

THREE SHORT TREATISES BY
VASUBANDHU, SENGZHAO,
AND ZONGMI

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BDK English Tripiṭaka Series

**THREE SHORT TREATISES
BY VASUBANDHU,
SENGZHAO, AND
ZONGMI**

**A Mahayana Demonstration
on the Theme of Action**

(Taishō Volume 31, Number 1609)

Translated by John P. Keenan

Essays of Sengzhao

(Taishō Volume 45, Number 1858)

Translated by Rafal Felbur

**Treatise on the Origin
of Humanity**

(Taishō Volume 45, Number 1886)

Translated by Jan Yün-hua

BDK America, Inc.

2017

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A Message on the Publication of the English Tripiṭaka

The Buddhist canon is said to contain eighty-four thousand different teachings. I believe that this is because the Buddha's basic approach was to prescribe a different treatment for every spiritual ailment, much as a doctor prescribes a different medicine for every medical ailment. Thus his teachings were always appropriate for the particular suffering individual and for the time at which the teaching was given, and over the ages not one of his prescriptions has failed to relieve the suffering to which it was addressed.

Ever since the Buddha's Great Demise over twenty-five hundred years ago, his message of wisdom and compassion has spread throughout the world. Yet no one has ever attempted to translate the entire Buddhist canon into English throughout the history of Japan. It is my greatest wish to see this done and to make the translations available to the many English-speaking people who have never had the opportunity to learn about the Buddha's teachings.

Of course, it would be impossible to translate all of the Buddha's eighty-four thousand teachings in a few years. I have, therefore, had one hundred thirty-nine of the scriptural texts in the prodigious Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon selected for inclusion in the First Series of this translation project.

It is in the nature of this undertaking that the results are bound to be criticized. Nonetheless, I am convinced that unless someone takes it upon himself or herself to initiate this project, it will never be done. At the same time, I hope that an improved, revised edition will appear in the future.

It is most gratifying that, thanks to the efforts of more than a hundred Buddhist scholars from the East and the West, this monumental project has finally gotten off the ground. May the rays of the Wisdom of the Compassionate One reach each and every person in the world.

August 7, 1991

NUMATA Yehan
Founder of the English
Tripiṭaka Project

Editorial Foreword

In the long history of Buddhist transmission throughout East Asia, translations of Buddhist texts were often carried out as national projects supported and funded by emperors and political leaders. The BDK English Tripiṭaka project, on the other hand, began as a result of the dream and commitment of one man. In January 1982 Dr. NUMATA Yehan, founder of Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism), initiated the monumental task of translating the complete Taishō shinshū daizōkyō edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka (Buddhist canon) into the English language. Under his leadership, a special preparatory committee was organized in April 1982. By July of the same year the Translation Committee of the English Tripiṭaka was officially convened.

The initial Committee included the following members: (late) HANAYAMA Shōyū (Chairperson), (late) BANDŌ Shōjun, ISHIGAMI Zennō, (late) KAMATA Shigeo, (late) KANAOKA Shūyū, MAYEDA Sengaku, NARA Yasuaki, (late) SAYEKI Shinkō, (late) SHIOIRI Ryōtatsu, TAMARU Noriyoshi, (late) TAMURA Kwansei, (late) URYŪZU Ryūshin, and YUYAMA Akira. Assistant members of the Committee were as follows: KANAZAWA Atsushi, WATANABE Shōgo, Rolf Giebel of New Zealand, and Rudy Smet of Belgium.

After holding planning meetings on a monthly basis, the Committee selected one hundred and thirty-nine texts for the First Series of the project, estimated to be one hundred printed volumes in all. The texts selected were not limited to those originally written in India but also included works composed in China and Japan. While the publication of the First Series proceeds, the texts for the Second Series will be selected from among the remaining works; this process will continue until all the texts, in Japanese as well as in Chinese, have been published. Given the huge scope of this project, accomplishing the English translations of all the Chinese and Japanese texts in the Taishō canon may take as long as one hundred years or more. Nevertheless, as Dr. NUMATA wished, it is the sincere hope of the Committee that this project will continue until completion, even after all the present members have passed away.

Editorial Foreword

Dr. NUMATA passed away on May 5, 1994, at the age of ninety-seven. He entrusted his son, Mr. NUMATA Toshihide with the continuation and completion of the English Tripiṭaka project. Mr. Numata served for twenty-three years, leading the project forward with enormous progress before his sudden passing on February 16, 2017, at the age of eighty-four. The Committee previously lost its able and devoted first Chairperson, Professor HANAYAMA Shōyū, on June 16, 1995, at the age of sixty-three. In October 1995 the Committee elected Professor MAYEDA Sengaku (then Vice President of Musashino Women's College) as Chairperson, and upon the retirement of Professor Mayeda in July 2016, the torch was passed to me to serve as the third Chairperson. Despite these losses and changes we, the Editorial Committee members, have renewed our determination to carry out the noble ideals set by Dr. NUMATA. Present members of the Committee are Kenneth K. Tanaka (Chairperson), MAYEDA Sengaku, ICHISHIMA Shōshin, ISHIGAMI Zennō, KATSURA Shōryū, NARA Yasuaki, SAITŌ Akira, SHIMODA Masahiro, WATANABE Shōgo, and YONEZAWA Yoshiyasu.

The Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research was established in November 1984, in Berkeley, California, U.S.A., to assist in the publication of the translated texts. The Publication Committee was organized at the Numata Center in December 1991. In 2010, the Numata Center's operations were merged with Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai America, Inc. (BDK America), and BDK America continues to oversee the publication side of the English Tripiṭaka project in close cooperation with the Editorial Committee in Tokyo.

At the time of this writing, in February 2017, the project has completed about sixty percent of the seven thousand one hundred and eighty-five Taishō pages of texts selected for the First Series. Much work still lies ahead of us but we are committed to the completion of the remaining texts in order to realize the grand vision of Dr. Numata, shared by Mr. Numata and Professor Hanayama, to make the Buddhist canon more readily accessible to the English-speaking world.

Kenneth K. Tanaka
Chairperson
Editorial Committee of
the BDK English Tripiṭaka

Publisher's Foreword

On behalf of the members of the Publication Committee, I am happy to present this volume as the latest contribution to the BDK English Tripiṭaka Series. The Publication Committee members have worked to ensure that this volume, as all other volumes in the series, has gone through a rigorous process of editorial efforts.

The initial translation and editing of the Buddhist scriptures found in this and other BDK English Tripiṭaka volumes are performed under the direction of the Editorial Committee in Tokyo, Japan. Both the Editorial Committee in Tokyo and the Publication Committee, headquartered in Moraga, California, are dedicated to the production of accurate and readable English translations of the Buddhist canon. In doing so, the members of both committees and associated staff work to honor the deep faith, spirit, and concern of the late Reverend Dr. Yehan Numata, who founded the BDK English Tripiṭaka Series in order to disseminate the Buddhist teachings throughout the world.

The long-term goal of our project is the translation and publication of the texts in the one hundred-volume Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon, along with a number of influential extracanonical Japanese Buddhist texts. The list of texts selected for the First Series of this translation project may be found at the end of each volume in the series.

As Chair of the Publication Committee, I am deeply honored to serve as the fifth person in a post previously held by leading figures in the field of Buddhist studies, most recently by my predecessor, John R. McRae.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the members of the Publication Committee for their dedicated and expert work undertaken in the course of preparing this volume for publication: Managing Editor Marianne Dresser, Dr. Hudaya Kandahjaya, Dr. Carl Bielefeldt, Dr. Robert Sharf, and Rev. Brian Kensho Nagata, Director of the BDK English Tripiṭaka Project.

A. Charles Muller
Chairperson
Publication Committee

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**A MAHAYANA DEMONSTRATION
ON THE THEME OF ACTION**

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Translator's Introduction

The *Mahayana Demonstration on the Theme of Action* (*Karmasiddhi-prakaraṇa*) is a relatively brief text, consisting of one fascicle in the Chinese translation. The original Sanskrit text is not extant. There are two Chinese translations, by Xuanzang (T. 1609), and by Vimokṣaprajñā (T. 1608), and a Tibetan translation, *Las grub pa'i rab tu byed pa* (Derge 4062) by Viśuddhasiṃha and Devendra-rakṣita. The only commentary on the text is the *Karmasiddhiṭkā* of Sumatīśīla, extant only in Tibetan (*Las grub pa'i bshad pa*, Derge 4071).

Despite its brevity, Vasubandhu's text is densely packed with philosophical argumentation on how to correctly interpret the scriptural references about the three kinds of actions, bodily action, verbal action, and mental action. Vasubandhu, in accepted commentarial style, assumes that his readers are familiar with the ongoing context of argumentation about action and only infrequently identifies the intellectual landscape. The rhetorical format is in the form of dialogue between the author, Vasubandhu, and a number of proponents of false views whom he refutes, before he frames his presentation of the nature of action by sketching a Yogācāra theory of the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*).

The traditional teaching on action (karma) identified mental action as volition, which inexorably matures to produce its subsequent result. There were, however, disputes over the nature of bodily and verbal actions that communicate or make known (*vijñapti*) this inner volition to others. In Part One Vasubandhu turns to a presentation and refutation of false theories about the nature of a bodily communicative act. He refutes the theories that such an act consists of bodily shape, physical movement, or through a special mentally engendered wind that moves the body. Instead he insists on the Sautrāntika position that any bodily action occurs through a special volition that moves the body to perform a physical action, and that apart from volition one cannot adequately describe a bodily communicative act.

The text then turns in Part Two to a consideration of the maturation of actions, how they ripen within the mind to attain their results. Vasubandhu refutes notions that past acts actually maintain a present existence, or that there are special

realities called “the increase” or “the imperishable” through which acts attain their results. In contrast, he argues that the maturation of action is effected by a special volition that evolves within and permeates the mental continuity, leading to the attainment of the subsequent results of such actions.

Part Three reflects on the underlying problem of how karmic maturation functions in the case of entrance into and emergence from the concentration of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*), because this concentration cuts off all mental activity and would seemingly interrupt any maturation of former actions. Vasubandhu’s answer is that there is a storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) that, although subtle and latent, remains present even in the so-called mindless concentration. The storehouse consciousness is a central Yogācāra theory, elicited probably in answer to this very question in an earlier Yogācāra compendium, the *Yogācārabhūmi*.¹

Having interpreted karmic maturation in terms of the storehouse consciousness, Vasubandhu established the context for his presentation, in Part Four, of the Sautrāntika analysis of the nature of action, in which he defines the main terms and summarizes his presentation.

There are questions about both the text and its lineage. The textual questions derive, for the most part, from the difficulty of reconstructing the assumed rhetorical context of argumentation. While its main contours are clear, the back-and-forth flow of the argument between contending parties, each of whom tries to catch the other in logical inconsistencies, is at times confusing. This is especially true in Part One, where the issues turn upon early notions of physical matter and sense perception. The originally intended audience likely had no problem identifying the various arguments presented and knew just who was proposing what. Later readers who are far from that classical context, however, have had problems following the flow of the dialogue. Sumatīśīla’s commentary, the *Karmasiddhiṭīkā*, was composed to elucidate the meaning of the text and he clarifies the flow of argumentation by identifying the various schools of thought. Yet Sumatīśīla’s identifications of the lines of argumentation are not always the same as those of Xuanzang. At times, where Sumatīśīla’s commentary identifies a passage as belonging to Vasubandhu’s opponent, Xuanzang sees it as reflecting the position of Vasubandhu himself.² Xuanzang’s text also has significant sections (e.g., 783a20–783b11) that are not found in either the Tibetan or Chinese translations of *Vimokṣakaprajña*.³ Throughout this English translation I have followed

Xuanzang's text exclusively, and have made no attempt either to present any parallel readings or offer any critical analysis.

There is some dispute among modern scholars about the text's lineage because even though it has been attributed to the Yogācāra philosopher Vasubandhu, it makes no use of central Mahayana themes. For instance, emptiness, the two truths, or even the central Yogācāra theme of the three patterns of consciousness (*trivabhāva*) are never mentioned in the text. This led the French scholar Étienne Lamotte, in his translation of the text, *Le Traite: de l'Acte de Vasubandhu (Karma-siddhi-prakaraṇa)*, to identify its lineage as Hinayana, as it presents simply a Sautrāntika point of view even in the presentation of the storehouse consciousness.⁴ On the other hand, Stefan Anacker, in "A Discussion for the Demonstration of Action (Karma-Siddhi-Prakaraṇa)," argues that the text is indeed a Mahayana work; it not only quotes the Yogācāra *Explication of the Underlying Meaning (Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra)* but also ends with the traditional Mahayana transference of merit to all sentient beings. If the text is not itself Hinayana, however, it is certainly directed at Hinayana thinkers.⁵ Xuanzang clearly thought that this text was a Mahayana composition, and he alone adds the term "Mahayana" to the title.

In this English translation I identify Vasubandhu's sections by placing them in plain type, while those of his interlocuters appear in italics. In order to lend clarity to the flow of the argumentation I have added subheadings (not present in the Chinese text) drawn from Leo M. Pruden's English version of Lamotte's translation, *Karmasiddhi Prakaraṇa: The Treatise on Action by Vasubandhu* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988).

A Mahayana Demonstration on the Theme of Action

by

Bodhisattva Vasubandhu

Translated by the Tang Tripiṭaka Master Xuanzang

Part One

Erroneous Theories with Respect to the Nature of Action

In various scriptures the Bhagavat has taught the three kinds of actions: bodily action, verbal action, and mental action. 781a29

1. Theory of the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika: The Communicative Act as Shape

The [Vaibhāṣika] theory holds that a bodily action refers to what is done by the body. Since language itself is an act, it is called a verbal action. In themselves, these two can be either acts of communicating information [to others] or not. A mental action refers to action concomitant with thinking and consists solely in mind. 781b

What do you mean by “communicate”?

A bodily act of communicating consists in physical shape and is engendered by mental states that take that [shape] as object.

What shape?

The shape of the body.

If [a bodily act of communication] is the physical shape of the body, then why do you say that a bodily action is an act done by the body?

It is said to be physical shape of the body because [shape] is constituted by the individual members of the entire body. It is said to be done by the body because [shape] comes about in dependence on the primary elements of the body. That which is predicated of the body as a whole also applies to its members. In common parlance people say, “I live in the village” or “I live in the forest,” [while in fact we live in houses in the village, or in groves in the forest].

Why do you say that [the bodily act of communicating] is engendered by mental states that take that [shape] as object?

In order to exclude [such things as] the physical shape of the lips, because [a bodily act of communicating] is not engendered by mental actions that take that, [the shape of the lips,] as their object. Rather, [the shape of the lips] is engendered by mental states that take as their object the enunciation of language. We also want to exclude shapes elicited from the mental states of former aspirations, because [a bodily act of communicating] is not engendered by mental states that take those [wished-for shapes] as its object. Rather, these [wished-for shapes] are engendered by mental states that have a residual cause for maturation.

Why is [bodily shape] said to be communicative?

Because a mind that informs and manifests an act, which it itself has engendered, communicates that to others. In order to clarify this, we present a stanza:

*Since we manifest outwardly through the body and speech,
We communicate the volitions of our inner mind.
Just as a fish hidden in the deep
Communicates its presence by beating the waves.*

What then is physical shape?

This refers to [the categories of shape:] long, [short, square, circular, high, low, same, different].

But what is length, etc.?

This refers to that by which the ideas designated as long, etc. are engendered.

In what sphere is [physical shape] included?

It is included in the sphere of physical form.

Critique of the Theory that the Communicative Act is Shape

Now, we must carefully examine [this Vaibhāṣika theory]. Are [the shapes of] length, etc. specific atoms, as are colors? Or are they composites of specific atoms? Or are they a discrete and unique reality pervading the composites of color?

What errors are these in these options?

If [the shape of] length, etc. were a specific atom, then it would be analogous to color. Then in each and every minute part of a physical composite [the shape of] length, etc. would be apprehensible.

If [the shape of length, etc.] were a composite of specific atoms, then would there be no difference between [this composite] and a composite of the atoms of color? And then the specificity of the composites of all the colors would themselves have to be long, etc.!

If [the shape of length, etc.] were a discrete and unique reality pervading the composites of colors, then, because it is both unique and pervasive it would be found in each and every part, since it would be concomitantly present in all parts. It would not then be unique, however, for it would abide separately in all the parts.

Moreover, this [theory] refutes your own [Vaibhāṣika] tenet that the ten spheres are all composites of atoms, and it confirms the [Vaiśeṣika] thesis of Kaṇāda's followers that substances exist in the parts because they pervade all the parts, i.e., in all the composite physical matter so united.

[Our explanation is that] the notion of "length" occurs when one sees a great quantity lying in a single direction. The notion of "short" occurs when one sees a small quantity lying in one direction. The notion of "square" occurs when one sees [a figure that is] equal in four directions. The notion of "circle" occurs when one sees [a figure that is] full in all directions. The notion of "high" occurs when one sees a protrusion jutting out from a center. The notion of "low" occurs when one sees a hollow indentation in a center. The notion of "even" occurs when one sees a surface that is level. The notion of "uneven" occurs when one sees a surface that is irregular. We conceive various different notions of shape as we roll out and inspect a brocaded tapestry, but, just as with colors, this does not mean that these various physical shapes really exist together in the same one section. If we were to allow this to be the case, then in each and every section we would engender the notions of all the shapes. This is not what happens, however. Therefore, physical shapes have no distinct reality. The colors seen in a squareshaped piece of linen do not simultaneously engender the notion of length, such as might be [engendered] by a row of trees or a column of ants. There is no logical error here!

781c

If this is true [that shape and color are not distinct substances], then how is it that from a distance and in a dark place we do not discern color but we do discern shape?

How is it that we do not discern the shape of [individual] trees and yet can discern the shape of a row of trees? Now, apart from the [individual]

trees there is no separate row [of trees]. Rather, in distant or darkened composite matter neither color nor shape is discernible. Even when we can perceive [that something is there], it remains unclear and we wonder what it is that we are seeing. We conclude that we apprehend only color [and not shape]. Our vision is indistinct when we are far away [from the observed object] and in darkness. Therefore, [the objection is invalid and] it is not logically proven that a communicative act is shape.

2. Theory of the Vātsīputrīyas and Sāṃmitīya: The Communicative Act as Movement

Another theory [of the Vātsīputrīya and the Sāṃmitīya] holds that a bodily act of communication consists in movement, engendered by mental states that take [movement] as object.

Why does [this theory] repeat [the claim that a bodily act of communication] is engendered by mental states that take that as object?

In order to exclude the physical movement of the lips, because that [movement] is engendered by mental states that take as object the enunciation of language.

What does the term “movement” mean?

It means a change of position.

In what sphere is [movement] included?

It is included in the sphere of physical form.

How does one know that [a bodily act of communication] is a change in position?

Because no specifying characteristic can be ascertained [in the bodily act beyond its change in position].

Critique of the Theory that the Communicative Act is Movement

This reasoning [that it must be a change in position just because we cannot ascertain the specifying characteristics of things] is invalid. Let us use as an example the heating of objects [such as pottery, or in cooking food]. Although [the product] has come into direct contact with [agents that transform it, such as] fire, sunlight, snow, vinegar, etc., and the causes for all these heatings are indeed different, one cannot ascertain these specifying characteristics [in the finished product]. Nevertheless, the [product’s] later state differs from its

former state. This is analogous [to the case of a bodily act of communication, so you cannot claim that simply because we cannot ascertain its specifying characteristics the bodily act of communication has no change beyond its change in position, because we cannot ascertain those characteristics even when things clearly do change].

Another example: comparable bunches of grass to be burned as fuel each produce different flames. Although they are different, we cannot ascertain their specifying characteristics. Nevertheless, those comparable [bunches of grass] are certainly different. This is also analogous [with the bodily act of communication. So although we cannot ascertain the specifying characteristics of those acts, we should not conclude that they are all identical, except for the change in the position of that body].

Suppose that when a fired product came into direct contact with the cause [of its firing] its characteristics as a fired product did not immediately arise—even afterward they would not arise because that cause would not have changed. If the comparable bunches of grass to be burned as fuel did not each produce different flames, then the flames would have no cause to differ, yet they do differ in their dimensions, luminescence, and heat.

Therefore, it does not follow that because specifying characteristics [of a bodily act] cannot be ascertained, we must conclude that [a bodily act of communication] is a change of position. [Rather,] we must [more] carefully examine and understand these specifying characteristics.

782a

We claim that [a bodily act of communication] is a change in the position [of the body] because a cause for the extinction [of such things as bodies] cannot be ascertained. [Such things as bodies have a certain duration and do not perish from moment to moment, as they belong to the category of things that do not perish instantaneously. Therefore, the only specifying characteristic of the bodily act of communication must be its change in position.]

This is also unreasonable. It is like mind, mental states, sound, light, flames, etc., [all of which you include in the category of things that do perish from moment to moment without a cause]. What cause for extinction do these things have? Yet they do perish from moment to moment. This applies also to the other things [you hold to have a certain duration]. Extinction does not depend on a cause.

Mind, etc. do have a cause for extinction, however—each and every item [included in our list of mind, mental states, sound, light, flame, etc.] is itself characterized by impermanence.

Why then does this not apply to other things [and not just your restricted list]? You recognize that the extinction of mind, etc. does not depend on a cause. If that is true of mind etc., why is it not true of other things too?

If, in the case of things other than [the impermanent mind, etc.] extinction did not depend on a cause, [for example, the destruction of wood by fire,] then the material nature [of the firewood] could not be ascertained even before the wood had come into contact with flame, because [if the wood perishes from moment to moment without any other cause, then] its later state would be the same as its former state. How then could it be perceived at all?

[Let us take flame and sound, which you admit perishes from moment to moment without any cause.] Before the wind has contacted the lamp and before the hand has grasped the bell, the lamp's flame and the bell's sound are distinctly perceptible, but this is not the case after [they have been touched by the wind or grasped by the hand]. However, the extinction of the flame and the sound do not depend on the wind or the hand [because they spontaneously perish from moment to moment]. The same applies to the firewood. This should present no logical difficulty. [All things perish from moment to moment and need no cause for their extinction.]

Moreover, even if [we grant that] the firewood is destroyed because of the fire and its material nature cannot be perceived, then, at the very moment it comes into contact [with the fire] one would not perceive it, since when it has come into contact it is altered.

Moreover, all heated products have degrees: slightly, medium, and completely [heated], although the external cause [of the fire] remains unchanged. Although these differences in the characteristics of what is heated do occur, their cause is [the unchanged external fire]. Now, how could [the fire] be both the cause for the later occurrence of the products fired and also the cause for their prior extinction? It is impossible that that because of which a thing arises should also be that because of which it is destroyed. Two contrary states do not have a single common cause. Common sense confirms this! Conditioned things do not depend on a cause for their extinction; they perish spontaneously. Whether or not they are perceived as they were, we must recognize that this is the specific

characteristic of either the evolutions or the extinctions of their continuities, because they have a subtle progression.

Moreover, if things that are destroyed did indeed have a cause [for their destruction], and thus there is nothing that is destroyed without a cause, then the mind and mental states, etc., [which you assert need no cause for their extinction], would need a cause for their extinction too, just as they need a cause for their arising. Yet it is not true that there is a separate impermanence [for things] different from mind etc. Common sense confirms this!

Moreover, since these causes [for extinction] would differ, the extinctions would also be different, since fire, sunlight, snow, and vinegar differ and the products prepared [with them also] differ.

Moreover, a thing already destroyed would again be destroyed, because it would be granted a cause, just as physical form, etc.

Therefore, extinction definitely has no cause. Because extinction has no cause, as soon as something occurs it immediately perishes. Thus we conclude that [a bodily act of communication] is not a change of place.

We claim that this state [of a bodily act of communication] is indeed a change of position because no cause for the arising [of a bodily act of communication] is perceptible.

This is unreasonable because there is a cause for the arising [of a bodily act of communication]. The prior state serves as cause for the later state. It is just as the mind of a previous moment issues in the mind of a later moment. It is just as a prior [moment of] heating issues in a later [moment of] heating; just as milk issues in curdled cream; just as grape juice issues in wine, or as wine issues into vinegar. Not the slightest thing changes position. Since there is no change of position, what movement is there?

Moreover, [in your theory movement can take place in certain things, such as physical bodies, because they are not destroyed from moment to moment but have a certain duration of existence]. If they have such duration, however, then they would have no movement—only something that is unmoving would have stable duration. Even if a thing has no duration, [as we claim,] it would still have no movement because something that perishes as soon as it arises precludes movement.

782b

If this is true, what is it that we observe as movement [in changes of position]?

That which is seen in another place is not the same thing as before.
How do you know that it is not the same thing as before?

Because new things arise in sundry places, like flames from a grass fire or the play of shadows. The shadow of one place is not seen at another place. A stationary form does not move but sunlight moves off and comes back and one can see the shade that is produced, either long or short, or changing. Moreover, when one covers the light only small streaks occur.

You are very critical! Why all these subtle objections against a change of position? How can you be sure that what is seen in another place is not the same thing as before?

We must repeat the above reasoning as proof. As we have explained, if there is duration then there would be no movement, and so forth.

Moreover, even though an external cause of fire, etc. does not change, afterward differences are perceived. Thus, we conclude that from moment to moment there is a different thing.

Moreover, despite your argument that what is seen in another place is the selfsame thing as before because there is no cause for these differences, you have given no reason to show that it is indeed the same thing as before. So why not grant that it is not the same thing as before? Both of these assertions [that it is the same thing as before and that it is not] remain unproven. Therefore, the assertion about change of place is invalid.

3. Theory of the Sauryodayika-Dārṣṭāntika: The Communicative Act as Wind

The Sauryodayika theory holds that all activity in fact does not change position, since conditioned things, of their nature, are destroyed from moment to moment. However, there is a distinct reality that is the cause for a special thought. This reality, arising in dependence on the hand, the foot, and so forth, activates that hand or foot and is the reason something arises in a different position. This is what is termed movement and bodily communication.

In what sphere is it included?

In the sphere of physical form.

If this is true, then why can [this special reality] not be seen with the eye, as are all the colors [in the sphere of physical form]? If it cannot be seen, it does not communicate to others. Why then call it communicative? How does

one even know this reality in fact exists? How does this reality cause the body itself to move into another position and arise in a different manner?

We claim that the wind, arisen [internally] from a special thought, is this [reality]. The very essence of the wind element is movement. It is the general cause whereby the foot changes its position. Apart from the wind, what [other] element of movement can one identify?

Furthermore, even grasses and leaves have no separate movement apart from the wind. How could they move about? Yet when the wind touches them they all naturally begin to move. This is why we should conclude that this [wind element] causes the hand to move its position. Why dither about other theories? [Other things] either by their essence or by their activity cannot engender any reality capable of movement.

Critique of the Theory that the Communicative Act is Wind

You incorrectly hold that the wind, engendered by a special thought, is the generative cause whereby the hand alters its position, and that this is a bodily act of communication. Since the wind has nothing whereby it communicates, however, how can you call it communicative?

Furthermore, how can you claim that the sphere of the tangible, [which includes the wind,] is either morally good or bad? This is not [the theory of] a disciple of the Buddha!

782c

If you incorrectly claim that a special thought causes the body itself to arise in different positions, and that this bodily act is then bodily communication, such a bodily communication is [only] a verbal designation and not real, because the body itself is essentially a composite of many elements.

Moreover, how can that which is not communicative be termed communicative? The nose and [the other parts of the body] do not communicate with others.

Moreover, if you hold that the sense of smell [and the activities of the other parts of the body] are either morally good or bad, this is not [a theory of] a disciple of the Buddha!

If you incorrectly hold that physical color, arising from a special thought, would be bodily communication, [we remind you that] physical color does not arise from any special thought, it arises from its own seeds (*bījas*) and a special wind. Moreover, if you hold that physical color is either good or bad, this is not [a theory of] a disciple of the Buddha!

Even if the essence of physical color is not a bodily communication, its arising in other positions can still be a bodily communication.

Good heavens! You artfully exhaust your abilities discussing the act of communicating and assiduously pile up whirling images. Even with the best of effort, however, you cannot validate your demonstration. Why continue to weary yourself in this regard? Who could prove that this arising [of physical color] has a special reality [apart from physical color itself]? If the arising you propose is not homogeneous with physical form, etc., and what is seen is not homogeneous with the eye, then how could the observer ever know of its existence? And if it were invisible, how could it be termed communicative? It was explained above that [the wind] cannot communicate to others! Moreover, if physical color is either morally good or bad, one could claim that it engenders bodily acts of communication, but physical color is neither morally good or bad, as we have explained above. Likewise, its arising is [neither good or bad]. Therefore, it most certainly is not the bodily act of communication!

If this is true, then acts of the body would be exclusively noncommunicative, [as the Sarvāstivāda and Vaibhāṣika propose]!

What do you identify as “noncommunicative”?

I refer to the physical form of discipline included within the sphere of thought.

Then, in the realm of desire can a good noncommunicative [act] be elicited apart from a communicative act?

What problem is there if in the realm of desire there is such a noncommunicative [act]?

It would have to flow from thought, as in the realm of form, [where noncommunicative acts are not engendered from communicative acts but from a strong thought]. Then, when one has another thought or is unconscious, there would be neither restraint nor its absence.

We avoid this error because we claim that [a noncommunicative act] endures for a time, since it has been projected at the appointed time by the recitation [of the Rules of Discipline].

How then could one who, when the *Scripture on Discipline* is recited, keeps silent and says nothing during the appointed time [for confession] incur the transgression of lying?

Moreover, [if a noncommunicative act always comes from a communicative act], then there could be no morally neutral act of the body, because the noncommunicative [act] is only of the two varieties [of morally good and bad].

Also, there could be no bodily acts that are both good and bad at the same moment, since all noncommunicative [acts] have a definite continuity. A weak thought does not engender a noncommunicative act, while that engendered by a strong thought maintains a definite continuity.

Part Two

The Structure of the Maturation of Action

1. Theory of the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika: The Present Existence of Past Acts

Even though one follows his whims and imagines really existent physical acts of body and speech, still he cannot demonstrate that they are good or bad. Why? Because what some call physical acts are entirely abandoned at the end of life. How could they have a future result that is either agreeable or disagreeable?

Some [of the Vaibhāṣika thinkers] say, “Why is this unreasonable? Past acts essentially and really do exist, and can produce their fruit in the future.”

Critique of the Theory that Past Acts Really Exist

Pimples popping out of a boil! You claim even that past acts essentially exist! The past means that which has previously existed but now no longer exists. How can you claim that [past acts] essentially and really exist? 783a

If you are correct, then how could the Bhagavat himself have said:

*Acts, even after a hundred years pass by,
Still do not perish. When they encounter the convergence of
[Proper] conditions and an [appropriate] occasion,
They necessarily bear their fruit.*

What does this phrase “they do not perish” mean? It clearly means that past acts do not lack their results, just as is shown in the latter half of the stanza. Who does not admit that good or bad acts produce their results long afterward? However, we must examine with care just how they produce those results. Is it due to a special evolution in one’s mental continuity, just as rice seeds produce their fruit? Or is it because their specific natures remain unchanged over a long time and thus produce their results?

It is admissible to hold that they produce their results because of a special evolution of mental continuity. If they produce their results because their specific natures remain unchanged over a long time, however, then you are saying that these acts essentially do not come to an end even after a long time.

Our claim about these acts is that they are said to come to an end not because their specific natures do not exist but because they have no further activity.

How is it that they have no further activity?

Because they no longer can project a future result.

Why are they unable to project a future result?

Because having already projected that result, they are without ability in its regard and cannot project it again. This is just as how things that have already arisen do not arise again.

Since there is no limitation to the flow of similar results [of acts once performed], why do they not project other similar results?

One would expect that a present result, having already been projected once, would not necessarily project again. The essence of the act does not perish but remains eternally in the present.

Why then does it not eternally project the result it has brought about?

Have I not just explained that it is unable to project again its already projected result, just as a thing that has already arisen does not arise again? Why do you keep raising this objection?

Even though you have treated this above you have not resolved the difficulty. An act that essentially exists forever must be coextensive with time. Being eternal, it should eternally project its results in the present. It should constantly be able to arise anew as at its inception.

We hold that although a past act essentially exists it is not present, inasmuch as it lacks activity.

This is not admissible! Indeed, existing forever by its essence it should always have activity in the present. Besides, in your theory all past things have the activity to give forth their results. Why not then in the present?

We hold that the present refers only to the activity of grasping a result in dependence on a multitude of factors.

This reasoning doesn't hold. Since the meaning of activity is univocal, there would be things simultaneously present and past.

Now, the past denotes the absence of activity to grasp a result, while the present denotes the existence of an activity to give forth a result. When this activity is exhausted [acts are] said to come to an end.

It then follows that all these things would both perish and then perish again. Consequently, it would follow that [things] arise and then arise again. Therefore, the reasoning behind your theory is invalid. How can anything be said to be able to project a result?

783b

We hold that it disposes other factors that lead to its later arising.

When at the last moment [an arhat] has exhausted all impure outflows, he clearly does not project future results because they no longer arise. Thus, his thoughts are certainly not present. They are neither annihilated again nor do they enter into the past. If at first they have no activity in the present, then how can you claim that later they fail and perish?

We hold that, although they lack activity [in the present] they can still be destroyed again [later]. This is how a past act must again be annihilated.

If [a past act] has already been annihilated and then is annihilated again, it follows that something that has arisen again will once more arise. This contradicts what you have asserted above.

We hold that even though the thoughts [of an arhat who has exhausted outflows] do have the activity to engender subsequent results, because conditions are lacking the subsequent results do not arise.

This is not reasonable. If a result is never engendered, how can you know that they have the activity to engender it? You are forced to state that these thoughts [of the arhat] both counter and harmonize with two conditions, because they would both exist and not exist: even though they arise from a cause they lack any activity to engender a subsequent result! Therefore, this theory that in sundry modes [a past act] can project a result is logically invalid.

Rather, we should conclude that because a seed can nourish a result, we can speak about the projection of results. Your theory holds that the past and the future both really exist. Then how would the future not be able to project a result, just as the present does? If everything always exists, would anything essentially ever not exist? Yet the scriptural passage [cited above] says that [acts] “produce their results when they encounter a convergence of conditions and occasion.” You should explain just what, how, and in which state [an act] can be described as “disposing other [factors] that lead to the future

arising [of results],” called the projection of results because everything always exists [in your theory]. Therefore, we deem invalid this theory that holds that past acts essentially and really exist and can realize the future results they give forth.

2. The Theory of the Early Sāṃmitīya: Special Realities—The Increase and the Imperishable

Then one must admit that the two acts of body and speech, whether morally good or bad, engender a special reality in the continuity of the aggregates, which essentially and really exist and which is included among the aggregate of formations not associated with mind. Some, [i.e., Mahāsaṃgīkas] call this reality the increase, while others, [the Sāṃmitīyas,] call it the imperishable. It is because of this reality that one can realize future results, whether agreeable or disagreeable. One must grant that mental acts must have such a reality. Otherwise, when an alternate mind arises and the [former mind] disappears, how could that [former act] realize a future result if such a special reality were not elicited within the mental continuity? Therefore, one must certainly admit that there is such a reality.

Critique of the Theory of the Special Realities of Increase and Imperishability

783c If this is true, then, when one first studies a text and recalls it to memory after a long period of time has elapsed, , or when one at first sees or hears things and recalls a memory of those things after a long period of time has elapsed, at what instant is this reality [that enables one to remember] engendered?

Moreover, when one first enters the concentration of cessation, what reality is elicited by the mind whereby one might later return from that concentration and elicit a mind leaving concentration?

Moreover, if one were to dye the flowers of a citron tree with the juice of purple lac, after both [the dye and flower] perish, what reality is engendered whereby the later result is that the pith of the fruit has a red color?

Therefore, we distance ourselves from this imagined special reality engendered by the two acts of body and speech.

3. Vasubandhu's Sautrāntika Theory: The Evolutions of Mental Continuity

However, we conclude that a special kind of volition does exercise its permeations on the mental continuity, causing it to engender its activity. It is due to the special evolution of such activity that the varieties of future results occur. This is similar to dyeing the flowers of a citron tree with the juice of purple lac—when the evolution of its continuity reaches its term the pith of the fruit is colored red. We should recognize that the permeations of inner states of consciousness is analogous.

When then do you not allow that the two acts of body and speech also permeate the mental continuity?

Acts of body and speech become morally good or bad because they are engendered from thought. Since they become morally good or bad because of thought, it does not follow that they themselves can give forth future results in a different mental continuity, either agreeable or disagreeable. It is not that one thing performs the act and another experiences the result. Although in fact an already performed act terminates, the mental continuity that has been so permeated does experience a special evolution of its potentialities and can realize future results, either agreeable or disagreeable.

Part Three

The Continuity of Maturation

1. On Emergence from the Concentration of Cessation

The question arises: When the mental continuity of one abiding in a concentration of the cessation [of all mental activity] or among the unconscious gods is severed, how can an act prior [to those unconscious states] realize a future result, either agreeable or disagreeable, [viz., the reemergence of conscious life in any of the destinies]?

The theory of some [Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika thinkers] holds that in this life a mind previously permeated necessarily returns to its continuity and thus realizes its results, either agreeable or disagreeable.

If [consciousness] has already been severed for some time, however, what can cause it to reconnect [with conscious life]?

The mind entering into concentration is the immediately antecedent and similar condition whereby it can bring about that reconnection.

That [mind] has already come to an end long before. How then can it serve as the immediately antecedent condition? We have already refuted the notion that past acts can realize results. By the same token, this too is logically refuted. Therefore, the mind that emerges from those concentrations is unconnected with [the mind prior to entry into those concentrations].

Some others [among the Dārṣantikas] hold that the mind after [emergence from those unconscious states] returns because of the force of seeds that adhere in the sense organs. These seeds that engender mind and mental states rely as needed on two continuities, mental continuity and sense organ continuity.

Do the scriptures not teach that “Thinking and things [thought] are the causes that engender thinking consciousness?” Apart from thought, how can thinking consciousness arise [supported only in seeds in the sense organs]?

You should recognize that the seeds of thought are sometimes referred to as thought [as in the scripture], as they speak about the result in place of the cause, just as one might refer to hunger or thirst in place of the tangible.

Yet how can each thought and mental state arise from these [two] continuities of seeds? It is never observed that sprouts engender things from [two sets of] seeds, or anything like this. It is possible that [seeds] engender a single fruit in reliance on many conditions, but the arising of a single fruit never comes from two seeds.

In your theory of returning [consciousness] you fail to avoid the error outlined above. This is to say, when the mental continuity of one abiding in a concentration bereft of mind or among the unconscious gods is severed, how can an act prior [to those unconscious states] realize a future result, either agreeable or disagreeable, [i.e., the reemergence of conscious life in any of the destinies]?

Yet others hold that this opinion is erroneous.

784a

What opinion?

The opinion that these states are devoid of mind. Some hold that these states do possess mind. This is how we avoid this error. In the Inquiry, Blessed Vasumitra says, "Those who hold that the concentration of cessation is entirely devoid of mind encounter this error. However, I teach that even the concentration of cessation has a subtle mind and thus I avoid this fault." He also quotes the scriptures to demonstrate his interpretation, such as a passage that states, "In those who abide in the concentration of cessation, the formations of the body are eliminated, . . . but the sense organs remain unchanged, undestroyed, and consciousness does not leave the body."

Well then, what is the consciousness present in that state?

Some hold that it is the sixth thinking consciousness.

Yet a scripture states, "Thinking and things [thought] are the causes that engender thinking consciousness." The convergence of these three issues is contact, and with contact sensation, conceptualization, and volition arise. How then could the [unconscious] states actually have a thinking consciousness without the convergence of these three, (i.e., thinking, things [thought], and thinking consciousness)? Even if this was possible, how could these three come together yet there is no contact? Even if that was possible, how could contact be present without sensation and conceptualization? We are

speaking, however, about a concentration that has extinguished sensation and conceptualization.

There is yet another interpretation of the Bhagavat's teaching that "sensation causes craving." Not every sensation invariably causes craving. This same can apply to contact. Not every contact invariably causes sensation.

In other scriptures the Bhagavat himself has examined this issue. He explained that "all sensation engendered by contact that is qualified by primal ignorance is the cause engendering craving." Nowhere has he identified the contact that engenders sensation, however. Since he has not specified [the different kinds of contact], yours is not a good interpretation.

Yet another interpretation holds that the assertion that the phrase "the convergence of the three issues in contact" means that contact arises when these three factors have the force to come together. In these [unconscious] states, however, the three factors lack the force to engender contact, or to engender sensation or conceptualization, since the mind that enters into concentration is extinguished. If indeed these states of concentration lack contact, then obviously sensation and conceptualization will be absent. Therefore, in these states, all that remains is the mental consciousness without any mental states.

If this is true, how can the mental consciousness in these states be morally good, defiled, or undefined?

What error is entailed in these [alternatives]?

If their nature is morally good, how then can that good nature not be associated with the roots of goodness, such as detachment and so forth? And if they are associated with the roots of goodness, such as detachment and so forth, then how could there be no contact?

What we assert is that this consciousness is good because it is projected by an immediately antecedent and similar condition that is good.

This reasoning does not follow, since three kinds of mind, [morally good, bad, or neutral], may arise immediately after a good mind. A good mind projected by the force of [antecedent] good roots, however, would be incapable of eliminating detachment and so forth, [and thus could not emerge as either bad or neutral]. And if it lacks good roots, it follows that it could not become good. Yet this concentration of cessation is good, just as cessation is good.

[On the other hand,] if it is of a defiled nature, how then can that defiled nature not be associated with the passions, such as covetousness and so forth?

If it is associated with the passions, such as covetousness and so forth, then how could there be no contact? As the Buddha himself has taught in the *Scripture of Ten Questions*, “All the aggregates of sensation, conceptualization, and formation have contact as their cause.” Moreover, if a concentration without conceptualization is not deemed to be defiled, this applies even more to the concentration of cessation.

784b If you affirm that [this mental consciousness] is unobstructed and undefined, [i.e., morally neutral,] then does it arise from maturation, from deportment, from craftsmanship, or from magical illusions? [These are the only morally undefined states taught in the *Great Book of Options* that you follow.]

What error is entailed here?

If [this mental consciousness] arises from maturation, then how immediately after the concentrated mind [attains to] the summit of mundane being can it still engender a mind born from maturation that pertains to the realm of desire, because in the lower eight stages of meditation [such a mind] has been severed. Again, how could it be that immediately after one emerges from this mind [of maturation pertaining to the realm of desire], one attains and elicits a mind of utter non-agitation? In the *Mahākauṣṭhila-sūtra* a question is asked, “After one emerges from the concentration of cessation, how many contacts does one experience?” [The Buddha] answered, “Dear student, one experiences three contacts: contact with non-agitation, contact with the absence of being, and contact with the absence of image.”

Moreover, if [this mental consciousness] is projected by previous acts of a maturing mind, what reason exists whereby the temporal force [of those acts] present prior to the concentration of cessation does not go beyond the time period for emerging from that cessation?

If the mind of concentration at the summit of being, focused on cessation, were to reach its termination and then come to manifest as a mind maturing karmic results, projected by the permeations of former acts in the realm of desire, then why has it not done this during the previous states [of meditation leading up to that concentration of cessation]?

Material forms arisen from elicited maturation that have been engendered by that [previous mind] have already been severed and do not continue. Why then, when that mind engendered by maturation is severed [in the concentration of cessation], would they reconnect [later upon emergence]?

Perhaps [this mental consciousness is undefined because it relates to] department, craftsmanship, or magical illusion.

Why would this mind take as its object department, etc.? In the absence of contact [with them,] how could it have such activity?

Moreover, you admit that the nine progressive concentrations and the eight liberations, all of which are cultivated, are all by nature good. Thus, it does not follow that in these states there would arise either a defiled or a morally undefined mind.

Moreover, employing the summit of being, focused on cessation as objective, and supported by a concentration that reflects on quietude, one realizes entry into the concentration that eliminates sensation and conceptualization. In the *Mahākauṣṭhila-sūtra* a question about the concentration of cessation is posed: “How many are the causes and conditions on which one relies for entry into the concentration on the imageless realm?” [The Buddha] answered, “Dear monk, there are two causes and conditions dependent on which one enters the concentration of the imageless realm: the absence of reflection of any image and correct reflection on the imageless realm.” If, as you admit, there is a mental consciousness in this concentration of cessation, what would its object be? What would be its mode of operation?

What if its object is cessation and its mode of operation is quietude?

Then how could it not be good? If you grant that it is good, then why not admit that it is associated with the roots of goodness, such as detachment and so forth? If you grant that it is so associated, why then not admit that contact is its cause for arising?

What if it has another object and another mode of operation?

How then could one engender a distracted mind immediately after the mind of entry into the concentration of cessation? Isn't this a contradiction? If you imagine that there exists another undefined state [apart from the four discussed above], you are not correct, because of the two causes [for concentration given above in the passage from the *Mahākauṣṭhila-sūtra*]. Therefore, you have incorrectly understood the meaning of the scripture and rashly imagined that a sixth mental consciousness is always present in the concentration of cessation, and thus claim that these states have mind.

Vasubandhu's Theory: The Subtle Mind

Well then, do you hold that the concentration of cessation is a state entirely devoid of mind? Or does it have mind?

784c

It is as some of the Sutrāpṛamāṇikas think: a subtle mind is present in these states. A consciousness that matures results, endowed with all the seeds [of those results], from the first moment of taking birth until final death, evolves in continuity without interruption. Throughout the various lifetimes, because it is the cause of their maturation the various different continuities [that characterize those different lifetimes] flow forth, until it is finally eliminated at cessation. Indeed, because this consciousness is uninterrupted, one can say that there is mind during these mindless states. One can also say that there is no mind, however, because the complex of the other six consciousnesses do not function at all in these states. It is because of the dominant force of the mind preparatory to the concentration of cessation that the seeds of the six consciousnesses are temporarily suppressed and remain unmanifested. This is why [those states] are said to be devoid of mind, but they are not entirely so devoid.

Mind has two varieties. The first is a mind that accumulates innumerable seeds. The second is a polymorphous mind that functions with differences in object and modality. Since this second [polymorphous] mind is lacking in these states of the concentration of cessation, we say that it is “without mind.” It is just as if a chair has one leg but is missing the other [three], we say that it doesn't have its legs. In states in which the seeds of the [six] consciousnesses are subdued, the consciousness that matures results evolves in a special way from moment to moment, as the force of that suppression gradually diminishes [them] until it is entirely eliminated, just as the heat of boiling water or the velocity of a released arrow gradually diminishes until it is exhausted. [When the subduing force is exhausted] the seeds of the [six] consciousnesses again engender their results. At first the mental consciousness is again engendered from the seeds, and later the other [sense] consciousnesses are gradually engendered as conditions warrant. As explained above, the consciousness that matures results harbors the various seeds of all things. When it becomes manifest through the good or bad permeations of the various other consciousnesses and their concomitant states, then the force of the seeds inevitably increase. Because of this special evolution of its continuity and in accord with the powerful maturation of the seeds and the

auxiliary conditions one encounters, one then engenders future results, whether agreeable or disagreeable. There is a stanza that supports this interpretation:

Mind together with unlimited seeds
 Continues in a constant stream,
 Encountering conditions for specific permeations,
 These seeds increase in the mind.
 The force of the seeds gradually matures and
 Gives forth its fruit when conditions converge.
 Just as when one has dyed citron flowers,
 The pith of the ripening fruit will be stained red.

In support of this, the Bhagavat declared the following stanza in the *Great Vehicle Scripture on the Explication of the Underlying Meaning*:

The depth and subtlety of the appropriating consciousness
 With all its seeds is like a violent torrent.
 I have not revealed this to worldlings,
 Fearing they would imagine it to be a self.

2. The Storehouse Consciousness

Since it continues onward and has the ability to appropriate a body [upon rebirth into another life], it is called the appropriating consciousness. It is also called the storehouse consciousness as it encompasses and stores the seeds of all states. It is also called the consciousness that matures results because [in it] the projected actions of previous lives mature.

If one does not admit the existence of this maturing consciousness, then what consciousness can appropriate a body? There is no other consciousness that is adequate for taking up an entire body and remaining without abandoning it until the end of a lifetime.

785a

Moreover, what [other] sphere or aggregate is able to sever the passions and their residues when their antidote arises?

We think that aggregate is found in the very mind that counters [the passions and their residues].

This is incorrect. How could that which conforms to those residues and passions be able to counter [them]?

Moreover, when a mind, defiled, good, or without outflows, is generated among beings born into the formless realm, where would these maturing states that support those destinies lodge? Alternately, you would have to admit that in these destinies the pervasive presence of states that are not maturation or that are unconnected [with maturation], but this contradicts reason.

Moreover, the result of a non-returner (*anāgāmin*), when born into the summit of being, is the eradication of the remaining outflows and the cultivation of the path that counters [them]. Now, when the absence of outflows occurs in the sphere of nonbeing, what is the specific reality at the summit of being, what is the substance that continues to exist whereby [such a non-returner] is deemed not to be dead? It is not true that a homogeneous existence or a vital force, [as proposed by the Vaibhāṣika theory,] exist separately as realities apart from the mind and material form. These two are only metaphors for the successive progression of the maturing aggregates. This successive progression is not a distinct substance; it is just like the successive progression of weeds in a field, [which does not entail any reality apart from the weeds themselves]. Therefore, we must indeed conclude that apart from the complex of the six consciousnesses, there does exist the essence of this seminal consciousness, as described above.

In support of this consciousness, in the canon of the Tāmraparṇīya [the Buddha] established what is called the branching consciousness [between two lifetimes]. The canon of the Mahāsāṃgika calls it the foundational consciousness. The canon of the Mahīśāsaka speaks about the aggregate that remains until the end of transmigration.

What is the object and the mode of operation of this consciousness?

Its object and mode of operation cannot be identified.

Then why call it a consciousness?

In your theory there is another consciousness in states of the concentration of cessation, object, and mode of operation, which are difficult to perceive. The same applies here.

Within which of the appropriating aggregates is this consciousness included?

It is only reasonable to answer that it is included within the appropriating aggregate of consciousness.

If that is the case, then how do you interpret the scriptural passage, “What is called the appropriating aggregate of consciousness? This refers to the complex of the six consciousnesses.” Or again, “Conditioned by consciousness is name and form. Consciousness refers to the six consciousnesses.”

We must recognize that these scriptural [passages] have a special, underlying intent. It is just as a scripture says, “What is the aggregate of karmic formation? This refers to the complex of the six volitions.” This does not mean that in the aggregate of karmic formation there are no other states, however. The same applies here.

What is this underlying intent when [the scripture] speaks about the six [consciousnesses] and not about any other [consciousness]?

It is as the Bhagavat explained in the *Explication of the Underlying Meaning*:

I have not revealed it to worldlings
Fearing they would imagine it to be a self.

Why would the foolish imagine it to be a self?

This [consciousness] has no beginning and lasts until the end of transmigration. Having a subtle mode of operation, it does not change. However, the supports, objects, modes of operation, and varieties of the six consciousnesses are gross and easily understood, since they are associated with the passions and the practices of countering [those passions], and since they establish the categories of defilement and purification. In essence, they are consciousness as result. Therefore, we infer that this seminal consciousness does exist.

Because [scriptures] teach only what is appropriate [for their hearers] [the Buddha] did not teach about this causal consciousness in the scriptures, as it would have been just the opposite of [the gross consciousnesses] he had just explained. This was his underlying intent when he spoke about the six [consciousnesses] and not about the [storehouse consciousness]. As we have already explained, in other canons he only spoke of the complex of the six consciousnesses as the branching consciousness. Since the scriptures teach only as appropriate, they are not opposed [to what we propose]. Furthermore, in each of the various canons untold scriptures are no longer extant, as we know from the discussions in the *Rules for Interpretation*. Therefore, we

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cannot assert that the store consciousness has never been discussed in the scriptures; clearly it is reasonable that it was.

If this is true, then one person would have two consciousnesses active simultaneously, the maturing consciousness and the other active consciousnesses.

What error is there in this?

If two consciousnesses are simultaneously active in the same one person, it follows that they would simultaneously establish two sentient beings, for those two consciousnesses would be active in different bodies.

There is no such defect [in our reasoning], since these two consciousnesses evolve in mutual support as cause and result and are not disassociated from each other, and because the maturing consciousness is permeated by the other active consciousnesses. It is not the case, then, that these two consciousnesses are simultaneously active in different persons. Therefore, we avoid this fault in reasoning.

Can you not see that the seed and the result of that seed are different continuities?

In the world we do observe that in the case of blue lotus flowers, the roots and stems have different continuities, which lead to the production of fruit from seed. This also applies to [the two consciousnesses]. Furthermore, whether or not it can be observed by worldly seeing, if you do not grant that the store consciousness exists, you commit the logical errors outlined above. Thus, one must certainly admit that the store consciousness essentially exists apart from the six consciousnesses.

Why then not admit that an essential self exists as the support for the complex of the six consciousnesses?

What would be the characteristics of this self you propose, which you describe as the support of the six consciousnesses? If you admit that like the store consciousness this self continuously arises and perishes, evolving according to conditions, then how is it preferable to this [storehouse] consciousness? Why would you proffer it as a self?

We claim that the essence of the self is one and eternal, forever unchanging.

How then can you say that [such a self] is supported by the permeations of the consciousnesses that [arise] from sensation? Now, these permeations are the causes of the mental continuity thus permeated so that it evolves with

its distinct abilities, just as citron flowers, permeated and dyed by purple lac, engender enabling changes in their continuities. If there were no permeation, there would be no such evolution of different abilities. How then would the many different permeations of former experience, knowledge, and attachment arise much later as differences in memory, knowledge, and attachment?

Moreover, since the essence of the self is not altered, either within or after emerging from unconscious states, there would be no consciousness. So how could a subsequent thinking consciousness and the other [sense consciousnesses] arise?

Moreover, what power does the self have over the consciousnesses that would lead you to think that it is the support of those consciousnesses?

We say that the consciousnesses arise because of the self.

Yet if the essence of a self is forever unaltered, how could the consciousnesses arise, one after the other, at all? Why wouldn't they arise simultaneously and instantaneously?

We suggest that they must wait upon other conditions as aids for their arising.

How can you be sure, then, that the existent self functions apart from these other conditions in engendering [the consciousnesses]?

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We say that the consciousnesses become active in reliance on the self.

As soon as things arise they immediately perish. Indeed, this is what their instability means. How could they last and remain active? Therefore, we do not allow the theory that the essence of the self is the support of the complex of the six consciousnesses. Moreover, the theory that there is a self contradicts the scriptural authority that says that "all things are without self." Your opinion of a unique and eternal self is entirely without true reasoning. It issues solely from your mistaken emotions!

Therefore, we have demonstrated that special volitions simultaneously permeate the store consciousness and cause its continuity to differ in all its evolutions, projecting future results, either agreeable or disagreeable. They are not characterized as bodily or verbal actions, as you assert.

Part Four

Vasubandhu's Sautrāntika Theory on the Nature of Action

If you do not grant that the two acts of body and speech exist, do you not then contradict and slander the scripture on these two kinds of acts?

We neither contradict nor slander it. We are able intelligently to interpret the scripture, so that we commit no error in its regard.

How do you interpret this scripture without error?

We avoid the poison of your opinion. We will explain in detail why the scripture speaks about three acts, what is meant by an act of the body, what the terms “body” and “act” mean, and what the terms “bodily action” and “mental action” signify. These are our questions.

1. The Three Actions in the Scripture

Why then does the scripture only speak of the three acts of body, [speech, and mind] and not about [acts of] sight, and so forth?

The scripture talks about the three acts to show that these three actions comprehend the ten paths of action, because its intent is to encourage those who fear there are too many things to be implemented. In a similar fashion, [the Buddha] summarized the three trainings for Vṛjiputra. Some thought that all acts are exclusively acts performed by the body, not by either speech or mind. So the scripture speaks about the three acts to show that these latter two are also to be performed.

2. The Body and Action

The body denotes a special combination composed of all the basic great elements, [endowed with] sensation. Action denotes a special volition.

3. The Meaning of the Term “Body”

A body is that which is brought about by accumulation, since it is brought about by the accumulation of atoms composed of the great material elements. Some think that the body denotes the accumulation of the various kinds of filth, because it is supported on various impure things. If this were true, however, then there would be no bodies among the gods.

4. The Meaning of the Term “Action”

An act signifies a deed performed with intention by an agent.

5. The Meaning of the Phrase “Bodily Action”

Bodily action denotes the volition that moves a body [to perform a physical act]. There are three types of such volitions: the volition to deliberate, the volition to decide [about that deliberation], and the volition to put [that decision] into effect. The volition that moves the body is itself called a bodily action, because that volition can engender the wind element that projects the bodily continuity into a different place. To be exact, one would say “the act that moves the body,” but here the term “move” has been omitted and the text only says “the act of the body,” just as one might speak simply of “an oil of strengthening” in place of “an oil that increases strength” or simply of a “dust wind” instead of “a wind that moves dust.”

786a *You should admit that in the path of the ten acts [only] the first three acts are included in the acts of the body, i.e., taking life, taking what has not been given, and [engaging in] illicit sexual activity. How does the act of volition deserve the same name?*

Because it is an act of volition that moves the body to commit murder, theft, or [engage in] illicit activity. That which is done through the power of volition to move the body is identified as an act of volition. We commonly say that violent rebels burned down a village or that the fuel cooks the rice, [while in fact it is fire that does both].

Why then is volition called a path of action?

It is called an action because volition has activity. It is called a path of action because it brings about the paths leading to good and bad destinies and then engenders those [destinies]. Alternately, the body that has been moved is the path of the action of volition because the three kinds of acts of volition function in reliance on the [body].

Moreover, killing, stealing, and debauchery are supported on the body, because they arise from an act of volition. Thus they are called bodily actions in accord with convention. Yet, in fact, such actions are themselves neither good or bad; it is by convention that one provisionally establishes their [designations as “good” or “bad”] so that people in the world might cultivate positive volitions and avoid negative volitions through the teachings. They are labeled as good or bad only through provisional designation.

If only acts of volition are good or bad, then why does the Scripture on the Path of Action say “It is because of the threefold [acts] of the body, [i.e., killing, stealing, and committing debauchery,] that a volition initiates action, and then performs and increases it. Because it is bad, it engenders the result of suffering and the maturation of that suffering.”

The meaning of this scriptural passage is that the act of volition, which moves the body, which employs the body as its means, which is supported on the body and which takes killing, stealing, or debauchery as its object, is the cause that influences the resultant maturation of suffering. While they are called three kinds of bodily acts they are brought about by volition. The other volitions, [i.e., deliberation and decision,] are distinct from [the volition that effects bodily communication] and thus are called acts of mind, because they are associated with mind and neither move the body nor emit speech.

If this is true, why then does the scripture speak of two actions: the act of volition and the act that has been willed?

Among the three types of acts explained above, the first two kinds of volition, [deliberation and decision,] are called acts of volition; only the third volition [that effects bodily communication] is called an act that has been willed. There is no error of contradicting the scripture here.

6. The Meaning of the Phrase “Verbal Action”

Speech denotes the enunciation of words. It is called speech because it manifests

the meaning of what one wishes to express. The volition that enunciates speech is named a verbal action. Alternately, speech is the support of syllables, etc., and it is called “speech” because it elucidates meaning by maintaining the syllables, etc. To be exact, we would call it “an act that enunciates speech,” but here the term “enunciates” has been omitted and [the scripture] simply calls it “an act of speech.” The examples are as given above.

7. The Meaning of the Phrase “Mental Action”

Mind signifies consciousness. It is called mind because it can deliberate and move toward the engendering of other [acts] and toward [other] objects. The volition that activates the will is called an act of willing, because it brings about the willfulness to create various affairs, either good or bad. To be exact, we should call it “an act that effects will,” but [the scripture] omits the term “effects” and simply talks about “an act of willing.” The examples are as explained above.

If the three kinds of acts denote only volition, then in a distracted mind, or in an unconscious state in which no mind occurs, how could there be discipline or laxity?

786b Because the seeds permeated by virtue of that special volition are not lost, we speak about discipline or laxity [in these states]. There is no error here. We understand the special volition to communicate either the discipline or laxity that such a superior thought elicits, since this volition permeates these two kinds of superior seeds. As long as these two kinds of seeds have not been lost, we provisionally establish the noncommunicative [acts] of good and bad discipline.

What do you mean when you say that one loses the seeds implanted by this special volition?

We mean that these [seeds] are no longer active causes for engendering a volition either for renunciation or its opposite, as they previously have been.

What can destroy these seeds?

We hold that a volition that engenders a communicative act causes the abandonment of either good or bad discipline, as well as other causes that also lead to their loss.

8. The Principle of the Classification of Actions

The reason [the scripture] does not talk about acts of sight, etc., is because it only treats the acts of effort of sentient beings, not the acts carried out by all the sense spheres.

What are these acts of effort of sentient beings?

The activity brought about by the will of an agent.

What are acts carried out by all the sense spheres?

The separate abilities of the eye, ear, [and the other senses].

The Buddha explained the three actions, whose meaning is deep and subtle.

Relying on reason and doctrine, I have finished this wondrous discourse.

I vow to transfer this merit to save the host of beings,

Influencing them to quickly realize pure enlightenment.

[End of] *A Mahayana Demonstration on the Theme
of Action* [in] One Fascicle

Notes

- ¹ Lambert Schmithausen, in *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy, Part I: Text, Part II: Notes, Bibliography, and Indices* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1987), argues that the theory of the storehouse consciousness developed in direct response to such a problematic and identifies the probable textual origin in the “Basic Section” of the *Yogācārabhūmi*.
- ² This becomes apparent from a comparison of the critical Tibetan text prepared by Gijun Muroji, *Jōgōron: Chibetto yaku kōteihon. The Tibetan Text of the Karma-Siddhi-Prakaraṇa of Vasubandhu with Reference to the Abhidharma-Kośa-Bhāṣya and the Pratītya-Samutpāda-Vyākhyā. Critically edited from the Cone, Derge, Narthang and Peking Editions of the Tibetan Tanjur* (Kyoto: Self-published, 1985). Muroji’s translation includes brief introductory remarks in both Japanese and English, followed by a critically edited Tibetan text along with Xuanzang’s Chinese translation. Following Sumatiśīla’s commentary, Muroji differentiates Vasubandhu’s voice from that of his interlocutors, yet the grammar of Xuanzang’s Chinese at times clearly differs.
- ³ Étienne Lamotte, in his translation of the text, “Le Traite de l’Acte de Vasubandhu (*Karma-siddhi-prakaraṇa*)” *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 4 (1935–1936): 151–282; English translation by Leo M. Pruden, *Karmasiddhi Prakaraṇa: The Treatise on Action by Vasubandhu* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), restricted his attention to the Tibetan text and to Xuanzang’s Chinese, and did not make use either of Vimokṣaprajñā’s Chinese translation or of Sumatiśīla’s commentary. He invariably follows Xuanzang in identifying the lines of argumentation. In contrast, Yamaguchi Susumu, in *Seishin no Jōgōron: Zenkeikai no chūshaku ni yoru gententeki kaimei* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1951), has made use of all the relevant materials and this work remains the best source for a comparative study of the text.
- ⁴ Lamotte, trans. Pruden, *Karmasiddhi Prakaraṇa: The Treatise on Action by Vasubandhu*, pp. 36–39.
- ⁵ Stefan Anacker, “A Discussion for the Demonstration of Action (Karma-Siddhi-Prakaraṇa),” in *Seven Works of Vasubandhu, the Buddhist Psychological Doctor* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), p. 85. This translation is from the Tibetan and is guided by Sumatiśīla’s commentary, the *Karmasiddhiṭkā*.

ESSAYS OF SENGZHAO

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Translator's Introduction

Thematic Overview

The collection of texts translated here, four essays and an exchange of letters, plus an introductory chapter, attributed to the scholar-monk Sengzhao (374–414 C.E.) is perhaps best seen, in the most general terms, as an extended meditation on a perennial theme in Chinese religio-philosophical reflection, the theme of sagehood. As the *Essays* investigate the nature and attributes of the sage—the sage's cognition, his world, his activities, and his mode of being in time—they take up a broad range of religio-philosophical topics, from self-cultivation and charisma to ontology and language, action and power. While Sengzhao draws on Indian Buddhist religio-philosophical resources (mainly, the Madhyamaka critique of substantializing language and its distinction of two levels of truth), as well as on the native Chinese tradition of philosophical and aesthetic reflection (especially those associated with the “Daoist” classics, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*), the *Essays* resist simple reduction to either, nor can they be explained as a straightforward case of influence or adaptation. Instead, these writings present an original response to a set of concerns unique to Sengzhao, his community, and his times, and as such are an important voice in the religious speculation of early medieval China.

Among the issues explored in these *Essays* are such questions as who is a sage? How is the “sagely mind” different from the mind of the ordinary person? What are the properties of the world that the sage inhabits? If that world is empty (i.e., empty of “substantial being”), what happens in it to the reality of individual things, and what does it mean to say (as is said in the *Essays*) that in it “the power of myriad things is greatly amplified”? If emptiness is not a simple eradication of being, what, then, is it exactly—a state prior to the beingness of beings? An inherent quality of linguistic expression that can never reach any transcendental signifier? Or a mental attitude of withdrawal from engagement with things? Who is capable of becoming a sage? Is this a universal capacity or is it limited to a select few? And how does one attain sagehood? Is this attainment akin to “worldly” attainments

and thus it can be made into a human project? Is such attainment at all possible if all things are really empty, without anything to be attained? Assuming the possibility of sagehood, is it brought about by a process of practice and learning, or rather by letting go and unlearning? Or is it not a process at all but rather a sudden breakthrough? How does the extraordinary cognition of the sage, *prajñā* (transcendental wisdom), affect the functioning and applicability of language? Can the wisdom of *prajñā* be communicated in language or does it inevitably confound all attempts at linguistic expression, ultimately rendering one silent? On the emotive-active side, if for the sage individual desires have ceased, how is it that he or she is able to “respond to things and events with an inexhaustible acuity”? Finally, what about time: if in emptiness things do not display temporal extension (they neither pass away nor endure unchangingly but rather exist in an eternal “now”), does this not present the possibility of a unique type of immortality?

Language and Form

The core texts of the collection translated here, aside from the epistolary exchange and the introductory overview, represent the genre of *lun*, “expository essay” or “disquisition.” This genre started to gain popularity from the late Han period (late second century C.E.) and subsequently emerged as a favorite form of expository writing on political, aesthetic, and religious topics among the literary elites of the Northern and Southern dynasties (late third to sixth centuries). The language of *lun* is highly stylized, rich in tersely structured aesthetic devices such as allusion, alliteration, and parallelisms. *Lun* are as much a demonstration of the author’s literary skill as an expression of philosophical insight or moral integrity. Though often polemical, the rhetoric of *lun* is not primarily argumentative but rather persuasive: it does not rely on strict logical reasoning but instead on an aesthetic appeal designed to solicit the reader’s intellectual and emotional assent. All these characteristics are on ample display in Sengzhao’s *Essays*.

Other noteworthy features of the text are frequent references to Buddhist (mainly “Mahayana”) sutras and *śāstras*, which both structure the discussion and lend it an aura of antiquity and authority; the question-and-answer format (dialogue with a fictitious opponent); and the use of a highly structured pattern of exposition, referred to in scholarship as interlocking parallel structure, or chain-argument, in which two lines of argument are developed simultaneously and intertwined.

Historical Context

Sengzhao lived in a time of turmoil and innovation, referred to by historians as the “Northern and Southern dynasties” era (220–589 C.E.). It began with the fall of the Han empire, a momentous event that ushered in four centuries of political, military, and social upheaval and led to the redefinition of China’s geography, society, and power structures. After almost a century of civil war dominated by the Three Kingdoms (the Shu, Wu, and Wei), the Jin restored a short-lived period of peace (280–316). In 316 the ruling house collapsed, due to internal strife and “barbarian” revolt, and for the next three centuries the areas north of the Yangzi River came to be dominated by non-Han nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes (which established a rapid succession of polities known collectively as the Sixteen Kingdoms). War and catastrophic flooding forced Han populations out of their heartland in the Yellow River basin to the sparsely populated mountainous and forested areas south of the Yangzi.

This tumultuous era was also one of major cultural innovation. As the Han empire fell its imperial orthodoxy, the foundation of classics, historiography, and state-controlled ritual systems, were also brought down. When the dust settled a new open space of unprecedented autonomy in the realms of literature, cosmology, and religion was revealed. Already by the late second and early third centuries, thinkers such as Wang Chong, Wang Bi, and He Yan had launched innovative critiques of Confucian orthodoxy, which reevaluated the foundation of individual and social life by probing the relationships between being and nonbeing, language and reality, the one and the many, and active involvement and eremitic non-action. The intellectual tradition they initiated came to be known as *xuanxue*, “dark learning” or “study of the dark. The word “dark” is an allusion to such Daoist classics as the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Yijing*, in which the concept of darkness figures prominently, and which gained immense popularity in this time.

In the mid-third century, with the increasing alienation of intellectual elites from the structures of state power, a new form of eremitism emerged, epitomized by the so-called Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, a semi-legendary group of poet-recluses. Their works profess a disdain for established mores, political careerism, and literary orthodoxy and celebrate individualism, music, wine, and nature. The elites no longer defined themselves exclusively by hereditary inclusion

in the institutions of state power but through the autonomous cultivation of literary refinement. This is manifested in the emergence of new poetic genres (especially the lyric poem, which expresses individual feelings) and new collections of poetry, as well as in *qingtan*, “pure conversation,” a refined style of conversation rife with bon-mots, literary allusions, puns, and sharp repartée. In later centuries, especially in the south, the very meaning of textual authority came to be redefined in the composition of theoretical treatises on literature, often with strong *xuanxue* overtones, that departed from the traditional orthodox definition of the canon. All of these factors reverberate throughout the *Essays*, with its *xuanxue* vocabulary, its *qingtan* aesthetics, its appeal to the ideal of cultured withdrawal, and its novel approach to the literary canon.

Buddhism and Daoism, the first large-scale institutionalized religions in Chinese history, also emerged in this period. In the last decades of Han rule, in what is now Shandong and Sichuan, mass millenarian religions (mainly the Heavenly Masters, or Tianshi, sect of Daoism) empowered popular rebellions that carved out new social spaces outside of established societal and state structures. After the fall of the Western Jin and the division of China in 316, the southern elites were drawn to literary forms of Daoism, which offered techniques for attaining immortality through bodily and alchemical practices (e.g., Ge Hong and his text, *Master Who Embraces Simplicity*), as well as promising access to the spirits of deceased kin through shamanic revelation (the Shangqing, or Highest Clarity, tradition). Also in the south, around the turn of the fifth century, a new institutional form of Daoism, the Lingbao sect, appropriated the Buddhist doctrine of karma to develop elaborate rituals for the salvation of the dead. This institution was modeled on the Buddhist religion, which by then had become established as a significant presence in China.

Buddhism had been making inroads into China’s vast territory via the Silk Road routes since the turn of the eras. Its sophisticated analyses of the mind and meditation practices attracted members of the literary elite steeped in “dark learning” and “pure conversation.” The social spheres of the monk and the literatus interpenetrated. After China’s split into north and south, the two regions developed divergent models of state-Buddhism relations. In the south, state regulation of Buddhism was mild: rulers patronized the religion, building monasteries and stupas, sponsoring sutra recitation, and granting land for monastic institutions,

in order to accrue spiritual merit and cultural capital, but the ruling powers generally refrained from challenging Buddhism's self-professed autonomy vis-à-vis the state. A more assertive policy toward Buddhism developed in the northern kingdoms, whose nomadic and semi-nomadic non-Han rulers, while often genuinely devoted to the religion, also actively regulated it and used it for purposes of statecraft. For them, the charismatic monks, with their miracle-working powers, were a potent political asset, and Buddhist cosmology, with its ideal of the *cakravartin* ("wheel-turning king"), a model of kingship that is both transcendent and worldly, offered a powerful symbol of political authority.

One of the northern kingdoms, the Later Qin (384–417), fit this profile quite well. Its ruler, the Sinified proto-Tibetan Yao Xing (366–416, r. 393–416), established in his capital, Chang'an, what was to become one of the greatest centers of Buddhist translation and scholarship in history. He imported to Chang'an numerous Indian and Central Asian Buddhist masters and sponsored scripture translation projects on an unprecedented scale. In early 402 he brought to Chang'an the great Kuchean scholar Kumārajīva, lavishing great honors on him, and put him in charge of the translation academy with (according to some traditional accounts) some five hundred learned monks. One of Kumārajīva's chief disciples and colleagues was Sengzhao, then twenty-eight years old.

Biography of Sengzhao

According to Sengzhao's traditional biography, he was born to an impoverished family in 374 in the vicinity of Chang'an. As a young man he earned his living as a copyist, which exposed him to the literary canon of the day. He was especially fond of the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, but ultimately found these texts unsatisfactory. An encounter with the *Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (in the old third-century translation by Zhi Qian of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*) proved pivotal—he was captivated by the text and resolved to direct his efforts toward Buddhism. He studied various forms of Buddhist doctrine, including the Prajñāpāramitā literature and also Mainstream (non-Mahayana) texts. Word of his intellectual prowess and debating skills spread quickly throughout the Chang'an area. In 398 Sengzhao joined Kumārajīva in Guzang, far west of present-day Gansu province, and became his disciple. In early 402, when the king of the Later Qin, Yao Xing, brought Kumārajīva to his capital in Chang'an, Sengzhao accompanied the master to

the city. Kumārajīva was put in charge of the translation academy and Sengzhao joined the team that included Sengrui, Daorong, Sengdao, Tanying, and others, in time becoming one of Kumārajīva's chief intellectual collaborators.

The Text

Sengzhao composed his first essay, translated in the present volume as “*Prajñā* without Knowing,” around 405, following on Kumārajīva's retranslation, in 403–404, of the the *Larger Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*. In this essay Sengzhao attempts to distinguish from ordinary knowledge the special mode of cognition that is unique to the sage. In the introductory passage Sengzhao praises the king's patronage of Buddhism as well as the genius of Kumārajīva, and announces the essay's topic: wisdom (*prajñā*) that knows everything without being limited to the cognizance of individual things. A longer section follows in which this theme is developed over a series of nine objections from a fictitious opponent with nine responses by Sengzhao.

This essay was taken south to Huiyuan's community at Lushan by Daosheng (408), where it was read by many, including the literatus and lay devotee Liu Yimin, as well as the scholar-monk Huiyuan. In response Liu wrote a lengthy letter to Sengzhao; this letter, along with Sengzhao's subsequent reply (circa 410), forms the “Correspondence with Liu Yimin” translated in this volume. The polite greetings that open both letters contain valuable information about the history of this period. In the main part of the essay Liu expresses his own and Huiyuan's doubts about the coherence of Sengzhao's portrayal of the “sage's mind” as at once all-knowing yet being altogether without knowledge.

Likely between 408 and 411, Sengzhao wrote “Emptiness as Nonsubstantiality.” In the first part of this essay Sengzhao attacks three competing theories of emptiness current in his day: emptiness defined as “no mentation,” as “original nonbeing,” and as “form.” He denounces these positions as failing, in different ways, to capture the truth that emptiness, properly understood, is the defining characteristic of form as such—form is inherently “insubstantial.” In order to arrive at emptiness, therefore, one must not abandon form but, on the contrary, develop a unique intimacy with its essential nature. The remaining sections of the essay contain Sengzhao's elaboration of this view.

Sengzhao's next *lun*-essay, “Things Do Not Shift,” has a noticeably more technical ring, perhaps a reflection of his exposure to the *Zhonglun* (Nāgārjuna's

Madhyamaka-kārikā, T. 1564) translated by Kumārajīva in 408–409. In this essay Sengzhao attempts to argue against a “common person’s perception” of time. Usually people perceive that things arise, endure for some time, and then gradually cease to exist, but in reality the arising and ceasing of things are both empty. This position, far from leading Sengzhao into nihilism, allows him to assert in the closing sections of the essay that the “actions of the Tathāgata,” and perhaps by extension those of the sage, do not “wither away” but instead “abide forever, unmoving.”

Sengzhao wrote his final and longest essay, “Nirvana is Unnameable,” after Kumārajīva’s death, around 413–414. According to his own “Memorial to the King” placed at the beginning of the text, this essay is Sengzhao’s attempt to adjudicate on an exchange between King Yao Xing and his younger brother, Yao Song, regarding the nature of nirvana, and, in a related thread, on the character of sagehood, a topic important to the royal family for both religious and political reasons. Sengzhao sides with the Yao Xing but also offers important modifications to the king’s positions. The essay contains crucial evidence regarding the earliest formulations of a Sinitic Buddhist doctrine of subitism, the idea that if awakening is possible at all it must be sudden and complete, and, in some formulations, not dependent on prior study or effort. Sengzhao argues against this idea. Some scholars have doubted the authenticity of at least parts of this essay.

Initially the four essays and Sengzhao’s letters circulated independently. They appeared together for the first time in a commentary, *Zhaolun shu* (X. 866), by the late sixth-century exegete Huida. However, the sequence in which they appear in Huida’s commentary differs from that in the standard Taishō version, an arrangement first seen in the slightly later commentary, also titled *Zhaolun shu* (T. 1859) by Yuankang (fl. mid-seventh century). The introductory chapter of the *Essays*, “Main Doctrine,” is also first found in Yuankang’s work, and may have been authored by Yuankang himself. In this translation I make frequent use of Huida’s and Yuankang’s commentaries, as well as of a commentary by Wencai (1241–1302), the *Zhaolun xinshu* (T. 1860), for insight on particularly difficult passages, as well as for variant readings that I find preferable to those in T. 1858.

Other works authored by Sengzhao but not included in the present translation include *Commentary to the Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (written between 406–410); prefaces to the *Bailun* (*Śata-śāstra*, after 404), the *Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (406

or after), and the *Chang ahan jing* (*Dīrghāgama*, 412 or after); a postface to the *Lotus Sutra* (406 or after); and an obituary for Kumārajīva (some scholars question the authenticity of this text).

Sengzhao died in Chang'an in 414. His death became the stuff of legend in the later Chan tradition, and stories circulated of the Qin ruling house having executed him for some unspecified transgression.

Sengzhao's Reputation in Later Centuries

While it is common to see Sengzhao presented as one of the original “patriarchs” (*zu*) of the Sanlun (“Three Treatises”) “lineage” (*zong*) of Chinese Buddhism, such portrayals are not accurate. Sengzhao himself never claimed any sectarian affiliation. Indeed, the tendency to compartmentalize Chinese Buddhism into “sects” or “lineages” postdates Sengzhao in the history of the tradition by many centuries, and reflects less the realities on the ground and more the historian’s and bibliographer’s need for systematization. Furthermore, even after the invention of the “Sanlun” lineage Sengzhao’s name was not immediately included in it and was only added much later. On the other hand, already during the Sui and early Tang periods the great scholiast Jizang, in an attempt to secure his own position in a competitive doctrinal and institutional environment, presented himself as the heir to a hallowed exegetical tradition going back to Sengzhao, and further back to Kumārajīva and Nāgārjuna before him. Jizang’s construction of Sengzhao as the forefather of Chinese Madhyamaka shows the significance that he, and his *Essays*, held in later centuries.

A noteworthy expression of the significance of the *Essays* is the large number of commentaries written on the text in later eras. Between the Chen (557–589) and Ming (1368–1644) periods no fewer than ten large commentaries were composed. Remarkably, these texts come from representatives of various Buddhist schools of thought, attesting to the appeal of Sengzhao’s work across a broad spectrum of doctrinal orientations and sectarian affiliations. An equally telling sign of the lasting impact of the *Essays* are the countless references to it that show up in later Chinese Buddhist, especially Chan, literature. A humorous example is a passage from Hanshan Deqing’s (1546–1623) autobiography, which says that he first attained insight into the truth of emptiness when, during an

urgent stop at the outhouse, he recalled Sengzhao's words from "Things Do Not Shift" about the rivers that remain still while gushing forth!

Aside from references to Sengzhao, some authorial communities chose to present their own writings as Sengzhao's, appropriating some of his substantial cultural capital; for example, the important eighth-century text the *Treasure Trove Treatise* (*Baozang lun*, T. 1857), associated with the Ox-head lineage of Chan and with trends in Tang-era Daoist speculation. Finally, Sengzhao's essay translated here as "Things Do Not Shift" is at the heart of one of the main doctrinal debates in the Ming period, when a number of prominent intellectuals clashed over the essay's logical coherence and its doctrinal orthodoxy. This gives an indication of the enduring influence of Sengzhao's texts more than a millennium after their composition.

Note on the Translation

The present translation of Sengzhao's *Essays* is based on the standard Taishō shinshū daizōkyō edition of the text (Ch. *Zhaolun*, Jp. *Jōron*, T. 1858). It includes the entire text as it appears in T. 1858, with the exception of the preface written by Huida, which is worthy of translation and study in its own right. In translating technical terms I tried to remain consistent throughout, although in many cases I failed to find glosses that would function well for every instance of the original term. Chinese phonetic transcriptions of Sanskrit proper names and technical terms are retranscribed into Sanskrit and given with diacritics. I have rendered in English those Sanskrit terms translated in the *Essays* into Chinese (this applies mainly to titles of sutras), with the exception of such terms/names that are now well established in English usage, for example Śāriputra, Subhūti, etc. The same applies to Chinese proper names, which have been translated into English (e.g., Dashi Si = Large Stone Temple), with the exception of proper names in the original Chinese that are widely accepted in English (so Laozi is not rendered as "Old Master" or Chang'an as "Eternal Peace"). Readers interested in learning more about Sengzhao and his *Essays* are referred to the Bibliography, in which a few of the more important studies are listed.

Essays

by

Shi Sengzhao from Chang'an,
Later Qin Kingdom

I. Main Doctrine

“Original nonbeing,” “reality-mark,” “Dharma-nature,” “emptiness by nature,” “dependent origination”: all these are one doctrine. 150c15

How so? All dharmas arise through dependent origination: before they arise, they do not exist; when the conditions of their existence perish, they too cease to exist. Were they to exist substantially, then—once in existence—it would be impossible for them to perish. From this it follows that though they presently manifest as being, in nature they are always fundamentally empty. This is referred to as “emptiness by nature.” This empty nature is called “Dharma-nature.” Dharma-nature being thus, it is called “reality-mark.” Reality-mark is a nonbeing by itself—it is not made a nonbeing merely through analysis. Thus it is called “original nonbeing.”

Negations of being and nonbeing are not expressions of a belief in a substantial, eternal being and in an annihilationist, nihilistic nonbeing. To take being as being leads one to take nonbeing as nonbeing. But to perceive dharmas without attachment to nonbeing is to discern the reality-mark of dharmas: in this manner, though one perceives being, one does so without grasping to marks. Since the dharma-marks thus perceived are markless marks, the mind of the sage is established in that which has no location.

Beings in all three vehicles attain the Dao through insight into emptiness by nature. Emptiness by nature is called the reality-mark of dharmas. To see the reality-mark of dharmas is called correct contemplation; to see differently is called wrong contemplation. Whoever should think that beings of the two vehicles have no insight into this principle would be gravely mistaken. The Dharma perceived by all three is the same, what differs are merely the mental capacities of beings.

Upāya and *prajñā* are called “great wisdom.” To see the reality-mark of dharmas is called *prajñā*; to then not claim final liberation is the work of *upāya* (skillful means). To adapt to beings and transform them is called *upāya*; to not be tainted by karmic afflictions is the power of *prajñā*. Thus, the gate of *prajñā* is the contemplation of emptiness, the gate of *upāya* is immersion in being. In the midst of being vacuity is never lost, therefore one can dwell 151a

within being while not becoming polluted by it. Contemplation of emptiness does not reject being; thus while contemplating emptiness one can refrain from claiming final realization. In this way within one moment of thought both skillful means (*upāya*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) are fully activated. Reflect on this well, and you will understand fully.

The truth of nirvana, of cessation: once afflictions are eradicated, life and death are forever extinguished—“cessation” is only this, not some other place to be reached.

II. Things Do Not Shift

Life and death alternate, seasons come and go, all things are in flux: this is the common view. I say it is erroneous. Here is why.

It is said in the *Radiancy*, “Dharmas neither come nor go, they do not move in any way.”¹ Is their motionless activity to be sought by discarding motion and instead pursuing stillness? No, it is within all movements that stillness is to be sought. Since stillness is to be sought within all movements, though moving, dharmas are constantly still. Since stillness is to be sought without discarding motion, though still, their motion never ceases. Indeed, motion and stillness are in no way distinct.

This unity eludes doubters, however. As a result, the true teaching becomes mired in disputations, and the road to understanding is distorted by their fixation on distinctions.

Truly, this ultimate, wherein stillness and movement are one, is not easy to capture in words. Why? Talk of the ultimate contradicts conventional beliefs, while conformity with the conventional does injustice to the ultimate. Words that oppose the ultimate lose sight of Nature and are powerless to convert beings. Words that disregard the conventional are bland, flavorless: hearing them, people of average faculties cannot tell what is real and what is not, while inferior types clap their hands in amusement and turn away.²

So close, yet unknowable—is this not the very nature of things? Yet I cannot remain silent. Once again I will vest my mind where motion and stillness meet and venture an imperfect intimation.

It is said in the *Dao Practice*, “Originally there is no ‘where’ from which dharmas come; when they go, there is no ‘where’ that they reach.”³ And in the *Middle Way Treatise*, “Seeing the place [of departure] we see the going, but the goer does not reach a place.”⁴ These passages assert that stillness is to be sought in identity with motion, from which it follows that things do not shift.

Now, that past things do not reach the present is what is commonly thought of as movement. People say, “things move, they are not still.” But the same

fact that past things do not reach the present is what I call stillness. I say, “things are still, not in motion.”

[Others claim that] since things do not come [from the past to the present], they move and are not still. [I claim that] since things do not depart [from the present to the past], they are still and do not move. What we speak of are not two realities but one, though we view it differently. Oppose this reality—you will be bogged down; align yourself with it—you will penetrate its depths. Once you understand, nothing will obstruct you.

151b Alas, for so long people have been trapped in delusion. Even though they are face to face with the ultimate, they do not wake up to it. They know that past things do not come [from the past to the present], yet they insist that present things can pass away [from the present to the past]. But since past things do not come [to the present], how could present things pass away [to the past]?

Allow me to explain. For a past thing, do you search in the past? In the past [such a thing] does not not exist. Do you search for it in the present? In the present it does not exist. That past things do not exist in the present shows that they do not come [to it from the past]; that they do not not exist in the past shows that they do not depart [from it to the present]. Now, as for present things: when in the present, they do not pass away. Hence, past things are by nature in the past—they do not do not reach it from the present; and present things are by nature in the present—they do not reach it from the past.

Confucius said, “Behold, Yan Hui, how swiftly things become new; in the twinkling of an eye they are no longer as before!”⁵

All this shows that things do not come or go [between moments in time]. Since there is not even the slightest trace of departing or returning, how could one assert “movement” of anything at all?

With this mind, why still doubt that while the whirlwind⁶ uproots the mountains⁷ it stays constantly still; while the great rivers roar crashing into the sea they do not flow; while the wild horses⁸ flutter in the sky they remain unmoving; and while the sun and moon travel the skies they are never in rotation?

But wait! The Sage said, “The passage of life is swift, swifter than the gushing torrents.”⁹ Thus one might object that through insight into impermanence do *śrāvakas* realize the Dao, and on awakening to the state free of conditions do *pratyekabuddhas* join with the ultimate. If indeed, as you say,

the movement of things does not involve real change, how could it be claimed that by responding to change these two groups attain progress on the Dao?

Yet, on careful investigation, the words of the Sage prove exceedingly subtle, deep, difficult to fathom. He asserts both that things, while seemingly in motion, are still; and that while seeming to depart they remain unmoving.

[This truth] can only be encountered with the spirit, it cannot be found amid ordinary affairs.

Allow me to explain. While things are said to “depart,” this is not to assert that they literally depart but merely to dispel people’s attachment to the idea of permanence. Though they are said to “remain,” this is not to argue that they literally remain but merely to counter people’s clinging to “passing away.” Surely, “departing” does not mean that things actually evanesce, nor does “remaining” mean that they perdure through time.

Accordingly, it is said in the *Complete Realization*, “The Bodhisattva dwells among those attached to permanence and teaches them impermanence.”¹⁰ And in the *Mahayana Treatise*, “All dharmas are ultimately unmoving; in them there is no trace of coming or going.”¹¹

Such teachings are devised to lead beings from all quarters to liberation. The words may be contradictory but the reality in which they converge is one. Surely variation among descriptions does not make incongruous their object.

Thus, though things may be said to be “constant” they do not remain. Though described as “departing” they do not shift [in time]. As things do not shift, while passing away they are constantly still; as things do not remain, while still they constantly pass away. In stillness things constantly pass away; thus, while passing away they never shift. In passing away things are constantly still; thus, while still, they never stay.

Zhuangzi speaks of hiding a mountain in a marsh and Confucius stands at the bank of the river [gazing at its gushing torrent]: both reflect on the inability to make passing things stay in the present. Surely they do not mean that things push away the present and pass away [into the past].¹²

Indeed, if one carefully examines the mind of the sage, one will understand that what the sage perceives differs from what the common person perceives. How so? People claim that, young or old, a human being is of one constant body and its substance perdures throughout a lifetime of a hundred years. They only know that the years pass, but do not realize that the body follows

suit. Take the story of the *brahmacārin* who left the householder's life [as a young man] and only returned home as a white-haired old man. When his former neighbors saw him, they said, "Could this be our former neighbor?" The *brahmacārin* said, "I may seem to be my former self but I am certainly not him." The neighbors were startled. It is just like in the allegory of the strong man [who sneaks up under cover of night] and carries away [the boat] on his shoulders, [while the owner,] fast asleep, knows nothing [of the theft].¹³

151c In order to dispel people's delusions, the Tathāgata uses words appropriate to their individual limitations; he rides the vehicle of the nondual ultimate mind, yet elaborates nonsingular diverse teachings. Words that even though contradictory do not impute incongruity to their object—such are the words of the Sage alone.

Hence, from the perspective of the ultimate, he teaches of "not-shifting"; in order to guide the common people, he speaks of things flowing through time. Even though he charts out a thousandfold paths, they all return to a common destination.

Yet, when those who cling to the evidence of texts hear the teaching of "not-shifting" they say that past things do not reach the present, but when they hear of "flow and motion" they say that present things can reach the past. However, once the terms "past" and "present" have been assigned [to their respective moments], why still insist on viewing things as "shifting" [from one to the other]? After all, when it is said that things "pass away," this is not to affirm that they literally pass away but only that things of the past and present persist constantly [in their respective moments]—they are not in motion. When it is asserted that things "depart," this is not to claim that things literally depart but only that things do not reach the past from the present—they do not come. They do not come: they do not gallop between the past and the present. They do not move; each thing, by nature, persists in just one[—its own particular—]time.

The myriad texts differ in their formulations, the hundred schools teach divergent doctrines, but once you arrive at where they all converge, their diversity will no longer confuse you.

Now, what others call "remaining" I refer to as "departing"; what they call "departing" I speak of as "remaining." Yet, though "remaining" and "departing"

differ in name, in reality they are one. It is not without reason that the classic says, “True words appear nonsensical.”¹⁴ Who would believe them?

How so? People search for past things in the present, and conclude that [things] do not remain. I seek for present [things] in the past and determine that they do not depart. If present [things] could reach the past, then the past should contain those present [things]. If past [things] could reach the present, then the present should contain those past [things]. But there are no past [things] in the present, which shows again that [things] do not come. And there are no present [things] in the past, which shows once more that [things] do not depart.

Since past [things] do not reach the present, nor do present [things] reach the past, therefore each event by nature remains in its own particular time. There is really nothing at all that can be described as either coming or going [in time].

Grasp this subtle meaning, and you will understand that even though the four seasons gallop like a windstorm and the Big Dipper whirls in the sky like thunder, in all their velocity they are forever unmoving.

The acts of the Tathāgata are efficacious throughout myriad generations yet they remain always still; his Dao penetrates a hundred eons yet it is all the more unmoving. Piling up a mound is as if complete with the first basket of dirt; reaching the destination of a long journey is accomplished with the first step.¹⁵ All this is because meritorious deeds truly do not wither away. That meritorious acts do not wither away means that the act remains in the past time and does not transform out of being. As such, it does not shift in time. It does not shift: it abides forever, unmoving. Thus it is.

Therefore it is said in scripture, “Should the triple deluge consume the world, my works will abide, unmoving.”¹⁶ True indeed.

How is this so? The result does not contain the cause, it is brought about by the cause. Since the result is brought about by the cause, in the past moment the cause is not-extinct. Since the result does not include the cause, the cause does not come [from the past] to the present. Neither is the cause extinct [in its own past moment], nor does it come [to the present]. This is further proof of the truth of “not shifting.”

With this understanding, can one continue to oscillate between “departing” and “staying,” dither between “motion” and “stillness”?

Truly, should Heaven collapse and Earth topple over, I will not say things are not still. Should a great deluge submerge the world, I will not say things move. If you can tally your spirit with things in their reality, this truth will be within reach.

III. Emptiness as Nonsubstantiality

[Introduction]

The perfectly vacuous, the unborn: such is the wondrous object of *prajñā*'s mysterious mirroring, the unifying apex of existing things. If not through the exceptional realization of sagely insight, how could one tally one's spirit with the space between being and nonbeing? 152a

Thus, the Perfected Person extends his spirit-mind to the limitless, yet individual things cannot obstruct him. He exerts his ear and eye to the utmost, yet sounds and forms have no power over him. Is it not because he has identified with the self-emptiness of all things that things cannot hamper his spiritual brilliance?

The sage rides the vehicle of the ultimate mind and yet aligns himself with all principles; there are no obstructions he cannot penetrate. He inhabits the Singular Pneuma and therefrom observes transformations; he moves in accord with all he encounters. Since there are no obstructions he cannot penetrate, he attains simplicity in the midst of complexity.¹⁷ Since he moves in harmony with all that he encounters, he becomes one with whatever he touches.

In this way, though the myriad images are individually discrete, their distinctiveness is not inherent to them. As such, images are not substantially real images. Since they are not substantially real images, I say that images are not images. Indeed, at the root things and I are one, affirmation and negation are the Singular Pneuma.

This doctrine is deep and subtle—beyond, I fear, the ken of conventional understanding. Hence of late, whenever the topic of emptiness is raised in debate, disagreements inevitably arise. Is it possible to arrive at agreement when the [thing discussed] is [seen as] incongruous? Conflicting theories proliferate¹⁸ and yield no agreement on the nature [of emptiness].

[Three Doctrines of Emptiness]

Why? The doctrine of “no mentation” defines emptiness as a state in which the mind no longer reaches out toward things, even though things themselves do not cease to exist. The merit of this doctrine is its valuation of the stillness of spirit; its flaw is its failure to understand that things themselves are empty.

The theory of “emptiness is form” rests on the claim that since forms are not self-produced, and despite being called forms, they are not forms. But the analysis of forms should not be limited to forms produced by a coming together of forms; the analysis should apply to forms as such, and should see them as what they are in themselves. This theory acknowledges merely that forms are not self-produced, but it has yet to grasp the truth that forms as such are not forms.

The teaching of “original nonbeing” is obsessed with the idea of nonbeing, which dominates the discussion throughout. It takes negations of being as assertions that being is actually nonexistent, and negations of nonbeing as claims that nonbeing likewise is actually nonexistent. However, if one were to investigate the original purport of the scriptures, one would understand that negations of being are merely a rejection of substantialized being, while negations of nonbeing are merely a refutation of substantialized nonbeing. Why insist that negations of being mean that this being is actually nonexistent, and that negations of nonbeing mean that nonbeing is likewise actually nonexistent? Such words reveal an infatuation with “nonbeing”; surely they cannot harmoniously enter the reality of events nor reach the true character of things.

[Argument]

If you conceptualize a thing as a thing, what you thus conceptualize can indeed be called a thing. But if you conceptualize a non-thing a thing, though you conceptualize it as a thing it is not a thing. For things do not derive their reality from names, and names are not brought about simply by virtue of there being things.

Thus ultimate truth dwells in sovereign stillness beyond the domain of ordinary naming;¹⁹ how could mere words and letters articulate it? Yet I cannot remain silent and will try to fashion for it an approximation in words.

It is said in the *Mahayana Treatise*, “Dharmas do not possess marks, nor do they lack marks.”²⁰ And in the *Middle Way Treatise*, “Dharmas do not exist, nor do they not exist.”²¹ This is the supreme ultimate truth.

152b

Now, on close examination, these assertions of “neither being nor non-being” cannot mean that ultimate truth is realized only when one has purged the mind of all things, shut the doors of seeing and hearing, and when the mind is still and empty. Indeed, ultimate truth is realized when one identifies with things and penetrates them harmoniously, for then things in their concrete reality do not oppose it; and when this very reality is rendered selfsame with the ultimate, for then empty Nature does alter their individual reality. Since Nature does not alter their reality, even though they are nonexistent, things do exist. Since things do not oppose [ultimate truth], even though they are existent, they do not exist. While nonexistent, things exist; hence “existence” does not capture them. While existent, they do not exist, hence “nonexistence” also does not apply. Thus, it is not that nothing exists; rather, things are not substantially real things. And since they are not substantially real things, what is there that could possibly be conceptualized as a thing?

Thus, when it is said in the sutra, “Emptiness is the nature of form, not an obliteration of form,” this is to demonstrate that the sagely mode of engaging things is to identify with their essential vacuity. Could the sage, in striving for the ultimate, have to “hack” his way there through forms?²²

Therefore [Vimalakīrti,] in his sickbed, teaches about insubstantiality; and Supreme Brightness speaks of the identity [of form] and vacuity. In all, though the teachings in the tripartite canon are diverse, what unifies them is one.

The *Radiance* proclaims, “From the standpoint of supreme ultimate truth there is no realization [of *bodhi*], no attainment; from the standpoint of relative truth there is realization and attainment.”²³ Now, “attainment” is but the relative name of nonattainment, and “nonattainment” is the ultimate name of attainment. In view of the ultimate name they are ultimate, yet they do not exist. In view of the relative name they are relative, yet they do not nonexistent. Thus, to call them “ultimate” is not to say that they exist; to call them “relative” is not to say that they nonexistent. These descriptions are mutually opposed, yet the principles behind them are not different.

Thus a sutra says, “Ultimate truth and relative truth: are they distinct? They are not.”²⁴ In this sutra ultimate truth is asserted only to refute “existence,”

and relative truth is asserted only to refute “nonexistence.” Just because there are two “truths,” must one impute two-ness to the reality of things?

Things have both an aspect of not-existing and an aspect of not-nonexisting. Under the aspect of not-existing, even though existent, things do not exist. Under the aspect of not-nonexisting, even though nonexistent, they do not nonexist. While nonexistent they do not nonexist, hence their nonexisting is not a one-sided emptiness. While existing they do not exist, hence their existing is not substantial being.

Since the being of things never becomes substantial being, and since their nonexistence is not just an erasure of traces, then even though their “being” and “nonbeing” are distinguished in name, in reality they are one.

Thus the youth exclaimed, “You teach that since things arise due to karmic conditions, they neither exist nor nonexist,”²⁵ and in the *Bodhisattva’s Diadem* it is written, “The turnings of the wheel of Dharma are neither turnings nor non-turnings: its very turnings are non-turnings.”²⁶ Such are the subtle words of all sutras.

Also, you wish to argue that things nonexist? Then you would fail to denounce the views of annihilationists. You wish to claim that things do exist? Then you would give sanction to the positions of eternalists. Yet, things do not nonexist, hence annihilationist beliefs are to be denounced. Things do not exist, hence eternalist views are also to be rejected. Negation of both being and nonbeing: verily, such are the words of ultimate truth.

Thus it is said in the *Dao Practice*, “Mind neither exists nor does not exist,”²⁷ and in the *Middle Way Verses*, “Since things arise from conditions, they do not exist; since they do arise, they do not nonexist.”²⁸ Consider this well, and you will see it is so.

Here is why. If being existed substantially, then it would exist of itself, constantly, and it would not depend on conditions in order to come into being. Similarly, substantial nonbeing exists by itself, perdures eternally as nonbeing, and would not depend on conditions in order to come about.

However, being is not being by and of itself; it becomes being depending on conditions—therefore, being does not exist substantially. Since being is not substantial being, even though it exists it cannot be called “being.”

Likewise nonbeing. The term “nonbeing” truly applies only to something perfectly quiescent, unchanging. If myriad things nonexisted in this manner,

it would be inconceivable that they would arise at all. Yet they do arise, hence “nonbeing” does not apply. But since it is through conditions that they arise, things do not nonexistent.

Thus it is said in the *Mahayana Treatise* that all dharmas, constituted as they are by all causes and conditions, should be considered existent; all dharmas, constituted as they are by all causes and conditions, should not be considered existent; all nonexistent dharmas, constituted as they are by all causes and conditions, should be considered existent; all existent dharmas, constituted as they are by all causes and conditions, should not be considered existent.²⁹ Are these pronouncements on being and nonbeing nothing but a futile exercise in contrariness?

If one were to take things as “being” in a real, substantial sense, then they could not be described as “nonbeing”; if one were to take them as “nonexistent” in a real, substantial sense, then “existence” would not apply. But when “being” is predicated of things, it is merely that the term “being” is used as expedient to refute claims of their “nonbeing.” Likewise, when “nonbeing” is asserted, it is just that the term “nonbeing” is applied provisionally in order to reject the assertions of their “being.”

The reality is one, even though the concepts are dualistic. The descriptions may be incongruous, but if one grasps the unified reality behind them no disagreement will be left unresolved.

From one perspective myriad things truly do not exist—they cannot be described as “being.” From another perspective they do not nonexistent—they cannot be taken as “nonbeing.” How so? Do you wish to claim that they exist? Even though they exist, they do not emerge into substantial being. Do you want to say that they nonexistent? Images of events are already formed in them, and with images already formed they cannot be simply nonexistent. Since their being is not substantial they do not really exist.

With this, emptiness as nonsubstantiality has been demonstrated.

Accordingly, it is said in the *Radianance*, “Dharmas, as merely conventional appellations, are not substantial. They are akin to a phantom. It is not that the phantom does not exist, rather, the phantom is not a substantial being.”³⁰

Now, if one uses names to consider the [respective] things, [one will find that] things lack the actuality corresponding to their names; if one uses things to consider their names, [one will find that] the names lack the power of

obtaining the things. That things lack the reality corresponding to their names means they are not “things.” That names lack the power of obtaining things means they are not “names.” Thus, names do not correspond to actuality, and actuality does not correspond to names. Since names and actuality do not correspond to each another, where are the “myriad things”?

Thus, it is said in the *Middle Way Treatise* that there is in things no distinction between “this” and “that,” it is just that people take “this” as “this” and “that” as “that.”³¹ “That” becomes “that” in relation to “this,” “this” becomes “this” in relation to “that.” Neither “this” nor “that” can be defined independently of the other. Yet the deluded take the duality as self-evident. Thus, though the division between “this” and “that” originally does not exist, they think that it has never been absent. However, should they attain insight into the fact that “this” and “that” do not exist, will there be any thing left for them that could be called “being”? From this it is known that truly things are not substantially real, they are only made to appear so by conventional designations.

153a This is why the *Complete Realization* describes the arbitrariness of names³² and why the master from Yuanlin Grove³³ uses the metaphors of the finger and the horse. Such profound teachings are everywhere to be found.

Thus again: the Sage rides the vehicle of the thousand transformations yet remains unchanged; he treads amid the myriad objects of delusion yet always penetrates them. This is because he has identified with the self-emptiness of things, instead of imputing vacuity to things through conventional concepts.

Thus it is said in the sutra, “How marvelous, World-honored One! Unmoved in the apex of reality, you establish all dharmas.”³⁴ Dharmas are not established outside of the ultimate, they are established as one with the ultimate.

Is the Dao beyond reach? Touch phenomena—they are the ultimate. Is sagacity beyond reach? Realize them—you will be a like a spirit.

IV. *Prajñā* without Knowing

[Statement of Topic]

Prajñā: vacuous, tenebrous, the unifying principle of the three vehicles. Truly, it is ultimate unity, free from all distinctions. Yet contentious debates about it have raged on and on.

The Indian *śramaṇa* Kumārajīva was still a youth when he trod into the Great Square³⁵ and set about investigating this mystery. Alone he reached beyond words and images, and wondrously tallied [his mind] with the realm of the Invisible and Inaudible.³⁶ He subdued the non-Buddhist teachers in Kapilavastu,³⁷ and with the wind of his virtue he filled the fans of the East. He would have carried his torch to yet other countries but he hid it in the land of the Liang;³⁸ the Dao does not respond without cause, it responds only when the conditions are ripe.

Hence, in the third year of the Hongshi era (402 C.E.), with the year-star in the second position, the king of Qin took Liang's intent to submit to the [Qin] kingdom as an opportunity to send troops there to bring Kumārajīva.³⁹ Then I thought, the age of the Northern Sky⁴⁰ has arrived.

The Heavenly King of the Great Qin, whose Dao tallies with the source of the hundred kings of antiquity and whose virtue will nourish a thousand generations to come, he who plays with his blade freely amidst the myriad affairs of state while tirelessly spreading the Dao, he is truly like Heaven for the pitiful beings in this age of decline, like a pillar for the Dharma bequeathed by Śākyamuni. He assembled over five hundred learned monks at the Hall of Free-and-Easy Wandering, and held the Qin text, setting down the correct meaning of the universal [Mahayana] scriptures alongside lord Kumārajīva. Does the path he blazed benefit only his own day and age? It is a bridge [across samsara] for countless ages to come.

Ignorant though I am, I had the privilege of taking part in that august assembly. It was then that I heard for the first time this doctrine so unique and profound. Truly, sagely wisdom is abstruse, subtle, difficult to fathom.

Free from marks and names, it cannot be captured in images or words. I can do no more than to purge my mind of all images and try to fashion a likeness for it in these my untamed words.⁴¹ Yet let no one think that the sagely mind can be captured in analysis!

It is said in the *Radiance*, “*Prajñā* perceives no marks of existence, no marks of arising or ceasing.”⁴² And in the *Dao Practice*, “*Prajñā* has no objects of knowing, no objects of seeing.”⁴³ These statements assert wisdom’s illuminative activity, even as they claim that there are in it no individuating marks and, accordingly, no knowledge. What do they mean? There must be a markless knowing, a knowledgeless illumination.⁴⁴

How is this so? For every thing that is known, there is a thing that is not known. But in the sagely mind, there is no thing that is known, thus there is nothing not known. This knowledgeless knowing is called “all-knowledge.” Thus, the words of the sutra true are: “In the sagely mind there is nothing known, nothing not known.”⁴⁵

153b In this way, the sage empties his mind and makes full his illumination. He cognizes constantly yet is always without knowing. Thus he can dim his brightness and conceal his glow, while mirroring mysteriously with a vacuous mind. He can shut down his intellect and turn off his cleverness, while solitarily realizing the mystery of mysteries.

In wisdom there is a mirroring that reaches the deepest depths, yet there is in it no knowledge. Spirit has the function of responding to and according [with events], yet it is free from deliberate effort. Since spirit is free from deliberate effort, it can reign sovereign beyond the world. Since wisdom is without knowledge, it can mysteriously illuminate beyond [conditioned] events. Yet, even though wisdom is beyond events it is never without them. Though the spirit is beyond the world it is always within its borders.

Therefore, as [the sage] contemplates [the earth] below and [the heavens] above and follows their transformations, he accords with phenomena and responds to them with an inexhaustible acuity, there are no depths to which his vision cannot reach, yet his illumination shines forth with no deliberate effort. This is how not-knowing knows, how sagely spirit accords with phenomena.

Now, as for *prajñā* in its objective aspect: it is actual yet not existent, vacuous yet not nonexistent, present yet beyond description. Is this not sagely wisdom itself? How so? You wish to claim that it is existent? Yet it lacks

form or name. You wish to claim that it is nonexistent? Yet the sage is numinous by its power. Since the sage is numinous by its power, even though it is vacuous it never forfeits its illuminative functioning. Since it lacks form or name, even though it is illuminating it never loses its vacuity. While illuminating it does not lose its vacuity; therefore it merges with things without being altered by them. Even though it is vacuous, it never ceases to illuminate; therefore its every movement meets gross phenomena.

In this way the functioning of sagely wisdom never ceases, but seek for it among shapes and marks and you will never find it.

Thus Ratnākara says, “The Buddha acts without conscious intention,”⁴⁶ while in the *Radiance* it is written, “Unmoved in perfect awakening he establishes all dharmas.”⁴⁷ Clearly, though the traces of the sage reach out in a myriad directions, what they all lead to is one.

Hence, *prajñā* can illuminate while remaining vacuous; ultimate truth can be known despite not being there. The myriad movements can be met in stillness, sagely response can nonexistent yet remain efficacious. Such is self-knowing without knowing, self-acting without action. “Action,” “knowing”—these words simply miss the mark.

[Nine Arguments]

[1]

Objection: The sage, his ultimate mind uniquely brilliant, illuminates each and every thing. His responsiveness unlimited, with every movement he accords with phenomena. Since he illuminates each and every thing, nothing eludes his knowing. Since with every movement he accords with phenomena, his responsiveness is never amiss. It is never amiss: he unfailingly accords with all that is to be accorded with. Nothing eludes his knowing: he unfailingly cognizes all that is to be known.

Now, since the sage cognizes all that is to be known, his knowing is surely not without content. Since he accords with all that is to be accorded with, his responsiveness is likewise not empty of content.

Since he thus both cognizes things and accords with them, why do you claim that he does neither? If by saying that the sage forgets knowledge and ceases to accord with things you mean only that his knowing and according are free from personal desires—and that for this very reason he is able to

fulfill his personal desires—then you can only say that the sage is not attached to his knowledge, but can you argue that he does not know at all?

Answer: The feats of the sage surpass those of the Two Principles,⁴⁸ yet he is not humane.⁴⁹ His brightness exceeds that of the sun and moon, yet this only deepens his darkness. Could one say that he is blind like stone or wood, that he lacks cognition altogether? Indeed, it is just that on account of what distinguishes him from a common person—his spiritual perspicacity—he is not defined by marks of conditioned events.

153c You, sir, would like to argue that while it is not for his own satisfaction that the sage possesses his knowledge, he is never devoid of it. Does this not misrepresent the sagely mind and miss the purport of the scriptures? After all, it is said in a sutra, “Ultimate *prajñā* is pure like empty space: not sullied by knowledge or perception, unproduced, unconditioned.”⁵⁰ That is, this knowledge is itself without knowledge. How could this knowledgelessness be said to result from a mere “turning back of the illumination”?⁵¹

If one were to call *prajñā* “pure” by arguing that while it does cognize, its objects are essentially empty, such a “*prajñā*” would not be distinguishable from conventional “wisdom.” Indeed, under this premise the three poisons⁵² and the four inverted views⁵³ would also have to be considered pure. Why then extol *prajñā* alone?

If you were to praise *prajñā* because of [the properties of] the objects of its knowing, remember: if it has objects, it is not *prajñā*. Though the objects be perfectly pure, such “*prajñā*” can never be considered pure and there is no reason to extol it as such.

Thus, when the sutras describe *prajñā* as pure, is it not because it is in essence ultimately pure, that is, fundamentally free from deluded grasping? Being fundamentally free from deluded grasping, it cannot be called knowledge at all. It is not only ordinary ignorance that can be called “not-knowing.” Indeed, [in *prajñā*] knowledge itself is without knowing.

Thus the sage with knowledgeless *prajñā* illuminates the markless ultimate truth. Ultimate truth is without limitations, like those of the “hare” and the “horse,”⁵⁴ *prajñā*’s mirroring leaves nothing unfathomed.

In this way, the sage accords [with individual things] without differentiating them, corresponds without affirming. Quiescent, bland, he does not know, yet there is nothing he does not know.

[2]

Objection: Things cannot communicate themselves; in order to render them communicable words are established. Even though things are distinct from names, in reality nameable things that correspond to names do exist. Therefore, for every given name it is possible to identify the thing to which it refers.

Yet you claim that “in the mind of the sage there is no knowing,” even as you assert that “there is in it nothing that it doesn’t know.”

Now, in my view, not-knowing can never be called “knowing,” and knowing can never be called “not-knowing.” My objection is in line with the doctrine of names, with the fundamental rules of establishing words.

You, however, insist that [knowing and not-knowing] are one in the sagely mind, and differentiated [only] in textual descriptions. When I try to follow your words to reach the reality they purport to describe, I do not see how they could correspond. How is this so? If “knowing” correctly describes the mind of the sage, then “not-knowing” cannot be correct. If “not-knowing” captures it, then “knowing” does not apply. If both miss the mark, it is pointless to continue the discussion.

Answer: It is said in scripture that *prajñā* is inexpressible, no name applies to it: neither existent nor nonexistent, neither full nor vacuous. Though vacuous it never ceases to illuminate; illuminating, it never loses its vacuity.⁵⁵ It is a nameless dharma—language cannot express it. However, if not for language, it could not be communicated. Thus, the sage speaks ceaselessly, never saying as much as a word.

Now listen on, as I shall attempt to intimate it for you in these, my untamed words.

The sagely mind is subtle, markless, and cannot be considered “existent.” Vastly generative in its activity, it cannot be called “nonexistent.” As not “nonexistent,” sagely wisdom endures in it. As not “existent,” the doctrine of names does not apply to it.

Thus, when “knowledge” is asserted of it, this is not predicated literally but merely to point to its [function of] mirroring. When “not-knowing” is asserted of it, it is not predicated literally but solely to indicate the [absence of] marks therein. To signal its [freedom from] marks is not to assert that it is nonexistent; to indicate its mirroring is not to assert that it is existent. As

154a

not “existent,” it knows, and is yet without knowing. As not “nonexistent,” it is without knowing, and yet it knows. Thus, not knowing is one with knowing. That the two are differentiated in words does not mean they are distinct in the sagely mind itself.

[3]

Question: Wisdom alone, profound and abstruse, can fathom ultimate truth. Thus is manifested the power of sagely wisdom. Accordingly it is said in the sutras, “Without the attainment of *prajñā*, ultimate truth cannot be seen.”⁵⁶ This means that ultimate truth is the condition of *prajñā*’s knowing. If wisdom is defined by conditions, this “wisdom” must be [mere] knowledge.

Answer: If we were to consider wisdom in terms of its conditions, we would see that wisdom is not [mere] knowledge. Why? In the *Radiance* it is said, “To produce consciousness not conditioned by form, this is called ‘to not see form’”⁵⁷ and “As the five aggregates (*skandhas*) are pure, *prajñā* is pure.”

Now, *prajñā* is the faculty of knowing, the five *skandhas* are the known. The known is the condition [of knowing]: now, knowing and the known can either exist in mutual codependence, or mutually nonexistent. When they mutually nonexistent, there is no thing at all that is existent; when they mutually exist, there is no thing at all that is nonexistent. When no thing is nonexistent, [knowledge] arises in response to conditions. When no thing is existent, [knowledge does not] arise in response to conditions. When [knowledge does not] arise dependently on conditions, it only illuminates them and never becomes “knowledge.” When it does arise dependently on conditions, knowledge and its conditions bring each other about. Thus, the distinction between knowing and non-knowing is defined by the [nature of the] object.

How so? If “wisdom” is of the type that knows objects or grasps marks, it is [mere] knowledge. But ultimate truth is markless; could ultimate wisdom then be [mere] knowledge?

Here is why. What is known is not what is known [by and of itself]. Rather, the known arises dependently on the knowing, and since the known arises dependently on the knowing, the knowing likewise arises dependently on the known. Since the known and the knowing bring each other about, they are conditioned dharmas. Because they are conditioned, they are not ultimate. Not being ultimate, they are not ultimate reality.⁵⁸ It is said in the *Middle Way*

Treatise, “Things that exist dependently on conditions are not ultimate. If they existed without dependence on conditions they would be ultimate.”⁵⁹ Now, ultimate reality is called “ultimate” precisely because it is not dependent on conditions. Because it is ultimate and thus not dependent on conditions, there is in it no thing produced from conditions. Of this the sutra says, “No existent dharma can be found that arose independently of conditions.”⁶⁰

Hence, ultimate wisdom’s contemplation of ultimate reality is never the grasping of an object. Since wisdom thus does not grasp objects, how could it be called “knowledge”? This is not to say that wisdom is altogether without knowledge; it is just that since ultimate reality is not an object, ultimate wisdom is not knowledge. Yet you claim, sir, that if we consider wisdom in terms of its conditions, it will prove to be mere knowledge. But since its conditions are itself not conditions, how could it be called “knowledge”?

[4]

Question: When you claim that [the sage] does not grasp, do you mean that he is altogether devoid of knowledge? Or that even though he does know he does not consequently grasp [that which he has cognized]? If his not grasping means that he is altogether without knowledge, the sage is like a traveler lost in the dark of night, unable to tell black from white. If his not grasping means that even though he does cognize, does not grasp subsequently, then [the sage] does have knowledge and thus cannot be without grasping.

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Answer: Neither do I claim that [the sage] is altogether without knowledge and in this sense does not grasp, nor do I argue that, though cognizing at first, he does not grasp subsequently. Rather, his knowing is in itself a non-grasping, and thus he is able to know yet be without grasping.

[5]

Objection: You argue that the sagely mind does not grasp, because indeed it is free from deluded grasping, in that it does not reify things. But “non-grasping” means lack of affirmation, and no affirmation means no corresponding [between the knowing and the known]. If so, what exactly is it that corresponds with the sagely mind so as to justify your description of it as all-knowing?

Answer: True, [the sagely mind] is without affirmation and without corresponding. But, as for this lack of affirmation and of corresponding: although

there is in it no corresponding, there is nothing with which it does not correspond. Though there is in it no affirmation, it leaves nothing unaffirmed. That it leaves nothing unaffirmed means that it affirms while not affirming; that there is nothing with which it does not correspond means that it corresponds while not corresponding. In the words of a sutra, “Seeing all dharmas, he sees not a thing.”⁶¹

[6]

Objection: It cannot be that the sagely mind does not affirm. Rather, it is precisely because it is devoid of affirmable things that even though devoid of them, it must be able to affirm that very absence of the affirmable. Accordingly, when it is said in scripture that “ultimate truth is without marks, *prajñā* is without knowledge,”⁶² this is indeed because *prajñā* is free from mark-perceiving knowledge. How could *prajñā*’s ultimacy be in any way compromised if it were to know that marklessness as the markless?

Answer: The sage does not have [knowledge of the] markless. If he were to take the markless as the markless, he would be turning the markless into a marked. To discard being and cling to nonbeing is like fleeing the mountain peak only to become trapped in a ravine: in neither situation is one safe. Accordingly, the Perfected Person establishes himself in existing while not existing, resides in nonbeing while not nonexisting. Not grasping either being or nonbeing, neither does he reject being or nonbeing. In this manner he can “harmonize his radiance with the dust and toil”⁶³ and travel freely among the five realms of rebirth.⁶⁴ Silently he goes, soundlessly he comes; bland, without deliberate action, there is nothing he does not accomplish.

[7]

Objection: Sagely mind may be without knowledge, yet in according with and responding to conditions the sage is infallible. It responds to that which calls for its response, and abides with that which does not. Therefore we can say that the sagely mind now arises [in activity], and then perishes. Can this be so?

Answer: Arising and perishing is the mind of arising and perishing. Since the sage is without mind, how could there be for him any arising or perishing? Yet it is not that he is altogether devoid of mind; rather, non-mind is [the very nature of his] mind. Also, it is not that he does not respond; rather, non-responding

is [the very nature of his] response—that is all. Indeed, the pattern of sagely response is infallible, just like the cycle of the four seasons. [The sagely mind,] in essence vacuous and nonexistent, cannot be described either as arising or perishing.

[8]

Objection: Both the wisdom of the sage and the deluded [ordinary] “wisdom” you speak of in terms of “nonbeing”—of the absence of arising and perishing. How should one distinguish [between the two]?

Answer: When asserted of sagely wisdom, “nonexistence” points to the absence [therein] of knowledge. When asserted of deluded “wisdom,” it refers to the fact that this knowledge knows “nonexistence.” Though “nonexistence” is asserted of both types of wisdom, it is used differently in each case.

Let me explain. Sagely mind, empty and still, has no knowledge of which it could be said that it [knows] nonbeing; thus we can say that it is a nonbeing of cognition, not that it cognizes nonbeing. Deluded wisdom does possess knowledge: there is in it a knowledge of which it can be said that it [knows] nonbeing, [which is why] I say that it knows nonbeing, not that it is a nonbeing of knowledge.

154c

Nonbeing of knowledge: this is the “nonbeing” predicated of *prajñā*.
 Knowledge of nonbeing: this is “nonbeing” [known as] ultimate truth.

Now, as for the relation between *prajñā* and ultimate truth, under the aspect of function they are differentiated in their unity; under the aspect of stillness they are unified in their differentiation. When unified, the mind is not purposely directed to this and that, subject and object; when differentiated, nothing of *prajñā*'s illuminative power is lost. Even though I may speak of their unity, it is unity within differentiation; even though I may assert their differentiation, it is differentiation within unity. Therefore, neither “differentiation” nor “unity” captures the nature of this relation.

Allow me to explain further. Within is the light of solitary mirroring; without is the reality of myriad dharmas. Though dharmas are real, it is only through illumination that they can be reached. The power of illumination is activated just when the inner and the outer enter into mutual relation. This is the aspect of function: [under this aspect even] the sage cannot make them one. Knowledgeless illumination within, markless reality without, the inner

and the outer are unagitated, mutually nonexistent. This is the aspect of stillness: [under this aspect even] the sage cannot make them different.

Thus when it is said in the sutra, “Dharmas are not differentiated,”⁶⁵ could this mean that in order to abolish distinctions one must “extend the duck’s legs” or “shorten the crane’s neck,” “level the hills and fill up the valleys”?⁶⁶ No. Here distinctions are not substantialized as distinctions; hence even though they are distinct, dharmas are not differentiated.

Thus a sutra says, “How marvelous, World-honored One! From within the dharma of nondifferentiation you teach that dharmas are distinct”⁶⁷ and also “*Prajñā* and dharmas are neither unified nor differentiated.”⁶⁸ So it is.

[9]

Objection: You say “differentiated under the aspect of function, unified under the aspect of stillness.” Do you mean that in *prajñā* functioning and stillness are distinct?

Answer: Its functioning is one with its stillness, its stillness is one with its functioning; the two are of one body, “one in origin, different in name.”⁶⁹ Truly, there is here no motionless stillness that could prevail over function. The darker the wisdom, the brighter its illumination; the quieter the spirit, the swifter its response. How could one claim that the bright and the dark, the active and the still, are here distinct?

[Concluding Statement]

Thus it is said in the *Complete Realization*, “[The Buddha] does not act, yet his actions are supreme.”⁷⁰ And Ratnakāra says, “Without discernment, without knowledge, he has total comprehension.” Such words speak of the perfect realization of spirit and the full activation of wisdom; they reach the apex beyond the realm of images. Follow these luminous words and knowledge of the sagely mind will be within your reach.

V. Correspondence with Liu Yimin

Liu's Letter

[Preface]

From Yimin, with obeisance.

I have longed to meet you, sir, since I first tasted of your exquisite renown. How is your health now that at year's end the winter frost has arrived? With communication severed I grow ever more concerned about your well-being. Here, the humid countryside has taken away my health; illness is my constant companion.⁷¹

Monk Huiming is setting off to the north, and so I have an opportunity to write you at length.

People of old never allowed mere physical distance to weaken their friendships; shared understanding always kept them close. Likewise, though we have never met, with endless rivers and vast mountain ranges between us, I have always cherished the edifying breeze of your virtue, and with your images and traces reflected in the mirror of my mind deep joy gathers up within me. Yet great distances still separate us and the conditions for us to meet never ripen. I gaze at the rosy-colored clouds and sigh in longing. 155a

Please take good care of yourself, in accordance with the seasons. I hope that travel may resume promptly so that I can write you more often. In the meantime I pray that your congregation thrives in harmony and that the foreign master is well.

Your insight and expert analysis, sir, fill this reservoir of wisdom; your exegesis allows one, in the words of the classic, "to bring the understanding past the midway point." Every time I reflect on the distances between us, my longing is all the more acute.

The mountain monks are pure and resolute in their practice. Single-minded in upholding the precepts, in addition to secluded meditation they devote themselves entirely to study and lecture. It brings me great joy to see them so faithful and dignified. I, too, guided by the promptings of my former lives,

have come along this noble path. For this I shall remain grateful as long as the sun and moon circle the skies.

Master Huiyuan is well.⁷² Ever refining his spiritual practice, he is “diligent night and day.”⁷³ Were it not for the deep undercurrent of the Dao coursing through him, and for the fact that his spirit is driven by the Principle, could he, at the advanced age of sixty, still possess a spirit so vast and indomitable? My gratitude to him deepens as I find here more and more peace and fulfillment.

It was at the end of last summer that Master Daosheng⁷⁴ introduced to me your essay, “*Prajñā* without Knowing.” It shows refined beauty of expression, profound points of doctrine, as well as subtlety and acuity in the explication of sagely writings. I savored it, captivated, unable to put it down. Truly you have bathed your mind in the ocean of the universal teachings [of the Mahayana] and have attained insight into the hall of transcendent darkness. Whoever uses [your essay] as a guide to understanding will witness the diverse currents of *prajñā* converge in wordless unity. What joy!

Now, words may become treacherous when applied to so subtle a principle; few will respond to a song that is so unlike any other. One who has not transcended words and images will inevitably cling to them and end up in error.

[Statement of Topic]

Your analysis of wisdom in terms of its conditions is exquisite, conclusive, superbly refined; its reasoning is without a single fissure. Yet, dull-witted as I am, I have difficulty comprehending it all at once and a handful of doubts still remain for me. I would like to lay them out for you, in the hope that you may respond at your leisure with a rough explanation.

In your essay you say that *prajñā* is in essence “neither existent nor non-existent, neither full nor vacuous. Though vacuous, it never ceases to illuminate; illuminating, it does not lose its vacuity. . . . [In the *Radiance*] it is said, ‘Unmoved in perfect awakening, he establishes all dharmas.’” Further, you assert, “Indeed, it is just that on account of what distinguishes [the sage] from a common person—his spiritual perspicacity—he is not defined by marks of conditioned events.” You also say that the functioning of the sagely mind “is one with its stillness, its stillness is one with its functioning . . . the quieter the spirit, the swifter its response.”

[You argue then that] the mind of the sage is quiescent, yet it reaches to the apex of Principle, which is one with nonbeing.⁷⁵ It is “swift without swiftness,

slow without slowness.”⁷⁶ Its knowing does not conflict with its stillness; its stillness does not oppose its knowing. Never is its stillness lost; never does its knowing cease. Thus, the pattern of the sage’s engaging with things, accomplishing his acts and transforming the world, is such that he remains within the realm of the nameable, all the while transcending it immensely, united with the nameless.

This mysterious doctrine, I confess, continues to elude me.

[Question]

Presently I should like to address these doubts regarding your outstanding essay. Specifically, I would like to inquire what it is precisely that makes the sagely mind different [from the mind of the ordinary person].

Does this difference consist in the sage’s thorough mastery of numen and his complete activation of the operations of mind, in wondrous comprehension and dark tallying? Or, rather, does it consist in the sagely mind being essentially self-so, self-enclosed, and self-sufficient, numinously silent in solitary self-apprehension?

155b

If it is the former case, then the terms “stillness” and “illumination” [with which you describe the sage] must be equivalent to “concentration” and “wisdom.” If the latter is the case, the sagely mind has by and large ceased responding to conditions.⁷⁷

You say, however, that even though the mind’s activities are obscured by the darkness of mystery, it remains extraordinarily active in its illuminating; and that even though the spirit dwells unsullied beyond the world of transformations, it shines the light of discernment with an unparalleled brilliance. To argue such a thesis you must have recourse to a deep realization indeed.

In my view, a knowledge that perceives change, responds to occasions, and accords with and responds to beings cannot be considered “nonexistent.” You write that the sagely mind is “fundamentally free” from falsely discriminating knowledge, but you do not demonstrate how the sagely mind can be without discrimination.

It may be advisable to first determine how exactly the sagely mind accords with and responds to things. Is it that it illuminates the markless alone? Or is it that it completely discerns the marked in all its transformations?

If it perceives [nothing but the marked in] its transformations, then this differs from [a perception of] the markless. If it illuminates the markless and

only the markless, it must be powerless to respond to conditions. You say that there is no phenomenon to which it reaches out, and at the same time that it has the power of according with beings. I do not fully understand this and I beg you to elucidate further.

You write that “though there is in [the sagely mind] no corresponding, there is nothing with which it does not correspond; though there is in it no affirmation, it leaves nothing unaffirmed. That it leaves nothing unaffirmed means that it affirms while not affirming; that there is nothing with which it does not correspond means that it corresponds while not corresponding.” Now, that there are no things with which it does not correspond, even while it does not correspond: this is perfect corresponding. That there are no things it does not affirm, even as it does not affirm: this is ultimate affirmation.

But how could there be an ultimate affirmation that would at the same time not be affirmation at all, or a perfect corresponding that would at the same time not be a corresponding, such that it would allow you to speak of “corresponding without corresponding” and “affirming without affirming”?

If what you mean is simply that perfect corresponding is not ordinary corresponding and that ultimate affirmation is not ordinary affirmation, then your words are just a way of referring to the fundamental distinction between insight and delusion, nothing more.

This is the point of your essay that I do not understand. I beg you to explain it once again and dispel my doubts.

The day your essay arrived, Master Huiyuan and I wasted no time in examining it closely. The Dharma master admired it just as I did. You and us lead each other in the pursuit of truth. It is just that our reasoning seems to be based on different principles, and so our understanding may not be identical to yours. Afterward your work was circulated among the community, and many pondered its crucial points. We only regret you cannot be with us now.

Response to Liu Yimin

[Preface]

“Never have we met”⁷⁸ and long have I yearned for an encounter—in vain. When Monk Huiming arrived, he gave me your letter dated the twelfth month of last year, including your inquiry. As I savored its words, reading

it repeatedly, in my enjoyment of it I felt as though, if only ever so briefly, you were present here in front of me.

The season of cold winds has arrived; how has your health been since you wrote? As for me, poor in virtue as I am, I have been struggling with exhaustion and have rarely been well.

The messenger makes ready for his journey back south, so I must be brief.

Fifteenth day of the eighth month. Sengzhao.

Though our garb differs, we are one in our pursuit of the wondrous truth. Separated by vast rivers and mountains, we are neighbors in a shared understanding. Thus, as I gaze off into the southbound road and my thoughts fly off toward you, a sense of homecoming fills the emptiness under my lapels.

Sir, you have now fulfilled your aspiration for noble solitude, beautifully transcending the mundane, and you dwell in secluded tranquility beyond the realm of worldly affairs; the square inch of your heart⁷⁹ is surely filled with joy. “Whenever you gather for debate”⁸⁰ we hear refined song not unlike that of the Bamboo Grove,⁸¹ lofty as it is effortless.

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You who are so pure and free, I do not know when at last we will meet! I only wish that you will take good care of your health, and that I may receive news from you whenever there is a messenger. I also hope that the monks on Lushan are in good health, and that the clergy and householders prosper in harmony.

News of Master Huiyuan’s well-being comforted me greatly. While I have yet to receive his pure tutelage, I have long revered his superior virtue and hoped eagerly to meet him. How wonderful that the noble Huiyuan, though now over sixty, is still so full of vigor, as he guides his disciples on secluded cliffs and gives himself to contemplation, guarding the One in the empty valley,⁸² while praises of his virtue are heard far and near. Often I extend my thoughts toward his corner of the earth, but they vanish on the hazy horizon. Unable to pay him my respects directly, I sigh deeply with regret.

But you, sir, are always in his pure presence. Your insight thus deepening, you must be brimming with elation!

[Situation in Chang’an]

The community here is as usual. Master Kumārajīva is in good health. The Qin king is a natural conduit for the Dao, endowed by Heaven with

extraordinary faculties. He is like a wall and moat guarding the Three Jewels, his mind set on propagating the Dao.

This has attracted monks of great renown, specialists in the wonderful scriptures, to come here from afar, and the edifying winds of Vulture Peak have been gathering force in this country.

The noble Ling's⁸³ far-off journey will be a ferry for a thousand generations to come: he brought back from the Western Regions more than two hundred new texts of the universal [Mahayana] teaching. The king also invited a master of Mahayana meditation, a master of the Tripiṭaka, and two masters of the *Vibhāṣā*.⁸⁴

Master Kumārajīva is translating the newly acquired scriptures in Large Stone Temple. This treasury of the Dharma is deep and vast and daily yields new wonders. The *dhyāna* master⁸⁵ teaches meditation at Tilers' Temple, surrounded by hundreds of disciples, who exert themselves tirelessly day and night in dignified harmony. This delights me greatly.

The master of the Tripiṭaka⁸⁶ is translating the *Rules of Discipline* in the Middle Monastery. His text is meticulous yet comprehensive, just as if it was the original text when first compiled.

The masters of the *Vibhāṣā* are working in Stone Ram Monastery on the Indian text of the *Śāriputra-abhidharma*.⁸⁷ Though they have not yet begun with the translation itself, whenever I inquire about their proceedings I hear new and remarkable things.

The greatest fortune in my insignificant life has been to take part in this splendid occasion, to encounter this magnificent transformative event. Regret, as I may, that I was not there in the Buddha's Jetavana assembly, my only other sorrow is that you, O sir of virtue and renown, cannot join us here in the present Dharma gathering.

Venerable [Dao]sheng was here with us for a number of years. Whenever we spoke he expressed deep admiration for you. Abruptly, he had to return south where you, sir, met him. I myself have not heard from him since, and this fills me with unspeakable worry.

When Monk Wei came from Mount Lu (Lushan), he brought with him your poems "In Praise of the Buddha-recollection *Samādhi*" along with Dharma master Huiyuan's own "In Praise of *Samādhi*" with preface. In both

content and form these compositions are exquisite; anyone with a taste for refined writing will recognize their beauty. So sings one who entered the door of sagacity, who knocked on the gate of mysteries. You, sir, and the master must have composed other writings. Why send so few?

In the year Wu (406 C.E.) Master Kumārajīva translated the *Teaching of Vimalakīrti*. I listened with deference to the translation proceedings, and in between sessions I wrote down all of the master's definitive explanations and compiled them into a commentary. Though its form is far from refined, its content rests firmly on the master's authority. I will have the messenger take a copy to the south, in hope that you, sir, may peruse it at your leisure. 156a

The questions you send me are subtle and penetrating, and I feel like that man from Ying, perplexed and humbled.⁸⁸ Now, my thoughts are not at all sophisticated and I am clumsy with the brush; moreover, the ultimate realm is beyond words, and any attempt to express it must fail. Endless, endless, is the flow of words, and in the end nothing is asserted. Nevertheless, I shall venture a reply to your letter in these, my untamed words.

[Answer]: [Part 1]

In your letter you quoted me, "The mind of the sage is quiescent, yet it reaches to the apex of Principle, which is one with nonbeing." You say that I assert that [although the sage] remains within the realm of the nameable, he nevertheless far transcends it, united with the nameless. And you added, "This mysterious doctrine, I confess, continues to elude me."

Now, to see things in this manner you must forget words and have inner realization, you must attain concentration in the square inch of the heart: the "uniqueness" of the sagely mind can never be understood in terms of any "uniqueness" that an ordinary person can reach.

You also wrote [that if the sage's "uniqueness" consists in his] "thorough mastery of numen and his complete activation of the operations of mind, in wondrous comprehension and dark tallying, . . . then the terms 'stillness' and 'illumination' [with which you describe the sage] must be equivalent to 'concentration' and 'wisdom.'" Conversely, if it means that the sagely mind is "essentially self-so, self-enclosed, and self-sufficient, numinously silent in its solitary self-apprehension," then it "has by and large ceased responding to conditions."⁸⁹

To this I reply, “wondrous comprehension and dark tallying” is not equivalent to “concentration and wisdom,” nor is “still numinosity in quiescent self-apprehension” tantamount to the “ceasing of the power of response.” The descriptions differ, but the wondrous function is always one. Where word-traces follow from the self, incongruence ensues, but in the sage there is no discrepancy.

Let me explain. “The mind of the sage illumines silently, yet it reaches to the apex of Principle, which is one with nonbeing.” Now, in that unity all things converge: once it is asserted that the sage has attained this apex-as-one-with-nonbeing, why distinguish between “concentration” and “insight”?

For do the terms “concentration” and “wisdom” not fall outside this unity? If these appellations were to emerge within the unity, their very presence would compromise the unity. But since they emerge outside of it, they have no bearing at all on the [sagely] self.

Furthermore, although the sagely mind is vacuous and sublime, it wondrously transcends all limited objects, responds to all stimuli, penetrates all that it encounters, its arcane mechanism operating mysteriously, its responsiveness inexhaustible—surely it cannot be said to have ceased responding to conditions.

Now, as for mind’s “being”: though one may substantialize being as being, being is not being in and of itself. Thus the sagely mind does not substantialize being. Since it does not substantialize being, [for the sage] being is without being. Since being is without being, it is also without nonbeing. Since it is also without nonbeing, there is for the sage neither “being” nor “nonbeing.” With neither being nor nonbeing, his spirit is vacuous.

How is this so? Being and nonbeing are but the mind’s shadow and echo. Words and images are but mental objects produced by contact with these shadows and echoes. When being and nonbeing are discarded, the mind’s shadows and echoes are no more. When shadows and echoes cease, words and symbols are nowhere to be found. When words and symbols are nowhere to be found, one will have transcended the world of limited things. When one has transcended, then, and only then, will one have attained “thorough mastery of numen and ultimate activation of the operations of mind.” This is what I call “wondrous comprehension.”

This “wondrous comprehension” rests on “the supportless.”

The “supportless” is in quiescence; when quiescence is attained, vacuity permeates all. “Wondrous comprehension” is in reaching the apex of things; when the apex is reached, each thing is responded to. When each thing is responded to, [the sage] accords with each and every event. When vacuity permeates all, his Dao transcends the realm of the nameable. It is because it transcends the realm of the nameable that I call it “nonexistent,” and because it accords with each and every event that I call it “existent.” To thus call it “existent” may seem to imply substantial existence, but this is just forcing a name on it. Could it really be thus?

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It is said in a sutra, “Sagely wisdom is without knowing, yet there is nothing it does not know; it is without purposeful activity, yet there is nothing it leaves undone.”⁹⁰

This wordless, markless Dao of quiescent cessation: can it be spoken of in terms of “being” as being or “nonbeing” as nonbeing, “motion” as opposed to “stillness” or “stillness” that nullifies function?

Yet today those who discuss it look to immobilize it in words—they seek corners in the Great Square,⁹¹ they force erudition on mystery and cling to their preconceptions as though they were the final truth. Thus, when they hear that “the sage knows” they think that the sagely mind is a deliberate one; when they hear that the sagely mind “has no knowledge” they imagine it as a vast hollow space. Such assertions of either being or nonbeing are the abode of one-sided views; surely they are not the middle path of nonduality.

There is more. Even though things are individually unique, their nature is always fundamentally one: neither can they be seen as things, nor can their thingness be denied. When things are substantialized as things, names and marks arise in profusion. When thingness is not imputed to things, each is identical with the ultimate.

The sage does not impute thingness to things, nor does he deny the thingness of things. Since he does not impute thingness to things, for him things do not exist. Since neither does he deny the thingness of things, for him things do not nonexistent. Since they do not exist, he does not cling to them; since they do not nonexistent, he does not reject them.

Since he does not reject them, things wondrously abide as one with the ultimate. Since he does not grasp them, names and forms no longer bring each other about. When there are no more names and forms, he cannot be

said to have knowledge. When things wondrously abide as one with the ultimate, he cannot be said to be without knowing. A sutra speaks of this, “As for *prajñā* and the dharmas: [the sagely mind] does not grasp them, nor does it reject them; it has no knowledge, nor is it without knowledge.”⁹² This is a realm beyond the cognition of objects, beyond the deliberate mind. Is it thus not preposterous to try to confine it to either “being” or “nonbeing”?

Allow me to speak now of this “being and nonbeing.” [Ordinary] wisdom arises completely within the realm of marks. Since dharmas are fundamentally markless, how could sagely wisdom be considered [mere] knowledge?

Yet when people speak of “not knowing,” they mean an insentient state, like that of a piece of wood, a rock, or a mere hollow space. Can this “not knowing” accurately describe that numinous mirror, that candle in the dark, that which was shaped before the beginning and from which nothing, however miniscule, can hide?

Now, not knowing arises in relation to knowing; neither not knowing nor knowing can be asserted [of the sagely mind].⁹³ Because there is in it no knowing, I speak of it as “not being”; because there is in it no not knowing, I call it “not nonbeing.”

Thus, even though vacuous, the sagely mind never ceases to illuminate; illuminating, it does not lose its vacuity. Nebulous, unperturbedly still, it is perfectly free from grasping and attachment. How could one claim that when active it is “existent” and when still it is “nonexistent”?

Thus it is said in a sutra, “Ultimate *prajñā* is neither being nor nonbeing, there is in it neither arising nor perishing; it cannot be communicated in words.”⁹⁴

Allow me to explain further. When I say it is not “being,” I merely reject assertions of it as being—I do not affirm it as nonbeing. When I say it is not nonbeing, I merely reject assertions of it as nonbeing—I do not affirm it as not-nonbeing. It is neither existent, nor nonexistent; neither nonexistent, nor not nonexistent.

156c This explains why while Subhūti discoursed on *prajñā* incessantly, he claimed never to have said anything. How could one ever communicate this Dao beyond all words?

I wish that you, sir, attuned as you are to sublime things, will understand it.

[Part 2]

You also said, “It may be advisable to first determine how exactly the sagely mind accords with and responds to things. Is it that it illuminates the markless alone? Or is it that it completely discerns the marked in all its transformations?”

It seems that you assume that “the markless” and “transformations” refer to separate entities. You see “discernment of transformations” as distinct from the “markless,” and “illumination of the markless” as at odds with reaching out to and responding to events. I fear that this obfuscates the truth of “identity [of emptiness] with the ultimate.”

It is said in a sutra, “Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form; form is identical with emptiness, emptiness is identical with form.”⁹⁵

If what you wrote in your letter was true, then when apprehending form and emptiness, one would have to see form with one mind and emptiness with another. Viewing form with one mind, one would see only form as not emptiness. Viewing emptiness with one mind, one would see only emptiness as not form. As a result, emptiness and form would be torn asunder and their common root would remain beyond reach.

Thus when the sutras speak of “not form,” they attribute non-formness to form itself, not merely to that which is already not form. Were they merely attributing non-formness to that which is already not form, this would be like asserting that a vast hollow is in fact vast and hollow: doing so would not advance our understanding. Since, however, they assign non-formness to form itself, they mean that form is not other than non-form, and saying that form is not other than non-form is saying that form and non-form are one and the same.

Thus we know that transformations are one with the markless, and the markless is one with transformations. Yet, this is not the common person’s perception of things—thus the conflicting doctrines.

If one were to examine closely the abstruse scriptures and rest one’s understanding on the original intent of the Sage, could one still insist that the ultimate and the relative require two separate minds, and that emptiness and being need different illuminations?

Thus as [the sagely mind] illuminates the markless, its power of reaching out to and according with phenomena does not diminish. As it observes the changing, it does not violate the principle of marklessness. When it encounters being, it does not contrast it with nonbeing. When it encounters nonbeing, it does not contrast it with being. Therefore it is said, “Unmoved in perfect awakening, he establishes all dharmas.”⁹⁶

It follows that stillness and function do not obstruct each other. How could one claim that there is a discrepancy between change-perceiving knowledge and markless illumination? You argue, heedlessly I fear, that emptiness and being require two minds, and that stillness and agitation involve disparate functions, which leads you to assert that change-perceiving knowledge cannot be described as “not being.”

However, if only you could give up your self-attachment within the realm of things and find the dark mechanism beyond the realm of conditioned events; if you could equalize all existents in one moment of vacuity and understand that this perfect vacuity is not [mere] nonbeing, then you would say that while the Perfected Person never ceases to accord with and respond to things, to move in harmony with them, to ride their movements in accord with their transformations, such a person is never confined to being.

The sagely mind being like this, could there be in it any discrimination? Yet you claim that I “do not demonstrate how it is that the sagely mind is without discrimination.”

You also say that the sagely mind “does not correspond: this is perfect corresponding. That there are no things it does not affirm: . . . this is ultimate affirmation.” These words are quite apt. If you could only affirm without a deliberate mind, and thus affirm in nonaffirming; if you could only correspond with things without a deliberate mind, and thus correspond in noncorresponding! Then you would be able to affirm inexhaustibly while not obstructing nonaffirmation, and to correspond inexhaustibly without compromising noncorresponding.

But beware of bringing substantial affirmation to nonaffirmation, and substantial corresponding to noncorresponding—this is the road to calamity.⁹⁷ Why? If your “ultimate affirmation” can affirm [in this way], and if your “ultimate corresponding” can correspond [in this way], names and marks will take shape, distinctions will arise between the beautiful and the ugly,

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and you will have to struggle through the cycle of rebirth, life after life, without end.⁹⁸

Thus the sage empties his breast and rids himself of discernment and knowing. He resides in the domain of movement and function, yet rests in the realm of non-action. He establishes himself within the nameable, yet dwells in the village beyond words. Quiescent, vacuous, he cannot be captured in shapes or names. Such is the sage.

To say that ultimate affirmation can be affirmed and that ultimate corresponding can be corresponded with is to show a lack of comprehension of the noble purport. I fear that while such “affirmation” and “corresponding” may apply to things, it certainly does not apply to the [sagely mind itself]. How could it?

[Concluding Comment]

When word-traces proliferate, conflicting doctrines thrive. But there is something that words cannot express, and something that traces cannot trace. Therefore, those who are skilled at speaking words seek that which words cannot express. Those skilled at tracing traces seek that which traces cannot trace.

The highest principle is vacuous and mysterious. The moment you try to represent it in the mind you will have missed the target. How much more so when you attempt to express it in words! It will then, I fear, recede even further into the distance.

I hope, O seeker of the truth, that we shall one day meet beyond words.

VI. Nirvana is Unnameable

Memorial to the Lord of Qin, Yao Xing, by Sengzhao

I have heard it said that by attaining the One the heavens become clear, the earth peaceful, and the lords of the land bring order to the world.⁹⁹

Now I stand humbly before you, your Highness, you whose wisdom is profound and resplendent, you whose spirit accords with the Dao, you who are wondrously in line with the center of the wheel,¹⁰⁰ who encompasses all principles, who effortlessly plays with the blade¹⁰¹ amid the myriad affairs of state while tirelessly propagating the Dao; you whose charisma shields beings like a cloak, and whose every written word becomes a standard for them to follow. Truly, four are the greats in the universe—the king is one of them.¹⁰²

Nirvana is the final destination of the three vehicles, the treasury of the universal [Mahayana] sutras. Vast like the ocean, beyond the realm of the visible and audible, tenebrous mystery—it is, I fear, not something that ordinary people can fathom.

Unworthy though I am, thanks to the boundless generosity of the king I was able to lead a tranquil scholarly life in the academy and to study under Master Kumārajīva for over a decade. While the myriad sutras vary in their subjects, each with its own central tenet, we inquired first and foremost about the problem of nirvana.¹⁰³

Yet my inferior intellect hampered my understanding, and though I was blessed with the finest instruction my mind remained shrouded in a thick fog of doubt. However, I worked tirelessly, exerting my meagre intellect, and at last, it seemed, I began to comprehend a little. However, without an authority to lead me in my understanding I dared not decide on my own. Alas, Master Kumārajīva had passed away and I had no one of whom to inquire. Therein was my boundless sorrow.

Yet, as it is said, O King, “Sagely virtue does not dwell alone.” You and Kumārajīva found spiritual kinship, “at first look you recognized the Dao”¹⁰⁴

present in each other, and took great delight in this newfound intimacy.¹⁰⁵ You fanned the transformative wind of his profound teaching and so brought understanding to beings in this time of decline.

Your Highness, some time ago I had the honor of reading your response to a letter from Yao Song,¹⁰⁶ the Marquis of Ancheng, who inquired about the final principle, the unconditioned. You wrote, “The reason beings wander on and on through the cycle of life and death is their attachment, their desires. If the desires in their minds were to stop, they would no longer be confined to life and death. No longer in life and death, their spirits would delve into recondite silence, their virtue would harmonize with the vacuous. This is nirvana. Nirvana being thus, how could it accept any name?”

This, I say, is the quintessence of the subtle teachings, words that reach the apex beyond images. Who else [but you], whose understanding equals that of Mañjuśrī and whose virtue matches that of Maitreya, could thus propagate the mysterious Dao, be the wall and moat for the Dharma, and again unroll the scroll of the great teaching so as to make manifest its once-forgotten recondite purport?¹⁰⁷ Your letter, filled with insight and delight, arrested my attention as I studied it intently, unable to put it down. The superior course it charts out—is it fit for our present age alone? No! It is a bridge across sam-sara for countless eons to come.

Yet, your sagely doctrine is abstruse, its principle subtle, its words precise, you are a master craftsman for the high monks, a conduit of liberation for erudite gentlemen—those who cling to verbal designations will, I fear, fail to fully comprehend it.

[For this reason,] and following the model of the “Ten Wings”¹⁰⁸ of the *Yijing*, I have undertaken to compose this essay, “Nirvana is Unnameable.” Mere proliferation of embellished words is not my intention; instead, my goal is to open up and propagate the profound purport of your teaching.

The essay consists of nine critical passages and ten responses. I quote broadly from the scriptures for evidence and illustration.

Your Highness, as I reverently take up for discussion your thesis of “namelessness,” I dare not pretend that I have been admitted for an audience with your spirit-mind or mastered the profundities of your teaching. At best, I can attempt a distant intimation of this gate of mystery, in the hope that my words might be of use to fellow students of the Way.

In concluding your letter you wrote, “When various exegetes speak of supreme truth, they all call it ‘vast, vacuous, and still,’ and claim ‘therein is no sage.’ Such views have always struck me as too extreme, too far removed from the aspirations of ordinary people. Moreover, if there was no sage, who would be there to know nothingness?” How true, how true are Your Majesty’s words! Indeed, while this Dao is obscure and unfathomable, the “vital essence resides therein.”¹⁰⁹ If there were no sage, who would be there to wander in harmony with the Dao?

Previously scholars flocked outside the gate of this Dao, disoriented, distressed, ridden with doubt, unable to see correctly. How fortunate they are now! Your lofty instruction has arrived and the doctrine is all at once made clear. Those who stood outside the gate are now admitted into the mysterious chamber and find peace. Indeed, with your teaching the wheel of Dharma turns again in Jambudvīpa,¹¹⁰ and the light of the Dao shines once more, as it will on a thousand generations to come.

In the present essay I discuss in depth nirvana’s nameless nature and put to rest the claim that, in its vastness, it is disengaged from the world.

Your Highness, I humbly present to you the following passages. If my essay succeeds in expressing but a fraction of your sagely teaching, I beg that you order it placed in the records. Should it fail to do so, I implore you to provide your generous corrections.

Sengzhao

(Three readings [for the term “nirvana”] are in use: *niyue*, *nihuan*, and *niepan*. This is because [the term] was translated at different times, reflecting differences [in pronunciation] between the central kingdoms and the peripheries. *Niepan* is the standard reading.)¹¹¹

Essay

1. Main Doctrine

Author: What is spoken of in the sutras as nirvana—“nirvana with remainder” and “nirvana without remainder”—in the idiom of the Qin is called “the unconditioned” or “cessation-passing across.” “The unconditioned” refers to the vacuous silence that defines nirvana, that wondrous freedom from all conditioned things. “Cessation-passing across” points to where “the great

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tribulation has completely ceased” and where the four streams¹¹² have been crossed over and left behind.

Indeed, [nirvana] is the place to which the images in the mirror all return, that recondite abode beyond words. “With remainder” and “without remainder” are mere conventional designations for the divergent modes in which the sage responds to things: reaching out to them and withdrawing from them.

I would like to discuss this in more detail. Nirvana: silent, vacuous, it cannot be captured in forms or names; subtle, markless, it cannot be known with a deliberate mind. Beyond all existents, it rises mysteriously above them; vast like the great void, it abides forever. Follow it, you will not find its traces; approach it, you will not see its face. Its existence is not contained in the six realms of rebirth, its substance is impervious to [time], that strong-armed thief.¹¹³ Vast and nebulous, it seems to effulge in and out of presence. The five types of vision¹¹⁴ cannot see its shape; the two types of hearing¹¹⁵ cannot hear its sound. Dark, inscrutable—could it ever be seen? Could it ever be known?

Nirvana is all-encompassing, omnipresent, yet it rises up solitarily beyond being and nonbeing. Therefore those who try to name it miss its reality; those who try to know it contradict its simplicity. They who say it exists oppose its nature, while those who say it does not exist violate its body.

This is why Śākyamuni shut himself off in a room in Magadha, why Vimalakīrti refused to speak in Vaiśālī, why Subhūti preached without speaking and so made manifest the Dao, and why Indra and the gods rained down flowers [in gratitude for the Dharma] even though they had heard nothing. The sages remained silent; this was because their spirit was driven by the Principle. But did they not preach at all? They preached a sermon on the inexpressible.

It is said in a sutra, “Ultimate liberation is freedom from the realm of nameable things. It is cessation, eternal peace, without beginning or end, neither dark nor bright, neither cold nor hot, deep like space, beyond description.”¹¹⁶ And in a *śāstra*, “In nirvana things are neither existent nor nonexistent; here words have no access, the mind’s activity is extinguished.”¹¹⁷ If we consider their foundation, the sutras and *śāstras* are surely not mere idle talk.

Indeed, under one aspect [nirvana] does not exist—it cannot be called simply existent; under another it is not nonexistent—it cannot be called simply nonexistent. How so? One may try to establish it in the realm of being

but [in nirvana] the five aggregates are forever extinguished. One may search for it in the village of nonbeing but [in nirvana] the recondite numen is never depleted of its power. With the recondite numen never depleted of its power, deep and still, [nirvana] embraces the One. With the five aggregates forever extinguished, the myriad afflictions are no more. With afflictions no more, it is merged through and through with the Dao. Deep and still, embracing the One, even though the spirit is active therein, it produces no karma. Active, yet producing no karma, perfect *karman* abides in it forever. Merged through and through with the Dao, it permeates all and yet remains unchanged. All-pervading yet unchanging, it cannot be considered existent. Perfect *karman* abiding in it forever, it cannot be considered nonexistent.

Thus it follows that considered from within, nirvana is neither existent nor nonexistent; viewed from without, language fails to approach it. Seeing and hearing do not reach it, and the four kinds of emptiness¹¹⁸ obscure it even further. It is tranquil yet awesome, plain yet grand. All nine classes of beings¹¹⁹ return to it, all sages mysteriously congregate in it. This is the realm of the Invisible and Inaudible and the village of great mystery. 158a

To try to discuss this spiritual Dao by labeling it as either “being” or “non-being,” by marking off its boundaries—is this not preposterous?

2. Analyzing the Essence

Opponent: Now, names do not arise in a vacuum, designations do not arise by themselves. The designations found in the sutras, “nirvana with remainder” and “nirvana without remainder,” must be, respectively, the true name for the return to the root and the wondrous designation for the way of spirit. Allow me to speak of these in turn.

[Nirvana] with Remainder

When the Tathāgata attained great awakening and his Dharma body was established, he bathed in the pure waters of the eight kinds of liberation and found repose in the verdant grove of the seven members of awakening.¹²⁰ After cultivating wholesome deeds for innumerable eons, he at last shook off the dust accumulated over time immemorial. The three illuminations¹²¹ mirrored within him, his spiritual glow illuminated without. Having at first armed himself with the bodhisattva’s resolve,¹²² finally, in universal compassion, he delved into the world of human distress.

Above, he held on to the root of mysteries; below, he reached out to lift the weak and the forlorn. He strode beyond the threefold world; he trod alone into the Great Square. He opened up the eightfold path, a road for the multitude, broad and gentle. He mounted the spirit-steed of the six supernatural powers¹²³ and rode the royal carriage comprised of the five vehicles.¹²⁴ At will he crossed the border between life and death, joining with beings as they wandered [in samsara], his Dao harmonized with all, his virtue reaching everywhere. He plunged to where the mother of transformations gives origin to beings, and fully activated the wondrous function of the mysterious mechanism. He draped the firmament of vacuity beyond all borders, and stoked the fire of *sarvajñatā*¹²⁵ to illumine the darkness. He was ready to erase his traces from the nine abodes of being¹²⁶ and immerse himself forever in great vacuity, yet there remained in him a residue of karmic conditions, traces not yet effaced. This residue lingered on like a cloud-soul, and his sagely wisdom endured.

This is nirvana with remainder.

In the words of scripture, “Myriad afflictions are no more, as though transmuted into pure gold, yet his numinous cognition alone abides.”¹²⁷

[Nirvana] without Remainder

When the Perfected Person (the Buddha) had taught what had to be taught, he extinguished forever his numinous illumination and vanished into the boundless and nonmanifest: this is nirvana without remainder.

Of all forms of disease, none is greater than that of having a body—he extinguished the body and returned to nothingness. Of all forms of torment, none is more severe than that of having a calculating mind—he erased it and submerged in the vacuous.¹²⁸ The mind is taxed by the body; the body is burdened by the intellect. The two pull each other, turning like a wheel on the endless road of misery. It is said in a sutra, “The intellect is poison, the body is shackles. Because of them the abysmal silence of liberation remains beyond reach; they are the cause of all tribulations.”¹²⁹

The Perfected Person turned his body into ashes and extinguished his intellect, he relinquished his form and discarded his reason. Within, he abandoned the stirrings of illumination; without, he put to rest the basis of misery.¹³⁰ Transcendent, perfectly free from all existents; boundless, he merged with the great vacuous. Tranquil, inaudible, bland, non-manifest,

mysteriously gone forever into a destination unknown. When a lamp goes out its flame is extinguished, the oil and the flame gone all at once.

This is nirvana without remainder. In the words of a sutra, “The five aggregates are no more, like a flame extinguished.”¹³¹

[Critique]

This being so, nirvana with remainder can indeed be called “the nameable,” while nirvana without remainder may be called “the nameless.” With non-nameability asserted, partisans of emptiness will be gratified to find sanction for their belief in that all-pervading silence; with nameability affirmed, those concerned about virtue and morals will have the Sage’s actions to look up to as their model. Such are the teachings imparted to us in the authoritative scriptures, the tracks laid down by the sages of old.

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And yet you say, “Considered from within, neither is it existent nor non-existent; viewed from without, language fails to approach it. Seeing and hearing do not reach it, the four kinds of formlessness obscure it even further.”

When lovers of virtue hear this doctrine they will despair; when proponents of emptiness hear it they will be left without a refuge. You describe a state no different from that of someone who, even though his eyes and ears are as obtuse as when he was still in the womb, and for whom the heavenly bodies are obscured beyond the most distant clouds, nevertheless attempts to pronounce on fine distinctions in musical notation and to discuss the diverse appearances [of astral phenomena]. You, sir, know only to banish the Perfected Person outside of being and nonbeing, to sing lofty praises of what is beyond forms and names. Yet all the while your words lead nowhere and block the recondite path, instead of revealing it. Though I ponder on them intently, they do not bring me peace. Are they really the light in the dark chamber, the wondrous sound that restores hearing to the deaf?

3. Essence Established

Author: The terms “with remainder” and “without remainder” are only external appellations for nirvana, conventional designations for the divergent modes of [the sage’s] responding to things. Those who cling to concepts will be bound by concepts; those who are attached to forms and images will be constrained by forms and images. Names reach no further than the definable; forms stop at the square and the round. But there are things that “square” and

“round” cannot capture, and things that concepts cannot convey. How could names express the unnameable, how could forms truly capture the formless?

You are correct to say that the terms “with remainder” and “without remainder” describe the two modes establishing the teaching, through skillful [action] and through quiescence, or the two modes of the Tathāgata’s supreme activity, the manifest and the hidden. But they do not refer to, on the one hand, any dark mysteriously quiescent principle beyond words, or, on the other, to some wondrous workings of the Perfected Person in the center of the circle. Have you never heard of “correct contemplation”? Vimalakīrti said, “The way I see the Buddha is as one with no beginning or end, one who has transcended the six senses, who has left the triple world behind, one who is neither somewhere nor nowhere, who neither acts nor does not act, one who can neither be cognized with consciousness nor known with knowledge, one beyond language, one whose mental operations are extinguished. To view in this manner is called to contemplate correctly; to view otherwise is to not see the Buddha.”¹³² And the *Radiance* says, “The Buddha is like empty space. He neither comes nor goes. He manifests in response to conditions, he dwells in no definite location.”¹³³

As for the sage’s position in the world: silent, vacuous, he does not grasp, he does not contend, he leads without asserting himself, he responds to each stimulus without fail, like an echo in a dark valley or images in a clear mirror. Face him, no one knows from where he came; follow him, no one knows where he goes. He emerges suddenly into being, suddenly he disappears. The more active he is, the more quiescent; the more hidden, the more manifest. From the darkness he emerges, to the darkness he returns; his transformations follow no predefined pattern.

As for these appellations, they are established to indicate the various modes of [sagely] response. When [the sage] manifests traces, we call this “arising”; when he makes them vanish, we call this “cessation.” His “arising” is referred to as nirvana “with remainder,” his “cessation” as nirvana “without remainder.” All along both appellations—“with” and “without remainder”—

158c remain rooted in the nameless. Surely the nameless Dao will take any name?

Thus, the Perfected Person becomes a square when he inhabits a square, a circle when he stops in a circle, a heavenly being when among *devas* (gods), a human being when among humans. To become a *deva* or a human being

in accordance with circumstance is surely not something that *devas* or humans could do. It is precisely because he is neither a *deva* nor a human that he can become one or the other.

As for his transformative rule, he merely responds, he does not act deliberately; he follows the causes, he is not being charitable. Not being charitable, his charity is perfect; not acting deliberately, his action is unsurpassed. He is unsurpassed in his action, yet he goes back to ordinary accomplishments. He is perfect in his charity, yet in the end he returns to the nameless.

It is said in scripture, “The Dao of *bodhi* cannot be measured; it has no top, no bottom, it is expansive, and deep without limit. Great, it envelops Heaven and Earth; miniscule, it penetrates into that which has no openings. Thus it is called ‘Dao.’”¹³⁴ Clearly “being” or “nonbeing” cannot capture the Dao of nirvana.

Yet when the deluded consider [the Buddha’s] extraordinary feats¹³⁵ in the world they assert his existence, and when they reflect on his passing into cessation they assert his nonexistence. Yet how could one, from within this realm of being and nonbeing, from this domain of delusive thought, adequately express his abstruse Dao and adjudicate on the sagely mind?

I say that the Perfected Person is quiescent, imperceptible, without any external form. The hidden and the manifest aspects of his being originate in one source. Although present, he does not “exist”; gone, he does not “nonexist.”

How so? The Buddha said, “There is no birth realm where I am not born, but I am never born. There is no form that I do not take on, but even while embodied I do not have a body.”¹³⁶ This means that though present, he does not “exist.” It is also said in a sutra, “The Bodhisattva entered limitless *samādhi* and saw all the buddhas of the past who had passed into cessation.”¹³⁷ Also, “He entered nirvana, yet did not [enter] *parinirvāṇa*.”¹³⁸ From this we know that, while vanishing, the Tathāgata does not simply nonexist. Not non-existent: while non-existent, he exists. Not existent: while existing, he does not exist. Existing, he is non-existent: therefore “being” cannot be attributed to him. Non-existent, he exists: thus “nonbeing” likewise does not apply.

Hence, we can conclude that nirvana transcends the domain of being and nonbeing, and leaves the path of names and images far behind.

Yet you say that the Sage saw the body as the source of the greatest distress, so he extinguished the body and returned to nothingness. He saw the unawakened

mind as the source of the greatest torment, so he eradicated it to submerge in the vacuous. Is this not a violation of the Sage's spiritual perfection, an injustice to his profound teaching?

It is said in a sutra, "The Dharma body is formless, in responding to things it takes on particular shapes. *Prajñā* has no knowledge, it just illuminates in response to objects."¹³⁹

As [the Sage] hastens to engage the myriad events, his spirit stays unperturbed; as he responds to each of a thousand exigencies, his mind remains unruffled. In movement, he is like wandering clouds; in repose, he is like the valley spirit.¹⁴⁰ Would he tangle his mind in discriminations between "this" and "that," or his emotions in the distinction between "movement" and "repose"?

Since he does not bring a deliberate mind to his movement or stillness, he does not show discrete forms in his coming and going. Since he does not impute a discrete form to his coming and going, there are no shapes that he cannot assume. Since he does not bring a deliberate mind to his movement or stillness, there are no stimuli to which he fails to respond,

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What I mean is that [the Sage's] "mind" arises in response to the deliberate mind [of beings]; his "forms" emerge in response to the existing forms [in the world]. Since his forms do not emerge from his self, even if he were to tread on molten rock and metal he would not be burned.¹⁴¹ Since his mind arises not from his self, even though he delves into everyday affairs he remains unperturbed.¹⁴² Could the tangles of [conventional distinctions like that between] self and other constrain his self?

Thus the Sage's wisdom embraces all things yet it is never belabored; his bodily form fills the eight directions but this brings him no distress. If you add to him, he will not overflow; if you subtract from him, he will not be lessened.¹⁴³ How could anyone take literally the story that he contracted dysentery on the way [to Kuśinagara], that his life ended under the twin trees, that his spirit ceased in the regal casket, and that his body was cremated on a pyre?¹⁴⁴

Yet all the while the deluded, investigating the traces of his extraordinary responsiveness, cling to the evidence of their eyes and ears. Carpenter's square and ruler in hand, they go about trying to measure the Great Square: they want to find the Perfected Person belabored by knowledge and distressed

by bodily form. “He discarded being to delve into nonbeing,” they claim, and then assign to him corresponding names.

Surely what they do is not picking words of subtlety from the realm beyond speech, or pulling the root of mystery from the vacuous field.

4. [Question:] Examining Transcendence

Opponent: As the Primordial Chaos began to differentiate, the myriad existents divided among the triad [of Heaven, Earth, and humanity]. Then, in the wake of being, nonbeing ineludibly followed. Nonbeing is not self-caused; it depends on being, as is expressed in the saying, “High and low fulfill each other.”¹⁴⁵ This is a universal law, the pinnacle of all laws.

Thus, at the beginning, all that the mother of transformation gave birth to and nurtured, whether manifest or hidden, however strange or uncanny—all that was being. Subsequently, as beings began to transform out of existence, nonbeing ensued—all that was nonbeing. These two realms of being and nonbeing completely encompass all principles.

It is said in scripture that the two dharmas of being and nonbeing subsume the entirety of dharmas.¹⁴⁶ Also spoken of are the three unconditioned dharmas: empty space, extinguishing of afflictions by means of analytic meditation, and extinguishing without analytic meditation. The extinguishing of afflictions by means of analytic meditation is nirvana.¹⁴⁷

Yet you say, “beyond being and nonbeing there is a wondrous Dao, more wondrous yet than either being or nonbeing—nirvana.” I should like to get to the root of this “wondrous Dao.”

If it does exist, then, however wondrous, it cannot be called nonbeing; if, however wondrous, it cannot be called nonbeing, then it must belong to the realm of being. If it does not exist, then, as nonbeing, it is devoid of any distinctions; if, as nonbeing, it is devoid of any distinctions, then it belongs to the realm of nonbeing.

In sum, there cannot be anything that while other than being would not amount to nonbeing, or anything that while other than nonbeing would not amount to being.

Still you say, “beyond being and nonbeing there is a wondrous Dao, neither being nor nonbeing—nirvana.” Your words reach my ears but they do not enter my heart.

5. Above the Realm

Author: Indeed, the categories of being and nonbeing do encapsulate all dharmas, comprise all principles. However, that which they encompass is merely conventional truth. It is said in a sutra, “What is ultimate truth? The Dao of nirvana. What is conventional truth? The dharmas of being and non-being.”¹⁴⁸ Let me elucidate.

159b Being is possible only in relation to nonbeing, nonbeing only in relation to being. “Being” comes about by an assertion of nonbeing, and “nonbeing” by a negation of being. In this way, being is born of nonbeing and nonbeing is born of being: what is called “being” is the being of nonbeing, and what is called “nonbeing” is the nonbeing of being. Apart from being there is no nonbeing; apart from nonbeing there is no being. Being and nonbeing depend on each other, just as do high and low, for where there is high, there is low, and where there is low, there must be high.¹⁴⁹ Thus, even though being and nonbeing are distinct, they never escape the domain of being. Out of this [duality] words and images emerge and affirmation and negation arise. Could they capture the recondite apex, represent the spiritual Dao?

Accordingly, the reason I speak of nirvana as “transcendent”—beyond the realm of being and nonbeing—is indeed that the dharmas of being and nonbeing are confined to the realm of the six sense objects, and the realm of the six sense objects is not the abode of nirvana.¹⁵⁰ With “transcendence” I free nirvana from [these confines].

Seekers of the Dao, this subtle recondite path, should vest their minds in that transcendent domain, capture the meaning and discard the words, and realize its essence as neither being nor nonbeing. How could anyone claim that beyond being and nonbeing there exists yet another existent that could be named?

When the sutras speak of the three unconditioned dharmas [it is for this reason]: the endless tangles that bind the multitude are all produced by severe affliction, and of all the types of affliction none is more severe than [attachment to] being. Since no concept is farther from “being” than that of “nonbeing,” [the sutras] use it as an expedient to elucidate [nirvana’s] not being a being. They merely indicate that [nirvana] is not a being, they do not assert that it is a nonbeing.

6. Inquiring into Mystery

Opponent: You yourself say that nirvana exists neither beyond the realm

of being and nonbeing, nor within it. If it does not exist within it, it cannot be found within. If it does not exist beyond it, neither can it be sought beyond. If there is thus nowhere that it can be found, there is altogether no such thing. Yet it cannot be that this Dao simply does not exist. Since it cannot be non-existent, this recondite path can surely be found: the thousand sages followed it and did not return empty-handed. It must exist—yet you insist it is neither beyond the realm of being and nonbeing nor within it. Your assertion is extraordinary. I implore you to elucidate.

7. Wondrous Presence

Author: Now, speech is an expression of names, names arise in response to marks, marks depend on that which can be marked. The markless cannot be named. Without names there can be no speech, without speech there is nothing to hear. It is said in a sutra, “Nirvana is neither a dharma nor a non-dharma. Inaudible and inexpressible, it cannot be known by the [ordinary] mind.”¹⁵¹ How could I dare speak of it? And you, sir, how could you desire to hear about it? Yet Subhūti once said, “If the assembly can receive without a deliberate mind and hear without hearing, I am ready to speak without words.”¹⁵² Now you ask me to speak, so I will.

Vimalakīrti said, “To attain nirvana without leaving the realm of afflictions: this is correct meditation.”¹⁵³ The goddess said, “Enter the buddha field without leaving the realm of Māra.”¹⁵⁴

This is because the mysterious Dao resides in wondrous insight. Wondrous insight is unification with the ultimate. To unite with the ultimate is to view being and nonbeing as equal. In this equalizing vision, self and other are no longer two. Of this it is said, “I am of one root with Heaven and Earth, the myriad things and I are one body.” In this unity between self [and things] there is no longer any [duality between] being and nonbeing, but as long as [things and] self are separate perfect comprehension is impossible. Thus, [nirvana] is neither beyond nor within the realm of being and nonbeing—
the Dao resides in the spaces between.¹⁵⁵

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The Perfected Person’s illumination is dim, his mind vacuous, yet there is nothing he does not encompass. He takes into his breast the entire world in the six directions, yet his numinous mirroring is never depleted of its power. In the square inch of the heart he mirrors all existents, yet his spirit remains vacuous. Indeed, he plucks the root of mysteries from the time before all time;

he unites with all movement with an unmoving mind. Tranquil, bland, silent like an abyss, wondrously he tallies with the self-so nature of things.

This is because even though he dwells in being, he is not of it; even though he resides in nonbeing, he is not of it. Not part of nonbeing, he does not substantialize it as nonbeing; not part of being, he does not substantialize it as being. In this way he can be not apart from the world, even as he is not a part of it.

Further, just as dharmas have no marks of being and nonbeing, so does the sage have no knowledge of being and nonbeing. That he has no knowledge of being and nonbeing is because he has no deliberate mentation within. That dharmas have no marks of being and nonbeing is because there are no discrete phenomena without. No discrete phenomena without, no deliberate mentation within; “this” and “that” mutually quiescent, extinguished, things and “I” darkly unified, nebulous, without traces—this is nirvana.

Nirvana being thus, all attempts to measure and define it must fail. How could you seek for it within the realm of being and nonbeing? How could you pursue it without?

8. Questioning the Distinctions

Opponent: You say that nirvana is not bound to the realm of the measurable and definable, hence it transcends the sphere of the six senses; it is neither within nor without, yet here the recondite Dao is singularly present. This is the ultimate Dao, the consummation of Principle and of Nature, wondrously unified, undivided. This may be true.

However, in the *Radiance* it is said, “The three vehicles differ with regard to the unconditioned.”¹⁵⁶ Also, the Buddha said, “In the past, when I was a bodhisattva by the name of Sumedha, I entered nirvana in the presence of Dipamkara Buddha.”¹⁵⁷ Sumedha Bodhisattva first attained the forbearance in the face of the nonarising of dharmas on the seventh stage, and continued to practice into three more stages.

Now, if nirvana is one and undivided, it should not allow for three more stages. If it does allow for three stages, it cannot be the ultimate. An ultimate Dao that allows of gradations? The sutras disagree.¹⁵⁸ Where can we look for a resolution?

9. Distinctions Defended

Author: You are correct, the ultimate Dao in principle is undivided. The

Lotus Sutra says, “The supreme great Dao cannot be twofold, but for the benefit of the indolent, where there is One Vehicle I teach that there are three.”¹⁵⁹ This is just as [in the parable of] the three carts [that the father uses to prompt his children] to leave the burning house. Since all [three vehicles] [get beings] out of life and death, in all cases can we speak of the “unconditioned.” It is just that what is used as the vehicle differs [among the three cases], so we use three distinct names.¹⁶⁰ All the while the final destination is certainly one and the same.

Further, in your question you say, [quoting scripture,] “The three vehicles differ with regard to the unconditioned.” This only means that since beings are of three types, there must be three ways of realizing the unconditioned, not that the unconditioned itself is of three different types.

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Accordingly, it is said in the *Radiancy*, “Is nirvana differentiated? It is not. It is just that in the Tathāgata’s case karmic defilements have all been extinguished, while in the *śrāvaka* they have not.”¹⁶¹

Allow me to elucidate this abstruse point with an ordinary example. Suppose a man is cutting a log of wood. If he cuts off a foot-long piece, that foot-long piece is now no more. If he cuts off an inch, an inch [is no more]. The differences in the length [of the remaining material] are determined by how much has been cut off, not by the nonexistence [of the severed pieces] itself. Nirvana is like this. Beings, in their immense plurality of forms, differ in their spiritual potential, in the depth of their wisdom’s mirroring, in their propensity for virtuous conduct. Thus, though they all arrive at the other shore, there are between them differences of level. Could the other shore itself be differentiated? It is only the seekers that differ. Thus, while the scriptures contain different doctrines, what they all lead to is one.

10. Scrutinizing the Difference

Opponent: Since all [the children] leave the burning house, the freedom from suffering [they attain] is [in all cases] one. Since all [beings] leave life-and-death, the unconditioned they reach is [in all cases] one. Yet you say that the other shore is itself not differentiated and that differentiation pertains only to the “selves” of beings.

The “other shore” is the shore of the unconditioned. The “self” is that which realizes the unconditioned. Dare I ask, what is the relation between the “self” and the “other shore”? Are they one? Are they different?

If the self is one with the unconditioned, the unconditioned is also identical with the self, and thus we cannot say that while the unconditioned is not differentiated, there is differentiation that pertains to selves.

If the self is distinct from the unconditioned, then the self is simply not the unconditioned: the unconditioned always remains just the unconditioned, the self always remains just the conditioned, and the passage to their dark union is forever shut.

Therefore, if we see the self and the unconditioned as one, the doctrine of the three [vehicles] cannot hold. If we see them as distinct, the doctrine of the three [vehicles] cannot hold. Why speak of “three vehicles” at all?

11. Differences Unified

Author: If you stay on this side, you are of this side; once you reach the other side, you are of the other side. “If you accord with gain, gain makes you into gain; if you accord with loss, loss makes you into loss.”¹⁶² When the self reaches the unconditioned it is one with the unconditioned. However, although the unconditioned is one, this is no reason to object to the diversity [of the selves].

For example, [imagine that] three birds escape from a net and fly off into a place free from suffering. The freedom they gain is the same for all, yet each bird is different. That the birds differ does not imply that the freedom itself is differentiated; neither does the freedom’s sameness imply that the birds are the same. In short, the birds are one with freedom, freedom is one with the birds, but how could this mean that freedom itself is differentiated? Any differentiation pertains only to the birds.

By analogy, beings in the three vehicles all flee the cage of delusive thought, and they all reach the realm of the unconditioned. Although the unconditioned they reach is the same [for all], the vehicles [that brought them here] vary. That the vehicles vary does not mean that the unconditioned itself is differentiated; neither does the unity of the unconditioned mean a unity among the three vehicles. In short, the selves are one with the unconditioned, the unconditioned is one with the selves, but how could this mean that the unconditioned itself is differentiated? Any differentiation pertains only to the selves.

160b In sum, just as [the birds] differ in how far they fly into the open, even while the freedom [they attain] is the same, likewise, although the unconditioned is

one, the [three types of beings] differ in the depth of dark mirroring they attain. The unconditioned is one with the vehicles; the vehicles are one with the unconditioned. It is not that the selves are distinct from the unconditioned, only that not all realize it completely. Hence the doctrine of three vehicles.

12. Critique of Gradualism

Opponent: The tangles of affliction grow profusely¹⁶³ from the root that is delusion. As soon as delusion is severed, afflictions cease. Beings of the two vehicles attain the wisdom of eradication.¹⁶⁴ Bodhisattvas attain the wisdom of nonarising.¹⁶⁵ In that moment, [in both cases] delusion is completely eliminated, afflictions are wholly uprooted. When afflictions cease, the mind reaches the unconditioned. As the mind attains the unconditioned, the principle of nirvana stands in full view, without any leftover obstructions.

It is said in a sutra, “The various forms of sagely wisdom do not conflict with each other: they all neither depart nor dwell in the world of being and nonbeing, and are all in reality empty.”¹⁶⁶ Also, “The great Dao of the unconditioned is even, equal, not two.”¹⁶⁷

If it is indeed “without two,” then [if beings realize it] they cannot have different minds. If they do not realize it, let us stop the discussion here and now, but if you insist that beings can realize it, then they must all reach fully to the depths of that subtle wondrous Dao. Yet you say that even though they realize it, not all do so completely. I do not understand this.

13. Gradualism Demonstrated

Author: The unconditioned is without two, this much has been established. What has not been demonstrated is whether one can eliminate the afflictions, the accumulated karmic hindrances, suddenly and all at once.

It is said in scripture, “All three arrows hit the target; all three animals succeed in crossing the river.”¹⁶⁸ “Hitting the target” and “crossing the river” are in all cases the same, but there do remain differences of depth, resulting from the varying capacities [of those involved]. Likewise, beings in the three vehicles all cross the river of dependent origination, all attain insight into the “target” of the Four [Noble] Truths; they leave the relative behind, identify with the ultimate, and rise up into the unconditioned. And yet, all the while what is used as the vehicle differs, because the beings possess different capacities for understanding.

Many are the things in this world, but their number has a limit. Yet, even if one were as wise as Śāriputra or as eloquent as Maitrāyaṇīputra,¹⁶⁹ even though one may fully exert one's skill and wit, one will not be able to behold that limit. How much more so with regard to that vacuous dharma, the domain of twofold mystery: it is limitless! Do you insist that one can eradicate all afflictions and so realize it completely in an instant?

Is it not written in the book, "To study is to daily accrue; to practice the Dao is to daily diminish"?¹⁷⁰ "Practice of the Dao" is practice toward the unconditioned. Since progress toward the unconditioned consists in "daily diminishing," how could it be called "sudden attainment"? Diminish diligently, diminish again, until you have reached what can no longer be diminished. The allegory of the firefly and the sun,¹⁷¹ as found in scripture, captures well the [different grades of] wisdom.

14. Against Movement

Opponent: The sutras teach that after [Sumedha] attained the Dharma body and entered the realm of the unconditioned, his mind became unknowable to ordinary knowledge, his form unfathomable through ordinary perception. His body was purged of the aggregates and sense fields, and his mental functions were extinguished. But it is also said that "He continued on to progress through three more stages, accumulating stores of merit."¹⁷² Now, such further progress could only be the result of harboring aspirations, such accumulation of merit can only arise from the activation of desires. Aspirations cause clinging and aversion, desires trigger gain and loss.

[The Bodhisattva's] mind was thus defined by clinging and aversion, his body shaped by gain and loss, yet it is also said that his body was purged of the aggregates and sense fields and his mental functions were extinguished. Two inconsistent descriptions, two conflicting ideas, all directed at one person. A wayward traveler asks for the road, you point to the south and call it the north!¹⁷³

15. Movement and Stillness

Author: A sutra says, "The sage does not act, yet he leaves nothing undone." He does not act: although in motion, he is constantly still. He leaves nothing undone: although quiescent, he is constantly in motion. Still yet constantly in

motion, he never perceives things as one. In motion yet constantly still, he never perceives them as dual. Nondual: the more active he is, the more still. Not one: the more quiescent he is, the more active. Thus [for the sage] activity is identical with non-action, and non-action is identical with activity. While movement and stillness are distinguished [in words], [in reality] they are not distinct.

In the *Dao Practice* it is written, “His mind neither exists nor does it not exist.”¹⁷⁴ To say it does not exist means that it is not a deliberate mind. To say it does not nonexistent means it is not simply a lack of mind. How so? The deliberate mind is [limited to] the manifold beings; a lack of mind is a vast hollow space. The realm of beings is confined by delusive thought; the vast hollow cancels out numinous mirroring. How can you speak of the spiritual Dao, of the sagely mind, as limited by delusive thought and canceling out numinous mirroring?

Sagely mind does not exist, yet it cannot be called nonexistent. It does not nonexistent, yet it cannot be called existent. As it does not exist, within it thought has completely ceased. As it does not nonexistent, it tallies unfailingly with each individual principle. Since it tallies unfailingly with each principle, it greatly amplifies the power of myriad things. Since thought has completely ceased within it, even though it completes actions, they are not of the “I.” Thus [the sage’s] responsiveness to beings is unlimited, yet he never acts; he is still, motionless, though never without action. In the words of a sutra, “He engages his mind in no deliberate activity, yet there is nothing he does not act upon.”¹⁷⁵

Sumedha said, “In the past, eon after eon, I gave away to innumerable people the wealth of my kingdom and my life. But since I gave with a mind marred by delusive thought, it was not true giving. Now I offer to the Buddha these five flowers in full comprehension of the birthlessness [of dharmas]. Only this can be truly called ‘giving.’”¹⁷⁶ Also, after entering the gate of liberation through the realization of emptiness, Empty Practice Bodhisattva said, “My practice continues, this is not final realization.”¹⁷⁷

Hence, the more vacuous the sagely mind, the more expansive his action; he acts constantly but this never obstructs his non-action. Therefore the *Fortunate Eon* describes giving without there being anything to surrender,¹⁷⁸ the *Perfect Realization* praises activity without action,¹⁷⁹ the *Dhyāna Canon* extols objectless compassion;¹⁸⁰ and the *Viśeṣacinti* expounds on knowledgeless knowing.¹⁸¹

Mysterious is the sagely teaching: its formulations are diverse, while the reality behind them is one. It is just that descriptions of the sage's "action" cannot be taken to mean that he engages in deliberate activity, nor can speaking of his "non-action" be taken to mean that he simply does not act. [As is said in scripture,] "the bodhisattva establishes himself in the universal non-discriminating dharma gate of both eradication and noneradication of afflictions":¹⁸² neither does he eradicate activity, nor does he dwell in non-action. This explains our case. Your claim that [I confuse] north and south shows, I fear, that you do not quite understand.

16. Tracing the Source

161a Opponent: If not for beings, there would be no one to ride the three vehicles. Without the three vehicles, the attainment of nirvana would be impossible. It follows that beings must precede nirvana. This in turn means that nirvana must have a beginning in time—and whatever has a beginning must also have an end.

Yet a sutra says, "Nirvana has no beginning, no end, it is peaceful, akin to empty space."¹⁸³ If nirvana exists previously, then it cannot be something to be attained later, after a period of study.

17. The Perennial

Author: The Perfected Person is empty, devoid of all images, yet it is through his "self" that all things are established, and it is through his according with things that his own identity is perfected. Such is the Sage, none other.

How so? Without the Principle sagacity is impossible; without sagacity the Principle cannot be. When through [insight into] Principle one has become a sage, the sage is no different from Principle.¹⁸⁴

Thus, when the Ruler of Gods asked, "Where should one seek *prajñā*?", Subhūti answered, "One should not seek *prajñā* within form, nor should one seek it outside of form."¹⁸⁵ Elsewhere it is said, "To see dependent origination is to see the Dharma; to see the Dharma is to see the Buddha."¹⁸⁶ These passages confirm that [for the Sage] things and self are not distinct.

So the Perfected Person collects the mysterious mechanism [of his mind] in what is prior to all manifestation, and vests its recondite workings among things already transformed. He gathers together all [things present in the] six directions, and reflects them in the mirror of his mind. He unifies past

and future, thus establishing his body. Past and present interpenetrate, beginning and end are one. In perfect mastery of both root and branches, he never imputes any duality. Vast, expansive, perfectly equal—this is nirvana.

It is said in a sutra, “Attain nirvana without discarding dharmas.”¹⁸⁷ And “Dharmas being boundless, *bodhi* is boundless.”¹⁸⁸ These passages show that the way to nirvana leads through wondrous tallying; the gist of wondrous tallying is in recondite unity. Things are not distinct from the self, the self is not distinct from things; things and self mysteriously converge and together they return to the limitless. Seek its front, you will not find it; seek its back, it is not there. Ideas of “beginning” or “end” have no place here. The goddess said, “How much time has elapsed since the Elder attained liberation?”¹⁸⁹

18. Investigating Attainment

Opponent: It is said in scripture that the nature of sentient beings is defined entirely by the five aggregates.¹⁹⁰ It is also said that the attainment of nirvana is the eradication of the five aggregates, like extinguishing a lamp.

So [with the attainment of nirvana] the nature of beings is completely eradicated along with the five aggregates, the Dao of nirvana is established solitarily beyond the triple world of being. These two domains are separated by a chasm so vast that it should be impossible for beings to attain nirvana.

If you do insist that such attainment is possible, this can only be if the nature of beings is not defined by the five aggregates. Or, if it is so defined, then the five aggregates cannot be completely eradicated, for if they were completely eradicated who would be present to attain nirvana?

19. Attainment in Mystery

Author: Now, the ultimate arises from detachment; the relative is born of attachment. Attachment leads to “something attained”; detachment opens up to the nameless. Thus, one who models himself after the ultimate will unite with the ultimate; one who follows the limited will end up defined by the limited. You, sir, take attachment as “something attained,” and so you seek [for nirvana] among attainable things. I view attainment as “nothing attained” and so I speak of nirvana as attainable within nonattainment.

When setting out an argument it is necessary to first establish its basic premise. If we want to speak of nirvana we need not do so from outside of it.

161b

Yet if we were to try to speak of nirvana from within it, would there be any being left outside of nirvana wishing to attain it?

How is this so? Nirvana wondrously stops all conventional calculation, it fuses the Two Principles,¹⁹¹ it purges the myriad existents, it equalizes gods and humans, and it unifies the one and the many. Look within it and you will see no “self”; listen inwardly and you will hear no “me.” It is neither something attained nor something non-attained.

It is said in scripture that nirvana is neither identical with nor distinct from beings.¹⁹² Vimalakīrti said, “If Maitreya is able to attain liberation, all beings should also be able to attain it. Why? Because by nature all beings are always already in cessation, they do not need to attain cessation anew.”¹⁹³ This shows that cessation is attained in the cessationless.

Also, beings are not “beings,” so who could be the attainer? Nirvana is not “nirvana,” so what could be attained? The *Radiance* says, “‘Is *bodhi* attained from being?’ ‘No.’ ‘Is it attained from nonbeing?’ ‘No.’ ‘Is it attained from both being and nonbeing?’ ‘No.’ ‘Is it attained from neither being nor nonbeing?’ ‘No.’ ‘So is it not attained at all?’ ‘Not true. How so? To be without anything attained is attainment; one attains being without anything attained.’”¹⁹⁴ Since to be without anything attained is attainment, could there be anyone unable to attain nirvana?

The recondite Dao resides in the transcendent realm: it is attained in not attaining. Wondrous wisdom is present beyond things: it is known in not knowing. The Great Image is concealed in the shapeless: it is seen in not seeing. The Great Sound¹⁹⁵ is hidden in the soundless: it is heard in not hearing.

Thus nirvana embraces all eternity, guides beings from all directions, cures them of their poison, it is “loosely woven, yet nothing slips by,”¹⁹⁶ vast, expansive like the ocean, there is nothing that does not proceed from it. The *brahmacārin* said, “I have heard that the Buddha’s teaching is vast, deep, boundless like the ocean, not a single being is not perfected by it, and not a single being is not delivered by it.”¹⁹⁷

With this, now, the roads of the three vehicles stand open, the ultimate and the relative are demarcated, the Dao of the sages is secured, and the unnameability of nirvana is demonstrated.¹⁹⁸

Notes

- ¹ T.221:32c19–20.
- ² Cf. *Laozi* 35.
- ³ T.224:475a19–21.
- ⁴ The commentators Yuankang and Wencai suggest that this refers to the general idea of the “Guan qulai pin” section of T.1564:3c6ff, which speaks of the interdependence and thus “emptiness” of the place from which movement proceeds, of the goer, and of going itself.
- ⁵ An allusion to a story from *Zhuangzi* 21.3. Confucius speaks to his disciple Yan Hui about the study of the Dao, “I have taught you all my life and now, as we stand shoulder to shoulder, you have forgotten everything: is this not sad?” Sengzhao departs from the wording and meaning of the original story, clearly influenced by the Guo Xiang commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, and transforms the passage into a reflection on the topic of time.
- ⁶ Likely a reference to Vairambha, the hurricane that occurs at the end of an eon.
- ⁷ Mount Meru, which stands at the center of our world.
- ⁸ Image from *Zhuangzi* 1.1, representing fickle springtime breezes.
- ⁹ Here the term “Sage” is traditionally interpreted as referring either to Confucius from *Lunyu* 9.17; or by Yuankang, controversially, to the Buddha from the *Da banniepan jing* (T.374:398c26).
- ¹⁰ T.630:451c25–26.
- ¹¹ T.1509:428a12–13.
- ¹² An allusion to an allegory from *Zhuangzi* 6.2. To keep his boat safe from thieves a man hides it in a gully inside a mountain, which in turn is hidden in the middle of marshland. A strong man sneaks up in the middle of the night, heaves the boat onto his back, and carries it off. Traditionally this has been read as expressing the vanity of our efforts to counter the transience of things. (*Zhuangzi*’s final injunction is to “hide the world in the world, so that nothing can be lost.”) The second image, of Confucius standing on the bank of the river, comes from *Lunyu* 9.17: “Standing by a river, Confucius sighed and said, ‘The passing away of things is like this. Day and night it never stops.’” Both images are used here as exemplifications of impermanence or, in the language of the essay, of the “shifting” of things.
- ¹³ See note 12.
- ¹⁴ *Laozi* 78.

- ¹⁵ The image of piling up a mound comes from *Lunyu* 9.19, where it is used as a metaphor for the incremental process of learning or self-cultivation: “It is like piling up a mound: if I stop just one basketful of dirt short of completing the task, I have stopped completely; it is also like leveling ground: even if I have dumped just one basketful of dirt, this is a step forward and I am making progress.” The *locus classicus* for “A journey of a thousand miles starts with one step” is *Laozi* 64.
- ¹⁶ Source unknown. There are resonances with *Yijing*, *Xi Ci*, I:4.
- ¹⁷ According to the commentator Yuankang, this is an allusion to a passage from *Zhuangzi* 2.12: “People busy about in agitation, the sage is slow and witless—he joins the ten thousand years into a singular purity. All things are for him in this way, he gathers them all into one.”
- ¹⁸ Historical evidence regarding these theories is scant and their polemical presentation in this text is descriptively unreliable. Traditionally six (or, in some sources, seven) theories were identified. In this text three are brought into focus. The theory of “original nothingness” is associated variously with the exegetes Daoqian (286–374 C.E.) or Dao’an (312 or 314–385 C.E.). *Śūnyatā* or *tathatā* is identified with the pre-Buddhist Chinese concept of *wu* (nothingness) as the primordial origin of all things. The theory of “no-mind” is usually linked with Zhi Mindu (fl. ca. 326 C.E.). It is sometimes thought of as a subjectivist-psychological response to the more objectivistic orientation of “original nothingness.” “Emptiness as form” is usually associated with Zhi Daolin (known also as Zhi Dun; 314–366 C.E.). The name of this theory is an allusion to the formula “form is emptiness, emptiness is form,” representative of much of the Prajñā-pāramitā literature immensely popular in Sengzhao’s period. The meager available evidence suggests that Zhi Dun’s conception of emptiness was largely similar to Sengzhao’s as formulated in this chapter. Sengzhao, however, portrays him as a believer in a world of composite and thus “empty” dharmas on the one hand, and indivisible and thus “non-empty” dharmas on the other, a position he denounces.
- ¹⁹ Literally, “beyond ‘the doctrine of names.’” The latter is a general reference to classical Chinese theories of language, which investigate the relationship between names (*míng*) and things or actualities (*shì*), often in a normative moral or political context. Here, more specifically, it is a polemical term for realist conceptions of language.
- ²⁰ T.1509:105a5–11?
- ²¹ T.1564:7c16–17? (Suggested by Yuankang.)
- ²² An allusion to a story from *Zhuangzi* 3.2. Cook Ding is so skilled at cutting up an ox that his cleaver needs no sharpening; after seventeen years of use it is still as sharp as if just taken off the whetstone. This is in contrast to the mediocre butcher who does not skilfully carve up an oxen but crudely “hacks” it apart.
- ²³ T.221:36c19–23.
- ²⁴ T.223:378c10–14.

- ²⁵ T.475:537c15. The “youth” is Ratnakāra, leader of a group of young nobles who, in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, approach the Buddha and ask him how to purify the buddha field.
- ²⁶ T.656:109a1.
- ²⁷ T.224:425c27.
- ²⁸ Likely a reference to T.1564:33b3–7.
- ²⁹ Likely a reference to the verses in T.1509:105a5–10.
- ³⁰ Likely a summary of T.221:40a26–b10.
- ³¹ The source and scope of this reference are obscure. The content is reminiscent of the chapters “Guan wuyin pin” and “Guan ku pin.”
- ³² Likely a reference to T.630:454c2.
- ³³ The “master from Yuanlin Grove” is a reference to Zhuangzi. The “metaphors of finger and horse” are discussed in *Zhuangzi* 2.
- ³⁴ A reference to the *Radiance*; see T.221:140c15.
- ³⁵ Mahayana. This paragraph traces, in hagiographic mode, the narrative of Kumārajīva’s life.
- ³⁶ An allusion to *Laozi* 14.
- ³⁷ Traditionally regarded as Śākyamuni Buddha’s birthplace.
- ³⁸ The Later Liang kingdom (386–403 C.E.). The ruler Lü Long, under increasing pressure from the neighboring Northern Liang and Southern Liang territories, suffered a crucial defeat at the hands of the Later Qin general Yao Shuode in 401 C.E. The Later Qin forces besieged the Liang power base at Guzang, where Kumārajīva had been held since 385. To end the siege Lü Long, on the advice of his younger brother Lü Chao, agreed to offer nominal submission to the Later Qin. He sent to the Later Qin capital of Chang’an a number of his family members and prominent clans as hostages. Kumārajīva seems to have been included in this group, and he reached Chang’an in February of 402. Lü Long eventually submitted to the Later Qin formally in 403 C.E. and moved from Guzang to Chang’an.
- ³⁹ The commentators Yuankang and Wencai give a pious twist to the story so as to make it seem that the goal of Yao Shuode’s military mission to Guzang was strictly to fetch Kumārajīva and bring him to Chang’an.
- ⁴⁰ An allusion to a prophesy in the *Radiance*, according to which after the passing of the Buddha the Dharma would spread first to the south, then to the west, and finally to the north.
- ⁴¹ An allusion to *Zhuangzi* 22.7.
- ⁴² T.221:97c7–9; T.223:354a12–13.

- ⁴³ Cf. T. 224:428a17ff.
- ⁴⁴ “Markless knowing” and “knowledgeless illumination” can be understood as “understanding,” “insight.”
- ⁴⁵ Cf. T.586:39b11.
- ⁴⁶ T.474:519c21; cf. also T.475:537c18. See also note 25.
- ⁴⁷ T.221:140c15. See also note 32.
- ⁴⁸ The “Two Principles” are *yin* and *yang*, a pair of complementary opposites, such as light and dark, male and female, etc., whose configurations form all phenomena.
- ⁴⁹ An allusion to *Laozi* 5: “Heaven and Earth are not humane: they take the myriad things as straw dogs. The sage is not humane: he takes the common people as straw dogs.”
- ⁵⁰ Cf. T.223:262c24–25.
- ⁵¹ This is a polemic against positive valuations of the “reversal of intuition”—stopping or overturning ordinary ways of perceiving—as the primary mode of accessing the Dao. *Prajñā* is not accessed in this manner.
- ⁵² The “three poisons” are desire (or greed), anger (or hatred), and ignorance (or delusion).
- ⁵³ The four inverted views are seeing the impermanent as permanent, seeing non-self as self, seeing suffering as joy, and seeing the impure as pure.
- ⁵⁴ “Horse” and “hare” are metaphors for different degrees of understanding. The hare, which crosses the river of samsara by swimming frantically on the surface, represents the *śrāvaka* (hearer). The horse reaches deeper into the water with his hooves—this is the *pratyekabuddha* (solitary enlightened one). A third animal is often mentioned, the elephant, whose strength allows him to reach the very bottom. The elephant is the bodhisattva. Cf. T.186:488b20–26; T.1547:445c9–114. The allegory of the three animals crossing the river appears in “Nirvana is Unnameable,” section 13, p. 118.
- ⁵⁵ Source unknown.
- ⁵⁶ Source uncertain; Wencai refers to T.1509:190c20.
- ⁵⁷ T.223:326b9–10. Note that this is not from the *Radiance*.
- ⁵⁸ “Ultimate reality” can be understood as “ultimate truth.” Here Sengzhao seems to be trying to distinguish between two types of objects, or two types of “conditions” of knowing: ordinary conditioned objects, and unconditioned “ultimate” truth. Since *prajñā* perceives “ultimate truth,” it is not a kind of knowledge, since the latter by definition is restricted to conditioned things.
- ⁵⁹ This passage is not a literal quotation but a general paraphrase of a central idea of the *Middle Way Treatise* (T.1564). It has been speculated that if this treatise was published

in 409 C.E. and Sengzhao's essay was brought to Lushan in 408, Sengzhao must have seen a draft version of the translation of the *Middle Way Treatise* before publication of his completed essay.

- ⁶⁰ Possibly a reference to T.1564:33b3–7 and the verse at 33b13. Remarkably, Sengzhao seems to assume that there is such a thing as “ultimate truth” beyond conditioned dharmas, while the *Middle Way Treatise* consistently denies the existence of such a beyond, insisting that “the ultimate” is the ultimate truth about the conditioned, i.e., its emptiness.
- ⁶¹ Cf. T.221:53b18–22, 12c4–12.
- ⁶² Source unknown.
- ⁶³ An allusion to *Laozi* 4, 56.
- ⁶⁴ The five realms of rebirth are the realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, and gods.
- ⁶⁵ Cf. T.223:382c23–24.
- ⁶⁶ An allusion to a passage from *Zhuangzi* 8.1, where such actions are portrayed as examples of an unnaturalness that violates the Dao.
- ⁶⁷ T.223:390a4.
- ⁶⁸ T.223:384c23–24.
- ⁶⁹ An allusion to *Laozi* 1.
- ⁷⁰ Cf. T.630:452b29.
- ⁷¹ The exchanges between Chang'an in the north and Lushan in the south, where Liu Yimin was stationed, were compromised as a consequence of the political and military turmoil that eventually led to the demise of the Later Qin in the north (417 C.E.) and the establishment of the Liu Song regime in the south (420 C.E.). Sengzhao sent his answer to Liu Yimin through a messenger, but Liu passed away before receiving it.
- ⁷² Huiyuan (334–416 C.E.) was an influential Buddhist monk who established the important Buddhist community at Lushan. In 402 he assembled one hundred and twenty-three followers in front of an image of Amitābha Buddha to vow to be reborn in his “pure land” Sukhāvātī, an event traditionally considered to mark the beginning of the Pure Land tradition. One of the most erudite Buddhist thinkers of his age, Huiyuan was renowned, among other things, for his tracts stipulating the proper relationship between the sangha and the state, and for his sophisticated correspondence with Kumārajīva, which has survived.
- ⁷³ A classical description of the ideal gentleman, with origins in the *Yijing*, Qian.
- ⁷⁴ Daosheng (355–434 C.E.) was active at Lushan from 397 to 405, when he joined Kumārajīva's community in Chang'an. There he took part in the translation activities,

and began writing his many texts in various genres, of which very few survive, unfortunately. In 408 he returned to Lushan, carrying Sengzhao's essay "*Prajñā* without Knowing." He traveled extensively and befriended the literatus Xie Lingyun. He was a proponent of an original doctrine of subitism as well as of the doctrine that buddhahood is inherent in all sentient beings, both of which became the object of much debate in the late 420s.

- ⁷⁵ The commentator Yuankang opines that this "Principle" refers to emptiness. However, the term could equally well be read in the plural, and with a lower case "p" ("principles"), in the sense that all individual things are defined by their own character, or principle. Liu Yimin was apparently troubled by what he saw as a logical contradiction in Sengzhao's description of the sagely mind: it is perfectly quiescent, yet it reaches the "apex" of reality.
- ⁷⁶ An allusion to *Yijing*, Xi Ci, I: 10. Alternatively, an allusion to *Zhuangzi* 13.9, where a wheelwright speaks to Prince Huan about the art of making wheels, and argues that the secret to making wheels is in working neither too leisurely, nor too hurriedly.
- ⁷⁷ Here Liu Yimin presents Sengzhao with two possible readings of the latter's exposition of "the power of sagely wisdom": *prajñā* can either be a form of extraordinarily powerful cognition accessed by a cessation of ordinary understanding, or it can be a solitary withdrawal into a type of spiritual self-absorption. In his response Sengzhao tries to complicate Liu's question.
- ⁷⁸ An allusion to T.474:525c3.
- ⁷⁹ The "square inch of the heart" is a literary expression for the human heart or mind.
- ⁸⁰ An allusion to a poem by Ruan Ji (210–263 C.E.), one of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove; see note 81.
- ⁸¹ "Bamboo Grove" alludes to a social, artistic, and philosophical trend of the late third century, traditionally known as the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, which was associated with the ideal of the poet-hermit seeking artistically elevated seclusion during times of political turmoil.
- ⁸² An allusion to *Laozi* 10, 22. "The One" (and "guarding" it) are important images in Daoist cosmological reflection. The One mediates between the origin of things in nonbeing and the world of being.
- ⁸³ Zhi Faling. He was a disciple of Huiyuan, on whose behest he traveled to Khotan in 392 C.E. and brought back a number of sutra texts, including the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Flower Ornament Sutra*), later translated in 421 C.E. under Buddhahadra as the sixty-fascicle *Huayan jing* (T. 278).
- ⁸⁴ The "two masters" referred to here are most likely *Dharmayaśas and *Dharmagupta (see also note 87). *Vibhāṣā* is an abbreviation for a genre of Mainstream scholastic writing, most famously represented by the *Mahāvibhāṣā-sāstra*, a key compendium

of the Sarvāstivāda school from Kashmir translated under Saṃghadeva (var. Saṃghabhūti) in Chang’an in 383 C.E.

- ⁸⁵ Buddhahhadra. He arrived in Chang’an around 406–408 C.E. and enjoyed great renown for his expertise on monastic rules and in *dhyāna*. Initially on good terms with Kumārajīva, according to tradition he was eventually expelled from the Chang’an community due to an altercation with its elders on matters of discipline (he was reportedly critical of the harem kept by Kumārajīva). He moved to Lushan and joined Huiyuan’s congregation, and died in the southern capital Jiankang in 429 C.E. Buddhahhadra is credited with a number of important translations.
- ⁸⁶ Buddhayaśas. He was the teacher of Kumārajīva in Kashmir before Kumārajīva’s “conversion” to Mahayana. Here “Tripiṭaka” refers to Mainstream (non-Mahayana) texts. In 408 C.E., at Kumārajīva’s invitation, he went to Chang’an and became involved in the translation academy. Among other texts, Buddhayaśas oversaw the translation of the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya* (T. 1428).
- ⁸⁷ The *Shelifu apitan lun* (Skt. *Śāriputra-abhidharma-śāstra*, T. 1548). Translated by *Dharmayaśas and *Dharmagupta 407–415 C.E.
- ⁸⁸ An allusion to a story from *Zhuangzi* 24.6. A “man from Ying” asks an artisan to remove—with an axe, no less!—a speck of mud from the tip of his nose. The artisan swings the axe “with such dexterity that it stirs up a wind” and removes the speck of mud, as the man from Ying stands there without flinching, and unharmed.
- ⁸⁹ Concentration and wisdom are two of the six *pāramitās*, or perfections. Liu Yimin suggests that Sengzhao’s “*prajñā*,” defined by the latter as still yet active, should be thought of in terms of the duality between concentration (meditation) and the wisdom to which it leads. Liu seems to assume that if the sage’s insight is “uniquely penetrating,” as Sengzhao’s asserts, it is because the sage has modified, through the practice of concentration, his ordinary mode of cognition and has developed another type of cognition, or a cognition that gives him access to some other content.
- ⁹⁰ Cf. T.223:292c15–17, 302a19–21, 374b4–b8.
- ⁹¹ An allusion to *Laozi* 41.
- ⁹² Cf. T.221:6c2–7.
- ⁹³ I follow the variant recension in Huida’s *Zhaolun shu*, X.866:71a13.
- ⁹⁴ Source uncertain; Yuankang suggests this refers to the general sense of T. 221.
- ⁹⁵ Cf. T.223:223a13–14.
- ⁹⁶ See also notes 32 and 45.
- ⁹⁷ See analysis in Yuankang’s commentary, T.1859:189a24ff.
- ⁹⁸ Here Sengzhao critiques the view, expressed earlier by Liu Yimin, that the sagely

mind's "ultimate affirmation and corresponding" is merely a special type of cognition, extraordinary in its content, a "wisdom" attained through "concentration."

- ⁹⁹ This lengthy argument is a response to Liu Yimin's question from the final section of his letter about what specifically makes the sagely mind different from the mind of an ordinary person.
- ¹⁰⁰ An allusion to *Zhuangzi* 2.5.
- ¹⁰¹ An allusion to *Zhuangzi* 3.2.
- ¹⁰² An allusion to *Laozi* 25.
- ¹⁰³ This reference to nirvana has frequently been read as invoking the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahā-sūtra*. Given that this sutra was translated into Chinese only after Sengzhao's death (two translations were produced, one between 416–418 C.E. under Buddhahadra, and one begun in 421 under Dharmakṣema), commentators and scholars have speculated that this essay could only have been written after 416, and therefore its attribution to Sengzhao is at least in part spurious. Alternatively, it has been suggested that Sengzhao must have seen, and somehow understood, the Sanskrit original of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahā-sūtra* before publication of the first translation, but recent scholarship has weakened the force of such speculation. As the commentator Yuankang observes, the essay speaks only of the idea of nirvana and does not reference the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahā-sūtra* itself.
- ¹⁰⁴ An allusion to *Analects* 4.25.
- ¹⁰⁵ An allusion to story in *Zhuangzi* 21.2, which describes a meeting of two men whose minds are united in the Dao.
- ¹⁰⁶ Yao Song was the younger brother of the king, Yao Xing. Correspondence between the two on topics of Buddhist doctrine has been preserved in the *Guang hongming ji*, T.2103:228a–230a.
- ¹⁰⁷ Mañjuśrī and Maitreya are bodhisattvas who embody, respectively, wisdom and compassion.
- ¹⁰⁸ The "Ten Wings" is a set of early commentaries on the *Yijing*, traditionally, though spuriously, attributed to Confucius.
- ¹⁰⁹ An allusion to *Laozi* 21.
- ¹¹⁰ In Buddhist cosmology, Jambudvīpa is the southern of the four continents encircling Mount Meru, and is here a shorthand reference to our world.
- ¹¹¹ This parenthetical note was most likely added later by the editors of Sengzhao's *Essays*.
- ¹¹² The "four streams" of samsara: desire, ignorance, existence, and false views.
- ¹¹³ See note 13.

- ¹¹⁴ The five types of vision are the physical organ of the eyes, the eye of the gods, the wisdom eye, the Dharma eye, and the buddha eye.
- ¹¹⁵ The two types of hearing are hearing with the physical organ of the human ear and the ear of the gods.
- ¹¹⁶ Source uncertain. Yuankang suggests the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahā-sūtra*, but this is doubtful.
- ¹¹⁷ Source uncertain. Yuankang sees this as reflecting the general meaning of the *Zhonglun*, or again of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahā-sūtra*.
- ¹¹⁸ The four kinds of emptiness, or four kinds of formlessness, associated with the four formless concentrations, i.e., limitless space, limitless consciousness, nothingness, and neither consciousness nor nonconsciousness.
- ¹¹⁹ In Mahayana sutras, “nine classes of beings” is a classification scheme grouping living beings in three main categories with three subcategories each, on the basis of the nature of their karmic endowment.
- ¹²⁰ “Eight factors of liberation” and “seven members of awakening” are two lists of elements of Buddhist practice conducive to liberation. Specific contents of the lists vary.
- ¹²¹ The “three illuminations” are divine vision, knowledge of previous lifetimes, and extinction of contamination.
- ¹²² “Resolve” refers to a bodhisattva’s vow to save all beings.
- ¹²³ The six supernatural powers are unhindered physical power, divine vision, divine hearing, awareness of the minds of others, cognizance of former lifetimes, and eradication of the afflictions.
- ¹²⁴ The five vehicles are five types of religious practice and their corresponding destinations or realms of rebirth as humans, gods, *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and buddhas.
- ¹²⁵ *Sarvajñatā* literally means “all-knowledge,” omniscience.
- ¹²⁶ The nine abodes of being span from the upper reaches of the realm of desire (Skt. *kāmadhātu*) below to the four *dhyānas* above.
- ¹²⁷ Source unknown.
- ¹²⁸ An allusion to *Laozi* 13.
- ¹²⁹ Source unknown.
- ¹³⁰ The “basis of misery” refers here to the body.
- ¹³¹ Source uncertain. The metaphor of extinguishing a lamp’s flame is common in both Mainstream and Mahayana texts.
- ¹³² Cf. T.475:555a1–24.

¹³³ Cf. T.221:145a12ff.

¹³⁴ Commentators trace this quotation to either the *Xiuxing daodi jing* (T. 606), Dharmarakṣa's translation of Saṃgharakṣa's **Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra*; or to the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* (T.185:478c21–22), a third-century translation of a “biography” of the Buddha's previous lives.

¹³⁵ I.e., the Buddha's activities during his forty-five-year teaching career.

¹³⁶ Cf. T.221:123b8–9; T.1775:353a2–3.

¹³⁷ Source unknown; Wencai points to the *Huayan jing* (T. 278), but this is anachronistic.

¹³⁸ Source unknown.

¹³⁹ The commentator Hanshan Deqing refers to the general contents of chapter 32 of the *Huayan jing* (T.278:599b21ff).

¹⁴⁰ An allusion to *Laozi* 6.

¹⁴¹ An allusion to the description in *Zhuangzi* 1.5 of the transcendent beings that inhabit Mount Guye.

¹⁴² Cf. *Laozi* 6.

¹⁴³ An allusion to *Zhuangzi* 22.5.

¹⁴⁴ This passage gives the traditional account of Śākyamuni Buddha's last days and death.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Laozi* 2.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. T.1509:289b1–3.

¹⁴⁷ Extinguishing of afflictions by means of analytic meditation leads to a complete non-being of afflictions (for a standard exposition of this term, see T.1509:743a1–2). The opponent wants to define nirvana as a complete nonbeing, an idea rejected by Sengzhao.

¹⁴⁸ Source unclear; cf. T.223:378c9ff.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Laozi* 2.

¹⁵⁰ The six sense objects are the objects of the five physical senses (eye, ears, nose, tongue, and body) and of the mind.

¹⁵¹ Despite the traditional tracing of this passage to the *Da banniepan jing*, it more likely reflects the content of chapter 12 of Kumārajīva's translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (T. 475).

¹⁵² Perhaps a reference to T.223:275b20ff.

¹⁵³ T.475:539c25.

¹⁵⁴ Source uncertain. Commentators suggest T.475:548a16–18 or T.339:471a.

- ¹⁵⁵ Possibly an allusion to a story from *Zhuangzi* 12.9, which conveys the idea that the Dao cannot be expressed in words and can be only learned through practice.
- ¹⁵⁶ T.221:114b10. Directly after the statement quoted here, in which the Buddha asserts that the three groups differ with regard to “the unconditioned,” the Buddha’s interlocutor Subhūti asks if this is really the case. The Buddha responds in the negative and says that the distinction between the three groups is merely a matter of a naming convention.
- ¹⁵⁷ This is the traditional presentation of Śākyamuni Buddha’s previous lives. Eons before his embodiment as Śākyamuni he was a brahman by the name of Sumedha (Sengzhao uses the alternative Chinese name, Rutong, for Mānava), who received from Dīpaṃkara, the buddha of that eon, the prediction that he too would one day become a buddha. Cf. T.420:932b.
- ¹⁵⁸ The phrase “the sutras disagree” is ambiguous, and I leave it as such. Yuankang takes it to mean that the content or meaning of the scriptures differs (T.1859:197c2); Wencai reads it as suggesting that the scriptural evidence conflicts with the position of the present author (X.970:212a20).
- ¹⁵⁹ Cf. T.262:26a20–22.
- ¹⁶⁰ The idea here is that according to standard presentations, especially in the mature texts of the Prajñāpāramitā tradition, followers of all three vehicles of *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and bodhisattvas all attain insight into emptiness at the seventh stage of the Buddhist path, but while *śrāvakas* stop there, bodhisattvas continue to practice until the tenth stage and then ideally attain buddhahood after that. Here the “author” argues that the emptiness realized by all categories of practitioners is the same for all, and any differences between them that do exist pertain only to their differing methods of practice. The standard view, echoed also by commentators, is that *śrāvakas* practice based on the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, *pratyekabuddhas* rely on the teaching of dependent origination (Skt. *pratīyasamutpāda*), while bodhisattvas use the six *pāramitās* as their guide.
- ¹⁶¹ T.221:114a30–b3; T.223:275c25ff. The passage addresses a point crucial to the problem of subitism and gradualism, namely, how is it possible that while beings in all three vehicles attain insight into “the unconditioned,” real differences remain between the depth and quality of their insight?
- ¹⁶² Cf. *Laozi* 23.
- ¹⁶³ Cf. *Laozi* 57.
- ¹⁶⁴ “Beings of the two vehicles” are *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. The “wisdom of eradication” (Skt. *kṣayajñāna*) is the wisdom arrived at by the arhat who has accomplished the complete and permanent elimination of the fetters (*saṃyojana*).
- ¹⁶⁵ The “wisdom of nonarising” (Skt. *anutpādayajñāna*) is the wisdom attained by the bodhisattva that consists of the understanding that the fetters have been eliminated and will never reemerge. Alternatively, it refers to insight into, and acceptance of,

the nonarising and nonceasing of dharmas, i.e., their emptiness. In this passage, as well as elsewhere throughout this chapter, when discussing the three vehicles and the problem of gradualism versus subitism, Sengzhao channels the vocabulary, current in his day, of the ten stages of religious practice as developed in Prajñāpāramitā texts (although not in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, generally considered to be the earliest representative of this category of texts). The first seven stages are common to the three vehicles and culminate in the elimination of the fetters (see note 167). This is followed by the stages of the *pratyekabuddha*, bodhisattva, and buddha. While the bodhisattva is “higher” than the arhat and *pratyekabuddha*, the three by and large share the same attainments of stages one to seven. The opponent in this passage emphasizes their commonality; in his response Sengzhao emphasizes the bodhisattva’s superiority.

¹⁶⁶ A paraphrase of T.221:5a27ff; see also T. 223, ch. 3. Śāriputra asks the Buddha: if the “wisdoms” attained by the *srota-āpanna* (“steam-enterer,” the first stage of the Mainstream path), arhat, *pratyekabuddha*, bodhisattva, and buddha are all equally insights into emptiness, why insist that the bodhisattva’s wisdom is the highest? The Buddha answers that it is because of the bodhisattva’s vow to save other beings.

¹⁶⁷ Yuankang suggests that this is a nonliteral reference to the *Lotus Sutra*.

¹⁶⁸ Yuankang claims that this invokes the *Vibhāṣā*, T.1547:445c17–19. The metaphors of the three animals and three arrows as representing the three vehicles are present also in the surviving writings of Huiyuan, the leader of the Lushan community to which Liu Yimin belonged (T.1856:130c13–14). The image of the three animals also appeared previously in Sengzhao’s essay “*Prajñā* without Knowing,” p. 80.

¹⁶⁹ Śāriputra, along with Mahāmaudgalyāyana, was one of Śākyamuni Buddha’s two main disciples; he was renowned for his wisdom. Maitrāyaṇīputra, one of the Buddha’s ten principal disciples, was famous for his eloquence in preaching the Dharma.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Laozi* 8.

¹⁷¹ Likely an allusion to the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. The Buddha instructs Maitrāyaṇīputra to visit with the ailing Vimalakīrti. The latter criticizes Maitrāyaṇīputra’s “Lesser Vehicle” teachings as being like a firefly in comparison to the “sun” of the Buddha. See T.475:541a2; cf. also T.221:5b16.

¹⁷² “Three more stages” refers to the standard scheme of ten stages in the Prajñāpāramitā literature; see note 160. For Sumedha, see note 157.

¹⁷³ The image of mixing up north and south appears also in the *Mouzi lihuo lun* (T.2102:6c20), composed certainly by 465 C.E. but likely much earlier. More pertinent, Xie Lingyun uses the image in the concluding statements of his *Bianzong lun* (T.2103:225c11–14).

¹⁷⁴ T.224:425c27.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. T.223:308b17ff.

- ¹⁷⁶ This story of Sumedha is found in T.1509:180a23–b5. See also note 157.
- ¹⁷⁷ Wencai points to chapter 20 in the *Radiance*, but a more fitting passage is found at T.221:94b24–28. Yuankang suggests that this is a reference to T.1509:592b2–6.
- ¹⁷⁸ Cf. especially T.425:16b20–22.
- ¹⁷⁹ Cf. T.630:452b29.
- ¹⁸⁰ Cf. T.586:39b10–20.
- ¹⁸¹ Cf. T.614:282c7–10.
- ¹⁸² Cf. T.475:554b3–6.
- ¹⁸³ Wencai suggests that this refers to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahā-sūtra*, T.374:487a22–23, but the overlap is minimal.
- ¹⁸⁴ The “principle” here is emptiness, which is not marked by a temporal beginning or end.
- ¹⁸⁵ Cf. T.223:278b25–29.
- ¹⁸⁶ Yuankang indicates that this idea is present in the *Larger Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, and in the *Daji jing* (T. 397), without specifying the exact location. Wencai predictably points to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahā-sūtra*. Cf. also T.708:815b7–8.
- ¹⁸⁷ Cf. T.475:539c25.
- ¹⁸⁸ Cf. T.221:146b11–12.
- ¹⁸⁹ From a well-known exchange between a goddess and Śāriputra in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, T.475:548a9. In response to this question Śāriputra remains silent, which is traditionally read as meaning that awakening is not limited by time.
- ¹⁹⁰ Wencai sees a correspondence with T.374:536a11. Yuankang says that this expresses “the general meaning of scriptures.”
- ¹⁹¹ The “Two Principles” here refers to Heaven and Earth. See also note 48.
- ¹⁹² Yuankang suggests that this refers to the general meaning of the texts referred to so far. Wencai again points to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahā-sūtra*, T.374:495a1, 537a7–9.
- ¹⁹³ Cf. T.475:542b18–19.
- ¹⁹⁴ Cf. T.221:113a29–113b6.
- ¹⁹⁵ See *Laozi* 41 for “Great Image” and “Great Sound.”
- ¹⁹⁶ Cf. *Laozi* 73.
- ¹⁹⁷ Cf. *Foshuo bashi jing*, T.581:965a10–14.
- ¹⁹⁸ This final paragraph has traditionally been read either as a summary of this chapter or of all of Sengzhao’s essays taken together; see T.1859:200c20–23.

**TREATISE ON THE ORIGIN
OF HUMANITY**

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Translator's Introduction

The *Treatise on the Origin of Humanity* is an English translation of the *Yuanren lun* by Zongmi (780–841 C.E.), one of the most systematic of the great doctrinal masters of Chinese Buddhism. He was educated in Confucianism and well versed in Daoist texts during the early years of his career, but he grew dissatisfied with their concern merely for the mundane facets of life. His own interest was the Way (Dao) or Nature (*xing*), and Zongmi was dissatisfied in his studies for a while. Eventually he met a monk of the Chan Buddhist tradition, and finding that Chan practices were concerned with self-discovery, he renounced household life and ordained as a Buddhist monk in his late twenties. Chan Buddhist teaching, practice, and monastic life at that time were very effective in solving the religious problems for many people, especially in regard to establishing calmness in a restless mind. Zongmi was no ordinary person, however; in his intellectual interests he constantly sought to understand and explain the doctrinal underpinnings of the power of religious practices. The Mahayana teaching of a great compassion toward all sentient beings further inspired him in his doctrinal quest.

In order to satisfy his thirst for knowledge, Zongmi left his homeland in Guozhou (modern-day eastern Sichuan province) and traveled to other places in China. In the course of his travels he secured some works belonging to the Huayan school of Chinese Buddhism. While this school placed emphasis on meditative practices, it also featured what is arguably the most sophisticated form of philosophy to appear in East Asia. Drawn to the Huayan doctrine, Zongmi initially lectured on the texts but then contacted Chengguan (733–839), the most respected Buddhist master in the Tang capital of Chang'an at the time. Impressed by Zongmi's intellect and earnestness, Chengguan accepted the youthful monk as his disciple and initiated him into the Huayan school.

Chengguan, the leader of Buddhism in the empire and an eminent thinker of the age, attracted a number of distinguished intellectuals to study with him. Zongmi's association with this master brought him into the circle of the Chinese elite. This new situation gave him the opportunity to study Buddhism in a more

systematic manner and under the best guidance available. His association with leading scholars and philosophers stimulated him to deeper reflections on the philosophical problems confronting Chinese thinkers. This work, the *Yuanren lun*, was one of the products of that scholarly association.

The discussion about the “origin of humanity” was one of the burning questions in the Tang capital at the time, beginning with an essay written by the most influential Confucian scholar, Han Yü (768–824), joined by two other distinguished thinkers and friends, Liu Zongyuan (773–819) and Liu Yuxi (772–842). These men were the leading writers and thinkers of the age; Zongmi knew of their discussions and became a personal friend of Liu Yuxi. There is no doubt that Zongmi wrote the *Treatise on the Origin of Humanity* as his contribution to the debate. During his time in the capital Zongmi was a very prolific writer and compiler, with more than forty titles attributed to him. Of these the longest work was his compilation of the *Chanzang* (*Collection of Chan Buddhist Writings*) in one hundred and thirty chapters; unfortunately, only the preface of this work is extant (Taishō 2015).

Compared with other works written or compiled by Zongmi, the *Yuanren lun* was much less known in earlier records, and in fact neither Buddhist nor non-Buddhist bibliographers noted this title as an independent work by Zongmi. The earliest non-Buddhist catalogue that records this treatise is the bibliographical chapter of the *Xin Tang shu* (*New History of the Tang Dynasty*), compiled by Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) and others between 1044–1060. The *Jejong gyojang chongnok* compiled by the Korean monk Uicheon (1055–1101) in 1090 is the earliest Buddhist bibliography to record the *Yuanren lun* as an independent work by Zongmi. Earlier and more authentic sources, such as the inscription of Zongmi written by Pei Xiu (787–860?), or the biography of him in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* (*Song Collection of Biographies of Eminent Monks*, Taishō 2061) by Zanning (919–1002), do not mention this work. This lack of information from the earlier references does not have any bearing on the authenticity of this work, however. Its contents, context, and style of writing and phraseology all prove that the *Treatise on the Origin of Humanity* was without doubt composed by Zongmi.

Moreover, the earliest extant catalogue of works by Zongmi mentions a few titles that are no longer available, including the *Daosu chouda wenzhi* in ten chapters, which has been lost for a long time. The title of this work indicates that it was a collection of correspondence between Zongmi and disciples or

friends, both clergy and laypeople. The earliest known commentator of the *Yuanren lun*, Jingyuan (1011–1088), had already pointed out that the so-called preface of the *Yuanren lun* written by Pei Xiu “contradicts the theme of the work: the preface belongs to the *Fazhi*, not to the *Yuanren lun*.” This suggests that the *Yuanren lun* was originally part of a larger collection, not an independent work. The text mentioned by Jingyuan, *Fazhi*, seems to be most likely an abbreviation of the *Daosu chouda wenzhi*. This work was separated from the collection and became an independent title during the eleventh century C.E. At the time Jingyuan wrote the commentary there was already some confusion about the work and the large collection. Jingyuan was one of the masters under whom the Korean bibliographer Uicheon studied, which explains why the bibliography in the *Jejong gyojang chongnok* is the earliest Buddhist record that mentions the *Yuanren lun* as an independent work.

Although the *Treatise on the Origin of Humanity* has enjoyed a high degree of popularity in China, Korea, and Japan for a thousand years, it was unknown to European scholars until the twentieth century. Hans Haas of Heidelberg first translated the work into German in 1909,¹ but it did not seem to produce any noticeable impact on European scholarship. Haas' German translation includes the text but the notes from the original have not been translated. Recent research shows that Zongmi, an outstanding commentator, annotated a number of very important Buddhist texts, including some of his own works. The notes found in the *Yuanren lun* (which are placed in parentheses and italicized in this translation) are a good example of Zongmi's commentarial command. The comments explain the source, context, and subtle philosophical points discussed in the text and they also connect various segments of the text on the same or related problems, thus helping readers gain systematic knowledge from other parts of the work as a whole. This makes readers aware of the historical context of the discussion as well. A good example can be seen in a few words from a note in Part II of the *Treatise*, in which the annotation explains the reason why the book is titled the “origin of humanity”: its intent is “to confront the secular teachings” (see Part II, “Critique of the Partial and Shallow Teachings,” section 1, p. 153ff). This indicates that this work is indeed connected with the debate on the origin of humanity current in Zongmi's lifetime.

The quality of Haas' German translation is representative of European knowledge of the Buddhist tradition at large, and Chinese Buddhism in particular, at

the time of its publication. The situation showed a little improvement over the next few years. The earliest complete English rendering of the *Yuanren lun* was published by Kaiten Nukariya in 1913, as an appendix to his work *The Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan*.² As far as Zongmi's contribution is concerned, however, the translation of the *Yuanren lun*, titled "Origin of Man," as merely an appendix in a work devoted to Chan/Zen had no impact on scholars. On the technical side, Nukariya's English translation goes further than Haas' German version, since most of the original annotations have been loosely rendered in English. However, Nukariya moved Zongmi's annotation into footnotes and interspersed them with his own comments; as a consequence, readers cannot distinguish Zongmi's notes from those of the translator.

An English translation of the treatise by Yoshito S. Haketa was published in 1969 in *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China, and Japan*, edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary.³ This was the first translation published in North America, and this version is more accurate than the earlier European versions, an improvement that clearly indicates the advancement of the discipline over the previous sixty years. However, this translation does not include any of the original annotation. Moreover, this volume is a collection of translated selections from Buddhist sources in general and its usefulness for understanding Zongmi is therefore limited. The only book-length study on the *Yuanren lun* is Peter N. Gregory's 1981 dissertation, "Tsung-mi's Inquiry into the Origin of Man: A Study of Chinese Buddhist Hermeneutics."⁴

This volume presents a new translation of the Chinese text. In the course of translating from the Taishō shinshū daizōkyō edition, I also benefited from consulting Shigeo Kamata's Japanese translation, the *Genninron*,⁵ and a modern Chinese version in the *Zhongguo fojiao sixiang ziliaoxuanbian*.⁶

Treatise on the Origin of Humanity
by
Zongmi, a Monk of Caotang Temple
of Zhongnan Mountain

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Preface

All the active myriad living beings have their roots, [just as Laozi said:] “The myriad things are teeming, each of them returns back to its root.” There is not a single creature that has branches but is rootless. Furthermore, how could the most conscious one of the three powers of life (i.e., a human being) remain without the original source? Besides, “those who know others are wise, he who knows himself is enlightened.” Now, if one has received a human body but still does not know from whence he came, how can he know where he will transmigrate in the next life? How could he understand past and present worldly affairs? In recent decades I have learned from no fixed teachers but I have investigated my origins through studies of Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts. This persistent investigation of the origin has finally achieved its goal.

Scholars of the present time who study Confucianism, however, merely know a limited perspective: that this body came from the lineage of one’s parents and grandparents. When viewed from a broader perspective, they believed that a single nebulous material force (*qi*) was divided into two: *yin* and *yang*. The Two produced the Three—Heaven, Earth, and humanity. The Three produced the myriad things. The myriad things and humanity both take material force as their origin. Speaking from an immediate perspective, those who have studied the laws of the Buddha say only that the human body is a result of the effects from corresponding deeds one did in a previous life. When understood from a broader point of view, they assert that such deeds were rooted in delusion and, subsequently, came to the conclusion that the store consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) is the origin of the body. All claim that their investigations have been exhaustive but actually this is not the case.

Confucius, Laozi, and Śākyamuni are all perfect sages. They responded to the needs of beings at different times, establishing different ways of teachings. Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings are mutually supportive so as to benefit average people. The sages urged diligence in myriad practices, illustrating the beginning and end of cause and effect; they carefully investigated all dharmas, showing the root and the manifestation of birth (*utpāda*). Although these were their intentions, there is a difference between the nominal and the

real. The two teachings (i.e., Confucianism and Daoism) are exclusively expedient; Buddhism is expedient as well as real. As far as the encouragement of myriad practices, punishment of the wicked, exhortation of the good, and caring for people is concerned, the three teachings are worthy of being practiced. In regard to “inferring the principle of the myriad dharmas and exploring all natures to their origin,” however, only Buddhism apprehends this perfectly.

Scholars of the present age cling only to their respective sects, and even those who learn Buddhism are still missing the complete truth. Consequently, they are unable to enquire into the ultimate source of Heaven and Earth, humanity, and all things. I will now investigate the myriad dharmas according to Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings, starting with the shallow and going into the deep, causing those who have studied the provisional teachings to become free from obstruction and thus attain the ultimate root. I will then show the gradual process of birth, according to the complete teaching, so that the partial [understanding] culminates in perfect understanding, and further extend this to all the branches. (*The “branches” means Heaven, Earth, humanity, and the myriad things.*) This treatise comprised of four parts is entitled “On the Origin of Humanity.”

This concludes the Preface to the *Treatise on the Origin of Humanity*.

I. Critique of Deluded Clinging

(For practitioners of Confucianism and Daoism.) The two teachings of Confucianism and Daoism say that all living beings such as humans or animals, etc., are produced, completed, nourished and brought up by the great Dao, which is void. They also say that “The Way models itself on that which is self-so,” and it has produced the primordial material force. The primordial material force produced Heaven and Earth, and Heaven and Earth produced the myriad things. Therefore stupidity and wisdom, a noble birth and a low birth, poverty and wealth, sorrow and joy are all received by them from Heaven at the time of their birth. Later, after dying, they will return to Heaven and Earth and return to the void.

The main thrust of the non-Buddhist teachings, however, is to establish the conduct for humanity, not to inquire into its ultimate origin. The myriad things discussed in the two teachings are limited to the phenomenal world. Although they point to the great Dao as the root, they do not completely explain agreeability and adversity, arising and ceasing, purity and defilement, or causes and conditions. Consequently, those who practice these teachings are not aware that the doctrines are provisional and cling to them as perfect teachings. 708b

Now I will take up a few brief points and questions. [Confucians and Daoists] say that the myriad things were produced by the great Dao, which is void. This means that the great Dao is the root of life and death, wisdom and folly; it is the base of good and evil, calamity and blessings. If the root and the base are eternal, then calamity, disorder, evil, and stupidity cannot be eliminated, and blessings, happiness, virtue, and good cannot increase. What then would be the use of the teachings of Laozi and Zhuangzi?

If the Dao has nurtured tigers and wolves, given birth to [the wicked] Jie and Zhou,⁷ brought early death to [virtuous] Yan and Ran,⁸ and visited misfortune on the brothers [Bo] Yi and [Shi] Qi,⁹ how could this Dao be called esteemed?

Again, it has been said that the myriad things are produced and transformed by Nature and do not arise due to causes and conditions. If this is the case, then birth and transformation would take place everywhere free from causes

and conditions. This means that a stone might give birth to grass, grass might give birth to a man, and men might give birth to animals, etc. Furthermore, it would also mean that all birth would be without the distinction of prior and subsequent, that the time of rising from bed [after sleep] would be no different whether in the morning or evening, that immortality does not depend on alchemy and herbs, that peace does not depend on virtuous talents, and that humaneness and justice are not dependent on education and cultivation. If this is so, how could the doctrines established by Laozi, Zhuangzi, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius have become the norm?

Again, it has been said that all things are produced by the primordial material force (*qi*). If this is so, how would a living being that is suddenly born and has not yet learned to think be able to love and hate, be proud and willful? If you say that following birth one would be able to spontaneously express love, hatred, and so on, and naturally understand the five virtues and the six arts, why then are these accomplished only after undergoing the causes and conditions of learning?

Again, does life suddenly come to be through the endowment of material force, and death come to pass through the sudden disintegration and disappearance of material force? What then would there be left to become ghosts and spirits? Moreover, there are people in the world who are able to recall clearly past events from their previous lifetimes. From this, we know that the present life continues from the previous one and is not due to a sudden reception of material force. Again, if we examine ghosts and spirits we see that their numinous awareness has never been interrupted. From this it is known that nonexistence after death is not the result of the sudden disintegration of the material force. Therefore, there are literary records of [the practice of] sacrifice and prayer to the spirits. Furthermore, there are those who have been revived from near-death and recounted their experiences in the nether realm, and those who [as spirits] after their deaths asked their wives or children to take revenge or show gratitude. Have not such stories been recounted in the past and present?

Others object, saying that if it were the case that people become ghosts after death, then all the ghosts from ancient times on would crowd the streets and roads and others would encounter them, so why is this not the case? The answer is that people die and [are reborn] into [one of] the six realms of

transmigration. It is not necessarily the case that everyone becomes a ghost and that ghosts will become human beings when they die. How could ghosts endlessly accumulate from ancient times? Besides, the material force of Heaven and Earth is originally without intelligence, and human beings are endowed with this nescient material force. How then could they suddenly come to have intelligence? Also plants are endowed with this same material force, so why are they not intelligent?

It has also been said that [if one is] poor or rich, noble or base, wise or foolish, good or evil, or has good luck or bad luck, calamities or blessings—it is all the Mandate of Heaven. The endowment of Heaven includes more poor people and fewer rich ones, more base and fewer noble, or even more calamitous and less blessed. If increase and decrease are allotted by Heaven, why is Heaven so unjust? Even more so in the case of those who do not practice [good conduct] yet are of the nobility, or those who observe moral principles yet remain in a low social class; those who lack virtue yet are wealthy, virtuous yet poor; unjust people who are lucky, while those who are just are unlucky; the good die young and the cruel are long-lived. People of the Way perish, while those without the Way flourish. If all these come from Heaven, why does Heaven grant prosperity to those who lack the Way and destroy those who follow it? Where are the rewards of fortune for the good and profit for the modest? Or the punishment of calamity for the debauched and loss for the excessive?

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Again, if disorder and rebellion are also the Mandate of Heaven, then why do the teachings established by the sages reproach only humanity but not Heaven? They punish people but not the Mandate; this is definitely unfair. Yes, the *Book of Songs* criticizes corrupt governments, and the *Book of Historical Documents* praises the kingly way. The *Book of Rites* extols stable leadership, and the *Classic of Music* calls for the transformation of manners. How can these be regarded as following the heavenly intention above and obeying the will of Heaven? From this we know that those who have devoted themselves to these teachings are not yet able to understand the origin of humanity.

II. Critique of the Partial and Shallow Teachings

(For those who practice the incomplete doctrines of Buddhism.) There are five grades of Buddhist teachings, from shallow to deep: (1) The teaching for humans and gods, (2) the teaching of the Lesser Vehicle (Hinayana), (3) the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) teaching of dharma characteristics, (4) the Great Vehicle teaching that refutes phenomenal appearances, *(These teachings are included in this section.)* and (5) the One Vehicle teaching that reveals the Dharma-nature. *(This is included in Section III.)*

(1) For those who have just been initiated, the Buddha discussed the doctrine of good and evil karmic retribution in the three periods of past, present, and future. This means that if a person has committed the ten most grave unwholesome activities he will fall into hell after he dies; crimes committed at a middling level will lead to rebirth as a hungry ghost (*preta*); crimes of the lowest degree will lead to rebirth as an animal. Thus the Buddha has prescribed something analogous to the five constant virtues of the worldly teachings *(Although the secular teachings of India are different from [the Chinese] ritual standard, they do not differ as far as punishing the wicked and extolling the good are concerned. Nor do they depart from the five constant virtues of humaneness [ren], justice [yi], etc., thus providing cultivatable virtues. Taking the manner of greeting as an example, the practice in China is to raise both hands together, while in Tibet the manner is to lower one's two hands separately.)*, causing people to observe the five precepts. *(Not killing is humaneness, not stealing is justice, not committing adultery is propriety [li], not lying is trustworthiness [xin], not consuming wine and meat cleanses the spirit, which is beneficial for wisdom [zhi]).* This enables one not to fall into the three lower realms and to be reborn in the human realm. If a person practices the ten wholesome behaviors at the highest level, as well as giving and the precepts, he or she will be reborn in one of the six heavens in the realm of desire; if a person practices the four kinds of meditation and the eight kinds of concentration, he or she will be reborn in the heavens of form and formlessness. *(The reason that the realms of heavenly beings, ghosts, and hells are not*

mentioned here is that these belong to the different spheres that cannot be reached through the senses of seeing or hearing. If ordinary people do not even know the branches, how can they know the root? This is why the origin of humanity is presented here in order to counteract secular teachings. As I am now discussing the Buddhist scriptures, [Buddhist terms] are used here.) This is why the teaching is called the teaching of humans and gods. (However, karma is of three kinds: first, evil; second, good; and third, nonretributive. There are also three times of retribution: effected in the present life, in the next life, and in the subsequent rebirth.) According to this teaching, karma is the origin of one's existence.

709a It may be questioned now that if being reborn in one of the five realms is due to the effect of karma, who is it that creates karma and receives the retribution? If it is the [bodily organs and members of the] eyes, ears, hands, and feet that create karma, why don't the eyes, ears, hands and feet of someone who has just died have the same functions of seeing, hearing, etc. as when the person was alive? If you say that it is the mind that creates karma, then what is this mind (written with the character for "heart")? If it means the physical heart, then the substance of the heart is confined to the body. How then could it suddenly enter into the eyes and ears and decide "yes" and "no" externally? If one cannot decide "yes" or "no," how could one accept and reject things? Moreover, if the mind and the eyes, ears, hands, and feet are essentially separated from each other, how can they communicate with other internal and external organs to coordinate movement and create karma jointly?

You might say that it is only feelings of joy and anger, like and dislike that stimulate the body and mouth to create karma. Yet feelings of joy, anger, etc. arise and cease from moment to moment without any enduring substance. What, then, is the agent that creates karma? If you say that one should not inquire into individual items, that it is the entire body/mind complex that creates karma, then who will receive the retribution of suffering or happiness after the body dies? If you say that there is another body that still exists after death, then how can the body/mind that has committed sins or cultivated merit cause that future mind/body to receive the effects of suffering or happiness [from its acts]? If this is the case, how unfortunate is the one who has cultivated merit, and how fortunate is the one who has committed sins! What is this divine Principle (*shenli*) that is so unjust? From this we know that the

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practitioners of this teaching only believed in karmic causation but did not penetrate to the origin of existence.

(2) The teaching of the Lesser Vehicle asserts that since the beginningless past the physical body and the thinking mind arise based on the power of causes and conditions, and they arise and cease from moment to moment continuously and endlessly, like a steady trickle of water or the flames of a lamp. The body and mind provisionally assemble, appearing to be unitary and permanent, but ordinary ignorant people do not realize this and thus grasp it as a self. By treasuring this self people develop the three poisons of attachment (*attaching to fame and profit so as to prosper the self*), ill-will (*aversion toward disagreeable objects for fear that they may harm the self*), and ignorance (*illogical considerations*). The three poisons stimulate the mind and motivate [acts of] the body and speech, thus creating all kinds of karma. Once karma is formed it is difficult to escape. This is why people receive a suffering or a joyful body in one of the five destinies (*as the result of their particular karma*), and either a superior or inferior place in the triple world (*as the result of shared karma*). One grasps the received body as the self and repeatedly gives rise to attachment and so on, creates karma, and again receives retribution. The body then passes through birth, old age, sickness, and death again and is reborn. The worlds too pass through the stages of formation, existence, decay, and voidness; they are emptied and formed again. (*About the formation of the world from the empty kalpa, a verse says:*)

A great wind rises up in the realm of space (*kongjie*),
Reaching everywhere, without limit.
Sixteen *lakṣas*¹⁰ in thickness,
Adamantine, indestructible.
This is called the wind that supports the world,
The golden treasury cloud of Light-sound (*Ābhāsvara*) Heaven.
Spread over the three thousand realms,
Rain falls [and forms pools] up to the axles of the wagons;
The wind so strong one cannot hear the flow of water,
Which rises to the height of eleven *lakṣas*.
First the diamond realm is created,
Then the golden treasury cloud next.

Pouring rains filled this up,
Thus creating the realm of Brahmā.
All realms down to the Yāma Heaven were created in sequence,
Vibrant winds purified the waters.
The seven metals and materials of Mount Sumeru,
Along with the dregs, become mountainous lands,
The four continents and joyless hells,
All surrounded by salty oceans—
The world of names and things is thus established.
After passing through one *kalpa* of increase and decrease,
And arriving at the bliss of the second meditation.
They eventually descend to be born in the human world,
Where they first eat thin earth cakes (*pṛthivī-parpaṭaka*) and shrubs
from the forests.
Millet is taken later,
Undigested and passed quickly.
Male and female forms are distinguished,
Lands are divided and rulers are established.
Ministers and officials are recruited,
And everything is thus differentiated.
After this they pass through nineteen more *kalpas* of increase
and decrease,
Making twenty [minor] *kalpas* of increase and decrease in total.
This is called the *kalpa* of formation (*vivarta-kalpa*).

It might be argued that the *kalpa* of annihilation (*saṃvarta-sthāyī-kalpa*) points to the vacuous Dao mentioned by the Daoists. However, the Dao embodies tranquil illumination and supernormal penetration, which are not vacuous. The Daoists might have been confused, or perhaps wished to put forward an expedient means in order to eliminate human desires, and so they pointed to the realm of emptiness as the Dao. The great wind in the realm of space is what the Daoists called the single material force of the Primordial Chaos. This is why they say that “The Dao produced the One.”¹¹ The “golden treasury cloud” refers to the beginning of material formation, which is the Supreme Polarity (*taiji*). The “rain falls down. . .” but does not flow is the

congealing of the *yin* material force. Creation is possible only when *yin* and *yang* are united. “The realm of Brahmā . . . and Mount Sumeru” is what [Daoists] call Heaven; the “dirt and dregs” are Earth. This is what is meant by “The One produced the Two.”¹² The “bliss of the second meditation . . . born into the human world” means humanity. This is what Daoists call “The Two produced the Three.” The three potencies (*san-cai*) are now complete. The various items described following “thin earth cakes” is what the Daoists mean by “The Three produce the myriad things.” This corresponds to the period of the Three August Emperors, in which people lived in caves and ate raw food, as fire had not yet been harnessed. However, because there were not yet any literary records at the time, accounts transmitted to people of later generations are unclear. Errors occurred in transmission and discrepancies appeared in the literature of various schools.

Because the Buddhist teachings were clearly known throughout the trichilocosm and were not confined to the great Tang empire, Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts are not fully in accord. The word “abiding” means the abiding *kalpa* (*vivarta siddha*). This too passes through twenty minor *kalpas* of increase and decrease. The word “destruction” means the *kalpa* of destruction (*saṃvarta*), which too passes through twenty minor *kalpas* of increase and decrease. The first nineteen *kalpas* of increase and decrease destroy sentient beings, and the last destroys the natural world. The agents of destruction are the three calamities of fire, flood, and wind. The word “space” means the *kalpa* of annihilation (*saṃvarta-sthāyin*), which also passes through twenty [cycles of] increase and decrease. In this period of annihilation there is neither a world nor sentient beings.]

Kalpa after *kalpa*, birth after birth, the endless and beginningless wheel of transmigration goes on, like the pulley over a well. (*The Daoists understand only that there was a period of vacuity before the formation of the world, the “vacuous and undifferentiated material force” that is called the Primordial Beginning. They do not know that long before this empty period there were already thousands and thousands of hundreds of thousands of pervasive kalpas of formation, abiding, destruction, and annihilation, ending and beginning again. From this, we know that even the shallow teaching of Lesser Vehicle Buddhism already surpasses the deepest teaching of the non-Buddhists.*) This is due to the failure to understand that this body has never

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been a self. That it is not a self means that the body is a form created by the union of physical and mental elements. If these are investigated and analyzed, the physical elements are the four gross elements of earth, water, fire, and air, and the mental elements are the four aggregates of feeling (*the ability to feel pleasant and unpleasant sensations*), perception (*the ability to apprehend images*), mental formation (*the ability to act in transition from moment to moment*), and consciousness (*the ability to discriminate*). If each one of these were a self, then there would be eight selves.

Furthermore, there are many elements within the great element of earth. Each of the three hundred and sixty bones can be counted separately; the skin, hair, tendons, muscles, liver, heart, spleen, and kidneys are all distinct from one another. Various functions of the mind are also distinct: seeing is not hearing, joy is not anger; such also is the case of the eighty-four thousand afflictions. Which among these numberless things should be selected out as the self? If they are all selves, then there would be a hundred or a thousand selves—in which case there is bound to be confusion created by the multiplicity of masters within a single body. Apart from these there is no other separate dharma. No matter how much you seek this self you will not find it.

So we should immediately realize that the body is nothing other than a seeming conglomeration of myriad conditions. If there is originally no self, for whom would there be craving and ill-will? For whom is there killing or stealing, giving or morality? (*This is knowing* [the first of the Four Noble Truths], *the truth of suffering*.) Thereafter, one does not become attached to contaminated good or evil in the triple world (*this refers to* [the third of the Four Noble Truths], *the truth of eliminating the causes of suffering*) but cultivates insight only from the contemplation of no-self ([the fourth of the Four Noble Truths], *the truth of the path*). Because attachment and so on are cut off, all karmic activities cease and the thusness of no-self is attained (*the truth of cessation*). One is even able to attain the realization of arhatship. Through extinguishing body and mind you are able to cut off all suffering. According to this teaching, the two dharmas of form and mind, as well as craving, ill-will, and delusion, are the origin of the [sense] faculties, the body, and the natural world. There is no other dharma of the past or future that can be regarded as the origin.

It may be questioned now that the substance of the entity that was born and reborn through many transmigrations would endure without any interruption. Now, the five [sense] consciousnesses cannot arise without causal conditions (*the sense organs and their objects are the conditions*), and the thinking consciousness sometimes does not function (*such as during states of fainting or deep sleep, or in the concentration of extinction [i.e., cessation], the thoughtless concentration, or the heaven of no-thought*). In the formless heaven there are no four gross elements. What then holds the entity together without extinction throughout many transmigrations? From this we know that those who exclusively hold to this teaching also do not get to the origin of human existence.

(3) The Mahayana teaching of dharma characteristics asserts that all sentient beings from the beginningless past are naturally endowed with the eight kinds of consciousness. Of these eight, the store consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) is the root. It transforms suddenly into the seeds of the sense organs, the body, and the material world; the other seven consciousnesses are then produced in turn, and all of these are capable of transforming their respective objects, though none is a real dharma. How do they transform? It is said that it is due to the discrimination of self and dharmas empowered by perfuming. When all the consciousnesses arise, they appear as the apparent self and dharmas due to the sixth and seventh consciousnesses being obscured by ignorance. Therefore people attach to a real self and real dharmas, just as a sick person [has hallucinations] (*serious illness muddles the mind, thus one sees strange things and people*) or as if in a dream (*everyone knows what dream images are like*). Because of the effects of illness or dreams, the content of the mind appears to be various objective phenomena. When we are dreaming we grasp the dream images as if they were actual external objects. Only after we awaken do we know that these are only the [images] in the dream. It is the same with the self, which is nothing but the transformation of consciousness. In delusion we grasp the existence of a self and its objects. From this delusion karma is created and [the cycle of] birth and death goes on endlessly. (*This was discussed in detail above.*) When this principle is understood, then you will know that the self and body are nothing but the transformations of consciousness, and that consciousness is the basis of the body. (*The incomplete aspects of this doctrine are refuted in the following section.*)

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(4) The Mahayana teaching of the refutation of characteristics refutes both the prior Mahayana and Hinayana attachment to the characteristics of dharmas. This is the principle of the emptiness and tranquility of the true nature after the hidden is revealed. (*The refutation of dharma characteristics is not confined to the Perfection of Wisdom [Prajñāpāramitā] literature but is found throughout the Mahayana scriptures. The previous three teachings were discussed according to their sequence of development, but this teaching refutes attachment wherever it is encountered, regardless of time period. Therefore, Nāgārjuna propounded the two kinds of wisdom [prajñā]: first is shared wisdom and second is unshared wisdom. “Shared” [wisdom] refers to that which is heard, believed in, and understood by adherents of the two vehicles, the teaching that refutes attachment to dharmas; “unshared” [wisdom] refers to that which is exclusively understood by bodhisattvas as it secretly reveals the buddha-nature. The two Indian exegetes Śīlabhadra and Jñānaprabha established their respective teachings of the three periods of time in reference to this teaching of emptiness. Some say that this teaching came before the establishment of the consciousness only [i.e., Yogācāra] doctrine of dharma characteristics; others say that that it was posited afterward. I support the latter position.*)

If you wish to refute the former, you would first ask: If the transformed objects are unreal how can the transforming consciousness be real? If you say that one exists while the other does not (*this analogy will be used in refutation of other teachings later*), then perceptions in a dream would be different from the thing that is perceived in the dream. If they are different, then what is seen in the dream is not the [actual] thing, which is not seen in the dream. Otherwise, when one awakens and the dream disappears, the seen thing would still remain. Again, if the thing is not in the dream it would be real; and if that which appears in a dream is not an [actual] thing, where do its characteristics come from? From this we can know that while in the dream, both the perceptions and the things perceived in the dream seem to show the distinctions of “seer” and “seen,” but in fact they are both void and unreal, and thus utterly nonexistent. Consciousness is also like this. It has no self-nature and exists only nominally in dependence on myriad conditions. The *Madhyamaka-śāstra* says:

II. Critique of the Partial and Shallow Teachings

There has never been a single dharma
Not produced by causes and conditions.
Hence, among all dharmas
There are none that are empty.

The accompanying prose says, “Dharmas produced from dependent arising—I say they are empty.”¹³

The *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* says:

The discrimination of all dharmas is only due to illusory thought. If one frees oneself from illusory thought, then the defining characteristics of all objective realms disappear.¹⁴

[The *Diamond*] *Sutra* says, “All things that have characteristics are false and ephemeral. Those who separate from characteristics are called buddhas.”¹⁵ (*These kinds of statements can be found throughout the Mahayana canon.*) It is known from this that both the mind and objects are empty; only this is the real principle of the Mahayana. If one seeks for the origin of humanity according to this, the form of existence is originally empty and the emptiness is the root.

Now let us examine the teaching again: If mind and object are both nonexistent, who is the knower of this nonexistence? Furthermore, if all objects are unreal, what makes the false phenomena manifest? Moreover, none of the manifested false phenomena could arise without relying on something that is real. Without the wet and immutable water, how could we see the false characteristics of waves? Without a clear and immutable mirror, how could we see the unreal and temporary reflections? Again, as mentioned earlier, both the perceptions and objects that appear in a dream are unreal; if this is true, then the unreal dream must be dependent on the sleeping person. Now, if the mind and the object are both empty, how can we explain the basis upon which the false phenomenon manifests? From this it is known that this teaching merely refutes attachment to discriminations, it still does not reveal the real and sapient nature. Hence, the *Dharma Drum Sutra* says, “All the scriptures on the doctrine of emptiness require further explanation (*neyārtha*).”¹⁶ (“*Require further explanation*” means that some points still remain unexplained.) The scripture of the *Great Perfection of Wisdom* says, “The teaching of emptiness is the initial entrance into the Great Vehicle.”¹⁷

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The above four teachings are shown in sequence according to their relationship to each other. The earlier teachings are shallower and the later ones are more profound. If one studies one [teaching] and realizes that it is incomplete, it will be understood as being a more shallow [teaching]; if, however, one grasps it as complete, then one is said to be biased. The practitioners of these teachings are said to be biased and shallow.

III. The Direct Revelation of the True Source

(*This is the fully explained meaning and the true teaching of the Buddha.*)

(5) The teaching of the One Vehicle (*ekayāna*) reveals the true nature; it asserts that all sentient beings are universally endowed with originally enlightened true mind. From the beginningless past up to the present, the mind has always abided in purity, clear and unobscured, always possessing full awareness. This is also known as buddha-nature; it is also called the matrix of the Tathāgata (*tathāgatagarbha*). Blinded by false thoughts from the beginningless past, it is unaware of itself and cognizes only ordinary substances. It is sunk in attachment, creates binding karma, and undergoes the suffering of birth and death. The Great Enlightened One (the Buddha) pitied human beings and taught that all is empty. He also revealed to them the pure, numinous, and enlightened true mind, which is absolutely identical with that of the buddhas. The *Flower Ornament Sutra* thus says:

O sons [and daughters] of the Buddha, there is not even a single sentient being who does not possess the wisdom of the Tathāgata. It is only due to clinging to false thoughts that they are unable to realize this. If you free yourself from false thoughts, then all-inclusive wisdom, inborn wisdom, and unimpeded wisdom will emerge immediately.¹⁸

The sutra then gives the simile of a particle of dust containing a thousand volumes of scripture. “Particle of dust” is a metaphor for sentient beings; “volumes of scripture” is a metaphor for the Buddha’s wisdom. Once again, it says:

At the time, the Tathāgata universally observed all the sentient beings in the realm of existence and said, “Strange! Strange! Why are the sentient beings who possess the wisdom of the Tathāgata yet blinded by delusion? I shall teach them the noble path, causing them to become forever free from false thoughts and to discover the vast and great wisdom of the Tathāgata within their own selves, which is no different from that of the Buddha.”¹⁹

Nota Bene: We have passed through many *kalpas* without having yet encountered the true principle and did not know how to return to our original state. We grasp only unreal characteristics and willingly accept the condition of the follies of mundane awareness, whether human being or animal. Now, if we seek the according to this perfect teaching we will realize that we are originally buddhas. We shall, therefore, act in accordance with the practices of the buddhas and identify our minds with the mind of the buddhas; return to the root and go back to the origin, and thus eliminate our habits as ordinary people. “One does less and less until there is nothing left to do.”²⁰ One will be able to respond spontaneously to innumerable situations as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River, and thus be called a buddha. You should know that delusion and enlightenment are the same true mind. How great is this wonderful gate! The search for the origin of humanity ends here.

710b *(Even though the Buddha has discoursed on all of these aforementioned five teachings, some of them are gradual and some are sudden. Those who possess medium or lesser faculties should begin with the shallower and then proceed to the deeper [teachings]. You should gradually lead them along the way. First instruct them in the initial teaching so as to cause them to abandon the unwholesome and abide in the wholesome. Then instruct them with the second and third teachings, in order to cause them to abandon defilement and abide in purity. Finally, instruct them in the fourth and fifth teachings in order to refute characteristics and reveal the nature, harmonize with the expedient and return to the real, relying on the real to practice until the culmination of buddhahood. As for those who possess the wisdom of the best of the highest faculties, they should begin with the root and then extend to the branches. This means to start with the fifth teaching, which directly points to the essence of the one true mind. When the essence of the one true mind is revealed, one will naturally realize that all phenomena are unreal, originally empty, and quiescent. Phenomenal characteristics arise only due to delusion and in dependence on the real. They must use the wisdom of awakening to reality to cut off the unwholesome and cultivate the wholesome; cultivating the wholesome, they stop falsity and return to the real. When falsity is exhausted, the real is completed. This is called the Dharma-body buddha.)*

IV. The Merging of the Roots and Branches

(This merges what has been rejected previously, bringing all [the teachings] into one source and causing them all to become correct doctrines.)

Although the true nature is the root of the person, its arising and development all have causes; the bodily marks cannot come into existence suddenly without causes. It is only because the above-proposed teachings were incomplete in their explanations that they were rejected point by point. Now the root and the branches will be fully merged and assimilated, including even Confucianism and Daoism. *(At first, only the fifth teaching, that of [buddha-] nature, will be discussed; subsequent segments will discuss other teachings according to their respective attainments. This will be explained in the notes.)*

This is to say that at first there is only a single sapient nature that neither arises nor ceases, increases nor decreases, transforms nor shifts. Sentient beings have been slumbering in delusion from the beginningless past and they cannot awaken by themselves. As the nature is covered over, it is called the matrix of the Tathāgata. Depending on the matrix of the Tathāgata, the mental characteristics of arising and cessation arise. *(Hereafter the discussion refers to the fourth teaching, which also refutes the apparent characteristics of arising and ceasing.)*

This refers to the true mind that neither arises nor ceases and that merges with the false perceptions of arising and ceasing. They are neither the same nor different. This is called the store consciousness. This consciousness has two aspects: enlightened and unenlightened. *(The following discussion refers to the third teaching of dharma characteristics, which is the same as the doctrine discussed above.)* In dependence on the unenlightened aspect false thoughts begin to arise, which is called the mark of karma. Furthermore, if one does not realize that these thoughts are originally nonexistent, they are transformed into the consciousness of subjective viewer and viewed object. One then does not know that the object is a false projection of his or her own mind, and they hold to the object as definitely existing. This is called clinging to dharmas.²¹

(*The following refers to the second teaching. The teaching of the Hinayana school is similar to this doctrine.*) Because of attachment to phenomena, one sees differences between oneself and others and thus clings to the self. Because of their clinging to the characteristics of self, people cherish and seek out agreeable objects, wanting them to enrich the self, and they despise disagreeable objects, fearing that they will harm the self. These deluded feelings grow and develop. (*The following refers to the first teaching; the teaching for humans and gods also has a similar doctrine.*) Henceforth, carried by the evil karma the spirit (*xinshen*), permeated by killing, stealing, etc., is reborn in the [three lower] realms of hells, hungry ghosts, and animals. Furthermore, there are those who are fearful of suffering or who by their good nature practice almsgiving and morality. Carried by this good karma, their spirits are brought to the intermediary state and enter into a human womb (*The following refers to the two teachings of Confucianism and Daoism, which give the same explanation.*), thus receiving material force elements and individual characteristics. (*This agrees with the teachings that take the material force as the basis of the human being.*) The material force suddenly possesses the four gross elements, which gradually form the sense organs; the mind suddenly possesses four aggregates, which gradually form consciousness. After ten months a living being is born, called a human being. Thus the present self is this body and mind. From this we know that both body and mind have their origins: a human being comes into existence only when these two combine. The gods and *asuras* follow a process that is generally the same as this.

710c Although one's present body is received according to directive karma, it is furthermore based on the particular karma with which one is endowed with the various qualities of life: [being born into a] noble or humble [family], being poor or wealthy, long-lived or short-lived, healthy or ill, prospering or declining, [experiencing] suffering or happiness. This means that humility or arrogance in one's previous life is the cause and this bears the [karmic] fruit of one's higher or lower status in the present life. This extends to various individual retributions, including benevolence, which leads to longevity or malevolence, [which leads] to unnatural death; generosity brings wealth, while greediness results in poverty, etc. All [possible actions and their karmic results] cannot be fully listed here. There are also cases in which misfortune befalls one who has not acted in an evil way, or those who do no good receive

good fortune; longevity may be enjoyed by those who are not humane, or premature death may come to those who are not malevolent. All of this is predetermined by the particularizing karma of the previous life, which differs from the deeds one does in their present life. This is naturally the case.

Adherents of non-Buddhist teachings do not know of previous existences and merely depend on what their eyes can see, and they hold to this exclusively as the way things are. (*This agrees with their doctrine that the [apprehension of a] self is the root.*) There are also those who cultivated good deeds in their youth in a previous life but did evil in their later years, or they did evil when they were young but became good when they got older. This is why some people are wealthy, of noble birth, and happy when they are young in this life but later become poor, of humble means, and sorrowful when they are old, or vice versa. Adherents of non-Buddhist teachings do not know this, believing that failure and success are [solely] due to fate at any given moment. (*This agrees with [Confucian and Daoist] teachings of the Mandate of Heaven.*) However, if the endowment of the material force is examined all the way back to the origin, it is the primordial material force of the primal unity; if the mind that is arisen is examined all the way back to its source, then it is the sapient mind of true oneness.

In truth, there is no other dharma apart from the mind. Even the primordial material force is transformed from the mind and belongs to the projected objects of the evolving consciousness, as discussed previously, including the objectified characteristics from the store consciousness.²² From the first stirring of thought, the mark of karma bifurcates into mind and object. Mental activity then descends from subtle to coarse, manifesting false discrimination and creating karma.²³ (*This has been discussed above.*) The objects also go from obscure to apparent; they develop and change until they produce Heaven and Earth. (*They call this that which began from the Great Change and arrived at the Supreme Polarity through the fivefold evolution. The Supreme Polarity produces the two primary forces [of yin and yang], which they consider to be the great and spontaneous Dao, and which we call here the true nature. It is actually the subjective aspect of the mind. What they call the primordial material force is what we call the first arising of thought. It is actually the marks of the objective world.*)

Once karma ripens, one receives the two kinds of material force from one's father and mother, which unite with the activity consciousness, thus forming a human being. According to this doctrine, the mental consciousness and the objective world that is transformed from the mind bifurcate into two: one part unites with mind and consciousness, thus becoming a human being; the other part does not join with the mind and consciousness but becomes Heaven and Earth, mountains and rivers, countries and towns. Among the three powers, human beings are the most sapient because their minds and spirits are united within. This is why the Buddha has said that the four great internal elements differ from the four great external elements. This is right.

Alas! Those miserable scholars who cling to their confusions! I would like to present this treatise to students who have entered the stream of the path (*srota-āpanna*) and who wish to become buddhas. They should thoroughly understand what is coarse and what is refined, [and distinguish] the branch from the root. They should then abandon the branches and return to the root in order to reflect upon the luminous source of mind. When coarse and refined [false thoughts] are completely eliminated, one's sapient nature will manifest. No dharma will be left uninvestigated. This is known as the Dharma body (*dharmakāya*) or the reward body (*sambhogakāya*). Responding to the needs of sentient beings without limit, it is called the transformation-body (*nirmāṇakāya*) buddha.

End of the *Treatise on the Origin of Humanity*

Notes

- ¹ Hans Haas, “Tsung-mi’s Yuen-zan-lun,” *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 12 (1909): 491–532.
- ² Kaiten Nukariya, “Origin of Man,” in *The Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan* (1913) (London: Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1973, reprint), pp. 219–253.
- ³ Yoshito S. Haketa, trans., “On the Original Nature of Man,” in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China, and Japan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969; reprint, 1975), pp. 179–196.
- ⁴ Peter N. Gregory, “Tsung-mi’s Inquiry into the Origin of Man: A Study of Chinese Buddhist Hermeneutics,” Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1981. A section of the dissertation was published in Peter N. Gregory and Robert M. Gimello, eds., *Studies in Ch’an and Hua-Yen, The Kuroda Institute, Studies in East Asian Buddhism No. 1* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1983). Gregory subsequently published a fully annotated translation of the text, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005).
- ⁵ Shigeo Kamata, *Genninron* (Tokyo: Meitoku shuppansha, 1973),
- ⁶ Zongmi, *Hua Yan Yuanren Lun (Hua Yan’s Treatise on the Origin of Humanity)*, in Jun Shi, et al., eds., *Zhongguo fojiao sixiang ziliao xuanbian (Anthology on Chinese Buddhist Thought)*, Vol. II, Part 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983).
- ⁷ King Jie of the Xia and King Zhou of the Yin were both evil rulers who lost themselves completely in the enjoyment of luxury. They have been known for posterity as examples of corrupt and evil kingship.
- ⁸ Yan Tong and Ran Geng were two disciples of Confucius who were famous for their moral integrity.
- ⁹ Bo Yi and Shi Qi were the sons of King Guzhu Jun of the Yin dynasty.
- ¹⁰ A *lakṣa* is an ancient Indian numerical amount, equivalent to one hundred thousand.
- ¹¹ *Dao de jing*, chapter 42.
- ¹² *Dao de jing*, chapter 42.
- ¹³ T.1564.30:33b13–14.
- ¹⁴ T.1666.32:576a9–10.
- ¹⁵ T.235.8:749a24.
- ¹⁶ T.270.9:296b9.

- ¹⁷ This citation is found throughout commentarial literature in the Chinese canon but I have not been able to locate the actual line in the *Great Perfection of Wisdom (Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra)*.
- ¹⁸ T.279.10:272c4–7.
- ¹⁹ T.279.10:272c27–29.
- ²⁰ *Dao de jing*, chapter 48.
- ²¹ What Zongmi describes in this paragraph as the “dharma characteristic” teaching is actually not the model of consciousness propounded in the Faxiang school of Xuanzang and Kuiji but is from the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* (T. 1666).
- ²² This is the teaching of the Faxiang (Yogācāra) school.
- ²³ The prior two sentences represent the teaching of the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*. Faxiang’s presentation of the function of mind and the production of karma is quite different from that of the Faxiang school, but here Zongmi presents the two in the form of a single system.

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- aggregate that remains until the end of transmigration (*āsaṃsārika-skandha*): In Mahīśāsaka texts, the aggregate (*skandha*) of consciousness that remains throughout all lifetimes.
- appropriating consciousness (*ādāna-vijñāna*): The storehouse consciousness that appropriates the body upon transmigration. *See also* eight kinds of consciousness.
- arhat: Literally, “worthy of offerings,” an enlightened saint; the ideal of the highest level of attainment in the Hinayana, in contrast with the Mahayana ideal of the bodhisattva. An arhat has eliminated all afflictions and reached the stage of no more training. *See also* Hinayana.
- asura*: Originally meaning a spirit, titan, or god, the term generally indicates titanic demons who are enemies of the gods (*devas*), especially Indra, with whom they wage constant war. One of the ten kinds of beings in different states of existence and one of the eight supernatural beings that protect Buddhism.
- bodily action (*kāya-karman*): According to Vasubandhu, the volitional action of moving the body to perform a physical action.
- body (*kāya*): The combination or aggregate of physical elements endowed with sensation.
- Book of Historical Documents (Shujing)*: also known as *Shangshu*): The oldest extant work of history in China, covering the period from the Zhou dynasty (1050–256 B.C.E.) to the Warring States period (480–221 B.C.E.). Because it contains much instruction from ancient sage kings, it is counted as one of the Thirteen Classics.
- Book of Music (Yuejing)*: Said to be one of the Six Classics, it was lost after the burning of the books in 212 B.C.E., during the Qin dynasty (221–206 B.C.E.). The lack of concrete information about this text has led some scholars to think that it is a reference to the *Book of Songs*. *See also* *Book of Songs*.
- Book of Rites (Liji)*: “Records Concerning Ritual”: One of the Five Classics, often cited by Confucius; the original locus of the *Daxue (Great Learning)* and the *Zhongyong (Doctrine of the Mean)*. It deals with the rituals connected with the Zhou government. The compilation of this text is attributed to Dai Sheng of the Former Han period (second century B.C.E.) but its rich philosophical contents are much older.
- Book of Songs (Shijing)*: One of the Five Classics, a collection of poems written during the five hundred year-period between the beginning of the Zhou dynasty to the

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- middle of the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 B.C.E.). It is believed that Confucius selected three hundred and five from more than three thousand pieces and edited them into this book to be used for education. Also called *Book of Odes*.
- branching consciousness (*bhavāṅga-vijñāna*): In Tāmraparṇīya texts, the consciousness that branches from one lifetime to another. Vasubandhu sees it as a synonym for the storehouse consciousness.
- cause for maturation (*vipākahetu*): That which causes actions to mature or “ripen” and attain their results.
- change of position (*deśāntara-saṃkrānti*): In the Vātsīputrīya and Sāmmitīya schools, movement that constitutes a communicative bodily action.
- communicative act/action (*vijñapti-karman*): An action that communicates or informs others of inner intent.
- concentration of cessation/extinction: The meditative attainment of cessation (Skt. *nirodha-samāpatti*), an extremely deep state of meditative concentration in which sensory and discriminative mental functions are completely extinguished; one of the six states of mental inactivity. When this concentration is attained the thinking consciousness is also extinguished, which enables the practitioner to be reborn into the highest heaven. *See also* eight kinds of consciousnesses.
- Confucianism: The system of morality and self-cultivation centered around the teachings of Confucius and Mencius and their disciples, which generally deals with the cultivation of human character through awareness of important values, such as humanness, justice, filial piety, trustworthiness, loyalty, and so forth. Along with Buddhism and Daoism, considered one of the “three teachings” of traditional East Asian thought.
- consciousness as result (*phala-vijñāna*): Consciousness as the result of permeations due to former actions.
- Daoism: A native Chinese philosophical/religious system primarily based on the teachings of the Chinese philosophers Laozi and Zhuangzi, which emphasized naturalness and unattached activity in personal behavior. The tradition also features a strong critique of the ontological status of language, not so different from that seen in Buddhism. Over the centuries Daoism influenced a broad range of areas other than philosophy, and informed alchemical practices aimed at attaining longevity and immortality.
- dependent arising (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*): The fundamental Buddhist concept that everything arises from conditions, there is nothing that arises out of nothing, nothing arises of itself, and things do not come into existence through the power of an external creator; thus, there is nothing that is self-contained, independent, or which has its own separate and independent nature. The condition of relationship to something else, resulting in the arising or production of all phenomena.

Dharma: The term has a wide range of meanings in Buddhism but the primary meaning is the teaching delivered by the Buddha, which is fully accordant with reality; thus it means truth, reality, true principle, law. The term connotes Buddhism as the perfect religion, and as a common noun (dharma) it is also used in the sense of “all things” small or great, visible or invisible, real or unreal; affairs, truth, principle, method, concrete things, abstract ideas, etc.

Dharma body. *See* three bodies.

directive karma and particularizing karma: Directive karma is produced from ignorance and draws one into the overarching conditions of the species of which one is a member; also called the “karma of general reward” or “generic retribution.” It is contrasted with particularizing karma, which is produced from desire and grasping and refers to relatively quickly actualized karma that generates more detailed differences between beings, such as the distinction of being born into wealth or poverty, as beautiful or ugly, etc.

eight kinds of concentration: Eight degrees of meditative concentration (*dhyāna*), consisting of the four *dhyānas* of the realm of form (*rūpadhātu*) and the four formless concentrations of the formless realm (*ārūpyadhātu*). *See also* three realms.

eight kinds of consciousness: As taught in the Yogācāra school, the doctrine that the minds of sentient beings are comprised of eight distinguishable regions of consciousness, which can be broken down into four general types: (1) the first five consciousnesses correspond to the sense perceptions generated from the five senses of the eyes, ears, nose, body, and mind; (2) the sixth, *mano*, or “thinking consciousness,” plays many roles, including gathering sensory perceptions, generating value judgments, calculation, emotion, and intention; (3) the seventh, *manas*, also referred to connotatively as “defiled mental consciousness” (*kliṣṭa-mano-vijñāna*), hypothesized as the origin of the sense of self, which develops based on the perception of the apparent continuity of sameness exhibited by the base consciousness; and (4) the eighth, *ālayavijñāna*, “storehouse consciousness,” understood as the fundamental or base consciousness that functions as the repository of all the impressions from one’s experiences. *See also* storehouse consciousness; Yogācāra.

five consciousnesses. *See* eight kinds of consciousness.

five constant virtues: In Confucianism, the five constants in human relationships, consisting of humaneness (*ren*), justice (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and trustworthiness (*xin*). *See also* humaneness; justice; propriety; trustworthiness; wisdom.

Flower Ornament Sutra (Skt. *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*; Ch. *Huayan jing*): One of the most influential sutras in East Asian Buddhism, of which three Chinese translations, all entitled *Dafangguang fo huayan jing*, were made. The text describes a cosmos of infinite realms that mutually interpenetrate and contain one another. The vision expressed in this work was the foundation for the creation of the Huayan school of Buddhism, characterized by a philosophy of interpenetration.

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foundational consciousness (*mūla-vijñāna*): In Mahāsāringika texts, the basic consciousness, seen by Vasubandhu as a synonym for the storehouse consciousness. *See also* eight kinds of consciousness; storehouse consciousness.

four gross elements (Skt. *mahābhūta*): The four material elements of which all physical substances are composed: (1) earth (*prthivī*), which has the basic quality of hardness and the function of protection; (2) water (*āpas*), which has the function of gathering and storing wetness; (3) fire (*tejas*), which is the nature of heat and has the function of warming; and (4) wind (*vāyu*), which has the function of giving motion to all living things.

four kinds of meditation: The four progressively subtle stages of meditation that lead one out of the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*) into rebirth in the four meditation heavens (Skt. *catur-dhyāna*; Pāli *cattāri jhānāni*). *See also* three realms.

Four Noble Truths: The fundamental teaching of the Buddhist path, which is the truth of suffering, Śākyamuni's realization that existence as we normally perceive it is dissatisfactory; the truth of the origination of suffering; the truth of the cessation of suffering, the principle espoused by Śākyamuni that all suffering eventually ceases; and the truth of the eightfold path that leads to the extinction of afflictions and to liberation from suffering.

god (Skt. *deva*): Related to the Latin *deus*, literally “radiant ones,” heavenly or celestial beings who inhabit the heavens of sensual pleasure. There are many classes of heavenly beings, and as a rule they are invisible to humans. The term is also a general designation of the gods of Brahmanism and of all the inhabitants of *devalokas* (*deva*-worlds) who are subject to suffering in cyclic existence (*samsara*), just as do all human and other living beings.

golden treasury cloud (Skt. *kāñcana-garbhā meghāh*): The first cloud that arises when a new world is completed; it appears in the Ābhāsvara Heaven and brings the first rain.

hell (Skt. *naraka*): Literally, a prison in the bowels of the earth where prisoners are subject to all kinds of torture as retribution for extensive evil activities in their prior lives (such as violating the precepts). Considered one of the three evil destinies. Buddhist scriptures have extensive categories and lists of the various hells. *See also* three evil destinies.

Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle): In general, the term refers to Buddhist practices centered on individual salvation, or which are not based upon the true experience of emptiness, in contrast to the ideal of the Mahayana (Great Vehicle), and its usage by Mahayanists implies a derogatory sense. In a historical sense, the term is applied to the early Indian groups typified by Theravādins and Sarvāstivādins, who held to a monastically centered approach to Buddhist practice. There are four stages of attainment in the Hinayana path: stream-enterer (*srota-āpanna*), once-returner (*sakṛdāgāmin*), non-returner (*anāgāmin*), and arhat. Mahayana texts refer to Hinayana practices of the

- śrāvakas* (direct disciples) and *pratyekabuddhas* (self-enlightened buddhas) as lacking the elements of a penetrating view of emptiness as well as universally functioning compassion, both of which are considered to be the hallmarks of the Mahayana bodhisattva path. *See also* arhat; bodhisattva; Mahayana; non-returner.
- humaneness (*ren*): One of the five constant virtues of Confucianism; consideration for others, a sense of altruism, goodness, kindness, compassion, or benevolence. In the thought of Confucius and Mencius, *ren* is the basic quality of unselfishness present to one degree or another in the minds of all human beings, and which is the basis for the appearance of all proper forms of human interaction, such as justice, filial piety, trustworthiness, propriety, and so forth. *See also* Confucianism.
- imperishable (*avipranāśa*): In the Sāṃmitīya school, the special morally neutral principle of transmigration, unassociated with mind, through which actions mature their results.
- increase (*upacaya*): In the Mahāsaṅgika school, the special morally neutral principle unassociated with mind, through which actions mature their results.
- Jñānaprabha: A disciple of Śīlabhadra. *See* Śīlabhadra.
- justice (*yi*): One of the five constant virtues of Confucianism; the quality of justice, fairness, appropriateness, giving each thing its due; the appropriate conduct of the Noble Person. *See also* Confucianism.
- kalpa*: An eon or world period; the longest period of time in Indian cosmology; an age, such as the period of time between the creation, destruction, and subsequent re-creation of a world or universe. The *Treatise on the Origin of Humanity* references several *kalpas*, including the abiding *kalpa* (Skt. *vivarta siddha*), an existing or persisting *kalpa* and the period of human existence, second of the four *kalpas*. In this eon the sun and moon rise, gender is differentiated, heroes arise, the four castes are formed, and social life evolves. The *kalpa* of annihilation (*saṃvarta-sthāyī-kalpa*) is a period of nothingness during which nothing whatsoever exists. The *kalpa* of destruction (*saṃvarta*) is a period of decay during which the world of sentient beings first decomposes followed by the dissolution of the natural world; this eon is subdivided into twenty lesser *kalpas*. The *kalpa* of formation, one of the four *kalpas*, consists of twenty small *kalpas* during which worlds and the beings in them are formed.
- karman* (action): According to Vasubandhu, any deed or act performed with an intention by an agent.
- Mahaprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Great Perfection of Wisdom*): A collection of sixteen sutras of varying length that articulate the central Mahayana doctrine of *prajñāpāramitā*, the “perfection of wisdom.” Translated by Xuanzang from 660–663 C.E., this massive work includes such well-known texts as the *Diamond Sutra* (*Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*), and is one of the most complete collections in the Prajñāpāramitā corpus. *See also* Mahayana; Xuanzang.

Mahayana (“Great Vehicle”): The name of a late Indian sectarian movement that became the main form of Buddhism in East Asia. The term was created along with and in opposition to the disparaging term Hinayana, used by the former to distinguish the two. In the polemical sense, the concept of a “great vehicle” refers to the fact that the Mahayana doctrines were considered to be more open and universal, that enlightenment was attainable by all sentient beings, including lay followers and householders, rather than only to monastics. This movement produced a large body of new sutras, in which the new model practitioner of the Mahayana, the bodhisattva, preached the doctrine of the emptiness of all things. *See also* bodhisattva; Hinayana.

maturation (*vipāka*): The ripening of actions within consciousness, through which they attain their results.

mental action (*manas-karman*): The volitional act of activating the will, causing it to bring forth various kinds of actions.

mental continuity (*saṃtāna*): The moment-to-moment flow of consciousness, whereby the mind instantaneously arises and perishes.

mind that accumulates (*ācaya-citta*): The storehouse consciousness that accumulates seeds of actions. *See also* eight kinds of consciousness; storehouse consciousness.

Nāgārjuna (second–third centuries C.E.): One of the most esteemed figures in Buddhist history, considered by many Mahayanists as second in insight and importance only to the Buddha himself. Nāgārjuna was a master of Sanskrit grammar and linguistics as well as a skilled debater and critical thinker, and his masterwork, the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (*Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*), sharply critiqued in elegant, sophisticated verse many treasured concepts and theories held by Buddhists and non-Buddhists, from causality and time to karma and nirvana. Based on the title of this text, the school based on Nāgārjuna’s thought was called Madhyamaka.

nescience (Skt. *avidyā*): Ignorance, delusion, folly; the fundamental misunderstanding of reality that underlies all the suffering of unenlightened people; the first of the twelve links of dependent arising. More than a lack of factual knowledge, it is a fundamental error in our mode of perception that prevents us from seeing things as they really are; for example, being unaware of the fact that all things are ultimately impermanent, or that there is in reality no such thing as an inherent, permanently existing self. *See also* dependent arising; no-self.

noncommunicative action (*avijñapti-karman*): An action that is not manifested outwardly and so does not communicate to others.

non-returner (*anāgāmin*): A saint who will not be reborn again into transmigration; one of the stages of the Hinayana path. *See also* Hinayana.

no-self (*anātman*): The basic notion that there is no permanent, abiding self.

One Vehicle (*ekayāna*): A Mahayana doctrine that holds that the earlier Buddhist teaching of the three vehicles for *śrāvakas* (disciples), *pratyekabuddhas* (self-enlightened

- buddhas), and bodhisattvas was merely an expedient teaching to attract beings to the single buddha vehicle, i.e., the bodhisattva path of the Mahayana. The One Vehicle doctrine is a key theme in such important and influential Mahayana scriptures as the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Great Perfection of Wisdom*), the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Flower Ornament Sutra*), and the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra* (*Sutra of the Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*), but it is most forcefully articulated in the *Lotus Sutra*. *See also Flower Ornament Sutra; Mahayana; Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra.*
- outflows (*āśrava*): The defiled “leakages” of actions within consciousness.
- perfuming or permeation (Skt. *vāsanā*): The “perfuming” of consciousness by the performance of actions. The literal meaning of the term *vāsanā* is of being permeated with an odor, used as a metaphor to describe how karma works in the form of various undefiled and defiled phenomena, created by our activities which unfailingly leave impressions on our consciousness and alter it. Just as clothing or fabric that has been exposed to an odiferous substance, such as perfume, gradually takes on the aroma of that substance, our own actions of body, speech, and mind (thought) influence our mental state and consciousness. The idea of perfuming is a distinctive Buddhist explanation of how karmic influence is transmitted through the consciousnesses of living beings.
- physical shape (*saṃsthānarūpa*): In the Sarvāstivāda and Vaibhāṣika schools, the visible configurations that constitute communicative bodily actions.
- polymorphous mind (*nānā-citta*): The mind characterized by the many activities of sensing, perceiving, and thinking in all their variations.
- propriety (*li*): One of the five constant virtues of Confucianism, ceremony, ritual, etiquette, propriety, respect. In Confucian thought, *li* can be understood as referring to all outward correct action that serves to reveal one's innate humaneness (*ren*). *See also* humaneness; Confucianism.
- realm of space (Skt. *ākāśa-dhātu*): One of the six realms of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and knowledge.
- seeds (*bījas*): The inner force of actions deposited in consciousness and resulting in the fruits of those actions. *See also* eight kinds of consciousness; seminal consciousness.
- seminal consciousness (*bīja-vijñāna*): Consciousness as the seed-cause for future results. *See also* eight kinds of consciousness; seeds.
- seventh consciousness. *See* eight kinds of consciousnesses.
- shared karma (Skt. *sādhāraṇa-karman*): Karmic results of actions experienced by oneself and others who have engaged in the same activities, which are held in common by all those in the group. For example, people experience their environment and the things of the natural world in the same way when they have shared the same flow of activity. In contrast, the karmic results of individual activity are not necessarily shared with or experienced by others.

Śīlabhadra (529–645 C.E.): A renowned Indian master of the Yogācāra school. Originally from Magadha, he taught at Nālandā, the great Buddhist monastery and university in northern India, where he met Xuanzang who came to study with him in 636 C.E. *See also* Xuanzang; Yogācāra.

six consciousnesses (*ṣaḍ-vijñāna*): The five sense consciousnesses of the eyes, ears, nose, and body, and the thinking consciousness of mind. *See also* eight kinds of consciousness.

six heavens: According to Buddhist cosmology, above Mount Sumeru, the central axis of Jambudvīpa (one of the four continents or quarters, which forms our world) are six heavens, each higher than the last, stretching up toward the realm of form (*rūpa-dhātu*). They are (1) the heaven of the four *deva* kings who guard the four quarters of the world; (2) Trāyastriṃśa, the heaven of the thirty-three gods; (3) Yāma, where the god Yāma resides; (4) Tuṣṭita, the heaven of contentment where Maitreya Bodhisattva is said to be preparing to be reborn in the world as the buddha of the next *kalpa*; (5) Nirmāṇarati, the heaven where one's desires are magically fulfilled at will; and (6) Parānirmitavaśavartin, the heaven where one can partake of the pleasures of others, and also where Pāpīyāṃs, the king of the *māras*, resides. *See also* three realms.

six realms of transmigration: Six samsaric destinies into which sentient beings are reborn in accordance with the good or evil actions they carried out in previous lifetimes, including the realms of (1) hell (Skt. *naraka-gati*), (2) hungry ghosts (*preta-gati*), (3) animals (*tiryagyoni-gati*), (4) *asuras* (*asura-gati*), (5) human beings (*manuṣya-gati*), and (6) gods (*deva-gati*). *See also* *asura*; god; three evil destinies.

special evolution (*pariṇāma-viśeṣa*): In Vasubandhu's Sautrantika theory, the process of maturation caused by volition and leading to future results.

special volition (*cetana-viśeṣa*): In Vasubandhu's Sautrantika theory, volition as an act of the will is itself action, the cause that permeates the mental continuity, thereby leading to further activity and the maturation of the results of that activity.

storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*): The underlying consciousness, containing all the seeds of former actions, which forms the linkage of mental continuity from one lifetime to another, and from entrance into and emergence from such states as the concentration of cessation. *See also* eight kinds of consciousness.

subtle mind (*sūkṣma-citta*): An alternate description of the storehouse consciousness, present during the concentration of cessation. *See also* storehouse consciousness.

summit of being (*bhavāgra*): The highest sphere of meditative attainment within the triple world. *See also* three realms.

Supreme Polarity (*taiji*): An early Chinese conception of the great tension between *yin* and *yang* energies that existed before actual differentiation into Heaven and Earth; a term for the origin of myriad phenomena. *See also* Daoism; *yin* and *yang*.

- teaching of humans and gods: The first in Zongmi's fivefold taxonomy of the teaching, consisting of the basic teaching of karmic retribution, through which beings are able to gain a favorable rebirth either as a human being or a god.
- ten unwholesome activities (Skt. *daśākuśāla-karma-pathā*): The ten unwholesome activities carried out through the three modes of action of body, speech, and mind (thought): killing, stealing, engaging in debauchery, lying, flattery, insult, treachery, covetousness, anger, and holding false views.
- thin earth cakes (Skt. *prthivī-parpaṭaka*): Thin cakes that grow spontaneously on the surface of the earth at the beginning of an eon (*kalpa*). Human beings initially require only mental nourishment at the onset of an eon, but they must eventually turn to material food in the form of these thin cakes for sustenance, and later consume the vegetation found in forests.
- thinking consciousness. *See* eight kinds of consciousnesses.
- thoughtless concentration: One of the six states of inactivity of mind, the state of concentration that is the cause of being born into the Heaven of No-thought in which all mental actions and the functions of the first six consciousnesses cease. This concentration, which is also practiced by non-Buddhists, is called a good but tainted concentration, because within it the seventh *mano* consciousness is still producing self-view. *See also* eight kinds of consciousnesses.
- three bodies (Skt. *trikāya*): The principle of the three bodies or modes of manifestation of buddhas: (1) the transformation body (Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*), the temporal, physical body of a buddha in the form of a sentient being, such as the buddha of the present era, Śākyamuni, in order to teach and save them. A transformation-body buddha utilizes superknowledges to appropriately discern and respond to the various capacities of sentient beings in order to lead them to liberation. (2) The reward body (*sambhogakāya*), also called the body of bliss or body of recompense, is the ideal body of a buddha produced upon entering buddhahood as the result of vows undertaken during their practice in the bodhisattva path. In this body a buddha enjoys the blissful reward of enlightenment. (3) The Dharma body (*dharmakāya*) is a term for the absolute, the manifestation of all existences; the true body of reality, or of the Buddha as eternal principle; a pure body of essence that possesses no marks of distinction and is equated with emptiness.
- three evil destinies: The three lowest of the six realms of transmigration, the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, and animals, into which sentient beings are reborn according to the karmic results of actions carried out in previous lifetimes. *See also* six realms of transmigration.
- three realms: The three realms of samsaric existence into which beings are reborn: the desire realm (Skt. *kāmadhātu*), in which one's consciousness is subject to physical desires; the realm of form (*rūpadhātu*), in which beings take physical form but are

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no longer subject to craving; and the formless realm (*ārūpyadhātu*), in which beings no longer have physical form. Also referred to as the triple world.

trichiliocosm (Skt. *trisāhasra-mahāsāhasra-lokadhātu*): The worlds that constitute the domain of the Buddha. A single world consists of the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*) and the first heaven of the realm of form (*rūpadhātu*). In ancient Indian cosmology, the term is used to describe the vastness and interconnectedness of the universe. *See also* three realms.

trustworthiness (*xin*): One of the five constant virtues of Confucianism, a cardinal value in the system of human relationships. The presence of this quality is the defining factor of friendship. *See also* Confucianism.

two vehicles: The two Hinayana vehicles or paths of practice of *śrāvakas* (“hearers,” direct disciples) and *pratyekabuddhas* (self-enlightened ones). These two kinds of practitioners are regularly introduced in Mahayana literature where they are generally cast in a negative light as representatives of the so-called Hinayana, in contradistinction to the Mahayana ideal of bodhisattva. They are understood to be engaged in a view toward practice and enlightenment that will permit them to attain the realization of an arhat but not buddhahood. *See also* arhat; Hinayana; Mahayana.

underlying meaning: The hidden or implicit intent of a scripture preached by the Buddha.

verbal action (*vākkarman*): The volitional action of enunciating speech.

vital force (*jīvitendriya*): In the Vaibhāṣika school, the reality of the life force apart from mind and matter, which accounts for the perdurance of the person.

volition to deliberate, to decide, and to put into effect: Acts of the will to consider a course of action, determine a course of action, and carry out a determined course of action.

wind (*vāyu-dhātu*): Literally, the wind element, which in the Sauryodayika and Dārṣṭāntika schools constitutes a communicative bodily action.

wisdom (*zhi*): Intelligence, the function of the intellect; one of the five constant virtues of Confucianism. Understood by Confucius and Mencius to be one of the fundamental good qualities of the mind; the ability to discern right from wrong. *See also* Confucianism.

Xuanzang (602–664 C.E.): A famous Chinese monk-scholar who traveled to India to collect teachings and texts; one of the most important figures in the history of scholastic Chinese Buddhism. The precise date of his journey to India is uncertain (possibly 629 or 627), but the year of his arrival in India is given as 633. While in India he studied with many famous Buddhist masters, especially at the famous center of Buddhist learning in Nālandā. On his return to China in 645 he was received with honor and given support to carry out the largest and most sophisticated translation project at that time in the history of Buddhism. His strongest personal interest in Buddhism was the study of Yogācāra, and his own extensive studies, translations,

and commentaries on the texts of the tradition stimulated the development of the Faxiang school in East Asia. His closest and most eminent student was Kuiji (632–682), recognized as the first patriarch of the Faxiang school.

yin and *yang*: The two fundamental cosmic opposites in Chinese Daoist onto-cosmology, which manifest in the world as the polarities of female/male, negative/positive, dark/light, cold/hot, etc. *See also* Daoism.

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- Bodhisattva’s Diadem (Pusa yingluo jing, T. 656)*. Traditionally considered to have been translated by Zhu Fonian (fl. 365 C.E. to early fifth century C.E.), the text traces the career of the Buddha-to-be.
- Complete Realization (Chengju guangming dingyi jing, T. 630)*. Traditionally regarded as a translation by Zhi Yao (fl. late second century C.E.), this text is more likely a native Chinese composition of the mid-fourth century. The Buddha describes a concentration that allows one to “completely realize” a set of virtuous qualities.

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- Dao Practice (Daoxing bore jing, T. 224)*. Lokakṣema's translation, dated 179 C.E., of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*. The title of the sutra is borrowed from the title of the first chapter, which centers on the topic of the "practice," or progress on the Dao, as the path of a bodhisattva.
- Dhyāna Canon (Zuochan sanmei jing, T. 586)*. A compilation by Kumārajīva (402 C.E.) of teachings on *dhyāna* from various Mainstream and Mahayana sources.
- Fortunate Eon (Xianjie jing, T. 425)*. Translation of the *Bhadrakalpika-sūtra* by Dharmarakṣa (late third century C.E.). The title refers to the notion that the present eon is a "fortunate" one, inhabited by a thousand worthies.
- Lotus Sutra* (Skt. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*). There are two Chinese translations: the *Zhengfahua jing* (T. 263), translated by Dharmarakṣa in 286 C.E., and the *Miaofa lianhua jing* (T. 262), translated by Kumārajīva in 406 C.E. One of the most influential sutras in East Asian Buddhism, it is known for its parables as well as for the doctrines of the One Vehicle and skillful means.
- Mahayana Treatise (Moheyan lun)*, alternative title of the *Dazhidu lun* (T. 1509). An extensive commentary on the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* traditionally attributed to Nāgārjuna (though this attribution is questionable) and produced under Kumārajīva in 402–405 C.E.
- Middle Way Treatise (Zhong lun, T. 1564)*. Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamaka-kārikā* with commentary by Piṅgala (Ch. Qingmu), translated by Kumārajīva, 409 C.E. A fundamental text of the Three Treatises (Sanlun) "school" of Chinese Buddhism.
- Radiance (Fanguang bore boluomi jing, T. 221)*. *Mokṣala's translation of the "large" *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, dated 291 C.E. The title's literal meaning, "Emission of Light Perfection of Wisdom Sutra," refers to the scripture's opening scene in which the Buddha magically emits light from the pores of his body and his tongue, and this radiance penetrates countless world systems, teaching the Dharma to their inhabitants.
- Supreme Brightness (Chaoriming sanmei jing, T. 638)*. Translation credited to Nie Chengyuan (fl. late third to early fourth centuries C.E.), a lay collaborator of Dharmarakṣa. The eponymous "supreme brightness" or, more precisely, "brightness greater than that of the sun," is the name of the concentration (*samādhi*) described in this sutra.
- Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (Skt. *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*). Two Chinese translations are of relevance to the *Zhaolun*: the *Weimojie jing* (T. 474), translated by Zhi Qian from 222–229 C.E., and the *Weimojie suoshuo jing* (T. 475), translated by Kumārajīva in 406 C.E. In this text Vimalakīrti, an advanced bodhisattva from the Abhirati buddha world, has manifested in our world as a lay bodhisattva in order to teach sentient beings the truths of nonduality and emptiness.
- Viśeṣacintī (Siyi fantian suowen jing, T. 586)*. Kumārajīva's translation (402 C.E.) of the *Brahma-viśeṣacintī-paripṛcchā-sūtra*, in which Viśeṣacintī, among others, receives teachings on the doctrine of emptiness from the Buddha.

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BDK English Tripiṭaka (First Series)

Abbreviations

<i>Ch.</i> :	Chinese
<i>Skt.</i> :	Sanskrit
<i>Jp.</i> :	Japanese
<i>Eng.</i> :	Published title

Title	Taishō No.
Ch. Chang ahan jing (長阿含經)	1
Skt. Dīrghāgama	
Eng. <i>The Canonical Book of the Buddha's Lengthy Discourses</i> (Volume I, 2015) <i>The Canonical Book of the Buddha's Lengthy Discourses</i> (Volume II, 2017)	
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Ch. Zabao zang jing (雜寶藏經)	203
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Ch. Daluo jingang bukong zhenshi sanmoye jing (大樂金剛不空眞實三麼耶經) Skt. Adhyardhaśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-sutra Eng. <i>The Sutra of the Vow of Fulfilling the Great Perpetual Enjoyment and Benefiting All Sentient Beings Without Exception</i> (in <i>Esoteric Texts</i> , 2015)	243
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Ch. Shengman shizihou yisheng defang bianfang guang jing (勝鬘師子吼一乘大方便方廣經) Skt. Śrīmālādevīsīmhanāda-sutra Eng. <i>The Sutra of Queen Śrīmālā of the Lion's Roar</i> (2004)	353
Ch. Wuliangshou jing (無量壽經) Skt. Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Eng. <i>The Larger Sutra on Amitāyus</i> (in <i>The Three Pure Land Sutras</i> , Revised Second Edition, 2003)	360
Ch. Guan wuliangshou fo jing (觀無量壽佛經) Skt. *Amitāyurdhyāna-sutra Eng. <i>The Sutra on Contemplation of Amitāyus</i> (in <i>The Three Pure Land Sutras</i> , Revised Second Edition, 2003)	365

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Ch. Da banniepan jing (大般涅槃經) Skt. Mahāparinirvana-sutra Eng. <i>The Nirvana Sutra</i> (Volume I, 2013)	374
Ch. Fochuibo niepan lüeshuo jiaojie jing (佛垂般涅槃略說教誡經) Eng. <i>The Bequeathed Teaching Sutra</i> (in <i>Apocryphal Scriptures</i> , 2005)	389
Ch. Dizang pusa benyuan jing (地藏菩薩本願經) Skt. *Kṣitigarbhapraṇidhāna-sutra	412
Ch. Banzhou sanmei jing (般舟三昧經) Skt. Pratyutpanna-buddhasammukhāvasthita-samādhi-sutra Eng. <i>The Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra</i> (1998)	418
Ch. Yaoshi liuli guang rulai benyuan gongde jing (藥師琉璃光如來本願功德經) Skt. Bhaiṣajyaguru-vaiḍūrya-prabhāsa-pūrvapraṇidhāna-viśeṣavistara	450
Ch. Mile xiasheng chengfo jing (彌勒下生成佛經) Skt. *Maitreyavyākaraṇa Eng. <i>The Sutra that Expounds the Descent of Maitreya Buddha and His Enlightenment</i> (2016)	454
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Ch. Weimojie suoshuo jing (維摩詰所說經) Skt. Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sutra Eng. <i>The Vimalakīrti Sutra</i> (2004)	475
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Ch. Zuochan sanmei jing (坐禪三昧經) Eng. <i>The Sutra on the Concentration of Sitting Meditation</i> (2009)	614
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Ch. Shoulengyan sanmei jing (首楞嚴三昧經) Skt. Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sutra Eng. <i>The Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sutra</i> (1998)	642
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Ch. Jie shenmi jing (解深密經) Skt. Saṃdhinirmocana-sutra Eng. <i>The Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning</i> (2000)	676
Ch. Yulanpen jing (盂蘭盆經) Skt. *Ullambana-sutra Eng. <i>The Ullambana Sutra</i> (in <i>Apocryphal Scriptures</i> , 2005)	685
Ch. Sishierzhang jing (四十二章經) Eng. <i>The Sutra of Forty-two Sections</i> (in <i>Apocryphal Scriptures</i> , 2005)	784
Ch. Dafanguang yuanjue xiuduoluo liaoyi jing (大方廣圓覺修多羅了義經) Eng. <i>The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment</i> (in <i>Apocryphal Scriptures</i> , 2005)	842
Ch. Da Biluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing (大毘盧遮那成佛神變加持經) Skt. Mahāvairocanaḥśambodhi-vikurvitādhiṣṭhāna-vaipulyasūtreन्द्रa- rājanāma-dharmaparyāya Eng. <i>The Vairocanaḥśambodhi Sutra</i> (2005)	848
Ch. Jingganding yiqie rulai zhenshi she dasheng xianzheng dajiao wang jing (金剛頂一切如來真實攝大乘現證大教王經) Skt. Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha-mahāyānā-bhisamaya-mahākālparāja Eng. <i>The Adamantine Pinnacle Sutra</i> (in <i>Two Esoteric Sutras</i> , 2001)	865
Ch. Suxidi jieluo jing (蘇悉地羯囉經) Skt. Susiddhikara-mahātantra-sādhanaopāyika-pañāla Eng. <i>The Susiddhikara Sutra</i> (in <i>Two Esoteric Sutras</i> , 2001)	893
Ch. Modengqie jing (摩登伽經) Skt. *Mātāṅgī-sutra Eng. <i>The Mātāṅga Sutra</i> (in <i>Esoteric Texts</i> , 2015)	1300

Title	Taishō No.
Ch. Mohe sengqi lü (摩訶僧祇律) Skt. *Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya	1425
Ch. Sifen lü (四分律) Skt. *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya	1428
Ch. Shanjianlü piposha (善見律毘婆沙) Pāli Samantapāsādikā	1462
Ch. Fanwang jing (梵網經) Skt. *Brahmajāla-sutra Eng. <i>The Brahmā's Net Sutra</i> (2017)	1484
Ch. Youposaijie jing (優婆塞戒經) Skt. Upāsakaśīla-sutra Eng. <i>The Sutra on Upāsaka Precepts</i> (1994)	1488
Ch. Miaofa lianhua jing youbotishe (妙法蓮華經憂波提舍) Skt. Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-upadeśa Eng. <i>The Commentary on the Lotus Sutra</i> (in <i>Tiantai Lotus Texts</i> , 2013)	1519
Ch. Shizha biposha lun (十住毘婆沙論) Skt. *Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣā	1521
Ch. Fodijing lun (佛地經論) Skt. *Buddhabhūmisutra-śāstra Eng. <i>The Interpretation of the Buddha Land</i> (2002)	1530
Ch. Apidamojushe lun (阿毘達磨俱舍論) Skt. Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya	1558
Ch. Zhonglun (中論) Skt. Madhyamaka-śāstra	1564
Ch. Yüqie shidilun (瑜伽師地論) Skt. Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra	1579
Ch. Cheng weishi lun (成唯識論) Eng. <i>Demonstration of Consciousness Only</i> (in <i>Three Texts on Consciousness Only</i> , 1999)	1585
Ch. Weishi sanshilun song (唯識三十論頌) Skt. Triṃśikā Eng. <i>The Thirty Verses on Consciousness Only</i> (in <i>Three Texts on Consciousness Only</i> , 1999)	1586

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Ch. Weishi ershi lun (唯識二十論) Skt. Viṃśatikā Eng. <i>The Treatise in Twenty Verses on Consciousness Only</i> (in <i>Three Texts on Consciousness Only</i> , 1999)	1590
Ch. She dasheng lun (攝大乘論) Skt. Mahāyānasamgraha Eng. <i>The Summary of the Great Vehicle</i> (Revised Second Edition, 2003)	1593
Ch. Bian zhongbian lun (辯中邊論) Skt. Madhyāntavibhāga	1600
Ch. Dasheng zhuangyanjing lun (大乘莊嚴經論) Skt. Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra	1604
Ch. Dasheng chengye lun (大乘成業論) Skt. Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa Eng. <i>A Mahayana Demonstration on the Theme of Action</i> (In <i>Three Short Treatises by Vasubandhu, Sengzhao,</i> <i>and Zongmi</i> , 2017)	1609
Ch. Jiuqing yisheng baoxing lun (究竟一乘寶性論) Skt. Ratnagotravibhāga-mahāyānottaratantra-śāstra	1611
Ch. Yinming ruzheng li lun (因明入正理論) Skt. Nyāyapraveśa	1630
Ch. Dasheng ji pusa xue lun (大乘集菩薩學論) Skt. Śikṣāsamuccaya	1636
Ch. Jingangzhen lun (金剛針論) Skt. Vajrasūcī	1642
Ch. Zhang suozhi lun (彰所知論) Eng. <i>The Treatise on the Elucidation of the Knowable</i> (2004)	1645
Ch. Putixing jing (菩提行經) Skt. Bodhicaryāvatāra	1662
Ch. Jingangding yuqie zhongfa anouduoluo sanmiao sanputi xin lun (金剛頂瑜伽中發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心論) Eng. <i>The Bodhicitta Śāstra</i> (in <i>Esoteric Texts</i> , 2015)	1665
Ch. Dasheng qixin lun (大乘起信論) Skt. *Mahāyānaśraddhotpāda-śāstra Eng. <i>The Awakening of Faith</i> (2005)	1666

Title	Taishō No.
Ch. Shimoheyān lun (釋摩訶衍論)	1668
Ch. Naxiān bīqiū jīng (那先比丘經)	1670
Pāli Milindapañhā	
Ch. Banruo boluomiduo xīn jīng yuzān (般若波羅蜜多心經幽贊)	1710
Eng. <i>A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heart Sutra</i> (<i>Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra</i>) (2001)	
Ch. Miaofāliānhuā jīng xuānyī (妙法蓮華經玄義)	1716
Ch. Guān wúliàngshòu fó jīng shū (觀無量壽佛經疏)	1753
Ch. Sānlùn xuānyī (三論玄義)	1852
Ch. Dāshèng xuān lùn (大乘玄論)	1853
Ch. Zhāo lùn (肇論)	1858
Eng. <i>Essays of Sengzhao</i> (In <i>Three Short Treatises by Vasubandhu, Sengzhao, and Zongmi</i> , 2017)	
Ch. Huāyān yīshèng jiāoyī fēnqǐ zhāng (華嚴一乘教義分齊章)	1866
Ch. Yuānrén lùn (原人論)	1886
Eng. <i>Treatise on the Origin of Humanity</i> (In <i>Three Short Treatises by Vasubandhu, Sengzhao, and Zongmi</i> , 2017)	
Ch. Mòhé zhǐguān (摩訶止觀)	1911
Ch. Xiūxī zhǐguān zuòchān fāyào (修習止觀坐禪法要)	1915
Ch. Tiāntāi sìjiāo yī (天台四教儀)	1931
Eng. <i>A Guide to the Tiantai Fourfold Teachings</i> (in <i>Tiantai Lotus Texts</i> , 2013)	
Ch. Guóqīng bǎi lù (國清百錄)	1934
Ch. Zhènzhōu Línjī Huìzhāo chānshī wǔlù (鎮州臨濟慧照禪師語錄)	1985
Eng. <i>The Recorded Sayings of Linji</i> (in <i>Three Chan Classics</i> , 1999)	
Ch. Fǒguó Yuánwú chānshī bìyān lù (佛果圓悟禪師碧巖錄)	2003
Eng. <i>The Blue Cliff Record</i> (1998)	
Ch. Wúmén guān (無門關)	2005
Eng. <i>Women's Gate</i> (in <i>Three Chan Classics</i> , 1999)	

Title	Taishō No.
Ch. Liuzu dashi fabao tan jing (六祖大師法寶壇經) Eng. <i>The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch</i> (2000)	2008
Ch. Xinxin ming (信心銘) Eng. <i>The Faith-Mind Maxim</i> (in <i>Three Chan Classics</i> , 1999)	2010
Ch. Huangboshan Duanji chanshi chuanxin fayao (黃檗山斷際禪師傳心法要) Eng. <i>Essentials of the Transmission of Mind</i> (in <i>Zen Texts</i> , 2005)	2012A
Ch. Yongjia Zhengdao ge (永嘉證道歌)	2014
Ch. Chixiu Baizhang qinggui (勅修百丈清規) Eng. <i>The Baizhang Zen Monastic Regulations</i> (2007)	2025
Ch. Yibuzonglun lun (異部宗輪論) Skt. Samayabhedoparacanacakra Eng. <i>The Cycle of the Formation of the Schismatic Doctrines</i> (2004)	2031
Ch. Ayuwang jing (阿育王經) Skt. Aśokāvadāna Eng. <i>The Biographical Scripture of King Aśoka</i> (1993)	2043
Ch. Maming pusa zhuan (馬鳴菩薩傳) Eng. <i>The Life of Aśvaghōṣa Bodhisattva</i> (in <i>Lives of Great Monks and Nuns</i> , 2002)	2046
Ch. Longshu pusa zhuan (龍樹菩薩傳) Eng. <i>The Life of Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva</i> (in <i>Lives of Great Monks and Nuns</i> , 2002)	2047
Ch. Posoupandou fashi zhuan (婆藪槃豆法師傳) Eng. <i>Biography of Dharma Master Vasubandhu</i> (in <i>Lives of Great Monks and Nuns</i> , 2002)	2049
Ch. Datang Daciensi Zanzang fashi zhuan (大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳) Eng. <i>A Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty</i> (1995)	2053
Ch. Gaoseng zhuan (高僧傳)	2059
Ch. Biqiuni zhuan (比丘尼傳) Eng. <i>Biographies of Buddhist Nuns</i> (in <i>Lives of Great Monks and Nuns</i> , 2002)	2063

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Ch. Gaoseng Faxian zhuan (高僧法顯傳) Eng. <i>The Journey of the Eminent Monk Faxian</i> (in <i>Lives of Great Monks and Nuns</i> , 2002)	2085
Ch. Datang xiyu ji (大唐西域記) Eng. <i>The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions</i> (1996)	2087
Ch. Youfangjichao: Tangdaheshangdongzheng zhuan (遊方記抄: 唐大和上東征傳)	2089-(7)
Ch. Hongming ji (弘明集) Eng. <i>The Collection for the Propagation and Clarification of Buddhism</i> (Volume I, 2015) <i>The Collection for the Propagation and Clarification of Buddhism</i> (Volume II, 2017)	2102
Ch. Fayuan zhulin (法苑珠林)	2122
Ch. Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan (南海寄歸內法傳) Eng. <i>Buddhist Monastic Traditions of Southern Asia</i> (2000)	2125
Ch. Fanyu zaming (梵語雜名)	2135
Jp. Shōmangyō gisho (勝鬘經義疏) Eng. <i>Prince Shōtoku's Commentary on the Śrīmālā Sutra</i> (2011)	2185
Jp. Yuimakyō gisho (維摩經義疏) Eng. <i>The Expository Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sutra</i> (2012)	2186
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Jp. Hannya shingyō hiken (般若心經秘鍵)	2203
Jp. Daijō hossō kenjin shō (大乘法相研神章)	2309
Jp. Kanjin kakumu shō (觀心覺夢鈔)	2312
Jp. Risshū kōyō (律宗綱要) Eng. <i>The Essentials of the Vinaya Tradition</i> (1995)	2348
Jp. Tendai hokke shūgi shū (天台法華宗義集) Eng. <i>The Collected Teachings of the Tendai Lotus School</i> (1995)	2366
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Jp. Hizōhōyaku (秘藏寶鑰) Eng. <i>The Precious Key to the Secret Treasury</i> (in <i>Shingon Texts</i> , 2004)	2426
Jp. Benkenmitsu nikyō ron (辨顯密二教論) Eng. <i>On the Differences between the Exoteric and Esoteric Teachings</i> (in <i>Shingon Texts</i> , 2004)	2427
Jp. Sokushin jōbutsu gi (即身成佛義) Eng. <i>The Meaning of Becoming a Buddha in This Very Body</i> (in <i>Shingon Texts</i> , 2004)	2428
Jp. Shōji jissōgi (聲字實相義) Eng. <i>The Meanings of Sound, Sign, and Reality</i> (in <i>Shingon Texts</i> , 2004)	2429
Jp. Unjigi (吽字義) Eng. <i>The Meanings of the Word Hūm</i> (in <i>Shingon Texts</i> , 2004)	2430
Jp. Gorin kuji myōhimitsu shaku (五輪九字明秘密釋) Eng. <i>The Illuminating Secret Commentary on the Five Cakras and the Nine Syllables</i> (in <i>Shingon Texts</i> , 2004)	2514
Jp. Mitsugonin hotsuro sange mon (密嚴院發露懺悔文) Eng. <i>The Mitsugonin Confession</i> (in <i>Shingon Texts</i> , 2004)	2527
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Jp. Fukan zazengi (普勸坐禪儀) Eng. <i>A Universal Recommendation for True Zazen</i> (in <i>Zen Texts</i> , 2005)	2580
Jp. Shōbōgenzō (正法眼藏) Eng. <i>Shōbōgenzō: The True Dharma-eye Treasury</i> (Volume I, 2007) <i>Shōbōgenzō: The True Dharma-eye Treasury</i> (Volume II, 2008) <i>Shōbōgenzō: The True Dharma-eye Treasury</i> (Volume III, 2008) <i>Shōbōgenzō: The True Dharma-eye Treasury</i> (Volume IV, 2008)	2582
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Jp. Senchaku hongan nenbutsu shū (選擇本願念佛集) Eng. <i>Senchaku Hongan Nembutsu Shū: A Collection of Passages on the Nembutsu Chosen in the Original Vow</i> (1997)	2608

Title	Taishō No.
Jp. Kenjōdo shinjitsu kyōgyō shōmon rui (顯淨土眞實教行証文類) Eng. <i>Kyōgyōshinshō: On Teaching, Practice, Faith, and Enlightenment</i> (2003)	2646
Jp. Tannishō (歎異抄) Eng. <i>Tannishō: Passages Deploring Deviations of Faith</i> (1996)	2661
Jp. Rennyō shōnin ofumi (蓮如上人御文) Eng. <i>Rennyō Shōnin Ofumi: The Letters of Rennyō</i> (1996)	2668
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