

On *Zhenshen* (True Body) in Buddhist Literature

Rhi Juhyung

The word *zhenshen*, which literally means “true body,” is occasionally—met in Buddhist literature. At first glance its meaning is straightforward, possibly equatable with *dharmakāya*, because the character was commonly used in Chinese Buddhist vocabulary in such words as *zhēn* (*paramārthasatya*), *zhenruo* (*tathatā*) and *zhenshi* (*tathātva* or *tattva*), the connotation of the ultimateness. But its actual usage is more multifarious, as we see for instance in such expressions as *zhenshen* (*zhenshen* relics) and *zhenshen shijia* (Śākyamuni of—or as—*zhenshen* paper examines the usage and diverse significances of *zhenshen* in Buddhist literature.

An overview of various works in the Chinese Buddhist canon reveal dominant usages of *zhenshen*: 1) one as a term related to the theory of Buddha's body, and 2) one as an epithet for *sheli*, physical remains of Buddha or a saint. In the first usage, it first appears in the *Daji Chengshi lun* translated by Kumarajīva (early 4th century) among extant translations of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit. In these texts it contrasts with *huashen*, apparently indicating *nirmānakāya*, and seems to have substituted for *dharmakāya* in the twofold-body system, more ordinarily as *fashen* or *faxingshen*, particularly in the *Dajidu lun*. A similar usage is found in other texts such as *Hebu jin'guangming jing* (by Jñānayaśas), *Jin'g zuishengwang jing* (by Yijing), *Daban nieban jing* (by Dharmakṣema), *Huayen jing* (by Śikṣānanda) and *Shu wujiu cheng jing* (by Xuanzang). In the *She da lun* (by Buddhasena) and a few other texts, however, *zhenshen* appears i

of *dharmakāya* in the threefold-body system against *baoshen* and *yingshen*.

This usage was followed by Chinese commentators, and thus as early as Baoliang cites Shengliang's remarks on twofold bodies, *zhenshen* and *yin* his *Daban nieban jing jijie*. But a more remarkable opinion, which seems exerted profound influence on the understanding of this concept among Chinese, was expressed by Huiyuan of Sui (523-92). In his *Dasheng yi* where he most elaborately expounds his ideas, Huiyuan, citing the *Jin'g jing*, defines *zhenshen* as combining both *fashen* and *baoshen* in contrast to *yingshen* in the threefold-body system. The account of *Jin'guangming* Paramārtha Huiyuan cites actually does not refer to the word *zhenshen* in the relevant context, nor does the sūtra itself seem to deliver a concept. Thus this definition seems more likely Huiyuan's own interpretation. It is not clear that such interpretation was initiated by Huiyuan, it seems to have been fairly well known in the Buddhist scholarly circle by the end of the 6th century. A slightly younger contemporary of Huiyuan, the Tiantai master Zhiyi who would have been most influential in the contemporaneous Buddhist circle seems to have understood the term in a similar sense. The *Vijñaptimātrkārikā* Kuiji's account is quite similar to Huiyuan's even in vocabulary. However, Huiyuan's understanding of *zhenshen* in the sense closer to the *dharmakāya* in the twofold-body system seems to have persisted as well, as we see in the *Jizang*. Chengguan of the Avatamsaka school offers a slightly different definition with an alternative definition of *zhenshen* as *dharmakāya* in the threefold-body system. Besides, *zhenshen* was occasionally used for Śākyamuni Buddha—would be normally regarded as *nirmānakāya*—in contrast to *nirmāna* but magically created by Śākyamuni himself or simply in the meaning of body.”

The earliest appearance of the second usage, which equates *zhenshen*

relics, is found in the *Jin'guangming jing* translated by Dharmakṣema in the early fifth century. In comparison with the particular passage with the equivalent parts in other translations, it is evident that the Sanskrit original contained no word in any way connectable to *zhenshen*, which was simply an insertion by Dharmakṣema and his assistants. *Zhenshen* in this context seems to have been used as an honorific prefix to *sheli* with the assertion of its authenticity, while it was also commonly used without *sheli* as a substitute for the latter. This usage, however, is quite rarely met in translations of Indian texts or Chinese Buddhist literature until the tenth century, when it seems to have been firmly established as we witness in the *Zudang ji*, the *Song Gaoseng zhuan* and later on in the *Fozu tongji*. By this time we begin to see another—but related—usage, in which *zhenshen* designates a mummified portrait of monks.

The present author, being an art historian, attempted to examine the concept of *zhenshen* for its possible ramifications in Buddhist art ordinarily understood as a term combining *dharmakāya* and *sambhogakāya* in the threefold-body system could have been quite useful and even favorable Buddhist imagery in that it does not reject the ultimate significance of forms unlike the more strict and abstract *dharmakāya*. Its true significance in a discussion of Buddhist art would have to be answered in further detail explorations.