

## Outsiders: Medieval Chinese Buddhists and the 'Borderland Complex' An Exploration of the Eight Difficulties<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** My research examines and contextualises Shi Daoxuan's 釋道宣 (c. 596-667) *Shijia fangzhi* 釋迦方志 (*A Record of Buddhist Places*). Finished in 650, this text locates China within a Buddhist geographic and cosmological framework. Daoxuan, in common with his predecessors, regards central northern India (Sanskrit *Madhyadeśa*, the Central State), the Buddha's homeland, as the very centre of the world. China is of lower status; a borderland. Since the fourth century, the Buddhist assertion of China's non-centrality had given rise to feelings of deep disquiet among Chinese Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Chinese Buddhists keenly felt their disadvantage, suffering from what Antonino Forte called the 'Borderland Complex,' outsiders within their own religion. In the *Shijia fangzhi*, Daoxuan affirms India's geographic centrality, yet simultaneously undermines the importance of that centrality, arguing that Chinese Buddhists were not blighted by their peripheral position, thus providing an antidote to the Borderland Complex. In this paper I investigate the role played by the 'Eight Difficulties,' situations hampering the apprehension of the Buddha's teachings, in the rise of the Borderland Complex. Known during the very earliest stages of Buddhism in China, at first their formulation causes no problem for Chinese Buddhists. But with the influx of *Āgama* texts at the very end of the fourth century it becomes clear that being born in a borderland is problematic, stimulating the development of the Borderland Complex. I argue a resurgence of this Borderland Complex was triggered by the return of Xuanzang from India in 645, prompting Daoxuan to argue that being born in a borderland was not a 'Difficulty' in an attempt to neutralise the problem.

### Introduction

As Buddhism moved beyond India, Indian cosmological assumptions went along with it. These had profound implications for Chinese Buddhists who grappled with their position, and that of China, in the Buddhist cosmological and geographical scheme. One of the major issues causing controversy was centrality.<sup>2</sup> In the Buddhist scheme, central Northern India (Sanskrit: *Madhyadeśa*, the Central State), the Buddha's homeland, is the centre of the world. To challenge the centrality of China was to challenge the entire Chinese understanding of the cosmos and man's place in it. This is what Buddhism did in its assertion that the Buddha's birthplace was the very centre of the world. This had

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a shortened version of what will eventually become a section within a chapter on the Buddhist conception of *Jambudvīpa* and China's place in it. My thanks go to my supervisor, Dr Antonello Palumbo, for his helpful comments on a draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Centrality is a major concern of my thesis and an entire chapter will be devoted to the Chinese idea that China is central geographically, politically and cosmologically. A common name for China, *Zhongguo* means the Central State, and as we will see below the same term is used to translate the Sanskrit term for central Northern India (*Madhyadeśa*), the sphere of operation of the Buddha. There is a great deal of scholarship on the importance of centrality in Chinese thought. For a recent analysis see Mark Edward Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006).

two important effects: first, it gave rise to conflict with non-Buddhists and second, it caused consternation among Buddhists themselves, leading to what Antonino Forte called the 'Borderland Complex.'<sup>3</sup> The major symptom of this Borderland Complex was feelings of inadequacy resulting from not being Indian, or in India. Geography played an important role. If India was central then, *ipso facto*, China was not; it was a borderland, and therefore by implication not as good a place for a Buddhist to be. These issues would only be resolved when Chinese Buddhists saw China as a religiously efficacious place on a par with India.

My research focuses on a Chinese work of Buddhist geography that seeks to hasten this resolution. The *Shijia fangzhi* 釋迦方志 (*A Record of Buddhist Places*), authored by Daoxuan (c. 596-667) was submitted to the Court in 650, five years after the traveller monk Xuanzang's 玄奘 (c.603-664) return from his lengthy stay in India and, I argue, in response to that event. Daoxuan aims to locate China within a Buddhist geographic and cosmological framework in the Eastern section of the lower third of the Buddhist continent of *Jambudvīpa*, linked to India by rivers and mountains. Affirming India's geographic centrality, yet simultaneously undermining the importance of that centrality, Daoxuan seeks to make the case that China is not blighted by its peripheral situation, thus providing an antidote to the Borderland Complex suffered by his predecessors and contemporaries. This paper examines one of the ways by which Daoxuan seeks to do this, by denying that being born in a borderland is to be numbered among the difficulties that might face someone trying to put the Buddha's teachings into practice.

### **The Borderland Complex**

During the latter part of fourth century increasing numbers of Buddhist texts found their way to China, and Chinese Buddhists began to suspect there was much they did not understand about their religion. Men like Shi Dao'an 釋道安 (312-385), struggling to make sense of this partial picture complicated by the simultaneous arrival of texts from rival Buddhist schools, began to feel that China was not the best place to be for a Buddhist and it is in his writings that the first traces of the Borderland Complex are to be found.<sup>4</sup> In the *Preface to the Sūtra of the Skandha-dhatū-āyatana* (*Yinchiru jing xu* 陰持入經序), Dao'an laments that he was born at the wrong time and in the wrong place:

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<sup>3</sup> Antonino Forte, "Hui-chih (fl. 676-703 A.D.), A Brahmin Born in China," *Estratto da Annali dell'Instituto Universitario Orientale* 45 (1985): 125-7.

<sup>4</sup> Dao'an's writings are preserved in the collection of prefaces in the *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 T2145.

世不值佛又處邊國。<sup>5</sup>

The age has not encountered a Buddha and I dwell in a border country.

And again in the *Preface to the Sūtra on the Twelve Gates (Shi'er men jing xu, 十二門經序)*,

Dao'an decries the legacy of his former existences:

安宿不敏、生值佛後又處異國。<sup>6</sup>

My karmic residue has left me slow-witted, born after a time I could encounter a Buddha and dwelling in a different country.

To Dao'an, it is India (*Tianzhu* 天竺) that is central and China, merely a borderland. In his *Preface to the Sūtra of the Stages of the Path (Daodi jing xu 道地經序)*<sup>7</sup>, in the context of a discussion on the challenges of translating the teachings into Chinese, he provides us with a vivid glimpse into his feelings about being so far from India:

然天竺聖邦，道岨遼遠。幽見硯儒，少來周化。先哲既逝來聖未至。  
進退狼跋咨嗟涕洟。<sup>8</sup>

The road to *Tianzhu* (India), state of sages, is uneven and long, from our remote situation we are aware of the great erudition there, but few come to complete our conversion. The Wise One of old has departed, and the future sage has not yet arrived. [All we can do] is pace back and forth like wild beasts, sighing and weeping.

Dao'an is not alone in lamenting his geographical position. Shi Huiyuan 釋慧遠 (334-416), his pupil, also talks of India as superior.<sup>9</sup> Another of Dao'an's pupils who was particularly affected by his plight is Shi Sengrui 釋僧叡 (c. 352-436), also a leading disciple of the great Indo-Scythian translator and exegete Kumārajīva (Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什 355/60-413), whose arrival in Chang'an in 402 marked a turning point in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Sengrui talks of his 'border situation' (*bianqing* 邊情), which was offset by the wisdom his foreign master brought to China.<sup>10</sup> While Kumārajīva was able to allay some of the concerns of his pupils, certain materials he brought with him to Chang'an could only have exacerbated them. One cannot help but wonder how the

<sup>5</sup> T2145, 45 a11. All references in this form refer to the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 number: page: frame: line.

<sup>6</sup> T2145, 46 a8-9, and see Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫, "Chūdo, hendo no ronsō 中土，邊土の爭論 (The Debates over the Central Lands and the Borderlands)," *Shisō* 思想 579 (1972): 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> See Jan Nattier, *A Guide to the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations: Texts from the Eastern Han [Dong Han] and Three Kingdoms [San Guo] Periods, Bibliotheca philologica et philosophica buddhica* (Tokyo: International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2008), 62.

<sup>8</sup> T 2145, 69 c15-17, and see He Fangyao 何方耀, *Jin-Tang Nanhai qiufa gaoseng qunti yanjiu* 晋唐南海求法高僧群体研究 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2008), 100.

<sup>9</sup> *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 T2059, 333 b1.

<sup>10</sup> T1564, 1 a22-23. See also T2145, 77 a1-2 and cf. T 2145, 59 a1. This passage has textual and translation problems therefore I will not deal in detail with it here.

(allegedly) five hundred people or more<sup>11</sup> involved in the translation of the *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論 (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sāstra*) (T1509) during the years 402-406 must have felt when they heard the reason why the Buddha stayed as often as he did in cities such as Rājagrha, Śrāvastī and Vārānaśī and never at great cities like Ujjayinī (capital of the Avanti kingdom, modern Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh), Puṇḍravardhana (in modern Bangladesh), Ahichatra (in what is now Uttar Pradesh) and Puṣkarāvātī (a Gandhāran city, modern Chārsadda in Pakistan.) These latter were said to be situated in 'border countries' (*bianguo* 邊國 Skt. *pratyanta-janapada*), such places being *mleccha*<sup>12</sup> territories replete with evildoers and others whose good roots were not yet ripe, which is why the Buddha did not choose to stay there.<sup>13</sup> These cities were all in India, although not in central India. According to Faxian who returned from India in 412, Puṣkarāvātī was even a city where the Buddha was active in a previous existence.<sup>14</sup> How much more would China be considered *mleccha* territory?

Faxian (337 - c.422) who had left for India before Kumārajīva's arrival in Chang'an, seems to have suffered from one of the worst cases of the Borderland Complex. If his suffering was a factor in his making the journey to India, it seems to have been intensified by his experience. Faxian's anonymous biographer, author of the *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* 高僧法顯傳, was clear that Faxian regarded central northern India as the Central State and China as a benighted borderland, making explicit the identity of Central India 中天竺 as **the Central State**.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> T1509, 57 b5.

<sup>12</sup> The word *mleccha*, frequently translated as 'barbarian,' has many connotations and is certainly no synonym for foreigner. In Brahmanical thought *mleccha* was a term encompassing all the 'uncultured' including indigenous non-Aryan tribes and foreigners; those outside of the ritual, religious, social and linguistic community of the Aryans. They were regarded as beneath even the category of *caṇḍālas* (indigenous outcastes, who are part of the karmic system whereas *mlecchas* are not): see Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: an essay in understanding* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988), 180. For Buddhists, '*mleccha* as a term of exclusion also carried within it the possibility of assimilation...' (Romila Thapar, "The Image of the Barbarian in Early India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13 (4) (1971): 157). This was not readily appreciated by the Chinese who felt they were at a severe spiritual disadvantage having been born in China.

<sup>13</sup> T1509, 76 c20-77a2: 問曰：已知耆闍崛山義，佛何以故住王舍城？諸佛法普慈一切，如日照萬物，無不蒙明。如漚祇尼大城 (Ujjayinī)、富樓那跋檀大城 (Puṇḍravardhana)、阿藍車多羅大城 (Ahicchatra)、弗迦羅婆多大城 (Puṣkarāvātī)，如是等大城，多人豐樂而不住；何故多住王舍城 (Rājagrha)、舍婆提大城 (Śrāvastī) 波羅柰 (Vārānaśī)、迦毘羅婆 (Kapilavastu)、瞻婆 (Campā)、婆翅多 (Sāketa)、拘睢鞞 (Kauśāmbī)、鳩樓城 (Kuru) 等，雖有住時，而多住王舍城、舍婆提。云何知多住二處？見佛諸經多在二城說，少在餘城。答曰：佛雖大慈等及，以漚祇尼等諸大城，是邊國故不住。又彌離車弊惡人多，善根未熟故。

<sup>14</sup> See for example Faxian's account: T2085, 858 b5.

<sup>15</sup> T2085, 858a19-20. *Udyāna is truly in North India. All the [people of this place] use the language of Central India. Central India is that which is called the Central State (Zhongguo = Madhyadeśa). The dress and food and drink of the ordinary people [in Udyāna in North India] are the same as those in the Central State (Zhongguo = Madhyadeśa).* 烏長國是正北天竺也。盡作中天竺語。中天竺所謂

When Faxian reached what he regarded as the Central State (*Madhyadeśa*)<sup>16</sup> he provided what has become a much-discussed passage:

中國寒暑調和無霜雪。人民殷樂。無戶籍官法。唯耕王地者乃輸地利。欲去便去，欲住便住。王治不用刑斬。有罪者但罰其錢，隨事輕重。雖復謀為惡逆，不過截右手而已。王之侍衛左右皆有供祿。舉國人民悉不殺生不飲酒不食蔥蒜，唯除旃荼羅。旃荼羅名為惡人，與人別居。若入城市則擊木以自異，人則識而避之不相唐突。國中不養豬雞不賣生口。市無屠店及沽酒者。貨易則用貝齒。唯旃荼羅漁獵師賣肉耳。<sup>17</sup>

In the Central State (*Madhyadeśa*) the cold and heat are in harmony, there being neither frost nor snow. The people are numerous and happy. There is neither household registration nor the laws of officials. Only those who plough the lands of the King need hand over part of their profits [in tax]. If one wishes to go, then one can go; if one wishes to stay then one can stay. The King governs without the use of beheading. Criminals are only punished with a fine, which will be light or heavy depending on the offence. Even in the case of repeatedly planning wicked rebellion the offender will only have his right hand cut off and that is all. The King's attendants and guards of his entourage all have a salary. None of the people of the entire state will take life, nor do they drink wine, eat onions or garlic. The sole exception is the *caṇḍāla*.<sup>18</sup> *Caṇḍāla* is the name for evildoers and they live separately from others. If they enter the city then they must bang a bit of wood thereby announcing their difference and people then know to avoid them and do not make contact with them. In this state they do not raise pigs and chickens, and animals are not sold while alive. In the markets there are no butchers or wine merchants. They use cowrie shells to buy and sell. Only the *caṇḍāla* fish, hunt and sell meat.

Xiaofei Tian has analysed this 'idealised account' of central India. Noting that all trace of hardship and danger disappear once Faxian had reached central India (*Zhongguo*), Tian argues that the journey to central India should be seen as a journey through hell ending in the earthly paradise

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中國。俗人衣服飲食亦與中國同。 This section has been misinterpreted by some (Sen, Deeg and Felt) to suggest that the people of the *Madhyadeśa* had the same habits as those of China (*Zhongguo*). This can probably be traced back to James Legge's ambiguous translation (James Legge, *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms*, San Francisco, 1886 (1975 reprint), 28). Other translators have hedged their bets by using a literal translation without explanation (for example, Beal). Only Abel-Rémusat, and recently Haiyan Hu-von Hinüber ("Faxian's (法顯 342-423) Perception of India - Some New Interpretations of His *Foguoji* 佛國記," *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University for the Academic Year 2010 XI* (2011): 223-247), treat the second instance of *Zhongguo* in this passage as referring to *Madhyadeśa*. Given the context (the author has just mentioned the language of Udyāna and the habits of the people of *Madhyadeśa* are discussed in a later passage and sound nothing like those of China) I follow Rémusat and Hu-von Hinüber. On the authorship of Faxian's biography see Hu-von Hinüber, "The Case of the Missing Author: Who wrote the anonymous Epilogue to Faxian's *Foguoji*?" *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University for the Academic Year 2012* (2013): 307-314.

<sup>16</sup> The nature and extent of *Madhyadeśa* will be dealt with in detail elsewhere in my thesis. For Faxian *Madhyadeśa* denotes the regions to the east of Mathurā.

<sup>17</sup> T51 No 2085 859 b2-14.

<sup>18</sup> See note 12 above.

described above. She argues that, '*in many ways, Faxian's portrayal of central India .....serves as a reversed mirror image of the Chinese regimes at the time. Corporal punishment was an important part of punitive law; ...Household registers were another important issue, because registered households were the taxpayers on whom the state relied for income and corvée labour. Many people tried to evade being registered by secretly moving to another place...the state fought constantly against such practices, and the freedom of going or staying at will, enjoyed by the people of central India was quite unimaginable.*'<sup>19</sup> Accounts of this 'earthly paradise' could hardly fail to increase Borderland anxieties.

The text records that on more than one occasion Faxian meets with monks who express astonishment: how can men of a borderland have been able to understand about leaving the household to pursue the Buddhist way and come such a great distance in search of the law? 如何邊地人能知出家爲道遠求佛法.<sup>20</sup> It is possible to read into their reaction not only surprise that Buddhism had spread to China, and that Chinese Buddhists had made this incredibly arduous journey, but also that Chinese people, being from a borderland and *mleccha*, should have been able to practice Buddhism in the first place. When Faxian and Daozheng arrived at Jetavana, where the Buddha had lived for so long, they keenly felt their borderland status, which was undoubtedly exacerbated by the reaction of the local monks:

法顯，道整初到祇洹精舍念昔世尊住此二十五年。自傷生在邊地。共諸同志遊歷諸國。而或有還者。或有無常者。今日乃見佛空處愴然心悲。彼眾僧出問法顯等言。汝等從何國來。答曰。從漢地來。彼眾僧歎曰。奇哉邊國之人乃能求法至此。自相謂言。我等諸師和上相承以來未見漢道人來到此也。<sup>21</sup>

When Faxian and Daozheng first arrived at Jetavana Vihāra they thought about how in the past the World Honoured One had lived here for 25 years. They reproached themselves for being born in a borderland. They had travelled through many states with friends of the same objective. Some had returned, and some were no more. Now seeing the Buddha's place empty, they were disconsolate. A crowd of monks came out and asked Faxian and the others, 'Which state have you come from?' They replied, 'From the land of Han.' The monks sighed and said, 'How strange that men of a borderland are able to come here to seek the law.' They said to one another, '[In the information] passed down between our teachers and monks, we have never heard of Chinese clerics coming here.'

This kind of disbelieving attitude towards men of a borderland proved too much for Daozheng. Having seen the way Buddhism operated in *Madhyadeśa* and contrasting the situation in

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<sup>19</sup> Tian Xiaofei, *Visionary Journeys: travel writings from early medieval and nineteenth-century China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2011), 102.

<sup>20</sup> T2085, 859 a22.

<sup>21</sup> T2085, 860 c1-8.

his homeland unfavourably, he vowed that till he achieved Buddhahood he desired not to be born in a borderland and declined to return to China with Faxian.<sup>22</sup>

It is not just geography that presented a problem, but time itself. Faxian's account repeatedly remarked on the temporal links between the places he visited and the Buddha, recording several times that the various rites being performed or customs followed had been passed down since the time of the Buddha. It is as if Faxian felt that in India, and in particular in *Madhyadeśa*, one could overcome the temporal issue by these links with the time of the Buddha.<sup>23</sup> Not so for those born outside India. Faxian's lament when he reached Vulture Peak (*Gṛdhrakūṭa*) near the ancient city of Rājagṛha (in modern Bihar) where the Buddha often gave teachings, echoes Dao'an's above and is one of the few parts of the record that gives the impression of a personal account. We read of Faxian preparing for the ascent by purchasing incense, flowers, oil and lamps, and arranging for guides to assist him. Having made his offerings and lit his lamps he was overcome with emotion; holding back tears he said: 'It was here long ago that the Buddha preached the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. I was born at a time when I could not encounter the Buddha, merely being able to see the traces he left and that is all.'<sup>24</sup>

Faxian and Daozheng reproached themselves for being born in a borderland: 自傷生在邊地.

This is not surprising. As T.H. Barrett explains:

...as one of Xuanzang's contemporaries makes clear in discussing the controversial question (to the true Buddhist) of the peripheral position of Chinese civilization, it entailed an acceptance of an implicit spiritual inferiority for all Chinese since personal karmic forces were held to determine not only one's own station in life but also the whole environment in which one found oneself. To have witnessed the Buddha's own preaching in India was a sure sign of past spiritual effort; to live in China a millennium later...was itself an indictment for past failings.<sup>25</sup>

The contemporary of Xuanzang, the great traveller monk, to whom Barrett refers, is of course Daoxuan and the text concerned the *Shijia fangzhi*. Daoxuan uses the term *yibao* 依報 to refer to the conditions - social, geographical, physical and temporal - which one is born into as the result of one's karmic inheritance.<sup>26</sup> Faxian's lament elsewhere that he was 'born when he could not meet the Buddha' (法顯生不值佛) is explained by Barrett as far from being a statement of the

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<sup>22</sup> See T2085, 864 b29-c2.

<sup>23</sup> See T2085, 859 b1 ; 859 b13-14 ; 859 c2.

<sup>24</sup> T2085, 863 a3-4: 佛昔於此說首楞嚴。法顯生不值佛。但見遺跡處所而已。

<sup>25</sup> T. H. Barrett, "Exploratory Observations On Some Weeping Pilgrims," in *The Buddhist Studies Forum, vol. 1: Seminar Papers 1987-1988*, ed. Tadeuz Skorupski (London: London School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990), 99-100.

<sup>26</sup> T2088, 950 b1. See Barrett, "Exploratory Observations," 100 n.2.

obvious: it is ‘actually an item on the list of the ‘eight sad conditions’ blocking the apprehension of the Buddha’s message, along with items such as living in a peripheral land.’<sup>27</sup> As we will discover, Daoxuan argues that to be born in the borderlands is not included in the Eight Difficulties (the *ba’nan* 八難 Skt. *aṣṭāv akṣaṇāḥ*) as I refer to the ‘sad conditions.’

### The Eight Difficulties

Although Barrett, and more recently Jinhua Chen<sup>28</sup>, have recognized the role played by these Difficulties in stimulating the Borderland Complex, there is no scholarship on the development of these concepts in China or in the place(s) of their original formulation. The latter can only remain a matter for speculation for the moment lying as it does outside the scope of this paper. Their reception and development within China, however, is directly relevant to Daoxuan’s efforts to inoculate his brethren against the harmful effects of the Complex, which I argue was a major motivating factor for the composition of the *Shijia fangzhi*.

The Eight Difficulties came in many guises and enumerations and within these there were significant ambiguities and a lack of continuity.<sup>29</sup> In order to analyse these I classify them into the following categories:

<sup>27</sup> Barrett, “Exploratory Observations,” 105-106.

<sup>28</sup> See Chen Jinhua, “Dongya Fojiao zhong de “biandi qingjie”: lun shengdi ji zupu de jiangou 东亚佛教中的“边地情结”:论圣地及祖谱的建构” (The “Borderland Complex” in East Asian Buddhism: a discussion of the development of sacred space and genealogies), *Foxue yanjiu* 佛学研究 (2012): 25.

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that some versions talk of the Difficulties as something to be endured, whereas others speak of circumstances that are difficult to achieve. The Tang Buddhist dictionary, the *Complete Pronunciation and Meanings [of terms found in the] Scriptures (Yiqie jing yinyi 一切經音義)*, originally compiled by Xuanying 玄應 (d.u. fl. mid 7<sup>th</sup> century), revised and edited by Huilin 慧琳 (737-820) in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century gives ‘[the eight circumstances in which one has no] leisure time to practice or pursue the teachings]’ (*wuxia* 無暇) as the more up to date version of what used to be referred to by the synonyms Eight ‘No-Leisures’ (*ba buxian* 八不閑) and the Eight Difficulties (*ba’nan* 八難): T2128, 420 b15. There is a further definition later in the work which defines the *ba wuxia* 八無暇 as the ‘eight difficult times when one has no leisure time to practice the way’. 言此八難之時無有閑暇可修道業也 T2128 498 a14. (In all these formulations ‘Opportunity’ may be a more meaningful, but less accurate translation of *wuxia* 無暇.) Further, elsewhere in the work ‘receiving birth in the difficult places’ 難處受生 is defined as ‘being born in the Eight Difficult [places or situations]’ 難處謂八難中生也 T2128 449 b22. As we will see there are both temporal and spatial factors in the Difficulties. Other synonyms include:

1. The Eight Difficult (circumstances in which to) understand the Dharma 八難解法 (This appears only in the *Chang ahan jing*: see T1, 54 c18);
2. The Eight Wrong Times 八非時 (See *Zhong ahan jing* eg. T26, 613 b2);
3. The Eight Evils 八惡 or Eight Evil Places/Situations 八惡處 (see *Wuku zhangju jing* T741, 544 a28); and

1. Non-human realms (Realm R);
2. Incomplete sense faculties or some other physical factor (Condition C)<sup>30</sup>;
3. Geographical factors (Geography G);
4. Birth in a time when there is either no Buddha or when Buddhism is not honoured (Time T); and,
5. Whether, though born at the right Time, one fails to get the opportunity to practice (Opportunity O).

After each Difficulty I will assign the most appropriate category to assist my explanation as we proceed.

The earliest evidence for the Difficulties in China appears during the Eastern Han (25-220 CE) in a translation of an *Āgama*,<sup>31</sup> text by the Parthian An Shigao 安世高 (fl. 148-170). The *Chang ahan shibao fa jing* (長阿含十報法經 *Daśottarasūtra*)<sup>32</sup> talks of nine ‘non-responding times’, when one is unable to respond to the dharma and so does not get the opportunity to practice, or (as in the ninth situation) when practice is not sufficient: 九不應時，人不得行，第九行不滿。As they differ substantially from some later formulations it is worth quoting the passage in full:

何等爲九？一或時人在地獄，罪未竟不令應得道。二或時在畜生，罪未竟不令應得道。三或時在餓鬼，罪未竟不令應得道。四或時在長壽天，福未竟不令應得道。五或時在不知法義處，無有說者，不能得受，不令應得道。六或時在聾不能聞不能受，不令應得道。七或時在瘖不能受，不能諷說，不令應得道。八或時在聞不能受，不令應得道。九或時未得明者，無有開意說經，不令應得道。<sup>33</sup>

What are the nine? First, when one is a denizen of hell, when one’s sin remains unexpiated and [thus] one cannot respond and achieve the way. (R)

Second, when one has been born as a beast, when one’s sins remain unexpiated and [thus] one cannot respond and achieve the way. (R)

Third, when one has been born a hungry ghost, when one’s sins remain unexpiated and [thus] one cannot respond and achieve the way. (R)

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4. The Eight Times when one will not get to hear the Dharma 八不聞時節 (See *Ekottarika-āgama*, T125, 747 a9-10).

<sup>30</sup> That is, the six sense faculties, the *liu qing* 六情, viz. the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

<sup>31</sup> *Āgama* refers here to the four collections of discourses from the Sanskrit Buddhist Canon that broadly corresponds to the *Nikāyas* of the Pāli Canon. These are preserved in Chinese translation and derive from different schools.

<sup>32</sup> The *Daśottarasūtra* presents the Sarvāstivādin version of the doctrinal lists corresponding to those in the Pāli *Dasuttarasuttanta* of the *Dīgha nikāya*. Sanskrit fragments have been excavated in Turfan corresponding closely to the An Shigao translation, but these fragments do not include the section we are concerned with here. Nor do they appear in the Pāli equivalent in this form: de Jong, 4-5. These details do not provide us with any clues as to the ultimate origin of this formulation other than a vague Central Asian connection through these inconclusive fragments and the text’s Parthian translator. See also Nattier, *Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations*, 49.

<sup>33</sup> See T13 240 a12-23.

Fourth, when one is born as a *Deva* of Long Life<sup>34</sup> when good fortune has not been used up and [thus] one cannot respond and achieve the way. (R)

Fifth, when one is in a place that does not know the meaning of the Way and there are none who explicate it and [thus] one cannot respond and achieve the way. (G)

Sixth, when one is born deaf and is unable to receive [the dharma] and [thus] cannot respond and achieve the way. (C)

Seventh, when one is born dumb and thus unable to recite [the teachings] and thus cannot respond and achieve the way. (C)

Eighth, when one does [not] hear [see?] and is unable to receive [the dharma] and thus cannot respond and achieve the way. (C)<sup>35</sup>

Ninth, when one has not yet achieved clarity, an opening of the thought processes [to those] explicating the sutras and [thus] cannot respond and achieve the way. (C)

The essence of these non-responding times is a situation in which a being for one reason or another cannot (or is unable to) respond to the teachings. These nine all fall into my first three categories: the Realm in which a being is born - birth in Hell, as a hungry ghost, an animal, or as a *Deva* of Long Life (living in a heaven which while the result of an accumulation of good karma, the long life span and the easy conditions combine to mean spiritual progress is difficult as there is little incentive to strive, and the inhabitants have little understanding of the workings of karma). In these non-human realms spiritual progress, while by no means impossible, is very hard. If one is born in the human realm, *where* you are born, Geographical factors (here, whether one's birthplace affords the opportunity to access the Buddha's teachings) are significant, as is the Condition in which you are born (here, whether you are in possession of intact sense faculties and a degree of mental acuity). It is, of course, the Geographical factor that concerns us here. There is nothing in this formulation of the Geographical factor to suggest that China is not a place in which liberation could be achieved as much as in any other. The Buddha's word had reached China and this translation and those responsible for it would surely have been regarded as evidencing this fact. As this will become

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<sup>34</sup> The *changshou tian* 長壽天 (Skt. *dīrghāyuska-deva*) are usually regarded as beings living in the fourth *dhyāna* heaven where life is 500 great *kalpas*, and in the fourth *arūpaloka* where life extends over 80,000 *kalpas*. In this context, I doubt its meaning is so restrictive. I suspect that here the term includes beings of the higher heavens of the Realm of Desire (*Kāmadhātu*), the Gods of Desire (*Kāmadeva*). In any event, these *Devas* do not reside in the human Realm.

<sup>35</sup> The text may well be corrupt here. By analogy with other sets of Difficulties this should concern being born blind.

relevant below, it should be noted that the non-human Realms are enumerated in succession (1-4) followed by the Geographical factor (5).<sup>36</sup>

It is with the translations of various other *Āgama* texts beginning in the late fourth century that things start to get complicated. The translation of the two major texts which concern us here, the *Zengyi ahan jing* 增壹阿含經 (*Ekottarika-āgama*, the ‘*Āgama Increasing By One*’) and the *Zhong ahan jing* 中阿含經 (*Madhyama-āgama*, the ‘*Middle-length Discourses*’) has recently been investigated by Antonello Palumbo.<sup>37</sup> He concludes that the group responsible for the translation of these texts, which took place virtually simultaneously, was led by Dao’an and included two monks from Kashmir (Jibin 罽賓<sup>38</sup>), Gautama Saṃhadeva (Qutan Sengqietipo 瞿曇僧伽提婆, fl. 383–398) and Saṃghabhadra (Sengqiebacheng 僧伽跋澄, fl. 383-399) and a monk from Tokharistan, Dharmananda (Tanmonandi 曇摩難提, fl. 383-391)<sup>39</sup>.

Dealing first with the *Ekottarika-āgama*, this text contains its own section on the Difficulties (八難品) which formulates them as the ‘eight time periods when one will not hear’ (*ba buwen shijie* 八不聞時節). The first seven envisage a time when the Buddha has appeared in the world, taught

<sup>36</sup> The *Sutra in Forty-two Sections* 四十二章經 (T784) mentions two sets of circumstances referred to as Difficulties, one of eight (T784, 723 c25-29), and one of five (722 c11-12). The former list introduces a defined geographical element in contrast to the vagueness of the *Shibao fa jing*: birth in the (or a) Central State (or States) 生中國. Academic opinion is deeply divided on the dating of this text. On the one hand, Zürcher considers that at least part of the text dates from the second century (Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), 29-30) and on the other, Okabe Kazuo 岡部和雄 (“Shijūnishōkyō’ no seiritsu to tenkai. Kenkyūshiteki oboegaki” 四十二章經の成立と展開 — 研究史的覚え書き, *Komazawa daigaku bukkyōgakubu kenkyū kiyō* 駒澤大學佛教學部研究紀要 25 (1967): 103–118), who argues that the text was patched together from a variety of sources during the fourth or fifth century. Equally divergent are the opinions on the nature and purpose of the text. In the light of these issues I will, for the present, leave this text out of my considerations, suffice to say that if it does date from prior to the late fourth century, as it does not contrast *Zhongguo* with *biandi* (see below) it does not affect my argument here.

<sup>37</sup> See Antonello Palumbo, *An Early Chinese Commentary on the Ekottarika-āgama: the Fenbie Gongde Lun 分別功德論 and the History of the Translation of the Zengyi Ahan Jing 增一阿含經*, Dharma Drum Buddhist College Research Series (Taiwan: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation, 2013), generally.

<sup>38</sup> See Palumbo, *Early Chinese Commentary*, 23-25, n. 34 & 27, n. 38 for a discussion on the extent of Jibin.

<sup>39</sup> See Palumbo, *Early Chinese Commentary*, 17 and for the reconstruction of Tanmonandi’s 曇摩難提 name, 5, n.12. Palumbo has reconstructed the extremely complex translation history of these two texts and concluded that the translation of both probably commenced on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 384 (Lunar New Year’s Day of Jianyuan 20) and, with respect to the *Ekottarika-āgama*, continued until June or July of that year, with the *Madhyama-āgama* completed shortly afterwards. The following year saw several further redactions of the *Ekottarika-āgama* being produced by this same team: see Palumbo, *Early Chinese Commentary*, 271, Table 1.

widely, and achieved *nirvāṇa*, so the Buddha's teachings and practices are theoretically available to all.<sup>40</sup> Of the Difficulties relevant to this enquiry the first four are those relating to the Realm in which one is born: as a denizen of Hell, an animal, a hungry ghost or as a *Deva* of Long Life.<sup>41</sup> It is the fifth and sixth Difficulties that are the most interesting:

復次，如來出現世時，廣演法教，然此眾生在邊地生，誹謗賢聖，造諸邪業，是謂第五之難。

Next, if a Buddha manifests during an era, widely expounds the teachings, but it is the case that these sentient beings are born in a borderland, slander the Virtuous Sage (the Buddha) [and thus unwittingly] create evil karma, this is called the fifth Difficulty. (G qualified)

復次，如來出現世時，廣演法教，得至涅槃，然此眾生生於中國，又且六情不完具，亦復不別善惡之法，是謂第六之難也。

If a Buddha manifests during an era, widely expounds the teachings, achieves *nirvāṇa*, but it is the case that these sentient beings are born in the Central State, but with sense faculties incomplete, and consequently unable to distinguish between good and evil teachings, this is called the sixth Difficulty.<sup>42</sup> (G/C)

Here for the first time we see being born in a borderland set in opposition to being born in the Central State (*Zhongguo* 中國 being used presumably to translate *Madhyadeśa* or its equivalent in another Indic language). However, it seems that being born in a borderland, a Geographical factor, does not stand here as a Difficulty in and of itself, but is qualified, coupled with slander of the Buddha. Neither does being born in the Central State stand alone as being a Geographical matter, but it is also dependent on one's Condition.

The *Ba'nan jing* (八難經 *Sutra on the Eight Difficulties*) contained in the *Zhong ahan jing* is also worthy of some attention. Here the Difficulties are enumerated as Difficulties for one trying to

<sup>40</sup>若如來出現世時，廣演法教，得至涅槃、如來之所行..... T125 747 a11 cf. the eighth Difficulty: 如來不出現世，亦復不說法使至涅槃者..... *Ibid.* b1-2.

<sup>41</sup> T125 747 a9-18.

<sup>42</sup> There is a passage in the Pāli *Akkhaṇa sutta* of the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* where the fifth unfavourable situation for religious practice (*asamayo brahmacariyavāsāya*) is birth in a borderland, *paccantimesu janapadesu*, among *milakkha*. (Skt. *Mleccha*: see above note 12). For translations see Bikkhu Bodhi, trans, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A translation of the Āṅguttara-nikāya* (Bristol: Pali Text Society, 2012), <http://wisdompubs.org/book/numerical-discourses-buddha/selections/numerical-discourses-book-eights-householders> and Edward M. Hare, trans., "Akkhaṇa sutta," in *The Book of Gradual Sayings (Āṅguttara-Nikāya): or more-numbered suttas*. (London: Pali Text Society, 1935), 152. The relationship between this Chinese translation and the *Akkhaṇa sutta* is complex, and it would be unsafe to draw any conclusions about the underlying Indic version from which this translation derives other than noting there is no mention of slandering the Buddha in the Pāli on which these two translations are based.

practicing pure conduct (*brahma-caryā*) 人行梵行第一難, or ‘wrong times’ 非時. The second to the fifth Difficulties are dealt with together:<sup>43</sup>

彼人爾時生畜生中，生餓鬼中，生長壽天中，生在邊國夷狄之中，無信無恩，無有反復，若無比丘、比丘尼、優婆塞、優婆夷。

When that person is born as an animal, a hungry ghost, a *Deva* of Long Life, or in the borderlands among the [barbarian tribes of the] Yi and the Di, where there is no trust, no kindness, and no understanding of the workings of the laws of karma<sup>44</sup>, and if there are no *bhikṣu*, *bhikṣuṇī*, *upāsaka* or *upāsikā*.<sup>45</sup>

Here not only is the Geographical issue of birth in a borderland qualified by the lack of Buddhists, monastic and lay (that is by a lack of Opportunity), but it is refined as being among the ‘barbarian’ *Yi* and *Di* tribes, something no Chinese reader would imagine could apply to them. In addition, birth in a borderland seems to be treated as something akin to a different Realm being grouped together with birth as an animal, hungry ghost, or *Deva* of Long Life, in contrast to the earlier An Shigao *Daśottarasūtra* version where the Geographical factor came after birth as a *Deva* of Long Life. A similar set appears in the slightly later translation of the *Shishang jing* 十上經 contained in the *Chang ahan jing* (長阿含經, *the Dīrgha Āgama* or *Long Discourses*), translated by Buddhayaśas 佛陀耶舍 (ca. 340-d. after 413), a teacher of Kumārajīva and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念, in 413.<sup>46</sup> Although unnumbered, Difficulties two to five are also grouped together here.<sup>47</sup> This formulation starts with a question: which are those eight impediments to understanding the teachings during an age when a Buddha manifests? 云何八難解? They are called the ‘Eight [circumstances] of no leisure that impede the practice of pure conduct’: 謂八不閑妨修梵行. Being born in Hell is the first, and the second to the fifth are the other non-human Realms and the ‘border

<sup>43</sup> The remaining Difficulties envisage being born in a Central State, but with some other sort of disadvantage, such as lacking some of the sense faculties.

<sup>44</sup> Translation tentative.

<sup>45</sup> A more succinct version appears in the slightly earlier *Wuku zhangju jing* 五苦章句經 translated sometime between 381 and 395 by Zhu Tanwulan 竺曇無蘭. Here the first five of what the sūtra refers to as ‘Eight Evil Places’ (or Circumstances) as well as ‘Eight Evils’ and ‘Eight Difficulties’, are listed as birth in hell, as a hungry ghost, a beast, in border territories and as a *Deva* of Long Life: 地獄, 餓鬼, 畜生, 邊地, 長壽天 T741 544 a28-b07. A very similar version of Difficulties two to five in the *Ba’nan jing* is found in the slightly later *Shelifu apitan lun* 舍利弗阿毘曇論 translated in 414. Rather than being barbarians here, the residents of the borderlands are stupid and slow: 邊地愚癡人 T 1548, 654 c13.

<sup>46</sup> Palumbo, *Early Chinese Commentary*, 91, 106, 107.

<sup>47</sup> The corresponding section in the Pāli *Dīgha-nikāya* has been translated by Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston (USA): Wisdom Books, 1995), 506-7, 3.2 (4): the nine unfortunate, inopportune times for leading the holy life (*akkhaṇā asamayā brahmacariya-vāsāya*).

area, a place of no knowledge and no Buddha dharma' 邊地無識無佛法處, a Geographical factor, this time qualified by lack of Opportunity.<sup>48</sup>

In reality, the later formulations of the Geographical factor reflect An Shigao's fifth Difficulty ('when one is in a place which does not know the meaning of the way and there are none who speak [of it] and one is unable to respond and achieve the way'), but the juxtaposition of the Central State (*Zhongguo* - soon to be explicitly defined as central northern India by Faxian, but probably already understood as such by Buddhists) and the borderlands (*biandi*) may well have contributed to the Chinese monks' feeling of being at a fundamental disadvantage, and must surely have been a factor in the emergence of the Borderland Complex. Once the concept of a borderland is introduced an explanation would be required. If India is the Central State, what is China? If India is the Central State, does that mean China lies in the borderlands? If so, what does that mean for Chinese Buddhists? Whatever qualifications accompany birth in a borderland, it is clearly not as good as being born in the Central State and thus carries negative implications for those not born there. These Difficulties, one must remember, are the result of one's karmic inheritance. If being born in a borderland is not as good as being born in the Central State this means Chinese Buddhists labour under karmic difficulties *ab initio*, and this inevitably gave rise to disquiet. The *Ekottarika-āgama*, for example, specifies there is but one good time to practice Buddhism and that involves being born in the Central State.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that notwithstanding the fact that none of the formulations of the Difficulties condemn those in the borderlands to an existence where no spiritual progress can be made, one can see how anxieties could arise. It is within the very group responsible for these *Āgama* translations that we see the first traces of the Borderland Complex emerge in the statements of Dao'an above. We can see echoes of the Difficulties in the language Dao'an used to

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<sup>48</sup> T1 55 c11. The remaining three are those who are born in the central regions, have erroneous views, impaired senses and who, although they do not lack the requisite abilities to receive the teachings, do not meet a Buddha: *ibid* 55 c6-21.

<sup>49</sup> 非梵行所修行，是謂，比丘！有此八難，非梵行所修行。「於是，比丘！有一時節法，梵行人所修行。云何爲一？於是，如來出現世時，廣演法教，得至涅槃，然此人生在中國，世智辯聰，觸物皆明，修行正見，亦能分別善惡之法，有今世、後世，世有沙門、婆羅門等修正見，取證得阿羅漢者。是謂梵行人修行一法，得至涅槃。」 T125, 747 b7-13.

This is called the being unable to practice *brahma-caryā*, *Bhikṣu!* When [any of] these Eight Difficulties are present *brahma-caryā* cannot be practiced. Thus *Bhikṣu!* There is but one time period when people are able to practice *brahma-caryā*. What is this one? It is when the 'Thus-come One' has manifested during an era, widely expounded the teachings, and achieved *nirvāṇa*, and that being the case these people are born in the Central State, with worldly wisdom and debating skills, when they encounter things they have clarity, they practice with the correct view and are able to distinguish between good and evil methods, [understanding] there is the present and the past and that the era has *śramaṇas* and Brahmins, obtaining proof that they have obtained arhatship, this is called the only way to practice *brahma-caryā* and [thus] attain *nirvāṇa*.

express his feelings of inadequacy. He talks of ‘not encountering a Buddha’ 不值佛<sup>50</sup>, ‘being born after a time he could encounter a Buddha’ 生值佛後<sup>51</sup>, and ‘being situated in a border state’ 處邊國.<sup>52</sup>

Palumbo has hypothesized that the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama* may be the product of a *bahirdeśaka* lineage (this term being used as a self-designation meaning literally, ‘someone from an outer country’). This, he argues, would imply these men accepted the Indian designation that defined them as foreign.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps their qualification of the borderland Difficulty as including slandering the Buddha, or as being among the barbarian Yi and Di tribes was a subtle way of excluding themselves and the Chinese from this obviously second-class status.<sup>54</sup> Daoxuan also accepts the Indian designation of China as a borderland, but whereas the early *Āgama* translators may have qualified the borderland difficulty suggesting subtly to their non-Indian readership that this did not apply to them (as they were not among the barbarian Yi and Di, for example), Daoxuan goes further and denies that being in a borderland is a Difficulty at all.

The first question we must address is why Daoxuan concerned himself with this issue. It is part of my wider argument that Daoxuan composed the *Shijia fangzhi* in part as a response to Xuanzang’s return from India following his travels and study in India between 629 and 645. While it had never entirely disappeared, it is arguable that the Borderland Complex had become less important to Chinese Buddhists than the feeling that the Buddha’s dharma was in decline, causing Buddhists to worry more about living in the wrong time than in the wrong place. However, on Xuanzang’s return the Chinese got to hear precisely what some Indian Buddhists thought of them and their country. According to Xuanzang’s biographer Huili 慧立 (615-d.u.), when Xuanzang announced his intention to return to China the monks at the Buddhist university at Nālandā expressed astonishment. Why would Xuanzang want to return to China?

<sup>50</sup> T2145, 45 a11.

<sup>51</sup> T2145, 46 a8-09.

<sup>52</sup> T2145, 45 a11. When Dao’an laments being ‘situated in a different country’ (處異國 T2145, 46a08-09) it is tempting to speculate that he could not bring himself to use the term ‘borderland’ here. Further, when Dao’an talks of his karmic residue having left him slow-witted he may refer to his sensory perception not being as good as it might be.

<sup>53</sup> Palumbo, *Early Chinese Commentary*, 320, and personal communication. Palumbo links this to the rising prestige of Sanskrit among non-Indian Buddhist communities during the fourth century.

<sup>54</sup> *Dīgha-nikāya* has ‘stupid’ rather than ‘barbarian’, but still qualifies with having a lack of access to *bhikṣu*, *bhikṣuṇī*, *upāsaka* or *upāsikā* as the Chinese *Madhyama-āgama* does: see Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 507.

India is the country of the Buddha's birth and though he has left the world, there are still traces of him. What greater happiness could there be than to visit them in turn, to adore him and chant his praises? Why then do you wish to leave, having come so far? Moreover, Cīna is a country of *mlecchas*, of unimportant barbarians, a place which denigrates (ordinary) people and despises the dharma, a place where Buddhas are not born, a place to which sages and saints do not go on account of the narrow outlook and deep-seated imperfections of the populace.<sup>55</sup>

This must have been quite unpleasant to the ear of many a Tang monk unable to make the journey to India themselves. In addition, among the large quantity of materials Xuanzang brought back from India there were many reminders of China's borderland status. In 645, Daoxuan was summoned by imperial decree to assist Xuanzang with his translation activities centred in the Hongfu Monastery in Chang'an. We know from Daoxuan's own writings the extent of his engagement in this project, and it seems likely that in the short period he was involved, his major involvement was in the translation of the *Sutra of the Scriptural Basket of the Great Bodhisattva* (*Da Pusa cangjing* 大菩薩藏經).<sup>56</sup> This text contained material in which, although not formulated as Difficulties, the disadvantages of being born in a borderland are made clear.<sup>57</sup> Further, a passage contained in one of the most significant texts brought back by Xuanzang, the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (*Yuqie shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論 T1579), translated between 646 and 648, talks of being born when one will have no opportunity to follow the dharma (*sheng wuxia* 生無暇.)<sup>58</sup>, that is, when one is 'born in a borderland among *dasyu* and *mleccha*' 生於邊國及以達須蔑戾車中, beyond the reach of

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<sup>55</sup> *Datang daciensi sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 T2053, 246 a12-27, translation adapted from Forte, "Hui-chih", 126 and Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>56</sup> This information is contained in Daoxuan's *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* biography of Xuanzang: T2060, 455 a13-24. The *Da Pusa cangjing* corresponds to the *Ratnakūṭa sūtra*, now included in the *Da baoji jing* 大寶積經 T310 [*sūtra* 12] in *juan* 35-54. Daoxuan tells us he was back in the Zhongnan mountains at the end of 646 in his postscript to his *Sifen lü hanzhu jieben shu* 四分律含注戒本疏. This sub-commentary circulates today as part of the *Sifen lü hanzhu jieben shu xingzong ji* 四分律含注戒本疏行宗記 (An account of the Practices and Essentials in the *Sifen lü hanzhu jieben shu*) composed by Yuanzhao 元照 in 1088 (XJ vol. 62, 309-1026). See Jinhua Chen, "An Alternative View of the Meditation Tradition in China: Meditation in the Life and Works of Daoxuan (596-667)," *T'oung Pao, Second Series* 88 (4/5) (2002): 370 n. 107. Chen translates part of the postscript at 370-372. Daoxuan's involvement in the translation project and his relationship with Xuanzang will be examined in more depth elsewhere in my thesis.

<sup>57</sup> See for example T310, 274 c 3-4: That is to say, descending into hell, the animal [realm], or born in Yama's domain, or being born in a borderland among *mleccha* of evil views....謂墮地獄畜生焰魔世界，或生邊地及蔑戾車惡邪見中。

<sup>58</sup> See above note 27.

Buddhism as Buddhists do not travel to these places.<sup>59</sup> These factors may well have been among those which stimulated Daoxuan to formulate his reanalysis of China's position.

In the *Shijia fangzhi*, following on from a discussion of the centrality of India, clearly accepting that China is geographically a borderland, Daoxuan informs his readers:

夫以八難所標,邊地非攝.

Now, the Eight Difficulties do not include [being born] in a borderland.<sup>60</sup>

How is Daoxuan able to make this claim when so many of the texts available to him seem to make quite the opposite point? Daoxuan was clearly troubled by this issue and several of his works touch on it. For example, the *Method of Abstention and Contemplating the Purity of Mind (Jingxin jieguan fa 淨心誠觀法 T1893)*<sup>61</sup> states that in relation to the 'six Difficulties', even if one obtains birth in the human realm it is difficult to be born in the Central State. Daoxuan comments, "*this land [China], although among the borderlands, has all the Mahāyāna true Dharma [both] scriptures and vinaya.* 此土即當邊地之中具足大乘正法經律."<sup>62</sup> Here Daoxuan seems to be responding to formulations of the Difficulties such as those seen in the *Chang ahan jing 長阿含經* which talk of 'a border area, a place of no knowledge and no Buddha dharma' 邊地無識無佛法處.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps if Daoxuan had been asked for clarification he would have explained that the point he was making was that it is not the Geographical position of the person that was the problem, but whether the works

<sup>59</sup> T1579, 396 a15-16. *Dasyu* is a term with several connotations in Sanskrit, usually translated as 'barbarian' or 'outcast'. Cf. the formulation of the *Zhong ahan jing* above.

<sup>60</sup> This is not the way Bagchi has understood this sentence. He translates as follows (page 5): *It is mentioned in the eight misfortunes that the borderlands are not included (among the fortunate).* It seems to me that there is no need in the context to introduce the qualification in parentheses.

<sup>61</sup> This text was written to encourage a disciple and members of his monastery to cultivate their minds (Yifa, *The Origins Of Buddhist Monastic Codes In China: An Annotated Translation And Study Of The Chanyuan qinggui* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 25). The date of composition is not clear. Huaiyu Chen ("The Revival of Buddhist Monasticism in Medieval China," (PhD diss., University of Princeton, 2005), 229) suggests that Daoxuan is responding to action taken by the Emperor Taizong in the 630s, but then in his bibliography dates it to 659. Tan does not date it and does not include in his chronology and Yifa also gives no date.

<sup>62</sup> T1893, 821 c28-a16.

<sup>63</sup> The statement in the *Shijia fangzhi* that being in a borderland does not constitute one of the Difficulties may well represent an advance in his thinking, but this all depends on dates and these are problematic (see above note 52). It should be further noted that in other of his compositions Daoxuan implies that China is not a borderland and seeks to recast places such as Gaochang as such: see for example the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography of Shi Huisong 释慧嵩 who is reported as having regarded himself as too good for such a borderland: 以吾之博達。義非邊鄙之所資也。T2060, 483 a15-16.

of the Buddha were available; in other words, it is not a Geographical problem, but one of Opportunity, echoing the very earliest Chinese formulation of An Shigao.

Earlier I drew attention to the change of position in the lists of the Geographical factor of birth in the borderlands, from being listed after the non-human Realms to being grouped together with, and in some cases within, the non-human Realms between the Hungry Ghosts and the *Devas* of Long Life. This suggests that the borderlands are in some way akin to the non-human Realms. In fact, later formulations of the Difficulties have the northernmost continent of Uttarakuru in the position one would have found the borderlands in the earlier formulations. For example Zhanran's 湛然 (711-782) *Weimojing lüeshu* 維摩經略疏 T1778, a summary of a commentary by Zhiyi 智顛 (538-597) on the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, explains the Eight Difficulties mentioned in that *Sūtra*. These are, Zhanran explains, birth in one of the three evil destinations 三惡道 (that is, in Hell, as a Hungry Ghost and as an animal), the fourth is birth in the northern continent of Uttarakuru 北鬱單越, the fifth is as a *Deva* of Long Life 長壽天, the sixth is being born human, yet born blind, deaf, mute or dumb 六盲聾瘖啞, the seventh is being one who takes issue with Buddhism using secular knowledge 世智辨聰,<sup>64</sup> and the eighth is being born before or after a Buddha 佛前佛後. In this formulation, and others similar<sup>65</sup>, the Central State/borderland (*Zhongguo/biandi*) dichotomy has disappeared altogether, the distinction no longer an issue. Uttarakuru has taken the place of the borderlands and the problem is effectively neutralised. In Uttarakuru, the lifespan of the beings who live there is always 1000 years and, like that of the *Devas* of Long Life, it is too long for the residents to be properly aware of the workings of karma and so spiritual progress is difficult.<sup>66</sup> It is only the residents of *Jambudvīpa* (whose lifespan declines towards the end of a *kalpa*) who are able to understand and it is only in *Jambudvīpa* during a time of shorter lifespans that a Buddha will appear.<sup>67</sup>

Although Daoxuan does not tell us on what he bases his conclusion about the Difficulties not including birth in the borderlands, there is enough ambiguity in the various formulations of the Difficulties that he is able to do so and claim that being born in the borderlands of *Jambudvīpa* is not

<sup>64</sup> Translation tentative. Unlike in the *Ekottarika-āgama* (see above note 49), the phrase 世智辨聰 has obvious negative connotations here.

<sup>65</sup> See the Preface to *Da Song sengshi lüe* 大宋僧史略 (dated 1144) T2126, 234 b-7.

<sup>66</sup> Randy Kloetzli, *Buddhist Cosmology: Science and Theology in the Images of Motion and Light* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), 27, 37.

<sup>67</sup> Akira Sadakata, *Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy & Origins* (Tokyo: Kōsei, 1997), 107.

a Difficulty in and of itself.<sup>68</sup> In doing so he anticipates the change evident in the later formulations. It is imperative to reclassify the status of a borderland because of the implications for the karmic legacy of those born there.<sup>69</sup> As we have seen this had given rise to some harsh self-judgments from Dao'an and Faxian. Later Chinese Buddhists would not have to subject themselves to this kind of self-abnegation, as it seems they were only too keen to accept Daoxuan's analysis and discard any idea of being outsiders within the Buddhist world.

### **Conclusion**

The *Shijia fangzhi* is unequivocal in asserting India's geographic centrality. This is unsurprising: as the place of the Buddha's birth India remained of central importance to pre-modern Buddhists everywhere. But for Buddhism to spread and develop into the cross-cultural phenomenon it became, this centrality could not consign those beyond *Madhyadeśa* to the status of outsiders for whom spiritual progress was difficult or impossible. Forte argued that the Borderland Complex could only be overcome by 'showing that China, too, was a sacred land of Buddhism.'<sup>70</sup> This is precisely what Daoxuan was attempting to do in the *Shijia fangzhi*. As Robert Campany reminds us, it is not Buddhism that develops, but people who develop it. Buddhism did not spread, it was spread; and it was spread by Buddhists who incrementally adapted it (consciously or unconsciously) to meet their religious needs. In Daoxuan's denial that being born in a borderland is one of the Eight Difficulties we are witnessing this process in action.

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<sup>68</sup> I am currently working on possible influences on Daoxuan, in particular the works of Jizang 吉藏 (549–623).

<sup>69</sup> It is not just in the Chinese tradition that a redefinition of centrality is important. Buddhagosa's commentary on the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the *Manorathapurani* ('the Wish Fulfiller'), of around 100 years later than these translations contains a statement that all of *Jambudvīpa* can be called the Central States (or middle region): see Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 1617, n 184.

<sup>70</sup> Forte, "Hui-chih," 127.

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