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## How to Will Backwards: Time, Forgetting and Repetition in the Lotus Sūtra

Brook Ziporyn

Professor, Dept. of Religion, Northwestern University

### Summary

This essay is an investigation into the certain distinctive rhetorical features of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra, with special attention to their relation to Tiantai doctrine. In particular, it focuses on the relation between the śrāvaka disciples and the Bodhisattva's, or between a particular figure's own śrāvakahood and the same figure's bodhisattvahood, which is seen as the primary locus classicus for the Tiantai doctrine of "inherent entailment." In the case of Śāriputra, we are told that he has forgotten his own Bodhisattva vows, that he has been a Bodhisattva all along without knowing it. In the Tiantai reading, this further means that his practice as a śrāvaka has been a part of his practice as a Bodhisattvahood, and indeed his own forgetting of his Bodhisattvahood has been a part of this practice. Zhiyi analyzes the sūtra according to four categories: 1) Narrative causes and conditions, 2) Categorization of Buddhist teachings, 3) Roots and traces and 4) Mind contemplation. It is the third of these categories that is of special relevance to the Lotus, the analysis of the "original" or "root" identities of all the characters in the text and their present "traces" of apparent situation and practice. We are told in this part of the Fahua wenju commentary that all the śrāvaka and Bodhisattvas in the text have long been Buddhas. Zhiyi further introduces the category of "Mahāyāna śrāvakas," a contradiction in terms which crystallizes the Tiantai view on this

matter. For he ends up concluding that we are not to understand the relation of roots and traces as a form of conscious dissimulation, where one is inwardly aware of one's Buddhahood but pretends to be a śrāvaka or even a heretic, or as a differentiation between "real" Bodhisattvahood and "merely apparent" śrāvakahood, but rather in accord with the forgetting of one's own status as a further exemplification of that status. The Mahāyāna śrāvakas are all the more Bodhisattvas the more they are real śrāvakas. Moreover, in a distinctive Tiantai move, they are only in this way "true śrāvakas"—to be a Bodhisattva, in fact, is simply to be a śrāvaka (literally, "sound-hearer") only moreso: they now "make heard" the "sound" of the Dharma universally, as Bodhisattvas.

The vision of time that emerges from this, and the rhetorical Emphasis on repeated realization and homonymous Buddhas awakening again and again in the text, is one where certain moments of awakening distinguish themselves by their ability to recognize themselves in every past and future moment, to see all previous and future deviations from themselves as also instantiations of themselves; awakening is a moment which see all previous and future non-awakening as forms of awakening, as forgettings of awakening which further express awakening. This temporal position is analogous to the Tiantai treatment of the "Buddhahood of insentient beings" in the spatial register: being awakened means seeing awakening even in the non-awake insentient beings, as forms of the expression of awakening, such that it can never be definitively said that any of these beings are purely awakened or deluded, sentient or insentient. Hence we find that the Lotus Sūtra's treatment of Śāriputra's forgetting of his bodhisattvahood serves as a model for some of the most distinctive Tiantai doctrines.

**Keywords:** 1.Lotus Sūtra 2.Tiantai 3.Time 4.Śrāvaka 5.Forgetting

The Lotus Sūtra presents a picture of time and the positioning of human activity therein which is, if we try to knit it together into a single coherent picture, somewhat baffling; vast stretches of past and present time are invoked, and various figures in the drama are said to attain "Buddhahood" either in the distant past or the distant future, and sometimes both. The Buddha's vow to make all beings equal to himself as Buddha is "already accomplished";[1] the Buddha attained Buddhahood in the distant past, but also more recently, and over and over again in between. The Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta is also Śākyamuni, even though Śākyamuni had become a Buddha in the even more distant past, according to Zhiyi's specification of the sequence in the Fahuawenju. It is not always clear how the causes and effects of this attainment are to be understood in any given case; the situation is further complicated by the lack of tense specifiers in Kumārajīva's Chinese version. What comes first, what comes after, how does the past affect the future, and the future affect the past? What goes forward, what goes backward, how does one become or contain or reverse the other? These are some of the questions that come up when we begin to look at the depiction of the

temporal process in the Lotus Sūtra, particularly with the further complications added by the Tiantai exegetical tradition. It is to be noticed immediately that this depiction of time is entirely dependent on the concept of cultivation of the Buddhist path and the attainment of Buddhahood, of which it is, we might almost say, considered a function. Hence our problem here is really the question of how the attainment of Buddhahood is depicted in the Lotus. I will try to approach this issue as it has come into focus through the lens of Tiantai exegesis, which has steered so much of the reading of this text in East Asia. This means that another tantalizing riddle, Tiantai doctrine, will be applied to the riddle of the Lotus, in the hopes that they will fit together like

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pieces of a tally, filling in the empty places of one another.

The focal point of my discussion will be the treatment of a particular incident from the sūtra in the Tiantai tradition, and its bearing on the temporal issues involved in reading the sutra itself, as enumerated above. The episode in question is this: In the third chapter of the Lotus Sūtra, the śrāvaka disciple Śāriputra announces his delight in having learned, in the previous chapter, that there was only one vehicle, the Buddha-vehicle, and that he was, unbeknownst to himself, also destined for Buddhahood, not merely arhatship. The Buddha responds by declaring he has instructed Śāriputra in the Bodhisattva path for many aeons, that he, the Buddha, has caused Śāriputra to be born in his Law and to study as a śrāvaka in the present, and also that Śāriputra had long ago made the Bodhisattva vow, had undertaken the Bodhisattva path, but now had forgotten all about it. He goes on to predict that Śāriputra would, at a point in the distant future, indeed become a Buddha called Flower Light Tathāgata.<sup>[2]</sup>

So far, given just this explicit sūtra-text, there is a simple real-time literal way to understand this incident. Recalling a common motif from the jātika literature, a disciple is said to have forgotten his own past lives. Śāriputra once started out as a Bodhisattva, but then backslid to the level of a śrāvaka. The Buddha compassionately caused him to be born in the present assembly, to get him back on course. Once this is done, he will go on to become a Buddha some day in the future.

However, several factors complicate this straightforward picture, particularly as this text was understood in East Asia, primarily under the aegis of the Tiantai commentarial tradition. This tradition obviously interprets the sutra in terms of Tiantai doctrinal concerns, but we can also perhaps detect the ways in which these complications are necessitated by any attempt to read the Lotus as

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a consistent whole—something modern interpreters are of course not obligated to do. The complications of the Śāriputra situation can be pinpointed through an examination of Zhiyi's fourfold method of explication, employed intermittently in the Fahuawenju. The application of this method entails that each line of scripture is

interpreted in terms of 1) causes and conditions behind the incident recounted in the text—construed to also include stimulus-response interactions between deities and practitioners, 2) the level of teaching being explicated, 3) the root and traces, of which more in a moment, and 4) mind-contemplation.[3] Zhiyi further specifies that of these, the first, second and fourth are applicable to all sutras, whereas the third, root and traces, is distinctive to the Lotus.[4] It is this Lotus-specific aspect of the commentary that adds most to the complication of the Śāriputra picture.

The most usual referent indicated by root and trace is, of course, the original enlightenment of Śākyamuni in the distant past as opposed to his repeated births as again deluded, as again practicing the path, and as again attaining enlightenment—a dominant note in the motif of repetition we shall return to presently. However, the terms root and traces have a more comprehensive set of meanings which bear on the issue in question, as will be discussed in a moment. For now, though, the aspect of this broader definition that concerns us is that it is not only Śākyamuni who has a root and traces. Rather, Zhiyi indicates the precise root of all the main characters in the Lotus saga, in the sense of their original status or past achievement. In the case of Śāriputra, he states that Śāriputra had long ago become a Buddha, by the name of Jinlongtuo. In his traces he helps Śākyamuni as the disciple of wisdom at his right hand. First he manifested as a heretic, then as a śrāvaka and finally as a Bodhisattva, exhibiting

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each of the “five flavors,” so as to bring benefits to various types of sentient beings. All these things are accomplished by his traces.[5] That is, his appearances as a śrāvaka, his “backsliding,” occurred only in his traces, and in order to fulfill his Bodhisattva vow to enlighten beings. His backsliding, qua trace, was his progress or fulfillment, qua root.

Here we see the scope of the problem. In his root, Śāriputra has long been a Buddha. In his traces, he is said to manifest various forms to benefit all creatures; his entire career, from heretic to Bodhisattva, has been a matter of traces. On the other hand, we are also told that he has forgotten his past vow, and will become a Buddha in the future—note, not the same Buddha Jinlongtuo, but another Buddha, Huaguang. Two straightforward real-time accounts are now suggested, but they are, by any common sense notion of time, mutually incompatible. On the one hand, we can imagine that Śāriputra is really a Buddha all along, and has been consciously taking on the roles of heretic, Bodhisattva, backslider, śrāvaka, Bodhisattva again, and so on. On the other hand, we can imagine that he has really backslid, and really didn’t know that he had formerly made the Bodhisattva vow. Zhiyi says both, of course, and the simplest way to understand this is of course to take the “real” as subsuming the “provisional,” but not vice versa—that is, that he has really been a Buddha all along, and when Zhiyi says otherwise, he is merely speaking of the traces which are superseded by the real. This, however, would be to ignore the main thrust of Tiantai concepts of provisional and real. Indeed, Śāriputra’s case is emblematic of the fate of all the śrāvakas in the sutra, which is indeed emblematic of the case of all sentient beings, which is emblematic of the true mark of all dharmas. The issue is whether there are in fact such things as real śrāvakas or not—and by extension, whether there is “really” any other form of delusion. The

treatment of the Śāriputra question is the treatment of the śrāvaka question, which is the treatment of the fundamental philosophical question obsessing the Tiantai tradition, the relation between provisional and ultimate, or between delusion and enlightenment.

Zhiyi explicitly addresses the question of the reality of the śrāvakas in the Fahuawenju. First he quotes the views of two previous commentators on the sutra, Guangzhai and Kaishan. Guangzhai said there were definitely real (shi 實) practicing śrāvakas—that is, real sentient beings deluded about the ultimate truth, floundering in the Tripitaka teaching—arguing that otherwise there would be no one for the upāyas, that is, the upāyically appearing śrāvakas who were secretly Bodhisattvas all along, to respond to and guide. Kaishan said there were definitely no real practicing śrāvakas—that is, all have been enlightened from the beginning, all are Buddhas in their “root”—citing scripture and claiming that when the contrary is stated this is a provisional teaching. Typically, Zhiyi rejects both of these views, which correspond to the two alternate straightforward accounts of Śāriputra’s case outlined above, accusing them each of equally distorting the meaning of the sutra. It is not the case then that Śāriputra is really a śrāvaka, nor simply that he has been merely pretending to be one, clearly knowing he was a Bodhisattva all along. Neither the presence or absence of real śrāvakas simpliciter should be one-sidedly clung to, Zhiyi says, and cites the intersubjective situation of the parable of the lost son:

Viewing it from the real wisdom of the father, there is no stranger at the gate. If we focus on the capacity and character of the son, he calls himself a stranger.[6]

In keeping with standard Tiantai usage, “real” here is just as one-sided, non-ultimate and inconclusive as “deluded,” and final

privileging is given to neither side of the encounter. It is not the case that because the father sees things truly, we can definitively say that in reality there is no stranger—no śrāvaka. The deluded view of the son himself is just as irrevocable a determinant of the situation.

Zhiyi goes on to quote the Saddharmapundarīka Śāstra (Fahua lun) attributed to Vasubandhu, which specifies that there are in fact four separate types of śrāvaka: the definite (i.e., unchangeable) (jueding 決定), 2) the false-claimants (zeng shang man 增上慢), 3) those who have backslid from the Mahāyāna and 4) upāyic transformations, adding that the first two are not given the prediction of Buddhahood, while the latter two types are. Zhiyi first modifies this categorization, and then decisively rewrites its meaning. He says that there should really be five types, according to the Lotus: 1) those who have long practiced the Hīnayāna, and in the present lifetime can reach the Hīnayāna fruit by hearing the Hīnayāna teaching, equivalent to the unchangeable śrāvakas of the Śāstra. 2) those who were originally

Bodhisattvas, but in the long aeons of their practice grew fed up with saṃsāra and backslid to the Hīnayāna; the Buddha preaches the Hīnayāna doctrine to them as well, so as to allow them to complete the Hīnayāna path. These have only recently backslid from the Mahāyāna and should be easy to reawaken to it. They correspond to what the Śāstra calls the backsliding śrāvakas. 3) The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who appear as śrāvakas for the sake of these first two types, to lead them to the Mahāyāna, corresponding to the Śāstra's upāyic transformation śrāvakas. Zhiyi's fourth type is also not a real śrāvaka, but in another sense; someone who falsely claims to have attained the śrāvaka fruit, corresponding to the false-claimant śrāvaka in the Śāstra. The final type of śrāvaka, added by Zhiyi, is the Mahāyāna śrāvaka (da sheng shengwen 大乘聲聞). These are those who, as the Lotus puts it, are only now “really” “sheng wen” or “voice-hearers”: they make the “sheng”——voice——of the Buddha's path “wen” ——

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heard——by all beings.[7] We have here two types of apparent śrāvakas who are really śrāvakas, and two who are not, and then the final category, which, as we shall see, is what scrambles the whole picture. It would seem inevitable, however, given that there are two types who really are śrāvakas, that the answer to the question of whether there are or are not real śrāvakas would have to be affirmative: there are some real śrāvakas, and also some fake ones. But Zhiyi rejects this answer; there are neither definitively real śrāvakas, nor definitively fake ones. Using the same intersubjective logic as just sketched in the case of the parable of the lost son, he says:

From the side of the unchangeable and the backslid śrāvakas, there are śrāvakas. From the side of Mahāyāna [śrāvakas], there . . . are none . . . . If you comprehend this, having and not having are perfectly clear, and there is no need to dispute about it one way or the other.[8]

Having and not having are perfectly clear——that is, both are clearly present, which again does not end up meaning there “are” both, that we can conclude that there are in fact real śrāvakas, or that there are not.

The reason for this lies in the fifth category, the Mahāyāna śrāvakas, those śrāvakas who are, we may say, more śrāvaka than the śrāvakas. Zhiyi moves the question to the existence or non-existence of these peculiar creatures. “If we go by the fact that they provisionally transform themselves, externally manifesting the traces of the Hīnayāna while internally disguising their Mahāyāna meritorious properties, then there would be no Mahāyāna śrāvakas.

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If we go by their self-practice, putting forth the traces to reveal the root, then there are in fact Mahāyāna śrāvakas.”[9] Zhanran explains this to mean, going by the fact that they have a root behind the traces, the traces are subsumed, but the root is hidden, and they are not Mahāyāna śrāvakas——that is, they are simply Bodhisattvas. But going

by the traces being manifested, they are still manifesting as śrāvakas; śrāvakahood is itself set up within the Mahāyāna. That is to say, even after the traces have been revealed as traces, have been opened up and superseded, they “still manifest as śrāvakas.”<sup>[10]</sup> That is, neither the root nor trace can finally subsume the other once and for all; the appearance of śrāvakaness is enough to make it undeniable that they are śrāvakas. A clear-cut picture of “really” being something, perhaps consciously aware of one’s own dissembling, while “pretending” to be something else, simply does not apply here. To be manifesting as something makes one as much that thing as one can be, whether or not one is aware of being merely pretending to be such—a sticky issue we will take up presently.

Zhiyi continues:

The real intent of the present sūtra’s opening of the three vehicles to reveal the one vehicle is make the unchangeable and backslid śrāvakas into Mahāyāna śrāvakas. Since their self practice is established, they can transform responsively to appear as śrāvakas. If you understand this, you can comprehend the question of the being or non-being of the śrāvakas.<sup>[11]</sup>

Notably, Zhiyi has completely undermined the definition of the unchangeable and backslid śrāvakas from the Śāstra, in which they were excluded from the prediction of Buddhahood; here they become

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the Mahāyāna śrāvakas, they are not unchangeable after all. Moreover, in doing so, they do not cease being śrāvakas; it is their becoming true Bodhisattvas that then allows them to appear precisely as śrāvakas, that is, as what they have been appearing as all along.<sup>[12]</sup> So perhaps they are unchangeable śrāvakas after all.

Do we understand this? If not, we are not alone. For the question of Śāriputra’s real status continued to plague many in the Tiantai and Tendai traditions for centuries after Zhiyi had supposedly settled the matter. A text purporting to record the questions put by the Japanese monk Enchō asks the Tang Tiantai monk Guangxiu about the exact rank from which Śāriputra supposedly backslid, seizing on some inconsistencies in the attribution of the status of non-backsliding in Zhanran’s comment on the situation. Guangxiu’s answer is that the backsliding “is also a manifestation of his real practice, and thus the backsliding is not real backsliding.” That is, the backsliding is provisional, put forth as a warning to practitioners to be ever vigilant of backsliding, and hence also an expression of true practice.<sup>[13]</sup> The full import of this response should become clearer as we proceed. Enchō asks a

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similar question to Weijuan, citing contrary evidence in other passages from Zhiyi where it is said that views are already extinguished by the sixth stage—why then does Zhanran say that Śāriputra backslid from the sixth stage because he had not yet

eradicated his false views? Weijuan, citing Zhiyi's *Pusa jie shu*, attempts to clarify by saying that the sixth dwelling here really means the sixth stage of faith.[14] Genshin asks the same question of Siming Zhili in the early Song. Zhili answers that the ranking system strictly applied is a matter of the Separate Teaching, and Zhanran was filling in the meaning with a free hand for fear that practitioners at that stage might backslide. Such calculations, he says, are not to be objected to on the basis of exoteric Separate Teaching rankings. Zhili adds that the question of backsliding naturally pertains only to the provisional, to the traces of Śāriputra, and that in the Integrated Teaching there is no backsliding to speak of.[15] The implication would seem to be that in the root, as considered in the Integrated Teaching, there is no backsliding. This is significant, because, as we shall see in a moment, it is not at all the case that the root is a simple across the boards enlightenment—it too is a matter of practice and attainment. That there is no backsliding in relation to the root does not mean there is an originally enlightened state which is magisterially manifesting as backsliding now and then.[16]

The persistent recurrence of this question can perhaps be taken as symptomatic of an important point of stress or tension in the tradition. Although all the exchanges just cited are couched in

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terms of a concern for working through the exact minutiae of the doctrine—in particular, at what particular stage on the path Śāriputra had backslidden—we can easily discern here that the broader issue which is tied to this case, as I indicated above, is what is really bringing this question to the surface so unremittingly. The question is, what does it mean to attain Buddhahood, if it happens both in the past and in the future to one character, and if one can backslide and forget that one is a Buddha, in at least some sense, after one has attained it? This, it would seem, is the more pressing issue bubbling below the surface of the persistent Tendai/Tiantai concern about the implications of this incident.

This is borne out by the other questions that seem to come with this one in the fascinating records of cross-cultural pilgrimages in the Tang and Song just cited. Of particular interest are the questions concerning attaining Buddhahood put by Enchō to Guangxiu, and by Genshin to Zhili. Let's start with the first of these. The question listed just after the one about Śāriputra in the former dialogue touches on the infamous Tiantai doctrine of the attainment of Buddhahood by inanimate objects (*wuching cheng fo*). Enchō asks, if the Three Buddha-natures—as proper cause, revealing cause and conditioning cause, hence as object of enlightenment, awareness of enlightenment and practices leading to this awareness—pervade all places, why is it that there is awareness in sentient beings, but none in the insentient? The sentient, he goes on, give rise to practices to attain Buddhahood; the same should be the case for the inanimate, if they really have all three Buddha-natures, including the conditioning and revealing cause. Why then don't they attain Buddhahood through exertions on the path? Guangxiu's answer is worth quoting at some length: "In fact, the inanimate do, contrary to your question, also give rise to practice and attain Buddhahood. And why? Because they become Buddhas whenever the sentient do. Thus 'when one attains it, all attain it' —how could this exclude the inanimate? If you say



that the insentient do not give rise to practices and attain Buddhahood, then the sentient also do not give rise to practices and also do not attain Buddhahood. And why? They would then be all together in the not-giving rise (to practices, apparently belonging to one side of the encounter). When one gives rise to practice, all give rise to practice. (By the same token, if one is said to not give rise to practice, then none do). . . . Moreover, a person's ears and eyes are sentient, but at the same time are themselves insentient—what need is there to look outside for the insentient? . . . The sentient can become the insentient, the insentient can become the sentient. . . thus the four great elements compose the body, and precisely the body is composed of the four great elements; the body is sentient but the elements are insentient. **Just this body is completely sentient.** If the body gives rise to practices and attains Buddhahood, the four great elements also give rise to practice and attain Buddhahood . . . .”[17]

This answer is especially relevant to our present inquiry. For the question of the attainment of Buddhahood by the insentient structurally mirrors in the register of space, as it were, the problem of Śāriputra's forgetting his status in the register of time. That is, to put it naively, if Śāriputra is sentient and enlightened in certain moments, how does this relate to those other moments, before and after, in which he is not regarding himself as enlightened, in which he does not know he is a Buddha, in which he has forgotten himself? These moments of forgetting are to his awakenings what the surrounding insentient beings are to the practicing and attaining sentient being. That is, if we can put together the two straightforward but mutually incompatible accounts of the temporal sequence of Śāriputra's biography, and if it is not right to say either that there really are or are not śrāvakas since both views are entertained by the interested parties, and if this implies, as I think

it does, that the question is not one of whether among all presenting themselves as śrāvakas there are some who really are and some who really are not, but rather than both determinations are applicable to every apparent śrāvaka, on the basis of his own varying self-conceptions as real śrāvaka or as transformed, “Mahāyāna” śrāvaka, the following possibility emerges. We no longer have to regard the question as, did Śāriputra really forget he was a Buddha or was he really a Buddha all along. We can entertain the idea that he was a Buddha, and that he forgot he was a Buddha. Or, even more: that his forgetting that he was a Bodhisattva was itself a part of his Bodhisattva practice, was a part of the fulfillment of his original Bodhisattva vow. To vow to practice the Bodhisattva path would then be to vow to be willing to forget that one was a Bodhisattva, to really assume various ignorant forms, to have to struggle back to enlightenment, in real time, all over again, over and over, forever. By the same token, attaining Buddhahood would mean seeing all past moments of non-awareness of being a Buddha as the forgetfulness of such an ancient vow, and therefore as the realization of that ancient vow, and therefore as also instances of Buddhahood itself. As with Guangxiu's sentient and insentient beings, moments of remembering oneself

to be Buddha would embrace in themselves the other moments, the moments of forgetting, by defining Buddhahood in such a way that it could be fulfilled by its own effacement and forgetting. When one moment is a Buddha, all moments are Buddha; only a vow of Buddhahood in this sense, as a voluntary alternation of enlightenment and delusion, would be capable as recognizing itself in all past and future moments, of seeing Buddhahood in all Three Bodies as always already present, of seeing practice as non-creating. During the forgetting, the Buddhahood is also forgotten, also ignorance—the sentient are also completely insentient; during the awakening, the forgetting is also an aspect of enlightenment—the insentient are completely the sentient.

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This picture is confirmed by the Genshin-Zhili dialogue. Just before the Śāriputra question, Genshin asks about the three rounds of predictions of Buddhahood for śrāvakas in the distant future, in the Lotus: do they mean the attainment of Buddhahood qua the first dwelling (chu zhu), namely, arisal of bodhicitta, or the attainment of final supreme enlightenment? Zhiyi repeatedly says “first rank eight marks Buddha”—but in that case, it should be doable in one or two lives, so why does the sūtra say it will take innumerable ages? Zhili answers, these predictions refer to the attainment of the eight-mark nirmānakāya body of Buddhahood. From the first dwelling it partially manifests the dharmakāya, and at supreme enlightenment it ultimately manifests the dharmakāya—“all are able to manifest these marks which bring advantage to sentient beings.” Zhiyi says the first dwelling only to indicate its “head,” its first or topmost part, but this reference is not limited to just the first dwelling, the arisal of bodhicitta. Zhili goes on,

The reason [the sūtra] speaks of going through numberless kalpas for each one of them is so they can establish karmic connections with sentient beings, and thereby create causes for the purification of their Buddhalands. If there are not a multitude of capacities to receive transforming instruction, how can they manifest their various bodies and preach the dharma? As for the root of the dharmakāya, that is attained as soon as one ascends the seat—how could it require numberless kalpas?[18]

The dharmakāya is attained at the beginning of the process, and this is what the predictions speak of; but the vast stretches of time they add to this concerns, not the attainment of this “root,” but the full manifestation of the traces qua nirmānakāya. This root must be attained, and this can be done quickly, but once it is attained it continues to develop, through various forms of intersubjective

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involvements, leading to the manifestation of numberless virtues and appearances, the full attainment of the nirmānakāya, the infinite array of its traces. However, the ability to benefit beings accrues to it from the first; there is no dharmakāya without nirmānakāya, no root without trace, no self-attainment without other-benefiting. Indeed, in accordance with Tiantai conceptions of the Buddha’s three bodies, the dharmakāya and nirmānakāya are inseparable; there is no attainment or manifestation of one without the other. Both are always operating everywhere. But the really

interesting thing here for our present discussion is the reference to the interactions with beings as a necessary condition of full attainment of Buddhahood, the full manifestation of the multitudinous traces, under the term “creating causes for the purification of their Buddhalands.” Significantly, Zhili uses this terms again in answering another of Genshin’s questions, one that bears directly on the temporal question of the attainment of Buddhahood. Genshin asks: if, as Zhiyi says in the Wenju, the incident recounted in the “Sadāparibhūta” chapter takes place at a time after the initial attainment of Buddhahood by Śākyamuni described in the “Lifespan” chapter, why does the Sūtra say that because of the Sadāparibhūta (non-disparaging) practice, as cause, Śākyamuni quickly attained Buddhahood? Zhili answers that this is the cause of Buddhahood in the sense, once again, of the cause of the purification of his Buddhaland;<sup>[19]</sup> that is, the forming of

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relationships with deluded sentient beings, thereby developing and perfecting of the various forms of his traces or *nirmānakāya* in response. Buddhahood is complete only with both attainments, although either one can separately be referred to as the attainment of Buddhahood. This notion can further articulate the picture we tried to paint a moment ago. The full attainment of Buddhahood depends on first, a moment of personal awakening, of which one is apparently in personal control, and can be done all at once, and second, a long sequence of situational encounters, for which one must wait, which depend on others in particular states of delusion, over which one has no control. This incorporation of the loss of control into the notion of ultimate control is congruent with that of the incorporation of the insentient into the sentient, and the forgetting into the remembering, as described a moment ago. The text of the *Sadāparibhūta* chapter gives no indication that the Bodhisattva *Sadāparibhūta* knew he had already become a Buddha in the distant past, or indeed that he knew anything much about the intricacies of Buddhist doctrine or his or anyone else’s past lives; in light of Zhiyi’s discussion of the *śrāvakas* and the case of Śāriputra cited above, perhaps *Sadāparibhūta* may be seen as another case of forgetting coming after Buddhahood, and thereby at the same time fulfilling it, by “accomplishing the cause which purifies his Buddhaland,” as described by Zhili here. By becoming

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ignorant of his Buddhahood again, he is able to form the relationship with his tormentors which leads to their enlightenment. Hence the lack of control incorporated into the ultimate control is not only that of the deluded sentient beings encountered, but also of himself as forgetting his own Buddhahood, losing control of it, but as reclaimed retrospectively by another moment of awakening—remembering, as in Śāriputra’s case—so that this forgetting is seen as a way in which he had always been accomplishing his Buddhahood in the sense of purification of his Buddhaland. And of course this is only made so of the moments of forgetting from the perspective of the moment of the “root,” the attainment of the personal experience of enlightenment. Given this definition, we can see that this moment can come either before or after the forgetting, the non-knowing of it, which accomplish its fulfillment. This is made possible by the nature of the awakening, its content: the Tiantai notion of the Threefold Truth, which allows the negation of itself, its absence, to serve as an always-already fulfillment of itself, its hyper-presence. That is, once there is a

moment of seeing the Threefold Truth, that any quiddity is as present in its absence as in its presence, that any X is always appearing as some non-X, hence is X (provisional positing), is non-X (emptiness) and is always appearing (the mean), it can regard itself, this understanding, as the X in question, and see it as also appearing in the form of not-understanding this, in all other moments, past and future. This allows us to see clearly how the root can be both prior to everything, and also something that has to be attained. The root, by its very nature, posits itself as prior to its own traces, as what they have always already been manifesting, unbeknownst to themselves, even if, temporally, it occurs—is attained—after them.

This intimation can be supported perhaps by a consideration of roots and traces (benji 本跡) as defined by Zhiyi in the *Fahuaxuanyi*. There it is said that this pair of terms applies on six separate levels:

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1. The root is principle, that is, the real-mark of all dharmas, the one ultimate path; trace would here mean everything besides the real-mark of all dharmas.
2. Both principle and phenomena are the root, while speaking of either principle or phenomena is the trace, i.e., teaching.
3. Teachings about principle or phenomena are the root, and practice done accordingly is the trace.
4. The substance realized by practice is the root, the functions that arise according to this substance are the traces.
5. Genuinely attained substance and function are the root, while upāyic presentations of substance and function are the traces.
6. What is manifested now, i.e., the Lotus teaching, is the root, while all previous teachings are the traces.[\[20\]](#)

It should be obvious from this typically sliding Tiantai reference system that root and traces refer not to any two definitely delineated sets of contents, but to a fundamental structural split that can be applied at any level of analysis. This must be borne in mind when we look at the way the term is applied in the commentary. Its most usual reference, as we mentioned already, is to the “original” enlightenment of Śākyamuni, countless aeons ago, as compared to the “trace” enlightenment manifested in this lifetime. The Buddha enlightened in the distant past is the “root” Buddha, from which is generated the present “trace” Buddha. However, Zhiyi makes it quite clear, consistently with the definitions of root and trace just cited, that this selection of Śākyamuni’s initial enlightenment is an arbitrary starting point for the discussion.[\[21\]](#) In other words, the tradition is explicit in

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indicating that the specification of the original enlightenment of Śākyamuni as the

root is a pragmatic decision, and that in principle there may be previous Buddhas, but that this is irrelevant to present practice. The root is never simple or unsplit, never unmediated by traces, never simply so and not attained. That this continued to be unclear for some is evident from one of Genshin's questions to Siming Zhili in the early Song. Zhanran had already

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raised the question of an infinite regress, and the possibility that there was some first Buddha, long before Śākyamuni's original enlightenment, who might have enlightened without the benefit of the instruction from previous Buddhas' traces. Genshin says, If there was a first Buddha who was enlightened without teaching, we have the error of causelessness, if not, we have the error of infinite regress. Zhili responds saying that even if there were a first Buddha, Zhanran had clearly stated that he has the cause of internal transformation, so there is no problem of causelessness.[22] To put this in terms of the Xuanyi passage cited above, even if there is no longer the root and trace of the later levels (someone else's teaching and enlightenment), there is always necessarily the root and trace of principle and phenomena. The division exists anywhere; the root for the hypothetical first Buddha would then be the principle itself. Zhiyi describes this ever present level of root-and-trace, namely, root as principle and trace as phenomena—as follows:

“All dharmas are established by the root of non-dwelling.” The principle of non-dwelling is the real truth of the real-mark at [any] original time. All dharmas are the conventional truth of the thicket of differentiated phenomena also present at [any] original time.[23]

At the original time, this twosidedness is also present; that is, at any time designated as original for any discussion, both sides are necessarily present. Whatever point is chosen, there is a “past” in the form of the non-dwelling which is manifested by the present differentiations. That is, the past is to the present as principle is to phenomena. The same structure applies in both cases, and the same doubleness is always in effect. To be a present is to have a past, which skews the future into multitudinous recontextualized

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retrospective readings of this present. To be a phenomenon is to have a principle which is likewise always casting unending new contexts around this phenomenon which change its meaning, identity and value in inexhaustible ways. This can perhaps explain why we sometimes find, for example, Zhanran, glossing Zhiyi's remarks that the invaluable jewel hidden inside the garment is the same as the jewel in the king's crown, in the two stories from the Lotus, a statement which would tend to invite a straightforward identification of the hidden jewel with the Buddha-nature or original enlightenment per se, by asserting:

Within the bodies of sentient beings are the past karmic conditions and seeds——this is called the jewel hidden in the garment.[24]

Indeed, this is quite in accordance with the explicit text of the Lotus, which is quite clear in stating that the jewel hidden in the garment represents the teaching which the Buddha had, while still himself a Bodhisattva, given those who now regarded themselves as śrāvakas. The jewel is identified with their original Bodhisattva vows, which they had in the meantime forgotten.[25] If this is still to be taken as equivalent to the Buddha-nature, this Buddha-nature must be understood as no more or less than one's own forgotten past intentions. This pastness is not identical to simple "original" or "eternal," although we may regard it as a constitutive and ineradicable category here. That is, as with the jewel in the story, it is not something that simply has always existed; rather something which exists as a particular attainment of the past, marked with a certain contingency. Nonetheless, this pastness is constitutive in that it is not a past which was ever simply present; it is of its nature to be past, never to be present, as we have seen in the

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Tiantai root/traces structure. It is not simply an ever-present nature always possessed by all, but all have attained it somewhere or other, and always in the distantly, lost past. Its nature is to be present as something contingently attained somewhere in the distant past and since forgotten, a phenomenal and metaphysical category quite distinct from either an absolute presence like an atman or soul or a contingent present occurrence like a materialistically conceived emergent event. We may say that the past is equated with Buddha-nature here, a notion which helps us to understand the distinctive Tiantai notion of the pre-existence not only of the Buddhanature qua cause proper, but also as revealing and conditioning cause, and how this answers to the traditional Buddhist concern to avoid both eternalism and annihilationism. All past conditions are reappropriated as the Buddha-nature as conditioning and revealing causes. Whatever one had ever been doing or thinking in the past, or whatever had been happening, whether good or evil, belonging to one or another, is re-readable, in the context of one's present understanding of the Bodhisattva-path (it leads to and from Buddhahood, it necessarily involves taking on an infinity of forms and shapes for the sake of interacting with sentient beings) together with the Lotus concept that it entails periods of unconsciousness of itself, as one's own past Bodhisattva practice. One has been practicing the Bodhisattva path without knowing it, indeed, precisely by not knowing it, its absence from one's consciousness in and of the past is no longer any argument against the claim that one has been a Bodhisattva all this time. One reads one's past not-being-a-Bodhisattva now as a form of being-a-Bodhisattva. In itself it is equally susceptible to both readings. Just as, in Guangxiu's description, the sentient is composed of the insentient, is nothing but the insentient, and vice versa, the past moments of forgetting, or, more strictly, simply of not regarding oneself as a Buddha and creating various kinds of deluded karma and views instead, are what the moment of

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awakening, remembering itself to be a Buddha, is composed of; each is, in typical Tiantai fashion, nothing but the other.

This brings us back to the fifth of Zhiyi's categories of śrāvakas, the so-called Mahāyāna śrāvakas, which I said above would be key to understand this problem. In the Fahuaxuanyi, Zhiyi tells us that in a certain sense the śrāvakas of the Tripitaka teaching are not yet true śrāvakas; to truly be a “sound-hearer” one must have reached the fully realized position of the Integrated teaching, as the Lotus says:

We are today finally true “sound-hearers,” for now we have made the “sound” of the Buddha path “heard” by all.

The same is true of the Arhats, which means literally “worthy of offerings”: they only truly fulfill their definition when they reach the full realization of the ultimate teaching—then, they say, we are now at last truly “worthy of offerings.” Our previous claim to be so was a misunderstanding; or rather, we said more than we thought we meant at the time.<sup>[26]</sup> What they say and what they mean differ, and the truth lies in what they say rather than in what they mean; they say the ultimate Integrated teaching without realizing it. Zhiyi says that the Lotus predictions are meant to make the unchangeable śrāvakas into Mahāyāna śrāvakas, and that when they become so they will be able to manifest as śrāvakas—that is, as “true” śrāvakas in this sense. They change but do not change; the function of the Lotus Sūtra is to make them realize that they have always already been Bodhisattvas, and their not being so was an expression thereof. In the future, they continue to be the same, but everything is different. This may even mean that in future moments too they will forget once again that they are Bodhisattvas—but given the existence of this present moment of enlightenment surveying its own past and future, both these types of forgetting are

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seen to be examples of “true” śrāvakahood—that is, forming connections with sentient beings in order to complete the purification of one's Buddhaland and thus fulfill one's Bodhisattva vow, making the “sound” of the Buddhaway “heard” by all, being a Bodhisattva qua śrāvaka. This has been and will be accomplished by not knowing one is a Bodhisattva.<sup>[27]</sup> This sort of “making into” provides the key to the temporal question we've been grappling with. When Zhiyi says there neither are nor are not real śrāvakas, we must remember the help he is getting from the lack of tense specifiers in the Chinese language. For this accords perfectly with the point being made here: given the existence of the Lotus—which is to say, in Tiantai terms, the fact of kaiquanxianshi (which by the way we may also take to mean, the omnipresence of the categories of root and trace), no moment is discrete, has a single determinate

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character, is unrevisable. Time cannot be chopped into sections where it is proper to say something was one way but will be another way. The past is still going on; the śrāvakas were never śrāvakas because they will turn out not to have been, they will turn out to have always already been Bodhisattvas. Hence there are no real śrāvakas. The Bodhisattvas of the present were in other moments non-Bodhisattvas, śrāvakas. Hence there are real śrāvakas. The “are” should here be read as a collective “were-are-will-be” predicated on the notion of *kaiquanxianshi*. Given the mutual recontextualizing of moments, no being simply “is” or “is not” a śrāvaka or a Bodhisattva any more than any being is simply insentient or sentient.

To be a Mahāyāna śrāvaka is then to continue to be a śrāvaka as before, but now to regard one’s former regarding of oneself as merely a śrāvaka and not also a Bodhisattva as a forgetting of one’s original Bodhisattva vow. It also means regarding future moments of forgetting in the same way, and being willing to undergo that forgetting, since it is seen to be a way of making karmic connections with particular sentient beings and thereby perfecting one’s *nirmānakāya* and purifying one’s Buddhaland. This means to see only this form of śrāvakahood as the true śrāvakahood—truly making the sound of Buddhahood heard everywhere, universally. It is a universalization of the original, narrower meaning of śrāvakahood which equals Mahāyāna śrāvakahood, or Bodhisattvahood. This is why I said before that the Mahāyāna śrāvakas were simply śrāvakas only moreso, or more śrāvaka than the śrāvakas themselves. They are just doing what the śrāvakas had always done, but seeing that as something that must be done everywhere and everywhen; whatever they are doing, they are making the Buddhasound heard, even in assuming forms which are the very absence of that activity. śrāvakahood is, to use the Tiantai phrase, all-pervading.

I said before that the case of the śrāvakas must be regarded as

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emblematic of the case of all beings, of all phenomena, and of the problem of the relation of delusion to enlightenment in general. This is borne out by Zhiyi’s application of the same line of reasoning to the Three Poisons: in the *Guanyinyishu*, Zhiyi speaks of the Great Greed, Great Hatred and Great Ignorance:

All sentient beings are to be called those with too little greed, hatred and ignorance. And why? They only hate the pains of the three evil paths of existence, are greedy for the pleasures of the human and divine paths. The Two Vehicles only hate *samsāra* and are greedy for *nirvāna*—this is what is meant by too little [hatred and greed]. The Bodhisattva is otherwise; he not only takes joy in seeking one type of Buddha-dharma, but searches everywhere for unspeakably many Buddha-dharmas, like the sea consuming all the rivers, and still is never satisfied. [This is his great greed.] He not only rejects *samsāra*, he also rejects *nirvāna*. This is his great hatred . . . Great kindness, great compassion, the four gatherings, the ten powers, the smash of fearlessness, liberation, supreme bodhi, purification of Buddhalands and deliverance of all sentient beings—this is the path of adoption, the great greed. All dharmas empty, nothing existing, not dwelling, not clinging, *prajñā* like a great conflagration destroying everything so that nothing can be retained . . . language and thought cut off, bodhi beyond the four propositions, nothing attained, nothing realized—this is the



gate of renunciation, the great hatred. The Middle Way is neither adoption nor rejection, neither hatred nor love, neither annihilation nor eternity, not coming or going, unborn and undestroyed, like an image in a mirror, invisible and yet seen, seen and yet invisible, neither visible nor invisible, free of the two extremes and thus unspeakable, so that Vimalakīrti remained silent——this is the middle path, the Great Ignorance.[28]

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The Bodhisattva's great greed far surpasses the petty, not-yet-fully universalized or realized greed of ordinary folk; when greed, hatred and ignorance fully realize themselves, reach their ultimate, become universalized, they are identical to Buddhahood. That is, "true" lust, greed and ignorance are Bodhisattvahood, just as is "true" śrāvakahood, and in just the same way, by bringing to the ultimate, and applying universally, on every level and in every direction, their original character. Lust and greed as usually experienced are anti-values because they stand at only one place and face only one direction, seen as expressed only in a limited number of ways; they are not yet universal lust and greed, the lust for the omnipotence and omniscience of Buddhahood, which sees itself expressed everywhere, even in its own absence. Hatred too for the deluded is only negation and destruction of some things, not of all, including itself, and ignorance is still too clear about itself, has not yet become all-inclusive and self-referential so as to overturn even its own sense of standing on a solid ground from which to doubt or be confused. Realization of the inconceivability of everything, including knowing, constitutes the Great Ignorance which is Buddhahood. Once the intersubjective point that it is impossible to stand firmly in any one position applying any operation only in one direction is grasped, however, this greed, hatred and ignorance extend from all to all, and this is what constitutes the highest good. Such partial applications of the poisons are revealed to have been upāyas training one for the ultimate universal deployment of the same, that is, Buddhahood. To attain Buddhahood is therefore to will backwards, to borrow the Nietzschean phrase; all that one had previously happened to be is now part of one's Bodhisattva practice, something one had, unbeknown to oneself at the time, willed, vowed, chosen, in order to create the present moment, and which, moreover, one continues to will, vow and choose forevermore. These two, we now see, are equivalent; to simply go ahead and will it now, and see future instances of one's forgetting as willed by one's

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present clarity, is to have always already willed it, to see all past instances of one's not-knowing what one was doing as equally pre-willed, but retrospectively.

This can perhaps allow us to gain some comprehension of how the motif of repetition, one of this sūtra's most distinctive rhetorical features, both in form and in content, were understood in the East Asian exegetical tradition. Perhaps the most striking instantiation of this repetition motif in the sūtra is the appearance of Buddha after

Buddha with the same name, sometimes for thousands of kalpas. The connection of this motif with the question of roots and traces, and the related tangle of Śāriputra's identity, is perhaps most explicitly stated by Ruiguang, a Tiantai exegete of the early Republican Period, whose attention to this detail further underscores the continuing importance of this problematic node of the sūtra. Noting that in the declaration to Śāriputra that he had long ago forgotten his Bodhisattva vow, the Buddha states that he had taught Śāriputra “in the places of 200 billion (twenty thousand koṭis) of Buddhas,” Ruiguang writes:

Does this mean the 200 billion Sun Moon Light Buddhas (Ri Yue Deng Ming Fo) of the Trace Gate [that is, in the “Preface” chapter, as Ruiguang reconstructs the numbering]? Or the 200 billion Majestic Voice King Buddhas (Wei Yin Wang Fo) of the Root Gate [i.e., in the “Sadiparibhutra” chapter]? The Buddha's meaning is very profound. If you understand the meaning here, what need is there to wait for the “Lifespan” Chapter to open and reveal before you know that Śāriputra long ago became a Buddha, by the name of Jinlongtuo?[29]

Śāriputra has been a Bodhisattva under 200 billion Buddhas——is this a matter of his traces or his root? That is, has he really been

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studying and cultivating the path, or only pretending to? Ruiguang has here more or less spilled the beans; his rhetorical question——“which is it?” —— indicates the most significant feature of this configuration: the undecidability between traces and root, the uncertainty that necessarily pertains to them, and thus to any ascription of identity, the inevitable wavering virtual presence of both of these registers applying to any given token of experience. The real point of the root-traces paradigm is this inescapable undecidability. We are told of 200 billion homonymous Buddhas——the same Buddha over and over——as traces, 200 billion homonymous Buddhas as root, and moreover that the Buddha Śākyamuni has taught Śāriputra in the places of 200 billion Buddhas. The repetition of becoming Buddha again and again is itself repeated, reinscribed simultaneously in the register of trace and in the register of root, and this repetition is again repeated in the similarly double-sided career of Śāriputra and his learning of the Bodhisattva path. The repetition of repetition speaks eloquently of the significance of Śāriputra's forgetting; to be is to be always already both root and trace, which means never definitively one or the other only, and to be both root and trace means to realize this, and forget it, and to repeat again and again this realization and this forgetting.

Let me sum up. We have tried to put these two parallel riddles——the Lotus's and Tiantai doctrine's depictions of time——next to each other; we hope we have shown to some extent how they fit together. We have found that Zhiyi's simultaneous interpretation of Śāriputra as someone who simply backslid and as someone who had already become a Buddha in the distant past and is manifesting in his present form as an upāya for the benefit of sentient beings——and was prophesized to become a different Buddha——when integrated into other key features of the Sūtra and of

Tiantai exegesis, plays a key role in the formation of the distinctively Tiantai notion of Buddhahood, and goes a long way toward

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explaining the importance of the Sūtra to the Tiantai philosophical edifice. We find the Tiantai notion of Buddhahood to be a state which recognizes itself in its own absence, in the forgetting of itself, in the repetition of its own achievement all over again from the beginning, in backsliding itself; like the doctor in the parable from the “Lifespan” chapter, it makes its presence felt just as keenly in its absence as in its literal presence, if not moreso. This in turn provides us with a key to the more abstract philosophical notions of negativity and the Three Truths in Tiantai doctrine, which must be understood in the context of *kaiquanxianshi*: Emptiness expresses itself as Provisional Positing in the same manner that the Ultimate Truth expresses itself as the Conventional Truth, often by means of its own negation and contrast with the final state, as in the relation between a set-up and a punch-line in a joke. The Mean is this alternation, this “appearing as” process itself. I have suggested elsewhere that the Tiantai notion of time too must be understood as a special case of *kaiquanxianshi*. Perhaps we can now say a little more about this. The identity of provisional positing and emptiness, of the presence and absence of any quiddity, is here played out as an unendable repetition, a rhythm of appearance and disappearance, of forgetting and remembering, of sentience and insentience; like the Buddha of the “Lifespan” chapter, repeatedly declaring his own birth and death, and like the many repetitions of Buddhas in a series, all of whom share the same name, the same thing happens over and over, an oscillation of backsliding and reattainment, of vanishing and appearing, a Provisional Positing which turns out to be Emptiness, an Emptiness which turns out to be Provisional Positing. This continual “turning out,” the Mean, is hence a rhythm, a vibration, a wave pattern of repetition, a fluttering, a self-propelling fluctuation. This is where we can perhaps put our finger on what temporal process really means in this tradition, or how it is to be experienced, if we are interested in such a question. Given this vibration, what is time? Perhaps we

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can be forgiven for suggesting that time here is depicted as something like the tone or resonance produced by this vibration. May we say, in other words, that time is the note played by the oscillation of remembrance and forgetting of who one is, the losing and regaining of one’s identities, the vibrating repetition of the alternating appropriation and relinquishment of meanings and significances accruing to one’s own case, the shrinking and expanding horizon of relevances that are continually rewriting one’s own identifying narrative saga? It would be interesting to pursue the implications of this notion of time further.

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# 如何逆流往過去立志——《妙法蓮華經》 重覆觀、忘記觀、時間觀

任博克  
西北大學教授

## 提要

本文探討《妙法蓮華經》對於時間的帷幄運籌，由本經典中數序中的重覆性和主角聲聞弟子，對於自己的菩薩本願的遺忘來著手，用天台智者大師的註解方法中的四種解釋立場（因緣、教相、本跡、觀心）的本跡立場來分析本經典對於聲聞弟子定位的問題。

智者大師引申法華論，自己立義五種聲聞。其最後一種命名為大乘聲聞，同時也是大乘菩薩也是小乘聲聞，非為內菩薩外聲聞，亦非為部份菩薩部份聲聞。經文指出舍利子「忘記」自己早是菩薩，此「忘記」本身亦即是菩薩行的一個表現，並非是菩薩行的遺失或否定，亦可為愈當聲聞愈當菩薩。如經文所謂的真聲聞，即是大乘聲聞，亦即是「一聲聞一切聲聞」。依時間觀而言，此一剎那自認為菩薩，亦把自己無實過去、無窮未來，皆解讀為「菩薩行」。就算以後又忘掉自己菩薩的身份，亦無礙於現在眼目中所認識的事實：即是遺忘本身也是一種菩薩行。歸納此事含義的時間觀的話，可謂每一剎那是無限時光的總體，可以說是薰陶其他所有的剎那，把這一剎那的屬性特點都隱隱表現在所有剎那裡面，如經文說，授記以後的聲聞才是「真聲聞」，同時肯定跟否定聲聞的身份，含著天台宗中心思想的三諦概念，同時此種聲聞行具菩薩行成為天台性具思想的典故。如此聲聞彌隱彌顯。同理此一剎那各種屬性彌隱彌顯。

此道理亦可引申到空間觀，如廣修法師談論「無情成佛」的道理所現，有情無情中間的關係亦如此剎那於其他剎那的關係一樣。有情成佛時，一切無情同時成佛。此佛性亦彌隱彌顯。

**關鍵詞：**1.《妙法蓮華經》 2.天台 3.時間觀 4.聲聞 5.遺忘

[1] T9.8b.

[2] T9.11b.

[3] T34.2a.

[4] T34.3c.

[5] T34.64a. Cf. also the discussion of Śāriputra's "root" at T34.13b.

[6] T34.46a.

[7] T34.46a-b. The reference is to the "Faith and Discernment" chapter of the Lotus, T9.18c. The types of śrāvakas, and their relation to the enumeration in the śāstra, are also given a preliminary discussion at T34.6a-b.

[8] T34.46b.

[9] T34.46b.

[10] T34.226c.

[11] T34.46b.

[12] See, for example, the example of Pūrṇa at T9.27c-28a.

[13] Enchō: "When Śāriputra backslid from the sixth minds, what state did he backslide from?" Guangxiu: "According to the Benyejing, 'Even if one backslides from the sixth of the ten dwellings, it is still a display of one's true practice.' Thus the backsliding is not true backsliding. And why? From the ten faiths up to the first dwelling is already a state of non-backsliding. When [Zhanran] now says that [he backslides] from within the sixth dwelling, it is to display something to future generations. That Benyejing says, Everything prior to the seventh dwelling is called the stage of backsliding. If one does not meet good spiritual guides at this point, even after one to ten kalpas, one may still backslide from one's bodhicitta. . . . Śāriputra was about to enter the seventh dwelling, but in the meantime encountered bad spiritual guides and thus backslid into ignorant and evil paths . . . ." The Awakening of Faith Commentary says, "This is just a provisional teaching, he did not really backslide." But in the Tiantai teaching, provisional always brings with it the ultimate. . . . (Xuzangjing, 100, p. 817, a-b.)

[14] Ibid. p. 836a.

[15] T46.887c.

[16] Cf. Zhili's rejection of a non-paradoxical or literal understanding of original enlightenment in real time, T46.893c. All beings have been in delusion from the beginningless beginning; it is this delusion itself that is retrospectively referred to as original enlightenment, but only after temporal enlightenment has been achieved.

[17] XZJ 100.817b-818a. Emphasis added.

[18] T46.885c.

[19] T46.887c. The Ming Tiantai exegete Ouyi Zhixu takes up the same question in his commentary to the Lotus. He compares the Buddha to the entrepreneur Taozhugong, who was “skilled at attaining unusual methods for becoming rich,” and would go from place to place, making a fortune in each place and then leaving it all behind, starting from scratch and making a new fortune in the next place. The Buddha attains and loses his Buddhahood again and again in the same manner; the Lotus itself is the “unusual method for becoming rich,” in this case, and is all that he takes with him from life to life—indeed, it is implied that even this is left behind, and is “taken along” only in the sense that one gets to encounter it again, that it is set circulating in the world, and hence that one need only encounter it, the news that one was already a Buddha in the past, that whatever one is doing is part of that Buddha’s practice, for one to be able to bring the unsuspected capital at hand to good account. Zhixu even says that the Buddha discards the virtues attained at the stage of the “root,” going again to the practice of the cause and attainment of the result of Buddhahood infinitely many times. Moreover, he says, the lifespan and various other merits attained from the practice of the Bodhisattva path are not used when one attains Buddhahood, are left behind. Here we have an image of real renunciation of Buddhahood as part of Buddhahood, and real repetition of the process. See Ouyi Zhixu, *Fahuajing huiyi* (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1992), pp. 350b-351a.

[20] T33.764b.

[21] Zhiyi says, “In the distant past when [Śākya] practiced the Bodhisattva path and propagated the Lotus Sūtra taught by former Buddhas, there was also . . . both root and traces. But if we look from each Buddha to the one previous, there is no end to it, so we especially select the time when he first attained Buddhahood . . . and call it the root . . . and call all subsequent deeds and preachings the traces . . . and henceforth all future teachings refer to this first attainment of Buddhahood as the root. (T34.2c-3a.) Zhanran explains this saying that “since the teaching received by [Śākya] at the stage of the original cause is also the trace spoken by a former Buddha, there is the danger of an infinite regress, so we only refer the present Buddha’s cause and effect as the root. But in principle it is not that he did not receive the teachings of other Buddhas. It’s just that since the causes and conditions and the teachings parts of the commentary all refer to the present Buddha, in the root and traces section Zhiyi also ignores the other Buddhas for the moment. Thus we refer to the Buddha of the Lifespan chapter in the sutra as the root of Śākyamuni, and don’t go on to refer to the teachings of previous Buddhas. Previous Buddhas have previous Buddhas before them, which is why he speaks of an infinite regress. But if we restrict our reference to this one Buddha, we won’t have this problem. Everything coming after this root is thus defined as the traces. Q: Because he doesn’t want to get into an infinite regress, he just talks about Śākyamuni. But now if we wanted to talk about all the Buddhas successively teaching one another, we must eventually get to a Buddha who was the first to be enlightened, with no teaching by another. Having no previous teaching as the root, where is the infinite regress? If you allow that there is an end to the progression in this way, however, you have made the error of causelessness. A: We brush off the traces and seek the root originally in order to seek the teaching so we

can obtain its genuine benefits. Even if there is a first Buddha, it is different from the initial enlightenment of the present Buddha, so what use is it to our practice and understanding? Q: But if you allow that there was a first Buddha who was enlightened without any teaching, why do we even need to receive the present Buddha's teaching? A: When there is no teaching available, one can internally transform and awaken oneself. When the teaching is available, how can one hold on to his delusion? It is like a hundred blind and lost men, all not knowing the way; one first understands the way, and teaches the others . . . . But all such speculations are fruitless . . . ." (T34.158a.)

[22] T46.888a-b.

[23] T33.764b.

[24] T34.210b. A similar sentiment is echoed by Zhili in the dialogue with Genshin, T46.887b, among other places.

[25] T9.29a.

[26] T33.732b.

[27] We may take this as a clue also to the troublesome matter of the image of the Buddha as "father" in the Lotus, in spite of the fact that the implication of creationism is carefully avoided. In what sense is the Buddha a father? Not in that he creates sentient beings, but in that they as Buddhist practitioners they are "born of his mouth," i.e., from his teaching . . . . But in the present case, it also means that he is their compassionate caretaker, who takes responsibility for them. (See T9.13a, where the Buddha's fatherhood is glossed in terms of his powers and his tireless use of them to remove the difficulties of sentient beings.) But more significant here for our purposes are the implications of the father-son relation in the parable of the lost son. We are told there that the father becomes rich after he loses his son (T9.16b). That is, the relation between them is established while both are poor, not that the son strays from an originally wealthy family (as an atmanic reading of Buddha-nature doctrine might imply). The blood relation is here equivalent to mutual involvement in poverty—that is, in delusion and suffering. The relations between Buddha's and sentient beings must be undertaken while the Buddha is in a state of ignorance like sentient beings in order for them to attain the intensity of a blood relation, they must partake of the same nature of vexations and defilements. Whoever emerges from this state transforms, we may say, from a blood brother to a father, who aspires to rescue his erstwhile brothers. Hence the connections with sentient beings which are necessary to the fulfillment of the Bodhisattva vows can only be formed while one is ignorant of one's Bodhisattvahood.

[28] T34.929c.

[29] Ruiguang, *Miaofalianhuajing miaode xuanji*, (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1978), vol. 1, p. 255.