

## Filial Piety with a Zen Twist:

### Universalism and Particularism Surrounding the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*

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*My paper includes four sections: 1. The introduction suggests one way to envision filiality from the perspective of our entanglement in saṃsāra; 2. The second section provides a sample of pre-Buddhist and Buddhist texts and their various blends of filial piety; 3. The third section more specifically discusses what I called the Zen twist of Tōrei, a Japanese teacher of the Rinzai school who lived in the eighteenth century. 4. The last section deals with universalist and particularist appropriations of filial piety, a set of reflections leading to the conclusion.*

#### I. Introduction

Let us first envision the broader picture. Not many certainties are shared by all human beings regardless of their personal, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Among them figures the inevitability of death, which also implies its correlate: the undeniable reality of birth. Because of their emphasis on impermanence, Asian religions and Buddhist traditions in particular have always accentuated the bond between life and death. Such perspective is reflected in the technical term *saṃsāra*, often translated as “life-death,” so deeply intertwined that a hyphen needs to link both terms. The Chinese translation of the same concept—*shēngsǐ* 生死 — also suggests that life and death are akin to the two sides of the same coin.

As soon as one explores the awareness that death occurs as the natural consequence of birth, it leads to questioning the philosophical and moral implications of having received life from two human beings we usually call our parents. It also entails problematizing the socio-historical contexts in which the concept of filial piety was reinterpreted in significantly different ways. Our understanding of this concept needs to be complicated accordingly.

This leads us to a general reflection about the present relevance or obsolescence of filial piety in the globalizing world. For this, we need to consider how

formulations of filial piety can either be bent in the direction of an all-encompassing universalist concept, or on the contrary be appropriated as an instrument to justify particularism and enforce submissive behaviors.

## II. Filial Piety as a Genre of Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Literature

The theme of filial piety (*xiào* 孝), or “family reverence” as it recently has been translated,<sup>1</sup> was emphasized in China long before the introduction of Buddhism. On the other hand, we know that filial devotion was not a uniquely Chinese phenomenon. Remaining inscriptions in South Asia tell us that donors often made a gift dedicated to their parents, living or dead.

For instance, sometimes the dedication is explained by the donor as “an act of *pūjā* for my mother and father (and) for the advantage and happiness of all beings.”<sup>2</sup> The most surprising feature of these inscriptions is not only that their stated purpose was the worship of the donors’ parents and their well-being, but also that “this concern for the well-being of deceased and living parents was an active concern and major preoccupation of Indian Buddhist monks in particular.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, Schopen’s discoveries contribute to put into perspective conventional geographical divides and to problematize the usual distinction between clergy and lay followers.

Yet, depending on whether the emphasis is put on the concept or on the practices that are performed independently from the various labels attached to them, one needs to fine-tune the analysis and not to take for granted the prevalence of a universal set of attitudes towards one’s parents. I suggest that the widespread distribution of practices associated with “family reverence” indicates the coexistence of two distinct phenomena: 1. A generic form of filial worship resulting from the perception of the importance of receiving life and the indebtedness associated with it, which knows no particular geographical boundaries and appears especially ubiquitous in Asia. 2. The specifically Sinitic interpretation of this perception, which took a life of its own and spread across East Asia in particular.

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<sup>1</sup>See Ames, Roger T. & Rosemont, Henry. (2009). *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence*.

<sup>2</sup>Schopen (1997). *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks*, pp. 59.

<sup>3</sup>Schopen (1997: 64).

For the purpose of this paper, I shall mostly focus on the Sino-Japanese developments, before returning to wider issues.

### **The Sinitic Interpretation**

References to filial piety in ancient Chinese sources abound, for instance in the *Book of Rites*, which precedes the introduction of Buddhism into China by several centuries. This text suggests that filial piety was often understood in a twofold way: active dedication during one's parents' lifetime, and performance of memorial services after their demise. This behavioral code was further systematized in the *Classic of Family Reverence* (*Xiàojīng*), which appeared between 436 and 239 BCE.<sup>4</sup>

When examining such ancient examples, it is crucial to remember that both the concept and the practices associated with filial piety were not monolithic: they constantly shifted with their sociohistorical context. This is illustrated by the emergence of controversies surrounding filial piety, which are already visible in the second century CE. John Makeham has shown how filial piety was sometimes criticized as a form of hypocritical behavior, because "being seen to practise this particular virtue provided a means of acquiring reputation."<sup>5</sup>

In any case, the ancient Chinese concept of filial piety implied a deep link between the personal sphere of family relations, the public sphere of government, and its consequences for the achievement of social fame and "success." It is thus no surprise that this concept served as one of the central pillars of the Confucian ideology: its implication was that citizens either would comply with it or rebel against it, the latter case implying social exclusion.

This indicates that respect due to one's parents was and still is no small matter. Fortunately, there is an alternative to simply seeing this as an unavoidable duty toward one's relatives: some Buddhist traditions suggest a much wider understanding of what this concept entails, especially of who are the beneficiaries. Such reinterpretation—called "great filial piety"—provides a way to *universalize* the idea. This constitutes the crucial juncture where I see a movement from the particularist interpretation of filial piety to a universalist take.

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<sup>4</sup> Ames, Roger T. & Rosemont, Henry. (2009: 18).

<sup>5</sup> Makeham, John. (1994). *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*, 100.

## The Buddhist Sutras and Their Appropriation of Filial Piety

At any rate, around the third century CE in China, filial piety had become both an unavoidable form of social behavior and a rather lifeless idea, because it implied conformity with the established social norms. It is in this context that we witness the emergence of several Buddhist scriptures touching the same theme while claiming to put new wine in old bottles.

I suggest to focus on one particular piece: the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* (T 16 no. 684). Its translation is attributed to Ān Shīgāo, who reached Luoyang in 148, but this attribution is suspicious.

According to recent research only about thirteen of Ān Shīgāo's works can be regarded as genuine.<sup>6</sup> Another indication in this regard is provided by Sēngyòu in his *Catalog of Works Included in the Tripiṭaka*, who wrote that "It was copied from the *Middle-length Discourses*."<sup>7</sup> Actually, the source that seems to have inspired the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* is rather found in the Chinese translation of the *Ekottarāgama-sūtra*, which contains the main ingredients of the narrative.<sup>8</sup> This translation was completed in 397. If we admit that this constitutes the main source for the narrative found in the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*, it pushes the date of its composition to after the end of the fourth century. Let us now have a brief look at its close equivalent in the Pāli Canon.

### Source in the Pāli Canon

This piece is included in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, or *Numerical Discourses*.<sup>9</sup> I will skip the reading of this text, but it carries a very simple message: first it emphasizes the child's indebtedness and the impossibility to reciprocate through material means the kindness he has received, secondly it prescribes to use the only means of true reciprocation, which is to convey four of the essential tenets of Buddhism.

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<sup>6</sup> Nattier, Jan. (2008). *A Guide to the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations*, 68.

<sup>7</sup> T 55 no. 2145, 29c03.

<sup>8</sup> T 2 no. 125, 601a10–a20. Passage partially translated in Cole, Alan. (1998). *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*, 117–118.

<sup>9</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu & Nyanaponika, Thera. (1999). *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 42–43.

Considerable work remains to be done to establish the precise chronology of the early Buddhist sources, as well as of their translations or reiterations, and I will leave the mapping of this research area to specialists, but the main textual sources can be summarized as follows:

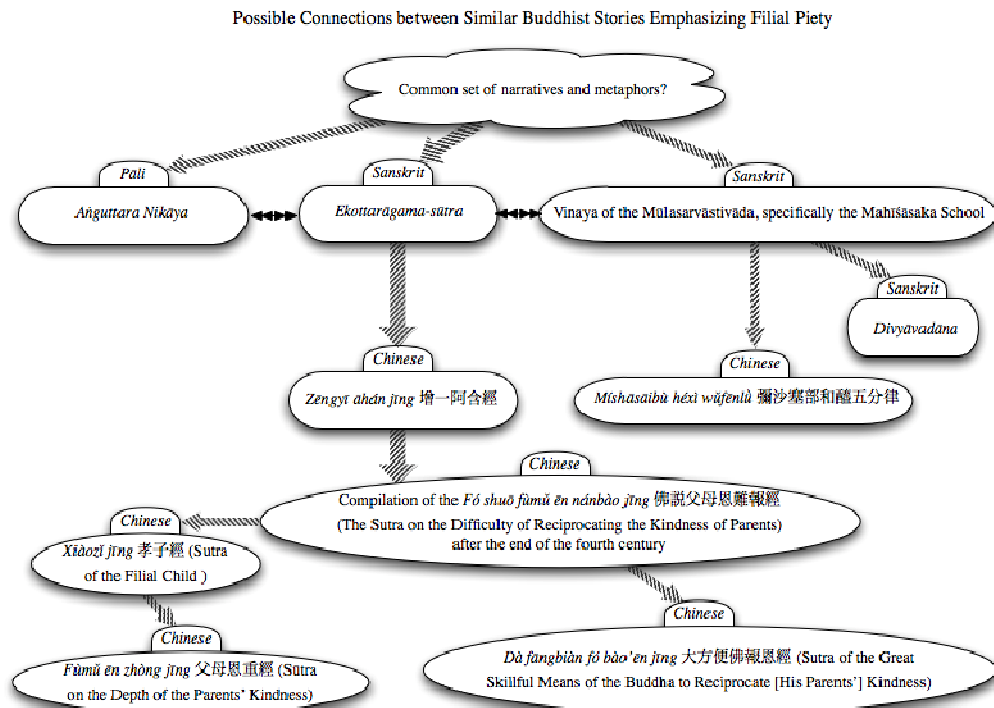


Figure 1: Speculative Connections

**Fig. 1:** Possible Connections between Similar Buddhist Stories Emphasizing Filial Piety

Let us now fast-forward more than twelve hundred years to examine a commentary on this sutra composed in eighteenth-century Japan.

### III. Tōrei's Zen Twist

The *Annotated Commentary on the Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* (*Bussetsu bumō onnanpōkyō chūge*) by Tōrei Enji sheds a different light on the text discussed so far. Tōrei also wrote another work focusing on the theme of filial piety: the *Oral Explanation of the Filial Piety Classics*

in the *Three Teachings of Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism* (*Shinjubutsu sanbō kōkyō kuge*). This indicates Tōrei's lifelong interest in an early form of comparative studies, stemming in part from his personal commitment to practice a dying form of Shinto while assuming the abbacy of a major Rinzai monastery. Tōrei's *Annotated Commentary* was composed in July 1770, when he was fifty years old according to the traditional reckoning. These lectures coincided with a memorial service for his own parents.

### **An Early Comparative Approach**

In his *Annotated Commentary*, Tōrei reviews and compares three main sources, and describes how each of them borrowed from the previously existing scripture. He begins with the *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*, saying that it can be considered the "primary source." Secondly, he mentions the *Sutra of the Filial Child* (T 16 no. 687), saying that "its essential message is lacking and it has lost the deep meaning of the sutra." The third source is the *Sutra on the Depth of the Parents' Kindness* (T 85 no. 2887), which Tōrei considered to be "an apocryphal sutra."

Although Tōrei's knowledge of the scriptures was amazing in many ways, he did not consider questioning the claim that the first sutra had been authored by Ān Shīgāo, an oversight showing the limits of his scholarship. Aside from this issue of authorship, the originality of Tōrei's analysis is that he considered the older and more concise *Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents* as not only the most reliable, but also as the most profound source. He viewed subsequent scriptures as merely popular adaptations. This begs the question of what Tōrei considered to be the "essential message" of the sutra.

The answer is linked to the actual scripture, which I have retranslated below for the sake of this paper.

### **New Translation of the Sutra**

The Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents

Fó shuō fùmǔ ēn nánbào jīng 佛說父母恩難報經<sup>10</sup>

[1] Translated by the Buddhist monk<sup>11</sup> Ān Shīgāo in the Later Han (25–220 CE).

[2] Thus have I heard. Once, the Bhagavat was staying in the city of Śrāvastī, at the [Jetavana monastery in the] Anāthapiñḍada Park. At that time, the World-Honored One told all of the monks (*bhikkhus*):

“Fathers and mothers immensely contribute to the wellbeing<sup>12</sup> of [their] children. [After] having breast-fed<sup>13</sup> and nourished [them], [they] raise and educate<sup>14</sup> [them] in accordance with [their] age, [so that] the four great elements can fully develop.<sup>15</sup>

Suppose [they] were to carry [their] father on the right shoulder and [their] mother on the left, went through this for a thousand years, and further let [them] relieve themselves on their back<sup>16</sup> without bearing any resentment. Still, this would not be enough for these children to reciprocate the kindness<sup>17</sup> of [their] parents.

<sup>10</sup>Original text included in the Taishō Canon (hereafter abbreviated “T”) volume 16, no. 684, pp. 778c–779a. The punctuation and some characters have been modified to follow Tōrei Enji 東嶺圓慈 (1721–1792) and his commentary *Bussetsu bumo onnanpōkyō chūge* 佛說父母恩難報經註解, which was completed in 1787. Significant differences will be indicated in the footnotes.

<sup>11</sup> The Taishō text has “the Tripiṭaka of Parthia” (© *Ānxiguó sānzàng* 安息國三藏) instead of “the Buddhist monk” (© *śramaṇa* © *shāmén* 沙門).

<sup>12</sup> In this context the technical term *zēngyì* 增益 (© *pauṇḍrika*) indicates what causes growth or welfare.

<sup>13</sup> The Taishō text has © *rūbù* 乳哺 instead of © *rūbǔ* 乳哺 in Tōrei’s version.

<sup>14</sup> The compound *jiāngyù* 將育 is read *yashinai sodatete* by Tōrei.

<sup>15</sup> Meaning that the four elements (earth, water, fire, and wind) resulted in a full-fledged human body.

<sup>16</sup> The Taishō text has “just” (© *zhèng* 正) instead of “further” (© *gèng* 更). Cole translates this passage as “while making them comfortable on his back,” and further explains his choice in note 19, p. 247. Cole, Alan. (1998). *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*, 43. The translation of © *biànlì* 便利, which could be interpreted as either “comfort” or “feces” was problematic, but the identification of the source of this sutra as being the *Zēngyī āhán jīng* 增一阿含經 (*Ekottarāgama-sūtra*) and the corresponding text in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* allows to dispel all doubts. Additionally, a passage in the *Vinaya of the Mahāsāka School* (© *Mishāsāibù héxì wūfēnlǚ* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律) is very explicit about this, with the clause “[even if they should] discharge feces and urine on [them]...” (© *yú shàng dàxiǎo biànlì* 於上大小便利). This text was translated into Chinese in 434 CE. For a complete translation of this passage, see Guang Xing. (2005). “Filial Piety in Early Buddhism,” 98. Thus, the translation by Yifa, and Peter Matthew Romaskiewicz is correct. See Yifa, and Peter Matthew. (2008). *The Yulan Bowl Sutra and Collection of Filial Piety Sutras*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> The Chinese word *ēn* 恩 is usually translated as “kindness,” but it also involves the idea of a favor and of a debt that must be repaid or reciprocated (© *bào* 報). Buddhist texts provide various lists of four types of benefactors (© *siēn* 四恩), always including one’s parents. A benefactor (© *ēnrén* 恩人) is someone from which enormous indebtedness has been accumulated.

[3] If [your] father and mother lack trust,<sup>18</sup> enjoin them to trust [the Buddha],<sup>19</sup> so that they achieve a state of ease and peace (*huò ānwěn chù* 獲安穩處).<sup>20</sup> If they lack morality,<sup>21</sup> instruct them in morality so that they achieve a state of ease and peace. If they do not listen [to the Dharma], instruct them in listening so that they achieve a state of ease and peace. If they are stingy and greedy, enjoin them to appreciate generosity; promote their happiness<sup>22</sup> and instruct them so that they achieve a state of ease and peace. If they lack wisdom (*prajñā*), make them sharp and wise;<sup>23</sup> promote their happiness and instruct them so that they achieve a state of ease and peace.<sup>24</sup>

[4] This is the way to trust the Tathāgata, [who has realized the] Ultimate Truth, the Perfectly Awakened One,<sup>25</sup> Accomplished in Knowledge and Conduct.<sup>26</sup> He is called the Well-Gone, the Knower of the World,<sup>27</sup> the Unsurpassed Being, the Charioteer of the Dharma, the Teacher of Deities and Human Beings. Such are the epithets for the Buddha, the World-

<sup>18</sup> To avoid meek nuances, I prefer to translate the character 信 *xìn* (S *śraddhā*) as trust, rather than faith or belief.

<sup>19</sup> In this text, the word 教 *jiào* is almost always used as the factitive “make...”, read by Tōrei as *-seshimu* in Japanese. In this translation the verb 教授 *jiàoshòu* has been rendered as “to instruct” and 教令 *jiàolìng* as “to enjoin.” This last compound is used as an equivalent for 教化 *jiàohuà*, which refers to the selfless guidance of others (S *śāsana*).

<sup>20</sup> The Taishō text has 安隱 *ānyǐn* instead of 安穩 *ānwěn*. Both compounds suggest a wide range of meanings including security, peace, comfort, ease, rest, and tranquillity, corresponding to the Sanskrit *kṣema*. Since ultimate peace is understood as the actualization of *nirvāṇa* (S *ānyān niēpān* 安隱涅槃), the peace of mind obtained by the parents seems to imply an anticipation of the serenity obtained through realization. Although the last character 處 *chù* means a location, it also indicates an inner “state.” The verb 獲 *huò* means “to acquire” but to achieve a certain mental state sounds more natural.

<sup>21</sup> The Chinese word 戒 *jiè* corresponds to the Sanskrit *śīla* for morality, while 律 *lǜ* corresponds to the precepts (*vinaya*).

<sup>22</sup> The compound 勸樂 *quànlè* refers to joy and pleasure, such as the enjoyment experienced by the devas. See Nakamura Hajime. (2001). *Kōsetsu bukkyōgo daijiten*, 247a–b. Tōrei’s text dissociates the two characters as 樂 *raku* o 勸 *susume* 樂を勸め (encouraging pleasure).

<sup>23</sup> 點 *Xiǎnhuì* 點慧 (S *katsue*) indicates a type of intelligence dominated by sharpness. One of its Sanskrit equivalents, *paṇḍita*, suggests someone who is learned, but also shrewd and clever. Tōrei emphasizes clarity by adding the reading 點 *akiraka* to the character 點 *katsu*.

<sup>24</sup> Here, the Taishō text has the variant 護 *hù* instead of the leitmotiv with 獲 *huò*, but this appears to be a typo.

<sup>25</sup> The Chinese 等正覺 *děngzhèng jué* is one equivalent for the Sanskrit *samyak-saṃbodhi*.

<sup>26</sup> Translation of the three characters 明行成 *míngxíngchéng* 明行成, corresponding to the Sanskrit *vidyācara-saṃpanna*, often rendered into Chinese as 明行足 *míngxíngzú*.

<sup>27</sup> The name 世間解 *shìjiān jiě* corresponds to the Sanskrit *lokavid*, also one of the ten epithets of the Buddha.



Honored One.

[5] Make [your parents] trust the Dharma, and instruct [them] so that they achieve a state of ease and peace. All the Dharma teachings being profound, the achievement of their fruits<sup>28</sup> in the present body [also] has a profound significance.

[6] [With] such insight,<sup>29</sup> clear knowledge permeates their conduct.<sup>30</sup> Instruct [your parents] to trust the noble community.<sup>31</sup> The Tathāgata's noble community is extremely pure; their conduct being forthright and incorruptible, they are constantly in accord with the Dharma.<sup>32</sup> When the Dharma is realized, morality is realized; *samādhi*, wisdom, liberation, and liberated insight are realized.

[7] What is known as the noble community [includes the] four pairs and the eight types of accomplished practitioners.<sup>33</sup> They constitute the Tathāgata's noble community [made of] the most venerable and the most eminent. You should worship and respect [them], as this field of merit is unsurpassed in this world. Thus all children should make their parents

<sup>28</sup> The “fruits” indicate the various forms of realization of Buddhahood, such as the four attainments (© *siguǒ* 四果) mentioned later in the text where it speaks of the four pairs and the eight types of accomplished practitioners. The mention of these attainments, usually emphasized in pre-Mahāyāna sources, suggests either that when this sutra was composed the boundaries between Mahāyāna and non Mahāyāna were ill-defined or that it aimed at being all-inclusive. Tōrei favors the latter interpretation and speaks of the three vehicles and the five natures (① *sanjō goshō* 三乘五性) all trusting the wonderful Dharma in accordance with their abilities (① *ōki* 應機).

<sup>29</sup> Here I followed Tōrei's interpretation of © *zhìzhě* 智者 as a nominalization of © *zhì* 智, commonly translated as “wisdom.” The translation “wisdom” has been kept for the compound © *zhìhuì* 智慧, corresponding to the Sanskrit *prajñā*.

<sup>30</sup> This passage seems to allude to the compound © *míngxíng* 明行 (knowledge and conduct) used as one of the above-mentioned epithets of the Buddha, *Míngxíngchéng* 明行成 (Accomplished in Knowledge and Conduct). I did not follow Tōrei's interpretation of © *míng* 明 as the adverb “clearly” (① *akirakani kono gyō ni tsūzu* 明らかに此の行に通ず). In this context, © *xíng* 行 seems to indicate “conduct” (© *acara* or *ācāra*) rather than practice. The explanation of “their conduct” (© *cǐ xíng* 此行) follows.

<sup>31</sup> The compound © *shèngzhòng* 聖眾 is the Chinese equivalent for the Sanskrit *ārya-saṅgha*.

<sup>32</sup> The way Tōrei punctuates this passage gives it a significantly different meaning. Most texts including the Taishō edition and the translation in the Buddha's Light series have the Chinese text divided as 甚清淨行。直不曲常和合。法法成就, whereas Tōrei understood it as 甚清淨。行直不曲常和合法。法成就。My translation follows Tōrei's interpretation.

<sup>33</sup> These four categories include those of: 1. Stream-enterer (© *srota-āpanna* © *yùliú* 預流) in the initial stage (*xiàng* 向) and in the realization stage (*guǒ* 果); 2. Once-returner (© *sakā-d-āgāmin* © *yīlái* 一來) in the initial stage and in the realization stage; 3. Nonreturner (© *anāgāmin* © *bùhuán* 不還) in the initial stage and in the realization stage; 4. Arhat (© *āluóhàn* 阿羅漢) in the initial stage and in the realization stage.

practice compassion.<sup>34</sup>

[8] All monks consist<sup>35</sup> of two ‘children’: the child who was produced,<sup>36</sup> and the child who is nurtured. This is what is meant by speaking of ‘monks who consist of two children.’ It is for this reason that all monks should learn about the child who was produced, and [reciprocate by] emitting from their mouth the flavor of the Dharma.<sup>37</sup> This is how all monks should engage in this [form of] learning.”<sup>38</sup>

At this time, once all of the monks had heard what the Buddha taught, they were uplifted in delight and respectfully put [these teachings] into practice.

[9] [End of] *The Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents.*

### The Essential Message of the Sutra According to Tōrei

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<sup>34</sup> As noted above, here ④ jiào 教 indicates the factitive “make...” and does not mean “instruct.”

<sup>35</sup> Depending on the context, ④ yǒu 有 can sometimes be translated as “to have” or “to be.” Here, it seems to refer to the fundamental constituents of existence, two modalities of “being” (⑤ asti) in the world: as a physical body inherited from one’s parents, and as person who can nurture or cultivate buddhahood. We will return to Tōrei’s detailed explanation.

<sup>36</sup> Tōrei explains the mundane and supra-mundane implications of this analogy. According to him, the child who was produced or engendered (④ suǒshēngzǐ ① shosei no ko 所生子) indicates everything that was received from the parents, such as predispositions (① kishitsu 氣質), flesh and blood (① kechiniku 血肉), material possessions (① zaisan 財產), and wisdom and qualities (① chitoku 智德). Even after having learned about one’s predispositions, and having personally received these karmic manifestations (① gōhō 業法), one’s vital energy (① ki 氣) cannot thoroughly implement filiality, and one’s karma cannot exhaust all its subtleties (① myō 妙): this is what is called the child who is nurtured (④ suǒshēngzǐ ① shoyō no ko 所養子), implying that cultivation is necessary. Both pertain to the mundane dimension (① se 世), whereas the supramundane dimension (① shusse 出世) indicates the application of the same two to the teacher-disciple relation.

<sup>37</sup> This term (⑤ dharma-rasa ④ fǎwèi ① hōmi 法味) frequently appears in the *Flower Ornament Scripture* (*Dāfang guāng fó huáyánjīng*) in 60 fascicles (T. 9 no. 278). Here, Tōrei indicates that one of the keys to this passage is the section of the *Lotus Sutra* where Śāriputra exclaims: “Now I have heard from the Buddha what I had never heard before, a Law never known in the past, and it has ended all my doubts and regrets. My body and mind are at ease and I have gained a wonderful feeling of peace and security. Today at last I understand that truly I am the Buddha’s son, born from the Buddha’s mouth, born through conversion to the Law, gaining my share of the Buddha’s Law!” *Miāofǎ liánhuájīng*, T. 9 no. 262, p. 10a11–a14. Translation by Watson, Burton. (1993). *The Lotus Sutra*, pp. 48. Two ideas contained in this passage help us clarify *The Sutra on the Difficulty of Reciprocating the Kindness of Parents*: 1. The idea of “having gained a wonderful feeling of peace and security” (④ kuài dé ānyīn 快得安隱), and 2. The idea of being “born from the Buddha’s mouth” (④ cóng fókǒu shēng 從佛口生).

<sup>38</sup> In this context the distinction between learning and practice is, of course, irrelevant. The expression translated as “engage in this [form of] learning” (④ dāng zuò shì xué, ① masani kono gaku o nasu beshi 當作是學) is an injunction to understand the indebtedness to one’s parents and the importance to reciprocate this debt by teaching the Dharma.

Let us now examine how Tōrei extracted the core meaning of this scripture, which otherwise could easily be read as commonplace. He dissected the sutra into three main sections, focusing in particular on its symbolic meaning, which he describes thus in his *Annotated Commentary*:

[The sutra] considers the wisdom and the excellence of the Tathāgata as the father and considers the compassionate vows of the Bodhisattva as the mother: they engender all the children who emit the thought of awakening. This indicates the conditional cause. [The sutra] considers the ever-present Buddha nature as the father and Prajñā's light of wisdom as the mother. This indicates the direct cause. [The sutra] considers the skillful means of practice as the father and the perfection of wisdom [realized through] the actualization of one's [true] nature as the mother, [thus] progressing and reaching the supreme stage of perfection. This indicates the concluding cause.

Rather than viewing the sutra as a moral tale, this commentary suggests a philosophical take. Yet, it only reflects Tōrei's application of scholastic categories and is not especially Zen-like.

His commentary on section 6 in the translation of the sutra introduces an altogether different perspective. He analyzes each of the words in the apparently trivial passage saying, "When the Dharma is realized, morality is realized; samādhi, wisdom, liberation, and liberated insight are realized," and he provides the following comment concerning the last clause:

The single eye on one's forehead cuts off the wisdom eye and surpasses the Dharma eye. Without penetrating the tiny matter of going beyond [according to] the Zen approach, how could one obtain this small share?

According to Tōrei, the various types of insight gained by accomplished practitioners who follow traditional Buddhism are still limited and need to be surpassed by the subtler awakened perception gained through the practice of going beyond (㊦ *kōjō* 向上).<sup>39</sup> He considers that this advanced phase of practice requires overcoming attachment to the initial realization of one's true nature

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<sup>39</sup> Concerning this crucial concept, see Mohr, Michel. (2009). *Beyond Awareness*.

until all traces of the initial breakthrough have disappeared. This is where Tōrei gives a different twist to the narrative of the sutra, and extrapolates from the simple idea of reciprocating the kindness of one's parents through filial behavior to the idea of reciprocating the kindness of all sentient beings by leading them to the ultimate stage of realization.

After having examined the main features of Tōrei's *Annotated Commentary*, we can now widen our discussion and consider how filial piety was either interpreted from the perspective of its application to one's blood relatives, or envisioned as including all sentient beings among its beneficiaries. This particular point, I believe, may serve to establish a link with the present significance of this concept in an increasingly globalized world.

#### IV. Universalist and Particularist Appropriations of Filial Piety

Obviously, Tōrei was not the only cleric to have reformulated the concept of filial piety to allow for a broader interpretation. He was particularly inspired by the work of Fórì Qìsōng (1007–1072), who had attempted to demonstrate that Buddhist teachings largely converge with Confucianism and Daoism but nevertheless provide a deeper interpretation of “great filial piety” (© dàxiào ① *daikō* 大孝).<sup>40</sup> The last section of Fórì's *Fǔjiāobiān* 輔教編 (Supplement to the Teachings) is dedicated to an elaborate Discourse on Filial Piety (© Xiàolùn 孝論) including twelve chapters.<sup>41</sup> The last section of Fórì's work includes an extended “Discourse on Filial Piety.” Fórì explains that his discourse aims at “expounding the profound rationale and the hidden intention of our sages.” In his *Oral Explanation of the Filial Piety Classics in the Three Teachings of Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism*, Tōrei repeatedly quotes Fórì to emphasize the universality of filial piety.

Fórì and Tōrei both wanted to convey to their respective audiences the central idea that all beings could have been our relatives in previous lives, or may become so in a future existence, and that “great filial piety” thus needs to be understood as including all sentient beings.

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<sup>40</sup> The same word (© dàxiào 大孝) is used in Confucian classics such as the *Mencius* or the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhōngyōng*), but its meaning is purely conventional and often simply indicates a “person of great filiality.” See for example Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. (2001). *Focusing the Familiar*, 96.

<sup>41</sup> See Araki Kengo 荒木見悟. (1981). *Hogyōhen* 輔教編. Included in *Tánjīn wénjí* 鐔津文集 (Collected Works [of Qisong] of Tanjin, T 52 no. 2115).

In his *Annotated Commentary* Tōrei legitimates this interpretation by quoting the *Sutra of the Great Skillful Means of the Buddha to Reciprocate [His Parents'] Kindness*:

Because [they] receive a bodily form, all sentient beings have also been the mothers and fathers of the Tathāgata. For the sake of all sentient beings the Tathāgata has also become [their] fathers and mothers. Because he becomes the father and mother of everyone, he constantly cultivates the most difficult practices and the hardest austerities; he is expert in renouncing what is difficult to renounce.<sup>42</sup>

## **V. Conclusions**

The above should suffice to indicate the extent of the shift that occurred between the earlier Confucian sources exclusively stressing respect to one's parents as a gateway to morality, their equivalent in early Buddhist scriptures, and the reinterpretation of the same concept by Fōrì and Tōrei. What may have been on the verge of becoming an obsolete idea was infused with new vitality as its implications were expanded from one's own family to the unlimited sphere of all sentient beings. We still need to fine-tune some of the details of this evolution, but a general picture of how filial piety was skillfully reformulated in Song China and in eighteenth-century Japan begins to emerge. To what extent this transformation may yield further insight into ways to reach out to those eager to focus on "family" values remains to be seen. What clearly appears is that particularist interpretations of filial piety limited to one's relatives lack the suggestive power supplied by Tōrei's twist of the same concept.

## **Postscript**

The above paper has been edited to closely reflect the actual conference presentation, with the exception of the translation of the sutra, distributed as a handout. A more elaborate version of this paper with additional references will be published as one chapter of my forthcoming book entitled *Tōrei Enji and the Construction of Rinzai Orthodoxy*.

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<sup>42</sup>T 3 no. 156, 127c11–c14.

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