

Sentient Beings and Their Salvation in the *Dizang pusa benyuan jing*

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Introduction

The *Dizang Bodhisattva's Original Vows Sūtra* (地藏菩薩本願經 *Dizang pusa benyuan jing*, hereafter *Original Vows Sūtra*) has been known for its doctrine of the swift salvation of sentient beings, most notably in the form of more favorable rebirths from hell and other realms of suffering through the worship of Dizang Bodhisattva (地藏菩薩, Kṣitigarbha). However, it also embraces the traditional Mahāyāna ideal of attaining Buddhahood through the practice of leading oneself and others to enlightenment (自覺覺他 *zijue jueta*). Hitherto, focus on this *sūtra*, by believers and scholars alike, has generally been on the “easy” means of salvation through worship practices (making offerings to and reciting the name of Dizang, etc.) and holding memorial services for deceased souls by the bereaved. Much attention has also been paid to Dizang’s original vows to save all sentient beings, and to the stories of Dizang’s past meritorious lives (本生 *bengsheng*). This paper, in contrast, considers the often-neglected aspects of Dizang contained in this *sūtra*. The aim is to elucidate the figure of Dizang as a preacher and practitioner of Mahāyāna Bodhisattvahood, that is, as one determined to not just lead the sentient beings of the defiled world (五濁惡世 [T13, 777c]), who are “difficult to edify, strongly stubborn, and of sin and suffering” (難

化剛強罪苦衆生 [T13, 779b]), to better rebirths, but also to teach them “to gradually practice the ultimate” and “gradually let them escape [from the world of suffering] and attain the great merit” of enlightenment (漸修無上／漸度脱使獲大利 [T13,789b; 779c]).

1. The Origin of the *Original Vows Sūtra*

The origin of the *Original Vows Sūtra* is shrouded in mystery. Although it is generally regarded as having played a major role in the development of Dizang worship in ancient and medieval China and Japan along with the *Ten Wheels Sūtra* (十輪經 *Shilun jing*)¹⁾ and the *Sūtra of Divining the Requit of Good and Bad Karmas* (占察善惡業報經 *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing*, hereafter *Divination Sūtra*), which is most probably a Chinese apocryphal work from the late sixth century, the historical background of this *sūtra* has been an object of controversy.²⁾ Matsumoto Fumisaburō has noted that it was not entered into the official Chinese canon until as late as the *Ming Canon* (明藏 *Mingzang*). There, it is recorded as a translation by the famous Central-Asian monk Śikṣānanda (実叉難陀, 652-710), but there is no mention of it in Tang *sūtra* catalogues such as the *Kaiyuan lu* (開元錄) and *Zhenyuan lu* (貞元錄). Therefore, Matsumoto concluded that this *sūtra* is of a much later date, implying that it is a Yuan or Ming translation.³⁾ Manabe

1) Two Chinese translations with much the same content in essence are extant: *Dafangguang shilun jing* (大方廣十輪經), a Northern Liang dynasty translation, and *Dacheng daji dizang shilun jing* (大乘大集地藏十輪經), a mid-seventh-century Tang dynasty translation by Xuanzang (玄奘).

2) The most extensive examination of the origin of this *sūtra* is by Manabe Kōsai (1960), and this paper owes much to his research results in this regard. For brief overviews of the discussion surrounding the origin of Dizang Bodhisattva worship and Dizang *sūtras*, see Hayami 1975, Onoda 1975.

3) Matsumoto 1927, 315; Manabe 1960, 83-84. Miyamoto Shōson (1954, 491) repeats Matsumoto's conclusion. Hatani Ryōtai (1934, 9-10) sees this *sūtra* as a translation by Śikṣānanda and, suggesting links to Iranian religious thought, concludes that it was

Kōsai refuted Matsumoto's view, mainly on the grounds that various citations of this *sūtra* can be found prior to the Yuan period, most importantly in Changjin's (常謹) *Records of Miracles of Dizang Bodhisattva Statues* (地藏菩薩像靈驗記 *Dizang pusa xiang lingyan ji*), completed in the second year of Duangong (端拱二年, 989) in the early Song dynasty.⁴⁾ Manabe, while hinting at the possibility that this *sūtra* is a Śikṣānanda translation, concludes that it goes back at least to 10th or 11th century.⁵⁾

Most recently, Françoise Wang-Toutain has pointed out a passage in the *Records of Miracles of Dizang Bodhisattva Statues* that says that an Indian monk, Zhiyou (智祐), brought a transformation image of the Dizang Bodhisattva (地藏菩薩變像 *Dizang pusa bienxiang*) and an Indian palm-leaf copy (梵夾 *fanjia*) of a *Sūtra on the Merits of the Original Vow* (本願功德經 *Benyuan gongde jing*) to China during the Tianfu era (天福 936-944) of the Five Dynasties period.⁶⁾ She also notes that the name of the *Original Vows Sūtra* is found in the inscription on a stone pillar of *Uṣṇīṣa-vijayā-dhārānī* (仏頂尊勝陀羅尼經幢 *Foding zunsheng tuoluoni jing chuang*) from the third year of Changxing (長興三年, 932), which was studied by Tsu-

compiled in Central Asia, taking as models the *Ten Wheels Sūtra* and the original vows doctrine of the Amitābha Buddha. Hayami Tasuku maintains that this *sūtra* appeared at about the same time as the Tang version of the *Ten Wheels Sūtra* (651) and the *Divination Sūtra*, and that these three *sūtras* made Dizang worship popular from the seventh century onward in China. He notes that the *Dizang Bodhisattva Sūtra* (地藏菩薩經 *Jizō bosatsu kyō*) listed in Japan's Shōsōin (正倉院) records among *sūtras* copied in the tenth year of Tempyō (738) is the *Original Vows Sūtra* (Hayami 1975, 29, 36). More recently, Wakamori Tarō (1983, 49), viewing this *sūtra* as a Tang translation, has suggested that it triggered the worship of Dizang as a savior of the damned souls in hell.

4) Manabe 1960, 86-92. The citation in the *Records of Miracles of Dizang Bodhisattva Statues* [X87, 587c] corresponds to the passage 汝当憶念, 吾在忉利天...如是三白仏言 in the *Original Vows Sūtra* [T13, 779b-c].

5) Manabe 1960, 84, 92.

6) Wang-Toutain 1998, 79; *Records of Miracles of Dizang Bodhisattva Statues* [X87, 594c].

kamoto Zeryū in 1931.⁷⁾ Further, she suggests that a footnote in the Tang *sūtra* catalogue *Kaiyuan lu*, stating that five *sūtras* from among the 19 works by Śikṣānanda are no longer extant, may have permitted people to “expand nonchalantly” the number of translations ascribed to him.⁸⁾

From these preceding studies, we can say that this *sūtra* was extant in China by the early tenth century at the latest. However, if this is a later compilation ascribed posthumously to Śikṣānanda, we must ask why this Central Asian monk was chosen as the fictional translator. It can reasonably be speculated that, at the time of the compilation, Śikṣānanda’s reputation as a great translator must still have had currency, but the time must also have been sufficiently removed from the date of his death to make the fiction believable. Thus, this *sūtra* possibly dates back to as early as the mid- or late eighth century.⁹⁾ Seemingly Chinese elements such as the pejorative reference to alien minorities as “*qiang hu yi di*” (羌胡夷狄 [T13, 780b])¹⁰⁾ and the appearance of a ghost king named Administrator of Life (and Death) (鬼王名曰主命 [T13, 785b-c]), reminiscent of the Daoist god Taishanfujun (泰山府君), suggest the possibility that it was compiled and expanded in China, even if it is not entirely a Chinese creation. Further detailed research into the origin of this *sūtra* is necessary, but at present we

7) Wang-Toutain 1998, 79; Tsukamoto 1931, 138. She also notes that three copies of the *Original Vows Sūtra* seemingly from the tenth century exist among the Dunhuang manuscripts (Wang-Toutain 1998, 79).

8) Wang-Toutain 1998, 78. The footnote in the *Kaiyuan lu* [T55, 566a] states Śikṣānanda’s translations as “nineteen volumes in one hundred seven fascicles” with “five volumes in five fascicles non-extant” (右一十九部一百七卷, 五部五卷闕本). Incidentally, as the *Original Vows Sūtra* consists of either two or three fascicles (Manabe 1960, 83), this *sūtra* could not have been among the five missing works.

9) One negative testimony regarding this speculation is that the *Great Ming Memoirs of Eminent Monks* (大明高僧伝 *Da Ming gaoseng zhuan*), compiled in 1617, names Śikṣānanda as one of the most prominent translators of *sūtras* in history along with Kumārajīva (譯經之盛, 莫過於六朝盛唐鳩摩什矣又難陀輩。) [T50, 901c], revealing the longevity of this monk’s reputation through Chinese history.

10) Matsumoto 1927, 318.

must settle for the tentative conclusion that this *sūtra* is most likely a Chinese compilation, completed no later than the early tenth century, possibly dating back to the mid- or late eighth century, and fictionally ascribed to Śikṣānanda.¹¹⁾

2. The View of Sentient Beings in the *Original Vows Sūtra*

The *Original Vows Sūtra* takes a deeply pessimistic view of the nature of sentient beings living in a defiled world. This *sūtra*, consisting of 13 chapters in two fascicles,¹²⁾ is set in the Trāyastrimśa Heaven, where Śākyamuni Buddha has gone to preach to his late mother, Māyā. There, countless buddhas and bodhisattvas praise the Buddha for “showing the magical power of inconceivable great wisdom in the defiled world of five turbidities, subduing the strongly stubborn sentient beings.”¹³⁾ Here the world is perceived as heavily defiled and the sentient beings as extremely difficult to

11) Another point of interest is a passage stating that the deceased soul is placed under judgment by various officials of hell (諸司 *zhusi*) before receiving rebirth accordingly [T13, 784b]. However, this is not as developed as the doctrine of judgements by the Ten Kings as seen in the later *Ten Kings Sūtra* (予修十王生七經 *Yu xiu shi wang sheng qi jing*), hinting that this *sūtra* predates the end of the Tang period.

12) For a study of the version in three fascicles, see Manabe 1960, 83-84. The thirteen chapters are as follows: Top Fascicle (卷上): (1) Chapter on the Magical Power in the Palace of the Trāyastrimśa Heaven 忉利天宮神通品, (2) Chapter on the Gathering of Divided Bodies [of Dizang] 分身集會品, (3) Chapter on the Observation of Karmic Conditions of Sentient Beings 觀衆生業緣品, (4) Chapter on the Karmic Results of Sentient Beings of Jambudvīpa 閻浮衆生業感品, (5) Chapter on the Names of Hells 地獄名号品, (6) Chapter on the Praise by the Tathāgata 如來讚歎品; Bottom Fascicle (卷下): (7) Chapter on the Merits of the Living and the Dead 利益存亡品, (8) Chapter on the Praise by Yamarāja and his Assembly 閻羅王衆讚歎品, (9) Chapter on the Recitation of the Names of Buddhas 称仏名号品, (10) Chapter on the Discernment of the Merits of Giving Offerings 校量布施功德緣品, (11) Chapter on the Earth God's Guarding of the Dharma 地神護法品, (12) Chapter on the Merits of Seeing and Hearing [the Figure and Name of Dizang] 見聞利益品, (13) Chapter on the Entrusting of Human Beings and Divinities 囑累人天品.

13) 能於五濁惡世, 現不可思議大智慧神通之力, 調伏剛強衆生. [T13, 777c].

edify. Let us first see in greater detail how the sentient beings are “strongly stubborn,” after which we shall examine how Dizang is expected to save them.

2.1. Strongly Stubborn Sentient Beings

This *sūtra* repeatedly lays out how sentient beings of the defiled world and age are extremely difficult to save. Below are some examples.¹⁴⁾

- (1) In the defiled world of five turbidities, I [the Buddha] have edified those strongly stubborn sentient beings, by training and subduing their minds, I have made them renounce what is wrong and return to what is right. Among ten people, [however,] one or two would still keep to bad habits. So I, too, divided my body into myriads and widely proffered skillful means...There were the dull and ignorant whom I edified over a long period, finally making them followers.
吾於五濁惡世教化如是剛強衆生，令心調伏捨邪歸正。十有一二尚惡習在。吾亦分身千百億廣設方便...或有暗鈍久化方歸。 [T13, 779b]
- (2) You should see how I [the Buddha] have toiled in hardships over multiple *kalpas*, and enlightened those sentient beings who are difficult to edify, strongly stubborn, and of sin and suffering.
汝觀吾累劫勤苦，度脫如是等難化剛強罪苦衆生。 [T13, 779b]
- (3) [Sentient beings] are reborn repeatedly among the five destinies¹⁵⁾ without a moment’s respite. Often they would meander for countless

14) There is an excellent English translation of this *sūtra* by the Buddhist Text Translation Society, and I have benefited greatly from their insights and have adopted their choice of English terms in some instances. However, all translations of the *sūtra* in this paper are mine, and any errors or unsuitable English terms are my responsibility.

15) The five destinies are hell denizens, hungry ghosts, beasts, humans, and divinities. Although the Chinese phrase here is literally ‘five paths’ (五道 *wudao*), this English phrase is also used as the translation of the ‘five levels of practice in Bodhisattvahood’ (五位 *wuweī*). I have taken the meaning and translated 道 as ‘destiny’ (趣 *qu*). See *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, ‘five paths’ (1074r), ‘six destinies’ (1076r).

kalpas among hindrances and hardships. They are like those fish that play among the fishing net; they would escape, enter, get out for a while in the river, then get caught in the net again. For those persons I am gripped with apprehension.

輪轉五道暫無休息。動經塵劫迷惑障難。如魚遊網將是長流脫入暫出又復遭網。以是等輩吾當憂念。 [T13, 780b]

- (4) Dizang Bodhisattva has, through endlessly distant *kalpas* until now, led sentient beings to enlightenment, but his vows are yet to be fulfilled. Out of compassion and pity for the sinful, suffering sentient beings of this world, and also observing that the entangling vines of [ill] causes will not be severed in the future, for these reasons he has once again renewed his vows.

地藏菩薩久遠劫來迄至于今，度脫衆生猶未畢願。慈愍此世罪苦衆生，復觀未來無量劫中因蔓不斷，以是之故又發重願。 [T13, 781b]

- (5) Observing these sentient beings of Jambudvīpa, I see that their hearts are restless and their minds agitated, and that none of them are free of sin. [Even if] they escape [from sin] and acquire good merits, many of them would retrogress from their original [good] intention, and should they encounter bad opportunities, [bad intentions] will only grow with each instant.

我觀是閻浮衆生，拳心動念無非是罪。脫獲善利多退初心，若遇惡緣念念增益。 [T13, 783c-784a]

- (6) The nature of sentient beings of the southern Jambudvīpa is strongly stubborn, difficult to train, and difficult to subdue... Naturally, the sentient beings of Jambudvīpa are heavily entangled in bad habits; one instant they will escape [from them] and the next instant they will fall in. In this way, they trouble the Bodhisattva [Dizang] everlastingly, and after numerous *kalpas*, [Dizang] leads them to enlightenment.

南閻浮提衆生，其性剛強難調難伏...自是閻浮衆生結惡習重，旋出旋入。勞斯菩薩久，經劫數而作度脫。 [T13, 784c-785a]

- (7) These sentient beings of the southern Jambudvīpa have no firmly fixed will or nature, and many are of bad habits. Even if they give rise to good intentions, they would retrogress in an instant; if they encounter bad opportunities, [bad intentions] will only expand with each instant.

是南閻浮提衆生，志性無定習惡者多。縱發善心須臾即退，若遇惡緣念念增長。 [T13, 789b]

In these passages, we see the author(s) of this *sūtra* describing sentient beings as hopelessly difficult to save. The sense of crisis is deep, urgent, and real. Furthermore, the sentient beings are inclined to retrogress; even if they are led to desirable habits and ways, they instantly fall back into sinful deeds. Their outlook towards the future is no more promising; they are entangled in vines of ill conditions for eons to come. The situation appears so desperate that even the Buddha cannot help but remain gripped with anxiety over them.

Then how are they to be saved? According to the *sūtra*, the Buddha entrusts this seemingly impossible mission of rescuing the “strongly stubborn” sentient beings to Dizang Bodhisattva.

2.2. The Buddha’s Delegation to Dizang Bodhisattva

Chapter Two, on the Gathering of Divided Bodies (of Dizang) (分身集會品第二), though very short (just one and a half columns in the *Taisho Canon*), is one of the most memorable chapters in this *sūtra*. It echoes the devout faith and earnest hopes of the *sūtra*’s creator(s). In this regard, the chapter is important for our understanding of the figure of Dizang that this *sūtra* embraces.

At the outset of this chapter, myriad Dizangs gather at the Buddha’s

assembly from myriad hells in myriad worlds. They are the divided bodies of Dizang that have been striving in other worlds and realms of existence to save sentient beings. They come together with countless sentient beings that were saved by Dizang after limitless *kalpas* of sin and suffering and are now residing in the eternally non-retrogressing state of ultimate perfect enlightenment.¹⁶⁾ To them, the Buddha recounts his own endless past efforts to save the “strongly stubborn” sentient beings. Through skillful means, he had appeared in myriad forms: as men, women, divinities, ghosts, monks and nuns, lay followers, kings, ministers, etc.¹⁷⁾ Still, however, there would always be one or two among ten persons who were especially difficult to edify (see example (1) in section 2.1 above). Even the Buddha has not been able to save all, and he entrusts Dizang to carry on the job after his death. Following the statement shown in example (2) in section 2.1, the Buddha says:

When those who are yet to be trained and subdued receive retribution according to their karmas, and if they are damned to ill rebirths and receive great suffering, you should remember that I, in the Palace of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, entrusted [their salvation] to you with sincerity. Let the sentient beings in the Sahā World, until the coming of Maitreya, all attain enlightenment and leave the various sufferings forever, and let them receive the Buddha’s promise [of attaining buddhahood in the future].

其有未調伏者隨業報應，若墮惡趣受大苦時，汝當憶念，吾在忉利天宮殷勤付囑。令娑婆世界至彌勒出世已來衆生，悉使解脫永離諸苦，遇仏授記。 [T13,

16) 永不退轉於阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。 [T13, 779b].

17) 或現男子身或現女人身，或現天龍身或現神鬼身，或現山林川原河池泉井，利及於人悉皆度脫。或現天帝身，或現梵王身，或現轉輪王身，或現居士身，或現國王身，或現宰輔身，或現官屬身，或現比丘，比丘尼，優婆塞，優婆夷身，乃至聲聞，羅漢，辟支仏，菩薩等身，而以化度。 [T13, 779b].

779b-c]

Here we see that the Buddha will pass away (into perfect *nirvāṇa*), leaving the task of saving sentient beings unaccomplished. To this, Dizang (after recovering his state of a single body) answers in tears:

The bodies I will divide will fill myriad countless worlds, and myriad divided bodies will appear in each world, with each of the bodies enlightening myriad people, making them revere the three jewels [of buddha, dharma, and saṃgha], eternally free from birth and death to reach the comfort of *nirvāṇa*. Even if the good deeds they perform in the buddha dharma may be but as one single string of fur, one drop of water, one grain of sand, or a mere strand of thin hair, I will gradually lead them to enlightenment and let them attain great merit. Pray, may the Lord not have apprehensions for the sentient beings of bad karma in the coming ages.

我所分身遍滿百千萬億恒河沙世界，每一世界化百千萬億身，每一身度百千萬億人。令歸敬三寶，永離生死至涅槃樂。但於佛法中所為善事，一毛一滯一沙一塵，或毫髮許，我漸度脫，使獲大利。唯願世尊，不以後世惡業衆生為慮。
[T13, 779c]

Dizang repeats this last line, “Pray, may the Lord not have apprehensions for the sentient beings of bad karma in the coming ages,” three times.

The Buddha and Dizang are confronted with strongly stubborn sentient beings, the age is defiled and full of turbidities, and the Buddha is apprehensive about the fate of sentient beings as his own death is imminent. We may see here a reflection of the views of the creator(s) of this *sūtra* on their own age, the state of the world, and the fate of the masses. Faced with a reality much like the “defiled world of five turbidities” (五濁惡世 *wuzhuo eshi*), one

in which the masses repeatedly fall back into unwholesome deeds (if they are not entrenched in bad karma already), and gripped with deep, acute longing for the Buddha in a buddha-less age, they must have turned their hopes toward salvation by Dizang, a bodhisattva who enjoyed a strong bond of trust with the master, the Buddha. Let us next explore how this outlook on the world and the masses is reflected by the teachings of salvation by Dizang expounded in this *sūtra*.

3. Dizang's Salvation of Sentient Beings

Undoubtedly, Dizang's salvation is based on his past original vows, but the focus of examination in this section will be the modes of salvation, rather than its grounds which have often received attention in past studies. This *sūtra* recounts four past lives of Dizang: (1) as the son of a wealthy man, (2) as the daughter of a Brahmin [T13, 778b-779a], (3) as king [T13, 780c], and (4) as a woman named Eyes of Light (光目 Guang mu) [T13, 780c-781b]. All of them vow to save all sentient beings.¹⁸⁾ What merits attention here is that both female characters perform meritorious deeds as memorial rites to help the soul of their deceased mother attain good rebirth. Teachings on how to attain good rebirths and other mundane merits are major characteristics of this *sūtra*, but are they the ultimate goals of Dizang's salvation?

3.1. Mundane Merits Expounded in the *Original Vows Sūtra*

Given the extremely pessimistic view of the nature of sentient beings that

18) Son of a wealthy man: 我今尽未来际不可计劫, 为是罪苦六道众生, 广设方便尽令解脱. 而我自身方成仏道. [T13, 778b]. Daughter of a Brahmin: 愿我尽未来劫, 应有罪苦众生广设方便使令解脱. [T13, 779a]. King: 发愿若不先度罪苦, 令是安樂得至菩提, 我终未愿成仏. [T13, 780c], Eyes of Light: 却后百万亿劫中, 应有世界所有地獄及三恶道诸罪苦众生, 誓愿救拔令離地獄, 恶趣, 畜生、餓鬼等. 如是罪報等人尽成仏竟, 我然後方成正覺. [T13, 781a].

we have already seen, it is unsurprising that this *sūtra* repeatedly explores the topic of salvation from suffering in hell through good rebirths. Chapter Three, on the Observation of Karmic Conditions of Sentient Beings (觀衆生業緣品第三), lists the various names of hells and the abominable retributions to which the damned are subjected [T13, 779c-780b]; Chapter Four, on the Karmic Results of Sentient Beings of Jambudvīpa (閻浮衆生業感品第四), recounts the story of the above-mentioned woman, Eyes of Light, and how she saves the soul of her deceased mother from suffering in hell by making and worshipping a statue of a Buddha; Chapter Five, on the Names of Hells (地獄名号品第五) lists further names of hells and details the sufferings experienced therein [T13, 781c-782b]. Then how and in what way are those damned souls saved by Dizang?

Chapter Six, on the Praise by the Tathāgata (如来讚歎品第六), states:

Those who hear the name of this Great Being Dizang Bodhisattva, if they pray with the palms pressed together, praise him, bow before him, and adore him, will surmount thirty *kalpas*' worth of sins....If good men and good women create a painting or a statue of this bodhisattva, whether with clay, stone, glue and lacquer, gold, silver, bronze, or steel, and if they look up and bow before it once, they will be born in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven a hundred times, eternally not falling into bad destinies. Even when the heavenly fortunes are exhausted, they will be born as humans still to be kings; the great merits will not be lost.

聞是地藏菩薩摩訶薩名者, 或合掌者, 讚歎者, 作礼者, 恋慕者, 是人超越三十劫罪...若善男子, 善女人, 或彩画形像, 或土石膠漆金銀銅鉄作此菩薩, 一瞻一礼者, 是人百返生於三十三天, 永不墮惡道. 假如天福尽故下生人間, 猶為国王, 不失大利. [T13, 782c]

Furthermore, in Chapter Seven, on the Merits of the Living and the Dead

(利益存亡品第七), it is said that if the bereaved family members perform memorial rites for the departing souls, then the following results will occur:

Even if one name, one appellation [of the buddhas and bodhisattvas] reaches the ears of the dying...then all the numerous sins will disappear. If, on behalf of the deceased, various good deeds are performed widely for seven-seven [i.e., forty-nine] days after death, those sentient beings will effectively leave the bad destinies eternally, attain births as human beings and divinities, and receive superior, exquisite comfort.

一名一号, 歷臨終人耳根...如是衆罪尽皆消滅. 若能更為身死之後七七日內廣造衆善, 能便是諸衆生永離惡趣, 得生人天, 受勝妙樂. [T13, 784a]

The last chapter, Chapter Thirteen, on the Entrusting of Human Beings and Divinities (囑累人天品第十三), goes still further, listing 28 meritorious outcomes for men and women and another seven for divinities, dragons, and ghosts.¹⁹⁾ It states that, by simply adoring a statue or hearing the name of Dizang, let alone reciting the *sūtra*, making various offerings, and performing worshipping rites, they will be blessed with such mundane merits as “having sufficient clothing and food,” “avoiding plagues,” “being free from floods and fires,” and “having sweet dreams during sleep.”²⁰⁾ These mundane merits (including good rebirths) must have been precisely the kind that the masses longed for, and, most probably, if this *sūtra* was popularly revered, these elements must have played vital roles in that popularity.

We may well say that the very aim of this *sūtra* was to propagate Dizang

19) 若未來世有善男子善女人, 見地藏形像及聞此經乃至誦誦, 香華飲食衣服珍寶布施供養讚歎瞻禮, 得二十八種利益。/ 若現在未來天龍鬼神聞地藏名禮地藏形, 或聞地藏本願事行, 讚歎瞻禮得七種利益. [T13, 789c]. It is true that there are merits of “attaining non-retrogression in bodhi” (No. 4 in both) and “ultimately attaining buddhahood” (No. 28 in the former, No. 7 in the latter), but the emphasis is clearly on mundane merits.

20) 五者衣食豐足, 六者疾疫不臨, 七者離水火災....二十二者夜夢安樂. [T13, 789c].

worship by encouraging simple acts of piety and promising mundane merits for such observance. However, judging from the text, there seems to be no coherent, logical connection between this “easy” way to salvation and the pessimistic view of sentient beings. Contrary to the Easy Practice Path (易行道 *yixing dao*) of the Pure Land doctrine propagated by the Japanese Kamakura period monk Hōnen (法然), for example, who exclusively selected the recitation of Amitābha’s name (専修念仏 *senju nenbutsu*), there is no explicit explanation that simple methods of practice and their mundane outcomes provide the only sensible way of salvation for the deeply defiled sentient beings. Then, is attaining mundane merits the ultimate aim of this *sūtra*? After all, there are also passages that cast doubt on the attainment of mundane merits.

3.2. Doubts Cast by Divinities and Other Beings

Although the *Original Vows Sūtra* expounds the power of Dizang’s original vows and his efforts to gain people’s salvation dating back to endlessly distant *kalpas*, strangely, doubts are expressed regarding Dizang in two instances. What do these passages reveal?

In Chapter Four, on the Karmic Results of Sentient Beings of Jambudvīpa, after the story of Dizang’s past life as the woman named Eyes of Light has been recounted, the Four Guardian Kings (四天王 *si tianwang*) ask the Buddha why Dizang’s salvation has not been completed and why he is still repeatedly making the same vows eons after his original ones. Buddha’s answer is the passage quoted above as example (4) in section 2.1. Then the Buddha goes on to say:

[Although] Dizang Bodhisattva edifies them through myriad skillful means, these various sentient beings will first receive those retributions [earlier laid out by Dizang], and later if they are banished to hell, often there will be no limit to the *kalpas* they will spend there. There-

fore, you kings should guard the people, guard the country, and not let the various karmas trouble the sentient beings.

地藏菩薩百千方便而教化之，是諸衆生先受如是等報，後墮地獄動經劫數無有出期。是故汝等護人護國。無令是諸衆業迷惑衆生。 [T13, 781c]

Here, despite Dizang's tireless efforts, countless sentient beings will continue to be banished to hell, so the Buddha commands the Four Guardian Kings to prevent that.

Chapter Eight, on the Praise by Yamarāja and his Assembly, depicts a similar scene. The Yamarāja (閻羅天子 Yanluo tianzi) says, "Now, I have a small doubt" (我今有小疑事), and asks the Buddha:

This Great Bodhisattva [Dizang] has those inconceivable magical powers, yet although the various sentient beings succeed in escaping from the retributions of sins, they fall back into the bad destinies again in no time. Although Dizang Bodhisattva has these inconceivable magical powers, how can sentient beings attain eternal enlightenment without resorting to [births in] the good destinies?

是大菩薩有如是不可思議神通之事，然諸衆生脫獲罪報，未久之間又墮惡道。世尊，是地藏菩薩既有如是不可思議神力，云何衆生而不依止善道永取解脫。 [T13, 784c]

Example (6) in section 2.1 is Buddha's answer. It takes eons for Dizang ultimately to lead sentient beings to enlightenment. Further, the Buddha conceded that "even if they are born as humans or divinities, they enter [the bad destinies] again, and if the bondage of karmas are serious, they would live in hell eternally and there will be no time of enlightenment."²¹⁾ Next,

21) 生人天中旋又再入。若業結重永處地獄無解脫時。 [T13, 784c-785a].

there appears a ghost king called Administrator of Life (and Death) (主命),²²⁾ who declares:

At the time of death, if [the dying one] gets to hear one name of a buddha, one name of a bodhisattva, or one phrase or one verse of a Mahāyāna *sūtra*, I shall see that person and remove the five murderous sins worthy of [banishment to] Avīci Hell. Those of light minor karmas who will fall into the bad destinies, I will come and enlighten... Pray, do not have apprehension. I will, until my time in this form is over, support the sentient beings of Jambudvīpa every instant, and I will let them gain peaceful comfort in times of life and of death. I pray that the various sentient beings will, in life and death, have faith in my words, and that there will be none who will not be enlightened and gain great merit.

臨命終時，若得聞一仏名一菩薩名或大乘經典一句一偈，我觀如是輩人，除五無間殺害之罪。小小惡業合墮惡趣者，尋即解脫...願不有慮。我畢是形念念擁護閻浮衆生。生時死時俱得安樂。但願諸衆生於生死時，信受我語，無不解脫獲大利益。 [T13, 785c]

The ghost king Administrator of Life (and Death) steals the show, declaring that he will lead sentient beings to enlightenment. Furthermore, the Buddha tells Dizang that this ghost king's deeds are inconceivably marvelous and that his salvation of human beings and divinities is also unlimited.²³⁾

Why does this *sūtra* propagating Dizang worship cast doubt on his ability to provide salvation, going so far as to speak of other deities who seem superior in their acts of salvation of sentient beings? Here, we should recall this *sūtra*'s deeply pessimistic view of sentient beings, and especially its view

22) See section 1.

23) 大鬼王其事如是不可思議，所度天人亦不可限量。 [T13, 785c].

that sentient beings readily retrogress from desirable ways of life. Merely removing past bad karmas to gain better rebirth will not suffice; it only helps to postpone the possibility of falling back into bad destinies. Then are Dizang's efforts merely in vain? That is not necessarily so. We see in this *sūtra* the notion that Dizang leads sentient beings ultimately to enlightenment, and that he does not just provide the fleeting comfort of a better rebirth.

Dizang's determination to lead sentient beings to enlightenment, though often neglected and overshadowed by his overwhelming power of removing past karmas and its retributions, appears in multiple passages in this *sūtra*. One impressive example appears in Chapter Two, on the Gathering of Divided Bodies (of Dizang), on which we focused earlier in this paper. After being entrusted by the Buddha to carry on the deed of saving the "strongly stubborn" sentient beings, especially those who are defiled enough to be banished to hell, Dizang vows to the Buddha, as we saw in section 2.2:

The bodies I will divide will...make them revere the three jewels, eternally free them from birth and death to reach the comfort of *nirvāṇa*. Even if the good deeds they perform in the buddha dharma may be but as one single string of fur, one drop of water, one grain of sand, or a mere strand of thin hair, I will gradually lead them to enlightenment and let them attain great merit.

我所分身...令歸敬三宝，永離生死至涅槃樂。但於佛法中所為善事，一毛一滯一沙一塵，或毫髮許，我漸度脫，使獲大利。 [T13, 779c]

Dizang promises to seize on the smallest of wholesome deeds done by the sentient beings and to "gradually lead them to enlightenment." Only then can they be free from retrogression and escape from the cycle of rebirths among the bad realms of existence. It must be this aspect of Dizang, then,

that makes this bodhisattva a true savior. This must be the idea that this *sūtra* is truly trying to convey.

This orientation toward enlightenment can also be seen in Dizang's original vows. The *sūtra* recounts multiple vows by Dizang, and there are inconsistencies between them. However, their essence remains the same. His vow in his past life as a son of a wealthy man best expresses the idea:

I will here, until the end of uncountable *kalpas* to come, widely proffer skillful means for the sake of sinful, suffering sentient beings of the six destinies and enlighten them all. Then, for the first time, I myself will attain fulfillment of buddhahood.

我今尽未来際不可計劫，為是罪苦六道衆生，広設方便尽令解脫。而我自身方成仏道。 [T13, 778b]

The aims of both Dizang's salvation and his own practice are enlightenment. This is because only by attaining enlightenment can one become free from the strongly stubborn nature of retrogression that even good rebirths entail. Dizang too, as a bodhisattva, is on his own seemingly endless quest toward enlightenment.

Conclusion

Dizang has been depicted as a practitioner of Mahāyāna bodhisattvahood since the *Ten Wheels Sūtra*. Nishi Yoshio notes that “the early Dizang has a considerably strong connection with Chan meditation (禪觀 *zenkan*).”²⁴ In

24) Nishi 1966, 245. More recently, Moro Shigeki (2011) has explored this aspect of Dizang in his study of the *Divination Sūtra*, hinting at connections with the *Sūtra on the Ocean-Like Samādhi of the Visualization of the Buddha* (觀仏三昧海經 *Guanfo sanmei hai jing*). This latter *sūtra* may have some connection to the *Original Vows Sūtra*, as in Dizang's past-life story of the daughter of a Brahmin, the Buddha of her

his study of the *Ten Wheels Sūtra*, Nishi points out that Dizang carries out his deeds of salvation while deeply immersed in meditation and sees the roots of this characteristic in the figure of Dizang in the *Great Assembly Sūtra* (大集經 *Daji jing*).²⁵⁾ Although the *Original Vows Sūtra* mostly depicts Dizang as a savior with limitless compassion, a savior of the banished souls in hell, it is interesting to see how the image of Dizang as a practitioner has been preserved. The practices of Dizang in the two *sūtras* differ in that the *Ten Wheels Sūtra* expounds various forms of meditation, whereas the *Original Vows Sūtra* does not. However, they share the common idea that Dizang is a practitioner, not some purely transcendental savior.

One view put forward by Nishi does not fit the figure of Dizang depicted in the *Original Vows Sūtra*. Nishi claims that Dizang is a typical *bodhisattvecchantika* who has already attained assurance of his own enlightenment, does not need or pursue the upward quest for his own enlightenment, and solely acts with downward acts of altruism forever.²⁶⁾ However, as aforementioned, Dizang's original vows as stated in the *Original Vows Sūtra* do not preclude his own attainment of enlightenment in a distant future. Rather, even though his vows to save all sentient beings may keep him striving almost indefinitely to save suffering souls, Dizang's ultimate aim is none other than the attainment of buddhahood for himself and for others (自覺覺他 *zijue jueta*). As an evidence of this fact, let us consider a statement by the Buddha to Dizang at the end of the chapter on the Gathering of Divided Bodies (of Dizang). After Dizang prays to the Buddha three times over not to be apprehensive about the future fate of sentient

time is Ding zizai (定自在) and the daughter's mentor is Caishou pusa (財首菩薩), a combination also seen in a past-life story in the *Ocean-like Samādhi Sūtra* [T15, 689a].

These possibilities merit further examination.

25) Nishi 1966, 246.

26) Nishi 1966, 233, 240.

beings, the Buddha says:

Well said, well said, I shall aid you in your joy. You should attain perfection of the vast vows you have made since endlessly distant *kalpas*. Lead [sentient beings] to enlightenment far and wide and when accomplished, realize bodhi.

善哉善哉，吾助汝喜。汝能成就久遠劫來發弘誓願。广度將畢即証菩提 [T13, 779c]

Dizang's "joy" which the Buddha promises to help attain is the fulfillment of his original vows to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment and to attain enlightenment for himself.

The *Original Vows Sūtra* expounds such mundane, practical doctrines as saving deceased souls through memorial rites, attaining better rebirths as human beings and divinities, and instant removal of sinful karma through simple acts of piety. These must have been a blessing for people who acutely desired a swift salvation from the sufferings of this world. In this sense, the Dizang depicted in this *sūtra* is a magnificent savior of limitless compassion (much like the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in that respect). However, as we have seen, the creator(s) of this *sūtra* had skeptical views toward mundane rewards such as better rebirths, because they are not ultimate solutions to the problem of how to save deeply defiled, strongly stubborn, ever-retrogressing sentient beings. However long it may take, Dizang's efforts are aimed at leading all sentient beings to enlightenment. Furthermore, his own stature as a practitioner of endless efforts aiming at ultimate attainment of buddhahood may be taken as a role model for all practitioners, since all practitioners in the Mahāyāna way are, after all, bodhisattvas; that is, sentient beings striving for the attainment of enlightenment, both for themselves and for all others.

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Abbreviations

T: Taishō shinshūdaizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經.

X: Shinsan dai-nippon zokuzōkyō 新纂大日本統藏經.