SOME RANDOM (AND VERY PRELIMINAR) NOTES ON PERFOMATIVE DIMENSIONS OF BUDDHIST COMMENTARIES WRITTEN IN CHINA AND KOREA

Jörg Plassen, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

1. Introduction: The *shu* commentary

First appearing in the 4th century, commentaries known as *shu* 疏[1] or *i-shu* 義 疏 enjoyed increasing popularity among Buddhist and Confucian exegetes of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589) and developed into the standard commentarial form of the Ch'en (557–589), Sui (589–618) and T'ang (618–906) dynasties. In the Buddhist context, the *shu* 疏 provides a paragraph-by-paragraph exposition of a given *ching* 經 or *lun* 論, i.e. a sūtra spoken by the Buddha or an authoritative treatise written by one of the great Indian Bodhisattvas (e.g., Vasubandhu, Nāgārjuna, or Āryadeva). By its nature, the *shu* 疏 is an interlineary commentary that follows the original text (*sui wen* 隨文) paragraph by paragraph, at times breaking it down into individual sentences. Thus, the commentary is organized in alternations of quotes from the text commented upon and corresponding notes. Often, instead of the whole text, only sections regarded as particularly important are quoted. Also, in some cases, only key phrases are glossed, while in others virtually all of the text is accompanied by extensive notes. These usually internally are structured through enumerations or lists and and also series of questions (or objections) and answers, individual arguments again being supported by quotations from other chapters or texts.

Since the sixth century, *shu* 疏 commentaries often begin with a *hsüan* 玄 or *hsüan-i* 玄義, an introduction on the "dark [meaning]" of the text, which outlines major points to be kept in mind when reading the text. The contents of the *hsüan* are arranged under a variable set of generic sections, often labeled as

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1 Traditional reading: *su*. The original meaning of this designation ("fanning out," "thinning out") remains unclear. In the case of Buddhist textual traditions, the translation as "sub-commentary," often encountered in sinological literature, is misleading. The term *shu* appears to be an abbreviation of the alternative designation *i-shu* ("fanning out," or "thinning out the meanings").

men 門 and normally arranged in decreasing degree of abstractness. Thus, along with the overall intention (*ta-i* 大意), the "ancestor-and-purport" (*tsung-chih* 宗旨), i.e. the particular point of departure and the more specific purport of the text, the title (*ming-t'i* 名題), or the causes and conditions (*yin-yüan* 因緣), i.e. the conditions of text production, may be addressed. Alternatively, at times they may begin with a brief preface (*hsü* 序) in addition to the *hsüan* 玄.

Although *hsüan* 玄 and *shu* 疏 may be forged into a unitary whole,[2] they were distinct textual forms. In fact, we know that both *shu* 疏 and *hsüan* 玄 occasionally were written as separate works and circulated independently,[3] sometimes bearing other designations (e.g., *yu-i* 遊意, "[Free] roaming in the Intention [of the text commented upon]") Furthermore, there is textual evidence that in fact they were considered more or less independent genres. Thus, in *Hsü Kao-seng chuan*'s biography of the famous San-lun master Chi-tsang (549–623), we read that he wrote numerous *hsüan* and *shu*, which "were received everywhere."[4]

Shu and *hsüan* evolved at the borderline of orality and literacy, for various biographical entries in the *Kao seng chuan* attest to their being, in some way or another, connected with lecturing (*chiang* 講). Based on this external evidence rather than the texts themselves, we can distinguish different types. Some texts apparently were used by the Dharma master as scripts for his lectures. Other texts, most often labeled *chi* 記 ("record"), are but transcripts of such lectures written down by the disciples. Finally, there exists a group of "redacted" lectures rewritten by the master himself on imperial command or redacted by his disciples as "official writings" after his death.[5]

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2   Such as in the case of the famous Silla exegete Wŏnhyo's 元曉 (618–686) *Kŭmgang-sammaegyŏng non* 金剛三昧經綸, cf. below.

3   Chi-tsang's *San-lun hsüan-i* 三綸玄義 (written on imperial command after a dispute at court) may be among the best known examples of such independent *hsüan* texts.

4   Cf. T.2060.50.514c29.

5   Thus, although Chi-tsang's *San-lun hsüan-i* 三論玄義 (T.1852.45.1a–14b) very much mirrors the influence of his teacher Fa-lang, when (re)writing this text and the commentaries on the Three Treatises (i.e., the *Chung-kuan lun shu* 中觀論疏, *Pai-lun shu* 百論疏, *Shih-erh men lun shu* 十二門論疏), he drew on his own lecture notes, whereas Kuan-ting 灌頂 (561–632) edited (and apparently significantly rewrote) lectures originally held by his deceased mentor Chih-i 智顗 (538–597).

It might be noted, that in spite of a gradual resurrection of the author in literary sciences, more "decentered" concepts of authorship might be fruitfully applied also to research on Buddhist commentarial literature.

Depending on the reputation and position of the *fa-shih* 法師 ("Dharma master"), lectures might take place in remote mountain temples or in the capital. Sometimes they were held in front of the monastic community, at other times in the presence of huge crowds, and occasionally even at court, i.e. in presence of the emperor. Some were famous as lecturers and did not write themselves but rather used the works of others. Other monks did not lecture but rather would send their texts to others who would present them orally.[6]

Certain seminal lectures apparently were viewed as or could be stylized into memorable *events*. Thus, in his introduction to the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* 摩訶止觀 ("The great cessation and contemplation"), Kuan-ting (531–631) noted the twenty-sixth day of the fourth month in the fourteenth year of K'ai-huang (594) as the date on which Chih-i lectured on the "luminous quiescence of cessation and contemplation."[7] At the same time, written evidence demonstrates that texts were exchanged for dissemination or private study. Also, we occasionally find references to the composition of specific texts at a given place and time, indicating that the authors indeed conceived their writings not merely as preparatory notes but rather as literary works in their own right, as a remark by Chi-tsang in his *Ching-ming hsüan lun* 淨名玄論 illustrates:

昔在江南著法華玄論
Once, when I was staying south of the river and wrote (*chu* 著) the *Fa-hua hsüan-lun* 法華玄論 [...][8]

An interesting coincidence of both perspectives appears in Hui-chün's *Ch'u-chang chung-chia i* 初章中假義, a text hitherto unfortunately accessible only through quotations in Japanese secondary literature:

興皇師 太建六年五月 房内亦開六章
Master Hsing-huang (i.e. Fa-lang 法朗, 507–581) in the fifth month of the sixth year of T'ai-chien in [his] room also opened (*k'ai* 開) six sections (*chang* 章) [...][9]

The verb *k'ai* 開 ("to open") apparently does not refer to the physical act of opening the scripture role, but more aptly should be understood as a technical

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6   Cf. Jörg Plassen. *Die Spuren der Abhandlung (*Lun-chi*): Exegese und Übung im San-lun des sechsten Jahrhunderts.* Diss., Hamburg, Univ., 2002, p. 16ff. a. 26ff.

7   *chih-kuan ming-ching* 止觀明淨, tr. Swanson.

8   T.1780.38.876b28.

9   Cf. Itō Takatoshi, "Sanron gaku ni okeru Shōshō chūge gi (ka)," *Komazawa Daigaku Bukkyōgakku-bu kenkyū kiyō*, 34 (1976), pp.174–203, here p. 180.

term for introducing analytical subdivisions. Nevertheless, the use of the term *chang* 章 ("sections"), normally employed only in conjunction with texts or lectures based on texts, and a subsequent enumeration of the six section titles together suggest that the event referred to should be understood as having the double nature of a memorable lecture and the presentation of a unique text.[10]

2. Lectures as performances of commentaries

As André Bucher has recently pointed out, summing up very basic insights of Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida, the performative is neither juxtaposed against the text, nor does it transcend it into another dimension. Rather, it is an essential momentum of the text itself: there is no text without performance, just as there is no performance without text.[11] However, apart from this very general insight, what qualifies these lecture texts to be labeled "performative"? To get closer to an answer on this question, we should begin by turning briefly to the scanty knowledge we have of the presentation of a sixth-century Buddhist lecture.

The most important extant source is an acount appended to an edict against wine-drinking and meat-eating by Emperor Wu-ti 武帝 (r. 502–49) of the Liang 梁 preserved in the *Kuang-hung ming chi* 廣弘明, which in Yu Siyi's translation runs as follows:

> In the morning of the twenty-third [of the fifth month in 513] Fa-yün of the Kuang-chai Temple ascended the east-facing podium in front of the Hua-lin Palace, assuming the role of dharma master.
> Hui-ming of the Wa-kuan Temple ascended the west-facing podium as *tu-chiang* 都講 and chanted one part of the Four Avasthā of the *Ta-nie-p'an ching* 大涅般經 (*Mahāparinir-vāṇa sūtras*), detailing the interpretation that meat-eaters would be cut off from the seed (*vīja*) of the Great Compassion.

10 The commemoration of the lecture seems to entail that the original script either was not accessible to the compiler, consisted only of notes, or was not destined for dissemination among a wider audience.

11 Cf. André Bucher, "Text und Performanz. Walter Serners Kriminalgeschichten." In: Barbara Sabel (ed.): *Der entgrenzte Text. Perspektiven auf einen literatur- und kulturwissenschaftlichen Leitbegriff.* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001, pp. 7–22, here: p. 12.

As Fa-yün was expounding, His Majesty had come in person. Mats were placed north of the podiums, on which monks and nuns were seated in the order of their ranks. [...] [12]

As the text explains, the main task for the *tu-chiang* (i.e. "assistant lecturer") is to chant passages of the text that the Dharma master will comment on. Apparently originating with Confucian lecturing traditions of the late Han dynasty, the institution of the *tu-chiang* in the Buddhist context can be traced back as far as to the Chin dynasty. Thus, T'ang and the authors following his footsteps also quote an entry in the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* 世説新語 compiled by Liu I-ch'ing 劉義慶 (403–444). The passage is a report on a lecture held by the famous Chih Tun (314–366) on the *Wei-mo so shuo ching* 維摩所説經 or *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* – as Yu Shiyi quotes from Mather's translation:

> Chih Tun, Hsü Hsün, and other persons were once gathered at the villa of the Prince of K'uai-chi, Ssu-ma Yü. Chih acted as dharma master (*fa-shih*) and Hsü as discussant (*tu-chiang*). Whenever Chih explained an interpretation there was no one present who was not completely satisfied, and whenever Hsü delivered an objection everyone applauded and danced with delight. But in every case they were filled with admiration for the forensic skill of the two performers, without the slightest discrimination regarding the content of their respective arguments. [13]

What is really striking in this vivid report is *ching-t'an* 精談 ("pure conversation") character of the event, reminding much more of a witty verbal exchange in a debaters' contest than of a lecture. This case of Dharma master and *tu-chiang* apparently vying with each other for the audience's favour might be regarded as mirroring the spirit of the time or just an extreme example. Be that as it may, the structure of question and answer was commonly used in fifth-century commentaries (*chu* 注 and *chieh* 解) and related *catenae*, and also became an *integral part* of sixth-century *shu* and *hsüan*. However, while such questions and answers at least partly could be based on real debates, the frequent occurrence of unspecific references such as "the *Ti-lun* 地論 masters say" indicates a certain artificiality. In fact, the sequencing of these questions and answers normally would follow a certain plot imposed by the author of the commentary.

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12   Yu Shiyi, *Reading the Chuang-tzu in the T'ang Dynasty. The Commentary of Ch'eng Hsüan-ying (fl. 631–652)*. Asian thought and culture, vol. 31.9. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000, pp. 173f. For the original text, cf. T.2103.52.299a1–5.

13   op. cit., pp. 172f. For the Chinese text, cf. *Shih-shuo hsin yü* 世説新語, 4/40.

This point may be illustrated in the overall layout of the already mentioned *San-lun hsüan-i*. Although the actual debate appears to have ended with Chi-tsang's defeat, in the first part of the text, labeled *p'o hsieh* 破邪 ("scattering the deviant [views]") various groups of opponents are defeated. In doing so, the opponents are arranged according to their level of understanding. Thus, first outsiders and Buddhist are set apart, and, in the case of the Buddhist opponents, the scale then ranges from Hinayanists on the lower end to heretics in the own tradition on the other end. In the second part of the text, termed *hsien cheng* 顯正 ("manifesting the correct"), the contents of the previous questions and answers are taken up again, but question and answer themselves are only used to back up subordinate arguments in intricate movements towards what might be termed a "correct understanding." Question and answer have become a written rhetorical device.

How then were questions and answers presented in the lectures? Although some of these pseudo-dialogues may have been designed to have been read (if not performed) by the Dharma master alone, this is somewhat difficult to imagine in the case of longer question and answer sections. Rather, it might be reasonable to assume that the *tu-chiang* would take the role of the opponent(s), paralleling Yu Shiyi's findings in the Taoist context.[14] In any case it may be safe to remark that the artificial nature of the question and answer dialogues necessitated some kind of dramatization in these parts of the lecture.[15] In this sense, one might be justified in saying that with a limited time span, an organizational programme, a set of performers, an audience and a place and occasion of performance, Buddhist temple lectures might very well be regarded as cultural performances.

What is the source of this preference for organizing content in question and answer? Did it indeed evolve out of the *ching-t'an* discussions, or were there other foundations? Unfortunately, at this stage we will not be able to give conclusive answers to these questions. And yet, it should not pass without notice that there was a "theoretical side" to the use of questions and answers. Already T'an-ying 曇影 (n.d., fl. 412) writes in his preface to his *Chung-lun* 中論 commentary:

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14   op. cit., pp. 178f.

15   In the Tun-huang *chiang-ching wen* 講經文 corpus, texts corresponding to *su-chiang* 俗講 ("popular lectures"), introductory stage instructions, e.g. "please begin to chant [...]," are quite frequent. Shi Yu-yi also quotes a Taoist text bearing such notes. Cf. Mair, "Oral and Written Aspects of Chinese Sutra Lectures," *Chinese Studies* 4.2 (1986), pp. 311–334, here pp. 313f. and Shi, op. cit., 175ff.

寂此諸邊　故名曰中　問答析微。所以為論。是作者之大意也

It silences all these one-sidednesses, therefore it is named "middle." One breaks down to the finest [parts by] question and answer, therefore it is a "treatise." This is the great intention of the author. (*tsuo-che* 作者).[16]

Most obviously, "question and answer" in this quote stands pars pro toto for the argumentative structure of the *Chung-lun* 中論, a commentary to the Chinese translation of Nāgārjunas *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*s (forthwith: MMK) which was translated by Kūmarajīva and his team in Ch'ang-an around 409. Even though the general flow of the commentary is structured by the chapters and verses to be commented upon, the explanations themselves indeed are given as series of question (*wen yüeh* 問曰)and answer (*ta yüeh* 答曰).

This terse definition of a commentary based on a simple observation concerning the *Chung-lun* 中論 seems to have exerted considerable influence. Quoted or paraphrased by Chi-tsang in several of his works, it also appears to be the ideological background of an intriguing passage in one of his major works. In his *Fa-hua hsüan lun* 法華玄論, Chi-tsang begins the exposition with a discussion of the methods of propagating the sutra (*hung ching fang-fa* 弘經方法). The first of seven subsections deals with the meaning of the term *fa-shih* 法師, or "Dharma master."

3. The Dharma master, a Bodhisattva performing the role of the Buddha

Quoting Vasubandhu's commentary, Chi-tsang at first enumerates and discusses the three meanings given in the "Fa-shih p'in" 法師品, chapter 10 of the *Fa-hua ching* 法華經: 1. entering the room of the Thus-come (i.e. the Tathāgata, or Buddha), 2. taking on the robes of the Thus-come, 3. sitting on the seat of the Thus-come. The "room of the Thus-come" would stand for a compassionate mind, the "robes" would mean a gentle and harmonious mind enduring insult, and the "seat" would denote the emptiness of the *dharma*s as its basic premise.

Then Chi-tsang reduces these three "access gates" to two basic meanings and enumerates a series of definitions and designations covering various aspects of a Dharma master. The text allows an intriguing glimpse into the self-understanding of the Dharma master Chi-tsang:

16   T.2145.55.77b6f.

慈忍為福德空觀為智慧　福慧兼習大道可弘　謂福慧法師
是以經云具二莊嚴能問能答

Compassion and forbearance (*tz'u-jen* 慈忍) are the power of blessings (*fu-te* 福德), the emptiness-contemplation (*k'ung-kuan* 空觀) is wisdom (*chih-hui* 智慧). Blessings and wisdom both being practiced, the Great Way can be propagated. – [This] one calls "Dharma master of blessings and wisdom." Therefore, the *sūtra* says: "equipped with both embellishments, one can ask [questions] and one can answer (*neng wen neng ta* 能問能答)."

所言法師具問答者弘道之人必敷經說論。經論之中有問答　巧申菩薩之難為能問
妙顯如來之通為能答　巧申外人之難為能問　妙顯論主之通為能答

Where one says that the Dharma master is equipped with [the ability to] question and answer. The persons propagating the way must make known (*fu* 敷) *sūtras* and give expositions on (*shuo* 説) treatises (*lun* 論). In *sūtras* and treatises there are questions and answers (*wen-ta* 問答).[17]

Obviously, the Dharma master needs to achieve a thorough knowledge of the techniques of question and answer, as these are devices employed in the texts commented upon. This knowledge again has to be reenacted when propagating the texts to others:

經論之中有問答　巧申菩薩之難為能問　妙顯如來之通為能答
巧申外人之難為能問　妙顯論主之通為能答

[…] In the sutras and treatises there are questions and answers. To skillfully state the Bodhisattva's objections (*nan* 難) is to be able to question; to wonderfully manifest the Thus-come's thoroughgoing understanding (*t'ung* 通) is to be able to answer.

To skillfully state objections by outsiders (*wai-jen chih nan* 外人之難) is to be able to question, to wonderfully manifest the thoroughgoing understanding [on the side] of the owner of the treatise (*lun-chu chih t'ung* 論主之通, *i.e the Bodhisattva's understanding*) is to be able to answer. […][18]

In fact, these techniques have to be applied also independently when defending and manifesting the correct teaching, as the text proceeds to explain:

摧破九十六種外道為能問　妙顯諸佛如來正法為能答　又能破三乘異執為能問　巧
顯一乘同歸為能答　能問能答佛教宣流故名大法師也

To break down and scatter the 96 kinds of [opponents from] outside the way, is to be able to question. To wonderfully manifest the True Dharma of the Buddhas or Thus-comes is to be able to answer. Furthermore, to be able to scatter the aberrant graspings (i.e. false theories brought about by clinging to individual statements) of the three vehicles, is to be able to question. To skillfully manifest the identic refuge of the One vehicle (I-sheng *t'ung kuei* 一乘通歸) is to be able to answer.

17   T.1720.34.361a24ff.
18   T.1720.34.361a25–28.

By being able to question and being able to answer, the Buddha-Dharma is proclaimed and flows [freely]. – Therefore one names [him] a "Great Dharma master."[19]

Further on, Chi-tsang not only names "understanding" (*chieh* 解) an indispensable prerequisite for acting as a Dharma master, but more explicitly writes:

又如論云 以空觀故名為菩薩 具大悲故名摩訶薩
謂菩薩摩訶薩法師以有如是種種利益

Also, as the Treatise says: "Because of the emptiness-contemplation he is named Bodhisattva. Because he is equipped with great compassion, he is named Mahāsattva." One calls [him] Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva-Dharma master because he has such various kinds of merits.[20]

Chi-tsang would not go so far as state that the Dharma master entering the room, taking on the robes and occupying the seat of the Thus-come eventually should be equated with the Buddha. Nevertheless, obviously the Dharma master should not only strive to reenact the role of the eminent Bodhisattvas (e.g. Nāgārjuna, or Vasubandhu), but instead should *be* a great Bodhisattva *himself*.

Although the various other definitions of the ideal Dharma master given in this passage cannot be discussed in this context, clearly the notion of a balance between compassion and emptiness-wisdom pervades all of them. Lecturing always is a compassionate act, which evolves out of the mental state of "emptiness-contemplation." Of course this has implications for the lectures themselves.

4. The performative commentary

Among these "performance" texts, a certain subgroup might be labelled "performative" in the sense that they present interactions that may be characterized as visualisation and production. Visualizing and enacting, rather than explaining or theoretically justifying, these texts quite literally aim to lead the reader/listener towards awakening and to perfect the authoring Dharma master's skill-in-means.[21]

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19   T.1720.34.361a28–b2.

20   T.1720.34.361b22–24.

21   The Bodhisattva-"training" focuses mainly on the refinement of his skills-in-means, training on behalf of oneself and practice for others effectively becoming one.

The *Lun-chi* 論迹,[22] a *hsüan* written by Chi-tsang 吉藏, provides an extreme instance for what might be labelled the "cathartic" mode, which aims at being "performative." A *hsüan*-type introduction to the *Chung-lun* 中論, the text is highly elusive to any philosophical-minded approach. After certain premises have been raised, they are replaced by conflicting statements from another point of view, often only to be reasserted again for some other reason. The basic technique may be exemplified by a glance at the beginning of a section dealing with the similarities and differences between Buddhas and Bodhisattvas:

一往且折彼疑 則云 不同不異
In a first approach breaking down the doubts of that [opponent] one says: they are not identical and they are not different

佛與菩薩 所以不同 同顯實相 所以不異
[They are] Buddha or Bodhisattvas, therefore they are not identical. Identically they manifest the marks of the real, and therefore they are not different.

此是同異不同不異
This means "being identical and being different, they are not identical and not different."

既得不同異即得同異
Having reached [the conclusion] that they are not identical or different, one then immediately reaches [the conclusion] that they are different and identical.

佛菩薩具足不具足勝劣故異　皆破邪顯正故同也
Buddha and Bodhisattvas, because of being completely endowed and not fully endowed [with the marks of Buddhahood] and [thus] being superior and inferior, are different, and, because of [their] scattering of what deviates and manifesting the right, are identical.

言佛菩薩異者　佛即説教樹二諦赴録　菩薩直助佛揚化無別制作也
That one says that Buddha and Bodhisattvas are different: The Buddha immediately expounds the two-fold scrutiny in order to give attention to the conditioned [living beings], [whereas] the Bodhisattvas directly support the Buddha in spreading [the teaching] and converting, and have no separate [literary] production. [...][23]

What follows are differentiations among the Bodhisattvas. As this brief example shows, the commentary is structured by discussions of opposite pairs. The elucidations often begin by contrasting two noun phrases, e.g. "Buddha" and

22   T.1853.45.68a–76b.
23   T.1853.45.69a ff.

"Bodhisattvas," "sutra" or "treatise," "scattering" and "notifying." The opposing terms then each are related to similarly opposing predicates or meanings (*i* 義), e.g. making use of the two-fold scrutiny vs. making use of the two-fold wisdom, which overtly contradict each other. Such expositions concerning the relation between the noun phrases and the predicates proceed in two steps with differing perspectives. Thus, first the view is taken that both predicates can be attributed to both nouns. Then the differences concerning their applicability to these nouns are highlighted. In the sections emphasizing the differences, predicate "a" at first may be attributed to one term, while predicate "b" is attributed to another term, but after a slight change of perspective somewhat further on the attributions may be reversed.

Due to the pervasive use of this and other techniques, terms become "deconstructed," and in the end virtually no philosophical insights – except for the pointlessness of the doctrines held by the opponent – can be learned from the text. The careful composition of the text and certain meta-statements show that the puzzling and seemingly redundant contradictions are merely devices designed to lead away from an intrinsically essentialistic grasping at fixed concepts (*hsing-ch'ih* 性執), and increase the awareness of the relativity of all determinations.[24]

Almost needless to say, the text mirrors exactly the attitude of the Dharma master who speaks from the perspective of emptiness, as described in the passages quoted above. Furthermore, it applies the characteristics of dependent origination to the realm of verbal statements, and in doing so also enacts an important theme found in the text commented upon, i.e. MMK verse 24:18:

> 眾因緣所生法 我説是無 亦為是假名 亦是中道義
> All dharmas arising by causes and conditions I explain as being that which does not have [differentiating characteristics], also [I] call them provisional designations, also they are the meaning of the Middle Path.[25]

Just as all *dharma*s in general have no self-nature, but rather evolve from direct and indirect causes, individual interpretations are no longer valid statically and

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24 The most striking feature of this technique of undermining fixed positions by juxtaposing and alternating opposites employed in this commentary is its kataphatic nature, which almost seems to run counter against the *prasaṇga*, or reduction *ad absurdum*, dominating most passages of the *Chung-lun* itself.

25 T.1564.30.33b11–12. The prose commentary has *k'ung* 空 ("emptiness") instead of *wu* 無 ("non-having"). Cf. 33b15.

by themselves, but developed only provisionally (*chia* 假) and with emphasis on particular circumstances. Due to mutual erosion among the multitude of conflicting statements presented, the emptiness (*k'ung* 空) of these alternating statements gradually becomes tangible. In parallel, the opposition between dependent origination and emptiness itself is levelled in movements back and forth between a unifying and a differentiating perspective, gradually leading towards a mental state (or, perhaps more accurately, flux) corresponding to the middle (*chung* 中). Thus, the commentary is not only explaining, but above all, *embodying* the assumed intention of the text commented upon.

As the commentary leaves hardly any statement uncontested, its major purpose is not to convey "meanings," but rather to train the audience in threading the middle way between "having" (*yu* 有) and "not-having" (*wu* 無) [differentiations] characteristics (and thus differentiations). Only towards the end of the text, this concern and the method employed are revealed straightforwardly. Discussing the full title *Chung-kuan lun* 中觀論, Chi-tsang writes:

故論非但盡言. 亦復盡觀. 觀非但盡. 亦復盡論. 中非但盡觀. 亦復盡論.
[...] Therefore, the treatise does not only exhaust the words, it also again exhausts (*chin* 盡, here to be understood both as "to devour and thus bring to a halt" and as "to take the last out of something") the contemplation. Contemplation does not only exhaust the conditions, it also again exhausts the treatise. The middle does not only exhaust contemplation, it also again exhausts contemplation.

是故今表中觀論名. 只欲盡淨諸法. 不如人解以論欲釋中觀義. 但欲盡淨諸法可爾.
For this reason, [if I] now reveal the name "Treatise of the Middle Contemplation" (*Chung-kuan lun* 中觀論), I only want to exhaust and cleanse (*chin-ching* 盡淨) the *dharma*s. – [This] does not equal the explanations by others, who take the treatise and want to explain the meaning of "middle contemplation." Only [if one] wants to exhaust and cleanse the *dharma*s, it is feasible [to do] so.

今表一中. 非但中是中. 辨諸法皆中.
[If] I now point out the One middle, [then] not only the "middle" is the middle. I set apart that the dharma*s* all are [in the state of the] middle.

既道諸法中. 復有何法可有. 故表中則盡淨諸法 [...]
After having said that all dharmas are [in the state of the] middle, which dharma would be [left], which [still] would "have" [distinctions]? Therefore: Pointing out the Middle, one exhausts and cleanses the *dharma*s.[26]

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26   T.1853.45.76b28ff.

The main point of this ironic passage is that the method to cleanse the *dharma*s (both teachings and phenomena) lies in affirming every single one as [an aspect of] the middle, so that none survives as a self-differentiating entity. By revealing this strategy, all of a sudden a new light is shed on the previously displayed host of seemingly conflicting statements. What beforehand had been considered the "provisional" has always been nothing less than the middle itself. This climactic 'twist' in the text indicates that its visualization of the middle is designed to lead the audience to a certain experience, and thus suggests a strong emphasis on "production." It is performative in the very literal sense of bringing a process to its fulfilment.

A similar, yet more "quietist" approach can be found in the opening sections of the *Kŭmgang sammaegyŏng non* 金剛三昧經論, a text written by the outstanding Silla exegete Wŏnhyo 元曉 (617–686).[27] Again, the reader is subjected to a constant move back and forth between the perspectives of unity and diversity, the text oscillating between the "One mind" and lengthy lists of individual *dharma*s. Due to their repetitive redundancy, these textual movements again cannot be interpreted but as intended to make the reader gradually *experience* the complementary character of unity and diversity.

In spite of terminological differences, the technique of leveling opposites employed in a move towards non-differentiation definitely is indebted to Chi-tsang's works. What is unique about this text is the intricate way in which different topics are interwoven with each other. The outline of the text enumerates four sections:

初述大意 次辨經宗 三釋名題 四消文義
First, I confer the overall intention. Next, I differentiate the ancestor (i.e., the specific point of departure and purport) of the *sūtra*. Third, I analyze the title. Fourth, I dissolve (lit.: 'melt') the text.

However, already towards the end of the section on the "overall intention" we find explanations concerning the title of the text. Likewise, the section on the "ancestor" or specific point of departure contains a passage, the contents of

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27   For a more detailed discussion of the structure of this work, the interested reader may be referred to Joerg Plassen: "Another inquiry into the commentarial structure of Wŏnhyo's works, focussing on *Kŭmgang sammaegyŏng non*," in: Antonetta L.Bruno and Federica Baglioni, (comp.): *Proceedings of the 21ˢᵗ Conference of The Association for Korean Studies in Europe*. Frascati, 2004, pp. 270–75. For sake of brevity, in the given context I will restrict myself to presenting the major results.

which are equated with the "overall intention," and later on also briefly touches upon the title of the text. In other words, although each section is dedicated to a specific topic, these topics are raised also in other sections. Thus, the boundaries of the terms adduced in the section headings are blurred, and even the originally static nature of the analytical scheme itself is undermined with the result that it becomes fluid.

It should be obvious that resorting to this compositional technique at the same time emphasizes the interrelatedness of the sections as parts of a whole. In fact, the *Kŭmgang sammaegyŏng non* as a whole is marked by particular interest in part-whole relations. Because of this emphasis on integrity and wholeness, the usual structural division between *hsüan* and *shu* also is avoided. The outline integrates the *hsüan* and *shu* parts into a consistent whole. Thus, even though the part corresponding to the *shu* or *sŏ* fans out into a multitude of ramifications, the text remains an integrated whole, and the reader may trace even the most minute statement back to the "source of One Mind."

Repeated references to the relation between "one" and "ten" remind one of Hua-yen or Hwaŏm 華嚴 thought, and even more so does the special emphasis on the relationship between the whole and the parts. In fact, the intertwining of diversity and unity and the mirroring of subjects into each other might even be seen as embodying the principles of *li shih wu ai / i sa mu ae* 理事無礙 ("non-obstruction between [underlying] structure and [particular] events") and *shih shih wu ai / sa sa mu ae* 事事無礙 ("the non-obstruction between event and event"): The *Kŭmgang sammaegyŏng non* belongs to the late period of Wŏn-hyo's work, and is supposed to have been written after Ŭisang, one of Chih-yen's (602–68) major disciples and the leading Hwaŏm proponent in Silla, returned from China in 668.

Wŏnhyo's work is devoid of a climactic structure, and focuses more on visualization rather than on the abrupt evocation of an existential soteriological experience. Whether this also reflects a shift in the concept of practice, assigning gradual visualization itself a higher value, can only be left to further scrutiny. On the contrary, one might even question whether the rather literary *Kŭmgang sammaegyŏng non* to some degree also represents a stage in which lecturing itself became enacted in literature. As the introductory remarks on the *shu* genre show, the commentarial form Wŏnhyo resorted to is what in the Chinese context corresponded to that of a lecture manuscript. However, hardly anyone among the Silla clergy would have been able to follow an oral lecture delivered on the basis of such a text. Thus it is very likely that the text itself never was read to the audience, and only served as the basis of a vernacular lecture.

5. A brief, preliminary conclusion

The above inquiry must be considered a speculative attempt at judging the usefulness of the concepts of "performance" and "performativity" in the context of Buddhist commentarial literature. Furthermore, the two examples of commentaries "performing emptiness" that have been discussed in the last section may be viewed as extreme examples, and scores of Buddhist works with a much more "philosophic" agenda might come to mind.

However, the still prevalent "philosophical bias" in research on textual traditions has led to widespread neglect of the practical soteriological and related literary dimensions of the texts. Thus, despite the appearance of a wealth of studies on ritual, the relation between text and practice remains to be studied in more detail. At least to a certain extent, concepts of "performance" and "performativity" should prove useful "skillful means" in this endeavor.