

## 22 BUDDHIST DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES

*Buddhism was introduced into China in the late Han and flourished during the Age of Division and the Tang and Song dynasties. Buddhism differed markedly from earlier Chinese religions and philosophies. It was a universal religion appealing to individuals of all countries and all social stations. It had a founding figure, Shakyamuni Buddha (ca. 563-483 B.C.), and a body of scriptures called sutras said to be records of the sermons of the Buddha. Its most devoted followers became monks and nuns and formed a part of a complex organized church. As a set of ideas, it built on the Indian conviction that sentient beings transmigrate through endless series of lives as people, animals, gods, hungry ghosts, hell dwellers, or titans, moving up or down according to the karma, or good and bad deeds, that they have accumulated. The major insight of the Buddha was that life is inevitably unsatisfactory because beings become enmeshed in the web of their attachments. Yet he offered hope, teaching that it was possible to escape the cycle of rebirth by moral conduct, meditative discipline, and the development of wisdom.*

*To get at some of the complexities of the impact of Buddhism on Chinese civilization, four separate sources are given below. The first is a basic description of Buddhist teachings written by a Chinese historian of the sixth century, Wei Shou, as part of his account of Buddhism in his history of the Northern Wei dynasty. It shows how Buddhist ideas could be put into Chinese vocabulary by a reasonably well-informed scholar. The second piece consists of two biographies, both from the sixth century Lives of Eminent Monks. These biographies illustrate different aspects of the spiritual life of the period, one showing an educated man caught between traditional social obligations and his religious calling, the other a charismatic figure who strongly influenced the religious life in the cities. The third selection consists in five colophons or notes appended to sutras that survived by chance at Dunhuang. Both lay persons and clergy would often commission the copying of sutras as a way to gain religious merit for themselves and their relatives, including deceased relatives. The colophons they wrote let us see how they understood Buddhist principles. The fourth piece, also from Dunhuang, is a popular song on the theme of how a woman's life changes as she grows older. By stressing how life inevitably leads to change and sorrow, it plays upon a familiar Buddhist theme of the transience*

*of life but does not make explicit reference to Buddhist principles.*

## **WEI SHOU'S SUMMARY OF BUDDHIST DOCTRINE**

The words we use for Buddha (Fotu or Foto) are based on the sound of the words used in the western lands. The meaning of the word is “awakened.” It refers to destroying impurities and gaining understanding, which lead to sagely enlightenment.

The general import of their scriptures is that everything in this and all other lives is a result of karma. Through the three ages of the past, the present, and the future, the conscious spirit is never destroyed. Any act of good or evil will be recompensed. By gradually accumulating good deeds, purifying vulgarities, passing through many forms, and refining the spirit, one can arrive at a level at which rebirth will not recur and thus attain buddhahood. There are many steps and mental activities to take, all proceeding from the simple to the profound, the imperceptible to the manifest. Through building up one's goodness and obedience, eliminating desires, and practicing serenity, one can break through.

The first step in cultivation of the mind is to take refuge in the Buddha, the dharma [Buddhist teachings], and the sangha [the community of Buddhists]. These are called the three refuges. These are comparable to the three things a man of virtue stands in awe of [in Confucianism]. There are also five prohibitions: one must not kill, rob, commit adultery, lie, or drink wine. The meaning is much like [the Confucian virtues of] benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness, though the names are different. They say that those who adhere to these rules will be reborn among heavenly beings or humans, but those who violate them will end up suffering with demons and animals. Altogether there are six paths for rebirth according to how good or bad a person was.

Those who submit to these teachings shave their beards and hair, free themselves from obligations, and take leave of their homes. They attach themselves to a teacher, observe rules and regulations, and live together to bring their minds under control and cultivate tranquility. They practice begging to support themselves. Individually, they are called by the foreign word sramana, or collectively by the term sangha. The word sangha means “group whose fate is harmonious,” sramana means “quiet-hearted,” bhiksu [another word for monk] means “beggar.” Laymen who believe in the dharma are called upasaka, laywomen upasika.

Monks begin by cultivating the ten rules, which makes them beginners, and

when they have mastered 250 they are ready to become senior monks. Women who enter the path are called nuns; they accept 500 rules. In each case the rules are gradually increased. They concern protecting one's mind, restraining one's person, and regulating one's speech. Their hearts must get rid of greed, anger, and folly; their bodies expunge killing, lust, and robbery; their mouths stop uttering false words. Taken together, these are called the ten good paths. Those who have mastered these are called triply accomplished and purified. Ordinary people's behavior is coarse in the extreme, but the Buddhists say that if they can comprehend the rewards for good and bad acts they can gradually climb to the level of sages....

The one called the Buddha was originally named Shakyamuni, which can be translated "capable of benevolence" and means that when his virtue was perfected he was able to aid all creatures. Before Shakyamuni there were six buddhas; he succeeded to them and lived in the current eon. Their books say that the next buddha to enter the world in the future will be Maitreya Buddha.

Shakyamuni was the son of a king of the country of Kapilavastu in India. He was born from his mother's side at night on the eighth day of the fourth month. At his birth there were thirty-two unusual signs, and there were also thirty-two portents sent down by Heaven in response to him. The scripture on his origin describes them in detail. The year he was born was the ninth year of King Zhuang of Zhou [688 B.C.]. In the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, under that year, the seventh year of the Duke Zhuang of Lu, it says, "the fixed stars were not visible but the sky was bright." From that time until the eighth year of the Wu-Ting period in Wei [650] is 1237 years.

When Shakyamuni was thirty he attained buddhahood, and he then spent forty-nine years preaching and converting others. Then on the fifteenth day of the second month, in the city of Kusinagara, between a pair of Sala trees, he entered nirvana. Nirvana means annihilation and crossing over. Another interpretation is that it means eternal joy; one is enlightened, free from change and suffering.... When the Buddha left the world, his body was burned with fragrant wood. His holy bones broke apart in pieces the size of grains. They could not be crushed by blows nor scorched by fire. Sometimes they would emit light as a sign of their spiritual power. In the foreign tongue these are called sarira, "relics." His followers took them and put them in jeweled jars and offered their respects to them with incense and flowers. They built buildings called stupas, another foreign word, which are like ancestral shrines, so that they are commonly called stupashrines. A hundred years later there was a King Asoka who with divine power divided the Buddha's relics and built 84,000 stupas all over the world for

them, accomplishing it all in one day. Today Loyang, Pengcheng, Guzang, and Linzi all have Asokan temples where the traces can be seen. Even though the Buddha entered nirvana, he left footprints, nails, and teeth in India. Travelers to that land have mentioned seeing them.

Soon after he entered nirvana, five hundred disciples who had heard his teachings, such as Mahakasyapa and Ananda, recorded the teachings he had delivered orally. Ananda had received the teachings personally and understood much, and so was able to organize it all very thoroughly so that nothing got left out. This is the Tripitaka with its twelve categories of scriptures, which is comparable to the nine schools of thought [used by Chinese bibliographers]. All of them take the Three Vehicles as the basis. A few hundred years later, arhats and bodhisattvas, one after the other, discussed and elaborated on the meanings of the scriptures to combat heresies. Their books comment on the meanings in the Tripitaka, pose questions and answers, or elaborate in terms of inner teachings.

*Translated by Patricia Ebrey*

## **LIVES OF EMINENT MONKS**

*Zhu Seng Du* was originally named Wang Xi (Xuanzong) and came from Donghuan, in Guangdong, South China. He came from a lesser literati family but was a very presentable young man. When he was sixteen his spirit soared high and his character stood out among his peers. His personality was mild and he was well loved by his neighbors. He lived with his mother and was a filial son to the last letter of the Confucian code. He courted the daughter of Mr. Yang Deshen in the same village. The Yang family was also respectable. Their daughter, Tiaohua, had a comely face and proper poise. She was versed in the apocryphal literature and was the same age as Du. The day he proposed to her, she accepted. However, not soon afterwards and before the marriage was set, Tiaohua's mother died. Tiaohua's father soon followed. Meanwhile, Du's mother also passed away. Suddenly realizing the transience of this world, Du left it behind and entered a monastic order, changing his name into Seng Du, Du, the follower of Sakyamuni. He left his trace beyond the world of dust and wandered, as a student, in faraway places. Tiaohua, after having tended to the mourning rites for her parents, realized that there was no place in society for a woman like her without anyone on whom to depend, neither parents, husband, nor child. Therefore she wrote to Du, "According to the Confucian norms of filial piety the hair and skin of one's body, being something one received from one's parents,

should not be harmed [for example, by tonsure]. The ancestral temples should not be abandoned as you, Du, the monk, have done. Moreover, considering the teaching of Confucian society you should abandon your lofty hermit ideal, and arousing your talents make a name for yourself in the world. Through your success you should let shine the spirit and glory of your ancestors and be a comfort to those close to you, fulfilling the expectations of both man and the spirits.” She also wrote five poems....

Seng Du responded, “Serving the king, as demanded by Confucianism, is to assist in the ruling of one’s country. That cannot be compared with pursuing the Buddhist path for all peoples. Serving one’s parents means to establish a family of one’s own; but that cannot be compared with following the Buddhist path for the sake of all beings in the three realms. The dictum ‘Never to harm your body or hair’ is the narrow advice of those committed to the world. I am ashamed that my present virtue has not extended itself to cover even that filial duty. However, small baskets of earth add up to a mountain: all beginnings are small. Thus I put on my monk’s gown, drink the pure water, and laud the wisdom of the Buddhas. Although the dress of princes, the food of the eight rarities, the sound of music and the color of glories are all fine, I would not trade my lot for them. If our minds are in tune to one another, we will meet in nirvana. However, people’s hearts are different, just as their faces are. Your distaste for the hermit’s way is like my indifference to the world. Dear one, let this be the last parting and let all the karmic ties from ten thousand years past that brought us together end here. Time is running short. The student of the dharma must learn to daily eliminate his attachment to the world of action. Men and women of the world, however, should adapt themselves to the times. You are, in age and virtue, in your prime, so you should pursue what you desire and admire. Do not keep this man who is committed to Buddhism in your mind and thereby lose the best years of your life.” Du further wrote five poems in reply....

Du’s mind was made up and, like a rock, it could not be swayed. Touched by his reply, Tiaohua also entered an order and became a nun.

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*Seng Baozhi*, originally surnamed Zhu, came from Jincheng. He left home in his youth and entered the Daolin temple in the capital where he practiced meditation under the monk Jianwei. At the beginning of the Taishi period in Song (465-471), his behavior suddenly became extraordinary. He would regularly stop eating or sleeping, let his hair grow to several inches, and walk the streets barefooted, holding a staff on which hung either a pair of scissors or a mirror, or sometimes a few strips of cloth.

During the Jianyuan period in Qi (479-482), Baozhi developed more extraordinary traits. He would go for days without food, showing no sign of hunger. He would talk to people in unintelligible enigmas that later turned out to be true. He composed poetry that was no less prophetic. As a result, the officials and the people in the capital became his followers. Emperor Wu of the Qi dynasty thought that Baozhi was bewitching the public and had him imprisoned in Jiankang. The next morning people saw him walking into the city again. When the matter was investigated, Baozhi was found to have been in jail all the time. Once he told the guards, "There are two carriages outside bringing rice in a golden alms-bowl. Accept it for me." Later, indeed Prince Hui and the Duke of Jingling, Wang Ziliang, sent food to Baozhi in the manner predicted.

The governor of Jiankang, Lu Wenxian, reported these events to Emperor Wu, who invited Baozhi to stay in the palace. Once when the emperor dismissed all courtiers during a private banquet, Baozhi left with the others. Soon it was learned that in the Jingyang mountain, another Baozhi was staying with seven renowned monks. The emperor, infuriated, sent people after him but they failed to find his whereabouts. Upon inquiry, it was reported that Baozhi had long since left the capital. The messengers were hoping to mark his body to prevent him from disappearing.

At another time, the eminent monk Faxian wanted to give Baozhi a robe. He sent a messenger to look for Baozhi in the two monasteries of Longguang and Jibin; and both places claimed that Baozhi had stayed there the previous night, leaving at daybreak. The messenger went to the residence of Bo, Count of Li, which Baozhi frequented. Bo said, "Baozhi was practicing devotions yesterday. He is still asleep now." The messenger returned and reported to Faxian. It was then clear that Baozhi could split himself into three persons and lodge at different places.

At one time Baozhi was walking in the cold winter without any upper garment. A monk, Baoliang, wanted to give Baozhi a monk's robe. Before Baoliang had uttered even a word, Baozhi appeared suddenly and took the robe. At another time, Baozhi asked someone for finely sliced pieces of fish. They were prepared for him. He dined to the full and left. Then the person turned around and saw the fish still alive and swimming in the bowl as before!...

The minister of war of Qi, Yin Qizhi, was to follow Chen Xianda to take up a post at Jiangzhou. When he took leave from Baozhi, Baozhi drew a picture of a tree with a crow in it, saying, "In case of an emergency, climb this tree." Later Xianda rebelled and left Qizhi to guard the state. When he was defeated, Qizhi also rebelled and then escaped into Lu Mountain. As the pursuers were drawing

near, Qizhi saw a tree in the woods with a crow in it, just like the one Baozhi had drawn earlier. Realizing this, he climbed the tree and contrary to expectation, the crow did not fly away. The pursuers saw the bird and thought there was no one up in the tree. They turned back and thus Qizhi escaped death.

The general Sang Yan of Qi was planning a rebellion when he went to see Baozhi. When Baozhi saw him from afar, he ran away, crying: “Besieged city walls. Rebellions contemplated. Head chopped off. Chest rent.” In less than ten days, the plot was exposed and Sang Yan, escaping to Zhufang, was captured. He was beheaded and his chest was rent as Baozhi had predicted.

Prince Zhonglie of Boyang in Liang asked Baozhi to stay at his place. One day, Baozhi suddenly ordered him to get bramble shrubs to be fixed to the gate. He did as he was told but could not figure out why. In a little while, the prince was made the governor of the state of Jin—literally “the bramble state.” However, such cases of Baozhi’s prophecies cannot all be fully documented.

Baozhi used to stay at the two monasteries of Xinghuang and Jingming. The previous emperor respected Baozhi highly, but did not allow Baozhi to come in and go out of the palace at will. When Emperor Wu came to the throne, he issued this decree, “Though the trace of Master Baozhi’s body is within this world, his spirit roves in the mysteries. Fire cannot burn him; water cannot dampen him; snakes cannot bite him; tigers cannot frighten him. When he expounds the meaning of Buddhist doctrines, his voice rises to the heights above; when he discourses on the esoteric matters, he proves to be the highest of all withdrawn immortals. How can he be bound by the rules of common sentiments or by empty forms? How can the previous edicts be so narrow-minded? From now on, the master can come and go as he pleases. No one is to stop him.” Since then, Baozhi has been in and out of the forbidden palace areas frequently.

In 506 there was a drought. All efforts at invocation and sacrifice were of no avail. Baozhi came to the emperor unexpectedly and said, “As I am ill, please ask an official to pray for a cure. If he fails, then the official should be whipped. I would hope to see the *Lion’s Roar of Queen Srimala* read to pray for rain.” The emperor then asked the monk, Fayun, to lecture on the sutra. When the lecture ended, heavy snow fell in that very night. Baozhi then demanded a basin of water and placed a knife on top of it. After a while, rain fell abundantly and the lands, high or low, had sufficient water.

The emperor once asked Baozhi, “I, your disciple, have not gotten rid of all defilements and delusions. What cure is there?” Baozhi answered cryptically,

“Twelve.” Those who knew interpreted that to mean the twelve-linked chain of causation, the medicine to cure delusions. The emperor then asked about the meaning of “Twelve.” Baozhi answered, “The principle is to write characters according to the ‘drip-clock’ measure.” Those who knew thought it meant writing within the twelve periods of time. The emperor then asked at what time he should quietly cultivate his mind. Baozhi answered, “Prohibiting ease and pleasure.” Those who knew thought it meant stopping at the easy hours since the word “prohibit” could mean “stop.”

Later the monk Fawen lectured on the *Lotus sutra* in the Hualin monastery. When he came to the passage on magically evoking the black winds, Baozhi suddenly asked whether there is wind or there is no wind. Fawen answered, “From the perspective of the conventional truth, there is. From the perspective of ultimate truth, there is not.”

There was a captive slave of war from Chen, whose family followed Baozhi with reverence. Once Baozhi revealed his true form to them; and it shone forth like a bright image of a bodhisattva.

Baozhi was known to the world and performed miracles for more than forty years and attracted innumerable devout disciples. In 514 he revealed to the people in the Taihou Hall: “This bodhisattva will soon depart.” Within ten days, he passed away without any illness, his body remaining soft and fragrant, his features serene and blissful. At his death bed he lit a candle which he gave to a palace attendant named Wu Qing. Qing reported it to the emperor who sighed, “This master is no longer with us. Does the candle (*zhu*) not indicate that he is entrusting (*zhu*) to me the matters of his funeral?” Thus he gave Baozhi an elaborate funeral and buried him at the Dulong hill on Zhong mountain. He erected a monastery at the tomb site and ordered Lu Chui to compose an eulogy to be engraved on the tomb, while Wang Yun wrote an inscription on the monument at the gate of the monastery. Baozhi’s portrait was distributed all over the country to be preserved in reverence.

When Baozhi first showed his miraculous powers, he was already about fifty or sixty years old. He never seemed to age, though, and no one knew his age exactly. A man, Xu Jiedao, who lived to the north of Jiuri Terrace in the capital claimed to be the cousin of Baozhi. He was four years younger which would have made Baozhi ninety seven when he passed away.

*Translated by Walen Lai*

## **DEDICATORY COLOPHONS**



Recorded on the 15th day of the fourth month of 531. The Buddhist lay disciple Yuanrong—having lived in this degenerate era for many years, fearful for his life, and yearning for home—now makes a donation of a thousand silver coins to the Three Jewels [the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha]. This donation is made in the name of the Celestial King Vaisravana. In addition, as ransom money<sup>\*</sup>, he makes a donation of a thousand to ransom himself and his wife and children, a thousand more to ransom his servants, and a thousand more to ransom his domestic animals. This money is to be used for copying sutras. It is accompanied by the prayer that the Celestial King may attain Buddhahood; that the disciple's family, servants, and animals may be blessed with long life, may attain enlightenment, and may all be permitted to return to the capital.

Happiness is not fortuitous: pray for it and it will be found. Results are not born of thin air: pay heed to causes and results will follow. This explains how the Buddhist disciple and nun Daorong—because her conduct in her previous life was not correct—came to be born in her present form, a woman, vile and unclean.

Now if she does not honor the awesome decree of Buddha, how can future consequences be favorable for her? Therefore, having cut down her expenditures on food and clothing, she reverently has had the *Nirvana sutra* copied once. She prays that those who read it carefully will be exalted in mind to the highest realms and that those who communicate its meaning will cause others to be so enlightened.

She also prays that in her present existence she will have no further sickness or suffering, that her parents in seven other incarnations (who have already died or will die in the future) and her present family and close relatives may experience joy in the four elements [earth, water, fire, and air], and that whatever they seek may indeed come to pass. Finally, she prays that all those endowed with knowledge may be included within this prayer. Dated the 29th day of the fourth month of 550.

Recorded on the 28th day of the fifth month of 583.

The army superintendent, Song Shao, having suffered the heavy sorrow of losing both his father and mother, made a vow on their behalf to read one section each of the following sutras: *The Sutra of the Great Assembly of Buddhas*, *The Nirvana sutra*, *The Lotus sutra*, *The Benevolent King sutra*, *The Golden Light sutra*, *The Sutra of the Daughter of Prasenajit*, and *The Master of Medicine sutra*. He prays that the spirits of his parents will someday reach the Pure Land [paradise of the Amitabha Buddha] and will thus be forever freed from the three

unhappy states of existence and the eight calamities and that they may eternally listen to the Buddha's teachings.

He also prays that the members of his family, both great and small, may find happiness at will, that blessings may daily rain down upon them while hardships disperse like clouds. He prays that the imperial highways may be open and free of bandits, that the state may be preserved from pestilence, that wind and rain may obey their proper seasons, and that all suffering creatures may quickly find release. May all these prayers be granted!

The preceding incantation has been translated and circulated.

If this incantation is recited seven, fourteen, or twenty-one times daily (after having cleansed the mouth in the morning with a willow twig, having scattered flowers and incense before the image of Buddha, having knelt and joined the palms of the hands), the four grave sins, the five wicked acts, and all other transgressions will be wiped away. The present body will not be afflicted by untimely calamities; one will at last be born into the realm of immeasurably long life; and reincarnation in the female form will be escaped forever.

Now, the Sanskrit text has been reexamined and the Indian Vinaya monk Buddhasangha and other monks have been consulted; thus we know that the awesome power of this incantation is beyond comprehension. If it is recited 100 times in the evening and again at noon, it will destroy the four grave sins and the five wicked acts. It will pluck out the very roots of sin and will ensure rebirth in the Western Regions. If, with sincerity of spirit, one is able to complete 200,000 recitations, perfect intelligence will be born and there will be no relapses. If 300,000 recitations are completed, one will see Amitabha Buddha face to face and will certainly be reborn into the Pure Land of tranquillity and bliss.

Copied by the disciple of pure faith Sun Sizhong on the 8th day of the fourth month of 720.

The lay disciple Madame Duan (nee Zhang) has ever lamented that the fragrant orchid, like a bubble, blooms for but one day, and that separation from loved ones causes so much sorrow. She wonders how it can be that Heaven feels nothing for the calamities it inflicts, and causes the worthiest to be the first to be cut down, just as the young tree is the first to wither and the tallest blossoms are the first to fall.

Thus, on behalf of her deceased third son, Commissioner Duan, an officer of the local commandery, she has reverently had this section of the *Golden Light sutra* copied. Now that the transcription is completed, she prays that her son's spirit may visit the azure heavens, that he may mingle with the immortals, that he may

travel in person to the Pure Land and listen to sutras being recited under the tree. She also prays that he may never pass through the three unhappy states of existence or the eight calamities, but will gather karma sufficient to enable him to proceed joyfully to the Lotus Palace and the Flowering Throne, that he will never again suffer a short life but enjoy longevity in the Pure Land and may be perpetually reborn only there.

His loving mother, thinking of him, prays that the karma for both of them may be good and that they may both enjoy the fruits of salvation.

Recorded on the 9th day of the sixth month of 900 in the Great Tang dynasty.

*Translated by Lucie Clark and Lily Hwa*

### **A Woman's Hundred Years**

At ten, like a flowering branch in the rain, She is slender, delicate, and full of grace. Her parents are themselves as young as the rising moon And do not allow her past the red curtain without a reason.

At twenty, receiving the hairpin, she is a spring bud. Her parents arrange her betrothal; the matter's well done. A fragrant carriage comes at evening to carry her to her lord. Like Xioshi and his wife, at dawn they depart with the clouds.

At thirty, perfect as a pearl, full of the beauty of youth, At her window, by the gauze curtain, she makes up in front of the mirror. With her singing companions, in the waterlily season, She rows a boat and plucks the blue flowers. At forty, she is mistress of a prosperous house and makes plans. Three sons and five daughters give her some trouble. With her lute not far away, she toils always at her loom, Her only fear that the sun will set too soon.

At fifty, afraid of her husband's dislike, She strains to please him with every charm. Trying to remember the many tricks she had learned since the age of sixteen. No longer is she afraid of mothers- and sisters-in-law.

At sixty, face wrinkled and hair like silk thread, She walks unsteadily and speaks little. Distressed that her sons can find no brides, Grieved that her daughters have departed for their husband's homes.

At seventy, frail and thin, but not knowing what to do about it, She is no longer able to learn the Buddhist Law even if she tries. In the morning a light breeze. Makes her joints crack like clanging gongs.

At eighty, eyes blinded and ears half-deaf, When she goes out she cannot tell north from east. Dreaming always of departed loves, Who persuade her to chase the dying breeze.

At ninety, the glow fades like spent lightning. Human affairs are no longer her concern. Lying on a pillow, solitary on her high bed, She resembles the dying leaves that fall in autumn.

At a hundred, like a cliff crumbling in the wind, For her body it is the moment to become dust. Children and grandchildren will perform sacrifices to her spirit, And clear moonlight will forever illumine her patch of earth.

*Translated by Patricia Ebrey and Lily Hwa*

\* Ransom from their present existences