

UNDERSTANDING TSUNG-MI'S VIEW ON BUDDHA NATURE

by

SEONG-UK KIM

(Under the Direction of Russell Kirkland)

ABSTRACT

Tsung-mi detailed the cosmological and soteriological map, embracing both the scholastic and the Ch'an traditions. In doing so, he interpreted Buddha nature as "empty tranquil awareness" (*k'ung-chi chih*) from the view point of the Ho-tse school of Ch'an. For him, all sentient beings possess this empty tranquil awareness as their true nature of mind. According to Tsung-mi, "empty tranquil awareness" serves ontologically as a basis for a soteriological path as well as epistemologically as a basis for phenomenal appearances: whether it is covered by defilements, it remains pure and unchanging and becomes the foundation for sentient beings to attain Buddhahood; whether it is disrupted by beginningless ignorance, ever-present awareness brings phenomenal diversity into the minds of sentient beings.

INDEX WORDS: Tsung-mi, Buddha Nature (*fo-hsing*), Tathāgatarbha, Nature-Origination (*hsing-ch'i*), Ālayavijñāna, Yogācāra, Ho-tse school, *The Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*), Awareness (*chih*), Understanding-Awakening (*chieh-wu*), Realization-Awakening (*cheng-wu*), Sudden Awakening followed by Gradual Cultivation (*tun-wu chien-hsiu*).

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DEDICATION

With great love and gratitude I dedicate this thesis to my beloved wife, Heejung and my parents.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How to Understand the Doctrine of Tathāgatagarbha-Buddha Nature

Buddhist Religions, co-written by Richard Robinson, Willard Johnson, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, describes Buddhism as “a family of religions that are related but so inherently different that they cannot be reduced to a common core.”¹ This description draws on the significant diversity within Buddhism as a whole, though the book counts up to only three members of the Buddhist family: Theravāda, East Asian, and Tibetan traditions.

Diversity, however, characterizes each tradition in itself as well. For instance, we can find apparently diametric opposites when looking at the East Asian tradition from the soteriological perspective. Suppose one is only familiar with the Lin-chi school of Ch’an that emphasizes self-reliance to attain Buddhahood. He or she would be surprised to find the Japanese Pure Land school Jōdoshinshū that promotes reliance on the compassion of Amitābha Buddha for personal liberation from the samsaric world. In addition, there is a spectrum of diverse forms of Buddhist theories and practices between these two opposites in the history of East Asian Buddhist religion.

At this point, we can ask how we should take such differences. The Book *Buddhist Religions* suggests that we should understand them as results of the efforts made by Buddhists to reinterpret their traditions to meet their religious needs. The doctrine of tathāgatagarbha-Buddha nature, which this paper will examine, is one such interpretation.

¹ Richard Robinson, Willard Johnson, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction* (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2005), xxi.

The doctrine of tathāgatagarbha-Buddha nature asserts that sentient beings possess tathāgatagarbha, the Matrix of Buddhahood. The term “tathāgatagarbha” refers to Buddha’s immutable and permanent qualities within sentient beings. In Indian Buddhism, the substantive description of tathāgatagarbha caused a number of debates. Most of these debates revolved around whether the doctrine is compatible with the doctrine of emptiness (śūnyatā), which maintains that no substantial self exists.²

Such Indian debates entered a new phase in China, where philosophically diverse Indian Buddhist texts were introduced regardless of their historical development. Due to a lack of systematic knowledge of Buddhist texts, having to translate them from an entirely different language made comprehending intricate Buddhist concepts much more difficult for the Chinese. This situation sometimes led to problematic Chinese debates about the concept of Buddha nature: a renowned monk was excommunicated from the sangha because he challenged the dominant theory. I will explore this event in more detail in chapter 3.

However, such harsh debate also occurs among modern Buddhist scholars who have a much more thorough and accurate knowledge of Buddhist texts. One controversial movement is the “Critical Buddhism” campaign of Japanese Buddhist scholars Matsumoto Shirō and Hakuin Noriaki. Notably, Matsumoto argues that the doctrine of Buddha nature is not Buddhism at all; he says that rather, Buddhism is exclusively about the teachings of “no-self” (anātman) and “interdependent origination” (pratītyasamutpāda), which he believes were Śākyamuni’s original teachings. Thus, Matsumoto excludes later reinterpretations of those teachings, such as the Chi-

² *The Ratnagotravibhāga-śāstra* and *the Buddha Nature Treatise (fo-hsing lun)* deal with this issue. For *the Ratnagotravibhāga-śāstra*, see Jikido Takasaki, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga* (Roma: Instituto Italiano Per Il Medio Ed Estremo Oriente, 1966) and for *the Buddha Nature Treatise*, which is extant only in Chinese, see Sallie B. King, *Buddha Nature* (New York: State University of New York, 1991).

nese Hua-yen theories of “four dharma realms” from Buddhism.³ Regardless of the validity of his criticism, Matsumoto raises a significant question about how a new interpretation made by a certain Buddhist in a certain time and place should be understood: have they damaged Buddhism rather than contributed to it? Should there be a certain set of orthodox criteria to evaluate them? Russell Kirkland, though speaking of Taoism, offers instructive guidance to Buddhist scholars or those who wish to understand Buddhism better:

We may not legitimately privilege any particular form of Taoism as intrinsically normative for proper identification of the category. There are certainly Taoists today who may wish us to believe that their particular form should be accepted as normative, just as there are Hindus and Christians who do so. But I shall argue that no Taoists’ claim to have a normative understanding of Taoism may legitimately be accepted. Rather, I shall argue that all such claims must be evaluated, not only in terms of each other, but also in terms of all the claims of all of the Taoists of the past.⁴

As Kirkland points out, standardizing a certain interpretation or claim might *disenfranchise* other interpretations or religious claims.⁵ Kirkland suggests that we should rather evaluate them in terms of all the other claims made by the people within that religious tradition without any preference.

This paper, as a matter of course, does not attempt to explain all of the claims developed over the history of Buddhism or Chinese Buddhism; neither does it attempt to assume a certain claim as normative. Rather, this paper attempts to take a certain claim as a contribution to Buddhist tradition: a certain individual or the group of people represented by that individual re-

³ For details about the debate, see Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson ed., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997) and See Steven Heine, “After the Storm: Matsumoto Shirō’s Transition from Critical Buddhism to Critical Theology,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol.28, no.1-2 (2001), 133-146.

⁴ Russell Kirkland, *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

interpreted the tradition handed down to them, developed a new teaching and practice in terms of that tradition, and then handed it down to the next generation.

From this vantage point, this paper examines the interpretation of Buddha nature attempted by Kuei-feng Tsung-mi (780-841), who was the fifth patriarch in both the Hua-yen scholastic tradition and the Ho-tse school of Ch'an. The Hua-yen and Ch'an schools are believed to be among the most innovative expressions through which the Chinese adjusted the Buddhist tradition to their society.⁶ Hence, through the lens of Tsung-mi's understanding of tathāgatagarbha-Buddha nature, we can look at one aspect of the Chinese contribution to Buddhism. Two works in particular serve well in this project: *The Preface to the Collected Writings on the Source of Ch'an* (*Ch'an-yüan chu ch'üan-chi tu-hsü*, hereafter, *the Ch'an Preface*) and *The Chart of the Master-Disciples Succession of the Ch'an Gate that Transmits the Mind Ground in China* (*Chung-hua ch'uan-hsin-ti ch'an-men shih-tzu ch'eng-hsi t'u*, hereafter *the Ch'an Chart*).⁷

The Purpose and the Structure of the Paper

An examination of other studies about Tsung-mi will help clarify the purpose of this paper. There are several works about him including books, dissertations, and articles, but there are three especially related to the topic under consideration.⁸

⁶ Peter N. Gregory and Robert M. Gimello, ed., *Studies in Ch'an and Hua-yen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), xii.

⁷ I used the classical Chinese texts of Tsung-mi's *the Ch'an Preface* and *the Ch'an Chart* from Shigeo Kamata's book *Zengen Shosenshū Tojo* (Tokyo: Chukuma shobō, 1979).

⁸ For example, there are fifteen articles and six dissertations in Korean, found in one research database alone: www.riss4u.net; there are nine articles and two books in English found in another: ATLA Religion Database.

Japanese scholar Shigeo Kamata conducted a comprehensive research into study of Tsung-mi's Buddhist ideas in his *Shūmitsu Kyōgaku no Shisōshi-teki Kenkyū* [Research into Tsung-mi's Doctrinal Teachings from the Perspective of Chinese Intellectual History].⁹ He provides Tsung-mi's thoughts on the Hua-yen and Ch'an doctrines in relation to Confucianism and Taoism in the T'ang period. In addition, Kamata explores Tsung-mi's view on Buddhist rituals, based on *A Manual of Procedures for the Cultivation and Realization of Ritual Practice according to the Scripture of Perfect Awakening* (*Yüan-chüeh ching tao-ch'ang hsiu-cheng i*), which has hardly been studied. Although he covers quite a wide spectrum of Tsung-mi's Buddhist thoughts, Kamata hardly treats Tsung-mi's understanding of Buddha nature. Kamata makes passing reference to Tsung-mi's view of Buddha nature as the substantial entity, but he does not go further to examine that view with regard to the doctrine of emptiness. Nor does he pay much attention to the question of how or whether indigenous Chinese views of human nature influenced the Buddhist understanding of Buddha nature.¹⁰

Peter N. Gregory, in his *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, to which this paper is indebted, takes a systematic approach to Tsung-mi's view on Buddha nature.¹¹ Gregory examines the development of the idea of Buddha nature from early Indian tathāgatagarbha texts to Tsung-mi's works. Most of all, Gregory argues that Tsung-mi answered the demand for the foundation of religious practice by interpreting Buddha nature as the substantial entity. In doing so, Gregory maintains that the Confucian concept of human nature affects the Chinese Buddhist

⁹ Shigeo Kamata, *Shūmitsu Kyōgaku no Shisōshi-teki Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1975).

¹⁰ Kamata explains the relationship among three religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism in the T'ang period. However, he focuses on the influence of Buddhism on the other two: Shigeo Kamata, *op.cit.*, 117-127.

¹¹ Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

understanding of Buddha nature.¹² In another book, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity*, Gregory argues that the Mencian concept of human nature laid “an ontological basis for moral values” and led the Chinese Buddhists to put on Buddha nature “a much heavier ontological weight than had been borne by the original Sanskrit term.”¹³

The Korean scholar Gyu-Tak Shin explores Tsung-mi’s thoughts on Buddha nature in the context of Chinese discourse on human nature in his *Keihō Shūmitsu no Hongaku Shisō Kenkyū* [Research into Kuei-feng Tsung-mi’s Thoughts on Original Awakening within the True Mind].¹⁴ Shin says that Tsung-mi’s concept of Buddha nature and defilement explains the source of inherent human good and evil. Shin also shares with Gregory the idea that Tsung-mi’s interpretation of Buddha nature lays the ontological basis for Buddhist practice. However, much more interesting in relation to the purpose of this paper is his article “Tangdae Sonjongui Simsonglon” [The Ch’an Views on the Human Nature of Mind in the T’ang Period].¹⁵ Here, Shin charges Tsung-mi with reducing all Ch’an teachings to his own teaching, arguing that the cardinal principle of Ch’an, held by all the Ch’an masters including Bodhidharma, Hui-neng, Shen-hui, and Ma-tsu, does not accept the ontological interpretation of Buddha nature at all. Then Shin criticizes Tsung-mi for misunderstanding the Ch’an view on Buddha nature. He goes further to say that Tsung-mi’s ontological interpretation of Buddha nature is a heretical teaching:

[Tsung-mi’s] claim that the cardinal principle of Ch’an holds the substantial concept of Buddha nature is an oxymoron, similar to saying that my mother is originally barren. . . . Pojo Chinul, who argues that the true mind is always present and

¹² Ibid., 296.

¹³ Peter N. Gregory, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 11-12.

¹⁴ Gyu-Tak Shin, *Keihō Shūmitsu no Hongaku Shisō Kenkyū* (Hakushi Gakui Ronbun, Tokyo Daigaku, 1993).

¹⁵ Gyu-tak Shin, “Tangdae Sonjongui Simsonglon,” *Tongyang Ch’olhak* [Philosophy of the East], vol. 6 (1995), 1-37.

eternal by uncritically accepting Tsung-mi's such view, is a heretic from the [true] Ch'an point of view. . . . These two [Tsung-mi and Chinul] are surely heretics of Ch'an.¹⁶

Considering these three studies, focusing in particular on the validity of Gregory's and Shin's arguments, this paper examines Tsung-mi's understanding of Buddha nature and his Buddhist path of "sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation" (*tun-wu chien-hsiu*). This examination follows four steps.

First, the paper explores the historical development of the doctrine of Buddha nature. It shows the religious issues raised by the Madhyamaka philosophy to which the literature of tathāgata-garbha-Buddha nature attempts to respond. Consequently, Tsung-mi's interpretation of Buddha nature can be located in the Buddhist context of establishing a soteriological path from samsara to nirvana.

Second, this paper examines, in two parts, the views on "human nature" (*hsing*) within indigenous Chinese thought and Buddhism alike: (a) refuting Gregory's argument, the first part explores the meanings of the term "human nature" within indigenous Chinese thought in order to show whether the Chinese usage of that term increases the ontological implications of the term "Buddha nature" (*fo-hsing*); (b) refuting Shin's argument, the second part looks into the thoughts of Tao-sheng, Hui-neng, and Ma-tsu Tao-i on Buddha nature.

¹⁶ Underneath Shin's harsh criticism of Tsung-mi lies the sudden-gradual debate caused by Songchol (1911-1993) in South Korea from the 1980s to the early 1990s. Songchol, who claimed himself a true descendent from Lin-chi, criticized Chinul, who is still honored as the founder of the Korean Son tradition, to have taught a false Son. His criticism triggered the debates in not only the Korean Buddhist sangha but also the Korean Buddhist academy. For this debate within the Korean Buddhist academy, see Gon-ki Kang, ed., *Kedalum: Tono-jomsu-inka Tono-tonsu-inka* [Whether Awakening Occurs in the Path of "Sudden Awakening Followed by Gradual Cultivation" or in the Path of "Sudden Awakening and Sudden Cultivation"] (Seoul: Minjoksa, 1992). Here I translated this quotation from Korean into English without permission of the author. Therefore, I am fully responsible for any misunderstanding that might arise from it: Gyu-tak Shin, "Tangdae Sonjongui Simsonglon," op.cit., .

Third, the paper explores Tsung-mi's understanding of Buddha nature. Tsung-mi attempted to integrate the scholastic and the Ch'an traditions from the viewpoint of the Ho-tse school of Ch'an by interpreting Buddha nature as "empty tranquil awareness" (*k'ung-chi chih*). Tsung-mi also maintained that "empty tranquil awareness" is a ground for phenomenal appearances by employing native Chinese terminology: "essence – function" (*t'i-yung*).

Fourth and finally, this paper looks into Tsung-mi's Buddhist path of "sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation." Tsung-mi argued that as the inherent ontological essence, Buddha nature becomes the fundamental basis for his soteriological path toward awakening. In doing so, he answers the social demand for moral training by introducing two different kinds of awakening: "understanding awakening" (*chieh-wu*) and "realization awakening" (*cheng-wu*).

CHAPTER 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF BUDDHA NATURE

The Concept of Buddha Nature

It is necessary to examine the terms bearing the concept of Buddha nature, including the most commonly used Sanskrit term “tathāgatagarbha” and its Chinese translation “*ju-lai-tsang*.”

The term “tathāgatagarbha” is a compound of two words, “tathāgata” and “garbha.” “Tathāgata,” the epithet of a Buddha, can mean either “thus-come-one” or “thus-gone-one.” The former refers to the one who has come from nirvana to samsara to work for the salvation for all sentient beings, while the latter refers to the one who has gone in realization from samsara to nirvana. In translating the term, Sino-Korean Buddhists generally opted for the former, Tibetan Buddhists the latter. “Garbha” means womb, storehouse, seed, embryo, etc.¹⁷ Hence, the term “tathāgatagarbha” may mean either “womb of tathāgata,” the container of Buddha, or “embryonic tathāgata,” the Buddha that is contained. The former indicates the conditional cause of tathāgata, while the latter indicates the constitutional cause of tathāgata. The term “tathāgatagarbha” is usually translated into Chinese as “*ju-lai-tsang*,” which holds only the meaning “the container of thus-come-one.”

As Andrew Rawlinson has pointed out, however, the concept of Buddha nature is conveyed in many different Sanskrit and Chinese terms besides “tathāgatagarbha” and “*ju-lai-tsang*”: tathāgatadhātu, tathāgatagotra, Buddhadhātu, Buddhagotra in Sanskrit and *fo-ti*, *fo-t'i*, *fo-*

¹⁷ *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, 1st ed., s.v. “tathāgata” and “tathāgatagarbha.”

hsing, *ju-lai-hsing* in Chinese, to name a few.¹⁸ In order to define the general meaning of Buddha nature using such terms, it is helpful to examine the original Sanskrit terms and their Chinese translations within *the Ratnagotravibhāga-śāstra* (hereafter, *the Ratnagotra*), of which both Sanskrit and Chinese versions are extant.

In *the Ratnagotra*, the concept of Buddha-nature is embodied in the compound of “Buddha or tathāgata” and “dhātu (element, ingredient), garbha, or gotra (family, race).” “Buddha-dhātu” appears six times. One is translated into Chinese as “*ju-lai-hsing*” (Thus-come-one’s nature). The other five are translated as “*fo-hsing*” (Buddha nature). “Tathāgata-dhātu” appears thirty three times; although some are translated as “*fo-hsing*” or “*ju-lai-tsang*,” most of them are translated as “*ju-lai-hsing*.” “Buddha-garbha,” which appears three times, is translated as “*fo-hsing*” or “*ju-lai-tsang*.” “Tathāgatagarbha,” appearing forty six times, is all translated as “*ju-lai-tsang*.” Both “Buddha-gotra,” which appears three times, and “tathāgata-gotra,” which appears twice, are translated as “*fo-hsing*.”¹⁹

With this information, we can define the general meaning of the concept of Buddha nature as “some essential qualities that characterize Buddha or individuals whose spiritual maturity is indistinguishable from Buddha.” The terms “tathāgatagarbha” and “*fo-hsing*” are most commonly used for referring to the concept of Buddha nature within *the Ratnagotra*.

Because the term “*hsing*” (human nature) was central to Chinese philosophical discourse, the Chinese Buddhists have settled on the term “*fo-hsing*” since it appeared first in the Chinese

¹⁸ Andrew Rawlinson, “The Ambiguity of the Buddha-nature Concept in India and China” in *Early Ch’an in China and Tibet*, ed. Whalen Lai and Lewis R. Lancaster (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1983), 259-270.

¹⁹ Ichijo Ogawa, *Bussō Shisō* [Buddha Nature Thought] (Tokyo: Buneito, 1982), 24-27.

translation of *the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* (hereafter, *The Nirvāna sūtra*), which is only extant in Chinese.

In this paper, I generally use the term “Buddha nature,” a translation of “*fo-hsing*” to refer to the concept of Buddha nature except when the literal meanings of other terms need to be emphasized.

The Development of the Doctrine of Buddha Nature

1. Religious Motive for the Doctrine of Buddha Nature: Madhyamaka Philosophy

The Abhidharma tradition, in particular Pudgalavāda and Sarvāstivāda, devised the impersonal category of dharma in order to explain the painful reality of a world of endless birth-and-death without the notion of self. However, the tradition gave ontological status to the category and even to nirvana. Nirvana was regarded as unconditioned dharma, which was something opposite to conditioned samsaric beings.²⁰

The Madhyamaka school appeared as a reaction to ontological dualism within the Abhidharma tradition. Nāgārjuna, the founder of the school, advocated the doctrine of emptiness to refute such dualism. According to him, emptiness indicates the interdependence of all things, and there is nothing that has its own self-nature. Everything is empty of its own being. Even emptiness itself is empty, regarded only as a tool to avoid establishing any metaphysical views.²¹

²⁰ Joseph Walser, *Nāgārjuna in Context: Mahayana Buddhism and Early Indian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 191-223.

²¹ Sallie B. King, *Buddha Nature*, op.cit., 6-8; For Nāgārjuna’s theory of emptiness, see Nancy McCagney, *Nāgārjuna and the Philosophy of Openness* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Co., 1997), 53-117.

Here, nirvana also loses its ontological status and is identified with the interdependent world of samsara.

The Madhyamaka emphasis on destructive criticism of metaphysical views makes it difficult to affirm the soteriological path from samsara to nirvana. A serious question is therefore raised about Buddhist practice: how do sentient beings attain nirvana, or how are awakening and ignorance connected to each other? The Madhyamaka theory of the two truths reveals the problem in an obvious way. The theory says that there are two kinds of truth: conventional and ultimate.²² The problem is that the ultimate truth is beyond the realm of language. All language, no matter how profound it is, even the apophatic language of the Madhyamaka school, “falls within the realm of the conventional truth.”²³ Although the school claims the equivalence of ultimate and conventional, and of nirvana and samsara, it leaves unanswered the problem of how that equivalence is attained.

2. Buddha Nature Thought

According to Shunko Katsumata, although the term “tathāgatagarbha” first appeared in the Mahāyāna texts composed in India between approximately 200 and 350 C.E.,²⁴ its basic idea can be found in the expressions of the early Pali sūtras such as “Mind is pure” (*pabhassaram*

²² The conventional truth indicates the truth of biological world and human world of culture and society, while the ultimate truth indicates the truth of a religious, numinous world. Gadjin Nagao, tr. John P. Keenan, *The Foundational Standpoint of Madhyamika Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 23.

²³ Peter N. Gregory, “The Problem of Theology in the Awakening of Faith,” *Religious Studies*, vol. 22(1986), 65; Youru Wang also shares this explanation about the problem of Madhyamaka philosophy: Youru Wang, *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 55-56.

²⁴ Sallie B. King, *op.cit.*, 12.

cittam).²⁵ The concept of the pure state of mind developed into the doctrine of Buddha nature, producing the related literature, though it never formed a philosophical school in India like the Madhyamaka and the Yogācāra.²⁶

The literature of tathāgatagarbha attempts to answer the problem caused by Madhyamaka philosophy. The literature opens the possibility of a Buddhist path toward attaining Buddhahood by advocating the doctrine of Buddha nature, which claims the universal presence of Buddha nature within all sentient beings. The literature also suggests a unique interpretation of the concept of emptiness. However, the possibility of an ontological interpretation of Buddha nature within the literature raises another issue: whether the doctrine of Buddha nature is compatible with the doctrine of emptiness. Here, let us look in detail at two tathāgatagarbha texts: *the Śrīmālādevī-simhanāda-sūtra* (referred to hereafter as *the Śrīmālādevī*) and the *Ratnagotra*.²⁷

The chief scriptural authority for the doctrine of Buddha nature is ascribed to *the Śrīmālādevī*, which was written about the third Century C.E., belonging to the earliest tathāgatagarbha literature corpus.²⁸ The sūtra criticizes the negative interpretation of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) literature on the doctrine of emptiness from a unique viewpoint. The sūtra maintains that tathāgatagarbha is empty (*śūnya*) and at the same time non-empty (*aśūnya*):

²⁵ Anguttara-nikaya, 1:5; re-quoted from Shunko Katsumata, *Butkyōno Okeru Shinshikisetsuno Kenkyū* [Research into the Theories of Mind and Consciousness in Buddhism] (Tokyo: Sankibo Busshorin, 1988), 465.

²⁶ Among representative tathāgatagarbha texts are *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*, *Anunatvapurnatvanirdesa-sūtra*, *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*, *Lankavatara-sūtra*, *Ratnagotravibhāga*, Buddha-Nature Treatise, etc. Katsumata divides the process of development of tathāgatagarbha thoughts in India into three steps in relation to the doctrine of ālayavijñāna and explains the representative sūtras and commentaries of each step: Shunko Katsumata, *op. cit.*, 593-637.

²⁷ For explanations of other tathāgatagarbha texts, see Brian Edward Brown, *The Buddha Nature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1991) and Heng-Ching Shih, "The significance of Tathāgatagarbha," <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebddha191.html>.

²⁸ Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman, *The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 1.

tathāgatagarbha is both the emptiness of defilements and the non-emptiness of the Buddha's virtues. *The Śrīmālādevī* explains Buddha's virtues with ontological terms such as permanence and self.²⁹ Then the sūtra accuses the Perfection of Wisdom literature of leading to a nihilistic interpretation of emptiness by emphasizing only the empty aspect of tathāgatagarbha, and totally ignoring the non-empty aspect. *The Śrīmālādevī* argues that it cannot but claim the non-empty aspect of tathāgatagarbha in order to counter the one-sided interpretation.³⁰

The Ratnagotra, written about the fourth Century C.E, takes the same perspective that *the Śrīmālādevī* does, though *the Ratnagotra* advocates the middle position of nihilism and realism.³¹ According to *the Ratnagotra*, novice bodhisattvas who do not understand the doctrine of Buddha nature make two kinds of mistakes. Some understand emptiness as annihilation, believing that nirvana means the extinction of the elements of phenomenal reality. Others substantiate the emptiness, believing there is something that is different from form.³² *The Ratnagotra* quotes from *the Śrīmālādevī* to explain the true meaning of the concept of emptiness:

The Matrix of the Tathāgata is devoid of all the sheath of defilements which are differentiated and separated [from the Absolute Essence]. The Matrix of the Tathāgata is by no means devoid of the Buddha's properties, which are indivisible, inseparable [from the Absolute Essence], inconceivable, and far beyond the sands of the Gangha in number.³³

Although *the Ratnagotra* claims itself as the highest teaching beyond both extremes of nihilism and realism, it still does not seem to stand firm on the middle position between the two. It grants positive values to "the body of the Tathāgata," another name for Buddha nature: "there is estab-

²⁹ Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman, *op.cit.*, 102.

³⁰ Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman, *op. cit.*, 96-113.

³¹ There are a few theories about the date of *the Ratnagotra*. For details, see Jikido Takasaki, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga*, *op.cit.*, 6-9.

³² Jikido Takasaki, *op.cit.*, 299-300.

³³ *Ibid.*, 301.

lished the fourfold supreme virtue of the absolute body of the Tathāgata. That is to say, the supreme eternity, the supreme bliss, the supreme unity, and the supreme purity.”³⁴ Thus, like *the Śrīmālādevī*, *the Ratnagotra* leaves room for an ontological understanding of Buddha nature.

3. Integration of Yogācāra – Buddha Nature Thought

Buddha nature thought gained new momentum in Chinese Buddhism through a unique concept developed by the Yogācāra school: ālayavijñāna (storehouse consciousness). The Yogācāra school responds to the issue raised by the Madhyamaka philosophy differently from the literature of tathāgatagarbha. In order to explain how the ultimate is connected to the conventional, the school is interested more in the way the conventional reality arises than in the way the ultimate truth is attained: The Yogācāra Buddhists attempt to elucidate the process of phenomenal evolution by introducing the concept of ālayavijñāna.

The concept of ālayavijñāna first appeared in *the Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, which was compiled in India in the early fourth century C.E. and translated into Chinese around the fifth century C.E. According to the Sūtra, ālayavijñāna is the activity of consciousness that perpetuates a certain mode of behavior or perception. It also metaphorically serves as a receptacle of the seeds that are produced by past karma and bear future karma. The Sūtra also compares ālayavijñāna to the current of a flood, which purports to deny the substantial interpretation of it.³⁵

Based on this notion of ālayavijñāna, the Yogācāra Buddhists explain how phenomenal diversity appears. For them, ālayavijñāna is the foundational structure for conventional reality: ālayavijñāna, most of all, lays a theoretical basis for justifying the notion of a subjective agent responsible for constructing the phenomenal world without the notion of substantial self. With

³⁴ Ibid., 209.

³⁵ Shunko Katsumata, *Butkyōno Okeru Shinshikisetsu-no Kenkyū*, op.cit., 559-562.

this concept, the Yogācāra Buddhists attempt to harmonize the two incompatible doctrines of “anitya” (impermanence) and “karma.”³⁶

Yogācāra texts conveying such a notion of ālayavijñāna were introduced to China together with tathāgatagarbha texts in the first half of the fifth century. The Chinese Buddhists were concerned about the relationship between the two different notions of ālayavijñāna and tathāgatagarbha. Their key interest in this relationship was whether ālayavijñāna is pure or impure, an issue closely related to the long-standing Chinese interest in the question of whether human nature is good or evil.

The Chinese Buddhists established their own Yogācāra schools according to their positions on this issue: Southern Ti-lun, Northern Ti-lun, She-lun, and Fa-hsiang. Let us look at briefly the positions of two Ti-lun schools among them.³⁷

The two Ti-lun schools, the name of which derives from their cardinal treatise, “*shih-ti ching lun*” (Daśabhūmika-sūtra-śāstra), was founded by Ratnamati and Bodhiruci, who arrived in China in 508. The two Indian Yogācāra masters took opposite sides on the issue of ālayavijñāna and therefore established their own schools: Southern Ti-lun and Northern Ti-lun.

Fa-shang (495-580), the second generation descendent of Ratnamati, represented the position of the Southern Ti-lun. He asserted that tathāgatagarbha and ālayavijñāna were separate from each other: ālayavijñāna, which is illusory and impure, exists only as a source of phenomenal appearances, whereas tathāgatagarbha is the ultimate source of all phenomenal reality.³⁸ On

³⁶ Tao Jiang, *Contexts and Dialogue: Yogacara Buddhism and Modern Psychology on the Subliminal Mind* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 1-47.

³⁷ The position of the She-lun school on this issue is well shown in *The Awakening of Faith*. The position of the Fa-hsiang school is generally the same as the position of the Southern school.

³⁸ For the Chinese development of early Yogācāra thoughts, see Diana Y. Paul, *Philosophy of Mind in Sixth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 38-71.

the contrary, for the Northern Ti-lun school, which is the Bodhiruci branch, ālayavijñāna is pure and the ultimate support for all phenomena: it is none other than tathāgatagarbha.³⁹

However, each position has its own theoretical problem: the Southern Ti-lun position cannot explain how the deluded world and the ultimate truth are connected, which is reminiscent of the Madhyamaka issue, while the Northern Ti-lun position cannot explain the empirical fact of delusion because it only affirms the pureness of the reality.

The Awakening of Faith attempts to reply to all these existing issues by integrating the two concepts of tathāgatagarbha and ālayavijñāna. It provides two different points of view on ālayavijñāna: ontologically, it is not distinct from tathāgatagarbha, while epistemologically, it is a combination of pure and impure consciousnesses. If awakened, ālayavijñāna is pure; if deluded, it is impure. Now let us examine the thought on Buddha nature within *The Awakening of Faith* in more detail.

4. *The Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna*

The Awakening of Faith, written in China in the sixth century, tries to lay a foundation for Buddhist practices and, at the same time, avoid reifying the concept of Buddha nature.⁴⁰ In doing so, *the Awakening of Faith* introduces two aspects of mind: mind as suchness (*hsin chen-ju*) and mind subject to birth-and-death (*hsin sheng-mieh*).

³⁹ Sang-Il Kim, “Whitehead-wa Wonch’euk-ui Yusik Bulgyo” [Wonch’euk’s Yogācāra Idea from the Viewpoint of Whitehead] (Presented on Feb., 23, 2002 in Korean Society of Whitehead). Diana Y. Paul says that the Northern Ti-lun, like the Southern one, believes that ālayavijñāna is impure. But unlike the Southern one, it believes that ālayavijñāna supports all phenomenal reality. On this issue, Tsung-mi says that the Northern position is that ālayavijñāna is pure while the southern one is that ālayavijñāna is a combination of pure and impure. Tsung-mi’s understanding of the southern position, however, is based not on Fa-shang’s view but on Hui-yuan’s (523-592), who is deeply affected by *The Awakening of Faith*. For Hui-yuan’s position, see Diana Y. Paul, op.cit., 52-64.

⁴⁰ For brief explanation for its authorship and date, see Peter N. Gregory, “Theodicy in the Awakening of Faith,” op.cit., 64.

According to *the Awakening of Faith*, mind as suchness, considered the essential nature of mind, has two layers of meaning. First, since the term *true-suchness* refers to “the limit of verbalization wherein a word is used to put an end to words,” mind as suchness indicates the truth beyond all forms of verbalization and conceptualization.⁴¹ *The Awakening of Faith* says, “all explanations by words are provisional and without validity, for they are merely used in accordance with illusions and are incapable [of denoting Suchness.]”⁴² There is no way to understand this mind as something substantial. However, if mind as suchness is always beyond the realm of all language, *the Awakening of Faith* faces the same problem that Madhyamaka philosophy does: How is the Buddhist path possible? *The Awakening of Faith* expresses it through a novice practitioner, asking “if such is the meaning [of the principle of Mahāyāna], how is it possible for men to conform themselves to and enter into it?”⁴³ In response to the problem, *the Awakening of Faith* brings mind as suchness into the realm of language. *The Awakening of Faith* says that mind as suchness, if predicated in words, has two aspects of mind. The explanation of *the Awakening of Faith* then follows the pattern of the Indian tathāgatagarbha texts: Mind as suchness, which is identified with tathāgatagarbha, is empty of defilements and nonempty of Buddha’s virtues.⁴⁴ Mind as suchness in this effable level holds ontological implications with the kataphatic language: *the Awakening of Faith* describes it as eternal, permanent, immutable, pure and self-sufficient.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Yoshito Hakeda, *The Awakening of Faith* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 33.

⁴² Yoshito Hakeda, op. cit., 33.

⁴³ Yoshito Hakeda, op. cit. 34.

⁴⁴ See footnote 16.

⁴⁵ Yoshito Hakeda, op. cit., 35.

Now, the issue of the possible Buddhist path can be rephrased as follows: how is mind as suchness connected to mind subject to birth-and-death? Or how is Buddha mind related to the mind of sentient beings? *The Awakening of Faith* answers this issue with the concept of ālayavijñāna, which refers to tathāgatagarbha representing the samsaric world. Then *the Awakening of Faith* regards “mind subject to birth-and-death” as ālayavijñāna. Here, mind as suchness, tathāgatagarbha, or Buddha mind is ontologically identified with mind subject to birth-and-death, ālayavijñāna, or the mind of sentient beings. However, why sentient beings experience suffering if their mind is ontologically the same as Buddha mind remains a question.

At this point, *the Awakening of Faith* shifts the perspective from the ontological to the epistemological. *The Awakening of Faith* distinguishes two epistemological aspects within ālayavijñāna, which is ontologically the same as tathāgatagarbha: awakening and non-awakening.⁴⁶ *The Awakening of Faith* again distinguishes “original awakening” (*pen-chüeh*) and “experiential awakening” (*shih-chüeh*). The interdependent aspects of “original awakening, non-awakening, and experiential awakening” form a cycle of Buddhist practice. According to *the Awakening of Faith*, sentient beings, though originally awakened, suffer in the samsaric world because they are deluded by ignorance. Through religious practice, they can realize that there is no delusion and experience awakening, which is not any different from their own original awakened mind.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid., 36-37: Peter Gregory explains this shift in detail: Peter Gregory, “The Problem of Theodicy in the Awakening of Faith,” op. cit. 71-77.

⁴⁷ Yoshito Hakeda, trans., op.cit., 38-46.

The Awakening of Faith shows well the Buddhist efforts to harmonize the tension between apophatic and kataphatic languages for the truth.⁴⁸ On the one hand, they try to found Buddhist practices by introducing the substantialist concept of Buddha nature. On the other hand, they keep searching for the compatibility of the two doctrines of Buddha nature and emptiness.

Now, let us turn to the meanings of the term “human nature” (*hsing*) within Chinese thought, including Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, in order to ascertain whether the Chinese usage of the term influences the substantialist implications of “Buddha nature” (*fo-hsing*).

⁴⁸ I here use “apophatic” as a way to speak of the ultimate truth in terms of what may not be said about the truth, while “kataphatic” as descriptive, entitative, or metaphysical way of speaking of the truth.

CHAPTER 3

CHINESE DISCOURSE ON BUDDHA NATURE

Confucian and Taoist Views on the Term “Human Nature” (*Hsing*)

1. Mencius

According to A.C. Graham, the term “*hsing*” was used as a synonym for the term “*sheng*” (life, growth, to give birth). The term “*hsing*” is one of the major terms in the philosophy of Mencius (391-308 B.C.E.).⁴⁹ Roger Ames controversially argues that Mencian “*hsing*” is an achievement concept, not an essential term for an “unchanging” and “some innate endowment present in us from birth.” He says that “*hsing*” means a culturally and historically conditioned act or “a creative act.”⁵⁰ He goes on to say, “*xing* [*hsing*] is not reducible to what is innate (“to be born in”) or a priori.”⁵¹ Ames also excludes physical desires, into which he translates “*ming*,” from the meanings of “*hsing*.”⁵² Refuting Ames’ interpretation of “*hsing*,” let us look in more detail at the Mencian concept of “*hsing*” (hereafter, human nature).

For Mencius, the term “human nature” indicates innate elements that naturally develop if uninjured: it includes both physical conditions and morality. For Mencius, a human being is a psychophysical whole consisting of two constituents.⁵³ Morality affects physical reality, which

⁴⁹ A.C.Graham, “The Background of the Mencian Theory” in *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, ed. Xiusheng Liu and Philip J. Ivanhoe p. 6

⁵⁰ Roger T. Ames, “The Mencian Conception of Ren xing: Does it Mean ‘Human Nature’?” in *Chinese Texts and philosophical Contexts* ed. Henry Rosemont, Jr. 143-145.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 156-158.

⁵³ Mencius says, “every human being has these four sprouts just as he has four limbs.” *Mencius*, 2a6: Mencius. trans., D.C.Lau (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 83: I have made some changes.

can be fully realized through the moral life: “[our] body and complexion are heaven-given nature. Only a sage can give his body complete fulfillment.”⁵⁴ Denying one’s own morality is even self-destructive.⁵⁵

Mencius believed that morality is inborn, like physical conditions: “humaneness, rightness, propriety, and wisdom are not welded on to me from the outside; they are in us originally.”⁵⁶ Humaneness, rightness, propriety, and wisdom are moral powers possessed by human beings. Mencius again affirms the innateness of morality in three illustrations: an infant’s love for his parents, a boy’s respect for his elder brother (7a15), and spontaneous concern for a child about to fall down a well (2a6).

Just as the human body grows, inherent morality develops naturally, which Mencius compares it to sprouts. The four sprouts, which are the four moral minds of compassion, shame and dislike, courtesy and modesty, and right and wrong, mature into the four moral powers.⁵⁷ Mencius goes further to liken the natural development of morality to water always flowing downwards.⁵⁸

Although Mencian nature is not unchanging, it is definitive feature of human beings.⁵⁹ As the four limbs define human appearance, so the four moral sprouts are fundamental elements

⁵⁴ *Mencius*, 7a38: Mencius. trans., D.C.Lau, op.cit., 191: I have made some changes.

⁵⁵ *Mencius* 2a6: “For a man possessing these four germs to deny his own potentialities is for him to cripple himself.”: Irene T. Bloom says about the idea of psychobiological whole in his “Mengzian Arguments on Human Nature” in *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, 78

⁵⁶ *Mencius*, 6a6: D.C.Lau, op.cit., 163: I made some changes.

⁵⁷ As Janghee Lee points out, it is controversial whether four moral powers and four sprouts can be clearly distinguished in *the Mencius*: Janghee Lee, *Xunzi and Early Chinese Naturalism* (New York: State University of New York, 2005), 26: *Mencius* 2a6 says about four moral powers that four sprouts mature into while 6a6 says that four moral powers are four sprouts. In both case, human morality is innate.

⁵⁸ *Mencius*, 6a2: D.C.Lau, op.cit. 160.

⁵⁹ Irene T. Bloom also shares this concept of Mencian nature: Irene T. Bloom, “Mengzian Arguments on Human Nature” in *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, op. cit., 92

within all human beings that define humanity:

Whoever is devoid of the heart of compassion is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of the shame is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of courtesy and modesty is not human, and whoever is devoid of the heart of right and wrong is not human.⁶⁰

For Mencius, the term “human nature” indicates physical reality and morality at the same time.

It refers not to something “fixed and unchanging” but to innate elements that grow naturally.⁶¹

2. Hsün-tzu

Unlike Mencius, Hsün-tzu (298-238 B.C.E) considered morality, which is represented by social moral codes (*li*), to be a human artifice created by sages.⁶² By the term “human nature,” Hsün-tzu refers only to physical reality such as sense organs, perception, and desires given by Heaven:

Man is born with the desires of the eyes and ears, with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds.⁶³

That which is as it is from the time of birth is called the nature of man. That which is harmonious from birth, which is capable of perceiving through the senses and of responding to stimulus spontaneously and without effort, is also called the nature.⁶⁴

According to Hsün-tzu, human beings are predisposed to satisfy their physical desires. If physical desires are allowed to grow without control, they inevitably destroy the moral values and

⁶⁰ *Mencius*, 2a6 82-83.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 155: Tang Junyi also says that Mencian nature is not changeless essence: “It [hsing] should not be termed an essence or principle deeply rooted in the mind.” Tang Junyi, *Zhongguo Zhexue Yuanlun: Yuanxing Pian* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1984), 29 re-quoted from Youru Wang, *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 71.

⁶² *Hsün-tzu* ch. 23: re-quoted from *Xunzi*, tr. by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 162-163; D.C.Lau also points out that Xunzi regarded morality as human artifice, contrary to innate human nature: D.C.Lau, “Theories of Human Nature in Mencius and Xunzi” in *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, ed. T.C.Kline and Philip J.Ivanhoe (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000), 206.

⁶³ *Hsün-tzu* ch.23: re-quoted from *Xunzi*, op.cit, 161.

⁶⁴ *Hsün-tzu* ch. 22: re-quoted from *Xunzi*, op. cit, 143-144.

social order that maintain human society and prevent chaos. Hence, human nature should be guided and regulated according to the social moral codes created by sages.⁶⁵ However, human nature is not opposed to moral training. Rather, it is “basis and raw material” for moral training.⁶⁶ Hsün-tzu goes further to say that human nature can be transformed by moral training: “Accordingly, [sages] created ritual principles and laid down certain regulations in order to reform man’s emotional nature and make it upright, in order to train and transform it and guide it in the proper channels.”⁶⁷ For Hsün-tzu, human nature is the basic physical reality of human beings, but it does not consist of “deterministic features that define humankind as humankind.”⁶⁸

3. Tung Chung-shu

Tung Chung-shu (ca.179-104 B.C.E.) viewed human nature as that which pertains to human beings by birth. Introducing the theory of “*yin* and *yang*” to the Confucian philosophy of human nature, he paired human nature and feelings with *yang* and *yin*, respectively, believing the former to be positive and the latter to be negative.⁶⁹ Human nature, which represents inner moral potential, is not given complete form; rather, it must be nourished by moral training.⁷⁰

Although *yang* and *yin*, as Roger Ames claims, are relational categories rather than ontological concepts, one cannot totally deny that *yang* and *yin* – and therefore human nature and

⁶⁵ Xunzi, op.cit., 161-162; Janghee Lee says that this does not mean that nature is itself bad. Nature is rather wild and raw. For details, see Janghee Lee, *Xunzi and Early Chinese Naturalism*, op. cit., 28-30.

⁶⁶ Xunzi, op. cit. 106: “Therefore it is said that human nature is the basis and raw material, and conscious activity is responsible for what is adorned, ordered, and flourishing. If there were no human nature, there would be nothing for conscious activity to work upon, and if there were no conscious activity, then human nature would have no way to beautify itself.”

⁶⁷ Xunzi, op. cit. 162.

⁶⁸ Janghee Lee, op.cit., 25.

⁶⁹ Fung Yu-lan, Tr. By Derk Bodde, *A History of Chinese Philosophy vol. 2* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 20-37.

⁷⁰ Tung Chung-shu stands in a middle position between Mencius and Hsün-tzu: *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, Dong Zhongshu.

feelings – have ontological implications to some degree for Tung Chung-shu.⁷¹ Tung Chung-shu says:

Within the universe exist the ethers (*ch'i*) of the *yin* and *yang*. Men are constantly immersed in them, just as fish are constantly immersed in water. The difference between them and water is that the turbulence of the latter is visible, whereas that of the former is invisible. Man's experience in the universe, however, is like a fish's attachment to water. Everywhere these ethers are to be found, but they are less viscid than water. . . . Thus in the universe there seems to be a nothingness, yet there is substance.⁷²

Clearly, Tung Chung-shu regards *ch'i* as something invisible but substantial. Hence, it is possible to say that Tung Chung-shu's views on human nature as *yang ch'i* (positive material force) has an ontological sense.

4. *Chuang-tzu* and *Huai-Nan-tzu*

According to Harold D. Roth, the term for human nature does not appear in early Taoist texts such as *the Tao Te Ching* and the Inner chapters of *the Chuang-tzu*. The concept of human nature appears on the "Outer" and "Mixed" chapters of *the Chuang-tzu* and only becomes a major concern in the *Huai-nan-tzu*.⁷³

In *the Chuang-tzu*, the term "human nature" indicates what a thing is born with.⁷⁴ Human nature is a special principle that physical form (*hsing*) innately possesses.⁷⁵ *The Chuang-tzu* says, "Physical form served as a protection to the spirit; each became possessed of its own

⁷¹ *Encyclopedia of Chinese philosophy*, Yin and Yang written by Roger T. Ames.

⁷² *Ch'un-ch'iu Fan-lu* ch. 81: re-quoted from Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* vol. 2, op.cit., 20.

⁷³ For brief explanation for the dates of the three works, see Harold D. Roth, "The Concept of Human Nature in *the Huai-nan Tzu*," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* vol. 12, 2-4.

⁷⁴ Harold D. Roth, *A Companion to Angus C. Graham's Chuang Tzu* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 211.

⁷⁵ *Chuang-tzu* ch. 12 : *The Divine Classic of Nan-Hua; The Works of Chuang Tsze* (London: Trubner and Company, 1881), 142 trans. By Frederic Henry Balfour and Victor H. Mair, *Wandering on the Way* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), 108.

principles, and this was what is called its nature.”⁷⁶ However, human nature is not changeless essence but inner potential to do something freely or spontaneously, as shown in illustrations such as a dialogue between Confucius and a hunchback, and one between Confucius and a good swimmer.⁷⁷ In *the Chuang-tzu*, human nature is an inborn principle that makes (cultivated) spontaneity possible.⁷⁸

In *the Huai-nan-tzu*, human nature is given by heaven, represented by the term “spirit” (*shen*), a term for mental activities, including perception, cognition, and emotions:

Human nature is tranquil, but desire disturbs it. What people have received from heaven is the ability to hear sound, to see color, to taste tastes, to smell smells, to sense heat and cold. Their reality is the same (in all people). Now why is it that some people use them to attain insight while others are nothing more than fools? It is because they govern them in different ways. Therefore, the spirit *shen* is the fount of understanding. . . . Understanding is the storehouse of the mind. . . . When the spirit is clear, then desire cannot disturb it.⁷⁹

Human spirit is in accord with natural and social environments because it is originally tranquil and pure. However, it might not remain in accord with them, if human desires disrupt it.

The Huai-nan-tzu details the process through which the innate spontaneity of human spirit is disturbed.⁸⁰ When a person comes into contact with external things, his spirit responds and perceives them. Preference is created when perception arises. Desires are caused by preference. Then desires disturb the inherent tranquility of human nature; consequently, its spontane-

⁷⁶ Nature in *the Cuang Tzu* is not opposed to moral virtues though it criticizes Confucian moral trainings: *Chuang-tzu* ch. 7: *The Divine Classic of Nan-Hua: The Works of Chuang Tsze*, op. cit., 142.

⁷⁷ *Chuang-tzu* ch. 19: Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 199-200 and 204-205.

⁷⁸ *Chuang-tzu* ch. 16: Burton Watson, op.cit, 171 and Victor H. Mair, op.cit., 148: Henry G. Skaja asserts that the author of *Chuang-tzu* chapter 16 regards human nature as fundamentally social and cooperative with respect to virtue. Henry G Skaja, “How to Interpret Chapter 16 of *the Zhuangzi*: Repairers of Nature (Shan Xing)” in *Wandering at ease in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Roger T. Ames (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 114.

⁷⁹ *Huai-nan-tzu* ch.2/10a8: re-quoted from H.D.Roth, op. cit., 14-15.

⁸⁰ This explanation from *the Huai-nan-tzu* is quite similar to that from *the Awakening of Faith*.

ous responses to the world are destroyed.⁸¹ Desires prevent the spontaneous functioning of human nature: “If we seek the basis of human nature, we find that it is covered over by weeds and does not manifest its inherent clarity because external things have sullied it in various ways.”⁸²

In *the Huai-nan-tzu*, human nature is originally pure, tranquil, and spontaneous.

5. Wang Pi

Wang Pi (226-249 C.E.) was a representative thinker of the early period of the *ch'ing-t'an* (Pure Conversation) movement, which responded to the intellectual condition after the fall of the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.-220 C.E.).⁸³ He sought a fundamental ground for diverse phenomena, abandoning the cosmological theories of the inter-relation between the cosmos and humankind that were typical of the Han period.⁸⁴ Wang Pi is believed to have written several works.⁸⁵ Here, let us explore Wang Pi's view on human nature within his *Commentary on the Tao-te ching*.

In Wang Pi's commentary, the term “(human) nature,” appearing in thirteen chapters, refers to the innate tendency within all things freely to follow their own way.⁸⁶ Wang Pi expresses the tendency as “spontaneity” (*tzu-jan*):

The nature of the myriad things is spontaneity. It should be followed but not interfered with. One can penetrate this nature, but one cannot rigidly hold on to it. Things have an eternal nature (*ch'ang hsing*), and if we artificially interfere with

⁸¹ *Huai-nan-tzu* ch.1/5a6: re-quoted from H.D.Roth, op. cit., 13.

⁸² *Huai-nan-tzu* ch. 11/4a1: re-quoted from H.D.Roth, op.cit., 8.

⁸³ The rise of the Ch'ing-t'an movement was also politically motivated. For details on the motives of that movement, see Alan K.L.Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu* (New York: State University of New York, 1991), 16-21 and 26-28.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 23 and 29-34.

⁸⁵ According to Chan, there was a collection of Wang Pi's works in five chuan, which is now lost. Among his surviving works are *Commentary on the I-ching* and *Commentary on the Tao-te ching*: *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁶ These chapters are 10, 12, 16, 17, 21, 25, 27, 29, 32, 36, 41, 45, and 47.

it, we shall surely fail. Things come into and go out of being, and if we would hold on to them, we certainly lose them.⁸⁷

For Wang Pi, as in the *Chuang-tzu* and the *Huai-nan-tzu*, (human) nature refers to the inner spontaneity of things: this nature, if not interfered with, complies with the function of the Tao that Wang Pi describes as the one ultimate source of all things.⁸⁸

Wang Pi's concept of (human) nature does not include ontological implications in itself. However, he enables Chinese Buddhists to understand Buddha nature from the ontological viewpoint by connecting (human) nature to the ultimate Tao. As shown later, his influence can be recognized in Tao-sheng's view on Buddha nature.

6. The Influence of Chinese Indigenous Thought on Buddhist Understanding of Buddha Nature

Human nature was believed to be inborn in both Confucian and Taoist Traditions. Confucians regard human nature as changing, not given in a complete form: Mencius views human nature as innate elements that develop naturally; Hsün-tzu sees it as physical reality that can and should be transformed; Tsung Chung-shu believes it to be a positive material force that needs nourishment. On the other hand, Taoists believe human nature to be originally spontaneous: *the Chuang-Tzu*, *the Huai-nan-tzu*, and Wang Pi say that human beings are born with innate spontaneity.

Until the third century C.E., metaphysical discourse on the term "human nature" hardly appeared in either early Confucian or early Taoist thought. This fact refutes Gregory's argument

⁸⁷ Ariane Rump, trans., *Commentary of the Lao Tzu by Wang Pi* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1979), 88.

⁸⁸ Wang Pi refers to the Tao as the source of all things in chapters 1, 4, and 42. In chapter 42, he says, "Myriad things have myriad shapes but return to the One": Paul J. Lin, trans, *A Translation of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi's Commentary* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1977), 81.

that Mencian view of human nature was ontological and therefore affected Buddhist ontological interpretation of Buddha nature. One exception to this general trend of this period was Tung Chung-shu, who brought ontological implications into the concept of human nature. However, it is necessary to examine Tung Chung-shu's understanding of "yin and yang" more thoroughly, as well as his usage of the term "human nature."

The early *ch'ing-t'an* movement, represented by Wang Pi, introduced metaphysical implications to the Chinese indigenous thought. The Chinese Buddhists were surely influenced by the movement in understanding Buddhist concepts, sometimes with heavy ontological weight. They even established a hermeneutical system of "matching-concepts" (*ke-i*), which was prevalent from the second to the early fourth century.⁸⁹

However, whether Chinese indigenous thought intensified the ontological interpretation of Buddha nature within Buddhism as a whole is another problem. Not only were there already ontological implications in the Indian Buddhist history of the concept of Buddha nature to differing degrees, but there were also ontological implications of that term in the Chinese Buddhist history to differing degrees. Now let us consider the latter.

Chinese Buddhist Views on Buddha Nature

1. *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*

Together with *The Awakening of Faith*, *The Nirvāna sūtra* had a crucial role in the Chinese discourse on the concept of Buddha nature. There are three extant Chinese translations of it.

The earliest, consisting of six volumes, was translated in 418 by Fa-hsien and Buddhabhadra

⁸⁹ For brief explanation of "matching-concepts," see Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 36-38.

(359-429). The second, better known as the Northern edition, was translated in 421 by Dharmakṣema (385-431) and consists of forty volumes. The third, known as the Southern edition, is the stylistic revision of the Northern edition by Hui-yen (363-443), Hui-kuan (d. 453), and Hsieh Ling-yun (385-433).⁹⁰

As the literature corpus pertaining to the idea of tathāgatagarbha began to be translated into Chinese, during the fifth century, one of the most controversial issues was whether *icchantika*, incorrigible beings, can attain Buddhahood.⁹¹ The problem is that Fa-hsien's first version, which is not a complete translation of the original Sanskrit text, states that sentient beings possess Buddha nature with the exception of *icchantika*. Tao-sheng (d. 434), who devoted himself to studying the sūtra, believed that such a statement was inconsistent with the tenor of *The Nirvāṇa sūtra*, and therefore argued that even *icchantika* possess Buddha nature.

Tao-sheng's daring challenge against the authority of the sūtra resulted in his excommunication in 428 or 429.⁹² Tao-sheng was reinstated when Dharmakṣema's translation became popular. This second translation of *The Nirvāṇa sūtra* includes statements that vindicate Tao-sheng's argument.⁹³ Afterwards, Tao-sheng and *The Nirvāṇa sūtra* came to be the chief authority on the doctrine of Buddha nature.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ming-Wood Liu, "The Doctrine of the Buddha-Nature in the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa-Sūtra*," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 5, no.2, 1982, 63-64.

⁹¹ The term "icchantika" is loosely rendered into English as "hedonist" or "dissipated." In the doctrine of *icchantika*, the term refers to a class or lineage of beings who are beyond all redemption and have lost forever the capacity to achieve nirvana: *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, "icchantika."

⁹² According to *Kao-seng chuan*, Tao-sheng was expelled from the Buddhist community and retreated to Lu-shan, predicting that he would be proven right: *Kao-seng chuan*, *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* vol.50, no. 2059, 322.

⁹³ Young-ho Kim, *Tao-sheng's Commentary on the Lotus Sūtra* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 34-35. See also Whalen W. Lai, "The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-Sūtra* and Its Earliest Interpreters in China: Two Prefaces by Tao-lang and Tao-sheng," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 102, no. 1, 1982, 99-104 and Ming-Wood Liu, "The Problem of the *icchantika* in the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1,

Now, let us examine how *The Nirvāna sūtra* describes Buddha nature. First, it does not hesitate to endow Buddha nature with positive qualities:

The Buddha-nature has six aspects. What are these six? [They are,] first, to be eternal, secondly, to be pure, thirdly, to be real, fourthly, to be virtuous, fifthly, to be discerned in the future [by every one], and sixthly, to be true. It also has seven aspects: the first is “being attainable [by everyone],” while the remaining six are the same as [the six aspects listed] above.⁹⁵

According to *The Nirvāna sūtra*, the term “Buddha nature” refers to Buddha’s eternal virtues, which are true and pure. The sūtra illustrates the presence of Buddha nature within sentient beings using various analogies that augment the ontological implications of the concept. As Ming-Wood Liu indicates, the seed metaphor is most frequently used in ways such as “the seed of the middle-way, which is the most perfect enlightenment of all the Buddhas.”⁹⁶ Other metaphors used in *The Nirvāna sūtra* include a precious pearl within the body of a strong man, roots of grass, and underground water.⁹⁷ In most such illustrations found in *The Nirvāna sūtra*, Buddha nature is referred to as the kind of thing that is universally present within sentient beings but not fully realized.⁹⁸

1984, 57-77.

⁹⁴ There were several theories about the doctrine of Buddha nature at the time of Tao-sheng. For details, see Ming-Wood Liu, “The Early Development of the Buddha Nature Doctrine in China,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 16(1989), 1-36.

⁹⁵ *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* vol. 12, 513a, 11.3-11.5: re-quoted from Ming-Wood Liu, “The Doctrine of the Buddha-Nature in the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāna-Sūtra*,” op. cit., 67

⁹⁶ Ming-Wood Liu, op. cit., 80.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 72, 77-78.

⁹⁸ As Ming-Wood Liu points out, the sūtra also uses negative terms. The sūtra says, “Buddha-nature is matter, non-matter, and neither matter nor non-matter. It is with marks, without marks, and neither with marks nor without marks. It is one, not one, and neither one nor not one. . . . It is being, non-being, and neither being nor non-being. It is finite, infinite, and neither finite nor infinite”: *T*, vol.12, 526a, 11.2-6: quoted from Ming-Wood Liu, op.cit, 69. Ming-Wood says that the general position of *The Nirvāna sūtra* is anti-metaphysical, despite the frequent use of metaphors that give ontological connotations to Buddha nature. However, there is little reason for him to ignore the importance of those metaphors. Indeed, negative terms are used in the context of admonishing those who do not cultivate Buddhist practices, merely believing the universal presence of Buddha nature. Therefore, *The Nirvāna sūtra*, like *The Ratna-*

2. Tao-sheng and Seng-chao

Although *The Nirvāṇa sūtra* affirms the universal presence of Buddha nature within sentient beings, it does not resolve the tension between the doctrine of emptiness and Buddha nature. The debate over the ontological interpretation of Buddha nature raised by the Indian Buddhist texts remains unsettled in Chinese Buddhism. The ongoing debate can be recognized in the thoughts of two famous monks during the period of “matching concepts.”

Tao-sheng understands Buddhism through the lens of Neo-Taoist ideas. In particular, his understanding of Buddha nature is affected by Wang pi’s notion of Tao as the source of all myriad things. Tao-sheng regards Buddha nature as “*li*,” the one ultimate, indivisible and the origin of all things. He uses various terms as synonyms for Buddha nature such as Tao, Dharma, the immutable, the True. For him, Buddha nature is the ontological essence that produces and governs all things; within human beings, it serves as the dormant potential for awakening because it is covered with defilements and needs to be actualized by the Buddhist practice of six pāramitās.⁹⁹

On the contrary, Seng-chao (374-414), a disciple of Kumarajiva, does not accept any possibility of an ontological interpretation of Buddha nature, based on the Madhyamaka philosophy. In *Essay on the Immutability of Things* (*Wu pu-ch’ien lun*), Seng-chao criticizes the dualism of quiescence and movement, asserting that things are neither changeless nor changing. Such negative expressions, representative of the Madhyamaka philosophy, are well shown in his *Essay*

gotra and *The Śrīmālādevī*, should be regarded as one effort to harmonize the two doctrines and lay the basis for Buddhist practices. Whether it was successful is a question that requires more research. For Ming-Wood Liu’s position, see Ming-Wood Liu, “The Early Development of the Buddha-Nature Doctrine in China,” op.cit., 1-36.

⁹⁹ Young-ho Kim, Tao-sheng’s *Commentary on the Lotus Sūtra*, op.cit., 29-38.

on *Non-True-Emptiness* (*Pu-chen k'ung-lun*).¹⁰⁰ Here he criticizes both nihilistic and realistic views. He first refuses the realistic view that nirvana is unchanging by saying that no positive qualities can be applied to nirvana. He then refuses the nihilistic view that emptiness is annihilation by affirming the conditioned existence of things. Denying nihilism and realism at the same time, Seng-chao finally explains the mind, which is neither existent nor non-existent:

Existence, if having ontological status, would imply self-sufficiency and permanence; it would not depend upon causation for its existence. Just so, non-existence, if having ontological status, would imply self-sufficiency and permanence; it would not depend upon causation for its non-existence.¹⁰¹

Here, Seng-chao does not suppose the unchanging supra-mundane essence at all. Sublating the two extremes of nihilism and realism, he affirms temporal existence in terms of “interdependent origination.”

Such opposite views held by Tao-sheng and Seng-chao on whether an unchanging essence exists can also be found in the thoughts of a single person or work. This internal conflict is discussed in the next section.

3. *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*

In *the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* appears the full-fledged idea of “seeing the nature and achieving Buddhahood” (*chien-hsing ch'eng-fo*). The sūtra passim asserts that sen-

¹⁰⁰ According to Ming-Wood Liu, the term “*pu-chen-k'ung*” can be understood in two different ways: “In the first case, the compound *pu-chen* (unreal) is an attributive describing the meaning of *k'ung* (emptiness), and the term *pu-chen k'ung* indicates that to be ‘empty’ means to be ‘unreal.’ In the second case, the compound *chen-k'ung* (absolute emptiness) is modified by the negative particle *pu*, and the term *pu chen-k'ung* is a negation of the nihilistic theory of the absolute inexistence of all things”: Ming-Wood Liu, *Madhyamaka Thought in China* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 53.

¹⁰¹ Walter Liebenthal, trans., *Chao Lun: The Treatises of Seng-chao* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1968), 60: I made some changes.

tient beings possess originally pure nature; thus, if they see their own nature, they become Buddhas.¹⁰² The sūtra seems to deny the substantialist view on Buddha nature:

Bodhi originally has no tree,
The mirror also has no stand.
Buddha nature is always clean and pure;
Where is there room for dust?¹⁰³

The sūtra alleges that this verse is written by the eventual sixth-patriarch Hui-neng (638-713).

The verse appears in the context of criticizing Shen-hsiu's (ca. 606-706) model of "detaching-thought" (*li-nien*) as the fundamental dualism of awakening and ignorance. The sūtra advocates the practice of "no-thought" (*wu-nien*), which means "always keeping your own nature" and "freely coming and going," not "attaching to all things."¹⁰⁴

The sūtra, however, is not totally exempt from criticism on the basis of the doctrine of emptiness, which denies any kataphatic language. Although the mind verse denies the presence of pure nature, the sūtra describes nature as something that can be possessed.¹⁰⁵

In the sūtra, instead of a systematic discourse clarifying whether Buddha nature is empty of its own being, a discourse about the two epistemological aspects of awakening and non-awakening often appears. The sūtra repeatedly claims that sentient beings, though originally awakened, are deluded by external things and that when they realize their original status or see their nature, they become Buddhas in no time.¹⁰⁶ However, the sūtra does not explain how sen-

¹⁰² To list a few, Trans., Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 125, 135, 137, 149, 150, etc.

¹⁰³ Philip B. Yampolsky, *op.cit.*, 132.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁰⁵ That kind of descriptions are found in the passages saying the ideas of 'seeing the nature and achieving Buddhahood.' However, there is also another phrase within the sūtra describing the non-existence of Buddha nature: *Ibid.*, 139: "If someone speaks of 'viewing the mind,' [then I would say] that the mind is of itself delusion, and as delusions are just like fantasies, there is nothing to be seen."

¹⁰⁶ The sūtra likens defilements covering original nature with clouds covering the sun: Philip B. Yampol-

tient beings can see their own nature, unlike the explanation in *the Awakening of Faith* of a complex system of Buddhist practices within the circle of “original awakening – non-awakening – experiential awakening.”

4. Ma-tsu Tao-i

Ma-tsu Tao-i (709-788 C.E.) develops the idea of “original awakening” in a radical direction. He asserts that ordinary mind is Buddha mind. According to Ma-tsu, sentient beings, since without beginning, have never been deluded: they are always awakened. Thus, everyday mind is an awakened mind: “Since they are limitless kalpas, all sentient beings have never left the samādhi of dharma-nature. Wearing clothes, eating food, talking and responding, making use of the six senses, all activities are dharma-nature.”¹⁰⁷ Such identification of Buddha mind with ordinary mind is made through the Hua-yen doctrine of “the unobstructed interrelation of the absolute and the phenomenal” (*li-shih wu-ai*). Ma-tsu regards “Buddha mind” and “ordinary mind” as “the absolute” and “the phenomenal,” respectively. Then he identifies Buddha mind, which is the ultimate, with ordinary mind, which is the phenomenal: “the ultimate and the phenomenal are without difference; both are wonderful functions.”¹⁰⁸

Although the two minds are unified from the perspective of function (a synonym for the phenomenal), Ma-tsu leaves room for the ontological interpretation of Buddha nature: he endows Buddha nature with positive values: “This mind is as long-lived as space. Even though you

sky, op.cit., 143.

¹⁰⁷ Jinhua Jia, trans., “Appendix: Annotated Translation of Mazu Daoyi’s Discourse,” *The Hongzhou School of Ch’an Buddhism in Eighth-through-Tenth-Century China* (New York: State University of New York, 2006), 127.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 124: I made some change.

transmigrate to multiple forms in the six destinies of transmigration, this mind never has birth and death.”¹⁰⁹ Later, some of Ma-tsu’s disciples also mention the eternality of the mind.¹¹⁰

Ma-tsu’s identification of ordinary mind with Buddha mind and of awakening with delusion makes Buddhist practice unnecessary. As a modern scholar Jinhua Jia points out, Ma-tsu breaks a cycle of religious practice from original awakening through non-awakening to experiential awakening and highlights original awakening alone.¹¹¹ Ma-tsu says, “[The mind] exists at present. It does not depend on the cultivation of the Way and seated meditation. Neither cultivation nor seated meditation – this is the pure Ch’an of Tathāgata.”¹¹² For Ma-tsu, there is no need for practice: there is no seeing the nature and achieving Buddhahood. Buddhahood is already manifest in the ordinary mind and our everyday experience.

5. Chinese Buddhist Views on Buddha Nature

Chinese Buddhism, like Ch’an Buddhism more specifically, is not a single, unified tradition. The unique views on Buddha nature of the four monks (including the two Ch’an patriarchs) examined here demonstrate the diversity. Neither can one singularly decide whether the term “Buddha nature” has an ontological sense. On the one hand, an ontological understanding of the term does appear; on the other hand, that ontological interpretation is criticized. Similarly, in some places, the distinction between awakening and ignorance is emphasized; in other places, the identity between the two is asserted.

From this vantage point, Gyu-tak Shin’s arguments should be discarded. Shin’s first argument – that there is a cardinal principle of Ch’an – is based on the traditional view that Ch’an

¹⁰⁹ Jinhua Jia, trans., op.cit., 122.

¹¹⁰ Jinhua Jia, op.cit., 72.

¹¹¹ Jinhua Jia, op.cit., 73.

¹¹² Ibid., 125.

is a monolithic tradition, preserving one single principle transmitted from one patriarch to the next. This view, however, has now been disproven, not only in part by this study but also by modern scholars who have verified that this view was projected by Ch'an monks from about the eighth century for the purpose of establishing a sectarian identity.¹¹³ Shin's second argument is that the cardinal principle held by Ch'an patriarchs, including Hui-neng and Ma-tsu, denies any ontological interpretation of Buddha nature. However, this argument also proves to be wrong. Both *The Platform Sūtra* (traditionally believed to be written by Hui-neng) and Ma-tsu endow Buddha nature with ontological implications.

This section of the paper demonstrates that the substantialist view of Buddha nature continued to exist to differing degrees in India and China alike. This tendency was explicitly revealed in Tsung-mi's eventual interpretation, to be discussed in the following section.

¹¹³ According to Philip B. Yampolsky, the attempts to conceive Ch'an as one single tradition started in about the eighth century. He also says that one of the earliest versions is represented in *the Ch'uan fa-pao chi*: Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, op.cit., 4-5. For a comprehensive explanation of this issue, see John R. McRae, *Seeing through Zen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

CHAPTER 4

TSUNG-MI'S THOUGHTS ON BUDDHA NATURE

Tsung-Mi's Life and Social Background

Tsung-mi was born in 780 in Hsi-ch'ung County in Kuo-chou, located in what was then known as the province of Chien-nan East (corresponding to the western part of present-day Nan-ch'ung County in central Szechwan). From age six to seventeen, he devoted himself to Confucian and Taoist studies for civil service examinations. From age eighteen to twenty-two, he studied Buddhist sūtras and treatises. For the next two years, he once again focused his effort on Confucian studies. At the age of twenty-four, however, he became a monk, fascinated with the teachings of Tao-yuan (fl. 821), who was the fourth generation of the Ho-tse school of Ch'an. From age thirty to thirty-two, he studied the Hua-yen doctrines under the guidance of Ch'eng-kuan (738-839), the fourth patriarch of the Hua-yen school. Tsung-mi succeeded both Tao-yuan and Ch'eng-kuan and integrated Ch'an and Hua-yen teachings from the perspective of the Ho-tse school in *The Ch'an Preface* and *The Ch'an Chart*. He wrote approximately forty works, including these two, and died in 841. After Tsung-mi's death, both the Hua-yen and the Ho-tse schools waned.¹¹⁴

Tsung-mi's life falls between the An Lu-shan rebellion (755-763) and the Hui-ch'ang proscription of Buddhism (841-845). This period featured political, social, and economical

¹¹⁴ Peter Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, op. cit, 27-90 and Shigeo Kamata, *Shūmitsu Kyōgaku no Shisōshi-teki Kenkyū*, op.cit., 52-101.

upheavals, which surely affected Chinese Buddhism. The T'ang government tried to control Buddhism, which had enjoyed economical and political privileges in the former century, by imposing restrictions on Buddhism such as prohibition of private construction of a new temple, limitations on land-owning, and prohibition of preaching in the countryside.¹¹⁵ Although Buddhism was still popular among the old aristocracy and populace, there arose antipathy against Buddhism among Confucian literati, a new political power that had emerged during the late seventh century.¹¹⁶ The memorial of Han Yü (768-824), written in 819 when Tsung-mi was thirty-nine, reveals Confucian antipathy against Buddhism:

Now the Buddha was of barbarian origin. His language differed from Chinese speech; his clothes were of a different cut; his mouth did not pronounce the prescribed words of the Former Kings; his body was not clad in the garments prescribed by the former Kings. He did not recognize the relationship between prince and subject, nor the sentiments of father and son.¹¹⁷

Here, Han Yü argues that Buddhism can never be intermingled with Chinese culture mainly because the former does not promote the social ethics, such as loyalty and filial piety that have maintained Chinese society. Tsung-mi responded to this criticism by writing *Inquiry into the Origin of Man* (*Yüan-jen lun*), based on the theory of “nature origination” (*hsing-ch'i*).¹¹⁸ The examination of Tsung-mi's understanding of Buddha nature should consider this social context.

¹¹⁵ Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 219-224.

¹¹⁶ According to Charles Hartman, government powers of the post An Lu-shan rebellion split into following five distinct groups: (1) the imperial T'ang house of Li, (2) the old aristocracy of early T'ang times, (3) Confucian literati emerging through the examination system, (4) eunuchs, and (5) the military outside the capital. For details on the political situation at Tsung-mi's time, see Charles Hartman, *Han Yü and the Tang Search for Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 119-172.

¹¹⁷ Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, *op.cit.*, 225.

¹¹⁸ Peter N. Gregory, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity*, *op.cit.*, 35-36.

Tsung-mi's Thoughts on Buddha Nature

1. True Mind as Tathāgatagarbha

Tsung-mi asserts that the Ch'an Buddhist tradition is rooted in the scriptural tradition of tathāgatagarbha-Buddha nature. Referring to *the Nirvāna sūtra*, Tsung-mi accepted the primary idea of the doctrine of Buddha nature: the presence of Buddha nature within all sentient beings:

[The Buddha] declares without doubt that all sentient beings possess Buddha nature. All sentient beings with [Buddha nature] will attain Buddhahood and enjoy ever-pleasant pureness of self at the ultimate stage of Nirvana.¹¹⁹

Tsung-mi then asserts that Buddha nature is “the source of Ch'an”:

The term Ch'an originates from India. Its full name is Ch'an-na. . . . [This] indicates Samādhi and Prajñā. The term “source” means all sentient beings' inherent awakened true nature, which is called Buddha nature and also called ground of mind. . . . Realization of this [mind] is called prajñā, and cultivation of this [mind] is called samādhi.¹²⁰

Buddha nature is identified with mind in Ch'an. Tsung-mi equates cultivation and realization of mind with Samādhi and Prajñā, which refer to Buddhist meditative practices and awakening.¹²¹

Mind comes to be the source of Ch'an. Hence, understanding mind is crucial to understanding Ch'an teachings. Tsung-mi breaks the term “mind,” used indiscriminately at his time, into four concepts: (a) the heart as a physical organ (*ju-t'uan hsin*); (b) the mind that perceives and differ-

¹¹⁹ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, *op.cit.*, 201.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹²¹ Samādhi is a state of deep calm and concentration achieved by moral and meditative practice. Prajñā is the intellectual and experiential insight into the Truth: *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, “meditation” and “Prajñā.” Buswell also says, “Tsung-mi elsewhere goes so far as to claim that samādhi is actually an abbreviation for both samādhi and prajñā, thus Ch'an was by implication the epitome of all Buddhist meditative culture”: Robert E. Buswell, “Short-cut Approach of K'an-hua Meditation” in *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, ed. Peter N. Gregory (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1987), 329.

entiate objects in the ordinary life (*lu-lü hsin*);¹²² (c) the eighth consciousness ālayavijñāna, where all the seeds of other consciousnesses are stored (*chi-ch'i hsin*);¹²³ and (d) true mind (*chen-shih hsin*). Only this last concept of mind is tathāgatagarbha-Buddha nature.¹²⁴

“True mind” as Buddha nature is more than the source of Ch’an: in Tsung-mi’s view, it is the quintessence of Buddhism:

True mind is named . . . tathāgatagarbha-consciousness since it is the source of both awakening and delusion of all sentient beings. It is also called *Buddha-nature* because it is the source of all Buddhas’ virtues and *the ground of mind* because it is the source of all bodhisattvas’ practices.¹²⁵

Tathāgatagarbha, Buddha nature, and the ground of mind point to one single entity: true mind.

Each name indicates a different aspect of mind, not a separate thing. True mind has all Buddhas’ virtues. All sentient beings, whether awakened or deluded, possess such a true mind. The mind also is a ground for sentient beings to perform all bodhisattvas’ practices and attain Buddhahood.

2. Teachings that Reveal the Truth

For Tsung-mi, the doctrine of Buddha nature is a crucial characteristic of superior teachings. Buddhist Sūtras, commentaries, sub-commentaries, and even Ch’an teachings, can be assessed according to their relation to this doctrine. It serves as a criterion for understanding and judging all Buddhist teachings. In his *Ch’an Preface*, Tsung-mi upholds the Ho-tse school of

¹²² This understanding of mind as Buddha nature is related to the teachings of the Hong-chou school. See section 7 of this chapter, Analogy of a Manj Jewel.

¹²³ This is related to the teachings of the Northern school of Ch’an. See footnote 163.

¹²⁴ Shigeo Kamata, *op.cit.*, 70: Tsung-mi also says that the first three minds are mere appearances of true mind. However, they are not separate from true mind.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

Ch'an, from which he claims descent, as the supreme teaching that articulates the essence of mind as Buddha nature.

Over the 400 years before Tsung-mi, the Chinese made strenuous efforts to understand diverse Buddhist teachings, such as Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and tathāgatagarbha. Such efforts led them to establish doctrinal schools such as San-lun, Ti-lun, and She-lun. Based on the accomplishments of these schools, Chinese Buddhists came to interpret Buddhism in accordance with their experiences, provided new forms of theory and practice in response to their religious concerns, and formed several unique Chinese schools. Among the schools that flourished at the time of Tsung-mi were scholastic schools such as Fa-hsiang, T'ien-t'ai, and Hua-yen, as well as Ch'an schools such as Northern Ch'an, Ox-head, Hung-chou, and Ho-tse.¹²⁶

Tsung-mi classifies all these traditions into three Mahāyāna teachings and three types of Ch'an as follows: (a) three Mahāyāna teachings: the teaching that negates objects by means of consciousness (i.e., Fa-hsiang Yogācāra); the teaching of hidden intent that negates phenomenal appearances in order to reveal the nature (i.e., the Madhyamaka teaching of emptiness); and the teaching that directly reveals that the mind is nature (i.e., the tathāgatagarbha teaching); (b) three schools of Ch'an: the school that cultivates mind by eliminating delusion (i.e., the Northern Ch'an); the school that is utterly without support (i.e., the Ox-head); and the school that directly reveals mind as nature (i.e., the Ho-tse).¹²⁷ Then Tsung-mi categorizes the Ho-tse school of Ch'an as the supreme source of teaching.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Shigeo Kamata, *Geninron* [Inquiry into the Origin of Human] (Tokyo: Meitoku shuppansha, 1980), 5-20.

¹²⁷ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, *op.cit.*, 85 and Peter N. Gregory, Tsung-mi and the Sinifica-

The Ho-tse school of Ch'an was founded by Ho-tse Shen-hui (684-758). Although Shen-hui made his master Hui-neng (638-713) earn public recognition as the sixth patriarch of Ch'an, he himself could not be acknowledged as Hui-neng's true successor. At the time of Tsung-mi, Shen-hui was probably notorious for his overly ambitious and self-promoting attitude, as shown in the fact that the Ho-tse school faded with the death of Tsung-mi. The biography written by Tsung-mi only says that Shen-hui was honored as Hui-neng's true successor or the seventh patriarch.¹²⁹

Despite the disrepute of Shen-hui, Tsung-mi claims the supremacy of the Ho-tse school of Ch'an because he thinks that Shen-hui directly presents the essence of mind for the first time in the history of Ch'an Buddhism. In justifying this, Tsung-mi draws on the traditional explanation of Ch'an transmission. Let me give an outline of it:

According to Tsung-mi, Ch'an masters do not rely on written words over direct experience. Since the time of Buddha, the ultimate Truth of Ch'an has been transmitted independent of the doctrinal teachings. Ch'an masters directly point to the mind, which enables people to see their nature and attain their Buddhahood. A disciple who realizes his Buddhahood is entrusted with the seal of the Buddha-mind just as the first patriarch of Ch'an Mahākāśyapa was.¹³⁰ How-

tion of Buddhism, op.cit., 224-225.

¹²⁸ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, op.cit., 267.

¹²⁹ John R. Mcrae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 240-242 and Peter D. Hershock, *Chan Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 73-74. For Shen-hui's teachings, see John R. Mcrae, "Shen-hui and the Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment in Early Ch'an Buddhism" in *Sudden and Gradual*, op. cit., 227-278.

¹³⁰ Sung Kung-an collections, including *Wu-men-kuan*, elaborate the legendary story about the initial transmigration of Dharma. The story says that Mahākāśyapa was the only person who grasped the profound meaning when the Buddha raised a flower without a word: Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), 68.

ever, Shen-hui could not find any successor capable of realizing his true nature and therefore revealed true mind in written words in order to preserve the Truth.¹³¹

After this explanation, Tsung-mi defines that Shen-hui's teaching of mind is "the teaching that reveals the Truth" (*piao-ch'üan*).¹³² In contrast with the Ho-tse school, Tsung-mi calls the teachings of other schools "teachings that cover the Truth" (*che-ch'üan*).¹³³ According to him, they rely on negative expressions such as "neither birth nor death, neither tainted nor pure, without cause or effect, neither ordinary nor noble, etc."¹³⁴ Tsung-mi warns that such teachings can be mere endless enumerations and eventually cover the Truth without revealing the essence of mind, because they only define what is not true mind. For Tsung-mi, Shen-hui's direct revelation of the essence of mind is the ultimate Buddhist teaching.

3. Framework for True Mind

What is the essence of mind that Shen-hui revealed? Before answering this question, it is necessary to understand the basic framework that Tsung-mi uses in order to explain true mind. Tsung-mi provides the basic conceptual framework for true mind in terms of immutability (*pü-pien*) and conditionality (*sui-yüan*):

¹³¹ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshü tojo*, *op.cit.*, 141: For a brief explanation of this traditional explanation of Ch'an transmission, see footnote 113.

¹³² The word *ch'üan* means discussion, investigation, truth, etc. Here, I translate it as "truth" that indicates Buddha nature: Mark Spahn & Wolfgang Hadamitzky, *The Kanji Dictionary* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1996), 1464 and Andrew N. Nelson, *The New Nelson Japanese-English Character Dictionary* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1997), 1008.

¹³³ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshü tojo*, *op.cit.*, 167. Tsung-mi also classifies the Hong-chou school teaching as the teachings that reveal the Truth. Here, I intentionally skip this point in order to emphasize Tsung-mi's intention to declare that the teaching of the Ho-tse is supreme. I deal with the Hong-chou interpretation of Buddha-nature in section 2.8, Analogy of a Mani Jewel.

¹³⁴ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshü tojo*, *op. cit.*, 167.

When it comes to dharma [mind], there are two different aspects: immutability and conditionality. . . . When mastering these two meanings, [one] will know what all Buddhist sūtras and commentaries teach.¹³⁵

For Tsung-mi, immutability refers to the nature that does not change, while conditionality refers to phenomenal appearances that take place in accordance with conditions. Tsung-mi compares the two qualities to goldness and diverse things made of gold, respectively. Immutability corresponds to goldness, the unchangeable nature of gold, while conditionality corresponds to appearances taken in diverse forms of things made of gold.¹³⁶ Tsung-mi also correlates these two aspects to two concepts of mind from *the Awakening of Faith*: Immutable nature and changeable appearances match the mind as suchness (*hsin chen-ju*) and the mind subject to birth-and-death (*hsin sheng-mieh*), respectively. Tsung-mi says:

Both nature (*hsing*) and appearance (*hsiang*) are the meanings of mind. . . . Therefore, Aśvagosa [in *the Awakening of Faith*] takes these two meanings as suchness and birth-and-death. . . . The mind as suchness is the essence of mind, and the mind as birth-and-death is the function of mind.¹³⁷

The mind as suchness refers to the pure nature of mind, free of any deluded thoughts, while the mind subject to birth-and-death refers to the diverse appearances of mind in response to conditions. Here, Tsung-mi also uses a unique Chinese set of terminologies for the two aspects of mind: “essence” (*t’i*) and “function” (*yung*). The unchangeable nature is the essence of mind. Phenomenal appearances in accordance with conditions are functions of mind. All correspondences that Tsung-mi employs are interchangeable.¹³⁸

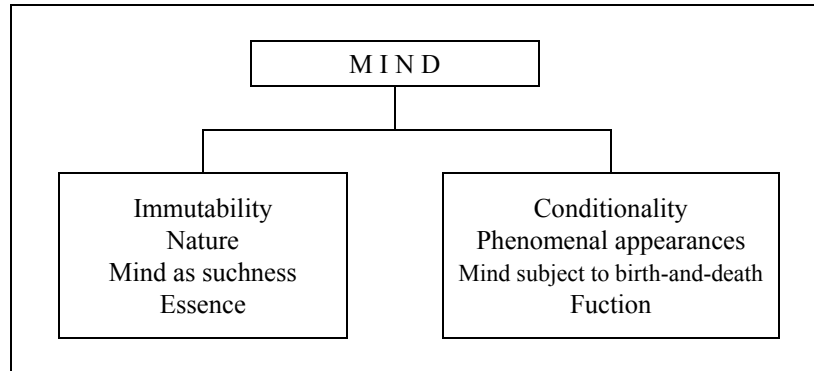
¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹³⁸ Peter Gregory adds ‘root’ and ‘branch’ into each pillar. Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, op.cit., 233.

Table 1. Two Aspects of Mind



4. Two Aspects of the Essence of Mind

Tsung-mi accepts Shen-hui's direct explanation of mind and systematizes it. On the basis of the above-mentioned framework, Tsung-mi explains the essence of true mind as follows:

All sentient beings have empty, tranquil, true mind. [From time] without beginning, it is inherently pure and immaculate. It is bright, unobscured, and thoroughly aware.¹³⁹ Until the future time ends, it is ever-present and not to be annihilated. It is called Buddha-nature and tathāgatagarbha.¹⁴⁰

True mind is inherently empty, tranquil, and, at the same time, thoroughly aware. It is possessed as Buddha nature by all sentient beings. Emptiness (*k'ung*), tranquility (*chi*), and awareness (*chih*) are the characteristics of true mind. Tsung-mi elucidates the meaning of the three words:

¹³⁹ The term *awareness* is a translation of *chih* in Chinese (Korean *chi*). Here, I follow Gregory's translation of the term. It might be useful to introduce his explanation of the term *chih* here: "The word *chih* is primarily verbal, meaning 'to know.' Even when it is used nominally, as it is by Tsung-mi, its verbal force is still retained. What *chih* refers to is an activity rather than a thing. The English word "knowing" might seem to be a better translation of *chih*, as it more faithfully represents both the literal meaning and verbal character of the Chinese world. However, the problem with "knowing" is that the verb "to know" is transitive and demands an object. But Tsung-mi emphasizes the fact that *chih* is intransitive and does not demand an object": Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, *op.cit.*, 244.

¹⁴⁰ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, *op. cit.*, 131.

“Empty” means empty of all phenomenal appearances. . . . “Tranquil” only refers to the principle of the immutability of the true nature and is not the same as nothingness. “Awareness” refers to the fact that the very essence is self-revelatory and is not the same as discrimination. Only these are the essence of true mind.¹⁴¹

Tsung-mi identifies the essence of mind as empty tranquil awareness. The terms “empty” and “tranquil” do not imply nothingness, but the very presence of immutable mind, free of deluded thoughts. The term “awareness” means that the essence of mind is self-revelatory without being stimulated by phenomenal objects. Tsung-mi thus maintains that the essence of mind is simultaneously unchanging and functioning. There are both static and dynamic modes in the one unchanging essence of mind. Awareness is the crucial aspect of mind that the teachings of Revealing the Truth characterize. Thus, it is worthwhile to look in more detail at awareness.

5. Awareness as Function

Tsung-mi often mentions awareness in the following phrases: “numinous awareness” (*ling-chih*),¹⁴² “numinous awareness unobscured” (*ling-chih pu-mei*),¹⁴³ “ever present thorough awareness” (*liao-liao ch’ang-chih*),¹⁴⁴ and “empty tranquil awareness” (*k’ung-chi chih*).¹⁴⁵

Awareness is important because it shows the dynamic aspect of mind. Mind is not a static ground that has no function. Mind possesses self-revealing awareness as an active function, which makes sentient beings different from insentient beings. Tsung-mi says,

The awareness mentioned here is not the awareness of realization. It surely means that true nature is different from [insentient nature], such as the void,

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 333. Here, I consulted Gregory’s translation. For his translation on this paragraph, see Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, *op. cit.*, 216.

¹⁴² Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, *op. cit.*, 329 and 332.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 95, 317, and 336.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 131, 333, and 336.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 322, 329, and 333.

trees, and stones. . . . This is the ever-present awareness as true nature of suchness.¹⁴⁶

True nature characterizes ever-present awareness, unlike insentient nature, which has no dynamic aspect. Ever-present awareness is not what can be realized. Rather, it is the inherent true nature that all sentient beings, whether awakened or deluded, possess. Thus, awareness is different from wisdom attained through religious practice:

True wisdom and true awareness are different from each other. . . . According to the teachings that reveal nature, realizing the sacred principle (*sheng-li*) is wisdom while true nature that sages and ordinary persons share is awareness. Thus, wisdom is partial while awareness is universal.¹⁴⁷

Both ordinary people and sages share awareness, while only sages possess wisdom. Awareness is intrinsic nature of mind, while wisdom is a spiritual insight obtained through religious practice. Ordinary people possess empty tranquil awareness as their true nature; they can become sages if they see their true nature and realize wisdom. Tsung-mi says:

The master Ho-tse points out the presence of awareness at the place of emptiness without forms, and therefore enables people to realize their mind. People finally attain Buddhahood since [awareness] is always present, though [many] lives and generations pass.¹⁴⁸

Awareness is a ground for attaining wisdom. It is the potential to realize Buddhahood, always present as an intrinsic awakened nature within both ordinary people and Buddhas.¹⁴⁹

6. Awareness and the Phenomenal World: Nature Origination (*hsing-ch'i*)

According to Tsung-mi, awareness is the essence of mind. It is unchangeable, not being disrupted by the diversity of phenomena. However, it also becomes a ground for diverse phe-

¹⁴⁶ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, *op. cit.*, 132.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁴⁹ This clearly shows that Tsung-mi accepts the concept of intrinsic awakening from *the Awakening of Faith*.

nomena to take place. For Tsung-mi, there are two kinds of function in the mind: (a) awareness and (b) functioning in accordance with conditions. Tsung-mi explains the difference between the two in terms of the paradigm of essence and function:

The essence of true mind has two levels of functioning. One is the intrinsic functioning of self-nature. The other is its functioning in response to conditions. . . . The ever-present tranquility of mind is the essence of self-nature. Constant awareness of mind is the functioning of self-nature. [Constant awareness] enables functioning in response to conditions, which includes speech, discrimination, bodily movement, etc.¹⁵⁰

Self-nature here is used as a synonym for true mind. Emptiness and tranquility are the essence of self-nature. Awareness is the functioning of self-nature; it gives rise to functioning in accord with conditions. All kinds of “psycho-physical functions,”¹⁵¹ though nothing themselves but phenomena, are based on awareness. Thus, nature functions as the cause of phenomenal appearances. This is the Hua-yen doctrine of “nature origination:” appearances originate from nature.¹⁵² The doctrine is a unique Chinese twist of the doctrine of “interdependent origination.” It explains the way sentient beings, who do not see interdependent origination, construct the world in their consciousness, which the doctrine of interdependent origination is little concerned about.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, op. cit., 336.

¹⁵¹ “Psycho-physical functions” are the term that Gregory uses to refer to the functioning in accord with conditions in his book *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*. I use it since it well shows that the objective things are always connected to the subjective consciousness: Peter N. Gregory, op. cit., 239.

¹⁵² The Hua-yen doctrine of nature origination is based on the philosophy of the Southern Ti-lun school, which heavily depends on Paramārtha’s interpretation of Yogācāra philosophy. The important thing is that Paramārtha’s version does not deny the existence of the exterior world. On the contrary, Hsüan-tsang, the founder of the Chinese Yogācāra school Fa-hsiang, denies the existence of the exterior world: Paul Diana Y., *Philosophy of Mind in Sixth-Century China*, op.cit., 1-92. For two versions of Yogācāra thought, see Florin Giripescu Sutton, *Existence and Enlightenment in the Lankavatara Sūtra: A Study in the Ontology and Epistemology of the Yogacara School of Mahayana Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 183-202 and Yoshifumi Ueda, “Two Main Streams of Thought in Yogācāra Philosophy,” *Philosophy East and West*, no.17(1967): 155-165.

¹⁵³ Like Yogācāra philosophy, nature origination doctrine focuses more on the issue of subjectivity than

Let us examine this doctrine in more detail. Ever-present awareness in self-nature can grasp the world as it is. All things in the world are empty of their own being. They lack the ability to own their own being and to be themselves by themselves; hence, they lack all independent identity and characteristics.¹⁵⁴ They exist depending on other things. The world of interdependent origination is ineffable. Only the term “suchness” can be used to refer to it. Sentient beings can realize such indescribable truth through seeing their true nature, i.e., their empty tranquil awareness. However, since the awareness is always covered by ignorance, sentient beings do not see the interdependent origination of all things.¹⁵⁵ Tsung-mi asserts that

The ignorance of awareness constructs the realistic view of self. It also gives rise to the bifurcation of consciousness into subject and object. Then, the feelings of like and dislike arise. [Sentient beings] do good and evil things in accordance with their feelings and receive [various] good and bad consequences. They keep transmigrating in the six destinies.¹⁵⁶

Since sentient beings are not aware of awareness, they are attached to the realistic view of the world. The process of differentiation begins: the world as suchness comes to be divided into perceiving subject and perceived objects. Sentient beings project their desires on the world. They verbalize and conceptualize all objects. Phenomenal diversity appears in their consciousness, rather than the world as it is.¹⁵⁷ Sentient beings take such distorted appearances to be real and independent. However, phenomenal appearances do not have origins separate from nature. Ever-present awareness of self-nature causes phenomenal diversity within the empty tranquil

Nikaya and Mādhyamika philosophies: Gadjin M. Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 7-12 and also see footnote 163.

¹⁵⁴ Sallie B. King, *op. cit.*, 7.

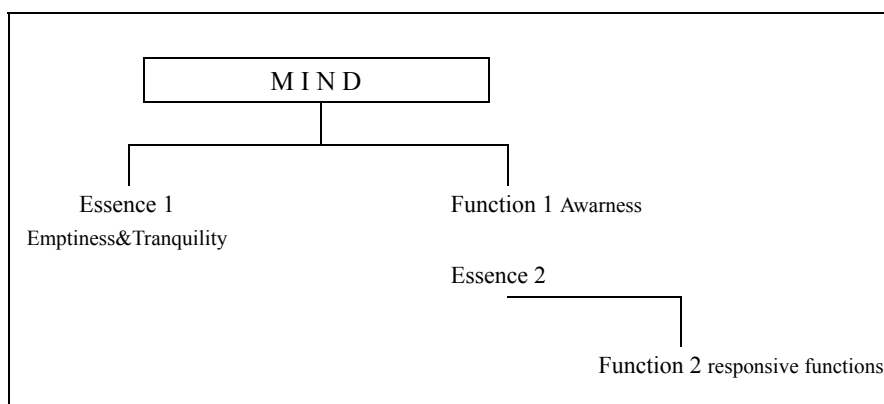
¹⁵⁵ This paper does not deal with the issue of the origin of ignorance in Tsung-mi's thoughts. I will examine it briefly in footnote 204.

¹⁵⁶ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, *op. cit.*, 318.

¹⁵⁷ For Tsung-mi's explanation of this process, see Peter N. Gregory, “Sudden Enlightenment Followed by Gradual Cultivation” in *Sudden and Gradual*, *op. cit.*, 290-298.

mind. The functioning of true mind engenders the diversity of the world. All kinds of psycho-physical activities indicate the presence of awareness in self-nature. Hence, in Tsung-mi's thought, all phenomenal appearances are not totally denied; neither are they totally affirmed. Since they are based on ever-present awareness, phenomenal appearances can be representations of true mind. Since they are caused by the ignorance of awareness, however, they are distorted representations. Even if deeds appear to be evil, they are not inherently evil, separate from true mind. Covered by evil deeds is empty tranquil awareness. Even if deeds appear to be good, they do not lead to awakening. Good deeds only give rise to good consequences in the phenomenal world. Tsung-mi's framework for true mind could be characterized in terms of the essence-function paradigm:¹⁵⁸

Table 2. Tsung-mi's Framework for True mind



7. Analogy of a *Mani* Jewel

Tsung-mi uses an analogy of a *mani* jewel to clarify such a complex structure of mind. Through the analogy, Tsung-mi also clearly works to show the superiority of his view on mind to those of three other Ch'an schools:

¹⁵⁸ Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, op. cit., 240.

A mani jewel is like the one numinous mind; its perfectly pure luminous reflectivity,¹⁵⁹ empty tranquil awareness. [Just as the jewel] has no colors at all, this awareness is inherently not differentiating. It also won't differentiate between sacred and profane, good and evil. Since the essence [of the jewel] is luminously reflective, whenever it comes into contact with external objects, it can reflect all different colors. Since the essence [of mind] is ever-present awareness, whenever it comes into contact with conditions, it can differentiate between the shades of right and wrong, good and evil, and can even produce or create all manner of mundane and supramundane phenomena. This is its conditioned aspect. Even though the [reflected] colors are themselves distinct, the luminously reflective jewel never changes. Even though ignorance and wisdom, good and evil, are themselves distinct, sorrow and happiness, love and hatred, arise and disappear. The mind as ever-present awareness is never interrupted. This is its unchanging aspect.¹⁶⁰

Here, the jewel is luminously reflective as well as pure. Because of its luminous reflectivity, the jewel reflects any color when it comes into contact with external objects. The ever-present awareness of mind causes all phenomena in accordance with conditions. However, such awareness of mind is unchanging. The very jewel and its luminous reflectivity are never affected by external objects. Even when the jewel reflects the black color, its entire surface becomes completely black, and its luminosity is no longer visible, the jewel itself does not become black and still has its luminosity under the black color. According to Tsung-mi, the Hōtse school of Ch'an directly reveals the essence of mind as empty tranquil awareness. As a jewel reflects everything and forms an image of it, so awareness gives rise to phenomena in accordance with conditions. The analogy can be summarized as follows:¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ "Luminous reflectivity" is a translation of *ming* in Chinese. Here, I follow Gregory's translation. The term *ming* literally means "bright" and "shining." However, Gregory's translation shows well the intention of this analogy. For Gregory's translation of this term, see Peter Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, *op. cit.*, 243-244.

¹⁶⁰ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, *op.cit.*, 322. I translate this analogy with reference to the translations of Peter and Robert E. Buswell. For Gregory's translation, see Peter Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, *op. cit.*, 246. For Buswell's translation, see Robert E. Buswell, *The Korean Approach to Zen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), 272.

¹⁶¹ Peter N. Gregory, *op. cit.*, 239.

Table 3. Tsung-mi's Analogy of Mind

Mani jewel	Mind	Ontology
Mani jewel Luminous reflectivity Reflected images	Ever-Present tranquility Ever-present awareness Psycho-physical activities	Essence of self-nature Functioning of self-nature Functioning responding to conditions

Tsung-mi uses this analogy for criticizing the three contemporary types of Ch'an: Hung-chou, Northern, and Ox-head. The Hong-chou school, he argues, overemphasizes functioning in accordance with conditions. It considers every activity to be true, whether it is good or evil. Greed, anger, compassion, good deeds, and evil deeds are all manifestations of Buddha nature. There is nothing but Buddha nature. For Tsung-mi, such a possible antinomian tendency is due to ignorance of awareness. In the metaphor of a mani jewel, the Hong-chou school does not acknowledge the luminous reflectivity of the jewel. Since it is only familiar with the colors reflected on the jewel, it cannot discriminate between the pure jewel and the reflections on it. The Hong-chou school, Tsung-mi says, believes that the reflections on the jewel are the jewel itself.¹⁶²

Tsung-mi criticizes the Northern school as dualistic. In his view, the Northern school thinks that mind and phenomena are separate from each other.¹⁶³ It considers all phenomena to be independent of true mind, since it does not know that they are caused by the functioning of true mind. It only knows the static phase of mind. For them, mind is only empty and tranquil.

¹⁶² Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, *op.cit.*, 326.

¹⁶³ According to Tsung-mi, the Northern school shares the same philosophical viewpoint with the Fa-hsiang school. The Fa-hsiang school believes that ālayavijñāna, the cause of phenomena, is separate from tathāgatagarbha. On the contrary, Tsung-mi as the fifth patriarch of the Hua-yen school identifies ālayavijñāna with tathāgatagarbha: Peter N. Gregory, *op.cit.*, 230-234.

The northern school thinks that the colors reflected on the jewel are really dubbed on the jewel. It tries to sweep them away in order to find the pure jewel.¹⁶⁴

The Ox-head school is nihilistic for Tsung-mi. It is too preoccupied with the empty aspect of mind. It asserts that neither phenomena nor mind itself exists at all. There is nothing unchanging and abiding. The Ox-head school negates the existence of the jewel itself as well as that of the reflections on the jewel. Here, even the very presence of true mind is denied.¹⁶⁵

Tsung-mi's substantialist interpretation of Buddha nature is clearly shown in his criticism of the Ox-head school. Hence, it will be helpful to look in more detail at Tsung-mi's criticism of the Ox-head school.

8. Tathāgatagarbha as Entity

The doctrine of Buddha nature is closely related to the doctrine of emptiness. Tsung-mi's understanding of the doctrine of emptiness draws on the understanding of this doctrine from the tathāgatagarbha texts. As mentioned earlier, the tathāgatagarbha literature criticizes the interpretation of emptiness in the Perfection of Wisdom literature as nihilistic. Tathāgatagarbha literature claims to provide a balanced interpretation of emptiness: Emptiness does not mean empty of tathāgatagarbha, but empty of defilements. Such a perspective can be found in Tsung-mi's criticism of the Ox-head school – one of the schools holding the doctrine of emptiness as its cardinal principle.

Tsung-mi characterizes the Ox-head school as follows:

In essence, all dharmas are like a dream, and from the very beginning, nothing is of any concern; mind and its objects are intrinsically tranquil, and it is not that they are now for the first time empty. . . . If one had the wisdom to understand

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 327.

this idea, it would still be like a dreaming mind. Even if there were a dharma that surpassed nirvana, it would still be like a dream or hallucination.¹⁶⁶

According to Tsung-mi, the Ox-head School of Ch'an asserts that there is nothing immutable and permanent. Even Buddha nature simply arises and passes away like a dream. It negates the existence of true mind as Buddha nature by interpreting the doctrine of emptiness as empty of Buddha nature. It only knows an empty aspect of Buddha nature, not knowing its non-empty aspect or the very presence of true mind as empty tranquil awareness:

[The followers of the Ox-head school] believe that even the jewel is not real, having heard that all the colors on the jewel are not real. . . . They do not know that the emptiness of colors and reflections on the jewel show the non-emptiness of that jewel.¹⁶⁷

Here, Tsung-mi affirms the existence of the jewel. True mind as Buddha nature is substantial.

Tsung-mi goes on to say that the term "true-suchness" (*chen-ju*) also indicates the very presence of mind:

Mind as true-suchness is the essence [of mind]. It is called "true" because mind is inherently not empty at all. It is also called "suchness" because mind does not change. Therefore, *the Awakening of Faith* calls it mind as suchness.¹⁶⁸

Tsung-mi understands mind as suchness in *the Awakening of Faith* as immutable mind that is not empty. Here, suchness is a term to indicate some qualities of mind.

As mentioned earlier in section II. 2. 4, in *the Awakening of Faith*, the term "true-suchness" has two layers of meaning. First of all, it refers to all things transcending all forms of conceptualization. True-suchness is "the limit of verbalization wherein a word is used to put

¹⁶⁶ Peter N. Gregory, *op. cit.*, 234-235.

¹⁶⁷ Shigeo Kamata, *Zengen shosenshū tojo*, *op. cit.*, 327.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

an end to words.”¹⁶⁹ It is just like saying “Be quiet” to stop all other voices.¹⁷⁰ The qualities or attributes of a thing are not the case for true-suchness here. True-suchness is a term for the world as it is. However, *the Awakening of Faith* also says that true-suchness has two aspects if predicated in words. In this case, true-suchness has empty and non-empty aspects, just as Tsung-mi’s explanation of true mind.¹⁷¹ Tsung-mi only picks up the second meaning of true-suchness from *the Awakening of Faith* and thus reduces it to a synonym for immutable mind, always present as something substantial. For Tsung-mi, tathāgatagarbha, Buddha nature, true mind, empty tranquil awareness, or true-suchness exists as something substantial.

9. Tsung-Mi’s Thoughts on Buddha Nature

The literature on the concept of Buddha nature is a unique tool that Tsung-mi used to understand Ch’an Buddhist teachings. The doctrine of Buddha nature serves as a criterion for classifying all Buddhist teachings. More importantly, it offers a rationale by which Tsung-mi declares the superiority of his Ho-tse school to other Ch’an schools. Tsung-mi can justify his direct explanation of Buddha nature with the scriptural authority of tathāgatagarbha texts.

Tsung-mi defines the essence of Buddha nature as empty tranquil awareness. All sentient beings possess this empty tranquil awareness as their true nature of mind. Although mind is totally covered by ignorance, its empty tranquil awareness remains pure and unchanging. This unchanging pure mind is also a ground for diverse phenomena. Ever-present awareness causes the diversity of the world. Just as external objects are reflected on the mani jewel because of its reflectivity, all phenomena can arise in mind because of its awareness. Awareness

¹⁶⁹ Yoshito S. Hakeda, *The Awakening of Faith Attributed to Asvaghosha*, op.cit., 33.

¹⁷⁰ According to Hakeda, this is Fa-tsang’s interpretation on the term “suchness.” Ibid., 33.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 31-36.

links the empty and tranquil mind (mind as suchness) with mind full of all diversity (mind subject to birth-and-death).

Tsung-mi asserts that Buddha nature within all sentient beings is the substantial entity, consisting of Buddha's eternal and unchanging virtues. This assertion raises a couple of questions about human reality and religious practices: if Buddha nature is the inherent ontological essence of human beings, why do we not experience ourselves as Buddhas? Why do we need to cultivate religious practices for attaining virtues that we already possess? Tsung-mi replies to these questions by providing a unique interpretation of the tradition given to him. Using the Chinese discourse on awakening and practice in terms of "sudden" and "gradual," Tsung-mi suggests a new Buddhist path from suffering to liberation: "sudden awakening followed by gradual practices" (*tun-wu chien-hsiu*).

CHAPTER 5

TSUNG-MI'S BUDDHIST PATH TOWARD AWAKENING

Chinese Buddhist Discourse on the Concepts of “Sudden” and “Gradual”

As Peter Gregory pointed out, the concepts “sudden” and “gradual” were among the means used by Chinese Buddhists to set up a soteriological path to meet their own religious needs.¹⁷² Though sometimes exploiting them for polemical reasons, they employed the concepts to elaborate on their unique understanding of the meaning of awakening and its mechanism.

In the history of Chinese Buddhism, Tao-sheng (ca.360-434) first stirred up debate about awakening and practice in terms of sudden and gradual. He advocated the concept of “sudden awakening” against that of “gradual awakening” promoted by Hui-kuan (363-443). Hui-kuan claimed that there were a series of steps to follow that combined practice and awakening, using an analogy of mountain-climbing in which the higher one climbs, the wider his or her view becomes. On the contrary, Tao-sheng asserted that since Truth itself is non-dual, awakening to it cannot be accomplished in steps. For Tao-sheng, awakening is a one-time experience that occurs all at once, not in a gradual manner. He, however, did not totally deny Hui-kuan's gradual approach. Although he championed “sudden awakening,” Tao-sheng accepted a series of practices as necessary to attain the ultimate awakening.¹⁷³ Liu Ch'iu, one of

¹⁷² Peter N. Gregory, “Introduction” in *Sudden and Gradual*, op.cit., 1-5.

¹⁷³ For details of the debate between the two, see Young-ho Kim, *Tao-sheng's Commentary on the Lotus Sūtra*, op.cit., 29-34 and Whalen Lai, “Tao-sheng's Theory of Sudden Enlightenment Re-examined” in

Tao-sheng's followers, compared Tao-sheng's approach to a tree-cutting: a tree stands firmly until a certain breaking point.¹⁷⁴

Perhaps the best-known Chinese figure to use the concepts of sudden and gradual polemically was Shen-hui (684-758). Shen-hui attacked the Northern school, more popular at his time, as inferior because the school, he argued, taught the gradual doctrines about awakening and practice. According to Shen-hui, the Northern school masters prescribed a formula to progressively purify oneself along the path toward perfect awakening: they urged followers to get engaged in the long process of practices and cultivate their minds for achieving that ultimate goal. Shen-hui despised this Northern approach as dualistic and gradual and claimed that his approach was non-dual and sudden, focusing on the realm beyond all forms of dualism.¹⁷⁵

Both Tao-sheng and Hui-kuan accepted a series of steps in practice as necessary, although they differed on whether awakening is accomplished only once in its entirety or gradually as each step is completed. On the other hand, Shen-hui raises a question about the very nature of Buddhist practice: how can it contribute to awakening? Or is it a necessary precondition for awakening? As John McRae pointed out, Shen-hui weakens the concept of practice as an intentional and conscious effort.¹⁷⁶ According to McRae, although Shen-hui admits the concept of gradual spiritual growth, he believes it to be spontaneous and to develop naturally, as shown in his analogy of a child, who is complete at birth, growing into an adult. For Shen-hui, Buddhist practice naturally flows out of the experience of awakening. From this vantage point,

Sudden and Gradual, op.cit., 169-200.

¹⁷⁴ T9.384a. Cf. *Chao-lun*, ch.9, in T45.160a: re-quoted from Yong-ho Kim, op.cit., 32-33.

¹⁷⁵ John R. McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, op.cit.

¹⁷⁶ John R. McRae, "Shen-hui and the Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment" in *Sudden and Gradual*, op.cit., 254 and 227-275.

it seems natural that Shen-hui did not present any specific regimen for cultivation. However, Tsung-mi, though claiming descent from Shen-hui, emphasizes the necessity of conscious effort in Buddhist practice. Now, let us turn into Tsung-mi's explanation of awakening and practice.¹⁷⁷

Tsung-mi's Analysis for the Concepts of Sudden and Gradual

Tsung-mi explains five different ways that the concepts of *sudden* and *gradual* are used in the context of Buddhist discourse on awakening and practice. Tsung-mi intends to affirm that the Ho-tse model is the most appropriate way to pursue Buddhist practice. Let us examine his analysis of the concepts of *sudden* and *gradual* in more detail.¹⁷⁸

1. Gradual Cultivation Followed by Sudden Awakening. According to Tsung-mi, after a long series of practices, one eventually experiences perfect awakening. Tsung-mi illustrates this formula by means of two analogies – tree-cutting, and traveling to a distant city: (a) one gradually cuts a tree until it falls down suddenly and (b) one approaches a city with each step until he or she reaches it suddenly. Here, “gradual cultivation” refers to a series of steps toward a certain goal, while “sudden awakening” is the moment in which that goal is achieved suddenly.

2. Sudden Cultivation Followed by Gradual Awakening. Tsung-mi likens this approach to someone learning archery. “Sudden” refers to the acts of paying direct attention to a target while “gradual” refers to the process in which released arrows gradually get nearer the target. Hence, “sudden cultivation” means a conscious and attentive act rather than cultivation per-

¹⁷⁷ I consulted Peter N. Gregory's treatment of this topic: “Sudden Enlightenment Followed by Gradual Cultivation” in *Sudden and Gradual*, op. cit., 279-312.

¹⁷⁸ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 191-192 and Peter N. Gregory, op. cit., 282-285.

fectured all at once. “Gradual awakening” means that awakening is progressively perfected through the repetitive acts of “sudden cultivation.”

3. Gradual Cultivation Followed by Gradual Awakening. The analogy that Tsung-mi employs for this position is someone climbing a nine-story-tower: since one’s view widens with each higher step, he or she tries to climb further and further. Here, both cultivation and awakening are gradually improved toward perfection.

In these three models, Buddhist practitioners first perform diverse formulas of practice and, as a result, they reach awakening. Tsung-mi labels such awakening actualized by practice “realization awakening” (*cheng-wu*), which is final and perfect. However, in the following two models, in which “sudden awakening” precedes cultivation, Tsung-mi signifies another kind of awakening: “In the case that one cultivates based on awakening, awakening here refers to ‘understanding awakening’ (*chieh-wu*)”¹⁷⁹ The next two models can be explained in terms of these two kinds of awakening.

4. Sudden Awakening Followed by Gradual Cultivation. Tsung-mi explains this position by quoting from *the Avatamsaka sūtra*: “when one aspires to Buddhahood, he gains true awakening of the world as it is (*cheng teng-chüeh samyaksambodhi*) and then cultivates along the path of Bodhisattva to realize [the Truth].”¹⁸⁰ Tsung-mi identifies this position with the Ho-tse model of practice, to be considered in more detail in the next chapter.

5. Sudden Awakening and Sudden Cultivation: Tsung-mi says that this model is only for those who have the highest capacity and aspiration: thanks to strenuous practice in their past lives, they understand all Buddhist teachings and realize the Truth the moment they listen to a Bud-

¹⁷⁹ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 191.

¹⁸⁰ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 191.

dhist teaching. Tsung-mi illustrates this situation with two analogies: (a) All defilements are suddenly eradicated just as myriad fibers are cut off all at once when a cloth is cut off; (b) All Buddha's virtues are suddenly accomplished just as myriad fibers are dyed all at once when a cloth is dyed.

Tsung-mi's analysis clarifies the meanings of awakening and practice in terms of sudden and gradual. In the first three models, awakening implies "realization awakening," which is the final and perfect realization of the Truth. This "realization awakening" can be attained in two different ways: the first model presents it as an instantaneous experience in which perfect awakening is entirely consummated all at once, while the second and the third models grant it as the process in which awakening is gradually consummated.¹⁸¹ There are also two different kinds of cultivation: the first and the third models refer to a series of practices that effectuate awakening; the second model refers to the intentionality of a certain act.

Although Tsung-mi does not classify the existing Buddhist theories and practices in his analysis, each model can be identified. The first and the third models correspond to Tao-sheng's sudden approach and Hui-kuan's gradual approach, respectively, judged from the similarity of analogies: the first model and Tao-sheng use the same analogy of tree-cutting and the third model and Hui-kuan use the analogy of climbing to a great height. The second model can also be identified with the Northern school's position because both emphasize conscious effort to achieve the ultimate goal.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Gregory says that the second and the third models that characterize "gradual awakening" can be converged into "gradual cultivation" within the first model that characterizes "sudden awakening." If so, awakening in the first model can be gradually consummated as each step of practices is completed, leading to the reduction of all the first three models to the third model of "gradual cultivation followed by gradual awakening." For Gregory's explanation, see Peter N. Gregory, *op.cit.*, 284.

¹⁸² Later Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089-1163) uses the same analogy in order to explain his model of K'an-

Tsung-mi, however, refuses all three models as false practices:

Cultivation not based on awakening is not true cultivation (*fei chen-hsiu*). There is nothing true in false cultivation. Isn't it true that cultivation of the Truth should be based on the Truth? This is why a sūtra says, "If someone has never heard about this teaching, he cannot realize the Truth even if he cultivates all Buddhist practices."¹⁸³

Denying other existing Buddhist paths, Tsung-mi asserts that the last two models that characterize "understanding awakening" are true cultivation. These two models introduce two kinds of awakening: "understanding awakening" and "realization awakening." For Tsung-mi, "understanding awakening" is the moment one gains true awareness of the world as suchness and therefore always occurs in a sudden manner, whereas "realization awakening" can be either the process toward perfection or the instantaneous experience of perfection. From this vantage point, the fourth model can be reformulated in the following three stages: "understanding awakening – gradual cultivation – realization awakening." Here, "realization awakening" refers to the process in which one consummates his awakening gradually through practice. The fifth model, as mentioned before, is only for those who cultivated themselves in their past lives and, as a result, have the highest spiritual and physical abilities in this life: they accomplish all three stages set up in the fourth model all at once. Tsung-mi surely asserts that this approach is not appropriate for ordinary people.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, Tsung-mi's analysis demonstrates his intention to boost up the Ho-tse model of "sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation" to be the most correct and most appropriate. Tsung-mi's explanation of the five different models of practice in terms of sudden and gradual can be charted as follows:

hua meditation. Rober E. Buswell, Jr., "The Shortcut Approach of *K'an-hua* Meditation" in *Sudden and Gradual*, op.cit., 367, no. 78.

¹⁸³ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 191.

¹⁸⁴ *Yü-jen so pu-chi*: Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 191.

Table 4. Tsung-mi's Explanation of the Five Models for Cultivation

	Model	Understanding awakening	Cultivation	Realization Awakening	Tsung-mi's Assessment
1	Gradual Cultivation Sudden Awakening	×	Series of practices	Instant moment of perfection	False Practices
2	Sudden Cultivation Gradual Awakening	×	Attentive act	Process toward consummation	
3	Gradual Cultivation Gradual Awakening	×	Series of practices	Process toward consummation	
4	Sudden Awakening Gradual Cultivation	Instant moment of gaining true awareness	Series of practices	Process toward consummation	True Practices
5	Sudden Awakening Gradual Cultivation	Instant moment of gaining true awareness	Instant moment of perfection	Instant moment of perfection	

Tsung-mi's View on Human beings

Tsung-mi presents a three-staged model of Buddhist practice: “understanding awakening – gradual cultivation – realization awakening.” A couple of questions are in order: (1) why is “understanding awakening” needed at first, even if human beings possess empty tranquil awareness as their true nature of mind? (2) Why is “realization awakening” needed even if “understanding awakening” is true awakening to the world as suchness? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to explore Tsung-mi's view on human beings, a view that buttresses his model of “sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation.”

According to Tsung-mi, there is no difference between Buddha and sentient beings because they all share empty tranquil awareness as Buddha nature within their minds. However, he also asserts that there is a difference between the two because there occurs awakening and delusion:

The sentient beings in the Six destinies and the sages of the three vehicles all share one-dharma-realm-mind [i.e. Buddha-nature], which is numinous, pure, and bright. Because [original] awakening of the nature of mind is perfect and jewel-like-radiant, there is no need to be named Buddha and sentient beings. However, in accord with delusion and awakening, some generate karma and suf-

fer from [its consequences] and others practice [the Buddhist] way and realize the Truth: the former is called sentient beings, the latter called Buddha.¹⁸⁵

For Tsung-mi, Buddhas and sentient beings are ontologically same because of the universal presence of Buddha-nature, but they epistemologically differ because of delusions. However, Tsung-mi's emphasis lies in the difference between Buddhas and sentient beings. For Tsung-mi, humans are sentient beings who are deluded by beginningless (*wu-shih*) ignorance. Because sentient beings are not aware that their true nature of mind is empty tranquil awareness free from all defilement, they identify themselves with their deluded mind and body, attach themselves to false identities, and give rise to the defilements of greed, anger, and folly.¹⁸⁶ Hence, Tsung-mi asserts that the first and foremost step for right practice is to gain "understanding awakening" of the presence of Buddha nature within the mind.¹⁸⁷ Tsung-mi criticizes the Northern and the Ox-head schools of Ch'an from this viewpoint: the Northern school does not know that the true mind is empty tranquil awareness, and the Ox-head school does not know the very presence of that awareness within mind.¹⁸⁸ According to Tsung-mi, "understanding awakening" also accompanies true awakening of the reality of phenomenal appearances. This point leads to the second question of why Tsung-mi demands further practice and awakening despite such "understanding awakening."

For Tsung-mi, humans are psycho-physical wholes whose mind and body are not separate from each other. Thus, delusion influences not only the human mind but also the body: delusion is therefore embodied:

¹⁸⁵ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 212.

¹⁸⁶ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 342.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 95.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 292 and 313.

Even though one gains awareness that his true mind is Buddha mind, it is difficult to remove defilements all at once because defilements, caused by false identification of four great elements with self and attachment to the self over numerous kalpas, come to be nature of mind. Hence one should gradually cultivate, based on such awareness [i.e., “sudden awakening”], and keep removing defilements. One does not achieve Buddhahood until nothing is left to remove.¹⁸⁹

For Tsung-mi, the epistemological status of non-awakening affects the ontological status of sentient beings. Thus, even though one gains awareness of the true nature of mind, he or she needs to remove embodied defilements. Through the process of removing defilements and cultivating virtuous practices, one’s body and mind advance step by step into perfect realization of the Truth. According to Tsung-mi, if someone is only aware of the presence of Buddha nature, and unaware of defilements, he does not try to cultivate his mind and remove defilements because he identifies his defiled nature with the true nature of mind. Tsung-mi criticizes the Hung-chou school from this vantage point.¹⁹⁰

Tsung-mi demands “gradual cultivation” for embodying the Truth. Here, “understanding awakening” is a necessary condition for right cultivation while “gradual cultivation” is a long process of practices in which one purifies his or her mind and body toward “realization awakening.” Tsung-mi portrays this three-staged path with three analogies: (a) A famous metaphor from *the Awakening of Faith*, waves raised by the wind gradually calm down even though the wind suddenly ceases; (b) frost and dew gradually dry out even though the sun suddenly rises; (c) a baby is suddenly born with four limbs to grow into an adult to perform various things freely with them.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 340.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 308.

¹⁹¹ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 191.

Although Tsung-mi's three analogies depict cultivation as spontaneous, they purport to emphasize that cultivation derives from true nature. By doing so, Tsung-mi lays the fundamental basis for cultivation upon the true nature of mind. However, unlike Shen-hui, Tsung-mi urges practitioners to make a conscious effort to grow spiritually:

Question: After gaining an insight of this mind, how should one cultivate?

Answer: There are two ways to cultivate. Those who cannot reveal [one's true mind], calm down restless mind, or restrain from greed and anger because of heavy defilements should administer various skillful means from various teachings in accord with the symptoms. If [there is some one who] has bright wisdom and acumen with insignificantly thin defilements, [he or she] . . . should rely on one-practice-samādhi [i.e. no-thought-practice].¹⁹²

According to Tsung-mi, there are two different ways to cultivate oneself after “sudden awakening”: (a) various skillful means to purge defilements and reveal the true nature of mind and (b) one-practice-samādhi, which refers to no-thought practice, freely developing from the true mind. The former can be applied to the fourth model of “sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation,” the latter applied to the fifth model of “sudden awakening and sudden cultivation.” Hence, in his three-staged-model of soteriological progress, Tsung-mi demands “gradual cultivation,” a series of conscious and intentional efforts based on various Buddhist teachings to realize the ultimate Truth.

Two processes of Delusion and Awakening

Tsung-mi elucidates his three-staged soteriological path through the process of delusion and that of awakening, which are based on two aspects of ālayavijñāna from *the Awakening of Faith*: awakening and non-awakening. Each process constitutes ten stages. Let us examine

¹⁹² Ibid., 145.

first the process of delusion, describing how delusion generates phenomenal appearances, in more detail.

1. The Process of Delusion¹⁹³

(1) Original Awakening. All sentient beings possess original awakened mind as an ontological ground for the next nine stages to evolve. *The Awakening of Faith* defines “original awakening” as the essence of mind that is free from thought and nothing other than the essence of Buddha mind.¹⁹⁴ Tsung-mi’s analogy is a noble, rich man who lives freely at his home.

(2) Non-Awakening. This refers to the non-awakened aspect of ālayavijñāna. *The Awakening of Faith* says about non-awakening that all sentient beings are deluded by beginningless ignorance.¹⁹⁵ Tsung-mi compares this stage to the rich and noble man falling asleep, forgetting who he is.

(3) Arising of Thoughts. This stage corresponds to the first aspect of the three subtle phenomena (*san-hsi-hsiang*) from *the Awakening of Faith*:¹⁹⁶ ignorance agitates mind, commencing the process of phenomenal evolution. Tsung-mi compares this stage to the dreams that naturally arise while sleeping.

(4) Arising of the Perceiving Subject. Because agitation gives rise to discrimination within the mind, there appears the perceiving subject. This stage corresponds to the second aspect of the three subtle phenomena from *the Awakening of Faith*. Tsung-mi’s analogy for this stage is the consciousness of the dreaming man.

¹⁹³ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 217-218 and Peter N. Gregory, op.cit., 290-293.

¹⁹⁴ Yoshito Hakeda, *The Awakening of Faith* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 37.

¹⁹⁵ Yoshito Hakeda, op.cit., 40.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 44.

(5) Arising of the Perceived Objects. The body and the world manifest as the objects of the perceiving subject within the mind. This stage accords with the final aspect of the three subtle phenomena from *the Awakening of Faith*. Tsung-mi compares this stage to the noble and rich man who finds himself suffering from poverty and perceives things that he likes and dislikes within his dream.

(6) Attachment to Things. At this stage, one takes phenomenal appearances as real and is attached to them. This stage is equivalent to the first movement of the six coarse phenomena (*liu-ts'u-hsiang*) from *the Awakening of Faith*: “discrimination of intellect and second discrimination of feelings with regard to things.” Tsung-mi compares this stage to the man’s attachment to the realistic view of what he perceives within his dream.

(7) Attachment to Self. At this stage, one develops self-consciousness distinct from the perceived objects, corresponding to the third and the fourth movements of the six coarse phenomena from *the Awakening of Faith*: “attachment and speculation.” Tsung-mi’s analogy for this stage is the man’s identification with the person within his dream.

(8) Three Poisons. The three poisons of greed, anger, and folly occur according to feelings of like and dislike. Tsung-mi compares this stage to the man who produces three poisons in accord with his feelings.

(9) Giving Rise to Karma. At this stage, one generates karma, based on three poisonous minds. This stage corresponds to the fifth of the six coarse phenomena from *the Awakening of Faith*. Tsung-mi compares this stage to the man doing diverse good or evil acts.

(10) Receiving Consequences of Karma. Sentient beings suffer the consequences of karma within the six destinies. This stage corresponds to the sixth movement of the six coarse phe-

nomena from *the Awakening of Faith*. Tsung-mi allegorizes the inevitability of the consequences of karmas as follows: “one cannot avoid [the consequences of] generated karmas just as shadows and echoes follow forms and sounds.”¹⁹⁷ Tsung-mi compares this stage to the man being punished for his evil deeds and rewarded for his good deeds.

This ten-stage process of delusion provides the model for cosmogony as well as soteriology: it elucidates the process through which all diverse phenomena originate from the mind and at the same time presents the soteriological path by showing the cause of delusion and karmic causality. Tsung-mi expounds this soteriological path in the process of awakening, which reverses the direction of the process of delusion.¹⁹⁸

2. The Process of Awakening¹⁹⁹

(1) Sudden Awakening. At this stage, one meets a good friend who leads him to gain “understanding awakening.” Tsung-mi describes “understanding awakening” as follows: “one believes that four great elements are not self, that five aggregates are empty, and that his true mind is not empty of Buddha’s virtues and unchanging.”²⁰⁰ He asserts that “understanding awakening” is the result of good deeds in the past lives and relates it to the four faiths from *the Awakening of Faith*: (a) faith in the ultimate source, (b) faith in the numberless excellent qualities of the Buddhas, (c) faith in the great benefits of the Dharma (teaching), and (d) faith in the Sangha whose members are able to devote themselves to the practice of benefiting both them-

¹⁹⁷ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 218.

¹⁹⁸ Tsung-mi’s illustration of the process of delusion plays the same role that the twelve-chained-interdependent-origination does. For the explanation of the soteriological role of the twelve-chained-interdependent origination, see Ronald Nakasone, *The Huan-Yuan-Kuan: A Study of the Hua-Yen Interpretation of Pratītyasamutpāda* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980), 37-42.

¹⁹⁹ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 222-223 and Peter N. Gregory, op.cit., 293-297.

²⁰⁰ Shigeo Kamata, op.cit., 222.

selves and others.²⁰¹ This stage counteracts the second stage of the process of delusion: “non-awakening.”

(2) Resolving to Attain Awakening. The process of “gradual cultivation” starts with this stage. One raises the three minds of wisdom, compassion, and vow. Tsung-mi relates them to the three minds from *the Awakening of Faith*: (a) the mind filled with great compassion, (b) the mind of profoundness, and (c) the mind characterized by straightforwardness.²⁰² This stage counteracts the tenth stage of the process of delusion: “receiving consequences of karma.”

(3) Cultivating Five Practices. At this stage, one cultivates five practices to strengthen the roots of belief raised at the first stage. Tsung-mi enumerates these five practices, based on *the Awakening of Faith*: giving (dāna), morality (śīla), patience (kṣānti), vigor (vīrya), and cessation [of illusion] and clear contemplation (śamatha-vipaśyanā).²⁰³ This stage counteracts the ninth stage of the process of delusion: “giving rise to karma.”

(4) Developing Three Minds. At this stage, the three minds from the second stage develop through the cultivation of five practices. This stage counteracts the eighth stage of the process of delusion: “three poisons.”

(5) Emptiness of Self. At this stage, one realizes that his or her self is empty of any substantial qualities. This stage counteracts the seventh stage of the process of delusion: “attachment to self.”

²⁰¹ Yoshito Hakeda, op.cit., 92-93.

²⁰² Yoshito Hakeda, op.cit., 82.

²⁰³ Ibid., 93: Here, the fifth practice is a combination of the fifth and the sixth practices from the Six perfections (pāramitās): meditation (dhyāna) and wisdom (prajñā).

(6) Emptiness of Things. One keeps cultivating the five practices until he or she realizes that phenomenal appearances have no substantial self. This stage counteracts the sixth stage of the process of delusion: “attachment to things.”

(7) Mastery of Things. Having realized the emptiness of things and self in the previous two stages, one realizes that all things are interdependent and interpenetrate each other without obstruction and, as a result, masters all things at this stage. This stage counteracts the fifth stage of the process of delusion: “arising of the perceived objects.”

(8) Mastery of Mind. At this stage, one realizes that all myriad phenomena derive from the mind and that the mind and things interpenetrate each other. He or she masters the mind. This stage counteracts the fourth stage of the process of delusion: “arising of the perceiving subject.”

(9) Freedom from Myriad Thoughts. At this stage, one’s true nature of mind is present in every thought. He or she cultivates the practice of no-thought, soon achieves a state of no-thought, and enters Buddha’s rank. This stage counteracts the third stage of the process of delusion: “arising of thoughts.”

(10) Accomplishment of Buddhahood. At this stage, one accomplishes the whole process of “gradual cultivation” and reaches “realization awakening.” As Tsung-mi explains, “When one is in no-thought, it is equivalent to ‘experiential awakening’ (*shih-chüeh*) . . . [One’s] mind is always in dharma-realm when he or she sees phenomenal appearances. . . . He or she also sees that all sentient beings share true awakening.”

As Gregory points out, these two processes of delusion and awakening constitute a continuum, not two distinct directions. The final stage of delusion introduces the first stage of

awakening: Thanks to the consequences of good deeds, one meets a good friend who reveals the true nature of mind and gains “sudden awakening” of the Truth. Based on this sudden awakening, one follows along the path of “gradual cultivation” and eventually accomplishes the whole process of awakening: “understanding awakening – gradual cultivation – realization awakening.” In the same manner, the final stage of the process of awakening indicates the first stage of the process of delusion: one realizes that the final fruit of “experiential awakening” is none other than original awakening and that all the last nine stages of the process of delusion evolve from the first stage: empty tranquil awareness.²⁰⁴ For Tsung-mi, empty tranquil awareness is the inherent ontological ground for human beings’ experience of awakening and non-awakening.

Tsung-mi’s Buddhist Path

Tsung-mi proposes a Buddhist path of “sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation,” which can be delineated in the following three steps: “understanding awakening – gradual cultivation – realization awakening.” “Understanding awakening” is a precondition for cultivation; “gradual cultivation” is the process through which perfect awakening is embodied; “realization awakening” is the perfect embodiment of the Truth.

²⁰⁴ Here, defilements are adventitious: they cannot affect empty tranquil awareness as Buddha nature within sentient beings. All the texts pertaining to the tathāgatagarbha-Buddha nature literature take this position on the issue of the origin of defilements. They ignore the question of where defilements come from or another related question of where ignorance comes from: each question challenges the Buddhist claim of non-dualism from the ontological or epistemological point of view. Generally speaking, the theories of Buddha nature, including Tsung-mi’s, cannot reply to them effectively. For this issue within *the Awakening of Faith*, see Peter N. Gregory, “The Problem of Theology in the Awakening of Faith.” *Religious Studies*, op.cit.

This model is based on Tsung-mi's understanding of human reality: due to the beginningless ignorance, human beings are not aware of their innate Buddha nature, develop the realistic view of the self and the world, and eventually suffer from the endless cycle of birth-and-death. Tsung-mi illustrates the process of delusion and suffering in a ten-stage process, which shows that such ignorance has total effects on the human mind and body.

In his soteriological path from suffering, Tsung-mi, therefore, asserts that the first and foremost step is to understand thoroughly the presence of Buddha nature within one's own mind. However, one has not necessarily accomplished Buddhahood even if he or she has such "understanding awakening." Tsung-mi rather demands a process of religious practices for removing defilements. He sets up the ten-stage process of awakening, where each step in that process counteracts the corresponding stage of the process of delusion. Through the process of awakening, one finally reaches "realization awakening," which is the perfect embodiment of the Truth. This final realization of the Truth indicates that both ten-stage processes are based on one single entity: Buddha nature.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Attempting to establish a Buddhist soteriological path, appropriate for the Chinese society of his time, Tsung-mi applied the tradition handed down to him to urgent religious needs. He reinterpreted the tradition, developed a new theory and practice, and handed them down to the next generation.

The discourse on the concept of Buddha nature that had developed over the hundreds of years before him offered a rationale by which he justified and located his interpretation within the Buddhist context of searching for a path from samsara to nirvana. The literature corpus of tathāgatagarbha enabled Tsung-mi to look at the concept of Buddha nature from the ontological point of view by providing him with a unique interpretation of the doctrine of emptiness. Early Ch'an Buddhist traditions also support his ontological interpretation to differing degrees: *The Platform Sūtra* often describes Buddha nature with kataphatic language, and Ma-tsu goes further to say that Buddha nature is the ultimate, eternal and changless.

Based on these traditions, Tsung-mi detailed the cosmological and soteriological map, embracing both the scholastic and the Ch'an traditions. In doing so, he interpreted Buddha nature as "empty tranquil awareness" from the view point of the Ho-tse school of Ch'an. For him, all sentient beings possess this empty tranquil awareness as their true nature of mind. According to Tsung-mi, "empty tranquil awareness" serves ontologically as a basis for a soteriological path as well as epistemologically as a basis for phenomenal appearances: whether it

is covered by defilements, it remains pure and unchanging and becomes the foundation for sentient beings to attain Buddhahood; whether it is disrupted by beginningless ignorance, ever-present awareness brings phenomenal diversity into the minds of sentient beings.

This interpretation of Buddha nature led Tsung-mi to present a Buddhist path of “sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation,” demonstrating his view of human reality. For Tsung-mi, human beings suffer from the psychophysical effects of ignorance despite the presence of Buddha nature within their minds. Relying on this view, Tsung-mi organized the path into three stages: “understanding awakening – gradual cultivation – realization awakening.” According to this model, one should gain awakening that he or she inherently possesses Buddha nature, devote him or herself to a series of practices, aim for purifying the defiled nature, and eventually reach perfect embodiment of Truth.

The Madhyamaka philosophical tradition does not agree with this understanding of Buddha nature and awakening: it leaves no room for a substantialist interpretation of Buddha nature nor an epistemological dualism of awakening and ignorance. Standing on the Madhyamaka philosophical tradition, Matsumoto and Shin labeled Buddha nature tradition “pseudo-Buddhism” or “a heretical teaching.” However, it might be a reckless prejudice to stigmatize an accomplishment from another tradition as false Buddhism from this single point of view. Indeed, is it not hubris and prejudice to say that one single religious claim can hold the mystery of Truth completely?

Considering Buddhist efforts to present paths to liberation from the time of Śākyamuni, Tsung-mi’s claim should be accepted as a legitimate path. If there is no eternal Buddha nature and there is only a temporary being, the soteriological path would be impossible. If all things

are already awakened, the path would be unnecessary. For sentient beings who suffer in the samsaric world, the self-awareness that their sufferings are caused by ignorance becomes the first step toward liberation, and the belief that they possess eternal Buddha nature makes them keep cultivating themselves toward liberation without falling back. After a long process of cultivation, they eventually reach perfect realization of Truth and declare, “All sentient beings are Buddha 衆生即佛 しゅじょうが すなわち ぶっただだ!”

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