

# ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE *CHUNG-LUN* 中論

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The *Pai-lun* 百論, *Shih-erh-mên-lun* 十二門論, and *Chung-lun* 中論 are traditionally regarded as the three basic texts of Mādhyamika Buddhism in China, Korea, and Japan. In a paper delivered at the Third Annual Conference of the Nihon Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kai at Komazawa University, Tōkyō, I attempted to question the authenticity of the *Pai-lun* and *Shih-erh-mên-lun*.<sup>1</sup> In the present paper I wish to similarly investigate the authorship and reliability of the *Chung-lun* which is the most important of the three Mādhyamika texts.

Heretofore it has been common practice in China and Japan to attribute the authorship of the *Chung-lun* to Lung-shih 龍樹 (Nāgārjuna, ca. 175–200 A. D.). It has also been frequently asserted in traditional Asian and Western scholarship that the original verses of the *Chung-lun* are extant in Sanskrit. However, I believe that such opinions are in bibliographical and textual error for the following reasons.

The *Chung-lun* 中論 (*Taishō* No. 1564 in vol. 30) is a Chinese translation made in 409 A. D. by Chiu-mo-lo-shih 鳩摩羅什 (Kumārajīva, 344–413 A. D.) from a text no longer extant, which now is presumed to have been in Sanskrit and is often called the *Mādhyamika-śāstra*. However, the word *śāstra* may not have been appended to the titles of Mādhyamika works before the early 5th century A. D. and Kumārajīva may have used the affix *lun* 論 in his translation-title *Chung-lun* in order to distinguish the work from texts in the *sūtra* class (*ching* 經). Judging by the nature of the composition, which contains quoted verses and their exposition, we

may rightly regard the *Chung-lun* as a commentary. But who was its author?

The heading to Kumārajīva's translation attributes the authorship of the verses to Lung-shih (Nāgārjuna) and the exposition to Ch'ing-mu 青目 [Pin-ch'ieh-lo 賓伽羅 or Pin-lo-ch'ieh 賓羅伽] (Piṅgala? *ca.* 3rd-4th century A. D.). My earlier paper considered the problem of identifying this Piṅgala and suggested a possible Central Asian, rather than Indian, origin for him and his writings.

In any case, we must distinguish between the prose or exposition and the verses in our study of the *Chung-lun*, and hence properly regard the present text as a Chinese translation by Kumārajīva of a commentary by an unidentified Piṅgala which quotes verses attributed to Nāgārjuna. Thus the *Chung-lun* as a whole is a compilation by Piṅgala and not Nāgārjuna.<sup>2</sup> It may or may not have originally been called *Mādhyamika-śāstra*; it may have been first written in Sanskrit or in a Central Asia language.

The *Chung-lun* as a commentary attributed to Piṅgala exists only in the one Chinese translation by Kumārajīva and has not been found in a comparable Tibetan translation or in its presumed Sanskrit (or possibly Central Asian) original. Hence, at the present time there appears to be no way to determine the authenticity of the prose or expository part of the *Chung-lun*. The verses in the *Chung-lun* can, however, be studied comparatively with other versions. We may presume that the original verses were composed by Nāgārjuna and were so quoted for exposition by Piṅgala. The title of this now lost work by Nāgārjuna was probably *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* or *Mūlamadhyamaka-Kārikā* or possibly *Prajñā-nāma-mūlamadhyamaka-Kārikā*, instead of *Mādhyamika-sūtra* as given by Louis de La Vallée Poussin and certainly not *Mādhyamika-śāstra* as given by Max

Walleser and other scholars. How many verses were there? According to Sêng-jui 僧叡 (378-444? A. D.) in his Preface (*Hsü* 序) to the *Chung-lun*, there were 500 verses (偈); but the present text contains only 446 verses (actually 445 by Nāgārjuna). A possible reason for this discrepancy might be that the Chinese figure *wu-pai* 五百, as used by Sêng-jui, stands for a round number or a general figure and not necessarily "five hundred" exactly (cf. *wan* 萬 meaning "ten thousand, large numbers, all"). In any case, we must note that the number of verses (of the so-called *Mādhyamika-Kārikā*) is 447 in all five Tibetan translations (of possibly the original text and of four commentaries) and 448 in the extant Sanskrit commentary (*Prasannapadā*) by Candrakīrti. The discrepancy between the Tibetan 447 verses-count and the Sanskrit 448 verses count can be explained by the fact that in Chapter III the 7th verse quoted in the *Prasannapadā* was originally not a verse in the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* but was the 55th verse in Chapter IV of the *Ratnāvali*, also composed by Nāgārjuna. Otherwise, the 447 Tibetan translated verses generally correspond to the actual 447 verses quoted by the *Prasannapadā*.<sup>3</sup> But how do these 447 verses in Sanskrit correspond with the 446 verses in the *Chung-lun*? By comparing La Vallée Poussin's edition (Bibliotheca Buddhica, IV) of the *Prasannapadā* commentary by Candrakīrti (ca. 600-650 A. D.) with the Taishō edition (No. 1564 in vol. 30) of the *Chung-lun* (*Mādhyamika-śāstra*?) commentary by Piṅgala (ca. 3rd-4th century A. D.), we may note the following verse discrepancies according to chapter.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter I. 14 Sanskrit verses and 16 Chinese verses: the introductory verse of the Sanskrit text was arranged as the first 2 verses of Chapter I of the Chinese text.

III. 9 Sanskrit verses and 8 Chinese verses: the Sanskrit 7th verse was originally not a verse in the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā*

but was the 55th verse in Chapter IV of the *Ratnāvali*.

- VII. 34 Sanskrit verses and 35 Chinese verses: the Sanskrit 7th verse corresponds to the Chinese 7th and 8th verses.
- VIII. 13 Sanskrit verses and 12 Chinese verses: the Sanskrit 11th verse would be inserted between the 10th and 11th verses of the Chinese text.
- XIII. 8 Sanskrit verses and 9 Chinese verses: the Sanskrit text does not include the Chinese 4th verse.
- XXI. 21 Sanskrit verses and 20 Chinese verses: the Sanskrit 5th verse (cf. the Tibetan translations and the Chinese translation *Pan-jo-têng-lun-shih* 般若燈論釋 [*Taishō* No. 1566 in vol. 30]) would be inserted between the 4th and 5th verses of the Chinese text.
- XXIII. 25 Sanskrit verses and 24 Chinese verses: the second half of the Sanskrit 10th verse corresponds to the second half of the Chinese 11th verse; the second half of the Sanskrit 11th verse corresponds to the second half of the Chinese 10th verse (thus the number of Sanskrit verses and Chinese verses remains the same). The Sanskrit 20th verse would be inserted between the 19th and 20th verses of the Chinese text (thus making a total of 25 Sanskrit verses and 24 Chinese verses).
- XXVI. 12 Sanskrit verses and 9 Chinese verses: the Sanskrit 3rd, 4th and first half of the 5th verses correspond to the Chinese 3rd verse; the Sanskrit second half of the 5th verse and first half of the 6th verse correspond to the Chinese 4th verse; the Sanskrit second half of the 6th verse and the entire 7th verse correspond to the Chinese 5th verse; the Sanskrit 11th verse is omitted in the Chinese text.

XXVII. 30 Sanskrit verses and 31 Chinese verses: the Chinese 25<sup>th</sup> verse is by Aryadeva and not Nāgārjuna (thus not to be counted in the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā*).

Such variations in numerical order, with notable omissions and additions, between the Chinese *Chung-lun* text and the Sanskrit *Prasannapadā* text raise the question as to which commentary quoting the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* is the more reliable. On the one hand, there is no Chinese translation of the so-called *Mādhyamika-śāstra* other than the *Chang-lun* version by Kumārajīva, nor is there a comparable Tibetan translation or Sanskrit original. The *Chung-lun* thus stands alone. On the other hand, the *Prasannapadā* in Sanskrit, although written possibly three centuries later, can be supported by comparison with its Tibetan translation. This textual circumstance has evidently induced Asian and Western Scholars to regard the *Prasannapadā* as authentically quoting the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* and hence to conclude that the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* itself actually exists in the Sanskrit original by Nāgārjuna (with a commentary, the *Prasannapadā*, by Candrakīrti).

But such an assumption cannot be substantiated until a thorough comparative study has been made of the verses of the now lost *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* which are available in only one Tibetan translation<sup>5</sup> (of the so-called *Prajñā-nāma-mūlamadhyamaka-Kārikā* which may be the original) and are quoted by one Sanskrit commentary (by Candrakīrti) with its Tibetan translation, by five Tibetan translations of now lost commentaries (attributed to Nāgārjuna [two ?], Buddhapālita, and Bhāviveka or Bhavya), and by five Chinese translations of now lost commentaries (attributed to Bhāviveka [cf. the Tibetan translation], Asaṅga, Sthiramati and Piṅgala [two, of which one by Nāgārjuna]). In such a comparative study it should be observed that the mere quotation of a verse by a commentary (such

as the *Prasannapadā*, especially if available only in translation (such as the *Chung-lun*), cannot suffice for the original text of the verse.

Thus, contrary to most scholarly opinion, the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* is known to us only indirectly through commentaries and is therefore of questionable textual status. As for one of its commentaries, the so-called *Mādhyamika-śāstra* or *Chung-lun* in Chinese translation, the prose or expository part is attributed to an unidentified Piṅgala, is evidently unknown in the Indian-Tibetan lineage of the *Mādhyamika*, and exists now only in one Chinese translation. The verse part of the *Chung-lun* is attributed to Nāgārjuna but does not agree in number, numerical order, or occasionally in meaning with comparable verses quoted by other commentaries in Sanskrit and in Tibetan translation. In short, our present knowledge is too meager for the *Chung-lun* as a whole to be accepted as an authoritative statement of the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* without serious qualification.

- Notes.** 1. See my "On the Authenticity of the *Pai-lun* 百論 and *Shin-erh-mên-lun* 十二門論" *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 印度學佛教學研究 (*Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, Tōkyō), vol. II, No. 2 (March, 1954), pp. 751-742.
2. Confusion sometimes results from the Japanese practice of indiscriminately giving the title *Chū-ron* (*Chung-lun*) 中論 to: (a) the commentary by Piṅgala (extant only in Chinese translation by Kumārajīva as the *Chung-lun*) including the 446 (actually 445) verses quoted from the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* by Nāgārjuna—the only proper designation.; (b) the 446 (actually 445) verses (in Chinese translation) quoted from the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* by Piṅgala's commentary customary designation, but in which case the title *Chū-ron* (*Chung-lun*) could not be reconstructed in Sanskrit as *Mādhyamika-śāstra* and there would be no way to title-distinguish Piṅgala's commentary from Nāgārjuna's verses; or the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* (448 verses, actually 447, in Sanskrit) quoted by the *Prasannapadā* commentary by Candrakīrti—thus confusing a Chinese translation of the verses as selected and quoted by Piṅgala with those verses selected and quoted by Candrakīrti in Sanskrit (and subsequently in Tibetan translation); or

other Chinese and Tibetan translations of the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* as quoted by other lost commentaries—thus confusing Piṅgala's selection and quotation of them with selections and quotations of them by Buddhapālita, Asaṅga, Bhāviveka, Sthiramati and possibly Nāgārjuna himself; (c) the commentaries by Piṅgala, Buddhapālita, Asaṅga, Bhāviveka, Sthiramati and Candrakīrti in Tibetan or Chinese translation—as a common appellation or classifier of these *Mādhyamika* texts. When the Chinese characters *Chung-lun* (*Chū-ron*) 中論 are used typographically to represent both the original work (presumably in Sanskrit) and its Chinese translation, and sometimes Tibetan translations, and no distinction is made between verse portion and prose portion of a commentary, then bibliographical error is unavoidable and confusion in textual discussion inevitably results. Japanese typography must somehow resort to romanizing Sanskrit, Tibetan, and other non-Japanese names and words when their native characters or letters are unavailable.

3. Consult Yamaguchi Susumu 山口益, *Chūk(w)an Bukkyō Ronkō* 中觀佛教論攷 (Studies on Mādhyamika Buddhism). Tōkyō: Kōbundō 弘文堂 1944. See especially Chapter I. 中論偈の諸本對照研究要論 pp. 1-28.
4. Consult Hatani Ryōtai 羽溪了諦, "Chū-ron 中論 (Japanese translation of the *Chug-lun*)" with an Appendix "Chū-ron Honju Sanshu Kanyaku Taishō 中論本頌三種漢譯對照 (A Comparative Analysis of the Verses [quoted] in Three Chinese Translation of [Commentaries 中論, 般若燈論, 大乘中觀釋論 on] the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā*) *Kokuyaku Issaikyō*, *Chū-k(w)an-bu*, vol. 1. 國譯一切經中觀部一, pp. 384-434. Compare Ui Hakuju 宇井伯壽, "Chū-ron 中論 (Japanese translation of the *Chung-lun* [with footnotes comparing the verses quoted in the *Chung-lun* and Sanskrit *Prasannapadā*])." *Kokuyaku Daizōkyō*, *Ron-bu*, vol. 5 國譯大藏經論部第五帙, pp. 1-261.
5. The *Dbu-ma rtsa-baḥi tshig-leḥur-byas-pa ses-rab ces-bya-ba* (Tōhoku No. 3824) is a Tibetan translation by Jñānagarbha and Cog-ro Kluḥi rgyal-mtshan (Nāgadh-vaja), revised first by Hasumati (from Kaśmīra) and Pa-tshab Ñi-ma grags and later by Kanaka varma and Pa-tshab Ñi-ma grags, of a now lost work attributed to Klu-sgrub (Nāgārjuna). Its title may be reconstructed in Sanskrit as *Prajñā-nāma-mūlamadhyamaka-Kārikā* or *Mūlamadhyamaka-Kārikā-prajñā-nāma*, which may be the now lost *Mādhyamika-Kārikā* by itself. Compare the *Dbu-ma rtsa-baḥi tshig-leḥur-byas-pa ses-rab* (Tōhoku Extra-Canonical Tibetan Collection No. 6778. Hbras-spuṅs pho-bran edition.).