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Stuart H. Young. *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. 352 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8248-4120-1.

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Commissioned by Gregory A. Scott

Among the publications on Chinese Buddhism to have appeared during recent years, this monograph by Stuart H. Young stands out based on the importance of the topic as well as its overall quality. He fills a crucial gap in scholarly studies on Chinese Buddhism. Sectarian transmission histories of the Chán and Tiāntái traditions have been studied thoroughly for decades; however, the origins and predecessors of this development have received only relatively minor attention. The author addresses this gap in an exemplary way, and provides the first convincing study on the formative period of Chinese Buddhist transmission literature and the strategies with which medieval Chinese scholar monks tried to bridge the gap between Indian and Chinese Buddhism.

Young analyzes the numerous strategies that were devised to deal with the question of what it meant “to be Buddhist in medieval China” (p. 243), and specifically, the role of narratives on Indian patriarchs in bridging the spatiotemporal distance separating Chinese Buddhism from its Indian roots.

The introduction provides a useful chapter outline but also contains methodological considerations on hagiographic literature which are at times somewhat confusing and only remotely relevant to the concerns that the author skillfully develops in the subsequent chapters. The factual methodology employed by the author is transparent and effective, based on the study of textual (and to a lesser degree iconographic) material, as well as the sociocultural context, and does not need any additional theoretical underpinnings. Fortunately, Young’s study is firmly grounded in a close reading of the primary sources and an analysis of the functions of the hagiographies of Aśvaghōṣa, Nāgārjuna, and Āryadeva in defining medieval Chinese Buddhism. As Young demonstrates, Aśvaghōṣa, Nāgārjuna, and Āryadeva were successively represented by Chinese Buddhists as (1) paradigmatic fig-

ures who were able to revive the Dharma in a time of decline (cyclical philosophy of history), (2) transmitters and representatives of a lineage stretching back to the historical Buddha (master-to-disciple lineage), and (3) scholars and exemplars who shone through their exegetical and doctrinal works, but who eventually also became figures in popular and esoteric Buddhist practices. We learn that Nāgārjuna was at some point associated with Pure Land Buddhism and worshipped for his apotropaic powers, while Aśvaghōṣa was turned into a silkworm deity, thus legitimizing sericulture as a Buddhist activity.

Chapter 1, “Buddhist Sainthood in the Dharmic History,” provides a detailed background on the historical settings in which the hagiographical writings were developed, including the “borderland complex,” since Chinese Buddhists perceived themselves as distant both in space and time from the homeland of the Buddha. The author also introduces the “models of sainthood” (p. 41) that were chosen to represent the Indian sages in China. In this key chapter, Young shows that traits such as “conversion” and skill in debate were highlighted in the early description of the Indian saints, which aimed at defining the “proper relationship between state and sangha” (p. 44). In addition, the significance of commentary literature is discussed, since these texts were the main source in “post-parinirvāṇa India” (this term is used very frequently by Young) for medieval Chinese Buddhist monks. As Young remarks, “these patriarchs were thus bonded initially through their shared faith in the power of written exegesis to save the world, and this bond would hold steadfast throughout Chinese Buddhist history” (p. 54). He emphasizes the practice of meditation as another important feature in the early description of the Indian saints, in addition to filling the social role of eremites.

In chapter 2 the author introduces us to key texts concerning the transmission records of Indian patriarchs,

in particular the *Fù fǎzàng yīnyuán zhuàn* 付法藏因緣傳. Young translates the title as “Tradition of the Causes and Conditions of the Dharma-Treasury Transmission,” which is somewhat puzzling and seems to require a more detailed explanation. We do not understand why *zhuàn* is translated as “tradition” here, since it clearly refers to a (transmission) “record.” In addition, the term *yīnyuán* needs further clarification. The literary translation is “primary causes and secondary conditions,” as indicated by the author. However, we think the use of the term is much more specific in the title and refers to the life stories and deeds of Buddhist saints, that is, *avadānas*. According to this influential text (also for the later formulation of sectarian lineages in the Chán tradition), the transmission of the dharma was broken off after the final patriarch Shīzǐ 師子 (Sīṃha), since he was murdered before he could secure the continuation of the teaching. Young provides an interesting interpretation of this narrative, emphasizing that the “rhetoric of Dharma decline was widespread” (p. 69) during medieval China, and that this break in the lineage was meant “to exhort latter-day Chinese Buddhists to redouble their efforts at upholding the Dharma” (p. 70).

In the same chapter, the author introduces a fascinating visual account of that scripture, carved in 589 as part of the Língquán 靈泉 monastery complex at Bǎoshān 寶山, near the Northern Qí capital of Yè 鄴 (close to the modern city of Ānyáng). This area was one of the foremost centers of medieval Chinese Buddhist practice and is also known for the extant meditation cave of the influential meditation master Sēngchóu 僧稠 (480-560 CE). The stele of the Indian patriarchs is unique; unfortunately, the author only includes a shady photograph in which hardly anything can be discerned (based on a low-resolution photograph of an older Chinese publication), and he also does not provide us with an analysis of the fascinating iconographic features of this stele, which visualizes the transmission process by positioning masters and disciples face-to-face. It would have been also worthwhile to discuss the inscribed text accompanying the images. To help readers appreciate the significance of this stele, we will include a better image (detail) here:

<https://networks.h-net.org/resource/lingquan-monastery-stele-scott>

In the right upper corner (second figure to the right) of the photograph we see Nāgārjuna, facing his predecessor to the right. The face-to-face arrangement obviously symbolizes the transmission process from master to disciple. Nāgārjuna is numbered as fourteen in the lineage

of Indian patriarchs. The inscription has the following text:

第十四龍樹菩薩南天梵志種生在樹下因龍剋道

Note that Nāgārjuna is already titled as “Bodhisattva” here, in contrast to most of the other Indian patriarchs listed.

In this chapter, Young also describes how the Dharma Treasure Transmission functioned to establish the Indian patriarchs, first of all Āryadeva, as saints by describing their determination to perform the ultimate deed of self-sacrifice in order to relieve the suffering of others. According to the author, the cave structure and contents reflect a soteriological program, integrating various buddhas and the Indian patriarchs as protectors of the dharma, and connecting the patriarchs to practices such as meditative visualization, the recitation of Buddha’s name, and confession and repentance rituals: “Together with myriad buddhas represented at this site, the twenty-four Indian patriarchs carved inside the cave were rendered as immanent holy beings who could be entreated to confer blessings upon their Chinese descendants” (p. 111).

Chapter 3 opens with remarks on the sociopolitical context of Sui-dynasty Buddhism, in which the Buddhist clergy actively participated in legitimizing the restoration of imperial power. Complementarily, the power of Buddhist institutions was strengthened, leading far beyond the self-perception of being “a Buddhist hinterland” (p. 111), but rather “the Indian patriarchs who constituted these lineages were made to play prominent roles in the redefinition of China as a center of Buddhist civilization” (p. 112). The chapter examines the new functions of Aśvaghōṣa, Nāgārjuna, and Āryadeva between the sixth and the eighth centuries, and their central role in commentarial exegesis, as well as in the sectarian concerns of the early Tiāntái school. After analyzing key texts of this period (including the linking of Aśvaghōṣa to the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* scripture), Young also discusses the role of Indian patriarchs in Xuánzàng’s influential writings, particularly in the *Great Táng Record of the Western Regions* (*Dà Táng xīyù jì* 大唐西域記). The author concludes that this period witnessed a new role assigned to the Indian patriarchs and was crucial in redefining Chinese Buddhism: “[I]n the Sui-Tang period the Indian patriarchs were represented as having conveyed to China the full truth of Indian Buddhism. As such, Chinese Buddhists no longer needed to concern themselves with Dharma’s devolution or China’s distance from the motherland. Rather, ... the True Dharma

could now flourish in latter-day China” (p. 151).

Chapter 4 follows the chronological sequence of chapter arrangements and focuses on the ninth century, discussing “a dramatic metamorphosis” (p. 152) undergone by the figures of Aśvaghōṣa and Nāgārjuna during that time. One of the most striking new developments was Nāgārjuna’s gradual integration into Pure Land practices. This eventually had wide-reaching repercussions. For example, Nāgārjuna subsequently became a Pure Land patriarch in Japan (p. 155). In addition to appearing in treatises of the Pure Land school, Nāgārjuna’s efficacy in ritual practices and spellcraft was vigorously promoted. This led to the interesting situation where Nāgārjuna figured as a prominent author of doctrinal commentaries, and simultaneously played a leading role in ritual practices performed by the general populace. Young admits that it is difficult to determine with certainty the context in which these Nāgārjuna-related ritual texts arose. Besides the influence of medieval Taoist texts and Tantric ritual manuals, however, the author emphasizes that the figure of the saint was used in this context to show that “the most efficacious Daoist thaumaturgic methods were actually ancient Indian or that only Buddhist adepts were capable of mastering both Daoist and Buddhist ritual technologies” (p. 184).

Chapter 5 focuses on the rather abrupt transformation of Aśvaghōṣa into a “local god of sericulture” (p. 187), joining an already significant number of sericulture deities. As already evidenced in the discussion of Nāgārjuna, here also the integration in esoteric rituals was essential. In this chapter the author also provides a short overview of the history of sericulture practices in China and the textual material related to it. The remainder of the chapter deals with texts promoting Aśvaghōṣa as “God of Silk”. In the conclusion to the chapter, Young problematizes the ambiguity of this endeavor, since silk production was conceived as a uniquely Chinese cultural technology and in addition the production process would involve the death of countless sentient beings. The author interprets the involvement of Buddhists in silk production as the outcome of a pragmatic view: “Chinese Buddhist were practical-minded products of a sociocultural environment in which sericulture was widely extolled and silk was ubiquitous. Buddhist involvement in the silk industry was simply unavoidable, at least to some degree, and it also presented a host of socioeconomic and soteriological opportunities of which the monastic community often availed itself” (p. 213). That the figure of Aśvaghōṣa was chosen as protector of sericulture is explained by his “foreignness ... crucial to his ability to in-

tegrate Buddhism into the silk industry—or, rather, to re-define sericulture as an Indian Buddhist enterprise. Aśvaghōṣa’s status as an accomplished bodhisattva of ancient Indian origin allowed him to effectively legitimize sericulture in the face of widespread moral outrage over unchecked silkworm murder” (p. 214).

Chapter 6 is relatively short and focuses on the roles of the Indian patriarchs in bridging the spatiotemporal divide between Buddhist India and China. Although the publication has a separate conclusion (summing up some of the main results), this chapter could also be regarded as a kind of conclusion, since it builds on material discussed in previous chapters. The author recounts the changing roles of the Indian patriarchs in the unfolding of medieval Chinese Buddhism, first mirroring the concerns and models of elite Chinese scholar-monks, being depicted as masters of commentary, meditation, and eremitic practices, as well as serving as advisors to the secular powers. They also came to reflect the “patriarchal principles” (p. 223) so important for Chinese society, and therefore the chain of transmission became one of the most prominent features. Eventually, they were promoted far beyond the human domain of famous Buddhist practitioners and gradually assumed a divine status, described as being in possession of supernatural powers, which again allowed their integration into ritual practices. As such, they were transformed into “homegrown” bodhisattvas (p. 228) despite their foreign origin. Young explains this by emphasizing that “it was the Indian patriarchs’ proximity within Dharmic history that made them especially valued resources for medieval Chinese Buddhists” (p. 228), as such functioning for Chinese Buddhists as “emulating the Indian other” (p. 240). In this last part of the chapter the author also makes some attempts to cross-religiously contextualize this notion of emulation, through comparing it with early Christian saints. This section of half a page could have been deleted with good conscience, since it is obviously not a real concern of the author in the context of this study, nor does this reduced form provide any essential insight. Hopefully, the author will expand on this on another occasion. The book also includes a number of very useful appendices, including translations of some of the key material introduced in the monograph.

Although the material the author deals with is of great difficulty and complexity, Young manages to maintain a transparent structure and skilfully guides the reader through the various chapters. One of the essential achievements is the structural build-up of the book in which materials are organically related to each other,

making the development of the topic transparent and retraceable for the reader.

The texts are presented in a philologically sound way (including the Chinese text portions!), with a quality of translations going far beyond the average level usually encountered in the treatment of Chinese Buddhist textual material in Western scholarly publications. Although the author provides valuable information in the footnotes, the annotations are somewhat unevenly distributed throughout the publication, and especially in the translation section a more extensive explanatory apparatus would have been desirable. As it is, some choices in the translation remain somewhat vague and could have been problematized more frequently.

The most obvious lacuna in this publication is the nearly total lack of reference to the role the Indian patriarchs played in the formation of the Chán school. Whereas the transmission histories of Indian patriarchs are well connected to early Tiāntái sectarian thought, this aspect is totally lacking with regard to the early Chán school. I explain this by the bulk of literature on early Chán transmission thought, the integration of which would have gone far beyond the already very impressive scope of the present study.

However, these are minor points of criticism which do not unduly distract from the immense contribution to Chinese Buddhist studies this volume constitutes. This book will set a new standard in the treatment of text-related material from the Chinese medieval period.

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