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Faith and Wisdom in the T'ien-t'ai Buddhist Tradition: A Letter by Ssu-ming Chih-li

In the Christian tradition, Faith and Reason (Wisdom) have often been pitted against one another, as though they are mutually exclusive. This tension, however, grew out of a particular Western heritage which, in many ways, is more the exception than the rule for other religious traditions. The tension began with the Christian reading of *pistis* (faith) and the formulation of the *credo* (creed) whereby faith as denoting cognitive accent came to be implied. The usual contrast then of the "God of the Philosophers" and the "God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob" thus began. This was further underlined during the Protestant Reformation through the formula of *sola fide* (By faith alone). The anti-intellect bent increased with the Pietist movement reacting to the Age of Reason and its rational theology. A similar later reaction to the scientific erosion of the tenets of faith among Biblical literalists only drove Reason and Faith farther apart. Discussion on Faith, when coloured by that somewhat uncompromising perspective, has often managed to distort the issue of the dialectics between Faith and Wisdom, especially when applied to other religious traditions. In traditions where there had not been a similar conflict between two cultures in the mask of two Gods, Faith and Wisdom are more reconcilable. In Hinduism, for example, *bhakti* devotionism would not abrogate the insight or the gnosis that is the *Upaniṣad* (Vedānta). In Buddhism, a tradition that began as a wisdom (*prajñā*) tradition, even Mahāyāna "faith" (*śraddhā*) in its extreme form—Pure Land Buddhism in the Far East—cannot be divorced from "wisdom." As a small contribution to the discussion on the dynamics of faith, I would introduce a classic defence of the mutual practice of Faith and Wisdom by Sung T'ien-t'ai master, Ssu-ming Chih-li (959-1028), in a letter replying to Yang-i.

Chih-li, a native of Ssu-ming, was easily the most knowledgeable monk of the time. He entered the order at an early age, studied the

precepts, and in 979, followed I-t'ung in acquiring a T'ien-t'ai training. Resident of the Pao-yin Temple in Ssu-ming, he received in 1030 a Japanese pilgrim who brought with him 27 questions posed by the monk Genshin of Mount Hiei. He also participated in a famous debate dividing the orthodox Shan-nai and the heterodox Shan-nai groups within T'ien-t'ai, the latter having gone too far into the Mind Only philosophy championed by the Hua-yen school. In 1009, he found probably the earliest *nien-fo* (Buddha-name Recitation) society for the masses, numbering up to 10,000 members, bringing together both laymen and monks—a practice endorsed by Genshin in Japan. In 1019, he and ten other monks—decided to pursue a three-year-long course of practising the Lotus Confession, at the end of which, they would willingly burn their bodies in an ultimate act of donation (*dāna*) to the Truth of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the hope of attaining thereby birth in Pure Land. It was at this point that Yang-i interceded, pleading with Chih-li to stay on in this earth (*chu-shih*). Chih-li acceded to this request. Our focus is on this exchange of letters, but we will focus instead on the observed tension between Faith and Wisdom. Herein we will see Chih-li's doctrine of *yüeh-hsin kuan-fo*, a kind of contemplative devotion to Amitābha based on the natural correlation (*yüeh*) of the Pure Land to the inner mind of men.¹

Although we said earlier that Faith and Wisdom might not be mutually exclusive, nevertheless, the tension does exist (for many others). Now we generally associate Wisdom with Ch'an (Zen) and Faith with Pure Land because these are the two surviving major schools after the ninth century. In Sung, however, T'ien-t'ai scholarship was quite dynamic and Pure Land piety merged with this more meditative and wisdom-centred tradition. In Japan, Zen and Jōdō (Pure Land) seldom overlapped, but in China synthesis is more the norm. However, insofar as mystical Wisdom seems to assume the destruction of subject and object, self and other, the question naturally rises how it can or would accommodate Faith—if Faith implies a separation of the

1. Taken from a brief discussion in Mochizuki Shinko, *Chūgoku Jodokyorishi* (1942); I happen only to have the Chinese translation by Shin Yin-kai (Taipei: Hui-jih, 1975), pp. 234-240. Since I am dealing here primarily with apologetics and not pure Buddhologica, I will not refer to the finer points in T'ien-t'ai doctrine (best analyzed by Ando Toshio in his works).

devotee from Amitābha, this impure world from his Pure Land.² And if the mystic should stop discriminative "taking and forsaking," should not the desire for Pure Land be considered as another ill craving to be eliminated? These are age-old questions, and although Chih-li was not entirely original—he never claimed to be; he was defending the T'ien t'ai understanding all along—his statement is one articulated expression on this issue.

Yang-i, a major lay supporter, wrote to Chih-li asking him to desist from leaving the world through the planned baptism of fire. In the course of the letter, he raised the problem of Wisdom and Faith:³

I have come to hear that, master, you plan, with ten other monks in a fellowship, to devote three years to the (Lotus) Confession and then to go through the flames in utter devotion in a decision to be born in Pure Land. Indeed, when one so empties the self and subjective views,⁴ the power of the *bodhisattvic* vow⁵ would be ever more strong. To so attain the Lotus seat of the highest rank,⁶ reborn in Pure Land to see the sound of the Dharma at the *bodhi* Tree is no fiction; it is well attested to by the former Buddha. Still, the common lot has harboured the mind of aspiration, and has so much benefited from the master's teaching on the Three Aspects. You are revered by the fourfold congregation, as one heir to the wise callings of the T'ien-t'ai⁷ tradition who open up this most transcendental of all gates to freedom. By the Ten Good

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2. Of course, Paul Tillich has noted that the Religion of Grace is also the Religion of Paradox (*Theology of Culture*). The Zen mystic who goes beyond self and other might psychologically approximate the inception of Other-Power in his egoloss. The pietist, like Shinran, who renounces his self to Amitābha's Other-Power might approximate the mystical natural abandonment (*jinen honi*, things-as-is). The latter is noted by Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki in his *Essays on Shin Buddhism* (Kyoto: Otani, 197?).
 3. The full scope is actually Wisdom, Faith and Asceticism; Sung dynasty is the last age for wide-spread show of medieval ascetical zeal.
 4. Or, perhaps better, "notion of the self." Indeed, Chih-li refers later to the yogic indifference to self and therefore to the apparent pain.
 5. In this context, this should be Chin-li's own *bodhisattvic* vow, not the so-called Other-Power of Amitābha's vow.
 6. According to the hierarchy of birth as listed in the *Kuan-ching*.
 7. Taking *t'ai* to refer to T'ien-t'ai.

Deeds the multitude is led to the faith; they so now compete in performing the pure deeds. By one voice the teaching is spread; widely the true words of the Buddha are developed. The shade of your compassion is all encompassing; the climate of your way has so flourished.⁸

Having so praised the master and reminded him of his living influence, Yang-i raised indirectly the question whether the drastic abandoning of the body via the yogic art of immolation was called for.⁹

The Realm of Supreme Bliss is the expedient teaching of the Enlightened Lord. The body that is plagued by suffering is indeed not something that the man of wisdom would rejoice in. Still, when one harbours secretly the aspiration (for bliss) and the abhorrence (of suffering), there is aroused immediately love and hatred. Once this seed of taking and forsaking is sown, there is born the distinction of the seer and the seen.¹⁰ (The Pure Land teaching) is only for the purpose of pointing to enlightened wisdom, something to initiate the probing of the true permanence (that is one's innate Buddha-nature here and now¹¹).¹²

So questioning the need for that extreme self-denial and the worthwhileness of a ritual birth in Pure Land through fiery flame, Yang-i implored Chih-li to stay on earth, to abandon his wish to leave this dusty world so that the larger congregation would benefit from his continual guidance. In that, Yang-i was successful, for Chih-li was persuaded to change his mind. In the process of clarifying his stand, namely, why with his knowledge that there should be no self and other, taking and forsaking, he would still aspire for the Pure Land in a

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8. From Tsung-hsiao's collection of Pure Land writings, the *Le-pan wen-lui* in the Taisho Daizokyo (henceforth T.), [vol.] 47, p. 201c. All translations in this study come from this section of the text. No Japanese translation is known to me and there is almost no study on Chih-li as yet in English. The following translations avoid over-technical vocabulary; the finer points and nuances are slotted to the notes.
 9. Added for interpretative purpose; the reader might choose to disregard this.
 10. My choice of words: "take and forsake" for discriminative acts, "seer and seen" for the more technical subject-object dichotomy.
 11. A logical inference: the *Nirvāna Sūtra's* doctrine of the true self (Buddha-nature) as permanent (*sat*), implying that Pure Land is not a "beyond."
 12. T, 47, p. 201c.

drastic act of denying his plagued body—Chih-li gives us a very personal insight into the tension between Faith and Wisdom, the life of the person and the life of the mind.¹³ One might add, the life of the spirit and the flesh, too.

Chih-li's Letter

After thanking Wen-i for the kind words, Chih-li responds as follows: You go too far in saying that I have penetrated the principle of the Three Perspectives, but you are right that the reference to Supreme Happiness is an expediency and that the cultivator of the Way must ultimately renounce both aspiration (for the pure) and abhorrence (for the impure). However, there are reasons why I should aspire for the Pure Land and abhor this plagued body. That I would explain later. As to the "One Mind with Three Perspectives," I can hardly claim to have penetrated it fully but would presume to speak somewhat. For forty and more years I have sought out its traces and studied its tendencies, but being slow-witted, I have hardly verified it.¹⁴ Still in my cloistered life, by practice, and through apprenticeship under various masters during my wandering, I manage to have some inkling. Since you so honour me with the question, I cannot remain silent and will outline it for your consideration.¹⁵

The "One Mind with Three Perspectives" doctrine is a Wisdom formula in T'ien-t'ai Buddhism. The historical evolution of this doctrine cannot be included here. Suffice it to say that, for the insiders, the doctrine emanated from the Buddhist canon itself.¹⁶ The "Three" refers to the Real, the Empty and the Middle (meaning neither real nor empty; both real and empty). The pair of the Real and the Empty was

13. There are other standard resolutions to the Wisdom/Faith tension, but Chih-li represents the T'ien-t'ai mode that is generally more sophisticated than, say, the Ch'an (Zen) resolution of this tension.

14. Although Chih-li was being humble, his supposed lack of experiential verification of this key Lotus *samādhi* may help to explain why he was a more active supporter of Amitābha pietism than Chih-li who "discovered" (and structured) the supreme Lotus *samādhi*.

15. T. 47, p. 201c.

16. See the sectarian legend first narrated in Kuan-ting's preface to his recording of Chih-li's teaching on Mahāyāna meditation, the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* (*samata-vipāsana*) in T. 46, p. 1.

taken from the basic Emptiness philosophy in Mahāyāna: "Form is Emptiness; Emptiness is Form." The Middle refers to the Middle Path and was supposedly inspired by the *Mādhyamika* (Middle Path).¹⁷ However, in the Chinese exegetical tradition of *Mādhyamika*, this Middle is taken up by the T'ien-t'ai (also known as the *Lotus Sūtra*) school as a third factor beside the Real and the Empty. Sometimes this Middle is aligned with the Third Truth (*san-ti*) above the standard Two Truths system in Indian *Mādhyamika*—the Real¹⁸ and the Empty being then aligned with the first Two Truths. The triad is circular, each negating the others, including and simultaneously sublating the others, in a kind of perfect cycle deemed in this school as the *yüan* ("Round") meaning perfection. The complete system is rather intricate and quite often scholastic and not easily re-translateable into Indian *Mādhyamika* because it had actually incorporated (though also changing) the Chinese idea of yin-yang Harmony.¹⁹ Yet I find Chih-li's rather personal explanation, which is given below one of the most illuminating both for its simplicity as well as for its insight into the soteriological function of this triple perspective.

The Three Perspectives refers to how, in any one moment of thought, (reality is)²⁰ immediately Empty, Real and Middle. As far back as the Buddha or more recently in our master Chih-li (founder of the T'ien-t'ai school), enlightenment has been predicated upon the arousal of this truth from within one's nature. It

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17. The "One Mind Three Wisdoms" is from the *Ta-chih-tu-lun*; the correlation of the "Three" with the Real, the Empty, the Middle is taken from the *Chung-lun* (*Mādhyamika-karikā*); see *ibid.* Full translation and annotation available in Neal Donner, Ph. D. thesis under Prof. Leon Hurvitz but see T. 46, p. 1.
18. For simplicity and ease of reading, I have rendered *chia* (for *chia-ming*, *prajñāpti*: "false names" implying "conventional designations") as Real (as in "provisional reality") to sustain better English contrast.
19. This I trace to a liberal Chinese exegesis and dialectics borrowed from Chou Yung's *San-tsung-lun*; see my "Further Development of the Two-Truths Theory in China," *Philosophy East and West*, 30, no. 2 (1980), pp. 139-161, and "Nonduality of the Two Truths: Origin of the Third Truth," *Journal of International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 2, no. 2 (1979), a sequel. Note: "Doctrinaire" Buddhology that follows the sectarian traditions might not take kindly to my findings.
20. My addition; equally applicable is "(mind is)"—but in T'ien-t'ai dialectics, mind and reality (*hsin*, *se*; *citta*, *rūpa*) are "correlates."

is not due to cultivation.²¹ Thus the Mind has these three function perfectly. When it is Empty, all things are emptied. Then the Three Perspectives are all manifested, functioning to destroy all forms. When it is Real, all things are realized. Then the Three Perspectives are all illuminated; its merit is to establish all realities. When it is Middle, then all things are in the mean (neither/nor). Then the Three Perspectives are as they are (being neither denied nor affirmed); this is the substance of being without dependence. In this way one can negate phenomena all day and yet reality is completed thereby. One can affirm all day and yet the finest defilements are exhausted. One can likewise erase all dependence and yet the Two Truths (i.e. two relative poles) remain as lucid as ever. Thus can the *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtras* discourse on Emptiness and still manifest the eighty teachings as real. Thus can the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* establish the (Non-dual) reality and yet be able to discard the subjectivity and cravings of the Three Realms. Thus too may the *Lotus Sūtra* speak of the One Vehicle and permit the mundane forms (of *samsāra*) to be, nevertheless, permanently existing. All these are due to the perfect identity of the Three Aspects that can comprehend all realities without missing any.²²

In simple terms, the adoption of the triple perspective exhausts all possible stands one can take towards the world. It corresponds to the four-cornered dialectics in Indian logic. To say that the Mind (or Reality) has these three "sides" is to (a) affirm reality, (b) deny reality, (c) neither to affirm nor deny reality. The denial is meant to "destroy all forms," that is, to free ourselves from being attached to things of the world. This, of course, can fall into the fallacy of world-flight or chasing after the rainbow of *nirvāṇa*. Mahāyāna, however, recognizes not just "Form is Emptiness," but also "Emptiness is Form;" not just "Saṃsāra is Nirvāṇa," but also "Nirvāṇa is Saṃsāra." There must also be immediately the element of re-affirmation. This is the aspect of Reality, by which things are established for what they are. To so deny and then to so affirm is not enough, for the denial and the affirmation, the notion of the Empty and the real, might still constitute a pair of opposites "dependent on their mutual opposition." This

21. What is already replete in one's nature needs only to be unveiled, not cultivated. This is the T'ien-t'ai notion of *hsing-chu*.

22. T. 47, p. 202a.

is where the third aspect, the Middle, comes in. This cancels out as well as accepts the tensions so set, because the Middle is both "Neither/Nor" and "Both/And." This secures the lasting freedom, the state known as "being without dependence" (or, being non-relative). The triad of *sūtras* at the end shows the canonical bases for the T'ien-t'ai *Mādhyamika*. The *Prajñā-pāramitā*'s ideal Emptiness negates the Real in the midst of the Real. The *Vimalakīrti* affirms the Non-dual (some "unity") in the midst of the destruction of opposites. If the first destroys the mundane forms and the second points to the Beyond, the *Lotus*' idea of the Ekayana, One Vehicle, collapses them such that the mundane is immediately the transcendental; the impermanent is immediately everlasting Truth. *Samsāra* indeed is none other than *nirvāṇa*.²³

If that sounds far-fetched, the triple perspective can be translated into our experience. There are only these three stands we can adopt towards anything.²⁴ We love and we hate. Yet, in the end, we must learn to transcend them (because they signify egoistic biases and can be the cause of suffering). Having transcended them, that is, our worldly delights and abhorrences, we should not stay, as it were, in the "seventh heaven" like some emotionless angels, but rather we should return to earth, as is the vocation of the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva*. We affirm our humanity in a seeming display of emotions (as skilful means, usually for the sake of others). To cap it all, we adopt the Middle Path, to engineer the perfect "detached compassion" or "compassionate detachment"—to love without wanting, to denounce without hatred. The above is only one psychological ramification of what the Three Perspectives mean. The threefold aspects are as applicable to Mind (subject) as they are to the object (Reality). In the latter case, the dialectics become one of denying the world as Empty, reaffirming the world as Real, and realizing the identity of "*Samsāra* is *Nirvāṇa*;

23. This sequence is acknowledged in the T'ien-t'ai tenet-classification system: *Prajñā* destroys the phenomenal, *Vimalakīrti* points beyond ("sublate": cancel-and-uplift), *Lotus* establishes the noumenally permanent—and at the same time, subsumes ("rounds off") all, such that the noumenal is none other than the phenomenal. For this *p'an-chiao* logic, see the brief summary, in Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1964), pp. 305-311.

24. So far, in my reading, I find greater "personalization" of the Three Perspectives in Chih-li who discovered this universal scheme.

Nirvāṇa is *Samsāra*." Having shown the rationality in the Three Perspectives, it seems best to take heed Chih-li's following qualifications, lest the reader should take my explanation too ontically and pride himself on his rational understanding. If it is so simple, it would not have taken Chih-li, the most learned monk of his age, forty-odd years to merely approximate it, not quite fully verifying it.

Thus too, the Three, is not Three nor the One One. It is not true that there is a progression, step by step, nor are the Three Aspects three things, laid side by side, for separate contemplation.²⁵ One cannot really seek it through being and non-being (i.e. Real and Empty) and one cannot find it in the Middle either. Therefore we say they are neither symmetrical nor asymmetrical, neither vertical nor across (i.e. criss-crossing one another).²⁶ This is because the Three and the One are perfectly round and harmonious. In the end, both cultivation of it (as though it is something beyond us) as well as realizing its essence (being in us already) have to be stopped.²⁷ It is not something knowable to our everyday mind, and certainly not something comprehended in words. If we have to put it in words, then we simply have to say it is the most mysterious and incomprehensible insight. Even to say so means having said nothing, but even as it has not been discoursed on, it too has been. If you know this fully, you can inspect all phenomena that confront your mind. You can carry out all tasks using this perspective to help you accomplish them. You can establish all teachings, using this perspective to illuminate them. Those who cultivate this perspective, they can forget inevitably the subject and the object, put an end to the taking and the forsaking. The nature of reality (Suchness) is indeed without (discriminative) thought.²⁸ Those who confront this would cease their

25. My discussion so far has used only the progressional approach. Ideally, one can start with any of the Three Perspectives; the whole scheme is "circular" (perfection). Any One can subsume all Three; this is the logic behind the previous statement, "When it is empty, *all* is emptied" etc. The three sets criss-cross and are mystically perfectly overlapping.

26. Criss-crossing is a technical term referring to the total matrix.

27. Intentional further negation of the logic set forth in note 21 above. Chih-li is not contradicting himself. Rather, contradiction (better, dialectical negation) is the very essence of reality that we must see.

28. *Chen-ju wu-nien*: famous formula from the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna*.

(subjective) mind. They can instruct all day and yet they would be as if speechless. Abandon it and one is in league with the devils. Depart from it and one would yet have to leave behind the heresies. Thus Nagarjuna said, "Aside from this Truth (the real nature of all myriad realities),²⁹ everything else is the work of the devil." Kasyapa said, "If you have not heard about the teaching of the *Mahāparinirvana Sūtra*,³⁰ all is heterodoxy." Great indeed is this teaching. This is how I hope to find repose in life and peace of extinction in death, namely, by relying on the Three Perspectives to put an end to the hundred wrongs.³¹

For those living in the Wisdom tradition of the T'ien-t'ai school, this insight into the Three Perspectives of the One Mind holds the key to all of life's problems. However, if we stay within this parameter, what place is there for such a thing as Faith in Amitabha and aspiration for the Pure Land?

If one takes an absolutist stand based on this Wisdom formula, there is little room for Faith. Since, ideally, there is no "self" and "Other", no "taking" and "forsaking", no distinction between "this shore (*saṃsāra*)" and "the other shore (*nirvāṇa*; in this case, Pure Land)", it does not make much sense to say, in Faith, I, as a "self", rely on Amitābha's "Other" power in an ardent aspiration ("taking") for the Pure beyond while "forsaking" this impure world. In the dialectical exercise of the Three Perspectives, one would have to subject every one of these ontic realities to that dialectical negation, affirmation and Neither/Nor transcendence. Even the idea of "one" or "I, myself" would have to be emptied, affirmed, emptied and affirmed, neither emptied nor affirmed. The same would apply to even Amitābha, even as in the statement "There is Amitābha." The final results—if we can speak of such (cf. the previous expressed denial of any sequential progression in the last quote)—is the realization that the Pure Land, or the polluted land, is merely an "aspect of the Mind." The favourite quote is from Vimalākirti: "If the Mind is pure, the Land

29. *Chu-fa shih-hsiang* (roughly: Dharmatā), the term has special meaning in the T'ien-t'ai school, also known as the *shih-hsiang* school.

30. Basic and key text to this school, often on par with the *Lotus Sūtra* and prized for its doctrine of the "permanent true self"; see 11 above.

31. T. 47, p. 202a.

is pure."³² Or this from the *Prajñā-pāramita Sūtra as taught by Mañjuśrī*: "The Mind that contemplates the Buddha is itself the Buddha; the deluded mind (trapped in things *samsāric*) is what is called the common man.³³ By the way, these two quotes do not mean that one should therefore "strive" to be Pure or be Buddha. Surely one should, but again the full programme is to realize, beyond that urge to "Strive after," the totality (pure, impure and what-not) of the Mind; to realize, "beyond the search for Buddhahood," the identity of the commoner and the Enlightened One. Given such tireless, persistent use of dialectics, it would appear that Faith—personal Faith—would be absorbed into this transpersonal Wisdom.

However, the same dialectics traditionally makes allowance for faith, first as the classic expediency (*upaya*) to help the mundane lot unable to penetrate that higher Wisdom, then, in a dialectical exercise encompassing now Faith and Wisdom, expediency is brought *on par* with the True, *upaya* lined up with *prajñā*. From this expanded outlook, the search for Wisdom alone would prove to be just one-sided and not "round" (i.e. perfect, all-comprehensive). We will examine these two arguments in Chih-li's further reply to Wen-i, the inquirer. We will look at the more personal, his intimate confession for the Pure Land path, later. This is what he said following the earlier cited discourse on the One Mind with Three Perspectives :

The talk about the realm of Supreme Bliss is the show of expediency on the part of the Enlightened Lord. As the *sūtras* and *śāstras* have designated the Pure Land teachings as the superior *upaya*, we can be sure that it is the skilful teaching of the Tathagata. However, the expedient is not as such an obstruction; the real Principle³⁴ can nevertheless be penetrating. There must be a clear distinction made before one can know what to take and what to reject. The expediency of externals must be destroyed, but the *upaya* of the inner reality must be cultivated.³⁵ The principle devoid of the actual is coarse; the Truth fully in accord with the

32. Often cited to show the position that "Pure Land is Mind Only."

33. A dictum also used by the early Ch'an patriarch, Tao-hsin.

34. Real Principle : the Principle in a particularized form such as Pure Land.

35. Principle and Truth are universal; actual and means are particularistic. A proper combination can be fruitful.

means is truly subtle. Thus in Hinayana there is no teaching about other Buddhas³⁶ (such as Amitabha), whereas Mahayana speaks of the myriad ocean realms. This is because the essence of the Mind permeates all. The Dharma realm is so expansive in its Principle that there is nothing outside of it and, therefore, the actualities can be the more encompassing.³⁷ The Lotus Womb is so cosmic that the pond of enlightenment is so much more deep. The realms are like Indra's Net of jewels, their manifestations endless and non-obstructing. This way it can well show the principle of the quiescent Light (of the Pure Land).³⁸ The substance is like heaven's ambrosia, so that its response to men is always individualized. This way it well shows the nature of sun-like³⁹ brilliance. Can we not see then that the Supreme Bliss is ultimately of the (inner) Mind Only? Thus the *tathagatagarbha* (Buddha-womb) is replete with *nirvāṇa* and in accordance with the conditions, the latter would show itself. If it (our mind) can reveal Heavens and Hells, is it not also the architect of the impure world as well as the Pure Land? Our nature is replete with all realities.⁴⁰ According to our mental states, realities will be manifested. Amitabha has relied on his conditionless compassion to so chose⁴¹ this land of Supreme Bliss. Śākyamuni has happily discoursed on it, showing thereby this gate of birth in Pure Land. All those are acts of expediency to induce the lost lot drowning in *samsāra*, to enable those who fear they might backslide not to backslide, and to enable those who cannot contemplate well to achieve a contemplative vision (of the Pure Land). There are many skilful uses but here I just list these two.⁴²

Following T'ien-t'ai Buddhology, Chih-li distinguishes a naive, externalized understanding of Pure Land and the proper internalized

36. *Sic.*: Hinayana does teach about other Buddhas. What is meant here is the "simultaneous existence of Buddhas, Buddhas in other spheres".

37. Punctuation in the Taisho is wrong.

38. A technical term: quiescent Light describes the highest of Pure Lands, one with the Dharmakāya, in the T'ien-t'ai system of Four Pure Lands.

39. Vairocana, the Sun Buddha: symbol of total enlightenment, Dharmakaya.

40. See note 21 on this *hsing-chu* ideology.

41. In the *avadāna* of Amitābha, he shopped for and chose the Pure Land.

42. T. 47, p. 202ab.

understanding of it as an aspect of the Mind.⁴³ The latter is legitimate and not contrary to Wisdom. Why is it necessary to depend on such realistic means?

Thus the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* says, "Those beginning students of the true faith of Mahāyāna who recognize that the earth is often without a living Buddha and who fear that (without direct guidance) their faith might backslide, should know there is this superior means revealed by the Buddha that would enable them not to backslide. They should contemplate on the Realm of Supreme Bliss, the Dharmakāya of Amitābha, Suchness itself. So doing, he would be born in that land."⁴⁴ Because he so relied on that Buddha as the object (of his focused attention),⁴⁵ he can be drawn to that land. Such is the Buddha's use of skilful means. Or, as the *Amitābha-dhyāna (?) Sūtra* says, "The common person has an inferior mind. He had not the Heavenly Eyes (of the enlightened) and therefore he cannot look far or deep. The myriad Buddhas have this exceptional means that allows them to see."⁴⁶ This is the supernatural power of Śākyamuni, the vow and wish of Amitābha. If one harbours the right perspective,⁴⁷ he can surely see it. This too is the unusual power of the Enlightened Lord. Since this expediency corresponds well with the "round" (perfect, Wisdom) teaching, therefore it is not different from the fine expediency of the *Lotus Sūtra* (endorsed by the T'ien-t'ai school). Gods, mankind, the *śravākas* (listeners), the *pratyakabuddhas* (solitary buddhas), the *bodhisattvas* seeking the perfection, and the great men who pursue the path of gradual cultivation fill the world, in numbers as many as the sands of the

43. The perfect dialectician, Chih-li was engaged in a controversy over the status of the Pure Land. He ended up rejecting the total identity of Mind and Pure Land as well as the externality of Pure Land. The two are correlates (*yueh*); see note above.

44. From the Siksanda version where the word "Dharmakāya" is explicit.

45. Note the form of Amitābha is used as a symbol of the Dharmakāya—not as *sambhogakāya*.

46. The *Kuan-ching* affords "iconic meditation" for those who need such aids.

47. *Kuan* (perspective) is also the word for *vipāsana* (contemplative discernment). So the Three Perspectives are "objective" (as aspects) as it is also, correlatedly, "subjective (as *vipāsana* states of mind).

Ganges.⁴⁸ This is not something that can be known even to the profoundest of our minds.⁴⁹ Only the Buddhas as Buddhas can understand them fully. Only the perfect faith and the perfect understanding (wisdom) can truly complete the task.⁵⁰

The ultimate is so extraordinary that expediencies are more than necessities. The path of Faith—leading to Wisdom—is almost imperative for all beings less than Buddhas. Since we are not that sublime, Faith is only natural.

Chih-li finally talks in personal terms. After the abstractions of the perfect "One Mind with Three Perspectives," and after the mystification of the Ultimate and the glorification of Buddhas' compassionate means, we come to man himself. The "God of Philosophers" is usually a God of the Mind in one form or another, but the philosopher is more than pure Mind. His intelligence and his intelligent universe notwithstanding, he is also a person, a common man. The thinker who weaves the grandiose dialectics of the Real, Empty and Middle knows well, perhaps better than the casual layman with some intelligence, the human limits of Reason, therefore, often shows greater humility. This last section is far too long to be included in full, and so the translation will be more selective.

Chih-li began by noting how despite his commitment to the perfect Wisdom the appeal of the Pure Land path remains. This is because of a basic existential uncertainty in the arduous path of Wisdom, an oft-cited reason for relying on the easier way of Amitābha—not as a substitute but as an aid, for that same Wisdom.

Although I, Chih-li, am dull-witted and have dabbled in this perfect ("round") teaching, I have never discarded that thought (about Pure Land). I still wish to be born in that land wherein even the lowliest person would not backslide (from attaining

48. An apology for the mystery of the spiritual universe—more things in Heaven and on Earth than philosophers had dreamt of—and a call to be humble, to "have faith" or "take heart" in Amitābha.

49. Famous idiom: Such things as known only among the Enlightened.

50. T. 47, p. 202b.

enlightenment)⁵¹ . . . (Contrasted with the difficulties lying in wait for the usual practitioner), how can one not desire this promise of benefits? Thus I would use the "One Mind with Three Perspectives" as the boat, and the "Six Times of Fivefold Repentance" as the oar, in the hope of arriving at the "Pure Land of the Mind Only" and seeing the "Amitābha that is One's Nature."⁵² . . .

He admitted that Yang-i was right when he said that the usual like and dislike would create the fallacy of the seer and the seen. However, he made a just distinction between worldly cravings and true *bodhisattvic* aspiration :

The sentient lot, trapped in the *sahā* universe, desires after the coarse, the ill, the forms and the sensate, being thus fixated with the inferior ends. They not only do not have the abhorrence for such crass cravings, but ever more so accumulate further worldly bondages . . . Therefore the various Buddhas, for the sake of men, would procure the pure realms through their vows and deeds, so that men might (in seeing them) arouse the necessary inclinations (for the pure) so as to be born therein . . .⁵³ (There, in the pure surrounding,) men might attain the right meditation . . . to know that the Pure Land is Mind Only just as the defiled world is as much due to our own nature. So doing, one may harbour no abhorrence even in the midst of the abhorrible, aspire for nothing beyond while in the midst of the transcendental.⁵⁴ In this way, the major practice [Wisdom] and the auxiliary practice [Faith] are cultivated simultaneously. Liberation [by Wisdom] and practice [in faith] go hand in hand, in full accordance with the teaching of the Buddha.

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51. This is the original design of the Pure Land, namely, when our world is without a reigning Buddha, men of weak hearts can appeal to this Buddha of Long Life (i. e. eternal presence) in his different sphere (Pure Land). Rebirth in his land permits one to daily listen to the Dharma and not backslide.
52. Basic idioms in the Idealist interpretation of Pure Land.
53. Buddhas create a "pure sphere" to lure men on to the nirvāṇic goal.
54. Because what we desire and abhor are truly things within us. Ideally, one desires, abhors, and then, through the Middle, transcends them both. In T'ien-t'ai Idealism the goal is comprehensive Totalism.

Chih-li then explained why he nonetheless contemplated the extreme measure of a three-year-long confession followed by the fiery self-donation.

Even as I, Chih-li, so use the Three Perspectives to train my mind, and use the Five Repentances to help me on the way, still I am fearful that I have not enough pure causes. Thus I decide that the termination of life (yogic style) has an important function. By this extreme act of condition at the last moment of one's life, I hope to find the definitive act leading to birth in Pure Land.

He then cited several scriptures as the justifications for such acts of utter singleminded devotion to the *Dharma*. Ultimately, it is not the immolation itself, but the state of mind at death that secures one's eternal destiny.

Thus (Master Chih-li) said, "The contemplative mind at the moment of death, that is the Pure Land itself. The aroused thought (aspiring for birth in Pure Land) is itself the moment of that entrance into that realm." If one so discards this plagued body, then when all the defilements are gone, what Principle would not be illuminated? If so one takes to the Pure Land, then as it penetrates to the fountainhead of all purities, what delusions can there be which cannot be dispelled?

Returning at this point to the dialectics of the Three Aspects, by applying them to the issue of the impure, the pure and their transcendence, Chih-li gives us this relevant re-interpretation:

Because all realities are Empty, therefore one discards completely all that is defiled. Because all realities are Real, one takes fully to the numinal purity without missing any. Because all realities are Middle, one has actually neither take nor forsake.⁵⁵

In this way, Chih-li harmonized Wisdom and Faith. Faith does not contradict Wisdom; Wisdom does not dispense with Faith. Wisdom satisfies the Mind; Faith the living personality. Without Wisdom, Faith becomes gross and even superstitious—projecting a paradise like some alien land beyond our inner selves. Without Faith, Wisdom

55. This last long section has been abridged from T. 47, pp. 202c-203b.

is somewhat cold, inhuman and far too difficult to achieve within men's lifetime. In the end, there should also be a Middle Path between the two, a same balance and dialectics typical of T'ien-t'ai. Only the mutual practice, each in each, is the perfect way.

This is a fine picture, a perfect, "round" picture.

But as some purist Faith spokesman would say, this is a formula based on Wisdom.⁵⁶ The major practice, the boat, is Wisdom; Faith remains the auxiliary aid, the oars. By a kind of *sola fides* standard, Chih-li remained a Gnostic first, a pietist next, wherein Faith is the means, a handmaid to Wisdom. There is some base for this judgement, especially if we choose to look at him as a thinker and at his rational arguments.⁵⁷ However, before we pass that hasty "protestant" judgement upon this "catholic" thinker, we should take note of a historical fact, an irony perhaps and a side of Chih-li's character too easily overlooked if we focus only on the "philosopher" and his "God of philosophy."⁵⁸ As we said in the beginning, Chih-li founded one of the most populace-oriented *nien-fo* society, 10,000 members strong, and one that produced offshoots. In his role as an evangelical, he did not mention the One Mind with Three Aspects doctrine. In the short treatise, "A Call to Join the Nien-fo Society," we discover, as expected, a much simpler, more faith-centred, message. It ends in a simple call to chant the Buddha's name :

Just follow the words of the Buddha.
Follow not the way of man.

Immediately cease all attachments. Simply just diligently *nien-fo*.⁵⁹ Chih-li might meditate, but surely his large following would simply chant. We have already mentioned how Genshin requested instructions from Chih-li, and we know Genshin also founded *nembutsu*

56. I have in mind the Shinshu perspective. To it, the aforesaid is the Heian Tendai understanding of Pure Land, which indeed it is.

57. Better argued because Wisdom is more rational; and both are more universal than the particularism, personalism and elements of the irrational will in most doctrines of Faith.

58. See T. 47, p. 203b: hint to a "hidden, deep-seated aspiration" that even the rational Chih-li could not discount or discard.

59. T. 47, p. 203c.

societies for "mixed congregations" (monks and laymen). One person Genshin's popular teachings touched was Honen, and through him, Shinran. Out of that came the more purist Faith tradition of the Jōdōshū and Jōdōshinshū. Likewise, in China, a spiritual son of Chih-li was Mou Tzu-yüan, founder of the White Lotus Teaching, which in one generation also turned into a dubiously "lay clerical" movement.⁶⁰ Chih-li (or Genshin) might be a philosopher at heart, committed to the Three Perspectives and placing Wisdom above Faith. Both however, stooped to conquer the populace, and in moments of their more personal, practical or simple piety, they were endorsers of Faith. From that came the purer Faith movements. The end-result might not have been anticipated by these scholar-monks, but they were certainly the ones who opened the flood-gate. They brought the Wisdom/Faith tension into the open and actually encouraged or instigated its future schism.

We began our discussion with an East/West contrast, how the Faith/Wisdom tradition is more exaggerated in the Christian West. Through several turns, all intentional, we draw out, at least, sociologically and psychologically, the greater East/West similarity. This is for the purpose of highlighting the complexities of a key, perhaps universally human issue, in the hope of calling attention to the problem, soliciting further investigations, with sympathy as well as acumen.⁶¹ I have chosen to stay with one letter, a minor document perhaps, but, given the context, an important landmark in the historical dynamics of Buddhist faith in China.

60. On this, see my manuscript on Mou Tzu-yüan and the Founding of the White Lotus; *The Limits of Orthodoxy* (1978).

61. And some tolerance from textual philologists who think otherwise.