

## The Establishment of the Theory of the Two Truths

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### Summary

This paper is one of the seven chapters in my PhD thesis. There are three sections. In the first section, I expound the early Chinese interpretations of the two truths, according to chronological order. In the second section, I explain the reasons why Chi-tsang establishes the theory of the two truths. Besides that, I also give an account of the relationship between the two truths and the Sanlun school. Finally, I go one step further to illustrate the significance and benefits of the two truths from Chi-tsang's point of view. One can summarise the discussion of this paper as follows:

1. There are those who had interpreted the two truths before Chi-tsang's time, such as Seng-chao, Prince Chao-ming, Fa-yün, Hui-yüan, Harivarman etc.. Nevertheless, their usage of the terms "existence" (*yu*) and "non-existence" (*wu*) to explain the two truths appeared rather vague and ambiguous.

2. Chi-tsang's reason in establishing the two truths is to abandon the two extreme views of annihilationism and eternalism. His idea in establishing the two truths was influenced by his predecessors such as Nāgārjuna and Fa-lang.

3. There is a close relationship between the two truths and Sanlun school in which the two truths play an important role.

4. The two truths are significant for one to obtain wisdom. Chi-tsang explains the benefits of the two truths from both the mundane and the supramundane standpoints. Nonetheless, his approach places more emphasis on the supramundane than the mundane perspective. Nevertheless, Chi-tsang also attempts to include the mundane view as well in order to highlight the significance and benefit of the two truths.

**Key words:** 1. two truths 2. existence and non-existence 3. realm  
4. wisdom 5. principle 6. destruction and eternality

## 1. Early Chinese Interpretations of the Two Truths

The discussion of the two truths in the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* (*Mahāprajñā-pāramitā-śāstra*), translated by Kumārajīva (344~413)<sup>1</sup> is found in its presentation of the four *siddhāntas*.<sup>2</sup> The word *siddhānta* refers to method, teaching, principle, or objective. The four *siddhāntas* are as follows:

The worldly principle (*shih-chieh-hsi-t'an*, *laukika siddhānta*)

The individual principle (*ke-ke-wei-jen-hsi-t'an*, *prātipauruṣika siddhānta*)

The therapeutic point of view (*tui-chih-hsi-t'an*, *prātipākṣika siddhānta*)

The supreme point of view (*ti-i-i-hsi-t'an*, *pāramārthika siddhānta*)<sup>3</sup>

First, the worldly principle (*shih-chieh-hsi-t'an*) refers to the Buddha in accordance with sentient beings' desire. He therefore taught the worldly dharmas in order to enable them to accept his teachings. The *Ta-chih-tu-lun* writes:

If people do not truly exist, then why does the Buddha say, "With my divine eye I see sentient beings?" Hence, we should conclude that people exist but only from the worldly principle, not from the supreme point of view.<sup>4</sup>

In this passage, the Buddha uses his divine eye to see sentient beings. The

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<sup>1</sup> For the life of Kumārajīva see his biography in the *Kao-seng-chuan* (*The biography of eminent monks*). T50.330a-333a. Robinson, Richard H., *Early Mādhyamika In India And China*, Motilal Banarsidass: Indological Publishers and Booksellers, Reprint: Delhi, 1976, 1978, pp. 71-73. For a discussion of the dates of Kumārajīva see Robinson, pp. 244-247, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Ta-chih-tu-lun*, T25.59b17-61b18.

<sup>3</sup> Swanson, Paul L., *Foundations of T'ien-T'ai Philosophy*, Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press, printed in the United State of America, 1985, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Translated by Swanson, p. 24. Also, see T25.59c7-9.

Buddha's perception of the existence of sentient beings is from the worldly principle point of view. In the mundane world, sentient beings view things as truly existing. Nonetheless, from the supreme point of view, all things are provisionally existent. It is because all things lack inherent existence, that they only conditionally exist. Hence, all things are provisionally existent in the mundane world rather than really existent. That is the reason why the Buddha views sentient beings as truly existing only from the worldly principle point of view.

Secondly, the individual principle (*ke-ke-wei-jen-hsi-t'an*) refers to the Buddha preaching the Dharma in accordance with the sharp and dull faculties of the individual among sentient beings.

Thirdly, the therapeutic principle (*tui-chih-hsi-t'an*) refers to the teaching of the Buddha as a remedy for the maladies which afflict sentient beings such as the use of compassion to remedy greed and the contemplation of conditionality to remedy ignorance. Regarding the Buddha's adoption of the contemplation of conditionality to deal with sentient beings who are ignorant, the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* writes:

Question: Why are you now saying that people who are ignorant should contemplate the conditionality?

Answer: For people who are ignorant, it is not because they are like a cow, or a sheep etc.. Ignorance comes about as a result of people wanting to attain the real path. Nonetheless, they have the wrong mind for contemplation, so they therefore generate false views. Hence, these people should contemplate the conditionality and this is called wisely dealing with the individual principle.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> T25.60b6-10.



As pointed out above, the ignorant people referred to are those who have the wrong mind for contemplation and thus generate false views. Hence, the contemplation of conditionality is used to deal with this faculty of people.

Fourthly, the supreme point of view (*ti-i-i-hsi-t'an*) refers to the Buddha teaching the real reality of dharmas to enable sentient beings to become truly enlightened.

Swanson says: "There are many scattered references to the Two Truths in the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* which can be categorised into four uses in the following pattern. There are two ways of viewing one reality, or (1) there are two truths, but (2) they are not contradictory. (3) There are conventional differences between the two truths, but (4) they are mutually dependent, that is, they are identical or ultimately one."<sup>6</sup> He subsequently cites a couple of quotations from the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* to explain these four categories of the two truths. Here, it is not a paradox for the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* to claim that the two truths are mutually dependent and yet are identical. Swanson, for example, quotes the *Ta-chih-tu-lun's* proposition of the two truths as mutually dependent:

If there are no names and words, causes and conditions, or coming together [of aggregates], then all mundane things, language, and phenomena perish. If there is no worldly truth, then neither is there a supreme truth. If there is no "two truths", then all reality [*sarvadharma*] is an illusion.<sup>7</sup>

This is evidence to show that the two truths are mutually dependent.

Regarding the two truths as identical, Swanson quotes the *Ta-chih-tu-*

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<sup>6</sup> Swanson, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Swanson, p. 32.

*lun* and says:

"Bhagavan, are the worldly and supreme truths different?"

"Subhuti, the worldly truth and the supreme truth are not different. Why? Because the thusness of the worldly truth is identical to the thusness of the supreme truth. Because sentient beings do not know nor see this thusness, Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas utilise the worldly truth to signify [that dharmas are] both existent and non-existent."<sup>8</sup>

In this passage, it is important to note that there is no difference of "thusness" (*ju*) between the worldly truth and the supreme truth. Here, the term "thusness" is referring to real reality of dharmas. That is to say, in terms of "thusness" of the two truths, they are identical. This is because the thusness of the worldly truth refers to real reality, that is emptiness. Likewise, the thusness of the supreme truth is undoubtedly referring to real reality-emptiness as well. The two truths as mutually dependent is merely concerning the two truths by themselves. On the other hand, the two truths being identical is referring to both having the same "thusness". The main difference between these two issues is the "thusness". Therefore, the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* suggests that the two truths are mutually dependent and identical.

In conclusion, from the exposition of the four categories of the two truths by the *Ta-chih-tu-lun*, we realise that the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* was influenced by Mādhyamika philosophy. As Swanson writes:

Its teachings can thus be considered "orthodox" *Mādhyamikan* philosophy with a more positive slant than the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, and its positive approach had a great influence on the development of

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

*Mādhyamikan philosophy in China.*<sup>9</sup>

In the *Emptiness of the Unreal* (*Pu-chen-k'ung-lun*), Seng-chao (374~414) deals with the views of three of them, known as “mental non-existence” (*hsin-wu*), “identical with form” (*chi-se*) and “original non-existence” (*pen-wu*). Nonetheless, Seng-chao merely gives a brief description of each view, followed by a short criticism of the view's position. For example, Seng-chao writes about the view of “mental non-existence” as follows:

(Description:) [There is the view of] *hsin-wu* [which maintains that] one should not have a [deliberate] mind towards myriad things. Myriad things are, however, not inexistent.

(Criticism:) What this [view] realises is [the importance of] calming the spirit; what it misses is [the nature of] voidness of things.<sup>10</sup>

In this passage, Seng-chao criticises this school which has the view of “mental non-existence” (*hsin-wu*) and refutes it as realising only the importance of calming the spirit. Seng-chao's intention is to deal with the views of “mental non-existence” and existence of myriad things. Hence, Seng-chao points out that calming the spirit has to be realised. It seems that the expression of “emptiness of things” refers to the nature of things as lacking inherent existence. Things are impermanent and therefore the names of things are considered as provisional names. In this regard, Seng-chao also writes:

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<sup>9</sup> Swanson, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Liu Ming-Wood, *Madhyamaka Thought In China*, Leiden: New York; Köln: Brill (Sinica Leidensia; vol. 30), 1985, p. 54. Also, see T45.152a15-16.

The Mahāyāna śāstra says: "Dharma neither have the characteristics of existence nor those of non-existence." The *Chung-lun* says: "Dharma are neither existent nor non-existent."<sup>11</sup>

The *Chung-kuan[-lun]* <sup>12</sup> says: "Things exist by conditionality. Hence, they are considered as non-existent. Because things arise through dependent-origination, thus they are not non-existent."<sup>13</sup>

A sūtra says: "Is there any difference between the real truth and the mundane truth?" Answer: "No difference." This sūtra says that the real truth explains "not existence" (*fei-yu*) and the mundane truth explains "not non-existence" (*fei-wu*). <sup>14</sup>

It is justifiable for us to claim that Seng-chao was influenced by Madhyamaka philosophy in this context.<sup>15</sup>

As Swanson pointed out, it is inappropriate for Seng-chao to use the terms "neither existence nor non-existence" (*fei-yu-fei-wu*) in explaining the two truths. Swanson writes:

The Chinese terms *yu* (existence) and *wu* (non-existence) are used with two different meanings depending on whether they are affirmed or

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<sup>11</sup> Translated by Liebenthal, Walter, *Chao Lun*, Hong Kong University Press, Second revised edition, 1968, p. 57. Also see the *Chao Lun*, T45.152a28-b1. As for the *Chung-lun* quoted in this quotation, see T30.36a27-28.

<sup>12</sup> The *Chung-kuan-lun* is an alternative name for the *Chung-lun*.

<sup>13</sup> The *Chao Lun*, T45.152b29-c1. Also, see Liebenthal, Walter, *Chao Lun*, p. 60 and the *Chung-lun*, T30.33b11-14.

<sup>14</sup> T45.152b15-17. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> This view is supported by Liu in his book, *Madhyamaka Thought In China*, p. 37 and p. 67.

denied . . . . Therefore, "non-existence" (*fei-yu*) is affirmed in the sense that though phenomena have conventional existence, they have no substantive Being. "Not inexistent" (*fei-wu*) is affirmed in the sense that though phenomena have no substantive Being, they are not complete nothingness . . . . Seng-chao explains that the supreme truth means non-Being (*fei-yu*) and the conventional truth means not non-existent (*fei-wu*), "non-Being" and "not non-existent" ultimately, having the same meaning (T.45, 152b17). The argument is taken one step further by pointing out that one cannot accept the position that things are non-existent nothingness, because this is the extreme view of annihilationism (*ucchedadr̥ṣṭi*) and one cannot accept the position that things have substantial Being, because this is the extreme view of eternalism (*nityadr̥ṣṭi*) (T.45, 152b26-28). Since things are not complete nothingness, annihilationism is wrong. Since things do not have substantial Being, eternalism is wrong.<sup>16</sup>

Swanson's account cited above suggests that the interpretations of the notion of the two truths in terms of the formula 'neither existence nor non-existence' is problematic. It seems that Seng-chao might have overlooked the fact that "not existence" (*fei-yu*) and "not non-existence" (*fei-wu*) are inappropriate terms to explain the two truths. All in all, it is legitimate to say that Seng-chao's use of the terms "not existence" and "not non-existence" to explain the two truths was influenced by Madhyamaka thought, and that he uses them to refute the three traditions of "mental non-existence", "identical with form" and "original non-existence".

Swanson says: "In the *Kuang Hung-ming-chi* of Tao-hsüan (596~667), there is a collection of two hundred and ninety six documents on Buddhism. One of the documents, *On the Meaning of the Two Truths* (T.52, 247b~250b)

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<sup>16</sup> Swanson, pp. 35-36.

records a discussion of the two truths introduced and presided over by Prince Chao-ming of the Liang Dynasty (502~557).<sup>17</sup> According to Prince Chao-ming, the two truths are derived from “[objective] realm” (*chin*) and “[subjective] wisdom” (*chih*).<sup>18</sup> He writes:

There is, indeed, not one single way to appreciate the Tao. Essentially (there are two ways): one can approach it either by way of the [objective] realm (*chin*) or by way of [subjective] wisdom (*chih*). At times, one can understand the meaning by way of the realm [aspect]. At times, one lets the actions manifest by way of the wisdom [aspect]. Concerning the theory of the Two Truths, it is the tool to understand the meaning by way of the realm [aspect]. If this point is missed [by the reader], then the person would be lost forever in [wrongly] thinking that there are Three Truths. However, if he sees the point, the myriad problems will disappear.<sup>19</sup>

As pointed out above, Prince Chao-ming asserts that the meaning of the two truths comes from the “[objective] realm” (*chin*) and the act to understand the two truths is performed in “[subjective] wisdom” (*chih*). In order to

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<sup>17</sup> Swanson, p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> The term “[objective] realm” is a translation of the Chinese term *chin*. “[Objective] realm” means the objective sphere, eg. The sphere of mind, the sphere of form for the eye, of sound for the ear, etc.. The term “[subjective] wisdom” is a translation of the Chinese term *chih*. “[Subjective] wisdom” refers to knowledge of the objective sphere.

<sup>19</sup> Translated by Whalen Lai, “Sinitic understanding of the two truths theory in the Liang Dynasty (502~557): Ontological Gnosticism in the thoughts of Prince Chao-ming” (*Philosophy East and West* 28, no. 3, July 1978), p. 343. Also, see Swanson, p. 59. There is a different translation between Lai and Swanson. In this quotation, Lai translated the Chinese character *san* (three) as the three truths. Conversely, Swanson translated it as three ages (past, present and future).

support his proposition of the meaning of the two truths as “[objective] realm”, Prince Chao-ming subsequently attempts to explain it. As Swanson claims, this is a rather vague statement although he tries to clarify his assertion somewhat.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, there is a dialogue between the Prince and Fa-yün (467~529)<sup>21</sup> on the issue of the distinction between “[subjective] wisdom” and “[objective] realm”.

Question: The objective realm known by the sage is called the real truth. Is the wisdom of the knower called the real truth or is this the mundane truth?

Answer: Knowing (*jen-chih*) is called wisdom. That which can be known (*so-chih*) is called the objective realm. When wisdom is gained, the objective realm is obscured [it is seen for what it truly is?], and thus it can be called the real.

Question: Are people who have wisdom the real truth or the mundane truth?

Answer: As long as one speaks of a person who has wisdom, this is the mundane truth.<sup>22</sup>

In this passage, Prince Chao-ming points out the distinction between the

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<sup>20</sup> See Swanson, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup> Fa-yün, one of the *Ch'eng-shih-lun* scholars. He excelled in the *Lotus sūtra*. Biographical data is found in the *Hsü Kao-seng-chuan* (*Further Biographies of Eminent Monks*), T50.463c13-465a19.

<sup>22</sup> Swanson, p. 67.

“[objective] realm” and “[subjective] wisdom”. As far as Prince Chao-ming is concerned, the real truth refers to the [subjective] wisdom that is gained beyond the [objective] realm of the mundane world and also that which is known by [subjective] wisdom. The mundane truth is referring to the [objective] realm of concepts and words. Prince Chao-ming depends on the “[objective] realm” to explain the two truths. There is also another example to show that Prince Chao-ming is using the theory of “[objective] realm” to define the two truths. Prince Chao-ming writes:

The *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* says: “That which can be known by the supramundane people is called the truth of supreme meaning (*ti-i-i-ti*). That which can be known by the mundane people is called the worldly truth (*shih-ti*).”<sup>23</sup>

Since Prince Chao-ming defined the two truths as belonging to the “[objective] realm”, it is justifiable to say that he viewed them as two realities. As Lai writes:

The Prince had digested an admirable amount of the Mādhyamika logic. He was not totally free from an ontological understanding of the two truths, but he had recognised the *perspectival* nature of the two realities.<sup>24</sup>

The Prince did solve the paradox of the two truths-realities by suggesting that there is ultimately one reality with two perspectives. However, his solution was not always perfect and in the questions and answers collected after the essay (the prince solicited these responses), the

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<sup>23</sup> The *Kuang Hung-ming-chi*, T52.247c16-17. Also, see Lai, p. 344.

<sup>24</sup> Lai, p. 347.



problem emerged of how the two "substances" of the two "realms" can be related to one another.<sup>25</sup>

Swanson also comments: "The Prince's essay is unsatisfactory in many ways. He affirms the unity of the two truths but is not clear concerning their relationship."<sup>26</sup> Hence, it is legitimate to say that Prince Chao-ming's suggestion of the two truths pertaining to the "[objective] realm" is rather ambiguous.

In the final summary of this document, Prince Chao-ming uses the ambiguous terms "existence" (*yu*) and "non-existence" (*wu*) to define the content of the two truths. He writes:

The real truth is beyond existence and non-existence. The mundane truth is being as existence and non-existence. Being as existence and non-existence constitutes the provisional name. Beyond existence and non-existence is the Middle-Path. The real [truth] is the Middle-Path, and it is based on non-arising as "substance" (*t'i*). The mundane [truth] is the provisional name and it is based on arising dharmas as substance.<sup>27</sup>

Again, Prince Chao-ming uses the terms *yu* (existence) and *wu* (non-existence) to define neither existence nor non-existence as the real truth, and the mundane truth as existence and non-existence. This is exactly the same as Seng-chao using these two terms to define the content of the two truths. As was mentioned earlier, this is a rather vague and imprecise use of *yu* and *wu*, which was pointed out by Swanson.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>26</sup> See Swanson, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> The *Kuang Hung-ming-chi*, T52.247c22-25. Also, see Swanson, p. 61 and Lai, p. 344.

According to Liu, Hui-yüan (523~592), one of the leading *Ti-lun* (*Daśabhūmika*) figures of Chi-tsang's time, is typical. In the *Erh-ti-i* section of his monumental work, the *Ta-cheng I-chang* (*A Compendium of the Themes of the Mahāyāna*), Hui-yüan devoted an entire section to elaborate on the two truths.<sup>28</sup> Besides declaring the worldly truth (*shih-ti*) and the truth of supreme meaning (*ti-i-i-ti*), he also introduced the idea of the "truth of plurality" (*teng-ti*) which is considered as another name for the worldly truth. Hui-yüan writes:

When speaking of the "truth of plurality" (*teng-ti*), the meaning of plurality" is equality and mutuality. [Nonetheless,] the worldly dharmas are not one. [Hence,] we cannot say that [the worldly dharmas are equal.] Rather, "plurality" is the mutuality of all dharmas. For this reason, we speak of the "truth of plurality".<sup>29</sup>

As pointed out above, Hui-yüan defines the "truth of plurality" as mutuality of all dharmas. Hence, he treats the "truth of plurality" as another name for the worldly truth. Although Hui-yüan suggests that there are two categories of the two truths,<sup>30</sup> nonetheless, he makes the point that establishing the names of the two truths does not mean that the names can be contrasted with one another.<sup>31</sup>

As far as Hui-yüan is concerned, although there are seven ways to distinguish the two truths,<sup>32</sup> they rely on the "phenomena" (*shih*) and

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<sup>28</sup> See Liu, p. 139.

<sup>29</sup> The *Ta-cheng I-chang*, T44.482c22-24.

<sup>30</sup> Phenomenal dharmas: the worldly truth (*shih-ti*), the mundane truth (*su-ti*) and the truth of plurality (*teng-ti*). Principle dharmas: the truth of supreme meaning (*ti-i-i-ti*) and the real truth (*chen-ti*). See T44.483a4-5.

<sup>31</sup> See T44.483a3.

<sup>32</sup> The seven ways are: (1) Emotional and intellectual, (2) Provisional and real, (3)

“principle” (*li*) of the two truths as the fundamental theory.<sup>33</sup> For this reason, Hui-yüan writes:

“Phenomena” (*shih*) and “principle” (*li*) are mutually contrasted. [Hence,] “phenomena” are referred to as the worldly truth (*shih-ti*) and “principle” as the real truth (*chen-ti*).<sup>34</sup>

In this passage, Hui-yüan relies on the “phenomena” and “principle” to define the two truths as the worldly truth and the real truth. Since Hui-yüan claims that the phenomenal dharmas are the worldly truth, the mundane truth and the truth of plurality, and that the “principle”, referring to all dharmas being empty, is the truth of supreme meaning and the real truth, it seems that he is in favour of the worldly truth and the real truth.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the fact that Hui-yüan adopts different aspects to explain the two truths, he actually relies on “phenomena” and “principle” to define the

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Principle and phenomena, (4) Bondage and liberation, (5) Conditioned and unconditioned, (6) Emptiness and existence and (7) Practice and teaching. See T44.483c22-25.

<sup>33</sup> See T44.484a15-16.

<sup>34</sup> T44.483.c2-3.

<sup>35</sup> In the *Ta-cheng I-chang*, Hui-yüan wrote that the term “the truth of supreme meaning” may be contrasted with other terms. For example, if “the truth of supreme meaning” is contrasted with “the mundane truth” (*su-ti*), then it should be called not mundane (*fei-su*); and if it is contrasted with the worldly truth, it should be called supramundane. Nonetheless, as for the real truth, it is merely contrasted once with the worldly truth. For example, if the worldly truth is contrasted with the real truth, then it should be called “truth of delusion” (*wan-ti*). See, T44.482c29-483a3. In order to avoid possible confusion as a result of the names of the truths contrasting with one another, Hui-yüan therefore adopts the names of the worldly truth and the real truth rather than the worldly truth and the truth of supreme truth, should not be contrasted with other terms.

two truths. For example, he uses the terms “substance” (*t'i*) and “function” (*yung*) to define the two truths. He writes:

The real nature of own “substance” is to be called the real truth and the dependent-origination of “function” is called the worldly truth.<sup>36</sup>

This is rather a vague statement. It is because Hui-yüan simply constructs a terse sentence to define the two truths. He did not elaborate further on the relationship between the “substance” and “function” of the two truths. In this regard, Hui-yüan applies the theory of “phenomena” and “principle” by using “substance” and “function” to define the two truths although he did not mention this in this passage. It seems that dependent-origination of function as the worldly truth pertains to “phenomena”. This is because dependent-origination of function is to deal with the phenomenal world which is impermanent. Likewise, the real nature of own substance pertains to “principle”. As far as Hui-yüan is concerned, the real nature of own substance is the principle to enable sentient beings to realise the true reality.

Again, Hui-yüan also uses the terms “existence” (*yu*) and “non-existence” (*wu*) to define the two truths. He writes:

Conditionality of the provisional existence is called the worldly truth and emptiness-no nature is called the real truth.<sup>37</sup>

In this passage, although Hui-yüan avoids the simple identification of “existence” (*yu*) with the worldly truth and “non-existence” (*wu*) with the real truth, his definition of the two truths is vague. Hui-yüan did not

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<sup>36</sup> T44.483c20-21 and t44.484c25-26.

<sup>37</sup> T44.483c5.

mention the relationship between “existence” and “non-existence” among the two truths. Furthermore, Hui-yüan suggests that “existence” and “non-existence” can be applied to the two truths.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, there are some problems with his suggestion. As Swanson says: “Thus for Hui-yüan both *saṃvṛtisatya* and *paramārthasatya* include correct and incorrect aspects of *yu* and *wu*, of existence and non-existence, depending on the level of understanding or school which is interpreting the terms.”<sup>39</sup>

Since Hui-yüan is one of the leading *Ti-lun* figures, his exposition of the two truths must be somewhat influenced by the *Ti-lun* school. Hui-yüan also examines the relationship between the worldly truth and the real truth from the two aspects of “dependence” (*i-chih*) and “origination” (*yüan-ch'i*). These two aspects deal with the concept of true consciousness, also known as the *tathāgatagarbha*.<sup>40</sup> Liu writes:

The aspect “origination” indicates that the false phenomenal order originates from the true consciousness; the aspect “dependence” indicates that the false phenomenal order is sustained by the true consciousness. All in all, in the *Ta-cheng I-chang*, the concept of two truths has been assimilated into the *Ti-lun* metaphysical framework, and has become a part of the teaching of ideation-only espoused by the Yogācāra tradition.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the fact that Liu claims that the concept of two truths in the *Ta-cheng I-chang* (*A Compendium of the Themes of the Mahāyāna*) has been assimilated into the *Ti-lun* (*Daśabhūmikasūtra-śāstra*) metaphysical

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<sup>38</sup> For a detailed description, see Swanson, pp. 79-80. Also, see the *Ta-cheng I-chang*, T44.484b22-c14.

<sup>39</sup> Swanson, pp. 80-81.

<sup>40</sup> See T44.483c14-21.

<sup>41</sup> Liu, p. 139.

framework, it actually still pertains to the fundamental guide of “phenomena” (*shih*) and “principle” (*li*). Regarding the two aspects of “dependence” and “origination”, Hui-yüan writes:

When the two [truths] are explained from [the perspective of] “dependence”, the false phenomena are taken as the dependent [objects] and the true [consciousness] is [taken as the subject] being depended on. The false phenomena which are dependent are said to be the “mundane truth”; the true [consciousness] which is being depended on is classified as the “supreme truth”. When the two [truths] are explained from [the perspective of] “origination”, the pure *dharmadhātu* [i.e.] the *tathāgatagarbha* [, engages in the activities of] origination and gives birth to [the realms of] *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. The true nature [of the *tathāgatagarbha*] itself is said to be the “supreme truth”; the function of origination is classified as the “mundane truth”.<sup>42</sup>

As pointed out in this passage, the aspect of “dependence” is to deal with the false phenomena. Hence, it belongs to “phenomena” (*shih*) as one of the fundamental guides. The aspect of “origination” is to deal with the theory of *tathāgatagarbha* which engages in the activities of origination and gives birth to the realms of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Hence, it belongs to the “principle” (*li*) of the fundamental guides.

The *Ch'eng-shih-lun* (*Satyasiddhi-śāstra*) was written by Harivarman (250 ~ 350) around the fourth century.<sup>43</sup> In the *Ch'eng-shih-lun*, Harivarman writes:

All the Buddhas and sages wish to lead sentient beings to be free from

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>43</sup> See Liu, p. 88.

attachment to conventional names, therefore they utilise the worldly truth to teach.<sup>44</sup>

Next, the worldly truth is the fundamental teaching method of all Buddhas such as giving, precepts etc.. We use this method to adjust and quieten our mind in order that we might become more receptive. After this, we then speak of the truth of supreme meaning. This may be likened to the Dharma which is not very profound at the beginning, or the sea which gradually gets deeper. Hence, we speak of the worldly truth.<sup>45</sup>

In the first quotation, Harivarman demonstrates that all the Buddhas and sages teach the worldly truth in order to enable sentient beings to be free from the concepts of attachment to provisional names. He is trying to show the importance of the worldly truth. As for the second quotation, Harivarman also highlights that the worldly truth is the fundamental teaching of all Buddhas. He subsequently mentions that our mind can be taught by using the method of the worldly truth. It seems that the worldly truth has to be known first, and then the truth of supreme meaning may be understood. He even quotes the examples of Dharma and the sea to signify the essential function of the worldly truth. In my opinion, Harivarman focuses more on the worldly truth rather than on the truth of supreme meaning.<sup>46</sup> The *Ch'eng-shih-lun's* definition on the two truths seems rather vague. It interpreted the two truths as separate realities. In

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<sup>44</sup> Translated by Swanson, p. 84. Also, see T32.327a25-26.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84. Also, see T32.327b4-5.

<sup>46</sup> In this regard, it is important to note that the *Ch'eng-shih-lun's* statement is different from chapter twenty-four of the *Middle Stanzas*: "The Buddhas have recourse to the two truths on preaching the Dharma for sentient beings: First, the mundane truth, second, the supreme truth". Translated by Liu, p. 136. Also, see the *Chung-lun*, T30.32c16-17.

this context, it does not show the relationship between the two truths.

In the *Ch'eng-shih-lun*, Harivarman also uses the terms "existence" (*yu*) and "non-existence" (*wu*) to define the two truths. Harivarman writes:

Question: When we advance the idea of no-self, we might be guilty of expressing a heretic view. Why?

Answer: There are two truths. If we speak of the truth of supreme meaning, [we regard] the existence of [a true] self as "the illusion of being a self" (*shen-chien*).<sup>47</sup> If we speak of the worldly truth, [we consider] no-self as a heterodox view. If we speak of the worldly truth, it therefore refers to self-existence and speaking of the truth of supreme meaning is referring to no-self. This is called the right view. Next, if we speak of the truth of supreme meaning as "non-existence" (*wu*) and the worldly truth as "existence" (*yu*), both do not fall into these views. [Hence,] it is justifiable to say that such is "existence" and "non-existence".<sup>48</sup>

In this passage, Harivarman suggests that it is the right view for one to claim the worldly truth as "existence" (*yu*) and the truth of supreme meaning as "non-existence" (*wu*). According to Harivarman, it is incorrect for us to define the worldly truth as "non-existence" and the truth of supreme meaning as "existence". However, Harivarman treats the two truths as separate realities and he does not explain the relationship between the two truths. Subsequently, Harivarman also writes:

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<sup>47</sup> See Lim Teong-Aik, *Fo-hsyeh-ming-tz'u-chung-ying-pa-fan-chi* (*A Glossary of Buddhist Terms*), Taipei: Hui-Cü, First edition 1971 and seventh edition 1990, p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> T32.316c1-6.



Next, if we speak of the worldly truth as existence, then it is not necessary [for us] to speak of the [truth of] supreme meaning as non-existence.<sup>49</sup>

This passage furnishes us with the important clues that the *Ch'eng-shih-lun*'s use of the terms "existence" and "non-existence" to define the two truths is ambiguous. Also, the *Ch'eng-shih-lun* emphasises more on the worldly truth as compared with the truth of supreme meaning. As was mentioned earlier, Harivarman suggests that teaching of the worldly truth is to set one free from attachment to the provisional names in order to attain liberation—the truth of supreme meaning. Hence, he claims that it is not necessary to speak of the truth of supreme meaning as non-existence if we speak of the worldly truth as existence. That is to say, Harivarman asserts non-existence with the truth of supreme meaning. As Priestley says: "Nāgārjuna accordingly regards existence and non-existence as equally unreal; but Harivarman identifies non-existence with ultimate truth."<sup>50</sup>

Regarding Chi-tsang's vehement criticism of the *Ch'eng-shih-lun* scholars Chih-tsang (458~522) and Seng-min (467~527) who have their own exposition of the two truths, it will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **2. Establishment of the Two Truths and the Relationship with the Sanlun School**

### **2.1 Establishment of the Two Truths**

The most detailed and comprehensive Sanlun exposition of the Two

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<sup>49</sup> T32.316c26.

<sup>50</sup> C.D.C. Priestley, "Emptiness in the Satyasiddhi" (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* 1, 1970), p. 36.

Truths is found in Chi-tsang's *Erh-ti-i*, where various reasons are to be found for setting forth a theory of the two truths. Having said that, there are also some other works written by Chi-tsang which are relevant to this discussion. In the *Erh-ti-i*, Chi-tsang writes:

Before my teacher [Fa-lang, 507~581] passed away, he ascended to the high seat and instructed his followers. He said that since he had come down from the mountain, he had relied upon the two truths as the right path. He taught more than twenty approaches to the two truths, particularly one method called ten-fold (*shih-chung*). The purpose of teaching ten-fold, as regards the two truths, was to respond to the monk K'ai-shan.<sup>51</sup>

This passage shows that Chi-tsang greatly respected his master [Fa-lang] and truly inherited his teacher's instructions, relying upon the two truths as the main principle of Dharma. Particular account is taken of his teacher's exposition of shi-chung (ten-fold) with regards to the two truths, in order to deal with one of the *Cheng-shih-lun* scholars, Chih-tsang. This discussion of the term *shih-chung* is to be found in Chi-tsang's work, *Ta-cheng Hsüan-lun*. This, in turn, provides one of the arguments used by Chi-tsang to establish the two truths.

The Buddhist Middle-Path is described as neither existence nor non-existence. Nāgārjuna focuses on eight negations<sup>52</sup> at the beginning of

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<sup>51</sup> T45.78a27-b2. The monk Kai-shan refers to Chih-tsang (458~522) as one of the prominent scholars of the *Ch'eng-shih-lun*. In the *Erh-ti-i*, Chi-tsang is fond of using the name of the temple to address the monk instead of the monk's name. For his biography, see *Hsü Kao-seng-chuan* (*Further Biographies of Eminent Monks*), T50.465c7-467b27.

<sup>52</sup> Eight negations refers to non-origination (*anutpādam*), non-extinction (*anirōdham*), non-eternal (*aśāśvatam*), non-destruction (*anucchedam*), non-identity (*anekārtham*),

the *Chung-lun*, the second pair of which refer to “eternalism” and “annihilationism”. The eight negations are one of the main features of Nāgārjuna’s thought, their purpose being to extinguish all the extreme views which are based on the ignorance of sentient beings. In the *San-lun Hsüan-i* (*The Profound Meaning of the Three Treatise*), Chi-tsang cites the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*, and says that there are two views arising in the minds of sentient beings, namely “destruction” (*tuan*) and “eternality” (*chang*).<sup>53</sup> Sentient beings have a tendency to hold either of these two views, which causes them to fall into saṃsāra and prevents them from being liberated. The *A-p’i-ta-mo Ta-p’i-p’o-sha Lun* (*Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā-śāstra*) contains an extended discussion of these wrong views in a chapter called “Aggregate of Views”.<sup>54</sup>

In the *Ta-ch’eng Hsüan-lun* (*A Treatise on the Profound [Teaching of the] Mahāyāna*), Chi-tsang writes:

The *Cheng-shih-lun* scholars claim that due to continuity [of the phenomena], there is “eternalism” (*chang*). Moment by moment there is arising and ceasing with no self [which is] “annihilationism” (*tuan*). Because they see annihilationism and eternalism, they therefore do not believe in the abstention from both “eternalism” and “annihilationism”. It needs to be refuted.<sup>55</sup>

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non-differentiation (*anānārtham*), non-coming into being (*ānāgamam*), and non-going out of being (*anirgamam*). See Inada, Kenneth, *Nāgārjuna—A Translation of his Mūlamadhyamakakārikā with an Introductory Essay*, Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1970, p. 25. Also, see Bocking, Brian, *Nāgārjuna in China—A Translation of the Middle Treatise*, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> T45.14b25-26.

<sup>54</sup> T27.987a-1004a.

<sup>55</sup> T45.28a1-3.

The annihilationism and eternalism views represent serious maladies of sentient beings. The presentation of the two truths is meant to remedy these two wrong views, substituting instead the concepts of the worldly and the supreme meaning. Also, Chi-tsang writes:

People who hear neither "existence" (*yu*) nor "non-existence" (*wu*) and think that there is no two truths of real and mundane, generate the view of annihilationism. For this reason, the second alternative is to speak of "existence" and "non-existence" as the two truths in order to abandon one's mind.<sup>56</sup>

In this passage, Chi-tsang demonstrates that the reason to establish the two truths is to save people who have the view of annihilationism of neither "existence" nor "non-existence". The reason of establishing the two truths is to negate the two extreme views such as "annihilationism and eternalism" and "existence and non-existence".

"Truths qua instruction" (*chiao-ti*) is the main feature of Chi-tsang's theory of the two truths, a theme which we will explain in more detail in the next chapter. Chi-tsang points out that "truths qua instruction" is like a medicine for sentient beings though when there is no illness there is no need for any medicine.<sup>57</sup> The malady refers to the annihilationism view and eternalism view. If one recovers from an illness, one no longer requires any medicine.

Likewise, if one abandons these two wrong views, one has no need for "truths qua instruction". These two views of annihilationism and eternalism are presented as two of the eight negations, as mentioned earlier. Nāgārjuna sets out the eight negations to extirpate these extreme views, in

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<sup>56</sup> The *Ta-ch'eng Hsüan-lun*, T45.20a13-15.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, T45.73a5-7.

order to reveal the true nature of phenomena—the Middle-Path. Chi-tsang realised that the doctrine of two truths is a crucial and fundamental part of Dharma and that only Dharma discoursed by Buddha can be of benefit to mankind. Moreover, his teacher (Fa-lang) also emphasised the importance of the two truths. Chi-tsang not only established the two truths, but also corrected what he saw as the mistakes made about the two truths by other earlier schools, such as the *Cheng-shih-lun*, thus explaining his advocating of “truths qua instruction”, his original contribution to Buddhist philosophy.

In the *San-lun Hsüan-i*, Chi-tsang writes:

Question: For what purpose is the theory of the two truths expounded in the sūtras?

Answer: There are two reasons. First, in order to highlight the fact that Dharma is a Middle-Path (*chung-tao*) and with the idea of the worldly truth, it is possible to explain the reason for the rejection of annihilationism. Second, with the idea of the [truth] of supreme meaning, it is possible to explain the reason for the rejection of eternalism. Therefore, the [theory of the] two truths are established. Next, the two wisdoms<sup>58</sup> (*erh-chih*) are the Dharma body of the Buddhas of the three ages (past, present, and future): Wisdom arises from the [truth] of supreme meaning and skilful means (*fang-pien*) arises from the worldly truth. [Hence,] both of them acquire wisdom concerning the real and wisdom concerning skilful means. Thanks to the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three ages, the [theory of the] two truths thereby are established. Next, there is knowing that the [truth] of supreme meaning is “self benefit” (*chi-li*) and the worldly truth can “benefit others” (*li-ta*). Hence, we know that the

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<sup>58</sup> The two wisdoms refer to *chüan-chih* (conventional wisdom) and *shih-chih* (wisdom concerning the real).

two truths are as “mutual benefit” (*kung-li*). The two truths therefore are established. Next, because of the two truths, hence, the Buddha’s speeches are true. Because of the worldly truth, we therefore speak of existence as true. Because of the [truth] of supreme meaning, we therefore speak of emptiness as true. Next, Dharma is gradually abstruse. Hence, we first speak of the teaching of cause and effect of the worldly truth, then we speak of the [truth] of supreme meaning. Next, in order to help the wise one towards enlightenment, we therefore speak of [truth] of supreme meaning and we do not speak of the worldly truth. Next, if we do not speak of cause and effect of the worldly truth first and merely speak of the [truth] of supreme meaning, then this will generate the view of annihilationism. Hence, we explain the two truths.<sup>59</sup>

In the above quotation, Chi-tsang explains the two reasons why the sūtras established the two truths. It seems that these two reasons are rather crucial concepts in Buddhism. In addition, Chi-tsang gives another four reasons by himself. These four reasons were given through his understanding of the two truths.

In the *Ching-ming Hsüan-lun* (*A Treatise on the Profound [Teaching of the] Vimalakīrti sūtra*), Chi-tsang says that according to the explanation of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the “right path” (*chen-tao*) originally does not have “existence” (*yu*) and “non-existence” (*wu*). In accord with sentient beings, we therefore speak of “existence” and “non-existence”.<sup>60</sup> Chi-tsang knew that preaching of the two truths was a form of skilful means, although he used the two truths to develop further his own explanations and refutations of the wrong assertions of other schools.

However, he definitely would not develop attachment to his doctrine,

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<sup>59</sup> T45.11c12-24.

<sup>60</sup> T38.893c7-9.

using it instead simply as a skilful means. “Right path” (*chen-tao*) or the ultimate is beyond verbalisation. In the *Pai-lun Su* (*A Commentary on the Twelve Topic Treatise*), Chi-tsang writes:

Question: If the “mind” (*shen*) and “consciousness” (*chüeh*) are one, why does the two truths need to be established?

Answer: The “substance” (*t’i*) is one but the meanings are different. Since the substance is one, therefore “consciousness” is “mind” and “mind” is “consciousness”. As for the meanings being different, [the body] which we control, is “mind” and [the ability to] completely distinguish [all things] is called “consciousness”. Some people suggest that suffering and origination are one thing. Nonetheless, the meaning of “cause” (*yin*) and “effect” (*kuo*) is different. Hence, we speak of the two [truths].<sup>61</sup>

In this passage, Chi-tsang uses the terms of “mind” and “consciousness” to explain the concepts of “substance” (*t’i*) and “meaning” (*i*). According to Chi-tsang, “mind” and “consciousness” have the same “substance”. Hence, Chi-tsang claims that “mind” is identical with “consciousness” and “consciousness” is identical with “mind”. Having said that, their meanings are different. Chi-tsang subsequently defines the meaning of “mind” and “consciousness” to show their differences. In addition, he gives an example to explain why the two truths are established. In this example, Chi-tsang highlights that the meaning of “cause and effect” is different. It seems that Chi-tsang was proposing that “mind” and “consciousness” are one “substance”. Nonetheless, due to the difference in their meanings, the one substance has two “truths”.

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<sup>61</sup> T42.262c3-6.



## 2.2 The Relationship with the Sanlun School

The Chinese term *Sanlun* refers to the three treatises, namely the *Chung-lun* (*Madhyamaka-śāstra*), the *Shih-erh-men-lun* (*Dvādaśamukha-śāstra*), and the *Pai-lun* (*Śata-śāstra*). According to Chi-tsang, the first two texts are aimed mainly at refuting *Shuo-i-chüeh-yu-pu* (*Sarvāstivāda*) and they are also aimed at correcting the influence of the non-Mahāyāna schools. The *Pai-lun*, however, acted as a critique of the doctrine of others including non-Buddhist schools.

In the *Ta-ch'eng Hsüan-lun* (*A Treatise on the Profound [Teaching of the] Mahāyāna*), Chi-tsang writes:

Generally speaking, the *Chung-lun* relies on the two truths as its "central theme" (*tsung*). The *Pai-lun* is also like this. The *Pai-lun* is using the two wisdoms (*erh-chih*) as "central theme" and the *Chung-lun* is also like this. If we say that the *Chung-lun* relies on the two truths as its central theme and that with the *Pai-lun* this is not the case, this is [the wrong statement.] There are two reasons for us to say that this is the wrong statement. First, the Bodhisattva composes treatises in order to reveal Buddhism. The *Chung-lun* reveals Buddhism by making the two truths as its central theme. The *Pai-lun* also reveals [Buddhism] Why is it that the *Pai-lun* cannot rely on the two truths as its central theme? Second, . . . the master [Seng]-chao's *Preface of the Treatise* say: "Leading the path of the sage's mind and speaking of main theory of the real truth." [For this reason,] why don't the *Chung-lun* and *Pai-lun* use the two truths as its central theme? . . . The end of the *Pai-lun* says: "Since the Buddha speaks of the two truths, I now also follow the Buddha to speak of the two truths." [For this reason,] why does [the *Pai-lun*] not use the two truths as its central theme? Hence, both of these treatises rely on the two truths as



its central theme.<sup>62</sup>

As pointed out above, Chi-tsang declares that the *Chung-lun* and the *Pai-lun* rely on the two truths as its central theme. He gives two reasons to support his statement. At the end of this quotation, Chi-tsang quotes the *Pai-lun* to argue that not only the *Chung-lun*, but the *Pai-lun* also relies on the two truths as its central theme. The reason for Chi-tsang to claim that the *Chung-lun* and the *Pai-lun* rely on the two truths and the two wisdoms as their central theme at the beginning of this quotation is that he treats the two truths as identical to the two wisdoms. As for this issue, it will be discussed in the next chapter. Hence, we realise that in the relationship between the two truths, the *Chung-lun* and the *Pai-lun* are very close.

With regard to the texts of the *Sanlun* (the Three Treatises) and *Sanlun Tsung* (Three Treatises school), the presentation of the root *Sanlun* texts is rather terse compared to the commentaries of the *Sanlun Tsung* written by Chi-tsang. Chi-tsang, a founder of the *Sanlun Tsung*, composed a detailed commentary for each of the *Sanlun*, entitled the *Chung-kuan-lun Su* (*A Commentary on the Middle Treatise*), the *Shih-erh-men-lun Su* (*A Commentary on the Twelve Topic Treatise*) and the *Pai-lun Su* (*A Commentary on the Hundred Treatise*). *Sanlun Tsung* refers to Chi-tsang's three commentaries on the *Sanlun*.

The main distinction between *Sanlun* and *Sanlun Tsung* is the term *tsung* (school) which includes the theory of "classification of the Buddhist doctrine" (*p'an-chiao*). Schools are established because the first patriarch of the school publishes his own ideas, while trying to abandon the propositions of other schools and emphasising his own assertion. The first patriarch classifies his own theory from the Buddhist doctrine, so he thinks that his theory is superior to that of other schools. Schools such as *Pure-*

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<sup>62</sup> T45.71b8-18.

*Land, T'ien-T'ai, Hua-Yen, Ch'an* etc., are gradually generated inasmuch as their own "classification of the Buddhist doctrine" is propounded by the individual founder of the school. That is to say, those founders of their schools adopt the theory of "classification of the Buddhist doctrine" as their principal guide in order to establish their own school.

Koseki said that those favouring the "Indian input", quite naturally, point out that Chi-tsang's theories lack fidelity. Then he quotes Robinson, who writes: "The three treatises tradition is quite simply a restatement of Nāgārjuna's teaching in a new vocabulary, with a few additional theses on matters such as the Two Truths where Nāgārjuna was too brief and vague."<sup>63</sup> Subsequently, Koseki writes:

This emphasis on scriptural fidelity also tends to treat Chi-tsang's thought in isolation, that is, apart from the greater Chinese Buddhist tradition. In a sense, to conclude that *San-lun* is a "restatement" is perfectly all right, given Robinson's belief that, "It cannot be assumed that the structure of language corresponds to the structure of thought, or that all thoughts can be represented by symbols, or that language is the only kind of symbolic system." . . . they tend to give the impression of the mere continuity of ideas, that the significance of Chi-tsang's thought lies in his transmission of some acculturated form of Mādhyamika.<sup>64</sup>

Koseki agrees with Robinson's suggestion that *Sanlun* is a "restatement". With regard to language and thought, José Ignacio Cabezón writes: "language is a means of communicating ideas, facts and emotions in general,

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<sup>63</sup> Koseki, Aaron Ken, "Later Mādhyamika in China: Some Current Perspectives on the History of Chinese Prajñāpāramitā Thought", in *Journal of The International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 5, No. 2, 1982, p. 55.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

but from the viewpoint of the Buddhist tradition, perhaps the most important thing that language can communicate is the doctrine that leads to salvation, the Dharma.”<sup>65</sup>

But my argument is that the term “restatement” and “new vocabulary” are very misleading. It tries to tell us that Chi-tsang’s theories are no different from Nāgārjuna’s. If we compare Nāgārjuna and Chi-tsang’s texts, Chi-tsang’s texts are more detailed and lengthy. Also, Chi-tsang’s presentation is different from Nāgārjuna’s. Perhaps, one may find it easier to read Nāgārjuna’s text than Chi-tsang’s. It is true that Chi-tsang’s texts are more complex and dense, and therefore not easy to understand. Actually, Chi-tsang elaborates on Nāgārjuna’s thought in order to make it more accessible for his readers who belonged to a different time from Nāgārjuna. He presented it in this manner to benefit them.

Nevertheless, Chi-tsang basically follows Nāgārjuna’s main principles as his fundamental guide and presents his work in a very different manner through skilful means in order to benefit his contemporary readers. Chi-tsang then develops Nāgārjuna’s ideas further to generate his own exposition of the three commentaries of *Sanlun*. Hence, Chi-tsang’s three commentaries of *Sanlun* are more detailed. As we analyse Chi-tsang’s texts, we discover most of the concepts and explanations which we cannot find in Nāgārjuna’s *Chung-lun*. These concepts developed by Chi-tsang are different to those of Nāgārjuna though he follows Nāgārjuna’s ideas as his principle. In my opinion, Chi-tsang’s three commentaries of *Sanlun* are different from Nāgārjuna’s. It is not what Robinson claims, that the Three Treatises Tradition is a restatement of Nāgārjuna’s teaching in a new vocabulary. Hence, it seems that the terms “restatement” and “new

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<sup>65</sup> José Ignacio Cabezón, *The Development of A Buddhist Philosophy of Language and its Culmination in Tibetan Madhyamika Thought* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987), p. 9.

vocabulary” are inappropriate in this context.

Koseki says: “ ‘Restatement’, however, is an overstatement, and is again challenged by several problems dealt with in Hirai’s study. At least two major areas may be isolated as illuminating: 1. the historical background and religious dynamics involved in the *Sanlun* development of the two truths theory; 2. the influence of the *Nirvāṇa sūtra* and its doctrine of universal enlightenment, Buddha-nature (*buddhadhātu*).”<sup>66</sup> Koseki’s points, particularly the first one, support my argument. It seems to be more convincing and plausible.

In the *Chung-kuan-lun Su* (*A Commentary on the Middle Treatise*), fifteen out of the twenty seven chapters have references to the issue of the two truths. In the *Shih-erh-men-lun Su* (*A Commentary on the Twelve Topic Treatise*), four out of twelve chapters mention the two truths. Finally, in the *Pai-lun Su* (*A Commentary on the Hundred Treatise*), seven out of ten chapters mention the two truths. This indicates that the relationship between the two truths and the three commentaries of *Sanlun* are very close and the two truths play an important role in the *Sanlun* school.

According to the Chinese scholar Lee Shih-Chieh, he writes:

The teaching theory of the Three Treatises school (*Sanlun Tsung*) can be defined by three aspects of “refutation of falsehood and revelation of truth” (*p’o-hsieh-hsien-chen*), the two truths of real and mundane, and the Middle-Path of eight negations.<sup>67</sup>

This indicates that the two truths is one of the main theories at the core of the *Sanlun* school.

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<sup>66</sup> Koseki, p. 56.

<sup>67</sup> Lee Shih-Chieh, *San-lun-chung-chih-fa-chan-chih-ch’I-ssu-hsiang* (Editor: Chan Man-T’ao, volume 47), Taiwan: Ta-Cheng-Wen-Hua, 1955, p. 215.

### 3. The Significance and Benefits of the Two Truths

#### 3.1 The Significance of the Two Truths

The theory of the two truths is one of the fundamental and crucial concepts in Buddhism. Indeed, all the Dharma discussed by Buddha can be classified into the two truths. For example, Chi-tsang writes: "All sūtras [taught by the Buddha] are within the two truths. If [one] knows the two truths, then all sūtras could be understood."<sup>68</sup> The issue of the two truths was hotly debated in the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>69</sup> As we mentioned in chapter two, particularly for the *Ch'eng-shih-lun* scholars such as Chih-tsang (458~522), Seng-min (467~527) and Fa-yün (467~529) who suggested the theory of the two truths was the "[objective] realm" (chin) and "principle" (li).<sup>70</sup> The development of this idea comes to Chi-tsang's time, he then criticises them and asserts that the theory of the two truths is "instruction" (*chiao*) in Buddhist thought and is not to be confused with the "[objective] realm" and "principle".<sup>71</sup> Hence, we realise that the theory of the two truths is significant. Guy Newland says: "Consequently, comprehension of the two truths enables one to understand the sūtras, progress on the path and attain Buddhahood."<sup>72</sup> Nāgārjuna, in his *Chung-lun* (*Madhyamaka-śāstra*) chapter twenty-four declares that:

Verse 8: *dve satye samupāśritya buddhānām dharmadeśanā/  
lokasaṃvṛtisatyam ca satyaṃ ca paramārthataḥ*//

<sup>68</sup> See the *Erh-ti-I*, T45.78a24-25.

<sup>69</sup> See Swanson, p. 57.

<sup>70</sup> See section one in Chapter Two, pp. 57-70. Also see the *Ta-ch'eng Hsüan-lun*, T45.15a20-24.

<sup>71</sup> See the *Ta-ch'eng Hsüan-lun*, T45.15a16-17.

<sup>72</sup> Newland, Guy, *The Two Truths*, Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publication, 1992, p. 172.

The teaching of the dharma by the various Buddhas is based on the two truths; namely the relative (worldly) truth and the absolute (supreme) truth.

Verse 9: *ye'nayorna vijānanti vibhāgam satyayordvayoḥ/  
te tattvam na vijānanti gambhīram buddhaśāsane//*

Those who do not know the distinction between the two truths cannot understand the profound nature of the Buddha's teaching.<sup>73</sup>

The above two passages shows that the two truths are significant in Buddhism. It is important to note that Buddhas rely on the two truths to preach Dharma and that without knowing the difference between the two truths, the profound nature of Buddha's teaching could not be understood. Chi-tsang writes:

One who speaks real speech relies on the real truth. One who speaks true speech relies on the worldly truth. Hence, the Buddha gives these two speeches and propagates the Dharma which relies on the two truths. One who speaks such speech, such as all the Buddhas propagating the Dharma, relies on the two truths.<sup>74</sup>

If one [speaking the Dharma] is separated from the two truths, then this

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<sup>73</sup> Translated by Kanneth K, Inada, *Nāgārjuna — A Translation of his Mūlamadhyamakakārikā with an Introductory Essay*, p. 146. Also, see T30.32c16-19 and Brian Bocking, *Nāgārjuna in China*, p. 342.

<sup>74</sup> The *Chin-kang Pan-jo Su*, T33.116a18-21.

is considered as deluded speech.<sup>75</sup>

In the *Ching-ming Hsüan-lun* (*A Treatise on the Profound [Teaching of the] Vimalakīrti sūtra*), Chi-tsang says: "Because of these two truths, then the two wisdoms arise."<sup>76</sup> Chi-tsang realised that one needs to understand the two truths in order to obtain wisdom, and eventually attain the ultimate goal. Since the two truths are fundamental to all Dharma, therefore the real speech of the Dharma should rely on the two truths. Again, Chi-tsang writes:

There are four kinds of "ignorance" (*wu-ming*): First, "ignorance which is wrong views" (*mi-li-wu-ming*) which is wrong views on the two truths. Thus a sūtra says: "One who does not comprehend the worldly truth and the truth of supreme meaning is called ignorant."<sup>77</sup>

If one were to say there are no two truths it would be considered as evil view.<sup>78</sup>

The followers of Abhidharma say: "No-self is real. Because the mundane world is a provisional name we therefore speak of self-existence. [Similarly] the Ch'eng-shih-lun (*Satyasiddhi-śāstra*) is also like this. Hence, we say that self-existence in the worldly truth and no-self in the [truth] of supreme meaning is called the right view. [Conversely, if we speak of] no-self in the worldly truth and self-existence in the [truth] of

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<sup>75</sup> The *Pai-lun Su*, T42.303a20-21.

<sup>76</sup> T38.883b10. The two wisdoms refer to the conventional wisdom and wisdom concerning the real.

<sup>77</sup> The *Fa-hua I-su*, T34.572b25-27.

<sup>78</sup> The *Chung-kuan-lun Su*, T42.108a24.



supreme meaning, this is called the evil view.<sup>79</sup>

These citations suggest that Chi-tsang attempts to emphasise the importance of the two truths by explaining that if one does not understand it, such ignorance and evil views will cause one to fall into saṃsāra and not be liberated. On the other hand, Chi-tsang was born into the traditional Chinese culture which had a strong emphasis on filial respect to one's ancestors and parents. Chi-tsang used the terms "grandparent" and "parent" in order to bring the importance of the two truths into focus. He writes:

The two truths are the grandparents of all the Buddhas and two wisdoms are the parents of all the Buddhas.<sup>80</sup>

As we discussed in the foregoing, the terms *yu* (existence) and *wu* (non-existence) were hotly debated and a controversial issue before Chi-tsang's time. In order to explain how the two truths correspond to *yu* and *wu* and the relationship between them, Chi-tsang attempts to show that without the two truths, *yu* and *wu* cannot be formed. In the *Chung-kuan-lun Su* (*A Commentary on the Middle Treatise*), Chi-tsang writes:

Next, because the [truth] of supreme meaning is emptiness, thus the worldly truth exists. If the two truths are established, then all [dharmas] are established. If there is no emptiness, then the [truth] of supreme meaning cannot be established and the worldly truth also cannot be established. Hence, all [dharmas] will be destroyed. Next, all [dharmas] are established when emptiness exists, because the [truth] of supreme

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, T42.129b26-29.

<sup>80</sup> *The Pai-lun Su*, T42.232c5-7.



meaning is emptiness; thus prajñā is generated. Because of prajñā which annihilates affliction, thus the Buddhas of the three ages<sup>81</sup> exist. Because of the Buddhas, we therefore speak of all the teachings of mundane and supramundane.<sup>82</sup>

In conclusion, Chi-tsang employs different approaches to focus on the significance of the two truths. Chi-tsang not only used Buddhist terms “emptiness” and “prajñā”, but also employed the terms such as “grandparent” and “parent” to highlight the significance of the two truths.

### 3.2 The Benefits of the Two Truths

In Chi-tsang’s texts, indeed, there are not many issues raised on the benefits of the two truths. Nevertheless, there are treatises which discuss this issue which we can refer to. In the foregoing, we already mentioned the reasons for the establishment and significance of the two truths. Perhaps, one may ask, what are the benefits we can get from these? One benefit is to enable sentient beings to be aware of the two truths, so that they can obtain perfect understanding and eventually attain liberation. In the *Erh-ti-i*, Chi-tsang writes:

Question: Why do we rely on the two truths to teach the Dharma? Are there any benefits in speaking of the two truths?

Answer: There are two treatises which mention this issue. First, [chapter twenty-four] of the *Chung-lun* says: “If one is not able to distinguish between the two truths, one cannot understand the real meaning of the profound Dharma. If one does not understand the two truths, one cannot

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<sup>81</sup> The three ages refer to past, present and future.

<sup>82</sup> T42.151c14-18.

understand the real meaning of the profound Dharma. If one perfectly understands the two truths, one will know the real meaning of the profound Dharma." Hence, we know that there is great benefit in speaking of the two truths. Second, [chapter eight] of the *Shih-erh-men-lun* (*Dvādaśamukha-śāstra*) says: "If one does not know the two truths, then one cannot obtain self benefit, benefit others and mutual benefit. If one knows the two truths, then one will obtain these three benefits . . . . These two benefits [from these two treatises] encompass all the benefits. The *Chung-lun* explains the benefit for knowing the profound Dharma and the *Shih-erh-men-lun* explains the benefit for sentient beings. Seeking [the Dharma from the Buddha and benefiting the sentient beings] are within these two benefits [from these two treatises].<sup>83</sup>

From the Buddhist point of view, wisdom and compassion are the key concepts. In this passage, the two benefits Chi-tsang mentions correspond to wisdom and compassion. The first benefit mentioned about understanding the real meaning of the profound Dharma, refers to wisdom and the second about the benefit to sentient beings refers to compassion. Hence, Chi-tsang's two benefits entirely cover all the benefits, particularly when seen from a Mahāyānist point of view. This should be considered of great benefit for Buddhists.

These two main benefits were summarised by Chi-tsang. However, there are other benefits of the two truths, particularly regarding the two evil views, annihilationism and eternalism, which form one of the main reasons for establishing the two truths. Chi-tsang further adduced the three benefits as follows:

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<sup>83</sup> T45.82c17-26. Also, see the *Chung-kuan-lun Su*, T42.151a4-6 and the *Shih-erh-men-lun Su*, T42.206b5-11.

If one perfectly understands the two truths, then the two wisdoms<sup>84</sup> exist. Having the two wisdoms, thus the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three ages exist . . . . Hence, we know that there is great benefit in speaking of the two truths. Next, as for the benefit, if one completely knows the truth of supreme meaning follows the worldly truth, one will separate oneself from the stage of sentient beings. If one completely knows the worldly truth follows the truth of supreme meaning, one will separate oneself from the stages of [śrāvaka and pratyeka Buddhas] . . . . Hence, there is great benefit in knowing the two truths. Next, [there is another benefit for one to separate oneself from] the two views of annihilationism and eternalism. If one completely knows the truth of supreme meaning comes after the worldly truth, one will separate oneself from the view of eternalism. If one completely knows the worldly truth comes after the truth of supreme meaning, one will separate oneself from the view of annihilationism. When one separates oneself from the two views of annihilationism and eternalism, it is like walking in the Middle-Path of [the Buddha] and seeing the Buddha-nature . . . . For this reason, there is great benefit in knowing the two truths.<sup>85</sup>

If we examine the three benefits accordingly, we can realise that, indeed, the first benefit is the reason why Chi-tsang tries to focus on wisdom in order to know the profound doctrine. It should be considered from the standpoint of the supramundane to explain the benefit of the two truths. Likewise, in the second benefit, Chi-tsang attempts to explain that the tandem of the worldly truth and truth of supreme meaning must ultimately be understood from the standpoint of the supramundane in order to explain the benefit of the two truths. In this regard, whether one separates oneself

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<sup>84</sup> The two wisdoms refer to conventional wisdom and wisdom concerning the real.

<sup>85</sup> T45.86a3-18.

from the stages of sentient beings and the two vehicles (*śrāvaka* and *pratyeka*) depends on knowing the truth of supreme meaning comes after the worldly truth and knowing the worldly truth follows the truth of supreme meaning. As far as Chi-tsang is concerned, it seems that speaking of the tandem of the two truths is to abandon attachment to the stages of sentient beings and the two vehicles. For example, if one completely knows the worldly truth then the truth of supreme meaning, one will separate oneself from the stages of sentient beings. The worldly truth is the stage of sentient beings. In order to enable one to separate oneself from the stage of sentient beings, Chi-tsang explains the truth of supreme meaning comes after the worldly truth. His intention is to enable one to realise the truth of supreme meaning. The main idea is the truth of supreme meaning. Similarly, the concept in explaining the benefit of the two truths is also applied to the third benefit. All in all, the first two benefits are from the viewpoint of the supramundane perspective. The third benefit is from the mundane standpoint; for it addresses the two extreme views. In fact, one of the main reasons why Chi-tsang established the two truths was to refute the two extreme views of annihilationism and eternalism.

## 二諦理論之建立

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### 提要

本文為我的博士論文七章中之一小章。其共有三節。在第一節裡，我以不同年代來解釋中國早期對二諦之詮釋。在第二節中，我解釋吉藏為何要建立二諦之理由。除此之外，我也闡述了二諦與三論宗之間的關係。最後，我甚至進一步從吉藏之立場來說明二諦之重要及利益。以下為本文作了研究之後所得出之結果：

(1)早在吉藏之前，已有些人對二諦作了詮釋，如僧肇、昭明太子、法雲、慧遠、訶黎跋摩等等。雖然如此，他們皆用「有」及「無」兩種術語來解釋二諦。這顯示出其作法相當粗糙及模糊。

(2)吉藏建立二諦之理由是為要破除「斷常」極端之二見。吉藏建立二諦之概念是受到其先驅者如龍樹及法朗之影響（法朗為吉藏之老師）。

(3)二諦與三論宗之關係非常密切，尤其二諦扮演著重要的角色。

(4)若想擁有智慧，先知道二諦是非常重要的。吉藏從世間及出世間立場來解釋二諦之利益。然而，與世間相比，其多從出世間角度來強調二諦之利益。雖然如此，吉藏也嘗試站在世間立場來說明二諦之重要及利益。

**關鍵詞：**1.二諦 2.有與無 3.境 4.智（慧） 5.原理 6.斷與常