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BuddhistRoad Paper 3.1

BODHIDHARMA, MEDITATION, AND MEDICINE: ON THE MESSAGE OF A FRAGMENTED BUDDHIST MEDICAL TEXT FROM DUNHUANG

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BUDDHISTROAD PAPER

Peer reviewed

ISSN: 2628-2356

DOI: 10.46586/rub.br.262.239

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Please quote this paper as follows:

Sørensen, Henrik H., “Bodhidharma, Meditation, and Medicine: On the Message of a Fragmented Buddhist Medical Text from Dunhuang,”
BuddhistRoad Paper 3.1 (2023).

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Established by the European Commission



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 725519).

BODHIDHARMA, MEDITATION, AND MEDICINE:
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TEXT FROM DUNHUANG

HENRIK H. SØRENSEN

Abstract

The present essay is devoted to a discussion and analysis of Dunhuang (敦煌) manuscript P. 3181 which features a meditation text attributed to the Buddhist saint and Chan Buddhist (Chin. *chanzong* 禪宗) patriarch Bodhidharma (d. c. 530). It is noteworthy because it represents a stage in the development of Chinese Buddhism in which local practitioners of meditation became increasingly influenced by Daoist beliefs and practices. As such, the manuscript under discussion documents the conflation of Chan Buddhism, Buddhist meditation generally conceived, and Daoist practices for the circulation of vital energy of the kind one later encounters in the tradition of internal alchemy (Chin. *neidan* 內丹). In the course of this presentation, the focus will be on Dunhuang, and how medical beliefs and practices, many of which derived from Daoism, were incorporated into the various systems of belief and practice of local Buddhism.

1. *Introduction*

Even today, more than a century after its discovery, the hoard of Dunhuang (敦煌) manuscripts continues to yield new and interesting discoveries, although sometimes only on a modest scale. One fragmented manuscript that has not so far attracted much attention from the scholarly community, is P. 3181,¹ featuring a text ascribed to Bodhidharma (d. c. 530, 達摩), the reputed First Patriarch of Chan Buddhism (Chin. *chanzong* 禪宗).² The title of this text is *Dasheng yaoguan Nantianzhuguo Damo*

¹ CMCT, Vol. III, 139.

² Bodhidharma as a constructed persona has been explored in John McRae, “The Hagiography of Bodhidharma: Reconstructing the Point of Origin of Chinese Chan Buddhism,” in *India in the Chinese Imagination: Myth, Religion, and Thought*, ed. John Kieschnick and Meir Shahar (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 125–140. See also McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch’an* (Honolulu:



chanshi jiyi 大乘藥關南天竺國達摩禪師急譯 [Medicinal Gate of Mahāyāna Hurriedly Translated by the Chan Master Bodhidharma from Southern India; hereafter *Bodhidharma's Text*], an identification that derives from the final line of the text (see Appendix I). The first to take note of it was Tanaka Ryōshō (田中良昭), one of several Japanese experts on early Chan Buddhism and related manuscripts from Dunhuang. Tanaka wrote a short essay on the manuscript during the first half of the 1970s but he did not study the text on its own terms, nor did he do so from the perspective of its message or possible usage. Most importantly, he did not manage to place it in a viable historical context.³ I only came across the manuscript by chance at a much later date while perusing the catalogues of Dunhuang manuscripts looking for something entirely different. At that time the manuscript captured my attention because I have always been fascinated by the connection between religious practices and medicine—both concrete and imagined—as historically manifest in medieval Chinese Buddhism. In fact the confluence between religious practices and beliefs and medicine is widespread and manifold in the Chinese material, as recent studies in the field of Buddhist medicine have shown.⁴ Since I had

University of Hawai'i Press, 1986): 16–19. See also John Jorgensen, “Early Chán Revisited: A Critical Reading of Dáoxūan’s Hagiographies of Bodhidharma, Huikè and Their Associates,” in *Chán Buddhism in Dūnhuáng and Beyond. A Study of Manuscripts, Texts, and Contexts in Memory of John R. McRae*, ed. Christoph Anderl and Christian Wittern (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2021), 25–98.

³ See Tanaka Ryōshō 田中良昭, *Tonkō zenshū bunken no kenkyū* 敦煌禪宗文獻の研究 [Studies in the Dunhuang Documents Pertaining to Chan Buddhism] (Tokyo: Daito shupansha, 1983), 517–546 (see esp. 534–537). Tanaka’s piece on Bodhidharma and Daoism was originally published as, “Bodaidaruma to kansuru Tonkō shahon sanshu ni tsuite 菩提達摩に関する敦煌写本三種について [Concerning Three Types of Dunhuang Manuscripts Related to Bodhidharma],” *Komazawa daigaku bukkyō gakubu kenkyū kiyō* 駒沢大学仏教学部研究紀要 [Journal of the Faculty of Buddhism of the Komazawa University] 31 (1973): 161–179, and later included in the above work made up of a series of the author’s individual studies. An attempt at contextualising the text as belonging to a specific type of Chinese Buddhist literature can be found in Kawasaki Michiko 川崎ミチコ, “Tsūzoku shi-rui - zatsu shibun-rui 通俗詩類 - 雑詩文類 [Ordinary Poetry - Miscellaneous Poetry],” in *Tonkō bukkyō to zen* [Buddhism in Dunhuang and Chan], edited by Shinohara Hisao 篠原壽雄 and Tanaka Ryōshō 田中良昭, (Tokyo: Daitō Shuppansha, 1980), 327. The importance of this short piece of data is that it documents the adoption of Daoist longevity practices and medicine by the medieval Chan tradition at a relatively early phase in its history.

⁴ See the various studies and translations by C. Pierce Salguero, *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); C.

not seen the actual manuscript up close when first encountering it, I made a note of it with the intention to give it a go in the foreseeable future. As it happened, I entirely forgot about it for several years until quite recently, when I came upon it again while going through my old files and decided to do something about it before it slipped into oblivion once more.

What follows is my take on the manuscript in question, including a critical edition of the text for easy perusal, a full translation, and an analysis of its contents together with an attempt to place it in the context of Buddhism in Dunhuang during the late medieval period, i.e. 9–10th centuries. Finally, this leads to a discussion of the Bodhidharma persona within Daoism as part of an attempt to understand certain aspects of religious appropriation in Chinese religion and culture. Needless to say, I remain indebted to Tanaka Ryōshō's pioneering efforts throughout, as well as to the various elucidations produced by the series of specialists currently working on the Daoist tradition of inner alchemy.⁵

2. Bodhidharma, Medicine, and Daoism

Before looking at P. 3181 itself, let us first review what we know about the Bodhidharma persona in relation to medicinal practices in China. Whether Bodhidharma's association with an early Chan Buddhist

Pierce Salguero, ed., *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2017); Catherine Despeux, "Buddhist Healing Practices at Dunhuang in the Medieval Period," in *Buddhist Healing in Medieval China and Japan*, ed. C. Pierce Salguero and Andrew Macomber (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 118–159. For a highly useful survey of Buddhist involvement with medicine in late medieval and early pre-modern China, see Liu Shufen 劉淑芬, "Cong yaofangdong dao Huimin ju: Sengren, guojia he yiliao de guanxi 從藥方洞到惠民局——僧人、國家和醫療的關係 [From Yaofangdong to the Huimin Bureau: The Relationship between Monks, the State and Medical Care]," *Tang Song shehui bianqian wangzhan ziliao* 唐宋社會變遷網站資料 [Information from the Tang and Song Social Changes Website], last accessed May 05, 2022. <http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~tangsong/papers/lau941210.pdf>. This document provides useful information on the spread and use of medicinal practices in Buddhist institutions during the Tang and Song Dynasties based on mainly historical sources including the genre concerning 'great monks' (Chin. *gaoseng* 高僧). As such it covers monks as doctors, the meaning of medicine in Buddhism, Buddhist medicinal knowledge in medieval China, the role of temples in providing cures, the transmission of medicinal methods and prescriptions, as well as healing through magic (spell arts) and repentance.

⁵ I am here mainly thinking of the pioneering work of Isabelle Robinet, as well as the more recent studies by Fabrizio Pregadio, and Stephen Eskildsen.



tradition *per se* can be given any historical credibility or not, it remains a fact that as a semi-mythological figure his presence looms large, not only in Buddhism but in the over-all religious imagination of Chinese culture. In that regard one only has to think about his thoroughly imagined role in martial arts, including his purported association with Shaolin (少林) boxing. As such his legacy has gone well beyond the Chan tradition itself, and he has truly entered the Chinese mythological mainstream as a bona fide cultural hero. Thus, in addition to his hallowed role as the First Patriarch of Chan Buddhism, we find him adopted by the Daoist tradition as a practitioner and promoter of longevity practices (Chin. *yangsheng* 養生) and as a transmitter of certain physical exercises.⁶ As part of his status as cultural hero, Bodhidharma has even been credited with introducing some form of martial arts (Chin. *gongfu* 功夫) to China, a type of belief that largely reflects the ahistorical speculations of later ages.⁷

Our interest here is in a method of meditation ascribed to Bodhidharma which belongs to the Daoist tradition of longevity practices concerning the manipulation of the breath (Chin. *qi* 氣, 炁). The fact that the word *qi* carries a polyvalent meaning in Chinese as ‘breath’, ‘vital energy’, ‘life force’, ‘miasma’, etc., makes a single-stringed translation difficult if not problematic. One should therefore be prepared, depending on the context, to apply the same polyvalence or ambivalence to one’s translations. In the case of *Bodhidharma’s Text* and its association with the Daoist tradition of inner alchemy, it makes sense to distinguish between ‘breath’ and breathing on the one hand, and ‘vital energy’ on the other. Not that

⁶ Such as the instructions given in a work like the popular *gongfu* manual, the *Yijin jing* 易筋經 [Scripture on Easing the Muscles] ascribed to Bodhidharma. For a classical edition complete with apocryphal Tang preface, see *Yijin jing* 易筋經 last accessed June 05, 2022. <http://digimuse.nmns.edu.tw/sport/wushu/oldpaper/B34.pdf>. For a traditionalist discussion, see Lu Wan’an 呂萬安, “Fojiao de yangsheng gongfa - Damo *Yijin jing* 佛教的養生功法 噢達摩 易筋經 [Buddhist Longevity Practices—Bodhidharma’s *Yijin Jing*],” *Foxue yu kexue* 佛學與科學 [Buddhist and Social Studies] (2003): 112–123.

⁷ Although the connection between martial arts and religion in China is interesting in its own right, I shall here avoid dealing with the various myths linking Bodhidharma with the late tradition of so-called Shaolin boxing. Historically there is no verifiable connection between Chan Buddhism and the practice of martial arts until the late imperial period. This is not to say that Bodhidharma could not in principle have transmitted certain types of exercises for keeping healthy, as e.g. some form of Indian yoga. This is surely not impossible or even farfetched. However, the fact remains that there are no surviving writings which can be taken as evidence for such practices under his name. See Stephen Eskildsen, “Bodhidharma Outside Chan Literature: Immortal, Inner Alchemist, and Emissary from the Eternal Realm,” *Journal of Chinese Religion* 45.2 (2017): 119–150.

breathing is not vital to life, but because vital energy carries a particular connotation in Daoist practice as a power or supernatural force that in many cases is not limited to living beings, but can sometimes also indicate a natural force that exists in certain topographical locations including inanimate things. That being said, the manner in which *qi* appears in *Bodhidharma's Text* is by and large limited to the concept of breath and breathing.

The co-opting or appropriation of Bodhidharma by the Daoist tradition may actually not be extremely old as far as mythologies go, but is something that is likely to have taken place some time between the late Tang and the early Five Dynasties (906–978, 五代) period.⁸ However, a certain conflation between the Buddhist lore on breathing techniques (Skt. *prāṇāyāma*) and Daoist beliefs concerning *qi*, may previously have taken place in certain Buddhist circles during the early phase of the religion's introduction to China.⁹ This is borne out by the fact that early Buddhist meditation tracts translated into Chinese contain many Daoist elements, chief among which is the applied terminology.¹⁰ In fact, as early as the Sui

⁸ For a discussion of the Daoist appropriation of Buddhist saints, see Henrik H. Sørensen, "Looting the Pantheon: On the Daoist Appropriation of Buddhist Divinities and Saints," *The Electronic Journal of East and Central Asian Religions* 1 (2013): 54–80.

⁹ The influence of Daoist breathing exercises on the writings of An Shigao (fl. 149–168, 安世高) has been explored in Xiao Dengfu 蕭登福, "Laozi sixiang dui Dong Han fojiao yijingshi An Shigao yijing zhi yingxiang 老子思想對東漢佛教譯經師安世高譯經之影響 [On the Impact of Laozi's Thought on An Shigao's Translations of Buddhist Scriptures]," *Zongjiao zhexue 宗教哲學 [Studies in Religion and Philosophy]* 63 (2013): 55–66. While Xiao's insights and the evidence he presents are worth considering, as with much of his research, he remains somewhat blind-sided with regard to similar terminologies used by Daoists and Buddhists for sometimes very different phenomena. Eric M. Greene refuted the impact of Daoism on Chinese meditation practices during the early phase of the inculturation of Buddhism in his "Healing Breaths and Rotting Bones: On the Relationship between Buddhist and Chinese Meditation Practices during the Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms Period," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 42.2 November (2014): 145–184. However, I for one remain somewhat sceptical of his conclusions which in my view do not cover enough ground.

¹⁰ For a useful study on the conflation between Buddhist breathing exercises and the Daoist inhalation or absorption of vital energy, see Greene, "Healing Breaths and Rotting Bones." See also the more Sino-centric essay by Liu Jiahe and Dongfang Shao, "Early Buddhism and Taoism in China (A.D. 65–420)," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 12 (1992): 35–41. The process that led to this conflation and its further developments has also been discussed in Friederike Assandri, "Buddhist-Daoist Interaction as Creative Dialogue: The Mind and Dào in Twofold Mystery Teaching," in *Chán Buddhism in Dīnhuáng and Beyond. A Study of Manuscripts, Texts, and Contexts in Memory of John R. McRae*, ed. Christoph Anderl and Christian Wittern (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2021), 363–390.



Dynasty (581–617, 隋) there was a concerted effort to institutionalise the practice of medicine and healing including various therapeutic exercises (Chin. *daoyin* 導引) transmitted by both religions.¹¹

Coming back to Bodhidharma and embryonic breathing (Chin. *taixi* 胎息), one of the most comprehensive Daoist treatises on this type of meditation practice associated with his name is to be found in the Daoist encyclopedic *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 [Seven Tallies of the Cloud Satchel] (DZ 1032.22),¹² which features a full section entitled *Damo dashi zhushi liuxing neizhen miao yong jue* 達磨大師住世留形內真妙用訣 [The True and Wondrous Secret Method for staying in Shape by the Great Master Bodhidharma while Dwelling in the World], which consists of the text of the *Damo taixi lun* [Treatise on Embryonic Breathing; hereafter *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing*].¹³ That text is a standard example of the Chan master cast in the garb of a Daoist immortal. Unsurprisingly, this tract reads as a standard text of the tradition of inner alchemy. Moreover, beyond the appearance of Bodhidharma, the work as such has nothing in it which reflects on either Buddhism or Chan.¹⁴

3. Previous Research

One of the first scholars of Buddhism to take proper notice of the Daoist appropriation of Bodhidharma as a hero of the inner alchemy was the Japanese scholar Sekiguchi Shindai 關口真大, who in his now classical

¹¹ Cf. Dolly Yang, “Prescribing ‘Guiding and Pulling’: The Institutionalisation of Therapeutic Exercise in Sui China (581–618 CE)” (PhD diss., University College London, 2018). This study brings together Daoist and Buddhist methods of healing in China during the pre-Tang period, and shows, among other things, the manner in which the two religions were involved in medicinal practices on an institutional level. It also discusses the manner in which medicinal lore was formulated as a cultural Sino-Indic compromise.

¹² In the following I make use of the modern edition, *Yunji qiqian*, 3 vols., *Daojiao dian jixuan kan* 道教典籍選刊 [Daoist Books Selected and Printed] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003). For information on the compendium itself, see Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, ed., *The Taoist Canon*, vol. 2 (Chicago, London: Chicago University Press, 2004), 943–944. However, as descriptions of the contents of the *Yunji qiqian* have been decentralised for practical reasons (?), related data appears scattered throughout this important resource.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1310–1314.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive listing and discussion of the Daoist texts linking the Bodhidharma-persona with *neidan* practices, see Eskildsen, “Bodhidharma Outside Chan Literature.”

study of the Chan patriarch stumbled upon *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing* as transmitted via the *Seven Tallies of the Cloud Satchel*. Sekiguchi did little more than note the Daoist side of Bodhidharma in that study, but in doing so opened up a new dimension in the study of Buddh-Daoist integration.¹⁵

Many years later, the present author touched upon Bodhidharma in Daoist garb in an essay and a report written for *The Electronic Journal of East and Central Asian Religions* (University of Edinburgh). These pieces were both meant as appetisers for further studies on Buddh-Daoist conflation, and only touch superficially on Bodhidharma and inner alchemy.¹⁶

Since then, interest in the Bodhidharma persona outside formal Chan discourses has been on the rise and in recent years occasioned a series of illuminating essays on his role as a patriarch of the Daoist tradition of inner alchemy. The first of these studies was by Joshua Capitano, who investigated the manner in which Chan Buddhist figures have been recast as patriarchs of the Daoist tradition.¹⁷ Capitano's survey identifies a number of important sources in which Buddhist monks, including Bodhidharma, are portrayed as Daoists.¹⁸ However, his study remains

¹⁵ Sekiguchi Shindai 關口真大, *Daruma daishi no kenkyū* 達摩大師の研究 [A Study of the Great Master Bodhidharma] (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1969), 391–400.

¹⁶ Henrik H. Sørensen, "Looting the Pantheon: On the Daoist Appropriation of Buddhist Divinities and Saints," 57–79; and Henrik H. Sørensen, "Buddho-Daoism in Medieval and Early Pre-modern China: A Report on Recent Findings Concerning Influences and Shared Religious Practices," *The Electronic Journal of East and Central Asian Religions* 1 (2013): 109–138.

¹⁷ Joshua Capitano, "Portrayals of Chan Buddhism in the Literature of Internal Alchemy," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 43.2 (2015): 119–160.

¹⁸ Among other things, Capitano's study is important for providing a detailed historical record of the various Song sources in which the Bodhidharma persona appears portrayed/inserted into a Daoist context of inner alchemy. Capitano, "Portrayals of Chan Buddhism in the Literature of Internal Alchemy," 127, fn. 22. He provides many useful details regarding this interesting material, although there are a few logical slip-ups here and there. One example of which is when Capitano reads the title of the *Liuzu Damo zhenjue* 六祖達磨真訣 [Correct Prescription of the Sixth Patriarch Bodhidharma] as "*Perfected Formula of the Sixth Patriarch [and] Bodhidharma*." The Sixth Patriarch is of course an epithet of Bodhidharma, and not a reference to Huineng (638–713, 慧能), the Sixth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism. It appears that whoever compiled the *Correct Prescription of the Sixth Patriarch Bodhidharma* only had a superficial knowledge of Chan Buddhist history (an indication that he was actually not a Buddhist?). Perhaps he misunderstood the idea that Bodhidharma was considered the first of six patriarchs, and instead made him the



focused on relatively late sources, mainly from the Northern and Southern Song (960–1276).

In 2015, the same year in which Capitano's study appeared, Lucia Dolce published an essay on the creation of a perfect embryo as part of bodily perfection in Japanese Buddhism during the Kamakura period (1185–1333, 鎌倉時代). Although she did not touch directly on breathing techniques, nor on Bodhidharma, she addresses the Buddhist appropriation of a key Daoist practice similar to that associated with Bodhidharma in the Daoist context.¹⁹

Two years later, Stephen Eskildsen, a noted specialist in Daoist contemplative practices, produced a follow-up to Capitano's study, with the Bodhidharma persona as its sole focus. Eskildsen traced the Chan patriarch in a series of Daoist and non-Daoist writings, all of which relate to inner-alchemy Daoism. However, like Capitano, he also focused his attention solely on Song Dynasty sources, even if his findings do actually point further back in time.²⁰ Eskildsen echoes some of Capitano's findings, including a reference to the early Southern Song literati Chao Gongwu's (1105–1171, 晁公武) *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志 [Supplementary Records of Books in the Prefectural Studio] dated to 1151, which refers to a text entitled *Taixi bijue* 胎息秘訣 [Secret Method on Embryonic Breathing] said to have been written around the close of the Tang by the monk Zunhua (d.u., 遵化).²¹

Sixth Patriarch? Or perhaps he simply considered Bodhidharma to be the sixth patriarch in a lineage of practitioners of inner alchemy?

¹⁹ Lucia Dolce, "The Embryonic Generation of the Perfect Body: Ritual Embryology from Japanese Tantric Sources," in *Transforming the Void: Embryological Discourse and Reproductive Imagery in East Asian Religions*, ed. Anna Andreeva and Dominic Steavur (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 253–310. This article documents a high degree of Daoist or rather Daoistic influence on Esoteric Buddhist belief and practice in Japan during the Kamakura period. The reference to "tantric forms" is of course quite misleading in the context of Japanese Buddhism, where Tantric Buddhism, as deriving from the Buddhist *tantras* proper, never played any noticeable role. In connection with the metaphorical use of pregnancy and germination, it is recommended that one also consults Kevin Buckelew, "Pregnant Metaphor: Embryology, Embodiment, and the Ends of Figurative Imagery in Chinese Buddhism," *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* 78.2 (2018): 371–411.

²⁰ Stephen Eskildsen, "Bodhidharma Outside Chan Literature: Immortal, Inner Alchemist, and Emissary from the Eternal Realm," *Journal of Chinese Religion* 45.2 (2017): 119–150.

²¹ Eskildsen, "Bodhidharma Outside Chan Literature," 122. Interestingly, a *Seng Zunhua yangsheng taixi bijue* 僧遵化養生胎息秘訣一卷 [The Monk Zunhua's *Taixi bijue*

More recently Cao Ling (曹凌), a young Chinese scholar from Normal University in Shanghai, has published a study in which he sought to identify the origin(s) and textual development of *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing*. To this end he has made use of three manuscripts identified among the corpus of the Dunhuang hoard, material which he believes formed part of the early *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing*. They consist of BD 11491, the old *yu* 羽 704E, and P. 3043, all incomplete. By combining these disparate fragments, Cao believes that he has discovered the earliest version of *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing*.²² However, as we shall presently see, he may not actually have found the earliest version of this text, but more likely excerpts lifted from not only that but from various other texts dealing with hygienic prescriptions. In contrast to the studies by the two US scholars above, Cao makes a wider connection between the Bodhidharma persona, Daoism and traditional Chinese medicine by linking hygienic practices and medicine with inner alchemy meditation.

The last scholarly input of note to appear regarding Buddhism and incipient inner alchemy is a study of another Dunhuang manuscript linked to *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing*, and thus related—indirectly perhaps—to *Bodhidharma's Text*. The author of this new piece of research, Cheng Zheng (程正), has discovered a link to *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing* in the *Weixin guan* [Contemplating the Mind] (S. 212).²³ Cheng makes a useful comparison between the manuscript text and the edition of *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing* as found in the Seven Tallies of the Cloud Satchel. One could say that he is covering some of the same ground as Cao Ling, but it appears that both were unaware of each other's research (?). In any case neither of them refers to the other.

for Nourishing Life] in one roll is actually mentioned in the *Song shi* 宋史 [History of the Song Dynasty], 205 (Section of Records (Chin. *zhi* 志) 158, Books and Texts (Chin. *yiwen* 藝文) 4). This would seem to indicate that the text—whether or not from Zunhua's hand—was reasonably well-known during the Song Dynasty.

²² Cao Ling 曹凌, “Damo taixi lun *zhuben de cheng li*—yi Dunhuang ben wei zhongxin—*達磨胎息論* 諸本的成立—以敦煌本為中心 [Accounting for All the Versions of the *Damo taixi lun*: From the Perspective of the Dunhuang Versions],” *Fagu foxue xuebao* 法鼓佛學學報第 [Dharma Drum Journal of Buddhist Studies] 23 (2018): 25–67.

²³ See Cheng Zheng 程正, “*Ishin kan ichi han* (S212) no kiso kenkyū 「惟心觀一卷」 (S212)の基礎的研究 (2) [A Study of the Basis of the *Weixin guan, yiben* (S. 212) (part 2)],” *Kōmazawa daigaku zen kenkyū sho nembō* 駒澤大學禪研究所年報第 [Annual of Zen Studies at Kōmazawa University] 31 (2019): 212–195 (35–52). Cheng refers briefly to *Bodhidharma's Text* but does not seem to ascribe much relevance to it. *Ibid.*, 200 (42).



4. Bodhidharma's Method of Mahāyāna Medicine

The fragmented Bodhidharma text of interest to us here, i.e., the text as featured in P. 3181, *Bodhidharma's Text*, appears to be part of a unique work not found anywhere else. The manuscript consists of a single sheet and contains sixteen lines in total. The discourse of the text begins rather abruptly, indicating that the manuscript is a torso and that what we have is probably only the final part of something that was originally much longer. The manuscript has been written in a plain, but fairly neat, standard script (Chin. *kaishu* 楷書), with the occasional variant character. As such, it is fairly easy to read and does not offer significant problems. Stylistically it resembles several other Dunhuang manuscripts dating from the 10th century. There are no overt or tell-tale signs that the text represents something like an original Indian work, so the statement in the title that it represents a 'hurried or rapid translation' may be dismissed out of hand. It is safe to consider it a Chinese composition by an anonymous author who appropriated the name of Bodhidharma in order to lend authority to his composition. Moreover, *Bodhidharma's Text*, although it does make use of Buddhist vocabulary, bears no overt signs that it was produced within a Chan Buddhist context.

The French catalogue entry for the text identifies it wrongly as “texte de l'école du *dhyāna* comportant des éléments tantriques.”²⁴ Not only is there no obvious link between the text and a purported 'school of meditation', unless of course this simply means a *Buddhist* meditation text, but there are also no tantric elements to be found in the manuscript other than a few references to the chanting of *mantras* and a single reference to an unspecified *mudrā*, probably referring to the *dhyāna-mudrā*, i.e. the position of the hands held by practitioners during meditation. Hardly signs of Esoteric Buddhism *per se*, not to mention Tantric Buddhism. What is more enigmatic is that the catalogue does not even mention Daoism and its longevity practices, the presence of which is obvious when perusing P. 3181.

Having attempted to account for the background and context of the manuscript, let us now turn to its contents.

²⁴ CMCT, Vol. 3, 139.

5. A Translation of P. 3181

[...] ²⁵ [in order] to behold your own body/essence of suchness (Chin. *zhenru shen* 真如身) one should form the [*dhyāna*] *mudrā* and enter into meditative absorption [(Chin. *ruding* 入定, Skt. *samādhi*)]. The four contemplations [(Skt. *dhyāna*)] [each] have four levels.²⁶ On the seventh day of the second month one should begin by simply sitting in meditation, and on the twentieth day one should come out of it. On the second day of the third month one should commence sitting in meditation, and stop on the eighth day. On the twenty-third day of the eighth month one should commence sitting in meditation, and on the twenty-ninth day, one should come out of it. On the twelfth day of the ninth month, one should commence sitting in meditation, and on the sixteenth day one should come out of it.

The time for entering meditative absorption is on the seventh day of the second month: Again sit facing east, regulate the *qi*/breath and holding it [for a while] and then expel it [using] fourteen *he* [(呵)] exhalations. When doing the proceeding (lit. ‘worship’) visualise the poison entering [the body]. When doing the fourteen exhalations of *he* breaths, ingest them (again) by inhaling them a full fourteen times.²⁷ Meditate from three to fourteen days, at the end of which one will surely [be able to] attain meditative absorption.

On the third day of the third month, again sit facing south, regulate²⁸ the *qi* and hold it [before] exhaling it six times [with] the *he* [breath] while

²⁵ Evidently something comes before this.

²⁶ The four contemplations that follow in the text are not the traditional Buddhist four types of meditation but here refer to a non-orthodox category of contemplative exercises. The traditional four contemplations signify the attainment of the four successive stages of meditative absorption in which the adept experiences bliss and increasing mental purity.

²⁷ This refers to the practice of ingesting *qi* (Chin. *shi qi* 食氣), a central aspect of Daoist longevity practice. Cf. Xiao Dengfu 蕭登福, “Dunhuang xiechuan suojian shou dao jiao bi gu shi qi sixiang yingxiang de fojing 敦煌写卷所见受道教避谷食气思想影响的佛经 [Evidence in the Dunhuang Manuscripts of the Influence of Daoist Concepts of Qi Ingestion in Buddhist Scriptures],” *Zongjiao xue yanjiu* 宗教学研究 [Research in Religious Studies] 2 (2002): 1–13. Even though Xiao lists several of the important manuscripts relating to various Buddho-Daoist prescriptions and methods, including the *Laozi shuo Wuchu jing* 老子說五廚經 [Scripture on Laozi Discoursing on the Five Kitchens] (DZJ 77.2), also known as the *Scripture on the Heavenly Kitchens*, he overlooks the material featuring Bodhidharma as a promoter of inner alchemy.

²⁸ Here the text has *song* (誦), which is probably a miswriting of *zhou* (調).



visualising the poison entering the *he* breath six times. Having exhaled the *qi* six times, ingest it [again]. Meditate for two to six days, after which one will surely attain meditative absorption.

On the twenty-third day of the eighth month²⁹ sit again facing southwest. Regulate the breath and hold it [in the body] then exhale it [by way of] the *he* [sound] while visualising the poison entering the *he* breath seven times. [Then] ingest it [again]. Having meditated from two to seven days one will surely attain meditative absorption.

[Again] on the twelfth day of the ninth month meditate facing north, control and hold the breath, and expel it in five *he* breaths while visualising the poison entering the breath five times. Then ingest it by way of the *he* [sound]. Having meditated from two to five days one will surely attain meditative absorption. At the point of death direct the contemplation as it is imperative to investigate with care and reduce [the breaths?] in order to enter meditative absorption.

In order to cut and collect medicinal plants one should know where they are to be found. On the seventh day of the seventh month one must enter mountains and forests and sit extensively [in meditation] for seven days and seven nights contemplating. Thereafter, when preparing the medicine,³⁰ [one must] invite the Bodhisattva Bhaiṣajyarāja (Medicine King)³¹ in his true form [(Chin. *zhenshen* 真身)], one must chant the *Dacheng ruding zhenyan* 大乘入定真言 [Mantra of the Mahāyāna for Entering Meditative Absorption].³² One needs only chant it one hundred and eight times. At that time the bodhisattva Medicine King will transform (himself?) into birds and pigeons being released into a great wind. When

²⁹ It is possible that the character *hou* (後), ‘after’, is intended. Even so it would not change the discourse significantly.

³⁰ Stephen Eskildsen suggests that *fu* (復) could be a copying error of its homophone *fu* (服) meaning ‘to ingest’. If that turns out to be correct, it of course alters the meaning of the sentence some.

³¹ While this bodhisattva appears prominently in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*’s 23rd chapter (T. 262.9: 53a–55a), he also figures in the *Zhi chanbing biyao fa* 治禪病祕要法 [Secret and Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Disease] both as a spirit and a bodhisattva (T. 620.15: 342a).

³² It is unclear which *mantra* the text refers to here. There are several such *mantras* in the canonical literature, and it is likely that it derives from one of the standard Esoteric Buddhist scriptures, possibly from one of those associated with Amoghavajra (705–774, Chin. Bukong 不空). In any case, given that the word *zhenyan* (真言) for *mantra* is used, it is in any case a source that post-dates the translation of the *Mahāvairocanaśūtra* (T. 848.18) from 725, which is the earliest text in which its usage is documented.

the great wind moves it will be proof that one's mind is like that (achieved when) entering meditative absorption [(Chin. *chanding* 禪定)].³³ When cultivating, take the medicine and store it in the monks' residence. When seeking to obtain the mind, take it. The medicine must be completed whilst among the mountains by seven selected men, and [used?] by them. [For the] medicine [the following ingredients should be used]: First, a catty of incense. Second, high quality incense.³⁴ Third, a catty of honey. Fourth, white silver. Fifth, gold (alt. golden metal). Sixth, great pearls. Seventh, a table or a section of flat board. For receptacles take four dishes and [store] the four medicines in a monastic dwelling [(Chin. *fang* 坊)] for seven nights among the mountains, and seven nights among men [before using them].

Medicinal Gate of Mahāyāna Hurriedly Translated by the Chan Master Bodhidharma from Southern India

6. What we Learn from P. 3181

Despite the Buddhist cloaking of the text, it is undeniable that it carries with it a noticeable Daoist fragrance. The Buddhist terminology alone must not seduce us into believing that is anything like a bona fide Buddhist text. Hence, in order not to descend into speculation, let us take a critical look at the Buddhist-sounding concepts used in our text.

³³ This is a method of meditation usually associated with the Northern Chan School. It appears as the second method of meditation in the Dunhuang manuscript featuring the *Nantianzhu guo Putidamo Chanshi guanmen* 南天竺國菩提達摩禪師觀門 [The Methods of Meditation of the Southern Indian Master of Meditation Bodhidharma] (T. 2832.85, S. 2669, S. 6958). The passage in question reads:

“As for the method of having an empty mind, it means gazing at the mind's changes [(Chin. *kanxin* 看心)] and awakening to its empty stillness which is neither going nor coming, which does not dwell (on anything), and which does not create mental states. For this reason it is called the ‘method of having an empty mind’ [(Chin. *kongxin men* 空心門)] and ‘method of the formless mind’ [(Chin. *xin wuxiang men* 心無相門).”

For some unknown reason McRae does not refer to this practice in his *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an*, a work in which he otherwise discusses meditation forms in Northern Chan at considerable length. For further information on *kanxin*, see Carmen Meinert, “A Pliable Life: Facts and Fiction about the Figure of the Chinese Meditation Master Wolun,” *Oriens Extremus* 46 (2007): 184–210.

³⁴ The text has *duixiang* (白香), which should read *guanxiang* (官香).



Beginning with the reference to ‘Mahāyāna medicine’ (“Medicinal Gate of Mahāyāna”) in the title, it is evident that it is a play on the time-honoured metaphor in Mahāyāna Buddhism, in which its teachings are equated with a medicine and Śākyamuni Buddha with a physician. In the case of *Bodhidharma’s Text*, however, it is obvious that no metaphor is intended.³⁵ Rather, the text refers to medicine proper, including the use of healing breaths. More on this below.

Then we have ‘body of suchness’, which is actually a fairly rare concept only found in a few isolated cases in the entire Buddhist canon. For our purpose it is interesting to find it used in a Chan verse (Chin. *chanmen ji* 禪門偈) in a fragmented Dunhuang manuscript kept in the collection of the National Library in Taiwan (D 8915.45: 4a). In this manuscript it occurs as part of a sentence which reads: “The great body of suchness is the body of principle in which one may behold [its actual] body.”³⁶

This passage clearly indicates that the ‘body of suchness’ is a reference to the all-pervading transcendent body of the Buddha (Skt. *dharmakāya*) and does not refer to a concrete physical body, even a purified one. One therefore wonders whether the manner in which it appears in *Bodhidharma’s Text* could be understood in a more Daoist reading as a special ‘numinous body’, i.e. as an actual super body?

The text’s reference to a category of four contemplations, indicating four exercises to be carried out at different times, is, as stated above, rather unorthodox. Unorthodox in the sense that their manner of conceptualisation does not follow standard Buddhist understanding as states of meditative absorption. As such, their usage shows that whoever wrote the text did not understand their original place and meaning in Buddhism. We are therefore dealing with a case of appropriation of a basic Buddhist concept relating to contemplative states, which in *Bodhidharma’s Text* is being re-configured and re-formulated to fit into

³⁵ There have been a few attempts to classify or otherwise align *Bodhidharma’s Text* with certain didactic and poetic compositions associated with Chan Buddhism, most notably the Dunhuang manuscripts featuring the *Zhou chanshi yaofang liao youlou* 稠禪師藥方療有漏 [Prescription of Chan Master Zhou for Curing Karmic Outflows] (P. 3664, P. 3559), and the *Liang Wudi wen Zhigong heshang ruhe xiu dao* 梁武帝問志公和尚如何修道 [Emperor Wu of the Liang asks Ven. Zhigong Regarding the Cultivation of the Way] (S. 3177, P. 3641). However, neither of these texts has anything to do with healing in its concrete meaning of medicine. Instead, they make use of medicine and healing as metaphors for spiritual attainment.

³⁶ D 8915.45: 4a: 大躰真如理身中得見身.

another, different context of spiritual practice. Conceptually we may see this as a case of what Foucault refers to as ‘displacement,’ i.e. a concept or idea lifted out of its original context and inserted into another, but with a somewhat different meaning and intent.³⁷

Next, we have the idea of meditative absorption (Chin. *ding* 定, Skt. *samādhi*) being attained after the purification of *qi*. This is obviously not a Buddhist idea, but one that links our text with the Daoist tradition of inner alchemy. Perhaps we would be better served by translating the term not as ‘*samādhi*’ but as ‘meditative absorption’ or ‘fixation’ in the sense of concentrating the absorbed vital energy? In any case, it makes sense when read in context.

Then we have the manner in which medicine (Chin. *yao* 藥) is being conceived in the text, or more specifically, how we should understand ‘Mahāyāna medicine’. Does it refer to the context in which the medicine is to be used? Does it refer to the medicine provided by Mahāyāna Buddhism? Or does it actually mean medicine of the ‘Higher Vehicle’, a concept commonly used in Lingbao Daoism (靈寶派)? Although the text provides a listing of the ingredients to be compounded in the prescription for its meditation medicine, there is no mention of how to actually prepare it. All we can say in this regard is that it has a certain resemblance to Daoist alchemical prescriptions of the type commonly known from *waidan* (外丹) practices.³⁸ Such alchemical processes are known from at least one other Buddho-Daoist text found among the Dunhuang manuscripts, namely the *Longshu pusa jitian Xuannu zhou* 龍樹菩薩九天玄女咒 [Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva’s Spells for the Mysterious Lady of the Nine Heavens] (P. 3825 (4)).³⁹ One may also see the section in our text on the preparation of medicine as reflecting the types of medicine described in

³⁷ For the Foucauldian discussion, see Barry Smart, ed., *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments*, vol. 2 (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 352–353. Elsewhere I have touched upon this phenomenon of religious appropriation and copying in the context of Buddho-Daoist exchanges of practices and beliefs. See Henrik H. Sørensen, “Looting the Pantheon: On the Daoist Appropriation of Buddhist Divinities and Saints,” 57–79.

³⁸ A succinct discussion of *neidan* practices at the time of the late Tang can be found in Joshua Capitano, “Portrayals of Chan Buddhism in the Literature of Internal Alchemy,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 43.2 (2015): 119–160.

³⁹ Incidentally Nāgārjuna is another Buddhist saint who was coopted by Daoism, one who had already made the transition from Buddhist master to divinity in Chinese Buddhism prior to this adoption. See, Stuart H. Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 152–185.



Ge Hong's (283–343/284–364, 葛洪) celebrated *Baopuzi neibian* 抱朴子內篇 [Inner Chapters of the Scholar Who Embraces Simplicity] (DZ 1185.28), in particular the chapter known as *Xian yao* 仙藥 [Medicine of Immortality] (ch. 11).⁴⁰ Of course medicinal compounds for longevity and enhanced practices belong more correctly to the tradition of outer alchemy (Chin. *waidan* 外丹).

Most notably perhaps, is the reference in *Bodhidharma's Text* to a method of breathing using the *he* sound (呵), one of the six healing sounds of Daoist inner alchemical practice.⁴¹ It so happens that already by the early Sui, the Tiantai (天台) Buddhist master Zhiyi (538–597, 智顛) incorporated the six healing breaths into his own system of meditation as formulated in his various writings, something which been documented on several occasions previously.⁴² However, despite the fact that

⁴⁰ See also James R. Ware, trans., *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung (Pao-p'u tzu)*. (New York: Dover, 1966), 117–199.

⁴¹ For a brief introduction to this practice, see Catherine Despeux, “The Six Healing Breaths,” in *Daoist Body Cultivation: Traditional Models and Contemporary Practices*, ed. Livia Kohn, 37–67 (Magdalena, NM: Three Pines Press, 2006). The widespread use of breathing exercises, ingestion of vital energy and food taboos during the medieval period in China—including the six healing breaths—is discussed in some detail in Jia Jinhua 賈晉華, “Longevity Technique and Medical Theory: The Legacy of the Tang Daoist Priestess-Physician Hu Yin,” *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies* 63.1 (2015): 1–31. Although the use of medicinal practices in Chinese Buddhism is mentioned in passing, the study's focus is on healing in the context of Daoism. It is interesting to observe that the early Tang work, *Qian jin yifang* 千金翼方 [Medical Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold] (ch. 29), refers to ‘Five Healing Sounds’ rather than six. See, *Qian Beiji jin yifang* 千備急金翼方, last accessed April 03, 2018. <http://seirouosone.web.fc2.com/SennkinnYokuhouHanantai.pdf>, 678. We see the same in the *Waitai biyao* 外台秘要 [Secret Essentials of the Outer Platform] (ch. 39), *Waitai biyao—Zhongguo zhexue shu dianzi hua jihua* 外台秘要 — 中國哲學書電子化計劃,” last accessed January 01, 2018. <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=798621>. This of course shows that the traditional Chinese *materia medica* followed the pentad manner of organising their prescriptions to match the Five Agents’ system, (including the organs in the human body). One can only speculate as to why the same system was not followed in the Daoist scriptures referred to above.

⁴² See among others C. Pierce Salguero, “Treating Illness: Translation of a Chapter from a Medieval Chinese Buddhist Meditation Manual by Zhiyi (538–597),” *Asian Medicine* 7.2 (2012): 461–473. The relationship between medicine and meditation is also explored in Li Silong 李四龍, “Tiantai Zhizhe jibing guan yu fo dao jiaorong 天台智者疾病观与佛道交融 [Zhiyi's Notion of Disease and its Relationship with Taoism],” *Beijing daxue xuebao* 北京大学学报 [Journal of Beijing University] 56:2 (2019): 62–71. For a complete translation of Zhiyi's *Xiao zhiguan* 小止觀 [Small Zhiguan] (T. 1915.46), see Charles Luk, trans., *The Secrets of Chinese Meditation* (London: Rider and Co., 1964), 109–162.

Bodhidharma's Text concerns breath control, including storing the breath, releasing and ingesting it, it is not really advocating inner circulation of vital energy, i.e. embryonic breathing, but rather a type of controlled breathing in combination with visualisation intended as a healing device. This indicates that the inspiration for whoever wrote *Bodhidharma's Text* appears to have derived from a variety of sources.

It is known that interest in inner alchemy increased during the Tang, from which period we have several Daoist texts on internal circulation of vital energy/breath including the *Songshan Taiwu xiansheng qi jing* 嵩山太無先生氣經 [Mr. Supreme Nothingness of Mt. Song's Scripture on Vital Energy] (DZ 824.18),⁴³ *Taixi jing zhu* 胎息經註 [Commentary on the *Taixi Scripture*] (DZ 130.2),⁴⁴ *Taixi biyao ge jue* 胎息秘要歌訣 [Instructions of the Secret Essential Song on the Embryonic Breath] (DZ 131.2),⁴⁵ *Taiqing fuqi kou jue* 太清服氣口訣 [Oral Message on the Embryonic Breath according to the Great Purity] (DZ 822.18),⁴⁶ etc. It is interesting to observe that the six healing breaths occur prominently in a number of these scriptures as primary features allowing the adept to guide the breath. The importance of this variegated material should not be overlooked, and we can readily appreciate that these scriptures must have exerted a considerable influence on Chinese healing culture during the time they appeared. Obviously, this material would also have impacted Chinese Buddhists, not least those who were concerned with healing and meditation.

What we have in *Bodhidharma's Text* is then a type of healing meditation mixed with Daoist breathing exercise centring on the ingestion of breath/vital energy to expel illnesses in the body of the practitioner. It is a veritable confluence of concepts involving Buddhist *prāṇa* and Daoist *qi*. In this sense *Bodhidharma's Text* is highly interesting as it sits conceptually and practice-wise at the crossroads of standard Buddhist meditation on the breath à la Zhiyi's Sinitic method of *śamatha-vipassāna* (Chin. *zhiguan* 止觀, i.e., ceasing and contemplating), and Daoist inner (and outer) alchemy. What is perhaps most noteworthy is that the text itself, which appears not to date later than the 10th century, may in fact pre-date all the other formulations of ingestion of vital energy that

⁴³ *Taoist Canon*, 367–370.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 166–167.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 369–370.



we find in the Daoist tradition in which the Bodhidharma persona occurs.⁴⁷ This does not mean that our text does not reflect Daoist influence, but rather that the conflation and mutual adaptation of practices and beliefs of this type of meditation in both religions may have taken place quite a bit earlier than previously thought, and in any case earlier than documented in the Daoist canonical material. This means that the merging of Buddhist contemplation (Skt. *dhyāna*) techniques and Daoist practices of internal breathing surely happened at an early phase in the history of both religions in China. Moreover, it is all but certain that the formal appropriation by the Daoist tradition of inner alchemy featuring Bodhidharma as a master of meditation had already taken place by the late 9th century, as indicated by the appearance of the term ‘gazing at mind’ (Chin. *kanxin* 看心) in *Bodhidharma’s Text*, a term usually associated with the Northern Chan tradition of the 8th century.⁴⁸

In order to get an idea of how *qi* ingestion and the type of contemplation to be carried out in tandem with this were conceived, it is rewarding to take a closer look at the method briefly described in the *Damo chanshi taixi jue* 達磨禪師胎息訣 [Method of Embryonic Breathing by the Meditation Master Bodhidharma] as found in the Daoist work, the *Zhu zhensheng taishen yong jue* 諸真聖胎神用訣 [Prescriptions on the Embryonic Spirit Used by all the True Saints] (DZ 826.18).⁴⁹ The text reads:

⁴⁷ This has been explored at some length in Capitano, “Portrayals of Chan Buddhism in the Literature of Internal Alchemy,” 119–160. Although all of the sources Capitano uses in his discourse post-date the Dunhuang material, it is nevertheless useful for understanding how the merger between the two traditions took place in the course of the late medieval and early modern periods, in particular from the Daoist position concerning the practice of ‘embryonic breathing’ (Chin. *taixi* 胎息).

⁴⁸ See Stephen Eskildsen, *Daoism, Meditation, Wonders of Serenity: From the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220) to the Tang Dynasty (618–907)* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 257–259. Among other things, Eskildsen provides a convincing argument for the evolution of Bodhidharma’s embryonic breathing in the Daoist sources.

⁴⁹ Briefly discussed by Kristofer Schipper in *The Taoist Canon*, II, 789. Schipper, who indicates that the text contains earlier material, nevertheless dates it very loosely to the Song (960–1279) due to its mention of Daoist figures from that period. Stephen Eskildsen concurs, but evidently considers the text that makes up Bodhidharma’s embryonic breathing to be an earlier work. Eskildsen, *Daoism, Meditation, Wonders of Serenity: From the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220) to the Tang Dynasty (618–907)*, 347–348, fn. 27. The latter case would indicate that Bodhidharma had in fact entered into the Daoist pantheon earlier than previously thought. As will be apparent in the following, this is also the view of the present author.

With regard to the refining of embryonic breathing, this means the refinement of *qi* by focusing the mind [(Chin. *dingxin* 定心)]. Constantly breathing in the heart's orbit [(Chin. *xinlun* 心輪)] so there will be no manifestation of the ten thousand things. If the *qi* is not firm, one's meditation will be in vain (lit. hollow). If the *qi* is firm, then the form body will be free of disease, and meditation and the Way will both be at rest. If those who cultivate do not preserve the mind, the source of *qi* [(Chin. *yuanqi* 元炁)] will be lost and will not be gathered up. How could the Way then be accomplished?

Therefore, a person of old has said: 'When the *qi* is firm, the mind is firm [(Chin. *xinding* 心定)],⁵⁰ when the *qi* is coagulated [(Chin. *ning* 凝)] the mind is quiescent.' These are the essentials of the Great Way, and may furthermore be called the cinnabar [field] [(Chin. *dan* 丹)]. The man of the Way is free of all kinds of anxieties [(Chin. *wu zhu guanian* 道人無諸掛念)]. If one 日日 day after day cuts [them off] in this manner, then it may be called true absorption of meditative contemplation [(Chin. *changuan* 禪觀)].⁵¹ Hence, the holy ones in the three-fold worlds [(Chin. *sanshi* 三世)] all cultivated this method, which is called the combined cultivation of meditation and concentration [(Chin. *chanding shuangxiu* 禪定雙修)].⁵²

The interesting thing about this type of meditation is that, while it presents a fairly straight-forward Daoist inner alchemical process, it makes extensive use of Buddhist terminology, such as *wanshi* (萬事), *chanding*, *changuan*, *chanding shuangxiu*, *sanshi*, etc., this final term being particularly interesting. As for *chanding shuangxiu*, no equivalents of this are to be found in the Buddhist material. One suspects, however, that the unknown author of the *Prescription of the Embryonic Spirit Used by all the True Saints* may have been inspired by the idea of 'meditative absorption (Skt. *samādhi*) and discerning knowledge (Skt. *prajñā*) to be conjointly cultivated' (Chin. *dinghui shuangxiu* 定慧雙修). This phrase occurs in various versions in texts of the Tiantai and Chan Buddhist

⁵⁰ For this term in Daoist inner alchemy, see Li Yuanguo 李遠國, ed. *Zhongguo daojiao qigong yangsheng daquan* 中國道教氣功養生大全 [Complete Handbook of Qigong for Nourishing Life in Chinese Daoism] (Chengdu: Sichuan cishu chubanshe, 1991), 164.

⁵¹ The source for this intertextual quote is not known. However, in the later literature on inner alchemy from the Song–Ming there are several treatises which build on the same ideas, and indeed feature a similar vocabulary. See for example, *Lü zu quanshu* 呂祖全書 [Combined Writings of Patriarch Lü] (Taipei: Zhen shanmei chubanshe, 1980), 225, 227. Cao Ling provides a number of examples from the Daoist Canon, see eg. Cao, "Damo taixi lun zhuben de cheng li," 42–45.

⁵² With slightly different wording, see Eskildsen, "Bodhidharma Outside Chan Literature," 125–126. The Chinese text is provided below in Appendix II.



traditions. Even so, one should not necessarily read the terminology in the above quotation from the *Method of Embryonic Breathing by the Meditation Master Bodhidharma* according to a standard Buddhist manner of interpretation, i.e., with Buddhist meanings and overtones, but rather as reflecting a Daoist perspective disguised as a Buddhist one.

Incidentally, the type of instructions conveyed by *Bodhidharma's Text* are not unique. When perusing the traditional Chinese *materia medica* we encounter material which to a large extent echoes Bodhidharma's medical text. Among this material is the celebrated *Qian jin yifang* 千金翼方 [Medicinal Methods Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold] by the Daoist doctor Sun Zimiao (c. 581–682, 孫思邈) dating from 682.⁵³ Although this work is predominately Daoist in its formulations, it does in fact contain some Buddhist material, including Sanskrit spells. For our current discussion we note among its prescriptions one entitled, *Zheng chan fang* 正禪方 [Method for Correct Meditation]. It reads:

[For this method one needs] mulberry fungus of spring, mulberry seeds of the summer, and mulberry leaves of the autumn. The above three ingredients must be divided into equal portions and pounded and sieved. Cook one *sheng* of adzuki beans with one scoop of water, and make it boil greatly. [Then] cook it with one *sheng* of the mulberry powder and cook it until it bubbles. Add salty, fermented beans and ingest it. When eating it for three days, eat heartedly and without hesitation. After three days get rid of the adzuki beans. One's body will feel light, the eyes bright, and one will not need sleep. After ingesting the [medicine] for ten days one will awake to wisdom and penetrate the first meditative absorption. Having ingested [the medicine] for twenty days one will reach the second meditative absorption. [After another] one hundred days one will obtain the third meditative absorption. Having continued for a full year one will reach the fourth meditative absorption. The ten-thousand signs will all be seen [(Chin. *wanxiang jie jian* 萬相皆見)], [as well as] the destruction of the realm of desire, and when contemplating the limits of the world, it will be like seeing something in the palm of one's hand, and one will [be able] behold the Buddha nature [(Chin. *jian foxing* 見佛性)].⁵⁴

⁵³ This is one of the most important medical texts in Chinese history. For a discussion of Sun's role in Daoist longevity practices, see Livia Kohn, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Longevity* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Three Pines Press, 2012), 138–139. In Daoism, Sun Zimiao is a transcendent persona, much like Bodhidharma, and in historical terms he surely looms larger than life.

⁵⁴ *Qianjin yifang*, last accessed August 03, 2020. <http://seirouoosone.web.fc2.com/SennkinnYokuhouHanantai.pdf>, 394. The Chinese text is provided below in Appendix III.

This prescription, strange as it sounds, claims to provide the practitioner with a dietary short-cut to the highest forms of meditative absorption, and eventually enlightenment. Exactly how a concoction of mulberry and adzuki beans are thought to replace actual meditation practice is unclear from the text, but perhaps the potion was essentially meant as a supplement? The medicine or magical potion briefly described in Bodhidharma's medical text is of course of a different type than this one from the *Medicinal Methods Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold*, but would nevertheless appear to have worked in much the same way, namely as an aid to meditation.

Another prescription found in the *Medicinal Methods Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold*, is the *Za shou jin fa* 雜受禁法 [Miscellaneous Received Preventive Methods]. Like *Bodhidharma's Text*, the *Za shou jin fa* also features the Buddhist Medicine King Bhaiṣajyarāja, one of the bodhisattvas appearing in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (T. 262.9), as well as directions for inhaling the *qi* of the five directions (see appendix V). However, in this case the method is clearly Daoist in orientation. Incidentally, Bhaiṣajyarāja also occurs in the important Heian (794–1185, 平安時代) medical compilation, the *Isshimpō* 醫心方 [Medicinal Heart Methods] from 984, in which he is invoked together with a host of healing-related divinities which unsurprisingly also includes the Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru.⁵⁵

The material from the *Medicinal Methods Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold* is significant because it clearly shows that life-nourishing beliefs and practices that originated in Daoism had entered Buddhism by the 7th century and become mixed up with its meditative practices through the shared concept of *qi* as life-giving force. Likewise, we find that Daoism on its part had absorbed salient elements from the Buddhist tradition of the 6th–7th centuries, including some of its medicinal prescriptions.

⁵⁵ This is in the *Bao yao song* 服藥頌 [Song for Ingesting Medicine], said to derive from the *Xinluo fashi fang* 新羅法師方 [Methods of the Dharma Master from Silla]. Cf. *Isshimpō*, ch. 2, last accessed August 03, 2020. <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=560966>, 181.



7. Meditation, Medicine, and Magic in Dunhuang

It would seem that *Bodhidharma's Text* was most probably written or formulated in a Buddhist milieu inspired by Daoist *neidan* practices, rather than directly by Daoists seeking to appropriate a Chan Buddhist saint for their cause. I feel that the tract is less likely to have been written by Daoists because formal Daoism did not begin to recast Bodhidharma (as well as a number of other Buddhist saints) as Daoist practitioners until the 11th century, as already argued above. Given that *Bodhidharma's Text* was found among the Dunhuang manuscripts, it may therefore be worth our while to take a closer look at other integrated Buddho-Daoist practice texts found in Dunhuang to see what they may yield.⁵⁶

While it is commonly acknowledged that traditional Chinese medicine was already heavily influenced by Daoist thought at the beginning of the Tang—not least because some of the most important *materia medica* were compiled by Daoists—the situation that persisted with regard to medicine and Chinese Buddhism appears to have been somewhat different. This difference may to some extent be explained by the fact that āyurvedic medicinal prescriptions had been transmitted in Buddhist circles for centuries, and there is a marked tendency for belief in magic to influence the Buddhist understanding of healing (more so than in Daoism). With this I mean belief in supernatural causes rather than in medicinal cure per se. To a large extent, medieval Chinese Buddhists looked to traditional Chinese medicine for cures. However, when Buddhist magic failed to yield results, certain aspects of Daoism were indirectly adopted and put in common use by Chinese Buddhists. In fact, medicinal practices that made use of normative medical prescriptions as well as cures through magic continued in vogue side by side in both Buddhist and Daoist contexts.

This pattern is observed in the Dunhuang material, in which a large number of medical prescriptions of various kinds can be found. The relationship between Buddhism and medicine in medieval Dunhuang has already been documented in various recent writings, so there is no need

⁵⁶ See Henrik H. Sørensen, “On the Presence and Influence of Daoism in the Buddhist Material from Dunhuang,” in *Buddhism in Central Asia III: Doctrine, Exchanges with Non-Buddhist Traditions*, ed. Lewis Doney, Carmen Meinert, Yukiyo Kasai, and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden, Boston: Brill, forthcoming).

for us to repeat here what has already been said.⁵⁷ However, it is important to understand that the relationship rested on a number of local factors over and beyond strictly medical concerns. It is evident that even though the transmission in Dunhuang of traditional Chinese (as well as Indian and Tibetan) medicine was not the sole province of Buddhist clerics, it would appear that much of this knowledge was indeed transmitted by monks rather than by Daoists.⁵⁸ One should remember that while Daoist professionals were active in the production of medical treatises during the Tang, as mentioned above, Daoism itself was no longer active as a functioning religion in Dunhuang—at least not in any noticeable sense—after the late 8th century.⁵⁹ This means that the bulk of medical lore in Dunhuang after that time was primarily handled by Buddhist monks (possibly nuns as well?) and by ordinary doctors. This fact is clearly reflected in the relevant corpus of manuscripts.⁶⁰

The Buddhist imprint on and transmission of medical lore in Dunhuang means that, even in those cases where we are obviously dealing with traditional Chinese *materia medica* and bona fide Daoist medical

⁵⁷ For a comprehensive overview of medical texts relating to Buddhism in Dunhuang, see *Dunhuang fo shu yu chuantong yixue* 敦煌佛书与传统医学 [Buddhist Books from Dunhuang and the Transmission of Medicinal Study], compiled by Li Yingcun 李应存 (Beijing: Zhongyi guji chubanshe, 2013). See also Li Yingxu 李应存 and Shi Zhenggang 史正刚, “Cong Dunhuang foshu zhong de yixue neirong tan fojiao de shisu hua 从敦煌佛书中的医学内容谈佛教的世俗化 [On the Secularisation of Buddhism in Dunhuang based on Medicinal Contents in Buddhist Books],” *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 4 (2007): 111–116. Apart from the fact that the article’s authors are mistaken with regard to their conceptualisation of ‘Buddhist secularisation’, the article offers useful background information on the presence of medical discourses in the Buddhist manuscripts from Dunhuang.

⁵⁸ For information on monk-doctors in Dunhuang during the 9th century, see Catherine Despeux, “Buddhist Healing Practices at Dunhuang in the Medieval Period,” 120–121.

⁵⁹ No dated Daoist manuscripts have been found among the Dunhuang manuscripts which post-date the 8th century. This indicates that Daoism was no longer active in the oasis-kingdom after the Tibetan occupation during the 780s. Moreover, we have many examples of Buddhist texts which were copied on the verso of Daoist scriptures, something which indicates that they were no longer in use. It is also likely that the Daoist manuscripts found in Cave 17 derived from Buddhist libraries.

⁶⁰ The role and function of Buddhist monks as doctors/healers is briefly discussed in John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 67–111. It is important to note, however, that Kieschnick believes that Buddhist thaumaturges mainly healed through magic in the pre-Tang period (ibid., 173, fn. 99). Personally, I find this unlikely, and there must surely be evidence of monks before the Tang using proper, even traditional Chinese medicine.



prescriptions, their use was—as far as we can tell—often taking place within monastic settings. This inevitably meant that medicinal lore and Buddhist beliefs became further conflated and mixed-up. Moreover, this trend was amplified by a continuous influx of both foreign and new Chinese material into the Hexi region up through the 10th century.

As is well established through many decades of research, Bodhidharma, the purported author of *Bodhidharma's Text*, occurs rather frequently in the Buddhist material from Dunhuang. In most cases, however, he appears in his role as the patriarch of Chan Buddhism, i.e., as the progenitor of that Buddhist tradition in China. So, the Bodhidharma persona current in Dunhuang is primarily represented as a major religious figure, a Buddhist saint and not as a healer, and, as far as we can tell, Bodhidharma's appearance as a transmitter of Daoist or daoistic breathing techniques as seen in our text seems to constitute a relatively rare and unusual case.

Because of Bodhidharma's important place in formal Chan history, one may perhaps be inclined to read the text of P. 3181 within a Northern Chan context, given the large number of treatises and historical works deriving from that tradition found among the Dunhuang manuscripts. However, I would suggest another possibility. There are several medical texts of a Buddhist nature among the manuscripts from Cave 17, the so-called Library Cave, as previously stated, among which are some which deal specifically with meditation in one form or another.⁶¹ Moreover, *Bodhidharma's Text* does not resemble any of the standard Northern Chan works discovered among the Dunhuang manuscripts. So, who were the users of this text, and what was the context of its usage? We know that there was a group of monastics living in or near the Mogao Caves (Chin. Mogao ku 莫高窟), practitioners identified as 'masters of meditation' (Chin. *chanshi* 禪師), not necessarily Chan monks in any sectarian sense

⁶¹ Spells for improving one's practice of meditation also occurs in other manuscripts relating to Bodhidharma. Although this material cannot be considered medicinal *per se* nor related to the fostering of longevity in any direct sense, it does belong together with other forms of prescriptive practices relating to prolonged meditation. When seen together with the other Bodhidharma-related material discussed above, it is clear that we are dealing with the presence of multiple contemplative methods, a veritable field of integrated practices and beliefs geared to support meditation in a variety of forms. Cf. Sørensen, "The Meeting and Conflation of Chán and Esoteric Buddhism during the Táng," in *Chán Buddhism in Dīnhuáng and Beyond. A Study of Manuscripts, Texts, and Contexts in Memory of John R. McRae*, ed. Christoph Anderl and Christian Wittern (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2021), 342.

but simply Buddhist meditators.⁶² Given that a number of Buddhist manuscripts featuring salient Daoist elements have been identified among the Dunhuang material, it is in my view not unrealistic to suppose that a text on breathing techniques featuring elements of Daoist internal alchemy would have been of interest to them. This means that *Bodhidharma's Text*, in spite of its strong Daoist imprint, would in principle have found an interested and prepared audience among local Buddhist practitioners. That the text can readily be placed in a Buddhist context is abundantly clear from the terminology, and this would also explain the presence of a spell in the text as well as the medicinal prescription that follows.

In the apocryphal *Foshuo sanchu jing* 佛說三廚經 [Scripture Spoken by the Buddha on the Three Kitchens], a knock-off of a Daoist scripture of which several different versions have been found among the Dunhuang manuscripts (S. 2673, S. 2680, P. 3032, P. 2637, etc., and T. 2894.85), are extensive instructions on dietary and health-related issues in which no meaningful distinction between food and medicine applies.⁶³ This of course reflects the traditional Daoist obsession with longevity and conservation of vital energy, but to what extent these extreme dietary practices caught on among Buddhist meditators in Dunhuang is an open question. However, one can easily see how cave-dwelling ascetics without sponsors might benefit from a diet consisting of ingested cosmic vapours and moon light.

Also among the Dunhuang manuscripts is found a magico-medical text in which Avalokiteśvara appears as a doctor or medical specialist, the *Guanyin pusa miao xiang fa* 觀音菩薩罐勝妙香丸法 [Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Highly Victorious and Majestic Method of Fragrant Pills] (P. 2637R (2)), evidently a Chinese composition masquerading as an Indian Buddhist text. It does not relate to meditation practices per se, but touches upon a number of the medicinal issues also covered in *Bodhidharma's Text*, including how forest-dwelling ascetic monks should protect themselves in times of danger. The text reads:

⁶² See Henrik H. Sørensen, "On Meditation Caves and Cave-dwelling Ascetics in Dunhuang, 9th to 13th Centuries," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 5.1 (2020).

⁶³ Cf. Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Daoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 27–28. Of interest to the present purpose is a Japanese manuscript of the *Foshuo sanchu jing* from Mt. Kōya (高野山) mentioned by Molier, which apparently has Bodhidharma as its transmitter.



At that time the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara addressed the Great Brahmadeva King [saying]: If in the future [period] of the [Dharma]-ending age in the world of the five turbid evils, when the ten *māras* compete to rise, [as well as] the three calamities and eight hardships, when war and famine [abound], a time when banditry proliferates and all kinds of difficulties arise, if there are monks who seek to enter into the deep mountains to sit in meditation and uphold the spells, cultivating the Supreme Way, who are oppressed by starvation and fire, on behalf of such persons I will discourse on the method of the wondrously fragrant pills, which will make these monks obtain eternal liberation [and] not meet with the difficulties [caused by] water and fire but will cause benefits to all. When their [normal] breaths are cut off they will obtain the *tathāgatas*' Ocean of the Great Round Mirror and Ocean-like [(Chin. Dayuan jinghai 大圓鏡海)], live for a million years and obtain the five divine penetrations [(Chin. *wu shentong* 五神通, Skt. *pañcābhijñā*)].⁶⁴ For the *Method of the Wondrous Fragrant Pill*, one need only accord with the [instructions in] the scripture to prepare it (?) [...].⁶⁵

After this follows a lengthy instruction on how to prepare the various compounds for making the magical pills referred to in the text's title. The preparation and effectuation of the medicine, i.e., the empowerment (Chin. *jiachi* 加持), involve Buddhist ritual proceedings including worship before a Buddha image, prostrations, the taking of the Mahāyāna vow of a bodhisattva to save all sentient beings, avoidance of certain foods, and the chanting of the *Tianwang hushen zhenyan* 天王護身真言 [Mantra of the Heavenly Kings for Protecting the Body].⁶⁶ The basic idea behind the use of these magical pills is that they will enable practitioners to endure hardships while living away from human habitation and gradually attain to various elevated levels of spiritual liberation. Thus, the pills not only have a curative and nourishing effect but are envisaged as potent spiritual conveyors. It is not difficult to see how medicines such as Avalokiteśvara's magical pills would be of considerable interest to the Buddhist cave-dwelling meditators of Dunhuang.⁶⁷ Therefore, if one feels a need to explain the rationale behind the presence of *Bodhidharma's Text* in Dunhuang, it was most likely as a set of prescriptions for practitioners of meditation.

⁶⁴ For this category of spiritual powers, see FDC 2, 1153b–1154a.

⁶⁵ The Chinese text is provided below in Appendix IV, P. 2637R (2).

⁶⁶ The text does not provide the actual spell, but based on circumstantial evidence it may be identical with one of the spells associated with Vaiśravaṇa.

⁶⁷ See Henrik H. Sørensen, "On Meditation Caves and Cave-dwelling Ascetics in Dunhuang, 9th to 13th Centuries."

8. Bodhidharma in Daoist Garb

So long as our dating of *Bodhidharma's Text* holds water, we may see it as standing at the very beginning of the conflation of Chan Buddhist and Daoist meditation techniques involving breathing exercises for healing and the attainment of longevity. As such, it presages the many later hybrid texts associated with Bodhidharma's name, which chiefly set forth types of meditation that closely resemble formal practices of inner alchemy. In other words, Chan Buddhist meditation re-configured to fit Daoist spiritual goals.

Eskildsen notes the oblique nature of the religious context(s) that produced the image of Bodhidharma as a *neidan* or longevity practitioner. I would suggest, and that this took place within a milieu influenced by practitioners steeped in late Lingbao Daoism, who may have seen the respective practices of Buddhism and Daoism as leading to the same goal.⁶⁸ But perhaps Bodhidharma's adoption by the Daoist *neidan* tradition is not so 'oblique' after all? In what follows, an attempt will be made to show that it was in all likelihood Buddhist meditators themselves who appropriated *neidan* practices, and thereby paved the way for the Bodhidharma persona to be so readily coopted and inserted into the Daoist *neidan* discourse.⁶⁹

The late Daoist work, the *Huiming jing* 慧命經 [Scripture on Wisdom and Lifespan] (ZWDS 131.5)⁷⁰, which builds on a variety of earlier material including an unusually great number of classical Buddhist sources, also makes the connection with the Bodhidharma figure in Daoist garb. These include narrative elements relating to Bodhidharma's death/attainment of immortality which indicate a use of Daoist imagination including the story of his sandal left on his empty tomb and

⁶⁸ Eskildsen, "Bodhidharma Outside Chan Literature," 133.

⁶⁹ Thanks to Stephen Eskildsen for reminding me of those miraculous events that appear in the mythology surrounding the Bodhidharma persona in early Chan Buddhism.

⁷⁰ The personal preface by the compiler Liu Huayang (b. 1736, 柳華陽) dates from 1794. The work purports to have grown out of the three teachings (Chin. *sanjiao* 三教) movement, but in fact its focus is really on longevity-related practices, wherefore its overall orientation, including the manner in which it reads the Buddhist sources, is overwhelmingly Daoist. This fact is also borne out in the work's numerous illustrations. See also Eva Wong, trans., *Cultivating the Energy of Life: A Translation of the Hui-Ming Ching and Its Commentaries* (Boston, London: Shambala, 2013). This is a book for popular consumption, one which does not reflect any deeper sense of scholarly prowess.



the post-death meeting with the official Song Yunfeng (宋雲奉) in the Pamirs.⁷¹

Given that *Bodhidharma's Text* is quite a bit older than those texts we find bearing Bodhidharma's name in the Daoist Canon, a possible identification with Zunhua's *Taixi bijue* mentioned above is a tempting if somewhat daring take on the origin of the text. However, it is true to say that *Bodhidharma's Text* does bear straightforward imprints of Buddhist beliefs—despite its obvious Daoist elements—which matches Chao Gongwu's description of Zunhua's text and incidentally makes its presence in 10th century Dunhuang a likely scenario. By that time, institutional Daoism had greatly declined in this part of Hexi (河西), and it is therefore highly probable that Buddhist meditation texts with a Daoist flavour could have circulated there. As we have seen, there are scores of such hybrid texts among the Dunhuang manuscripts, even though *Bodhidharma's Text* does seem to be a special case.

9. *How Daoist Neidan Practices of Inner Alchemy came to be Cooperated into Buddhism*

Before ending this discourse on Bodhidharma as a master of Daoist internal alchemy, we need to understand how and why this happened. As mentioned above, Eskildsen (and others) signalled the existence of a *Taixi bijue* by the Buddhist monk Zunhua during the Later Tang Dynasty (923–935, 後唐). During the mid-Song this peculiar work was mentioned in the scholar Chao Gongwu's bibliographical compilation *Junzhai dushu zhi* from the mid 12th century.⁷² The passage in question reads:

The monk Zunhua of the Later Tang compiled the treatise *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing*, in eighteen leaves, as well as thirty-three songs, all-

⁷¹ This account can be found in the *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 [Jingde Transmission of the Lamp] (T. 2076.51: 220ab).

⁷² Eskildsen, "Bodhidharma Outside Chan Literature," 122.

together one thousand four hundred and forty words. In the *dingyou* year of Tian [fu] (937)⁷³ the book was completed.⁷⁴

To the extent to which we can trust this piece of information, *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing* only came about in 937 which may tentatively be taken as the *ante non quem* for the appearance of Bodhidharma as a champion of the Daoist tradition of internal breathing. Now, in his discussion of the origin of *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing*, Cao Ling presents a re-constructed text-critical edition based on his reading of two Dunhuang manuscripts, BD 11491 and P. 3043, in which two lengthy quotations, as well as two separate songs (Chin. *ge* 歌), are ascribed to Bodhidharma. Since the above quote on Zunhua is relatively late, and only provides a very rudimentary description of the text itself, we have no way of knowing exactly how it looked, or indeed, how it was organised, including the accompanying songs. I would suggest that while it is tempting to identify the Dunhuang fragments as deriving from *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing* (or a related text), we shall need further information before a final verdict on the text can be pronounced. Until then, let us settle on the material we currently have and remain satisfied with having a number of excerpts which indicate that there were hybrid Buddho-Daoist texts in circulation in late medieval Dunhuang which may primarily have been used by Buddhist practitioners of meditation, whether or not they specifically invoke the persona of Bodhidharma.

Even though *Bodhidharma's Text*, the focus of the present study, has turned up among the Dunhuang manuscripts, and as such can be added to the material brought together by Cao referred to above, there is no reason to believe that it originated in the oasis-town. The conflation between Buddhism and Daoism began in China shortly after the former's introduction during the Later Han Dynasty (25–220, 後漢), and their mutual appropriations and adaptations had already become widespread by the late Northern and Southern Dynasties period (386–589, 南北朝). As is well-known, deep-level conflations between the practices and beliefs of

⁷³ 'You Tang' (右唐) in the short entry obviously refers to the Later Tang, and a corresponding *dingyou* (丁酉) year with a *tian* (天) character in title of the reign-period can only correspond to 937.

⁷⁴ *Junzhai dushu zhi*, 16 (神仙類釋書類 [Miscellaneous Books of Divine Immortals and Buddhists]): 右唐僧遵化撰論達磨胎息, 總十八篇, 歌二十三首, 凡一千四百四十言。天口丁酉書成。



the two religions are fully expressed in the scriptures produced by the Lingbao Daoist tradition, especially during its later phase at the beginning of the Tang.⁷⁵ It therefore makes sense to see the material in which Bodhidharma appears in disguise as a practitioner of inner alchemy as yet another example of the continued rapprochement between China's two great religions, a process which surely began in the central provinces of the Chinese empire.

10. Conclusion

As we have seen here, Daoist practices relating to inner alchemy evidently influenced methods of meditation in Chinese Buddhism from fairly early on in the religion's history in China. One of the reasons for this to have taken place, in spite of the many elaborate Buddhist meditation texts translated from Indian languages, may have been the fact that concepts of controlled breathing as a technique of healing were already current in Chinese culture prior to the advent of Buddhism. Moreover, the shared interest of both Buddhists and Daoists in contemplative methods functioned as a common denominator throughout the long history of interaction between the two religions. Once Buddhist meditation techniques began to gain popularity in China during the Nanbeichao period, it seems quite natural that elements of Daoist meditation would have become incorporated into their development, as we find in P. 3181.

As we have seen, the relationship between *Bodhidharma's Text* and the six healing sounds is not a direct one, or rather, based on what remains of the manuscript it does not appear that it made use of sounds other than the *he* breath, which stands centrally in the instructions on breathing in the text. What this means is that it does not really follow the traditional Daoist system of the healing breaths, nor that recommended by Zhiyi. Evidently, *Bodhidharma's Text* represents a different tradition of breathing technique for self-healing, one that while it is not divorced from Daoist ideas about

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the scriptures which reflect an increasing influence from Buddhism, in particular the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*, see Ōfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾, *Dōkyō to sono kyoden* 道教とその經典 [Daoism and Its Scriptures: A Study on the History of Religious Daoism] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1997), 186–203. See also, Wang Chengwen 王承文, *Dunhuang gu lingbao jing yu Jin-Tang dao jiao* 敦煌古靈寶經與晉唐道教 [The Old Lingbao Scriptures from Dunhuang and Daoism from the Zhou to the Tang] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002).

healing is somewhat more Buddhist in orientation. This allows us to argue that the main difference between *Bodhidharma's Text* and the later *neidan* texts that cast Bodhidharma as a Daoist practitioner of internal breathing techniques is primarily that the former work retains a more overtly Buddhist flavour, while the latter appear more clearly in line with formal Daoist ideology, i.e. longevity discourses evolving around the circulation of *qi*, such as the one we find in the famous section in the *Seven Tallies of the Cloud Satchel* discussed above. Hence, one could say that while the Dunhuang text is evidently meant for use in a Buddhist context, the opposite is the case with regard to the material which casts Bodhidharma as a Daoist practitioner. To this one may add that the Daoist Bodhidharma texts are technically more sophisticated, and also more detailed with regard to the meditation processes involved. The Buddhist texts that co-opt inner alchemical elements, such as *Bodhidharma's Text*, tend to be less sophisticated with regard to the appropriated Daoist methods and also retain a more standard Buddhist vocabulary. From the perspective of religious literature, the appropriations we see on both sides of the religious spectrum are simply appropriations of useful material from outside their own circle and the discourse they carry reflects attempts at domesticating the adopted techniques. In both the Daoist and Buddhist cases, however, we can clearly see how the appropriated practices impacted the recipient schools differently. In the Buddhist case we find the appropriated technique incorporated deeper into the structure of the discourse, creating a new technique of healing through meditation, whereas the Daoist case of adopting Bodhidharma as a master of inner alchemy appears more as a kind of adornment. Adornment in the sense that the foreign element is mainly used to give the appearance of sophistication, or to lend authority to one's own teaching. In neither of the two cases do we actually see fundamental aspects of either religion's core beliefs or doctrines undergo any major shift as a result of their meeting with the other religion. In the case of *Bodhidharma's Text*, we can see that certain concepts deriving from inner alchemy are being used in Buddhist meditation while other Daoist techniques and beliefs are ignored. In other words, the absorption of vital energy is not linked to revitalising the organs *per se*, or otherwise circulated inside the body. And, on the other side, the Bodhidharma persona is simply recast to fit the Daoist mold. Daoists simply inserted a Chan Buddhist saint into their own tradition without reference to the type of meditation associated with him in Buddhism.



As such, *Bodhidharma's Text* represents an interesting case in which the Buddhist meditative tradition broadly defined has adopted or appropriated two fundamental elements from Daoism, namely elements from both the inner and outer alchemical traditions. This means that our text presages the rise of the Daoist or appropriated Bodhidharma-figure around which Daoism created an entire cycle of apocryphal texts, texts which had essentially nothing to do with the Chan Buddhist tradition and its formal image of Bodhidharma or the teachings that form part of his legacy.

Although *Bodhidharma's Text* most certainly draws on practices relating to aspects of inner alchemy, I would be hesitant to identify it as an early version of *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing*. In fact, I find it somewhat improbable that the two texts are directly related. The reasons for this being that there are no direct textual correspondences between the former and the latter, although there are of course several instances of conceptual and terminological overlapping. This observation also pertains to Cao Ling's attempt to identify *Bodhidharma's Embryonic Breathing* from among the Dunhuang manuscripts. This does not mean that the two texts are not historically related as representatives of the Buddhist appropriation of Daoist inner alchemical practices, obviously they are. However, when looking at the title of *Bodhidharma's Text*, one cannot help noticing the reference to 'Mahāyāna' (Chin. *dasheng* 大乘), which surely appears in the title for a reason. Now what reason might that be? If we think back to the time in China during the late Nanbeichao when several traditions of meditation were engaged in rivalry over which method was the best, those who claimed Bodhidharma as their guide were especially fighting against the followers of Sengchou (480–560, 僧稠), a meditation teacher whose brand of Buddhism has been traditionally classified as belonging to the Hīnayāna or Lesser Vehicle.⁷⁶ This fact

⁷⁶ See Jan Yün-hua, "Seng-ch'ou's Method of Dhyāna," in *Early Ch'an in China and Tibet*, edited by Whalen Lai and Lewis R. Lancaster, 51–64. Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press; For a more broad treatment of the meditation traditions and their contexts in China during the 6th to early 7th centuries, see Chen Jinua, "An Alternative View of the Meditation Tradition in China: Meditation in the Life and Works of Daoxuan (596–667)," *T'oung Pao* 88 (2002): 332–395; and Eric Greene, "Another Look at Early Chan: Daoxuan, Bodhidharma, and the Three Levels Movement," *T'oung Pao* 94 (2008): 49–114. Among the Dunhuang manuscripts there is a short tract entitled *Chou chanshi yi* 稠禪師意 [Meditation Master Chou's Intent] (P. 3559). This piece, whether actually authored by

could therefore very well have been the reason for specifying that *Bodhidharma's Text* belonged to the Mahāyāna, i.e. a superior dispensation of Buddhism. Of course by the time of the formal Chan Buddhist tradition, no one would need to identify themselves as representing Mahāyāna. Hence, it is possible to see the reference to Mahāyāna in the title of *Bodhidharma's Text* as a later reflection of the early rivalry between pre-Tang groups of Chinese Buddhist meditators. Another possibility—perhaps more remote—could be that the words *Greater Vehicle* (Mahāyāna as *dasheng*) were lifted from Daoism. It is a concept and name that is documented in the titles of many medieval Daoist scriptures, especially those from the Sui and early Tang, although it is clear that it had been appropriated from Buddhism, especially in the scriptures of the Lingbao tradition as noted above. Of course it is also possible that the appearance of Mahāyāna in the title of *Bodhidharma's Text* is a case of re-appropriation.

The manner in which *Bodhidharma's Text* has been conceived reveals that it belongs to the category of healing texts of which several have been found among the Dunhuang manuscripts. Similar to those texts, it represents a prescriptive text in which medicine and religion are intimately intertwined. It is therefore quite possible that *Bodhidharma's Text* was just one of several texts that originally made up the manuscript.

The realms of medicine and hygienic practices, including life prolongating exercises, would appear to have functioned as 'shared conceptual spaces' for Buddhism and Daoism in the Sinitic cultural sphere. Buddhists were happy to use Chinese normative medicine as well as more specifically Indian types of medicine of the Āyurvedic kind, together with cures belonging to the realm of magic. In fact, traditional Indian medicine consisted of a rather motley mix of bona fide prescriptions and a whole range of more fantastic methods for effecting cures based on a variety of beliefs in magic and the presence of demonic forces acting upon the world of humans. With regard to belief in effectuating supernatural responses, Daoism and Buddhism certainly had a good many points in common.

Sengchou, or just ascribed to him, gives some idea of the type of meditation he is said to have advocated. With regard to the issue of healing, see Christoph Anderl, "Metaphors of "Sickness and Remedy in Early Chán Texts from Dūnhuáng," in *Festschrift for Jens Braarvig on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, edited by Lutz Edzard, Jens W. Borgland and Ute Hüskén, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018), 27–46.

BuddhistRoad Paper 3.1. Sørensen, "Bodhidharma, Meditation, and Medicine"



Finally, it is more than evident that *Bodhidharma's Text* stands at an important conceptual intersection between the fields of medicine and religion, and as such is a prime example of the conflation between religious exercises and methods for healing that we find so incessantly and overwhelmingly expressed in medieval and pre-modern Chinese culture. This fascinating and important fact has taken some time to crystalise in the study of religion in the Chinese cultural sphere. It is therefore gratifying for those of us in the field of Sinology, who have long since advocated for the two fields to be understood as reflecting two sides of the same proverbial coin, to find that there is now an increasing awareness of the significance of religious aspects in Chinese traditional medicinal practices, and vice versa.

Appendices

Appendix I

The Chinese Text of P. 3181.

- (1) ...⁷⁷ 見自真如躡姓結印入定四禪徒有四重
- (2) 二月七日開徒坐禪, 二十日出定. 三月二日開徒坐禪, 八日出
- (3) 定. 八月
- (4) 二十三日開徒坐禪, 二十九日出定. 九月十二日開徒坐禪, 十六日出定.
- (5) 入定之時, 二月七日復坐向東調氣坊出去十四呵觀毒入. 祭之
- (6) 時入氣十四呵遍食. 禪三日十四下必定三月三日後坐向南誦
- (7) 氣坊出氣六呵觀毒入氣六呵遍食. 禪二日六下必定.
- (8) 八月二十三日復⁷⁸坐向南西. 調氣坊出呵觀毒入氣七呵遍
- (9) 食. 禪二日七下必定. 九月十二日復坐向北, 調氣坊出氣五呵觀
- (10) 毒入氣五呵遍食. 禪二日五下必定. 死向之觀努力努力審
- (11) 思要入定伐藥求覓處照. 七月七日入於山林間廣坐七日七夜
- (12) 觀. 然復藥之時, 請藥王菩薩真身. 誦者大乘入定真言但
- (13) 誦一百八遍. 其時藥王菩薩化作鳥鴿放其大風. 大風動之時
- (14) 證心如入禪定看心. 修取藥坊取得心. 藥足了山間七公人

⁷⁷ Evidently something comes before this.

⁷⁸ It is possible that the character *hou* (後), ‘after,’ is intended. Even so it would not change the discourse significantly.



- (15) 間七公在人間藥. 一者, 兩香. 二者, 自 [官] 香. 三者, 兩蜜. 四者, 白銀. 五
(16) 者, 黃金. 六者, 大珠. 七者, 案葉都. 卞捨四般.⁷⁹ 四藥坊七宿在
(17) 山間七宿在人間. 大乘藥關南天竺國達摩禪師急譯.

Appendix II

The Chinese Text of *Damo chanshi taixi jue* 達磨禪師胎息訣 [Method of Embryonic Breathing by the Meditation Master Bodhidharma] (DZ 826.18: 5b–6a, <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=158134>, 25–26).

夫煉胎息者, 煉炁定心是也. 常息於心輪, 則不著萬物, 炁若不定, 禪亦空也. 炁若定則色身無病, 禪道雙安. 修行之人, 因不守心, 元炁失了不收, 道怎成矣. 古人云: 炁定心定, 炁凝心靜, 是大道之要, 又名還丹. 道人無諸掛念, 日日如斯, 則名真定禪觀. 故三世賢聖修行皆在此訣, 名為禪定雙修也.

Appendix III

The Chinese Text of *Zheng chan fang* 正禪方 [Method for Correct Meditation]

<http://seirouoosone.web.fc2.com/SennkinnYokuhouHanantai.pdf>, 394.

春桑耳 夏桑子 秋桑葉 上三味, 等分搗篩. 以水一斗煮小豆一升, 令大熟, 以桑末一升和煮微沸, 著鹽豉服之, 日三服, 飽服無妨. 三日外稍去小豆. 身輕目明無眠睡, 十日覺運智通初地禪, 服二十日到二禪定, 百日得三禪定, 累一年得四禪定. 萬相皆見, 壞欲界, 觀境界, 如視掌中, 得見佛性.

⁷⁹ Evidently a substitute for *pan* (盤).

Appendix IV

The Chinese text of *Guanyin pusa miao xiang fa* 觀音菩薩罐勝妙香丸法 [Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Highly Victorious and Majestic Method of Fragrant Pills] (P. 2637 (2)).

- (1) 觀音菩薩罐勝妙香丸法
- (2) 爾時觀世音菩薩告大梵天王: 卻後未來, 五濁惡世之時, 十魔競
- (3) 起, 三災八難, 刀兵飢饉, 草劫諸難生時, 若有比丘入於深山坐
- (4) 禪持咒, 修無上道, 飢火所迫, 我為人說妙香丸法, 令此比丘永得解
- (5) 脫, 不遭水火之難, 大小便利, 息比斷絕, 得如來大圓鏡海, 壽千萬
- (6) 歲, 獲五神通. 妙香丸法, 但依經修合 [...]

Appendix V

Translation of the *Za shou jin fa* 雜受禁法 [Miscellaneous Received Preventive Methods].

The first day of the first month: On this day do not commence [with the method for receiving the ritual prohibitions] at the time of *yin* [(寅)]. On the 3rd day of the 3rd month at the time of *yin*, on the 5th day of the fifth month at the time of *wu* [(午)], on the 7th day of the 7th month at the time of *chou* [(丑)], on the 9th day of the 9th month at the time of *yin* [(Comment: 'some say *chou*')]. If one receive it in the 1st month of the year, it may be used in all year, if one receive it in the 3rd month it may be used in all of spring, if one receive it in the 5th month it may be used in all of summer, if one receive it in the 7th month it may be used in all of autumn, if one receive it in the 9th month it may be used in all of winter. In the above years always adhere to those days. When receiving this method one is not allowed to partake of alcohol, eat meat, the five pungent herbs,⁸⁰ curd [(Chin. *rulao* 乳酪)], cheese and honey. [Moreover,] one's disposition should be like the Medicine King's [(藥王)] above-mentioned

⁸⁰ Same as the five pungent roots (Chin. *wuxin* 五辛).



medicine [used when] praying to deliver and protect all sentient beings [(Chin. *jiuhu yiqie zhongsheng* 救護一切眾生)]. Do not create hardships [for oneself and others], do not seek money and material things, only maintain this disposition and eat it (i.e. the medicine). Then one will recover from everything, and out of ten-thousand not one will go wrong. When receiving the method use it in the above months and on [the stipulated] days. First one should wash oneself with pure well-flower water [(Chin. *qingjing jinghua shui muyu* 清淨井花水沐浴)] above and below, and the clothes one wears should all be fresh and clean. One should observe the for seven days, and when reaching the stipulated day, one must first rinse the mouth with well-flower water, burn incense and prostrate to the five directions. For each of the Five Emperors⁸¹ make five prostrations to each. Face correctly towards the East when burning incense and sit erect. The pure [ritual] vessels should contain well-flower water arranged side by side. [Then] chant the text of the received commandments prohibitions fourteen times each. Keep the water in your mouth and gaze in the five directions. Next wash hands and face. Face in the eastern direction and inhale green vital energy while imagining that it enters the mouth in seven inhalations, next face towards the South and inhale red vital energy, next face towards the West and inhale the white vital energy, next face towards the North and inhale the black vital energy, next inhale the central yellow vital energy, all should make seven inhalations while visualise them entering the abdomen. Perform prostrations to each of the five directions. Afterwards undertake for two months the upholding of the precepts of the fast [(Chin. *chi zhai jie* 持齋戒)], and reflect on the prohibitions [(Chin. *jinxiang* 禁想)]. [If one can] avoid engaging oneself in all evil doings when receiving [the regulations], one will then complete the method of the prohibitions. For the vessels and [ritual] objects one may not use those which had been used previously for alcohol, meat and the five pungent roots.

Chinese Text

正月一日，日未出，寅時，三月三日寅時，五月五日午時，七月七日丑時，九月九日寅時（一云丑時）。正月受一年用，三月受一春用，五月受一夏用，七月受一秋用，九月受一冬用。上年年常依此日受之法，不得飲酒食肉五辛芸台乳酪酥蜜，心如藥王藥上願救護一切眾生，不作

⁸¹ I.e. the directional spirits.

艱難，不求財物，但作此心下口即瘡，萬不失一。受法用前月日，先以清淨井花水沐浴，上下衣服一切鮮淨清齋七日，至其日，先以井花水澡浴漱口，燒香禮五方五帝各五拜訖。正面向東燒香，端立，淨器盛井花水置傍，誦所得禁文各二七遍訖。口含水仰五方承取洗手面訖，向東方吸青氣想入口中七吸，次向南方吸赤氣，次向西方吸白氣，次向北方吸黑氣，次吸中央黃氣，皆作七吸入腹想訖，更禮五方各五拜訖，後作兩月持齋戒作得禁想，不得作一切諸惡行受訖，即成禁法。器物不得用曾經盛酒肉五辛者。



Abbreviations

- CMCT *Catalogue des manuscrits Chinois de Touen-Houang. Fonds Pelliot chinois de la Bibliothèque Nationale, Vols. I–V. Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1970–1995.*
- D Collection of Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved in the National Library of Taibei, Taiwan (CBETA electronic versions).
- DZ *Zhengtong daoze* 正統道藏 [Daoist Canon from the Zhengtong Reign Period], 36 vols. Wenwu edition. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988.
- DZJ *Daoze jiyao* 道藏輯要 [Collected Essentials of the Daoist Canon]. Edited by Chen Dali 陳大利. Chengdu: Ba Shu shuhui, 1995.
- FDC *Foguang da cidian* 佛光大辭典 [Great Dictionary of Foguang], 8 vols, ed. Ciyi 慈怡 et. al. Gaoxiang: Foguangshan chubanshe, 1988.
- P. Pelliot Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.
- S. Stein Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London.
- T. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 [Taishō tripiṭaka], ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高順次郎 et. al. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1935, vols 1–55, 85.
- ZWDS *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 [Daoist Books Outside the Canon], 1–36 vols, edited by Hu Daojing 胡道靜, Lin Wanqing 林萬清, and Chen Yaoting 陳耀庭. Chengdu: Ba Shu chubanshe, 1992–1995.

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- Bao yao song* 服藥頌. Cf. *Xinluo fashi fang in Isshimpō*.
- Chou chanshi yi* 稠禪師意. P. 3559.
- Damo chanshi taixi jue* 達磨禪師胎息訣. Cf. *Zhu zhensheng taishen yong jue*.
- Dasheng yaoguan Nantian zhuguo Damo chanshi jiyi* 大乘藥關南天竺國達磨禪師急譯. P. 3181.
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Taiqing fuqi kou jue 太清服氣口訣. DZ 822.18.
Taixi biyao ge jue 太息秘要歌訣. DZ 131.2.
Taixi bijue 胎息秘訣. Cf. *Junzhai dushu zhi*, 16.
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