

SAN-LUN'S CHI-TSANG AND THE "SPIRITUAL LINEAGE OF IDEAS"

"That Nagarjuna's lives are enmeshed with others' in different roles illustrates the changeability yet connectedness of situations over the continuum of lives and the relativity of particular relationships of the moment. That the purpose of his activities over so many lives is all for the benefit of others illustrates the boundless extent of altruism advocated in the Great Vehicle [= Mahayana]. That the teaching of emptiness ...comes from this illustrious being indicates that the source of its presentation is no ordinary being but one whose lives are directed by principle--Nagarjuna is not just an intelligent scholar but also a special being, this very specialness stemming from altruistic intentions. The religious value of imagining such a special being and thereby mixing one's mind with such compassionate heroism is implicit." (Hopkins 1998 21)

[Editor's note: The following excerpts are from each of the eight parts of the series on Chi-tsang that is published at the Madhyamika Egroup website. Chi-tsang is an important figure in Madhyamika thought and development. He not only clarifies Nagarjuna's views but also expands on them and, in order to correct popular misconceptions regarding the Dharma, incorporates such doctrines as Buddha-nature (via the middle path) into the Madhyamika discourse. For an in-depth study of Chi-tsang's contribution to Buddhism in general and Madhyamika in particular, see the Madhyamika Egroup site series on "San-lun's Chi-tsang."]

SAN-LUN'S CHI-TSANG (1): IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS TIME

"The significance of Chi-tsang's contribution to Madhyamika ...is that he presupposes certain Mahayana teachings, particularly those of the Nirvana Sutra...which preaches the innate buddhahood of all beings, including the worst sinners. Chi-tsang's aim was to set Madhyamika and Prajnaparamita [= the perfection of wisdom] thought firmly within a Mahayana context, provided by the teachings of the Nirvana Sutra, and to show how the Madhyamika method of intellectual debate might further the cause of attaining enlightenment. This said, his style and his conclusions are not very different from those of the earlier Madhyamikas." (Bocking 1995 7-8; and compare Koseki 1982 60 on Chi-tsang and the Nirvana Sutra)

Contentious Interpretations of the Dharma

Historically, Buddhism has frequently been plagued with deep conflicts over interpretations of the Dharma's meaning, sometimes violently. In India, the eighteen schools of early Buddhism vied for doctrinal authenticity. In China, the same divergence of views is seen in the many schools of thought that emerged during the early assimilation of the new religion. (See Warder 1980 on India; Chan 1963 on China; and also Robinson 1967 for an overview of Chinese Madhyamika.)

This series of essays on Chi-tsang examines the "**spiritual lineage of ideas**" common to the Madhyamika system of thought, specifically regarding similarities between India's Nagarjuna (about 100-200 A.D.) and China's Chi-tsang (549-623 A.D.) of the San-lun (Madhyamika) school. Nagarjuna and Chi-tsang (Tibetan: Jizang), in their own times and places, encountered equally insidious doctrinal and metaphysical misconceptions promoted by rival schools of thought. Indeed, the legacy of the Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism resounds

throughout its history as the most prominent--if not frequently the ONLY--voice of criticism when movements within Buddhism promoted doctrinal misinterpretations and misconceptions. Such sectarian errors required correction, and so the Madhyamika assumed the role of facilitator for the necessary reforms in India and China. (See Hurvitz 1975 362-363, 365 on the idea of a spiritual lineage.) [*1]

[*1. The San-lun, also known as the School of Emptiness, the School of the Middle Way, and the Three Treatises School, is based on three main texts: Nagarjuna's Middle Treatise and Twelve Gate Treatise, and Aryadeva's Hundred Treatise. (Cheng 1981b 67) Various works by Hsueh-li Cheng and others (listed in the references below) reveal the profound consistencies between Nagarjuna and such San-lun masters as Chi-tsang.]

San-lun's Chi-tsang does a wonderful job of deconstructing many misconceived higher-level reifications and attachments that the human mind commits--and which we see all-too-often in Buddhist history, including today. He provides a fresh and expansive application of Madhyamika views of the Dharma. And, equally important, he sheds light on the common thread running throughout the recurring historical distortions and misconceptions plaguing the Buddhist tradition.

Our focus here will be on his "innovative" approaches to the Madhyamika tradition and how his views fit with Nagarjuna's own views. Though he is now generally acknowledged as the preeminent Buddhist scholar and philosopher, Nagarjuna was first and foremost concerned with the soteriological (= way of salvation) implications of the Buddha's Dharma. To that end, he sought to present the Dharma in the most authentic and useful manner possible. How Chi-tsang follows Nagarjuna's soteriological lead will be our guiding light here.

As will become clear during our study, Chi-tsang's knowledge of higher-level implications of the doctrine of sunyata, such as the emptiness of sunyata itself, the nonduality of nondualism, the nonattachment to nonattachment, and so on reveals his soteriological (= way of salvation) approach to Buddhism--which is traditionally reflected in both the Buddha's teaching and Nagarjuna's Madhyamika. (see Cheng 1982 14)

While demonstrating how we err through our language-bound conceptualizations, for the Madhyamika to become attached to a specific upayic (skillful means) method or approach limits its own relevance and effectiveness. If the Madhyamika is to remain a necessary and useful tool for facilitating a corrective view of the Dharma, it must be flexible enough to creatively "rise to the occasion" and not cling to past methodologies when confronted with new forms of old misconceptions.

Clinging to ancient notions of debate or to chant old, familiar remedies that may not have any direct significance to the new versions of recurring misconceptions is to commit the same errors of REIFICATION and ATTACHMENT that are being critiqued. Such clinging also stifles the Buddha's Dharma, turning it into something stagnant and NOT a living religion for all time. So, the Buddha's doctrine of nonattachment also applies to the Madhyamika's own methods of conveying the Dharma to others. No other school of Buddhism addresses this higher-level (self-

deconstructive) critique as thoroughly as the Madhyamika. We see this "rising to the occasion" in Chi-tsang's work while addressing the Chinese mind of his time.

SAN-LUN'S CHI-TSANG (2): ONE-SIDED SVABHAVIC THINKING

"According to Chi-tsang, all metaphysical speculations of Being, Nothingness or any other thing involve the *svabhavic* way of thinking. When people make an ontic [= of, relating to, or having real being] commitment to something (whether it is Being, Nothingness, or some other thing), they think of that thing *svabhavaly*: they ascribe a 'determinate or its own nature' (*ting-hsing* or *tzu-hsing*) to it. The thing is believed to possess an essence or quality of being itself. But this concept of ontological [= a reified existence] Entity or entity is contradictory to empirical facts. Hence the Entity cannot be the true state or essential constituent of our experience, but only an objectified concept." (Cheng 1981a 374)

The Madhyamika relentlessly targets the svabhava illusion for a good reason. The habitual ATTACHMENT to our reified conceptualizations reflects svabhavic thinking and is basic to the dukkha (misery, anguish) that "we experience and which we inflict on others." (Macy 1991 184) The unwillingness or inability to acknowledge the often inherited and unexamined, and thus habitual influence of the svabhava assumption in our daily lives reinforces its perpetuation and its consequences.

Before moving on to Chi-Tsang's "Corrective Dharma" (Fox 1992 13) involving refutation as illumination, and his other methods, we must consider some preliminary facets about his approach to the Madhyamika's critique of svabhava. In this second part, we look at svabhava's one-sidedness manifested as attachment to dual extremes (such as is/is not, and so on). Then, we consider Buddha's deconstructive soteriology (= way of salvation) as it applies to the svabhava illusion, and which involves "the emptiness of form." Finally, a detailed example of svabhavic construction is considered.

The One-sidedness of Svabhavic Thinking

*"In order to make this point clear, San-lun doctrine teaches that each thesis that may be proposed concerning the nature of truth must be negated by its antithesis, the whole process advancing step by step until total negation has been achieved. Thus the idea of existence, representing worldly truth, is negated by that of non-existence, representing ultimate truth. In turn, the idea of non-existence, which now becomes the worldly truth of a [dual] **new pair**, is negated by the idea of neither existence [= is] nor non-existence [= is not], and so forth until everything that may be predicated about truth has been negated." --Chi-tsang, The Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises (in Cheng 1982 16: and compare Lai 1979 56-57 on Chi-tsang's views of this "serial negation.") [*1]*

[*1. The term "predicate" means to affirm, declare, or assert some quality, attribute, or property. Compare Cheng 1981a 374; and Loy 1999 251 on using the conventional (samvrti) "lower truth to climb up the ladder that, finally, is kicked away." Actually, no position is asserted or "negated" since the errors of reification and attachment are rooted in the svabhavic ILLUSION of one-sided extremism and independence, which we assume to be real characteristics of our

world. An illusion is dealt with by exposing its lack of substance (svabhava). So, since it never existed in the first place, its illusory nature is revealed. In this sense, then, its false svabhavic existence can be considered "negated." Though, it is "not the negation of anything real in the world." (Cheng 1981a 377) Chi-tsang's use of "negation" is a deconstructive a tool. (Cheng 1984 48) Madhyamika exposes this common, recurring distortion and deconstructs (empties) it. Nagarjuna frequently used the deconstructive logic of the four-pronged tetralemma (is, is not, both, neither) which is implicit in Chi-tsang's quote above, as well as his approach to dualisms in general. (See Nagarjuna's MK 1:1, 7; 12:1; 18:8; 21:13; 22:11; 23:20; 25:17-18, 22-23; 27:13, 20 on the tetralemma.)]

"Application of deconstructive analysis to conventional experience neither creates nor destroys anything. It merely reveals the contextual, 'dependently originated' nature of this experience." (Huntington 1989 95-96)

Across the continents and centuries, this popular recurring svabhavic PATTERN reflects what Chi-tsang (and others) have called "ONE-SIDEDNESS" of conceptual constructs. This pattern of one-sidedness validates the svabhava-driven self opposed to its other whereby self reifies and attaches to one side of a dual "new pair" while its other does not. (Cheng 1982 16) This svabhava-driven self is illusory because it is rooted in DUALISTIC distinctions that are neither absolute nor inherent to the perceived dharma but RELATIVE to the perceiver: being relative and thus "dependent on conditions," they are empty of svabhava. Once reified and attached to, these dual distinctions manifest as self-serving tyranny (fear, desire, grasping) of an oppositional self split from its other.

"If you believe in the existence of independent dharmas with real properties [= svabhava], then you will see them existing without causes and conditions." --Nagarjuna, MK 24:16 (Compare McCagney's 1997 202 translation; and see YS 46-47 and CS III:51-52 on dogmas in Lindtner 1982 115, 157.)

SAN-LUN'S CHI-TSANG (3): TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATIVE VIEWS

"Before the Three Treatises [= the San-lun] appeared, there were Abhidharma [= early Buddhist scholasticism] followers, Ch'eng-shih [= a Nirvana school syncretism] followers, as well as meditation masters, vinaya [= monastic discipline] masters, practitioners of the Tao, and devotionalists. Individuals such as these all adhere to arising and ceasing or to impermanence and permanence. They obstruct the true insight of the middle path and thus obstruct the great function of the unlimited interdependency of provisional reality. If one realizes the true mark [= emptiness], one then comprehends the great function of the unlimited interdependency of provisional reality." --Chi-tsang, A Commentary on the Middle Treatise (Chung-kuan-lun-su in Koseki 1981 457; and see Lai 1979 47, 55; 1980 147, 151; and 1983 506-511 on the Ch'eng-shih school)

Before we examine the various ways Chi-tsang dealt with the svabhava illusion of his time, we will briefly consider some points of contrast and similarity between Nagarjuna and Chi-tsang. Then, we look at a selection of innovations to the Madhyamika tradition which are attributed to

Chi-tsang.

A few examples of the points of consistency between these two Madhyamikas are offered here to emphasize the important similarity in their thought, which was profoundly influenced by the Prajna-paramita (perfection of wisdom) literature. As with Buddha's doctrines in general, as well as Nagarjuna's views, Chi-tsang's methods are interrelated and overlapping, as our study reveals. We also see the interconnectedness of his approach in his treatment of the concept of Buddha-nature.

However, unlike Nagarjuna, Chi-tsang considered Buddha-nature to be "the most important issue of the Buddha Dharma" (Liu 1985 187 note 4), so we will more thoroughly examine his Buddha-nature views in a separate essay. For now, since his views on Buddha-nature are so pivotal, a glimpse of his contributions on the subject is provided in a section below. Also, since his views on the two truths are quite innovative, the topic will be treated more thoroughly in a separate essay. Here, a glimpse of his commitment to the soteriological (= method of salvation) efficiency of the two truths, which is consistent with the Madhyamika tradition, is provided below.

Chi-tsang emphasized certain doctrinal points that Nagarjuna only occasionally broached, such as wisdom (prajna), skillful means (upaya), and nonattachment. And although Nagarjuna equates the Buddha and emptiness (MK 22:10, 14, 16), Chi-tsang also emphasizes the equivalence of Buddha-nature with prajna (wisdom), nondualism, interdependency, the middle path, and asunya (not empty). (Liu 1985 177; Koseki 1982 60) This contradiction between Nagarjuna's "emptiness" (sunyata) and Chi-tsang's "not-empty" (asunya) is only apparent, as we shall see in the separate essay on Chi-tsang's approach to the Buddha-nature concept.

Although one man's approach emphasizes certain or different conceptual relationships more than the other approach, the consistency of thought between the two methods reflects the Madhyamika perspective. Their similarity of perspective is obvious when the doctrinal interconnectedness of Buddha's Dharma--and Madhyamika's approach to it--is understood. Much has to do with their respective upayic approaches. Thus, in a separate essay on his views of "concurrent insight," we examine Chi-tsang's use of the interrelatedness of prajna (wisdom) and upaya (skillful means).

"Everything is interconnected in the doctrines of the Buddha. They form a consistent and organic whole, so that the complete understanding of any part includes the understanding of the whole, of all the other parts." (Warder 1980 104)

SAN-LUN'S CHI-TSANG (4): REFUTATION AS ILLUMINATION

"Falsehoods are innumerable, and truths are also of many kinds. Roughly speaking, they do not fall outside two categories: 'with acquisitiveness' and 'without acquisitiveness'. Those [ideas] which are with acquisitiveness are false and have to be refuted; those [ideas] which are without acquisitiveness are true and have to be expounded." --Chi-tsang, **A Compendium on Mahayana Doctrine** (Ta-ch'eng hsuan-lun in Liu 1993 651)

Chi-tsang's aim was "to show how the Madhyamika method of intellectual debate might further the cause of attaining enlightenment.... The precise nature of the relationship between the Madhyamika dialectic on the one hand, and the practical path to liberation on the other, which Chi-tsang tried to explain systematically through the idea that 'refutation is at once an awakening to the true dharma', remains one of the elusive aspects of Madhyamika in [Nagarjuna's] Middle treatise which contribute to its appeal." (Bocking 1995 8)

The Blind Men and the Elephant Revisited

"For the Madhyamikas the refutation of erroneous views and the illumination of right views are not two separate things or acts but the same. A right view is not a view in itself; rather it is the absence of views. If a right view is held in place of an erroneous one, the right view itself would become one-sided and would require refutation. The point the Madhyamikas want to accentuate, expressed in contemporary terms, is that one should refute all metaphysical views, and to do so does not require the presentation of another metaphysical view, but simply forgetting or ignoring all metaphysics." (Cheng 1979 351; and see 362)

In the Buddhist parable of "the blind men and the elephant," blind men feel different parts of the elephant's body (head, ears, tusks, trunk, belly, legs, rectum, member, and tail), and conclude differently about what an elephant is. They fought furiously among themselves, shouting and crying, "This is what an elephant is like; that is not what an elephant is like."

The Buddha's moral of this parable addresses those who, delighting in heresy, "are blind, without eyes: knowing not good, knowing not evil, knowing not right, knowing not wrong, they quarrel and brawl and wrangle and strike one another with the daggers of their tongues, saying, 'This is right, that is not right.'" (Campbell 1988 8)

To avoid the pitfalls of "blind men," the Madhyamika's refined deconstructive methodology addresses the definitive question of what precisely is an elephant through the full-proof method for sculpting an elephant: first, get a huge block of marble, and then chip away everything that doesn't look like an elephant. In other words, we learn what an elephant IS by discovering what it IS NOT. Madhyamika's deconstructive methods reveal the true form of the elephant and without any of the distortive baggage picked up along the way by other methods. This, then, is how Chi-tsang's method of "refutation as illumination" is approached in this essay regarding Buddha's Truth.

So, Madhyamika's approach is to "chip away" at certain views that do NOT represent the Buddha's Truth and are misleading. As some readers will no doubt note, however, being erroneous and distortive does not necessarily guarantee that such views will not become a popular prop for those who need to cling to something for self-validation, self-justification, and a sense of security, if not superiority. It is the contention here that Chi-tsang's method of "refuting what is misleading and revealing what is corrective" (Fox 1992 1) follows Nagarjuna's views.

SAN-LUN'S CHI-TSANG (5A): THE NONDUALITY OF BUDDHA-NATURE

"In explaining the meaning of 'Buddha-nature', all masters either maintain that Buddha-nature is cause and not effect [= of enlightenment], or maintain that it is effect and not cause. Such dualistic conceptions of cause and effect is not 'Buddha-nature'. As the Sutra says, 'Whatever entails dualism is a perverted view'. So we know that all these masters do not understand what the Buddha-nature is. Holding on to one extreme, they argue with each other and lose sight of [the true meaning of] Buddha-nature. Only when one sees that cause and effect are equal and nondual can one speak of Buddha-nature. Thus, the Sutra says, 'As for to be neither cause nor effect, it is what is known as the Buddha-nature.'" --Chi-tsang, A Compendium on Mahayana Doctrine (Ta-ch'eng hsuan-lun in Liu 1985 178-179)

It is a misconception to assume that Chi-tsang did not know Buddha-nature (tathagatagarbha) is upayic (skillful means) and NOT an absolute characteristic of our world. Therefore, as his comprehensive approach to the apparent conflict between emptiness (sunyata) and Buddha-nature reflects, he wanted to reconcile the discrepancy between the two doctrines without reifying (= ascribing ontological significance) to either one. (see Chi-tsang's quote below on the inherent/acquired dispute over Buddha-nature, Liu 1985 182)

It is also a misconception to perceive emptiness (sunyata) as "negative" (which Madhyamika rivals are predisposed to do) and Buddha-nature as "positive." As frequently pointed out, Nagarjuna's "ultimate affirmation" is interdependency, which mutually defines dharmic emptiness (of svabhava): dharmas are interdependent because they are empty (of svabhava), and vice versa. He also equates emptiness and interdependency with the middle path. (MK 24:18) Correctly understood, these concepts are NOT negative at all, but profoundly celebrate the richness of conventional (samvrti) daily life. (Streng 1973 36)

Nagarjuna equates the Buddha with emptiness (sunyata), and emptiness with interdependency and the middle path. (MK 22:10, 14, 16; MK 24:18) Chi-tsang equates Buddha-nature with **prajna** (wisdom), **nondualism**, interdependency, and the middle path. (For other similarities either implied or explicit between Nagarjuna and Chi-tsang on the Dharma, see Part Three). This study follows Chi-tsang's definition of "Buddha-nature" as primarily meaning "what constitutes a Buddha," as well as his synonym of Buddha-nature and tathagatagarbha. (Liu 1985 177, 183, 190 note 49; see Chi-tsang's criticism of the Yogacara's tathagatagarbha concept, in Liu 1994 181-183)

As implied in Nagarjuna's quote above (MK 22:16), if the Buddha is emptiness then, by extension, Buddha-nature is also emptiness. And as also suggested above (CS III:42), if "there is really no difference between the world of living beings and Buddhas," then Buddha-nature is **NONDUAL** and therefore nonexclusionary. Only as nonexclusionary and nondual does the Buddha-nature concept reflect primary Madhyamika doctrines of the middle path, the two truths, interdependency, and emptiness. This is supported logically since nonduality entails emptiness or the lack of dualistic (svabhavic) distinctions. Chi-tsang understood this and, further applying nondualism, he rejected the dualistic view of Buddha-nature that splits the sentient and nonsentient worlds, as we shall see in Part 5b.

Nagarjuna's lack of emphasis of Buddha-nature in his own work does not mean that it is

incompatible with Madhyamika thought and therefore should be discarded for all time. The problem is not with the doctrine itself but with the various interpretations that misrepresent the soteriological (= way of salvation) intent, such as the Yogacara's absolutist version reflected in their reifications of inherent (svabhavic) "true mind" or "true consciousness" and "**mind-only**." (Liu 1985 171-172, 175; and 182, 184 on Chi-tsang's rebuttal)

As Madhyamikans, both Nagarjuna and Chi-tsang were first and foremost concerned with the soteriological (= way of salvation) efficacy (= the power to produce an effect) of the Buddha's Dharma. However, unlike Nagarjuna, Chi-tsang reportedly considered the Buddha-nature to be "the most important issue of the Buddha Dharma." (Liu 1985 187 note 4) In Chi-tsang's view, then, there is a conceptual or upayic **shift** from Nagarjuna's recourse to "emptiness" (sunyata) to Chi-tsang's use of Buddha-nature. What was Chi-tsang's reasons for this conceptual shift? (see Koseki 1981 463 for Chi-tsang's "conceptual shift" on the middle path)

Chi-tsang confronted "a long process of transformation of the 'Buddha-nature' from a basically practical to an ontological [= reified] concept." One "ontic" (= of, relating to, or having real being) connotation ascribed to Buddha-nature was emptiness (sunyata). Reification (to make real) of "emptiness" occurred even though Nagarjuna rejected absolute emptiness and even though, within the Madhyamika, emptiness equals nondualism and thus reflects the middle path. (see Nagarjuna's MK 13:8 and MK 22:11 in McCagney 1997 169, 194 on sunyata)

For Madhyamika, a reified emptiness, nondualism, the middle path, and so on are misconceptions of "svabhavic thinking." To reify sunyata (emptiness) as an absolute characteristic of our world (so as to define Buddha or anything else) establishes a dual "new pair" of emptiness (sunyata) and nonemptiness, and therefore negates the doctrines of nondualism and the middle path. And, while dualistic thinking reflects dharmic permanence (by subscribing them with svabhava), nondualism suggests dharmic impermanence (by rejecting svabhava). (See Cheng 1982 16 on "new pair"; Cheng 1981a 371, 374-375, 378 and 1984 52 on svabhavic attachment.)

Thus, even the teaching of "impermanence" can become an object of attachment, involving a dual "new pair." A reified emptiness, then, is manifested as attachment to the concept of "impermanence," as well as to the other derivatives such as nondualism, nonattachment, and so on. (see Liu 1985 182 on impermanence below; Cheng 1981a 379 and 1981b 72, 82 on new attachments; and see Cheng 1982 18-25 on ontological thinking; Part Four on higher-level errors)

SAN-LUN'S CHI-TSANG (5B): THE NONDUALITY OF BUDDHA-NATURE

"When the contemplative mind looks at it, what is the difference between sentient beings and grasses and trees? If the Buddha-nature exists, then it exists in both; if it inexists, then, it inexists in both. [So, from the perspective of the middle path:] It both exists and inexists, and neither exists nor inexists. For this reason, if you comprehend that existence and inexistence are non-dual and equal, then you can initially speak of the true cause [= the middle path] of Buddha-nature...." --Chi-tsang, A Compendium on Mahayana Doctrine (in Koseki 1980 29-30,

and see 24, 26; and 22 on the middle path as true cause, and Buddha-nature and the middle path as nondual)

Within the context of "the lineage of ideas" discussed in Part One, the concern here (Part Five) is to show that Chi-tsang's views on Buddha-nature and other doctrines do not conflict with Nagarjuna's views of the Dharma. Of course, the approaches of these two men towards the Dharma are different in some respects (Part Three). Even so, their basic understanding of the soteriological (way of salvation) intent and design of the doctrines are not different.

In the first part of this essay (5a), we considered two results of reified thought which reflect our dualistic model of the Buddha and not-Buddha: the (1) deification of the Buddha which promotes (2) attachment to that reified conceptual form. In this second part (5b), we examine more closely Chi-tsang's checks and balances incorporated into his views of Buddha-nature. His idea that Buddha-nature was equally applicable to both the sentient and nonsentient worlds neutered the popular dualism defining Buddha-nature as requiring sentience. Even so, his nondualistic approach is not unique within the doctrine's long evolution.

We begin, therefore, by briefly reviewing two other dualistic misconceptions of the Buddha-nature concept for a better understanding of how the concept has been distorted. First, we look at the icchantika ("incorrigible heretics") dispute which excluded some people from Buddha's lineage (gotra).

Next, the dualism of "inherent" versus "acquired" Buddha-nature is reconsidered since it reappeared after Chi-tsang's time. Then, we examine the implications of Chi-tsang's perspective on sentient and nonsentient Buddha-nature. Finally, we consider whether or not Chi-tsang's Buddha-nature is based on any ontological commitment or assertion since his goal was to eliminate such errors of reification.

Chi-tsang: Sentient Versus Nonsentient

Nagarjuna promoted such doctrines as the middle path, the two truths (relative and supreme), interdependency and emptiness, bodhicitta ("enlightenment mind"), and so on. Since all dharmas (= factors of experience: people, objects, events, ideas) are empty of inherent self-nature (svabhava), according to the supreme (paramartha) truth, then all doctrines, which are also dharmas (concepts, ideas)--without exception--are provisional and ultimately lack ontological (reified) significance. Buddha's doctrines are also concepts (dharmas) and so are equally subject to the deconstructive import of the supreme truth of emptiness (sunyata).

For Chi-tsang to incorporate Buddha-nature thought into his own discourse is not the deciding issue regarding adherence to any Madhyamika "standards." The problem is NOT with the Buddha-nature concept itself but with those previous popular misinterpretations of it involving reification and/or deification embedded in dualistic and ontological (reified) presuppositions. Therefore, when correctly understood and presented, the Buddha-nature doctrine is no more of an ontological commitment or assertion than was Nagarjuna's own use of those "standard" Madhyamika doctrines that are mentioned above. All of these doctrines are upayic (skillful means) in design, which ultimately neuters reified thinking.

So, the issue is not which doctrine conforms to "traditional" Madhyamika discourse but HOW a doctrine--any doctrine--is presented for assimilation and practice. To confirm this point, simply look at the historical misapplications of the doctrines of emptiness (sunyata), the two truths, the middle path, and so on. While these doctrines were generally accepted by Buddhists, some schools misunderstood them and still others presented them incorrectly. This tendency towards misrepresentation and misunderstanding is still prevalent in popular Buddhism today.

According to the Madhyamika methodology, all doctrinal concepts are subject to emptiness (sunyata), so what is the difference between using one doctrine or another? What is the criteria that determines which doctrines are appropriate to the Madhyamika and which are not? If the criterion is the lack of ontological assertion, Chi-tsang complies. If the criterion is a deconstructive outcome, he also complies. If the criterion is that Buddha-nature violates Madhyamika's "negative" approach, we counter that the Madhyamika is ultimately NOT negative but affirms our daily life.

In fact, since Madhyamika offers no alternative conceptual (svabhavic) construction for attachment, as other schools do, the Madhyamika actually affirms the richness of our daily lives better than other approaches to the Dharma that insinuate some concept by which to view and respond to our world and others in it. Such constructions obstruct instead of clarify Buddha's Truth. Interdependency is Nagarjuna's "ultimate affirmation," which he equates with emptiness and the middle path. (MK 24:18) Correctly understood, these doctrines are NOT negative at all, but profoundly celebrate the richness of daily life. (Streng 1973 36 on affirmation)

SAN-LUN'S CHI-TSANG (6): THE DOCTRINE OF THE TWO TRUTHS

"Further, if [we take] the two truths as two principles [= reified views], that would constitute 'acquisitiveness'.... Sentient beings already have the error of [harboring] dualistic views. If the Buddhas further teach that the true principle [= enlightenment] is dual, then not only is their old error not got rid of, but new delusions would also be added. For this reason, the Buddhas, [with a view to] adapting to [the understanding of] sentient beings, say that there are two truths. Actually, the true principle is not dual." --Chi-tsang, The Meaning of the Twofold Truth (Erh-ti-i in Liu 1993 660)

The Two Truths as Deconstructive Tools

We have already examined how the two truths contribute to Chi-tsang's method of "refutation as illumination" (see Part Four) regarding their application as "instruction" and also as "standpoints." (see Liu 1993 660-664) In this sixth part of our series on San-lun's Chi-tsang, we look at **how** and **why** he structures the two truths in terms of the "four levels of discourse on the two truths." The two truths are: relative or conventional (samvrti) truth of the interdependency of daily life, and the supreme (paramartha) truth of emptiness (sunyata) of any inherent (reified) self-nature (svabhava).

Although some of the material discussed below has already been covered previously, it is presented here anew within the CONTEXT of the two truths. And, once again, we see the interconnected and overlapping structure of Chi-tsang's methods of deconstruction. Placing this

material within a different context may help to better understand both Chi-tsang's methodology and his deconstructive techniques. As a consequence, perhaps a greater understanding of both the Buddha Dharma and the Madhyamika approach will follow.

Chi-tsang is aware of the danger of conceptual tools, as seen in his intricate and comprehensive approach to the Buddha-nature. (see Part Five) He takes great pains to ensure that no error of reification (ontological commitment) is legitimized by his own representation of the doctrine. (see Huntington 1989 125 on "dangerous tools")

Subjective Constructions Versus Objective Reality

"If you believe in the existence of independent dharmas with real properties [= svabhava], then you will see them existing without causes and conditions." --Nagarjuna, MK 24:16 (compare McCagney's 1997 202 translation; and see YS 46-47 and CS III:51-52 on dogmas below)

Madhyamika deconstructive efforts are directed towards the errors of ontological commitments. The historical and recurring PATTERN of misconceptions is rooted in reification and ATTACHMENT to the metaphysical assumption of an inherent self-nature (svabhava) that ascribes dharmas (= factors of experience: people, objects, events, ideas) with characteristics of independence and permanence. This inherited, unexamined, and habitual process separates them from other dharmas and also negates the interdependency (dependence on conditions) of our world and others in it. If attached to, these conceptual constructions contribute to the self/other split of the svabhava fallacy.

For Chi-tsang, then, an "ontic" (= of, relating to, or having real being) commitment to any conceptual construction reflects REIFICATION and ATTACHMENT, which are synonymous with svabhavic (inherent self-nature) thinking. The "svabhavic way of thinking" is a "disease" rooted in "LANGUAGE-BOUND" knowledge of conceptualizations. (Cheng 1981a 374, 381; and see Part Two on "language-bound knowledge") But how does this svabhavic way of thinking influence our daily lives?

SAN-LUN'S CHI-TSANG (7): THE EMPTINESS OF SUNYATA

"If we harbor [the distinction between] Buddhist and non-Buddhist and dwell upon [the division between] Mahaayaana and Hiinayaana, we shall fall into the falsehood of one-sidedness and lose sight of the true principle [of non-duality].... Only the simultaneous allaying of [the thoughts of] Buddhist and non-Buddhist and the concurrent subduing [of the ideas of] Mahaayaana and Hiinayaana are known as the true principle." --Chi-tsang, The Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises (San-lun-hsuan-i in Liu 1993 651)

"Further, the general purport of the works which [Nagarjuna] composed during his appearance in the world is first of all to refute and to eliminate all errors of acquisitiveness, until they are totally done away with. Any mind with the slightest [proclivity for] dependence [= attachment] and any discourse with the smallest [sign of] determinateness [= reified thinking], whether they be Mahaayaana or Hiinayaana, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, based upon the words [of the scriptures] or created without the support of the words [of the scriptures], are all to be

cleansed, until they are made entirely pure. However, when the impure have been got rid of, the pure also do not remain." --Chi-tsang, Treatise on the Profound [Teaching of] the Lotus (Fa-hua hsuan-lun in Liu 1993 650)

As we have seen elsewhere, the reification of emptiness (sunyata) itself comes in many forms, such as the popular derivatives of an absolute nonattachment, impermanence, and nondualism (with its transmoral agenda); mind-only (which spouts dharmic nonexistence); nihilism (which denies the existence of everything); relativism (= the "all-is-relative" dogma) which denies any foundational basis for "worldly norms" such as morality, social obligations, ethical behavior, and so on. These result in such insidious errors as Zen's notion of Dharma-sanctioned killing. (see Egroup posting #88 of 5-1-03 on "How Do We Know What the Buddha's Truth Is? Part 5")

The svabhavic way of thinking involves the reification of and attachment to certain doctrines or concepts manifested as an "ontological commitment." Such commitments are inherited, unexamined, and habitual. Throughout Buddhist history such errors have infected a number of doctrines that were initially designed to discourage this attached way of thinking. We have previously reviewed such errors during Nagarjuna's time. We now look at a few examples of this persistent and popular misconception of a reified emptiness during Chi-tsang's time.

SAN-LUN'S CHI-TSANG (8): PRACTICE OF CONCURRENT INSIGHT

In Chi-tsang's time, due to popular misconceptions, the need arose to "clarify Mahayana contemplative methods of practice" and also to clarify and systematize the San-lun doctrine. For Chi-tsang, then, this necessitated a balance between study and practice, specifically "contemplative practice." Thus, his use of the "concurrent insight of the two truths," which was motivated both by his intellectual understanding and his religious sensitivities. The practice of "concurrent insight" was "an integral part of a larger system to explain the relationship between the theory and practice of the two truths." (Koseki 1981 450-452, 463)

The Two Truths and The Two Knowledges

*"First, we explain the essence of the teaching, namely, the two truths, and next we explain the function of the two truths, [namely], the 'two knowledges'. We seek to explain truth and knowledge as the interdependency between teaching and practice. Again, we first explain the two truths and then explain the two knowledges because the former primarily explains the meaning of the teaching, and the latter explains the experience of the teaching. For this reason, we speak of the two truths to cause sentient beings to **give rise** to the two knowledges."*
--Chi-tsang, Commentary on the Middle Treatise (Chung-kuan-lun-su in Koseki 1981 453)

THE TWO TRUTHS are (1) the conventional (samvrti) truth of daily life which involves the interdependency (dependence on conditions) of all dharmas (= factors of experience: people, objects, events, ideas); and (2) supreme (paramartha) truth of emptiness (sunyata), the lack of any permanent, inherent self-nature (svabhava). According to the Madhyamika, the two truths are central to the Buddha's teaching and also reflect the best approach to it. For Chi-tsang, quoted above (Koseki 1981 453), the two truths are the essence of Buddha's teaching and "give rise" to the two knowledges which are functions of the two truths. (see Chi-tsang below on the two truths, from Lai 1983 506)

THE TWO KNOWLEDGES are (1) PRAJNA, the wisdom of sunyata (emptiness of svabhava) involving the Buddha's "nondiscriminating vision" of the world; and (2) UPAYA (skillful means), the expedient measures or methods used for teaching purposes. (see Liu 1985 185 on this "vision")

So, prajna and upaya involve an understanding of sunyata (emptiness), the former as theory and the latter as practice. Thus, "the primary function of upaya was practice, namely, the 'practice of emptiness.'" Therefore, the two knowledges are mutually defining: upaya is "guided and informed by prajna" and is directed towards "the refutation of discursive thinking," including the reification of and attachment to emptiness itself. And upaya, as an expression of prajna, reflects the wisdom of emptiness in our daily lives, which is manifested as compassion. (Koseki 1981 455-456)

"Prajna, then, intuits the true mark [emptiness: sunyata] of dharmas and upaya intuits the dharmas' true mark. Hence, one does not sink into the perspective of emptiness. This is called nonsubstantiation [= not reified]. As the Ta-chih-tu-lun [Maha-prajña-paramita-sastra] says: 'Prajna enters the final emptiness in which there is no prapanca [= conceptualization] and upaya appears from the final emptiness to teach men'. 'Entering the final emptiness in which there is no prapanca' is identical with intuiting the true mark; it refers to non-grasping as well as [to] the skill of severing delusion. Upaya appears from the final emptiness and is guided by prajna." --Chi-tsang, A Compendium on Mahayana Doctrine (Ta-ch'eng hsuang-lun in Koseki 1981 456)

For Chi-tsang, these two knowledges, which are generally associated with the Buddha and go hand in hand, are also applicable to the bodhisattva (= student) practice as "paths" to enlightenment. The "path of prajna" has four functional aspects: intuiting the true mark, perfecting nonattachment, dispelling delusion, and serving as a guide for the "path of upaya." The "path of upaya" has three attributes defined as the "skill of prajna": intuiting the object-of-cognition, the nonsubstantiation (= lack of reification) of emptiness, and the function of practice. (Koseki 1981 455, 456)

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