

Confucian Morality and Rebirth into the Pure Land of Amitābha: The Compartmentalist Thoughts of Ven. Jingkong

Stefan Kukowka*

Abstract

Amitābha (nianfo 念佛), but also a this-worldly focused moral Confucian cultivation. Based on an analysis of Ven. Jingkong's online dharma talks and publications, the present article identifies the Confucian notion of filial piety (xiao 孝), and one specific paragraph of the 'Sūtra of the Meditation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life' (*foshuo guan wuliangshou jing* 《佛說觀無量壽經》) as the starting point of his advocated soteriology. This Sūtra provides the Buddhist textual foundation of xiao, thus erecting a bridge to connect the Sūtra with Confucian and Daoist texts, such as 'The Classic of Filial Piety' (*xiaojing* 《孝經》), 'Rules for Disciples' (*dizigui* 《弟子規》), and 'Treatise of the Most High on Action and Retribution' (*taishang ganyingpian* 《太上感應篇》),

* **Stefan Kukowka**, International dual degree (cotutelle) Ph.D. student at National Chengchi University and Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO).

ipso facto explaining the incorporation as well as the ‘Buddhicising’ of the former texts. In this sense he emphasises that the improvement of one’s fate – and therefore the chance to be reborn into the Pure Land – is not the result of acts of worship towards Buddha or the potential effectiveness of rituals or even the renunciation of all worldly distractions, thus ‘going forth’ (chujia 出家) and entering a monastic environment, it is rather based on ‘correct’ moral conduct in daily life, through acts of filial piety, compassion, honesty, and humility – which are de facto Confucian values. This train of thought falls into the category of ‘compartmentalism’ because Jingkong argues that Buddhism and Confucianism address different domains of reality and truth, which complement each other and address specific issues without interference. Thus, they constitute a parallel space within their shared universe of discourse: Buddhism gives reason to what holds the world together at its core and being focused on extramundane salvation, whereas (selected parts of) Confucianism explain how to conduct oneself in the world. These selected parts are then re-interpreted through a Buddhist lens and integrated. Thus, not triggering any conflicts regarding their soteriology, that needs to be reconciled. The article, therefore, investigates the questions: how does a Pure Land advocate rationalises the incorporation of other tradition’s morality concepts through certain narratives, what terminology can be applied to describe this phenomenon, and finally, why does Jingkong emphasise this-worldly cultivation based mostly on the ‘*Rules for Disciples*’?

Keywords: Ven. Jingkong, Pure Land Buddhism, Confucian Morality, Taiwanese Buddhism, Syncretism

1 Introduction

For the concept of salvation within a given system of beliefs, it is essential there be alternatives for one's afterlife dependent on one's choices and manner of life, that there be either transcendental entities that 'saves' humanity from eternal damnation, or exist means to improve one's predetermined fate through conscientiously performed meritorious deeds. That is because, by its very nature, salvation must provide answers to the mundane plight of humanity, offering forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation to resolve the contingency-problematic of life.

In Buddhism, it is the liberation from karmic bondage, that originates from blindness towards our true nature as passion-ridden beings filled with desire, anger, and ignorance (sandu 三毒), which can be attained through meditation, accumulation of wisdom, asceticism, rituals, and good deeds. There are two fundamental approaches to the salvific path in Buddhism: the path of wisdom represented by Chan meditation and the path of compassion and devotion within the Pure Land tradition. As an advocate of Pure Land, Ven. Jingkong 淨空 (1927—) lays stress on the invocation of the name of Amitābha,¹ karmic redemption² and Confucian

¹ In one of his numerous dharma talks, that are broadcasted on YouTube, he explains that in order to be reborn the Pure Land one needs 'to fix the heart-mind on one Buddha' (xixin yifo 繫心一佛) and 'to keep the repetition of the Buddha's name in one's heart-mind' (xinlitou changchang guanian fo 心裡頭常常掛念佛). Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, The Biggest Taboo of those who Invoke Amitabha's Name (nianforen zuidade jinji 念佛人最大的忌諱), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLnQVZCCzsg> (accessed November 10, 2017). Rošker, Jana, Epistemology in Chinese Philosophy, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/chinese-epistemology/>, (accessed November 10, 2017).

² See Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, Cause and Effect: The Inevitable Way of Karma (yinguo baoying sihao bushuang 因果報應絲毫不爽), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6z_VqtkU, (accessed November 10, 2017).

morality³ as a means of salvation. In particular, he emphasises Confucian moral cultivation, as this-worldly actions serve as the foundation of the salvific path and transformation of one's fate. In this sense he emphasizes that the improvement of one's fate – and therefore the chance to be reborn into the Pure Land – is not the result of appeasing acts toward Buddha or the potential effectiveness of rituals or monastic life, it is rather based upon moral conduct in daily life, through acts of 'filial piety' (xiao 孝)⁴, compassion, honesty and humility – which are de facto Confucian values.⁵ Therefore he not only expounds Buddhist sūtras including 'The Five Sūtras and One Treatise on Pure Land' (jingtu wujing yilun 淨土五經一論)⁶ and 'The

³ There are quite a few dharma talks of him praising the compatibility of Confucianism and Buddhism on YouTube, i.e. just to name two: Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, Confucian Culture and the Construction of a Harmonious Society (rujia wenhua yu hexie shehuijianshe 儒家文化與和諧社會建設), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCUapN_Ietw, (accessed November 08, 2017); and Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, Buddha, Confucius, Mencius, Confucians of the Past Generations engaging in education for their lifetime (fotuo, kongzi, mengzi, lidai rujia de, yisheng congshi jiaoxuede 佛陀、孔子、孟子、歷代儒家的，一生從事於教學的), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VO_OM07lm0, (accessed November 08, 2017).

⁴ Rosemont and Ames' translate xiao as 'family reverence' instead of 'filial piety', since 'piety' implies a sense of sanctimoniousness, that according to the authors is absent in the Chinese term, but inherent in the context of Abrahamic traditions. Additionally, xiao is linked to people in living in this world, not to a transcendent world. See, Henry Rosemont and Roger T. Ames, *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), p.1. Xiao is undoubtedly difficult to translate, since it reflects a variety of emotions in social and family relationships, such as respect, love, loyalty, etc. Whether 'reverence' or 'piety' adequately addresses these emotions will not be discussed in context of this article. One may refer to Alan K. L. Chan's book review: Alan K. L. Chan, Review of "The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing," by Henry Rosemont and Roger T. Ames, *Journal of Chinese Studies*, No. 50 (2010), pp.335-341.

⁵ Yanfei Sun, "Jingkong: From Universal Saint to Sectarian Saint," in *Making Saints in Modern China*, ed. David Ownby, Vincent Goossaert and Ji Zhe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.400. Shi Jingkong 釋淨空. Piety to one's parents, respect to one's older brother, loyalty to one's monarch, faith to one's male friends; Sense of propriety, justice, integrity and honour (xiaotizhongxin xinyilianchi 孝悌忠信禮義廉恥), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvSe1cL9Xbg>, (accessed November 08, 2017).

⁶ Including: 'The Shorter Sukhāvāṭīyā Sūtra' (*foshuo amituojing* 《佛說阿彌陀經》), 'The Sūtra on Contemplation of Amitābha' (*foshuo guanwuliangshou jing* 《佛說觀無量壽經》), 'The Longer Sukhāvāṭīyā Sūtra' (*wuliangshoujing* 《無量壽經》), 'The Avatamsaka Sūtra' (*huayanjing* 《華嚴經》), 'The Śūraṅgama Sūtra' (*dafodingshou lengyanjing* 《大佛頂首楞嚴經》) and the 'Treatise on Rebirth' (*wangshenglun* 《往生論》).

Discourse On The Ten Wholesome Ways Of Action’ (*shishanye daojing* 《十善業道經》), in the following abbreviated to *shishan*), but also utilizes texts based on Confucian morality ideas, for instance ‘*Rules of Disciples*’ (*dizigui* 《弟子規》) and ‘*Three Character Classic*’ (*sanzijing* 《三字經》), Daoist scriptures and morality books (*shanshu* 善書) such as ‘*Treatise on the Response of the Dao*’ (*taishang ganyingpian* 《太上感應篇》), in the following abbreviated to *ganyingpian*), ‘*Lord Superior Wenchang Tract of Hidden Good Deeds*’ (*wenchang dijun yinzhiwen* 《文昌帝君陰騭文》), and ‘*The Four Instructions of Liaofan*’ (*liaofan sixun* 《了凡四訓》), all of which mirror these motifs. Thus, from this textual choice, it can be seen that he does not confine himself to ‘pure’ Buddhist sūtras, but also turns to texts from other traditions that fit into his edifice of ideas.

The article, therefore, seeks to elucidate answers to the following questions: What is the reason for the incorporation of other tradition’s morality concepts into the belief system of a Pure Land advocate and can the term ‘syncretism’ be applied to describe this phenomenon? Through what narratives and canonical scriptures is this incorporation legitimised and ultimately ‘buddhicised’? Why does he emphasise this-worldly cultivation based mostly on the *dizigui* in conjunction with the ‘*Sūtra of the Meditation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*’ (*foshuo guan wuliangshou jing* 《佛說觀無量壽經》), in the following abbreviated to *Contemplation Sutra*)?

The first part of this paper will outline a theoretical framework, which constitutes the basis from which the questions above will be tackled. The second part will introduce the reader into Jingkongs soteriological concept, focusing on the two main pillars of his thoughts: *dizigui* and *Contemplation Sutra*. The last will combine the findings of the previous two parts and draw conclusions.

Most of the information to answer these questions will be taken from Ven. Jingkong's online dharma talks and books, as well as scholarly publications. However, the number of literature on the topic is rather limited, as there are only a few scholarly articles that discuss Ven. Jingkong's thoughts on moral education and salvation, which also tend to be quite short. By using literature and empirical-based research methods, it is possible to shed light on the meaning of the information conveyed by the communicator (Jingkong) and on the recipient's (lay people) interpretation. Therefore, the present study aims to contribute to a better understanding of Jingkong's thought in terms of his advocated path towards rebirth into the Pure Land.

2 A Theoretical Discussion of Syncretism

By analysing the origin of the word 'syncretism,' how its meaning changed throughout history and the scholarly debate surrounding its definition and usage especially in the East Asian religious context, this chapter sets the theoretical framework for the following discussion of Jingkong's Buddhist soteriology paired with a notion of Confucian morality concepts.

2.1 The Etymology and Terminology of Syncretism

The term 'syncretism' can be traced back to Plutarch (46—120) who introduced it in his work 'De fraterno amore' as a part of the 'Moralia,' in which he wrote about the people of Crete, who have frequently been drawn into war against each other, but reconciled themselves in times of conflict when facing an approaching enemy. To stay

together in a unified manner was called ‘sunkrētismos,’ meaning ‘to hold together in the Cretan way.’⁷ But that does not explain where the modern definition of ‘merging,’ ‘blending,’ ‘amalgamation’⁸ comes from. According to Kurt Rudolph, when the Helmsted Theologian Georg Calixt (1585—1656) was caught up in the internecine rivalry of orthodox polemics, his attempts for unity and peace were branded as ‘syncretism,’ consequently, both Lutherans and Catholics designated it the ‘syncretic conflict.’ Additionally, the Jesuit Veit Erbermann (1597—1675) concluded that his attempts to achieving unity by appealing to the Apostol’s Creed only resulted in superficial unity, the differences would still exist internally. This incident became the first time when ‘syncretism’ was used to refer to ‘mixing’ and eventually was understood in the pejorative context, as a fake and incompatible unity.⁹ These two historical examples merge in the modern conceptualisation of ‘syncretism.’ On the one hand, a political usage, where it had a positive connotation of unity against a common foe. On the other hand, a theological usage, that rendered the term into an invective with the notion of blending incompatible elements into something like a ‘hybrid religion.’

It is the last notion that continues to overshadow the first meaning and persists to determine the scholarly usage, as a category within the realm of metalanguage. Ulrich Berner argues for instance, that since ‘syncretism’ has been used by Christian theologians

⁷ Kurt Rudolph, “Syncretism: From Theological Invective to a Concept in the Study of Religion,” in *Syncretism in Religion*, edited by Anita M. Leopold and Jeppe S. Jensen (Sheffield: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2004), pp.68-69.

⁸ These synonyms were taken from *Oxford Online Dictionary*, s.v. “syncretism”, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/syncretism>, (accessed January 2, 2018).

⁹ See Kurt Rudolph, “Syncretism: From Theological Invective to a Concept in the Study of Religion,” Kurt Rudolph, “Syncretism: From Theological Invective to a Concept in the Study of Religion,” in *Syncretism in Religion*, p.70.

as a (negative) normative category, it is difficult to deconstruct this notion and make use of it as a purely descriptive category because of hidden bias, assumptions, or ideologies. Furthermore, another problem results from the interplay between metalanguage and object-language. Because of its historical concatenations, it is not exclusively used as a research terminology, but also as a derogatory term within religions to distinguish themselves from certain tendencies in their ranks or from other belief systems,¹⁰ thus denying any value to the other belief system.¹¹ Additionally, Baird points to the fact that syncretic tendencies can only be viewed from an etic perspective and do not exist in the emic perspective since internal believers' attitude excludes disunity in its universe of discourse. The usage would imply internal inconsistency, that does not exist and 'syncretism' as a category would be obsolete.¹² Simply because this conception cannot be comprehended on the emic level, it does not mean the problem has been solved or explained, and, does not give cause to discard 'syncretism' as a category, it only indicates that the definition of 'syncretism' is not clear enough.

Facing these difficulties in its applicability, consequently, it stands to reason to discard 'syncretism' as an analytical category, but it seems too fundamental, for its usage depends on the specific definition of the researcher, the cultural background, and the religious group in question. In the following subchapter, we shall, therefore, turn to the

¹⁰ E.g., Jingkong claims that, if we depart from the way of the five precepts and ten honourable deeds (wujie shishan 五戒十善) viewing it as the fundamental dharma (genbenfa 根本法), we will abandon ourselves to evil ways (xiedao 邪道). See, Shi Jingkong 釋淨空. *Treatise on the Response of the Dao (taishang ganyingpian 《太上感應篇》【1】1-12)*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWZEEscw3VM>, (accessed December 31, 2017).

¹¹ Ulrich Berner, "The Notion of Syncretism in Historical and/or Empirical Research," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 27, no. 3 (2001), pp.499-501.

¹² Robert D. Baird, "Syncretism and the History of Religions," in *Syncretism in Religion*, edited by Anita M. Leopold and Jeppe S. Jensen, p.57.

question of what can be considered syncretism and what not.

2.2 Syncretism – A Question of Definition

As has been shown in the two examples above, using syncretism as an analytical category requires the careful attention of its historical dimension and its dualistic nature in terms of emic and etic perspectives. Consequently, we need to define the subtle nuances of interreligious exchange to get an unambiguous definition that fits the research conducted for this paper.

Firstly, a syncretic¹³ phenomenon – in history or current affairs – cannot be a mere mixture, as it implies a biased theological usage, which juxtaposes ‘purity’ and ‘impurity.’ Therefore, to avoid this juxtaposition, it must be understood dynamically without a distinctive end.¹⁴ Secondly, it cannot be conceptualised as ‘synthesis’, because truth claims are not ascribed to the separate traditions, but rather to the result itself. It is the new unity of the former distinct doctrines or practises that would be given truth-value, not the distinct parts. At this level, a religious system has already transcended the syncretic phase.¹⁵ Consequently, it is the nuanced greyscale in between that needs further attention. Michael Pye concluded syncretism is ‘the temporary ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern.’¹⁶ This

¹³ It should be noted, that according to the Oxford Dictionary, both ‘syncretic’ and ‘syncretistic’ are acceptable adjectives of ‘syncretism.’

¹⁴ Michael Pye, “Syncretism versus Synthesis1,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 6, no. 1 (1994), p.220.

¹⁵ Rodney L Taylor, “Proposition and Practice: The Dilemma of Neo-Confucian Syncretism,” *Philosophy East and West* 32, no. 2 (1982), pp.193-194.

¹⁶ Micheal Pye, “Syncretism versus Synthesis1,” p.220.

definition describes clearly the above-mentioned greyscale; however, it fails to subdivide the nuanced forms of interaction, covers them indiscriminately, and eventually, everything can become an ‘ambiguous coexistence.’ Hence, in what follows, I will present a subtler distinction of interreligious exchange and finally working categories, based on Timothy Brook’s elaborations.¹⁷

Brook raises the questions what syncretism constitutes, whether the concept of syncretism applies to the Chinese religious context, and whether ‘syncretism’ can be used to describe the discourse called ‘The Unity of the Three Teachings’ (sanjiao heyi 三教合一) that started to appear in the Yuan Dynasty (1279—1368), entered intellectual discourse of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472—1529), Xue Dachun (1586—1660), Li Zhi 李贄 (1527—1602), Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546—1623), and Lin Zhao’en 林兆恩 (1517—1598) during the Ming Dynasty, and circulated through ‘precious scroll’ (baojuan 寶卷) in Ming-Qing popular texts. He starts his theoretical investigation with Judith Berling’s definition of syncretism: ‘the borrowing, affirmation, or integration of concepts, symbols, or practices of one religious tradition into another by a process of selection and reconciliation’,¹⁸ and highlights the last part – ‘reconciliation,’ because reconciliation is a crucial part when distinct worldviews are combined in terms of the re-formulation of the doctrine, the re-structuring of rites, and/ or the subjective understanding of believers. This process mitigates the dissonance between different religious systems, however, as claimed by Brook, because of logical differences,¹⁹ these dissonances might not

¹⁷ Timothy Brook, “Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China,” *Journal of Chinese Religion* 21, no. 1 (1993), pp.13-15.

¹⁸ Judith Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p.9.

¹⁹ Brook does not go into detail at this point, but I understand it as referring to different soteriological theories, because the question of how salvation can be achieved is the crux of every religion.

disappear and therefore instead of syncretism (definition above) other forms of religious interchange appear (the above-mentioned greyscale), such as ecumenism, inclusivism, compartmentalism, and eclecticism. We shall, therefore, have a closer examination of these four categories.

1.In ecumenism, truth is considered universal. Different religious worldviews are continual as separate traditions not because of different ‘truths’, but because of external elements, for instance, rituals or their universe of discourse. In the eye of the believer, they share the same pursuit of truth, and can, therefore, tolerate both views without combining it.

2.Inclusivism can be defined as the attempt to explain the belief system of a religious tradition regarding another religious tradition. That means, if one religion is brought into the context of another, the former will be viewed as inferior, incoherent or as a flawed representation of the truth.

3.If the exchange is described as compartmentalism, the different religious system will tend to acknowledge that distinct teachings explain distinct domains and aspects of reality as well as truth. They complement each other and address specific issues without interference. Thus, constitute a parallel space within their shared universe of discourse. If their explanations are insufficient, they will recourse to the other tradition, and if they cover the same area of interest, it will strengthen and consolidate the internal structure.

4.Eclecticism is defined as the utilization of concepts or methods that the tradition considers practical for their purposes without actual incorporation of two or more systems. It is the reaction to religious pluralism, in which people draw to different religious benefits meeting their demands to alleviate vulnerabilities of daily life.

These four categories constitute and provide an analytical framework that is more nuanced than Berling's definition of syncretism. Nevertheless, Berling's definition shall be kept in mind in the following section. The four categories and the definition will be tested in terms of their applicability in the conclusion of this paper.

While Brooks starts his historical investigation of sanjiao heyi in the Yuan Dynasty, since variations of this formula cannot be found prior to the Yuan Dynasty (1279—1368), Joachim Gentz dates the beginning of the sanjiao heyi discourse back to the 4th century when monks such as Sun Chuo 孫綽 (310—397) or Huiyuan 慧遠 (334—416) sought to mediate the differences between the three teachings for which they used certain aspects of the other's tradition.²⁰ As we shall see in the next section, monastics indeed tried to explain and defend their standpoint in relation to Confucianism and Daoism, especially on the field of family ethics. However, it was not a discourse on sanjiao heyi, but Buddhists trying to adapt their doctrines and lifestyle to a new environment. This is not tantamount to unifying or harmonising the three teachings into one, but to explain the apparent differences to a new readership and potential believers. Actively choosing concepts of the other's tradition did not start until the Neo-Confucians – among them Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017—1073) and Zhuxi 朱熹 (1130—1200) – incorporated a cosmology, epistemology, and ontology that borrowed a Buddhist understanding of the world, as Brook pointed out.²¹ Until the Tang, the three constituted “a trinity of distinct discourses that might be lumped together for convenient reference but were not interchangeable or reducible to

²⁰ Joachim Gentz, “Religious Diversity in Three Teachings Discourse,” in *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*, edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2013), pp.123-124.

²¹ Timothy Brooks, “Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China,” p.17.

any sort of unity.”²²

With the emergence of the Mongolian Yuan Dynasty and the subsequent struggle for court patronage, since the Mongolian emperors considered the three teachings as foreign in nature, an environment of relative openness and a need to explain the religious diversity gave rise to the first formulations of sanjiao heyi in writings of Liu Mi 劉謐, Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (ca. 1316—1402) and others where they were thought of different explanations of the same universal truth – a ecumenical point of view.²³ Wei Yueping indicates that during the Ming Dynasty, the stance of Confucians towards Buddhism and Daoism has changed. Before the Ming, Confucian scholars such as Hanyu 韓愈 (768—824), Zhuxi, and Zhang Zai 張載 (1020—1077) accused Buddhism of being an empty illusory teaching that violates the heavenly way (tiandao 天道). While during the Yuan and Ming, however, various Confucians started to highlight the similarities between the three teachings. Wang Yangming’s concepts of ‘the three teachings return to the same source’ (sanjiao tongyuan 三教同源) and ‘three rooms in one hall’ (tingtang sanjian 廳堂三間) is an example for an inclusive openness²⁴ or – in Brooks’s terms – a compartmentalist position. Later in his life, though, Wang Yangming conceptualised the relationship between the three in an inclusive vision attributing Neo-Confucianism the superior position with Buddhism and Daoism supporting it.²⁵ Even the ‘most radical Chinese syncretist’ as Berling describes

²² Timothy Brooks, “Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China,” p.16

²³ Timothy Brooks, “Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China,” pp.17-18.

²⁴ Yueping Wei 魏月萍, *Unity of the Way of Monarch and Teacher: Discourses of Confucians on the Unity of the Three Teachings during the Late Ming (junshi daohe: wanming ruzhe de sanjiao heyi lunshu 《君師道合：晚明儒者的三教合一論述》)*. (臺北：聯經出版事業股份有限公司，2016), pp.61-62.

²⁵ Timothy Brooks, “Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China,” p.19.

Lin Zhao'en, who thought of the three teachings as being interchangeable and combined them into a nine-levelled cultivation system, committed himself to a 'fundamentally Confucian goal and world view'²⁶ not to a syncretic world view where the three teachings are reconciled and equally regarded. About the purpose of utilising non-Confucian concepts, Lin Zhao'en wrote he wanted to 'Confucianize the Taoists and Buddhists, and broaden Confucianism to its fullest extent' and 'cause the Taoists and Buddhists to return to Confucianism.'²⁷ As we shall see in the following discussion, Jingkong's view on the three teaching does to a certain extent resemble Wang Yangming's 'three rooms in one hall' concept which allows open interaction between the residents.

3 The successive Path to Salvation

This chapter will delve into Ven. Jingkong's thoughts on how a Buddhist practitioner – both laymen and monastics – can achieve rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land through – what I call – 'the threefold grades of meritorious acts to rebirth' and why 'filial piety' is the central premise to realise this goal. Thus, this chapter will touch upon the questions pointed out in the introduction.

²⁶ Judith Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*, p.238 and p.143.

²⁷ Lin Zhao'en, 'The Great Purpose of the Unity of the Three Teachings' (*sanjiao heyi dazhi* 三教合一主旨), in *Systematic discussions on the correct principles of the Three Teachings* (*sanjiao zhengzong tonglun* 《林子三教正宗統論》) (1597), quoted in Timothy Brooks, "Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China," p.23.

3.1 The Threefold Grades of Meritorious Acts to Rebirth

Viewing Jingkong's countless dharma talks that are broadcasted either on YouTube or websites of his Pure Land Learning Societies (jingzong xuehui 淨宗學會) scattered around the globe and reading through his lecture notes, it becomes apparent that the scriptural basis of his propagated path towards rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha is the apocryphal²⁸ '*Sutra of the Meditation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*' (*foshuo guanwuliang shoufojing* 《佛說觀無量壽佛經》). In his video dharma talks, such as 'Why is it necessary to learn the '*Rules for Disciples*' and the '*Treatise on the Response of the Dao*' for studying Buddhism?'²⁹ and books, such as '*Lecture Notes on the Three Meritorious Acts to Purify Karma*' (*jingye sanfu jiangyi* 《淨業三福講記》),³⁰ '*Understanding Buddhist Education*' (*renshi fotuo jiaoyu* 《認識佛陀教育》),³¹ '*An Introduction to Pure Land*' (*jingtu rumen* 《淨土入門》),³² '*Essential Principles for Cultivation*' (*xiuxing yaodao* 《修行要道》)³³ and others, he frequently quotes particularly one paragraph from the *Contemplation Sutra*:

²⁸ For a detailed examination of the apocryphal nature of this sūtra, see: Kotatsu Fujita, "The Textual Origins of the Kuan Wu-liang-shou ching: A Canonical Scripture of Pure Land Buddhism," in *Buddhist Apocrypha*, edited by Buswell, Robert E. (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp.149-174

²⁹ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, Why one has to learn *dizigui* and *ganyingpian* for studying Buddhism (xuefo weishenme yao xue *dizigui*, weishenme yao xue *ganyingpian* 學佛為什麼要學《弟子規》, 為什麼要學《感應篇》?), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yianeHaPwZM>, (accessed February 20, 2020).

³⁰ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *Lecture Notes on the Three Meritorious Acts to Purify Karma* (*jingye sanfu jiangyi* 《淨業三福講記》). (臺北: 華藏淨宗學會, 2014).

³¹ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *Understanding Buddhist Education* (*renshi fotuo jiaoyu* 《認識佛陀教育》). (臺北: 華藏淨宗學會, 2014).

³² Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *An Introduction to Pure Land* (*jingtu rumen* 《淨土入門》). (香港: 香港佛陀教育協會, 2012).

³³ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *Essential Principles for Cultivation* (*xiuxing yaodao* 《修行要道》). (臺北: 社團法人中華華藏淨宗學會, 2019).

Whoever wishes to be born in that Land [Amitābha's Pure Land] should cultivate the three meritorious acts: first, being filial and caring for one's parents, being respectful and serving one's elders and teachers, compassionately refraining from killing, and cultivating the ten good deeds; second, taking the Three Refuges, keeping the various precepts of the fully ordained monk or nun, and refrain from breaking the rules of conduct; third, arouse the mind of intention to achieve awakening, believing deeply in the law of causality, chanting the Mahayana sūtras, and encouraging people to follow the teaching. These three acts are called to purify karma.³⁴

In '*A Summary of General Knowledge on Buddhism*' (*fojiao changshi gaishuo* 《佛教常識概說》), he argues that only the Pure Land Dharma Gate leads us out of samsara during the period of the final dharma (*mofa* 末法) in which we live, whereas Chan practise was suitable for the period of the semblance dharma (*xiangfa* 像法) and living in accordance with the precepts for the period of the true dharma (*zhengfa* 正法). Therefore, anything apart from the three meritorious acts (*sanfu* 三福) described in the *Contemplation Sutra*, which he identifies as the basic Pure Land practice, will lead us astray.³⁵

Firstly, he interprets this paragraph as moving from one sentence to the next and compares it to an eleven-storeyed building, in which the following sentences build upon

³⁴ 「生彼國者，當修三福：一者，孝養父母，奉事師長，慈心不殺，修十善業。二者，受持三歸，具足眾戒，不犯威儀。三者，發菩提心，深信因果，讀誦大乘，勸進行者。如此三事，名為淨業。」 (CBETA, T12, no. 365, p. 341, c8-13).

³⁵ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *A Summary of General Knowledge on Buddhism* (*fojiao changshi gaishuo* 《佛教常識概說》). (臺北：社團法人中華華藏淨宗學會，2019), p.61.

the previous sentences and therefore containing it, and secondly, he divides the three meritorious acts into three successive grades: The first meritorious act regards how to conduct oneself, representing the ‘worldly dharma’ (shijianfa 世間法) or the ‘vehicle of men and gods’ (rentiansheng 人天乘); the second meritorious act refers to entering the Buddhist order, receiving the precepts, and starting the endeavour towards awakening by means of the ‘lesser vehicle’ (xiaosheng 小乘) as foundational studies; and by practising the third meritorious act, one arrives at the ‘greater vehicle’ (dasheng 大乘) and becomes a Bodhisattva. This sequence cannot be interrupted, bypassed, or altered, for it is similar to climbing up a ladder.³⁶

In his book ‘*Understanding Buddhist Education*,’ Jingkong writes that before the Buddha elaborated on the methods of rebirth into Amitābha’s Pure Land, he taught the ‘three kinds of purifying karma’ (sanzhong jingye 三種淨業), which are ‘the direct cause of pure acts of the Buddhas of the three worlds’ (sanshi zhufu jingye zhengyin 三世諸佛淨業正因). These three meritorious acts are the essential practice leading us to realise how the Buddhas of past, present, and future received the rewards of the various stages of attainment (zhengguo 證果).³⁷ Therefore, Jingkong exhorts the reader to start daily practice with the first meritorious act centring on filial behaviour, since the dharma that lead the Buddhas of the ten directions in the three worlds to realise Buddhahood is built upon the ‘way of filial piety’ (xiaodao 孝道) and the ‘way of the teacher’ (shidao 師道). The dharma represents the ‘way of the teacher’ and can only be practised based on the ‘way of filial piety,’ for without it there would not be a dharma of the mundane and

³⁶ With firm, penetrating, vibrant voice he says: ‘If you want to become Buddha, you have to abide by this guiding principle. If you neglect it, you will absolutely not be successful.’ See footnote 22.

³⁷ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *renshi fotuo jiaoyu* 《認識佛陀教育》, pp.35-36.

transmundane world.³⁸

In the following section of the above-mentioned dharma talk, Jingkong asks rhetorically, why we are not able to act in accordance with the five cardinal relations (wulun 五倫), the five cardinal virtues (wuchang 五常), the four social bonds (siwei 四維), the eight virtues (bade 八德) and immediately answers: because we lost our ‘root’ (gen 根). In order to make his point and to contrast the abilities of pious Buddhist practitioners at different times, he refers to Ven. Yinguang 印光法師 (1862—1940), Ven. Dixian 諦閑法師 (1858—1932) and Ven. Xuyun 虛雲法師 (1840—1959). They were able to cultivate themselves and to hold the precepts (chijie 持戒). The next generation of respectable practitioners according to Jingkong are Li Bingnan 李炳南 (1891—1986) his lay teacher for more than ten years at the Taizhong Lotus Society³⁹, Xia Jiquan 夏繼泉 (changed his name to Lay Buddhist Xialian 夏蓮居居士 1884—1965) who wrote a compilation (*huijiben* 《會集本》) of the five existent translations of the ‘*Longer Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Sūtra*’ (*wuliangshoujing* 《無量壽經》) that Jingkong and his Pure Land Societies propagate, and the lay Buddhist Huang Nianzu 黃念祖 (1913—1992) who was a student of Xia Jiquan and who wrote a monumental work of over one thousand pages of explanatory annotations to Xia Jiquan’s compilation⁴⁰ that Jingkong and his Pure Land Societies as well include into their ‘Buddhist Education.’ This generation of lay masters was not able to realise this salvific path, to hold the precepts and to cultivate themselves

³⁸ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *fojiao changshi gaishuo* 《佛教常識概說》, p.53.

³⁹ Shi Xiuchan 解修禪, *Sixty Years of Taiwanese Pure Land Buddhism (taiwan jingtu liushi nian* 《臺灣淨土六十年》). (臺中：圓淨出版社，2003), pp.58-60 and pp.154-166.

⁴⁰ Huang Nianzu 黃念祖居士, *Explanation to the Mahayana Infinite Life Adornment Purity Impartiality and Awakening Sutra (foshuo dasheng wuliangzhuangyan qingjing pingdeng juejing jie* 《佛說大乘無量壽莊嚴清淨平等覺經解》). (臺北：佛陀教育基金會，2011).

(which explains why they all are lay Buddhists but not monks), however, they understood the importance of this path and encouraged ‘us’ to learn it. By referring to venerables and lay masters of the past, Jingkong draws upon his ‘intellectual lineage’ to imply a motif of decline, beginning after the days of Yinguang and becoming apparent in our time, thus it becomes even more important to go back to the ‘root’ of correct cultivation.

In his conclusion, the ‘root’ of cultivation is constituted by three ‘classics’⁴¹ which are equated with the first meritorious act: firstly, the Confucian primer *dizigui* (xiaoyang fumu, fengshi shizhang 孝養父母，奉事師長) teaching proper human relationships and family ethics, secondly the Daoist morality book *taishang ganying pian* (cixin busha 慈心不殺) explicating the law of cause and effect (karma) and thirdly the Buddhist sutra on ten virtues *shishan yedaojing* (xiushi shanye 修十善業). These three texts are the backbone of his advocated ‘rooted education’ (zhagen jiaoyu 扎根教育) which is complemented by an uninterrupted invocation of Amitābha. After three years of diligent studies, according to him, one certainly will realise rebirth into Amitābha’s Pure land, for one is now a ‘good son’ or ‘good woman’ (shannanzi shannüren 善男子善女人).⁴² The other two meritorious acts are interpreted as follows: the second meritorious act is equated with the ‘*Extended Annotations to the Outline of Precepts and Etiquette of śrāmaṇeras*’ (*shami lüyi yaolüe zengzhu* 《沙彌律儀要略增註》). The third meritorious act is equated with the ‘*Longer*

⁴¹ As Ji zhe points out, these three scriptures in fact were never considered classics in the past and the scholarly world would not ascribe the same status as Jingkong does. Ji Zhe, “Making a Virtue of Piety: Dizigui and the Discursive Practice of Jingkong’s Network,” In *The varieties of Confucian experience: Documenting a Grassroots Revival of Tradition*, edited by Sébastien Billioud, Religion in Chinese Societies volume 14. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018), p.68.

⁴² Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, Rooted education of all people starts with me (quanmin zhagen jiaoyu congwo zuoqi 全民紮根教育，從我做起), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpsuC6-o6VU>, (accessed February 18, 2020).

Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra’ and its explanatory annotations written by Huang Nianzu, the ‘Annotations of the Great Pure Land Sūtra with Simple Explanations’ (*jingtu dajing kezhu qianshi* 《淨土大經科註淺釋》).⁴³ Each one of these eleven sentences is equated with a specific scripture that all together form a progressive path towards awakening. For Jingkong, propagating a combination of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist scriptures into a curriculum titled ‘Rooted Education’ – or simply ‘Buddhist Education’ as the umbrella term – based on the sages of the past becomes the counter mechanism to deal with a perception of moral decline and a chaotic society.⁴⁴

The underlying narrative of his speeches is obvious: the world is deteriorating and we are not able to practise the dharma in its original way – we lost the connection, respectively our ‘root.’ These three texts are beneficial in explaining the meaning behind this paragraph written in classical Chinese for a wider audience, and textual familiarity lowers the bar to receive access to Buddhist sūtras in a Confucian as well as a Daoist disguise – or as Jingkong would put it ‘Traditional Chinese Culture.’ What does it tell us from a soteriological perspective? If the essential and ultimate aim of Mahayana Buddhism is defined as to extricate oneself from the cycle of rebirth by means of taking refuge to the Three Precious Ones together with realising the way of becoming a Buddha and the foundation to realise this lofty goal is the chain of conditions characterized as the first *dizigui*, secondly *ganyingpian*, thirdly *shishan*, then it means that the mere invocation (or mindfulness?) of the Buddha Name (*nianfo* 念佛) in context of Pure Land

⁴³ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *jingye sanfu jiangyi* 《淨業三福講記》.

⁴⁴ In ‘Wealth, Long Life, Health, Tranquillity,’ Jingkong gives a variety of examples: modern science, high divorce rate, no or wrong family education, education of cause and effect (karma) is not valued anymore, excessive greed, etc. Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *Wealth, Long Life, Health Tranquillity* (*fushou kangning* 《富壽康寧》). (臺北:社團法人中華華藏淨宗學會, 2019), p.124, 152, 162, 175, 185.

is not enough to first be reborn into a Pure Land and then to realise Buddhahood (even though there are examples of people calling out the name in the last moment before death and still receiving rebirth into the Pure Land)⁴⁵, there must be a this-worldly focused cultivation characterised by Confucian as well as Daoist virtues re-interpreted and utilised through a Buddhist lens that comes before everything else. Which brings us to the first character of the paragraph – xiao.

3.2 The Centripetality of xiao

When Buddhism was introduced to China during the times of the Han dynasty (206 BC—220 AD), it was confronted with challenges from Confucian scholars in terms of morality, since Buddhist focus their life predominantly on individual liberation through moral cultivation and express their devotion through celibacy, shaving their heads, and leaving their homes, whereas Confucians emphasise family and society as well as on physical integrity as found in the ‘*Classic of Filial Piety*’ (*xiaojing* 《孝經》).⁴⁶ In the following centuries, Buddhist monastics had to respond to a Confucian ethical ideology implemented and propagated by the Han government and following dynasties, it, therefore, underwent a process of acculturation in which debates were fought on family

⁴⁵ See, the part regarding the lowest three levels of the nine levels of rebirth (jiupin 九品), (CBETA, T12, no. 365, p. 345, c10-p. 346, a26).

⁴⁶ 子曰：身體髮膚，受之父母，不敢毀傷，孝之始也。 “Your physical person with its hair and skin are received from your parents. Vigilance in not allowing anything to do injury to your person is where family reverence begins.” Rosemont and Ames, *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*, p.105. For a more detailed analysis of the historical events, see Guang Xing, “The Teaching and Practice of Filial Piety in Buddhism,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 31, no. 2 (2016), pp.212-226.

ethics.

According to Wang Yueqing, the core ethic of Chinese Buddhism may be considered as mainly an ‘ethic of filial piety,’ for in the process of localisation of Buddhism into the Chinese context, Buddhism was faced with the challenge to adapt to an environment that emphasised proper human relationships, self-cultivation and pursuit of morality, loyalty to the sovereign, filial behaviour, as well as regulation of the family and government of the state for the goal of pacifying the lands under heaven.⁴⁷ Fang Litian further points to xiao and zhong as normative code of the Chinese patriarchal clan society as well as the traditional religious concept of heaven (tian 天) interwoven with xiao and zhong, and the concepts of ghosts and deities connected to the ancestor worship that together formed an ethical normative based on consanguinity and religious imperatives that maintained the centralised authoritarian rule since that Zhou Dynasty. The early translations made during the Eastern Han until the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317—420), reflect a keen awareness of the translators regarding the different cultural context in which they were translating the first sutras into Chinese. They adopted methods, such as choosing (xuan 選), deleting (shan 刪), abridging (jie 節), and adding (zeng 增) to attune the sutras to a new context.⁴⁸

All of these aspects were linked to an essential ethical category that pre- and described one’s behaviour in social relationships, which is filial piety. Particular because Buddhists (from a Confucian point of view) cut their hair for going forth, turn their back on the world to live in secluded mountains, and leave the family and parents, the issue

⁴⁷ Wang Yueqing 王月清, *Ethical Thought of Chinese Buddhism (zhongguo fojiao lunli sixiang 《中國佛教倫理思想》)*, (臺北：雲龍出版社，2001), pp.231-232.

⁴⁸ Fang Litian 方立天, *Chinese Buddhist Culture (zhongguo fojiao wenhua 《中國佛教文化》)*, (香港：三聯書店有限公司，2008), pp.244-248.

over how to be filial, who is more filial, and what the concept of filial piety encompasses, became the cause for numerous debates in speech and writing which eventually led to a converge of a ‘this-worldly focused’ ethical system and an ‘other-worldly focused’ ethical system – the sinicization of Buddhism.

In the process of being introduced to China, Wang Yueqing⁴⁹ and Guang Xing⁵⁰ both identified three practical and theoretical methods that Buddhists used to find a way to close the gap between both ethical systems: (1) Search for filial piety in sutras to prove that Buddhism as well emphasises filial piety; (2) exaggeration of filial piety in apocryphal sutras, popularisation of stories and parables that depict filial Buddhists via public lectures, painted illustrations (bianxiang 變相), and an annual celebration of the Yulanpen festival (yulanpenjie 盂蘭盆節); (3) elaboration on various theories to defend and disseminate Buddhism.

These translations showed that Buddhism has its own concept of xiao, either as expounded in the Pāli Nikāyas and Chinese Āgamas⁵¹ or as a Buddhicised version of a Confucian notion of xiao. They could, therefore, show that Buddhism by itself emphasised a concept of xiao that goes beyond the scope of material and physical support for parents as demanded in *Analects* (《論語》) 2.7,⁵² for it includes all sentient beings.

This means Jingkong could easily draw upon Buddhist sūtras of his tradition

⁴⁹ Wang Yueqing 王月清, *zhongguo fojiao lunli sixiang* 《中國佛教倫理思想》, pp.231–232.

⁵⁰ Guang Xing, “A Buddhist-Confucian Controversy on Filial Piety,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37, no. 2 (2010), pp.249–250.

⁵¹ Such as the ‘*Sutra of Śiṅgāla*’ (*shanshengzi jing* 《善生子經》) translated by Zhi Fadu 支法度 during the Western Jin 西晉 (266—316) in 301, or the ‘*Ājātaśatru sūtra*’ (*foshuo weishengyuan jing* 《佛說未生冤經》) translated by Zhi Qian (fl. 220—252).

⁵² Edward Slingerland, *Confucius Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc, 2003), p.10.

to illustrate the meaning of xiao, but he only refers to the apocryphal *Contemplation Sutra* and uses Confucian texts, such as *dizigui*, *xiaojing*, *sanzijing*, and the *Analects* to support his explanations. He claims that, since the Chengshi school 成實宗⁵³ and Jushe school 俱舍宗⁵⁴ disappeared in China in the late Tang dynasty (618—907), Confucian moral education fits very well to fill this gap, because they are basically the same and should, therefore, be incorporated.⁵⁵ This statement stands in contrast to the fact that the Chengshi school, on one hand, concerns the structure of mind and elaborating doctrinal issues;⁵⁶ whereas the Jushe school on the other hand comments on the doctrines of the Sarvāstivāda (shuoyiqie youbu 說一切有部) – an Abhidharma tradition that as well focusses on expounding the doctrines. Neither the Chengshi school nor the Jushe school was concerned with the sort of education that Jingkong envisioned: family ethics, the Confucian notion of human relations, and the order of society to bring about peace under heaven and rebirth for the individual in the Pure Land. Moreover, Jingkong emphasises that a devout Buddhist practitioner on his/ her way towards rebirth into the Pure Land should as well study the ‘lesser vehicle’ (xiaosheng), for it is the foundation of the ‘greater vehicle’ (dasheng). However, since both schools disappeared in China, he substitutes

⁵³ One of the thirteen major Buddhist schools (shisanzong 十三宗) that is based on the ‘*Treatise of Establishing Reality*’ (*chengshilun* 《成實論》) written by Helibamo 訶梨跋摩 and translated by Kumārajīva (344—413) in 406-412 (T32n1646).

⁵⁴ As well one of the thirteen major Buddhist schools that is based on the ‘*Verses on the Treasury of Abhidharma*’ (*abidamo jushelun* 《阿毘達磨俱舍論》) written by Vasubandhu 世親 (fl. 4th-5th century) and translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602—664) (T29n1558).

⁵⁵ Jingkong ascribes these two schools to the tradition of the ‘lesser vehicle’ (xiaosheng 小乘). See, footnote 22, and Jingkong. ‘淨空法師講：中國的儒、道與小乘,’ accessed January 05, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouPljVhkX18>. I was told the same when asking a nun of ‘The Corporation Republic of Hwa Dzan’ 華藏淨宗學會 (a Pure Land Learning Association founded by Jingkong in Taipei in 1989) regarding the order of learning Buddhism and why the *dizigui* is the first book I had to start with.

⁵⁶ See Lin Qian. *Mind in Dispute: The Section on Mind in Harivarman’s *Tattvasiddhi*. (Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Washington, 2014).

them with Confucianism even though they address different aspects of reality.

The fact, that Jingkong uses non-Buddhist writings to expound xiao, leads to a shift of its subtle meaning: From ‘being filial towards the way’ (xiaodao 孝道) – which includes the family – to exclusive ‘filial piety’ (xiaoshun 孝順) and ‘being respectful in serving one’s elders and teachers’ (fengshi shizhang). Even though he frequently uses both words,⁵⁷ but since he quotes the *Analects* 2.7,⁵⁸ and claims that a sophisticated person shall support the will of the parents as well as offer sacrifices to the ancestors at their memorial tablet because they constitute an integral whole (yiti 一體), the usage and his own explanations reveal a shift towards a Confucian notion of xiao. Additionally, the following phrase of ‘being filial and caring for one’s parents’ that regards jing, reads: ‘being respectful and serving one’s elders and teachers,’ which Jingkong explains as directed not at elders and teachers as persons, but rather at the work and studies one should be dedicated to. But the next sentence, in which he writes: ‘Honour the teacher and revere his teachings (zunshi zhongdao 尊師重道),’⁵⁹ can be traced back to the ‘*Book of Rites*’ (lijì 《禮記》)⁶⁰ as well as to the ‘*Book of the Later Han*’ (houhanshu 《後漢書》).⁶¹ Considering the textual context, thus, it appears that a respectful attitude shall

⁵⁷ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空 . *jingye sanfu jiangyi* 《淨業三福講記》. Particular the pages 25-55.

⁵⁸ The Master said, “The filial piety nowadays means the support of one’s parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to do something in the way of support; - without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?” Chinese Text Project, wei Zheng (〈為政〉), <http://ctext.org/analects/wei-zheng>, (accessed January 11, 2018).

⁵⁹ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空 . *jingye sanfu jiangyi* 《淨業三福講記》, p.34.

⁶⁰ “In pursuing the course of learning, the difficulty is in securing the proper reverence for the master. When that is done, the course (which he inculcates) is regarded with honour. When that is done, the people know how to respect learning.” Chinese Text Project, xue ji (〈學記〉), James Legge translation, <http://ctext.org/liji/xue-ji>, (accessed January 12, 2018).

⁶¹ “Your servant has heard that there was not on insightful and wise kings as well as monarch, who did not revered the teacher and his teachings.” (author’s translation) Chinese Text Project, *rulin lieyuan shang* (《儒林列傳》), <http://ctext.org/hou-han-shu/ru-lin-lie-zhuan-shang>, (accessed January 12, 2018).

not only be directed at the 'way,' but also (or even more) at the person teaching and embodying it.

Furthermore, regarding the question of rebirth, a lay Buddhist asked him whether it is possible to be reborn into the Pure Land despite not being filial towards his/her parents. He states that: no one does not fulfil his or her filial duty (buxiao) and disrespects (bujing 不敬) teachers in the Pure Land of Amitābha, because parents give us body and life, and teachers illuminate the wisdom for spiritual development. Thus, Buddhahood can only be realised if we understand these two concepts. If someone is not filial, then there will no karmic reward (fubao 福報), if someone disrespects his or her teacher, this person will learn nothing.⁶²

Explaining the importance of these two concepts, he appears more as a Confucian scholar than a Buddhist monk, and again the motif of decline is implied: We are not able to be filial, because we lost direction and misidentify the real objective, thus not paying filial duty to our parents, and causing all present catastrophes. That is why he continuously reminds his audience of this correlation: Being filial leads to Buddhahood, not being filial leads to catastrophes.

This has soteriological consequences, to the extent that mere invocation of Amitābha's name is not enough (relying on tali 他力), as one also has to cultivate one's own behaviour and attitude which amounts to relying on one's power (zili 自力). Thus from an etic perspective, the Buddhist notion of zili is given a new Confucian notion, whereas from an emic perspective fundamental Buddhist values are to be found behind

⁶² Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, Will one be reborn into the Pure Land if s/he is not filial? (nianforen buxiao fumu, neng wangsheng ma 念佛人不孝父母, 能往生淨土嗎), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTNNHY-VZtA>, (accessed December 28, 2017).

the concept of xiao and jing. It reveals again, that he emphasises a salvific path, focused mainly on this-worldly cultivation - what comes afterwards is less important. Considering the nine levels of rebirth explained in the *Contemplation Sutra*⁶³, they give rise to the question of why someone should care about being filial and self-cultivation if in the last moment Amitābha's name is invoked and one would still receive rebirth into the Pure Land. At first sight, it serves as a disincentive for moral action, for even the lowest of the lowest class of beings can escape countless ages of reincarnation by nianfo. However, from a doctrinal position, it serves as an incentive for moral action because, on the one hand, the pious practitioner would not choose to put his or her awakening and the saving of other sentient beings at risk or delay it only to enjoy mundane pleasures; and on the other hand, the Pure Land of Amitābha is not the final goal but rather an intermediate step towards full awakening that is beneficial for faster cultivation. Thus, by striving for higher grades of rebirth one follows the compassionate path of a bodhisattva and will sooner be able to save sentient beings.⁶⁴ In Jingkong's advocated soteriology, this includes filial piety as a precondition. Regarding the question how one of the lowest beings may be reborn, the answer is rather simple: If this person meets a good teacher before death, it means that the person's positive karmic reward manifested itself in form of a teacher and saved him or her, as a result of being filial in former lives.⁶⁵

Thus, being filial is the nucleus of Jingkong's advocated path to salvation. This standpoint differs from the elaborations of Buddhist masters of the past who tried to

⁶³ (CBETA, T12, no. 365, p. 344, c09-p. 346, a26).

⁶⁴ See Jones' discussion of 'Ethics and Precepts' in the Pure Land tradition for further historical and doctrinal information, Charles B. Jones, *Chinese Pure Land Buddhism: Understanding a Tradition of Practice*. Pure Land Buddhist studies. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), pp.85-105.

⁶⁵ This was pointed out to me by the same nun of Hwa Dzan mentioned above.

explain, defend, or compare both concepts of filial piety. Mouzi's *'Master Mou's Treatise on Settling Doubts'* refuted the accusations that Buddhists would abandon one's family and disfigure one's appearance, but practice great filial piety. Huiyuan 慧遠 (334—416) considers Buddhism and Confucianism to be different in appearance but similar in essence and believes that the Buddhist dharma observes loyalty and filial piety on a higher level.⁶⁶ Liuxie's 劉勰 (465—521) *'Treatise on the Eradication of Doubts'* (*miehuolun* 〈滅惑論〉) states that filial piety depends not on mere actions, but rather on one's correct attitude of mind, therefore, cutting one's hair does not violate filial piety.⁶⁷ Qisong's 契嵩 (1007—1072) *'Treatise on Filial Piety'* (*xiaolun* 〈孝論〉) systemised filial piety in length and concluded that if neglecting filial piety as part of the precepts, they cannot be called precepts, for it is the source of the precepts and virtuous behaviour and leads one on the path towards awakening.⁶⁸ In *'Treatise on Explaining the Way'* (*yudaolun* 〈喻道論〉) Qisong unifies Buddhism and Confucianism in four aspects: (1) Filial piety is the principle of heaven and earth; (2) Filial piety, precepts, and good actions (*xiaojieshan* 孝戒善) coalesce into one; (3) Filial piety and cultivation leads to happiness of the practitioner and the parents; (4) By filial mourning (in thought) for three years one can ponder one the self and phenomena.⁶⁹ He concludes that the Buddhist concept of filial piety had the characteristics of universality and superiority. It was universal because Buddhists respected all living beings without harming them, so that peace may pervade the world, and it was superior because Buddhists extended the practice of filial piety not

⁶⁶ See, "Treatise on why Monks Do Not Bow Down Before Kings" (*shamen bujing wangzhelun* 〈沙門不敬王者論〉), (CBETA, T52, no. 2102, p. 30, b17-19).

⁶⁷ (CBETA, T52, no. 2102, p. 49 -p. 53).

⁶⁸ *Tanjin wenji* 《鐔津文集》 (CBETA, T52, no. 2115, p. 660, b15-b20).

⁶⁹ (CBETA, T52, no. 2115, p. 660, b26-p. 662, b14).

only to their parents but to all sentient beings.⁷⁰

In this respect, Buddhist masters sought to find common grounds in terms of Confucian and Buddhist ethics in the process of acculturation and even elevated filial piety to a supramundane all-encompassing category of virtuous behaviour superseding the Confucian notion of filial piety as structuring force of the family and society at large. Wang Yueqing further points out, that the writings of Buddhist masters and Confucians from the Song (960—1279) onwards, such as Qisong, Zhang Shangying 張商英 (1043—1121), Mingben 明本 (1263—1323), Pudu 普度 (1254—1330), Zhuhong 祿宏 (1535—1615), and Zhixu 智旭 (1599—1655) on the subject of ‘considering filial piety as the precepts’ (yixiao weijie 以孝為戒) and ‘considering the precepts as filial piety’ (yijie weixiao 以戒為孝) reflect the interaction and mutual assimilation of religious and secular ethical systems.⁷¹ Upholding the precepts becomes an act of filial piety, whereas practising filial piety is an expression of upholding the precepts.

For Jingkong, however, the key for practising Buddhism is to understand how to respect teachers and to value the path. Being filial towards one’s parents and respecting one’s teachers is an expression of following one’s virtue possessed by nature (xingde 性德) not the precepts. Only when giving rise to one’s xingde, the wisdom and virtue of our self-nature (zixing 自性) of becoming Buddha can develop. Therefore being filial and respectful is the first element of self-cultivation. Jingkong claims that the entire Buddhist dharma is built upon filial piety which he proves by explaining the character

⁷⁰ Xing Guang, “A Buddhist-Confucian Controversy on Filial Piety,” pp.249-250.

⁷¹ Wang Yueqing 王月清, “A Discussion of the Buddhist Concept of Filial Piety and its Characteristics since the Song (lun songdai yijiang de fojiao xiaoqinguan ji qi tezheng 〈論宋代以降的佛教孝親觀及其特徵〉),” 《南京社會科學》, no. 4 (1999), pp.61-65.

itself. It depicts the relationship between the last and next generation – past and future in beginningless time. The dharma speaks of the self-nature (zixing), reality-nature (zhenru 真如), and one's original nature (benxing 本性) and the character xiao reflects these concepts. Without wisdom, the character xiao cannot be created. He concludes the character xiao must have therefore been created by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that appeared in human form before Buddhism entered China.⁷²

This line of argumentation not only surpasses the Confucian notion of a universal category that links heaven and earth to all humans in a reciprocal relationship in which the emperor works as intermediary, but also the Buddhist notion delineated above that views Buddhist filial piety as great filial piety (Mouzi) as well as universal and superior since it is directed at all sentient beings (Qisong) or as a reflection of holding onto the precepts. By claiming that xiao was created by Buddhas or Bodhisattvas and that it reflects the concepts of self-nature, reality-nature, and original nature, Jingkong effectively sanctifies xiao as a cosmological unit that links past and future in beginningless time and thus underlies every Buddhist practise and human conduct in general.

In terms of specific Pure Land practice (nianfo), however, the late Ming (1368—1644) Buddhist Zhuhong's understanding of xiao as the precondition to nianfo resembles Jingkong's train of thought. In '*Commentary to uncover the hidden Doctrine of the Sutra of the Bodhisattva Precepts of Brahmā's Net*' (*fanwang pusajie jing yishu fayin* 《梵網菩薩戒經義疏發隱》) he wrote, '[practising] filial piety is the method for accomplishing the way'⁷³ and by knowing the precepts one does not leave filial piety, this

⁷² Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *Ethics and Morals (lunli daode 《倫理道德》)*, (臺北:社團法人中華華藏淨宗學會, 2019), pp.4-9.

⁷³ (CBETA, X38, no. 679, p. 162, c13).

was pointed out in various sutras. Therefore, having filial piety as the cause, one receives rebirth [into the Pure Land]. This is the reason why if those who nianfo and cultivate the Pure Land, do not obey their parents, [their practice of nianfo] cannot be called nianfo.⁷⁴

Yinguang, whom Jingkong vies as his intellectual predecessor, follows Zhuhong's stance on combining nianfo and xiao. In a letter, Yinguang describes the characteristics of the Pure Land Dharma gate. He quotes the first meritorious act of the *Contemplation Sutra* and concludes that 'practitioners who invoke Amitābha's name must be filial and care for one's parents, [...] we always have to fulfil our duty in the family and society. [...] If we fail to do so, our minds contradict the Buddha's mind and receiving rebirth becomes difficult.'⁷⁵

As these examples show, Jingkong is not the only monastic who views xiao as the sine qua non for nianfo. But in his edifice of thought, it is a sanctified cosmological unit that serves as the foundation of the Dharma and can be understood by arduously studying and practising the *dizigui*.

3.3 Dizigui in Juxtaposition with the First Meritorious Act

In his article on the discursive practice of Jingkong's network, Ji Zhe points out that the *dizigui*, written by Li Yuxiu 李毓秀 (1647—1729) later revised by Jia Cunren 賈存仁 (1724—1784), has been used as teaching material in 'private schools' (sishu 私

⁷⁴ (CBETA, X38, no. 679, p. 163, b11-p. 163, b13).

⁷⁵ Shi Yinguang 釋印光, *Continuation to the Collected Works of Master Yinguang (yinguang dashi wenchao xubian)* 《印光大師文鈔續編》, (臺北：華藏淨宗弘化基金會，2010), p.2.

塾) for moral education of children since the middle Qing dynasty and has seen a rapid increase of distribution since the 1980s in Mainland China mainly through Jingkong's network of lay followers that sponsored his activities.⁷⁶ Ji Zhe also identifies Jingkong's increasing awareness of the importance of 'cultural identification for overseas Chinese'⁷⁷ that led him to integrate non-Buddhist elements into his propagation of the dharma, particularly those that concerned filial piety and respect for teachers. Jingkong himself wrote in an introduction to the *dizigui*, *sanzijing*, and *xiaojing*, that abolishing the classics and ethics is the cause of corrupt law and order. Greed, anger, and ignorance are the causes of moral degeneration. Therefore, if one wants to achieve peace under heaven one has to start at the 'root' – correct education of children. As he writes, reading classics, cultivating wisdom and meditative concentration, teaching the principle of cause and effect as well as how to fulfil one's duties, will exactly achieve that.⁷⁸

On an intellectual level, since the coalescence of Buddhism and Confucianism in one character xiao represents both the beginning of propriety and the first character of the first meritorious act (see *Contemplation Sutra* above), the *dizigui* provides the textual basis to teach correct conduct, family ethics and even work ethics as Hu Xiaolin's

⁷⁶ Ji Zhe, "Making a Virtue of Piety: Dizigui and the Discursive Practice of Jingkong's Network," pp.62-67.

⁷⁷ Ji Zhe, "Making a Virtue of Piety: Dizigui and the Discursive Practice of Jingkong's Network," p.67. The rapid distribution of the *dizigui* in the 80s and 90s coalesced with Jingkong starting to propagate at overseas Chinese communities in the USA, Malaysia, Singapore, and Australia in the late 80s and 90s.

⁷⁸ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空. *Collected Edition of Rules for Disciples, Three Character Classic, Classic of Filial Piety* (*duizigui sanzijing xiaojing hekan* 《弟子規》《三字經》《孝經》合刊), (臺北:華藏淨宗學會, 2012), p.2.

reflections on studying and implementing the *dizigui* shows.⁷⁹ Therefore, before studying complicated books or sutras, such as ‘Four Books and Five Classics’ (*sishu wujing* 四書、五經), ‘Thirteen Classics’ (*shisanjing* 十三經), ‘*Avatamsaka Sūtra*’ (*huayanjing* 《華嚴經》), or ‘*Lotus Sūtra*’ (*fahuaqing* 《法華經》), etc. one shall start with the *dizigui* for it is the ‘root’ of ‘rooted education.’ Furthermore, Jingkong considers it belonging to the monastic discipline as the ‘foundational discipline’ (*jiben jielü* 基本戒律)⁸⁰ and constitutes the beginning of the path to Buddhahood with a Confucian Text at its spearhead. If a person properly puts it into practice while dealing with things and treating people, then, despite not taking the precepts, he or she will receive rebirth through *nianfo*.⁸¹ Otherwise, if one does not start with the *dizigui*, one will not be successful in any aspect of life. The *dizigui*, thus, serves as the foundation of ‘propriety’ (*li* 禮), of upholding the precepts in general and the five precepts in particular, and the ten virtuous acts, regardless of being a lay practitioner or monastic. According to Jingkong, its efficaciousness has been proven by its history of 1000 years since Zhuxi 朱熹 (1130—1200) wrote its predecessor ‘*What Children ought to know*’ (*tongmeng xuzhi* 《童蒙須

⁷⁹ Xiaolin Hu, chairman of Beijing H.T Technology Develop Co. Ltd. and supporter of Jingkong in mainland China, started learning the *dizigui* in 2007. He reports major changes in his company, family, and himself: beneficial for better working atmosphere, for being happier, for understanding correct conduct, and it helped him to become a psychologically healthier person. Hu Xiaolin 胡小林. *Experience Sharing of Traditional Chinese Culture Fostering Healthy Economic Development. Inspiring Results from Studying the Rules for Disciples* (*zhongguo chuantong wenhua daidong jingji liangxing fazhan de jingyan fenxiang, xuexiao dizigui zhi chengguo qishi* 《中國傳統文化帶動經濟良性發展的經驗分享：學校《弟子規》之成果啟示》), (臺北：華藏淨宗學會，2012). Ji Zhe further points to his role in organising forums of traditional culture after Jingkong learning centre in Lujiang was shut down by the Chinese government in 2008. Ji Zhe, ‘Making a Virtue of Piety: Dizigui and the Discursive Practice of Jingkong’s Network,’ p.76.

⁸⁰ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, Traditional Culture, New wisdom, let us [learn] the *Rules for Disciples* together (*laowenhua xinzhihui rangwomen yiqilai dizigui* 老文化 新智慧 讓我們一起來「弟子規」), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yH0bF0LC6UQ>, (accessed January 2, 2018).

⁸¹ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, The *Rules for Disciples* are the Foundation of a bodhisattva (*dizigui shi pusa de jichu* 《弟子規》是菩薩的基礎), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQr5SMTePxY>, (accessed December 27, 2017).

知》) during the Song.⁸²

The Confucian nature of the *dizigui* can be verified by contrasting the following two passages: first, from the *Analects* 1.6, second, from the *dizigui*.

The Master said, ‘A young person should be filial when at home and respectful of his elders when in public. Conscientious and trustworthy, he should display a general care for the masses but feel a particular affection for those who are Good. If he has any strength left over after manifesting these virtues in practice, let him devote it to learning the cultural arts.’⁸³

The *Rules for Disciples* are the teachings of the sages. First, to be filial to one’s parents and respect one’s elder brothers; secondly, be solemn and trustworthy. Show love to everyone and become close with the benevolent. If there is still some vitality left, devote it to the cultural arts.⁸⁴

The resemblance of these two passages is self-evident and it clearly shows the incorporation of a this-worldly Confucian moral concept into a Buddhist soteriology focused on realising rebirth in a land outside our world. Filial piety, as has been shown in the discussion above, was extended from being exclusively directed at one’s parent to

⁸² Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, Preaching Hall of Benevolence and Peace: The Importance of Traditional Education, Second Part, Pure Land Learning Association (renai heping jiangtang, chuantong jiaoyu de zhongyaoxing, jingzong xueyuan zhi er 仁愛和平講堂 - 傳統教育的重要性 淨宗學院之二), http://www.amtb.tw/bt/amt_b_jindian.asp?web_choice=67&web_amtb_index=859, (accessed February 20, 2020).

⁸³ 子曰：弟子入則孝，出則弟，謹而信，汎愛眾，而親仁。行有餘力，則以學文。 Edward Slingerland, *Confucius Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, p.3.

⁸⁴ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *dizigui sanzijing xiaojing hekan* 《《弟子規》《三字經》《孝經》合刊》, p.2. Interestingly, the second page of the booklet depicts a picture of Confucius surrounded by a rhyming couplet quotation from the first meritorious act: 孝養父母，奉事師長。

all sentient beings by various monastics during the acculturation of Buddhism into the Chinese context. Therefore, from Jingkong's perspective, 'be filial towards one's parents' in the above quotations does not only have a Confucian but also a Buddhist connotation of compassion. Filial piety towards one's parents and respect towards one's teachers has to be extended to all sentient being to cultivate non-attachment. In this way, one's virtue possessed by nature (xingde) illuminates the mind (mingxin 明心) and one sees one's Buddha-nature (jianxing 見性).⁸⁵ By this, he avoids being drawn into explaining how exclusive filial piety conforms to Buddhist non-attachment.

From an etic perspective, these dichotomic directions (exterior/interior) lead to contradictions as for the aspired salvation, but from an emic perspective, since everything is the embodiment of truth and law (dharmakāya, fashen 法身), Jingkong asks rhetorically: How can there be any dharma, that cannot be called Buddha-dharma?⁸⁶ At this point, two processes can be identified: First, a Confucian text is being used to explain a Buddhist sutra, essentially only two sentences of one paragraph, and becomes the first grade of 'the threefold grades of meritorious acts to rebirth.' Second, the same Confucian text is attributed to the Buddhist canon, losing its Confucian origins, and is re-interpreted as quintessentially Buddhist. Thus, not triggering any internal conflicts that needed to be reconciled. The last part of this chapter will consider the effects on lay practitioners and monastics.

⁸⁵ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *Reciting Buddha, Becoming Buddha (nianfo chengfo 《念佛成佛》)*. (臺北:華藏淨宗學會, 2017), pp.24-25.

⁸⁶ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *Treatise on the Response of the Dao (taishang ganyingpian 《太上感應篇》)*【1】1~12).

3.4 Nianfo as Lay Practitioner or Monastic?

If the first step is to be filial towards one's parents, then one could ask whether renouncing the household is the violation of it, since the discontinuation of one's family line is the greatest act of unfilial behaviour. This is one of the perennial questions put forward in '*Master Mou's Treatise Settling Doubts*' (*mouzi lihuolun* 《牟子理惑論》), contending about who is more filial: the monastic who accumulates great merit for the whole family and is compassionate towards all sentient beings or the one who stays at home taking care of the parents and continuing the family line.

Jingkong has been asked the same question in his Q&A videos,⁸⁷ and advises better not to renounce, since being a monastic in this time⁸⁸ is not easy. Additionally, he warns: 'There is a great number of monastic at the gates of the hell' (*diyu menqian sengdaoduo* 地獄門前僧道多), insinuating, if the way is not understood properly, one will fall into hell, become a hungry ghost or an animal. Thus, single-mindedly concentrating one's devotion towards Amitābha and seeking rebirth in his Pure Land is more effective than renouncing the household. But regardless of being a monastic or a lay devotee, learning starts at the roots: Confucianism *dizigui*, Daoism *ganyingpian*, and Buddhism *shishan*. Furthermore, he points to two types of renouncing the household: mind and body. This statement resembles an entry in the '*Recordings of the Ancient Teachings of the Brahma's Net Sutra*' (*fanwangjing guji* 《梵網經古迹記》): 'There are two [ways] of renouncing

⁸⁷ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, I Want to Renounce, but it has a great Impact on My Family. What Should I do? (*ziji xiang chujia, dan dui jia ren yingxiang henda, ying ruhe shihao* 自己想出家, 但對家人影響很大, 應如何是好?), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bi3tNMpyAPo>, (accessed December 9, 2017).

⁸⁸ With 'this time' he is alluding to the 'period the final dharma'.

the household: the first is called the mind renounces the household, the second is called the body renounces the household,⁸⁹ and Hongzans 弘贊 (1611—1685) explanation of what is meant by ‘novice’ in the *‘Extended Annotations to the Outline of Precepts and Etiquette of śrāmaṇeras’*: ‘In the beginning, the mind of a śrāmaṇera first renounces the household and then receives the ten precepts.’⁹⁰ At this point, he then refers to the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* (weimojiejing 《維摩詰經》) explaining that Vimalakīrti, the paragon of a mahāyāna lay Buddhist, did not receive the tonsure and the ordination, but since his ‘mind left the household’ he became a lay bodhisattva, who was even able to surpass and instruct the bodhisattva associated with wisdom, Mañjuśrī. He concludes if only the body leaves the household while the mind remains attached to the ‘world that must be endured’ (suopo shijie 娑婆世界), it is impossible to extricate oneself from saṃsāra.⁹¹

In order to support this line of argumentation, Jingkong refers to masters of former days such as Yinguang and Li Bingnan who never advised people to renounce the household, only to take refuge to the three jewels. The reason is when advising someone to take the ordination and the precepts in the period of the final dharma, and the person cannot live up to the rules, breaks them, the advisor must take responsibility. Only a small number of people with virtuous roots, a compassionate will, and the right intentions can

⁸⁹ See, 出家有二：一、心出家。二、身出家。(CBETA, T40, no. 1815, p. 712, b13-14).

⁹⁰ See, 謂沙彌始心出家，稟受十戒。(CBETA, X60, no. 1118, p. 225, c20-21). This book on the śrāmaṇera precepts is utilised as part Jingkong’s advocated lay education and represents the second meritorious act as well. See. Stefan Kukowka, “Standards for Proper Behaviour – An Inquiry into the Weekly Lay Education at the Main Dharma Centre of ‘The Corporation Republic of Hwa Dzan Society,” (presented at 政治大學宗教研究所研究生論壇, Taipei, June 24, 2019).

⁹¹ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, To Renounce the Household (chujia 出家), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCV16YqHdvw>, (accessed December 9, 2017).

live as monastics.⁹²

Following another question, whether someone who cultivates the way at home lacks the benefits of collective practice – implying monastic cultivation – he answers: If someone seeks to be reborn into the Pure Land the most important ‘outer condition’ (waiyuan 外緣) is not to be disturbed by the environment while invoking Amitābhas name. That is why some lay practitioners are more successful in cultivating the way than some monastics.⁹³ One’s home is the first and foremost place of practice and one’s family members are the first ought to be saved. Diligent cultivation at home, therefore, not only influences family members but also neighbours and the local community. This is what is meant by cultivating the way of bodhisattvas.⁹⁴

What does this mean in light of soteriological consequences? It means that is not necessary to leave the household and become a monastic since the praxis of nianfo can also be pursued at home. Thus, the whole meaning of the existing monastic order is questioned. If lay Buddhist can achieve even greater levels of spiritual cultivation compared to the monastic counterpart, why would someone then voluntarily accept the life of a monastic, that involves a strict daily routine and (depending on the sex) a multitude of rules and regulations, that complicate the path to salvation? Considering Jingkong’s notion of the final dharma, even having virtuous and compassionate roots is highly improbable, and if someone is lucky to have these, he or she would only represent

⁹² Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, Does one has to bear Karmic [retribution] for Advising People not to Renounce? (quan taren buyao chujia shifou yao bei yinguo 勸他人不要出家是否要背因果?), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC-uSkKehI>, (accessed December 9, 2017).

⁹³ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, Reciting Buddha and Listening (zaijia tingjing nianfo bu qu daochang, nengfou wangsheng 在家聽經念佛不去道場, 能否自在往生?), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LTVbble1fc>, (accessed December 28, 2017).

⁹⁴ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空, *xiuxing yaodao* 《修行要道》, p.145.

an insignificant number of people. Again, even though himself being a monastic, he de-emphasises the value of leaving the household (as the ideal way to reach awakening) and places much more stress on diligent learning of this-worldly focused morality texts as well as of regulating (non-monastic) human interaction in context of the family in conjunction with a daily nianfo practice as means to a forthcoming salvation.

4 Conclusion

As has been shown in the above study, the central Sūtra of Jingkong conceptualised path to salvation is the *Contemplation Sutra*, particularly one paragraph that is being utilised to rationalise his soteriology. Divided into three grades, every grade is assigned a specific tradition: Firstly, the worldly dharma or ‘vehicle of men and gods’ including Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist ‘classics’, such as *dizigui*, *ganyingpian*, and *shishan*; secondly, the ‘lesser vehicle’; and thirdly, the ‘greater vehicle’. Jingkong’s writings and dharma talks covered in this study, evidently show that he clearly emphasises the first two sentences of the mentioned paragraph: ‘Being filial and caring for one’s parents, being respectful and serving one’s elders and teachers.’ ‘Being filial’ becomes the pivotal element from which everything else is explained. The incorporation of Confucian and Daoist texts into the tripartite division of the salvific path is made possible because of three factors: On the one hand, since the ‘lesser vehicle’ disappeared in the late Tang dynasty, Jingkong claims that Confucianism and Daoism – or generally ‘Traditional Chinese Culture’ – fit perfectly to fill this gap, because they are the same, despite the fact, as has been shown, that the Chinese schools associated with the ‘lesser vehicle’ (Chengshi school and Jushe school) do not address ethical issues concerning human relation or the

family; and on the other hand, the apocryphal *Contemplation Sutra* provides the textual foundation of xiao, thus building a bridge to connect the Sūtra with the Confucian text, and ipso facto explaining the incorporation as well as Buddhicising the former Confucian text itself. Moreover, by depicting Buddhism as ‘education’ and Shakyamuni as ‘teacher’, Jingkong tries to deemphasise religious aspects to manifest an appearance or image that equals Confucianism as being ‘education’ and Confucius as its main ‘teacher.’

Jingkong’s interpretation of filial piety reveals a two levelled notion: On the one hand, it is the foundation of Buddhist practice and directed at all sentient beings, precondition for rebirth into Amitābha’s Pure Land, and a cosmological unit that permeates everything, thus referring to a Buddhist discourse; on the other hand, when addressing human relationships and duties, family education, the order of society, and world peace he refers to a Confucian discourse, which is similar to the method described in the ‘*Great Learning*’ (*daxue* 《大學》) on how to achieve world peace: self-cultivation, family regulation, governance of the state, and peace under heaven. These notions address different discourses of meaning: (1) an ultimate meaning that leads the way out of suffering and (2) a temporal meaning that structures the mundane world and prepares the practitioner to be able to extricate oneself from the cycle of rebirth. It can thus be seen that both conceptions do not contradict each other but constitute a parallel space within their shared universe of discourse.

The inclusion of the above-stated classics and by his publications, Jingkong and Hwa Dzan are authoring and commenting on doctrines, thus keeping this discourse in existence – both are procedures of constitution and circulation of discourse. By this, they are organising and grouping discourses into a unit of perceived coherence and meaning. The umbrella term that reflects this discursive framework is ‘education’ (jiaoyu 教

育) under which both Confucian and Buddhist notions are brought together. Jingkong distinguishes four kinds of Buddhism: 1) Traditional Buddhism that is ‘correct’ Buddhist education (fotuo jiaoyu 佛教教育); 2) Religious Buddhism (zongjiao fojiao 宗教佛教); 3) Buddhist Studies (foxue 佛學); and 4) Heretic Buddhism (waidao fojiao 外道佛教).⁹⁵ By categorising Buddhism into these four types, Jingkong creates an opposition between true and false. Everything that is not considered traditional Buddhism is rendered false and should therefore not be pursued.

At first sight, the differentiation between ‘Buddhist education’ and ‘religious Buddhism’ seems to evoke a tendency towards secularisation, since education – in its own discourse – is associated with learning in an institutional setting (school and university). However, what he calls religious Buddhism refers to ‘superstitious behaviour’ – utilising another discourse that in its own is complex⁹⁶ – of a sole focus on worship, prostration, and receiving blessed rewards (fubao 福報), thus apotheosising the Buddha. Buddhist education does include worship, but it is extended to understand one’s position as a student in relation to the Buddha as one’s teacher to acquire wisdom. In this elaboration on ‘ancient’ Buddhist education, he equates it with our modern-day secularised educational system of museums, schools, and universities and claims that the monastery was a similar institution and that Arhat, Bodhisattva, and Buddha are academic degrees (Bachelor, Master, PhD).

⁹⁵ Shi Jingkong 釋淨空 . *renshi fotuo jiaoyu* 《認識佛陀教育》, pp.11-13. During a closed-doors meeting, Ven. Chengde 成德 (before renouncing known as Teacher Cai Lixu 蔡禮旭老師 in Jingkong’s network) further added touristic Buddhism (guanguang fojiao 觀光佛教) and business Buddhism (qiye fojiao 企業佛教) to the list. Author’s field notes.

⁹⁶ See Ko-wu Huang, “The Origin and Evolution of the Concept of mixín (superstition): A Review of May Fourth Scientific Views,” *Chinese Studies in History* 49, no. 2 (2016), pp.54-79.

The Confucian notion of filial piety as a structuring force of society can, therefore, be easily incorporated into his concept of Buddhist education as a this-worldly cultivation method that prepares the practitioner for more ‘advanced courses’ on the ‘*Longer Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra*’ for example – the third meritorious act described in the *Contemplation Sutra*. In this sense, the *Contemplation Sutra* works as the overarching discursive frame of reference for discourses on family ethics, cultivation, and liberation. Its doctrinal authority subjects Jingkong and his followers to its discourse but is open to interpretation for his own ends.

Regarding the question of whether this phenomenon can be called ‘syncretic,’ I opt for Brook’s category of ‘compartmentalism,’ because Jingkong argues that Buddhism and Confucianism address different domains of reality and truth. Buddhism gives reason to what holds the world together at its core and being focused on extramundane salvation, whereas (selected parts of) Confucianism explain how to conduct oneself in the world. These selected parts are then re-interpreted through a Buddhist lens and integrated. Thus, not triggering any conflicts regarding their soteriology that needs to be ‘reconciled’ (one category of Berling’s definition). On the contrary, this factor and the fact, that Jingkong focuses his attention to one passage of the *Contemplation Sutra*, in which the threefold grades of meritorious acts leading to salvation is expounded, begin with xiao – the central category of Confucianism – the connection, internal structure as well as the main objective ‘realising rebirth into the Pure Land of Amitābha’ is reinforced, strengthened, and consolidated. In this sense, both complement each other in a holistic all-encompassing edifice of thought. Filial piety in a Confucian and Buddhist sense becomes the centre and starting point of individual this-worldly cultivation, realised by means of *dizigui*, while nianfo serves as transcendental means to reach out to Amitābha.

Jingkong gives special importance to the *dizigui* because of several reasons: Firstly, it centres around xiao as the starting point towards rebirth, secondly, since everything is the representation of the dharmakāya it is attributed to the Buddhist canon, loses its Confucian origin, and is re-interpreted as quintessentially Buddhist, thirdly, the period of the final dharma deprives us of the ability to understand Buddhist teachings (directly), which is why we need to start at the ‘root of all’ – the *dizigui*. Fourth, as Ji Zhe points out, while his endeavours to propagate the dharma internationally, the *dizigui* becomes a cultural marker for overseas Chinese as a representative of ‘traditional Chinese culture’ that emphasises filial piety and respect towards elders and teachers. Thus, a socio-historical and an intellectual factor are pushing for the incorporation and distribution of the *dizigui* into Jingkong’s edifice of thought.

With that in mind, not only are the narratives Jingkong utilises understandable: ‘we lost our root,’ ‘the world is in decline,’ ‘turning back to traditional Chinese culture and rejecting Western culture,’ but also the textual foundation he draws on: mainly the *Contemplation Sutra* for his soteriology and the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* to point out that lay praxis is as efficient or even better suitable to our day as monastic cultivation.

All things considered, Jingkong appears as having at least two identities: The Confucian scholar who teaches classical Confucian concepts, such as xiao or propriety and the Buddhist monk who expounds the meaning of the world and the way to escape the suffering of saṃsāra through nianfo. Interestingly, while studying his advocated salvific path, it became apparent that it resembles the progressing grades of the ‘Great Learning’ (*daxue* 《大學》), starting at the (1) ‘investigation of things’ (*gewu* 格物) till (5) ‘personal cultivation’ (*xiushen* 修身) and ending at (8) ‘freedom underneath heaven’ (*tianxiaping* 天下平). The first five steps can be interpreted as to recover one’s unclouded

mind and filial nature, while the following three steps represent the bodhisattva ideal to help all sentient beings to abandon suffering and obtain happiness. This eventually means ‘to rest in the highest excellence’ (zhiyu zhishan 止於至善) or to become Buddha.

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儒家倫理作為往生極樂世界之基礎—— 以淨空法師之淨土思想為列

顧頡鋒*

摘要

本文以淨空法師的網路影片與書籍為分析對象，探討其具有儒家色彩的「孝」觀念與《佛說觀無量壽經》為何成為其提倡的解脫思想（soteriology）。這部佛經提供大乘佛教中有關「孝」之基礎，因此成為佛經與儒家和道家經典連接的一座橋，如《弟子規》與《太上感應篇》，進一步說明此一體化與此經典的佛教化。因此，本文探討如下的問題：身為一位淨土倡導者，淨空是如何通過特殊的敘事闡述其他傳統的倫理規範的一體化？是否可以用「融合主義」來解析此種現象？淨空法師為何強調此世的修養，並主要以《弟子規》為基礎？

關鍵字：淨空法師、淨土法門、儒家倫理、臺灣佛教、融合主義

* 顧頡鋒：「國立政治大學宗教研究所」和「法國國立東方語言文化學院（INALCO）」的雙聯博士生。