

Zen Roots in American Soil: Robert Aitken as Authentic Buddhist Thinker

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As Buddhism has moved throughout the world, there have been two constants which have followed it unerringly, that of friction and adaptation. From these circumstances, we see the Buddhist tradition splinter off into various subgroups all attempting to vie for the privilege of being considered orthodox while trying to expound and live upon their unique belief systems. What this conflict spawns is the usage of “authenticity” to criticize one’s opponents as inauthentic yet to claim that they themselves are authentic. This raises a myriad question about what, exactly, authenticity is. Can those on the fringes be authentic? What if they reject tradition outright? What if they are moral antinomians? The Buddhist tradition naturally grappled with the question of authenticity, and their rhetoric towards their opponents weaponized it. Its not just the Buddhist tradition that care about this, for many Buddhist studies scholars are greatly concerned with the boundaries of authenticity with the advent of a numerous amount of “new religion movements” and new age spirituality that draw freely from the Buddhist tradition. One tradition which has, in the past, received some doubt of its authenticity is that of American Zen Buddhism, with the general lack of knowledge its practitioners have about the larger Zen tradition. One figure who stands in stark contrast to this perception is Robert Baker Aitken, an American Zen Buddhist master who was deeply versed in the traditional writings of not just Zen Buddhism, but Buddhism as a whole. Aitken is unique, as he is an American Zen master who, as will be argued, could be considered a legitimately authentic Buddhist thinker, with intellectual roots which stretch even to early Chinese and Indian Buddhism. Thus, the various strands of his personal philosophy will be discussed in relation to the larger Buddhist tradition in order to find the various connections and differences, and to intimately understand these relations, the contexts of traditions such as Chinese, Japanese, and Chan/Zen Buddhism must be discussed in precise detail.

The methodology of this research is simple, I aimed to write about the philosophy of Robert Aitken on a variety of topics which were unique to him, and I initially began with acquiring and reading his entire corpus of writings. Going from there, the two themes which interested me the most were that of abuse within American Zen Buddhist spaces and Aitken's stance on sexuality in the life of an American Zen practitioner. What this led to was an interest of the celibate monastic lifestyle in both Chinese and Japanese Buddhism as well as the deeper history surrounding the major scandals of American Zen abuse and Aitken's relation to them. Delving deeper into the past made it clear that Aitken had intellectual roots in traditional Zen Buddhism, and looking towards contemporary times showed that he was capable of incredibly novel adaptations.

The kinds of sources this research uses are incredibly varied, ranging from modern books written by Aitken all the way to medieval Chan monastic codes such as the *Chanyuan qinggui*. Aitken's sources are fairly ordinary in terms of what could be expected. We see that many of his books are intended to be pedagogical and reflective, guiding those on the American Zen Buddhist path. There are, however, some slight outliers, with an autobiographical source (*Zen Training*), an obituary dedicated to one of his teacher, Haku'un Yasutani, a quirky book made in the same style as the recorded conversations between Zen master and student (*Zen Master Raven*), and a book focused on the poetry of Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō (*A Zen Wave*). For other primary sources, I have drawn upon the Chinese versions of the *Chanyuan qinggui*, a Chan Buddhist monastic code, and the *Brahma's Net Sutra*. The vast majority of the remainder of my sources are secondary, covering topics such as the Chinese Buddhists' schism with Confucianism through the research of Guang Xing, various sources which record the history of American Zen masters and the scandals that took place, such as Michael Downing's *Shoes*

Outside the Door and Rick Fields' *When the Swans Came to the Lake*, and a wide range of sources dealing with the matters of Buddhist monasticism all throughout the tradition, such as Richard Jaffe's *Neither Monk nor Layman* and Yifa's *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*. There are also a few outliers, such as the letters involving Robert Aitken and Eido Shimano, websites from American Zen institutions, and one source from a Japanese magazine discussing an instance of prolonged abuse which occurred at a Sōtō temple. In conclusion, the chronological breadth of this research topic has brought me to a variety of sources, some old, some new, some expected, some bizarre.

Robert Baker Aitken (1917-2010) was one of the first Zen masters native to America as well as one of the most influential. In many ways, he was the ideal of an American Zen Buddhist master. He was highly respected by his peers, had a deep knowledge of the traditional Zen Buddhist writings, could read and understand the languages they were written in, and was fluent in Zen Buddhist philosophy. He also had strong ethical conduct in a region where abuses in Buddhist spaces have far greater frequency, strove to adapt and develop Zen in accordance with American culture, and was a symbol to his peers illustrating the heights of what a uniquely American Zen Buddhist master could achieve. Not stopping there, Aitken's storied history as a Zen practitioner serves to only bolster his reputation and display his competency, for unlike most American Zen Buddhists, Aitken traveled to Japan multiple times throughout his career, engaged in rigorous monasticism overseas,¹ founded the Koko-an Zendo, the Honolulu Diamond Sangha, and Maui Zendo, all of which were in his home state of Hawaii, was the student of not just one, but three influential Zen masters, studying under the tutelage of Nyogen Senzaki (千崎如幻;

¹ See Robert Aitken, *Zen Training: A Personal Account*, (Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing LLC, 2011).

1876-1958), Haku'un Yasutani (安谷白雲; 1885-1973), and Yamada Kōun (山田耕雲; 1907-1989), received dharma transmission from the aforementioned Yamada Kōun, and was the author of 13 books on Zen Buddhism.

A frontline soldier for the American Zen tradition, Aitken was a pioneer who created some of the most novel adaptations of American Zen while also suffering some of its greatest difficulties as the tradition was acculturating to its new region. Receiving his dharma transmission from the Sanbō Zen tradition, Aitken was an entirely lay *rōshi* who led a lay community. While purely lay Buddhist organizations were not novel to Buddhism during his time, Aitken was eager to adapt the lay sangha to the American culture, which was one of his major focuses within his career. As well as this, Aitken was also forced to react to the abuse which the American Zen tradition is, sadly, known for, one of which occurred in Aitken's very own community. And it, alongside the various other instances of abuse, served as the catalyst for novel adaptations to American Buddhism for matters such as power structures in the sangha and the image of the *rōshi*.

But the true purpose as to why Aitken is being analyzed in this research is not draw attention to his novel ideation – although that is doubtlessly important – but to argue for Aitken's legitimacy as an authentic Buddhist thinker, tracing and relating his personal philosophy on various topics back to the Buddhist tradition throughout the millennia. American Zen Buddhism is sometimes criticized for its average practitioners' lack of understanding of the larger tradition, as many of them do not know how to read the Zen texts in their source language and remain somewhat disconnected from Zen's history, complex philosophy, and cultural background. Aitken, however, was deeply rooted in the Zen tradition, with his commentary on *The Gateless*

Barrier (無門關; Ch. *Wumenguan*; Jpn. *Mumonkan*), a collection of Zen koans, his ability to understand Chinese and Japanese as shown by his work on the Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō (松尾芭蕉; 1644-1694) and his commentaries on the Bodhisattva Precepts, his deep knowledge of Zen philosophy, and recognition of the mechanics of the Buddhist tradition as it moved from culture to culture, Aitken was undoubtedly far more knowledgeable about both Zen and Buddhism overall when compared to other American Zen practitioners and even his fellow American Zen masters.

However, in order to understand how deep the roots of Aitken's ideation run, the larger Buddhist tradition and the shifts it underwent must be analyzed. Matters such as the monastic lifestyle throughout the tradition's history, prominent philosophies which have arisen in the past, and the Buddhist tradition's sincere effort to adapt to various cultures must be analyzed to the best of one's abilities in order to find out how, specifically, Aitken is an authentic Zen thinker with roots planted deep in the tradition. Furthermore, in order to understand the foundations of the forms of Buddhism that Aitken inherited and was influenced by, it must be traced like a genealogy throughout time. Thus, it is necessary to cover Chinese, Japanese, and particularly Chan/Zen Buddhism within these regions, as Japanese Zen had the largest impact on American Zen, and thus Robert Aitken, and Chinese and Chan Buddhism laid the foundation for Japanese Buddhism.

The starting point for all of this will be Chinese Buddhist monasticism, and particularly the *Chanyuan qinggui* (禪苑清規; *The Rules of Purity in the Chan Monastery*), a Chan monastic code written by Changlu Zongze (長蘆宗曠; ?-1107) that was found in its full form in 1103 C.E.

The *Chanyuan qinggui* is, at least for the moment, the only fully complete Chan monastic code that we as scholars can find, and we also see that it was foundationally influential for the monasticism of Japanese Zen, influencing both Eihei Dōgen (永平道元; 1200-1253) and Myōan Eisai (明菴栄西; 1141-1215), the founders of Japanese Sōtō and Rinzai respectively. The *Chanyuan qinggui*, then, is one of the strongest links for Zen Buddhism throughout the ages, and by understanding both it and the context which gave rise to it, we can establish a foundation which to understand the ideation of Robert Aitken as well as Zen Buddhism as a whole. The source which will primarily be used to accomplish this deep dive into Chinese Buddhist monasticism and the *Chanyuan qinggui* is Yifa's *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Code in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan qinggui*. As most of this research's unique conclusions revolve around Aitken, it is not my intention to claim Yifa's research as my own. I seek only to use it in order to set the stage of the connections I make between Aitken and Chinese Buddhist practice and philosophy. Without further ado, it is time to enter the context of Chinese Buddhism.

China: Monastic Precepts, Sexuality, and Antinomianism

When Buddhism was first introduced to China in the first century C.E., individuals had begun to take the tonsure, leave their familial households, and vow to become monks. However, because the Indian *Vinayas* – the guidelines which establish the exemplary monastic life – had not yet been brought to China, these aspiring monastics could not be formally inducted into the Buddhist tradition as monks.² They could only take the Three Refuges, which are refuge in the

² Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Code in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan qinggui*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 3.

Buddha, the Dharma, and Sangha. Taking the Three Refuges, however, was also performed by the laity of the time, and so the only trait that separated the monastics from the laypeople was the tonsure taken by the former.³ This lack of formal ordination and the absence of any translated versions of the Indian *Vinayas* lasted for approximately two centuries, when Indian *Vinaya* master Dharmakāla brought over portions of the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* to China around 249 to 253 C.E.⁴ What began from this was a myriad of partial translations of different versions of the Indian *Vinayas* which became scattered throughout China at the time, and it was not until the fifth century C.E. that the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya* was brought over from India and China had its first fully translated *Vinaya* to study and emulate.⁵ What followed was the continual development of various Chinese monastic codes which subsequently became the basis for the monastic codes of Chan Buddhism.

Although initially focused on for his contributions to the understanding of *prajñā* and *dhyāna*, Daoan's (道安; 312-385) largest impact is, according to Yifa, his contributions to the development of monastic guidelines and culture.⁶ Cognizant of the lack of individuals who can compare and critique all the scattered translations of the Indian *Vinayas* present in China during his time, Daoan took up the task under the tutelage of his teacher, Fotucheng (佛圖澄; 232-348).⁷ An austere devotee to the monastic lifestyle, Daoan wrote a set of guidelines, the *Standards for Clergy and a Charter for Buddhism* (*Sengni guifan fofa xianzhang*), that clergy

³ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 3.

⁴ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 3.

⁵ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 4-5.

⁶ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 8-9.

⁷ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 9.

within China could use to supplement the portions of the Indian *Vinayas* already known to them.⁸ Daoan's major points of emphasis in this text were the performance of tasks such as circumambulating, offering incense, how to take one's seat, daily practices, and fortnightly confessions of wrongdoings by monks and nuns.⁹ Of course, Daoan was not the only person who was modifying and adding onto the translated portions of the *Vinayas* during his time, but he was one of the most prominent,¹⁰ and his emphasis was on the complete transference of the Indian *Vinayas* to the Chinese context through translation, thus further connecting Chinese monastic life to them.

Daoxuan (道宣; 596-667) was the monk who had preserved all of Daoan's works we know of, and it is through him that we can understand Daoan's philosophy and impact on the burgeoning monastic culture of China at the time.¹¹ Daoxuan, however, was also an innovator of monastic culture in his own right, for he played a key role in further popularizing the *Four-Part Vinaya*, the translation of the Indian *Vinayas* that was gaining the most notoriety in China, through his commentaries.¹² In these commentaries, Daoxuan insisted that the *Four-Part Vinaya*, typically considered to be a Hīnayāna (non-Mahāyāna) text, was a part of the Mahāyāna tradition, drawing upon sutras such as the *Bodhisattva Stages Sutra* to aid his arguments.¹³ He also advocated for the removal of any forms of meat from the diet of monks, again citing Mahāyāna sutras, like the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* (also known as the *Brahma's Net Sutra*; 梵網經),

⁸ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 10.

⁹ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 10, 12-13.

¹⁰ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 17.

¹¹ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 23.

¹² Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 23.

¹³ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 23-24.

which advocates for vegetarianism.¹⁴ As well as this, Daoxuan also utilizes the concept of skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*) to claim that both Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna Buddhism are equal, but that they are just different paths for people of differing faculties.¹⁵ This is how he was able to “Mahāyāna-ize” the *Four-Part Vinaya*, a Hīnayāna text, into the Mahāyāna tradition. Among the many commentaries on the *Four-Part Vinaya* Daoxuan wrote, the most prominent one was the *Xingshi chao*, a text which was based off Daoan’s practices.¹⁶ The prominent aspects of the *Xingshi chao* were its creation of the five contemplations (五觀; pinyin: *wǔguān*) repeated before each meal – which is still practiced by modern-day monks in China and Japan – its usage of the “hammer and stand” signal instruments also used in Zen monasteries today, and the recitation of the Ten Precepts, the major list of precepts that monks typically take.¹⁷ Daoxuan’s writings had a great impact on the *Chanyuan qinggui*, with many sections being copied from one to the other.¹⁸

The first wholly Chan monastic code was purportedly written by Baizhang Huaihai (百丈懷海; 720-814), who became a notoriously revolutionary figure within the tradition, with the intention of further separating Chan practice from the other traditions of Chinese Buddhism through unique monastic practice. The issue, however, is that the alleged code he wrote no longer exists from what we can tell. In fact, modern scholarship is not even sure if he wrote a code to begin with,¹⁹ as well as whether the deeds and beliefs attributed to him are even factual. It could be the case that Baizhang was retroactively and falsely attributed to being the author of a

¹⁴ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 24.

¹⁵ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 24.

¹⁶ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 24.

¹⁷ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 24-25.

¹⁸ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 27.

¹⁹ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 30.

code – which may or may not exist – due to political reasons within the Chan tradition, as the increased fame of Baizhang from this association benefited not only those who were a part of his lineage, but Chan as a whole, as it reified the validity of their distinct monastic practice.²⁰

Baizhang's purported contribution to the monastic culture and development of the Chan school was that of his emphasis on work and manual labor within the monasteries. “One day without work, one day without food,” a quote commonly attributed to Baizhang, shows his ideology well, and if Chan history is true, he cultivated this adaptation in spite of the forbiddance of agriculture within the *Vinaya* in order to counter the common claim in Chinese society that monks were nothing more than parasites on society.²¹ By committing themselves to labor, Baizhang was able to further separate the Chan school from the rest, as well as show Chinese society that Buddhist monks could be self-sufficient and able to perform labor. Undoubtedly, Baizhang’s notoriety, and the contributions to the Chan monastic culture attributed to him, cause him to be one of the more important figures to discuss in Chan’s monastic history, irrespective of what is fact and what is myth.

Hailed as the author and compiler of the *Chuanyuan qinggui*, not much is known about Changlu Zongze (長蘆宗蹟; ? – 1107?). Zongze’s birthdate is unknown, and his year of death is dubiously labeled as 1107. He was a member of both the Chan Yunmen lineage (雲門宗) and the Pure Land tradition (淨土宗).²² How this affected the contents of the *Chanyuan qinggui* only becomes relevant when talking about funerary rites, for Zongze heavily encouraged the recitation

²⁰ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 33.

²¹ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 29.

²² Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 101.

of the *nianfo* (念佛)– the recitation of the name of Amitābha Buddha which is at the heart of Pure Land Buddhism – during the funeral ceremony for a monk.²³ In terms of Zongze’s work towards the remainder of the *Chanyuan qinggui*, we will see that it is, in one sense, incredibly reminiscent to the Indian *Vinayas* as well as the monastic traditions of Zongze’s Chinese predecessors, and yet there are also distinct differences – adaptations which arose due to the Chinese cultural context, its philosophies, its critiques, and its pressures.

As Baizhang’s monastic code is either lost to time or a mythical invention by Chan historians, this leaves the *Chanyuan qinggui* as the earliest accessible and completed Chan monastic code that we as scholars can use to analyze Chan/Zen monasticism. In the context of Yifa’s research, her purpose when analyzing and translating this text was to argue for the connection between the Indian and Chinese *Vinayas*,²⁴ a conclusion reaffirmed by Helen J. Baroni in her analysis of Ōbaku Zen monasticism.²⁵ As one of the aims of my research is to draw new connections between the various *Vinayas* and Robert Aitken in much the same way as Yifa did with the Chinese and Indian *Vinayas*, the various similarities she gave attention to in her research will be summarized. As well as this, the differences that arose between the *Chanyuan qinggui*, the Indian *Vinayas*, the Chinese *Vinayas*, and the context which surrounded them will also be discussed. Lastly, the *Chanyuan qinggui*’s policy on the matters of celibacy, sex, and the attached punishment will also be analyzed in relation to Chinese culture at the time, the Indian *Vinayas*, and Mahāyāna philosophy in order to better understand sexuality in the Buddhist

²³ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 104.

²⁴ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 53.

²⁵ Helen Baroni. *Ōbaku Zen: The Emergence of the Third Sect of Zen in Tokugawa Japan*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 88.

tradition and draw connections between that and the sexuality and abuse in American Zen Buddhism.

As argued by Yifa, the *Chanyuan qinggui* still maintains the dichotomy of purity and impurity that is found in the Indian Brahminic tradition which the Indian Buddhist tradition inherited. With protocols discussing the purity of the water sources one drinks from, the two separate water canteens for pure and impure water, and the concern towards the purity of the cook involved in the cooking process so as to not spread impurity, the *Chanyuan qinggui* was just as much concerned about purity and impurity as that of the Indian Buddhist Vinayas.²⁶ Continuing with the theme of food, the overall diet, as well as the rituals surrounding food, remained very similar. The four bowls the Buddhist monastics use for eating, the habit of which was prescribed by the Buddha, is also found in the *Chanyuan qinggui*, and the intended dietary habits of the Chan monks were highly similar to the Buddhist monks of India, with certain vegetables forbidden due to the belief of having potentially aggravating qualities when consumed and the disallowance of wine and other sources of alcohol due to their intoxicating qualities.²⁷ However, meat was deemed entirely forbidden in the *Chanyuan qinggui*, a lifestyle which was probably followed – or intended to be followed – by many monks of the time, reasserting the fact that the diet of Chan monks was to be strictly vegetarian.²⁸ The Indian monks, while averse to eating meat, were not forbidden from it due to the diet available to them in the Indian culture.²⁹ The reasoning for this change was through Mahāyāna scriptures such as the *Brahma's Net Sutra* which explicitly states that a vegetarian diet was the most ideal diet for a Buddhist.³⁰ Thus, the

²⁶ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 63, 66.

²⁷ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 55.

²⁸ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 56.

²⁹ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 56.

³⁰ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 56.

Indian Buddhism monastic allowance to eat meat was argued to be provisional, and that the true diet was a vegetarian one.

As well as this, the *Chanyuan qinggui* also adopted common ceremonial practices from Indian Buddhism such as the act of circumambulating around statues of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and religious leaders, and the offering of incense for the deceased.³¹ However, there was also the adoption of a ritual which involved one dedicated their food to all sentient beings, which was another addition inspired by the Mahāyāna scriptures like the adoption of the vegetarian diet.³² There was also an incredibly heavy emphasis on seniority found within the *Chanyuan qinggui* that was certainly inherited from the Indian Buddhist monastic culture. With a seating order determined entirely by one's seniority in the monastery and the hierarchy of monks being strictly determined by one's duration spent as a member in said monastery, the structure of priority in Chan monastic contexts was highly similar and strongly connected to the Indian Buddhist monastic structure.³³

In terms of substantial differences between the Indian and Chan monastic life, we can see an adoption of new rituals, habits, and adaptations to the pressures and culture of the land Chan Buddhism was residing in. One of the new difficulties faced by Chinese Buddhist, and thus Chan, monasticism as a whole was that of a vastly more authoritarian environment through the form of the medieval Chinese government. By having limited movement between monasteries, being forced to pay for certifications in order to be abbots or monks, and having to wait for the government to approve the election of a new abbot in a monastery, the Buddhist monks of

³¹ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 67.

³² Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 61.

³³ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 62.

medieval China faced disruptions and restrictions that the Indian Buddhists had no analogous experience with.³⁴ Thus, monastic life was attached to the hip of the state, and in the *Chanyuan qinggui* we can see references to the bureaucratic protocols that were imposed on the Chan, and almost certainly to the Chinese, monks.

While not just struggling with the restrictions imposed by the state, the Chinese Buddhists were also assailed with criticisms from Chinese scholars while also attempting to harmonize with the native culture. Because of this, the Chinese Buddhist, and thus Chan, monastic culture naturally changed, sometimes to adapt to criticisms and be viewed more favorably, but sometimes because new ideas naturally arose due to interactions with the medieval Chinese culture and the philosophies of Confucianism and Daoism. In the case of Chan, in response to the critique that Buddhism was a “social parasite” of sorts on Chinese society due to their separation from society, Baizhang, with the famous quote attributed to him, “one day without work, one day without food” purportedly began to prescribe manual labor, such as temple maintenance, cleaning, and gardening in the lives of Chan monks in order to defend against these claims, which, according to Chan history, is the origin for this practice which has since become a mainstay in Zen monasticism.³⁵ As well as this, the Confucian tea ceremony that was an emphasized part of the social life of Chinese Buddhist monasticism helped to incorporate a Confucian emphasis on ritual, or *li*, into the monastery.³⁶ This ceremony is, in one sense, an appreciation and partaking of Confucian ritual and in another a result from the attempts to conform to Chinese culture and repel critiques about being a foreign culture, and due to this incorporation, it became an iconic facet of Zen ritual. For another example, due to critiques from

³⁴ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 77-78, 80-81.

³⁵ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 73.

³⁶ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 90.

Chinese scholars about the schism between worshipping the emperor and the Buddhist's world - and thus state - abnegating philosophy, the physical structure of Chan temples began to shift in order to resemble the ideal physical arrangement of the imperial courts discussed in Confucian works such as the Book of Rituals (*Yili*; 儀禮).³⁷ The Chan monastics also incorporated rituals and festivals dedicated to deities native to China as well as famous figures of Chinese history such as the emperors of the past,³⁸ intended to further counteracting the claims of Chinese and Chan Buddhism as foreign culture antithetical to the state as well as showing that the native culture was fusing itself to them just as much as they were fusing to it.

Despite these monastic modifications done by Chan Buddhism throughout its history, the cultural tension between Buddhism and medieval Chinese culture was initially a harsh one that, in ways that will be discussed later, was perhaps never truly able to be fully resolved, and when one looks at the foundations of Buddhism and China at the time, it seems as if Buddhism had no hope to succeed in China. The celibate Buddhists, who talk of “leaving home” and retreating away to their isolated monasteries with their stories of their founder, Siddhartha Gautama, who went against his father's wishes to be a great king, who abandoned his pregnant wife to pursue awakening, and who, upon learning of the birth of his son, said “a fetter is born,” entered into a society where filial piety, posterity, and participation in society were non-negotiable expectations.

The tension between the two cultures, one dominant, one not, was positively dissonant, and it is the works of Guang Xing that document this tension and how it was navigated. Because of its foundation, Buddhism was antagonized by the Chinese intelligentsia for its lack of filial

³⁷ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 87.

³⁸ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 94-95.

piety due to the celibate monastic culture and act of “homeleaving,” its focus of individual liberation which drew one away from society, and its inferred ambivalence towards the emperor due to certain implications of its transcendent, world-abnegating philosophy. In response to these attacks, the Buddhist tradition in China was encouraged to emphasize instances of filial piety, its own benefits to society, and signs of loyalty to the state found within their scriptures and stories. What this led to, according to Xing, was an increase in translation of sutras which ameliorated this problem from Pali and Sanskrit to Chinese, such as the *Kataññu Sutta* and *Sabrahma Sutta*.³⁹ These sutras and stories, include filial themes such as how two of the five grave offenses include matricide and patricide, the positive karmic benefits gained by practicing filial piety, the Buddha’s explicit advising of lay followers to support their parents, how the Buddha went to teach his mother the Dharma in Tushita Heaven, converted his father and stepmother to Buddhism, and how in his past lives he practiced filial behavior, and the debt one owes to their parents for birthing and raising them.⁴⁰

The Buddhist were not simply defending themselves only through their own scripture, they were also appropriating their opponents’ philosophies in order to reassert their validity. In addition to the previously mentioned critiques, Buddhist monks were also attacked for their culturally unorthodox traditions, such as shaving their heads, their ritual, being celibate, and the clothes they wore. This, to the Chinese intelligentsia, puts the Buddhists in association with the “Barbarians,” those who lived outside the “Middle Kingdom,” which was China’s conception of itself at the time, and who were considered culturally inferior to the Chinese people and their way of life. The way that the Buddhists defended themselves was by utilizing texts such as the

³⁹ Guang Xing, “Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism,” (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Incorporated, 2016), 204.

⁴⁰ Xing, “Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism,” 213-214, 217, 219, 220-221.

Confucian *Xiaojing* (*Classic of Filial Piety*; 孝經) and interpreting them in ways that proved that the Buddhists were, in fact, filial and conducive with Chinese culture. Lushan Huiyuan (廬山慧遠; 334-416), who was a key figure in the justification of Buddhist actions, argued that shaving one's head – a problem to the Confucianists because it was viewed as disrespectful to the hair your parents gave you – was not actually unfilial, for it was one's actions that determined whether they were filial or not, and not necessarily their appearance. Filial piety, Huiyuan argues, is accomplished by “walking the proper Way (Dao) in the world,” a quote which he recited from the *Xiaojing* against one of his opponents.⁴¹ Mouzi (牟子; approximately 2nd century C.E.), who also sought to defend and legitimize Buddhism against Chinese critiques, wrote something similar in his *Mouzi Lihoulun* (牟子理惑論), saying that virtue was far more important than skin and hair.⁴² Huiyuan also justified the habit of the Buddhist monks not bowing to the emperor that the Chinese state wanted them to do. Huiyuan's argument was that the Buddhist monks do, in fact, pay respect to the king, they just do so in their hearts.⁴³ We can also see arguments that claimed that Buddhism was, in contrast to the conventional view of the time, *more* filial than Confucianism, for the Buddhists, through their practice, were helping their parents in many lifetimes in the future by their practice and their drive to bring them to awakening.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Guang Xing, “Conflict and Harmony Between Buddhism and Chinese Culture,” (2015), 92.

⁴² Guang Xing, “A Buddhist-Confucian Controversy on Filial Piety,” (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Incorporated, 2010), 250.

⁴³ Xing, “Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism,” 224.

⁴⁴ Xing, “A Buddhist-Confucian Controversy on Filial Piety,” 258.

To connect the themes of loyalty to the emperor and the Buddhist tradition's capacity for filial piety, we can see emphasis placed upon the "four debts" everyone has which were formulated by the Mahāyāna tradition and found in translated texts such as the *Dasheng bensheng xindiguan jing* (大乘本生心地觀經). The debts are ones of gratitude, and are the one owes to their parents, all sentient beings, the Buddhist tradition, and their rulers.⁴⁵ In India, the Brahmin, or priest class, is conventionally considered to be above the Kshatriya, or royalty class, yet in medieval China, where the emperor was considered the most important person, it was anathema to believe that the monks were equal, much less above, the emperor. Rulers being listed as one of the four groups one owes debt to, Guang Xing makes clear, is a Chinese creation, done in attempts to counteract the claims that Buddhism, as a foreign culture in China, was in intrinsic opposition to the state.⁴⁶ In addition to being perceived a foreign, state opposing entity, loyalty to the emperor and politics as a whole were also issues deeply connected to filial piety, Guang Xing points out, as the *Xiaojing* states that "service to the lord with filial piety is loyalty."⁴⁷ So, the Chinese Buddhists were heavily incentivized to produce defenses of their tradition which countered issues of loyalty just as much as issues of filial piety, as seen by Huiyuan, his debates with the Chinese intellectuals of the time, and the critiques the Buddhist tradition faced in China, hence why these four debts were formulated the way they are. But, as previously discussed, the many shifts that the Chan Buddhist monks made in their daily lives, such as the addition of rituals dedicated to Chinese deities and historical figures, show that the conformity to Chinese culture and tradition was not limited to debate. The tea ceremony, the ideal physical arrangement of the temple, the incorporation of labor into the monastic life all

⁴⁵ Xing, "Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism," 223.

⁴⁶ Xing, "Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism," 223.

⁴⁷ Xing, "Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism," 224.

show that the transformation of Chan Buddhism which led it to better acclimate to the Chinese context did not exist purely in philosophical debates and textual translations, but in the lifestyle of the monastics.

However, the Indian tradition from which the Chinese and Chan monastic culture arose was, quite shockingly, far more befitting for filial piety than China, the Chinese Buddhist, and for a time even scholars themselves, thought. The Indian Buddhist monastic lifestyle, which was thought of as being staunchly celibate as well as incredibly distant from one's family, spouses, and posterity, was, in fact, far more flexible and accommodating when it came to these matters than both Buddhist monk and scholars would initially believe. Shayne Clarke's *Family Matters in Indian Buddhism Monasticism* dispels many of the myths one would have about the lifestyle that was advertised to be entirely absent of families, children, wives, sex, and pregnancy.

Typically, the monastic lifestyle is conceived of by the Buddhist tradition as one of celibacy, isolation from society, and a cutting of family ties, all of which were conceived of as impediments to awakening, and as much of Buddhist monasticism is modeled on the life of the Buddha, we see him give up sex, his family, and anything that is associated with the worldly as he chose to live his life as an austere ascetic. The *Vinayas*, which are designed around the life of the Buddha, his words, his prescriptions to the monks, and responses to the errors that had occurred within the religious community of monks, emphasize many of these things. Thus, the terms of "going forth" from society and the household and the title "homeleaver" dominate conceptions of monastic life.

While the Indian *Vinayas* still emphasize and highly value the separation from family, society, and sex, it was not, in fact, a black or white situation in which one who visited their family, married, became pregnant, or, in some extreme cases, had sex was immediately cast out

from the monastic community. The reason for this erroneous belief about what Indian Buddhist monastic life actually looked like is, in the opinion of Clarke, because of the overemphasis of “in-house” monastic law codes in India,⁴⁸ such as the Pali law code.⁴⁹ *Vinayas* were not monolithic, and the monastic codes that came from them had varying qualities, rules, and proscriptions. Chan, China, and Japan are no different in this regard, as shown by the purported existence of Baizhang’s code as well as the *Chanyuan qinggui*. In the case of the Indian *Vinayas*, the Pali code, for example, was most popular in Indian Buddhism as well as being overemphasized by scholars. But it was also particularly austere, with, for example, the harshest yet most well-known punishment for sex.

In contrast to the Pali canon, what Clarke instead sees when analyzing the entirety of the *Vinayas* of India are allowances and proscriptions which go against the typical narratives of Buddhist monasticism. We see monks and nuns interacting with their families, sometimes even spending multiple days away from the monastery, supporting, living, and eating with them, we see monks and nuns formally married, lay couples formally renouncing together and keeping their marital status, and we see both children of nuns being taken care of as well as nuns getting pregnant within the monastery, who are, shockingly, able to keep and raise the child and while maintaining their status as a nun.⁵⁰ From just this image alone, we can see vows of celibacy being broken, family ties and filial piety being maintained by monks, families being supported despite the renouncement of a father, husband, or son, mother, wife, or daughter, we see marriage between monks, nuns, and laypeople – which is a major point, as this significantly predates the Japanese practice of clerical marriage, typically viewed as a unique trait of Japanese

⁴⁸ Shayne Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 2.

⁴⁹ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 103.

⁵⁰ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 2, 96, 107, 134, 150.

Buddhism.⁵¹ Even more shocking than all of this, Clarke even shows that “going forth,” and leaving home, the iconic terms which signifies one’s abandonment of family and the secular life for that of the religious, monastic life, were not always interpreted as implying these in the Indian *Vinayas*.⁵² That strict separation from the monks and nuns and their families was not necessarily required from the renunciate, and the meaning of “going forth” and leaving home was, to many, to *only* join the monastic order.⁵³

If family life was still a possibility, what about sex and celibacy in the Buddhist monasticism of India? From the ordinary perception of both the scholar and the monk, the Buddhist monastic life was expected to be entirely celibate with very few, if any, exceptions. Sex was taught to be a blockade to one’s path to liberation, negatively affecting their practice by disrupting the concentration of their minds, causing attachment, and drawing them into the worldly aspects of existence. Because of this, the Buddha lived a life of celibacy. Thus, both the Five Precepts and the Ten Precepts, two of the most important ethical codes for the behavior of monks and laypeople throughout the entirety of Buddhism’s history, have precepts dedicated to the discouragement of sexual activity. In the case of the laypeople who take the Five Precepts, they are discouraged from sexual misconduct, such as rape, adultery, and a licentious lifestyle. For the monks, they are told to abstain from sexual conduct entirely, taking a vow of celibacy. Violating this precept as a monastic constitutes one of the four gravest offenses a monk can do. These offenses, known as the *pārājikas*, include not just sexual intercourse, but killing a human being, stealing, and falsely claiming to possess awakening. The punishment for committing these *pārājikas* is stated to be immediate expulsion from the monastic order, and both the *pārājikas*

⁵¹ Kenji Matsuo, *A History of Japanese Buddhism*, (Global Oriental, 2007), 6.

⁵² Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 46.

⁵³ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 46.

and their intended punishments have become a traditional part of many *Vinayas* as well as the monastic codes across different cultures and traditions, being found in Chinese, Japanese, and Chan/Zen monastic codes, including the *Chanyuan qinggui*.

In the context of the debates between the Chinese intellectuals and Buddhist monasticism, it is the Chinese Buddhist's inheritance of the vividly celibate model of life which was the cause of the Confucian thorn in their side they were never able to truly remove, that of the thorn of posterity, for the Buddhist monks abstained from making any progeny (and if they did, it was almost certainly unintentional). In the Confucian culture, posterity is, perhaps, the most important aspect of filial piety. Due to the practice of ancestor worship, one was expected to have children in order to not just sustain the spirits of their ancestors in the afterlife, but to take care of oneself as well, for soon they will die and join their ranks, needing the same sustenance as well. As well as this, the parent-child relationship, more specifically the father-son relationship, was the necessary foundation for almost everything in Confucianism from the state to the household. To abstain from this process, irrespective of whether one takes care of their parents or not, is anathema to the Confucianists. While counterarguments were mounted, such as that of Mouzi's reference of the praise Confucius gave to Xu You (許由; traditionally 2356-2255 B.C.E.), a celibate hermit from ancient times, no arguments were ever produced that satisfied the Confucian scholars because it was a fundamental difference between the Buddhist monastic and Confucian way of life.⁵⁴

When it comes to sex and celibacy in the Indian *Vinayas*, they did, in fact, have a more flexible policy better aligned with the values of Chinese culture than the Chinese and Chan Buddhists whose monastic codes were constructed from *Vinayas* brought from India. Although

⁵⁴ Xing, "A Buddhist-Confucian Controversy on Filial Piety," 250, 257.

the typical image of what the Buddhist monastic life should be is that of a celibate one, what should be is not always what is – a sentiment which could define monastic life anywhere – and in much the same vein that “going forth,” houseleaving, and one’s separation from their family were not always what was lived upon as prescribed by the Indian Buddhism monastic stories and protocols, so too, was sex unexpectedly present in both the monasteries and monastics.

In one case in an Indian *Vinaya* Clarke draws from, a married layman tells his wife that, due to his old age and inability to make a living and sustain himself, he will “go forth” and join the monastic order.⁵⁵ His wife, nonplussed, asks only for him to visit her from time to time. The husband agrees, and after becoming a renunciant, he returns home to his “former” wife in order to fulfill his promise.⁵⁶ Upon leaving, he was cautioned by another monk to remain vigilant, and guard against her. The “former” husband, after returning home, was continually seduced by his wife, being encouraged to relax, take his robes off, bath with her, and sleep with her. They, of course, had sex, and on the next morning the monk sets off to return to the monastery. Slyly interrogated by one of his peers in order to confirm his consummation and eject him from the monastery, the husband let the secret out, which drew the attention of a senior monk to pass judgment on him.⁵⁷ However, instead of being expelled from the monastery, the husband receives no punishment because he was unaware of the rules regarding celibacy due to being a neophyte.⁵⁸ Thus, he was able to transgress one of the *pārājika* and maintain his status as a monastic, although he would no longer be able to do it again because he was made aware of the rules.

⁵⁵ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 81.

⁵⁶ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 81.

⁵⁷ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 83.

⁵⁸ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 83.

In this story, Clarke says, we can make certain statements of the values of the *Vinaya* writers of that time and place. He points out how it was not, in contrast to expectations, controversial for a monk to return to his lay wife because of the lack of comment made on the monk's actions. As well as this, it shows that a monk can theoretically have sex yet not face the punishment of the *pārājika*. Last, however, is the reaffirmation of the celibate lifestyle the senior monk gives to the younger monk. This shows that while there is some flexibility towards the *pārājika*, the vow of celibacy is still intended to be maintained.

Another case in a different Indian *Vinaya* Clarke references is that of the monastic family of the monk Udāyin, the nun Guptā, and their son Kumāra-Kāśyapa. The story, which Clarke describes as reminiscent of Bollywood movies,⁵⁹ revolves around the lay couple of Udāyin and Guptā who through bizarre and awkward circumstances, informally divorce, become monk and nun without each other knowing, and meet again as members of the Buddhist Sangha, to both of their shock. Their vows of monasticism and their feelings as formerly married lovers clash. With emotions running high, Guptā declares that she would abandon the monastic life for Udāyin if he did, and the pressure of their vows of celibacy, Udāyin ejaculates after Guptā touches his thigh. Udāyin, after calming down, does not accept Guptā's offer to forsake the monastic life to be with her. Guptā simply asks for Udāyin's garments so that she can wash them. When washing them, however, Guptā becomes "somewhat nostalgic" and uses the semen of Udāyin to impregnate herself.⁶⁰ Now pregnant, Guptā generates controversy with her fellow nuns, who cannot believe that she was able to become pregnant without sexual intercourse. Guptā, defending herself as best as she can, confuses even the *Vinaya* writers, Clarke points out, who can only say, "since the

⁵⁹ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 99.

⁶⁰ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 102.

maturation of the actions of beings is difficult to fathom, she came to be with child.”⁶¹

Essentially, Clarke says, they are pleading to the mysterious workings of karma to justify the events of this story.⁶² In order to solve this conundrum of unfathomable pregnancy, the Buddha himself had to step in to defend Guptā, saying quite explicitly that “Monks, that nun has not committed a *pārājika*...”⁶³ Guptā, according to the Blessed One, had not broken her vow of celibacy. She gives birth to her child, names him Kumāra-Kāśyapa, and raises him in the nunnery. The child grows up to be a strong, religious man in the same vein as his father, becoming one of the Buddha’s foremost disciples. However, what had the *Vinaya* writers implemented as a rule to prevent a situation like this from occurring again? That nuns cannot wash the dirty laundry of those unrelated to them through blood!

What can be understood from this story, Clarke says, is that both childbirth and raising the child in the monastic space is not problematic, but in terms of celibacy and sex, the conclusions get peculiar.⁶⁴ One of the key details of this story is the lack of penetrative sex. This is, in a sense, a virgin birth from Guptā, and it is this distinction that allows her to maintain her vow of celibacy and avoid committing *pārājika*. We can also see that the impregnation occurred between monk and nun, an incident which probably happened more than the *Vinayas* would like to let on to, and one the writers were eager to address. The two most important details, however, is the Buddha’s reaffirmation of the celibate status of Guptā as well as the fact that there was, in fact, no sex in this story whatsoever. While this story is sexual, the *Vinaya* writers created a story which veers so asymptotically close to sex with its references to love, ejaculation, and impregnation, yet, there was no explicit sex in this story. As well as this, the Buddha, posing at

⁶¹ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 104.

⁶² Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 104.

⁶³ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 104.

⁶⁴ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 104.

the perfection of the monastic ideal, triumphantly declares that Guptā is still celibate and reaffirms the importance of the vow of celibacy. This may be because of concerns held by the *Vinaya* writers that, if they were to write a story which included sex between monks and nuns and they did not receive punishments, many others may have viewed celibacy as unnecessary and inter-monastic consummation would have gained popularity. Viewing celibacy as vital, the *Vinaya* writers may have wanted to preserve proper behavior yet accommodate for impregnations in monastic spaces.

In a different interpretation, Clarke states that the rule introduced by this case, the rule of nuns no longer cleaning the laundry of those unrelated to them, was introduced in order to preserve self-image, for the nuns were reportedly doing so much laundry that the laypeople began to criticize the monastics for being no different than themselves.⁶⁵ If this is the case, we can also argue that if monastic sex were to be proliferated laypeople would raise the same concerns about the blurring boundary between lay and monastic. Thus, the emphasis of the vow of celibacy could also simultaneously function as both behavior control and image preservation.

Whatever the case may be, what these two stories show us is undeniable. The celibate lifestyle is heralded as the monastic ideal that should be strived towards and breaking the vow of chastity is still viewed as a moral failing irrespective of the flexibilities granted to it. We have seen that sexual conduct within the Indian Buddhist monastic context can, in fact, avoid the punishment from committing a *pārājika* if certain conditions are present. However, what if there are no technicalities in a situation where a monk or nun engages in sexual conduct? If the situation was flagrantly in violation of the precepts, they could, according to Clarke, remain in the Sangha despite committing a *pārājika*. This, however, could be accomplished if and only if

⁶⁵ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 105.

the relevant offender were to be sincerely repentant and mournful about the actions they had committed.⁶⁶ The foundation behind this rule that Clarke brings attention to came from the stories surrounding Nandika, a monk who was notorious for his sexual indiscretions. Nandika's great offense was not, however, fornication with a nun, or a human woman, but with one of the daughters of Māra, the Buddhist personification of delusion.⁶⁷ Nandika is given the opportunity to redeem himself, and in this path, he sets the foundations for how monks are meant to repent in order to stay in the monastic fold after committing a *pārājika*, and in the end, Nandika's story ends not with failure, but with his success as he attains the state of an arhat.⁶⁸

Redemption from a *pārājika* is, in fact, possible, but it is due to the overemphasis of the Pali *Vinaya* which explicitly disallows this redemption, Clarke says, that may cause one to think the opposite.⁶⁹ What we can also see is the repeating theme that a monk breaking the vow of celibacy is viewed as morally wrong. As well as this, there is still a pervasive feeling of evasion in this story, for Nandika does not copulate with a human woman, but instead with one of the daughters of Māra. Perhaps worried about legitimizing breaking the vow of celibacy with human women, there still does not seem to be a story which portrays a monk copulating with a human woman and achieving redemption in the corpus of the Indian *Vinaya* (in the case of the story involving the monk seduced by his former wife, he was unaware of the punishments for breaches of celibacy, and thus could not be held accountable). Because of this consistent reaffirmation of the importance of monastic celibacy within the Indian Buddhist context, we can infer that even if the Chinese Buddhists incorporated the Indian *Vinayas*' sexual flexibilities into their monastic lifestyles, Confucian critics would still not be entirely placated, for celibacy is a black and white

⁶⁶ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 105.

⁶⁷ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 103-104.

⁶⁸ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 103.

⁶⁹ Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, 103.

matter, you either have sex, or you don't. Thus, the Chinese scholars and the Buddhist monks would always be facing each other over a fundamentally uncrossable chasm about the monastic lifestyle.

Of course, with the myriad *Vinayas*, it is erroneous to proclaim that these instances Clarke writes about were monolithically accepted and partook in by the entirety of the Buddhist monastics of India. The punishment for committing sexual *pārājika*, for example, was undoubtedly enacted at times, irrespective of whether one could be redeemed from it, and celibacy was certainly the expectation of the Indian Buddhist monastic community. But it is precisely the presence of cases where sex, marriage, and family ties are considered normative and the nuance they generate that allow connections to be made that would be initially thought impossible. Monastic marriage in Japanese Buddhism, for example, is not so unique as once thought, and understanding how sexual conduct was viewed and acted upon in the monastic communities allows connections to be drawn from – quite shockingly – the Indian *Vinayas* and East Asian monastic lifestyles to American Zen master Robert Aitken.

However, as aforementioned, despite the strengths of filial piety and instances of flexibility surrounding celibacy and sex that the Indian Buddhist *Vinayas* offered, we see none of these practices and rules within the Chinese and Chan Buddhist monastic lifestyles. It does not appear that any of them had any impact or bearing in relation to the Chinese and Chan Buddhist monastic codes. We see, instead, that these groups maintain a traditional and austere approach to the matters of family, sex, celibacy, and women similar to those found in the Pali law code. Returning to the *Chanyuan qinggui*, we can see this in the section dedicated to upholding the precepts, found in fascicle one.

受戒之後常應守護。寧有法死不無法生。如小乘四分律四波羅夷... 大乘梵網經十重四十八輕。竝須讀誦通利。善知持犯開遮.... 財色之禍甚於毒蛇。尤當遠離....⁷⁰

“After receiving the precepts, [a monk] must always uphold them. [he would] rather have the law and die than not have the law and live. Thus, the Hīnayāna *Four Part Vinaya* [has] four *pārājika*... The Mahāyāna Brahma’s Net Sutra [has] 10 major and 48 minor [offenses]. Together, [the monks] must study and memorize [them] to be well-versed at chanting them. [The monks] must properly know and verify what an infraction is, and when to commit infractions when the situation deems it so.... The evils of wealth and sensuality are greater than that of a poisonous snake. [One] should avoid [these things] in particular.”

The phrase 波羅夷 is the Chinese transliteration for *pārājika*, and the intended punishment for committing them is identical to that of the Indian *Vinayas*. As well as this, we can see the usage of the characters 財色, translated here as “sensuality” but literally elsewhere as “wealth and [feminine] beauty,” is intended to reaffirm the Indian and Chinese cultural belief that women were at fault for any sexual temptation, being impure seedbeds for desires who lead monks astray from the path to awakening. We can also see a rule in the *Chanyuan qinggui* which specifically forbids women from staying the night in the male-dominated monasteries, further reaffirming the aforementioned beliefs that women are considered disruptive to monks, that this is due to their nature, and that they should be kept out of the monastic spaces of the monks. In the Chan monastic tradition, we see the sexism, aversion towards sexual behavior, a reaffirmation of

⁷⁰ *Chanyuan qinggui*, CBETA 2023.Q4, X63, no. 1245, p. 523b4-14 // R111, p. 877a15-7 // Z 2:16, p. 439a15-7, <https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/X1245>.

heteronormativity (with how men are never labeled as the source of lust and the male/female dichotomy), belief of celibacy as the supreme monastic lifestyle, and the same monastic rules and punishments for sexual conduct, all of which has been inherited from the Indian *Vinayas*, both Pali and non-Pali.

Furthermore, in this same passage we see reference made to 10 major and 48 minor precepts. These precepts are known as the Bodhisattva Precepts (菩薩戒), first found within the *Brahma's Net Sutra* (Skt. *Brahmajāla Sūtra*; 梵網經) and are of paramount importance to understanding the direction that Chinese, Japanese, and thus American Buddhism has moved towards in terms of monastic discipline and leniency. The *Brahma's Net Sutra* that these vows come from is, according to Paul Groner in his works, apocryphal.⁷¹ While typically conceived of as being spoken by the Buddha and recorded in Sanskrit, the earliest edition scholars can find is written in the Chinese language.⁷² One timeline that Groner theorizes is that the version of the *Brahma's Net Sutra* that we now know came about several decades after the translations of the major Indian *Vinayas* in China, being compiled in the fifth century C.E.⁷³ The purpose of this text, when taking both this date of compilation and its apocryphal nature into account, could be an attempt to ameliorate the conflicts of filial piety that were occurring between Confucian and Buddhist ideologies in much the same vein as the adaptations and arguments made by Buddhist figures that were previously discussed by Guang Xing, as several vows discuss the importance of respect and love towards one's parents.⁷⁴ As translations of Buddhist texts on family and the

⁷¹ Paul Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2022), 14.

⁷² Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 14.

⁷³ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 14.

⁷⁴ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 17.

utilization of Confucian works such as the *Xiaojing* were employed to assist the Buddhists in China, why couldn't the fabrication of apocryphal texts also be employed?

The Bodhisattva Precepts themselves play a similar role to any other precept that would be taken, their goal is to be a guidepost for proper behavior towards both moral conduct and conducive practice. In the context of Zen Buddhism, these vows were implemented during the Tang and Song periods,⁷⁵ and were expected to be followed by monks at the same time as the Ten Precepts, as seen by both its presence in the first fascicle and explicit encouragement by certain Chinese Buddhists to harmonize the Bodhisattva Precepts with the Four-Part Vinaya.⁷⁶ We can also, as already aforementioned, see their existence in the *Chanyuan qinggui*. Their contents, while more expansive than that of the Ten Precepts or Five Precepts, have many similarities, for we see precepts that proscribe one from killing, stealing, engaging in sexual acts, lying, and enticing one's anger among various other precepts.

Where these vows are distinct lies in their purpose, their designated audience, and their unique leniencies. The purpose of the Bodhisattva Precepts is to advance one on the path to becoming a bodhisattva in order to save all sentient beings. In the Mahāyāna tradition, this is the purpose of following the path of the Dharma, a unique trait which the Hīnayāna traditions did not share. While the Bodhisattva Precepts did not create this belief, it was certainly a product of it, and the traditional precepts prescribed to both laypeople and monks in India were not of Mahāyāna origin. In addition, the Bodhisattva Precepts as a whole were intended to be taken not just by monastics, but by the entirety of the Buddhist community, with laypeople taking them as well⁷⁷ – although with some vows having differing expectations, such as that of sexual conduct.

⁷⁵ Baroni, *Ōbaku Zen*, 98.

⁷⁶ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 22.

⁷⁷ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 18.

Some of the precepts even seem designed specifically for laypeople, with the precept discussing the handling of gold and silvers being far more relevant for lay mercantilism.⁷⁸ We also see reference to the allowance of laypeople conferring these vows to their spouses and that women could both receive and give these precepts, thus taking emphasis away from the Buddhist monks as well as giving women privileges not initially found in the Buddhist tradition.⁷⁹ Another, and perhaps most important aspect of the Bodhisattva Precepts was its greater leniencies towards major offenses. The *pārājikas*, while traditionally described as irredeemable, could be expiated as explicitly mentioned by the forty-first minor precept.⁸⁰ This, Groner says, was a trait which made the Bodhisattva Precepts much more attractive to monastics, and this also shows that Chinese Buddhist monasticism did, in fact, have ways of negating the punishments of the *pārājikas*.⁸¹

The leniency the Bodhisattva Precepts provided, however, was thought to be much more extreme depending on one's interpretation. What gives credence to this radical conclusion as well as what defines it is the apocryphal *Adornment Sutra* (菩薩瓔珞本業經; *Pusa yingluo benye jing*), a text associated with the *Brahma's Net Sutra* which was compiled after it.⁸² The major conclusion of the *Adornment Sutra* is that the precepts can be entirely eliminated as rules to be followed and that it was entirely unnecessary to adhere to the *Vinayas*.⁸³ The passage which functions as the foundation of this conclusion states that,

⁷⁸ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 18.

⁷⁹ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 19.

⁸⁰ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 21.

⁸¹ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 21.

⁸² Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 16.

⁸³ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 25.

“When sentient beings receive these precepts of the Buddha, they immediately enter the ranks of the buddhas. Their rank is that of the great enlightened ones, they are truly the children of the buddhas.”⁸⁴

What this passage implies is plain, that one who takes the Bodhisattva Precepts receives instantaneous Buddhahood. If one is awakened, can they ever do wrong? And then what is the point of monastic rulings, discipline, and precepts? In addition to this, the contents of the Adornment Sutra also led into the conclusion that, because these precepts relate to the path of the bodhisattva and the incredible amount of lifetimes it takes to complete it, one could never lose their precepts, even if they sought to violate them, and that one who had taken the Bodhisattva Precepts yet violated them was better than one who had proper behavior yet did not take them.⁸⁵ The *Adornment Sutra*, then, falls into the category of ethical antinomianism, a trait unique to the Mahāyāna tradition, and thus the Bodhisattva Precepts can be interpreted as having the capacity to negate all prescriptions of ethical conduct and monastic discipline.

In the context of this research, the most important major precept of the Bodhisattva Precepts is that of the third, which denounces sexuality and is partially translated below.

“若佛子！自婬、教人婬，乃至一切女人不得故婬。婬因、婬緣、婬法、婬業，乃至畜生女、諸天鬼神女，及非道行婬....”⁸⁶

“My disciples! You should not engage in licentiousness, incite others to licentiousness, or partake in unplanned licentiousness with any women. You should avoid the causes of licentiousness, the conditions of licentiousness, the planning of licentiousness, and the act

⁸⁴ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 25.

⁸⁵ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 25-28.

⁸⁶ *Fànwǎng jīng*, CBETA 2023.Q4, T24, no. 1484, p. 1004b26-c2, https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T1484_002.

of licentiousness. This includes female animals, female celestials and demons, female spirits, and immoral forms of licentiousness.”

The expectations established by this precept were, at least in the time and place of the *Chanyuan qinggui*, meant to be different depending on one’s status within the Buddhist community. For monks, this precept is interpreted as entirely forbidding sexual activity, and for laypeople, this vow is meant to discourage acts such as rape, adultery, and the like in much the same vein as both the Ten Precepts and the Five Precepts. However, owing to the *Adornment Sutra*, arguments made in the monastic sphere which disregarded the entirety of monastic discipline, and thus monastic celibacy, began to be made. In the context of Chinese Buddhism, these arguments were never able to take root,⁸⁷ but in Japan, they became far more popular due to the Japanese Tendai (Ch. Tiantai; 天台) tradition and the concept of *mappō*, translated as The Last Age of Teaching, which claimed that the state of the world had decayed so much that true practice and awakening were impossible.⁸⁸ Thus, in Japanese Buddhism, there is much less monastic discipline overall, with traditions such as the Pure Land and Tendai traditions being archetypical examples – although some, such as the *ritsu* lineage, went the opposite direction, and sought to maintain the typical rigor found in the *Vinayas*.

In terms of monastic celibacy in Japan, then, it becomes obvious that arguments dismissing the proscriptions against sexual activity to be favored over any other, and thus the third major precept of the Bodhisattva Precepts would be interpreted by some as not actually prescribing celibacy for the monks. The consequence of this specific interpretation in addition to other rejections of monastic discipline, however, is a blurring of the lines between monk and

⁸⁷ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 22.

⁸⁸ See Paul Groner’s *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese*.

layperson, as seen by Tendai struggles to determine what special status allows monks to be considered separate.⁸⁹ Overall, the laxity towards not just sexuality, but many other matters of monasticism as well, is a unique facet of Japanese Buddhism, and as American Zen as a whole and Robert Aitken both trace the majority of their roots to Japanese Zen, this all becomes intertwined and leaves lasting ramifications, as will be shown by Aitken's usage and interpretation of the Bodhisattva Precepts as a lay *rōshi*.

In the context of American Zen Buddhism at large, this non-celibate interpretation of the third precept of the Bodhisattva Precepts dominates the landscape, but almost entirely because American Zen is a mostly lay tradition, so its practitioners typically take lay vows and thus are subjected to different expectations than their monastic peers. The major precepts of the Bodhisattva Precepts in their entirety are, in fact, widespread in American Zen and Zen as a whole, and the reason why can be traced back to Eihei Dōgen (永平道元; 1200-1253), the founder of the Sōtō school of Zen in Japan and one of the most important and influential figures of the Zen tradition.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Dōgen received the Bodhisattva Precepts (Myōan Eisai (明菴栄西; 1141-1215), who was the founder of the Rinzai school in Japan, also received these precepts too.)⁹⁰ Sometime after receiving the Bodhisattva Precepts, Dōgen translated and expanded upon them so that he could incorporate them into the Sōtō school for both priests and laypeople. Thus, the Sōtō school has the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts, adding the Three Treasures and the Three Pure Precepts (to do no evil, to do good, and to save all

⁸⁹ Paul Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 23, 29.

⁹⁰ James Ishmael Ford, *Zen Master Who? A Guide to the People and Stories of Zen*, (Boston, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 51.

beings) to the ten major precepts of the Bodhisattva Precepts. Dōgen’s translation of the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts has been inherited by various American Zen centers and thinkers due to Sōtō’s presence as the most populous sect, and owing to both the impacts of the various lax interpretations the Bodhisattva Precepts which were popular in Japan and the massive lay population of American Zen, the precept on sexuality has been mostly interpreted as “do not misuse sexuality” by its practitioners. San Francisco Zen Center, Zen Mountain Monastery, and Robert Aitken are several adopters of both Dōgen’s translation of the Bodhisattva Precepts and belief that the third precept does not suggest celibacy. For San Francisco Zen Center and Zen Mountain Monastery, Dōgen’s Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts are given specific pages and translations on their website, both of which interpret the third vow as “do not misuse sexuality,”^{91, 92} and for Aitken, we have his discussions on this precept found within several of his works,

The original title of this precept is "No Unrighteous Lewdness" (a kind of tautology, which in Chinese —and in older English —can be a strong expression). "Lewdness" has a rather quaint ring in modern English, but its derivation is instructive.⁹³

And,

I take up the way of not misusing sex. It seems that Classical Buddhism limited this Precept to a careful exposition of where, when, and with whom sexual intercourse is appropriate.⁹⁴

⁹¹ “The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts.” San Francisco Zen Center, accessed April 22, 2024. <https://www.sfzc.org/offerings/establishing-practice/sixteen-bodhisattva-precepts/>.

⁹² “Receiving the Precepts.” Zen Mountain Monastery, accessed April 22, 2024. <https://zmm.org/teachings-and-training/receiving-the-zen-precepts/>.

⁹³ Robert Aitken, *The Mind of Clover: Essays in Zen Buddhist Ethics*, (Berkeley, CA: North Point Press, 2015), 37.

⁹⁴ Robert Aitken, *The Practice of Perfection: The Paramitas from a Zen Buddhist Perspective*, (New York, NY: Pantheon, 2012).

As the purpose of this research is to connect Aitken's beliefs as a thinker back to traditional Buddhist thought, it becomes pertinent to briefly discuss sexuality in both Zen and non-Zen Buddhism in light of his interpretations of sexual activity in relation to Dogen's Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts. Bernard Faure's *The Red Thread* does just this, documenting the presence and conception of sexuality in Zen Buddhism as well as various other traditions of Buddhism, showing that despite how little the Buddhist tradition explicitly discusses sex in a vacuum, its existence both as something to philosophically debate and something that was partaken in was undeniable. In the Mahāyāna tradition specifically, sex and the role it plays in the path to awakening began to become conceived of in mostly soteriological terms. This standpoint, while seemingly anathema to non-Buddhists aware of the tradition, Buddhist laypeople, and even many Buddhist monastics themselves, can be understood only in the context of the philosophical tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Due to Mahāyāna Buddhism's metaphysical division between ultimate reality, that which is truly real, and conventional reality, the world as it appears, the tradition came to the conclusion that any writing which discuss the nature of ultimate reality (what "ultimate reality" entails has multiple interpretations) were the true teachings of the Buddha whilst any that did not were considered provisional, told by the Buddha because he believed that his students were not yet ready to hear the true nature of reality. Thus, argued by the Mahāyāna Buddhists, the prescriptions of behavior given by the Buddha and found within the Hīnayāna writings were, while still valuable, placed firmly in the realm of the conventional, and thus considered provisional "stepping-stones" meant to be discarded – or reinterpreted – when compared to texts discussing the nature of ultimate reality. Further exacerbating the validity of this conclusion, the

ultimate reality of Mahāyāna Buddhism in these novel arguments was that of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Emptiness is typically defined in the Mahāyāna philosophical tradition as the ontological lack of intrinsic existence in all things in reality – the lack of the ability of things to exist in-and-of themselves and through their own power. Essentially, everything within existence is not as real as it actually appears to be, and it is the nature of this ontological negation, which is the ultimate truth of reality, that allows to the Mahāyāna philosophers to “transcend” the conventional morality and expected behavior that were initially the foundation of their lifestyle and worldview, as the immorality associated with acts such as sex, and even evil itself, were empty, and thus not as real as initially conceived. Although argued for in a different way, this vein of antinomianism in the tradition that some Mahāyāna thinkers utilized is precisely why the *Adornment Sutra* and the Bodhisattva Precepts could possibly be interpreted in the radical ways they were.

Furthermore, as emptiness negated the intrinsic existence of evil and immorality, it also came with the conclusion that the methods of awakening the Buddhist tradition had relied on in order to achieve salvation were also fundamentally empty. Thus, while their efficaciousness at bringing awakening was not denied, it no longer became necessary to conceive of them as the only means to achieving salvation due to everything else in reality possessing the same ontological emptiness they possessed. Because of this equalization, salvation could be conceived of as being attained through any action, no matter how impure, evil, or controversial, just as long as one had legitimate understanding of ultimate reality and embodied it as they partook in it.

In fact, in the Mahāyāna path to awakening, adherence to ultimate reality – which enables these types of moral transgressions – sometimes became the only necessity for attaining awakening, and nothing else, no matter what importance it was attributed with, could ever be

sufficient. In Faure's work, the story which he uses to represent this principle is that of Prasannendriya and Agramati, told by Nagarjuna in his attributed work, *Treatise of the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (大智度論; *Dazhidulun*).⁹⁵ Agramati, portrayed as the ideal of purity in terms of conventional behavior, is put in contrast to Prasannendriya, portrayed as an immortal, indecent monk who holds ultimate reality above all else. In contrast to typical expectations, Agramati falls into one of the many Buddhist hells because of his false views, and Prasannendriya achieves salvation because of his adherence to and recognition of the emptiness which pervades everything, including both good and evil and the Dharma taught by the Buddha.⁹⁶

Thus, because of the Mahāyāna belief that conventional morality could be “transcended” and that transgression through emptiness (or other forms of ultimate reality) was superior for achieving awakening than the typical abidance to ethical, proscribed behavior, it became natural that sex would be conceived as a soteriological force which could guide both oneself and others to awakening if executed in the proper context. As Faure describes it, “rather than negating passion, desire, or sexuality, one can transmute them.”⁹⁷ Reaffirming this viewpoint, Faure draws upon stories of the bodhisattvas themselves employing this techniques of sexual salvation, such as one story in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (首楞嚴經), which depicts a bodhisattva making love to the daughters of Māra, just as Nandika did, in order to save and deliver them towards awakening, and a Japanese Buddhist story about how Kannon (Ch. Guanyin; 觀音), the female bodhisattva

⁹⁵ Bernard Faure, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 4.

⁹⁶ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 4.

⁹⁷ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 4.

associated with compassion, takes the form of a monk and copulates with an empress in order to convert her.⁹⁸ This usage of sex as a vehicle of awakening is also one of the defining traits of Vajrayāna Buddhism, which participates in Tantric rituals of copulation and utilizes the pleasure obtained from it in order to achieve unique forms of meditative consciousness in order to gain understanding and wisdom about emptiness. But it wasn't just the Vajrayāna Buddhists who were interested in sex, for Faure points out how,

It is no mere coincidence that Chan masters were particularly interested in the Tantric precepts brought to China by Śubhakarasiṃha at the beginning of the eighth century.

Tantric (or Vajrayāna) Buddhism contained a number of sexual elements that were not always expurgated from the Chinese translations.⁹⁹

And so, the conception of sex as soteriological was not unknown to the minds of the Chan Buddhists in China. However, the schism this antinomian view of sexuality caused between it and the behaviors proscribed by the *Vinayas* of Chinese Buddhism was undeniable. To show this, Faure draws upon the apocryphal story of Daoxuan, the austere Chinese *Vinaya* master previously referenced in this work, and Śubhakarasiṃha, an Indian master of Vajrayāna Buddhism (which implies a sexual history) who was known for rude behavior and violations of the *Vinaya*.¹⁰⁰ Daoxuan, of course, is greatly aggravated by Śubhakarasiṃha's lifestyle. Sharing a room together at the Ximing Monastery, whether by force or consent is unknown, one can feel the tension in the room. However, in the middle of the night, Daoxuan catches and kills a flea in their room, and Śubhakarasiṃha shouts "The *Vinaya* master has killed a child of the Buddha!" Daoxuan, realizing the immorality of his actions, is convinced that Śubhakarasiṃha is a

⁹⁸ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 4.

⁹⁹ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 8.

bodhisattva, going so far as to declaring that his behavior cannot be comprehended by ordinary men.¹⁰¹ Thus, at the end, Śubhakarasiṃha, the iconoclast who violates the *Vinaya*, is portrayed as the wiser of the two masters, and Daoxuan, the *Vinaya* master, reasserts the supremacy of antinomianism in the Buddhist tradition by recognizing that Śubhakarasiṃha's behavior, which includes his ethical transgressions, were the actions of a bodhisattva incomprehensible to those of lesser wisdom.

However, despite the obvious conclusion of this story, in which the antinomianism of Mahāyāna philosophy is superior to the adherence to the *Vinaya* as well as doctrinal adherence, Faure cautions us from concluding that these two things are entirely different, for the Mahāyāna tradition would occasionally experience periods in which the sheer liberality of these antinomian interpretations would be curbed, contradicted or realigned more with traditional interpretations by various groups,¹⁰² such as the aforementioned *ritsu* movements of Japanese Buddhism or the Ōbaku sect of Zen.¹⁰³ Thus, Mahāyāna Buddhism sought to balance and harmonize both of these things in relation to each other, and it is through the various theories and solutions to this tension that determine how the various sects of Mahāyāna Buddhism, as well as Chan Buddhism, interpret and engage with matters such as sex and its role in the tradition, the adherence of the precepts, and the rules of the monastic lifestyle.

The relationship between Chan monasticism and sexuality is, however, not at all harmonious, and Chan (and truthfully Chinese Buddhism as a whole) was never accommodating to idea that sex could be used as soteriological and conducive to the path of enlightenment. As previously mentioned, the predominant opinion in Chinese Buddhism was that the

¹⁰¹ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 8.

¹⁰² Faure, *The Red Thread*, 8.

¹⁰³ Baroni, *Ōbaku Zen*, 95.

antinomianism of the *Adornment Sutra* was not favorable, and that the Bodhisattva Precepts should be maintained alongside the *Four-Part Vinaya* and its monastic standards. Chan was no different in this regard, and while the tradition has its own antinomian streak, it certainly wasn't analogous to traditions such as Vajrayāna Buddhism. In addition, with all the similarities it has with the Indian *Vinaya*, we still see reference to the *pārājikas* and the punishments one receives if they commit one, as well as the precepts the monks take such as the vow of celibacy, in the *Chanyuan qinggui*. Although, it should be mentioned again that, because of the Bodhisattva Precepts, the Chan Buddhist monks did have legitimate ways to expiate these major offenses in ways similar to those some of the Indian *Vinayas* described. Celibacy in monastic spaces has been, overall, the most popular stance in Zen Buddhism. In the Rinzai and Sōtō schools of modern-day Japan, which will be discussed in more detail further on, there is still an insistence upon forbiddances on matters related to marriage and sexual activity for monks – particularly those in training monasteries -- despite the legalization of both clerical marriage for every Japanese Buddhist lineage as well as the non-celibate behavior amongst the clergy during the Meiji period.

However, the full picture of the Zen tradition is far from monolithic, and when it comes to both sexuality and the transcendence of doctrine and behavior through means of the ultimate, we see one that is nuanced, complicated, and varied. We can, at times, see sex discussed and conceived of in much the same way of the antinomian Mahāyāna thinkers, and Chan Buddhism, being a tradition notorious for its iconoclasts, were no strangers to the philosophical stance that ultimate reality trumps the conventional in its entirety, which allowed them to transgress the ordinary and behave in ways that would otherwise be considered anathema by their peers. Briefly viewing the antinomian philosophy of Eihei Dōgen, as well as the poetry of the

controversial Zen master Ikkyu Sojun, both of these aforementioned points can be proven. In the case of the precepts – Bodhisattva or not -- Dōgen has this to say,

“Though a monk breaks the ten grave prohibitions, he is still superior to a layman who observes the five lay precepts. According to him, Zen in particular cannot be judged by ordinary standards.”¹⁰⁴

And,

“The Three Wheels are pure and clear. When you have nothing to desire, you follow the way of all Buddhas.”¹⁰⁵

Here there are two major themes, the first of which is Dōgen’s proclamation that the Zen Buddhist monk who breaks the ten grave prohibitions is still superior to the properly behaving layperson because Zen “cannot be judged by ordinary standards,” and thus can transcend above conventional, prescribed morality. The second is Dōgen’s usage of the ultimate to negate the immorality of one’s actions in much the same way Mahāyāna thinkers used emptiness to perform the same function. The minor difference is that Dōgen, like many other Zen thinkers, believe that *tathāgatagarbha*, or Buddha-nature, is ultimate reality whilst earlier Mahāyāna thinkers claim that emptiness is ultimate reality. The difference between these two concepts in the context of antinomian rhetoric is, truthfully, negligible. Buddha-nature is the Mahāyāna belief that every living thing has the capacity to achieve Buddhahood, but in the context of Zen, Buddha-nature becomes the belief that every living thing – and in some cases *everything* – is an awakened buddha. Being able to assert that everything is a buddha or, in Dōgen’s words, “pure and clear”

¹⁰⁴ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 158.

¹⁰⁵ Aitken, *The Mind of Clover*, 43.

is not much different from asserting that everything is empty, or lacking intrinsic nature, because of the non-dualistic metaphysics of both philosophies. In much the same way that asserting that everything is empty leads to the negation of evil through a sort of equalization, asserting that everything is a buddha also creates an equalization which can lead to the negation of evil.

Buddha-nature, although different from emptiness in certain ways, has both the same function and capacity for antinomian, radical argumentation and interpretation that emptiness has, as shown by Dōgen's statement on the Zen monk's capacity to transgress immoral behavior and belief that the absence of desire allows one to behave as if they were a buddha. For Robert Aitken, who is to be discussed further on, Dōgen's quote relating to the Three Wheels has been used to justify sexual activity, as this "purity and clearness," combined with the implication of their involvement with action, coincides with his belief that sex could be beneficial towards one's practice.

In terms of Chan Buddhism's more explicit dealings with sexuality – which would of course embody the antinomian tendencies that have been discussed – we have very little, for as aforementioned, Zen monasticism was not particularly appreciative of the possibility that sex and non-celibate monastics could be optimal or beneficial. There is, however, one particularly striking outlier which wears this belief on his sleeve: Ikkyū Sōjun (一休宗純, 1394-1481), a Japanese Zen Buddhism master notorious for his unconventional, monastically immoral, and lascivious lifestyle. Known for frequenting the brothels,¹⁰⁶ the themes of Ikkyū Sōjun's poems are in direct contrast to the celibacy encouraged and expected from Zen monks. Within his works, we can see references to and participation in sex, masturbation, prostitutes, and other licentious things of the like. Viewed as a way to obtain wisdom, it is within Ikkyū's poetry that

¹⁰⁶ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 111.

we find the conception of sex as soteriological within the Chan/Zen tradition, being utilized as a vehicle which leads one to awakening,

Shaking off dust, that arhat is still far from Buddhahood.

One trip at a brothel brings Great Wisdom.

Quite a laugh; Mañjuśrī chanting through the Śūraṅgama Sutra

Long gone the pleasures of his youth.¹⁰⁷

“One trip at the brothel brings Great Wisdom,” Ikkyū claims, and this is furthered by the juxtaposition of Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva associated with wisdom, and the brothel.

As well as this, we can see allusions in Ikkyū’s poetry to the participation of sexual activity in the lives of Zen Buddhist monks — or perhaps his own life – despite the vows of celibacy taken, showing that these vows may not have been maintained as rigidly as was expected from them.

My naked passions, six inches long.

At night we meet on an empty bed.

A hand that’s never known a woman’s touch,

And a nuzzling calf, swollen from nights too long.¹⁰⁸

The allusions to the theme of masturbation are shown here by the reference to the six inch long “naked passions,” the empty bed, and the “hand that’s never known a woman’s touch.” Whether this is intended to be somewhat autobiographical for Ikkyū Sōjun, a presentation of a common event that occurred in the lives of Zen monks, or both, what we can conclude is that, because of the lack of a moral to this poem, feelings of lust, loneliness, the act of masturbation, and

¹⁰⁷ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 111.

¹⁰⁸ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 111.

sexuality as a whole were all things that Ikkyū embraced and experienced – sometimes not even in ways considered soteriological – and it would not be unreasonable to conclude that, despite their expectation to be chaste, other Zen monks experienced many of these same feelings and partook in coping mechanisms similar to Ikkyū, thus violating their vows and living lives in clear opposition to the ideals of monastic life espoused in their *Vinayas*. And they certainly did break their vows of celibacy, with Groner providing evidence that some Chinese Buddhist monks – not just those of the Chan tradition – committed major infractions (one of which is sexual conduct) and, as aforementioned, were married.¹⁰⁹ He even draws upon the story of Kumārajīva, a monk and key figure in the translations of the Indian *Vinayas* into Chinese, and how he copulated and produced offspring after being ordered to by a ruler.¹¹⁰ Faure explains the reason behind this behavior eloquently, saying,

Any spiritual practice is fated to confront the obstinate realities of human existence, however. The desire for purity is in itself unable to rule out the defilement of lust.

Buddhism was no exception to this rule.¹¹¹

In almost every monastic tradition in the world, celibacy has been incredibly difficult to enforce, and is a policy that is dotted with more failures than successes. It is unrealistic to insist that the Chan/Zen monks perfectly adhered to their strict practice of celibacy, and it is still unrealistic to insist that those who would break this precept were of a very small population. In terms of other Chan/Zen references of breaches of chastity, Robert Aitken discusses a story in which Zen monks would use stools to climb the walls of their monastery at night in order to visit

¹⁰⁹ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 20-21.

¹¹⁰ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 20.

¹¹¹ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 4.

the local brothels and partake in sexual activities in what he calls “going out on the town.”¹¹² In this story, it is made clear that even the abbot of the monastery was well aware of these nightly escapades. So, one night, the abbot moves the stool and stands right where it was, and waits for one of his monks to return. Later on, one of his monks returns, and instead of climbing the wall and landing on the stool, he lands on the abbot's back! The monk, obviously mortified at what had just occurred, was told “It's chilly out, be careful not to catch a cold” by the abbot to slyly discourage him from doing this again, and he was not punished for his assumed breach of celibacy (although he never did it again!). However, although not punished, he was discouraged from visiting the brothel again by the abbot. This is not an unexpected response, for despite the leniency shown, monastic celibacy is required from Zen monks, and the abbot enforces the rules of the monastery both because that is his role and to perhaps prevent his monks from believing that celibacy is no longer necessary for proper behavior. In this story, the role of the Chan abbot is remarkably similar to the aforementioned Indian senior monk who, upon learning of his neophyte's consummation with his former wife, doesn't punish him for his mistake yet reaffirms the importance of celibacy.

What this story demonstrates is the schism between the ideal and real of the religious lifestyle – monastic or lay – that every religious tradition encounters. In the case of Buddhism, this is the difference between the ideal monastic life as described in the *Vinayas* and the real monastic life as it was actually lived. In the case of sexuality and the *Vinayas*, Faure says,

Much of what we know about Buddhist sexual “normality” and “deviance” comes from the norms edicted in the *Vinaya*. These norms, when they are clearly stated, should be

¹¹² Robert Aitken and David Steindl-Rast, *The Ground We Share: Everyday Practice, Buddhist and Christian*, (Liquori, MO: Triumph Books, 1994), 181.

understood as they were allegedly promulgated, that is, in an *ad hoc* manner.

Unfortunately, we no longer have the “stage directions” for these ritual performances of monastic repentance and, like the Buddhists themselves, we tend to confuse highly localized statements with universal laws.¹¹³

Faure’s last statement of how the *Vinayas*’ contextual rules become universal, unbending laws is a statement of profound importance, for this can help to explain the monastic culture of not only Chan and Chinese Buddhism, but aspects of American Zen Buddhism, as well. In the case of Chinese Buddhism, we can see this transformation of the prescriptions of the *Vinayas* into rigid laws through the tradition’s aversion to adapting to the Confucian culture and adopting rules about family life and such like the Indian Buddhist monastic tradition did, despite having the presence of marriage and sexual conduct in some parts of their monastic community. In the case of American Zen Buddhism, we can see it in their conceptions of dharma transmission and the power dynamic between *rōshi* and student. Because of the importance that many American Zen Buddhists have placed on dharma transmission, due primarily to the Zen tradition’s own emphasis found within its writings, this can help lead to abuse within American Zen as the overemphasis on the *rōshi*’s spiritual status as a dharma heir assisted them to have ultimate, guru-like authority more easily, allowing them to harm others whilst being deeply entrenched and influential in the community.

What the tendencies of reifying the laws of the *Vinayas* also cause is a great decrease in flexibility about how the monastic life can be lived. Although already aforementioned, we can see that the Chinese Buddhism monastic culture, and the Chan monastic culture as well, is in some ways more rigid than that of the Indian monastic culture. The Indian *Vinaya* writers,

¹¹³ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 11.

recognizing the contextuality which their rules arise from, embraced flexibility, with certain *Vinayas* allowing families, marriages, pregnancies, child-rearing, and a stronger connection to one's family ties. Chinese and Chan Buddhism struggled with formalizing these sorts of filial flexibilities – even though some monks were married and engaging in sexual activities -- perhaps not believing that an accommodation involving family ties was possible without deeply violating the monastic rules of the Buddhist tradition. As well as this, the Indian *Vinaya* writers also developed a process of penitence for those who commit *pārājikas*, allowing them to reenter the monastic fold if done properly. This, however, was something that the Chinese Buddhist monastics managed to implement through the Bodhisattva Precepts, giving them a laxity which may have impacted the perception towards monastic sexual activity as well as monastic marriage, as it could have both softened the consequences of these violations as well as encourage others to partake in it. It could also be that, if improper conduct was legitimately prevalent amongst the Chinese monks, many monastic code writers were encouraged to find ways to tolerate this behavior, as these things were probably unlikely to disappear. If the story of the abbot who caught his monk violating the precepts is true, then it may be that Zen Buddhism as a whole was more flexible with sexual behavior than one would expect.

For more on Zen Buddhism, the violations of the precepts, and the differences between the ideal and the real of the lives as its monks, we can see violations not just through the aforementioned visits to the brothel, but also through the smuggling of meat and other forbidden foods not found within the prescribed Zen diet.¹¹⁴ In relation to the decreased flexibility of their monastic codes, in terms of sexuality and diet, we see more violations of the precepts from Zen monks, and not a decrease. This is not unexpected, for psychologically, more severe punishments

¹¹⁴ David Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryū Suzuki*, (Broadway Books, 1999), 232.

do not always deter violations of the rules. In the case of both Zen and Japanese Buddhism as a whole, what we see instead are attempts to hide these violations with greater secrecy, hidden from the eyes of authority and punishment. Thus, for some Zen monks, life in the monastery was not defined by adherence to the precepts, but by how far they could push the boundaries of the rules (which rarely matched up with what was explicitly expressed) and how well they could hide their violations in order to avoid punishment. Because of this, it appears to be that a subculture may have come about within Zen monasteries, one in which techniques about how to smuggle meat into the monastery, where the easiest spots to climb over the wall are, and what the best times to sneak out of the monastery were. It may have even been possible that this subculture of subversive mavericks was an open secret, as shown by the abbot's cognizance of his monks' habit of visiting the brothel at night. Thus, there may have been a conscious recognition of the schism between both the ideal and real of Zen monastic life from both those in power and those in not. The image of the ideal may have been to many in the tradition as just that: an image, and there may have been a conscious acceptance and recognition that Zen monastic life as it was lived was just not at all how it was both described and intended by the tradition.

But of course, viewpoints like this are never monolithically subscribed to by individuals, and there were certainly monasteries and masters who still believed in the traditional monastic ideal, strived to achieve that, punished their students for violations, and subjected them to a particularly rigorous Zen lifestyle. Yet, the austere behavior expected from the Zen monks was not always particularly effective at deterring them – as seen by the visits to the brothel and smuggling of meat – and while the Indian and Chan/Zen monastic cultures have the similarities of both sexuality present within the celibate monks, the existence of monastic marriage, and the

recognition of the schism between the ideal and real monastic lifestyle, the Indian *Vinaya* writers accepted the reality of how their monks lived, and took greater strides to modify a number of their rules to essentially “legalize” and accommodate the monks’ behavior. While we do see protocols for forgiveness directed towards offending monks in Chinese Buddhist monasticism through the form of the Bodhisattva Precepts, the changes made by both Indian and Chinese Buddhism were not equal. For the Indian *Vinaya* writers, these changes were possibly done under the assumption that, if the issues surrounding matters such as family and pregnancy were not accepted, then the monks would do it regardless. So, they were flexible, and willing to produce *ad hoc* solutions that, while going against the mainstream monastic lifestyle, were made with the issues of the monastic community in mind, which is the core philosophy of the *Vinayas*, thus lending to them a unique kind of legitimacy in the Buddhist tradition. In contrast, the Chan/Zen *Vinaya* writers, who may have subconsciously attributed a sort of immutability to the *Vinayas* they were building off of, did not explicitly adapt their monastic culture to the needs of the community, demarcating one of the major differences between the Indian and Chan/Zen monastic context. Yet there may have been an implicit acceptance of the violations of the precepts monks made within certain Chan/Zen communities, with the redemption from the *pārājikas* offenses found within the Bodhisattva Precepts written into the Chan/Zen monastic codes, evidence of Chinese monks both partaking in sexual activity and marrying, and the story of the Zen abbot who caught one of his monks visiting the brothel.

These difficulties that Chan/Zen monastics faced when attempting to adhere to the standards of celibacy were certainly not lost on Robert Aitken, who rejected celibacy not just because he led a lay community that was not obliged to commit to it, but also due to qualm he had of the lifestyle in general,

Our great Ancestors were, you can be sure, victims of the same tapes of incessant thinking that trouble the rest of us: loops of paranoia, sex, and acclamation that are so persistent and tiresome. How did they handle this dilemma?¹¹⁵

Aitken's conception of the tense relationship between celibacy and sexuality is one that is simultaneously traditional and authentic yet at the same time novel and controversial. While his rejection of the celibate lifestyle was brought about in no small part to his status as a lay *rōshi* leading a lay sangha – a topic which he cared deeply about – it is also valid to conceive of his critiques as targeting monastics as well. In *The Ground We Share*, we see an explicit disfavoring from Aitken towards the celibate life at large,¹¹⁶ and in his other works, we see him argue the presence of sexuality in one's practice can serve to further it if utilized properly, not hinder it,

The sexual drive is part of the human path of self-realization. With our modern, relatively permissive sexual mores, we have increased opportunity to explore our human nature through sexual relationships. At the same time, of course, there is more opportunity for self-centered people to use sex as a means for personal power.¹¹⁷

And,

People who have been conditioned by overliteral Catholic teaching or who have been followers of Yogananda or certain other Hindu teachers may come to Zen Buddhism with ideals of purity that interfere with the practice. The person for whom sexual purity is a psychological problem has little energy left over for zazen. Sex is neither pure nor impure. Our attitude about it can either be disruptive or conducive to deep practice. If two

¹¹⁵ Aitken, *The Practice of Perfection*, 88.

¹¹⁶ Aitken and Steindl-Rast, *The Ground We Share*, 111.

¹¹⁷ Aitken, *The Mind of Clover*, 41.

people are committed to one another, their sexual fulfillment in each other can be a positive support to their zazen.¹¹⁸

Furthermore,

With the help of our evolving Western cultural attitudes, we in the Zen movement can use sex in our practice, rather than trying to exclude it. I don't mean that we should be experimenting with tantra, but simply that we must acknowledge sexual energy as part of the sangha treasure. Certainly we cannot justify rejecting sex and accepting the other human drives and emotions, such as anger, fear, hunger, and the need for sleep. All we have learned on our cushions proves that physical and mental conditions, the will, and emotions are human elements to be integrated into our daily-life practice and our zazen practice. For all its ecstatic nature, for all its power, sex is just another human drive. If we avoid it just because it is more difficult to integrate than anger or fear, then we are simply saying that when the chips are down we cannot follow our own practice. This is dishonest and unhealthy.¹¹⁹

What we see in these three quotes are the broad strokes of Aitken's philosophy on sexuality. We see the explicit belief that sexual desire should be accepted in the path of practice, that it can be utilized to further one's progress, and that, if handled improperly, it can make practice go awry. Aitken's view on sexuality in relation to Zen Buddhism is undeniably complex, as there is cognizance of the behavior of his monastic predecessors, recognition of the inescapability of sexual desire for Zen practitioners, the aim to accept all of one's emotions and apply them to practice, and the admittance that, if handled improperly, this sort of practice can go horribly

¹¹⁸ Robert Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen*, (Berkeley, CA: North Point Press, 2015), 82-83.

¹¹⁹ Aitken, *The Mind of Clover*, 41-42.

awry. Aitken's personal philosophy on the utilization of sexual desire in practice is, in his own works, akin to a sort of psychological sublimation¹²⁰ (although distinct from tantra, as seen in the quote above), and this belief is foundational to Aitken's philosophy not just on sexual desire, but anger and other negative emotions as will be discussed later. In addition, when analyzing these passages, they seem entirely applicable to not just Aitken's intended audience of lay Buddhists, but to Zen Buddhist monastics as well. In another passage, we can see Aitken utilize Zen Buddhist philosophy to equate Buddha-nature, which he says is energy, to that of sexual energy.¹²¹ While many of Aitken's conclusions may be novel, his thought process has a legitimate authenticity to it, drawing from not just Buddhist philosophy, but from texts in their source language and classic Zen Buddhist literature, as we will see.

When thinking of Aitken's authenticity as a Zen Buddhist thinker, one of his most obvious connections – which is deeply connected to his views on sexuality – is his mention and adoption of the classic antinomianism that was foundational to both Mahāyāna and Zen thinkers. In his work *The Morning Star*, this is shown plainly,

Antinomianism is the doctrine that true faith gives one freedom from morality. Its expression might be 'Since I am saved, anything goes.... There is Buddhist antinomianism too. Its expression is "When I am hungry, I eat; when I am tired, I sleep." Yet those same words can voice the great mind (Buddha-nature) itself. Could "anything goes" express salvation? Yes, if you contain that "anything."¹²²

¹²⁰ Aitken, *The Ground We Share*, 111.

¹²¹ Aitken, *The Mind of Clover*, 42.

¹²² Robert Aitken, *The Morning Star: New and Selected Zen Writings*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2003), 182.

However, Aitken's views on antinomianism, like his views on sexuality, comes with nuance, as implied by this passage's last line, and he also says,

In the Zen literature, you will find a broad spectrum of seemingly unconventional human conduct used as teachings, from Ikkyū's elegant cunnilingus poems to the story of master Danxia burning a wooden image of the Buddha to keep himself warm. Be careful. The message is not that anything goes. It's just that the Dharma is not something put together by Miss Manners.¹²³

Anything does not, in fact, go in Aitken's conception of antinomianism, although in the current context, sexuality – which has typically been frowned upon in Buddhism overall – can be justified as beneficial in one's practice through antinomian argumentation in a way very similar to the soteriological usage conceived by some Mahāyāna philosophers. What we also see here is a reference to Ikkyū Sōjun, and it becomes clear that Aitken was influenced by him and his poetry, showing another root of authenticity in Aitken. Although, it must be made clear that orthodoxy and authenticity are not synonymous. It was undeniable that Ikkyū was a controversial figure who did not fit into the traditional mainstream of Zen Buddhism during his time, but he was made a Zen master and died as one, and it is undeniable that he is thoroughly authentic. In the same vein, Aitken's status as an authentic Zen Buddhist thinker is not necessarily harmed if he draws from less mainstream figures within his tradition.

Other sources of authenticity include Aitken's aforementioned usage of the ten major precepts of the Bodhisattva Precepts, which he expounds upon to his community in great detail and over multiple chapters in both *Taking the Path of Zen* and *The Practice of Perfection: The*

¹²³ Robet Aitken, *Miniatures of a Zen Master*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2009), 75.

Paramitas from a Zen Buddhist Perspective. Aitken’s interpretation of the third major precept as “not misusing sex” is an interpretation that he held for an incredibly long time, and within his analysis of them, he refers to commentaries written by Eihei Dōgen¹²⁴ and makes clear that he knows how to read the original language of Chinese they were written in.¹²⁵ Furthermore, and what may be the most shocking of all, Aitken’s philosophy of sexual sublimation has legitimate roots in Zen literature, with a story featuring Chan master Zhaozhou Congshen (趙州從諗; Jpn. Jōshū Jūshin; 778-897) that he references in another one of his works, *Original Dwelling Place*, saying,

I’ll let old [Zhaozhou] have the last say:

“[Zhaozhou]: Buddhahood is passion and passion is Buddhahood.

Monk: In whom does Buddha cause passion?

[Zhaozhou]: Buddha causes passion in all of us.

Monk: How do we get rid of it?

[Zhaozhou]: Why should we get rid of it?”¹²⁶

This may draw light to the meaning of a passage in Aitken’s *Zen Master Raven*, with Aitken, represented by the role of Raven Rōshi, saying,

¹²⁴ Robert Aitken, *Encouraging Words: Zen Buddhist Teachings for Western Students*, (New York, NY: Pantheon, 2010), 79.

¹²⁵ Aitken, *The Mind of Clover*, 37

¹²⁶ Robert Aitken, *The Original Dwelling Place: Zen Buddhist Essays*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1996), 96.

One morning Porcupine came to Raven and asked, “What is Raven Rōshi?”

Raven said, “I have this urge to prey on newborn lambs.”

Porcupine asked, “How do you deal with it?”

Raven said, “I’d be disoriented without it.”¹²⁷

One additional thread of authenticity, one which goes beyond Zen Buddhism, is that of Aitken’s personal philosophy on the adaptation of the Buddhist lifestyle to fit one’s needs and actions. Although Aitken is not a monastic and thus is not compelled to follow the rules of the *Vinayas* and various monastic codes, connections can be made between him, the Indian *Vinaya* writers and the Chinese Buddhists who strove to ease the tension between Buddhism and Chinese culture. For, using the Indian *Vinayas* as an example, they were intended to be modified in relation to the needs and circumstances of the monastic community, and the Indian *Vinaya* writers held that philosophy with great importance. Aitken utilizes this principle as well, and although he is focused on the Western Zen lay community at large, he is unafraid – and in fact eager – to make modifications to the Buddhist lifestyle to better fit this group, saying,

“Of course, monks and nuns of the Tang period had no gathas for noticing a billboard advertising Jim Beam Kentucky Sour Mash Whiskey. As lay Western Buddhists, however, we pick our way daily through an agglomeration of compelling reminders to pamper ourselves and serve no one else. Our task is harder, it seems, than the one that faced our ancestors. Somehow, we must cultivate methods, perhaps including gathas, to

¹²⁷ Robert Aitken, *Zen Master Raven, The Teachings of a Wise Old Bird*, (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017), 55

follow the noble path of the Buddha as fellow citizens of Jim Beam and his acquisitive cohorts.”¹²⁸

And,

“We too can have coolers just outside the kitchen door or on the apartment veranda, saving the money the refrigerator would cost to help pay for the education of our children. Like our ancestors, we too can walk, bicycle, or take public transportation.... We can join without friends and offer rites of passage to sons and daughters in their phase of experimenting and testing the limits of convention.”¹²⁹

We can also take into account Aitken’s willingness to incorporate sexuality into one’s personal practice as a product of this desire to accommodate Zen Buddhism to a different culture with a set of people with different needs and values. Aitken, then, recognizes the importance of one of the most consistent facets of the Buddhist tradition, that of its openness to change.

Japan: Clerical Marriage, Monastic Laxity, and Lay Buddhism

In the case of Zen Buddhism in Japan, the *Chanyuan qinggui* is still one of the most important Zen monastic codes, for it was used as the inspiration for Eihei Dōgen’s monastic code as well as the basis for Eisai’s, the founder of the Rinzai school in Japan, who wanted to establish Rinzai temples in accordance with it.¹³⁰ Eisai, who made two pilgrimages to China during his lifetime, was particularly impressed by the Chan monastic lifestyle perpetuated by the *Chanyuan qinggui*.¹³¹ Upon returning to Japan for the last time, he wrote a short essay, known as the *Kozen gokoku ron* (興禪護国論, *Essays on the Promotion of Zen and Protection of the*

¹²⁸ Robert Aitken, *The Dragon Who Never Sleeps: Verses for Zen Buddhist Practice*, (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 1990), xix.

¹²⁹ Aitken, *The Morning Star*, 253.

¹³⁰ Baroni, *Ōbaku Zen*, 88-89.

¹³¹ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 38.

State), which sung songs of praise towards the Chan Buddhists of the Song dynasty and explicitly called for the *Chanyuan qinggui* to be the foundation of the Japanese Zen monastic lifestyle.¹³² Although Eisai's essay portends the large impact the *Chanyuan qinggui* would have on Japanese monastic life, it was not, in fact, a monastic code. The first Japanese monastic code was compiled by Eihei Dōgen. Inspired from his pilgrimages to China just like Eisai, Dōgen based his monastic code off the still prevalent *Chanyuan qinggui*.¹³³ Called the *Eihei shingi* (永平清規), this code was a collection of six different smaller codes he compiled on subjects such as the etiquette of the cook and how to manage administrative offices within the monastery. As well as this, Dōgen also copied certain sections from the *Chanyuan qinggui* into his largest work, the *Shōbōgenzō*.¹³⁴ Undeniably so, the *Chanyuan qinggui* was a major part of the foundation of Zen monastic life in Japan, and it is for this reason that the Zen monastic culture, although legitimately changed by its cultural context, is connected to both the Chinese monastic culture and as will be argued, the Indian *Vinayas* as well.

Of course, because Japanese Zen inherits the *Chanyuan qinggui*, it thus inherits the Bodhisattva Precepts typical to Chinese Buddhism monasticism found within the *Brahma's Net Sutra*, as did Japanese Buddhism as a whole. The first figure who introduced the Bodhisattva Precepts of Japan was even a Chan monk, for Dao-xuan (道璿; 702-760; not to be confused with the previously aforementioned Chinese *Vinaya* master) transmitted them as well as the first orthodox *Vinaya* to Japan in the year 736.¹³⁵ The striking difference between the Bodhisattva

¹³² Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 38.

¹³³ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 41.

¹³⁴ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 41.

¹³⁵ Faure, *The Red Thread*, 94.

Precepts as conceived in Japan compared to China was that the antinomian argumentation of the *Adornment Sutra* regarding monastic discipline and adherence to the *Vinayas* were far more popular. The relation between the Bodhisattva Precepts and Japanese Buddhism in its entirety is impactful enough that it deserves to be discussed at length in order to understand Japanese monastic behavior, Zen Buddhism, and what exactly American Zen inherited from Japan which would substantially define expectations for the practitioner's lifestyle.

While the Bodhisattva Precepts first came to Japan through Dao-xuan, the first instance of formal monastic ordination in Japan was through Jianzhen (鑑真; Jpn. Gnajin; 668-763), a Tiantai (天台; Jpn. Tendai) master, who, alongside his ordained disciples, came to Japan in 753 as the country lacked the necessary number of authorized monastic witnesses for the ceremony to be considered valid.¹³⁶ Due to this as well as the massive influence of the Japanese Tendai school, this connects Japanese Tendai, the Bodhisattva Precepts, and the entirety of Japanese monasticism together from then until contemporary times, and it is the antinomian interpretations of the Bodhisattva Precepts brought about by the *Adornment Sutra* and several key Tendai thinkers which would, according to Groner, become one of the major factors as to why traditional monastic rigor and adherence to the *Vinayas* would depreciate in Japanese monasticism as a whole,¹³⁷ even though this interpretation never became mainstream in China.

The first key figure in Japanese Buddhism who would cause the rise of this theory's popularity was that of Tendai master Saichō (最澄; 767-822), who adopted the Bodhisattva Precepts as the only necessary precepts to take for full ordination and hailed the *Adornment*

¹³⁶ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 22.

¹³⁷ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 303.

Sutra's conclusion that, if one were to take these vows, then they would automatically achieve the status of awakening and join the ranks of the buddhas.¹³⁸ Saichō, as one of the masters of the influential Tendai school and a very important figure in Japanese Buddhism, was one of the driving forces as to why the antinomian interpretation of the Bodhisattva Precepts became one of the mainstays of Japanese Buddhist monasticism.

This theory, however, was not met without any criticism from those during his time and after it, for figures such as Eisai disapproved of Saichō's interpretation of the Bodhisattva Precepts, and instead sought to recombine them with the *Four-Part Vinaya* because he believed that they were meant to go together in much the same way the Chinese Buddhists who came before him thought.¹³⁹ In addition, the Tendai monks were heavily criticized by the monks of Nara – which was the source of authority in medieval Japanese Buddhism – for both the Tendai belief that the Bodhisattva Precepts constituted full ordination and the status as awakened as well as being universal, designed for monks and laypeople.¹⁴⁰ The criticism, then, was that this heavily blurred the lines between monks and laypeople,¹⁴¹ a theme which will haunt the history of Japanese Buddhism. Furthermore, even the Tendai monks themselves were confused and unsure about this interpretation, as some of them sought different conclusions and created splinter groups – some of which utilized the *Lotus Sutra* for antinomianism instead of the Bodhisattva Precepts¹⁴² -- and many were plagued with unsureness about the specifics of Saichō's beliefs, for he died before he could fully expound them.¹⁴³ Japanese Tendai monks still,

¹³⁸ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 23.

¹³⁹ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 30.

¹⁴⁰ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 29.

¹⁴¹ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 29.

¹⁴² Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 305.

¹⁴³ See Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, for all of these themes are discussed throughout the entirety of the work.

however, had to rely on the *Vinayas* for various procedures within the monastery, as the Bodhisattva Precepts were terse, and did not prescribe matters to the minutiae as the *Vinayas* did.¹⁴⁴

Saichō's successor, Annen (安然; 841-889?), took it upon himself to continue popularizing and expounding the belief that the Bodhisattva Vows and the *Adornment Sutra* made one achieve instantaneous awakening and thus invalidated the *Vinayas* and traditional monastic lifestyle.¹⁴⁵ Annen was a key figure in promulgating the conclusions that one who takes the Bodhisattva Precepts could never violate or lose them.¹⁴⁶ Annen himself was also a novel thinker whose philosophy on sexuality would influence Japanese Buddhism rhetoric throughout its history, for he began to argue that sexual desire (as well as hatred) was actually acceptable, much like Aitken argued, but that it could drain energy for practice so one should be careful with it.¹⁴⁷ He also argued that the suppression of sexual desire served only to increase its power, and that if one benefits from violating the precepts (both for monastic sexual activity among other things), then it was a good thing.¹⁴⁸ Although there is no direct evidence of Aitken referencing Annen's works, there are many similarities between these two philosophies, thus lending to Aitken's authenticity through assumed means of parallel means. Annen's argument – or one analogous to it – was also used by Japanese Buddhists throughout its history, and Aitken, whose influences are from Japanese Zen, may have been inadvertently influenced by this idea due to its notoriety.

¹⁴⁴ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 29.

¹⁴⁵ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 40.

¹⁴⁶ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 40.

¹⁴⁷ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 45.

¹⁴⁸ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 46.

Moving away from Aitken and into Japanese Buddhism, it is undeniable that arguments proffered by Saichō and Annen influenced the whole of Japanese monasticism, for Japanese Tendai was a highly impactful school, and by virtue of its interpretation of the Bodhisattva Precepts, they influenced Japanese Buddhism and thus Zen Buddhism. Thus, Groner concludes, the behavior of Japanese monks has much to do with the Tendai interpretation of the Bodhisattva Precepts popularized by Saichō and Annen.¹⁴⁹ Looking at one figure or school's frequency of reference to the *Adornment Sutra*, he says, can be used to determine one's attitude towards monastic rigor and observance of the precepts.¹⁵⁰ The impact of this conclusion undoubtedly affected Zen Buddhism throughout the centuries, for even though Eisai rejected the antinomian vision of the Bodhisattva Precepts which would undoubtedly lay the foundation for Zen's relation to this, Japanese Tendai was incredibly influential to all of Japanese Buddhism, and as times change and generations pass, beliefs, circumstances, and expectations certainly do not stay static.

Of course, as Tendai's relationship with the Bodhisattva Precepts and their impact on Japanese Buddhist monasticism necessitated the popularization of the precepts – whether they be viewed antinomian or not -- in monastic codes at large, this led into the protocol of the expiation of major offenses, such as the *pārājikas* and monastic sexual conduct, to become a part of essentially every Japanese monastic code in much the same way it was in China. If expiation of major offenses was a reality in Japanese Buddhist monasticism, Groner says, was what the point of monastic discipline?¹⁵¹ What this, as well as other arguments supporting monastic laxity and violation of the precepts, would cause would be a tension between the conventionally loose and

¹⁴⁹ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 303.

¹⁵⁰ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 26.

¹⁵¹ Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 303.

rigorous lineages of Japanese Buddhism as well as an increase of monastic laxity at large. In the end, the major impact of the interpretations of the Tendai thinkers would be the drastic decline of monastic discipline in Japanese monks during the Heian period (794-1185), particularly in the 11th and 12th centuries,¹⁵² which would become one of the most foundational and unique facets of Japanese Buddhism.

Thus, the Japanese Zen context, and Japanese Buddhism as a whole, inherits the same expiations towards sexual activity for monks in both the Chinese context and Indian context, and, through means of parallel thinking, incorporates clerical marriage into their lifestyle in much the same way as the Indian context. As well as this, we can also see the antinomian interpretation of doctrines native to the Mahāyāna tradition in addition to the ineffectiveness of the forbiddance of fornication in the lives of monks. As Japanese Zen became the primary basis for most of American Zen Buddhism and Robert Aitken, a deep dive into the monastic laxity as well as the other unique aspects of the Japanese Buddhist setting and the transformations it went through in eras such as the Edo period and the Meiji restoration will be undertaken. Thus, Japan will now become the focus of this research, for according to Baroni, the Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen communities had diminished contact with one another beginning in the Yuan dynasty due to changes in Chan practice and thought which occurred in China, and began to develop separately.¹⁵³ Thus, post-Yuan dynasty Chan Buddhism has no relevance to the remainder of this research.

In addition to the antinomian interpretation of the Bodhisattva Precepts and *Adornment Sutra* being one of the substantial causes for monastic laxity in Japanese clergy, there was also another factor that was entirely unique to Japan. It was the uniquely Japanese Buddhist concept

¹⁵² Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice in Medieval Japanese Tendai*, 55.

¹⁵³ Baroni, *Ōbaku Zen*, 88-89.

of *mappō*, typically translated as The Last Age of Teaching, which transformed the way the Japanese Buddhist monastic lifestyle was conceived of, how it was lived upon, and whether one should be rigorous or lax when it came to the observance towards the precepts and monastic discipline.

The Last Age of Teaching was the belief that the state of the world had decayed so far that the teachings of the Buddha could never be fully understood and lived on by anyone who was alive, irrespective of their accomplishments and abilities. In the cyclical Indian-Buddhist cosmology inherited by every region Buddhism has come to except the West, every world system (analogous to our idea of a universe) was continually undergoing a process of decay which led into the destruction of everything subsequently followed by a resetting, in which the world system would be recreated in its original form and the cycle would begin again. In Buddhism, it is believed that the current state of our world system is in the last part of this cycle. This part, named the *Kali Yuga*, is the period of time in which the decay and the negative consequences it brings are at its worst. Thus, the decay caused by the *Kali Yuga* is one of the foundations for the idea of The Last Age of Teaching. In addition, the Japanese Buddhists also conceived of themselves as being the furthest away from India geographically, the holy place of the Buddha's teachings, and as the ones who received the Dharma the latest in time in comparison to India and China, thus further exacerbating this sense of discouragement in understanding and embodying the teachings of Buddhism. So, the world system's state of decay, Japan's physical distance from India, and the temporal distance between the time the Buddha taught and the time of the Japanese Buddhists, led to the unique belief in Japanese Buddhism that it was impossible to achieve awakening in this world, and that other means had to be sought in order gain progress on the path.

This idea of The Last Age of Teaching is the foundation of both the Japanese Pure Land (浄土真宗; Jōdo Shinshū) and Nichiren (日蓮仏教) sects of Japanese Buddhism, and both of their unique belief systems arise in relation to this. For Nichiren Buddhism, it was believed that the *Lotus Sutra* was the only valid teaching, and that because of the Last Age of Teaching, one should meditate on it through reciting both it and the phrase *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*, as this was the only means of achieving awakening. In the case of both Chinese and Japanese Pure Land Buddhism, because of The Last Age of Teaching, it is believed that one can only gain awakening if they find a way to exit this world system. Thus, obeisance is given strictly to Amitābha Buddha, who devoted himself to bringing awakening to all beings by means of cultivating the perfect Pure Land (浄土), a realm of a buddha or bodhisattva whose purpose is to be far more conducive towards awakening than any other realm. Amitābha Buddha established that in order to enter this Pure Land, all one needs to do is recite the *nenbutsu* (念仏; Synonymous with the Chinese *nianfo*; 念佛) which is the vocal repetition of Amitābha Buddha's name (in Japanese, this is typically "*namu amida butsu*").¹⁵⁴ Thus, in relation to the concept of The Last Age of Teaching, recitation of Amitābha Buddha's name and rebirth in his Pure Land is conceived of as the only way to achieve awakening, as every other practice is insufficient. In some cases, the *nenbutsu* is viewed as the only way to make *any* progress on the path to awakening. The importance of The Last Age of Teaching is not just in these sects, though, but in the whole of Japanese Buddhism. In the context of the *Vinaya* and monastic life, if any process one can make to the path of awakening is not possible in this world system or not produced by the monastic

vows, then what is the purpose of continuing to emulate them? The Last Age of Teaching, then, is one of the core factors to both the monastic developments of Japanese Buddhism as well as the lived behavior of the monks.

What we can see in the lives of the pre-Meiji Japanese monks was behavior that certainly seemed to imply that the Last Age of Teaching invalidated their precepts and validated the Tendai's more antinomian interpretation about them, leading into another instance of the schism between the ideal and real of the religious lifestyle. In the Japanese clergy, we see fornication, meat eating, and clerical marriage, the violations of which may have been so flagrant that even the Japanese population and government began to complain about it.¹⁵⁵ Because of this, scholars such as Kenji Matsuo go as far as to say that "the ignoring of the fundamental precepts... is a characteristic of Japanese Buddhism."¹⁵⁶ The frequency of this even increased as the number of ordained monks became higher.¹⁵⁷ Although we cannot see the exact frequency in which these violations took place amongst the clergy or even verify if they happened, Jaffe, in his work *Neither Monk nor Layperson*, concludes that because of the presence of those who were punished by the state because of these violations, they did exist.¹⁵⁸ Bolstering this claim, Jaffe says,

“[V]iolations of the various strictures enacted by the temporal and ecclesiastical authorities were common for most of Japanese history. Reports of fornication, meat eating, and other forms of clerical disregard for official standards yield plentiful evidence that violations were widespread and that the authorities had a difficult time controlling

¹⁵⁵ Richard Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman: Clerical Marriage in Modern Japanese Buddhism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 9.

¹⁵⁶ Matsuo, *A History of Japanese Buddhism*, 7.

¹⁵⁷ Matsuo, *A History of Japanese Buddhism*, 35.

¹⁵⁸ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 9.

the clergy. Clerical fornication frequently appears in song, poetry, and other tales, adding to the impression that clerical meat eating and marriage were entrenched practices in certain segments of the clerical population.”¹⁵⁹

Fornication, sexuality, and breaking the vows of celibacy were, like in the Indian context, real facts of life that the Japanese monastic community had to accept, and like the poetry of Ikkyū Sōjun, there did not appear to be any self-flagellation about these violations from the monastic community. The striking similarity between the Indian and Japanese monastic contexts, and where sexuality was concentrated in, was the matters of clerical marriage, referred to in Japanese as *nikujiku saitai* (肉食妻帯). Clerical marriage was partaken in by the Japanese clergy in widespread fashion throughout the history of Japanese Buddhism, despite its forbiddance. It is this issue which would become the connecting point for matters of sexuality, The Last Age of Teaching, the Bodhisattva Precepts, the Meiji Restoration, breaches of the monastic conduct, and, unique to the Japanese context, the laicization of the Japanese monastics, both forced and consensual.

Despite the forbidding of the marriage of monks within the Indian *Vinayas*, the Japanese clergy took part in this ritual of clerical marriage like their Indian and Chinese counterparts, with Jaffe saying,

The pre-Meiji historical record contains ample evidence that both clerical marriage and meat eating existed at numerous temples in Japan during the Edo period and earlier. The practice of clerical marriage was often covert, particularly at the official level, but for

¹⁵⁹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 11.

some localized groups of the clergy it appears to have been accepted tacitly as an institutional practice.¹⁶⁰

One reason for this habit of clerical marriage was the frequency in which temples were inherited by familial relationships.¹⁶¹ Jaffe draws attention to indications that familial inheritance, and thus the fornication of monks and perhaps clerical marriage as a whole, was a practice that had been engaged with since the Heian period.¹⁶² Continuing his tracing of this history, evidence shows that these violations of fornication continued into the Japanese medieval period (1185-1603),¹⁶³ and that “by the late medieval period, clerical fornication and marriage appear to have been relatively widespread and accepted.”¹⁶⁴ As well as this, Jaffe’s recognition of the tacit acceptance of the forbidden practice of clerical marriage done by some groups draws attention to the fact that there were Japanese Buddhist monks whose lives as they were lived were substantially different from what was expected from them. However, these breaches of the monastic vows, according to Jaffe, were always considered as immoral behavior from the perspective of both the state and the leaders of the Buddhist denominations.¹⁶⁵

In terms of Buddhist groups which explicitly accepted clerical marriage before its legalization during the Meiji period, we have the aforementioned Pure Land Buddhism and *Shugendō*, a syncretic and ascetic religious tradition which was, from the perspective of the Japanese state, adjacent to Buddhism. The practice of clerical marriage in Pure Land Buddhism was begun by its Japanese founder, Shinran (親鸞; 1173-1263). Shinran, a contemporary to

¹⁶⁰ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 33.

¹⁶¹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 1.

¹⁶² Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 11.

¹⁶³ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 12.

¹⁶⁴ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 13.

¹⁶⁵ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 3.

Dogen and Eisai, held at the foundation of his philosophy that, because of The Last Age of Teaching, the Buddhists of the current world system could only be saved through rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land. In addition, Shinran was also a former Tendai monk who came after the time of Saicho and Annen. Certainly familiar with the antinomian arguments of the *Adornment Sutra* and particularly keen on the futility of tradition practice, Shinran clearly discarded the traditional expectations of monastic life and willingly chose to break and redesign its precepts. Shinran's most notorious acts which cemented his legacy in history is that he had decided to become married, encouraged his fellow monks to do so, and declared himself "neither monk nor layman."¹⁶⁶ This formalization of clerical marriage paved the way for the allowance of clerical marriage for the Japanese Pure Land sect both internally and externally, as the Japanese state, which could give punishments to those who go against the monastic lifestyle, legalized marriage for the Pure Land sect in medieval times. It could be said, then, that Japanese Tendai and its rejection of monastic discipline laid the groundwork for not just Pure Land to embrace and participate in clerical marriage, but in all of Japanese Buddhism.

Zen Buddhism, however, never made any changes in relation to this until after the Meiji restoration, and the concept of The Last Age of Teaching had very little impact on them as a whole. Because Zen Buddhism's theory of awakening is defined by the belief that awakening is something we already have, The Last Age of Teaching, which encourages many to believe that awakening is highly difficult or impossible to achieve, was conceived by many to not be compatible with the philosophy of Zen Buddhism. This differing philosophy on The Last Age of Teaching between the Zen Buddhists versus the Pure Land and Nichiren schools defines what Matsuo described as the rudimentary dichotomy of "self-power" (*jiriki* 自力; *Jiriki*) and "other

¹⁶⁶ Matsuo, *A History of Japanese Buddhism*, 9, 227.

power” (他力; Tariki).¹⁶⁷ Self-power can be defined by belief in the individual as capable of awakening through their own power, and other power is the inverse, in which one had to rely on another, greater power to make any progress towards awakening. The Zen Buddhists, believing that awakening was already achieved and that one just needs to realize it, are placed in the category of self-power, while Nichiren and Pure Land Buddhism are categorized as other power for their reliance on the *Lotus Sutra* and Amitābha Buddha. Although, reasserting what Matsuo said, this dichotomy is incredibly under-nuanced, as for one example, one can utilize both self and other power simultaneously as in the case of Zongze, who belonged to both Pure Land and the Chan Yunmen traditions. However, it can still explain the differences of the philosophy of The Last Age of Teaching between Zen Buddhism and many other schools eloquently and effectively. Thus, because of their stance on The Last Age of Teaching, Zen Buddhism as a sect had no reason to doubt the validity of their monastic precepts.

Although the Zen Buddhists did not subscribe to this stance monolithically, we still see a strong belief in the value of the adherence to their monastic codes from those in sectarian power even during the Meiji era,¹⁶⁸ when they were forced to grapple with the legalization of clerical marriage among other things. Yet, despite this purported traditional adherence to the Zen monastic lifestyle, there is no indication that the Zen Buddhists did not also break their precepts like their Japanese Buddhist peers.

In much a way similar to Chinese Buddhism, the Japanese Buddhists were also subjected to harsh regulations put in place by their respective government. While Chinese Buddhism having to deal with regulations in the realms of financial and bureaucratic approval have already

¹⁶⁷ Matsuo, *A History of Japanese Buddhism*, 52.

¹⁶⁸ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 3.

been mentioned, the Japanese Buddhists had to deal with this as well as state-based regulations on their behavior. Jaffe writes,

In one form or another, the temporal authorities have played an integral role in sangha affairs throughout the course of Japanese Buddhist history. Until very recently the temporal powers in Japan have tried, with varying degrees of success, to use enforcement of the precepts to assert hegemony over Buddhist institutions that in power and wealth often vied with the state itself. State efforts to control the Sangha were codified when, following the precedent of Tang dynasty China, the court included in the *ritsuryō* codes the *Sōniryō*, a set of regulations specifying state standards for clerical conduct. As in China, the *Sōniryō* used the precepts and Vinaya regulations as the basis for regulating clerical deportment (Jaffe 10).

The *Sōniryō* was essentially built from the precepts, regulations, and punishments of monastic conduct written in the *Vinayas* and various other popular monastic codes. It was, essentially, the Japanese state's own *Vinaya* for managing the Japanese clergy, and it became its way to codify the breaching of the precepts as illegal and dispense punishments for their violations. Observance of the precepts was now a legal matter,¹⁶⁹ and when one committed an offense in the monastic community, it was no longer only the monks who could decide whether the offender can reenter the Sangha. As well as this, the extant *Sōniryō* which the Japanese government used in the eighth century contains explicit reference to the *pārājikas* and the punishment of expulsion associated with them.¹⁷⁰ Breaking the vow of celibacy, then, can be punished by the state in the ways detailed in the traditional *Vinayas*. The key difference here is that, as will be shown further, the expiation of major offenses brought the Bodhisattva Precepts

¹⁶⁹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 4.

¹⁷⁰ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 10.

could not be utilized, as the Japanese state, although almost certainly aware of the precepts, would dispense incredibly harsh punishment to clergy found violating the monastic rules without any possibility of redemption.

As well as this, we also see reference to the prohibition of nuns staying at temples and the consumption of liquor, meat, and strong-smelling vegetables for fear of raising sexual desire, all of which were listed in the *Chanyuan qinggui* and certainly inherited from the Chinese monastic codes.¹⁷¹ These prohibitions further highlight the tensions involving sexuality and the monastic life in the Buddhist tradition, showing that monks, despite their intended chastity, did indeed go against it, and that these breaches happened consistently in light of rules that were initially intended to be flexibly modified to fit one's context, yet were instead treated as rigid, unbending laws.

While the Japanese government enforced the *Sōniryō* throughout the history of Japanese Buddhism – although it was a seemingly difficult task¹⁷² – the intensity increased greatly during the Edo period (1603-1867) of Japan.¹⁷³ In the late eighteenth century, Jaffe says, the perception of the Buddhist clergy in Japan as precept violators eating meat and fornicating had become so popular that it was agreed upon by supporters of Buddhism just as much as its critics.¹⁷⁴ As well as this, Buddhism had a special place in both society and state at that time,¹⁷⁵ given a status during the Edo period that, according to Matsuo, was similar to that of a natural religion.¹⁷⁶ This gave the clergy the luxury of financial support, protection through the government,¹⁷⁷ and lenient

¹⁷¹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 10.

¹⁷² Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 11.

¹⁷³ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 9.

¹⁷⁴ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 9.

¹⁷⁵ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 16.

¹⁷⁶ Matsuo, *A History of Japanese Buddhism*, 225.

¹⁷⁷ Matsuo, *A History of Japanese Buddhism*, 19.

punishments for more common crimes.¹⁷⁸ However, with many intellectuals raising the issues of the clergy's flagrant violations of the precepts,¹⁷⁹ the government in the Edo period felt compelled to address this.

Thus, in order to rein in the behavior of the Japanese Buddhist clergy, the punishments related to fornication, adultery, the eating of meat, and other sexual transgressions were given with great frequency and made increasingly harsh.¹⁸⁰ Although the typical result for a monk partaking in sexual conduct was either expulsion from the Sangha or redemption through the Bodhisattva Precepts, in 1736, a law was issued stating that clerics who violated the precept of celibacy were to be paraded around the capital city of Edo (now Tokyo) to both be humiliated and made an example of to deter other monks, and then crucified.¹⁸¹ This law also stated that monks caught breaking the other precepts were to be forcibly expelled from the Sangha with no appeal and banished either from Edo or to an island.¹⁸² This punishment of banishment was the second most severe punishment one could receive at that time, and was the same punishment given to those who committed manslaughter or organized large-scale gambling events, showing that the act of non-celibate behavior in monks had the same intensity of immorality as these two crimes in the eyes of the Japanese state.¹⁸³ Other punishments made include public exposure and humiliation and, in the case of adultery, decapitation after being paraded throughout the town.¹⁸⁴

Waves of these increasingly harsh punishments continued throughout the Edo period, but whether they deterred the behavior of the Japanese clergy is dubious. Jaffe makes reference to

¹⁷⁸ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 16.

¹⁷⁹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 9.

¹⁸⁰ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 20.

¹⁸¹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 20.

¹⁸² Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 20.

¹⁸³ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 20-21.

¹⁸⁴ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 20-21.

“the frequent arrests of wayward clerics and numerous complaints about married or fornicating monks throughout the Edo period” in order to question the effectiveness of these harsh prohibitions against clerical sexuality and the punishments meted out in response.¹⁸⁵ Here we see the schism between expiation for major offenses given by the Bodhisattva Precepts which essentially every Japanese monastic code had, and the lack of flexibility the Japanese state showed surrounding the accommodations of these punishments and their intended processes of redemption. The Japanese state’s desire to enforce power, coupled with its own image of how Buddhism monasticism should be through its *soniryo*, almost certainly sought to strike down the apparent disrespect and laxity of its state-sponsored religion, as by association, the state loses legitimacy and feels insulted by their improper conduct.

In addition, we see yet again the Buddhist tradition’s difficulty with resolving the tension caused by celibacy, which resulted the punishment enacted in response to sexual acts having increased severity – the violence of which was greatly increased because of the Tokugawa government’s control in the matter. If instead of disallowing sexual activity and having a process of penance but instead formalizing matters such as sex, would crucifixion be deemed a necessary punishment by the Japanese state of the time? As well as this, the proscriptions of these acts of monastic sexuality may have exacerbated these problems instead of aiding them, for the public illegality would force monks to fulfill these urges in more conventionally disreputable places such as brothels and have relationships with socially marginalized individuals such as prostitutes,¹⁸⁶ irrespective of what redemption the Bodhisattva Precepts could provide. Thus, to the public and the state, it was not simply that the monks were breaking their vows of celibacy, it was that they were breaking them at the whorehouse. So, more negative reputation and

¹⁸⁵ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 34.

¹⁸⁶ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 222.

punishment accrued around the Japanese Buddhist monks than theoretically necessary, and the increasingly harsh punishments which were targeted towards Buddhist clergy and the perception the government and public had of them felt more easily justifiable. These punishments, however, came to a screeching halt during the Meiji Restoration.

The Meiji era began in 1868 with the defeat of the Tokugawa *shōgun* and the reinstatement of the Japanese emperor in the seat of highest power, which thus brought an end to the final years of the Edo period, known as *bakumatsu* (幕末; 1853-1857), and signaled the beginning of a new era in Japanese history. The purpose of the Meiji Restoration was to reinstate and reaffirm the emperor's power as the highest authority of the Japanese government and society as a whole. In addition, there was also the desire to modernize Japan, adopt Western ideas and thinking, and distance itself from the Edo period, its culture, and its overall political and societal structure. Ketelaar's *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan* documents how Japanese Buddhism was affected by this event. Due to Japanese Buddhism's special status given to it in the Edo period, the Meiji government, eager to get away from the Tokugawa, sought to wrest the privileges of government protection it once had, strip it of its material possession such as confiscating its metals and gold in order to fund the state and make cannons, and remove all government interference from the lives of monks.¹⁸⁷ As well as this, we see various criticism pointed towards Japanese Buddhism, such as the perception of its clergy as “womanizers, drunkards, and meat-eaters,” the gathering of wealth that many of the major temples had, arguments made by Japanese Confucianists that Japanese Buddhism was foreign and thus evil, and that its world-transcending philosophy made it an enemy to the state, which is highly

¹⁸⁷ James Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, (Princeton, Nj: Princeton University Press, 2001) 5-6, 7, 9

reminiscent of the Chinese scholars' arguments made against Chinese Buddhism (Ketelaar 14), and the belief that Buddhism was unscientific and antithetical to modernity.¹⁸⁸ As well as this, many members of the Meiji government sought to make Shintoism the national religion due to its nativity, and so they sought to separate any connections and syncretisms between Shintoism and Buddhism. Attacked from almost every side, what affected Japanese Buddhism in the Meiji period was a rapid removal of the privileges it once had as well as additional restrictions meant to hinder the power, status, and capabilities of the Japanese clergy. What came from Japanese Buddhism, however, was a rapid laicization and flexibility of policies involving issues of sexuality and marriage brought upon by the imposition of laws from the Meiji government as they attempted to react to these massive shifts in their lifestyle.

The watershed law that completely transformed Japanese Buddhist monastic life was issued from the Meiji government in the fourth month of 1872. Titled order number 133, what this law entailed was not a restriction or prohibition, but the legalization of the eating of meat, marriage for non-Pure Land sects and *Shugendō* (for whom it was already legalized), cutting of a monk's hair, and the wearing of commoner clothes while performing official duties and rituals.¹⁸⁹ What this legalization entails, according to Ketelaar, is not necessarily the freedom of religion, the government's declaration that it will no longer interfere with the lives of monks, or its attempts to distance itself from the policies of the Edo period, but the implicit recognition that Japanese Buddhism would no longer be protected by the state.¹⁹⁰ To further prove that this last point was a reality, the Meiji government also began closing and destroying approximately 40,000 temples, destroyed a myriad of temple artifacts, and forcibly laicized thousands of priests

¹⁸⁸ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 5-6, 9, 12-14.

¹⁸⁹ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 5-6.

¹⁹⁰ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 6.

among many other regulations and restrictions meant to disenfranchise Japanese Buddhism.¹⁹¹ One major trend of these regulations, while not only to damage the social standing of the Japanese Buddhist tradition, was to aggressively laicize the Japanese clergy and to encourage them to return to secular life. Laws that limit the proliferation of priesthood, for example, are highlighted in Ketelaar's work, such as the law which rose the minimum age of new priests to 20 years old, the financial guidelines imposed on temples, and the forbiddance of monks from moving into unoccupied temples.¹⁹² As well as this, the legalization of clerical marriage and the implicit allowance of non-celibate behavior amongst the monks reopened discussions and triggered conflicts relating to monastic discipline and precept observance within the various lineages that would last even until today. In many ways, there are striking similarities to the criticisms launched against Tendai Buddhism for its interpretation of the Bodhisattva Precepts blurring the lines between monk and layperson and the intentions of the Meiji government to try and blend monastics and laypeople together.

With the legalization of clerical marriage and the already prevalent habit of fornication in the Japanese monks, this would naturally raise the question amongst the clergy of what the point is in following one's vow of celibacy. It's not as if this question was novel as well, as due to the Japanese Tendai's arguments and influences about the Bodhisattva Precepts and *Adornment Sutra*, doubt towards the validity of the precepts and monastic life had already been a serious topic for several centuries now. In accordance with this law, of course, many more Japanese clergy did get married.¹⁹³ Yet, when clerical marriage was legalized, Jaffe says, the response from the leadership of the Buddhist clergy was overwhelmingly negative.¹⁹⁴ The reason for this

¹⁹¹ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 7.

¹⁹² Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 49.

¹⁹³ Matsuo, *A History of Japanese Buddhism*, 227.

¹⁹⁴ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 165.

was that, despite the prevalence of clerical marriage in the Japanese clergy, it was still explicitly forbidden by their monastic codes. However, Jaffe shows that some figures within Japanese Buddhism began criticizing this response Japanese Buddhist authorities had towards clerical marriage as early as 1880.¹⁹⁵

One major figure in the process of normalizing clerical marriage within Japanese Buddhism was that of Tanaka Chigaku (田中智學, 1861-1939), a former Nichiren cleric who advocated for clerical marriage, strived to restore Japanese Buddhism's image in the eyes of Japanese society, developed the first indigenous Buddhist marriage ritual in Japan, and paved the way for purely lay organizations within Japanese Buddhism. Initially a Nichiren cleric, Tanaka broke off from Nichiren Buddhism for a variety of reasons. One of them was Tanaka's distaste for what he perceived as Buddhism's close connection to death due to their association with funerary rites and the afterworld.¹⁹⁶ This, coupled with his radical views on family and marriage which clashed with Nichiren Buddhism,¹⁹⁷ encouraged him not only to abandon Nichiren Buddhism, but to also create his own uniquely Buddhist marriage ritual in order to bring it closer to daily life.¹⁹⁸ Another reason why Tanaka left Nichiren Buddhism was the perceived laxity he saw in the Nichiren Buddhists due not to their lifestyle, but their lack of attacks against other schools.¹⁹⁹ In this sense, Tanaka wasn't trying to break away from Nichiren, he was trying to uphold "true" Nichiren Buddhism. Another reason for Tanaka's separation from Nichiren was his disenchantment with the relationship between monks and laypeople. Believing the current parishioner-temple system to be outdated in post-Meiji Restoration Japan, Tanaka wished for a

¹⁹⁵ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 165.

¹⁹⁶ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 170.

¹⁹⁷ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 166-167.

¹⁹⁸ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 170.

¹⁹⁹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 168.

system in which laypeople would turn away from the clergy and into the manifestation of the Buddhist practice in their daily life.²⁰⁰ Thus, because of these reasons, Tanaka left Nichiren Buddhism and founded the Nichirenist movement, which formed the basis for not only Nichiren-based “new religions” such as Reiyukai, but also the creation of a series of strictly lay Nichirenist-based religions such as the Kokuchukai, founded in 1914. In this sense, Tanaka emphasized Buddhist practice as universal in a similar vein to Saicho, who insisted that the Bodhisattva Precepts were all that were necessary for practitioners and intended for all, and one of the foundational reasons Tanaka could conceive of an entirely lay Buddhist organization as being valid is because of the antinomian arguments which depreciate and doubt the value of the traditional monastic lifestyle popularized by lineages such as Tendai and continually promulgated by other traditions such as Pure Land Buddhism.

As well as these events, Tanaka spent most of his life heavily advocating for clerical marriage, the importance of family, and an increased emphasis on Buddhism’s role in the daily lives of people. One of his primary issues with the Buddhism of his time was his belief that it was far closer to death than it was life because of its emphasis on funerary rites and the afterlife.²⁰¹ Tanaka, then, believed that Buddhism should develop more rituals pertaining to the major events of life and created rituals for matters such as marriage, childbirth, and entrance into the military.²⁰² This reorientation of Buddhism into the daily lives of its practitioners, Tanaka thought, would also help restore its poor standing. One of his most important impacts on Japanese Buddhism was that of the creation of an entirely indigenous Buddhist marriage ritual in 1887.²⁰³ This ritual consisted of recitations of the *Lotus Sutra* because of Tanaka’s Nichiren

²⁰⁰ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 168-169.

²⁰¹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 170.

²⁰² Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 170.

²⁰³ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 172.

background, a de-emphasize on the prominent role that parents and other relatives could play that was common in East Asian culture, and a focus on the marrying couple themselves.²⁰⁴ This ritual, according to what Tanaka himself claimed, was popular enough to be copied by the Pure Land and Zen schools.²⁰⁵

As well as this, Tanaka also reutilizes arguments centered on *The Last Age of Teaching* in order to justify the practice of clerical marriage. The argumentation, Jaffe shows, was the first of its kind by those associated with the Nichiren-affiliated schools and was soon adopted by other Nichiren clerics by the end of the century.²⁰⁶ Tanaka also utilized *The Last Age of Teaching* in order to argue that celibacy was only meant to be for a certain group of people in a certain time.²⁰⁷ In fact, Tanaka argued that the precepts for the clergy, such as those relating to clerical marriage, are provisional and negated by *The Last Age of Teaching*,²⁰⁸ thus we can again see threads of that Mahāyāna antinomianism towards both monastic rigor and precept observance. In addition, Tanaka also had entirely new interpretations of the *Lotus Sutra* relating to women and marriage. It was Tanaka's belief that the *Lotus Sutra* itself, as the all-encompassing source of truth as claimed by the Nichiren school, contained within it femininity and the husband-wife relationship (Jaffe 180).²⁰⁹ Tanaka's views on the *Lotus Sutra* can connect the splinter groups of Tendai which held both that the *Lotus Sutra* was supreme and that the precepts of the *Vinaya* were irrelevant to Tanaka and the other Nichiren clerics he subsequently influenced by virtue of his antinomianism and redefinition of the standards of monastic life.

²⁰⁴ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 171.

²⁰⁵ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 172.

²⁰⁶ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 182.

²⁰⁷ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 180.

²⁰⁸ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 184.

²⁰⁹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 180.

What is typically underrepresented in Tanaka's life and philosophy, Jaffe says, is Tanaka's emphasis on lay Buddhism, which has deep connections to clerical marriage.²¹⁰ Tanaka's response to issues revolving clerical marriage and the loss of reputation Japanese Buddhism faced was the complete dissolution and replacement of the parishioner-temple system which was, at the time, foundational to Buddhist across the world. What it would be replaced with, Tanaka claimed, was an entirely lay Buddhist organization following the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism which would quite ambitiously, Jaffe describes, "provide religious support for eventual world unification under Japanese imperial rule."²¹¹ While Tanaka was lay-focused, he was also an ultranationalist. We can also see emphasis placed on *The Last Age of Teaching* when Tanaka criticizes the Japanese clergy, calling them "lay bodhisattvas" in his unfinished work, *Bukkyo soryo nikusai ron*.²¹² Going even further with this argument, Tanaka insists that one cannot even attack clerical marriage because, due to the Last Age of Teaching, he claims that there cannot be "home-leavers" at all anymore (Jaffe 186).²¹³ Clerical marriage cannot be an issue if there are no clergy to begin with! Tanaka's belief, Jaffe summarizes, is,

"...[T]he radical conclusion that only lay Buddhism was a viable option in Meiji Japan. Instead of attempting to resolve the contradictions of clerical marriage by defending the validity of that practice, he solved the problem by redefining who was and who was not a home-leaver. He interpreted the existence of clerical marriage as crucial evidence that the

²¹⁰ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 166.

²¹¹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 166.

²¹² Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 184.

²¹³ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 186.

only Buddhism possible was lay Buddhism, specifically, the kind of Buddhism promulgated by his own lay organizations.”²¹⁴

Tanaka’s conclusions on the matters of celibacy, sexuality, women, lay Buddhism, and marriage would pave the foundations for many future religious groups in Japanese and Zen Buddhism, and thus most of American Zen Buddhism and Robert Aitken, for we can see celibacy rejected due to the American cultural context, practitioner marriage as commonplace, an emphasis on lay life, and the creation of entirely lay American Zen communities, all of which are inherited from the Japanese Buddhist tradition. Yet despite Tanaka’s impact on clerical marriage and his efforts to restore the reputation of Japanese Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and particularly the Sōtō school, was particularly reluctant to openly accept clerical marriage and its implied breach of celibacy from the perspective of its authority figures. According to Jaffe, although the pushback against the legalization of clerical marriage became essentially non-existent during the 1880s, opposition to it within leadership remained strong in various school, with the Sōtō school passing their strictest anti-marriage law in 1885 and the current head of the Engaku-ji branch of Rinzai Zen, Imakita Kōsen (今北洪川; 1816-1892), discouraging his disciples from abandoning the monastic standards of celibacy.²¹⁵

However, in the Sōtō community as a whole at that time, clerical marriage was a practice that was commonly participated in, and a tension arose between Sōtō leadership and their clergy. One Sōtō cleric, Kuriyama Taion (1860-1937), an influential figure who eventually became the director of the Sōtō headquarters, mounts an extensive criticism against the Sōtō leadership for

²¹⁴ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 188.

²¹⁵ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 191.

their handling of the practice of clerical marriage, and argues for its acceptance in the rules of the Sōtō school. In Kuriyama’s argumentation, he draws upon the necessity to conform to the actions of the clergy, its potential to revitalize the Sōtō school and Buddhism as a whole in Japan, and the habit of Japanese clergy sexually engaging with “undesirable” women due to them having to hide their marital status.²¹⁶ In addition to this, Kuriyama also unexpectedly utilizes *The Last Age of Teaching*, despite Zen Buddhism’s indifference to it, in order to argue that the practices and behavior of Buddhist clergy - in this case, marriage – should conform with the age that they are in.²¹⁷ This mirrors the arguments made by the Pure Land Buddhists and figures like Tanaka, which justified their practice of clerical marriage, and in much the same way, demonstrates a willingness to adapt the monastic code to the members of the community in much the same way as the Indian *Vinaya* writers, Chinese Buddhist monks, and Robert Aitken.

Japanese Zen leadership, on the other hand, has remained incredibly rigid on the matters of clerical marriage and celibacy even until today. Even though the practice of clerical marriage is tolerated by Japanese Zen Buddhism, there is still a complete lack of official support from the sectarian leaders.²¹⁸ Celibacy and the bachelor life, for many, is still perceived as the apex of monastic life, with Soko Morinaga, a Rinzai master, advocating for celibacy as the clergy’s optimal habit,²¹⁹ and Dōgen’s emphasis upon the traditional monk’s lifestyle found in his works have made it difficult for the Sōtō school to heavily modify it.²²⁰ Over time, though, the schools of Zen Buddhism had no choice but to eventually give in to the advocates of clerical marriage in some way due to its overwhelming prevalence amongst their clergy, with 81 percent of Sōtō

²¹⁶ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 222.

²¹⁷ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 221.

²¹⁸ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 238.

²¹⁹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 239.

²²⁰ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 240.

temples having a married family in it,²²¹ and two decades after the Meiji era, we see the passing of protection laws for married clerical families in 1930 for the Rinzai school and 1937 for the Sōtō school.²²² However, it should be mentioned that there are differences in expectations towards which kinds of clergy should and shouldn't get married. In the context of training monasteries, celibacy would certainly be necessary even in today's time, but in family temples, in which inheritance is typically required for the temple's survival, clerical marriage and the breach of celibacy it necessitates would be accepted.

Clerical marriage, Jaffe concludes, was not accepted due to doctrinal reasons, but because of the already high population of married clerics present within essentially every school of Japanese Buddhism.²²³ This does not signal, however, the validation of the non-celibate lifestyle by the Japanese clergy. Many Buddhist clerics, Jaffe says, are prone to viewing clerical marriages – including their own – as proof of their own frailty and a sign of The Last Age of Teaching,²²⁴ and what we instead see is a recognition of the schism between the ideal and the real of the monastic lifestyle, with the emphasis that one should pursue the idealistic monastic standards of conduct even if they are incapable of fulfilling it in the way it was intended. Thus, Jaffe continues,

One important thing that many contemporary Japanese Buddhist clerics do at times is to reflect that there are precepts—prohibiting sexual relations, for example—that they do not, for a variety of reasons, follow.”²²⁵

²²¹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 224-225.

²²² Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 214.

²²³ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 234.

²²⁴ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 234.

²²⁵ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman*, 240.

And this, to repeat what Matsuo says, is one of the fundamental characteristics of Japanese Buddhism.²²⁶ In American Zen Buddhism, however, what we see is not a recognition of the traditional monastic life being unfulfillable by Americans, but rather the conception of it being unideal for practice in the American context. In the case of Aitken, we see the viewpoint, that, much like Ikkyu Sojun, sexuality can be valuable in one's practice. Celibacy, then, is not conceived as ideal like some Japanese Buddhist monks thought, and sex is typically engaged in without any pretense of shame or sense of unbecoming behavior by most despite the history of abuse in the tradition.

While the Meiji Buddhists were grappling with the normalization of clerical marriage and how it can be used to re-incorporate Buddhism into Japanese society, there was, at the same time, efforts to restore its reputation through a reinterpretation of the various sects of Japanese Buddhism and its relationship to national identity. During the Meiji era, Japanese Buddhist intellectuals began reviving the works of the syncretic Buddhist philosopher Shaku Gyōnen (1240-1322), who argued that all the different schools of Buddhism are just different interpretations of the same truth. Countering the view that the proliferation of the schools of Buddhism were degenerations of the truth, Gyōnen states that they are, instead, refinements in relation to the geocultural environment they are present in.²²⁷ Thus, instead of the typical hierarchical organization of the Buddhist schools, they are all equal, and meant to be taken together in order for one to understand the truth of Buddhism. This, Ketelaar says, was of primary interest to the Meiji Buddhists, for when combined with the belief that the diverging schools of Buddhism were refinements in response to their geocultural environments, the Meiji

²²⁶ Matsuo, *A History of Japanese Buddhism*, 7.

²²⁷ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 182.

Buddhists could argue that every sect of Japanese Buddhism was an evolution of the Buddha's teaching brought upon by the culture of Japan.²²⁸

Beginning to take on a distinctly nationalist tone, this transsectarianist philosophy by Gyōnen is soon associated with the theory of social Darwinism which was beginning to dominate the Japanese intellectual landscape. This movement, labeled by Ketelaar as “transnationalism,” was developed by Meiji intellectuals, with one leading example being Takada Doken. Takada, believing that the developments of complexity in the Buddhist tradition to be a result of social evolution, thought of Buddhism as being on the verge of a major evolutionary stage.²²⁹ This next stage of Buddhism would be instead a great simplification, with Takada claiming that the different schools, temples, and the distinction between priests and laypeople would all fall away.²³⁰ To Takada, “homeleaving” was not a physical matter, but one of the mind, and to him, the image of the lay Buddhist was the true ideal of modern Buddhism.²³¹ One of the consequences of his ideology that Takada and many other Meiji Buddhists believed in was the simplification of the *Vinayas* and the Buddhist vows for the sake of the laity.²³² The last development in this theory of Buddhism transnationalism was the conception of the “essence” of Buddhism.²³³ What this essence allowed for was the assertion that Japanese Buddhism was, in one sense, stamped “with the mark of Japanese genius” due to its interactions with the geocultural context, and yet at the same time “possessing an exteriority to the state’s ideology.”²³⁴

²²⁸ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 184.

²²⁹ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 185.

²³⁰ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 185.

²³¹ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 185.

²³² Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 186.

²³³ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 185.

²³⁴ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 213.

This specific trait of transnationalism would play a role of great importance in the transfer of Zen Buddhism from Japan to America, for this essence allowed for the conception of Zen Buddhism as being entirely communicable irrespective of its culture or practices, permitting an excess of flexibility as it moved to the region of America. As well as this, the shifts that Japanese Buddhism went under during the Meiji era only served to further the Zen tradition's compatibility in Western spaces. With the acceptance of clerical marriage, the changes on the matters of celibacy and sexual conduct, the laicization of the tradition, and the introduction of purely lay organizations, Japanese Buddhism, and thus Zen Buddhism, was more fitting for American soil than any other Buddhist tradition in history, and the group which capitalized on these circumstances the best was that of Sanbō Zen.

The Sanbō Zen organization, previously known as Sanbō Kyōdan, is a Zen Buddhist sect that was founded by Yasutani Haku'un (安谷白雲; 1885-1973) in the year 1954. Sanbō Zen's unique characteristics when compared to its peers are, according to Robert Sharf, its sheer emphasis on the experience of *kenshō* (見性), its divergence from the typical styles found in Sōtō, Rinzai, and Ōbaku, and its disproportionate impact it had in terms of influence on American Zen Buddhism.²³⁵ In addition to this, the Sanbō Zen style of teaching is one that is highly syncretic, with Yasutani's mentor, Harada Daiun Sogaku (原田大雲祖岳; 1871-1961), as well as Yasutani himself, being trained in both the Sōtō and Rinzai lineages.²³⁶ One of Harada's driving forces as a Zen practitioner was the synthesis of the Sōtō and Rinzai teachings, incorporating koan collections into what was typically considered a traditional Sōtō style of

²³⁵ Robert Sharf, "Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22, no. 3/4 (1995): 417.

²³⁶ Sharf, "Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions," 420.

practice.²³⁷ Yasutani, following in his teacher's footsteps, sought to integrate these schools together and, as Sharf describes it, "return to the original teachings of Dōgen."²³⁸ The reason Yasutani gives for this belief was, in the much the same vein as the transsectarianism of the Meiji period, that "Rinzai and Sōtō Zen have their respective strong and weak points... by correctly learning each kind of Zen the strong points are both taken in."²³⁹

In addition to this syncretic teaching style, we see an aggressive emphasis on lay lifestyle as both capable and optimal for the Zen practice. Harada believed that *kenshō* was available to both laypeople and priests, going against the commonly held belief that only those in monastic environments can accomplish this.²⁴⁰ Yasutani goes multiple steps further, proclaiming that the current priests of Japanese Zen were essentially ruining the tradition and that "the Dharma could best be maintained among people of the workaday world."²⁴¹ Sanbō Zen, then, was an almost entirely lay focused tradition in much the same way as the ones that Tanaka Chigaku founded, and this can be shown by Yasutani's practice in which, in contrast to Harada, he spent much of it as a layperson. Becoming an elementary school teacher and principal at age 30, Aitken says that this period was,

A foundation for, rather than just postponement of his future career of Zen teaching. The understanding he always showed for the problems of laymen as Zen students, and his capacity to communicate readily with women probably grew out of his own domestic and social periods during those early years.²⁴²

²³⁷ Sharf, "Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions," 420.

²³⁸ Sharf, "Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions," 420.

²³⁹ Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*, (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1992), 287.

²⁴⁰ Sharf, "Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions," 420.

²⁴¹ Robert Aitken, "Yasutani Hakuun Rōshi 1885-1973," *The Eastern Buddhist* 7, no. 1 (1974): 152.

²⁴² Aitken, "Yasutani Hakuun Rōshi 1885-1973," 151.

We also see Yasutani eager to accommodate the differing contexts in which he was teaching. Phillip Kapleau, one of his students, comments upon how Yasutani tried experimenting with chanting English versions of the sutras in the Zendo (however, translating the Heart Sutra was not acceptable to him), Western styles of clothing, Western versions of Buddhist names, and “ceremonies, forms, and rituals that are in accord with Western traditions.”²⁴³ Sanbō Zen also showed a willingness to integrate Christian practices into Zen, further proving Yasutani’s desire to integrate with Western culture and its lifestyle.²⁴⁴ In Yasutani’s modifications made to Sanbō Zen, we see traces of the belief of transnationalism in his actions, for Zen, if thought of as an essence which transcends its culture and practice, can freely discard and modify its style in response to its environment, still be transmittable, and still be Zen.

Sanbō Zen’s importance in the context of American Zen is, as aforementioned, its incredibly disproportionate influence on the whole of the tradition compared to what Sharf refers to as its moderate size in Japan.²⁴⁵ Phillip Kapleau’s *The Three Pillars of Zen* (1969), one of the most widely read books about Zen Buddhism in America, has a staunchly Sanbō Zen foundation, as Kapleau was a student of Yasutani.²⁴⁶ In addition to this, we can trace Yasutani’s teachings to Robert Aitken, the focus of this research, Eido Tai Shimano (嶋野栄道; 1932-2018) a Japanese Zen master with a history of sexual abuse in Aitken’s community, Yamada Koun (山田耕雲; 1907-1989) who ordained Aitken and taught in America, and Hakuyū Taizan Maezumi (前角博

²⁴³ Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 295.

²⁴⁴ Shūhei Fujii, “The History and Current State of Japanese Zen Buddhism in Europe,” *Journal of Religion in Japan* 10, no. 2-3 (2021): 204.

²⁴⁵ Sharf, “Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions,” 417.

²⁴⁶ Sharf, “Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions,” 418-419.

雄; 1931-1995) who founded the White Plum Asanga and established the Zen Center of Los Angeles, as well as many others.

This comes as little surprise, however, when one considers the transformation that Japanese Buddhism went through due to the Meiji era, with its higher emphasis on laicization, acceptance of clerical marriage (in the case of Yasutani, he was married with five children), de-emphasis of celibacy, and cultural transcendence of Buddhism through the belief of its “essence.” Furthermore, the specific traits of Sanbō Zen, with its belief that *kenshō* was possible for the layperson, distaste for monastics, and the accommodations it gave towards Western culture, all helped to aid in Sanbō Zen’s compatibility with American culture. All of these were also coupled with the advent of the “Zen boom” of the 1950’s and 1960’s. Essentially, Westerners, especially Americans, were interested in Zen Buddhism when Sanbō Zen was on the move, and the structure of it was particularly harmonious with their lifestyle.

In the case of Robert Aitken, he was a student of both Yasutani and Yamada, receiving transmission from Yamada, which undeniably places him in the lineage of Sanbō Zen. It is no surprise, then, that Aitken is a lay *rōshi* deeply invested in the matters of the lay sangha. The previously discussed matter of Aitken’s willingness to accommodate the Zen practitioner’s lifestyle goes, of course, hand-in-hand with his heavy emphasis on the lay sangha, which he believes to be the most optimal form of practice for Western Zen Buddhism, despite the many difficulties that will come with such massive changes in a culture Buddhism has never had much experience in. To these ends, Aitken has written extensively on these topics, saying,

As Western Zen students we have experienced certain problems during the acculturation process, some of them relating to our own perceptions and motives. It has been clear from the outset that Zen Buddhism offers understanding and strengths we missed in our

own ways of life, but as we got better acquainted with our new religion, we have found that it was monastic, and perhaps not readily translatable into our egalitarian society. Certain cultural accretions are firmly embedded in the traditional way and seem unsuitable in the Western context. Our task, in relatively short order, has been to distinguish what is relevant from what is not, and to turn on some lamps that our ancestors left dark — no easy chore. One such lamp would illuminate the lay path of marriage, children, and career. As Westerners our natural predilection is to seek ways to practice rigorously at home and in the workplace, a path some ancestral teachers thought impossible. Moreover, the unspoken understanding in the Far East has been that Zen is a practice for men. We are recasting the Dharma to include women, jobs, and family — a fascinating course with many pitfalls....²⁴⁷

So we are left with the task of formulating and presenting a code of daily living as lay people that is in keeping with the basic teachings of Zen Buddhism. Much of my concern lies within this realm....²⁴⁸

Yet the tree that shades formal religious practice also shades homemaking, schoolteaching, and building a garage. The inspiration that guided monks and nuns in the ancient Sangha incentive as we establish our new Sangha forms in a world that desperately needs new forms of kinship and love.²⁴⁹

And,

The Buddha Shakyamuni recognized the profound difficulty of sound religious practice in the household, and so separated monks and nuns from lay people and established the

²⁴⁷ Aitken, *Original Dwelling Place*, xvi.

²⁴⁸ Aitken, *Original Dwelling Place*, xvii.

²⁴⁹ Aitken, *Original Dwelling Place*, xviii.

rule of celibacy for his immediate disciples. We are faced with the same difficulties of lay practice that Shakyamuni acknowledged. However, the human race is twenty-five hundred years older now. In that long period of time, we can trace a gradual process of encouraging individual responsibility for spiritual growth in world religions. This process has been very uneven, and poisons that infected people in the Buddha's time are now intensified by technology. Nonetheless, I think it is possible to see spiritual self-reliance gradually taking hold in the human mind. Responsibility for our practice, individually and together, is the only way we can cope with the problems of maintaining true Dharma in a Sangha of householders.²⁵⁰

What we see in these quotes are a broad range of topics, such as the difficulties that Western Zen students have faced with the tradition, the process of acculturation, the belief that monasticism and other cultural facets of Zen would failed to thrive in the West due to cultural differences, the emphasis on family, marriage, and work, the claim that Westerners do better as laypeople with jobs, and the lack of discussion on these matters within the Zen tradition. Despite the number of themes in Aitken's work relating to the lay sangha already discussed, there are still far more. Aitken also discusses how to balance one's daily life and zazen practice,²⁵¹ recognition of the monastic model as an important metaphor,²⁵² how the lay sangha will always have problems,²⁵³ the potential of the layperson to achieve inner realization, serenity, and good practice in the

²⁵⁰ Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, 113.

²⁵¹ Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, 113.

²⁵² Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, 108.

²⁵³ Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, 110.

home and on the job,²⁵⁴ and that one's ordinary experiences as a layperson are still the Buddha's own teachings.²⁵⁵

Furthermore, we also see that Aitken has a strong understanding of the importance of family in the Zen practitioner's life, and owing to his lay background, he certainly has no hesitation in finding ways to balance and incorporate them into Western Zen practice, as shown in his *Miniatures of a Zen Master*. In contrast to the origins of Buddhism, family, to Aitken, should not be discarded, and each person should balance their familial obligations with those of practice and career to which end he encourages each of his students to find a balance that works best for them.²⁵⁶ Owing to these beliefs, we can draw direct connections between not just Aitken and Sanbō Zen, but with figures such as Tanaka Chigaku, Kuriyama Taion, and all the other Japanese Buddhist practitioners who participated in, advocated for, and formalized the practices of clerical marriage, the existence of strictly lay organizations, and the presence of the family in the lives of Buddhist clergy. Aitken, who inherited the practices, philosophy, and structure of Sanbō Zen, could also be said to have a connection – albeit indirect – to thinkers like Tanaka Chigaku, who created the first lay Buddhist organization and a Buddhist marriage ritual, who also sought to incorporate the family more into Buddhist practice. The same could also be said of Shinran, who first formalized clerical marriage in Japanese Buddhism and paved the way for matrimony in formal Buddhist spaces, and Annen as well, who, alongside Saichō, lowered the emphasis on monastic practice and, in an argument specific to just him, began to normalize sexual desire. It is undeniable that Aitken's ideation both has parallels and connections to the

²⁵⁴ Robert Aitken, *A Zen Wave: Basho's Haiku and Zen*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2003), 137.

²⁵⁵ Aitken, *Original Dwelling Place*, V.

²⁵⁶ Aitken, *Miniatures of a Zen Master*, 130.

thinkers of Japanese Buddhism, and although many of these may be unique to developments in the Meiji era, it still lends credence to Aitken's authenticity as a Buddhist thinker.

What Aitken did adopt that has its roots in more ancient Zen was that of his personal philosophy on anger. Aitken's views on anger are incredibly similar to that of sexuality, believing that Zen's purpose is not to be a denial of any emotion or thought,²⁵⁷ and that they can be put towards one's practice through means of sublimation. In one passage, he reflects on Yasutani, whose anger was one of his most memorable traits, saying,

[Yasutani's] anger was transformed into passion in teaching. He never lost any of that early feeling, but it was transmuted. Be grateful that you have anger. Be grateful that you have sexual drive, and so on. These are your passions, your energy. How will you use them?²⁵⁸

In addition to this, there is also reference to conceiving of anger as impermanent²⁵⁹ and just simply noticing and accepting them,²⁶⁰ two iconic coping mechanisms for negative emotions all throughout the Buddhist tradition, the encouragement of including one's anger during zazen,²⁶¹ and the nuance that anger, if not properly handled, can cause harm to both oneself and others.²⁶² We also see Aitken expound the Bodhisattva Precept of anger, which is the ninth major precept, interpreting it as "not indulging anger" and saying,

²⁵⁷ Robert Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan*, (Berkeley, CA: North Point Press, 2016), 5.

²⁵⁸ Aitken, *The Practice of Perfection*, 44.

²⁵⁹ Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, 48.

²⁶⁰ Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen*, 47.

²⁶¹ Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen*, 47.

²⁶² Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen*, 85-86.

I take up the way of not indulging in anger. Those of us who have attended religious retreats have had the experience of bathing in anger. Something unreasonably tiny, perhaps something we don't even notice, punctures a nasty bubble of angry gas and we sit there on our meditation pads playing out scenarios of retribution. However, this condition fades and the experience reveals the power of anger and its possibilities. Blake said, "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction." Kuanyin hurls a thunderbolt of anger from time to time. I vow to find the place of equanimity where my anger can come forth to save everybody and everything.²⁶³

For Aitken, anger doesn't just have application towards the path of practice, but towards compassion directed at all sentient beings. This is not a particularly novel belief in the whole of Buddhism, surprisingly, for in both Vajrayāna Buddhism and Zen we can see anger being used for liberative purposes, with Vajrayāna Buddhism's *Herukas* and Zen's history of its iconoclastic teachers suddenly exploding in rage when teaching students as well as Bodhidharma's generally crotchety attitude. Zen literature undeniably references anger and has almost always used it for liberative and pedagogical means for others. Aitken's views on anger can be conceived of as legitimately traditional when analyzing the corpus of Zen literature. Thus, in *The Ground We Share*, he says this,

"I'm convinced that anger itself is a virtue and that the problem lies in *indulging* our anger...." "In its pure form, anger is a teaching. In the New Testament, there are at least two instances of Jesus losing his temper, both very instructive. When he cleansed the temple of the money changers, for example, you can be sure that his anger was quite hot, probably white-hot. Pure Anger."²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Aitken, *The Practice of Perfection*, 36.

²⁶⁴ Aitken, *The Ground We Share*, 120.

Aitken's direct appreciation for this virtuous "white-hot anger," as well as his belief that anger can be sublimated for the sake of practice, can allow us to potentially understand this passage from *Zen Master Raven*,

"When the community was discussing ethics after zazen one evening, Black Bear remarked, "I have a hard time dealing with my anger."

Raven said, "Check it out afterward."

Black Bear said, "What good will that do?"

Raven said, "It might have been Great Bear's anger."²⁶⁵

America: Abuse, Sexuality, and Power.

Retuning now to the broader American Zen context, it was not only Sanbō Zen which would help define the lifestyle of American Zen, Shunryū Suzuki, a Sōtō Zen cleric, would have an incredible impact due to his founding of the San Francisco Zen Center and the very first American Zen monastery, Tassajara. Suzuki, a married Japanese clergyman, carried many of the same assumptions as Yasutani into American Zen. Willing to change the structure of monastic and lay life in order to conform to the capacities of American Buddhists, such as modifying traditional monastic standards when Tassajara was built as well as accepting sexuality within the Zen community,²⁶⁶ Suzuki was also able to take quite well to the American soil.

The founding of Tassajara, however, raises the question of the relationship between the monastic and lay life of American Zen. Undeniably, American Zen is an almost entirely lay focused tradition, and even in spaces such as Tassajara, the monastic life there has made many changes which separates it from the traditional ideal. Suzuki, who engineered many of these changes himself, even says that American Zen Buddhists are "neither laypeople nor monks,"

²⁶⁵ Aitken, *Zen Master Raven*, 97.

²⁶⁶ Fields, *When the Swans Come to the Lake*, 317-319.

much like Shinran declared towards himself.²⁶⁷ Despite this, many aspects of the traditional monastic lifestyle, such as vegetarianism, are still followed by American Zen Buddhists both in the monasteries and within the Zen centers. Simply put, portions of the Chan/Zen monastic codes were followed in both lay spaces and the monasteries. Thus, it makes less sense to speak of American Zen monastic culture and more to speak of American Zen *community* culture, for the overall tradition, with its blending of the monk and layperson, carries with it facets of the expectations of ethical conduct for monastics diffused across the entire population.

Although Zen Buddhism after the time of the Meiji period was far more fitting for the American context than ever, it would still have to change in response to the new culture it was integrating itself into. The major catalyst behind these changes was that of the counterculture that had the most interest in it, which were the hippies and the beatniks. Typically, in contemporary times, the average American Buddhist, Zen or not, is a White, highly educated, upper-middle class individual with an interest in all things spiritual or “Eastern.”²⁶⁸ When Zen Buddhism was first planting its roots in America as an institution, however, the image was much more bombastic,

The spiritual atmosphere of the new generation was eclectic, visionary, polytheistic, ecstatic and defiantly devotional.... The beats had dressed in existential black-and-blue; this new generation wore plumage and beads and feathers worthy of the most flaming tropical birds. If the previous generation had been gloomy atheists attracted to Zen by iconoclastic directives—“If you meet the Buddha, kill him!”—these new kids were, as

²⁶⁷ Fields, *When the Swans Come to the Lake*, 59.

²⁶⁸ David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 28.

Gary Snyder told Dom Aelred Graham in an interview in Kyoto, “unabashedly religious. They love to talk about God or Christ or Vishnu or Shiva.”²⁶⁹

The beats – as well as the hippies – were a lot less tame than what Zen Buddhism was used to, and within their culture we can see four distinct threads which would change the style of Zen Buddhism in America: feminism, free love, laxity, and ordinary Orientalism.

In the case of feminism, we see Buddhism in America having the strongest sense of gender equality than any other form of Buddhism in the world. One of the watershed moments which became a first for the Buddhist tradition was when Tassajara became the very first co-ed monastery in the history of the tradition.²⁷⁰ In addition to Suzuki’s efforts, Robert Aitken also fought to do away with Buddhist patriarchy, and had great distaste towards the sexism of Buddhism and applauding a scene in the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* where the Buddha’s primary attendant, Ānanda, is temporarily changed into a woman through the powers of an unnamed goddess.²⁷¹ Thus, in contrast to the patriarchal disposition of the Buddhist tradition, we see women in positions of power, in the monasteries with men, and even being more plentiful than men in the Buddhism of America.²⁷² As well as this, free love was one of the major philosophies of the beats and hippies. In response to the puritanical tendencies of Christianity, the beats and hippies had an increase of sexuality and sexual behavior. We see sex as a common occurrence within Tassajara, for example, and Suzuki even vocally expressed that sexual activity was appropriate as long as one took heed of who they were doing it with, why they were doing it, and the frequency of when they partook in it. In summary, Suzuki says that “sex is like brushing your

²⁶⁹ Fields, *When the Swans Come to the Lake*, 302.

²⁷⁰ Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber*, 284.

²⁷¹ Aitken, *Miniatures of a Zen Master*, 67.

²⁷² Duncan Williams and Christopher Queen, *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, Curzon Critical Studies in Buddhism, (1999), 94.

teeth, it's a good thing to do, but not so good to do it all day long."²⁷³ While the beats and hippies brought gender and sexuality to Zen Buddhism, they did not always thrive in the practices Zen brought to them. Zazen and the pain it caused, for example, was a common frustration to many American neophytes.²⁷⁴ Monastic practice as well was incredibly difficult for many of Suzuki's students who went to Japan to become formally ordained, with the language barrier, diet, sleep schedule, and intensive Zazen causing great stress.²⁷⁵ Thus, in Tassajara, Suzuki was sincerely willing to adjust the typical monastic lifestyle in response to the capacities of the Americans.²⁷⁶ It would be wrong, however, to conclude that American Zen Buddhism had thrown away all forms of intensity just to conform to the American Buddhists. Suzuki, for example, ended up building Tassajara because, despite all of his accommodations to the Americans, he felt as if they weren't getting it.²⁷⁷ And Tassajara, according to Suzuki's preferences, "followed the traditional way" while giving space to his students to figure out what worked best for them.²⁷⁸ Yasutani, as well, was notorious for being an incredibly fierce teacher to his lay students.²⁷⁹ Last, we have what I have referred to as "common Orientalism," the tendency to take all things "Eastern" and meld them into one monolith, with their "spirituality" being over-exaggerated. Essentially, Zen Buddhism and many of its practices, which was one of the traditions at the forefront of the Western conception of the mysticism of the "East," were highly exaggerated by Westerners due to their exotic nature. What this had led to for many was the overemphasis of states of consciousness such as *satori* (悟り) and *kenshō*, as well as a reification of the process of dharma

²⁷³ Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber*, 297.

²⁷⁴ Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber*, 177.

²⁷⁵ Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber*, 235.

²⁷⁶ Fields, *When the Swans Come to the Lake*, 282.

²⁷⁷ Fields, *When the Swans Come to the Lake*, 314.

²⁷⁸ Fields, *When the Swans Come to the Lake*, 318.

²⁷⁹ Aitken, *The Practice of Perfection*, 44.

transmission and the status of one who had received it. Inversely, there is a de-emphasis on general Zen rituals and the ethical aspects of the tradition.

The triumvirate of the increased presence of women, the common Orientalism surrounding Zen Buddhism, and the libertine nature of sexuality in American Zen Buddhist spaces has, I argue, contributed greatly towards the increased frequency of abuse that has occurred within the tradition. Aitken also feels the same way, commenting on how the accommodation of both men and women in American Zen centers brings “a stream of crises that hinge on sex.”²⁸⁰ The American Buddhist tradition, and thus the American Zen tradition, has been both the victim and perpetrator of many instances of abuse, both sexual and non-sexual, throughout its history. Although it may appear that this is a trait unique to American Buddhism, it is not, for even Sōtō Zen in Japan has undeniable evidence of abuses against its students, with two monks physically abusing another monk and being arrested because of it in 2013, which has warranted a full-scale investigation by leadership into the various Sōtō monasteries in order to verify if other monasteries have abuse.²⁸¹ While it may not be known if the frequency of abuse in Sōtō Zen monasteries in Japan equals that of American Zen, it can be said with utter certainty that this is not only an issue in American Buddhism. In the context of this research, Robert Aitken was chosen as its focus because of his numerous experiences with sexual abuse in American Zen spaces throughout his career. For Aitken, sexual abuse afflicted not just the communities around him, but his own as well. Forced to accept the prevalence of these abuses, he had developments in his personal philosophy in response to this which will be analyzed, for we can see brand-new

²⁸⁰ Aitken, *The Mind of Clover*, 40.

²⁸¹ “Rensai kaku shūha ga mata shūgikai ga ima rongi shite iru koto wa jiin ya jūshoku no tame nanoka chekku shiyō,” *Gekkan Jūshoku* 238 (2018): 48-51.

solutions which have never been seen in the Zen tradition that would subsequently influence American Zen Buddhism as it is lived.

The first instance of sexual abuse which Aitken experienced was within his own Honolulu Diamond Sangha, and was perpetrated by one of its own members, Eido Tai Shimano (嶋野栄道, 1932-2018). These events are documented and published in the Aitken-Shimano files, a collection of letters and various documents written by Aitken and several other figures about the actions of Eido Tai Shimano throughout the years. Eido Shimano, sometimes referred to by the Honolulu Diamond Sangha as “Tai San,” was a student of both Sōen Nakagawa (中川宋淵; 1907-1984) and Haku'un Yasutani. Because of these mutual connections, Aitken and Shimano made contact and quickly became acquainted, with Shimano being asked to serve as the resident advisor of the Honolulu Diamond Sangha in 1960.²⁸² This relationship quickly deteriorated as Shimano’s behavior was incredibly unbecoming for the Sangha, with demands of a “substantial” salary and dressing “like a young man of commerce.”²⁸³ This behavior was a portend of things to come, for in 1964, two women from Aitken’s Sangha were hospitalized for nervous breakdowns. Aitken, seeking to take care of the women, was accompanied by Shimano as they made visits to check on the condition of them. However, it was made clear to Aitken by the hospital staff that Shimano’s name was a recurring theme in the reports on these two women, with one nurse saying that Shimano’s purpose for visiting the ward was to “prey on other vulnerable women.”²⁸⁴

²⁸² Helen Baroni, *Love, Rōshi: Robert Baker Aitken and His Distant Correspondents*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 33.

²⁸³ Stuart Lachs and Vladimir K., “The Aitken-Shimano Letters,” *The Zen Site*, September 2019, https://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/Aitken_Shimano_Letters.html, 4.

²⁸⁴ Lachs and K., “The Aitken-Shimano Letters,” 5.

Aitken was shocked by this possibility and wrote to the psychiatrist who was treating one of the women to confirm sexual misconduct. This psychiatrist's response was that sexual misconduct by Eido Shimano was, in fact, what had occurred to the two women in the hospital.²⁸⁵ Aitken sought out the advice of both Sōen and Yasutani in Japan, neither of which seemed to have had any issues with the harm Shimano had afflicted upon the Honolulu Diamond Sangha. They insisted that it was “rascal” behavior which was a result of Shimano's life as a bachelor.²⁸⁶ When Aitken returned, Shimano, who discovered that he spoke with their teachers about this matter, was positively enraged, and left the Honolulu Diamond Sangha to go to New York and work with the Zen Studies Society.²⁸⁷

Aitken, fearful of rupturing the already fragile Sangha by discussing this matter, kept silent, and Shimano, who was then across the country, continued his habit of sexually abusing his female students. In 1975, there were more instances of Shimano's sexual and financial abuses during his time at the Zen Studies Society. In 1982, another scandal occurred in which a female reporter said that Shimano was attempting to seduce her during *dokusan*, a private meeting between teacher and student. Shimano denied these allegations, but was called to resign by some of the members of the board of the Zen Studies Society. Shimano, however, refused to resign, and would not do so until 2010, in which another female student publicly announced that her and Shimano were having an affair.

In Helen Baroni's *Love, Rōshi*, which covers the events of this incident, she astutely points out that the actions of Eido Shimano had deeply influenced the actions and philosophy of Aitken, and that his failure to prevent the suffering of his sangha members and desire to make

²⁸⁵ Stanard Smith to Robert Aitken, August 8, 1964, in *The Shimano Archive*, https://www.shimanoarchive.com/PDFs/19640808R_Smith_Aitken.pdf.

²⁸⁶ Baroni, *Love, Rōshi*, 35.

²⁸⁷ Lachs and K., “The Aitken-Shimano Letters,” 6.

things right would motivate him until the end of his life.²⁸⁸ Thus, Eido Shimano was the catalyst for the themes of power, abuse, and ethical conduct within the philosophy of Aitken, and as he reflects on Shimano, he says this,

I met a young Asian man who had had remarkably good training in religious practice with an excellent teacher, who had fallen under the sway of a subsequent teacher who convinced him that he was a perfect guru who could do no wrong. So with overweening confidence in an unfamiliar Western setting, the young man made terrible mistakes and created havoc at every turn. He was what local folks in Hawai'i call a "danger man."²⁸⁹

In 1983, a large-scale scandal would erupt, with Richard Baker (1936-), dharma heir of Shunryū Suzuki and leader of the San Francisco Zen Center, having an affair with the wife of one of the Zen center's wealthiest financiers.²⁹⁰ This event, dubbed as "The Apocalypse" by the members of the Zen center,²⁹¹ was only the beginning of the troubles they would face, for while the affair would have serious impacts on the financial status of the Zen center, it also shone light on many other of Baker's abuses. These abuses, covered in Michael Downing's *Shoes Outside the Door*, included multiple affairs with female students, one of which committed suicide in relation to this, physical abuses against students, and financial abuses such as giving himself a yearly salary of \$215,000.²⁹² Baker was, quite shockingly, particularly confused on what the cause for controversy behind any of these events was.²⁹³ The conclusion of this continually amplifying scandal was the removal of Richard Baker from his leadership position in the San

²⁸⁸ Baroni, *Love, Rōshi*, 35.

²⁸⁹ Aitken, *Miniatures of a Zen Master*, 113.

²⁹⁰ Michael Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Center*, (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001), 6.

²⁹¹ Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 4.

²⁹² Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 14, 97, 203, 233.

²⁹³ Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 242.

Francisco Zen Center and its adjacent facilities such as Tassajara.²⁹⁴ As for Aitken, who had visited and worked with Baker, Suzuki, and the Zen center as a whole, he was not just a bystander, he was one of the figures trying to help the Zen center recover after the scandal.²⁹⁵

One year later, in 1984, another similar scandal would occur at the Zen Center of Los Angeles. Its perpetrator was its leader and founder Hakuyū Taizan Maezumi (前角博雄, 1931-1995), who was another student of Yasutani just like Shimano, and it was revealed that he had numerous affairs with his female students as well as being an alcoholic. This scandal, while not leading to the removal of Taizan Maezumi's position as leader, led to his wife and children separating from him.²⁹⁶ In the life of Robert Aitken, Taizan Maezumi was a figure who helped him gain confidence as a leader in his Zen community as well as a guide to understanding the deeper parts of the Zen tradition Aitken was unsure about. The actions he took were undoubtedly disappointing for Aitken, but, perhaps due to Maezumi's penitent attempts to redeem himself after the scandal, Aitken never seemed to lose his ability to respect him, stating that he was "eternally grateful" for the assistance Maezumi provided to him.²⁹⁷

In 1999, we find another instance of student-teacher relations occurring within the American Zen community. This time, it was perpetrated by one of Aitken's students. John Tarrant (1949-), founder and leader of the Pacific Zen Institute, was originally one of Aitken's dharma heirs. However, due to the increasing number of reports of misconduct – implied to be sexual misconduct as well as other kinds – Aitken and multiple other members of the Honolulu Diamond Sangha wrote an open letter to Tarrant, expressing their disappointment and wish that

²⁹⁴ Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 324.

²⁹⁵ Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 13.

²⁹⁶ Ford, *Zen Master Who?*, 162.

²⁹⁷ Aitken, *Miniatures of a Zen Master*, 65.

Tarrant would be open about these instances of misconduct and heal the pain within his community.²⁹⁸ Tarrant neither responded to this letter nor to any earlier attempts made by Aitken and the Honolulu Diamond Sangha to contact him about these matters privately, and Aitken rescinded his dharma transmission given to Tarrant in response to this.

Aitken's experience as a leader in the American Zen Buddhist community is dotted with instances of abuse occurring in both other communities and his own. Aitken, in his writings and talks to his students, was unafraid to draw attention to the prevalence of this abuse in America, saying "waves from disturbances in other centers are washing our shore and these too remind us that Zen Buddhism is still in the process of acculturation in the West."²⁹⁹ What Aitken as a thinker does which separates him from more traditional Zen Buddhist thinkers are his various adaptation and conclusions made as a result of the abuse which his community, and American Zen as a whole, faced.

Engaging now with the specifics of Aitken's philosophy formulated in response to the abuses which plagued the American Zen Buddhist community, we can see an objective denouncement of sexual relations between teacher and student, saying,

"It's safe to say that, in the vast majority of cases, deliberate seduction of a student or someone in an analogous position, taking advantage of the trust that's developed in the milieu of transference, is wrong and tends to be highly destructive."³⁰⁰

Coupled with this is the reaffirmation of true Zen practice as ethical action, with Aitken deliberating arguing against the claim that Zen "exists in a place where there is no right and

²⁹⁸ Diamond Sangha Teacher Circle to John Tarrant, December 16, 1999, in *Sydney Zen Center Newsletter*, 4, <http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVLPages/ZenPages/DOCS/szc-newsletter-feb-mar-2000.pdf>.

²⁹⁹ Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, 112.

³⁰⁰ Aitken, *The Ground We Share*, 184.

wrong,” which implies that Zen has no moral applications and thus one can do anything they want.³⁰¹ In addition, Aitken adopts an argument made by one of his teachers, Yamada Kōun, who remarks that any Zen teacher who exploits their female students must lack true realization of their awakened nature.³⁰² Thus, Aitken says, one must spend time reexamining whether they have been honest with their vows as well as strive to make their realization truly real through their moral conduct.³⁰³

In addition to directly denouncing the abuse which occurs in American Buddhist spaces, we also see Aitken take great efforts to discuss transference, tear down the hyper-idealistic image of the *rōshi* as analogous to a guru, and reconceive of the Sangha’s power structure, and. In terms of transference, Aitken seeks to draw attention to the temporary status of transference between student and teacher, encourages others to recognize that the relationship will not be perfect and that at times this bond will go through difficulties, and how important it is to never betray the process, saying “transference gone bad has the anguish of divorce and its hatreds. It can destroy lives. Let’s be mindful and tender with each other.”³⁰⁴ Aitken also expressed his desire for students to be able to “wield their own sword,” allowing them to stand up to abusive authority figures, even if they are their own teacher, and in classic Zen fashion, “kill the Buddha.”³⁰⁵ In *Encouraging Words*, Aitken wishes for quick and strong criticism from students towards abusive teachers, as well as for students to “cast the beams” from one’s eyes.³⁰⁶ Taking all this into account, we can begin to understand the following passage from *Zen Master Raven*,

Porcupine then asked, “Is trust in the teacher important for practice?”

³⁰¹ Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, 87.

³⁰² Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, 91.

³⁰³ Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, 90-91.

³⁰⁴ Aitken, *The Morning Star*, 183.

³⁰⁵ Aitken, *The Ground We Share*, 160-161.

³⁰⁶ Aitken, *Encouraging Words*, 92.

Raven said, “Indispensable.”

Porcupine asked, “Can’t that create problems?”

Raven said, “Interminable.”³⁰⁷

In terms of the image that the *rōshi* has, after seeing how much damage Zen masters could bring to their communities, we see Aitken advocates for the *rōshi* as imperfect. Aitken wanted to strike back against the American tendency to view one’s spiritual leaders as a guru, going to great lengths in order to show his preference for a more down-to-earth view of the *rōshi* in the Zen community.³⁰⁸ The *rōshi*, Aitken says, should not be interested in being “deified” and will refuse to be placed in that position if given the opportunity.³⁰⁹ As well as this, Aitken wishes for the *rōshi* to be recognized for his foibles, and that faith towards the *rōshi* is not a matter of perfection.³¹⁰ Although, wary of the potential harm unconditional loyalty could cause, Aitken reiterates the importance of separating oneself from their teacher.³¹¹ To further separate the *rōshi* from an over-exaggerated, deified position, Aitken wrote extensively on the presence of negative emotions not just within other Zen leaders, but within himself as well, with one passage in *Miniatures of a Zen Master* saying,

Suzuki Shunryū Rōshi said, “Being a Zen master means coping with one’s mistakes.”

Indeed, and it’s a pretty lonely position. If you confess to your errors, some of your good students will go away. If you don’t confess, you yourself will go away. I don’t wonder at the alcoholism found occasionally in sacred halls.³¹²

And in *The Dragon Who Never Sleeps*, he says this,

³⁰⁷ Aitken, *Zen Master Raven*, 106.

³⁰⁸ Aitken, *A Zen Wave*, 134.

³⁰⁹ Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen*, 90.

³¹⁰ Aitken, *The Mind of Clover*, 90.

³¹¹ Aitken, *The Mind of Clover*, 44.

³¹² Aitken, *Miniatures of a Zen Master*, 73.

When I turn into somebody nasty
 I vow with all beings
 To reflect on how it all happened
 And uncover my long-hidden tail.³¹³

Aitken, of course, is incredibly conscious of the harm that these sorts of negative emotions can bring, and he makes clear that they are, in fact, one's own responsibility, and can be rooted in self-centeredness.³¹⁴ They can, however, simply be misguided, and just like sexuality and anger, Aitken advocates for a sublimation of negative emotions and habits, saying that one should "prune the poisonous stuff and let the plant grow appropriately to your vow to save the many beings."³¹⁵ When taking all of this into consideration, we can attempt to utilize Aitken's acceptance of one's inner darkness to interpret yet another passage from *Zen Master Raven*,

Next day, Woodpecker came around when Raven was cleaning up after a windstorm and asked, "Do you think I could be a teacher?"

Raven looked her over. "What's the dark side?" he asked.

Woodpecker hesitated. "I'm not sure there is one," she said.

Raven turned away, saying, "Then how could you be a teacher?"

To Aitken, a Zen teacher has the obligation to master their own dark side and learn how to utilize it in order to avoid the harm it can cause, avoid delusions of grandeur when in positions of authority, and propel one forward in their practice.

In addition to these beliefs, Aitken also strove to modify the power structures of his own Honolulu Diamond Sangha to allow for more democratic decision making and less opportunities

³¹³ Aitken, *The Dragon Who Never Sleeps*, 25.

³¹⁴ Aitken, *The Morning Star*, 222.

³¹⁵ Aitken, *The Morning Star*, 222.

of the abuse of power, with Helen Tworikov discussing some of these changes in her biography on Aitken,

Aitken has advocated communication workshops as a way of replacing the Japanese monastic model of submission to a well-defined authority with one that relies on consensus as a method of governing the center. Over the years he has tried to shift the decision-making operations of the sangha from a democratic voting system to a nonvoting method of group consensus. It never worked on Maui, but in his absence, it met with some success in Honolulu. “People aren't used to this way of working,” Aitken says, “and it has taken a long time to get used to the idea.”³¹⁶

Despite these changes not being as successful at the Maui Zendo as Aitken wished, it was a novel way of handling the structure of the sangha, never before done by Buddhism in the entirety of its history. What we can see in modern times, now, is that the Honolulu Diamond Sangha has, in fact, adopted a consensual form of governance in which democracy is the foundation of decision making as seen on their website.³¹⁷ In addition, the Honolulu Diamond Sangha has also crafted an ethics agreement that must be followed by its teachers, and if problems with authority were to arise, a grievance process has been put in place so that one can file complaints to any of the three members of Grievance and Reconciliation Committee. It is not just the Diamond Sangha which has made shifts in its power structure, for the San Francisco Zen Center has also adopted a sort of committee board in which the authority of its leaders is diminished and divided by means of bureaucracy,³¹⁸ and the head abbot no longer resides for life, but for four-year

³¹⁶ Helen Tworikov, *Zen in America: Profiles of Five Teachers: Robert Aitken, Jakusho Kwong, Bernard Glassman, Maurine Stuart, Richard Baker*, (San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1989), 55.

³¹⁷ “GOVERNANCE,” Honolulu Diamond Sangha, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://diamondsangha.org/about-us/consensus/>.

³¹⁸ Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 148-149.

terms.³¹⁹ They also have their own versions of a grievance, complaint, and ethical review process on their website.³²⁰ While it is not clear if Aitken had a hand in the San Francisco Zen Center's adjustments of power structures, he was, as aforementioned, involved with the recovery process after Baker's scandal. It is not impossible that he laid the foundation it, but whether it be the case or not, it is undeniable that Aitken was a trailblazer for the unique modifications in power structure that have been popularized in some of the major American Zen institutions within the country, doing something that Buddhism had never done before in its entire 2,500-year long history.

In conclusion, what we see of Robert Aitken as a thinker is a fascinating split of both traditional authenticity and novel adaptations. We see antinomian interpretations relating to matters such as sex, the adoption of the Bodhisattva Precepts, an unorthodox yet legitimate interpretation of both sexuality, anger, and other negative emotions and their usage on the path of practice through means of sublimation. Ethics and compassion, as well, are a core part of Aitken's personal philosophy which also lay at the core of the Mahayana tradition. We also see emphasizing family ties and matters such as marriage, which while clashing with more traditional forms of monasticism, is entirely in line with Japanese Buddhism. His emphasis on the lay sangha, as well, is in much the same vein, for Sanbo Zen indirectly arises from the criticism of the monk-layperson relationship popularized by figures such as Tanaka Chigaku and Takada Doken. Where Aitken begins to separate himself from the rest of the Buddhist tradition is through his conclusions revolving around matters such as the image of the *roshi*, matters of abuse, transference between teacher and student, and the unique changes he established within

³¹⁹ Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 331.

³²⁰ "Conflict Resolution, Informal and Formal Complaint, and Ethical Review Processes," San Francisco Zen Center, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.sfzc.org/about/how-san-francisco-zen-center-operates/conflict-complaint-and-ethical-review-processes>.

the power structures of his own community. All of these things Aitken discussed, entirely unique to either him or American Zen as a whole, were adaptations brought about by the presence of abuse and the harm it caused within the American Zen sangha. It could also be argued that because of this, Aitken's novel modifications to the American Zen lifestyle paradoxically make him an authentic Buddhist thinker more than anything else, as it was at the heart of the Indian *Vinayas* that they were meant to be changed for the sake of the community. And when looking at the entire history of the Buddhist tradition and all the adaptations it willingly went through, it seems to be that Aitken recognizes and embodies the most traditional and authentic Buddhist philosophy of them all, that of change.

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