

Summary of the Relationship Between Bai Juyi and Buddhism

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Abstract: The Tang Dynasty witnessed the first studies of the relationship between Buddhism and Bai Juyi. With the advent of modern scholarship, however, interest in the subject became more intense. For the most renowned academic commentators, there are four principal aspects to the relationship between the two traditions. These are: Bai Juyi Buddhist karma, the unity of Buddhist characteristics, Bai Juyi and the sects of Buddhism, and finally, Buddhism and the creation of Bai Juyi literature. Each of these components has proven fruitful in terms of research outcomes.

Keywords: Bai Juyi; Buddhism; Tang Dynasty

1. INTRODUCTION

Bai Juyi himself was a distinguished poet of the Tang Dynasty period. In fact, since the middle stage of that dynasty, scholarly attention regarding his relationship with Buddhism has been unremitting. In the early twentieth century, academic scholarship in China underwent radical modernization, and this heralded major advances in the study of the subject. Indeed, by broad scholarly consensus, Bai Juyi is now recognized as “one of the three most thoroughly studied Tang Dynasty writers in 20th century academia.” With the acceleration of interest in the poet’s relationship with Buddhism, in particular, significant research results have been obtained (Du, 2001). The present paper seeks to make a further contribution to this important field. It will do so by addressing several facets of Bai Juyi’s work, the relationship between his literary *oeuvre* and Buddhist thought, and the characteristics of “Buddhist unity”.

2. BAI JUYI' S STUDY OF THE BUDDHIST KARMA

As noted above, scholarly interest in the relationship between Buddhism and Bai Juyi may be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. In the second half of the twentieth century, moreover, academic interest in the field witnessed a resurgence. Nonetheless, before the advent of modern scholarship and academic methodology, perceptions of the poet and his spiritual beliefs were colored by certain traditional conceptions. Tang Si Kongtu, for example, commented on the relationship between the poet's texts and the "Zen demon (S. K. Tang, 1960)." Tang Li Shen, conversely, when assessing the *oeuvre* of Bai Yuji, noted the "Jade lotus hidden, the silent pearl shell closed (L. S. Tang, 1960). The courtyard where guests read and speak, and the tired monk listens." Jin Yuan Haowen referenced the poet's supposed "Yin Gaoti teaching outside Zen (Jin, 1990)." These writers were notably preoccupied with the relationship between Bai Yuji and Zen Buddhism, but their comments were essentially broad generalizations. Their observations, in other words, lacked concreteness and specificity. From the mid-twentieth century onwards, the advent of modern academic scholarship ushered in a particularly fruitful period of study regarding "Bai Juyi Buddhism." New research directions were pioneered and developed. Broadly, however, this new scholarship encompassed the following areas: first, research on Bai Juyi *per se*; second, analyses of the tripartite relationship between Buddhist monks, Buddhist temples, and the poet; and third, research on Buddhist scriptures.

2.1 Research regarding Bai Juyi's Buddhist education

In the twentieth century, as we have already seen, considerable scholarly interest was evinced in the relationship between Buddhism and the eminent Tang poet, Bai Juyi. Before this field could be thoroughly reinterrogated, however, it was necessary to determine how far the poet himself had studied Buddhism. In the 1930s, for example, Zhang Ruzhao resisted the common idea that Bai Juyi's writings were somehow external to Buddhism. In fact, Buddhist concepts had profoundly influenced his *oeuvre*. Although this scholarship was general in character, the reclamation of the poet's Buddhist character was pioneering and influential. Indeed, this marked the beginning of renewed interest in Bai Juyi's specifically Buddhist beliefs. The poet, as a faithful Buddhist, for example, was a paradigm favored by Chen Youqin (Chen, 1956). Around three decades later, Luo Liancheng produced his work, *An Exploration of the Relationship between Bai Juyi*,

Buddhism, and Taoism (Luo, 1989). This particular study closely interrogated Taoist and Buddhist elements within the poet's texts, reaching the conclusion that Bai Juyi was, in fact, profoundly affected by Zen Buddhism. The same topic was addressed by Li Xinghua, in his specific commentary on the nexus between Buddhism (Li, 1982), Tao, and Bai Juyi, a relationship further examined by the scholar Zhang Liming, in his *Bai Juyi, Buddha and Tao* (Zhang, 1984). The consensus among these commentators was, indeed, that the impact of Buddhism on the poet's thought was far-reaching. Moreover, in *History of Literature in the Tang Dynasty*, the scholars Qiao Xiangzhou and Chen Tiemin remarked that the influence of Buddhism on Bai Juyi far exceeded that of Taoism (Qiao & Chen, 1995). This did not imply universal scholarly consensus, however, and much debate was expended on the subject of *when* the poet himself began to study Buddhism. The Jiangzhou exile was deemed a likely chronological point for Liu Weichong and Han Tingyin, whereas Shi Jiu Tang posited the age of seventeen or eighteen (Han, 1984; Liu, 1974). Different points were proposed by Yang Zongying and Yu Bingli, while Chen Youqin suggested that the poet's Buddhist studies began before the age of twenty (Chen, 1956; Yang, 1985; Yu, 1988). Meanwhile, "youth" was posited as a plausible option by Sun Changwu and Luo Liancheng. Indeed, in so far as any agreement was reached, scholars broadly concluded that Bai Juyi began his investigations of Buddhism at some point in his youth (Luo, 1989; Sun, 1985). In terms of the *evolution* of Bai Juyi's beliefs, several scholars paid close attention to plausible timeframes. Xie Siwei, for example, posited various chronological points in relation to the poet's Yuanhe and Changqing periods (Xie, 1997d). A different chronology was suggested by Zhang Hong, however (Zhang, 2001). This scholar identified a series of basic stages, namely, the initial making of influential friends, a return to basic Buddhist precepts, the diligent study of Buddhism, Buddhist practice, and finally, Bai Juyi's role as a lay scholar in Xiangshan.

2.2 Research on the Relationship Between Bai Juyi, Buddhist Monks and Buddhist Temples

Modern scholarship has discovered a great deal regarding the tripartite relationship between Buddhist monks, temples, and Bai Juyi (Tang, 1988). Substantial information on this theme may be found, for instance, in Xie Siwei's *Scholarly Notes to Bai Juyi's Collected Poems* and Zhu Jincheng's *Bai Juyi Scholastic Anthology* (Tang & Xie, 2006). Although these works are relatively brief, several other works and papers touch on the topic either directly or indirectly. A.D. Huang's *Poems of Bai Juyi in Hangzhou*, for example, deals

specifically with the poet's literary reactions to the Buddhist temples in that region, such as those of Gushan, Baoen, Zhaoxian, Lingyin, Yuquan, Kaiyuan, and Tianzhu. The poet's residence in Luoyang, meanwhile, is addressed by Du Xuexia's *Buddhist Belief of Bai Juyi during his Period in Luoyang*, a work that examines Bai Juyi's relationship with the *Luoyang* temples at Shengshan, Fengguo, Changshou, Xiangshan, and Tiangong. A detailed analysis of the poet's interaction with the Buddhist temple of Chang'an, in particular, is provided by Wang Zaojuan, in that author's *Study of Chang'an Buddhist Literature in the Tang Dynasty*. Indeed, the scholar associated the poet's interactions with the temples of Ci'en, Ximing, and Qinglong, on the one hand, with "clear enlightenment," while noting the influence of Xianyou temple on the evolution of Bai Juyi's Buddhism. Other temples, meanwhile, imbued the poet with a radical "sense of life." Finally, the 87 temples cited in the works of Bai Juyi were examined in some detail by Xiao Weitao. In terms of Bai Juyi's relationship with Buddhist monks, Niu Sengru, contemporary with Bai Juyi, informs us that, "I envied Bai Juyi, who lived in the eastern capital of Luoyang, because Bai Juyi could apply to the Zen Master every year at Xiangji Temple." This demonstrates, at the very least, that Bai Juyi conversed with monks in his lifetime. The influence of both Buddhism and Taoism on the poet's *oeuvre*, meanwhile, was examined by the modern scholar, Luo Liancheng (Luo, 1989). That author maintained that Bai Juyi had maintained constant, cordial relationships with various monks from the Zhenyuan period onwards. The same scholar placed special emphasis on the poet's relationship with Daguan Kuan, a Zen master. Doing so sheds light, not merely on the communications between the two men, but on the historical context from which these conversations emerged (Liao et al., 1995). Meanwhile, no fewer than 27 monastic acquaintances of the poet were addressed in Xiao Weitao's *Examination of Bai Juyi and the Monks* (Xiao, 2014). This scholar believed that "extremely important" influences on Bai Juyi's life and work were exerted, in particular, by the monastics Fa Ning, "Bird Nest," Zhiru, Daozong, Wei Kuan, Master Ji and Ru Man.

2.3 Studies of Bai Juyi's Readings of Buddhist Scriptures

The subject of Bai Juyi's reading of the Buddhist scriptures was by no means unfamiliar to ancients or contemporaries. Song Suzhe, indeed, supposed that the poet became familiar with Buddhist texts in his teenage years (Su et al., 1990): "Many young people read Buddhist books and practiced meditation, which involved the world, everyday preoccupations, and the nature of illusion." The subject of Bai Juyi's early reading has also

attracted scholars of the more recent past. For example, Sun Changwu's research on Chinese literature highlights the poet's profound attachment to the Vimojie Sutra, which supposedly transformed his wider attitude to life (Sun, 1996). In fact, "Vimojie" serves as a self-portrait of the poet, an exemplar of his daily behavior and a philosophical foundation for his life. Zhang Haisha's research on the "five classics" of Buddhism, meanwhile, and on the poetry of the Tang and Song dynasties, reminds us that, as a literary figure himself, Bai Juyi essentially learned about Buddhism via its texts, i.e., its scriptures (Zhang, 2012). These included the "Prajna Heart" scriptures, "The Diamond Sutra," "The Lotus Sutra," "Vimalakirti Sutra," and "Tan Sutra." We know, in sum, that Bai Juyi was well-versed in the sacred literature of Buddhism, which profoundly impacted his personality, as well as his writings. The emergence of previously unknown documentary sources has further clarified the nature of Bai Juyi's Buddhist reading. An archaeological exploration of the site of the poet's house, for example, was undertaken by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences between 1992 and 1993. Various engravings of Buddhist scripture were uncovered, including the "Usnisa Vijaya Dharani Sutra" and the "Great Compassion Heart Dharani." This discovery stimulated considerable academic attention, while debate was also triggered around the precise version of the mantra unearthed at the site. The scholar Wen Yucheng, for example, claimed that a translation of Bin Samun was the source of some of the discovered material (Wen, 2001). The "Great Compassion Heart Dharani" located by the archaeologists, he maintained, was broadly similar to contemporary popular translations. Meanwhile, Wang Zhenguo drew parallels between the books of the Fuxian temple, on the one hand, and the Sutra inscriptions produced in the middle and later Tang Dynasty, in Luoyang. The source here, however, was not the Buddori translation, but rather the mantra of the translation of the Buddha. Hence, the literary engravings uncovered at the Bai Juyi site may coincide with the Dihara translation. Wang Zhenguo, meanwhile, maintained that in the case of the "Great Compassion Heart Dharani," only 77 engraved sentences could be associated with Bai Juyi, and in this sense, the origins of the book *per se* were impossible to determine (Wang, 2006). The year 2014, moreover, saw the publication of materials from the *Archaeological Excavation Report* (1959-2001) of the "Luoyang City of the Sui and Tang Dynasties." This shed further light on the nature of the Buddhist scriptures discovered at the poet's house (Archaeology, 2014). This information was exploited, in particular, by Han Jianhua, who concluded that Bai Juyi was responsible for 36 sentences of the discovered text, while 78 sentences pertained to an earlier translation of Gada (Han,

2017).

3. RESEARCH ON THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BAI JUYI AND BUDDHIST SECTS

The relationships obtained between Bai Juyi and various sects of Buddhism have also interested expert commentators, with most attention centering on Pure Land, North and South Zen, and Tantra. The integration characteristics of Bai Juyi's Buddhist belief were, in fact, highlighted by Sun Changwu (Sun, 1988). The latter proposed that the earlier years of the poet's life reflected the study of Zen, while his later years exemplified adherence to the "Pure Land." In his paper "Bai Juyi and Hongzhou Zen", the scholar Sun Changwu posited contact, within the Shangshan temple, between Southern Zen Buddhism and Bai Juyi (Sun, 1994c). Academics have, indeed, pondered the question of whether the temple might more properly be linked with the North or South sect. Xie Siwei, for instance, addressed the problem by interrogating the social milieu of North Zen Buddhism, alongside the historical development of the temple. This particular scholar felt that the "eight words and the poems" of Bai Juyi reflected the influence of *Northern Zen* (Xie, 1997a). Similarly, an adherence to Northern Zen Buddhism by the youthful Bai Juyi, at least, was supported by Jian Changchun (Jian, 2002). Likewise, Chen Yinchu informs us that Bai Juyi entered the public domain gradually, through the "Northern door." Finally, North Zong Zen is associated, by Jian Zong Xiu, with the poet as both apprentice and master (Chen, 2001; Jian, 2006). As regards affiliations between Bai Juyi and the Pure Land, the poet's attachment to the sect was highlighted by Sun Changwu in the latter's article, "Bai Juyi and Buddhism, Zen and the Pure Land." (Sun, 2004). Drawing on information derived from Bai Ji, meanwhile, Xu Hongxing attributed the practice of Pure Land to the poet in his later years, while also providing a broad-brush analysis of Bai Juyi's faith *vis-à-vis* MiBuddha and Maitreya (Xu, 2010). Conversely, scholarly attention has been relatively meager in terms of Bai Juyi's putative relationship with Tantrism. In his Comprehensive Anthology of Bai Juyi, Xie Siwei referenced the problem associated with the poet's "Tantric faith." He noted that, "Bai Juyi's Shangshan Temple, in the reign of Zhenyuan, was a famous temple in the Eastern capital, inherited by the Tantric and the North Zong." Xie Siwei chose not to explore the matter in greater detail, however (Xie, 1997b). In fact, the interaction between Tantrism and Bai Juyi has been clarified, to a degree, by the discovery of certain cultural

artefacts. The archaeological excavation of the poet's house between 1992 and 1993, by the Archaeology Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, has already been cited. In the course of this work, a structure was unearthed bearing engravings of "Usnisa Vijaya Dharani Sutra," alongside "Great Compassion Heart Dharani." These texts would appear to reveal certain private beliefs of Bai Juyi. Interrogation of the works has, indeed, provided a contextual basis to examine the poet's putative acceptance of the "secret" school's teachings. In their *Origin of the Chinese Buddhism of Bai Juyi*, King Kong Shihong and Xu Jie noted the three essential manifestations that the poet associated with the eponymous Chinese Buddhism (Xu, 2014). There was, for example, intimate communication between man and Master Buddha of Light. Bai Juyi's receipt of the "diamond ring" is also relevant here. "Therefore," the article proceeds to claim, "it is easy to comprehend why such a book might be found in Bai Juyi's former residence."

4. STUDY OF THE "UNITY CHARACTERISTICS" OF BAI JUYI'S CONDUCT REGARDING BUDDHIST STUDY

Academia has generated a broad consensus regarding the so-called "unity of the three religions" and its characteristics. Primarily, this implicates the integration of Taoism and Buddhism, the parallel evolution of Buddhism and Confucianism, and the convergence of Zhuang and Zen. In terms of the triple religious unity reflected in the work of Bai Juyi, Sun Changwu notes that Vimalakirti's belief is a tangible reflection, even an embodiment, of this unity. As regards *Vimo and Guanyin in Chinese Literature*, Sun Changwu examined Bai's Vimalakirti belief, together with the notion of "Bai Vimalakirti." (Sun, 1996). Here, he claims, one finds, "Neither 'golden millet' as a sacred character, nor an eloquent mystery home, nor incredible gods, nor a degree of the human heart. Rather, there is merely the ordinary lay scholar in reality." For Bai Juyi, Vimalakirti coincided with the practice of the three religions as a form of philosophy of life. For Fan Haibo, meanwhile, Buddhism (Fan, 1993), Taoism and Confucianism provided the basis for the poet's "three religions." Second, the features associated with the Qing Dynasty combination of Buddhism and Confucianism have been examined by Lu Jilu (Lu, 1878). That scholar's *Notes in Heifei* contain the following passage: "There is no discussion in Xiangshan, but rather 'attacking Confucian style and practicing Buddhism.' Bai Juyi learned Buddhism alongside traditional poetry, and he 'begged for

the spirit.”” Meanwhile, the modern scholar Xie Siwei indicates, in *Bai Juyi's Life Consciousness and Literary Practice*, that the poet's Buddhist belief system evinces a distinct typology and chronology (Xie, 1992). First, Bai Juyi could deploy Buddhist ideals as a form of lifestyle guidance. Second, he was able to achieve a coordination and synthesis of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, and this integration had both spiritual and political dimensions. As regards Bai Juyi's philosophical synthesis, indeed, Xie Siwei observes that the poet's Buddhist thought evinces both practicality and harmony “From pure theory to the direct problems of life, this comprehensive Buddhist thought allows the individual to review and guide their own life consciousness (Xie, 1997c), but also more skillfully to coordinate Buddhist thoughts and other ideas, permitting these to fit more naturally into the scholar's political life and spiritual life pursuits.” We find further interesting points in Shang Yongliang's *On the Influence on Bai Juyi of Buddha Lao and the Path to Transcendence* (Shang, 1993). This work examines Bai Juyi's deployment of Zen Buddhism as a means of achieving spiritual transcendence. The same study notes that, while the academic influence of Buddhism on the poet's life should be acknowledged, it served more significantly “as a guide to viewing the world and oneself. At the same time, Bai Juyi seldom studied Buddhism as a serious branch of knowledge. He often adopted Buddhism with a relaxed attitude, understood it at the moment [*sic*], and directly tested his own heart, so that he could serve his real life.” At the same time, the influence of Zen Buddhism on Bai Juyi's hermetic thought is emphasized by Xiong Xiaoyan's *Relationship between Bai Juyi's Hidden Theory and Zen* (Xiong, 1995). In fact, the nature of Bai Juyi's relationship with both Taoism and Buddhism has gradually been clarified within academia. Even ancient scholars recognized something of the poet's interactions with these two philosophies. For Song Yaokuan, Bai Juyi's conversion to Buddhism probably occurred after his failed engagements with alchemy, as he notes in his *Xixi Cong*. The same opinion was offered by the Qing Dynasty scholar Zhao Yi: “Yuanhe period, the art of burning and refining was prevalent; many scholars and officials had faith. Xiangshan constructed the Lushan cottage to practice alchemy with Guo Xuzhou, but suffered failure despite anticipated success. [...] Even though all the cinnabar was burned down, Bai Juyi still did not achieve the liberation of his soul.” Failures in alchemy, Zhao Yi suggests, led Bai Juyi to discard that pseudo-science. From that point onwards, he was more powerfully drawn to Buddhism (Yi & Jiang, 2012). The philosophy of Bai Juyi also received detailed scrutiny from Chen Yinque, a scholar of the 1940s. The poem “Answer,” he believed, suggested that the poet converted

to Buddhism in later life. In this context, Chen Yinque highlights Bai Juyi's recategorization of Penglai's Fairy Mountain as "Buddhist soil." (Chen, 2015).

Scholars have, finally, noted the significance of "Zen confluences" in the work of Bai Juyi. Song Chao Jiong, for example, noted the presence of these influences within Bai's poems, notably: "*Fazang Fragmented Gold Record*," volume five: "Bai has a poem, 'Whether it's right or wrong is just a dream, language silent might as well Zen.'..... 'Whether it's right or wrong is just a dream' indicated Zhuang Zhou's purport. 'Language silent might as well zen' showed Buddhist tenet." (Chao, 1983). This was particularly true in terms of Zhuang and Zen thought, which he believed the poem reflected. Centuries later, meanwhile, Sun Changwu, in his *Bai Juyi and Hongzhou Zen*, maintained that Bai Juyi accepted the key tenets of the eponymous philosophy, which provided him with spiritual sustenance and harmony (Sun, 1994b). The poet's personal opinions, indeed, are reflected in the correspondence with Buddha Lao, and notably the Zen Village, and the expressed views are in line with Hongzhou Zen: "Lao Zhuang and Zen are not in opposition to Bai Juyi, but [we see instead] his acceptance of Hongzhou Zen." With this revelation, earlier apparent contradictions between Taoism and Buddhism may be bridged, and new directions are suggested for the study of philosophical confluence.

This has, in turn, provided the foundation for the study of the "confluence of confluences" by scholars such as Xiao Lihua. The latter traces the theory of Zhuang Zen confluence, and its evolution, within Bai Juyi's poetry. Given modern scholarship's rigorous analysis of the chronology of Bai Juyi's works, we may suggest that the first influence of Zen confluence on the poet coincided with his earlier life, and the Yuanhe period. Bai Juyi was engaged with Zen thought at this time, as we see from the communicative phenomena of Zhuangzi and Zen meditation. The further integration of Zhuang Zen may be traced to between 10 and 14 years of the Yuanhe stage. The poet was influenced by the "free and easy" aspects of Zhuangzi, as well as the precept of Hongzhou Zen that "the common heart is the Tao." During Bai Juyi's period of office as Governor of Hangzhou, furthermore, he was influenced by the principle that "the normal heart is right," as well as by the practice of fasting and Taoist reflections on the nature of immortality. In the Dahe period, conversely, the poet evinced a more profound understanding of Southern Zen. Gradually, he relinquished the pursuit of immortality in favor of greater peace of mind.

5. RESEARCH ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BUDDHISM, ZEN AND BAI JUYI' S LITERARY *OEUVRE*

In the aftermath of the Song Dynasty, interest gradually mounted regarding the elements of Buddhist philosophy that Bai Juyi's poems contained. Song Ruan Yue, for example, reflected on the Buddhist components within the "West Qing Poetry": "The world often noted Bai Juyi's Buddhist faith, deriving benefit from the eminent monk Ruman, Looking at his sentence 'If I learn from Buddhism but not from Taoist immortals, then I must return to Tusita deva-world,' this implies more than a language of liberation." While Song Ruan Yue was skeptical regarding the extent of Bai Juyi's study of Buddhism, Qing Zha Shenxing also recognized the Buddhist content of the poet's *oeuvre* (Song Ruan, 1998). The poem "Feeling about the false karma, write a poem in front of the temple wall," for example, evinced a conclusion "redolent with Zen enlightenment (Zha & Fan, 2017). Indeed, numerous modern scholars have examined the corpus of the "Bai Juyi's Poems" in terms of Buddhist literature, and several important insights have been achieved. Zhang Ruzhao confirmed the significance of Buddhist thought within Bai Juyi's work, drawing particular attention to the concepts of "emptiness," "study," "speed," "Zen," and "Zen enlightenment." (Zhang, 1981). Du Songbai, moreover, highlighted the fact that Bai Juyi not only wrote Zen poetry, but that his *oeuvre* differed from Gatha (Du, 1976). For Sun Changwu, meanwhile, the slowness, lightness of style and content of Bai Juyi's poems reflected Buddhist influence (Sun, 1988). Xie Siwei examined the ways in which the poet's literary endeavors were affected by his Buddhist beliefs (*Bai Juyi's Life Consciousness and Literary Practice*). Xie Siwei maintained that this influence was, indeed, significant. Under the aegis of Buddhist thought, there was no real conflict between "working for the king, the minister, and the people " and "writing for himself"; the two could coexist. Simultaneously, Bai Juyi evinced a greater literary understanding than his predecessors, and his works formed a milestone in the evolution of Chinese narrative literature (Xie, 1992). Finally, the influence of Buddhist "wisdom," "precepts" and "rules" on the themes, content and form of Bai Juyi's poetry was examined by Hu Sui (Hu, 2002). These scholars, in sum, have generated far greater understanding *vis-à-vis* the discursive systems and academic constructions of Buddhist literature. Over time, certain fundamental principles of the relationship between poetry and Buddhism have emerged, and scholarship concerning Bai Juyi has not been the sole

beneficiary. In addition to the above, considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to the influence of Pure Land and Zen on Bai Juyi's poetry. Academics have, moreover, addressed the latter's relationship with the wider Buddhist canon, and the interplay between Buddhism and "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow." Among those scholars who have considered Zen influences on Bai Juyi's literary *oeuvre*, Deng Xinyue and Mao Yanjun remain prominent, having successively interrogated and categorized the Zen components in the poet's "leisurely" works. For Deng Xinyue, the "comfortable and leisurely" poems of Bai Juyi strongly exemplified Zen principles (Deng, 2002; Mao, 2005), with particular reference to four characteristics: 'The homely realm of "seeking to isolate oneself from the world," the leisurely realm of "idle people stirring up their own troubles," the broad realm of "troubles are Bodhi," and the aesthetic realm of "silent flowers, people are elegant just like the chrysanthemums."' Mao Yanjun, in a similar context, also perceived the Buddhist influence on Bai Juyi's poems in terms of four broad areas. These were, first, the Dharma and the everyday; second, the "Bodhi" and its aesthetic environment; third, the open environment and the homely qualities of peace of mind; and fourth, the natural state of mind ("spring grass is green") (Mao, 2005). Indeed, the study of Buddhism and other influences on the Bai Juyi's poems has become a favored avenue of scholarly research. For Sun Changwu, Buddhist influences on Bai Juyi's *oeuvre* were primarily reflected in the leisurely adaptability of style and simplicity of language (Sun, 1994a). The "lightness" of Bai Yuji poetry is also, for Zhou Yukai, connected to Hongzhou Zen, in particular (Zhou, 1992). The influence of the latter on the poet's works was discussed in a similar vein by Ma Xiancheng, Xiao Chi and Hu Sui. In particular, Ma Xiancheng observed that, "Under the influence of Hongzhou Zen, Bai Juyi's poems evince the characteristics of Zhuang Zen integration." (Ma, 1999). Xiao Chi, meanwhile, asserted that Bai Juyi's understanding of Hongzhou Zen caused the theme of "emptiness" to become a recurring theme in his poetry (Xiao, 2005). Landscape also gained greater prominence as a topic, while the poet's style became easier and more leisurely. Discussing Bai Juyi from the perspective of the principle that the "common heart is 'Tao,'" Hu Sui emphasized the importance of that concept in the poet's work. The same scholar also recognized the influence of Hongzhou Zen, and the "straightforwardness" and simplicity of Bai Juyi's linguistic expression (Hu, 2007). By comparison, only modest scholarly attention has been devoted to the influence of Pure Land ideology on the works of Bai Juyi. Wang Xinya, in *Bai Juyi's Faith in Pure Land and His Later Poetic Style*, linked the poet's change of literary style

to his adherence to Pure Land. Following the decline of Jiangzhou, Bai Juyi's work evinced a transition from the satirical to the leisurely (Wang, 1998), and even to the "vulgar." The relationship between Buddhist texts and the literary creations of Bai Juyi has been interrogated, as we have seen, by Sun Changwu, Zhang Haisha and Xiao Lihua, among other scholars. Sun Changwu, in his *Vimo and Guanyin in Chinese Literature*, noted the influence of the *Vimalakirti Sutra* on the poet, highlighting the importance within Bai's poems of concepts such as "Vimo," "Jing Mingweng" "illness," and "Biye elder." (Sun, 1996). For Xiao Lihua, meanwhile, concepts around "the Sutra" were associated with the production of the Tang "banquet poems," and indeed, the banquet poetry of Bai Juyi directly referenced Zen practice (Xiao, 1996). Finally, Zhang Haisha, in his *Five Buddhist Classics and Tang and Song Poetry*, stressed the conceptual importance of the "empty realm" and the "vast and empty view." The latter holds that the so-called "dream" perspective reflects the illusory nature of the world. Zhang Haisha also stresses the degree of Sutra's influence on poetic style within Bai Juyi's work (Zhang, 2012). Additional academic interest has been aroused by the relationship between Buddhism and "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow." Indeed, this correlation was recognized during the Tang Dynasty itself. With regard to the poem, Zhang Hu highlighted the following: "Search upwards, exhaust the sky, Go down and search all over the underground, There's no trace of either place." This, he believed, reflected a relationship with the *Narrative of Mu Lian Saving His Mother*. Following the emergence of modern scholarship in the previous century, Chen Yunji examined the plot content of the poem in terms of both Buddhism and changing perspective. More specifically, he observed that: "The popular folk rumors processed and refined in *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* actually have the vast majority of plot elements formed on the basis of the *Joyful King's Fate*." For "*The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*," moreover, the internal plot is closely bound up with the search of Mu Lian for his mother (Chen, 1985).

6. EXISTING PROBLEMS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

There are four key components to any discussion of the relationship between Buddhism and Bai Juyi. These are: the origins of the poet's Buddhism, the relationship of the poet with various sects, the life and character of Bai Juyi himself, and the specific interplay between Buddhism

and the poet's literary *oeuvre*. Impressive research results have been attained in all four areas. Meanwhile, the relevant scholarship has demonstrated an evolution from broad generalization towards detailed analysis. In particular, much light continues to be shed on the manner in which both the poet's life and his work were impacted by Zen Buddhism. Still, an examination of the academic status quo indicates that much work remains to be done, and this work is heterogeneous. First, the role of classical reading within the religious observances of scholarly officials has been stressed, *inter alia*, by Zhang Haisha, Sun Changwu and Xiao Lihua. This is significant, but further work needs to be done to identify those Buddhist scriptures especially favored by Bai Juyi. How, moreover, was his *oeuvre* influenced by such works? Such questions have not been answered satisfactorily by the extant studies. Second, the integration of the various schools of Buddhism and their characteristics, together with the "unity of the three religions," has been broadly adumbrated, but there has been inadequate discussion of the evolution and cultivation of Bai Juyi's personal beliefs. Third, more scholarly research is needed in terms of Buddhism's various modes of religious observation, and the manner in which these influenced Bai Juyi's poetry. Lastly, as we have noted, considerable scholarly attention has focused on Buddhist themes and images within the Bai's poems, but what is the precise nature of the Buddhist sentiment that the poet's works evince? There has, for instance, been insufficient explanation of the images of Guqin that the Bai Juyi's poems contain. These matters, then, provide the principal focus of the present paper.

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