

12 *The Sacred and the Secular in a Medieval Chinese Buddhist Scripture – The Sūtra on the Analogy of the Physician (ca. 1000 CE)*

Introduced and translated by C. Pierce Salguero

Introduction

Sacred Buddhist texts were greatly influenced by secular medical systems, such as Āyurveda and classical Chinese medicine.^I References to medical doctrines, models, and terminology can be found in even the earliest Buddhist scriptures, and increased in frequency and importance in subsequent centuries. Heroic doctors, legendary surgeons, and miracle-working healer-monks were presented as model Buddhist patrons or practitioners. Divine Buddhist healers, such as Bhaiṣajyaguru (*Yaoshifo* 藥師佛), Avalokitśvara (*Guanshiyin* 觀世音), and Jīvaka (*Qipo* 耆婆 or *Qiyu* 耆域), were popularly venerated through a wide range of healing rituals. Although Buddhist views on the relationship between Buddhism and medicine have been neither uniform nor unvarying, in the premodern world, medicine was a central part of the practice of Buddhism, and Buddhism was a major catalyst for cross-cultural medical exchange.

While Buddhism and medicine were thus entangled throughout the premodern period, some Buddhist traditions were at great pains to distinguish between these two fields. Most Buddhist societies have recognized monastics and physicians as discrete social categories, and Buddhist texts consistently value the former over the latter. One way of making this valuation is by distinguishing the “worldly” or “mundane” (Skt. *laukika*) activities of ordinary unenlightened society from the “otherworldly” or “supramundane” (Skt. *lokottara*) activities concerned with liberation. In Chinese Buddhist texts, this *laukika/lokottara* dichotomy is generally represented in translations as “of the world” (*shi* 世 or *shijian* 世間) versus “transcending the world” (*chushijian* 出世間, *lishi* 離世, *dushi* 度世, etc.).^{II}

I The perspectives introduced in this paragraph are detailed in C. Pierce Salguero. *A Global History of Buddhism & Medicine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022); C. Pierce Salguero. *Buddhism & Medicine: An Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); C. Pierce Salguero, *Buddhism & Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

II See discussion in C. Pierce Salguero. “Healing and/or Salvation? The Relationship Between Religion and Medicine in Medieval Chinese Buddhism,” *Working Paper Series of the HCAS: Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities* 4 (2018); https://www.multiple-secularities.de/media/workpaper_4_salguero_final.pdf.

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The short Buddhist scripture called the *Sūtra on the Analogy of the Physician* (*Foshuo yiyu jing* 佛說醫喻經) was translated into Chinese in the late tenth century by a monk named Danapala (?–1017) who hailed from Udyāna, India. Like many Buddhist texts in Chinese and other languages, this sūtra uses a number of medical analogies. It equates the Buddha to a physician, calls the Buddha’s teaching a “Dharma-medicine,” and also compares the Four Noble Truths (a fundamental Buddhist doctrine) to the steps taken by a doctor in diagnosing and prescribing for a patient.^{III} These analogies are intended to draw the readers’ attention to the systematic efficacy of the Buddha’s teachings, both in understanding the sources of human suffering, and in providing remedies for those ills.

In the course of presenting these metaphorical equations, this text distinguishes explicitly between the knowledge of the “skilled worldly physician” (*shi langyi* 世良醫), on the one hand, and the “supreme Dharma-Medicine” (*wushang fayao* 無上法藥) taught by the Buddha, on the other. In so doing, it contributes to the construction of a dichotomy between worldly and Dharmic knowledge that is reminiscent of (though surely not exactly the same as) our modern concepts of the secular and the sacred.

Bibliographical Information

Danapala, trans. *Foshuo yiyu jing* 佛說醫喻經 [The Sūtra on the Analogy of the Physician]. In *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, edited by Junjirō Takakusu, and Watanabe Kaikyoku, 85 vols. Tokyo: Issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1935. Vol. 4, No. 219; 802.

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Thus have I heard. At one time the World Honoured One was staying in Śrāvastī, together with a group of monks. At that time, the World Honoured One spoke to the monks, saying:

You ought to know: A skilled worldly doctor’s knowledge of disease and understanding of medicines is fourfold. If he is consummate in these, then he has earned the name “King of Physicians.” What are these four? 1) He knows each disease, and applies its specific medicine. 2) He knows the cause of the disease, and applies the medicine according to this cause. 3) When the disease has arisen, he knows how to purge it. 4) The disease having been eliminated, he knows how to prevent it from arising again. These are the four types [of knowledge].

III For more on the use of medical metaphors in Chinese Buddhist texts, see C. Pierce Salguero, *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 67–95.

What do I mean by saying, “he knows each disease, and applies its specific medicine”? I mean that, having first understood the symptoms, he knows the medicine by which the disease may be cured, and he thus brings about harmony.

What do I mean by saying, “he knows the cause of the disease, and applies the medicine according to this cause”? I mean that he knows whether this disease arose because of *vāta*, or arose because of *pitta*, or arose because of *ślesman*, or arose because of the combination,¹ or arose because of the bones and joints, or arose because of excesses. Knowing the origins of the disease, he uses the appropriate medicine to treat it, and he thus brings about harmony.

What do I mean by saying, “when the disease has arisen, he knows how to purge it”? I mean that he knows whether this particular disease should be purged through the eyes; or purged through the nose by means of a specific therapy such as nasal fumigation, irrigation, or exhalation; or purged through vomiting; or purged through full-body sudation; or whether purging via the upper or lower portions of the body is most appropriate. Knowing the location by which this disease may be purged, he skillfully uses the medical treatment, and he thus brings about harmony.

What do I mean by saying “the disease having been eliminated, he knows how to prevent it from arising again”? I mean that understanding the conditions that led to the disease arising, he consequently will understand its removal. Working zealously on the task before him, he will get rid of it. Having done so, this disease will never again arise, and thus he brings about harmony.

These, then, are the four types of knowledge about disease and understanding of medicines. The Tathāgata, Worthy of Honor, Supremely Enlightened, is just like this. Having appeared in this world, he teaches four types of supreme Dharma-medicines. What are these four? They are the Noble Truths of suffering, its arising, its cessation, and the path to enlightenment.

These Four Noble Truths, which the Buddha teaches to living beings based on his own true knowledge, lead to the elimination of the arising of dharmas. Because dharmas arising from the roots of suffering are eliminated, old age, illness, death, sorrow, and suffering are all forever destroyed.

The Tathāgata, Worthy of Honor, Supremely Enlightened, on account of these benefits, teaches this supreme Dharma-medicine so that all sentient beings may be

¹ CPS: *Vāta*, *pitta*, and *ślesman* are the three main disease factors (*tridoṣa*) of classical Indian medicine, and are frequently encountered in both Buddhist and Āyurvedic texts. See Mark Tatz, trans., *Buddhism and Healing: Demiéville's Article "Byō" from Hōbōgirin* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 65–76; C. Pierce Salguero, “Mixing Metaphors: Translating the Indian Medical Doctrine *Tridoṣa* in Chinese Buddhist Sources,” *Asian Medicine: Tradition and Modernity* 6, no. 1 (2010–11): 55–74; Natalie Köhle, “A Confluence of Humors: Āyurvedic Conceptions of Digestion and the History of Chinese ‘Phlegm’ (tan 痰).” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136, no. 2 (2016): 465–93. While the Chinese term *tan* 痰 usually also refers to *ślesman*, here it is most likely referring to the combination of the three disease factors, which typically is mentioned after *vāta*, *pitta*, and *ślesman*, as a fourth cause of disease.

free from all suffering. Monks, I am like a wheel-turning Dharma-King who is endowed with four armies, and has therefore attained total freedom. The Tathāgata, Worthy of Honor, Supremely Enlightened is just like this.

When the Buddha had spoken thus, the assembly of monks rejoiced, and accepted his words.