

## The Mahāyānization of the Chinese Dhyāna Tradition

NEAL DONNER

**SPEAKING FOR HIMSELF**, Edward Conze succeeds at the same time admirably in summing up the Hīnayānist attitude towards meditation when he says

Noise is a thorn in the side of *dhyāna*. . . . Its ubiquitous and distracting effects give additional force to Peguy's definition of modern civilization as one vast conspiracy against the spiritual life.<sup>1</sup>

and elsewhere that

The ideas expounded in this book are only too easily disturbed by the hideous and brutish noises emanating from machines of all kinds (cars, motorcycles, lorries, wirelesses, television sets, electric drills, helicopters, and, of course, aeroplanes roaring, whining and screaming overhead . . .) and by the constant interruption of the deep brooding indispensable to their comprehension.<sup>2</sup>

It is a poignant statement on the present Western knowledge of Buddhist meditation that this foremost transmitter to the English-speaking world of the wisdom sūtras of the Mahāyāna ("form is emptiness, and emptiness form") can take the position that there is anything at all which must be excluded from the meditative practice of Buddhism. In fact few

---

<sup>1</sup> *Buddhist Meditation*, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> *Buddhist Thought in India*, pp. 7-8.

Buddhist treatises as preserved in Indic languages have much to say about the actual practical details of Mahāyāna meditation, so that one who relies on Sanskrit and Pali writings to present Buddhist meditation has little choice but to present only its Hīnayāna aspect.<sup>3</sup> We must rather look to Tibetan and East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhist documents if we wish to gain an intellectual understanding of the kind of meditative practice which corresponds with the ideas of the Mahayāna form of Buddhism. In the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* 大智度論, the great Chinese commentary to the *Pañcaviṃśatikā* (a Mahāyāna wisdom sūtra which was translated from the Sanskrit by Conze), we find an eloquent reply to the above statements quoted from one of Conze's books:

When a bodhisattva contemplates the collectivity of dharmas, (he understands that) whether he is distracted or concentrated, there is (still) no mark of duality to them. But other people (who wish to meditate try to) exclude distraction and seek concentration, developing thoughts of anger amid dharmas of distraction, and developing thoughts of attachment amid dharmas of concentration.<sup>4</sup>

By "other people" is clearly meant the devotees of the Hīnayāna among others.

The Chinese knowledge of Buddhist practice followed a course similar to that which we may observe in the modern world. Though a Mahāyāna wisdom sūtra, the *Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines* (*Aṣṭa-sāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā-sūtra*), was translated as early as the last part of the Later Han dynasty, it was centuries before the monistic Mādhyamika philosophy was fully understood, and longer yet until corresponding Mahāyāna meditation methods could be developed.

One of the ways to understand the history of Chinese Buddhism is to view the intertwining and the separation of the *prajñā* tradition and the

<sup>3</sup> There are some extant Sanskrit texts of the Yogācāra school, like Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and *Madhyāntavibhāṅga*, which are partly devoted to meditation, but these are short on concrete details.

<sup>4</sup> TCTL T25. 188c-189a.

*dhyāna* tradition.<sup>1</sup> Both had their origin in late Han, in the translations respectively of Lokakṣema 支婁迦讖 and An Shih-kao 安世高, but until the middle of the sixth century, not long before the reunification of China under the Sui dynasty, it was only the *prajñā* tradition which could be considered Mahāyānist. There were elements of Mahāyāna thought in the *dhyāna* tradition from the very beginning, but the emphasis tended to be either on the magical and superhuman powers attainable through certain exercises and breathing techniques (an aspect which caught the fancy of the simpler Chinese and their simpler barbarian conquerors) or on contemplations which promoted one's separation from the polluted world and afforded entry to the "other side of the river" which was nirvāṇa. Only with the rise of the Pure Land, the T'ien-t'ai, and the Ch'an schools, the same schools which sinified Buddhist thought, did the *dhyāna* tradition finally take on a predominantly Mahāyānist flavor, as it had by this time become clear that there was no ontological difference between "this side" and "the other side." The effort which the Chinese masters of these schools poured into validating their ideas by reference to scriptures translated from Indic languages does not detract from their great originality in developing forms of practice and meditation which were in line with the true epistemological meaning of emptiness as taught in the wisdom sūtras and Mādhyamika treatises.

The need for a balance between *dhyāna* and *prajñā* was stressed well before Buddhism crossed to China; it was part of the threefold approach which included also *śīla*, morality or discipline in conduct (the word *samādhi* is generally used instead of *dhyāna* in this context). These "three knowledges" 三學 are a simplification of the Eightfold Way, and traditionally one way to understand their mutual relationship was that *dhyāna* (*samādhi*) and *śīla* produce *prajñā*—in this case *prajñā* is understood as an effect or result, though it may also be considered a cause, and then is better understood as "intellection," "gnosis" or "discernment." The Buddhist system of discipline, essential though it may be to the monastic

<sup>1</sup> Both Zurcher and Demiéville feel that in its Chinese usage the word *dhyāna* is often better rendered "yoga," meaning the whole of Buddhist practice rather than a specific mental exercise or state. When opposed to *prajñā* this is the sense in which it should be taken.

life, lacked appeal for those Chinese not willing to commit themselves totally to the new religion imported from the West. The dilettantes who in the early period formed the great majority of those interested in Buddhism tended either towards elegant metaphysical speculations on emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which could until the time of the great Mādhyamika translator Kumārajīva (early fifth century) be more or less blended with the "pure talk" and "mysterious learning" of the intellectual Neo-Taoists; or they tended towards the more plebeian thaumaturgy which they perceived in such texts as the *Ānāpānasmṛti-sūtra*, An Shih-kao's translated compilation of Hinayānistic methods of breath control, and which seemed to promise longer life and superhuman powers. The first group identified with the *prajñā* tradition, the second with the *dhyāna* tradition.

The third (usually listed as first) of the "three knowledges," *śīla*, also remained fundamentally Hinayānistic for centuries, considerably longer in fact than the *dhyāna* aspect. The *vinayas* or codes of discipline employed within Chinese Buddhist monastic institutions were those of Indian Hinayāna schools like the Mahāsaṅghika and the Sarvāstivāda. It was only in Japan that this third "knowledge" was finally Mahāyānized in East Asia, by Saichō (767–822),<sup>6</sup> the founder of the Japanese extension of the T'ien-t'ai. It is interesting then that the Mahāyānization of the three knowledges proceeded in the reverse order from their traditional listing, which is *śīla*, *samādhi*, *prajñā*, a sequence which is supposed to correspond to the internal structure of the Buddhist Path.

Most modern accounts of the development of Chinese Buddhism deal mainly with the *prajñā* aspect, the process by which the Chinese first identified Buddhist emptiness 空 with the non-being 無 of their own Taoist tradition and over the centuries came to grasp its real epistemological sense. Here I would like to discuss Chinese trends in the *dhyāna* aspect whose literary culmination is in the *Mo-ho-chih-kuan* 摩訶止觀 (MHCK) of Chih-i 智顗 (538–597).

Three translations of the Later Han laid the foundation for the develop-

<sup>6</sup> Tamura Yoshirō and Umehara Takeshi, *Zettai no Shūri*, p. 299 (*Bukkyō no Shisō*, Vol. 5).

ment of the *dhyāna* tradition in China: the *Ānāpānasmṛti-sūtra* 安般守意經 (T#602), the *Yogācārabhūmi* 道地經 (T#607) and the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra* 般舟三昧經 (T#417/418), the first two accomplished by An Shih-kao and the last by Lokakṣema. The *Yogācārabhūmi*,<sup>7</sup> originally composed by the Indian Sarvāstivādin monk Saṅgharakṣa, was later retranslated (in 284) in a more complete version (T#606) by Dharmarakṣa; it is a completely different work from the perhaps better-known and voluminous work of the same Sanskrit name (T#1579; 瑜伽師地論) by the Mahāyāna patriarch Asaṅga (but attributed by the Chinese to his legendary teacher Maitreya). The latter work was translated in full in the seventh century by Hsüan-tsang and often in fragmentary form before that. Both are supposed to be treatises on Buddhist yoga (the real meaning of *dhyāna* in the broad sense in which the term is usually used in East Asia), but the former is Hinayānist, and the latter a Yogācāra Mahāyānist revision of Sarvāstivādin abhidharma theory.

The *Ānāpānasmṛti-sūtra* is not truly a sūtra, but a compilation from earlier Indian sources of the method of meditation that focuses on one's inhalation and exhalation. It contains nothing of importance that is not also present in the section on this subject in Saṅgharakṣa's *Yogācārabhūmi*. These two translations by An Shih-kao were at first more popular than the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra*, but the latter work was ultimately more important in the development of Chinese Buddhist meditation, for it contains the first explanation in Chinese of the *buddhānusmṛti* method 念仏, the contemplation, mindfulness or visualization of the Buddha (in this case Amitābha), which became the basic meditative technique of the thoroughly Mahāyānistic Pure Land school. It is all but certain that it was the scriptural authority used by Hui-yüan 慧遠<sup>8</sup> when he led what was later dubbed the White Lotus Society in a famous group vow to be reborn in the Pure Land of Amitābha (402 AD), an event regarded as the remote harbinger of the later Pure Land school. This sūtra is also

<sup>7</sup> See Demiéville's excellent article on this text and the early *dhyāna* tradition in China, "La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharakṣa," in the *Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême Orient*, 44, 2 (1954), pp. 339-446.

<sup>8</sup> See Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, p. 220 ff.

the scriptural authority for the Constantly-Walking Samādhi in Chih-i's *MHCK* (where the emptiness of the Buddha is clearly stated in a most un-Hīnayānistic fashion). Later when the Pure Land school as such developed however, this scripture was largely replaced by the (forged) *Kuan-wu-liang-shou-fo-ching* 觀無量壽佛經 (T#965), and the exercise of visualization of Amitābha gradually came to be replaced by the far simpler exercise of reciting and meditating on the *name* of Amitābha. In the *MHCK* emphasis is laid upon visualizing the Buddha with all his characteristic marks as well as the Dharma-body or ultimate aspect of the Buddha, which is to be considered "empty." The presence of this Constantly-Walking Samādhi in the *MHCK* provided part of the justification for many T'ien-t'ai monks of the Sung dynasty to devote themselves to Pure Land practices to the point that they practically became devotees of the school of that name.

T'ang Yung-t'ung 湯用彤 classifies the meditations used in Chinese Buddhism from the Han to the end of the Eastern Chin (420 AD) into four major types:<sup>9</sup>

1. Respiration-meditation 安般 or 數息 (*āṇāpānasmṛti*). This was early understood as a means to superhuman powers, though it is more properly an antidote to discursive thinking. An Shih-kao's translations, together with the later prefaces to these by monks like K'ang Seng-hui 康僧會 and Tao-an 道安, were the avenue by which this form of meditation was introduced in its Buddhist guise. However it seems certain that certain breathing techniques already were being practiced among Taoists well before the Buddhist contact, and this was doubtless one of the main reasons for the popularity of Buddhism in the late Han dynasty.<sup>10</sup> They are also typical of the earliest forms of Indian yoga; it is an open question whether the early Taoist and Indian types of breathing yoga may have had a common source in prehistoric times. Even today the counting of the in-breaths and the out-breaths is the first method of focusing the mind which is taught in the Zen school.

<sup>9</sup> *Han Wei Liang-Chin Nan-Pei Ch'ao Fo-Chiao-Shih* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史, pp. 767-769.

<sup>10</sup> Zürcher, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

It is mentioned as an auxiliary technique in both the *Sūratigama-samādhi-sūtra*<sup>11</sup> and the *Ch'ing-kuan-yin-ching* 請觀音經<sup>12</sup> (The Sūtra on the Supplication to Avalokiteśvara), two of the scriptures upon which the Four Samādhis of the *MHCK* are based. Though never wholly abandoned in Chinese or Japanese Buddhism, this method of meditation was too closely associated with the Hīnayāna to be more than a preliminary to the more advanced Mahāyāna meditations later practiced in East Asia.

2. Contemplation of the Impure 觀不淨 (*asubha-bhāvanā*). The purpose of this meditation is to counteract craving and desire. Epitomized by the contemplation of the nine or ten stages of putrefaction and dissolution of the human corpse, this is like respiration-meditation identified with the Hīnayāna, but unlike this had no Taoist antecedents and failed to develop much popularity in China. It is mentioned in practically all the Hīnayānist *dhyāna* sūtras and treatises translated into Chinese, and was especially esteemed by Hui-kuan 慧觀, the disciple of Kumārajīva otherwise prominent for his advocacy of gradual enlightenment as against the sudden enlightenment preached by Tao-sheng, another of Kumārajīva's disciples. Both the gradual approach and the contemplation of the impure were ultimately stigmatized as Hīnayānistic, so it may be said that in this respect Hui-kuan represented a reactionary tendency in the development of Chinese Buddhism. The Hīnayānistic orientation of Kumārajīva's contemporary and rival Buddhahadra may be seen by the fact that the major meditation scripture which he translated (ca. 419), the *Dharmatāradhyāna-sūtra* (T#618) of the Kashmirian Sarvāstivādin patriarch Buddhasena, confined most of its attention to this contemplation of the impure and the aforementioned respiration-meditation. The first eight of the seventeen chapters of this text deal with respiration-meditation, the next four with the contemplation of the impure, while the other chapters deal with the contemplation of numerical categories from the Abhidharma like the eighteen *dhātus*, the four unlimited

<sup>11</sup> T15.639b.

<sup>12</sup> T20.34c.

states of mind, the five *skandhas*, the twelve *āyatanas*, and the twelve links of dependent co-origination, such contemplations falling more in the category of Hīnayāna *prajñā* than *dhyāna*. Contemplations on emptiness or on the Buddha are completely lacking.

3. Contemplation (visualization) of the Buddha 念仏 or 觀仏 (*buddhānusmṛti*). This contemplation is said to generate faith and remove doubt. It is present in the Hīnayāna tradition as part of the contemplation of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha). As I have mentioned, this became the primary meditation exercise of the Pure Land school, where the Buddha in the meditation is the Mahāyānistic Buddha Amitābha. It may also be considered Mahāyānistic in that it is simple enough to be practiced easily by laymen, and unlike the contemplation of the impure, which promotes revulsion of the world, involves the contemplation of something far more pleasant than cadaverous putrefaction. As the Pure Land school developed in later times, however, the Buddha and his Land tended to be hypostatized by many as something separate from the meditator, which must be considered a degeneration of the *prajñā* aspect of this practice. This meditation was originally based on the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra* as translated by Lokakṣema (T#417 and #418, in one and three rolls, respectively),<sup>13</sup> but as mentioned above this sūtra was later supplanted in the Pure Land (though not the T'ien-t'ai) tradition by the *Kuan-wu-liang-shou-fo-ching* (T#365), which is along with the longer and the shorter *Sukhāvati-vyūha* one of the three basic scriptures of the Pure Land. In the Constantly-Walking Samādhi of the *MHCK*, where Chih-i's concept of the Three Truths is applied to this meditation, we find that the Buddha is to be viewed not only in his physical form but also as empty and as identical to the meditator's own body and mind.<sup>14</sup> Such a degree of sophistication in this meditation was not suitable for the lay people who formed the overwhelming majority of

<sup>13</sup> Scholars are still in disagreement about the exact relationship between the two versions of this sūtra: whether the shorter is a later abridgement of the longer, or the longer a later spurious amplification of the shorter. See Zürcher, pp. 220-221 and T'ang, p. 768.

<sup>14</sup> T46.12c.

Pure Land devotees, nor was this a part of the *buddhānusmṛti* meditation in its Hīnayāna form.

4. Samādhi of the Heroic Stride 首楞嚴三昧 (*Sūraṅgama-samādhi*). This is praised in many scriptures as the most eminent form of meditation in the Mahāyāna. For example the *Sūraṅgama-samādhi-sūtra* (T # 642) itself states that only a bodhisattva of the tenth of the ten stages is capable of performing it.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the previous three forms of meditation it has no specific content, signifying rather contemplation of emptiness in all one's acts and thoughts, and the realization of the Six Perfections in every mode of physical, vocal and mental behavior. The *Nirvāna sūtra* (roll 27) equates it to the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*), *vajra-samādhi*, lion's-roar samādhi, and the Buddha-nature 仏性. Although the major sūtra in which this is expounded, the *Sūraṅgama-samādhi-sūtra*, was translated again and again,<sup>16</sup> the Kumārajīva version is all that has come down to us, apart from a forgery of the T'ang dynasty. This "method" of meditation is what is detailed in the Neither-Walking-Nor-Sitting Samādhi of the *MHCK* (where, importantly, the *specific* method of the contemplation on the four phases of thought is added to it), and also evidently formed a great part of the inspiration for Hui-ssu's *Sui-tzu-i-san-mei* 隨自意三昧, itself quoted frequently without attribution in the *MHCK*. This "meditation" generated a great deal of interest among the "dark-learners" in the heyday of Neo-Taoism, for inasmuch as its purpose was to transcend form and develop wisdom (*prajñā*), they concluded that if they could develop wisdom there should be no need for meditation. It accelerated the tendency of Southern intellectuals to neglect specific methods of meditation in favor of dandling about in their heads the concept of *tūnyatā*, insofar as they were able yet to understand it.

Despite two centuries of the *dhyāna* tradition as I have outlined above, the famous monk Hui-yūan (344-416) still felt the lack of suitable guides for meditation keenly enough that he commissioned disciples to journey

<sup>15</sup> T 15.691a.

<sup>16</sup> T'ang lists nine versions: *op. cit.*, pp. 770-771.

to the West to garner more information on this subject, and later requested Buddhahadra to produce his aforementioned translation of the *dhyāna* text by Buddhasena. Seng-jui 僧叡, lamenting the paucity of relevant scriptures, likewise besought his master Kumārajīva to translate *dhyāna* texts. Both these requests produced fruit, but the three works (T#613, #614, #616) translated by Kumārajīva, eminently a member of the *prajñā* stream in Chinese Buddhism, turned out to be little better suited for truly Mahāyāna meditation than the Hinayanistic efforts of Buddhahadra. They were not yet an efficient means to the realization of the Mahāyāna emptiness, to the vision of Ultimate Truth in every scrap of the phenomenal, to the understanding that there is no separation between nirvāṇa and *samsāra*. Kumārajīva himself must be credited with mediating the final Mahāyānization of the *prajñā* tradition in China (after centuries in which *sūnyatā* or emptiness was misunderstood as analytical as in the Hīnayāna or ontological as in Buddho-Taoism), but the Mahāyānization of the *dhyāna* tradition had yet to occur.

The most popular of Kumārajīva's three *dhyāna* translations was the *Tso-ch'an-san-mei-ching* 坐禪三昧經 (T#614: "the sūtra on the *samādhi* of sitting meditation"), not really a sūtra but his compilation primarily from the *dhyāna* teachings of certain Sarvāstivādin patriarchs like Vasumitra, Upagupta, Kumāralāta, etc.<sup>17</sup> This text treats meditation under five main headings: (1) the contemplation of the impure, (2) the cultivation of good-will (*maitrī*, one of the four Unlimited States of Mind, *brahma-vihāras*), (3) the contemplation of the twelve-linked chain of dependent origination (*pratitya-samutpāda*), (4) respiration-meditation, and (5) the contemplation or visualization of the Buddha. Kumārajīva did introduce some Mahāyāna ideas in an appendix to the *Tso-ch'an-san-mei-ching*, compiled from the *Vasudhara-sūtra* 持世經 (T#482) and in his *Ch'an-fa-yao-chieh* 禪法要解 (T#616), but essentially he did nothing but transmit Hīnayāna meditation methods from the Sarvāstivādin school to China, methods with which as we have seen, the Chinese were already acquainted. Dharmamitra (356-442), another foreign Hīnayānist monk, produced still more translations of *dhyāna* texts slightly after Kumārajīva's time.

<sup>17</sup> See Demiéville, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

His *Wu-men-ch'an-ching-yao-yung-fa* 五門禪經要用法 (T#619) focused on the same five categories as Kumārajīva's *Tso-ch'an-san-mei-ching*, with special emphasis (significantly, by this time) on the visualization of the Buddha. Two other texts attributed to him (T#277 and #409) deal respectively with the visualization of the bodhisattvas Samantabhadra and Ākāśagarbha, the former figure being the subject of the *MHCK*'s Lotus Samādhi in the section on Half-Walking/Half-Sitting Samādhi. Yet the Mahāyāna emptiness had yet to be integrated into the meditation delineated by Dharmamitra.

The *dhyāna* and *prajñā* traditions were never fully separate, particularly wherever actual monastic life was carried out. Yet after the dissolution of Kumārajīva's school in Ch'ang-an with the fall of the Yao Ch'in dynasty in 417, exegetical studies (the *prajñā* stream) declined in the North, while in the South from the Liu Sung (to 479) a similar deterioration of meditative practice was in effect.<sup>18</sup> Even before this time the major centers of *dhyāna* practice in the South, Hsiang-yang (365–379) and Lu-shan (380–417), had been led by the northerners Tao-an and Hui-yüan. With their passing, the combination of northern *dhyāna* with southern *prajñā* which they strenuously advocated lacked powerful adherents until nearly the time of the Sui reunification. Hui-yüan in particular stressed visual representations and sensual contact with the Buddha, concerned as he was to appeal to the lay element in his group. He consequently made great use of icons and images as well as concrete visualizations of the Buddha, while simultaneously stressing the need for the wisdom approach. But in his fusion of semi-Mahāyānistic *dhyāna* with semi-Mahāyānistic *prajñā* (it is doubtful whether he ever really understood *śūnyatā* properly), just as in the group vow which he led to be reborn in the Pure Land, he was too far ahead of his time to have much influence in melding the two streams permanently. His organization dissolved upon his death. Very few foreign monks arrived in the South thereafter, and the decline there of the *dhyāna* tradition was evident everywhere except in a few regions close to the border with the North, such as Ching-chou and Szechuan<sup>19</sup> (it is

<sup>18</sup> Tang, p. 774.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

of some interest that the former area was the birthplace of Chih-i). Yet nourished by the interest of the aristocratic Chinese court, the southern *prajñā* tradition continued to develop in the form of exegetical studies of treatises like the *Tattvasiddhi-sāstra* 成實論 (T#1646) and the *Daśabhūmivyākhyāna* 十地經論 (T#1522); and likewise stimulated by the interest in practical shamanism of the barbarian dynasties, the northern *dhyāna* tradition (including a marked tendency towards devotionism) was far from moribund.

Towards the end of the Northern Wei a tendency towards scriptural study began to develop in the North again under the influence of certain Indian Mahāyāna masters.<sup>20</sup> In 531, Buddhasānta translated the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* 攝大乘論 (T#1592) of Asāṅga (which was to be retranslated by Paramārtha in the South in 563, T#1593), and he had participated with Ratnamati and Bodhiruci in the translation of the *Daśabhūmivyākhyāna (sāstra)* (T#1522) attributed to Vasubandhu, in 508. Both these texts heightened interest in the philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism, while at the same time these masters emphasized a practice of *dhyāna* founded upon such Mahāyāna texts. While the study of the Mahāyāna *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* increased apace, the same Bodhiruci converted the monk T'an-luan 曇鸞 (476-542) to initiate the development of the Pure Land school, eminently a *dhyāna* movement in the wider sense of the word (practice as opposed to intellectualized study). Bodhidharma, first (and semi-legendary) patriarch of the Ch'an tradition, also appeared in the North at this time, sometime between 516 and 526, advocating a non-dual and direct form of practice founded in the Mahāyānist *Lañkāvatāra-sūtra*. Hui-wen 慧文, the obscure "first patriarch" of the T'ien-t'ai school, flourished in the North in the middle of the sixth century, and according to tradition became enlightened through reading a verse from the *Madhyamaka-kārikās* of Nāgārjuna as translated by Kumārajīva in the *Chung-lun* 中論 (this famous *gāthā*<sup>21</sup> figures prominently in the *MHCK*, being the origin of Chih-i's theory of the Three Truths). T'an-luan (the disciple of Bodhiruci), Hui-ssu (the disciple of Hui-wen, and Chih-i's

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 779.

<sup>21</sup> Chapter 24, verse 18.

teacher), and Hui-k'o 慧可 (the disciple of Bodhidharma), transmitted the inspiration of their teachers to their own followers, and so prepared the soil for the fecund growth of respectively the Pure Land tradition, the T'ien-t'ai tradition, and the Ch'an tradition, in the T'ang dynasty. We thus find that during the sixth century the Northern emphasis on meditation and devotion came at last to be founded on Mahāyāna treatises and sūtras instead of on the compilations by Hīnayānist masters like Saṅgharakṣa and Buddhasena upon which Chinese *dhyāna* had formerly relied.

After the middle of the sixth century, not long before the reunification of China by the Sui dynasty (589), the second T'ien-t'ai patriarch Hui-ssu went south where in the year 560 he acquired his most famous pupil, Chih-i. We may take this as a convenient date marking the introduction of the inchoately Mahāyānized *dhyāna* tradition into the South. In succeeding years there was significant intercourse between Chih-i's associates and disciples and the Mādhyamikan San-lun school on Mt. She 叢山 in the South; the latter school also maintained an emphasis on meditation founded firmly in Mahāyāna *prajñā*. In fact the *Ta-chih-tu-lun*, which is constantly quoted by Chih-i in the *MHCK*, was regarded equally highly in the San-lun, while the *Chung-lun*, which furnished the stimulus for Hui-wen's enlightenment, was one of the San-lun's "three treatises" 三論, all of which belonged to the Mādhyamika stream of Mahāyāna. It is not clear at the present stage of research whether the San-lun's equal emphasis on *dhyāna* and *prajñā*<sup>22</sup> was a result of stimulus from the T'ien-t'ai tradition, but it is clear that the San-lun Mahāyānized the philosophically reactionary Ch'eng-shih 成實 (*Tattovasiddhi*) *prajñā* tradition with its more correct understanding of the meaning of *śūnyatā*. Then given as a hypothesis the stated influence from T'ien-t'ai, the latter may be said to have Mahāyānized the *dhyāna* tradition within the San-lun school.

After Hui-k'o (487-593), the second patriarch of the Ch'an transmission, this school also moved to the South, where it was to attain its greatest influence. The later dispute on patriarchal succession between the followers of Shen-hsiu 神秀 and those of Hui-neng 慧能 (initiated by Hui-neng's disciple Shen-hui 神慧 in 734) can be read as a classical

<sup>22</sup> T'ang, p. 796.

confrontation between the old Hīnayānist and the new Mahāyānist *dhyāna*. This dispute is usually understood as a continuation of the old Chinese conflict between the gradual theory and the sudden theory of enlightenment, but the former tended to be identified with the Hīnayāna and the latter with the Mahāyāna. Shen-hsiu, representing the gradualistic approach, advocated diligent action to "wipe the bright mirror of the mind clean of the dust that obscures enlightenment." This betrayed a view of Ultimate Truth (the bright mirror of the mind) as separate and distinct from the defilements including nescience, and of T'ang's four categories of meditation is closest to the Contemplation of the Impure, quite definitely a Hīnayānistic variety. Hui-neng is on the contrary reputed to have upheld the view that since there is no mind or mirror at all (i.e., both are "empty"), there could be no dust to obscure them. That is, enlightened mind and defilements are not different. Chih-i frequently makes the same statement or similar ones. E.g. at T46.17c,

If a person has by nature a great number of desires and is seething with contamination, so that despite his efforts to counter and suppress them, they continue to increase by leaps and bounds—then he should simply direct his attention wherever he wishes. Why? Because without the arising of the Anti-perfections, he would have no chance to practice contemplation.

Thus it was not the T'ien-t'ai alone which promulgated a Mahāyānized form of *dhyāna*, in which it was linked with the Mahāyāna *prajñā*, though perhaps it was the first school to do so (in the persons of Hui-ssu and Chih-i). All the great Buddhist schools of the Sui and T'ang emphasized both *dhyāna* and *prajñā*, this being a result of the influence of northerners like Hui-ssu, Bodhiruci, Buddhāśanta and Bodhidharma.<sup>23</sup> Though Tao-an, Hui-yüan and Seng-jui had long before, in the fourth and fifth centuries, advocated the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā*, only the third of these men could be said to have understood the Mahāyāna emptiness, while in the *dhyāna* aspect of their Buddhism all three were restricted to the Hīnayāna approach. Hence it was only by Sui-T'ang times that Chinese Buddhism

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 797.

could be said to have reached its full inner flowering, signifying at once the Mahāyānization of the *dhyāna* stream, the incorporation *and* creative adaptation of the *prajñā* stream, and the blending together of the two into a unified whole.

This is a perspective on the development of Chinese Buddhism which mitigates the more frequently encountered view that in becoming more Chinese, Buddhism somehow became less Buddhist. On the contrary, it is possible to say that the native philosophies of China had uniquely suited the Chinese mind to work out the practical implications of the Mahāyāna wisdom. The result may have been less Indian, but did not on that account constitute a deviation from the transcultural principles of the Mādhyamika philosophy.

Though Chih-i was an important influence in this process, it would have occurred without him, as the momentum towards this goal was being built up in all areas of Chinese Buddhism. His unique contribution in the area of Mahāyāna *dhyāna* (for which he now used the old term *chih-kuan* 止觀, *samatha-vipaśyanā*, indicating thereby a union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā* within the *dhyāna* aspect itself) was to produce for the first time in Chinese Buddhist history a great body of work which codified Mahāyāna practice, laying down a specific and detailed series of graded exercises and "samādhis" which could finally supplant the meditation texts of the foreign Hīnayāna patriarchs. Until then this had never been done by representatives of the other schools, nor even (so far as is known) by any thinkers in the Indian sub-continent. His *Great Calming and Contemplation* (*MHCK*) is the key text within this body of work. One would be justified therefore in translating its Chinese title *Mo-ho-chih-kuan* 摩訶止觀 by the expression "Summation of Mahāyāna Meditation," where *mo-ho* (for the Sanskrit *mahā*, great) has the double sense of "Mahāyāna" and "summation."<sup>24</sup>

In the *MHCK* we find therefore no references to the earlier Hīnayāna *dhyāna* treatises, but rather a consistent use of Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras to justify the philosophy behind the practice as well as many of the

<sup>24</sup> One could go so far as to Sanskritize the title as "Mahāyāna-dhyāna-saṃgraha" instead of the usual "Mahā-samatha-vipaśyanā."

details of the practice itself. Instructions are given as to how to sit or walk, what to do with the voice, and what to do with the mind, that exceed in precision anything up to then in the Chinese Mahāyāna tradition: it is no surprise therefore that this text is still used in East Asia (at least in Taiwan and Japan) as a meditation guide. In addition the *MHCK*'s emphasis on meditation and realization in all aspects of thought and behavior (as in the Neither-Walking-Nor-Sitting Samādhi) was in full agreement with the Pure Land and the Ch'an, being both fully Mahāyānistic and fully Chinese. The latter schools, while unlike the T'ien-t'ai in that they made no important contribution to the Mahāyāna *prajñā* (in fact were partly degenerate in this respect), exceeded the T'ien-t'ai in their creative sinification of *dhyāna* (again understood broadly as practice), to the point that by the time of the Sung dynasty, T'ien-t'ai monks themselves were increasingly attracted to them both.<sup>23</sup> The story of these developments must be told at another time.

---

<sup>23</sup> See Andō Toshio, *Tendai-gaku*, p. 372 ff.