

The *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*

The Authority of Meditation in the *Kaiyuan* Era

Eric M. Greene

Introduction

Cave 59, dominated by the first four scrolls of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (*Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經),³³⁴ also features, on the east wall, two short texts pertaining to meditation. Both are excerpts from larger works—the first from the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* (*Shi lun jing* 十輪經),³³⁵ and the second from the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* (*Chan mi³³⁶yao jing* 禪秘要經; T#613). Both carvings seem to have been sponsored by a certain Li She 李涉 of the nearby Changjiang County 長江縣, on the fifteenth day of the second month of the twenty-third year of the *kaiyuan* 開元 era (March 13, 735).³³⁷

Because they share a common topic, were excerpted from larger works, and were paired together in cave 59 as a single unit, we are justified

in reading the content of these texts as having some particular significance for either Li She himself or the local Buddhist community. We can, in other words, ask why these portions in particular, of these texts in particular, were carved at this place at this time, questions that for most of the other texts engraved at the Grove of the Reclining Buddha (Wofoyuan 卧佛院) can be approached only in the most general of terms.

In what follows, I will first provide background information on the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*³³⁸ and consider the nature and origin of the excerpted version of the text carved in cave 59. I will then consider the content of both this text and the preceding passage from the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* in relation to the broader context of

³³⁴ T#374, 12: 365a1–390b8, with the exception of 384c26–385b6, as chapter 3 *The Virtues of the Name* (*Mingzi gongde pin* 名字功德品) in scroll 3 was not carved.

³³⁵ By its full title, the *Mahayana Great Collection Sutra on the Earth-Store Bodhisattva and the Ten Wheels* (**Daśacakraṣṭigarbha-sūtra*; *Dasheng daji Dizang shi lun jing* 大乘大集地藏十輪經; T#411, 13: 721a–777c).

³³⁶ The carving reads 秘 in the front title in column 74, and 祕 in the rear title in column 105. Historically, and as “formal” modern pronunciation, both characters were read *bi* (PULLEYBLANK 1991, 213; GU HANYU ZIDIAN 2000, 829). For the sake of simplicity, I follow the more usual modern Mandarin pronunciation *mi*.

³³⁷ Changjiang County was approximately 20 kilometers north-east of Wofoyuan, in Suizhou 遂州 (modern Suining City 遂寧市; ZHONGGUO LISHI DITU JI 1982–1987, 5: 65–66). The colophon gives only the date, and the name of the sponsor who “reverently had these [texts] made as an offering 敬造供養.”

³³⁸ For comparable information concerning the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels*, see WANG-TOUTAIN 1998, 16–71.

early eighth-century debates about meditation (*chan* 禪) and the new political climate brought

about by the reign of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756).

The Text in Cave 59

The text of the *Secret Essentials of Meditation* is immediately followed by the short colophon naming Li She. Li She's carving project must have included both the *Secret Essentials of Meditation* as well as the preceding *Sutra on the Ten Wheels*, as the titles of both texts seem to be mentioned together at the beginning of this section of the wall.³³⁹ After the carving of the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels*, we then find the title *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* (*Chan miyao jing* 禪秘要經), followed by "one text in three scrolls 一部三卷,"³⁴⁰ and then "scroll two 第二卷."³⁴¹ Strangely, mid-way through the material from the second scroll of the complete text which follows, we find the words: *Secret Essential Methods of Meditation, scroll two* (*Chanfa miyao di er juan* 禪法秘要第二卷; note the slightly different title),³⁴² followed by yet more material from the second scroll.³⁴³ Material from the third scroll is then

introduced under yet another title—*Meditation Scripture, Third Scroll* (*Chan jing juan di san* 禪經卷第三).³⁴⁴ Finally, we find the title *Fo shuo chan miyao jing* 佛說禪秘要經,³⁴⁵ followed by the short colophon.

These different titles have led to some confusion among scholars.³⁴⁶ However, everything here carved indeed corresponds to material from scrolls 2 and 3 of the *Chan miyao fa jing* 禪秘要法經 (T#613) found in the woodblock printed editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon.³⁴⁷ One of the titles found in the carving—*Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* (*Chan miyao jing* 禪秘要經)—also appears, in reference to this text, in the contemporaneous *Kaiyuan Era Catalog of Śākyamuni's Teachings* (*Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄).³⁴⁸ For the sake of consistency, I shall use this title and this title only.

³³⁹ Column 74, segments 9-A and 9-B, of wall f in cave 59. After the title of the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels*, we read "Excerpt from the Meditation Methods Spoken by the Buddha 佛說禪法略出." Here *fo shuo chan* 佛說禪 would appear to be a shortened version of the title *Fo shuo chan miyao jing* 佛說禪秘要經. It seems unlikely that these words refer to the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels*, as this text never uses the word *chan* 禪 (discussing meditation only using the word *ding* 定), "concentration."

³⁴⁰ Column 82, segment 10-B of wall f in cave 59. In scripture catalogs, *yi bu* 一部 often means a complete "text" in multiple scrolls. The *Catalog of Scriptures, Authorized by the Great Zhou* (*Da Zhou kanding zhong jing mulu* 大周刊定眾經目錄) thus lists this text as: "*Secret Essential Methods of Meditation*, one text in three scrolls 禪秘要法一部三卷."

³⁴¹ Between the title and the words "scroll two," there is written "the above has been drawn from the third scroll of the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* 已上出十輪經第三卷." This refers to the previously carved *Sutra on the Ten Wheels*, but the positioning of this line is very peculiar. Perhaps "yi shang chu *Shi lun jing di san juan* 已上出十輪經第三卷" and "*Chan miyao jing yi bu san juan di er juan* 禪秘要經一部三卷 第二卷" were originally two separate, sequential columns in a manuscript, the former to conclude the previous text and the latter to introduce the next, that were mistakenly transposed into a single line in the carving.

³⁴² Column 93, segment 11-C of wall f in cave 59.

³⁴³ It is difficult to understand why any title is here given, as the material both before and after is drawn from the same scroll 2 of the complete text. However, the original text is itself divided into four individual sutras. The divisions between these sutras do not correspond to the divisions between scrolls. But the material carved after this oddly placed title is drawn from the very beginning of the third sutra, while the material before comes from the second sutra. Perhaps this is somehow relevant.

³⁴⁴ Column 100, segment 12-B of wall f in cave 59.

³⁴⁵ Column 105, segment 13-A of wall f in cave 59. The carving reads "[. . .] shuo *Chan miyao jing* 說禪秘要經." We may presume the unreadable character is *fo* 佛.

³⁴⁶ PENG JIASHENG 1988, 7, LI LIANG AND DENG ZHIJIN 1997, 42, and LEE 2009, 66, all read "Fo shuo chanfa lue chu 佛說禪法略出" as referring to a separate text. This does not seem to be correct.

³⁴⁷ The excerpts in cave 59 seem to be based on a 3-scroll version of the text, arranged as the version in the printed canons (represented by T#613). The text is known to have circulated in a number of different formats, including four- and five-scroll versions (GREENE 2012, 109–125).

³⁴⁸ T#2154, 55: 693a10.

History and Origin

Although Chinese Buddhists seem to have always accepted the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* as an authentic translation of an Indian text, doubts about its status began to arise during the first half of the twentieth century. The text was shown to share many unusual stylistic and linguistic features with a number of other potentially apocryphal meditation texts that appeared in China during the first half of the fifth century, most famous of which is the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (*Fo shuo guan wuliangshou fo jing* 佛說觀無量壽佛經).³⁴⁹ Most scholars now agree that these texts were not direct translations of Indic-language originals.³⁵⁰ There is also a general consensus that they were not simply invented in China from scratch, but partake of complex textual histories in which Indian and Central-Asian meditation practices were transmitted orally, written down (in either Indic languages or Chinese), and eventually compiled into their present forms. But precisely how and where such compilation took place—either in China proper or possibly in various Central Asian locations such as Turfan—remains a point of contention.³⁵¹

Several small but telling details confirm that the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* was written or assembled in a Chinese environment.³⁵² In a number of cases, for example, different Chinese translations of the same Indic technical term are presented as different words. A reoccurring case of this is the “three gates to deliverance” (*vimokṣa-mukha*; *san jietuo men* 三解脱門) of

“emptiness” (*śūnyatā*), “signlessness” (*animitta*), and “desirelessness” (*apraṇihita*). In Chinese Buddhist translations, *apraṇihita* was sometimes rendered as *wuyuan* 無願, “non-wishing,” and sometimes as *wuzuo* 無作, “non-arising.” In the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*, however, these two translations occur together, giving a single list of four items.³⁵³ In some instances, the correct number of items (three) is preserved, but with both translations of *apraṇihita* retained at the expense of *animitta* (*wuxiang* 無相).³⁵⁴ The author(s) were thus clearly drawing from their knowledge of translated Chinese Buddhist scriptures, rather than from a direct familiarity with texts written in Indian languages. A number of similar confusions are scattered throughout the text.³⁵⁵

Unlike many apocryphal Chinese Buddhist scriptures, the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* does not contain any wholesale borrowing from previously translated Chinese Buddhist texts. However, in a section describing the meditation practice of Contemplating the Image (*guan xiang* 觀像), a number of short, four-character phrases describing the Buddha’s appearance have clearly been taken—either directly or indirectly—from *Dharmakṣema (Tan Wuchen 曇無讖; 385–433 or 436) translation of the *Golden Light Sutra* (*Suvarṇa-[pra]bhā-sottama-sūtra*; *Jin guangming jing* 金光明經).³⁵⁶ These shared passages help to establish a *terminus post quem* for the text. The *Golden Light Sutra* was translated between 420 and 431.³⁵⁷ A similar date is hinted at in the text

³⁴⁹ TSUKINOWA 1971, 43–176.

³⁵⁰ TAKAHASHI 1993 and ŌMINAMI 1995.

³⁵¹ FUJITA 1970, 116–136 and FUJITA 2007, 162–232; SUEKI 1986, 166–173. Among the vast scholarship on these questions, see also YAMADA MEIJI 1976, SILK 1997, and TAGAWA 1999B. Concerning texts apart from the *Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*, including the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*, see YAMABE 1999A; YAMABE 1999B; YAMABE 1999C; YAMABE 2002.

³⁵² GREENE 2012, 92–109.

³⁵³ T#613, 15: 258a6–7. It is clear that these were intended as four distinct items, because each is explained separately, see T#613, 15: 267b22–c1.

³⁵⁴ T#613, 15: 254b29–c1.

³⁵⁵ See T#613, 15: 269b4–6 (giving both *si wuliang xin* 四無量心 and *si fanxing* 四梵行). Even more tellingly, at T#613, 15: 251a29–b2 the same stages of the developing embryo are given in both translation and transcription, with the “stage of *kalala*” (*geluoluo shi* 歌羅邏時) and the “stage of the joining of the red and white essences” (*he chi bai jing shi* 合赤白精時) treated as distinct phenomena, even though the latter is a translation of the former, and so too with *arbuda* (*anfutuwo* 安浮陀) and “foamy bubble” (*pao* 泡).

³⁵⁶ T#613, 15: 255b9–18, with numerous parallels in the *Golden Light Sutra*, T#663, 16: 339a14–25. Many of these same phrases are also found in other fifth century apocryphal meditation texts (YAMABE 1999A, 217–245). There are also other borrowings from the *Golden Light Sutra*; GREENE 2012, 97–98.

itself, which gives the prophecy that 1500 years after the Buddha's death the teachings found in the text will have been nearly forgotten and will meet with ridicule.³⁵⁸ If we follow the dating of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* to 1084 BCE given by Faxian 法顯 (340–420) in the record of his travels to India,³⁵⁹ this would correspond to the year 417. The *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* was thus plausibly composed shortly after this date.

The woodblock printed editions of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* (and following these, the modern *Taishō* edition) record the text as a translation by Kumārajīva (d. 409/413). The work does not appear, however, in the earliest lists of Kumārajīva's translations, and modern scholars have generally agreed that the text was first assigned to Dharmamitra (Tanmomiduo 曇摩蜜

多; 356–442), a Gandhāran “meditation master” (*chanshi* 禪師)³⁶⁰ active in south China during the Song 宋 dynasty (420–479).³⁶¹ If the text was indeed composed in China, even Dharmamitra cannot, of course, have actually translated it. But it is noteworthy that his name was associated with it from an early date.³⁶² Like many of the other apocryphal meditation texts that appeared in China at this time, the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* thus seems to represent an understanding of meditation popular in south China during the middle of the fifth century and which was associated—ideologically, if not in fact—with the teachings of the various foreign “meditation masters” who at this time received patronage from the highest echelons of society.³⁶³

Structure and Content

The *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* is actually a collection of four distinct sutras, that are nominally separate. Each of them introduces a new protagonist, who wishes to practice Meditation (*chan* 禪), but who is hindered by some particular trouble. The carving in cave 59 includes the opening of the third sutra, which introduces the Monk Panthaka (Panzhijia 槃直迦) in a presentation clearly derived from the traditional Buddhist narratives associated with this figure.³⁶⁴

The *Secret Essentials of Meditation* is thus arranged in separate sections, each presenting a

method of meditation suitable for counteracting particular kinds of problems. This was indeed a common format for many of the Indian Buddhist meditation manuals translated into Chinese in the early fifth century, which were often structured around a five-fold division of meditation methods (the so-called “five gates of chan,” *wu men chan* 五門禪).³⁶⁵ Though differences exist between the various versions of this list, they usually included traditional meditation practices similar to those found in the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*, such as the Contemplation of Impurity (*bujing guan*

³⁵⁷ CHEN JINHUA 2004, 258. Some scholars favor the earlier date of 412, see FUNAYAMA 1995, 9.

³⁵⁸ T#613, 15: 269b29–c2.

³⁵⁹ CHAPPELL 1980, 138.

³⁶⁰ Dharmamitra is so called in his biography in the *Compilation of Notes on the Issuing of the Tripitaka* (*Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集, T#2145, 55: 105a5–6. The title “chan master” was not used in China prior to the early fifth century.

³⁶¹ See YAMABE 1999A, 106–107.

³⁶² It may be, however, that the text was first associated with someone else, a certain layman named Juqu Jingsheng 沮渠京聲 (active mid-fifth century), see GREENE 2012, 115–125.

³⁶³ Dharmamitra resided at some of the most important monasteries in and around the southern capital, Jiankang 建康 (modern Nanjing 南京), including the Qihuan 祇洹 (Jetavana) Monastery, and the Upper and Lower Dinglin 定林 Monasteries, and was patronized by members of the imperial family; see the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, T#2059, 50: 342c29–343a6).

³⁶⁴ Panthaka is based on the character Cūḍapanthaka, “Panthaka the Younger,” who was ordained by his elder brother, but was unable to memorize even a single verse of teachings, even after months of effort. Deemed to lack the necessary aptitude, Cūḍapanthaka is then expelled from the order. Later the Buddha gives Cūḍapanthaka special teachings that allowed him to become an arhat. DIVYAVADANA 1959, 427–445 (C483–C515); *Apidamo da piposha lun* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論, T#1545, 27: 902a7–c10; BURLINGAME 1921, 1: 299–310. In contrast to all other accounts, Panthaka in the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* is a disciple of Katyāyana, not of his elder brother. The transcription of his name Panzhijia 槃直迦 is also unique among Chinese sources (and also phonetically problematic, as *zhi* 直 does not normally represent –a endings).

³⁶⁵ Some versions of the list were also called the “five methods for concentrating the mind” (*wu tingxin guan* 五停心觀).

不淨觀), Meditation on the Breath (*shuxi guan* 數息觀), the Cultivation of Love and Compassion (*cixin guan* 慈心觀), or Meditation on the Buddha (*nian fo* 念佛 or *guan fo* 觀佛).³⁶⁶

Despite its nominally separate individual sutras, the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* has an overall coherence and structure. Thirty named and numbered stages of progress thus spread across the first three sutras,³⁶⁷ forming a progression that culminates in the attainment of Stream Enterer (*śrotāpanna*, *xutuohuan* 須陀洹) in section 26, Once-returner (*sakṛdāgāmin*, *situohan* 斯陀含) in section 29, and Non-returner (*anāgāmin*, *anahan* 阿那含) in section 30.³⁶⁸ The numbering stops after the third sutra, but the fourth sutra implicitly continues the progression, as it claims to provide a method allowing Non-returners to reach the final attainment of arhatship.³⁶⁹

The Scripture in China

That the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* was carved in cave 59 at all is itself significant. The local Buddhist community evidently considered this text—or at least these parts of it—an important and authoritative exposition on meditation. This is, furthermore, not a trivial point, as other metrics might have suggested that this text was rarely used or consulted in medieval China. For example only a few small fragments of the text have

Soteriologically, the context is thus decidedly non-Mahayana, and the possible results of meditation are explicitly presented in terms of the four traditional “fruits” of Buddhist practice. However, as I will discuss below, it may be significant that the excerpts in cave 59 do not mention these attainments, and that they conclude with a short passage near the end of the text that promises rebirth in the Tuṣita Heaven of the future Buddha Maitreya to anyone who practices these meditation methods for even a moment.³⁷⁰ Rebirth in Tuṣita was a common goal among medieval Chinese Buddhists (equal in popularity, at least for a time, to the structurally similar goal of rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha), and it may have been this promise that came to be most attractive to those who read and used this text in China.³⁷¹

been found among the Dunhuang and Turfan documents, and it was not carved at Fangshan.³⁷² Scholars studying the history of Buddhist meditation in China have also tended to overlook this text, perhaps because of its emphasis on the contemplation of bodily impurity (seen prominently in the excerpts in cave 59), a meditation practice that existing scholarly narratives tend to unjustifiably assume was not appreciated by Chinese Buddhists.³⁷³

³⁶⁶ On the various lists of these practices in Indian and Chinese meditation manuals, see ŌMINAMI 1977; SAKURABE 1980; FUJIIHARA 1985; MYOJIN 1993; ODANI 1995.

³⁶⁷ One passage in cave 59 (column 93, segment 11-B of wall f in cave 59) mentions this numbering system.

³⁶⁸ The details of the stages here suggest a version of the path similar to what is found in Sarvāstivādin sources, see GREENE 2012, 88–89.

³⁶⁹ T#613, 15: 263a16–17; near the end, the protagonist of this sutra then attains arhatship, see T#613, 15: 267c3–4.

³⁷⁰ Column 104, segment 13-B of wall f in cave 59.

³⁷¹ Advocacy of both rebirth in the heavenly paradise of Tuṣita as well as the Western Pure Land of Amitābha might be understood as a soteriology, conveniently (or even strategically) neither explicitly Mahayana nor non-Mahayana. Among other things, this may have made it possible to incorporate many nominally non-Mahayana traditions (such as the one represented by the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*) into the Chinese Buddhist universe, where Mahayana soteriologies were always orthodox, at least in principle. This same point may also apply to the more famous meditation texts associated with the Pure Land of Amitābha, such as the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*.

³⁷² Three small fragments of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* (of 114, 23, and 10 characters) can be found among the Dunhuang documents collected in the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies (Дx18543, Дx18545 and Дx18591, respectively), as has been noted by TAI HUILI 2007, 102 (these fragments all seem to have originally come from a single manuscript page). I am grateful to Chen Ruifeng 陳瑞峰 for this information. Additionally, among the still largely unpublished Turfan fragments from the Ōtani expedition held by the Lüshun Museum 旅順博物館, there have also been found seven or eight short fragments of this text, on the order of 30 characters each (Ikeda Masanori 池田將則, personal communication, January 2009).

³⁷³ On this point, see GREENE 2014, 149–150.

From other sources, however, we can conclude that this text was indeed widely read by Chinese Buddhists in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries. A Dunhuang manuscript of what is likely a sixth-century local monastic code thus invokes it—as “the meditation scripture” (*chanjing* 禪經)—as part of its encouragement for monks to practice meditation:

The *Meditation Scripture* says: If one is able to cultivate the contemplation of the white bones, and if from among the three hundred and sixty bones of one’s body one manages to successfully [see] even a single one, and if later one then does not commit any evil deeds, after death one will go straight to Tuṣita Heaven.³⁷⁴

Though this passage is not included in the carvings in cave 59, we should note here the similar fixation on the claim that meditation will lead to rebirth in the Tuṣita Heaven.

Other sources point to continuing interest in the text during the late sixth and seventh centuries, and along with the similarly-titled *Secret Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* (*Zhi chanbing miyao fa* 治禪病秘要法; T#620, 15: 333a–342b), with which it was often confused (or even conjoined), the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* is referred to by Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) in

his massive and influential writings on meditation, cited in seventh-century Buddhist encyclopedias, and discussed at length in the surviving writings of the famous eighth-century monk Fazhao 法照 (d. ca. 820).³⁷⁵ The carving of this text in cave 59 thus both reflects, and provides further evidence for its enduring popularity, from the fifth through the eighth centuries, as an authoritative source for those Chinese Buddhists interested in Meditation, *chan*.

The popularity of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* may lie in part in that it was one of the only Chinese Buddhist scriptures explicitly devoted to *chan*. Many Indian meditation texts had been translated into Chinese beginning from the second century CE, but none were written as sutras, and may have therefore lacked a certain prestige. The desire to endow such texts with scriptural authority may well have been a motivation for the creation of apocryphal sutras such as the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*. The text is also relatively practically oriented. It includes, for example, the earliest known account—in any Buddhist text—of proper meditation posture.³⁷⁶ Despite being apparently composed in China, this text is also not a blatant fabrication. It contains no overt traces of native Chinese cosmology or other obvious signs of Chinese origin. This, no doubt, contributed to its success among elite, clerical authors.

The Carving in Cave 59

The carving of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* in cave 59 may be most valuable precisely because it is not a carving of the entire scripture. Many scriptures carved at the Grove are incomplete, but usually in a straightforward manner.

Some texts thus remain unfinished, such as the *Sutra of Liberation and Breaking the Attributes of the Mind through the Wisdom Stored in the Ocean of Buddha-nature* (*Foxinghai zang zhihui jietuo po xinxiang jing* 佛性海藏智慧解脱破心相經 in cave

³⁷⁴ 《禪經》云：若能修白骨觀，三百六十節中但得一節，於後不作諸惡，是人命終直生兜率天 (TSUKAMOTO 1974–1976, 3: 295), paraphrasing T#613, 15: 268a9–18. The line “if later one does not commit any evil 於後不作諸惡” does not appear in the original passage as we have it today. The manuscript of this text was seen by Tsukamoto in the 1930s, but its present whereabouts are unknown. On its other contents, see MOROTO 1990, 68–69.

³⁷⁵ See *The Great Calming and Contemplation* (*Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀), T#1911, 46: 117c15–18; the *Pearl Grove in the Garden of the Law* (*Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林), T#2122, 53: 853a14–29; the *Rite Involving Intonation of the Buddha’s Name and Recitation of Sutras According to the Five Tempos of the Pure Land* (*Jingtu wu hui nianfo songjing guanxing yi* 淨土五會念佛誦經觀行儀; Pelliot 2066), T#2827, 85: 1255a4–27. Zhiyi’s writings, the *Pearl Grove in the Garden of the Law*, the writings of Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), and numerous other sources, also frequently cite, under the name *Chan miyao jing* 禪秘要經, a passage from the *Secret Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* (T#620). Elsewhere I have argued that both of these texts were originally a single body of material, see GREENE 2012, 109–138.

³⁷⁶ T#613, 15: 243b22–26. Here we find details of meditation posture—including proper positioning for one’s hands—that do not seem to be included in earlier Buddhist texts, see OTOKAWA 1995.

46, or else only certain scrolls have been carved, such as the *Consecration Sutra* (*Guanding jing* 灌頂經; T#1331, 21: 495a2–536b6) in cave 33.³⁷⁷ In such cases, however, the texts may be incomplete for comparatively banal reasons, such as funding constraints or the lack of availability of complete texts as opposed to individual scrolls.

With the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*, we have something entirely different—passages from the complete text have been excerpted and skillfully woven together. The carving thus provides evidence of a particular “reading” of the text, a glimpse of which portions of the text were considered most important. We do not know precisely when and where the excerpts were made. But various details suggest two tentative conclusions: 1) that the excerpts existed as an independent text prior to the carving, and 2) this text was produced locally, in Sichuan.

The first of these points is suggested by the short gaps, about one character in length, that punctuate the carving. These gaps often correspond with “jumps” relative to the original text. Such gaps are not present in other carvings at the Grove—in cave 59 neither the *Nirvana Sutra* nor either of the two copies of the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents* (*Fo shuo bao fumu enzhong jing* 佛說報父母恩重經) contain such spaces.³⁷⁸ We might therefore assume that these spaces signal moments when the carved text skips a section of the original text.

However, in several places a space is left even when the text does not jump.³⁷⁹ We also find at least one similar space within the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* on the engraved wall of cave 59,³⁸⁰ which contains no textual jumps of any kind. These spaces thus likely correspond to the “paragraphs” found in medieval manuscript copies of Buddhist

scriptures, in which the text recommences in a new column. That such spaces are seen only in the carvings of the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* and the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* indicates, it thus seems, a distinctive stylistic choice of whoever arranged these two texts (and further confirms that these two texts were carved at the same time).

Notably, in two cases the carving of the *Scripture on Secret Essentials of Meditation* jumps relative to the original text without a corresponding space left in the carving.³⁸¹ This suggests that the carving was not made directly from a manuscript of the complete text, nor from a manuscript that simply listed each excerpted passage sequentially, but from a manuscript in which the excerpted passages had already been rearranged into paragraphs following the logic and flow of the newly created text. It is possible that this putative manuscript was created expressly for the purpose of this carving. It seems more likely, however, that this excerpted text already existed, and we know that such “excerpted scriptures” (*chaojing* 抄經) were common in medieval China, though few examples of such texts have survived.³⁸²

Though there is no other evidence for the existence of an “excerpted scripture” based on the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*, this may be because, as I will now discuss, the excerpted text was most likely not brought to Sichuan from the capitals, but rather produced locally, and may thus have escaped the attention of the standard scripture catalogs. This conclusion rests on a careful comparison of readings of the carving at the Grove against seven other versions of the corresponding text—five woodblock printed editions, and two manuscript editions from Japan.³⁸³

³⁷⁷ See OVERBEY 2014.

³⁷⁸ However, only a small portion of the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents* on the inside of the cave is legible.

³⁷⁹ Column 85, segment 10-B of wall f in cave 59; column 94, segment 11-B of wall f in cave 59; two times in column 98, segments 12-A and 12-C of wall f in cave 59; Column 101, segment 12-B of wall f in cave 59.

³⁸⁰ Column 79, segment 10-C of wall f in cave 59.

³⁸¹ Column 86, segment 10-B (first jump) of wall f in cave 59; column 87, segment 10-C (second jump) of wall f in cave 59.

³⁸² Numerous “excerpted scriptures” are listed in medieval catalogs. Traditional bibliographers, however, often expressed concern that such texts could distort the meaning of the original and convey wrong ideas about Buddhism, see TOKUNO 1990, 39–40.

³⁸³ For the critical edition of the Chinese text incorporating these versions (except the first carving of the Korean canon, which I have only been able to consult recently), see GREENE 2012, 342–542 (sections 1.139, 1.140, 1.158, 1.160, 1.176, 1.177, 2.29, 2.35, 2.38, 2.39, 2.41, 2.44, 2.45, 2.57, 2.58, 2.59, 2.63, 3.1–3.5, 4.73–4.75, 4.80).

These seven editions fall into three main lineages or types:³⁸⁴

1. The two Japanese manuscripts, one dated to 740, both likely in the lineage of official Tang manuscript copies from the Chinese capitals.³⁸⁵
2. The Kaiyuan 開元, Sixi 思溪, Qisha 磧砂, and Puning 普寧 woodblock editions.³⁸⁶
3. The first and second woodblock Korean editions.³⁸⁷

Crucially, the Korean canons (group 3) ultimately derive from the so-called Kaibao 開寶 edition of 968–975, which was carved in Sichuan on the basis of the local manuscript traditions.

The carving in cave 59 contains many variants not present in any other edition.³⁸⁸ Most relevant, however, is when a reading common to groups 1 and 2 differs in all the versions from group 3, as such cases are likely (though given the complexities of the textual histories, by no means certain) to represent distinctive points of divergence between the official mid-Tang manuscript traditions of the capital region (groups 1 and 2), and the Sichuan manuscript tradition (group 3).

Within the legible material carved in cave 59, there are eight such cases.³⁸⁹ In none of them does the Wofoyuan carving match the group 1 and 2 reading. Conversely, there are no cases where the cave 59 carving follows variants unique to group 1 which, especially in the 740 CE Japanese manuscript, are the examples most likely closest to the official Tang manuscript traditions. Finally, in two cases the Wofoyuan carving follows a significant variant found in the first Korean canon but not the second.³⁹⁰ This variant is significant, because the first carving of the Korean canon is a more faithful representative of the Kaibao canon than the second, which includes “corrections” made in consultation with other editions.³⁹¹

In short, the Wofoyuan carving of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* indisputably lies in a lineage closely related to the editions deriving from the *Kaibao* canon, and hence, to the Tang-dynasty Sichuan manuscript tradition. It is, moreover, only distantly related to group 1, the lineage that, especially in the 740 CE Japanese manuscript, is closely associated with mid-Tang official manuscript copies from the capitals. With all due

³⁸⁴ On the different editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon, see ZACCHETTI 2005, 92–140. Though as Zacchetti notes, these three groups do not constitute a stemma of the canon *per se*, in the case of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*, these divisions do seem to represent distinct, identifiable lineages.

³⁸⁵ The 740 (Temyō 天平 12) manuscript is that held in the Shōsōin 正倉院, copied as part of the canon dedicated to Queen Consort Kōmyō 光明皇后. This text was among the scriptures brought back to Japan by Genbō 玄昉 (d. 746) in 735 (YAMAMOTO 2007, 180). I have also consulted photographs of a likely Kamakura-era manuscript from Kongōji 金剛寺 (I wish to thank professor Ochiai Toshinori 落合俊典 for helping to make this possible). Unlike the Shōsōin manuscript, which is a 5-scroll version of the text, the Kongōji copy is in 3 scrolls, like the woodblock printed editions and the one used as the basis for the Wofoyuan carving. The Kongōji manuscript is clearly not derived from the Shōsōin manuscript, yet it also shares many characteristic features of it. Shōsōin documents record a 3-scroll version of the text copied during the Nara period (DAIJIHON KOMONJO 1904, 7: 16; dating to 731). The Kongōji manuscript thus seems to represent an independent lineage of the text that, however, also stems from a Tang-dynasty official copy. For further details, see GREENE 2012, 110–115; 342–343.

³⁸⁶ On this family of editions, see ZACCHETTI 2005, 109–116. The Sixi and Puning versions have been accessed through the collation notes in the *Taishō* (Song 宋 and Yuan 元 respectively). The Qisha edition was consulted through the Xinwenfeng 新文豐 reprint. The Kaiyuan edition is that held in the library of the Japanese Imperial Household and was consulted from the microfilms held by the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University (this edition is also collated by the *Taishō* editors as *ku* 宮).

³⁸⁷ The *Taishō* text nominally gives the readings from the second Korean canon. I have, however, directly consulted the images of a printing of the second carving of the Korean canon that are available through the Tripitaka Koreana Knowledgebase (http://kb.sutra.re.kr/ritk_eng/index.do). A copy of the *Scripture on the Secret Essential Methods of Meditation* from an exemplar of the first carving of the Korean canon is available at GAOLI DAZANGJING CHU KEBEN JIKAN 2013, 33: 363–483. The surviving portions of the Jin 金 canon, the other nearly complete representative of the *Kaibao* canon lineage, do not include a copy of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*.

³⁸⁸ By “variant” I exclude simple orthographic variants, of which there are always many across different editions.

³⁸⁹ GREENE 2012, 443n4; 443n5; 449n7; 455n10; 460n6; 460n10; 462n5 (the carving is difficult to read, but clearly does not follow the group 1 and 2 reading of *mo* 莫); 462n15. In one additional case (GREENE 2012, 455n6–7), a significant variant shared by the group 1 and 2 editions is not shared by either group 3 or the Wofoyuan carving. However, in this case the Wofoyuan carving also differs substantially from the group 3 reading (it leaves out four characters entirely).

³⁹⁰ GREENE 2012, 410n3; 462n6 (the variants for the first carving of the Korean canon are not listed here, but I can now confirm that they indeed correspond to the Wofoyuan readings).

³⁹¹ Chiefly in consultation with the so-called Liao 遼 Canon (see ZACCHETTI 2005, 101).

caution, we may therefore conclude that the Wofoyuan carving was based on an excerpted version that was itself derived from a specifically Sichuan-area copy of the complete text.

As Stephen Teiser notes in his introduction to the *Lotus Sutra* in volume 1,³⁹² a plausible model for the Wofoyuan scriptures is the carving of the Kaiyuan canon at Cloud Dwelling Monastery in 730, on the basis of the donation by Grand Princess Jinxian 金

仙長公主 of an extensive complete copy of this newly codified collection. It may well turn out that many, if not most of the scriptures carved at the Wofoyuan were indeed carried out on the basis of authoritative versions of the text that had been dispensed from the capital(s). However, the excerpts of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* in cave 59, at least, seem to have had a more local origin.

Chan in the Early Eighth Century

The *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* presents itself as a text about *chan*, “meditation,” a concept that during the early eighth century had become an object of contention among Chinese Buddhists. Much of this contention was associated with the rise of what is now referred to as “early Chan” (Zen). By “early Chan” scholars usually mean those Buddhists who had come to conceive of themselves as members of an elite lineage, one traced to the “East Mountain” (Dong Shan 東山) teachings of Hongren 弘忍 (601–674) and Daoxin 道信 (580–651), and then back to an Indian monk usually known as Bodhidharma (Putidamo 菩提達摩). This lineage was presented by its proponents as transmitting the very mind of the Buddha, and between the late seventh and early ninth centuries there was much jostling and competition over who rightfully belonged to this tradition.

Those purporting to represent this tradition eventually began to characterize themselves primarily by using the word *chan*—“meditation.” In part this reflects the fact that many of those associated with the lineage of Bodhidharma were “meditation masters,” a title that, however, had hitherto carried a generic meaning. Indeed, throughout the Tang dynasty there were monks known as “meditation

masters” (*chanshi* 禪師) who had no connections, real or claimed, to the Bodhidharma lineage. But the word *chan*, and the title “*chan* master,” did come to be more and more associated with the Bodhidharma lineage—with Chan capital “C”—and its distinctive understandings of meditation. This gradually shifting of associations was well underway by the 720s and 730s when the carvings at the Grove were carried out.³⁹³

Several early Chan lineages were active in the Sichuan region in the early eighth century, including some based in areas extremely close to Anyue. The *Record of the Masters and Disciples of the Lañkāvatāra [school]* (*Lengqie shizi ji* 楞伽師資記; T#2837, 85: 1283a–1290c), written in the early eighth century, thus records a certain Zhishen 智誦 (609–702), based in the Sichuan prefecture Zizhou 資州 (the prefecture immediately to the southwest of Anyue), as one of the ten great disciples of Hongren, the “Fifth Patriarch” to whom almost all later Chan groups traced their lineage.³⁹⁴ Later sources indicate that Chuji 處寂 (665–732) became Zhishen’s successor at the Dechun Monastery 德純寺 in Zizhou.³⁹⁵ Mazu 馬祖 (709–788), whose disciples came to dominate late Tang-dynasty Chan, is also said to have ordained under Chuji.³⁹⁶

³⁹² TEISER 2014, 66.

³⁹³ For example Huiji 慧日 (680–748) sharply criticizes understandings typical of some branches of early Chan simply by referring to the teaching of the “*chan* masters.” It would thus seem that by this time the word *chan* had begun to acquire a more specific meaning—in at least some contexts it could apparently be assumed to mean not meditation in general but a specific understanding of and approach to meditation, the one that we now associated with Chan. On Huiji’s writings, see CHAPPELL 1986.

³⁹⁴ YANAGIDA 1971A, 273; T#2837, 85: 1289c11–12.

³⁹⁵ The *Song Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Song Gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳), T#2061, 50: 836b8–29; *Record of the Treasure of the Dharma Throughout Successive Generations* (*Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記), T#2075, 51: 184c3–16; see YANAGIDA 1971B, 140; ADAMEK 2007, 334–335.

³⁹⁶ JIA JINHUA 2006, 12–13; POCESKI 2007, 22–23.

Chuji is also recorded to have transmitted the Dharma to Master Wuxiang 無相 (684–762), who in 739 (most likely) was appointed as the leader of the Jingzhong Monastery 淨眾寺, in the regional capital of Yizhou 益州 (modern Chengdu 成都), by the Regional Administrator (*zhangshi* 長史) of Sichuan Province.³⁹⁷ The later Chan doxographer, Zongmi 宗密 (780–841), mentions two additional Chan groups based in Sichuan—the Baotang 保唐 School of Wuzhu 無住 (714–774),³⁹⁸ and a lineage descended from Master Xuanshi 宣什 (another disciple of the Fifth Patriarch) that was carried on by at least three masters in central Sichuan prefectures immediately to the north-east of Anyue.³⁹⁹

Historical details about these groups—including the sectarian identity, if any, they themselves would have claimed—are clouded by the polemical agendas of the sources that describe them. Still, it is clear that during the *kaiyuan* era, not far from Anyue, many prominent Buddhists were known for their mastery of *chan*, and that some of them were connected, in some way, to the groups and trends that we associate with early Chan.

There is no evidence that Li She, who commissioned the carving, or the local monks, who may have helped him select this text, had any direct connection with “early Chan.” Nevertheless, the selection of passages from the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* in the carving reflects an understanding of what meditation is, or should be, that bears certain resemblance to some of the distinctive ideas of early Chan.

The *Record of the Treasure of the Dharma Throughout Successive Generations* (*Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記), penned by disciples of the Sichuan-based Chan master Wuzhu 無住, makes two central claims: that Wuzhu’s lineage is the true transmission from Bodhidharma,⁴⁰⁰ and that Bodhidharma’s lineage is distinguished by its superior approach to “meditation,” *chan*. The text’s vision of

how Bodhidharma’s *chan* differs from other approaches to meditation is made particularly clear in the following passage:

The various Lesser Vehicle forms of *chan* and the various samadhi practices are not the tenets of the school of the Patriarchal Master Bodhidharma; examples of the names [of these inferior practices] are as follows: the white bone contemplation, counting breaths contemplation, nine visualizations contemplation, five cessations of the mind contemplation, sun contemplation, moon contemplation, tower contemplation, pond contemplation, Buddha contemplation.

The *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* says, “A person afflicted by a heat illness should perform the contemplation of cold. One afflicted by a cold illness should perform the contemplation of heat. One with thoughts of carnal desire should perform the contemplation of poisonous snakes and the contemplations of impurity. One fond of fine food and drink should perform the contemplation of snakes and maggots. One fond of fine clothing should perform the contemplation of his body wrapped in hot iron.” There are various other such samadhis and contemplations.

[On the other hand] the *Scripture of the Chan Gate* [transmitted by Bodhidharma]⁴⁰¹ says, “In the midst of contemplation in seated meditation, [if] one sees an image of the Buddha’s form with the thirty-two marks, of variegated radiance, soaring in the air and manifesting transformations at will—are these true [signs of attainment] or not?”

The Buddha said [in response]: ‘When sitting in meditation, if one sees emptiness then there are no things. If one sees the Buddha with thirty-two marks, of variegated radiance, soaring

³⁹⁷ On the history of the Jingzhong Monastery, see ZHANG ZIKAI 2000. On the Jingzhong School, especially in the late eighth century, see ARAMAKI 2000.

³⁹⁸ On the Baotang School, see YANAGIDA 1983 and especially ADAMEK 2007.

³⁹⁹ *Extracts from the Great Commentary on the Scripture on Perfect Awakening* (*Yuanjue jing dashu shiyi chao* 圓覺經大疏釋義鈔), X#245, 9: 534c20–535a5. According to Zongmi, these masters were master Wei 未 of Guozhou 果州, Yunyu 蘊玉 of Langzhou 閬州, and the Nun Yisheng 一乘 of Xiangru County 相如縣 (located in Guozhou).

⁴⁰⁰ The text actually uses the name Bodhidharmatrāta (Putidamoduoluo 菩提達摩多羅). For the sake of simplicity, I will here speak of Bodhidharma.

⁴⁰¹ The biography of Bodhidharma (Bodhidharmatrāta; see previous note) had already associated him specifically with the teachings of this text, the *Scripture on the Gate of Chan* (*Chanmen jing* 禪門經; see ADAMEK 2007, 311), which is likely to be an eighth-century Chinese apocryphon (YANAGIDA 1999B).

in the air and manifesting transformations at will, then this means that your own mind is confused, that you are bound up in a demon's net. To see such things while in the midst of empty quiescence is nothing but delusion."⁴⁰²

Though the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* is here mentioned by name, the material referred to stems from the text now called *Secret Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*.⁴⁰³ This text may have once circulated together with the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* under a shared title.⁴⁰⁴ They are indeed quite similar in both content and style, and some of the Contemplations listed, such as the White Bone Contemplation, are indeed topics discussed at length in the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*. Others, such as the Sun Contemplation and the Pond Contemplation, derive from the famous *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*.

The *Record of the Treasure of the Dharma Throughout Successive Generations* rejects these practices—the practices that are the subject of the most prominent fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-century Chinese meditation scriptures—as “Lesser Vehicle” meditation. Conceptually, the criticism here targets any practice that emphasizes contemplating or seeing concrete objects. As the ensuing passage explains, visions of even nominally auspicious things, such as the Buddha, are not signs of true attainment, but proof that one's mind remains enslaved by demons. In true meditation, we are told, no such things appear, and one remains immersed solely in emptiness. Although early Chan texts present many different perspectives on meditation, not all of which are compatible,⁴⁰⁵ criticism of the confirmatory power of concrete visionary expe-

riences runs through much if not all early Chan literature.⁴⁰⁶

On the one hand, the *Record of the Treasure of the Dharma Throughout Successive Generations*, and early Chan literature more generally, thus appear to target precisely the understanding of meditation of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*. Indeed this text, like the other fifth-century Chinese-authored meditation texts, presents meditation as a process of contemplation (*guan* 觀) or imagination (*xiang* 想), often of a specific scene or image (such as one's own corpse or skeleton), ideally culminating in various visions. Thus in the eleventh meditation exercise, the practitioner is instructed to “imagine” his own body as a skeleton, and to further imagine light radiating from all of the bones. It is then stated that the attainment (*de* 得) of this practice will be made known when the meditator experiences a vision:

[The meditator] suddenly sees a sixteen-foot Buddha within the sunlight. Its halo measures six feet horizontally and six feet vertically. Its golden body radiates light all over, brilliant and majestic. Its thirty-two major marks and eighty minor marks are distinctly apparent. Each major and minor mark is clearly perceptible, exactly as when the Buddha was still present in the world.⁴⁰⁷

Interestingly, the text goes on to say that having seen this Buddha, the meditator must then consider that all things are by nature empty, and that in ultimate truth there is nothing that can be seen.⁴⁰⁸ But then *this* meditation is itself confirmed by another vision of “all the Buddhas 一切諸佛.”⁴⁰⁹ The entire practice is then called the “Contemplation of the Light of the White Bones 白骨流光觀.” The

402 T#2075, 51: 183a11–19: “諸小乘禪及諸三昧門，不是達摩祖師宗旨。列名如後：白骨觀，數息觀，九相觀，五停心觀，日觀，月觀，樓臺觀，池觀，佛觀。又禪秘要經云：人患熱病，想涼冷觀；患冷病，作熱想觀；色想，作毒蛇觀、不淨觀；愛好飯食，作蛇蛆觀；愛好衣，作熱鐵纏身觀。諸餘三昧觀等。禪門經云：坐禪觀中，見佛形像，三十二相，種種光明，飛騰虛空，變現自在，為真實耶？為虛妄耶？佛言：坐禪見空無有物，若見於佛三十二相，種種光明，飛騰虛空，變現自在，皆是自心顛倒，繫著魔網，於空寂滅見如是事，即虛妄。” See ADAMEK 2007, 326, with modifications.

403 The practices listed here appear to summarize the material found in the first scroll of T#620.

404 GREENE 2012, 120–125.

405 For example some early Chan texts actually recommend, at least as preliminary practices, meditation methods based on the *Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*, which is here criticized (McRAE 1986, 127).

406 For some representative examples, see IBUKI 1998, 32–35.

407 T#613, 15: 248a12–15: “當自然於日光中，見一丈六佛，圓光一尋左右，上下亦各一尋，軀體金色，舉身光明，炎赤端嚴。三十二相，八十種好，皆悉炳然。一一相好，分明得見，如佛在世，等無有異。”

408 T#613, 15: 248a16–19.

409 T#613, 15: 248a19–20.

Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation thus fully acknowledges that the highest truth is free of concrete images. But this does not prevent the attainment of concrete visions from serving as confirmation of advanced attainment. The contrast between this understanding and that expressed in early Chan texts, such as the *Record of the Treasure of the Dharma Throughout Successive Generations*, where any and all such visions are demonized, could not be clearer.

Some passages in the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* mention the possibility of negative visions, most often said to indicate sins (*zui* 罪) that must be expunged through the practice of repentance.⁴¹⁰ But the potentially auspicious nature of meditative visions is never questioned. Indeed, throughout the text the destruction of the hindrances signaled by inauspicious visions is itself revealed by new visions.⁴¹¹ This connection between *chan* and visionary experiences of all kinds is seen in numerous sources throughout the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries. Indeed, though practices aimed at producing visions—especially visions of Buddhas or their paradises—is often associated (by both the later East Asian tradition, and by modern scholars) with “Pure Land” rather than *chan* meditation, this is itself a distinction that emerged only when and where the ideology of the Chan school was the dominant understanding of the meaning of *chan*; indeed prior to the rise of Chan, in the seventh century, “Pure Land” masters such as Shandao 善導 (613–681), who emphasized obtaining visions of the Buddha, were known to their contemporaries as “*chan* masters”.⁴¹²

Given that the connection between *chan* and auspicious visions is central to the complete text of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*, it is extremely significant that positive visionary experiences are not included anywhere within the excerpts carved in cave 59. The excerpts drawn

from the second sutra even appear to explicitly edit away reference to such matters.⁴¹³ In the complete text, the meditation practices in this section begin with “Bringing to Mind the Buddha 念佛,” described as an elaborate exercise of meditative imagination leading to a vision of the body of the Buddha. This visionary Buddha then anoints the practitioner’s head with water, and “those whose sins have been removed will at this point hear the Buddha preach the Dharma 罪業除者聞佛說法.”

The excerpts from cave 59 begin at this point: “When the Buddha preaches the Dharma, he preaches the four bases of mindfulness 佛說法者，說四念處. . .” In the carving, however, all reference to the broader context of a visionary encounter with the Buddha has been left out. This passage here is instead appended directly after a passage drawn from an earlier section of the text, such that it appears simply as part of a general explanation of methods of meditation. As this passage continues, after the words “those with excessive lust 貪婬多者” the carving gives instructions for meditation on the breath. Here, however, passages have been left out both before and after this introduction. These omitted passages make clear that this teaching on breath meditation is intended specifically for those who have first obtained the vision of the Buddha, but who, because of their defilements, are still unable to obtain benefit.⁴¹⁴

Following the method of breath contemplation, the complete text then describes the further visions that this practice will lead to, culminating in a vision of the Seven Buddhas of the Past who present yet further teachings.⁴¹⁵ All of this is omitted from the carving. Once again, the text included in the carving picks up only with the teachings delivered by these visionary Buddhas, teachings that appear in the carving, shorn of their original context, simply as further instructions for meditation.

⁴¹⁰ T#613, 15: 249b17; 250b14; 250c10. For other examples, see GREENE 2012, 218–228.

⁴¹¹ For a particularly clear illustration of this, see T#613, 15: 252c29–b3.

⁴¹² SHARF 2002A, 302.

⁴¹³ From “佛說法者” (column 85 in segment 10-C of wall f in cave 59) through “數息觀竟” (column 93 in segment 11-B of wall f in cave 59).

⁴¹⁴ Following the words “those with excessive lust,” the complete text continues with “though they have obtained the samadhi of the contemplation of the Buddha, will not be helped; they will still be unable to gain the fruits of the holy path. 雖得如此觀佛三昧，於事無益，不能獲得賢聖道果。” (T#613, 15: 256c22–23). The Buddha’s initial interlocutor Nandika, it should be noted, is described as having obtained arhatship on the basis of the initial practice and visions alone (T#613, 15: 256c16).

⁴¹⁵ T#613, 15: 257b12–258a7.

The carved excerpts do include one notable account from the complete text of a meditative vision.⁴¹⁶ Crucially, however, this vision is a negative one, said to indicate that the practitioner has transgressed the precepts and failed to confess. These transgressions must be atoned for before meditation can proceed. The excerpted text thus discusses meditative visions only in the case, where such visions are considered hindrances to meditation practice. The positive role of visionary experience in certifying meditative attainment, so central in the complete text of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*, is thus entirely ignored by the carving. Indeed, reference to such matters was carefully and consciously excluded from those passages selected for carving.

There is no direct evidence linking the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* in cave 59 to any of the groups, texts, or individuals associated with early Chan. The approach to meditation seen in the excerpts does also differ undeniably from the discussions of meditation typical in early Chan sources, which rarely if ever describe the details of traditional meditation practices such as the contemplation of impurity. From this point of view it

is not surprising to find later Chan texts such as the *Record of the Treasure of the Dharma Throughout Successive Generations* explicitly contrasting the “Chan” understanding of meditation with that found either in the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* or in closely related literature.

Nevertheless, whoever created the excerpted version of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* does seem to have been motivated by at least some of the same concerns that animated early Chan discourse. The excerpted text thus shares the typically Chan suspicion, or at the least the conscious overlooking, of the notion that visionary experiences serve as signs of meditative attainment. This understanding was a nearly universal feature of the Chinese Buddhist approach to *chan* in earlier centuries. In the excerpts of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* carved in cave 59, an important, canonical text on *chan*, one typical of an earlier era of Chinese Buddhism, has been reshaped, shorn of precisely this notion of the power and importance of meditative visions, an idea that in the early eighth century was coming to be seen, by some Chinese Buddhists at least, as problematic.

The Authority of Meditation

Unlike that of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*, the carving of the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* is a single, complete section of the original text. It is clear, however, that this section was chosen because it too concerns meditation, here discussed in terms of “concentration” (*ding* 定).⁴¹⁷

Asked how those who practice meditation should purify their minds, the Buddha gives two lists that, at first glance, appear to be instructions for those practicing meditation. Meditators must not “violate the precepts 犯尸羅,” “falsely cling to divination 妄執吉凶,” “fail to follow the [teachings of] worthies and sages 不順賢聖,” or “speak with crude and vulgar words 雜穢語.” Nor will they reach meditative attainment if they cling to “speaking and discours-

ing 談論,” “sleeping 睡眠,” “beautiful sounds 妙聲,” or “fine fragrances 芬香.”

However the overall message here may not be targeting meditators themselves. For in conclusion, the Buddha makes the following pronouncement:

I allow you to give to those monks who meditate in hermitages the best quality lodgings, the best quality bedding, and the best quality food and drink, and to exempt them from all monastic duties.⁴¹⁸ Why? If those who cultivate meditation are lacking in supplies and requisites, they will give rise to various evil states of mind and therefore will be unable to achieve the various samadhis [and will experience the other

⁴¹⁶ Segments 11-A, 11-B, 11-C, 11-D of wall f in cave 59; T#613, 15: 257a29–b12.

⁴¹⁷ *Ding* was the usual Chinese translation for *dhyāna*, the word transcribed as *chan* 禪. Indeed, the earlier translation of the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* (T#410, 13: 692c26–693c16) here uses the word *chan*.

⁴¹⁸ The earlier version of the text is here rather different (T#410, 13: 693c2–3).

problems enumerated previously] up to falling into the Avīci hell, where they will suffer innumerable, unbearable tortures.⁴¹⁹

The passage concludes with a verse declaring that meditation is the highest Buddhist “vocation”(業), and that, accordingly, those who practice meditation must be honoured and supported.⁴²⁰ This excerpt from the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* thus serves as justification for relieving those who specialize in meditation from “monastic duties,” presumably referring to day-to-day administrative or ritual duties, and, above all, to encourage providing such monks with the very best material resources.

This is also a central concern of the previously enumerated 20 admonitions for meditators. The first item from the first list thus explains that failure in meditation occurs when those who meditate “desire to practice meditation, but lack material resources and become agitated as they search them out.”⁴²¹ Meanwhile the second list of ten begins by rebuking meditators who delight excessively in “work” 事業.⁴²² We might have been tempted to take these two items, like the others on the lists, as instructions for meditators. But read together with the Buddha’s later injunction, they too seem more like admonitions for the wider community, who must help meditators avoid these problems by supplying them resources and freeing them from mundane chores. The centrality of these points is made clear in the ensuing discussion of the dangers of not following these admonitions, where it is emphasized that “because of [needing to] seek the donations of the faithful 追求受用信施因緣,” meditators will “give rise to evil states of mind 發起惡心心所有法,”⁴²³

leading in turn to violation of secular laws, punishment for such violations, sickness, death, and eventually rebirth in hell.

This passage from the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels*—at least when read in isolation—thus claims that it is just as bad for a meditating monk to lack excellent material resources as it is for such a monk to “violate the precepts,” “falsely cling to divination,” or “not follow the teachings of sages.” Indeed, by introducing the bad results of wrong meditation practice, which include meditators ending up in hell, as occurring “because of [needing to] seek the donations of the faithful,” the passage seems even to place blame for such results, at least in part, on the shoulders of those who fail to provide the necessary offerings. In the final passage, the Buddha even compares the fate of such meditators to that of Devadatta, the Buddha’s cousin, who was condemned to hell for having tried to kill the Buddha, causing a schism in the sangha.⁴²⁴ Failing to provide sufficient and even excellent material support to meditating monks is here implicitly linked to the most terrible of Buddhist transgressions.⁴²⁵

On the one hand, we see here the perennial Buddhist theme of the importance of providing offerings to the sangha. Worthy of special notice, however, is the idea that there is a sub-section of the sangha—meditators—for whom such offerings are particularly important, and for whom offerings of particularly high quality are especially necessary.

As discussed above, eighth-century Sichuan hosted many Buddhists who claimed to be masters of “meditation”. And precisely during this period of time, with the rise of Chan, it was becoming an ever-more common strategy to ground Buddhist

⁴¹⁹ T#411, 13: 735c21–26: “吾聽汝等給阿練若修定苾芻，最上房舍，最上卧具，最上飲食。一切僧事，皆應放免。所以者何？諸修定者，若乏資緣，即便發起一切惡心、心所有法，不能成就諸三摩地，乃至墮於無間地獄，受無量種難忍大苦。” Segments 9-C, 9-D, 10-A, 10-B of wall f in cave 59.

⁴²⁰ T#411, 13: 736a10–11: “The cultivation of meditation cuts off all delusions. This is something that other vocations cannot do. Therefore those who cultivate meditation are honored. The wise must support them with offerings. 修定能斷惑，餘業所不能，故修定為尊，智者應供養。” Segment 10-B of wall f in cave 59.

⁴²¹ T#411, 13: 735b16–17: “雖欲修定而乏資緣經求擾亂。” Segment 9-D of wall f in cave 59.

⁴²² T#411, 13: 735c6. Segment 9-B of wall f in cave 59.

⁴²³ Segment 9-C of wall f in cave 59 (T#411, 13: 735c13–14). The Liang translation at T#410, 13: 693b23–24 here reads as follows: “He will [act only] so as to obtain the faithful offerings of donors, and on account of [desiring] material gain, he will give rise to evil states of mind. 但為得檀越信施。因其利養心生惡法。”

⁴²⁴ Devadatta, along with several others from Buddhist lore, are here mentioned as examples of those who “lost their *dhyaṇa* [and therefore suffered from these misfortunes] up to and including falling into the Avīci hell where they suffered innumerable, unbearable tortures. 如是等類退失靜慮，乃至墮於無間地獄受無量種難忍大苦。” (Segments 9-B and 9-C of wall f in cave 59; T#411, 13: 735c19–21). I am unaware of any traditional story in which Devadatta’s fate was linked specifically to a loss of meditative power.

⁴²⁵ Devadatta was not necessarily always viewed as evil (see DEEG 1999), though in this passage that is clearly the implication.

religious authority in a claimed mastery of “meditation,” posited as apart from, and superior to, particular doctrinal, scriptural, or ritual traditions.

It would be a mistake, however, to take the carving of the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* in cave 59 as simply reflecting the increased status and authority of those claiming mastery of, or devotion to, meditation. That this text would be carved at all bespeaks, rather, a certain anxiety about that which it asserts. What some in the community evidentially wished to claim is that, mastery, or the mere practice of meditation, should be grounds for religious authority and the excellent material support it merits.

The need to make this kind of claim fits with the broader pattern of state-church relations during the *kaiyuan* era. Beginning with the second short reign of Ruizong 睿宗 (r. 684–690, 710–712), and then continuing more substantially during the first 25 years of the reign of Xuanzong, the Tang government adopted an increasingly restrictive attitude towards the Buddhist establishment.⁴²⁶ This was in response to the unprecedented power, status, and freedom that Buddhism had enjoyed in the final years of the reign of Empress Wu 武后 (r. 690–705) and during the initial Tang restoration under

Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 684, 705–710). At least to some extent the new policies succeeded in humbling the clergy. Xuanzong thus issued edicts compelling the clergy to reverse their longstanding custom and perform acts of reverence to both their secular families and to the emperor, and in contrast to similar efforts in previous generations, there is no record of any clerical opposition to these policies.⁴²⁷ This was a comparatively sudden change in public status—as recently as the reign of Zhongzong, monks were still being praised for refusing to reverence secular authorities.⁴²⁸

Some of the language used in the promulgation of Xuanzong’s policies suggests that the status of meditation as a granter of authority was specifically called into question by government officials. Thus in the seventh month of *kaiyuan* 2 (714), an edict was issued prohibiting officials from employing monks within their households for the purpose of “divining good and bad fortune 緣吉凶.”⁴²⁹ The putative motivations for this order are stated as follows:

We have heard that many among the families of the hundred officials maintain relations with members of the Buddhist and Daoist clergy as

⁴²⁶ WEINSTEIN 1987, 49–54; TONAMI 1986, 444–470; TONAMI 1988.

⁴²⁷ TONAMI 1988, 44–45. These orders were issued in two edicts—one in 714 concerning reverence of parents, and one in 733 that added obeisance to the emperor. These policies were reversed in 761. Several scholars have suggested that the initial edict of 714 was quickly repealed (WEINSTEIN 1987, 34; FAURE 1997, 76; see also TWITCHETT 1979B, 362, who appears to be drawing from an unpublished draft of WEINSTEIN 1987). This does not appear to be correct. Faure cites a passage from the *Essential Regulations of the Tang* (*Tang hui yao* 唐會要), TANG HUIYAO, 47: 836, that mentions only the order, not its cancellation. Weinstein meanwhile cites the *Old Book of the Tang* (*Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書), JIU TANGSHU, 8: 172, and the *General Chronicle of the Buddha and the Patriarchs* (*Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀; T#2035, 49: 373b9). The *Old Book of the Tang* entries for 714 do not, in fact, mention the order ever being rescinded. This is mentioned only in the *General Chronicle of the Buddha and the Patriarchs*, which here, however, seems of questionable reliability. After indicating the initial order (in the third, intercalary month of *kaiyuan* 2), we read: “In the fourth month was rescinded [the edict] compelling veneration [by the clergy of their parents] 四月罷致敬.” There follows a long comment by the editor, Zhipan 志磐 (fl. 1258–1269), about the justice of this reversal. Zhipan then claims: “Since the time of that Enlightened Sovereign up until our present dynasty there has never again been this injustice [of compelling monks to bow to their parents] 自明皇至我朝，無復爲此非議者矣。” This claim blatantly contradicts the edict of *kaiyuan* 21 (733), an edict that the *General Chronicle of the Buddha and the Patriarchs* conveniently fails to mention in its own entry for that year (T#2035, 49: 375a1–2). Along with the absence of any other evidence for the rescinding of the 714 order, this suggests that the *General Chronicle of the Buddha and the Patriarchs* is in this respect not reliable. Interestingly, the *Old Book of the Tang* entry for the fifth month of *kaiyuan* 2 states that Wei Zhigu 魏知古, Minister of Works (*gongbu shangshu* 工部尚書), was “removed from his [supplementary position] of Manager of Affairs 罷知政事.” Is it possible that Zhipan has deliberately or accidentally misread *ba zhi zheng* 罷知政 as *ba zhijing* 罷致敬?

⁴²⁸ *General Chronicle of the Buddha and the Patriarchs*, T#2035, 49: 372c13–15; though as mentioned in the previous note, the *General Chronicle* may not be the most objective source.

⁴²⁹ TANG HUIYAO, 49: 860; QUANTANGWEN, 1:243; CEFU YUANGUI, 159.11b. In the *Complete Prose Works of the Tang Dynasty* (*Quan Tangwen* 全唐文), this edict is titled *Order prohibiting interaction between officials and Buddhist and Daoist clergy* (*Jin bai guan yu sengdao wanghuan zhi* 禁百官與僧道往還制). Weinstein thus writes that by this order “officials were prohibited from associating with members of the Buddhist and Taoist clergies,” see WEINSTEIN 1987, 51. However the title, added by the editors of the *Complete Prose Works of the Tang Dynasty*, does not accurately reflect the content of the edict, which itself states that officials are allowed to host the performance of religious rituals as long as the participating clergy are first vetted by the local government office. As noted by GERNET 1995, 284, the point of the edict is to prohibit officials from employing clerics as private priests within their households, not to ban any and all interaction with them.

if they were members of their households, their wives and children interacting with them freely. Some [clerics], deceitfully claiming the authority of Meditative Contemplation (*changuan* 禪觀), make false statements about good and bad fortune, their affairs thus partaking of false and evil practices.⁴³⁰

The following year, in an edict dated to the eleventh month of *kaiyuan* 3 (715), Buddhist and Daoist temples were subjected to new regulations. Explaining the need for new regulation, the edict laments a general lack of discipline and virtue among the clergy, who are criticized for, among other things, failing to maintain proper attire and for spreading false prophecies. Criticism is directed especially against those who: “claiming to have mastered Meditative Contemplation, falsely prophesize disasters or auspicious happenings.”⁴³¹

The general fears here expressed, of religious figures claiming prophetic powers, are unremarkable. But it is noteworthy that the edicts repeatedly invoke “Meditative Contemplation”. That these comments do indeed indicate a climate of skepticism towards those Buddhists who were claiming meditation as their source of authority gains confirmation from an edict issued on the twenty-sixth day of the sixth month of *kaiyuan* 12 (724), requiring all monks to memorize slightly more than 200 pages of scriptures or face defrocking.⁴³² Although scriptural exams were already required for ordination candidates,⁴³³ the new order stipulated testing for all monks, once every three years. Significantly, the edict explicitly states that expertise in “meditation” (*zuo chan* 坐禪) could not be put forward as a substitute for scriptural memorization.⁴³⁴

Weinstein suggests that this edict shows “the importance attached in this period to sutra chanting as the principal religious activity of the monk.”⁴³⁵ However, the edict also shows the exact opposite—that it would have been expected or customary for

meditation to be considered a valid equivalent for such an examination. Xuanzong’s policies towards Buddhism thus both assumed that meditation was often invoked as a source of legitimation, and at the same time occasionally targeted this legitimacy directly and attempted to enforce a different understanding.

It is, to be sure, difficult to know to what extent the attitudes reflected in Xuanzong’s edicts would have influenced anyone in Sichuan, let alone the extent to which they would have been enforced there. There is, however, at least some evidence that other aspects of Xuanzong’s policies towards religion—notably his support of Daoism over and against Buddhism—were being felt in Sichuan at precisely this moment. Thus in an edict of *kaiyuan* 12 (724), one recorded in Xuanzong’s own calligraphy on a stele that stands to this day, it was ordered that the Administrator of the Sichuan capital region of Yizhou 益州 re-establish a Daoist temple at a site on Qingcheng Mountain 青城山 that, the edict claimed, had of late been “taken over and converted to a monastery by Buddhist monks of the Feifu Monastery 有飛赴寺僧奪以為寺.”⁴³⁶ That pressure of this kind was felt more widely among the Sichuan Buddhist communities can furthermore be seen in sculpture projects dating from this time that implicitly assert the subservience of Buddhism to Daoism.⁴³⁷

The carving of the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* in cave 59 of the Wofoyuan strongly suggests that at least some members of the local Buddhist community, who based their legitimacy on the practice of meditation, felt that this legitimacy was under threat. At the same time, that it was even possible to enshrine this passage in such a public manner shows the limits of governmental attempts to restrict such authority or legitimacy. In this regard, it is interesting to contrast the passage excerpted from the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* with the one that immediately follows in the complete scripture, a

⁴³⁰ TANG HUIYAO, 49: 860: “如聞百官家多以僧尼道士等為門徒往還，妻子等無所避忌，或詭託禪觀，禍福妄陳，事涉左道。” This edict was reaffirmed in the third month of *kaiyuan* 5, see TONAMI 1988, 33.

⁴³¹ CEFU YUANGUI, 159.8b9–10: “稱解禪觀妄說災祥。”

⁴³² WEINSTEIN 1987, 111.

⁴³³ MICHIHATA 1967, 46–47.

⁴³⁴ TANG HUIYAO, 49: 861.

⁴³⁵ WEINSTEIN 1987, 189n22.

⁴³⁶ *Qingcheng Shan Changdao Guan chi bing biao* 青城山常道觀敕并表 (LONG AND HUANG 1997, 23). ROBSON 2012, 101.

⁴³⁷ MOLLIER 2010.

passage in which the Buddha declares that even those monks who have violated the precepts must be honored, that violators of the monastic precepts must never be punished on the basis of secular laws, and that even corrupt and unworthy monks who “claim to be renunciants but are in fact not renunciants 實非沙門自稱沙門” are fit to serve as religious teachers.⁴³⁸ It is difficult to imagine statements such as these being approved for public display, at least during the climate of the *kaiyuan* era.

But the supreme value of meditation, and the status of those who practice it, was clearly something the local community was willing to publically advocate. At the same time, it is also tempting to see in the immediately following passages from the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* at least some attempt to preemptively parry any criticism along the lines of that implicit in the edicts and regulations of Xuanzong. The excerpts from scroll 2 of the text are devoted entirely to methods of meditation. But there then follow excerpts from scroll 3, which just, as in the passage from the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels*, present the Buddha issuing a series of *vinaya*-like rules, in this case rules pertaining to monks and nuns who improperly claim association with meditation:

There may be monks, nuns, laymen, or laywomen who, while within the Buddhist fold, ceaselessly covet personal gain and material support. Out of desire for fame they dissemble and perform evil, not practicing meditation and being heedless in acting and speaking. Living a life of heedlessness, out of greed for personal gain, they claim to practice meditation.⁴³⁹

Such practitioners—only monks and nuns are mentioned specifically in the next passage⁴⁴⁰—are guilty of grave transgressions, and failure to imme-

diately atone for them will result in long suffering in hell. The Buddha also rebukes monks and nuns who make false claims to actual meditative attainments, those who “have not in fact seen the white bones but claim to have seen them 實不見白骨自言我見白骨.” This transgression is even more serious than merely claiming to be a meditator—no possibility of atonement is mentioned, and the guilty parties will be reborn in the deepest hell (*Avīci*) for an entire eon (*kalpa*).

Read together with the earlier commands from the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels*, these passages from scroll 3 of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation* yield a nuanced message concerning meditation and its inherent power. Meditation is the supreme Buddhist practice, and those devoted to it are more worthy of support than anyone else. At the same time, falsely claiming the power or prestige of meditation, or even merely to be a meditator, is a heinous crime. Indeed, as is then implied by the final significant passage included in the carving,⁴⁴¹ meditative attainment itself is not actually necessary:

With thoughts still, the mind free of distraction, sit upright in absorption, concentrate the mind in a single place, and block off the sense faculties. Even though they do not obtain any visions,⁴⁴² such people, their minds calm, will by the power of their concentrated minds be reborn in Tuṣita Heaven where they will meet Maitreya. Together with him they will be reborn on earth. Present at the first dragon-flower assembly [of Maitreya’s reign as Buddha], they will be among the first to hear [Maitreya’s] Dharma and realize the path of liberation.⁴⁴³

It is thus not necessary to attain the kind of visions that figure so prominently in the complete

⁴³⁸ T#411, 13: 736a16–27.

⁴³⁹ T#613, 15: 268a19–22: “若有比丘、比丘尼、優婆塞、優婆夷，於佛法中，為利養故，貪求無厭。為好名聞，而假偽作惡，實不坐禪，身口放逸。行放逸行，貪利養故，自言坐禪。” (Segment 12-C of wall f in cave 59).

⁴⁴⁰ The complete text also discusses the case of laymen or laywomen, see T#613, 15: 268b10–c13.

⁴⁴¹ Following this passage, we find the characters *ruo you biqiu biqiuni* 若有比丘比丘尼, followed by an unreadable section that may have contained as many as 31 additional characters. Since these characters appear several more times in the remaining text, it is difficult to judge what the final lines here may have been.

⁴⁴² In translated Buddhist texts, the word *jingjie* 境界 usually translates Indic terms such as *ālambana*, *viśaya*, or *jñeya*. These words all refer to the object of either the mind or a sensory organ. In this text, however, the word seems to be used to refer specifically to those objects that appear during meditation, and hence my translation as “vision.”

⁴⁴³ T#613, 15: 268c14–18: “繫念住意，心不散亂，端坐正受，住意一處，閉塞諸根。此人安心，念定力故，雖無境界，捨身他世，生兜率天，值遇彌勒，俱下生閻浮提。龍華初會，最先聞法，悟解脫道。” (Segments 13-A to 13-C of wall f in cave 59).

scripture (visions that, as mentioned above, are pointedly not discussed within the excerpted passages). Merely being someone who practices medi-

tation and succeeds in concentrating the mind is enough to ensure rebirth in the heaven of Maitreya and, eventually, liberation.

Conclusions

Read together, as seems to have been the intention, the passage from the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels* and the excerpts from the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials* thus both hold up meditators as the supreme “fields of merit” for the faithful, all the while deflecting any expectation that such meditators will claim, or even possess, the kinds of special attainments or powers that might arouse government suspicion.⁴⁴⁴ This message—that the prestige of meditation comes merely from being one devoted to it—can thus be seen, at least in part, as a strategy intended to safely reaffirm the value of meditation as a source of authority and legitimacy in a difficult political climate.

As mentioned above, apart from occupying a shared moment in Chinese Buddhist history, there is little that explicitly connects the meditation texts in cave 59 and the trends associated with early Chan. As I have tried to demonstrate in regard to the excerpted text of the *Scripture on the Secret Essentials of Meditation*, it is nonetheless possible to see at work certain shared problematics concerning the nature of meditation. The broader questions raised, in connection with the passage from the *Sutra on the Ten Wheels*, questions concerning the authority of meditation and the policies of Xuanzong towards the Buddhist establishment, may similarly represent an area where the selection (and excerpting) of the meditation texts in cave 59 and the ideological innovations of early Chan can be profitably interpreted as differing but related reactions to a shared climate.

Scholars of early Chan have indeed occasionally pointed out that Xuanzong’s policies may have

served as a catalyst for developments in early Chan ideology. As Wendi Adamek suggests:

During Xuanzong’s era, the state tried to appropriate the authority to judge the standards of discipline of the clergy and assigned values to certain kinds of speech and writing and certain genealogies. Thus, it is no coincidence that this era also saw the development of various ideologies meant to convey the Saṅgha beyond the limits of provisional orthodoxy, as all formal means of legitimation were being subjected to usurpation by an outside authority, the state.⁴⁴⁵

Here Adamek is speaking most particularly about the many novel and competing claims to lineage-based authority that were pioneered by early Chan, and which seem to have developed at a particularly rapid pace during the Xuanzong’s reign.

In the end, the meditation texts carved in cave 59 may thus be most interesting and significant not as further evidence for the history of early Chan, but rather as a testament to the fact that early Chan did not have a monopoly on special appeals to “meditation”—*chan*—as grounds of authority. The lineages and doctrinal and rhetorical strategies associated with early Chan may merely have proven the most successful and long-lasting of what at the time were numerous other similar efforts, efforts that have largely been erased from history, but at least some traces of which survive among the stone sutras of the Grove of the Reclining Buddha.

⁴⁴⁴ Early Chan authors were also forced to address this issue. They were clearly criticized for their apparent lack of magical powers despite their supposed mastery of *chan* (CHAPPELL 1986, 170), and they responded to these criticisms in various ways (FAURE 1991, 111–114; BIELEFELDT 2012).

⁴⁴⁵ ADAMEK 2007, 190–191.

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