



The Reincarnation Story of Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (573-621) : Rethinking a Buddhist Lineage in the 8-9th Century China and Japan

Pei-Ying Lin
SOAS, London

Abstract:

This essay aims to answer a question: In Tang 唐 (618-907) China and Heian 平安 (794-1185) Japan, to what extent was the Zen 禪 (Chi. Chan) School's sectarian consciousness clear and distinguishable? An answer is found in the process when the lineage discourse created power during the time of Japanese Monk Saichō 最澄 (767-822), who took an important part in generating the reincarnation stories of Shōtoku taishi 聖德太子 (573-621) and Huisi 慧思 (515-577). The connection between Huisi and Shōtoku taishi reflects that they shared the source constituted by the same master's teachings. The sectarian identity, however, might have been blurred due to this Buddhist networking.

The reincarnation story of Shōtoku taishi shows how the Zen resources were used; also it will be analysed as a rhetoric product of lineage construction by a variety of Chinese and Japanese monks. By investigating layers of additions in the reincarnation plots, their own sectarian identity is inferable from their purposes of story fabrication.

Does a distinct lineage represent an equally distinct membership, or sectarian consciousness? Lineage construction, however, was an issue in later periods, whereas during the earlier stages, Chinese Buddhists freely referred to and incorporated many other meditation systems for the sake of systematizing Buddhist teachings of similar kinds. Accompanying the trend of Buddhist categorization and systematization, in the early stages, Zen-related terminology was often borrowed and shared by various schools.

The religious environment of medieval China represents a huge 'cafeteria' where religious followers took combos of whatever they liked most. Moreover, even sectarian lineages were part of the shared resources and sometimes interchangeable in the initial stage. Buddhists from various traditions shared the same 'Zen' masters and patriarchs. Hence, the assumption of a monolithic "Zen School" based on "the" Zen lineage is in fact our projection and rather problematic; it is more likely that Zen was simply "a" lineage, which was not that special and unique as it has been depicted.



Introduction

Shōtoku taishi (Prince Shōtoku) has invited a longstanding interest of modern scholars.¹ His association with Buddhism as the earliest in Japan makes him a starting point of historical discussions on Japanese Buddhism, as well as on the Sino-Japan cultural interaction. Conspicuously, his reincarnation story has been put in use by Zen and Tendai followers in Japan from the eighth century onward. Amongst the texts that have come down to us, it is very interesting to find that the authors, including Japanese and Chinese, of these texts had some subtle, but sturdy, connections between each other. The connections, aligned with the historical context, prove to manifest a continuing and developing agenda of Buddhist monks, which pointed at lineage invention. In other words, it is from these texts that the reincarnation stories centred on Shōtoku taishi were incorporated into the lineage making process. The mechanism of lineage making set about since that time continued for centuries in Japan, most notably carried on by the Tendai monks.

The ideological use of reincarnation story in the Buddhist context represents an important source for disclosing the agendas of medieval monks in China and Japan. Hence, this essay first aims to look into the discourse, so as to find out its underlying logic and the mechanism of lineage invention in relation to reincarnation legends, the latter in some ways equivalent to the former. It then argues that the politics within Buddhism dominated the process of legend invention, whereas, at the same time, the new discourse may have altered or reshaped the self-definition of the Tendai sect. Their self-definition involves how Japanese monks located themselves within a broader context of East Asian Buddhism. Therefore, it is arguable that the politics in a form of reincarnation legend reveals the authors' motives to rearrange the Sino-Japan association.

In terms of the structure of this essay, following by a brief account of the plot of the reincarnation story of Shōtoku taishi, the main part of this essay turns to an analysis about the authors and their mutual relationships. The conclusion, then, draws from the motives of these authors taking part. In so doing, the continuing agendas of the Chinese and Japanese authors selected become discernible.

¹ Discussions on this mythical figure, especially in the Japanese scholarship, have centred on his historical activities. Ōyama Seiichi 大山誠一 has argued that existence of Shōtoku taishi as a historical figure was fabricated; see Ōyama (2003), *Shōtoku Taishi no shinjitsu* 聖德太子の真実, Tokyo: Heibonsha. For an updated study on Buddhism under the patronage of Shōtoku taishi, see Sone Masato 曾根正人 (2007), *Shōtoku Taishi to Asuka Bukkyō* 聖德太子と飛鳥仏教, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan. For a study of the complicated process of the construction of Shōtoku taishi's myth, in relation to the Korean immigrants in particular, see Michael Como (2008), *Shōtoku: Ethnicity, Ritual, and Violence in the Japanese Buddhist Tradition*, New York: Oxford University Press.



The survey provided in this essay takes aim at providing a different genealogy, which transcends spatial limit and sectarian boundary.² Sectarian identity of medieval Buddhists, presented in the sectarian historiography, demands a better definition. It is widely accepted that Buddhist sectarian history of China and Japan, largely boosted by hagiographical writing and lineage making, began from around the seventh century. Nevertheless, this type of sectarian movement during the early stage is still a field, which requires discovery.³

As a different aspect, the reincarnation story also presents intriguing Sino-Japan relations within the Buddhist tradition. Early in the eighth century, Japanese monks had thoroughgoing thought about the position of themselves in relation to the Buddhist “motherland” of either China or India. Japanese monks were more than imitators and receivers of their Chinese fellows. Even though it is not a brand new caution that Japanese Buddhism should not be treated as simply a continuation of Chinese Buddhism, while coming to terms with sectarian history, however, scholars start from tracing the root in China.⁴ Legends associated with Shōtoku taishi is one example that the rebirth legends happened in Japan did not have the same potency in China.

1. The Reincarnation Story

Shōtoku taishi 聖德太子 (573- 621), also known as Prince Umayado 厩戸皇子, was literally the earliest Japanese ruler who paid great patronage to Buddhism introduced from China. The official introduction of Buddhism started during the rule of his father, Emperor Yōmei 用明 (r. 585-587), but the substantial introduction of Buddhism, together with Confucianism and Chinese culture, was put forward by Shōtoku taishi. It is said that Shōtoku taishi wrote commentaries to three important Buddhist sūtras, namely the *Śrīmālā-sūtra* 勝鬘經, the *Lotus Sutra* 法華經, and the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra* 維摩經. As such an important figure in Buddhism, more and more mythical components were added to the biographies of Shōtoku Taishi as time moves on. It is of our interest here that Shōtoku taishi was connected to the

² For an outstanding study, which adopts an approach that overcomes the sectarian limitations, see James Robson (2009), *Power of Place: The Religious Landscape of the Southern Sacred Peak (Nanyue) in Medieval China*, Harvard Univ. Press.

³ Therefore, it comes a valuable volume on Tiantai's propaganda, Jinhua Chen (1999), *Making and remaking history: a study of Tiantai sectarian historiography*. Tokyo, International Institute for Buddhist Studies of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies. For how the Chan school established its foundation in the society, see John J. Jørgensen (2005), *Inventing Hui-neng, the sixth Patriarch: Hagiography and biography in early Ch'an*, Leiden ; Boston, Brill. Also, Wendi Adamek has done an excellent study on the *Lidai fabaoji*, which demonstrates the Chan school's lineage making, see Wendi L. Adamek (2007). *The mystique of transmission: on an early Chan history and its contexts*, New York, Columbia University Press.

⁴ Jinhua Chen's (2008) recent study on the Japanese Tendai sect is one exception, which argues that the Japanese Tendai Esoteric literature could be the origin of some Tiantai scriptures in the Chinese side. See Jinhua Chen (2008), *Legend and Legitimation: The Formation of Tendai Esoteric Buddhism in Japan*, Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques, vol. 30. Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises.



Chinese Tiantai Patriarch Huisi⁵—the former was said to be the reincarnation of the latter. In the relevant accounts (listed below), Huisi is described to be reborn as Shōtoku taishi, and admired as having compassion to spread Buddhism to a non-Buddhist land.

The legend that the Shōtoku taishi was the reincarnation of Huisi seemed to be widely accepted by Chinese and Japanese Buddhists, and it took effect in the Sino-Japan Buddhist transmission.⁶ However, there was an obvious counter-evidence of this legend: the years of birth of these two figures. Shōtoku taishi was born in 573, three years earlier than Huisi's death in 577 recorded in Daoxuan's *Xu gaoseng zhuan*. Considering the existence of contradictory evidences, it is curious why this story was still widely accepted by medieval Buddhists—there must be a strong motivation in making up this story. In other words, the use of this legend is a pertinent clue for understanding the propagandas of the authors. There are several versions of the legend; concerning the sources, the texts to be discussed are listed as the following:

- A. *Nanyue Si Chanshi famen zhuan* 南岳思禪師法門傳 (“Account about the Dharma Branch of *Dhyāna* Master Nanyue Si”) by Du Fei 杜胄, probably written during 716-732. Now lost.⁷
- B. *Qidai ji* (Jap. *Shichidaiki*) 七代記 (“Story of Seven Lives”) (Also known as the *Hiroshima Taihon taishi den* 廣島大本太子傳), compiled in 771. In the end of this text, there are quotations from the lost *Datang guo Hengzhou Hengshan daochang Shi Huisi chanshi qidai ji* 大唐國衡州衡山道場釋慧思禪師七代記 (“Story of the Seven Lives of *Dhyāna* Master Shi Huisi of Mount Heng, Hengzhou, Great Tang State”)⁸

⁵ Nanyue Huisi (Jap. Nangaku Eshi) 南岳慧思 (515-577) was the master of Tiantai Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597). According to Huisi's biography in the *Xugaoseng zhuan*, he was at first inspired by the *Most Wonderful Meditation Sutra* 最妙勝定經, and then joined the group led by Huiwen 慧文 in Northern Qi. T (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*) 50, No. 2060, p. 563c. For a study of Huisi's life, see Paul Magnin (1979), *La vie et l'œuvre de Huisi : 515-577 : les origines de la secte bouddhique chinoise du Tiantai*, Paris, École française d'Extrême-Orient : depositaire, Adrien-Maisonneuve. For a study on one of Huisi's important work, see Daniel B. Stevenson and H. Kanno (2006), *The meaning of the Lotus sutra's course of ease and bliss : an annotated translation and study of Nanyue Huisi's (515-577) Fahua jing anlexing yi*. Tokyo: International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, Soka University.

⁶ From the eighth century onwards, Chinese monks were willing to transmit teachings to Japanese monks, and held predictions of Japanese monks. This may have been partly due to reincarnation stories linking Huisi and Shōtoku taishi. See Paul Groner (1984), *Saichō: the establishment of the Japanese Tendai School*, Seoul: Po Chin Chai, p. 291. One example can be found when Enshū 圓修, who succeeded the *zazu*, went to China, Chinese monks on Mt. Tiantai helped Enshū with zeal. BZ (*Dainihon Bukkyō zenshū* 大日本仏教全集) 65, pp. 207-8.

⁷ This book title appears in Ennin's catalogue, *Jikaka daishi zaitō sōkoroku* 慈覺大師在唐送進錄, T 55, No. 2166, pp. 1075b; 1077c, T 55. Some quotations survived in Saichō's writings and the other texts listed below, eg. the *Jōgū taishi shūi ki* 上宮太子拾遺記, BZ 112, pp. 249, 361.

⁸ See the *Nara ibun* 寧樂遺文, Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三 (1965), ed., Tokyo: Tōkyōdō shuppan, vol. 3, pp. 893a.10 – 894a.5. For a fine research on the text in relation to the Zen school, see Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士 (1997: 98- 103), “Nara jidai no zen” 奈良時代の禪, in *Zen to shisō* 禪と思想, Sueki Fumihiko, ed., Tokyo: Perikansha, pp. 77-108. For a recent research on its authorship, see T. H.



- C. *Dai Tō denkai shisō myōki daiwajō Ganjin den* 大唐伝戒師僧名記大和上鑑真伝 (“Biography of Great Master Jianzhen in a Collection of Names for Vinaya Masters from the Great Tang”; hereafter: *Ganjin den*) by Situ (Jap. Shitaku) 思託 (722-809) and Fajin (Jap. Hōshin) 法進 (709-778).⁹
- D. *Tō daiwajō tōseiden* 唐大和上東征傳 (“The Account of Tang Great Master’s Eastward Conquest”; Hereafter: *Tōseiden*) by Aomi-no-Mabito Genkai 真人元開 (722-785) in 779.¹⁰
- E. *Jōgū kōtaishi bosatsu den* 上宮皇太子菩薩傳 (“The Biography of the Prince Bodhisattva”; hereafter: *Bosatsu den*) by Situ during 786-794.¹¹
- F. *Kenkairon* 顯戒論 上¹² and the preface poem to the *Nyu Sitennōji Shōtoku taishibyō Guden Hokkeshū* 入四天王寺聖德太子廟求傳法華宗¹³ by Saichō.
- G. *Denjutsu isshin kaimon* 伝述一心戒文 (“Concerning the Essay on the One-Mind Precepts”) by Kōjō 光定 (779 – 858) in 834.¹⁴
- H. *Jōgū taishi shūi ki* 上宮太子拾遺記 (“A Record of Gleanings of Jōgū Shōtoku”) by Hōkū 法空 (c. 1314).¹⁵

According to Sueki Fumehiko¹⁶, the origin of this legend probably came from an indication that “Huisi was reborn in a place where there was no Buddhist teachings yet” in the lost text by Du Fei, the earliest resource of this legend. Judging from the dates of all the texts, Sueki deduced that it is very likely that the story of Huisi’s seven

Barrett (2009) “Rebirth From China To Japan In Nara Hagiography: A Reconsideration”, in *Buddhist Studies Review* 26.1 (2009). (Coming out very shortly.) Based on two odd phrases, “below his epitaph” 碑下題 and “Emperor Li the Third Gentlemen” 李三郎帝, appeared in the colophon, Barrett suggests that the *Shichidaiki* was fabricated by a Japanese author, instead of a Chinese origin as being widely accepted. Taken Michael Como’s (2008) study on the role of Monk Dōji 道慈 (? - 744) into consideration, Barrett furthers his proposition that the author is very likely to be Dōji or his Japanese fellows.

⁹ It is collected in the *Shōtoku taishi heishiden zōkanmon* 聖德太子平氏傳雜勘文 (hereafter: *Zōkanmon*), in BZ 112 (the volume of *Shōtoku taishi den sōsho*), pp. 227-8. *Zōkanmon* is a collection of writings about the life of Shōtoku taishi.

¹⁰ T51, No. 2089, p. 988a. For French and English translations of this text, see Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 (1928-9), “Le voyage de Kanshin”, in *Bulletin d'Ecole Francaise de l'Extrême Orient* XXVIII (1928) pp.1-42 (Introduction), pp.442-472 (Translation I); BEFEO XXIX (1929) pp.48-62 (Translation II); Marcus Bingenheimer (2003-4), “A translation of the *Tōdaiwajō tōseiden* 唐大和上東征傳 (T.2089 (7))”, in *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* No.4 (2003) & No.5 (2004). For some analysis of the appearance of this biography, see Andō Kōsei 安藤更生 (1960), *Ganjin daiwajō den no kenkyū* 鑑真大和上傳之研究, Tokyo: Heibonsha, pp. 113-4.

¹¹ See BZ 112, p.1.

¹² DZ (*Eizan daishiden* 叡山大師伝) 1. The end of section 7 in *Kenkairon* vol. 1. See annotations in Andō Toshio 安藤俊雄 and Sonoda, Kōyū 蘭田香融 (1991), eds., *Saichō: Kenkairon, Sange gakushōshiki, tagōhen* 最澄一顯戒論、山家学生式、他五篇, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, p. 46.

¹³ DZ 3, p. 447.

¹⁴ T 74, No. 2379, 653a- 654c.

¹⁵ BZ 112, pp. 2, 6, 8, 115, 225.

¹⁶ Sueki (1997: 98-99).



lives had been widely known already in Tang China before it was written down.¹⁷ In terms of what have come down to us, the clearest version of this account appears in a biography of Jianzhen 鑑真 (688-763), the *Ganjin den*: the authors, Situo and Fajin were Jianzhen's most eminent disciples. In the *Tōseiden*, a relatively latter edition of Jianzhen's biography, this reincarnation story also plays a part. Later in the Tendai literature, it is mentioned in Saichō's *Kenkairon* and Kōjō's *Denjutsu isshin kaimon*. From Du Fei to Kōjō, the author names listed above indicate a variety of Buddhist sects, including Zen, Tendai and Vinaya monks. In the analysis below, not unnaturally, a strong cross-sectarian connection between the authors becomes evident.

2. Du Fei 杜朏 (c.710 – 720)

It appears that, during the seventh century, Huisi was rather attractive to the Chan monks in China. Du Fei, who composed the earliest text of the reincarnation story, was also the author of *Chuan fabao ji* 傳法寶記 (ca. 713)¹⁸, a Chan lineage account discovered at Dunhuang. Du Fei was a disciple of Faru 法如 (638-689). The *Chuan fabao ji* claimed that Monk Faru received the orthodox lineage rendering down from Bodhidharma: it shows that Du Fei had a keen sense of what an orthodox lineage represents. Hence, the fact that he wrote a biography for Huisi indicates that the latter was regarded as having some affiliations with the Chan lineage.

This text is important in the way that it initiated a new method in imagining Huisi. Its mention of a 'non-Buddhist country' brings forward the possibility of Japanese connection. It also hints at a supernatural power of knowing one's destination of next life, which was rather appealing to meditation practitioners. Also, Huisi's sympathy to the non-Buddhist land represents bodhisattva's compassion. This rhetoric, however, was not completely new as one can find similar descriptions in stories about Bodhidharma, too. This similarity indicates that the stories about Huisi and Bodhidharma might share the same group of readers. The fact that Du Fei was the author of both Huisi's story and a Chan lineage account affirms the shared readership again. This means the members of these two 'sects' were more or less the same group of people.

The images of Huisi and Bodhidharma are very similar in Du Fei's *Chuan fabao ji* and the *Nanyue Si chanshi famen zhuan*. This means that Du Fei regarded the two masters a similar type of meditation practitioners. Historical evidences may help to explain it. Du Fei once gave lectures to Puji 普寂 (851 – 739) at the Dafuxiansi 大福

¹⁷ Nevertheless, in the biographies of Zhiyi written by Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (written in 784), Guanding 灌頂 (561-632), and other later editions, the story is not mentioned. See *DZ* 4, pp. 175-8; 206-7.

¹⁸ For Du Fei and the *Chuan fabao ji*, see Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 (2000), *Shoki zenshū shisho no kenkyū* 初期禪宗史書の研究, *Yanagida Seizan shū* 柳田聖山集 vol. 6, Kyoto: Hōzōkan 法藏館; reprint from Yanagida (1967) *Shoki zenshū shisho no kenkyū*, Kyoto: Hōzōkan, pp. 47-50.



先寺 in capital Louyang.¹⁹ Puji was Shenxiu's 神秀 (606? – 706) disciple and later became the mentor of Daoxuan, who transmitted Chan teachings to Gyōhyō 行表 (722 – 797). Gyōhyō was the direct supervisor of Saichō. This means Du Fei's perception of Bodhidharma and Huisi might have been transmitted to Japan through this line, and finally accepted by Saichō and his disciples. This assumption is supported by the facts that the common characteristics of Puji, Daoxuan and Gyōhyō are that they all learnt Tiantai, Chan and Vinaya, and also, they all transmitted the meditation associated with the Bodhidharma system.²⁰

The direct link between Huisi and Bodhidharma developed continuously in the Buddhist literature. In the *Qidai ji*, Huisi was said to have met Bodhidharma, who encouraged Huisi to be reborn in Japan for the next life. Other versions even go so far to acclaim that Shōtoku taishi also met Bodhidharma on a mountain, when Bodhidharma pretended to be a hungry and poor old man. Here, it is clear that the authors of these stories tried to build a connection between the Huisi, Bodhidharma and Shōtoku taishi. The meeting between Bodhidharma and Shōtoku taishi was strongly proclaimed by Kōjō in the *Denjutsu isshinkaimon*, where both the *Qidai ji* and the lost *Datang guo Hengzhou Hengshan daochang Shi Huisi chanshi qidai ji* are quoted. Kōjō's attitude of asserting this connection demonstrates that, at least at Mount Hiei, Bodhidharma was regarded as quite close to the Tendai School.

This story occurred during a time when issues about sectarian lineages increased its weightiness. Reincarnation, in some ways, provided the same function with lineage construction. Reincarnation represents doctrinal continuation as well as transmission of authority. Therefore, it is understandable that the authors of lineage accounts turned out to be those who advocated the reincarnation story. On the other hand, it is likely that the sectarian boundary was not clear-cut between the various sects in an early stage.

3. Situo 思託 (722-809) and Jianzhen 鑑真 (688-763)

Among the texts listed, one can find that Situo is the author of two biographies, one of Jianzhen and another of Shōtoku taishi: the *Ganjin den* and the *Bosatsu den*. Why did Situo compose these two biographies, and mention the reincarnation legend in the two works? It is reasonable that he would write a biography for his own master Jianzhen, whereas his motive of writing a biography of Shōtoku taishi may not be taken for granted. By investigating how he depicted Jianzhen, Huisi and Shōtoku taishi, one may get a clear picture of his agenda.

¹⁹ Yanagida (2000: 48).

²⁰ For Saichō's teachings of the Bodhidharma system, see Sueki (1997: 83, 96).



Tsuji Zennosuke²¹ argues that Situo invented the reincarnation story as a political strategy to compete with other Buddhist groups. Accompanying Jianzhen, Situo came to Japan in 753 and became Jianzhen's most reliable disciple since then. While dwelling in the Tōshōdaiji 唐昭提寺, Jianzhen encountered criticism and oppression from other Japanese Buddhists. It is possible that Situo promoted this legendary story in order to get the legitimacy for his master. Nevertheless, it is beyond our discussion that whether Situo was the first author of this story or not. This section focuses on how Situo conferred the image of Huisi and Shōtoku taishi, and so as to identify Situo's the purpose.

According to the *Bosatsu den* by Situo, Shōtoku taishi had often lent a hand to common people with expedient methods; through him, the *Lotus Sutra* was propagated for the first time. Moreover, Situo described Shōtoku taishi as practising meditation regularly; Shōtoku taishi had achieved a fairly advanced stage in meditation for that he often entered samādhi (*ru ding* 入定) for one, three or even five days. The contemporaneous people did not understand what meditation or *dhyāna* (*Chan ding* 禪定) was and simply thought him having "entered the hall of dreams" (*ru mengtang* 入夢堂). Furthermore, Shōtoku taishi did not lose the memory of his past life as a Chinese patriarch, and once he asked his sister to bring back from the Tang some items left by his previous life. According to what Situo has laid out, there are parallels between Shōtoku taishi's image and Huisi's: their supernatural capability of knowing the past life, and their persistence in meditation practise. In the same text, firstly, Huisi was also depicted as mastering four kinds of meditation and practising the ascetics (*toutuo xing* 頭陀行) in Mount Nanyue. Secondly, Huisi once said that both he and Zhiyi attended the Śākyamuni Buddha's preaching on the *Lotus Sutra* on the Mount Grdhrakuta.²² Then, it goes on to say that Huisi once erected three-life stone(s) on the mountain, which implies that he knew his past lives clearly and had ability to decide his location of rebirth.²³

Situo's depiction of both Huisi and Shōtoku taishi continued to be quoted in later editions of stories of Shōtoku taishi. In the *Zōkanmon*²⁴ and the *Taishi den kokon mokuroku shō* 太子傳古今目錄鈔²⁵, it goes even further to say that the Shōtoku taishi (and Huisi) was the reincarnation of the Lady Śrīmālā in earlier time and Kōbō daishi 弘法大師 (Kūkai 空海, 774-835) in later time. The writings on Shōtoku taishi seem to develop so freely that connections between Shōtoku taishi, Huisi,

²¹ Tsuji Zennosuke 辻善之助 (1929), "Shōtoku taishi Eshi zenshi goshin setsu nikansuru gi" 聖德太子慧思禪師後身説に関する疑, in *Reikishi Chiri* 歴史地理 53.1, pp. 1-13, reprinted in Tsuji (1931), *Nihon Bukkyōshi no kenkyū* (zokuhen) 日本仏教史の研究 続編, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.

²² Huisi's biography in Daoxuan's *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan* mentions that Huisi told Zhiyi that himself and Zhiyi were both Mount Grdhrakuta when Śākyamuni was preaching on the *Lotus Sutra*. However, this may not be taken literally as Huisi really means he had such a past life, but Situo apparently regarded it as a proof of Huisi's supernatural capability.

²³ Daoxuan's *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan* has no mention about Huisi's rebirth in the next life.

²⁴ BZ 112, p. 229.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 71.



Bodhidharma, Lady Śrīmālā and Kōbō daishi were built up in the *Zōkanmon* and the *Taishi den kokon mokuroku shō*. The reincarnation story comprised of these big names has provided convenient approaches for Buddhist followers to convince others of a distinct origin of their lineage. The fact that this story was absorbed and expanded by later Buddhists is a proof that the connection between Shōtoku taishi and Huisi corresponded to medieval Buddhist's need. However, what was the reason for Situo to borrow a Chinese Tiantai patriarch's name to honour his own master Jianzhen? In answering this question, we must refer to Jianzhen's biography by Situo.

This reincarnation story quoted in Jianzhen's biography appears in the section about his decision to depart for Japan. It was during the time when the sea transport was fairly dangerous and very few Chinese masters dared to travel to Japan at the risk of their lives.²⁶ When Japanese monks, namely Eiei 榮叡 and Fushō 普照, invited Jianzhen to go to Japan with them in 742. Eiei and Fushō began their petition by saying that,

“The teachings of the Buddha have flown east and reached Japan. But although these teachings are there, nobody has [properly] transmitted them. In Japan there was once Shōtoku Taishi, who said that after 200 years, the holy teachings would prosper in Japan. Now the hour has come. We beseech the Great Master to venture to the East and take charge of the advancement [of Buddhism].”²⁷

In hearing that, out of the expectation of all other people in attendance, Jianzhen gave a positive reply to the invitation. He said that,

“A long time ago I heard that the Meditation Master Huisi from Nanyue after his demise was reincarnated as a prince in Japan to promulgate Buddhism and enlighten the people [there]. I have also heard that in Japan there was King *Nagayao* 長屋王 (684-729), who deeply revered Buddhism. I gather that it implicates that [Japan] is a good country to propagate Buddhism.”²⁸

It is quite remarkable that Jianzhen mentioned Huisi in this special occasion. No one can be sure if Jianzhen really talked about the legendary story at this historical point, but, however, it is beyond question that Jianzhen and Situo had respect to Huisi, so that Situo had no hesitate to mention Huisi. Moreover, in the biography written by Situo, it goes on to refer to the anecdote about Huisi's first meet with his successor,

²⁶ Master Jianzhen from Yangzhou region was regarded as the earliest monk who bravely travelled across the dangerous sea to Japan, so his contemporary called him “the monk who had crossed the sea” (*Guohai heshang* 過海和尚). See the section of “Fofa guo haidong” 佛法過海東 in Li Zhao's 李肇 (fl. 806-820) *Tang Guoshi Bu* 唐國史補 卷上, vol. 1, Shanghai : Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1957. p. 23.

²⁷ *Tōseiden*, in T51, No. 2089, 988b. Translation is from Marcus Bingenheimer (2003: 171).

²⁸ T 51, 988b. Translation is adopted from Bingenheimer (2003: 171-2). Compare with the *Ganjin den*, in *BZ* 112, p. 228.



Zhiyi. Huisi recognised Zhiyi's past life and told Zhiyi that they received Śākyamuni Buddha's preaching of the Lotus Sutra on Mount Grdhrakuta. Thereupon, Zhiyi immediately attained the one-vehicle sudden enlightenment²⁹. Following this anecdote, Situo concludes that,

“Hence, we know that *Dhyāna* Master [Hui]Si, in terms of his earlier practice, recited the Lotus Sutra as well as contemplated deeply in *dhyāna*. [One day,] all in a sudden, the view instantly cleared up on him and he enlightened by attaining the *Lotus samādhi*. ... Zhiyi relentlessly devoted himself to Buddhist careers in the Tang country; likewise, *Dhyāna* Master [Hui]Si cultivated and transformed sentient beings in the East of the sea.”³⁰

Situo introduced Huisi and Zhiyi as a pair of Buddhist sages who devoted themselves to help sentient beings, resembling Mahāyāna bodhisattvas. By phrasing that one of the two remained in China and the other one went to Japan, China and Japan become ‘twin’ countries in terms of Buddhist transmission. It also implicated that Japan was an important place that urgently needed Chinese masters to transmit Buddhism. It is totally reasonable that being a disciple of Jianzhen, it was necessary to provide a good reason for travelling overseas from China to Japan. By pairing the two sages of Huisi and Zhiyi, Japan and China become a pair, too. Then, by admiring Huisi's decision to be reborn in Japan, Situo meant to address that his master was as great as the two big names. Only under this context, it becomes sensible that Situo spent more than half space for Huisi in the biography he dedicated to his master, the *Ganjin den*. As Situo called themselves Vinaya masters as well as expressed the aim of transmitting proper Vinaya codes to Japan, the fact that Huisi was singled out to pay particular respect indicates that Situo valued the Tiantai tradition. Situo's view of Tiantai probably came from Jianzhen's teaching. This hypothesis is also supported by other proofs of Jianzhen's connection with the Chinese Tiantai circle, which is discussed below.

4. Jianzhen and Huisi

The link between Huisi and Jianzhen is showed in both their doctrines and the geographical facts. First of all, Jianzhen and Huisi were both from the Yangzhou 揚州 region. Jianzhen was probably familiar with Huisi's name when he was growing up in Yangzhou. The Yangzhou Longxingsi 揚州龍興寺³¹, where Jianzhen was ordained and spend all his teenage, was a famous temple in that region. According to the description about Yangzhou Longxingsi in Ennin's diary³², inside the Lotus Hall of this temple, there was a portrait of Huisi; inside its Eastern Tower Hall, there was statue and biographical inscription of Jianzhen. In addition, after making the decision

²⁹ Equal to the *Lotus samādhi* (*Hokke zanmai* 法華三昧), which appears later in the same passage.

³⁰ BZ 112, p. 228 b.

³¹ See Andō Kōsei 安藤更生(1958), *Ganjin* 鑑真 (688-763), Tokyo: Bijutsu chuppansha, pp. 22-5.

³² Ennin's *Nittō guhō junrei gyōki* 入唐求法巡礼行記, vol. 1, in BZ 113, p. 183b.



to depart for Japan, in order to physically demonstrate his reverence to Huisi, Jianzhen then took a pilgrimage to Mount Heng (*Nanyue*) where Huisi resided.³³

Jianzhen's education indicates a syncretic approach that he learnt Tiantai, Chan, and precepts. According to the *Tōseiden*³⁴, Jianzhen first learnt precepts and Chan (*Chanmen* 禪門) from Master Zhiman 智滿 at Yangzhou Dayunsi 揚州大雲寺. Later he studied precepts from the fourth Tiantai Patriarch Hongjing 弘景 (634-712) at the Yuquansi 玉泉寺. The Yuquansi was a monastery famous for its syncretic teachings, containing Tiantai, Chan, Vinaya and Esoteric Buddhism. For example, Esoteric Master Yixing 一行 (683 – 727), Hongjing's student, lived here and Shenxiu resided at Yuquansi for some time. Moreover, Puji, who was Shenxiu's disciple and once studied under Du Fei, also came to the Yuquansi to learn from Hongjing. Hence, it is obvious that Jianzhen had an adequate connection with the Chan circle. This fact corresponds to the trend already existed in southern China—a cross transmission between Chan and Vinaya (*Chan Lü huchuan* 禪律互傳).³⁵

Judging from the bibliography he brought to Japan with him³⁶, the amount of Tiantai scriptures proves Jianzhen's preference for Tiantai teachings. Meanwhile, the Tang aristocracy during his time were fairly aware of his study on the Tiantai teachings. This supposition is supported by the occurrence of the *Inscription for the Tower of Cross-Sea Monk* 過海和尚塔銘 (*Guohai heshang taming*)³⁷ written by Liang Su 梁肅 (753-793). Liang Su was an outstanding writer in the Tang and has been known for his close relationship with some famous Tiantai monks.³⁸ The fact that Liang Su wrote an inscription for Jianzhen implies that the Tiantai circle was also quite familiar to Jianzhen, too. Therefore, one may draw a conclusion that it was quite common that Buddhist followers during that time trained themselves with both Vinaya and Tiantai teachings.

5. Saichō and Huisi

The process that Saichō appropriated this legend is closely related to the reshaping of Tendai's self-definition in Japan.³⁹ Saichō was not an author of any

³³ Andō Kōsei (1958: 130). Jianzhen also went to Zhiyi's monastery in Mount Tiantai and Six Patriarch Huineng's Faquansi in Shaozhou as a pious pilgrim.

³⁴ T51, No. 2089, 988b.

³⁵ For instance, it was said that Vinaya Master Dao'an 道岸 (654-712) dreamed of Mahākāśyapa 摩訶迦葉 giving instructions. See Yanagida (2000: 198).

³⁶ For a list of the items and scriptures he brought to Japan, see *Tōseiden*, T 51, No. 2059, 993a.

³⁷ The original has been lost. Citation about it can be found in the *Quan Tang Wen* 480. The "Cross-Sea monk" refers to Jianzhen.

³⁸ For Liang Su's thought in relation to Buddhism, see Guo Zhonghan 郭中翰 (1998), *Liang Su (753-793 C.E.) and the Restoration of Literature (wen-chang or literary compositions) as well as the Learning of Nature and Destiny in the mid-T'ang China*, MA dissertation (1998), National Ching Hwa University, Taiwan.

³⁹ Como (2008: 133- 153) also notices that Japanese Buddhist apologists up to Saichō have put Shōtoku taishi at the centre in building up the Tendai tradition and its self-definition. Through a survey of the



versions of the reincarnation story, but he had quoted and emphasised it in his preaching. For example, it is written in the *Taishi den kokon mokuroku shō* that Saichō eulogised that Huisi had seven lives in China before the eighth life as Shōtoku taishi.⁴⁰ It is also mentioned in Saichō's *Kenkairon* and the preface poem to the *Nyu Sitennojī Shōtoku taishibyō Guden Hokkeshū*.⁴¹ Later, Saichō's disciple Kōjō spent remarkable space in the *Denjutsu isshin kaimon* to expound this legend in details. It is evident that this reincarnation story expedited Saichō and his followers to promote the Tendai School—the reincarnation of Shōtoku taishi vindicates that Tendai should be in the central place in the Japanese Buddhism. If one looks at the competition between Buddhist groups in Heian (794-1185) Japan, it is fairly rational that Saichō and his followers adopted this strategy as an agenda.

The competition between the Sanron 三論 and the Hossō 法相⁴² groups was fierce during early Heian, and Emperor Kammu 桓武天皇 (737-806, r. 782-806) attempted to balance the two sects by encouraging Buddhist monks to learn Sanron teachings. Probably in responding to the competition between some of the Nara sects, Saichō raised a criticism of the six Nara sects in his proposal, *Shōnyuttō shōyakuhyō* 請入唐請益表⁴³ to study in Tang China. Saichō first denigrated the śāstra-centred Sanron and Hossō, and then he praised the value of the *Lotus Sūtra* and the Tendai School. By stating a higher status of sūtras over śāstras, the Tendai School was elevated over both Sanron and Hossō. In the Chinese land, Saichō probably found Huisi was in a similar situation with him that they both faced enemies from exegetic traditions.

Saichō began to be interested in the Chinese Tiantai School while in Japan, but among the Tiantai masters, Saichō seemed to find Huisi particularly appealing. Some other schools were also based on sūtras instead of śāstras in China, so the *Lotus Sūtra*'s attractiveness cannot be the only factor of Saichō's interest in the Tiantai. Additionally, given that Huisi was one of the earliest masters advocating meditation practice against the one-sided exegetic tradition, one finds many parallels of Huisi's background with Saichō's circumstances. Further more, since that Saichō was at first attracted by the meditation section in the Tiantai teachings brought by Jianzhen, it seems reasonable that teachings and stories of Huisi greatly inspired Saichō and

efforts done by several Japanese monks, namely Dōji, Ganjin (Jianzhen), Huisi and Saichō, heargues that the Shōtoku cult eventually brought about the Nara-Heian Buddhist transition.

⁴⁰ BZ 112, p. 50. Also in DZ 4, p. 747. The original text reads: “傳教大師讚云、剋七生於大唐，現一生於日本，位登初信，妙解圓融 云云。”

⁴¹ Analysis about Saichō's writings in Sonoda, Kōyū 園田香融 (1991), “Saichō to sono shisō” 最澄とその思想, in Andō Toshio 安藤俊雄 and Sonoda Kōyū, eds., *Saichō: Kenkairon, Sange gakashōshiki, tagōhen* 最澄一顯戒論、山家学生式、他五篇, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, pp. 462-70.

⁴² Jinhua Chen (1999: 121 -126) convincingly proves that the *Ehyō Tendai shū* 依憑天臺集 was a product of Saichō's attempt to fight with Hossō.

⁴³ *Eizan daishiden* 叡山大師伝, pp. 11-12. For an analysis of this text in relation to the State Buddhism, see Sone Masato 曾根正人 (2000), *Kodai Bukkyōkai to ōchō shakai* 古代仏教会と王朝社会, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, pp. 171-184.



became part of his motive to learn Tiantai from China.

It is interesting to note Saichō's reverent attitude to Huisi in medieval time, because compared with modern Tendai /Tiantai scholars, the emphasis on Zhiyi is out of balance—Saichō refers to Huisi's teachings more than modern scholars do. As explained earlier, Saichō had sympathy in Huisi's situation against the dominant exegetic Buddhism. Reflecting on the Japanese Buddhist environment, Huisi's strategy to overcome the exegetic Buddhism by championing meditation might also motivate Saichō to study Tiantai Buddhism.

Through the scriptures brought by Jianzhen, Saichō had chance to read the Chinese Tiantai School. As showed above, among the Tiantai teachings, Jianzhen was particularly interested in Huisi. Saichō learnt Huisi through the media of Jianzhen's collection of Tiantai books, and perhaps together with the latter's comments and reference to Huisi. Taken together, Huisi, Jianzhen and Saichō seem to have inherited the same transmission, or even a 'lineage', centred on Huisi.

It should be marked that the legend brings closer the Sino-Japan Buddhist relation. Saichō's reinterpretation of this legend presents a new apprehension of Japan's position within the Buddhist world. As Como and Barrett both noticed⁴⁴, the narratives of "otherworldly communion of saints" (in Barrett's phrase) are not uncommon during this period; they serve to create a direct link to the Buddhist origin of India. By stating that Japan's Tendai originated from Master Huisi, who was even earlier than the celebrated Master Zhiyi, Saichō may intend to assure that Japan was not inferior to China.⁴⁵

7. Conclusion

The reincarnation story occurred during a time when issues about sectarian lineages increased its weightiness. Reincarnation, in some ways, provided the same function with lineage construction. Reincarnation represents doctrinal continuation as well as transmission of authority. It is, therefore, understandable that the authors of lineage accounts turned out to be those who advocated the reincarnation story. Not surprisingly, all compositions possessed the same purpose: transmission of power and orthodoxy. For this reason, it is worthy discussing how this reincarnation connection was used in China and Japan. This essay argues that politics within Buddhism dominated the process of legend invention. The consonance between Situo and Saichō stands on the same motivation of a closer Sino-Japanese Buddhist transmission by referring to Huisi's reincarnation as Shōtoku taishi. For Situo, a closer Sino-Japanese

⁴⁴ Como (2008: 151); Barrett (2009).

⁴⁵ About Japan's position in Saichō's mind, some other scholars have different views. Como notices Saichō's concern in placing Tendai in the centre of Japanese Buddhism by linking itself to India. In Jinhua Chen's (1999: 137, 140) study on the *Ehyō Tendai shū*, he argues that Saichō attempted to persuade that China had superseded India in terms of Buddhist development.



tie could elevate his master Jianzhen; for Saichō, this reincarnation related to Shōtoku taishi could promote his Tendai School. There are parallels between Saichō and Du Fei, too. They were both concerned about lineage construction, and both inclined to bring closer the link between Huisi and Bodhidharma in their writings.

The 8-9th centuries saw a transition and formulation in Buddhist discourses that manifested Chinese and Japanese monks' religious identity. The Japanese monks' self-definition, maturing as the reincarnation story grew into its full form, involves how Japanese monks located themselves in a broader context of East Asian Buddhism. It is therefore arguable that the politics, demonstrated in the reincarnation legend, reveals the authors' motives to rearrange the Sino-Japan association. As late as the ninth century, it is evident that this reincarnation story expedited Saichō and his followers to promote the Tendai School. To Saichō and his followers, it brings closer the Sino-Japan Buddhist relation, and, meanwhile, it implies that Japan was not inferior to China by stating that Japan had acquired Master Huisi, who was even earlier than the celebrated patriarch Zhiyi. This underlying logic represented the ideology sustainable to locate Japan in general, Tendai in particular, at the centre of the Buddhist world, so as to win over the fierce competition between various Buddhist groups. Taking all authors together, the creativity contributes to the richness of imagination in the story line and the multiplex scheme in promoting Buddhism. As surprising as it may be, development of the legend in the Japanese side, strongly held up by coherent agendas, succeeded the Chinese origination.