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REVIEW

**Jérôme Ducor and Henry W. Isler (ed. and trans.):  
Jizang: Le sens des arcanes des Trois Traités, contribution à  
l'étude du Mādhyamika dans le bouddhisme d'Extrême-  
Orient**

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Jérôme Ducor and Henry W. Isler's French-language annotated translation of what they title *Le sens des arcanes des Trois Traités*, or *Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises* (*Sanlun xuanyi* 三論玄義, T.45.1852) by Jizang (吉藏 c. 549–623) is the first translation – indeed, the first book-length study – in any European language of this pivotally important Chinese Buddhist text. Far more than merely what Ducor modestly terms a “traduction française d'un ouvrage chinois bouddhique de la fin du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle accompagnée seulement de l'information indispensable à la compréhension de ce texte relativement difficile” (p. 11), then, what this book represents is a meticulously researched, copiously annotated, and fluently translated entry-point into a notably under-researched current of Buddhist thought standing at the very frontier of Indian and Chinese Buddhist visions.

Alongside Sengzhao (僧肇 374–414), Jizang was one of the two most prominent exponents of the Sanlun or Three Treatise (三論) school, the Chinese development of the Indian Madhyamaka school founded by Nāgārjuna (龍樹 c. 150–250). Alongside his commentaries to Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* or *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way* (中觀論疏, T.42.1824), the *\*Dvādaśamukhaśāstra* or *Twelve Gates Treatise* attributed to Nāgārjuna (十二門論疏, T.42.1825), and Āryadeva's (提婆 third century) *Śatakaśāstra* or *Hundred Verse Treatise* (百論疏, T.42.1827), the *Sanlun xuanyi* ranks among the most important of Jizang's many collected works.

The book begins with an “Avant-Propos” by Isler (7–9) and a “Préface” by Ducor (11–12) explaining the genesis of this book, which is sufficiently noteworthy to merit brief recapitulation here. The book's origins lie in doctoral work undertaken by Isler between 1979 and 1983 under the supervision of the late Buddhistologist Jacques May. Following May's death in 2018, his widow Hyung-Hi Kim May suggested publishing the work, but the outdated nature of its critical apparatus led Isler to approach Ducor for assistance. As Ducor explains, “j'ai ainsi entièrement repris la traduction sur le chinois, y compris l'annotation, et renouvelé la bibliographie tout en composant une nouvelle introduction ainsi qu'un index général et en révisant l'index des caractères chinois établi par Henry [Isler]” (p. 11). This treatise of Jizang, then, arrives within these covers as a work “à quatre mains” (p. 8): effectively a joint effort by Jizang, May, Isler, and Ducor.

Following these prefatory comments, a detailed “Introduction” (pp. 13–70) provides background information on “L'auteur et ses œuvres” (pp. 13–26), “Les œuvres de

Jizang” (pp. 26–30), and the “Chronologie de Jizang” (pp. 31–2), collectively comprising a brief biography and chronology of Jizang and summary of his works based on both classical canonical sources and the latest scholarship in European and East Asian languages. Sections then follow on “Le sens des arcanes des Trois Traités” (pp. 32–7), explaining the title and structure of the *Sanlun xuanyi*, “Les Trois Traités qui sont quatre” (pp. 37–47), introducing the three treatises of this Three Treatise school along with the *Da zhidu lun* (大智度論 / \**Mahāprajñāpāramitā śāstra*), “Le Mādhyamika et l’école des Trois Traités” (pp. 47–57), trying to assess the validity and value of treating Sanlun (and for that matter Madhyamaka) as an “école” (宗), “Le Médialisme” (pp. 57–67), summarizing the major tenets of Madhyamaka/Sanlun, and lastly a survey of “Le texte : commentaires et éditions” (pp. 67–70).

The bulk of the book is then comprised of Ducor and Isler’s translation of Jizang’s *Sanlun xuanyi* (pp. 73–255). Although the Chinese-language original includes a few markers of global structure, Ducor and Isler go much further in dividing the text’s contents into as many as eight levels of divisions and sub-divisions. This evidence of a concerted effort to render the text as comprehensible as possible to the modern reader is reinforced by the use of copious extra-textual editorial amplifications (marked with []), and above all by no fewer than 771 footnotes accompanying the translation. Citing a wide range of classical primary and commentarial sources as well as modern scholarship in Japanese, Chinese, French, English, and German, these notes provide troves of relevant information. As for the translation itself, this is fluent, accurate, and mercifully unimpaired by copy-editing errors. Specialists may prefer a different rendering of this or that passage or phrase, and I myself occasionally wished for a note here and there mentioning a possible alternative reading, but overall I would rate the translation and notes amply erudite for use by scholars and satisfyingly readable for interested non-specialists.

The book concludes with an “Index des caractères chinois dans le texte du canon de Taishō” (pp. 257–88), which includes pinyin transliteration alongside French translation, a “Bibliographie et abréviations” (pp. 289–327), which, however, inexplicably lists some (but not all) edited works under title rather than editor/s, an “Index général” (pp. 329–61), which includes alphabetized entries of technical terms in both Chinese and Japanese transliteration, and lastly the Taishō-edition text of Jizang’s *Sanlun xuanyi* (pp. 363–405). While the character index admittedly enables readers to approximately locate a given character or multi-character term in the original text without needing to consult any sources beyond the book in their hands, I consider it a largely superfluous inclusion given the ease of online access to the electronic version of the original text. It is also arranged according to the traditional but rather cumbersome method of Kangxi radical number and stroke count, is not supplemented by an arguably more useful alphabetic character index to the original, and is slightly marred by some imperfect concordances between index and text. But these are small gripes.

Overall, the book under review makes a significant contribution to the study of Buddhism. Its translation deftly marries accuracy with eloquence, while its scholarship is extensive and astute. *Le sens des arcanes des Trois Traités* will become required reading for any Francophone studying Jizang, Sanlun-cum-Chinese Madhyamaka, and the history of philosophy in Chinese Buddhism.