Reflections on the Structure of Buddhist Thinking

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According to the Avataṃsaka Śūtra twenty-seven days after his Enlightenment, the Buddha ascended higher and more rarefied stages of mindfulness before entering sāgaramudrā-samādhi (Chinese: haiyin sanmei; Jpn kai’in zanmai), a quiescent meditative condition that intuits an infinitely expansive and luminous psycho-cosmic universe, the dharmadhātu (Ch.: fachieh; Japanese: hokkai) or “dharma-realm” wherein all dharmas are mutually dependent and interrelated. This multi-centered psycho-cosmic vision provided the canonical justification and inspiration on which the Chinese Huayan masters would construct the doctrine of fajieyuanqishuo (Jpn: kokkai engi setsu), dharmadhātu-pratītyasamutpāda or “universal-dependent-co-arising” that amplified Siddhārtha Gautama’s original insight of “living, dying, and rebirth” experience by all dharmic-existences. In addition to opening new vistas for spiritual, ethical, aesthetic, and intellectual explorations that are still unfolding, the experience of sāgaramudrā-samādhi is also a blueprint for Buddhist knowing, thinking, and doing. The Chinese Huayan patriarch Fazang (643-712) crystallized this blueprint in a series of conceptual grids, the shixuan yuanqi wuài famen (Jpn: jūgen engi muge hōmon) or “Ten Subtle and Unimpeded Dharma-gates of Pratītyasamutpāda,” hereafter simply the Ten Dharma-gates.1 In brief, the Ten Dharma-gates (Sanskrit: dharma-parāya, “pathway to Dharma [truth]”) is a conceptual overlay on the dynamic interplay between and among dharmas of the dharmadhātu that includes the insight into and participation in the interplay of dharmas.

As a bridge between abstraction and reality, the Ten Dharma-gates is a series of propositions constructed on earlier doctrinal developments, made comprehensible by metaphors, examples, and rational argument, to articulate the reality that Tathāgata Śākyamuni intuited and experienced. The Ten Dharma-gates justifies the identity and interfusion between and among dharmas, and categorizes their concomitant spatial, relational, and temporal interplay; it also maps the landscape of dharmadhātu-pratītyasamutpāda. As a map, the Ten Dharma-gates highlight the most salient landmarks of the dharmadhātu; and the Huayan manner of apprehending and thinking about the world.

This article explores the paradigms that frame and direct the Huayan Buddhist knowing and thinking as a basis for critical thinking. It begins with an overview of the dharma-gates that establish the rationale for Huayan knowing and thinking. Subsequently, it considers the ninth and tenth dharma-gates that bring to light different aspects of knowing and thinking. It concludes with some reflections on nurturing critical thinking.

Huayan Posture

Fazang states his reliance on the experience of sāgaramudrā-samādhi in the opening lines of the Huayan wujiao zhang (Jpn: Kegon gokyōshō). “I expound the ten categories of the sāgaramudrā-samādhi the Tathāgata Śākyamuni [ascended, and which is

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1 The Ten Dharma-gates of Pratītyasamutpāda systematized by Fazang is a reworking of the Ten Subtle Pathways of Ekāyana formulated by Zhiyan (602-668), his mentor. Some scholars trace the origins of the Ten Dharma-gates to Fashun (558-640), the first Huayan patriarch who composed Fachieh kanmen (Jpn Hōkai kanmon, Pathways of the Meditation of the Dharmadhātu) – it builds on these early enumerations.
the basis for] the teaching and doctrine of Ekayāna” (Wujiao zhang, Taishō 45:477a). The treatise concludes with a discussion of the Ten-dharma-gates. Fazang returns to the Ten Dharma-gates in the Huayan danzuanji, his commentary on the Avatamsaka Sūtra. The listing and articulation of the dharma-gates differ, indicating a shift in Fazang’s thinking from an emphasis on the relationship between absolute and particular to the relationship among particulars. The earlier is referred to as the Old Ten Dharma-gates, and the latter as the New Ten Subtle Dharma-gates. I will consider the New Ten Dharma-gates; it represents Fazang’s matured views and the distinctive Huayan attention to dharmas (beings, things, and events).² It is important to note that Fazang’s speculations presuppose the capacity of the human mind to ascend and enter into sāgaramudrā-samādhi and intuit the dharmadhātu.³

The first dharma-gate, the “simultaneous and complete accommodation [of dharmas]” is a descriptive restatement of fajieyuanqi or dharmadhātu-pratītyasamutpāda, “universal-dependent co-arising.” The dharma-gates two through six detail the rationale for mutual-interfusion, mutual-identity, and mutual-inclusion between and among all dharmas. Mutual-identity refers to the ontological identity of dharmas; and the existential identity between appearance and reality. Mutual-interfusion refers to the efficacy (function: influence, energy) a dharma projects that penetrates other dharmas; and includes the capacity of each and every dharma to absorb the projected energy and/or influence. Mutuality provides support and meaning to each and every dharma. These five dharma-gates draw from prior doctrinal developments and establish the basis for the next four dharma-gates.

The final four dharma-gates are the epistemological paradigms that map the noetic experience of sāgaramudrā-samādhi and map the pathways of Huayan thinking. They constitute a set of cognitive mediators through which Huayan Buddhists perceive and interpret the world. Each dharma-gate calls attention to different cognitive paradigms; they are not mutually exclusive. The seventh dharma-gate, “Indra’s Net” plots the functional or dynamic interplay between and among dharmas. The eighth dharma-gate charts the identity between appearance and reality. The ninth dharma-gate, “interfusion of time” maps the interchange among the past, present, and future. The tenth dharma-gate, “shifting centers (perspectives)” plots the fluid spatial and relational associations among dharmas. These four dharma-gates describe paradigms along which Buddhist thinking proceeds; they also highlight the ambiguity that is inherent in these epistemological paradigms. I begin with the tenth dharma-gate, shifting centers.

Shifting centers

Drawing attention to the spatial and relational structure of dharmas, the tenth dharma-gate tenth, “the complete accommodation of principal and secondary [dharmas],” or what I have renamed “shifting centers” re-imagines the truth of dharmadhātu-pratītyasamutpāda, a universe of multiple and shifting centers. Fazang explains:

[In the event] a single dharma is designated to be the principal [dharma], all [of the remaining dharmas] are relegated to a secondary [status]. …Consequently, [as the occasion requires] a single dharma can play either the principal or secondary role. [These dual roles] are inexhaustibly repeated (Huanyuankuan, T. 45: 640bc).

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² For a detailed discussion, see Yusugi Ryōe, Kegon taikei (Tokyo: Kokusho hangyokai, 1918) 481-497.
³ For a discussion on the Huayan notion of mind, see my “Spiritual Cartography: Mapping the Huayan Mind.” In Humanity and Religion in the Age of Science. Committee in Charge of Publishing Collected Papers Commemorating the Retirement of Professor Takeda Ryūsei. Kyoto: Hōzōkan.
The above passage presumes constant change, a prime Buddhist presupposition, and organic totality of the dharmadhātu. Simply, the tenth dharma-gate states that in such a universe, when a dharma is arbitrarily singled out for special consideration that particular dharma becomes the principal dharma and the remaining dharmas assume secondary roles. Yet at the next instant, when another dharma assumes the central role, the once principal dharma will be relegated to a supporting role. This is true for every other dharma. Every dharma therefore has the potential of alternately assuming the principal or secondary role.

Shifting-centers characterizes our collective impressions of the world and events; and affirms the validity of varying viewpoints and allows for openness to new discoveries. The most obvious value of varying viewpoints is evident in scientific investigations of physical phenomenon. To cite one example, the chemist and the physicist who observe a helium atom are interested in and see different aspects the same element. To the chemist the helium is a molecule because it behaves as a gas; to the physicist, on the other hand, it is not a molecule, because it does not display a molecular spectrum (Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions 1962: 50-51.) The atomic scientist, on the other hand, sees the element as a byproduct when hydrogen atoms fuse and releases energy. Each specialist, by his or her training and professional methodology understands the same phenomenon from a specific perspective. The chemist’s view does not discount the physicist’s understanding; both contribute to our knowledge of this simple atom. A specific discipline illuminates one facet of reality, never its totality. It is unlikely that we will never have a complete understanding of a single phenomenon. Our knowledge remains incomplete and ambiguous.

“Shifting centers” highlights the spatial and relational structure of knowing and thinking that emerges from even a slight shift in space or perspective. While “shifting centers” may seem quite commonplace, useful, and even innocuous, it is a serious challenge to persons and ideologies that adhere to a single perspective or absolute center. The most recent example of such narrowness surfaced when Rev. Rob Morris, who lost a member of his congregation, delivered the benediction at an interfaith prayer service in Newtown, Connecticut a few days after Adam Lanza fatally shot twenty children and six adult staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School. It was a high profile event. President Barak Obama together with families who lost children and relatives, clergy from different faith traditions, including Muslim and Baha’i clerics attended the December 2012 service.

Rev. Morris drew the ire of his denomination, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and was asked to apologize. The denomination forbids its clergy from participating in multi-faith services, lest it will “give the impression that other faiths are equally valid” (The New York Times, National Edition, February 8, 2013, A19). The Sandy Hook incident recalled the rebuke Bishop David Benke received for sharing the podium at Yankee Stadium with representatives of other faith traditions who had gathered to memorialize the victims of 9/11. In an interview on Frontline: Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero, Bishop Benke recalled that on 23 September 2001, the day after the service, he began receiving calls reminding him that “the doctrine of the church does not allow a Christian to stand at the same podium with someone of another faith or everybody is going to get the same idea that all religions are equal, and we have made absolute claims, exclusive claims about our faith.” Like Morris, Benke, is also a Missouri Synod cleric.

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4 Bishop Benke’s participation in this event was met with extreme opposition by many in his denomination, who claimed that his participation constituted syncretism and unionism. On 6 July 2002 the Bishop was suspended from his responsibilities. However on 10 April 2003 he was reinstated. The charges against Benke were eventually withdrawn because internal investigation determined that the president of the Synod, Gerald B. Kieschnick, his ecclesiastical supervisor sanctioned his participation in the event.
One of the most notorious examples of an absolute center is the Roman Catholic Church’s condemnation of Galileo (1564-1642). The Church accused the scientist for willfully disobeying the Church’s order not “to hold or defend” Copernican contention that the Earth and other planets orbit the sun. In 1633 the Congregation of the Holy Office that administered the Inquisition concluded that Galileo’s confirmation of Copernicus’ observations were inconsistent with scripture; Church doctrine stated the planets revolved around the earth. The Church’s single vision did not allow Galileo to imagine the possibility of an alternative reality. In 1992 after 359 years Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) declared that Galileo suffered at the hands of some individuals and church institutions. The Church officially apologized to Galileo in 2000.

The above incidents expose the limits of absolute centers, namely a reluctance to admit the possibility of other visions of reality that would invite ethical and moral relativism. Such concerns prompted in 2000, before his guise as Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the head of the Roman Catholic office for the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith (formerly, Congregation of the Holy Office) to proclaim in Dominus Jesus, “The Church’s constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism” (Ratzinger 2000, para. 4). Continuing the document disparages the validity of other faith traditions when it states, “If it is true that followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation” (Ratzinger 2000, para. 22).

A faith tradition is free to declare itself to be absolute and perfect, but such claims become problematic when it has the means to forcibly impose its beliefs beyond its ideological boundaries. Ideological centers are not limited to faith traditions. Thich Nhat Hanh and others caught up in war, experienced firsthand the rigidity of “isms” and its proponents, during the American misadventure in Southeast Asia. In response, they developed the fourteen precepts (guidelines) of the Tiep Hein Order that re-imagined the traditional Precepts and revived the spirit of the Buddhadharma in the “crucible of war and devastation.” The first Precept is most pertinent to our discussion; it states:

Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. Buddhist systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth. Even meritorious teachings become a burden if one does not know when to discard them (Nhat Hanh 1987:27).

This statement challenges the “True Way” or “One Way” attitude of ideological centers and the inertia of tradition that clings to the “truths” of the past. For the Tiep Hein Order the Vietnam (American) War was an ideological conflict. The Americans and their allies claimed to be fighting for freedom and democracy. The National Liberation Front and their allies believed that they were battling against colonialism and for national self-determination. Thich Nhat Hanh seems to have taken to heart Buddha’s advice to the Kālāmas clansmen and women. When asked whose teaching they should believe and follow, Buddha underscored that his Dharma or teaching is only a guide, and that he too was a guide, not an absolute authority. Saṅghabhadra recounts the Buddha’s advice to the Kālāmas.

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5 On a less universal scale, nationalism requires a degree of homogeneity. To cite an extreme case, leaders of the post-French Revolution wanted the citizens to read the same books and identify with the same history. Similarly the Japanese national building project required Okinawans and other people on the fringes of its cultural and political sphere to become Japanese.
If anyone wants to have knowledge about the words of a rule of conduct, or the original text of a rule, or if he has any difficulty in answering the question on the same, he must know the fourfold aspects of the Vinaya, which the great elders with miraculous powers have found out and have explained to people. At the time when the congregation had assembled, there was a question: What are the fourfold aspects? (1) First, the original text (of the Vinaya); (2) second, what is in consonance with the original text; (3) third, the words of teachers; and (4) one’s opinion (Saṅghabhādra, 1970: 172).

This passage outlines the four levels of authority that should be appealed to determine whether a specific activity constitutes proper conduct. Saṅghabhādra reminds us that while the words of the Buddha may be the final authority, he lists three other levels of authority. The second level of authority is what might be properly referred to as the implicit spirit of the Buddha’s teaching, namely, “What is in consonance with the original text.” The third level of authority is to be obtained from “the words of the teachers,” which I understand to mean the interpretations of learned persons. The fourth level of authority is “one’s own opinion.” In response to the question, “What is meant by one’s own opinion?” The Buddha responded:

Leaving aside the original text, leaving aside what is in consonance with the original text and leaving aside what is the word of Teachers, to infer with one’s own mind, or with the help of other means such as the detailed explanatory commentaries…, or with what is said by Teachers - this is called one’s opinion” (Saṅghabhādra, 1970:172).

Thich Nhat Hanh took Buddha’s caution against over-reliance on dogma and doctrine to heart. I am not certain if he appealed to the four sets of authorities outlined above, certainly refashioning the traditional Precepts for the crucible of war time realities conforms to the spirit of “one’s opinion.” The Buddha stressed that he was a guide, not an authority, and that all propositions must be tested, including his own (Conze 1982:12). “Shifting-centers” offers a road map for traversing the complex spatial and relational perspectives that must be considered in accessing and making decisions.

**Interfusion of the ten time-periods**

The ninth dharma-gate, “free interplay of the ten time-periods,” or simply the “interfusion of time” is an exposition of time from the standpoint of the Enlightenment. Each time period—past, present, and future—possess its respective three time periods, for a total of nine time periods. Entering into the sāgaramudrā-samādhi, these nine time periods collapse into the tenth, a time of timelessness-time.

Existentially, the ninth dharma-gate describes the reality and experience of transcend-timelessness that is realized in transient-time. The rarefied experience that suspends all time into a single existential moment contrasts with our conventional understanding of time represented by the clock. Mechanical or clock-time is orderly, and evenly sequenced; it divides time into past, present, and future. Such notions of time are unidirectionally; namely time moves either from the past to the future or from the future to the past. Regularity is crucial for managing credit card payments, scientific experiments, flight schedules, and generally establishing order in our daily lives. Mechanical time is observed; one stands outside of time and change. Time is also experiential and embodied in experience and memory; and is freely manipulated. The imaginative mind can re-create and retrieve the past and bring it to present time and into being; the imagination can also “remember the future” and transport it into the present and into being. These creative
manipulations are common in the elderly with dementia and persons with cognitive impairments, who frequently move in and out of time by tapping their memory store or by juxtaposing non-sequential events. In Ingmar Bergman’s (1918-2007) Wild Strawberries, Professor Isak Borg moves between the past and present by reminiscing, nightmares, and day dreaming. Moving through and between past and present is a theme in the recent Uncle Boonmee who can recall his past lives (Lung Bunmi Raluek Chat) produced and directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul. In both films past memories and the making of present memories are set against memories of the future (anticipated) death. The mind traverses, collapses, transcends, denies, and even reverses time.

The expression “jūsōsei” or “porously-laminated nature” coined by Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō captures the existential and ontological complexity that evolves with the interplay of past, present, and future memories. Watsuji (1889-1960) maintained that the Japanese are informed by a variety of traditions and cultures - Shintōism, Confucianism, Daoism, Chinese and Indian Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, Christianity, and a variety of Western thought and attitudes. Folk beliefs, emotional, social, historical and current events, personal proclivities and experiences, and recent advances in biotechnology and the culture that it has spawned can also be added to these layers. Additionally these layers are porous; the Japanese may have assimilated the above traditions in their comings and goings, but they may respond to an event from a single, or any combination of these layers. “Jūsōsei” highlights the embodiment of different layers of personal and community experience and memory that inform and nurture individuals and communities.

The co-mingling of ancient with more recent memories is evident in the multiple definitions of death in the 1997 Japanese Organ Transplant Law. A clear legal and medical definition of brain-death is essential for harvesting and transplanting organs. After more than thirty years of debate and reflection, the Law admits the traditional cardio-pulmonary definition of death or the more recent brain-death criteria. While an individual and/or family may rationally accept the notion of brain-death and the medical logic of organ transplants, they are still informed by the traditional cardiopulmonary definition of death, especially while the heart is still beating and the body is warm. It is perhaps for this reason that the Law has a “family consent” provision, which is in essence a third definition: “social death.” This provision allows the family to negotiate the definition of death that would allow for the harvesting of organs. These multiple definitions of death played out during Japan’s very public first experience with brain-death and heart transplant.

In 1968, Dr. Wada Jurō removed and placed the heart of Yamaguchi Yoshimasa in eighteen year old Miyazaki Nobuo. On 11 August 1968, four days after the transplant, the Asahi Shimbun reported that both families met and appeared together at a news conference. Present dharmas quicken future dharmas to appear in the present, linger momentarily, before and disappears in the past. Present dharmas quicken future dharmas to appear in the present, linger momentarily, before exiting into the past. This idea can be likened to film strip that consists of a series of individual frames continuously moving through an illuminated lamp from one reel to the next to create the reality that we experience at the cinema. Like the already existent frames on the outtake reel, dharmas that appear in the present already exist in the future, and those dharmas that disappear from the present continue to exist in the past. For the Sarvastivāda thinkers, these three time periods of future, present, and past all exist - and dharmas themselves possess substantial essence (Sakurabe and Ueyama 1969, 62-63).

The Japanese criteria for whole-brain death are: a) deep coma; 2) cessation of spontaneous breathing; c) fixed and enlarged pupils; d) absence of brain-stem reflexes; e) flat brain waves; f) the above four conditions must continue for at least six hours. Children under six are not subject to the criteria. Two physicians with no vested interest in the harvesting of the individual’s organs, in addition to the attending physician are required to make the diagnosis. The law makes a distinction between a clinical diagnosis and a legal determination of brain-death. In cases where an individual has agreed to the legal definition of whole-brain-death, that person can request that his or her heart and other organs be removed for transplantation. However, should the occasion arise and before the organs can be harvested, a transplant coordinator must consult with the family to ascertain that they will agree with the legal diagnosis of brain-death and approve the removal of the organs.
conference. The article noted that though Yamaguchi’s parents were initially hesitant in donating their son’s organs, they were now pleased that their son was able to make a contribution to society. Miyazaki’s father responded that he had no words to express his gratitude, and that he would like, if the Yamaguchi’s were amenable, for both families to continue their relationship as relatives. Yamaguchi’s teenage daughter initially opposed gifting her brother’s heart. While she now agrees with the decision, she tearfully wished that her brother’s body could have been left alone. Her remarks hinted of the intensity of the family discussion. These brief remarks suggest some of the different spiritual layers that may have informed members of the family. I offer a few observations.

Ms Yamaguchi lament that she wished her brother’s body not be violated can be attributed in part to the Buddhist view that associates life with sentience in its broadest sense. Though the brain may have ceased to function, the individual with a beating heart is still alive and thus would be pained by being cut and having his or her organs removed; or she may have been informed by the Confucian and/or Shintō objection to any calculated violation of the body. The deliberate removal of vital organs is a most unfilial act. Additionally popular Shintō belief maintains that a person should be buried with all of his or her body intact; lest its angers the spirit (reikon) of the deceased who may become vengeful and wreak havoc on the living. Moreover, the lack of a completely intact body complicates the individual’s transformation into a kami or ancestral spirit (sosen). Daoist beliefs maintain that the body is a microcosm of the harmonious universe and such vital organs as the heart are inhabited by spirits (Ch: shen) that coordinate its vital functions. A replacement heart would destabilize the inner harmony of the body. Another concern is the dwelling place of the spirit that once resided in the heart. Without a permanent abode, the spirit is apt to become distressed and cause misfortune on the family.

These views may seem archaic, but they still inform Japanese attitudes toward personal and family identity, life, death, and the afterlife. Miyazaki’s father expressed long held beliefs in the nature of personhood, when he proposed that he would like their families to continue their relationship as relatives. Such an attitude can be attributed to Confucian notions of filiality that defines the responsibilities and obligations between and among individuals: parent and child, husband and wife, siblings, friends, and the community. An essential part of Japanese identity is his or her place within the family lineage that emerges from the distance past and extends into future generations. That his son received and is living with someone else’s organ raises significant conceptual questions concerning the notion of family and personhood. Though deceased, the donor’s heart is alive and beating in another person. To which family lineage does the person Yoshimasa belong to? Assuming that the Yamaguchi family belonged to a temple and their son was buried with and continues to be memorialized with Buddhist rites, what ritual adjustments, if any, did the priest or priests make? How did the Miyazaki’s memorialize Nobuo, who passed away 83 days later? As far as I am aware, Buddhist mortuary and memorial rituals have not been modified to account for donors and recipients of large organs.

As an epistemological paradigm, the “interfusion of time” cautions that there is always more than meets the eye. The Japanese’s first experience with organ transplant challenged them to re-image death and long held attitudes of family and personal identity. The need for a precise definition of death requires a subjective shift that unveils other ways of thinking and being. Like “shifting centers,” the “interfusion of time” is a

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9 The opening lines of the Hsiao-ching (Classic on Filiality) states, “Filial piety is the basis of virtue and the source of our teachings. We receive our body, our hair, and skin from our parents, and we dare not destroy them” (Hsiao-ching 1997: 4).
reminder that the slightest subjective shift opens new possibilities for knowing and thinking.

**Reflections**

Dwelling in the a-temporal and non-spatial mindfulness of sāgaramudrā-samādhi the Tathāgata Śākyamuni apprehended the reality of the dharmadhātu immediately and directly. From this vantage, he apprehended all dharmas: beings, things, and events - to be part of a continually changing organic whole, rising and falling as a single body. The Ten Dharma-gates is a map through which we can visualize this luminous psycho-cosmic landscape and to imagine the contours of Enlightened knowing that apprehends “the rich sensual world of everyday experience” in a single swoop that is of increasing interest to scientists who wish to understand complex organisms and systems in their entirety. Scientific inquiry is moving away from a physical-mechanical-mathematic model of the world toward a cognitive texture that is closer to an individual’s direct perception of reality (Nakayama and Sivin 1973: xxix). Multiple and “shifting centers” and the “interfusion of time” support the effort to understand every being, thing, and event in its entirety.

In a world of conflicting demands and responsibilities dharma-gates ten and nine are useful guidelines for observing and assessing events, passing judgment, and taking action. Such prudence is evident in the geriatric team that coordinates the respective expertise of medical professionals, social service providers, clergy, family, and volunteers in partnership with the elder and his or her family to best ensure the elder’s well-being. Even these efforts are never exhaustive, and our knowledge of a particular phenomenon or care for a person always is indeterminate and changing. An issue may be irresolvable and may remain forever ambiguous. Yet living and working in ambiguity may be the most productive way of ethical deliberation and action. Such a posture initiates humility in deliberation, decision-making, and action, knowingly that others have different values and may not approve or follow our example. Living and working with uncertainty is invaluable in public discourse; indeterminacy demands that we consider all concerns in advancing the public good or determining end-of-life care.

The moral ends of Buddhist knowing, thinking, and doing, and their institutionalization at Nālandā Mahāvihāra may be useful models for fostering critical thinking. Students at Nālandā explored and measured the Buddhadharma by studying the different branches of Brāhmaṇic philosophy.

In addition the more than forty scholar-monks from China, Korea, Tibet, Central and Southeast Asia who studied were in residence no doubt introduced non-Indian visions of reality, healing, and problem solving (Joshi 1967:140). The secular disciplines, especially medicine and pharmacology, nurtured the practical aspects of compassion (Demiéville 1985:50-53). If this experience is any guide, the exposure to competing ideologies the students at Nālandā received instilled an appreciation for “relative values.” This “liberal education” prepared the students to engage their ideological competitors and more importantly to face

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10 After three centuries Nālandā universal educational vision gave way to a focus on “Buddhist Tantra, an amalgamation of mysticism, and magic that radically departed from classical Buddhist teachings of sūnyatā and other fundamental ideas. Tantra incorporated mystical and magical elements into Buddhist ritual and practice, including sexual components. Tantra’s emphasis on the necessity of a guru to guide the devotee limited the glories of the Dharma to a select few. This intellectual narrowing limited the exposure to alternative visions of reality and thus solutions to human questions. Scholars speculate that this intellectual stunting was a major reason Nālandā was unable to adequately respond to the Brahmānic and Muslim challenges. While Brahmānism was able to recover from the destruction of its temples and the slaughter of its ascetics, the Buddhism of Nālandā was unable to (Dutt 1962:344. Joshi 1977:304-327). Passing the secrets of the Dharma from teacher to disciple also suggests the decline of Buddhism as a living faith; the laity was not included in the fruits of the academy, distancing the Dharma from the wider society. The scholar-monks did not involve themselves with the lives of the laity and their rituals for birth, marriage, and death. These mundane tasks were relegated to the Brahmānic clergy (Joshi 1967:323).
unprecedented moral, ethical, spiritual, and intellectual challenges. At its height, the rector - Dharmapāla, Śīlabhadra, and Santideva were scholar-monks of liberal learning and wide philosophical outlook (Joshi 1977:345). Edward Conze attributes the spread of Buddhism to monks, who “Having the advantage of a liberal education, …react to the unproven with a benevolent skepticism and so …have been able to accommodate themselves to every kind of popular belief not only in India, but in all countries they moved into” (Conze 1982: 12).

“The Buddha always stressed that he was a guide, not an authority, and that all propositions must be tested, including his own” (Conze 1982:12). To that end, he continually retooled the conventions (language) and his pedagogy, cognizant that what may work today or in one context may not be appropriate tomorrow or in a different context. A lesson that was not lost to Zeami Motokiyo (c. 1363-1443), the nō actor and aesthetician who observed the ambiguities of his art. For his part, Zeami applied Buddha’s pedagogy to “hana” or “flower,” an expression that refers to the consummate skill of a performer who is able to consistently transport the audience into the imagined world created by the theater. What may be successful for one theatrical venue may not be effective in another for any number or reasons, not the least, a different audience at every performance. He buttressed this opinion with a reference to Dōgen (c. 1200-1253), Zeami writes:

The non-believer (turtika) quires the Buddha. “Yesterday, what kind of Dharma did you preach?”
“Yesterday I preached the unambiguous Dharma.”
“What kind of Dharma will you preach today?”
“I will preach the ambiguous Dharma.”
“Why do you preach the ambiguous Dharma today?”
“Yesterday’s unambiguous Dharma is today’s ambiguous Dharma (Zeami 1970: 305-306).”

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