

SANKAI KYŌ NO KENKYŪ: An investigation concerning the Three Degrees Sect. By YABUKI KEIKI. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1927. 18 yēn.

This is the most important work on the Tun-huang manuscripts since Pelliot and Chavannes' *Un Traité Manichéen Retrouvé en Chine*.¹ Its late appearance is due to the fact that the first draft was destroyed in the earthquake of 1923. With a courage not unparalleled in Japan, but almost inconceivable to Western minds (I know of three manuscripts by European writers that were destroyed in the earthquake, and not one of these authors has had the heart to return to his task), Mr. Yabuki rewrote his book, which in this second version runs to some 1,300 pages.

I will not attempt to summarize the contents of this vast work; but I hope that the following notes will call attention to the importance of contemporary Buddhist scholarship in Japan, and to the necessity for all students of Northern Buddhism to be equipped with a knowledge of Japanese.

The history of the Three Degrees Sect stretches roughly from the end of the sixth to the middle of the ninth century. It derives its name from the theory that between the departure of one Buddha and the arrival of his successor there are three "steps" by which mankind climbs down to darkness. For 500² years his essence is still perceived and his teaching rightly apprehended; for a further 500 years an "idolon" or image of his person and doctrine can still reach the human mind. In the third stage (which lasts till the coming of the future Buddha Maitreya) the concept of Buddha has irredeemably vanished. we are all spiritually blind, sinful, incapable of perceiving the middle path between existence and non-existence, over-specialized ("sharp") in our sense-perceptions, so utterly corrupt as to defile the most generous action by the very fact that it is we who perform it.

This three-fold division of the period between Buddha and Buddha was a theory accepted by almost all sects and goes back to very early days. It was in the stress laid upon this doctrine and the consequences drawn from it that the San Chieh sect was peculiar and even, as was subsequently decided, heretical.

The Founder.—Hsin-hsing³ was born at Hsiang-chou in Honan

¹ Paris, 1911-13.

² The periods are variously given, but according to all reckonings the sixth century A.D. comes well within the third period.

³ 信行.

in A.D. 540. In his youth he was an invalid, and consequently unable to practise meditation or recite the scriptures. But from his seventeenth year his interest was centred on religion. He became a monk, and seems to have inhabited two different monasteries in his native town. Here he thought out the new doctrine and way of life which will be presently described. But at the age of 47 he had found only four converts; two monks and two laymen who were apparently both members of his own family. However, his fame was rapidly growing, and next year (589) he was summoned to the capital (Ch'ang-an in Shensi) by the Emperor Wēn of the Sui dynasty. In 594 he died and was buried in the Chung-nan hills. During his latter years he achieved an extraordinary reputation. The eulogies written after his death teem with resounding phrases, the "greatest of Śākyamuni's followers", "sole support of the Church"; but the anecdotes told concerning him, such as his excessive outburst of sensibility at the age of 4, on seeing a bull straining to drag a cart through the mud, are the stock-in-trade of Buddhist hagiography, and give us no clue whereby to distinguish him from rival saints. Moreover, we cannot be certain what part of the doctrine, as we know it from later writings, belongs to the founder himself, and what was added by his successors, so that our picture both of his personality and his opinions becomes somewhat dim. What emerges vividly from the surviving documents is the general complexion of San Chieh views during the time of the sect's prosperity.

This age, then, is a dark chasm which divides the world that is gone from the world that is to come. We are like a traveller who, after the sun has set and before the moon has risen, must creep warily along the main high road. If he turns to right or left he may mistake a ditch for a dyke, a shadow for a stepping stone. And so we, if we turn aside to worship this Buddha or honour that saint, may in the darkness of our latter-day hearts, for all we know, be worshipping a pig or honouring a goat. And what is the main road, the general way, that is left to us?

Our inner, transcendental vision is lost; Buddha is no longer visible to us in his "true form" but only in the complicated, kaleidoscopic mirage that our physical senses convey; he is accessible only as mirrored in All Creatures that have Life.¹ For this reason the followers of Hsin-hsing provoked ridicule by prostrating themselves

¹ Owing to the theory that plants cannot feel and that life is consciousness, the vegetable world was specifically excluded.

in the street before any chance-comer, whether donkey or human being. Our behaviour must be appropriate to the Age in which we live. The followers of Śākyamuni in the First Age were able to fertilize their lives with meditation and prayer. But for us to imitate them would be just such folly as once led a fool to strew gold and silver on his field instead of manure, thinking that it was filthy to eat cabbages that were grown with the aid of dung. Nor can life in the cloister help us. Who are we that we should live in houses with fine rooms, when Buddha (i.e. mankind and all creatures) must often dwell in vile and nauseous places?

The followers of the sect accordingly did not live in monasteries, but were allotted courtyards and out-houses of monastic buildings. Their lives, however, were spent for the most part in crowded streets and markets. Here, rather than in cell or hermitage, they felt able to commune with the Tathāgata, the ceaseless undercurrent of life. For images and libraries of holy books they had little respect. "Such things," says a ninth century opponent, "they regard as mere lumber."

Another tenet of the sect was that, for men of the Third Stage, the attainment of individual salvation was impossible. We are like a carriage that has come to bits. The individual pieces are useless. But tied together with rope and a few sticks it may yet see service of a kind. And so must we, making ourselves as blind as possible (for our sharpened senses tinge the world for us with a false diversity and separateness) rumble along together, stealthily and unobtrusively creeping nearer to salvation, like a man who with his servants has been made prisoner in a foreign land. He escapes from his prison. But he still wears his Chinese clothes and if he were seen on the road he would at once be arrested. So he must go secretly, travelling only at night, and thus he may reach his own home.

The followers of the sect currently observed austerities that had indeed long been known as forms of occasional penance, but had never been adopted as a permanent way of life. They ate only once in the day and would take no food that they had not themselves received as alms. Their clothes were made of such rags as they could collect from rubbish heaps. Most conspicuous of all was the stress they laid on alms-giving: "Of all the Buddhas that occupy the diverse spheres of the Ten Quarters of the Universe, there is not one who gained his Buddhahood save by alms-giving." About 630 was founded the Inexhaustible Treasury, into which were tilted cart loads of silk and money. The great houses of Ch'ang-an poured out their wealth

in this anonymous donorship.¹ From time to time the treasury was opened, and its contents divided into three parts. One was used in the repair of ancient monasteries and stūpas, for it was a tenet of the sect that the degenerate beings of this "third stage" are incapable of producing new buildings that would not be an insult to the ideas they were supposed to incorporate. A second part was distributed among the poor and hungry all over China, the rest being used in miscellaneous dedications. A certain P'ei Hsüan-chih whose piety had attracted attention for many years, was put in charge of the treasure-room. About 650 he was suspected of peculation. He got wind of this, and fled. On the wall of his sleeping-place the monks found the poem:—

You put your lamb under the wolf's care,
You left your bone in front of a hungry dog;
Knowing that I was not an Alohan²

How could you expect me not sometimes to steal?

In 713 was published an Imperial proclamation which stated that this treasury "supposed to succour the poor and weak, has in reality been squandered for improper purposes". It was therefore to be seized and officially distributed among Taoist and Buddhist temples. This was not the first time that the sect had suffered from governmental hostility. Their writings, accepted as orthodox by the official list of scriptures drawn up in 664, were denounced as heretical in the list of 695. In 699 a proclamation ordered the sect to abandon all practices and austerities save those of begging, eating only once a day, avoiding cereal food, and meditation.³ In 725 the followers of Hsin-hsing were ordered to destroy the partitions which separated their quarters from those of the ordinary monks. In 730 their writings were again denounced as unorthodox. However, it appears (not with absolute certainty) that in 800 their books once more appeared on the official list.⁴ In 845 strong measures were taken against the huge encroachments that monasticism had made on Chinese life. Thousands of monasteries were closed and their inhabitants compelled to resume a lay existence. After this date such faint echoes of the sect's activity as still survive are to be sought in Korea and Japan rather than in

¹ It was considered an essential of alms-giving that it should be entirely impersonal, the donor neither disclosing his name nor having any control over the way in which his gifts were used.

² Arhat, Saint.

³ Meditation was, however, theoretically discouraged by the sect.

⁴ The *Ch'eng Yuan Lu*.

China. The Korean catalogue of 1090 still contains two works of the San Chieh sect. In Japan, the Shōsō-in Treasury at Nara contains fragments of San Chieh writings that were copied in 747. Throughout the middle ages important works survived that have now completely disappeared, and even in 1792 Ensen, a priest of the Zōjōji, writes that he once saw a copy of the *San Chieh Chi Lu* (Hsin-hsing's principal work), but could make no sense of it.

At the present moment there survives in Japan only one work, the *San Chieh Fo Fa* (in four chapters which are scattered over various temple libraries). All the rest of our knowledge concerning the sect is derived from the Tun-huang manuscripts brought back by Pelliot to Paris and Stein to London. Of these there are about 20; they were examined by Mr. Yabuki in 1916, and again in 1922.

One document (Stein 2137) incomplete at both ends, appears to be an extract from Hsin-hsing's own writings. The rest date from the T'ang dynasty and in method of composition follow the practice of T'ang commentators; that is to say, they subject scriptural and exegetic texts to an elaborate and rather forced analysis, discovering in them hidden schematizations and cross-correspondences.¹ The interest of the San Chieh sect was of course centred upon those scriptures that foretell or can be construed to foretell the coming of the Third Stage. Of Hīnayāna works the most useful was the Mixed Āgama, which is frequently quoted; but the basis of San-Chieh teaching is the *Sūtra of the Ten Wheels* (Nanjio 64) which explains how Buddha's ten wheels (i.e. ten powers) can efface the ten Sin-wheels of humanity. The discourse is given at the request of the Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha, who arrives at the assembly clad as a monk. The worship of a particular Buddha was utterly at variance with the views of the sect, but the need for a central figure was felt, and in course of time it seemed at any rate to outward spectators that the Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha played much the same part in the San Chieh sect as did the Buddha Amitābha among followers of the Pure Land doctrine. Kshitigarbha is indeed preeminently the guardian deity of the Between-time—the gap between one Buddha and the next.

Each day at break of dawn he enters into successive meditations
And mentally visits every Hell, to relieve the sufferings of the damned.

¹ One excellent practice of the sect deserves mention. In quoting they scrupulously distinguish between "the text", "the purport", or "general sense" of the text and "human opinion", i.e. the commentaries.

In Buddha-less spheres of this World he saves all living things;
In this life and the after life he can lead the way.

Thus Kshitigarbha assists Yama in the merciful judgment of the dead, and in China replaces him, Yama being relegated to a merely accessory position. Readers of *Un Traité Manichéen* will remember that Kshitigarbha figures there (p. 53) as the fourth of the Five Deities of the Macrocosm. Did Manicheism borrow the name from Buddhism, or did both religions draw on a common source? Other alternatives seem improbable.¹ *The Sūtra of the Ten Wheels*, first translated into Chinese early in the fifth century, seems to be a genuine translation from Sanskrit, and the cult of Kshitigarbha presumably existed in India, or at any rate in some sphere of Sanskrit culture in the fourth century. But it is not mentioned by any of the Chinese pilgrims, from Fa Hsien onwards.

Another link between the San Chieh sect and Manicheism is the *Great Cloud Sūtra*. In 690 the usurping Empress Wu Hou caused a "new translation" of this well-known sūtra to be made, with passages inserted in which it was foretold that Maitreya would one day descend to earth and rule China in the guise of a woman. The new translation was officially circulated throughout China, and Wu Hou was able to pose as an incarnation of the Future Buddha. Now we know that the Manichean temples erected in China in 768 and 771 received the name of Great Cloud Temples, and it has been suspected that there was some connection between Manicheism and the forged prophecies issued in the new *Great Cloud Sūtra* of 690. Finally, the San Chieh sect was currently accused of having had a hand in the concoction of these prophecies. It has therefore been suspected that there is some connection between San Chieh and Manicheism. All those questions, only alluded to in the final version of the book, were discussed at length in the draft which perished in 1923. We can only hope that Mr. Yabuki will find time to return to them, particularly in view of the increasing interest in Manicheism.

The intrinsic importance of the San Chieh documents, apart from the light they shed on an obscure chapter of Buddhist history, lies rather in the state of feeling that they express than in any intellectual subtlety, dialectic power or literary beauty, qualities in which they fall far short of the Indian Abhidharma. The controversies of the age were marred by the vastness of the accepted Buddhist Canon. Each

¹ It is, for example, unlikely that Buddhism derived the name from Manicheism.

party in the discussion quoted from its own favourite bunch of scriptures, which the other disputant accepted as orthodox, but chose for purposes of argument to ignore. The opponents, therefore, could never get to grips, and it was only fatigue or lack of ingenuity that brought the combat to a close. But as documents of psychological history the writings of the sect are of the greatest interest, all the more so since the secular literature of Hsin-hsing's age (the second half of the sixth century), being mostly either trivial or wholly retrospective, fails to throw light on the contemporary mind of China. It is not difficult to trace a connection between the San Chieh creed and the desperate political situation of China at the time of Hsin-hsing's birth. Four hundred years of disunion and disorder had followed the fall of the Han dynasty. Half and sometimes more than half of the country had been seized by successive barbarian invaders; public security had sunk to the lowest ebb. Finally, in Hsin-hsing's prime had come the great prosecution of 574, when 2,000,000 (?) Taoist and Buddhist monks were forced back into secular life. It seemed indeed as if the destruction of the Law so often foretold in apocalyptic works as marking the last phase before the coming of Maitreya, had actually taken place. But the Third Stage was to last 10,000 years, and by no reckoning could it be maintained that in the sixth century it had advanced more than a few hundred years. Maitreya was therefore a long way off, and he figures only occasionally and very dimly in the San Chieh books. Theirs is a dark and hopeless or at least desperate creed, that flattens out the spiritual world into one dead level of ignorance and folly. It could not long compete with the optimistic creeds that offered a swift and easy approach to Paradise.

The sect with which Hsin-hsing's followers came chiefly into conflict was indeed the Pure Land¹ (Japanese Jōdo) whose worship of Amitābha, a "separate Buddha", seemed to them a perilous proceeding. With the other great Chinese sect, the Dhyāna (Zen) which arose almost at the same time, they came to a less definite issue, for though meditation was considered by the San Chieh to be "unsuitable" to the age, they did not altogether eschew it. The Tun Huang collections contain a large number of wholly unedited Zen documents. It is greatly to be hoped that Mr. Yabuki or one of his colleagues

¹ The earliest Paradise scripture that survives in the Chinese Tripitaka is the *Akshobhya Sūtra*, translated in A.D. 147. Whether An Shih-ka'o's translation of the *Amitābha Sūtra* (attributed to the same time) ever existed is doubtful, in view of the extremely conflicting evidence about the extent of his activities.

will turn their attention to these and throw some light on the absolute darkness which surrounds the birth of the most famous and typical Far Eastern sect.

A. WALEY.

MOHAMMEDAN SAINTS AND SANCTUARIES IN PALESTINE. By TAUFİK CANAAN. London: Luzac and Co., 1927.

This book, by Dr. T. Canaan, a Jerusalem physician who has made a considerable study of Arab folk-lore, who is a prominent member of the Palestine Oriental Society, and also author of *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel*, gives a valuable and interesting account of sanctuaries and of saints who are the object of a popular cult in Palestine to-day. It is not limited, as the title would suggest, to Muslim shrines and saints only, but deals also with those venerated by Palestinian Christians.

The author discusses the sites of these sanctuaries and the reasons for their choice. "High Places" have always been associated with religion in Palestine, and monasteries as well as shrines are to be found on the summits of the hills there to this day, and that this preference was well-known even in the earliest days of Islām, is suggested by the tradition according to which the Prophet stated that after a certain period, "monastic life upon the tops of the mountains" would be lawful for his followers.¹

The writer, in describing the structure and decoration of these tombs, gives several inscriptions, including that on the tomb of Fātima (daughter of the Imām Ḥusayn, not Ḥasan as stated here), near Hebron, which is given more fully by Ibn Battūta.²

The association of trees with shrines and holy personages, of which the author gives several instances, was to be found also in pre-Islamic Arabia and is still existent among Muslims in India and Albania and North Africa.³

The types of tombs mentioned include the "maqām", a sanctuary of some size, sacred usually to a saint universally honoured, which

¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-i'tidāl*, i, p. 377.

² اسكنت من كان في الاحشاء ومسكنه ; بالرغم متى بين التراب والجبر
ياقبر فاطمة بنت ابن فاطمة : بنت الائمة بنت الانجم الزهر
ياقبر مايفك من دين ومن وروع ومن عفاف ومن صون ومن خفر

(i, p. 119).

³ Cf. Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 185-93. Al-Tabarī, i, 922. Garnett, *Women of Turkey (Muslim)*, p. 212; Trumelet, *Les Saints du Tell*, pp. 306-25.