THE JOURNAL

OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF

BUDDHIST STUDIES

Volume 3 1980 *Number 1*

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Prajñāpāramitā and the Buddahood of the Non-Sentient World: The San-Lun Assimilation of Buddha-Nature and Middle Path Doctrine

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Prior to the Sui-T'ang period, the concept of Buddha-nature,[1] the fundamental or universal nature of enlightenment in sentient beings, was already a topic of central importance to Chinese Buddhists. In 418, when Fa-hsien translated the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* in six fascicles (*Ta-pan ni-yüan ching*), the debate centering on Buddha-nature, as is well known, concerned Tao-sheng's (?-434) view of the *icchantika,* a spiritual outcast forever excluded from enlightenment. Tao-sheng's thesis that all sentient beings, including the *icchantika,* possessed the potentiality for Buddhahood was substantiated when the so-called "Northern edition" of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* was translated in 421 by Dharmakṣema (385-433).[2] While the *icchantika* issue would again surface during the T'ang with the popularity of the Fa-hsiang school and its *triyāna* doctrine, by the Sui period (589-612) the *ekayāna* theme was well established. In the intervening years of the Liang and Ch'en dynasties, Chinese Buddhists in the south had moved on to other aspects of the Buddha-nature theory and were primarily concerned with the composition of exegetical commentaries which speculated on the specific meanings of universal enlightenment. That a variety of commentaries and Buddha-nature theories existed during this period can be seen if one examines the Liang compilation of the *Collection of Nirvāṇa-sūtra Commentaries* (*Ta-pan nieh-p'an ching chi-chüeh*).[3] The *Collection,* however, represents the peak of *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* study in the south, for following the end of the Liang and Ch'en periods, the study of this text was superseded by the rise of Prajñāpāramitā-based traditions like San-lun and T'ien-t'ai. Exegesis of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* and debate on the meaning of Buddha-nature continued within these schools, and while an independent

scholastic tradition centering on the sutra had long passed from the Buddhist horizon by Sui times, it was during this period that the discussion of universal enlightenment was taken to a new degree of explicitness.

In the case of the San-lun tradition, the most intriguing discussion on this subject occurred in the writings of its systematizer, Chi-tsang (549-623).[4] In his Buddha-nature essay, contained in the *Ta-ch'eng hsüan-lun* (*A Compendium of Mahāyāna Doctrine*), Chi-tsang sought to integrate the Prajñāpāramitā doctrine of emptiness and the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* concept of Buddha-nature.[5] Assimilating two radically different aspects of Buddhist thought, Chi-tsang was the first individual in the history of East Asian Buddhism to argue that the inanimate world of grasses and trees also had the possibility of achieving Buddhahood. The most obvious pecularity of this theory was the fact that, prior to Chi-tsang's time it was not a commonly accepted view of universal enlightenment. Indeed, it was a view totally rejected by earlier commentators of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, who associated the potentiality for Buddhahood with anthropocentric concepts such as "mind," "luminous spirit," "*ālaya-vijñāna*," and "inherently pure mind." The textual basis for these earlier views was, of course, already established by the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, which extended the promise of Buddhahood to all sentient existence, that is, to those who possessed the faculty of "mind." Although there was no doctrinal precedent for Chi-tsang's assertion, in his examination of Buddhist texts he found several passages to substantiate his theory of a comprehensive Buddha-nature. As we shall see, Chi-tsang took a highly qualified step in expanding the notion of salvation to include all of the natural, phenomenal world. As a San-lun scholar, however, Chi-tsang was neither interested, in a Taoist sort of way, in elevating nature to a religious dimension, nor simply concerned with the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*'s anthropocentrically-limited promise of eventual enlightenment. Rather, Chi-tsang's most significant contribution to the discussion lay in his assertion that the Buddha-nature was a synonym for the middle path doctrine. The route by which he came to his expanded conception of Buddha-nature, then, was based on his primary view of *prajñā*, and it is this that we wish to investigate in what follows.

Based on material preserved in Chi-tsang's essay, it appears that, when Buddhists of the North-South period debated the question of Buddhahood, they were primarily interested in defining the manner in which the Buddha-nature exists and in identifying its location or scope. Of the two characters comprising the term, "nature" (*hsing*)[a] was generally understood to mean "a seminal cause for enlighenment." The primary concern for Buddha-nature advocates lay in defining the "primary" or "true" cause for attaining Buddhahood (*cheng-yin*).[b] That is to say, does the Buddha-nature "inherently exist" (*pen-yu*),[c] or is it something "acquired" (*shih-yu*).[d] Again, was the Buddha-nature a "result" stemming from some antecedent cause, or was it already a complete Buddha-essence? In the opening sections of his Buddha-nature essay, Chi-tsang presented, in broad, retrospective terms, a group of eleven theories that had beforehand advanced canonical evidence for universal enlightenment. These eleven theories on "true cause" were further divided into three major categories, "individual,"[e] "mind and *vijñāna*,"[f] and "principle,"[g] which are outlined as follows:

I. Individual
   1. Sentient being
   2. Six elements (five *skandha*, fictious whole)

II. Mind and *Vijñāna*
   3. Mind
   4. Perpetual activities of mind
   5. "Avoiding suffering and seeking bliss"
   6. Luminous spirit
   7. *Alaya-vijñāna*, inherently pure mind

III. Principle
   8. Future result
   9. Principle of realizing Buddhahood
   10. *Tathatā*
   11. Emptiness[6]

Although the present discussion does not seek to recapitulate the finer details of these individual theories, it is of importance to note here that the earlier theories were explicitly concerned with the problem of identifying the basic cause of enlightenment with some component element of either *saṃsāra* (theories 1-7) or *nirvāṇa* (theories 8-11). Implicitly, the problem was also limited to the enlightenment of

sentient existence alone. While Chi-tsang seems to have been concerned with collecting and reviewing the various earlier speculations, the traditional material he presented was essentially used to clarify and to emphasize doctrinal differences. Accordingly, after summarizing the earlier theories, Chi-tsang remarked:

> The Dharma-masters Ho-hsi Tao-lang and Dharmakṣema translated the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* together. [Tao-lang] intimately received instruction from the Tripitaka master and wrote a commentary on the sūtra (*Nieh-p'an i-su*). He correctly interpreted the meaning of Buddha-nature as the middle path. Consequently, later masters all depended on Master Lang's commentary to lecture on the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* and to interpret the meaning of Buddha-nature.[7]

This comment is significant, for it suggests the motivation behind Chi-tsang's summary dismissal of the traditional theories. To Chi-tsang, it seemed obvious that, in the years that had passed since Tao-lang had commented on the sutra, Buddha-nature advocates—if we may judge from his summary—no longer discussed the Buddha-nature theory on the basis of the middle path doctrine. Based on his own reading of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, Chi-tsang also felt that the earlier theories ignored the Prajñāpāramitā doctrine articulated in the "Bodhisattva Lion's Roar" chapter on the identity of *prajñā* and Buddha-nature, viz., "The Buddha-nature is called the first principle of emptiness; the first principle of emptiness is called *prajñā*."[8] Thus, in reviewing the earlier arguments from the perspective of non-duality, Chi-tsang isolated two major streams of thought, one arguing for enlightenment as a seminal cause (theories 1-7), and the other arguing for an *a priori* or inherent view of Buddha-nature as an ultimate principle (theories 8-11).

Central to this distinction were, of course, the somewhat ambiguous statements found in the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* itself. Certain passages in the sutra, for example, would assert the real existence of the Buddha-nature, while other passages would claim that it was something acquired. Buddhists who adhered to the "inherent" view would explain, again following the similes given in the sutra, that the Buddha-nature was like a "jewel on the brow of a wrestler,"[9] the "treasure store of a poor woman,"[10] or the "sweet herb of the Himalayas."[11] That is to say, the Buddha-nature originally exists, but is not manifested or readily perceived. Other passages, however, were used to explain that this "fruit of Buddhahood" was the result of some "profound cause," and the most commonly cited examples on incipient possession were

the "seed and the sprout" and "milk and cream."[12]

What these similes actually meant to Buddhists in the time preceding the Sui-T'ang period can again be seen in Chi-tsang's summary of seven arguments, six by earlier North-South masters associated with the Nirvāṇa *cum* Ch'eng-shih (Tattvasiddhi?)[h] tradition and one by a Ti-lun master identified as Ching-yin Hui-yüan 523-592):

> 1. The two characters, "Buddha" and "nature," both refer to the result. "Buddha" is a term for "enlightenment," and for this reason it is not the cause. "Nature" means "unchanging," and hence, the essence of the result is permanent. For this reason it does not change. Because the deluded mind is present in cause, it is not enlightenment, but because it changes, it cannot be called nature. However, sentient beings will certainly realize this principle of the Buddha-nature because it is said that they all have the Buddha-nature.
>
> 2. The Buddha-nature is present within cause. Since the sutra says that all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature, how can it be said that this term is not present within cause? Sentient beings are Buddhas because enlightenment is present within cause. They possess a "principle of certainty"[i] which is called an unchanging nature.
>
> 3. "Buddha" is a term for result and "nature" is a term for cause. Sentient beings are deluded and defiled, and consequently they do not possess *prajñā*. If they possess the dharma of enlightenment, one can then acknowledge their Buddhahood and enlightenment. However, since sentient beings are completely unenlightened, how can one say that they are Buddhas? Accordingly, by refining an inferior knowledge of *saṃsāra*, in the end it becomes the result-stage of great enlightenment. This result is initially called Buddhahood, and thus, Buddha is a term for result. However, sentient beings will certainly attain it. Since this principle of realizing Buddhahood is unchanging, it is called nature. "Nature" is simply the principle [of realizing Buddhahood] and is present within cause.[13]
>
> 4. The Buddha-nature of sentient beings inherently exists because it is the principle nature,[j] the luminous spirit,[k] the *ālaya-vijñāna*.
>
> 5. Since the sūtra explains that the fruit of Buddhahood arises from a profound cause, how could impurities already exist within food? Therefore, we know that the Buddha-nature is acquired.
>
> 6. It is called inherent existence because inherent means "what will come about."
>
> 7. [The Ti-lun master said:] "There are two kinds of Buddha-nature, viz., the principle nature and the nature of practice.[l]

> Because the principle is not a created thing (*samskṛta*), it inherently exists. Because the nature of practice depends on the completion of practice, the Buddha-nature is acquired."[14]

Although we are simply presented with brief descriptions of the earlier arguments, in almost every case they parallel the enigmatic position of the sūtra. However, the predominant interpretation of Buddha-nature advocates in the south, and Chi-tsang was no exception, was the presentation of Buddha-nature much more in terms of something already actualized than in terms of a potentiality. For exegetes, however, it was especially important to determine the overall them of the sūtra, and the distinction of cause vs. result or inherent vs. acquired was a matter of selective emphasis. To Chi-tsang, however, the seemingly contradictory doctrine expressed by the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* was simply a device designed to wean people away from conceptualized views of Buddhahood. Following the middle path doctrine, it was his opinion that the earlier theories created false distinctions, and this became the determining factor that aligned them under the heading of "dualistic interpretations." In the first argument, for example, although Buddhahood is defined as a result, the use of the term "deluded mind," viz., an antecedent stage, still implies the view of Buddha-nature as a seminal cause despite the initial thesis of a complete Buddha-essence. In the second and third arguments, Buddha-nature is defined as cause, but here, too, enlightenment is again seen as something which, by right ("principle of certainty"), is possessed by sentient beings from the outset. There were similar problems in the remaining four theories, where the question of enlightenment was discussed in acquired-inherent terms. In each argument certain conditions were still necessary to act in collaboration to produce the result. The seventh interpretation even argues for both inherent and acquired. It describes Buddha-nature as a complete Buddha-essence, and yet argues that the dynamics of enlightenment require progressive stages of development.

"True Cause": The Buddha-Nature of the Middle Path

In his review of the earlier arguments, Chi-tsang felt that their basic conceptual error lay in conceiving of Buddha-nature within a causative and temporal framework. By emphasizing one aspect over

the other, the earlier theories had in effect created two equally off-centered attitudes toward the "principle" reality of the middle path of non-duality. Two specific realms of understanding are implied, creating two parallel orders which do not participate in a process of mutual identity. His own approach was to combine two passages from the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra:* 1) the twelve-fold chain of causation (*pratītya-samutpāda*) as "neither arising nor ceasing, neither cause nor result,"[15] and 2) the identity of Buddha-nature and the twelve-fold chain of causation.[16] While the first passage emphasized the Prajñāpāramitā basis for the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, the second passage articulated their common theme. The conflation of middle path doctrine and Buddha-nature theory may be seen in the following definition of "true cause":

> If one knows that cause and result are equal and nondual, then one can speak of Buddha-nature. Hence, the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* says: "Neither cause nor result is called the Buddha-nature."
>
> Now, the meaning of Buddha-nature explained by our doctrinal transmission is neither existent nor inexistent and neither inherent nor acquired; also, it is not what will be manifested. Therefore, a sūtra [*Vimalakīrti*] says: "Only because of worldly conventions, letters, numbers, is it said that the three time periods exist." It does not say that enlightenment has a past, a future, or a present. This is because it is neither inherent nor acquired. Or, one can say it is because of *pratītya-samutpāda.*[17]

The difference between his approach and the earlier theories is characteristic of the Prajñāpāramitā approach to the question of universal enlightenment. Since the relation between cause and result is asserted in terms of essential emptiness, and hence, identity, this interpretation of Buddha-nature is not concerned with the temporal production of enlightenment. There are no conditions antecedent to Buddha-nature as it presently exists. By associating "true cause" with an element of *saṃsāra* (e.g., "sentient beings," "six elements," etc.), the earlier arguments also ran the danger of implying that Buddha-nature was not only incomplete and imperfect, but a *svabhāva* as wel. In contrast, by defining Buddhahood in terms of non-duality, Chi-tsang's "middle path = true cause" approach avoids relegating Buddha-nature to any incipient status and rejects any identification of a complete Buddha-essence with any specific component of the phenomenal or noumenal realms. By placing the question of universal enlightenment within a middle path framework, Chi-tsang tried to overcome this type of distinction.

When Chi-tsang established the middle path framework for examining the Buddha-nature theory, he did not criticize the earlier speculations only on the basis of their causative and temporal interpretations of this theory. He also accused them of holding wrong views of the Buddha-nature's location. To support the position of sentient enlightenment alone, Buddhists of the North-South period usually relied on passages from the "Bodhisattva Lion's Roar" and the "Kāśyapa" chapters of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*.[18] These passages assured eventual enlightenment to those who possessed a "mind" and identified all of the natural world, viz., walls, tiles, rocks, etc., as non-sentient, and hence, without Buddha-nature. What the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*'s position actually meant to Buddhists prior to Chi-tsang's time can be seen to some extent in the writings of Seng-liang (438-496) and Pao-liang (444-509), two prominent *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* scholars of the North-South period.[19] Following material preserved in the Liang *Collection*, it appears that both monks relied on the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra* for their definition of "true cause," viz., "avoiding suffering and seeking bliss" [T12, 222b]. Seng-liang, for example, declared that non-sentient existence was without the "nature of liberation."[20] Since the "true cause" of enlightenment was defined as "avoiding suffering and seeking bliss," Buddha-nature was limited to those who possessed this impulse or "functional quality" of mind. This attribute of sentient existence was maintained by the following generation of *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* exegetes and was adopted by the masters of the Liang Ch'eng-shih tradition. Pao-liang's view, for example, continued through his disciple, Kuang-chai Fa-yün (467-522), one of three eminent Ch'eng-shih scholars. Fa-yün's theory is preserved in the *Nieh-p'an tsung-yao*, a T'ang commentary written by the Korean monk Wonhyo:

> [Fa-yün said:] "The mind of sentient beings differs from trees and rocks because, by right, they have the nature of avoiding suffering and seeking bliss. Because they have this nature, they cultivate a myriad of practices and in the end realize supreme enlightenment. Therefore, it is said that the nature of mind is the essence of the true cause. . . ."[21]

Still another theory of sentient enlightenment may be seen in the following passage which defines "true cause" as a "luminous spirit":

> The mind possesses a nature which is not lost. This luminous spirit

> is the essence of the true cause. Since it is already present within the body, it differs from trees, rocks, etc., objects which do not have this nature of the mind. This means that the nature of the luminous spirit already exists within cause, and hence, one can realize the fruit of true Buddhahood.[22]

Although the only feature that distinguishes these theories is the definition of "true cause," it is clear that the question of universal enlightenment was limited to the framework of "all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature." That is to say, the question concerning the location of Buddha-nature was primarily discussed in terms of "mind and *vijñāna*." The motives for this view, if any, are difficult to establish. This type of thinking is at least coincident with the primary objective of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra,* namely, the establishment of the *icchantika's* potentiality for enlightenment. In this respect, Buddhists of the North-South period may have simply followed the lead of the sūtra, and expanding the boundaries of enlightenment to include all of the natural world was of secondary importance. With the establishment of *ekayāna* traditions during the Sui-T'ang period, however, the earlier interpretations came under increasing scrutiny and challenge, and the broader implications of a universal Buddha-nature became an important question for San-lun and T'ien-t'ai Buddhists.[23]

In the San-lun tradition, the distinction between sentient and non-sentient was analyzed in terms of "within and apart from the path"[m] and "within and apart from principle."[n] These terms refer neither to the distinction between Buddhism and heterodox traditions nor to a distinction between the "actual" and "theoretical" possibility of non-sentient Buddhahood. For Chi-tsang, "principle" was synonymous with non-duality, and his assessment of non-sentient Buddha-nature concerns the development of a middle path perspective. When this perspective of identity and interdependency was applied to the traditional distinction between sentient (intensive) and non-sentient (comprehensive) beings, Chi-tsang maintained:

> If one seeks to explain the existence of Buddha-nature, then not only do sentient beings have the Buddha-nature, grasses and trees also have the Buddha-nature. This contrasts the inexistence of Buddha-nature apart from principle [middle path] by discussing the existence of Buddha-nature within principle.[24]

This passage, which established the framework for investigating non-sentient enlightenment, shocked many Buddhists of his day. The

assertion of non-sentient Buddha-nature ignored the premise established by the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* and was without doctrinal precedent. To substantiate his position, Chi-tsang cited the following passages from sūtras and *śāstras*. His comments on each passage follows the citations:

> 1. *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*: "Samantabhadra saw the stately mansion of Maitreya and then realized innumerable Dharma-gates." [Isn't this insight into objects, seeing their nature, and then realizing innumerable *samādhi*-s?]
> 2. *Mahāsaṃnipāta-sūtra:* "The Buddhas and bodhisattvas see that all the dharmas are not without enlightenment." [This explains that, because of the delusion of Buddha-nature, there is *saṃsāra*. Comprehension of a myriad of dharmas is identical with enlightenment.]
> 3. "Not Absolute, But Empty" [Seng-chao]: "Is the path far away? While identical with objects, it remains ultimate. Is the sage far away? When you understand him, you are identical with his spirit." [If all the dharmas are not without enlightenment, then why is there no comprehension that all is Buddha-nature?]
> 4. *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*: "All the dharmas are completely endowed with the nature of bliss."
> 5. *Wei-shih-lun:* "There is consciousness only; the external realm does not exist." [This explains that mountains, rivers, grasses, and trees are all mind; apart from the mind, there does not exist a separate dharma.][25]

According to Chi-tsang these passages supported his view of a "pervasive" theory of enlightenment. The sources for this view are taken from a wide spectrum of texts, but the major idea that appears is the concept of non-duality. His view of non-sentient Buddha-nature, then, is concerned primarily with the relationship that exists between sentient and non-sentient beings. The key to this reduction is, again, *prajñā*. The technical terms used to express this relationship are *i*[o] and *cheng*.[p] While these two terms are generally associated with primary and secondary retributions (e.g., the body and its external world), in his use of the terms, *i* ("secondary," "dependent") refers to the object-of-cognition (e.g., rocks, trees, etc.) and *cheng* ("primary," "chief") refers to the cognizing subject. His objective here is to rationalize the comprehensive scope of Buddha-nature by describing a world in which all things are endowed with this non-duality quality:[q]

> These passages explain that, within principle, all the dharmas are non-dual in terms of subject and object. Because of the non-duality

> of subject and object, if sentient beings have the Buddha-nature, then grasses and trees also have Buddha-nature. . . . If you comprehend the equality of dharmas and do not see their dual marks of subject and object, the principle, in truth, is without the marks of attainment and non-attainment.[26]

This line of thought is coincident with Chi-tsang's discussion of the inherent and acquired status of Buddha-nature. In that context, since the "true cause = middle path" was removed from a causative and temporal framework, it also followed that any attempt to locate the Buddha-nature would not only falsely identify it with some element of *saṃsāra,* but would also deny the universality of the middle path.

The Intensive View: Prajñāpāramitā vs. Vijñānavāda

From the preceding, one gains the impression that Chi-tsang was interested in the Buddhahood of the non-sentient world not because he was especially attuned to nature, but primarily because he was interested in exploring the possible consequences of his Prajñāpārmitā position. Yet, despite the face that the aim of his essay was to describe and rationalize Buddha-nature in middle path terms, Chi-tsang was equally sensitive to the qualities that distinguished the natural world from all that was human. He did acknowledge the existence of "mind" in the make-up of sentient beings, for after defining the "pervasive" theory, he turned his attention to the "specific" theory or intensive view of Buddha-nature and wrote:

> Because sentient beings have the mind of delusion, they can realize the principle of enlightenment. Because grasses and trees are without mind, they are not deluded. How could they have the principle of enlightenment? For example, to dream is to experience and not to dream is not to experience.[27]

An important element of enlightenment, then, was an experiential quality limited to those having "mind," and the Vijñānavāda idea of "consciousness" was the determining factor. Not to experience or function, then, was simply not to exist in a sentient way. This type of thinking is similar to the Buddha-nature theory of Chi-tsang's contemporary, the Ti-lun scholar Hui-yüan. Although there is very little criticism of Hui-yüan's thesis in Chi-tsang's essay, the above Ti-lun

position bothered Chi-tsang, not because it restricted enlightenment to sentient existence per se, but because the theoretical basis for that interpretation was quite different from his own. The conceptual difference between the two positions was left unstated in Chi-tsang's essay, and it remained for later San-lun scholars to resolve what, at first sight at least, appeared to be two mutually exclusive views. For example, when asked about the differences between the intensive vs. extensive views, the Japanese Sanron scholar Chinkai (1091-1152) replied:

> The seventh master [i.e., Hui-yüan] said: "The *ālaya-vijñāna*, inherently pure mind, is the true cause of Buddha-nature." These interpretations on mind and *vijñāna* are not used in our tradition. The meaning of the [Ta-ch'eng] *I-chang* is that the nature of the "knower," the mind of the true *vijñāna*, is the doctrine of Buddha-nature. The middle path, the first principle of emptiness, viz., [Hui-yüan's] "nature of the known," is the secondary meaning. Now, we hold that the middle path, the first principle of emptiness, is the true cause of Buddha-nature.[28]

Chinkai's analysis suggests that the differences between the two positions are primarily conceptual. If we examine Hui-yüan's essay on Buddha-nature,[29] he does, to a limited degree, also affirm the existence of Buddha-nature in non-sentient objects. For example, as it exists apart from the mind of sentient beings, the "nature of the known"[r] was synonymous with *dharmatā*,[s] "true mark," and the first principle of emptiness. This aspect of the Vijñānavāda theory of mind was referred to as the "general theory" and distinguished between the Buddha-nature existing "within" (sentient beings) and "without" (non-sentient beings).[30] Hui-yüan's main concern as a Ti-lun scholar, however, was in describing the "nature of the knower,"[t] the *ālaya-vijñāna* or the "mind of the true *vijñāna*."[u] Thus, as far as a San-lun scholar like Chinkai was concerned, this aspect of Hui-yüan's theory represented his fundamental doctrine. Within this dual context of the "knower" and the "known," the Buddha-nature was specifically identified with the "nature of the knower," and, according to Hui-yüan, did not "pervade non-sentient existence."[31] For this reason, Hui-yüan's theory of non-sentient Buddhahood is not, in strictest terms, Buddha-nature, but *dharmatā*. While his interpretation of the "nature of the known" can be broadly construed to mean Buddha-nature, Hui-yüan's idea of "true cause" was limited to those possessing an *ālaya-vijñāna*.

Chinkai's evaluation of the two positions also defines the limits of Chi-tsang's theory. In the first place, the San-lun tradition is concerned with the so-called "secondary meaning" of Buddha-nature (i.e., Hui-yüan's "nature of the known"). Again, there is also a difference in the use of the terms "within" and "without." When Hui-yüan uses these terms, he is associating them with the *ālaya-vijñāna* and the remaining seven *vijñāna*. In contrast, when Chi-tsang uses the same expressions they are specifically associated with *prajñā*, the middle path. These differences are explicit in the following San-lun interpretation of "subject" ("nature of the knower") and "object-of-cognition" ("nature of the known"):

> Now, when we speak of *prajñā*, it is not the past explanation of prajnā. In the past it was simply explained that *prajñā* was [subjective] knowledge and not the object-of-cognition. This, too, is a one-sided view and cannot be called the middle path.[32]

When we compare the above with the Ti-lun concept of "true cause," viz., "principle nature" and the "nature of practice," the "principle nature" refers to the Buddha-nature "within" (*ālaya-vijñāna*, pure mind). From this perspective, there is no strict distinction in the Ti-lun theory between the Buddha-nature "within" and "without," since one aspect of this "principle nature" corresponds to the "nature of the known" in the sense of *dharmatā*, the emptiness of all dharmas. In this respect, the positions are not mutually exclusive. However, when the Buddha-nature was explained in terms of the "nature of practice," then Buddhahood was limited to sentient beings, since they alone possessed the "true cause" and were endowed with the "nature of the knower." Thus, in Ti-lun terms, when the adventitious covering of *kleśa* was removed, sentient beings achieved Buddhahood and realized the *ālaya-vijñāna* in its pure form. From the Ti-lun standpoint of practice, *prajñā* was limited to sentient existence, and grasses and trees were incapable of having Buddha-nature simply because they, along with everything else in the phenomenal world, were without both aspects of the "true cause."

Since Chi-tsang was a San-lun scholar, his position differs from Hui-yüan's arguments inasmuch as he is less interested in positing a quality that distinguishes sentient from non-sentient and more interested in pursuing and clarifying the Buddha-nature's connection with the middle path. To specify the real existence of such a quality

would, of course, mean to conceive of Buddha-nature in *svabhāva*-terms. A key difference between the two positions, then, is that, for Chi-tsang, there was virtually no distinction between Buddha-nature and *dharmatā*, since both terms referred to the essential emptiness, and hence, identity, of sentient and non-sentient beings. As seen in the preceding passage, *prajñā* is not simply a quality possessed by the sentient (i.e., "subject") world, but is the principle that defines the proper relationship between the phenomenal and human spheres. These conceptual differences between the San-lun and Vijñānavāda perspectives are also clear in the following definition of *vijñāna:*

> The meaning of Vasubandhu's "consciousness only" is to borrow the mind to dispel the object. The dispelled object does not reside in the mind; though still and without *point d'appui,* the principles of themselves profoundly meet.[33]

Again, in his commentary on the *Srīmālādevī-sūtra,* the *Sh'eng-man p'ao-ku,* Chi-tsang briefly discussed the differences between the Buddha-nature as form (*rūpa*) and mind:

> The *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* says: "Form and mind are non-dual; the nature of form is identical with knowledge and the nature of knowledge is identical with form."[34]

The most striking aspect of this interpretation of *vijñāna* is that it borrows Seng-chao's concept of identity and defines mind in terms of *prajñā.*[35] While there is no contradiction with the original meaning of the concept, the Vijñānavāda notion of "mind" is manipulated in such a way that it is primarily a means for rationalizing the San-lun view of interdependency ("stillness of subject and object"). It is regrettable that Chi-tsang did not further define this quality of sentient existence. As a San-lun scholar, he reduced almost everything to middle path terms. Beyond this point, he was unwilling to speculate on the nature of "mind." However, in his desire to describe Buddha-nature as the complete interdependency of all things, he did, nevertheless, emphasize the contemplative experience of *prajñā:*

> When the contemplative mind looks at it, what is the difference between sentient beings and grasses and trees? If the Buddha-nature exists, then it exists in both; if it inexists, then, it inexists in both. It both exists and inexists, and neither exists nor inexists.

> For this reason, if you comprehend that existence and inexistence are non-dual and equal, then you can initially speak of the true cause of Buddha-nature. . . .
>
> The true cause is the very mind enlightened to it. However, nothing can describe this contemplative mind. Thus, Kāśyapa always sighed, saying, "Inconceivable."[36]

By identifying *prajñā* as a quality equally possessed by sentient and non-sentient beings, Chi-tsang essentialy dissolved the traditional distinction. He did not, of course, state that grasses and trees are capable of having Buddha-nature, but that, in a middle path context, both are equal participants in a process of *pratītya-samutpāda*. The location of the Buddha-nature could be as intensive as sentient beings or as extensive as the entire natural world. This contrasts with the view of Buddha-nature as something projected from the sentient mind. For Chi-tsang, the Buddha-nature of the middle path was purely an operational term meant to expose the fallacy of conceiving of enlightenment in causative, temporal, and spatial terms. For this reason he is not describing a situation in which sentient existence is always primary; it is not a world in which those with the faculty of "mind" alone possess Buddha-nature. The question of non-sentient enlightenment, then, could not be answered by appealing to some quality that distinguished the human world from the natural world. Rather, the question for him was where the line could be drawn in terms of the location of the middle path itself. In Prajñāpāramitā terms, no such line could be drawn, for to deny the Buddhahood of the non-sentient world was, in effect, to deny the enlightenment of sentient existence.

Chinese Glossary

a 性	h 成實	r 所知性
b 正因	i 必當理	s 法性
c 本有	j 理性	t 能知性
d 始有	k 眞神	u 真識心
e 人	l 行性	o 依
f 心識	m 內道外道	p 正
g 理	n 理內理外	q 依正不二

NOTES

1. *Buddha-dhātu* or *Buddha-gotra*. Here we follow Takasaki Jikidō, *Nyoraizō Shisō no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1974), p. 11. See, also, his article, "Nyoraizo-Busshō shisō," *Koza Bukkyō Shisō*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Rishōsha, 1975), pp. 101-133. Further, see Ogawa Ichijō, *Nyoraizō-Busshō no Kenkyū* (Kyoto: Buneidō, 1974), pp. 62-66.

2. Several works in Japanese deal with this early period of *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* study. See, for instance, Fuse Kōgaku, *Nehandhū no Kenkyū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1973), pp. 12-44. See, also, Tokiwa Daijō, *Busshō no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1972), pp. 178-180.

3. A discussion of the *Collection* and its compiler (attributed to Pao-liang) can be found in Fuse, *Nehanshū no Kenkyū*, vol. 2, pp. 74-85. See, also, Ogawa Kōkan, *Chūgoku Nyoraizō Shishō no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Nakayama Shobō, 1976), pp. 210-225.

4. For an overview of Chi-tsang's theories, see Kamata Shigeo, *Chūgoku Bukkyō Shisō-shi Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1968), pp. 31-46, and Hirai Shun'ei, *Chūgoku Hannya Shishō-shi Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1976), pp. 617-637.

5. *Taishō shinshu Daizōkyō* (hereafter T), 45, 35b-42b.

6. For further discussion of these earlier theories, see Aaron K. Koseki, *Chi-tsang's Ta-ch'eng-hsüan-lun: The Two Truths and the Buddha-nature* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1977), pp. 200-217. While Chi-tsang's essay does not refer to specific masters, the names of Buddhists associated with these interpretations of "true cause" are given in Chün-cheng's *Ssu-lun-hsüan-i* [Cf. *Daihion Zokuzōkyō* (hereafter ZZK), 1,1,74 recto b46]: 1. Sentient beings, Chuang yen Seng-min, a Ch'eng-shih scholar; 2. Six elements, Seng-jou (431-494) and K'ai-shan Chih-tsang, both Ch'eng-shih scholars; 3. Mind, also attributed to Seng-jou and Chih-tsang; 4. Perpetual activities of mind, Hsiao-an; 5. Avoiding suffering and seeking bliss, Kuang-chai Fa-yün, a Ch'eng-shih scholar; 6. Luminous spirit, Liang-Wu-ti (emperor) and Ling-wei Pao-liang; 7. *Alaya-vijñāna*, inherently pure mind, Hui-yüan; 8. Future result, Dharma-master Ai of Pai-ma temple; also attributed to Tao-sheng; 9. Principle of attaining Buddhahood, Ling-ken Seng-cheng, a Ch'eng-shih scholar; 10. *Tathatā*, Pao-liang; and 11. Emptiness, an unidentified "Mahāyāna master of the North."

7. T45, 35c. Tao-lang's commentary is no longer extant. Portions of it are preserved in Kuan-ting's (561-633) *Ta-pan nieh-p'an ching-su*, T38, 43a-b.

8. Cf. the "Southern edition" of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, T12, 767c.

9. T12, 649a.

10. T12, 648b.

11. T12, 649a-b.

12. See, for example, T12, 775c, 776a, 777b.

13. The translations are summaries of the main points of each of the seven arguments. The complete section is in T45, 38b-39a and 39a-b. The first three arguments may be attributed to Ch'eng-shih scholars: (1) Lung-kuang Seng-ch'o; (2) K'ai-shan Chih-tsang; and (3) Chuang-yen Seng-min. With the exception of short excerpts preserved in Chi-tsang's writings, the Liang Ch'eng-shih doctrines are not extant. For further discussion on the Liang theories, especially the two truths doctrine, see Whalen Lai, "Sinitic Understanding of the Two Truths Theory in Laing Dynasty,"

and "Further Developments on the Two Truths Theory in China: Toward a Reconstruction of Chou Yung's *San-tsung-lun*," both forthcoming in *Philosophy East and West.*

14. The proponents of the fourth, fifth, and sixth arguments are difficult to identify, and it appears that Chi-tsang simply combined several different tenets. The expression, "principle nature," viz., the "principle of achieving Buddhahood," may be traced to Fa-yao (*Kao-seng-chuan,* T50, 374b-c) whose theory is found in the Liang *Collection,* T37, 448c. In Chi-tsang's short *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* commentary (*Nieh-p'an yu-i*), the doctrine of the "luminous spirit" is attributed to Pao-liang, the compiler of the Liang *Collection* (T38, 237c). The seventh theory is clearly associated with the Ti-lun scholar Hui-yüan whose theories on *nirvāṇa* and Buddha-nature are found in the *Ta-ch'eng i-chang,* T44, 817a and 473b-474a.

15. T12, 768b.

16. T12, 768c.

17. T45, 38c.

18. "All who have mind will certainly realize supreme enlightenment. . . ." [T12, 769a].

"Those without Buddha-nature are non-sentient objects such as walls, tiles, and rocks; what is apart from non-sentient objects such as these is called Buddha-nature." [T12, 838b]

19. For further discussion of their Buddha-nature theories, see Ogawa, *Chūgoku Nyoraizō Shisho,* pp. 236-244. On Seng-Liang, see Fuse, *Nehanshū no Kenkyū,* pp. 232-241.

20. T37, 598b.

21. T38, 249a.

22. Cited in *Ssu-lun hsüan-i,* ZZK, 1,1,74 recto b46.

23. For an extensive discussion of non-sentient enlightenment, see Kamata Shigeo, *Chūgoku Kegon Shisō-shi no Kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1965), pp. 434-443. Kamata's work (pp. 466-473) also discusses the Buddha-nature theories of Chan-jan (711-782), a T'ien-t'ai monk who is generally credited with the definitive theoretical formulation of non-sentient enlightenment in China. On the basis of written material, however, it appears that Chi-tsang may have been the first to advocate the theory of non-sentient Buddhahood. In his study of Chan-jan's works, such as the *Chin-kang-pei-lun* and the *Chih-kuan fu-hsing-chuan-hung-chüen,* Kamata believes that Chi-tsang and Chan-jan approached the question of non-sentient enlightenment from a similar doctrinal standpoint, viz., the "non-duality of subject and object" discussed below.

24. T45, 40b.

25. T45, 40c. The citation from Seng-chao's essay has been slightly altered from "it touches objects" to "identical with objects." The change is minor, but it may have been a conscious alteration in view of Chi-tsang's desire to establish the theme of identity. The reference to "consciousness only" is taken from the Bodhiruci (arrived in China in 508) translation of the *Viṃśatikā-vijñaptimātratā-siddhi,* T31, 63c and 64b.

26. T45, 40c.

27. Ibid., 40c.

28. *Sanron myōkyōshō,* T70, 714b.

29. *Ta-ch'eng i-chang,* T44, 472a-477c.

30. Ibid., 472c.

31. Ibid., 472a.

32. T45, 37c.

33. *Ching-ming hsüan-lun*, T38, 857c.
34. *Sheng-man p'ao-ku*, T37, 85b.
35. Cf. *Preface to the Hundred Treatise*, T30, 167c-68a.
36. T45, 41b, 39a.