

Evil And/or/as The Good: Omniscentrism, Intersubjectivity And Value Paradox In Tiantai Buddhist Thought

120 *Reviews of Books*

EVIL AND/OR/AS THE GOOD: OMNISCENTRISM, INTERSUBJECTIVITY, AND VALUE PARADOX IN TIANTAI BUDDHIST THOUGHT. By BROOK ZIPORYN. pp. viii, 482, bibliography, glossary, index. Cambridge, Mass., and London, Harvard University Press, 2000.

In 1017 (the date of 1016, which Ziporyn prefers, is supported by only a single dubious source) the eminent Chinese monk Siming Zhili (960–1028) together with ten of his companions made a vow. They announced that after three years practising the rituals of the *Lotus* repentance, they would burn their bodies as offerings to the *Lotus sutra*. Later that same year the emperor bestowed on Zhili the purple robe as a particular sign of his esteem for this monk. The Hanlin academician and well-known literatus Yang Yi (974–1020), who had recommended him for that honour, wrote to Zhili in an attempt to dissuade him from carrying out his promise. Zhili would not be talked out of it, but his reply to Yang began a series of letters between the two men, which are still preserved. In the end, Zhili never set fire to himself, and although the reasons why he abandoned his plan remain somewhat obscure, it was apparently not Yang's arguments themselves that convinced him to remain alive. The bestowal of an imperial title as a consequence of a memorial written by Yang to the emperor may well have had something to do with his change of heart. During the course of the lengthy correspondence between the two men, Zhili proposed, in one letter, that there was no distinction between the Buddha and Māra, the demon-king (whom Ziporyn calls "the devil" throughout the book).

This expression of the complete identity between value and anti-value (Buddha and Māra, or good and evil) provides Ziporyn's point of departure for an examination of some aspects of Zhili's thought. But from the very beginning he is too quick to leave behind the actual historical circumstances and to plunge straight into his philosophical quest. He blithely announces on p. 20 that the type of self-immolation proposed by the eminent Tiantai monk "did not involve breaking the monastic rules". Here, I fear Ziporyn is wrong. Had he troubled to consult a recent article on self-immolation which does mention the case of Zhili, he would have learned that in fact self-immolation was the subject of considerable controversy within the Chinese Buddhist tradition, especially as regards the Vinaya (monastic regulations).¹ Zhili's defence of his proposed act rested upon his interpretation of two important apocryphal sutras: the *Fanwang jing*, and the *Shoulengyan jing*, often known as the *Sāraṅgama sūtra* (Ziporyn offers "*Sāraṅgama*", which seems a less plausible reconstruction of the title). It appears to me that much of Zhili's worldview was dependent on influential apocryphal works such as these, and it is a pity that Ziporyn has not taken the opportunity to explore these particular avenues.

There are seven chapters including an introduction and conclusion. The introduction lays out the question of antithetical value as Ziporyn sees it expressed in Zhili's statement, "other than the devil there is no Buddha; other than the Buddha there is no devil". In Chapter Two, Ziporyn turns to the classical Chinese tradition in search of earlier positions on the issues of holism, intersubjectivity, and value paradox. But the chapter contains too many digressions and is not rooted firmly enough in the primary materials to be of much value as a clear exposition of these topics as they appear in the classical texts. Chapter Three, on value and anti-value in Indian Buddhism, is brief and focuses mostly on Nāgārjuna before leaping ahead to make some rather general observations about the influence of the Indian tradition on Zhiyi (538–597), the major thinker of the medieval Tiantai tradition. Chapter Four lays out some of the basic concepts of Tiantai, and is probably the most coherent chapter of the book, although I could not really recommend it as an introduction to Tiantai thought. In Chapter Five, Ziporyn turns to Zhili's perspective on the relationship between unenlightened beings and the buddhas, and in Chapter Six he examines the theories of Zhiyi, Zhanran (711–782) and Zhili on

¹ Benn, James A., "Where Text Meets Flesh: Burning the Body as an 'Apocryphal Practice' in Chinese Buddhism", *History of Religions* 37/4, 1998, pp. 295–322.

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