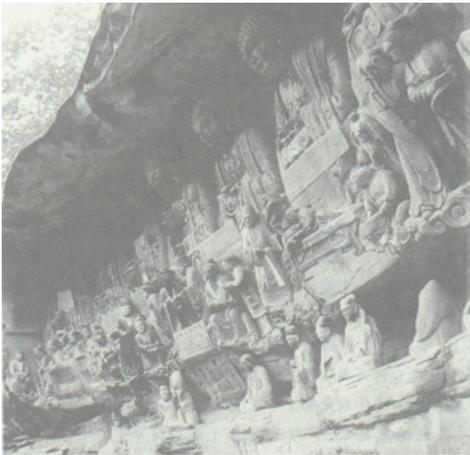

THE YULAN BOWL SUTRA

SUTRA ON THE DIFFICULTY OF REPAYING THE KINDNESS OF PARENTS

SUTRA ON THE PROFOUND KINDNESS OF PARENTS

SUTRA ON THE DIFFICULTY OF REPAYING THE PROFOUND OF PARENTS



Dazu Grottoes Enzhong jing section



Dazu-Feeding and nurturing



Dazu- Suffering of birth



Dazu-Laying in wet places

THE YULAN BOWL SUTRA
SUTRA ON THE DIFFICULTY OF REPAYING THE KINDNESS OF PARENTS
SUTRA ON THE PROFOUND KINDNESS OF PARENTS
SUTRA ON THE DIFFICULTY OF REPAYING THE PROFOUND OF PARENTS

— Translations from Chinese Versions —



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The Yulan Bowl Sutra and Collection of Filial Piety Sutras:
Translated from the Chinese Version
by Venerable Yifa, Peter Matthew Romaskiewicz

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Frontispiece: Red sandstone reliefs, painted and gilded, from Baodingshan in Sichuan, China. Created in the 12th-13th centuries, these form one grouping depicting scenes inspired by the Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents. The first picture (top left) shows the entire grouping with various scenes depicting the kindness of parents. The bottom left relief represents the suffering of the mother in childbirth, the top right represents the feeding and nurturing of young children, and the bottom right represents the mother laying in the wet spots while allowing the child to sleep in the dry spots.

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《孟蘭盆經與報恩三經》

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經頭插圖：四川寶頂山大足石窟的紅沙石浮雕，約創於第12至13世紀。一窟中描述父母恩重難報經的情節。（左上）全窟雕群；（左下）臨產受苦恩；（右上）哺乳養育恩；（右下）廻乾就濕恩。

2008年第一版

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父 母 恩 重 難 報 經

THE YULAN BOWL SUTRA
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SUTRA ON THE PROFOUND KINDNESS OF PARENTS
SUTRA ON THE DIFFICULTY OF REPAYING THE PROFOUND OF PARENTS

— Translations from Chinese Versions —

開經偈

無上甚深微妙法，
百千萬劫難遭遇，
我今見聞得受持，
願解如來真實義。



VERSE FOR COMMENCING THE SUTRA



The unexcelled, most profound, and exquisitely
wondrous Dharma,

Is difficult to encounter throughout hundreds of
thousands of millions of *kalpas*.

Since we are now able to see, hear, receive and
retain it,

May we comprehend the true meaning of the
Tathagata.



THE YULAN BOWL SUTRA AND
COLLECTION OF FILIAL PIETY SUTRAS



Yulan Bowl Sutra

Translated by the Western Jin Tripitaka Master
Dharmaraksa from Yuezhi

Thus have I heard: Once the Buddha was in the kingdom of Sravasti, in Jetevana, Anathapindika's Park. The great Maudgalyayana had just obtained the six numinous powers and desiring to liberate his parents in repayment for their kindness in nursing and feeding him, he used his eye of enlightenment to observe the worlds. He saw that his deceased mother was reborn among the hungry ghosts, and never seeing drink or food, her skin clung to her bones. Maudgalyayana was grieved, and filled his bowl with rice to go feed his mother. When his mother obtained the bowl of rice her left hand shielded it as her right hand scooped up the rice. The food had not yet entered her mouth before it transformed into fiery coals, thus she could not have the food. Maudgalyayana, in a great howl of grief, wailed and wept. He hurriedly returned to address the Buddha, reporting to him these events in full.

孟蘭盆經

西晉月氏三藏竺法護譯

聞如是。一時佛在舍衛國祇樹給孤獨園。大
目乾連始得六通。欲度父母報乳哺之恩。即
以道眼觀視世間。見其亡母生餓鬼中。不見
飲食。皮骨連立。目連悲哀。即鉢盛飯往餉其
母。母得鉢飯。便以左手障飯。右手搏飯。食未
入口。化成火炭。遂不得食。目連大叫悲號。啼
泣。馳還白佛。具陳如此。

佛言。汝母罪根深結。非汝一人力所奈何。汝
雖孝順。聲動天地。天神地神。邪魔外道。道士
四天王神。亦不能奈何。當須十方眾僧威神
之力。乃得解脫。吾今當為汝說救濟之法。令
一切難。皆離憂苦。罪障消除。佛告目蓮。十方
眾僧。於七月十五日。僧自恣時。當為七世父
母。及現在父母。厄難中者。具飯百味。五果。汲
灌。盆器。香油。錠燭。床敷。臥具。盡世甘美。

The Buddha said, “The roots of your mother’s offenses are so deep and knotted that it is beyond your power as a single person to do anything. Although the echoes of your filial obedience have shaken the heavens and earth, the heavenly spirits, earthly spirits, evil demons, heterodox practitioners, Daoist masters, and the Four Heavenly King-Deities are not able to do anything. You must have the strength of the numinous powers of the monastic assembly from the ten directions to obtain her liberation.”

“I will now, on your behalf, teach the means for her rescue, so as to allow all her troubles to be completely alleviated, and to eliminate her grief, suffering, and offensive hindrances.”

The Buddha told Maudgalyaya, “On the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, when the monastic assembly from the ten directions release themselves in confession, you should, for the sake of seven generations of parents, as well as your current parents and those under duress and difficulty, gather food of a hundred flavors, five kinds of fruits, pots for drawing and pouring water, incense, oil, lamps, candles, bedding, mattresses – all that is sweet and beautiful in the entire world

以著盆中。供養十方大德眾僧。當此之日。一切聖眾。或在山間禪定。或得四道果。或樹下經行。或六通自在。教化聲聞緣覺。或十地菩薩大人。權現比丘。在大眾中。皆同一心受鉢和羅飯。具清淨戒聖眾之道。其德汪洋。其有供養此等自恣僧者。現在父母七世父母六種親屬。得出三途之苦。應時解脫衣食自然。若復有人。父母現在者。福樂百年。

– and place them in a bowl to make offerings to the ten directions of the vastly virtuous monastic assembly.”

“On this day all of the sagely assembly, whether those meditating in the mountains, or who have attained the fruits on the four-fold path, or who are walking in meditation under the trees, or those freed by the six numinous powers, or those who edify others, or *sravakas*, or *pratyekabuddhas*, or those great beings, the bodhisattvas of the tenth *bhumi*, who provisionally manifest as *bhiksus* – all of those among the great assembly – will together, with a single mind, receive the *patra* of rice. Those who are replete with the pure precepts and the Way of the sagely assembly all have virtue as vast as the ocean.”

“If there are offerings made like this when the *sangha* release themselves in confession then your current parents, parents of seven generations, and six kinds of relatives will all obtain release from the sufferings of the three mires and they should be at that time liberated, clothed, and fed spontaneously. If, furthermore, there are parents of a person who are living, they will have a hundred years of fortune and joy.

若已亡七世父母生天自在化生入天華光
受無量快樂時佛敕十方眾僧皆先為施主
家咒願七世父母行禪定意然後受食初受
盆時先安在佛塔前眾僧咒願竟便自受食
爾時目連比丘及此大會大菩薩眾皆大歡
喜而目連悲啼泣聲釋然除滅是時目連其
母即於是日得脫一劫餓鬼之苦爾時目連
復白佛言

If they are already deceased, then parents of seven generations will be reborn in the heavens. They will be freely reborn through transformation, entering into the light of heavenly flowers and receiving immeasurable joy.”

Then the Buddha directed the monastic assembly from the ten directions to all first recite mantras and make vows on behalf of the donor's family and seven generations of parents, and practice meditation by settling their thoughts. Only afterwards may they receive the food. In the beginning, when they receive the bowls, they should first place them in front of a Buddha pagoda, and when the monastic assembly has finished reciting the mantras and making vows may they then receive the food.

At that time, Bhiksu Maudgalyayana and this vast assembly of great bodhisattvas all greatly rejoiced. The sounds of Maudgalyayana's grieved weeping dissipated and dispelled. Then, on that day, Maudgalyayana's mother was liberated from a *kalpa* of suffering as a hungry ghost.

At that time Maudgalyayana further addressed the Buddha saying,...

弟子所生父母得蒙三寶功德之力眾僧威
神之力故若未來世一切佛弟子行孝順者
亦應奉此孟蘭盆救度現在父母乃至七世
父母為可爾不佛言大善快問我正欲說汝
今復問善男子若有比丘比丘尼國王太子
王子大臣宰相三公百官萬民庶人行孝慈
者皆應為所生現在父母過去七世父母於
七月十五日佛歡喜日僧自恣日以百味飲
食安孟蘭盆中施十方自恣僧

“The parents who give birth to me, your disciple, are able to receive the meritorious power of the Three Jewels because of the strength of the numinous powers of the monastic assembly. In future ages, may all of the Buddha’s disciples who practice filial obedience offer these *yulan* bowls to rescue their current parents as well as their parents from seven generations, or may they not?”

The Buddha replied, “A greatly pleasing question. I was just going to speak about what you now inquired. My good son, if there are *bhiksus*, *bhiksunis*, kings of countries, princes, sons of kings, great ministers, chancellors, nobility of the three grades, officials in the hundreds, citizens by the thousands, or any commoners who practice filial compassion, then for the sake of their current parents and their parents of the past seven generations, on fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month – the day on which buddhas rejoice and the *sangha* release themselves in confession – they should all place the drinks and food of a hundred flavors into *yulan* bowls and offer them to the *sangha* of the ten directions who have released themselves in confession.”

乞願便使現在父母壽命百年無病無一切
苦惱之患。乃至七世父母離餓鬼苦。得生天
人中福樂無極。佛告諸善男子善女人。是佛
弟子修孝順者。應念念中常憶父母供養。乃
至七世父母。年年七月十五日。常以孝順慈
憶所生父母。乃至七世父母。為作盂蘭盆施
佛及僧。以報父母長養慈愛之恩。若一切佛
弟子。應當奉持是法。爾時目連比丘。四輩弟
子。

“The pleas and vows will cause the lifespan of their current parents to be a hundred years without sickness and without any misfortune of suffering or distress. Even the parents of seven generations will be freed from the suffering of being hungry ghosts and will be able to be reborn among heavenly beings of limitless fortune and joy.”

The Buddha told all of the virtuous men and women, “These disciples of the Buddha who cultivate filial obedience should, with every moment, constantly think of their parents and make offerings for them, as well as their parents from seven generations. Every year on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, out of filial obedience and compassionate regard for the parents that gave birth to them and for their parents of seven generations, they should always make *yulan* bowls and offer them to the Buddha and *sangha* in order to repay the kindness of those parents who have reared, nourished, and cared for them. All of the disciples of the Buddha should uphold this Dharma.”

At that time, Bhikṣu Maudgalyayana and the four classes of disciples,...

聞佛所說歡喜奉行。
盂蘭盆經

...upon hearing what the Buddha had said, rejoiced in, honored, and practiced it. ❀

Yulan Bowl Sutra

父
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祇
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孤
獨
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父
母
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大
增
益
乳
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隨
時
將
育
四
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右
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負
父
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處

後漢安息國三藏安世高譯



Sutra on the Difficulty of Repaying the Kindness of Parents



Translated by the Later Han Tripitaka
Master An Shigao from Parthia

Thus have I heard: Once, the Bhagavat was in the city of Sravasti, in Jetavana, Anathapindika's Park. At that time, the World-Honored One told all of the *bhiksus*, "Fathers and mothers have been of great benefit to their sons by breast-feeding and nurturing them, and rearing them in accord with the seasons so that the four great elements can be fully established in them. Yet, if using his right shoulder a son carried his father and with his left shoulder he carried his mother for thousands of years even while they defecate on his back, and did so without any resentment toward his parents, then this son has still not sufficiently repaid the kindness of his parents."

"If parents do not have faith, then instruct them in belief so they may obtain a peaceful and secure state. If they are without the precepts, then provide education on the precepts so they may obtain a peaceful and secure state.

不聞使聞教授獲安隱處。慳貪教令好施。勸
樂教授。獲安隱處。無智慧教令黠慧。勸樂教
授。護安隱處。如是信如來至真等正覺。明行
成為善逝。世間解。無上士。道法御天人師。號
佛世尊。教信法教授。獲安隱處。諸法甚深。現
身獲果。義味甚深。如是智者。明通此行。教令
信聖眾。

If they have not heard the Dharma, then educate them to listen so they may obtain a peaceful and secure state. If they are greedy, instruct them in delightful generosity by encouraging and teaching them, so they may obtain a peaceful and secure state. If they are without wisdom, instruct them in wisdom by encouraging and teaching them so they may obtain a peaceful and secure state.”

“Thus believe in the Tathagata, the Utmost True One, the One of Equinimious Proper Awakening, the One Accomplished in Wisdom and Conduct, the Well-Gone One, the Comprehender of the World, the Unexcelled One, the Trainer in the Way of the Dharma, the Teacher of *Devas* and Humans. These are names of the Buddha, the World-Honored One.”

“Instruct your parents to believe in the Dharma, educating them so they may obtain a peaceful and secure state. The Dharma is extremely profound, yet one can obtain fruits in this life. Its essential meaning is extremely profound, and thus those who are wise have penetrating insight into these practices.”

“Instruct your parents to believe in the sagely assembly.

父母恩難報經

如來聖眾甚清淨行直不曲常和合法法成就戒成就三昧成就智慧成就解脫成就脫見慧成就所謂聖眾四雙八輩是謂如來聖眾最尊最貴當尊奉敬仰是世間無上福田如是諸子當教父母行慈諸比丘有二子所生子所養子是謂比丘有二子故諸比丘當學所生子口出法味如是諸比丘當作是學爾時諸比丘聞佛所說歡喜奉行

The Tathagata's sagely assembly is extremely pure in conduct. It is upright and unbending, always harmonious and is fully established in the methods of Dharma, precepts, *samadhis*, wisdom, liberation, and liberating insightful wisdom. What is called the sagely assembly is the four pairs of eight practitioners. Therefore, those who are called the Tathagata's sagely assembly are the most honored and the most valuable. You should honor and revere this field of merit which is unexcelled in this world."

"Thus, all sons should instruct their parents to practice compassion. All *bhiksus* have two "children", the one who gave life to them, and the one who nurtured them. Therefore they are called '*bhiksus* with two "children".'

"For this reason all *bhiksus* should learn from those who gave life to them and speak to them about the essence of the Dharma. Thus, all *bhiksus* should practice this teaching."

At that time, when all of the *bhiksus* had heard what the Buddha had said, they rejoiced in, honored and practiced it. ❀

Sutra on the Difficulty of Repaying the Kindness of Parents

父
母
恩
重
經
 如是我聞。一時佛在王舍城耆闍崛山中。與
 大菩薩摩訶薩及聲眷屬俱。亦與比丘比丘
 尼。優婆塞。優婆夷。一切諸天。人民。及天龍鬼
 神。皆來集會。一心聽佛說法。瞻仰尊顏。目不
 暫捨。佛言。人生在世。父母為親。非父不生。非
 母不育。是以寄託母胎。懷身十月。歲滿月充。
 母子俱顯。生墮草上。父母養育。臥則蘭車。父
 母懷抱。和和弄聲。含笑未語。飢時須食。非母
 不哺。



Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents



Thus have I heard: Once, the Buddha was in the city of Rajagrha, on Mount Grdhrakuta with a following of great bodhisattva *mahasattvas* and *sravakas*, along with *bhiksus*, *bhiksunis*, *upasakas*, *upasikas*, and all kinds of *devas*, humans, *nagas*, ghosts, and spirits who came to assemble and meet. Whole-heartedly they listened to the Buddha speak the Dharma, and while gazing up at the honorable countenance of the Tathagata their eyes did not leave him for a moment.

The Buddha said, "People are born into the world with a father and mother as their parents. Without the father there is no birth, and without the mother there would be no rearing. Therefore, one depends on the mother, whose womb carries a child for ten lunar months. When the term is full, the child appears to the mother as he is delivered on top of the grass. The parents nurture and rear him, laying him in a crib or holding and embracing him. Goo-ing and gaa-ing, they make playful noises as the child smiles, unable to speak."

"When the child is hungry he must eat, yet without the mother there is no feeding.

渴時須飲，非母不乳。母中飢時，吞苦吐甘。推乾就濕，非義不親。非母不養，慈母養兒，去離蘭車。十指甲中，食子不淨。應各有八斛四斗。計論母恩，昊天罔極。嗚呼慈母，云何可報。阿難白佛言：世尊云：何可報其恩？唯願說之。佛告阿難：汝諦聽，善思念之。吾當為汝分別解說。父母之恩，昊天罔極。云何若有孝順慈孝之子，能為父母作福造經。

When the child is thirsty he must drink, yet without the mother there is no nursing. Even when the mother is hungry, she will swallow the bitter food and share the sweet, or place the child in the dry spots while taking the wet ones herself. Without these responsibilities she would not be acting as a parent. Without the mother there would be no nurturing, yet the compassionate mother nurtures the child. When taking him from the crib she will get lodged in her ten finger nails food particles and filth of the child when changing him. Each child must have eighty-four pecks of his mother's milk. This is what is discussed as the kindness of the mother, which is as vast as the expanses of heaven. Alas! How are we able to repay our compassionate mothers?"

Ananda addressed the Buddha saying, "World-Honored One, how are we able to repay their kindness? I only hope you will explain it."

The Buddha told Ananda, "Listen attentively and consider this well. I will explain it in detail for you. The kindness of parents is as vast as the expanses of heaven. Yet if there is a filial, obedient, and loving son who is able, on behalf of his parents, to make merit and reproduce sutras,...

或以七月十五日能造佛槃盂蘭盆獻佛及
 僧得果無量能報父母之恩若復有人書寫
 此經流布世人受持讀誦當知此人報父母
 恩父母云何可報但父母至於行來東西鄰
 里井灶³碓磨不時還家我兒家中啼哭憶我
 即來還家其兒遙見我來或在蘭車搖頭弄
 腦或復曳腹隨行嗚呼向母母為其子曲身
 下就長舒兩手拂拭塵土

2 槃 ≡ 𠬞 (S. 0149)

3 灶 ≡ 竈 (S. 0149)

4 十億母。母即心驚。兩乳汁出。即知家中我兒... (S. 0149)

5 我 ≡ 母 (S. 0149)

...or is able to perform the Buddhist offering of *yulan* bowls on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month donating to the Buddha and the *sangha*, then the fruits he obtains will be immeasurable, and he will be able to repay the kindness of his parents.”

“Furthermore, if there are people who write this sutra and circulate it among the people of the world who receive, retain, read and recite it, then you should know that these people have repaid the kindness of their parents. How is this able to repay your parents?”

“Still, when parents go out to all parts of the village, including the well, stove, or mill they always return to the house. When my child is at home crying thinking of his mother, the mother’s heart will suddenly becomes agitated and her two breasts will secrete milk, as she knows ‘My child is at home thinking of me.’ She then will return to the house and her child may see his mother coming from afar. If in the crib, he may shake his head and bounce around or may even crawl on his belly to go where she is walking, crying out in the direction of his mother. The mother will bend over for her child, extending her two hands to wipe away the grime and dirt.

鳴和其口開懷出乳以乳與之母見兒歡兒
 見母喜二情恩悲親愛慈重莫復二歲三歲
 弄意始行於其食時非母不知父母行來值
 他座席或得餅肉不噉輟味懷挾來歸向其
 與子十來九得恒常歡喜一過不得憐啼伴
 哭憐子不孝必有五適孝子不懷必有慈順
 遂至長大朋友相隨梳頭摩髮欲得好衣覆
 蓋身體弊衣破故父母自著

Cooing with her mouth she opens her blouse, and takes out her breast to nurse him.”

“When the mother sees the child, she is joyous, and when the child sees the mother, he is jubilant. The two feel kindness, compassion, intimacy and love for each other. This love is so strong, it is like nothing else.”

“At two or three years old, the child toys with ideas and begins to walk. Without the mother, the child would not know the appropriate time to eat. The parents may go out to a neighbor’s house and sometimes have cakes and meat, but they will not eat or even taste them and will carry them back to give to their child. Nine times out of ten the child will be consistently pleased, yet the one time he does not get anything, he will plaintively whine and pretend to cry. Whining children are not filial, they possess the five disgraces. Filial children do not whine, they must be loving and obedient.”

“As he grows older, the child will make friends with those around him. He will comb his head and fix his hair and want to have nice clothing to cover his body. The parents will wear the worn-out and tattered clothing themselves,...

新好綿帛先與其子。至於行來官私急疾傾
 心南北。逐子東西。橫上其頭。既索妻婦得他
 子女。父母轉疏。私房屋室共相語樂。父母年
 高氣力衰老。終朝至暮不來借問。惑復父孤
 母寡。獨守空房。猶如客人。寄止他舍。常無恩
 愛。復無濡被。寒苦辛厄難遭之。甚年老色衰
 多饒蟣虱。夙夜不臥。長呼歎息。何罪宿愆生
 此不孝之子。

7 橫上其頭 ⇨ 橫簪上頭 (S. 0149)

8 惑 ⇨ 或 (S. 0149)

9 濡 ⇨ 濡 (S. 0149)

...while the newest and nicest cottons and silks will first be given to their child. When he finally goes out for business or private affairs his mind is everywhere, thus his parents try to chase him all around, disheveling the hair on their heads.”

“Once having found a wife, she will bear him children, while the parents will become neglected as the new family speaks happily with each other in their private rooms. As the years go by the parents’ vital strength weakens as they age, yet, from morning to night, their son does not come to inquire after them.”

“Or, furthermore, the father might be widowed, or the mother a widower, off alone staying in an empty house, as if only a traveller stopping by in someone else’s home. Always without kind love and even without clothes to cover them from the cold, they encounter many hardships and difficulties. When they are really old, their complexion fades and they have many lice. From morning to night they cannot sleep, and with a prolonged exhale they sigh saying, ‘What crimes or mistakes from a past life were committed to have given birth to such an unfilial son?’”

或時喚呼。瞋目驚怒。¹⁰歸兒罵詈。低頭含笑。妻復不孝子。復五適。夫妻和合同。作五逆。彼時喚呼。急疾取使。十喚九違。盡不從順。罵詈瞋恚。不如早死。強在地上。父母聞之。悲哭懊惱。流淚雙下。啼哭目腫。汝初小時。非吾不長。但吾生汝。不如本無。佛告阿難。若善男子善女人。能為父母受持。讀誦書寫。父母恩重大乘。摩訶般若波羅蜜經。一句一偈。一逕耳目者。所有五逆重罪。悉得消滅。

“Sometimes when they call on their son he glares in surprising anger, as the wife and son scold them, with their heads lowered, smirking. The wife is also an unfilial child. Furthermore, possessing the five disgraces, the husband and wife jointly practice the five heinous acts. Sometimes the son will call out, and his parents will immediately take notice, but nine time out of ten the son will refuse their calls. In the end he is not obedient.”

“He will scold them in a rage saying, ‘Why will you not die soon, instead of stubbornly remaining on this earth?’ When the parents hear this they cry in misery and are in agony. Tears pouring out from their eyes, they cry until their eyes are swollen and say, ‘When you were small, if it were not for us you would not have grown. We gave birth to you, yet perhaps we should have never had you.’”

The Buddha told Ananda, “If virtuous men and women are able, on behalf of their parents, to receive, retain, read, recite, record or write one line or verse from this Mahayana *maha-prajnaparamita* sutra on the profound kindness of parents with it passing only once through their ears or by their eyes, then all of the five heinous acts and grave offenses will be fully eradicated,...

永盡無餘。常得見佛聞法。速得解脫。阿難從
座而起。偏袒右肩。長跪合掌。前白佛言。世尊
此經云何名之。云何奉持。佛告阿難。此經名
父母恩重經。若有一切眾生。能為父母作福
造經。燒香請佛禮拜。供養三寶。或飲食眾僧。
當知是人。能報父母其恩。帝釋梵王諸天人
民。一切眾生。聞經歡喜。發菩薩心。嗥哭動地。
淚下如雨。五體投地。信受。

...being completely exhausted without remainder. Consistently seeing buddhas and hearing the Dharma, they will quickly be liberated.”

Ananda rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, kneeled, and joined his palms. In front of the Buddha he addressed him saying, “World-Honored One, what should this sutra be called? How should it be preserved?”

The Buddha told Ananda, “This sutra is to be called the *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents*. If all sentient beings are able, they should, on behalf of their parents, make merit, reproduce sutras, burn incense, petition the Buddha, pay reverential obeisance to him, and make offerings to the Three Jewels, or give drinks and food to the *sangha*. You should know that these people are able to repay the kindness of their parents.

When Sakra, the King of the Brahma Heavens, and all of the *devas*, humans and every sentient being heard this sutra they rejoiced and developed the bodhisattva mind. Their cries shook the earth and their tears fell like rain as they threw the five parts of their bodies to the ground in faithful acceptance,...

頂禮佛足歡喜奉行。
父母恩重經

...fully prostrating at the feet of the Buddha.
Rejoicing, they honored and practiced this
teaching. ❀

Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents

父母恩重難報經
姚秦三藏法師鳩摩羅什譯
如是我聞，一時佛在舍衛國祇樹給孤獨園，
與大比丘二千五百人，菩薩摩訶薩三萬八
千人俱。爾時，世尊引領大眾，直往南行，忽見
路邊聚骨一堆。爾時，如來向彼枯骨，五體投
地，恭敬禮拜。阿難合掌白言：世尊！如來是三
界大師，四生慈父，眾人歸敬，以何因緣禮拜
枯骨？佛告阿難：汝等雖是吾上首弟子，出家
日久，

 Sutra on the Difficulty in Repaying the
Profound Kindness of Parents 

Translated by the Yao Qin Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva

Thus have I heard: Once, the Buddha was in the Kingdom of Sravasti, in Jetavana, Anathapindika's Park with a great gathering of two thousand five hundred *bhiksus* and thirty eight thousand bodhisattva *mahasattvas* in all. At that time, the World-Honored One, leading the great assembly, walked directly toward the south and unexpectedly saw a pile of bones gathered on the side of the road.

At that time, the Tathagata threw the five parts of his body to the ground in reverential obeisance to the withered bones.

Ananda joined his palms and addressed the Buddha saying, "World-Honored One, you are the great teacher of the triple realm, the compassionate father of the four kinds of birth, and the one whom the masses of people turn to in reverence. Under what causes and conditions do you pay reverential obeisance to these dried up bones?"

The Buddha told Ananda, "Although you and the others are my chief disciples, having renounced the family life a long time ago,...

知事未廣。此一堆枯骨，或是我前世祖先，多生父母。以是因緣，我今禮拜佛告阿難。汝今將此一堆枯骨，分做二分。若是男骨，色白且重；若是女骨，色黑且輕。阿難白言：世尊，男人在世，衫帶鞋帽，裝束嚴好，一望知為男子之身。女人在世，多塗脂粉，或薰蘭麝，如是裝飾，即得知是女流之身。而今死後，白骨一般，教弟子等，如何認得。佛告阿難：若是男子，在世之時，入於伽藍，聽講經律，禮拜三寶。

...yet your knowledge of things is not comprehensive. This pile of withered bones could be the ancestors of my previous life or my parents of many past rebirths. It is under these causes and conditions that I now pay reverential obeisance.”

The Buddha told Ananda, “You will now divide this pile of withered bones into two parts. If they are the bones of men then they will be white in color and heavy. If they are the bones of women they will be black in color and light.”

Ananda addressed the Buddha saying, “World-Honored One, while men are alive they adorn themselves in elegance with shirts, belts, shoes, and hats so that from one far away glance anyone could know that they are men. While women are alive they often apply cosmetics and powders, and daub on perfumes and musks for adornment so that anyone will immediately know that they are women. Now however, after death, their white bones are all of a similar sort. Teach us, your disciples, how we can discern between them.

The Buddha told Ananda, “If these men, during their lives, enter into a *sangharama* and listen to lectures on the sutras and *vinayas*, pay reverential obeisance to the Three Jewels,...

念佛名號，所以其骨，色白且重。世間女人，短於智力，易溺於情，生男育女，認為天職。每生一孩，賴乳養命，乳由血變，每孩飲母八斛，四斗甚多白乳，所以憔悴，骨現黑色，其量亦輕。阿難聞語，痛割於心，垂淚悲泣，白言：世尊！母之恩德，云何報答？佛告阿難：汝今諦聽，我當為汝分別解說。母胎懷子，凡經十月，甚為辛苦。在母胎時，第一月中，如草上珠，朝不保暮，

...and recite the names of the buddhas, then their bones will be white in color and heavy. Women of this world lack the strength of wisdom and are easily drowned with passion. Giving birth to and rearing their sons and daughters is regarded as their heavenly duty. The life of every single child born relies on the nourishment of a mother's milk. The milk is transformed from the mother's blood, and every child drinks a lot – up to eighty-four pecks of the mother's white milk. Therefore the mother becomes worn and haggard, and her bones appear black in color and light in weight.”

Once Ananda heard these words pain cut into his heart, and shedding tears as he sorrowfully wept he addressed the Buddha saying, “World-Honored One, how can one repay the kind virtue of mothers?”

The Buddha told Ananda, “Now listen attentively and I will explain it for you in detail. The mother's womb carries the child, which normally gestates for ten lunar months. This is extremely burdensome and strenuous for her.”

“During the first month in the mother's womb the embryo is like dew atop grass which may not last from morning until night,...

晨聚將來，午消散去。母懷胎時，第二月中，恰
 如凝酥。母懷胎時，第五月
 胎時，第四月中，稍作人形。母懷胎時，第五月
 中，兒在母腹，生有五胞。何者？為五頭，為一胞，
 兩肘，兩膝，各為一胞，共成五胞。母懷胎時，第
 六月，中，兒在母腹，六精齊開，何者？為六，眼為
 一精，耳為二精，鼻為三精，口為四精，舌為五
 精，意為六精。母懷胎時，第七月中，兒在母腹，五
 生成骨節，三百六十，及生毛孔，八萬四千。母
 懷胎時，第八月中，出生，意，智，以及九竅。

...as it collects in the early morning, yet disappears by noon.”

“During the second month of pregnancy the embryo is just like congealed curd.”

“During the third month of pregnancy it is like coagulated blood.”

“During the fourth month of pregnancy it partially assumes a human form.”

“During the fifth month of pregnancy the fetus inside the mother’s belly develops five limbs. What are these five? The head is one limb while the two elbows and two knees are also one limb each. Together they complete the five limbs.”

“During the sixth month of pregnancy the fetus in the mother’s belly forms the six sense organs. What are these six? The eyes are one sense organ, the ears are the second, the nose is the third, the mouth is the fourth, the tongue is the fifth, and the mind is the sixth.”

“During the seventh month of pregnancy the fetus inside the mother’s belly develops the three hundred and sixty bones and joints and develops the eighty-four thousand hair pores.”

“During the eighth month of pregnancy the fetus develops the intellect and the nine orifices.

母懷胎時，第九月中，兒在母腹，吸收食物，所
 出各質，桃梨蒜果，五穀精華，其母身中生臟
 向下，熟臟向上，喻如地面，有山聳出，山有三
 名，一號須彌，二號業山，三號血山。此設喻山，
 一度崩來，化為一條，母血凝成胎兒食料。母
 懷胎時，第十月中，孩兒全體一一完成，方乃
 降生。若是決為孝順之子，擎拳合掌，安詳出
 生，不損傷母，母無所苦。倘兒決為五逆之子，
 破損母胎，扯母心肝，踏母跨骨，如千刀攪，又
 髻鬚似萬刀攢心。如斯重苦，出生此兒，

“During the ninth month of pregnancy the fetus inside the mother’s belly absorbs the sustenance provided by food, such as the essential nutrients from peaches, pears, garlic, fruits, or the five grains. Inside the mother’s body, where the gastric organs extend downward and the intestinal organs extend upward, it is like the surface of the earth. There is mountain rising up which has three names: Sumeru, Karma Mountain, and Blood Mountain. This metaphorical mountain will collapse one time and transform into a single stream where the mother’s blood will coagulate to become the food for the fetus.”

“During the tenth month of pregnancy, when every single part of the child’s body is completely formed, it will descend to be born. If this child is to be deemed filial and obedient then it will be born peacefully with hands raised and palms joined, without harming the mother or causing her any suffering. If this child is to be deemed capable of the five heinous acts he will injure the mother’s uterus, tearing at her heart and liver, and trampling on her pelvic bones. Such profound suffering of giving birth to this child is like the flurry of a thousand knives, or even like ten thousand blades piercing at her heart.”

更分晰言，尚有十恩：第一、懷胎守護恩；第二、臨產受苦恩；第三、生子忘憂恩；第四、咽苦吐甘恩；第五、迴乾就濕恩；第六、哺乳養育恩；第七、洗濯不淨恩；第八、遠行憶念恩；第九、深加體恤恩；第十、究竟憐愍恩。

第一、懷胎守護恩頌曰：
累劫因緣重，今來托胎母，月逾生五臟，
七七六精開。體重如山岳，動止劫風災。

“To explain this even more clearly there are still the ten kindnesses. The first is the kindness of carrying the fetus while guarding and protecting it. The second is the kindness of enduring the suffering of the approaching childbirth. The third is the kindness of forgetting the misery of childbirth. The fourth is the kindness of swallowing the bitter while sharing the sweet with the child. The fifth is the kindness of offering the dry spots to the child while taking the wet ones. The sixth is the kindness of breast-feeding and rearing. The seventh is the kindness of washing away the filth. The eighth is the kindness of missing the child who is travelling far away. The ninth is the kindness of deep sympathy for the child. The tenth is the kindness of utmost love for the child.”

1. A verse on the kindness of carrying the fetus while guarding and protecting it:

Causes and conditions are reinforced for many *kalpas* until the fetus now comes to be held in the mother's womb. After a few months the five limbs develop, and after seven periods of seven days the six sense organs form. The mother's body becomes heavy like a mountain, while her activity and rest feels like the windy devastation of the *kalpa*.

第二、羅衣都不掛，裝鏡惹塵埃。
臨產受苦恩，頌曰：

懷經十箇月，產難將欲臨，
日日似昏沈，將難惶怖述，
含悲告親族，惟懼死來侵，
第三、生子忘憂恩，頌曰：

慈母生兒日，五臟總開張，
血流似屠羊，生已聞兒健，
身心俱悶絕，
歡喜倍加常，

第四、咽苦吐甘恩，頌曰：
喜定悲還至，痛苦徹心腸。

She never wears any of her fine clothing, thus her dressing mirror is tarnished by dust and dirt.

2. A verse on the kindness of enduring the suffering of the approaching childbirth:

Pregnancy lasts for ten lunar months, and as the difficult labor draws near, every morning the mother is severely ill and every day she is faint and weak. Her distress and fear is difficult to express as anguished tears cover her breast lapel. Choking back sorrow, she tells her family that she is only afraid that death will overcome her.

3. A verse on the kindness of forgetting the misery of childbirth:

On the day the compassionate mother delivers the child her five organs are all extended open and her body and mind are completely exhausted as her blood flows like that from a slaughtered lamb. After the delivery, when she hears the child is healthy, her gleeful joy is many times more than normal, yet after her joy has settled her grief returns as painful sorrow pervades her heart and gut.

4. A verse on the kindness of swallowing the bitter while sharing the sweet with the child:

父母恩深重，
咽苦不顰眉。
但令孩兒飽，
第五迴乾就濕恩頌曰：
母願身投濕，
羅袖掩風寒。
但令孩兒穩，
第六哺乳養育恩頌曰：
慈母像大地，
嚴父配於天，
顧憐沒失時，
愛重情難忍，
恩深復倍悲，
吐甘無稍息，
將兒移就乾，
兩乳充饑渴，
恩憐恆廢枕，
寵弄纔能歡，
慈母不求安。

The kindness of parents is deeply profound while their care and sympathy is unending. The mother shares the sweet without the slightest hesitation, and swallows the bitter without knitted brow. Her love is so profound that her passions are difficult to endure. Her kindness is so deep, that it is many times that of her sorrow. Only wanting her child to be full, the compassionate mother never complains of her own hunger.

5. A verse on the kindness of offering the dry spots to the child while taking the wet ones:

The mother is willing to cast her body into the wetness so that the child can be moved to where it is dry. With her two breasts she satiates the child's hunger and thirst, and with her sleeve she covers him from the wind and cold. She is kind and sympathetic, as she constantly forgoes the pillow. Thus by favoring the child she is able to make him happy. Only wanting her child to be comfortable, the compassionate mother does not seek amenities.

6. A verse on the kindness of breast-feeding and rearing:

The compassionate mother is like the great earth and the stern father is like the heavens. One covers and the other supports,...

父娘恩亦然。不憎無怒目，不嫌手足攣，
誕腹親生子，終日惜兼憐。

第七、洗滌不淨恩頌曰：

本是芙蓉質，精神健且豐，眉分新柳碧，
臉色奪蓮紅。恩深摧玉貌，洗濯損盤龍，
只為憐男女，慈母改顏容。

第八、遠行憶念恩頌曰：

死別誠難忍，生離實亦傷，子出關山外，
母憶在他鄉。日夜心相隨，流淚數千行。

...thus the kindness is equally everywhere. The kindness of the father and mother is also thus. They do not glare in hatred or anger, and are not upset if the child has crippled hands or feet. From when in the belly to when the mother delivers the child and throughout the day, the parents care for and comfort their child.

7. A verse on the kindness of washing away the filth:

Originally, the mother was as pretty as a hibiscus flower, her spirit was strong and abounding, her eyebrows were both like fresh willow leaves, and her complexion surpassed that of a red lotus. Her kindness is so deep that she will mar her beautiful face and in washing away the child's filth she injures her hips and back. Solely acting to comfort her son or daughter, the compassionate mother will tarnish her appearance.

8. A verse on the kindness of missing the child who is travelling far away:

Separation in death is truly difficult to endure, yet separation in life is truly also painful. When the child travels beyond the passes and mountains, the mother laments in her village. Day and night her thoughts are with her child, as a thousand tears flow in a trail,...

如猿泣愛子，寸寸斷肝腸。
第九、深加體恤，恩頌曰：

父母恩情重，恩深報實難，子苦願代受，
兒勞母不安，聞道遠行去，憐兒夜臥寒，
男女暫辛苦，長使母心酸。
第十、究竟憐愍，恩頌曰：

父母恩深重，恩憐無歇時，起坐心相逐，
近遙意與隨，母年一百歲，常憂八十兒，
欲知恩愛斷，命盡始分離。

...like a monkey whimpering affectionately for its child. Bit by bit, this tears into her gut.

9. A verse on the kindness of deep sympathy for the child:

The concerned feelings of the parents are so profound and their kindness so deep, that it is truly difficult to repay. If the child suffers the mother is willing to endure it instead. If the child toils, the mother is uneasy. If she hears her child is on the road, traveling far away, she has sympathy for her child who will have to lay out in the cold at night. If the son or daughter has a moment's hardship, it causes sustained duress in the mother's heart.

10. A verse on the kindness of utmost love for the child:

The kindness of parents is deep and profound. Their concerned sympathy does not have a moment's rest. Whether active or at rest their hearts follow with their children, and whether near or far their thoughts are with them. Even when the mother's years reach one hundred, there is constant worry for her eighty-year-old child. Do you want to know when such kindness and love ends? It only begins to dissipate after the end of her life.

佛告阿難。我觀眾生。雖紹人品。心行愚蒙。不思爹娘。有大恩德。不生恭敬。忘恩背義。無有仁慈。不孝不順。阿娘懷子。十月之中。起坐不安。如擎重擔。飲食不下。如長病人。月滿生時。受諸痛苦。須臾產出。恐已無常。如殺豬羊。血流徧地。受如是苦。生得兒身。咽苦吐甘。抱持養育。洗濯不淨。不憚劬勞。忍寒忍熱。不辭辛苦。乾處兒臥。濕處母眠。

The Buddha told Ananda, “When I observe sentient beings, although they are reborn as human beings, their thoughts and actions are still foolish and ignorant. They are inconsiderate of their parents’ great kindness and virtue. They do not show reverence, they forget kindness, and they betray righteousness. They lack humane compassion, and are neither filial nor obedient.”

“During the ten months the mother is with child, when she arises or sits, she is discomforted as if lifting a heavy burden. She cannot keep down her food or drink, as if she is a chronically ill person. When the baby is full-term and it is the time for birth, the mother endures all kinds of pain and suffering, and in the moment of childbirth, she is fearful of her mortality. Like a slaughtered pig or sheep, the blood flows all over the ground. She endures suffering such as this.”

“Once the child is born the mother swallows the bitter and shares the sweet, embraces him, nurtures and rears him, and washes away his filth. She does not dread the labor and toil, and endures the cold and heat without complaining of her hardships. The child lays in the dry spots while she sleeps in the wet spots.

三年之中，飲母白血，嬰孩童子，乃至成年，教導禮義，婚嫁營謀，備求資業，携荷艱辛，懃苦百倍，不言恩惠。男女有病，父母驚憂，憂極生病，視同常事。子若病除，母病方愈。如斯養育，願早成人。及其長成，反為不孝。尊親與言，不知順從，應對無禮，惡眼相視，欺凌伯叔，打罵兄弟，毀辱親情，無有禮義。

For three years the child drinks the mother's "white milk-blood" and from infancy to childhood, and through to adulthood, they are taught manners and righteousness. Marriages are arranged, wealth is prepared, and a profession is sought. Parents take up this hardship, endeavoring and toiling a hundred times over, never speaking of their kindness and graciousness."

"If the son or daughter is ill, the parents become awfully worried, grieving to the extent that they may become ill themselves, and considering it a trivial matter. Only when the child's illness has been cured will the mother's sickness be alleviated. Like this the children are nurtured and reared, with the hope that they will soon become adults."

"Reaching their maturity, however, they become unfilial, as their respected parents may offer warnings, but the children do not know obedience or compliance. While having interactions, they lack manners and glare with an evil eye. They deceive and insult their uncles and hit and curse at their brothers. Ruining and abusing any familial sentiment, they are without manners or righteousness."

雖曾從學，不遵範訓，父母教令，多不依從，兄弟共言，每相違戾。出入來往，不啟尊堂，言行高傲，擅意為事。父母訓罰，伯叔語非，童幼憐愍，尊人遮護，漸漸成長，狼戾不調，不伏虧違，反生嗔恨，棄諸親友，朋附惡人，習久成性，認非為是。或被誘，逃往他鄉，違背爹娘，離家別眷。或因經紀，或為政行，荏苒因循，便為婚娶，由斯留礙，久不還家。

“Although they are educated, they do not observe rules or training. They often will not comply with their parents’ instructions or commands. Talking with their brothers, they are defiant and rebellious with every encounter. In coming and going they do not inform their father or mother. Their speech and acts are haughty and arrogant, and they manage their affairs with an impulsive mentality. As to their parents’ admonitions and punishments and their uncles’ warnings, these children are immature and are to be pitied, thus elders must protect and defend them. As they gradually become older they become fiercely rebellious and obstinate. They do not hide their defiance and instead become resentful. Rejecting their families and friends these children befriend evil people. Before long bad habits become natural, and they recognize wrong as right.”

“Some may be tempted by others to run away to another village, thus betraying their parents by leaving home and separating from their family.”

“Some may become brokers or civil servants, and in the course of time become tied down, or they may marry and due to this are detained for a long time, never to return home.”

或在他鄉，不能謹慎，被人謀害，橫事鉤牽，枉
被刑責，牢獄枷鎖，或遭病患，厄難縈纏，囚苦
饑羸，無人看待，被人嫌賤，委棄街衢，因此命
終，無人救治，膨脹爛壞，日暴風吹，白骨飄零。
寄他鄉土，便與親族，歡會長乖，違背慈恩，不
知二老，永懷憂念，或因啼泣，眼暗目盲，或因
悲哀，氣咽成病，或緣憶子，衰變死亡，作鬼抱
魂，不曾割捨。

“Some in other villages may not be able to be cautious as they are plotted against and injured by others and lured into evil schemes. They may be wrongly punished and convicted, being placed in jails, cangues, or shackles.”

“Some may encounter disease and misfortune, be entwined in adversity and hardship, or be captive to the sufferings of starvation and emaciation, without others caring for or treating them. Being detested and scorned by others, they are abandoned in the streets and due to this their lives will end since no one will rescue or treat them. Their bodies will swell and decay, and then desiccated by the sun and blown away by the wind, their white bones will disintegrate and scatter throughout the dirt of that other village. To have a joyous reunion with the family is now forever impossible.”

“By betraying compassionate kindness the children will never know that their aged parents will eternally worry and lament over them. The parents’ eyes will become blind from weeping, their throats will become hoarse from mourning, and they will eventually weaken and die from constantly lamenting on the memory of their child. As ghosts they will cling to their child’s spirit, not once letting go.”

或復聞子，不崇學業，朋逐異端。無賴粗頑，好習無益。鬥打竊盜，觸犯鄉閭。飲酒樗蒲，姦非過失。帶累兄弟，惱亂爹娘。晨去暮還，不問尊親。動止寒溫，晦朔朝暮。永乖扶侍，安牀薦枕。並不知聞。參問起居，從此間斷。父母年邁，形貌衰羸。羞恥見人，忍受欺抑。或有父母寡，獨守空堂，猶若客人，寄居他舍，寒凍飢渴。

“Furthermore, some such children may not honor an education or profession, and may participate in outlandish activities. Villainous, vulgar, and mischievous, they enjoy a lifestyle that is unbeneficial, and by fighting and stealing they cause transgressions against the village. They drink alcohol and gamble while their debauchery is excessively negligent. Through implicating their brothers they further distress their parents. Leaving at dawn and returning at dusk, they never inquire about their respected parents. Throughout the month, from morning to night, they never attend to them to see if they need exercise or rest, or are too cold or hot. Moreover, they do not know to arrange their beds or offer them pillows. By being estranged like this they do not participate in, or inquire about, their parents’ daily life. As the years pass by for the parents, their appearance becomes withered and emaciated, and they are ashamed to see others, being left to endure deception and oppression.”

“Some have a father who might be widowed, or a mother who is a widower, living alone in an empty house, as if only a traveler staying in someone else’s home. Cold, hungry, and thirsty,...

曾不知聞。晝夜常啼，自嗟自歎，應奉甘旨，供養尊親。若輩妄人，了無是事，每作羞慚，畏人怪笑。或持財食，供養妻兒，忘厥疲勞，無避羞恥。妻妾約束，每事依從，尊長嗔呵，全無畏懼。或復是女，適配他人，未嫁之時，咸皆孝順。婚嫁已訖，不孝遂增。父母微瞋，即生怨恨。夫婿打罵，忍受甘心。

...no one has knowledge of them. From morning to night they constantly cry, groaning and sighing to themselves. Children should offer delicacies in support of their respected parents. If this generation of reckless children accomplishes nothing and every activity brings them shame, then their parent will be fearful that others will blame them and tease them.”

“Some, having wealth and food, will support their wives and children instead, forgetting their own weariness and toil, and will not try to avoid the shame in these acts. Due to their wives’ restrictions and control, they comply with every demand, yet when respected elders glare at and scold them, they are completely unfazed.”

“Some, furthermore, may be daughters who are matched with a man. When they are not yet married, they are totally filial and submissive, yet after marriage they become increasingly unfilial. With the parents’ slightest glare of displeasure, the daughter will foster resentment and enmity, yet she will endure her husband’s attacks and accusations with the sweetest temperament. Though her husband has a different surname and ancestry,...

異姓他宗，情深眷重。自家骨肉，卻以為疏。或隨夫婿，外郡他鄉，離別爹娘，無心戀慕，斷絕消息，音信不通，遂使爹娘，懸腸掛肚，刻不能安，宛若倒懸，每思見面，如渴思漿，慈念後人，無有休息。父母恩德，無量無邊，不孝之愆，卒難陳報。爾時，大眾聞佛所說，父母重恩，舉身投地，搥胸自撲，身毛孔中，悉皆流血，悶絕。躄地，良久，乃蘇，高聲唱言：

...her sentiment runs deep and her concern for him is profound. As for her own flesh-and-blood family, she retreats in neglect.”

“Some move with their husbands to other villages in foreign regions, separating from their parents. Neither thoughtful nor loving, they cut off all communication, either spoken or written. This causes their parents’ stomachs to knot in anxiety and twist in agitation, it is as if they are suspended upside-down. Their every thought is of seeing their daughter’s face, just as one who is thirsty and longs for a drink.”

“Their compassionate thoughts for their offspring are without rest. The kind virtue of parents is immeasurable and illimitable. The transgression of being unfilial makes it ultimately difficult to discuss.”

At that time, the great assembly who heard the Buddha explain the profound kindness of parents all threw their bodies to the ground, and began beating their chests and striking themselves until their pores all gushed with blood. Having fainted and fallen to the ground, it was a long while before they regained consciousness. In a loud voice they called out saying,...

苦哉，苦哉，痛哉，痛哉，我等今者深是罪人，從
 來未覺，冥若夜游，今悟知非，心膽俱碎，惟願
 世尊哀愍，救授云：何報得父母深恩？爾時，如
 來即以八種深重梵音，告諸大眾：汝等當知，
 我今為汝分別解說。假使有人，左肩擔父，右
 肩擔母，研皮至骨，穿骨至髓，遠須彌山，經百
 千劫，血流沒踝，猶不能報父母深恩。假使有
 人，遭飢饉劫，為於爹娘，盡其己身，鬻割碎壞，
 猶如微塵，經百千劫。

...“Such suffering! Such suffering! What agony! What agony! At present, we are all deep offenders. Never awakened, we were oblivious as if traveling in the night. Now that we have realized our faults, our hearts are entirely torn apart. We only hope the World-Honored One will sympathize and rescue us. How may we repay the deep kindness of our parents?”

At that time, the Tathagata told all in the great assembly by means of his eightfold deeply resonant Brahma voice, “All of you should know this. I will explain it for you in detail.”

“If there is a person whose left shoulder carries his father and right shoulder carries his mother until his skin is rubbed away to the bone, and his bone is bored through to the marrow, and who circumambulates Mount Sumeru for hundreds of thousands of *kalpas* until the blood pours down to his ankles, then that person would still not be able to repay the deep kindness of his parents.”

“If there is a person who, during a *kalpa* of starvation and famine, and for the sake of his parents, used his own body to slice off flesh, mincing it as fine as dust, and did so for hundreds of thousands of *kalpas*,...

猶不能報父母深恩，假使有人，為於爹娘，手執利刀，剜其眼睛，獻於如來，經百千劫，猶不能報父母深恩，假使有人，為於爹娘，亦以利刀，割其心肝，血流徧地，不辭痛苦，經百千劫，猶不能報父母深恩，假使有人，為於爹娘，百千刀戟，一時刺身，於自身中，左右出入，經百千劫，猶不能報父母深恩，假使有人，為於爹娘，百千劫，猶不能報父母深恩，假使有人，為於爹娘，打骨出髓。

...then that person would still not be able to repay the deep kindness of his parents.”

“If there is a person who, for the sake of his parents, held a sharp knife in hand and scooped out his eyes, offering them to the Tathagata, and did so for hundreds of thousands of *kalpas*, then that person would still not be able to repay the deep kindness of his parents.”

“If there is a person who, for the sake of his parents, also used a sharp knife to slice his heart and liver so that the blood would flow all over the ground, never expressing pain or suffering, and did so for hundreds of thousands of *kalpas*, then that person would still not be able to repay the deep kindness of his parents.”

“If there is a person who, for the sake of his parents, used hundreds of thousands of swords and spears to stab his body at the same time so from left to right they entered and exited his body, and did so for hundreds of thousands of *kalpas*, then that person would still not be able to repay the deep kindness of his parents.”

“If there is a person who, for the sake of his parents, smashed his bones until they spewed out marrow,...

經百千劫，猶不能報父母深恩。假使有人，為於爹娘，吞熱鐵丸，經百千劫，遍身焦爛，猶不能報父母深恩。爾時，大眾聞佛所說父母恩德，垂淚悲泣，痛割於心，諦思無計，同發聲言，深生慚愧，共白佛言：世尊，我等今者，深是罪人。云何報得父母深恩？佛告弟子：欲得報恩，為於父母書寫此經，為於父母讀誦此經，為於父母懺悔罪愆，為於父母供養三寶，為於父母受持齋戒，為於父母布施修福。

...and did so for hundreds of thousands of *kalpas*, then that person would still not be able to repay the deep kindness of his parents.”

“If there is a person who, for the sake of his parents, swallowed hot iron pellets, and did so for hundreds of thousands of *kalpas* until his entire body was scorched and charred, then that person would still not be able to repay the deep kindness of his parents.”

At that time, the great assembly who heard the Buddha explain the kind virtue of parents shed tears and sorrowfully wept as pain cut into their hearts. After carefully considering it, without machinations, they simultaneously cried out, and deeply expressing their humiliation they addressed the Buddha together saying, “World-Honored One, we presently are all deep offenders. How may we repay the deep kindness of our parents?”

The Buddha told his disciples, “If you wish to repay their kindness, then write out this sutra on behalf of your parents, or recite this sutra on their behalf, or repent your offenses and mistakes, or make offerings to the Three Jewels, or uphold the fast-day precepts, or practice giving to cultivate merit, all on their behalf.

若能如是，則得名為孝順之子，不做此行，是地獄人。佛告阿難：不孝之人，身壞命終，墮於阿鼻無間地獄。此大地獄，縱廣八萬由旬，四面鐵城，周圍羅網。其地亦鐵，盛火洞然，猛烈火燒，雷奔電爍。烱銅鐵汁，澆灌罪人，銅狗鐵蛇，恆吐煙火，焚燒煮炙，脂膏焦燃，苦痛哀哉，難堪。劍¹²忍。鈎竿槍槊，鐵鏘鐵串，鐵槌鐵戟，劍樹刀輪，如雨如雲，空中而下，或斬或刺，苦罰罪人。歷劫受殃，無時暫歇。

If able to do so, you will then be named a filial and obedient child. If you do not do these activities, then you will be a hell dweller.”

The Buddha told Ananda, “If a person is unfilial, when his body decays and his life ends, he will fall into Avici, the unremitting hell. This great hell is eighty thousands *yojanas* wide, with iron walls on four sides and covered by nets. The ground is also made of iron, and filled with flames that burn fiercely while thunder crashes and lightning flashes. Molten copper and iron are spattered and poured over the offenders while copper dogs and iron snakes constantly spew out smoke and fire which sear and roast their fleshy fat to a char. Such suffering and pain! It is so hard to endure and so difficult to bear all of the hooks, poles, spears, lances, iron bayonets, iron chains, iron mallets, iron halberds, and sword-leaved trees as well as wheels with knives which fall like rain from clouds in the air – all of them cutting or stabbing the offender in horrid punishment. Throughout *kalpas* he endures torture without time for even a temporary respite.”

又令更入餘諸地獄，頭戴火盆，鐵車碾身，縱橫駛過，腸肚分裂，骨肉焦爛，一日之中，千生萬死。受如是苦，皆因前身五逆不孝，故獲斯罪。爾時，大眾聞佛所說父母恩德，垂淚悲泣，告於如來：我等今者，云何報得父母深恩？佛告弟子：欲得報恩，為於父母造此經典，是真報得父母恩也。能造一卷，得見一佛；能造十卷，得見十佛；能造百卷，得見百佛。

“Furthermore, the offenders are forced to enter into the remaining hells where their heads are topped with fiery bowls while iron carriages crush their bodies, passing quickly over them both vertically and horizontally until their guts are ripped open and their bones and flesh are pulverized. Within a single day they die and are reborn tens-of-thousands of times. To endure of suffering like this is all a consequence of committing the five heinous acts or of being unfilial in a previous life. Therefore one will receive such punishment.”

At that time, the great assembly who heard the Buddha explain the kind virtue of parents shed tears and sorrowfully wept as they addressed the Tathagata saying, “How may we repay the deep kindness of our parents?”

The Buddha told his disciples, “If you wish to repay their kindness, then reproduce this sutra on behalf of your parents. This will truly repay your parents’ kindness. If you are able to reproduce one copy, then you will see one buddha. If you are able to reproduce ten copies, then you will see ten buddhas. If you are able to reproduce one hundred copies, then you will see one hundred buddhas.

能造千卷，得見千佛；能造萬卷，得見萬佛。是等善人，造經力故，是諸佛等，常來慈護，立使其人，生身父母，得生天上，受諸快樂，離地獄苦。爾時，阿難及諸大眾，阿修羅、迦樓羅、緊那羅、摩侯羅伽人、非人等、天、龍、夜叉、乾闥婆及諸小王，轉輪聖王，是諸大眾聞佛所言，身毛皆豎，悲泣哽咽，不能自裁，各發願言：我等從今盡未來際，寧碎此身，猶如微塵，經百千劫，誓不違於如來聖教，寧以鐵鈎拔出其舌，

If you are able to reproduce one thousand copies, then you will see one thousand buddhas. If you are able to reproduce ten thousand copies, then you will see ten thousand buddhas. Virtuous people like this, due to the power of reproducing sutras, will constantly and compassionately be protected by all buddhas who will cause such people, and their parents who birthed them, to be reborn in the heavens above, enjoying all kinds of happiness and bliss and free from the suffering of the hells.”

At that time, Ananda and the great assembly of *asuras*, *garudas*, *kinmaras*, *mahoragas*, humans, non-humans, *devas*, *nagas*, *yaksas*, *gandharvas*, as well as the lesser kings and wheel turning sage kings all had their bodily hairs stand on end when they heard the Buddha speak. Sorrowfully weeping and choked up, they could not stop themselves.

Each then set forth a vow saying, “From now until the end of time, we would rather grind our bodies into particles of dust over hundreds of thousands of *kalpas*, than disobey the sagely teaching of the Tathagata.”

“We would rather pull out our tongues with iron hooks, extending them for a *yojana*,...

長有由旬，鐵犁耕之，血流成河，經百千劫，誓不違於如來聖教，寧以百千刀輪於自身中，自由出入，誓不違於如來聖教，寧以鐵網周匝纏身，經百千劫，誓不違於如來聖教，寧以剄確斬碎其身，百千萬段，皮肉筋骨悉皆零落，經百千劫，終不違於如來聖教。爾時，阿難從於坐中安詳而起，白佛言：世尊，此經當何名之？云何奉持？佛告阿難：此經名為父母恩重難報經，以是名字，汝當奉持。

...so iron plows could cut through them causing blood to flow like a river over hundreds of thousands of *kalpas*, than disobey the sagely teaching of the Tathagata.”

“We would rather have hundreds of thousands of bladed wheels enter and exit through our bodies than disobey the sagely teaching of the Tathagata.”

“We would rather have our bodies wrapped and entwined in iron nets for hundreds of thousands of *kalpas* than disobey the sagely teaching of the Tathagata.”

“We would rather have our bodies cut, pounded, chopped, and ground into hundreds of thousands of tens-of-thousands of pieces so that our skin, flesh, muscle, and bone would completely disintegrate over hundreds of thousands of *kalpas*, than disobey the sagely teaching of the Tathagata.”

At that time, Ananda arose from his seat in complete serenity and addressed the Buddha saying, “World-Honored One, what should this sutra be called? How should it be preserved?”

The Buddha told Ananda, “This sutra is called the *Sutra on the Difficulty in Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents*. By this name should you preserve it.”

爾時，大眾、天人、阿修羅等，聞佛所說，皆大歡喜，信受奉行，作禮而退。❀

父母恩重難報經

At that time, the great assembly, *devas*, *asuras* and do forth, upon hearing what the Buddha said, all greatly rejoiced, faithfully receiving, honoring, and practicing it. Having made obeisance, they then withdrew. ❀

*Sutra on the Difficulty in Repaying the
Profound Kindness of Parents*



SUTRA INTRODUCTION



THE YULAN BOWL AND COLLECTION OF FILIAL PIETY SUTRAS

For well over a millennia Buddhists in China, both monastics and laypeople, have gathered annually during the full moon of the seventh lunar month to participate in activities of atonement and salvation.¹ Known today as the Ghost Festival, the popular event caps a month long period in which the deceased are released from the torturous conditions of the afterlife and are allowed to roam the earth to visit their families. The occasion is marked by celebration as firecrackers are lit, joss money and other paper goods are burned, elaborate feasts are held, and holy scriptures are recited. More poignantly, offerings are made to the Chinese Buddhist monastic community in the hopes of accumulating merit that will be dedicated to parents and ancestors so as to allow them to be reborn in a more fortuitous existence.

1 The date usually corresponds to the full moon in August according to the western Gregorian calendar.

Such a festival marks an intersection of multiple cultural influences, but none is perhaps more important to its popularity than filial piety 孝 – the devotion and dutiful reverence toward one’s parents.² This virtue had prominent mention in the Confucian *Analects* 論語 and by the 3rd century BCE had reached a full expression in a text of its own called the *Classic on Filial Piety* 孝經. This text was soon officially recognized by the state, becoming a main element in the educational system, and was eventually codified among the Thirteen Classics. Thus, filial piety was established as a cornerstone of social ethics in China and provided a moral and motivational thrust for many Chinese people to participate in practices honoring their ancestors, such as the Ghost Festival.

2 James C. H. Hsü argues the provocative claim that in pre-Confucian China sacrificial blood letting and euthanasia were wide-spread practices, suggesting that filial piety did not extend into the high antiquity of Chinese history. See his “Unwanted Children and Parents: Archaeology, Epigraphy, and the Myth of Filial Piety,” in *Sages and Filial Sons: Mythology and Archaeology in Ancient China*, eds. Julia Ching and R.W.L. Guisso. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991, pp. 23-41.

Early on in China, however, the perceived relationship between Buddhism and filial piety was very dissonant, if not outright antagonistic. When Buddhist monks first started arriving in China during the Later Han (25-220), they would often find themselves in ideological conflict with the Confucian ruling elite, and by the 4th century there was a fairly rigorous polemic against the activities of the *sangha* and the lifestyle of the monks.³ One of the charges frequently leveled against the Buddhists was that they did not hold filial piety as a sacred virtue, and would rebel against it by leaving their families to become monks⁴ and by shaving their heads. By not producing heirs and by harming the body – even the hair – given by parents, Buddhist monks were cast as immoral and

3 For an overview of the apologetic literature of this period see Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959, pp. 254-85.

4 The Sanskrit term for becoming a Buddhist monk, *pravrajyā*, literally “going forth,” or “to wander forth” was translated in Chinese as *chujia* 出家, literally “leaving the family.” In India the term stressed leaving behind worldly distraction and obstacles, while in China the polemicists stressed abandonment of the family.

irreverent towards their families, and numerous Chinese Buddhist apologetic treatises appeared trying to redefine and salvage the Buddhist stance on filial piety.⁵

This does not mean that Buddhists in India did not revere or provide for their parents.⁶ The Buddha

5 Mencius states, “There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no heir is the greatest of them” (4A:26). Adapted from James Legge, *The Works of Mencius*. New York: Dover Publications, 1990, p. 313. The *Classic on Filial Piety* states in the first chapter, “Our bodies—to every hair and bit of skin—are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them – this is the beginning of filial piety.” Adapted from James Legge, *The Sacred Books of the East: Texts of Confucianism*, Vol. III. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879, p. 466. Shaving the head was also a punishment for criminals serving hard labor, and newly released convicts were banned from visiting their ancestral tombs because of this. See Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, p. 281.

6 Many academic works have addressed this issue, notably John Strong, “Filial Piety and Buddhism: The Indian Antecedents to a ‘Chinese’ Problem,” in *Traditions in Contact and Change*, ed. Peter Slater and Donald Wiebe. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1983, pp. 171-86; Gregory Schopen, “Filial Piety and the Monk: A Question of ‘Sinicization’ Viewed from the Other Side,” *T’oung Pao* LXX (1984), pp. 110-126; and Guang Xing, “Filial Piety in Early

had directed his monastic followers to support (such as to feed and clothe) their parents in the monastic codes, and advised his lay followers to do the same in canonical sutras. The *Jatakas* extolled the virtues of filial children in popular stories, and epigraphical evidence supports that monks and nuns made donations in order to transfer merit to their parents. Indian Buddhist even made offerings of food to their deceased ancestors, which was very similar to the later practices in China during the Ghost Festival.⁷ By contrast, in China filial piety was enshrined as a cardinal virtue of the culture – a virtue singled out so exclusively so as to merit its own text – and while Indian Buddhist texts embraced reverence for parents, it cannot be said that they isolated it with such moralistic singularity. Perhaps it is telling that there is no single word in Sanskrit that corresponds to the Chinese term for filial piety, *xiao* 孝 (nor is there a truly appropriate term in English).

Buddhism,” in *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol. 12, 2005, pp. 81-106.

⁷ These examples are duly discussed in the resources in the previous note.

Concerns for parents, both living and dead, are negotiated and addressed differently in each cultural sphere. The early Confucian attacks on Indian Buddhist filial piety stemmed not so much from the total absence of it in their discourses, as from a failure to answer Chinese cultural concerns. In short, Indian solutions did not adequately answer Chinese questions. Thus, Buddhists in China had to be more self-conscious and cognizant of the audiences they were addressing, and recast the old discussions of filial piety to fit more comfortably on Chinese soil. The translations presented in this compilation account for some of those retooled solutions.

The *Yulan Bowl Sutra*, the *Sutra on Repaying the Kindness of Parents*, the *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents*, and the *Sutra on Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents* were all produced in the span of the 1000-year period from the 3rd century to the 13th century and give slightly different, yet inter-related, voices to the formation of Chinese Buddhist filial piety. The *Yulan Bowl Sutra* established the ritual basis for the widely popular Ghost Festival discussed above, centering

on a famed disciple of the Buddha whose devout interest to help his deceased mother was made legend in China. The other three texts illustrate a progressive development in the theory and practice of Buddhist filial piety, originating in faithful Chinese translations and culminating in fully Chinese compositions. These texts gave power to an emerging voice on filial piety from a Chinese Buddhist perspective, which only added to the already rich cultural history of this important social virtue.

YULAN BOWL SUTRA 盂蘭盆經

The *Yulan Bowl Sutra* has a difficult history to retrace. It appears that it may have grown out of an older text nearly half its size called the *Sutra on Repaying Kindness by Offering Bowls* 報恩奉盆經.⁸

8 The Chinese version of the *Yulan Bowl Sutra* translated in this volume was taken from the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (hereafter abbreviated as T), ed. Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku, and Ono Gemmyō, 100 vols. (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924~1935); Vol 16, No. 685. The *Sutra on Repaying Kindness by Offering Bowls* is T. no. 686. A line-by-line translation comparison was made by Stephen F. Teiser in *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*. Princeton: Princeton

Mention of a *Yulan Sutra* 盂蘭經 is made in the *Collected Records of the Tripitika* 出三藏記集, a medieval Chinese catalogue compiled by Sengyū 僧祐 and finished in 518, though as Stephen Teiser and Alan Cole have noted, this title may actually refer to the *Sutra on Repaying Kindness by Offering Bowls*.⁹ A later work, the *Catalogue of Collected Sutras* 眾經目錄 compiled in 594, claims that these two sutras, along with a third, are different translations of single Sanskrit original (though no existent Sanskrit manuscript remains).¹⁰ Finally, in 597, the catalogue of Fei Changfang 費長房, the *Record of the Three Jewels throughout History* 歷代三寶紀, attributes authorship of the *Yulan Bowl Sutra* to Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (ca. 230-308), a claim that is upheld in the modern canon of Buddhist texts, the Taisho.¹¹

University Press, 1988, pp. 48-54.

9 See Teiser, *Ghost Festival*, p. 54 note 10, and Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 254 note 8. For Sengyū's reference see T55.2145.28c.

10 See T55.2146.133b. See also citation in Teiser, *Ghost Festival*, p. 55 note 11.

11 For Fei's reference see T.49.2034.64a.

While the attribution to Dharmarakṣa is contentious, since Fei was fond of ascribing authors to previously anonymous texts, it seems a fair assumption that the *Yulan Bowl Sutra* was a later adaptation and expansion of the *Sutra on Repaying Kindness by Offering Bowls*, although this latter text may have circulated under the *Yulan* name previously.¹² Whether either text was a translation of an Indian, or even central Asian original, remains in doubt. The present form of the *Yulan Bowl Sutra* was reached by at least the middle of the 7th century when Huijing 慧淨 authored his line-by-line commentary on it.¹³

The only other existent commentary is by the famous scholar-monk Zongmi 宗密 (780-841), whose exegesis firmly establishes the *Yulan Bowl Sutra* as an expression of filial devotion by citing both Buddhist sutras and Chinese classics in his analysis.¹⁴ The most often cited text in his treatise

12 Cole argues this point in his *Mothers and Sons*, p. 88ff.

13 See T no. 2781. For more information on this text see Teiser, *Ghost Festival*, p. 63ff.

14 See T no. 1792. For more information on this text see Teiser, *Ghost Festival*, p. 91ff.

is the *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents*, which itself lays a strong foundation for Buddhist filial piety in China. Among the treasure trove of manuscripts found in Dunhuang 敦煌 in the early 20th century, there were lecture notes 講經文 on the *Yulan Bowl Sutra*, indicating that it was also a popular choice among the laity who wanted to receive further insight into the text. The existent sections of the lecture notes stress the importance of supporting one's parents and provide in-depth explanation on the ten kindnesses, a popular feature of filial piety sutras, which valorize the mother for her sacrifices in raising children (see below).¹⁵

In turning to the *Yulan Bowl Sutra* itself, we start with one of its odd features – the title. To a Chinese reader the characters *yu-lan-pen* 盂蘭盆 look foreign, as if they were transliterated from a foreign language, a very common practice among Chinese Buddhists. The sutra itself makes it evident that *yu-lan-pen* refers to a type of bowl, or *pen*, into which offerings are placed. Zongmi's commentary adds that *yulan* is an expression from the western

15 For more information on this text see Teiser, *Ghost Festival*, p. 99ff.

regions that means “hanging upside-down” which is a metaphor for the suffering one endures in the lower realms of rebirth.¹⁶ Thus the title makes reference to the religious practice of rescuing relatives “hanging upside-down” by making a bowl of offerings in order to generate merit for them. Modern scholars have debated the authenticity of this etymology extensively, but it was the more popular understanding among medieval Chinese monastics.¹⁷

The story in the *Yulan Bowl Sutra* provides an authoritative origin for the Ghost Festival. The unfolding narrative suggests that it was founded by the Buddha in his attempt to help one of his disciples, Maudgalyāyana 目連, rescue his tortured mother from an unfortunate rebirth as a hungry ghost. In Indian Buddhist literature, Maudgalyāyana is famous for his magical powers, which he uses to scan all of the realms of rebirth

16 This passage can be found at T39.1792.506c.

17 To best capture this understanding for this translation, *yulan* was used to retain its foreign looking nature to both a Chinese and English audience, while *pen* is translated as bowl, echoing the way figures such as Zongmi understood it.

for his parents in the beginning of the text. But in China his fame arose out of his concern and devotion to his mother, and specific aim to liberate her in repayment for her sacrifices in raising him, making him more of an icon of filial piety.¹⁸ The notion of seeking repayment to atone for one’s debt accrued as a child was present in Indian texts, but Chinese authors spent a lot of time redefining the depth and severity of a child’s debt, as we shall see in the other texts on filial piety.

After locating his mother and discovering that she cannot eat any of the food he offers her, Maudgalyāyana rushes to the Buddha to find another solution. The Buddha instructs Maudgalyāyana to present offerings to the monastic community in order to generate a sufficient amount of merit to allow his mother to be reborn in a better existence. The Buddha makes it clear that even though Maudgalyāyana is a very dutiful son, he

18 Maudgalyāyana visiting his deceased mother was already well known in India from the classic history, the *Mahāvastu*. See J.J. Jones *The Mahāvastu*. London: Luzac and Co. 1949-56. For more on the history of this figure in China see Teiser, *Ghost Festival*, esp. pp. 140-167.

requires assistance from others – specifically the Buddhist institution – to accomplish his goal. The rationale is based on an old belief that due to the pure and virtuous nature of the *sangha*, they have the ability to amplify the merit generated in the act of giving. This notion is based on the field of merit metaphor, where the received merits, or “fruits,” of one’s generosity are proportionally related to whom the gifts are given, or “planted.” Thus with the *sangha* being a virtuously fertile field, any deed’s merit will be increasingly fruitful.

Even with these operations at play, the Buddha also makes it clear that those offerings to the *sangha* must be made at a special time, when the monastics emerge from their three month summer retreat and finish with their confessional ceremony, a practice in which members of the *sangha* are invited to note any infractions of discipline by other monastics during the retreat. Having offered themselves up to criticism from the community, each monastic publicly repents for any offenses. This closing ceremony, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, marks the time of utmost purity for the *sangha*, after months of strenuous religious

practice and cleansing of sullyng infractions. At this height of purity, and gift offered them is bound to generate bountiful merit, enough merit, as the *Yulan Bowl Sutra* states, to release seven generations of ancestors from dismal rebirths.¹⁹

After Maudgalyāyana’s offerings to the *sangha* secure the release of his mother from the realm of hungry ghosts, he compassionately asks the Buddha if others are also able to participate in these activities to free their relatives. The Buddha assents, claiming that anyone who makes offerings at the appropriate time to the *sangha* on behalf of their family will be able to save them from the torments of a unfortunate rebirth. Furthermore, if their parents are still living, these offerings will lengthen their life spans and increase their fortunes. This sutra thus legitimates the practices that are followed during the Ghost Festival, an event that has been popularly celebrated since at least the fifth or sixth centuries in China. It also creates a

19 The view in medieval China was that only one-seventh of the merit gained could be actually transferred to others, with the other six-sevenths going to the person who performed the meritorious act.

new social order that legitimates the very existence of the *sangha*. Buddhist monastics, removed from the nexus of the Chinese family, are reinserted into a cycle of exchange as a necessary intermediary agent between filial children and their parents. They may have left their families, but as a monk or nun they exert more power to help families than ever before.

The *Yulan Bowl Sutra* provides the basic theoretical framework that allows the *sangha* to operate within Chinese society. As fields of merit, the *sangha* accepts donations from patrons who dedicate that merit to their own parents and ancestors. The rest of the texts in this collection address the emotional and motivational factors for wanting to participate in these religious Buddhist activities. As well shall see, the relationship with one's parents is increasingly defined in terms of debt and methods to repay it. The *Sutra on the Difficulty of Repaying the Kindness of Parents* presents an early attempt at identifying filial remuneration before the *Yulan Bowl Sutra* and practices of the Ghost Festival were known in China. As the themes of Buddhist filial piety evolve, the Buddhist institution plays an

increasingly larger role in attempting to shape the relationships between children and their parents.

SUTRA ON THE DIFFICULTY OF REPAYING
THE KINDNESS OF PARENTS
父母恩難報經

One of the earliest known discourses translated into Chinese on the specific bond between children and their parents in the Buddhist canon comes in the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Repaying the Kindness of Parents* (hereafter *SDRKS*).²⁰ This text has an interesting history and is traditionally attributed to the body of translation work by An Shigao 安世高, one of the earliest translators in China who lived during the 2nd century. This attribution is highly dubious, however, being first attested to in the catalogue of Fei Zhangfang 費長房 in 597, while the earliest extant catalogue, that of Sengyou 僧祐 in 518, lists it in a section of sutras without known translators.²¹ With the passing of time, many more

²⁰ The Chinese version of the translation presented in this volume is from T no. 684.

²¹ For Fei Zhangfang's note see T49.2034.51a; for that of Sengyou see T55.2145.29c. Fei lists an alternative title for

texts were wrongly attributed to An Shigao in late medieval Chinese catalogues (which were uncritically followed by the editors of the modern canon, the Taisho), and this text is more than likely one of them. Regardless of authorship, it remains an early expression of Buddhist filial piety in China, certainly circulating long before Sengyou catalogued it in the early 6th century.²²

Although an independent text at the time, Sengyou notes that the *SDRKS* was an extraction from the *Madhyamāgama*. No such text, however, exists in the version of the *Madhyamāgama* as we have it today. Guang Xing has shown that during

this text as the *Sutra on the Diligent Repayment (勤報) of the Kindness of Parents*.

22 The usage of the archaic Chinese translation of *evaṃ mayā śrutam* (Thus have I heard) as *wen rushi* 聞如是 as opposed to *rushi wo wen* 如是我聞 points to its antiquity. Guang Xing has argued that the archaic usage of some of the ten names of the Buddha points to a period before Kumarajiva who standardized terms like these. I have benefited greatly from the analysis of this text and the *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents* in an unpublished article entitled, “A Study of the Apocryphal Sutra: *Fumu Enzhong Jing*,” by Guang Xing.

Sengyou’s time there were two different versions of the *Madhyamāgama*, and that by the early part of the 8th century one of those versions was lost. This clarifies comments made in the catalogue of Zhisheng 智昇 in 730, which proclaims his inability to locate the *SDRKS* in the (then solely existent) *Madhyamāgama*.²³ Thus the *SDRKS* most likely had been originally extracted from the version of the *Madhyamāgama* that was lost.

Zhisheng also suggests an alternative possibility, and mentions that there is another sutra found in the *Ekottarāgama* 增一阿含經 that bears resemblance to the *SDRKS*, although he further notes that the introductory and some of its contents differ greatly.²⁴ While Zhisheng provides no further details as to the sutra’s identity, the following sutra from the *Ekottarāgama* seems like a plausible candidate:

Thus have I heard: Once, the Buddha was in the Kingdom of Sravasti, in Jetavana, Anathapindika’s Park. At that time the World-Honored One told all of the

23 See T55.2154.480a.

24 See T55.2154.618a.

bhikṣus, “I teach that there are two people who act so virtuously that you cannot possibly repay their kindness. Who are these two? They are your father and mother.

聞如是。一時。佛在舍衛國祇樹給孤獨園。爾時。世尊告諸比丘。教二人作善不可得報恩。云何爲二。所謂父母也。

Furthermore *bhikṣus*, if there is a person who can bear his father on top of his left shoulder and his mother on top of his right shoulder for thousands of tens-of-thousands of years, providing them clothing, food, bedding, mattresses, medicine when ill, and even allowing them to expel their excrement and urine onto his shoulders, then he still would not be able to repay their kindness.

若復。比丘。有人以父著左肩上。以母著右肩上。至千萬歲。衣被。飯食。床蓐臥具。病瘦醫藥。即於肩上放於尿溺。猶不能得報恩。

Bhikṣus, you should know that the kindness of parents is profound. They carry him, rear him, and protect him according to the seasons, never losing track of the seasons or festivals by always observing the sun and moon (?). By these expedient means you should know that this kindness is difficult to repay. For this reason,

bhikṣus, you should support you parents, constantly being filial and obedient by never losing track of the seasons or festivals. Thus, *bhikṣus*, you should practice this teaching. At that time, when all of the *bhikṣus* heard what the Buddha had said, they rejoiced in, honored, and practiced it.

比丘當知。父母恩重。抱之育之。隨時將護。不失時節。得見日月。以此方便。知此恩難報。是故。諸比丘。當供養父母。常當孝順。不失時節。如是。諸比丘。當作是學。爾時。諸比丘聞佛所說。歡喜奉行。²⁵

In comparison with the *SDRKS*, we find both texts contain an evocative passage on children bearing their parents on top of their shoulders. This description can be found in other Chinese Buddhist texts on filial piety such as the *Sutra on Filial Sons* 孝子經,²⁶ and the *Sutra on the Difficulty*

²⁵ See T2.125.601a. The *Ekottarāgama* places this sutra is in the section of “twos” based on its topic of father and mother. The sutra just prior to this one in the *Ekottarāgama* also mentions parents. It discusses two methods to acquire great merit; providing for and supporting your parents, and providing for and supporting one-more-birth (一生補處 *ekajāti*) *bodhisattvas*.

²⁶ T no. 687. Sengyou lists an alternative title as the *Sutra on Filial Sons Repaying Kindness* 孝子報恩經, see T55.2145.17c.

in *Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents*.²⁷ It is also found the *Kataññu Sutta* of the Pali *Aṅguttaranikāya*, a text also discussing reverence toward parents.²⁸ It appears as if this metaphor may have become a common trope for supporting one's parents, not merely in the sense of bearing their weight, but in the sense of providing them with clothing, food, bedding, and medicine, as described here in the *Ekottarāgama*.²⁹ These were the practices commonly sanctioned and practiced by the Indian Buddhist community, but in all of these texts (both Chinese and Indian) these activities were not deemed good enough to fully repay the

The translator is unknown. A partial translation of this text is found in Kenneth Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 43-5 and full translation in Cole, *Mothers and Sons*, pp.68-78.

27 The filial piety section of the massive medieval encyclopedia, the *Pearl Grove of the Dharma Garden* 法苑珠林, cites the *Ekottaragama* passage above (T53.2122.655a), while Zongmi paraphrases the metaphor in his commentary to the *Yulan Bowl Sutra* (T39.1792.508a).

28 The *Kataññu Sutta* is located in *Aṅguttaranikāya* 2.31-32.

29 Ch'en notes that there is a passage in *Lotus Sutra* which talks about not being able to repay the kindness of the Buddha if you carried him on your shoulders. See his *Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, p. 20 note 15.

kindness of parents. As we will see, it would take a higher moral standard to repay their kindness.

The *Ekottarāgama* finishes by providing general advice on being obedient and supportive of one's parents, but the *SDRKS* moves in a different direction. It concludes with a discussion on how a filial child should bolster their parents' faith in Buddhism, encouraging them to adhere to a moral lifestyle and to participate in discussions on the Dharma. It then follows with three short sections instructing children to ensure their parents' faith in the Three Jewels; the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha – in essence having their parents convert to Buddhism. Here, notions of filial remuneration are considered to include spiritual nurturing, not only physical nurturing. The Pali *Kataññu Sutta* also addresses these types of spiritual concerns, and thus the *SDRKS* may be in better ideological alignment with it rather than the *Ekottarāgama*. The *Kataññu Sutta* also makes clear that if children are able to instruct their parents in the Buddhist virtues of morality, generosity, and wisdom that they have succeeded in repaying their debts to them. While the *SDRKS* makes no similar assertion on success,

its notion of repayment definitely moves toward conversion.

The final passage of the *SDRKS* is found neither in the *Kataññu Sutta* or the *Ekottarāgama*, and is highly obscured in meaning. One possible rendering, following along the lines of children “spiritually rearing” their parents, tells how *bhikṣus*, have two children/disciples 子 (a potential play on the terms for “child” *zi* 子, and “disciple” *dizi* 弟子); the ones who give life to children 生子 and ones who nurture children 養子.³⁰ Ancient Chinese medical knowledge assigned the role of the former to the father, who was seen as the main factor in procreation, and the latter to the mother, whose main duty was rearing a child. This is attested to in the Chinese classic, the *Book of Songs* 詩經, in the section called *Liao E* 蓼莪:

My father begot me,	父兮生我、
My mother fed me,	母兮鞠我。
Led me, bred me,	拊我畜我、
Brought me up, reared me,	長我育我。

³⁰ This reading follows that of Cole in his *Mothers and Sons*.

Kept her eye on me, tended me,	顧我復我、
At every turn aided me.	出入腹我。
How could I repay their good deeds,	欲報之德、
Vast as the horizon of heaven? ³¹	昊天罔極。

This biological view of birth was the norm for medieval China and can also be found in the beginning of the *SPKP*, discussed below. Also, as we see, this passage from the *Book of Songs* contains direct reference to the difficulty in repaying parents for one’s life and upbringing (as was noted by Zongmi who quotes this passages in his commentary on the *Yulan Bowl Sutra*³²), thus making it a natural parallel to the concerns extolled in the *SDRKS*.

If we understand the above passage in the *SDRKS* as addressing a role reversal where *bhikṣus*, upholders of the Dharma, are seen as the spiritual caregivers to their fathers and mothers, then repayment is potentially fulfilled through establishing faith in their parents and imparting

³¹ Translation by Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1937, pp. 316-7.

³² See T32.1792.508a.

unto them basic Buddhist morals and tenets. As surrogates, the *bhikṣus* foster their parents on the spiritual nutrients of the Dharma, mirroring their own upbringing when they were children. This notion of conversion repayment was already found in Indian texts like *Kataññu Sutta*, but it also worked well for early Chinese Buddhist apologetics. Defenders of the Buddhist monastic system would commonly cite the story of the Buddha returning home to enlighten his father and ascending to the heavens to teach Dharma to his mother as indications of his filial piety. Texts like the *SDRKS* helped reframe the discussion as to why children left the family to become monastics, claiming that they would be in a far better position to repay their parents as monks or nuns versed in Buddhist teachings, than if they remained in the family.

This emphasis on children teaching parents was short lived however in Chinese Buddhist discussions on filial piety. Early apologetic treatises, such as Mouzi's 牟子 *Lihuo lun* 理惑論 (4th-5th cent.) and Sunchuo's 孫綽 *Yudao lun* 喻道論 (4th cent.), took recourse against their

Confucian and Daoist detractors by pointing to the important role the Buddha played in converting his parents, and by extension the similar role monks and nuns play in their families.³³ But this notion of converting parents was probably adverse to traditional Confucian family values where children were always supposed to be subordinate to their parents. This might explain why the *SDRKS* never entrenched itself within popular medieval Chinese Buddhist circles. The following two texts instead place a more sustained focus on the indebtedness of children to their parents and explain how repayment is achieved through religious acts such as participation in the Ghost Festival or the recitation and reproduction of sutras. Thus, instead of directing parents to amend their lifestyles, their children use the more efficient method of funneling their activities through the Buddhist monastic institution, which generates the necessary merit to

33 These works are found in the *Hongming ji* 弘明集, compiled by Sengyou 僧祐 probably between 515 and 518. They can be found at T.52.2101.1a-7a and 16b-17c respectively. A translation of Mouzi's work has been done by John Keenan, *How Master Mou Removes Our Doubts: A Reader-Response Study and Translation of the Mou-Tzu Li-Huo Lun*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994.

save their parents.

SUTRA ON THE PROFOUND KINDNESS OF PARENTS
父母恩重經

While the *SDRKS* appears to have been an authentic (though anonymous) translation from non-Chinese sources, the *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents* (hereafter the *SPKP*) has from its earliest appearance been considered a native Chinese composition.³⁴ The catalogue of Mingque 明佺 in 695 was the first to list the *SPKP*, but did so under the category of spurious or apocryphal texts (偽經).³⁵ Regardless of this attribution, the *SPKP* had a far greater impact on medieval Chinese culture than the presumably authentic *SDRKS*. The cache of manuscripts found in Dunhuang contains over fifty hand copies of the *SPKP*, making it a favorite among the devote scriptorium visitors.³⁶

34 The translation presented here is based on T. no. 2887. The *Taisho* version collated manuscripts S.2084 and S.1907 (mistyped as S.190 in some reprints of the *Taisho*) from the British Museum with a manuscript from the Fusetsu Nakamura Collection.

35 See T55.2153.474a.

36 The most copied text was, by far, the *Vajra*

Depictions of scenes from the text were painted as murals (or “transformation tableaux” 變相) on cave walls in Dunhuang, often right next to scenes from the highly popular *Lotus Sutra*.³⁷ Colorful stone carvings of the text are also found in the Dazu grottoes of Sichuan.³⁸ Furthermore, the *SPKP* was esteemed enough to warrant the creation of accompanying lecture notes to aid teachers in lecturing to lay audiences.³⁹ As mentioned before, *Prajanaparamita or Diamond Sutra*, with over 2000 extant copies. The *Lotus Sutra*, and especially its twenty-fifth chapter which was separately called the *Guanyin Sutra*, appears in nearly 1000 scrolls. The next most common were the *Vimalakirti Sutra* and the *Sutra of Golden Light* with almost 100 copies each. See Fujieda Akira, “The Tun-Huang Manuscripts,” in *Essays on the Sources for Chinese History*, eds. Donald Leslie, Colin Mackerras and Wang Gungwu, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1975, pp. 120-8.

37 Pictorial examples of the *SPKP* can be found in caves 17, 112, 156, 170, 238, and 449.

38 For these depictions see Angela F. Howard, *Summit of Treasures: The Buddhist Caves of Dazu, China*. New York: Weatherhill Press, 2001.

39 This example is preserved in manuscript P.2418. Only the most influential sutras were honored with these types of companion texts. Of those in Dunhuang, we also find lecture notes for the *Diamond Sutra*, *Lotus Sutra*, *Vimalakirti Sutra*,

the famous Tang dynasty scholar-monk Zongmi frequently cited it in his exegesis on the *Yulan Bowl Sutra*, pointing to its importance among monks and lay people alike.⁴⁰ Thus, while expunged from Chinese Buddhist canon, the *SPKP* remained in favor for large groups of Chinese society. We will see how its success may be gauged by its reliance on a strong rhetoric of emotional sentiment and by alterations in content which place much more focus on the debt accrued by children, rather than schemes to repay it.

The *SPKP* opens by bypassing the traditional trope of shouldering ones parents and instead begins with a vivid elucidation of the sacrifices made largely by mothers in the process of child rearing. It further establishes this theme by asking how we can specifically repay our compassionate *mothers* for their deeds (both parents are addressed rarely in the text, and fathers are never singled out). Interestingly, the first section of the *SPKP* closely echoes the structure of the *Liao E* poem above. Both begin with the biological roles of each parent,

and the *Yulan Bowl Sutra*.

40 Zongmi's commentary can be found at T no. 1792.

and then follow with a longer description of the specific duties performed by the mother in child raising, and close with a question as to how to repay a kindness which is “as vast as the expanses of heaven” 昊天罔極 (with this last phrase as a clear allusion to the Chinese classic).⁴¹ While the *SPKP* focuses solely on maternal repayment and the *Liao E* concerns repayment for both parents, the relative length – and detail – of the care provided by mothers is embraced by and mirrored in both texts. The focus on maternal sacrifice will remain a lasting theme in all future discussions of Buddhist filial piety.

The first section of the *SPKP* highlights such maternal sacrifices as conceding the better tasting food to the baby, giving up the more comfortable sleeping arrangements, and contending with the filth as she cleans her child.⁴² Examples such as

41 At least one manuscript (P.3919) ascribes both the ability to give life 生 and to rear 育 a child to the mother. This may anticipate the total eclipse of the father's procreative powers as seen in the *Sutra on Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents*.

42 Cole notes the phrase “Giving up the dry spots...” is a pre-Buddhist expression of maternal care, found in the *Hou*

these are more fully elaborated in lists such as the “ten kindnesses” which can be found in other medieval Chinese Buddhist texts on filial piety and in the *Sutra on the Difficulty in Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents* (see below). Frequently, the language used to describe these sacrifices is poignantly evocative, aimed at stirring a deep conviction in children to repay their mothers for the hardships they have endured. This is a change from the *SDRKS*, where the descriptive energies (such as carrying one’s parents while they defecate) express the difficulty of repaying parents, while the passages here accentuate the depth of a child’s debt.

We also find that the Buddha’s response on filial remuneration decisively turns away from advising monks to lecture their parents in the Dharma as in the *SDRKS* (as well as the *Kataññu Sutta*), and instead points followers to make offerings to the community of Buddhist monastics on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (as prescribed in the *Yulan Bowl Sutra*) and to recite, reproduce and circulate copies of the *SPKP*. This injunction

Han Shu 後漢書. See his *Mothers and Sons*, p. 252 note 22.

makes an appeal to a larger audience who are not necessarily members of the monastic community and who may not be capable – or willing – to provide instruction on Buddhist doctrine and practice. The activities advocated are oriented around further support of the monastic institution and its literature. This also removes the potentially socially awkward position of Chinese children remonstrating their parents’ immoral lifestyles. Certain Confucian sensibilities toward absolute obedience could sometimes dictate that a truly filial son would ignore and even conceal his father’s immoral deeds.⁴³ Thus by avoiding conflict with culturally entrenched familial relationships and

43 A well-known example is Analects 13.18 where father steals sheep and it is explained that a righteous son should cover up for him. For a discussion on this topic see Bi Lijun and Fred D’agostino, “The Doctrine of Filial Piety: A Philosophical Analysis of the Concealment Case,” in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 31. No. 4, (December 2004), pp. 451-67. Mencius (4B:30) also claims that reprobation is fine among friends, but such activity “infracts the kindness” 賊恩 between sons and fathers. See Legge, *The Works of Mencius*, pp. 337-8. Thus giving parents advice on morality might not have been viewed as the best manner in which to repay their kindness.

by expanding the filial duties to include activities that can be more easily accomplished by non-monastics, we can figure why the circulation of this text surpassed that of the *SDRKS*.

Directly following these instructions by the Buddha, the *SPKP* returns to a further analysis of the sacrifices and hardships experienced by a mother. This middle section is long and effusive, going into much further – and somewhat redundant – detail of the daily deprivation experienced by parents and expounds on the growing abusiveness of sons once they get married. Alone and in declining health, the parents are left to wonder why they deserve such treatment in return for a life of service to their sons and question as to whether or not they should have even had a child. While highly impressionistic and affective, this section is however poorly crafted and written, and curiously switches to a first person perspective of the mother (e.g. “my son” 我兒), whereas previously (and following) it had remained in third person. This section is also sandwiched between passages on advice the Buddha gives on appropriate repayment for parents, hinting that this middle part of the

sutra was an interpolation to further drive home the message that a child has accrued a personal debt to his parents of which he is morally obliged to repay.

This obtrusive middle section deserves further attention, not for what is presented there, but for what has been omitted in many later versions of the text (including the one preserved in the *Taisho*). Mingque may have listed the *SPKP* as apocryphal, but he did not give any explicit reasons for this attribution. Nearly forty years later, Zhisheng specifies the problem by claiming the text contained the names of famous filial Chinese sons, Ding Lan, Dong Ya (Dong An 董黯), and Guo Ju, people that certainly would not have been known to the Buddha in India.⁴⁴ Since the traditional view was that all sutras were originally spoken by the Buddha, the insertion of figures like this would be an obvious indication of a much later composition in China. Later editors apparently elided this problematic passage to try and retain the authenticity of this popular text.⁴⁵ Of

⁴⁴ See T55.2154.673a.

⁴⁵ Zongmi, however, in trying to appeal to popular audiences mentions the filial sons in his commentary on the

the numerous manuscripts preserved in Dunhuang, only a handful of versions survive that retain this controversial passage.⁴⁶ It follows directly from the passage where the parents question the reasons for even having a son if he is dismissive and abusive to them. Besides the inclusion of well-known filial Chinese figures, the passage expresses the absolute importance of filial piety and its ability to make the miraculous happen:

In the past, Ding Lan's wooden mother had a living soul in response to his filial obedience (?). Dong Ya exhibited virtue in his repayment of justice. Guo Ju was the utmost filial, and the heavens conferred gold upon him. The king of Kapilavastu went to the mountains to go hunting and pulling back his bow he shot a deer. He realized that he injured Sāma in his chest, and Sāma's two parents looked toward the heavens and sorrowfully cried out. Due to his utmost filial piety in all of the world, medicine was able to be rubbed on his wound and Sāma was returned to life. His parents eyes were also healed, and they were able to clearly see the sun

Yulan Bowl Sutra. See T39.1792.508a

46 I have located the passage in manuscripts S.0149, S.2269, S.6087 (partially damaged), B.8202, B.8204, and Q.0548.

and moon. If he was not compassionate nor filial, then the heavens would not have responded by reviving Sāma or healing his parents' eyes. Out of a hundred activities, people should consider filial obedience as the most important. Outside of books or even within scriptures, this elucidation of culture should be fixed in memory.

昔⁴⁷丁蘭木母川靈感應孝順。董壓⁴⁸壓生義之報德⁴⁹。郭巨至孝天賜黃金。迦夷國⁵⁰王入山。射獵獮挽弓射鹿。悟傷閃匈。二父母仰天悲嗥。由是至孝⁵¹諸天下。藥塗其⁵²瘡上⁵³閃子還活⁵⁴。父母眼開。明觀日月⁵⁵。不慈不孝。天不感應。閃子更生。父母開目。入之孝順。百行為本。外書內經。

47 Var.: B.8204 omits 昔, "In the past."

48 Var.: Orthography altered in Q.0548 as 壓. Zhisheng notes in his catalogue the name here as 董黯.

49 Var.: B.8204 reads 生義報恩, "exhibited virtue in his repayment of kindness."

50 The Pali version of this story (see below) has the king reigning from Bernares.

51 Var.: B.8204 reads 由閃之孝, "Due to Sāma's filial piety."

52 其, "his" only found in S.6087.

53 上, "on" only found in S.6087.

54 Var.: B.8204 reads 更還活, "moreover was returned to life."

55 Var.: B.8204 reads 父母眼得開。明即得日月, "his parents eyes were healed (lit. opened) and clearly and immediately saw (lit, obtained) the sun and moon."

明文成記。

This passage continues sermonizing to the unfilial son, where famous and heart-wrenching examples of filial acts in the past are brought in to contrast with the depraved activities of sons in the present, who neglect and abuse their parents. The three sons mentioned in the beginning of the passage were all superb examples of filial piety during the Han dynasty, and their stories would have been well known in medieval China. Ding Lan 丁蘭 was known for carving a wooden statue of his deceased mother and attended to it like it was living. Due to his devotion, the statue exhibited life-like characteristics such as the ability to eat, feel pain, and smile and frown. Dong Ya 董壓 was able to avenge his mother's honor by killing a person who insulted her. He immediately gave himself to the authorities, but was released due to his filial act. Guo Ju 郭巨, perhaps the most famous filial son in medieval China, had a particularly painful situation. Living in abject poverty, he had to decide whether to feed and take care of his newborn son or his mother. Ultimately, in true filial devotion to his mother, he decided to kill his son by burying

him alive, thus allowing his mother to live. As the tale goes, when his wife was digging the hole she miraculously found gold which allowed them to afford enough food for everyone.⁵⁶

The tale about the king is actually an Indian Buddhist story that was originally preserved in the collection of *Jataka* tales. According to the *Sāma Jātaka*, Sāma 閃子 (more commonly 睺子) was a filial son who took the utmost care of his elderly and blind parents in a forest hermitage. One day, while fetching water wearing a deerskin so as to not disturb the other deer, he was mistakenly shot with a poisoned arrow by a king. As he lay dying, he was only concerned about his parents' welfare, and asked the king to look after them, to which he agreed. When the king returned with the parents they cried out and performed an Act of Truth, declaring that if Sāma was truly a paragon of filial piety then he would recover. The *deva* Sakra descended from the heavens and gave Sāma medicine which restored his life. And as an added benefit, Sāma's parents also regained their sight.

56 For more on the stories of these filial sons see Ch'en, *Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, p. 37-8.

The story finished with Sāma preaching to the king on the benefits of filial piety.⁵⁷ For obvious reasons this story was a goldmine for Chinese Buddhists, and it was translated as an independent sutra no less than four times.⁵⁸ In fact, Sāma's story becomes so well known that by the Song dynasty he is included among the Confucian list of twenty-four exemplars of filial piety.⁵⁹

The stories of these sons, who with impetuous zeal overcame insurmountable odds to provide for their parents, would resonate on a deep level even with the most apathetic Chinese reader. By invoking eminent cultural figures of the past these stories

57 The *Sāma Jātaka* is number 540 in the Pali *Jataka* collection.

58 See T3.174, 175a, 175b, and 175c. Sengyu's catalogue claims this text circulated under three names, the *Sāma Sutra*, the *Bodhisattva Sāma Sutra*, and the *Filial Son Sāma Sutra*. See T.55.2145.17c.

59 See Ch'en, *Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, pp. 23-4. It is interesting to note that Sāma saved himself, not his parents through his filial actions. Yet, gaining the ability to see is a common metaphor for the enlightenment experience, thus perhaps there is the slightest hint of Sāma repaying his parents through conversion.

try to renew and invigorate familial obligations that have become lax in the present. This passage concludes with the note that filial piety is the most important of activities, securing the notion that parents deserve the most sincere devotion from their children. Yet, the citation of Chinese folk stories raised warning flags for those concerned about forgery, and this passage was scrapped in later versions of this text. And rather than leaving the authentic foreign story of Sāma, the editors instead end this section on parental negligence with a desperate and emotionally charged statement on the failures of sons and the regret of parents.

The last section of the *SPKP* suddenly switches back again to the issue of repayment, instructing followers to read, recite, and write this sutra and then reaffirms how these activities will repay their parents by generating enough positive merit to eradicate the effects of even their most heinous crimes. Again, the simple structure of a question and answer dialogue on filial repayment seems to be interrupted by a lengthy passage in the middle that targets an emotional strain in its readership. The child is established as the sole reason for the

hardships of the parents, whether in childhood or as a married adult. Yet atonement is possible, and is found through involvement with – and support of – the Buddhist institution.

The *SPKP* redirects the thrust of the *SDRKS* by focusing on the bond between mother and son, and energizes it with intimate details on the sacrifices mothers make in the process of raising a child. It also connects to a Chinese cultural base with an allusion to a Chinese classic by modeling the opening section on the *Liao E*, and by aligning repayment with the Buddhist monastic institution and avoiding potential familial conflict. The *SPKP* introduces a language that is rich in sentiment, which is only further elaborated on in later evolutions of Buddhist filial piety texts.

SUTRA ON THE DIFFICULTY IN REPAYING THE PROFOUND
KINDNESS OF PARENTS
父母恩重難報經

The *SPKP* was influential in shaping the tone of future texts on filial piety, and the *Sutra on the Difficulty in Repaying the Profound Kindness*

of Parents (hereafter the *SDRPKP*) is one of its heirs.⁶⁰ This text is presently attributed to the famous translator Kumarajiva 鳩摩羅什 (343-413), who similar to An Shigao, was generously ascribed numerous unwarranted translations after his death. This text, however, is not found in any of the medieval Chinese catalogues and is also excluded from the modern *Taisho* canon. Based in part on the *SPKP*, the *SDRPKP* underwent numerous editorial revisions before reaching what scholars believe to be its present incarnation in the late Song, early Yuan dynasty.

This slow evolution is attested to in one of the manuscripts found in Dunhuang which contains two different versions of the *SPKP*. One is the same as the apocryphal text discussed above, while the other, different in content, is clearly an early rendition of the *SDRPKP*.⁶¹ This early rendition can be a helpful tool in bridging the gap between

60 The Chinese version of the translation presented in this volume is taken from Makita Tairō 牧田諦亮, *Gikyō Kenkyū* 疑經研究. Kyoto: Kyoto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyū-jo, 1976, pp. 55-60. It is based on manuscript *he zi* 河字 12 in the Beijing Library.

61 This manuscript is P.3919.

the *SPKP* and the current version of the *SDRPKP*. The copyist inscribed its name in the manuscript as the *SPKP*, showing that there were diverse variants of this popular text circulating around Dunhuang. For clarity, we will call this intermediary text the *SPKP* variant, or simply the variant, and use it to highlight certain aspects in the evolution of Buddhist filial piety texts in China.

The *SDRPKP* itself is a very popular text in East Asia today. It is a common choice for free distribution among Buddhist temples and there are pocket-sized comic book editions that depict the sutra's vivid imagery. It has been adapted to a cartoon format with narration in modern colloquial Chinese which can be readily found uploaded on internet sites. While the popular dissemination of the *SPKP* was accomplished in medieval China through murals, carvings and lecture notes, the *SDRPKP* has found modern outlets of expression to reach wider audiences. A version of this text is also circulated in Japan which includes a few passages of poetic verse at its conclusion, while in Korea it is circulated (with minor alterations) under the title of the *Sutra on the Great Repayment of the*

Profound Kindness of Parents 大報父母恩重經.⁶² The variety of formats and editions of this text are testament to the importance of the values East Asian cultures find within it.

The *SDRPKP*, as we have it today, is the most expressive statement on parental devotion to their children. Focusing almost exclusively on maternal sacrifice, the tone is gravely solemn, devoting long passages to the rigors and tribulations of pregnancy, child rearing, raising unruly teenagers, and the experiences of parental neglect. This text, like the other filial piety sutras in this collection, was not meant to act as a warning to parents, but to publicize the debt children have accrued. If guilt was not sufficient motivation enough, this text also adds threats of torture in the hell realms to further compel unfilial children to action. When reading this text it is easy to feel moved by the hardships of mothers and fearful for one's fate if reparations are not made.

62 A translation of the Japanese text can be found in Harold J. Isaacson, *The Throat of the Peacock*. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1974.

The *SDRPKP* begins with an introductory story that establishes the macabre tenor of the text: the Buddha's discovery of a mysterious pile of bones on the side of the road. Immediately the Buddha throws his body on the ground in reverence to the bones, an awkward position for someone who has reached the *summum bonum* of Buddhist existence. This point is not missed by his disciples who are surprised to discover that the Buddha is simply being a filial son since the bones could be those of his parents in a past life. The Buddha also reveals that there are two types of bones present, heavy white bones and frail black bones. The disciples, as well as the readers, are surprised to learn that men's bones remain sturdy and white due to their participation in Buddhist religious practices, while women's bones become weak and discolored from the nutrients they expend in nursing. Specifically, this is the result of a biological process where the mother transforms her very blood into milk for the baby to suckle.⁶³ This then leads naturally into the

⁶³ There is a passage in the *Mahātanhāsankhaya-sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya* which claims that mothers feed their child with milk that is made out of her blood. See citation in Cole, *Mothers and Sons*, p. 252 note 24.

discussion of how we can repay the sacrifices of mothers who sacrifice so much for their children.

Here, again, the discussion clearly distinguishes mothers as the target of repayment since his disciple, Ananda, singles them out in his inquiry. But instead of immediately discussing remuneration, the Buddha parlays his teaching into a discourse on debt. While these passages on debt are awkwardly positioned, the editors of this sutra seem to want to make sure the disciples – an extension of the readers – do not trifle over repayment until they fully understand just how indebted they are to their mothers. The Buddha begins with a lengthy discourse on pregnancy, giving a partially metaphorical month-by-month account on the gestation process. With this, only the faintest echoes of the Liao E remain, as the reproductive duties of the father are completely omitted – they simply do not add anything to the ongoing discussion about mothers. And while the *SPKP* mentions the mother's ten months of pregnancy in passing, the *SDRPKP* expands on it and goes into explicit detail of the entire process.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The *SDRPKP* variant does not contain this section on

This expansion further drives home the message of maternal sacrifice during pregnancy, and compounds the guilt for unfilial children who, as we learn, caused tremendous pain for their mothers as opposed to filial children whose births were painless and peaceful.

Following the description of pregnancy and childbirth, the Buddha continues with a discussion on the ten kindnesses 十恩 of parents, though most of them relate only to the mother. These are nothing more but an orderly compilation of stock phrases used in previous sutras, such as giving the baby the tastiest food, conceding the best sleeping spots, and cleaning their filth – all examples found in the *SPKP*. With slight variances in the list, the ten kindnesses became a standard symbolic pregnancy, nor the introductory section on the bones, and can be viewed as relatively late additions. The division of pregnancy into ten months appears to be a relatively late Buddhist view. The *Profound Kindness of Parents and Fetus Sutra* 父母恩重胎骨經 (late 14th c.) talks in terms of ten months, but the much earlier *Womb and Fetus Sutra* 胞胎經 (late 3rd c.) and Entering the Womb division 入胎藏會 of the *Mahāratnakūta Sutra* 大寶積經 (early 8th c.), among others, divide the term into thirty-eight weeks.

expression for the utmost generosity of parents, and particularly of mothers who have to deal with the pains of delivering a baby. These kindnesses were inserted into the *SDRPKP* fairly early since they are found in the Dunhuang variant as well. The variant, however, does not contain the longer verse descriptions of the ten kindnesses which include much more graphic, even gruesome, depictions of maternal sacrifice. It appears as more time passed through the centuries, Chinese authors of filial piety texts turned to more morbid and terrifying themes, culminating in the addition of some passages in the *SDRPKP*, such as these verses. Thus, even though the ten kindnesses were already enumerated, they are repeated a second time with a much more malicious edge.

The inclusion of the poetic verse of the ten kindnesses testifies to an almost perverse attitude toward motherhood. The expectant mother is explained to be constantly ill and faint, and fearful for her life. Childbirth is compared to the slaughtering of a lamb, with blood being spilled and flowing everywhere. Even if a mother survives these ordeals, she can only look forward to a life

of agony as her child defies and neglects her, and only with her death can she be free from pain. These experiences are very similar to being in one of the hells, tortured to no end, with no foreseeable escape. Only upon death (or rebirth) can one be freed from the horrors of this hellish existence.

Again, this rhetoric was meant to play on and intensify the guilt of the unfilial child who has not taken strides to repay his tremendous debt. We are reminded at almost every turn in this sutra with strong language and vicious imagery. The bloodlust is almost palatable, with invocations of slaughtered animals and the underlying presence of a mother sacrificing her own blood – making her bones frail and black – to satiate a young child who needs to be fed. This infatuation with blood was even amplified in a later passage when mention of the mother’s “white milk” in the variant text was later amended to the more disturbing “white blood” in the *SDRPKP*. This sutra frequently refocuses the reader on the child who has caused agony for the mother and who has drained her of her vitality and youth, evidence of which remains long after she has died.

This analogue to criminality is not accidental. Following the verses on the ten kindnesses we find a reworked and expanded section on adolescent disobedience and the growing abusiveness of married adult sons who neglect their parents. It is more difficult to fault a baby *in utero* or a newborn for causing pain to its mother, but, presumably, adults should know better than to betray filial obligations. The disciples of the Buddha respond violently to these charges, beating themselves until they bleed and fall unconscious. Crestfallen and remorseful at realizing their unfilial behavior, they – just like the reader of the text – are explained to be the worst kind of criminals, even though they were totally unaware of it until the Buddha opened their eyes to their crimes.

Feeling penitent, the disciples inquire, again, how they can repay their debt. The Buddha, in alignment with the *SDRKS* and *Ekottaragama*, claims how valiant acts such as carrying your parents on your shoulders for interminable lengths will not suffice. The *SDRPKP* ups the ante again by going into further explicit detail of how other forms of self-inflicted torture and mutilation will

also be futile. These descriptions are bloody and graphic, and even though they do not develop the theme of maternal sacrifice, they still further define the deepness of the debt by revealing the supreme difficulties in reparation.

Repayment, of course, does not lie within self-sacrifice or even in dealing directly with the parents, but in connection with Buddhist activities. The Buddha claims that by practicing methods of merit cultivation, such as copying sutras or making offerings, and transferring that merit to one's parents will one finally be able to amply repay them. Participating in these practices will also re-align oneself in good standing as a filial and obedient child. In comparison with the failed methods mentioned previously, these solutions are tame, but they include the most important component in the repayment equation, the Buddhist institution. As is made explicit in the *Yulan Bowl Sutra*, no one is able to generate the necessary merit by themselves, they need the help of the Buddhist community to amplify their good deeds to sufficient levels. Yet the main difference that has evolved between the filial piety sutras and the

Yulan Bowl Sutra is that in the *Yulan Bowl Sutra*, practitioners save their parents and ancestors from unfortunate rebirths, while the in the filial piety sutras practitioners also have to save themselves from their own filial debts.

The *SDRPKP* also takes it an extra step by claiming that if people fail to repay their parents, they will suffer in the Avici Hell, the most intolerable of the Buddhist hell realms. These warnings are found in the manuscript variant, and thus were included early on to help goad unfilial children into participating in Buddhist activities.⁶⁵ Like many descriptive passages in the *SDRPKP*, the realms of hell are treated in gory detail, with depictions of “flowing blood” that are surly meant to echo the hellish suffering endured by mothers. The Buddha warns that the horrible punishments inflicted in the Avici Hell are only for the most deplorable crimes, which include the traditional five heinous acts and the crime of being unfilial. Repaying parents is no longer motivated solely by guilt, but

⁶⁵ The *SPKP* variant also includes a list of eighteen hells, the popular enumeration during medieval China, but was excluded in the extant version of the *SDRPKP*.

also by threats of the most unimaginable torture. The Buddha reaffirms the opportunity to avoid this fate by producing copies of this sutra. This time he explains that the number of sutras reproduced will be directly related to the number of buddhas a person will encounter. This act will also ensure that the once unfilial child and his parents will never have to deal with the torments of the hells.

In this manner the *SDRPKP* provided a firm motivation for children to repay the kindness of their parents and to participate in Buddhist merit making activities. The reproduction of this sutra, as directed by the Buddha, also ensured a wider circulation of this Buddhist ideology on filial piety. Standing in a long lineage of Buddhist texts devoted toward filial obligations, the *SDRPKP* remains popular to this day, voicing the enduring hardships of mothers and the need for children to acknowledge their debt, and to engage in activities that would repay that compassionate maternal kindness.

All of the sutras discussed above helped shape the discourse on Buddhist filial piety in China.

At first, examples of filial activity were culled from the Indian Buddhist canon to help quiet the Chinese polemicists claiming that Buddhist monks and nuns abandoned their families and turned their backs on the foundational values of Chinese society. Early apologetic literature tended to locate the importance of the *sangha* in their ability to convert their parents to Buddhism, as the Buddha did during his lifetime. Texts such as the *Sutra on Repaying the Kindness of Parents* advocated this type of role reversal, where monastics would nurture their parents with the Dharma in repayment for the sacrifices they have endured. Ultimately, this line of rationale did not last, and new texts appeared, like the Yulan Bowl Sutra, which championed the inclusion of the *sangha* into a cycle of exchange. Repayment was now satisfied by participation in Buddhist merit making activities, highlighted by offerings made to the *sangha* during the Ghost Festival when those acts of generosity could generate the most merit. The motivation to participate in these religious activities came via an emotive rhetoric found in Chinese apocrypha such as the *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents*, which placed focus on maternal sacrifice

that inspired guilt in unfilial children. Other texts, like the *Sutra on the Difficulty in Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents* deepened the somber tenor of this discourse by expanding the descriptions of maternal sacrifice and adding more graphic and violent elements. Feelings of guilt were also complemented by warnings of torture in the hell realms as unfilial children were cast as the worst type of criminals.

By giving new voices to matters of family, Buddhists in China were able to alter perceptions about their supposed disinterest in the virtues of filial piety. Evolving from Indian discourses on filial obligations, Buddhists were able to mold the discussion on family to more adequately address new cultural contexts in China. Buddhist monks and nuns, who were stationed at the periphery of Chinese society, soon took a more central role within it. The success of which can be easily gauged by the popularity of the Ghost Festival from medieval China up to today, which successfully manages to marry the monastic institution of Buddhism with the social institution of the family.



TRANSLATION CATALOGUE

The following is a list of books and/or journals that contain versions of the texts presented in this volume in Chinese or in English translation.

YULAN BOWL SUTRA

CHINESE VERSIONS

Taishō no. 685. *Yulan Bowl Sutra* 盂蘭盆經.
Attributed to Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (fl. 265-309)

Taishō no. 686. *Sutra on Repaying Kindness by Offering Bowls* 報恩奉盆經. Composed by anonymous author.

ENGLISH VERSIONS

Bandō, Shōjun. “The Ullamabana Sutra.” In *Apocryphal Scriptures*. Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2005, pp. 19-25.

Cole, Alan. *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 80-93 (partial translation).

de Visser, M.W. *Ancient Buddhism in Japan*, Vol I. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1935, pp. 68-71.

Teiser, Stephen F. *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 48-56.

SUTRA ON THE DIFFICULTY OF REPAYING
THE KINDNESS OF PARENTS

CHINESE VERSIONS

Taishō no. 684. *Sutra on the Difficulty of Repaying the Kindness of Parents* 父母恩難報經. Attributed to An Shigao 安世高 (fl. 148-170)

ENGLISH VERSIONS

Cole, Alan. *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 42-6 (partial translation).

Guang Xing. “A Study of the Apocryphal Sutra: *Fumu Enzhong Jing*.” (unpublished paper)

SUTRA ON THE PROFOUND KINDNESS OF PARENTS

CHINESE VERSIONS

Taishō no. 2887. *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents* 父母恩重經. Composed by anonymous author.

ENGLISH VERSIONS

Arai, Keiyo. “The Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love.” In *Apocryphal Scriptures*. Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2005, pp. 129-39

Ch’en, Kenneth. *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 38-40 (partial translation).

Cole, Alan. *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 132-50 (partial translation).

SUTRA ON THE DIFFICULTY OF REPAYING
THE PROFOUND KINDNESS OF PARENTS

CHINESE VERSIONS

Sutra on the Difficulty in Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents 父母恩重難報經 in Makita Tairō 牧田諦亮, *Gikyō Kenkyū* 疑經研究. Kyoto: Kyoto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyū-jo, 1976, pp. 55-60. Attributed to Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (343-413).

ENGLISH VERSIONS

Cole, Alan. *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 186-9, 218-20 (partial translation).

Nicholson, Terri. “The Buddha Speaks the Sutra about the Deep Kindness of Parents and the Difficulty in Repaying It” in *Filiality: The Human Source*, Vol. 2, ed. Buddhist Text Translation Society. Talmage, CA: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1983, pp. 81-109.



GLOSSARY



The entries in this glossary fall under two categories: 1) foreign terms and technical concepts that appear in the body of the text and 2) generalized topics that are inferred in the text and which have thematic importance to the reading of the sutra.

All entries that are covered by the first category are parenthetically followed by their commonly Romanized Sanskrit form, with diacritical marks if necessary, and by the correlating Chinese character(s) as they are exactly found in the text. The Sanskrit term provided is the most typical equivalent of the Chinese word, and not necessarily based on comparative examples found in extant manuscripts.

Entries which are topical and not discussed in the text directly, or are indigenous Chinese concepts or innovations, are not included with a Sanskrit equivalent.

When possible we have also provided other

common translations of terms at the end of some entries.

Ananda (Ānanda 阿難): The cousin of the Buddha who became his personal attendant and was considered one of his ten great disciples. Ananda was considered the foremost in memory, and since he constantly accompanied the Buddha he was believed to have memorized all of his teachings. Thus, during first council of the *sangha* after the Buddha's death, he was asked to recite the sutras for the attending members of the monastic community so they could canonize the Buddha's teachings and preserve them for future generations. For this reason, all sutras traditionally begin with "Thus have I heard," indicating to the reader that this is considered to be Ananda's first-hand account to the council.

An Shigao (安世高): (fl. 148-170) A famed Parthian monk who was among the first Buddhist monks to arrive in China. According to tradition he was a crown-prince in Parthia (which at the time was conglomeration of smaller kingdoms) who left lay life to become a Buddhist monk. He traveled

east, eventually reaching the Chinese capital city of Luoyang 洛陽 during the early part of the reign of Emperor Huan 桓帝 (r.147-167). He is most well known for his voluminous translation efforts of pre-Mahayana texts, which are the earliest translations of Buddhist works in China.

asura (*asura* 阿修羅): A semi-divine being who resides just below the *devas* on the slopes of Mt. Sumeru. They are characterized as jealous demigods in constant conflict with the heavenly *devas* who banished them from the top of Mt. Sumeru. They are sometimes considered to constitute another realm of rebirth. They are one of the members of the Eightfold Assembly. Other translations: "titan," demon."

Avici (Avīci 阿鼻): The most heinous of the hell realms where torture is continuously inflicted. While only those committing the most horrendous of crimes are reborn here, the duration of one's stay in this particular hell, however, is not eternal. It is traditionally located as the lowermost of the eight hot hells. Other translations: "Unrelenting Hell," "Uninterrupted Hell," "Unremitting Hell."

Bhagavat (Bhagavāt 婆伽婆): A reverential term in India used to address holy sages. In Buddhist texts it denotes the Buddha. Other translations: “Lord,” “Master,” “Blessed One.”

bhikṣu (*bhikṣu* 比丘): A fully ordained male member of the Buddhist monastic community. Other translations: “monk,” “mendicant.”

bhikṣuni (*bhikṣuni* 比丘尼): A fully ordained female member of the Buddhist monastic community. Other translations: “nun”.

bodhisattva (*bodhisattva* 菩薩): A title given to a being who compassionately vows to liberate all sentient beings from suffering and help free them from *samsara*. Originally this term was exclusively used to describe the Buddha in his previous lives before his enlightenment, but in the Mahayana tradition this term denotes anyone who aspires to attain buddhahood through the practice of the *paramitas*. Some particular bodhisattvas have come to symbolize an especially valuable quality of Buddhist practice, i.e. wisdom, compassion, etc. The term “bodhisattva” is traditionally glossed

as meaning “enlightenment being,” but can also be understood to mean “a being oriented toward enlightenment.”

buddha (*buddha* 佛): A title meaning “Awakened One” used for a being who has perceived the true nature of all phenomena, has overcome all suffering, and who compassionately teaches these insights to others. It is one of the ten titles of a fully enlightened being. When capitalized and preceded by definite article “the” the term refers to the historical figure Siddhartha Gautama, and when it is pluralized or not capitalized or it refers to anyone in the general class of fully enlightened beings. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha comprise the Three Jewels.

causes and conditions (*hetu-pratyāya* 因緣): The antecedent grounds from which all phenomena arise. All phenomena based on causes and conditions are ultimately transitory and impermanent. Causes generally refer to the primary grounds which directly effect results, while conditions generally refer to the secondary or proximate grounds which indirectly effect results.

deva (*deva* 天): An inhabitant of the heavens that are located on or above Mt. Sumeru. Any sentient being with the requisite amount of merit can be reborn as a *deva*. Life in the heavenly realms is generally considered to be utopian; however it is also transient, as all devas are mortal and subject to rebirth. They are one of the members of the Eightfold Assembly. Other translations: “god,” “deity.”

Dharma (*dharma* 法): The Dharma refers to the body of Buddhist teachings. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha comprise the Three Jewels. Other translations: “Truth,” “Law.”

Dharmarakṣa (Dharmarakṣa 竺法護): (fl. 265-309) Perhaps the most significant translator prior to the early fifth century arrival of Kumarajiva in China. Born to Indo-Scythian (Yuezhi) parents in the provincial garrison city of Dunhuang 敦煌, he joined the monastic order and eventually began translating Buddhist texts in the city of Chang’an 長安. Dharmarakṣa was one of the first monks who was fluent in both Sanskrit and Chinese (and supposedly many other Central Asian languages)

and produced early translations of texts that became very influential in China, such as the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, and the *Larger Sūkhavativuḥya Sutra*.

Eightfold Assembly: Eight groups of non-human beings that are often present in the audience of the Buddha’s sermons. They include *devas* (divine beings), *asuras* (semi-divine beings), *nagas* (snake-like beings), *garudas* (eagle-like beings), *gandharvas* (celestial musicians), *kimnaras* (half-human celestial musicians), *yaksas* (tree spirits), and *mahoragas* (large snake-like beings). Considered once to be evil, these beings became followers of the Buddha and now protect his teachings and practitioners.

eightfold deeply resonant Brahma voice (*brahma-svara* 八種深重梵音): The Buddha was considered to have an attractive voice, like that of the Brahma *devas*, that had eight qualities: distinct, intelligent, melodious, audible, ringing, euphonious, deep, and sonorous.

eye of enlightenment (*divya-cakṣur-abhijñā* 道眼):

Supernormal vision that allows an enlightened being to see any sentient being in any realm of rebirth.

fast-day precepts (*upoṣadha* 齋戒): The eight precepts that lay Buddhist practitioners hold during particular days of month when *devas* would descend to inspect their conduct. Normally, lay practitioners follow the first five of the ten precepts that Buddhist monastics adhere to, but take on three additional precepts for these special days. The eight precepts include not harming life, not taking what is not given, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not lying, not taking intoxicants, not eating after noon, not watching people sing, dance or perform any shows, and not wearing garlands, perfumes, or ointments, and not high broad beds/seats.

field of merit (*punya-kṣetra* 福田): A classic Buddhist metaphor which relates the relationship between a farmer, his field, and the seeds he planted to a benefactor, a beneficiary, and the gift exchanged. Just as a fertile field will yield a more bounteous crop to a farmer who plants his seeds, so does a virtuous beneficiary (such as a Buddhist

monastic) yield more advantageous merit to a benefactor (such as a lay donor) who donates a gift.

five disgraces (五過): A highly ambiguous term that appears with little frequency in the Buddhist canon. Some scholars read it as *zhe* 謫, “disgrace,” and link it with the retributions one receives when they commit the five heinous acts. In another context, it might also refer to what Mencius described as the five actions that are considered unfilial: being lazy and not caring for one’s parents; gambling and drinking and not supporting one’s parents; being greedy and infatuated with one’s wife and child and neglecting one’s parents; having a gluttonous attitude that brings disgrace to one’s parents; and being quarrelsome so as to endanger one’s parents (*Mencius* 4B:30). Though not originating from the Buddhist tradition, this understanding also fits the context of the passages.

five grains (五穀): Five cereal crops that were considered sacred in ancient China. Sources vary as to what grains were included, but are frequently listed as: rice, wheat, barley, millet, and soybeans (technically a legume, not a grain).

five heinous acts (*pañcānantarya* 五逆): The five crimes of matricide, patricide, killing an *arhat*, causing a buddha to bleed, or disrupting the harmony of the *sangha* that traditionally would lead to an immediate rebirth in the worst of the hell realms. Other translations: “five heinous sins.”

five parts of the body (*panca-maṇḍala* 五體): The five sections of the body, i.e. the knees, elbows, and head, which are placed on the ground in utmost deference and respect.

four classes of disciples (*catur-praṣad* 四輩弟子): All followers of the Buddha: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

four-fold path (*catasro-gataya* 四道): The four stages on the path toward becoming enlightened as an *arhat*. The stages include stream-enterer, non-returner, once-returner, and finally the *arhat*.

Four Heavenly King-Deities (四天王神): See **Four Heavenly Kings**.

Four Heavenly Kings (*catur-mahārāja* 四天王):

The four *deva* kings who are guardians of the world and protectors of the Buddhist teachings. Each king guards one of the cardinal directions. They reside in the heaven located on the slopes of Mt. Sumeru below Trayastrimsa Heaven. The Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings is the first of six heavens in the Desire Realm. Other translation: “Four Guardian Kings”

four kinds of birth (*catasro-yonaya* 四生): The four ways in which beings are born into the triple realm, i.e. the world. Beings can be born oviparous (from eggs such as birds and most reptiles), viviparous (from wombs such as most mammals), from moisture (as was once thought of smaller insects and fish), and from metamorphosis (as was thought of hell beings, heavenly beings, or those beings in general that are not born in the above three manners, but still are reborn due to their karma).

four pairs of eight practitioners (*catvāri puruṣa-yugāny aṣṭau puruṣa-pudgalā* 四雙八輩): The eight categories of attainment for one who aspires to become enlightened as an *arhat*. Each

stage on the fourfold path toward enlightenment (stream-enterer, non-returner, once-returner, arhat) is divided into two levels, that of entry onto the path and that of realization of the goal.

garuda (*garuḍa* 迦樓羅): A mythological class of eagle-like creatures which are at constant enmity with the nagas, often devouring them. They are depicted in an anthropomorphic form with wings, or in the form of an eagle. They are one of the members of the Eightfold Assembly.

ghandarva (*ghandarva* 乾闥婆): A mythological class of heavenly musicians who are also known to eat fragrances, as their name suggests in Sanskrit. They are one of the members of the Eightfold Assembly.

hungry ghost (*preta* 餓鬼): Originally, in early Indian thought, this being was simply the spirit of a deceased person. In Buddhism, these spirits became a pitiful class of creature who would constantly suffer from starvation, or who would have the endless misfortune of having their food turn into some putrid and inedible substance. They

are considered to be a class of rebirth in Buddhism owing to particular karmic activities, thus not every deceased person will become a hungry ghost.

Jetavana Anathapindika Park (Jeta-vana anāthapindika-ārāma 祇樹給孤獨園): A monastic compound located on the outskirts of Sravasti where the Buddha was traditionally said to have spent nineteen rain retreats. The park was donated to the Buddhist monastic community by a wealthy merchant named Sudatta, who was more commonly known as Anathapindika, which means “one who gives to the needy”. The land was originally owned by the royal prince, Jeta, who agreed to sell the land for the amount of gold coins that were required to cover the ground of the entire park. When Anathapindika initially ran out of gold and gave instructions for more to be carted in, Jeta was moved by Anathapindika’s devotion to the Buddha and freely donated the uncovered patch of land. Together they built a meeting hall, a dining hall, residential halls, walkways, wells, and surrounded the park with a barrier wall. To honor the efforts of both Jeta and Anathapindika, texts refer to the park using both of their names. This site was excavated

in 1863 by the English archaeologist Alexander Cunningham, and is located in modern day Saheth, India.

kalpa (*kalpa* 劫): An extremely vast measurement of time used in ancient India. The length of time of a single kalpa is considered to be of an almost inconceivable duration. The life-span of the triple realm is measured in *kalpas*. Other translations: “eon,” “cosmic age”.

King of the Brahma Heavens (*mahā-brahman* 梵王): Often called Brahma, this figure is an important Hindu *deva* who was regarded as the creator of the world. In Buddhist texts he is relegated to an inferior position, yet is still respected since he rules over the first three heavens of the form realm. In Buddhism this term generally refers to a title or status rather than a particular deva.

kimnara (*kiṃnara* 緊那羅): A mythological class of beings that are heavenly musicians in Sakra’s court. They are most commonly depicted as having the lower half of a bird with the upper half of a human, but are also described as humans with the

heads of horses. They are one of the members of the Eightfold Assembly.

Kumarajiva (Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什): (343-413) A Famed Buddhist monk who hailed from the Central Asian kingdom of Kucha 龜茲 and traveled to China and became one of the “Four Great Translators” of Chinese Buddhism. He arrived in the capital of Chang’an 長安 in 401 and immediately headed a translation bureau in producing translations of Buddhist texts in Chinese. His translations are considered to be composed in the most elegant prose and have significantly impacted the history of Buddhism in China.

Later Han (後漢): After the collapse of the short-lived Xin Dynasty 新朝 (9CE-23CE), the Han Dynasty was restored with its capital at Luoyang 洛陽, east of the Former Han 前漢 capital at Chang’an 長安. Thus, the Later Han is also known as the Eastern Han 東漢. The Later Han lasted from 25CE to 220CE before feuding in the court and religious uprisings caused its collapse. This period is notable for the introduction of Buddhism into China which occurred just at a time when ruling Confucian

ideology was being called into question.

maha-prajnaparamita sutra (*mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經): See **prajnaparamita sutra**.

mahasattva (*mahāsattva* 摩訶薩): A title given to bodhisattvas that means “great being”. There also is some evidence to indicate that *mahasattva* might be a distinct class of bodhisattva.

Mahayana (*mahāyāna* 大乘): A major movement in Buddhist history that offered reinterpretations of Buddhist doctrine in an entirely new body of literature and sutras. Philosophically the movement is distinguished by its emphasis on the notion of emptiness, and practically it is distinguished by its emphasis on compassion.

mahoraga (*mahoraga* 摩侯羅伽): A mythological class of large snake-like beings. They are one of the members of the Eightfold Assembly.

mantra (*mantra* 咒): A sacred incantation used in the practice of meditation and the performance

of ritual. Mantras are thought to be imbued with the power to produce specific effects and range from a single syllable to a lengthy series of words. The continuous recitation of mantras is generally accompanied by other practices such as visualization techniques and the positioning of the body into particular postures.

Maudgalyayana (Maudgalyāyana 目乾連; 目連): Considered to be the second of the chief disciples of the Buddha, along with Sariputra, and was also considered the foremost in special powers. He entered the *sangha* with his lifelong friend Sariputra, and both are commonly represented in artworks as flanking the sides of the Buddha. In East Asia, Maudgalyayana is well known from the multiple stories where he saves his mother from some horrible torment.

Mount Grdhrakuta (*Gr̥dhrakūṭa* 耆闍崛山): The famed Vulture’s Peak, which was located east of Rajagrha. Its names derived from the belief that the peak was shaped like a vulture’s beak, or from the many vultures that lived there. This was a remote area that was a popular location for ascetics, and a

site that is commonly referenced as a place where the Buddha gave teachings.

naga (*nāga* 龍): A mythological class of snake-like creatures that are closely associated with water and rainfall. *Nagas* are thought to be cunning and with the ability to transmogrify into human form. Influenced by native snake species (like the King cobra), Indian artisans depicted *nagas* as either half-human half-snake, or as humanoids with a cobra hood shielding the back of their heads. In China, the Sanskrit term *naga* was translated by the Chinese word for dragon, thus *nagas* are sometimes depicted in that form. They are one of the members of the Eightfold Assembly. Other translations: “dragons,” “serpents.”

nine orifices (九竅): The nine openings in the body, i.e. the eyes, nostrils, mouth, ear canals, anus, and urethra.

numinous power (*abhijñā* 通; 威神): The supernormal cognitive faculties and thaumaturgical abilities normally possessed by buddhas and bodhisattvas which are used to assist sentient

beings in attaining enlightenment. This power is seen as a type of knowledge acquired through adeptness at meditation. The set of six powers includes: ability to travel anywhere, supernormal vision, supernormal hearing, ability to read minds, knowledge of past lives, and ability to clear one’s own defilements. Other translations: “supernatural powers,” “extraordinary powers,” “supernormal cognition,” “numinous charisma.”

Parthia (安息國): An ancient kingdom that was situated in modern northeastern Iran which is well known in Western history as being an enemy of the Roman Empire. Parthia was known to China through the travels of the explorer-general Zhang Qian 張騫 who visited the region on imperial envoy in the second century BCE. Situated on the east-west trade routes of the Silk Road, Parthian merchants often derived profits by acting as middlemen. The kingdom was overtaken by invading forces in the second century CE.

patra (*pātra* 鉢和羅): The alms bowl used by Buddhist monastics.

prajnaparamita sutra: A particular genre of Buddhist literature that was mainly composed between the first century BCE and the first century CE in India. Its content focuses on the ideal of the bodhisattva, and the ultimate realization of wisdom which reveals that all phenomena are empty of inherent and eternal existence. The seemingly paradoxical situation that arises out of these doctrines is the fact that a bodhisattva, being an empty phenomena, does not ultimately exist.

pratyekabuddha (*pratyeka-buddha* 緣覺): A term which refers to a being who has been enlightened through their own effort and study without the aid of a teacher. Specifically, they come to realize the nature of causality (*pratitya-samutpada*). A *pratyekabuddha*, however, does not possess the wisdom and compassion of a fully enlightened buddha, and so does not teach his insight to others. Other translations: “solitary buddha,” “solitary realizer,” “self-enlightened one.”

Rajagrha (Rājagṛha 王舍城): The original capital city of the ancient northern Indian kingdom of Magadha, located just south of the Ganges River.

The city was positioned in a valley between seven hills known for their hot springs and caves, making them ideal locations for ascetics and meditation practitioners. The region was ruled over by Bimbisara, who was a devoted follower and patron of the Buddha.

sage assembly (聖眾): See **four pairs of eight practitioners**.

Sakra (Śakra 帝釋): The common Buddhist name for the Vedic *deva* Indra who is considered to be the king of the *devas*. He resides in Trayastrimsa Heaven ruling over a court of thirty-two other heavenly beings. He is regarded as a model for kingship, embodying the ideal ruler who protects the teachings of the Buddha and his followers. In Buddhism this term generally refers to a title or status rather than a particular *deva*.

samadhi (*samādhi* 三昧): A deep state of meditative concentration and absorption which is the result of continued focus upon a single object. Mahayana texts mention a variety of *samadhis* that each have their own particular name and associated

qualities. Other translations: “meditation,” “trance,” “deep concentration.”

Sangha (*saṃgha* 僧): The monastic community originally organized by the Buddha. The *saṃgha* would participate in a three month long retreat during the summer rainy season, reducing their contact with laity and undertaking more rigorous religious practices. On the final day, monastics would invite other members of the *saṃgha* to cite any of their infractions of discipline, and would then repent for any offenses that were reported. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha comprise the Three Jewels.

sangharama (*saṃgha-ārāma* 伽藍): A term which specifically denotes the garden used for meditation on Buddhist monastic grounds, but generally refers to the monastery itself.

six kinds of relatives (六種親屬): The commentary by Zongmi states that the six relatives include the father, mother, older brother, younger brother, husband, and wife.

six numinous powers: See **numinous power**.

śravaka (*śrāvaka* 聲聞): Literally meaning “hearers,” this is a name used in Mahayana texts to denote the early disciples of the Buddha who heard and practiced his teachings in order to become *arhats*. The term comes to be used disparagingly in Mahayana sutras. Other translation: “auditor”.

Sravasti (Śrāvastī 舍衛國): Sravasti was the capital city of the ancient northern Indian kingdom of Kosala located in modern day Uttar Pradesh. To distinguish it from a southern Indian kingdom that was also called Kosala, this northern Indian state was sometimes referenced by its capital city, thus being called the Kingdom of Sravasti. Prasenajit, the sovereign ruler of this kingdom, was a devoted follower and friend of the Buddha.

Sumeru (Sumeru 須彌): The mountain considered to be the *axis mundi* of traditional Buddhist cosmology, the summit of Mount Sumeru (or Mount Meru) extends into the heavens and constitutes the highest geographical point of a world.

sutra (*sūtra* 經): Scripture which traditionally preserves the discourses of the Buddha. The earliest dialogues of the Buddha were preserved orally, and it is commonly held that his teachings were not committed to writing until the first century BCE. With the advent of Mahayana Buddhism new sutras were circulated in Northern India and Central Asia.

Tathagata (*tathāgata* 如來): One of the ten epithets given to every fully enlightened being. The Sanskrit term is a fanciful combination of *tathā-āgata*, meaning “thus-come”, and *tathā-gata*, meaning “thus-gone”. This purposefully preserves an ambiguity in the meaning of the term. However, the Chinese translation only captures one aspect of the play on words found in Sanskrit and can be translated as the “Thus Come One.”

Three Jewels (*tri-ratna* 三寶): The three most highly valued objects of reverence in the Buddhist tradition, namely the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Other translations: “Three Treasures,” “Triple Gem.”

ten bhumis (*daśa-bhūmi* 十地): The ten stages

along the path of a bodhisattva’s spiritual career. The advancement through the stages requires a bodhisattva to hone particular practices and virtues which bring about the elimination of certain obstacles to enlightenment. The *paramitas* are used to complement the ten *bhumis*. The culmination of the tenth stage is traditionally equivalent to the attainment of buddhahood.

Tripitaka Master (三藏法師): Honorary title given to Buddhist monastics in China who mastered the *tripitaka*, or three divisions of the Buddhist teachings, namely the sutras, *vinaya*, and commentarial literature.

triple realm (*triloka* 三界): The three divisions of the world in which sentient beings can be reborn, namely, the realm of desire, the realm of form, and the formless realm. These are based on the pre-Buddhist Indian divisions of the earth, atmosphere, and heavens.

upasaka (*upāsaka* 優婆塞): A male lay Buddhist.

upasika (*upāsikā* 優婆夷): A female lay Buddhist.

vinaya (*vinaya* 律): The teachings of the Buddha meant to act as rules for the sangha.

Western Jin (西晉): A brief period of unity from 265 to 316 before chaos caused by princely fratricide and the uprising of nomadic tribes caused an enormous exodus of Chinese peasants, landowners, and aristocrats to the south, where they established what is known as the Eastern Jin 東晉. The most important Buddhist figure in this period was Dharmarakṣa who fled east from Chang'an 長安 toward Luoyang 洛陽 when war amid the imperial family reached climax, but fell ill and died before reaching the city.

wheel-turning sage king (*cakravartī-rāja* 轉輪聖王): A sovereign ruler who embodies the Buddhist political ideal of the virtuous monarch who brings about peace and prosperity to his subjects. There are four hierarchical classes of wheel-turning sage kings that are distinguished by the type of metal used for the wheels of their chariots and their ability to move between the four main continents that constitute the Buddhist conception of a world. The historical Indian king, Asoka, who ruled the

Mauryan kingdom in the third century BCE, is commonly referred to in Buddhist texts with this title.

yaksa (*yakṣa* 夜叉): A mythological class of beings that can be generally characterized as nature spirits who had a special association with trees and forests. In pre-Buddhist times they played an ambiguous role as being both beneficent and demonic. Early Buddhist art forms embraced the *yaksas*' connection to trees, but in later texts *yaksas* became predominantly evil and hideous creatures that often tormented other beings. They are one of the members of the Eightfold Assembly.

Yao Qin (姚秦): A short lived kingdom, more commonly referred to as the Later Qin 後秦, which lasted from 384-417 during the tumultuous period in northern China known as the Sixteen Kingdoms of the Five Barbarian Tribes. Yao Xing 姚興 (r. 393-415) was responsible for bringing Kumārajīva to the capital, allowing him to begin his prodigious undertaking of translating Buddhist texts into Chinese.

yojana (*yojana* 由旬): A classical Indian measure for longer distances. It is quantified diversely in different sources, but ranges from 4.5 miles to 10 miles (7.2 to 16 km).

Yuezhi (月氏): Originally a Central Asian people who were settled in the eastern part of the Tarim basin in western China. From the third century BCE to the first century CE they migrated west and eventually formed the powerful Kushan Empire in northwestern India. The term more accurately describes the group of migratory people, rather than a geographically oriented kingdom, even though it can be used in that sense. These people were possibly the Tocharians referred to by the Greeks

yulan bowl (盂蘭盆): The container in which goods are placed and offered to the *sangha* when they emerge from their rain retreat and hold confessions. See Introduction for more information.



EDITORIAL MESSAGE



With the growing popularity of Buddhism around the world, access to its doctrine through reliable translations of its scriptures is of utmost importance. Therefore, we have set as our pinnacle goal the production of a new standardized canon of Buddhist sutras in English. As scholars, teachers and students of Buddhism, we recognize that the most valuable resources for Buddhist texts are the exhaustive editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon, yet of the hundreds of sutras in Chinese, only a fraction have been reliably translated into the English language. We are aware of the efforts of other translation committees and translators involved in the effort to produce English translations of Buddhist texts. However, we feel our endeavor is unique in several important ways.

First, we are committed to producing bilingual editions of each sutra with tools for studying the original Chinese text. By providing facing bilingual pages, we hope to encourage those students who are learning Chinese to compare our English translation with the original source text, thereby

deepening their understanding of the translation process and of the content of the sutra. Our editions will also include a brief history of the particular sutra, an exhaustive glossary of foreign words and ideas, and, as an homage to the long Chinese tradition of compiling catalogues of sutras, a translation catalogue which lists many of the other Chinese and English translations of the same text.

Secondly, our method of translation attempts to provide a literal, yet fluid, rendition of the Chinese text, trying to capture the experience of reading sutras in Chinese while remaining as faithful as possible to the original text. For example, we choose to back-transliterate terms such as *biqu* 比丘 (Skt. *bhikṣu*), instead of translating them (“monk”) to try to maintain a similar reading experience of the Chinese text. By attempting to make the translation process more transparent, we aim to uncover the subtleties of the text that are easily lost when rendering a sutra from one language into another. Our translation board consists of a variety of experts on Buddhism from different areas and fields, and all our translations go through a series of revisions and renditions before final printing to ensure their accuracy.

Finally, our focus is the production of not just one, but a complete series of translations of specifically Chinese Buddhist sutras using a consistent vocabulary for technical terms and foreign concepts. Throughout all our translations we will employ a standardized lexicon and methodology for translation, so that a technical term will be translated, or transliterated, in the same manner in every volume in this series. In this way, we hope to aid the reader in comprehending the complexities of Buddhist doctrine, which often call upon a diverse array of technical terminologies and conceptual constructs.

Through the publication of these translations, we hope to allow a greater accessibility to Buddhist sutras, and circulate them to a much wider audience. We hope to appeal not only to the uninitiated, but also to the more accomplished student of Buddhist thought.

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ABOUT THE TRANSLATORS



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Recently Yifa has been conducting the “Humanistic

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She is the author of *The Origin of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China* (2002), by Hawaii University Press and *Safeguarding the Heart: a Buddhist Response to Suffering and September 11* (2002); *On Junk* (2007); *On Suffering* (2007); all by Lantern Books, NY; and co-author of *Benedict's Dharma: Buddhists Reflect on the Rule of Saint Benedict* (2001), Riverhead, NY.

Peter Matthew Romaskiewicz was born and raised in a small town near the Atlantic coastline of New Jersey. While attending Rutgers University he became interested in the study of philosophy and world religions and was ultimately attracted to the richness of Buddhism and Chinese culture. He embarked on his study of literary Chinese at

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