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## Filial Piety with a Zen Twist: Universalism and Particularism Surrounding the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*

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### Abstract

This article examines the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* and its reinterpretation by the Japanese Rinzai Zen monk Tōrei Enji 東嶺圓慈 (1721-1792). In the context of the Tokugawa period (1600-1867) where filial piety was upheld as one of the pillars of morality and Neo-confucian orthodoxy, Tōrei's commentary of this sutra skillfully combined the particularist understanding of filiality as limited to one's relatives with its broader construal as a universal attitude of reverence directed toward all sentient beings. The father is envisioned as the wisdom and the excellence of the Buddha, the mother as the compassionate vows of the Bodhisattva, and the children as those who emit the thought of awakening. Tōrei further pushed this interpretation by adding the distinct Zen idea that the initial insight into one's true nature needs to be surpassed and refined by perfecting the going beyond (*kōjō* 向上) phase of training, where the child/disciple's legacy and his indebtedness towards his spiritual mentors is recast in terms of overcoming one's attainments and attachment to them.

### Keywords

filial piety, family reverence, Song period Chan, Rinzai Zen, universality, going beyond

### Introduction

Not many certainties are shared by all human beings regardless of their personal, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Among them figures the inevitability of death, which also implies its correlate: the undeniable reality of birth. Because of their emphasis on impermanence, Asian religions and Buddhist traditions in particular have always accentuated the bond between life and death. Such perspective is reflected in the technical term *saṃsāra*, often translated as "life-death," so deeply intertwined that a

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hyphen needs to link both terms. The Chinese translation of the same concept—*shēngsǐ* 生死 (Jp. *shōji*)—also suggests that life and death are akin to the two sides of the same coin.

As soon as one explores the awareness that death occurs as the natural consequence of birth, it leads to questioning the philosophical and moral implications of having received life from two other human beings generally called our parents. It also entails problematizing the sociohistorical contexts in which the seemingly similar concept of filial piety was reinterpreted in significantly different ways. Our understanding of this concept needs to be complicated accordingly.

This article first surveys early sources dealing with filial piety before focusing on the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* (*Fùmǔ ēn nánbào jīng* 父母恩難報經, T 16 no. 684). I will provide a new translation of the sutra and introduce its eighteenth-century Japanese commentary, a text barely known in scholarly circles. The sutra seems to have appeared in China between the fifth and the sixth century of the Common Era, although it is attributed to a second-century translator. The second section of this article will discuss its commentary by the Japanese Rinzai Zen monk Tōrei Enji 東嶺圓慈 (1721-1792), and examine his contribution to our understanding of this scripture. The final section of this article will broaden the discussion by problematizing the Confucian concept of filial piety and its Buddhist reinterpretation. We will further ask whether the Buddhist reinterpretation of filial piety and its recasting in universal terms emptied it from its content or whether it rather created a broader understanding of parentage.

A side question is whether the usual distinction between elitist forms of religious practice and devices geared toward popular audiences proves meaningful when applied to both ancient China and eighteenth-century Japan. We need to consider how formulations of filial piety can either be bent in the direction of an all-encompassing universalist concept, or in the contrary be appropriated as an instrument to justify particularism and enforce submissive behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cole deployed considerable skills in exploring “the semantic space that the term ‘filial piety’ (*xiao*) occupied in pre-Buddhist China with reference to three root thematic: (1) repayment, (2) obedience, and (3) the merging of familial and political authority” (Cole 1998: 16).

### Filial Piety as a Genre of Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Literature

The theme of filial piety (Ch. *xiào* 孝), or “family reverence” as it recently has been translated (see Ames and Rosemont 2009), was emphasized in China long before the introduction of Buddhism. On the other hand, thanks to the work of Gregory Schopen on epigraphic sources, we know that filial devotion was not a uniquely Chinese phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> Remaining inscriptions in South Asia tell us that many donors made a gift dedicated to their parents, living or dead. For instance, an early inscription found in Ceylon and dated between 210 and 200 BCE explains why a cave was given to the religious community: “The cave of princess (Abi) Tissā, daughter of the great king Gāmaṇī-Uttiya, is given to the Saṅgha of the ten directions, for the benefit of (her) mother and father” (Schopen 1997: 58).

Often the dedication is explained by the donor as “an act of *pūjā* for my mother and father (and) for the advantage and happiness of all beings” (Schopen 1997: 59). The most surprising feature of these inscriptions is not only that their stated purpose was the worship of the donors’ parents and their well-being, but also that “this concern for the well-being of deceased and living parents was an active concern and major preoccupation of Indian Buddhist monks in particular” (Schopen 1997: 64). Thus, Schopen’s discoveries contribute to put into perspective conventional geographical divides and to problematize the usual distinction between clergy and lay followers.

Yet, depending on whether the emphasis is put on the concept or on the practices that are performed independently from the various labels attached to them, one needs to fine-tune the analysis and not to take for granted the prevalence of a universal set of attitudes towards one’s parents. I suggest that the widespread geographical distribution of practices associated with “family reverence” indicates the coexistence of two distinct phenomena: 1) A generic form of filial worship resulting from the existential perception of the importance of receiving life and the indebtedness associated with it, which knows no particular geographical boundaries and appears especially ubiquitous in Asia. 2) The specifically Sinitic interpretation of this perception, which took a life of its own and spread across Asia. For the purpose of

<sup>2</sup> See in particular his “Filial Piety and the Monk in the Practice of Indian Buddhism: A Question of ‘Sinicization’ Viewed from the Other Side,” originally published in *T’oung Pao, Revue Internationale de Sinologie* 80 (1984) and reprinted in Schopen (1997: 56-71).

this article, I will mostly focus on the Sino-Japanese developments, before returning to wider issues.

### *The Sinitic Interpretation*

References to filial piety in ancient Chinese sources abound,<sup>3</sup> but let us mention only one anthology composed during the Warring States Period (480-222 BCE). The approximate date for the composition of the *Book of Rites* (*Lǐjì* 禮記) precedes the introduction of Buddhism to China by at least three centuries. This text contains several passages stressing the proper conduct of a filial child (*xiàozǐ zhī xíng* 孝子之行), including the performance of appropriate mourning duties.<sup>4</sup> It suggests that filial piety was often understood as including two complementary facets: active dedication during the parents' lifetime, and the performance of memorial rituals after their demise. This behavioral code was further systematized in the *Classic of Family Reverence* (*Xiàojīng* 孝經), which appeared between 436 and 239 BCE (Ames and Rosemont 2009: 18).

When examining such ancient examples, it is crucial to remember that both the concept and the practices associated with filial piety were not monolithic: they constantly shifted with their sociohistorical context. This is illustrated by the emergence of controversies surrounding filial piety, which are already visible in the second-century *Discourses That Hit the Mark* (*Zhōnglùn* 中論), a work by the Chinese philosopher Xú Gàn 徐幹 (170-217).

John Makeham's study of this work shows how filial piety was sometimes criticized as a form of hypocritical behavior. The reason was that, "*being seen to practise this particular virtue provided a means of acquiring*

<sup>3</sup> See for instance the *Classic of History* (*Shàngshū* 尚書), which was composed during the Spring and Autumn period (772-476 BCE).

<sup>4</sup> The Ji Tong 祭統 chapter of the *Book of Rites* contains an especially clear account: "Therefore in three ways is a filial son's service of his parents shown—while they are alive, by nourishing them; when they are dead, by all the rites of mourning; and when the mourning is over by sacrificing to them. In his nourishing them we see his natural obedience; in his funeral rites we see his sorrow; in his sacrifices we see his reverence and observance of the (proper) seasons. In these three ways we see the practice of a filial son." Translation by James Legge, as per Sturgeon, Donald, ed. Chinese Text Project. <http://ctext.org> (accessed 27 March 2012).

reputation.”<sup>5</sup> This is cited as one example of the growing gap between fame or name (Ch. *míng* 名) and the actual achievements (Ch. *shí* 實) of people, especially in terms of virtue. The ethos of that period, or its characteristic spirit, placed “filial respect and submission” at the center of its moral system, and it was in particular used as a measure of one’s reputation.

The ramifications of the concept of *xiào* beyond the personal sphere are further illustrated in the above-mentioned Confucian *Classic of Family Reverence*, which establishes three stages in its application: “This family reverence, then, begins in service to your parents, continues in service to your lord, and culminates in distinguishing yourself in the world” (Ames 2009: 105). The last sentence about “distinguishing yourself in the world” could also be translated more literally as “having one’s name stand out for future generations” (Ch. *míng lì yú hòushì* 名立於後世). In any case, we see here the extent to which the ancient Chinese concept of filial piety implied a deep link between the personal sphere of family relations, the public sphere of government, and its repercussions on the achievement of social fame and “success.” It is thus no surprise that this concept served as one of the central pillars of the Confucian ideology: its implication was that citizens either would comply with it or rebel against it, the latter case implying social exclusion.

#### *The Buddhist Sutras and Their Appropriation of Filial Piety*

As illustrated in the above examples, in China by the third century of the Common Era filial piety had become both an unavoidable form of social behavior and a rather lifeless idea, which implied conformity with the established social norms. It is in this context that we witness the emergence of several Buddhist scriptures touching the same theme while claiming to put new wine in old bottles.

Without reviewing the vast literature belonging to this genre, I suggest to focus on one particular piece, the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* (*Fùmǔ ēn nánbào jīng* 父母恩難報經, T 16 no. 684). The Chinese translation of this short scripture is attributed to the Parthian prince Ān Shìgāo 安世高, who reached Luoyang in 148 CE, where he died twenty years later, but the accuracy of this attribution is suspicious. The

<sup>5</sup> Makeham (1994: 100). Emphasis in Makeham’s text.

Taishō Canon includes more than fifty sutras whose translations are attributed to him,<sup>6</sup> but in his 1991 study Zürcher considered that the number of texts that can be safely considered as “genuine products of An Shigao” does not exceed “sixteen short scriptures” (Zürcher 1991: 283).<sup>7</sup> Jan Nattier further contributed to fine-tune the criteria for including or excluding some of these works,<sup>8</sup> taking also into account new texts that emerged in 1999: “The field of An Shigao studies is currently being revolutionized by the recent re-discovery at Kongōji 金剛寺, a temple located in Ōsaka Prefecture, of several texts that appear to be ascribable to An Shigao” (Nattier 2008: 64).

Nattier concludes that, “of the fifty-four texts credited to An Shigao in the current Taishō edition of the canon (counting T150A and B separately), only thirteen have been accepted as genuine here” (Nattier 2008: 68). Since neither Zürcher nor Nattier include the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* in their short list, we may safely assume that the authorship of this translation is questionable. A decisive criterion is the fact that Sēngyōu 僧祐 (445-518) mentions this title in his *Catalog of Works Included in the Tripiṭaka* (*Chūsānzàng jìjí* 出三藏記集 T 55 no. 2145), but does not attribute this translation to Ān Shìgāo. Sēngyōu also appends a succinct note: “It was copied from the *Middle-length Discourses* (Ch. *chāo Zhōngahán* 抄中阿含).”<sup>9</sup> Such suggestion by Sēngyōu—who is usually

<sup>6</sup> Zürcher mentions that “in the successive bibliographies the number of works attributed to An Shigao has grown from 34 to 179,” but does not explain the source for the larger figure (Zürcher 1991: 278). Stefano Zacchetti also agrees by not mentioning this work in his “Defining An Shigao’s Translation Corpus: The State of the Art in Relevant Research” (2010). In his *Lexicographical Study* (2012) Tilmann E. Vetter adopts the same stance by not considering the inclusion of this sutra in Ān Shìgāo’s corpus.

<sup>7</sup> The list of these 16 works is included in Zürcher’s Appendix (Zürcher 1991: 297-298).

<sup>8</sup> See Nattier (2008), pages 38-72 focus on Ān Shìgāo.

<sup>9</sup> T 55 no. 2145, 29c03. The *Zhōng Ahánjīng* 中阿含經 is included in T 1 no. 26, but it seems to bear only vague resemblance to the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*. Examples include several passages emphasizing the fact that one’s physical body and the four great elements have been received from one’s parents (Ch. *sìdà zhī zhǒng, cóng fùmǔ shēng* 四大之種。從父母生), that they have always provided food and clothing (Ch. *yǐnshí zhǎngyǎng, cháng yìbèi fū* 飲食長養。常衣被覆), and that they kept massaging and washing their children even when it was unpleasant (Ch. *zuòwò ànmó, zǎo yù qiǎngrén* 坐臥按摩。澡浴強忍). Nothing similar to this appears to exist in the Pāli *Majjhima Nikāya*.

reliable—that the work could have been borrowed from another collection is intriguing enough to warrant further scrutiny.

Although Sēngyòu was not precise in his attribution, a very similar text is included in another of the *Āgamas*. The source that seems to have inspired the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* is a passage from the *Zēngyī āhán jīng* 增一阿含經 (*Ekottarāgama-sūtra*), which contains the main ingredients of the narrative.<sup>10</sup> We know that this translation is attributed to the Kashmiri monk Gautama Saṃghadeva (Jùtán Sēngqiétípó 瞿曇僧伽提婆) and that he completed it in 397 after a first translation was made in 384.<sup>11</sup> If we admit that this section of the *Zēngyī āhán jīng* constitutes the main source for the narrative found in the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*, it pushes the date of its composition to a much later period of time, roughly the interval between the end of the fourth century (the translation of the *Ekottarāgama*) and the midst of the fifth century (the Chinese translation of the **Mahīśāsaka Vinaya** is dated 434 CE, while the *Chūsānzàng jǐjí* 出三藏記集 was written around 515 CE). Another route of transmission between Sanskrit versions of the same story appears to link the **Vinaya** of the Mūlasarvāstivāda to the *Divyāvadāna*.<sup>12</sup>

Now that we have a better grasp of the time range during which the Chinese translation of the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* has been compiled, it is worth noticing that in spite of issues of authorship or ownership of the translations, several of the texts wrongfully attributed to Ān Shìgāo share interesting features. They reflect a fascination

<sup>10</sup> T 2 no. 125, 601a10-601a20. Passage partially translated in Cole (1998: 117-118). It is included in a quote from *The Pearl Grove of the Dharma Garden* (*Fǎyuàn zhūlín* 法苑珠林) by Dào Shì 道世.

<sup>11</sup> The foreword to the translation explains that the text was first translated during the Former Qin 前秦 (351-394) Dynasty, and involved translators including Dharmanandi (Tán-mónántí 曇摩難提), who arrived in Chang'an in the 20th year of the Jiànyuán 建元 era (384). Fóniàn 佛念 was translating orally (Ch. *yìzhuan* 譯傳) while Tán-sōng 曇嵩 was writing it down (Ch. *bǐshòu* 筆受). Their work was completed in the summer of 384 when a war (*Āchéng zhī yì* 阿城之役) broke down and disrupted the project, so that the manuscripts were scattered or lost (T 2 no. 125, p. 549 a13-a15). Dharmanandi then returned to the Western region. A more detailed account is included in the entry on Dharmanandi in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gāosēng zhuàn* 高僧傳, T 50 no. 2059, p. 328 c02 and following).

<sup>12</sup> See Silk (2008: 62). For the *Divyāvadāna* version of the story, see Rotman (2008: 111-112). I am indebted to Andy Rotman for pointing me in the direction of Silk's erudite article.

for the idea of karmic retribution (Ch. *bào* 報), and are written in the form of short pieces illustrating the unfortunate consequences of immoral behavior.<sup>13</sup> These edifying stories—often sharing a rudimentary narrative—suggest parallels with tales found in the transformation texts (Ch. *biànwén* 變文), an increasingly popular genre during the Tang dynasty.<sup>14</sup> At this juncture, it is necessary to restate that the emphasis on filial piety—or at least its variation as indebtedness towards one's parents—is not a uniquely Chinese phenomenon. The above-mentioned passage of the *Zēngyī āhán jīng* (*Ekottarāgama-sūtra*) has, in fact, a close equivalent in the Pāli Canon.<sup>15</sup>

#### Source in the Pāli Canon

Thanks to the footnote “A. II.4.2. Duppaṭikāra” in the Taishō edition (T 2 no. 125, 601), it is possible to find the Pāli text corresponding to the Chinese version of the *Ekottarāgama*, which in turn seems to have inspired the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*. This piece is included in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, or *Numerical Discourses*, in the second section “Book of Twos” (*Dukanipāta*), in the chapter entitled *Samacittavagga* (On the Calm Mind). For the purpose of our analysis it is crucial to have a look at a translation of the second part of this text:

<sup>13</sup> See for instance the *Guǐ wèn mùlián jīng* 鬼問目連經 (On Dead People Questioning Maudgalyāyana, T 17 no. 734), where dead people (Ch. *guǐ* 鬼 is often also translated as “ghosts”) are asking about why they are suffering in the afterlife and confess their evil deeds. The story of Prince Mùpò 慕魄太子, Śākyamuni in a previous life, is narrated in the *Tàizǐ Mùpò jīng* 太子慕魄經 (T 3 no. 167). The *Zuìyè yīngbào jiàohuà dìyù jīng* 罪業應報教化地獄經 (The Sutra on Edification about Crimes and Their Retribution in Hell, T 17 no. 724) mentions four times those who are unfilial toward their parents (Ch. *bùxiào fùmǔ* 不孝父母). Another example is the *Fēnbié shàn'è suǒqǐ jīng* 分別善惡所起經 (The Sutra on Producing Discernment between Good and Evil, T 17 no. 729), which stresses the importance of filial behavior (Ch. *xiàoshùn fùmǔ* 孝順父母) and chastises the absence of respect toward one's parent (Ch. *bùjìng fùmǔ* 不敬父母).

<sup>14</sup> About this genre of literature, see Teiser (1988, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> As the Sanskrit original of the *Ekottarāgama-sūtra* has not been preserved we have no means to determine the extent of divergences between the Sanskrit and Pāli texts, or between the Chinese translation and its Sanskrit source. Regarding this issue, Bronkhorst observes: “The Chinese version of the *Ekottarāgama* is classified according to the same general principles but differs so drastically from the Pāli version in details that we are forced to conclude that the two collections were produced independently of each other” (Bronkhorst 2009: 63).



I declare, O monks, that there are two persons one can never repay. What two? One's mother and father. Even if one should carry about one's mother on one shoulder and one's father on the other, and while doing so should live a hundred years, reach the age of a hundred years; and if one should attend to them by anointing them with salves, by massaging, bathing and rubbing their limbs, and they should even void their excrements there—even by that would one not do enough for one's parents, one would not repay them. Even if one were to establish one's parents as the supreme lords and rulers over this earth so rich in the seven treasures, one would not do enough for them, one would not repay them.

What is the reason for this? Parents do much for their children: they bring them up, feed them and guide them through this world. But, O monks, one who encourages his unbelieving parents, settles and establishes them in faith; who encourages his immoral parents, settles and establishes them in virtue; who encourages his stingy parents, settles and establishes them in generosity; who encourages his ignorant parents, settles and establishes them in wisdom—such a one, O monks, does enough for his parents: he repays them and more than repays them for what they have done. (Bodhi Bhikkhu and Nyanaponika Thera 1999: 42-43).

Obviously, this passage carries a very simple message. The first paragraph emphasizes indebtedness and the impossibility for the child to reciprocate the kindness he has received through material means, whereas the second paragraph prescribes to use the only means of true reciprocation, which is to convey four of the essential tenets of Buddhism.<sup>16</sup> One should notice, however, that the idea of reciprocating or repaying a karmic debt (Ch. *bào* 報) does not seem to be explicit in the Sanskrit fragments that have reached us. The quote of the Vinaya in the *Dīvyāvadāna* is translated by Andy Rotman as follows:

Were a son to care for his mother with half his energy and father with the other half for a full one hundred years [...] that son would still not have sufficiently served or obliged his mother and father.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> In this text they are listed as: 1. Trust (P. *Saddhā*, Sk. *Śraddhā*, Ch. *xìn*, Jp. *shin* 信); 2. Ethical conduct (P. *sīla*, Sk. *śīla*, Ch. *jiè*, Jp. *kai* 戒); 3. Generosity (P. *cāga*, Sk. *dāna*, Ch. *shī*, Jp. *se* 施); 4. Wisdom (P. *paññā*, Sk. *prajñā*, Ch. *huì*, Jp. *e* 慧).

<sup>17</sup> Rotman (2008: 111). Andy Rotman kindly indicated that the Sanskrit original has *neyatā putreṇa mātāpitaroḥ kṛtaṃ vā syād upakṛtaṃ vā* (Divy 51.26-27; Divy-V 31.24) and that “the verbal form here doesn't let on to the notion of payment or repayment” (email communication received April 23, 2012).

Concerning the differences between the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, its Sanskrit equivalents, and their correspondence with the Chinese text, Bhikkhu Anālayo points out that:

The Chinese translation of an *Ekottarika-āgama* (增壹阿含經) of uncertain school affiliation differs from the above delineated textual corpus, in that material found in this collection stems from a longer time span than what is reflected in the other āgamas and the four Pāli Nikāyas. While the *Ekottarika-āgama* does contain a number of early texts, other passages found in this collection pertain to a much later period, showing that the collection must have remained open to the integration of new material and ideas for a considerable time span. (Anālayo 2010: 12-13).

This seems to leave room for another possibility belonging to pure speculation: could we imagine a reverse chronology of these texts, where the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*—whoever its translator may be—could have preceded the Chinese translation of the *Zēngyī āhán jīng* (*Ekottarāgama-sūtra*)?

Considerable work remains to be done to establish the precise chronology of these early sources, as well as of their translations or reiterations, and I will happily leave the definitive mapping of this research area to specialists. In this regard, it is necessary to mention the work of Guang Xing, from the University of Hong Kong, who has discussed many of the sources mentioned here. It is only after having discovered the link between the Chinese sutras and their Pāli antecedents that I learned how Guang had made similar connections.<sup>18</sup> Yet, in spite of my admiration for the meticulousness of his research, scrutinizing the intricate web of intertextuality linking the Pāli Canon and Chinese sources leads me to significantly different conclusions.

His distinction between “an authentic version” of the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* and an “apocryphal” one—the late *Fùmǔ ēn zhòng jīng* 父母恩重經 (Sutra on the Depth of the Parents’ Kindness, T 85 no. 2887)—seems especially problematic (Guang 2008: 105-146). Showing that a sutra in Chinese is based on a narrative found in the Pāli Canon (albeit not entirely identical to it) is an invaluable piece of infor-

<sup>18</sup> See my 1995 report in Japanese about this sutra (Mohr 1995).

mation. Yet, it only demonstrates that the same story traveled East, and does not tell us how, when, and why this occurred.

The issue of authenticity is a completely different one, which can be approached from several perspectives and whose implications should be clearly disclosed. Modern scholarship tends to be very skeptical about the normative position asserting that all Mahāyāna sutras have been preached by the historical Buddha, and the Nikāya teachings preserved in the Pāli Canon are not immune to such historical scrutiny. Moreover, as far as the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* is concerned, I would be inclined to follow Sēngyòu and to say that its narrative is more likely to have been inspired by a passage in the Chinese version of the Āgamas than directly by a lost Sanskrit text. Referring to the above-mentioned passage in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Guang asserts: “In this passage, it is quite explicit that the Buddha taught filial piety” (Guang 2005: 85). I would question both claims. First, the mention in a Pāli source does not prove that the historical Buddha taught any of this. Secondly, one may wonder whether the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*’s emphasis on repaying the debt to one’s parents amounts to “filial piety” in the sense of the Chinese word *xiào*. In any case, discussing Indian sources that have not been preserved in their entirety is a tricky task. It seems safer to put the emphasis on the contextualization and analysis of these stories, and to focus on concrete examples of how the concept of “filial piety” traveled across chronological and geographic boundaries.

This leads us to the second half of this article, which involves first providing a new translation of the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*, and then fast-forwarding more than twelve hundred years to discuss a commentary of this sutra composed in eighteenth-century Japan. To get a sense of how filial piety was reinterpreted across time and space, we need to have a closer look at the earliest scripture in Chinese, which has been retranslated below for the sake of this article. Its division into nine paragraphs is arbitrary and only aims at making the text more readable. Chinese characters follow Tōrei’s version, as published in 1995 (Mohr 1995).

## New Translation of the Sutra

## The Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents

*Fó shuō fūmǔ ēn nánbào jīng* 佛說父母恩難報經<sup>19</sup>

- [1] Translated by the Buddhist monk<sup>20</sup> Ān Shìgāo in the Later Han (25-220 CE).
- [2] Thus have I heard. Once, the Bhagavat was staying in the city of Śrāvastī, at the [Jetavana monastery in the] Anāthapiṇḍada Park. At that time, the World-Honored One told all of the monks (*bhikṣus*):

“Fathers and mothers immensely contribute to the wellbeing<sup>21</sup> of their children. After having breast-fed<sup>22</sup> and nourished them, they raise and educate<sup>23</sup> them in accordance with their age, so that the four great elements can fully develop.<sup>24</sup>

Suppose they were to carry their father on the right shoulder and their mother on the left, went through this for a thousand years, and further let them relieve themselves on their back<sup>25</sup> without bearing any resent-

<sup>19</sup> Original text included in the Taishō Canon volume 16, no. 684, pp. 778c-779a. The punctuation and some characters have been modified to follow Tōrei’s commentary *Bussetsu bumō onnanpōkyō chūge* 佛說父母恩難報經註解, which was completed in 1787. Significant differences will be indicated in the footnotes.

<sup>20</sup> The Taishō text has “the Tripiṭaka of Parthia” (Ch. *Ānxīguó sānzàng* 安息國三藏) instead of “the Buddhist monk” (Sk. *śramaṇa*, Ch. *shāmén* 沙門).

<sup>21</sup> In this context the technical term *zēngyì* 增益 (Sk. *pauṣṭika*) indicates what causes growth or welfare.

<sup>22</sup> The Taishō text has Ch. *rǔbù* 乳哺 instead of Ch. *rǔbǔ* 乳哺 in Tōrei’s version.

<sup>23</sup> The Chinese compound *jiāngyù* 將育 is read *yashinai sodatete* by Tōrei.

<sup>24</sup> Meaning that the four elements (earth, water, fire, and wind) resulted in a full-fledged human body.

<sup>25</sup> The Taishō text has “just” (Ch. *zhèng* 正) instead of “further” (Ch. *gèng* 更). Cole translates this passage as “while making them comfortable on his back” (Cole 1998: 43; and further explains his choice in note 19, p. 247). The translation of Ch. *biànlì* 便利, which could be interpreted as either “comfort” or “feces” was problematic, but the identification of the source of this sutra as being the *Zēngyì āhán jīng* 增一阿含經 (*Ekottarāgama-sūtra*) and the corresponding text in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* allows to dispel all doubts. Additionally, a passage in the *Vinaya of the Mahīśāsaka School* (Ch. *Mīshāsāibù héxì wūfēnlǜ* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律) is very explicit about this, with the clause “[even if they should] discharge feces

ment. Still, this would not be enough for these children to reciprocate the kindness<sup>26</sup> of their parents.

- [3] If your father and mother lack trust,<sup>27</sup> enjoin them to trust [the Buddha],<sup>28</sup> so that they achieve a state of ease and peace (*huò ānwěn chù* 獲安穩處).<sup>29</sup> If they lack morality,<sup>30</sup> instruct them in morality so that they achieve a state of ease and peace. If they do not listen [to the Dharma], instruct them in listening so that they achieve a state of ease and peace. If they are stingy and greedy, enjoin them to appreciate generosity; promote their happiness<sup>31</sup> and instruct them so that they achieve a state of ease and peace. If they lack wisdom (*prajñā*), make

and urine on [them] . . ." (Ch. *yū shàng dàxiǎo biànlì* 於上大小便利). This text was translated into Chinese in 434 CE. For a complete translation of this passage, see Guang (2005: 98). Thus, the translation by Yifa and Romaskiewicz (2008: 21) is correct.

<sup>26</sup> The Chinese word *ēn* 恩 is usually translated as "kindness," but it also involves the idea of a favor and of a debt that must be repaid or reciprocated (Ch. *bào* 報). Buddhist texts provide various lists of four types of benefactors (Ch. *sìēn* 四恩), always including one's parents. A benefactor (Ch. *ēnrén* 恩人) is someone from which enormous indebtedness has been accumulated.

<sup>27</sup> To avoid meek nuances I prefer to translate the Chinese character *xìn* 信 (Sk. *śraddhā*) as trust, rather than faith or belief.

<sup>28</sup> In this text the word *jiào* 教 is almost always used as the factitive "make . . .", read by Tōrei as *-seshimu* in Japanese. In this translation the verb *jiàoshòu* 教授 has been rendered as "to instruct" and *jiàolìng* 教令 as "to enjoin." This last compound is used as an equivalent for *jiàohuà* 教化, which refers to the selfless guidance of others (Sk. *śāsana*).

<sup>29</sup> The Taishō text has Ch. *ānyǐn* 安隱 instead of Ch. *ānwěn* 安穩. Both compounds suggest a wide range of meanings including security, peace, comfort, ease, rest, and tranquillity, corresponding to the Sanskrit *kṣema*. Since ultimate peace is understood as the actualization of *nirvāṇa* (Ch. *ānyǐn nièpán* 安隱涅槃), the peace of mind obtained by the parents seems to be understood as an anticipation of the deeper serenity obtained through realization. Although the last character *chù* 處 literally means a location, it also indicates an inner "state." The Chinese verb *huò* 獲 literally means to gain or acquire, but achieving a certain mental state sounds more natural.

<sup>30</sup> The Chinese word *jiè* 戒 corresponds to the Sanskrit *śīla* meaning morality, while *lǜ* 律 corresponds to the precepts (*vinaya*).

<sup>31</sup> The compound *quàn lè* 勸樂 refers to joy and pleasure, such as the enjoyment experienced by the devas (see Nakamura 2001: 247a-b). Tōrei's text dissociates the two characters as Jp. *raku o susume* 樂を勧め (encouraging pleasure).

them sharp and wise;<sup>32</sup> promote their happiness and instruct them so that they achieve a state of ease and peace.<sup>33</sup>

- [4] This is the way to trust the Tathāgata, [who has realized the] Ultimate Truth, the Perfectly Awakened One,<sup>34</sup> Accomplished in Knowledge and Conduct.<sup>35</sup> He is called the Well-Gone, the Knower of the World,<sup>36</sup> the Unsurpassed Being, the Charioteer of the Dharma, the Teacher of Deities and Human Beings. Such are the epithets for the Buddha, the World-Honored One.
- [5] Make [your parents] trust the Dharma, and instruct them so that they achieve a state of ease and peace. All the Dharma teachings being profound, the achievement of their fruits<sup>37</sup> in the present body also has a profound significance.

<sup>32</sup> Ch. *Xiáhuì* 點慧 (Jp. *katsue*) indicates a type of intelligence dominated by sharpness. One of its Sanskrit equivalents, *pañḍita*, suggests someone who is learned, but also shrewd and clever. Tōrei emphasizes clarity by adding the reading Jp. *akiraka* to the character *katsu* 點.

<sup>33</sup> Here, the Taishō text has the Chinese variant *hù* 護 instead of the leitmotiv with Ch. *huò* 獲, but this appears to be a typo.

<sup>34</sup> The Chinese *děngzhèng jué* 等正覺 is one equivalent for the Sanskrit *samyak-saṃbodhi*.

<sup>35</sup> Translation of the three Chinese characters *míngxíngchéng* 明行成, corresponding to the Sanskrit *vidyācara-saṃpanna*, often rendered into Chinese as *míngxíngzú* 明行足.

<sup>36</sup> The Chinese *shìjiān jiě* 世間解 corresponds to the Sanskrit *lokavid*, also one of the ten epithets of the Buddha.

<sup>37</sup> The “fruits” indicate the various forms of realization of Buddhahood, such as the four attainments (Ch. *siguǒ* 四果) mentioned later in the text where it speaks of the four pairs and the eight types of accomplished practitioners. The mention of these attainments, usually emphasized in pre-Mahāyāna sources, suggests either that when this sutra was composed the boundaries between Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna were ill-defined, or that it aimed at being all-inclusive. Tōrei favors the latter interpretation and speaks of the three vehicles and the five natures (Jp. *sanjō goshō* 三乘五性) all trusting the wonderful Dharma in accordance with their abilities (Jp. *ōki* 應機).

- [6] With such insight,<sup>38</sup> clear knowledge permeates their conduct.<sup>39</sup> Instruct [your parents] to trust the noble community.<sup>40</sup> The Tathāgata's noble community is extremely pure; their conduct being forthright and incorruptible, they are constantly in accord with the Dharma.<sup>41</sup> When the Dharma is realized, morality is realized; *samādhi*, wisdom, liberation, and liberated insight are realized.
- [7] What is known as the noble community [includes the] four pairs and the eight types of accomplished practitioners.<sup>42</sup> They constitute the Tathāgata's noble community [made of] the most venerable and the most eminent. You should worship and respect [them], as this field of merit is unsurpassed in this world. Thus all children should make their parents practice compassion.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Here I followed Tōrei's interpretation of Ch. *zhìzhě* 智者 as a nominalization of Ch. *zhì* 智, commonly translated as "wisdom." The translation "wisdom" has been kept for the Chinese compound *zhìhuì* 智慧, corresponding to the Sanskrit *prajñā*.


<sup>39</sup> This passage seems to allude to the Chinese compound *míngxíng* 明行 (knowledge and conduct) used as one of the above-mentioned epithets of the Buddha, *Míngxíngchéng* 明行成 (Accomplished in Knowledge and Conduct). I did not follow Tōrei's interpretation of Ch. *míng* 明 as the adverb "clearly" (Jp. *akirakani kono gyō ni tsūzu* 明らかに此の行に通ず). In this context, Ch. *xíng* 行 seems to indicate "conduct" (Sk. *acara* or *ācāra*) rather than practice. The explanation of "their conduct" (Ch. *cǐ xíng* 此行) follows.

<sup>40</sup> The compound *shèngzhòng* 聖眾 is the Chinese equivalent for the Sanskrit *ārya-saṅgha*.

<sup>41</sup> The way Tōrei punctuates this passage gives it a significantly different meaning. Most texts including the Taishō edition and the translation in the Buddha's Light series have the Chinese text divided as follows: *Shèn qīng jìng xíng, zhí bù qū cháng hé hé, fǎ fǎ chéng jiù* 甚清淨行。直不曲常和合。法法成就, whereas Tōrei understood it as *hanahada shōjō ni shite, gyō jiki ni shite magezu, hō jōjū sureba...* 甚清淨。行直不曲常和合法。法成就. According to the latter reading, "conduct" is the subject of the second clause. My translation follows Tōrei's interpretation.

<sup>42</sup> These four categories include those of: 1. Stream-enterer (Sk. *srota-āpanna*, Ch. *yùliú* 預流) in the initial stage (*xiàng* 向) and in the realization stage (*guǒ* 果); 2. Once-returner (Sk. *sakṛd-āgāmin*, Ch. *yīlái* 一來) in the initial stage and in the realization stage; 3. Nonreturner (Sk. *anāgāmin*, Ch. *bùhuán* 不還) in the initial stage and in the realization stage; 4. Arhat (Ch. *ālúohàn* 阿羅漢) in the initial stage and in the realization stage.

<sup>43</sup> As noted above, here Ch. *jiào* 教 indicates the factitive "make..." and does not mean "instruct."

[8] All monks consist<sup>44</sup> of two ‘children’: the child who was produced,<sup>45</sup> and the child who is nurtured. This is what is meant by speaking of ‘monks who consist of two children.’ It is for this reason that all monks should learn about the child who was produced, and [reciprocate by] emitting from their mouth the flavor of the Dharma.<sup>46</sup> This is how all monks should engage in this [form of] learning 

<sup>44</sup> Depending on the context, Ch. *yǒu* 有 can sometimes be translated as “to have” or “to be.” Here, it seems to refer to the fundamental constituents of existence, two modalities of “being” (Sk. *asti*) in the world: as a physical body inherited from one’s parents, and as person who can nurture or cultivate buddhahood. We will return to Tōrei’s detailed explanation.

<sup>45</sup> Tōrei explains this analogy by referring to its mundane and supra-mundane implications. According to him, the child who was produced or engendered (Ch. *suǒshēngzǐ*, Jp. *shosei no ko* 所生子) indicates everything that was received from the parents, such as predispositions (Jp. *kishitsu* 氣質), flesh and blood (Jp. *kechiniku* 血肉), material possessions (Jp. *zaisan* 財產), and wisdom and qualities (Jp. *chitoku* 智德). Even after having learned about one’s predispositions, and having personally received these karmic manifestations (Jp. *gōhō* 業法), one’s vital energy (Jp. *ki* 氣) cannot thoroughly implement filiality, and one’s karma cannot exhaust all its subtleties (Jp. *myō* 妙): this is what is called the child who is nurtured (Ch. *suǒshēngzǐ*, Jp. *shoyō no ko* 所養子), implying that cultivation is necessary. Both pertain to the mundane dimension (Jp. *se* 世), whereas the supramundane dimension (Jp. *shusse* 出世) indicates the application of the same two to the teacher-disciple relation.

<sup>46</sup> This technical term (Sk. *dharma-rasa*, Ch. *fǎwèi*, Jp. *hōmi* 法味) frequently appears in the *Flower Ornament Scripture* (*Dàfāng guǎng fó huáyánjīng* 大方廣佛華嚴經) in 60 fascicles (T. 9 no. 278). Here, Tōrei indicates that one of the keys to this passage is the section of the *Lotus Sutra*, at the beginning of chapter 3, where Śāriputra exclaims: “Now I have heard from the Buddha what I had never heard before, a Law never known in the past, and it has ended all my doubts and regrets. My body and mind are at ease and I have gained a wonderful feeling of peace and security. Today at last I understand that truly I am the Buddha’s son, born from the Buddha’s mouth, born through conversion to the Law, gaining my share of the Buddha’s Law!” (*Miàofǎ liánhuájīng* 妙法蓮華經 T. 9 no. 262, p. 10a11-a14, translation by Watson 1993: 48). Two ideas contained in this passage help us clarify recurrent themes in *The Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*: 1. The idea of “having gained a wonderful feeling of peace and security” (Ch. *kuài dé ānyǐn* 快得安隱), and 2. The idea of being “born from the Buddha’s mouth” (Ch. *cóng fókǒu shēng* 從佛口生).

<sup>47</sup> In this context the distinction between learning and practice is, of course, irrelevant. The expression translated as “engage in this [form of] learning” (Ch. *dāng zuò shì xué*, Jp. *masani kono gaku o nasu beshi* 當作是學) is an injunction to understand the indebtedness to one’s parents and the importance to reciprocate this debt by teaching the Dharma.



At this time, once all of the monks had heard what the Buddha taught, they were uplifted in delight and respectfully put [these teachings] into practice.

[9] [End of] *The Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*.

### Tōrei's Zen Twist

I now suggest to examine the *Annotated Commentary of the Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* (*Bussetsu bumo onnanpōkyō chūge* 佛說父母恩難報經註解) by Tōrei Enji, which sheds a different light on the text studied so far. Since I have detailed Tōrei's role in the Zen revival of the Tokugawa period elsewhere, I will skip this dimension (see in particular Mohr 1997, 2000, and 2009). What is directly relevant to our discussion is that Tōrei wrote another work focusing on the theme of filial piety: the *Oral Explanation of the Filial Piety Classics in the Three Teachings of Shintō, Confucianism, and Buddhism* (*Shinjubutsu sanbō kōkyō kuge* 神儒佛三法孝經口解), which he completed in 1789 and published in 1791. This indicates Tōrei's lifelong interest in what could be labeled an early form of comparative studies, stemming in part from his personal commitment to practice a dying form of Shintō while assuming the abbacy of Ryūtakuji 龍澤寺, a major Rinzai monastery.

The same comparative approach is visible in Tōrei's prior *Annotated Commentary on the Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* (hereafter *Annotated Commentary*), composed in ~~July~~ 1770. Tōrei was fifty years old according to the traditional reckoning,<sup>48</sup> and these lectures coincided with a service dedicated to his own parents. He recalls having erected a large memorial stūpa (*daihōtō* 大寶塔) in memory of his father Sōju 宗樹 and his mother Chisen 智仙, and having spent five days teaching about this text. Several relics were put in the stūpa, including a tooth from his father (*ha ichimai* 齒一枚),<sup>49</sup> a coil of hair from his mother (*motodori*

<sup>48</sup> The *Annotated Commentary* has a very precise date: 24th day of the seventh lunar month, seventh year of the Meiwa era (明和七年庚寅七月二十四日), corresponding to August 25, 1770 in the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>49</sup> We know that in 1749 Tōrei's father was agonizing, but that Tōrei was in the midst of the most important phase of his practice and could not return to be present at his deathbed

*ikkei* 髻一莖),<sup>50</sup> and bits of his own nails and hair (*sōhatsu issatsu* 爪髮一撮).<sup>51</sup> It is worth noticing that this ritual was performed more than twenty years after the passing of both parents. Tōrei was present at his mother's bedside in her last year (1747),<sup>52</sup> but when his father died two years later he could not return home. Anyhow, the *Annotated Commentary* consists of lectures given at Reisenji 齡仙寺, a temple in Tōrei's hometown, where the fifth abbot Dokushō Soshin 獨照祖愼 helped him build the memorial monument.<sup>53</sup>

### *An Early Comparative Approach*

In his *Annotated Commentary* Tōrei reviews and compares three main sources, and describes how each of them borrowed from the previously existing scripture. He begins with the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* (*Fùmǔ ēn nánbào jīng* 父母恩難報經), saying that it can be considered the "primary source" (*honkyo* 本據). Secondly, he mentions the *Sutra of the Filial Child* (*Xiàozi jīng* 孝子經) and characterizes it thus:

It was a way for the luminaries (*shoken* 諸賢) of the Western Jin 西晉 (265-316 CE) dynasty to disseminate this sutra. Since it was provisionally aimed at admonishing people of middle or low capacity (*chūge no ki* 中下機) the name of the translator is not recorded. Moreover, its essential message (*shūtai* 宗體) is lacking and it has lost the deep meaning (*shingi* 深義) of the sutra.

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(Nishimura 1982: 137-138). He passed away on the second day of the twelfth lunar month of Kan'ei 2, corresponding to January 4, 1750 (see Ryūtakuji 1992: 90).

<sup>50</sup> Tōrei's mother passed away in the fifth lunar month of 1747 (Ryūtakuji 1992: 90; Nishimura 1982: 129-130).

<sup>51</sup> Nishimura (1982: 221-222). Although the particulars of this ritual would deserve to be explored, this needs further research.

<sup>52</sup> Nishimura (1982: 129-130). Tōrei was 27 according to the traditional reckoning.

<sup>53</sup> Details of the event are recorded in Tōrei's biography (see Nishimura 1982: 220-222). The names of Tōrei's parents given here are their posthumous names. While alive the father was known as Nakamura Zenzaemon 中村善左衛門 and his wife as Tsuyu 露 (maiden name Terada 寺田); upon arrival in Obata 小幡 their family had opened a drugstore (*yakushi* 藥肆). Presently, this temple is located in the town of Higashiōmi 東近江, the result of a 2005 merger of smaller agglomerations including Gokashō-chō 五個莊町 in the Kanzaki District of Shiga Prefecture, where Tōrei was born (formerly Obata-eki Demachi 小幡驛出町).

The third and last source Tōrei mentions is the *Sutra on the Depth of the Parents' Kindness* (*Fùmǔ ēn zhòng jīng* 父母恩重經). Here is his appraisal:

It is practically the same as the *Sutra of the Filial Child* (*daidō shōi* 大同小異). Since it was not included in the Buddhist Canon (*zōchū* 藏中), it is considered an apocryphal sutra (*gikyō* 偽經). One may suppose that later generations concocted a separate book based on the *Sutra of the Filial Child*. Depending on convenience, it could be used for lecturing (*kyōkun* 教訓) lay people (*zaike no mono* 在家者); it proves beneficial and harmless (*eki arite gai nashi* 有益無害). One can read it in parallel [with the other texts].

Although Tōrei's knowledge of the scriptures was amazing in many ways he did not even consider questioning the claim that the first sutra had been authored by Ān Shìgāo, an oversight showing the limits of his scholarship. Aside from this issue of historicity, the originality of Tōrei's analysis is that he considered the older and more concise *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* as not only the most reliable, but also as the most profound source. He viewed subsequent scriptures as merely popular adaptations.<sup>54</sup> This begs the question of what Tōrei considered to be the "essential message" of the sutra.

#### *The Essential Message of the Sutra According to Tōrei*

We are now equipped to discover how Tōrei extracted the core meaning of this scripture, which otherwise could easily be read as commonplace. He dissected the sutra into three main sections,<sup>55</sup> focusing in particular on its symbolic meaning. Here is an excerpt from the first part of his *Annotated Commentary*:

First, [we must] clarify the causes and conditions [why] these teachings originated. Although the vast kindness (*kōon* 洪恩) of the parents pervades heaven and earth, sentient beings perceive it but, inevitably, fail to pay attention. As they go against this kindness and forget their obligations (*gi* 義), they eventually [have to] endure the retribution of sinking [in the ocean of rebirths] (*jinrin* 沈淪). It is because the Buddha

<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, most contemporary books in Japanese aimed at vulgarizing these texts tend to be based on the less "orthodox" *Sutra on the Depth of the Parents' Kindness* (Jp. *Bumo onjū-kyō* 父母恩重經). Here are two examples: Matsubara (1992) and Tagami (1993).

<sup>55</sup> Tōrei followed the traditional way of analyzing a sutra by dividing it into three sections (Ch. *sānfēn kē jīng* 三分科經).

empathizes with this that he especially instructs them in filiality (*kōdō* 孝道), opening the gate of trust and understanding.

Secondly, [we must] clarify the essential message taught in the sutra. At first [it tells how] in the secular world (*seken* 世間) [one] offers guidance to [one's] parents, gradually leading [them] to complete buddhahood [according to] the one vehicle of perfect interpenetration (*ichijō en'yū* 一乘圓融).<sup>56</sup> Subsequently, [one] shows filial reverence (*kōjun* 孝順) towards [one's] supra-mundane parents (*shusse fubo* 出世父母).<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, [the sutra] fully explores (*kyūjin* 究盡) the great matter of the two children legacy (*nishi shōzoku* 二子紹續).<sup>58</sup> In short, the supra-mundane approach further contains three meanings. [The sutra] considers the wisdom and the excellence (*chitoku* 智德) of the Tathāgata as the father and considers the compassionate vows (*higan* 悲願) of the Bodhisattva as the mother: they engender all the children who emit the thought of awakening (Sk. *bodhicitta-utpāda*, Jp. *hotsu bodaishin* 發菩提心). This indicates the conditional cause (*en'in* 緣因). [The sutra] considers the ever-present Buddha nature (*jōjū busshō* 常住佛性) as the father and Prajñā's light of wisdom (*hannya chikō* 般若智光) as the mother. This indicates the direct cause (*shōin* 正因). [The sutra] considers the skillful means of practice (*shugyō hōben* 修行方便) as the father and the perfection of wisdom [realized through] the actualization of one's [true] nature (*kenshō chido* 見性智度)<sup>59</sup> as the mother, thus progressing and reaching the supreme stage of perfection (*kujyō enman no kurai* 究竟圓滿之位).<sup>60</sup> This indicates the concluding cause (*ryōin* 了因).<sup>61</sup>

<sup>56</sup> The one vehicle refers to the *Lotus Sutra* teachings. From the Tiantai perspective this reflects the highest perception of reality, where everything is in a perfect state of mutual fusion (Ch. *yuán róng* 圓融) and distinctions between opposites vanish.

<sup>57</sup> The supra-mundane refers here to the spiritual dimension and to the individuals who have left the world to exclusively engage in religious pursuits.

<sup>58</sup> According to Morohashi, the compound *shōzoku* 紹續 is equivalent to *shōkei* 紹繼. *Daikanwa jiten* 8.1023a.

<sup>59</sup> The technical term *kenshō* 見性 (Ch. *jiànxìng*), often translated as “seeing one's [true] nature,” can also be understood as an equivalent for “manifesting the nature” (Ch. *xiànxìng* 現性), because the first character of the compound (見) can also be read “*xiàn*” with the same nuance as the other *xiàn* 現, literally “to appear.” Examples are included in the four-fascicle version of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, whose translation is attributed to Guṇabhadra (394-468) (T 16 no. 670, 486c29 and 502a25).

<sup>60</sup> This stage (Ch. *jūjìng yuánmǎn wèi* 究竟圓滿位) corresponds to “supreme awakening” (Ch. *miàojué* 妙覺), the last in the Tiantai doctrine's fifty-two stages (Chegwan and Ichishima 1983: 32-33).

<sup>61</sup> The three causes of the Buddha-nature (Ch. *sānyīn fóxìng* 三因佛性) refer to a standard Tiantai teaching, expressed for instance by Zhiyi 智顛 (538-597) in his *Jīnguāng míngjīng xuányì* 金光明經玄義 (T 39 no. 1783), or in the *Zhǐguān fǔxíngzhuàn hóngjué* 止觀輔行傳弘決 (T 46 no. 1912) by Zhànrán 湛然 (711-782).

Tōrei's *Annotated Commentary* privileges the interpretation of this sutra as a metaphor for spiritual progression rather than considering it as a moral tale. Yet, the above discussion of the three causes only reflects Tōrei's erudite application of the Tendai three causes for the manifestation of the Buddha-nature (direct, conditional, and concluding) and is not especially Zen-like.

Tōrei's commentary on section 6 in the above translation of the sutra introduces an altogether different perspective. He analyzes each of the words in the apparently trivial passage saying, "When the Dharma is realized, morality is realized; *samādhi*, wisdom, liberation, and liberated insight are realized," and provides the following comment concerning the last clause, "liberated insight is realized" (*gedatsu ken'e jōjū su* 解脱見慧成就す):

The single eye on one's forehead (*chōmon no issekigen* 頂門一隻眼) cuts off the wisdom eye and surpasses the Dharma eye.<sup>62</sup> Without penetrating the tiny matter of going beyond (*kōjō no shashi* 向上些子) [according to] the Zen approach, how could one obtain this small share (*shōbun* 少分)?

According to Tōrei, the various types of insight gained by accomplished practitioners who follow traditional Buddhism are still limited and need to be surpassed by the subtler awakened perception gained through the practice of going beyond (*kōjō* 向上).<sup>63</sup> He considers that this advanced phase of practice requires overcoming attachment to the initial realization of one's true nature (*kenshō* 見性) until all traces of the initial breakthrough have disappeared. This is where Tōrei gives a different twist to the narrative of the sutra by uncovering three layers of meaning:

1. The first layer reflects the early Buddhist idea of reciprocating the kindness of one's parents through filial behavior, which involves more than

<sup>62</sup> Allusion to the five types of eyes (Sk. *pañca-cakṣuṃṣi*, Ch. *wǔyǎn*, Jp. *gogen* 五眼) possessed by various beings at different stages in their spiritual development. The wisdom eye (Sk. *prajñā-cakṣus*, Ch. *huìyǎn*, Jp. *egen* 慧眼) refers to the vision gained by advanced practitioners of the pre-Mahāyāna schools. The dharma eye (Sk. *dharmā-cakṣus*, Ch. *fǎyǎn*, Jp. *hōgen* 法眼) refers to the vision gained by the bodhisattvas. Tōrei claims that these two forms of vision are insufficient and need to be respectively "cut off" (Ch. *zuòduàn*, Jp. *zadan* 坐斷) and "overcome" (Ch. *chāoyuè*, Jp. *chōetsu* 超越).

<sup>63</sup> Concerning this crucial concept, see Mohr (2009).

the Confucian filial duty in the sense that children are enjoined to lead their parents toward liberation.

2. The second layer focuses on the idea of going beyond the sphere of one's relatives, and on reciprocating the kindness of all sentient beings (virtual parents in previous or future lives) by leading them to the ultimate stage of realization, a perspective shared by many Mahāyāna interpreters.
3. The third layer constitutes Tōrei's original contribution to the understanding of the sutra and his personal "twist" to the story. Although this could be viewed as a stretch to accommodate his own agenda of teaching advanced stages of Rinzai practice to his followers, Tōrei used the sutra and this sophisticated form of filial piety to emphasize the necessity of "going beyond" one's initial realization of the Way. The rationale here is that without being able to overcome the first *kenshō* and without succeeding in integrating this awareness into every single moment of thought, there is no way to repay the debt of gratitude due to all sentient beings.

After having examined the main features of Tōrei's *Annotated Commentary*, we can now widen our discussion by returning to the first two layers in Tōrei's exegesis, so that we can further consider the implications of either interpreting filial piety as limited to one's blood relatives, or as including all sentient beings among its intended beneficiaries.

#### *Universalist and Particularistic Appropriations of Filial Piety*

Obviously, Tōrei was not the only cleric to have reformulated the concept of filial piety to allow for a broader interpretation. It is also true that filial piety often served as a popular topic for Buddhist preachers throughout East Asia, and that Japanese clerics during the Tokugawa period were increasingly inclined to include this topic in their sermons, largely because of the need to compete with Neo-Confucian schools. Among the Chinese teachers whose thought appears to have particularly inspired Tōrei, the work of Fòrì Qìsōng 佛日契嵩 (1007-1072) stands out. While Fòrì attempted to demonstrate that Buddhist teachings converge to a large extent with Confucianism and Daoism, he also concluded that Buddhism provides a deeper interpretation, and he formulated the idea of "great filial piety"

(Ch. *dàxiào*, Jp. *daikō* 大孝) to encapsulate its superiority.<sup>64</sup> The last section of Fóri's *Fǔjiāobiān* 輔教編 (Supplement to the Teachings) is dedicated to an elaborate "Discourse on Filial Piety" (Ch. *Xiàolùn* 孝論) including twelve fascicles.<sup>65</sup> Fóri explains that his discourse aims at "expounding the profound rationale and the hidden intention of our sages" (Ch. *fāmíng wú shèngrén dàxiào zhī àolǐ mìyì* 發明吾聖人大孝之奧理密意) (T 52 no. 2115, 660b10; Araki 1981: 193). In his *Shinjubutsu sanbō kōkyō kuge*, Tōrei generously quotes from Fóri's publication to emphasize the universality of filial piety. Thus, Fóri and Tōrei both wanted to convey to their respective audiences the central idea that all beings could have been our relatives in previous lives, or may become so in a future existence, and that "great filial piety" thus needs to include all sentient beings.

In his *Annotated Commentary* Tōrei provides a canonical source to legitimize this interpretation and cites the following passage of the *Dà fāngbiàn fó bào'ēn jīng* 大方便佛報恩經 (Sutra of the Great Skillful Means of the Buddha to Reciprocate [His Parents'] Kindness):

Because [they] receive a bodily form, all sentient beings have also been the mothers and fathers of the Tathāgata. For the sake of all sentient beings the Tathāgata has also become [their] fathers and mothers. Because he becomes the father and mother of everyone, he constantly cultivates the most difficult practices and the hardest austerities; he is expert in renouncing what is difficult to renounce (T 3 no. 156, 127c11-c14).

Thus, since the Song period we see a growing trend toward the Buddhist appropriation of filial piety, which uses the astute strategy of claiming that its own version detains the key to a deeper comprehension encompassing all sentient beings in the past and in the future. Tōrei represents one of the last links in this chain of teachers trying to rejuvenate the old concept, albeit in a slightly different context where Buddhist thinkers were eager to

<sup>64</sup> The same word (Ch. *dàxiào* 大孝) is used in Confucian classics such as the *Mencius* or the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhōngyōng* 中庸), but its meaning is purely conventional and often simply indicates a "person of great filiality." See, for example, Ames and Hall (2001: 96). Several other Chan teachers, such as Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1263-1323) who wrote an "Admonition on Filiality," elaborated on this theme, but they rarely went beyond the reiteration of the Confucian concept in Buddhist garb (with a touch of transmigration).

<sup>65</sup> See Araki (1981). Included in *Tánjīn wénjí* 鐔津文集 (Collected Works [of Qisong] of Tanjin, T 52 no. 2115).

demonstrate the compatibility of their tradition with the official Neo-Confucian doctrine.<sup>66</sup>

### Conclusions

The above should suffice to indicate the extent of the shift that occurred between the earlier Confucian sources exclusively stressing respect to one's parents as a gateway to morality, their equivalent in early Buddhist scriptures, and the later reinterpretation of the same concept by Fōri and Tōrei. What may have been on the verge of becoming a lifeless idea in early Confucianism was infused with new vitality as its implications were expanded from one's own family to the unlimited sphere of all sentient beings. We still need to fine-tune our understanding of some of the details of this evolution, but a general picture of how filial piety was skillfully reinterpreted in Song China and in eighteenth-century Japan begins to emerge. To what extent this transformation provides avenues that may prove meaningful to those eager to focus on "family" values even today remains to be seen. What clearly appears is that particularistic interpretations of filial piety limited to one's relatives lack the suggestive power supplied by Tōrei's twist of the same concept.

On the other hand, Tōrei's wider interpretation of "filial piety" as encompassing all sentient beings indicates that the whole concept of "parentage" was infused with new meaning, whereby interconnectedness among all forms of life (not limited to human beings) takes precedence over any clinging to the narrow concept of one's blood relatives. Furthermore, even "blood" was reinterpreted to indicate spiritual lineages, as shown by the Chan/Zen usage of the term "bloodline" (Ch. *xuèmài*, Jp. *kechimyaku* 血脈)

<sup>66</sup> Proclaimed two years before Tōrei's death, the 1790 "Edict Forbidding Heterodox Doctrines" (*Kansei igaku no kin* 寛政異学の禁) illustrates the increasingly authoritarian tendencies that were surfacing toward the end of the eighteenth century. Although the edict's explicit objective was to reform the Bakufu's official academy (Shōheizaka Gakumonjo 昌平坂學問所), it sent a clear message to all religious traditions that dissent would not be tolerated.



for genealogical lines of teachers.<sup>67</sup> We thus witness an intentional blurring of the boundaries between family ancestry and religious descent.

This can be viewed as both an attempt to make the clergy's outreach to society more effective, and also as a move highlighting the relevance of religious cultivation in a context where traditional values associated with family were deeply woven into the societal fabric. Tōrei's commentary provides a significant example of how the metaphorical and literal meanings of filiality were intertwined, but further exploration of similar innovations may yield fresh insights into such multifaceted cognizance of "parenthood." Although Tōrei's twist of filial piety—especially his emphasis on the "going beyond" phase of training—appears quite unique in Chan and Zen history, its departure from the idea of worshipping one's relatives was skillfully formulated to preserve its compatibility with the literal meaning of filiality.

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<sup>67</sup> See for instance the *Dámó dàshī xuèmài lùn* 達磨大師血脈論, a text attributed to Bodhidharma, in Z 110: 809-815, also Z 63, No. 1218 in the new edition. Red Pine translated this title as "Bloodstream Sermon" (Bodhidharma 1989: 9-45). In Japanese Pure Land lineages this became even more ambiguous, since the spiritual heir was often the actual scion of a cleric. Concerning this dimension, see Faure (1998: 194, 197). In Japan, the transmission of the *Naishō buppō sōjō kechimyakufu* 內證佛法相承血脈譜 attributed to Saichō raises a range of related issues. This text is included in the Complete Works of Saichō, *Dengyō daishi zenshū* 傳教大師全集, vol. 2, 513-562.

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