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by Young-ho Kim

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is in many senses participatory (according to Tambiah's definition), and it is just this which makes them difficult to place within a scheme that wants a sharp distinction between science and magic. Moreover, as Evelyn Fox Keller has pointed out, the modern scientific enterprise itself does not, and historically has not, been engaged only in the dominant mode. Science, in its representation of causal structures and in its attempts to understand the natural world and our place in it, contains within it drives toward totalization, toward holistic as well as atomistic thinking, toward contemplative as well as technologically interventionist modes. It is only a rather narrowly "mechanistic" notion of cause which would yield the contrast Tambiah seems to want. Tambiah rightly cautions against using technological, scientifically informed conceptions of rationality and efficiency as the yardsticks by which to judge all cultures. But he seems to regard natural science itself as something which can be freed from its cultural embeddings (so that problems arise only when scientific attitudes are extended to yield moral and social values), as something which is morally and socially neutral and which can be used in the service of different ends. This is of a piece with taking causality as a universal category and with failing to see the richness and diversity of which scientific thought is capable but which is masked by the values of an ideological image of science which functions to create, through privileging and selecting, science of a certain kind. It is unwise to lose sight of the extent to which science is itself a collective representation and as such reflects the moral and social structures which reproduce and sustain it. We cannot just embrace modern science while regarding technology with suspicion and rejecting the moral and social values which have produced the science-technology complex. We need to work for a deeper understanding of the actual and possible relations between science and society.

Tao-sheng's Commentary on the Lotus Sūtra: A Study and Translation.
By Young-ho Kim. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.
Pp. xix + 374.

Tao-sheng (ca. 360–434) holds an important place in the history of Chinese Buddhism as one of the earliest proponents of the theory of sudden enlightenment and the universality of the Buddha nature. Almost all of his works, unfortunately, have been lost or survive only in excerpted, fragmentary form, and the only complete work that has come down to our own time is his commentary on the Lotus Sūtra. Young-ho Kim, assistant professor of philosophy at Inha University in Korea, presents a complete translation of this difficult text, and adds to it an introduction (Part I) and a critical study (Part II). One reviewer (cited on the back cover)

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says that Kim “has exhaustively and carefully reviewed all the existing research in English, Chinese, and Japanese. He presents the material in a straightforward manner, tightly reasoned, and fully documented.”

A careful reading of the book, however, does not bear out this praise. Following the Preface is a Prolegomena in which Kim raises the first of his two main concerns: Tao-sheng’s identity as a Buddhist in the light of his heavy reliance on Neo-Taoist and, to a lesser degree, Confucian, terms and ideas. We are given two alternatives: “Either . . . Tao-sheng was far ahead of his time in grasping the essence of the Buddhist doctrines, or he deviated from the traditional Indian Buddhist presentation and thinking” (p. xiii). The question is raised repeatedly (pp. 48, 84–86, and 105–106) and is answered repeatedly along predictable lines: Tao-sheng was essentially a Buddhist using Neo-Taoist terms to explain his Buddhism. The issue is an old one, largely resolved, and is a reflection of Kim’s use of work done by scholars from the 1930s to the 1960s. Having shown Tao-sheng to have been a true Buddhist, Kim apparently regards him as having being “ahead of his time.”

As background, chapter one gives us Tao-sheng’s “prehistory,” in which we are told that Buddhist studies before Tao-sheng was largely a syncretic attempt to overcome the differences between that foreign religion and indigenous thought, and that Northern Buddhism was more practical than the largely philosophical Southern Buddhism. The brief biography in chapter two also employs broad generalizations that describe Hui-yüan as a conservative, “more or less a dualist,” while Tao-sheng is more liberal and has a “somewhat monistic tinge” (p. 16). Both the dualist and the monist embrace Mādhyamika philosophy. The description of Tao-sheng’s writings in chapter three is straightforward but unaware of another opinion concerning the date of the Lotus Sūtra commentary. Kim dates it at 432 and thus regards it as a statement of Tao-sheng’s mature thought, and makes no reference to Whalen Lai’s dating of 406–413 and his characterization of the commentary as being unrepresentative of his later thinking.¹

Kim’s second and primary concern centers on an apparent contradiction he discovers and then tries to resolve. Rather than deal with the problem in a direct manner, Kim spreads out his discussion over several chapters. As indicated in the Prolegomena (p. xv), the problem is that while Tao-sheng is known for his theory of sudden enlightenment, he advocates a gradual approach in his commentary to the Lotus Sūtra. In chapter four, “Tao-sheng’s Doctrines,” Kim characterizes the idea of sudden enlightenment as Chinese and Mahāyāna in contrast to the gradual approach, which is more Indian and Hīnayāna (pp. 30–31), and again does not refer to previous researchers on this issue, mainly Whalen Lai, who regards Tao-sheng’s early subitism as being “by no means Mahāyāna inspired,”² or Luis O. Gómez’ observation that the whole

sudden-gradual dichotomy was “a part of Chinese culture and not an idea introduced with Buddhism.”³ A final discussion of the problem of Tao-sheng’s internal contradiction is left for chapter eight. Part I ends with chapter five, a description of Tao-sheng’s influence on other schools.

Part II, “A Critical Study of Tao-sheng’s Commentary on the *Lotus Sutra*,” begins with a description of how Tao-sheng was probably introduced to the Lotus Sūtra through Kumārajīva in Ch’ang-an. Kim notes that Tao-sheng wrote his commentary using material from other writers, and that therefore there is a problem with identifying just which ideas are Tao-sheng’s and which are from others. Having raised the issue, Kim characteristically postpones his examination until later.

Chapter seven, “Literary Aspects,” is somewhat of a misnomer, since it deals with some of Tao-sheng’s major ideas, the subject also of the next chapter. The most important idea is *li*, but Kim’s main discussion of it does not come until chapter eight. Other ideas are discussed to demonstrate once again that Tao-sheng was a Buddhist appropriating Neo-Taoist terms for his purposes.

Chapter eight, “Central Ideas,” is the most important section in which Kim tries to resolve the problem of Tao-sheng’s contradiction of himself. In returning to a discussion of *li*, Kim notes that its indivisibility admits of no stages and therefore must be apprehended instantaneously as a whole, and yet *li* is also conceived of as something which, in Tao-sheng’s own words, “‘cannot be arrived at instantaneously’” (p. 130). *Li* must be arrived at in stages, and this gradualist view “seemingly contradicts” the doctrine of sudden enlightenment. On the reverent assumption that Tao-sheng cannot be found to be contradictory, Kim engages in some tortured, sometimes blind, reasoning to rescue Tao-sheng from his inconsistency, which, oddly enough, Kim believes himself to be the first to notice. What this means is that no one else has noticed it before, and this in turn means that Tao-sheng therefore could not have shifted his position to produce the contradiction (Kim is now discovering!) because “it is highly improbable that such a radical change in his theory of enlightenment would have gone unrecorded anywhere, unnoticed by any historian, and unmentioned by Tao-sheng himself” (p. 131). This is a rather astounding statement in a book whose main contribution is to point out the existence of something that, it is now being said, could not have existed because no one else has pointed it out before. Tao-sheng “may have shifted his initial position on the issue of enlightenment” (p. 130), but Kim rejects this possibility on the grounds that “there is no record of such a momentous shift. . .” (p. 131). How can Kim have translated Tao-sheng’s commentary as the record of Tao-sheng’s gradualist view that contradicts his subitism, and say that there is no record of such a momentous shift? Kim insists that what he himself is pointing out as the shift that took place

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in Tao-sheng's thought did not really take place! Now you see it, now you don't. Where is the tight reasoning?

Kim is apparently not aware of the contradiction in his own statements, and thus proceeds to assume in spite of himself that Tao-sheng's contradiction does exist and therefore needs to be resolved. There is a desperate quality to Kim's arguments as he shifts from one possible explanation to another, rejecting some, recommending others. Could it be that the *li* of his commentary is not really the *li* of enlightenment? No, that cannot be true, since the range of *li* in the commentary embraces "mystic comprehension" (p. 130). Tao-sheng could not have simply contradicted himself, for people would have noticed if he did. Maybe the "ideas in the commentary may not necessarily represent Tao-sheng's original thinking" (p. 131). Tao-sheng did say that he used older materials in writing his commentary, and since he could not have shifted his position, then it must mean that the contradictory portions represent someone else's thinking. Kim's final answer, actually two in number, is given in his explanation of how it is that "two apparently conflicting theories of enlightenment need not remain incompatible" (p. 131).

The first solution is to understand that there are two different phases in a single complex process. In this way, Tao-sheng's gradualist theory can be seen as referring only to the first phase of the total process, the culminating point of which should be an instantaneous breakthrough, which "Tao-sheng somehow does not happen to mention in the commentary" (p. 131). If Tao-sheng did not mention it, is Kim reading in too much? Aware of this possibility, Kim claims that the unmentioned idea of sudden enlightenment was "intimated" by Tao-sheng (p. 131). The second solution (and it is different from the first) is to see gradual and sudden as being "two alternative approaches merely to the first half of a single process, the other half being equivalent to what was to be called later *cultivation*..." (p. 132). The sudden approach can thus be selected as one of two alternatives comprising the *first* phase, but in the first of Kim's solutions the sudden aspect is the *second* phase of the process. Which is it? Kim seems to be unaware of the difference.

Apparently Kim was not convinced by his own arguments, for, in chapter nine, "Traces of Tao-sheng's Doctrines," he raises the issue of the contradiction again. Tao-sheng's gradualism, he notes, requires that one "accumulate one bit of goodness after another" (p. 138). Earlier Kim had said the opposite: "salvation consists not so much in an increment of positive elements as in a decrement of negative ones, not in progression but in retrogression" (p. 88). Nothing new is proposed as a solution for the contradiction, and the book ends with chapter ten, "Conclusions," in which Tao-sheng is hailed for being faithful to the Lotus Sūtra and Indian Buddhism (whatever that might be), for synthesizing Indian and Chinese thought, for being a practitioner as well as a theoretician, and for his

“probable” impact on other writers whether they “realized or acknowledged it” (p. 145) or not.

Though he lists Peter Gregory’s book on sudden and gradual enlightenment in his bibliography, Kim does not cite from it. Had he used Gregory’s book, much of the torture could have been taken out of his arguments, for there he would have found sophisticated explanations of how “the subitist on one occasion may well espouse a number of doctrinal positions held by the gradualist on another,”⁴ or how “any doctrine that satisfactorily ‘accounts’ for sudden enlightenment becomes thereby a gradualist doctrine.”⁵

In contrast to the first part of the book, which is confusing, contradictory, and uninformed, the second half comprising the translation is a real contribution to scholarship. We give far too little credit to translators, as if somehow translating is a mechanical process requiring no thought. Kim has made Tao-sheng easily accessible in English, and for that he deserves our respect and gratitude. As if Kim does not have enough of his own problems in the book, he could have been spared the many typographical errors (pp. xiii, 33, 43, 49, 97, 105, 123, 127, 137, 140, 145, 146, 147, 189, and so on) that threaten to become one of the trademarks of SUNY Press.

Notes

- 1 – Whalen Lai, “Tao-sheng’s Theory of Sudden Enlightenment Re-examined,” in *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, ed. Peter Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), pp. 181–182.
- 2 – *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- 3 – Luis O. Gómez, “Purifying Gold: The Metaphor of Effort and Intuition in Buddhist Thought and Practice,” in *Sudden and Gradual*, p. 69.
- 4 – Peter N. Gregory, “Introduction,” in *Sudden and Gradual*, p. 6.
- 5 – Luis O. Gómez, “Purifying Gold,” p. 85.

The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika. By C. W. Huntington, Jr., with Geshé Namgyal Wangchen. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989. Pp. xvi + 287.

For scholars who read Buddhist material, the title *The Emptiness of Emptiness* has a familiar ring; for others it is often, at best, a puzzling claim of the “mysterious East.” For both types of readers this book is of interest. For the latter it is a clear statement of the fact that Buddhist philosophy arises in a context of “transformative philosophy,” whose goal is comprehensive freedom, and it is a warning against interpreting emptiness either

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