

THE GREAT CALMING AND CONTEMPLATION: A Study and Annotated Translation of the First Chapter of Chih-i's Mo-ho Chih-kuan. By Neal Donner and Daniel B. Stevenson. Kuroda Institute Classics in East Asian Buddhism. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1993, pp. xx + 385. ISBN 0 8248 1514 9 (PBK)

CHIH-I 智顗 (538–597), the principal founder of the T'ien-t'ai school, was undoubtedly one of the most brilliant Buddhist minds that China ever produced. An extraordinary thinker, he took all the diverse and often contradictory Buddhist teachings and meditational practices that had been transmitted to China from India and welded them together into a single coherent system. Doctrine and meditation are given equal emphasis in the T'ien-t'ai system, for, as Chih-i himself states, they are like the two wings of a bird or the two wheels of a cart. Consequently, we find Chih-i's writings to be both a comprehensive doctrinal system based on the concept of the "complete fusion of the Three Truths" (*yüan-jung san-ti* 円融三諦), as well as an elaborate system of meditation to lead practitioners to insight into reality.

Despite his importance, for some time there was only one monograph in a Western language on Chih-i and his thought: Leon Hurvitz's *Chih-i (538–597): An Introduction to the Life and Ideas of a Chinese Buddhist Monk*, originally published in 1962 as volume 12 of *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*. However, during the past two decades or so we have seen a steady growth in the number of works on T'ien-t'ai Buddhism by Western scholars. A landmark event was the publication in 1983 of David Chappell's translation of the *T'ien-t'ai ssu chiao i*, an exceedingly influential outline of the T'ien-t'ai doctrinal system compiled by the Korean monk Chegwan during the Sung dynasty (David Chappell, tr., *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism: An Outline of the Four Teachings*, Tokyo, Daiichi shobo, 1983). Several years later, Paul L. Swanson published his *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989), a detailed study of the T'ien-t'ai concept of the Three Truths. And now, with the publication of *The Great Calming and Contemplation* by Neal Donner and Daniel B. Stevenson, we finally have a reliable guide to the meditational "wing" of the T'ien-t'ai system.

The book under review is a study and partial translation of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* 摩訶止觀, Chih-i's major work on meditation. In this work, which belongs to the final decade of his life, Chih-i sums up his meditational system under the compound "*chih-kuan*" (Skt., *śamatha-vipaśyanā*) or "calming (*chih*) and contemplation (*kuan*)."¹ It is interesting to note that in earlier works Chih-i used the term *ch'an* 禪 (meditation; Skt., *dhyāna*) to refer to religious practice. The use of the compound *chih-kuan* as the term for meditation reflects an

BOOK REVIEWS

important change in Chih-i's views on practice. As Donner and Stevenson note, "[I]n his later years Chih-i grew to regard religious practice and religious perfection as fundamentally composed of two elements: the static and the dynamic, the quiescent and the luminous, the cessation of delusion (*nirvāṇa*) and the intuiting of ultimate reality (*bodhi*). To express this quality the dyad *chih-kuan* became a more suitable term for him than *ch'an*" (p. 8).

The Great Calming and Contemplation is made up of two parts. Part I consists of textual and historical studies on the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* and its thought. This section is composed of three solid, perceptive essays: "The Text of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*" (Chapter 1), "The Status of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* in the T'ien-t'ai Tradition" (Chapter 2), and "The Problematic of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* and T'ien-t'ai History" (Chapter 3). The first chapter was written jointly by Donner and Stevenson, while the latter two chapters are the work of Stevenson alone. Part II contains a heavily annotated translation of the first of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*'s ten chapters, entitled Synopsis (*Ta-i*). The volume closes with a glossary of Chinese and Japanese characters, an extensive bibliography and an index.

According to its preface, this book began as a dissertation that Donner submitted for his doctorate to the University of British Columbia in 1976. The bulk of the dissertation consisted of a translation of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*'s Synopsis, and I fondly remember using a copy of the dissertation as I read through the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* during my student days. In 1990, Stevenson, a specialist in T'ien-t'ai ritual, revised the translation and footnotes and added the essays that appear as chapters 2 and 3. Thus this book is Stevenson's revision of Donner's dissertation.

The core of the book to be found in the 250-page translation of the Synopsis found in Part II. Although the Synopsis takes up only about one-seventh of the entire *Mo-ho chih-kuan*, the authors justify their decision to limit their translation to this section by pointing out that "it rehearses in condensed form the basic structure and thematic content of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* as a whole, with certain variations," and that "because of its self-contained character, T'ien-t'ai exegetes have treated it almost as a work unto itself" (p. xiv).

Reading the translation, I found it read very smoothly—a considerable feat given the highly technical nature of the original text. Earlier reviewers of this volume, most notably Paul Swanson (in the *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 17-2 [1994], pp. 337-360) and Yamano Toshirō (*Bukkyōgaku Seminar*, 59 [1994], pp. 31-35 [in Japanese]), have discussed the translation in great detail. Since I have little new to add concerning the translation, I will mention here only one point and this concerns the extensive use made of Chan-jan's 湛然 (711-782) commentary in the footnotes, a point which both of the reviewers above have touched upon.

Chan-jan, the sixth patriarch of the T'ien-t'ai school, is famous as the reviver of the T'ien-t'ai teaching during the T'ang dynasty, and his *Chih-kuan fu-hsing ch'uan-hung chüeh* 止觀輔行傳弘決 has traditionally been considered the most authoritative commentary on the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*. Donner's original footnotes consisted of explanations and paraphrases, but Stevenson revised them to include extensive quotations from Chan-jan's commentary. Stevenson gives two reasons for his decision: "First, it is at best tenuous to attempt any systematic reconstruction of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* apart from Chan-jan's commentary, given the lack of earlier materials as well as the enormous impact that Chan-jan's work has had on shaping the current text. And second, since Chan-jan's version of the text and commentary became the normative one for virtually all of East Asia, adopting his reading at least puts us within the mainstream of later T'ien-t'ai exegetical discourse" (p. xvi).

In a word, since the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* has traditionally been understood through Chan-jan's commentary, Stevenson consciously incorporated much of this commentary into the footnotes as a guide to understanding and interpreting the text. While acknowledging the validity of this approach, in his review Swanson criticizes Stevenson's decision by arguing that this perpetuates an excessive reliance on Chan-jan and prevents us from encountering Chih-i "directly" (Swanson, p. 348). Certainly, in reading the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*, we must use Chan-jan's commentary with care. As Yamano has pointed out, Chan-jan's commentary was written about 170 years after Chih-i's text, and the historical situation in which Chan-jan lived was quite different from that of the earlier monk. In particular, with the rise of the new Buddhist schools (including the Hua-yen, Ch'an and Pure Land schools) during the T'ang, Chan-jan keenly felt the need to demonstrate the superiority of his T'ien-t'ai school. As a result, in his writings (including the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* commentary) he emphasized the distinctiveness of his school's teaching vis-à-vis those of the other schools (Yamano, p. 33). Thus, lying behind Chan-jan's commentary is an agenda that does not exist in the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*. However, even today there persists the tendency to conflate the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* with Chan-jan's commentary and treat the latter as the final word on the former work. Swanson's criticism is directed towards this abiding tendency in T'ien-t'ai studies.

However, is it really possible, as Swanson asserts, to encounter Chih-i (or his writings) directly? Our understanding of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* is invariably conditioned by the T'ien-t'ai exegetical tradition, and Chan-jan's commentary is one of the fundamental documents in this tradition. This being the case, is it not the scholar's task to acknowledge the central place that the commentary has in the T'ien-t'ai tradition and consciously work to reveal how Chan-jan's influential commentary has shaped the T'ien-t'ai tradition through

BOOK REVIEWS

its interpretations of difficult or problematic sections of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*? Perhaps we should use a concept from Gadamer's hermeneutics and openly acknowledge the "effective history" of an influential text like the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*, and strive to trace the specific steps and moves in the formation of the effective history which stands between our horizon and that of the text. This is Stevenson's aim in translating numerous passages, often at considerable length, from Chan-jan in the footnotes, and I believe he is to be commended for taking this approach.

In recent years a number of superb works on T'ien-t'ai Buddhism have appeared in English, but only a small fragment of Chih-i's voluminous writings has been translated. Much work needs to be done before Chih-i's thought in its entirety can be presented to the West. Fortunately, Donner and Stevenson's work has laid yet another solid foundation upon which future scholars of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism can build.

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