

Ascertaining Rebirth by Self-validation or Communal-accord?

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How to Ascertain Rebirth:

Historical Background in the Late Ming

- Dialogue on Life and Death between Master Yun-ch'i Chuhong (雲棲株宏 1535-1615) and Wu Yingbin (吳應賓 1565-1634)
- Chuhong, “Master of Yun-ch'i ”, is listed on the top of three most illustrious monks of the Late Ming (along with Hanshan Deching and Tzupo Chenke)
- He was active in the Buddhist "revival" of the period. Trained as a monk in both the Chan and Pure Land traditions, Master Chuhong emphasized strict observance of monastic discipline.
- Although he simply advocated *nien-fo* for all, he is also honored as someone with “dual achievement of Chan and Pure Land based on One-mind. 禪淨雙修，不出一心

Historical Background in the Late Ming

- The revival of Buddhism in the Late Ming was mostly driven by interactions between Confucian literati and Buddhist monks.
- Literati like Wu enjoyed cultivation in competition with *same-year* laureates of degrees (*jinshi*) in the pursuit of the learning of xingming (性命 nature-and-life).
 - Those who earned the degree in the same year include Yuan Tsung-tao (袁宗道1560-1600), Tsiao Hung (焦竑1541-1620), Tao Wang-ling (陶望齡1562-1609), Tung Ts'i-ch'ang (董其昌1555-1636) and Huang Huei (黃輝1559-1621).
- Wu “Accepted precepts from Lien-ch'i, teaching from Hanshan and get Enlightened from Po-shan.” 「受戒蓮池，析教憨山，於博山處脫桶底。」(方以智) “Combine Lien-chi, Hanshan and Po-shan as a drop of milk.” 「合蓮池、憨山、博山為一滴乳」(道盛)

Paragraph in Master's Epitaph

- ✓ In the collection of *the Record of Rebirth Narratives* by Master Yunchi, the number of two kinds of laypeople, i.e. men and women, [compared to the monks and nuns,] is as little as the sound of footstep in the empty valley. On the other hand, the rebirth of the filial-and-righteous of Yunchi Temple is simply marked by the realization of “mindfulness [of the Buddha]” before dying rather than by the “manifestation in matching to the same [sage] category”.

師所彙往生之流，在家二輩寥寥空谷足音；而雲棲孝義諸賢，以無「同分」顯證，姑取臨終「正念」分明而已。

- ✓ Although the so-called heavenly-music or extraordinary-scent in the air (天樂、異香) is well-known by all, it is not a requisite for the rebirth in Pure Land, since those [auspicious signs] are the common characteristics of the storehouse consciousness. (*ālayavijñāna*阿賴耶識) in communal accord (感應道交) [between Buddha and sentient beings]

且夫「天樂、異香」，普聞[於]一切[眾生]，良繇賴耶共相「感應道交」，殆未可為往生者必。

Paragraph in Master's Epitaph (cont.)

- ✓ [Why is that?] Since at the moment of dying, one is confronted with the evil signs (臨終惡相), it is rare to see one could accuse himself (自訟) inwardly [as Confucius said] other than said matching to the sage category . If it were a requisite, few people would fall into hell.

使為往生者必，則「臨終惡相」「自訟」猶希，矧曰「同分」？而世之墮「泥犁」者寡矣！

While the sense organs are destroyed, yet life, heat [and consciousness] are not dissociated. [Buddha's] coming with assembly of sages, [sentient being's] going liberated without attachment are the reward of the realization on mindfulness of Buddha.

然則諸根已謝，壽暖尚連，還然而迎，倏然而往，故是正念分明者報合境界。(而以獨知之契，寧闕所疑，謹厚精嚴，不以自宗假借類此。)

Key Question or Problem for the *Rebirth* :

What sort of evidence could establish the religious claims of “Rebirth in Pure Land”? Is there any objective or real sense in which we can ascertain that the dying person is reborn in the Pure Land?

Buddhist Rebirth in syllogism

Proposition:

For the time being, what we could ascertain the *Rebirth* is only by the *awareness on mindfulness [of Buddha] (cheng-nien fern-ming 正念分明)* .

[That is certifying via inner and subjective state of self.]

Reason

There is no sense of objectivity or reality to certify dying people's *Rebirth*.

[Ideally and objectively, it is to certify by the same-order-of-sages (*tong-fern 同分*) in Pure Land.]

Example

1) Positive example:

One could self-accuse (*Zhi-song 自訟*) before dying is suggested to be a sage in Confucian thought.

[At the moment of dying, one is confronted with all the evil signs; it is rare to see one could self-accuse, if not, there is any such matching-into-the-order-of sage?]

2) Negative example:

Although the *heavenly music or extraordinary scent 天樂異香* is well known to all, it is not a guarantee to the *Rebirth*.

[The auspicious sign is the distinct character represented on *Ālaya* through communal accord or mutual resonance (between Buddha and sentient beings) *gayin-daogao 感應道交*]

Self-validation or Communal-accord?

- Mindfulness characterizes a self-possessed consciousness, related to mind or thought
- On the other hand, communal accord or mutual resonance through sense consciousness is cognized through form, vision, sound and smell, related to sense organs.

Consciousness theory and analogy

Ugly sign versus good sign before dying—
Subjectivity or Objectivity?

- Although it is a distinct character 相 common to all, it is also a variant perception of individual's *Ālaya*. An analogy in the *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論: when many lamps are assembled, their illuminations, though separate, seem to combine to make a single illumination.

Reasoning or Rationale

Self-validation or Communal-accord?

Despite the objectivity of communal accord or mutual resonance, Wu argued that if this were true, then few people would fall into hell.

Since one before dying could not inwardly accuse himself (自訟), “which is rare to be seen in life”, as Confucius said, how could an ugly countenance lead to favorable communal accord?

- people in routine life usually lack of self-reflection to perceive their faults. It is then falling into self-deception, which is the cause of affection and/or illusion.

1. Sense of objectivity or in reality: Communal-accord / Matching-order (*sabhāga*)
2. Subjectivity or Self-consciousness: Mindfulness/ Self-accusing

Religious Experience and/or Religious Claim?

- The similarity of the indications could be invoked in daily practice and activity, e.g.: Buddhist hymns, chanting and burning incense thing in place.
- To devout people, the religious affections and sentiments could be habitual, either in the sense that they are easily and frequently aroused or in the sense that they become constituents of their personalities (Wainwright 1981: 2).

Idea of Soteriology of *Māhayāna*

Meditation

- The traditional meditation is to cut off all the desire from sense consciousness by guarding the gates of the senses. (守護根門)

Pure Land and idea of pervasive folk-religion:

- Shutting off the discursive thoughts simply by single-mindedness of the continuous and uninterrupted practices, such as reciting or visualization process of recollection.

Mindfulness versus sensual experience

Why philosophers or religionists should be especially concerned with mindfulness?

- Mindfulness (or inner communion) does not include empirically false beliefs and it is not culturally conditioned. Therefore, there are reasons for discounting visions and occult phenomena.
- Religious affections or sentiments do not involve an intuitive sense of objective presence or reality, and are therefore not genuinely perceptual. (Wainwright 1981: 3-7)

Sensual experiences played important role in spiritual life of practice in *Māhayāna* Buddhism:

- “Visions of the Bodhisattvas, and of the Buddhas and their Paradises.”

The role of sense-consciousnesses and mano-consciousness in practice

- Although the 6th consciousness, *mano*, is more powerful than any other sense consciousness, yet it also “hosts the majority of afflictions and cognitive errors.” It provides the basis for meditation—the spiritual cultivation.
- Five sense consciousnesses arise in connection with the five sense organs, which perceive form, sound, smell, taste and tactile objects, in a way in principle free of cognitive errors. These provide a basis for making true claims about something other than the experience itself.

The general idea of the practice of Pure Land

It is an endless effort of repetition of a non-reflective nature, associated with the process of activities of devotion, such as:

- hearing and reciting Buddha's name,
- circumambulation of stūpa or statues,
- visualizing and conceiving of sacred images
- perfuming bliss of flower-incense-lamp-candle (花香燈燭), i.e., burning incenses, scattering flowers and splendid illumination with lamp/candles.

Moreover, this process provides sensual or aesthetical elements of functional performance in the habitual rituals and religious activities.

Examples

Daoxuan (596-667) "Caring for the Sick and Sending off the Deceased" (瞻病送終)

- There he should be placed a standing Buddha image, whose right hand raised up and left hand has been tied to a five-colored banner with one end trailing on the ground. The dying person's left hand is made to grasp the other end of this banner, to help him generate thought of following the Buddha to his pure realm.

其像右手舉，左手中繫一五綵幡，脚垂曳地。當安病者在像之後，左手執幡脚作從佛往淨刹之意。

Examples

Tiantai Zhiyi (智顛538-597) , he taught the monastery controller(維那 *karmadāna*):

- As one is dying, make him hear the sound of bell and chime to enhance his mindfulness, and to maintain the duration as long as possible until his breath stops. 教維那曰：「人命將終，聞鐘磬聲，增其正念，唯長唯久，氣盡為期。」

The passing bell, or passing chime for the dying, (無常鐘/無常磬, literally, bell of impermanence or chime of impermanence) is used to enhance the dying person's sensation of maintaining mindfulness.

The Mind at Conception and at Death

Two extreme cases are explained in *CWSL* to prove the existence of *ālaya*:

- Rise to the beings of the formless realm (*ārūpya-dhātu* 無色界)
- The cessation of *arhat* in mindless meditation (*nirodha-samāpatti*).

Why the mindfulness (*Cheng-nien*) plays an important role before dying?

To guarantee the *Rebirth* in two ways :

- The presence of all those afflicted states, the very last moment will have significant influence on the circumstances of one's rebirth.
- One is to be free at the last moment from ignorance, attraction and aversion for one's rebirth.

Conclusion

- The purpose of the study is not on validation for the Rebirth, rather is on the findings for its process.
- Meditation is not a single, monolithic Phenomenon- *Śūraṅgama-sūtra*.
- *Nianfo* not merely enhances sensual experience-- the religious life illustrated by William James.
- If *Enlightenment* or *Rebirth* is to reach or attain “reality of being”, then the former is more concentrated on the knowledge experience, and the later is aimed at affective experience.

Meditation is not a Single, Monolithic Phenomenon

"Twenty-five Methods of Complete Penetration" *Śūraṅgama-sūtra*

Eighteen fields of cognition and seven great elements

Six defiling fields	Six faculties	Six consciousnesses	Seven elements
sound (<i>kaunḍinya</i>)	ear (<i>Avalokitêśvara</i>)	hearing (<i>Samantabhadra</i>)	ether (<i>Ākāśagarbha</i>)
form (<i>Upaniṣad</i>)	eye (<i>Aniruddha</i>)	seeing (<i>Śāriputra</i>)	fire (<i>Ucchuṣma</i>)
smell (<i>Youth Fragrance-adorned</i>)	nose (<i>Cūḍapanthaka</i>)	smelling (<i>Sundarananda</i>)	earth (<i>Earth-holding Bodhisattva</i>)
taste (<i>Bhaiṣajyarāja- bhaiṣajyasamudgata</i>)	tongue (<i>Gavāṃpati</i>)	tasting (<i>Pūrṇa Maitrāyaniputra</i>)	Water (<i>Candraprabha kumāra</i>)
touch (<i>Bhadrapāla</i>)	body (<i>Pilindavatsa</i>)	touching (<i>Upāli</i>)	wind (<i>Nirbhāsa kumāra</i>)
Mental (<i>Mahākāśyapa</i>)	mind (<i>Subhūti</i>)	knowing (<i>Mahāmaudgalyāyana</i>)	Vision (<i>Mahāsthāma-prāpta</i>) Consciousness (<i>Maitreya</i>)

六三十八界及七大合為二十五圓通

六塵	六根	六識	七大
聲塵 (憍陳那五比丘)	耳根 (觀世音菩薩)	耳識 (普賢菩薩)	空 (虛空藏菩薩)
色塵 (優波尼沙陀)	眼根 (阿那律陀)	眼識 (舍利弗)	火 (烏芻瑟摩)
香塵 (香嚴童子)	鼻根 (周利槃特迦)	鼻識 (孫陀羅難陀)	地 (持地菩薩)
味塵 (藥王藥上菩薩)	舌根 (憍梵鉢提)	舌識 (富樓那)	水 (月光童子)
觸塵 (跋陀婆羅)	身根 (畢陵伽婆蹉)	身識 (優波離)	風 (琉璃光法王子)
法塵 (摩訶迦葉)	意根 (須菩提)	意識 (大目犍連)	見 (大勢至菩薩) 識 (彌勒菩薩)

Religious life- (William James: 373)

1. That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance;
 2. That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end;
 3. That prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof — be that spirit “God” or “law” — is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world.
- An assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections.