

BOOK REVIEWS

Zhipan's Account of the History of Buddhism in China vol.1: Fozu tongji, juan 34-38: From the Times of the Buddha to the Nanbeichao Era, by Thomas Jülch. Brill. 2019. X + 316pp. €116/\$140. ISBN: 978-90-04-39620-3.

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Thomas Jülch's translation of *Zhipan's Account of the History of Buddhism in China vol. 1* is the first of a projected three volume work that will provide a complete translation, for the first time, of a major work of Chinese Buddhist historiography compiled in the late Song dynasty. The *Comprehensive History of the Buddhist Patriarchs* (*Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀, T 2035) is a massive work of 54 fascicles compiled by Zhipan 志磐, completed in 1269. The portions translated by Jülch are from a sub-text, the *Fayun tongsai zhi* 法運通塞志 (*Monograph on Success and Obstructions in the Spread of the Dharma*), of the main compilation spanning fourteen fascicles (34-48). The current first volume is a translation of fascicles 34-38, covering from the time of the historical Buddha to the end of the Nanbeichao (Northern and Southern dynasties) era, or 589 CE. Subsequent volumes will cover periods from the beginning of the Sui dynasty to the end of the Five Dynasties period (581-960 CE), fascicles 39-42; and the Song dynasty (960-1279), ending with events in 1236, fascicles 43-48.

Jülch's translation is a major contribution to Chinese Buddhist Studies. The rich historiographical tradition of Chinese Buddhism, the marriage between Chinese secular historiography and its adaptation by Buddhist scholastics in China, is a genre of literature whose breadth and depth is arguably unprecedented outside of East Asia and invaluable for understanding East Asian Buddhist traditions. That much of this bibliographic legacy—borne of a nearly 1300-year history of Buddhism in China at the time of the *Fozu tongji*'s compilation—has gone unexplored, except in brief snippets, leaves an unexamined area in our understanding of Chinese Buddhism. As indicated by Jinhua Chen in his Foreword (vii), historiography is one of the fields traditional Chinese culture excelled in, and while scholars have long availed themselves of the major works of Chinese secular historiography, Chinese Buddhist historiography has received comparatively little focus. Jülch's translation serves to fill this gap.

Prior to the translations of each of the five fascicles, or *juan* (17-290), which are generally reliable and well executed, Jülch includes a brief Introduction (1) and Preliminary Remarks (13). Backmatter includes a Glossary of Sanskrit and

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Pāli Terms (291), Bibliography (293), Index of Personal Names (308), Index of Place Names (313), Index of Work Titles (314), and Index of Terms (316). Footnotes rather than endnotes are employed, a welcome feature that increases the functionality of the work for students and scholars who can refer to them with ease. The footnotes are dominated by translations of Song-era glosses embedded in the original text, coupled with explanations of terms and contents to aid current readers. Taishō pagination is provided in the margins, easily facilitating cross checking with the original text.

Following Buddhist adaptations to Chinese secular historiography, the *Fayun tongzai zhi* is written in the style of an annalistic chronology, most familiar to readers of Chinese dynastic histories, going through Chinese history dynasty by dynasty, ruler by ruler, and year by year. Because of the paucity of references to Buddhism in Chinese imperial chronicles, Buddhists produced works in the annalistic style in order to fill the gaps left in the imperial record. The purpose, however, was more than supplementary. While acknowledging the progress of heaven's mandate, the successful execution of imperial rule, implicit in the annalistic style, Buddhist chronicles like the *Fozu tongji* served to “set the record straight,” to impose an underlying and essential Buddhist substratum to the course of imperial history. That the course of this history was not always in Buddhists' favour is implicit in the title of the *Fayun tongzai zhi*, the “successes and obstructions” in the spread of the dharma.

This is such a valuable contribution I hesitate to weigh in with some caveats. I understand that with the economic pressures on book publishers these days, proof-reading is often given short shrift. This is unfortunate. In addition to typographical errors, in this case proofing by a native English speaker could have helped avoid some infelicitous expressions. A representative list of such typos and infelicitous expressions includes: “shinging” (shining, 7), “ascets” (ascetics, 23), “At will he ate to his repletion,” → satisfaction (24), “At that time the palace of the king of the māras was shaken by itself” → shook of its own accord (25), “they [made their halberds and swords] fly straightly and threw them chaotically” (25), “troups” (troops, 25), “[Śākyamuni] immediately entered the samādhi and contemplated the absolute truth” (omit “the,” 25), and “about about” (duplicated word, 25).

Translators of Chinese face decisions on what to translate and what to leave in Romanized (pinyin) pronunciation. Specialists may have little issue with what Jülch chose to leave untranslated, but the failure to translate may lead to confusion among non-specialists. The term “Superintendent” occurs frequently, but it is not clear what term is being translated. In some cases, it appears as a translation for *sengzheng* 僧正 (e.g. 182, 189). In other cases, for *sengzhu* 僧主 (e.g. 190), and still others, for *dutong* 都統 (e.g. 259), or *gangling* 綱領 (e.g. 185). In addition, the term *datong* 大統 is left untranslated as “Datong” (268, 273, 274, 275, 277). This may be particularly confusing to novices as it appears as both the name of an era (e.g. Datong 大通, 221 and Datong 大同, 225) and a city name (Datong 大同, 259 n. 45). None of the terms appear in a glossary of names/titles in the appendices. Some standardized translations that might have been considered, for example: “Office

for the Clarification of Buddhist Profundities” for Zhaoxuan si 昭玄寺, “Controller-in-Chief” for *datong* 大統, “Controller” for *tong* 統, and “Buddhist Deacons” for *du weina* 都維那. In any case, consistency should have been employed to enable a more nuanced understanding of official Buddhist administrative titles.

Similarly, Jülch leaves Tongdao Guan 通道觀 untranslated (286). This was, in fact, an Academy of Experts on the Dao. Jülch translated, rather blithely, the passage pertaining to it: “In the sixth month it was decreed that specially for famous scholars of Buddhism and Daoism the Tongdao Guan 通道觀 should be established. 120 scholars were assigned to it. They were endowed with robes and hats, notepads and shoes.” Although Buddhist and Daoist scholars were appointed to it, the study by Arthur F. Wright that Jülch cites contends that the Academy was founded by Emperor Wu as part of his program for the elimination of the Buddhist and Daoist schools and the creation of a state based on the Ritual Canon of Confucianism (Wright 1951, 38f). This crucial detail is missing from Jülch’s account. Because of the emperor’s personal interest in Daoism, the Academy was soon dominated by Daoist practitioners. Neither Jülch’s translation or explanation reveal the true nature of the Tongdao Guan or its expressed aim of undermining Confucian rivals, especially Buddhism. The contents that follow expose how *śramaṇa* Daoan 道安 refused appointment in protest, and dharma master Jing’ai 靜藹 submitted a petition requesting an audience. But without an explanation as to the real nature of the Tongdao Guan, it is hard to determine what is at issue.

Most difficult for me to fathom was Jülch’s decision to issue a chronology without providing equivalent Western dates. Chinese era names followed by the year and month of the particular era are in evidence, following the style of the original chronicle. Anyone searching for a Western equivalent will be found wanting. Nor is a table provided anywhere to navigate the morass of Chinese imperial era names. Even in an era of google searches, the lack of equivalent dates is hard to fathom. Most of us are familiar with the imperial reign dates and eras in the periods we work in most often, but has anyone memorized all the era dates of the entire spectrum of Chinese history from the Zhou dynasty to end of the Nanbeichao period? How will students and readers unfamiliar with Chinese historiographical conventions sift through the information without the slightest of measures (i.e., dates) to guide them?

One other thing I would have liked to see is an expanded introduction on the background of the text and the intentions of Zhipan, its compiler. Major historical compilations, like the *Fozu tongji*, are created in a particular time and place, and it would be useful and instructive to learn more about this context. Jülch does indeed provide some indications in his Introduction regarding tensions between Buddhism and Confucianism as well as the sectarian struggles between Chan and Tiantai that animate the work. But what of the specifics? Admittedly, this opens a can of worms that is not easily or tidily dealt with. Now that the translation has been (is being) completed, perhaps Jülch and others can begin to address the meaning and importance of the text itself, the context it draws from, and the impact that these have on the contents themselves. Rather than a window that transparently reveals its

world, texts like the *Fozu tongji* (and its embedded subtext, the *Fayun tong sai zhi*) are more like paintings whose contents need to be deciphered to be interpreted. Many basic questions remain to get to this level of understanding of Zhipan and his compilation. In fairness, Jülch himself seems to have anticipated these concerns. His translated second volume, *Fozu tongji, juan 39-42: From the Sui Dynasty to the Wudai Era*, will include introductory sections on: The Buddhist-Confucian Confrontation and the Buddhist-Daoist Confrontation in the *Fayun tong sai zhi*, The Representation of Chan- and Tiantai-Buddhism in the *Fayun tong sai zhi*, The Place of the *Fozu tongji* in Chinese Buddhist Historiography, and Sources the *Fayun tong sai zhi* Relies On. These sections should begin to address some of the concerns.

The caveats above should not overly detract from the quality of the work. The translation of the *Fayun tong sai* sections of the *Fozu tongji* is a major milestone that will endure for decades to come. It makes the contents of a major work of Chinese Buddhist historiography available for the first time,¹ and laying bare the full spectrum of Chinese Buddhism by a Chinese Buddhist protagonist will greatly enliven our knowledge and understanding of the tradition as seen through its own eyes. Each reader will find different aspects of the translation rewarding and insightful, depending on their interest and expertise. For me, the sections on the creation of Aśoka stupas 阿育王塔 in China and the ongoing importance of the Aśoka stupa in Mingzhou (contemporary Ningbo) underscored the significance it held for successive rulers who periodically undertook to maintain and worship it. This is a reference work that will grace the shelves of any meaningful library devoted to Buddhism, especially its Chinese iteration.

Bibliography

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1. Notwithstanding the overlap of volume 2 with Jan Yün-hua's translation (1966).