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Hu-Jan Nien-Ch'i^a
(Suddenly a Thought Rose): Chinese
Understanding of Mind and Consciousness

by Whalen Lai

The Issue: In the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* (*Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin lun*),^b henceforth abbreviated as AFM), is found a unique explanation of the origin of *avidyā*, ignorance:

Hu-jan nien-ch'i, ming wei wu-ming^c

Suddenly a thought rose; this is called ignorance

This idea has baffled many modern scholars as it has traditionally charmed many a Far Eastern Buddhist. What is meant by “suddenly”? What constitutes “thought”? The most recent translator of the AFM, Yoshito Hakeda, has appended this remark to the passage:

There has been much discussion on the meaning of *hu-jan* in connection with the origin of ignorance, mainly on the basis of interpretations proposed by Fa-tsang,^d (1) that ignorance alone becomes the source of defiled states of being. It is the subtlest; no other state of being can be the origin of this. It is therefore said in the text that ignorance emerges suddenly. (2) Commenting on a quotation from a *sūtra*, he says “suddenly” means “beginninglessly,” since the passage quoted makes clear that there is no other state of being prior to the state of ignorance. (3) The word “suddenly” is not used from the standpoint of time, but is used to account for the emergence of ignorance without any instance of inception.

. . . A monk of Ming^e China, glosses “suddenly” as *pu-chüeh*,^f which may mean “unconsciously” or “without being aware of the reason.”

. . . If *hu-jan* is a translation of a Sanskrit word, the original word *asasmāt* may be posited. *Akasmāt* means “without reason” or “accidentally.”^g

The above remark does not actually answer the question of the origin of the concept, *hu-jan* (suddenly) or the identity of *nien*⁸ (thought). We become only more aware that *hu-jan* is one crucial justification for *ch'an*^h (zen) "sudden enlightenment," itself a unique idea. Concerning the meaning of *nien* and *wu-nien*ⁱ (no-thought), I have shown in a related article that (a) Hakeda is not the first repeatedly to read *nien* as *wang-nien*,^j *vikalpa*; Śikṣānanda's AFM was bothered by the same term; (b) but both managed to distort the original meaning; for (c) *nien* is rooted in a peculiar understanding in pre-Buddhist Han China.² *Nien* is the incipient thought, associated with *yin*^k that disrupts the otherwise passive, *yang*,^l mind. In this present article, I will cite more evidences—this time focusing upon the concepts of *shih*,^m consciousness, and *hu-jan*, suddenness—to show again why the AFM cannot be fully understood without reference to the native mode of thought.

The origin of ignorance is naturally a mystery. The first of the chain of causation (*nidānas*), *avidyā* cannot be pushed back to any prior cause. In the AFM metaphor of water and wave, the *nien* is a result of "the wind of ignorance"; in another place, *nien* comes after the deluded mind has been so perfumed. "Because Ignorance perfumes Suchness, there is the deluded mind (*wang-hsin*)ⁿ. . . . The unenlightened *nien* arises and lets manifest the deluded object-realm."³ These inconsistencies perhaps cannot be avoided. It is part of the peculiar *pratītya-samutpāda*, concomitancy of factors, endorsed by the AFM.⁴ Hakeda's explanation draws upon a similar paradox that attends the *tathāgata-garbha*, the embryonic Buddha in all sentient beings. The existence of this enlightened essence in unenlightened men is, by itself, a mystery. The *agutakleśa* (accidental defilements) on the innately pure mind are as inconceivable as the Buddha-essence itself. This ideology is basic to the AFM understanding of the nature and origin of ignorance, but the more direct precedent is to be found in the innovations in earlier Chinese exegesis. Below we will trace the history of the concept of mind and consciousness from early Chinese Buddhism through the Six Dynasties to the AFM, itself.

A Clue from Shen-hui^o and *Tsung-mi*.^p The AFM defined much of sinic Mahāyāna thought that came after. One tradition heavily influenced by it is Ch'an. Although it is not always advisable to use Ch'an as the standard for measuring the AFM (because of the way Ch'an takes liberties with concepts), its more radical pronouncements can help to bring our problem into the open. In the *Yu-lu*^q (Recorded Sayings) of Shen-hui and in the *Yüan-jen-lun*^r (*Essay on Man*) by Tsung-mi, we have

two rather intriguing passages holding a clue to the origin of the idea of *hu-jan*. Shen-hui's question and answer is a bit puzzling on the first reading:

- Q: Why is ignorance the same as spontaneity (*tzu-jan*)?⁵
A: Because ignorance and Buddha-nature come into existence spontaneously. Ignorance has Buddha-nature as its basis and Buddha-nature has ignorance as its basis. Since one is the basis for the other, when one exists, the other exists also. With enlightenment, it is Buddha-nature. Without enlightenment, it is ignorance.

The hidden reference is to a passage in the *Nirvāṇa sūtra*, a familiar one known to Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty¹ in his essay on Buddha-nature.⁵ The Chinese took it to imply the *interdependence* of wisdom and ignorance. The next question in the *Yu-lu* alludes to a heretical understanding of "spontaneous causation." The Buddha taught that all realities are caused. A doctrine of spontaneity, the self-caused or the uncaused, would violate this basic dictum in Buddhism. The self-caused has been negated by Nāgārjuna along with other fallacies (the other-caused, the together-caused, the uncaused).⁶

- Q: If ignorance is spontaneity, is that not identical with the spontaneity of heretics?
A: It is identical with the spontaneity of the Taoists, but the interpretation is different.
Q: How are they different?
A: In Buddhism both Buddha-nature and ignorance are spontaneous. Why? Because all dharmas depend on the power of Buddha-nature. Therefore all dharmas belong to spontaneity. But in the spontaneity of Taoism, "Tao^u produced the One. The One produced the two. The two produced the three. And the three produced the ten thousand things."⁷ From the One down, all are spontaneous. Therefore, the two interpretations are different.⁸

"Spontaneous" ignorance is in reference to the AFM idea of *hu-jan nien-ch'i*. The association of spontaneous ignorance with Taoist spontaneity suggests a native source to *hu-jan*. If so, *hu-jan* might be a version of *tzu-jan*. The difference between the two naturalnesses is not exactly clear in the *Yu-lu*, but fortunately we have Tsung-mi's explanation.

In his *Yüan-jen-lun*, Tsung-mi turns also to the question of the relative superiority of Buddhism *vis-à-vis* Taosim and Confucianism

over the understanding of "origin." Chinese naturalism is described by him as:

In Confucianism and Taoism, it is explained that all species such as human beings, beasts, etc., are generated from and nourished by the Great Tao of Nothingness. The principle of Tao gives rise to the primal force [ether] which created Heaven and Earth which then created the myriad things [in the sequence of One, Two, Three and the ten thousand things]. . . .⁹

Since everything is natural, then evil, misfortunes, etc., would also be natural. If everything is so ordained by Heaven, man can only accept his fate (*ming*).^v In contrast, even the Hīnayānist would have a better system, namely, recognition of cause and effect. Through such causative analysis, man can change his fate and reverse the *nidānas* producing suffering. However, Hīnayāna is judged dualistic and, in the end, Tsung-mi returns to the "higher naturalism" of the Hua-yen^w and Ch'an, basically the monism of Mind found in the AFM. From this higher perspective, what was the one natural Ether in Chinese cosmogony is seen as a self-bifurcation of the One Mind. Reality is, according to the AFM, the transformation of the mind, the manifestation of object-realm out of the evolving consciousness that became the *ālaya-vijñāna*.¹⁰ The one thought (*nien*) so splits the One Mind into the dualism of subject and object. Tsung-mi describes the process as follows:

The Great Ultimate gives birth to the two poles (*yin-yang*). This is the spontaneous Great Tao. The true essence is so understood (in Taoism). However, in fact, it is the one thought (*i-nien*)^x (in the mind) that so transmutes itself into the seeing and the seen (i.e., the two poles). The (objective) Original Ether is only the movement (*tung*)^y of the one thought (*i-nien*); it is only the object-realm (to the subjective consciousness).¹¹

By introducing *nien* into mind, the Buddhist system can account for duality and yet find a way to eliminating delusion instead of passively tolerating it as the natural fate. This final Mahāyāna teaching allows for but does not endorse Hīnayānist dualism. Ignorance may be, in Shen-hui's words, "spontaneous," but this "natural" factor is reducible to being an accident in the mind. Buddha-nature is *essential*, as ignorance is *existential*, spontaneity. The latter can be and should be transvaluated into the former, for ultimately Buddha-nature is the sole truth and

reality. Thus, Taoism represents ontological monism and fatalism, whereas AFM represents noetic non-duality and self-transformation. Hence the superiority of the latter.

That clever distinction need not detain us at the moment. It is the characterization of ignorance as spontaneous, *tzu-jan*, that intrigues us. The term *hu-jan* is indeed a radical form of *tzu-jan*. We find a similar term used by Kuo Hsiang² in his commentary to the *Chuang-tzu*.^{aa} Kuo Hsiang had rejected Wang Pi's^{ab} idea that all existent things (*yu*,^{ac} being) come from non-being. Being cannot be derived from its opposite. Being simply *is*. There is likewise no Heaven and earth *prior* to the myriad things; it is not true that the many came from the three, or the three from the two, or the two the one. Rather, the term "Heaven and earth" is the "name for the totality of the myriad things." But if all things simply *are*, how do they come-to-be at all? Kuo Hsiang simply said "they suddenly are."

Since non-being is non-being, it cannot produce being. Before being itself is produced, it cannot produce other beings. Then by whom are things produced? They spontaneously produce themselves, that is all. (i.e. They suddenly are born.)¹²

The actual expression used for "suddenly" is *kuai-jan* (*erh-sheng*) which reads literally "In one chunk (they are born)." *Kuai* as noun means "a lump, a piece." *Jan* makes the noun an adverb. In one piece, things are. The noun has been used by Chuang-tzu. Nature is one great *kuai*. (Creel has rendered it as the "Great Clot").¹³ In rejecting the genesis *ex nihilo*, Kuo Hsiang gives us a supreme paradox similar to the AFM's idea of a paradoxical *hu-jan*. Suddenly, a *nien* arose and ignorance is replete. However, Kuo Hsiang's "naturalism" still falls under Shen-hui's and Tsung-mi's critique of fatalistic monism. In fact, Kuo Hsiang is often judged to be a fatalist, precisely because he equated the given (or *jen-wei*)^{ae} with the *tzu-jan*.¹⁴ Therefore, we have to look deeper for a more subtle form of spontaneity, one involving psychology. We will look at three cases of Chinese Buddhist understanding of mind that anticipate the ideas in the AFM. These cases combine Indian insights and Chinese predispositions.

Shih (Consciousness) in the Feng-fa-yao^{af}

A lay student of the famous monk, Chih Tun,^{ag} Hsi Ch'ao^{ah} (336–377) wrote the *Essentials of Faith (Feng-fa-yao)* to explain the purports of the Buddhist faith. The text has been translated in full by Eric Zürcher.¹⁵ There are also many insightful remarks in his notes. The more recent Japanese translation has not fully taken Zürcher's work into account.¹⁶ What Zürcher finds to be mistakes in Hsi Ch'ao's reading of basic concepts in Buddhism can also be seen as Sinitic creativity. Some of these ideas recur in the AFM but within a mature structure. It is doubtful that the ideas are Hsi Ch'ao's; they went back to Chih Tun and to Chih Ch'ien^{ai} a century before.¹⁷ One basic “confusion” surrounds the use of the word *shih* (consciousness).

Shih is An Shih-kao's^{aj} choice for rendering *viññāna*, one of the five *skandhas*. However, there are overlaps with the other *skandhas* in the Chinese exegesis:

	Sanskrit		An Shih-kao	In the Nidānas
<i>rūpa</i>	form	<i>che</i> ^{ak}	color, form	4th member
<i>vedana</i>	perception	<i>yang-t'ung</i> ^{al}	itch-pain	7th
<i>saṃjñā</i>	conception	<i>ssu-hsiang</i> ^{am}	thinking	—
<i>saṃskāra</i>	will	<i>sheng-ssu</i> ^{an}	life-death	2nd
<i>viññāna</i>	consciousness	<i>shih</i>	consciousness	3rd

The *skandhas* should be discrete and separate, but Hsi Ch'ao follows a current practice to interpret *ssu-hsiang* (for *saṃjñā*) as:

To think in anticipation of what has not yet taken place is *ssu*;
afterwards to recall what has already happened is called *hsiang*.

This is based on a *yin-yang* bifurcation of functions. He also reads *saṃskāra* (life-death) liberally: it is the birth and death of momentary thoughts.

The incipient *hsin-nien*^{ao} (psychic thought) signals *sheng*^{ap} (birth).
The *mieh*^{aq} (cessation) of the *i-shih*^{ar} (intention-consciousness) constitutes *ssu*^{as} (death).¹⁸

However, the recollection of things past is also associated with karmic retribution. Things can be stored away for ages only to sprout later.

That function is usually given over to the *shih*, *viññāna* (consciousness).

By *shih* is meant what has concerned the mind, then is stored away unforgettten. *Shih* can sprout in the bosom of men even after *kalpas* have passed. . . .¹⁹

Shih can fulfill this karmic function because *viññāna* is the item that survives death, if but for a limited time, to be born in the mother's womb for the next rebirth. It is the third of the *nidānas*, and it carries over the predispositions of the second, *hsing* (*saṃskāra*). The twelve are:

ignorance → action intention → consciousness → name and form → six senses →
avidyā *saṃskāra* *viññāna* *nāmarūpa* *ṣaḍāyatana*

contact → perception → cravings → clinging → becoming → birth → old age, death
sparsā *vedanā* *trṣṇā* *upādāna* *bhāva* *jāti* *jarā-maraṇa*

The series resumes at *viññāna* after death. Hsi Ch'ao took the further liberty of associating *shih* with the object of the mind. The six senses (*āyatana*, fifth of the *nidānas*) are the five senses plus the mind, *manas*. Each has its corresponding object. Eyes perceive sight, ears sound, etc., and all are paired to consciousness (*viññāna*), i.e., eye-consciousness, etc. Now, Hsi Ch'ao designates, as the object of *manas*, the *shih* (consciousness)!

. . . The mind perceives thought. This thought is the same as the *skandha* mentioned earlier.²⁰

This is not warranted in Sanskrit but rather natural to the Chinese. The mind knows; what it knows is knowledge. The word *shih* happens to mean "to know" as well as "knowledge." Therefore *viññāna* is the object to *manas*.

Finally, the frequent choice of *sheng-ssu* for *saṃskāra* by An Shih-kao can also be misleading, for its synonym *sheng-mieh* is used for *saṃsāra*, i.e., birth-and-death. In the *nidānas*, *sheng-ssu* is defined as the emergence and cessation of mental phenomenon (*jāti-nirodha*). At other times *hsing* (行) is used for *saṃskāra*, sometimes written as *hsing* (行).²¹ Now, rebirth was seen as *shih-shen pu-mieh*, *sui-hsing shou-shen*,²² and that, upon a cursory reading, is "the spirit is immortal; it would take on a body following its karmic due." This is how it is usually taken. Technically though, it should be read as "the *viññāna* does not perish,

but due to the action-intention (the 'grasping after') of the *saṃskāra*, it would in time be reborn (in the mother's womb) to resume a *rūpa*."²¹ The overlap of *saṃskāra* with the Chinese understanding of *ssu-hsiang*, karmic recollection, is mentioned already. *Saṃskāra* also overlaps with the Chinese concept of *i^{av}* (intention), also used to translate *manas*.

Strictly speaking, the Chinese should have kept these items apart; *saṃjñā*, *jāti-nirodha*, *saṃsāra*, *saṃskāra*, *viññāna*, etc., are different. From the Chinese liberal point of view, however, they can be justifiably fused. The message then becomes this: "The mind has conscious (*shih*, *viññāna*) thought (*nien*). Thoughts (*nien*) rise and fall (*jāti*, *nirodha*) in an instant (*nien*, for *kṣana*). Ergo, life-and-death (*sheng-mieh*, *saṃsāra*) is a correlate of *shih* (consciousness). As an agent of karmic deeds (*hsing*, *sheng-ssu*, *saṃskāra*), consciousness is capable of recollecting (*hsiang*, of *ssu-hsiang*, *saṃjñā*) past events after long lapses of time. The *shih* transmigrates (into the mother's womb). The elimination of *nien* (thought, momentariness), i.e., *wu-nien* (no-thought), is the pure state of mind in nirvāṇic inactivity. The termination of *shih* (consciousness) likewise liberates." We will find this structure in the *Feng-fa-yao*, as part of Hsi Ch'ao's exegesis. But we also find it in the AFM, which is supposed to be an Indian *śāstra*. Without going into the whole controversy of the AFM authorship and its redaction to the *Śikṣānanada* version, I will limit myself first to a comparison of the *Feng-fa-yao* and the AFM in order to show this legacy of a sinitic psychology.

The Concept of Suddenness, Hu-jan. Not only is the word *hu* (sudden) actually used by Hsi Ch'ao, but the structure of his explanation of the emergence of delusion in the mind is the same as the one in the AFM. We read:

The *sūtra* says, "It is mind that creates [determines one's rebirth as] gods, men, hellish beings and animals; it is also mind that attains the Way." All *lü^{aw}* (anxious pondering) springs from the mind; each and every *nien* receives its retribution. Although matter (event) has yet to take shape (*hsing*),^{ax} mysteriously the karmic fate is already set. *This is because ch'ing nien^{ay} (emotive thoughts) are complete by themselves. Swiftly, abruptly, and suddenly (hu) they appear with no gaps in between. The first stirring (chi-tung)^{az} may be fine as a hair, but (its result) can eventually fill the universe. Reward and punishment, rebirth in the six paths, are all determined by it. Fortune and disaster, shame and regret, are decided in a moment. Therefore the man of the Way should "be on guard while in solitude."* In his mind, he should guard against the tiniest beginning of *lü*. With the ultimate *li^{ba}* (Principle) as his castle, he commands

over the *pen* (origin) and thus restrains the *mo*^{bb} (end). He would not, prior to the events or actions taking form (*hsing*), so very lightly arouse any *hsin-nien*, mental thoughts.²² (Italics mine)

The *sūtra* cited in the beginning is the *Parinirvāṇa sūtra* (*Hīnayāna*); its use of the active verb *tso*^{bc} (create) charmed the Chinese then as the line from the (Mahāyāna) *Daśabhūmika* (“The three realms are created by the mind”) will charm the writer of the AFM. The mind creates the world. The whole piece should be read, however, with this from the *Po-hu-t’ung*,^{bd} the *locus classicus* for understanding the dynamics of *nien* and *lü*, in a discussion on *hsing-ching*:^{be} “What is meant by nature (*hsing*) and emotion (*ching*)? Nature is the workings of *yang* as emotions that of *yin*. In the confluence of *yin-yang* is man born, endowed with the Five Natures (the five moral virtues) and the Six Emotions (joy, anger, grief, happiness, love and hatred). Emotions imply passivity; nature means life. The reception of these procures existence itself.” Therefore the *Kuo-ming-chüeh* [Apocryphal book on the Classic of Filial Piety]—here the *Po-hu-t’ung* quotes from this text—explains:

Emotion rises from *yin*; it is desire in accordance with *shih-nien*,^{bf} the thought of the moment. Nature comes from *yang*; it is always in tune with *li*, the Principle. *Yang* is considerate; *yin* seeks gain. Therefore emotions are greedy but nature is directed at common humanity.²³

Hsi Ch’ao and the AFM drew from this psychology. Hsi Ch’ao’s metaphor for karmic impact is taken from the *I Ching*,^{bg} already well cited in the period to show that China too knew of psychic retribution. The pairing of *nien* with *shih* (time, moment) and the anchorage of *li* are found in Hsi Ch’ao as in the *Po-hu-t’ung*. A similar message is found in this other passage:

The *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* says: “All the various *dharmas* take form (*hsing*) according to *i* (intention, thought.)^{bh}” The sign of fortune stirs (within) as the incipient element; the affairs (of the world) respond (without) as the consequent. *As a nien rises, there is being (yu). As a lü ceases, there is nonbeing (wu).* Where the intention (*i*) is at rest, all encounters run smoothly. Where the emotions (*ch’ing*) are obstructed, hazards abound. Therefore it is said that the cause for penetrating all as well as for being impeded lies within and not without. . . . (for) nothing is more manifested than what is hidden.²⁴ (Italics mine.)

From this, Hsi Ch'ao drew the conclusion that *wu-nien* is the gate to enlightenment. The term *wu-nien*, used already in that sense in the *Ming-tu*^{bi} commentary (third century), will become pivotal in the AFM and Ch'an.²⁵

Hsin and Shih in the Prajñā Schools

Contemporaneous with Hsi Ch'ao were the early schools of Emptiness. Among them are two that speculated on the emptiness of mind and the illusions of consciousness. The first is the *hsin-wu*^{bj} school of Chih Min-tu, who came south in A.D. 326. As reported later by Chitsang,^{bk}

What it says is that when the *sūtras* state "Various *dharmas* are empty," the *sūtras* only hope that the person would empty his mind so as not to hold onto the empty illusions; therefore it is called "Mind as Empty," *hsin-wu*.²⁶

By emptying the mind, realities would be emptied. According to the explanation appended in the *Shih-shuo hsin-yu*,^{bl} others also agreed that the mind, burdened with defilements, sees differentiated realities, whereas a pure mind would reflect all just as a mirror would.²⁷ Chih Min-tu,^{bm} however, went on to negate even the mind. For that he was much criticized when the majority believed in the existence of an enlightened entity (the luminous *shen*^{bn}).²⁸

The other figure holding an idealist interpretation is Yu Fa-kai^{bo} who proposed "*shih-han*."^{bp} T'ang Yung-t'ung^{bq} takes a clue from Tsung Ping's^{br} *Ming-fo-lun*^{bo} and regards this to mean "*shen-han-shih*," spirit includes, as its function, the consciousness.²⁹ Yu Fa-kai's position is reportedly this:

The Three Realms are the abode of the Long Night. The *hsin-shih* (psychic consciousness) is the primary cause of the Great Dream. What we see as myriad realities are only things in a dream. When one wakes from the dream or when the night finally dawns, then the *perverted, deluded consciousness* would cease, and the Three Realms will appear as altogether empty.³⁰ (Italics mine)

Realities are blamed on *hsin-shih* (mind-and-consciousness, but consciousness is intended here, *hsin* being only an adjective, i.e. psychic

consciousness). *Shih-han* should be taken as "(realities) are incorporated under consciousness." It does not mean "consciousness being incorporated under spirit (or mind)," even though the latter ideology is not rejected. For our purpose that ideology is also significant, for here is a hierarchy in which *shih* is considered to be lower than mind, *hsin*. The mind is deluded by consciousness.

The subordination of *shih* to *shen* (spirit) is found in Tsung Ping. Tsung Ping followed his master, Hui-yüan.^{bt} Hui-yüan had said:

Shen. . . lies beyond the parameters of the (*yin-yang*) hexagrams and the (*I Ching*) emblems, *hsiang*^{bu}. . . having no master (above it). . . and is beyond all (finite) appellation. Stimulated by things, it becomes active. Using numbers [*yin-yang* enumerations], it acts, but (being itself above things and numbers) it neither ceases. . . nor ends. Things with feeling can be found via things; things with consciousness can be sought out by numbers. . . . Thus we know: transformations are perceived by feelings but the spirit transmigrates through rebirths. Feeling is the mother of transformations but spirit is the root of feeling. Feeling can react to things but spirit can mysteriously transfer itself. The enlightened one would revert to the *pen*, the fundamental (spirit) but the deluded ones would (foolishly) chase after things.³¹

In Hui-yüan, the pair corresponding to *hsin* and *shih* is *shen* (spirit) and *ling* (the animated soul). One is higher, passive, while the other is lower, active. It is *ling* that drags the *shen* down into the world of things, emotion and change. The logic is similar to the tension between *hsin* and *nien* discussed earlier; both use the framework of Han *yin-yang* thought.

Tsung Ping substitutes *shih* for *ling*. This is partly in order to underline the connection that *shih* has with *sattva*. *Han-shih chih-liu*^{bv} (the species that has consciousness) is *sattva*, i.e., sentient beings. It is from *shen* that *shih* (sentientcy) emerges. The divine mind falls into sentientcy.

The alternation of *yin* and *yang* [in their differentiated forms] is called the Tao. The [undifferentiated] state prior to *yin-yang*'s being distinguished is called *shen*, spirit. . . . Following the Tao, *shen* enters into *ching-shen*, (the human) spirit, but it remains behind (above) *yin-yang*, not encompassed by them (not affected by change). . . . Although the spirit of all sentient beings is ideally one, in following the conditions (*sui-yüan*),^{bw} it wavers and changes to become the various, defiled *shih* (sentient beings). . . . The spirit (*ching-shen*)^{bx} took on form (*hsing*) and populated the

five paths (of *samsāra*) in infinite numbers during the creation and destruction of the Heaven and the Earth [the *kalpas*]. . . . The spirit is that which animates (*miao*)^{by} the myriad things. If it only exists by virtue of form (body) and ceases to be along with the (mortal) forms, then it would have been subservient to the then primary body. If so, how can spirit be said to be *miao* (animating) the form?³²

No, *shen* is the *pen*, basis; bodily form is *mo*, end, and not *vice-versa*.

The hierarchy of *shen/ling*, *shen/shih*, *hsin/shih* is duplicated in the AFM. In the words of Fa-tsang, “the Suchness mind (*chen-ju hsin*)^{bz} in following conditions, *sui-yüan*, becomes the *ālayavijñāna*.” The word *sui-yüan* is used by Tsung Ping in that sense already. Tsung Ping, of course, did not know about the *ālayavijñāna*. The AFM does. The question, however, is: how orthodox or strict is the AFM’s understanding of the *ālayavijñāna*?

The AFM contains a unique theory about the evolution of the *hsin*, *i*, and *i-shih*.^{ca} Elsewhere these three would be usually taken to mean *ālayavijñāna* (*citta*), *manas*, *mano-vijñāna*, but it is clear from the AFM context that the *hsin* (*citta*) cannot possibly be the *ālayavijñāna*; it stands for the Suchness mind (or, rather, that aspect of it involved in *samsāra*, i.e., the *ju-lai-tsang hsin*,^{cb} the *tathāgatagarbha* mind). The *i* is not *manas*, the seventh consciousness; it is the *i* (intention) as used by Hsi Ch’ao and others, meaning the “first stirring of mind.” The *i-shih* is even more baffling; it is not *mano-vijñāna*, but is explicitly identified as *ālayavijñāna* by the AFM. The commentators of the AFM tried, but no objective scholarship has yet been able to establish the correlation of the AFM psychic scheme with the one used in Indian Yogācāra.³³

Briefly, the AFM evolution of mind goes through first five *i* (intentions) to become the *i-shih* or *ālayavijñāna*. First, there is karmic action that upset the inactive mind; the mind evolves; then it projects (reality); then it knows. From this fourth *i*, it is said that “corresponding to *nien* (thought), the mind is continuing, *hsiang-hsü*,^{cc} with no end.”³⁴ This sequence is actually an expansion of the one found in Hsi Ch’ao. The mind at first is passive, until karmic forces move it. Stirred, it moves outward and begins to create things. Forms rise out of its formless *i* (intentions). As objects now appear, there is subject-object knowledge, in the mode of thought, *nien*. *Nien*, however, implies *kṣaṇa* (*nien-nien*), and so as thoughts follow thoughts, there is continuity (*nien-nien hsiang-hsü*).^{cd} The result is the fifth *i* of *hsin*, the *i-shih*, known as the *hsiang-hsü hsin*, the continuous mind, i.e. *citta-santāna* (mental continuum). This,

says the AFM, is the *ālayavijñāna*. *Citta-santāna* was originally a concept denoting the continuity of mind, or stream of consciousness that is impermanent and a series of *kṣaṇas*. For the AFM to so reduce *ālayavijñāna* might be a little oversimplifying. The AFM description of the *hsiang-hsü* goes:

The fifth (in the series of psychic emanations) is called the *hsiang-hsü-shih* (continuity consciousness, a form of *hsin*, Mind). As the various *nien* (thoughts) mutually respond (to one another), therefore (the Mind) *hsiang-hsü* (continues) with no end. (This *shih*) can retain all the good and evil karma of infinite past live with no omission; it can bring forth the painful and joyous retribution, past or present, with no mistake. It makes one suddenly recall things gone by or present and in our delusions makes us anxious over future things. . . . What is called *i-shih* (same as *shih*, consciousness) is this continuity mind.³⁵

The function of this *i-shih* or “*ālayavijñāna*” is basically the same as the *vijñāna-samjñā* in Hsi Ch’ao. No wonder that the *ālayavijñāna* is the *shih* in the AFM triad of *hsin*, *i*, and *i-shih*. As the karmic consciousness (born in the womb), it carries over the *saṃskāra* from one life to another. As *samjñā* (*ssu*, *hsiang* in their divided functions), it recalls things and anticipates things. The AFM only paraphrased Hsi Ch’ao’s psychology.

Ch’eng-Shih^{ce} *Masters’ Speculation of Citta-santāna*

What is absent in Hsi Ch’ao but present in the AFM is the concept of *citta-santāna*. Although the Buddhist in the third and fourth century already knew of *kṣaṇa* and the momentary nature of thought, the first sign of interest in the details of the mental process emerged only after Saṅghadeva’s introduction of Sarvāstivāda. Hui-yūan so posed problems of discontinuity to Kumārajīva. What is available to the AFM but not to Hsi Ch’ao is the water-and-wave metaphor of the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*. The metaphor has been somewhat subtly changed by the AFM. Furthermore, the metaphor is used by the AFM to handle an issue not central to the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*: the problem of the continuity and discontinuity between mind and consciousness. This passage in the AFM well demonstrates this concern:

Q: If the mind ceases to be, then what becomes of continuity? If

continuity remains, then what is being extinguished?

- A: The cessation is only the cessation of the forms of the mind (the waves), not the cessation of the essence of mind (the water). This is comparable to the wind (ignorance) [otherwise invisible] taking on forms of movements *vis-à-vis* (the wave-forms) the water. If the water (mind) ceases to be, then the forms of wind (changes of consciousness and phenomena) will end, for there would be nothing on which they can rely (to become “visible”). Because the water does not cease to be, therefore the forms of wind can continue. It is only the wind (ignorance) that ceases. Accordingly, the movements cease. The water itself does not cease. . . . It is only that as folly ceases to be, the forms of the mind also cease. The wisdom of the mind itself does not cease.³⁶

This problem of water and wave is the problem of substance and function (*t'i-yung*).^{cf} *T'i-yung* affirms both the permanence of the water and the variability of the waves. It is a solution to a predicament Chinese found when faced with the doctrine of momentariness (*kṣaṇavāda*). The AFM even shares the concern expressed by Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty: “If there is no substance (of mind), there would not even be sentient beings. If there is nothing lasting for them to rely on, all things will then be extinguished.” The Emperor and the AFM both confront the hypothetical questioner, saying that it is only the form of mind (consciousness) that ceases, not the basis of mind that supports all things.³⁷ The idea of a substratum, alien to early Buddhism, has by then been reconfirmed by the *tathāgatagarbha* philosophy, and given even more positive readings by the Chinese. At times, the Chinese verges upon *satkāryavāda* and *t'i-yung* seems more like the Hindu *bhedābheda*.

The AFM choice for the water-and-wave metaphor, *a la t'i-yung*, should well be seen as the final Chinese success at a format to handle the paradox of the continuity of mind and the discontinuity of consciousness. If so, it comes at the end of a search for the perfect analogy. The question of *hsiang-shü* was one raised and answered by the Ch'eng-shih (Satyasiddhi) masters in the South in the early sixth century. *Hsiang-hsü chia*³⁸ (the falsehood due to continuity) is one of the three *chia* (false, for false name, *chia-ming*,^{ch} *prajñapti*) considered by the Ch'eng-shih tradition. Causation is one *chia*, provisional reality: a man is false because he is a bundle of *skandhas*. Relativity or mutual dependence is another *chia*, nominal reality: fatherhood and sonhood, being dependent upon one another, are not absolute, and thus nominal. The

Ch'eng-shih school excelled in the causative analysis; San-lun (Mādhyamika) explored more the idea of interdependence. However, it is *hsiang-hsü* that posed the greatest challenges. In what sense is this *chia*?

The three grand masters of the Liang dynasty each had an opinion.

<i>Chuang-yen</i> ^{ci}	<i>K'ai-shan</i> ^{cj}	<i>Kuang-tse</i> ^{ck}
As one <i>nien</i> (thought) ceases, something is carried over to the next. This is like "transferring light from one candle to another," the flame living on to the next.	A former <i>nien</i> turns into a succeeding one "temporally" with no essential change in essence, like "rolling and unrolling the same lotus leaf.'	One <i>nien</i> succeeds another with no ontological continuity, like "dripping droplets giving the impression of a flowing stream." ³⁸

The first metaphor is the most basic; it has already been applied to the continuity of rebirths. The third denies any real continuity; the whole (the continuous stream of water) is a fiction created by the observer; in truth there is only the discontinuity of droplets in momentary (*kṣaṇa*) succession. I would have thought that the third one is closer to the Indian norm. However, the Chinese preferred the second one: the rolling and unrolling of the same lotus leaf. What that seems to endorse is the reality of the object (the lotus leaf) and the attribution of its appearance and disappearance (the rolling and the unrolling) to the subjective *nien*, thought. It is our perception that "packs and unpacks" reality; reality as such remains the same.

Among the Ch'eng-shih masters, the first *chia*—that of causality—is the most fundamental. It was then taken as the *t'i* (substance) of the mundane truth, *saṃvṛti-staya* on the assumption that mundane (*saṃāric*) realities are causative. The above *chia*—that of continuity—was seen as the function, *yung*, derived from the *t'i*. Only because there are causes and conditions that there is the *chia* of continuity (better, discontinuity) in the succession of *nien* (momentary thoughts). There was some disagreement over the status of the other *chia*—the falsehood of relativity. Chuang-yen regarded it as purely nominal (*ming*),^{cl} that is, further superimposed and not directly warranted by causality, i.e., causality by itself does not suggest the relativity (of old age and youth). K'ai-shan, on the other hand, thought that relativity is just another functional (*yung*) aspect. Both, however, utilized causality to break the seeming reality of mundane truth so as to reveal its emptiness, and by

so doing, align this emptiness (at the mundane level) with the Emptiness of the Highest Truth.

In light of this prior interest in continuity in China, the solution offered by the AFM—the ingenious use of the water-and-wave metaphor to handle the subsistence of *t'i* (water) and the indissociably dynamic aspect of its *yeng* (waves)—is a sinitic solution to a sinitic problem. This aspect of the AFM understanding of *nien* (as *citta-santāna*) supersedes the more primitive reflections of the *Po-hu-t'ung* and the apologetics of Hsi Ch'ao.

Conclusion: The idea of *hu-jan nien-ch'i* (suddenly a thought rose) used to explain the genesis of *avidyā*, ignorance, involves a classic intellectual *impasse*, a paradox to resolve the paradox of the uncaused first cause. The Chinese leaned toward *hu-jan* because of the native tradition of natural genesis, *tzu-jan*, in Taoism. However, Taoist *tzu-jan* is a “single-cause” explanation that would easily recommend a fatalistic acceptance of the what-is. Insofar as Buddhism is a religion or philosophy of self-transformation, it has to go beyond that “naturalism.” Insofar as Mahāyāna cannot endorse any final duality (such as Hīnayāna's *samsāra* and *nirvāna*), China had to come up with a psychic monism, an idealism of the One Mind, that can be simultaneously the cause of delusion as well as the basis for enlightenment. The intrusion of the active *nien* into the passive mind, and the reversal of it by *wu-nien* (no-thought), are the preferred solution to the AFM. The ideology of *nien* is pre-Buddhist; the acknowledgement of the *hu* (suddenness) mystique in the transition from passivity to activity is also sinitic. Even though we might find similar emphases in Indian Buddhist thought, for example, in the recognition of the subtlety of the subconscious will, the *cetanā*, etc., nevertheless the fuller structure of thought—the reliance on *t'i-yung* to resolve the tension seen between the changeless mind and the continuity consciousness—tells of a more immediate, Chinese Buddhist exegetical inspiration.

NOTES

1. Yoshito Hakeda, trans., *Awakening of Faith attributed to Āśvaghōṣa* (New York: Columbia, 1967), pp. 50–51; passage on “suddenly a thought rose. . .” in *Taishō Daizōkyō* (henceforth T.) 44, p. 577c of the Paramārtha text, interestingly edited off in the Śikṣānanda text, T. 44, p. 586a. See note 2 below.
2. Whalen W. Lai, “A Clue to the Authorship of the *Awakening of Faith*: Śikṣānanda’s Redaction of the Word *Nien*’.”
3. See T. 44, pp. 576c, 577a; Hakeda, trans. cit., pp. 41, 55–56.
4. Water (Suchness), Wind (ignorance) and waves (form of consciousness, as well as ignorance, *alias samsāra*) are all concomitant. See brief explanation in Whalen Lai, “Ch’an Metaphors: Waves, water, mirror, lamp,” *Philosophy East and West*, 29.3 (1979), pp. 246–48.
5. Translated in my “An Essay on the Immortality of the Soul by Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (forthcoming).
6. *Mādhyamika-hārīkā*.
7. *Lao-tzu*, ch. 42.
8. Translation from Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 443.
9. Translation with slight changes from Theodore de Bary et al ed., *The Buddhist Tradition* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 182. For more exact translation, see Peter Gregory’s Harvard doctoral dissertation (near completion).
10. See T. 44, p. 577bc; Hakeda trans. *op. cit.*, pp. 46–50.
11. De Bary ed., *op. cit.*, does not translate this section in small prints.
12. Translation taken from Wing-tsit Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 328, under section 11. Bracketed addition mine.
13. H. G. Creel, *What is Taoism?* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1970), ch. II.
14. The oft-cited example is Kuo Hsiang’s reversal of Chuang-tzu’s dictum: the ring men put on the nostril of the buffalo is now seen as *tsu-jan*.
15. As appendix B to chapter three in his *The Buddhist Conquest of China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), I, pp. 164–76, with notes in II, pp. 372–8.
16. *Gumyōshu kenkyū* (Kyoto: Kyoto Univ., Jimbun kagaku kenkyūsho, 1974).
17. Concerning Chih Ch’ien, judgement is based on my study on the running commentary to the *Ming-tu-ching*, chapter one (T. 8, pp. 478–82), probably a work of his student reporting the “master’s” opinion.
18. Translation of this and above two lines cited mine, from T. 44, p. 86c; Zürcher overlooks the significant structure of the passage here, see his trans., *op. cit.*, I, p. 166.
19. *Ibid.*, translation mine.
20. Translation mine; see Zürcher, *ibid.*, p. 167 and note 46 in II, p. 376.
21. From ongoing study of the *shen-pu-mieh* controversy, focusing on Tsung Ping’s *Ming-fo-lun* and earlier (pre-420) reflections in China.
22. Translation mine; see Zürcher, *op. cit.*, p. 167 where the link is overlooked.
23. Translation mine; see translation by Tjan Tjoe Som of this work by Pan Ku (32–92), *Po Hu Tung* (Leiden: Brill, 1949–52), II, p. 565.
24. Translation mine; see Zürcher, *op. cit.*, p. 172. Italics mine.
25. See note 17, finding partly reported in essay mentioned in note 2.

26. For convenience, the following citations can be found in T'ang Yung-t'ung, *Han Wei liang-Chin Nan-pei-chao Fo-chiao-shih* (Peking: Chung-hua reissue, 1955), p. 270 for this citation.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, p. 267. In my judgement, a much-maligned figure; he is the only Prajñā-ist that truly realized the fallacy of *ātmagrāha*.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 265. His judgement is misguided; see below.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 264; passage cited from Chi-tsang's *Chung-lun-so*.

31. Translation mine, from T. 52, p. 31c.

32. Translation mine, from T. 52, pp. 9c–10a.

33. See Hakeda's note in his translation cited, p. 47.

34. T. 44, p. 577b; Hakeda, *ibid.*, pp. 48–49. Actually the AFM repeats itself, for here it has mentioned a *hsiang-hsü-i* (continuous 'manas') just prior to its mention of a *hsiang-hsü-shih* (continuous 'vijñāna'). In one place, the Śikṣānanda translation gives *i* for *i-shih*.

35. *Ibid.*

36. My translation from T. 44, p. 578a; compare Hakeda, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

37. See T. 52, p. 54bc, and note 5 above.

38. Summary of positions found in Tokiwa Daijo, *Shina Bukkyō no kenkyū*.

Chinese Glossary

a 忽然念起	aa 莊子	ba 理	ca 心意意識
b 大乘起信論	ab 王弼	bb 本末	cb 如來藏心
c 名為無明	ac 有	bc 作	cc 相續
d 法藏	ad 物塊然而生	bd 白虎通	cd 念念相續
e 明	ae 人為	be 性情	ce 成實
f 不覺	af 奉法要	bf 時念	cf 體用
g 念	ag 支遁	bg 易經	cg 假名
h 禪	ah 牟超	bh 隨意生形	ch 開善
i 無念	ai 支謙	bi 明度經	ci 相續假
j 妄念	aj 安世高	bj 心無	cj 莊嚴
k 陰	ak 色	bk 吉藏	ck 光澤
l 陽	al 癡漏	bl 世說新語	cl 名
m 識	am 思想	bm 支度	
n 妄心	an 生死	bn 神	
o 神會	ao 心念	bo 于法開	
p 宗密	ap 生	bp 識含	
q 語錄	aq 滅	bq 湯用彤	
r 原人論	ar 意識	br 宗炳	
s 自然	as 死	bs 明佛論	
t 梁武帝	at 衍行	bt 慧遠	
u 道	au 識神不滅隨行受身	bu 象	
v 命	av 意	bv 含識之類	
w 華嚴	aw 應	bw 隨緣	
x 一念	ax 形	bx 精神	
y 動	ay 情念	by 妙	
z 郭象	az 機動	bz 真如心	