

## BUDDHISM IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

*Whalen Lai*

## INTRODUCTION: BUDDHIST MIND AND BUDDHIST REALITY

Within the larger context of the history of Chinese philosophy, the major contribution of Chinese Buddhism can be said to be its insight into the working of the human psyche and the structure of ultimate reality, in short, psychology and metaphysics. Chinese understanding of these two areas has not been the same since the medieval Buddhist period. As the Qing scholars charged, the Neo-Confucian philosophers of the Song and Ming period (which came after the Buddhist era) had been so heavily influenced by Buddhism in their inner cultivation and in their metaphysics as to be crypto-Buddhists.

Before Buddhism came to China, the two dominant traditions were Confucianism and Daoism. In Confucianism, man sees himself as a social being tied from birth to family and state; to be human is to be son of one's father and subject to one's lord and king. In Daoism, man sees himself as part of nature; to be true to nature, it is sometimes necessary to renounce the artificiality of human culture, even to reject society and return to the hills. In the Han Confucian synthesis of these two traditions under the rubric of so-called Yin-Yang Confucianism, the ideal was to integrate man into the family, the family into the state, and the state into the cosmos under the guidance of the emperor, the Son of Heaven who binds heaven, earth and man together. There was no need then to look for a very subtle self like the Chan (Japanese Zen) idea of 'your original face before you were born' or to seek an escape from both society and nature to some acosmic Beyond higher than the limit of heaven itself.

It is Buddhism that led the Chinese to scrutinize the innermost reaches of their psyche while promising a personal deliverance to a transcendental realm beyond the natural cosmos. Not only that: it is in the nature of this medieval philosophy that this depth psychology is a reflection of the new heights reached by the new metaphysics. The classic Buddhist universe organized around Mount Sumeru and divided into the *triloka* (the three realms of desires, form and formlessness) is in fact a psychic universe. Mind and reality correlate. As a salvific or liberating religion, Buddhism had its leading practitioners, the monks, turning their attention away from the social and natural definition of man towards discovering the pneumatic mind and some acosmic Beyond. It is no accident that the Chinese word for 'transcendence', like the English one, came into philosophical usage largely from this period on. Just as the Buddhists would introduce into Chinese many more senses of 'mind' than it had words for before, they would also give to it the idea of 'transcendence' based on the verbs 'to leave, to go above, to shed, to be released from'. It is this medieval flight of the spirit in philosophical expression that this chapter will describe.

### THE NEW PARAMETERS OF DISCOURSE

To accomplish this explication of the inner reality and its lofty end, Chinese Buddhist philosophy, while building on the wisdom of the Buddhist tradition that went before, transformed Chinese thought in the following three crucial areas:

- 1 Understanding Mahāyāna Emptiness as a more profound wisdom-reality than the naïve realism of the Confucian world of Being as well as the nihilism of the Daoist Non-Being or Nothingness.
- 2 Uncovering a corresponding non-self (*anātman*) through an emptying of the empirical self or selfhood as such...until this dual approach, still predicated upon a negative rhetoric, reverses itself during...
- 3 The final Mahāyāna transvaluation of the same into a positive, direct and immediate identity between the Buddha-nature self and the Suchness nature of reality.

Using the above as a framework, this chapter will recapitulate the major developments of Chinese Buddhist philosophy, namely: the maturation of the insight into Emptiness from the early Prajñāists to Sengzhao (AD 384–414?); the development of the Nirvana School from Daosheng (AD 355–434) to Jizang (AD 549–623); and the flowering of Sinitic Mahāyāna from Tiantai to Huayan, i.e. from Zhiyi (AD 538–97) to Fazang (AD 643–712).

#### The discovery of Emptiness as transcendental

The Buddhist teaching of cessation of the passions and of life's sufferings had initially defined *nirvāṇa* negatively as 'extinction'. This negativism had, however, the positive function of eroding the reality of this world of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) and opening up a dimension of the 'other shore' (*nirvāṇa*). This set up in Hīnayāna a dualism of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. But the rise of Mahāyāna with the Wisdom Sūtras (*Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*) challenged that dualism with the new wisdom of Emptiness.

Emptiness denies the duality. It negates the opposition of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Form and Emptiness, or, in Chinese shorthand, Being and Non-Being. Both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are empty; both Being and Non-Being are relative. Emptiness even empties itself to guard against those who cling on to it as another, real absolute. This is because true freedom is freedom from the fixities of mind, from habits of thought, and mental defilements that created those distinctions in the first place. In more positive terms, it is freedom to realize the interdependence of all things, to see the non-dual, the nature of what truly is. This Emptiness philosophy (*śūnyavāda*) is therefore not nihilistic. It just happened to retain the negative rhetoric associated with early Buddhism.

These Wisdom or Emptiness Sūtras reached China in the late second century AD. By the third century, they struck a chord among those Chinese philosophers, the Neo-Daoists, who were then interested in the mysteries of the *Yijing*, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. At first, 'Emptiness' was mistaken for just another word to express the Daoist idea of Nothingness or Non-Being. In fact, it was translated as such.

Before the rise of Neo-Daoism, though, Non-Being was not a central concept in Chinese thought. During the Han Dynasty (206 BC—AD 220), it was assumed that beings with forms and shapes somehow arose from some formless Non-Being. But then Non-being meant not absolute Nothingness but rather some nebulous ‘stuff’, some *materia potentia*. It was the Neo-Daoist Wangbi (226–49) who discovered the importance of Nothingness.

Wangbi made much of chapter 40 of the *Laozi*, which says ‘and Being comes from Non-Being’. Whether he knew the Emptiness Sūtras or not we cannot be certain. (The word *śūnya* in Sanskrit does denote the mathematical zero.) Wangbi made Non-Being the ground and substance of all beings. When it became fashionable to read Buddhism by matching its concepts with the Daoist ones (*geyi*), most assumed that the teaching of universal Emptiness also reduced all things to some primal void. Even Dao’an (312–85) did not entirely avoid that error.

The mistake was not corrected until the early fifth century by Kumārajīva (344–413), who not only translated more Emptiness Sūtras but also introduced the *śāstra* commentaries of Nāgārjuna. With his guidance, Sengzhao came to the first proper reading of Emptiness. Emptiness is not Non-Being; it is not a conceptual device for ‘reducing Being to Nothingness’. If it were, it would have committed two fallacies: (a) the retention of a dualism of Being and Non-Being and (b) a confusion of an epistemic wisdom with an ontic faith in some nihilistic reality.

The proper understanding is that Being and Non-Being—conceived of as self-sufficient entities—are equally empty; that the goal of philosophy is to expose the antinomies of reason; and that by such destructive dialectics, one attains freedom from all misconceptions and misrepresentations of the real. With this, Sengzhao exposed the limits of Neo-Daoism. Wisdom is not something known (*gnosis*); it is more a way of knowing (*gnoma*). It is realizing that all positions staked out as absolute are ultimately false, delimiting and biased. The true position is a positionless position.

Sengzhao offered his own reading of Emptiness in the essay ‘The Emptiness of the Unreal’: Being is empty because this (claim to a self-nature of) Being turns out to be Unreal. Sengzhao also demolished three current schools of or opinions on Emptiness. He censured the School of No Mind by charging it with a subjective bias. The school would empty only mind and not the physical reality. He then faulted the School of Abiding with Form for trying to sit astride two worlds. This school proposed that a person should abide physically in form while roving psychically in Emptiness. He then criticized the School of Original Nothingness, noting how it prized Non-Being at the expense of Being. This amounts to missing the Middle Path.

The issues behind this exchange are actually more complicated than this. The School of Original Nothingness appeared first. It was indeed guilty as charged. But the School of No Mind had already disputed that school’s ontological nihilism. Arguing rightly that the *sūtras* never asked one to annihilate reality, it went on to propose that what one should do—and what one can only do in the circumstances—is to empty the (wrong) concepts (about the real) in the mind. Reality is not changed, but our perception of it should be. Reality now appears empty as the mind is emptied. The School of Abiding with Form in turn tried to improve on this view. It agreed that one should not reduce Being to Non-Being, i.e. one should remove the distinction Being versus Non-Being created by the mind. So doing, one can abide physically in the world of forms while mentally roving in

the mysteries. One proponent of this school, Zhidun (314–66), however, believed that the mystery involved a higher self, a spirit. It is this refined spirit that roves in the vacuous. In this, Zhidun believed, as even did Dao'an, that Buddhism accepted the existence of a soul that transmigrates from rebirth to rebirth. Only the School of No Mind dared to imagine the possibility of no-mind, i.e. no-soul, *anātman*. For that, it became the most maligned and misunderstood of the early Prajñā schools.

When we examine the evolution of these three schools, we see that Sengzhao's dialectical negation of them was simply an extension of their tradition of internal criticism. After Sengzhao, the same dialectics would unfold, almost always keeping to the triadic structure of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

The early Emptiness spokesmen were, however, better at applying Emptiness to reality than to mind. Even Sengzhao's description of the mind drew more on the native Daoist ideas of the psyche. The mind should be emptied of thought so that it can mirror all things impartially. By coincidence the metaphor also appeared later in Yogācāra psychology.

### The discovery of the transcendental Buddha-nature

One reason why the Chinese were not very well informed about Buddhist psychology is that they were not exposed to the Indian reflections on the mind until relatively late. It was Saṅghadeva who first really introduced the Abhidharmic literature in the last decade of the fifth century. Soon Kumārajīva taught Mādhyamika and discredited the Hīnayāna scholarship of Saṅghadeva. But Kumārajīva did not anticipate that soon after he died, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* would arrive and introduce the still higher notion of a Buddha-nature in man. In a short space of time, the Chinese had to adjust to doctrines of soul, no-soul, universal Emptiness, and universal Buddha-nature.

Daosheng (355–434) tried to reconcile these various notions of the psyche. Armed with the still incomplete translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, Daosheng foresaw its final teaching concerning the presence of a seed of enlightenment in all sentient beings. But what is this Buddha-nature? Although the *sūtra* called it *ātman* (permanent self), it also specified that it is not the *ātman* of the Hindu *Upaniṣads* and that it is not other than wisdom or Emptiness. And indeed, Buddha-nature is not the Hindu *ātman*. It retains that traditional Buddhist criticism of atmanic self-sufficiency and endorses the self only in the context of the interdependence of all realities.

It is well to review briefly the history of the Buddhist understanding of the self. The Buddha had taught *anātman* and dependent co-origination, in opposition to the *Upaniṣads*. Then the Hīnayāna Abhidharmist tried to give rational support to this teaching by breaking down the self and the elements of causation, by arguing that there is not the whole called the self; there are only these elements or *dharma*s. Mahāyāna came along and its Emptiness philosophy criticized even that, noting that there is no reason to deny the reality of the whole while believing in the *svabhāva* or self-sufficiency of the parts. Both *dharma* and *ātman*, part and whole, are empty. For a time, that seemed to be the last word on the matter.

To see how the Buddha-nature concept arose, it is necessary to remember its source. All the talk about the psyche mentioned above emerged from Buddhist reflection on the *Dharma* (Reality, Truth). The Wisdom Sūtras were *Dharma*-centric in that regard. But

there is a different strand in Mahāyāna, the one that focused not so much on the *Dharma* Jewel as on the Buddha Jewel. Mahāyāna had idealized the Buddha into a transcendental (*lokottara*) reality and showered him with infinite, real attributes. Given the Buddha's omniscience and omnipresence (a boundless body), it was only natural that speculation about the presence of his wisdom in all sentient beings would arise. And indeed it did, in *sūtras* that are more Buddha-centric than *Dharma*-centric. A subgroup of these *sūtras* is now recognized as the Tathāgatagarbha (Buddha-nature, womb of the Buddha) corpus. The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* is one of those. It pictured the presence of the transcendental wisdom in man as a *buddha*-seed (*buddhagotra*). So stated, this positive doctrine would in time reverse the negative vocabulary about the self as *anātman* in early Buddhism. Now we may return to Daosheng.

Daosheng, who discovered this doctrine of a universal Buddha-nature, noted that there is in man not the self of the eternal soul (*ātman*), but this Buddha-nature. This true self is expressive of the omnipresence of wisdom. It appears as seminal enlightenment in all sentient beings. What this means, in the later Chan-inspired appreciation of Daosheng, is that it removes any need of mediation between the innermost Self and the highest Good. Such a one-step identity of the two is more radical than anything in classical China—more than the moral metaphysics of Mencius or the oceanic selfloss in Zhuangzi. Thus to Daosheng is attributed the first theory of 'sudden enlightenment' based on his having 'seen into the Buddha-nature'. Later Chan (Zen) would do the same.

This Chan-inspired reading of Daosheng has to be qualified, however, for there are actually some important differences:

- 1 Unlike Chan, Daosheng never said that there is a full-grown Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is only the seed, the beginning, of an eventual perfection of wisdom.
- 2 It follows then that his 'sudden enlightenment' was predicated upon gradual cultivation. Sudden or total insight refers only to the final break with *saṁsāra*.
- 3 Daosheng still analysed the issue from the side of man more than seeing it from the side of the Buddha. His is a relative instead of an absolute perspective.

Finally, despite all caution, the Nirvāṇa (Sūtra) School that Daosheng brought into being often lapsed back into confusing self, soul, *anātman*, Emptiness, and Buddha-nature. Thus a common assumption then was that Buddha-nature was still some ontic entity located within man. At its worst, as in the writing of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (502–56), it was confused with the immortal soul that transmigrates. However, it is the third point above that is definitive. In simple terms, a mature understanding of Buddha-nature is not just that man possesses it in himself; it is rather that all humanity is 'possessed' by it. We 'store' the *tathāgatagarbha* in us, but we are also 'stored' in that cosmic womb of the One Thus Come. This Buddha-centric reading did not mature in China until the sixth century, however.

The first volley of fire against the shortcomings of the Nirvana School of Daosheng came, however, from Jizang (540–623). Heading a Sanlun (Mādhyamika) revival, he looked like a latter-day Sengzhao. Jizang criticized the mistaken reading of an ontic Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature, he said, is not an entity; it is a state of mind free from all definition of the self or no-self. It is the wisdom of Emptiness. In this way, Jizang brought the understanding of Buddha-nature squarely back into the fold of Mādhyamika. Unlike Sengzhao, though, he had a better grasp of the One Vehicle.

‘Ekayāna’, or ‘One Vehicle’, was introduced as a synonym for ‘Mahāyāna’ in the *Lotus Sūtra*. When the Emptiness Sūtras first declared the path of the *bodhisattva* to be Mahāyāna, they set Mahāyāna apart from the Two Vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and the *pratyekabuddha*, which were Hīnayāna. Later, though, the *Lotus Sūtra*—the earliest of the Buddha-centric corpus—came up with an ‘inclusive Mahāyāna’ idea. It subsumed all three Vehicles under the one, inclusive Ekayāna. Sengzhao failed to see this. In a 410 essay entitled ‘Nirvāṇa is Nameless’, now reauthenticated as his, Sengzhao defended the discreteness of the Three Vehicles against the Ekayāna thesis of Daosheng. He was using Triyāna (Three Vehicles) to support gradual enlightenment as Daosheng was using Ekayāna to support sudden enlightenment. That failure to recognize Ekayāna is probably the reason why Sengzhao was not counted by Jizang as belonging to the true lineage of the Sanlun masters.

### Beyond the Two Truths towards the One Vehicle

The impulse towards an Ekayāna, ‘monistic’ philosophy in the late sixth century would lead to Zhiyi (538–97) of the Tiantai or Lotus Sūtra School. But Jizang, a defender of Mādhyamika, non-dual Emptiness, did not go that far. Nevertheless, he was instrumental in criticizing current readings of the Two Truths theory by Nirvāṇa School thinkers, who were then sidetracked into following a reading in the treatise called ‘To establish the real truth’ or *Satyasiddhi*.

The Two Truths theory originated in Nāgārjuna. He had noted how the Buddha taught the *Dharma* with recourse to the Two Truths: the Mundane Truth for living in the mundane world and the Highest Truth for gaining *nirvāṇa*. The former grants the world a nominal ontic reality; the latter finds it truly empty. In this original form, the ‘two’ does not refer to two realities. There is only one reality. The ‘two’ are just two ways of looking at it. The Chinese Buddhists were new to such theories of knowledge and were not able to keep the ontic and the epistemic apart. They sometimes naïvely thought that the Mundane Truth was *saṃsāra*; the Highest Truth was *nirvāṇa*. If so, since there is wisdom insight into how ‘*nirvāṇa* is none other than *saṃsāra*’, should not the Two Truths meet in that higher union of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*? If so, should there not be a Third Truth?

The Chinese also tended to apply the ‘substance-function’ relationship to analysing the Two Truths. Substance and function are categories that Wangbi brought to his analysis of Non-Being and Being. Non-Being is said to be the substance of Being and Being is seen as the function of Non-Being. Previously, during the Han Dynasty, Non-Being was origin, and Being was end. In this old origin/end model, Non-Being temporally preceded Being. In the new substance/function model, Non-Being is the eternal ground of Being. Applying this to the Two Truths, the Chinese Buddhists misconstrued Emptiness as some actual substance supporting mundane forms which act as its function. Since function is other than but not exactly separate from substance, this also led these Chinese Buddhists to assume that substance/function well described the non-duality nature of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

Closer scrutiny reveals that this is not exactly what Nāgārjuna meant. The non-dual in Nāgārjuna is the Neither/Nor of the two extremes; it is synonymous with the Middle Path. But in the substance/function model, substance subsumes function under itself. (It is

closer to the Hindu *bhedābheda* than to Buddhist *advaya*.) Being asymmetrical, substance/function does not offer two real extremes for the Middle (Path) to avoid. This subtle difference between Indian and Sinitic non-duality was noticed by Jizang, who launched a sharp critique of the Two Truths theories then current.

Jizang first noted how the Two Truths are not supposed to describe reality. They pertain only to two ways of discourse on reality. Since they are a didactic device with no ontic substance of its own, there is no reason to dream up a Third Truth to unite the Two Truths. Then Jizang corrected the misperception of the Higher Truth as the substance of the Lower Truth. If indeed something has to be designated as 'substance' upon which everything else hangs, it would be the Middle itself.

No dialectician, however, could ignore the structure of thought already in place. So, since his Chinese contemporaries had already piled up, like steps in a pyramid, higher and higher unions of Two Truths, Jizang countered with his own Threefold and Fourfold Two Truths. The purpose there was not to build more castles in the air. It was to undercut the assumptions of his opponents. Jizang's pyramids did not 'build up'; they just 'undercut'. The so-called Ultimate Emptiness topping his system serves only to bring the whole scaffold down. In it, one realizes that 'there is nothing (definite or absolute) to be gained'.

So destructive is Jizang's dialectics (*prāsaṅgika*) that it is sometimes said that his school could not have survived in China for that reason. China knew negations before. Zhuangzi and Wangbi had known how words cannot exhaust reality. There is a silence beyond words. But the Mādhyamika art of 'using words against words'—demolishing words not by silence but by the words themselves—is arguably something new. Even now, reading Jizang, most of us would find it unnecessarily mind-bending. Jizang keeps pulling the rug from underneath us just when we think we know what he is talking about. That, however, is his intention: to bend minds that have become too comfortable.

Jizang's school did not last, but recent scholarship has shown that the cutting edge of his razor-sharp intelligence actually persisted in the Ox-head branch of early Chan. Led by Fayong (599–657), this school disseminated the art of saying an Eternal Nay into all surviving Chan sects. The spirit of that resolute 'No!' is still captured in the *Wumenguan* (Japanese *Mumonkan*) headed by the *Gong'an* (*koan*) of Master Zhaozhou: 'Does a dog have Buddha-nature?' 'No!'

### A different symmetry of mind and reality

In the late sixth century, there was more than one way to react to the Nirvāṇa School and its Two Truths theory. Besides Jizang, there was Zhiyi. Regarding Emptiness as the Middle Path, Jizang would not take Ekayāna as implying monism. Critical of the self-sufficiency of mind, he would not make mind absolute either. Zhiyi felt differently. He came up with the first theory of a symmetry between the structure of one Mind (with three yogic stances) and the structure of one Reality (with its own three truth aspects).

In this, Zhiyi took in more of the Nirvāṇa School's teaching than Jizang would. His Lotus [Sūtra] School absorbed the Nirvāṇa [Sūtra] School. The Nirvāṇa School had been speculating on the whereabouts of the Buddha-nature. Since the *sūtra* said that all sentient beings have Buddha-nature, and since sentience (*sattva*) meant having consciousness or mind, the Nirvana School generally located Buddha-nature in the mind,

above all, of men. Zhiyi, who was a yogin cognizant of the need to cleanse the mind, inherited this reading of the Mind as the locus of enlightenment.

Building on *abhidharma*, Zhiyi also accepted a correlation of subject mind and object-realm. To this, he added his own Mādhyamika reading of the Three Aspects of One Reality being correlated to the Three Meditative Stances of One Mind. (On the triads, see the next section.) This symmetry of Mind and Reality gave his Tiantai school a stability that Jizang scrupulously shunned in his. Symmetry is not identity. *Rūpa* and *citta* (form and mind) are two, perceived and perceiver. The goal of wisdom is to capture the whole of the universe (the trilocosm) in the unity of the mind (as one); it is not to absorb matter into mind or reduce mind to matter. Those two extremes of idealism and materialism Zhiyi considered to be contrary to the Middle Path. In this, he continued the Indian Mādhyamika criticism of Yogācāra.

It should be remembered that Yogācāra—the second major Mahāyāna philosophy, which traces all representations of reality to the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*)—originated later than Mādhyamika. It also arrived in China late, i.e. a century after Kumārajīva. Committed to Mādhyamika and suspicious of the recent arrival, Jizang and Zhiyi would not include the latter's idealist tendency in their own systems. That was left to the later schools of Huayan and Chan: under Fazang (594–657) and Daoxin (580–651), the symmetry of Mind and Reality ended not just in correlation but in identity. Reality is Mind Only; Mind is the True Suchness.

### The Mind as Suchness in the *Awakening of Faith*

That equation of Mind with Suchness (*tathatā*, the ultimate reality and nature of all things) was not spelled out as much in Indian Yogācāra as it was in a text compiled in China called the *Mahāyāna Awakening of Faith*. Appearing around AD 550, it stated in no uncertain terms how all of Reality is One Mind. (The formula was taken freely from the *Huayan (Avataṃsaka) Sūtra*, where the *triloka* (three realms) are said to be of One Mind.) Suchness and Mind are One. That being the case, there is an *a priori* identity of the mind of sentient beings and the truth of Suchness, such that we are all *de facto* enlightened. That we do not see this simple fact is due to an accidental, deluded thought. With this, the text overcame the limitations of Daosheng's understanding of Buddha-nature and sudden enlightenment noted earlier. Now (a) the essence of *a priori* enlightenment in man is total, not seminal; such that (b) gradual cultivation is now predicated upon sudden enlightenment, not just leading up to it; and (c) the mode of discourse is no longer anthropocentric but rather Buddha-centric, i.e. not from the side of mundane cause but from the side of transmundane effect.

Thereupon, this philosophy permits the telescoping of all Reality into the One Mind. Mind here is no longer just a human faculty, the perceiver of the perceived, but is rather the Suchness Mind manifested as the *tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha-nature) in us. This *tathāgatagarbha* is empty (*śūnya*) in terms of mundane self-natures, but it is not empty (*aśūnya*) in that it is endowed with transmundane powers to liberate itself from bondage. This formula came from the *Śrīmālādevī Sūtra* and is indicative of the higher awareness that it is not man possessing the Buddha-nature but the Womb (*garbha*) of the Buddha (*tathāgata*) possessing all men. On this note, Mahāyāna reversed the premiss of early



Buddhism, where life is suffering and *nirvāṇa* is a Beyond. Now, to put it simply, suffering is an illusion and *bodhi* is here and now.

This radical idealism of the *Awakening of Faith* did not catch on immediately. Zhiyi and Jizang avoided it. The work was even suspected by some to be a forgery because it contradicted other Sanskrit Yogācāra texts in translation. The pilgrim Xuanzang (602–64) even went to India in the hope of finding a judgement for or against. In 645, he brought back from Nālandā the Yogācāra of Dharmapāla, which contradicted the *Awakening of Faith*'s teachings. His Weishi (Consciousness Only, Vipñaptimātrata) School won the day.

But then, as another ideological legend has it, Fazang (643–712) was working on Xuanzang's monumental translation project when he broke away because of a disagreement, and that led to his formulating the Huayan philosophy. Fazang's basic charge is that Xuanzang's Yogācāra idealism was fixated with a deluded *ālayavijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) tied to phenomenal reality. It is one grade lower than the Pure Mind immediately identical with the noumenal Suchness. Weishi's *ālayavijñāna* itself is a devolution of this Suchness Mind; it represents the *tathāgatagarbha*-in-bondage (to the world). So successful was Fazang's campaign against Xuanzang that we now have a distinction made only in Chinese Buddhism between the higher philosophy of 'Mind Only' (meaning Huayan and Chan) and the lesser philosophy of 'Consciousness Only' (Xuanzang's Weishi).

In the process Fazang also uncovered in Indian Mahāyāna a separate *tathāgatagarbha* corpus. The Huayan School then claimed for itself a knowledge of *Dharmatā* (Dharma essence) and berated Xuanzang's expertise in knowing only *Dharma-lakṣaṇa* (Dharma phenomena or *Faxiang*). Hence *Faxiang* was used pejoratively to describe this 'crypto-Hīnayāna' school of Weishi. Many buddhologists still labour to prove that Fazang was right, but to date no one has found even a Sanskrit or Tibetan reference to the *Awakening of Faith* or a theory of Mind and Reality in India or Tibet that is anything like the one Fazang developed.

The *Awakening of Faith* also had an impact on the two other Sinitic Mahāyāna schools: Chan and Pure Land. The historical (as distinct from the mythical) beginning of Chan came with Daoxin (580–651), now counted as the Fourth Patriarch. He had apparently popularized his meditative practice using the philosophy of this text. But with Xuanzang back and the authenticity of this text in question—plus the fact that it is only a *śāstra* and not a *sūtra*—it seems that his circle eventually came up with a more respectable name for his emerging school. It called itself the lineage of the Masters of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. This is the *sūtra* considered in China to be the inspiration behind the *śāstra* that is the *Awakening of Faith*. The proclamation of this lineage is the first indication of a Chan movement.

The *Awakening of Faith*'s impact on the Pure Land School is more indirect. The final section of this text encouraged a meditation on Amitābha Buddha as the most expedient means of realizing the Suchness Mind for most people. One meditates here on the *Dharmakāya* manifested through this Buddha's icon. I shall conclude this section with a problem which the *Awakening of Faith* left for them. If the Mind is indeed Suchness, how did illusion, suffering and *saṃsāra* arise in the first place? The answer offered by the text creates more problems than it solves. It says: 'Suddenly, a deluded thought arose'—and there was the illusion of *saṃsāra*. This is the beginningless Ignorance. But since

Suchness or enlightenment is also beginningless, are we now left with two irreducible and opposing principles? If so, how can one speak of there being just One Mind? In AD 681, a treatise by the monk Fuli asked even more pointedly: did not the Buddha himself teach that all things have causes? Only things with causes and conditions can be brought to a cessation. If indeed ignorance is beginningless (causeless), how can we ever effect its cessation so as to achieve enlightenment?

### The character of the Sinitic Mahāyāna schools

By the ninth century, the Buddhist schools in China with obvious Indian antecedents had disappeared as distinct entities. Weishi Yogācāra had been discredited by Fazang. Jizang's Mādhyamika had disappeared into Ox-head Chan. Except for popular rituals, Tantrayāna never reached beyond the initiated few either—though it did claim the thinker Yixing (673–727). The Sinitic Mahāyāna schools with no known Indian forerunners were the ones that counted. Though all of them espoused theory (philosophy) and practice (path), tradition associates theory with Huayan and Tiantai and practice with Chan and Pure Land. By association, Pure Land feeds off Tiantai, which has more of a faith component, as Chan draws on Huayan, which has more of a wisdom bias. The Pure Land School knew of eschatological anxiety and the paradox of finding grace in the midst of despair, but it had more impact on popular piety than on rational philosophy as such.

#### *The comprehensiveness of Tiantai*

Of the remaining and more philosophical three, Tiantai, the earliest, developed a unique philosophy of the Round or in the Round. 'Round' refers to the circle; the closest English translation of this *yuan* ideal is perhaps 'comprehensiveness'. (I avoid the term 'Holism', for that is also a characteristic of Huayan.) Metaphorically, nothing escapes this circle; everything is included in it. The root-metaphor may be Chinese; it is the old harmony of *yin-yang*. But instead of the simple complement of *yin* and *yang*, we have a much more subtle trinity of One-in-Three and Three-in-One.

The *Lotus Sūtra*'s idea of the Three Vehicles being in the end just One provided the scriptural norm here, but it is Nāgārjuna's *Mādhyamika-kārika* that was credited with working out this Three/One dialectics. Nāgārjuna spoke of only Two Truths, but, as we noted earlier, the Chinese came up with the idea that if there are (1) *saṃsāra* and (2) *nirvāṇa* and then (3) *saṃsāra* is none other than *nirvāṇa*, there should be correspondingly the Three Truths of the Real, the Empty and the Middle. Among the Nirvāṇa/Satyasiddhi masters, this had led to the idea of a Third Truth that is the Unity of the Two Truths. Zhiyi only inherited this triadic format. Instead of deconstructing the trio as Jizang had done, he rearranged the pyramidal Three Truths into a circular triad in the Round. The circle represents the One of Ekayāna, of Reality as well as of Mind. The circle knowing no beginning and no end represents a timeless perfection. (Tiantai traditionally disputed causation and favoured a non-causative whole.)

It is in that sense that the Round is more than the old Harmony of complementary *yin* and *yang*. Yin-yang philosophy still distinguishes *yin* from *yang*; though they mix (quantitatively), their quality (passive versus active) remains distinct. In Tiantai philosophy, the Three Truths collide only to be fused, so that everything is at once

Empty, Real, Middle. Furthermore, the *yin-yang* philosophy admits of a Unity (the Great Ultimate) prior to the emergence of the Two (*yin* and *yang*), but this is based on the classic 'origin-and-end' sequence. In Tiantai, the Empty, the Real and the Middle blend timelessly 'in the Round (One)'. The One is present in the Three, though. The catchy Tiantai dictum—'Every form (colour) or smell (odour) is the Middle Path'—denotes that omnipresence of the One in every phenomenon. When later the Neo-Confucians talked about finding the Great Ultimate in every object in the world, they did so after the manner of Zhiyi, not after the manner of the Han Confucians. In Han thought (religious Daoism excepted), the preservation of the origin (One) intact in the subsequent (Many) is not possible.

What does that mean in real life? Let us take a common problem in philosophy to illustrate the efficacy of this dialectics. Whether we are sinners or images of God, whether human nature is evil or good, cannot be answered one way or the other. There is no lack of trying, though: thinkers, East and West, down the centuries have argued for man being evil, not evil, both or neither. These positive, negative and inbetween answers are manifestations of the Three Truths of the Empty, the Real and the Middle. But every one of those positions is incomplete and biased. None is absolutely right, for otherwise the question would have been solved long ago. The answers contradict one another endlessly; they just drive us around 'in circles'. The only resolution is to accept the whole. Truth, as Hegel says, is the Whole. Freedom is learning to stop momentarily before the Mystery. There, 'beyond the reach of words and speech,' says Tiantai, 'the *karma* of the mind is simply cut off.'

This is the Tiantai dialectics, a Hegelian 'Whole of the Wholes' without further progress. This is Nāgārjuna's 'Non-dual Emptiness' given a Harmonic twist. In this *Dharmatā* seen as the 'various phenomena's true form', there is no essence/phenomena divide. The Truth of Emptiness is in the Whole of the Real. And that holism can be found in any 'colour' or 'aroma'. The Whole is so important to Tiantai that this school would not throw out any part of it, however negative. Thus in a unique phrasing of the interdependence of all things, Tiantai would say 'There is the Devil in heaven; there is God in hell.' Even the Buddha has an essential evil in him. His goodness is acquired. (That sounds almost like Xunzi!) Perfectly enlightened, the Buddha retains that innate evil in order to be present in all Ten Realms. In this philosophy one learns to affirm, deny, transcend; transcend, deny, affirm everything; *ad infinitum*. We who live in an imperfect world might aspire to a perfection beyond, but real redemption comes when the *bodhisattva* accepts his present lot as 'perfectly imperfect' in the only 'imperfectly perfect' world there is. This is the genius of Tiantai Comprehensiveness.

#### *The world of infinity in Huayan*

If Tiantai cultivates the perception of the Whole, it still does so in a circle. A circle has clear boundaries. Tiantai might traffic in astrological numbers ('3,000 worlds in a split second of thought'), but its favourites are the prime numbers three and one. Huayan alone truly looked into the face of infinity itself. Only it could toy with the Mystery of the Ten—ten is a full number that is the sum of all numbers—and talk of 'millions and millions' of Buddha-worlds as if they were everyday realities. Although it has been pointed out by the leading Tiantai scholar in Japan (Andō Toshio) that in the later

writings of Zhiyi, there were already intimations of such Totalistic extravagance, in the end, its *Lotus Ekayāna* stopped far short of the grandiose world of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*.

Details aside, the catch-phrase of Huayan philosophy is ‘One is All; All is One.’ What that claims is that in every tiny speck of the universe the whole of the universe is present and that everything in the universe is somehow coextensive with every other thing there is. Imagine stepping into a realm of light, where every light lights up every other light, and each point of light is so free of substance as to be transparent to all other points of light. This is the hall of mirrors that Fazang once used to illustrate his point to his patron, the Zhou Empress Wu. This is Sudhana’s ‘entry into the boundless *dharmadhātu* (realm of reality)’ only to find the seer becoming the seen and the pilgrim disappearing into and becoming the Buddha.

Once again, though one can trace some precedence for this philosophy in the Chinese tradition in the likes of Zhuangzi or Huishi, there is a difference. The *Dao* ‘found in a piece of dust’ is a certain principle; it is not the physical sum of all things. ‘The ten thousand things in one finger (pointing, category)’ is not yet ‘millions and millions of worlds in a speck of dust’. This is because generally speaking, classical philosophy knew only a finite universe. Heaven had its edge; earth had its limit. But there is, in medieval cultures, an explosion of the universe and an expansion of consciousness, although the parties did not then have the vocabulary to account for the difference that we now have. The simple fact is this. Mathematically speaking, a part can be immediately the whole—as Huayan’s One-is-All equation claims—only when we are dealing with the infinite. Any part of infinity is still infinity. That sense of the infinite, not there in Tiantai yet, is the mark of Huayan.

*An aside: answers to ‘Whence ignorance?’*

Huayan philosophy is more than that. There is a dynamic and optimistic side to it that is not in Tiantai. Scholars are divided on which is the higher philosophy. Tradition grants Huayan superiority because Tiantai still accepts the presence of delusion in the mind. Huayan knows only a totally pure mind. But then it is in the nature of Tiantai Comprehensiveness not to dismiss evil, while it is the *Awakening of Faith* (which Zhiyi rejected) that led Huayan to imagine a radical idealism based on the Suchness Mind. Yet as we queried above in the case of the *Awakening of Faith*: whence then comes delusion? It is in struggling with this question that Fazang arrived at new answers.

The simplest answer, one found in the *tathāgatagarbha* corpus, is to leave it unanswered. The defilements are simply accidental and inconceivable—but they are there. But as Ignorance (*avidyā*) is privation of wisdom with no ontological reality of its own, it can be removed by wisdom. This is the logical Indian answer.

The *Awakening of Faith*, however, has suggested a Chinese answer. This work has taken in the ‘substance and function’ paradigm that Wangbi pioneered. Calling Suchness substance, it compares it to a body of water. Ignorance is presented as the wind. The text then has the wind of Ignorance ruffling up the water of Suchness into the waves of *saṃsāra*. With the waves being the function that is not ‘separate from’ the substance of the water, the text came up with a pseudo-Mādhyamika reading of their non-dual relationship: *saṃsāra* (waves) generated out of Suchness (water) remains ‘not other than’ *nirvāṇa*, because waves are still wet as water. The text used this to explain the canonical

teaching about how the pure *tathāgatagarbha* could somehow possess the impure world (both *sa<sup>m</sup>sāra* and *nirvā<sup>n</sup>a*) within its womb.

Fazang, however, took the intent of the metaphor one step further. Since it was the interaction between water and wave that created *sa<sup>m</sup>sāra*, he inferred that it was the coming together of Suchness and Ignorance that created the world. In his commentary on the *Awakening of Faith*, he treated Suchness and Ignorance as if they were *yang* and *yin*. He mapped out, implicitly, a genesis of the phenomenal world according to the logic of the broken and unbroken lines in the hexagrams of the *Yijing*. He called this elsewhere the ‘Causation [of reality out] of the *tathāgatagarbha*’ and ranked it above the causation due to the *ālayavijñāna*. The latter is a lower manifestation of the former.

Making the wind and the water co-creators of *sa<sup>m</sup>sāra* (waves) has the unintended consequence of making light of Ignorance. This is because since the waves (*sa<sup>m</sup>sāra*) are no less water (*nirvā<sup>n</sup>a*), a person should realize the presence of Ignorance, but there is not really the need to remove it (wind). This is not how the original ‘water-wave metaphor’ in the *La<sup>n</sup>kāvatāra Sūtra* intends it to be. In the original metaphor, *sa<sup>m</sup>sāra* as object-realm is the wind; and the waves represent the agitated, object-clinging consciousness. Ridding the wind of object-forms so as to calm the waves of turbulent, subjective mentation would be imperative. This describes more faithfully the Yogācāra psychology.

In the redacted metaphor of the *Awakening of Faith*, Ignorance as wind and *sa<sup>m</sup>sāra* as waves were given more positive value. But as if that were not enough, Fazang came up with a still higher theory known as *Dharmadhātu* causation. In this theory, *Dharmatā* as essence (water) could generate all phenomenal realities (waves) from itself without even the help of Ignorance (wind) serving as condition (*pratyaya*) that brought the world into being. The elements of the whole universe, one and all, simply generate themselves by themselves. This ‘conditionless’ co-arising (*samutpāda*) happens from second to second, non-stop, from every point in the universe. This provided the dynamic side to the ‘One is All; All is One’ formula that Huayan has and that Tiantai never knew and, content with the Round, never cared to acquire. But with this totalistic world-view, Fazang also removed the last trace of evil from the world. But if so, whence Ignorance?

#### *The subitism of Chan*

Chan did not indulge in the same speculations as Huayan, but rather confronted the question ‘Whence Ignorance?’ head on. To the question ‘If we are in fact already *buddhas*, why do we not feel enlightened?’ it offered no ready-made answer. No such answer exists. Everyone must face that paradox of life itself. Later Chan would even intentionally precipitate this sense of crisis, this Great Doubt—why am I not enlightened when the truth is that I am?—that when resolved would effect the Great Enlightenment. Just as ‘suddenly a deluded thought arose to cloud the Suchness Mind’, as suddenly would the *a priori* enlightenment break through. That is the subitism of Chan.

The basic teachings of Chan are often expressed thus: ‘No reliance on words; transmission outside the teachings; point directly at the minds of men; see your Buddha-nature and become enlightened.’ Those teachings really belonged to Mazu Daoyi (709–88), but legend would attribute them to Bodhidharma in the early sixth century. But perhaps the best-known Chan story concerns the Sixth Patriarch Huineng (538–713). One

generation removed from Daoxin (580–651), Huineng supposedly succeeded Hongren (602–75) by defeating Shenxiu (d. 706) of the so-called Northern School.

The episode of their exchange of Mind Verses told in the *Platform Sūtra* is now recognized by critical scholars as mere fiction. The story has it that Huineng, an illiterate youth from the barbaric South, upstaged Shenxiu by answering his Mind Verse:

The body is the *Bodhi* Tree  
 The mind is a mirror bright  
 Daily with diligence (the mirror) to clean  
 Let no dust upon it adhere.

(Shenxiu)

*Bodhi* is not some tree  
 Nor needs mirror a stand  
 Originally there being not a thing  
 Whence the dust to adhere.

(Huineng)

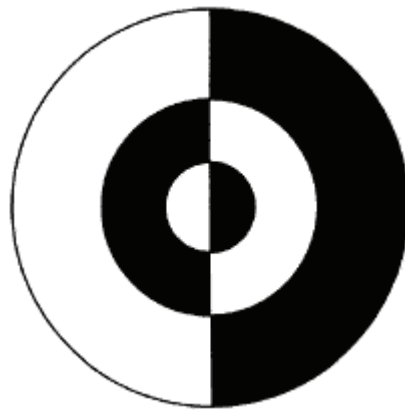
These poems about the Mind are not ground-breaking. There is nothing in them that cannot be traced back to the basics of Mahāyāna. If Shenxiu only described the basic technique of removing the mental defilements (*klesā*), then Huineng only reiterated the Emptiness dictum to deny that last duality of the pure and the impure. What is new here is not the content. What is new is the form. The story is historically unique.

This story has encapsulated volumes of Mahāyāna wisdom in very few words concerning a fabled life. The form of the exchange recalls the *Analects* of Confucius; the aphorism of the *Laozi*; the Mencian interest in human nature; and the anecdotes of Zhuangzi. The folklore transferred wisdom from the centre of learning to the countryside. The young, illiterate, barbaric Huineng had exposed the folly of age, learning and high culture. *Bodhi* is no longer for the few. Sagehood is now within the reach of everyone.

By the mid-ninth century, when this tale gained currency, however, Buddhism was ready to bow out to a Confucian revival. The symmetry of Mind and Reality—body/mind and *bodhi*/mirror—is now set out by Zongmi (780–841), who belonged both to the Huayan and the Chan lineage, in his *Essay on Man*. By making man—instead of buddhahood or general sentience—the topic and by including Confucianism and Daoism as legitimate, non-Buddhist, paths to the same *Dharma*, Zongmi paved the way for the transition. He might believe the Suchness Mind to be the most profound of anthropologies, yet he helped the Neo-Confucians to file their counter-claim.



*Figure 28.1 The later yin-yang circle*



*Figure 28.2 The Li Kan circle*

Zongmi also capitalized on Fazang's alignment of Huayan and the *Yijing* philosophy. He produced a diagram for the *ālayavijñāna* based on the *Li Kan* hexagram, which, when modified in the twelfth century, would become the well-known *yin-yang* circle (see Figures 28.1, 28.2). All that affected Neo-Confucian metaphysics. After Zongmi, the only real thinker was the Tiantai master Siming Zhili (960–1028). Hence, Chinese Buddhism generally gave up on speculative reason even as Neo-Confucians acquired it.

### **The legacy of Buddhist psycho-metaphysics**

Han Confucianism knew how to integrate man into society and cosmos. Buddhism knew how to fathom the depths of the psyche to reach acosmic heights—but usually by bypassing family and state. Although by the high medieval era (AD 600–800), Sinitic Mahāyāna had already renounced renunciation and reaffirmed the goodness of the world,

there was a limit to that secularization. It was left to the Neo-Confucians to emulate the monk's pneumatic (spiritual) independence but to redirect it to the ends of family and state. They took over the Buddhist interest in mind and metaphysics, but looking now to Mencius, they mapped the vocation of moral man in a moral universe. In this, they changed the basic definitions of man and the world.

The Chan Buddhists still looked for 'their original face before they were born', something aligned with a Suchness Principle that is universally self-same. For the Neo-Confucians, that 'original face' is so pre-natal as to be asocial and pre-moral; and that self-same principle too uniform to take into account the differentiation in the world. Accordingly, the Neo-Confucians modified Buddhist psychology and metaphysics. The early Song masters would practise 'quiet sitting', but they meditated not on some 'faceless (Buddha) face', but on the mind at its moral inception—the moment when it can freely follow the good or else let the emotions and inclinations draw it towards selfish ends. Mystical meditation, in short, had been remade into moral introspection. Likewise the Neo-Confucians, while accepting the presence of the One (Great Ultimate) in all things, insisted that the same principle would and did underwrite the hierarchy of ruler/minister, father/son and husband/wife. In the end, these neoclassicists returned their fellow Chinese to the more rational, if limited and more Sinocentric, cosmos of the Han. But they kept a gift from the Buddhists. Very few men ever became sages in ancient Han, but in late medieval Song, all men had a duty to realize this sagehood in them. This was the Confucianization of the Buddhist idea of an *a priori, in toto*, Buddha-nature in all men.

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