

Amida Cult in the Nara Period

I. Amida Cult within the Priesthood

1. General Outlook
2. Chiko's Pure Land Teaching
3. On the Variation of the Pure Land Illustration

II. Belief in the After-world in the Civil Society

1. As seen in the post-scripts of copied sutras
2. As seen in the epigraphs on statues or stone monuments
3. On the Empress Komyo's Faith

III. Conclusion

In so far as Japan's Buddhist circle within the Nara period is concerned, Chiko (709-781?), a resident priest at Gango-ji in Nara, is the only one, in whom we perceive Amida Cult most remarkably realized. He left the *Muryoju Kyo Ronshaku* (5 Vols.) and the *Annyo-fu* (1 Vol.) as its evidence, but both of them have long since been lost to this day. Fortunately, however, the former has often been quoted in various books, and recently, as those quotations found in other books were collected and were put in order (cf. Prof. Ryukai Etani's thesis entitled, " 'The Muryoju Kyo Ronshaku' Restored to the Original State," in the Bukkyo Daigaku Kenkyu Kiyu, Vol. XXXIV.), it is now possible for us to consider its general content. According to the restored book, Chiko's Pure Land thought may be reduced to the sole objective of attaining Birth in the Pure Land after being received by Amida, with His Original Vow (specified as the 18th, 19th, and 20th) as its indirect cause, and with the practices of contemplating the Pure Land and of doing meritorious deeds while reciting the Nembutsu as its direct cause. As for the nature of the Nembutsu, Chiko distinguishes between mental and verbal, and he gives priority to the former, while the latter (verbal) ensures the concentration of mind for those who are incapable of performing the former (mental). This view is apparently tantamount to emphasizing, among others, the 'contemplation'

in the so-called "Five Gates of the Nembutsu." Indeed this may be in accordance with Vasubandhu's Pure Land thought as expressed in the so-called *Treatise on the Pure Land* (or the *Muryoju Kyo Upadesha Ganshoge*,) but it is not necessarily identical with Tan-luan's standpoint as manifested in his *Commentary to the Treatise on the Pure Land*, and it stands rather in agreement with Chia-tsai's thought as revealed in his *Treatise on the Pure Land*.

The time when Chiko flourished in Japan corresponds to the one in China when we see there already the practice of the Pure Land teaching centered around the verbal recitation of Amida's name, which had been completed by Shan-tao after having been transmitted from Tan-luan to Tao-cho. Moreover, most of Shantao's writings had already been brought over to Japan.

Here a question may be asked: "In spite of all this, why is it that Chiko was little influenced by Shan-tao's Pure Land teaching which emphasized verbal Name-calling, and Chiko's doctrine remained dominantly contemplation-centered?" The so-called "Chiko Jodo Hen" or the "Chiko Maṇḍala" may be mentioned as an evidence for his contemplation-centered teaching, and it constitutes, together with the one at Taima-dera, an evidence for the existence and fashion of the variations of the Pure Land illustration toward the end of the Nara Period.

In theory, the teaching and the faith solely depend upon the individual's self-realization. The stage of grasping human nature attained by the general public in this Period may be said to be most realistic and secular in the light of the general belief in the after-world, and common belief itself was not necessarily concerned with the individual.

For instance, the famous Amida-belief held by the Empress Komyo, was not, in fact, the actual case, but it was attributed to her by people in later times who cherished her memory. In the same way, the Pure Land teaching prevalent in the Nara Period with Chiko as its main figure, must be considered as one of the natural reflections of the contemporary thought prevailing all over Japan.

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