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Rejoinder to Wayman's the Buddha's Birthdate

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by Wang Shih-chen, though I had hoped that the evidence I produced on pp. 83–4 might convince the reader that by *yün* Wang meant a personal “tone”, I would like to stress again that the word *yün* here should be taken as akin to *feng-yün* (“style”) and *yün-wei* (“flavour”), not in the literal sense of “rime” or even the metaphorical sense of “harmony”. I am at a loss to understand what Mr. Debon means by “the conception of enlightened poetry advocated by Wang Shih-chen”. Nowhere can I find any indication

that Wang ever advocated such a thing. That he compared poetic inspiration to the process of spiritual enlightenment in the Ch’an Buddhist sense is not at all the same thing as advocating “enlightened” poetry.

I am grateful to Mr. Debon for pointing out the slip on p. 85 (it should of course be Meng Hao-jan and not Meng Chiao) and the misprints on pp. 123, 124, and 128 (not 127).

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*Surrejoinder*

Hoping that later studies will throw more light on Huang T’ing-chien and Wang Shih-chen I only should like to make clear three points in my review which seem to be liable to be mistaken.

1) I have no objection at all to the expression “couplets” in connection with the *Li-sao*. Is it, on the other hand, really pedantic to refrain from calling that poem as written in six-syllabic lines—or couplets—since as much as the fourth part of it is in non-six-syllable-lines?

2) It was not my intention to suggest Professor Liu as having created the term “Mutually Defining” for *chuan-chu*. That problem is extensively dealt with in the preface to *The Six Scripts . . . by*

*Tai T’ung*, translated by L. C. Hopkins. But, in conformity with Edkins, von der Gabelentz and others, I think it is not the original meaning.

3) I did not imply that we could not find among the hundred thousands of *shih* some which can pass, in a broad sense, as “love poetry”. The point which seems to me worth stressing, especially with regard to the non-sinological reader, is, that “love” is almost a taboo in Chinese poetry (which consists for the most part in *shih*, and only on a rather small scale in *tz’ü*).

GÜNTHER DEBON

KÖLN

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*Rejoinder to Wayman’s The Buddha’s Birthdate*

In the pages of this journal there recently appeared (*JAOS* 82, 1962, 374–376) an unhappy attempt to date the birth of the Buddha 11 April –571 on the basis of astrological and astronomical arguments. It is the purpose of this short note only to indicate some of the fallacies in this technical argument, though all of the errors and misconceptions need not be here investigated;

the problem of the historicity of Ásvaghoṣa’s legend will not be brought into consideration.

The longitude of Jupiter on 11 April –571 was approximately 93° measured from the true vernal equinox of that year; the longitude of the “equal” nakṣatra Puṣya, measured from the same point, was about 78° to 91°. Wayman has made the basic error of applying the traditional Indian

zodiac, which is that of the sixth century, A.D., to a period eleven centuries before it could have first been used. There is no necessity to comment further on this point. Jupiter was not in the "equal" nakṣatra Puṣya on 11 April –571.

But there is, of course, no reason to assume that the nakṣatras were considered to be equal in the sixth century, B.C.; it is much more probable (in fact, almost certain) that the *yogatāras* rather than equal segments along the zodiac were employed. Using the data provided by the Sūrya-siddhānta (8, 2) one can easily compute that at the date proposed by Wayman Jupiter rose more closely to the *yogatāra* of Āśleṣā than to that of Puṣya. However, this is all rather irrelevant considering that neither Jupiter nor Puṣya was visible at the time (10:30 A.M.) proposed by Wayman, and no method of computing planetary longitudes is known to have existed anywhere in the world in the sixth century, B.C.

Finally, some words about Wayman's astrology are perhaps not out of place. That *nakṣatra* is influential at an individual's birth which is in conjunction with the Moon; Jupiter is not at all involved. Puṣya, when occupied by the Moon, is the most auspicious of *nakṣatras*; see Śārdūla-karṇāvadāna p. 133 Mukhopadhyaya, Bṛhajjātaka 16, 5 (equals Bṛhatsaṃhitā 100, 5), etc. So Aśvaghōṣa was referring to an event which occurs thirteen times in every year. Moreover, the *rājayoga* in Bṛhajjātaka 11, 20—which is seriously misrepresented by Wayman—is not derived from a Buddhist legend; that it is pure astrological speculation is shown by the astronomical impossibility of two of its variants. Its connection with the cardines as well as its general content indicate its Greek origin.

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### Surrejoinder

Admittedly my brief communication develops with arguments resting on hypotheses which may or may not be sound. That is why I did not insist that I had solved the problem of the Buddha's birthdate. I fully expected that my procedure would not pass unchallenged, but must ask indulgence for devoting greater space to an answer than Dr. Pingree has in his attempted refutation, for he is so confident of the faultiness in my account as to be content with bare assertions.

Let us begin with the astrology. Since he refers the reader to Varāhamihira's *Bṛhajjātaka*, 16, 5, to show the influential birth *nakṣatra* as occupied by the moon, let us see the line in question: *śāntātmā subhagaḥ pañtito dhanī dharmasamṣṛtaḥ puṣye*. There is no word for 'moon.' Nor is there such a word in the 14 *ślokas* of that chapter describing birth in the 27 *nakṣatras*. A Sanskritist may also consult the expansion of those *ślokas* in the *Horāsāra*, Adh. 27, of Pṛthuyāśas, the son

of Varāhamihira, to see that a word for 'moon' does not occur in these *ślokas* either. However, Bhaṭṭotpala's influential commentary on the *Bṛhajjātaka* comments on the title of Chap. 16 with the expression *candrabhujyamānanakṣatra-śīlam*, perhaps the basis for the later general view that Varāhamihira intends the *nakṣatra* occupied by the moon. My Madison study of Varāhamihira's *Bṛhajjātaka* led me to believe that he intended either *lagna* (rising point) or moon, and possibly also the sun, whichever be stronger. My choice of *lagna* as determinant in the present case was purely to see what would ensue. For the resultant horoscope as published with my communication, an Indian astrologer would ordinarily say that *lagna* is stronger because joined by Jupiter, while moon is weakened by being in the 12th house, *vyaya* 'loss.' In Bangalore I obtained a book carried by "Raman Publications": C. G. Rajan's *Jaathaka Satyaachaareeyam by Sage*