Chinese Buddhist Religious Disputation

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ABSTRACT: From about the fourth to the tenth century Buddhist monks in China engaged in formal, semi-public, religious disputation. I describe the Indian origins of this disputation and outline its settings, procedures, and functions. I then propose that this disputation put its participants at risk of performative contradiction with Buddhist tenets about language and salvation, and I illustrate how some Chinese Buddhists attempted to transcend these contradictions, subverting disputation through creative linguistic and extra-linguistic strategies.

KEY WORDS: Disputation, dialectic, logic, China, Buddhism, India, performative contradiction, Chan, Zen

INTRODUCTION

In this essay I will be discussing a fascinating but somewhat neglected argumentation tradition, that being the Chinese Buddhism practice of competitive religious disputation. From the fourth century down into the twentieth century such debate was a familiar event in Chinese Buddhist monastic life. In medieval China Indian Buddhist manuals of disputation were translated and circulated, and a few Chinese Buddhist monks even specialized in their study. Because many of these monastic debates were open to the laity and were well-attended, such debate was a familiar feature of Chinese culture as well. Indeed, during certain dynasties a renowned debater might be invited by the emperor to court to exhibit his skills, and thus gain imperial patronage for his temple.

This tradition of religious debate is of interest not only for historical reasons, but also because the doctrines being debated seem, on the surface, to involve the participants in a performative contradiction. That is, the practice of disputation presupposes certain norms that were seemingly incompatible with the beliefs being advanced. I will suggest that this performative contradiction is only apparent, and that behind it there lies a philosophy of language and an ethics which encouraged a view of religious disputation as a self-consuming artifact.

In what follows I lay the groundwork for approaching this phenomenon. I begin by outlining the cultural and intellectual milieu preceding the

arrival of Buddhism from India. Next I turn to the missionaries who brought Buddhism to China and describe their training in disputation and the manuals on disputation that were translated into Chinese. Then I describe the practice of Chinese Buddhist disputation that resulted from the confluence of these cultural streams. After sketching the typical settings, procedures, and themes of the disputations, I will conclude with a quick look at the self-consuming disputation as a logical culmination of this tradition.

DEBATE AND DISPUTATION IN CHINA BEFORE BUDDHISM

Despite persistent characterizations of China as a monolithically Confucian state which crushed dissent and enforced harmony, in early and medieval China both political debate and philosophical disputation were well-established practices among the ruling elite. It is true that certain prominent figures, such as Confucius, Mencius, and Han Feizi, disapproved of argumentation, preferring to reach consensus through education, indoctrination, or force instead. However, in reality, argumentation pervaded political and intellectual life (Kroll, 1985).

Informal debates on ethical, political, and historical questions were common at rulers' courts, and they were carried on through written proposals as well. In fact, rulers often convened a group of scholars and officials precisely to deliberate in a more comprehensive way over a proposed policy decision, or to puzzle out a point of ritual procedure. Attempts during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) to create a state-sponsored intellectual orthodoxy and to assign renowned scholars to specialize in teaching particular classics also initiated a history of recurring textual disputes at court. The standard dynastic histories are replete with references to and, often, lengthy records of all these varieties of oral or written arguments.

As for philosophical disputation, there were several well-developed forms of this in early and medieval China. During the Warring States period (481–221 B.C.E.) the 'dialecticians' (*bianzhe*) were notorious for contending over paradoxes and abstruse theses (Garrett, 1993b). The chapters on how to conduct disputations found in the Later Mohists' works reflect the degree of interest in this practice (Graham, 1978). Later, during the third through the eighth centuries, 'Pure Talk' (*qingtan*) became popular. Groups of the literate elite met to engage in witty conversation and, often, to clash in structured disputation over abstract metaphysical and ethical theses and interpretations of philosophical works (Garrett, 1993a).

I refer to this philosophical kind of debate as 'disputation' because, first, its theses were much more general and abstract ('human nature is bad') than were those of the debates over policy held at court ('The Emperor should abolish the salt tax'). Second, as befits real-world argumentation, the arguments over policy relied on a wide variety of argument structures,

from enthymeme to historical example to analogy to argument from authority, not to mention such forms as *ad hominem*. The more philosophical disputations tended to rely on a narrower range of argumentative structures; deduction, quotations from the Classics, and illustrative example were most common. However, both kinds of argumentation proceeded competitively; indeed, the concept of 'argument as war' is the most common metaphoric framing of these events.

DISPUTATION IN INDIA

Buddhism first came to China sometime during the first century C.E. and it spread during a period of particularly intense political instability and ideological turmoil. Confucianism had become the state orthodoxy under the reign of the emperor Han Wudi, c. 140 B.C.E. But with the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E. and the splitting of the empire into warring kingdoms Confucian thought fell into some disrepute, and there was a deep questioning of the received traditions and an openness to new views. The continuing civil strife and political uncertainty from c. 200 to c. 600 C.E. reinforced the appeal of Buddhism's transcendental doctrine of individual salvation. Despite Buddhism's incompatibility with certain fundamental tenets of Chinese culture it became increasingly popular and powerful, to the point that emperors from the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–419) onward professed Buddhist beliefs or felt obliged to give state support to the Buddhist establishment.

In addition to texts and doctrines, the Indian Buddhist monks brought the associated religious practices to China, such as sutra-reading, lecturing, chanting, and exorcism. One of the major religious practices that these monks were familiar with was disputation. Indian Buddhist monks were shaped by a long tradition of competitive, public disputation on philosophical and religious topics in which all schools of thought participated. The study of logic in India developed out of this agonistic context. The Buddhists became especially skilled in such argumentation and some of the greatest writers on disputation from the fifth through tenth centuries in India were Buddhists.

The practice itself was called *vāda* or *vivāda*, a structured, competitive debate on general propositions such as 'whether there is a soul' or 'whether sound is eternal.' The proponent's goal was to defend the thesis, while the questioner sought to destroy it by such tactics as *reductio ad absurdum*, demonstration of infinite regress or meaninglessness, or laying bare informal fallacies.

Since the purported goal of all Indian philosophies was not just knowledge for its own sake but knowledge that led to liberation (*mokṣa*), the practice of *vivāda*, convincing others of one's doctrines, was taken quite seriously. Each participant was assumed to be arguing his actual beliefs and

seeking not just victory, but the acquiescence of opponent and audience. What's more, there were often substantial rewards for the winner. At the large, public *vivāda* between proponents of different schools or sects, the winners would not only augment their reputations, they might be rewarded substantially. The rulers who patronized such debates frequently rewarded the winning sect or monastery generously and withdrew support from the loser.

Though all schools engaged in such debate, the Nyāya school emphasized its study (*nyāya* means 'right,' that is, 'right' reasoning). Beginning at least as early as the third century B.C.E. Nyāya thinkers began specializing in dialectical debate. Technically speaking, the earlier works of this school (which include those works that were translated into Chinese) are not works of logic. Rather, they are concerned with disputation, in the sense of competitive argumentation on philosophical theses. The Nyāya distinguished such disputation from mere attack and also from sophistical argumentation, argumentation which is motivated by the desire to win at any cost. Typically their manuals cover the structures of sound and unsound argumentation and end with a short section on perception and inference.

The Nyāya disputers held that valid reasoning proceeded according to a five-part model.[1] One of their stock examples is:

proposition: This mountain has fire.
reason: This mountain has smoke.
example: Whatever has smoke has fire, as in the (homogeneous) example of a
              fireplace, and unlike the (heterogeneous) example of a lake.
application: This mountain has smoke.
conclusion: This mountain has fire.

Nyāya *vade mecums* outline the varieties of fallacious reasoning, which are considered sources of legitimate refutation, and they also distinguish between unsound refutation of a sound argument (*jāti*) and unsound refutation of an fallacious argument (*nigrahasthāna*). In addition, the student learned the procedural 'rules of the game,' which disqualified such moves as: assuming a subject or quality the other side does not grant; mere repetition of one's assertion; irrelevant examples; failure to answer; and, shifting the topic. The Nyāya strictures were generally accepted by all schools as the binding ground-rules for disputation and have been continuously studied and refined down to the present day by the *naiyāyikas*, the Nyāya pandits.

Of course, the categorization system and some of the specific rules dictated in these handbooks are not identical to those laid down for dialectical reasoning by, for instance, Aristotle. However, in general both the rules themselves as well as the patterns of reasoning used in actual arguments are similar to those we find in Western dialectical disputation, to the extent that they are routinely described using the language of modern symbolic language (e.g., Chi, 1969; see also Daye, 1973).

The Indian Buddhists embarked on the study and practice of *vivāda* with

tremendous enthusiasm. In their great monastic universities, such as Nālandā and Valabhi, which flourished from c. 400 to until their destruction by the Moslems in the early thirteenth century, such disputation occupied a central position analogous to that of disputation in medieval and Renaissance education. In the Buddhist universities *hetuvidyā* constituted one of the five basic subject matters. *Hetuvidyā*, often translated as 'logic,' actually covers both logic and dialectic. Students were tested in all subjects through disputation, and monastic masters demonstrated their prowess in public exhibitions. Success in such debate brought advancement in the monastic hierarchy and corresponding marks of status, such as use of an elephant for transportation. Over the centuries Buddhists scholars wrote extensively on *vivāda* and also contributed substantially to the development of *hetuvidyā*.

CHINESE BUDDHIST DISPUTATION

Missionaries for and converts to Buddhism had to explain and argue for their new and, to the Chinese, alien beliefs, such as monastic celibacy, reincarnation, and karma. Buddhism faced direct attacks from the native Chinese Confucian and Daoist traditions, and these were fought at the philosophical and the political level. The arguments are recorded in a vast literature of letters, treatises, critiques, counter-critiques, and contentions embedded in petitions to the ruler.[2] In addition, rulers often invited representatives of these schools of thought to debate their beliefs at court (Garrett, 1994).

Finally, there was a place for intradoctrinal Buddhist disputation as well. Buddhist ideas and practices did not spread over China in one uniform wave. Rather, over a period of centuries, various scriptures and somewhat differing schools of Buddhist thought were brought to China, there to undergo a complex process of interpretation and reinterpretation, classification, and appropriation. As more Buddhist scriptures were translated (and as native Chinese scriptures were created) and as differing interpretations sprang up so, too, did rival schools of Chinese Buddhist thought, and they contended amongst themselves for supremacy. One of the places where such battles took place was in the monasteries themselves.

The Chinese Buddhists did not establish monastic universities on the Indian model, but their monasteries had public lecture halls (*jiangtang*). It was in these lecture halls that the Buddhist religious disputations were held, a practice that began sometime in the late fourth century. The discussants sat on a raised platform and the audience on mats on the floor, sometimes arranged according to their status (the higher-status places were in front). The lecture hall was usually open to the public, so that the audience could contain monks, nuns, laypeople, and interested onlookers. Although the Buddhist references to hundreds and even thousands of people attending

such events are probably somewhat exaggerated, other historical records indicate considerable general interest in these sessions.

These discussions were called 'explication' (*jiang*) or 'explication and explanation' (*jiangshuo*). Like Aristotelian dialectic, the Chinese Buddhist *jiang* could be used either for educational purposes or for competitive debate. In either case the 'dharma master' (*fashi*), usually the senior monk, began by expounding a sutra or a doctrine. (There are occasional references to the 'lecturer' [*zhang*] announcing the topic first). In exceptional cases the brilliance of the dharma master's explication stunned the audience into a silence of assent. But generally he answered questions or objections from the 'assistant explicator' (*dujiang*) or from the audience. Each set of question and answer or objection and response formed one 'exchange' (*fan*). There was no set length to an 'exchange' or even to the entire disputation, since competitive debates continued until one speaker reduced the other to contradiction, evasion, or silence. In a handful of cases the disputation stretched over days, and there are a few cases in which neither disputant was able to compel the other's assent. These were adversarial dialogues with a strong dramatic component, as is underlined by their frequent description in terms of battles and military strategy. Further excitement was generated as the disputants pounded and waved their chowries (*zhuwei*, yak-tailed fly swatters) for emphasis. The chowrie was, in fact, a symbolic marker of the disputant.

The victor of such battles might gain in several ways; at the least he improved his standing, and he sometimes converted an influential individual or an entire group to his position. In theory the defeated party also gained by being enlightened by the better position. There are references to monks in training roaming from temple to temple challenging the local abbots in debate; should the abbot win, they stayed to study with him, but should he lose, they moved on. For example, according to the monk and literatus Zongmi, when the monk Daoyi visited Huairang (677–744), 'the two monks debated on the destiny of the school and entered into difficult questions on the supreme principle. As his [Daoyi's] arguments were not up to those of Jang, and as he knew that the latter was the legitimate receiver of the robe from the patriarch of Ts'ai-Ch'o [Zaichuo], he therefore decided to stay on with the master for religious cultivation' (Jan, 1972: 45–46).

The mode of argumentation in these disputations was predominantly deductive, as it was in the Indian Buddhist *vivāda*. Proponents of a thesis attempted to defend their position by constructing arguments based on the *topoi* typical of dialectical disputation, such as definition, species/genus, contraries, and cause/effect. Their opponents, on the other hand, tried to demonstrate such fatal flaws as contradiction, equivocation, infinite regress, *reductio ad absurdum*, and meaninglessness. In short, like Aristotelian dialectic, such argumentation assumed the laws of identity, excluded middle, and non-contradiction.

One relatively accessible example of this argumentation is the exchanges c. 520 at the court of Prince Zhaoming, with the Prince acting as host and twenty-three monks and literati disputing with him. The prince began by summarizing the doctrine of the 'two truths,' the Buddhist recognition of the worldly, mundane, conventional truth, which is held to be only relatively true, and the Buddhist affirmation of a higher truth which is absolutely true, that being the essential 'emptiness' of all objects and phenomena. In the following excerpt Tan Zong raises the question of the enlightened person's relationship to conventional truth. As is often the case in these disputations, he pose his opening question disjunctively.

> Q: Does the sage perceive the worldly truth, or not perceive the worldly truth?
> A: Sages know that common men perceive the existence of the worldly truth, but the sage does not perceive [the worldly truth].
> Q: So the sage does not perceive the worldly truth. Then how does the sage teach sentient beings by means of the worldly truth?
> A: The sage is not deluded, so he does not perceive the worldly truth, but the unhindered sage knows what is perceived by the common person (Swanson, 1989: 64–65).

Tan Zong's second question is intended to lead the Prince into undercutting the efficacy of Buddhist teachings themselves, an egregious contradiction, and the Prince barely rescues himself with the distinction he draws in his response. In a later exchange, with Lo Pinghou, the Prince falters more seriously.

> Q: It is not yet decided whether or not mundane truth refers to phenomena which arise.
> A: The essence of the mundane truth is phenomena which arise.
> Q: But the mundane truth is an arbitrary perception. How can phenomena arise?
> A: One sees existence through an arbitrary perception. Therefore existence is [perceived as] arising.
> Q: For there to be existence merely through arbitrary perception is not true phenomena. If it is not true phenomena, how can they be said to arise?
> A: "Arising phenomena" itself is called an arbitrary perception. Also, those who arbitrarily perceive [this unreal arising of phenomena] call it the arising of phenomena.
> Q: If this is merely an arbitrary perception, then it is not true arising. If there really is arising, why is it called arbitrary perception?
> A: [Common people] already perceive arbitrarily, but there is not really an arising. They merely perceive existence arbitrarily and thus there is arbitrary arising (Swanson 1989: 65–66).

Lo Pinghou's attack here focuses on the Prince's fallacious inference that the perception of something means that it exists, a point he pounds home through demonstrating the resultant inconsistencies for the Prince's position.

This practice of rigorous deductive disputation had some broader influence on contemporaneous discourse practices. It became the fashion to carry on a structured, focussed disputation in letters (letters were treated as a public genre). There were many such argumentative exchanges, which can usually be identified by their titles: the formula were 'Person A objects to (*nan*)/questions (*wen*) person B on topic C' or 'Person B responds to Person

A,' sometimes followed by the bibliographer's remark 'X number of rounds (*fan* or *shou*).'

Given this degree of concern with disputation, it is not surprising that some half dozen Indian debate manuals were translated and studied in China from the sixth through the eighth centuries.[3] The translations of the debate manuals were one small part of a massive translation project that included Buddhist sutras, scholastic treatises, and tracts on monastic life as well as works on such Indian sciences as astronomy, medicine, and mathematics. Hundreds of works were eventually translated. In many cases the Chinese state sponsored these translation projects, which usually involved teams of three to six people per text. These translations began during the fifth century and continued through the twelfth.

Bibliographies from the late sixth and early seventh centuries list such disputation manuals as the *Tarkaśāstra* [*Rushilun*] attributed to Vasubandhu and the *Upāyahṛdaya* [*Fangbian lunxin*] attributed to Nāgārjuna; both of these works still exist in some form. These bibliographies also list other works whose titles suggest they related to disputation, such as a *Paripṛcchāśāstra* [*Fanzhi lun*], a *Nigrahasthānaśāstra* [*Duofu lun*], and a *Nyāyaśāstra* [*Zhengshuo daoli lun*], all of which have disappeared (Vassiliev, 1937: 1015, 1017).

During the Tang (618–906) two works on disputation by the famed Indian logician Dinnaga (c. 480–540) were translated, his *Nyāyamukha* (*Yinming zhengli menlun*) and his later *Pramāṇasamuccaya*. The Chinese also had access to the *Nyāyapraveśa* (*Yinming ruzheng lilun*), an introduction to the *Nyāyamukha* written by his disciple Śaṅkarasvāmin. Mention should also be made of the monumental *Yogacārabhūmiśāstra* [*Yujia shilun*] by Asanga (c. 350–420), which was translated c. 647 C.E. Chapter fifteen, which outlines the types of speech and speech situations, also contains the rules for disputation.

Although these handbooks on disputation were but a handful of the many texts translated, they were deemed important enough to merit some further scholarly attention. At one time there existed at least three separate Chinese commentaries on the *Tarkaśāstra*, and quite a number of commentaries were written on the *Nyāyapraveśa*. Seven of these latter commentaries are still preserved, as is much of Shentai's exegesis of the *Nyāyamukha*. Consistent with this interest, some individuals pursued the study of *yinming*, travelling to monks who specialized in lecturing on these texts. Knowledge of the technical terms and concepts of these works also percolated out more generally. Zongmi, for instance, in his discussion of valid knowledge reproduces the *vivāda* handbooks' list of its sources: 'inference (*biliang*), perception (*xianliang*), and Buddhist doctrine (*Foyen liang*)' (Zongmi 833: 401a).

These manuals on disputation were almost surely lost during the persecution of Buddhism under the emperor Tang Wuzong. This campaign culminated in 845 in the destruction of the monasteries, burning and

dispersal of the libraries, and laicization of the clergy. This policy was not reversed until 847, upon the accession of the next emperor. It would have been possible to reimport the works on disputation; in fact, the Chinese could have obtained more advanced tracts such as those by the Buddhist logician Dharmakirti. During the Song dynasty (960–1126) teams of monks were sent to India, as well as to Japan and Korea, to obtain copies of lost Buddhist scriptures. But apparently there was no felt need for recovering materials on disputation – this, despite a continuing commitment to the practice itself. As before, Buddhist biographers continue to praise individuals who were 'skilled in disputation,' and the historical records for the later Tang and the Song dynasties continue to refer to religious disputation as a central activity in the monasteries and at the courts.

A PERFORMATIVE CONTRADICTION?

The Buddhist specialization in disputation is somewhat puzzling, and on several grounds. First, it is in direct conflict with remarks attributed to the Buddha himself. In several major Buddhist scriptures Buddha alleges that a devotion to argument and debate distracts from the quest for enlightenment. The ground for the criticism can be traced directly back to the most foundational of Buddhist beliefs, the Fourfold Analysis of the problem of suffering. According to the Buddha, suffering results from desire, and the remedy is to extinguish the causes of desire by following the Eightfold path. Hence the 'paradox of desire' of Buddhism – the desire to become enlightened is negative insofar as it is still a form of desire. On a less exalted plane, the desire to win a debate, and to be rewarded for the victory, is also a step in the wrong direction, soteriologically speaking. To the extent that the very structure of competitive debate encourages such aspirations, to the same extent it is incompatible with the most elementary Buddhist tenets.

The Chinese monk Baizhang brought out the parallel very clearly when he declared that 'For one to be called renunciant because of the search for unsurpassed enlightenment and ultimate peace is still a false aspiration – how much the more so is worldly disputation, seeking victory and defeat, saying "I am able, I understand," seeking a following, liking a disciple, being fond of a dwelling place, making a pact with a patron (for) a robe, a meal, a name, a gain' (Cleary, 1978: 57–58).

Furthermore, disputation, like all language use, puts Buddhist practitioners at risk of some serious inconsistencies. Buddhist ontology affirms the 'emptiness' (Sanskrit *śūnyatā*) of all beings, objects, thoughts, and emotion states. 'Emptiness' here refers to the Buddhist doctrine of 'codependent arising' (Sanskrit *pratītya-samutpāda*). According to this doctrine, all beings, rather than being characterized by an enduring essence, instead are continually reconstituted in an ever-changing stream of coincident

circumstances. (It is helpful to keep in mind, as several Buddhologists have noted, that 'emptiness' is not a primary term that refers to an entity in the world, nor is it equivalent to 'nothingness.' Rather, it is a term in the meta-system describing the world [Robinson, 1967: 43].) From the Buddhist standpoint, language ineluctably freezes an ever-fluid and shifting reality and it reifies non-persisting entities. Language, and the distinctions it draws, are admittedly useful on a conventional, mundane level of reference but they are ultimately unable to express the true nature of reality.

This limitation of language was particularly emphasized by the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, which extended the application of the notion of emptiness to the most basic components of reality. 'Emptiness was understood in this tradition, in one sense, as the perception of reality that resulted from a deconstruction of the conceptual and verbal framework by which other Buddhists had sought to rationalize Buddhist teaching' (Powell, 1986: 9). Thus the Mahayana stressed that language is incapable of expressing reality, and, in fact, it commonly acts to reinforce delusion.

The Mahayana doctrines were brought to China at the end of the fourth century C.E. by the Central Asian monk Kumarajiva, and this was the branch of Buddhism that eventually predominated in China. Chinese Buddhist teachers emphasized its perspective on the unreliability of language and its delusory nature. The theme was explicitly announced in the story of Yangshan Huiji's dream of being called upon to preach. His entire sermon consisted of one sentence: 'the Teaching of the Great Vehicle is beyond all predication' (Cleary and Cleary, 1990: 386–388). Similarly, Linji warned, 'Followers of the Way, do not lay hold of what I am saying. Why not? My teachings have no fixed foundation; they are only designs of an instant in space, like images painted in colour, or other teaching devices' (Schloegl, 1976: 60–61).

There seems a *prima facie* incompatibility here. On the one hand the Chinese Buddhists espoused the Mahayana ontology of emptiness and a view of language as delusory. On the other hand, they enthusiastically engaged in disputation, which committed them to such assumptions as the laws of identity, excluded middle, and non-contradiction. In short, the Chinese Buddhist practice of disputation seems to place its practitioners into a 'performative contradiction' with the doctrines they are arguing for.

This apparent contradiction could be smoothed over by recourse to the Buddhist pedagogical and soteriological concept of *upāya*, 'expedient means,' according to which a misleading method was allowed or even encouraged insofar as it brought its hearer closer to an apprehension of Buddhist truths. The challenge, then, was to devise ways to exploit the use-fulness of language without being trapped within it. In this spirit the third century Indian thinker Nāgārjuna developed a 'negative elenchus' which, like the Socratic version, enabled him to uncover the logical contradiction which he believed necessarily underlay any thesis offered in debate

(although the logical soundness of his method has been called into question: see Robinson, 1972).

The more popular strategy was resort to the 'tetralemma' or *catuṣkoṭika*, the 'four-cornered negation,' a series of four statements which took a form such as the following:

1. A ("the soul exists")
2. not-A ("the soul does not exist")
3. A and not-A ("the soul exists and does not exist")
4. not-A and not not-A ("the soul does not exist and it does not not exist")

This pattern was not original to the Buddhists, but they used and developed it so extensively that it became associated with them. It appeared in Mahayana scriptures such as the *Mādhyamikaprajñāpāramitā sūtra* and in the treatises of scholars such as Nāgārjuna, who cited it in both positive and negative forms.

Considered as a class of propositions, the tetralemma has been criticized as internally inconsistent. But this criticism depends on a synchronous reading of the four statements, which is a misunderstanding of its pedagogical function. The tetralemma is a diachronic and progressive sequence. In either its positive or its negative forms, it allowed the Buddhist disputant to counter whatever level of belief his opponent was at, and thereby lead him to and, eventually, through the higher levels. This process of entering into and conducting the debate on the opponent's terms might lead to apparent inconsistencies in the positions successively argued by one individual. But this need not be considered a problem or a shortcoming so long as he was employing debate as a type of *upāya*.

This situational use of the appropriate level of affirmation or negation is best seen through some brief examples.

> Ta-mei asked Ma-tsu, "What is Buddha?" Ma-tsu said, "This very mind is Buddha." (Aitken, 1990: 189)
>
> A monk asked Ma-tsu, "What is Buddha?" Ma-tsu said, "Not mind, not Buddha." (Aitken, 1990: 204)
>
> Tao-wu and Chien-yuan went to a house to pay condolences. Chien-yuan rapped on the coffin and asked, "Living or dead?" Tao-wu said, "I won't say living, I won't say dead." Chien-yuan said, "Why won't you say?" Tao-wu said, "I won't say! I won't say!" (Cleary and Cleary, 1977: vol 2, 365).
>
> Tao-wu paid a visit to his sick brother monk, Tun-yen. "Where can I see you again, if you die, and leave only your corpse here?" asked the visitor. "I will meet you in the place where nothing is born and nothing dies." Tao-wu was not satisfied with the answer and said, "What you should say is that there is no place in which nothing lives and nothing dies, and that we need not meet each other at all." (Senzaki and McCandless: 60).

The tetralemma, as well as the broader concept of 'the hundred different kinds of negation,' were widely cited and employed by the Chinese Buddhists. Tetralemmic negation was refined by the scholar Jizang (549–623) who developed 'The Double truth on Three Levels' (Chang,

1969: 11). Along similar lines, Yongjia traced the relationship between affirmation and negation by stating that

> "[m]ind is neither being nor non-being, and simultaneously it is neither not being nor not non-being. When mind is either being or non-being, it falls into the trap of affirmation. When it is neither being nor non-being, it falls into the trap of negation. Thus, it merely asserts that both affirmation and negation are wrong, but it does not assert that both non-affirmation and non-negation are right. Now to use both negations in order to deny both affirmations is to say that when affirmation is denied and becomes non-affirmation, it is still negation. Conversely, if one uses both negations to deny both negations – that is, when negation is denied and turned into negation of negation – the result is affirmation. Thus, what we have is the assertion of the rightness of non-affirmation and non-negation, but it is neither not negation nor not non-negation, neither not affirmation nor not non-affirmation" (Chang, 1969: 33).

Within this context disputation still fulfilled the same functions: as before, disputation was used to weigh the acceptability of the thesis under discussion and also to rank an individual's level of insight. When this happened publicly it could lead to serious results, as when Dongshan Liangjie (807–869) audited a certain Master Ch'u's doctrinal exposition.

> "It is wonderful indeed!" Ch'u said to the assembly. "It is wonderful indeed! How immeasurable are Buddhism and Taoism [Daoism]." Master Liangjie made his reply: "As for Buddhism and Taoism, let us leave them for a moment. Could you tell me what kind of man is he who is speaking of Buddhism and Taoism? Please just give me a simple statement." For a while Ch'u was silent without answering. Master Liangjie pressed him: "Why don't you say something immediately?" Ch'u replied: "If you want to dispute with me you will get nowhere." To this Master Liangjie said: "You have not yet uttered a word. What do you mean nothing will be gained by dispute." Ch'u made no answer. Master Liangjie continued: "The difference between Buddhism and Taoism lies simply in their names. Should we not bring out their teachings?" Ch'u replied: "What teachings do you want to discuss?" Master Liangjie gave his illustration by a quotation: "When ideas are obtained, words are forgotten." Ch'u challenged him, saying, "You are letting the teachings stain your mind." The Master then said: "How much more you are staining your mind by talking about Buddhism and Taoism!" It is said that Reverend Monk Ch'u died because of this challenge (Chang, 1965: 49–50).

Along the same lines, when a new monk appeared in a monastery both he and the master could use this form of disputation to assess the other, as happened when Yongjia visited the Sixth Patriarch. Having passed his first interview, he went to bid his leave later the same day.

> "Are you not leaving too soon?" asked the Patriarch. "Basically, motion does not move. How can you say that I am leaving too soon?" challenged Yongjia. "Who is he who is aware of no-movement?" asked the Patriarch. "You, Master, are making this discrimination," replied Yongjia. "You have grasped very well the meaning of no-birth." "How can no-birth have meaning?" "If it has no meaning, who can differentiate it?" "Even though one may differentiate it, it is still meaningless." The Patriarch exclaimed, "Good! Good! Please stay here for at least one night" (Chang, 1969: 28).

However, even such overt negation of distinctions could still be seen as a kind of affirmation, as still relying on, and hence reifying, the distinc-

tions of language itself, and so still leaving the speaker vulnerable to accusations of inconsistency. Some masters took the further step of deliberate disrupting the orderly flow of linguistic interchange, in what look like nothing so much as a series of determined attempts to violate Grice's conversational maxims. The maxim of relevance was a favorite target.

> A monk asked the priest Feng-hsueh, "Speech and silence are concerned with equality and differentiation. How can I transcend equality and differentiation.?"
> Feng-hsueh said [quoting a line of poetry], "I always think of Chiang-nan in March; partridges chirp among the many fragrant flowers." (Aitken, 1990: 157).

In other episodes the speakers use such stratagems as simply repeating the question, attacking the questioner or the question, or contradicting themselves, all of which serve equally well to upset the conventional assumptions governing conversation.

Even these strategies, though, still remained within language, with the attendant risk of performative contradiction. The ultimate step was to transcend language, to respond to its affirmations and distinctions non-linguistically. This category includes such responses as blows, slaps, animal noises, shouts, silence, overturning objects, and leaving the scene. Thus, for instance, when the master Linji was pressured to lecture on Buddhism he opened his talk by declining to speak, and instead challenging any member of the crowd to "prove his skill before the assembly". . . . In response a monk asked: "What is the essence of Buddhism?" The Master gave a *katsu* [a shout]. The monk bowed. The Master said, "This one can hold his own in debate" (Schloegl, 1976: 13).

Despite the apparent transcendence of language, the terminology of 'debate,' with its reference to 'Dharma combat,' winning and losing, and of host and guest, continues to be used not only in Linji's writings, but down to the present day, in the practices of Zen Buddhism (which developed from the Chinese Chan Buddhism). One final story will illustrate this persistence of these practices and their assumptions, as well as their highly localized character within Buddhism. The story is told by Mark Epstein, an American student of Buddhism, who was present at what was billed as a 'dharma combat' between Seung Sahn, a Korean Zen master, and the venerable Tibetan teacher Kalu Rinpoche.

> The Zen master . . . reached deep inside his robes and drew out an orange. "What is this?" he demanded of the lama. "What is this?" This was a typical opening question, and we could feel him ready to pounce on whatever answer he was given.
> The Tibetan sat quietly fingering his mala [rosary] and made no move to respond.
> "What is this?" the Zen master insisted, holding the orange up to the Tibetan's nose.
> [Kalu Rinpoche and his translator whispered together for several minutes.] Finally the translator addressed the room: Rinpoche says, "What is the matter with him? Don't they have oranges where he comes from?"
> The dialogue progressed no further (Epstein, 1995: 13–14).

NOTES

[1] Much ink has been spilled recently over the question of whether this form represents a deduction in the form of an extended syllogism, as has been the received view, or whether it is closer to another form of inference, such as retroduction (as is argued by Factor 1983), or even no inference at all. Douglas Daye believes it does qualify as an 'explanation' or an inference schema, because the conclusion comes first; the examples are, on his view, extraneous – he considers them 'rhetorical' elements, directed toward persuasion (1975). Other scholars have argued that the examples function to forestall paradoxes that arise in reasoning about non-existent entities. This is consistent with the interpretation advanced by Gupta (1980) that the Nyaya were concerned with soundness rather than merely with validity.

[2] Many of the arguments, both pro and con, are preserved in the seventh-century collections *Hong mingji* (T.2102), *Guanghong mingji* (T.2103), and *Ji gujin fodao lunheng* (T.2104). Relatively little of this material has been translated into European languages until Livia Kohn's *Laughing at the Tao*.

[3] R. Chi makes the rather startling claim that the Chinese concern with these texts was hermeneutical. He argues that '[I]n Hsuan Tsang's [Xuanzang's] time logic in India was mainly a tool for organized public debates. In China there was no such a tradition and public disputation was rare. As a result the application of logic in China was even more modest than that in India. It was not applied as a tool for actual debate, but as a key to the understanding of certain Indian texts in which debates were involved. In other words, certain Indian texts would be completely incomprehensible to one if one had not some knowledge of debate' (1969: lxxvi). The striving for a better comprehension of the Indian philosophical works was no doubt one motive behind the study of Indian texts on argumentation. But the frequent descriptions of public disputation as recorded in the primary source materials, and the importance attached to this activity by all concerned, is a strong counter-argument to Chi's interpretation.

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