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Knowledge and Truth in the Thought of Jizang (549–623)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine Jizang's theory of knowledge and truth in terms of contemporary philosophy. Firstly, I present the main areas of Madhyamaka thought, especially those concerning human knowledge and cognition, enunciated in Nagarjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartani*. Secondly, I raise the issue of the acceptance of Madhyamaka in the area of Chinese thought, which provides us with the question of the inception and development of the *sānlùn zōng* – the Three Treatises School. Thirdly, I expound the main points and key notions of Jizang's philosophy: the crucial concepts of the “refutation of erroneous views as the illumination of right views” (*bóxiè xiànzhēn*) and “the Four Levels of the Two Kinds of Truth” (*sìzhōng èrdí*). I try to explicate and develop these ideas in terms of modern epistemology, which in the first instance is related to the Münchhausen trilemma.

KEY WORDS

Jizang, Sanlun, Three Treatises, Madhyamaka, Nagarjuna, Buddhist epistemology, theory of two truths, Chinese Buddhism, Münchhausen trilemma

The aim of this paper is to examine Jizang's (chin. *Jizàng*, 吉藏) theory of knowledge and truth in terms of contemporary philosophy. This undertaking may show us not only the historical significance of the thought of Chinese Buddhism, but also its intercultural importance and its own contribution to the entire philosophy of language. Firstly, I shall adumbrate the main areas of Madhyamaka thought, especially those concerning human knowledge and

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cognition, enunciated in Nagarjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartani*. Secondly, I shall raise the issue of the acceptance of Madhyamaka in the area of Chinese thought, which provides us with the question of inception and development of the *sānlùn zōng* (三論宗). Thirdly, I would expound the main points and key notions of Jizang's philosophy: the crucial notions of the "refutation of erroneous views as the illumination of right views", (chin. *bóxiè xiànzhēn*, 驳谢现真) and "the Four Levels of the Two Kinds of Truth" (chin. *sìzhōng èrdì*, 四中二諦). Then, I shall explicate and develop these ideas in terms of modern epistemology, which is, in the first instance, related to the Münschausen trilemma.

BACKGROUND: MADHYAMAKA ON KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH

Buddhist epistemology and philosophy of language is widely considered as one of the subtlest traditions in this philosophical area and obviously one of the most prominent currents in the philosophy of the East per se. There are various reasons for this state of affairs. Firstly, according to Buddha, the majority of metaphysical questions are meaningless. They are purely theoretical and uncertain, because one should rather obtain salvation in a sorrowful world. As a result, metaphysics cannot be a Buddhist *philosophia prima*. Secondly, Buddha insisted on individual practice and meditation. Any philosophical concept should be tried in practice to decide whether it is (or not) an expedient means to salvation.¹ It is not empiricism in the Western sense, because we are *trying*, not *proving*, the concept: it has more of a pragmatist and ethical, rather than merely an epistemological, character. Nevertheless, we could say that experience and knowledge of oneself tends to be the measure for merely intellectual ideas. Thirdly, Buddhists denied the substantive view of the world and the soul represented by the Brahmins. The fundamental doctrine of arising co-dependency shows us that every view ought to be perceived as being linked with one's karma and one's own individual experiences. Epistemology seems to be a good tool for criticising such substantive systems as Astika. The last reason, probably the most skeptical one, is fundamental to understanding Nagarjuna's philosophy of language.

Madhyamaka is a widely varied philosophical school with a half-millennium tradition and long-lasting influence. Nevertheless, I would limit my

¹ It was later developed in the doctrine of expedient means (scr. *upāya*), based on the Lotus Sutra.

subject to the thoughts of Nagarjuna and Aryadeva, because Jizang, who lived between 549 and 623, could not have known the later thinkers. It also concerns Buddhapālita and Bhāvaviveka, because the time needed for the reception of their ideas (especially of the division of Madhyamaka into the Prāsaṅgika and the Svātantrika) was too short. The main idea of Nagarjuna's philosophy is that all phenomena are empty; videlicet there is no substance (*svabhāva*). This means that all things arise and perish while being dependent on other things, that everything is conditional. There is no being that exists by its own nature or essence, like God, and no being that exists apart from other beings, like a spirit. *Śūnyatā* can be treated as a reinterpretation of the fundamental Buddhist doctrines, such as dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and no-self (*anātman*).² This philosophical explication of Buddha's teaching helped Nagarjuna with the refutation of the metaphysics of non-Mahayana schools: Sarvastivāda and Sautrāntika. Nevertheless, the main aim of his endeavour was not specific because his most famous conclusions, especially the epistemological ones, are as general as possible.

If there are no intrinsic natures, words cannot have constant referents appertaining to them from "the act of baptism" in perpetuity. Words do not have *svabhāva*. Enclosing the complexity of the chain of conditions in simple words is the first step to the illusion of essentialism. Grasping the meaning, we tend to think of it as something outside our minds; not changing them, we perceive things in the same way as their names: as unchangeable, distinguishable atoms of the world. Such was the ontology of the dharmas enunciated in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*. In fact, our language is about any thing, because of the bankruptcy of the idea of denotation, as long as "thing" means the same as "substantion"; in Jay Garfield's translation: "whatever grasping there is, does not exist through essence."³ Moreover, Nagarjuna shows the demise of the correspondence conception of truth. It stems from the impossibility of comparison between the sphere of thought and the immutable sphere of things. The greatness of Nagarjuna relies on the fact that he showed the self-contradiction of this concept of truth while disregarding his own statements: we call it *reductio ad absurdum*, Mādhyamikas called it *prasanga*. In the "Reversal of Dismissal", *Vigrahavyāvartani*, the Buddhist philosopher writes that the criteria of correct cognition should be proved, but they cannot be proved by other criteria because these criteria also ought to be proved by

² J. Westerhoff, *Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka. A Philosophical Introduction*, New York 2009, pp. 21–32.

³ J. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, New York 1995, p. 61.

other criteria, and so on ad infinitum: this mistake is referred to by him as *anavasthā* (*regressus ad infinitum*). They cannot also be unproved because this is dogmatism. Nagarjuna called it the wrong argument, (*upanyāsa*), inasmuch as criteria established apart from the objects of the correct cognition are the criteria of nothing. Finally, they cannot be proved by themselves because this is a vicious circle (*svataḥ siddhi*).⁴ This commentary is key in the perspective of the thought of Jizang. The question is: is Madhyamaka itself free from this reflection? Is *śūnyatāvāda* true?

Of course, it cannot be true in the abandoned sense. If we still think of truth as a correspondence between things and thought, the answer is: Madhyamaka is neither true, nor false, neither true and false, neither true nor false. The fourfold negation or *catuṣkoṭi* shows us that even the last option shares the premises of the classical concept of truth. The answer is possible thanks to Nagarjuna's theory of two truths: "a truth of mundane conventions (*saṃvṛti-satya*) and a truth of the ultimate (*paramārtha-satya*)."⁵ Differently from earlier Buddhists, Nagarjuna does not think of *paramārtha-satya* as a hidden essence of the universe, but rather regards it as an emptiness. An acquaintance with conventional truth leads to the knowledge of the ultimate truth, which is necessary to achieve *nirvāṇa*. Because of this relation, Nagarjuna could say that truth about emptiness is empty itself and there is no self-contradiction. Self-reference, which has blown apart so many philosophical systems, is not the problem of the Middle Way.

Āryadeva held that point of view. Later controversy between the Prāsaṅgika and the Svātantrika involved the problem of the nature of *saṃvṛti-satya*. The Svātantrika Madhyamaka claims that things are causally efficient because of their conventionally intrinsic reality. The Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, namely Candrakīrti, argues that things are causally effective just because they are empty and their *niḥsvabhāva* is the conventional truth. The disputation is eventually about whether the ultimate truth denies or clarifies the conventional truth, which is overdrawn.

⁴ Nagarjuna, *Vigrahavyāvartani* 31–33.40–51. Source: J. Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes. Nagarjuna's Vigraha-vyāvartani*, New York 2010, pp. 30–35.

⁵ J. Garfield, op. cit., p. 68.

THE THREE TREATISES SCHOOL: CHINESE MADHYAMAKA

The Madhyamaka school was introduced to China as one of the first schools of Buddhist philosophy, at a time when Buddhism was being rapidly sinicised: in 374 Dao An (*Dào Ān*, 道安), who lived between 312 and 385 AD, compiled the very first Chinese version of the Tripitaka canon. His translations largely influenced Kumarajiva; he himself accepted the main points of the Madhyamaka view, saying that original emptiness is the true nature of all phenomena, the Absolute, which is the basis for the mundane truth.⁶ Dao An wanted Chinese Buddhists to know not only philosophical treatises, but also practical rules concerning the everyday life of monks (namely Vinaya). This dream was embodied by the famous pilgrimage of Faxian (*Fǎ Xiǎn*, 法显). He had been travelling throughout Asia for about fourteen years, covering around 15,000 km; when he came back to Chang'an he was seventy six years old. Faxian believed that Maitreya was watching over the spread of the Buddhist faith throughout China.⁷

Faxian wrote his "Record of Buddhist Kingdoms" because of recommendations made by Kumarajiva. Undoubtedly, the latter was inspired by the great monk.⁸ Kumarajiva (scr. *Kumarajiva*, chin. *Jiūmóluóshí*, 鸠摩罗什), who lived between 344 and 413, is just as concerned as the first patriarch of the Three Treatises School. Born in Kucha (in what is now the province of Xinjiang), from an early age he showed unusual abilities: it is rumoured that he learned by heart about a thousand lines of Buddhist scriptures per day.⁹ At the age of nine, Kumarajiva and his mother came to Kashmir, when he became the disciple of an Indian monk, Bandhudatta. After arriving in Kashgar, he started to study the scriptures of the Sarvastivāda school, but he converted to Mahayana; then he came back to Kucha. When the late Jin dynasty (chin. *Jīn Cháo*, 晋朝) conquered his home town, he learned to speak Chinese; in 401 he moved to the contemporary capital city, Chang'an, when at king Yaoxing's bidding, he devoted himself to his life's work – the translation of the Buddhist canon. It is estimated that Kumarajiva translated up to 300 Buddhist texts, 51 of which were lost, while 61 have survived to our times in pristine condition. Needless to say, Kumarajiva

⁶ H. Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History. India and China*, New York 1988, p. 67.

⁷ Fa-hien, *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms*, trans. J. Legge, Oxford 1886, pp. 18–28.

⁸ J. Edkins, *Chinese Buddhism*, London 1880, p. 91.

⁹ Chou Hsiang-Kuang, *History of Chinese Buddhism*, Indo-Chinese Literature Publications, Delhi 1956, p. 57.

did not translate on his own: when translating *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* he was assisted by about five hundred monks. In turn, when translating one of the most important sacred texts of Mahayana Buddhism – the Lotus Sutra – he was supported by over two thousand monks.¹⁰ For the purpose of this paper the most important point is that Kumarajiva translated the three treatises from which Chinese Madhyamaka took its name: *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā* – *Zhōnglùn* (中論), Nāgārjuna’s *Dvādaśanikāyaśāstra* – *Shìèrménlùn* (十二門論) and Āryadeva’s *Śatakaśāstra* – *Bǎilùn* (百論). Usually *Māhaprajñā-paramitopadeśa* – *Dàzhìdùlùn* (大智度論) is added as the fourth text. Kumarajiva, unlike Xuanzang (*Xuánzàng*, 玄奘), who preferred to translate Indian texts literally, tried to convey the essence of the Buddhist writings using vernacular notions. Nevertheless, this did not mean a defection from the original ideas. For instance, Kumarajiva did not choose Chinese *wú* (無) for *sūnya*, because this word had its very own special meaning in Neo-Daoist metaphysics (chin. *Xuànxué*, 玄学); he used *kōng* (空) instead. The translation of the main Mahayana concepts looks as follows:¹¹

Sanskrit	Chinese
Śūnya	kōng, 空
Prajñā	bōrě, 般若
mahāparinirvāna	dà bān nièpán, 大般涅槃
dharmamudrā	fǎyìn, 法印
bhūtatahātā	zhēnrú, 真如
ṣadhetu	liù yīn, 六因
saṃsāra	lúnhuí, 輪迴
bodhisattva	púsà, 菩薩

We can also reconstruct Kumarajiva’s own philosophy from the letters between himself and Huiyuan (*Huìyuǎn*, 慧遠, 344–416), named the First Patriarch of the Pure Land School of Buddhism, which were rushed into “The Essentials of Mahayana”, *Dàchéng dàyīzhāng* (大乘大義章). Huiyuan

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 60.

¹¹ Source: S. Beal, *The Buddhist Tripitaka As It Is Known in China and Japan. A Catalogue and Compendions Report*, Devonport 1876.

asks Kumarajiva to explain dharmadhatu. The Kuchanian monk answers that dharmas do not have their own nature or rather: their nature is lack of nature, emptiness. They all arise and de cease in dependence on each other. Kumarajiva also claims that the dharma of arising has no real being (*sadbhūta*) and all dharmas are non-arising, non-ceasing and have the nature of nirvāna. He argues that a different point of view leads to a contradiction: to regress to infinity in tracking the ultimate basis of reality or to ask absurd questions about what was before the beginning. Indeed, he rejects most ontological categories, including such pairs of concepts as being/non-being, cause/effect, past/future, which seem to be inadequate tools to describe the emptiness.¹²

The most significant disciple of Kumarajiva, Sengrui (*Sēngruì*, 僧睿) lived between 352 and 436 and became the succeeding patriarch of the Three Treaties School. Sengrui's distinctive feature was the exceptional piety that he held towards Amitabha Buddha – at the end of his life he officially joined the community of Huiyuan. Sengrui lamented that the Buddhist tradition of meditation, dhyana (which would later be known by its Chinese name *chan* and Japanese *zen*), had been neglected. Sengrui expounded his views in his prefaces to translated works, and above all, in the preface to “Zhonglun”. As he noted, the doctrine of emptiness, rejecting all dualities, was primarily created as a remedy for pervasive suffering. Similarly, the notion of the unity of samsara and nirvana is opposed to the rationalist soteriology of Hinayana and the Neo-Taoist speculation.¹³

Nevertheless, the greatest and, according to the tradition, also the first disciple of Kumarajiva was Sengzhao (*Sēngzhào*, 僧肇), who lived between 384 and 414. He is the link in the chain between Jīumóloushí and Jizang. Originally fascinated by Neo-Taoism, he converted to Buddhism after he had read the Vimalakirti Sutra. Despite his young age and Taoist past, he rapidly mastered Buddhist philosophy, to such an extent that at the age of twenty seven he assisted Kumarajiva during one of his journeys; then he became his private secretary during the translation of the Madhyamaka texts. His main work entitled “Treatise concerning the Cause” (chin. *Zhàolùn*, 肇論) consists of four parts:

- the first part – “Things do not change” (*Wùbùqiānlùn*, 物不遷論),
- the second part – “The Emptiness of the Non-Absolute” (*Bùzhēnkōnglùn*, 不真空論),
- the third part – “Prajñā is not knowledge” (*Bōrěwúzhīlùn*, 般若無知論),

¹² R. Robinson, *Early Madhyamaka in India and China*, Madison 1967, pp. 92–97.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 119.

- the fourth part – “Nirvana has no name” (*Nièpánwú mínglùn*, 涅槃無名論).

The third part is the most interesting: it is devoted to an attempt to explicate *prajña*: the divine knowledge of every buddha, transcending temporal and spatial borders, independent and absolute. *Prajña*, understood in such a way, would interfere with the doctrine of emptiness (the co-dependence of everything). Sengzhao states that there is no contradiction there, because *prajña* is not the same as know-ledge. Emptiness excludes the existence of objects (resp. objective substances), but objects are always the objects of knowledge, not of *prajña*.¹⁴ In his treatise Sengzhao alleges some further arguments for his thesis:

1. Something that is known is related to something that is not known: temporarily or fundamentally. But in wisdom there is no ignorance, so it is not knowledge.
2. Wisdom is nameless and formless (empty of *namarupa*), therefore it cannot be said that it exists or not, just like knowledge. So wisdom is not knowledge.
3. A Holy Mind intuitively knows everything, but it is not knowledge, because it cannot make a mistake and without not knowing there is no knowing. And so on.
4. In the intuition, the knowing and the known coexist, but knowledge is defined as generated by the object. And so on.¹⁵

The conclusion is simple and quite startling: names do not have designations; *prajña* cannot be expressed by language. In this sense *prajña* is identical with epistemological emptiness, as the topic of Nagajuna's *Vigrahavyāvartani*. What is more interesting, Sengzhao expressed his conclusion concerning the nature of wisdom in the language of Neo-Taoist metaphysics, which (as we can see) was not finally left by him. He wrote that in wisdom there is no difference between substance and function (noumenon and phaenomenon), namely: between the Way in which the world exists independently from the subject and the Way of how the world manifests to the subject. Notwithstanding, the content of his thought is undoubtedly Buddhist: in “The Emptiness of the Non-Absolute”, Sengzhao argues that emptiness cannot be treated as non-existence and identified with the original non-being (*běnwú*, 本無).

Sengzhao gives us some very general statements (or maybe rather counter-statements) about cognition and knowledge; he also emphasises the soteriological

¹⁴ Chan Wing-tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. New York 1963, pp. 343–344.

¹⁵ R. Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–126.

dimension of Madhyamaka's epistemology. All of the above thinkers, from Nagarjuna to Sengzhao, were necessary to mention to understand the thought of Jizang correctly. His philosophy transcends any particular period of time and the problems he had to cope with take on a mature and subtle form.

JIZANG'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH

Jizàng (549–623 A.D.), born in Jinling (金陵), according to the “Further vitae of the famous monks” (续高僧傳, *Xù gāosēng zhuàn*), became a monk at the age of seven. After the succession of the Tang Dynasty in 617 he became the head abbot of four new Buddhist temples in metropolitan Chang'an. He was a very prolific writer: it is estimated that he wrote about fifty books, mainly commentaries, which is quite peculiar for such a sceptical thinker. The most important are: “Meaning of the Two Levels of Truth” (*Èrdí yì*, 二諦意), “Treatise on the Mystery of the Mahayana” (*Dàchéng xuánlùn*, 大乘玄論), “Essay on the Two Levels of Truth” (*Èrdí zhāng*, 二諦章), “Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises” (*Sānlùn xuányì*, 三論玄義) and the commentaries on three treatises: *Zhōnglùn*, *Bǎilùn* and *Shíèrménlùn*.¹⁶

Jizàng's contribution to the development of Mādhyamaka embraces both ontology and epistemology. In the first point of *Sānlùn xuányì* he criticises existing Buddhist concepts of causality, technically using *catuṣkoṭi*.¹⁷ It is not possible that there are effects without causes, i.e. that the spontaneity of phenomena does not need a Creator (as Taoists preach), or that there are only causes (as materialists teach), because the cause exists only in relation to the effect and vice versa. Neither is the cause the same as a result, either, whereas the abandonment of both the causes and effect is equal to the rejection of the law of karma. The Nagarjunian tetralemma, applied to the critique of the recent doctrines of causality looks as follows: neither causes, nor effects, neither causes and effects, nor neither causes nor effects:

$$\neg\exists x[C(x)] \ \& \ \neg\exists x[E(x)] \ \& \ \neg\exists x[C(x) \ \& \ E(x)] \ \& \ \neg\exists x[\neg C(x) \ \& \ \neg E(x)]$$

¹⁶ A. Fox, *Jizang*, [in:] *Great Thinkers of the Eastern World*, ed. I. McGreal, New York 1992, pp. 105–106.

¹⁷ Jizang, *Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises*, pt. 1, [in:] Chan Wing-tsit, op. cit., pp. 361–367. Also in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*: TSD 45: 1–7.

Jizàng also criticised the concept of the four causes in abhidharma: if they are produced by something else, they are not the ultimate cause. If they (C) have their own causes (C'), these causes (C') also have another causes (C''), and so on ad infinitum. If we settle into some cause, it means that this cause has a self-existence; therefore, it does not need anything except itself to be itself. Yet, if it does not need an effect to be itself – namely, the cause – then this is no longer a cause. In the next part of the text the adversary created by the author attacks Madhyamaka itself: the Middle Way assumes nonexistence, for instance preaching the nonexistence of being and non-being (this method resembles Plato's *Parmenides*). Jizàng replies that this non-being is adopted pragmatically and temporarily as a remedy for a contrary statement; when the disease recedes, the cure will be postponed. To sum up, co-dependent arising can be understood neither in the category of (self-)existence nor non-existence. "The true nature of all dharmas is not directly expressible in language and realizable in thought", writes Chinese.¹⁸

This pragmatism leads us to the central concept of "refutation of erroneous views as the illumination of right views", *bóxiè xiànzhēn* (驳谢现真), which was enunciated in the "Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises". As we remember, Prāsaṅgikas claimed that Mādhyamaka is only a negative method of refuting views, but Svātantrikas believed that it has also its own, undoubtable view. Although Jizàng cannot have been a witness of this dispute, he subverted the salience of this argument: the refutation of erroneous views is always the illumination of right views, and *vice versa*. All beliefs are empty because they depend on their rejections. Two opposite beliefs (statements) share the same premises and the horizon of possible continuations. Tetralemma is the transcendence of these artificial oppositions, such as nothingness/absolute, false/truth, samsara/nirvana, and so on.

Nevertheless, Madhyamaka is also empty; we already know this from *Zhōnglùn* (XIII, 8): "if someone thinks of emptiness as an existing thing, he cannot be saved even by all Buddhas". Jizàng writes about malignant attachment to the doctrine of emptiness in quite poetic words: "it is like water able to extinguish the fire, if the water itself could ignite, what would be used to extinguish it? Nihilism and eternalism are like fire and emptiness can extinguish them. But if someone insists on adherence to emptiness, there is no cure which could help him."¹⁹ In this perspective, the doctrine of emptiness seems

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 368.

¹⁹ Idem, *Meaning of the Two Levels of Truth*, pt. 1, [in:] Hsueh-li Cheng, *Empty Logic*, Delhi 1991, p. 49.

to be the reinterpretation of the doctrine of expedient (skr. *upāya*, chin. *fāng-biàn*, 方便) means. *Śūnyatā* means that we are not attached to any extreme view, because it will not help us with our liberation. Jizàng quotes the “Fame for Purity”: “The Buddha is unattached to the mundane world and is like the lotus flower. He is always skilful in entering into the paths of emptiness and silence.”²⁰ Although the method of Jizàng is called *bóxiè xiànzhēn*, we cannot treat *xiè* and *zhēn* as falseness and truth in a critical sense; Jizang knew it – he asked himself: “if there is no statement and counterstatement, there is no *zhēn* and *xiè*; so why it is written here about the refutation of *xiè* and the illumination of *zhēn*?”²¹ *Zhēn* and *xiè* should rather be translated as “appropriate”, “advisable” and “inappropriate”, “inadvisable”. Jizàng is not nihilist (despite the fact that he is to some extent a sceptic), because he does not forbid us to have our own beliefs. They probably have personal, emotional, maybe also pedagogical, value, but we cannot be excessively tied to them: we cannot on the basis of our beliefs judge other beliefs as incorrect. “If the illness of attachment to the being went down, the cure of emptiness is abandoned and finally it is known that sacred way has nothing to do with being and non-being. Originally there was nothing to affirm and there is now nothing to negate.”²²

Jizang shows also his pragmatic approach to the crucial doctrine of two truths: “the two truths are just means of instruction and are not concerned with objects and principles.”²³ If two truths were opposite principles, Madhyamaka would fall into substantialism. Adversaries of Madhyamaka would also say that the dualism of two truths is not in fact different from other dualisms, which were eradicated by the Middle Way. According to Cuma Ozkan, “the essence of the Buddha’s teachings is the rejection of dualistic thinking, the ontological understanding of two truths poses a serious threat to emptiness. In addition, Jizang points out the soteriological function of two truths because it helps people understand the Buddha’s message.”²⁴ Jizang claims that to prevent misunderstandings we should distinguish four levels of two truths²⁵:

²⁰ Idem, *Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises*, op. cit., p. 368.

²¹ Idem, *Meaning of the Two Levels of Truth*, op. cit., p. 50.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Idem, *Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises*, pt. 2 [in:] Liu Ming-Wood, *Madhyamaka Thought in China*, Leiden 1994, p. 140.

²⁴ C. Ozkan, *A Comparative Analysis: Buddhist Madhyamaka and Daoist Chongxuan (Twofold Mystery) in the Early Tang (618–720)*, MA thesis at University of Iowa, Iowa 2013, p. 37.

²⁵ Jizang, *Essay on the Two Levels of Truth*, op. cit., pp. 360–361. TSD 45:90–1.

1. *The first level.* “Existence” is taken as the mundane truth and “emptiness” as the supreme truth. What is taken by Svatantrikas as Madhyamaka’s conclusion, Jizang faces as a starting point. “Ordinary people” claim that dharmas possess being, whereas “saints and sages” know that all dharmas are empty. This level should enable people to renounce worldly truth.
2. *The second level.* “Existence” and “emptiness” are mundane truths and “non-duality” is the supreme. “Non-duality” means “neither emptiness nor existence”. Applied to the famous conclusion of the twenty-fifth chapter of the “Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way”, non-duality sounds like “neither the cycle of life and death nor Nirvana”.
3. *The third level.* “Duality” and “non-duality” are mundane truths, “neither duality nor non-duality” is called the supreme truth. According to Jizang, duality is one-sided, while non-duality is central, but both are extremes: they are called worldly truth.
4. *The fourth level.* “Differences” are the mundane truth, “non-difference” and “non-dependence” is the supreme truth and the principle. By “differences” Jizang understands the tetralemma created from the negation of the third level: “neither duality, nor non-duality, neither duality and non-duality, nor neither duality nor duality”. In fact, the tetralemma itself is abandoned for non-difference and non-dependence on any doctrine.

In my opinion, Jizang’s list of levels is not finite, and it could not be finite, because – according to the *bóxiè xiànzhēn* method – every view has its opposition. Jizang writes: “The four kinds of Two Levels of Truth all represent the principle of gradual rejection, like building a framework from the ground.”²⁶ The *ì èrdí* concept shows that by justifying the assumptions of our beliefs (in this case non-directly, by showing that the opposite views are false), we fall into the trap of infinite regression. Nāgārjuna and Jizang raise the issue of the limits of our knowledge, demonstrating that the classic model of truth and rationality is self-contradictory. We could compare it with the so-called Münchhausen trilemma, created by the contemporary philosopher, Hans Albert, to prove the self-contradiction of the principle of sufficient reason. Justifying belief, we have to choose between [1] infinite regress (A because B, because C, ad inf.), [2] vicious circle (A because B, B because A, or: D, because B, etc.) and [3] dogmatism, which is refuted from the starting point.²⁷ As we

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 90.

²⁷ In Polish: H. Albert, *Nauka i poszukiwanie prawdy. Krytyczny realizm i jego konsekwencje dla metodologii*, tłum. D. Sadowski, W. Bensari, [in:] *Krytyczny racjonalizm*, red. P. Dehnel, Wrocław 1992, p. 63.

have already seen, Nāgārjuna used this trilemma explicitly in *Vigrahavyāvartani*, writing about [1] *anavasthā*, [2] *svataḥ siddhi* and [3] *upanyāsa*. Jizàng also used this approach in his critique of causality, writing that [1] a chain of causes leads to infinite regress, [2] ultimate causes cannot be established by ultimate causes, [3] causes do not have self-existence. In fact, whole philosophy of Jizang resembles this trilemma: [3] he refuted dogmatism because of his doctrine of emptiness, close to the doctrine of skilful means; [2] he showed a vicious circle in the method of refutation of erroneous views as the illumination of right views (A because not-B, not-B because A); [1] finally, he demonstrated the infinite regress of our assumptions in the *sizhǒng èrdí*. What is interesting, according to Jizàng, Madhyamaka itself is not free from these limitations: [3] it is also empty, [2] it is right only when nihilism and eternalism are wrong and vice versa, [1] its basic notion of two truths leads to *regressus ad infinitum*. As we can see, the thought of Jizang is very consistent and coherent. At the same time, his scepticism does not have a nihilistic, but rather a pragmatic and soteriological face.

Jizang is at the same time the greatest and the last philosopher of the Sanlun school, brought to Japan by his disciple Ekan (kor. *Hyegwan*) as Sanron, when it eventually died out. According to Chan Wing-tsit, there are three reasons for this state of affairs: firstly, his philosophy was too Indian; secondly, it was too abstractive; thirdly, it was also too sceptical for incipient Chinese Buddhism.²⁸ In my opinion, it is quite an injurious remark, also for the Chinese. Even if Jizang's philosophy is Indian at its core, it very often uses many notions typical for Chinese philosophy. Just like Sengzhao, Jizang relates to the fundamental Neo-Daoist division into substance and function: "Correctness in substance means that it is neither absolute nor worldly, and correctness in function means being both absolute and worldly."²⁹ Personally, I doubt that Jizang did not have any disciples because he was too abstractive, it is rather because there was nothing left to say in Chinese Madhyamaka after him. We cannot talk for a long time about the limits of our knowledge; therefore the rest was left for practice ("the rest is silence"), as conducted by Chan Buddhism. Apart from the historical significance of his philosophy, which is obvious, I tried to emphasise its intercultural importance and original contribution to the development of epistemology.

²⁸ Chan Wing-tsit, op. cit., p. 359.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 368.

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