

The Concept of “*Dharmakāya*” in the *Tai-ch'êng-tai-i-chang*

The *Tai-ch'êng-tai-i-chang* is a collection of documents written by Kumārajīva (350–409 A.D.) of Chang-an at the beginning of 5th century. They were written to explain important Mahāyāna doctrines in response to questions put to Kumārajīva by Hui-yüan (334–416 A.D.) of Lo-shan. They enable us to know the kind of problems in Buddhist thought that most interested the Chinese Buddhist scholars at the time. Further, a consideration of the circumstances in which those problems were taken up can clarify the process in which Buddhism was brought to, took root, and beveloped in China. The questioner, Hui-yüan, who was well versed in the indigenous thought of China, was also the highest authority in China at the time as regards Buddhist doctrine. The responder, Kumārajīva, on the other hand, was an Indian scholar who, after making a deep study of Hīnayāna Buddhism in India, was converted to Mahāyāna and came to China. Thus, this collection of the records of questions and answers exchanged between these two personalities, offers many clues which reveal the contrast in thought existing between India and China. We may also regard this book as having laid the foundation for the later development of Buddhist doctrines. The present writer made Japanese translation and annotations of the *Tai-ch'êng-tai-i-chang* with other fellow scholars (The Volume on His Writings, 1960), which formed a part of the *Studies in Hui-yüan* (Compiled by Eiichi Kimura), and also wrote an article, entitled *An Introduction to the Studies in the Tai-ch'êng-tai-i-chang* (The Volume on the Study, 1962). Since little has ever been studied, however, about Kumārajīva's views on ‘*dharma-kāya*’, which was regarded as the most important of his themes in the *Tai-ch'êng-tai-i-chang*, the present writer now attempts to elucidate this theme alone in this thesis.

Hui-yüan, ever since learning the teachings of the *Fang-kuang-p'an-jê-ching* from his master Tao-an, developed a deep faith in Mahāyāna

teachings. After some time he encountered the two incidents which made him too confused to remain at ease with what he had learned. One was the advent of Abhidharma to China, the doctrine of the Sarvāstivādins of the Hīnayāna tradition, which was quite novel to the Chinese at the time. Another was the advent of the *Tai-p'in-p'an-jê-ching*, an equivalent sutra to the *Fang-kuang-p'an-jê-ching*, and the *Tai-chih-tu-lun*, a commentary to the *P'an-jê-ching* by Nāgārjuna. Since those two scholars were distinct from each other in their basic attitude of thinking, it was impossible for him to understand them homogeneously without reconciling them somehow or other. It followed, therefore, that Hui-yüan, after studying them closely with great interest, put questions to Kumārajīva in an effort to solving the inconsistencies between them. Of the questions thus put forward, the problem of how to understand *dharmakāya* was the most difficult and the most important. Kumārajīva's answers were based upon his own studies both in Mahāyāna and in Hīnayāna traditions as well as upon his experience of conversion from Hīnayāna to Mahāyāna Buddhism, and they owed, among others, to the thought expounded in the *Tai-chih-tu-lun* which clearly elucidated the real significance of the Mahāyāna *prajñāpāramitā* thought, rejecting the *abhidharma* thought. In answering Hui-yüan's questions, Kumārajīva tried to give him full understanding of the teaching by dwelling upon the themes concerned, reiterating the important points, implementing his former answers, correcting Hui-yüan's misunderstandings, in order to enlighten and guide him.

According to Kumārajīva, the term 'dharmakāya' has a dual meaning: one common to Mahāyāna, and, the other peculiar to Mahāyāna. 1) The meaning of the term 'dharmakāya' peculiar to Mahāyāna points to the 'dharma-tā' which is universal and eternal. 2) It is said that the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva acquires the Law-body, discarding his body in flesh, when he attains the realization of the truth of non-arising through his practices. This means that through undefiled practices he can acquire the body deriving from 'dharma-tā,' which becomes the

subject of the Bohisattva practices he has to perform until he finally attains Buddhahood. 3) The Bodhisattva thus having acquired the Law-body transforms himself multifariously in accordance with the forms of sentient beings he is going to deliver. From various points of view, Kumārajīva tried to elucidate those points, but Hui-yüan seems to have had great difficulty in rightly grasping what Kumārajīva meant. However, in spite of the fact that there was no sutra in his time in which the Buddha's triple body (dharma-kāya, sambhoga-kāya, and nirmāṇa-kāya) was clearly stated other than the Buddha's dual body (the Flesh-body and the Law-body), Kumārajīva had already given a deep thought to the distinctions among the dharmatā-kāya, the dharma-kāya in reward, and the nirmāṇa-kāya, which correspond to the triple body as well as to the mutual relationship among them. For these reasons mentioned above, it may be said that Kumārajīva was not only one of the important scholars in the history of Chinese Buddhism, but also he was without doubt a first rate thinker in the history of Buddhist thought in India.

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