PAPERS COMMUNICATED

**102. On the Statements on Prince Shōtoku's
Buddhist Learning in the Hōwō Teisetsu.**

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(Comm. Nov. 12, 1943.)

The *Hōwō Teisetsu* 上宮聖德法王帝説¹⁾ is known as the oldest collection of the materials connected with the life of Prince Shōtoku. Its value as an historical source can hardly be overestimated, but it goes without saying that the materials contained in it are to be handled with critical discriminations. This is particularly so concerning Buddhist doctrinal matters, because these are subject to the personal views and idiosyncrasies of the compiler and the currents of his time, much more than the data of dates, pedigrees and the like. Taking this consideration as the departure of the discussion the present writer finds the need of re-examining the current interpretations of the Teisetsu statements on Buddhist learning.

Let us first essay a plain translation of the passage in question, apart from the difference of interpretations. It says:—

上宮王師高麗慧慈法師，
王命能悟涅槃常住，五種佛性之理，
明開法花三車，權實二智之趣，
通達維摩不思議解脫之宗，
且知經部薩婆多兩家之辨。

The Prince of the Upper Palace (Shōtoku) had as his master the Koma (Korean) monk Eji. The Prince has well comprehended (the tenet of) the perpetuity of Nehan (Nirvāṇa) and the truth of the five kinds of the Buddha-nature; he has clearly opened (the ways for) the three carts²⁾ (as taught) in the Lotus of Truth, and the meaning of the two aspects of wisdom, the expedient and the fundamental³⁾; he has penetrated into the principle of the deliverance beyond comprehension (as stated) in the Yuima; he has also been acquainted with the discrimination between the two schools, the Sautrāntika and the Sarvāstivāda⁴⁾.

This is followed by the Prince's knowledge of Chinese wisdom and sciences and ends in mentioning his commentaries on the Buddhist texts.

The first and principal question is concerned with the first clause stating the doctrines of Nehan and Buddha-nature. The prevailing interpretation since 披齋 Ekisai (1775-1835), the first commentator on the Teisetsu, amounts to that the first part refers to the doctrine

1) The whole is reproduced in a German translation by Hermann Bohner in his "*Shōtoku Taishi*" (Tokyo, 1940), pp. 8-28. The translation and notes, as well as the whole book, are a remarkable contribution to the study of the Prince, to be used with utmost caution.

2) See S.B.E. **21**, p. 75; the parable of the three carts for inducing the playing children out of a burning house.

3) See Proc. **18**, pp. 160-162.

4) Comp. Bohner, p. 16, and notes, pp. 32-33.

of the eternal nature of Nehan as taught in the 涅槃經 *Nehan-gyō* (Nanjio, nos. 113 and 114) and that the kinds of Buddha-nature mean the five distinct endowments of the beings, including those who are entirely incapable of Buddhahood, as taught in the 楞伽經 *Ryōga-kyō* (*Lankāvatāra*, Nanjio, nos. 175-177) and maintained by the Hossō school, to which we shall return below.

The first half of this interpretation is involved in the question whether Prince Shōtoku was acquainted with the Nehan-gyō text or the Nehan-shū school based on it. Some scholars even go so far as to say, on the basis of this passage, that the Nehan school existed or flourished in Japan at the time of the Prince. This is a *petitio principii* and its validity depends solely upon the assumption that the Nehan doctrine mentioned in the Teisetsu means the same as stated in the Nehan-gyō, which is quite a question to be settled in conjunction with other data. In fact, the eternal nature of Nehan is the central idea of that book, but is, at the same time, nearly universal in other Mahāyāna books and schools, as is the case with the Shōman-gyō to be mentioned below.

The second point, the qualifications concerning the Buddha-nature, can be examined in a much clearer light. If the interpretation amounting to the discriminative distribution of the Buddha-nature, implying the exclusion of a certain class from Buddhahood, be accepted, it is simply contrary to the Prince's conviction as we see it in his own writings, even if the Lankā in two of its older translations were known to him. The statement of the Teisetsu in this regard is obviously inapplicable to the Prince's position. Thus the point is to be pursued to an alternative, either the statement of the Teisetsu is to be branded as a mistake, or it is to be interpreted otherwise.

Before taking up the attempt at a new interpretation, we have to give a glance at Kume's assumption that both the tenet of Nehan and the five kinds of Buddha-nature are to be referred to the Kusharon (Abhidharma-kosha)⁵⁾. This can easily be dismissed as irrelevant, hardly to need further comment.

A recent attempt at re-interpretation is the one proposed by Iyenaga⁶⁾, who would see in the first clause under discussion a résumé of the Shōman-gyō. He cites for this interpretation the passages on Nehan in the text and comments and also the Prince's remarks on the 如來藏 Tathāgata-store analyzing its nature into five features. All this is quite plausible, if the passage in question should be a faithful representation of the Prince's position, which is, however, quite a question hitherto overlooked and to be further discussed. The present writer could, if he should go along the line of Iyenaga's interpretation, propose another alternative for the "five kinds" in the Prince's remarks on the five yānas 五乘, "ways to Buddhahood"⁷⁾, which are found in

5) Bohner, p. 32, note 39.

6) 家永三郎, 上代佛教思想史研究 (Iyenaga, *Studies in Buddhist Thought in Ancient Japan*), pp. 39, 129.

7) See Proc. (Jap. ed.), 2, pp. 371-373, in connection with the birth by mutation; Proc. 19, p. 323.

connection with several passages in the Shōman and once in the Yuima.

Either of these may have been meant by the compiler of the Teisetsu, and then either is true to the Prince's idea. A weight is added to Iyenaga's interpretation, when we see that the Teisetsu statements mention the titles Hokke and Yuima, only Shōman being not mentioned, and this gap can be filled up by interpreting the first clause as referring to the Shōman. But a counter-weight is to be taken into account, that Iyenaga bases or supports, if not explicitly, this important reference to the Shōman on his theory of a particular importance of this book. It amounts to say that, among the three texts taken up by the Prince as the subjects of his commentaries, the Shōman plays the rôle of the pivot while two others that of the auxiliaries. This view sustained by him and some others, especially those of the Shinshū affiliation, is due to their sectarian bias, and the present writer has repudiated that position, not in controverting them but in definitely showing that the Hokke plays the central part among the three books⁸⁾. The identification of the "five" in the Teisetsu with the "five" in the Shōman meets another objection from the consideration that either the five of the Tathāgata-store or the five yānas can hardly be called the kinds of Buddha-nature, a point to be passed over because the points are too intricate to be treated here.

Looking through these several interpretations, we see that all of them overlook the question what was the scope of those statements in the Teisetsu, whether its compiler intended to represent faithfully the Prince's ideas of Buddhist doctrine, or simply to tell, according to the compiler's own conception, how erudite was the Prince, being well versed in the dogmatics of the several schools of Buddhist thought. The former presupposes an objective attitude of the compiler's mind and his careful study of the Prince's writings, whereas the latter means that the compiler kept in view the different schools prevailing at his own time and carried back to the Prince the erudition in those dogmatics. Any one who reads the whole passage with candid mind could easily see that the attitude and intention of the compiler amounted to the latter of these trends. The following statements on the Prince's acquaintance with Chinese philosophy and sciences, and also the story of a miraculous figure appearing before the Prince in vision and giving him instructions on the meanings of the texts, all point to the same direction. This can also be made more evident by a comparison of the Teisetsu passage with another exultation of the Prince ascribed to his former master Eji. It is recorded in the *Nihon-gi*⁹⁾ as Eji's words uttered on his having learned the death of the Prince.

It says :—

於日本國有聖人，曰上宮豐聰耳皇子，

8) Cf. Proc. 18, pp. 159-160; the Japanese edition of the Proc. 1, pp. 5-6, 226-31, 247-48; 2, pp. 378-80.

9) Comp. Aston, *Nihongi* (London, 1896), vol. 2, pp. 148-49. Here Aston's rendering "Three Precious Things" mean 三寶 which he translates by "Three Treasures" in p. 129.

固天攸縱，以玄聖之德，生日本之國，
苞貫三統，纂先聖之宏猷，恭敬三寶，救黎元之厄，
是實大聖也。

There is (or was) a sage in the Land of Sunrise. He is known as the Prince of the Upper Palace, Toyotomimi by name. Truly he is specially gifted by Heaven; being endowed with the virtues of a profound sage, he was born in the Land of Sunrise. (In his thought) he has penetrated the three cosmic orders; (in his idea) he has integrated the high ideals of the predecessor sages; (in his faith) he has revered piously the Three Treasures; and thus he has saved his people from disasters.

Indeed he is a great sage.

The contrast is quite significant; the latter depicts the personal endowments and cardinal achievements of the Prince, whereas the former arrays the branches of learning, and so forth. The question here is not which of the two eulogies is a truer representation of the Prince's personality or life, but the point is the difference of the scope and intention. Seen in this light, the aim of the Teisetsu statements is easily discernible, and the point turns back to the remark made at the outset, that the personal equation of the compiler and the trends of his time had much to do with these statements on the Buddhist learning of the Prince. In fact the last decades of the seventh century marked a period of rising sectarianism, when doctrinal discussions were overtaking religious enthusiasm and the erudition in those scholastic teachings was regarded as an essential qualification of Buddhist doctors. This change was largely due to the leadership of 道昭 Dōshō¹⁰, having in its background the brilliant civilization of the T'ang China and the scholastic philosophy of the 法相 Hossō school. The compilation of the Teisetsu is believed to belong to this period, perhaps two decades or three after Dōshō's return from China or even later. It would be rather a wonder, if its compiler had escaped the influence of his time and tried to represent Prince Shōtoku in the objective light of the Prince's own writings and life work.

In fact, the Prince's ideas and life ideals were almost an antipode to the prevailing Hossō philosophy. The most conspicuous contrast is seen in the belief in the capacity of all without exception to Buddhahood, on the part of the Prince, and the exclusion of a certain class, on the part of the Hossō doctrine. This latter is known as the doctrine of 五性各別 or 五種定性, the "five different inalienable capacities", and it would be no wonder if the compiler of the Teisetsu designated this cardinal dogma by the name 五種佛性, the five kinds of Buddha-nature¹¹. Similarly it is quite natural that the first interpreters of the passage understood the phrase in that sense; only the modern scholars trained in more objective historical methods and faithful to the Prince's writings could have raised question concerning that identification.

10) See Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, pp. 81-82, 94-96.

11) Here it may be objected that the "non-capacity" could not be called a feature or kind of the Buddha-nature. This can be retorted by pointing out the instance of the Buddhist classification of animals according to the legs, including the "non-legged," side by side with the two-legged, four-legged and many-legged.

This consideration is confirmed by examining the other points in the passage under discussion. The Teisetsu passage, in stating the Prince's comprehension of the Hokke, gives prominence to the parable of the three carts and the associated doctrine of the expediency and the fundamental truth. This is so far true as the statement goes, but it misses the more important points in the Hokke, which the Prince has regarded as its cardinal theses, the teaching of 諸法實相, the reality (or realities) of the Dharma, and 佛壽無窮極, the everlasting life of Buddha. This is not to say that we expect in a short statement like the present one an exhaustive exposition of all the teachings; but it would hardly be pardonable if the compiler did sacrifice the cardinal points to the introductory thesis, which is here the case. This neglect or misapprehension is brought to a clearer light, when we see that just therein is shown the sectarian bias of the Hossō philosophy towards the Hokke ideals. This amounts to say that the Hokke is merely introductory to the chief canon of the Hossō school, explaining away the universal Ekayāna ideal of the Hokke as an expediency adapted to the desires of those of the lower faculties. This debasement of the Hokke implies that the everlasting life of Buddha as taught in it is not the ultimate entity, and similar arguments. Thus we can safely assume that the compiler of the Teisetsu, in stating the kernel of the teaching of the Hokke, was under the influence of this bias, whether intentionally or unconsciously. It matters little whether he was a Hossō doctor or otherwise.

This point finds confirmation in the other parts of the passage too. No one could miss the importance in the Hokke of the doctrine of Buddha's eternal dignity, yet the Teisetsu had to pass by this cardinal point in its statement on the Hokke. Yet its compiler could not pass by without touching Buddhahood itself at all. His mention of the perpetuity of Nehan, whether as taught in the Nehan-gyō or other books, may have been made for filling up this gap in his statements on the Prince's Buddhological idea; this seems to have been done intentionally.

All this points to the conclusion that the Teisetsu statements are nothing else than a eulogy of the Prince formulated according to the ideas prevailing more than sixty years after his death and not with the intention of faithfully representing his ideas and learning on the basis of his own writings. Thus the ground is cleared. The thesis of the "five kinds" is not true to the Prince's idea, if it meant the five as emphasized in the Hossō doctrine; yet this may have been, or rather was, what the Teisetsu intended to say. Iyenaga's interpretation of it as a thesis taught in the Shōmian-gyō is true to the Prince's conception, but it was almost certainly not what the Teisetsu meant to say. Thus what amounts to say is:—Do not regard the Teisetsu as an unquestionable source for rightly comprehending the Prince's Buddhist ideas but as a more or less distorted representation left by a learned man, possibly a Hossō doctor, looking at the Prince through the lens of the changed time, when the sectarian difference was arising and the Hosso school was gaining ground, nearly a century after the Prince.