

Complete Interfusion of the Three Truths as the Wonderful Law and Its Philosophical Background

—Prolegomenon to the Study of the *Fa-hua-hsüan-i*—

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It was Chih-i (538-597) who originally delivered the lectures which are known as the T'ien-tai Triple Scripture, comprising his three great commentaries on the *Lotus Sutra*. The *Fa-hua-hsüan-i*, which clarifies the T'ien-tai doctrinal system, is one of the three. A major part of this work is devoted to an inquiry into the implications of the term *miao-fa* (Wonderful Law) in the title of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Chih-i interpreted the *fa* (Law) to be all the phenomena which make up the one hundred *dhātus* (realms) or one thousandfold *ju* (suchness), and the *miao* (Wonderful) as meaning 'unthinkable,' the contents of which he analysed as the ten *miao* of the phenomenal sphere and the ten *miao* of the noumenal sphere. He further argued that in each of the twenty *miaos* above mentioned there were both relative and absolute aspects, and that the role of the *Lotus Sutra* within the entire body of Buddhist thought was thus of the greatest importance. He insisted that the absolute *miao* implies among other things that the Buddha's teachings of accommodated aspect of truth are not to be discarded as such, but they have their unique value, and that this was basically expounded by the *Lotus Sutra*.

The absolute *miao* of the *Lotus Sutra* is based upon the logic of the complete interfusion of all things as simultaneously 'non-substantial' (*śūnya*), 'phenomenally existent' (*prajñapti*), and 'in the middle' (detached from the extremist views of all things being either real or nil); this logic is at once the fundamental philosophy of the T'ien-tai doctrine and the feature which distinguishes it from all the other Buddhist philosophies. This philosophy, however, did not originate with Chih-i; its philosophical background can be traced back to the Bud-

dhist teachings in the Southern and Northern dynasties. I would like to treat this subject in the following five sections:

(1) In their interpretations of *miao*, the followers of Kumārajīva of the Eastern Chin dynasty and the subsequent *Lotus Sutra* scholars failed to explore fully the implications of the term. Even the interpretations of it given by Fa-yün of the Liang dynasty, who was regarded as the greatest authority on the *Lotus Sutra* at the time, were criticized by Chih-i as being confined to the relative *miao*.

(2) He clarified the complete interfusion of the three truths, what he called the absolute and subtle (*miao*) presentation of this principle, which could be brought about only by critically overcoming the gross (*ts'u*) presentation of the three truths as consecutive. Upon inquiring into the contents of the gross presentation of truths in the Liang and Ch'en dynasties criticized by Chih-i, we should mention first of all the teaching of the twofold truth current in the Liang dynasty. In its typical form it proclaimed that the twofold truth comprises two kinds of truth: *śūnyatā* and *prajñapti*, which are based upon the unifying principle of 'the middle way.'

(3) The San-lun sect scholars such as Fa-lang criticized the above mentioned teaching of the twofold truth as having fallen into the heretical view of upholding substance, being ignorant of the true meaning of Tathāgata's accommodated teaching. They once again returned to the basic standpoint of the study of the transcendental wisdom, firmly established the idea of the 'middle way' to deny and overcome the twofold truth as being an accommodated truth and established the dialectical teaching of the middle way of the twofold truth.

(4) Chih-i insisted in opposition to this that principle of the 'middle way' should not only bear a nature transcending both primary and accommodated truths, but also it should be immanent in both of them. He further argued that not only should the principle of *śūnyatā* and *prajñapti* (phenomenal being) be denied and overcome by the principle of the 'middle way,' but in each of them the value of abso-

lute affirmation should be discovered.

(5) In his discovery of the value of the principle of 'phenomenal being,' Chih-i is especially indebted to Hui-ssū's attitude towards the study of the *Lotus Sutra*, with its special emphasis upon religious practice. The absolute nature of 'phenomenal being' in the *Fa-hua-hsüan-i* is the universal law pervading all phenomena seen mainly from the viewpoint of the Buddhist practice. In other words, Chih-i's insistence was that the existence of all phenomena is not simply denied by the principles of *śūnyatā* and the 'middle way,' but they are, as the antitheses to these principles, none other than absolute existence, 'eternity in its phenomenal aspect.' Further, the so-called 'complete interfusion of the three truths' refers to the inscrutable reality in which these three principles are mutually embodied and interfused while being opposed to one another; it is this which Chih-i considered to be the ultimacy of the 'Wonderful Law.'