On the Principle of “*negative-intermediation*” Seen in the
Interpretation of Shan-tao’s
Kuan-wu-liang-shou-fo-ching-shu

—compared with that of the two famous
phrases in an embroidered curtain
depicting a land called Tenju—

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It is said that Chinese Buddhism has diverged from Indian Buddhism to a very great degree. Many facts have influenced the nature and extent of these divergencies. In translating, for example, Chinese commentators and scholars often gave twisted or distorted interpretations of the original. The Sanskrit texts were not always faithfully translated, interpretations were often added, the sentences were frequently embellished with Chinese literary ornament, thus taking on the appearance of original works of Chinese literature. What is more, words corresponding to the prepositions, conjunctions and relative pronouns of Western languages are very rare. And the lack of number, gender and case in Chinese pronouns had also brought about the tendency toward ambiguity. So, the Chinese had the greatest difficulty in understanding the meaning of the Buddhist scriptures which had originally been written in Sanskrit and sentences in the Chinese version of sūtras were often understood in a sense different from that of original. The misinterpretations thus produced were often very important in the dogmatic development of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism.

The Japanese translators of Chinese writings by the Chinese would, *knowing that the Chinese language has no rigid grammar, make quite free interpretations of Chinese texts*, adding to these ideas of their own for their

own purposes. The accuracy in the sense, however, was not so with the religionists who were propagators of Buddhism for the Japanese public. The more genuinely native the thought of a religionist was, the greater was his deviation from Chinese texts (just like Prince Shotoku, Shinran, Dogen etc.), Chinese-translated sūtras, then, were seldom understood correctly by the Japanese. As a natural course of events, Buddhistic thought in particular underwent vast changes after it was introduced into this country, though it is problematical whether these new features should be regarded merely development or degeneration. [vid. *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*. by Hajime NAKAMURA]

In connection with the above, I had already expressed my opinion last year. [vid. *The Principle of negative-intermediation* in the Thought of Prince Shotoku—laying stress on the two famous phrases in Tenjukoku-Shūchō, or an embroidered curtain depicting a land called Tenju—*Journal of Prince Shotoku Studies*, Vol. 6, 1971] There I used symbolic logic and drew some conclusions in understanding the relation between two Chinese-written phrases (i. e. determination of conjunction). Here I tried to compare this effect with the process of grasping *deep mind* in “Kuan-wu-liang-shou-ching” from China to Japan, and to draw inferences from facts. In reference to this, I’d attempted the similar comparison from several points of view. [by Haruhiko MASAKI, An Introduction to the Comparative Study of the Commentaries upon Amitāyur-dhyāna-sūtra and Śrīmālā-devī-simhanāda-sūtra, op. cit. Vol. 3, 1967// Shoman and Idaike, *Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XXXXI-1, No. 192, 1967// The Practice of Buddhist Austerities and Its Popularization in Shan-tao and Prince Shotoku—in connection with Śrīmālā and Vaidehī—*Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, Vol. XVI-2, No. 32, 1968// Noumenon and Phenomenon in Early Japanese Buddhism, Japanese Society for Ethics, pub. from Risō-sha 1970] It is an innovation, I think, to compare the thought of Prince Shotoku with the process of transformation in Pure Land thought from China to Japan.

I

《Shan-tao’s commentary upon *the deep mind*》

“Kuan-wu-liang-shou-ching” (Amitāyur-dhyāna-sūtra) teaches sixteen kinds of meditation as a means for birth in the Pure Land. At the chapter of the fourteenth meditation [vid. p. 344c, Vol. 12, T. S. D.], there clarified the points of the “*Three Minds*” and shown that these constitute the right cause to the Land. They are the mind of genuine and truth (or the heart of sincerity), *deep mind*, the mind that seeks birth in the Pure Land by transferring the merit of virtuous deeds. (similar Three Minds can be seen in “Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra” and “Mahāyāna-śraddhot-pāda-śāstra”.) Though many Chinese commentaries were written on this sūtra, the most characteristic of these is the one by Shan-tao (613~681), which had a great influence on later generations.

Explaining the “*deep mind*” Shan-tao says that this means “the mind that is of deep faith” and that there are two phases:

“First, we *fixedly and deeply believe* that we are actually the sin-ridden common mortals (sattvas) who have since unknown past ever been floundering in the sea of birth and death (prthag-jana), never once being blessed with any prospect of getting out of it.” [vid. “Kuan-wu-liang-shou-fo-ching-shu” chap. 4, p. 271A, Vol. 37, T. S. D.]

“Second, we *fixedly and deeply believe* that the forty-eight vows of Amitāyus or Amitābha take us in and that we can unfailingly be born in His Land, as we trust upon the power of His vows with not a speck of doubt and with no apprehension. And we *fixedly and deeply believe* that Śākyamuni Buddha delivered sermons on the Threefold Weal, The Nine Kinds of Practice, and the Two Good Deeds of the Settled and the Dispersed Mind of this sūtra (‘Settled’ means ‘to cease in thinking’ and ‘to concentrate in mind.’ ‘Dispersed’ means ‘to abandon evil and to practice good.’), and that testifying and praising that Buddha’s Two Recomposed Adornments of Land and Beings he makes us long for. And we *fixedly and deeply believe* that in the ‘Sukhāvatī-vyūha’ (O-mi-t’o-ching) all the Buddhas of the ten quarters stand witness and urge all common mortals unfailingly to gain birth. And those who deeply believe ! I pray, all Way-seekers should one-minded trust in the word of the Buddha, not minding their lives, and fixedly follow in the step of His Practice, abandon at once what the Buddha desires one to abandon, act at once what the Buddha desires one to act, and leave (this mundane world) what the Buddha desires one to leave. ……Therefore I say

‘deep mind’.” [vid. do. p. 271A 272B, Vol. 37, T. S. D.]

The first phase might be originated in the severe reflection on himself, because He says as follows :

“We lack wisdom and are actually the common mortals (pṛthag-jana) who flounder in the sea of birth and death. Our sins and hindrances are great and heavy, and we have been trnsnmigrating through the six realms (naraka-gati, preta-gati, tiryagyonī-gati, asura-gati, manuṣya-gati, deva-gati). Pains have been untold.” [vid. do. p. 278B, Vol. 37, T. S. D.]

The second is advocated based on this reflection, because the more humbly the reality of sentient beings appears, the more brilliantly the ideal would shine. He says :

“Śākyamuni Buddha of this world saḥā (this mundane world where one cannot live without patience or forbearance), answering the call of Vaidehī, at once opens widely ‘The Essential Gate’ of the Pure Land, and Amitābha or Amitāyus of the Land of Peace and Happiness manifests and reveals the meaning of ‘The Particular Vow’. Now the Essential Gate is none other but the two gates of Settled and the Dispersed Gate of Kuan-wu-liang-shou-ching. ……All the beings, steeped in vice or virtue, are absolved from sin and able to get born just by the Vow’s power of Him.” [vid. do. p. 246B, Vol. 37, T. S. D.]

He links the two into closer relations with each other, while at the first, sattvas (all sentient beings) are regarded as the mortals of the lowest capacity with the most gravely sinned, at the second, this lowest mortals of pṛthag-jana are dexterously related to the salvation, by looking upon this capacity connected with the highest and the best Dharma. From this opinion, not one man exists who is absolutely evil and does not possess the possibillity of being saved. The same meaning is repeated in his “Wang-shêng-li-tsan-chieh”. [vid. p. 438C, Vol. 47, T. S. D.] His versions of “the sin-ridden common mortals”, might come from not a self-affirmative but a self-negative viewpoint that the human beings have great hindrances, their mind is coarse, so perception or ability to attain enlightenment is difficult to have. But there would be no doubt, I think, that he was awakened to himself who existed in close touch with the Absolute, just at that moment when he, as an ordinary

mortal, became aware of his own limitedness by feeling an eternal truth. Although his recognition of “*prthag-jana*” seemed to be a co-ordinated concept of the Absolute, we can find the serious paradox there. Thus he put a unique construction on the “*deep mind*”.

The first is, for short, called “*the mind that is of deep faith in the capacity of prthag-jana*”, the second “*the mind that is of deep faith in Dharma*”. Investigating the relation of the *capacity* to *Dharma*, it appears to me that the way how the former connects with the latter is as follows :

In spite of A is B, C is D.

Although this does not mean the foresaken of the sin-ridden common mortals, but Shan-tao, in this case, does not link the two (i. e. the lowest capacity with the most gravely sinned, and the highest and best Dharma) into closer relations with each other *unconditionally*. According to His eighteenth Vow in “*Wu-liang-shou-ching*”, Amitābha will save the whole of the sentient beings out of His great benevolence, “excepting only those who committed *pañcāvīci-karmāṇi* (five great sins) and those who condemned the Right Dharma”. Shan-tao interpreted the sentence as meaning that even great sinners could be reborn into the Pure Land. As far as the surface meaning of the sentence is concerned, his commentary is diametrically opposed to the original *sūtra*’s. (It is fact that such a view has been generally considered to be epoch-making in Pure Land thought.) But we should not fail to notice his *sine qua non* of “*under the condition that they be converted*”. He explains the reason of exclusion as follows :

“The reason why those who committed the *pañcāvīci-karmāṇi* or abused the Dharma are excluded in Amitābha’s Vow (the eighteenth), is because these two transgressions are very sins, and if one performs them, he will surely be born in *avīci* and stay there for a long period of time. Therefore, Tathāgata mentioned these words as a means to stop one from committing these sins and does not mean that he does not save such evil one.” [vid. do. p. 277A, Vol. 37, T. S. D.]

He further explained why both good and evil one can be born in that Land as follows :

“Amitāyus, in compassion, took his Vow before the attainment of Buddhahood.

And it is by the power of this Vow that the Five Deadly Sins and Ten Evil Deeds are cut. Therefore, those who have committed these sins can also be born in that Land. Even the icchantika who has abused the true Dharma can be born there, *if he will turn his efforts towards the Pure Land* (conversion).” [vid. “Fa-shih-tsan” I, p. 426A, Vol. 47, T. S. D.]

His way how *the capacity* connects with *the Dharma* is quite characteristic. And the combination must be possible only through the medium of the severe self reflection or self-negation. The relation, however, between the former and the latter is not necessary, because it is elucidated by the form “in spite of A is B, C is D”.

《Genshin’s commentary upon Shan-tao’s》

Genshin (942~1017) was well versed in logic (hetu-vidyā) and wrote a book to comment in detail on one of its most difficult problems (the doctrine of Four Contradictions), and sent this work, through Sung marchants to disciples of Master Hung-tao of the Tz’u-ên Temple in China. After all his name is famous for the “Ojoyoshu”, which also he sent to China in 986. In this book we come across the word *three mind* everywhere. [e. g. Chap. 4, p. 58A, Vol. 84, T. S. D.// Chap. 9, p. 66C// p. 78A// Chap. 10, p. 81A~C etc.] At the Chap. 4-(5), he makes reference to Shan-tao’s “two phrases of mind that is of deep faith”. We find these phrases quoted not from “Kuan-wu-liang-shou-fo-ching-shu” but from “Wang-shêng-li-tsan” [vid. p. 438C, Vol. 47, T. S. D.], where nearly the same words are reiterated with the former. Genshin, by using Shan-tao’s comments on the deep mind just as it is, discusses it meeting on the common ground. It appears, therefore, to me that the way how *the capacity* of prthag-jana connects with *Dharma* is as follows:

In spite of A is B, C is D.

In “Yokawahogo” he also touches upon the relation of the capacity to Dharma and says:

“*For all* the little faith, deeply is the Pūrva-praṇidhāna……, *though* it is tiresome for prthag-jana to invoke the name of Amitāyus, certain would be the welcoming of him into that Land by Amitāyus and his attendant bodhisattvas……”

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There are many conjunctions similar to these in his writings and these are just the principle of “in spite of”.

《Genku's commentary upon Shan-tao's》

The doctrine of Genku (1133~1212) is based exclusively upon one master, Shan-tao. At the Chap. of Three Minds in his “Senjakushu”, he borrows the explanation of deep mind *entirely from Shan-tao's commentary*—the two phases of deep mind—. [“Senjakushu” p. 10A, Vol. 83, T. S. D.] The analogous could be seen in his “Ojotaiyosho”. Shan-tao said, “Even the icchantika who has abused the true Dharma can be born there, if he will turn his efforts towards that Land”. [vid. “Fa-shih-tsan” I, p. 426A, Vol. 47, T. S. D.] We should not fail to notice this sine qua non of *under the condition that they be converted*.

But these exceptions came to be completely ignored by Genku, (later considered as problematic in several scholars). He says as this:

“Salvation includes all that are embraced in the great benevolence and the real vow of Amitābha, even the ten evils and five great sins not being excluded, and those who excel in those practices other than that of invocation of Amitābha being also included. Its meaning is to believe in what are revealed in the invocation of Amitābha for once and also for ten times.” [vid. “Ojotaiyosho”, The Complete Works of Genku, pp. 61~62]

“The original vow of Amitāyus is not concerned whether one's predisposition is good or evil, or whether the religious practice is more or less. Since it does not depend upon the purity or impurity of the body or time, or place or opportunities, the occasion of death is of no consequence……” [vid. Illustrations of the Doings of St. Genku” No. 21, do. p. 241, Vol. 16]

In these case, the exceptions by Shan-tao are completely ignored. So, it appears to me that the Pure Land thought in Genku disregards the distinction between the observance of disciplines and the infringement of disciplines. But he also says as follows:

“You should believe that even those who have committed the ten evils and the five heinous sins are eligible for rebirth in the Pure Land, *and yet you should*

shrink from the slightest of all the sins.” [vid. do. No. 21]

Therefore the way how *the capacity* of prthag-jana connects with *Dharma* is, his ignoring the exceptions by Shan-tao, still as follows :

In spite of A is B, C is D.

“In spite of” here I say means the opinin: “*even sinners are reborn into the Land, and how much more so with the good*”. The Pure Land thought of India and China, broadly speaking, with due allowances for the exceptions, took a view similar to that of Genku.

《Shinran’s commentary upon Shan-tao’s》

Shinran (1173~1262) was absolutely devoted to his master, Genku. As a natural course of event, he says :

“Shan-tao alone aright read, Of masters all of his age, The True and right heritage, That is contained and stated, In a book sacred we call Kuan-wu-liang-shou-ching”: The purport of the Buddha, He showed aright to us all.……” [vid. “A Gāthā of Right Faith”, p. 600B, Vol. 83, T. S. D.]

These lines of the Gāthā evidently were written under the influence of Genku.

As I stated above Shan-tao’s exceptions “under the condition that they be converted”, came to be completely ignored by Genku. Out of such an inclination of thinking, was formulated the so-called “view of the eligibility of the evil ones for salvation (i. e. the view that the evil are rightfully eligible for salvation by Amitābha). His saying is :

“……Since the purpose of His Vow is to have the evil attain Buddhahood, the evil who trust the Other Power is *especially* the one who has the *right cause* for birth in the Land”. [vid. “Tannisho” Chap. 3, pp. 728C~729A, Vol. 83, T. S. D.]

This is not the logic of “In spite of A is B, C is D.” but of

“Because A is B, C is D.”

Man is by nature evil, and because he is evil, he is entitled to be saved by the great benevolence of Amitābha, that is to say :

“Because prthag-jana is possessed of many karmic sins,” (cf. the deep mind of one’s own capacity)

“the Absolute resolved to save him.” (cf. the deep mind of Dharma) [vid. do. p.

734C, Vol. 83, T. S. D.]

The necessity he must transform the Pure Land thought of China into the characteristic, originates in severe moral self-reflection. For example Shan-tao, in explaining the heart of sincerity which is the first of Three Minds and which the ascetic should always observe, says “You should not assume outwardly the appearance of wisdom, goodness and religious abstinence, in spite of embracing illusions inwardly”. Shan-tao’s explanation written by Chinese language must naturally be read as the above. According to Shinran, several illusions make for the evil nature of man, which is so intrinsic to man that ascetic practice even of the utmost austerity, could not possibly him of this. Such a belief led him to read Shan-tao’s words differently from the way they originally stood: “You could not assume outwardly the appearance of wisdom, goodness and religious abstinence, because you embrace illusions inwardly”. [“Kyogyoshinsho” p. 601C, Vol. 83, T. S. D.] He *could not accept*, though absolutely devoted to Shan-tao, that commentary *without the transformation* of its meaning into what he himself thought proper.

There is no doubt that his conception of “because” means *the unconditional acceptance* of the evil, since there is not any sine qua non of conversion as is seen in “Fa-shih-tsan”. The problem of conversion by Shan-tao is disregarded where he touches upon those who had committed the Five Deadly Sins and those who had abused the Right Dharma. [op. cit. p. 615C]

But the affirmation of the evil should be brought about not through the simple affirmation, but through the negation of the evil. Here is the paradox in religion. (abridged)

II

《decision of coupling word between two phrases in an embroidered curtain》

In an embroidered curtain depicting a land called Tenju, there are four hundred Chinese-written letters which explain the reason why this curtain was made. We find two essential phrases in it:

“This loka-dhātu is *not true* (filled with falsity and temporariness)”

“The Buddha only is *true*”

This antithesis could be read variously, by parenthesizing different conjunction one after another. So I tried to decide the conjunction by two methods:

First, I induced the conjunction from many analogous phrases on loka-dhātu and Buddha shown in the writings of Prince Shotoku.

Second, by examining every possibility conceivable at the compound proposition, I came to the conclusion that a coupling word should be “and” (conjunctive), but a case of “disjunctive” ($\sim$ or), “implicative” (if..., then...), “equivalent”. This conclusion by using reduction to absurdity is consistent with that. (abridged)

The conjunctive coupling word “and” could have several nuance in this phrases, such as

- (1) “Though A is B, but C is D.”
- (2) “Nevertheless A is B, C is D.”
- (3) “In spite of A is B, C is D.”
- (4) “Because A is B, C is D.”

No. 4 must be the very case for these phrases. We could mark the first step toward the absolute or the eternal *because of* being awakened to our own limitedness. *Because* prthag-jana takes recognition of his falsity and temporariness, he searches for the true. *Because* this loka-dhātu is not true, Prince Shotoku established the seventeen-article Constituion to realize the true.

(In connection with this, I had already expressed my opinion last year entitled “The Principle of negative-intermediation in the Thought of Prince Shotoku” —laying stress on the two famous phrases in an embroidered curtain depicting a land called Tenju—. Want of space does not allow me to dwell upon the point.)

III

What does this all mean? Paradoxical expression is an inevitable accompaniment to religion. It would, without this, turn out mere epistemology or mere ethical code. “Falsity and temporariness” in this case would mean neither simple affirmation nor simple negation. *Negative expression* in Bud-

dhism such as prthag-jana nature of man, transiency of loka-dhātu etc., therefore, does not mean simple denial but does form fundamental precondition for more positive affirmation of itself. So, this is exactly the logic of negation.

Giving example in evidence for this, *the external denial* of prthag-jana nature of man (in Shinran) or of transiency of loka-dhātu (in Shotoku) *does not necessarily follow that they give weight to unworldly practice*. (This might be the great divergency from an early Buddhism, because Buddhism declares itself to be a teaching transcending worldliness. According to Buddhist philosophy, the positive state of transcending worldliness is arrived at after one has transcended this world. The central figures in Buddhist orders were all priests who had freed themselves not only from their families but from any specific human nexus.) All through the commentaries upon Three Sūtra by Shotoku, the author seeks absolute significance within each instance of practical conduct *in every worldly life*, and saying “All the good deeds practiced *in this world* of life and death are eventually turned into the causes that lead prthag-jana to the rank of enlightenment.” [“Commentary upon Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra” p. 13R, Showa-Ehon] A similar idea underlies the later thought of Japanese Buddhism. Both men of renounced the world and laymen should achieve the self-same ideal i. e. the consistency of renouncement and laity (by Saicho), absolute reason should be realized through actuality i. e. reality is revealed in accordance with worldly things (by Kukai). But it was Shinran who pushed this point to its extreme. He completely *denied the life of an ascetic* and advocated becoming a Buddhist *as a layman*, and put into practice himself. The expression of “because” in explaining two phases of deep mind of Shan-tao is, I think, founded on this worldliness. (abridged)

The absolute truth would emerge itself only through the denial of worldliness. And by the very means of this denial, however, becomes possible comprehending the absolute truth within secular life toward the world not filled with falsity and temporariness. This principle, therefore, can be said to be formed through the negative-intermediation of prthag-jana or loka-dhātu. (abridged)