

Nan-yüeh Hui-ssu on Evil

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Nan-yüeh Hui-ssu (515-577) is a unique practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra*, and regarded as the first priest in China who declared the coming of the eschatological age, the period of Latter Dharma (末法). He is also famous as the master of Chih-i, the founder of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai sect, who attained to Fa-hua san-mei 法華三昧, the essence of the *Lotus Sutra*, under Hui-ssu's tutelage. In this paper I discuss the bodhi-sattva theory of Hui-ssu, focusing on the issue of evil. Hui-ssu engaged in the battle with the evils inherent in the period of Latter Dharma, and that was the matter of great importance to his Buddhist career.

According to his autobiography in the *Li shih yüan wen* 立誓願文, Hui-ssu was often seriously persecuted by the evil monks through the heated debates on the meaning of the Mahāyāna (摩訶衍義). These experiences led him to believe more firmly the coming of the age of Latter Dharma, and confirm his will to protect the Buddhist Dharma in this age. Based on his belief on Maitreya, the future Buddha, he dares to declare, in the *Li shih yüan wen*, that he strongly wishes to maintain the Dharma of Śākyamuni until the day when Maitreya will appear in this world to save people.

It is not necessarily clear, however, who persecuted Hui-ssu, or what kind of monks regarded Hui-ssu's view on the Mahāyāna with hostility. In this essay, I also tried to solve this issue. The persecutors, in my view, were the Buddhist monks who willfully interpreted the meaning of the Mahāyāna sūnya (大乘空) and were attached to the wrong view on sūnya (惡趣空). According to Hui-ssu, they simply affirm worldly desires, and they claim that to follow the desires freely is exactly the Way (Bodhi), the

essence of the Mahāyāna śūnya. They were his opponents, and the evils in the period of Latter Dharma.