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## BUDDHIST CONTROVERSY IN EARLY FIFTH-CENTURY CHINA

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Included in Tao-hsüan's *Kuang Hung-ming-chi* is a little-noticed "Discourse on Various Profound Meanings in the Buddha's Teaching" by Yao Hsing,<sup>1</sup> ruler of the Later Ch'in during 383 - 415. The royal treatise seems simplistic; the text itself is corrupted. The piece has attracted little attention from scholars.<sup>2</sup> After all, Yao Hsing is better known as the barbarian ruler who patronized Kumārajīva the translator than for any original thinking himself. That is still true but the present study will introduce the said *Discourse* as an important signpost of the times. It reflects both significant institutional changes in the patronage of the faith and some unsettling philosophical controversy in the early fifth century. To unravel these requires more than stylistic philology and more than doctrinaire Buddhology. One must relive the tensions of that era.

The *Discourse* is actually an exchange of opinions between Yao Hsing and the king and Yao Sung, his brother and Marquis of An-ch'eng. It began when the king, upon the last wish of the Empress, sent to the Marquis a pearl-laden statue of the Buddha. It was presumably a treasured devotional object that belonged to her, and the gift might have been to compensate a similar one Yao Sung had yielded as a gift to the famed gentry monk, Huiyuan of Lu-shan, in the South in 405 at the urging of the king.<sup>3</sup> It seems that Yao Hsing happened to discover, at the bottom of a drawer, some dated thoughts he had once had concerning matters in the Buddha-Dharma. One of these concerns the matter of the Three Times (past, present, future) which he had already discussed with Kumārajīva and to which Kumārajīva had sent an approving reply. This reply he enclosed for his brother. However there were three other pieces, drafted around the same time with which Yao Hsing had also hoped to engage Kumārajīva. Unfortunately, Yao Hsing now recalled, Kumārajīva had "suffered a turn for the worse" and so the pieces were unsent, left at the bottom of the drawer. What with political unrest and the Empress' death taking his mind off such lofty topics, Yao Hsing had forgotten about them until this chance to exchange views with his brother. Yao Sung then wrote back, hardly daring to contradict Kumārajīva's approval of the thesis on the Three Times but more willing to air a friendly disagreement over the other three topics: on Prajñā, Śūnyatā and a rather obscure issue relating to the Buddha's Light (see infra). Yao Hsing wrote back defending his original reading, and Yao Sung prudently bowed out of the debate, thanking the king for his instructions. The *Discourse* as such ends here. Fortunately, we have an additional piece of information, a postscript as it were. It seems that Yao Hsing, maybe sensing the prudence of Yao Sung, wanted a more public and more decisive victory. He showed the exchange to Seng-chao, the famed disciple of Kumārajīva an expert on the Emptiness philosophy, in effect asking him to adjudicate. Seng-chao was in mourning for Kumārajīva but could hardly refuse and could certainly not undermine the king's thesis. He sided with Yao Hsing in the essay "Nirvāna as Nameless"<sup>4</sup> which became part of the collected essays of Seng-chao, the *Chao-lun*. In that sense, the *Discourse* is more than the intellectual pastime of a king and a nobleman, two amateur philosophers (though I do not think they are so

uninformed); it involves also the authoritative translator Kumārajīva and the much-respected expositor Seng-chao, professional thinkers.

In that larger context, we should appreciate the *Discourse* for what it reflects of (a) the social and institutional status of the Buddhist *sangha* during that critical period, and (b) certain philosophical problems current in the first decade or so of fifth-century China. These we will explain, if somewhat tersely, prior to a translation and analysis of the issues involved in the debate between the two Yaos.

#### THE LARGER SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISCOURSE

The depth of Yao Ysing's understanding aside, even the existence of just such a discourse should defuse the oft-made and too often unquestioned characterization of Buddhism under the Northern barbaric regimes as Buddhism founded upon these uncouth foreigners' gullibility in the face of magic. Moreover, the employment of Kumārajīva and the acknowledgement of Seng-chao's wisdom indicate a very fortunate turn in the evolution of the Chinese *sangha*.

The traditional characterization of Northern Buddhism as Buddhism founded upon magic goes back to the Buddhist records themselves. Fo-t'u-teng is justly seen as one instrumental in spreading Buddhism in the North, and his biography tells how he "bewitched" Shih Lo, ruler of the Later Chao (328 - 352), by miraculously drawing a lotus flower out of the water in his begging bowl.<sup>5</sup> Too much has been made of this incident -- and wrongly too. If it is meant to show that the North, being barbaric, was more susceptible to such supernatural events than the Chinese, that is, 'civilized' South, then one should recall how it was a Neo-Taoist who compiled the tales of the bizarre known as the *Shou-shen-chi* -- except these were not regarded as 'fiction' (*hsiao-shuo*: "minor tradition" is the original meaning) -- not until Sung -- but as actual facts, divine happenings (*shen*) worthy of *shou* (literary search). If, on the other hand, the "lotus in the begging bowl" is simply magical, one should note that this is no simple magic and certainly not very utilitarian. The episode is actually a hierophany, to use an Eliadean term. It was meant to underscore the transcendental nature of the Dharma ("the lotus above the water") as represented in the holy vocation of the monk ("the begging bowl"). Shih Lo did not bow to magic; he bowed to the other worldly calling of a living saint, an exemplar of Truth.

At any rate, not all monks were magic-inclined; many more I suspect had magic imposed upon them due to a demand for such powers at the time. Tao-an and Kumārajīva were clearly more philosophic souls, but they fulfilled the then-current role of being soothsayers and war prophets for their militant patrons in those unsettling days. Such demythologization of magic aside, Yao Hsing in this *Discourse* and in his patronship of Kumārajīva clearly shows that barbarians were more than uncouth ruffians. After all, Yao Hsing won Kumārajīva's approval for his crisp reading of *śūnyatā* (Emptiness) -- not as nonbeing or nothingness but as the "emptying of both being and nonbeing." Yao Hsing's discourse on "profound meanings in Buddhism" is clearly also more than just a royal pastime; he quite excelled himself, as we will see, and he was committed to both the faith and the learning thereof. Yao Sung was an even better dialectician. The whole Yao clan had a cultured bent not expected, by sinophiles, of *barbaroi*. Yao Hsien, the prime

minister, knew the tradition well enough to specify that the *Ch'eng-shin-lun* of Harivarman be translated. A bad choice, some might say later, but a sign of a knowledgeable ability that few Chinese had at the time.

These "cultured barbarians" changed the whole direction of Buddhism in the Central Plains around the 400s because they were indeed well versed in Buddhist *gnosis*. It was under them that Kumārajīva was given a free rein (relatively) to render an enormous amount of largely philosophic Mahayana *sūtras* and *śāstras*, a choice that reflects both Kumārajīva's own proclivity and the patrons' receptivity. It was actually a rather narrow range of work compared with the wide spectrum offered by Dharmakṣema in Liang-chou.<sup>6</sup> What we should not overlook is that Kumārajīva could easily have not been so gainfully employed. His talent was buried during his seventeen years prior to 401; it was Yao Hsing's attack on Lü Kuang and his release of Kumārajīva and subsequent patronage that led to the grand translation project. Had the Yao clan been less intellectually inclined, Kumārajīva's role as the transmitter of Mahayana thought would have been aborted and Buddhist learning in China set back at least half a century. The accidents of his career can tell this.

The fame of Kumārajīva reached China by 379, and Tao-an would have liked to invite him to the capital. Fu Ch'ien who captured Tao-an, in the current "fight for holy men," from Hsiang-yang would indeed so "invite" him. He sent his general Lü Kuang to Kucha to release Kumārajīva. Lü Kang did so, but decided to keep the saint to himself, in Liang-chou, forcing concubinage on him in hope of perpetuating that saintly *charisma*. Lü Kuang did not employ Kumārajīva's talent and it is doubtful if Fu Ch'ien, had he gotten Kumārajīva, would have either. Like Shih Lo and Shih Hu, who did not make use of Fo-t'u-teng's learning, this pair too might just have used Kumārajīva for spiritual security, international prestige and war prophecy only. Fu Ch'ien's dream to conquer the South was dashed in the disaster of 383, and Yao Ch'ang rules Ch'ang-an by 385. Probably charging Lü Kuang with mistreating the saint, Yao Hsing sacked Liang-chou and brought Kumārajīva back to Ch'ang-an in 401. (The charge might have been a ruse, for Yao Hsing could be as wilful as Lü Kuang since he then imposed the same concubinage upon the robust Kumārajīva.<sup>7</sup>) Yao Sung then informed Hui-yüan of Kumārajīva's arrival. A gesture of Buddhist goodwill, it was also diplomacy between two states then on friendly terms with one another. Hui-yuan sent his students, Tao-sheng and Hui-kuan, to study under Kumārajīva in 405 - 406, after having himself corresponded with the master in what is now the *Ta-ch'eng ta-i-chang* (On the Great Meaning of Mahayana) in 403. It is no accident that the first decade of the fifth century marks a leap in Chinese appreciation of Mahayana like no other decade before. The *Discourse* came out of that milieu and contains within it the birth pain of that not-awaysmooth transition, too easily overlooked once the transition was made.

That in the end Seng-chao was honoured with the task of adjudication is also significant. His rise in prominence is very symbolic of a fundamental shift in the make-up of the *sangha*. The *sangha* was expanding. Yao Hsing who placed 800 monks under Kumārajīva and 3,000 under Hui-kuan would be remembered for the first appointment of "monk officials," which included two housekeeping monks in charge of the wealth of donations flowing in to support the group. These are internal administrative offices, not political

appointments, and they signal the independence of the *saṅgha* made possible by the imperial patronage. The economic self-sufficiency of the consolidating temple manorial system with its many privileges would explain the jump in the membership after 400. The temple was then a self-perpetuating co-operation that had secured its right to ordain, that is recruit new members. Although this might be somewhat of an exaggeration, it is well to note that prior to 400, in the South, only the well-off could afford monkhood (for example, Chih Tun had enough money to think about buying a mountain for his retreat -- from another *ming-seng*, monk of renown, who owned the lot). Otherwise, poor aspirants had to attach themselves to powerful patrons such as Ho Chung, who housed "a hundred and more in his private estate-temple." However, such 'guest' monks seldom made the list of *ming-seng* in the then high-brow society. Seng-chao, a copyist who became one of the four leading disciples of Kumārajīva, was snubbed for that reason when he first arrived at Ch'ang-an, but before his death, his worth was fully recognized there. One must credit Yao Hsing with allowing the *saṅgha* to 'take-off' around AD 400; henceforth, it was a community on its own merits drawing its strength from a wider social basis. (This reading runs contrary somewhat to the usual characterization of Northern Buddhism as "state Buddhism" which I regard as a grossly misleading label to what is a far more complex "hierocracy" in the Northern Wei<sup>8</sup>).

The *Discourse*, aside from being a welcome testimony of Yao Hsing's unique personage, is also a clue to solving some nagging problems in Buddhist studies, which are mired in controversies. Two major questions at present exist: (a) Did Seng-chao write "Nirvāṇa as Nameless?" and (b) When did Kumārajīva die, in 409 or 413? These questions came up largely because some scholars could not perceive how Seng-chao could have sided with gradual enlightenment in the said essay. And that in turn raises two problems too seldom asked and never answered: (c) Why it is not improper for Seng-chao to digress into sudden vs. gradual enlightenment despite the absence of this controversy in the letters between Yao Hsing and Yao Sung? and (d) Why is it fully comprehensible that Seng-chao, later claimed by suddenist Ch'an as one of its native sons, should indeed be a gradualist -- and not otherwise? Some untangling of the issues is needed here.

Suspicion that "Nirvāṇa as Nameless" was a forgery is raised by T'ang Yung-t'ung. Basically he noted (a) the discrepancy in dates, (b) the likelihood that Seng-chao cited the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* which was not yet translated in 413, (c) the uncharacteristic stand and expressions found in the treatise attributed to Seng-chao, and (d) his siding with gradualism and reporting on a controversy that seems to postdate 413.<sup>9</sup> Walter Liebenthal was likewise troubled by the seeming anachronism of the subitist debate and Seng-chao's alliance with the 'wrong' party. He would consider at least that section dealing with sudden vs. gradual enlightenment to be a later interpolation by some gradualist who misused Seng-chao's authority.<sup>10</sup> Ōchō Enichi, however, has refuted many of these charges. He showed how (a) the discrepancy of dates can be resolved if one accepts Tsukamoto's suggestion that Kumārajīva died in 409 instead; see later discussion; (b) Seng-chao did not cite from the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* but simply from earlier sources; indeed, the Mahayana text's basic message is not found in Seng-chao's work. Ōchō also disputed Liebenthal's rather arbitrary selection of certain sections as interpolation.<sup>11</sup>

However, even Ōchō who devoted his essay to Seng-chao's article did not really answer (d) why there was a digression into a controversy not found in the exchange he was supposed to be adjudicating. Unless that is better understood, (c) remains a problem not fully answered, i.e. why is "Nirvāṇa as Nameless" a seemingly weak thesis?

First, we will resolve the problem of dating Kumārajīva's death. Seng-chao's piece, dated 413, is supposed to be adjudicating the Yaos' exchange that presumably occurred a short time ago (412-413 at best). Yet Yao Hsing's opening remark gives the impression that he engaged Kumārajīva in a discussion on Time some time back before his "turn for the worse," a political unrest and the Empress' Death, during which Yao Hsing forgot he had these dated thoughts left at the bottom of his drawer. The lapse of time would suggest that Kumārajīva died in 409, the date unearthed by Tsukamoto<sup>12</sup> and that the political unrest was probably the Yang Ch'eng revolt of 412. If Kumārajīva died in 409 instead of the usually accepted date of 413, then the apparent time lapse is well accounted for. Unfortunately, this runs up against Seng-chao's open confession in his 413 treatise that he was still in mourning for Kumārajīva's death. Seng-chao could not possibly be in mourning -- unless poetically -- four years after Kumārajīva died. Even a filial son stops at the 25th month. On top of that, there is the problem of the *Ch'eng-shih-lun* that Kumārajīva completed translating in 412, a fact that few doubted and concerning which the records allow little doubt. Richard Robinson for one does not find Tsukamoto's theory convincing; it could be that the whole series of exchanges -- from Yao Hsing's initial thesis on Time forwarded to Kumārajīva to Seng-chao's final judgement -- occurred in one year, 413.<sup>13</sup> I find that equally unsatisfactory, for old and new reasons listed below.

Walter Liebenthal in his revised work on the *Chao-lun* still sticks by his original contention that there are interpolations in "Nirvāṇa as Nameless." He agrees with Ōchō that Seng-chao wrote the thesis, that it was well publicized by Yao Hsing; but that it was lost in the fire of Ch'ang-an in the fall of Yao's rule in 416; then someone else rewrote, rewadded and added to that original thesis to produce this inferior text. I think Liebenthal still could not free himself from the presupposition that Seng-chao must be a subitist (just because he was so loved by Ch'an later) and let that prejudgement affect his reading of "Nirvāṇa as Nameless." However, his suggestion that Kumārajīva suffered a stroke in 409 by reading that "sudden turn for the worse" as something less than death (which came finally in 413)<sup>14</sup> provides perhaps the best solution to the dilemma at hand -- for us and our different reading of what happened.

There are contextual reasons to prefer 409 as the date for Yao Hsing's initial thesis on Time sent to Kumārajīva and his decision not to send the other three following that 'stroke.' The essay on Time recalls this issue as one mentioned but not resolved in the *ta-fa* (Great Teaching). Yao Hsing also asked the monks around him and they failed to give him an answer. Here it appears that the issue of Time arose when the *Mādhyamika-kārikā* which discourses on it was translated in 409. By 410, Seng-chao supposedly offered his reading in "The Immutability of Things."<sup>15</sup> Yao Hsing did not refer to the latter but could have meant by the *ta-fa* the former. This would help to place his thesis on Time in 409 prior to Seng-chao's explication. We will also

see how Yao Hsing's thesis on Prajñā and Śūnyatā failed to benefit from Seng-chao's "The Emptiness of the Unreal" (410 also) as Yao Sung's critique built itself on it. This too would put the "dated thoughts" -- as Yao Hsing called his treatises<sup>16</sup> -- in the 409 period prior to Kumārajīva's stroke. The stroke would also explain the sudden slowing down of the translation activities. Between 409 and 413, Kumārajīva only translated -- as far as we can tell -- the *Ch'eng-shih-lun*. Who knows, this work, said to be a mistake, might only have had Kumārajīva's oversight.<sup>17</sup> If we accept a stroke in 409 and final death in 413 (prior to Yao Hsing's letter to Yao Sung), we can then account for the seeming time gap as well as Seng-chao's mourning; it will also handle other discrepancies, not least of which is the dating for the other big controversy: When did Tao-sheng and Hui-kuan quarrel over sudden and gradual enlightenment? This issue proves to be even more complex. I can only report on my findings from a separate and longer study.<sup>18</sup>

At first one is tempted to side with Liebenthal on the interpolation of this other controversy. This other debate is very badly dated so that it is open to suggestion as to who copied from whom. If we follow T'ang Yung-t'ung, then a treatise thought to represent Hui-kuan's gradualism (a *Chien-wu-lun*) would be judged as having been developed after "Nirvāṇa as Nameless." If so, Seng-chao could not be reporting Hui-kuan's position.<sup>19</sup> That however would also mean that "Nirvāṇa as Nameless" was forged before Hui-kuan articulated his stand. The other alternative is to simply have Seng-chao abridging a more refined gradualist opinion held by Hui-kuan prior to 413. Yet a puzzling fact exists, not noted by scholars. If the controversy did exist before 413, why do we not find it catalogued as an issue people customarily posed to Kumārajīva for his wise counsel during his life time (before 413)?<sup>20</sup> It is very unlikely that that controversy only rose between Kumārajīva's death and Seng-chao's adjudication of the same year. However, here the "stroke at 409" hypothesis can resolve the discrepancy. If Yao Hsing could decide not to bother Kumārajīva with his imperial treatises after 409, others would also prudently not bother him with this new controversy. We may then date the sudden/gradual enlightenment debate safely between 409 and 413. Seng-chao, who sided with gradualism, was only defending a position taken by his master Kumārajīva in 403 over Ekayāna/Triyāna in his correspondence with Hui-yüan.

Still one piece of the puzzle is missing. Why should Seng-chao digress into this other controversy that was not an issue between the two Yaos? Liebenthal would see this as a reason to regard this as an interpolation. A closer look however will reveal that it was a reasonable digression, even good polemics. The Yaos touched on a sensitive issue that affected that other discussion. In their debate over the "Buddha's Light," Yao Hsing opted for graded perception of it based on the Prajñā tradition; so his was a rational Triyāna position. Yao Sung on the other hand argued for a totalism based on the *Lotus* Ekayāna. Since Yao Hsing in his rejoinder openly claimed primacy for the Prajñā tradition, Seng-chao saw fit to make a cross-reference to an ongoing debate between Tao sheng and Hui-kuan. He aligned Yao Hsing with the majority opinion, gradualism, a position previously taken implicitly in Kumārajīva's explication of Ekayāna and Triyāna (to Hui-yüan in 403). These will be further explained in the translation and analysis toward the end of the essay here.

No scholar, as far as I know, notice this logical link between the Yaos' debate on the Light and the subitist/gradualist divergence on enlightenment. Not even Ōchō who did a thorough job in summing up Seng-chao's treatise. By finding this link, we can put to rest Liebenthal's charge that the section on sudden/gradual enlightenment was later interpolated or that Seng-chao was out of character in defending gradualism. By this link we also can date better the evolution of Tao-sheng's subitist thesis. (See next paragraph). Still some might be nettled by the fact that "Nirvāṇa as Nameless" is not the best of Seng-chao's treatises; it seems to be unlike Seng-chao's better thoughts. Instead of attacking it as forgery (T'ang Yung-t'ung) or defending it as wisdom (Ōchō), there can be a simpler explanation. Namely, Seng-chao was forced by his station to side with the king against a Yao Sung who, in more ways than one, was actually spiritually indebted to Seng-chao for his own dialectical critique of the king. Seng-chao could not be at his best when he so defended, at times, a less defensible position, even digging up Hinayanist categories to justify the king's use of the term *wu-wei* (see translation *infra*). However Seng-chao's sympathy for Yao Hsing's preference for the Prajñā lore over the *Lotus Sūtra* was genuine, so, ironically, Seng-chao's sustained critique of suddenism is not the worst but probably the better portion of his treatise!

Tao-sheng's subitist reflections passed through several phases, but the debate surfaced some time close to 413. The proofs are as follows: The *Pien-tsung-lun* shows that as late as 422 - 423, subitism was not dependent on the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* (already in translation 416 - 417).<sup>21</sup> Rather, it was predicated upon three points: (a) how, since karmic cultivation is endless, enlightenment as a step out of *saṃsāra* has to be sudden; (b) how, as nonbeing is totally different from being, the innate reckoning of it by a mirroring mind (*chao*) has also to be drastically discontinuous; and (c) how, by virtue of the one principle implied in Ekayāna, penetrating wisdom has to be total, not piecemeal. Item (a) was given in a citation from Tao-sheng by Hsieh Ling-yüan, and this seems to be the ur-thesis that predated even 401. At the time, both Tao-sheng and Hui-kuan were at Lu-shan with Hui-yüan and studying *abhidharma* as introduced by Saṅghadeva who translated the *Abhidharma-hṛdaya* at that mountain site in 391. As noticed by Fund Yu-lan, Tao-sheng's subitist thesis is similar to a stand taken by Hui-yüan. *San-pao-lun* (On Three Types of Retribution), dated 395, by Hui-yüan drew on chapter five of the *Hṛdaya* where the final step of enlightenment was specified to be sudden and non-karmic.<sup>22</sup> Item (b) came both earlier and later. Earlier than his stay at Lu-shan, Tao-sheng was a Prajñā-ist; he acquired his taste for the Neo-Taoistic 'nonbeing' and 'principle' at that time. Saṅghadeva, however, condemned the Prajñā tradition as the work of the Devil. As Fan-t'ai will recall for Tao-heng and Hui-kuan, the pair only readjusted to the Prajñā heritage after Kumārajīva in turn debunked Saṅghadeva.<sup>23</sup> This detour is often overlooked, but even the biography of Kumārajīva remembers Kumārajīva's wish to "compose an *Adhidharma* of Mahāyāna ... better than that of Kātyāyanīputra"<sup>24</sup> (of the *Jñāna-prasthāna Śāstra* (trans. Saṅghadeva 383); Kumārajīva blamed him for the mistake known as *abhidharma*) Kumārajīva did restore the Prajñā supremacy.

Both Hui-kuan and Tao-sheng left Lu-shan for Ch'ang-an around 405 - 406,

and it seems that at the time even if Tao-sheng might have already proposed sudden enlightenment -- in the early paired thesis known as "The Good (meaning *nirvāṇa*) entails no Reward (meaning *karma*) (so that indeed) "Enlightenment (into *nirvāṇa*) has to be Sudden to attain Buddhahood," -- Hui-kuan, himself an abhidharmist then, had no objection. Both learned Mādhyamika under Kumārajīva; they differed on its implication for suddenism/gradualism. However, the more decisive difference was over Ekayāna and Triyāna or how the *Lotus Sūtra* should be read. Already in the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* (405), Kumārajīva acknowledged that the *Lotus* is in one sense superior to the *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* -- otherwise the core of Mahayana wisdom -- because the *Lotus* readmits and *arhant* into Buddhahood.<sup>25</sup> This modified the original Triyāna doctrine that kept the three vehicles' *gotra*-lineages distinct, i.e. *śrāvaka* (listeners in Hinayana) would become *arhant* but advance no further. (More in the translation *infra*). In 406, Kumārajīva offered his translation of the *Lotus Sūtra* and Seng-jui's preface noted how for the first time Ekayāna's meaning was clarified. Tao-sheng wrote a commentary some time after (date unclear; it was revised in 432 in light of his final understanding of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*). Although sudden enlightenment was not in this commentary, Tao-sheng already inclined toward a 'monistic' understanding of Ekayāna, making it the One Principle that allows no dualities or three vehicles. This radical reading would take the One as solely true and the Triyāna as multiple and thereby untrue. That for Tao-sheng, would invalidate the enlightenment and liberation traditionally attributed to the *arhant*, the *pratyeka-buddha* and the *bodhisattva*. The moderate and actually the mainline position on the implication of Ekayāna -- one shared by Kumārajīva, Hui-kuan and Seng-chao -- takes the One in Ekayāna (One Vehicle) differently. Indeed, it is true that Ekayāna is the final goal for even the *arhant*, and indeed it is true in some sense that the Triyānas are expediences (*upāya*). However, *upāya* need not imply unreal falsehood; rather it can be real, effective, skillful means. This stand would accept degrees of enlightenment within the *nirvāṇa* the three experienced; it is only that the Saṃyak-sambuddha (or Buddha) had the power of omniscience not available to the lesser liberated ones. In the traditional use of the *daśabhūmi* (Ten Stages) for classifying the relative achievements of the Triyānas, the lesser but enlightened-nonetheless trio occupied the *bhūmis* that transcended the world of *samsāra*, in a series beginning with the lowest achiever, the *śrāvaka*, to the highest, the all-knowing wisdom of the Buddha. Kumārajīva accepted this, but Tao-sheng in a Taoistic sweep of "One and Only" would consider the expediences of three and multiples (the ten *bhūmis* included) to be untrue. *Nirvāṇa* can only be one; enlightenment had to be all or nothing. He was not without justifiable supports but he was, as Hsieh Ling-yün in effect confessed in his *Pien-tsung-lun*, (where suddenism is regarded as a Chinese proclivity), going against the dominant Indian trend. Given Tao-sheng's argument from Ekayāna and the fact that Ekayāna was seen as the key issue by Seng-chao (413) and later Hsieh Ling-yün, we can safely say the subitist position could and did emerge before 413; that is, after the 406 translation of the *sūtra* and, it seems, after 409 (because of Kumārajīva's silence on this matter prior to the alleged stroke). Our conclusion therefore is: "Nirvāṇa as Nameless" is no spurious forgery; its reference to sudden enlightenment is

no spurious interpolation; and we must really place the Yaos' exchange in the larger intellectual context and link it up with Seng-chao's treatise.

## TRANSLATION OF THE CORE EXCHANGE

*Yao Hsing on the Three Times:* In sending the statue to Yao Sung, Yao Hsing enclosed, first of all, a treatise on Time he once submitted to Kumārajīva:

At one time I asked various masters whether the Three Times are real or not. None could offer a proper answer. The matter is also discussed in the Great Dharma [the *Chung-lun* (409)?] but it was not settled there either. Every time I ponder about it, I cannot help having these rash thoughts or giving some speculative expression to them. I know speculations never fathom the (ineffable) principle, but still the meagre sentiments aroused in my breast cannot be kept down. So I offer here these few lines in hope of receiving your kind comments.

I propose that the Three Times are one unity, functioning circularly. The past has gone by but its principle forever remains. By "remaining" I do not mean that it is permanent like the five heaps (*skandhas*) spoken of by the abhidharmist. Rather, it is more like the feet pacing the ground. The real foot has moved on but its footprint remains still. The future is comparable to the fire in the wood. Can we say the fire is present now in the wood? Look and it cannot be seen. Can we say that it is absent? But under the right conditions, it will appear. Furthermore, the *sūtras* state that the Buddha can look into the Three Times. If the three are said not to be there, then he would have nothing to see. If the three are said to be there though, that would constitute the fallacy of the eternalist (the Sarvastivadin who argued for the separate, discrete reality of the three).<sup>27</sup> We should therefore understand that although the past and the future are not confronting our eyes (present to us), their principles serve forever as one another's cause.<sup>28</sup> Because the principles never cease to be, therefore the Buddha may look (and find) past, present and future.<sup>29</sup>

In 409, the *Kārikā* was available but Seng-chao had not offered his essay on the Three Times (the *Immovability of Things* [410]), so Yao Hsing attempted his own solution. Considering the fact that even Seng-chao failed to solve this, we should be forgiving of the king's failing. Yao Hsing knew the *dharma*s of past, present and future should not be frozen into discrete entities like the elemental *skandhas*, but in avoiding that mistake, he only managed to salvage the two other times 'not confronting the eyes' as eternal principles, i.e. one *post facto* print, one latent fire.

*Kumārajīva's Prudent Reply.* Kumārajīva approved the king's thesis; he could hardly do otherwise. However, even as he lent support to it, we also see him adding necessary correctives in his discussion:

Your piece is very penetrating and excellent. Indeed it would not do to say past and future do not exist. The Buddha has said that the *rūpa skandha* (the material element) that is formed in combination within the Three Times is called *rūpa* and the same applies to all five *skandhas*. He

also says that (an action of) mind is born of (the prior mentation of) mind, just like cereals give birth to cereals.<sup>30</sup> Thus we know there must be past and no such thing as an uncaused (*dharma*). He also says that the sixth consciousness, the *mano-vijñāna* (mental consciousness), is born (not of the immediate object-sense but of) the thought that just passed away.<sup>31</sup> Or: how the Right View is a past deed pointing to a future resultant (good). And: how the second of the Ten Supernatural Powers of the Buddha is his ability to know the happenings in the Three Times. It is also said that had there not been past *karma*, there would not be the retribution in the three evil paths.<sup>32</sup> It is furthermore said that the student of the Way who still harbours a mind with defiled outflows does not qualify as yet to be called enlightened (Sage). From these analogies, we know definitely that there cannot be no past. If there is neither past nor future, then the principle cannot be penetrated. This is not permitted by the *sūtras*. However, the twelve *nidānas* (links in the chain of causation)<sup>33</sup> is the most profound of the Buddha's teachings. If a person firmly holds that there is past and future, then he will be contradicting this law. Why? Because it is like some seeds: if the soil and the season are right, then they will sprout roots and grow. If the plant is said to pre-exist within the seed, then it will have need of no conditions. If (the future state) is present prior to it, then it will not be called "conditioned arising" (*pratītya-samutpāda*). If there is prior existence, this will be the eternalist fallacy (of *satkāryavāda*). Therefore one should never say that it is definitely there or not-there. The is-there and is-not-there are statements that accord with particular times. Because deeds have been performed in the past, they cannot be said to be nonexistent. It is also said that since these do not confront the eyes, they cannot be said to be there either. Your treatise is indeed penetrating and has excellent intentions. Furthermore, it is said in the *Larger Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* that the suchness of the past is not separate from the suchness of the present, or of the future. The suchness of the present or the future is not separate from the suchness of the past. This too is not saying that there is no (past) either. This truly is the key purport of the *sūtra*.<sup>34</sup>

The hidden correctives Kumārajīva added are, I think (a) a better appreciation of *pratītya-samutpāda* to counter the king's more naive understanding of causality; (b) a note on the conventional nature of language, 'being' and 'nonbeing,' to counter the king's ontic language; and (c) an emphasis on the uniformity of the suchness of the Three Times, lest the king should make the present more real than the other two.

*Yao Hsing's Restatement for Yao Sung.* It seems that Yao Hsing missed the more subtle points, for he merely repeated his original contention to the Marquis:

The lives of sentient beings span the Three Times. It is like an endless circle. The past and the future may not confront the eyes but their principle is permanently there. Therefore the Buddha can seek out the past to know the past, or reverse the process to know the future.<sup>35</sup>

Yao Sung, eager to engage the king on the other issues, accepted Kumāra-

jīva's approval at this point.

*Yao Hsing on Prajñā and Śūnyatā.* Two of the unsent thesis now belatedly forwarded to Yao Sung deal with the then popular issue of wisdom and emptiness. The one of *Prajñā* is probably titled, at first, "Not abiding with *dharma* but rather with wisdom." It could have been influenced by Seng-chao's "Prajñā is Non-cognizant" essay (404 - 408?). Seng-chao had distinguished non-object-bound "wisdom" from subject-object-defined "knowledge" that cognizes. He depicted the Sage in the traditional common metaphor of a mirror-mind (*chao*) illuminating all without being attached to any particulars. Yao Hsing shows below his familiarity with the scriptural and the native tradition; this barbarian bestrode two worlds, India and China.

The reason why sentient beings have not ascended the path to the Tao is their attachment. Therefore the teaching of the Sage (Buddha) regards as essential freedom from attachment. Therefore it speaks of nonabiding as wisdom (nonabiding *nirvāṇa*). Even though the Great Sage may once more darkly survey and in response mirror all with no end, he too cannot be attached to anything. Attachment would again bring ill. If one wants to make the pilgrim forget the self and the other and dispense with all reliances, (tell him to) be free-flowing like a boat left adrift. Precisely the less he is anchored in anything, the closer he is to the principle.<sup>36</sup>

Yao Hsing also composed some related lines on "the Emptiness of the myriad *dhamas*." The word *wu-wei* and *yu-wei*, nonaction and action, may stand for *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*, nonbeing and being, or *asaṃskṛta* and *saṃskṛta*, but below I would take more the Chinese reading:

The Tao has as its principle *wu-wei*. As if it is *wu-wei* (nonbeing) what further being (*yu: svabhāva*) is there?<sup>37</sup>

Yao Sung had *wei* (action, *saṃskṛta*) instead of *yu* (being) in his citation.<sup>38</sup>

*Yao Sung's Critique of Prajñā and Śūnyatā.* Yao Sung criticized the king's *prajñā* thesis for being subjectively and his *śūnyatā* thesis for being objectively nihilistic. Writing in 412, Yao Sung had the benefit of Seng-chao's famed demonishing of the early *Prajñā*-ist doctrines in his essay "The Emptiness of the Non-Real" (409 - 410). There Seng-chao criticized a *hsin-wu* ("mind as empty") school<sup>39</sup> for succeeding in emptying the mind but failing to truly question the reality of the objects. Now Yao Sung charged Yao Hsing with the same bias (*hsin-wang*: forgetfulness of mind):

... Indeed the six *pāramitās* are perfected principally by nonattachment. As far as the mind (subject) is concerned, it is as your illuminating instruction says. Apropos the objects, the liberation from being seems to be incomplete. This is because although non-attachment may approximate the subtle truth, still there seems to be lacking the total identification (of things) with Suchness (*chen*: the true) and the cessation of both (subject and object). If things are not yet as such Suchness (leading to) that mutual cessation, then I am afraid (your thesis) amounts to what is known as *hsin-wang* (the mere one-sided forgetfulness of mind). When I seek out the dark teachings, I seem to locate something



better. I now put that in crude words to express my foolish opinion. Thus it is said in the *sūtra*, "Perfect the perfection of charity (*dāna*: donation) by seeing that there is no one to be charitable to, because the three items (the donor, the gift, the recipient) are all unascertainable (as real)." When the three items so cease, 'being' and 'nonbeing' have nothing to approximate to. That principle of non-correspondence is then identical with (reality as) illusion. From this we may infer that your teaching of nonattachment is not yet directly (or: truly)<sup>40</sup> forgetfulness of both self and other. Rather, it is only the abandoning of attachment itself.<sup>41</sup>

Yao Hsing is here accused of psychologism or 'mere nonattachment' and of failing to penetrate the illusion of subject and object involved.

Yao Hsing had a thesis about the myriad *dharma*s as basically empty but now that thesis is attacked for its ontological nihilism. Either way, he lost! Yao Sung followed Seng-chao's criticism of the *pen-wu* school. The *pen-wu* school reduced being to a basic nonbeing, preferring nihilism at the expense of the real and failing thereby to see the true identity of what Seng-chao titled as "the emptiness of the non-real." Once more, after praising the king's thesis, the Marquis had second thoughts:

... I wonder what the substance of this *wu-wei* is by which you say one may gain the Way. If its principle is *miao* (*miao-yu*: some mysterious existent), then even if it be "prior to the gods" (*Lao-tzu*),<sup>42</sup> then it is still not the ultimate. If by *miao* you mean the absence of being then there should be a prior cause to the not-nonbeing. As both cause and its designation (or: manifestation) have not been (dialectically) put to rest (by you), can it be considered the way of the nondual? For it is said by the *śāstra*: "If there is nonbeing to nonbeing, then there would be a being (*svabhāva*) to being." If so, the characteristics of being and nonbeing become a matter of 'relative shortening'. (reduction of being to nonbeing). The principle of nonbeing might be mysterious, but I am afraid that that still would amount to the so-called fallacy of the eternalist and the annihilationist. If permanence cannot be established as real, how much less can annihilationism! However, the mistake in (so holding on to) being and nonbeing is due simply to one-sidedness. Therefore the *Chung-lun* (*Mādhyamika-kārikā*) says: "If the mundane truth is not destroyed, the highest truth may also not be so destroyed (or: solved)."<sup>42</sup> The *śāstra* also says, "If the myriad *dharma*s are considered real, then there will not be the Two Truths" (with emptiness as the highest truth). If they are considered empty, then there will be no karmic retribution (where good and evil are real). If there is no retribution, then there is no way to differentiate between the common people and the Sage. If these two (ignorance and enlightenment) are indistinguishable, what good will the way (*marga*: path to enlightenment) be?<sup>43</sup>

Seng-chao would be later placed in the quandary of having to criticize someone who leaned this dialectical art from him.

*Yao Hsing's Rejoinder to Yao Sung.* Yao Hsing thanked his brother but like *ch'ing-t'an* ("pure conversation") practitioners in the South, was not about to give in so easily. He qualified his original thesis in such a way as to defuse

Yao Sung's criticism. It appears that now, on second thoughts, he rephrased his *Prajñā* thesis into "Not abiding with either *drahmas* or *prajñā*," taking that as an object-subject pair. However, it was his weaker defense of *wu-wei* that would force Seng-chao to justify somehow the "nameless *nirvāṇa*," by taking a more *Mādhyamika* reading than the king.

What you cite about the absence of donor, recipient and gift is not so different from my idea of abiding neither with the *dharma*s nor with *prajñā*. Both are but the beginning and the end of the same teaching. Generally speaking, both seek to terminate attachment. What is there to blame or not to blame? If there is neither donor, recipient nor gift, what may one be attached to? That this too endorses nonattachment is thus clear.

You also inquire about the *wu-wei* of the Way that (I set) as the principle (or: about (my designating) nonbeing as the principle behind *wei*). (You suggest the immediate) identity (of things) with the innate emptiness (*svabhāva-śūnyatā*) of the myriad *dharma*s as the (truly) *miao*, mysterious. Should not the emptying of nonbeing be the ultimate? You then cited that Two Truths statement from the *śāstra*, suggesting that the ineffable be called the (ultimate) basis for *wu-wei*. However, when I said, "The practice of the Way ends in *wu-wei*," I did not fully explain the principle on which that is based. Why? This is because sentient beings are perpetually reborn in life and death (*samsāra*) due to their attachment. If they only put an end to (cravings in) the mind, then they will not be reborn. When life and death cease, the hidden spirit (*shen*) will subtly diffuse and become one with the Tao. That is *nirvāṇa*. As it is called *nirvāṇa*, can it entertain any more the attribute of names within itself. (Thus *nirvāṇa* is "nameless," being free from even 'being and non-being'.). The basis of the Way is indeed nonattachment. If one has to ask what this is attached to, he is greatly deluded.

When I said *wu-wei* could not entertain any being, I left certain things unsaid, and so there might be a small problem when it is scrutinized. So I will now further clarify it. What you cited from the *Chung-lun* is what I wanted to say. If the various *dharma*s are not emptied, then there will not be the Two Truths. If they are not affirmed, there will not be the Two Truths either. This clearly elucidates how being and nonbeing are inseparable. How? If one says there definitely is, then the lofty cannot be elevated. If one says there definitely is not, then the common lot cannot be saved. Therefore it is said that the Sage embraces both being and nonbeing, never abandoning either. However, the various masters tend now to penetrate (only) the *paramārtha* (highest truth) saying how all is empty quiescence and how there is not even a Sage. I always thought that that was going a bit too far and was too removed from human sentiments. If there is no Sage, who is it that knows Emptiness then?<sup>44</sup>

Seng-chao would take the cue from this last line in his essay -- not entirely unhappily because Seng-chao's own dialectics also presuppose the reality of a Sage.<sup>45</sup> The entity 'Sage' is more the standard than impersonal, universal Emptiness. However, the most obscure point in the Yaos' debate is the first-- here placed last -- on "the Light emitted by the Sage that Shines in All

Directions." A preamble on this light is called for here.

*The Light of the Buddha.* Mahayana *sūtras* often open with the scene of the Buddha emitting a fluid stream of light from some part of his body. This light, often with the sacred five colors, flows through the universe, illuminating all spheres, and usually then returns to the Buddha's body through another part. Scholars have traced this iconographic motif back to the *avadānas* and shown how this stream of light, along with the gentle smile, usually precede *vyākaraṇa*, the Buddha's prophetic assurance of the future destinies of his audience.<sup>46</sup> I take this light to represent the Buddha's omniscient enlightenment. That it envelops the whole universe and then draws it, as it were, back into his luminous body signals the encompassing nature of the *buddha-jñāna*. The *Lotus Sūtra* recognizes this implication when Śākyamuni is depicted as "calling back" all the *buddhas* of the ten directions (unveiled by his light) into the presence of the Buddha in the *Stūpa*.<sup>47</sup> If the reader was not familiar with this motif, he would be sympathetic with the Yaos' attempt to come to terms with this scriptural message. We must relive the anxieties of the Chinese Buddhists in the early fifth century.

The light episode is not found in Hinayana *sūtras* where the Buddha walked the earth without such uncanny show of powers. How is one to reconcile these two different visionings of the Buddha in two sets of scriptures, both claiming to be the words of the Buddha? Now it is well-known that China never really had a distinct Hinayana phase, but that does not mean she was fully cognizant of the meaning of Mahayana from the start. There was an inability to resolve the above problem before the time of Kumārajīva. Tao-an thought, for example, that the Hinayana and Mahayana *sūtras* were two lines of transmission from the historical Buddha. It was Kumārajīva who first alerted the Chinese to the notion that the two sets of *sūtras*, delivered by the Buddha "in one voice", were so differently perceived by the audience because one group was petty (Hinayanist) while the other group was of higher aspirations (Mahayanists).<sup>48</sup> The full mechanics were later worked out by Chih-i of the T'ien-t'ai school, but in the early fifth century, Yao Hsing could only toy with rather simple but laudable solutions.

Yao Hsing argued that the Buddha in his transcendental body did emit the light and that this shines upon all, but he explained that this was not perceived by the Hinayanist or recorded in the *Āgamas* because only advanced *bodhisattvas*, themselves close to enlightenment ('light'), alone had the privilege of beholding that light. Lesser men, including the Yaos and most of us, do not see the aura. Here Yao Hsing had common sense on his side. He then tied this graded perception of light to the Buddha's exercise of *upāya* (skillful means): the Buddha taught -- including teaching by this light -- in accordance with the capacity of his audience. He recalled then how when the Buddha was a horse or a deer, he behaved just like one; or, how when he was in India among (lesser) men, he was like any other man. The Buddha did not transcend the limits he provisionally imposed upon himself. A rational solution to a nagging problem, Yao Hsing's thesis read well -- until Yao Sung poked holes in it from a different perspective. In order not to confuse perspectives, we will postpone discussion of Yao Sung's idealistic stand.

*Yao Hsing on the Upāya of the Light.* This is the king's laudable thesis: The teaching of the Sage is mysterious, penetrating and boundless. It responds to needs from multiple directions, so that is cannot be sought out in any one single way or derived from one single principle. Thus he responds to the coarse in a coarse fashion, to the refined in a refined way. That is only logical. Therefore the emission of the great light and the show of myriad miraculous transformations are in response to the various *bodhisattvas* of the ten directions whose achievements are approximating to the seat of the Honoured One.<sup>49</sup> When the Buddha was dwelling among the mundane lot, in touch only with the coarse, how could such extraordinary matters be? Thus the *Āgamas* describe Śākyamuni as living forty-odd years in India (as the Buddha), putting on clothes and eating meals, suffering even sickness and pain, just like any other mortal. The *sūtra* (better: *jātaka*) also depicts the Buddha as entering the lot of horses and deer to deliver (better: instruct) them. When he was among horses and deer, he also behaved no differently from them. Since he had so adjusted to the (common) lot, he responded to the world's common way with no reliance on miracles or light. On every occasion, the Buddha adapts himself to the situation at hand; only so can he carry out his teachings.<sup>50</sup>

I added the note about *jātaka* -- the prebirth stories of the Buddha when he was still a wisdom seeker -- in the translation, because Yao Hsing's depiction of a kind of "natural limit" best described this 'low bodhisattvic' career. The 'high *bodhisattva*' of Mahayana, who by then is no longer a pre-enlightened seeker but an accomplished 'being of wisdom' empowered in compassion to aid all, is not naturally limited in the same way.<sup>51</sup> Yao Sung would pick on that model instead. However, there is an even more subtle disagreement.

*Yao Sung's Ekayāna Critique of Yao Hsing's Relativism.* Not only does the 'high *bodhisattva*' exercise magic and emanate light if he sees fit, there is even a *sūtra* in which the Buddha wanted his light or wisdom to shine upon all indiscriminately (like the rain-cloud of Dharma falling on big and small alike)<sup>52</sup> -- the famed *Lotus Sūtra*. Not only that even, for the *sūtra* could be critical of acknowledged spiritual elders whose pride prevented them from receiving the light so that, as irrational grace, the light might be better perceived by those less endowed by training to approximate the honoured seat. The implication of this Ekayāna critique against what is basically a Triyāna rationality will become evident as we merge ourselves into the contending voices.

... Indeed myriad beings are not alike; refinement and coarseness differ. The responses to them are different, though the Sage Mind remains One. Because it is One, it can respond perfectly. Because (beings) are different, the Sage uses expediences to help them. But even he might appear as horse or deer; that by itself takes nothing away from his greatness. Even though he might demonstrate the light and the miracles, those would not change his (adopted) coarse form either. Therefore the *Ching-ming* (Vimalakīrti sūtra) says, "The Tathāgata might perform his deeds through a show of light or he might do so



through quiescence. Although the manifested (action) and silent (inaction) might be different, the ultimate purpose is not two." As to the difference between the Great and the Small (Vehicle), it seems to be due to the different times and audiences involved. For example, the *Hua-shou-ching*<sup>53</sup> says, "Initially the Buddha, the store of merits, showered light so that all sentient beings could benefit from it." Or the *Ssu-i-ching*,<sup>54</sup> section on questions posed by Bright Net, says, "Anyone who happened upon the thirty-three types of light would benefit from it." The *Lotus Sūtra* also notes how the four and eightfold congregation was taken by surprise when the Buddha emitted a light from between his eyebrows.<sup>55</sup> None could comprehend it. It also says, "Beings dwelling in ignorance may nonetheless witness the luminous marks. If they are so predisposed, they will benefit from it. If a fitting cause is absent, even the elders might not." Therefore the *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* says, "if there is any sentient being who chances upon the light, he will attain the highest of enlightenment." There is also recorded the miraculous transformations of the Buddha whereby he enables beings of the three lower rebirths to gain rebirth in the higher paths of men and gods. From these examples it appears that we can infer that the light and the miracles are equally for all to see.<sup>56</sup>

The difference between a wisdom and a faith tradition, one accepting a series of self-perfections reaching the light and the other stressing the open membership in one compassionate vehicle, is slowly emerging.<sup>57</sup>

*Yao Hsing Defends the Primacy of the Prajñā Tradition.* The debate gets a little too much into minute points at this point, but if we recognize what is truly at stake, these quibblings are no minutiae.

You cite the *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* to the effect that any sentient being who sees the light will attain *samyaksambodhi*. However, according to this same *sūtra*, there is no common lot who may see this light. For example, when it depicts Śākyamuni emitting this great light and illuminating the ten directions, at that time there is not mentioned any (common) multitude who, chancing upon this strange event, is surprised at it. Rather, everybody in attendance understands it. This shows we are not dealing with an ordinary group. If you should argue that the sentient beings are incredulous, do you mean to say that the hundreds and millions of *bodhisattvas* are (ordinary) sentient beings still? The *sūtra* does depict the all-understanding (*bodhisattvas*) going along with the sons and daughters of good families in bringing flowers and incense to worship the Buddha, so that all worshippers naturally bathe in the universal grace. However, the show of light is not originally intended for the sons and daughters of good families. That they should benefit tangentially is analogous to the fly who covers a thousand miles (a day) because it happens to have latched itself on to the mane of a speedy mare.

You also cited the matter of the Buddha, by his miraculous transformations, delivering beings from the three evil paths to future lives as men or gods. If this is done through appearing as a horse or horses and as a deer to deer, then this is what I would take as miraculous transforma-

tions too. If the *Hua-shou*, *Ssu-i* and *Lotus Sūtras* should discourse on the radiant light, they should not be any different from that of the *Larger (Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra)*. In every case the light is shown according to the predispositions of the audience, that function being incomprehensible to (samsaric) men and gods. (I do not dispute the fact that) even as the Buddha's choice of light or silence depends on his intention, the source (the Sage Mind) is One. (I dispute only the perception of it).<sup>58</sup>

The difference between the *Lotus* and the *Prajñā* text, however, is not so easily ironed out. After the king's rejoinder, Yao Sung bowed out of the debate. To have a public final word, Yao Hsing asked Seng-chao to comment on the exchange and had that judgement published and circulated. We will only focus on Seng-chao's deduction that at stake was an Ekayāna vs. Triyāna difference over sudden and gradual enlightenment.

*Seng-chao on Sudden and Gradual Enlightenment.* Less obvious to us but evident to Seng-chao in this context, the Yao Hsing/Yao Sung debate touched upon the question of whether the light as conceived in Ekayāna would effectively abolish the distinctions of the Triyāna. The One-ness of the light would argue for sudden enlightenment, because Tao-sheng had made the case that such an indivisible and holistic principle admits of no gradation or piece-meal understanding. Yao Sung who argued for universal light was put on the suddenist side. Yao Hsing who, though recognizing the one ultimate source of the light, argued for graded perception of that enlightened essence, was put on the gradualist side. It is somewhat incongruous that the suddenist has Mr. Name as his spokesman whereas the gradualist has Mr. Nameless as his defender, but that is predefined for Seng-chao. Mr. Nameless will argue that Nirvāṇa is *wu-ming* ("no-name") or attributeless; for Seng-chao, that is done to underscore *nirvāṇa* as transcending both being and non-being (which Yao Sung would hardly disagree with). *Wu-ming* is also *wu-wei* ("without action") or *asamskrta*; for Seng-chao, this is made a defense on behalf of gradual enlightenment. One reaches *wu-wei* only by gradual elimination of *wei*, actions.

That sudden vs. gradual enlightenment should be divided over the *Lotus* Ekayāna at this time can be inferred from Hsieh Ling-yun's *Pien-tsung-lun*: this defender of Tao-sheng in 422 - 423 still built his case around the singularity of principle (Ekayāna) and the indivisibility of the light being mirrored by the innate mind. This is one Chinese reading and is not immediately derivable from the *Lotus Sūtra*; Hui-kuan was an Ekayānist no less. Likewise, the Triyāna doctrine is no *Prajñā* monopoly; Yao Sung also cited this corpus for his own end, as would Tao-sheng. Still, there is a historical basis for this division in terms of the two *sūtras*. The *triyāna* was pre-Mahayana: it speaks of the three separate careers of the *śrāvaka*, a listener enlightened by the Buddha; the *pratyekabuddha*, the self-enlightened one; and the original *bodhisattva* (Śākyamuni) who strove for enlightenment, found it and revealed the path to others. The early *Prajñā-pāramitā sūtras* accepted this discrete set of three, but in aligning its own Mahayana calling with the *bodhisattva-yāna* (now broadened to include all wisdom-seekers committed to likewise lending aid to all), it learned in time to group the other two *yānas* into the Hinayana (Small Vehicle). This severing and highlighting of the Mahayana

*bodhisattvayāna* only perpetuated, logically, the distinctness of the Triyāna (or at least Mahayana over against Hinayana). Accordingly, *arhants* (the end of the *śrāvakas'* career) are distinctly said to remain so; they cannot shift *gotra*-lineage and become Buddhas. The *Lotus Sūtra*, itself critical of Hinayana at times (and though less noticed, also of some *bodhisattvas* outside its own camp), is also generous enough to accept the Buddha-hood of *śrāvakas*. This point, not found in the Prajñā teachings, is noted by Kumārajīva as the unique "hidden store of the Tathāgata" in this Ekayāna *sūtra*;<sup>59</sup> somehow the Triyāna would lose its meaning in the One Vehicle. Tao-sheng latched on to this singularity of principle to make his case for sudden, total enlightenment. Although Yao Sung never alluded to suddenism and he might not even have regarded himself as a suddenist, the fact that he used the *Lotus* to support the ubiquitous Light the Buddha generously shone upon all and the fact that Yao Hsing staked his claim on the Prajñā tradition (the opinion of which the 'other *sūtras*' should follow, he stressed) were reasons enough for Seng-chao to lump Yao Hsing and Mr. Name together in the suddenist camp. With that, we may follow Seng-chao's argument, the pros and cons, as he presented it.

A Madhyamika master, Seng-chao was not known for sympathy for the *Lotus Sutra*, which he seldom quoted in his writings. Below we find Mr. Name, the suddenist, citing the gradualist opinion of the Prajñā tradition, and then raising the typical objection:<sup>60</sup>

However, the *Fang-kuang* (*Astasāharikā Prajñā-parāmitā-sūtra*) says, "The varying path of the Triyāna derives its (threefold) distinctions by virtue of *wu-wei* (*nirvāṇa*) itself." And the Buddha said, "When I was the wisdom-seeking (*bodhisattva*) Manava under the tutelage of the Buddha Dīpamkara (Lamp-Lighter [under whom Śākyamuni as Manava began his career for enlightenment]),<sup>61</sup> I already resided in the seventh (of the ten *bhūmi*) stage, and for the first time attained the *anupatīka-dharma-kṣānti* (the passive recognition of reality as that which is neither born nor destroyed) and I was about to further cultivate three more stages (until I reached the tenth *bhūmi* and full Buddhahood). Now, if *nirvāṇa* is indeed One, then there should not be the Three (the Triyāna and/or the three additional steps or stages). If there are the Three, then one cannot have penetrated the Ultimate. How can it be that there are such possibilities of ascending and descending (backsliding)? There are these different opinions in the *sūtras*, so how is one to decide on the proper understanding?<sup>62</sup>

The "ascending/descending" may refer to the stages or it may actually be a reference to the metaphor of the "three animals crossing the river" found for example in the *Upāsaka-prātimokṣa* to describe the Triyānas' crossing to the other shore. The rabbit, the horse and the elephant all succeeded in crossing the river, but the rabbit crossed it without ever feeling the river bottom (or depth); the horse felt it now and then; the elephant -- the *bodhisattva* and symbol of the Buddha -- steadfastly touching depth all the way.

Mr. Nameless now defended the gradualist understanding of Ekayāna, one that would not annihilate the meaningfulness of the Three.

The way of the Ultimate is indeed free from any distinction in principle. The *Lotus Sūtra* says, 'The greatest path entertains neither the one nor the two; I have thus exercised *upāya* (skillful means of the Triyānas)

for the sake of the slow-witted." Thus grounded upon the One Vehicle, one may speak of the Three, as demonstrated in the parable of the three carts (that attracted the children) out of the burning house.<sup>63</sup> In that they all deliver them out of life and death (*samsāra*), they are all said to be *wu-wei* (nirvanic paths). Because those who ride upon them are different, we call them Three. In the end, they all meet in the One. As to the objection you raised, about how the distinctions of the Triyāna could be derived from the (indifferentiable) *wu-wei*, (it should be noted that) the Three is due to the people (the riders). The Three arrive at *wu-wei*; it is not that *wu-wei* itself is three. Therefore the *Fang-kuang* (also) says, "Are there distinctions within *nirvāṇa*? The answer is no. It is only that the Buddha had put an end to all the fine perfumings (*vāsanā*) of mental defilements (*saṃyojana*) whereas the listener has not." Take as an example this case, that might serve to illustrate the profound point here. A man cuts wood. As he chops off a foot, a foot is gone. As he cuts off an inch, an inch is gone. The shortening pertains to the foot and the inch; it does not touch the nonbeing (the ultimate absence of wood) as such. (The Triyāna cut off attachments at different depths but the end result is the same). As sentient beings are different, and their knowledgeability never one -- that is, there are different depths in their endowed wisdom, different depths in their accumulated virtues -- therefore in their (progress at) attaining the other shore, there is the ascending and the descending (here: the different depths touched by the three animals crossing the river). Yet how can the other shore be any different. The difference lies only in the subjects involved. Thus although the various *sūtras* might seem to espouse different themes, the final messages do not conflict.<sup>64</sup>

The analogy to the shortening of the piece of wood is also used by the suddenist to support his cause. There it reads: no amount of practice can terminate because the wood can be halved till infinity -- with no end in sight; therefore enlightenment has to be sudden and totally different from practice. However, the right chronology should be that Hsieh Ling-yun borrowed the metaphor from Seng-chao here, adding to it the sophist (Zeno-esque) touch; it is not that the forger of "Nirvāṇa as Nameless" borrowed from Hsieh -- that would be self-defeating once that Zeno usage had been known. By the way, as Louis Gomez has pointed out to me, the elephant who crossed the river and represents the Buddha might be the slowest in getting over. The Mahayana *bodhisattva* takes the much longer "three aeons" to attain his enlightenment; not so the *śrāvaka*.<sup>66</sup> By the same token, one cannot tell who cuts the wood by the foot and who cuts it by the inch. The patient, painstaking one might be the Buddha.

Mr. Name was not easily convinced. He raised the valid objection of how the 'self' to whom the Triyāna has been attributed would be unable to participate in the *nirvāṇa* that is the path or paths. The two cannot coexist so easily.

The other shore pertains to *wu-wei*; the self is the one who embodies the *wu-wei*. Now I would like to know if the 'self' and the *wu-wei* (path) be one or are they different? If the self is itself *wu-wei*, then indeed *wu-wei* is the same as the self. If so, you cannot say that there is no difference in

the *wu-wei* and that the difference (of the Triyāna) lies with the self. If the self is different from *wu-wei*, then the self can never be (in) the *wu-wei* (path). *Wu-wei* is by nature *wu-wei* whereas the self is by nature in the realm of *yu-wei* (action, *saṃsāra* or *saṃskṛta*). If so, the idea of the self being somehow in tune with the path (it is travelling on) would also run up against contradictions. So, apropos the relationship between the self and the *wu-wei* (path), if they are one, there cannot be Triyāna; if they are different, there can also not be Triyāna. From where then can you derive this rationale for the Three? <sup>67</sup>

In answer to this sophist's objection, Seng-chao returned to the realism of accepted metaphors. This time it is the "three birds who escaped the net."

Although *wu-wei* is one, that does not need to contradict the not-one. This is comparable to the three birds that flew from the net. All three are alike in that they escaped to the realm of no further suffering, but although the absence of suffering be the same, the (species of) birds remain different. One cannot say that just because the birds are different, the absence of suffering is also different. Likewise, one cannot say that because the absence of suffering is one, the birds are the same (species). <sup>68</sup>

However, for the suddenist Mr. Name, who persisted in thinking in terms of absolute entities like the self and the Way, the "process philosophy" of Mr. Nameless who kept to the tradition of analysing progress and advancements was not acceptable. In his next question, we find included this sentiment, that well reflects the position of Tao-sheng himself:

It is also said *wu-wei* is the Great Way, wherein all things are the same (*sama*) and nondual. If it is said to be nondual, then it will not permit difference in the mind (that is, degrees in the mental attainment of purity or freedom from defilements). Unless one does not embody it (the one-ness of the Way) one must embody it in such a way as to exhaust the most subtle depth there is. But you propose that (the lesser vehicles can) embody (*wu-wei*) and yet not fully penetrate it. That I cannot understand. <sup>69</sup>

This uncompromising Ekayanist of a suddenist would deny the traditional characterization of the Triyanas as equally liberated with the Buddha alone having omniscience. The one goal would not justify the three means.

If we side with the gradualist (which unfortunately is not in vogue among Sinologists or Far Eastern Buddhists at the moment), we will see the fallacy of suddenism as trusting, rather simplistically, in the necessity of the *One* -- some innate harmony of the luminous mind and the eternal Tao. This metaphysics of the *One* has its innate charm. That I would not dispute. However, such monism is really more Taoist than Buddhist. That Hsieh Ling-yun in the end recognized. The gradualist Hui-kuan disputed the necessity of such unity by the use of Madhyamika dialectics. <sup>70</sup> Below, we see Seng-chao, the authority at the time, readily accepting the mystery of enlightenment and using Lao-tzu's idea of the "double mystery" (ch. 1: *hsüan-chih-yu-hsüan*, "mystery upon mystery") to defuse the suddenist's simplicity:

The sphere of vacuous Nonbeing (Emptiness), the realm of the double mystery, (are even harder to perceive). Boundless is its way. Can it be exhausted so suddenly? Did not the book (*Lao-tzu*) say, "The man of

learning increases daily, but the student of the Way decreases daily." The student of the Way is the student of *wu-wei*. Seeking to actualize the *wu-wei* is known as "daily accretion." How can this be called sudden enlightenment? One has to decrease and decrease until there is nothing more to decrease. The *sūtra* has spoken of the achievement of the Buddha (relative to other enlightened beings) as the difference between the sun and fireflies. The (extraordinary) ability of his wisdom (his omniscience) is well shown here. <sup>71</sup>

Sympathizers with Tao-sheng can still argue that Seng-chao here only dealt with the gradualism of practice -- which no one denied -- but not yet the logic of sudden awakening. The point however is that the two may not be so discontinuous; one leads to the other. <sup>72</sup> The suddenist could make a better case when the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* was drafted into the debate; that came very late. In 413, Seng-chao had Kumārajīva's implicit blessing. The Triyana cannot be dismissed at will; at that time, suddenism was too radical a doctrine. Seng-chao knew the consensus then. He placed Yao Hsing conveniently on the majority's side and Yao Sung perhaps unfairly on the then harassed minority. So the king was vindicated in his wisdom; his "nameless *nirvana*" somehow presented as the better of the two theses.

CONCLUSION: A barbarian can be philosopher and king. Fortunately for China, Yao Hsing was such a figure. Kumārajīva might lament that he was "a bird with clipped wings" in that he did not find the kind of informed audience he hoped for. Still Yao Hsing was preferable to many others for it was under him that Kumārajīva could introduce Mahayana ideas. <sup>73</sup> Under him too the *saṅgha* achieved new independence. Finally, in this king's philosophic pastime of writing a *Discourse*, we catch a glimpse of live issues stirring up the souls of the Buddhists in the early fifth century: matters of wisdom, emptiness, Ekayana and Triyana, sudden vs. gradual enlightenment. The *Discourse* is in that sense a minor gem from that time.

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1. *Taishō Daizōkyō* (henceforth T.) 52, pp. 228a - 230a.
2. In English, it was summarized by Walter Liebenthal in an appendix (IV) in the original edition of his *The Book of Chao* (Peking: 1948) but left out in the revised edition *Chao-lun* (Hongkong: University of Hongkong, 1968).
3. Noted by Eric Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), I, p. 249; II, pp. 408 - 409.
4. T. 45, pp. 157a - 161b. Liebenthal, pp. 101 - 129.
5. His biography is translated by Arthur Wright, "Fo-t'u-teng," *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies*, 11 (1948), pp. 322 - 370.
6. Kumārajīva's selection is almost unmagical whereas Dharmakṣema's offered liturgy, precepts, *jātakas*, nation-protecting *sūtras* as well as intellectual texts such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (421).
7. 'Robust' because judging from his biography, Kumārajīva, who lamented his weakness might not have needed that much persuasion; T. 50, pp. 330a - 333a.
8. The interpretation above is drawn from my study on "Buddhist Hierocrats and the Eclipse of their Influence: Saṅgha and State AD. 310 - 446" (revised ms. for the Six Dynasties Conference, Stanford, 1980).
9. T'ang Yung-t'ung, *Han-Wei liang-Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao Fo-chiao-shih* (Peking reissue: Chung-hua, 1955), p. 670.
10. Liebenthal, *Chao-lun* (1968), pp. 150 - 152.
11. Ōchō Enichi, "Nehan mumyōron to sono haikai," *Jōron kenkyū* (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1955), pp. 197 - 199.
12. Tsukamoto Zenryū, "The date of Kumārajīva and Seng-chao re-examined," *Silver Jubilee Volume of the Zinbun Kagaku Kenkyūsyō* (Kyoto: 1954), pp. 568 - 584; *Jōron kenkyū*, pp. 120 - 121, 130 - 135. Sequence of events here taken largely from Ōchō, op. cit., pp. 70 - 71, 190 - 193. See 14 *infra*.
13. *Early Madhyamika in India and China* (London: The University of Wisconsin, 1967) disputes the necessity of the 412 date for the unnamed unrest.
14. Liebenthal, op. cit., p. 5, note 17 rejects Tsukamoto's suggestion of "death in 409" but accepts the alternative "incapacitation."
15. Dating according to Ancho, *Chūron shoki*; see Liebenthal, op. cit. p. 9.
16. T. 52, p. 228a 26, "ideas of former days."
17. And Buddhayasas' help?
18. The following taken from my "Why did Tao-sheng first propose Sudden Enlightenment?" completed ms. 1981.
19. T'ang, *Fo-chiao-shih*, pp. 671 - 672. The same section notes another unsolved chronology between Hui-kuan's thesis and the *Pien-tsung-lun*.
20. See list compiled by T'ang, op. cit., pp. 310 - 314.
21. T. 52, pp. 224c - 228a. There is only one reference to Buddha-nature but as a mutable seed. Full documentation in work noted in 18 above.
22. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 249 -- except Fung noted the *Ming-pao-ying-lun* (T. 52, pp. 33b - 34b) and not the *San-pao-lun* (pp. 34bc) that I noticed has links with the *Hrdaya* (T. 28, p. 820a).
23. T. 52, p. 78b.
24. T. 50, p. 332c. Translation here follows Liebenthal, op. cit., p. 3.

25. In Chinese, known as *a-han ch'eng-fo* (arhants becoming buddhas): the Lotus represents *ju-lai pi-tsang* (or "the Dharma of the secret treasure house"). See Leon Hurvitz trans. *The Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia, 1976), p. 95 for both.
26. This will be briefly touched upon in my "Sinitic Speculation on Buddha-Nature: The Nirvāṇa School, 420 - 589," *Philosophy East and West* (1982?).
27. Actually, Sarvastivāda would be more in the *asatkāryavāda* camp.
28. Meaning: relative to one another.
29. T. 52, p. 228b 5 - 12.
30. Meaning: succession of mental moments -- like seeds giving rise to new plants and new seeds.
31. This is unlike the other unmediated consciousnesses (the senses).
32. Rebirths as animals, hungry ghosts, hellish beings.
33. *Yin-yüan*: also *pratītya-samutpāda*.
34. Some clear corruption in the text here; could the last lines belong originally to Yao Sung's agreement with the king? T. 52, p. 228b 14-cl.
35. T. 52, p. 228c 21 - 23.
36. T. 52, p. 228c 4 - 8. Taishō text has this run into previous section.
37. T. 52, p. 228c 25.
38. T. 52, p. 229b 19 - 20; also 230a 5 which reverts back to *yu*.
39. This is a much maligned school, the only early school to be free from a notion of the self; I will redress the injustice done in a future article in *Philosophy East and West* (1984?).
40. See variant offered by Taishō; both would do.
41. T. 52, p. 229a 28 - 27. The last line actually yields "abandoning the object of attachment"; I keep it vague because the *hsin-wu* school is usually accused of abandoning the subject-self.
41. Chapter IV: "It is prior to the gods."
42. The Chinese *p'o* has this double meaning.
43. T. 52, p. 229b 18-cl.
44. T. 52, p. 229c 21 - 230a 13. Some punctuation changes.
45. Most evident in his exchange with Liu I-min in the *Chao-lun*.
46. In Japanese, Taga Ryūgen has worked on *vyākaraṇa* in depth.
47. This is the episode where time (past and present) and space (the ten directions) collapsed in defiance of the Hinayana idea that only one Buddha can exist in one time and space.
48. On this Mahayana consciousness, see Ōchō Enichi, *Chūgoku Bukkyō no kenkyū* Vol. 1 (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1971), chapter on this topic.
49. This is the *sambhogakāya*, a radiant body, which according to Dharmamitra the Mādhyamika in his *Prasphuṭapāda* (mentioned by Briston Vol. 1, pp. 131 ff) is visible only to the *bodhisattva* who has reached the tenth *bhūmi*. See T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London: George & Unwin, 1955) p. 286. So Yao Hsing is in good company here.
50. T. 52, p. 228c 10 - 20.
51. Use of the term 'low' and 'high' borrowed from Western use of 'low' and 'high' Christology.
52. See ch. V, "Medicinal Herbs" in the *Lotus Sūtra*.
53. *Kuśala-mūla-saṃgrahā*, trans. by Kumārajīva (406).

54. *Viśeśacintabrahma-pariprechā*, trans. by Kumārajīva (402).
55. Opening chapter.
56. T. 52, p. 229z 29 - b16.
57. The *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* seems to continue an ascetic tradition that goes the hardship in the arhant's self-help career; one better the *Lotus Sūtra* rose more out of a popular *stupa* cult worshipping the Buddha jewel. But since these traditions are complex, I would shy away from that historical correlation at the moment.
58. T. 52, p. 229c 5 - 15.
59. See, for example, last chapter (no. 100) of the *Ta-chih-tu-lun*.
60. In English, see Liebenthal trans. *Chao-lun*, pp. 118 - 123. For Kumārajīva's view see Leon Hurvitz, "Daijō daigisho no okeru ijjō to sanjō no mondai ni tsuite," *Ēon Kenkyū* (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1962) II, pp. 169 - 194.
61. Manava is offered in the Japanese translation's notes; see Tsukamoto et al. ed., *Jōron Kenkyū*, p. 76; Liebenthal offers Sumedha. Also known as Megha elsewhere.
62. T. 45, p. 159c 17 - 23.
63. From the *Lotus Sūtra*, parable of the burning house.
64. T. 45, p. 159c 25 - 160a 8.
65. And the interest in the metaphor of shortening was initiated earlier in the Yaos' exchange when Yao Sung criticized Yao Hsing over *wu-wei*.
66. At the conference on Sudden Enlightenment at the Institute for Transcultural Studies, Los Angeles, 1981.
67. T. 45, p. 160a 11 - 17. Liebenthal's translation is unnecessarily confusing once he reads *wu-wei* as *asaṃskṛta*.
68. T. 45, p. 160a 21 - 25.
69. T. 45, p. 160b 9 - 11.
70. Cited by T-ang Yung-t-ung, *Fo-chiao-shih*, pp. 671 - 672.
71. T. 45, p. 160b 20 - 24.
72. Edward Conze, *A Short History of Buddhism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 70, states the Indian position on the two as being continuous.
73. For background on the trends, I am indebted to Ōchō Enichi's essay, "Kyōsō hanyaku no genshi keisei" in his *Chūgoku Bukkyō nokenkyū*, vol. II (Kyoto: Heirakuji, 1971), pp. 141 - 161 and an English draft translation made by Robert Rhodes (in Kyoto), but it should be noted that Ōchō attributes Kumārajīva's translation opportunity to relative peace under Yao Hsing (see his essay on Kumārajīva's translations, *op. cit.*, pp. 86 - 118, esp. 107 - 108.)

## IMPERATIVES AND RELIGION IN INDIA

Shlomo Biderman

An ancient Indian parable tells of a traveller who lost his way in a dense forest. Trying to find his way out he encountered a wild elephant which charged at him, trunk upraised. Terrified, the traveller looked for refuge. As the parable concludes, he finds himself hanging on a clump of reeds growing from the wall of an old well, while two mice are busily gnawing the roots of the reeds. Waiting patiently at the bottom of the well were many snakes. Among them, a huge python, its mouth wide open, ready to catch the miserable traveller when the mice had finished their meal.<sup>1</sup>

The purport of this story is to teach the highest value of Indian religion. The traveller is the human soul and his journey through the forest is *saṃsāra* - the endless and painful chain of suffering and misery which can not be terminated as long as man chooses to see himself as part of phenomenal existence. The only way to stop this suffering is by detaching oneself from this mode of phenomenal existence and by acquiring a right philosophical knowledge about the world. When these are finally achieved, man attains the long-desired state of release (*mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*).

There is no doubt that the notion of release - that is to say, the assumptions concerning the existence of *nirvāṇa* and the possibility of attaining it - is the most fundamental notion of the majority of the philosophical and religious schools of India. However, among the six main philosophical schools that form what is commonly defined as 'Hindu philosophy', Jaimini, the founder of the Mīmāṃsā school, was the only thinker in whose writings *nirvāṇa* is not even mentioned. Indeed, one searches Jaimini's writings in vain for any attempt at preaching an ultimate release from everyday existence. Returning to the parable quoted above, it thus seems to me that it is not coincidental that the only detail kept in Indian tradition about the life of Jaimini is his unfortunate death, as a result of a savage attack by a wild elephant. Within a cultural tradition that regarded *nirvāṇa* to be the highest value for man, the Mīmāṃsā school is therefore quite exceptional. It is for this reason that it has aroused little interest among scholars and researchers of Indian philosophy and religion. A substantial number of books and articles devoted to Hinduism as a religion and a way of life do not even mention the Mīmāṃsā. And among historical studies of Indian Philosophy there are instances of outright scorn and contempt directed towards it.<sup>2</sup>

My firm conviction is that such attitude towards the Mīmāṃsā school cannot be justified. Moreover, I believe that one can find in the religious position of ancient Mīmāṃsā some promising possibilities for a new appreciation of the religious phenomenon as well as some sophisticated arguments which are relevant to current studies in the philosophy of religion. Within the framework of the present paper I will deal primarily with one aspect of ancient Mīmāṃsā - its standpoint concerning the status of religious language. The position of the Mīmāṃsā on this issue may be familiar to anyone who is acquainted with certain contemporary philosophies of religion. However, my method in the present paper will not be explicitly comparative. Rather, I will confine myself to the examination of the primary sources of ancient Mīmāṃsā, and even when using some Western terms, I will try my best not to distort or misinterpret the ideas conveyed in these ancient Indian