

Introduction into Chinese Tiantai Thought

Hans-Rudolf Kantor

Huafan University Graduate Institute of Asian Humanities

DYNAMICS OF PRACTICE AND UNDERSTANDING – CHINESE TIANTAI PHILOSOPHY OF CONTEMPLATION AND DECONSTRUCTION

The present article is an introduction into Chinese Tiantai thought and focuses on the gist and tenet of this Buddhist school, discussing Tiantai's deconstructive practice (*po* 破) of contemplation (*guan* 觀). The scope of this examination embraces all the Tiantai doctrines that describe the dynamics and epistemological nature of ultimate realization, called "subtle awakening" (*miaowu* 妙悟), as well as all the relevant Buddhist sources based on which Tiantai master Zhiyi (智顓 538-597) developed this type of "contemplation" (*guan* 觀). According to the Tiantai view, epistemological and ontological issues coincide with one another, since contemplation entails our insight that "truth and falsehood are inseparable" concerning the way we relate to and exist in our world. Therefore, (1) the introduction deals with the question of the specific sense in which Tiantai contemplation must be grounded in deconstructive practice. The subsequent two sections, (2) and (3), elaborate the epistemological and soteriological implications of this Buddhist teaching; section (4) and (5) discuss its linguistic pragmatics; (6) and (7) highlight the ontological and hermeneutical issues, and (8) elaborates on the Tiantai philosophy of mind.

1. Introduction

“Deconstruction” (*po* 破) accounts for one of the crucial philosophical components in Zhiyi’s (智顓 538-597) Tiantai teaching (天台) of “contemplation” (*guan* 觀). The deconstructive practice of contemplation unveils a hidden and persistent type of falsehood which shapes the way we relate to our world. Contemplation, furthermore, discloses to us the instructive value and significance of all illusions so that we can use such illusiveness in a salutary manner. Fully aware of the ambiguity of all falsehood, we see and realize that deceptiveness and instructiveness are inseparably bound up with one another in the conventional realm of our existence. In this way, all discernments rooted in contemplation entail a type of “wisdom” (*zhi* 智) in virtue of which we may realize our “turn” (*zhuan* 轉) from the non-awakened into the awakened state of being and thus “transform” (*hua* 化) the way we exist in this world.

Hence, the Tiantai meaning of contemplation implies that ontological, epistemological, and soteriological issues coincide with one another. Contemplation engages in self-observing discernment, realizing that it is the “inseparability of truth and falsehood” that characterizes the specific way in which we relate to our world.¹ This epistemological nature of our understanding embraces also the ontological

implication that reality in the sense of what constitutes this world and the way we exist in it incorporates falsehood. In a soteriological sense, contemplation signifies “liberation” (*jietuo* 解脫) as it severs all bondages to deceptiveness and thus eradicates the root of our suffering; yet this does not completely terminate all illusions. Rather, our practice of contemplation achieves full awareness of all falsehood, turning deceptiveness into instructiveness, just as medicine is made from poison.

To realize such awareness, we must invalidate all the deceptive effects arising from that falsehood. For this purpose, we must cultivate wisdom and contemplation according to the varying levels of “deconstruction” (*po*, 破). The deconstructive practice of contemplation prevents our understanding from clinging onto constructions and reifications resulting from our epistemic-propositional references to this world. The Chinese character *po* literally means to destruct, dissolve, disperse, nullify, invalidate, and also refute. However, the specific Tiantai use in the chapter *Deconstructing Dharmas Thoroughly* (*Po fa bian* 破法遍) of Zhiyi’s *Great Calming and Contemplation* (*Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀) implies a dynamic sense of deconstruction, which, in some respects, seems to show a certain degree of similarity with the post-structuralist use of the Western term. *Po* promotes the ongoing and self-modifying course of our contemplation and thus dynamically integrates in that

course. In an analogous way, this may parallel that sense of deconstruction which impels historical progression (or continuity) and is embedded in a process of becoming, according to the understanding developed by Derrida and LeMan. Hence, both deconstruction and *po* incessantly change and thus evade any kind of fixation, even though they generate sense. Contravening reiterations, the two defy an ultimate or irrevocable form of definition and exclude the sense of a broadly applicable method. Yet, in the Tiantai context of contemplation, *po*, tentatively translated as “deconstruction,” may bear a certain sense of strategy, as epitomized in Zhiyi’s “threefold contemplation” (*sanguan* 三觀).²

This Tiantai doctrine unifies two contrary yet complementary ways of invalidating the reifications that arise from our intentional acts and epistemic-propositional references. One side of our contemplation aims at realizing true “emptiness” or “ultimate truth” untainted by falsehood; and this is primarily based on observations and examinations that invalidate any kind of linguistic and conceptual construction of truth. The other side invalidates a reified sense of emptiness as nonexistence, while upholding and exemplifying the instructive significance of a falsehood which is ineradicably rooted in our epistemic stance to this world. In other words, each side upholds what the other invalidates and denies; the two are correlative

opposites and exclusively refer to one other. They restrict and complement each other at the same time; thus their mutual negation is tantamount to mutual affirmation. In this sense, *po* or “deconstruction” also incorporates a sense of “setting up,” “upholding,” and “sustaining,” expressed by the character (*li* 立), which literally means “to erect.” Hence, the deconstructive practice of Tiantai contemplation is dynamical, since it reveals reciprocity and mutuality of “two contrary forms of invalidation” (*shuangzhe* 雙遮), which, paradoxically, turns into the opposite state of “mutual validation” (*shuangzhao* 雙照). Such a dynamics, called the “middle way” (*zhongdao* 中道), is what instantiates and constitutes both of them. If fully realized in this deconstructive practice of contemplation, each of the two equally presents and unfolds the whole dynamic of the middle way. Therefore, Zhiyi emphasizes that each of the three aspects, called “emptiness” (*kong* 空), “false/provisional” (*jia* 假), and the “middle-way,” incorporates, embodies, and reveals all three of them. This is called the “threefold contemplation,” which applies to the cultivation of “mind-contemplation” (*guanxin* 觀心) or introspection, the exegetical interpretation of Sūtra texts, and also provides the structural framework for classifying all the differing doctrines transmitted in the Indian Buddhist texts.³ Thus, the “threefold contemplation” combines soteriological, epistemological, and hermeneutical issues with one another.

However, what is most important is the dynamics or the “inseparability of deconstructing and sustaining” (*jipo jili* 即破即立), which features the epistemological nature of what is called “subtle awakening” (*miaowu* 妙悟) and thus signifies our full realization of the threefold contemplation.

Zhiyi explains that subtle awakening means that our “dreaming” (*meng* 夢) does not completely extinguish; instead, it “becomes fully aware” of itself (*jue* 覺). When dreaming without awakening, we mistake falseness for realness, called “inversion” (*diandao* 顛倒), while our subtle awakening, not completely terminating our dreaming, realizes both all the falseness in our dreams and the realness of that dreaming. Constantly differentiating between realness and falseness while dreaming, the subtle awakening realizes the inseparability of the two. It is the deconstructive practice that sets up and sustains all this, since, while dreaming, contemplation realizes awakening, just as it becomes aware of the dreaming, while awakening. We fully realize inescapability from our own constructions, discerning both our epistemic stance to the world we inhabit and the existential relevance of this for our being. The *Great Calming and Contemplation*, traditionally ascribed to Zhiyi, is the crucial Tiantai work that extensively expands on that topic.

Hence, after delineating the semantic field of the term “contemplation” in section

(2), this article proceeds with section (3) on the Madhyamaka concept of emptiness and its implicit ambiguity of “deconstructing and sustaining,” followed by discussions about the significance of contradiction in Madhyamaka and Tiantai in section (4), the relevance of both speech and silence in section (5), the meaning of ontological indeterminacy expressed by the Tiantai interpretation of “Buddha-nature” and the dynamic “middle way” from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* in section (6), the Tiantai view of hermeneutics and its specific relationship with the compositional structure of the *Lotus-sūtra* in section (7), and the Tiantai understanding of “mind” based on the *Garland-sūtra* in section (8). All these sections try to reveal the soteriological, epistemological, and ontological issues, as well as the aspects of the philosophy of language implicit in the deconstructive practice of Tiantai contemplation. Moreover, the whole paper also shows that Tiantai thought is deeply rooted in the textual sources of the Chinese Buddhist canon.

2. The Tiantai Notion of “Contemplation”

The terminological root of the crucial Tiantai expression *zhiguan* (止觀), translated as “calming and contemplation,” can be traced back to the Sanskrit *śamatha-vipaśyanā*. The Chinese *zhi* (止) for the Sanskrit *śamatha* denotes the ending of distortions and

distractions via “concentration,” which has the effect of “calming the mind.” Such a “calming” supports *guan* or *vipaśyanā*, our “contemplation” which realizes “wisdom,” the insight into the true nature of everything that comes into the focus of our observing mind. Zhiyi, the principal founder of the Tiantai school, considers the binary *dinghui* (定慧), “concentration and wisdom,” as a synonym for *zhiguan*. Moreover, without “moral discipline” in one’s life, the calming of one’s mind cannot be realized, nor can be contemplation. Therefore, the Chinese *lu* (律) corresponding to the Sanskrit *śīla*, translated as “moral discipline,” is a prerequisite of Zhiyi’s view. In other words, the Tiantai binary *zhiguan*, “calming and contemplation,” fully represents and denotes the “path of the Buddha” in the sense of cultivation and transformation, which is traditionally referred to as the combination of “discipline (*śīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*).”

Expounded in the Tiantai classic *The Great Calming and Contemplation*, the crucial concept “contemplation” accounts for both a complex system which presents all the Tiantai doctrines as a coherent whole and an epitome which embraces all the varying practices of cultivation described by Zhiyi. Most importantly, it stresses the inseparability between these two aspects. On the doctrinal level of theoretical reflection, Tiantai master Zhiyi develops a system which combines, integrates, and

reconciles the diversity of Buddhist perspectives on soteriological, hermeneutical, ontological, epistemological, and linguistic issues mentioned and developed in all the canonical sources and differing exegetical traditions known in his time. On the practical level of cultivation, he elaborates on ritual and devotional practices as well as techniques of meditation and concentration, which matches the systematic framework of his teaching. The Tiantai term *yuandun zhiguan* (圓頓止觀), “perfect/round and sudden calming and contemplation,” sums up and accounts for such a synergy of systematic thought and practices of cultivation. Ultimate wisdom achieved through self-reflective observation and insight enacts the practical aspect of contemplation to the same extent as the highest level of our cultivation realizes the cognitive understanding that is codified in the doctrinal system of the Tiantai works. Tiantai-terms such as “understanding and practice supporting each other” (*jiexing xiangzi* 解行相資), or “eyes and feet are mutually complementary” (*muzou xiangzi* 目足相資) explicitly point at this non-duality of practice and understanding.

The first phrase of the introduction to the *Great Calming and Contemplation* composed by Zhiyi’s disciple, Guanding (灌頂 561-632), who recorded and posthumously edited his master’s lectures from 594 in the shape of the present text, describes *zhiguan*, “calming and contemplation,” as “brightness and silence,”

explaining the qualities of “wisdom and concentration.” The subsequent passages further state that the way Zhiyi’s text unfolds those virtues represents the “dharma-gateways“ (*famen* 法門) which the Tiantai master has preached on grounds “of his own practice and realization in his mind.” For Guanding the *Great Calming and Contemplation* reveals, in this sense, an unprecedented view of the Buddha-dharma; and Zhanran (湛然 711-782), the Tang-dynasty commentator of that text, endorses this, explaining that the genuine dharma can only be transmitted if it is truly realized by the practitioner himself.

Hence, although grouped into the line of the dharma-transmission of the Indian masters, Zhiyi is said to have taken his inspiration from Nanyue Huisi (南岳慧思 515-577) who is the Chinese master and highly devoted practitioner who had passed down the three types of “calming and contemplation” to his famous disciple. Characterizing the differing levels of all Mahāyāna-teachings, the three are called “the gradual” (*jian* 漸), “the indeterminate” (*buding* 不定), and “the perfect/round and sudden” (*yuandun* 圓頓) types of calming and contemplation. According to the introductory chapter, Zhiyi’s work, called the *Gateway to the Six Subtleties* (*Liumiao men* 六妙門), unfolds “the indeterminate calming and contemplation,” his early work the *Gateway to the Meditation in a Sequential Order* (*Cidichan men* 次第禪門)

represents “the gradual calming and contemplation,” and the *Great Calming and Contemplation* accounts for the last and highest level, called the “perfect/round and sudden.”⁴ With respect to the foundational Buddhist doctrine of the “four truths,”

Guanding explains the meaning of the last type:

[Practicing] the perfect/round and sudden incorporates, from the outset, the discernment of the real mark and the formation of all the realms that are indivisibly linked to the middle, hence there is nothing that is not true and real. When we focus on [true] dharma-realm to a degree that each single instant of our awareness itself becomes [true] dharma-realm, then each single instant of visible form as well as each single instant of fragrance appears to be nothing but the middle way. This also applies to the realm of oneself as well as that of the Buddha and all the other sentient beings. Both the aggregates, [which constitute the person], and all the [sensory] entrances are alike, [1] hence there is no [real] suffering to be cast away. Ignorance and all delusions are not beyond bodhi-wisdom, [2] hence there is no [real] origin [of suffering] to be eradicated. The exclusive/extreme and false views do not really deviate from the middle and the right, [3] hence there is no [real] path to be cultivated. Saṃsāra is nothing but nirvāṇa, [4] hence there

is no [real] extinction to be realized.⁵ If there is no [real] suffering and no [real] origin, then the worldly realm does not [really] exist; if there is no [real] path and no [real] extinction, then the realm beyond that world does not [really] exist. There simply is the single real mark beyond which no dharma [really] exists. Dharma-nature is quiescence, called calming. Quiescence yet constant brightness is called contemplation. Even though we may expound [the practice of such calming and contemplation] in terms of the [sequential] first and after, there is no real duality and no real difference; hence, we call it the perfect/round and sudden calming and contemplation.⁶

“Real mark” (*shixiang* 實相) is the referent of that insight which the present passage specifies as the “middle way” (*zhongdao* 中道). By contrast, the “exclusive/extreme views” are erroneous, failing to realize that opposites, such as suffering and bliss, or *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* etc. cannot be set up or constituted apart from one another. Similarly, the “false views” cling either to the exclusive and illusory image of a permanent world and self, or to the opposite which implies discontinuity. However, non-excluding insight rooted in the middle way discerns the real mark and hence is detached from such an error and exclusion. It realizes that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* etc. are correlative opposites mutually dependent. Constituted

via mutual negation, they depend on and refer to each other; both are devoid of a core of self-sustaining reality. There is no real suffering beyond bliss, nor real saṃsāra beyond nirvāṇa and vice versa. Hence, the referents of the “four truths” are not real in an intrinsic sense. Even the term “real mark,” cannot be taken literally, since it would lack realness, if it were understood as correlatively opposed to the erroneous views. Based on this non-exclusive sense of the middle, the text stresses, in a paradoxical way, that even the exclusive/extreme and false views (*bianjian* 邊見) do not really deviate from the middle and the right.

Hence, as previously mentioned, reality in the sense of what constitutes the way we exist incorporates falsehood. This means that epistemological and ontological issues coincide with one another, since our epistemic stance to the world we inhabit gives rise to the constructive force which shapes this world and all the things which exist in it. Therefore, the term “real mark” cannot be understood as “ultimate reality” in the metaphysical sense. There is no realm of truth which transcends our world, and goes beyond, or is separated from our delusions. According to this passage, the metaphysical understanding of the “real mark,” would even intensify our delusive views. “Real mark” rather signifies an immanent and soteriological connotation regarding the way we truly exist in this world.⁷

The soteriological implication of “real mark” just means that suffering, saṃsāra, falsehood inversely refer back to their opposites which are bliss, nirvāṇa, truth etc. Thus, these negative qualities could also be understood positively, namely, as an inverse form of instructiveness; the text uses paradoxical statements to express this, such as ignorance is bodhi-wisdom etc. In a dynamic way, each of the two poles indicates its respective opposite. In other words, to really understand the salutary side means to thoroughly know and discern the harmful counterpart of it, which also includes the reverse. Hence, our insight into the middle realizes this dynamics, by taking the two opposites simultaneously and equally in account. All this is deeply rooted in the early Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Prajñāpāramitā*-, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*-, *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*-, *Mahāparinirvāṇa*-, *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, and has been further developed by the early Madhyamaka treatises, which all have influenced the Tiantai teaching.⁸

Again, suffering pointing back to its opposite, like sickness to healing, is an inverse mode of manifestation; thus there is no real suffering in an intrinsic or ultimate sense. Our insight into the “middle” realizes this, by simultaneously and equally considering the two sides, which are correlative opposites, interdependent, and indivisible. In other words, such an insight realizes that each of the two equally

embodies the unity of their opposition as a whole; thus they are not really what they apparently, or *prima facie* seem to be; this is to say there are not real qualities which exclude each other. Such a view really sees the inverse nature and falsehood of what we conventionally consider or conceive of as real. We discern and realize not just falsehood in all patterns of interdependency but also the inevitability of using them in the “conceivable realm” (*siyijing* 思議境). Fully aware of this, such discerning may dissociate our understanding from all the errors of the conceivable without really or completely nullifying that realm. It is exactly this form of self-observing examination that is called “contemplation.” Since truth and wisdom realized through contemplation cannot be discussed in terms of parameters rooted in the conceivable realm, they are called “inconceivable” (*busi* 不思議) even in a sense which goes beyond the opposition of conceivable and inconceivable. Devoid of correlative opposites, such as beginning and ending, or arising and cessation, contemplation accomplishes the “perfect/round and sudden.”

This inconceivability also conforms to the true nature of all dharmas. “Dharma-nature” (*faxing* 法性) is what truly sustains the realm of all things, that is, all kinds of “interdependency and correlative opposition” (*xiangdai* 相待) as well as all “arising and cessation” (*shengmie* 生滅), which, from the conventional point of view,

are opposites that seem to exclude each other. Hence, the true nature of all things – “dharma-nature” which is pure and untainted by any such deception – goes beyond those forms of mutually exclusive apparitions. Its “non-arising and non-cessation” (*busheng bumie* 不生不滅) embodies “quiescence” (*ji* 寂) in the same way as the “perfect/round and sudden contemplation,” devoid of beginning and ending, realizes “calming.” Again, the full and true awareness of a falsehood that pervades the conventional realm of our existence is inconceivable. It is this inconceivability that features the “round/perfect and sudden contemplation” which realizes that inverse instructiveness and ambiguity of falsehood is the true “nature of all dharmas” and the “real mark.”

3. Ambiguity of Deconstructing and Sustaining

Terms, such as “real mark,” “dharma-nature,” and “middle way,” are expressions which Kumārajīva (334–413) frequently uses in his translations of the early Madhyamaka works and also in his explanatory notes to the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*, transmitted in Seng Zhao’s (374–414) commentary to the same scripture. Moreover, Guanding’s introductory chapter mentions that Zhiyi’s master Huisi was a follower of dhyāna-master Huiwen (慧文 ?-557) who elaborated on the famous Madhyamaka

work *Dazhi du lun* (*Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, 大智度論), translated, or probably, even composed by Kumārajīva. This is a commentary to one of the larger *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*, traditionally ascribed to the Mādhyamika Nāgārjuna (ca. 150-250), who is revered to be the 13th of the 24 Indian masters forming the lineage of the dharma-transmission. From Zhiyi's frequent references to the *Dazhi du lun* and to Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, it is obvious that the early treatises of Madhyamaka thought, all translated by Kumārajīva, provided a major source of inspiration for his teaching; and Guanding as well as Zhanran particularly stress that Nāgārjuna is the "founding ancestor" (*gaozu* 高祖) of the Tiantai-line.

Guanding reinforces this view in the initial passages of the introductory section, quoting the famous verse 18 in chapter 24 from the *Kārikā* translated by Kumārajīva, called *Zhong lun* (中論).⁹ According to this crucial chapter, only our insight into the foundational nature of "emptiness" (*kong* 空) enables us to correctly understand and deal with all the changing in our world, which also includes our own transforming into an awakened being. To achieve insight into emptiness is to realize what embraces the sense of the "three jewels" and the "four truths" and thus constitutes the course of our transformation.¹⁰ Without such insight, we cannot realize what truly grounds and constitutes the causes and conditions that entail our salutary transformation.

Hence, “emptiness” primarily signifies the sense of “setting up,” “sustaining,” or “constituting” the essentials of the “Buddha-dharma” (*fofa* 佛法). This is the law or principle which configures the whole path of our turn from the non-awakened into the awakened state of being within the framework of those causes and conditions which evoke such transformation. Yet, as exemplified in the entire text of the *Zhong lun*, our actual understanding of emptiness requires our deconstructing, invalidating, or nullifying of all reifications that arise from our linguistic references and intentional acts. Kumārajīva’s translation seems to suggest that our understanding must constantly alternate between the nullifying and sustaining aspect. This “change of aspects” in our comprehension of true emptiness brings about a certain dynamics: We cannot understand the sustaining nature of emptiness, without realizing the aspect of deconstruction, which also applies in reverse: If we do not comprehend the sustaining nature of emptiness, we cannot really accomplish the aspect of deconstruction. Our understanding of either side involves that of the other, which is not a linear and finite process.

According to Zhiyi, Guanding, and Zharan, this dynamics of “sustaining and deconstructing” of our understanding completely fits the Tiantai view of contemplation, and the quoted fourfold verse from the *Kārikā* fully embodies this.

Hence, the verse provides a source of canonical evidence which justifies, proves, characterizes, and outlines the peculiar feature of Zhiyi's "calming and contemplation." The *Zhong lun* says: "(1) Whatever dharma arises through causes and conditions; (2) that I declare to be inseparable from emptiness. (3) It is also a false/provisional designation. (4) This, furthermore, is the meaning of the middle way."¹¹

Zhanran's commentary explains that (1) "causes and conditions," (3) "false/provisional designation," and (4) "the middle way" signify the sense of "setting up" or "sustaining," while (2) "emptiness" means, in this particular context, "nullifying" or "deconstructing."¹² According to the Tiantai interpretation, the whole phrase culminates in the "perfect/round teaching" (*yuanjiao* 圓教) which simultaneously contemplates "emptiness," "false/provisional designation" (*jiaming* 假名), and "the middle way" in each single moment of our awareness, called the "threefold contemplation in/as/of one instant of awareness" (*yixin sanguan* 一心三觀). In the section "contemplating mental activity as the inconceivable realm" (*guanxin jishi busiyi jing* 觀心即是不思議境), Zhiyi explains that the "indivisibility of sustaining and deconstructing" (*jipo jili jili jipo* 即破即立, 即立即破) must be performed via the dynamical "threefold contemplation" (*sanguan* 三觀).¹³

However, in which specific sense does the passage from the *Zhong lun* express an understanding of emptiness which realizes the dynamics of “deconstructing and sustaining”? Given the fact that there is no worldly thing that exists apart from extrinsic relationships and arises independently, “emptiness” accounts for the absence of inherent existence. Yet it is such “emptiness of inherent existence” that is the ground which sustains all patterns of interdependent arising. Therefore, emptiness is not at all the same as nonexistence, but rather has the foundational, sustaining, or positive significance of “true emptiness” (*zhenkong* 真空), “the real mark of all dharmas” (*zhufa shixiang* 諸法實相), and “the nature of all dharmas” (*faxing* 法性).

In a positive sense, emptiness grounds and sustains the interdependent arising of all things; but this is true only because it also bears a negative side which denies that any of those things abides in an “intrinsic nature” (*wuzixing* 無自性). The negative side, furthermore, implies that none of the particular things which we identify in virtue of our intentional acts and to which we refer by means of linguistic expression is intrinsically, ultimately, and really the thing it appears to be, nor is it self-identical given the irreversible and unceasing changing in/through time. No thing or object of our observation, intentional acts, or any linguistic referent is intrinsically existent or real; those are all reifications and constructions. This also applies to “emptiness,”

which, like any other name, is nothing but a “provisonal/false designation” (*jiaming* 假名).¹⁴ Our clinging to reifications inseparably bound up with our linguistic references to the world we inhabit entails “inversions” (*diandao* 顛倒) confusing falseness with realness.¹⁵ Hence, the *Zhong lun* mainly focuses on deconstructing those inversions and reifications, emphasizing the negative implication of emptiness.

Yet, this does not really exclude the positive, foundational, and ultimate sense of “true emptiness” which goes beyond words and thought. Chapter 24 highlights that aspect. Setting up and sustaining all patterns of interdependency and correlative opposition, emptiness is not correlatively dependent upon an opposite non-emptiness.¹⁶ Instead, “true emptiness” rather implies that terms such as “emptiness” and “non-emptiness,” like all correlatively dependent opposites, are “ultimately empty,” that is, “empty of any intrinsic nature” (*wuzixing* 無自性). Hence, “ultimate emptiness” (*bijingkong* 畢竟空) devoid of correlative opposites, such as being and non-being, emptiness and non-emptiness, as well as falseness and realness (*feixu feishi* 非虛非實) is what this foundational sense truly implies. Ultimately, true emptiness is irreducible, “inexpressible” (*bukeshuo* 不可說) and “inconceivable” (*bukeshiyi* 不可思議). By contrast, all cognizable things of our intentional acts as well as all referents of our names and linguistic expressions are built upon patterns of

“interdependency and correlative opposition” (*xiangdai* 相待). These always imply falsehood which occludes our insight into true emptiness on/of the conventional level of linguistic expression. Hence, when we intend to explicate our understanding of true emptiness, we must become aware of the difference between the ultimate and conventional, according to the crucial chapter 24.

Such understanding, furthermore, realizes that unreality and non-realness does not equal nonexistence. The unenlightened or non-awakened way each of us exists in this world proves the existential relevance of falsehood. While ascertaining the ontological status of “false existence” (*jiayou* 假有) or “illusory existence” (*huanyou* 幻有) in the conventional realm, we must also realize that emptiness of inherent existence, in an ultimate sense, is ontologically indeterminable. Madhyāmika specify such indeterminacy as the “middle way” (*zhongdao* 中道), denying both “real existence” and “complete nonexistence” (*feiyou feiwu* 非有非無) of things rooted in patterns of interdependency. This also includes ontic indeterminacy, as there is no “invariant or definite identity” (*jueding xiang* 決定相) which really characterizes those things.

Presenting such a view of ontic-ontological indeterminacy, the previously quoted verse from the *Zhong lun* outlines the foundation for a pragmatic sense of truth, which

characterizes the Buddhist soteriology of detachment and liberation. For example, a given person may appear to be a teacher in certain circumstances and a student under other conditions; however, ultimately, this person must be empty of both, to be constantly ready to adopt either role contingent upon the ever changing circumstances. Each specific or particular thing only acquires a “provisional/false identity” which points back to its ultimate emptiness devoid of any identity. Conversely, devoid of any real identity, quality, or characteristic, the foundational sense and nature of ultimate emptiness cannot be explicated or “characterized” beyond the falsehood that hints at this nature in an inverse way. In order to fully realize and enact this sense of ultimate truth or true emptiness, our understanding must become aware of such inevitability and therefore engage in an operation of self-observing examination. This implies a linguistic pragmatics which performs non-clinging via the dynamics of “deconstructing and sustaining” and, thereby, accomplishes the insight into the inseparability of truth and falsehood.

4. The Rhetorical Significance of Contradiction

Falsehood sustained by emptiness pervades and shapes the conventional realm of our existence to a degree that the true sense of ultimate emptiness, also called ultimate

truth, is occluded by such falsehood. Among the Indian commentators of the *Kārikā*, Candrakīrti (ca. 600–650) is the one who particularly stresses the concealing significance of the conventional.¹⁷ He realizes that we must resort to linguistic expressions to disclose the world we inhabit; thus we can hardly avoid clinging to the reifications that result from our epistemic-propositional references; we are generally unaware of these “inversions” on the conventional level. By creating these inversions, our linguistic reference must constantly conceal the fact that they are nothing but inversions. When we perform or utter a certain act of linguistic reference, we cannot be aware of this inversion in the very moment we perform it. This evades us even at the very moment that we attempt to point to it due to the falseness implicit in any linguistic expression. Consequently, chapter 23 of the *Zhong lun* denies the realness of what is signified by the term “inversion.”¹⁸ Therefore, it really is an “inversion” if we ascribe realness to what is signified by that term. This paradox just shows that, in our linguistic pointing, we cannot evade the type of falsehood which is concealed to us like a blind spot. In other words, we must use or rely on the rhetoric or linguistic strategy that construes such a type of paradox to become aware of this.

Hence, in signifying the foundational and inexpressible sense of “true emptiness,” Madhyamaka thinkers realize the “performative contradiction” which

arises from that signification and thus features the falsehood of this operation. Such an expression is like a “self-referential paradox”: By denying realness in all linguistic references, the term “emptiness” also denies what it signifies. Conversely, if used as a signifier denoting falseness in all significations, it also includes itself. The notion of falseness represented or signified by this term is false due to this self-inclusion. What is signified is not really falseness, since that signifying operation is actually false. Hence, the contradiction of this expression embodies a self-falsifying feature which is not the referent of the signifying operation, but a characteristic which in fact marks this signification. Thus, viewed from the Buddhist sense of linguistic pragmatics, the contradiction may function as a performative by means of which this self-observing examination of our understanding exhibits falsehood of the expression “emptiness” in a genuine way, that is, beyond its reifying or signifying operation. If seen in this way, it may really highlight the inevitableness or persistence of a falsehood which usually evades our awareness on the conventional level of our linguistic expression. Only this contradiction may really cause us to become fully aware of such a blind spot which is the source of all deceptiveness.

To denote the root of our deceptions – the blind spot, Buddhists generally use the expression “ignorance” (*wuming* 無明). But the Tiantai masters particularly

emphasize that it is the true nature of all dharmas, called “dharma-nature,” that embraces what “ignorance” predicates about the way we truly exist in our world. *Dharma-nature*, that is, the true nature of all things, in which they are equally empty and unreal, does not reach beyond the ignorance which is the source of that unreality. Conversely, such ignorance cannot be separated from the nature of things, in which they truly are empty, which sustains the interdependent arising of all unreal things.

However, our genuine awareness of the “blind spot” enables us to dissociate our discernments from all deceptions and reifications, without really or completely eradicating all constructions and falsehood. The Tiantai masters refer to this level of awareness as the “inconceivable realm” (*buisiyijing* 不思議境). Zhiyi also calls it the “severing [of deceptiveness] without [really] severing [falsehood]” (*duan er buduan* 斷而不斷). This is the summit of our contemplation only accomplished by the awakened mind which, in each moment of its awareness, realizes that “*dharma-nature*” is “ignorance,” just as “ignorance” is “*dharma-nature*.” To thoroughly discern the true nature of all dharmas is to truly understand all falsehood of our ignorance, which is a circular and dynamic process implying the reverse: To truly understand all falsehood of ignorance is to thoroughly discern true *dharma-nature*.

When Tiantai Buddhists state that “*dharma-nature*” is [identical to] “ignorance,” they usually mean that the two terms point to the same referent, yet the respective meanings of the two – truth and falsehood – are perspectives which are not the same but opposed to one another.¹⁹ In other words, the awakened mind, which has completely internalized the dynamic perspective of the middle way, observes or contemplates identity in the sense of the common referent that only seems to split into contrary realms excluding each other. Only if *dharma-nature* and ignorance equally reflect the correlative dependency of truth and falsehood as a whole, has our mind realized that point of reference. This just means that the contemplating mind (=ignorance) and the realm that is contemplated (=dharma-nature) are not separate entities differing from each other in an essential sense. Fully accomplished contemplation just realizes that *dharma-nature* and ignorance completely embrace each other, while the same falsely displays the separation of the two if seen from the viewpoint that lacks the accomplishments of our contemplation. This deceptive image does not cease to prevail in our understanding until we accomplish the subtle awakening to a degree that even contemplation and non-contemplation do not appear as essentially different. This is the way in which the Tiantai masters realize the epistemological nature of our ultimate understanding, which implies the insight into

the inseparability of truth and falsehood.²⁰

Hence, viewed from this Tiantai perspective, the contradiction that features the term “emptiness” is just a semantic characteristic, which does not imply any metaphysical significance; it simply reveals the inevitable falsehood of this term. Nevertheless, Jay Garfield and Graham Priest uphold the contrary view. On the basis of Tibetan and Sanskrit Madhyamaka sources, the two develop the understanding that Nāgārjuna’s “ultimate truth” represents the idea of “true contradictions at the limits of thought.”²¹ However, according to the Chinese Madhyamaka sources – Kumārajīva’s translations, Seng Zhao’s treatises, as well as Jizang’s (549-623) and Zhiyi’s commentaries on the canonical scriptures – the contradictory expression “emptiness” mainly fulfills a rhetorical function. Thanks to the falsehood that it manifests, we are capable of detaching our understanding from deceptive reifications and thus can truly disclose the path to the realm of liberation. Thus, it plays an important role in the textual pragmatics which constitute a crucial part of the soteriological practices developed by the Mahāyāna Buddhists.²² According to this point of view, the metaphysical interpretation of that contradiction oversees ontological indeterminacy and thus entails a reification which, in fact, undermines our awareness of falsehood. It is just a view which again falls prey to our clinging and inversions.

Hence, the deconstructive practice of contemplation is an operation of self-observing examination in which the contradictory and self-falsifying term “emptiness” fulfills a twofold purpose: First, it evokes our awareness of a persistent form of falsehood which, on the conventional level of our linguistic expression, is concealed to us like a blind spot. Second, the contradictory feature of this expression also demonstrates the instructive and positive value of falsehood, deconstructing and invalidating all deceptions rooted in linguistic reifications. The Chinese *jiaming* (假名), used for the Sanskrit *prajñapti* and translated as “provisonal/false designation,” expresses this ambiguity of falsehood, since it literally signifies both “borrowing” and “false.” Hence, falsehood is ambiguous with regard to the existential relevance that it bears for us: If revealed to a degree that its actual and true nature (=dharma-nature) becomes fully evident to us, falsehood is instructive and salutary, whereas, if veiled and hidden like a blind spot, it is a source of deception (=ignorance), which entails harmful consequences. Closely bound up with the meaning of emptiness, ambiguity of falsehood and inverse instructiveness are those viewpoints which feature the epistemological content in the Mahāyāna discussions about truth. However, the specific use of the terms “dharma-nature” and “ignorance” is a characteristic of the Tiantai teaching which is deeply rooted in Kumārajīva’s translations.

5. Speech and Silence

The differentiation that characterizes the self-observing manner in which we contemplate the meaning of inversion or falsehood also applies to the Madhyamaka contemplation of truth, since this operation, too, involves a sense of deconstruction. According to chapter 24 in the *Zhong lun*, we must differentiate between the notion we falsely construe on the conventional level and the sustaining or foundational significance of true emptiness on the ultimate level. Hence there are “two truths” called “conventional truth” and “ultimate truth.”²³ The conventional embodies truth in a provisional sense; it is a modification of the ultimate or true meaning of the Buddha-dharma and cannot be taken literally; ultimately, it is even false. The manner in which we reveal the sustaining sense of true or ultimate emptiness invalidates and deconstructs all inversions on the conventional level. Hence, to realize ultimate truth (=true emptiness) is to achieve complete transparency of all conventional falsehood; therefore, it is crucial to differentiate between two truths.

The relationship of the two is complex and reciprocal, as is demonstrated in the Chinese discussions of Seng Zhao, Jizang, and Zhiyi. On the one hand, the two are equally empty, on the other they are opposites. Detached from reifications arising

from our linguistic references, the understanding corresponding to the ultimate sense realizes true emptiness, while the conventional lacks an awareness or even conceals the sense of emptiness due to its clinging onto linguistic referents. Construing the notion of a separate ultimate, the conventional understanding has not yet fully realized emptiness and thus fails to recognize the conventional nature of this operation. In fact, it confuses the two, mistaking that which is merely conventional for the ultimate, whereas the true understanding of the ultimate, fully aware of emptiness and its inseparability from the conventional, differentiates between the two in an operation of self-observing examination. Hence, though equally empty, the two are opposed to one another. Yet, they do not exclude each other; there is no contradiction between them, nor is the nature of reality truly inconsistent.

The realm of the ultimate beyond thought and speech is not transcendent to, but coextensive with, the conventional realm of the conceivable and expressible. The two relate to each other like speech and silence, according to Zhiyi's explanation.²⁴ Not completely terminating the use of language, silence embodies a para-linguistic mode of awareness achieved through self-observing examination. Paradoxical rhetoric, performative contradiction, and ambiguous language are the linguistic means and strategies used to deconstruct reifications and deceptions arising from our literal

understanding of words, names, and statements. Based on these rhetorical means, we may accomplish the para-linguistic effect of silence amidst our speech, which means that our deconstructive practice turns into a process of constituting or setting up. Silence and speech are indivisible in this specific use of language (*jipo jili jili jipo* 即破即立, 即立即破), which, again, mirrors inseparability of truth and falsehood in our understanding.²⁵

Enacting the ambiguity of falsehood, the conventional fullfills the function of a “skilfull means” (*fangbian* 方便). This is an instructive sign or heuristic means which is essential in disclosing to us the sense of ultimate truth, as explicated by the *Zhong lun*.²⁶ Hence, according to Piṅgala’s (c. 300-c. 350) and Bhāviveka’s (c. 500–c. 578) commentaries on chapter 24, the conventional accounts for the adaptation to the “inverse understanding of truth” characterizing all non-awakened beings. As previously expounded, the “provisional/false term emptiness,” for instances, represents a false yet instructive form which inversely points back to the ultimate or true sense of emptiness. Only with regard to the instructive functioning of these inverse forms can we speak of “conventional truths.” Again, this is truth in a pragmatic sense: Conventional truths are provisionally indispensable, yet, ultimately, they must be abandoned. Only on grounds of such inverse instructiveness and

ambiguity of falsehood can the conventional be regarded as a temporary and contextually limited form of truth.

The concept of “dependent co-arising” (*yuanqi* 緣起) is another example of the same meaning: From a Madhyamaka point of view, the Buddhist notion of “arising” (*sheng* 生) involves patterns of interdependency; but interdependent arising is sustained by emptiness, which denies the reality and inherent existence of things rooted in those patterns.²⁷ Hence, ultimately, there is no real arising. “Dependent arising” is just a conventional truth which inversely points back to that which ultimately is “non-arising” (*busheng* 不生) or “emptiness.” Therefore, the *Dazhi dulun* explains: “A ‘mark of arising’ is not really comprehensible; therefore, it is called ‘non-arising’.”²⁸ Yet, this statement does not imply that arising and non-arising are identical in the same respect, nor are the ultimate and conventional. Pingala commenting on Nāgārjuna’s *Kārikā*, explains that the first verse of the first chapter commences with “non-arising,” to clarify the true or ultimate meaning of “dependent co-arising,” which is true emptiness or ultimate truth.

“Arising” and “non-arising” relate to one another like the two truths, provisional designation and ultimate emptiness, or ignorance and dharma-nature etc. All these polarities are interchangeable and present a dynamic relationship. Due to the

inevitable falsehood in all of our linguistic references and intentional acts, we must constantly renew or adjust our awareness to cope with such persistency. Hence, according to the Madhyamaka teaching, the two truths represent the code for that dynamics which enacts or characterizes the self-observing examination in our understanding of emptiness: We must lay out the inseparability of realness and falseness in our understanding via our constant differentiating between mere conventional truths and the ultimate truth.²⁹ Our continuous differentiating does not strengthen our clinging to reifications, but rather undermines it. It is crucial to see the whole relationship from the perspective of the Buddhist linguistic pragmatics. Equally rooted in emptiness, none of the two has any significance apart from the other. According to Jizang's commentary to the *Zhong lun*, the denial of one side entails that of the other, just as the affirmation of one side requires that of the other. On the linguistic level, the two are "provisonal/false designations," that is, "opposite terms correlatively dependent" (*xiangdai er jiacheng* 相待而假稱).³⁰

Hence, like the ultimate sense of emptiness, "non-arising" denies not only the realness of its opposite but also the literal sense of the very same term; both arising and non-arising are devoid of inherent existence or empty of an intrinsic nature. If understood in this non-literal way, such a term may be helpful in conveying the sense

of ultimate truth. Its negativity mainly functions as a linguistic means used to nullify our reifying tendencies and to differentiate between the two truths. In the initial verse of the *Zhong lun*, this negativity particularly appears in the shape of the “eight negations” (*babu* 八不): “(1) non-arising, (2) non-cessation; (3) non-permanence, (4) non-discontinuity; (5) non-separatedness, (6) non-identity; (7) non-coming, (8) non-going.” Thus, it also is a linguistic symbol for silence amidst speech, accomplishing the para-linguistic understanding of true emptiness, which is full awareness of the inseparability of truth and falsehood.

6. The Dynamic Sense of Buddha-nature

Besides the *Dazhi du lun* and *Zhong lun*, the Southern version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* has also played a crucial role in the formation of Zhiyi’s Tiantai teaching. The Sūtra regards the “supreme meaning of emptiness” (*diyī yī kōng* 第一義空) as both the “middle way” and the “Buddha-nature” (*foxing* 佛性). It discusses this, by specifying the dynamic relationship of “emptiness and non-emptiness” through a complex set of polarities embracing “impermanence – permanence, non-self – self, sorrow – bliss, impurity – purity.” Viewed separately and apart from its respective opposite, none of these terms can account for the ultimate or

“supreme meaning of emptiness.” Each of them is an inversion deeply rooted in reifications. However, in combination, those polarities represent a set of non-dual and mutually complementary viewpoints which relate to each other in an equal and dynamic manner. When we explicate the “supreme meaning,” we must realize the inverse form of this explication, which requires our self-observing examination enacted in such a dynamic way. Hence, according to this Sūtra, this fourfold set of coupled terms can be used in contrary ways: If regarded as separate or discrete qualities, they are called the “four inversions” (*si diandao* 四顛倒); yet as polarities including non-duality, they are referred to as the “four virtues/characteristics” (*si de* 四德) of nirvāṇa and liberation. The dynamic sense of these “four virtues” also embodies “Buddha-nature” (*foxing* 佛性) which is the ultimate or “supreme meaning of emptiness.” The Sūtra explains:

Buddha-nature is called supreme meaning of emptiness. Supreme meaning of emptiness is called wisdom. Emptiness we talk about means not to view emptiness and non-emptiness [as mutually excluding]. The wise person sees emptiness and non-emptiness [without contradiction], permanence and impermanence [without contradiction], sorrow and bliss [without contradiction], self and non-self [without contradiction]. (...) Seeing

emptiness but not non-emptiness cannot be called Middle-Way; (...)

Middle-Way is called Buddha-nature. For that reason, Buddha-nature is permanent and does not [really] change.³¹

Impermanence, non-self, sorrow, and impurity (=emptiness) are the characteristics of the worldly realm, called saṃsāra, while permanence, self, bliss, and purity (=non-emptiness) embody the four virtues of liberation and nirvāṇa. However, our biased understanding and clinging to one side, while excluding the other, entails two types of inversions. Worldly sentient beings one-sidedly attached to permanence, self, bliss, and purity mistake this unreal feature of saṃsāra for reality and non-emptiness; in that sense, these four are worldly inversions. By contrast, the Śrāvaka and Pratyeka-buddha surpassing the worldly realm one-sidedly cling to the opposite, regarding the four virtues of liberation and nirvāṇa as falsehood and emptiness.³² In this specific case, emptiness characterized through impermanence, non-self, sorrow, impurity of saṃsāra turns out to be a source of inversion for those dwelling beyond the worldly realm. Again, the view tainted by worldly inversions considers falsehood as truth, while that beyond the worldly realm falls prey to inversions mistaking truth for falsehood.

Only the supreme Buddha wisdom, accomplishing the “middle way” of the

Buddha-nature, realizes the supreme meaning of true emptiness in a dynamic way, since it truly embodies emptiness of any clinging: To fully observe the feature of all falsehood in the samsaric realm (=emptiness) is to realize the four indestructible virtues of true liberation and nirvāṇa (=non-emptiness), which also applies in reverse. Non-emptiness accounts for the sustaining aspect in the changing but continuing process of transforming from the non-awakened into the awakened state of being, while emptiness, in this specific context, represents the nullifying aspect. Complete nullification of all reifications in our understanding realizes full insight into the sustaining aspect and vice versa. Emptiness which nullifies or invalidates all deceptiveness discloses non-emptiness which truly is what sustains our becoming a Buddha in this specific way.

The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* occasionally quoting from the *Zhong lun* characterizes our insight into the middle way as the dynamic oscillating between emptiness and non-emptiness. However, such an understanding differs from the *Zhong lun*, since the Sūtra tries to describe the sustaining significance of emptiness in terms of the indestructible Buddha-nature. Furthermore, it specifies the dynamic sense of emptiness through the middle way and also regards this as the epistemological nature that characterizes our understanding of ultimate truth. We realize all this, by

constantly oscillating between the opposite yet mutually complementary perspectives which feature our mind's self-observing contemplation. Even though this epistemological view of the middle way differs from the *Zhong lun*'s meaning of ontic-ontological indeterminacy, the two are not unrelated, nor do they contradict each other. In fact the Sūtra's view implies that of the *Zhong lun*, since realizing the dynamics of the middle requires insight into ontological indeterminacy. Hence, the Sūtra also stresses that the supreme meaning does not reach beyond ultimate emptiness.

The section *Deconstructing Dharmas Thoroughly in Zhiyi's Great Calming and Contemplation* thus develops a strategy in virtue of which we can deconstruct the two types of inversions and, at the same time, achieve the insight into the true meaning of the four virtues. According to Zhiyi, this strategy is deeply rooted in his concept of the threefold truth and the intermediating force of the "supreme truth of the middle way" (*diyī yī zhongdao di* 第一義中道諦) which realizes the dynamics of "deconstructing and sustaining." Hence, Zhiyi's "middle way" comes close to the meaning of this Sūtra. His use of the term emptiness is also similar to that of the scripture which mainly stresses the nullifying aspect. Moreover, the important Tiantai compound "Middle-way Buddha-nature" (*zhongdao foxing* 中道佛性) seems also to be derived from the same text.

The Sūtra discusses the crucial term “Buddha-nature” according to a variety of viewpoints, one of which resorts to the paradigm of “causes and results” (*yinguo* 因果). The causes include those practices which entail our awakening and yet belong to a realm prior to our accomplishment, while the result accounts for our full accomplishment surpassing the worldly realm. “Buddha-nature” not only encompasses all factors relevant for our transforming from a non-awakened into an awakened being but also sustains the whole process and its continuity. Hence, the complex sense of “Buddha-nature” ramifies into differing and contrary segments of meanings and conditions: There is our ignorance, which results into our suffering; this entails our dislike of the worldly realm, and leads to our wish, inspiration, and effort to explore the blissful path to liberation and nirvāṇa, based on which we finally realize the Buddha-dharma and also liberate others. Sustaining an inexhaustible sequence of causes and results, Buddha-nature cannot be understood in terms of impermanence, sorrow, impurity, non-self, and emptiness, even though all worldly things are featured in this way. In contrast to those, it embodies the opposite, yet it must pervade the worldly realm, otherwise the notion of our transformation would not be consistent and intelligible.³³

Hence, permanence of Buddha-nature in the worldly realm of impermanence is

accessible to us via our insight into inverse instructiveness and ambiguity of falsehood. The false and ever changing world of saṃsāra inversely embodies the indestructible realm of nirvāṇa and liberation like sickness pointing back to health. The Tiantai rhetoric calls this, “saṃsāra is nirvāṇa,” “suffering is bliss,” “delusion is wisdom,” “evil is good,” or “ignorance is dharma-nature.” All this expresses the pragmatic sense that apart from its opposite neither side can be fully understood, since the negative is the inverse mode of the positive, just as the positive is the transformed mode of the negative.³⁴

Hence, for the inspired yet non-awakened state of mind within the wordly realm, Buddha-nature takes shape in those causes which evoke this mind’s turn into the awakened state going beyond that realm. Based on the terminology drawn from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, Zhiyi distinguishes three interconnected aspects of Buddha-nature. This is a combination of causes which matches his threefold pattern of the middle/emptiness/provisonal: (1) Buddha-nature as the “right cause” (*zhengyin* 正因) is constantly present, indestructible, and thus correlates with the dynamic sense of the middle. This aspect represents both the nature and the realm of our contemplation and discerning, which combines epistemological with ontological issues. (2) As the “cause of our full understanding” and awareness (*liaoyin* 了因), it

is the wisdom of emptiness realized by contemplation. (3) As the “cause of auxiliary conditions” (*yuanyin* 緣因), it embodies an inverse form of instructiveness matching the aspect of the false/provisional.³⁵ This refers to our skills of responding to the contingency and ever changing circumstances during contemplation. Again, the three causes are dynamically related. Furthermore, this pattern can be extended to a series of “ten threefold dharmas” (*shizhong sanfa* 十種三法), which mainly embraces the two poles of “ignorance” and “dharma-nature,” and demonstrates that, from opposite perspectives, each of the two fully presents the common referent of both of them, which is Buddha-nature.³⁶

7. Subtlety: The Hermeneutic Significance of the *Lotus-sūtra*

This threefold pattern accounts for the dynamics which Zhiyi also calls the “subtle dharma” (*miaofa* 妙法) – a binary borrowed from the Chinese title of the *Lotus-sūtra*, translated by Kumārajīva. According to Zhiyi’s extensive treatise on the meaning of this Sūtra title, called *The Profound Meaning of the Sūtra of the Subtle Dharma of the Lotus-Blossom* (*Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義), the term “subtle” (*miao* 妙) embodies the essential meaning of the Buddha-dharma (*fofa* 佛法), integrating the whole complex of Buddhist doctrines into an all-inclusive system.³⁷

Based on his quotation from the *Garland-sūtra* (*Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, *Huayan jing*), Zhiyi further emphasizes that “dharma” embraces the meanings of “Buddha, sentient beings, and mind” which do not differ from each other in an essential sense.³⁸ Moreover, “subtle” (*miao* 妙) is also a synonym for both “suspending” (*jue* 絕) and “inconceivable” (*bukesiyi* 不可思議).³⁹ Hence, the “subtle” sense of the “dharma” reaches beyond our conceivability, “suspending all patterns of interdependency” (*juedai* 絕待). In fact, it cannot be adequately discussed in terms of correlatively dependent opposites such as “conceivable and inconceivable.” This, indeed, is ultimately inconceivable and yet does not completely exclude the provisional use of the conceivable. The conceivable realm embraces all patterns of interdependency and correlative opposition, and it is the subtle and inconceivable force that instantiates this provisional use of the conceivable. Hence, our constantly changing and adjusting manner in which we use the various forms of the conceivable explores the dynamic sense of the inconceivable and thus reveals the “sustaining force” (*ti* 體) of such subtlety.⁴⁰

In the section *Subtlety of the Dharma* (*famiao* 法妙), the *Profound Meaning of the Lotus-sūtra* specifies the dynamic subtlety. “*Dharma*” literally means “law,” both in Sanskrit and in its Chinese translation “*fa*” (法), which is the norm or rule that must

or can be followed. Hence, Zhiyi explains the “subtle dharma” in terms of the “threefold track” (*sangui* 三軌) encompassing three links called “the track of true nature” (*zhenxing gui* 真性軌), “the track of contemplative illumination” (*guanzhao gui* 觀照軌), and “the track in support of accomplishment” (*zicheng gui* 資成軌).⁴¹

The first link is that which sustains the other two and thus reveals its very sense in the functioning of them. Therefore, the second link is also called “wisdom” (*zhi* 智) and the third “practice” (*xing* 行), while the first turns out to be the “realm” (*jing* 境) that is accessible to us via accomplishing the “functioning” (*yong* 用) of the two. Again, the “true nature” which is the “sustaining force” (*ti* 體) in the “functioning” of “wisdom and practice” is also called “realm,” because, when accomplished, those two fully reveal this force as their inner nature. Hence, the dynamic relationship of the “sustaining force” and “functioning” (*ti yong* 體用) can be further specified as that of “nature” and “cultivation” (*xing xiu* 性修), “fruit” and “cause” (*guo yin* 果因) etc. Most importantly, the two sides in this unity relate to each other like the two truths which form a polarity rooted in non-duality.⁴²

Analogous to the “non-arising” of ultimate truth and emptiness, Zhiyi expounds the “sustaining force” or the “true nature” in terms of “non-moving and non-putting forth” (*budong buchū* 不動不出). This embodies the inconceivable realm, which

suspends all patterns of correlative opposites and interdependencies. By contrast, the functioning of “contemplative illumination” (=wisdom) and “support of accomplishment” (=practice) accounts for the “capability of moving and putting forth” (*neng dongchu* 能動出), since there is also a certain sense of “conveying” (*yun* 運) the meaning of the Buddha-dharma via the “vehicle” (*sheng* 乘) of “teaching and transforming” (*jiaohua* 教化). However, this sense only conforms to the false/provisional form of “arising,” which features the conventional level of the conceivable realm. In the *Profound Meaning of the Lotus-sūtra*, Zhiyi explains the whole relationship:

Why did we previously explain “vehicle” in terms of “conveying”? If we apprehend the true nature, then there is no moving and no putting forth; hence there is neither conveying, nor is there non-conveying. If we apprehend the contemplative illumination and support of accomplishment, then there is the capability of moving and putting forth, and we call this conveying. Hence, [in the ultimate sense], moving and putting forth is nothing but non-moving and non-putting forth, just as non-moving and non-putting forth is moving and putting forth [in the provisional sense]. If we discuss the sustaining force which [provisionally] takes shape in the

functioning, then it is moving and putting forth that instantiates the sense of non-moving and non-putting forth. If we discuss the functioning which [ultimately] is the sustaining force, then it is non-moving and non-putting forth that appears in the shape of moving and putting forth. The sustaining force and functioning are non-dual, yet we differentiate them as two.⁴³

This just reiterates and exemplifies Zhiyi's understanding of the dynamic relationship of the two truths, which implies his view of the threefold truth and Buddha-nature. He similarly states that the supreme meaning of the ultimate truth must be enacted through the constant change and provisional use of the conventional truths, while realizing that none of those conventional truths really reaches beyond the interdependency that constitutes all of them.⁴⁴ In other words, only if we completely know the nature of the conventional, can we really know the ultimate and vice versa, which does not mean that this is a knowledge of two separate things. The same applies to suffering – bliss, saṃsāra – nirvāṇa, delusion – wisdom, and all the previously mentioned polarities, such as “arising” and “non-arising,” “moving” and “non-moving,” “putting forth” and “non-putting forth.” To fully realize one side is to perform and enact the turn into the other, which perpetuates the dynamic and circular “change of aspects” in our understanding of the ultimate and inconceivable level of

the “perfect/round teaching.”

All this means that, in addition to the two poles, the third position of the ambiguous and indeterminate middle must also be taken in account, which reflects their reciprocity as a whole. Indeterminacy of the middle means inconceivableness and inseparability which is non-duality yet polarity. To present this sense of the middle is to show that each of the two poles fully instantiates that which embraces and sustains the two of them; thus we differentiate between the two in a manner that each of them equally reveals or enacts the dynamic and indeterminate unity of that differentiation. It is the threefold pattern that truly accomplishes this, fulfilling the dynamic sense of this reciprocity as a whole. Consequently, Zhiyi stresses that the “true nature” correlates with the middle, the “contemplative wisdom” with emptiness, and the “support of accomplishment” with the false/provisional.⁴⁵ According to the threefold pattern, each of the three reveals and presents all three of them as a dynamic whole.

Zhiyi tries to prove that all crucial Buddhist doctrines ultimately culminate in the dynamic understanding of the subtle dharma, assorting the array of “ten threefold dharmas.” This consists of Buddhist terms drawn from the whole range of Mahāyāna scriptures.⁴⁶ However, among all sūtras, the *Lotus-sūtra* accounts for that sermon of

the Buddha which realizes the meaning of the subtle dharma in the most elaborated and most authentic way. Zhiyi refers to the “subtle dharma” of the *Lotus-sūtra* as the “manifesting of the root via/qua disclosing the traces” (*kaiben xianji* 開跡顯本). In this use of language, the binary “root/traces” (*benji* 本跡) codifies the whole doctrinal content of the subtle dharma and also applies to that Sūtra in a twofold sense: It denotes both the Sūtra’s inner compositional structure and its intertextual relationship with all the other Sūtras. None of the other Sūtras unfolds such a meaning, according to the Tiantai.

Originally, the expression “root/traces” is borrowed from Seng Zhao’s introduction to the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* and, most likely, derived from the indigenous Chinese Daoist and Xuanxue traditions. The “root” (*ben* 本) is invisible, hidden, and foundational, whereas the visible “traces” (*ji* 跡) are the secondary endings and branches such as twigs and leaves, which both refer back to and rely on this root. In this Buddhist understanding, the “traces” represent the visible but untrue apparitions and skillful means of the Buddha both relying on and pointing back to his invisible but permanent “root.”⁴⁷

Again, for the Tiantai masters, the “root/traces” binary parallels the compositional structure of the *Lotus-sūtra*. The “traces” are expressed through the

skillful means and the parables narrated in the first half of the text where the Buddha makes his pronouncement that all the apparitions and visible marks presented to sentient beings are neither real nor the ultimate embodiment of his nature. The root is addressed to in the second half of this text elaborating on the meaning that the Buddha “has already been becoming a Buddha a far distance of ages ago,” which, in other words, refers to Buddha-nature – the Buddha’s permanent yet hidden presence in the false world of ignorant beings; this is also called “root-time” (*benshi* 本時).⁴⁸

Zhiyi particularly stresses the mutuality between those two aspects, as this expresses the same dynamics that constitutes the relationship of the two truths: Without the root, the manifesting potential of the traces cannot be sustained; without the traces, the sustaining force of the root cannot be manifested. Therefore, on a hermeneutical level, this mutuality also characterizes the intertextual relationship between the *Lotus-sūtra* which is the root and all the other Sūtras which function as the traces. To fully understand the *Lotus-sūtra* is to understand all the other Sūtras and vice versa, as the *Lotus-sūtra* sustains what all the other Sūtras together manifest. Applied to the intertextual relationship of the *Lotus-sūtra* and all the other Sūtras, the root/traces binary signifies the hermeneutical circle, in which the practitioner’s understanding must engage, to realize and discern the subtle dharma.

Due to this dynamic pattern of mutuality, none of these texts can be neglected in the practitioner's course of studying the Buddha-dharma. Yet the accomplished understanding even apprehends or anticipates all the other differing texts, even while reading only one of them.⁴⁹ Ultimately, the true or genuine text of the *Lotus-sūtra* corresponds to this level of understanding (=subtle awakening); and the Sūtra embodies the root only in that specific sense. Hence, the text of the *Lotus-sūtra* sublates itself as a specific text in space and time, embodying and realizing the "root-time" (*benshi* 本時) of the "subtle dharma." In this sense, the *Lotus-sūtra* not only differs from but also embraces all the other Sūtras which only represent the "traces" and do not reach the "root," since they neither differentiate between the root and traces, nor realize the non-duality of them. The *Lotus-sūtra* is the text that enacts the non-duality of root and traces qua differentiation. For Zhiyi, the Sūtra title just codifies these two dimensions which embrace the entire doctrinal content of the Buddha-dharma, which he tries to unfold in his work *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus-sūtra*.

8. Mind

The inconceivable and suspending sense of the subtle dharma also shapes Zhiyi's

discussion of mind and contemplation, as is expounded in the chapter “contemplating the mind as the inconceivable realm” in the *Great Calming and Contemplation*. Buddhist texts often address the mind as that potential which, on the one side, brings about deceptiveness and suffering and, on the other, true insight and liberation. However, there are differing accounts of the nature of mind: Tathāgatagarbha scriptures, such as the *Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanāda-sūtra*, hold that the mind that sustains both the defiled and undefiled realms is “intrinsically clear and pure,” while Yogācāra texts, such as Asaṅga’s *Mahāyānasaṃgraha-śāstra*, regard the defiled *ālāya*-consciousness as our foundational mental bondage to the circular system of self-perpetuating falsehood. Even though the two equally advocate our transformation based on our mind’s awakening, they represent almost contrary viewpoints regarding our mind’s nature.

By contrast, Zhiyi’s understanding, mainly influenced by the Madhyamaka view, stresses that our mind does not abide in an intrinsic nature.⁵⁰ It is empty of inherent existence, and arises dependent upon conditions and within patterns of extrinsic relationships. Therefore, he does not call upon Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha sources to develop and justify his own view. Instead, he resorts to Buddhahadra’s translation of the *Garland-sūtra* which stresses the mind’s potential of generating. The mind’s

nature, according to this sūtra, neither differs from the awakened state of the Buddha nor from the unawakened sentient beings in an essential sense. “Mind” just refers to the potential that we must disclose when we transform into an awakened being. Each single moment of our mental activity and awareness contains the potential to transform itself into any of the existential possibilities implicit in the “tenfold *dharma*-realm” (*shi fajie* 十法界), which embraces the whole range of all beings, from those dwelling on the lowest stage of ignorance up to the highest Buddha-wisdom.

Moreover, transformation rooted in our contemplation and cultivation implies self-transformation. The notion of mind that Zhiyi discusses embraces both the object and the agent of our contemplation and transformation; it is the sixth among six types of sensory consciousness, called “intentional consciousness” (*yishi* 意識).⁵¹ As arising in correlation with the intentional objects, referents, or sensual realms extrinsic to itself, “mind” (*xin* 心) could be better called “mental activity” or “awareness” (*xinnian* 心念). However, the intentional consciousness consists of three components which all pertain to the mental realm. This is to say its awareness arises when its faculty and the referential realm corresponding to it join together; this referential realm is a mental aspect, since it embraces our conceptual constructions and images.

By contrast, the sensual realms extrinsic to the other five types of sensory consciousness are visible form, sound, smell etc, which must be distinguished from the “mental aspect” (*xin* 心) as the “physical form” (*se* 色). Yet, neither does our awareness arise without the specific realm to which it refers, nor does any of these realms appear apart from its corresponding consciousness that is aware of it. Moreover, the intentional consciousness defines or delineates the respective focus, object, or realm whenever one or more of the other five types of sensory consciousness is active.⁵² Hence, none of those five fulfills the function to identify sensual forms in the physical world apart from the sixth intentional consciousness. This a view which Zhiyi most probably adopted from Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharma-kośa*, according to Zhanran’s explanations.⁵³

Given the fact that mental activity and all the respective realms arise interdependently, the world of physical form and the realm of mental activity are equally empty and unreal. Hence, as long as we falsely assume that there really exists the present instant of mental activity that sustains our awareness, the whole range of all realms of beings, both awakened and non-awakened, is, in the same way, included. However, again, neither awareness in form of mental activity nor all the referents extrinsic to it are really existent. Yet all those illusory forms are existentially relevant

for us. The famous Tiantai formula “one single instant of awareness [inseparably bound up with] the three-thousand worlds” (*yinian sanqian* 一念三千) expressing this has often been falsely understood as a cosmological concept in both modern Asian and Western studies.⁵⁴

Hence, Zhiyi, like Sanlun master Jizang, denies the reality of what is signified by the name “mind.”⁵⁵ Though he denies the existence of a real mind, he points out that we cannot deny the existential relevance of this false view, as it ineradicably shapes the way we perceive and think of ourselves and our world. We cannot avoid thinking that all things that concern our life, existence, and awareness are comprehended, understood, and judged by an entity that we believe to be our real mind. He therefore holds that, in our practice of contemplation and introspection, the “false/provisional mind” may provide a point of departure for the realization of the full awareness of that falsehood which constantly pervades the way we relate to our world. Zhiyi’s “contemplating the mind as the inconceivable realm” examines and uses “mind” as a provisional means or useful fiction, by means of which we can reveal the persistent falsehood that would otherwise evade our conventional awareness like a blind spot.

In the dynamic performance of the “threefold-contemplation within/of/qua one-instant-of-awareness” (*yi xin san guan* 一心三觀), mind recognizes itself as the

source of all delusions and falsehood, and at the same time, thereby realizes that this same delusion is precisely identical to the true potential for our transformation. The object and the agent of/in this contemplation are not really distinguishable; “contemplation of emptiness” (*kongguan* 空觀) realizes falsehood in all referents of our intentional acts, “contemplation of the false/provisional” (*jiaguan* 假觀) realizes the instructive value of all falsehood, “contemplation of the middle” (*zhongdaoguan* 中道觀) realizes the reciprocal relationship of the previous two restricting and complementing each other. Hence, in the “threefold contemplation” each of the three realizes all three of them. This is regarded as the ultimate skill in dealing with all types of contingency in a soteriologically salutary manner. Achieving the insight that this ambiguity or ontological indeterminacy of mental activity is irreducible – that it is neither mere falsehood nor mere truth – is precisely what is referred to, in the chapter title “the mind contemplated as the inconceivable realm.”

Hence, from a summarizing point of view, the Chinese Tiantai teaching seems to follow the constructivist paradigm that understands reality and truth as a system of mutually constituting views and aspects of observation. In the deconstructive practice of Tiantai contemplation we realize that our cognitive system is not capable of distinguishing between the conditions of real objects and the conditions of our cognition,

because our cognition does not have independent access to a reality extrinsic to that cognition.

Without this fundamental insight into the nature of our cognition, which shapes the way we exist in our world, the Tiantai sense of awakening, as well as its soteriological significance, cannot be fully realized.

¹ Chinese Buddhist masters, such as the Huayan masters, Dilun masters, and later Tiantai masters often use the term “conjunction of truth and falseness” (*zhenwang hehe* 真妄和合), which refers to the inseparability of the “pure mind,” *tathāgatagarbha*, and the defiled *ālāya*-consciousness. Tiantai-master Zhiyi uses another phrase to denote his concept of inseparability, called “ignorance is dharma-nature; dharma-nature is ignorance,” (*wuming ji faxing, faxing ji wuming* 無明即法性, 法性即無明). See the subsequent sections.

² The way in which I use “deconstruction” for *po* comes close to Youru Wang’s explanation of the Chan strategies of “deconstruction”: “Deconstruction here is regarded as a contextual strategy or a situational operation of overturning oppositional hierarchies with the characteristic of self-subverting,” (see Wang, 2003).

³ The Chinese term *panjiao* (判教) means “classifying the doctrines.” Zhiyi’s model, called the “four teachings of the transforming dharma” (*huafa sijiao* 化法四教), is conceptually related to the threefold contemplation or truth, since the dialectical progress in which the “threefold truth” evolves follows those four levels. The first level embraces the “*tripitika* of the Small Vehicle teachings” (*sanzang jiao* 三藏教), the second comprises the “common teachings of the Small and Great Vehicle” (*tong jiao* 通教), the third refers to the “particular teaching of the Great Vehicle” (*bie jiao* 別教), and the highest culminates in the “round/perfect teaching” (*yuan jiao* 圓教) embracing the previous three yet going beyond them. The last of the four represents the tenet and core of the Tiantai thought and is, therefore, the focus in the present article.

⁴ See the *Great Calming and Contemplation*, (T46, no. 1911, p. 3, a4-10).

⁵ [1] = suffering (*ku* 苦), [2] = origin (*ji* 集), [3] = path (*dao* 道), [4] = extinction (*mie* 滅) signify the referents of the four truths. This passage also implies that the deconstructing and setting up of those referents is inseparable.

⁶ See the *Great Calming and Contemplation*, (T46, no. 1911, p. 1, c23-p. 2, a2).

⁷ Neal Donner and Daniel Stevenson translate “*shixiang*” (實相) as “ultimate reality,” interpreting this

term in a metaphysical way, see Donner and Stevenson, 1993, 112.

⁸ See Zhiyi's quotations from these scriptures in the *Great Calming and Contemplation*, (T46, no. 1911, p. 9, a7-13).

⁹ The Chinese *Zhong lun* (中論) is Kumārajīva's (344-413) translation of Nāgārjuna's (ca. 150) *Mūlamādhyamaka-kārikā*, transmitted together with *Piṅgala's (3rd century) commentary. The Chinese tradition considered the *Zhong lun* (along with this commentary) as a unitary and homogeneous text. Together with the *Da zhi du lun* 大智度論 (Sanskrit: **Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*) — a commentary on one of the large *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*, also translated by Kumārajīva — this specific text of the *Zhong lun* (including *Piṅgala's commentary) belongs to those early Madhyamaka sources only known and transmitted in the Chinese tradition. These two texts were fundamental for the development of the Chinese Sanlun, Tiantai, Huayan, and Chan schools.

¹⁰ See the initial verses of that chapter stating this meaning, (T30, no. 1564, p. 32, b13-22). The three jewels are called Buddha, dharma, saṅgha.

¹¹ Based on the quotation in the *Great Calming and Contemplation*, see (T46, no. 1911, p. 1, b29-c1); the verse in the *Zhong lun* differs a little from this, see (T30, no. 1564, p. 33, b11-12).

¹² See Zhanran's commentary on the *Great Calming and Contemplation*, (T46, no. 1912, p. 149, c10-12).

¹³ See the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (T46, no. 1911, p. 55, a19-21) and (T46, no. 1911, p. 55, b18-19). The “threefold contemplation” also correlates with the “threefold truth” (*sandi* 三諦) which is a Tiantai extension of the Madhyamaka view of the “the two truths,” (conventional truth and ultimate truth, *erdi* 二諦). For many modern scholars, it represents the core of Zhiyi's and Zhanran's Tiantai thought, see Swanson, 1989. Slightly different from this, Wu Rujun, or (Ng Yu-Kwan) stresses the concept of Buddha-nature, (see Ng, 1993). Furthermore, Paul Swanson's study as well as Ziporyn's (Ziporyn, 2004) stress the ontological significance of the “threefold truth.”

¹⁴ Unlike the semantics of the Chinese translation “*jiaming*,” the Sanskrit *prajñāpti* does not explicitly reveal the meaning of “falsehood.” See the *Zhong lun*, (T46, no. 1911, p. 55, b18-19).

¹⁵ One of the larger versions of the *Prajñā-pāramitā-sūtras* translated by Xuanzang (玄奘 602-664) explains the term “inversion” (*diandao* 顛倒): “All kinds of deluded beings variously produce attachments; in virtue of their differentiations and inversions the thought of real existence arises where there is no real existence; ... unreality is said to be reality in virtue of deceptive differentiations and inversions within the realm of all constructed *dharma*(s),” *Da bore boluomiduo jing* (大般若波羅蜜多經) (T07, no. 220, p. 418, c25- p. 419, a4).

¹⁶ See the *Zhong lun*: “If there is a *dharma* which is not empty, then there is the *dharma* of emptiness, too. In fact there is no *dharma* which is not empty; how then is it possible that there is the *dharma* of emptiness?” (T30, no. 1564, p. 18, c7-8).

¹⁷ See Garfield’s article (Garfield, 2011, 23-39).

¹⁸ See the *Zhong lun*, (T30, no. 1564, p. 32, a8-9).

¹⁹ See the *Great Calming and Contemplation*, (T46, no. 1911, p. 21, c16).

²⁰ Unlike the present article, the philosopher and scholar Mou Zongsan (1909-1995) understands this Tiantai view of “inseparability” (*ji* 即) in a metaphysical and ontological sense, which is criticized by Wu Rujun (see Ng, 1993 and Mou, Zongsan, 1977, 1993). For another recent English article coming close to Mou Zongsan’s view of ontological interpretation, see Kwan, 2011, 206-223. For an English critique and evaluation of Mou Zongsan’s interpretation, see my article (Kantor, 2006, 16-69).

²¹ This further implies that the Madhyamaka notion of the two truths has a metaphysical or ontological significance. That is to say that although two truths doctrine is coherent in terms of rationality, it leads to inconsistency regarding the nature of reality; there must be “two realities”, one indicated by each of the conventional and ultimate respectively, and this is called “di-aletheism.” Such an ontological interpretation of “true contradictions” subsumes the Madhyamaka concept under one of the modern views of logic called “para-consistent logic,” (Deguchi, Garfield and Priest, 2008: 395-402; Garfield, 2002: 86-109). Priest explains the ontological implications of this contradiction: “Nāgārjuna’s enterprise is one of fundamental ontology, and the conclusion he comes to is that fundamental ontology is impossible. But that is a fundamental ontological conclusion—and that is a paradox” (Priest, 2002: 214). For a critical discussion of Garfield’s and Priest’s interpretation, see Tillemans, 2009, 83-101. Moreover, the Chinese exegetical tradition of the early Madhyamaka works does not

conform to this interpretation; Seng Zhao's *Emptiness of the Unreal/Unreal Emptiness* (*Buzhen kong lun* 不真空論) explicitly denies the understanding of the two truths as two realities, or the inconsistency of the nature of reality.

²² For an analysis of the linguistic strategies in Chan Buddhism and Daoism, see Wang, 2003; also, my forthcoming article (Kantor, 2014).

²³ Piṅgala's and Bhāviveka's commentary (*Prajñāpradīpa*, *Boredeng lunshi* 般若燈論釋), which are only extant in Chinese, explain that the two truths represent two contrary understandings of truth – one which characterizes the common or non-awakened and the other which represents the noble, or awakened view. The conventional, common, non-awakened understanding is nothing but an inversion of the insight of the noble. See the *Zhong lun* (T30, no. 1564, p. 32, c20-23) and the *Boredeng lunshi* (T30, no. 1566, p. 125, b8-11).

²⁴ See the *Great Calming and Contemplation*, (T46, no. 1911, p. 55, a15-21).

²⁵ This represents the Tiantai interpretation of the relationship between the two truths which expands the view expressed in the *Zhong Lun* without contravening it.

²⁶ Chapter 24 in the *Zhong lun* says: “If we do not rely upon the conventional truth, we cannot realize the ultimate; without realizing the ultimate, we cannot accomplish nirvāṇa.” (T30, no. 1564, p.33, a2-3).

²⁷ The first chapter of the *Zhong lun* explains that “arising” implies the sequence of “cause and result”; however, without a result, no thing could be identified as a cause and vice versa, which demonstrates that the two emerge only in patterns of interdependency devoid of self-sustaining reality.

²⁸ See the *Dazhi du lun*, (T25: 1509.319a13).

²⁹ See chapter 24 in the *Zhong lun*: “If a person does not understand to differentiate between the two truths, he/she does not understand the true meaning of the profound Buddha-dharma,” (T30, no. 1564, p. 32, c18-19).

³⁰ Jizang states in the first chapter of his *Treatise on the Profoundity of the Great Vehicle* (*Dasheng Xuanlun* 大乘玄論): “The two truths are an explanatory device universally valid for all doctrines linguistically expressed. They are provisional/false designations based on correlative dependency. ... The two truths are only the doctrinal gateways, but do not really relate to the ultimate realm and

principle itself.” (T45, no. 1853, p. 15, a14-17).

³¹ See the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, (T12, no. 374, p.523, b12-19).

³² Śrāvaka and Pratyeka-buddha are Sanskrit terms for the accomplished person following the Small Vehicle, while the Bodhisattva and the Buddha, according to the Tiantai teaching, represent those of the Great Vehicle. The Śrāvaka (literally “voice hearer”) realizes awakening based on his listening to the Buddha’s sermons, while the Pratyeka-buddha seeks accomplishment in “solitary awakening.” Altogether, those four are called the “noble persons beyond the three realms,” whereas the six destinies of saṃsara embrace the “common persons within the three realms.”

³³ Mou Zongsan stresses the ontological significance of Buddha-nature, by saying that it is the Buddha-nature that sustains all dharmas interdependently arising, which is correct, as long as we are aware of the fact that those dharmas are not really but illusively existent. Indeed, the existential relevance and ontological status of falsehood is undeniable, even while the ontological ground of this is ultimately indeterminable. Therefore, the ontological significance of Buddha-nature cannot be explained in terms of a metaphysics which seeks the realm of truth beyond all falsehood, (see Mou, 1993, 26).

³⁴ Unlike the present article which stresses the epistemological and pragmatic sense of these paradoxical statements, Brook Ziporyn’s view on Tiantai “value paradox” also sees a metaphysical significance, (see Ziporyn, 2000, 352-358).

³⁵ See Zhiyi’s *Profound Meaning of the Sūtra of the Subtle Dharma of the Lotus-Blossom*, *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi* (妙法蓮華經玄義) =(Fahua xuanyi), (T33, no. 1716, p. 743, c17-18) and (T33, no. 1716, p. 744, c12-24).

³⁶ See Zhiyi’s *Fahua xuanyi*, (T33, no. 1716, p. 744, a21-24), *Weimo jing xuanshu* (維摩經玄疏) (T38, no. 1777, p. 553, c27-p. 554, a1), and the lengthy section in the *Jinguangming jing xuanyi*(金光明經玄義) commencing with the term “ten threefold dharmas” (*shizhong sanfa* 十種三法), (T39, no. 1783, p. 3, a14). See also Mou, 1993, Vol. 2, and Toshio, 1973, 35-54.

³⁷ The entire text of this treatise expounds the Tiantai view on the doctrinal system of the Buddha-dharma, interpreting the meanings of all the characters in the Chinese Sutra-title. The longest

part of this lengthy Tiantai work focuses on the first character “subtle” (*miao* 妙), divided into the sections “Ten Subtleties of the Gateway to the Traces” (*jimen shimiao*, 跡門十妙) and “Ten Subtleties of the Gateway to the Root” (*benmen shimiao*, 本門十妙). These two parts basically contain the whole doctrinal system of the Tiantai-teaching. Moreover, among the three extant Chinese translations of this early Mahāyāna-sūtra, (in Sanskrit called *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*), the first character “subtle” (*miao* 妙) in the Sūtra title occurs only in the Kumārajīva version (406 AD), while those of Dharmarakṣa (286 AD) and Dharmagupta (601 AD) use the term “right, true” (*zheng* 正), which comes closer to the Sanskrit meaning.

³⁸ See the Sutra text, (T09, no. 278, p. 465, c29) and Zhiyi’s *Fahua xuanyi* (T33, no. 1716, p. 693, a28-29).

³⁹ See Zhiyi’s *Fahua xuanyi* (T33, no. 1716, p. 697, a11) and (T33, no. 1716, p. 697, b9).

⁴⁰ See Zhiyi’s *Fahua xuanyi* (T33, no. 1716, p. 697, a3-b1).

⁴¹ See Zhiyi’s *Fahua xuanyi* (T33, no. 1716, p. 741, b7-c1). Furthermore, Zhiyi explains that, under deceptive influences, the “three tracks” take the shape of the “three obstacles” (*sanzhang* 三障) which can be removed by the “threefold contemplation” that realizes the “three dharmas”: “dharmakāya, prajñā, liberation.” The whole section of the *Subtlety of the Dharma* from page 741 to 746 in the *Taishō* edition seems to reveal the core of the Tiantai view on the “subtle.”

⁴² Based on this section and observation of the “subtle,” Zhanran seems to have composed his famous Tiantai work of the ten non-dualities, called *The Gateway of the Ten Non-Dualities*, *Shi buermen* (十不二門), (T46, no. 1927, p. 702, c17-18).

⁴³ See (T33, no. 1716, p. 742, c25-29).

⁴⁴ See the *Great Calming and Contemplation*, (T46, no. 1911, p. 55, a15-19).

⁴⁵ See the *Fahua xuanyi* (T33, no. 1716, p. 743, c17-18).

⁴⁶ See footnote 44.

⁴⁷ Parts of this section are taken from my article (Kantor, 2011, 274-293). Seng Zhao (374-414) uses this binary in his introduction to the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*, (T38, no. 1775, p. 327, b1-5). Like

Zhiyi (538-597), Jizang (549-623) uses it in his commentaries to the *Lotus-sūtra* and the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*, (T38, no. 1780, p. 872, b2-p. 873, a2).

⁴⁸ See the *Lotus-sūtra*, (T9, no. 262, p. 42, c19-20).

⁴⁹ See the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (T46, no. 1911, p. 3, b8-9).

⁵⁰ See the *Great Calming and Contemplation*, (T46, no. 1911, p. 54, b18-19).

⁵¹ See Zhanran's commentary to the *Great Calming and Contemplation*, hinting at this, (T46, no. 1912, p. 318, c14-15).

⁵² This thought is clearly explicated in the third chapter of the *Samādhirnirmocana-sūtra* (解深密經), see the passage in (T16, no. 676, p. 692, b19-28). There are two of four Chinese translations one of which has been accomplished prior to Zhiyi and the other by Xuanzang (602-664) in a later period.

⁵³ See the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (T46, no. 1911, p. 63, c23-p. 64, a4) and Zhanran's commentary on this (T46, no. 1912, p. 318, c10-14), quoting the *Abhidharma-kośa*.

⁵⁴ See the *Great Calming and Contemplation* expressing the meaning of this formula, (T46, no. 1911, p. 54, a7-9); however, the formula (*yinian sanqian* 一念三千) seems to be coined by Zhanran.

⁵⁵ See Jizang's argument in his commentary on the *Diamond Sūtra*: "Why is it called the inverted mind? Because no mind can be found if we investigate it with respect to the three temporal marks [consisting of the past, the present, and the future]; yet according to the viewpoint of the sentient beings, the mind does exist. However, this is just an ascription of existence to something that does not [really] exist; therefore it is called inversion (T33, no. 1699, p. 120, b12-13). Similarly, Zhiyi comments on the *Golden Light Sūtra* (*Suvarṇaprabhāsottama*): "Mind arises from conditions, therefore it is empty. Since we only say that mind exists in a forced sense, it is provisional/false. This does not extend beyond the [true] nature of all *dharma*(s), therefore it is the middle" (T39, no. 1783, p. 8, a1-4).

References:

Deguchi, Yasuo, Jay Garfield, and Priest, Graham. 2008. "The Way of the Dialetheist: Contradictions in Buddhism." *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 57, no. 2, 395–402.

-
- Garfield, Jay. 2002. *Empty Words—Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 86–109.
- . 2011. “Taking Conventional Truth Seriously: Authority regarding Deceptive Reality,” In: *Moonshadows – Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*. edit. Cowherds, New York: Oxford University press, 23-39.
- Donner, Neal & Stevenson, Daniel B. 1993. *The Great Calming and Contemplation – A Study and Annotated Translation of the First Chapter of Chih-i’s Mo-ho chih-kuan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.
- Kantor, Hans-Rudolf. 2006. “Ontological Indeterminacy and Its Soteriological Relevance: An Assessment of Mou Zongsan’s Interpretation of Zhiyi’s Tiantai Buddhism,” *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 56, no. 1, 16-69.
- . 2009. “Zhiyi’s Great Calming and Contemplation: Contemplating Mental Activity as the Inconceivable Realm.” Edit. Edelglass, William & Garfield, Jay. *Buddhist Philosophy – Essential Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 334-348.
- . 2011. “Ambivalence of Illusion – A Chinese Buddhist Perspective,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. vol. 38, no. 2, 274-293.
- . 2014. “Textual Pragmatics in Early Chinese Madhyamaka.” *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 65, no. 3.
- Kwan, Chun-Keung. 2011. “Mou Zongsan’s Ontological Reading of Tiantai Buddhism,” *Journal of Chinese Buddhism*, vol. 38, no. 2, 206-223.
- Moeller, Hans-Georg. 1999. “Zhuangzi’s Dream of the Butterfly: A Daoist Interpretation.” In: *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 49, no. 4; 439-450.
- Mou, Zongsan 牟宗三. 1977, 1st vol. and 1993, 2nd vol. *Buddha-nature and Prajñā (Foxing yu Bole 《佛性與般若》)*, Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju.

-
- NG, Yu-Kwan. 1993. *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism and Early Mādhyamika*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Priest, Graham. 2002. *Beyond the Limits of Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2005. *Towards Non-Being—The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Swanson, Paul. 1989. *Foundation's of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy – The Flowering of the Two Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.
- . 2003. *The Great Cessation-Contemplation*. Tokio: Kosei Publishing Company, CD-Rom.
- T (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 《大正新修大藏經》). 1933. Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe kaigyoku, eds. 100 vols. Tokyo: Daizo shuppan kai.
- Tillemans, Tom J.F. 2009. “How do Mādhyamikas Think? – Notes on Jay Garfield, Graham Priest, and Paraconsistency.” *Pointing at the Moon, Buddhism, Logic, Analytic Philosophy*. Edit. D'Amato, Mario, Jay Garfield, and Tom J.F. Tillemans, New-York: Oxford University Press, 83-101.
- Toshio, Andō. 1973. (*Tendai seigō shisōron* 《天台性具思想論》). Kyoto: Hozokan, 35-54.
- Wang, Youru. 2003. *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism*. London and New York: Routledge Curzon.
- Ziporyn, Brook. 2000. *Evil and/as/or the Good – Omnicentrism, Intersubjectivity, and Value Paradox in Tiantai Buddhist Thought*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 352-358.
- . 2004. *Being and Ambiguity: Philosophical Experiments with Tiantai Buddhism*. Illinois: Open Court.

