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僧肇著

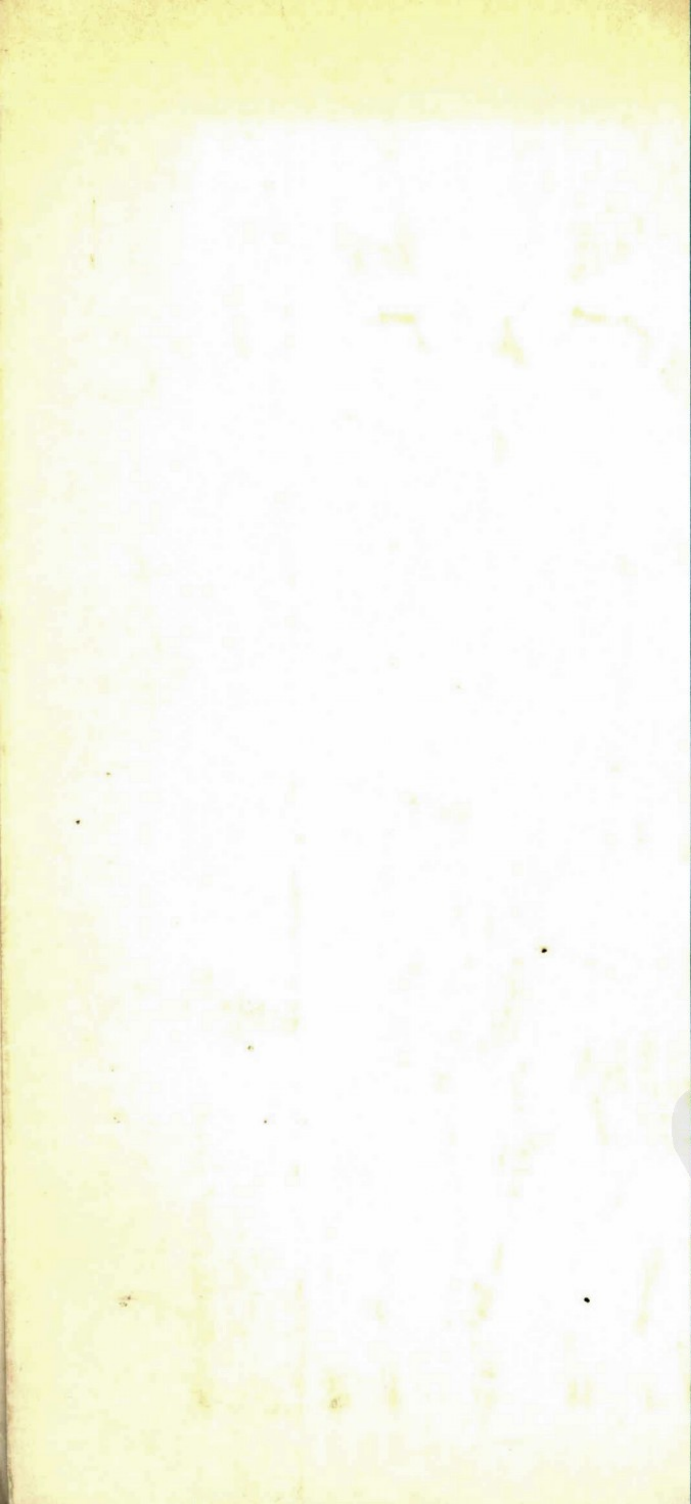
徐梵澄译注

THREE THESES OF
SENG-ZHAO

A Translation from chinese
Introduction and Notes
by Fancheng Hsu

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徐梵澄
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THREE THESES OF
SENG-ZHAO

肇 论

Written by Seng-Zhao

僧 肇 著

A Translation from Chinese with

Introduction and Notes by Hsu Fan-cheng

徐 梵 澄 译注

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Introduction

Both logic and dialectics lead to clear thinking. Sophistry, the specious art of reasoning originally based both upon logic and dialectics and also involved in rhetorics, flourished in ancient Greece and later on in the Graeco-Roman world in general. It helped in no small measure the development of ancient philosophy. At a final stage of its development, the professional sophists used yet further abused this art so much so that for any proposition, however absurd and contradictory to good sense, they could find sound arguments. In about the same period, at the time of the Warring States in China, (circa 475-221 B.C.) the same thing happened. Sophists, usually called Nominalists in history were not lacking and, indeed, very competent debaters they were. It was argued that, for example, 'a white horse is not a horse', or 'swift as the arrow is, it has its moments without motion as well as moments of ceaseless motion'. Well, the skill in the exposition of causes and reasons and in the employment of words specially in their ambiguity is admirable. The opponent can thus be defeated in debate but nobody is convinced. A modern scholar might become enthused if he is told that pictures of a motionless arrow can readily be seen on a photograph and might appreciate the ancient metaphysical mentality. But a white horse is still no other being than a

horse according to common sense. The archer knows well that his strength is limited and cannot set his arrow in ceaseless motion. Everyone will instinctively shun the arrow shot at him in spite of his whole knowledge of its being motionless. Hence this sort of reasoning had not lasted long. Not much better fared the philosophy of Mo-tze, otherwise a remarkable system rich in religious colouring with Universal Love as its core, also because of its singular logic which maintained, for example, 'to kill a robber is not to kill a man'. It flourished for less than a hundred years before it retreated from the stage of ancient Chinese culture.

At this point it may be argued that one must seek truth for its own sake without any illegitimate interference of common sense or life-utility. But still the truth, once discovered, must be realisable in our inner being and our outer activities: if it is not... it would be no more than the solution of a thought-puzzle or an abstract unreality or a dead letter.' — as a modern spiritual Master pointed out. The philosophy of common sense may be blamed for the limitation and narrowness in its scope, but it is still a good support and foundation for life.

Yet, the achievements of the Nominalists in history were not inconsiderable. Since everything in the universe has its name and form (*nāma-rūpa* in Sanskrit), the right handling of names and forms is of primary importance. Their service thus rendered to the Legalists in the field of jurisprudence was immense. Yet their logical reasonings which may or may not lead to any intellectual truth become ridiculous when carried to the extreme. Objectively speaking, being ridiculous or laughable is not much of an evil. Now, there are high reasonings that appear metaphysical in na-

ture, apparently deep in their thoughts, sound in their arguments, true in their specific formulation of truths, what can be said of them? They are no longer ridiculous but harmful.

Perhaps the ancient sophists were partly responsible for the decline of Greek culture since they misused and hence degraded both logic and dialectics. Compared with this the development of Illusionism (Māyavāda) in India since Shankarācarya (788-820 C. E.) and that of Nihilism (Shūnyavāda) earlier had even greater consequences. Both retarded the progress of society for ages. Together with the introduction of Buddhism into China, the Shūnyavāda spread like a forest fire had brought great destructions to the race. In India the ruin was even more evident, because both Shūnyavāda and Māyavāda prevailed ever since Buddha's time. The creative impulse together with the vitality of the race was gradually and silently sapped and weakened, and senility unduly crept in. By the devotee or any professed follower of such a creed, a misunderstood and misapplied theory of the Void together with the view of life as Illusion usually resulted in a great outburst of reckless hedonism for a certain period immediately followed by a steep downfall into radical pessimism. As it was so with the individual, so it was with the race. The rationale is if everything in our mundane existence is unreal or void or vain like a dream or a bubble in the stream, what is then the harm of doing evil sinning against oneself or against society, and what for is the achievement of anything positive? As life itself is void, so everything in life must be void. Beliefs in past actions (karma) and rebirths are by no means secure safety valves for preventing the vital explosions and the spasmodic psychological depressions. Corruption goes into the heart of society, decadence

creeps into every walk of life, and a destructive defeatism treads on the heels of every hopeful enterprise. It is regretful to say that the present condition of India as a symbol of all human misery cannot be incidental but had its deepest and remotest source somewhere here.

It is not intended here to boost moral principles. It cannot be denied that in those high metaphysical reasonings, even the most atrocious crimes in society are regarded as nil. The other-worldliness comes to a perfect nothingness of the present world. We know that these theories are not irrefutable and they can be defeated on their own grounds. It is meant here only to say how the high reasoning can be harmful and dangerous if indulged in. Viewed in the whole history of the world, its demerits greatly outweigh its merits, though merits there must also be. The discussions on several metaphysical subjects written by a Chinese Buddhist monk in the beginning of the fifth century are translated here. In the opinion of the translator a very good example of a play of the intellect or 'mental acrobatics' it is.

* * *

Buddhism rose like a sun in India. The seeds of this Dharma were widely sown all over North India even before Asoka's time, grew gradually into large plants and flourished exuberantly in Central Asia and finally in China. History tells of three great conquests in the world: the conquest of the Roman Empire, the conquest of Buddhism, and the conquest of Christ that followed. How and why Buddhism could not penetrate into Africa and failed in spreading to Europe but succeeded in coming to the East and held the field

for more than a thousand years in China are the most fascinating and enthralling problems in cultural history that engaged the keen intellects both in the East and the West for the last hundred years or more.

To these questions many answers are found and can still be found. Modern thinkers in China tackle these problems from the historical materialistic point of view. It cannot escape their perspicuity perhaps that before its introduction to China, the way was paved for it by Taoism. Now we know that the truths on the physical plane are universal, and no less so are the truths on the plane of life. Since both the Chinese and Indian peoples were highly cultured in ancient times, it was natural that great intellects had similar developments on the mental plane and probably similar realisations on the higher planes above. When the new Dharma was brought into the country and found to be very much akin or even the same as the native one, inevitably it was appreciated and easily accepted. In a sense because the soil was already well prepared and fertilised, so this new flower transplanted from the 'Western Heaven' could easily grow and bloom and bear fruits.

A comparative study of Buddhism and Taoism is a special subject too large to be dealt with in this small space. Yet a few points of their similarity may be mentioned here. Fundamentally there is a spirit of renunciation and a pursuit of higher things above the mundane existence common to both. Both believed in the authority of the saying of the sages, — in India, Āryavāda is taken as a measure of knowledge in or even above Nyāya, — and this is the point where both must differ from modern Science, because Science believes in no higher authority other than its own. And

in their pursuit of truth both claimed that the supreme Truth stood above words and names and forms of thought, inexpressible yet realisable. Both regarded all human knowledge including the verbal teachings held by themselves as external while their internal knowledge lay somewhere else. In Taoism the parable is the hare-trap or the fishing-net, which can be abandoned if the hare or the fish is caught. In Buddhism there is the classical example of the raft which must be dispensed with when one has crossed over the ocean and landed on the yonder shore. A great Void, unfortunately very much misunderstood even nowadays, taught by Laotze could very well fit into the new pattern of the thought of Shūnyata in Buddhism. On these broad lines of coincidence one can well imagine how these two great systems could have come to a nice understanding at the first stage of their meeting. The newcomer met some resistance in the very beginning, but was very soon welcomed and entertained like a younger brother by his elder brother and both walked a long distance hand in hand before they quarelled and finally parted company.

It was at this stage just before their separation when the Buddhist scholar Seng-zhao (383-414 C.E.) wrote these treatises elucidating the doctrines of Buddhism in the light of Taoism. Seng-zhao was a disciple of Kumārajīva who helped his master in composing the texts of the Chinese translations. His biography is extant, included in the 'Biographies of High Monks' by Hui Zhiao of the Liang Dynasty (in 512 C.E.). Obviously he was conversant with the philosophy of Lao-tze and Djuang-tze, and most of the Buddhist texts then current. Thus among the three principal Chinese metaphysical works he was supposed to be well versed in two,

with probably the exception of the first, the Book of Changes, which was scarcely utilised by him either because he disliked it owing to the discrepancy in the cosmic views and the ideals of life between these two systems, or because he was not yet too mature for that as he died at the age of only thirty-one.

Two points perhaps should not escape the notice of modern researchers in the history of religions. First, though what Seng-zhao wrote was in a style well elaborated as it was fashionable to write in that manner in his times, it was yet not so accomplished as it should and could have been, judged by the writings of his contemporaries. Certain places of naivety and awkwardness in expression are traceable in his handling of the pen. It was probably because he was mainly engaged in the work of translating a foreign language into his own that influenced his formulations of thought and statements. As his language has now become somewhat antiquated, this obstuseness in style has helped to make his thoughts appear more profound and obscure than they actually were that baffled the understanding of so many readers. Next, so far all his authentic works are based on Scriptures such as the Taoist and Buddhist texts — sūtras and śāstras — as the quotations show. This is Āryavāda held as authority in the measurement of knowledge. But these do not show any sign of the realisation of the writer as a spiritual Master, as the German scholar W. Liebenthal alleged. It would be far-fetched to conclude that Seng-zhao had owing to his personal realisation stood for Mysticism or the Divine Ecstasy or the like, as these things were depreciated by the Saṃgha, and any show of supernatural powers of personal accomplishment by any master, Indian or Chinese, was

forbidden on pains of expulsion from the Saṃgha, a punishment comparable to the excommunication of the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, there is nothing original in his thoughts so far we can gather.

* * *

It is well known that not all the extant writings of Seng-zhao are authentic. The thesis 'On the Namelessness of Nirvana' preceded by a 'Letter of Dedication' might be forged by someone else when the originals were lost. The epistle in answer to the Upāsaka Liu Chen (alias Liu Yi-ming) may not be spurious but not of much importance. Several other miscellaneous pieces are left to us with only their titles, or, if existing, of a dubious nature. Thus from among the famous 'Four Theses of Seng-zhao', only three are here presented in their English translation. The original Chinese text is one with 'Collected Annotations' made by Tsin Yuan in the Sung Dynasty with a postscript dated 1058 C.E. It is a lithography edition made in recent years after a Sung print with slight damages on the edges of several wooden blocks.

Prior to the present translation there were two in circulation, one in English and another one in modern Chinese. The English one, not very popular and known only to a few scholars in China, was done by W. Liebenthal, a German professor in Peking in the nineteen-forties, entitled 'The Book of Chao' (included in Monumenta Serica as Monograph XIII, published by the Catholic University of Peking, 1948). The modern Chinese one was done by Ren Ji-yu, Director of the Institute for Research on World Religions in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. It had under separate cap-

tions also only three theses, two of which were included in his 'Collected Writings' that appeared in its third edition in 1974, Beijing, and the third one in the Journal of Researches of the same Institute in 1979, also Beijing. A word must be said about these two works.

Anyone in the field of literature who has had some experience in writing especially poetry can well understand the lines written in certain moments of inspiration or high creativity can scarcely be altered or written by the same author in another form on another occasion. The task of changing the olden phraseology into a modern one even in the same language is similar to that. It is not easier than to render it into another language. Equally 'the taste is lost', as Kumārajīva once remarked about the work of translation in general. Nevertheless, it is of great help to beginners.

With regard to Liebenthal's translation, it should be separately treated apart from his studies found in the same book. The comprehensive collection of lexicographical material, the extensive retranslation of the technical terms into the original Sanskrit, and the broad references made to ancient Chinese literature merit our high esteem. These studies are likely to be omitted by a Chinese scholar, yet they show how great the effort has been made in helping the Western reader to a better understanding of Chinese Buddhism in the so-called Pre-ch'an Period. He must have been partly if not totally guided in his researches by the late Prof. Tang Yung-t'ung (1893-1964) who was then teaching in Peking University where he worked. Prof. Tang Yung-t'ung was an eminent scholar in Buddhology whose *History of Chinese Buddhism* was worldly

known. At any rate, whether with or without his guidance, Lie-benthal worked intensively on this subject and the results he submitted are highly recommendable to English readers.

But his translation itself is less so. As he himself said: 'it is fairly literal but sometimes it seemed impossible to render the meaning without changing the phrasing. In one or two cases the translation is so free that it almost amounts to a mere outline of the content.' — Now, we do find the structure of the original entirely changed and rebuilt, and nearly every form is put into a European 'pattern' (Denkform). The ancient formula of reasoning characterised by the 'turning of the sentences', in fact, a wheeling round and round of the same and often tautological expressions, which should nevertheless be preserved in a faithful translation has been discarded and substituted by his own set of forms, and nearly at every step the terminologies employed are subject to discussion. Hence, numerous interpolations in the text, usually the less the better, as well as so many foot-notes are needed to bring out the sense to an approximation.

Thus, on the whole it gives the impression that the translator is being enmeshed in a great thorn-bush hardly able to extricate himself. The trouble with him lies not in his method which is a sound one but in his point of view. Fundamentally he regarded and treated it as any system of European philosophy which he could have avoided. It is there where he stumbled. As he has learned of the great Master Ou-yang Ching-wu the distinction between T'i and Yung (which is simply Being and Becoming in a universal sense), why not at the same time learned of him that 'Buddhism is neither philosophy nor religion'?

The present translation is done in a straightforward way with nothing added or reduced, and made just readable without any embellishment. It is meant to help the readers to a clear understanding of how Buddhism at its first stage of introduction to China was in its theoretical aspect accepted by Taoism, as interpreted by a Chinese monk, Seng-zhao. It is meant for the general reading public instead for only a few scholars.

Usually a new translation should be better than its preceding ones. But in this case it is probably not so, since every translator has his own way. And, as a final remark on the contents of this booklet, it may be said that verbal sophistications and duels and arguments of this kind had a long history which began in Europe since Socrates, in India since Buddha's time, and in China since shortly after Confucius.

Beijing

Feb. 15, 1981

Hsu Fancheng

Contents

(目 录)

Introduction	
(序 言)	(1)
Three theses of Seng Zhao	
(肇 论)	(1)
On things unchanging	
(物不迁论)	(2)
On the unreal-void	
(不真空论)	(22)
On the wisdom unknowing	
(般若无知论)	(44)

**THREE THESES OF
SENG-ZHAO**