyānas*, which continue the progression toward increasingly rarefied states until we reach a point when consciousness itself ceases completely:

- 1: the abode of limitless space (*akāśa-anantya-āyatana*)
- 2: the abode of limitless consciousness (*vijñāna-anantya-āyatana*)
- 3: the abode of nothingness (*akiñcanya-āyatana*)
- 4: the abode of neither conception nor non-conception (*naivasamjñāna-asaṃjñā-āyatana*)
- 5: *nirodha*

Given the internal logic of the sequence, one would expect to find *asaṃjñi-samāpatti*—the attainment of non-conception—located among the formless *dhyānas*, abutting *nirodha* perhaps. After all, in terms of content (or lack thereof), *asaṃjñi-samāpatti* appears to be identical with *nirodha*. But this would create an insoluble problem: with the noted exception of *nirodha*, each of the *dhyānas* has a corresponding heaven. Were *asaṃjñi-samāpatti* placed in the formless sphere, masters of this absorption would be born into a realm in which they lacked not only minds but bodies as well. And even the most adroit Buddhist exegete would have had a difficult time explaining that! So *asaṃjñi-samāpatti* had to find a place among the *rūpa-dhyānas*, and the mindless gods a corresponding heaven in the realm of form. *Asaṃjñi-samāpatti* is accordingly situated among the highest of the *rūpa-dhyānas*, but even then there is confusion, as the tradition could not agree on its precise geographical location; some texts situate it within the Heaven of Extensive Rewards (Bṛhatphalāḥ), while others see the two realms as distinct.

What are we to make of this? The tacit assumption among scholars seems to

be that the architectonic systems associated with Buddhist scholasticism are the products of obsessive literalists unable or unwilling to step beyond the confines of scriptural orthodoxy. But perhaps the architects of the system were not as slavish to tradition as some might assume. Perhaps the proliferation of bodies without minds and minds without bodies are better viewed as thought experiments bearing on existential conundrums of inarguable import to the tradition: conundrums relating to insentience, death, nothingness, and nirvāṇa. Contemplating variant versions of mindlessness allowed them to refine their understanding of the path and the goal, and to rebut the charge of nihilism—the allegation that Buddhists preach mindlessness and that nirvāṇa is a mystification of insentience.

And this brings us to China and to Chan.

Terminological Confusions

The notions of non-conceptualization, cessation, and nirvāṇa are all inextricably tied to the seminal Buddhist doctrine of “non-self” (*anātman*). It is precisely because there is no permanent, unchanging, ontologically extant self or soul that the temporary cessation of consciousness in *nirodha*, and the permanent cessation of the aggregates in nirvāṇa, can be construed in positive terms. Buddhist practice, as depicted in the early textual tradition, is directed not toward the realization of some true self or transcendent other, but rather to the end of delusion. The notions of non-self (*anātman*), non-conception (*asaṃjñā*), cessation (*nirodha*), and nirvāṇa are all intertwined in complex and sometimes contentious ways.

The Buddhist tradition employed a host of terms in their technical analyses of self, consciousness, and personhood. *Vijñāna*, *citta*, *saṃjñā*, and *manas* are among the Sanskrit terms commonly used for what we might call mind, consciousness, cognition, or conception, for example, and “self” can be rendered, depending on context and ethical valence, as *ātman*, *pudgala*, or *sattva*. The distinctions among these terms are not always easy to parse, and there are inconsistencies in usage across our sources.

As we move to China, the terminological complexity is exacerbated by the problem of translation and the profusion of alternative Sinitic renderings of key Indic terms. Some equivalences became somewhat standardized in mature Chinese translations of South Asian sources: *wuwo* for *anātman*; *miejinding* for *nirodha-samāpatti*; *wuxiang* for *asaṃjñā*; and so on. But at the same time we find *vijñāna*, *citta*, *saṃjñā*, and *manas* all rendered, in different contexts, as *xin*, for

example, and *xin*, *xiang*, and even *shi* are not consistently or clearly distinguished in commentarial materials.

The terminological confusion slips into havoc as we turn to indigenous Chinese Buddhist exegesis on a term such as *wuxin* or “no mind”—a multivocalic term with roots in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist Chinese traditions. Much has already been written on the term, but given its relevance to the issues at hand a few words are in order.

One of the earliest appearances of *wuxin* is in *Laozi* 49, where it appears as a textual variant: “The sage is always mindless (*wuxin*); he considers the minds of the common people to be his own mind.”⁴⁹ But the pre-Buddhist use of the concept is more commonly associated with *Zhuangzi*, notably a passage in chapter 12, “Heaven and Earth”:

Those who shepherded the world in ancient times were without desire and the world was satisfied, without action and the ten thousand things were transformed. They were deep and silent and the hundred clans were at rest. The Record says: “Stick to the One and the ten thousand tasks will be accomplished; achieve mindlessness (*wuxin*) and the gods and spirits will bow down.”⁵⁰

Like the *Laozi* passage, *Zhuangzi* could here be understood as claiming that the sage has no desire, volition, or intentionality of his own; rather, he responds spontaneously to the needs of others. This is in keeping with the image of the sage emperors of old, who did not act (*wuwei*) yet ruled well; they did nothing, but nothing was left undone.⁵¹ “No mind” in such passages may simply refer to the absence of intention or desire or egotism, and there is little reason to equate it with insentience or unconsciousness.

However, in chapter 22 of the *Zhuangzi* there is a more intriguing passage, a song by Piyi:

Body like a withered corpse,
mind like dead ashes,
true in the realness of knowledge,
not one to go searching for reasons,
dim dim, dark dark,
mindless, you cannot consult with him:
what kind of man is this!⁵²

The notion of a mind “like dead ashes” comes closer to the notion of insentience proper, and, as we will see below, this caught the attention of later Buddhist commentators.

Turning to Buddhist understandings of *wuxin*, scholars often cite Sengzhao (374–414) as an influential early source on the subject. Unfortunately, although the term appears some fifteen times in his *Collected Essays (Zhaolun)*, it is difficult to pin Sengzhao down on his understanding of the term; as is often the case with this author, the passages in question are susceptible to multiple, sometimes contradictory, readings. The following passage, from the essay *Prajñā Has No Knowing (Banruo wuzhi lun)*, is typical:

Objection: Though the mind of the sage is without knowing, it does not err in its path of responding to situations. Therefore, it responds to what should be responded to, and leaves alone what should not be responded to. Consequently, the mind of the sage sometimes arises and sometimes ceases. How can this be?

Reply: “Arising and ceasing” is the arising and ceasing of mind. As the sage has no mind, how can arising and ceasing occur therein? Thus it is not that there is no mind, but only that his mind is without mind. Also, it is not that he does not respond, but only that his response is without response.⁵³

Sengzhao may be echoing the ideal referenced in *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* above, namely, that the sage has no intentions (or even agency) of his own; the sage responds spontaneously in accord with cosmic necessity. While Sengzhao’s writings are not always clear, here too there is little evidence that *wuxin* was understood as unconsciousness or insentience.

With the emergence of early Chan, however, the notion of *wuxin* is brought to the fore, along with a number of related and equally complex notions such as *jueguan* (severing discernment), *linian* (transcending thought), and *wunian* (no thought). While there is little consensus in our sources on the use and application of these terms—early Chan writers often champion one term as denoting correct practice while disparaging others—all these terms appear in discussions concerning the relationship of means and ends in Buddhist *dhyāna* practice.⁵⁴ And repeatedly, the controversies bear on the relationship between Buddhist practice on the one hand, and the simple insentience (*wuqing*) of the physical world on the other. This, I will suggest, gave rise to the Chinese Buddhist thought experiment *par*

excellence: the notion that insentient objects possess buddha-nature, become enlightened, and preach the dharma.

The Buddha-Nature of Insentient Objects

The medieval Chinese controversy concerning the buddha-nature of insentient objects (*wuqing foxing*) extended over several centuries and involved leading clerics from every major Chinese Buddhist tradition. The source materials are, accordingly, vast and complex. As I have written on the topic elsewhere, I will limit the discussion below to an overview of the key players, texts, and issues bearing on the debate.⁵⁵

The roots of the doctrine are usually traced to the monk Daosheng (360–434), who may have been the first in China to insist that all living beings, including *icchāntika* (*yichanti*), possess buddha-nature. This was an odd if not oxymoronic claim. *Ichchāntika* is a technical term for beings who lack the potential for buddhahood; they are, by definition, bereft of “buddha-nature.” Nevertheless, Daosheng’s controversial pronouncement was vindicated with the appearance of a new recension of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* in 421, which stated that all beings—including *icchāntika*—possess buddha-nature and will eventually attain enlightenment. While this “northern-recension” of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* is celebrated as the earliest canonical sanction for the universality of buddha-nature, it clearly restricts buddha-nature to the sentient. In the oft-repeated words of the scripture, “‘Non-buddha-nature’ refers to insentient things such as walls and fences, tiles and stones. Everything apart from insentient things such as these is called ‘buddha-nature.’”⁵⁶

More than a century later the monk Jingying Huiyuan (523–592) revisited the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*’s position in the context of the relationship between “buddha-nature” and “originally pure mind.” Huiyuan approached the topic by distinguishing between buddha-nature as a mode of cognition (“the buddha-nature that knows”) and buddha-nature as the metaphysical ground that makes such cognition possible (“the buddha-nature that is known”). The former, which is capable of awakening through the elimination of ignorance, is restricted to living beings; this, according to Huiyuan, is the referent of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* passage. The latter—the “nature that is known”—is the dharma-realm itself, and thus it logically encompasses all things, both animate and inanimate.⁵⁷

A similar strategy is found in the writings of the Sanlun exegete Jizang (549–623). Following a Mādhyamika line of reasoning, Jizang argues that the

distinction between sentient and insentient cannot pertain at the level of ultimate truth.⁵⁸ As such, if you deny buddha-nature to something,

then not only are grass and trees devoid of buddha-nature, but living beings are also devoid of buddha-nature. But if you hold to the existence of buddha-nature, then it is not only living beings that have buddha-nature, but grass and trees must also have buddha-nature. . . . If we understand that all dharmas are equal and do not view the two marks of the contingent and the absolute, then in reality there are no marks of attainment or non-attainment. Since there is no non-attainment, we provisionally speak of attaining buddhahood. Thus at the moment when sentient beings attain buddhahood, all grass and trees also attain buddhahood.⁵⁹

Jizang is quick, however, to concede that this represents the perspective of “pervasiveness” (*tongmen*, i.e., absolute truth). From the perspective of “difference” (*biemen*, i.e., conventional truth), it makes little sense to speak of grass and trees actually attaining enlightenment.

Because sentient beings have mental delusions, they can attain awakening. Grass and trees have no mind, and thus they have no delusion. What would it mean for them to obtain awakening? It is like waking from a dream: if you are not dreaming, then you cannot wake up from it. Therefore it is said [in the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*] that since sentient beings possess buddha-nature they can attain buddhahood, but since grass and trees are devoid of buddha-nature they cannot attain buddhahood.⁶⁰

This “two-truth” hermeneutic allowed scholiasts to affirm the universality of buddha-nature while upholding (from a provisional perspective) the teachings of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*. Several other writers, including the Huayan patriarch Fazang (643–712) and the Tiantai patriarch Zhanran (711–782), adopted a similar tactic to defend the buddha-nature of the insentient. Zhanran, to pick but one example, writes, “The individual of the perfect [teaching] knows, from beginning to end, that the absolute principle is non-dual, and that there are no objects apart from mind. Who then is sentient? What then is insentient? Within the Assembly of the Lotus there are no differences.”⁶¹

While the treatment of the buddha-nature controversy by renowned monks such as Huiyuan, Jizang, Fazang, and Zhanran has been studied in some detail, less attention has been paid to the controversy as it appears in early Chan materials.

As it turns out, the buddha-nature-of-the-insentient doctrine surfaces in a surprising number of Dunhuang manuscripts, and it was evidently the focus of a passionate (if not rancorous) debate among leading Tang Dynasty Chan prelates. This debate bore directly on the relationship between Buddhist practice, enlightenment, ethics, insentience, and death.

The earliest reference to the topic in a Chan lineage text is found in the *Record of the Masters and Disciples of the Laṅkāvatāra* (*Lengqie shizi ji*) attributed to Jingjue (683–ca. 750).⁶² Here both the fourth patriarch Daoxin (580–651) and the fifth patriarch Hongren (601–674) are depicted defending the notion that insentient objects not only possess buddha-nature but also “preach the dharma.” Hongren, for example, says, “At the moment when you are in the temple sitting in meditation, is your body not also sitting in meditation beneath the trees of the mountain forests? Are earth, trees, tiles, and stones not also able to sit in meditation? Are earth, trees, tiles, and stones not also able to see forms and hear sounds, wear a robe and carry a bowl? When the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* speaks of the dharma-body of the realm of objects, it [refers to] precisely this.”⁶³ For both Daoxin and Hongren, the non-duality of the subjective and objective realms, as well as the *Laṅkāvatāra* doctrine that “all is mind,” lead directly to the inference that even the inanimate objects of our perception can be said to preach the dharma.

A more developed discussion of the doctrine can be found in a slightly later text, the *Treatise on Severing Discernment* (*Jueguan lun*), also found at Dunhuang.⁶⁴

[The student] asks, “Is the Way found only in embodied spiritual entities, or does it reside in grass and trees as well?” [The master] replied, “There is no place the Way does not pervade.” Question: “If the Way is pervasive, why is it a crime to kill a person, whereas it is not a crime to kill grass and trees?” Answer: “Talk of whether it is a crime or not is a matter related to sentience and is thus not the true Way. It is only because worldly people have not attained the Way and falsely believe in a personal self, that their murder entails mental [intent]. This intent bears karmic fruit, and thus we speak of it as a crime. Grass and trees have no sentience and thus originally are in accord with the Way. As they are free of a self, there is no calculation involved in killing them, and thus we do not argue over whether it is a crime or not.

“Now one who is free of a self and is in accord with the Way looks at his own body as he would at grass or at trees. He treats the cutting of his own body as do trees in a forest. . . .”

Question: “If grass and trees have long been in accord with the Way, why do the scriptures not record the buddhahood of grass or trees, but only of persons?” Answer: “They do not only record [the buddhahood] of persons, but of grass and trees as well. A scripture says, ‘A single mote of dust contains all dharmas.’ Another says, ‘All dharmas are suchness; all sentient beings are also suchness.’⁶⁵ Suchness is devoid of any duality or discrimination.”⁶⁶

This argument is a significant departure from the Mādhyamika-style arguments associated with the Sanlun, Tiantai, and Huayan writers mentioned earlier. Rather than insisting that, from the perspective of ultimate truth, there is no distinction between insentient and sentient, the *Treatise on Severing Discernment* argues that grass and trees have buddha-nature *precisely because* they are insentient. Being insentient they have no mind (*wuxin*) and thus no thought of “me” or “mine” and no fear of death. Insentient things are not only “in accord with the way” but they are *de facto* buddhas!

This innovative position seems to have been favored by masters associated with the so-called Northern and the Ox-Head lineages of Chan, masters who playfully proclaim that insentient objects “cultivate realization” and “become buddhas.”⁶⁷ It may thus be significant that one of the most strident *critiques* of the doctrine is found in the record of Heze Shenhui (684–758)—the *de facto* founder of the Southern school of Chan. In his *Recorded Sayings* he debates an Ox-Head master on precisely this point:

Chan Master Yuan of Ox-Head Mountain asked: “[You say that] buddha-nature permeates all sentient things and does not permeate all insentient things. I heard a venerable elder say:

Lush groves of emerald bamboos,
Are wholly the dharma-body.
Luxuriant clusters of chrysanthemums,
Nothing is not *prajñā* (wisdom).⁶⁸

Now why do you say that [buddha-nature] only permeates sentient things and does not permeate insentient things?” [Shenhui] answered: “Surely you do not mean that the merit of groves of emerald bamboos equals that of the dharma-body, or that the wisdom of clusters of chrysanthemums is the same as *prajñā*? If the groves of bamboos and chrysanthemums are

equal to the dharma-body and to *prajñā*, then in which sūtra does the Tathāgata predict that an emerald bamboo or a chrysanthemum will attain *bodhi*? The notion that emerald bamboos and chrysanthemums are the same as the dharma-body and *prajñā* is a heterodox doctrine. Why so? Because the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* says: ‘That which lacks buddha-nature is deemed an insentient thing.’⁶⁹

Shenhui is believed to have been instrumental in shaping the biography of the Sixth Patriarch and the *Platform Scripture of the Sixth Patriarch* (*Liuzu tanjing*). As such, it is not surprising to find that surviving versions of the *Platform Scripture* also come out in opposition to the buddha-nature-of-the-insentient doctrine. This is clear from the “transmission verse” attributed to the fifth patriarch Hongren, found near the end of the Dunhuang version of the text:

Sentient beings come and lay down seeds,
And insentient flowers grow.
Without sentiency and without seeds,
The ground of mind produces nothing.⁷⁰

Recall that, according to the *Masters and Disciples of the Laṅkāvatāra*, Hongren was a champion, rather than a critic, of the buddha-nature-of-the-insentient doctrine. But that did not stop the compilers of later versions of the *Platform Scripture* from altering the wording of the verse to make Hongren’s opposition to the doctrine even more explicit:

Sentient beings come and lay down seeds,
From the earth fruit is produced.
Without sentiency and without seeds,
There is no [buddha-]nature and nothing is produced.⁷¹

This position is endorsed by a number of figures associated with the early “Southern Chan” lineage. The second fascicle of Dazhu Huihai’s (dates unknown) *Essential Gateway for Entering the Way of Sudden Enlightenment* (*Dunwu rudao yaomen*), for example, contains a number of exchanges on the topic,⁷² of which the following is typical:

Deluded people do not know that the dharma-body has no appearance, but manifests form in response to things. Thus they say that, “Lush groves of

emerald bamboos are wholly the dharma-body; luxuriant clusters of chrysanthemums, nothing is not *prajñā*.” But if chrysanthemums were *prajñā*, *prajñā* would be the same as the insentient, and if emerald bamboos were the dharma-body, then the dharma-body would be the same as grass and trees. Then when people munch on bamboo shoots, they must be munching on the dharma-body. . . .

A master who lectured on the Huayan scripture asked: “Does the Chan Master believe that insentient things are the buddha or not?” The Master said: “I don’t believe it. For if insentient things were the buddha, then living people would be inferior to the dead. Even dead donkeys and dead dogs would be superior to a living person. A scripture says: ‘The buddha-body is precisely the dharma-body; it is born of the precepts, meditation, and wisdom; it is born from the three wisdoms and the six supernormal powers; it is born from all the excellent dharmas.’ If you claim that insentient things are the buddha, then were you, venerable one, to die right now, you would be a buddha.”⁷³

Huangbo Xiyun (d. ca. 850) is yet another famous master who considered the notion that insentient objects have buddha-nature simply absurd. Huangbo is best known for his teaching that buddha and mind are one, and thus his opposition to the buddha-nature of the insentient logically follows: one can only ascribe buddhahood to things that have minds.⁷⁴

The position taken by these early Chan opponents of the buddha-nature of the insentient is straightforward. According to the classical Buddhist understanding of karma, only a sentient being can produce the kind of activity—the karmic seeds—that will germinate into *bodhi*. But this ignores the problem that sits at the very center of Buddhist soteriology, namely: How can any conditioned cause (karmic activity) ever give rise to an unconditioned effect (nirvāṇa)? And this, I believe, is what was driving the debate.

One Chan “solution,” already hinted at in the *Masters and Disciples of the Laṅkāvatāra* and developed in the *Treatise on Severing Discernment*, is to adopt a Yogācāra perspective, a “phenomenological” point of view that collapses the distinction between the knowing subject and the object that is known. At the same time, and again following Yogācāra precedents, one affirms the universality of buddha nature, such that the phenomenological realm is but an expression of the absolute. Here the identification of buddha-nature and mind, rather than supporting the distinction between the sentient and insentient, actually undermines it, since mind now subsumes the material realm. (In other words, “matter” is

reinscribed as a series of perceptual events.) This seems to be the approach taken by the figure who, in the later tradition, is most closely associated with the buddha-nature-of-the-insentient theory, Nanyang Huizhong (675–775):

A student asked: “Within the teachings of the scriptures one only sees sentient beings receiving the prophecy of future perfect enlightenment and then, at some future time, becoming a buddha named so-and-so. One never sees an insentient being receiving the prophecy of future perfect enlightenment and becoming a buddha. Among the thousand buddhas of the current *bhadrakalpa*, if there is a single case of an insentient object becoming buddha, please show it to me.” The Master said: “I now ask you, imagine a prince at the time of his coronation as king. Does the person of the prince receive the kingship [all at once], or must every territory in the kingdom be individually bestowed upon him?” [The student] replied: “When the prince is crowned king, everything in the kingdom becomes his. What need is there for him to receive anything else?” The Master said: “The present case is just the same: at the moment when sentient beings receive the prophecy of their future buddhahood, all the lands of the three-thousand great-thousand worlds are completely subsumed within the body of Vairocana Buddha. Beyond the body of the buddha, could there still be some insentient object to receive the prophecy?”⁷⁵ . . .

[The student] asked: “A venerable elder has said:

Lush groves of emerald bamboos,
Are wholly suchness.
Luxuriant clusters of chrysanthemums,
Nothing is not *prajñā*.

Some people do not accept this teaching while others believe in it. The words are inconceivable, and I do not know what to make of it.” The Master said: “This pertains to the realms of great beings such as Samantabhadra and Mañjuśrī; it is not something that lesser men are able to believe and accept. This teaching is fully in accord with the intent of the superlative scriptures of the Mahāyāna. Thus the *Huayan Sūtra* says: ‘The buddha-body fills the dharma-realm and manifests itself before all beings. It responds in accord with conditions, extending everywhere, yet it remains constantly ensconced on the seat of *bodhi*.’⁷⁶ As emerald bamboos

do not lie beyond the dharma-realm, are they not the dharma-body? Moreover, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* says: ‘Since matter is boundless, *prajñā* is also boundless.’⁷⁷ As chrysanthemums are but matter, are they not *prajñā*?⁷⁸

Huizong cites the *Huayan Sūtra* notion that the phenomenal universe itself is the body of Vairocana Buddha in support of his claim that all things, including the insentient, embody buddha-nature and “preach the dharma.” This position would eventually win the day: in later *gong’an* materials, the inert silence of a staff or tree, rather than bespeaking the inconceivable absence that is insentience and death, is rendered the perfect expression of the selfless quiescence of no-mind.⁷⁹ “A monk asked Zhaozhou, ‘What is the meaning of the patriarch [Bodhidharma] coming from the west?’ Zhaozhou replied, ‘The cypress tree in front of the garden.’”⁸⁰

Chinese Mindlessness

It may seem curious that the Chinese did not reference the rich Indian Buddhist discourse on *nirodha*, *asaṃjñi-samāpatti*, and the mindless gods as they pondered the buddha-nature of the insentient. But it should not be surprising: that the term *mie* was commonly used as a Chinese translation (rather than transliteration) for both *nirodha* and nirvāṇa blurred the distinction between the two. Discussion of *nirodha-samāpatti* in Chinese Buddhist treatises is uncommon, and when such a state is mentioned it typically appears in the context of supernatural attainments and powers. Note, for example, Xuanzang’s *Great Tang Record of Western Regions* (*Datang xiyu ji*), where he reports coming across two *arhats*, each ensconced in a cave, who had remained in *nirodha-samāpatti* (*miejinding*) for more than seven hundred years. As the hair and beards on their immobile bodies continued to grow, monks regularly shaved them and changed their clothing.⁸¹

So while the Chinese showed little overt interest in the scholastic controversies surrounding *nirodha* or *asaṃjñi-samāpatti*, they were, I am suggesting, just as invested as the Indians in the problem of nirvāṇa and its puzzling affinity to insentience. Indeed, the linguistic and cultural differences that made it difficult for the Chinese to negotiate the Indian scholastic terrain made it even more difficult for them to appreciate the underlying existential issues that galvanized the Indian debates. And so they had to come up with thought experiments—“intuition pumps”—of their own.

In other words, the philosophical dilemmas that animated Indian theories of *nirodha* and the mindless gods—confusions about sentience, agency, death, and *nirvāṇa*—were the same dilemmas that energized the buddha-nature-of-the-insentient debates in China. That there were so many approaches to the issues, and so little consensus, underscores the experimental character of this discourse. Note how many of our Chinese authors, including Shenhui and Huizong, honed their positions in response to the single adage: “Lush groves of emerald bamboos are wholly suchness; luxuriant clusters of chrysanthemums; nothing is not *prajñā*.” Reference to this aphorism functions much like reference to a brain transplant or a Turing test in modern philosophical discourse: it is a point of common reference, encapsulating a complex set of epistemological issues and arguments, that serves as a springboard for analyses and debate. The probative and even playful nature of the debate is evident in the *Treatise on Severing Discernment*, to pick a single example, which argues that it is precisely because insentient things *do not* have mind that they can be considered buddhas. The *Treatise on No Mind* (*Wuxin lun*), another Dunhuang text that appeared around the same time as the *Treatise on Severing Discernment*, takes a similarly innovative position:

Question: “The Reverend has already said that everything without exception is without mind, and thus trees and rocks are also without mind. But surely it cannot be the same for trees and rocks?”

Answer: “My mind that is without mind is not identical with trees or rocks. Why so? It is like a celestial drum which, although it also lacks a mind, spontaneously emits various marvelous teachings that instruct sentient beings. Or it is like the wish-fulfilling gem that, although it also lacks a mind, is able to spontaneously produce various apparitions. My own absence of mind is just like that; although I am without mind, I am perfectly able to apprehend the true form of all dharmas, and, endowed with true *prajñā*, the three bodies have freedom and responsive functioning without constraint. Therefore the *Ratnakūṭa-sūtra* says: ‘In the absence of mental intention it is still manifestly active.’ How could this be the same as trees and rocks? Indeed, the absence of mind is precisely true mind. And true mind is precisely the absence of mind.”⁸²

Here the *Treatise on No Mind* argues that “no-mind” does indeed refer to a kind of insentience—the absence of intention, mind, and consciousness. But this is not, according to the text, of a piece with the insentience of trees and rocks, since trees

and rocks are manifestly incapable of doing the sorts of things that animate things do. Rather, the text would have us consider the insentience of “supernatural” objects like celestial drums and wish-fulfilling gems; insentient things that have no mind or intention but are still capable (like us) of autonomous activity. In other words, the *Treatise on No Mind* is positing a medieval Chinese version of a “hybrid”—a category of things that conflates or confutes the sentient/insentient distinction.

This is not to suggest that Indian and Chinese Buddhist conceptions of “mindlessness” *never* came into direct contact and dialogue. There is, to my knowledge, one documented instance, associated with the “Samyé debate” that supposedly took place between the Indian master Kamalaśīla and the Northern Chan master Moheyan in mid-eighth-century Tibet. In this exchange, as recorded in a Dunhuang manuscript, Kamalaśīla critiques what he takes to be the Chan position, namely, that Buddhist practice is directed toward the elimination of thought and cognition. Kamalaśīla makes his point by polemically likening the goal of Chan to the mindlessness of the mindless gods:

[Kamalaśīla] further asked, “There are divine beings who [in their former life] suppressed all deluded conception, and as a result of their suppression of deluded conception attained rebirth in the Heaven of [Gods] Without Conception. [But we know that] such beings don’t attain the way of the Buddha, and thus it is clear that the elimination of conception is not the way to buddhahood.”

[Moheyan] respectfully replied, “Those divine beings posit the existence of both meditative discernments and paths of rebirth, and they grasp at the absorption of non-conception. It is precisely because of such deluded conceptualization that they are born into that heaven. If they could free themselves from [attachment to] the meditative absorption into non-conception, then there would be no deluded thought nor rebirth into that heaven. The *Vajracchedikā-sūtra* says, ‘To be free of all marks, this is called [the way of] the buddhas.’ In what scripture is it said that freedom from deluded conception is *not* the way to buddhahood?’”⁸³

Kamalaśīla’s point is that to strive for no-thought, no mind, no conceptualization, is to be no better than the mindless denizens of the Heaven of Gods Without Conception—beings who ignorantly mistake insentience for the goal of spiritual practice. Moheyan responds that it is precisely such ideas—ideas like a state of non-conceptualization, or a heaven wherein there are beings without

sentience—that keep people bound to *saṃsāra*.⁸⁴ The goal of practice is to let go of attachment to any and all discursive formations, to abandon conceptualization altogether, to reach a state of no mind. Is this tantamount to insentience, as Kamalaśīla believed? The Chan tradition—the tradition that rose to dominate Buddhism in China—was weaned on precisely this struggle.

Chapter 8. Is Nirvāṇa the Same as Insentience? Chinese
Struggles with an Indian Buddhist Ideal

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1. For an anthropological reflection on the relationship between the attribution of agency on the one hand, and the construal of inside/outside relations on the other, see Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

2. See, for example, Merry Bullock, “Animism in Childhood Thinking: A New Look at an Old Question,” *Developmental Psychology* 21, 2 (1985): 217–25; Alfonso Caramazza and Jennifer R. Shelton, “Domain-Specific Knowledge Systems in the Brain: The Animate-Inanimate Distinction,” *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 10, 1 (1998): 1–34; Susan Carey, *Conceptual Change in Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press/Bradford Books, 1985); Rochel Gelman, “First Principles Organize Attention to and Learning About Relevant Data: Number and the Animate-Inanimate Distinction as Examples,” *Cognitive Science* 14, 1 (1990): 79–106; Rochel Gelman, Frank Durgin, and Lisa Kaufman, “Distinguishing Between Animates and Inanimates: Not by Motion Alone,” in *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate*, ed. Dan Sperber, David Premack, and Ann James Premack (New York: Clarendon, 1995), 150–84; Rochel Gelman, Elizabeth S. Spelke, and E. Meek, “What Preschoolers Know About Animate and Inanimate Objects,” in *The Acquisition of Symbolic Skills*, ed. Don R. Rogers and John A. Sloboda (London: Plenum, 1983), 297–326; Susan A. Gelman and Paul Bloom, “Young Children Are Sensitive to How an Object Was Created When Deciding What to Name It,” *Cognition* 76, 2 (2000): 91–103; Susan A. Gelman and John D. Coley, “The Importance of Knowing a Dodo Is a Bird: Categories and Inferences in 2-Year-Old Children,” *Developmental Psychology* 26, 5 (1990): 796–804; Susan A. Gelman and John E. Opfer, “Development of the Animate-Inanimate Distinction,” in *Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Cognitive Development*, ed. Usha Goswami (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 151–66; Susan A. Gelman and Anne Watson O’Reilly, “Children’s Inductive Inferences Within Superordinate Categories: The Role of Language and Category Structure,” *Child Development* 59, 4 (1988): 876–87; Susan A. Gelman and Henry M. Wellman, “Insides and Essences: Early Understandings of the Non-Obvious,” *Cognition* 38, 3 (1991): 213–44; Cynthia R. Johnson and D. H. Rakison, “Early Categorization of Animate/Inanimate Concepts in Young Children with Autism,” *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities* 18, 2 (2006): 73–89; Benise S. K. Mak and Alonso H. Vera, “The Role of Motion in Children’s Categorization of Objects,” *Cognition* 71, 3 (1999): B11–21; Diane Poulin-Dubois, Anouk Lepage, and Doreen Ferland, “Infants’ Concept of Animacy,” *Cognitive Development* 11, 1 (1996): 19–36; David Premack, “The Infant’s Theory of Self-Propelled Motion,” *Cognition* 36, 1 (1990): 1–16; David H.

Rakison and Diane Poulin-Dubois, “Developmental Origin of the Animate-Inanimate Distinction,” *Psychological Bulletin* 127, 2 (2001): 209–28; Daniel J. Simons and Frank C. Keil, “An Abstract to Concrete Shift in the Development of Biological Thought: The Insides Story,” *Cognition* 56, 2 (1994): 129–53. On psychological essentialism, see especially the comprehensive overview in Susan A. Gelman, *The Essential Child: Origins of Essentialism in Everyday Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

3. See, for example, Simon Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind, Learning, Development, and Conceptual Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995); George E. Butterworth, Paul L. Harris, Alan M. Leslie, and Henry M. Wellman, eds., *Perspectives on the Child’s Theory of Mind* (Oxford: British Psychological Society and Oxford University Press, 1991); Alan M. Leslie, “Pretending and Believing: Issues in the Theory of ToMM,” *Cognition* 50, 1–3 (1994): 211–38; Peter Mitchell, *Introduction to Theory of Mind: Children, Autism, and Apes* (London: Arnold, 1997); Henry M. Wellman, *The Child’s Theory of Mind* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1990). For a critique of the “theory of mind” approach to autism, see Peter R. Hobson, “Against the Theory of ‘Theory of Mind,’” in *Perspectives on the Child’s Theory of Mind*, ed. George E. Butterworth, Paul L. Harris, Alan M. Leslie, and Henry M. Wellman (Oxford: British Psychological Society and Oxford University Press, 1991), 33–51; and Peter R. Hobson, *Autism and the Development of Mind* (Hove, UK: Erlbaum, 1993).

4. Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” in *The Mind’s I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul*, ed. Douglas R. Hofstadter and Daniel C. Dennett (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 392.

5. See, for example, Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); idem, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). Critics of such theories question, among other things, the simplistic identification of religion with belief in supernatural agents.

6. For an extended discussion of the relationship between color cognition and the biological determinates behind color cognition, see Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 157–71.

7. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

8. The social scientific and philosophical literature on the topic is vast. See, for example, Debora Battaglia, ed., *Rhetorics of Self-Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes, eds., *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Valentine E. Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Daniel C. Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987); idem, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991); Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The*

Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003); Brian Morris, *Anthropology of the Self: The Individual in Cultural Perspective* (London: Pluto Press, 1994); Ulric Neisser and David A. Jopling, eds., *The Conceptual Self in Context: Culture, Experience, Self-Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); Daniel M. Wegner, *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002); Geoffrey White and John Kirkpatrick, eds., *Person, Self, and Experience: Exploring Pacific Ethnopsychologies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

9. Ned Block, “Inverted Earth,” in *Action Theory and Philosophy of Mind, 1990*, ed. James E. Tomberlin, *Philosophical Perspectives* 4 (Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, 1990), 53–79.

10. Daniel C. Dennett, “Quining Qualia,” in *Consciousness in Contemporary Science*, ed. A. J. Marcel and E. Bisiach (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 42–77; Ned Block, “Troubles with Functionalism,” in *Perception and Cognition: Issues in the Foundations of Psychology*, ed. C. W. Savage, *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 9 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 261–325.

11. For an articulate defense of Buddhist scholasticism, along different lines, see Paul John Griffiths, “Scholasticism: The Possible Recovery of an Intellectual Practice,” in *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 201–35.

12. Nirvāṇa also has the related meaning of “to cool,” as in to cool the fire [of delusion]; see Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *The Way to Nirvāṇa: Six Lectures on Ancient Buddhism as a Discipline of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), 113.

13. For an overview of the controversy surrounding the interpretation of these two terms see Guy Richard Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana and Its Western Interpreters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 208–20.

14. See the discussion in La Vallée Poussin, *The Way to Nirvāṇa*, 116–38.

15. *Alagaddūpama-sutta* (*Majjhima-nikāya* [MN] 22 i.140), trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), 234.

16. *Yamaka-sutta* (*Samyutta-nikāya* [SN] 22.85), trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi, in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya* (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom, 2000), vol. 1, 931–33.

17. The other six questions are: Is the universe eternal? Is it not eternal? Is it finite? Is it infinite? Is the body identical with the soul (*jīva*)? Is the body not identical with the soul? See, for example, *Poṭṭhapāda-sutta* (*Dīgha-nikāya* [DN] 9); *Cūla-māluṅkyā-sutta* (MN 63) *Aggi-vacchagotta-sutta* (MN 72), and *Diṭṭhi-sutta* (*Aṅguttara-nikāya* [AN] 10.93). The question of the existence of the Tathāgata after death is handled separately in the *Khemātherī-sutta* (SN 44) and *Anurādhā-sutta* (SN 22.86).

18. On *nirodha* in non-Buddhist sources see Ian Whicher, “Nirodha, Yoga Praxis and the Transformation of the Mind,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 25, 1 (1997): 1–67.

19. See, for example, *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* (MN 36, i.240 ff.).

20. The literature on the role of *śamatha* techniques and attainments in Buddhist path theory is vast; see esp. Johannes Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1986); Paul John Griffiths, “Concentration or Insight: The Problematic of Therāvada Buddhist Meditation-Theory,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49, 4 (1981): 605–24; and Lambert Schmithausen, “On Some Aspects of Descriptions or Theories of ‘Liberating Insight’ and ‘Enlightenment’ in Early Buddhism,” in *Studien Zum Jainismus und Buddhismus*, ed. Klaus Bruhn and Albrecht Wezler (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1981), 199–250.

21. Griffiths cites AN 4.454, MN 1.209, and the *Visuddhimagga* to argue that the early tradition tended to equate *nirodha* with *nirvāṇa*; Paul John Griffiths, *On Being Mindless: Buddhist Meditation and the Mind-Body Problem* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986), 29.

22. There was, admittedly, controversy on this point; Schmithausen notes that some sources assert (explicitly or implicitly) that *some* form of consciousness (*viññāna*, *citta*) must remain in *nirodha*; see the detailed discussion in Lambert Schmithausen, *Ālaya-viññāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies, 2007), vol. 1, 19 ff.

23. *Visuddhimagga* 23.30, Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Berkeley, Calif.: Shambhala, 1976), vol. 2, 828. See also in the same text: “But when Noble Ones who have already produced the eight attainments develop concentration thinking, ‘We shall enter upon the attainment of cessation, and by being without consciousness for seven days we shall abide in bliss here and now by reaching the cessation that is nibbana’, then the development of absorption concentration provides for them the benefit of cessation” (11.124, Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga*, vol. 1, 407). The claim that *nirodha* is *phenomenologically* similar to or identical with *nirvāṇa* is odd, of course, given that neither state properly has a phenomenology per se. This underscores the conceptual ambiguities of these states; note how Buddhaghosa himself associates *nirodha* with the experience of bliss.

24. Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*. See also the extended discussions of *nirodha* in Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas: Early Buddhist Theories on Existence; An Annotated Translation of the Section on Factors Dissociated from Thought from Saṅghabhadra’s Nyāyānusāra* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1995), and Dan Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch’eng Wei-Shih Lun* (Richmond: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 123–53.

25. Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga*, vol. 2, 830.

26. Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 118. The Sarvāstivādins still had other problems with *nirodha*, notably with the doctrine that a buddha spontaneously masters *nirodha* at the same time that he attains enlightenment. Since *nirodha* entails an interruption of the karmic stream, the Sarvāstivādins struggled to explain how interruption could be coextensive with the continuous series of thirty-four mind-moments that mark the attainment of enlightenment; see the discussion *ibid.*, 116 ff.

27. On the connection between *nirodha* and the *ālayavijñāna* concept, see esp. Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, 91–106, and Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna*.

28. In the *Nyāyānusāra*, for example, Saṅghabhadra mentions the Dārṣṭāntika argument that cessation cannot mean the cessation of mind (*xin*), but only feeling (*shou*) and conception (*xiang*); otherwise there would be no distinction between cessation and death (T. no. 1562, vol. 29, 403a21–24). Saṅghabhadra, of course, disagrees. See Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 114–22, 267; Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, chap. 2; and Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna*, 18–27.

29. Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga*, vol. 2, 829.

30. *Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra*, T. no. 1545, vol. 27, 779c29 ff.; *Nyāyānusāra*, p. 401c11–16, trans. Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 257; Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, trans. Leo M. Pruden from the French translation of Louis de La Vallée Poussin (Berkeley, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), vol. 1, 226, 229; *Cheng weishi lun*, T. no. 1585, vol. 31, 37c28ff., trans. Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 150–51.

31. DN, iii.33–34, trans. Maurice Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha, Dīgha Nikāya* (London: Wisdom, 1987), 382, with changes. Cf. *Brahmajāla-sutta* i.28, trans. Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard*, 81.

32. *Abhidhamma vibhaṅga* 419, trans. Paṭhamakyaw Ashin Thīṭṭila, *The Book of Analysis (Vibhaṅga): The Second Book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1969), 537; *Visuddhimagga* 17.254, trans. Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga*, vol. 2, 661; *Kathāvattu* 4.11, trans. Shwe Zan Aung and Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids, *Points of Controversy, or, Subjects of Discourse, Being a Translation of the Kathā-vattu* (London: Pali Text Society and Luzac, 1969), 153–55.

33. There are variations on the geography of the realm of form. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, for example, places the unconscious beings in a raised area within the Bṛhat-phala Heaven (Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, vol. 1, 222).

34. See, for example, *Abhidhamma vibhaṅga* 425; trans. Thīṭṭila, *The Book of Analysis*, 543.

35. Aung and Davids, *Points of Controversy*, 153–55.

36. Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, vol. 1, 222.

37. The unconscious gods exist “there in the manner of an arrow fired by the force of the bowstring: as is the force from the bowstring, so is the height it reaches in the sky. In exactly the same way having been reborn there propelled by the force of the *jhāna*, as is the force of the *jhāna*, so is the length of time they remain there, but when the force of the *jhāna* is lost, then the physical aggregate disappears in that world and the relinking consciousness arises here in this world.” *Sumaṅgalvilāsini* (*Dīgha-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā*), 1. 118; trans. Rupert Gethin (personal communication).

38. The *Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra*, for example, devotes considerable space to this issue (pp. 784b14ff.). On the initial and terminal consciousness of the unconscious gods see also the discussion in the *Cheng weishi lun*, p. 37b8 ff. Additional references may be found in Lambert Schmithausen, “On the Problem of the Relation of Spiritual Practice and Philosophical Theory in Buddhism,” in *German Scholars on India*, vol. 2, ed. Cultural

Department of the Delhi Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany (Bombay: Nachiketa, 1976), 95 n. 526.

39. Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, vol. 1, 221.

40. The Theravāda considered only the factors of form and *nibbāna* as belonging to this category; they were content to treat unconsciousness as an absence of something, rather than a presence of something that effects the absence. See Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 67–74.

41. *Nyāyānusāra*, p. 404a28–29, see the discussion in Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 275–76.

42. Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 115.

43. *Ibid.*, 115–16. On the Yogācāra approach to the states without consciousness see also Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 122–59.

44. *Sumaṅgalvilāsīnī (Dīgha-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā)* 1,118; trans. Rupert Gethin (personal communication).

45. Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, vol. 1, 223–24, with minor changes. Cf. the corresponding passage in Saṅghabhadra’s *Nyāyānusāra*: “Holding that non-conception (*wu xiang*) is true liberation, and holding that the absorption of non-conception is the path of deliverance, [ordinary persons] cultivate this absorption in order to realize non-conception. No noble one would mistake something tainted (*āsrava*) to be true liberation or the true path of deliverance” (*Nyāyānusāra*, 401a19–21; trans. Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 247, with changes). The text goes on to say that the noble ones view the absorption of non-conception as a “deep pit” (*shenkeng*) to be avoided (401b5).

46. *Cheng weishi lun*, p. 37b3 ff.; cf. Swati Ganguly, *Treatise in Thirty Verses on Mere-Consciousness: A Critical English Translation of Hsüan-Tsang’s Chinese Version of the Vijñaptimātratātrimśikā with Notes from Dharmapāla’s Commentary in Chinese* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), 112, and Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 147–48.

47. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* argues that *prthagjanas* “cannot produce [*nirodha*] because they fear annihilation and because this absorption can only be produced through the power of the Path. In fact, it is the ascetic who has seen Nirvana who is determined to obtain it” (Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, vol. 1, 226).

48. This contrast is explicit in the Yogācāra doctrine that the *manas*, which is responsible for the reification of the “self,” is still active in *asañjñī-samāpatti* but has ceased in *nirodha*. See Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 145–51.

49. The alternate reading of *Laozi* 49 is “The sage has no fixed mind; he considers the minds of the common people to be his own mind.”

50. *Zhuangzi* 29/12/5–6, trans. Burton Watson in *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 127; see also 30/12/43, trans. Watson, 132. References to the Chinese text of the *Zhuangzi* are to the edition in the Harvard Yenching Concordance Series and are cited using the concordance format (page/chapter/line).

51. Robert H. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), 90–93.

52. *Zhuangzi* 58/22/24.25, trans. Watson, 237.

53. T. no. 1858, vol. 45, 154b20–26, trans. Richard H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 219, with changes. The term *wuxin* appears in the earlier translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* by Lokakṣema (T. no. 224, vol. 8, 425c26), but the context is a Mādhyamika-style negation of the notions of *both* mind and no-mind. On the use of *wuxin* in various early sources, see esp. Urs App, “Treatise on No-Mind: A Chan Text from Dunhuang,” *Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 28, 1 (1995): 83 n. 63; and Fukunaga Mitsuji, “‘No-Mind’ In *Chuang-Tzu* and in Ch’an Buddhism,” *Zinbun* 12 (1969): 9–45.

54. On the meaning of these terms in the context of early Chan meditation techniques see Robert H. Sharf, “Mindfulness and Mindlessness in Early Chan,” forthcoming in *Philosophy East & West*.

55. The following section draws directly from the discussion in Robert H. Sharf, “How to Think with Chan *Gong’an*,” in *Thinking with Cases: Specialized Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History*, ed. Charlotte Furth, Judith Zeitlin, and Hsiung Ping-chen (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007), 210–22. See also the extended treatment of the subject in 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).

56. *Da banniepan jing*, T. no. 374, vol. 12, 581a22–23. The earlier six-fascicle version of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, translated between 410 and 418, states that buddha-nature is eternal but *icchantika* do not possess it (*Da banniyuan jing*, T. no. 376, vol. 12, 881b24ff. and 893a9ff.). On Daosheng and the early debates concerning the universality of buddha-nature, see Whalen Lai, “The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* and Its Earliest Interpreters in China: Two Prefaces by Tao-lang and Tao-sheng,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102, 1 (1982): 99–105; Walter Liebenthal, “The World Conception of Chu Tao-Sheng,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 12, 1–2 (1956): 65–103, 241–68; Arthur Link, “Tao-sheng: A Biographical Essay” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1957); Liu Ming-Wood, “The Doctrine of the Buddha-Nature in the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5, 2 (1982): 63–94; idem, “The Problem of the *Ichchantika* in the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7, 1 (1984): 57–81; Linda Penkower, “T’ien-t’ai During the T’ang Dynasty: Chan-jan and the Sinification of Buddhism” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1993), 393–96 n. 15; Tang Yongtong, *Han Wei liang Jin nanbeichao Fojiao shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1955), vol. 2, 601–76; Tokiwa Gishin and Yanagida Seizan, *Zekkanron: Eibun yakuchū, gembun kōtei, kokuyaku* (Kyoto: Zenbunka kenkyūjo, 1973), 178–93.

57. See the *Dacheng yizhang*, T. no. 1851, vol. 44, 472c18–26.

58. *Dacheng xuanlun*, T. 1853, vol. 45, 40a–41a. On Jizang’s theory of buddha-nature, see Kamata Shigeo, *Chūgoku bukkyō shisōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1968), 43–46; Aaron K. Koseki, “Chi-tsang’s ‘*Ta-ch’eng-hsuan-lun*’: The Two Truths and the Buddha-Nature” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1977), 186–268; idem, “*Prajñāpāramitā* and the Buddhahood of the Non-Sentient World: The San-Lun Assimilation of

Buddha-Nature and Middle Path Doctrine,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 3, 1 (1980): 16–33; Liu Ming-Wood, *Madhyamaka Thought in China* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 160–87; Schmithausen, *Plants in Early Buddhism*, 122 ff.; and Tokiwa Daijō, *Busshō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1973), 217–19.

59. *Dacheng xuanlun*, p. 40b18–20 and 40c13–18; cf. Liu, *Madhyamaka Thought*, 186.

60. *Dacheng xuanlun*, p. 40c24–27.

61. *Jin’gang bei* (Adamantine Scalpel), T. no. 1932, vol. 46, 785b8–9; trans. Penkower, “T’ien-t’ai During the T’ang,” 525–28, with minor changes. The *Jin’gang bei*, which was composed in 780 shortly before Zhanran’s death, was the first full-length work dedicated to the doctrine of the buddha-nature of the insentient.

62. On the question of authorship and dating of the *Record of the Masters and Disciples of the Lanāvātāra*, see esp. Timothy H. Barrett, “The Date of the *Leng-chia shih-tzu chi*,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3rd ser. 1, 2 (1991): 255–59 (Barrett believes the text could not have been written later than 716); and Bernard Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 160–76.

63. T. no. 2837, vol. 85, 1290a4–6 and 14–18; Yanagida Seizan, *Shoki no zenshi* 1, *Zen no goroku* 2 (Kyoto: Chikuma shobō, 1971), 287–88.

64. This text, associated with the Ox-Head lineage (Niutou zong), was likely composed by a later Ox-Head teacher sometime during the third quarter of the eighth century, i.e., just around the time that Zhanran was formulating his own position on the buddha-nature of the insentient. On the Ox-Head lineage in general and this text in particular, see John R. McRae, “The Ox-Head School of Chinese Ch’an Buddhism: From Early Ch’an to the Golden Age,” in *Studies in Ch’an and Hua-yen*, ed. Robert M. Gimello and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1983), 169–52. An edition of the *Treatise on Severing Discernment*, along with Japanese and English translations, can be found in Tokiwa and Yanagida, *Zekkanron*.

65. The first quotation may come from the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* (T. no. 278 and 279), which contains numerous statements to the same effect. The second quotation is a slightly modified version of a sentence from *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* (T. no. 475, vol. 14, 542b12–13).

66. Tokiwa and Yanagida, *Zekkanron*, 91.

67. The Northern Chan master Shenxiu (605?–706), for example, takes a similar position in the *Zongjing lu* (Record of the Mirror of the Tradition), a text compiled by Yongming Yanshou (904–75) and published in 961 (T. no. 2016, vol. 48, 943a24–28).

68. I have not been able to identify the source of this verse; it appears repeatedly in discussions of the buddha-nature-of-the-insentient doctrine, including the *Zutang ji* records for Nanyang Huizhong, Dongshan Liangjie, and Dazhu Huihai; see Yanagida Seizan, *Sodōshū sakuin* (Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku jinbunkagaku kenkyūjo, 1984), 1.125.13; 2.65.3; and 4.47.6 respectively. (Citations from the *Zutang ji* are given using the concordance format: section.folio.line.)

69. *Shenhui yulu*, in Hu Shi, *Shenhui heshang yiji—fu Hu xiansheng zuihou de yanjiu* (Taipei: Hu Shi jinian guan, 1968), 139.

70. T. no. 2007, vol. 48, 344b9–10; cf. Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch: The Text of the Tun-huang Manuscript with Translation, Introduction, and Notes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 177.

71. This wording is found, for example, in the editions found in the *Zutang ji* (1.85.11–12), the *Jingde chuandeng lu* (T. no. 2076, vol. 51, 223a17–18), and the 1291 “vulgate” edition of the *Platform Scripture* (T. no. 2008, vol. 48, 349a26–27).

72. While this text was not published until 1374, it agrees with the account of Huihai’s teaching on the buddha-nature of the insentient found in the *Zutang ji* 4.47.6–11.

73. Hirano Sōjō, *Tongo yōmon* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1970), 138, 155, 175.

74. See the *Huangbo Duanji chanshi wanling lu*: “The Master ascended the hall and said: ‘This very mind is buddha. It reaches upward to all the buddhas and downwards to things that slither on the ground; *everything that contains spirit* possesses buddha-nature and is equal with respect to the substance of the one mind. The reason that Bodhidharma came from India was only to transmit the dharma of one mind and to directly indicate that all beings are originally buddha’” (T. no. 2012, vol. 48, 386b2–5, italics mine; see also 381a28–29 for similar phrasing).

75. *Zutang ji* 1.124.5–14; cf. *Jingde chuandeng lu*, p. 438b6–11; see also the discussion in Schmithausen, *Plants in Early Buddhism*, 267–71.

76. T. no. 279, vol. 10, 30a6–7.

77. T. no. 220, vol. 7, 871c14–15.

78. *Zutang ji* 1.125.13–126.7 (this segment does not appear in the *Jingde chuandeng lu*). See the discussion in Liu, *Madhyamaka Thought*, 255.

79. The controversy took decidedly different turns in Japan: the issue is addressed, often in innovative ways, in the writings of Kūkai (774–835), Saichō (767–822), Annen (d. 889), Enchin (814–891), Ryōgen (912–985), Chūjin (1065–1138), Dōgen (1200–1253), and Nichiren (1222–1282), to name just a few. The controversy was also the focus of one of a series of spirited Hossō–Tendai debates held under imperial auspices in 963. Nor was the Japanese interest in the doctrine limited to exegetical works; it found its way into Japanese literature and performance arts as well. Sources on the buddha-nature-of-the-insentient doctrine in Japan include Paul Groner, *Ryōgen and Mount Hiei: Japanese Tendai in the Tenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), 337–39; William R. LaFleur, “Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature, Part 1,” *History of Religions* 13, 2 (1973): 93–128; idem, “Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature, Part 2,” *History of Religions* 13, 3 (1974): 227–48; Miyamoto Shōson, “‘Sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu’ no busshōronteki igi to sono sakusha,” *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 9, 2 (1961): 672–701; Fabio Rambelli, *Vegetal Buddhas: Ideological Effects of Japanese Buddhist Doctrines on the Salvation of Inanimate Beings* (Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies, 2001); Sakamoto Yukio, “Hijō ni okeru busshō no umu ni tsuite—toku ni Tannen, Chōkan o chūshin to shite,” *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 7, 2 (1959): 21–30; idem, “On the ‘Attainment of Buddhahood’ by Trees and Plants,” in *Proceedings of the IXth International Congress for the History of Religions (1958)* (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1960), 415–22; Donald H. Shively, “Buddhahood for the Nonsentient: A Theme in No Plays,” *Harvard Journal of*

Asiatic Studies 20, 1–2 (1957): 135–61; Sueki Fumihiko, “Annen *Shinjō sōmoku jōbutsu shiki ni tsuite*,” *Tōhōgaku* 80 (1990): 97–110; idem, “Annen: The Philosopher Who Japanized Buddhism,” *Acta Asiatica: Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture (Tōhōgakkai)* 66 (1994): 69–86; Yoshizu Yoshihide, “Mujō busshōsetsu no kōsatsu,” [*Sōtōshū*] *Shūgaku kenkyū* 15 (March, 1973): 110–15.

80. *Chanzone wumen guan* case no. 37 (T. no. 2005, vol. 48, 297c5–6). For an extended analysis of the relationship between the buddha-nature-of-the-insentient controversy and the *gong’an* literature, see Sharf, “Chan *Gong’an*.”

81. T. no. 2087, vol. 51, 942a21–24.

82. T. no. 2831, vol. 85, 1269c9–16; cf. App, “No-Mind,” 94–98.

83. *Dunwu dasheng zhenglijue*, Pelliot 4646, folio 131 r–v; quoting from *Vajracchedikā*, T. no. 236, vol. 8, 754b24–25; cf. Paul Demiéville, *La concile de Lhasa: une controverse sur le quietisme entre bouddhistes de l’Inde et de la Chine au VIIIème siècle de l’ère chrétienne* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1952), 62.

84. In terms of mediating the debate, I would note that Kamalaśīla and Moheyan were arguing from incommensurable epistemological positions. Moheyan is decidedly phenomenological in his approach, taking as authoritative what is immediately presented to consciousness, while Kamalaśīla places ultimate authority in scripture, reason, and tradition. As such, more often than not, they talk past one another.

Chapter 9. Karma and the Bonds of Kinship in Medieval Daoism: Reconciling the Irreconcilable

1. Erik Zürcher, “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence,” *T’oung Pao* 66 (1980): 84–147.

2. Six Dynasties Daoist works start to mention the Eighteen Bureaus, and the *diyu* imported by Buddhism. The tortures perpetrated in these Buddhist hells are not yet so extensively described in Daoist works, but their eloquent names are listed as threats.

3. Michel Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins: le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 11. On karma in medieval China and related bibliography, see Livia Kohn, “Steal Holy Food and Come Back as a Viper: Conceptions of Karma and Rebirth in Medieval China,” *Early Medieval China* 4 (1998): 1–34.

4. Stephen Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 198.

5. In that respect, Zhi Qian was inspired by two works translated a few decades earlier: the *Xiuxing benqi jing* (T. no. 184, vol. 3) and the *Zhong benqi jing* (T. no. 196, vol. 4). See Zürcher, “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism.”

6. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival*, 198.

7. *Lunheng jiaoshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), *juan* 6.

8. *Laozi xiang’er zhu jiaozheng*, ed. Rao Zongyi, 1956, rev. ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai-gujichubanshe, 1991), 24, trans. Stephen Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 108.

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Abbreviations

- Dz. *Zhengtong daozeang* 正統道藏. Shanghai: Shanghai Yinshuguan, 1923–26. Citation is to number as given in Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozeang* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), followed by chapter, page number, side, and line number as found in the string-bound edition of the *Zhengtong daozeang*.
- T. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, eds. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–32. Citations are by Taishō number, followed by volume, page, and line number as necessary.
- TZ. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō tozōbu* 大正新修大藏經圖像部. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, eds. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1932. Citations are by Taishō number followed by volume and page number as necessary. This is the iconographic supplement to the Taishō edition of the Buddhist canon.
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- Betsugyō* 別行. T. no. 2476.

- Biyān lu* 碧巖錄. T. no. 2003.
- Bukong juansuo shenbian zhenyan jing* 不空羂索神變真言經. T. 1092.
- Byakuhō kushō* 白寶口抄. TZ. 3119, vols. 6–7.
- Chanzong wumen guan* 禪宗無門關, T. no.2005, vol. 48.
- Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論, T. no.1585, vol. 31.
- Chisong zi zhangli* 赤松子章曆. Dz. 615.
- Chuanfa zhengzong lun* 傳法正宗論. T. no. 2080.
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- Dacheng xuanlun* 大乘玄論, T. no. 1853, vol. 45.
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- Dongyuan shen zhou jing* 洞淵神咒經. Dz. 335.
- Dunwu dasheng zhenglijue* 頓悟大乘正理決 (Dunhuang manuscript), Pelliot no. 4646 and Stein no. 2672.
- Fahua wenju ji* 法華文句記. T. no. 1719, vol. 34.
- Falun zuifu* 法輪罪福. Dz. 346, 347, 348, and 455; Stein 1605 and Stein 1906.
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