Who best can *re-turn* the Dharma-cakra ?

— a Controversy between Wōnch'uk (632-696) and
K'uei-chi (632-682) —¹⁾

Shōtarō Iida

One day while engaging in the abstruse discourse with the Buddha about the shifts and turns of the Wheel of the Buddha-dharma, the Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata said about the three turning points :²⁾

“Bhagavan, at first in the Rṣipatana of the Deer Park near Vāraṇasī, by teaching the Four Noble Truths to the adherents of the Śrāvakayāna, you, sir, set in motion the Wheel of the wonderful dharma. Although this was marvellous and rare, and neither gods nor men had previously turned this kind of *dharma-cakra*, it was not the final word. This led to further debates.

Then the Bhagavan's second turning point was aimed at the adherents of the Mahāyāna because it said that since all the *dharma*s have no intrinsic nature, they are not really born, do not really cease and are perpetually quiescent and by nature they are *nirvāṇa* itself.

Although this was marvellous and rare, and neither gods nor men had previously turned this kind of *dharma-cakra*, it was not final word. This as well, led to further debates.

Then the Bhagavan's third turning point was aimed at the adherents of all paths as it said that since all the *dharma*s have no intrinsic nature, they are not really born, do not really cease and are perpetually quiescent and by nature they are *nirvāṇa* itself. Since the Bhagavan turned the Wheel of *saddharma* with much clarity, this was very marvellous and unsurpassed, and did not become the ground for further debates.”

The clarity of the third turning point was, according to the Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata, the teaching of the doctrine of *trisvabhāva* or ‘the triple aspects of reality.’

From the modern twentieth century Hermeneutic point of view, the above passage of the fifth century (?) *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* can be paraphrased as

follows :

In order to understand the diverse and apparently complex facets of the contents of Buddhist sūtras, it is essential to have the following perspective :

At first, the Pāli texts or the Archaic Buddhist scriptures emphasized somewhat the basic facts of life although the transcendental aspects of life were not lacking. That is: Buddha taught the basic analysis of the *dharma*s or psychophysical entities on which the Abhidharma has been developed. Thus, granted that the teachings were well categorized, which unfortunately led to a tendency to compartmentalization and a rigidity of analysis, with little interaction between categories.

As an antidote, the group of the *prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* were generated. The *sūtras* expressed emphatically the idea that all the *dharma*s are *śūnya*, i. e., devoid of permanent intrinsic nature, because they originate dependently. Thus, *śūnyatā* (emptiness or openness) of a thing means that it is not independent.

To maintain a fine turning of the balance of the verification and non-substantiation of the Wheel of Dharma, however, was not an easy task for some Buddhists, which resulted in the undeniable tendency of nihilism or super-nihilism (*atyanta-nāstika*).

In order to strike the middle path, the final and unambiguous turning point, the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* was taught, which, in turn, stopped the necessity of further turning of the *dharma-cakra*.

The foregoing view perhaps prompted the following statement of K'uei-chi :³⁾

"After the enlightenment, the Compassionate Buddha turned the Dharma-cakra of the Four Noble Truths at the Deer Park. He taught the *Āgamas* in order to eliminate the attachments to belief in internal self (*ātma-dṛṣṭi*), which would enable those disciples of small caliber to ascend gradually to the degree of Arhat.

Some of them, however, are attached to the view of native realism in the external objects, although purged of the belief in internal self after hearing the Four Noble Truths. To those disciples, the Buddha taught the doctrine of *śūnyatā* of all psychophysical entities (*dharma*s) at the Vulture Peak, which resulted in the Mahāyāna sūtras like the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*. Thus, those disciples of the mediocre caliber were able to comprehend the Lesser Way and could aspire to the Mahāyāna.

Following Bhagavan's deep intent, upholding the view of non-being by suppressing the view of being, those disciples took *śūnyata* as the unsurpassed truth while somewhat neglecting the two aspects of reality (*satyadvaya*). Thus, the above state of affairs created the opposing two camps, who busied themselves over the philosophical positions of *being* vs. *non-being* without any realization of the middle way. In order to eliminate the controversy over *emptiness* and *reality* of *dharma*s, Tathāgata propagated the third and final turning of Dharma-cakra wherein he taught the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* and others by declaring that "all the *dharma*s are representation only (*viññapti-mātra*)."

I submit that a contemporary of K'uei-chi named Wōnch'uk,⁴⁾ the Abbot of Hsi-min Monastery, developed an analytic approach to the re-turning of the Dharma-cakra superior to that of K'uei-chi. I submit that Wōnch'uk revealed an important point regarding the *tri-svabhāva* doctrine which differentiates the second and third turning of the Dharma-cakra.

Wōnch'uk said, "—the third Dharma-cakra thoroughly reveals three aspects of the nonsubstantiality. Furthermore, between the Second and the Third turning of Wheel, there is no difference in the depth of teaching as far as the doctrine of *nirlakṣaṇa* (non-characteristic) is concerned. Therefore, both belong to the teaching of the definitive meaning (*nītārtha*). In particular, the Third turning is said to be the definitive teaching due to the doctrine of the Three aspects of reality (*tri-svabhāva*) and its related teaching. Strictly speaking, then, the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* are also the sūtras of the definitive meaning. However, commonly speaking, the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* are said to be the sūtras of *neya* or provisional meaning. The basis of the above statement is to be found in the following passage of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* quoted by Asvabhāva (fl. 510?) in his Commentary on the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (Fascicle I.)

"The Lord: What do you think, Maitreya, among the Imagined aspect (*parikalpita*), that unreal substance is a *rūpa* or non *rūpa*?

Maitreya: It is non *rūpa*, O Lord.

The Lord: Among the other-dependent mode (*paratantra*), that conventional and verbal substance, which is based on the name and notion, is a *rūpa* or non *rūpa*?

Maitreya: It is non *rūpa*, O Lord.

The Lord: Among the Absolutely accomplished aspect (*pariṇiṣpanna*), that empty

and non-substantial substance is a *rūpa* or non *rūpa*?

Maitreya: It is non *rūpa*, O Lord.

The Lord: By this method, Maitreya, you should know that what is imagined nature is utterly devoid of reality and the Dependent nature has a nominal, conventional and verbal reality. The Absolutely accomplished nature has the true reality on account of its empty and non-substantial nature.

It is with this hidden intent that I have taught that to speak of '*rūpa*', etc. is to make a count of what is not-two.⁶⁾ Another passage of a *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* is quoted in *Asvabhāva's Commentary on the Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (Fascicle IV), which reads:

"All the *dharma*s, from the five aggregates to the special qualities of the Buddha (*Buddha-dharma*s) have the three aspects of reality."

Having presented K'uei-chi's and Wōnch'uk's analyses on the Second and the Third Dharma-cakra, I am struck with the thorough and fair treatment of the subject by Wōnch'uk as compared to that of K'uei-chi. Granted the fact that the occurrence of the *trisvabhāva* (three aspects of reality) doctrine in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* is rare and mysterious, it clearly occurred in the above mentioned Asvabhāva's work translated by K'uei-chi's master Hsuan-tsang. The translation belongs to the early work of Hsuan-tsang, who translated it between March 1st, 647 A.D. and June 17th, 649.

It was more than twenty years ago that I stumbled on the above important question which led me to make a fresh contribution to the scholarly world by identifying and publishing the Sanskrit passage with the late Dr. E. Conze.⁷⁾

Our English translation of the second quotation in the Asvabhāva's Commentary runs as follows:⁸⁾

The Lord: Imagined (*parikalpita*) form, etc. is the false imagination which has the own-beingness of form, etc. for its object, and which is based on the name, notion, social agreement, concept, and conventional expression 'form', etc. with regard to the entity which is the sign of something conditioned.

Discerned (*vikalpita*) form, etc. is the definition of that entity which is the sign of something conditioned as in its dharmic nature mere discernment, as a verbal expression which is conditioned by discernment and to which refers this name, notion,

social agreement, concept, and conventional expression, i. e., 'this is form', etc.

The Dharmic nature of form (*dharmatā-rūpam*), etc., is that dharmic nature of dharmas which is established whether Tathāgatas are produced or not, the established order of dharmas, the realm of Dharma, the absence of own-being which is characteristic eternally and through all eternity, constantly and through all time, of that discerned form because of that imagined form, the absence of self in dharmas, suchness, the Reality limit.

Wöñch'uk noticed this important passage and its significance, and carefully utilized it in his re-turning of the Dharma-cakra. This took place more than thirteen hundred years ago.

Stanley Weinstein commented that K'uei-chi or "Izu-en (632-682) stands out as one of the most important Buddhist scholars of the early T'ang Dynasty."⁹⁾ This is proper praise for K'uei-chi. However I have no hesitation in concluding that Wöñch'uk's analysis of the re-turning of the Dharma-cakra is more thorough than K'uei-chi's.

As I have shown in the foregoing, Wöñch'uk exercised keen and objective analysis on the basis of his astonishing encyclopaedic bibliographical knowledge. Thus, he also maintained that the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* is the final and last turning of *Dharma-cakra*. Wöñch'uk's seemingly minute and detailed expositions of terminology, however, never lost sight of the whole picture. On the contrary, these mosaics of expositions clearly sketched out the complexity and dynamics of the point at issue.

Moreover, as I have already mentioned elsewhere,¹⁰⁾ Wöñch'uk's view on the Dharma-cakras *turned* on the imagination and scholarship of Tsong-kha-pa the founder of Dge-Lugs-pa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419), studied Chos sgrub's Tibetan translation of Wöñch'uk's Commentary on the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, which, in turn, resulted in Tsong-kha-pa's magnum opus, the *Drang-ba dang nges-pa'i dan rnam par 'byed pa'i bstan-bcos, legs-bshad-snying po* (A treatise on the discrimination between the provisional meaning (*neyārtha*) and the final meaning (*ntārtha*) entitled "the Essence of Well-said commentaries").¹¹⁾

Although Tson-kha-pa's *re-turning* of the Dharma-cakra left a somewhat

different trace from Wöñch'uk's work,¹²⁾ it certainly requires another paper, which in turn, requires another conference.

- 1) As for the subtitle, the direct *controversy* never took place as far as the historical documents are concerned. Nevertheless, there are ample evidences which suggest an indirect controversy.
2. The sole Western Language translation of the *Samdhiniromocana-sūtra* is Étienne Lamotte. Louvain: Bureaux de Recueil. Bibliothèque de l'Université. 1935.

An English translation from the Tibetan by Brian Cuttillo and Geshe Jampel Thardo will be published in an English translation Series of Asaṅga's works. (Announced in *Buddhist Text Information* The Centre for Advanced Studies in World Religions. # 2, March, 1975.)

This passage, therefore, is my translation of the Chinese Text translated by Hsuan tsang, ca. 647 A. D. (Taishō, Vol. XIV. No. 676).

- 3) Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun-shu-chi (成唯識論述記), Taishō Vol. XXXI, p. 229d, ll. 16-25.
- 4) Having published the monographs on Bhāvaviveka (*Reason and Emptiness*) and Hei-cho (*Hei-cho's Diary etc.*)

I have been working on the Life and Works of Wöñch'uk. cf. Shotaro Iida, "A MuKung-hwa in Ch'ang-an: A study of the Life and Works of Wöñch'uk (613-696), with special interest in the Korean contributions to the Development of Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism", International Symposium Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of Korean Liberation, pp. 225-251: "Another Look at the Mādhyamika vs. Yogācāra Controversy concerning Existence and Non-existence" edited by L. Lancaster, *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems*: Berkeley, 1977, pp. 341-360; "The Three Stupas of Ch'ang An", *Papers of the 1st International Conference on Korean Studies*, The Academy of Korean Studies, Seoul, Republic of Korea, Ma 7 15, 1980, pp. 484-497.

- 5) The *Zokuzōkyō/Shu ts'ang ching*, Hong Kong Reprint Vol. 34. p. 414 a-b, lines, 18, 1-12; Tibtan Tripitaka Tokyo Reprint, Vol. 106, 86a8-86b8: As for "On chos-grub's Translation of the *Chieh-shen-mi-ching-shu*" (解深密經論) see Shōju Inaba's article in *Buddhist Thought and Asian Civilization* (Essays in Honor of Herbert v. Guenther on His Sixtieth Birthday), ed. Leslie S. Kawamura and Keith Scott, Dharma Publishing, 1977, pp. 105-113. Inaba also restored the lost portion of this text from the Tibetan translation in 1972 and 1979. Gadjin Nagao says, "an achievement that reveals the high level of skill in his use of classical Tibetan" (*Acta Asiatica*, No. 29, 1975, p. 122). See also Inaba, "Chōsen-shusshin-sō Enjiki hosshi ni tsuite" (On a Monk Scholar Wöñch'uk from Korea), *Chōsen Gakuho*, No. 2. We also should not forget Hatani Ryōtai's pioneering work, "Yuishikishū no Iha (A different Branch of the Vijnānavādins), *Shūkyō Kenkyū*, Vol. I, No. 1,

1916, pp. 65-84; No. 3, pp. 505-547; No. 4, pp. 705-744.

- 6) The phrase 'to make a count of what is not two' indicates the doctrine of *advaya* (nondual) which avoids the two extremes.
- 7) E. Conze and Iida Shotaro, "Maitreya's Questions in the Prajñāpāramitā," *Melanges d'Indianisme à la mémoire de Louis Renou*, (Paris, 1968). pp. 229-242.
- 8) E. Conze, *The Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom*, University of California Press, 1975, p. 648.
- 9) Stanley Weinstein, "A Biographical Study of Tz'u-en," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. XV. 1959/60, pp. 119-149. With all due respect to K'uei-chi, however, "the thing which I don't understand is, all 'courtesies' aside, why K'uei-chi strongly protested Hsüan-tsang's intention of translation of all the commentaries of the *Trimsikā*, the *Thirty Verses*, which is the basic text of the Yogācāra-vijnapti-mātratā school. Instead, K'uei-chi suggested a critical and selective translation gleaned from the commentaries by different Indian monk-scholars in order to avoid misinterpretations and confusions. There is nothing wrong with that either, although the opportunity to read 'un-abridged' commentaries was lost forever. However, the thing inherently wrong was to do the above project by himself with his master Hsuan-tsang. It seems to me that the Master finally gave in." (Three Stūpas of Chang-an), pp. 486-7.

Hakamaya Noriaki independently shares my above feeling in his recent work *Genjō* (Hsüan-tsang), Daizō Shuppan, 1981, pp. 311-2. Especially, Hakamaya mentions Hsüan-tsang's nightmare, when he pondered about the abridged translation of the large *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*. (*ibid.* p. 301).

- 10) Iida, *Reason and Emptiness; A Study in Logic and Mysticism*, Hokuseidō Press, Tokyo, 1980, pp. 262-269.
- 11) cf. Iida's "Three Stūpas of Ch'ang An," pp. 491-497. In North America I am aware the fact that two young scholars have been working on this very difficult text, namely, Robert A. F. Thurman (Amherst College) and Jeffery Hopkins (University of Virginia). While Thurman published a volume based on his dissertation at Harvard University in 1972, Hopkins has been working on the text with the Dalai Lama. In Japan, Katano, Michio (Ōtani University recently published a number of articles on the subject.
- 12) cf. Conze and Iida, "Maitreya's Questions," (pp. 232-3), "To a Mādhyamika most of the Prajñāpāramitā would be *nītārtha*, and the "Maitreya-Chapter" *neyārtha*. In contrast to these scholars Tsong-Kha-pa, who usually follows Candra-kīrti, in this case preferred more eclectic attitude, and decided after lengthy deliberations that the teaching of the three *Lakṣaṇas* is as authoritatively *nītārtha* at the remainder of the Prajñāpāramitā. He disagreed with those later Yogācārin, like Ratnākaraśānti (one of Atīsa's teachers) who had assumed the doctrine of the "Maitreya chapter" to be identical with that of the Saṃdhinirmocana."

As for a detailed discussion on the Maitreya Chapter, see, Hakamaya Noriaki, "A consideration on the *Byams sus kyi Lehu*, from the historical point of view," *IBS*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, Dec. 1975, pp. (499-489): "Mirokushōmon-shō Wayaku" (Japanese Translation of the Maitreya Chapter), *Komazawa Daigaku Bukkyogakubu Ronshū* (Selected Articles from the Komazawa University Buddhist Studies), No. 6, Oct. 1975. pp. (210-190).

In Gadjin Nagao, "On the so-called Maitreya Chapter," (Japanese) *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (Japanese Translation), Kodansha, Tokyo, 1982, pp. 33-41.

It is also interesting to note that Saichō (767-822), the founder of Japanese Tendai School, criticized the Three Dharma-cakras by saying, "this was nothing more than a personal theory of a bodhisattva names Shōgishō [Paramārtha-sumugata]." Saichō also left a remark on Asvabhāva's quotation of the Prajñā-pāramitā by saying, "the Prajñāpāramitā teaching of the Second Period are referred to as the doctrine of the middle path, while in fact it was K'uei-chi (532-682) who arbitrarily labeled the teachings as those representing a doctrine of insubstantiality; furthermore, these three periods reflect only the chronological order of the Buddha's teachings and do not touch upon the problem of the relative depth or shallowness of significance; and so on." Tamura Kōyū, "The Doctrinal Dispute between the Tendai and Hossō Sects," *Acta Asiatica*, The Tōhō Gakkai, Tōkyō No. 47, 1985, p. 51.

(Assoc. Prof., British Columbia University, Ph. D.)

The SUNY Series in Buddhist Studies

Kenneth K. Inada, editor

D. J. Kalupahana, *Nagarjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*

S. Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time
in Heidegger and Dogen*

R. E. Morrell, *Sand and Pebbles (Shasekishū): The Tales of Mujū
Ichien, A Voice for Pluralism in Kamakura
Buddhism*

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

Post Office Box 6525, Ithaca, NY 14850