The Absolute in Mahāyāna Buddhism

—Possible Conditions of our Understanding—

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(1)

The direct motif of this thesis is to elucidate the characteristics of Buddha in Mahāyānism. From ancient times in Buddhism the Three Bodies of Buddha had been explained, i. e. dharma-kāya (Body of Truth), saṃbhoga-kāya (Body of Enjoyment) and nirmāṇa-kāya (Body of Magic Transformation). This viewpoint arose in India and was transferred into China. And in China the unique understanding of Buddha developed on the sects of Tien-tai or Hua-yen. Japanese Buddhism stressed more on the idea of Buddha than Indian or Chinese. The Prince Imperial Shōtoku (574—622), a pioneer of Japanese Buddhism emphasized the devotion to the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma, Saṃgha), and especially the devotion to Buddha on which practicing of good was founded. Not merely thoughtfully, but he intended to realize the sphere of religious experience by practice and meditation of bodhisattva. Kūkai (774—835), the founder of Shingon sect discriminated the esoteric Buddhism from the exoteric and rejected the latter which contained the important Mahāyāna Buddhism, Tien-tai, Hua-yen and so on, because it is only esoteric Buddhism that brings the Great Buddha (Vairocana-Buddha) into our immediate experience. In Kamakura period, as is generally known, Shiran (1173—1262) or Dogen (1200—1253) elucidated the great power of Buddha from each viewpoint. Since Kamakura period, however, the buddhistic thought stopped to develop and so does not come into the problem of contemporary thought. There is a long gap of time between Japanese Buddhism and modern people in Japan. So Buddhism has not become the intellect of common Japanese, especially

younger people.

Contrary to this, from olden times Christianity has been discussing the problem of cognition of God. It is needless to say that in the medieval philosophy logical speculation was mixed up with Christian faith, especially intended to clear up the idea of God, e. g. St. Augustine (354—430), Thomas Aquinas (1225—1274), Meister Eckhart (1260?—1327) and so on. In spite of the fact that modern philosophy shook itself free from the medieval Christianity, the philosophers were going to make clear the idea of God as the final object of philosophy, e. g. Descartes (1596—1650), Spinoza (1632—1677), Leibniz (1646—1716), and so on. Even in our time the eminent thinkers of Christianity, Barth (1886—), Brunner (1889—), Bultmann (1884—), Tillich (1886—), etc. are now exploring the sphere of God from their each standpoint.

So we can discern that God in Christianity has been examined and developing in our contemporary thought, while Buddha in Mahāyānism had remained in traditional interpretations. We should understand Buddha in Mahāyānism in the midst of our modern thought, and taking one more step forward, not only Buddha in Mahāyānism, but also the Absolute in general in our time.

(2)

Now it is important for us to stand in the current of historical thought and hunt up historical materials. With regard to Buddhas in Mahāyāna Buddhism, there are innumerable Mahāyāna-sūtras and śāstras belonging to many schools. It is now impossible to survey the whole materials which we will reserve as a future problem. We here try to set some regulations.

1. China

As to Buddhas in Chinese Buddhism, we must have regard to both Tien-tai and Hua-yen sects as theoretical and practical Buddhism, and both Ching-tu and Chan sects as practical one. And on these doctrines are imposed the following conditions.

a. Direct experience of Buddha.

The doctrines of Tien-tai and Hua-yen are peculiar to Chinese and the Buddha also is understood in such Buddhistic thoughts. When we examine the characters of Buddhas from the type viewpoint, it is necessary to take up Buddhas in these doctrines. From the standpoint of direct experience of Buddha, however, they are apt to stress more on the form of the thought than direct authenticating of Buddha. Therefore, with respect to these doctrines, it is not necessary to form a image of Buddha from the system of each sect, but rather from what is streaming under the thought, or the infinite spirit at which it will aim. The case is the same with Ching-tu sect. There are important wrighings in this sect, Lun-chu, An-lo-chi, Kuan-ching-shu and so on. The fundamental type of thought in these wrighings is contrast between Amita-Buddha and sentient beings. But a essential life underlying them is viewed as what we directly confront Amita-Buddha and perceive him with our hearts and bodies.

b. Necessary philosophizing.

It is very important for us to give attention to that the method of understanding Buddha is not only religious experience or sensible perception of him, but also the strict thinking through logical necessity. Religious experience is subjective, while logical necessity is objective. Through the subjective method it is possible for us to attain or touch the sphere of the Absolute, through the objective method to make public and others recognizing it. Though the former is direct, the latter is not always indirect, rather it is very important that the latter is at once objective and direct. It does not mean to consider the sphere of the Absolute objectively, but logically to philosophize it in the midst of the experience logically. It is objective to philosophize it logically and is direct to do so in the midst of the experience.

The documents of Chan sect are regarded as direct expressions of the ultimate experiences in union with Buddha, the Absolute, but it is not almost possible to find here logical necessity. Contrary to this, Hui-yuan (523—592), the writer of Ta-cheng-i-chang which was general remarks of

Buddhism, elaborately systematized each item in its doctrine. He illustrated the astonishing accuracy in systematizing it from innumerable viewpoints. His philosophical characteristic, however, is to understand Buddhism too formally and schematically. So his system is only formally objective and does not contain the direct experience. It is important, therefore, to think while experiencing and to experience while thinking, or to think in the midst of experience and to experience in the midst of thinking, i. e. the mixture between religious life and logical necessity.

2. India

What is the matter in India? There are innumerable Mahāyāna-sūtras which are most fundamental materials concerning Mahāyāna Buddhas. But the meanings of them are very ambiguous and vague, not logical and philosophical, but symbolic and emotional. As to philosophical understanding of Buddha, there are materials concerning the thoughts of Tathāgata-garbha (embryo of Buddha) or Buddha-nature, e. g. Mahāyānottaratantra-śāstra, Mahāyānaśraddhotpādaśāstra and so on. We can discern in these writings the speculative system of Buddha founded on achieving experience of him.

It is necessary, further, for us to deliberate the Vedantism in modern India, even if it seems to have no relation to Mahāyānism. The reason why it should be referred to is as follows; (1) Modern Vedantism is, of course, based on the traditional Vedānta since Vedas and Upaniṣads, containing the deep meanings of Sāṃkhya philosophy. (2) The most eminent thinkers of modern Vedāntism, Vivekānanda (1863—1902) and Aurobindo (1872—1950) were striving to seek the Absolute through modern intellect and speculation. The modernity of speculation and the insatiable pursuit of the Absolute are much available for us. (3) To be the most important, the more we study the thoughts of these thinkers, the more seem they to express the unity of Mahāyāna Buddha, the Absolute which Mahāyānism could not thoroughly realize, in spite of having aimed at it.

(3)

Now let us deliberate the following two fundamental conditions in order to understand the Absolute in our contemporary thought, based on the historical materials as mentioned above.

I. Problem of mythology.

The Absolute in Vedāntism is derived from the myths in the Vedas. Although the Upaniṣads are more meditative and speculative than Vedas, nevertheless they are not always free from the mythology. The case is the same with the modern Vedantists, Vivekānanda or Aurobindo. Especially the thought of Aurobindo is highly westernized and most philosophical, furthermore he has his own philosophical speculation and point of view, i. e. the subjectivity of thought, founded on the traditional Vedantism. So his philosophy is extremely non-mythological, nevertheless his philosophical thinking is fundamentally based on the myth of the creation of the world in the Vedas. There remains one problem, whether we can shake thoroughly ourselves free from the mythology or not, when we advance along with the current of Indian thought.

Concerning this problem, let us ask the following question: What is the final trace of mythology, which still remains, however hard we strive to get rid of even a bit of the myth? The answer is then clearly as follows: *The Absolute exists*. Both modern Vedāntism and Mahāyāna Buddhism accept this answer. In the case of Ching-tu (Jōdo) sect which has comparatively stronger tint of mythology, finally remains there a Buddha who is himself the uninterrupted light all over the world (Jinjippōmuge-kōnyorai). Even in the case of Chan (Zen) sect which is extremely non-mythological in Buddhism on account of pure practice (zazen) beyond any doctrine, nevertheless there lies the absolute Buddha, even if, as this sect upholds that He himself is in fact myself, the direction on the emphasis might be distinguished from in Ching-tu (Jodo) sect.

Then, what is the basis by which the problem of mythology disappears? The answer to this question is as follows: It is to accept "*The*

Absolute exists", not only by our intellectual reason, but rather by our whole spirits and bodies, i. e., the active participation in the Absolute. By accepting "*Exist*" of the Absolute, the "*Exist*" in the objective form is solved into the subjective world, which itself also disappears, however, as soon as the Absolute is fused with the subject. Such acceptance like this is called "*Shin*" (Faith) in Buddhism. But Buddhistic "*Shin*" is very ambiguous, not only faith, trust, confidence, reliance, etc. (*saddha*, *śraddha*), but also clearness, brightness, purity, calmness, etc. (*pasāda*, *prasāda*) and further inclination, attachment, clear understanding or enlightenment, etc. (*adhimutti*, *adhimukti*). In fact these characters come together into one active "*Shin*". So it is quite different from such faith as Tertullianus's "*credo quia absurdum est*" (I believe, because it is irrational). It is rather fundamentally rational, as it includes clear understanding or enlightenment and so is to be opened inwardly.

Thus, by acceptance of the Absolute, the objective meaning of the "*Exist*" melts in one integral world of direct experience, in other words, a last bit of mythology disappears. Therefore we can discern that a final trace of mythorogy "*The Absolute exists*" is the same moment by which the trace of mythorogy is converted into the individuating world of direct experience. It is the acceptance of the Absolute (*Shin*, especially *adhimukti*) to make this conversion actualize.

2. Meaning of "*Exist*".

What does the "*Exist*" mean? It is to be expressed in many ways, e. g. the Absolute, the absolute or ultimate Reality, the absolute Nothingness, the personal Absolute, the Self itself, the Being in conformity with self, the Being utterly distinguished from self, etc.. Although there are various expressions mutually different from, the "*Exist*" itself is the same one. Then, why are there various expressions concerning the "*Exist*", in spite of being the same one? Because they are determined by each form of the self-awakening or direct perception of the Absolute with the self, i. e. by how to awaken to the Absolute. So they are necessarily related to the character of self-consciousness, while founded on the Absolute itself. Spea-

king in the buddhistic term, the form of self-consciousness is named *loka-saṃvṛti-satya* (worldly truth), and the Absolute itself *paramārthasatya* (absolute truth). The absolute truth can be only realized by and in the worldly truth.

When the worldly truth is related to and touches the absolute, the worldly truth is divided into the expressed forms and the expressing subject. The expressed forms are the Absolute, the ultimate Reality, the absolute Nothingness and so on, as have been above said. The expressing subject is the centre of self-consciousness, which by direct perception of the Absolute exhibits these forms. The forms are compared to clothes and the subject is to a body. So, when we take our temperature, we must not put the clinical thermometers into our clothes, but into our bodies. We must not attach to or be deluded by the expressed forms, and must always stand on the centre of self-consciousness. However mutually different these forms may be, the reason of difference is really based on how to perceive the Absolute by the central subject. We are apt to substantialize these forms and to forget the expressing subject. We cannot be too careful in this problem, as Kant(1724—1804) has pointed out substantializing (*hypostasieren*).

As a necessary result of this inference above mentioned, it is to be affirmed that the Absolute is unexpressed, infinite, endless, eternal and transcendent, and the central subject expresses the innumerable forms, being immersed in the Absolute. Therefore with regard to the relation among the Absolute, the central subject and innumerable forms, it is to be ascertained that the innumerable forms are the endless responses of the Absolute to the central subject. Here disappears any subject-object distinction in epistemology, so it is the same one that the central subject touches the Absolute and the Absolute touches the central subject. And so the subject, touching the Absolute, expresses innumerable forms, in other words, the Absolute responds to the subject in innumerable forms. These forms expressed by the central subject are the same forms responded by the Absolute as these. The endless response of the Absolute is considered to be the

endless action of *nirmāṇa-kāya* (Body of Magic Transformation). It means that the Absolute negatively is inexhaustibly impossible in self-limitation and positively is infinitely possible in it, i. e. the Absolute has both inexhaustible impossibility and infinite possibility in selflimitation.

Based on these two fundamental conditions as above mentioned, we would be able to deliberate the image of the Absolute.

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