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Review

Jungnok Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2012. x + 246 pp. £60. ISBN 978-1-84553-996-2 (hardback). £19.99. ISBN 978-1-84553-997-9 (paperback).

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In my study of contemporary Chinese Buddhism, I have observed many devotional practices aimed at looking after the souls of the dead that seem to contradict the foundational teachings of Buddhism, specifically the denial of a soul that perdures after death. Early Buddhism, reacting to the eternalist ideas of Brahmanism and employing analytic reasoning, accepted only empirical knowledge and explained the human person as a cluster of 'aggregates', perceptible but certainly without agency. This basic Buddhist idea is difficult to reconcile with the elaborate rituals that popular Chinese Buddhism observes to pray for the dead.

While in Buddhist studies, a perennial question has been the nature of the entity that goes through the cycles of rebirth, if it can be considered an entity at all, in Chinese Buddhism this question has not been a focus because, as Park's title suggests, Buddhism acquired a soul on its way to China. A Buddhist monk for ten years before disrobing and taking up the life of an academic, Park studied under Professor Richard Gombrich, who directed the doctoral thesis on which this book is based. Park's mastery of Classical Chinese, Japanese, Sanskrit, and Pali are put to good use in this very focused study on the evolution of the concept of a soul in Chinese Buddhism.

The book is divided into three parts with nine chapters. Part 1, made up of two chapters, contextualizes the work of Chinese Buddhist translation in the first centuries of Buddhism's development in China, explaining the process of translation as one that involved the use by Indian and Central Asian translators of Chinese assistants. This dependence inevitably led to the development of a Chinese form of Buddhism, as the cultural and linguistic differences between the India and China of the time had to be bridged. Park provides examples of translations from Pali or Sanskrit into Chinese, and explains the Chinese preference for stylish translation in order to make the texts intelligible to a Chinese audience. In this process, word order had to be shifted and the metre of the original text was literally lost in translation.

Park focuses on the work of Zhi Qian (fl. 222–53) and his translation of the Ambāṣṭha-sūtra as a case study of translators inserting their interpretations into the text and the subsequent translation acquiring the status of Buddhist truth. Park lays the ground for his later discussion of Chinese Buddhist ideas of self by demonstrating his method in examining texts. He builds on the earlier work of scholars such as Lewis Lancaster, Erik Zurcher and Jan Nattier, and presents a method of textual analysis where translatorship and dating can be ascertained to the best possible degree. This involved task is necessary to understand the historical development of Chinese Buddhist ideas of self.

In the three chapters of Part 2, Park presents the development of the Indian Buddhist concept of self, tracing its logic, internal inconsistencies, and substantial doctrinal implications. This presentation unveils the ways of thinking that made it possible for the concept of self to develop so dramatically in Indian and Chinese Buddhism.

Chapter 3 is a very clear presentation of what Early Buddhists meant by Non-Self. There are several quotes from Professor Y. Karunadasa, the eminent scholar whose treatment of the rejection of self in Early Buddhism has become classic. Chapters 4 and 5 are especially valuable for their reconstruction of the ways of thinking that formed the understanding of Self in Early Buddhism, Abhidarma, Prajñāpāramitā-Madhyamaka, and Yogācāra Buddhism, all the while focusing on the gradual attribution of permanence to a Self. The identification of different kinds of nirvana (with residue, without residue, and without abiding), and the discussion of the historical development of the conception of the three bodies of the Buddha and the Buddha-nature are especially helpful in preparing the reader for the Chinese Buddhist idea of Self. Park's style allows even the non-specialist to appreciate the subject matter.

Having laid the ground for his main topic, the four chapters in Part 3 detail the Chinese conceptions of Self before the arrival of Buddhism, with a focus on the term *shen*; the emergence of an imperishable Soul alongside the Non-Self in Chinese Buddhist translations, especially the borrowing and reinterpretation of philosophical Daoist terminology; the interpolations and adaptations of an agent in the cycles of rebirth; and, the characteristics of the Chinese Buddhist concept of Self. Park systematically identifies seven terms used in the Chinese canon to represent an imperishable soul and surveys their use and frequency in the canon, demonstrating the evolution of a Chinese Buddhist idea that was incompatible with Early Buddhist teachings.

The particularly Chinese understanding of Buddha-nature as an imperishable soul characterizes Chinese Buddhism. In a manner accessible to a variety of readers, Park has deftly employed textual analysis to trace the ways by which Chinese concerns and ways of thinking conditioned the adaptation of Buddhism in China. This process began with the work of translation during the earliest stages of Buddhism's introduction to China, and is evidence of the lasting impact of translation (e.g. use of *shen* to translate *vijñāna*) in the transmission of religion.

This book will undoubtedly re-ignite debates about the fidelity of Chinese Buddhism to Early Buddhism, the place of the Chinese canon in the study of Buddhism, and the parameters, if any, by which Buddhism adapts to new contexts. As Buddhism adapts to more and newer contexts in the twenty-first century, Park's book is an enduring contribution not only to the scholarship on the sinification of Buddhism, but also to its immense adaptability. His death at a young age is a great loss to academia.