

## A CANTONESE VERSION OF A MOCK DISPUTATION

by K. P. K. WHITAKER

There is a Cantonese saying: 搭起棚嚟交 Daap-xee praanq lray ngaaihaawx,<sup>1</sup> to erect a platform for the purpose of quarrelling. It is used to describe the manner or attitude of a person who makes a habit of picking a quarrel with someone and does it with gusto. But why the platform? This would seem to go back to the practice of carrying out public debates on raised platforms in front of an audience. But formal disputations before the general public were not normally practised in China. The Chinese language did not lend itself easily to the exacting *distinguo* and subtleties of the Aristotelian syllogism.

Though public disputations have a long history in Europe and the Levant, nothing of the kind has been witnessed in China. Linguistic difficulties encountered by Chinese sophists were almost insurmountable, as can be plainly seen in the arguments, recorded in the *Gongsuenlongtxyy*,<sup>2</sup> whether the hard white stone was one thing or three things and whether a white horse was a horse. Nonetheless Chinese philosophers were very fond of debating with one another in their own style, leaning heavily on puns and extension of meanings of key-words, doubtful interpretations of the Rites and sayings of former sage kings, and so on. To illustrate this by a well-known example: Mencius was said to have scored over Chwenyu Kuen completely when the latter posed the question whether it was enjoined by the rules of propriety that man and woman when giving and taking should not touch each other's hand, so that the passing of the object from the one to the other should not be direct. Mencius said that it was. Chwenyu then posed the second question, rather strangely in the light of present day logic: "If your sister-in-law is drowning, will you save her by hand?" Mencius: "Not to rescue one's sister-in-law from drowning is the behaviour of a wolf." Chwenyu: "Now the whole world is drowning. Why don't you save it?" Mencius: "When the world is drowning you save it by the Way (*daw*).

<sup>1</sup> For this system of romanisation see Professor W. Simon's Introduction to "1200 Basic Chinese Characters" by K. P. K. Whitaker, London, 1958, pp. ix-xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> See the contribution by Dr. A. C. Graham in this number.

When your sister-in-law is drowning you save her by your hand. Do you propose to save the whole world by your hand?"<sup>3</sup>

Further there are numerous records of philosophers or wandering sophists having to prove their case before rulers. Mohtzzy's demonstration of his ability to demolish all the nine stratagems of attack by Gongshu Ban 公輸班 before the King of Chuu is a typical episode. When Mohtzzy heard that Gongshu Ban offered his *yunti*, machines for scaling walls, to the King of Chuu for the purpose of attacking Sonq, he walked for ten days and ten nights to Chuu in order to dissuade Gongshu Ban from doing so. But as the latter had spoken to the king, Mohtzzy had to dissuade the king from such an unrighteous venture. Apparently the two 'debaters' set up a mock siege before the king: one demonstrated how the proposed machines for scaling walls were to be employed and the other showed how the attackers could be rolled back. Gongshu Ban, the loser, then said: "I know how to overcome you but I won't say how." Mohtzzy said: "I know by which means you propose to do so, but I won't say anything either." The King of Chuu asked for an explanation. Mohtzzy said: "He means to kill me, so that Sonq cannot be defended, since I should not be there to work the defence. But my 300 disciples have got ready my machinery for the defence on the top of the walls of Sonq." In this instance the pacifist defeated the warmonger completely.<sup>4</sup>

Sophists like Mohtzzy, who wandered from state to state in the Warring States period, had to offer their theories of government or statecraft to all and sundry, and had to defend their own positions against all comers. In the book *Harnfeitzzy*, for instance, the second chapter records objections by the minister of Chyn 秦, Lii Sy 李斯, to Harn Fei's presence in his state<sup>5</sup> and it took a great deal of verbal skill on the part of the visitor to persuade the King of Chyn to give him a trial.

If a sophist was unable to satisfy a powerful prince with an acceptable argument he might forfeit his life. As an example, I shall quote an anecdote from the *Shuoyuann*. Gong Lu 公廬 tried to offer a remonstrance to Jaw Jeantzyy 趙簡子 through a derisive laugh. He was ordered by his prince in no uncertain manner to explain himself: "If you can explain yourself, you shall live. But if you fail to do so, you shall die."<sup>6</sup> If on the other hand the ruler was satisfied, a sophist would probably be rewarded with an appointment. The latter possibility was considered by many to be worth the risk. This type of 'debate' required great debating skill on the part of the sophist. But it was hardly a fair verbal tournament since the

<sup>3</sup> *Mencius* (Legge), IV.A.17. For explanation of this argument see D. C. Lau's article in *A.M., N.S.*, X (1963), pp. 179, etc. In the *Juangtzyy* there are numerous anecdotes concerning word-plays and debates between Juangtzyy and Huey Shy.

<sup>4</sup> *Mohtzzy jiangguo B(asic) S(inological) S(eries)* J.13, pp. 303-307.

<sup>5</sup> *Harnfeitzzy jihjeh*, BSS J.1, pp. 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> *Shuoyuann, S(yh) B(uh) B(ey) Y(aw)*, J. 9, pp. 7b-8a.

ruler or prince merely asked questions and the only forfeit for him was loss of face.

There was another type of 'debate' - one that was carried out between equals. As an example I would like to refer to Sonq Yuh's 登徒子好色賦 *Dengtwtzzy haw seh fuh*. Master Dengtwu accuses Sonq Yuh before the King of Chuu of being too fond of women and Sonq defends himself ably, turning the tables on Dengtwu. In that way we understand he saved himself from being banished from court.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from these secular debates there are records of disputations in the religious field held between Buddhists, Taoists and Confucians. The descriptions of these, found e.g. in the *Fortzuutoongjih* 佛祖統紀<sup>8</sup> give us an idea of their importance. The famous one held between Buddhists and Taoists, supported by miracles, before Emperor Ming of Hann readily comes to one's mind. The Buddhists won the day and the emperor, we are told, adopted the Buddhist faith.

By the time of Jinn 晉 and the Northern and Southern Dynasties, scholar-officials had been so steeped in the popular Taoist-Buddhist tradition with an admixture of a *Yihjing*-imbued Confucianism that they associated freely with Buddhist monks, Taoist priests, recluses and scholars who were adepts at metaphysical discussion, which was called *Chingtarn* 清談. This branch of study was called dark, or mysterious, learning (*shyuan shyue* 玄學). It soon became the high fashion among the cultured gentlemen and scholarly royalty of the time to take part in these discussions. In the *Shyhshuo shinyeu*, which is a mine of information about the learned society of those days, we read the description of a priest from the north meeting with the great master Jy Dawlin 支道林 at the monastery Woaguansyh 瓦官寺, with leading Buddhists, Jwu Faashen 竺法深 and Suen Shingong 孫興公, also being there. The stranger from the north repeatedly posed questions to Jy. The latter, we are told, answered them clearly and logically with well coined phrases in a stimulating style, with the result that the priest was defeated time and again.<sup>9</sup>

Next I wish to quote the description of two further debates from the same source. When Sheu Shyun 許詢 was young, people compared him with Wang Shiou 王脩. Sheu was not pleased about it. At that time a number of people and Master Yu 於 held doctrinal debates in the West Monastery at Gueyji 會稽. Wang was there too. Sheu then went to challenge

<sup>7</sup> *Wensheuan* 文選 BSS, J.19, pp. 400-401.

<sup>8</sup> *T(aishō) T(ripitaka)*, XLIX, no. 2035, pp. 471c-472a.

<sup>9</sup> *Shyhshuo shinyeu*, SBBY, J.1, pt. 2, pp. 14a-17b:—

有北來道人好才理與林公相遇於瓦官寺講小品于時竺法深孫興公悉共聽此道人語屢設疑難林公辯答清析辭氣俱爽此道人每輒摧屈

him and defeated Wang completely in a debate. Then Sheu took over Wang's thesis and let Wang take over his own, and again defeated Wang. Afterwards Sheu asked Master Jy what he thought of his performance. Jy said slowly: "Your arguments were all right. But why did you seek to smash the other in such a way? Is this the kind of discussion that would lead to the truth?"<sup>10</sup>

The next doctrinal 'debate' is actually in the form of questions and answers. It was held at Gueyji. Jy was the master expounding the doctrine and putting forth the thesis, while Sheu was his 'opponent' *dujeang* 都講. When Jy finished putting across an argument, the whole audience around was satisfied. Then Sheu came back with a 'difficulty', and all the people clapped and stamped their feet. They only applauded the skill of the two debaters but did not know where the truth lay.<sup>11</sup>

As I said earlier, the form of debate as carried out in Europe was unknown in China. It must be admitted that through the translation of the *Milindapañha*<sup>12</sup> as 那先比丘經 (*T.T.* XXXII, No. 1670) Chinese Buddhists had in fact access to descriptions of formal debates since the 5th century A.D. But it was only after the idealized or romanticized performances of Shyuan Tzanq, in debates as well as miracles, were reported in the record of his life and travels in the Western Regions<sup>13</sup> that the idea of a religious debate on a platform before the general public became popularized. His marvellous exploits caught the imagination of the common people and public disputations on platforms became a feature in the story-teller's repertoire. Shyuan Tzanq actually brought back with him from India books on logic and rules for debate. In *The Real Tripitaka*<sup>14</sup> Dr. Waley translated some of the rules of debate included in Shyuan Tzanq's translation of the

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, J.1, pt. 2, p. 16a:—

許掾(詢)年少時人以比王荀子(脩)許大不平時諸人士及於法師並在會稽西寺講王亦在焉許意甚忿便往西寺與王論理共決優劣苦相折挫王遂大屈許復執王理王執許理更相覆疏王復屈許謂支法師曰弟子向語何似支從容曰君語則佳矣何至相苦邪豈是求理中之談哉

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, J.1, pt. 2, p. 16b:—

支道林許掾諸人共在會稽(簡文)王齋頭支爲法師許爲都講支通一義四坐莫不厭心許送一難衆人莫不拊掌但共嗟詠二家之美不辯其理之所在

<sup>12</sup> See *BEFEO* Vol. 24 (1924), the article "Les Versions Chinoises du Milindapañha" by Professor Demiéville, and also *J.Am.O.S.*, vol. 78 (1858), "The Rules of Debate according to Asaṅga" by Dr. A. Wayman, pp. 29-40.

<sup>13</sup> Such as 大唐被三藏玄奘法師行狀 by 冥詳 of 唐, *T.T.*, XXX, No. 2052.

<sup>14</sup> London, 1952, p. 32.

Yogacaryābhūmi.<sup>15</sup> The loser in a debate had to recite the following formula: "My words," says the loser, "are not good. Your words are better. My views are not good; your views are better. My contention is unreasonable; yours is reasonable. Mine is feeble; yours is strong. My argument has been defeated; yours is established. I have spoken on this occasion with all the eloquence of which I am capable. If a better idea should ever occur to me, I will tell you about it; but for the present I will drop the subject and say no more!"

In contrast to the Chinese, the Tibetans adopted the art of debating in their monastic curriculum. In fact, but for the coming of the Chinese, young monks in the famous monasteries of Tibet would still be practising it today. Thubten Norbu, the brother of the present Dalai Lama, mentions in his book that he was trained in this art as a student-monk. The following description gives a fair idea of what an exciting atmosphere a debate creates.

"The Sungieba now called on me to begin the questioning. We had a strip of floor about sixty feet long for our debate, and without hesitating I now advanced on my opponent, driving him before me with vigorous gestures as I hurled my loudly shouted questions at him. After a little while the shengo silenced me and called upon Drotsang Khempo to take up the questioning in his turn. As we had prepared ourselves down to the slightest detail, question and answer followed each other like lunges and parries in a fencing match. We sprang forward and we leapt back, and we accompanied our carefully studied performance with dramatic gestures. Our debate was a so-called Gelmingeh, that is to say it dealt with homonyms, words and ideas which sound similar but which in fact have different meanings.

Our duel was impressive – and small wonder! – and we earned a great deal of praise for our performance."<sup>16</sup>

Although Chinese monastic education neglected this subject, story-tellers saw great possibilities for comedy in this art. Mock disputations were included in their repertoire and they soon became favourite stories of the market place. The enjoyment was immense if a great man or a pedant was cornered and held up to ridicule. No doubt it is due to the practice of story-tellers that we owe the coinage of the Cantonese phrase mentioned at the

<sup>15</sup> *T.T.*, XXX, No. 1579, p. 359c:—

瑜珈師地論立論者謝對論者曰我論不善汝論爲善我不善觀汝爲善觀我論無理汝論有理我論無能汝論有能我論屈伏汝論成立我之辯才唯極於此過此已上更善思量當爲汝說且置是事我不復言

<sup>16</sup> *Tibet is my country*, by Thubten Norbu (as told to Heinrich Harrer, trans. from the German by Edward Fitzgerald), London, 1960, p. 124.

beginning of this paper. As far as the stories themselves are concerned, I wish to narrate just one as a representative example, which I owe to oral tradition.

A cobbler working in a lean-to stall against a monastery wall noticed one day that the master of that monastery looked worried and he asked for the reason. The master explained that a great learned monk from abroad had challenged him to a religious debate by signs, on a platform, and he felt unequal to the occasion, as he was not an adept in that sort of argument. "Don't fret, my master," said the cobbler. "I am willing to take him on." As the situation was desperate, the master agreed. The next morning a great crowd gathered to view the debaters and watch their arguments by sign. The proud challenger arrived first and was waiting to take measure of the master who had been forced into the game. Instead of the great master appearing in all his splendour there came to the platform a little man wearing the plain robe of the 'rank and file' and with unassuming manners. The learned stranger did not consider him a worthy opponent. However he immediately opened the attack with a slap on the top of his own head claiming in the tradition of his sign language that his head touches or reaches to the very heaven.<sup>17</sup> The cobbler seeing that gesture, and thinking that his opponent asked him to mend a hat, replied by stamping his foot, meaning that he could only mend shoes, not hats.<sup>18</sup> But to his opponent such a sign meant that his foot was stepping upon the eighteen layers of hell,<sup>19</sup> that is to say he was in control of them. So the little cobbler scored a point. The learned man then raised four fingers meaning he had the magic power of the four ferocious Vajra guardians (who usually stand at the entrance of temples).<sup>20</sup> The cobbler took the sign for the offer of four coins for the mending of a pair of shoes. He thought to himself, "What? Only four coins?"<sup>21</sup> He therefore answered with the raising of eight fingers: "The price was eight coins."<sup>22</sup> His opponent understood this from his own tradition that the little man claimed to have the power of the eight attendant deities of Vairocana,<sup>23</sup> and so he reckoned that he had lost the second round. Then he plunged in: he claimed the high honour of being worthy of the lotus seat,<sup>24</sup> by slapping his buttocks. The cobbler thought "Aha! He offered to pay only four coins and yet he asks for the best quality leather (that is, leather made from the hind quarter of the ox). Oh, no, you'll only get leather from the skin of the abdominal area."<sup>25</sup> Without

<sup>17</sup> "Traw derng thinn ghonq" 頭頂天綱。

<sup>18</sup> "Ngror wruue boo xraay zhea, m'rh wruue boo mrouv" 我嗰補鞋嗰唔增補帽。

<sup>19</sup> "Geok draap srappaat cranq dreijruk" 腳踏十八層地獄。

<sup>20</sup> "Sei draai gharmghong" 四大金剛。

<sup>21</sup> "Seigo crinn zraah?" 四個錢嘅。

<sup>22</sup> "Baatgo crinn ai?" 八個錢呀。

<sup>23</sup> "Baat draai thinnwronq" 八大天王。

<sup>24</sup> "Nranq cror l'innfhaah" 能哩蓮花。

<sup>25</sup> "Nree zrung seornq jiu shaahpreyr qrah? Trooprey zaa." 你重想要沙皮呀? 肚皮咋。

hesitation he answered with a loud pat on his own abdomen which was taken by the other to mean that the little man had his belly full of sūtras and śāstras.<sup>26</sup> In view of the magic power believed to be inherent in the Mahāyānist sūtras it was no wonder that the learned master fled from the dais and the little cobbler carried the day. Thus he saved the reputation of the monastery which offered him hospitality daily with a bit of its wall.

This debate by signs brings to one's mind immediately the famous story of Thaumast by Rabelais<sup>27</sup> with its long drawn out disputation by complicated gestures and movements. R. Köhler traces the source of this story to Accursius, in *Germania* 1858, reprinted in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II (ed. J. Bolte, 1912), pp. 479 etc.<sup>28</sup> J. Plattard also included it in *l'oeuvre de Rabelais*, Paris 1910, VI, p. 71, which reads as follows:

Il rapporte que jadis les Romains délèguèrent un fou pour discuter avec un certain sage, "quemdam sapientem", venu à Rome pour voir si les Romains étaient dignes d'avoir des lois. Le Grec, sans raison apparente ou énoncée, probablement par ignorance de la langue, se met à discuter par signes, "nutu disputare coepit". Il élève un doigt, "significans unum deum". Le fou croyant que ce doigt était levé pour lui crever un oeil, dresse à son tour deux doigts et la pouce, "sicut naturaliter evenit", pour menacer de crever les deux yeux de son adversaire. Le Grec voit dans ces trois doigts un symbole de la trinité. Il ouvre alors la main pour signifier que tout est découvert à Dieu. Le fou interprétant ce geste comme une menace de gifle, répond en brandissant son poing fermé. Le Grec croit qu'il indique par là que Dieu tient tout enfermé dans sa main et, jugeant l'épreuve suffisante, se retire: "Sic credens Romanos dignos legibus recessit."

The last story bears a closer resemblance to the Chinese than Rabelais'. Though it is far from my mind to prove or indicate 'influence' either way by such resemblances in stories dealing with sign language, the points of similarity are worth noting. First there is the learned man as the challenger. Then the illiterate or stupid fellow is put up by one side. Sign language is used and so the employment of double irony is made possible. Finally the great man is defeated and flees in acknowledgement of the superiority of his opponent, who is unaware of his victory.

I venture to offer this paper to the memory of Dr. B. Schindler as a tribute to his well-known interest in folklore.

<sup>26</sup> "Mruurn troo ghenq lreonn" 滿肚經輪。

<sup>27</sup> *Oeuvres de François Rabelais*, édition critique publiée par Abel Lefranc, Paris, 1922, Tome IV, Chap. 18, p. 207.

<sup>28</sup> I am indebted to Professor W. Simon for directing my attention to Köhler's article. See also Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Vol. III (1956), p. 434, Nos. H607 and 607.1, and also Vol. IV (1957), p. 151, No. J1804.