On the Simplification in the Theories of Buddhism

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What I would say about "the simplification in the theories of Buddhism" would never be understood in itself. Here I mean the selection of some sutras from various traditional ones, preferably making them clear as possible. The result and meaning which are derived from such selections—these are the main concern of my thesis. And furthermore I should like to clarify what kind of meaning these questions have in the development of the philosophy of Buddhism.

2

As already known, there are lots of sutra in Mahayana Buddhism. And to those sutras there have been so many theses and commentaries. And what kind of sutra is to be especially emphasized? This question has been the canonical measure by which various sects are distinguished each other. Here I would like to pick up few examples in Japanese Buddhism.

In the first place, I should like to point out in HONEN who had selected three sutras among many ones. And his selection could bear very rich fruits. Through his process of selection we can see three grades. The first is the most characteristic. He selected only three sutras, i.e. "Three Pure Land Sutras". It would mean from another point of view, the negation of all other sutras. Then the second would follow after it. He picked up only one sutra from those three mentioned above. It is so-called "KWAN-MURYO-JU SUTRA". From such a process of selections he pursued the true and genuine essence of the sutra. After his earnest pursuit, he attained the strictly condensed essence according to his own original intention. Thus
the way of simplification made it much more thick and dense. And the result from these densities was very simple but however very inclusive and significant one. That is "Three Mental Attitudes" (SAN-JIN). Thus repeating such selections the idea of Buddhism is being simplified. And finally those three should be reduced into one. This is final selection and the terminal point for the simplification. This one is, in HONEN, a vocal appellation of Amitabha's name in six characters. Namely: "NA-MU-A-MI-DA-BUTSU". The whole ideas and significances of the real essence of Buddha are regarded as being condensed within it. ……so declared HONEN.

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Then secondly I should like to point out another type of simplification. This would be, I think, Zen. Zen as generally known, ignores all the orthodox sutras. This is called "esoteric teaching". In another words expressed it would be said to be an extra teaching outside canonical sutras. According to a such trend, it should be regarded as being far beyond the simplification. Because after pushing out all the traditional sutras, there would remain nothing. Zen has set up himself upon such "nothing". The question which I intend to clarify, is by no means about such "nothing" itself. But about something following after it. For instance, about the famous phrase "direct intuition toward human psychology". It is only one example, we can see so many similar cases in the phrases and propositions of Zen.

Now let us explain theoretical trend of simplification in that specific field of Zen. In the same sense the famous phrase "without expressing words" should be understood. And the proposition "the broad way has no gate" is to be seen as a kind of ultimate simplification. In order to simplify all the contents, it has to introduce the concept of "nothing". And this "nothing" annihilates all complicated conditionings. Looking from another point of view, such simplification would tend to the practical purpose in the religious life. For such purpose Zen and Pure Land Buddhism both would go on the same way together. Here we see a common element in the simplification of the religious ideas.

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As above mentioned, I have already pointed out the simplification of religious theories both in Pure Land Buddhism and Zen Buddhism. In the former we see the method of selection playing the important role. On the contrary in the latter we see the selection aiming at the direction to "nothing". Even though there are such differences between both, they are accordingly keeping distance from canonical sutras. And if we would think much more in detail we should face to the question that for what purpose such selection was to be taken place. HONEN intended to apply the highest and best teaching for the low-cultured and worst people. And thus the majority of people would be able to be saved by Buddhism. Otherwise only good-natured and high-cultured people could be saved and attain Pure Land. And such people are quite few in number and this is regarded to be just contrary to the significance of the a priori avowal of Amitabha. The aim and purpose of his selection was to save many people in number as possible. This had been the original and a priori intention of HONEN. Of course, this question should be treated not only by such logical way of thinking, but also from historical point of view. Especially the historical trends and circumstances of the mediaeval times should be clarified in connection with this question.

According to such process of simplification in Pure Land Buddhism, the distance between earthly world and Pure Land would be extremely condensed and shortened by means of appellation of the name of Amitabha. In Zen also various kinds of distances should be condensed in "present perfection" by means of esoteric teaching and face-to-face method.

Now the conditioning under which the simplification should be carried out, would be also, I think, a kind of simplification. This simplification can be seen in both Zen and Pure Land Buddhism. In Zen, as already mentioned, the phrase "direct intuition toward human psychology" contains and con-
denses all kinds of logical process. This phrase seems to be concerned not only with human psychology but also with all things in the universe. The phrase: “the perfect fulfilment in the present state” should be a product of simplification which has to tide over the limit of time and space and the difference between man and nature. Through such process of simplification, Zen has been regarded as approaching the path toward “nothing”.

On the other hand, in Pure Land Buddhism, such a simplification was crystalized by SHINRAN. These crystals of the ideas of Pure Land Buddhism are usually regarded as pure faith which should be the absolute dependance upon Amitabha, and should ignore both knowledge and any kind of practice. With the condition that every content should be simplified by means of pushing into one term “faith”, the simplification mentioned above should be possible. It seems to be similar with “sola fides” in the christology of Martin Luther. Thus by putting aside the question from what origin HONEN did it, we would be able to see the common root between Pure Land Buddhism and Zen Buddhism.

As already stated, I have picked up two different cases about clarification. But they came from each different intentions and characters, yet at least more two questions would remain. The questions are as following. The first is the reason why such selection should be taken place. And the second is what meaning does the selection have. These are main concern of my thesis. Nevertheless from each different angle being seen, they have accordingly self-contradictions. And at the same time they make themselves deeper and deeper and purifying more and more. I should like to be careful of this point.

In referring to the first question, many interpretations and commentaries have been issued. But they are altogether within the boundary of their own sects. Each theology has emphasized their own dogmas along their authentic and apologetic lines. The validity of their theological clarification and commentary has been usually mixed with their religious suppositions which would be inevitable elements of all religions. Therefore sometimes they have been so much apologetic that they would have been considered much dog.
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matically and subjectively. But such a critical interpretation would be regarded as transcendental, being far from immanent viewpoint of its own sect.

Then it seems that we should be compelled to approach another question. This is rather a methodological problem. Even the object of our research being same, there can be the freedom for the selection of viewpoint and methodology. Now I should like to take up rather transcendental method much more than before. I must beg reader's pardon to put two different kinds of Buddhism upon the same dimension. That is already committed in this thesis. But I know well that it would be contradictory and eccentric to the authentic and traditional interpretation, and it would be ignored as heterodox and ridiculous.

As already stated, at least there are two types of simplification. Now I would like to intend to clarify just a little more the original character in both Buddhism. In Pure Land Buddhism the direct connection with Amitabha is always emphasized. And this connection is generally regarded as a key string for the research of its essential character. For that purpose the theoretical investigations should be put aside. If any one would believe in Amitabha without any kind of theories and practices, and pray with calling of six characters of the name of Amitabha, then regardless to the moral grade and status, he should be able to be thrown into the warm pocket of merciful Amitabha and should be able to live in Pure Land forever.

On the contrary, Mahayana Buddhism in general have lots of dogma and theology. And these have very important significance. Some are purely philosophical. On that account Mahayana Buddhism sometimes is regarded as atheism by western world. The existence of Buddha, in such a case, seems to be non-personal character. We can see such a vivid trend especially in Zen. Nevertheless in comparison with such a intellectual character, in Pure Land Buddhism, the term "Amitabha" means only its personal existence which is utterly contrary to the intellectual aspect. Amitabha has originally
48 avowals a priori. Above all, the 18th avowal is the most important one which is selected and therefore simplified by Pure Land Buddhism. At least psychologically this 18th avowal a priori is accompanied by the status of the highest rapture. "With the highest fidelity and ecstasy" so explained in it. Through such simplification, HONEN and SHINRAN set up and fixed one direct vertical line between Amitabha and human existence. And the condition under which this line would be able to have real validity, should be perfect dependance upon Amitabha through pure and genuine faith alone. By this condition alone, one can attain at Pure Land and live in it. We would see that the simplification would be possible only through this direct vertical line which must be, in any case, always existential and personal. If it would be possible to say so, the simplification in Pure Land Buddhism would be partial esoteric teaching, because it ignores all the canonical sutras except 3 Pure Land sutras.

Now let us turn our glance to Zen Buddhism. Then we will see quite opposite aspect in it. The simplification in Zen is comparatively rather intellectual. The ultimate object for which Zen should pursue, is an existence purely intellectual. Zen, if extremely stated, should exclude all volitional aspect from Buddha and approach chilly intellectual one. For that purpose, various kinds of condition and restriction are requested both actually and contemplatively. But the pursuit for such an object, sometimes, finds itself in the realm of "nothing" in which there would be no Buddha. The "esoteric teaching" would be regarded as a product from such process. Not only Buddha being simplified, but also all the methodologies should be simplified. And in this methodology there can be no "time". The famous Zen phrases: "the consciousness in past, present and future is quite incomprehensible" and "nothing passes away and comes in".....these should not be understood by common logic. They not only annihilate the expressions by words, but also ignores all dialectical inferences.

Now in order to attain to the ultimate object of Zen, purely intellectual
process is always requested with various practical restrictions. Consequently in Zen there is no relation between Amitabha and human existence as in Pure Land Buddhism. In exchange for it, Zen has very intimate connection with the things in the nature. For instance: “floating cloud and flowing stream”......this phrase has been very famous in Zen Buddhism. Therefore the human existence and logic have their original domicile in the midst of nature. Consequently there has been no prop in human logic and human existence. And they have been melted into the nothingness of the nature. Another famous phrase of Zen “being dominant according to the place in which one lives”......is to be considered on the background of this nihilistic “nature”. Therefore the function of such simplification which should achieve “perfect fulfilment in present state” of human existence, consists in non-temporal intuition which is to be extremely condensed. The term “nothing” above mentioned, should not be considered from the conventional point of view. DOGEN in his “SHÔ-BÔ-GEN-ZÔ” (chapter; “on the nature of Buddha”) said that the existence is not existence in contrast to “nothing”.

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Now I have explained the nature of the simplification of the theories in Buddhism mainly concerning Pure Land Buddhism and Zen. And particularly about the meaning and process of simplification. The Pure Land Buddhism intends to save the majority of people as much as possible, and to make them live in Pure Land. On the contrary Zen intends to get the cognition of the “truth” and its “perfect fulfilment in present state”. As yet we have seen the aspect of the simplification only from the front side. But now let us turn our glance to the back side. Then we would probably see the quite opposite aspect in both Buddhism. The appellation of Amitabha in six characters would be a product of simplification already mentioned. It is very simple. Because all the theories are condensed only in six characters. Yet at the same time it is very hard to understand it perfectly, because of its simplicity. For instance, both in HONEN and SHINRAN, the way toward simplification is by no means simple. And moreover how to demon-
strate and verify it, is still more difficult and complicated. For that purpose they had written books respectively in order to explain it. And those books have been considered extremely hard to understand by common people.

And also the phrase "without expressing words" is the most famous and typical regulation in Zen Buddhism. However there are many books containing the speeches and deeds of high rank Zen priests. The way of face to face method is never simple and easy. If we take it in our consideration, we would understand how difficult such a simplification is. And the question about the simplification would have a quite new question. At any rate those simplifications had been carried out against historical tradition and had been fulfilled by the special original character of religious personality. Though the clarification of this question is not sufficient, I have tried to do it. And I would like to explain the reality of religious personality along the process of such simplification. In detail I should like to clarify in another occasion.