



JIZANG AND ZHIYI ON REALITY

Negation and integration as methods for
understanding the world

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1. Introduction

1.1 *Line of argument*

In this project, I want to study a pivotal figure in the Chinese Madhyamaka tradition, namely Jizang 吉藏 (ca. 549 – 623 CE, also referred to in English as Chitsang) of the Sanlun school. This Buddhist master is interesting for two reasons. Not only is he “commonly recognized to be the key figure in the second phase of the development of Chinese Madhyamaka”,¹ but he was also the younger contemporary of Zhiyi 智顓 (538 – 597 CE, also written as Chih-i), the founder of the Tiantai tradition. Whereas Jizang advocated an interpretation of reality that is known as the ‘theory of two truths’, Zhiyi claimed that reality must be understood in terms of three truths. In this thesis, I will argue that, despite the difference in wording, these understandings of reality are highly similar. The *methods* that Jizang and Zhiyi recommended to establish a proper understanding of reality, however, are different and my claim will be that Jizang envisioned a method of *negation*, while Zhiyi argued that *integration* is the proper method. In other words, even though they seemed to agree on the end goal, they had different conceptions of that road that leads to it. Consequently, my approach to the differences between these two Buddhist masters will emphasize the theoretical aspect of their Buddhist views. However, Jizang and Zhiyi were not operating in a socio-historical vacuum and in order not to neglect the context in which they were active, I will succinctly discuss the presence of Buddhism in China up to and including Buddhism at the time of these two masters.

¹ Ming-Wood Liu, *Madhyamaka thought in China* (Leiden, New York, Köln 1994),

1.2 *Buddhism in early China*

Chinese Buddhism emerged in tandem with the arrival of Buddhist missionaries through the Silk Road during the first century CE, and most of these missionaries preached Mahāyāna Buddhism – a tradition in the making at that point.² The Silk Route did not only bring preachers, however, as icons and relics also played an important role in popularizing the foreign religion of Buddhism. John Kieschnick writes:³

According to an early legend, until modern times accepted as true, the beginnings of Buddhist history in China were marked by the arrival of emissaries who returned from India with Buddhist books and an image of the Buddha. Indeed, a common epithet for Buddhism in Chinese text is the “teaching of the icons” (*xiangjiao*). And images never ceased to be a central feature of Chinese Buddhist devotion.

Additionally, Buddhism brought the veneration of relics and books to China. Objects that were believed to be relics of the Buddha were spread to China and enshrined in stupas. Due to this, Buddhism also became a visible feature of the Chinese landscape and marked Chinese popular belief by introducing the idea of sacred power residing in the Buddha’s remains. Before the arrival of Buddhism, it was believed that a person’s spirit might be incarcerated in the bones of the deceased, but the idea that bones of sacred people were themselves sacred and powerful, was novel and had a great impact on Chinese society.⁴

The study of books and copying manuscripts was already an established aspect of Chinese culture, which proved to be fertile ground for a Buddhist impetus towards the veneration of sacred texts. A ‘secular’ appreciation of literature with respect to content and calligraphy was coated with the belief in books as sacred objects and the idea that through copying such texts one could

² Mario Poceski, ‘China’, in Edward Irons ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York 2008), 139-145, there 140.

³ John Kieschnick, *The impact of Buddhism on Chinese material culture* (Princeton 2003), 53.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-36.

earn merit.⁵ In the *Diamond sūtra* and the *Lotus sūtra*, for example, passages are found that encourage the reader as follows:⁶

[I]f there is a man who shall receive and keep, read and recite, explain, *or copy in writing* a single *gāthā* of the Scripture of the Blossom of the Fine Dharma [i.e., the *Lotus sūtra*], or who shall look with veneration *on a roll of this scripture* as if it were the Buddha himself, [...] O Medicine King, be it known that this man or any other like him shall have already made offerings to ten myriads of millions of Buddhas in former times, and in those Buddha's presence taken a great vow. It is by virtue of the great pity he shall have had for living beings that he shall be born here as a human being.

As a result, the production of Buddhist texts became booming business, even more so because it sparked innovation in printing, and mass-production of texts was not considered less meritorious, 'rather, the more texts produced, the more merit to be won.'⁷ The author of the bibliographical section of the *Sui History* wrote in the seventh century that Buddhist texts outnumber the classics from pre-Buddhist China by 'thousands of times', which might – astonishingly enough – not be an exaggeration. By that time, many emperors and other sponsors ordered the production of Buddhist texts in addition to private production by individuals.⁸

That was the seventh century, however, and the fledgling tradition of Buddhism had a long way to go and various obstacles to overcome in order to arrive at that point. One of those obstacles was the resistance by the Confucian elite that was distrustful of Buddhism with its non-native origin and alien ideas about monastic life. The main critique against the early Buddhist community – *saṅga* – was that they encouraged the Chinese to neglect their filial obligations by retreating into a monastic order.⁹ Another problem was the language barrier, since only a few teachers from India had mastered the Chinese language and were

⁵ Ibid., 165-7.

⁶ Ibid., 165.

⁷ Ibid., 181.

⁸ Ibid., 177.

⁹ Poceski 'China', 140.

able to freely convey their message. The extant Chinese translations of Sanskrit texts, moreover, were often of dubious quality and the clergy had to make do with them.¹⁰

In the fourth century, Buddhism profited from the fact that non-Chinese rulers in the north were attracted to its teachings and from the decline of Confucianism. The rise of Daoism, interestingly enough, also contributed to the growth of Chinese Buddhism, because there are similarities in the teachings of both traditions, one of them being the shared interest in the notion of emptiness.¹¹ The Daoist interest, however, turned out to be both a blessing and a curse, because it caused translation issues. Many Chinese translations of Sanskrit texts were coated in a Daoist jargon and Buddhist ideas were analyzed through a Daoist lens. This also happened with the notion of emptiness. It must be noted, however, that early Chinese Buddhism was not a concrete religious entity among the supposedly other well-defined traditions of China. Instead, the Chinese traditions influenced each other and in the case of Buddhism and Daoism, we not only see how Buddhist discourse on emptiness has absorbed features of a Daoist worldview, but also how Daoism has changed due to the introduction of Buddhism in China: 'Buddhism had served as a model for the establishment of Daoism in China as an organized church, with a religious canon and a spiritual community.'¹²

Jizang and Zhiyi lived in a period during which Buddhism was on the rise and profited from a growing interest for this religion among both the populace and the elite. They witnessed the emergence of the Sui empire (581-618 CE) that proclaimed itself a cultured regime. Discussing the success of the Sui empire, Paul Ropp writes:¹³

In three decades that were as dramatic as the Qin conquest of the Warring States, the Sui armies and civil government brought to China a much higher degree of military unity and political integration than the

¹⁰ Eric Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of china : The spread and adaptation of Buddhism in early medieval China* (third edition; Leiden 2007), 2.

¹¹ Livia Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese culture* (St. Petersburg 2016), 3.

¹² Xing Guang, 'Buddhist impact on Chinese Culture', in *Asian Philosophy* 23 (2013), 305-322, there 313.

¹³ Paul Ropp, *China in world history* (Oxford 2010), 51.

country had ever known before. Yang Jian took the reign title Wendi, “the cultured emperor,” suggesting that he well understood that cultural factors were as important as military ones in unifying north and south. In addition to his efficient armies, he had capable ministers who justified his every move in terms of the Confucian classics and the beliefs and practices of Daoism and Buddhism.

Especially Buddhism prospered under the new regime, as Ropp explains:¹⁴

The Sui and Tang ruling houses both claimed their leaders were bodhisattvas devoted to the spread of the religion, and both dynasties patronized Buddhism with lavish gifts of land and tax exemptions for temples and monasteries. Both ruling houses continued the monumental Buddhist sculptures on the limestone cliffs and in the caves of Longmen outside of Luoyang. Because it had become popular, albeit in different forms, among both the highly educated elite and the illiterate masses, Buddhism was very useful to the Sui and Tang rulers in appealing to all social classes.

This is not to say, however, that Jizang and Zhiyi merely drifted along on a wave of sympathy towards Buddhism. Both of them were already active before becoming part of the Sui empire and Zhiyi did not even live to see the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), ‘known as the greatest age of Buddhism in Chinese history.’¹⁵ When discussing the lives of Jizang and Zhiyi specifically, I will elaborate on their personal contribution to the rising interest in Buddhism generally, and Madhyamaka in particular.

¹⁴ Ibid., 55.

¹⁵ Ibid., 55.

1.3 Key concepts

Several themes take central stage in this thesis and need some further clarification. Firstly, ‘truth’ will be used here as an indicator of the state of reality, but there is no further implicitly assumed definition in play. I strive to use the notion of truth in a way that fits with Jizang’s and Zhiyi’s own understanding of it, although I focus on their use of term with respect to ontology. In other words, ‘truth’ here is synonymous to ‘correctness with regard to understanding reality’. In order to understand why Jizang and Zhiyi speak about multiple truths, it must be added that ‘truth’ means ‘correctness with regard to understanding reality *from a certain perspective*’. Jizang and Zhiyi discuss the conventional, the absolute and the middle perspective, which will be elaborately discussed in what follows.

Secondly, the use of ‘school’ (*zong* 宗), when discussing the Sanlun school and the Tiantai school, may be misleading. Depending on the ideological agenda of the interpreter, Jizang and Zhiyi can be considered as more or less likeminded by differentiating between the traditions to which Jizang and Zhiyi belong. The opinion that Tiantai is the first Chinese school of Buddhism, for example, suggests a dividing line between Zhiyi and Jizang, because the latter is then considered as part of an Indian Buddhist tradition. Especially given the fact that I will argue that both masters have a highly similar interpretation of enlightenment, it is important to note that Jizang’s Sanlun and Zhiyi’s Tiantai are not mutually exclusive schools. In order to substantiate this claim, a more detailed discussion is needed of the sense in which Sanlun and Tiantai can be called ‘schools’.

Around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the idea of world religions emerged and Japanese scholars reconfigured Buddhism as a religion on a par with Christianity.¹⁶ They invented the neologism *zongjiao* 宗教 as the overarching category in which both Buddhism and Christianity could be placed. Chinese intellectuals imported this new category of religion and started to

¹⁶ For more information, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The invention of world religions, or, how European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism* (Chicago 2005), and Jason Josephson, *The invention of religion in Japan* (Chicago and London 2012).

subsume the age-old Buddhist traditions under this new category, including Sanlun.¹⁷ Liang Qichao¹⁸ discerned thirteen distinct sects or schools that flourished during – what he called – the age of Buddhist learning. A narrative was spun that after the Sui and Tang period, Buddhism declined in China.¹⁹ Historians have pointed out that anachronistic problem of applying a modern category on old traditions and John McRae has suggested a different translation of *zong* when discussing Sanlun, namely as ‘lineage’. Moreover, he prefers to call it an ‘exegetical lineage’, focusing on the activity that united the Sanlun Buddhist, namely exegesis of the Three Treatises. In so doing, he hopes to avoid the anachronistic reading that became popular in twentieth century China and attributes modern religious features to Sanlun, such as ‘an integrated sectarian organization of prescribed doctrines and distinct practices and clearly defined institutional affiliations, priestly specialists, and lay membership.’²⁰ McRae gives the following description of exegetical lineages:²¹

The exegetical lineages ... constituted “schools” only in the most minimal sense. In the first place, although individual monks were known as specialists in particular scriptures, most seem to have worked on multiple texts of various types. Second, although the lineage of study of any text might be traceable from one generation to the next, even when a student’s interpretation borrowed heavily from his teachers such connections were overwhelmed by the fluctuations in popularity of different scriptures over the decades. Third, monks often studied with multiple teachers, so that exegetical lineages often “cross-pollinated” each other. Fourth, far from attempting to keep scriptural traditions

¹⁷ Jimmy Yu, ‘Revisiting the notion of *zong*: contextualizing the Dharma Drum Lineage of modern Chan Buddhism’, in *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 26 (2013), 113-151, there 116-117.

¹⁸ Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) was an important Confucian scholar and reformist in the final phase of the Qing dynasty (1644-1914). He is known, among other things, for campaigning to install a constitutional monarchy. See Ban Wang, ‘Liang Qichao 1873-1929’, in David Pong ed., *Encyclopedia of modern China* (Farmington Hills 2009), 467-468.

¹⁹ Erik Schicketanz, ‘Narratives of Buddhist decline and the concept of the sect (*zong*) in modern Chinese Buddhist thought’, in *Studies in Chinese Religions* 3 (2017), 281-300, there 285-286.

²⁰ Yu, ‘Revisiting the’, 118.

²¹ John McRae, ‘Buddhism, schools of: Chinese Buddhism’, in Lindsay Jones ed., *Encyclopedia of religion* (second edition; Detroit 2005), 1235-1241, there 1236-1237.

distinct and independent, the interpretations of individual scriptures were played against each other, with the understanding of one scripture used as a guide for the analysis of totally different texts, and the understanding of Buddhism as a whole applied to the line-by-line interpretation of specific scriptures.

Consequently, when I use the term ‘school’ in this thesis, I use it in the broad sense that includes both exegetical lineage and school as a more strictly organized social entity. Keeping in mind that Sanlun must not be understood as a school in the modern sense, but as an exegetical lineage, it is time to move on, thirdly, to notion of ‘classification of teachings’, that is, *panjiao*.

Because Buddhist scriptures were not brought from India to China in a systematic way, the Chinese needed to develop an interpretative framework that makes sense of all the different texts, and such frameworks were given the name ‘*panjiao*’. Chanju Mun lists as much as twenty six *panjiao* systems dating from the fourth to eighth century, some of which are original schemes, but many are adaptations of earlier *panjiao* systems.²² The reason for discussing *panjiao* systems here is that Jizang and Zhiyi have very similar views about general Mahāyāna Buddhist themes, such as emptiness, non-duality and the inadequacy of language – as we will see – but used different classification systems, which means that they thought about the ‘big picture’ of Buddhism in different ways. I will discuss the specifics of, respectively, Jizang’s and Zhiyi’s *panjiao* in the following chapters, but several general aspects can be mentioned already.

Kumārajīva (344-413 CE) was the first to develop a classification system:²³

Prior to Kumārajīva, some Buddhist texts had been unsystematically translated into Chinese. Kumārajīva systematically translated an enormous amount of texts with strong support from the court. When this mass of texts was translated, Chinese scholars felt an urgent need to

²² Chanju Mun, *The history of doctrinal classification in Chinese Buddhism: a study of the panjiao systems*(Oxford 2006).

²³ *Ibid.*, 1.

devise doctrinal classifications in order to explain the seeming contradictions among them.

Characteristic for Kumārajīva's system is the division between the traditions that he and many later scholars refer to as the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna tradition and how he ranked the latter higher than the former. The ranking was a topic of argument between him and Huiyuan (334-416 CE)²⁴, with whom he exchanged letters that not only contain his *panjiao* but also constitute 'an important resource for understanding the difficulties faced by the Chinese Buddhist community in understanding such concepts as *sūnyatā* (emptiness), *dharmakaya* (reality body), and momentariness.'²⁵ Huiyuan did not agree with Kumārajīva and argued that Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna should be considered as equally authoritative.²⁶ Mun introduces the terms 'ecumenical' and 'sectarian' to indicate whether or not a *panjiao* is hierarchical, concluding that Huiyuan was a 'complete ecumenist' for equating both traditions. Kumārajīva, however, can also be called an ecumenist, albeit in a more limited sense. He is a Mahāyāna ecumenist, because he considers all Māhāyana scriptures to be of equal value. His own students, however, already disagreed on the status of the various Mahāyāna scriptures, with Huiguan²⁷ arguing that the *Huayan sūtra* and the *Nirvāṇa sūtra* are the fundament scriptures

²⁴ Huiyuan (334–416 CE), a forerunner of the Buddhist Pureland schools, started off as a student of Confucianism and Daoism, but diverted his attention to Buddhism when he met Dao'an (312–385 CE), a Buddhist teacher that played an important role in the adaptation of Buddhism to the Chinese context (see Tanya Storch, in Edward Irons ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York 2008), 197). Huiyuan became his disciple at the Xiangyang monastery (Hubei), until it was destroyed in a military attack in 378 CE. He then relocated at Mt. Lu in South China, which would be his place of residence until his death. At Mt. Lu he established a lively community for both monks and lay people that would become a model for later monasteries with respect to doctrinal study, practice and maintenance of the precepts. See Mark Blum, 'Huiyuan', in Edward Irons ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York 2008), 348-349, 348.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 348.

²⁶ Mun, *The history*, 10.

²⁷ 'From the Qinghe Cui清河崔 clan, Huiguan abandoned secular life at the age of eighteen. Along with Daoseng道生(355–434), Daorong道融(?–322), and Sengzhao僧肇(384–414), he was celebrated as one of the four chief disciples of Kumārajīva. After Buddhahadra was ousted from Chang'an, he followed him to the south, first stopping at Mount Lu and then going to Jinling [...]. At the Daochang temple, Huiguan trained a disciple called Fayuan法瑗(409–489), who sometime after Yuanjia 15 (438) went to Mount Lu to practice meditation.' See Jinhua Chen, 'From Central Asia to Southern China: the formation of identity and network in the meditative traditions of the fifth–sixth century Southern China (420–589)', *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and the Social Sciences* 7 (2014), 171-202, there 176.

in the Mahāyāna corpus.²⁸ In other words, Huiguan was a sectarianist. We will see in the next chapters that while Jizang is clearly a Mahāyāna ecumenist, Zhiyi's classification appears to be more sectarian, emphasizing the extraordinary importance of the *Lotus sūtra*.

Another characteristic feature of *panjiao* systems, according to Mun, is whether they order the Buddhist teachings in a diachronic way or a synchronic way. In the early *panjiao* systems of the southern and the northern dynasties (386-589 CE), it was common to link the importance of a particular scripture with the period in which it was preached by the Buddha.²⁹ The early *panjiao* systemizers believed that the teaching period of the Buddha can be divided up into five parts, each of which featuring a specific teaching.³⁰ This is a diachronic ordering of texts, because they basically placed all scriptures on a timeline, where later teachings were considered more advanced than early teachings. A synchronic ordering, on the other hand, does not tie the importance of a text to its place on the Buddha's teaching timeline. We will see that Jizang, for example, criticizes the early *panjiao* systems for being purely diachronic and advances one that is both diachronic and synchronic instead.

1.4 Selection and use of sources

Most of the secondary authors cited or explicitly discussed in this thesis are contemporary historians, philosophers, or both. If I refer to someone without further introduction, I am discussing a contemporary scholar. It will be indicated when a name refers to a historical figure. Furthermore, it is important to note that this thesis relies on English sources,³¹ since I cannot access the source texts in their original language, which is classical Chinese. As a consequence, my interpretation of Jizang and Zhiyi will be biased by the translations and interpretations I use. A

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.

³⁰ Ming-Wood, *Madhyamaka thought*, 110-117.

³¹ With the exception on one German source; see footnote 103.

particularly forceful example of translation bias is found in chapter three, where I cite a passage from Zhiyi's *Mohe Zhi Guan*. Paul Swanson's translation of that passage conflicts with that of Hans Kantor and the difference in translation really alters the meaning of the text.³² Adding to this, there is also a scarcity of translated texts. With respect to Zhiyi, a substantial amount of his teachings have been made available for the English reading public, thanks to Swanson, but with regard to Jizang, I had to draw on a small selection of texts. In order to develop a more thorough understanding of Jizang's take on important topics such as language, truth and non-duality, I have added a variety of translated passages from secondary literature. The secondary literature underpins to an important degree my reading of Jizang and Zhiyi.

The reader will notice that I often refer to Hans Kantor's interpretation of these Buddhist masters, because he convincingly argues that Jizang and Zhiyi had very similar ideas about what it means to be enlightened, the end-goal of Buddhist practice. According to Kantor, both of them consider enlightenment to be the proper appreciation of reality as something non-dual, as something that neither has demarcated opposites nor blurs all ontological differences into an undifferentiated, monistic whole. Kantor's analysis of non-duality, including an explanation of the theme 'traces and root' that is found both in the work of Jizang and in that of Zhiyi, is particularly helpful.

However, I think that Kantor is stressing the similarities between them too much and in order to do justice to the differences, I turn to work of Swanson, Ming-Wood Liu, Junjirō Takakusu and Ellen Zhang. Swanson and Zhang explain Jizang's method by means of which the Buddhist practitioner becomes aware of the non-dual nature of reality, namely: negation of worldviews. Jizang, so they argue, advocates a system of four consecutive negations that help to find the middle in between the negating and the negated view. Liu points out that it is not negation itself that brings about enlightenment, but the non-attachment that results from the fourfold process of negation, which means that the practitioner may need to conduct more or less negations to reach that state. But how does

³² See footnote 169.

negation lead to the middle? Takakusu rightly raises this issue, because negation only leads to further negation, seemingly trapping the practitioner in an endless exercise. Expanding on this, I develop my claim that Jizang intends the negation process as a means to instill in the practitioner a sense of pointlessness, which is the true boon of the exercise. This experience of pointlessness of continuously creating and negating viewpoints will result in no longer attaching to any view, which is the middle, which is enlightenment.

Concerning Zhiyi, I draw on Brook Ziporyn's interpretation according to which Zhiyi's philosophical ideas are characterized by integration, which I interpret as an alternative method for reaching enlightenment. Through the use of various analogies, Ziporyn explains Zhiyi's theory of the middle, saying that enlightenment is reached by realizing the interdependency of viewpoints, by becoming aware of the context-dependency of views. Given that Ziporyn is not contrasting Zhiyi with Jizang, but Tiantai with Madhyamaka thinking, it might be that he is less adamant on separating the systems of thought of these two masters than I make it seem, but such a separation is nonetheless entailed as Zhiyi belongs to the first and Jizang to the second tradition. Another important source for my interpretation of Zhiyi is Leon Hurvitz's discussion of Zhiyi's classification of teachings, his *panjiao*. Zhiyi describes the path towards enlightenment as a progression through four teachings, and his theory of four teachings is part of his *panjiao*.³³ As will be clear from my discussion of the *panjiao* system above, I draw mainly on the work by Chanju Mun, who has constructed the most extensive discussion of the *panjiao* tradition in China to date.

1.5 Chapter division

With the aim, the key themes and the use of sources clarified, I will now explain the flow of the text. In the next chapter, the lives of Jizang and Zhiyi will be discussed, which in the case of Jizang implies a discussion of the Sanlun tradition.

³³ A schematic representation will be provided in the appendix.

I will chronologically work my way through the beginnings of the Sanlun school from Kumārajīva to Jizang and continue to discuss Zhiyi. This is slightly anachronistic, since Zhiyi was born several years before Jizang, but given the fact that the Sanlun school predates Zhiyi's Tiantai, I have opted for this way of presenting them.

In the third chapter, I will turn my attention to the contents of Jizang's teachings, specifically the way in which he conceived of reality. He inherits the notion of two truths – conventional and ultimate – from the Indian Madhyamaka tradition,³⁴ but the way in which describes it shows that he is writing for a Chinese readership with Chinese concerns, such as the influence of Daoism. The chapter starts with a discussion of language, which – according to Jizang – determines our understanding of reality and elaborates on the need for deconstruction. I will explain how for Jizang deconstruction happens by means of negation, which enables the deconstructor to detach itself from both the conventional and the ultimate, reaching the middle. Jizang refers to the middle as the non-dual nature of reality, because the middle can be seen as a negation of opposites, of extremes. As a result, the Buddhist practitioner also detaches itself from the Buddhist scriptures, which seems to be a problem. I will then explain how, for Jizang, this only appears to be so and elucidate his reinterpretation of the relevance of Buddhist, authoritative texts in light of his negation method. This is his classification of teachings, his *panjiao*. Following this, I go into the mechanics of negation and conclude the chapter with an evaluation of how different scholars have interpreted his negation method.

In the fourth chapter, I will argue that Zhiyi has by and large the same aim in mind, namely the detachment from both the conventional and the ultimate, but advances a different method. The approach there will be roughly the same as in the third chapter, although I will only shortly address Zhiyi's understanding of language, as I do not see important differences between his and Jizang's view. More attention will be given to the method of integration, which – according to

³⁴ See Sonam Thakchoe, in Edward Zalta ed., 'The Theory of Two Truths in India', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/twotruths-india/>.

Zhiyi – is the way in which a proper understanding of the non-dual nature of reality comes about. The integrative approach is also visible in Zhiyi's *panjiao*, where he elevates the Buddhist text in which integration is a key theme: the *Lotus sūtra*. Then I point out another aspect in which Jizang and Zhiyi disagree, namely that the negation method is not circular, while the integration method is. To be clear, the end stage of Buddhist practice that both aspire, enlightenment, is conceived of by both as circular, but the road towards it is not in the case of Jizang.

2. Jizang and Zhiyi in context

2.1 Introduction

In order to contextualize Jizang, it is necessary to know more about the Buddhist tradition in which he was active, the Sanlun school. Ellen Zhang provides the following clear and concise description of Sanlun:³⁵

The Sanlun School, known as the “School of Emptiness” (*Kong Zong* 空宗) and the School of Wisdom, (*Bore Zong* 般若宗) is one of the earliest Buddhist schools in China during Sui and early Tang periods. The Sanlun School is also known as the Chinese representative of the Indian Madhyamaka school of Nāgārjuna. It was introduced to China by a half-Indian missionary-scholar named Kumārajīva (鳩摩羅什 344–413 CE) ... The five Sanlun precursors whose works influenced Jizang’s philosophy include Nāgārjuna, Kumārajīva, Sengzhao 僧肇 (Seng-Chao 364–414 CE), and Falang 法朗 (507–581 CE), Jizang’s mentor. While some scholars have pointed out that there was no Sanlun School before Jizang, others contend that the Sanlun thought represented by Kumārajīva and his disciples are called in the Buddhist history of China “The Old Sanlun of Central Gate” (*Guanzhong Jiulun* 關中舊論) or “The Old Sanlun of West Gate” (*Guanxi Jiulun* 關西舊論). The two names here indicate the places where the group transmitted Madhyamika.

Zhang captures most of the characteristics of the Sanlun school, including the importance of Jizang. In this chapter, I will discuss the emergence of the Sanlun school and discuss how it developed before and during the time of Jizang. Subsequently, I will address another great figure in the history of

³⁵ Ellen Zhang, ‘Po: Jizang’s negations in the four levels of the Twofold Truth’, in Youru Wang & Sandra Wawrytko eds., *Dao Companion to Chinese Buddhist Philosophy* (Dordrecht 2018), 189-218, there 189-90.

Chinese Buddhism: Zhiyi. This chapter is more of a historical nature and aims to make clear who Jizang and Zhiyi were and what role they played in, respectively, the Sanlun and the Tiantai tradition.

2.2 *Jizang and the Sanlun school*

In the second half of the fourth century, a group of disciples flocked to Kumārajīva and started studying his translation of the Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way (*Mūlamadhyamakārikā*), the Twelve Gate Treatise (*Dvādaśadvāra-śāstra*) and the One Hundred Verses Treatise (*Śata-śāstra*).³⁶ These became known as the Three Treatises, or Sanlun, and its scholars formed the Sanlun school. This 'School of Emptiness' faced the difficulty of interpreting the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness in a non-Buddhist context without access to its original source. In the period from Kumārajīva to Jizang, various Daoist readings were prevalent in the Sanlun school. We know this, because Jizang criticizes these readings in an attempt to restore the original meaning of emptiness.³⁷ A reason for contesting that there was no Sanlun before Jizang lies in fact that there was another systematic thinker in the school before him, who took issue with the Daoist influences on Sanlun Buddhism, namely Sengzhao.

Although Kumārajīva initiated the study of the Three Treatises, the first member of the Sanlun school that left behind a sizeable amount of original writings about them is Sengzhao (384-414) – a disciple of Kumārajīva. He used Daoist terminology, which was prevalent in his time, but this did not prevent him from sophisticatedly describing the Buddhist topics of *prajñā*, emptiness, *nirvāṇa* and the problem of change.³⁸ The shift away from Daoism in the works of Sengzhao is particularly noticeable in his insistence on an epistemological reading of emptiness. The distinction between reality and nothingness in Daoist thought was an

³⁶ Ronald Green, 'East Asian Buddhism', in Steven Emmanuel ed., *A companion to Buddhist Philosophy* (Chichester 2013), 110-125, there 114.

³⁷ Paul Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai philosophy: the flowering of the Two Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism* (Berkeley 1989), 82-87.

³⁸ Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 39.

ontological one and Sengzhao stressed that, in Buddhism, it is impossible to make this distinction. In other words, ‘emptiness’ must be understood as an epistemological notion that concerns, not the world itself, but our attitude towards the world. “Hence, dharmas are without marks of existence and inexistence, and the holy [man] is without the cognitions of existence and inexistence. As the holy [man] is without the cognitions of existence and inexistence, he has no [deliberate] mind inside.”³⁹ This resistance against using emptiness as an ontological term is also found in Jizang’s teachings, which will be elaborately discussed in the next chapter.

Kumārajīva and Sengzhao were active in Chang’an⁴⁰, the capital of the Later Qin kingdom. After they had passed away, however, the three treatises became less popular and the school declined for more than a century. Then, mid-sixth century, the Ch’i-hsia monastery at She mountain (near today Nanjing) became the new home for the Sanlun school and Senglang (494-512 CE) became its new abbot. Senglang, or Sūngnang, was a Korean monk and fourth-generation student of Kumārajīva.⁴¹ His most prominent student – who is hardly known today – was Seng-ch’uan (d. 528 CE). Among the students of Seng-ch’uan was Falang (507-581 CE), who is known for his activism with regard to bringing Sanlun to the attention of the non-monastic public and managed to attract a large following. He was raised in a royal family and became a soldier in the army, but decided to devote his life to Buddhism at the age of twenty-one. He moved to Mt. She in order to be educated by Seng-ch’uan after he had studied meditation, the Vinaya, the *Satyasiddhi-sāstra* and the Sarvāstivāda texts. In 558 CE, he was requested by the emperor to come to Jinling⁴², the capital, where he put his rhetorical skills to good use and brought the Madhyamaka teachings to the attention of the people.

Among those people was the father of Jizang, who made his son join the retinue of Falang. Jizang was raised Chinese, although of Central Asian origin, and

³⁹ Sengzhao, *Zhao Lun* 肇論, T45.1858: 159c7-13 in *ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁰ Today known as Xi’an.

⁴¹ I use the lineage according to Hatani, see Richard Robinson, *Early Mādhyamaka in India and China* (Delhi 1978, 163. A problem with this lineage is that it does not list Falang as the teacher of Jizang and thereby contradicts other sources.

⁴² Now known as Nanjing.

it did not take long for Falang to recognize the potential in his young student. Even before being fully ordained, Jizang was made responsible for interpreting Falang's teachings and "[h]is exceptional intelligence and eloquence earned him fame and respect in the capital."⁴³ In 581, Falang died and Jizang left the city. He took up residence in Jiexiang Temple on Mt. Qinwang. Not long after the Sui army had toppled the Chen dynasty and conquered Jinling, Jizang was invited by the new emperor Yuangdi (581-618 CE) to return and live at Huirui Daochang, one of the four monasteries that Yuangdi had erected in support of Buddhism. When Chang'an was made the new capital of the Sui empire, he was again invited by the emperor and moved to the new capital and made the Riyuan Temple his residence. With the imperial support and his unique personality, he was highly successful in continuing the work of Falang and proselytized Sanlun teachings in the capital of the unified Chinese empire. Aaron Koseki writes:⁴⁴

Jizang witnessed the controlled revival of Buddhism at a time when the religion was sponsored not only for its own sake but also as a means by which the nation could be consolidated, expanded, and protected. Throughout his life Jizang participated fully in the optimism and luxury of imperial patronage. Under this patronage he produced twenty-six works, collected in some 112 fascicles, a number that makes him one of the most prolific Buddhist writers of his age.

Of these twenty-six, the following are among his most major works:

- the *Zhonglun Shu* 中論疏 (*Commentary to the Treatise on the Middle Doctrine*)
- the *Bailun Shu* 百論疏 (*Commentary to the Treatise on One Hundred Verses*)

⁴³ Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 84.

⁴⁴ Aaron Koseki, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/jizang> (accessed 16 December, 2019).

- the *Shi'er men lun Shu* 十二門論疏 (*Commentary to the Treatise on Twelve Gates*)
- the *Sanlun Xuanyi* 三論玄義 (*Profound Meaning of Three Treatises*)
- the *Dasheng Xuanlun* 大乘玄論 (*Profound Exposition of Māhayāna*)
- the *Erdi Yi* 二諦義 (*On the Twofold Truth*)

The political situation favored Buddhism and the imperial patronage enabled Jizang to be highly productive, which is the reason why he is considered the reviver of the Sanlun school.⁴⁵ Although Mt. She had become the new home for the Sanlun school under Senglang, Jizang never lived or worked there and due to the fact that the renewed interest in Madhyamaka teachings revolved around him rather than some specific monastery or temple, the Sanlun school was not as geographically located as the Tiantai school, which will be discussed next. Rather, it travelled with Jizang and because his personality played such an important role for the renewed flourishing of Sanlun, the school again lost its prominent place on the Chinese Buddhist scene after Jizang's death.

While Sanlun declined after the death of Jizang, another Madhyamaka-inspired Buddhist tradition rose to prominence: the Tiantai school, founded by Zhiyi (538-597 CE). Given that Zhiyi and Jizang were contemporaries that knew each other and had their students engage each other in debate, the history of Sanlun intersects with the history of Tiantai. Because of Zhiyi's formative influence on Jizang's thought, in particular regarding the *Lotus sūtra*, a better understanding of Jizang includes a discussion of Zhiyi and of the Tiantai tradition founded by him (and vice versa).

⁴⁵ Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 82-88.

2.3 Zhiyi and the Tiantai school

Tiantai Buddhism is sometimes called the first Chinese school of Buddhism⁴⁶ and, contrary to Sanlun, it has developed a characteristic theory. In addition, Zhiyi created a center for his tradition at Mt. Tiantai, including a lineage in which he figured as the fourth patriarch, and was less theoretical than Jizang by coupling his theories with practical teachings. McRae writes that “Zhiyi’s innovation was to combine (1) a set of interpretative schema⁴⁷ intended to govern all Buddhist doctrine (as available in the East Asian subcontinent at the time); (2) a similarly comprehensive system of meditation practice; and (3) a specific institutional center and teaching lineage.”⁴⁸

Born in present-day Hubei, Zhiyi became a monk at the age of eighteen and took the full precepts at the age of twenty. Three years later, he started studying under Nanyue Huisi,⁴⁹ where he developed an interest in meditational practices. At thirty, he moved to the Chen capital, Jinling, where he became a lecturer.⁵⁰ Zhiyi enjoyed the high esteem of – at that time – prince Yang Guang of the Sui empire and received from him the honorary title Zhi-che.⁵¹ Profiting from the patronage of Sui emperors and nobility, Zhiyi founded two major temple complexes⁵² and gave instructions to the founding of a third,⁵³ which would not be completed until after his death in 597 CE. The name of the tradition that would develop in the wake

⁴⁶ Brook Ziporyn, ‘Tiantai’, in Edward Irons ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York 2008), 845-851, there 845.

⁴⁷ McRae is probably referring here to Zhiyi’s *panjiao*.

⁴⁸ McRae, ‘Buddhism, schools’, 1237.

⁴⁹ Huisi (515-577 CE) was the one that taught Zhiyi about Nāgārjuna’s philosophy; see Ziporyn, ‘Tiantai’, 845.

⁵⁰ Brook Ziporyn, ‘Zhiyi’, in Edward Irons ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York 2008), 927-928.

⁵¹ Leon Hurvitz, ‘Chih-i (538-597); an introduction to the life and ideas of a Chinese Buddhist monk’, *Mélanges et chinois et bouddhiques* 12 (1960-62), 145.

⁵² “Xiuchansi (Monastery for the Practice of Meditation), founded by Zhiyi on Mount Tiantai in southeast Zhejiang province in 575 ... [and] Yiyinsi (One Sound Monastery) at the southeast foot of Mount Yuquan in Hubei in 592”; Linda Penkower, ‘In the beginning ... Guanding (561-632) and the creation of early Tiantai’, in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23 (2000), 245-296, there 272-273.

⁵³ “Guoqingsi (Monastery for the Purification of the Nation) ... This temple complex, located at the foot of the mountain, was conceived by Zhiyi but was not completed until 601, four years after his death. It was granted an official plaque and so named in 605 by Yang Guang, Zhiyi’s most powerful benefactor, who by then had ascended the throne as the second Sui emperor Yang (r. 604-617)”; *ibid.*, 273-274.

of Zhiyi is linked to the mountain on which the first and the third temple were built: Mt. Tiantai.

During the course of his life, Zhiyi had several encounters with adherents of the Sanlun⁵⁴ tradition and Jizang's influence on Zhiyi's thought is noticeably in the works of Zhiyi.⁵⁵ At first, the relationship between Zhiyi and the Sanlun school was slightly hostile: Falang had sent out his students to engage Zhiyi in debate, but over time the interactions between Zhiyi and the Sanlun school became increasingly friendly. He managed to win over several students of Falang and later in life he exchanged letters with Jizang, in which they expressed their mutual respect.⁵⁶ Jizang even asked Zhiyi to lecture on the *Lotus sūtra*, a significant request as both of them highly valued the *Lotus sūtra*.

The influence of Nāgārjuna's thought on Sanlun and the Silun (four treatise) tradition⁵⁷ is obvious, since these centered around the Chinese translations of his works. The connection between the Tiantai tradition and Nāgārjuna, however, might be less obvious. Guanding, the student of Zhiyi who has collected and transcribed the latter's teachings, has stressed the connection between them by presenting Zhiyi as the dharma heir of Nāgārjuna in a double-track lineage – Indian and Chinese. He links Zhiyi's Chinese line to the Indian line leading up to Nāgārjuna (and eventually Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha).⁵⁸ Zhiyi's most influential works were informed but not written by him. These are the following:

- the *Fahua wenju* 法華文句 (*Commentary on the Lotus sūtra*)
- the *Fahua xuanyi* 法華玄義 (*Profound Meaning of the Lotus sūtra*)

⁵⁴ Traditions informed by Madhyamaka theory include not only Tiantai and Sanlun, but also the Silun tradition; see *ibid.*, 251-52.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁵⁶ Although several letters from Jizang to Zhiyi have been preserved, there remain no letters from Zhiyi to Jizang. However, from the other occasions during which Zhiyi spoke about Jizang, it can be inferred that he respected the latter. See Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 193-195.

⁵⁷ Penkower speaks of Sanlun and Silun, describing the latter as a tradition that is related to but does not coincide with Sanlun. In addition to the three treatises of Sanlun, the Silun 'school' was interested in *Dazhidu lun* (Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom sūtra), which was also presumed to be written by Nāgārjuna, although the authorship of Nāgārjuna has been debated, see Penkower, 'In the', 251.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 245-296.

- the *Mohe Zhi Guan* (摩訶止觀 *Great Calming and Contemplation*)

The lectures given in 587 CE formed the basis for the *Fahua Wenju* and the lectures from 593 and 594 CE were incorporated in the latter two. Aside from these three works, Zhiyi also composed several works himself. His commentary on the *Vimalakīrtinideśa* is the most notable of these.⁵⁹ Zhiyi thought of the *Lotus sūtra* as the pinnacle of Buddhist teaching and harbored a great interest in this sūtra – as apparent from the titles of his main works mentioned above. The reason why he was so fond of this particular text is that it purports to explain how the various Buddhist teachings can be brought together in one harmonious teaching, the One Vehicle. This topic takes central stage in the *Lotus sūtra*.⁶⁰

2.4 Conclusion

Kumārajīva famously made a large number of Buddhist texts available for the Chinese Buddhist scene, among which three treatises from the Indian Madhyamaka tradition by Nāgārjuna. These texts, called ‘Sanlun’ in Chinese, became the basis for the Sanlun school. Sengzhao, a student of Kumārajīva, was the first to focus on the Daoism in many of the texts written by Sanlun scholars and he tried to cleanse them of Daoist influences. Later, Jizang continued this endeavor and made well use of the royal interest in Buddhism to popularize the teachings from the Sanlun texts.

Jizang lived and worked first in Jinlin, the capital of the Chen dynasty and later in Chang’an, the capital of the Sui empire that had unified China. Around more or less the same time, another famous Buddhist master was active: Zhiyi, founder of the Tiantai school that owes its name to the mountain on which he was active, Mt. Tiantai. Zhiyi also had friends in high places, receiving the honorary title

⁵⁹ Ziporyn, ‘Zhiyi’, 927-928.

⁶⁰ E.g. Paul Williams, Anthony Tribe & Alexander Wynne, *Buddhist thought: a complete introduction to the Indian tradition* (Oxon & New York 2012, second edition), 125-126; Yao Hu, ‘The elevation of the status of the *Lotus sūtra* in the *panjiao* systems of China’, *Journal of Chinese Religions* 42 (2014), 67-94.

Zhi-che by Yang Guang, who was at that time prince of the Sui empire. At first the relationship between Zhiyi and Jizang was slightly hostile and their students engaged each other in public debates. Their relationship improved over time, however, and at some point Jizang asked Zhiyi to lecture on the *Lotus sūtra*, which was a significant request as Jizang highly valued this text.

In the subsequent chapters, I will argue that Jizang and Zhiyi had very compatible opinions about enlightenment, which might explain why they ended up on good terms with each other. However, there are differences in their methods for achieving enlightenment. The similarities in striving and the differences in method will take central stage in the following chapters, and I will start with a discussion of Jizang.

3. Jizang: Enlightenment via negation

3.1 Introduction

In order to reach enlightenment, so Jizang argues, one needs to abandon her mistaken views about reality. In this chapter, I will argue that *negation* plays a key role in that process, by which I mean that Jizang envisions the road towards enlightenment as a series of successive rejections of views that will, in the end, result in the abandonment of all views. The reason why Jizang advocates a thorough negation of ontological theories lies in rejection of the adequacy of language. In the Mahāyāna tradition, it is not uncommon to push the Abhidharma idea of reduction to its extreme by not only claiming that phenomena, such as a wooden cart, but also the composing parts are ultimately constructs, which does not leave anything objective for words to capture.⁶¹ Jizang thinks along these lines and argues that there is a mismatch between language and the supposed object of language. I will argue that, for Jizang, the main problem of language is that it suggests a manifold of demarcations between distinct ontological items. Through our use of language, we mistakenly construct ontological theories, or worlds, out of these differentiated things and Jizang urges us to take a step back, as it were, and deconstruct these worlds. Jizang's project of deconstruction will be discussed first. I will discuss Jizang's understanding of language in the first section of this chapter.

In the second section, I will zoom in on this deconstructive process and point out an important theme, namely that of non-duality. Taking the organic metaphor of a tree as an example, Jizang explains that a branch is neither identical to the root nor different. Since branch and root are part of the same organism, they cannot be considered radically different things and Jizang claims that this avoidance of extremes, being *either this or that*, is how we are supposed to think about reality. Furthermore, by interpreting the branches as the 'traces', that is, the Buddha's teachings, and the root as enlightenment, the non-duality between

⁶¹ David McMahan, *Empty vision: metaphor and visionary imagery in Mahayana Buddhism* (Hoboken 2013), 15-54.

branch and root – teaching and enlightenment – enables the Buddhist practitioner to progress to enlightenment through hearing the teachings. In so doing, Jizang saves the credibility of Buddhist doctrines from the objection that, being constructed linguistic products, these doctrines are necessarily false.

This brings me in the third section to a discussion of Buddhist texts and how Jizang classified them, that is, his *panjiao*. Characteristic for Jizang's *panjiao* is its ecumenical nature (with respect to Mahāyāna scriptures) and how it mixes a diachronic and synchronic ordering of scriptures. Consistent with his discussion of non-duality, Jizang grants that the various Buddhist scriptures have their respective emphases, but holds that this does not imply difference. They all contain the Buddha's teaching and their instructiveness depends on the perspective with which the reader approaches the text.

Finally, in the fourth section, Jizang's interpretation of the theory of the two truths will be analyzed. He argues that the practitioner must try to find the middle in between the conventional view and the ultimate view, which – if successful – coincides with the deconstruction discussed above. The method for doing so consists in negating four consecutive conventional views. At that point, Jizang claims, the practitioner will realize that each new negation results in yet another conventional view and that the process of forming new views, new theories, is therefore pointless. That is when she will have reached the middle in between the conventional viewpoint and the ultimate viewpoint, according to Jizang. This raises the question if the fourfold negation is merely a tool that help the practitioner reach enlightenment, or if there truly is such a thing as conventional reality and ultimate reality. This will be the topic of the fifth section of this chapter.

3.2 *Deconstruction through suspension*

Sign, *hao* 號, and referent are two important notions for Jizang.⁶² My finger, for example, can be a sign when I point to the moon, which is the referent in that case. Jizang tells the reader that sign and referent are dependent on each other: a sign always signals some referent and the referent is always indicated by a sign. When my finger indicates the moon, the finger is no longer just a finger, but a finger-indicating-the-moon and the moon becomes a moon-indicated-by-my-finger. In doing so, the attention is drawn away from my finger to the moon, which is in Jizang's words the 'suspension of actuality' (*jueshi* 絕實).⁶³

In language, so Jizang argues, the same happens. When we devise terms and concepts, these words come to refer to entities in the world. Imagine yourself working on your laptop on a desk in front of a bookrack. Undoubtedly, you will have imaged the laptop, the desk and bookrack, which are the referents to which the words refer. This illustrates how concepts (or 'names') are suspended in language. Jizang uses the example of fire and writes: 'when we see that [the name "fire"] is present in the mouth [that is announcing it], but is not inherent in the fire, then we approach the fire, by suspending the name [of it].'⁶⁴ You approach the fire like you enter 11th century Scotland by reading the play of Macbeth, which dims the realization that you are reading and gives rise to an imaginary perception of story. It feels like you are there. In other words, what happened with the finger and the moon also happens with the story of Macbeth and the book in which it is written: they become entangled. Hans Kantor captures Jizang's idea as follows: 'Assigning reality to the absent and unreality to the present thing, we construe the extrinsic and contingent relationship of sign and referent (neither separate nor inseparable) and thereby uphold our differentiation of these two.'⁶⁵ There is still

⁶² For a general introduction to reference theory, see Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: the basics* (London 2007, second edition), 59-82. In Kantor's translation of Jizang, the use of the term 'suspension' is somewhat idiosyncratic. Suspension as it is used here resembles the act of moving beyond.

⁶³ Kantor 854.

⁶⁴ Hans Rudolf Kantor, 'Referential relation and beyond: signifying functions in Chinese Madhyamaka', in *Indian Philosophy* 47 (2019), 851-915, there 867.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 867.

the separation of sign and referent, because no one *really* thinks that they have travelled to 11th century Scotland while reading the play. The reader is still aware of the fact that she is reading, but the words have gained an extra dimension. Because words as signs involve their referents, a sentence combines many absent things and makes them present to the mind. What happens, in fact, is world-building. Jizang 'seems to express that the sense of what is represented by means of signs and names consists in *construing a reality*⁶⁶, which results from suspending actuality.'⁶⁷

The problem with this world-building is that the constructed nature is easily glossed over. Jizang draws on the teachings of Sengzhao to explain that language creates a *blind spot* in our thinking, because the very meaning of the words we use entails a reification of those words. When you read the word 'laptop' you will be thinking of the laptop as a thing with an identity that persists through time, while the actual things in the world are not persisting in this way. The words we use imply an ontological consistency that is ultimately absent. For that reason, Sengzhao speaks of the incongruity of names and things:⁶⁸

Searching for things by means of names shows that things are devoid of an actuality/reality (shi) that is [truly] congruent with those names. Searching for names based on things shows that names are devoid of a function that [really] reaches out to those things. Things are devoid of an actuality/reality that is [truly] congruent with names; hence, they are not

⁶⁶ It may be objected that this discussion of language *vis-à-vis* reality is out of place in the context of Jizang, who lived in a different intellectual context that was not acquainted with the Western tradition of linguistic theory. However, the issue of whether the words we use correspond to the world they supposedly describe is as much a Chinese topic as it is a Western topic. Several authors writing on the similarities between twentieth century European philosophy and classical Daoist thought have uncovered much common ground. The later Wittgenstein is talking about the limits of language when he claims that the aim of philosophy is to solve questions by deconstructing them, and a similar sentiment is found in the Daoist Zhuangzi. See Jung Lee, 'What is it like to be a butterfly? A philosophical interpretation of Zhuangzi's butterfly dreams', *Asian Philosophy* 17 (2007), 185-202, there 189. Additionally, Steven Burik writes that 'Heidegger, Derrida, and the Daoists [...] wish to point to the limitations of "everyday" language and its reference structure, and thereby to the limitations of metaphysical language. In doing so they argue for the possibilities that arise from a thorough thinking through of, and thereby a different view and use of, language.' See Steven Burik, *The end of comparative philosophy and the task of comparative thinking: Heidegger, Derrida, and Daoism* (Albany 2009), 136.

⁶⁷ Kantor, 'Referential relation', 868 (emphasis added).

⁶⁸ Sengzhao, *Zhao Lun*, 152c18-153a3, in Kantor, 'Referential relation', 861.

[real] things. Names are devoid of function that [really] reaches out to things; hence they are not [true] names. Therefore, names are not congruent with reality; and reality is not congruent with names.

In other words, there is a mismatch of names and things, and language cannot be used as the vehicle for true knowledge. Unfortunately, there is no way around using language to educate people, so Jizang – following Sengzhao – reaches the paradox of trying to explain the core ideas of Buddhism in words that by their nature cannot contain truth. The problem with world-building, then, is that people create an illusionary world, because names cannot reach out to the things they pretend to reach. Jizang calls language a conceptual game (*xilun* 戲論) because people talk about the world as if it contains substantial things, while it does not.⁶⁹ Even worse, my attempt to explain the shortcomings of language is couched in language and therefore relies on it. Whalen Lai writes: ‘Jizang himself had to fight fire with fire; he had to go along with an opponent’s wrong assumptions in order to expose the fallacy.’⁷⁰ How can this paradox be solved? Is Jizang pushing towards the conclusion that all Buddhist scriptures are wrong, purely because they are linguistic products?

Fortunately, there is a way to take the sting out of the paradox. Although Jizang does not claim to solve it, he argues that it is possible to develop a mode of instruction that is no longer dependent on language by repeatedly confronting the paradox, which, with the right practice, will diminish the need for words. In his discussion of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra* he discerns three stages in that practice – which he describes as ‘achieving the principle of non-duality’⁷¹ – and ascribes them to three different (groups of) people:⁷²

⁶⁹ Hsueh-li Cheng, ‘Chi-tsang’s treatment of metaphysical issues’, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 8 (1981), 371-389, there 377.

⁷⁰ Whalen Lai, ‘Buddhism in China: a historical survey’, in Antonio Cua ed., *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (London 2002), 7-24, there 11.

⁷¹ The notion of non-duality will be discussed in more detail below. ‘Principle’ in this thesis is synonymous to ‘truth’, unless defined otherwise.

⁷² Jizang, *Jing Ming Xuan Lun* 淨名玄論, T38.1780: 853b18-854a23, in Kantor, ‘Referential relation’, 886.

Therefore, the major concern must rather consist in realizing [the] principle devoid of linguistic expression, in order to be then capable of responding to all things by means of linguistic expression. Although the group of [the 31 Bodhisattvas] refers to [the] principle by means of linguistic expression, it has not become evident to them that the highest sense of [the] principle is devoid of linguistic expression; thus they have not achieved [the] principle. Although Mañjuśrī announces that [the] principle is devoid of linguistic expression, he still resorts to linguistic expression to refer to the ultimate sense of [the] principle; hence he is not yet in conformity with [the] principle. Vimalakīrti's [performance of silence] mirrors [the] principle devoid of linguistic expression; since he is capable of instantiating [the] principle without linguistic expression, he is the one who has achieved [the] principle.

According to Jizang, the 31 Bodhisattvas use words to discuss non-duality and are still trapped in the paradox. Mañjuśrī⁷³ has moved one step beyond that by recognizing that words are insufficient to express the principle. Vimalakīrti, however, does not even need to use words to illustrate that he has mastered the principle. His silence is the mark of his understanding. Jizang then continues: 'He is capable of deploying linguistic expression without clinging to it, as his performance is like principle which is devoid of linguistic expression.' In other words, given his non-linguistic understanding of the Buddhist teachings, he can use words freely. They have become *optional* to him, because he can also demonstrate his knowledge through silence. Chien-hsing Ho points out, however, that silence, although appropriate when faced with a truth that cannot be expressed in words, does not make words superfluous. '[S]ilence is somehow dependent upon and correlated with speech and must not be given an overly

⁷³ Mañjuśrī, an important figure in the Mahāyāna Buddhist pantheon, is a *bodhisattva*, one of a number of celestial heroes whose compassion has led them to postpone the bliss of final enlightenment until all other beings are freed of suffering. Especially associated with wisdom, Mañjuśrī is a key figure in numerous Mahāyāna scriptures, and he has been the focus of significant cultic activity throughout Mahāyāna Buddhist countries.' See Raoul Birnbaum, 'Mañjuśrī', in Lindsay Jones ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Detroit 2005; second edition), 5675.

privileged status.⁷⁴ Kantor describes this as *deconstruction*, rather than piling problematic concepts on each other and thereby construing a world. The Buddhist – according to Jizang – needs to become aware of the blind spot, of the hidden reification of concepts that happens in speech and writing.⁷⁵ Consequently, she stops world-building and starts deconstructing the reified concepts. Or, as Kantor states it:⁷⁶

Chinese Madhyamaka suggest that the linguistic approach to truth requires an awareness of falsehood that can only be developed with a thorough understanding of the Buddhist canon and an adoption of its specific speech of wisdom that *reverses linguistic norms in a paradoxical manner*.

In a somewhat confusing manner, Jizang calls this deconstruction also suspension, so there are two definitions in play: suspension of names resulting in world-building, and suspension of names resulting in deconstruction. The former concerns the truth of conventional or worldly reality, while the latter concerns ultimate truth.

3.3 *Non-duality*

The possibility to use language in an unproblematic way is needed to address the worry stated above, namely that the Buddha's teachings are flawed because they were transmitted by means of language. Jizang rejects this scenario by arguing that the Buddha, like Vimalakīrti, did not need the words for his own understanding, but needed them for educating his unadvanced followers. Jizang

⁷⁴ Chien-hsing Ho, 'The Nonduality of speech and silence: a comparative analysis of Jizang's thought on language and beyond', in *Dao : A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 11 (2012), 1-19, there 2-3.

⁷⁵ Kantor, 'Referential relation', 854.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 872, emphasis added.

speaks about the relationship between the truth and the teachings of the Buddha as root and traces, he writes:⁷⁷

On account of these names and forms, they [the sūtras] wish to induce an awakening of what is devoid of form and name. For, this is the main gist of what is handed down in the shape of the teaching [traces], and thus is the root-meaning [inconceivable liberation] of all the nobles. ... Owing to the traces shaped by name and form [of the teaching], they [the nobles] reveal the root devoid of name and form.

The inexplorable, non-linguistic truth is the root and the verbal teachings are the traces. The simile is supposed to illustrate the extent of the language paradox, because non-linguistic, ultimate truth is still connected to linguistic, conventional truth.

Probably, there is some confusion at this point: Jizang uses 'suspension' in an ambivalent manner; he says that there is an inherent problem with language, but somehow the Buddha is able to use it in a proper way; and although ultimate truth is non-linguistic, it is still somehow connected to language. The key to understanding this paradox is non-duality (*bu'er* 不二). In order to understand phenomena qua phenoma – Jizang argues – we need to grasp non-duality. In the foregoing, I discussed that the suspension Jizang talks about is a way of moving beyond all that is being suspended, which suggests that the suspended is lost in the process. By talking about 'non-duality' rather than 'monism', however, Jizang stresses that the suspended is *not* lost. The product of suspension is – both in the worldly and in the ultimate sense – entanglement. On the conventional level, as I have discussed, it binds sign and referent, while it binds conventional truth and ultimate truth on the ultimate level. Picture a tree and ask yourself: is the root of the tree different from the branches? The answer would be both yes and no. Yes, because we differentiate between branches and roots and we would not be searching for apples *in* the ground under the apple tree. No, because branches and

⁷⁷ Jizang, *Jing Ming*, 856b7-11, in *ibid.*, 873.

root are nothing but different aspects of one thing, which is the tree.⁷⁸ Jizang would argue that the difference between branch and root is one of polarity, because the root is the bottom side and the branches are the top side of a tree. When he speaks about traces and root in Buddhist teachings, he explains it as a polarity of Buddhist truth where the linguistic teachings are, as it were, the branches that characterize one side of the truth, while the silence of Vimalakīrti characterizes the root. The importance of non-duality is expressly stated in the following passage of *On the twofold truth*:⁷⁹

The reason for taking the middle Way to be the body (*ti* 體) of the two truths is that the two truths are meant to make explicit the nondual principle. As when one points toward the moon with a finger, his intention is not to highlight the finger, but to let others see the moon, so also with the teaching of the twofold truth. The two truths are meant to make explicit the nondual; the intention is not of duality, but to enable others to access the nondual. Thus, we take the nondual [principle] to be the body of the two truths.

In this passage, Jizang explains the theory of the two truths as a finger pointing toward non-duality; the theory extends to that which lies beyond theory, causing a shift of attention to the meta-theoretical non-duality, but it does not disappear in the process. I could also call Jizang's notion of non-duality a 'differentiated monism', if I want to approach his argument from another angle. Adding the 'non'

⁷⁸ A passage in which Jizang seems to support this is found in his *Profound meaning of the three treatises*: "If the root exists of itself, it means that the branches are not caused by anything else." Here, the of-itself-existence of the branches is inferred from that of the root, and that inference only makes sense if root and branches are considered to be one. Otherwise, the branches would have been caused by something else, namely the root. Jizang, *Sanlun Xuan Yi* 三論玄義, T45.1852. The translator does not provide the sentence number, see Wing-tsit Chan, *A source book in Chinese philosophy* (Princeton 2008), 362.

⁷⁹ Jizang, *Er Di Yi*, 二諦義, T45.1854: 108b22-25, in Ho, 'The nonduality', 11. Ho notices that Jizang is equating various terms: 'Here, the Way is variously named the middle Way (zhongdao 中道), the correct Way (zhengdao 正道), the principle, the correct principle (zhengli 正理), and so forth. Significantly, it is also equated with nonacquisition, nonattachment, or the like.' Similarly, Aaron Koseki writes: 'For Jizang, "principle" was synonymous with non-duality.' See Aaron Koseki, 'Prajñāpāramitā and the buddhahood of the non-sentient world: the San-Lun assimilation of Buddha-nature and Middle Path doctrine', in *The journal of the international association of Buddhist Studies* 3 (1980), 16-33, there 24.

to the ‘dual’ is starting in a position of multiple levels of reality – worldly and ultimate – and negating that in order to underline that the two truths are not about ontology.⁸⁰ It is possible to do the very same by starting in a position of one reality and negating the unicity by adding differentiation in terms of traces and root.

3.4 Jizang’s *panjiao*

The non-dual nature of truth, that the practitioner can move beyond theoretical constructions of reality via the Buddha’s teachings to the root of enlightenment, indicates not only the successive stages of the path to liberation, but also constitutes a framework for systematizing the Mahāyāna texts, according to Jizang. As mentioned in the previous chapter, his *panjiao* rejects the exclusive diachronicity of the early systems, which means that he does not believe that the message of the Buddha – later written down in the various scriptures – increased in quality over the years. That does not mean, however, that Jizang sees no correlation between the *when* and the *what* of those texts. He believes that the capacity of the audience, not the quality of the teaching, determines when it was delivered in the career of the Buddha, which makes Jizang’s *panjiao* very functionalistic.⁸¹

The career of the Buddha consists of three parts, which Jizang calls the ‘three dharma wheels’, the first of which indicates the time when the Buddha reached enlightenment and started to teach, the second describes how he noticed that many in his audience were not ready to hear the truth as he had told it during the first period and he decided to dumb-down – as it were – his sermons for forty years (i.e., the Hīnayāna teachings), all the while readying his audience for the proper exposition of truth (i.e., the Mahāyāna teachings). The third wheel stands for the third period in which the audience was ready to hear the truth in full and

⁸⁰ Cheng, ‘Chi-tsang’s treatment’, 377-378.

⁸¹ Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 132.

was instructed in the same way as it was in the first period, with the difference that now everyone had the ability to comprehend what was said.⁸²

Jizang does affirm the superiority of Mahāyāna doctrine over Hīnayāna doctrine, but it is important to note that the quality of his later teaching is not higher than his early teaching. In fact, the content of the third phase is identical to that of the first. Rather, it is the quality of the audience that has been improved throughout the three phases. This fits well with the idea of non-duality, because at no point in his career, the Buddha says something that contradicts something else he has said, so Jizang reasons. Even the simple-phrased sermons of the second dharma wheel are true, just as the branch is as much tree as the root is.⁸³ There is also non-duality among the Mahāyāna texts, because they do not contain different messages, but different *emphases*.⁸⁴ For example, the doctrine of the One Vehicle is the main topic of the *Lotus sūtra*,⁸⁵ the doctrine of buddha nature takes central stage in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*⁸⁶ and discussions of the impossibility to comprehend ultimate reality are prominent in the *prajñāpāramitā sūtras*.⁸⁷ However, in the *Lotus sūtra*, buddha nature and ultimate reality also figure as subsidiary themes. Furthermore, in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*, buddha nature and ultimate reality are the side topics, just as the One Vehicle and buddha nature are subsidiary in the *prajñāpāramitā sūtras*. He writes:⁸⁸

The myriad sūtras are not the same in their handling of the different capacities of sentient beings. But in their mutual effort to deliver the teachings, they seek to avoid unnecessary duplication or redundancy.

⁸² Hiroshi Kanno, 'The three dharma-wheels of Jizang', in *Buddhist and Indian studies in honour of professor Sodo Mori* (Hamamatsu 2003), 399-412.

⁸³ For Jizang's relative appreciation of Hīnayāna, see Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 123.

⁸⁴ Hiroshi Kanno, 'A comparison of Zhiyi's and Jizang's views of the *Lotus sūtra*: did Zhiyi, after all, advocate a "Lotus absolutism"?' in *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University* 3 (1999), 125-148, there 135-136.

⁸⁵ Williams, Tribe and Wynne, *Buddhist thought*, 125-26; Hu, 'The elevation', 67-94.

⁸⁶ Ming-Wood Liu, 'The doctrine of Buddha-nature in the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*', in *Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies* 5 (1982), 63-95; Yamabe Nobuyoshi, 'The Idea of *Dhātu-vāda* in Yogacara and *Tathāgata-garbha* Texts', in Jamie Hubbard and Paul Swanson eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: the storm over critical Buddhism* (Honolulu 1997), 193-204, there 195; Williams, Tribe & Wynne, *Buddhist thought*, 118-122.

⁸⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Wisdom of the heart: essential Buddhist sutras and commentaries* (Berkeley 2012).

⁸⁸ Jizang, *Fa Hua Xuan Lun* 法華玄論, T34.1720: 388b, in Kanno, 'A comparison', 136.

Because the inapprehensibility of ultimate reality is expounded at length in the *prajñā sūtras*, in the *Lotus sūtra* it is not treated in depth. And because the cause and effect of the One Vehicle is not expounded at length in the *prajñā sūtras*, in the *Lotus sūtra* it is expounded in detail.

This is why Mun calls this *panjiao* an ecumenical system: it considers all the texts of the Mahāyāna canon of equal value considers the differences between them as nothing more than alternating emphases. Additionally, the *panjiao* is both synchronic and diachronic. On the one hand, Jizang retains the idea that all the texts can be placed on the timeline of the Buddha's career, but omits the idea that the place on the timeline indicates the quality of the text. His system of classification is synchronic in that lists how different teachings are given at the same time. 'When the Buddha delivers a sermon, the understanding becomes totally different depending on the hearers.'⁸⁹ Categorizing the hearers as either from the Hīnayāna or the Mahāyāna tradition, Jizang writes:⁹⁰

- (1) [The Buddha] teaches the Hīnayāna in the beginning and the Mahāyāna in the end. [He]manifests first the Hīnayāna at the Deer Park and later the Mahāyāna .
- (2) [The Buddha explicates] first the Mahāyāna and later the Hīnayāna. It is like that [the Buddha] teaches the Mahāyāna teaching immediately after the enlightenment and the Hīnayāna since the Deer Park's [teaching].
- (3) [The Buddha] explicates the Mahāyāna in both the beginning and the end [over his whole teaching career.] It is like that in both the first time and the last time, [the Buddha] always teaches the *Nirvāṇa sūtra*.
- (4) [The Buddha] delivers the Hīnayāna in both the beginning and the end [over his whole teaching career]. It is like in the *Wisdom Śāstra*,

⁸⁹ Mun, *The history*, 186.

⁹⁰ Jizang, *Fa Hua*, 384b17-20, in Mun, *The history*, 186.

‘[The four] āgamas⁹¹ are assembled from the Buddha’s teachings from the first dharmic turn⁹² to his death.’

This seems to contradict the structure of the three dharma wheels, which states the order of Mahāyāna – Hīnayāna – Mahāyāna, but it is important to keep in mind that Jizang is here assessing the Buddha’s teaching career with respect to the capacity of the hearer. (1) He describes how, as far as the unadvanced practitioner can understand, the Buddha first teaches Hīnayāna and later Mahāyāna. (2) The advanced practitioner, however, recognizes that the Buddha starts with Mahāyāna doctrine. (3) She hears the same lessons over and over again, throughout all the sermons, while (4) the unadvanced practitioner never stops hearing the Hīnayāna teaching as she does not make progress.⁹³

3.5 *Two truths on four levels*

It is worth pointing out that the reader of Jizang’s works is supposed to feel puzzled. The puzzlement is used as an instrument to guide the reader towards non-attachment. A well-formulated and seemingly air-tight definition of empty reality would constitute yet another object of clinging and in that case the antidote would become poisonous. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to have a clear understanding of Jizang’s project and how he envisions the different stages. I will explain the scheme below that visualizes the steps in Jizang’s four-levelled⁹⁴ negation.⁹⁵

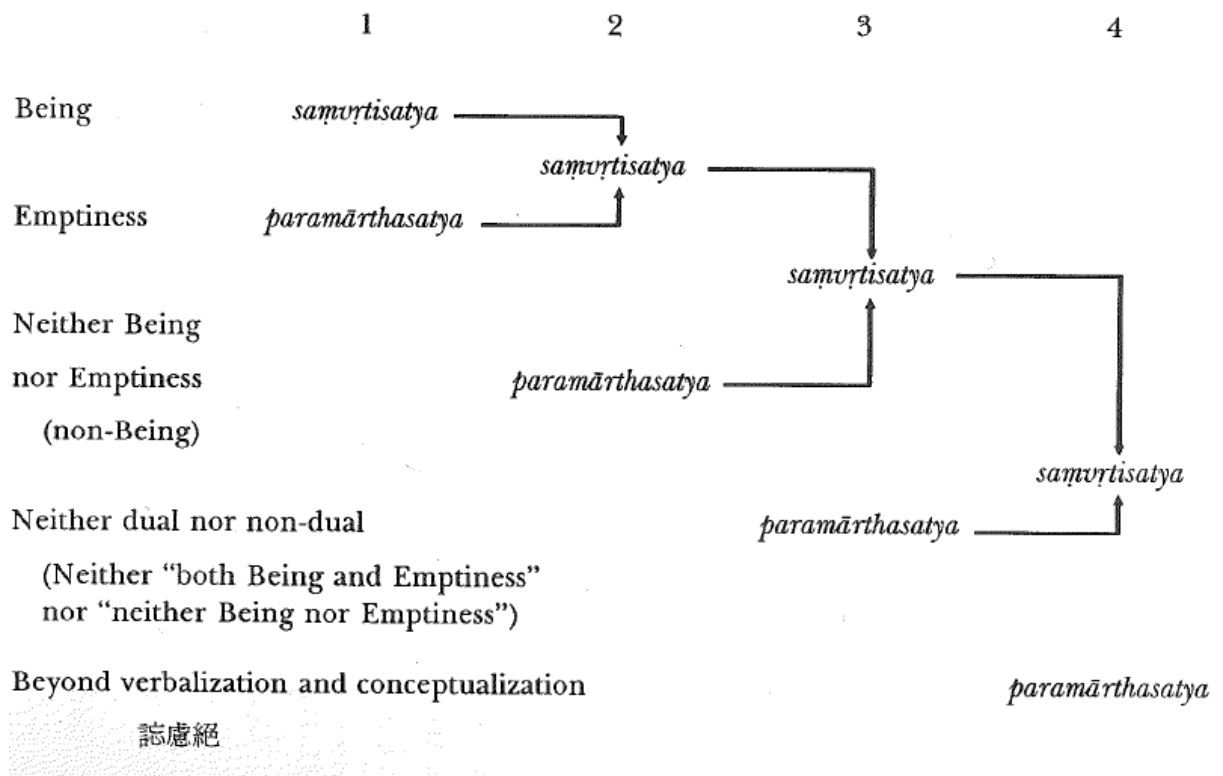
⁹¹ Synonym for the Hīnayāna scriptures.

⁹² From the period of the first dharma wheel.

⁹³ Mun points out that it not only wrong to only know the Hīnayāna teachings, but also to only know those of the Mahāyāna tradition, because the teachings of both traditions are interrelated. See Mun, *The history*, 207.

⁹⁴ Zhang, ‘Po: Jizang’s’, 194.

⁹⁵ Table retrieved from Swanson, *Foundations of*, 362.



We start at the left corner, at *saṃvṛtisaṭya* (conventional view). This indicates the view of the non-Buddhist who thinks that the world is filled with a manifold of substantial entities. After hearing the Buddhist teaching of emptiness, this person develops *paramārthasatya* (ultimate view) and becomes a Buddhist, who starts to distance herself from the view that all things have inherent nature. Thinking about the emptiness of everything, the view of inherent nature is replaced by another view, namely that things do not have an inherent nature, which is a first-order synthesis of being and emptiness. This synthesis, however, is also a view, which is why it is designated as conventional. In order to escape this view, the practitioner contrasts it with its anti-thesis (neither being nor emptiness), which gives rise to a second-order synthesis. Unfortunately, she now faces the same problem with the second-order synthesis that she had with the first-order synthesis: it is still a view that can be contrasted with its anti-thesis. This time, the anti-thesis is: neither dual nor non-dual. For the third time, she unites both sides of the opposition and develops a third-level synthesis. Jizang argues that, at this level, she will be able to realize the futility of all the synthesizing and will cease doing so. The limitedness

of language and the artificiality of concepts is supposed to make her grasp final enlightenment beyond verbalization and conceptualization.⁹⁶

Strictly speaking, the scheme above is wrong because the it should not say ‘beyond verbalization and conceptualization’ at the bottom, but ‘neither “dual, non-dual and “neither dual nor non-dual”” nor “not dual, not non-dual and not “neither dual nor non-dual””’. This sounds cryptic, but the point is merely that after a synthesis at level three, there will be one at level four, and at level five, and at six, and seven, etc. There is no end to the synthesizing. This is why Junjirō Takakusu writes:⁹⁷

Generally speaking, when one error is rejected by refutation, another view is grasped and held as right and as a natural outcome of it. In the case of this school, however, a selection is also an attachment to or an acquisition of one view and is therefore to be rejected.

Takakusu thinks it peculiar that the Sanlun Buddhist advocates refutation and is afterwards just as dissatisfied with the outcome as it was with the prior view.⁹⁸ For Jizang, however, this is not peculiar at all, because he values the process of negation over the outcome. The outcome, or the higher-order synthesis as I have called it above, is not better than that which it synthesizes because it is still a conceptual construct that serves as object of attachment. The reason for naming the fourth level of negation ‘beyond verbalization and conceptualization’ is that Jizang assumes that the practitioner will end her repetitive synthesizing when she becomes aware of the infinity of the process, that there is no end result. Some people will tire early and others later, but everyone will at some point stop synthesizing. This assessment fits well with Ming-Wood Liu’s explanation that, for Jizang, the four stages mentioned above need not be conclusive and says that the practitioner might need to go through more than four stages.⁹⁹ In the end, the fourfold negation is merely a lesson in pointlessness and teaches that the problem

⁹⁶ Ibid., 112-114.

⁹⁷ Junjirō Takakusu, *The essentials of Buddhist philosophy* (third edition; Honolulu 1956), 100.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁹⁹ Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 150.

of unenlightened people is not that they have a wrong view, but that the very fact that they have one.¹⁰⁰ The higher-order syntheses are, strictly speaking, not better than the lower ones because they are all views, and therefore problematic. Kantor explains it as follows: 'Therefore, the teaching must first adopt two opposite remedies to neutralize each respective form of clinging and then evoke a sense of non-clinging, which is neither existence nor nonexistence and undermines any type of duality. Thus to differentiate between "two truths" in terms of "existence and nonexistence" at the level of the teaching is the pragmatic response to those contradictory types of ontological delusions.'¹⁰¹ That Jizang tries to convey to the reader that both clinging to existence and clinging to emptiness are wrong, is clear from his writings. However, it is less clear how he envisions the end stage of Buddhist practice. What happens, exactly, after the disciple has passed through the stages mentioned above and has acquired the ability to be silent in the appropriate way? Or, what state are we in when we have gotten tired of having views?

3.6 *The two truths as ladder*

In the West, Wittgenstein is famous for talking about his philosophy as a ladder that one needs to climb, but can discard afterwards. Zhang seems to understand the fourfold process of negation in a similar manner, when she refers to it as Jizang's 'tetralemmatic ladder'.¹⁰² According to this approach, the various steps and stages on the path to Buddhahood are not true or valuable in themselves, but merely serve the purpose of getting the practitioner enlightened. Zhang is not the only one who interprets Jizang in this way. Wolfgang Bauer writes:¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ John Zijang Ding, 'Mystical symbolism and dialetheist cognitivism: the transformation of truth-falsehood (*zhen-jia*)', in *Journal of East-West Thought* 2 (2012), 119-134, 125.

¹⁰¹ Kantor, 'Referential relation', 869.

¹⁰² Ellen Zhang, 'Ji Zang's *nyat*-speech: a Derridian *dénégation* with Buddhahat negations', in Jin Park ed., *Buddhisms and deconstructions* (Lanham 2006), 97-107, 101.

¹⁰³ 'In der Retrospektive aber werden die verschiedenen Stufen und Formen der Wahrheit, einschließlich der letzten und höchsten, als reine Methoden erkennbar. Sie sind selbst nicht Ziel und Inhalt der Bemühung, sondern sie sind nur bloße Mittel zu einem Zweck, der sich freilich, da jede Formulierung ja wieder an einen Rest von Affirmation gebunden wäre, nicht mehr in Worte

In retrospect, however, the various stages and forms of truth, including those of the last and highest, turn out to be nothing more than methods. They are not themselves goal and content of the endeavor, but merely *the means to an end*, which freely – since every formulation would have been bound to a remainder of affirmation – does not let itself be captured in words.

Ascribing such an instrumental interpretation of truth to Jizang can be justified by the fact that the latter refers to various scriptures as *expedient*: they serve to affect change in the practitioner. However, Hiroshi Kanno points out that even in a discussion of expediency, Jizang differentiates between expediency understood as a means to affect change and expediency understood as untruthfulness.¹⁰⁴ In the following passage from the *Fahua Yishu*, Jizang rejects the latter understanding of expediency.¹⁰⁵

The old theory holds that the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* and other Mahāyāna sūtras are inferior to the *Lotus sūtra*, and thus are regarded as expedient means of the *Lotus sūtra*. Now it is revealed that while the bodhisattvas become enlightened in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*, the voice-hearers who are dull in spiritual capacity seize the opportunity to attain enlightenment by the ultimate teaching of the bodhisattvas and so the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* is regarded as the expedient means. We don't call the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* expedient because it is not ultimate.

In this passage, Jizang explains that the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* is not an expedient means for the voice-hearers – sravakas – because it is ultimately untrue. It is an expedient means, because it offers only an indirect opportunity for

fassen läßt.' The translation above is mine. See Wolfgang Bauer, *Geschichte der Chinesischen Philosophie* (München 2018), 210. Liu also argues that the theory of the Two Truths is only a means of instruction; see Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 140.

¹⁰⁴ Kanno, 'The three', 408.

¹⁰⁵ Jizang, *Fa Hua Yi Shu* 法華義疏, T34.1721: 557a in Kanno, 'The three', 409.

attaining enlightenment, through the teaching of the bodhisattvas. In other words, the spiritual capacity, not the veracity of the sūtra makes it expedient.

Some scholars take issue with the metaphor of the (expedient) ladder in the context of Sanlun Buddhism, because '[a] ladder suggests that one climbs the rungs, and then leaps from the top to a transcendent [thing], discarding the ladder.'¹⁰⁶ As they see it, Jizang does not tell the reader to discard conventional and ultimate truth. On the contrary, he says that a Buddhist master will continuously travel between the two truths, but without abiding in either one of them. According to Robert Magliola, non-abiding is the key to understanding the Madhyamaka notion of enlightenment.¹⁰⁷ Kantor writes that, for Jizang, non-abiding is the root that underlies all Buddhist terminology.¹⁰⁸ Liu underlines the importance of non-abiding as non-attachment to a certain theoretical stance by saying: '[Jizang] also follows [Falang] in considering the cultivation of non-attachment as the principal objective of the teaching of all Buddhist scriptures, when he makes out that "non-dependence" and "non-attachment" are the main principles of all sūtras and śāstras.'¹⁰⁹ He refers to the passage where Jizang writes: 'Hence, dependence and attachment are the roots of saṃsāra, and non-dependence and non-attachment are the major principles of the sūtras and śāstras.'¹¹⁰ Similarly, Lai argues that Jizang advocates a thorough negation of each view that one comes up with in order to cut off all attachment.¹¹¹

Contrary to Magliola and Kantor, Zhang seems to think about non-abiding as leaving behind the abode of the truths, instead of as oscillating between them. She writes:¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Robert Magliola, 'Nagarjuna and Chi-tsang on the value of "this world": a reply to Kuang-ming Wu's critique of Indian and Chinese Madhyamaka Buddhism', in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 31 (2004), 505-516, there 512; Robert Magliola, 'Afterword', in Jin Park ed., *Buddhisms and deconstructions* (Lanham 2006), 186-214, there 190.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁰⁸ Kantor, 'Referential relation', 892.

¹⁰⁹ Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 99.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹¹¹ Lai, 'Buddhism in', 14.

¹¹² Zhang, 'Ji zang's', 102.

For [Jizang] all views, expressed by our conventional language, are in one way or another associated with verbalization, conceptualization, discriminations, and differentiation, and thus are partial and relative. In the end, both the conventional and the ultimate should be erased, if one is to experience the infinite flux of *nyat*¹¹³, and comprehend “the ultimate wonder” of “things-as-they-are (*shixiang*).”

This reading of Jizang is compelling, given the discussion of language provided above. If the world is a flawed construct that ascribes inherent nature to all things, surely, Jizang would not want the Buddhist disciple that has been taught about emptiness to return to this naïve perception of reality. When Magliola criticizes Zhang for calling the four levels in Jizang’s theory of the two truths a tetralemmatic ladder, he probably has a different ladder in mind than she has. The erasing of the two truths that Zhang speaks about refers to the fact that – for Jizang – the conceptual distinction made by the unenlightened person using the problematic means of language is no longer made by the enlightened Buddhist, which seems to align well with Jizang’s appreciation of silence – as discussed above – and how he states the goal of contemplating the two truths:¹¹⁴

The idea of nonexistence is presented primarily to handle the disease of the concept of existence. If that disease disappears, the useless medicine is also discarded. Thus we know that the Way of the sage has never held to either existence or nonexistence. What obstacle can there be?

What Magliola seems to understand as the ladder that is thrown away in the end is the idea that the Buddhist master is no longer concerned with conventional and ultimate reality after becoming enlightened, while Zhang argues that the Buddhist master is not concerned with conventional and ultimate reality *in the same way* as she was before reaching enlightenment.

¹¹³ Zhang uses ‘*nyat*’ and ‘*kong*’ as translations of ‘ultimate’, see *ibid.*, 101.

¹¹⁴ Jizang, *Sanlun Xuan Yi* 三論玄義, T45.1852: 6-7, in Chan, ‘A source’, 366.

On this reading, Zhang seems to agree with Magliola's (and also Kantor's) interpretation of Jizang's definition of the enlightened Buddhist as someone who is moving between the two truths in a circular manner. Magliola writes: 'Indeed, regarded from the experiential perspective, the supreme truth of the third level, either non-existence nor non-emptiness, seems to off/circle back to the first level, 'existence' [mundane truth] and 'emptiness' [supreme truth].'¹¹⁵ Kantor supports the idea that there is circularity in Jizang's teachings when he compares the latter to the theory of the hermeneutical circle,¹¹⁶ claiming that the scheme of the four levels above contains 'transformative circularity'.¹¹⁷ He explains the change that occurs at the moment of enlightenment as the moment in which the Buddhist practitioner has found a 'para-linguistic' way of speaking about worldliness and emptiness that coincides with Jizang's interpretation of enlightened silence: 'Hence, silence not excluding speech could be regarded as a para-linguistic mode of expression.'¹¹⁸ According to Kantor, the para-linguistic hermeneutic circle is found in the theory of traces and root. Traces are only traces if they are considered in relation to their root, while on the other hand, the root would not be a root if there would not have been traces to be the root of.

Magliola and Kantor argue convincingly that enlightenment, once reached, entails complete non-attachment, which results in the Buddha's ability to freely circle between the conventional and the ultimate. However, this is only possible *after* enlightenment. The scheme of the four levels shows that before liberation, the practitioner is trapped in conventional thinking until she manages to break free from the otherwise infinite synthesizing of higher-order worldviews. This problematizes Kantor's comparison with the hermeneutical circle, because the latter is a description of the method that *leads to* understanding something, not that which happens when that something is already understood. In the next chapter, I will argue that it makes sense for Kantor to describe Zhiyi's method of

¹¹⁵ Magliola, 'Afterword', 191.

¹¹⁶ For an overview of the development of hermeneutics in the West, see Lawrence Schmidt, *Understanding hermeneutics* (London 2014).

¹¹⁷ Kantor, 'Referential relation', 905.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 912.

reaching enlightenment as a circular process, but I contest that the same can be said of Jizang.

3.7 Conclusion

Jizang argues that everyone is inclined to think wrongly about the reality we live in by reifying concepts that are mere constructions of our mind, rather than indicators of reality itself. He calls this suspension, because we suspend the sign in order to see the signified, and opposes this to another kind of suspension, namely deconstruction. Jizang argues that Buddhist education consists for an important part in learning how to deconstruct our worldviews, according to his modern interpreters. Realizing the artificial nature of our concepts is the right suspension that undoes the constructed reality, which was the result of our first suspension. This brings the practitioner to a paradox, because Buddhist teachings are dependent on language, such as the various sūtras, but reifying concepts is an integral part of the use of language. According to Jizang, deconstruction is not a solution to the paradox, but offers a way to use language all the while realizing its limited value. This pragmatic approach to concepts enabled the Buddha to teach a truth that cannot be adequately captured in words.

The paradox that it is somehow possible to discuss a truth that cannot be discussed is explained by Jizang's understanding of non-duality. He refers to the Buddha's sermons as traces that are neither identical nor non-identical to the root, that is, truth. Similar to a branch that is neither identical to a root, nor different from it insofar as both constitute the tree, the various teachings of the Buddha have different meanings, but all those meanings are but aspects of one true story. Those who understand the story have reached enlightenment. This interpretation of truth resonates with Jizang's *panjiao*, his classification of teachings, that equates all the different Buddhist teachings as truthful, which makes him a Mahāyāna ecumenist, but differentiates between them with respect to their instructiveness. It depends on the progression of the practitioner which text is more useful, according to Jizang, which makes his *panjiao* synchronic: one and the

same teaching can be understood in multiple ways at once. The *panjiao* is also diachronic, however, as Jizang describes the career of the Buddha as the ‘three dharma wheels’ that indicate three phases in his teaching that progress from an obscure exposition of the truth to an explicit exposition of the truth.

The truth has four levels, according to Jizang, and the mechanism by means of which the practitioner progresses to the fourth level is negation. Working with the assumption that everyone intuitively reifies concepts and in so doing constructs a worldview, the first level of truth is realizing that those reified concepts are mere constructs, which is the right kind of suspension mentioned above. This realizing is brought about by a negation of one’s worldview, of being, which is the assertion of non-being or emptiness. Repeatedly negating one’s view will eventually enable the practitioner to stop creating worldviews, which is the core of enlightenment for Jizang: being non-attached to ontological theories.

Jizang’s theory of the four levels has been referred to by some scholars as a pragmatic ladder: once the practitioner has reached the top, the ladder is no longer useful and can be thrown away. The teachings of the Buddha imbue the practitioner with a certain interpretation, a view about Buddhism that will be discarded in the end. Others have objected to the use of the ladder metaphor, because Jizang does not preach abandonment of view; only the non-attachment to those views. They argue that the ladder metaphor makes Jizang look like a nihilist, which he was not. I argue that the ladder metaphor is useful as long as the ladder consists of the *reified* views, which indeed must be discarded in order to enable the kind of non-attachment that Jizang envisions. This leaves room for *non-reified* views, so that the charge of nihilism is averted.

4. Zhiyi: Enlightenment via integration

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss Zhiyi's interpretation of the Two truths and the middle, which he jointly refers to as the three truths, and compare it to Jizang's. In order to do so, I will first address – in section 4.2.1 that which they have in common, namely an understanding of enlightenment as realization of the non-dual nature of reality. Zhiyi and Jizang even use the same metaphor of traces and root, or basis, to explain non-duality. Moreover, they both argue that enlightenment cannot be theoretically demarcated, which, in Zhiyi's phrasing, means that 'all is quiescent and pure'.¹¹⁹

In section 4.2.2, I will explain that both Jizang and Zhiyi stressed the non-dual nature of reality in order to oppose a substantialized view of the conventional (*yu*) and ultimate truth (*wu*), which was prominent in early Chinese Buddhist interpretations that were influenced by Daoist thought. Additionally, I will show that the tendency to substantialize persists, using the example of New-Confucian scholar, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909-1995), to illustrate this point. He argues that the conventional-ultimate distinction is akin to the phenomenal-noumenal distinction made by Immanuel Kant. Drawing on the work of Kantor, I will argue that this comparison is problematic, because the phenomenal and the noumenal are independent ontological realms that do not map unto, respectively, the conventional and the ultimate, because the latter two are interrelated.

Despite a shared interpretation of what it means to be enlightened, Zhiyi and Jizang differ on the way in which one becomes enlightened. These differences will be discussed in subsection 4.3, where I contrast Jizang's method of negation to Zhiyi's method of integration. I will explain in 4.3.1 that, according to Zhiyi, the mistaken view that things have independent, individual natures in opposition to other things can be abandoned when one realizes that all things are part of a context and owe their individuality to that context. Zhiyi's strategy for realizing

¹¹⁹ See footnote 131.

the non-dual nature of reality, therefore, consists in pointing out how seeming opposites are actually involved in the very being of the other, that is, pointing out that all opposites are integrated into each other.

The apex of integration, for Zhiyi, is found in the *Lotus sūtra* that teaches the doctrine of the One Vehicle. For this reason, his *panjiao* is described by Mun as sectarian as it ranks the *Lotus sūtra* higher than the other Mahāyāna texts. I will elaborate on Zhiyi's classification of teachings in 4.3.2 and describe how all Buddhist teaching, according to him, eventually cumulate in the Perfect Teaching of the *Lotus*. Lastly, in 4.3.3, I will address Kantor's suggestion that a Buddhist version of the hermeneutical circle is found in the works of both Jizang and Zhiyi and argue that circularity is indeed a feature of enlightenment for both masters and is also found in Zhiyi's integrative approach, but is absent in Jizang's method of negation.

4.2 *The subtle Truth*

Jizang speaks of the two truths and Zhiyi about the threefold truth, but both Buddhist masters agree on the nature of those truths: that it is beyond language. Unfortunately, we have no other choice than to use words in an attempt to do so. Zhiyi writes that 'if one becomes attached to this reality, words concerning reality become empty words. Since a mistaken verbal view arises, it is called "crude"'.¹²⁰ He explains this as follows:¹²¹

'Now, the *dharmadhātu*¹²² is pure and not something which can be seen, heard, realized, known, or verbalized. ... It also says, "This dharma cannot be expressed; the marks of words are *quiescent*." This also refers to the

¹²⁰ Zhiyi, *Miaofa Lianhua Jing Xuan Yi* 妙法蓮華經玄義, T33.1716: 705a24-25, in Swanson, *Foundations of*, 154.

¹²¹ Zhiyi, *Miaofa Lianhua*, 696c24, in Swanson, *Foundations of*, 203 (second and third emphasis are mine).

¹²² The *dharmadhātu* is usually referred to as the realm that contains everything perceivable by the sense faculties, but Zhiyi uses it in the wider sense of not only encapsulating the phenomenal, but also the ultimate. In other words, *dharmadhātu* refers to reality *tout court*. See Chi-chiang Huang, 'Dharmadhātu', in Edward Irons ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York 2008), 224-225.

limits of praising [the Buddha, or the subtlety of reality] with language. [The Buddha-dharma] cannot be expressed with relative terms, and it cannot be expressed with absolute terms. It means extinguishing of the relative and the absolute. Therefore it is said, “[words are] quiescent.”

In the previous chapter, I explained Jizang’s double use of ‘suspension’. Suspension of names that construes a world and suspension that helps the practitioner to move beyond such verbal constructions and to become enlightened. The second use of suspension is called the ‘suspension of correlative dependency’ in the work of Zhiyi. He writes: “All kinds of deceptive constructions and reasoning through differentiating are then called patterns of correlative dependence. Our unfolding of true wisdom suspends those patterns of correlative dependence, suspending again our suspending.”¹²³

Despite the suspension or eradication of the verbal and the conceptual, however, Zhiyi does try to shed some light on his interpretation of the truth by calling it *subtle* or *wonderful* (妙 *miao*). This subtlety or wonderfulness is of two kinds: relative and absolute.¹²⁴ An example of the first kind is the Mahāyāna teachings compared to the – as Zhiyi perceived it – Hīnayāna teachings. He writes that ‘[a]ll sūtras [which contain the sermons preached] at the Deer Park are incomplete, small, and crude. [The teachings of the Mahāyāna are] complete, great, and subtle in relative contrast to these Hīnayāna teachings]. [This is the meaning of “relative subtlety.”]’¹²⁵ Mahāyāna is subtle in relation to crude Hīnayāna. In order to explain absolute subtlety, Zhiyi refers to the theory of the Four Teachings.¹²⁶ This theory describes the four teachings that are linked to the four stages on the way to enlightenment. Although the theory is part of Zhiyi’s *panjiao* and will be discussed more elaborately in the section below that address his *panjiao*, I want to focus here on the notion of truth as it is used in this theory.

¹²³ Zhiyi, *Mohe Zhi Guan* 摩訶止觀, T46.1911: 22b16 in Hans Kantor, ‘Emptiness of transcendence: the inconceivable and invisible in Chinese Buddhist thought’, in Nahum Brown and William Franke eds., *Transcendence, immanence and intercultural philosophy* (Cham 2016), 125-152, there 132.

¹²⁴ Zhiyi, *Miaofa Lianhua*, 696b-697b, in Swanson, *Foundations of*, 199.

¹²⁵ Zhiyi, *Miaofa Lianhua*, 696b13, in Swanson, *Foundations of*, 199-200.

¹²⁶ Zhiyi, *Miaofa Lianhua*, 696c24, in Swanson, *Foundations of*, 202.

First, the practitioner's mind is uneducated and needs to hear the Tripiṭaka (Storehouse) Teaching that explains as a skillful means how things are phenomena, not substances.¹²⁷

First, [the Tripiṭaka Teaching that] dharmas arise in three conventional ways 三假 [is taught] in accordance with the capacity of the listener [It teaches that] if one comprehends the real truth [paramārthasatya], then the grasping of opposites is severed. Śariputra said, "I have heard that within liberation there is no verbalization." This is the meaning of the "absolute" in the Tripiṭaka sūtras.

The passage is somewhat confusingly phrased. Since Zhiyi considers the earlier Hīnayāna tradition as inferior to the Mahāyāna tradition, why say that it teaches the real truth? The Four Teachings, i.e. the Four Dharmas of Conversion, constitute a hierarchy of teachings in which the Tripiṭaka Teaching is the lowest, or as Zhiyi says: the crudest. 'If [as in the Tripiṭaka Teaching one teaches reality as] non-identical with emptiness, this is an expedient means for reaching the real [truth]. Therefore it is called "crude".'¹²⁸ In other words, it teaches the real truth, *but* to unexperienced practitioners and therefore stresses the importance of emptiness, which is what those practitioners need to hear at this stage. In the second through the fourth teaching, the real truth is increasingly clearer expressed, that is, crudeness decreases. In the Shared Teaching, the practitioner utilizes the knowledge of emptiness to overcome the dichotomy between worldliness and emptiness, and stresses the identity between the two: 'The Tripiṭaka Teaching seeks the absolute by denying the non-absolute, but [reality is] identical with phenomena yet real. This is [the meaning of] the "absolute" in the Shared Teaching.'¹²⁹ Third, the practitioner reevaluates the conventional world when instructed with the Distinct Teaching: 'This [*nirvāṇa*] is the worldly truth of *samsāra*, and the absolute in turn is present in the relative. If one comprehends the middle way of the Distinct Teaching, [one knows that] the relative and the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Zhiyi, *Miaofa Lianhua*, 696b13, in Swanson, *Foundations of*, 201.

¹²⁹ Zhiyi, *Miaofa Lianhua*, 696c24, in Swanson, *Foundations of*, 202.

absolute are identical.¹³⁰ Finally, then, the practitioner gains the ability to see all things as one, integrated totality under the Perfect Teaching: ‘The extremes are integrated with the middle, there is nothing which is not the Buddha-dharma. All is quiescent and pure.’¹³¹ It is the fourth teaching that contains absolute subtlety, because all the aspects of truth that have been alluded to in the previous teachings have now been integrated in a whole that is longer contrasted with anything. There is no longer a Mahāyāna-as-opposed-to-Hīnayāna, only Mahāyāna-by-itself. Note that Zhiyi uses the phrase ‘quiescent and pure’, which indicates his skepticism towards adequacy of language as discussed above.

Following the division of relative/absolute subtlety is an expansive discussion of thirty categories of subtlety: ten in a discussion of the mind, ten under the theme of the eternal buddha and ten under the theme of the buddha’s historical manifestation, his ‘traces’. ‘This term “subtle” refers to both the “traces” and the “basis”. The “basis” refers to that which is inherent in from the beginning. [...] Both the “traces” and the “basis” are teachings.’¹³² I have addressed how the theme of traces and root is a metaphor that Jizang uses to explain the nonduality of the Two truths. Zhiyi uses the metaphor in the same way, but contrary to Jizang, he ascribes a name to the circular movement that the enlightened being makes between the Two truths: the Middle. Consequently, the truth of Buddhism is threefold, because – so Zhiyi argues – the practitioner needs to find the middle ground between attachment to the phenomena and attachment to emptiness.¹³³

The reality of non-duality is called the Middle. ... This is the enlightened perception of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas. ... therefore it is called the supreme truth of the Middle Path. It is also called the truth of one reality 一實[.], and is also called emptiness [...], the Buddha-nature [...], the Dharma realm [...], thusness [...], and the *tathāgatha-garbha* [...].

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Zhiyi, *Miaofa Lianhua*, 697b22, in Swanson, *Foundations of*, 206.

¹³³ Zhiyi, *Lue Lun Anle Jing Tu Yi* 略論安樂淨土義, T47.1997: 727c12-21, in Swanson, *Foundations of*, 153.

4.2.1 *Absolute reality as noumenon*

The fact that both Jizang and Zhiyi endorse the notion of non-duality indicates that their theories converge in at least one important respect: that ultimate reality is not an independent reality. Below, I will explain how they propagate different strategies for reaching enlightenment, but here it is worth elaborating on the fact that they do not seem to disagree about the nature of enlightenment and how the practitioner will conceive of reality, once she has become a Buddha. Swanson and Liu convincingly argue that early Chinese Madhyamaka, under the influence of Daoist thought, conceptualized ultimate reality as a counter-reality, which entailed a reification of emptiness, *wu* as opposed to conventional reality, *you*.¹³⁴ Both Jizang and Zhiyi reject this understanding of ultimate reality as a separate realm and teach that *you* and *wu* are connected like the branches and roots of a tree. The middle between the Two truths (Jizang) and the middle truth (Zhiyi) indicates this identity while preserving the differences between *you* and *wu*.

The tendency to reify *wu* persists, however, as illustrated by the works of Mou Zongsan, who considers Zhiyi's theory the best exposition of Buddhism, but reads it along Kantian lines.¹³⁵ Although his reading of Zhiyi is a fascinating endeavor in comparative philosophy and religion, it places the doctrine of the three truths in a Western ontological frame, which – interestingly enough – results in the same reification of ultimate reality that early Chinese Buddhists were inclined to. Since Mou is neither a medieval scholar, nor a Daoist one, it is surprising that his reading of Zhiyi is so similar to the medieval Daoist way of reading Madhyamaka texts. This seems to indicate that differentiating between *you* and *wu* is not only a Daoist tendency, but a Confucian one too, and on top of that a tendency that has survived the ages.

Contemporary historian Jason Clower explains that Mou lived in a time when Confucianism was unpopular and facing various doctrinal problems.¹³⁶ Mou

¹³⁴ See Swanson, *Foundations of*, 90-95.

¹³⁵ Jason Clower, *The unlikely Buddhologist: Tiantai Buddhism in Mou Zhongsan's New Confucianism* (Leiden and Boston 2010), 1-55.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-27.

turned to the study of Buddhism in order to find a solution to these problems.¹³⁷ According to him, Zhiyi taught an ontology of parallel realities, conventional and ultimate, and being enlightened consists in dwelling in both of these realities. The Buddha, therefore, lived in two realities at once, while the unenlightened person has only access to the conventional realm. 'Mou believes ... that *all buddhas lead double lives*, as it were. They live as ordinary sentient beings, *and also* at the same time as buddhas.'¹³⁸ Informed by Kantian thinking, Mou argues that conventional reality is the realm of phenomena that are the perceptible representations of the things-in-themselves, the noumena, which cannot be observed or known as such.¹³⁹ Translated to a Kantian jargon, the accomplishment of the Buddha is that he is able to access the noumenal realm.¹⁴⁰ Kantor points out that phenomena and noumena are the dual aspects of Kant's ontological system, which makes them unsuitable for a Madhyamaka or Tiantai explanation of reality that is characterized by non-duality. For Kant, the phenomena are representations of the noumena but do provide the 'instructive clues' that reveal them as such.¹⁴¹

In sum, Mou turns absolute reality into a reified ontological realm by adopting a Kantian ontological framework. He does, however, stress that the phenomenal things are 'embodied' by emptiness, which means that nothing has an essence that either sets it apart from other things or makes it identical to them. This resembles the theory of non-duality (not being different while also not being the same), but the similarity is deceiving, because Mou claims that things embodied by emptiness are only seen as such through Buddha-goggles, as it were. When I, a rather unenlightened person, and the Buddha look at a house, we see radically different things. I see it as a phenomenon, but the Buddha sees it as a noumenon, stripped of all its phenomenal features. 'A buddha's enlightened mind of *prajñā* does not experience the world as a place of finite objects with number

¹³⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 74.

¹³⁹ For more information on Kantian ontology, see Nicholas Stang, 'Kant's Transcendental Idealism', in Edward Zalta ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/kant-transcendental-idealism/>.

¹⁴⁰ This is a modification of Kantian theory, because Kant argues that the noumena cannot be known, irrespective of one's intellectual or spiritual accomplishment. See Kantor, 'Ontological indeterminacy', 24.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 34.

or location in space, time, or any other phenomenal qualities. It has transcended such experiences.¹⁴² To be sure, the Buddha can choose to see the house as I do,¹⁴³ but that means that he has to switch between viewpoints, not that those viewpoints are in any way interconnected as required by the theory of non-duality.

Both Jizang and Zhiyi would object to the duality in Kantian ontology, and consequently to the duality in Mou's representation of Tiantai theory. Even though they think similarly about the non-duality of reality, the end goal of Buddhist practice, however, their ideas about the method that leads towards that goal differ.

4.3 *Differences between Jizang and Zhiyi*

Up until this point, it seems as if Jizang and Zhiyi were of the same mind. They both supported the Mahāyāna idea that language cannot express truth due to its being constructed,¹⁴⁴ they both argue that truth can never be apprehended by someone who draws contrasts. Even the person who contrasts truth to falsehood fails to grasp the fact that truth is nondual.¹⁴⁵ What is more, both Buddhist masters draw on the metaphor of 'traces and root' to illustrate the non-duality of truth, and they both argue that the Buddhist practitioner needs to deconstruct her world, that is, her mistaken reifications of words and concepts.¹⁴⁶ For this reason, it is not surprising that Kantor includes numerous references to Zhiyi while discussing Jizang's thoughts about language and discusses them as likeminded people.¹⁴⁷

Brook Ziporyn, however, considers Zhiyi's ideas unique in a way that contradicts Kantor's presentation of Jizang and Zhiyi. Ziporyn's claim is that Tiantai

¹⁴² Clower, *The unlikely*, 96.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁴⁴ 'This school [Tiantai] interprets the 'true state' as ... [something that] transcends all speech and thought.' Takakusu, *The essentials*, 135.

¹⁴⁵ See Hans Kantor, 'Ontological indeterminacy and its soteriological relevance: an assessment of Mou Zhongsan's (1909-1995) interpretation of Zhiyi's (538-597) Tiantai Buddhism', in *Philosophy East and West* 56 (2006), 16-68, there 39.

¹⁴⁶ Hans Kantor, 'Dynamics of practice and understanding – Chinese Tiantai philosophy of contemplation and deconstruction', in Youru Wang & Sandra Wawrytko eds., *Dao Companion to Chinese Buddhist Philosophy* (Dordrecht 2018), 265-294.

¹⁴⁷ Kantor, 'Referential relation', 851-915.

philosophy has made some significant changes to Madhyamaka philosophy,¹⁴⁸ which aligns well with his statement that Tiantai is '[o]ften described as the first Sinitic school of Buddhism...'¹⁴⁹ – a description that he seems to endorse. Since I will not contest the claim that the Sanlun school is the Chinese branch of the Madhyamaka tradition, it follows that Ziporyn's position leads to the implication that Jizang – as the arguably most prominent master of the Sanlun school – has either copied Zhiyi's innovative ideas (it could have been the other way round, but that would mean that Zhiyi was inspired by someone younger than him) or that Kantor is over-emphasizing the similarities between Jizang and Zhiyi. I will argue, on the contrary, the Ziporyn is over-emphasizing the differences between Tiantai and Madhyamaka – in the form of Sanlun – by elaborating on what Ziporyn considers the main difference between Madhyamaka and Tiantai. Namely that the latter tradition has developed a method of integration that avoids that problem we saw in discussing Jizang's fourfold negation. That the process of negation is, in principle, endless and does not lead to enlightenment even though Jizang advocates it as the path towards it. Ziporyn writes:¹⁵⁰

Pre-Tiantai Emptiness theory gets into an infinite regress, chasing its tail around the problem of the transcendence of Emptiness: no statement can represent it, even "all things are Empty". It is purely and totally above and beyond anything that can be thought or said, all ordinary experience of identities in the world. It is a negation that is supposed to bear no relation at all to what it negates, to entirely escape the system of relations, of conditionality. Emptiness is supposed to be strictly "inconceivable". In Tiantai, this problem disappears.

My claim, in short, is that Ziporyn indeed captures the most striking difference between Jizang's thought and Zhiyi's, but that he misconceives it as a problem. In my view, the infinite regress of negation is deliberately used by Jizang as a method

¹⁴⁸ Ziporyn, 'Tiantai Buddhism', in Edward Zalta ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (fall 2018 edition), retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/buddhism-tiantai/> (last accessed 16 December, 2019).

¹⁴⁹ Ziporyn, 'Tiantai', 845.

¹⁵⁰ See footnote 142.

to guide the practitioner towards a truth that due to its non-conceptual and inconceivable nature could never have been captured by logical argument in the first place. In other words, Jizang's fourfold negation is not a problem; it delivers the stepping stones towards enlightenment.

4.3.1 *Zhiyi's method*

With the modification that Jizang's negations constitute a method rather than a problem, Ziporyn is right to point out that Zhiyi has a different approach for grasping the non-conceptual, inconceivable nature of truth, which he flashily refers to as 'self-exploded holism' and the 'setup-punchline structure of reality'.¹⁵¹ The point he wants to make is that, for Zhiyi, the tendency of people to create¹⁵² illusory phenomena that they take to be real, substantial things, is best countered by a method that dissolves the artificial distinctions between the phenomena, rather one that negates them. Following this method, the practitioner needs to learn that genuine distinctions cannot be made and her progress is marked by an implosion – if I may add a flashy term of my own – because it is by means of demarcation that we differentiate between items. When all these demarcations fall away, everything collapses into some sort of oneness, which is why Ziporyn also speaks about Tiantai as a doctrine of monism. This monism does not imply, however, the Buddha will no longer recognize different items. Here, Ziporyn uses the 'setup-punchline' metaphor, according to which all things are related like the components of a joke: it is the fact that a setup precedes the punchline that makes a joke, while each taken separately is not funny at all. Zhiyi's integrative method, according to Ziporyn, is that the identity of one thing *involves* the identity of other things, and this applies to all things. According to a famous marketing story, when IKEA introduced flower vases in the US without clearly labeling them as such, Americans bought them as drinking glasses, because they were accustomed to

¹⁵¹ See footnote 148.

¹⁵² For an in-depth discussion of the Tiantai view that all people 'create' phenomena, see Brook Ziporyn, 'Mind and its "creation" of all phenomena in Tiantai Buddhism,' in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37 (2010), 156-180.

larger drinking glass sizes. According to Ziporyn's reading of Zhiyi, the non-Buddhist is like the American who thinks the vase is a glass, the pre-Tiantai Buddhist is like the IKEA marketing staff realizing that the Americans were using their vases in the wrong way and the Tiantai Buddhist is like the intelligent observer who concludes that it makes no sense to call the American behavior 'wrong', because in their context, the items they bought *were* glasses. Noting context-dependency is characteristic for enlightenment, and the enlightened Buddhist notes how emptiness is the context for phenomenal reality, and vice versa.

Zhiyi's strategy for realizing the non-dual nature of reality, therefore, consists in pointing out how seeming opposites are actually involved in the very being of the other, which creates a synthesis similar to those discussed in the section about Jizang's fourfold negation. There is a very important difference, however, because the syntheses there are a mere means to detach the practitioner from views. It is only the fourth 'synthesis' in Jizang's scheme, which as I have argued is not really a synthesis, that corresponds to Zhiyi's integration of the perspective of conventional reality in that of ultimate reality and vice versa. This integration of a multiplicity of conceptually informed perspectives into one is something Zhiyi derives from the *Lotus sūtra* where the doctrine of the One Vehicle is stated. It is for this reason that Mun contrasts Zhiyi's classification of teachings to that of Jizang by calling it sectarian. While, for the latter all Mahāyāna texts were of equal value, for Zhiyi the *Lotus sūtra* is the most important.

4.3.2 Zhiyi's panjiao

The list of Zhiyi's most famous works shows the importance of the *Lotus sūtra* in the Tiantai school. Zhiyi's *panjiao* explains why by arguing that all Buddhist doctrine eventually culminates in the *Lotus sūtra*. He discerns five periods that constitute the phases in which the Buddha preached the four teaches to which I have alluded above and which will be explained in detail below. The theory of the five periods and that of the four teachings therefore overlap. During the first phase, Zhiyi argues, the Buddha reached enlightenment himself and shared this truth with his audience in its purest form. Unfortunately, the audience was not capable of grasping the meaning of his words, which made the Buddha decide to, if you will, dumb-down and spread his teachings in a less intricate manner as partial truth – the Hīnayāna teachings. This was the second phase. During this time, he managed to gradually educate the people and started to speak again about the Full Truth – Mahāyāna. He instilled in them the wish to learn more about the Full Truth and was able to teach more about it during the fourth period. In the fifth period, he concluded his teaching by turning back to phase one and lecturing the *Lotus sūtra*, which was now accessible to all his followers thanks to the intermediate three phases.¹⁵³

In the first four periods, the Buddha used four styles of lecturing, which are the Four Methods of Conversion: sudden, gradual, secret indeterminate and express indeterminate teaching.¹⁵⁴ The sudden teaching was used in the first period when the Buddha, recently enlightened, lectured about the hard-core essentials of Buddhism. When he noticed that this did not work, he opted for another method, namely that of gradually preparing the audience by rephrasing the essentials in more familiar and better understood terms. This was his style of teaching throughout the second, third and fourth period. Parallel to the sudden and the gradual teaching, he also utilized the secret indeterminate and the express indeterminate teachings. The former method, Zhiyi argues, was used by the Buddha to convey different meanings to different people through the same

¹⁵³ Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 198-200.

¹⁵⁴ Mun, *The history*, 141-148.

story.¹⁵⁵ The latter method is similar. The only difference is the various audiences were not aware of each other when the Buddha used the *secret* indeterminate teaching, while they were aware of each other's presence when he used the *express* indeterminate teachings. In contrast to the sudden and gradual teachings, the latter two were used throughout all four periods while the sudden and gradual teachings were used successively.¹⁵⁶ Here we see that Zhiyi shares the pragmatic approach of Jizang, explaining the difference between the Mahāyāna texts by highlighting the differences in capacity of the various practitioners.

Zhiyi's *panjiao* is not purely pragmatic, however, as he seems to introduce a hierarchy of doctrines and in so doing a hierarchy of texts. Leon Hurvitz states it as follows:¹⁵⁷

[f]or it is here that he [Zhiyi] tries to set forth, in terms of ideological content, the entire range of what he supposed to be the Buddha's message to mankind so that every school of Buddhist thought known to him would be represented in a harmonious whole.

The 'harmonious whole' includes four doctrines: the Storehouse Teaching, the Pervasive Teaching, the Separate Teaching and the Perfect – Hurvitz calls it 'Rounded' – Teaching.¹⁵⁸ The doctrine, the Storehouse Teaching, is – as Zhiyi describes it – Hīnayana Buddhism epitomized by the Four Noble Truths: suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path to its cessation. According to Zhiyi, the story of the Storehouse Teachings is the traditional Buddhist story that starts with the insight that life is suffering and, after an investigation of why life is so miserable,

¹⁵⁵ This is somewhat similar to modern theories about hermeneutics, in which meaning is not determined solely by the author of a story – the Buddha, in this case – but in the *interaction* between author and audience. It would not make much sense to call this a method of the author, however, because it simply a fact – according to these theories of hermeneutics – that different audiences will understand the same story in different ways; see e.g. Lawrence Schmidt, *Understanding hermeneutics* (London 2014); or more specifically: Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning* (Forth Worth 1976).

¹⁵⁶ Hurvitz, 'Chih-i', 244-48.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 248. Ch'en refers to Tiantai as the 'all-embracing school of Buddhism', see Kenneth Kuan Sheng Ch'en, *Chinese transformation of Buddhism* (Princeton 2015), 10.

¹⁵⁸ A schematic overview of the four doctrines will be provided in the appendix to this paper. See also Mun, *A history*, 127-128.

ends with the extinction of suffering. If the Buddhist practitioner after listening to the Storehouse Teaching is able to understand it and to act in conformity with it, she will have reached the status of śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha or bodhisattva. With respect to this context, there is no relevant difference between these three statuses, because all three of them indicate the ability to end one's suffering.¹⁵⁹

The second doctrine is the Pervasive Teaching, which 'may be virtually identified with the Madhyamaka philosophical system.'¹⁶⁰ Here, the Four Noble Truths are again important, but a different aspect of them is emphasized, namely the aspect of non-origination. This lines up with the Madhyamaka theory that there is no such thing as substantial nature and that all things are empty, including emptiness itself. When the Buddhist practitioner has realized that everything is empty, she will no longer strive to end her suffering, because there is no suffering to begin with. The context of the Pervasive Teaching does not explicitly state that phenomenal and ultimate reality coincide, although it is implied in the definition of emptiness as interdependence.¹⁶¹

The Separate Teaching¹⁶² is Zhiyi's attempt to incorporate the ideas of Yogācāra Buddhism into his own system, which is highly similar to the Perfect Teaching, since forty-two of the fifty-two stages of development are also found in the latter. The rationale behind this list of fifty-two steps is that the practitioner first has to accept the Four Noble Truths through *faith*, which makes her feel at home with Buddhist thought and helps her cultivate the notion of emptiness. When she has made herself familiar with the notion of emptiness and fully 'resides' in it, she turns to the phenomenal world again and reappraises it in the light of her new insight. This reappraisal, as Leon Hurvitz describes it, 'is the bodhisattva's function of savior of lesser beings, hence *action*.'¹⁶³ In other words, she uses the knowledge she has gained to help others that have not yet progressed so far. Having done so, she has shaken of all the vestiges of attachment and she then 'applies (diverts, *hui hsiang* 迴向 all [her] past karman to the attainment of

¹⁵⁹ Hurvitz, 'Chih-i (538-597)', 248-59.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 260,

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 260-263.

¹⁶² Ibid., 262-267.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 266.

Buddhahood and diverts all [her] accumulated merit to the universal salvation of the beings. When finished with this course, [she] has suppressed (but not eliminated) supramundane ignorance.¹⁶⁴ This ignorance is how Zhiyi understands *avidyā* in the Yogācāra system, namely as force that tempts us to believe in a world filled with substantial beings.

The last and most advanced doctrine is found in the Perfect Teaching, where most of the steps of the Separate Teaching return, but in an integrated manner. The first five of the forty-seven steps of this teaching are derived from the *Lotus sūtra*. This doctrine instructs the practitioner on how to cut off all attachment and on becoming aware of the provisional, tentative nature of the previous teachings. She now understands how they were a means to help her progress to her current state. It is in this teaching that the practitioner perfects her understanding of the Middle.¹⁶⁵ The Perfect Teaching does not add anything to the previous ones, which explains why my discussion of it here is rather short, but only deepens and connects that which has been taught in the previous teachings.

The above description of Zhiyi's *panjiao* explicates why Mun calls this classification sectarian. The fourth doctrine, the Perfect Teaching, is the culmination of the three previous ones and not on equal footing with them and Kanno agrees with Mun arguing that Zhiyi is a 'Perfect Teaching absolutist'.¹⁶⁶ Even though Jizang and Zhiyi share an interest in the *Lotus sūtra*, Zhiyi considers it the best exposition of the Perfect Teaching, and for that reason values it over the other Mahāyāna texts.¹⁶⁷ It must be noted that, however, that he shares Jizang's criticism on previous sectarian *panjiaos* that those are too diachronic. Where Jizang argued for a pragmatic interpretation of the Mahāyāna texts by considering their differences in terms of varying emphases, as I have described above, Zhiyi

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 266.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 268-71.

¹⁶⁶ Kanno, 'A comparison', 145. It must be noted, however, that Kanno adduces this conclusion as a replacement for the hypothesis that Zhiyi is a *Lotus sūtra* absolutist. Therefore, when Mun summarizes Kanno's position in the latter's paper, he slightly misrepresents him by saying: 'Kanno Hiroshi concludes that Zhiyi is a Lotus sectarian ...'. See Mun, *The history*, xxix. Based on the conclusion in his paper, Kanno would prefer the formulation 'Perfect Teaching sectarian'.

¹⁶⁷ See also Liu, *Madhyamaka thought*, 203.

puts forward his theory of the Four Methods of Conversion. The secret and the express indeterminate teachings, for example, are an example of synchronicity in Zhiyi's *panjiao* because they state the simultaneous education of practitioners in different stages of progress. Both masters, therefore, advocate a *panjiao* that mixes diachronic and synchronic elements.

4.3.3 *Hermeneutic circle*

Arguably the most characteristic feature of Zhiyi's philosophy is his project of integrating all aspects of Buddhism into one teaching, which he couples to the doctrine of the One Vehicle as set out in the *Lotus sūtra*. This 'integration in the middle' which makes everything 'quiescent and pure' is established by a back-and-forth between conventional reality and ultimate reality, which fits nicely with the theory of the hermeneutical circle as discussed in the section about Jizang. What is more, it fits even better in the context of Zhiyi than in that of Jizang, because Zhiyi actually describes the movement between the conventional and the ultimate position as *circular*. Consider the following passage from the *Mohe Zhi Guan*:¹⁶⁸

In our ordinary mental state, [full of attachment and clinging], we chase after concepts, pushing forward all kinds of construction/images, and differentiate awakening from non-awakening, as well as mind from non-mind. Our suspending of the difference between the ordinary and the noble, is again correlatively dependent on non-suspending, and the inconceivable furthermore depends on the conceivable. *But in constantly turning from one pattern of interdependence to another, our suspending becomes empty of any form of reliance.* If we fully comprehend that sense, invalidating all propositions, our mental images will cease to be active. Following wisdom, our subtle awakening is then devoid of differentiating. Nor do we really discuss awakening and non-awakening, noble and non-

¹⁶⁸ Zhiyi, *Mohe Zhi*, 22b10-16, in Kantor, 'Referential relation', 912 (emphasis added).

noble, mind and non-mind, conceivable and inconceivable. All kinds of deceptive constructions and reasoning through differentiating are then called patterns of correlative dependence. Our unfolding of true wisdom suspends those patterns of correlative dependence, suspending again our suspending.

According to Kantor's translation, the enlightened Buddhist is in the middle of conventional and ultimate reality, because she is continuously traveling between these two extremes, that is, she is in the middle.¹⁶⁹ The idea is that the enlightened person by means of continuous travel, easily shifts from the one viewpoint to the other so that she is *not attached* to either one of them, which is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. As a consequence, nothing will be considered as radically opposite to something else, which entails a confluence of identities and the ceasing of differentiation. It is worth stressing again, however, this does not imply that all differences dissolve into a nondescript blur of reality, which would be the result of naively embracing the view that all is empty. The 'ceasing of differentiation' is only the dissolution of *absolute* difference, which means that there are no truly singular things separate from one another. *Relative* difference remains and Zhiyi's integrative approach is the acrobatic act finding a balance between abolishing differences on the one side and absolutizing differences on the other. In other words, integration so understood is the circular movement between viewpoints brought about by tracing the interrelations that connect these viewpoints.

Kantor argues that the principle of hermeneutic circularity is also found in Jizang's explanation of the Two truths, but his argument is not convincing at this point. In discussing the four stages of negation, he claims:¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Swanson translates the text in a very different way. The emphasized passage above is translated thus: '... they [People of this world] see things only in terms of a cycle of relations, and have no place for the absolute.' Paul Swanson, *Clear serenity, quiet insight: T'ien-t'ai Chih-i's Mo-ho Chih-kuan: Volume 1* (Honolulu 2018), 435. According to Swanson, Zhiyi considers it a feature of being *unenlightened* to observe the relatedness of conventional and ultimate reality.

¹⁷⁰ Kantor, 'Referential relation', 908.

This scheme is repetitive, insofar as each of the subsequent levels repeats the same form of differentiation that the preceding one performed. The conventional side of what follows contains or embraces the preceding level(s) as a whole, while the ultimate side denies such a sense of the conventional.

This is true, as we saw in the scheme above. At each level, there is a negation over the preceding lower level, which repeats itself. Kantor continuous, however, as follows:

Each level is structured according to this pattern. Hence, all together there are four pairs of correlatively dependent opposites, reduplicating the same type of differentiation in a circular manner. Thus, the whole scheme can accomplish inseparability qua differentiation, or non-duality qua polarity.

The problem here is that the successive negations are not circular, because there is no return to the original position. When the process does not return to a previously passed waypoint, it does not make sense to call it circular. Kantor thinks that this return happens at the fourth level: 'In repeating precisely the same type of differentiation, the fourth level refers back to and reenters the distinction of existence and emptiness at the first level.'¹⁷¹ The problem is that it does not. As we saw earlier, the synthesis that is formed at the fourth level is a negation of the previous three levels, including the first level. The reduplication of differentiation at higher levels only implies that each level is structured in the same way, not that the levels are identical. Otherwise, why did a 'reentering of the first level' not happen at the second or the third level? They have the same structure as fourth one, after all.

It makes more sense to understand this process of successive and potentially infinite negation as a training in non-attachment by instilling a sense

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 908.

of pointlessness in the practitioner, which makes her abandon the project of negating. This is how I interpret Jizang when he says about the fourth level:¹⁷²

Fourth, the [preceding] three types of two truths are all the gateways of the teaching. To facilitate the understanding of non-trinity, we explain it in terms of those three gateways. Only principle is called non-abiding, and is devoid of anything that can be hold to.

The move that the practitioner is supposed to make at this level is not negation, but something different, namely abandoning, which Jizang refers to as ‘principle’. The previous three stages are the gateways that ready the practitioner so that she can make this step. Abandoning comes down to approaching reality in a new way, which brings us back to both the issue of circularity and that of the Two Truth doctrine as ladder. Negation, for Jizang, is the ladder that is thrown away when enlightenment is reached, which makes the process towards enlightenment linear rather than circular. As long as the practitioner keeps negating, she is unable to escape from her tendency to force reality into a viewpoint, which for that reason continues to be conventional.

In sum, Zhiyi’s theory of the middle can be described in terms of hermeneutical circularity, because true meaning arises in the back-and-forth between the viewpoints of conventional and ultimate reality. Contra Kantor, I argue that Jizang’s account of the Two truths does not contain such circularity, because at no point before attaining enlightenment has the practitioner truly cast aside the perspective of conventional reality, which is why it does not make sense to speak of a ‘return’ to the conventional from the ultimate viewpoint.

¹⁷² Jizang, *Dacheng Xuan Lun* 大乘玄論, T45: 1853, 15c3-27, in Kantor, ‘Referential relation’, 907.

4.4 Conclusion

Zhiyi shares with Jizang the idea that truth cannot be adequately captured in verbal expression and understands its meta-verbal nature in a similar way. Both he and Jizang refer to truth as the middle in between the truth of conventional reality – being – and that of ultimate reality – emptiness. Moreover, they both use the same metaphor of root, or basis, and traces to indicate non-duality. They emphasize the non-dual nature of reality in order to counter the reification of ultimate reality as a ontological domain (*wu*) opposed to that of conventional reality (*you*), which happened due to the Daoist influence on early Chinese Buddhism.

It follows from the non-dual nature of reality that *you* and *wu* cannot be pitched against each other, but must be considered as co-dependent and mutually reinforcing sides of the same reality. Nevertheless, the tendency in scholarship to interpret the conventional and the ultimate as distinct ontological domains persists as demonstrated by the 20th century work of Neo-Confucian scholar Mou Zongsan, who thinks that Zhiyi's interpretation of the conventional and the ultimate is akin to Immanuel Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal. The problem with this comparison is that, for Kant, the noumenal realm is inaccessible for the human understanding and not dependent on the phenomenal. There is only a one-way dependence relation on the Kantian interpretation, which does not fit with Zhiyi's interpretation of the ultimate as accessible through the conventional (and vice versa).

Despite the fact that Zhiyi and Jizang agree on the non-duality of the conventional and the ultimate, they propagate different methods for realizing it. That is, they agree on what it means to be enlightened, but disagree on the process that leads to enlightenment. Not *negation*, but *integration* is the keyword for Zhiyi and he argues that middle between the conventional and the ultimate, which he refers to as the third truth of the middle, is known when the Buddhist practitioner discovers that every aspect of reality involves all other aspects of reality. Each of the three truths is dependent on the context that is formed by all three truths together.

The result of this integrative approach is a theory of oneness that Zhiyi connects to the *Lotus sūtra*, which contains the doctrine of the One Vehicle and plays an important role in Zhiyi's *panjiao*. Mun contrasts Zhiyi's classification of teachings to that of Jizang due to Zhiyi's emphasis on the importance of the *Lotus sūtra* and calls the latter's *panjiao* sectarian. He discerns four kinds of teaching in the sermons of the Buddha in order of increasing intricacy, which are, respectively, the Storehouse, the Pervasive, the Separate and the Perfect Teaching. The *Lotus sūtra* embodies the Perfect Teaching and thereby outranks all other Mahāyāna texts.

According to Zhiyi, the *Lotus sūtra* that 'integrates all extremes' and makes everything 'quiescent and pure' contains a back-and-forth between conventional reality and ultimate reality, which fits nicely with the theory of the hermeneutical circle. Both Zhiyi and Jizang connect enlightenment with the circling between the conventional and ultimate, with the difference that Jizang seems to argue that the non-attachment that enables this circular movement is only possible after the practitioner has reached enlightenment, while Zhiyi seems to claim that the path towards enlightenment, the integrative process, is itself circular.

5. Conclusion

China was changed by the introduction of Buddhism, but Buddhism was also changed by its introduction to China. In this thesis, I have discussed two Buddhist traditions that have adapted Madhyamaka theory from India to a Chinese context: Sanlun and Tiantai. In the first chapter, I provided a historical overview of early Chinese Buddhism and how it gave rise to the Sanlun school up until the beginnings of the Tiantai school under Zhiyi. Due to an already extant interest in literature in China and to increased popular interest in Buddhism, Buddhist scriptures were translated and copied. Even though the copying itself was already considered a source of merit, the production of texts also invited further study. Kumārajīva, a famed translator from the fourth century CE, translated many works among which three treatises by Nāgārjuna. These texts, called ‘Sanlun’ in Chinese, became the basis for the school bearing the same name. When Sanlun is called a ‘school’, the reader must bear in mind that this term indicates only a shared interest in the three treatises: the Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way (*Mūlamadhyamakārikā*), the Twelve Gate Treatise (*Dvādaśadvāra-śāstra*) and the One Hundred Verses Treatise (*Śata-śāstra*). It did not have a unique monastic code and membership was not exclusive. For this reason, McRae translates *zong* as ‘exegetical lineage’ rather than as ‘school’, because the main connection of masters in the Sanlun tradition is their exegesis of the three treatises. This explains why Sanlun is alternatively referred to as Chinese Madhyamaka and why the Tiantai school is often called the first Sinitic Buddhist school, even though it postdates Sanlun. Sengzhao was the first Buddhist scholar to expose the Daoist influences on early texts by Sanlun masters and his interpretation of emptiness inspired the work of Jizang, a later Sanlun master that successfully popularized the school. He lived and worked first in Jinlin, the capital of the Chen dynasty and later in Chang’an, the capital of the Sui empire that had unified China at a time in which another famous Buddhist master was active: Zhiyi, founder of the Tiantai school. Zhiyi settled on Mt. Tiantai, the mountain after which the school is named, and was able to profit from the same Buddhist-friendly social climate as Jizang, making friends in high places. At first, Jizang’s students debated with the pupils of Zhiyi,

but, as time passed, both masters became increasingly friendly towards each other. Most significantly, Jizang asked Zhiyi to lecture on the *Lotus sūtra*, a text that they both valued.

In the second chapter, I focused on Jizang's interpretation of Madhyamaka theory of the Two Truths and explained that this interpretation is grounded in a skepticism towards the adequacy of theory to describe reality. Consequently, the worldview that people build using language is flawed and needs to be deconstructed if one wants to learn about true reality that is beyond language. I have addressed how Jizang circumvents the paradox of how Buddhist teachings – that are couched in language – can teach the truth by elaborating on the notion of non-duality. The non-dual nature of reality enables Jizang to say that the Buddha's teachings are rooted in an, as Kantor calls it, para-linguistic truth, even though they are themselves linguistic. Just as a tree branch is, in a way, identical to a tree root in the sense that they both are tree. The principle of non-duality is found in Jizang's classification of teachings, his *panjiao*, where he couples the various Mahāyāna texts to the level of progress of the Buddhist practitioner, stressing that all texts are of equal importance, which makes him a Mahāyāna ecumenist, but that some texts may be more or less important depending on what the practitioner needs to hear. Moreover, the same text can be read in various ways by different people with different interpretative perspectives. In other words, his *panjiao* is synchronic. He does, however, argue that there is a certain order in which the student of Buddhism masters the various teachings, which he ties to the career of the Buddha that can be marked by three historical phases. He calls these the 'three dharma wheels', and this allocation of consecutive teachings to consecutive periods makes his *panjiao* not only synchronic but also diachronic. The truth that the Buddha preached in the three dharma wheels has four levels, according to Jizang, and negation is the method by means of which one progresses through each of them. Negation is possible from the perspective of ultimate reality. Enlightenment is reached by continuous negation of worldviews – the perspective of conventional reality – until the practitioner manages to stop creating new worldviews. In other words, continuous negation will enable the practitioner to detach from her views and detachment is enlightenment resulting in the arrival at

the middle in between the conventional and the ultimate. It has been argued that Jizang's method of negation is like a ladder than can be thrown away after one has reached the top, that is, enlightenment. Others, however, argue that this metaphor is unsuitable because Jizang does claim that reaching the middle means discarding the conventional and the ultimate. I argue that the metaphor is correct in the sense that the enlightened person has left behind both the conventional and the ultimate as separate viewpoints and has gained the perspective that combines them.

In the third chapter, I discussed Zhiyi's interpretation of the Two truths, to which he adds the truth of the middle. His theory of three truths, then, corresponds with Jizang's theory of the Two truths. Both scholars consider reality as non-dual and they even use the same metaphor of trace and root to describe it, which means that both of them reject reified interpretations of the conventional and the ultimate. This tendency to reify was not only prominent in the phase of early Chinese Buddhism, when Buddhist adopted the Daoist ontological categories of *you* – for the conventional – and *wu* – for the ultimate, but also in more recent times. Clower and Kantor describe how twentieth century scholar Mou Zongsan uses a Kantian ontological framework to interpret Zhiyi's theory on the conventional and the ultimate and in so doing misconstrues it, because the Kantian framework contains a separation of ontological domains, the phenomenal and the noumenal, that cannot be attributed to Zhiyi; or Jizang, for that matter. Although both of them agree on what it means to be enlightened, they seem to disagree on the method that brings enlightenment about. Instead of propagating negation as a salvific means, Zhiyi takes an integrative approach, arguing that the truth of the middle lies in realizing the interrelatedness of all things. He categorizes the lessons of the Buddha in four teachings, culminating in the Perfect Teaching, which is the doctrine of the One Vehicle that is most clearly expressed in the *Lotus sūtra* containing the doctrine of the One Vehicle. Because Zhiyi singles out the *Lotus sūtra* as the most important scripture, Mun contrasts Zhiyi's *panjiao* to that of Jizang and calls it sectarian. Just as Jizang's classification of teachings, however, Zhiyi's *panjiao* is both synchronic and diachronic.

To conclude, the most important difference between Jizang and Zhiyi is found in their method. Their interpretations of enlightenment seem to overlap, but while Jizang seems to claim that enlightenment is reached by means of negation, Zhiyi advocates integration of opposites. One important feature of the latter approach in contrast with the former is that the latter is akin to the theory of the hermeneutical circle. Integration involves circling between the conventional and the ultimate in order to detach oneself from both and reaching the middle, while negation is pitching attachment to the conventional against attachment to the ultimate so that these attachments eventually cancel each other out. The method of negation is dialectic in a way that reminds of Hegel, although caution is necessary in laying a Chinese discourse with roots in classical India next to a philosophical system that is thoroughly informed by European intellectual traditions.

Then again, such caution should not stand in the way of fruitful comparisons between traditions that grapple with similar issues. In this paper, I have shown that inserting Jizang in the category 'Madhyamaka' and Zhiyi in the category 'Tiantai' tends to obfuscate how incredibly close they came to each other in ontological respect. My expectation was to discover where these Buddhist masters parted ways in thinking about reality, given Jizang's embrace of the Indian distinction of two truths and Zhiyi's rejection of it in favor of a theory of three truths. In search of a principle that would clearly separate Jizang's thinking from that of Zhiyi's, however, I found a mere methodological difference, and even these methods are similar. The dialectic of negation is no stranger to the integrative approach, which assumes as much the opposition between the conventional and the ultimate as it does their integrated unity in order to lead the Buddhist practitioner towards that precious balance, that is, the Third Truth of Tiantai. It might be the case that the distance between Jizang's and Zhiyi's teachings depends on the academic discipline from which they are considered, but an ontology of Chinese Madhyamaka and Tiantai will place Jizang and Zhiyi side by side.

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7. Appendix¹⁷⁴

Zhiyi's *panjiao*

Four methods of conversion	Four Teachings	Five Periods
Sudden	Tripitaka / Storehouse	<i>Huayan Sūtra</i> 21 days
Gradual	Common / Pervasive	Deer Park or <i>āgama</i> 12 years
Esoteric / Secret indeterminate	Differentiated / Separate	<i>Vaipulya</i> 8 years
Indeterminate / Express indeterminate	Perfect	Wisdom 22 years
		Lotus and Nirvāṇa 8 years

¹⁷⁴ When two names are provided with a slash in between, the former translation is the one used by Mun and the latter one by Hurvitz. References to Hurvitz' text can be found above. For Mun's discussion of Zhiyi's *panjiao*, see Mun, *The history*, 123-168.