The Buddha’s “Middle Way” as a Vehicle of Culture

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Ever since human beings began to consciously examine the nature of experience, they seem to have become uncomfortable with the felt plurality, variety, multiplicity, diversity or difference, for they realized that such experiences, even while possessing pragmatic value, more often led to some sort of conflict within and without. Thus the belief in a variety of gods served a useful function in certain contexts, but, somehow it also led to conflict or strife. The farmer was satisfied with the worship of the deity in the rain-cloud (*parjanya*), as it provided him with the water he needed to irrigate his land. His wife found consolation in the god of fire (*agni*), for with his help she could get the dinner on to the table. However, the self-same god of rain, who was beneficial to the farmer, occasionally turns out to be an evil force that destroys his harvest of grain by flooding the field. The fire-god, instead of being helpful in getting the food prepared, may spell disaster by burning down the house. Are they different gods or does the same god act differently? Do they represent different realities independent of the experiences and conceptualizations of the farmer and his wife, or are they different conceptualizations on their part, whereas the realities of rain and fire remain the same?

The above questions pertain to the behavior of physical phenomena or our understanding about them. The problem is more complicated when we consider social, political or moral conventions. Stealing a sheep is a crime in one context and not so in another. If it were to be an act motivated by greed and no other reason, it would be condemned as a crime. If it is an act on the part of a father who has no other way of feeding his starving son and the sheep belonged to a rich landlord who amassed his wealth through “unrighteous” means, it is not normally recognized as a crime. It may even be considered the best social norm.

Conflicts that arise as a result of such plurality or multiplicity, whether
they be of events — physical, social, political or moral — or of our understanding of such events, have attracted the attention of the greatest thinkers in human history. Even during the so-called primitive stages of philosophical thinking or during modern times when there is no scarcity of elaborately argued systems, the problems seem to have remained the same, and surprisingly the solutions too have not shown a remarkable improvement.

Going back to the earliest period of philosophical speculations in India, one can discover a gradually emerging dissatisfaction with the experienced plurality or multiplicity and an enthusiastic search for unity as a way of achieving harmony. Even the "wise ones" were accused of indulging in plurality when reality is simply "one" (ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti).¹ There seems to be little doubt that this assertion of "one" or unity is prompted by a desire to eliminate the belief in plurality as well as its apparent consequences: conflict and strife. Unity of experience was looked upon as a foundation for establishing harmony. This search for unity of experience gave rise to the fundamental teachings of the Brahmanical schools, succinctly stated in a passage in the ʿBrhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad² and elaborated in great detail in the Hindu religious classic, the Bhagavadgītā. The ʿBrhadāraṇyaka passage begins thus:

In the beginning, this (world) was only the self (ātmān) in the shape of a person. Looking around he saw nothing else than the self. He first said: "I am." Therefore, arose the name of I. Therefore, even to this day when one is addressed he says that "This is I" and then speaks whatever other name he may have.

This is the Brahmanical response to the skepticism that pervaded the Indian philosophical atmosphere. Here is Descartes and Kant combined. Presenting himself as a previous incarnation of Descartes, and seeking for epistemological certainty, the Upanisadic thinker arrives at an indubitable and absolute truth:

"I am" (aham asmi).

In addition, this statement, though brief, contains all the implications of the "transcendental unity of apperception" formulated with such great enthusiasm by Kant. Neither experience nor conceptualization can take place without this ultimate apperception. Looking around the ātmān saw nothing else than ātmān. This means that the perception of self precedes every other perception, which the Upanisadic thinker is going to explain

¹Rg-veda 1.164.46.
²Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.1–5.
next. Not only perception, but also any statement about that perception will have to be prefixed with the statement “I” (aham). In other words, conscious experience as well as conscious description of experience make no sense at all unless it is preceded by the “transcendental unity of apperception” or “consciousness of self.” It is not the “empirical apperception” recognized by Kant, for this latter is the force or act of the variable inner sense. The “I” (aham) is the “self” (atman) that is permanent and eternal. Every other experience that takes place is united by that apperception.

The existential predicament is then examined, presenting it as a universal phenomenon. Fear and trembling grips him. Angst overwhelms him. He says:

He was afraid. Therefore, one who is alone is afraid. This one thought to himself, “Since there is nothing else than myself, of what am I afraid?” Thereupon his fear passed away, for, of what should he have been afraid? Assuredly, it is from a second that fear arises.

Having rationalized about fear and anxiety as a universal truth, the Upanisadic thinker proceeds to explain the variety and multiplicity in the world. He thus arrives at the psychological springs of creativity.

He had no delight. Therefore, he who is alone has no delight. He desired a second. He became as large as a man and woman in close embrace. He caused that self to fall into two parts. From that arose husband and wife.... He became united with her. From that human beings were produced.

Taking a cue from the earliest Vedic speculations where “desire” (kāma) was presented as the connecting link between the non-existent (asat) and the existent (sat), the Upanisadic thinker is here taking the “great leap” (Schopenhauer) in making that desire the cause of the evolution of the world-process. In order to do so, he had to relate the first of creation (namely, man and woman) to everything in nature. This he proceeds to achieve next.

She thought: “How can he unite with me after having produced me from himself? Well, let me hide myself.” She became a cow, the other became a bull and was united with her and from that cows were born.

“The Fall” also thus becomes the cause of the evolution of variety in the world. Four more paragraphs are devoted to an explanation of how everything in the world came to be. Underlying that variety is the ultimately indubitable truth, the self (ātman). This is essentialism in its absolute form.

³ Rg-veda 1.129.
It is interesting to note that even though the intention here is to explain the experience of plurality, the description continues to be couched in a language of duality—man/woman, bull/cow, etc. As such, plurality is first reduced to duality—negative and positive, *yin* and *yang*—but prior to all that is the unifying force which is the transcendental unity of apperception.

With this description, the problem relating to the diversity in the objective or physical world is settled by relying upon the unity of experience provided by the consciousness of the self. The attention of the Upanisadic thinker is then focused on the diversity or variety in human conventions—social, political as well as moral. Even though the unity of experience remains the same transcendental unity of apperception, because the present discussion involves values, the Upanisadic thinker utilizes a value-laden term—*brahma* (=*ātman*)—to refer to that apperception. The passage reads thus:

Verily, in the beginning, this world was *brahma*, one only. Being one he was not developed. He created a still superior form, the *kṣatra*, even those who are *kṣatra* among the gods: Indra, Varuna, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya, Yama, Mṛtyu, Isana. Therefore, at the *rājasūya* ceremony, the *brahman* sits below the *kṣatriya*. Upon *kṣatra* alone does he confer this honor. This same thing, namely, the *brahma*, is the source of the *kṣatra*. Therefore, even if the king attains supremacy, he rests finally upon *brahma* as his own source. Whosoever injures him [i.e., *brahman*] he attacks his own source. He fares worse in proportion as he injures one who is better. He was not yet developed. He created still a further form, *dharma*. This is the power of the *kṣatriya* class, namely, law. Therefore, there is nothing superior than law. So a weak man controls a stronger man by law, just as if by a king. Verily, that which is law is truth (*sautya*). Therefore, they say of a man who speaks the truth: “He speaks the law,” or of a man who speaks the law: “He speaks the truth.” Verily, both are the same.*

Unlike the previous passage explaining the reality of *ātman* which is value-free, this latter statement describing *brahman* is value-laden, especially with the use of terms like “superior” (*sreyas*). The unity of *ātman* and *brahman* is thus a marriage between ontology and axiology based upon the transcendental unity of apperception.

The question still remains as to the nature of *brahman* that is identified with *ātman*, which is pure consciousness of self. It could not be anything different from *ātman*. Otherwise, there would be duality. The above passage concludes with the statement that the best embodiment of *brahman* is *dharma*. The conception of *dharma* identified with *ātman* becomes the

*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.11–14.
sva-dharma, and this is the conception of "duty" relating to the fourfold caste-system advocated in the Bhāgavadgītā. Duty is contrasted with consideration of consequences, for one who performs an action through a sense of duty should not think of the consequences of his action at any moment. This notion of duty can be located in the consciousness of self if it were to be understood as "conscience."

Thus, even though presented in a very brief and non-discursive manner, the identity of ātman and brahman represents a unity of "consciousness of self" and "conscience," a sort of pre-established harmony between experience and moral life. It embodies the spirit of the Kantian attempt to relate the "starry heavens above" and the "moral law within." It seems as if the unrelenting criticism of this philosophical standpoint by the Buddha compelled the Brahmanical thinkers to stretch this idea to its logical conclusion by recognizing an author of the pre-established harmony. This is achieved in the Bhāgavadgītā.

When the Brahmanical tradition attempted to explain the unity of experience in terms of consciousness of self, the first reaction to it came from the Materialists who denied such a self and explained the unity of experience on the basis of a substantial object. For them, it is the nature (svabhāva) of material phenomena (bhūtāni) that is permanent and eternal which can provide the necessary foundation for the unity of experience. As such, neither "consciousness of self" nor "conscience" has any reality. Discourse on ātman and brahman (= dharma) turns out to be mere foolish talk. Extreme self-indulgence is the only reasonable norm of life.

The Brahmanical as well as the Materialist attempts to unify experience thus led to two conflicting theories, one upholding a transcendental "consciousness of self" (ātman), the other recognizing the reality of a physical law of nature (svabhāva). The conflicts were not eliminated by the elimination of plurality or multiplicity. The metaphysics they generated led to further conflict. The stage was thus made ready for a new approach and a radically new way of thinking. This new approach could not be a synthesis of the old. In fact, such an experiment on the part of the leader of Jainism, Vardhamāna Mahāvira, led to an equally complicated philosophy and a life of self-mortification. The new approach presented by Siddhārtha Gautama was a "middle way" (madhyamā pratipat) that avoids both extremes.

Siddhārtha's approach is the same as that adopted centuries later in Western philosophy by William James. While the mathematician and

physicist Kant was claiming a “Copernican revolution” in epistemology by admitting a “transcendental unity of apperception” or consciousness of self as the ultimate ground of all empirical perception and conception, the psychologist, James, was calling it a “psychologist’s fallacy.” James’ statement deserves to be quoted in full.

The great snare of the psychologist is the confusion of his own standpoint with that of the mental fact about which he is making his report. I shall hereafter call this the “psychologist’s fallacy” par excellence. For some of the mischief, here too, language is to blame. The psychologist... stands outside of his mental state he speaks of. Both itself and its object are objects for him. Now when it is a cognitive state (percept, thought, concept, etc.), he ordinarily has no other way of naming it than as the thought, percept, etc., of that object. He himself, meanwhile, knowing the self-same object in his way, gets easily led to suppose that the thought, which is of it, knows it in the same way in which he knows it, although it is far from being the case. The most fictitious puzzles have been introduced into our science by this means. The so-called question of presentative or representative perception, of whether an object present to the thought that thinks it by a counterfeit image of itself, or directly without any intervening image at all; the question of nominalism and conceptualism, of the shape in which things are present when only a general notion of them is before the mind; are comparatively easy questions when once the psychologist’s fallacy is eliminated from their treatment...

James believed that this psychologist’s fallacy plays havoc among philosophers, especially those who hold that the reflective consciousness of the self is essential to the cognitive function of thought. The view that a thought, in order to know a thing at all, must expressly distinguish between the thing and its own self, is considered by James as a “perfectly wanton assumption and not the faintest shadow of reason exists for supposing it true.” In a footnote he identifies Kant as the originator of this view. If our comparison of Kant’s theory of “transcendental unity of apperception” with the conception of ātman in the Upanisads is valid, then Siddhārtha’s criticism of the Upanisadic view could be comparable to the above criticism of James. James’ refutation of Kant’s theory is embodied in his encyclopaedic work, The Principles of Psychology, and especially in its most original chapter on “The Stream of Thought.” In the following pages, we propose to show how almost 2500 years before James, Siddhārtha Gautama or the Buddha presented a similar refutation of the Upanisadic “transcendental unity of apperception” and advocated a “middle way” in philosophy that could accommodate plurality, multiplicity,


*Ibid., 1.274.*
etc., as part of experience and still achieve a sense of harmony in relation to human thought without falling into conflict. As in the case of James, this required a detailed and careful examination of human psychology, especially the psychology of perception. As a result, in Buddhism, we come across the first ever detailed treatment of human psychology as well as an explanation of human conceptions and conventions and a way of avoiding any conflict and strife resulting from a diversity of such conceptions and conventions.

**The Buddha's Conception of a Person**

With the Upanisadic teachings in the background, questions such as "Does a permanent and eternal self exist?"8 or "Why are there conflicting views in the world?"9 have often been raised by the disciples of the Buddha, and almost always the Buddha resorted to an analysis of the process of perception in answering their questions. That explanation of the process of perception pre-supposed the conception of person explained in terms of five factors (pañca-khandha 五陰). The five factors are

1. material form (rūpa 形),
2. feeling or sensation (vedanā 感),
3. perception (saññā 知),
4. dispositions (sankhāra 當), and
5. consciousness (viññāna 意).

The first represents the body with which a person is identified. While the Buddha sometimes spoke of psychological states or states of meditation where the notion of "materiality" is absent (arūpa 闍色) he did not speak of human beings who are without identifiable physical bodies. Feeling and perception are normal activities of experience and are occurrences that take place in the human person so long as his sense faculties are functional. While the body is a necessary condition for the identification of a person, the dispositions provide the sufficient condition. Indeed, for

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10 These represent the five factors on to which a human grasps as his personality, M 1.299; Chung 58.1 (Taisho 1.788a), even though they are dependently arisen, M 1.191; Chung 7.2 (Taisho 1.467a).
the Buddha, the dispositions are more important because they contribute to the individuation of the personality and also serve as the conditions for his bondage or freedom. This will be explained later. Of course, neither feeling nor perception nor dispositions can function unless the person is conscious. The function of being conscious is consciousness (viññātīti viññānaṃ),

and this consciousness, associated with the other factors, represents an uninterrupted flux. It has nothing to do with the "consciousness of self." Taken in itself, it is referred to as "stream of consciousness" (viññāna-sota, translated into Chinese as jiānjiā), and taken along with the dispositions (sañkhāra 俱), it is called "becoming" (bhava 有), and this latter is also looked upon as a "stream of becoming" (bhava-sota).

James' "stream of consciousness, thought or experience" is the only explanation in Western psychology that can be fruitfully compared with the Buddha's view of conscious life.

The Psychology of Perception

With this conception of a personality in the background, the Buddha proceeds to explain every individual act of sense experience with a statement that has become the subject of many detailed studies. It reads thus:

Depending upon the visual organ and visible form arises visual consciousness. The coming together of these three is contact. Depending upon contact is feeling. What one feels, one perceives. What one perceives, one reflects about. What one reflects about, one becomes obsessed with. Because of such obsession, a person comes to be assailed by obsessed percepts and concepts in regard to objects cognizable by the visual organ, belonging to the past, the future and the present. [This is repeated with regard to the other auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and mental consciousness.]

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14 S 4.128; Tsa A-han Ching (abbreviated Tsa) 13.5 (Taisho 2.88b).

15 M 1.111–112; Chung 28.3 (Taisho 1.604b).
The implications of this passage are many and significant for all aspects of philosophical discourse, for epistemology, ontology as well as axiology. These may be summed up as follows:

(1) When the Buddha remarked that “depending upon the visual organ and visible form arises visual consciousness,” he was not saying that consciousness is a by-product of material phenomena, nor was he accepting a tabula rasa upon which external objects leave their impressions. The language of “dependence” should eliminate the former interpretation, and the fact that this visual consciousness occurs in a personality or the stream of becoming defined in terms of the five aggregates should rule out the latter assumption.

The fact that consciousness is part of the personality that is cognizing the object presented through the senses would mean that this cognitive activity will be dominated by the dispositional tendencies associated with consciousness. These dispositions determine the interests as well as the cognitive capacity of the individual, without which the object presented to the senses could not be cognized and understood. The Buddha’s refusal to admit “omniscience” as part of human knowledge makes these interests and capacities extremely important in dealing with experience, the “big blooming buzzing confusion” of sensory input. However, they do not function as transcendental categories of understanding, but continue to change with experience.

(2) The coming together (saṅgati) of sense, object of sense and consciousness is described as contact. This “coming together” was not understood as a pre-established harmony, for if it were pre-established it should occur whatever the circumstances are. The Buddha is not recognizing such a pre-established harmony, for he claims that this contact would take place if and only if the sense organ is not impaired, the object has come into focus, and that proper attention is available. Then and then only can there be the arising of consciousness. However, if someone were to question him as to why the visual organ cannot be unified or harmonized with sound or the auditory organ with color, etc. his answer could be that these are “dependently arisen” and he would avoid any statement regarding absolute origins or pre-established harmony.

When metaphysical theories emerged in Buddhism as a result of the speculations of the Sarvāstivādins and the Sautrāntikas, who analysed experience into discrete momentary existences, the idea of “coming together” could not work, unless the notion of harmony (sāmagri) was intro-

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16 M 1.482.
17 Ibid., 1.190; Chung 7.2 (Taisho 1.467a).
duced into the discussion. In that context, “harmony” became a characteristic or attribute of a substance or a discrete character-less entity. Therefore, we find Nāgārjuna devoting one whole chapter of his treatise to a criticism of the metaphysical implications of this theory of harmony (Chapter XX). Such a theory of harmony (or pre-established harmony) was not necessary when phenomena are explained in terms of “dependence” (pratītyasamutpāda).

(3) “Depending upon contact arises feeling.” Feeling is threefold: pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. Here again, feeling is not taking place in a vacuum but in a personality consisting of dispositions, interests and capacities. Therefore, for the Buddha, this is an extremely important stage in the process of perception. In an act of cognition, feeling becomes an inevitable result of contact. Thus, whether it is in an ordinary unenlightened person or in one who has attained freedom (nibbāna), feelings are generated as a result of contact. An emotive element is present in all cognition, whether it is of one in bondage or of one who is freed. However, the response to that feeling will be determined mostly by the interests and capacities of that individual. This is the time when the empirical self consisting of the flux of consciousness can “solidify” into a “pure Ego,” thus preparing the stage for the appearance of the “psychologist’s fallacy.” The Buddha seems to have realized that with the “appeasement of dispositions” (saṅkhāra-samatha), which is a synonym for freedom (nibbāna), one can prevent such solidification. It must be noted that the Buddha did not speak of the elimination of dispositions in the case of a living person, whether he is bound or freed, for that would mean the elimination of the only means by which human beings can deal with the “sensible muchness.” Furthermore, the complete elimination of dispositions (saṅkhārakkhaya) occurs only at the time an enlightened one passes away (parinibbāna) and is not reborn.

The appeasement of dispositions while a person is still alive was looked upon as a means of avoiding both “I-making” (ahaṁkāra), which is egoism, and self-destruction, which is suicide. Both are extremes. The Buddha’s doctrine of no-self (anatta) pertaining to the individual finds justification by this analysis of the process of perception. In fact, it seems to be a complete reversal of the position adopted in the Upaniṣads as well as

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19 See the discussion of “solidification” and “integration” in James’ Psychology II.79.
20 M 1.136, 167, 436; S 1.136, 3.133, 5.226, etc.
21 Dhammapada, ed. V. Fausboll (London: Luzac, 1900), verse 383.
in Kant. Whatever consciousness of self there is, is a product of the cognitive process, and not its pre-condition.

The solidification of the empirical ego into a “pure Ego” and the emergence of the “psychologist’s fallacy” is graphically presented by the Buddha when he changed the language of dependence to one of agency. Thus, instead of saying “Dependent upon feeling arises perception,” he maintained that “What one feels, one perceives.” (Note James’ remark that language is partly responsible for the psychologist’s fallacy.)

This stream of consciousness consisting of contact, thought, volition, emotion, perception as well as conception, with “flights as well as perchings,” is thus often interrupted by the “consciousness of self.” These constant interruptions leave unhealthy vibrations both in the sphere of knowledge and in moral life.

(4) The psychologist, like any other unenlightened person, who is fooled into assuming an ultimately real agent because of his unrestrained dispositions, will now proceed to break up the flux of experience into discrete units and begin to look for ultimately real objects with which he could identify his “perchings.” The fringes or the flights are all lost in the process. Absolute identity and absolute difference go hand in hand, providing a rich harvest of metaphysical speculations, all contributing to obsession (papānca) of one form or another. The ultimate result is conflict and strife.

The Buddha devoted several discourses, included in one of the earliest portions of the canonical texts, to an explanation of the cause of conflict and strife in the world. He attributed such conflict and strife to a wrong understanding of the psychology of perception (sāññā).

The passage explaining the process of perception discussed above clearly identifies two major problems that emerge in an understanding of the flux of experience. The first is the tendency to look for something in the flux or stream of experience which could be identified with the subject. The second is the tendency to look for something that could be identified with the object. While this curiosity continues, the stream itself flows along with percepts, fluctuating according to interests and emotions, constantly substituted by or translated into concepts. Unfortunately, the search for something, while leading up to difficult metaphysical issues relating to the perception of the subject as well as the object, also stands in the way of understanding the nature and function of concepts.

22. Ibid., 874, 886.
The translation of percepts into concepts is an extremely important and necessary part of human intellectual activity. As James remarked: “The intellectual life of man consists almost wholly in his substituting a conceptual order for the perceptual order in which his experience originally comes.” Without this activity, man would be like a “sessile sea-anemone on its rocks,” instead of being a university professor flying all the way to Hong Kong to discuss with his colleagues what harmony and strife could mean.

However, the metaphysical search for something in experience has rendered this conceptual order either completely useless or absolutely essential as a means of penetrating into that hidden mystery. For the Buddha, both are extremes and the function of concepts in experience need not be destroyed or exaggerated by this search for something. A person who has abandoned such a pursuit is called akiñcana, “one who is not looking for ‘something’ (kiñci, Sk. kimci),” and, therefore, takes things as “they have come to be” (yathābhūtām).

To avoid the search for something (kiñci), for some ultimate reality, is not an easy task. After all the experiments he carried out for almost six years following the contemplative tradition in India, the Buddha could not discover any mysterious reality. “Non-substantiality is hard to perceive,” he remarked. The appeasement of dispositions by eliminating lust (rāga) and hatred (dosa) was, for him, the sure way to overcome this confusion (moha). The one who has abandoned the search for something hidden (akiñcana) is also referred to as “a person without grasping.”

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25 Ibid., p. 39.

26 The following incident should help to clarify the extent to which this search for something (hidden) has become an almost inevitable part of human thinking. A professor who has published several books on metaphysics has a problem starting his automobile which is replete with all the modern electronic equipment. An engineer passing by takes a look at it and suggests the replacement of the fuel-injecting mechanism, which was replaced only a few months before. The depressed professor seeks the help of one of his colleagues, who has devoted some of his time to the reading of William James’ pragmatism and has published a few articles on the subject. Even though he is not a trained engineer, this pragmatist realizes that if the fuel-injecting mechanism is new and is still not functioning, the problem could be that no electric current is passing on to this mechanism for it to work. He checks the fuse-box and discovers a burnt up fuse which is immediately replaced. When, on the second attempt, the pragmatist is able to start the engine, the startled professor’s immediate response is: “Is that all?”

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(anādana), who has “overcome skepticism” (tiṇṇakukkucca) and who is “without cavil” (akathāṁkathā).

In the eyes of the substantialist, the Buddha’s conception of freedom (nibbāna, nirvāna 涅槃) represents a hidden something, a transcendent ultimate reality that could be perceived by the development of a special non-sensuous intuition. For the Buddha, it was simply the “absence of constraint;” the most potent of these constraints being the obsessions relating to percepts and concepts (pāpanca-saṅā-saṅkhā) which, as explained earlier, is the result of assuming a transcendent unity of apperception or recognition of a cogito (māntō asmi, “thinker, I am”). Therefore, the Buddha looked upon this obsession as the cause of strife. With the renunciation of the belief in a “transcendental unity of apperception” and of the search for something, the generator of strife and conflict (kalaha, viggaha) is also eliminated. Freedom turns out to be a life of harmony, not a permanent and eternal state beyond sensory experience and conception.

The harmony so achieved is in regard to one’s experience of the subjective and objective phenomena. The same sort of harmony can be achieved in relation to social, political as well as moral experience. For the Buddha, the conception of man or of an object is not radically different from a social convention, a political institution or a moral edict. So long as one does not go in search of something, these concepts function and produce consequences without causing disharmony. Only when they are considered to be ultimate and inviolable do they give rise to conflict and strife. All of them are “mere conventions” (vohāra-matta, Sk. vyavahāra-mātra). The description of them as “mere conventions” does not mean they are not part of experience; only that they are not ultimate realities.

Undoubtedly, all these conventions or conceptions produce fruits or consequences (artha 果). However, this epistemological criterion of pragmatism needs to be supplemented or augmented by a moral criterion. For example, there have been and are a variety of concepts of “personhood” that have continued to dominate human thinking from the earliest period in spite of the so-called advancement of human knowledge. There are those who believe that a human person is a bundle of material elements with an epi-phenomenon called mind or consciousness. Some others assume that a person is a spiritual entity, permanent and eternal.

28 Sn 620, 1094.
29 M 1.108; Chung 28.3 (Taisho 1.603a), etc.
30 Sn 916.
31 S 1.14–15; Tsu 22.6–7 (Taisho 2.154b–c).
Still others recognize him as a social entity. Such concepts have worked and have produced consequences. However, one needs to take into consideration not only the fact that these work, but also how they work.

The Buddha realized that a materialistic conception of a person is not only nihilistic (n’attī) but also generally hedonistic. Similarly, a spiritualistic conception is more often eternalistic (attī) and practically self-denying or self-destructive. He discovered that the conception of a person as one who is “dependently arisen” (paticcasamuppāna) avoids both extremes and their unfortunate consequences. If the person were to be dependently arisen, the conditions that are involved should be given serious consideration. If a person were to be placed in a context, the person as well as the context are equally important in deciding the pragmatic value of the conception. If the conception is such that it contributes to the happiness of the person as well as the society, that should serve as the most significant criterion. The theory of dependence he proposed took into account continuity as well as change in a person as well as in society. If there were to be no ultimate criterion, then one should be in a position to modify the conception depending upon the context. This idea is clearly expressed by the Buddha in one of his oft-quoted statements: “Monks, even the good things have to be relinquished, let alone the bad ones” (Dhammā pi bhikkhave pahātabbā pageva adhhammā). This statement is generally taken to imply the Buddha’s recognition of an ultimate reality transcending both good and bad. That would be to ignore all the epistemological and ontological speculations of the Buddha. The real implication of the passage may become clear if it were to be compared with a statement by William James:

But this world of ours is made on an entirely different pattern, and the casuistic question here is most tragically practical. The actually possible in this world is vastly narrower than all that is demanded; and there is always a pinch between the ideal and the actual which can only be got through by leaving part of the ideal behind.

Leaving part of the ideal behind does not mean the complete abandoning of all moral principles. On the contrary, it involves the non-grasping of a moral principle, that is, not taking it as an absolute law. For this

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32 N’attī at S 2.17; Ts 12.19 (Taisho 2.85c) can be correlated with kāmasukhallikānuyoga at S 5.421 (cf. Taisho No. 109).
33 Attī at S 2.17 can be correlated with attakilamathānuyoga at S 5.421.
reason, the conception presented by both the Buddha and James avoids the extremes of chaotic indeterminism and absolute determinism.

The Buddha’s method of treating the problem of conflict and harmony is summed up in a discourse called “The Analysis of Harmony” (Aranavibhaṅga-sutta). This discourse contains a passage where the Buddha explains how a wrong attitude toward language leads to conflict and strife (rāṇa), whereas the right attitude leads to harmony or absence of strife (arana). The passage reads thus:

When it is said: “One should not solidify the dialect of a country nor transgress recognized parlance,” in reference to what is it said? What, monks, is solidification of the dialect of a country, and what is the transgression of recognized parlance? In this case, monks, in different countries they perceive the same object as pāṭī, as patta, as viṭṭha, as sarāva, as ḍhārāpa, as pona or as piśīla. [These are dialectical variants for the term “bowl.”] Thus, when they, in different countries, perceive it as such and such, a person obstinately grasping and solidifying such and such, says: “This alone is true; all else is false.” This, monks, is the solidification of the dialect of a country and transgression of recognized parlance. What, monks, is the non-solidification of the dialect of a country and the non-transgression of recognized parlance? In this case, monks, in different countries, they perceive the same object as pāṭī, as patta, as viṭṭha, as sarāva, as ḍhārāpa, as pona or as piśīla. Thus they perceive it in different countries as such and such. “These noble ones, indeed, utilize it for this purpose,” and so saying he uses them without grasping. This, monks, is the non-solidification of the dialect of a country and the non-transgression of recognized parlance.

The two terms, “solidification” (abhinivesa, lit. “entering into,” “abiding,” “settling down,” etc.) and “transgression” (atisāra), explain the process by which language becomes a cause of conflict and strife. The first represents an attempt to penetrate into a concept, looking for an ultimate reality, or to “freeze” a concept and assume that it corresponds to a reality originating independently of all perceptual particulars that are in constant flux. “Such concepts as God, perfection, eternity, infinity, immutability, identity, absolute beauty, truth, justice, necessity, freedom, duty, worth, etc. and the part they play in our mind, are, as it was supposed, impossible to explain as results of practical experience.” Such a pursuit could end up with an arbitrary discovery of the validity of one concept and the rejection of all others as false.

The second represents an effort to abandon all concepts as being useless in the matter of understanding reality. This would mean going beyond

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36 M 3.230–237; Chung 43.5 (Taisho 1.701b–703c).
37 M 3.234 (emphasis added).
38 James, Some Problems of Philosophy, p. 35.
even the flux of experience looking for an ultimate reality. In order to avoid conflict and strife that arise as a result of such perspectives, the Buddha was suggesting a strongly pragmatic method of dealing with concepts and language.

Finally, in a discourse called "The Fundamental Mode" (Mūlapariyāyasutta) dealing with the fundamental mode of all phenomena (sabba-dhamma-mūla-pariyāya), the first discourse in one of the most philosophical parts of the canon, the Majjhima-nikāya, the Buddha refers to a variety of concepts such as:

- "earth, water, fire, air" [representing various physical elements];
- "beings, deities, Prajāpati, Brahīmā, the Radiant Ones, the Lustrous Ones, the Vehapphala (brahmās), the Overlord" [signifying ordinary human beings as well as those beings who have reached exalted and powerful status as a result of being virtuous];
- "the realm of infinite space, of infinite consciousness, of nothingness, of neither-perception-nor-non-perception" [representing different stages of meditation where consciousness is present in some form or other];
- "the seen, the heard, the reflected, the cognized" [signifying perceptual activities of all sorts];
- "unity, diversity, universality" [denoting abstract concepts]; and
- "freedom" (nibbāna).

Interestingly, he makes no discrimination with regard to any of these concepts, perceiving one as an ultimate reality over and above the others, but refers to three different ways in which these concepts are perceived, (1) by the ordinary unenlightened person, (2) by one who is on his way to enlightenment, and (3) by the enlightened one and his enlightened disciples. The first type of person perceives (sañjānātī) each one of the objects represented by the above concepts. He develops "consciousness of self" (maññātī) and proceeds to "own" the objects perceived (mamei maññātī) and takes delight in them. The second also perceives each one of the objects represented by the concepts, but tries not to develop such a consciousness of self or own them or take delight in them. The third too perceives the objects similarly represented by concepts and does not develop such consciousness nor claim them to be his own nor take delight in them. As such he is free from conflict and strife.

What is emphasized here is freedom from constraints caused by ideas or, in a broad sense, ideological constraints. Ignoring this most impor-

39 M 1.1–6; Chung 26.4 (Taisho 1.596a–b). Also Taisho 1.851a–b.
tant aspect of freedom (nirvāṇa), and highlighting the renunciation of the pleasures of sense, Buddhism has been described as an other-worldly ascetic religion. The one who has attained enlightenment and freedom is generally depicted as a “cold” individual, with no interests and emotions, and not caring for anything in this world of experience. The eradication of the notion of a pure Ego or “the consciousness of self” and the abandoning of unrestrained passions by the development of an attitude of dispassion does not mean the absence of compassion for oneself as well as others. It should be evident from the above discussion that the overcoming of obsession relating to perception and conception represents the highest form of freedom in Buddhism. If a mere abandoning of pleasures of sense constitutes freedom, Siddhartha could have been enlightened and freed on the day he left home or at any time during the next six years when he was practising the worst forms of self-mortification. That did not happen. He achieved moral and spiritual perfection, not by perceiving ultimate realities and adopting categorical imperatives but by abandoning substantialist metaphysics and renouncing absolute moral codes, stagnant social conventions and dogmatic thinking. All the evidence seem to indicate that he was a strong advocate of a pragmatic philosophy that takes into account human interests and emotions and lays down a “middle way” in satisfying them without running into conflict and strife. While recognizing the fruits (artha 果) of everyday life, the Buddha was most concerned with the ultimate fruit (paramārtha 布義/義), i.e., the fruit of the moral life defined as the happiness of oneself as well as others.40 Such a life of harmony among people could provide a strong foundation for cultural development rather than a life of “possessive individualism” that generates conflict and suffering.

Let us first assume that this is the philosophy of life that came to be introduced into China along with the introduction of Buddhism. For it to become popular among the Chinese it should be compatible with some of the basic ideas accepted in traditional Chinese thought and not contradict that tradition totally. If that were the case, the problem that has haunted modern historical studies—the problem as to how an alien, world-denying, ascetic religion could become a powerful force that influenced a culture and civilization like that of the T’ang dynasty—would be no more than a pseudo-problem. Yet, there is room for someone to argue that this is not the Buddhism that influenced the Chinese tradition in a profound way. It would be argued that, while the Buddha’s original discourses were all made available to the Chinese scholars in their language,

40 D 3.232; A 2.205.
the form of Buddhism that got rooted in China is Mahāyāna, especially those of Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu. This is yet another myth that needs to be demolished before one can really understand the character and contribution of Buddhism to Chinese thought.

There is no doubt that Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakārikā, translated into Chinese as Chung-lun 中論, and Vasubandhu’s Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi, part of which (namely, the Trimsikā) translated into Chinese by Hsüan Tsang 玄奘 as Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun 成唯識論, molded Chinese Buddhism before it became a considerable force in China.

In my most recent studies of Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, I have provided sufficient evidence to prove that both these philosophers were attempting to restore the original teachings of the Buddha as embodied in the Pali Nikayas and the Chinese Āgamas in two different ways. Nāgārjuna was making an effort to get rid of substantialist metaphysics by adopting a pragmatic standpoint and Vasubandhu was endeavoring to provide an epistemological basis for that pragmatism. As such, they represent two complementary aspects of the Buddha’s teachings that came to be introduced into China. There is every reason to believe that the fundamental teachings of the Buddha, presented in more concise form by Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, helped to resolve some of the major philosophical problems in the Chinese tradition such that it became a phenomenal success in that land.

A brief history of the Buddhist philosophical tradition after the Buddha leading to the scholarly activities of Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, even if it were to interrupt the present discussion, may be helpful in understanding why Buddhism became attractive to the Chinese elite, especially the Confucian philosophers.

Buddhism as a non-substantialist and pragmatic philosophy emerging in the context of a rigid and substantialist Brahmanical tradition, continued to be influenced by that tradition. Within a period of two and half centuries, substantialist speculations began to appear in Buddhism. The Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika schools are embodiments of such specula-

41 Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986) includes a new translation and detailed annotation of each one of the verses of the Mūlamadhyamakārikā indicating the theories criticized by Nāgārjuna and identifying the source material he utilized in criticizing such theories.

The former recognized ultimately real elements (*dharma*) possessing self-nature (*svabhāva*), and the latter introduced the notion of a mysterious person (*pudgala*), neither identical with nor different from the five aggregates. In addition, the conception of *buddha* as a transcendent ultimate reality began to emerge in the context of popular Buddhism, thus giving rise to ideological conflicts and creating sectarianism. The first restoration of the Buddha’s teachings, rejecting the metaphysics of the Sarvāstivādins and the Sautrāntikas as well as the emerging transcendentalism of Māhāyana, was achieved by Moggaliputta-tissa. This restoration served as the foundation on which the Indian emperor, Asoka, unified the Buddhist order and propagated Buddhism outside India. By the time of Buddhaghosa (sixth century A.D.), Moggaliputta-tissa was made out to be a Theravādin.

In spite of Moggaliputta-tissa, the Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika metaphysics as well as Mahāyāna transcendentalism continued to flourish in India, under the influence of if not with the support of the Brahmanical systems. The second century A.D. witnessed the second attempt to restore the non-substantivist teachings of the Buddha. The person responsible for this restoration was Nāgārjuna, whose primary philosophical text, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, is a digest of the Buddha’s discourses (available in Pali and Chinese). Twenty-five out of twenty-seven chapters of his treatise are devoted to the negation of substantivist metaphysics relating to concepts of things (*dharma*) and persons (*pudgala*). In order to do so, he depended heavily upon the negation of a cogito or “the consciousness of self” (*svatmānāṃ darśanam*), to which he devoted an entire chapter (III). He profusely utilized the abstract conception of “emptiness” (*śunyatā*) along with its concrete identification in “the empty” (*śunya*). This negation through emptiness was not a negation of either perceptual experience or conceptual thinking. It was confined primarily to the negation of substance (*svabhāva*). Without involving himself in any substantivist metaphysics, Nāgārjuna demonstrated how thoughts (*kalpanā*), concepts (*prajñāpti*) and conventions (*saṃśāra, vyavahāra*) can be explained in terms of “dependent arising” (*pratīyā-samutpāda*), i.e., in terms of fruitfulness (*artha*). For him, as it was for the Buddha, concepts are neither absolutely real (i.e., stand for an ultimate reality) nor are they absolutely unreal (and, therefore, useless in any attempt to understand reality). They are dependent concepts (*upādāya prajñāpti*) and, as such, are contextual. Nagarjuna spoke of conventions (*vyavahāra*) of good and bad that produce corresponding fruits, or which are identified in terms of fruits (*artha*), as well as ultimate fruit (*paramārtha*) of moral life, namely, a life of freedom and harmony (*nirvāṇa*). However, the main thrust of his
treatise was in the direction of exposing the futility of substantialist
metaphysics. In spite of all the positive statements, his emphasis on the
negations created a wrong impression that he was a negativist, with no
positive assertions.

It was left to Vasubandhu to eliminate this negative impression about
the Buddha’s own teachings created by Nāgarjuna’s writings. After be­
ing involved in the Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika metaphysical specula­
tions during the early part of his life, Vasubandhu rose from his slumber
because of the influence of his older brother, Asanga. However, what
emerges from his primarily philosophical treatise, the Vijnāpti-mātratāsiddhī is not an absolute idealism, as is generally believed, but a supple­
mentation of Nāgarjuna’s anti-metaphysical speculations with a clear
and concise presentation of the psychology behind the pragmatist-
epistemology.

Vijnāpti-mātratāsiddhi consists of two parts: the Vimśatikā (22 verses)
and the Trimsīka (30 verses). The first part deals with the Sarvāstivāda
and Sautrāntika metaphysics. At the end of this part, he claims that he has established the idea of “mere concept” (vijñāpti-mātra). The second
part, Trimsīka, embodies the most concise explanation of the evolution
of consciousness (vijñāna-parināma), showing how the “stream of con­
sciousness” (alaya-vijnana), consisting of “contact, attention, feeling,
perception and volition,” comes to be transformed by “consciousness of
self” (manana = “transcendental unity of apperception”), not only
generating defilements such as “self-view, self-confusion, self-esteem and
self-love,” but also the false notions of ultimately real objects. For Vasu­
bandhu, the so-called ultimate reality is a “mere concept” (vijñāpti-
mātra).

In the forthcoming work (The Principles of Buddhist Psychology), I
propose to show that the Buddha’s view of “mere convention” (vohāra-
matta, Sk. vyavahāra-mātra), referred to above, is not different from the
ideas of “dependent concept” (upādāya prajñāpti) in Nāgarjuna and
“mere concept” (vijñāpti-mātra) in Vasubandhu. If Nāgarjuna had
devoted a little more space to the explanation of the psychology of percep­
tion, as the Buddha did, and thus provided an epistemological founda­
tion for his pragmatism, the work of Vasubandhu would have been
superfluous. Considering their methodologies on a broad perspective, the
relationship between Nāgarjuna and Vasubandhu can be compared with
the relationship between Peirce and James in Western philosophy.

Of these two complementary philosophies, it was Nāgarjuna’s thought
that became popular in China at the beginning, this being due to the ex­
cellent translation of Kumārajīva. What aspects of Nāgarjuna’s philosophy
appealed to the Chinese, especially the Confucian scholars who first embraced Buddhism? The interpretation of Nāgārjuna in terms of Taoist metaphysics had not taken place yet. At least Kumārajīva’s translation does not allow for such a metaphysical reading of Nāgārjuna.

However, considering the problems the early Confucian tradition was faced with, namely, the reconciliation of the social, political and moral conventions that differed from state to state, region to region, it seems that the ideas expressed by Nāgārjuna were most acceptable to it. The denial of an ultimate metaphysical reality, within and without, utilizing the conception of “emptiness”, and the recognition of the usefulness of thoughts, concepts, conventions, etc., that did not contribute to disharmony and instead led to the ultimate fruit of freedom, provided an excellent reinforcement for the Confucian doctrine of “rectification of names” (cheng ming 正名).

Among the more recent publications on Confucius’ thought, Herbert Fingarette’s Confucius, the Secular as Sacred, attempts to highlight the philosophical content, whereas most previous interpreters have been satisfied with describing Confucius as a moral reformer without much interest in epistemological issues. Yet, Fingarette begins his work with an analysis of li 理 and jen 仁, when Confucius himself would begin with cheng ming. Indeed, cheng ming is better understood as the central doctrine in Confucian philosophy, with jen providing the epistemological foundation and li, the social, political and moral praxis.

Unfortunately, this single most important doctrine has lost its significance as a result of a very substantialist interpretation by leading Chinese scholars such as Fung Yu-lan. Explaining Confucius’ statement regarding cheng ming: “Let the ruler be ruler, the minister minister; let the father be father, the son son,” Fung Yu-lan says:

Every name possesses its own definition which designates that which makes the thing to which the name is applied be that thing and no other. The name is that thing’s essence or concept. In the phrase, “let the ruler be ruler,” etc., the first word, “ruler,” refers to the ruler as a material actuality, while the second “ruler” is the name and concept of the ideal ruler.

If name and concept of ideal ruler represent the thing’s essence and this name is the same in all contexts, which would be the implication of the term “essence,” it cannot be rectified. Rectification of an ideal with such

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an essence is not a possibility, for if and when the occasion arises where "part of the ideal has to be left behind" (as Buddha and James pointed out), the essence becomes inessential. The problem is highlighted in the famous passage where Confucius speaks of "uprightness" (chih 直).

The Governor of She said to Confucius: "In our village there is a man named 'Straight Body.' When his father appropriated a sheep, he gave evidence against him." Confucius answered, "In our village those who are straight are quite different. Fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. Straightness is to be found in such behavior." 45

This latter example brings to light the philosophical problem that Confucius tried to explain through cheng ming. Here, he was certainly not looking for an ideal of or essence in uprightness. The philosophical issue raised by Confucius is not solved by simply assuming that there is an "eternal Tao," of which there are different manifestations. This is to utilize the pre-Confucian or post-Confucian metaphysics to obliterate an important philosophical idea that Confucius was trying to convey.

In presenting the idea of the rectification of names, Confucius did not have to resort to a detailed psychological analysis, as the Buddha had to do in explaining the nature and function of percepts (saññā), concepts (saṅkhā) and conventions (vohāra). For, there is no evidence that an elaborate theory of "consciousness of self" (a transcendent unity of apperception) was presented in pre-Confucian China, as happened to be the case in pre-Buddhist India. In other words, the water was not so muddied as it was in the philosophical atmosphere in India. This does not mean that a thinker of such fame as Confucius could have been completely oblivious to such problems. His treatment of the "consciousness of self" as a pre-condition for all conscious experience is succinctly presented in one ideogram, jen 仁.

Here again, the enthusiasm to present Confucius as a moral reformer has been responsible for the strictly moral connotation given to the term jen by most interpreters. 46 While it is true that jen implies love, benevolence, humaneness, man-to-man-ness or interpersonal relations, this moral sense is based upon a more significant epistemological implication involving the rejection of "consciousness of self." It functions in the same effective way in which the Buddha's doctrine of "no-self" (anātman) functions in dissolving solidified and stagnant concepts, conventions, etc. 47

45 The Analects, XIII.3.
47 The Analects, XII.1.
Thus, instead of discoursing on the origin and function of concepts in experience, Confucius utilized parables, anecdotes and sometimes simple contradictions in order to awaken people from their “dogmatic slumber,” a method that turned out to be extremely popular among the later Ch’ an Buddhists.

Just as the Buddhist conception of “no-self” (anatta) or the Buddha’s appeal to renounce the so-called “consciousness of self” by appeasing dispositions, abandoning lust or passion (rāga) and developing an attitude of dispassion (virāga) could be wrongly interpreted to mean the complete and absolute negation of self-interest (not merely self-love), so did Confucius’ emphasis upon jen as a means of avoiding “consciousness of self” create difficulties for the later interpreters of his teachings in the understanding of chung 忠. This term, consisting of the two characters chung 中, meaning “middle,” and hsin 心, implying “mind,” made no sense to them. Hence their interpretation of the term as “exhaustion of one’s self” (盡己). This, then, is taken to imply absolute altruism, comparable to one’s performance of “duty” regardless of whether it will annihilate oneself. This could not be the proper way to “understand oneself” (知己). On the contrary, chung 忠 as “sincerity” would represent a more moderate (中) attitude of mind (心) that takes into “consideration” oneself as well as others, which was the middle ground inculcated in the Buddha’s own idea of “compassion” (see earlier discussion of compassion). Indeed, chung in Confucius is synonymous with majjhatta in the Buddha’s teachings, the latter representing “balance of mind” or “equanimity” (upekkhā, Sk. upeksa), which again is wrongly interpreted as “indifference” leaving room for the introduction of a notion of “duty” into the Buddhist context. Understanding chung as “balance of mind” would make more sense of the Confucian virtue of compassionate behavior or “like-minded-ness” (shu 同), i.e., “not doing unto others what one does not like for oneself.”

Finally, while the metaphysical self or the “pure Ego” is eliminated by the cultivation of jen, the empirical self is brought back into the discussion of “rightness” or “meaning” represented by the Chinese character i (義 symbolizing “oneself” 我 carrying the insignia of a “lamb” 羊). No better pictorial representation of “self-restrained behavior” or “appeasement of dispositions” could be found in a language that utilizes visual aids in expressing ideas.

48 Fung Yu-lan, I.71, note 1.
49 Cheng Chung-ying, op. cit., p. 4.
If the revolution that Confucius brought about in traditional Chinese thought were to be understood in the above manner, the popularity of the strongly non-substantialist teachings of Buddhism becomes less of a mystery than has been made to be. Nāgārjuna’s treatise, once it was translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva, provided the Confucian philosophers with an extremely subtle analysis of concepts. The recognition of this philosophy by the Confucian elite probably contributed to its acceptance by the general population; those who were opposed to it during this period being the Taoists. The major theme in Nāgārjuna’s treatise is stated in the last two verses of the concluding chapter. The first verse says: “If all existents are empty of substance, where, to whom, which and for what reason, views such as eternalism could ever occur?” In the final verse, Nāgārjuna pays tribute to the Buddha who, out of compassion, has taught the true doctrine in order to relinquish all views. This treatise could easily convince the Confucian that no “rectification of names” is possible so long as one sticks to one single idea or concept as representing an essence or reality. It also probably made them realize that it was not necessary to abandon plurality and diversity in a higher synthesis in order to develop an attitude of non-grasping essential to a harmonious life. The Buddha, as an embodiment of such non-grasping and moral perfection, was an appealing object of veneration.

This may have provided the motivation for the Chinese rulers to invite Buddhist missionaries and provide support for their activities. Furthermore, it also provided the greatest inspiration for the early Chinese pilgrims to go in search of more information regarding this tradition. The enthusiasm and dedication demonstrated by these pilgrims remain unmatched. Let it not be forgotten that the most outstanding Chinese pilgrim to India was Hsüan Tsang and that he was a Confucian. After being conversant with the work of Kumārajīva, who preceded him by almost two centuries, Hsüan Tsang arrived in India and found the missing link in the psychological treatises of Vasubandhu. He did not have to worry about Vasubandhu’s Viśnusūtra. That philosophical analysis was already found elaborated in great detail in Kumārajīva’s Chung-lun. What was new and not found in the Chung-lun was the psychological material contained in the Trivikramā. Hsüan Tsang’s treatment of this work turned out to be a masterpiece in Chinese literature, serving as a locus classicus of a full-fledged tradition called the Fa-hsiang (dharma-lakṣaṇa). A careful

53 Mūlamadhyamakakārikā XXVII.29–30.
study of the San-lun 三論 and the Fa-hsiang schools of Chinese Buddhism, without being unduly influenced by subsequent interpretations, would throw much light on the contributions of Buddhism to the culture of the Sui 隋 and T'ang 唐 dynasties.

It seems that the Buddhist notions of "mere conventions" (vyavahāra-mātra) or "dependent concepts" (upādīya prajñāpāti) or "mere concepts" (vijñāpīta-mātra) combined with the Confucian "rectification of names" (cheng ming) created harmony and peace in the social and political life of the Chinese people and eliminated "possessive individualism," thus promoting interpersonal relations (jen), and bringing about a golden age in Chinese culture and civilization.