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The Four Levels of Pratītya-samutpāda
According to the Fa-hua hsüan i

by Carl Bielefeldt

I.

The historical status of the Mādhyamika school in China and Japan, like its famous doctrine of the middle way, is not easy to grasp.¹ On the one hand, of course, all the major traditions of East Asian Buddhism claim Nāgārjuna as a patriarch and claim to embrace his madhyamaka teaching; on the other hand, except for a few scholastics of medieval China and early Japan, none of the East Asiatic traditions have identified themselves directly with the Mādhyamika school or made the works of its founder—let alone of its later representatives, of whom they were largely ignorant—the primary textual basis of their systems. The Madhyamaka-kārikās, which modern scholarship has made so famous in the West, may have been basic reading for most well-educated Buddhists, but it rarely attracted prolonged attention, and it is probably fair to say that most who read it did so less in search of ultimate answers than in preparation for what were considered more sublime expressions of the Mahāyāna.

Already in the fifth century, even as the Kārikās and other early treatises of the major Indian schools were becoming available in China, scholars there were turning their attention to the question of the relationship among these schools; and by the sixth and seventh centuries, when the country was learning the new literature of the Yogācāra, they were creating their own original syntheses of the Indic materials. While the content of these new systems inevitably owed much to the imported sāstra literature, their structure was often built on indigenous interpretative categories—like substance and function (t'iyung), prin-
principal and phenomena (li shih), sudden and gradual (tun chien), and the like; and while they could not fail to take into account the famous prajñā-paramitā doctrine of emptiness and its explanation in Mādhyamika, they were more inspired by certain sūtras of particular popularity in China, especially those—like the Sad-dharma-puṇḍarīka, Mahāparinirvāṇa, and Avatamsaka—that expressed a positive interpretation of the absolute, as aśūnyā, as the dharma-kāya, and tathāgata-garbha, and so on, and that offered hope of a single great vehicle, or ekāyāna, in which all forms of Buddhism could be resolved. The so-called Three Treatise (San lun) school of Chi-tsang, supposed to represent East Asian Mādhyamika, was itself such a synthetic system.

Of these new Chinese systems, none was more characteristic of the age nor more influential than that of the great sixth-century T'ien-t'ai scholar Chih-i (538-597). Inspired as it was by the Lotus Sūtra, none was more committed to the higher Buddhism of the one vehicle. Yet probably none was more sympathetic to (what its author took to be) the insights of Nāgārjuna's middle way. In what follows, I want to explore some features of this system—in particular its famous schema of doctrinal classification (p'an chiao)—to give a sense of how it sought to incorporate the teachings of the middle way into its vision of the one vehicle. Rather than try here to discuss the schema in the abstract, I shall focus on a single concrete example—a core sample, as it were—of how Chih-i's system actually functioned in the analysis of a specific Buddhist doctrine; I shall then go on to make one or two more general observations about the principles at work in the example.

II.

The doctrine I want to use for this sample is the famous Buddhist teaching of pratitya-samutpāda, or conditioned origination, especially as this is expressed in the classical formula of the twelvefold chain of causation. Few doctrines are more venerable or more centrally placed in Buddhist tradition than the dvadasāṅga-pratitya-samutpāda. It was, after all, supposed to be the insight into the truth of this chain that most occupied the Buddha himself as he sat on the bodhi-mañḍa; and the sūtras
sometimes said that to see this truth was itself to see the dharma and to see the Buddha. Nāgārjuna himself, though of course his arguments for emptiness are based more on the general principle of relativity than on the specific cause and effect relationships of the twelfefold chain, nevertheless seems to have taken the ancient formula of the chain quite seriously and devoted several discussions to it. Yet, for all this, probably few doctrines would seem less immediately susceptible to interpretation as an expression of the sort of supreme Mahāyāna envisioned by Chih-i. Buddhist contemplative tradition had regularly consigned the investigation of the twelfefold pratītya-samutpāda — along with mindfulness of breathing, reflections on impurity, and the like — to the lowly, preliminary meditations intended as antidotes to unwholesome states. Indian commentators on Nāgārjuna (including Pingala, whom Chih-i read) had tended to dismiss his discussion of the chain as merely conventional (sārṣṭi) teaching, intended for the edification of the śrāvaka. No less than the Lotus Sūtra itself (at least in Kumārajīva’s version) identified the doctrine as a teaching intended for the relatively unsophisticated understanding of the pratyeka-buddha. Hence it is crucial to Chih-i’s vision of the intellectual and ethical coherence of the one great vehicle that he be able to show why this doctrine was so central to the tradition and how, despite appearances to the contrary, it could function even at the highest levels of the religion.

Chih-i’s extensive corpus contains quite a few discussions of pratītya-samutpāda, many of which reflect traditional ways of handling the twelfefold chain. In his influential organization of contemplative technique, for example, he treats meditation on conditioned origination as one of the five techniques for generating wholesome states (shan ken); like the Lotus Sūtra, he associates the twelfefold chain with the pratyeka-buddha-yāna. Yet he also has a more exalted reading of the chain that extends its significance across the entire range of the buddha-dharma, from the basic teachings of the Hīnayāna through the supreme, perfect enlightenment of the Buddha himself. For my purposes here, the most important example of such a reading occurs in the Miao-fa lien-hua ching hsüan i, his extended commentary on the “dark import,” or deeper meaning, of Kumārajīva’s version of the Saddharma-pundarīka. The work is largely organized
around a detailed analysis of the theoretical implications of the Chinese title of the sūtra. In its second fascicle, in the context of his discussion of the first word of the title, Chih-i distinguishes six objects of Buddhist wisdom (ching-miao), as the second of which he takes up the doctrine of pratītya-samutpāda.9

Chih-i divides his interpretation of pratītya-samutpāda into four categories, or levels, of understanding, to which he assigns the following rather unwieldy names: (1) conceivable origination and cessation (ssu-i sheng mieh), (2) conceivable non-origination and non-cessation (ssu-i wu-sheng wu-mieh), (3) inconceivable origination and cessation (pu-ssu-i sheng-mieh), and (4) inconceivable non-origination and non-cessation (pu-ssu-i wu-sheng wu-mieh). As the names suggest, the four are arranged in two groups of two: first, pratītya-samutpāda is divided into the conceivable and inconceivable; then, each of these is sub-divided into origination and cessation and non-origination and non-cessation.

The hermeneutical categories of the conceivable (cintyā), or what can be grasped by the reason, and its opposite (acintyā) are common, of course, not only throughout Chih-i’s writings but in Buddhism in general. This epistemological dichotomy is identified by Chih-i here with what is more properly a religious or moral distinction between the mundane (chieh-nei; laukika) and transmundane (chieh-wai; lokottara). These terms derive from the traditional Buddhist distinction between the state of those dominated by the defilements (yu-lou; sāsrava) and the pristine state of the ārya, who has attained the anāsrava stages. Thus, Chih-i’s analysis of pratītya-samutpāda begins with a distinction between two spheres of application or understanding of the doctrine—that of the defiled world of ordinary experience, and that of the immaculate world of the advanced adept.10

Each of these spheres is again divided into two, according to two ways of treating them—in terms of origination (utpāda) and cessation (niruddha), and in terms of non-origination and non-cessation. These two kinds of treatment, says Chih-i, are intended for those of dull (tun) and acute (li) faculties respectively. Though he does not elaborate the point here, a reference near the end of his discussion to the terms “phenomena” (shih) and “principle” (li) indicates that he also identifies the two with these metaphysical notions, commonly used in T’ien-t’ai and other Chinese exegesis for the Buddhist categories of samvrti-
satya (su ti), or conventional truth, and paramārtha-satya (chen ti), or ultimate truth. Thus, both the mundane and transmundane spheres can be discussed for the dull in the more easily understood terms of the phenomena that comprise them, and for the acute in the more subtle terms of the principle that underlies such phenomena. These identifications, then, allow Chih-i to treat pratitya-samutpāda on four levels of discourse: (1) mundane phenomena, (2) mundane principle, (3) transmundane phenomena, and (4) transmundane principle; and we can expect a relationship among the four such that (1) is to (2) as (3) is to (4). As we shall see, this relationship is central to the T’ien-t’ai p’an chiao system.

III.

Well over half of Chih-i’s discussion of pratitya-samutpāda is concerned with his first level of understanding, that of conceivable origination and cessation. Since this represents what he considers the lowest understanding, the space devoted to it might seem somewhat surprising, and one might have expected him to move quickly on to the higher and more sublime realms of interpretation. In fact, however, the attention paid here to the details of the basic teaching appears quite characteristic of Chih-i’s approach. Elsewhere in his writings as well, it is precisely the lower teachings that seem to receive the most detailed and thorough treatment, while the higher understanding is often passed over quite quickly. In one sense, of course, this imbalance may be inevitable, since the lowest level is usually, as here, concerned with the more detailed scholastic teachings of the ābhidhārmikas; but it is also suggestive of the importance Chih-i placed on a firm grounding in the basic doctrines of Buddhism and a measure of the conservative, classical approach he took to the religious life. This approach gives to his teaching a strong sense of what the Chinese like to call “gradualness” (chien) as opposed to the flashier “sudden” (tun) style that is often held up as more characteristic of East Asian Buddhism.

The section on the first level of pratitya-samutpāda is composed of two parts: a general explanation and a discussion of some additional considerations. The former provides a basic
definition of the doctrine and identifies it as the characteristic understanding of causality that distinguishes Buddhism from the theories of the non-Buddhists.

This [teaching of pratitya-samutpāda] differs from that of the infidels (wai-tao). They falsely maintain that phenomena originate from Isvara, or from nature (shih-hsing; prakṛti,) or from atoms (wei-ch’en; anu), or from male and female, or without cause. These various false theories do not accord with the principle of the way (tao-li). But this correct [doctrine of] pratitya-samutpāda differs from such false notions. It holds simply that ignorance (avidyā) in the past produces in the perverted mind (tien-tao hsin; viparyasta-citta) the predispositions (saṃskāra), which bring forth in the present the fruit of suffering in the six destinies in different ways according to [whether one's karma is] good or evil.¹²

On the basis of the Smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra, Chih-i draws an analogy between the first three members of the twelvefold chain—avidyā, saṃskāra, and vijñāna—and a painter, his paint and his picture: the ignorant mind is like a painter, using the various shades of good and evil karma to produce the rebirth consciousness (pratisandhi-vijñāna) in the six destinies.¹³ He then summarizes the first level by saying that the chain revolves through the three times like a wheel, the members arising and ceasing again and again in moment after moment—hence, the designation “twelvefold pratitya-samutpāda of origination and cessation.”

In the rather lengthy section devoted to additional considerations, Chih-i takes up several traditional technical topics on the twelvefold chain that we find in the abhidharma literature, including various approaches to the distinctions between dependent production (pratitya-samutpāda) and dependent origination (pratitya-samutpanna), the division of the twelve members into the three times (san shih) and their application to the maturation of the individual, the simultaneous occurrence of the twelve in a single moment, the cause and effect of the first and last members respectively, the members occurring in each of the three loka (san chieh), and so on.¹⁴
IV.

The second section deals with the pratītya-samutpāda of conceivable non-origination and non-cessation, intended for those of acute faculties. In sharp contrast to the preceding, it is very brief and direct, stating simply that all members of the twelfold chain are like empty space (hsū-k'ung), like an apparition (huanhua) and therefore ungraspable (pu-k'e-te). Chih-i does not bother to give here any arguments for the emptiness of conditioned entities but merely cites the Suvarṇa-prabhāsa-sūtra to the effect that avidyā does not exist of itself but only in dependence on deluded ideas (wang hsiang; vikalpa), or false thinking (pu-shan ssu-wei; ayoniṣo-manaskāra). Thus, he leaves it to the reader to supply the major premise—i.e., that dependently existing entities are empty—and the conclusion—that, therefore, avidyā is empty. He then covers the remainder of the chain by pointing out—as the popular simile has it—that just as the magician produces elephants, horses, necklaces, and people, which the deluded take to be real, so avidyā magically produces the karma of the six destinies. Finally, by means of another well-known simile, Chih-i explains the religious significance of non-origination and non-extinction: “When one realizes that the vine [he has taken for a snake] is not a snake, fear of it will not originate, and not originating, it will not cease. This is called the twelfold pratītya-samutpāda of conceivable non-origination and non-cessation.”

V.

The third section, that dealing with the pratītya-samutpāda of inconceivable origination and cessation, is perhaps the most interesting and difficult. This level of interpretation is said to refute the “lesser” (hsiao) understanding and reveal the “greater” (ta), teaching the transmundane dharma for the sake of those of both dull and acute faculties. The discussion here concerns the cittamātra teaching that the mind is the cause of all dharmas. This teaching is introduced by a quotation from the Avatamsaka-sūtra, which employs the same painting simile we have seen in the first section: “The mind is like a painter producing the various
five skandhas. Throughout all worlds, there is nothing not pro-
duced from the mind."¹⁷ In explicating what it means for the
mind to produce phenomena, Chih-i first cites two conflicting
views of the ālaya-vijñāna: "Some say that the ālaya producing
all dharmas is the true consciousness (chen shih); others say that
the ālaya producing all dharmas is the ‘unsinking’ consciousness
(wu-mo shih) that is neutral (wu-chi; avyākyta) and ignorant."¹⁸
Neither Chih-i nor his famous commentator Chan-jan identifies
here the proponents of these two views, but the text does refer
us to another discussion of them in the author’s Mo-ho chih-kuan,
from which it would appear that he assigns them respectively
to the so-called Ti-lun and She-lun schools—i.e., the sixth cen-
tury Chinese exegetical traditions emphasizing, in the former
case, Vasubandhu’s commentary to the Daśabhūmika-sūtra (Shih
ti ching lun) and, in the latter, the Mahāyāna-saṃgṛaha (She ta-
sheng lun). In the same discussion, Chih-i rejects the views of
both schools, arguing in effect that the former mistakenly iden-
tifies citta with the ultimate dharmatā, while the latter fails to
account for any relationship between the two.¹⁹ The problem,
he says in our text, comes from attachment to the reality of the
svabhāva (hsing), which leads to a satkāryavāda understanding of
casuality akin to the Sāṃkhya theory of the evolution of the
world from prakṛti (ming-ch’u)—an understanding we have al-
ready seen Chih-i reject in the first section.

Having thus dismissed these two views, Chih-i goes on to
state what he holds to be the correct understanding of the Bud-
dhist teaching that the mind produces the dharmas.

Not by themselves, not by another, not by both, and not without
cause [do the dharmas arise.] According to these four propositions,
[the production of the dharmas by the mind] is inconceivable. Yet
given the conditions of the four siddhānta, [pratitya-samutpāda]
can still be explained.²⁰

Here Chih-i employs the opening verse of the Kārikās to
establish that the occurrence of dharmas is inconceivable—i.e.,
that they have only provisional reality and in their own nature
are ungraspable.²¹ Their occurrence, he says, is like the arising
of images in a dream: though we say that the dream produces
images, the nature of the dream itself cannot be grasped; simi-
larly, though we say that avidyā produces the other members of the twelvefold chain, the status of avidyā itself cannot be grasped by any of the four propositions (su chi; catuskoṭi). Nevertheless, in accordance with the four siddhānta (su hsi-t'an), or heuristic methods of the Buddha's teaching, we can still discuss the arising of saṃskāra and the rest of the twelvefold chain from the mind of avidyā.

With this reminder that the teaching of transmundane phenomenal pratitya-samutpāda is established only as a device for the sake of the practitioner, Chih-i proceeds to a consideration of the actual content of this teaching as it applies to those advanced bodhisattvas of the anāsrava-dhātu, who, although freed from the mundane realm of the kleśas, still transmigrate in the manomayakāya (i-sheng shen). Here he relies on the Ratnagotravibhāga doctrine of the four spiritual obstacles to ultimate liberation—conditions (yüan; pratyaya), causes (yin; hetu), origination (sheng; upāda), and cessation (mieh; nirodha)—to draw out the higher significances of the twelvefold chain.

"Conditions" refers to avidyā; ["cause"] to saṃskāra; "origination" to nāma-rūpa and the rest of the five [present effects]; (the three members, trṣnā, upādān, and bhava, are to be understood as above;) "cessation" to jāti and jarā-maraṇam. These twelve are numerically the same as those of the mundane pratitya-samutpāda, but their meaning is very different.

Chih-i then uses the traditional division of the twelvefold chain into kleśa, karma and vastu (or duḥkha) to show the relationship between its members and the Ratnagotravibhāga's doctrine of the four higher inverted views (tien-tao; viparyāsa) — impurity (pu-ching; aṣuddhi), selflessness (wu-wo; anātman), suffering (k'u duḥkha), and impermanence (wu-ch'ang; anitya)—that still characterize the understanding of even the advanced bodhisattva: the kleśa of condition (i.e., avidyā, etc.) prevents the realization of purity; the karma of cause (i.e., saṃskāra, etc.), the realization of selfhood; the vastu of origination (i.e., vijñāna, etc.), the realization of bliss; [the vastu of] cessation (i.e., jarā-maraṇam), the realization of permanence.
Finally, our text briefly considers the fourth and highest level of \textit{pratītya-samutpāda}, that of inconceivable non-origination and non-cessation. Here Chih-i quotes the \textit{Nirvāṇa-sūtra} to the effect that the twelfofold \textit{pratītya-samutpāda} is itself the buddha-nature (\textit{fo-hsing}).\textsuperscript{27} The identification is worked out by means of correspondences between the three divisions of the twelfofold chain—into \textit{klesa}, \textit{karma} and \textit{vastu}—and the three aspects, or causes, under which the \textit{Nirvāṇa-sūtra} treats the buddha-nature—the cause of apprehension (\textit{liào yìn}), the cause of conditions (\textit{yüan yìn}), and the cause proper (\textit{chéng yìn})—i.e., the intellectual, ethical, and metaphysical causes identified with \textit{bodhi}, \textit{mokṣa}, and \textit{dharma-kāya} respectively.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, the \textit{klesa} members (i.e., \textit{vijñāna}, \textit{trṣṇā} and \textit{upādāna}) are associated with \textit{bodhi}; the \textit{karma} members (\textit{samskāra} and \textit{bhava}) with \textit{mokṣa}; and the remaining, the \textit{vastu} members, with \textit{dharma-kāya}. On the basis of these correspondences, the three divisions of the chain are further identified with the four \textit{guṇas} (\textit{ssu te}) of \textit{nirvāṇa} taught in the same \textit{sūtra}. The argument runs somewhat as follows: the \textit{klesas} are themselves \textit{bodhi}; \textit{bodhi} is by definition free from defilement; hence, the \textit{klesas} are themselves the ultimate purity (\textit{ching}; \textit{suddhi}) or \textit{nirvāṇa}. In like fashion, \textit{karma} is identified with the ultimate self (\textit{wo}; \textit{ātman}) of \textit{nirvāṇa}, and \textit{vastu} with the bliss (\textit{lo}; \textit{sukha}) and permanence (\textit{ch'ang}; \textit{nitya}).\textsuperscript{29} 

In the sections immediately following his analysis of the four levels of \textit{pratītya-samutpāda}, Chih-i goes on, in a pattern typical of his exegetical methods, to make several general points about the character and significance of this analysis. In a section on “distinguishing the coarse and subtle” (\textit{p'án ts'ú miao}), he makes explicit its hierarchial structure, pointing out that, while there are no levels in the object (\textit{ching}) of \textit{pratītya-samutpāda} itself, there are more or less profound understandings of the object, which, like the famous \textit{Nirvāṇa-sūtra} simile of the refinement of milk, progress from the “coarse” to the “subtle.” From the perspective of the fourth level, corresponding to the ultimate
reality (shih) of the middle way taught in the one vehicle of the
Lotus Sūtra, all three of the lower levels are "coarse" because
merely expedient (ch'üan).\(^3^0\)

The succeeding section, on "opening the coarse to reveal
the subtle" (k'ai is'u hsien miao), reminds us of another, rather
different implication of the one vehicle: that the classification
of the lower teachings as coarse is itself based on a coarse under­
standing. Chih-i here quotes the line from the Lotus Sūtra in
which the Buddha says, "My dharma is subtle (miao) and difficult
to understand." Since all three of the lower teachings are part
of the buddha-dharma, the argument goes, it follows that even
they (insofar as they are the expression of the Buddha's miracu­
lous upāya) are subtle and inconceivable.\(^3^1\)

In his last section, on "discerning the mind" (kuan hsin),
Chih-i points out the religious implications of his analysis: to
discern one moment of ignorance (wu-ming) is itself enlighten­
ment (ming). Each moment of thought contains all twelve mem­
ers of the chain, and, since these members are ultimately the
four virtues of nirvāṇa, to discern them is itself to discern inher­
ent permanence, bliss, selfhood, and purity. In such discern­
ment, the mind constantly abides in the womb of the āryas (sheng t'ai), from which it is destined to emerge into full enlighten­
ment.\(^3^2\)

VIII.

Such, in outline, is Chih-i's multi-faceted account of the
twelvefold chain. His basic notion that the doctrine of pratītya­
samutpāda could be thus distributed over several levels of inter­
pretation is by no means without precedent: the Nirvāṇa-sūtra
itself, for example—one of Chih-i's favorite scriptures and the
one he cites as authority for his final section—has its own four­
tiered division of the doctrine, associated with the four types of
Buddhist adept: śrāvaka, pratyeka-buddha, bodhisattva, and
buddha.\(^3^3\) Similarly, the Ta-chih-tu lun, which East Asian tradition
attributes to Nāgārjuna, and which regularly provides the source
for so much of Chih-i's material, identifies three types of twel­
vefold chain: for the prthagjana, for those on the two vehicles
and bodhisattvas not yet established in emptiness (anupattika-
dharma-ksanti), and for the advanced bodhisattva. Such scriptural precedents no doubt provided inspiration for the treatment of pratitya-samutpāda in our passage, but the structure of this treatment remains Chih-i's own and clearly reflects the particular principles of his larger project to bring the whole of Buddhism into a single coherent system. Here I want to add just a few words about those principles as they relate to the status of the middle way.

In recent years, there has been some debate about the exact nature of Chih-i's classification system and its relation to the doctrinal schemas through which it was taught by later T'ien-t'ai tradition, but there is no doubt that the most original and important feature of that system is the doctrine—of the so-called “four teachings” (hua-fa ssu chiao)—that divides the buddha-dharma into “piṭaka” (tsang), “common” (t'ung), “distinct” (pieh), and “complete” (yuan). Put very briefly and schematically, the first corresponds to the Hinayāna teaching on dharmas, intended for śrāvaka and pratyeka-buddha vehicles, the second to the basic Mahāyāna teaching of śūnyatā that leads onto the bodhisattva-yāna, the third to the advanced Mahāyāna teaching of citta-mātra that is “distinctive” of the bodhisattva-yāna, and the last to the “complete,” perfect understanding of the Buddha that both transcends and unifies all the other teachings. It should be immediately obvious that such a fourfold division stands behind our pratitya-samutpāda passage; and, in fact, though he does not make the connection in our text, later on in the same work, Chih-i explicitly assigns his four levels of interpretation to the four teachings.

While we may (or may not) want to applaud Chih-i's ingenuity in bringing pratitya-samutpāda into accord with his own system, so far removed in time, space, and spirit from the ancient Buddhist formula of the twelve nidāna, for the T'ien-t'ai master himself, this success must have seemed only a natural elaboration of the passage on dependent origination by Nagarjuna that is supposed to have provided the metaphysical basis for the system. This is the verse, Madhyamaka-kārikās 24:18, in which, according to Kumārajīva's translation, it is said,

Phenomena produced by causes and conditions,
We declare to be empty;
Again, they are called provisional names,  
Or, again, they are what is meant by the middle way.\textsuperscript{97}

A particular understanding of this famous passage (the only one, as far as I know, in which the \textit{Karikās} actually uses the term \textit{madhyama-pratipat}) is said to have provided the inspiration for the teachings of the First Patriarch of T'ien-t'ai, Hui-wen (fl. ca. 550), and to have been handed down to his disciple, Hui-ssu (515-577), by whom it was transmitted to Chih-i. The understanding in question is formulated by the T'ien-t'ai teachers as their characteristic doctrine of the three truths (\textit{san ti}). This doctrine understands Nāgārjuna's verse to be describing conditioned phenomena in terms of three levels of truth: the empty (\textit{k'ung; sūnyatā}), the provisional (\textit{chia; prajñāpatti}), and the middle (\textit{chung; madhyama}). Very briefly put, the three truths can be expressed somewhat as follows: conditioned dharmas, when understood on the first level, are empty of \textit{svabhāva}; on the second level, this emptiness is seen not as the total negation of the dharmas but as the affirmation of their conditionality, or "provisionally" real status; on the third level, the two categories of the empty and provisional are understood to be nondifferent—or, put in other terms, the ultimate truth about the dharmas is understood to lie in a middle ground, free from the extremes of the empty and provisional.

What is most immediately striking and most peculiar about this reading of Nāgārjuna's verse is that it seems to isolate his famous teaching of \textit{sūnyatā} as but one pole, set off from both the conditioned phenomena of the first line and the provisionally established phenomena of the third, an extreme that is itself to be overcome, or resolved, by his middle way. Such an understanding of emptiness, quite common in East Asian exegesis, is well expressed in the other formula by which Chih-i most frequently discusses the movement among the three truths. This is adopted from the \textit{P'u-sa ying-lo ching}, an important \textit{sūtra} generally thought to have been written in China in the fifth century, which explains the relationships among the three truths in terms of (1) entering the empty from the provisional (\textit{ts'ung chia ju k'ung}), (2) entering the provisional from the empty (\textit{ts'ung k'ung ju chia}), and (3) the ultimate middle way (\textit{chung-tao ti-i i}).\textsuperscript{38}

Though at first glance it appears here that the empty and
the provisional are merely two opposing poles, Chih-i tends to read the "provisional" of the first line in the Sūtra formula as corresponding to the conditioned phenomena in the first line of Nāgārjuna's verse; hence he gives the formula a strongly dialectical character, such that it moves through four "moments"—from the thesis of dharmas, to the antithesis of śūnyatā, through a higher synthesis of the two in prajñāpti, to the final synthesis (of emptiness and the provisional) in madhyama. Clearly, śūnyatā is the crucial "moment" in this dialectic, the higher "principle," as Chih-i calls it in our example, that leads both into and beyond the transmundane phenomena of the Mahāyāna. As such, it is not merely the opposite of the dharmas but, like the provisional, must function on two levels: first, in opposition to the dharmas as their mere negation; and second, as the higher negation of the opposition that accounts for the ultimate unity of the two poles. Whether or not Nāgārjuna himself would still recognize himself in this dialectical interpretation of his verse, it is probably possible to read it as an interesting extension of his reminder that emptiness is also empty of svabhāva.39

IX.

There is one final feature of Chih-i's pratītya-samutpāda teaching to which I should like to call attention in closing. If the metaphysical levels we have seen here are supposed to be supplied by Nāgārjuna's verse, the logic of these levels and the religious significance attached to them seem to come from what strikes me as an extremely interesting coalescence in Chih-i's thought of two ancient Buddhist formulae. The first is the well-known rhetorical device of the catuskoti or "four propositions." This device, through which the speaker is thought to exhaust all meaningful positions on a topic, was of course much appreciated by Nāgārjuna, and in fact we have seen his use of it quoted in our example to establish the merely provisional nature of citta-mātra. As in this case, Nāgārjuna tends to use the formula to negative ends, as a means to the refutation of others' views.40 Chih-i, however, also has a more positive, more metaphysical reading of the four propositions that assigns to each member a
level of truth exactly corresponding to our four levels of pratītyasamutpāda. Though he does not invoke the formula in our passage, the relationship is made explicit elsewhere in his writing, where each of the teachings is assigned a basic metaphysical proposition, such that the pīṭaka asserts being (yū); the common teaching, emptiness (k’ung, here obviously equivalent to non-being [wu]); the distinct asserts both; and the perfect, neither.41

In recent years, the catuṣkoṭi has occupied a number of commentators, who have been particularly disturbed by the third and fourth members, which seem to conflict with the laws of non-contradiction and of the excluded middle respectively.42 It may well be that it was his own awareness of such logical conflicts that led Chih-i to assign these two members to the realm of the “inconceivable.” Yet, whatever we may say of other uses of the formula, Chih-i’s actual application of it to his four teachings clearly resolves these difficulties. The apparent contradiction of the third proposition disappears in the distinction, central to his “distinct” teaching, between paramārtha and saṃvṛti realms of discourse—a distinction we have seen reflected in Chih-i’s assertion that, while the mind itself cannot be ultimately established, it can still be treated for heuristic purposes as the cause of phenomena. The “distinct” teaching here is precisely that form of Buddhism that seeks to “straddle” the two realms of discourse, for the sake of the advanced bodhisattva, who, though already established in emptiness, still needs to cultivate the higher dharmas of the transmundane path. The fourth proposition, according to Chih-i, does indeed transcend the two-valued logic presupposed by the law of the excluded middle; it does so on the basis of the “complete” teaching of the buddha vehicle, which specifically posits a higher “middle” ground to which the predicates “being” and “emptiness” do not apply.

As interesting as Chih-i’s hierarchical reading of the catuṣkoṭi may be in itself, perhaps more striking is the way in which he is able, once the formula is read in this way, to lay its logical pattern over the seemingly quite unrelated spiritual hierarchy depicted by the traditional Buddhist model of the mārga. In this overlay, as should be apparent from our example, the assertion of being, characteristic of the first level of teaching, is associated with the laukika path; its denial, with the insight into emptiness that leads one to the lokottara plane; the higher affirmation of
both being and its denial then guides the bodhisattva along the upper bhūmis of the bhāvanā-mārga; and the still higher negation of both leaves him at the ultimate middle way of the āśaikṣa path of the Buddha.\textsuperscript{43}

In this kind of overlay, then, the spiritual development of each individual adept on the stages of the mārga is but an instance in microcosm of the development of Buddhism itself—a case, as it were, of ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny. Or to put the matter from the other side, the kind of analysis of the levels of Buddhist doctrine that we have seen in our example of \textit{pratitya-samutpāda} envisions (if I may be allowed this confusion of ancient tongues) a sort of \textquotedblleft meta-mārga,	extquotedblright in which both the formal relationships of the various conflicting Buddhist doctrines and the concrete historical development of the disparate Buddhist doctrinal literature recapitulate the inherent metaphysical and spiritual structure of the one great vehicle on which each individual Buddhist must make his way to the final goal of Buddhahood promised by the \textit{Lotus Sūtra}.

**NOTES**

1. A version of this paper was originally presented to the panel on \textquotedblleft Middleism: Ngārjuna and His Successors,	extquotedblright Fifteenth Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1986. I should like to express my thanks to Profs. Roger Jackson and José Cabezón for comments offered at that reading.


3. E.g., in chapter 26 of his \textit{Madhyamaka-kārikās} (Chung lun, T.1564:36b–c); and in his \textit{Pratitya-samutpāda-hṛdaya-kārikās} (Yin-yūan hsin lun; see T.1651–1654). For an excellent study of Ngārjuna’s treatment of the chain in the latter, see Kajiyama Yūichi, \textquotedblleft Chūkan ho no jūnī shi engi kaishaku,	extquotedblright \textit{Bukkyō shisō shi} 3 (1980), 90–146.

4. Especially in the common schema of the five \textit{samatha} contemplations known as the \textit{wu ting-hsin kuan}, among which meditation on \textit{pratitya-samutpāda} is recommended as an antidote to \textit{moha}. A discussion of these practices can be found in Ominami Ryūshō, \textquoteleft Go teishin kan to go mon zen,	extquoteright in Sekiguchi Shindai, \textit{Bukkyō no jissen genri} (1977), 71–90.


6. T.262:3c23–24. Here, as elsewhere in the literature, the \textit{dvadasāṅga-pratitya-samutpāda} is set in contrast to the four āryan truths, taught for the śrāvakas, and the six pāramitās, intended for the bodhisattvas. For a general
treatment of some of the various interpretations given the twelfold chain in the Mahāyāna literature, see Mitsukawa Toyoki, “Daijō butten ni mirareru jūni engi,” in Engi no kentō, Bukkyōgaku kenkyū (toku-shū) 39–40 (1985), 19–49.

7. See, e.g., his popular Hsiao chih-kuan, T.1915:469c10ff. The five correspond to the wu ting-hsin kuan.

8. E.g., in his Ts’u-ti ch’an men, T.1916:480c15.

9. T.1716:698b29ff. This section has recently been translated by Paul Swanson, in his “The Two Truths Controversy in China and Chih-i’s Threefold Truth Concept” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1985), 530–561; translations appearing herein below are my own. The other five objects discussed by Chih-i in this section are the ten “suchnesses” (shih ju) of the Lotus Sūtra, the four [āryan] truths (ssu ti), the two truths (erh ti), the three truths (san ti), and the one truth (i ti).

10. In technical T’ien-t’ai parlance, chieh-nei refers to all states within the three worlds (san chieh), prior to the elimination of the so-called chien-ssu afflictions (i.e., the darśana-heya and bhāvanā-heya kleśāvarana, as distinguished from the two types of jñeyāvarana that Chih-i calls ch’en-sha and wu-ming).

11. E.g., at 700a17.

12. 698c6–11. All the views of the infidels here, with the exception of “father and mother” (fu mu), appear in Pīñgala’s list of false doctrines corrected by the teaching of pratitya-samutpāda, Chung lun, T.1564:1b18ff.


15. After Chin kuang-ming ching, T.663:340b15, with some omissions; for the literature on this notion that the twelfold chain depends on false thinking, see Mitsukawa, op cit., 35–44.

16. 699c7–8.


18. 699c14–16. The term wu-mo here comes from one traditional interpretation of ālaya as alaya, “not sinking.”

19. Mo-ho chih-kuan, T.1911:54a23–b6. The argument of this passage would seem to be that, if, following (what Chih-i takes to be) the Ti-lun position, we identify the source of phenomena with dharmatā, which is neither subject nor object, then we cannot explain in what sense it is citta that produces phenomena; on the other hand, if, following the (reputed) She-lun position, we identify this source with an ālaya distinct from dharmatā, we cannot explain the relationship between the dharmas and the dharma nature.

20. 699c20–22.


22. Chih-i applies the catuskoti to the dream in the Mo-ho-chih-kuan (T.1911:54b8ff), to show that the dream cannot be understood as arising from the mind of the dreamer, the condition of sleep, both or neither. The dream, in this analogy, is to the mind as the ālaya is to dharmatā.

23. And see the parallel passage at Mo-ho chih-kuan, T.1911:54c7. The four siddhānta here derive from the Ta-chih-tu lun (T.1509:59b18ff), in which
it is said that the Buddha uses four types of teaching: the worldly (*shih-chien*), to encourage practice; the individual (*wei-jen*), to promote virtue; the antidotal (*tui-ch'i*), to counteract evil; and the cardinal meaning (*ti-i*), to bring about enlightenment. The *Fa-hua hsuan i* (686bff) discusses the four at some length, interpreting them according to ten different aspects and relating them to the four *āryan* truths, the four levels of practitioner, and so on. For discussion of these relationships, see Kawakatsu Mamoru, “Shi shitan gi to kyōsō ron,” in Sekiguchi, *Bukkyō no jissen genri*, 303–318.

24. For the *Ratnagotravibhāga* teaching (of which Chih-i’s passage here is an abbreviation), see *Chiu-ching i-sheng pao-hsing lun*, T.1611:830a28ff. Chih-i’s discussion is marred by the fact that throughout he consistently substitutes *hsiang* (“mark”) for the *śāstra*’s *yin-hsiang*.

25. 700a4–7 (the parenthetical clause here is Chih-i’s). The relationships being established in this passage depend upon the common organization of the twelfe fold chain into three divisions (*san tao* or *san lun*) distributed over the three times. (This tripartite division, found in the *Mahāvibhāṣa*, *Abhidhamma-kośa*, etc., is also employed by Nāgārjuna in his *Pratītya-samutpāda-hṛdaya.*) Chih-i’s schema here can be shown as follows:

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26. 700a7–16; paraphrasing the Śāstra at T.1611:830b13ff.  
28. For this teaching, see T.374:530aff.  
29. 700a16–27. The *gunas* here are, of course, the four original *viparyāśas*. The relationships among the members of these lists can be shown as follows:

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LEVELS OF PRATīTYASAMUTPĀDA 25

30. 700a27ff.
31. 700b22ff; the *Lotus Sūtra* line occurs at T.262:6c19.
32. 700c5ff.
33. T.374:524b2. The *Sūtra* goes on here to identify the twelvefold chain with the Buddha-nature, with *paramārtha-śūnyatā*, with the middle way, Buddha-hood, and nirvāṇa.
34. T.1509:a27ff.
35. The arguments have been brought together in Sekiguchi, *Tendai kyōgaku no kenkyū* (1978).
36. 709b; and see Chan-jan's sub-commentary, *Hsüan i shih-chien*, T.1717:848b26, c11, etc. In the T'ien-t'ai system, the second teaching is "common" to all three vehicles, in the sense that all realize śūnyatā—the two vehicles, through what is called "analytic emptiness" (*hsi-k'ung*); the bodhisattva, through "essential emptiness" (*t'i-k'ung*).
37. T.1564:33b11.
39. E.g., at *Kārikās* 12:10–11, 8:8. Chih-i's notion here that Nāgārjuna's middle way corresponds to the higher, self-negating function of emptiness reflects the sort of statements one finds in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*: e.g., "The Buddha-nature is called emptiness in its cardinal meaning (*ti-i k'ung; paramārtha-śūnyatā)*. This emptiness is called wisdom (*chih-hui*). The emptiness spoken of here consists in not seeing either emptiness or non-emptiness (*puk'ung*). . . To see everything as empty and not to see it as non-empty is not what is called the middle way." (374:524b12ff) A general discussion of the Chinese notion of the middle way as a third, higher truth appeared some years ago in the pages of this journal, in Whalen Lai, "Non-duality of the Two Truths in Sinitic Mādhyamika: Origin of the Third Truth," 2:2 (1979), 45–65. For more specific comparison of the T'ien-t'ai and Indian interpretations of *Kārikās* 24:18, see Nakamura Hajime, "Chūdō to kukan," in *Yuki kyōju shōju kinen: Bukkyō shiso shi ronshu* (1964), 139–180.
40. The closest study of Nāgārjuna's uses of the *catuskoti* in the *Kārikās* has been done by Tachikawa Musashi; see, e.g., his recent *Kū no kōzō: Chūron no ronri* (1986).
41. E.g., in *Ssu-chiao i*, T.1929:73a. This sort of hierarchic reading of the *catuskoti* in the *Kārikās* is not without its Indian parallels. Candrakīrti, for example, uses it to explicate verse 18:8, the only passage in which Nāgārjuna himself employs the four propositions in an affirmative sense to claim that the Buddha teaches that everything is real (*shih; tathya*), not real (*fei shih; na tathya*), both and neither. The first, says Candrakīrti, is intended to impress the worldly with the Buddha's complete knowledge of the world; the second, to cure the believer of his belief in realism; the third, to distinguish the ordinary and enlightened views; the last, to free the advanced practitioner from the final traces of the dvaranas. (*Prasannapāda* 370–371)
42. While the logic of the *catuskoti* has been discussed by Robinson, Jayatilleke, etc., perhaps the clearest statement of the basic logical problems was given by Frits Staal, in *Exploring Mysticism* (1975); for a discussion of the actual implications of the schema in Mahāyāna literature (and additional bibliography on the topic), see David Ruegg, "The Uses of the Four Propositions of the *Catuskoti* and the Problem of the Description of Reality in Mahāyāna

43. In Chih-i’s standard terminology, the second member of the catuṣkoṭi corresponds to the wisdom eye (hui yen) of the two vehicles that attains sarva-jñatā (i-ch’ieh chih); the third member represents the dharma eye (fa yen) of the bodhisattva that achieves mārga-jñatā (tao chung chih); and the last is the omniscient buddha eye (fo yen) that has realized sarvākāra-jñatā (i-ch’ieh chung chih).

**Glossary**

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Levels of Pratītyasamutpāda

San Chieh 三界
San Lun 三輪
San Shih 三世
San Tao 三道
San Ti 三谛
Shan Ken 善根
She-Lun 摄論
Sheng 生
Sheng T'ai 胎生
Shih 定
Shih-Chien 世間
Shih-Hsing 世性
Shih Ju 十如
Ssu Chü 四句
Ssu Hsi-T'an 四悉檀
Ssu-I Sheng Mieh 思議生滅
Ssu-I Wu-Sheng Wu-Mieh 思議生死滅
Ssu Ti 四諱
Su Ti 俗諱
Tao Chung Chih 道種智
Tao-Li 道理
T'ien-T'ai 天台
Tien-Tao 廣例
Tien-Tao Hsin 廣倒心
Ti-I 領倒心
Ti-I I Kung 第一義
T'i-Kung 第一義空
Ti-Lun 地論
T'i Yung 體用
Tsang 資
Ts'ung Chia Ju K'ung 從假入空
Ts'ung K'ung Ju Chia 從空入假
Tui-Ch'i 對治
Tun Chien 師漸
T'ung 通
Tun Li 異利
Wai-Tao 外道
Wang Hsiang 妄想
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Bukkyō shisō shi 仏教思想史

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