Preliminary Comments

One of the most important new religious movements of the late imperial period was the Non-Action Teachings. This was a lay-Buddhist religious movement in southern China that was founded in the late 16th century and flourished until the 1950s, when it was largely suppressed by the new communist state. It had been inspired by its reading of the so-called Five Books in Six Volumes (Wubu liuce 五部六冊) which is traditionally ascribed to Patriarch Luo. They contain a highly personal account in colloquial Chinese supported by extensive quotations, mostly from Buddhist texts. In this investigation I shall use the term “colloquial” to refer to the spoken language per se, whether in written or spoken form. As far as I am able...
to judge, this colloquial language is different from the usual “vernacular” language used for literary purposes (conventionally referred to as old-báihuá 白话). The term classical Chinese will be used to refer to the more formalized written language.

Patriarch Luo supports the description of his journey to enlightenment and his subsequent discussions of various religious issues with a very eclectic series of quotations based on his religious readings. In this survey I will look afresh at these quotations in order to analyze the reading behavior of the author. Although many authors before me have pointed out the existence of such quotations, none have as yet used this phenomenon in order to reconstruct the author’s writing and reading habits—if indeed he was a writer and reader in the first place.

The Historical Figure
Before we proceed to the quotations themselves, some preliminary remarks are in order on the historical figure of Patriarch Luo himself and on the history of the Five Books in Six Volumes. In my remarks I will take a very strict approach to the available evidence, much more so than most recent research. Since I intend to uncover the actual reading behavior of a concrete person, it is important to get as closely as possible to this figure and his historical time. This is not to deny the importance of later myth-building as such, for instance in the history of the Non-Action Teachings, but this simply is not my concern in this article. To begin with I should admit that no personal names are mentioned anywhere in the earliest version of the Five Books in Six Volumes, the textual history of which I discuss further below in more detail. The only reason I feel confident in using the family name Luo is because each and every early source uses this name as that of the author and it is convenient at least to have this much information. For reasons which should become clear very quickly, I will not use any personal names, but only the epithet “patriarch.”

The man whom we refer to as Patriarch Luo describes his route towards enlightenment in great detail in his own writings, but provides preciously little information on his age, social background, or geographical provenance. Although modern research has added such information, none of it dates back to sources contemporary to his life, and the additions are in fact closely tied to the needs of specific religious traditions. Instead of claiming that our account is historically accurate, we should probably settle for the less ambitious claim that we can

---

1 More will be said on this book further below. It consists of five books with different titles, of which one is in two parts or volumes.

2 See my Practicing Scripture: A Lay Buddhist Movement in Late Imperial China (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), 35-46.

3 Sawada Mizuho, “Raso no mugi kyō,” republished in his: Zo hōhen no kenkyū (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1975), 301-09, is a good example of an early study that utilizes sources of very different quality. Since he still uses the Kaixin fayao edition of the Five Books in Six Volumes as well as various Precious Scrolls, his reconstruction remains mythical. Ma Xisha and Han Bingfang, Zhongguo minjian zongjiao shi (Shanghai: Shanghai chubanshe, 1992), 166-73 and 245-50 continue this approach. Later sources are simply not reliable and should be studied as relevant for that period’s view of the founder, rather than being evidence on the historical figure.
reconstruct several versions of his life that were shared by different teachers and groups who were inspired by his writings. I emphasize only “his writings,” rather than his person, since we have no reliable historical information on people who were directly connected to the author himself.

Apart from his religious autobiography, the author makes a few straightforward comments about himself at the end of his fifth book, the *Precious Scroll of Deep Roots and Concluding the Fruit as Firm as the Lofty and Unmovable Mount Tai*. He was a hereditary soldier from Jimo County in Shandong and served in a border garrison in Miyun. This also confirms that we are dealing with a male person. The Ming founder, Zhu Yuanzhang, had systematized the Yuan practice of hereditary status, and this system was still functioning, at least in part, in the early 16th century. The Miyun garrison was quite close to Beijing and a later source tells us that it was a trade hub as well. The author continues as follows:

I practiced leaving the family [normally the term for becoming an ordained monk], at home I (wo 我) took the bodhisattva vow of respecting monks, nuns, lay men and women (i.e., the four groups or *sizhong 四眾*), practicing seven-day retreats (*daqi 打七*) and suppressing the demons (*lianmo 煉魔*). I engaged in ascetic practice without skirting away from it. I developed a heart of great goodness and opened (*kai 開*) the five books of scriptures (*wubu jingjuan 五部經卷*), to save you (*ni 你*) from the bitter sea of endless rebirth to transcend the ordinary world and never to return.

This text tells us that the patriarch did what monks in a monastery would do, but at home, probably because of his obligations as a hereditary soldier and/or duties to his family. Neither the colophon nor the original *Five Books in Six Volumes* give the author’s family or personal names. The text makes no explicit reference to writing, but only to the “opening” of the “five books of scriptures,” most likely referring to his act of composing these five texts.

In 1585 the prominent late Ming monk Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-
1623) visited the patriarch’s region of birth near Mount Lao. There he learned that the patriarch was called Luo Qing 清 and had become very influential locally. Deqing devoted much time and energy to draw these adherents back into the fold of monastic Buddhism by reconverting them and organizing projects to combat local famines.\(^8\) Mizang 密藏 (fl. 1581-1593) wrote around the same time and calls him Luo Jing 靜, which sounds rather similar.\(^9\) A kind of oral tradition probably existed on his life, slowly changing his original personal name in the process, although the family name of Luo seems extremely plausible. His purported descendants would ascribe a completely different name to him, Luo Menghong (written 羅孟/夢鴻), which I discuss further below, and which has been accepted as correct by most Chinese scholars of new religious groups. Whether they are truly his descendants or not can no longer be ascertained, but this more literary name is definitely of a much later date and does not fit the simple social background of the patriarch.\(^10\) Mizang adds that the patriarch was a soldier on the ships transporting tribute grain from the Lower Yangzi region to the capital, but this may reflect his early following among laborers on that fleet, already recorded in a late Ming gazetteer, rather than historical fact.\(^11\) Still, since early sources agree that he served in the army, we may choose to take this as a plausible fact. It certainly was an essential element of all later mythology.

The only hard fact is that someone wrote his religious views and experiences down in five works that eventually became known as the Five Books in Six Volumes. It seems that the oldest edition of the Five Books in Six Volumes goes back to 1509, but the earliest extant datable edition is from 1518. The work continued to be copied or printed, sometimes even reworked, throughout the following centuries.\(^12\) In fact, the impact of these writings, and with them of Patriarch Luo, on the following centuries can be compared to the influence of the Ming philosopher Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) or the Buddhist monk Zhuhong 祯宏 (1535-1615). While this may not fit our intellectual sensitivities because we tend to privilege elite figures over popular figures, it is clear that the historical significance

---

\(^8\) Hanshan Deqing, Mengyouji, juan 53: 481a, 482b (From the Japanese sequel to the Taishō-canon, hereafter ZZK edition). Biography in Sung-peng Hsu, A Buddhist Leader in Ming China: The Life and Thought of Han-shan Te-ch’ing (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979).

\(^9\) See the extensive discussion of his account in Barend ter Haar, Practicing Scripture: A Lay Buddhist Movement in Late Imperial China (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), 23-29.

\(^10\) Meng 孟 is a generation marker, meaning “oldest” of the male children. Two character personal names are quite rare until the late sixteenth century, certainly among common people. The version with meng 夢 (dream) instead is probably a further literary embellishment. For more detail, see my discussion in ter Haar, Practicing Scripture, 14-16.

\(^11\) Peizhi 薛志 (1596) 6: page unclear.

\(^12\) Daniel Overmyer, Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 391n1 provides an overview of the main literature. See also Sawada Mizuho 藻田瑞穂, “Raso no mugi kyō 羅祖の無為教,” in Zōko hōken no kenkyū 増補寳巻の研究, 301-09 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1975), 309-15; Ma Xisha 馬西沙 and Han Bingfang 韓秉方, Zhongguo minjian zongjiaoshi 中國民間宗教史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 1992), 177-87. We are unable to verify whether some of the early editions seen by Sawada and others were really as old as they thought.
of the author of the *Five Books in Six Volumes* on late imperial China is comparable to that of the great teachers and preachers of the Reformation in Europe during the 16th century.

Patriarch Luo reached his insights after a long period of soul searching. He taught about the insufficiency of the ritualistic worship of Amitābha and of the exclusive recitation of this Buddha’s name. Instead he wanted people to rely on individual disciplined practice, for the Buddha and the Pure Land are within oneself. He disapproved of the notion that only properly ordained monks could attain real understanding. Insight in the ultimate emptiness of everything, including all forms of ritualistic cultivation, can be transmitted through a ritual of opening up an inner eye which can penetrate everything. The importance of the self as the basis of religious experience is also absolutely crucial to the Non-Action Teachings.13

In his *Five Books in Six Volumes*, Patriarch Luo detailed his individual route towards true understanding, unlike the more traditional Buddhist approach of the Song and Yuan periods, which stressed legitimate transmission from a properly recognized teacher. This may well be the first (extant) more or less autobiographical text in which an inspired teacher outside mainstream Buddhism wrote down his *Werdegang* in such detail, and in colloquial Chinese to boot. Its message was that the reader could also attain these insights independently, by reading Patriarch Luo’s writings, but without a formally initiated teacher. Given the many reprints of the *Five Books in Six Volumes*, these books clearly inspired his audience.

**The Five Books in Six Volumes**
The titles of the individual books within the *Five Books in Six Volumes* are rarely mentioned separately, since they are very long. They are as follows:

1. *Scroll on Bitter Practice and Enlightenment in the Way* (*Kugong wudao juan* 苦功悟道卷) (one volume, no subdivisions) (short: *Scroll of Bitter Practice* [*Kugong juan*]);
2. *Scroll of Lamenting the World and Non-Action* (*Tanshi wuwei juan* 嘆世無為卷) (one volume; 13 subdivisions [*pin*]) (short: *Scroll of Lamenting the World* [*Tanshi juan*]);
3. *Scroll of the Key to Destroying Heresy and Manifesting Evidence* (*Poxie xianzheng yaoshi juan* 破邪顯證鑰匙卷) (two volumes; 24 subdivisions) (short: *Scroll of Destroying Heresy* [*Poxie juan*]);
5. *Precious Scroll* (as Firm as) the *Lofty and Unshakable Mount Tai of Concluding Karma from Deep Roots* (*Weiwei budong taishan shen’gen jieguo baojuan* 巍巍不動泰山深根結果寳卷) (one volume; 24 subdivisions) (short: *Scroll of Mount Tai* [*Taishan juan*]).

Although the number of subdivisions in the last three scrolls is roughly the same,

the *Scroll of the Key* is almost twice as long as the other two and was split into two volumes for reasons of length.

The oldest reference to the *Five Books in Six Volumes* as a group is in the books themselves, for instance in the brief autobiographical comments quoted above. The text only mentions the “Five Books of Scriptures” (*wubu jingjuan*) and does not yet specify the number of volumes. The author uses the term “part” to refer to the five principal parts of the Buddhist teachings (the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* or *Huayan jing* 華嚴經; the *Mahāsaṃnipāta Sutra* or *Daji jing* 大集經; the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra* or *Banruo jing* 般若經; *Lotus Sutra* or *Fahua jing* 法華經; and finally the *Nirvana Sutra* or *Niepan jing* 涅槃經). In the same way that these sutras together sum up the Buddhist teachings, the *Five Books in Six Volumes* are intended to do so as well.

The author is quite explicit about the importance of his writings as a summation of Buddhist teachings in the first section of his fifth book, *Scroll of Mount Tai (Taishan juan)*:

One is reborn in the world of the living to run a stretch, but does not succeed in turning around. The dim-witted people suffer untold bitterness, pitifully as if in a dream. In these [books] is evidence based on extensive perusal and compilation (*lanji* 覽集), and these are not empty words. So, I (我), the householder, have preserved an ego all day long. I (我) kept my ego thirty years, forty years, and fifty years. When the dharma was explained [I] did not value it and did not listen to it in my heart. Towards the outside world [I] claimed to be strong and spoke nonsense, giving rise to the disease of doubt. Completely obscured, [I] backed off from the way. Male and female Bodhisattvas of the ten directions [i.e. lay believers], if you hear nonsense and give rise to the disease of doubt [as I did for so many years], quickly listen to my Five Books of Scriptures, in order to rescue yourself from your disease of doubt and [understand] that nothing really exists. If [I] am not speaking true and veritable words, my body should turn into pus and blood this very moment.

The first person is used explicitly twice in the above text since the author is using a more colloquial register of writing in which doing so is far more common than in classical Chinese writing. He seems to be looking back at his overall opus as

---

14 The author frequently uses *bu* as a kind of measure word for Buddhist sutras. See for instance towards the end of *Poxie juan* 24 (digital edition; this section is missing in the Yongzheng 7 and Kaixin fayao editions), where the author uses *wuben jingjuan* 五本經卷 and *wubu jingjuan* 五本書卷 as synonyms.

15 *Taishan juan* (YZ 7) 1: 7b-10a (350-52). He again refers to *wubu jingjuan* in the final postscript to the same scroll and lists their titles as well, see *Taishan juan* (YZ 7) 95a-b (394). In the postscript to the fourth scroll, he still refers to *sibu jingjuan* or four scrolls; this is only in the digital edition; the Yongzheng 7 edition mistakenly corrects this to six or *liubu jingjuan*, but lists only four titles, confirming that this correction is not in the original. Curiously, the *Poxie juan* (YZ 7) 24: 70b (285, also in the digital edition) refers to five books or *wubu jingjuan*. Unlike the passages at the end of the *Zhengxin juan* and *Taishan juan*, however, this is not an autobiographical passage and it only mentions three of the five titles. It seems more likely that the original passage was later edited incorrectly and is no longer preserved in its original form. The phrase “extensive perusal and compilation” (*lanji* 覼集) also refers to his main source of quotations, the anthology *Collection of the Great Canon in One Glance* (*Dazang yilanji* 大藏一覽集). The same notion of culling the most important bits and pieces out of the Buddhist canon can be found in the *Poxie juan* (YZ 7) 3: 11a-12a (215-16).

---
a summary of the Buddhist canon. His self-imprecation was a common method of swearing to the truth in Chinese religious practice, including the violent punishment for transgressions of the oath. Although I refer to the *Five Books in Six Volumes* as writings, the author uses terms such as “listen” and “speaking” several times and only refers to his compilation process as “perusal and compilation.” The word which I have translated as “perusal” literally means “to see” and can be used as a more elevated term for “to read.”

The “Five Books of Scriptures” are intended to assist people in obtaining a quick insight into the true Buddhist message. They contain a mixture of comments in colloquial Chinese and endless quotations from Buddhist scriptures in classical Chinese. The “Five Books of Scriptures” do not consist of one single consistent argument, but are often repetitive observations that lack context. Given his very colloquial writing style, one suspects that the author may have been capable of reading, memorizing, and/or copying classical Chinese texts, but not of writing in this style himself, or at least not with ease. One can also imagine that the written texts which we now have are a combination of his original sermons with quotations added later on.

In the remainder of this investigation I will look more closely at the quoting behavior of the author. A more detailed analysis suggests that he probably did not work from reading notes, but from memory. A preliminary count shows that he quotes at least 275 times from some 59 works, of which the large majority—260 quotations to be exact—are from Buddhist works and 15 from Daoist or Confucian works. As many as 202 quotations come from only eleven works, as indicated in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Short Title</th>
<th>Number of Quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ritual text</td>
<td>Graded Ritual of the Diamond (Jin’gang heyi 金剛科儀)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collection of quotations</td>
<td>Collection of the Great Canon in One Glance (Dazang yilanji 大藏一覽集)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 I am relying here on Randall Nadeau (1990), but earlier scholars such as Sakai Tadao, Sawada Mizuhiko, Zheng Zhiming, and others have already looked at it in great detail. It is my impression that none of these scholars have as yet looked these quotations up in their original context.

17 I am using the count of Randall Laird Nadeau, “Popular Sectarianism in the Ming: Lo Ch’ing and His Religion of Non-Action” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1990), 239-48, with some corrections. He lists the Fo yinguo jing 佛因果經 as a separate entry, but it is explicitly marked as Dazang yilan in the Wubu liuce (see digital version, Poxie juan 7. 60a [235]). I have corrected this information in my summary. I could not find the following works from his list in the reconstructed version of the Wubu liuce: Fayuan zhulin 法苑珠林; Shensengzhuan 神僧傳; Yuzhi song 御製頌 and Zhongfeng heshang guanglu 中峰和尚廣錄. In addition, whereas Nadeau counts three quotes from the Jīng’anglun 金剛論, I found only one (not in the Dazang yilan ji) as well as one marked Jīng’anglun 金剛論 (not in the Dazang yilan ji). I expect that a more precise search that also covers unmarked quotations would yield still more material.

18 Nadeau, 249-56, partly based on research by Zheng Zhiming 鄭志明.

19 Nadeau’s count can be expanded with six additional quotations. Zhidulan is mentioned twice, once explicit as Dazung yilan and once without reference (Poxie juan 8: 63a-b [236]). The same is true for the Piyu jing 警喻經 (Tanshi juan 18a-b [166]); Dazhunfù lùn 大丈夫論 (Poxie juan 8: 64b [237]); Yongjia chanshi zhengdiao ge (Poxie juan 18: 29b-30a [264-65]); Zongjing lu (Tanshi juan 81a [197]); and Poxie juan 18: 30b [265]).
Interestingly, the other 73 quotations are much more thinly spread, stemming from 48 works. If all quotations go back to a personal reading of the quoted books, it is strange that he quotes so little from the large majority of his readings and then so much from only eleven books. Even from a famous work such as the _Lotus Sutra_, the patriarch quotes only four times. A strong argument against his use of systematic reading notes is the fact that he is quoting and re-quoting the same passages, but in a haphazard way, with many mistakes and sometimes even without credit. Most likely, he actually read and then memorized only a limited number of works, for instance the eleven works from the above table, although this raises the question of where the rest of the quotations came from. Besides the late Yuan or early Ming anthology entitled the _Collection of the Great Canon at One Glance_ ( _Dazang yilan ji_), I was not yet able to find other anthologies for those cases in which just a few quotations are used from one single source. Of the eleven works in the above table, only the _Collected Sayings of Youtan_ ( _Pudu 普度, 1255-1330_) ( _Youtan yulu 優曇語錄_) no longer seem to be extant. In fact, I am not even certain that such a collection ever existed, since the actual quotations are fragments of poems on Buddhist topics, rather than sayings by Pudu. They are contained in a Yuan period collection of lengthy poems in praise of the worship of the Pure Land and will be discussed further below.

A large group of references in the _Five Books in Six Volumes_ do not really consist of quotations to begin with, although they are usually counted as such in the secondary scholarship. The relevant titles typically contain the suffix for “scroll” ( _juan 卷_) or “precious scrolls” ( _baojuan 貴卷_) and have been taken by modern scholarship as references to written texts, although most of the titles have never been

---

20 Here I count two extra quotations as compared with Nadeau’s count, as follows: _Kugong juan_ 17 (134) (T48n2008_p0349c); _Poxie juan, shang_ 6: 51b-52b (230-31) (three partial quotations combined into one long quotation): _Luozu dashi fabao tanjing_ (T48n2008_p0349c; p0358b; p0358a-0358b; _Poxie juan, xia_ 20: 38b (T48n2008_p0355b-355c); _Zhengxin juan_ 20: 86a (332) (T48n2008_p0352a). John R. McRae’s translation, _The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch/_ transl. from the Chinese of Tsung-pao ( _Taisho_ vol. 48, nr. 2008) (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2000) allows the reader to consult the translation next to the Chinese of the _Taisho daizokyo_-edition. Also see my discussion below in the main text.
Patriarch Luo as a Writer and Reader: Speculating about the Creative Process behind the Five Books in Six Volumes

been identified. Within this larger group of nineteen titles, ten appear only as title references and not as quotations at all. In the other instances, it is not clear whether the author is really quoting an existing text or not.  

Given the history of the genre of the Precious Scroll and what we know about its performance practice in the late Ming period, it is likely that these materials were performed and therefore appreciated orally, even if a written (but not necessarily printed) version for the performer him- or herself may have existed. Furthermore, the patriarch’s primary concern is in establishing their orthodox or heterodox nature, for instance “the Lotus Flower Scroll contains the heretic way, seven parts are talk, the Heart Sutra Scroll contains the heretic way, seven parts are heterodox tradition” (fahuajuan youwaidao qifen yanyu, xinjingjuan youwaidao qifen xiezong 法華卷, 有外道, 七分言語。心經卷, 有外道, 七分邪宗). What he means precisely by “seven parts are talk” is unclear, although it fits nicely with my argument that we are dealing here predominantly with public sermons and storytelling performances that the patriarch heard in the marketplace or in monasteries and temples, rather than actual books or manuscripts that he read. He rarely judges these works positively, which fits his reliance on materials with a proper written origin, mostly from the Buddhist canon.

In itself, it is not that surprising that the patriarch refers extensively to Precious Scrolls. One of the few reliable pieces of historical information that we do have on him is the fact that he served in the military garrison in Miyun. This was actually not far from Beijing, the capital. Rostislav Berezkin has recently documented in even more detail than before the common practice of revering Precious Scrolls by at least two prominent groups in the imperial court, namely eunuchs and palace women, from at least the 15th century onwards. They represented a narrative form of lay Buddhism, focusing on stories of cycles of birth and rebirth shaped by moral (and immoral) behavior, rather than the Chan approach favored by the patriarch. It is therefore no surprise that he would disapprove of this genre, which was overly narrative and insufficiently reflective. This rejection again underlines the importance of distinguishing Patriarch Luo’s Five Books in Six Volumes from the overall genre of Precious Scrolls, with which he clearly did not want it to be equated.

On the basis of the above discussion, it can be seen that the the number of quotations from actual books becomes much smaller. Instead of 275 quotations, we have 256 quotations (i.e. minus the above 19 references to orally performed scrolls) of which at least 202 are from as few as 11 books (of which only one is not

21 Taishan juan 86b87b (390); the Jin’gang keyi can also be called a Jin’gang baojuan 金刚寶卷 and is included in this number. It is analogous to the Dizang keyi/juan 地藏科儀/卷. The Shousheng jing is listed by Nadeau among the Buddhist scriptures, but has not yet been properly identified. The real reference is as Shousheng juan 寿生卷 and it is one of the “scrolls” listed only as a title.


Barend J. ter HAAR

Buddhist, but Daoist). In other words, the library of books that Patriarch Luo had access to on a regular basis was probably far smaller than is commonly assumed. Furthermore, his erratic and often mistaken way of quoting from the above-mentioned eleven works suggests that he had learned them by heart as well, which was a common approach in traditional Chinese reading practice. The cases in which he only quotes once or twice from a given title probably do not derive from actual reading, but from his years of training with individual teachers, from whom he may have picked up isolated quotations. Even today, we quote proverbs rarely from their original context, but from oral usage (as well as through rote learning of proverbs in primary and secondary school). Since much of his knowledge was preserved by memorization rather than in written notes, we should probably not fault him for not quoting texts precisely at times. All of these materials were good to think with, but the author was a religious man, not an academic who needed to quote his sources accurately.

This raises the question why he is quoting these particular texts, rather than others. Given his skepticism about the worship of Amitābha, it does not come as a surprise that he does not quote from the otherwise very popular Amitābha sutras or the Lotus Sutra. Given the patriarch’s self-identification as a Chan practitioner, it seems plausible that this selection is at least partially motivated by a Chan teacher’s lectures and meditation training.²⁴ Since we know next to nothing of the kind of texts that people read, or were made to read, in Buddhist monasteries, whether Chan or otherwise, this hypothesis is hard to substantiate and would require much further study. Certainly, the Diamond Sutra, Nirvana Sutra, Heart Sutra, Sutra of Perfect Awakening and Platform Sutra all belong to the core corpus of texts used by early Chan authors.²⁵

But by far the largest chunk of quotations comes from only two sources, the Graded Ritual of the Diamond (Jin’gang keyi) with at least 61 and the Collection of the Great Canon in One Glance (hereafter: Collection of the Great Canon) with at least 35. Closer analysis might reveal even more unacknowledged quotations. This is already more than one third of the total number of presently identified quotations in the Five Books in Six Volumes. Concerning the first of these two books, I will discuss the patriarch’s own comments on the transformative importance of this work in his religious life further below. It is the Collection of the Great Canon that deserves more discussion at this point. Presently, I am aware of three editions. One is the rare original edition, compiled by the lay Buddhist Chen Shi 陳實 from Ningde in northern Fujian, and traditionally dated to the late Yuan or very early Ming period. This book was repeatedly reprinted during the Ming period, testifying to an ongoing audience for the text.²⁶ Quite surprisingly, the Jon’gyeong’gak Library

²⁴ This hypothesis was inspired by my Oxford colleague and Buddhism scholar Stefano Zachetti.

²⁵ They are, for example, frequently mentioned in John McRae, The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch’ an Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1986), and in the Sutra of Perfect Awakening (see the translation by Charles Muller, http://www.acmuller.net/bud-canon/sutra_of_perfect_enlightenment.html, accessed on January 3, 2015.

²⁶ For information on the original edition, see Sakai Tadao, quoted in Nadeau, 242. I found an
Patriarch Luo as a Writer and Reader: Speculating about the Creative Process behind the Five Books in Six Volumes

at the Academy of East Asian Studies of Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul preserves yet another edition. While the present copy may or may not be a Korean reprint, it actually preserves an edition from Jian’an 建安 (northern Fujian) in the characteristic style of Yuan and early or mid-Ming prints. The frontispiece says only: “The bookshop of Liu Wusanlang in Jian’an has printed it in order to transmit it” 建安劉五三郎書局刻梓以傳. I have been unable to find out more about this particular printer. Like the late Ming print this edition is in ten scrolls (juan). It confirms the northern Fujian origin of this compilation, but at the same time shows that the text also circulated in northern China, where it ended up in the hands of Korean travelers, whether diplomats, merchants, or religious specialists.27 The two Fujianese editions do not stem from the same woodblocks, although they do have the same contents.28 In 1614 another edition was published, which was also included in the Jiaxing canon and is the one most commonly used today.29

The Collection of the Great Canon was a compendium of quotations from the Buddhist canon, organized according to religious topic. It also has a detailed overall (i.e., book level) table of contents that includes subdivisions within each chapter, much in the same way as the so-called “daily encyclopedias” (riyong leishu 日用類書) compiled since the late Southern Song dynasty. Each chapter is itself also preceded by a table of contents. With each quotation, the source is clearly indicated. In other words, it is not necessary to learn the entire book by heart, but one could look up relevant quotations according to topic. Future analysis of the pattern of quotations in the Five Books in Six Volumes and similar books might yield more specific information on the way in which this handbook was actually used. The frequency of quotations in the Five Books in Six Volumes that are explicitly identified as stemming from the Collection of the Great Canon is one indication of the latter’s significance.

Patriarch Luo and Textuality
The Author as a Writer
Upon reading the author’s systematic account of his own road to religious enlightenment in the first book entitled Scroll of Bitter Practice and Insight in the Way (Kugong wudao juan 苦功悟道卷), we find that this description is entirely without

27 I was able to inspect this edition in May 2014 during a visit to Sungkungkwan University. I am grateful to Boudewijn Walraven and the local staff for their help during this visit. Incomplete versions of this edition also turn up on Chinese book auction websites. This particular edition was also included in a 1909 expanded edition of the Korean canon. On Song and Yuan book printing, see Lucille Chia, Printing for Profit: The Commercial Publishers of Jianyang, Fujian (11th-17th centuries) (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002).

28 This much is clear from comparing the available information. However, I was unable to carry out a detailed comparison on the page level.

29 This version can be consulted at http://tripitaka.cbeta.org
quotations and in straightforward colloquial Chinese. His first big step in the learning process was joining a master who told him to recite the name of Amitābha. This was essentially an oral practice, without textual study. After eight years he was so frustrated by his lack of insight into how he would eventually ascend to the Pure Land upon dying that he left his teacher in search of more answers. Now came a formative moment in his life, for in a neighboring house the old mother had died and monks were reciting scriptures, specifically the *Graded Ritual of the Diamond Sutra* (*Jin’gang keyi*). He listened to them at night and heard the line “One must accept in faith, pick it up, and investigate it oneself.” Hereupon his heart was filled with joy and “he requested a copy of the *Graded Ritual of the Diamond Sutra* and read it in its entirety in three years.” Interestingly, he uses the colloquial term “to read, to see” (*kan* 看) and not an equivalent that meant reciting or studying. Thus, he really meant reading in the modern sense of personal consumption through the eye, rather than through the ears and by sound. In terms of practice however, he continued to be afraid of rebirth and was not happy with his progress in his understanding of this text. He continued with a variety of practices, which he all found unsatisfactory, quite similar to the historical Buddha who also tried out alternative ways before reaching the middle path. None of these other practices involved reading and no texts are referred to in his description. And then, after thirteen years of trying, he finally became aware that everything is empty. He describes this final step as follows:

I have now searched until this point and have come to realize that I am a truly empty dharma nature, but I still do not know a state of being at ease in all directions and I also do not know how to settle down when I am about to die. The matter of life and death is big and I do not wish to set my search aside. Life and death are impermanent; the moment between breathing in and out, the bitterness of going under, how can I escape it? Day and night I worried and in my dreams I was in tears and pain. This startled and moved the “old true emptiness” to show great compassion. From the Southwest it set free a band of white light that enveloped and illuminated my body. In my dreams it enveloped and inspected [me], and after it had inspected [me] it went forth and my worries did not stop. Facing the Southwest I sat down straight-up in meditation and suddenly the flower of my heart-mind blossomed and the ground of my heart-mind was opened up, making totally clear the evanescent light of the land of origin [i.e., one’s original nature, often described in spatial terms]. Only now did I obtain a state of being at ease in all directions, and only now I obtained unbounded peace.

---

30 *Kugong juan, passim.*

31 The *Jin’gang keyi* in the Buddhist canon reads 若還信受怗來自檢看 (ZZK 74n1494_p0651) which could be translated as “if you return and accept in faith, you must investigate it yourself at your leisure.” The rhymed section that follows makes it quite clear that he interpreted this sentence as the need to study for oneself.

32 He uses *kan* in different ways, including “to read,” for instance in “if your read a recipe and do not administer the medicine” (*Poxie juan* 20:37b [268]). Also *Poxie juan* 24: 57b (278) on reading the *Lotus Sutra*. For another discussion of *kan* as a more intense and self-conscious way of looking, see Clunas (1997), 116-17, 129-30.
The conclusion that everything is truly empty and void is described by the author in a remarkable metaphor, “This namelessness cannot be put in any written form, even if using the water of the ocean as ink and Mount Sumeru as a brush you start writing and punctuating.” This metaphor certainly does not prioritize writing, stressing as it does the inability of ink and brush in capturing the ultimate emptiness of all things. On the other hand, the same metaphor does assume that the ordinary reader would prioritize writing, rather than imbibing a higher truth (or its absolute absence) in a more direct way.

It is common in English to describe the state of mind that was now reached by Patriarch Luo as enlightenment, although the term usually translated in this way means “insight” (wu 悟). Still, the core image that the author uses at this point is based on the metaphor of understanding as a form of giving light. After describing his enlightened being as the root of all things, referring quite literally to men and women, the bodies of all Buddhas, and the universe, the patriarch proceeds by expressing the need to tell this dharma to everyone in order to repay the favor he has just received. Thereupon he describes his insight as a light in a rhapsodic passage:

This light then is the Pure Land of the West.
This light then is Extreme Pleasure and Comfortable Support.
This light then is the world hidden in the lotus flower.
This light is the home region of the Old Buddha.

The author then continues on in this vein. In the second half of this much longer enumeration the pattern changes slightly, from bodies, locations, or worlds to states of emptiness:

This numinous light, when the four [Buddhist] elements [earth, water, fire, and air] will disperse [at death], one will not live and not be destroyed, [the light] will shine into all ten directions.
This numinous light, when the four elements will disperse, the divine penetration will be wide and great, it cannot be measured.

This style continues as the light of his insight penetrates and illuminates all distinctions and ways of being as empty. The light metaphor is striking and must have been highly meaningful to its audience. Chinese traditionally conceived of seeing with the eyes as emitting light, and, secondly, any devout Buddhist who recited a Pure Land sutra would be aware of the fact that Amitābha, too, emitted light to illuminate the entire universe. True understanding comes from this all-penetrating-light rather than from reading and writing.

33 On the light metaphor, see Kaji Toshino 加治敏之 in “Rakyo no shinkō no seisei katai no ‘kō’ ni tsuite,” 羅教の信仰の生成過程と＜光＞について、Chūō bungaku kaihō 中哲文學會報 10 (1985), 70-90 and “1482 nen no ‘kō’—futatabi gobu rokusatsu o yomu,” 一四八二年の＜光＞—再び五部六冊を読む, in Yamane Yukio kyōji taikyō kinen mindai shi ronshū 山根幸夫教授退休記念明代史論叢 (Tokyo: Saiko shoin, 1990), 1151-169. The name of Amitābha was taken to mean “light shining without limit.”
Our author may have claimed that reading and writing were insufficient means for attaining enlightenment, but the simple fact remains that he (or someone in his stead, a possibility I return to further below) wrote the *Five Books in Six Volumes*. I think, however, that it can be argued that originally the author may have conceived of this writing differently from traditional forms of writing. By using colloquial Chinese, one could argue, he was not even writing in any conventional sense of the word, which was always in what we are accustomed to call classical Chinese and was called “patterned” language (wenyan 文言). The entire *Five Books in Six Volumes* are remarkably empty of references to the classical canon which most literate persons would have acquired in the process of learning to read and write. Whereas classical Chinese was always intended to represent cosmic patterns, colloquial Chinese represented nothing beyond the spoken word. Therefore, our author was still speaking, but his speech had been written down in order to be read aloud and transmitted to an audience further away, whether in time or in space. His use of colloquial Chinese can best be compared to the original use of spoken Prakrit, rather than Sanskrit, by the pupils of the historical Buddha when they transmitted his spoken words to create the Buddhist sutras. Significantly, the patriarch was not quoting from classical Chinese works composed in “patterned” language, but almost exclusively from Buddhist writings that themselves also claimed to go back to the spoken word of the Buddha or, alternatively, to famous Chan teachers of the past.

**The Quoting Behavior of the Author**

Until this point in the first book, the author has described his search for enlightenment in very personal terms, without any recourse to scriptures and quotations. The descriptions would have been reasonably easy to comprehend for a northern Chinese audience since the colloquial was relatively close to their spoken language. They might have been more difficult for a southern audience, unless they knew some form of early Mandarin, in its sense of the spoken language of the bureaucracy. The text is also sufficiently redundant—an important element of oral presentation—to be understood without further exegesis. Still, reading and writing each appears at one point in the narrative, firstly in the three years of reading the *Graded Ritual of the Diamond Sutra*, and secondly in the metaphor of the ocean as ink and Mount Sumeru as a brush that cannot describe the namelessness that constitutes the author’s primary insight. When we are roughly two-thirds through the first book, the author starts quoting from scriptures to support his insights. The number of quotations is relatively low, as compared to the other scrolls, with nine in total. In the later four books he would quote far more often, though still mingling the quotations with colloquial passages, almost as if he had been exposed to much more material since his initial enlightenment.

A full analysis of the patriarch’s quoting behavior in the *Five Books in Six Volumes* would exceed the limits of this article, but the following examples may serve as an illustration of his treatment of written texts.\(^{34}\) The very first

---

\(^{34}\) Here I follow the sequence in the *Kugong juan* 145-53 and I will not refer to each separate
quotation is a poem from a history of Chan lineages cited in order to underline his enlightenment experience, “One bright pearl is here with me, pushing and moving, it emits light and moves the earth” (in the original version: yike mingzhu, zaiwo zheli, bozhu dongzhu, fangguang dongdi 一顆明珠。在我這裏。撥著動著。放光動地). In quoting this poem, Patriarch Luo changes the second character zhu 著 in the third line into di 地. Grammatically this is clearly a mistake, since the two characters zhu (probably the pronunciation should be zhe, but then the rhyme would be lost) function here as a suffix expressing ongoing movement. He was probably influenced by the appearance of the same character in the final sentence. It is the kind of error that fits the assumption that he knew this poem by heart (including its provenance, itself quite a famous history of Chan Buddhism) and probably out of context. The error suggests that he was not entirely clear about its meaning either. This is further supported by the fact that in its original context this poem was deemed to reflect insufficient understanding of enlightenment and was a reason for the Chan abbot to scold its author and tell him to go outside, therefore hardly a respectable quotation.

Immediately following the above quotation is another small poem that encapsulates some basic ideas of the author:

Everybody has the Pure Land in the West inside,
Without further practice it will appear in front,
If all good people see their nature,
Amitābha Buddha will stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

In addition to its meaning, the method of quotation is again interesting in itself. Closer inspection shows that the original quotation comes from the Prajñāpāramitā Sutra, which the author is quoting through the Jin’gang keyi, a text he had studied intensively for three years and undoubtedly knew by heart. Of the seven times that he quotes this fragment, its provenance is mentioned only once and he often partly reworks it. Like the previous example, this quotation was clearly by heart, rather than from reading notes.

Another example of Patriarch Luo’s quoting behavior is his treatment of the Platform Sutra elsewhere in his Five Books in Six Volumes. In one fragment contained in the Scroll of Destroying Heresy, for instance, he quotes the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch (his version of the title) in one extended passage, but is really combining different passages which originally appear in the Platform Sutra in quotation. A complete analysis of the quoting behavior in the Five Books in Six Volumes would exceed the page limits of this study.

35 Wudeng quanshu 五燈全書 X82n1571_p0136a07.
36 See Juelian 觉連, Xiaoshi jingang keyi huiyao zhujie 銷釋金剛科儀會要註解 (1551 preface), X24n0467_p0676b02-03
37 Also see varying ways of quoting the same poem in: Poxie juan 17: 22a-b (261); Zhengxin juan 12: 51a-b (314) (marked as a quotation from the Jin’gang keyi); Zhengxin juan 16: 68a (323); Zhengxin juan 20: 87a (332); Taishan juan 19: 70b (382); Taishan juan 22: 75a (384).
the sequence A C B.\textsuperscript{38} Below I give the complete passage from the *Five Books in Six Volumes*, with each of the three fragments followed by the relevant original from the *Platform Sutra*. The parts that are quoted from the *Platform Sutra* are marked in bold type.

1a) 六祖壇經云：禪定解脫是二法，不是佛法。
1b) 0349c19-20 「何不論禪定解脫？」能曰：「為是二法，不是佛法」

Here the fragment in the *Five Books in Six Volumes* is a correct, though slightly abbreviated version of the *Platform Sutra*.

2a) 視心靜坐，常坐不臥，拘身之法，於理何益？生來坐不臥，死去臥不坐，一具臭骨頭，何為立功課。
2b) 358b22-25 「住心觀靜，長坐不臥。」師曰：「住心觀靜，是病非禪；長坐拘身，於理何益？」

This fragment quotes from a much later part of the *Platform Sutra* and contains some interesting differences. The first four characters in the *Five Books in Six Volumes* are clearly inspired by the *Platform Sutra*, but carry a different message. The first character *chang* 常 of the next group of four has the same sound as the corresponding character *chang* 長 in the *Platform Sutra* and a slightly different meaning. The next eight characters are a shortened version of the corresponding statement in the *Platform Sutra*. The gatha that follows in the *Five Books in Six Volumes* comes straight from the *Platform Sutra*, which only adds an introductory phrase. The mistake for *chang* and the way in which part of the quotation is garbled and the rest simplified are easiest to explain as being the result of oral usage, rather than careless copying. Especially the discrepancies in the first four characters look more like memory mistakes than copying errors.

3a FBSV 有一僧舉臥輪禪師，偈曰：臥輪有伎倆，能斷百思想，對境心不起，菩提日月長。祖師曰：此偈未明心地，若依而行，是枷繫縛，祖示一偈曰：慧能無伎倆，不斷百思想，對境心數起，菩提作麼長？
3b PS 358a26-358b03 有僧舉臥輪禪師偈曰：「臥輪有伎倆，能斷百思想，對境心不起，菩提日月長。」師聞之，曰：「此偈未明心地，若依而行之，是枷繫縛。」因示一偈曰：「惠能沒伎倆，不斷百思想，對境心數起，菩提作麼長。」

The end of the quotation from the *Platform Sutra* is not formally marked in the *Five Books in Six Volumes*, but becomes clear because the author shifts to the regular rhymed verse of his narrative. The quotation of one of the most popular parts of the *Platform Sutra* is largely correct, except for the change of *yue* for the second *ri* in the first gatha poem and *zenma* for *zuoma*. In the last case, it would seem that

\textsuperscript{38} Poxie juan, shang 6: 51b-52b (230-31) (three partial quotations combined into one long quotation), compare *Liuzu dashi fabao tanjing* 六祖大師法寶壇經 in T48n2008_p0349c; p0358b; p0358a-0358b.
the customary explanation of zuoma has simply been adopted in the quotation. Here the quoting behavior does not necessarily suggest an oral channel, although this would have been a passage where the practitioner would need to have been exceptionally attentive to remember it correctly.

The author’s relationship to the Platform Sutra may even go further than these few quotations. As we have seen, in his postscript to the fifth book the author identifies himself as a hereditary soldier and in his autobiography in the first book he informs us that he was inspired to read the Graded Ritual of the Diamond Sutra (Jin’gang keyi) because he heard it recited at a funeral. The Platform Sutra also describes how the Sixth Patriarch Huineng was of extremely humble birth and was inspired to embrace Buddhism when he accidentally heard a man recite the Diamond Sutra while selling wood. Although the parallel is not literal, it is quite possible that Patriarch Luo was actually inspired by the example of Huineng, or alternatively modelled his life story on Huineng retrospectively.

Finally, we will take a look at the quotations that supposedly stem from the Collected Sayings of Youtan (Youtan yulu 優曇語錄). The monk Youtan is better known to posterity as Pudu 普度 (1255-1330), the great Pure Land reformer of the Yuan dynasty as well as an apologist for the White Lotus movement. Much of the material is contained in the Collection of the Udambara Flower of the Orthodox Tradition of the White Lotus of Mount Lu (Lushan bailian zhengzong tanhua ji 廬山白蓮正宗彌華集). It is not a collection of Chan sayings, but of devotional poems, mostly dealing with the recitation of the name of Amitābha. Elsewhere in the Five Books in Six Volumes the author refers to this book as “the Scroll of Youtan.” Whether this, or the title Collected Sayings of Youtan, refer to precisely the same book is another question. The ascriptions are not always completely correct, but most of the text under the label “Youtan” tends to stem from the “Collection of the Udambara Flower.” The first, and also longest, section is quite typical of the way in which Patriarch Luo quotes. I will first list the material in the following table and then provide some overall analytical comments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“A Comparison of Passages”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Five Books in Six Volumes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>剃地吹來真個涼,樹稍不動自然香；大地山河銀世界,不教人在暗中行。</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39 Liuzu dashi fabao tanjing, T48n2008_p0348a05-11.
42 Tanshi juan, 66a-68a (190-91).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>自家一個彌陀佛，薦得分明只是渠； 一片風光描不就，儘教浪籍滿江湖。</td>
<td>薦得分明只是渠 (208) 一片風光描不就 (232)</td>
<td>Single lines from separate poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>我念彌陀無易難，豈拘城市與深山； 白蓮香散塵沙國，這段風光不等閑。</td>
<td>我念阿彌陀佛難，豈拘城市與深山； 白蓮香散塵沙國，這段風光不等閑。</td>
<td>彌陀:&lt;&gt;=阿彌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>我念彌陀你不禪，也無東土與西天； 微塵剎海唯心境，遍界花開白玉蓮。</td>
<td>我念彌陀不問禪，也無東土與西天； 微塵剎海唯心境，遍界花開白玉蓮。</td>
<td>不禪:&lt;&gt;=不問禪  梵:&lt;&gt;=唯</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>進想西方地觀成，金街金道坦然平； 黃金世界黃金布，步步金光耀眼明。</td>
<td>進想西方地現成，金街金道坦然平； 黃金世界黃金布，步步金光耀眼明。</td>
<td>觀:&lt;&gt;=現</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>靜思浮世光陰短，老覺從前用處飛； 覺省家鄉歸去好，自憐捨此復何知。</td>
<td>靜思浮世光陰短，老覺從前用處飛； 覺省家鄉歸去好，自憐捨此復何之。</td>
<td>飛:&lt;&gt;=非  知:&lt;&gt;=之</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>白玉蓮開綠荷葉，一花有一活彌陀； 西方不比人間世，到者方知快樂多。</td>
<td>白玉蓮開綠荷葉，一花有一活彌陀； 西方不比人間世，到者方知快樂多。</td>
<td>Not immediately following preceding quotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>極樂家鄉甚妙哉，無諸憂苦樂常諧； 因談果海圓音徹，時禮金容歸去來。</td>
<td>No parallels</td>
<td>This couplet appears two other times, one of them correctly sourced as a quotation from the <em>Graded Ritual of the Diamond</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>西方極樂景幽深，寶網光騰百萬尋； 菩薩為鄰談妙旨，聲聞作伴演圓音。</td>
<td>No parallels</td>
<td>No source given, but identifiable as a quotation from the <em>Graded Ritual of the Diamond</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table compares the entire passage that is marked as a quotation from the “Collected Sayings of Youtan” with materials from the “Collection of the Udambara Flower.” The passage consists of nine couplets of four seven-character lines. Most

43 *Zhengxin juan*, 14: 63b (320) with source indication; *Taishan juan*, 21: 74a (384) without source indication. The quotation comes from *Xiaoshi jingang keyi huiyao zhujie*, X24n0467_p0747a16-17.

44 *Xiaoshi jingang keyi huiyao zhujie*, X24n0467 p0750c06-7.
couplets can also be found in the “Collection of the Udambra Flower,” except for couplets 1, 8, and 9. Couplet 1 cannot be found in the Buddhist canon, in so far as it has been digitized; couplets 8 and 9 come from the Graded Ritual of the Diamond. They are not identified as such in this passage, but presented as deriving from the “Collected Sayings of Youtan.” Couplet 8 is also quoted elsewhere, once explicitly with its proper provenance. Whereas both couplets come from the same source, they did not form one segment in the original. Similarly, the materials from the “Collection of the Udambra Flower” are quoted quite haphazardly and out of sequence (2-5-6-7-4-2-3, with large unquoted chunks of text in between), as compared with their source, although usually without significant mistakes. Many couplets are taken from much longer poems, without adequately reflecting their larger argument.

That the author is quoting from this particular source is in itself very interesting. This is not just another kind of Pure Land resource, but was originally composed for the White Lotus movement of the Southern Song and Yuan periods. It is full of references to the benefits of reciting the name of Amitābha and a vegetarian lifestyle. The collection contains two lengthy poems devoted to Lake Dian, the place where Mao Ziyuan had once preached and which was still remembered in the late Yuan dynasty.45 Numerous poems speak of the Lotus or the White Lotus Tradition (or specialists [jia家], teachers [shi师], or other White Lotus phenomena).46 When Patriarch Luo was probably active, around the turn of the 16th century, there was not yet the anti-White Lotus stereotype that would do so much to distort the official (and subsequently our own academic) view on new religious groups.47

As becomes very clear from the following poem, Luo Qing actually advocated an integrated approach of Pure Land and Chan practice:

One line of Amitābha serves as a “formulation” (huatou话头).
A “single statement” (danti单提) does not need to be obtained elsewhere.
When one’s “effort” (gongfu工夫) penetrates and one’s “ball of doubt” (yituan疑团) is destroyed,
Even an Iron Buddha will sweat over his entire body.48

Basically, this poem equates the recitation of the phrase “Praised be Amitābha” (namo Amitābha) with the Chan practice of “public cases” (gongan公案), in which one meditated on a single phrase or “formulation.” The only difference is that this phrase is deemed to be much simpler and much more effective. Against this background, the patriarch’s use of a collection of Pure Land poems is much less surprising than one might think at first.

48 Yuandai bailianjiao ziliao huibian (1989) 221.
Different explanations can be imagined for the haphazard way in which Patriarch Luo quotes from the “Collected Sayings of Youtan” or the “Collection of the Udambara Flower.” One way is to follow the judgment of officials and other observers from traditional China, and to dismiss his writings as rambling or vulgar. This is not a very interesting perspective, especially when we consider that the Analects ascribed traditionally to Confucius and his pupils are not the epitome of clarity and structure either. Moreover, this begs the question why he quotes in this particular way. First of all, I think that this example again underlines the likelihood that the author is quoting from memory, rather than from a written (or printed) text that is lying next to him on his desk. He might have learned these materials by heart during his early Buddhist phase of reciting the name of Amitābha, and they were not forgotten despite his later practice that was directed more towards Chan forms of enlightenment. They were then pushed out by and partly amalgamated with the next text that he learned, the Graded Rituals of the Diamond. This might also be the reason that he has included two couplets from the latter text in his purported quotations from the “Collected Sayings of Youtan” as well.

Concluding Observations
Although much more careful analysis is still required, some preliminary conclusions may be drawn that can hopefully serve as a basis for further discussion. Typically, quotations may or may not be marked as such and the same quotation may even be ascribed to different sources. Sometimes the author expands a quotation with some lines of his own. Throughout his work he also reuses his own writings (and/or sermons) in a variety of ways. His quoting behavior suggests that he is accessing his materials by heart from memory and not from sight. Most of the quoted material and the elaborations belonging to them return literally or in slightly revised form several times, suggesting that they belonged together as larger memorized chunks and came out together during the process of composing the public lectures or sermons on which the Five Books in Six Volumes are undoubtedly based.49 While no doubt reading (whether directly from books or indirectly through hearing people give lectures based on texts) and writing (whether personally or with the aid of more literate assistants) were very important to the patriarch, as is evinced by numerous references in the body of his text and his rejection of the Precious Scrolls discussed above, he was still living in a predominantly oral environment. He was not composing a book for reading in which one would focus on structure, excise repetitions, and correct mistakes, but writing down materials intended for listening and learning by heart.

In fact, we may legitimately wonder whether Patriarch Luo really wrote these books in the way that we commonly think of as authorship. In other words, it is not at all clear that he wrote the Five Books in Six Volumes sitting down at

49 This summary is primarily based on a detailed analysis of quotations in the rest of this first book of the Five Books in Six Volumes. A full discussion would require more space than is available here.
Patriarch Luo as a Writer and Reader: Speculating about the Creative Process behind the Five Books in Six Volumes

a table somewhere, dipping his brush in freshly made ink, and recording his thoughts in colloquial Chinese and mixing quotations in among them. An alternative interpretation would actually explain much better why we find this strange combination of colloquial Chinese for his own experiences and ideas and quotations that mostly come from Buddhist texts in classical Chinese. I already proposed interpreting his “reading” activities as a form of learning texts by heart, since this would explain the often haphazard way in which he uses his materials in the Five Books in Six Volumes. The “writing” process probably also took place in his head first and someone else would have written it down for him. Given the large number of inconsistencies, repetitions, and mistakes of interpretation (such as the above mishandling of the poem of the bright pearl), it makes much more sense to assume that the registration of his compositions was done by someone else and that he never reread what he created. In pre-modern China, anybody who could write Chinese characters would be able to write classical Chinese and at the time that Patriarch Luo was active there certainly was no tradition of writing down spoken Chinese. This was not a true Precious Scroll and we already saw that the patriarch actually disapproved of that particular genre anyhow. Even stranger is the combination of written colloquial with quotations, which really mixes two different languages. Instead, I would suggest that Patriarch Luo could read, maybe even literally in the sense of reading with his own eyes without external assistance, or equally likely read with the help of others and then memorize these texts. He would access these texts from memory, but in combination with his own insights. He did not write, but he talked and he could reproduce what he had memorized. As I already noted above, at the beginning of his fifth book the author tells his audience that they should “quickly listen to my Five Books of Scriptures” and in his postscript to the same book he “opens up the five scrolls of scriptures.” He does not describe himself as writing, but as talking.

It has been argued, convincingly in my eyes, that the use of vernacular Chinese in Chan enlightenment narratives was a literary conceit that was increased in successive rewritings of these narratives in order to strengthen the claim that these were real live conversations. In reality, so the argument goes, these were constructed narratives and not real live events at all. This raises the final question for this investigation, to what extent was the author of the Five Books in Six Volumes really talking, or was he merely represented (or represented himself) as talking? It is clear that the author saw himself as standing in a Chan-tradition, even though he did not make use of the lineage model. That he did not have a properly recognized lineage (or any lineage at all), does not invalidate his claim to be enlightened autonomously in the Chan tradition. The difference between the reworked Chan

---

50 This explanation needs to be elaborated in more detail than is possible in the present framework and must therefore remain a preliminary hypothesis. I was inspired by Paul J. Griffiths, Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), especially 56-57.

enlightenment narratives and the *Five Books in Six Volumes* is that the first group consists of many short narratives without larger plot, which have been heavily edited, whereas the *Five Books in Six Volumes* have not been carefully edited at all. As a result they are repetitive in a way that suggests the redundancy of oral lectures, but also convince more as the personal account of an enlightenment experience. The use of colloquial Chinese by Chan-narratives and by the *Five Books in Six Volumes* may have in common the attempt to enact the spoken nature of sermons by the historical Buddha, but in the second case I think that we are much closer to an actual oral context than in the case of the Chan narratives.

**REFERENCES**


Juelian 覺連. *Xiaoshi jingang keyi huiyao zhujie 銷釋金剛科儀會要註解* [Annotations and comments on the essence of the explanations of the graded rituals of the Diamond (Sutra)] (1551 preface) (ZZK-edition)


Patriarch Luo as a Writer and Reader: Speculating about the Creative Process behind the Five Books in Six Volumes

taiwanbuddhism/tb/md/md06-03.htm.
Wang, Jianchuan 王見川 and Lin, Wanchuan 林萬傳, eds. 1999. Ming Qing minjian zongjiaosheng jingjuan wenxian 明清民間宗教經卷文獻 [Popular religious scriptures and texts of the Ming and Qing]. Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubangongsi.
Zhongguo zongjiaosheng lishi wenxian jicheng: Minjian baojuan 中國宗教歷史文獻集成: 民間