



The Commentary on the Lankāvatāra Sūtra by Kokan Shiren (1278-1346)

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The Zen Buddhist commentarial literature has been almost entirely ignored by scholars in favour of Zen poetry and essays. Yet even that poetry and art has been widely misunderstood, as revealed in recent studies by Professors Yoshizawa Katsuhiko and Kageki Hideo. Furthermore, the only work by Kokan Shiren, a leading Zen figure of his day that has attracted much attention is his *Genkō shakusho* of 1320, a history that attempted to place Zen in the prime place in Japanese Buddhism. The third type of Zen literature that has been translated and possibly analysed is the *kōan* collection, but again these collections are meant to trigger enlightenment and generally provide no doctrinal content, being largely impenetrable witty dialogues. The commentarial tradition, on the other hand, was one that Zen had in common with other forms of East Asian Buddhism and is still being used and updated, for the commentaries were a prime means for expressing new philosophical and religious concerns, despite being ostensibly explanations of works from the past.

Kokan Shiren was abbot at various times of some of the most important Zen monasteries in Kyoto and was regarded as a major scholar and writer of Chinese. He was also the foremost polemicist for Zen of his day, yet he has largely been overlooked by modern scholarship, with the exception of linguists who have focussed narrowly on the phonology revealed in his *Shūbun inryaku* of 1306. This rhyme dictionary, in one form or another, was still being used into the nineteenth century.

To overcome some of these oversights this paper will analyse Shiren's 1325 *Butsugo shinron*, a commentary on the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*. This sutra had played a formative role in early Chan/Zen, only to have been supplanted by the *Diamond* and other sutras, although it did see a revival among some Song dynasty Chan monks, and in the late Ming dynasty. Shiren thus had few predecessors in Chan as commentators on this sutra; Shanyue in 1209, Chengshou (1195-1200) and Yang Yanguo in 1131. The only major extant commentary by a Buddhist scholastic was that by Fazang (643-712), a founder of the Huayan School. As the *Butsugo shinron* is a very long commentary totalling eighteen fascicles, Shiren likely had a strong motivation to write on this sutra rather than the more popular *Diamond* or *Heart* sutras. This search for intent is the first topic of the paper.

The *Butsugo shinron* itself attracted a commentarial discussion (not an interlinear commentary) by Chitetsu in 1676 in his *Butsugo shinron kuketsu* and it was used by the Sōtō Zen monk Yōson (d. 1703) in his *Ryōgakyō ronshosetchū* of 1687. Again, sometime after having thoroughly studied Shiren's text in 1692, Mujaku Dōchū (1653-1744) wrote a *Butsugo shinron kōshō* or evidential glosses in 731 folios (unpublished manuscript). Even the renowned scholar of tathāgatagarbha, Takasaki Jikido, in his 1979 translation of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* adopted Shiren's breaks in the Chinese text. Clearly, Shiren's commentary was valuable. Shiren drew upon Fazang for some of his commentarial categories, but his commentary displays a distinctive and possibly unique three-layered approach. In his commentary, Shiren clearly separates the ordinary or mundane level of explanation (glosses on names and terms), the status or structural level that dealt with questioners and exponents, and the insightful level, which is divided into five forms of wisdom. This latter is the most innovative part, and is purported to be at the stage of the Buddha's realisation and responses to beings. Shiren claimed this part as superior to other commentaries. This is the second topic of the paper.

This paper then will examine this commentary for its historical role in the interpretation of the *Lankāvatāra* from a Zen perspective while comparing it with earlier commentaries.