

“Beings and “Non-Being” in Ancient India and China

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“Where did it all come from?” At some time in his life everyone must surely ask himself this. At some point in their history, societies ask themselves the same question. The answers, as it seems, fall into two types: (1) in one form or another, “it” was always here; (2) nothing existed prior to the presence of “it”. Thus, in the former case, the present objects of common experience are the product of change; in the latter, of creation, whether spontaneous or intentional. In the case of India,¹ the original idea seems to have been that summarized in (2), but to have been developed by Śāṅkara (c.7th c.) to resemble (1).

The case of China is more complex. For, whereas in Sanskrit the key words are the n.s.n. of the pres. pcpl. of the verb *asti*, viz. *sat*, and a negation of the same, viz. *asat*, hence “being” and “not being” (or, less literally but more accurately, “something that is” and “something that is not”), the Chinese

*The present article is one of several pieces of work which the late Professor Hurvitz left to the SBS for publication as we saw fit. This task has become especially poignant since the sad passing, after a period of poor health, in the autumn of 1992 of this scholar, whose work did much to further the study of Chinese Buddhist materials in particular. Leon Hurvitz will be mostly remembered for his translation of the *Lotus Sūtra* (*The Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (*The Lotus Sutra*), New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), his pioneering work on Zhiyi (*Chih-i* (538–597): *An Introduction to the Life and Ideas of a Chinese Buddhist Monk*, Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques, Vol. XII, Bruxelles: Institut Beiges des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1980), and his translation into English and adaptation of Tsukamoto Zenryū’s history of early Chinese Buddhism, which appeared as *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism: From its Introduction to the Death of Hui-yüan* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985). It is to be regretted that his own extensive work on Huiyuan could not be completed before his death.

For the purposes of publication in this journal, a certain amount of extraneous material has been omitted, including verbatim quotations from Sanskrit sources which are readily available in reliable editions, and a long extract from the *Shi ji*, already translated by Burton Watson in his *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, 2 vols., New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1961, pp. 368–87. (Hurvitz’ version differed basically in that he translated *wang* as “prince” rather than “king”). We also regret that full references to some works have not been supplied, but trust that the reader will be able to locate the quoted material. —[The Editors]

¹ See, for example, *Taittirīyasamhitā* 6.5.6.If, 7.1.1.4ff; *Śatapathabrāhmaṇam* 2.1.4.11ff, 6.1.2.11, 7.5.2.6, 14.4.2.1, 14.4.2.23, 10.1.3.1; *Taittirīyabrāhmaṇam* 2.2.9.1ff, 2.3.8.1, 3.12.9.2, all translated in Vol. 1 of J. Muir’s *Original Sanskrit Texts on the Origin and Sources of the Religion and Institutions of India*, 2 vols., London: Williams and Norgate, 1858–63. See also pp. 25–55 of W. D. O’Flaherty (tr.), *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984.

words are *you* and *wu*, “has” and “has not”. While the Sanskrit words can function independently as nouns, the Chinese words cannot conventionally be used without an object. Thus, when the Chinese thinkers, both historical and semi-mythical, who shall be encountered below, use the words *you* and *wu* independently, they are already resorting to a sort of rhetorical game.

A restatement of the core of the problem at hand might look as follows. The Chinese and the Sanskrit, whatever they may have been wishing to say, set out from two different places. The Sanskrit root *as* in its classical use, quite apart from its presumed original meaning, appears to have been marked by the same ambiguity as its English cognate, “is”. Just, for example, as the English verb can refer, in keeping with the context, to existence (“There *is* an A”) or to identity (“A *is* B”), so too in Sanskrit *tad asti* can mean “[there] is that”—or, more idiomatically, “that exists”—while *tad idam asti* would mean “that is this”. Thus, in accordance with the *parti pris* of the interpreter, the negation of the n.s.n. of the pres. ppl., *asat*, can as easily mean “[that which there] is not” as “[an A which] is not [B]”, or, in Franco-Latin, the denial of existence on the one hand and of identity on the other. Whichever of the two it may have meant in the Upaniṣads, for Śaṅkara it clearly meant the latter. In still other words, for him the original form of existence was one in which nothing was distinct, in which nothing could be asserted of anything—in which, in fact, not even an accurate thought, a thought commensurate with truth or reality, would have been possible.

The Chinese, as said above, has a different point of departure, for *you* and *wu* do in fact refer to existence and inexistence, to presence and absence. “Presence and absence of what?” one may well ask, when there is no explicit object. For the Chinese thinkers who are at issue here, the omission of the object was intentional, thus leading to the notions of existence and nonexistence as abstractions. These abstractions being a short step removed from the affirmation and denial of identity, described in the previous paragraph, in the event the Chinese and the Sanskrit, in spite of their totally different premisses, come to virtually the same conclusion. What follows will attempt to justify this statement.

At any rate, in the event, the respective meanings of *sat/you* and of *asat/wu* came to bear a resemblance to each other that can be characterized only as uncanny. For the former came to be applied to anything of which one could say, “This is A, it is not B,” while the latter came to be understood as characterizing entities of which nothing specific could be actually posited, while potentially everything could be asserted of them all at once. The data below will be presented for what they are worth, since this writer, at least, does not venture to say more, certainly not to speculate on how this rather extraordinary notion occurred to the bearers of two so dissimilar civilizations. Even in what I do say I owe more than a little to the guidance of three colleagues, A. N. Aklujkar, D. L. Overmyer and E. G. Pulleybank.

On the Indian side, my primary texts were those of two Upaniṣads, the

Chāndogya^o and the *Taittirīya*^o; my secondary text, the commentary of Śaṅkara to the two. For the *Chāndogya*^o and its commentary, I had recourse to the English translation of Gaṅgānātha Jhā.² For the texts of both Upaniṣads I relied as well on the German translation of Paul Deussen,³ while for the commentary to the *Taittirīya*^o I had to fall back on my own resources, as well as on the kind help of the above mentioned A. N. Aklujkar.

On the Chinese side, the interpretations of my primary authority, the *Huainan zi*, are my own, aided by the commentaries of Gao You and Xu Shen, and by the Japanese translations of Togawa Yoshio, Kiyama Hideo and Sawaya Harutsugu,⁴ and of Kusuyama Haruki.⁵ For the *Daode jing* I made use of the commentary of Wang Bi (226–49), and of the translations of J. J. L. Duyvendak and James Legge;⁶ for *Zhuang zi* I consulted the commentaries of Guo Xiang (d. c.310) and of Cheng Xuanying (fl. 7th c.), and the translations of the above mentioned James Legge, and of A. C. Graham and Burton Watson;⁷ while for the last named I based myself on the edition of Liu Wendian,⁸ for *Huainan zi* and the *Daode jing* I made use of the versions of the *Kanbun taikai*.⁹

It should be pointed out that, while for the Indian material the sources cannot be dated, beyond saying that Śaṅkara is estimated to have lived in the seventh century, Liu An¹⁰ and his commentators, Gao You and Xu Shen, and the above mentioned commentators to Laozi and Zhuangzi, viz. Wang Bi, Guo Xiang, and Cheng Xuanying,¹¹ are persons whose dates, some precise,

² Gaṅgānātha Jhā (tr.), *The Chandogyopaniṣad: A Treatise on Vedānta Philosophy Translated into English with the Commentary of Śaṅkara*, Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1942.

³ Paul Deussen, *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda*, 3rd edition, Leipzig, 1921.

⁴ *Chūgoku bungaku taikai*, Vol. 6, 1974.

⁵ *Shinshaku Kanbun taikai*, Vol. 54, 1979.

⁶ J. J. L. Duyvendak (tr.), *Tao Te Ching, The Book of the Way and its Virtue*, London: Murray, 1954 (originally published as *Le livre de la voie et de la vertu*, Paris: Librairie d'Amérique & d'Orient, Adrien Maisonneuve, 1953); James Legge, *Texts of Taoism, Sacred Books of the East*, Vols. 39, 40 [bound as one volume], Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1891. The latter also contains his translation of the *Zhuangzi*.

⁷ A. C. Graham, *Chuang-tzū: The Inner Chapters*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1981; Burton Watson, *Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968.

⁸ *Zhuang zi buzheng*, 1939.

⁹ Cf. Vols. 20 (1915) and 7 (1901), respectively.

¹⁰ There is an extensive biography of Liu An in *Shiji*, ch. 118, and in *Qian Han shu* [History of the Former Han], ch. 44, the latter not much more than a copy of the former. It has been translated into English by Burton Watson in *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, Vol. 2, pp. 368–87.

¹¹ Wang Bi has a biographical notice, attached to that of Wang Huizhong, in ch. 28 of the account of Wei in the *Sanguo weizhi* [Records of the Three Kingdoms], as well as secondary accounts in H. A. Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1897–8, 34.2210, *Tōyō rekishi daijiten* [Historical Encyclopedia of the Orient] 1.364a,b (s.v. *ōhitsu*), and in the *Zhongguo ren ming da cidian* [Encyclopedia of Chinese Personal Names], p. 126b.

Guo Xiang has a notice in *Jin shu*, ch. 50, and secondary accounts in Giles, *Biographical Dictionary*, 406.1062, *Tōyō rekishi daijiten* 1.473c, and *Zhongguo ren ming da cidian*, pp. 1053d–

some only approximate, are known. The most shadowy is Gao You, known merely to have lived in the first century, while only slightly less shadowy is Xu Shen.¹²

First, the beginning of *Chāndogya* 3.19, which Deussen translates as follows:

1. Die Sonne ist das Brahman, so lautet die Anweisung [zur Verehrung].
Darüber ist diese Erläuterung.
Diese Welt war zu Anfang nichtseiend; dieses [Nichtseiende] war das
Seiende. Dasselbige entstand. ...¹³

Jhā's translation reads as follows:

The Sun is Brahman—such is the teaching; and its exposition is this:
In the beginning, this was indeed *non-existent*; it *became existent*; it
came into being; ... (1)

In the beginning—in its previous condition [before it came into
existence], *this*—whole universe—*was non-existent*; i.e. it had its name
and form undifferentiated, not that it did not exist at all. That this cannot
be the meaning is shown by the Vedic Text which says, “How could the
existing come out of the *non-existing*?”, which negatives the view that
the effect was absolutely non-existent before it was produced.—
Objection:—“In the present text, it is definitely stated that *all this was
non-existent* [i.e., it reads *asad eva*]; so that it should be a matter of
option to accept this *non-existence* or the *existence* indicated by the text
you have quoted.”—*Answer*:—“That cannot be; there can be no option
in regard to the state of things, as there is in regard to *actions*.”—“Then,
how is it that the present text declares *this* to be *non-existent*?”—“We
have already explained that what is meant is that the Universe was
undifferentiated as to Name and Form, and hence it was *as if non-
existent*, and hence spoken of here as ‘non-existent’.” The Text uses the
term *eva*, ‘indeed’, which serves to emphasise what is declared (which
therefore cannot be taken in any figurative sense).—“True, it is so; but
what is emphasised is not the *negation of existence* (but the absence of
differentiation of Name and Form); as a matter of fact, the term ‘*sat*’,
‘Existent’, is found

1054a.

Cheng Xuanying is known chiefly for his *Zhuang zi* commentary; cf. Morohashi Tetsuji, *Dai kanwa jiten* [Dictionary of the Chinese Language, hereafter *Morohashi* [Vol. no.].[page no. + row letter]:[item no./subitem no.]] 5.18d: 11544/335, 8.v. *seigen'ei*.

¹² For a laconic biographical note on him, cf. *Hou Han shu* 109b. There is a less laconic notice on him in Giles, *Biographical Dictionary*, 309.787, where his death is estimated to date to A.D. 120, and in the *Tōyō rekishi dai jiten* 2.262c, s.v. *kyoshin*, as well as in the *Zhongguo ren ming da cidian*, p. 1037b.

¹³ *op. cit.*, p. 116.

to be used in the sense of ‘differentiated Name and Form’. ... *It became existent*; that which was spoken of as ‘non-existent’ before coming into existence,—i.e. was as if stagnant, immobile, hence appearing to be *non-existent*—*became existent*,—i.e. slightly inclined towards producing positive effects, hence *existent*;—that is, it became mobile, and *came into being*, having its Name and Form slightly differentiated, just like the *seed* growing into the sprout.”(1)¹⁴

In *Chāndogya*° 6.2, Uddālaka Āruṇi says to his son, Śvetaketu,

1. Seiend nur, o Teurer, war dieses am Anfang, eines nur und ohne zweites. Zwar sagen einige, nichtseiend sei dieses am Anfang gewesen, eines nur und ohne zweites; aus diesem Nichtseienden sei das Seiende geboren.
2. Aber wie könnte es wohl, o Teurer, also sein? Wie könnte aus dem Nichtseienden das Seiende geboren werden? Seiend also vielmehr, o Teurer, war dieses am Anfang, eines nur und ohne zweites.¹⁵

Jhā translates as follows:

In the beginning, my dear, this was Being only,—one, without a second.—Some say that, in the beginning, this was Non-being, only one, without a second. From that Non-being sprang Being.—(1)

Being only—the term “*Being*” stands for that entity which is mere *esse*, subtle, undefinable, all-pervading, one, taintless, impartite, consciousness, as understood from the *Vedānta* texts. The particle “*eva*”, “only”, serves to emphasise the statement.

Question: “What is to be understood from this?”

Answer: “What is understood is that ‘this universe which with its names, forms and activities, is perceived as a modified product,—*was Being only*; such is the connection of the word ‘was’.”

Question: “When was this Being only?”

Answer: “*In the beginning*, i.e. prior to the birth of the universe.”

Question: “Is not this *Being* there now, at the present time—that it has been qualified—as Being so *in the beginning*?”

Answer: “Not so.”—“Then why the qualification (in *the beginning*)?”—“What is meant is that even now, at the present moment, it is *Being*, but it is accompanied by differentiation of Name and Form, the object of the idea of the term ‘this’, and as such it

¹⁴ *op. cit.*, pp. 172f.

¹⁵ Deussen, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

becomes *this*. Before birth—in *the beginning*,—however, it was answerable only to the idea and term ‘Being’; hence it is emphasised that ‘*in the beginning this was Being only*’. Before its birth, no object can be apprehended as being such and such in name, or having such and such a form; it is exactly as during the time of deep sleep. What is meant is that immediately on waking from deep sleep, all that one is conscious of is mere *existence* (of things), while during deep sleep, he is conscious of Being alone as the only entity; and so also *in the beginning*—before the birth of the universe.” ...

Objection: “The *Vaśēṣikas* also hold the view that, before its birth, this universe was mere *negation of Being*.—As to the question, ‘How did this exist before its birth?’,—the answer provided by them is that ‘it was Non-Being, *one without a second*’, where the thing spoken of is clearly related to a particular point of time (before birth); and they also declare its being *without a second* (and all this makes clear that this thing must be a *positive* entity).”

Answer: “True; but such an opinion is right for those who posit merely a *negation of things* [and do not admit of any *positive* entity]. In fact, the opinion that there is ‘non-existence only’ is not right; as, if that were so, then the person holding this opinion would himself have to be denied;—it might be argued that ‘the holder of the opinion is admitted to be an entity at the present time, not *before his birth*.’—But that cannot be; there is no evidence to show that prior to birth there was *negation of Being*; so that there is no evidence to show that there is no reason for the assumption that ‘Before birth, *it was only non-Being*’.”¹⁶

Near the end of the commentary to 6.2.1 occurs the following passage, which in Jhā translation runs as follows:

Hence, we conclude that the sentence, “This was non-Being only, etc., etc.,” has been used only for the purpose of denying a possible wrong notion that might be entertained by people. It is only after the wrong notion has been expressed that it can be denied (in the next text); in this way the sentence “This was non-Being” serves a distinctly useful purpose; and hence it becomes established that it is a Vedic assertion and fully authoritative; and there is no force in the objection that has been urged against it.¹⁷

A. N. Aklujkar glosses this by saying that the sentence in question is “part of *śrūti* and valid. Thus there is no fault in what we have said”.

¹⁶ *op. cit.*, pp. 295f, 298.

¹⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 299.

Before passing on to the Chinese material, one would do well to consider *Taittirīya*^o 2.7 and the beginning of the Śāṅkara commentary thereto, translated by Deussen as follows:

Nichtseiend war dies zu Anfang;
Aus ihm entstand das Seiende.
Er schuf sich selbst wohl aus sich selbst,
Daher dies “wohlbeschaffen” heißt.

Was dieses Wohlbeschaffene ist, fürwahr, das ist die Essenz. Denn wenn einer diese Essenz empfängt, so wird er wonnevoll. Denn wer könnte atmen, wer leben, wenn in dem leeren Raume [*âkâçe*, in dem Nichts, aus dem die Welt entstanden] nicht jene Wonne wäre. Denn er ist es, der die Wonne schafft. Denn wenn einer in jenem Unsichtbaren, Unrealen, Unaussprechlichen, Unergründlichen den Frieden, den Standort findet, alsdann ist er zum Frieden gelangt. Wenn aber einer in jenem einen Zwischenraum, eine Trennung [oder “eine wenn auch kleine Trennung”, zwischen sich als Subjekt und dem Âtman als Objekt] annimmt, dann besteht sein Unfriede fort; es ist aber der Unfriede des, der sich weise dünket [indem er Brahman zum Objekt der Erkenntnis macht].¹⁸

The *asit* quoted above, being the 3rd s. aor. (impf.?) of the above mentioned verb *as*, “to be” in both the existential and copulative senses, as also mentioned above, can as easily mean “... was ...” as “there was ...”. Śāṅkara, for whom *âtman* and *brahman* are timeless, takes it in the latter sense. Thus, what might seem to mean, in Deussen’s words, “nichtseiend war dies zu Anfang” is understood by Śāṅkara in the sense of “dies Nichtseiende war (oder ‘gab es’) zu Anfang”. What, then, is the meaning of *asat*, which to the unwary might seem to signify “non-existent”? It is, for Śāṅkara, the undistinguished *brahman*, the form that is the contrary of specific and well defined names and forms (*asad iti vyākṛtanāmarūpaviśeṣaviparītarūpam avikṛtaṁ brahmocyate*). It cannot be an unqualified negative, since no “existent” can be born of an “inexistent”. By “this” (*idam*) is meant the world with its distinctions of name and form, which “at the beginning”, that is, before its genesis existed as an entity fit to be designated as “only *brahman* the inexistent”. From this “inexistent” were born (i.e. arose) discrete names and forms. This is not to say, however, that the latter were born of the former as a son might be born to a father, for that which is called “*brahman* the inexistent” produced itself, *brahman* being, as is well known, the creator of everything, which must, consequently, include itself.

Further on, Śāṅkara has the following to say:

¹⁸ Deussen, *op. cit.*, pp. 231f.

...eṣa hy eva para ātmānandayāty ānandayati sukhayati lokam
dharmānurūpam / sa evātmanandarūpo 'vidyayā paricchinnō vibhāvvyate
prāṇibhir ity arthaḥ / bhayābhayahetuvād vidvadaviduṣor asti tad
brahma / sadvastvāśrayaṇena hy abhayaṃ bhavati /
nāsadvastvāśrayaṇena bhayanirvṛttir upapadyate / katham
abhayahetutvam ity ucyate yadā hy eva yasmād eṣa sādḥaka etasmin
brahmaṇi kiṃviśiṣṭe 'drśye drśyam nāma draṣṭavyaṃ vikāro
darśanārthatvād vikārasya / na drśyam adrśyam avikāra ity arthaḥ /
etasminn adrśye 'vikāre 'viśayabhūte 'nātmye 'sarīre yasmād adrśyam
tasmād ānātmyaṃ yasmād ānātmyam tasmād aniruktam / viśeṣo hi
nirucyate / viśeṣaś ca vikārah / avikāraṃ ca brahma /
sarvāvikārahetuvāt / tasmād aniruktam / yata evaṃ tasmād anilayaṇam
nilayaṇam nīḍa āśrayo na nilayaṇam anilayaṇam anādhāraṃ tasminn
etasminn adrśye 'nātmye 'nirukte 'nilayane sarvākāryadharmavilakṣaṇe
brahmaṇīti vākyaṛthaḥ / abhayaṃ iti kriyāviśeṣaṇam / abhayaṃ iti vā
liṅgāntaraṃ pariṇamyate / pratiṣṭhāṃ sthitim ātmabhavaṃ vindate
labhate / atha tadā sa tasmin nānātvasya bhayahetor
avidyākṛtasyādarśanād abhayaṃ gato bhavati / svarūpapraṭiṣṭho hy asau
yadā bhavati tadā nānyat paśyati nānyac chṛṇoti nānyad vijānāti /
anyasya hy anyato bhayaṃ bhavati nātmana evātmano bhayaṃ yuktam /
tasmād ātmaivātmano 'bhayakāraṇam / sarvato hi nirbhayā brāhmaṇā
drśyante satsu bhayahetuṣu / tac cāyuktam asati bhayatrāṇe brāhmaṇi /
tasmāt teṣāṃ abhayadarśanād asti tadabhaya-kāraṇam brahmeti / ...

In a summary English paraphrase, the above might look as follows:

The Supreme Self gives joy to the world appropriately,¹⁹ but that very Self, whose form is joy, is vitiated by the animate occupants of that world, who cover it over with nescience,²⁰ for *brahman*, one and the same though it be, is the respective cause of fear and of fearlessness on the part of the knowing and of the nescient. Fearlessness relies on an existent, for an inexistent cannot ban-

¹⁹ ... *ānandayati sukhayati lokam dharmānurūpam* does not lend itself easily to translation into English. *Loka*, “direction”, comes to mean “world”, and then, by extension, “people”, very much as the last-named word is used in everyday English. *Dharmānurūpam* is here used adverbially to mean “in keeping with *dharma*”, which latter differs from one person to the next, the king’s *dharma* being that of just rule; the subjects, that of obedience; the parents’, that of care for their children; the children’s, that of respect for their parents; the priest’s, that of performing sacrifice; etc. This devotion to *dharma* would unfailingly characterize all, if only they were aware of the identity of *ātman* and *brahman*. Nescience (*avidyā*), however, blinds them to this identity, leading them to posit the false distinction of “self” anti “other” and to draw from this false premise the deleterious conclusions known only too well to us all.

²⁰ The text reads *sa evātmanandarūpo 'vidyayā paricchinnō vibhāvvyate ...*, but I cannot escape the feeling that *-cchi-* is a mistake, whether a copyist’s error or a misprint, for *-ccha-*.

ish fear. When the practitioner takes his stand in *brahman*, he attains to fearlessness by not seeing its cause, [the mistaken notion of] variety, itself the product of nescience.²¹ For, when the Self takes a stand in its own proper form, it does not see, does not hear, does not discern anything outside of itself. Since fear always has another as its object, a Self aware of its own unique existence, having nothing to fear, is thus fearless.²² This is why Brahmins, even when there are causes for fear, are so obviously undisturbed, an impossibility were there no *brahman* to relieve them of fear.²³

Deussen's comments read in part, as follows:

... Brahman hat, wie in Anlehnung an die konventionelle Schöpfungsformel der Brähmana's (so *'kāmāyata, bahu syām*, u.s.w.) entwickelt wird, durch eine Art Selbstentäußerung (*tapas*) aus sich diese Welt geschaffen, ist auch in dieselbe eingegangen, aber *nicht seinem ganzen Wesen nach*; vielmehr besteht das wahre und tiefste Wesen Brahman's dem *Seienden, Sagbaren, Erkennbaren, Realen* dieser Welt gegenüber als ein *Jenseitiges, Unsagbares, Unerkennbares*, empirisch *Unreales (anṛitam)*. Denn: "als Reales ward er zu allem, was in dieser Welt vorhanden ist, denn dies ist, wie man sagt, das Reale". Brahman hingegen ist, wie der Vers besagt, ein Nichtseiendes (*asad*), jedoch ein solches, welches die Kraft hatte, sich selbst als Welt seiend zu machen (*tad ātmānaṃ svayam akuruta*), weil es, wie mit einem schwer übertragbaren Wortspiele gesagt wird, ein in sich Wohlbeschaffenes (*sukṛitam*), – weil es, wie Platon sagen würde, die Idee des Guten ist. Diese Wohlbeschaffenheit des Urwesens wohnt als Essenz (*rasa*) allen Wesen ein und ist Quelle aller Wonne, ja wer könnte leben und atmen, wenn in dem Nichts, in dem Leeren (*ākāṣe*), d.h. in dem transzendenten Brahman, nicht diese Wonne wäre? Aber voll und ganz erfährt diese Wonne nur der, welcher in jenem Unsichtbaren, Unwesenhaften, Unaussprechlichen, Grundlosen den Frieden, die Gründung findet, indem er ganz zu demselben wird, während hingegen derjenige, welcher zwischen sich und Brahman

²¹ I have omitted from my paraphrase much of the verbose commentary, which says, in effect, that *brahman* is "invisible" in the sense that it is without difference or specificity, that it is not the object of anything, has no self, no point of reliance, that it is the opposite of all conventional business.

²² As A. N. Aklujkar has pointed out, one experiences fear only when the said fear has an object, which latter must be someone or something other than the one experiencing the fear. Since one cannot fear oneself, a Self aware of its own unique existence cannot experience any fear whatsoever.

²³ The rest of the commentary has been left untranslated.

noch ein Trennendes annimmt (*udaram ântaram*, “eine Höhlung, einen Zwischenraum”, oder, ziemlich einerlei, *ud aram antaram*, “einen wenn auch kleinen Zwischenraum”), d.h. Brahman noch als Objekt der Erkenntnis festhält, aus seinem Wissenswahne den Unfrieden emtet, der überall ist, wo noch eine Zweiheit ist; daher, wie der Vers besagt, auch alle Götter dieser Sphäre des Unfriedens, der Furcht anheimfallen.²⁴

Thus, the lesson one draws from the Indic material cited above, as interpreted in the light of Śaṅkara, is one of negation but not of nothingness. It is a negation of conventional appearance and of the notions, of whatever sort, that take the said appearance at face value. It does not, however, set up a contrary view, not even that of the affirmation of negation. If this smacks of Madhyamaka Buddhism, it is no accident, for surely both are drawing on a common tradition. The similarity that is much more striking, and for which no attempt at explanation shall here be made, is that between the view just described and a Chinese notion, one of those that were later to eventuate in what is commonly known as “Daoism”.

To place the issue in a certain focus, it should be emphasised that the Madhyamaka Buddhist view, which the Chinese were slow to understand, is not temporal, it does not say that the perfect absolute degenerated into an imperfect relative. That, however, is what the Indian works in question do say: “Nichtseiend war dies zu Anfang; aus ihm entstand das Seiende.” Yet, in it seems to be the germ of what—in Buddhism, at least—was to become a preoccupation not with objective reality, whatever that might be, but with the subjective impression—“Denn wenn einer in jenem Unsichtbaren ... den Frieden ... findet, alsdann ist er zum Frieden gelangt.” An orthodox Brahmin (to his opponents, however, a “crypto-Buddhist”) pundit, Śaṅkara, while never denying *ātmabraman*, interpreted the “non-being” (*asad*) to mean not the inexistent but the undifferentiated, from which its opposite was, to be sure, produced. This he has in common with post-Han Chinese who lie beyond the scope of this study, and who were no closer than he to imagining that Something sprang from Nothing. While both of our Indian sources speak of the existence of an inexistent (*asad vā idam agra āsīt//asad evedam agra āsīd ekam eva//*), our Chinese sources say that there “was not yet” (*wei you*) anything. They state this not as a fact but as a view, which they allege to be the most sophisticated of all possible. While Zhuangzi never abandons this position, *Huainan zi* eventually confuses subjective and objective. For he begins by repeating not only Zhuangzi’s words but his thoughts as well. He adheres to them, however, only in his explanation of “there is ‘having begun’”, proceeding from there to the objective, thus coming closer, though he had no way of knowing it, to the Indians of the pre-exegetical period. Śaṅkara, ironically enough, comes closer to Zhuangzi.

²⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 227.

To summarize and to anticipate at the same time, the notion with which one concerns oneself here is that “being” (*sat, you*) sprang from “non-being” (*asat, wu*), not in the sense that existence sprang from a *néant*, but, rather, that the predictable, the proper subject of the assertion that “X is ...”, goes back to a state of which no predication can be made. The statement is made in Indian sources, none of which, and in Chinese only one of which (*Huainan zi*), can be dated; but their antiquity, in either case, presumably precedes any contact between the two civilizations. So committed, in fact, to this view (to anticipate even further) were those Chinese who later were to be attracted to Buddhism, that they fancied that to be one of the latter’s cardinal messages.

As indicated above, the Chinese presentation shall begin with *Huainan zi*, specifically with the second (*Shu zhen xun*) and seventh (*Jing shen xun*) chapters. Since the former harks back to the second chapter (*Qi wu lun*) of Zhuangzi, one must summarize its opening passage by saying that existence is posited in terms of two series, the first of three members, the second of four. In Graham’s terms, the three are: (1) having begun, (2) not yet having begun, and (3) not yet having not yet begun; the four are: (1) there being, (2) there not being, (3) there not yet being “there not being”, and (4) there not yet having been “there not being ‘there not being’”.

Before proceeding to see what *Huainan zi* makes of this, I might point out a comment from D. L. Overmyer, to the effect that the *Zhuangzi* passage is simply holding the philosophizing gents up to ridicule, and that *Huainan zi* is mistaking all of this humour and ridicule for the good coin of philosophy. At any rate, one proceeds to his second chapter.²⁵

“There is ‘having begun (*you shi*)’” is explained in four ways, viz. (1) burgeoning but not yet burst forth (*fan fen wei fa*); (2) buds, whether of flowers or on trees, having as yet neither specific forms nor well defined limits; (3) luxuriant to the point of squirming (*wuwu ruanruan*); (4) about to be born, but not yet belonging to any specific class.²⁶

“There is ‘not yet having begun’”²⁷ is explained as follows: Heaven’s vapours begin to descend and Earth’s to ascend, the dark (*yin*) and light (*yang*) elements commingle and, at ease each with the other, vie in spreading out within the Universe. Clothed

²⁵ As already mentioned, the chapter in question is entitled *shu zhen xun*. According to the commentary of Gao You, the *shu* in the title means “beginning” (*shi*), the whole title being glossed to mean that “the reality of the Way, beginning with non-being, develops and grows into being ...”. Thus, the title would mean “initial reality”. *Morohashi* 1.816cd:732, however, cites the *Shuowen jiezi* in support of the view that *shu* as a substitute for *shu* (*Mathews*.5882) may mean “good”, in which case *shu zhen* would mean “the good and the true”. *Xun* means “lesson”.

²⁶ From Xu Shen’s commentary, it is obvious that this to him meant “having a beginning”, not “having begun”.

²⁷ Where Zhuangzi has *you wei shi you shi*, the *Huainan zi* has *you wei shi you you shi*.

in potentiality and endowed with harmony, confusedly luxuriant they are about to come into contact with things, but shape no intimations.²⁸

“There is ‘not yet having not begun’” is explained as follows: Heaven, though endowed, with [the spirit of] harmony, has not yet conferred [it on Earth], while Earth, though possessing vital vapours, has not yet offered them up (to Heaven).²⁹ Vapid and isolated, lofty in emptiness, having not even the vaguest form, the vapours make their way, grandly attaining to darkness.³⁰ There is ‘there being’” is explained as follows: The myriad things sprout up, roots, stalks, branches and leaves a fragrant green all aglow,³¹ crawling creatures, flying creatures, squirming creatures, breathing creatures, creatures that can be touched, tamed, grasped, counted, weighed and measured.

“There is ‘there not being’” is explained as follows: Though one looks at it, one does not see its form; though one listens to it, one does not hear its sound; though one reaches for it, one cannot get it; though one gazes at it, one cannot see it to its limits.³² In the breadth of its sweep and in its universality, with its form that cannot be calculated, nor its measure taken, it passes through to

²⁸ The passage, “... at ease each with the other”, renders *xiang yu youyou*. The last two syllables are unmentioned in Gao You’s commentary; the *Lianmian zidian* devotes three columns to the word (1.358c–359b). While the first two definitions (*he rou, zi an zhi*) agree with the above, there is another one, “plentiful” (*rao duo*), for which another passage in the same chapter of the *Huainan zi* is cited in support. “Clothed in potentiality and endowed with harmony” renders *bei de han he*, the interpretation being based in part on Gao You’s commentary, in part on a remark by the Japanese translators, in which the latter *de* is glossed to mean the power of creation and of so impressing another as to effect in him a moral conversion (*seisei kanka ryoku*). You glosses *he* with *qi* “... confusedly luxuriant” renders *pin fen long cong*, the interpretation being You’s (*carou juhui*). For what it is worth, the Japanese translators’ rendition reads, in part, “... while attacking in swarms, they are seeking something, but” “Intimations” renders *zhao zhen*, which the commentary glosses with “strangeness of form” (? *Xing guai*). “Omen”, another standard meaning, is given by the Japanese translators (*kizashi*) as well.

²⁹ This could as easily be rendered, without affecting the meaning, “Though Heaven is endowed with the spirit of harmony, [the latter] has not yet descended; though Earth possesses vital vapours, [the latter] have not yet ascended.” This is, in fact, the way the Japanese take it, both in the *Kanbun taikei* and in the translation.

³⁰ *Xiao tiao* and *xiao di* are, according to E. G. Pulleybank, (*shuang sheng*) pairs analogous to Eng. “fiddle faddle” or “doodah”. The Japanese translators, with more eloquence than I have at my command, render this, in part, “... garan to hirogari, shin-shin to sabire, oboroge na kihai sura naku, ki wa munashiku nukewatatte, tsui ni mei-mei ni tasshite iru.”

³¹ It strikes me that *qincong linglong* is an elaboration on *qingling*, referring to plants both green and fragrant.

³² Ch. *wang zhi bu ke jiye*, which I have interpreted on the basis of the Japanese translation, being unable to distinguish between *shi* and *wang* in this context. E. G. Pulleyblank provides the following note: “*Wang* means to look up at something from a distance. I suppose this is appropriate—from a distance it looks vast and illimitable, while from closer at hand it looks formless.”

dazzling brilliance.³³

“There is ‘there not yet being there not being’” is explained as follows: [the state in which there is not yet “there not being”] envelops Heaven and Earth, it refines the myriad things, grandly passes through to the obscure. So deep, so great is it that nothing can be outside it; so fine, like a split hair or like the cloven tip of a blade of grass, that nothing can be inside it. Though it has not a dwelling of a single square *tu* in area,³⁴ yet it produces the roots of being and of non-being.

“There is ‘there not yet having been “there not being there not being”’” is explained as follows: Ere yet Heaven and Earth were split asunder, ere yet the dark and light elements were separated, ere yet the four seasons were divided—ere yet the myriad things were born, [this state was] broadly flat and calm, silently pure and unclouded; there was no seeing its form. It is like the case in which Brilliance, having questioned³⁵ Non-Being, retired and got lost [saying],³⁶ “I can have nothing, but am not yet able to be without nothing. When it comes to the extreme subtlety³⁷ of being without nothing, where must one begin in order to arrive at that?”

Chapter Seven of *Huainan zi*, entitled *Jingshen xun* begins as follows:

In antiquity, before there was Heaven or Earth, there was merely image but no form.³⁸ Cavernous and obscure, overgrown and

³³ *Qu yu* is another form of *xiao yao*, the well known word that refers to untrammelled wandering. *Hu yu* is glossed everywhere as “broad and great” (*guang da*; *hao hao han han* a doubling of *hao han*, conjures up the image of a flood. The most striking word in the passage is *yin*, which here means “measure,” an interpretation supported in *Morohashi* 11.970b:41891, 8.v. 17. *hakaru*, with references to the *Shuo wen tong xun ding sheng*, the *Guangya* and a *Guan zi* commentary.

³⁴ A *tu* is said to be five planks (*ban*), each eight or, according to another tradition, ten feet in length. Since the Chinese foot was approximately one half of an English foot, one is dealing with a hut twenty or twenty-five feet square.

³⁵ Both the *Kanbun taikei* and the *Er shi er zi* texts read *jian*, which I cannot construe, and which I therefore take for the closely similar *wen*. The Japanese translators, while not calling the reader’s attention to it, seem to agree, for they speak of Question and answer” (*mondō*).

³⁶ “Got lost” renders *zi shi*, which Gao You takes to mean “submerged himself and was not seen [again]” (*zi shi mo bu xian*). The Japanese translators take the word to refer to forlornness, adding “mourn” to their version (*bōzen to uchinageita tōri de aru*).

³⁷ The whole thing makes such perfect sense without the *zhi miao* that I cannot escape the feeling that it is a gloss that crept into the text. I have translated it, but one could just as easily omit “the extreme subtlety of”. The reader is reminded of a passage in *Zhi bei you*, to be translated below. There is also an episode very similar to this latter in *Dao ying xun*. Chapter 12 of *Huainan zi* (p. 29 in the *Kanbun taikei* edition) which, however, to which the reader is referred.

³⁸ The text reads *wei xiang wu xing*, an expression open to several different interpretations, of which the above, my own, is only one. The commentary of Gao You (or of Xu Shen, it is impossible

limitless, fluid and indistinguishable as it was,³⁹ there was no knowing its entrance. There were [then] two spirits [*shen*] that, born together, planned and laid out Heaven and Earth. So great were they that none knew where they terminated, so vast, there was no knowing where they ended. It is then that they parted into Dark and Light (*yin yang*), separated into the eight extremities,⁴⁰ that hard and soft complemented each other, then that the myriad things took shape, the gross vapours turning into insects, the subtle into men.⁴¹ This is why the spirit⁴² is the possession of Heaven, while the skeleton is that of Earth. The subtle spirit enters through its gate,⁴³ while the skeleton reverts to its origin.⁴⁴ How, then, shall the self exist?⁴⁵ This is why the Sage models himself on Heaven and follows his feelings,⁴⁶ not becoming the captive of the [base and] common, nor being enticed by others. He treats Heaven as his Father and Earth as his Mother, Dark and Light as his ropes, the four seasons as his skein.⁴⁷ Heaven,

to say which) glosses *wei* as *si*, “think”, a word that itself has a wide range of meanings. The commentary continues as follows, provided one may assume that this is its real meaning: “When one thinks (*nian*) of the time before Heaven and Earth took shape because [i.e. when] there was [already a] form.” On p. 322 in Vol. 1 of his annotated translation, Kusuyama mentions that Yu Yue (1821–1907) takes the *wei* to be a copyist’s error for *wang*, concluding that *wang xiang* and *wu xing* are simply two different ways of saying “formless”. In spite of the translation given above, I am inclined to think that he is right. D. L. Overmyer also shares this point of view.

³⁹ This is a literal translation of words used more to convey feeling than to point to meaning: *yao yao* and *ming ming* are both cases of repetition of the same syllable; *mang wen* (orig. *mun*) *mo min* is a case of initial alliteration (*shuang shen*); *xiang meng hong dong*, of (approximate) rhyme (*die yan*).

⁴⁰ *Ba ji* refers to the four primary and four secondary compass points.

⁴¹ “Gross” and “subtle” render *fan* and *jing*, respectively. While *jing* for “subtle” is usual, *fan* is not commonly used as its antonym. The commentary glosses it with *luan*, “confused”, while Kusuyama renders it with “muddy” (*kondaku*). The only gloss in the *Kangxi Dictionary* that is at all close to any of the above is “not simple” (*bu jian*).

⁴² The precise meaning of *jing shen* is not easy to determine, if only because in modern usage it has come to mean “spirit”, “ghoul”, or even “mind”, as these are understood in the Occident.

⁴³ *Jing shen ru qi men*, but the antecedent of *qi* is not clear. If parallelism means anything, it refers back to *ching shen*, but the commentary glosses it with *tian*, “Heaven”.

⁴⁴ Ch. *gen*, lit., “root”, but the commentary is undoubtedly right in glossing the word with *tu*, “earth”.

⁴⁵ Ch. *wo shang he cun*. While the commentary and Kusuyama both understand it in this way, this smacks too much of a Buddhist notion that could not possibly have filtered into China by this time. Far from being a denial of the existence of the self or soul, the remark seems to me to be a rhetorical question on the level of common sense, whether the *cun* be construed as transitive or as intransitive. Thus, “if the spirit goes through its own gateway while the skeleton returns to its place of origin in the bowels of the earth, what is left of *me*?” or “... what is left for me to hold to?”

⁴⁶ Ch. *fa tian shun qing*, of which the first half is self-evident. If *qing* refers to feelings, as I have taken it, then *shun* may be transitive in the sense of “bring into line”. If, as Mr. Kusuyama takes it, *qing* means objective reality, then *shun* means to “follow”, or to “accord”.

⁴⁷ *Gang wei* refer, respectively, to the large rope that surrounds a net and to the smaller ones

being calm, is on his account pure; Earth, being settled, is on his account tranquil. Of the myriad beings, those who run afoul of him die, while those who model themselves on him live.⁴⁸

The *Zhuangzi* passages to be cited in evidence are in Chapters 2 (*Qi wu lun*) and 22 (*Zhi bei you*), to be quoted below in the versions of Burton Watson and of James Legge; in the former case, in that of A. C. Graham as well; in the latter, in my own paraphrase. One begins by quoting selectively from Graham,

The men of old, their knowledge had arrived at something: at what had it arrived? There were some who thought there had not yet begun to be things—the utmost, the exhaustive, there is no more to add. The next thought there were things but there had not yet begun to be borders.⁴⁹ The next thought there were borders to them but there had not yet begun to be “That’s it, that’s not”. The lighting up of “That’s it, that’s not” is the reason why the Way is flawed. ...

“Now suppose that I speak of something, and do not know whether it is of a kind with the in question or not of a kind. If what is of a kind and what is not are deemed of a kind with one another, there is no longer any difference from an ‘other’.”

However, let’s try to say it.

There is “beginning”, there is “not yet having begun having a beginning”.

– There is “there not yet having begun to be that ‘not yet having begun having a beginning’”.

There is “something”, there is “nothing”.

– There is “not yet having begun being without something”.

– There is “there not yet having begun to be that ‘not yet having begun being without something’”.

All of a sudden “*there is nothing*”, and really we do not yet know of something and nothing which there is and which there is not.

that form its skein. They are metaphorical for government.

⁴⁸ It should be mentioned that the first *Chāndogya*^o quotation ended with a passage, not quoted above, translated as follows by Deussen: “Wer, dieses also wissend, die Sonne als das Brahman verehrt, bei dem ist Hoffnung, daß ihm beifälliges Jauchzen entgeschallt und ihn erquickt, – und ihn erquickt” (*op. cit.*, p. 116); and as follows by Jhā: “Now, if anyone, knowing this, meditate upon the Sun as *Brahman*, quickly will pleasant shouts approach him and will continue, yea, will continue” (*op. cit.*, p. 175). The most striking similarity is the one between this and the final Chinese sentence: *wanwu xian zhi zhe wufa zhi zhe sheng*.

⁴⁹ “The next thought that there were things but that there had never been any borders” is glossed by Guo Xiang to mean, “Although they had not yet forgotten everything, still they were able to forget its ‘this’ and ‘that’”. Note here too, for what it is worth, that, for Ruo Xiang, the persons in question did not deny the existence of things but were simply oblivious to it (*wang*). D. L. Overmyer says that they were, rather, oblivious to the boundaries and distinctions among things

Now for my part I have already referred to something, but do not yet know whether my reference really referred to something or really did not refer to anything.⁵⁰

The above corresponds to Legge's translation:

5. Among the men of old their knowledge reached the extreme point. What was that extreme point? Some held that at first there was not anything. This is the extreme point, the utmost point to which nothing can be added. A second class held that there was something, but without any respective recognition of it (on the part of men). A third class held that there was such a recognition, but there had not begun to be any expression of different opinions about it. It was through the definite expression of different opinions about it that there ensued injury to (the doctrine of) the Dao. It was this injury to (the doctrine of) the Dao which led to the formation of (partial) preferences. ...

6. But here now are some other sayings: I do not know whether they are of the same character as those which I have already given, or of a different character. Whether they be of the same character or not when looked at along with them, they have a character of their own, which cannot be distinguished from the others. But though this be the case, let me try to explain myself. There was a beginning. There was a beginning before that beginning. There was a beginning previous to that beginning before there was the beginning. There was existence; there had been no existence. There was no existence before the beginning of that no existence. There was no existence previous to the no existence before there was the beginning of no existence. If suddenly there was non-existence, we do not know whether it was really anything existing, or really not existing. Now I have said what I have said, but I do not know whether what I have said be really anything to the point or not.⁵¹

Watson's translation reads as follows:

The understanding of the men of ancient times went a long way. How far did it go? To the point where some of them believed things that have never existed—so far, to the end, where nothing could be added. Those at the next stage thought that things exist but recognized no boundaries among them.

Those at the next stage thought there were boundaries but recognized no right and wrong. Because right and wrong appeared,

⁵⁰ *op. cit.*, pp. 54f.

⁵¹ *op. cit.*, pp. 233ff.

the Way was injured, and because the Way was injured, love became complete. But do things such as completion and injury really exist, or do they not? ...

Now I am going to make a statement here. I don't know whether it fits into the category of other people's statements or not. But, whether it fits into their category or whether it doesn't, it obviously fits into some category. So it is in that respect no different from their statements. However, let me try making my statement.

There is a beginning. There is not yet a beginning to be a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is being. There is non-being. There is a not yet beginning to be non-being. Suddenly there is non-being. But I do not know, when it comes to non-being, which is really being and which is non-being. Now I have just said something. But I don't know whether what I have said has really said something or whether it hasn't said something.⁵²

If I understand it correctly, the first part of the above question says that the most sophisticated view was that of a denial of everything. At the risk of reading into the text something that may not have been intended, let it be said that *wei shi you wu* seems to be a denial of presence rather than an affirmation of absence. Just one degree lower in sophistication is the view that affirms the existence without separating it into "this" and "that." Below that, finally, is the view that says, not "This is X, that is Y", but "This is X, that is not". To quote Graham, "... Chuang-tzu believes that to distinguish alternatives is always to miss something out (... "The displaying of It and Other is the reason why something is missing from the Way")."⁵³ To this, D. L. Overmyer adds that these "alternatives" include pompous metaphysical ones.

As may be recalled, it was remarked above that for the Indian views discussed here, even before Śāṅkara, negation did not imply affirmation, that "non-non-X" is not the same as "X", a position shared with Madhyamaka Buddhism. The latter part of the *Zhuangzi* passage quoted above in Graham's translation seems to come to the same thing, as he himself observes. As will have been seen from the quotation, two examples are used, beginning and existence. While both are relevant to Zhuangzi's statement, the latter is closer to the theme of the present study. Graham says that "... these alternatives [sc. of 'being' and of 'non-being'] assume that we are distinguishing things of which we can say 'there is' or 'there is not'. Prior to making distinctions we can say neither, only say, "There is 'there is not yet being 'there not beings'""."⁵⁴

⁵² *op. cit.*, pp. 41ff.

⁵³ [*Ed. note:*] Quotation not located, but cf. Graham's note at the bottom of *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁵⁴ On fine points, the commentary of Cheng Xuanying is so imbued with Buddhist notions,

The *Zhi bei you* passage reads in paraphrase as follows:

Brilliance (Guangyao) asked Non-Being (Wuyou): “Sir, do you exist or not?” When Non-Being did not answer,⁵⁵ Brilliance, having gained nothing from his query, stared at his interlocutor the whole day through to no avail, looking but not seeing, listening but not hearing, reaching out but not touching. He then exclaimed, “What perfection! Who but he could achieve it? I, for instance, can have nothing, but I cannot be without nothing. When it comes to being without nothing,⁵⁶ where must one begin in order to arrive at that?”⁵⁷

Legge reads as follows:

Starlight asked Non-entity, saying, “Master, do you exist, or do you not exist?” He received no answer to his question, however, and looked steadfastly to the appearance of the other, which was that of a deep void. All day long he looked to it, but could see nothing; he listened for it, but could hear nothing; he clutched at it, but got hold of nothing. Starlight then said, “Perfect! Who can attain to this? I can [conceive the ideas of] non-existing nonexistence, and still there be a non-existing existence. How is it possible to attain to this?”⁵⁸

Watson reads as follows:

Bright Dazzlement asked Non-Existence, “Sir, do you exist or do you not exist?” Unable to obtain any answer, Bright Dazzlement

even with uniquely Buddhist terms, that as an interpretation of the *original* ideas of Zhuangzi it is useless. Even Guo Xiang, however, who died early in the fourth century, is not immune to Buddhist influence, a circumstance requiring one to use his commentary, as well, with caution. For instance, “There were some who thought there had never been any things”, is interpreted as follows: “These [ancients] were oblivious to Heaven and Earth, ignoring [or ‘neglecting’] the myriad things. Outwardly taking no cognizance of the universe, inwardly they were unaware of their own persons. This is why they were able to be as free of impediments as if empty, to go along with things, yet never to fail to respond [to stimuli?].” In other words, the objective existence or inexistence of the universe was not a matter of issue to these ancients, as understood by Ruo Xiang. The important thing, as understood by him, was that they *treated* everything as if it were not there. Where the Indian material is concerned, Śankara, the “crypto-Buddhist” (*pracchannabuddha*) must be used with the same caution.

⁵⁵ On the basis of a comment by Yu Yue, quoted in the notes to this passage, this introductory clause has been provided from another version of the story, presented in *Huainan zi* 12 (*daoying xun*), p. 29 in the *Kanbun taikēi* edition.

⁵⁶ The text reads *ji wei wu you yi*, but Liu Wendian, *ibid.*, 29b, emends the *you* to *wu*, quoting *Huainan zi* 2 (p. 2 in the *Kanbun taikēi* edition) in support. I have rendered *you* with “have”, although “there is” would have been closer to the meaning in this context, simply to meet the exigencies of the English language. Nearer, in one way, to the original would be, “I can bring it about that there shall be something, but not that there shall be nothing.”

⁵⁷ *Zhuangzi bu zheng* 7B29a.

⁵⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 510.

stared intently at the other's face and form; all was vacuity and blankness. He stared all day but could see nothing, listened but could hear no sound, stretched out his hand but grasped nothing. "Perfect!" exclaimed Bright Dazzlement. "Who can reach such perfection? I can conceive of the existence of non-existence. Yet this man has reached the stage of the non-existence of non-existence. How could I ever reach such perfection?"⁵⁹

The last Chinese source to be cited in evidence is the *Daode jing*, the core of the presentation being the second sentence in that work. Legge translates as follows:

2. [Conceived of as] having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth; [conceived of as] having a name, it is the Mother of all things.⁶⁰

The second-oldest commentary, that of Wang Bi (226–49), says that all being (*you*) begins with non-being (*wu*),

... therefore the time before which anything takes shape, when there is no name, is the beginning of myriadfold things. ... This means that the Way [the universal pattern of the behaviour of Nature; 'Nature' itself would not do violence to *dao*] first completes the myriadfold things by means of the formless and of the nameless. ... Still there is none who knows the origin of the origin.

It is obvious that one is not dealing with mere "nothingness", at least not in terms of Wang Bi's interpretation. Duyvendak renders the passage in question as follows: "The term Non-being indicates the beginning of Heaven and Earth; the term Being indicates the mother of the ten thousand things."⁶¹ He proceeds to say the following:

... Modern critics like Ma Xulun, following some older ones, punctuate after "to have not, to be not", and after *yu*, "to have, to be", and taking *ming* as a verb, as I do. If one should punctuate after *ming*, the translation might be: "Not having a name, it [i.e., the Way] is the beginning of Heaven and Earth; having a name, it is the mother of the ten thousand things." In support of my interpretation I quote *Daode jing* 40: "Heaven and Earth and the ten thousand things are born out of Being; Being is born cut of Non-being"; also chapter 2, in which being and Non-being are contrasted. *Wu you* "Being-Non-Being", is even personified in

⁵⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 144, making the emendation mentioned in note 55, above.

⁶⁰ *op. cit.*, p. 95; it has been pointed out to me by E. G. Pulleyblank that the Ma Wangdui text adds *ye* after both *shi* and *mu*, in addition to shifting the two words themselves.

⁶¹ *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Zhuang zi XXII.8 (Legge II.70). On the other hand, my interpretation is contradicted by the opening phrase of 32 ... and by the expression in 37, “natural simplicity of the nameless”, as well as by the end of 41: “The Way is hidden and without (differentiating) names”, that is to say, *ming* should be taken in the plural and in the technical meaning of “terms”.⁶²

It should be pointed out that every copy of *Daode jing* 40 that I have been able to consult reads *tian xia man wu sheng yu you you sheng yu wu*. Mr. Duyvendak reads *tian xia*, “under heaven”, as if it were *tian di*, “Heaven and Earth”. Wang Bi’s commentary likewise has *xia*, not *di*. Thus, rather than “Heaven and Earth and the ten thousand things”, “all things under Heaven”. Wang Bi says something that points at, but unfortunately not to, something: things under Heaven all have Being as their birth, but [the point?] at which Being begins has Non-Being as its source [or ‘base’]. Whoever intends to perfect [or to complete] Being must invariably revert to Non-Being.” “The point at which Being begins” may, just possibly, mean “that which Being launches” (*you zhi suoshi*). Taking some liberties with Mr. Duyvendak’s English, not his mother tongue, I reproduce his translation:

Being and Non-being produce each other,
Hard and easy complete each other,
Long and short are relative to each other,
High and low are dependent on each other,
Tones and voices harmonize with one another,
First and last succeed each other.⁶³

Legge reads as follows:

So it is that existence and non-existence give birth the one to [the idea of] the other; that difficulty and ease produce the one [the idea of] the other; that length and shortness fashion out of the one the figure of the other; that [the ideas of] height and lowness arise from the contrast of the one with the other; that the musical notes and tones become harmonious through the relation of one with another; and that being before and behind give the idea of one following another.⁶⁴

The *Zhuangzi* passage referred to in Duyvendak’s comment is the *Zhi bei you* passage translated above. As to *Daode jing* 32, it reads, in part, as rendered by Duyvendak, “The Way has the simplicity of the nameless. As soon as it is carved, there are names.”⁶⁵ If Duyvendak’s comments are valid,

⁶² *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁶³ *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁶⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁶⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 80. For his comments on what intervenes, cf. *ibid.*, *et seq.*

then I prefer to make the break between *ming* and *pu*, “The Way is ever nameless; once its timber is carved, it has a name.” Legge reads as follows:

32.1. The Tao, considered as unchanging, has no name. ...

4. As soon as it proceeds to action, it has a name. When it once has that name, [men] can know to rest in it. When they know to rest in it, they can be free from all risk of failure and error.⁶⁶

Daode jing 41 is rendered thus by Duyvendak: “The Way is hidden and without names. Indeed, just because the Way is able to lend, it is able to complete.” This is glossed as follows: “That the Way is without names means once more that it is undifferentiated. All things are implied in it; it comprises all contrasts, and by giving [lit. ‘lending’] its development to each thing, it completes everything.”⁶⁷ While this comment is more or less in line with that of Wang Bi, the latter still merits quotation in full (to the extent that the following translation is accurate):

All of the skills [mentioned in Chapter 41, viz. the capacity to appear slight] are the achievement of [or “perfected by”] the Way. In terms of images, it is a great image, yet a great image has no shape; in terms of sounds, it is a great sound, yet a great sound has a feeble [or “subtle”] voice. Things are completed [or “perfected”] by this, yet there is no seeing their completion [“perfection”]. The form is thus hidden, and there is no name.⁶⁸ “Lend” does not mean the simple filling of a want. For, once lent, there is enough of it to realize its potentialities finally and eternally. This is what is meant by “able to lend”. The completion [or “perfection”] is not like the craftsmanship of a weaver or of a carpenter, for there is nothing whose form it does not perfect [“complete”]. This is what is meant by “able to complete” [“perfect”].

Legge reads as follows:

41.3. The Tao is hidden, and has no name; but it is the Tao which is skilful at imparting (to all things what they need) and making them complete.⁶⁹

“Where did it all come from?” If “it” is timeless and/or beginningless, the question is moot. If one holds that “it” did have a beginning, what preceded “it”? Whether or not there ever was the belief that the forerunner of existence was a literal *néant* is a question not related to this study. Whatever its

⁶⁶ *op. cit.*, pp. 122f.

⁶⁷ *op. cit.*, pp. 97, 98.

⁶⁸ Another possible interpretation of these two sentences: “Things are completed/perfected by this, yet there is no seeing their completed/perfected forms. Therefore they are hidden and without names.”

⁶⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 133.

name, the precursor of existence was, in the views just described, an undistinguished mass pregnant with being. This view was obviously common to certain Indians and to certain Chinese, a portion of whose statements have been reproduced and discussed above. As already said, *Huainan zi* comes close, in his outlook, to the Indians of the pre-exegetical period, while Śāṅkara comes closer to Zhuangzi. Knowing about this no more than I do, I must ascribe these similarities to coincidence. Eventually, the two were to meet on Chinese soil, when the “dark learners” (*xuanxue jia*) of the Six Dynasties coming into contact with the Prajñāpāramitā and, in due course, with the Madhyamaka, fancied themselves to be seeing in them an affirmation of indigenous Chinese beliefs. It was to be a time before the Chinese Buddhist scholar was able to disengage the two; for the ordinary Chinese believer, that time never came.

List of Characters

<i>baji</i>	八極
<i>ban</i>	版
<i>beide hanhe</i>	被德含和
<i>binfen longzhong</i>	繽紛龍蓰
<i>bozen</i>	茫然
<i>bujian</i>	不簡
<i>carou juhui</i>	雜柔聚會
Cheng Xuanjing	成玄英
<i>Chugoku bungaku taikai</i>	中國文學大系
<i>chuyu</i>	儲與
<i>Dai kanwa jiten</i>	大漢和辭典
<i>dao</i>	道
<i>Daode jing</i>	道德經
<i>dieyun</i>	疊韻
<i>du</i>	堵
<i>Ershier zi</i>	二十二子
<i>fatian shun qing</i>	法天順情
<i>fan</i>	煩
<i>fan fen wei fa</i>	繁憤未發
<i>gang wei</i>	綱維
Gao You	高誘
<i>gen</i>	根
Guanzi	管子
<i>guangda</i>	廣大
<i>guangya</i>	廣雅
<i>guangyao</i>	光耀
Guo Xiang	郭象
<i>Haohao hanhan</i>	浩浩瀚瀚

<i>he</i>	和
<i>herou/zi anzhi</i>	和柔/自安止
<i>Hou Han shu</i>	後漢書
<i>hu ye</i>	扈冶
<i>Huainan zi</i>	淮南子
<i>ji wei wu you yi</i>	及為無有矣
<i>jian</i>	間
<i>Jin shu</i>	晉書
<i>jing</i>	精
<i>jingshen/jingshen xun</i>	精神/精神訓
<i>jingshen ruqi men</i>	精神入其門
Kiyama Hideo	木山英雄
<i>kondaku</i>	混濁
Kusuyama Haruki	楠山春樹
Laozi	老子
Li Wang	厲王
Liu An	劉安
Liu Wendian	劉文典
<i>luan</i>	亂
Ma Xulun	馬徐倫
<i>mangwen momin</i>	芒支漠閔
<i>ming</i>	名
<i>mingming</i>	冥冥
<i>mondo</i>	問答
Morohashi Tetsuji	諸橋燾次
<i>mu</i>	母
<i>nian</i>	念
<i>qi</i>	襍
<i>qiwu lun</i>	齊物論
<i>qingcong linglong</i>	青蔥苓龍
<i>Qian Han shu</i>	前漢書
<i>raoduo</i>	饒多
<i>Sanguo weizhi</i>	三國魏志
Sawaya Haratsugu	澤谷昭永
<i>seisei kanka ryoku</i>	生成感化力
<i>shen</i>	神
<i>shi</i>	視
<i>shi</i>	始
<i>Shiji</i>	史記
<i>Shinshaku kanbun taikei</i>	新釋漢文大系
<i>si</i>	思
<i>shu/shu</i>	俶/淑
<i>shu zhen xun</i>	俶真訓
<i>shuangsheng</i>	雙聲

<i>Shuowen jixi</i>	說文解字
<i>Shuowen tongxun dingsheng</i>	說文通訓定聲
<i>tian</i>	天
<i>tian di</i>	天地
<i>tian xia</i>	天下
<i>tian xia wan wu sheng yu you you sheng</i>	天下萬物生於有有生於無
<i>yu wu</i>	
Togawa Toshio	戶川言郎
<i>Toyo rekishi daijiten</i>	東洋歷史大辭典
<i>tu</i>	土
<i>wanmu xian zhi zhe wufa zhi zhe sheng</i>	萬物先之者無法之者生
<i>wang</i>	望
Wang Bi	王弼
Wang Huizhong	王會鍾
<i>wang zhi buke shiqi zhi ye</i>	望之不可視其極也
<i>weishi youwu</i>	未始有無
<i>weixiang wuxing</i>	惟像無形
<i>wei you</i>	未有
<i>wen</i>	問
<i>wo shang he cun</i>	我尚何存
<i>wu</i>	無
<i>wuyou</i>	無有
<i>wuwu ruanruan</i>	無無蠕蠕
<i>xiao yao</i>	逍遙
<i>xiaotiao</i>	蕭條
<i>xiaodi</i>	霄霏
<i>xiangmeng hongdong</i>	項濛鴻洞
<i>xiang yu youyou</i>	相與優游
<i>xinguai</i>	形怪
Xu Shen	許慎
<i>xuanxue jia</i>	玄學家
<i>xun</i>	訓
<i>yang</i>	陽
<i>yaoyao</i>	窈窈
<i>ye</i>	也
<i>yin</i>	隱
<i>you</i>	有
<i>you shi</i>	有是
<i>youwei shi you shi</i>	未始有始
<i>youwei shi youyou shi</i>	有未始有有始
<i>you zhi suoshi</i>	有之所始
Yu Yue	俞樾
Zhaozhen	兆朕
<i>Zhi bei you</i>	知北遊

zhimiao
Zhuangzi
Zhuangzi buzheng
zishi
zishi mo bujian

至妙
莊子
莊子補正
自矢
自矢沒不見