

Mou-tzu's Dialogue with His Critics

ARTICLE 1. WHO IS BUDDHA?

A critic asked: Where was the Buddha born? Did he have ancestors and a home place or not? Just what did he do? What did he look like?

Mou-tzu said: Rich indeed is the significance of your question! Even though I am not very bright, let me mention the main points. I have heard about the appearance of the Buddha's transformation, that when he had amassed the power of the Way for many countless aeons to a fullness unrecordable, when he was on the verge of realizing awakening, he was born in India. He borrowed his form from the wife of Śuddhodana. During a nap she dreamed that she was riding on a white elephant with six tusks.³⁴ Delighted, she was filled with joy and, affected [by it], conceived. On the eighth day of the fourth month, he was born from his mother's right side. When he trod the earth, he strode seven paces, lifted up his right hand, and declared, "Above or below the heavens, there is no one who excels me!" At that instant the heavens and the earth shook violently and the palace was filled with light. On that same day a blue-robed [servant girl] of

the king's household gave birth to a son and in the stable a white horse dropped a white colt. That servant was named Chaṇḍaka and that horse Kaṇṭhaka. The king ordered them always to attend the prince.

The prince had thirty-two major marks and eighty minor marks. He was exceptionally tall (six chang). His body was of a golden hue. On the top of his forehead he had the uṇiṣa. His jaws were like those of a lion. His tongue could cover his face. His hands held wheel [designs] with the thousand spokes. A light from the top of his head radiated for ten thousand li. These were his principal major marks.

When he was seventeen years old, the king presented him a woman from a neighboring land to be his wife. But when the prince sat down, he always moved his seat away. And when he slept, he used a different bed. The Way of Heaven is bright indeed and its yin and yang interpenetrate. Thus [even without sexual contact], she conceived a male child, who was born after six years.³⁵ His father the king greatly prized the prince and built palaces for him. He provided for him an array both of fine women and of precious objects of amusement. But the prince did not covet worldly pleasures. His mind dwelt on the power of the Way.

On the eighth day of the fourth month of his nineteenth year, in the middle of the night, he ordered Chaṇḍaka to bridle Kaṇṭhaka and, when he was so mounted, spirits supported and carried him in the air away from the palace. The next morning nobody knew where he was. The king together with all his servants and the people were distraught with sorrow. They chased him into the countryside and [when they found him] the king said to him, "Before you were [born], I entreated the spirits until finally you came [to me]. Now you are as [cold] as a jade tablet to me. You were to succeed me and would have been favored with position! Yet you leave! Why!" The prince said, "The ten thousand things are transient. Everything that exists faces demise. I now am resolved to practice the Way and deliver [beings within] the ten directions." Recognizing that his commitment was firm, the king got up and went home. The prince immediately left to meditate on the Way, and after ten years he became the Awakened One.

[The Buddha] was born in the first month of summer (i.e., the fourth month), which is neither cold nor hot, when the plants and trees flower and bloom, when one removes fox furs and

clothes oneself with light, broad-stitched cloth. Born in India, the center of heaven and earth, he was balanced and lived in harmony. In the twelve sections of the scriptures that he composed, there are 840 million chapters. The large chapters are somewhat under ten thousand words; the small chapters more than a thousand words. The Buddha taught the world and delivered the people. Thus, even after his entrance into cessation and departure on the fifteenth day of the second month, his scriptures and discipline still remain. Those able consistently to follow them also attain nonaction, for [his] blessing flows over into later generations. Those [lay followers] who uphold the five precepts and observe the six fast days each month, with one heart and mind repent their misdeeds and renew themselves. The monks uphold 250 precepts and fast every day. But these precepts are not applied to lay followers. Their ceremonies and liturgies do not differ from the classical ceremonies of antiquity. All day long and throughout the night they discuss the Way and intone the scriptures, without indulging themselves in worldly affairs. Lao-tzu says, "In his every movement a man of great virtue follows the way and the way only."³⁶ This [Way] is what [the monks] discuss.

Source Codes

In his opening phrase Mou-tzu signals his stance within the classical tradition. The phrase *Rich indeed is the meaning of your question* echoes the *Analects*, where Tzu-hsia exclaims, "Rich, indeed, is the meaning of these words!"³⁷

This account of the Buddha appears to have been drawn from the biography of Buddha in the *T'ai-tzu jui-ying pen-ch'i ching* (T. 185), which Chih Ch'ien translated between the years 222 and 228. Maspero presents the parallel passages, which are so close that he concludes that the *Li-huo lun* has copied sections from this scripture.³⁸ In that case, the *Li-huo lun* could not have been written prior to the translation of this text from the Sanskrit. However, Tsukamoto holds that Chih Ch'ien's translation is "a case not of direct translation from original texts but rather of a rearrangement of notes jotted down by Chinese interested in Buddhism who heard the sermons of early missionaries, ... a collection of memorandums."³⁹ If Chih Ch'ien depended upon a number of already existing Chinese accounts, it is possible that the textual dependency of the *Li-huo lun* on the *T'ai-tzu jui-ying pen-ch'i ching* is not apodictic, and that the *Li-huo lun* has drawn upon a source prior to and included in that scripture.

This question is of interest in that the *Li-huo lun* refers to no specific Buddhist scriptures at all and never cites Buddhist sources to validate its argument. The Preface tells that Mou-tzu studied the Buddha Tao by analyzing *The Book of Lao Tzu*. Here in Article 1, the source for Mou-tzu's account of the Buddha, if Tsukamoto is correct, is an oral tradition disseminated by early Buddhist missionaries in their preaching of the Dharma and put into writing by Chih Ch'ien. In the Later Han dynasty, Buddhism began to be slowly received by a small number of Chinese intellectuals. As Tsukamoto explains, Chinese Buddhists did not yet understand the teachings of Buddha through examination of translated scriptures; they understood in terms of their own Taoist doctrine.⁴⁰ The only other option would have been for Chinese to abandon their culture and take on the foreign culture of Buddhist India, the stance Mou-tzu has been charged with.

Reader-Response Criticism

The allusion to the *Analects* of Confucius in Mou-tzu's initial response signals the reader that this is indeed a true Confucian scholar. The numerous subsequent allusions to Confucian and Taoist texts are by no means accidental. Rather, they lead the implied reader, a cultured and classical gentleman, to identify with Mou-tzu's stance by drawing him in with familiar allusions and citations. That implied reader must be able to recognize the Confucian allusion without any overt clue, for Mou-tzu does not identify its source. Later, however, when he quotes from *The Book of Lao Tzu*, he does identify his source, perhaps suggesting that his implied reader may not have been as familiar with that text. Confucian doctrine was indeed the state ideology, enthroned from early Han times as the political and social norm. Even after the chaos and destruction that attended the end of the Han, the Confucian classics constituted the framework for cultured thinking. Yet, by late Han times the process of incorporating the ideas of Lao-tzu within a "new" Confucianism had begun. Tsukamoto again explains succinctly:

There arose a new form of Confucianism, the so-called 'dark learning' (*hsüan hsüeh*), which, liberated from the bonds of the by now official Confucianism, brittle and text-oriented as that was, made room for the ideas of Lao-tzu, Chuang-tzu, and the *Canon of Changes* (*Yi-ching*). The study of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu now became fashionable, a quest for an

awareness of human nature and the liberation of mankind was taking place, a mood of freedom of thought and study swept through the educated classes of the Middle Plain, and this intellectual mood in turn went south with the Tsin and there became intensified.⁴¹

Our text is situated at the beginning of this trajectory of "dark learning," piggybacking, as it were, Buddhist ideas onto the liberating words of Lao-tzu.

Mou-tzu, in presenting the story of the Buddha, steps out of his role as a character in the story to become a rather overt narrator. He reports an account of the life of Buddha designed to resonate in Chinese ears. His life of the Buddha is overlaid with Chinese notions about the power of the Way, about the interpenetration of yin and yang, and cosmic harmony. In such a context, the Buddha's celibacy can be introduced (Mou-tzu will treat the question later) and his abandonment of the world reported. In such a context, India can be identified as the center of heaven and earth, a novel notion for those who lived in the Middle Kingdom! The Buddha's father talks about the position that would have awaited the Buddha had he remained in society, much as official positions awaited Mou-tzu for the taking. Thus the Buddha's response about the transience of all things is contextualized in terms of Taoist and Confucian refusal to accept positions of public service. His awakening is reported in Chinese images of the spring awakening of flowers and trees, immune to both the heat of passion and the cold of aloofness.

Yet although the Buddha has entered cessation, Mou-tzu says nothing about the eternal Dharma body of the Buddha. Rather, he focuses only on the teaching the Buddha has left behind. The text uses the transliterated Sanskrit for the Buddha's cessation (*ni han* 泥洹), but then states that those who follow his teachings will also enter nonaction (*wu-wei* 無爲), thus equating these two terms. It is significant to observe that our text uses both terms, consciously adopting *wu-wei* as a Chinese version of *ni han*. Thus, the Chinese identification of *nirvāṇa* with nonaction (*wu-wei* 無爲) is not a matter of simple misunderstanding, but a conscious rhetorical strategy.⁴²

The Buddha's vast teachings are presented as the continuing presence of Buddha himself, and the practice of those teachings is aimed at the attainment of *wu-wei*. Those practices can thus be

recommended to all who desire to attain *wu-wei*. To emphasize this point Mou-tzu claims, perhaps ingenuously, that Buddhist practices are no different from the classical ceremonies of antiquity. Thus to practice the Buddhist precepts is to recover the practices of antiquity. Furthermore, the practices of the Buddhist monks are the same as those recommended by Lao-tzu.

Thus, the implied reader, a member of the Confucian literati, is drawn to identify more strongly with Mou-tzu, the true Chinese scholar, and assent that the Buddha is an embodiment of the Way and that the practice of his Way is identical with the practices of antiquity. Confucius had longed for the golden age of antiquity. Mou-tzu shows that one can attain it by practicing the Buddha's teaching.

ARTICLE 2. BUDDHA AS LINKAGE TO THE WAY

A critic asked, Why do you speak so reverently of the Buddha? What does Buddha mean?

Mou-tzu said, The word Buddha is a posthumous title, like calling the three sovereigns "divine" or the five emperors "sage." Buddha is the original ancestor of the power of the Way, our ancestral link to spiritual understanding. The word buddha means awakened. Shadowy and indistinct, by transformations in different bodies and varied forms,⁴³ [he appears in diverse realms]. Sometimes he is present, sometimes absent. He can be small or large, heavenly or earthly, old or young, hidden or manifest. He can walk on fire without being burned, tread on swords without being hurt, be mired in the mud without being defiled, encounter misfortune without injury. When he wants to travel, he flies through the air. When he sits, he emits light. This is what the title Buddha means.

Source Codes

On the divinity of the three sovereigns and the sageness of the five emperors, Timotheus Pokora explains that "until Emperor Wu the Five

Emperors were esteemed not as gods but as human beings."⁴⁴ The author of the *Li-huo lun* assumes here that the normative Confucian tradition of Tung Chung-shu, who formulated Han Confucianism and the cosmic interface between Heaven and the emperor, is known and accepted by his readers.

Mou-tzu's phrase *ancestral link* (*tsung hsü* 宗緒) is said by the *P'ei-wen-yun-fu* dictionary to have been employed by two other Han dynasty authors, Yang Hsiung and Chang Heng, although I have not been able to identify the sources. The *Chuang Tzu* has a similar notion: "He who has a clear understanding of the virtue of Heaven and earth may be called the great source [*ta-pen* 大本], the great ancestor [*ta-tsung* 大宗]."⁴⁵ The *Cheng-wu lun* (Rectification of Unjustified Criticism), which is an early Chinese Buddhist apologetic text,⁴⁶ has a similar passage: "From this we can infer that the Buddha indeed was the patriarch [*tsu-tsung* 祖宗] of Wen-tzu [who begged the *Tao Te Ching* from Lao-tzu] and the primate [*yüan-shih* 元始] of all beings. How could it be that the disciple [i.e., Yin-wen-tzu] would be able to perform supranormal transformations and that the teacher [i.e., Buddha] could not?"⁴⁷

The Buddhist layman Sun Cho (ca. 300–380) in his *Treatise Illustrating the Way* (*Yü-tao lun*) has a similar explanation of the term *buddha*: "The Sanskrit term 'buddha' is interpreted in the Chinese language as awakening. The meaning of awakening is enlightenment. In meaning it is just the same as when Mencius considered the sages to be awakened."⁴⁸ Likewise, Hsi Ch'ao in his *Essentials of the Dharma* (*Feng-fa yao*) writes: "Buddha in Chinese means awakened."⁴⁹

Mou-tzu's description of Buddha alludes to the *Lao Tzu*, to the *Chuang Tzu*, and to the *Lieh Tzu*. Chapter 21 of the *Lao Tzu*, from which our text has just quoted in Article 1, goes on to describe the Tao: "Shadow, indistinct. Indistinct and shadowy, yet within it is an image; shadowy and indistinct." Mou-tzu alludes to these lines, complementing them in his subsequent description with ideas from the Ta-sheng chapter of the *Chuang Tzu*, which states: "Heaven and earth are the father and mother of the ten thousand things. They join to become a body; they part to become a beginning."⁵⁰ The sentence about walking on fire is drawn from the same section of the *Chuang Tzu*: "Master Lieh-tzu questioned the Barrier Keeper Yin, "The perfect man walks under water and is not hindered. He walks on fire and is not burned. He journeys above the thousand things and is not afraid. . . ."

The *Lieh Tzu* describes the people in the country of Hua-hsü—which can be reached only by a journey of the spirit—as innocent of desire or lust and possessed of amazing abilities: "They go into the water without drowning, into fire without burning; hack them, flog them, there is no wound or pain; poke them, scratch them, there is no ache nor itch. They ride space as though walking the earth, sleep on the void

as though on their beds; clouds and mist do not hinder their sight, thunder does not confuse their hearing, beauty and ugliness do not disturb their hearts, mountains and valleys do not trip their feet—for they make only journeys of the spirit."⁵¹

Wang Cho's *Lao-tzu p'ien-hua ching* (Scripture on the Transformations of Lao-tzu), which dates to the second century, describes the divinization of Lao-tzu in parallel terms: "Lao-tzu was at the origin of the Great Beginning, revolving in the Great Expanse. Alone and without companion, he was moving in the times of yore, before Heaven and Earth. Coming out of the hidden and returning thereto, being and nonbeing, he is the First One."⁵²

A contrasting passage is found in the *Analects*: "The Master said, 'Benevolence is more vital to the common people than even fire and water. In the case of fire and water, I have seen men die by stepping on them, but I have never seen any man die by stepping on benevolence.'"⁵³ In his *Fa-yen* (Model Sayings) Yang Hsiung echoes this theme of fire and water in criticizing the Taoist rejection of the Confucian virtues: "Someone asked, 'Is it not Heaven that carves the multitude of forms?'⁵⁴ [Yang Hsiung] answered, 'I do not think that he carved them. How would he have obtained the strength to carve them one by one and so form them? I have accepted some things from *The Way and Its Power*, which Lao-tzu discusses. But when he flings away and rejects benevolence and righteousness, when he dispenses with and destroys ceremony and learning, I cannot agree at all! How can I bring you to understand? Only the sages can bring such understanding! Anyone else only screens off [the light of understanding]. How far-reaching, the words of the sages! If one is receptive to them, he will so enlarge [his horizon] as to see all within the four seas. But if one shuts his mind to them, he will become so narrow as not to see even what is within the walls. The words of the sages appear to be more than fire and water.'"⁵⁵

The *Li-huo lun* also echoes Yüan Hung's *Hou Han chi* (Record of the Later Han): "His [i.e., Buddha's] transformations are unlimited, and there is no place to which he cannot go. He is therefore able, in transformation, to permeate all things and greatly to rescue a multitude of living beings."⁵⁶

The description of the Buddha as heavenly or earthly, literally round or square, comes from the *Huai-nan Tzu*: "The King imitates Yin and Yang; his virtue stands on a par with Heaven and Earth [*t'ien ti* 天地]; his intelligence is comparable with the sun and moon; his spiritual character is like the divinities. He is similar to Heaven and Earth [they are round (*yüan* 圓) and square (*fang* 方)]."⁵⁷ The commentary of Kao Yu explains that "Round [*yüan* 圓] signifies heaven, while square [*fang* 方] signifies earth."⁵⁸

The phrase about being "mired in the mud without being defiled" is

a stock Buddhist image, reminiscent of the *Lotus Sūtra*. It is one of the few clearly Buddhist images in the text.

Reader-Response Criticism

Here Mou-tzu envisages the Buddha no longer simply as the historical Buddha of the previous article, but as a personal and cosmic embodiment of the Way. The designations he appends to the brief description of the title *Buddha* are drawn from previous descriptions of the Tao. In Article 1 Mou-tzu mentions the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*, then interprets it through a Chinese concept as nonaction (*wu-wei* 無爲). Here, too, his conscious rhetorical linkage of the Buddha birth to a very Chinese notion of Tao is aimed at the implied reader, whom he is leading to associate the Buddha with the more familiar Tao. It seems quite clear that the author knows precisely what he is doing. He is not confusing Buddha and Tao, for the initial definition of the term *buddha* is clearly drawn from Buddhist sources, while the notion of the Tao is familiar from Chinese sources.

Furthermore, the ability to walk uninjured on fire here ascribed to the Buddha depicts him in terms of Chuang-tzu's and Liu An's Taoist "perfect man." We already know from the Preface that Mou-tzu places no credence in the Taoist immortal (*hsien*). It is reasonable to assume, then, that he interprets the *Chuang Tzu*, from which comes the phrase about walking unharmed on fire, not as referring to supernatural traits of the *hsien*. Indeed, this section of *Chuang Tzu* does not mention the *hsien* at all. The implied reader is assumed to be familiar with this passage, and indeed that very familiarity is the reason Mou-tzu can use it with rhetorical effect. This section of the chapter from the *Chuang Tzu* continues:

[Master Lieh-tzu asked the Barrier Keeper Yin,] "Please tell how [the perfect man] attains these [abilities]."

The Barrier Keeper said, "[He attains such abilities] because he guards his vital energy [*ch'i*]. It is not that he musters his knowledge, skill, determination, or bravery. Please sit down and I'll tell you about it. All endowed with visage, form, voices, color are all things. But how could things be distant from one another? What would lead one to conclude to any priority [among them]? They are

simply forms and that's it! However, the creation of things lies in that which has no form and resides in what is not transformed. If a fellow attains this and penetrates it thoroughly, how could things come to detain him? He then abides in bounds that know no excess, hides at the limit that has no source, wanders at the end and beginning of the ten thousand things, unifies his nature, nourishes his vital energy, unifies his virtue [te], thereby penetrating to the creative source of things. If a fellow is like this, his heavenly protection is complete and his spirit is without fissures into which things might enter."⁵⁹

The point of this section of the *Chuang Tzu* is that, by reaching the source whereby things arise, one harmonizes with that source, unafraid of injury and fearless in living. Mou-tzu directs the reader's attention to such a passage in the *Chuang Tzu*, not to recommend the practices of *hsien* but to encourage the attainment of *bodhi*, which is here paralleled with the attainment of the unformed source of things. He gives the etymology of the title *Buddha* (i.e., awakened) only after he has depicted Buddha as the ancestor of the Way, the immanent center of Tao. The Buddha here is not merely the historical Buddha described in Article 1; the very nature of Tao, embodied by Buddha, is described. Mou-tzu has made a rhetorical move in his interpretation of the Buddha not just as the Indian prince, but as the Tao embodied. Already in Article 1, we learned that the Buddha amassed the power of the Way for countless aeons. Thus, the reader is led to recognize the Buddha as the embodiment of the Tao that he had all along accepted. The Buddha is becoming rhetorically Chinese, and one can detect here the emergence of early notions of Buddha nature.

We know further from the Preface that Mou-tzu accepts Lao-tzu's advice about discarding knowledge, quite in disagreement with Yang Hsiung's insistence on Confucian orthodoxy mentioned above. Indeed, if Yang Hsiung's *Fa-yen*, which is structured similarly as a question-and-answer dialogue, is recognizable behind the rhetorical form of the *Li-huo lun* dialogue, then the implied reader is further alerted that the *Li-huo lun* is attempting to establish a fissure in the hermeneutical method of the *Fa-yen* for interpreting the Chinese classics, coaxing the implied reader toward a fuller acceptance of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu.

ARTICLE 3.
THE WAY

A critic asked: What do you mean by the Way? To what kind of Way do you refer?

Mou-tzu said: The Way (tao 道) means to lead (tao 導). It leads people toward nonaction. Push it forward and there is no ahead. Pull it back and there is no behind. Lift it up and there is no above. Press it down and there is no below. Look at it and there is no form. Listen to it and there is no sound. The four directions are vast, yet it threads its way beyond. Millimeters and centimeters are small, yet it bores its way within. This is what I mean by the Way.

Source Codes

Mou-tzu here interprets the Buddha Tao in terms of the Taoist Tao and identifies its goal with inaction. His descriptions are reminiscent of the *Lao Tzu*, "Go up to it and you will not see its head; follow behind and you will not see its rear."⁶⁰

Yang Hsiung's *Fa-yen* has a germane passage, which discusses the Confucian virtues as the four limbs of the way: "The way serves to lead one. Its power serves to gain achievement. Benevolence serves to humanize one. Righteousness serves to straighten one. Ceremony serves to give one embodiment. [These five] are man's natural endowment. If united [in a person], he is well-integrated. If disunited, he is not."⁶¹

The *Huai-nan Tzu* similarly discourses on Tao: "Build it up and you cannot give it any more height of glory. Subtract from it and you cannot rob it of any virtue. Multiply it and it is the same number; detract from it and it is no fewer; hack into it and it is no thinner; slay it and it is not destroyed; dig into it and it is without depth; fill it in and it will be no shallower."⁶²

Reader-Response Criticism

Lao-tzu himself became identified with the Tao, first in the *Inscription for Lao Tzu* (*Lao Tzu ming*), which is dated to 165 C.E.⁶³ Sun Cho's *Treatise Illustrating the Tao* says: "Buddha is the essential Tao. Tao means to lead beings. It impels and guides

[them] toward nonaction and there is nothing that is not done. Because of nonaction, because empty quietude and spontaneity leave nothing undone, it transforms the ten thousand things."⁶⁴ Mou-tzu, however, refrains from identifying Buddha directly with Tao. In Article 2, he describes Buddha as our primal link with Tao. Perhaps when he wrote, the identification of Lao-tzu with Tao was not yet widespread, and thus he was not led to Sun Cho's conclusion.

Repeating the classic etymology of the Way as "to lead," Mou-tzu identifies it with the attainment of *wu-wei*, as he has already done above. His description is consciously drawn from Chinese sources, yet he does not circumscribe it within the normative classicism, as does Yang Hsiung. Indeed, when Yang was asked, "Is there anything that you accept from Chuang Chou?" he replied, "His lessening of the desires.... But Chou nullifies the duties between rulers and ministers.... Even if he were my neighbor, still I would not take notice of him!"⁶⁵ Mou-tzu is not so begrudging as Yang Hsiung in his acceptance of Taoist categories. Yet there is no hint that Mou-tzu has misunderstood the Buddhist doctrines in terms of Taoist notions. Rather, he skillfully employs such notions to present Buddha to his Chinese readers in such a fashion that they cannot simply reject Buddha as foreign. Indeed, if a true Chinese scholar identifies the Buddha as a direct link with Tao and *wu-wei*, to reject the Buddha might be the equivalent of rejecting Tao and *wu-wei*. The implied reader is drawn to accept Mou-tzu's identifications, and to distance himself from any norms that would disallow them, no matter how classical.

ARTICLE 4. TENSIONS BETWEEN MOU-TZU'S WAY AND THE CHINESE CLASSICS

A critic asked: Since Confucius considered the Five Classics to be the teaching of the Way, can you respect and recite them and in all your actions follow them? It seems that the Way of which you speak is empty, confused, inconceivable, and ephemeral. How can you speak so differently from that sage?

Mou-tzu said: One shouldn't think that only the accustomed is important or that the unfamiliar is unimportant. You are misled by external appearances and forget the heart of the matter. To be engaged in affairs and yet not lose the power of the Way is like playing a stringed instrument in harmony with other instruments and yet not losing the first two notes of kung and shang. The Way of Heaven regulates the four seasons. The Way of people regulates the five constant virtues. Lao-tzu says, "There is a thing confusedly formed, born before heaven and earth. . . . It is capable of being the mother of the world. I do not know its name, so I style it 'the Way.'"⁶⁶ The Way in its concreteness is the source whereby at home one serves parents, whereby in ruling the country one governs the people well, whereby in "standing alone" one governs the body well. If one follows and practices it, it will fill up heaven and earth. But it is never far, even if it diminishes because one rejects or fails to employ it. Why do you not understand? What is so different [from the words of that sage]?

Source Codes

The phrase *hsü-k'ung* (empty, confused 虛空) used by the critic alludes to an expression often used by Taoist writers. The *Chuang Tzu* employs it to refer to the condition of one who lives in emptiness and isolation (*hsü k'ung* 虛空), apart from his countrymen and all alone.⁶⁷ It was taken over by Chinese Buddhists to represent *sūnyatā*, the Mahāyāna notion of the emptiness of essence. Here, in our text, it is coupled with *huang-hu*, confused or blurred, suggesting that to the author of the *Li-huo lun* the term *hsü-k'ung* had not yet become a technical term for Buddhist emptiness.

The phrase *the heart of the matter* (*chung ch'ing* 中情) seems to allude to *The Songs of the South* (*Li Sao*) where Ch'ü Yüan laments that his lord, the Fragrant One (King Huai of Ch'u) has failed to appreciate him: "But the Fragrant One refused to examine my true feelings [*chung ch'ing*]. He lent ear, instead, to slander, and raged against me."⁶⁸

The five constant virtues mentioned by Mou-tzu are the proper relationships between prince and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and friends, traditionally defined as benevolence, righteousness, rites, wisdom, and good faith.⁶⁹

Mou-tzu describes the Way in phrases that remind one of the *Lao Tzu*. The Way in its concreteness (*tao chih wei wu* 道之爲物) is that whereby "standing alone" (*tu-li* 獨立) one governs the body. This seems to echo the passage partially cited in our text from the *Lao Tzu* (25):

"There is a thing [yu wu 有物] confusedly formed, born before heaven and earth. Silent and void, it stands alone [tu-li 獨立] and does not change."

Mou-tzu's attitude refuses to limit the Way to the Confucian classics, and, as will be seen later, directly counters any limitation of the Tao to Chinese civilization. In so doing, he cites the phrase *it will fill up heaven and earth*, alluding to one of the most mystical passages in the *Mencius*, where Kung-sun Ch'ou questions Mencius:

"May I ask what your strong points are?"

"I have an insight into words. I am good at cultivating my flood-like ch'i."

"May I ask what this flood-like ch'i is?"

"It is difficult to explain. This is a ch'i which is, in the highest degree, vast and unyielding. Nourish it with integrity and place no obstacle in its path and it will fill the space between heaven and earth."⁷⁰

Reader-Response Criticism

The objection is the obvious one: the Buddhist Dharma is not the teaching of the Way, but the Five Classics are. What need to speak about the empty and confused Buddhist teachings? In fact, it is alleged, Mou-tzu does not speak as do true sages. Indeed, that is the crux of his problem, for he is clearly introducing alien concepts into his understanding of the Way. This is the problem highlighted in the Preface. Mou-tzu must admit the obvious: that his speech is unfamiliar. Mou-tzu sets up the dialogue by describing the objection in such a way that it applies both to the Buddha Dharma and to the Way as described by Lao-tzu. Thus he can claim that Dharma is in harmony with the Way because it too is confusedly formed and beyond the realm of any speech, just as Lao-tzu says! He authenticates his Buddha discourse in terms of the ineffability of Tao.

The reader must here make a judgment about the validity of the alien discourse. He is led to do so by reference to accepted notions of the ineffability of Tao, familiar to anyone who has read the classical Taoist texts. If Lao-tzu only "styles" it the Way, then all speech is nothing but a styling of what cannot be expressed in any familiar terms, and Buddhist interpretations cannot be summarily dismissed.

Modern scholars often frame the question of the enculturation of Buddhism in terms of Chinese failure to appreciate the Indian dialectic of emptiness, how the emptiness of essence is

identical with a bodhisattva's compassionate immersion in the dependently co-arising world. Yet, in the China that is reflected in the *Li-huo lun*, there is already a balance and harmony between the Tao (here expressed in terms of Lao-tzu's maxim) that is the cosmic Tao of Heaven, and the human Tao, the moral tradition identified with Confucius. The Indian teaching of emptiness functioned within its context as a counter to Abhidharma realism, which regarded the truth of the Dharma as a transcendent absolute. Mou-tzu was faced not with such an attempt to transcend this world to find an absolute truth, but with the orthodox Confucianism that tended to focus entirely upon this-worldly affairs. He does this by claiming not to depart from Confucius himself, and throughout the Dialogue he often appeals to the words and examples of Confucius. He need only refute the notion that the Confucian tradition is a set of fixed norms valid once and for all, apart from any changing cultural conditions.⁷¹ He has no need as did Indian Buddhists to deconstruct a prior philosophical system that affirmed the reality of essences (*dharmā-svabhāva*), but is compelled rather to demonstrate that Buddhist teaching does not lead one to abandon the world completely. His advice is that one be engaged in affairs (*li shih* 立事) without losing the Buddha Tao. The argument shows little concern that the reader will opt for the disengagement of the Neo-Taoist "dark learning" and remove himself from society altogether. Either his efforts predate the time, the Cheng-shih era (240–48), when Neo-Taoism offered the alternative of a nihilistic escape, or, more probably, he did not regard that alternative to be a serious option for his readers.⁷² The need is not to recover conventional reality from the threat of a nihilistic emptiness, but rather to persuade the implied reader that, even while engaged in serving parents, ruling the country, or personal affairs, one can still adopt the Buddha teaching.

ARTICLE 5. BUDDHIST VERBOSITY

A critic asked: What is most important is not flowery, and the best words are not ornate. Words are beautiful when concise and well chosen. Deeds are illustrious when few and carried to completion. Thus jewels and jade, being rare, are precious, while pieces of tile, being plentiful, are cheap. The sages established the

texts of the Seven Classics⁷³ at not more than thirty thousand words, yet everything is complete in them. But the scrolls of the Buddhist scriptures are reckoned by the tens of thousands and their words by many hundreds of thousands. This is beyond the capability of any individual. I consider them troublesome and not important!

Mou-tzu said: Because of their depth and breadth, rivers and oceans differ from the rain flowing in the gutter. Because of their height and size, the five mountains differ from hillocks and mounds. If the height [of the mountains] did not exceed that of the hilly mounds, a lame goat could cross over their peaks. If the depths [of the oceans] did not exceed that of brooks and streams, a small child could bathe in their deepest pools. Race-horses⁷⁴ do not dwell in fenced pastures. Fish that swallow ships do not sport in narrow gorges. You will be disappointed if you try to find bright pearls by splitting half-inch oysters, or a phoenix's brood by searching for its nest in the brambles. This is because the small cannot contain the large.

The Buddhist scriptures presage the events of a hundred thousand generations and in retrospect lay open the basics of another ten thousand generations. Before the great simplicity had arisen and the great beginning had begun, when heaven and earth had just started to emerge, their subtlety could not be grasped and their intricacy could not be penetrated. Yet [in his scriptures] Buddha entirely fills up the exterior of their magnitude and interpenetrates the interior of their silent, obscure mystery. Since there is nothing not recorded [in them], the scriptural scrolls are reckoned by tens of thousands and their words are counted by hundreds of thousands. Their very abundance makes them complete and their vastness makes them rich. Why do you not deem them important? They are indeed important, although they are beyond the grasp of any single individual. Isn't it enough that when you approach a river to take a drink, your thirst is quenched? Why fret about the rest?

Source Codes

The objection that Buddhist rhetoric was too flowery and ornate reflects the quite distinct literary norms of Sanskrit and Chinese. Sanskrit is highly inflected, alphabetic, polysyllabic with compounds running on

at times for entire lines, and elaborated in a well-developed grammar. The canons of good writing prized not only the discursive argumentation of logical reasoning, but also the use of hyperbolic metaphor and imaginative simile. By contrast, Chinese is uninflected, ideographic, terse in the extreme, and without a systematic grammar. Chinese authors draw metaphors from familiar things, especially from nature, and tend to prize concreteness and the balance of well-chosen phrases.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the literary style in Chinese was to imitate the classics, for style itself carried ideological implications. The *Wen-hsin Tiao-lung* (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons) states that "the style which is defined as elegant and graceful models itself after the classical forms and adopts Confucian principles."⁷⁶ A similar complaint is found in the *Lun liu-chia yao-chih* (On Reading the Essentials of the Six Schools), which comments on Ssu-ma's *Shih chi* as follows: "The Confucians are broad-minded and keep the essentials to a minimum. . . . The classics and commentaries on the six arts are reckoned by the thousands and the ten thousands. Even in many generations, one cannot penetrate their teachings, in many years one cannot understand their main points."⁷⁷

The critic's assertion that jade is prized because rare, although a commonsense assertion, runs counter to a passage from *The Record of Rites* where Confucius is asked if jade is prized because it is rare, and he responds that it is valued not because of its rarity, but because of its intrinsic qualities, seen by the ancients to reflect human virtues.⁷⁸

Mou-tzu's reply echoes the words Mencius used to praise Confucius: "Within their species, there is the ch'i-lin among walking animals, the phoenix among flying birds, the Tai mountain among mounds and ant hills, and rivers and seas among the water flowing in gutters. The sages are of the same species as people, but they stand out from their kind and rise above their level. From the birth of humankind, there has never been one as illustrious as Confucius."⁷⁹

The phrase about a lame goat crossing over the peak of a mountain is taken from the *Meng-tzu tsa-chi*: "Mencius said, 'If their height did not exceed hillocks and mounds, a lame goat could walk over their summit.'⁸⁰

The fish that swallows boats alludes to a *Lieh Tzu* passage: "I have heard that the fish which can swallow a boat does not swim in side streams, the high-flying hawk and swan do not settle in ponds and puddles. Why? Because their aims are set very high."⁸¹ Similarly, the *Huainan Tzu* also states: "If you look into a running gutter, [you will find] no fish that swallows boats."⁸²

Mou-tzu's description of the "great beginning" echoes the *Lieh Tzu*: "There was a great evolution, a great inception, a great beginning, and a great simplicity. The great evolution is when the energies were imperceptible, the great inception is the origin of the energies, the great beginning is the origin of forms, and the great simplicity is the origin of substances."⁸³

The final sentence recalls a passage from the *Chuang Tzu*, in which Hsü Yu rejects Yao's offer of the Empire: "When the mole drinks at the river, he takes no more than a bellyful. Go home and forget the matter, my Lord."⁸⁴

Reader-Response Criticism

The distaste for flowery and ornate rhetoric is a common theme of the philosophers. Writing around 250 B.C.E., the *Hsün Tzu* says: "Some men of the present generation cloak pernicious persuasions in beautiful language and present elegantly composed but treacherous doctrines and sow great disorder and anarchy in the world. Such men are personally insidious and ostentatious, conceited and vulgar, yet they spread through the whole world their confused ignorance of wherein lies the distinction between right and wrong and between order and anarchy."⁸⁵

The objection presupposes that the critic is aware of the existence of a vast number of Buddhist texts, and sees the effort to study them as culturally disorientating. One does wonder how so many texts could have been known in Han times! And yet nowhere does the *Li-huo lun* show familiarity with even the most important of Buddhist texts.⁸⁶ It cites Buddhist sources only infrequently and does not evince any doctrinal sophistication. Perhaps only the existence of a large number of scriptures was known and not their doctrinal content. Any Buddhist missionary probably could have attested to the extensive Buddhist canon, even before Chinese translations were available. And it was indeed disorientating to cope with so many texts, as the subsequent history of Buddhist China demonstrates well enough. Mou-tzu's response, awash in metaphors from and allusions to the classics, defends the Buddhist scriptures, not for their brevity but for their richness and broad compass. All are important, yet one need not study every one of those many texts. Just drink until filled.

It is the implied reader, aware of the vastness of the Buddhist scriptures available to him (in what must therefore be assumed to be a cosmopolitan milieu), to whom these comments are addressed. Mou-tzu's attitude to the intra-story critic is rather condescending: he should be satisfied with what he can handle, even though he has not the capacity to master the whole. This is hardly an argument designed to convince his critic on the story level! In point of fact, the next article does present a response from the critic. Yet here Mou-tzu is speaking over the head of the critic to

convince the implied reader to be unlike that objector and delve into the Buddhist scriptures. By aligning the Buddha Dharma with the Taoist Tao, Mou-tzu assures that the Dharma will not be rejected out of hand as foreign. He can assume that his readers have such high regard for the *Lao Tzu* and the *Lieh Tzu*, which he quotes in support of the Dharma, that they cannot reject it.

ARTICLE 6. AN ATTEMPT TO TURN THE TABLES

A critic asked: Since the Buddhist scriptures are so numerous, I would like to grasp their main points and let go of the rest. Please point out only their main points and leave out the embellishments!

Mou-tzu said: That is not the way it is! The sun and moon each shine in their given realms. The twenty-eight constellations each have their proper domain. The hundred medicinal plants grow together and each heals a specific [malady]. Fox-fur garments guard against the cold, while broad-stitched linens mitigate the summer's heat. Boats and carriages take different routes, yet both can be used for a journey. Confucius himself did not consider the Five Classics to be complete, and he wrote The Spring and Autumn Annals and The Classic of Filial Piety because he wanted to fully explain the practices of the Way in accord with human ideas. Therefore, although the scriptures are numerous, they revolve around one central point, just as the Seven Classics, although different, are at one in valuing the Way, virtue, benevolence, and righteousness. The many words about filial piety are meant to accommodate to human behavior. Tzu-chang and Tzu-yu both asked the same question about filial piety, yet Confucius answered them differently because he was correcting their individual shortcomings. Why reject any of the [scriptures]?

Source Codes

The critic draws upon chapter 13 of the *Chuang Tzu*. When Confucius wanted to deposit his works with the royal house of Chou, he was

advised that he had first to see Lao Tan about it. "Excellent!" said Confucius, and went to see Lao Tan, but Lao Tan would not give permission. Thereupon Confucius unwrapped his Twelve Classics and began expounding them. Halfway through the exposition, Lao Tan said, 'This will take forever! Just let me hear the gist of it!'"⁸⁷

Mou-tzu's mention of boats and carriages may allude to the *Fayen* of Yang Hsiung, which says: "Someone asked about the Way. Yang Hsiung replied, 'The Way is like a road or a river. Carriages and boats rush helter-skelter without ceasing day and night.' That person then asked, '[If the Way winds around like boats and rivers,] how can one find the straight Way and follow it?' Yang Hsiung answered, 'Even though a road be full of curves, we can follow it since it leads to China. Even though a river winds to and fro, we can follow it since it leads to the sea.'"⁸⁸

Tzu-chang and Tzu-yu, mentioned by Mou-tzu, were disciples of Confucius. The *Analects* report: "Tzu-yu asked about being filial. The Master said: Nowadays for a man to be filial means nothing more than that he is able to provide his parents with food. Even hounds and horses are, in some way, provided with food. If a man shows no reverence, what is the difference? Tzu-hsia asked about being filial. The Master said: What is difficult to manage is the expression on one's face. As for the young taking on the burden when there is work to be done or letting the old enjoy the wine and food when these are available, that hardly deserves to be called filial."⁸⁹

Reader-Response Criticism

The critic is not ready to take Mou-tzu's advice in the preceding article. If Mou-tzu's argument about the obscure mystery of the Tao applies also to Lao-tzu, who only wrote the five thousand words of his famed book, then why are the Buddhist texts so voluminous? In words from the *Chuang Tzu*, there directed to Confucius, the critic insists on having the main points. By so doing, he attempts to claim the Taoist tradition and turn the argument against the validity of Mou-tzu's appeal to these notions. Mou-tzu, wily as ever, now answers by appealing to Confucian traditions, affirming that Confucius added two further classics precisely because the "main points" needed clarification in light of specific circumstances. The Buddhist notion of teaching as *upāya* is here at play, for all scripture is seen as skillful means accommodated to human ideas and capabilities, as witnessed in the two different replies Confucius gave to his disciples on filial piety. One cannot simply state a general principle applicable to everyone in