

44. Correlative Cosmology, Moral Rectitude, and Buddhist Notions of Health

Selections from the *Sūtra of Trapuṣa and Bhallika*

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The *Sūtra of Trapuṣa and Bhallika* is a fifth-century apocryphal *sūtra* in two parts, traditionally attributed to the northern Chinese monk Tanjing.¹ The text is a moral treatise aimed at a lay audience. Its main goal is to explicate and justify two key Buddhist practices: the Five Precepts and the communal Purification Ritual. Told in the form of a conversation between the Buddha and his student Trapuṣa, it provides a code of ethics for lay practitioners and emphasizes the role of the monastic community in providing religious instruction and health care services for the community. The first part of the text stresses the need to uphold five injunctions against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and the consumption of alcohol. The second part focuses on an imported communal ritual of purification that can be traced back to Vedic religion.² By the fifth century, this periodic ritual, which involved religious sermons, confession of sins, and recitation of sacred scripture, was most likely the most important occasion in the lives of both the monastic and the lay communities.³ The popularity of this ritual in China led to the creation of a rival Daoist version, which is still practiced today.⁴

Much like other apocryphal *sūtras* (i.e., scriptures composed in China and presented as if they were translated from India), the text displays a high level of hybridity and syncretism.⁵ To provide justification for Buddhist religious praxis, it employs a combination of ideas and terminology imported from India and indigenous Chinese beliefs and practices rooted in Han common religion and the imperial cult, as well as early medieval Daoist religion. The excerpts below, for example, highlight the use of classical Chinese cosmology and medical theory through the frequent usage of such terms as yin and yang, the Earthly and Celestial Souls, *qi*, and the idea of cosmic resonance.⁶ The

model of the human body presented here draws heavily on the classical depictions found in such texts as the *Basic Questions* recension of the Han dynasty *Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor*. In addition, it also employs an indigenous notion that later became central in Daoist religion: the body is deemed the dwelling place of inner gods that report our behavior to their counterparts in the celestial and netherworld bureaucracies.⁷ An important theme of the text is the idea of a moral universe governed by an other-worldly administration that operates according to the same rules as its earthly counterpart. The author melds these indigenous ideas together with imported deities, such as Indra, the Four Heavenly Kings, and King Yama, to produce a synthetic model of a moral universe in which participation in the Purification Rituals can ensure a long life and a favorable rebirth. The text can thus be read as a prime example of the exchange of religious and medical ideas and practices in early medieval China.

Despite its alleged association with Trapuṣa and Bhallika, two wealthy merchants who became the first lay disciples of Sakyamuni Buddha, Chinese sources indicate that the text was treated with suspicion and believed to be a forgery from a very early stage. The earliest reference for this text can be found in the *Collected Records of the Tripiṭaka*,⁸ a catalog of the early Buddhist texts compiled by Seng You (445–518), where it was already treated as a fabrication. This claim was adopted by later bibliographers, such as Fei Changfang (fl. sixth century) and Daoxuan (596–667).⁹ Given the perennially negative attitude toward this text, it is hardly surprising to find that it was not included in the *Taishō Tripiṭaka* canon. Renewed interest in the text arose after the discovery of multiple versions bearing similar titles in the Dunhuang corpus. The translation below is largely based on these manuscripts. Sections one and two are from the manuscripts collected by the French explorer Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), and section three is from those brought back to Britain by Aurel Stein (1862–1943). Section four is taken from the only surviving fragmentary record of this text in the received canon, found in the Tang compilation *A Grove of Pearls in the Garden of the Dharma* (on that text, see chapter 3).¹⁰

FURTHER READING

- Buswell, Robert E., ed. 1990. *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Lai, Whalen W. 1987. "The Earliest Folk Buddhist Religion in China: *T'i-wei Po-li Ching* and Its Historical Significance." In *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society*, ed. David W. Chappell, 11–35. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
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EXCERPTS FROM THE *SŪTRA OF TRAPUṢA AND BHALLIKA*

1. On the Internal Landscape of the Body¹¹

The Buddha said to Elder Trapuṣa: "The external manifestation of the Spirits of the Five Precepts are called emissaries. The Han people call them the 'Eight Tri-

grams.¹² Internally, they govern the Five Zang Viscera and produce and nurture the seven appendages.¹³ The precept against killing corresponds to the east. Its emissary is called 'Shaking Tree.' In humans, its spirit resides in the Liver. It is called the spirit of the Liver because it governs the abdominal *qi* that controls and animates the bodies and limbs of the myriad things. The precept against consuming alcohol corresponds to the south. Its emissary is called 'Parting Fire.' In humans, its spirit resides in the Heart. The Heart is the seat of humaneness. It is called the spirit of the Heart because its main purpose is to nourish the myriad things and bring them to maturity. The precept against licentiousness corresponds to the west. Its emissary is called 'Blissful Metal.' In humans, its spirit resides in the Lungs. The Lungs provide cover for the Five Zang Viscera. It is called the spirit of the Lungs since it provides cover for the myriad things. The precept against stealing corresponds to the north. Its emissary is called 'Cavernous Water.' In humans, its spirit resides in the Kidneys. The Kidneys are where all the myriad things finally conclude. It is called the spirit of the Kidneys since it stores away all the myriad things. The precept against false speech corresponds to the center. Its emissary is called 'Grand Earth.' In humans, it resides in the Spleen. The Spleen controls the distribution of *qi*. It is called the spirit of the Spleen since it governs the dispersal of *qi* to all the remaining four viscera.¹⁴

The Five Zang Viscera are the bureaus of the Six Spirits. The Celestial Souls reside in the Liver, the Earthly Souls reside in the Lungs, mental faculties reside in the Spleen, volition and cognition reside in the Kidneys, and the spirit that occupies the central bureau resides in the Heart. The Liver is its second-in-command. The Heart is the ruler. It expounds and upholds righteousness and embraces humaneness. Thus, inside [the human body], the Heart resides underneath hundreds of layers. When it emerges, it is surrounded by the officers of the anterior, posterior, right, and left bureaus. The Lungs are the bureau of the Commander-in-Chief, the Liver is the bureau of the Minister of Education, and the Spleen is the bureau of the Minister of Public Works.¹⁵ The Kidneys are a great ocean. In its midst, the Divine Tortoise inhales and exhales primal *qi*, disseminating it to produce wind and rain, and circulating it within his four limbs to create humankind. The left Kidney is the bureau of the Director of Destinies and the right Kidney is the bureau of the Director of Emoluments.¹⁶ They control the life span of human beings. The Lord Grand One resides in the abdomen. He is the central pillar of humankind, the great general of Heaven, and the commander of the special armed forces. Inside the human body, he rules over the twelve thousand great spirits.¹⁷ The Grand One has eight emissaries. The Han people call them the 'Spirits of the Eight Trigrams.' The stomach is the Great Granary. Its emissary is responsible for carrying out the great feasts. The small and large intestines are emissaries of primal sustenance. They are responsible for tracking and apprehending perverse *qi*. The Altar of Soil is located to the left of the Triple Burner and the Pass Head, and the Altar of Grain is located to the right.¹⁸ [Their emissaries] are responsible for apprehending scoundrels and thieves. The Upper Burner distributes *qi* upward, into the head. The Middle Burner functions as the ancestral temple, also known as the Cinnabar Field. In male bodies, it controls the accumulation and

storage of semen. In female bodies, it helps preserve the fetus inside the uterus through the coiling snake.¹⁹ The human body is part of the same system as Heaven and Earth and the myriad things. The gods are recording your actions, so you should avoid violating or harming it. You should know that Heaven cannot be deceived and Earth cannot be betrayed. Thus, you must cultivate yourself, be vigilant in your actions, and refrain from idleness.”

2. On the Correspondence Between Physiological and Cosmic Cycles²⁰

The Elder Trapaṣa asked the Buddha: “The east corresponds to yang. In the spring-time, all the myriad things are born. Why is the [spirit of the] precept against killing said to govern this direction? How exactly are the four directions, plus the center, connected to the Five Zang Viscera?”

The Buddha replied: “During the first and second lunar months, the Transcendent Official governs the east. The Han people call it ‘the time when lesser yang is prominent.’ Yin and yang exchange their vital essence, producing the myriad things. The life span allotted to each species by Heaven is different. Every living thing, from humans to plants, must work tirelessly and endlessly to nurture the life it has been given.

“To take the life of another human being is one of the great prohibitions of Heaven and Earth. Thus, it is said that the [spirit of the] precept against killing governs the east. . . . All living beings are made out of divine *qi*. Every embodied being fears death and revels in life. The evil and brutish who kill and harm others violate the life-giving *qi* of Heaven and Earth. All the gods of Heaven and Earth merge their spirit to make sure everyone receives a sufficient life span allotment. Even those in high office, who have fortune and fame by their side, cannot prevent their *qi* from leaving, thereby saving their soul and evading death. Those who break the prohibition against killing are inhumane. The celestial spirits will immediately instruct the Director of Destiny to decrease their allotted life span and cause them misfortune. They will suffer hardship and calamity in their daily lives. Their family members will be inflicted by countless diseases, dying before completing their allotted life span. In the springtime, when the transcendent official updates his registry, those who broke the precept against killing will suffer from Liver and Spleen disease, and their complexion will turn dark yellow.

“The [spirit of the] precept against stealing governs the north. On the tenth and eleventh lunar months, the Bureau of Water is in charge.²¹ The Han people call it ‘the time when major yang is prominent.’ The myriad things are born in the spring, grow during summertime, are harvested in the autumn, and are stored in the winter.²² Those who break the precept against stealing take away things that are not their own and hide them away. This offsets the harmony between Heaven and Earth. When the warm rays of the lofty sun are dampened and it hangs so low in the sky, water turns into ice as early as the eleventh lunar month. Those

who break the precept against stealing—taking things that are not their own and hiding them away—can thus be said to go against their heavenly heart. Respecting the precept against stealing allows you to guard against external corruption and greed, but it can also help you protect your own body. In the world, there are seven treasures: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, cornelian, and emerald.²³ Those who steal the *qi* of the Seven Treasures pervert the Dharma and cause harm to others. Upon an investigation by the Bureau of Water, their property will be taken away from them and given to others. During wintertime, they will be infected by diseases in their Kidneys, urinary bladder, and triple burner, manifested by chest pains and a darkening of their complexion.”

3. On Moral Rectitude and Health²⁴

The Buddha said: “He who observes one [of the Five Percepts] to the fullest extent will enjoy the Five Blessings. He who observes all five of them to the fullest extent will enjoy twenty-five blessings. He who neglects to observe one precept will suffer the Five Evils, and five good spirits will leave [his body]. He who neglects to observe all five of them will suffer twenty-five evils and twenty-five good spirits will leave [his body].²⁵ All the gods and good inner spirits will be aggrieved and discontent, the Director of Destiny will reduce his life span allotment, and all the demons and demonic inner spirits will lay siege to his bodily orifices, inflicting him with disease.²⁶ Unremitting and incessant, the diseases will come in waves, confining him back to bed as soon as he gets better. Seeking to expel these demonic spirits, he will turn to the services of diviners. These efforts will only make the demonic spirits go even deeper [into his body], however, resulting in numerous deaths. The worldly and base unenlightened masses who do not understand the Dharma proclaim to serve the Buddha, but their actions will only result in misery and death. They do not understand that their behavior sets them apart from those who practice [the Dharma], nor do they cherish the services of an enlightened teacher or uphold the precepts and prohibitions. Attached to their own thoughts and desires, they only bring calamity and misfortune upon themselves.”

4. On Purification Rituals²⁷

The Elder Trapaṣa asked the Buddha: “Oh Lord of the Worlds, why do we perform the three annual Purification Rituals on the first, fifth, and ninth lunar months and the six daily Purification Rituals on the eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, twenty-third, twenty-ninth, and thirtieth days of the month?”

The Buddha replied: “On the first lunar month of the year, lesser yang is prominent, the myriad spirits alternate their designated positions, yin and yang exchange their vital essence, and the myriad things germinate, nourished by divine *qi*. It is for these reasons that on the first day of the first lunar month, the crown

prince upholds a Purification Ritual and silently cultivates the Way, thereby assisting in harmonizing *qi* and promoting the growth of the myriad things. This takes place until the fifteenth day of the month. On the fifth lunar month of the year, major yang is prominent, the myriad things alternate their designated positions, the plants and trees finish germinating, the hundred things are born but have yet to attain maturity, and even those who have already attained maturity are still in their prime. All of this depends on the flow of divine *qi*. Thus, performing the Purification Ritual from the first day to the fifteenth day of the fifth lunar month assists in the circulation of divine *qi* and enables the maturation of the myriad things. On the ninth lunar month of the year, lesser yin is prominent, *qian* and *kun* [i.e., the first two hexagrams found in the *Classic of Changes*] exchange positions, the myriad things wither away and die, all living things go into hibernation, and divine *qi* returns to its source, spontaneously becoming tranquil in accordance with the Way. Therefore, the Purification Ritual is held from the first until the fifteenth day of the ninth lunar month. Spring is when the myriad things are born; summer is when they grow; autumn is when they are harvested; winter is when they are stored. Things are born and die in accordance with the Way. Heaven and Earth have their great prohibitions. For this reason, disciples of the Buddha take joy in avoiding these prohibitions and upholding the Purification Ritual, thereby saving their soul.”

NOTES

1. Ch. *Tiwei boli jing*.
2. See Haskett 2011.
3. See Hureau 2010: 1213.
4. For more on the development of the Daoist version of this ritual in the early medieval period, see Lü 2010: 1284–1301.
5. The term “apocrypha,” or “pseudepigrapha,” is derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition and refers to noncanonical writing of falsely ascribed authorship. See Buswell 1990: 3–5.
6. Ch. *ganying*.
7. The description of the inner landscape found in the first section presented here bears a striking resemblance to a late fourth-century Daoist meditation manual, *Medial Canon of Lord Lao* (*Laojun zhongjing*), DZ no. 1168, which was also found in the Dunhuang corpus. For more on this text, see Schipper 1995 and Lagerwey 2004.
8. *Chu sanzang jiji*, T no. 2145.
9. For a detailed discussion, see Cao 2011.
10. T no. 2122. Two more fragmentary versions are found in the Peking (*shuang* 15) and Lenin-grad (no. 2718) collections. The Pelliot and Stein manuscripts have been reproduced in Tairyō 1976.
11. P no. 3732, lines 91–115. For an alternative translation of all excerpts, see Tokuno 1994. (Sub-headings are not in the original text.)

12. These are the eight basic combinations of broken and unbroken lines from which the cosmological framework described in the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*) emerged. References to the Eight Trigrams as inner deities that reside in the body of the adept can be found Daoist texts, most notably in the third-century compilation, *Array of the Five Talismans of the Numinous Treasure* (*Lingbao wufu xu*), DZ no. 388. See Pregadio 2008: 201–3.
13. These are the four limbs and the mouth, ears, and nose.
14. The names of the five emissaries given here correspond to five of the eight trigrams of the *Classic of Changes*.
15. The Commander-in-Chief (*sima*), Minister of Education (*situ*), and Minister of Public Works (*sigong*) are also known as the Three Dukes (*sangong*), i.e., the three officials who stood at the highest level of the imperial government in the Eastern Han. See Loewe 2006: 19–20.
16. The Director of Destinies (*siming*) and the Director of Emoluments (*silu*) are prominent members of the netherworld bureaucracy; they were deemed responsible for determining the life span allotment of all human beings. See Pregadio 2008: 914–15.
17. Similar to the Director of Destinies and the Director of Emoluments, the Grand One (*Taiyi*) is an indigenous deity that was worshipped in a Han imperial cult and later incorporated into popular religion. See Li 1995–1996.
18. Like the Triple Burner, the Pass Head (*guanyuan*) is a Chinese medical concept that is problematic to translate, although there seems to be a consensus among commentators on the *Basic Questions* (*Suwen*) edition of the *Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor* that it refers to a *qi* reservoir located three inches below the navel. See Unschuld, Tessenow, and Zheng 2011: 589.
19. The coiling snake (*dianqu*) might refer to the umbilical cord. See Tokuno 1994: 325.
20. P no. 3732, lines 22–43.
21. The Bureau of Water, along with the Bureaus of Earth and Water, are jointly known as the Three Bureaus. In early Celestial Masters Daoism, the Three Bureaus are associated with the netherworld bureaucracy, sometimes even as physical locations in the Fengdu Hell, where the souls of the deceased remain until their ultimate fate is determined. See Pregadio 2008: 833–34.
22. Creating a correspondence between bodily, natural, and cosmic cycles is a common trope in early Chinese literature. The idea that things are born in the spring, grow in the summer, harvested in the autumn, and stored in the winter was a common feature of Warring States thought and was later adsorbed into the Han imperial cult and individual regimens of biospiritual self-cultivation. See Tavor 2012: 128–29.
23. The list given here contains only six treasures. In other Buddhist sources, the Seven Treasures (*saptaratna*) also include either rubies or pearls. See Sen 2003: 298.
24. S no. 2051.
25. The Five Blessings are mentioned in the “Great Plan” (*Hongfan*) chapter of the *Exalted Documents* (*Shangshu*), which is one of the Five Classics. These include longevity, wealth, mental and physical well-being, the cultivation of virtue, and the fulfillment of one’s own fate. The Five Evils appear in chapter 23 of the *Basic Questions*. These are five external conditions that harm the Five Zang Viscera: heat damages the Heart, cold damages the

Lungs, wind damages the Liver, humidity damages the Spleen, and dryness damages the Kidneys. See Unschuld, Tessenow, and Zheng 2011: 405.

26. The notion that the human body contains both good spirits and potentially harmful demons can be found in contemporaneous Daoist texts such as *Demon Statues of Nüqing* (*Nüqing guilü*), DZ no. 790. See Tavor 2012: 203–8.
27. T no. 2122, 53: 932b27–c12. For an alternative translation, see Forte and May 1984.