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Chinese Tiantai Doctrine on Insentient Things' Buddha-Nature

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Abstract

This essay is an investigation into the concept of insentient things possessing Buddha-nature with a focus on Jingxi Zhanran's thoughts. In the history of Chinese Buddhism, Zhanran was not the originator of such a concept; however, he was the first Tiantai thinker to advocate this idea. He strongly argues that according to the Tiantai Perfect Teaching, Buddha-nature certainly extends to insentient things, which refers to inanimate objects without a nervous system, i.e., tangible or formless nonliving existents. This essay therefore aims at revealing this intent of Zhanran by exploring his argument of insentient things' Buddha-nature.

For Zhanran, the key quality of Buddha-nature is all-pervasiveness, and thus naturally, not only animate beings but also inanimate things are imbued with Buddha-nature. According to the principle of mutual inclusion, each dharma realm includes the other nine realms. Also, because body and land are mutually identical, the bodies and lands of Buddhas are interfused with those of the dwellers in the other nine realms. Thus, the inanimate lands also have Buddha-nature. Lastly, mutual inclusion reveals a two-way relationship between the sentient and the insentient, thereby giving the possibility of reversing the positions of the subjective observer and the objective phenomenon. As such, it is conducive to my conclusion that insentient things can also take up an active role on the path of Buddhahood, as Zhanran contends that they inherently possess the threefold Buddha-nature.

Keywords:

Buddha-nature, Insentient Things, All-pervasive, Mutual Inclusion, Zhanran

天台宗無情佛性思想

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摘要

本文以荆溪湛然大師的思想為中心，探討無情有佛性的概念。在中國佛教史上，湛然並非此一概念的先河，但卻是天台宗裡的首倡者。根據天台圓教，湛然主張佛性亦擴及有形與無形的非生命存在。本文主在透過探究湛然對無情佛性的論證，揭示他闡發圓教的意向。

在湛然看來，佛性的主要特性是「遍」，所以有情與無情物均涵括於佛性中。就「互具」言之，每一法界包含其他九法界。又由於「身土相即」，所以，佛的身土與其他九界眾生的身土亦互融互即。故而，無情之土亦有佛性。再者，「互具」顯示了情與無情的雙向關係，能觀的有情與被觀的現象界因之互換主客地位。由此，筆者認為無情也能於佛道上扮演主動積極的角色。

關鍵字：佛性、無情物、遍、互具、湛然

Introduction

The notion that only sentient beings possess Buddha-nature is widely accepted in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In contrast, Jingxi Zhanran 荆溪湛然 (711-782) in the Chinese Tiantai school (*tiantaizong* 天台宗) enthusiastically contends that insentient things also have this nature. He suggests that not only tangible objects like walls, rocks, and flora, but also formless sounds and smells possess Buddha-nature. However, this teaching of Zhanran leads to different interpretations, for he does not directly declare that insentient things can *become* Buddhas. Some scholars (such as Mou Zongsan) consider it a possibility that insentient things are only *passively* imbued with Buddha-nature (1989, 896, 904). Others (e.g., Shih Heng-Ching) argue that Zhanran's original assertion implies that insentient things *actively* have this nature and can attain Buddhahood.¹ Based on the principle of the Perfect Teaching (*yuanjiao* 圓教) in the Tiantai classification of Buddhist doctrines that Zhanran embraces, I argue that his proposal of insentient things possessing Buddha-nature indeed refers to their ability to attain Buddhahood.

This essay explores Zhanran's idea through several major Tiantai doctrines such as nonduality (*buer* 不二), all-pervasiveness (*bian* 遍), the threefold Buddha-nature (*sanyin foxing* 三因佛性), identity (*ji* 即),² and mutual inclusion (*huju* 互具). The nonduality between the animate and the inanimate eliminates any attachment to their absolute distinction. All-pervasiveness reveals Buddha-nature's subsumption of insentient things. The threefold Buddha-nature demonstrates that insentient things have conditioning and revealing causes, and therefore, they are capable of practice. The doctrines of identity along with nonduality describe the nondifferentiation between Buddha-nature and the insentient, although these two concepts may not explicitly indicate insentient things' active participation in Buddhahood. Furthermore, mutual inclusion explains that insentient things that are usually taken as the object can act as the subject.³ Based on these doctrines, I argue, Zhanran's proposal implies that insentient things actively possess Buddha-nature.

This essay also puts Zhanran in conversation with some Tiantai commentators, including Guangxiu 廣修 (771-843), Zongying 宗穎 (c. ninth century), and Siming Zhili 四明知禮 (960-1028), so as to explore their ideas of insentient things' attainment of Buddhahood. In

- 1 Shih comments that Zhanran insists upon insentient things' capability to attain Buddhahood although she does not emphasize their activeness (1997, 269).
- 2 The scholarly translation of the term *ji* 即 varies. In this paper, I follow some scholars such as Neal Donner, Daniel B. Stevenson, and Paul Swanson to render it as "identity." By identity, I do not mean absolute sameness or oneness in an ontological sense. Rather, identity implies that two opposites, on the one hand, are not different and, on the other hand, remain distinct. The sameness and difference do not make two polarities contradict each other. On the contrary, the concept of (experienced) identity entails the simultaneous intersubsumption between two seemingly contrasting entities, a notion tightly related to "mutual inclusion" (*huju* 互具), which will be discussed later.
- 3 More detailed explanation for these Tiantai doctrines will be provided later.

short, their interpretations consider Zhanran's idea a truth that can be realized, rather than just an unfeasible ideology. However, if insentient things can realize Buddhahood, then how they practice would be an issue. Regarding this, these Tiantai thinkers conclude that there is no need to offer specific practice manuals for insentient things. In my judgment, this is because Zhanran's proposal that insentient things possess Buddha-nature aims to highlight the meaning of Buddha-nature in the context of the Perfect Teaching. For him, the consistency of the Perfect Teaching is much more important than the way in which insentient things practice. Accordingly, Zhanran's idea of insentient things possessing Buddha-nature needs to be examined in the context of the Perfect Teaching. Any attempt to search for examples of how insentient things practice and/or attain Buddhahood is, on the one hand, distinct from Zhanran's intention and, on the other hand, utterly unnecessary.

Zhanran's Idea of Insentient Things' Buddha-Nature

The discussion of Buddha-nature is a central topic in Chinese Buddhism. After the astonishing advocacy of Daosheng 道生 (ca. 360-434) concerning the *icchantika*'s Buddha-nature and the introduction of the complete *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* to China, there had been a unanimous agreement among Chinese Buddhist scholars that all sentient beings including *icchantikas* have Buddha-nature.⁴ The notion of Buddha-nature was further developed through the inclusion of insentient things. Jiexiang Jizang 嘉祥吉藏 (549-623) in the Sanlun school (*sanlunzong* 三論宗) was the first person to propose this novel notion.⁵ Although Jizang believes insentient things possess Buddha-nature, as Shih points out, his assertion of "possession" is limited to the sense of inclusion, rather than encompassing both inclusion and self-achievement (1997, 257-258). To wit, Jizang does not believe insentient things can ever engage in practices that enable them to come to perfection in Buddhahood, for they lack awareness and have no delusion or afflictions to eradicate in contrast to sentient beings having defilement to purify. Even though Zhanran was not the pioneer advocator,⁶ Dong Ping suggests that due to Zhanran's

4 That being said, it should be noted that the *Yogācāra* school (*yuqiezong* 瑜伽宗) classifies sentient beings into five categories according to their temperaments—*śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, Bodhisattva, one whose nature is indeterminate, and one lacking capacity for enlightenment, i.e., *icchantika*—among whom, *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *icchantikas* are doomed to never realize Buddhahood.

5 For details of Jizang's theory, see *Dasheng xuanlun* 《大乘玄論》, T 1853, 40b9-41b08.

6 Pan Guiming notices that before Zhanran, Farong 法融 (594-657) and Nanyang Huizhong 南陽慧忠 (682-769) in the Oxhead school (*niutouzong* 牛頭宗) and the lay Buddhist Li Tongxuan 李通玄 (635-730) in the Huayan school (*huayanzong* 華嚴宗) also suggest that insentient things possess Buddha-nature. Farong proposes that grasses and trees are harmonious with *dao*, Huizhong proposes that insentient things teach the Dharma, and Li Tongxuan believes that any intention to differentiate the sentient and the insentient is due to false clinging (Pan and Wu 2001, 302-304; Pan 2006, 499-501).

enthusiastic advocacy, the concept of inanimate things' Buddha-nature then started to receive more attention and have a significant impact on Chinese Buddhism (2002, 231-232).

In his early work, the *Zhiguan fuxing chuanhongjue* 《止觀輔行傳弘決》,⁷ a commentary on the *Mohe zhiguan* 《摩訶止觀》 of Zhiyi 智顓 (538-597), the founder of the Tiantai school, Zhanran explicitly claims, “*wuqing foxing huo'er jingxin*” (無情佛性惑耳驚心).⁸ The Chinese term *wuqing* means insentient or insentience, *foxing* is Buddha-nature, and the phrase “*huo'er jingxin*” literally means to “jar the ear and boggle the mind.”⁹ Since in Mahāyāna Buddhism the discussion of Buddha-nature tends to be limited to the realm of sentient beings, it is with the aforementioned statement that Zhanran acknowledges the difficulty of extending Buddha-nature to the inanimate.

Yet, the phrase “*wuqing foxing*” is problematic. The term *wuqing* may be seen as an adjective or a noun, opening possibilities for syntactic interpretation. In addition, because of the grammatical ambiguity, i.e., lacking a stative verb or preposition in the phrase, it is difficult to ascertain the linguistic relationship between the terms “insentient/insentience” and “Buddha-nature.” First of all, taking *wuqing* as an adjective, Linda L. Penkower tends to use “insentient Buddha-nature” when referring to the Buddha-nature of insentient things (1997, 1309).¹⁰ What is at stake in her terminology is that it might lead to an improper assumption that Buddha-nature may be qualified as sentient or insentient. As a result, it might dichotomize Buddha-nature and shift focus away from seeking a relation between Buddha-nature and insentient things.

In the context of Zhanran's works, the term *wuqing* needs to be considered a noun. Accordingly, one may translate the aforementioned phrase by adding a preposition, “Buddha-nature is existent *in* insentient things” (Sueki 2001, 76). In my judgment, this translation, provided by the Japanese scholar Sueki Fumihiko, ends up localizing and fixing Buddha-nature. Rather, for Zhanran's own part, Buddha-nature exists neither inside nor outside a body or an object. Another possible translation—insentient things *as* Buddha-nature—would suggest the identity between insentient things and Buddha-nature. A third possibility—the insentient things of Buddha-nature—conveys an idea that Buddha-nature pervades insentient things. This also means that no place or object lacks Buddha-nature, which relates to the next reading—Buddha-nature of insentient things. Here, insentient things take a more active role in demonstrating their holding of Buddha-nature.

In addition to adding a preposition into *wuqing foxing*, the insertion of a verb would make it more straightforward. Zhanran uses the stative verb “to be” and descriptive phrases, including “are replete with” and “are identical to,” to convey his point that insentient things are not

7 Hereafter, the *Fuxing* 《輔行》.

8 *Fuxing* 《輔行》, T 1912, 151c27-28.

9 Borrowed from Linda L. Penkower's translation of “*huo'er jingxin*” (1993, 364).

10 Nevertheless, Penkower also takes the term *wuqing* as a noun, i.e., insentient things. However, the fact that she uses it as an adjective makes her rendering of the phrase confusing.

excluded from Buddha-nature. Based on nonduality, I suggest that it is appropriate to use the purely stative verb “to be.” This results in the translation—insentient things *are* Buddha-nature. In his last work, the *Jin’gangpi* 《金剛鐮》 (*the Diamond Scalpel*), Zhanran makes it clear that “insentient things *have* [Buddha] nature” (*wuqing youxing* 無情有性).¹¹ In consequence, from the four perspectives of linking the insentient and Buddha-nature, Zhanran’s proposal becomes clear: i) insentient things “are replete with” (*juzu* 具足) Buddha-nature; ii) insentient things “are” (*shi* 是) Buddha-nature; iii) insentient things “are identical to” (*ji* 即) Buddha-nature and; iv) insentient things “possess” (*you* 有) Buddha-nature.¹²

The four kinds of relations between the insentient thing and Buddha-nature are embedded in the following discussion. I will first address Zhanran’s major concern of the Perfect Teaching, i.e., to reveal the Real (*xianshi* 顯實). Given the nonduality of the sentient and the insentient as well as the all-pervasive quality of Buddha-nature, he argues that every insentient thing, just like any sentient being, also has this nature. Then, based on his emphasis on insentient things’ possession of all of the three causal aspects of Buddha-nature, I suggest that Zhanran hints at their capability of practice. Lastly, for Zhanran, the identity of insentient things and Buddha-nature, along with the mutual inclusion between them and sentient beings, once again supports his thesis of insentient things’ Buddha-nature.

Revealing the Real

Zhanran’s *Jin’gangpi*, serves as a vehicle to present, clarify, and propagate the totality of the Perfect Teaching, i.e., the Real (*shi* 實), which, I argue, is the true intent of his work. Strategically, Zhanran voices a sense of urgency to again show the world the Perfect Teaching—an idea of perfection and immediacy—by calling attention to insentient things’ Buddha-nature. This is more than Robert H. Sharf’s contention that the ground of Zhanran’s proposal is as simple as an insistence on the pervasiveness of Buddha-nature and a rejection of a distinction between sentient and insentient things (1999). In fact, Zhanran’s rationale follows the Perfect Teaching, from which he expounds on concepts such as nonduality, all-pervasiveness, the threefold Buddha-nature, identity, and mutual inclusion.

Zhanran bases his theory on the Perfect Teaching, the method of which, for him, reveals the Real and the doctrine of which he considers the supreme truth. According to the first three provisional Teachings, insentient things have no Buddha-nature, while in the Perfect Teaching, Buddha-nature pervades all insentient things. Since the first three Teachings are not ultimate, Zhanran hopes to reveal a right view on all-encompassing suchness (*zhenru* 真如) and to help ordinary people get rid of delusion. If insentient things had no Buddha-nature, the Perfect Teaching would be untenable. The completeness of the Perfect Teaching is extremely

11 *Jin’gangpi* 《金剛鐮》, T 1932, 781a27-b01.

12 I owe this formulation to Prof. Brook Ziporyn, to whom I would like to express my gratitude for his helpful and insightful comments on this article.

important to Zhanran, because without it, the Tiantai philosophical system could be challenged on the grounds that, for example, if mind and matter are not necessarily nondual, then all notions of nonduality can fall apart. Therefore, he enthusiastically expounds upon the Buddha-nature of insentient things to clarify and defend the Perfect Teaching.¹³

The Nonduality of the Sentient and the Insentient

It is a truth in the Real teaching that insentient things have Buddha-nature. However, Zhanran also places stress on the nonduality of the sentient and the insentient to prevent a one-sided view of this matter. The most common concept of nonduality is described through two apparently opposing elements, such as matter and mind, the inner world and the outer world, cause and effect, purity and impurity, as well as self and other. The dynamic of nonduality lies in the reality that each of the opposite elements remains distinct yet is neither separate nor different from the other. These dyadic polarities seem incompatible; however, they exist in harmony. On the one hand, the focal point of nonduality is an emphasis on the equality and inseparability of two contrasting entities. On the other hand, nonduality is certainly not monism, for the distinctive characteristics of these two elements remain, yet there is no need to reconcile seeming contradictions.

In the *Fuxing*, Zhanran expounds the Buddha-nature of insentient things from ten perspectives, among which four concern the nonduality of the sentient and the insentient, indicating the significance of this notion.¹⁴ First of all, Zhanran states, “From the perspective of phenomenon, there are the sentient and the insentient. From the perspective of principle, there is no differentiation between the sentient and the insentient.”¹⁵ From the perspective of appearance or form, one can see the differences between the animate and the inanimate. However, from the perspective of nature, they are identical. In principle, therefore, any attempt to distinguish the sentient from the insentient would be a mistake. Note that although Zhanran discusses the issue of sentience/insentience from two perspectives, by no means is it valid to totally differentiate principle from phenomenon, making them incompatible. On the contrary, for him, these two aspects are not dualistic. It is permissible to say that Zhanran first intends to highlight the extreme view of dichotomizing sentience and insentience. In fact, his true intention is implied: one should further question the non-differentiation/differentiation between

13 Nevertheless, it is also necessary to note that Zhanran does not negate the first three Teachings. Since they are provisional, they are merely designed for those who need these kinds of Teachings. Thus, the concept that insentient things do not have Buddha-nature may be taught to those who will better benefit from this provisional doctrine.

14 *Fuxing* 《輔行》, T 1912, 151c29-152a23. The ten perspectives are body, essence, phenomenon/principle, land, doctrine/attainment, the ultimate/the conventional, inclusion, cause/effect, teaching in accordance with what is appropriate, and the four Teachings.

15 *Fuxing* 《輔行》, T 1912, 152a06-07; 「從事，則分情與無情；從理，則無情非情別。」

sentience and insentience (as well as between principle and phenomenon), for nonduality is one of Zhanran's major concerns, as he presents it in his *Shibuermen* 《十不二門》.

Second, “in terms of the ultimate, the essence is one; in terms of the conventional, there is separation of the sentient and the insentient. The two are nondual.”¹⁶ The substance of all dharmas is empty, and therefore, the essence of the sentient and the insentient are one, as Zhanran interprets in the *Shizhong xinyao* 《始終心要》 (*the Essential of the Beginning and the End*) that “the ultimate truth eliminates all dharmas.”¹⁷ In contrast, from the perspective of the conventional truth, each of the myriad dharmas is distinct, for the “conventional truth establishes all dharmas.”¹⁸ Therefore, the two provisional notions of the insentient and the sentient exist. Although the ultimate truth and the conventional truth appear as separate, they are not opposite. As Klein suggests, “the mutual pervasion” of the conventional and the ultimate indicates that these two are not contradictory and in fact inseparable (1995, 152). She thus coins the term “ontological nondualism” to describe this mutuality, and she emphasizes that neither of these two is superior to the other (1995, 152). Klein does not posit any purely ontological or metaphysical entity. Instead, she argues that a phenomenon does not have any underlying, unchanging substance of existence. Its lack of inherent existence, on the contrary, is its ultimate existence. The two aspects of ultimate and conventional existence sustain and pervade each other. Hence, it is permissible for Klein to suggest that the ultimate and the conventional exist only in a nondual manner. This must be understood as a way of denying any definitive ontology, rather than a way of positing one. In the same spirit, to borrow Tiantai terminology, the first line—in terms of the ultimate, the essence is one—is derived from the perspective of emptiness (*kong* 空); the second line—in terms of the conventional, there is separation of the sentient and the insentient—is a provisional positing (*jia* 假) and; the third line—the two are nondual—is seen from the perspective of the middle (*zhong* 中).¹⁹ These three truths are interfused: emptiness is ultimately identical to provisional positing and to the middle.

Third, “regarding teaching the path, there are the sentient and the insentient. Regarding realizing the path, they cannot be separated into two.”²⁰ The separation of these two is for the convenience of teaching. Take the three thousand dharmas of one moment of thought (*yinian sanqian* 一念三千) for example.²¹ The ten suchnesses, the ten dharma realms, and the

16 Ibid., 152a11-12: 「真故體一，俗分有無，二而不二。」

17 *Shizhong xinyao* 《始終心要》，T 1915, 473b15: 「真諦者，泯一切法。」

18 Ibid.: 「俗諦者，立一切法。」

19 There are different translations of the term *zhong* 中, including center, the mean, and the middle-way. Throughout the paper, I adopt “the middle.”

20 *Fuxing* 《輔行》，T 1912, 152a10-11: 「教道說，有情與非情；證道說，故不可分二。」

21 The term “three thousand” represents myriad dharmas, i.e., a matrix of dharma realms, suchnesses, and worlds. A dharma realm is a habitat of living beings. According to the *Huayan jing* 《華嚴經》 (*Avatamsaka Sūtra*), there are ten dharma realms in total (T 279, 199c23-200a21). Each of the ten realms of sacred and profane beings includes the other nine in itself, i.e.,

three types of worlds—the sentient world, the world of the five aggregates, and the insentient world—all have to be distinct so that they together constitute exactly three thousand, no more and no less.²² This distinction is also essential in meditation, i.e., in the path of cause. But, when it comes to the final stage of realization, i.e., fruition, the dichotomy naturally disappears. If duality still exists in one's mind, the attainment is certainly not the final liberation.

Lastly, “regarding the four phrases of debate, [the setup] is to follow *siddhānta* (the accomplishments). The teachings and benefits are different, and so [the sentient and the insentient] are temporarily separate.”²³ With respect to teaching in accordance with what is appropriate (*suiyi* 隨宜), for those who can be liberated through the Perfect Teaching, they should be taught that insentient things have Buddha-nature. For those who would benefit the most from other Teachings, they ought to be taught that only sentient beings have Buddha-nature. According to *upaya*, various teaching methods are used to fit different sentient beings' needs and faculties. This is the rationale for the Buddha's showing 84,000 Dharma gates (*famen* 法門) for the sake of liberating different beings.

Therefore, the ideas that *only sentient beings possess Buddha-nature* and that *insentient things also possess Buddha-nature* are both equally valid in different contexts—the former in the Common and Separate Teachings (*tongjiao* 通教, *biejiao* 別教), and the latter in the Perfect Teaching. Brook Ziporyn contends that all such claims “are true in the sense that all *can*, if properly recontextualized, lead to liberation,” so these two seemingly contradictory statements have to be “properly recontextualized” in order to make them effective and beneficial to all beings (2009, 241). In fact, either of these claims is accurate in the context of the Perfect Teaching, because once one has fully opened one's perfect understanding (*dakai yuanjie* 大開

the notion of mutual inclusion of the tenfold dharma realm. Accordingly, there are one hundred realms altogether. Each of the one hundred realms possesses ten suchnesses—such appearance, such nature, such embodiment, such powers, such actions, such causes, such conditions, such effects, such rewards and retributions, and such a complete fundamental coherence—stated in the *Fahua jing* 《法華經》 (*Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra*, T 262, 5c11-13), and therefore, there are one thousand suchnesses. These one thousand are seen in the three worlds of existence, i.e., the world of sentient beings, insentient things, and the five aggregates taught in the *Dazhidu lun* 《大智度論》 (T 1509, 546b29-c02). As a result, there are three thousand worlds or dharmas in total.

22 Nevertheless, it is worth noting that there is some overlap between the three worlds. The overlap indicates that three thousand is not an exact number describing the relationship between the animate and the inanimate. That being said, to some extent, the number has to be exactly 3,000, for it symbolizes the intact and exclusive relationship between each element in the abstract and concrete world. With respect to meditation, it denotes the mutuality between and among each of the elements; there are no clear-cut, fixed boundaries that separate the dharmas (inside or outside the mind). The number 3,000 also explains the intersubjectivity between the cognizer and the cognized.

23 *Fuxing* 《輔行》, T 1912, 152a16-17: 「四句分別，隨順悉檀，說益不同，且分二別。」

圓解), there is no longer obstruction or limitation, and any idea or practice is in accord with perfection and immediacy.

It is fair to say that Zhanran's proposal of insentient things possessing Buddha-nature, i.e., the content, is a teaching of the Real, while his emphasis on *insentient things*, i.e., his pedagogy, is a skillful means. One should not disregard the Real, which is the whole, nor place more stress on the provisional, which is the part. Hence, the idea that insentient things possess Buddha-nature has to be considered integrally in the whole. It may not be viewed as a contrast to sentient beings possessing Buddha-nature or further used to generate separation between the sentient and the insentient. My argument here should not be mistaken to mean that Zhanran's claim is merely provisional. His idea and his pedagogy are both in line with the Real. Ultimately speaking, there is no differentiation between the sentient and the insentient, although they are distinct on the provisional level.

All-Pervasiveness

As stated, Zhanran's *emphatic reassertion* of insentient things' Buddha-nature is used to reveal the Real teaching. To support this claim, he first lays stress on the all-pervasive essence of Buddha-nature in the Perfect Teaching. Since Buddha-nature is all-pervasive, Zhanran argues, it includes all types of beings without exception. If Buddha-nature excluded insentient things, it would become limited, impermanent, and subject to change. Thus, to be consistent with the notion of all-pervasiveness, insentient things must be imbued with Buddha-nature.

To support his argument, Zhanran cites Zhiyi's doctrine—"each color and each scent are nothing but the middle-way" (*yise yixiang wufei zhongdao* 一色一香無非中道).²⁴ For Zhanran, this statement succinctly and explicitly indicates the non-differentiation of all phenomena and demonstrates that the ultimate truth of the middle-way is to be regarded as Buddha-nature, i.e., middle-way Buddha-nature (*zhongdao foxing* 中道佛性).²⁵ Each dharma entails ultimate reality, and indeed *is* itself ultimate reality. All dharmas have real marks and are themselves real marks.²⁶ Accordingly, if any being or phenomenon were excluded, Buddha-nature would lose

24 Zhiyi, *Mohe zhiguan* 《摩訶止觀》, T 1911, 1c24-25. On this account, Ng Yu-Kwan takes Zhiyi's assertion of middle-way Buddha-nature's embracing all dharmas to convey a passive meaning, while the notion of insentient things' possessing Buddha-nature is done in an active manner (1993, 80).

25 Although the compound term "middle-way Buddha-nature" rarely appears in Zhiyi's works, its meaning does exist in Zhiyi's system of thoughts. Terminologically, there are various expressions which include "Buddha-nature is identical to the middle-way" (*foxing ji zhongdao* 佛性即中道) and "Buddha-nature middle-way" (*foxing zhongdao* 佛性中道), yet their meanings do not differ. For detailed discussion of Zhiyi's idea of "middle-way Buddha-nature," see, e.g., Ng Yu Kwan (1993, 62-69).-

26 Here, I am referring to the compound term, *zhufa shixiang* 諸法實相, which literally means the

its wondrous property of all-pervasiveness. Thus, Zhanran emphatically states that each particle of dust is replete with and identical to the Buddha-nature of all sentient beings and Buddhas.²⁷

To underpin his argument, Zhanran borrows a simile from the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* to analogize Buddha-nature with empty-space.²⁸ Space is indivisible, eternal, and ubiquitous.²⁹ The indivisibility of space indicates that any distinctions made within space are merely provisional demarcations of what are actually inseparable parts of the same whole space. To put it another way, space cannot be separate as being inside or outside sentient beings' bodies. Like space, the Buddha-nature of sentient beings is neither inside nor outside. Like space, which cannot be divided, Buddha-nature is also indivisible. The only thing that could intervene between two putative spaces, separating them, would be more space, which would mean that both of these spaces were contained in a larger space that runs continuously through themselves and the intervening space. In other words, one cannot say that there are two different spaces, one inside sentient beings' bodies and one outside of them. Similarly, Buddha-nature cannot be divided simply because of the seeming differences between the organism and the environment. Therefore, the Buddha-nature of sentient beings and of insentient things cannot be separated.

Zhanran further argues, if Buddha-nature were only to be found inside sentient beings' bodies, then there would be no Buddha-nature outside the body, and thus Buddha-nature would not be all-pervasive.³⁰ To continue the space analogy, if space partially existed, it would be

real marks of all things and is used to expound the phenomenal aspect of reality. The compound term may be translated as the ultimate reality/real marks of all dharmas, all dharmas as ultimate reality/real marks. *Shixiang qua* (intangible) ultimate reality in Tiantai is down to earth, for it is present right in and of and as every being close to us. Things are not like the shadows coming from the sun's projection on objects. Nor is *shixiang qua* (distinguishable) real marks concerned with any manifestation of other-worldly God. *Shixiang* is immanent in our environment. On the other hand, Tiantai does not deny ultimate reality in its transcendental character, which may be equivalent to Buddha-nature. In his *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi* 《妙法蓮華經玄義》, Zhiyi enumerates and classifies twelve synonyms of the term *shixiang* into four groups: existence, non-existence, both existence and non-existence, and neither existence nor non-existence (T 1716, 783c15-784a06). These designations indicate the two complementary aspects of *shixiang*, i.e., ultimate reality and real marks, which, however, may be treated as synonyms in the context of the three truths, for ultimate reality does not merely mean emptiness; neither should one misconstrue real marks as the provisional. Both of them represent three truths, i.e., they are identical to emptiness, the provisional, and the middle. In Zhanran's terminology, accordingly, each and every dharma possesses and is identical to ultimate reality, real marks, and Buddha-nature.

27 *Fuxing* 《輔行》, T 1912, 152a22-23.

28 *Dabo niepan jing* 《大般涅槃經》 (*Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra*), T 375, 809a04.

29 *Ibid.*, 809a19-22.

30 *Jin'gangpi* 《金剛錍》, T 1932, 781c15-782a05.

countable and finite, and become impermanent.³¹ Similarly, Buddha-nature, likened to space, is not partially existent or measurable and should not even be considered one entity. As the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* states, “Buddha-nature... is both one and not-one, neither one nor not-one...because it cannot be numbered.”³² Buddha-nature can never be viewed as one or many. Accordingly, to be consistent with the notion of all-pervasiveness, Buddha-nature must cover all inanimate things without exception.

Ziporyn points out that Buddha-nature in Tiantai thought is “a nature shared with something initially conceived as ‘outside’ us, the Buddha,” rather than “within us” (2000, 189). As stated above, Buddha-nature is not some kind of substance inside our bodies. However, the notion of being “outside us” as Ziporyn explains is not to be taken as the opposite of “inside us.” The sharp contrast Ziporyn uses, I assume, is a skillful attempt to elucidate his idea of intersubjectivity.³³ Buddha-nature is neither inside nor outside and always pervades everywhere. On the other hand, Buddha-nature is *both* inside and outside, as Ziporyn expounds: “anything placed outside it is only all the more placed inside it” because “its inside is its outside” (2000, 189). This notion of identity and interfusion demonstrates the indivisibility and all-pervasiveness of Buddha-nature in the Perfect Teaching.

Moreover, to describe Buddha-nature as all-pervasive is also to reveal its capacity, which is immeasurable and inconceivable. In the *Fuxing*, Zhanran writes, “Each particle of dust is replete with the Buddha-nature of all sentient beings. It is also replete with the Buddha-nature of all Buddhas from the ten directions.”³⁴ All qualities of Buddha-nature may be found in a small particle of dust; none of its qualities are left out. This follows from the fact that Buddha-nature, like space, is indivisible: to possess any of it is to possess all of it.

Another important idea conveyed in the above quote of Zhanran is that one contains all, and the small subsumes the large. In the conventional sense, a particle has very small volume and thus has very limited capacity to contain anything. However, in Zhanran’s eyes, even a tiny object has the capacity to “be replete with” something voluminous. Two instances in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* may dramatically illustrate his idea. In the Sūtra, there is a scene that *Vimalakīrti*’s house has thirty-two thousand thrones to accommodate Bodhisattvas, arhats, and celestial beings.³⁵ Although his house is small, the thrones are well arranged without crowding each other. This expresses how the small contains the large. The other example concerns Mt. Sumeru, which can be placed in a small mustard seed, without enlarging the seed or shrinking the mountain.³⁶ In conventional thinking, even if one cuts a mountain into

31 *Dabo niepan jing* 《大般涅槃經》 (*Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra*), T 375, 829a05-07.

32 *Ibid.*, 770b20-770c02: 「佛性者...，亦一非一，非一非非一。...無數法故。」

33 The concept of intersubjectivity will be discussed later.

34 *Fuxing* 《輔行》, T 1912, 152a22-23: 「一塵具足一切眾生佛性，亦具十方諸佛佛性。」

35 *Weimojie suoshuo jing* 《維摩詰所說經》 (*Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*), T 475, 546b05-10.

36 *Ibid.*, 546b25-27.

pieces, a small seed still cannot contain all of the pieces. In the inconceivable state, however, the small can contain the large, and the narrow has room for the wide.

These two inconceivable examples are explained by Zhanran's assertion that a particle of dust is replete with Buddha-nature, for which there are no spatial limitations at all. The examples seem improbable because they use a massive but concrete quantity to symbolize what is beyond massive and is unquantifiable. Mt. Sumeru is tangible and has volume, while Buddha-nature is invisible and has no volume at all. The thirty-two thousand thrones are countable, while Buddha-nature is uncountable. However, the key point is that the large is seen in the small, and many in one, without any omission. From this perspective, it is to be understood that a particle of dust with small volume is replete with the immeasurable capacity of all-pervasive Buddha-nature. Furthermore, following the aforementioned principle that insentient things *are* Buddha-nature, one may say that Mt. Sumeru is thus indivisible Buddha-nature and that the thirty-two thousand thrones, being themselves Buddha-nature, are also uncountable.

The Indivisibility of the Threefold Buddha-Nature

In addition to all-pervasiveness, which to some people may seem to describe merely a static property of Buddha-nature, Zhanran embraces the indivisibility of the threefold Buddha-nature, moving to a more dynamic dimension in realization. He insists that insentient things possess not only the cause proper (*zhengyin* 正因) but also the conditioning cause (*yuanyin* 緣因) and the revealing cause (*liaoyin* 了因)—Buddha-nature operating as three distinct kinds of causes of Buddhahood. According to Zhiyi, the revealing cause is the wisdom of awareness; the conditioning causes are merit and virtuous roots assisting the wisdom of awareness to bring forth the cause proper.³⁷ Zhiyi also says, “When one [cause] rises, all rise,” which means that when one cause functions toward Buddhahood, the other two work together toward the same goal.³⁸ When one succeeds, all of the three succeed simultaneously.

The relationship of the three causal aspects of Buddha-nature is that i) they are three aspects that together compose the perfection of Buddha-nature; ii) they are never apart from each other; iii) they are neither the same nor different; and iv) they are equally essential. These three causes are inherently included in one another, and none has supremacy nor can stand alone. Like a tripod, if any one of the three legs is missing, the other two cannot stand or function, and it can no longer be called a tripod. The triad should be viewed as a whole; without any of the three, Buddhahood cannot be fulfilled.

Zhanran interprets the inseparability of the three causal aspects of Buddha-nature in the *Jin'gangpi*. “The seeds, cultivation, and fruition of these three causes are all-pervasive.”³⁹ The seeds of the threefold Buddha-nature refer to its essence or quality, which is usually taken

37 *Jingguangming jing xuanyi* 《金光明經玄義》, T 1783, 4a03-09.

38 *Miaofa lianhua jing wenju* 《妙法蓮華經文句》, T 1718, 58a08.

39 *Jin'gangpi* 《金剛錍》, T 1932, 783c12: 「種遍、修遍、果遍。」

as the cause proper. Cultivation might specifically refer to the practice of the revealing and conditioning causes, and fruition is the realization of Buddhahood. These three causes are integrated with each other; their seeds, cultivation, and fruition interpenetrate and entail each other. Since the cause proper is all-pervasive and is not separate from the revealing cause or the conditioning cause, these two causes also pervade all places. Buddha-nature's quality of being all-pervasive is thus of foremost importance for Zhanran, for it signifies non-obstruction and non-differentiation. By stressing that insentient things have conditioning and revealing causes, Zhanran implies their potential Buddhahood.

Identity

Not only do insentient things possess threefold Buddha-nature, but also by underscoring the doctrine of identity, Zhanran contends that each and every insentient thing is identical to Buddha-nature. The Tiantai concept of identity goes beyond normal conventional use, which would describe two exactly same shirts or two twins having identical features. According to Zhili, there are three types of identity.⁴⁰ The first is the joining of two distinguishable things (*erwu xianghe* 二物相合), which emphasizes their inseparable relationship, like the different tiers of a layered cake which are attached parts of one whole, but still distinct. The second form of identity demonstrates the essence of two seemingly different objects or phenomena as the same. This may be exemplified by the front and back of a hand or the head and tail of a coin, which are two mutually exclusive views of the same whole; one must be “flipped over” and concealed in order to reveal the other (*beimian xiangfan* 背面相翻). The third type denotes that the present body of an object or a concept is itself, just as it entirely is (*dangti quanshi* 當體全是). Ziporyn gives a useful example to illustrate this notion of identity: when one uses a book as a doorstop, the object remains a book while functioning as a doorstop at the same time. This book appears as a doorstop without losing its identity as a book (2010, 177, 10n). There is no tension or exclusion between the book and the doorstop, which are in fact the same entity. This concept of identity is thus expressed by “X as Y.” There is no need to turn away from X in order to understand its being Y; nor is it necessary to turn X into Y. X itself, as it is, is Y; the opposite is also true. (In our example, it would be: the book as the doorstop; the doorstop as the book.) This type of identity allows us to see the entire whole in two alternate ways simultaneously.

The concepts of identity and nonduality are not exactly the same, although they are similar. As mentioned, the emphasis of nonduality is the harmony of two opposites, rather than making their differences stand out. In contrast, the third type of identity which best exemplifies Tiantai thought is based on mutual inclusion and stresses the interfusion of the dyadic polarities, while their distinctions remain.⁴¹ As Zhili suggests, whether an idea is in line with identity or not has

40 *Shibuermen zhiyao chao* 《十不二門指要鈔》, T 1928, 707a28-29.

41 That being said, the concept of nonduality in Tiantai teachings is also related to the notion of

to be examined through the concept of mutual inclusion.⁴² Yet, identity should not be taken as exactly the same as mutual inclusion.

Zhanran's suggestion of making insentient things and Buddha-nature identical fits into the third category of identity. In the *Jin'gangpi*, he writes, "Each particle of dust and each moment of thought are identical to the mind and nature of all sentient beings and of Buddhas."⁴³ This statement expresses identity in terms of property and numericalness. First, insentient things are identical to Buddha-nature. Second, one is identical to all, and vice versa. The core of identity necessarily means that the *present* object or phenomenon is as it is.⁴⁴ X is at the present moment absolutely identical to Y. Other than X, one cannot locate Y, temporally or spatially. Accordingly, when insentient things and Buddha-nature are identical, at this present moment one cannot locate Buddha-nature simply in sentient beings.

Zhiyi's statements—"ignorance is identical to dharma nature" (*wuming ji faxing* 無明即法性) and "delusion is identical to *bodhi*" (*fannaoyi puti* 煩惱即菩提)—are good examples of the third category of identity, although he never deals with the issue of insentient things' Buddha-nature. According to Zhiyi, one need not be rid of one's ignorance in order to realize dharma nature, symbolizing an achievement through elimination or negation. Neither is it necessary to transform ignorance into dharma nature, indicating a change of quality or status from impurity to purity. On the contrary, ignorance itself is dharma nature, and vice versa. To put it another way, dharma nature is situated right in ignorance, and the converse is also true. The more ignorance there is, the more profound dharma nature is revealed. (It is the same as the notion of "delusion as *bodhi*."⁴⁵ Dharma nature refers to the nature of all dharmas, including tangible objects, natural phenomena, actions, speech, and thoughts. *Bodhi* refers to

mutual inclusion.

42 Zongxiao, ed., *Siming zunzhe jiaoxinglu* 《四明尊者教行錄》, T 1937, 872c03-04.

43 *Jin'gangpi* 《金剛鐔》, T 1932, 782c10: 「一塵一心，即一切生佛之心性。」 This quote of Zhanran also suggests his attempt to make the sentient being, the insentient thing, mind(s), and Buddha(s) identical, which is a further step from the famous Huayan notion that mind, Buddha, and the sentient have no differences according to the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*.

44 Here, I use the term phenomenon in a broad sense which also includes experiences and concepts.

45 Zhiyi's proposal must not be mistaken as antinomian or unethical. Rather, any negative experience can be used as an opportunity leading to enlightenment. Ultimately, putative evil is not different from the supposed good. Zhiyi clearly states that defilements such as desires, ignorance, laziness, and anger are identical to enlightenment. For example, in the *Mohe zhiguan* 《摩訶止觀》, he writes, "Craving and desire are identical to enlightenment" (*tanyu ji puti* 貪欲即菩提, T 1911, 18b02). Zhiyi intends to emphasize the identity and nonduality between two seemingly contrasting opposites. It is not necessary to transform avaricious desire or hostility into enlightenment, for delusion rests on and has no differences from enlightenment. The concept of the identity between delusion and enlightenment is also related to the Tiantai thought of "inherent evil" (*xing'e* 性惡), which teaches that the Buddha inherently includes evil nature. However, this topic is beyond the scope of the paper.

the enlightenment of sentient beings and can be further considered as Buddha-nature. Based on the identity between ignorance and dharma nature and between delusion and *bodhi* (since ignorance and delusion may be seen as synonyms), we can infer that dharma nature is *bodhi*. Hence, the nature of the insentient is the nature of the Buddha. Accordingly, this supports Zhanran's contention that a particle of dust is identical to the mind/nature of Buddhas.

With respect to the identity of one and all, each particle of dust is understood to be all Buddhas, rather than merely any single Buddha. This is to prevent the assumption that a particle is a Buddha. If a particle were a Buddha, then when we cut the particle into two, there would be two Buddhas. The more cuts, the more Buddhas. The core of the identity between a particle of dust and many Buddhas is thus to break the boundary of Buddha and non-Buddha and to avoid counting Buddhas or Buddha-nature.

The Tiantai notion of "one is identical to all" (*yi ji yiqie* 一即一切) is not exactly the same as the Huayan conception of identifying one and all, which describes the interpenetration of phenomenal existences. Xianshou Fazang 賢首法藏 (643-712) uses numbers to expound this concept.⁴⁶ From the perspective of the variegated appearances or features of phenomena, one is opposed to ten. Ten is composed of ten ones, and one is the root or seed of ten. Without one as a foundational factor, there is no ten. Thus, Fazang concludes that one is ten, and ten is one. Yet, I think Fazang's logic here would be improved to say that there is no ten without one, showing a relationship of inseparability. From the perspective of the essence of phenomena, Fazang continues, the essence of each one in the ten does not differ from the essence of the first one. The essence in reality is empty, and thus there is no ten, i.e., ten is just one. In light of the empty nature of ten, since one is a factor of composing ten, then one is also empty. So, one is ten. Accordingly, the identity of one and ten/many/all in Huayan lies in the emphasis that the whole and the parts are inter-permeated. As Ng Yu-Kwan puts it, this type of Huayan identity in a phenomenological sense emphasizes inter-inclusion and non-obstruction, rather than the Tiantai sense of identity as discussed above (2005, 51-52).

The example of grain/heap in the sorites paradox might be used in a different manner to illustrate the Huayan thought of identity. The core of the sorites paradox is that no amount of grains forms a heap. When we accumulate grains of wheat, starting from which point do they change into a heap? Conversely, when grains of wheat are individually removed from a heap, when can we call the heap "not" a heap? There is no sharp boundary between a heap and not-a-heap. Not a single grain, neither two nor many, of wheat can be identified to make a significant change from not-a-heap to a heap, or conversely, from a heap to not-a-heap. We can also say that each grain of wheat has the quality or potential of making a heap, and a heap does not depart from a grain of wheat. That is: one is (in) many, and many are (in) one.

Tiantai does not analyze the identity between one and all from either phenomenal differences or essential/substantial sameness, as Huayan does. In contrast, Tiantai teaching emphasizes

46 For details of Fazang's argument, see *Huayan yisheng jiaoyi fenqi zhang* 《華嚴一乘教義分齊章》, T 1866, 503c02-21.

that the very object or phenomenon itself is always as it is, and is the entirety of others. In the conclusion of the *Jin'gangpi*, Zhanran reemphasizes that because of all-pervasiveness and mutual inclusion, the body and the land are identical, the large and the small are identical, and so are one and many.⁴⁷ It is based on this concept that Zhanran pinpoints the significance of the identity of insentient things and Buddha-nature.

Mutual Inclusion

As stated above, the Tiantai notion of identity is established on the grounds of mutual inclusion, which indicates that X includes Y, and Y includes X. Here, we move to the last doctrine Zhanran uses to argue for his case. Under the principle of mutual inclusion, the insentient and Buddha-nature are inherently inclusive and entailed in each other. Mutual inclusion is a two-way relationship of intersubjectivity, the interchangeability and fluidity between the subject (which is also an object) and the object (which is also a subject).⁴⁸ Buddha-nature is usually regarded as the subject that perceives or pervades, while dharmas are the object to be perceived or pervaded. However, when Zhanran says, “Insentient things have [Buddha] nature,” he does not only mean that insentient things, being the objects, are *passively* imbued with Buddha-nature. According to mutual inclusion, his position is that insentient things can also be subjects and *actively* possess and entail Buddha-nature. Here, Zhanran attempts to make the subject-object reversal. More precisely, he intends to break the boundary between subject and object. The subject no longer remains in its subjective position; neither does the object. The unique value of mutual inclusion thus lies in the two-way, or even multi-way, relationship of all-pervasiveness.

The concepts of “pervasiveness” (*qu/bian* 趣/遍) and “inclusiveness” (*she* 攝) together compose the notion of mutual inclusion and are equally important. If one considers the idea of insentient things possessing Buddha-nature only from the perspective of pervasiveness, it seems that Buddha-nature actively pervades insentient things, and insentient things are *passively* pervaded as the object. In contrast, from the perspective of “inclusiveness,” the concept that insentient things possess Buddha-nature reinforces their activeness as the subject. If one examines Zhanran's proposal exclusively from either of these two statements, the view is still one-sided, not in accord with the teaching of mutual inclusion. Because of all-

47 *Jin'gangpi* 《金剛鐮》, T 1932, 786a19-20.

48 In the context of mutual inclusion, each dharma may be both the subject and object, for each dharma entails and penetrates each other. For instance, for the subject X, Y is an object. Yet, Y may be seen as a subject, and thus Y turns into an object. Hence, both X and Y may be regarded as subjects at the same time. With this preservation of subject and object in their mutual inclusion, the demarcation of the subject and the object is simultaneously transcended, making them nondual.

pervasiveness and inclusiveness, Buddha-nature is all Buddhas as well as the entire dharma realm; it includes and entails all, and is included and entailed in all.

By declaring that insentient things have the nature of Buddha, Zhanran also reinforces the nature of the insentient thing that pervades and entails Buddhas. Ziporyn points out, when Zhanran claims that “X has the nature of Y,” he “does not mean that Y is hidden in X, but that X has a nature that pervades and includes (among other things) the quiddity Y” (2000, 191). In Tiantai, the three truths are found everywhere. Hence, insentient things are identical to the three truths, and the nature of insentient things is also empty, provisionally posited, and the middle. Thus, the nature of insentient things has no fixed locus and can include all other dharmas, including Buddhas, the nature of Buddha(s), and Buddhahood. This is why Zhili writes, “Matter and mind, environment and organism, are identical to the nature [i.e., the three truths], and therefore, they reducibly penetrate every dharma and non-exclusively integrate all others... Each dharma mutually pervades all others without boundary,”⁴⁹ representing perfect interfusion. Indeed, as Ziporyn explains, “(non-exclusively), this pervasion of Y by X also implies the pervasion of X by Y” (2000, 191). His interpretation is in line with the core of Zhanran’s idea of insentient things’ having Buddha-nature, which is based on the notion of mutual inclusion.

To further expound on the notion of mutual inclusion, Zhanran discusses the relationship between the sentient, the insentient and the Buddha in the *Zhiguan yili* 《止觀義例》：

Among the four wondrous objects, the first is the situation of the Buddha-Vehicle in the insentient object. If there is no Buddha-Vehicle [situated in insentient things], is the essence of the Buddha’s dharma-body all-pervasive or non-pervasive? Also, one should not say whether the essence of the Buddha’s dharma-body is the same as or different from [that of] insentient things. One should say that the word “dharma” means non-awareness, and the word “Buddha” means awareness. The Buddha is the dharma; the dharma is the sentient being. How can they be distinctly separate?⁵⁰

Situating the One Buddha-Vehicle in the insentient thing denotes that insentient things have Buddha-nature. If insentient things had no One Buddha-Vehicle, then the all-pervasive essence of the Buddha’s dharma-body would become non-pervasive. But if it is true that the essence

49 *Guanyin xuanyi ji* 《觀音玄義記》, T 1727, 892b19-21: 「色心依正，以即性故，趣指一法，遍攝一切。...法法互遍，皆無際畔。」 For a further discussion on this passage, see Ziporyn (2000, 206).

50 *Zhiguan yili* 《止觀義例》, T 1913, 450b22-26: 「妙境四者，一於無情境，立佛乘故。若無佛乘，佛法身體，為遍不遍？亦不應云，佛法身體，同於無情，及以不同。是故應云，法名不覺，佛名為覺；佛即是法，法即是眾。豈可條然？」

of the Buddha's dharma-body pervades all, insentient things would naturally be imbued with it, too.

In consequence, within the context of the One Buddha-Vehicle situated in insentient things, the Buddha, i.e., awareness, is dharmas⁵¹, i.e., objects of awareness, which are themselves putatively non-awareness, because “dharma” means the insentient. The reverse is also true. That is, the Buddha is dharmas, and dharmas are the sentient being, due to the all-pervasive essence and mutual inclusion. Furthermore, the Buddha (neither sentient nor insentient), dharmas (insentient), and the body (sentient) are mutually inclusive. Although the Buddha has transcended the sentient and the insentient, the Buddha is also sentient and insentient. Hence, the Buddha is both dharmas and sentient beings. In other words, Buddha-nature, the insentient, and the sentient should not be differentiated ultimately. Since sentient beings have minds, one may expand Zhanran's conclusion thusly: The mind, the Buddha, sentient beings, and insentient things are mutually entailed.

Ziporyn points out that the setup is temporarily used to emphasize “the inextricable presence of unawareness in every act of awareness” (2009, 242). There can never be an exclusive “awareness or non-awareness—subjectivity or objectivity, mental or material”; none of these exists alone (2009, 242). However, he continues, “there can be a reduction of all things to *either* side” in the context of mutual inclusion (2009, 242). It is because when speaking of awareness, non-awareness is understood to be referred to, and vice versa. One entails the other.

Conventionally, Buddha-nature is regarded as the subject that perceives, while dharma nature is the essence of the object perceived—the subject-object split. Buddha-nature thus is considered as awareness, while dharma nature is non-awareness. Buddha-nature is the subject that acts, while dharma nature is the object of the subject's action. In a similar spirit, Huiyuan 慧遠 (523-592) further bifurcates Buddha-nature between “the nature that knows” (*nengzhi xing* 能知性) and “the nature that is known” (*xuozhi xing* 所知性).⁵² For him, grasses and trees do not have consciousness, true mind, awareness, or wisdom of realization. Hence, they do not have Buddha-nature that knows as sentient beings do. The other aspect of Buddha-nature, i.e., that which is known, is equivalent to inconceivable emptiness or the middle-way, for this “Buddha-nature is like space pervading everywhere.”⁵³ To some extent, Huiyuan equates Buddha-nature and dharma nature, but this is based on their empty nature. With respect to awareness, Huiyuan believes, these two are distinct.

Sharf interprets Huiyuan's dichotomous perspective in terms of epistemology and ontology. Buddha-nature in the aspect of epistemology is regarded as that which cognizes, and Buddha-nature in the aspect of ontology is seen as the “content of a rarefied and non-dualistic mode of cognition” (1999). But, this bifurcation between subject and object is still problematic. Guo

51 In this context, the meaning of “dharma” has a broad sense which refers to all phenomena, including mental objects, the phenomena in the world, and elements of experience.

52 *Dasheng yi zhang* 《大乘義章》, T 1851, 472c12-13.

53 *Ibid.*, 472c26: 「佛性如空，遍一切處。」

Chaoshun points out that it creates a gap between “that which perceives” and “that which is perceived” (1991, 54). Then, the one that has “Buddha-nature that is aware” cannot really be awakened from the dharma nature because the subject remains the subject while the object remains the object, and there is no linkage between them (Guo 1991, 54). However, I think the problem of bifurcation does not simply lie with the issue that these two sides have no connection. Rather, it is merely a one-way relationship, which is not as complete as a two-way relationship of intersubjectivity. Instead, the subject is not always in the subject position, and the object is not merely the object. In Zhanran’s words, any dichotomy creates conflicts and violates the teaching of nonduality. It cannot reveal the undifferentiated, inconceivable, all-pervasive attribute of Buddha-nature.

In the *Jin’gangpi*, Zhanran further takes pains to reject the opposition between Buddha-nature and dharma nature by refuting the idea that awareness and non-awareness are mutually exclusive. “Awareness deprived of non-awareness is not called Buddha-nature. Non-awareness deprived of awareness cannot be said to be dharma nature. [If] awareness lacked non-awareness, how would Buddha-nature stand?”⁵⁴ In this passage, Zhanran does not mean to separate between awareness and non-awareness. Instead, he strongly upholds nonduality, which eliminates the opposition between subject and object and harmonizes awareness and non-awareness as well as Buddha-nature and dharma nature.

Continuing his idea of the nonduality of awareness and non-awareness, Zhanran uses the notion of suchness to discuss the relationship between the insentient and Buddha-nature. The conventional conception of suchness is that in the insentient it is called dharma nature, while only in the sentient can it be named Buddha-nature. According to this understanding, insentient things would have dharma nature, but not Buddha-nature. To refute the dichotomy of dharma nature and Buddha-nature, Zhanran states:

“Dharma” designates non-awareness; “Buddha” is a name for awareness. Although sentient beings originally have the principle of non-awareness, they have never had the wisdom of being aware of non-awareness. Therefore, [“dharma” nature and “Buddha” nature are] temporarily differentiated, making one aware of non-awareness. [How can] non-awareness remain non-awareness once you are aware of it? [So, how can you] instead say that the object of awareness is apart from the subject of awareness?⁵⁵

A “dharma” is putatively an object of awareness, an insentient thing devoid of awareness of its own. “Awareness” is consciousness of an object. For Zhanran, based on the principle of mutual inclusion, non-awareness is included in awareness, not negated or excluded. Likewise, awareness is included in, and has, non-awareness. (This should remind the reader

54 *Jin’gangpi* 《金剛鐮》，T 1932, 783a15-17: 「覺無不覺，不名佛性。不覺無覺，法性不成。覺無不覺，佛性寧立。」

55 *Ibid.*, 783a09-12: 「法名不覺，佛名為覺。眾生雖本有不覺之理，而未曾有覺不覺智。故且分之，令覺不覺。豈覺不覺，不覺猶不覺耶？反謂所覺離能覺耶？」

of the doctrines of nonduality and identity discussed above.) When we call an insentient thing unaware, we actually designate it as being both unaware and aware. There cannot be awareness that is without non-awareness, and vice versa. There cannot be an insentient thing, i.e., the putatively unaware, that is without awareness. Neither can we situate only dharma nature, but not Buddha-nature, in any one thing. The insentient and Buddha-nature, therefore, mutually include and entail each other. We can further say that insentient things and Buddha-nature mutually pervade one another, indicating that each insentient thing pervades the other insentient things as well, for Zhanran says, “Three thousand and three thousand are mutually all-pervasive.”⁵⁶ However, a detailed discussion of the concept that three thousand dharmas are inherently entailed in matter (*seju* 色具) is beyond the scope of this essay.

In the *Jin'gangpi*, Zhanran elaborates his thesis of insentient things having Buddha-nature by setting up a situation where, in a dream, he receives a visitor with whom he has a conversation on this subject. At the end of their debate and discussion, Zhanran imagines a challenger who might bring questions to his visitor, to whom Zhanran teaches the way in which he may forestall the challenger:

Once [you]⁵⁷ have believed in [its] all-pervasiveness, [I]⁵⁸ will next] show you [its] all-pervasive entailment. Since it is the same as all Buddhas and equal to the dharma realm, this all-pervasive nature includes the bodies of all Buddhas. One body is all bodies. It is like the response-lands of all Buddhas. One land is all lands. The body and the land are identical.⁵⁹

Here, Zhanran further moves from the all-pervasive essence to all-pervasive *inclusion* (*bianju* 遍具) of Buddha-nature. He also restates the identity of the organism and the environment to eliminate any tension between these two and to make them accord with each other. As Tiantai thinker Shiju 時舉 in the Song dynasty explains, the organism and the environment of the nine unenlightened realms and the one enlightened realm are “mutually inclusive and mutually pervasive, and identical to the three thousand [dharmas of/in/as] one moment of thought.”⁶⁰ The pairs of the mind and the form, the organism and the environment, the sentient being and the insentient thing, etc. are interfused. Consequently, Buddha-nature and insentient things do not differ from each other, and each completely includes the other. This concept indicates absolute non-obstruction and all-pervasiveness. Thus, insentient things all possess Buddha-nature.

Zhanran remarks, “To reveal the possession [of Buddha-nature] is to reveal the character of seeds, to reveal all-pervasiveness is to reveal the capacity, and to reveal entailment

56 *Fuxing* 《輔行》, T 1912, 290a09: 「彼彼三千互遍。」

57 “You” refers to the potential challenger comes to the visitor in Zhanran’s dream.

58 “I” refers to Zhanran’s visitor.

59 *Jin'gangpi* 《金剛錮》, T 1932, 786a17-19: 「既信遍已，次示遍具。既同諸佛，等於法界，故此遍性具諸佛之身，一身一切身；如諸佛之感土，一土一切土。身土相即。」

60 *Jin'gangpi lun shiwen* 《金剛錮論釋文》, X 937, 569b22: 「互具互遍，即一念三千。」

is to reveal the virtue.”⁶¹ Seeds are things that can grow. The character of seeds refers to insentient things’ potential of reaching the highest stage of liberation. Insentient things thus possess Buddha-nature. At the same time, the capacity of Buddha-nature is immeasurably all-pervasive, penetrating all sentient and insentient things. The perfect virtue of Buddha-nature is non-discriminative, considering the mutual inclusion of Buddha-nature and the insentient. In general Mahāyāna understanding, having Buddha-nature represents the essence of the Buddha and the potential to attain the supreme enlightenment of a Buddha. This quote of Zhanran shows his acknowledgement of these two definitions and, further, his elaboration of the quality of Buddha-nature. For Zhanran, since Buddha-nature is all-pervasive and non-exclusive, it must include all insentient things, and all insentient things must have Buddha-nature.

In sum, in the context of the Perfect Teaching, nonduality of body and land shows the inclusion of the environment in Buddhahood. All-pervasiveness denotes that Buddha-nature pervades both the sentient and the insentient. The identity of inanimate beings and Buddha-nature reaffirms that each of them is as it is and cannot be separated from one another. Mutual inclusion eliminates the subject-object confrontation. These attributes together with the threefold Buddha-nature affirm the conception that insentient things can actively attain Buddhahood.

Interpretations of Zhanran’s Idea

Zhanran enthusiastically promotes his idea that insentient things definitely have Buddha-nature. His advocacy has brought about great echoes in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. If insentient things can actively become Buddhas, rather than being passively pervaded by Buddha-nature, then how they reach the supreme attainment would be an issue, at least for some Japanese Tendai monks. How, they ask, do insentient things actually practice toward Buddhahood? And what are the examples of insentient things’ enlightenment? In their correspondence with their Japanese interlocutors, Guangxiu, Zongying, and Zhili take different approaches but all agree that the answers must be in accordance with the Perfect Teaching. Their arguments are mainly based on the inseparability of the sentient and the insentient, the nonduality of body and land, as well as the mutual inclusion of mind, Buddha, sentient beings, and insentient things.

61 *Jin’gangpi* 《金剛鐮》, T 1932, 786a28-29: 「示有，是示種性；示遍，是示體量；示具，是示體德。」

Guangxiu

Japanese Tendai monk Encho 円澄 (771-836) raises his doubt that insentient things are capable of practicing to become Buddhas. In his response to Encho's question, Guangxiu (廣修, 771-843) explains how insentient things become Buddhas:

[Insentient things] accompany⁶² sentient beings to become Buddhas; therefore, once one attains [Buddhahood], all attain [Buddhahood as well]. Insentient things are never excluded. If one says that insentient things neither resolve to practice nor attain Buddhahood, then sentient beings also neither resolve to practice nor attain Buddhahood. Why is this so? It is because they both do not resolve [to practice]. If one resolves [to practice], then all resolve [to practice]. Their essence is not separate from each other.⁶³

The point of Guangxiu's argument is the inseparability of sentient beings and insentient things that echoes Zhanran's conception of the nonduality of body and land, i.e., organism and environment. The essence of the sentient and that of the insentient are not separate. Also, their essence is unity, rather than a union that is a combination or connection of two essences. The inseparability of the sentient and the insentient denotes that there is no timing gap between the sentient being's and the insentient thing's attainment of Buddhahood. Sentient beings *alone* do not attain Buddhahood, and neither do insentient things.

Regarding Guangxiu's statement—once one attains Buddhahood, all do, too—Ziporyn offers an explanation by giving the example of “setup-punch-line model” in a joke or a funny story.⁶⁴ The punch line, which is a critical word, phrase, or sentence, makes the joke amusing. At the point when the punch line is delivered, the remarks that preset the joke and that are serious and opposite to the funny punch line also become funny. So, once the punch line succeeds, the setup does, too. Without the punch line, the joke falls flat. Without the setup, the punch line itself loses its purpose. So, the setup and the subsequent punch line assist each other to provoke laughter from the audience. The serious remarks, i.e., the setup, have to be introduced first, followed by the trigger, the punch line. If the punch line went before the setup, the joke would not be funny. Although there is a specific time sequence that displays the setup and the punch line, it is fair to say that they become funny at the same time. As the punch line

62 The original Chinese is “*sui* 隨”, which may be read as “to follow” or “to accompany.” If it is read as “*gensui* 跟隨” or “*suicong* 隨從,” then a timing difference of the sentient's and the insentient's achievement is implied, which also means that the sentient and the insentient are separate. However, if *sui* is read as “*bansui* 伴隨,” then there is no timing gap. From this context, it is better to render the Chinese word “*sui*” as “to accompany.”

63 *Tiantaizong weijue fu shiyi* 《天台宗未決 (附釋疑)》, X 942, 677b07-09: 「隨有情成佛，故一成一一切成，何嘗簡無情？若言無情不發修、不成佛，有情亦不發修，亦不成佛。何以故？俱不發故。一發一切發，體不相離故。」

64 For a detailed discussion about the model, see Ziporyn (2000, 4:601-609).

is introduced, the setup joins it together, and they simultaneously become funny. Also, they have to be in strong contrast; as Ziporyn puts it, their relation “reserves both radical opposition and uncompromising identity at the same time” (2000, 4:605). It is the contrast between their characteristics and functions that results in their simultaneous attainment. The sentient is *both* opposite and identical to the insentient; together, they simultaneously attain Buddhahood.

It is worth noting that Guangxiu also states that the inner insentient thing (*neiwuqing* 內無情)⁶⁵, or the physical body, is “first” transformed into a Buddha. Because the external insentient phenomena are where sentient beings reside, they also attain Buddhahood (*xitong chengfo* 悉同成佛).⁶⁶ In this sense, the inner insentient body is accompanied by the external insentient phenomena; yet, their attainments occur simultaneously. Insentient things become Buddhas as a result of sentient beings’ attaining Buddhahood, but not vice versa. Again, it should not be understood to mean that the sentient beings’ attainment precedes the insentient things’ in time, even though the former is causally and logically preceding the latter.

On the other hand, like sentient beings who can resolve to cultivate, Guangxiu argues that insentient things also have the same capacity, without sentient beings’ assistance. Since one is all, all is one; when any *one* does it, all do it, and vice versa. This would imply the possibility of insentient things’ attainment of Buddhahood prior to sentient beings’—but only in terms of causality, not in terms of timing. Insentient things may play an active role in achieving Buddhahood or even be in a leading position to assist sentient beings in realizing Buddhahood.

In contrast, Mou Zongsan argues that insentient things lack the ability to practice, thereby rejecting the concept of their Buddhahood. Mou takes insentient things’ Buddha-nature as an attribute of the “inclusion” (*zhan’gai* 霑溉) of Buddha-nature. That is, he thinks insentient things have Buddha-nature only in the sense of being passively imbued with Buddha-nature, not in the sense of being capable of active practice (1989, 904). He further describes this “inclusion” of insentient things as an ontological existence, indicating that they are incapable of “active self-realization (*jiji di zizheng* 積極地自證)” (1989, 904). As such, his critique does not differ much from Huiyuan’s depiction of the ontological aspect of Buddha-nature. Also, Mou’s understanding is only a one-sided pervasiveness as stated above, different from Zhanran’s emphasis on mutual inclusion and contrary to Guangxiu’s affirmation of insentient things’ active nature.

65 In general, the body is considered sentient. Here, Guangxiu succinctly declares the body as inner insentient thing referring to the matter of the sentient being to make a contrast to the outer insentient environment. After all, say, my fingernail as a part of my body is sentient. If I cut it, and it falls on the ground becoming a part of the environment, then is my fingernail sentient or insentient?

66 *Tiantaizong weijue fu shiyi* 《天台宗未決(附釋疑)》, X 942, 677b22-23

Zongying

Insentient things' capacity for attaining Buddhahood is perhaps not too difficult to understand from the perspective of the essence or the principle of Buddha-nature. In terms of phenomenal appearances, however, it would incur doubt. Tokuyen 徳円, a Japanese Tendai monk, questions which grass or tree has ever practiced the six perfections to become a Buddha and to teach the Dharma. Zongying (宗穎 c. ninth century) ascribes a wrong view to Tokuyen:

If one does not rid [oneself] of deluded attachment yet painstakingly looks for grasses and trees that practice the six perfections on their own, it is like seeking to see the fructification of illusory flowers in the sky with diseased eyes. The nonduality of environment and organism is the Dharma of One Vehicle. One who awakens to it [understands that] the dharma realms are penetrated and harmonious. For one who is confused about it, all [phenomena] and the self are separate.⁶⁷

Here, Zongying warns that any attempt to seek an enlightened insentient thing would be in vain. It is not because there are no enlightened insentient things to be found; rather, this kind of search results from one's discrimination, clinging, and delusion and therefore is meaningless. The flower in the sky is a creation of diseased eyes. Similarly, grasses and trees "outside" are created by the deluded mind. Outside the mind there are no phenomena.⁶⁸ Thus, there need no "other marks" of grasses or trees outside the mind, and there need no examples of their attainment.

Like Guangxiu, Zongying also reiterates the nonduality of organism and environment and calls it the One Vehicle, which is the supreme teaching. Duality departs from the teaching of all-pervasiveness, while nonduality is in line with mutual inclusion. Delusion leads to exclusion, while awareness leads to inclusion. It is due to delusion and perversion that one does not see non-distinction between the self and the other. Instead, one superimposes the duality of subject and object onto the bifurcation of body and land and vividly sees their differentiation, an erroneous view that makes one far away from enlightenment. If one really understands the concept of nonduality, one will never be caught up in a relative situation.

Zongying's clarification corresponds to Zhanran's argument about insentient things' Buddha-nature based on the nonduality of body and land. Zhanran maintains that, from the perspective of principle, the environment is identical to the organism. For him, the eternal

67 *Tiantaizong weijue fu shiyi* 《天台宗未決(附釋疑)》, X 942, 697b08-10: 「若妄執不消，苦求草木自修六度者，如以病眼，求見空華之結果而已。夫依正不二，一乘之法。悟之者，法界洞融；迷之者，舉自皆隔焉。」

68 It should be noted that this does not refer to mind-only or consciousness-only. Rather, it has to be examined in the context of nature inclusion, or inherent entailment, (*xingju* 性具). Accordingly, in Tiantai, it is more accurate to say that every thing is entailed in the nature of all dharmas or the mind, rather than being created by the mind. The mind and matter are inseparable, and they are just as they are.

tranquil-illumination (*chang ji guang* 常寂光) land of the Buddha is the land of the dharma-body, one of the three bodies of the Buddha. The body and the land are in accord with each other.⁶⁹ Viewed with delusion by beings with so-called sentience, however, there is a boundary between the environment and the organism. In reality, the true dharma land is not different from the true dharma-body. Inasmuch as they are not two—body, representing the sentient, and land, representing the insentient—both have Buddha-nature. Therefore, Zongying argues that one's mind and one's environment are interfused.

Siming Zhili

In the Song dynasty, an anonymous Japanese Tendai monk expressed his doubt, as did Tokuyen, about whether grasses and trees can actually become Buddhas:

The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* states that if a *nyagrodha* tree has mind, I will assure it [its attainment of] *anuttarā-samyak-sambodhi*. Because it does not have mind, there is no assurance [of its Buddhahood]. The *Faxianglun* says that suchness is depended by all dharmas. Although non-mind grasses and trees without exception [also depend on suchness], they only have principle-nature (*lixing* 理性) but no practice-nature (*xingxing* 行性) [and therefore] cannot become Buddhas.⁷⁰

This Japanese monk's main concern is that only those who have minds can practice. Without mind, it is impossible to even resolve to practice. Grasses and trees have suchness and are included in suchness, but that is so only from the perspective of principle. When speaking from the perspective of practice, cultivation does not actually take place because they have no mind, therefore lacking the capacity to contemplate or to eliminate defilements.

This point is the same as Jizang's argument that grasses and trees do not have (deluded) mind; therefore, it is unreasonable to talk about their realization of Buddhahood. Jizang does not think that insentient things can practice, even though he acknowledges that they have Buddha-nature. He uses a dream metaphor to elaborate the relationship between delusion and enlightenment. Enlightenment is likened to one's awakening from a dream. If one is not dreaming, one does not awaken from it. Insentient things are not in a state of dream/delusion, so they have no illusory state to escape from, therefore no Buddhahood to attain.⁷¹

To the Japanese monk's doubt, Zhili (四明知禮, 960-1028) responds with three points. First, the teaching in the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* and the *Faxianglun* 法相論 that grasses and trees only have principle-nature, but not mind or practice-nature, is provisional.⁷² This is

69 *Fuxing* 《輔行》, T 1912, 152a09.

70 *Siming zunzhe jiaoxinglu* 《四明尊者教行錄》, T 1937, 890b08-12: 「涅槃經云，若拘陀樹有心，我當授與阿耨菩提記；以其無心故，不與授記。法相論云，真如能為一切諸法所依。無心草木雖無所變，但有理性，無行性，不可成佛。」

71 *Dasheng xuanlun* 《大乘玄論》, T45. 40c.

72 *Siming zunzhe jiaoxinglu* 《四明尊者教行錄》, T 1937, 890b14-15.

similar to Zhanran's argument that the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* "teaches the Real combined with the provisional" (*daiquan shuoshi* 帶權說實).⁷³ This is a provisional way of addressing the issue of insentient things' practice and does not correspond with the Perfect Teaching. Therefore, one should not use these two texts to question insentient things' practice. Based on this, it is clear that, for Zhili, insentient things can practice.

Second, "In order to reveal true cultivation (*zhenxiu* 真修), it has to be based on the principle-nature. The principle is neither different from the past to the present, nor excluded from matter or mind."⁷⁴ True cultivation is not dependently co-arising. It is inherently in accord with the principle-nature; it is everlasting and ubiquitous. In other words, true cultivation is a practice of immediacy or spontaneity. That is, it is not performed step by step; rather, it is naturally revealed and achieved. Indeed, true cultivation has no beginning or end; it is always as it is. Based on this principle, all contrasting opposites are integrated and interfused. There is no discrimination or tension between matter and mind, the sentient and the insentient, or phenomenon and organism. Therefore, when one, sentient or insentient, attains Buddhahood, all become the world of the Buddha and the Buddha himself. There is no demarcation between the Buddha and non-Buddha. Additionally, although Zhili says the principle-nature is the basis of true cultivation, the practice-nature does not obstruct it at all, because true cultivation is already perfect, immediate, and as such.

Third, "according to conditioned cultivation (*yuanxiu* 緣修), to speak of the [notion of] insentient things' attaining Buddhahood, marks are exhausted and sentience is forgotten. Therefore, insentient things all become Buddhas."⁷⁵ Conditioned cultivation is "impermanent" for it has a beginning, contrasting to true cultivation that is beginningless. Simply put, conditioned cultivation is a gradual, deliberate practice, which would not be in accord with the Perfect Teaching, which is spontaneous and unconditioned.

Nevertheless, it is worth taking a closer look at the line that "marks are exhausted and sentience is forgotten (*xiangjin qingwang* 相盡情忘)." One possible reading is that *xiangjin* refers to the eradication of external phenomena; *qingwang* means the abandonment of internal feelings. In other words, there is no bifurcation of matter/mind or outer/inner. Another possible reading of *xiangjin* is that the appearances or marks that distinguish the sentient and the insentient disappear, and thus the Buddha is neither sentient nor insentient. *Qingwang* indicates that the enlightened one is rid of attachment. When a sentient being becomes a Buddha, he has no more attachment and makes no discriminations between himself and others. All are equal in the Buddha's eyes, and therefore, his environment including sentient and insentient things is also in the state of Buddhahood. As discussed above, if one adopts this reading, it then seems that insentient things' Buddhahood is only concomitant with sentient beings'.

73 *Jin'gangpi* 《金剛鐔》, T 1932, 782b09. However, while discussing Buddha-nature, Zhanran does not bifurcate between principle-nature and practice-nature.

74 *Siming zunzhe jiaoxinglu* 《四明尊者教行錄》, T 1937, 890b17-18: 「欲顯真修，須依理性。理非今古，不簡色心。」

75 *Ibid.*, 890b18-20: 「又依緣修，說無情成佛者，相盡情忘，則無情悉成佛矣。」

In Zhili's judgment, insentient things certainly can attain Buddhahood, whether it is discussed from the sudden or gradual perspective. In true cultivation, all dyads—be it form vs. mind, the sentient vs. the insentient, the phenomenon vs. the organism, or the body vs. the land—are not really oppositional or dual. Even with respect to deliberate, conditioned cultivation, in the final stage of fruition there is no external form or inner sentiment.

That being said, Zhili does not simply insist on the practice of insentient things. Citing from the *Sinianchu* 《四念處》 (*The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*) traditionally attributed to Zhiyi, Zhili contends, "Be it consciousness or matter, all are matter-only. Thus, the Buddhahood of sentient beings is identical to the Buddhahood of insentient things."⁷⁶ As Zhiyi teaches, whatever is matter or consciousness is both consciousness-only and matter-only, for the terms mind and matter are only used for convenience. Ziporyn describes the relationship between mind-only and matter-only as, "each means both," a multi-way relationship. The subject perceives itself and the object; the object perceives itself and the subject (2009, 242). Here, the conventional conception of cognition—a subject vs. an object—is broken down. The mind can reflect upon matter; equally, matter can reflect upon the mind. Following Zhanran, Zhili insists upon the nonduality of matter and mind. According to the nonduality of matter and mind, Zhili suggests that the Buddhahood of insentient things does not mean that a grass or tree can subjugate demons. Rather, there is no need to demonstrate insentient things' cultivation to prove their Buddhahood. When the mind is enlightened, the external forms are also enlightened simultaneously, for they are not apart from each other.

A possible, albeit superficial, answer to the Japanese monk's question can be drawn from the notion of animals' Buddha-nature. It is widely accepted in Mahāyāna Buddhism that all sentient beings in the nine dharma realms have Buddha-nature. However, Buddhists take this notion for granted, and it is rarely questioned how a bug or even a unicellular being can actually practice to be fully enlightened. Animals have Buddha-nature, meaning they have the potential to become Buddhas in the future, rather than now in an animal existence. If this explanation is reasonable, then one should not question insentient things' potential to Buddhahood, or ask for examples to prove the validity of this notion.

Zhanran makes it clear that he temporarily asserts insentient things' Buddha-nature in order to eradicate the world's delusion.⁷⁷ That is, the world is clinging to the view that only sentient beings have Buddha-nature, and so he attempts to rectify this wrong view by employing the *upaya* of asserting insentient things' capacity for Buddhahood. Strictly speaking, there are no sentient or insentient things. This is why at the end of the dream in the *Jin'gangpi*, Zhanran wakes up and finds both the bumpkin questioner and the wise respondent gone. Neither the questions nor the answers can be obtained.⁷⁸

76 Yongjia Jizong, ed., *Siming renyue yishuo congshu* 《四明仁岳異說叢書》, X 948, 860b08-09: 「若識、若色，皆是唯色。是則有情成佛，即無情成佛。」

77 *Jin'gangpi* 《金剛鐸》, T 1932, 782c14-16.

78 Let me reiterate that Zhanran's proposal of insentient things' Buddha-nature is not entirely provisional. On one level, he argues that his idea is a teaching of the Real, for insentient things

In Buddhism, all teachings serve a provisional purpose and should be put aside once the purpose is fulfilled. In the metaphor of the raft, once one has crossed the river, the raft should be abandoned. As Hans-Rudolf Kantor explains it, if one regards the text's "provisional constructions as apodictic statements or ultimate judgments," one generates attachments again (2009, 337), and it is like carrying the raft on one's back after having crossed the river. In my opinion, if one becomes attached to the concept that insentient things are Buddhas, one is still endorsing the dichotomy of the sentient and the insentient, deviating from Zhanran's teaching of nonduality.

Moreover, the attachment to proofs of insentient things' Buddhahood might lead to pantheism or animism. I think the fact that Zhanran neither straightforwardly declares that insentient things can practice toward Buddhahood nor touches upon the modality of their cultivation in a way refrains from animism. Unfortunately, his proposal has been transformed into the theory of grasses' and trees' attainment of Buddhahood, a claim that focuses on the enlightenment of grasses and trees, but not all insentient things, as Jacqueline I. Stone notes (1999, 29-30). This theory is then blended with Japanese local beliefs, evolving into animism in medieval Japan and continuing to the present day.

Guangxiu, Zongying, and Zhili all endorse Zhanran's doctrine that insentient things have Buddha-nature and further argue that they can realize the final liberation. They respond to the Japanese monks' questions in accordance with the Perfect Teaching and are not deterred by the question of *how* insentient things practice. They do not see any need to offer a curriculum of their practice or examples of their attainment of Buddhahood.⁷⁹

do have Buddha-nature in the context of the Perfect Teaching. On another level, his proposal is an *upayic* antidote to any attempt to separate the sentient and the insentient. Finally, *upaya* does not differ from perfection, and therefore, the Provisional and the Real are not dualistic at all (*quanshi buer* 權實不二), which means Zhanran's idea is the Real and in line with the Perfect Teaching as stated in the beginning of this paper.

79 Up to this point, some might regard my argument that the insentient thing actively, not passively, possesses Buddha-nature as a dualistic view. However, I am emulating Zhanran's strategy, which first argues for the case of insentient things and then deconstructs the separation of sentience and insentience. At the outset of this paper, the claim that the activeness of insentient things stands out is meant to challenge the belief that their Buddha-nature is purely inactive. According to nonduality and identity, it is necessary eventually to overcome the dichotomy of activeness and passivity. Moreover, it is necessary to reiterate that neither the sentient nor the insentient functions in isolation of each other, as discussed. Tiantai claims that all things have three truths (a point I have discussed) and three tracks. Related to one another, the track of contemplation (*guan Zhao gui* 觀照軌) corresponds to emptiness, the track of practice-support (*zicheng gui* 資成軌) to the provisional, and the track of the real nature (*zhenxing gui* 真性軌) to the middle. Take the first track for example, the contemplation (i.e., emptiness) is the negation of self-nature (Skt. *svabhāva*, Ch. *zixing* 自性), an underlying, unchanging, independent substance of phenomena. In a certain sense, the emptiness of an (insentient) chair

Conclusion

According to the *Jin'gangpi*, Zhanran's main intention for addressing the issue of insentient things' Buddha-nature is to offer a correct definition of Buddha-nature. As he states in the opening line of the text, "It has been many years since I first began to study the Buddhist scriptures. Never would I not keep the meaning of Buddha-nature in my mind."⁸⁰ By redefining Buddha-nature, he also makes the voice of the Tiantai school heard, expecting the Perfect Teaching to be better understood, which, I argue, is the original and deeper intent of Zhanran's proposal. This point is brought to light as Zhanran comments that the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* is a teaching of the Real combined with expedient means, as the text classifies insentient things into the category of beings lacking Buddha-nature. In addition, he even suggests that Zhang'an Guanding's 章安灌頂 (561-632) clear position on insentient things possessing no Buddha-nature is an *upayic* approach. That is, for Zhanran, Guanding actually believed in insentient things' Buddha-nature, but he knew it was not yet time to convince his contemporaries of insentient things' Buddha-nature.⁸¹ As a result, there is a discrepancy between what Guanding truly thinks and what he expresses in his commentaries. Whether Zhanran's attempt to defend his different opinions from the scriptures and to find a common ground with the Tiantai patriarchs before him is a success or not is beyond the scope of this essay. Nonetheless, it is clear that Zhanran takes pains to advocate his idea of insentient things' Buddha-nature. Because he believes that the Tiantai Perfect Teaching is the most profound one, he defends his claim

would be tantamount to the living being's mind; both are a negation of their bare inert facticity, their closedness, and their simple self-identity. A mind is just a more complex form of imminent self-negation, an openness-to-world. It is perhaps relevant here that "openness" is indeed among the translations sometimes suggested for *sūnyatā*. Under the disguise of passivity, an inanimate thing's track of contemplation, although ostensibly inert, is no less than the initiative of a mind. I can imagine that some might interpret my point this way: a sentient being achieves his or her final salvation, with the participation of the insentient world, in an active mode of practice, while an insentient thing attains Buddhahood, with the assistance of the sentient realm, in a passive mode of practice. However, such a view is still problematic in Tiantai. In both cases (sentient and insentient things) of practice, it is neither active nor passive, which can also be provisionally called either active or passive. The duality of activeness and passivity breaks down in the same way as the duality of subject and object: whatever we call "active" always involves both activity and passivity, and the same is true for whatever we call "passive." Each is always really both and neither. Further elucidation of the thorny issue of insentient things' active/passive practice needs to be done in a separate paper.

80 *Jin'gangpi* 《金剛錍》, T 1932, 781a21-22: 「自濫釋釋典，積有歲年，未嘗不以佛性義經懷。」

81 *Dabo niepan jing shu* 《大般涅槃經疏》, T 1767, 184a07-09.

by aligning his elaborated arguments with the doctrines of the Tiantai Perfect Teaching, such as nonduality, all-pervasiveness, the threefold Buddha-nature, identity, and mutual inclusion.

An examination into these related Tiantai doctrines helps clarify Zhanran's position on insentient things' Buddha-nature. In nonduality, the discrimination between sentient and insentient things is broken down, and dharma nature and Buddha-nature are not separate. Therefore, insentient things and Buddha-nature are not separate, either. Also, due to the principle of all-pervasiveness, Buddha-nature includes insentient things, and insentient things "are replete with" Buddha-nature. It is improper to dichotomize suchness into Buddha-nature and dharma nature, making them mutually exclusive. Furthermore, Zhanran's claim that insentient things have all of the three causal aspects of Buddha-nature implies their capability of cultivation.

Zhanran also talks about the identity of Buddha-nature and insentient things to reaffirm that each of them is as it is. One cannot locate Buddha-nature outside the insentient thing; nor can one locate any insentient thing outside Buddha-nature. According to the principle of mutual inclusion, insentient things that are conventionally denoted as the object, turn into the subject. They pervade, entail, and penetrate Buddha-nature, affirming their participation in Buddhahood. In addition, for Zhanran, awareness (i.e., sentience) indicates both awareness and non-awareness (i.e., insentience), and a referral to non-awareness pertains to both of them, too. Awareness and non-awareness are not distinctly different or contrary to each other. Therefore, Zhanran's statement that "insentient things have Buddha-nature" in my opinion is no less than a declaration that they will attain Buddhahood.

Zhanran's proposal needs to be investigated within the context of the Perfect Teaching. Any interpretation outside this context would not do justice to Zhanran's proposal. The interpretations of the Tiantai descendants given in this essay agree with Zhanran's idea; moreover, they provide their audience with different rationales and from various valuable viewpoints. Even though they do not doubt that insentient things can attain Buddhahood, what they differ on is how the fruition might take place. To some extent, their contemplation of insentient things' cultivation is triggered by the questions that Tendai pilgrims bring to China. With a background of the nature-based indigenous culture, the Japanese Tendai thinkers shift the focal concern of insentient thing's Buddha-nature to their Buddhahood. Through an examination of their intercultural conversation, we see how the Tiantai thinkers respond to their counterparts and elaborate on Zhanran's ideas.

Agreeing with these Tiantai thinkers, I suggest that there is no need to offer the exact process of insentient things' spiritual practice, for Zhanran's main concern is to offer a thorough interpretation of Buddha-nature. Furthermore, any attempt to search for the methods or examples of insentient things' practice would fall into the trap of attachment and reaffirm the bifurcation of sentience and insentience. Regardless of whether one agrees with Zhanran's ideas, it is clear that Zhanran's enthusiastic assertion of insentient things' Buddha-nature combined with the implication of their potential Buddhahood is an important development in the Tiantai school and Chinese Buddhism.

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