

Article

Snake, Spell, Spirit, and Soteriology: The Birth of an Indian God Jiedi 揭諦 in Middle-Period China (618–1279)

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Abstract: I introduce a Buddhist god named Jiedi, believed to be a personification of the renowned *gate* mantra in the *Heart Sūtra*. I argue for a complex genesis story where the transference of the *nāga*-taming function and aquatic setting from the rainmaking spell in the *Great Cloud Sūtra* to the *Heart Sūtra* Mantra, coupled with its exegetical tradition emphasizing the soteriological metaphor of crossing, created an independent cult of the Jiedi Mantra. In battling chthonic snake spirits demanding virgin sacrifice in Sichuan, a regional variation of a cosmopolitan alchemical theme, the mantra was personified into a god associated with water and warfare. The exorcistic function of the mantra was the motor behind its apotheosis in Middle-period China. While he was elevated from a mere spirit to a *vidyārāja* (“wisdom king”) in tantric Buddhism, his cult was also disseminated in the Song, witnessing him provide broad deliverance in diverse areas such as industry, agriculture, infrastructure, military, and civil service. In late imperial China, he further imprinted himself on sacred geography, became a special class of warrior god, made inroads into Daoism and local religion, and proliferated in vernacular fiction and drama. An exotic Indian god was born on Chinese soil.

Keywords: Jiedi God; Jiedi Wisdom King; Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi God; Jiedi Mantra; *Heart Sūtra*; human sacrifice; snake cult; well deities



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1. Introduction

“Where is Jiedi?” summoned Chan master Fahai and, after muttering a mantra, loudly shouted, “Go, quickly capture the Green Fish Monster for me! Have it change back to its original form with the White Snake! And listen to my judgment!” After a gust of wind, a Green Fish fell from midair and the White Snake succubus manifested her ophidian form. They were then suppressed beneath the Thunder Peak Pagoda by West Lake in Hangzhou. When the two demons were reduced to their animal forms at the climax in the earliest iteration of the famed *Legend of the White Snake* (*Baishe zhuan* 白蛇傳), a fierce god named Jiedi was summoned to extinguish the poignant love between the White Snake Spirit and her mortal lover.¹

Who is this spoiler of transspecies romance? What is his relationship with the mantra spoken by Fahai? How did he become entangled with snakes and fish? Some elements in this late imperial romance can be traced far back to the Tang dynasty (618–907). The Buddhist god Jiedi appears to be derived from arguably the second most “famous and oft-recited of Buddhist mantras”—*gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā* (Chn. *jiedi jiedi boluojiedi boluosengjiedi puti sapohe* 揭帝 揭帝 波羅揭帝 波羅僧揭帝 菩提薩婆訶)—which appears at the end of Xuanzang’s 玄奘 (602–664) version of the *Heart Sūtra* in 649, the most popular Buddhist scripture in the world.²

However, overexposure leads to overshadowing. In contrast with the limelight the doctrine of emptiness has drawn to this short sūtra, the Jiedi Mantra, not to mention the Jiedi God, has received far less attention in scholarly literature.³ Yet the mantra and god

have also contributed significantly to the popularity of the *Heart Sūtra* cult since the mid-seventh century. I will focus only on the Jiedi God in this article and reserve discussion of the mantra for a future treatment.

Contrary to the prevailing view that attributes the genesis of the Jiedi God solely to the *Heart Sūtra*, I argue that the Jiedi Mantra had an independent existence ever since the rainmaking spell for controlling *nāgas* or dragons in the *Great Cloud Sūtra*. It grew more popular with Xuanzang's version of the *Heart Sūtra*, and acquired not only soteriological significance but also an aquatic setting through metaphorical mappings in the commentarial tradition. In response to the distressing practice of offering virgin girls as brides to snake spirits in China's southwestern Sichuan, a regional variation of a cosmopolitan alchemical theme in which an elusive chthonic "game" is captured from a body of water through seduction and pursuit of a maiden on horseback, Buddhists wielded the Jiedi Mantra to combat serpents and abolish human sacrifices. From this intense struggle emerged the anthropomorphic Jiedi God in the Tang, who became associated with both war and water. The exorcistic function of the Jiedi Mantra was the motor behind its deification in the Middle Period. A Buddhist god with an Indian name and appearance, who is unattested in his supposed homeland, was thus born on Chinese soil. With the spread of tantric Buddhism, Jiedi was elevated from a mere spirit to a *vidyārāja* or wisdom king (*mingwang* 明王), the only indigenous Chinese *vidyārāja* I have come across. His cult flourished in the Song dynasty (960–1279), witnessing him provide broad deliverance in areas such as industry, agriculture, infrastructure, military, and civil service.

Drawing on a variety of sources, including Buddhist scriptures, exegetical works, local gazetteers, visual materials, anecdotal and tale literature, as well as Dunhuang and Yunnan manuscripts, I will start with a narrative trope that sees the Jiedi God killing local snakes and dragons to save virgins, move onto analyzing his origin in the rainmaking spell in the *Great Cloud Sūtra* and the soteriological significance of a particular form of Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi, then delve into his tantricization through examining two statues and their possible deployment in rituals, and finally discuss his sacred geography, network, and proliferation in vernacular fiction and drama in the late imperial period.

2. Snakes' Brides

Why and how was an Indian god born on Chinese soil? A few miracle tales revolving around the killing of serpents and dragons have provided clues. An account of the origin of the Jiedi God can be found in the Dunhuang manuscript Pelliot chinois 3142 currently preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Figure 1)⁴

During the Dali era (766–779) of the Tang Dynasty, there was a river within the territory of Mount Wu County in the Gorges region. Next to the river there was a well, nearby which stood a temple known as the White Dragon Temple. Leaning against a precipitous cliff, the temple had a hall extending widely. The wind surrounded its wooden [pillars], and clouds enveloped its painted beams. Whoever visited it would feel chills, hair standing on end; none dared to look up [at the temple]. Despite being ruthless and evil, the spirit could answer prayers. Those who revered or disrespected it would witness fortune or misfortune. Consequently, it commanded the villagers to make sacrifices in the spring and autumn. For each sacrifice, it demanded wine, food, money, a white horse, and a virgin girl. If the offerings were complete, there would be harvest and peace; yet if there lacked even one item, it would inflict harm on the crops and people. As for the girls, every household of the village would take turns providing them.

When it later came to the turn of the villager Ding Hui, he had a daughter named Spring Damsel, who was twelve years old. Gentle and beautiful, she possessed a benevolent and amiable nature. Although her parents held her dear in their hearts, she could not escape being offered as sacrifice to the demon. When the time arrived, villagers and the relatives of Ding Hui sent Spring Damsel to the

temple, accompanied by a white horse, wine, food, and money. After the completion of the sacrifice, they left her there and returned home.

Spring Damsel and the horse stood in front of the temple. Resentment gathered on her knitted brows like mist, and bitter tears stained her garment like blood. Until dusk fell, Spring Damsel was awakened in both body and mind. Knowing the compassion of the Buddha, she developed the intention to take refuge in him, in the hope that he might bestow salvation and protection. No sooner had she formed this thought than she suddenly saw an old man speak to her, “Just recite the Jiedi Mantra, and you will surely escape from the disaster”. Spring Damsel then followed the old man and chanted it fourteen times. Suddenly, she heard a sound as loud as thunder, as if heaven and earth were about to collapse. She then saw the old man transform into a god, who looked at the temple and shouted. With that shout, a huge white snake crawled out of the stone well. Several *zhang* long, it vomited blood and died. By the next dawn, Spring Damsel’s parents and the villagers came to the temple with the intention of burying her corpse, only to find Spring Damsel and the horse still alive. They inquired about the cause, and she recounted the incident in detail.

From this, we understand that righteousness will conquer evil, and that no monsters can prevail over the blessed. From this point on, all anomalies ceased to exist. Undoubtedly, this was thanks to the efficacy of the Jiedi Mantra. Consequently, a painting based on the form manifested [by the god] alongside the incident was submitted and distributed across the country to show what was seen and heard. Then the Mantra for Dispelling Misfortune was proclaimed.⁵

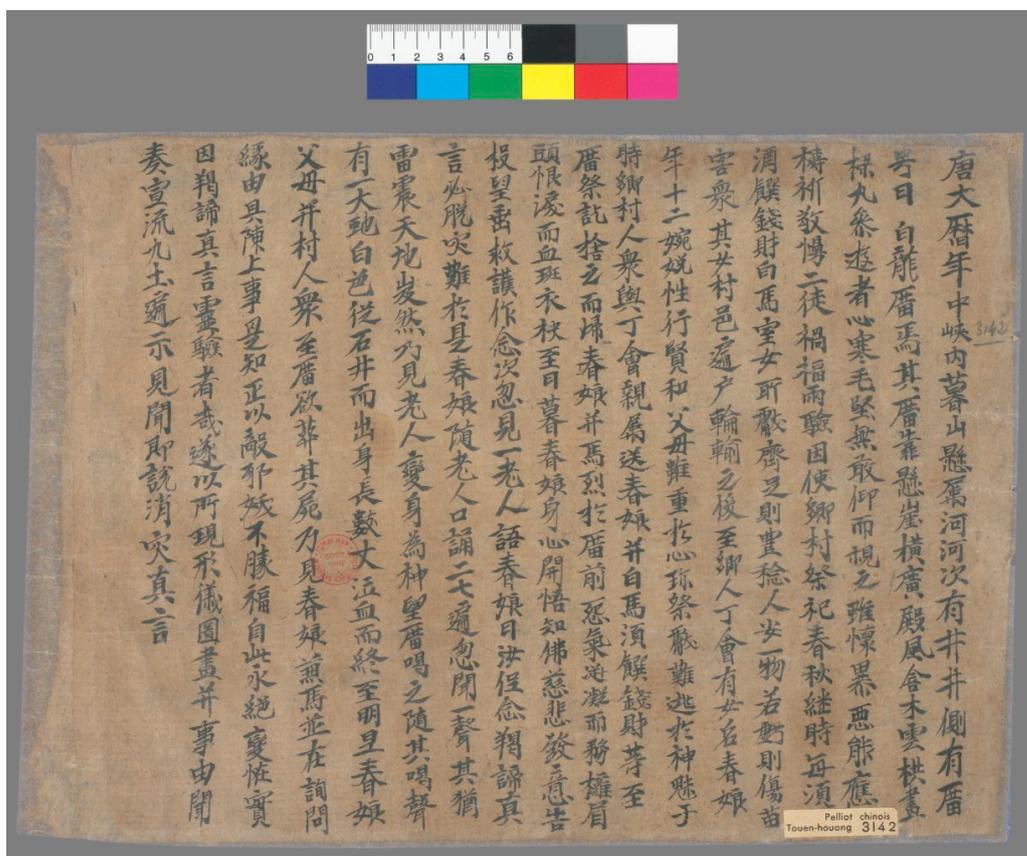


Figure 1. Dunhuang manuscript (P. 3142).

This miracle tale evokes the grim reality of human sacrifice that persisted in certain remote regions of the Tang Empire. The terror wrought by the white snake demon is mir-

rored by the setting of the cliffside temple. The very life of a virgin girl hangs there; the fear among the villagers is palpably chilling; and the illicit sacrifice exacts a heavy human and material toll on the local community. Ophidiophobia pervading the existential, psychological, social, and religious levels haunts all those affected. This represents the phenomenological reality of “killing people to sacrifice to demons” (*sharen jigui* 殺人祭鬼) that lingered in Middle-period China.

While we start to see sudden outpourings of records regarding human sacrifice and its repeated bans since the early Song period, the scarcity of such accounts during the Tang does not necessarily mean that the actual practice was less prevalent. Chinese intellectual historian Ge Zhaoguang attributes the reason why more such accounts are found in the Song to widespread and frequent civilizing projects endorsed by the Song court. The “civilization” as prescribed by state ideology extended from cities to the countryside, and from the Central Plains to remote areas. Ge points out perceptively that “an era in which an abundance of reports about ‘killing people to sacrifice to demons’ appears again in the historical records is precisely an era in which mainstream society is strongly resisting this kind of custom”. In other words, a cultural phenomenon only garners historical attention when it becomes aberrant and, as a result, moves into the foreground. Therefore, human sacrifice was not widely recorded by Tang historians precisely because it encountered no strong opposition.⁶

Building upon existing scholarship, I intend to highlight the distinct roles played by Tang and Song governments in human sacrifice, which might constitute another small piece of evidence for what is called the “Tang-Song transition”. In contrast to the repeated bans imposed by the Song court, medieval governments occasionally exhibited complicity in or even orchestrated human sacrifice. For instance, the well-known tale of “Li Ji, the Serpent-Slayer” (*Li Ji zhanshe* 李寄斬蛇) reveals that local Fujianese officials threw their hands up in the air, requisitioned daughters born to slaves or criminals, and reared them until the age of twelve or thirteen as sacrifices to a giant serpent.⁷ This account illustrates the ineffectual and ignoble role played by local bureaucrats in handling the snake scare. Scholars have also examined rumors concerning government involvement in human sacrifice documented in Tang history. Before the renovation of the Bright Hall in Luoyang in the lunar eighth month of 739, a rumor circulated that the court would capture and bury young children beneath it as part of the construction magic. Consequently, village children fled to hide in mountain valleys, and panic engulfed the Eastern Capital, with widespread belief that soldiers would be dispatched imminently. Emperor Xuanzang detested the rumor so much that he sent a special envoy to Luoyang and neighboring prefectures to reassure the people. Peace was only restored after a long while. In 744, another alarming rumor surfaced in Chang’an, suggesting that the government planned to send a creature called *chengcheng* to steal human livers for sacrifices to the Dog of Heaven (*Tiangou* 天狗; L. Sirius, the Dog Star). This rumor induced widespread panic throughout the capital region, leading the emperor once again to send a special emissary to calm the populace. As Wang Yu’s analysis suggests, “Rumors are typically composed by mixing false information with known information. This particular rumor gained traction because the public was already familiar with the practice of human sacrifice for ritual purposes”. While I concur with Barend ter Haar that the emperor was to some extent scapegoated in these rumors, it is important to recognize that the government’s acquiescence in or orchestration of human sacrifice, coupled with a lack of trust in the regime, created a breeding ground for the propagation of such rumors during the Tang dynasty. The repeated imperial bans since the Song dynasty may explain why similar rumors in later centuries seldom implicated the emperor as a scapegoat.⁸

What is unstated but commonly understood about virgin sacrifice in premodern China is that the Spring Damsel was offered as the bride of the white snake spirit. Ter Haar suggests that “the sacrificial marriage to divine beings” was probably intended as a form of ritual marriage rather than an actual full sacrifice (Ter Haar 2006, pp. 299–301; see also Sawada 1982, pp. 250–77). But why did sex come into play? I argue that the Spring Damsel

tale is in fact a Sichuanese variation of a cosmopolitan alchemical theme that stretches from Ireland to East Asia along the Silk Routes. As David Gordon White demonstrates, this Eurasian lore often involves a virgin, a horse, and the capture of an elusive chthonic “game” from a well or a body of water (White 1996, pp. 203–6; see also White 1997, pp. 73–77). As a typical example, an Indian technique describes a maiden on horseback who lures mercury to rise out of its well, which chases her over mountains and valleys and is subsequently captured in troughs, displaying a strong overtone of sexual enticement and pursuit/fleeing. In the extraction process, the maiden is specified as a virgin who has reached menarche, apparently used as “bait” (White 1997, p. 76). The first occurrence of menstruation of Chinese girls is usually between twelve and thirteen years, precisely the age of the Spring Damsel in Sichuan and victims in the Li Ji story in Fujian. When this cosmopolitan alchemical theme reached Sichuan, the precious mercurial “game” metamorphosed into salt, and the baiting maiden in mercurial extraction became the victim bride of chthonic dragons guarding salt wells, as described in the following legend from a local gazetteer cited in *Imperially Reviewed Encyclopedia of the Taiping Era* (*Taiping yulan* 太平御覽), completed in 983:

There is a well called Linjing 陵井 that yields salt in Renshou County, Linzhou 陵州 Prefecture (modern-day Meishan 眉山 City). Adjacent to this well, there stands a shrine dedicated to a Jade Maiden. Originally, the maiden had no husband. Later each year, a young man was chosen and cast into the well, or else the water would dry up.

In the West Mountain of the Shu counties, there resides a huge python which sucks people away. Atop the mountain stands a shrine referred to as “the Spirit of the Western Mountain”. Annually, the natives would select a girl to be adorned by the shrine as the spirit’s wife (*shenqi* 神妻). The python would then suck her away, or else it would harm people indiscriminately.

After the [Northern] Zhou Dynasty pacified Shu, Yuwen Gui (?–568), Duke of Xu, assumed the role of governor in Yizhou. He sent up a petition to arrange a marriage between the two spirits, selected an [auspicious] day, played music, and sent the statue of the Jade Maiden as a companion for the Spirit of the West Mountain. Since then, these disturbances have ceased to occur.⁹

Originally, the consummation of spirit-human marriage connotes the consumption of boys and girls, carrying the aura of a fertility cult. Franciscus Verellen shows that the Lingjing Salt Well and the subsequent Lingzhou Prefecture were derived from Zhang Ling 張陵 (34–156), the reputed founder of Daoism. According to local legend, Zhang performed divination with the assistance of twelve Jade Maidens to find the brine reservoir’s location. After evading their matrimonial proposition, he confined the maidens within the well, where they became guardian deities. In two other sources about this legend, the well spirit is stated to be venomous dragons, casting some questions on their relationship with the Jade Maidens (Verellen 1997, pp. 251, 259, and 263). Equine pursuit in the cosmopolitan alchemical lore takes the form of a marriage proposal in the Daoist legend, resulting reversely in the seductive maidens to be trapped within the well. Human sacrifices to the spirits of the salt wells in Sichuan continued into the Southern Song (1127–1279), despite repeated bans.¹⁰ Cults devoted to them have what von Glahn calls a “somber” and even “invidious” aura, as demonstrated by the Spring Damsel story (von Glahn 1987, p. 85). There exists “an exchange relationship between the community that provided the girl and the receiving deity (or deities),” points out Ter Haar (2006, p. 300). I suspect this sacrificial economy could even sometimes be collusive—locals might pursue profits from salt yields by sacrificing the tender sap of their community to the spirits, especially when the victim was a girl in a premodern patriarchal society.

The Spring Damsel tale from the Three Gorges region in eastern Sichuan is actually the earliest extant one among three stories involving the killing of snakes to save virgins by the Jiedi God or Mantra. A second story, titled “The Holy Monk Who Kills a Flood Dragon by Wielding the Jiedi Mantra” (*chi Jiedi zhou zhanjiao shengseng* 持揭諦呪斬蛟聖僧), comes

from the lost *Collected Record of the Bodhisattva of Perfect Interpenetration* (*Yuanton zong lu* 圓通總錄) but is preserved in *Geographical Record of Superb Places* (*Yudi jisheng* 輿地紀勝) by Wang Xiangzhi 王象之 (*jinsi* 1196). It runs as follows:

During the Shengli era (698–700) of Emperess [Wu] Zetian's reign in the Tang Dynasty, a flood dragon sometimes emerged from the People's Pond in Jiachuan County (modern-day Wangchang County in northeastern Sichuan) within Ji Prefecture, causing harm. Villagers thus made sacrifices to it with virgin girls and white horses. Having been deluded by [the dragon], they became accustomed to this as normal. When it was Zhang Congshan's turn to sacrifice his daughter, the elderly couple wept bitterly. A monk arrived at their doorstep and taught the girl the Incantation of the Jiedi God in the *Prajñā[-pāramitā-hṛdaya] Sūtra*. The girl followed his instructions. After being sent to the flood dragon temple, she suddenly saw a giant figure clad in armor and wielding a sword. The flood dragon rushed out, and the giant killed it with the sword, leaving the girl unharmed. An edict was issued to rename the temple as the Jiedi Cloister, and the girl was ordained as a nun, taking charge of it.¹¹

This story succinctly recounts the tale of the Spring Damsel, with the cosmopolitan alchemical theme of a maiden, a horse, and a chthonic spirit rising up from water and pursuing/fleeing all present. Flood dragon, or *jiao*, is a species of dragon capable of invoking storms and floods. It usually symbolizes the destructive or treacherous aspects of water, in contrast to the beneficent qualities typically associated with the *long*-dragon (Kroll 2017, p. 203; HDC s.v. 蛟). The Jiedi God is portrayed more concretely here as a titan in armor and with a sword combating the dragon. The conversion of its shrine into a Buddhist cloister illustrates the Buddhist domestication of local cults and territorial takeover (Faure 1987). The author demonstrates a keen awareness of the provenance of Incantation of the Jiedi God in the *Heart Sūtra*, which features Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara or Guanyin 觀音 as the main interlocutor. It is no wonder this story is excerpted from a collection of the Bodhisattva of Perfect Interpenetration (圓通 Yuanton), an epithet of Guanyin that refers to the penetrating abilities of his/her faculty of hearing.

The third story appears in a slightly different version in the *Thicket of Conversations* (*Tan sou* 談藪) during the Song period. Lai Xinggan 賴省幹, a famous diviner and native of Jianning 建寧 in the mountainous western Fujian region, practiced black magic to kill humans as sacrifice for demons (*xie yaoshu sharen jigui* 挾妖術殺人祭鬼). He often sought teenage girls in Zhejiang for this purpose, and one girl was selected for this grim fate. The storyline then closely resembles the previous two tales, except that in this version, a white python is killed solely by the Jiedi Mantra, with no appearance of the Jiedi God. The story results in the sorcerer and his family members apprehended by the government and exiled overseas. Spirit mediums or sorcerers played a significant role in perpetuating the practice of human sacrifice in premodern China.¹²

The chthonic spirits demanding virgin brides in the stories above invariably take the form of snakes, pythons, or dragons, all of which fall under the Indian category of snake-like *nāgas* following the transmission of Buddhism to China. Even the aquatic habitats of the *nāgas* are transposed: in the first story, the white snake emerged from a well near a river, while in the second, the flood dragon dwelled in a pond. Consequently, the Jiedi God became a Chinese instantiation of the dragon-slayer archetype found throughout the world.¹³

As Huaiyu Chen's recent book on animals in medieval Chinese religions demonstrates, "snake disaster" (*shezai* 蛇災) and tiger terror were considered the two biggest physical and psychological threats posed by animals. Consequently, the ability to tame tigers and kill snakes became "crucial cultural capital" for Buddhists and Daoists to exhibit their prowess, both in practice and in rhetoric (Chen 2023, p. 8). However, there is a significant distinction in how Buddhists handled these two ferocious animals: snakes were killed, but tigers never were. Since the snake is a Buddhist symbol for hatred, one of the three poisons directly contrasted with the Mahāyāna virtue of compassion, slaying a snake became emblematic of eliminating this poison (p. 148). Although intentionally or accidentally killing

snakes broke early Buddhist precepts, the tantric tradition, with its rhetoric of “compassionate violence,” had few qualms about wielding new ritual technology to slay serpents, abolish virgin sacrifice, assist local communities, and compete with Daoists for religious influence. This set the tantric tradition apart from the other Chinese Buddhist traditions in approaching snakes. While Bernard Faure shows that malevolent snake spirits are pacified or appeased in the Chan school, they are often, albeit not invariably, killed by tantric gods or spells.¹⁴ “Doctrinal, historical, social, and religious challenges shaped Buddhist acceptance of killing snakes in response to social, cultural, and religious crises in medieval China,” concludes Chen (2023, p. 150).

The Spring Damsel tale represents a Sichuanese variation of a cosmopolitan alchemical theme, in which an elusive chthonic “game” is captured from a body of water through sexual enticement and the ensuing pursuit or flight of a maiden on horseback. It also exemplifies the Buddhist typology of the superimposition on or suppression of local snake cults. With the recitation of the mantra, a god comes into being. The power of the Jiedi Mantra is vividly displayed through the thunderous shout of the Jiedi God. An Indian god was born from combating against the grim practice of sacrificing virgins to the snake cult in China.

3. Spells

But how did the Jiedi God and Mantra become associated with serpents and dragons? Some scholars have pointed out that the mantra found in the *Heart Sūtra* bears a resemblance to those contained in two other Mahāyāna sūtras: the *Dafangdeng wuxiang jing* 大方等無想經, more commonly known as the *Great Cloud Sūtra* (*Dayun jing* 大雲經; Skt. *Mahāmegha-sūtra*), translated in 417, and the *Dongfang zuisheng deng wang toluoni jing* 東方最勝燈王陀羅尼經 (Skt. *Agrapradīpadhāraṇīvidyārāja*), translated toward the end of the sixth century.¹⁵ Jan Nattier thinks that “the striking similarities between them suggests that a number of variants of this mantra must have been circulating outside the context of the *Heart Sūtra* itself” (Nattier 1992, p. 211n53). It appears that the mantra in the latter sūtra is less popular. However, I propose that it was the rainmaking dhāraṇī in the former that provided the direct inspiration for and exerted a greater impact on the *Heart Sūtra* mantra.

The *Great Cloud Sūtra* narrates that Vairambhaka, the king of the winds, creates a gentle cool breeze before joining the assembly. After generating four kinds of dark clouds saturated with sweet water and three types of thunder out of supernatural power, the Buddha then recites a long dhāraṇī, the opening section of which bears a striking resemblance to the Jiedi Mantra:¹⁶

gate pari-(or pra-)gate saṃgate pārasaṃgate... 竭帝 波利竭帝 僧竭帝 波羅僧竭帝...

gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā 揭帝 揭帝 波羅揭帝 波羅僧揭帝 菩提薩婆訶

The Buddha then warns, “if dragons, upon hearing this spirit spell, do not bring down sweet rain, their heads will be shattered into seven parts”.¹⁷ Six kinds of quakes soon occur, the dragons and clouds stir, and rain pours down, filling all the rivers and lakes in the world. Even after seven days of continuous rainfall, no damage is done. All sentient beings rejoice as if they had drunk elixirs. Aquatic beings (*shuixing zhi shu* 水性之屬), in particular, develop the aspiration to attain supreme enlightenment.¹⁸

This rainmaking spell illustrates the Buddhist domestication of the native Indian *nāga* cult. The dhāraṇī from the *Great Cloud Sūtra* circulated independently in China afterward. It gained popularity when included as the “Rainmaking Dhāraṇī” (*jiangyu toluoni* 降雨陀羅尼), along with a note about its provenance in the *Great Cloud Sūtra*, in the bulky compilation *Dhāraṇī Miscellany* (*Tuoluoni zaji* 陀羅尼雜集) dated to the first half of the sixth century.¹⁹ It also appears as the “Dhāraṇī-incantation for Praying for Rain” (*qiyu toluoni zhou* 乞雨陀羅尼呪) in the *Grove of Jewels in the Garden of the Dharma* (*Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林), an encyclopedic compilation by Daoshi 道世 (591–683) in 668.²⁰ This confirms Nattier’s insight on its independent circulation outside the context of the *Heart Sūtra*. Thus,

we see the rainmaking function of the dhāraṇī from the *Great Cloud Sūtra* being transferred to the Jiedi Mantra of the *Heart Sūtra* and utilized to subdue snakes and dragons.

But did the association of the Jiedi God or Mantra with water solely arise from confusion with the rainmaking dhāraṇī in the *Great Cloud Sūtra*? In the following, I will demonstrate that the commentarial tradition on the *Heart Sūtra* provided fertile ground for the reception of the water transference. Wōnch'ūk 圓測 (613–696), the eminent Yogācāra scholar monk who hailed from Silla Korea and stayed in Tang China until his death, explicates the mantra in his *Commentary on the Sutra on the Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom as Spoken by the Buddha* (*Pulsöl panya paramilda simgyōng ch'an* 佛說般若波羅蜜多心經贊), which had a great impact on the later Chinese understanding of the mantra.²¹ In the following, I will focus on Wōnch'ūk's exegesis while supplementing it with the *Brief Commentary on the Sutra on the Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom* (*Bore boluomiduo xinjing lüeshu* 般若波羅蜜多心經略疏), written in 702 by Fazang 法藏 (643–712), the Huayan scholar monk born in the Tang capital to a Sogdian family from Central Asia.

First, *gate gate* means “deliver, deliver” (or “cross over, cross over”; *du du* 度度), which eulogizes the two characters *bore* (“wisdom;” Skt. *prajñā*) in the previous prose section. It reveals that *prajñā* possesses the great function of delivering oneself and delivering others [to the further shore]. Thus it is said, “deliver, deliver”.

Next, the phrase *pāra*[gate] eulogizes *pāramitā* in the prose section. It means “reach the further shore,” with “the further shore” referring to nirvana. *Gate* means “cross over”. Where does one cross over to? It refers to the further shore to which one crosses over. Thus it is said *pāragate*.

As for *pāra*, it is translated as above. *Samgate* means “reach the ultimate”. *Bodhi* (“enlightenment”) is the essence of the further shore. Lastly, *svāhā* means “quickly”. This means because the wondrous wisdom has excellent functions, one is able to reach the further shore of *bodhi* quickly.²²

The mantra *gate gate pāragate pārasamgate bodhi svāhā* is usually understood to mean “Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone completely beyond; enlightenment; hail!” (McRae 1988, p. 315; Lopez 1996, p. 169; see also Conze 1958, pp. 101–2). The grammar of this phrase is a source of puzzlement among Indologists, however. It is generally understood that *gate* is derived from *gata* (“gone”), a past passive participle from the root \sqrt{gam} (“go”).²³ While Fazang's interpretation aligns with this understanding when he provides both the literal and derived senses of *gate* as “gone” and “delivered” (*quye duye* 去也度也),²⁴ I suspect that Wōnch'ūk's familiarity with Sanskrit helped other words derived from the root $\sqrt{tṛ}$ (“cross over”) to creep into his emphatic interpretation of *gate* solely as *du*, without any mention of its literal sense of “gone”.²⁵ The Chinese *du* is an intransitive verb meaning literally “cross over (a river or ocean),” and, as a transitive verb, has acquired a strong sense of “ferry over, save” in Buddhism.²⁶ Fully exploiting the intransitive and transitive function, or the primary and derived meaning, of the Chinese verb *du*, Wōnch'ūk creatively construes the repetition of *gate* (“gone”) as “deliver oneself and deliver others” or “cross over oneself and help others cross over,” and thereby imputes to it a strong Mahāyāna soteriological agency. This salvific sense of *gate* as *du* also echoes the phrase *du yiqie ku'e* 度一切苦厄 (“he delivered all from suffering”) at the beginning of the *Heart Sūtra*. As scholars have pointed out, this phrase is absent in both the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions and is clearly an audacious Chinese interpolation and innovation (Fukui 2000, p. 577; Watanabe 2009, p. 79; Funayama 2013, p. 67). In addition, *du* was used to render *pāramitā* (“perfection”) in early Chinese Buddhist translations (Teiser 2000, p. 133). The most notable example is the **Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa* or *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論, a treatise on the *Great Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*, whose authorship is attributed to Nāgārjuna and translation to Kumārajīva. By completing the six *pāramitās*, a bodhisattva delivers (*du*) both oneself and others to the further shore. All these intertextual resonances of *du* demonstrate deliverance as an important idea running throughout the *Heart Sūtra*.

In the next section, *pāra* means “beyond,” “the further bank, shore, or boundary”.²⁷ Wōnch’ük’s understanding of *pāragate* is the same as his previous explication on *pāramitā*, “arrive at the further shore,” and by extension, “perfection”.²⁸ Thus he introduces into the mantra the familiar soteriological metaphor of likening the entire Buddhist path to crossing the ocean of *saṃsāra* or suffering over to the further shore of nirvana or enlightenment (*bodhi*).²⁹

As for *pārasaṃgate*, a more in-depth interpretation is provided by Fazang: “*saṃ* means ‘wholly’ (*zong* 總) and ‘universally’ (*pu* 溥). This means that oneself and all others shall universally cross over (自他溥度), and will wholly reach the other shore”.³⁰

Finally, Wōnch’ük employs the traditional Chinese philosophical concepts of essence and function (*ti* and *yong*) to interpret *bodhi* (“enlightenment”) as the essence of the further shore, and “the wondrous wisdom” (*prajñā*) as the function whereby one can arrive quickly at the further shore of enlightenment. Thus, his interpretation of the mantra can be summarized as “Deliver (oneself)! Deliver (others)! Deliver to the further shore! Completely (or “Universally” in Fazang) deliver to the further shore! Enlightenment! Hail!” This derivative line of Sinitic interpretation, which has been circulating in East Asia for more than 1200 years, carries a more vigorous sense compared to the literal rendering by Indologists (“Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone completely beyond; enlightenment; hail!”). In particular, Wōnch’ük’s robust semantic interpretation of *gate gate* as *du du* harmonizes well with the sonic power of the Sanskrit spell. When *gate* is repeated four times, it starts to resemble a march, as Chinese Buddhologist Luo Zhao understands the mantra’s aural quality (Luo 2018, p. 141). The sonics and semantics of the spell combine to convey a compelling Buddhist soteriology.

Regarding the metaphorical understanding of this soteriology, the Tiantai patriarch Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) has a lucid explication in *Understanding Dhyāna Pāramitā: A Method in Stages* (*Shi chan boluomi cidi famen* 釋禪波羅蜜次第法門): “Speaking of ‘reach the further shore,’ life and death is the hither bank, nirvana the further one, and afflictions (Skt. *kleśa*) the middle stream. With markless wondrous wisdom, a bodhisattva rides the boat of meditation to cross over to the further shore of nirvana from the hither bank of life and death.³¹ This accords well with the Indian commentator Praśāstrasena’s understanding: “the sufferings of birth and death are this side, nirvana is the far side. Sentient beings who are driven by the desires of *saṃsāra* are [caught] in the middle. This wisdom acts as a raft and ship, delivering them to the shore of nirvana” (Lopez 1988, p. 23).

What is intriguing in this well-known metaphor is the middle stream or ocean between the shores, the domain where *nāgas* thrive. Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) provides a gloss over *yulong* 魚龍 (“fish and dragon”) in the *Liturgy of Reverence in the Buddhist Gate* (*Shimen guijing yi* 釋門歸敬儀): “Scriptures offer the similes that one’s inner poisons are like a dragon, difficult to touch, and desire and avarice are like a whale swallowing the sea”.³² Yanqi 彥起 further explains that “fish and dragon serve as a metaphor for the heavy karma of the sentient beings’ delusions” in the *Record of Apology for the Liturgy of Reverence in the Buddhist Gate* (*Shimen guijing yi hufa ji* 釋門歸敬儀護法記).³³ With the rise of the Chan School, ocean, dragon, and fish become metaphors for the perverted mind, poisoned mind and afflictions, respectively, in the *Platform Sūtra*. The sixth patriarch Huineng 慧能 (638–713) sermonizes: “The perverted mind is the great sea and the passions are the waves. The poisoned mind is an evil dragon, afflictions are fish and sea turtles.... If the perverted mind is cast aside the ocean will dry up, and when the afflictions are gone the waves will subside. If the poisons and harm are done away with then the dragons and fish will disappear”.³⁴ Crossing the turbulent ocean or middle stream over to the further shore, therefore, also entails subduing one’s afflictions symbolized by fish and dragon. Derived from the root $\sqrt{t\bar{f}}$ (“cross over”) are the meanings of “reach something,” “overcome something,” or even “conquer,” stresses Claire Maes (2022, p. 58). Traversing the path by destroying defilements or other conatively negative qualities is called “inverse *mārga* (‘path’)” in Buddhist soteriological terms (Buswell and Gimello 1992, pp. 12–13). A valiant martial sense is thus derived from the traversing of the ocean (*gate* as *du*).

Through a series of ingenious East Asian exegeses, the Jiedi Mantra is imputed with not only soteriological significance but also a metaphorical aquatic setting. As insight from Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) within the field of cognitive linguistics shows that metaphors extend beyond mere rhetorical language; they permeate our everyday thinking and actions, thereby possessing the remarkable ability to mold our cognition and conduct and, in turn, affect the way reality is constructed (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). There are frequent traversals back and forth between the literal and the metaphorical. In the case of the Jiedi Mantra, the weight of the commentarial tradition of the *Heart Sūtra* compels a mapping from the metaphorical domain to the material or tangible realm. This movement creates not only a figurative but an actual watery habitat for the mantra. Metaphors connect, extend, stretch, traverse; they can even materialize, mold, and make reality.

The association of the Jiedi Mantra with water and *nāgas*, I thus argue, is not solely the result of external transference from a rainmaking *dhāraṇī* in the *Great Cloud Sūtra*. Rather, the hermeneutic tradition, which interprets the soteriological metaphor of crossing within the mantra, has also provided a fertile ground for making this transference plausible. It springs from a confluence of both external and internal factors. In the following, I will illustrate how the metaphoricality of “crossing over” (Skt. *gate*, $\sqrt{tṛ}$; Chn. *du*) transforms into literalness and actuality by examining the devotional cult to a particular form of Jiedi.

4. The Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi God

In 1217, Cheng Boxiong 程伯雄 wrote the “Record of the Newly Built Bridge of Broad Deliverance at the Temple of Broad Deliverance” (“Xinjian Boji miao Boji qiao ji” 新建博濟廟博濟橋記), a highly significant yet regrettably overlooked document which touches upon crucial aspects of the salt industry, agricultural production, infrastructure construction, military campaigns, the intricate dynamics between the state and local interests, and the interreligious interactions among Buddhism, Daoism and local cults in Song-dynasty Sichuan. The temple, located in the present-day Baiyun Township 白雲鄉, Pujiang County 蒲江縣 in the Chengdu metropolitan area, held strategic importance, as it lay at the crossroads of five prefectures on the Sino-Tibetan frontier back to the Southern Song period.³⁵

Cheng narrates that the temple was originally built during the Yongxi period (984–987) in the early Song to honor the tutelary goddess of a salt well (lit. “white well;” *haojing* 皓井) (Figure 2). She first manifested herself in response to the prayer and sacrifice of a man from the Dugu clan during the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420) and was henceforth venerated as the “Holy Lady” (*shenggu* 聖姑) by the local community.



Figure 2. Remains of a salt well in Pujiang County (Chengdu shi wenwu ju 2011, p. 20).

Throughout the last millennium of imperial history, the salt monopoly consistently ranked as the second most important revenue generator after the land tax. The Pujiang

wells played a significant role in the Song salt industry. In the 1010s, a man named Wang Luan achieved a remarkable breakthrough in drilling technology by inventing the “lofty pipe well” (*zhuotong jing* 卓筒井) in Pujiang. This innovation allowed for the successful extraction of brine from previously inaccessible reservoirs, which were soon appropriated by the government (von Glahn 1987, p. 75). These wells fell under the oversight of a special government agency known as the Salt Well Directorate (*yanjing jian* 鹽井監), established in Pujiang during the Song.

In the latter half of the eleventh century, the state tried to maintain monopolistic prices of Pujiang salt by shutting down the privately owned lofty pipe wells in the Chengdu Prefecture Circuit, which led to mass unemployment among salt workers and incurred the ire of Sichuan-born officials.³⁶ Shortly before the “Record” in the early thirteenth century, salt yields from state-monopolized wells in Pujiang ranked second only to those of the Lingzhou Well, which was discovered by the Daoist founder and guarded by the Jade Maidens or venomous dragons discussed earlier.³⁷ Salt from Pujiang was submitted to the Super-provincial Directorates General (*zongling suo* 總領所), a government institution created in the early Southern Song, which dealt primarily with supervising the frontier army and finances, particularly revenue from taxation.³⁸ Sichuan was treated as “an autonomous economic region” by the Song fiscal policy-makers due to its geographical isolation and independent political history prior to the founding of the dynasty (von Glahn 1987, p. 74; Goals 2015, pp. 157–58). The state, however, never gave up on seeking greater profits from the private sector in this prosperous region by increasing state control.³⁹ Revolving around Pujiang salt production and distribution was the conflict between state control and decentralized tendencies throughout the entire dynasty, which was partially reflected in the relationship between translocal Buddhism and local cults.

Incidentally, *The Compiled Drafts of Important Documents of the Song* (*Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿) records that the Temple of Three Ladies was conferred the imperial title of Broad Deliverance in 1161. It is curious to note that the Holy Lady became three and were bestowed with the respective titles of Lady Numinous/Assisting/Supportive Kindness by Emperor Xiaozong in 1172. Considering the subordinate role implied by the titles of the latter two ladies, I suspect that two additional salt wells were discovered after the original one.⁴⁰

After recounting the genesis of the salt well, Cheng continues:

Later, a god descended to the temple and was remarkable in his numinous responsiveness. Only his holy title is written alternatively as “Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi (Pihai Jiedi 劈海揭帝),” which is the name of a god in a Buddhist spell. Considering the god’s efficacy, how can we know it is not derived from his Buddhist status? Therefore, when one seeks his illustrious spiritual power, it is [manifested] as magnificent brilliance such as this. During the Restoration period (1127–1141), the court widely increased various sacrifices and eventually bestowed upon him the title of “Duke of Broad Protection, Auspicious Response, and Bright Beneficence”.⁴¹

Cheng was evidently aware of Jiedi’s provenance in the mantra. From his six-character title, it can be inferred that Jiedi received titles thrice and was finally promoted to Duke. His inclusion in the register of sacrifices also implies that local officials were obliged to visit the Temple of Broad Deliverance biannually during the spring and autumn seasons to perform rituals as prescribed in *The Book of Rites*.⁴² It is significant to note that the Buddhist god was conferred the illustrious imperial title between Emperor Gaozong’s establishment of the Southern Song court in 1127 and the peace treaty with the Jurchens in 1141. During this Restoration period, Sichuan became the frontier war zone battling against the Jurchen invasion. The repeated promotion of this warrior god mirrors the military urgency of early Southern Song.⁴³

“Ocean-Cleaving,” the particular form of the Jiedi God enshrined at the Temple of Broad Deliverance, is rather puzzling. Neither is the temple located in the coastal region,

nor in a wide array of sources is there a single case in which the Jiedi God appears in oceans. The question can be rephrased with a verse from William Wordsworth (1895): “Though inland far we be, / Our souls have sight of that immortal sea”.⁴⁴ Why the sudden invasion of “sea theologies” or “maritime religiosity” into the Jiedi cult?⁴⁵ In her discussion of water as the root metaphor of Chinese philosophies, Sarah Allan sharply points out that it was from contemplating the most commonplace and close-at-hand forms of water that is found in small pools, irrigation ditches, meandering streams, and great rivers—rather than the infinite ocean—that Chinese sought to grasp the fundamental principles of life encompassing both the physical and social worlds (Allan 1997, p. 31). If put in mythological terms, the Jiedi God’s “field of action,” the places and occasions of his activities or services or “where he intervenes,” does not include the sea, though he is found in all other inland aquatic contexts, including wells, ponds, lakes, and rivers.

More important than a god’s “field of action” is his “mode of action,” which refers to the specific manner or means of action that is unique to him or “how he intervenes”.⁴⁶ The particular mode of this Jiedi God’s action, *pi* 劈 (“cleaving”), is graphically conveyed by *pi* 辟 (“breaking open”) on top of the *dao* 刀 (“sword”) radical, which conjures up the sword-brandishing Jiedi who killed the flood dragon mentioned above. Although the compound *pihai* 劈海 does not turn up many results through a search of the electronic Chinese Buddhist canon, it consistently appears in a magnificent Buddhist allusion—the “golden-winged [bird] cleaves/splits the ocean” (*Jinchi pi/bo hai* 金翅劈/擘海).

The allusion appears in several important Buddhist texts, including the *Huayan jing* 華嚴經 (*Avatamsaka Sūtra*) and the *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論:

When one first generates the mind for *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* (“supreme, perfect enlightenment”), one wishes to deliver (*dutuo* 度脱) all living beings from bodily and mental sufferings such as old age, illness, death, and so on. One takes a great vow that all one’s wishes will be fulfilled by adorning oneself with two things, merit (*gongde* 功德; Skt. *guṇa*) and wisdom (*huiming* 慧明; Skt. *prajñā*). These two things involve six-fold practices, namely the six *pāramitās* (“perfections”). Merit consists of charity, morality, and forbearance, while wisdom consists of effort, meditation, and wisdom. The bodhisattva practices these six *pāramitās* and, knowing that all the characters of dharma are profound, subtle, and difficult to know and comprehend, thinks as follows: “Sentient beings cling to dharmas of the three realms. In what way can one cause them to obtain these characters of dharmas?”⁴⁷

The treatise then provides a reply stating that with accomplishments in all merits and wisdom, as well as wondrous physical and mental qualities befitting a buddha,

one observes those who can be delivered (*ke du zhe* 可度者), preaches to them, and converts them. This is like the King of Golden-winged Birds (*Suparṇa*) gazing panoramically upon *nāgas* whose lives are nearing their end, striking the ocean (*bohai* 搏海) with its wings, causing the water to part, and snatching and eating them.

Similarly, the Buddha observes sentient beings in the five paths in the worlds of the ten directions with the Buddha eye and contemplates who should be delivered (*de du* 得度). He first displays supernormal powers and then reveals for them the directions of their minds. Using these two methods, he removes three hindrances, preaches the dharma, and liberates (*ba* 拔) sentient beings of the three realms. For one who has attained the boundless supernormal power of a Buddha, even if one were to speak a lie, it would still be trusted. How much more so when speaking the truth? This is referred to as “expediency”.⁴⁸

The King of Golden-winged Birds is the Chinese translation of *Suparṇa*, which means “either ‘the one with good features’ or the sun, whose rays are imagined to be like feathered wings carrying it through the sky”.⁴⁹ It is commonly identified with *Garuda*, a mythical

giant bird and a sworn enemy of *nāgas*. The *Garuda-Nāga* motif is especially popular in the Gandhāran and Kuchean Buddhist art in Centra Asia. As correctly explained by Juhung Rhi, “The *Garuda* is presented as a savior who ends the life of sentient beings for expediency and who is none other than the Buddha” (Rhi 2009, p. 152). The majestic gesture of *Garuda* cleaving the ocean to devour the dragon becomes a mighty metaphor for the Buddha’s immense salvific power in delivering living beings from suffering.

With the dissemination of Chan Buddhism in the Song, this potent image found its way into *kōans*, becoming one of the favored capping phrases. It was often coupled with another evocative metaphor of deliverance, as exemplified by Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163) when he posed a vigorous rhetorical question: “Can you emulate the fragrant elephant which crosses the river by severing its flow? Can you resemble the Golden-winged [Bird King] which splits the ocean and snatches the dragon directly for devouring?”⁵⁰ Already implied in the root $\sqrt{t\bar{f}}$ (“cross over”) is the notion of “a movement perpendicular to the riverbanks” and a palpable “spatial tension;” thus “a certain (physical) effort” is demanded of its agent, analyzes Maes (2022, p. 58). By cutting off the current, the elephant’s crossing put this effort into maximal relief, transforming into yet another potent metaphor symbolizing the resolute and unwavering pursuit of Buddhahood undertaken by a great bodhisattva.⁵¹ The coupling of these two colossal creatures, one splitting horizontally and the other vertically, forges a spectacular image of Buddhist deliverance. It resonates with a compelling biblical juxtaposition of God’s cosmogonic creation by cleaving the sea monster Rahab and Moses’s historic crossing by splitting the Red Sea.⁵² The parallel theme of horizontal and vertical splitting in Judeo-Christian and Chinese Buddhist traditions speaks to a profound common impulse across vastly different religions. While vertically, the two traditions share a similar serpentine monster to conquer, horizontally, the Jewish Promised Land morphs into the Buddhist further shore. Both convey the concept of creation or liberation born from the act of cleaving through chaos or bondage—wherein the magnificent new erupts from the fractured old. While these two giant animals remained separate in Indian Buddhism, they converged in the Chinese Buddhist literature. This paired imagery went beyond Buddhism, influencing literary criticism and becoming common knowledge among Song literati, which the author of the “Record” was likely aware of.⁵³

The shared function of subjugating *nāgas* allowed the particular mode of action—cleaving, splitting, or striking (*pi* 劈, *bo* 擘, *bo* 搏)—to transfer seamlessly from the Indian mythical bird to the indigenous Chinese Buddhist god.⁵⁴ Jiedi cleaves the ocean with his sword, bodying forth an image of severing the afflictions symbolized by the ocean, subduing deluded beings represented by the *nāgas* and ferrying them all to the further shore of enlightenment. The metaphoricity of deliverance is fully unfolded in the Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi. Facing him, one can quickly point out that he is a personification of the Jiedi Mantra. In Conceptual Metaphor Theory, personification refers to metaphors that enable us to comprehend nonhuman entities as people by using our knowledge and insights about ourselves “to maximal effect” (Lakoff and Turner 1989, p. 72). I contend this “maximal effect” is achieved through what Paul Copp calls the “synesthetic unfolding” found at the core of Buddhist incantations—aural and mental powers embedded in the Jiedi Mantra are transferred and unfolded into not just the visual, but to be more precise, the spectacular in this particular manifestation.⁵⁵ I argue it is only with the spectacle of the Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi that the explosive potencies of the sonorous sounds and soteriological semantics entailed in the spell is stretched to a snapping edge, released into a spectacular image and pushed to its logical completion. Hence, the “Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi”.⁵⁶

The ocean in Jiedi’s name, I suggest, refers more to the figurative ocean of suffering derived from Buddhist soteriology than a literal sea. However, the intervention of an oceanic god into this landlocked temple, originally devoted to a well goddess, carries added significance for the salt industry in Pujiang. When Cheng later remarks that “the power over rainfall or sunshine is truly in the charge of the god,” his meteorological concern also extends to sunny days, for rain would hinder workers from boiling brine and decrease salt production (Worthy 1975, p. 106). In the Lingjing Well, which is geographically close to

Pujiang, the output during the rainy season plummeted to only 38 percent of that during the dry season (von Glahn 1987, p. 84). Furthermore, as an unavoidable outcome of the mining process, the infiltration of freshwater will eventually reduce the salinity of the brine, which, unfortunately, does not alleviate the burden for the producer to pay the excise tax. I suggest that the seawater brought by this oceanic Jiedi will symbolically enhance the salinity of the inland wells, upon which the livelihood of salt workers depends.

After introducing the Buddhist deity, Cheng continues to relate that, following the renovation and expansion of the temple in early Southern Song, devotees who came to perform thanksgiving sacrifices from the neighboring prefectures numbered in the hundreds and thousands every day. However, Sichuan was notorious in premodern times for its formidable mountains and rocky gorges. This was particularly true for the physical location of the Temple of Broad Deliverance, where three streams converge and form a gorge, as indicated by the place name Sanxi xia 三溪峽 (Gorge of Three Streams). In front of the temple, there are steep mountains and rapid rivers, creating great difficulties for travelers crossing the rivers. The challenging geography made this highly desirable temple hardly accessible to worshippers. In the spring of 1212, a local named Yan Jue 嚴珏 gathered money and grains from his brothers and local wealthy families to build a bridge. The author then contemplates the three reasons for the name of the bridge.

Why was the bridge named Broad Deliverance? It was in fact derived from the Temple of Broad Deliverance of the Dugu family. However, the meaning of Broad Deliverance cannot be set up simply for a well or spring. Generally speaking, there are three reasons: To the left of the temple there is a Shrine to the Dragon Girl, a bit to the north of which there are two Dragon Grottoes, one big and one small. Whenever there is a severe drought, supplicants for rain from the four directions would show their devotions first, and rain will pour down afterwards. Thus the power over rainfall or sunshine is truly in the charge of the god. To the right of the temple there are two Dragon Grottoes, one big and one small, which lead to the dam water, irrigate several thousand *qing* and *mu* of fields, and result in no more years of famine. Thus the flow or blocking of water is truly in the hands of the gods. Those who come to supplicate the spirits at the temple [are so numerous that] their shoulders touch and their heels follow closely upon each other. Those in the past who had to dampen their clothes to cross when the water was deep and to lift their clothes when it was shallow now arrive quickly. Those in the past who had to lift their lower garments to wade through now arrive in leisure. Adding up these three [reasons], how can the name of Broad Deliverance be considered exaggerated praise?⁵⁷

Here we encounter three layers of deity worship at the temple: the Buddhist god, the Dragon Girl, and the three tutelary goddesses of the salt wells. Intriguingly, Cheng thinks that only the Buddhist god, not the local well goddesses, could merit the temple title of Broad Deliverance. Jiedi tames the Dragon Girl and four dragon grottoes while maintaining the salinity of the wells—clearly, a case of superimposing Buddhism upon early local religion. The Buddhist takeover of Sichuan's second most important salt well parallels the Daoist control over the largest one in Lingzhou. The ability to control well goddesses and generate brine became yet another example of "crucial cultural capital" (in Huaiyu Chen's term), or a repertoire element in the "contestational fields" (in Robert Campany's term) in the interactions of Buddhism and Daoism (Campany 2012, p. 109).

The three reasons Cheng provides—rainfall, irrigation and bridge—all revolve around *ji* 濟 in the name of the temple and bridge, which is originally an intransitive verb meaning "cross a river" or "get to the opposite shore"; from it is derived the transitive verb "help across or over, carry across, deliver". Only later did *ji* acquire its popular sense of "relieve, aid, assist".⁵⁸ The primary sense is precisely how Fazang interprets the *Heart Sūtra*, which he likens to "a lofty torch illuminating the dark road and a swift ship *crossing* the ocean of suffering. In rescuing beings and guiding the deluded, nothing can match it".⁵⁹

In its original meaning, *ji* is synonymous with *du* 度, and these two characters combine into a tautological yet emphatic compound *jidu* 濟度 in Buddhist soteriology, which means “ferry sentient beings across the sea of suffering to the ‘other shore,’” and “guide deluded sentient beings to their emancipation in the enlightened condition”. Hence it signifies “salvation”.⁶⁰ The soteriological sense of crossing over or deliverance in both the temple and bridge’s names creates a curious connection with the Jiedi Mantra and, specifically, the Chinese commentarial tradition surrounding it. This is evidently how Cheng interprets the third reason for the bridge over troubled water. The act of crossing a river can be accomplished through both a boat and a bridge, thus likening the Buddha to a raft or bridge builder (Maes 2022, p. 59). The term bridge and boat (*qiaochuan* 橋船) often appears together in the context of river crossing (*ji* 濟 or *du* 度) in Buddhist texts. The *Samyukta-āgama*, for instance, provides a verse: “In the torrential floods,/one should make floating bags,/and construct boats and bridges,/to cross the river oneself (*zidu* 自渡) and also help others to cross (*jita* 濟他)”.⁶¹

The initial two reasons of broad deliverance—meteorological control and irrigation with dam water—are closely tied to Jiedi’s capacity to subdue the *nāga* cult as seen in the Shrine of Dragon Maiden and four dragon grottoes flanking the temple. In this role, he manages not only the weather conditions crucial for salt production but also provides agricultural facility by irrigating vast expanses of land. Therefore, it is solely the translocal Buddhist deity who is worthy of the salvific title of Broad Deliverance.

Lastly, Cheng never forgot his official role and responsibilities. He associated Confucius’ sagely virtue in revering gods and spirits with the Buddhist practice of “giving generously to deliver the multitude” (博施濟眾). He then continues:

Although the bridge was constructed by humans, no one can match the meaning of Broad Deliverance except the [Jiedi] God. At another time a gentleman of like-minded aspirations will be given the book left behind [by the Old Sire of Yellow Rock] on a bridge, and ride waves to jump over the Dragon Gate [like carps]. If not the God, who would assist him? Composed by Cheng Boxiong, Military Prefect of Lizhou Bestowed with a Silver Fish Pouch, in the sixth month of the *dingchou* year of the Jiading era (1217).⁶²

The first allusion pertains to the famed strategist Zhang Liang, who received *The Art of War by [Jiang] Taigong* (*Taigong bingfa* 太公兵法) from the Old Sire of Yellow Rock (黃石公 Huang Shigong) on a bridge and assisted Liu Bang in founding the Han Dynasty. The second allusion draws from the Confucian and folkloric metaphor of a carp which metamorphoses into a dragon after leaping over the Dragon Gate on the Yellow River, symbolizing success in the civil service examination and the promise of an official career. Here Cheng stretches the Buddhist metaphor of crossing into the official realm (crossing by bridge or over the Dragon Gate). These two allusions demonstrate his astute awareness as a Confucian official shouldering both civil and military responsibilities for the benefit of the state.

His official career is next in order. Between 1208 and 1215, Cheng Boxiong, a native of Danling 丹陵, in what is now Meishan City, participated in suppressing and resolving a rebellion launched by Xubu, an ethnic Qiang tribal leader in the frontier Lizhou Prefecture. He was noted for being capable of setting up military formations.⁶³ By the time he composed the “Record” two years later, Cheng had evidently been promoted from the position of Military Judge to that of Military Prefect of Lizhou and conferred with a Silver Fish Pouch in recognition of his efforts in the successful resolution of the rebellion.

Interestingly, during the suppression, salt produced in the official wells of Pujiang was supplied as a crucial military provision,⁶⁴ evidencing the direct connection between salt and warfare. The government’s salt monopoly was initially instituted to alleviate the financial deficits resulting from the military campaigns of Emperor Wu of Han (156–87 BC). It was later reinstated on a national scale soon after the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763 AD). The revenue generated from this salt monopoly became the lifeblood for the nation, particularly for funding the military. From very early on soldiers were dispatched to garrison

the lucrative salt wells in Sichuan. The state-controlled salt wells in Pujiang not only held an industrial and fiscal significance but also had a military presence. It is thus entirely fitting for a military prefect to eulogize a martial god who oversees the salt wells.⁶⁵

In his final allusion to the civil service examination, Cheng expressed a personal aspiration for success under the auspice of Jiedi. Despite his early military success, he still yearned for literary success and status as a formal member of the literati. Eventually, his wish was fulfilled as he passed the exam and obtained the degree of a *jinshi* 進士, or Metropolitan Graduate, in 1228–1233.⁶⁶ With the turning and churning of the Buddhist soteriological metaphor in a Confucian framework, the Buddhist god Jiedi became revered for his numinous efficacy in answering even literati prayers for examination success.

By scrutinizing the Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi God at the Temple of Broad Deliverance, I illustrate how the Buddhist soteriological metaphor of deliverance became materialized and localized in societal mobilization, meteorological regulation, industrial production, hydraulic irrigation, agricultural cultivation, infrastructure development, military operations, and civil examination—all marshalled through a translocal Buddhist deity. This analysis also unveils the intricate interplay between state control and decentralized inclinations, as well as the dynamic relationship between local cults and translocal Buddhism and Daoism in Song-dynasty Sichuan.

5. Tantrification

What does such an Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi look like? An intriguing clue is given at the end of the Spring Damsel story, where it mentions the distribution of “a painting based on the form manifested [by the god] ... across the country”. This is likely the genesis of the visual representation of Jiedi in Tang China. Indeed, iconography is a major medium in the dissemination of the Jiedi cult, with at least five renowned artists painting the deity from the Tang to Song dynasties. Remarkably, four of them held official positions at court, and three served in the imperial arts academy (Table 1). Notably, Zhai Ruwen achieved the prestigious role of Vice Grand Councilor in early Southern Song. The courtly background of these artists underscores that Jiedi transcended mere local devotion, rapidly ascending to the upper echelons of Chinese society during the Middle Period.

Table 1. Paintings of the Jiedi God⁶⁷.

Artists	Time	Official Titles	Number of Jiedi Paintings
Chen Hong 陳閔	mid-8th c.	Academician in Attendance 御前供奉	1
Zhu You 朱繇	early 10th c.		4
Li Gonglin 李公麟	1049–1106	Gentleman for Court Service 朝奉郎	1
Zhai Ruwen 翟汝文	1076–1141	Vice Grand Councilor 參知政事	4
Su Hanchen 蘇漢臣	1094–1172	Gentleman of Trust 承信郎 Painting Academician Awaiting Orders 畫院待詔	1

Despite his popularity, as evidenced by painting records and miracle tales, only a couple of images have been clearly identified. Among the cliff statues of the Cave of Transcendents (Xianren dong 仙人洞), Meishan City, Sichuan Province, there exists a rectangular niche labeled as No. 51 (Figures 3 and 4). The identities of the two statues in this niche are revealed through the inscriptions between them. The right inscription reads, “[Here is] respectfully made a statue of the White-robed Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Monk Lingyan made it to seek longevity for his entire family and master. Sculpted on the tenth day of the eighth month in the first year of the Mingde era (934)”. On the left, the inscription states, “[Here is] respectfully made a statue of the God of Jiedi Wisdom King. Monk Lingyan made it with the intention of finding personal peace and prolonging his own life, offering it for eternity”. It is highly probable that this Jiedi Wisdom King was sculpted in the

Later Shu Kingdom during the Five Dynasties period, concurrent with the creation of the Guanyin statue around 934.⁶⁸



Figure 3. Author's own photo, September 2007.

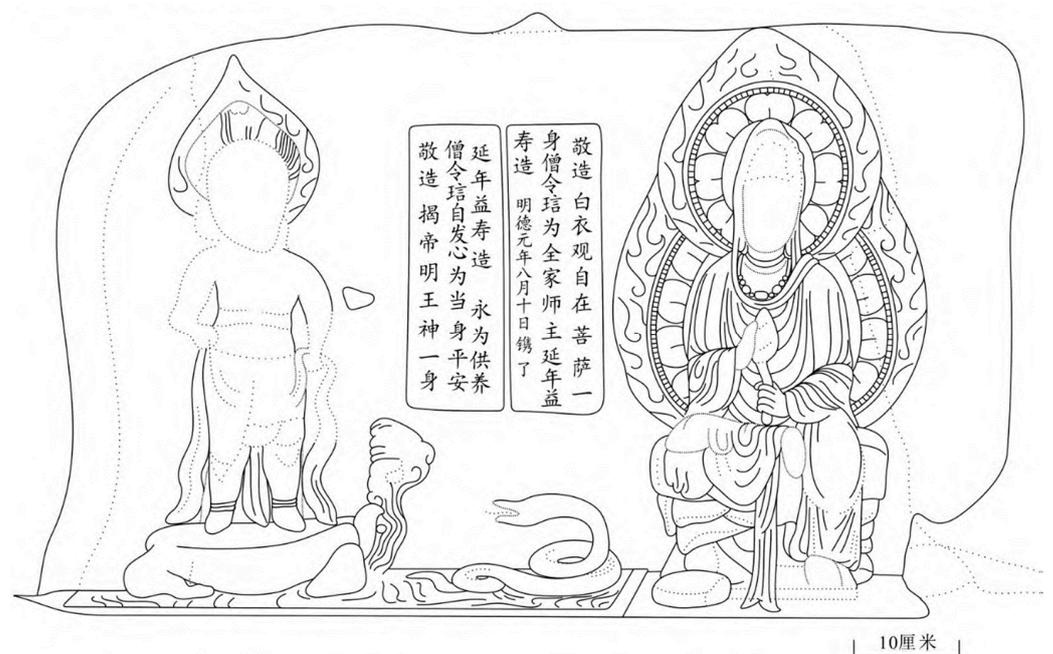


Figure 4. Sketch courtesy of Zhu Jixiang, in (Zhu and Chen 2022, p. 181). Scale: 10 cm.

The White-Robed Guanyin on the right is depicted in a seated posture, with one leg dangling. The slightly smaller statue of the Jiedi Wisdom King on the left has suffered severe damage to the head, arms, and torso. Thanks to Zhu Jixiang's detailed sketch, it is still possible to discern that this figure stands with arms akimbo, displaying an angry

gesture. His hair bristles up against a peach-shaped fiery halo. He stands atop the back of a turtle, which turns its head to the left. Facing the turtle is a coiled snake, its head raised high and its forked tongue appearing to strike at the turtle. Both reptiles are situated within a rectangular pond, with splashing waves drawn on the surface and the railings around. Traces of yellow pigment are still visible in the fiery aureole, around the belt, and on the legs of the standing statue.⁶⁹

This damaged statue from Meishan, featuring him riding a turtle and subduing a snake, is likely an early representation of the distinctive Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi God enshrined at the Temple of Broad Deliverance, also located in Meishan.

The damaged portions of the Jiedi statue in Meishan can be supplemented through a comparison with a similar three-headed wooden statue from the Northern Song period, which was discovered in the underground crypt of Fazang Monastery 法藏寺 in Yixing City, Jiangsu Province (Figure 5). In this representation, the deity's erect hair seems charged with electrifying energies, and two small heads are sculpted on either side of his main head. Although his facial expression has become somewhat blurred over time, his diagonal eyes betray his fierceness. While his right hand is damaged, he holds in his left hand a snake whose wide-gaped mouth seems poised to bite at the god's neck. The god stands atop a turtle, which raises its head towards the snake. I concur with art historians in identifying this statue as Jiedi (Zhu and Chen 2022, p. 192).



Figure 5. (Xu 2015, p. 69). H 6.5 cm.

The turtle and the snake combine to form an image of the Dark Warrior (Xuanwu), the northern one of the four heraldic animals in Chinese cosmology, symbolized either by

a single turtle or more commonly a turtle entwined by a snake in early Chinese sources, where the snake was perceived as a turtle in male form. The turtle's hard shell resembles armor, symbolizing protection and defense, thus linking the turtle with martial qualities. During the Tang dynasty, the infamous Gate of the Dark Warrior, situated in the north of the Taiji Palace in the capital Chang'an, witnessed several *coup d'états* and much bloodshed. The Dark Warrior is also associated with the element of water in the Five Phases of Chinese cosmology. This dual symbolism of both water and warrior aligns perfectly with Jiedi, who embodies qualities of both a water and warrior god (Chao 2011, pp. 13–21).

What is most significant about the Meishan statue is that Jiedi was elevated from a mere god (*shen*) to a *vidyārāja* (*mingwang*), the King of Wisdom or Magical Knowledge, in particular the knowledge of spells (*vidyā*). As fierce emanations of buddhas and bodhisattvas, Wisdom Kings constitute the most distinctive class of deities in tantric Buddhism.

The Sichuan and Jiangsu statues of Jiedi conform to many of the iconographical features of Wisdom Kings. "The hair standing sharply on end (Skt. *ūrdhvakeśa*)," explains Roger Goepfer, "belongs to the characteristic features of deities in wrathful mood" (Goepfer 1993, p. 26). The halo of soaring flames around the head of the Meishan statue is commonly seen among wisdom kings. Louis Frédéric notes that the aureole of flames around Acala Vidyārāja (Budong *mingwang* 不動明王) is believed to "consume the passions" (Frédéric 1995, p. 203). Additionally, there are faint traces of the Garuḍa-flame (*Jialouluo yan* 迦樓羅炎) at the back of his torso, resembling the golden-winged bird spreading its features.⁷⁰ Multiple heads are also a common feature among tantric deities. These distinctive iconographical features, without doubt, make Wisdom Kings the most visually exotic category among all the foreign gods transported to medieval China.

Yoritomi Motohiro, the foremost Japanese scholar on wisdom kings, summarizes four general characteristics as follows:

1. each possesses a specific mantra or *dhāraṇī* unique to themselves;
2. each is a wrathful god (*krodha*) to express one's inherent power;
3. each subjugates a specific Hindu deity;
4. each is a transformation body of either a buddha or bodhisattva.

Yoritomi adds that it is not necessary for all the four characteristics to be complete to make a wisdom king. But there is no exception to the first characteristic of owning an individual mantra or *dhāraṇī* (Yoritomi 1996, pp. 1 and ii).

If we measure Vidyārāja Jiedi against the four key features, we find he fulfills almost all the requirements. He possesses an independent Jiedi Mantra; he is a fierce god; he subjugates the *nāgas* as a class, though not necessarily any specific *nāga*; and he is considered an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, as evident from his pairing with the bodhisattva in the Meishan niche, or of Bodhisattva Prajñāpāramitā, which we will see in a ritual manual soon. He is an indigenous Chinese creation of an Indian Buddhist wisdom king who cannot be found anywhere in the South Asian subcontinent.

The identification of Jiedi as a Wisdom King in the Meishan statue is confirmed by the *Liturgy of a Great Feast Sanctuary of the Three Kinds of Wisdom of the Bodhisattva with Perfect Interpenetration* (*Yuantong sanhui dazhai daochang yi* 圓通三慧大齋道場儀), an important liturgical manuscript on Bodhisattva Guanyin rediscovered in the southwestern province of Yunnan. Its compiler, Hou Pu 侯溥 (1032–?1080), had previously served in government positions in Meishan and Chengdu and engaged in literary exchanges with the celebrated Meishan-born poet Su Shi. Although the earliest extant manuscript of this ritual dates to the Ming period, most of its content is believed to originate from the Northern Song. Among the numerous manifestations of Guanyin, Vajradhāra (Zhi Jin'gang *shen* 執金剛神), Deep Sand (Shensha *shen* 深沙神), the Wisdom King of Impure Traces or Uchusma (Huiji *mingwang* 穢跡明王), and Wisdom King Jiedi (Jiedi *mingwang* 揭帝明王) are invited to descend to the ritual sanctuary and later sent away.⁷¹ All four are fierce tantric gods and two are wisdom kings. Jiedi was paired with Deep Sand in a tantric pantheon known as Yoga, presided over by Uchusma, as observed by the thirteenth-century Daoist priest Bai

Yuchan (Davis 2001, pp. 128–34). Deep Sand later became the prototype for the character of Monk Sha 沙和尚, who protects Xuanzang in the famous novel *Journey to the West*. Interestingly, he and Jiedi even merged into a composite deity in late imperial China. In Japan, Deep Sand was paired with Xuanzang in what Ryūichi Abé calls “the Heart Sutra team” of deities, taming a local snake spirit Kasuga (Abé 2016). But this is a topic beyond the scope of this article. For now, it is sufficient to note that both the statue and manuscript testify to the tantricization of Jiedi in Meishan.

The exact period when he started to be invoked in rituals as a deity remains uncertain. Jiedi appears as an incantation in the Jiedi Rite (*Jiedi li* 揭帝禮),⁷² or as standalone names in contexts like the Jiedi Sanctuary (*Jiedi daochang* 揭諦道場; Skt. **Gate maṇḍa*)⁷³ and the heretic community known as the Jiedi Feast (*Jiedi zhai* 揭諦齋).⁷⁴ It is unclear, however, whether Jiedi was regarded as a full-fledged deity or merely as a spell in the latter two instances of an ad hoc sanctuary or a community.

Jiedi is featured as a set of four gods in the “Ritual Procedure for the Invitation of *Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra*” (Bore duoxinjing jiqing yigui 般若多心經稽請儀軌), a *sādhana* found within the *Ritual Procedures for the Invitation of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Adamant Beings, and More* (*Zhufo pusa jin'gang deng qiqing yigui* 諸佛菩薩金剛等啓請儀軌), which is preserved in a manuscript copied in cursive script in the southwestern Dali Kingdom 大理國 in 1136 and is currently housed in the Yunnan Provincial Library (Figure 6).⁷⁵

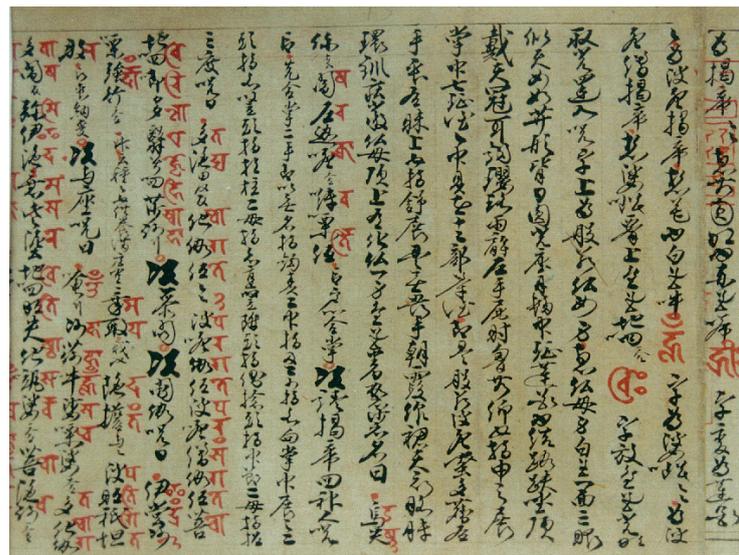


Figure 6. Photo courtesy of Hou Chong.

The Dali ritual draws significant inspiration from the *Great Heart Sūtra of Prajñāpāramitā* (*Bore boluomiduo da xin jing* 般若波羅蜜多大心經) found in the third fascicle of the *Collected Sūtras of Dhāraṇīs* (*Tuoluoni jijing* 陀羅尼集經) translated in 653–654, where the Jiedi Mantra appears under the title of the *Great Prajñā Hṛdaya Dhāraṇī*.⁷⁶ While the Prajñā Buddha Mother (Bore Fomu 般若佛母) is invoked as the central deity, Jiedi, in either mantric or anthropomorphic form, plays a significant role in this Dali ritual. Since Kawasaki Kazuhiro has introduced the entire ritual procedure, my discussion below will focus specifically on the sections involving Jiedi.

The contemplation of the Prajñā Buddha Mother commences with the ritual officiant visualizing the white syllable *a* within one’s own heart transforming into a big white wheel. One then focuses on visualizing within the wheel the white syllable *a*, which stands for *gate gate*. Subsequently, one visualizes the red syllable *hrīḥ* transform into a lotus flower, which represents *pāragate*. Within the flower, the white syllable *hūṃ* changes into a *vajra* (婆[口*嗟]), which signifies *pārasaṃgate*. Finally, one visualizes the golden syllable *dhiḥ* located at the waist of the *vajra* emitting golden light, which is then drawn back into the syl-

lable, standing for the body of the Prajñā Buddha Mother. The ritual performer progresses through the Jiedi Mantra, one syllable at a time, until reaching the body of the Prajñā Buddha Mother who symbolizes *bodhi* (“enlightenment”) at the end of the mantra. The four *gate* syllables play a fundamental role in constituting the body of the Prajñā Buddha Mother through this elaborate visualization practice.

Then following a visualization of the Prajñā Buddha Mother is the Mantra and Mudra for Inviting the Four Anthropomorphic Gods Jiedi (*qing Jiedi si shenren zhouyin* 請揭帝四神人咒印). While the mantra resembles the Great Prajñā Hṛdaya Dhāraṇī 般若大心陀羅尼 that appears in the *Collected Sūtras of Dhāraṇīs*, it is worth noting that the description of the hand gesture matches the Mudra of the Emissary of Prajñā there, albeit without clear identification of this messenger in the early Tang translation.⁷⁷ With the apotheosis of the Jiedi Mantra, it becomes evident that the four Jiedi Gods have assumed the role of emissary in the Dali ritual.

The ritual has its core practice in the recitation of the Jiedi Mantra while counting rosaries, and culminates in the Four Wisdoms and Five Wheels (*sizhi wuyuanming* 四智五圓明). It involves transmuting the Four Minds of Mistaken Attachments, which, on the phenomenal plane, cause all the unfortunate disasters and ailments afflicting the patron (*shizhu* 施主), yet are, from the perspective the ultimate truth, inherently identical to the Four Wisdoms. This pivotal transformation is orchestrated by the officiant, who visualizes on the patron’s body the four declensions (*a, aḥ, aṃ, ṃ, aḥ*; Chn. *sizhuan* 四轉) of the initial Sanskrit vowel *a*, symbolizing the Four Dharma Minds, absorb and extinguish (*ximie* 吸滅) the Four Minds of Mistaken Attachments, a practice derived from the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (*Dari jing* 大日經) of the Garbha or Womb system. Next, the officiant visualizes the syllable *a* evolving into a big wheel in an ethereal shade of blue, the radiance of which illuminates to eliminate all disasters, hindrances, ailments, and pains that plague the patron’s body, which is constituted by the four elements and five heaps (*sida wuyun* 四大五蘊). The choice of blue instead of the conventional white for this wheel, I suggest, likely draws influence from the Lapis Lazuli or Medicine Buddha who, always depicted in blue, is intimately associated with pacifying disasters and prolonging lifespan in the direction of the East. Then, within this big ethereal blue wheel, “he had an illuminating vision that all five heaps are all empty, and he delivered all from sufferings,” a direct quote from the opening lines of the *Heart Sūtra* (Teiser 2000, p. 113). The celebrated doctrine of emptiness is realized through a meticulous tantric visualization, acquiring a pragmatic and transformative role within the Dali ritual.

Subsequently, the ritual unfolds with an elucidation of the meaning of the Four Wisdoms, which I have reorganized within the following table to underscore the four Jiedi gods or syllables (Table 2).⁷⁸ The Four Jiedi Gods are mapped onto the four (vajra, jewel, lotus, and karma) of the five families or wheels of the Adamant Realm, with the fifth Buddha family unspecified but implied through the presence of the Prajñā Buddha Mother at the center. They thus become the emanations of the four bodhisattvas (Samantabhadra, Ākāśagarbha, Avalokiteśvara, and Tatāgatha Fist) positioned at the cardinal directions, flanking the central deity of the Prajñā Mother. Additionally, the four epithets of the *Heart Sūtra*’s spell are also mapped onto the four cognitions shared by both tantric and Yogācāra systems.

The entire practice of Four Wisdoms and Five Wheels represents a union of the dual systems of the Adamant and Womb Realms, correctly pointed out by Kawasaki, and demonstrates the continuation of Tang-dynasty tantric Buddhism in southwestern China, though there are indications of the influence from late Indian tantra in other sections of the ritual (Kawasaki 2008, p. 98). This ritual serves as a compelling illustration of the process of tantricization of the *Heart Sūtra*, with Jiedi, whether in the mantric or personified form, playing a significant role.

Table 2. The Meaning of Four Wisdoms.

[E]	[S]	[W]	[N]
Vajra Wisdom 金剛智	Jewel Pāramitā 寶波羅蜜	Lotus Dharma Wisdom 蓮花法智	Karma Wisdom 羯磨智
Gate 揭帝	Gate 揭帝	Pāragate 波羅揭帝	Pārasaṃgate 波羅僧揭帝
cognition of the great mirror 大圓鏡智	cognition of essential identity 平等性智	cognition of marvelous observation 妙觀察智	cognition that completes the work 成所作智
great unsurpassed spell 無上咒	great illuminating spell 大明咒	great spirit spell 大神咒	great unequalled spell 無等等咒
<i>hūṃ</i>	<i>oṃ</i>	<i>vaṃ</i>	<i>^ah</i>
Samantabhadra 普賢	Ākāśagarbha 虛空藏	Avalokiteśvara 觀自在	Tathāgata 如來

Commenting on the *Heart Sūtra*, the esteemed Chan master Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163) dismissed the connection between the Jiedi Mantra and God, asserting: “Lately, there is a sort of dharma master who tend toward fabrications, referring to this [syllable *gate*] as the name of a god. This is grossly wrong! In the Western Region there exists a Jiedi God, coincidentally sharing the same Sanskrit pronunciation [as the mantra], and thereby they claim that this mantra consists entirely of gods’ names”.⁷⁹ However, Zonggao’s stance is unfounded, as no such god exists in India. The Chinese Buddhist god drags as an Indian god by adopting an Indian name and appearance. While he disputes the Jiedi God’s origin in China, Zonggao nonetheless acknowledges the presence of other Buddhist monks, for instance, the contemporary author of this Dali ritual, who regard the Jiedi Mantra as multiple spirits.

With his elevation from a mere god to a tantric *vidyārāja*, as depicted in both iconographical and ritual sources, the China-born Jiedi has acquired a more pronounced and exotic Indian flavor.

6. Dissemination and Network

If tantricization represents the penetration of the Jiedi cult into a particular Buddhist tradition, it becomes evident from the table below that his name was imprinted much more widely on Chinese sacred geography during the Middle Period (Table 3). Natural landscapes like ponds and various monastic architecture, including cloisters, halls, and pagodas, were named after him.⁸⁰ Many of these places are situated within aquatic settings. For example, in the renowned Shengci Monastery in Chengdu, there existed a Jiedi Cloister, within which a Jiedi Hall stood by the Pond for Releasing Life. This architectural configuration underscores the god’s role in overseeing aquatic creatures like fish and turtles. Of particular interest is a marvelous rock formation in Guilin 桂林, Guangxi province. Suspended from the cavernous ceiling like a floating pillar, the rock leaves only a minute gap above the ground. While geologically a stalactite in the Karst topography, local legend attributes its creation to the Jiedi Spirit, who shattered it with a sword.⁸¹ Hence the Rock of the Brandishing Sword (*shijian shi* 試劍石). This rock is located within the Returning Pearl Cavern (Huanzhu dong 還珠洞), named after a local legend involving a dragon’s pearl.⁸² The cavern, in turn, is nestled within the Mount of Quelling Waves (Fubo shan 伏波山), adjacent to the Jiedi Pond (*tang* 揭帝塘), which we know from a poem composed by the renowned poet Zhang Xiaoxiang 张孝祥 (1132–1169) existed at least as far back as the Southern Song period.⁸³ Once again, the god finds himself in a watery environment, closely associated with dragons.

Table 3. The Jiedi God’s Sacred Geography.

Name	Location	Time	Notes
Jiedi Cloister 1 揭諦院	Jiachuan, northeastern Sichuan	698–700	originally a dragon temple
Jiedi Cloister 2 揭諦院 ⁸⁴	Shengci Monastery 聖慈寺, Chengdu	ca. 943	
Jiedi Hall 揭諦堂 ⁸⁵	by or in the Pond for Releasing Life 放生池, in Jiedi Cloister, Shengci Temple, Chengdu	ca. 943	
Jiedi Spirit Hall 羯帝神堂 ⁸⁶	Kaiyuan Temple, Yazhou, Sichuan	ca. 894–898	
Jiedi Pagoda 揭諦塔 ⁸⁷	Changsha, Hunan	Tang?	16 inscribed images
Jiedi Pond 揭帝塘	Guilin, Guangxi	Song?	Rock of the Brandishing Sword 試劍石

Although Jiedi makes appearances elsewhere, his cult has its roots and a prominent concentration in Sichuan, which provides breeding ground for snakes and dragons with its diverse terrains, including mountains, gorges, caverns, rivers, ponds, and wells. The prominence of Sichuan in the Jiedi cult might be linked to the famous story of Xuanzang, who received an early version of the *Heart Sūtra* in Chengdu during the early seventh century. As the popularity of the sūtra grew, so did the dissemination of the cult of the Jiedi Mantra and God to the other parts of China.

Jiedi often finds himself in the company of other deities or within a group context, especially after the Tang Dynasty. One common thread running through these groupings or pairings is the widely disseminated cult of the *Heart Sūtra*, including Bodhisattvas Guanyin and Prajñāpāramitā, as well as the revered transmitter Xuanzang. One illustrative example of this network is the trio of Guanyin, Jiedi, and the youth Sudhana (Shancai tongzi 善財童子) mentioned in a poetic eulogy penned by Confucian scholar Chen Changfang 陳長方 (1108–1148). In this depiction, the head-covered, crossed-legged Guanyin assumes a meditative posture, identified by art historians as the distinct form of the White-Robed Guanyin, reminiscent of the Meishan statue. The boy pilgrim Sudhana is conventionally paired together with the Dragon Princess worshipping Guanyin. With his dominion over *nāgas*, Jiedi replaces the Dragon Girl as a valiant guardian and athlete, assisting Confucians in “withstanding insult” (*yu wu* 御侮), which refers likely to the humiliating Jurchen invasion and occupation of the Northern Song since 1126, resonating with the repeated promotion of the Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi in Pujiang during the same period, as discussed above.⁸⁸

Subsequently, the Buddhist cults of Guanyin and the *Heart Sūtra* were appropriated wholesale and transformed into deities with Chinese names in a Daoist thunder ritual, as preserved in the *Great Rituals of the Manifestation of the Original Forces of the Heaven of Pure Tenuity* (*Qingwei yuanjiang dafa* 清微元降大法) of the fourteenth century. Guanyin manifests as the Imperial Lord of the Five Thunders, Zhu Qing. Among his entourage are the youthful pilgrim Sudhana, who takes on the form of the white-faced talismanic messenger Lin Zhongyuan, and the four Jiedi Gods who emanate as the Great Gods of Thunderclap of the Mysterious Brahmā [Heaven] (Xuan Fan pili dashen 玄梵霹靂大神), each adopting a Chinese name Kong Ji 孔伋, Yang Tingqing 楊霆卿, Lu Yuanfang 魯元芳, and Gao Sui 高遂. These four gods are all depicted in fiery hats, blue faces, golden armors, red robes and shoes. Their only distinguishing features lie in the weapons they wield—an axe, sword, bow and arrows, and a dagger, respectively.⁸⁹ This thunder ritual is further elaborated in the *Compendium of Daoist Rituals* (*Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元) codified in the first half of the fifteenth century, with the additional detail that the four gods bear a fierce appearance akin to that of the Adamant Beings (*Jin’gang* 金剛). Elsewhere, these four Jiedi or Great Gods of Thunderclap are invoked in a talismanic emblem representing a dragon,

accompanied by the Jiedi Mantra while drawing the emblem in a rainmaking Nine-dragon Talisman.⁹⁰

Owing to his role as a warrior god, Jiedi often finds himself paired or grouped with other Buddhist martial protector deities like the Adamant Beings, athletes (*lishi* 力士), and Weituo 韋陀 or Skanda.⁹¹ His martial character later evolves into the Jiedi Kungfu (*Jiedi gong* 揭諦功) within Shaolin 少林 martial arts. The fluid and sinuous movements of this style mimic but outperform those of dragons (*sai huolong* 賽活龍).⁹²

During the Tang dynasty, we encounter just one Jiedi god. However, from the tenth century onward, we begin to see four Jiedi gods. In the late imperial Chinese vernacular fiction and drama, this god's proliferation reaches unprecedented levels—appearing in groups of 5, 16, 25, and even 3000. In his multiplication, Jiedi forms “a special class of fierce supernatural warriors” protecting the Buddhist religion, and becomes synonymous with other classes of Buddhist guardians such as the Adamant Being and athletes (Idema 2009, p. 14, note 19). However, once he proliferates into a class, he also loses some of his individual distinctiveness.

7. Conclusions

Circling like the *ouroboros* symbol of a snake swallowing its own tail back to the cross-species romance at the beginning of the article, Jiedi may look like a villain in quenching the poignant love. The popular late imperial legend, however, has masked his valorous medieval past of battling a somber cult of snake spirits devouring virgin brides, which was a regional variation of a cosmopolitan alchemical theme. A Chinese Buddhist contribution to the worldwide archetype of the dragon or serpent-slayer, Jiedi was supposed to be a personification of the famous mantra found in the *Heart Sūtra*. I demonstrate how the *nāga*-taming function and aquatic setting in the rainmaking spell of the *Great Cloud Sūtra* were transferred to the *Heart Sūtra* Mantra, aided by its commentarial tradition stressing the soteriological metaphor of crossing or deliverance. The convergence of external and internal factors created an independent cult centered around the Jiedi Mantra, closely associated with both water and warfare. Through “synesthetic unfolding,” the sonics and semantics embedded within the mantra traverse into a spectacular personification embodied by the Ocean-Cleaving Jiedi God. He played an important role in meteorology, industry, agriculture, infrastructure, and military and civil services; in the intricate interplay between state control and decentralized tendencies; and in the dynamics between local cults and translocal Buddhism and Daoism as well as the cosmopolitan alchemical theme, all of which can be observed in the Temple and Bridge of Broad Deliverance in Song-dynasty Sichuan. As Jiedi evolved from a mere god to a tantric *vidyārāja*, his iconography and rituals took on a more pronounced and exotic Indian flavor. In the late imperial period, he further imprinted himself on sacred geography, networked with other Buddhist deities, entered Daoism and local religions, and proliferated as a distinct class of protector gods in vernacular fiction and drama. This exotic Buddhist god, never documented in India, finds his roots firmly established on Chinese soil. The exorcistic function of the Jiedi Mantra was the motor behind its deification in Tang, Five Dynasties, and Song China.

Drawing from his experience in Chinese vernacular literature, Stephen West astutely highlights “another possibility and a potentially wider arena for the *Heart Sūtra* ... as a mantra, an amulet, an incantation” (West 2000, p. 129). Indeed, there exists another facet of the *Heart Sūtra*'s history that merits exploration. It is the incantatory, magical, exorcistic aspect of the sutra, beyond the philosophical section, that has contributed significantly to the most popular Buddhist scripture in the world. And to the Jiedi Mantra, I will turn in a future installment.

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Abbreviations

B	manuscripts from Dunhuang in the collection of the National Library of China, Beijing
DDB	<i>Digital Dictionary of Buddhism</i> < http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/ >. Ed. Charles Muller
DZ	<i>Zhengtong Daozang</i> 正統道藏. 61 vols. Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1977.
FG	<i>Foguang dacidian</i> 佛光大辭典. Ed. Ciyi 慈怡. Gaoxiong: Foguang chubanshe, 1997.
HDC	<i>Hanyu da cidian</i> 漢語大辭典. Ed. Luo Zhufeng. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986.
MW	<i>A Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i> . Ed. Monier Monier-Williams. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1899.
P	manuscripts from Dunhuang in the Pelliot Collection, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
SKQS	<i>Wenyuange siku quanshu (dianzi ban)</i> 文淵閣四庫全書(電子版). Hong Kong: Digital Heritage Publishing, Ltd., 2007.
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經. Eds. Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyoku. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-1932. 85 vols. Also Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA), https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/
ZZ	<i>Shinsan Dai Nihon zoku zōkyō</i> 新纂大日本續藏經. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1975–1989. 90 vols.

Notes

- 1 揭諦何在？快與我擒青魚怪來，和白蛇現形，聽吾發落！（“Bai niangzi yongzhen Leifengta 白娘子永鎮雷峰塔，” pp. 444–45); my translation has consulted (West 2000, p. 129), with slight modifications. This short story is likely to be a product of the Southern Song, based on place names, official titles, and language style (Pan 1981, vol. 1, pp. 35–36). For English translation of the later versions of this famous legend, see (Idema 2009).
- 2 In Donald Lopez’s (1988, p. 8) assessment, the most popular Buddhist mantra is possibly the six-syllabled *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*. Due to the easy confusion of the Sanskrit syllable *gate* with the English word “gate,” I choose to refer to the mantra and god as the Jiedi Mantra and Jiedi God, but retain the italicized Sanskrit *gate* in the context of mantra. For Xuanzang’s version of the *Heart Sūtra*, see (Bore boluomiduo xin jing 般若波羅蜜多心經); for an English translation, see (Teiser 2000).
- 3 For scholarship on the Jiedi God, see (West 2000, p. 129; Davis 2001, p. 289, note 51; Deng 2019a, 2019b; Zhu and Chen 2022; Yu 2023).
- 4 (*International Dunhuang Project*, <http://idp.bl.uk/> (accessed on 17 August 2023), under the search value of 3142), while a facsimile of the the manuscript can be found in (*Dunhuang baozang*, 126: 414–15). A transcription appears under the titles of “Bailong miao lingyi ji” 白龍廟靈異記 (Chen 2005, 139/1699–1700; Dou and Zhang 2010, pp. 267–68), and “Jiedi zhenyan ganying ji 揭諦真言感應記” (Yang 2009, pp. 349–52; see also pp. 159–66).
- 5 唐大歷年中，峽內暮[>巫]山懸[>縣]屬河，河次有井，井側有廟，號曰“白龍廟”焉。其廟靠懸崖，橫廣殿，風含木，雲拱[>拱]畫梁。凡參遊者，心寒毛豎[>豎]，無敢仰而視之。雖懷暴惡，能應禱祈；敬慢二徒，福禍[>禍福]兩驗。因使鄉村祭祀，春秋繼時，每須酒饌、錢財、白馬、室女。所獻齊足，則豐稔人安；一物若虧，則傷苗害眾。其女，村邑遍戶輪輸之。//後至鄉人丁會，有女名春娘，年十二，婉婉，性行賢和。父母雖重於心，祭獻難逃於神魅。于時，鄉村人眾與丁會親屬，送春娘並白馬、須[>酒]饌、錢財等至廟。祭訖，舍之而歸。//春娘並馬烈[>列]於廟前，怨氣凝而務[>霧]擁眉頭，恨淚而血斑衣袂。至日暮，春娘身心開悟，知佛慈悲，發意告投，望垂救護。作念次，忽見一老人語春娘曰：“汝但念揭諦真言，必脫災難。”於是春娘隨老人誦二七遍，忽聞一聲，其猶雷震，天地岌然，乃見老人變身為神，望廟喝之。隨其喝聲，有一大蛇白色，從石井而出，身長數丈，泣血

而終。至明旦，春娘父母並村人眾至廟，欲葬其屍，乃見春娘兼馬並在，詢問緣由，具陳上事。//是知正以敵邪，妖不勝福，自此永絕變怪，實因羯諦真言靈驗者哉！遂以所現形儀圖畫並事由聞奏，宣流九土，遍示見聞。即說消災真言。 Emendations to Chinese texts are noted as X[>Y], meaning X has been emended to Y. I have consulted (Dou and Zhang 2010; Yang 2009) in my emendations, though further emendations are made where I see something missing in theirs. Of special note is my emendation of 暮 to 巫 in the first column. According to Bernhard Karlgren, the Medieval Chinese pronunciation of 暮 *muo* (Karlgren 1957, pp. 211–12, no. 802d) shares the same consonant with 巫 *miu* (p. 48, no. 105a). Since I cannot locate Mushan County in the Gorges region, I take it as an error in the oral transmission of the story from Sichuan to Dunhuang. My reading of the Gorges as the Three Gorges is also confirmed by (Zhu and Chen 2022, p. 190).

6 (Ge 2018, pp. 155–56; 2001, pp. 253–79, in particular pp. 261–63). For more on “killing people to sacrifice to demons,” see (Sawada 1982, pp. 332–73; Liu 2014, vol. 2, pp. 784–809; Wang 2010).

7 See Kenneth DeWoskin’s translation in (Kao 1985, pp. 105–6). DeWoskin is correct in comparing “the theme of virgin sacrifice” with “fertility cult traditions” (p. 106).

8 (Wang 2010, p. 109; Ter Haar 2006, pp. 106–16; Feng 2021). The Republican-period revolutionary and scholar Yi Baisha 易白沙 (1886–1921) compiled an entire section on human sacrifice from mostly official history (Yi 1984, pp. 9–13).

9 陵州仁壽縣有陵井出鹽，井傍玉女祠。初女無夫，後每年取一少年人擲置井中，若不送，水即竭。//又蜀郡西山有大蟒蛇吸人，上有祠號曰“西山神”，每歲土人莊嚴一女置祠旁，以為神妻，蛇輒吸將去，不爾，即亂傷人。//周氏平蜀，許國公宇文貴為益州總管。乃致書為神媒合婚姻，擇日設樂，送玉女像以配西山神。自送之後，無復此害。(882/9a-b).

10 (Song *huiyao jigao*, vol. 2, Li 禮 20/994–995; and *Jianyan yilai xinian yaolu* 165/3b, p. 1358).

11 唐則天聖曆中，集州嘉川縣百姓潭有蛟時出為害。因祠以處女白馬，里人惑之，習以為常。有張從善者當以女祭，翁媪垂泣。有僧至門，教女誦般若經中揭諦神咒。女如其言。及送至蛟祠中，忽見巨人被甲仗劍。其蛟奔出，即以劍戮之，女子安然。勅改祠為揭諦院，度女為尼以主之。(184/5359).

12 (Tan sou, p. 204.) *Tan sou* was attributed conventionally to Pang Yuanying, a Northern Song person, though it was likely compiled after the beginning of the 13th century due to the appearance of some later anecdotes (p. 195).

13 See the tale type of “The Dragon-Slayer,” which is no. 300 in (Aarne and Thompson 1961, pp. 88–90).

14 (Faure 1987). It is interesting to note that Bernard Faure’s personal encounter in the Ise peninsula with the skull of a huge snake killed after a failed conversion by the Japanese Shingon esoteric saint Shōbō, also considered one of the founders of Shugendō, seems to confirm my impression (p. 338). A notable exception is the White Dragon in the Broken Mountain (Po shan 破山), Changshu, Jiangsu province. During the Zhenguan era (627–649), it metamorphosed into a white-bearded old man to listen to a monk’s preaching. Upon seeing the dragon’s true form out of curiosity, the monk grew frightened and mistakenly recited the Jiedi Mantra. The dragon was hit by the Jiedi God with a *vajra* and broke the mountain to flee. But here is a dharma-loving dragon; see ([Baoyou chongxiu] *Qinchuan zhi*, 10/10a, p. 375). In contradistinction with their death by the Jiedi God or Mantra, pythons were exorcized or driven away by the Great Compassionate Incantation in the (*Yijian zhi*, 1: 126, and 4: 1683–1684); the Goddess of Mercy is not expected to kill.

15 (T. 387, 12.1084c7-12 and T. 1353, 21.867c12-22, respectively). See (Fukui 2000, p. 192; Nattier 1992, p. 211, note 53).

16 The former mantra is the Rainmaking Spell in the *Great Cloud Sūtra* (T. 387, 12.1084c7-12), its Sanskrit reconstruction belongs to (Harada 2010, p. 361). The latter mantra is the Jiedi Mantra.

17 若有諸龍聞是神呪。不降甘雨頭破七分。(T. 387, 12.1084c13).

18 (T. 387, 12.1084b29-c26).

19 (T. 1336, 21.609a25-b19, corresponding to 大方等無想經, T. 387, 12.1084c4-26).

20 (T. 2122, 53.742a10-22, corresponding to 大方等無想經, T. 387, 12.1084c4-13).

21 Limiting the scope to Tang-dynasty commentaries on the *Heart Sūtra*, Wōnch’ūk’s exegesis of the meaning of the mantra is followed by the Huayan master Fazang (643–712), the Tiantai master Mingkuang (ca. 777), and an anonymous commentator preserved in the Dunhuang manuscript P. 2903, all of which can be found in (*Bore xinjing yizhu jicheng*). For the Chinese tradition of explicating Buddhist incantations, see (Copp 2012; Overbey 2019).

22 初揭諦揭諦，此云度度，頌前長行般若二字。此顯般若有大功能，自度度他，故云度度。//次波羅等句，即頌長行波羅蜜多。此云彼岸到，是即涅槃，名彼岸也。揭諦言度，度到何處。謂即彼岸是度之處。故云波羅揭諦。//言波羅者，翻名如上。僧揭諦者，此云到竟。言菩提者，是彼岸體。後莎婆呵，此云速疾。謂由妙慧有勝功用，即能速疾到菩提岸。(Wōnch’ūk, T. 1711, 33.551 c18-25). My translation has consulted (Choo 2006, pp. 197–98), and (Lusthaus 2003, pp. 95–98), with slight modifications.

23 For speculations on *gate*, see (MW, pp. 346–47; Conze 1958, p. 106; Lopez 1996, pp. 168–69; Harada 2010, pp. 354–408; and more recently Attwood 2021, p. 46).

24 揭諦者。此云去也度也。(T. 1712, 33.555a8-9).

25 See (Hirakawa 1997, p. 427, s.v. 度; MW 1899, p. 454.2). I suspect that the Late Middle Chinese pronunciation of 度 *thu* (Pulleyblank 1991, p. 83) was used to render the Sanskrit root \sqrt{t} . See also (Maes 2022, pp. 56–61) for the application of \sqrt{t} in the literal and metaphorical language of liberation in early Buddhism.

26 (DDB, s.v. 度).

- (MW, p. 619.2; Lopez 1988, p. 21).
- (T. 1711, 33.543c23-24). Harada (2010, p. 385) points out that the mantric phrase *pāragate pārasaṃgate* as a vocative existed long ago and originated in a soil that had no relation to the *prajñāpāramitā* thought.
- For the classical study on Buddhist soteriology, see (Buswell and Gimello 1992).
- 波羅僧羯諦者。僧者總也溥也。即謂自他溥度總到彼岸也。(T. 1712, 33.555a11-12). See Cook's translation, with slight modification (1991, p. 201).
- 言到彼岸者。生死爲此岸。涅槃爲彼岸。煩惱爲中流。菩薩以無相妙慧。乘禪定舟航。從生死此岸。度涅槃彼岸。(T. 1916, 46.478a18-21). In the *Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, Sengzhao cites Daosheng, who has the same understandings of the hither and further shore, except that "the middle stream means bindings and instigations" (中流者，結使也), which is usually considered a synonym of afflictions (Skt. *kleśa*). (*Zhu Weimojie jing*, T. 1775, 38.410c25-26).
- 經喻內毒如龍難觸。欲貪如鯨吞海。(T. 1896, 45.856b26).
- 魚龍喻眾生惑業深重。See (*Shimen guijing yi hufa ji*, ZZ. 1094, 59.441b20).
- 邪心是大海，煩惱是波浪，毒心是惡龍，塵勞是魚鼈……除邪心海水竭，煩惱無波浪滅，毒害除魚龍絕。(Nanzong dunjiao zui-shang dasheng mohe bore boluomi jing liuzhu Huineng dashi yu Shaozhou Dafansi shifa tan jing, T. 2007, 48.341c1-5; trans. Yampolsky 1967, p. 158, with slight modifications).
- For this record, see ([*Jiaqing*] *Meizhou shu zhi*, 15/27a-29a). It also appears in a punctuated edition in (*Songdai shuwen jicun jiaobu*, vol. 6, 92/2933-34).
- See Lü Tao's "Fengshi huizhou shishi zhuang" (*Jingde ji*, 4/15a-16b); and (von Glahn 1987, pp. 78–79). The Lingzhou well and prefecture were renamed the Transcendent Well and Longzhou in the Song.
- ("Shu zhong guanyan," in *Jianyan yilai chaoye zaji* (jia ji), 14/242–243). The first 20 fascicle in the "jia ji" was completed in 1202.
- For *zongling suo*, see (Hymes and Schirokauer 1993, p. 20; Lei 2013).
- (von Glahn 1987, p. 79). For salt tax in Sichuan as an important source of revenue for the early Southern Song court, see (Tao 2009, p. 698).
- (*Song huiyao jigao*, vol. 2, Li 禮 20/1016–1017).
- 其後有神降於廟，著靈應，獨聖字又書爲劈海揭帝，迺仲氏咒中神名。則神之靈，安知莫不自佛地位中來？則求其盛神力，故如是之偉燁。中興，朝廷廣增諸紀，累封廣佑嘉應昌澤公。Emend 仲 to 佛 in 佛氏咒中神名，given the resemblance in form and likelihood of meaning.
- For the granting of titles to local deities during the Song, see (Hansen 1990, pp. 79–84).
- For the Restoration period, see (Yu 2019, pp. 241–78); for Sichuan as a frontier war zone, see also (Yu 2019, pp. 72–78).
- ("Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," st. 9, p. 94).
- For recent studies on "sea theologies" or "maritime religiosity," see (Rambelli 2018, pp. xii–xxiv and 181–99).
- For the distinction made between "field of action" and "mode of action" in mythological studies, see (Dumézil 1970, vol. 1, pp. 174–75; Detienne 2008, pp. 60–64; and Faure 2015, pp. 35–38).
- 有人初發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提意。欲度脫一切衆生老病死等身心諸苦。作大誓莊嚴功德慧明二事因緣故所願皆滿。是二事有六分修行。名爲六波羅蜜。布施持戒忍辱是功德分。精進禪定智慧是慧明分。修行六波羅蜜。知是諸法相。甚深微妙難解難知。作是念。衆生著三界諸法。以何因緣令衆生得是諸法相。(T. 1509, 25.162c25-263a3). My translation has consulted Juhyung Rhi's (2009, pp. 151–52), with slight modifications.
- 觀應可度者說法開化。譬如金翅鳥王普觀諸龍命應盡者。以翅搏[>搏]海。令水兩闕。取而食之。佛亦如是。以佛眼觀十方世界五道衆生。誰應得度。初現神足次爲示其心趣。以此二事除三障礙而爲說法拔三界衆生。得佛力無量神通。假令虛妄。猶尚可信。何況實說。是名方便。(T. 1509, 25.263a6-13).
- (Slouber 2017, p. 19). See also (MW, p. 1227.3, s.v. *suparṇa, suparṇin*; FG, p. 3586, s.v. 金翅鳥; and p. 3974, s.v. 迦樓羅鳥).
- 香象渡河截流而過得麼。如金翅擘海直取龍吞得麼。(Dahui Pujue *Chanshi yulu*, T. 1998A, 47.842a2-3). For the Zen capping phrases, see (Hori 2003, pp. 270, 299).
- (DDB, s.v. 香象). See also (Yu 2009).
- "Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,/Who pierced the dragon?//Was it not you who dried up the sea,/The waters of the great deep;/Who made the depths of the sea a way/For the redeemed to cross over?" (Society of Biblical Literature 2006, Isa 51.9-10). See its annotation, "The exodus is here identified with God's cosmogonic victory over the primeval chaos-dragon" (p. 979). See also the comment on Exo 14.16: "Splitting the sea evokes an Israelite creation myth in which the Lord cuts through the primeval sea monster (Isa 51.9; Job 26.13); Isa 51.10 in fact compares the exodus to creation. The nature myth in which the Lord cleaves the hostile sea monster, a tale shared with other Near Eastern cultures, is here transformed into a historical drama in which the Lord divides an inanimate sea and slays his enemies in it" (p. 108).
- In *Canglang's Remarks on Poetry* (*Canglang shi hua* 滄浪詩話; early to mid thirteenth century), Yan Yu 嚴羽 writes, "The several poets like Li [Bai] and Du [Fu] are similar to the golden-winged [bird king] which cleaves the ocean, and the fragrant elephant

which crosses the river". 李、杜數公，如金翅劈海，香象渡河。(pp. 177–78). The juxtaposed imagery becomes a metaphor for powerful language in literature.

54 For the exact phrasing of *pihai* in the Song, see Huihong Juefan's (1071–1128) commentary on the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Miaofa lianhua jing helun*, ZZ. 30, 603.365a10–13).

55 (Copp 2014, pp. 156–57, 188, 194; 2012). See also Qian Zhongshu on synesthetic “transference” and “interchangeable use” of the senses in Buddhist writings (Qian 1998, pp. 156–58; 1990).

56 I suggest that the “Wave-Cleaving Fudō” (Namikiri Fudō 波/浪切不動) in Japanese Buddhism is also derived from Garuda. According to one source, this esteemed sculpture had his eyes opened by the Chinese tantric master Huiguo (Muraoka 1987, pp. 141–62, esp. 142; and Faure 2015, pp. 139, 141).

57 乃名其橋曰博濟何？蓋取其獨孤博濟廟也。然博濟之義不得為井泉設，大略有三焉：蓋廟之左有龍女祠，稍北則有大小二龍洞，或遇亢旱，則四方祈雨者致其敬於前，甘澤沛於後，則雨暘之權，神實司之。廟右有大小二龍洞通堰水，溉田數千頃畝，無凶歲。然水之通塞，神實掌之。凡乞靈於廟者，肩相摩而踵相接。昔之深厲淺揭者，今則履履而至；昔之褰裳而涉者，今則翔步而來。疊是三者，則博濟之名豈溢美哉？

58 (HDC, Kroll, s.v. 濟).

59 般若心經者。實謂瞿昏衢之高炬。濟苦海之迅航。拯物導迷莫斯最爲。(Bore boluomiduo xinjing lüeshu, by Fazang, T. 1712, 33.552 a23–24; my italics and underlining). My translation has consulted (Cook 1991, p. 184).

60 (DDB, s.v. 濟度).

61 於大洪流中/應作浮囊楫/并造作橋船/自渡亦濟他。(Bieyi] *Za Ahan jing*, T. 100, 2.397c16–17). See also “cross over by bridge or boat” 橋船以濟度 (*Za Ahan jing*, T. 99, 2.261b8); and “deliver those who have not crossed by bridge or boat” 橋船濟未渡 (*Fenbie yebao lüejing*, T. 723, 17.448c11).

62 橋雖作於人，而博濟之義非神無以當之。異時同志之士授圯上遺書，躍龍門級浪，非神何以相之？嘉定丁巳年六月，知黎州軍事、賜銀魚袋程伯雄撰。已 is correctly emended to 丑 in (*Songdai Shuwen jicun jiaobu*).

63 (“Wuchen Xubu zhi bian 戊辰蓄卜之變,” in *Jianyan yilai chaoye zajia* (yi ji) 20/314).

64 (“Wuchen Xubu zhi bian,” in *Jianyan yilai chaoye zajia* (yi ji) 20/316).

65 For the relationship between salt monopoly and military, see (Worthy 1975, pp. 101–2, 109; von Glahn 1987, p. 72).

66 ([Jiaqing] *Sichuan tongzhi*, 123/36a and 38b).

67 The paintings of the Jiedi God by the first three artists survived at least until the end of the Northern Song and appear in (*Xuanhe huapu*, pp. 124, 71, and 157; McNair 2019 trans., pp. 155, 110, and 185, respectively); and those by the latter two survived until Qing and appear in (*Huishi beikao* by Wang Yuxian [ca. 1691], 6/23a–24a and 6/64a–b).

68 敬造白衣觀自在菩薩一/身。僧令瑄為全家師主延年益/壽造。明德元年八月十日鑄了 and 敬造揭帝明王神一身/僧令瑄自發心為當身平安/延年益壽造 永為供養。The inscription is provided by (Wang 1990, pp. 88–89).

69 The iconographical description is much indebted to (Zhu and Chen 2022).

70 (*Foxue da cidian*, s.v. “迦樓羅炎”).

71 Or else written as 揭諦明王; see (*Zangwai fojiao wenxian* 12: 123, and 185). For Ucchuṣma, see (Yang 2013).

72 (B. 8347; see also Wang Juan, pp. 225–57).

73 (P. 2811 and P. 4046).

74 Written as “Gati Fast” in (Davis 2001, p. 121).

75 (*Dali congshu: Dazangjing pian* 2: 146–158). See especially (Huang 2017, pp. 66–69); special thanks go to Huang Huang and Hou Chong for providing me the transcription and photos of this manuscript.

76 (T. 901, 18.807b19–22).

77 (T. 901, 18.807b19–21, and 806c22–26); see also (Kawasaki 2008, p. 96).

78 I have adapted Kawasaki's table (Kawasaki 2008, p. 97).

79 後來有一種杜撰底法師却言此是神名，訛謬甚矣！蓋西域有揭諦神，梵語偶相同，便謂此呪皆神名。(Dahui Pujue Chanshi pushuo, ZZ 1540, 59.946a15–16).

80 I have saved the appearance of Jiedi on Dhāraṇī pillars in a future installment because they involve only the mantra not the god.

81 昔有神人名揭諦者試劍於此下 (*Chi ya*, 2/12a–b, by Kuang Lu [1604–1650 or 1651]).

82 see (*Sougou baike* 搜狗百科, s.v., 還珠洞, <https://baike.sogou.com/m/fullLemma?lid=3624055>, accessed on 17 August 2023) for a photo of this marvelous rock.

83 (*Ming yitong zhi* 83/11a; and [Yongzheng] *Guangxi tong zhi*, 13/22a, 124/13a).

84 The first Jiedi Cloister, as discussed above, comes from (*Yudi jisheng*, 184/5359). The second one comes from (*Yizhou minghua lu*, p. 200); see also ([Jiaqing] *Sichuan zong zhi*, 42/3b).

85 (*Yizhou minghua lu*, p. 200).

86 (*Song Gaoseng zhuan*, T. 2061, 50.882a–b).

- ⁸⁷ ([Tongzhi] *Changsha xianzhi*, 30/12b, 31/14b).
- ⁸⁸ (*Weishi ji*, 3/7a-b). See also (Deng 2019b, p. 36; Zhu and Chen 2022, p. 192; Yü 2001, pp. 145, 245, 348).
- ⁸⁹ (80/8a-b).
- ⁹⁰ (6/1a-2a, and 116/10b-12a).
- ⁹¹ For Jiedi's pairing with Jin'gang, see, for instance, (*Xixiang ji zhu gong diao*, by Dong Jieyuang [ca. 1190–1208], p. 21); with Lishi, see (*Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu*, by Lin Ningzhen [1239–1302], 279/21a-b).
- ⁹² For the illustrations of the eighteen moves of the Jiedi Kungfu, see (*Shaolinsi wushu baike quanshu*, pp. 602–5).

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