PREFACE

The history of the Madhyamaka, one of the two main Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophical traditions, began around the second century A.D. with the appearance of the works of Nāgārjuna and Nāgārjuna’s followers. Several of these works were translated into Chinese in the first decade of the fifth century, and had exerted a considerable influence on the development of Chinese Buddhist thought. This book is a study of the teachings of various Chinese Buddhist traditions which shared the doctrinal standpoint and/or had professed allegiance to the writings of Nāgārjuna’s school.

The book comprises four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one describes the historical context out of which the Madhyamaka first emerged in India, with an eye to identifying the basic presuppositions and the central concerns of Madhyamaka thought. It provides the conceptual framework on which our subsequent discussion of Chinese Madhyamaka is based.

Chapter two opens with a short account of the introduction of the Madhyamaka into China by Kumārajiva in the early fifth century, followed by a detailed analysis of the writings of Seng-chao 僧肇 (374–414), a leading disciple of Kumārajiva distinguished for his philosophical acumen. It examines Seng-chao’s treatment of the central Buddhist concepts of prajñā, śūnyatā and nirvāṇa, and looks into Seng-chao’s arguments against the everyday conception of change, with a view to demonstrating the remarkable speed with which Chinese Buddhist thinkers assimilated the chief Madhyamaka principles and method of refutation, as well as drawing attention to the important contribution of the Madhyamaka to freeing Chinese Buddhist thought from the all pervasive influence of indigenous Taoist teaching.

Chapter three first relates in brief the revival of interest in Madhyamaka texts in China in the second half of the sixth century after a period of decline. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to the exposition of the thought of Chi-tsang 吉藏 (549–623), the main figure behind the revival. Chi-tsang’s attitude towards the various Buddhist scriptures and Buddhist systems of ideas popular in his time is carefully studied in order to show how the Chinese admirers of the writings of Nāgārjuna’s school came to see themselves as the champions of a separate Buddhist doctrinal tradition. Special attention is given to indicating how time-honoured Madhyamaka principles came to assume new significances when they were used in
Chi-tsang’s writings to interpret three themes central to the Chinese Buddhist dogmatics of Chi-tsang’s time, viz. p’an-chiao (classification of teachings), two truths and Buddha-nature.

With Chi-tsang, the orthodox Chinese Madhyamaka tradition, commonly referred to by historians of Chinese Buddhism as the San-lun School (Three Treatise School), reached the apex of its development. After the death of Chi-tsang, the study and the propagation of the works of Nāgārjuna’s school as the embodiment of the thought of an independent Buddhist doctrinal tradition gradually came to an end in China. However, there were two schools of Chinese Buddhist teaching which had demonstrable historical and doctrinal ties with the Madhyamaka: the T’ien-t’ai School and the Niu-t’ou School of the Ch’an tradition. These two schools were both marked by their keen interest in meditation, and their thought reflected how Madhyamaka beliefs may influence religious practice. Chapter four tries to separate out the Madhyamaka elements in the teachings of these two schools and to explain how these elements governed the two schools’ approaches to religious practice.

The conclusion brings together the main threads running through the body of the book, and shows how our study sheds light on the significance of Madhyamaka thought in general and of Chinese Madhyamaka thought in particular.

The methodology this study adopts is that of a history of ideas. The narration of historical events is taken up in so far as it is indispensable to the true understanding of the ideas under examination. Ideas originating in different historical periods and bearing on different topics are brought together, compared and contrasted so as to throw light on each other. The principal aim is to locate an ideological nucleus and to discover a general pattern of development, by referring to which the precise significance of the chief theoretical elements and the exact relation between the main doctrinal aspects of a broad Buddhist intellectual trend can be clearly demonstrated and accurately defined.

Since the subject of this study belongs to the field of Chinese Buddhism, scriptural references are made in the main to the Chinese Buddhist canons. The only exceptions are the discussions on the Indian Buddhist traditions predating the Madhyamaka in chapter one, which use the standard English translations of Pali and Sanskrit materials. Even in those cases, the corresponding Chinese versions of the materials used are noted whenever possible. Citations from the Taishō canon are listed in the following order: title of text, Taishō volume number, page, register (a, b, or c), line. Citations from the Hsü Tsang-ching are listed in the following order: title of text, Hsü Tsang-ching volume number, page, register (a, b, c, or d), line. Transliterations of Asian languages follow the commonly accepted systems: Wade-Giles for Chinese, Hepburn for Japanese.
terms appearing in Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* are regarded as English and are left unitalicized.

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