

Chang Tsai (張載) and the Lankavatara (入楞伽經)

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Introduction

One of the severest critics of Buddhism among the Neo-Confucian philosophers in China's Sung Dynasty was Chang Tsai (1020–1077). His criticisms were the more devastating because it was known that he himself had studied Buddhism for a few years before rejecting it for more Confucian views. Although he undoubtedly acquired many Buddhist ideas while studying Buddhism, he later "attacked Buddhism so severely that the very root of its teaching was greatly shaken."⁽¹⁾ It is the intent of this essay to examine the nature and accuracy of Chang's attacks, as well as the ways in which Buddhism influenced, perhaps subconsciously, Chang's own philosophy.

There were several major Buddhist schools in eleventh century China with which Chang might have had contact, including the Ch'an (Zen), the Amitabha (Pure Land), and remnants of the Hua Yen idealist tradition. These schools had widely diverging positions on the nature of reality and life, as well as about the way the present life should be conducted. Since it was often common for monasteries to study more than one tradition, it must have been quite confusing for any non-Buddhist trying to sort out and synthesize the real meanings of Buddhism from these various traditions. And it would be equally impossible for this study to treat each of the traditions which Chang Tsai might have studied as independent philosophies.

Chang Tsai must have studied numerous Buddhist scriptures during the period of his interest in Buddhism, but it appears that the famous *Lankavatara*, or *Leng Yen Sutra*, was the focal point of most of his attacks,⁽²⁾ and represented the mode of Buddhism which Chang studied reasonably well. Therefore, to more realistically confine the scope of this present inquiry, Chang's understanding and criticisms of the *Lankavatara* will be taken as representative of his approach to Chinese Buddhism of his day.

Several methodological dangers are inherent in this procedure. First of all, many of Chang's most vicious attacks are more probably directed against the contemporaneous practices of Buddhists who had strayed far from the doctrines spelled out in the *Lankavatara*. Secondly, if some of the sources of Chang's criticisms are actually psychological as well as philosophical, based on an ethnocentrism against the originally-Indian Buddhism,⁽³⁾ this purely philosophical comparison may necessarily be inadequate. Finally, Chang's attacks against the a-political nature of Buddhism cannot possibly be countered in this approach, for the *Lankavatara* (as indeed the vast bulk of Buddhist literature) simply does not concern itself with questions of government or the ideal society—which were major concerns to the Neo-Confucian Chinese!

This study, then, will concentrate on understanding Chang's ethical and metaethical criticisms of the *Lankavatara*. But this inquiry will attempt to avoid defense of Buddhism as a philosophy, and it grants from the outset that there are many areas of importance to philosophical thought which are simply not discussed by Buddhism. Therefore it will confine itself primarily to those areas which are discussed by both Buddhism and Chang Tsai. Since the *Lankavatara* is a rather unorganized document,⁽⁴⁾ and since Chang's philosophy is also somewhat "in a fluid state, lacking consistency,"⁽⁵⁾ some other basis for organization must be adopted. Chang's most strenuous criticisms are against the Buddhists' lack of ethical concern, so it is perhaps this area which should be examined first.

Ethics of Enlightened Love

One serious criticism of the Buddhist ethical stand was that the Buddhists were escapist, and denied social obligations.⁽⁶⁾ There appears to be a long historical basis for such a claim as well, for even the Buddha himself rejected the kingly political position which could have awaited him in India, to become a wandering monk and ascetic in search of enlightenment. This rejection of worldly obligation in pursuit of spiritual insight and enlightenment was firmly grounded in and acceptable to Indian society and world-views, but diametrically antithetical to the politically-conscious ethical philosophies throughout China's long history. The history of Buddhism in China shows monkish, a-social developments ever encroaching on the societal concerns and responsibilities of the intelligentsia, until at last the too-transcendental tendencies would be periodically and forcibly suppressed. Clearly, Buddhist philosophy did place much greater emphasis upon personal and spiritual culture than upon social policy.

However, Chang's attack could be slightly softened by two observations. First of all, there is an important distinction (even today) between that small elite of monastic Buddhists who are working towards spiritual advancement, and the vast majority of lay Buddhists who live fairly normal lives and abide by much more conventional moral standards. Since Chang studied in a monastery, it is undoubtedly the monks he studied under, and not the total Buddhist society, who deserve his censure for lack of political interest. Admittedly, the more influential the monasteries were, the more prominent this attitude might become, and the more justified this criticism would be to Buddhist society as a whole.

The second important distinction must be made between the practice of particular Buddhists with whom Chang may have been acquainted, and the actual ethical teachings of the *Lankavatara*. Chang's indictment reads: "...human relations have not been observed, things have not been understood, government has been neglected, morality has been in chaos, and heterodox doctrines have filled the ears."⁽⁷⁾ It has already been confessed that Buddhism does not adequately deal with issues of human relations and government. But in the areas of morality and doctrine, the *Lankavatara* is explicit:

"One should cherish the ideas of charity, good behavior, patience, zeal, thoughtfulness, and wisdom...Charity calls for the more costly gifts of sympathy and understanding... (*prajna*, or wisdom) will reveal itself in its true perfectness of all-inclusive Truth which is Love."⁽⁸⁾

Thus the *Lankavatara* does have an ethical side, even if it is often overshadowed by metaphysical implications or discussions.

However, even the metaphysical discussions of the *Lankavatara* have an implicitly ethical direction, all too often overlooked by its readers. D. T. Suzuki suggested that the *raison d'être* of the *Lankavatara* is its social and moral side: its numerous doctrines point to practices of selfless love for all beings. The emphasis on the practical and social side of life is precisely what distinguishes Ch'an Mahayana from Hinayana doctrines. Any philosophizing that a Ch'anist engages is supposedly "really to qualify oneself for social work".⁽⁹⁾ This distinctively Chinese element in Ch'an Buddhism is one of the major reasons that Ch'an survived the persecutions of other, less practically-oriented, Buddhist sects in tenth century China. Thus, the ethical impulses in Ch'an Buddhism are a definitely Chinese contribution to an Indian philosophy which underemphasized this sort of concern.

Even after Ch'an had been ethically reinforced by strong social impulses from the Chinese tradition, there remained an element of detachment or other-worldliness in the motives of its ethics. For the Buddhist, ethical actions were to be performed with as little effort and self-consciousness as possible, to generate the least possible karmic influences. For Chang Tsai and other Neo-Confucians, however, ethical actions are to be deliberately cultivated, educated, and consciously practiced. They are not Buddhist stepping-stones or results of a transcendental consciousness for Chang, but rather a definite, this-worldly effort to improve human relations and harmony on earth.

Chang Tsai writes repeatedly of sincerity as the essential virtue. He describes the great man as practicing sincerity resulting from enlightenment, thus:⁽¹⁰⁾

"The great man is able to know and to practice its principle to the utmost. Therefore, when he establishes himself, he will help others to establish themselves. He will share his knowledge with all. He will love universally."

This theme of universal love pervades Chang's philosophy, and leads one to recall the similar-sounding doctrines of Mo-Tsu. In fact, the connection of universal love with the sage's establishment in knowledge, and with his desire to share his wisdom with all, is a distinctly Mahayana concept. Carsun Chang expressly indicates that the cosmic significance and breadth which the concept of *jen* finds in Chang's universal love is a direct result of strong Buddhist influence.⁽¹¹⁾ Chang's thoughts are paraphrased by the words of Buddha to his disciple, found in the *Lankavatara*:⁽¹²⁾

"Thus, Mahamati, wherever there is the evolution of living beings, let people cherish the kinship of them."

And Chang somewhat similarly states:

"All men are my brothers, and all things are my companions."⁽¹³⁾

But there is an important, if subtle difference, between the sutra's and Chang's meaning in these passages. Notice that the *Lankavatara* thinks of kinship with all living beings, harkening back to the Indian concept of eternal reincarnations on different levels of existence. The Buddhist notion would suggest that man is distantly related to all beings because all in some sense either were, or might still become, human, in the course of innumerable ages. The Chinese approach needs none of this metaphysics. Chang's concern is clearly towards man, as man, and he draws the line between man and things, not between living beings and objects. After all, man is the only creature who has the capability of being ethical and the true responsibility of governing his own societies.

What this similarity does demonstrate is that, to the extent that Chang Tsai adopts the concept of universal love, it is more likely that he developed it from the Buddhist framework than from the ancient ideas of Mo-Tsu, or as a completely independent and personal pronouncement. This is not to say that the ethic of universal love is the only one in Chang's system, however. Although this may be held up as an ideal, still his famous western inscription acknowledges the importance of gradations of love, and particularly stresses the importance of filial piety, a virtue largely overlooked by Buddhist writers, including the *Lankavatara*.

Indeed, there is no good analogue in the Buddhist tradition to this most precious of Chinese virtues, and the Buddha himself exemplified this fact by disobeying his own parents and completely breaking his ties with his whole family. It is only in the more distant and universal applications of ethics that Chang Tsai and the *Lankavatara* could approach agreement. On the most fundamental and literally "close to home" level, Buddhism sees filial piety as engendering a dangerous self-attachment to home and people, and Chang Tsai sees Buddhism as ignoring the most essential of ethical requirements. However, a few further similarities between their systems could be located in a parallel role of Sage and Bodhisattva.

The *Lankavatara* frequently comments that its purpose is "for the welfare of many people... compassion for the world, for the benefit of the suffering multitudes..." Chang Tsai could agree with these concerns, particularly in view of his own discussion of mercy to orphans, help to the helpless, care for the aged and weak as the duty of the Sage. In the *Lankavatara*, every man is considered a potential Bodhisattva who must first establish himself in enlightenment by study of reality. Analogously, Chang Tsai holds that anyone can become a Sage by a study of principle and the enlightenment of sincerity. In his explanatory preface to the *Lankavatara*, Suzuki succinctly summarizes: "...the essence of Bodhisattvahood is an unequivocal affirmation of the social, altruistic nature of humankind. Whatever enlightenment one gains, it must be shared by one's fellow-being."⁽¹⁴⁾

Chang's ethical philosophy also postulates the social nature and altruistic imperative of mankind, and Chang's Sage naturally wishes to share his wisdom and express universal love to all his fellow beings.

In wording, therefore, Chang Tsai could almost be taken as repeating Buddhist ethical theory. But the practice and assumptions of these two ethics are on quite different grounds, which should fairly be distinguished. For Chang, all men can—indeed are morally compelled to—act in a moral fashion even on the way to Sagehood, whether they ever achieve it or not. For the Buddhist, man's major effort should be a spiritual cultivation preparatory to enlightenment, and only after enlightenment will the Bodhisattvas' actions be truly moral. Chang assumes that the Sage will want to share his wisdom for the betterment of the human condition and political situation here in this life, whereas the Buddhist, by contrast, thinks of the enlightened Bodhisattva as a deliverer leading all beings away from this realm of suffering existence, into a state of Nirvana where human relations are no longer even applicable. Thus the assumptions behind these theories of enlightened love are contrary.

Ethics of Non-Attachment

Having compared the similarities and differences between Buddhist and Chang's concepts of universal love, we might turn to a second major ethical concern: the ethic of non-attachment. The doctrine of non-attachment, in one form or another, is one of the most fundamental ethics of all Buddhism, stemming from the revelation of the Buddha himself.

According to the *Lankavatara*, greed, anger, and folly are the major vices which must be overcome if one would avoid ruin. It can easily be shown that each of these vices stems from a selfish or materialistic motive. The *Sagathakam*, a poetic version of the *Lankavatara*, suggests that the man seeking to become a sage must not keep "money, grain, gold, lands, goods, kine and sheep, slaves, horses, elephants," or other trappings of wealth. He is enjoined to avoid the court circles and the company of men of rank, lest he be spoiled by them and come to think that their esteem is essential. He is repeatedly advised to curb his sensual desires, and not to imagine that valueless things are valuable. Thus, the *Lankavatara* advises the avoidance of greed by the cultivation of a non-attachment towards wealth, fame, and real or imagined sensual pleasures.⁽¹⁵⁾

Chang Tsai's view is quite in accord with this Buddhist theory, although it may derive from Confucian rather than Buddhist influences. "Chang Tsai's theory rendered a great service to the art of personal cultivation. He stressed that to improve one's self is to change one's physical nature. Doing away with desires, controlling one's imagination, suppressing the search for fame and money, are methods."⁽¹⁶⁾ Clearly, it is not this aspect of the ethics of Buddhism which was repugnant to Chang Tsai, or he would not have accepted it so fully into his own system as well. However, Chang would warn against letting this doctrine of non-attachment separate one from society altogether. And his idea that the physical nature is what needs changing is also a variation on the theme, which will be more fully developed at a later point.

Anger, or emotional strain, is the second attitude which the *Lankavatara* criticizes as unethical and unworthy of the moral man. One who wills, and strives for personal ends or with ulterior motives, may easily become angered if he cannot achieve the ends he desires. The good Buddhist disciple, who has perfected a compassionate heart and an attitude of detachment, will disavow all self-oriented motives, and no disappointment will rouse him to anger. Suzuki elaborates on this idea as follows:

"The doctrine of effortless or purposeless deeds (*anabhogacarya*) is rooted in... the pitying heart that transcends the cold and severe contemplation of the reasoning philosopher... The Compassionate heart has no ulterior motive except that it moves spontaneously...out of its overflowing goodness."⁽¹⁷⁾

Chang also applies this ideal of effortless imperturbability to his philosopher-sage, of whom he writes: "To be sincere or grave without effort may be said of the superior man who... does not resort to anger and the people are awed."⁽¹⁸⁾ Thus Chang's ethics share with the *Lankavatara* the conviction that the good man need never lose his temper, but can maintain an effortless gravity and impressive calm in all situations.

Avoidance of folly is the third aspect of Buddhist non-attachment. For the Ch'anist, folly consists in the belief that material objects are important or real, which belief might lead one to follow pleasant sensations instead of the more austere path of wisdom. The poetic *Sagathakam* says that only the unintelligent imagine that melodious sounds reside inside the lute or conch-shell; only the unenlightened seek the sight of precious stones in streams or underground.⁽¹⁹⁾ Only by leaving the material desires and impressions for the true dharma is there purification from passions. This is perhaps the most fundamental tenet of all Chinese Buddhism.

Chang does not directly criticize this ethic either. He proposes: "The mind of ordinary people is limited to what is seen and what is heard. The sage, however, fully develops his nature and does not allow what is seen or heard to fetter his mind."⁽²⁰⁾

Although Chang has quite different ontological convictions, he accepts the Buddhist moral maxims of non-attachment in all of their three facets: the avoidance of greed, of anger or passion, of the folly of material fetters. At least in these respects, close examination shows that the Ch'anists whom Chang attacked so fiercely for their "moral chaos" did have a structured moral platform fundamental to their religious commitment, and one which Chang himself could basically agree with. However, Chang would never extend the doctrine of non-attachment to refer to people, and he would feel that an ethic which failed to include filial piety and family relations was sadly lacking.

In sum, Chang Tsai could accept the ethics of the *Lankavatara*, and adopted some of them into his own system. But he repudiated their strong emphasis on self-culture and urged the importance of more realistic, socially extroverted elements in his own, more comprehensive, system.

The foregoing analysis should make clear that Chang Tsai's criticisms of Buddhist morality were directed at several particular flaws in the Buddhist system: First, the failure of Buddhism to adequately deal with political and societal issues, leading also to monastic scholasticism; second, the failure of Buddhism to require familial and parental loyalties; thirdly, the essential differences in assumptions which underlay the apparent parallels between Chang's system and the ethical system of the *Lankavatara*. It is to these assumptions that this section will particularly turn.

Both Ch'an Buddhism and Chang Tsai tend to be quite optimistic about man's essential goodness, which comes to full view in the Bodhisattva or sage. Since sagehood can only be achieved through the practice of universal love (among other things) both philosophies assert that universal love actually can be practiced. This also seems to assume that all men are essentially good. Then what has produced this present state in which evil men abound and moral injunctions are required? The *Sagathakam* proposes that it is the combination of man's pure nature with the defilements of the external world which cause wickedness. A representative quotation proclaims:

"The ego (primarily) pure has been defiled, on account of the external passions, since the beginningless past, and what has been added from outside is like a soiled garment to be washed off." ⁽²¹⁾

In more classical Sanskrit terminology, the sutra elsewhere explains:

"The *Citta* in its essence is thoroughly pure, the *Manas* is defiled," (i. e., the mind in its essence is thoroughly pure, but that part of consciousness embedded in and concerned with physical matter is impure.) ⁽²²⁾

Chang's theory is somewhat similar. He also holds that there are two aspects of existence; a pure and unspoiled "Principle of Heaven" and a lower, material impulse involving human desires. One of his clearer statements on this issue reads:

"Nature in man is always good. It depends on whether man can skilfully return to it or not. To exceed the transforming operation of Heaven and Earth (as in sex and food) means not to return to it..." ⁽²³⁾

This citation is clearly in accord with the *Lankavatara* concept, if not adapted from it, and at least provides little ground for criticism of the Buddhist stance. Buddhism and Chang Tsai in some sense agree that man's physical involvement contaminates his pure and inherently good spiritual or "heavenly" nature. Chang, however, would contend that matter in itself is not evil, nor does it require an escape from this world; rather it is the differentiation and false valuing of matter which originate evil.

Chang's criticisms begin to have telling relevance when applied to the Buddhist rationales for non-attachment. Chang accuses the Buddhist theory of transmigration as entailing suffering, and as postulating a soul for which there is no evidence. Both of these objections illustrate Derk Bodde's point that "the Chinese failed to comprehend the deep meaning of Buddhism." ⁽²⁴⁾

First of all, the Buddhist theory is not that transmigration causes suffering, but rather that life itself is suffering, and transmigration merely adds that man cannot escape his dilemmas by death or suicide. Secondly, the Buddhists repeatedly emphasize that transmigration does not necessitate a soul; this doctrine of *anatman* was one of the basic elements in Buddha's enlightenment. Although often misinterpreted, it is not that difficult to comprehend: man's life and self is like a wave which passes through different waters or a flame which passes from match to match, but never has an independent entity or conscious substance apart from the process of life itself. Long before Chang's time, the *Lankavatara* had encountered this kind of confusion from other critics, so that long sections of the sutra are dedicated to clarifying that no soul or spirit transmigrates, according to Buddhism. One passage which Chang must have read confronts this objection directly:

"If a destroyer (critic) should come around and say, 'If there is an ego, show it to me!' a sage would declare, 'Show me your own discrimination!'"⁽²⁵⁾

In Buddhism, what transmigrates is pure process and function (like the wave or flame), and the karmic influences which a man's life has generated, not a soul, individual spirit, or personal identity in any form. This doctrine admittedly causes other philosophical problems for the Buddhists, but at least it exempts them from the brunt of Chang Tsai's misplaced criticism, which apply more appropriately to Hindu versions of reincarnation.

Chang also tended to criticize the doctrine of karma, because it seemed to entail a transmigrational theory.⁽²⁶⁾ However, these two concepts are entirely and logically independent of each other, although associated in Indian thought. Karma asserts that all man's actions produce effects which (in Buddhist theory) are preserved in the modifications of the universe which they effect. Karma also asserts the ultimate view that there is a kind of justice in the universe which ultimately will provide each man with his deserts. Chang Tsai, without realizing that he is paraphrasing this conviction of the karma theory, himself agreed:

"If one is upright in his life and follows principle, then all his good and evil fortunes are correct. If one is not upright in his life, either he enjoys blessings that are evil, or he shirks from danger."⁽²⁷⁾

This idea that man's fortunes will be appropriate to his character, or that he will be in danger if his fortunes exceed what he deserves, is very close to what the theory of karma advocates also. Chang Tsai attacked the theory of karma because he associated it with the theory of transmigration, and he attacked the theory of transmigration because he thought it entailed the notion of individual souls for which there was no empirical evidence. He was mistaken in both of these connections, but on his behalf, it should be added that this was a mistake of many Chinese who associated Buddhism with other Indian theories which were falsely attached to it.

At any rate, it is quite evident that Chang Tsai disliked certain theories of transmigration and karma which he attributed to the Buddhists. Either he seriously,

misunderstood the *Lankavatara* teachings, or he was actually ignorant of them, which seems improbable, or he distorted them for his own polemical purposes. These criticisms represent an anti-metaphysical, or at least an anti-spiritual tendency which has already been noted, and which was felt by many Chinese towards Indian spiritualisms. In any event, the fact that Chang Tsai's criticisms were so effective in diminishing Ch'an Buddhist influences in Sung China is a good indication that his readers suffered from some of the same misinterpretations or ignorance of true Buddhist doctrines that Chang did.

The Buddhist Doctrine of Illusion

Chang Tsai may have been critical of the Buddhists in his discussions of ethics, but he allowed within his own ethical system all of the major elements of the *Lankavatara*'s ethical scheme. Even in his criticisms of the underlying—and more foreign—assumptions of Buddhist morality, Chang's outward statements were much harsher than the actual differences between his beliefs and theirs. It is in the areas of epistemology and ontology that the greatest disparities emerge, which cannot be easily reconciled. Chang Tsai's postulation of a vital or material force (*ch'i*) appeared to be a direct assault on the long-standing Buddhist idealism. Typical of his disparagements is this exposition:

"The Buddhists think... that the production and annihilation of the universe are due to the elements of existence (*dharmas*) created by the mind. They regard the small (human consciousness) as the cause of the great (reality), and the secondary as the cause of the fundamental." ⁽²⁸⁾

Here, Chang Tsai is accusing the Buddhists of a subjective ontology, in which the human mind is the cause of all reality. The Buddhists, however, were subjective only in their epistemology, not their ontology. Thus the *Lankavatara* directly refutes Chang's criticisms, for it propounds an objective idealism as its ontology, as Buddha tells his disciple:

"What is meant by an eternally abiding reality? The ancient road of reality, Mahamati, has been here all the time, like gold, silver, or pearl preserved in the mine... and so does the reason of all things; reality forever abides, reality forever keeps its order, like the roads in an ancient city. For instance, Mahamati, a man who is walking in a forest and discovering a city with its orderly streets may enter into the city and... conduct himself like a citizen... Did this man make the road along which he enters into the city, and also the various things in the city? (No, Blessed One.)" ⁽²⁹⁾

With all due apologies for the length of these citations, they have been employed because they make absolutely explicit the Buddhist argument for objective ontology. External objects and their reasons abide forever independent of their observer, who may or may not experience them, but clearly does not create them. (There also appears to be some analogy in this passage between the Buddhist "reason for all things" (*dharmata*) and the Neo-Confucian "principle of things" (*li*) which Chang repeatedly

insists should be studied by the Buddhists.) In a passage of his own, however, Chang asserts the subjective aspect of epistemology which is very close to the intention of the Ch'an-ists:

"There is the principle of assisting Heaven in its task of production and bringing things to perfection. That depends on me... The relation between the mouth and stomach on the one hand, and food on the other, between the nose and tongue on the one hand and smell and taste on the other, are all cases of nature's attacking and seizing."⁽³⁰⁾

In his recognition that the relation between object and perceiver, between sense-data and what is sensed "depends on me" the perceiver, Chang is at least partially accepting the subjective element in the *Lankavatara*, which he misinterprets and attacks. In fact, the *Lankavatara* makes quite clear that an eternal and absolute Mind, above and beyond man, forever exists, and man's perceptions merely discriminate, for better or worse, that reality which supersedes him:

"According to the Buddha, there is nothing in this world but Mind itself, and all that is of duality has its rise from Mind, and is seen as perceived and perceiving."⁽³¹⁾

Suzuki treats this conception of Mind very thoroughly in his introduction to the *Lankavatara*. He stresses that *Alaya* and *Citta*, the terms Ch'anists use for Mind, must be carefully distinguished in their absolute and more relative usages. It is only the relative, ever-evolving aspect of *Alaya* which "lends itself to the treacherous interpretation of the *Manas*" (sense center in the consciousness of man).⁽³²⁾ It seems quite likely that Chang Tsai simply failed to understand this Sanskritic distinction when studying the *Lankavatara*. The clear intent of the *Lankavatara* is that man falsely discriminates the pre-existing reality with his relative mind, and in kindred vein, Chang writes, "the mind commands man's nature and feelings."⁽³³⁾ It is more in this epistemological and psychological respect that the *Lankavatara* sees the role of subjective mind, so its difference with Chang is much smaller than his criticism purported.

With this confusion between ontological and epistemological subjectivism already well in mind, it is not too surprising to find that Chang Tsai also somewhat misunderstands the Buddhist doctrine of illusion. Chang denounces the Buddhist proposition "that all things as perceived are unreal and end in nothingness..."⁽³⁴⁾ However, the Buddhist doctrine that the world is illusion is not equitable with a nihilism or negativism either ethically or epistemologically. (Ethically, it has already been shown how the concept of matter as illusion contributes to the important principle of non-attachment.) Epistemologically, illusionism follows a middle path between nihilism and eternalism, as the *Lankavatara* takes great pains to explain.⁽³⁵⁾ Dr. Suzuki cites the same misunderstanding of the *Lankavatara* which Chang Tsai shared with other readers:

"All these realities, so called, have no objective validity; and therefore, the world is altogether empty, void, unreal, and a mass of nothingness. [This seems to be Chang's objection.] To think this way, however, is not the way of the Mahayanist... The world is like *maya*, and has no ultimate reality, but at the same time they (wise men) know

that it is there, that it is not pure nothingness... An external, particularized world is an illusion as long as the ignorant are unable to break through the fetters of *vikalpa*, wrong discrimination; whereas for the wise, the phenomenal world is true in its suchness (*tathata*).⁽³⁶⁾

The doctrine of illusion is propounded in order to break the fetters of wrong discrimination and self-attachment, but the enlightened one knows that the experience is nonetheless irrevocably given, although it may be something ultimately very different from its appearance.

Chang might be tempted to quarrel, "What, then, is the status of the material world? Is it real or not?" The answer of the *Lankavatara* would be that Chang is trying to oversimplify matter by calling it either real or unreal, and oversimplify reality by calling it either material or immaterial. The truth, according to the *Lankavatara*, is that reality has aspects of both material impression and ideal Mind, and that the status of the material world is that it possesses both a certain mode of reality and a certain mode of deceptive illusion. This qualified admission of the value of the world is a distinguishing characteristic of Ch'an. Unlike earlier Hinayana and Mahayana (Madhyamika) nihilisms:

"According to Buddhist (*Lankavatara*) philosophy, reality must be grasped in this world and by this world, for it is that "Beyond Which is also Within." The *Lanka* compares it to the moon in water or a flower in a mirror. It is within and yet outside, it is outside and yet within. This aspect of reality is described as unobtainable (*anupalabdha*)."⁽³⁷⁾

This theory expresses the epistemological recognition that we cannot know any underlying *ontos* directly, but only through the medium of our senses. Chang Tsai's naive realist stance appears at first glance to overlook or oversimplify these sophisticated and important analyses. His attack that "those who take the human world as dream and illusion show their inability to investigate its origin," would be partially admitted by Ch'an Buddhists.⁽³⁸⁾ (They might respond that Chang's own postulation of *ch'i* was equally incapable of investigation except on subjective, sensory grounds.) At the same time, Chang is criticizing not only the Buddhist metaphysics as he understands it, but also the whole tendency of Buddhism to become more involved with metaphysical arguments than worldly affairs. If this be taken as the force of his argument, rather than the particular epistemological issue in question, then his objection certainly cannot be easily answered.

A final example of Chang's misunderstanding of Buddhist metaphysics comes in his criticism of the paradox of physical dimension.

"On the grandiose side, they (Ch'anists) err in equating a particle of dust or mustard seed with all within the six directions."⁽³⁹⁾

Taken at face value, particularly by a layman ignorant of philosophy, such a scathing criticism makes Buddhism sound pretty ridiculous. But this is only because it omits the context and intent of such statements. This Buddhist pronouncement is really merely

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a recognition of the relativity of all perceptions and physical objects, which will presumably be overcome in enlightenment. In fact, Chang himself shares this conviction almost verbatim in a sentence which would sound equally bizarre if quoted out of context to a layman, but with equally sound philosophic sense:

"What I call...enlightenment is a condition in which there is no perceptible distinction between the small and the great... such is the genuine knowledge; it is not the petty knowledge of seeing and hearing."⁽⁴⁰⁾ Elsewhere Chang says, "As far as the expanse of heaven and earth, there is our body,"⁽⁴¹⁾ or "what fills heaven and earth is my body."⁽⁴²⁾—these notions would sound equally absurd as those he criticizes, if torn from their philosophic contexts. Chang is certainly not claiming that his body is infinite in size, but rather that the same essence or substance of which his body and all nature are made comprises all space. And this is precisely what the *Lankavatara* is saying about the mustard seed: that in essence, its substance and reality are the same as the substance and reality of the whole material universe. Thus Chang's attack appears slightly illegitimate, based either on a genuine failure to comprehend the Buddhist teaching, or else (more likely, in view of his own parallel statements) on an underhanded pulling of an idea from its context.

Idealist vs. Materialist Ontology

The only large and unbridgeable gap between Chang Tsai and the *Lankavatara Sutra* appears to be in the domain of ontology, where the idealist/materialist debate has been waged for millenia without resolution. Chang's materialistic substance *ch'i* would appear improvable to Buddhists, and the *Lankavatara* doctrine of illusion seems unnecessarily skeptical to the realist Chang. These differences have been very thoroughly examined in an excellent essay on "Chang Tsai's Concept of *Ch'i*," by Dr. Siu-chi Huang, therefore this already-long essay will not further repeat them.

Even without examining the particulars of these doctrines, we may at least examine the Buddhists' susceptibility to Chang Tsai's accusation that they did not attempt to investigate *ch'i* or *li*.⁽⁴³⁾ Here the problem is more a confusion of names than a disagreement of fact; and some Confucian rectification is probably in order. The Buddhists disagreed with Chang about the basic composition of material elements, but they had investigated facts and principles long before his time. Traditional Sanskrit vocabulary might substitute the terms *vrttis* and *dharmata*—or numerous others—for *ch'i* and *li*. But in any vocabulary, the relation of material fact and principle was a definite concern of all Buddhists. Before the Ch'an school had reached its apex, Hua Yen Buddhists were already demanding:

"Principle shows itself in many characteristics. If we analyze their power and function, the meaning of their expansion and contraction can easily be seen, and only when we examine their profound principles can the two fold division of principle (*li*) and fact (*ch'i*) be understood..."⁽⁴⁴⁾

This Buddhist admonition would sound very much like Chang Tsai's own words four hundred years later, when ironically, Chang would criticize his opponents for lacking that very study which he had inherited from them. His real objection should be worded more in terms of a disagreement as to the nature of those *li* and *ch'i*, and not of failure to investigate them.

Chang's debate with Buddhism on this score remains unresolved. It seems to this author that any ontological claim to materialism, like Chang's, must eventually admit certain elements of a non-physical nature, such as moral imperatives. Conversely, any subjective or objective idealism will ultimately have to admit certain qualified realisms—or at least their appearances—to the external world. In this one area where Chang and the Buddhists originally appear so ontologically opposite, their more thorough elaborations lead to increasingly similar dualistic tendencies. But this is stretching the purview—and perhaps the objectivity—of this study.

Conclusions

In overview, Chang's criticisms of Buddhist epistemology were based either on repeated misunderstandings or on other motives for distortion. It is somewhat surprising to find a reputable philosopher like Chang Tsai attacking so viciously a school to which he himself had owed some ideas. The severity of his attacks would tend to highlight at least three possible conclusions. First, Chang Tsai strongly objected to the emphasis upon mental and spiritual growth in the Buddhist tradition, at the expense of political and agrarian concerns which undoubtedly seemed pressing in his contemporary China. Secondly, he may have had emotionally negative reactions to Buddhism, either personally towards his former Buddhist acquaintances, or philosophically towards a soteriology very alien to the Chinese mind. Thirdly, the practices of Ch'an Buddhists in the eleventh century must have strayed far from the non-attached and compassionate ethic dictated by the *Lankavatara*, in which case Chang's criticisms can be seen to apply quite validly to the practice, if not always to the theories, of Ch'an. As is so frequently the case in philosophical history, practices of a previous sect fall under the attacks of new conceptualizers, whose systems may in turn fall into the distortions of human interpretations through history. But fuller vindication of these hypotheses must await further historical and psycho-biographical research.

ENDNOTES

1) Huang, 255.

2) Huang, 147.

3) Huang, 141.

4) *Lankavatara*, xlv.

5) Chang, 175.

6) Huang, 258.

7) cited by Huang, 141.

8) *Self-Realisation*, 108f.

9) Suzuki, 214.

10) *Sourcebook*, 510.

- 11) Chang, 180.
- 12) *Lankavatara*, 212.
- 13) Huang, 144.
- 14) *Lankavatara*, xvi.
- 15) *ibid.*, cf. 126 & 252f.
- 16) Chang, 178.
- 17) Suzuki, 216.
- 18) *Sourcebook*, 513.
- 19) cf. *Lankavatara*, 282-3.
- 20) *Sourcebook*, 515.
- 21) *Lankavatara*, 283.
- 22) *ibid.*, 243.
- 23) *Sourcebook*, 509-510.
- 24) Huang, 142, and note #6.
- 25) *Lankavatara*, 283.
- 26) Huang, 142.
- 27) *Sourcebook*, 514.
- 28) *ibid.*, 515.
- 29) *Lankavatara*, 124.
- 30) *Sourcebook*, 510.
- 31) *Lankavatara*, 181.
- 32) *ibid.*, xxvi and xxiii.
- 33) *Sourcebook*, 517.
- 34) Huang, 257.
- 35) e. g., *Lankavatara*, 68.
- 36) Suzuki, *Studies*, 118.
- 37) *Lankavatara*, xxix.
- 38) cited by Huang, 255.
- 39) *ibid.*
- 40) Fung Yu-lan, 493.
- 41) Chang, 180.
- 42) in Huang, 144.
- 43) *Sourcebook*, 515-517.
- 44) *ibid.*, 414.

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