Culture and Dialogue
Vol.3, No. 1 (March 2013)

Special Issue on “Religion and Dialogue”

Honorary Member	Tzvetan Todorov	Historian, France
Chief Editor	Gerald Cipriani	Kyushu University, Japan
Guest Editor	Cosimo Zene	SOAS, University of London, UK
Assistant Editor	Jon K. Shaw	PhDc, University of London, UK

Editorial Board

Pal Ahluwalia	UNESCO, University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia
Åsa Andersson	Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, Sweden
Sze Wei Ang	University of Hong Kong, PR China
John Baldacchino	University College Falmouth, United Kingdom
Wim van Binsbergen	Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Thorsten Botz-Bornstein	Gulf University, Koweit
Gary Bouma	UNESCO, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia
Nino Chikovani	UNESCO, I. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilissi, Georgia
Robert Clarke	Lancaster University, United Kingdom
Jale Nejdet Erzen	Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey
Zornitza Ganeva	Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria
Jianping Gao	University of Beijing, PR China
Paul Gladston	University of Nottingham, United Kingdom
Arto Haapala	University of Helsinki, Finland
Hannah Halle	University of Derby, United Kingdom
Hans Koechler	University of Innsbruck, Austria
Gereon Kopf	Luther College, Decorah, USA
Antoine Leygonie	University of Paris VIII, Vincennes Saint-Denis, France
Hsia Yang Liu	Agathe Academe, Taipei, Taiwan
Shail Mayaram	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, India
Paul Morris	UNESCO, University of Wellington, New Zealand
Musanji Ngalasso-Mwatha	University of Bordeaux, France
Anthony M. Musonda	University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia
Kinya Nishi	Konan University, Kobe, Japan
Bertha Z. Osei-Hwedie	University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana
Tanehisa Otabe	The University of Tokyo, Japan
Martin Ovens	University of Oxford, United Kingdom
Giuseppe Patella	University of Roma Tor Vergata, Italy
Fabio Petito	University of Essex, United Kingdom
Daniel Raveh	Tel Aviv University, Israel
Ricardo Rozzi	University of North Texas, Denton, USA / UMAG, Punta Arenas, Chile Institute of Ecology and Biodiversity, Santiago, Chile
Madhucchanda Sen	Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India
Enric Olivé Serret	UNESCO, Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona, Spain
Steve Shankman	UNESCO, University of Oregon, Eugene, USA
Dimitri Spivak	UNESCO, Russian Institute for Cultural Research, St.Petersburg, Russia
Feng Su	Hunan Normal University, Changsha, PR China
Yasuhiko Sugimura	Kyoto University, Japan
Martin Svensson Ekström	Stockholm University, Sweden
William Sweet	St Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Canada
Edwige Tamalet Talbayev	Yale University, New Haven, USA
Hubert Timmermans	Maastricht University, The Netherlands
Jacynthe Tremblay	University of Montreal, Canada
Mohamed Turki	University of Tunis, Tunisia
Dominique Verdoni	CNRS, University of Corsica, Corti, France
Yi-Fang Wu	National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan
Joseph Yacoub	Political Scientist, France

Culture and Dialogue

Vol.3, No. 1 (March 2013)

Special Issue on “Religion and Dialogue”

Guest Editor: Cosimo Zene

Culture and Dialogue Vol.3, No. 1 (March 2013)
Special Issue on “Religion and Dialogue” (Culture and Dialogue Journal Series),
Chief Editor: Gerald Cipriani
Guest Editor: Cosimo Zene

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2013 by Gerald Cipriani, Cosimo Zene and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISSN: 2222-3282

… as long as things can be brought to the human level, I think dialogue can be fruitful. If it is between the Gods, it becomes quite difficult.

Tzvetan Todorov

CONTENTS

Editorial ... 1
Gerald Cipriani

Introduction ... 3
Cosimo Zene

Deqing and Daoism: A View of Dialogue and Translation from Late Ming China ... 11
Tim H. Barrett

Dialogue with a Devious Divinity: Sovereignty, Kinship, and Kṛṣṇa's Ethics in the *Mahābhārata* ... 25
Theodore Proferes

Freak, not Sage: An Exploration into Freakishness in Modern Jewish Culture ... 51
Catherine Hezser

The Limits of the Dialogical: Thoughts on Muslim Patterns of In- and Exclusion ... 73
Jan-Peter Hartung

Trauma, Dislocation, and Lived Fear in the Postsecular World: Towards a First Methodological Checklist ... 95
Stephen Chan

The Pietas of Doubt: Dialogue, Consciousness and Weak Thought ... 109
Tullio Lobetti

An Outlaw Ethics for the Study of Religions: Maternality and the Dialogic Subject in Julia Kristeva's "Stabat Mater" ... 127
Sîan Hawthorne

The Challenge of Critical Dialogue and the Study of Religions ... 153
Cosimo Zene

EDITORIAL

Vol.3, No.1 of *Culture and Dialogue* is a Special Issue in many ways.

This issue marks the takeover by a new publisher. Because of contractual constraints and practical reasons the decision was made to continue our journey with Cambridge Scholars Publishing, whose great enthusiasm foreshadows a bright future for the journal. Our words of thanks, however, must also go to Airiti Press without which the journal would not have seen the light of day. We are indebted to Airiti Press for having invested into the launch of a new journal, with all the risks entailed, and for their dedicated hard work. We are most grateful for this.

The Journal was officially launched in March 2011 and has since produced four issues, all of which focusing on a particular facet of dialogical practice within the field of culture, be it philosophy, art, or politics. Forthcoming issues will offer platforms to explore how dialogue impacts on the shaping of identity, aesthetic meaning, and historical significance. One issue will also de devoted to how dialogue manifests itself in language. This brings us to autumn 2015, after which other pressing themes will, no doubt, be proposed and treated.

In whatever case, the thread remains the cultural forms of dialogue; many of us know how critical ignorance about the nature of the dialogue can be, in all fields, at all levels. Argentinian poet Antonio Porchia once wrote that “To be someone is solitude.” Any self-felt genius or world-leading mortal will identify with this. The solitude at stake is that of the one who fails to link with others, or an Other, by denying the possibility to relinquish some of him or herself. In fact, the true someone is never alone; the true someone never leads. This is the message *Culture and Dialogue* is striving to convey, express, or analyse in its various forms across the humanities, the arts, and the social sciences. Beside, the Journal has always sought, when possible, to preserve a certain spirit of writing in addition to academic rigour and creativity – a spirit that is undeniably fading in the midst of the *publish or perish* ethos adopted by advanced techno-capitalist systems of education in some parts of the world.

Vol.3, No.1 is a Special Issue devoted to the theme of “religion and dialogue.” Cosimo Zene, of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, kindly accepted our invitation to be the Guest Editor, and our words of thanks must first go to him. Cosimo has managed to bring together a range of outstanding essays of which the Journal can only be proud. To various degrees and in different ways all essays discuss dialogue and religion, or show dialogue at work in religious studies. We are most grateful to all the authors who generously contributed to this Special Issue and therefore to the life of the Journal; in alphabetical order, T.H. Barrett, Stephen Chan, Jan-Peter Hartung, Sîan Hawthorne, Catherine Heszer, Tullio Lobetti, Theodore Proferes, and Cosimo Zene.

Finally and as ever, many thanks to our Assistant Editor, Jon K. Shaw, for the great work he did, his attention to detail, and above all his reliability.

Gerald Cipriani

INTRODUCTION

The Risk of Dialogue …

> … If we wish to move away from the misleading and dangerous idea of a "clash of civilizations," it is important to recognize that all dialogue is risky and that no great tradition or ideology is lacking in internal debates. The challenge becomes how to conduct dialogue about the relevant differences, not about any difference or all differences. After all, we value diversity. How can there be diversity without difference?
>
> Arjun Appadurai

Dialogue is born within diversity. Without diversity there cannot be dialogue, just monologue. Monologue is dictated by the cultivation of the self/same: self-preservation, self-adulation, self-gratification, self-indulgence … Monologue is also dictated by the "fear of the other," which prevents the self/same from opening up and coming out of itself, in an effort to meet with the other, the one who is different. When the self is willing to make a move towards the other, towards difference, a transition occurs from the safe monologue of the self towards the risk of dialogue.

The risk of dialogue is what allows the self/same to grow, to reach maturity, to leave the self-centred status of childhood so as to become an adult: a process which involves suffering, the crisis of leaving the secure grounds of what is known and familiar for the new territory of uncertainty, doubt, novelty and difference.

In religious discourse, as much as in any other human endeavour, reaching maturity presupposes effort and often pain. Even in the most "monolithic" and monotheistic of religions, diversity is acknowledged, if only to recognise the presence of a "totally Other" with whom dialogue might be established. Or is this simply a subtle variety of monologue? Although this is how most psychoanalytical approaches would define it, we cannot dismiss that even this type of "monologue" does engender multiple dialogues, not solely with an "invisible other" but, in the first instance, with those "others" with whom the self shares a belief or, at least, a vision of the world.

When Gerald Cipriani invited me to be the guest editor of this special issue on “Dialogue and Religion,” my first thought was to make a safe bet and involve some of the many scholars who engage in interreligious dialogue. I took, however, the risky decision to pursue another line of inquiry by inviting colleagues from within my own department of the Study of Religions at SOAS to submit papers close to their own areas of expertise. This effort has now materialized in this special issue of *Culture and Dialogue*.

The collection serves the double purpose of showing a joint reflection within one given department – hence highlighting dialogue among colleagues – who in turn concentrate on one specific kind of dialogue which is often overlooked: the internal dialogue happening within a given tradition, or within the study of religions in general, as opposed to the more publicised interreligious dialogue.

The sequence of essays follows the simple rationale of offering reflections on issues of dialogue within individual traditions and then gradually moves, with the last three essays, to more general concerns for dialogue within the study of religions.

Tim Barrett opens the series with an essay on religious dialogue in China during the late Ming period (1368-1644) manifest in the “translation” of foreign religious thought, represented by Buddhism, into a language dominated by other “contrasting” teachings, namely Daoism and Confucianism. For some translators, however, this contrast goes beyond literal translation in order to provide a “cultural translation” of the message of Buddhism “into the thought-forms and modes of expression most familiar in China.” The work of the Buddhist monk Hanshan Deqing (1546-1623) is taken as an example of translation-mediation – and hence intense dialogue – during this period in China.

In the second essay, Ted Proferes highlights some central dialogues taking place within the *Mahābhārata* as part of the thematic architecture of this epic narrative. While the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Yudhiṣṭhira shows that *dharma*, far from being a clear-cut, monolithic principle, still preserves “the ever-elusive character, the unresolved ambiguity, of the concept of *dharma*,” “religion” – however we wish to define it – remains deeply entangled within the web of human affairs, be it ethics, fight for sovereignty or the law, even when gods are invoked to express their judgement. The subsequent dialogue between Proferes and his colleagues (Matilal and Fisher), further clarifies the meaning of terms (*sakhya* relationship) upon which a new interpretation is built. Kṛṣṇa is neither a free moral agent nor an "amoral figure … standing aloof from ethical questions." In the end, it is Proferes' own compelling dialogue with the text which motivates him to reach a new interpretation with "profound implications for our understanding of Kṛṣṇa's role within the *Mahābhārata*, and thus for the appreciation of the thematic architecture of the epic as a whole."

Catherine Hezser's article "Freak not Sage" discusses an original and often overlooked idea, especially from a religious tradition point of view. In the case of Judaism, we usually find an emphasis on the solemn figure of the rabbinic scholar rather than on the "freak" or clown. Starting with Kafka's novella *Metamorphosis*, Hezser provides a series of examples to illustrate "Freakishness" in modern Jewish history through the work of Woody Allen, Philip Roth, Rona Yefman, and Sacha Baron Cohen. She also discusses the historical background of the idea and practice of "carnivalisation," together with the subversion of normative values and the stereotypical projection and scapegoating of the perceived "Other", but also "one's self-identification with and adaptation of stereotypes in order to subvert and change them." While "freakishness" had been exploited to amuse people at fairs and circuses, Hezser proposes here a reflection on its subversive potential in the case of self-identification with the freak in Judaism. She suggests "… that wisdom and freakishness are closely linked, since freakishness, expressed in whatever form, allows one to view reality from a new perspective and question what is perceived as 'normal,' 'normative,' and 'real'." This becomes, in other words, a "provocative dialogue" in which, pushing stereotypes to the extreme – as in the case of Sacha Baron Cohen – the clown who makes us laugh, disturbs our laughter, making us think. Hezser's article itself, making us reflect on this reality, becomes a provocation to our ideal of an often rarefied and "sanitized" dialogue and it becomes an invitation to consider other such human groups whose art, music, singing, performing etc. have become a "provocative dialogue" for their audiences, as in the case of Gypsies all over Europe, Dalits in South Asia, the Griot in Africa and jazz and blues musicians among Afro-Native Americans.

In his article "The Limits of the Dialogical," Jan-Peter Hartung challenges the assertion of well-known philosophical positions, represented by Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas, which support an "idealised communication community" based on universalistic shared values and "transcendental ethics," by opposing to these Wittgenstein's analytical philosophy and in particular the limits of language as a means to establish a “truthful” communication. Hartung provides the compelling example of the ongoing debate within the Muslim *umma* concerning the inclusion/exclusion of members into/from the “idealised discursive community,” so as to prove the (near) impossibility of a viable intra-faith dialogue, as a solid ground to assert the even greater impossibility of interreligious dialogue. Perhaps, given Hartung’s distrust for universal claims and for “dogmas,” we must assume that his is not a universal claim either, and that his “intellectual belief” is not a dogma. His argument, however, is a reminder that dialogue is never a given and that even the “purest” of claims – based on faith, theology, revelation, dogmatic assertions etc. – are always contaminated with human experience, history, culture, politics and social reality in general. On the other hand, with an almost predictable argument *ad hominem*, we could say that Hartung’s own writing, despite all the limitations we might place on language, unmasks his commitment to engage very seriously and effectively with the Islamic tradition, that is to say, to establish with it a critical, scholarly dialogue.

I welcome Stephen Chan’s contribution to this collection as our guest from the Department of Politics and International Studies. As an expert in International Relations, he is very interested in the role played by religion within his discipline, and also in the way religion has been interpreted within this field of studies. Chan’s passionate dialogue with International Relations becomes an invitation also for us to seriously engage with the postsecular, through the critical commitment “arising from the terrors of World War II … It is secular, although it can make room for luminosity and the doorways to the spiritual.” As such, this commitment becomes a responsibility to investigate into “other” religions and religious cultures, and their philosophical traditions. The works of Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur and Levinas are revisited so as to rediscover the scriptural roots of the hermeneutical tradition, as a moment of “transposition … of irrational method … of recognition and belief as opposed to one of reason and reason’s scepticisms.” Chan is attentive to link his philosophical meditation to events, such as the Iranian Revolution, which still probe and “disturb” our present with the persistence of penetrating questions (“What is faith when it morphs beyond philosophy into ideology? When it acts as a community marker that crosses and interferes with borders? When it acts diplomatically, militarily, and clandestinely? When it is prepared to act with nuclear force?”). While he doubts the effectiveness of postsecular studies he also laments the intellectual poverty of “the profession” (“There is not a single fully-trained philosopher within the profession”). Calling our attention to both the Book of Mormon and the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, the sacred text of the Bahai, Chan proposes to address the ambiguity of the “postsecular” underlining rather the “resacralisation” of International Relations, a move which allows him to recall “a lengthy tradition of complex debate” and to propose seventeen points on the “pathway to normative action” which propel this meditation into future and challenging dialogues, if “the profession” – and us – are ready to accept the challenge.

Following on from the last two articles, Tullio Lobetti problematizes further the “trope” of dialogue, often perceived as “natural lenitive epistemology,” to reveal that dialogue is in fact not a natural entity but an *event* which may take place within a “shared space.” Having discarded the “metaphysical premise” of dialogue, the probing question remains, however, as to what we, as humans, “have in common” for the possibility of dialogue to happen? Though acknowledging the presence of *consciousness* and *language* – but also their cultural and historical complexity – our common ground rests mainly on the “possibility for communication,” thus renouncing ontological essentialism so as to “postulate dialogue as a *necessary condition* of being, rather than a consequence of it.” In other words, following a Bakhtinian stance, the *dialogical event* happens not within the realm – or because of – being but in *being different*, since our consciousness “is affected by that of the other and replaced with a hybrid form of the two.” The central point carried out by Lobetti could be seen as an extended commentary to Appadurai’s initial epigraph given that the “excess of a strong consciousness” results in pseudo-dialogues, while “dialogue in our understanding presupposes difference.” At the same time, rather than producing fundamental(ist) certainties, difference is a source of doubt, “a primary prerequisite for dialogue. If I do not doubt, I have nothing to learn from any Other.” Returning to Bakhtin’s *dialogical event*, Lobetti proposes to welcome also Vattimo’s “*weak thought*” which implies a weak consciousness and the *pietas of doubt* as a necessary condition for “being together,” in real, risky and demanding dialogue.

Taking the move from Julia Kristeva’s “Stabat Mater,” Sîan Hawthorne offers in her essay a reflection on “Maternality and the Dialogic Subject” while exploring the place of “ethics” in the Study of Religions. Subverting the conventional ethical model of Western metaphysics, Kristeva, following Mikhail Bakhtin, proposes “herethics” as “a notion of difference that does not operate according to a dialectic logic of opposition but rather as dialogic." Thus, "Maternality" – the mother's body and relation to her child – renders the intensity of the dialogic relationship between self and other. In the narrative of maternality of the "Stabat Mater" Kristeva addresses both the construct of Mary offered by the Church and the Freudian omission of a theory of motherhood. Hawthorne thoughtfully re-reads the two columns of the one text – on the right-hand in academic style and on the left-hand column in a personal tone – as an extreme and troubled dialogue between the woman-scholar and the woman-mother: the two columns "appear progressively in dialogue as they repeat and exchange themes, motifs and terminology, overlapping, echoing and anticipating each other." Though dialogical, this transgressive text represents the embodiment of the subject-in-process, the split subject, forcing the reader to perceive and experience the splitting of marginality, separation, division and at the same time of maternality, i.e., to *become* mothers as "crossroads beings, crucified beings," and as subjects-in-process/on-trial. This constitutes the basis (but not a foundation) of "heretical/outlaw ethics" or *herethics*, as opposed to ontotheology and to challenging the autonomous ethical agent in favour of "plural, processual, intertextual and mutually constituting" subjects. As Hawthorne rightly suggests when applying this "different ethics" to the study of religions (as I interpret it), the figure of the powerful scholar/subject in charge of controlling "religion" should be abandoned in favour of a new model "that opens a space for an ethical orientation towards otherness which is productive, open, and where scholars of religion might be cognisant of their debt to the 'other modality'."

My own article "The Challenge of Critical Dialogue and the Study of Religions," concentrates on the double-dialogue happening within the study of religions: an internal dialogue, carried out amongst scholars of religions, and the wider dialogue the latter establish with their field of enquiry, with traditions and practitioners. These two types of dialogue are interrelated, dependent on each other and can survive only when carried out in conjunction with each other. In a sense, I am appealing here – for as much as these are "troubled" and risky dialogues – to recognise a dialogue of dialogues and an interdependency of theory and praxis, where the theoretical reflection acquires meaning because it is informed by the diversity of praxis. Praxis – "religious praxis" – comes to us as "the other" of our thoughts, as "the clown" who makes us think differently, as the doubt which unsettles our certainties, as the painful, continuous effort of the translator to achieve a better translation (both literal and metaphorical);

all these "metaphors" propelling us in our endeavour to adopt an ethics with a difference, to *become mothers*, rather than masters to our "subject matter."

When scholars of religions have declared "religion" defunct, it is because this religion has become our monologue, a reflection of our own imagination, an instrument in our hands to assert control over the "subject matter," until we realised that, in fact, we were empty-handed, and the word "religion" itself had become redundant. If we take time to retrace the history of intellectual endeavours dealing with "religion/s," we may discover that efforts have not always been directed at asserting ourselves as "masters of the field" to continue, as scholars, our internal, self-congratulatory monologues without listening to the instances coming to us from the field. I am appealing to this "lengthy tradition of complex debates," as much as to the tension expressed in the present articles so as to make our intellectual effort concerning religion/s meaningful and challenging. Notably, in the course of preparation of this Special Issue a new journal was being launched, *Critical Research on Religion*, sending thus a clear signal, not only that our quest is not a solitary endeavour but that a profound, ethical-critical dialogue is being encouraged by other colleagues within the field of the study of religions.

Cosimo Zene

DEQING AND DAOISM: A VIEW OF DIALOGUE AND TRANSLATION FROM LATE MING CHINA

T. H. BARRETT

Department of the Study of Religions,
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London, UK
tb2@soas.ac.uk

Abstract

Any dialogue conducted via mutually unintelligible languages constitutes no more than a dialogue of the deaf. Yet intelligibility in dialogue at the most basic linguistic level seems to have provoked little extended discussion in China, even though in practice getting one's ideas across was plainly a major concern, in the late Ming period (1368-1644). Whilst Buddhists of the period had ceased in any real sense to act as translators of fresh Buddhist materials into Chinese from other languages, we do find an essayist with things to say about translation. This was Hanshan Deqing (1546–1623), a major Buddhist monk of the age. Yet his essays are not readily to be found in his Buddhist writings, but in the preface to his annotations to the Daoist classic *Daode jing.* It is therefore within the context of dialogue with another rival tradition that his remarks were made, and so they have a particular relevance for those with an interest in the conduct of inter-religious dialogue in the Chinese tradition.

I

Dialogue and Language in China

Chinese materials for studying inter-religious dialogue as it unfolded across history are both extremely rich and as yet scarcely exploited. Perhaps the first scholars to reflect on this heritage were Japanese, usually Buddhist Japanese, in the early twentieth century, who felt that they were unable to comprehend the continental roots of their own religion without some consideration of the non-Buddhist environment that helped to shape it. They generally discussed this question under the traditional Chinese rubric of the “Three Teachings” (*sanjiao* 三教), namely Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. The thrust of more recent scholarship has been to stress the way in which the two Chinese traditions only gradually came to achieve self-conscious status as rivals to Buddhism. Nonetheless, both the early surveys and the later Japanese research building on these work allow well over a millennium of development before the era of greatest dialogue, which is situated in the intellectual ferment of the late Ming period – in other words, the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[1] The Manchu invasion and the fall of the dynasty in 1644 seem in the view of most East Asian scholars to have brought an end to this period of maximally open debate.

Western scholars have been slower to identify and study this golden age of religious dialogue. Perhaps the first was Judith Berling, who opens her monograph on the late Ming religious leader Lin Zhaoen (林兆恩, 1517–1598) with three chapters on questions relating to syncretism before turning to Lin himself.[2] More recent work on Lin has preferred to speak of “hybridity” in describing his synthesis of the Three Teachings, but even so it would seem that for the English language reader the temptation is to see the long history of frequently polemical dialogue between representatives of Buddhism and of Chinese thought as culminating during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in something of an irenic elimination of earlier barriers.[3]

---

[1] For examples of each type one might name Kubota Ryōen (九保田量遠), *Shina Ju, Dō, Butsu kōshō shi* 支那儒道佛交涉史 [A History of the Interaction between Chinese Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism], Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1943; and Araki Kengo 荒木見悟, *Bukkyō to Jukyō* [Buddhism and Confucianism] (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1961); both close their coverage with the end of the Ming dynasty.

[2] Judith A. Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao*-en (New York: Columbia, 1980).

Some would trace the start of this process back a long way, at least in so far as it concerns the roots of a reconciliation of Buddhism with Chinese thought, and would seek its origins in the very process of trying to express a foreign analysis of the human condition within the linguistic possibilities afforded by the Chinese language. Surely the enterprise of translation in itself reduced the difference between the South Asian and East Asian ways of thinking.[4] This is possible, of course. While in asserting that we are able to perceive a mismatch between an ancient Indian meaning and an ancient Chinese one we may be claiming that we are better able to judge than those who used these tongues as living languages, it must nonetheless be admitted that palpable errors of translation, rather than divergences due to faulty textual transmission or other such causes, have routinely been pointed out by scholars linguistically qualified to make such judgments.[5]

Yet error may not be the only explanation for some ostensibly inaccurate translation choices. It is also the case that scholars dealing not with the earliest phase of translation, but with a slightly later period – that is, one when standards of linguistic knowledge had perhaps improved – note mismatches of meaning, in polemical situations in particular, that could be construed as more deliberate. Buddhist polemicists, it has been suggested, were sufficiently in command of the linguistic effects that they sought to produce that they "relished systematic multivalence" – this even to the point that they have been suspected of smuggling Buddhist meanings into Chinese philosophical terminology so as to deliberately undermine that philosophy itself.[6] This, for its part, is not impossible: Chinese tradition was from an early stage not unreflective about language, and well before the arrival of Buddhism we find statements such as "we name by convention."[7] Certainly by the late eighth century CE the ambiguities of language were being consistently – and, therefore, we must suppose deliberately – exploited by Chinese poets.[8] One good reason for supposing that this poetic doubling of meaning was intentional may be found in a Buddhist author of the late eighth century, who tells us perfectly explicitly that he is placing one meaning on top of another in at least two clearly polemical cases. As was first pointed out by the Japanese scholar Kamata Shigeo (鎌田茂雄), the learned commentator Zhanran (湛然, 711–782) twice quotes *in extenso* from ancient Chinese works, namely the *Daodejing* of Laozi and the book known after its principal author as the *Zhuangzi* – both works that in his day were regarded as scriptures of the Daoist religion – and glosses each passage with a brief explanation that he was "borrowing" (*jie* 借) the words of the these texts not in their original meaning, but in order to express a Buddhist thought.[9]

---

[3] For a more recent reading of Lin and syncretism, see Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 21-28.

[4] Such appears to be the thrust of Jungnok Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2012).

[5] Such errors are, for example, pointed out by a special symbol in the glossaries of early Buddhist translations into Chinese prepared with great care and diligence by Seishi Karashima.

[6] Richard H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 17, 118 and 158.

[7] A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), 266.

Yet without explicit testimony of this sort, apparently prompted by use of particularly extended quotations, it is not possible to say for certain whether earlier Buddhists had been doing likewise – nor indeed later ones. What is nevertheless quite clear is that Buddhists of the late Ming period did write *in extenso* about key non-Buddhist texts from early China. In fact they wrote whole commentaries on them, and in one case, the *Book of Changes* as interpreted by Zhixu (智旭, 1599–1655), the result has even been rendered into English.[10] Were the Buddhists of this period simply seeking common ground with their fellow Chinese, stressing in syncretistic fashion that the three teachings came down to one and the same thing? Such a policy, if pursued without qualification, would seem to be rather at odds with the general Buddhist strategy of according only a relative, worldly value to other ways of thinking.[11] Since the terminology reflecting that strategy of assigning only expedient, provisional standing to one's rivals has survived into the twenty-first century to be co-opted by the new religion of Falun gong – though not necessarily to the same end – I find it hard to believe that it was not a standard part of Ming Buddhist thinking too.[12] Indeed, the *Book of Changes* commentator uses precisely this terminology in evaluating the most eminent Confucian of the dynasty.[13]

---

[8] A. C. Graham, *Poems of the Late T'ang* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), 20-24.

[9] Kamata Shigeo, *Chūgoku kegon shisōshi no kenkyū* [Research into the intellectual History of Chinese Huayan Buddhism] 中国華厳思想史の研究 (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1965), 265-6.

[10] Thomas Cleary, *The Buddhist I Ching,* Boston and London: Shambhala, 1987, which translates but does not analyse the commentary of Zhixu; this is reviewed, together with another translation by Cleary, by Kidder Smith, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108.2 (1988): 350-352.

[11] T. H. Barrett, "The Advent of the Buddhist Conception of Religion and its Consequences for the Analysis of Daoism": *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 9.2 (October 2009):149-165.

So, as an alternative, may we suppose that the Buddhists were borrowing Chinese texts simply in order to preach Buddhist sermons on them? Zhixu, in his prefatory remarks to his *Book of Changes* commentary, disclaims involvement in any simple dichotomies.[14] But one of his immediate predecessors is more forthcoming about his own approach to writing commentary on non-Buddhist works, not in this instance on the *Book of Changes,* but on the *Daode jing* of Laozi. Paradoxically, his remarks do not seem well known, even though he was in many ways the most famous of the great Buddhist leaders of the late Ming. A digest of his autobiography at any rate has been available in English for over half a century,[15] and among Chinese readers the autobiography of Deqing (德清, 1546–1623) is, of course, very widely known as an outstanding example of the genre.[16] The reason why his thoughts on commentary have been generally overlooked would appear to be in part bibliographic, since they are contained in a series of separate essays published with early editions of the commentary but often omitted in subsequent reprints, including those reprints by Buddhists at the end of the Qing period that were most frequently republished in the twentieth century.[17] In 1973, however, a photographic facsimile of a late Qing edition with the essays included was published in Taiwan, and this is the source that I have used.[18] The essay series also appears in print elsewhere, but buried deep in the forty-fifth volume of Deqing's *Collected Works.* These latter were made available in all their forbidding bulk in several canonical collections, and in the twenty-first century that at last includes one collection that can now be accessed in digital form.[19] At any rate, although a number of specialist publications on Deqing, and especially on Deqing and Daoism, do pick up and comment on passages drawn from them in discussing his views of the relationship between Buddhism and Daoism, they do not as far as I have been able to discover deal with the specific argument examined below.[20]

---

[12] Li Hongzhi, *China Falun Gong (Revised edition)* (Hong Kong: Falun Fo Fa Publishing Co., 1998), 51-52.

[13] Zhixu, *Lingfeng zonglun* 靈峰宗論 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2005), 273, uses the terminology in discussing the writings of Wang Yangming 王陽明.

[14] Zhixu, *Lingfeng zonglun,* 363-4.

[15] In Chang Chen-chi, *The Practice of Zen* (London: Rider, 1959), 97-115. Subsequent fuller translations exist, but have been less widely distributed.

[16] See Pei-yi Wu, *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 142-169.

[17] This deduction is based on the information given in Yan Lingfeng 嚴靈峰 *Zhou Qin Han Wei zhuzi zhijian shumu* [Bibliography of verified editions of philosophical literature of the Zhou, Qin, Han and Wei periods] 周秦漢魏諸子知見書目, Volume One (Taibei: Zhongzheng shuju, 1975), 163-4, though the correct date of final completion of the commentary (given only in cyclical terms in the preface) should be 1606; the essays, according to their postface, were already finished in 1598. Yan's information is not exhaustive, but this is not the place to expand it.

The overall title of the essay series is "*Guan Lao-Zhuang yingxiang lun*" (觀老莊影響論), "A Discussion Looking at the 'Shadows and Echoes' of Laozi and Zhuangzi." In contemporary Chinese this would refer to the "influence" of the two early Daoist thinkers, but the usage in earlier times of the compound was less restricted – and to judge from his remarks, both in the introduction and throughout the subsequent pages of the series, the meaning that was in Deqing's mind seems to have been that the reality described by these writers was a secondary phenomenon, like a shadow or echo, since in the view of the *Huayan Sutra* (華嚴經) it is in fact mind that produces all dharmas (法).[21] The series as a whole provides a rich resource for understanding the late Ming Buddhist view of the native Chinese tradition, but for present purposes only one section can be touched upon, namely that “Discussing adopting or rejecting” (論取去), since this directly addresses the question of ancient Chinese texts and their use in Buddhist contexts. The following two paragraphs are a rendering of the opening of this piece.

---

[18] Hanshan dashi 憨山大師 (i.e. Deqing), *Laozi Daode jing Hanshan zhu* 老子道德經憨山註, Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1973; in the 1996 reprint that I have used this is – as in all printings – bound with Deqing's comments on Zhuangzi from a late Qing Buddhist press. The essay in question is on pp. 5-9.

[19] In the *Xu zangjing* series, as included in digital form in CBETA, the section in question below begins on p. 766c in volume 73. I have used the CD-ROM version of their work: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association, *CBETA Chinese Electronic Tripitaka Collection,* Taibei, 2005 (ISSN 1562-9406).

[20] For an introduction to Deqing's thought in English, with brief coverage of his views on Daoism, see Hsu Sung-pen, *A Buddhist Leader in Ming China* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), note p. 155 for a reference to these essays. I have checked a sample of writings on Deqing and Daoism from both Taiwan and China, and I am also grateful to Professor Joachim Gentz for drawing my attention to the publications of Henrik Jäger in German, not all of which I have been able to consult.

[21] For an exposition of the type of Buddhist idealism involved, see Garma C. C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), 172-181; Hsu Song-pen and other commentators generally agree in seeing this as the source of Deqing's outlook, while the terms used themselves for the title of the collection are probably as Hsu says drawn from Zhuangzi (see preceding note).

II

Deqing’s Views

Our Buddhist scriptures all come from the Western Regions, so they are all translated. Though the importation of the scriptures started under the Han, it was only under the Western Jin that translation greatly flourished. Of the translators of the Jin period, Kumarājīva (羅什, 343–413; or 350–409) is known for his unique excellence, while his four disciples Daosheng (道生, ca. 360–434), Sengzhao (僧肇, 384–414), Daorong (道融) and Sengrui (僧睿, 371–438 AD) were “unicorns and phoenixes” among the clergy.[22] But while Kumarājīva kept control of the enterprise, he said to Sengzhao “In understanding I am your superior, but in matters of style we are on the same level.”[23] We should note that Sengzhao was particularly conversant with Laozi and Zhuangzi.

Though the Buddhist scriptures all come from the “Golden Mouth” (of the Buddha), on reaching this land their language (conventions) were frequently seen as odd. There are cases of the same scripture being translated several times, causing suspicion that the texts were only superficially understood, out of ignorance of the fact that the argument does not actually differ; the difference lies in the relative stylistic skill or otherwise of the translator. So in the Canon all those texts deriving from Kumārajīva’s hands are all well polished because he had the assistance of these four worthies. As a result the *Lotus Sutra* is deep in its arguments and close-knit in its wording; its intricacies are wonderful beyond words, while the *Vimalakirti* has a literary style that is supple yet strong, and its arguments come through clear and manifest.[24] As for Sengzhao's four essays, they are completely without any defects – if one is not fully possessed of the True Dharma Eye, they are utterly hard to understand. So it is fitting that the muddled should denounce them as emptily based on Zhuangzi and Laozi, careless talk. Chengguan (澄觀, 738–839) of Qingliang (清涼) was a bodhisattva of the *Huayan Sutra*, and when he commented on that sutra, every time he quoted Sengzhao he always used the honorific "Master Zhao" (肇公).[25] I presume to take the line that had Zhao's views been unorthodox, how would it have been possible for Kumārajīva to allow him to sit with him [in translation]; if Kumārajīva had been deceived, how could his translations have won respect? If Zhao's essays had been heterodox, how could Chengguan have allowed himself to quote them? Why is it that from of old until now many problems have been investigated but in sum no one has touched on this? As for Chengguan's commentary, he frequently quotes from Laozi and Zhuangzi, but he always says: "I adopt the text, but I do not adopt the meaning."

---

[22] For what we know and do not know of the translator, see Lu, Yang. “Narrative and Historicity in the Buddhist Biographies of Early Medieval China: The Case of Kumārajīva”, *Asia Major, Third Series* 17.2 (2004): 1-43. Most of the disciples are discussed by Robinson (as in n.6, above); see also the following note.

[23] Deqing has emended his quotation: cf. Walter Liebenthal, *Chao Lun; The Treatises of Seng-chao,* second ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1968), 7.

III

Deqing and Chinese Buddhist Tradition

This segment of translation provides less than half of the piece on "adopting or rejecting," but it already highlights a number of points with regard to what has been said about earlier Buddhist linguistic practice in relation to the classical Chinese heritage that requires commentary. First, Deqing takes us right back to about 400 CE, the time and place that has been most discussed both by pre-modern and modern scholars on account of the ambiguity of the language used then to express (or, if one prefers the alternative view, fail to express) Buddhist ideas. We have already cited one modern scholar who speaks of "multivalence;" by contrast, in somewhat earlier modern scholarship the degree to which a language so redolent of Daoism demonstrated an understanding of the authentic message of Buddhism had been called into question.[26] But this dispute was also a contemporary one for Deqing, and his remarks are in part plainly polemical, since the orthodoxy of Sengzhao in particular was also directly questioned in his own day, and Deqing was prominent in defending him.[27] Secondly, part of Deqing's defence of Sengzhao consists of enrolling his own efforts within a tradition. Thus the great Tang period exegete Chengguan, according to his earliest memorial notices, is said to have been particularly fond of Sengzhao's writings[28] – a fondness that has been amply confirmed by the findings of modern scholarship[29] – so it is not surprising to find his authority adduced here. But in its turn Deqing's autobiography makes clear his own regard for Chengguan's works, something that caused him to go to Qingliang – that, is, the mountain complex of Wutaishan (五台山) – in order to absorb the spiritual legacy of the great master of the eighth-to-ninth century.[30] One might add in passing that, from the point of view of Deqing's thoughts about translation, it is quite possible that during the almost ten years of his stay at Wutaishan he became acquainted with some non-Chinese language aspects of Buddhism, since the site remained a centre of international importance in the Buddhist world, for example to Tibetans.[31]

---

[24] Both these translations by Kumārajīva displaced earlier versions to become classics of East Asian Buddhist literature. See for the former in English Leon Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1976, and for the latter Burton Watson, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[25] Chengguan was posthumously regarded as a bodhisattva in disguise (i.e. a supernatural figure), as is made clear by his earliest funerary inscription: see Imre Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang: Chengguan's Biography* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2002), 76.

But finally we should note that whatever the justice of Deqing's position on Sengzhao, his description of Chengguan's attitude towards the early classics of the Daoist School appears in a broad sense entirely accurate, and his general argument about Chengguan has indeed been confirmed by the research of Kamata, who, as noted above, also identified precedents in the writings of Chengguan's older contemporary Zhanran.[32] To be strictly accurate, however, Chengguan does not make the remarks attributed to him in his massive commentary on the *Huayan sutra*, but rather in his yet more massive sub-commentary on his own work. His words are also not quoted quite verbatim by Deqing, either: in fact he says of Laozi "now I borrow his words and do not adopt his meaning" (今借其言不取其義), or, more simply, "I borrow his words" (今借其言).[33] Yet Laozi is by no means the only author whose words he adopts with this caution: in one instance he adopts a phrase from the secular poet Yu Xin (庾信, 513–581), a borrowing that plainly has nothing to do with religious syncretism.[34] But before weighing up what Deqing himself has to say on the topic of "received" language, perhaps it is worth tracing the argument of his essay to its conclusion, at least in outline.

---

[26] See the remark cited above, at n.6, by Richard H. Robinson; his approach explicitly opposed to that of Walter Liebenthal, whose work on Sengzhao, already cited in n.23 above, originally appeared in 1946.
[27] Liebenthal, *Book of Chao,* 14-15, gives the basic references to the surviving materials relating to this controversy.
[28] Hamar, *A Religious Leader in the Tang,* 22.
[29] Kamata, *Chūgoku Kegon*, 338-358, and 363-374, describes the more general influence on Chengguan of Sengzhao's teacher and fellow-pupils.
[30] Chang, *The Practice of Zen*, 101 and 105.
[31] For a brief summary of the most eminent Tibetan visitors throughout later Chinese history, see Gray Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 92.

For, having introduced those who were prepared to adopt the language of other traditions in China to express Buddhist truth, Deqing turns in his essay to other noted Chinese Buddhist thinkers whose attitudes appear to be much more polemical. Specifically, he describes as "rejecting" – rather than "adopting," as in the approach of Sengzhao and Chengguan – both an immediate disciple of Chengguan, Zongmi (宗密, 780–941), and a later admirer of Zongmi named Yanshou (延壽, 904–975). Zongmi is well known for, amongst other things, precisely his apprenticeship with Chengguan and his polemical writings.[35] Yanshou likewise encompassed a wide range of concerns, but in English-language scholarship less has been said about his attitudes to native Chinese thought.[36] To begin, Deqing affirms the high status of all four Buddhist thinkers, before turning once again to the problem of translation to explain why they should be at variance. The languages of the Western Regions are straightforward and unadorned, he declares, and frequently repetitive, so that a translator without a first-rate grasp of both linguistic traditions will produce rather dreary stuff. But in China, once one looks for literary models beyond the Classics, the *shijiao* (世教), the "worldly teachings," one comes to Laozi.[37] His writings are the very best as a "vehicle for the Way," *zaidao* (載道), and Zhuangzi is his best expositor.[38]

---

[32] Kamata, *Chūgoku Kegon*, 280, and cf. n.9 above.

[33] Chengguan, *Da Fangguang Fo Huayan jing suishu yanyi chao* 大方廣佛華嚴經隨疏演義鈔 1, p.2b9; 8, p.117c21; 19, p.146b3-4, in edition of Taishō Canon, vol. 36, text no. 1736.

[34] Chengguan, ibid., 33, p. 254c28. For Yu, see William T. Graham, *'The Lament for the South': Yü Hsin's 'Ai Chiang-nan fu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

[35] See for these aspects of his legacy Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 58-68, 261-276, respectively. For the latter in particular note also Peter N. Gregory, *Inquiry into the Origins of Humanity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 80-96.

[36] Yanshou is the topic of a number of publications by Albert Welter, but he does not examine his attitude to Chinese thought in any detail – I am grateful to Professor Joachim Gentz for confirming that this substantially holds true even for his most recent work. For some basic information on Yanshou's life, see, nonetheless, Albert Welter, "The Contextual study of Chinese Buddhist Biographies: The Case of Yen-shou (904-975)" in Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, eds., *Monks and Magicians: Religious Biographies*

> Suppose there had been better writings than Laozi and Zhuangzi in this land, Sengzhao would have rejected them without a backward glance. That Sengzhao should have used these texts in his own writings was because he took his line from the *Lotus Sutra*.[39]

What does this mean? Deqing goes on to resort to analogy to characterise Zongmi and Yanshou. They are like traditional Chinese historiographers, such as Confucius: it is their duty to assign "praise and blame" – as he is said to have done in editing the *Spring and Autumn Annals* – in their case to tell the truth about the inadequacy of non-Buddhist solutions to the human condition.[40] But the Sengzhao-Chengguan tradition, with which Deqing associates himself, looks back by contrast, in his opinion, to the twenty-fifth section of the *Lotus*, which concerns the saving activities of Guanyin. In this text – for Deqing the very word of the Buddha – we find asked of Guanyin: "How does he preach the Dharma to living beings?" And the answer the *Lotus* gives is in many ways, so that for example "To those who can be conveyed to deliverance by the body of a Brahman he displays the body of a Brahman."[41] Now, in Deqing's view

---

in Asia (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1988), 247-274

[37] For the overtones of "worldly teachings" in a Buddhist context, note Barrett, "The Advent of the Buddhist Conception of Religion," 159, and cf.155.

[38] On the phrase "vehicle of the Way," one may note Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1992), 25.

[39] Deqing, *Laozi Daodejing Hanshan zhu*, 8.

[40] For the historical tradition to which Deqing is referring, see Piet van der Loon, "The Ancient Chinese Chronicles and the Growth of Historical Ideals," in William Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank, eds., *Historians of China and Japan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 24-30.

[41] Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom*, 314.

"Laozi and Zhuangzi in our land are precisely of the same sort as the Brahmans of the Western regions."[42] And, in sum, in his eyes, only those deluded by externals can mistake this approach for heterodoxy.

Of course, not everyone even in the Ming period seems to have been convinced by this. And, in all fairness, this conclusion to this particular essay on the contrasting attitudes of Sengzhao and Chengguan versus Zongmi and Yanshou by no means exhausts what Deqing has to say about Buddhism and classical Daoist thought in the essay series as a whole. But to my mind it does at least *prima facie* put him firmly in the Buddhist tradition of only assigning relative, this-worldly value to rival ways of thinking. Indeed, the postface to the series as a whole reiterates this very point, ending with a key term of Buddhist apologetic:

> If one does not know the *Spring and Autumn Annals* one cannot make one's way through this world; if one does not know Laozi and Zhuangzi, one cannot forget this world; if one does not practise Zen, one cannot transcend the world, [*chushi* 出世].[43]

IV

Conclusion

All this is not to deny that the late Ming period saw an interest in hybrid forms of religion. But to place Deqing's commentary under this rubric without qualification would surely be misleading. The Ming was not a great age of translation for Buddhists – hardly anything was translated.[44] Only the beginnings of the translation of European Christian materials shortly after Deqing's time would seem to suggest that the resourcefulness of Chinese translators had by no means perished.[45] Indeed, this was not a great age of bilingualism in China, unlike the long periods when the

---

[42] Deqing, *Laozi Daodejing Hanshan zhu*, 9.

[43] Deqing, *Laozi Daodejing Hanshan zhu*, 34. Again, for the term used, see Barrett, "The Advent of the Buddhist Conception of Religion," 159.

[44] For one South Asian visitor to Wutaishan at the start of the dynasty who is said to have left a (now lost) translation, see Kuan Guang, "Sahajaśrī: A Fourteenth-Century Indian Buddhist Missionary to China," *Religions of South Asia*, 1.2 (2007): 203-215.

[45] This assessment is based on Robert Wardy, *Aristotle in China: Language, Categories and Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), a study of the Chinese translation of Aristotle's *Categories* published in 1631.