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## ONE NAME, INFINITE MEANINGS: JIZANG'S THOUGHT ON MEANING AND REFERENCE

### ABSTRACT

Jizang sets forth a hermeneutical theory of “one name, infinite meanings” that proposes four types of interpretation of word meaning to the effect that a nominal word *X* means *X*, non-*X*, the negation of *X*, and all things whatsoever. In this article, I offer an analysis of the theory, with a view to elucidating Jizang's thought on meaning and reference and considering its contemporary significance. The theory, I argue, may best be viewed as an expedient means for telling us how to use words provisionally without any definite understanding of their referents.

### I.

Speakers use words to identify the object they intend to refer, yet it is often not very clear what object is identified. For example, the demonstrative “that” can be used to refer to different objects on different occasions; there is no context-free word–object relationship. Likewise, many nouns cover a variety of meaning, and the ascertaining of the meaning, and hence the referent, of a noun in a given case hinges on concrete linguistic and nonlinguistic contexts. Furthermore, words may be used metaphorically, ironically, allusively, and so on, in which case they may go far beyond their literal meaning or reference.

A word can have multiple meanings and the referent of a word is not fixed independently of the context. Normally, of course, we would hardly claim, à la Humpty Dumpty, that speakers can use a word to mean just what they choose it to mean. However, perhaps the range of possible meanings that a word can have goes far beyond what we might think. Might it be possible to have a feasible theory of meaning and reference, which is followed in a community of language users, such that a word, as used on a particular occasion, expresses not only

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its conventional, literal meaning or referent, but also what is literally meant by its opposite word, and even the negation of its conventional meaning? Furthermore, can we stretch the meaning of a word without limit, such that it virtually means each and everything in the world? Startling as this may be, it is basically what is proposed by Jizang 吉藏 (Chi-tsang) (549–623 CE), the main philosophical exponent of the Sanlun 三論 school of Chinese Buddhism, in his hermeneutical theory of “one name, infinite meanings” (*yiming wuliang yi* 一名無量義), in which one name (*ming* 名), or rather one nominal word, is said to bear infinite (*wuliang* 無量) meanings (*yi* 義).<sup>1</sup> The multiplicity and indeterminacy of linguistic reference are highlighted to the utmost.

Indeed, Jizang also speaks of “one name, one meaning,” “one meaning, one name,” and “one meaning, infinite names.” However, the “one name, infinite meanings” theory is philosophically the most intriguing and is explicated quite extensively by Jizang himself.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, the theory serves for Jizang as a hermeneutical means for construing key Buddhist doctrinal terms to suit his own purposes; it also seems to be the epitome, in linguistic terms, of his overall philosophical position. The present article attempts to offer an analysis of the theory with a view to elucidating Jizang’s thought on meaning and reference and considering the contemporary significance, if any, of the theory.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. In Section 2, I briefly outline the Indian Mādhyamika thought propounded by Nāgārjuna (Longshu 龍樹) (c. 150–250 CE), mainly whose work Jizang used as a basis for his philosophy, and sketch certain aspects of Jizang’s philosophy. In Section 3, I discuss Jizang’s thought on language concerning the notion of provisional expression to pave the way for the following section. Section 4 is the focus of the article. Here, I explicate in turn the four types of interpretation of word meaning that together constitute the “one name, infinite meanings” theory. In Section 5, I attempt to give a sympathetic evaluation of the theory.

## II.

Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Buddhist Mādhyamika school, claimed that all things in the world originate codependently (*pratītyasamutpanna*), because their coming to be, change, and perishing depend on various causes and conditions. On the ground that they originate codependently, things are said to be empty (*śūnya*) in the sense of being devoid of self-nature (*svabhāva*) where by “self-nature” Nāgārjuna roughly means a self-existent, causally unconditioned, and unchanging nature that a thing may be believed to possess. In his view, putative self-natures are actually conceptual constructs that are illicitly reified and embedded in the world.

Now, the thorough dependent origination and consequential emptiness of a thing may seem to strip it of any firm ground and show its deeply illusory character. Here, Nāgārjuna resorted to figurative cases of a phantom, a dream, a reflection, bubbles, and so on, to indicate the ultimately illusory character of things. However, he upheld a doctrine of two truths that draws a thin line between the supreme truth (*paramārthasatya*) (*zhendi* 真諦) and the conventional truth (*samvrtisatya*) (*sudi* 俗諦). From the perspective of conventional truth, things in the world are (conventionally) real. It is only in the light of the supreme truth that they are said to be illusory. In this respect, they differ from self-nature, a square circle, and the horns of a rabbit, which are sheer nothings.

It is difficult to tell how Nāgārjuna understood the notion of supreme truth, and present-day scholars differ in their interpretations of his understanding. Given that we are concerned mainly with Jizang's philosophical thought, we may skip this intricate issue and turn to Jizang's construal of the doctrine.

Just as Nāgārjuna sought to render explicit some implications of the Buddha's teaching about the causally conditioned state of things by emphasizing their emptiness, Jizang further deepened Nāgārjuna's teaching about the emptiness of things by highlighting *nonacquisition* (*wude* 無得) as the main intention behind all Mahayana Buddhist scriptures as well as the gateway to final liberation. Here, to have acquisition is to make an item (an idea, a teaching, a thing, an event, etc.) an object of acquisition; this is to take it to be determinate and delineated in form or nature and to count on it as a firm ground. Jizang is emphatic that one must not abide in, or attach oneself to, any such object for dependence.<sup>3</sup>

Now, if the two truths are taken as singly determinate and mutually distinct principles (*li* 理) of actuality, there is a strong temptation to have them as objects of acquisition and become attached to them;<sup>4</sup> for those who have not yet begun to follow the path to liberation, attachment to the conventional truth is the de facto mode of being, whereas those who are already on the path will be tempted to become attached to the supreme truth. In order to counter against acquisition and attachment, Jizang avers that the two *truths* are just two provisional, expedient teachings about the ineffable, indeterminable nondual way (*dao* 道). Just as when one points to the moon with a finger, one's intention is not to show the finger, but to let others see the moon, so it is also with the doctrine of two truths. The two truths, contends Jizang, are meant to make explicit the nondual way; the intention is not of duality, but to let others get at the nondual.<sup>5</sup> Here, the way is variously named the middle way (*zhongdao* 中道), the correct way (*zhengdao* 正道), the nondual principle (*buer zhi li* 不二之理), and so

forth. Significantly, it is also equated with nonacquisition, nonattachment, or the like.

Jizang's philosophical practice aims at transcending all dualistic thought, challenging even the duality between the ineffable way and the verbal teaching. It dismisses as defective even the acquisition of nonacquisition itself. The fact that Jizang equates the way with nonacquisition may suggest that he dispensed with any notion of higher reality and attended merely to the subjective state of complete freedom from any acquisition whatsoever.<sup>6</sup> This explains his therapeutic use of words and his claim that once acquisition is gone, nonacquisition must be relinquished as well; that is, spiritually relevant words are timely medicines used for curing intellectual illness and not to be taken once the disease is gone. However, Jizang *also* uses words as a moon-pointing finger to point to the formless and nameless way and does not seem to wipe out completely the objective existence of the way, though, to be sure, the words used inevitably fall short of representing the latter.<sup>7</sup> For our purposes, in any case, we may leave behind this puzzling issue and focus instead on Jizang's linguistic thought.

### III.

Following Nāgārjuna, Jizang treats linguistic fabrication (*prapañca*) (*xilun* 戲論) as a root cause of human suffering. Although Nāgārjuna probably takes the Sanskrit term *prapañca* to mean our propensity to posit linguistic referents as self-natured and intrinsically real, Jizang construes the Chinese term *xilun* as meaning a definite understanding of all things as well as attachment to them.<sup>8</sup> Here, a definite understanding is one that views the intended referent of a word as determinate in nature and determinable by the word. Such a referent is an object for acquisition and attachment. Therefore, Jizang sets as his task a critique of the definite understanding of things.

We can only consider briefly how Jizang would deny things their determinate nature. Here is an example. One may take a green tree to be determinately such. However, the tree may be green only in respect of the surface of its barks and leaves, not the rest of it. Even the surface might look red to a colorblind person, a cat, or under a microscope. Furthermore, what one human being takes to be a tree may be just food for tree-eating bugs, a post ablaze for some meditating yogis, or a great mass of particles of indeterminate nature for a stubborn quantum physicist.<sup>9</sup> In Jizang's view, much of what things are is such only relative to the observer's perspective, and there is no ultimate, perspective-free determination of things for what they are.

Moreover, because what we take to be things are, at bottom, not different from the ineffable way, things are not determinable by words either.

On the other hand, Jizang appears to have a more positive attitude toward language than his Indian predecessors. In Indian Mādhyamika, the conventional truth is within the bounds of speech, whereas the supreme truth goes beyond the reach of words and is occasionally indicated to be sacred silence. In Jizang, we can detect two kinds of silence: silence *qua* sacred teaching and silence *qua* the nondual principle. He takes speech and silence *qua* sacred teaching to be codependent and declines to value the silence over (sacred) speech. Meanwhile, he emphasizes the nonduality of speech and silence *qua* the nondual principle.<sup>10</sup> In any case, because Jizang affirms the value of language, he must suggest and endorse a way of using and comprehending words such that one, while engaging in linguistic practice, does not fall into the trap of definite understanding.

For Jizang, all words are in reality provisional words (*jiaming* 假名) and should be understood and used as such. Provisional words are codependent and indeterminate in nature, neither intrinsically real, nor denotative of the real.<sup>11</sup> They are used expediently and pragmatically for conveying information, repudiating false views, or for other purposes, and should not be taken as implying the determinate nature of their referents. Correlatively, and as a prevailing practice in the Indian and Chinese Mādhyamika traditions, their referents are also said to be provisional, for they are codependent, nonsubstantial, indeterminate, and are expressible by provisional words.

Here is how Jizang speaks of the provisional use of words:

If one takes affirmation (*shi* 是) to be affirmation, negation (*fei* 非) to be negation, all affirmations and negations are to be negated. If one knows that there is no affirmation, no non-affirmation, no negation, and no non-negation, that both “affirmation” and “negation” are provisional words, then all affirmations and negations are to be affirmed.<sup>12</sup>

According to Jizang, affirmation, as meant by the word “affirmation,” is codependent and indeterminate in nature. To view an affirmation as a *determinate* affirmation unfavorably involves the definite understanding disproved of by Jizang. In reality, there is no determinate affirmation or negation at all, not even their (determinate) negation. Still, one may continue to use words like “affirmation” and “negation,” but only *provisionally* such that no determinate nature or state of their referents is posited. Thus, both affirmation and negation, taken precisely as provisional and indeterminate in themselves, may be used in the Sanlun system.

Likewise, existence and emptiness, signified in the school by the conventional and supreme truths respectively, are provisional and indeterminate. Given their codependent nature, Jizang refers to existence as existence-of-emptiness (*kongyou* 空有) and emptiness as emptiness-of-existence (*youkong* 有空). In the last analysis, existence and emptiness (or nonexistence) are not delimited and distinct from each other. This radical philosophy of indeterminacy denies things any real self-identity whatsoever.

Jizang agrees with Sengzhao 僧肇 (374?–414 CE), a forerunner of the Sanlun school, for the view that to say  $x$  is *not-existent* (*fei you* 非有) is to say it *is not existent* (*feishi you* 非是有), but not that it *is nonexistent* (*shi feiyou* 是非有). That is, the term “not-existent” is intended expediently to deny  $x$ 's existence and not to attribute to it the determinate property of being nonexistent. Similarly, Jizang elsewhere distinguishes between “is *not* dual” and “*is* nondual” and dismisses the latter. Here, with “is *not* dual,” one goes beyond duality without being attached to nonduality. By contrast, “*is* nondual” may easily result in a definite understanding of nonduality.<sup>13</sup> What matters, however, is not precisely the form of expression itself but the attitude behind its use: the expression should be taken provisionally so as to imply no positing of any determinate state or nature whatsoever.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Jizang would further ask us to recognize the intrinsically provisional character of words to avoid any such positing. Thus, he says that “if one realizes the provisional [nature of] words, though one speaks of existence and nonexistence, there is eventually neither existence nor nonexistence.”<sup>15</sup>

#### IV.

We saw in the previous section that for Jizang, words should be understood and used provisionally, such that nothing determinate concerning their referents is posited, that, as the referents of provisional words, all things are empty of any delimited, determinate form or nature. To ensure that there should be no such positing, we may resort to negative expression to negate or empty what has been spoken. For instance, if we apply the word  $X$  to the thing  $x$ , one may falsely think that  $x$  is a determinate  $X$ ; to guard against such thinking, we may then assert that  $x$  should *not* be said to be  $X$  or even that  $x$  is *not*  $X$ .<sup>16</sup> However, we may instead construe the referential function of a word in such a way that once one recognizes that the word has multiple meanings and has comprehended those meanings, one discerns its provisional character and is unlikely to have a definite understanding of its referent. The thing  $x$  as expressed by  $X$  is not a



determinate X, not even distinct from a non-X. Thus construed, words are to be valued for their intrinsically provisional and nonreifying character, and an appeal to negative expression may not always be needed.<sup>17</sup>

This leads us to Jizang's "one name, infinite meanings" theory, which proposes four types of interpretation of word meaning to disclose in a sequence the comprehensive *meaning* of a word. Jizang presents the theory mainly for interpreting key terms in Buddhist scriptures, and it serves for him as a hermeneutic means for showing the coincidence of his thought with what he takes to be the real intention behind the scriptures. However, the point to note is that given Jizang's respects for language, the theory indicates how words can, as usual, be used without their referents being reified and determined.

Here, what is meant by "name" in the phrase "one name, infinite meanings" is typically a nominal word, which includes both nouns and adjectives. The Chinese character for "meaning" here means, basically, what is expressed, directly or indirectly, by the nominal word and intended to be known by the hearer. Presumably, Jizang is not aware of any clear-cut sense-reference distinction. He, however, appears to recognize that different words can have different meanings even when they are used to refer to one and the same thing, that words used to refer to the nondual way have meanings even though the latter, being ineffable, is not directly and properly expressible. As we shall see presently, meanwhile, Jizang also uses the character to stand for the way. Thus, the character has a broad range of application, covering conventional and nonconventional meanings of a word as well as its referent. Consequently, in what follows I should loosely use and understand the notion of "meaning." Correlatively, I use the word "referent" to stand for what a word refers to, typically either things in the world or the ineffable way.

Now, to explore the *meanings* a nominal word has, especially in the context of Buddhist scripture, Jizang presents the following four types of interpretation of word meaning, which we shall examine in turn: the conventional interpretation (*suiming shi* 隨名釋), the codependent interpretation (*yinyuan shi* 因緣釋), the way-revealing interpretation (*xiandao shi* 顯道釋), and the nonhindrance interpretation (*wufang shi* 無方釋).

According to the conventional interpretation of word meaning, the meaning of a word in the Buddhist context is its conventional meaning as it is literally interpreted by Buddhist thinkers in reference to Buddhist texts. For example, the noun "existence" has as its meaning real being, whereas the adjective "middle" (as in "the middle way") means the state of being correct or of being not one-sided. Significantly, although the interpretation represents how the Buddhists normally

construe a word, if one knows only of this construal, one is in danger of taking the referent concerned to be determinate in nature. The word “existent,” for instance, may then refer to something determinately real, which in turn becomes an object for acquisition or attachment. That being so, Jizang regards the interpretation as an interpretation based on the attitude of acquisition.<sup>18</sup>

As the conventional interpretation readily leads to a definite understanding of things, the codependent interpretation and the way-revealing interpretation, both based on the attitude of nonacquisition, are introduced to make manifest the provisional character of words and counterbalance the understanding. In light of the codependent interpretation, given that *existence* and *nonexistence* (or their ideas) are mutually dependent in that one cannot be understood without also understanding the other, the word “existence” also has nonexistence as its meaning, and the word “nonexistence” means existence as well.<sup>19</sup> Some clarifications are needed.

We know that many words are interdependent and complementary, forming such pairs as “long” and “short,” “heaven” and “earth,” “life” and “death,” and so on. Indeed, given any word *X*, we can always coin a word, say, *non-X* to form a pair of interdependence. Moreover, in our experience of daily life, we cannot cognize things independently from words and concepts. Every cognition is a recognition that involves the presence of words or concepts. Consequently, our experience of things is inevitably conditioned by the relation of conceptual interdependence. This might have driven Jizang to imply that our experience of something *as* existent (involving the concept of existence) is deeply conditioned by the concept of nonexistence. It also explains why Jizang does not seem to draw a clear line between the referent of a word and its correlated idea.

In Jizang’s view, existence and nonexistence, as conceptually known and involving a relation of conceptual interdependence, depend on each other in order to be what they are: they are existence-*of*-nonexistence and nonexistence-*of*-existence, respectively.<sup>20</sup> Thus, they are not distinct from each other and are even interwoven in the sense that existence (now existence-*of*-nonexistence) has nonexistence somehow present within itself, and likewise for nonexistence. As a result, the word “existence” (now meaning existence-*of*-*nonexistence*) has also nonexistence as its meaning. In addition, the meaning of a word can, for Jizang, be what the word is used for: *meaning is function*. For example, the Buddha taught the conventional truth in order that people may comprehend the supreme truth. Comprehending the supreme truth is the purpose of teaching the conventional truth. Therefore, for Jizang, the word “conventional” can be said to take the supreme as its meaning, and vice versa.<sup>21</sup>



One may treat such a meaning of a word as its connotation or associated meaning, in contrast to its explicit and primary meaning. Yet the point is that the codependent interpretation serves for Jizang the purpose of shaking our attachment to determinate form or nature. On this interpretation, the existent as the conventional referent of the word “existent” is also meant by the word “nonexistent,” whereas “existent” means the nonexistent as well.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that the existent *may* not be determinately existent or determinable by the word “existent” in conventional meaning. Rather, it depends upon and is somehow interwoven with the nonexistent. However, this second interpretation only shakes the attachment concerned. It does not eradicate it. So, we need to proceed to the third interpretation.

According to the way-revealing interpretation, the word “dual” has as its meaning *not-dual*, whereas the word “existence” means *not-existence*. For Jizang, such an interpretation is handily derived from the codependent interpretation, for, if one knows existence to be codependent existence, one knows that it is *not* determinate existence, and so the word “existence” means not-existence, which, of course, must be distinguished from nonexistence. The word *X*, then, has as its meaning *not-X* or the negation of *X* (as its conventional meaning). One may also take *X* to mean *not-X* and *not-non-X*. Indeed, the meaning here may involve a series of negation such that what is *meant* is eventually the ineffable way. As a result, the word “existence” in fact points to the way that transcends all affirmations and negations. Because the way cannot be spoken of, cannot properly and directly be expressed, we understand that words in this interpretation negate their conventional meanings to *indicate*, or indirectly express, the ineffable way.

To sustain this interpretation, Jizang cites a verse from a Chinese translation of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* (*Huayan Jing* 《華嚴經》) to the effect that given all the existent and nonexistent things, one should comprehend that which is neither existent nor nonexistent.<sup>23</sup> However, this verse, referring to things but not words, does not clearly lend support to the interpretation. Anyway, for Jizang, though the Buddha made use of names, he actually intended the hearers to realize that which is nameless; similarly, when he spoke of “middle,” he actually intended to reveal the way that cannot be denoted by the word “middle.”<sup>24</sup> Jizang is then in a position to adapt the Buddha’s teaching to his own thought.

The way-revealing interpretation helps to eradicate our attachment to determinate nature. With the interpretation, the intended referent of the word “existent” is empty of any determinate content that is conventionally implied by the word. It is *not* a determinate existent and is, in its true nature, neither existent nor nonexistent. Moreover,

the word does not express anything determinate; it negates its conventional meaning while indicating that which is beyond any conceptual determination in terms of the notions of existence and nonexistence. Under this interpretation, incidentally, a nominal word would seem to *encode* the paradoxical formula of the Buddhist *Diamond Sutra* (*Jingang Jing* 《金剛經》): what is said to be X is not X, and so is called X. In any case, there is nothing determinate here to be an object of attachment.

Ideas echoing the way-revealing interpretation recur in Jizang's writings, and this suggests the centrality of this interpretation to his philosophy. For instance, he thus speaks of the "two truths inside the principle" (*linei erdi* 理內二諦), which represents how he thinks one should approach the Mādhyamika notion of twofold truth:

In the case of the two truths inside the principle, both existence and nonexistence are codependent. Codependent existence is not existence, while codependent nonexistence is not nonexistence. As "existence" and "nonexistence" express neither existence nor nonexistence [or express the not-existent, not-nonexistent principle], both existence and nonexistence [as the two truths] are named "means of instruction."<sup>25</sup>

We also recall Jizang's claim that if one realizes the provisional nature of words, though one speaks of existence and nonexistence, there is eventually neither existence nor nonexistence. The point, once again, is to highlight the indeterminacy of all linguistic referents.

Among the four types of interpretation of word meaning, the non-hindrance interpretation is perhaps the least intuitive. It is held here that a single word has as its meaning all things in the world—a cat, a cup, sky, water, whatever. There are two broad reasons for this interpretation. First, according to the third interpretation, the word "existence" points toward the ineffable way, which is in interwoven union with all things in the world; consequently, the word can *mean* all these things.<sup>26</sup> Second, in light of the second interpretation, the word "convention" has as its meaning nonconvention. Now, all things belong to the category of nonconvention; therefore, they can be considered to be the meaning of the word. Jizang also cites the words "jar" and "cloth" for elucidation. We know that "*is* a jar" and "*is not* a jar" are codependent; correlatively, jars and non-jars are codependent too. Because clothes are non-jars, the word "jar" can then have clothes as its meaning; correspondingly, the word "cloth" can mean jars as well.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, we may thus arrive at this interpretation. In Jizang's view, all things are codependent, interrelated, in no hindrance to each other, and with no determinate boundary between one another. They, let us say, constitute an interwoven net that stretches over whatever there is. The application of one word to one part of the net, then, never

terminates there; it is inevitably directed to any other part of the net as well. Therefore, one word *means* all things. Though this reason is not plainly formulated by Jizang, it somehow tallies with what is meant in the verse of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, “Realizing infinity (*wuliang* 無量) in one, and one in infinity,” which he quotes in support of the interpretation.<sup>28</sup>

We may here read the verb “mean” as “allude to.” Myriad things in the world, surely, cannot all be the semantic correlate of a word like “horse,” but they might be viewed as its allusions. For Jizang, a horse is not different from the nondual way as its *substance* (*ti* 體), whereas the way is not different from the myriad things, and so a horse is not really different from all other things. Thus, the word “horse” can allude to the myriad things other than horses!

All in all, the theory states that a nominal word *X* means *X*, non-*X*, the negation of *X* or the nondual way that is not *X*, and all things whatsoever. The word, then, amounts to have infinite meanings or referents. As a language user may stress one interpretation on one occasion, and another on another occasion, we see here the indeterminacy of linguistic reference.

## V.

We have briefly sketched Jizang’s Sanlun thought and explicated in detail his “one name, infinite meanings” theory. The theory presumably looks odd and problematic. Jizang resorts, perhaps not very successfully, to a few passages in Mahayana Buddhist sutras and treatises to show the soundness of his approach. The theory has the advantage of suggesting the coincidence between his thought and what he takes to be the content of Mahayana Buddhist scriptures. However, apart from its counterintuitive outlook, one may wonder whether the theory places too much of a referential burden on words, for a word like “cat” would then refer, not only to cats, but also to the nondual way and all other things. Again, communication may fail if the speaker and hearer do not have the same convention, or if the convention is unstable across time. Thus, one wonders whether one can practically *say* “It’s cold here” and *mean* “It’s warm here” or “It’s not cold here.”

Jizang, of course, does not claim that a word means simply what the speaker chooses it to mean. He seems to think that the Buddhist community or those who are to read the Buddhist texts should be aware of his four interpretations for a better reading of the texts but nothing beyond that.<sup>29</sup> Besides, the conventional interpretation remains the starting point for understanding key terms in the texts.

The conventional interpretation is not to be discarded. However, it need be implemented in the context of a provisional understanding of words, which the other three interpretations supply. These interpretations constitute, as it were, a new set of general linguistic rules that give the *nonconventional* meanings of words, and which one must follow in order to better catch the intention of the speaker or writer, generally a Buddha or a Buddhist sage.

The idea that all words refer toward the way reminds us of the semantic claim by the Hindu philosopher Rāmānuja (c. 1075–1140 CE) that all thing-denoting words, such as “cat” and “mat,” eventually refer to the supreme God as the existential basis and *soul* of all things. However, unlike Rāmānuja, Jizang does not take the way to be sayable in words.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the notion of “meaning” concerns not simply the semantic meaning of a word but also what the user of the word intends to convey beyond its literal meaning. It is not claimed that a word has many semantic meanings or direct referents. Hence, the theory may not confer an unbearable referential burden on words.

Within the context of the Buddhist community, the main problem facing the theory is that since the theory is bound up with Jizang’s own thought, those Buddhists who decline to embrace the thought are unlikely to subscribe themselves to the theory. But now, can we apply the theory to a larger context, beyond that of the Buddhist community? Can we take the word “coffee” to mean non-coffee, *not*-coffee or the negation of coffee, even all things in the world? Minus its meta-physical aspect, I think, the theory does deserve the attention of contemporary philosophers.<sup>31</sup>

The theory is not as absurd as it may seem. Here, it is not just that words within a given language system have meaning only relative to other words. Rather, words may mean what are literally meant by their opposite words. Yet, people do use language this way in daily practice, as when one says “Jack is a genius” but means, ironically, “Jack is a moron.” In the metaphor “Cynthia is a hedgehog,” on the other hand, the word “hedgehog,” apart from literally meaning a hedgehog, connotes the negation of a hedgehog (“Cynthia is *not* literally a hedgehog”) while conveying something else. Furthermore, an irascible boss shouting “Jack is a genius!” might imply that Jack is anything and everything but a smart creature, whereas the word “crows” in the order “Protect the sacrifice food from the crows!” may cover whatever has a mouth. However, though these observations might help to diminish the absurdity of the theory, they by no means suggest its plausibility.

If we dismiss the notion of the nondual way and the related thinking, the theory may remind us of what has been termed “meaning holism” in analytical philosophy, basically the thesis that what a

linguistic expression means depends on its relations to many or all other expressions in the language.<sup>32</sup> Jizang would agree that the meanings of “*x* is a jar” and “*x* is not a jar” are mutually dependent, so are the meanings of “jar” and “non-jar.” Given a rationale behind the nonhindrance interpretation, what a word means would somehow depend on the meanings of all or most other words.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, differing from the typical forms of meaning holism, Jizang’s theory rather centers around a notion of multiple meanings: to give the meaning of a nominal word is to give its four types of meanings, which involve the conventional meanings of many other words.

In the larger context, the conventional interpretation gives the conventional meaning of a word as is literally construed in ordinary language. The codependent interpretation, on the other hand, somehow resembles the usage of indexicals: the indexical “here,” conventionally meaning *this place*, can also mean *that place* in respect of a speaker or hearer some distance away. The key difference is that while an indexical depends on the situation and user for its reference, the interpretation hangs on a relation of conceptual interdependence and highlights the complementariness of opposite concepts. The word *X* means X-of-non-X, and so has non-X forming part of its meaning. If this interpretation of word meaning makes sense at all, we can derive from it the third interpretation to the effect that the word *X* means not X or the negation of X. From these two interpretations, together with an emphasis on the interrelatedness of all things, we can further arrive at the nonhindrance interpretation. Thus, these interpretations are not arbitrarily related. Incidentally, what the latter three interpretations give are not semantic or conventional meanings, but nonconventional meanings, or rather connotations and allusions.

The whole issue, it seems, eventually hinges on whether Jizang’s thought of the indeterminacy of actuality is broadly tenable. For Jizang, there is nothing determinate in reality, nor can there be any objective representation of reality through words. However, under the propensity, fostered by the improper use of words, for a definite understanding of things, we tend to view the referent of a word as determinate, independent, substantial, and delimited. We think that words match well with their objects, that the latter are properly determined by the former. We may, for instance, in our use of the word “mind” take the mind to be determinately existent and substantial, perhaps endowed with some essence, and delimited from the body or matter. Against this practice, Jizang would recommend that we provisionally bring in the notion of emptiness: the mind is empty of any determinate nature or form. He is emphatic that we must not then stick to a determinate conception of emptiness.

The matter at stake also concerns how we construe the meaning of a word. With the “one name, infinite meanings” theory, we are not supposed to attend only to the conventional interpretation of word meaning. Here, Jizang introduces the codependent interpretation to indicate that the thing  $x$  as the intended referent of the word  $X$  is known as  $X$  only in dependence on non- $X$ ; the  $X$  is only  $X$  of non- $X$  and so may not determinately be  $X$ . Indeed,  $x$  can also be referred to and known as non- $X$ . His way-revealing interpretation further advises us to treat  $X$  as connoting the negation of  $X$  such that  $x$  is *not* a determinate  $X$ . Meanwhile, the nonhindrance interpretation suggests that  $x$  is in interwoven union with all other things and has no exclusive self-identity. Overall, the thing  $x$ , being indeterminable by words like  $X$  and *non- $X$* , is not precisely as we may characterize it on the basis of the conventional meanings of the words. Given the theory, finally, the value of words is restored, for we now recognize right in words the mechanism for *emptying* whatever determinate content that may come with their conventional understanding.

Just as medicines are prescribed for eliminating disease, not the patient, so the theory is meant to erase the determinate factors in linguistic reference, but not the rest. It does not render all words equally applicable or inapplicable to a given object. On the other hand, we recall that Jizang’s notion of nonacquisition is self-referential. We, for example, cannot say  $x$  is *determinately* not a determinate  $X$ . The theory is not one that presents a determinate picture of linguistic meaning and reference. Thus, if the theory is of any relevance for contemporary philosophizing, it may best be viewed as an expedient means for telling us how to use words provisionally without any definite understanding of their referents.

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#### ENDNOTES

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1. In Chinese Buddhist scriptures and Jizang's writings, the Chinese term *wuliang* generally means infinite or innumerable. By using the term here, Jizang intends to emphasize that one nominal word bears as many as four types of meaning, and the fourth type of meaning actually consists of a countless number of things as *meanings*.
2. The theory is briefly described in Jizang's *Sanlun Xuanyi* 《三論玄義》, in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, eds. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe (Tokyo: Daizo Shuppan Kai, 1924–1934), 45: 14 and is discussed extensively in his *Erdi Yi* 《二諦義》, in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, eds. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe, 45: 94–6.
3. For Jizang, “non-acquisition,” “non-abidingness,” “non-attachment,” and “non-dependence” are in principle interchangeable. See his *Bailun Shu* 《百論疏》, in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, eds. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe, 42: 234c21–22.
4. *Erdi Yi*, 108c17–23; Jizang here quotes from a Buddhist sutra a statement that virtually equates a view of acquisition with a dualistic view.
5. *Erdi Yi*, 108b23–25. For a lucid exposition of Jizang's doctrine of two truths, see Ming-wood Liu, “A Chinese Mādhyamika Theory of Truth: The Case of Chi-tsang,” *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 4 (1993): 649–73. Meanwhile, Jizang also propounds the doctrines of “three levels of two truths” (*sanchong erdi* 三重二諦) and of “four levels of two truths” (*sichong erdi* 四重二諦). Given the limitation of space, however, I shall not discuss them here.
6. Refer to Hsueh-li Cheng, *Empty Logic: Mādhyamika Buddhism from Chinese Sources* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1984) and Ming-wood Liu, *Mādhyamika Thought in China* (Leiden/New York/Köln: E. J. Brill, 1994).
7. For an elaboration of the simile of a moon-pointing finger in relation to the Sanlun school, see Chien-hsing Ho, “The Finger Pointing toward the Moon: A Philosophical Analysis of the Chinese Buddhist Thought of Reference,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (2008): 159–77.
8. See his *Zhongguanlun Shu* 《中觀論疏》, in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, eds. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe, 42: 12b25–27. Correlatively, Jizang interprets the notion of self-nature to mean a determinate state or nature.
9. For Jizang's own, more exotic examples, see his *Jingming Xuanlun* 《淨名玄論》, in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, eds. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe, 38: 897a17–29.
10. For more on this whole issue, see Chien-hsing Ho, “The Nonduality of Speech and Silence: A Comparative Analysis of Jizang's Thought on Language and Beyond,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2012): 1–19.
11. Provisional words are unable to properly and directly express the ineffable way but are tentatively used as a moon-pointing finger for *indicating* it.
12. Jizang, *Dacheng Xuanlun* 《大乘玄論》, in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, eds. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe, 45: 42a29–b3.
13. For Sengzhao's view, refer to his *Zhaolun* 《肇論》, in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, eds. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe, 45: 156b25–27. For Jizang's citation and use of the view, see *Zhongguanlun Shu*, 72b13–15 and *Erdi Yi*, 93b27–c3. We have here two kinds of negation, “*x* is *not* P” and “*x* is *non-P*.” A similar pair of two types of negation (*paryudāsa* and *prasajya-pratiṣedha*) was made use of by Indian Mādhyamika thinkers after Nāgārjuna.
14. Given Jizang's dismissal of definite understanding of things, correlatively, he would not take words to have determinate meanings either. However, this does not mean that words have no distinguishable provisional meanings. The point is that the meanings of words are *not* determinate in such a way that the related referents are determinate in nature and determinable by the words.
15. *Dacheng Xuanlun*, 40a14–15. In Jizang's writings, significantly, “emptiness” and “non-existence” are basically interchangeable. This plainly deviates from Nāgārjuna's stance.
16. For example, according to Jizang, though things are said to be empty, given that one may then reify the notion of emptiness, it is said that things should *not* be said to be empty; see the *Zhongguanlun Shu*, 143a16–20. This view can be traced back to Verse 22: 11 (Chapter 22, Verse 11) of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, on which Jizang is commenting.

17. Negative expressions are not as prevailing in Sengzhao's and Jizang's writings as they are in Indian Mādhyamika texts. This, I believe, has to do with the Chinese Sanlun thinkers' ontological and linguistic thoughts.
18. *Erdi Yi*, 95a27–28. However, what Jizang really finds fault with, I believe, is not the interpretation as such, but the definite understanding that so easily comes with it.
19. *Erdi Yi*, 95a21–24. The words here used by Jizang are actually “supreme” and “conventional,” which is a clear reference to the doctrine of two truths. Plainly, Jizang resorts to the codependent interpretation to support his view that the two truths are two provisional, expedient teachings about the ineffable nondual way. The theory of “one name, infinite meanings” is closely related, even lends support, to Jizang's doctrine of two truths, though it can also be seen as an epitome, in linguistic terms, of his overall philosophy. In *Erdi Yi*, 96a13–14, Jizang remarks that the theory applies not only to such words as “supreme” and “conventional,” but also to all words that express causes, effects, persons, and things. In this article, I am concerned mainly with showing how the theory serves Jizang the purpose of counterbalancing any definite understanding that views the referent of a word as determinate in nature. In any case, I am grateful to Chung-ying Cheng and one anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to clarify this issue.
20. In a similar vein, life is life-of-death, while a finger is a finger-of-nonfinger. Such pairs of interdependence would vary from person to person; Jizang, for instance, may take a finger to be a finger-of-moon.
21. In his *Sanlun Xuanyi*, 14b11–12, Jizang quotes from a sutra to the effect that the Buddha taught the supreme truth to let people comprehend the conventional truth. He probably has in mind the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* (*Da Banniepan Jing* 《大般涅槃經》), yet the sutra only claims that the Buddha taught the conventional truth to let people comprehend the supreme truth, a claim also made by Nāgārjuna. I am not aware of any Buddhist sutra that makes the reverse claim. In any case, this second reason owes its validity to Jizang's philosophy, especially his doctrine of two truths, and can hardly hold good elsewhere.
22. This may be understood analogically by considering the case of an indexical. Here, *this place* as the referent of the indexical “here” can also be meant by the indexical “there” (in respect of a speaker some distance away), while “here” can mean *that place* as well. Of course, the actual extent of the place meant by “here” in a given context of utterance mainly hinges on the speaker's intention. However, such a purely pragmatic consideration is not pertinent to the theory.
23. *Erdi Yi*, 95b23–25. Elsewhere, in the *Dacheng Xuanlun*, 16a16–17, Jizang quotes for a similar purpose from Kumārajīva's translation of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra* (*Weimojie Suoshuo Jing* 《維摩詰所說經》) that “[all things' being] neither arising nor perishing is the meaning of [their] impermanence.”
24. *Sanlun Xuanyi*, 14b4–5. In *Zhongguanlun Shu*, 9c29–10a2, Jizang avers that the Buddha spoke of “life-and-death” and “nirvana” to indicate the way that is neither life-and-death nor nirvana. He thus suggests the accordance between his thought and what he takes to be the Buddha's real intention.
25. *Erdi Yi*, 89b10–12. Cf. Ming-wood Liu, *Mādhyamika Thought in China*, 145–8. It is stated in *Erdi Yi*, 81b6–8, that though a material object is, à la the two truths, said to be existent or nonexistent, it is in reality neither existent nor nonexistent. The two truths are two provisional teachings for manifesting the ineffable nondual way, and the way-revealing interpretation can well serve the purposes of highlighting the provisional nature of the truths and of directing one's attention to the way or principle. Here again, the theory of “one name, infinite meanings” lends support to Jizang's doctrine of two truths.
26. *Erdi Yi*, 95c8–95c12, 95c25–96a05. As a word can then mean innumerable things or have innumerable meanings, it does make sense for Jizang to speak of “one name, infinite meanings.”
27. *Erdi Yi*, 95c13–95c25. This second reason, then, concerns the codependent interpretation and the issue of classification, with, say, *cloths* being subsumed under the category of *non-jars*.
28. *Sanlun Xuanyi*, 45:14b13–14.

29. In an e-mail message to the author on February 6, 2010, Ming-wood Liu rightly stressed that the “theory” was brought up by Jizang as a method of textual interpretation and should not be taken as a determinate theory of linguistic meaning and reference. However, adopting a philosophical approach here, I am also keen on knowing whether the theory is relevant for contemporary philosophy of language.
30. For Rāmānuja, the word “cat” denotes the bodies of cats, the souls of cats, and God too, all being its proper referents; there seems to be a referential burden here. See S. S. Raghavachar, trans., *Vedārtha-saṅgraha of Śrīrāmānujācārya* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2002), 19.
31. In explaining his “one name, infinite meanings” theory, Jizang does not mention proper names, and, as one anonymous reviewer rightly points out, it is a quite challenging issue to apply the theory to proper names. Typically, a proper name has no conceptual meaning in that it does not refer to its object through a concept under which a class of things are subsumed. In addition, the relationship between such a name and its object is generally arbitrary. Then, the use of a proper name is unlikely to induce a definite understanding about its referent, and so there is little need to apply the theory to proper names. In any case, I think one can still apply the theory to proper names. Here again, I should like to express my gratitude to Chung-ying Cheng and the two reviewers of the *Journal* for their valuable comments and suggestions which help improve the quality of this paper. I have, in response to Cheng’s queries and suggestions, clarified issues concerning the meaning of the term “infinite,” Jizang’s use of negative expression, and certain problems of Jizang’s codependent and non-hindrance interpretations. In response to the two reviewers’ comments, I have added some textual evidences to support my interpretations of Jizang and Sengzhao, explained Jizang’s view on silence, and revised a few footnotes.
32. For a general introduction of meaning holism, see Peter Pagin, “Meaning Holism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Language*, eds. Ernest Lepore and Barry Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 213–32.
33. If all things are codependent and interrelated, then so are all words. As we cannot really speak of words (as signifiers) without considering their meanings, all words are codependent in meaning.