

## Interpretation of Śūnyatā in China – from 'Ben wu' to 'Xing kong'

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### 1. Historical background

Just as the teaching on *Anatta* put forward by the Buddha in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. created a great stir in the religious scene of the time, the teaching on *Suñña*, specially when systematically propounded by *Ācārya Nāgārjuna*, gave rise to much enthusiastic debate and even confusion. Ever since then, there has been a continuous interest shown by many on both of the concepts. Some have spoken in their favor, upholding the concept as presenting the real essence of the Dhamma, others have spoken critically of them, and attempted to show that these are misconceptions about the true nature of reality. Whatever is the position taken up by scholars regarding two major concepts *Anatta* and *Suñña*, there is no doubt about the fact that both concepts were instrumental in provoking much philosophical debate and spurring the development of Buddhist thought throughout the ages. This development of Buddhist thought is now seen in the appearance of new interpretations that are presented to these concepts.

The *Anatta* doctrine of early Buddhism was misunderstood by the Buddha's own disciples. For example, as seen in the