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On January 18th, 2018, Dr. Yi'nan Zhang 張軼男, invited by The Tianzhu Global Network for the Study of Buddhism and East Asian Cultures at UBC, delivered the talk “Du Fu's 杜甫 (712-770) Poems and Chan Buddhism” in Asian Center at UBC.

Dr. Yi'nan Zhang is a literary and cultural scholar whose research focuses on Chinese literature. Her book, *Interpreting Dufu's Poems According to Chan*, which is based on her doctoral dissertation, “Chan in Dufu's Poems,” was published by China Social Sciences Publishing Press in 2014. She is a visiting scholar at UBC (2017-2018) and an associate professor of the Department of Liberal Arts at Beihua University (Beihua daxue 北華大學), China.

Her talk expounded on the relationship between Du Fu's poems and Chan from the following perspectives: Du Fu's life and Chan Buddhism, Du Fu's Chan poems and Mahayana thought, Du's pastoral poetry and the Chan realm, and Du's chronicle poems and Mahayana compassion.

Instead of the common picture that Du Fu was primarily a Confucian, Dr. Zhang says that throughout his life, Du Fu's thought is largely a combination of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. It begins with

Confucianism in his youth; he learned both Taoism and Buddhism after middle age. In his later years, he devoted himself to Buddhism and Chan and took Mahayana and Chan as guiding principles for life. In the poems of his later years, he uses a large number of Buddhist stories, Buddhist terms, images of Chan Buddhism, etc., from which we can tell the poet was well-acquainted with Buddhism. In his series of Buddhist poems rich in religious meanings, Du frequently compares the eminent monks he has met to the historical venerables such as Hui Yuan (334-416), Zhi Dun (314-366), and Tang Xiu (n.d.) and expresses his wish to follow their steps. Meanwhile, Du Fu claims that at his early age he has already “been devoted to The Temple of Double Peaks and has knocked at the temple Gate for the Seventh Patriarch’s Buddhist Chan” (Du Fu’s poem “Autumn Day in Kui Prefecture: A Hundred Rhymes for Supervisor Zhen and Advisor Li”). In addition, some of his later works written in Sichuan Province express his desire to follow Chan masters like Hui Ke (487-593) and Seng Can (ca. 510-606) to practice Mahayana dharma. Dr. Zhang indicates that Du pursues Mahayana Buddhism. Throughout his life, Du Fu takes the identity of a spiritual explorer, pursuing the wisdom of Buddhism in order to obtain spiritual comfort for himself and a way of salvation for society.

Among the collections of Du Fu’s poetry, Dr. Zhang finds forty-eight poems related to Chan Buddhism. They are permeated with Mahayana thought. Apart from Buddhist teachings such as “impermanence” and “non-self,” Mahayana thought is manifested in three aspects: his demonstration of the concept of “emptiness of Prajna;” his attempts to apply the Mahayana Middle-way of “emptiness” and “existence;” his realistic attitude towards life, his optimism and benevolent feelings which embody the Mahayana thought of “real Nirvana.” From unintentional meditating on Chan to intentional writing of poetry, Du ponders “emptiness” and “existence” in the light of Buddhist wisdom and seeks balance between the spiritual appeal and real life. Dr. Zhang considers that Du

Fu's poems are called "epic poetry" in that they provide not only a rich and vivid history of society of his time, but also a history of his exploration of spirituality.

Besides the forty-eight poems obviously related to Chan Buddhism, Dr. Zhang points out that hundreds of Du Fu's pastoral poems can also be interpreted from the perspective of Chan. His pastoral poems are full of sincere love and optimism towards life, which is the ultimate state of Chinese Chan—a unity of the worldly and the transcendental. When appreciating Du Fu's Zen poetry, one can feel the serenity and tranquility, the quietness and liveliness that make the Du's poems transcendent. Though these poems do not talk about Buddhism or Chan, they exude a spiritual atmosphere and tension, which portrays Du's pastoral poetry's multidimensional style.

According to Dr. Zhang, Du Fu's chronicle poems further demonstrate a close connection with Chan. Du's chronicle poems are mostly in "epic" style. They show his concern with the livelihood and well-being of people and express his love for them. Du's lifelong wish to benefit the world and his down-to-earth attitude transcend the Confucian thought of "being loyal to the emperor and loving your countrymen," conforming more to the Mahayana thought of "non-abiding Nirvana" to benefit all beings. These poems implicitly reveal the Mahayana path of benevolence and equality, and compassion and wisdom. These poems, showing the great compassion beyond the limitation of time and space and the limitation of politics, are indeed "epic poems."

Based on the above aspects, Dr. Zhang demonstrates that Du Fu is deeply influenced by Buddhism. His poems must be interpreted through multiple dimensions, among which one important dimension is Chan Buddhism.