

Contemplation: Practice, Doctrine and Wisdom in the Teaching of Zhiyi (538-597)

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INTRODUCTION

It is not easy to define the type of experience initiated by practice and cultivation in Tiantai Buddhism. There are manifold methods of practice and cultivation in Tiantai Buddhism, but all of them are predominantly linked with the Chinese term for contemplation (*guan*). The terminological roots of the Chinese expression *guan* originate in Indian Buddhism, where it is called *vipasyana* and means examine, contemplate, consider illusion and discern illusion, contemplate and mentally enter into truth.¹ It is a fundamental concept of all Buddhist schools, but Tiantai Buddhists elevate it to a distinct doctrine. It would go beyond the frame of this paper to give a comprehensive survey of contemplation throughout various Buddhist schools.² What I intend to do here is to show how “Contemplation” works as a self-sufficient concept, wisdom and practice that allows one to live a spiritual experience without having to narrate or to represent it. This in turn might help us to identify species of spiritual traditions determined by varying relationships to the categories of narration and contemplation.

The inaugurator of the scholastic system of Tiantai doctrines, Zhiyi (538-597) explicitly dedicated several works to the doctrine of contemplation. His most important thoughts about this doctrine are expounded in the *Cidi chan men* (*Gate of the Gradual Meditation*), the *Liu miao men* (*Gate of the Six Subtleties*) and the *Mohe zhiguan* (=MHZG *Great Calming and Contemplation*). But in his other important works like the *Fahua xuanyi* (=FHXY *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus*), *Fahua wenju* (*A Textual Commentary on the Lotus*), *Weimo Lueshu* (*An*

1 This term frequently occurs in the binom *samatha vipasyana* (*zhiguan*) in Buddhist texts. Zhiyi's famous work *Mohe zhiguan* (*The Great Calming and Contemplation*) also stresses the indivisibility of both concepts during the practitioner's course of cultivation. Calming emphasizes the achievements that the practitioner obtains through concentration like the ending of desires etc. Contemplation represents the insight that the practitioner has achieved. But Zhiyi also employs the sole expression of *guanxin* (contemplating the mind). See W.F. Soothill, *A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms*, Taipei 1976, p. 489.

2 See the Japanese study of Sekiguuchi Shindai, *Shikan no Kenkyuu*, Tokyou 1975.

Abbreviated Commentary on the Vimalakirti Sutra), it is equally as important as it is in the afore mentioned works too.³

The immanent approach to understanding its structure, content, relevance and systematical position within Zhiyi's scholastic system of doctrines requires an outline of its terminological interrelation with other crucial concepts expressing the core of Tiantai thoughts. The most fundamental sources of this doctrine will be found in the three major works of Tiantai (*San dabu*): *Mohe zhiguan*, *Fahua xuanyi* and *Fahua wenju*.⁴ I will follow the immanent approach according to the subsequent issues:

The first question concerns the type of experience intended by contemplation. The focus of awareness in contemplation is the action of contemplative awareness itself, expressed by the Chinese term "mental activity" (*xin*). Mental activity is regarded as the source shaping things in the way they appear to the mind, because the presence of all things cannot be separated from the awareness of consciousness. Any object of consciousness is regarded as a thing. The appearance of things is understood as the result of mental activity, and mental activity's appearance itself cannot be but a thing because its presence is not beyond the awareness of consciousness.⁵ Contemplative awareness is mental activity contemplating itself. Contemplative awareness simultaneously is actor (*neng*) and object being acted upon (*suo*)⁶. The content of its experience is the introspection of mental activity (*guanxin*). If the appearance of all things is a product of mental activity and mental activity's appearance is nothing but a thing, then its true nature becomes evident by a deconstructing that is shaped by mental activity. The objects of deconstruction are the false views about things appearing to be outside to mental activity. Therefore, Zhiyi says that introspection is the deconstruction (*po*) of that appears to be outside by means of contemplation, in order to see mental activity from inside.⁷ In the section *Universal Deconstruction of Dharmas* from the *Great Calming and*

3 For a comprehensive survey on Zhiyi's development and system of the doctrine *zhiguan*, its influence from his master's (Nanyue Huisi 515-577) teaching about the Lotus-sutra and its later development by Jingqi Zhanran (711-782) and Siming Zhili (960-1028), see the Japanese study of Toshio Andou, *Tendaigaku*, Kyouto 1968.

4 See *Taishou shinshuu daizokyou* = T. T 46, 1911; T 33,1716; T 34, 1718. These works are records of Zhiyi's sermons from 587 to 593 compiled by his disciple Guanding (561-632).

5 See Zhiyi, *Sinianchu* T 46.578a. In this section, Zhiyi explains the non-duality between wisdom and its object, between mental-activity and material form (*sexin buer*). Mental activity is understood as consciousness and material form as its object acted upon.

6 Ibid. see also Jingqi Zhanran's (711-782) short treatise *Shi buer men* (*The Gate of Ten Non-Dualities*), T 46, 1929. For an English translation of it, see Ra Lang-Eun, *The T'ien-t'ai Philosophy of Non-Duality: A Study in Chan-jan and Chih-li*. Ph.D. temple Univ. 1988.

7 See Zhiyi *Sinianchu* T 46.578c.

Contemplation (Mohe zhiguan), Zhiyi explains in detail what deconstruction in virtue of contemplation means.⁸ Deconstruction in virtue of contemplation consists of a refutation of all possible ontological propositions about the origin and being of mental activity. This detailed refutation is based on rationalistic arguments showing that each of the propositions contains contradictions. Its structure is subdivided according to the scheme of the four alternatives (*siju*) encompassing the assertion of the proposition, its negation, the synthesis of the two, and the transcendence of the two.⁹ Experience of introspection caused by this type of contemplation can hardly be defined as religious experience. The question of how to define the experience intended by contemplation will be one of the issues of this paper.

The second question concerns the manner in which it is expounded in the above mentioned Tiantai texts. Generally, terminology in Tiantai-Buddhist texts from Zhiyi and Guanding (561-632)¹⁰ appears to be like an organism consisting of interrelated concepts. Tiantai concepts establish a systematic combination and continuity between doctrinal speculation, methods for practice, cultivation, concentration and its resulting experience of introspection.

The crucial concept of contemplation combines the three important contents of Tiantai-teaching: theoretical reflection in terms of doctrinal articulation, practice in terms of methods of cultivation and concentration, and experience in terms of introspection. The way in which its complexity is expounded in the major Tiantai-text cannot be described as narrative. The concept of contemplation appears as a highly speculative notion within these strictly and systematically subdivided texts of Tiantai-teaching, though simultaneously articulating practical instructions for all diverse kinds of sentient beings in order to achieve the final merits in terms of salvation (*jietuo*). Contemplation is represented as both a speculative and instructive concept in Tiantai-texts, thus combining practical experience and theoretical reflection.

The third point concerns its final purpose within Zhiyi's teaching. Its final purpose is said to be commonly shared by all sentient beings as their universal salvation (*du zhongsheng*) and relief from suffering that is supposed to be an indivisible part of their existence prior to this salvation.

8 See MHZG T 46.59b-85a.

9 The scheme of four alternatives (*catuskoti, siju*) is a common pattern of arranging all possible propositions in respect to a topic discussed in Buddhist texts. See, Hans Sturm, *Weder Sein noch Nichtsein – Der Urteilsvierkant und seine Korollarien im östlichen und westlichen Denken*, Augsburg 1995.

10 Guanding was the disciple of Zhiyi who recorded Zhiyi's sermons and compiled it to the FHXV, FHWJ and MHZG; these so called *Three Major Works of Tiantai* were Zhiyi's sermons between 578-593.

Contemplation neither indicates sole subjectivity of spiritual experience nor mystical experience nor ecstasy.¹¹ It does not even denote a path leading the practitioner to the experience of some transcendental sphere beyond the immediate concreteness of existence, although its object is described by words like inconceivable, ineffable (*bukeshuo*, *bukeshiyi*) etc..¹²

Its ultimate purpose rather is the entire salvation of all sentient beings realized through the practitioner's universal and simultaneously concrete wisdom (*yiqie zhongzhi*). Cultivation and realization of universal wisdom consist of these acts of contemplation, initiated by the single person's practice. Practice of contemplation and cultivation for one's own person is supposed to be capable of initiating a process of transformation extending to others. Universal salvation of all sentient beings initiated by the single person's practice accords with the idea of entelechy that initiating practice contains the potency of fulfilling the entire process of universal transformation: transformation of sentient beings is caused through transformation of the single person that in turn is caused by this single person's own practice. Fundamentally, Tiantai teaching deals with the idea of entelechy that transformation of others is based on one's own transformation, the two poles of one's own transformation and that of others are indivisible within this process of universal salvation. Viewed from the standpoint of ultimate contemplation and its highest achievement, Zhiyi says that there is no distinction between self and others.¹³ Human nature seems to be understood through this common process of general transformation. Based on the *Avatamsaka-sutra*, Zhiyi stresses the non-distinction of one's own actual moment of awareness, the state of ignorant mind of sentient beings and the awakened mind of the Buddha.¹⁴ Fundamentally, the essence of mental activity, — no matter whether it is viewed from the standpoint of the self or that of others, from the standpoint of the unenlightened or the enlightened, — essentially remains unchangeable, its distinct courses of manifestation only express the alternating degree of achievement in transformation. Each single sentient being is involved in this common process of universal transformation, because its nature of mental activity is its property for transformation. Perception of suffering is the common mark of all sentient beings, it is the most fundamental mark of mental activity in general, it initiates the impulse to strive for relief from suffering, that in turn

11 See N. Donner, *Chih-i's meditation on Evil*, In: *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society*, D.W. Chappell (ed.) 1987, 49-64. In his article, Donner associates contemplation with mysticism and intuition.

12 See MHZG T 46.55b.

13 See MHZG T 46.80b16-25.

14 See MHZG T 46.9a and *Avatamsaka-sutra* T 9.465a

is the basis for transformation.¹⁵ The diversity of sentient beings is understood as a manifestation of different degrees of transformation within this universal process, determined by sentient beings' quality of mental activity.

Zhiyi's teaching tries to outline the order, sections and functions of this universal transformation encompassing all sentient beings but initiated by one's own conduct of cultivation. The experience of one's own transformation does not only prove the transformation of human being in general, (that is the transformation of others too), but also qualifies the practitioner's ability for transformation of others.

FOUNDATION OF CONTEMPLATION

Zhiyi's teaching deals with contemplation leading to universal wisdom in virtue of mental-activity's property of transformation. It simultaneously comprises both the theoretical reflection about this property of transformation and its instructive exploration of how to realize it. In fact, thus his teaching has been already becoming the very act of contemplation of mental activity itself. His teaching itself must be understood as being nothing but the immediate embodiment of the self reflecting act of contemplation of mental activity. It embodies the concrete and immediate expression of mental-activity's innate nature, its property of transformation, experienced and embodied through the introspective act of transforming contemplation. Therefore, comprehension of and comprehension through his teaching is introspection of mental activity by itself leading to the wholesome fruits of Buddhist wisdom.

For this reason, Zhiyi says that mental activity is the source of teaching (*jiào*), contemplation (*guān*) and wisdom (*zhì*).¹⁶ On the other hand, teaching is the gate for contemplation, which in turn is the gate for wisdom, that in turn explores and illuminates the inner nature of mental activity, its property of transformation that has been being source of teaching, contemplation and wisdom.¹⁷ Mental activity's property of transformation is more commonly expressed as the "buddhanature" (*fóxìng*) of all sentient beings. The designation of buddhanature denotes this property of transformation within mental activity. Sentient beings are sentient beings because of obtaining mental activity, predominantly marked by perception of suffering; this in turn causes sentient beings to strive for release from suffering and to initiate

15 Zhiyi identifies the *dharmakaya* (*fáshēn*, =the incarnation of the Buddhadharma) with the perception of suffering in the FHX Y T 33.686a.

16 See FHX Y T 33.685c and T 33.778c.

17 See MHZG T 46.59b.

a process of transformation. Zhiyi says that any sentient being is gifted with buddhanature and thus is able to obtain the wisdom of a Buddha that is the presupposition for his ideal of universal salvation.¹⁸ Transformation based on teaching is nothing but introspection initiated by mental activity, leading to the wholesome fruit of universal salvation. Zhiyi's idea of teaching and transformation (*jiaohua*) concisely expressed as "striving for the higher, in order to save the lower" (*qiushang jiu Xia*) is regarded as mental activity's innate nature realized through its introspection.¹⁹

The gate of teaching (*jiaomen*) expresses the doctrinal level of theoretical reflection, represented by the entire bulk of Buddhist classical literature. The gate of contemplation (*guanmen*) realizes the practical path and its experience of concentration and introspection like the practice of *samadhi* (*sanmeidi*) and *dhyana* (*chan*). Within the level of wisdom (*zhimen*) the preceding levels of teaching and contemplation are indivisibly melted together.²⁰ Viewed from that standpoint, Zhiyi says that contemplation and teaching are the two wings of one bird or the two wheels of one vehicle.²¹ This expresses the non-duality of theoretical reflection and practical experience in Zhiyi's concept of wisdom. Theoretical reflection itself is one part of this diversified type of practice considered as this process of universal transformation. The universal principle of practice reflects itself through the articulation of teaching, that is, the doctrinal level of theoretical reflection. Practice of speculative thinking is the theoretically reflective part of contemplation.

The foundation of contemplation is the above mentioned Chinese term *xin* or "mental activity", from which accomplishment of universal wisdom realized through its acts of contemplation arises and proceeds. Mental activity is a very complex and fundamental concept comprising all diverse kinds of activity belonging to the consciousness, like perception, thought, feeling, desire and will. Mental activity is regarded as fundamental, because things that seem to exist in the way of how they appear are causally linked with that consciousness to which they appear in that way. Viewed from that standpoint, Zhiyi concludes, due to the *Avatamsaka-sutra* and the *Treatise of Great Wisdom*, that any object has to be predominantly regarded as a phenomenon of consciousness.²²

The opposite term of contemplation and wisdom is fundamental ignorance (*genben wuming*), the fundamental cause for all sentient beings'

18 See FHX Y T 33.744a-b.

19 See MHZG T 46.19a.

20 See MHZG T 46.59c.

21 See Zhiyi, *Xiuxi zhiguan zichan fayao* T 46.462b.

22 See MHZG T 46.52a10-52b1 and T 9.465a.

condition of suffering (*ku*).²³ Suffering is the result of an inversion into illusion (*diandao xuwang*): originally non-abiding (*buzhu*) existence of empirical objects appears to be like an abiding or fixed object, to which the deluded mind is attached through its habitual tendencies. In virtue of these habitual tendencies (*xiqi*) originally non-abiding content of one's perceptions, thoughts, desires etc. has been recognized, marked, distinguished, hypostasized and substancialized into a discrete entity, but its abidingness contradicts its authentic or original mode of non-abidingness. This hypostasis is an illusory inversion from non-abidingness into abidingness, from its original or authentic mode (*zhendi*) into its conventional mode (*sudi*), from real (*shi*) to unreal (*xu*). Distinctive marks always denote the condition of ignorance. The attached mind constantly has to experience the loss of that it tries to hold in vain, thus sentient beings' life is inevitably marked by suffering. The root of suffering is the deluded state of mind called ignorance.

But mental activity is fundamental for both contemplative wisdom as well as ignorance, wisdom is transformation of ignorance, and transformation is annihilation of inversion, which means deconstruction of illusions.²⁴ The unwholesome state of sentient being's existence is overshadowed by ignorance, whereas ultimate wisdom is linked with universal salvation. Fundamentally, both wisdom as well as ignorance are mental activity, accordingly the unwholesome state of sentient beings' existence (*samsara*) is essentially not different from the wholesome conditions of universal salvation (*nirvana*).²⁵ Distinction (*fenbie*) is a mark of ignorance only, and non-duality (*buer*) is a mark of wisdom.

Due to the *Prajnaparamita-sutras* Zhiyi also says that the real mark (*zhufa shixiang*) of all *dharmas*, that is the real mark of all things and all rules, is devoid of any distinctive marks (*wuxiang*), that is nothing but the only mark (*yixiang*), the nature of all *dharmas* (*faxing*).²⁶ Epistemologically, dharmanature devoid of distinctions is the opposite of ignorance producing distinctions. Ontologically, dharmanature and ignorance are not different but identical in terms of their essence, because "there is no duality between *samsara* and *nirvana*", as Zhiyi frequently quotes it from the *Mulamadhyamika-karika*.²⁷

Their paradoxical identification, frequently found in Tiantai texts, denotes the twofold and opposite tendencies for both illusion and wisdom in

23 The concept of fundamental ignorance is a term frequently used by Nanyue Huisi (515-577), the teacher of Zhiyi.

24 See MHZG, the section of *Universal Deconstruction of Dharmas* T 46.59b-84a.

25 See *Mulamadhyamika-karika* (*Zhonglun*) T 30.36a and *Dazhidu lun* T 25.752a10-12.

26 There are several locations of this quotation throughout all works of Zhiyi.

27 See T 30.36a.

mental activity. Zhiyi develops the paradoxical relationship between the ontological and epistemological viewpoint one step further, expressed by the phrase: “the one moment of mental-activity consisting of dharmanature and ignorance” (*yinian wuminigfaxing xin*).²⁸ The immediate moment of non-abiding existence, simultaneously experienced as and experienced by the one moment of mental-activity (*yinian xin*) itself, is authentic or true (*zhen*) in its dynamic mode during its immediate presence only, but its distinct content is illusory by its very nature, because distinctions are considered as illusory results of fundamental ignorance. Since being recognized as a distinctive thing the object of perception, thought etc. is hypostasized into an abiding entity, contradicting its originally non-abiding existence. The immediate act of any moment of thought, perception etc. is real but its content, the distinct object of that moment of consciousness is necessarily illusory. But there is no moment of mental activity not being related to a distinct object overshadowed by ignorance. In the same way there is no appearance of objects beyond mental activity that is real in terms of its dynamic and immediate presence only. In its original and dynamic mode it is not the phenomenon of a perceived object. Its immediacy is beyond articulation and conception, it is inconceivable (*bukesiyi*).²⁹ Paradoxically, this inconceivable realm of dharmanature, which is the ground of immediate presence of existing things, must include its inversion into ignorance producing all kinds of distinctions, the marks of the conceivable realm. The ground of diversity and the ground of immediate presence of existence are dialectically unified within each moment of mental activity.

THE THREEFOLD CONTEMPLATION

From a Buddhist viewpoint, impermanent entities of the empirical world are supposed to be devoid of an abiding substance. Buddhists understand abidingness or permanence of being as self-nature or self-being (*svabhava, zixing*) on which an object’s existence is based. An object’s existence conditioned by its nature is supposed to be an entity containing permanent self-being and thus contradicting to the impermanence of the empirical world. Absence of permanent self-being (*wuzixing*) in empirical entities is called emptiness (*kong*). Emptiness only denies self-being of empirical entities but not their impermanent and provisional existence (*jiayou*). For this reason, existence of empirical entities is said not to be based on their self-being nature, their existence arises through conditioned co-arising (*yuanyi*), but their conditions are in the same way empty or devoid of self-being.

28 Zhiyi, *Sinianchu* T 46.578c.

29 See MHZG T 46.55b.

Fundamentally, conditioned co-arising means ultimate emptiness (*bijīng kong*). It only denies self-being but not existence, it does not express nothingness. Empirical objects provisionally designated (*jīaming*) as such, are nothing but ultimate emptiness. On the other hand, provisional existence of conditioned co-arising identified with emptiness does not include non-existence. In order to emphasize its ontological status of “nor self-being neither non-existence” (*fěiyōu fěiwū*), Zhiyi stresses the middle way (*zhōng dào*) transcending self-being (*yōu*) and non-existence (*wū*) due to the *Mūlamādhyamika-kārika* and the *Dazhīdū Lùn* (*The Treatise of Great Wisdom*).³⁰

In Tiantai-Buddhism, the middle way does not only denote the transcendence of the two opposite extremes of self-being and non-existence in conditioned co-arising. It rather stresses the synthesis of provisional existence (*yōu*) and non (self)-being (*wū*), the mutual identity of the provisional (*jīa*) and emptiness (*kōng*).³¹ The three aspects of the middle, provisional and emptiness are perfectly integrated, which is called “perfectly integrated threefold truth” (*yuanrōng sāndī*)³²: there is no middle way, not simultaneously being provisional and emptiness; no emptiness, not simultaneously being provisional and middle way; no provisional not simultaneously being the middle way and emptiness. Since all of the three components pervade each other, Zhiyi also speaks of the threefold unity and the united threefoldness (*sānyī yīsān*).³³ This principle is valid for all discrete entities and notions holding an epistemic-propositional status in verbal articulation.

The threefold truth could be considered as the central concept of Tiantai doctrines, its content combines different levels: firstly, it expresses the relativistic standpoint in respect to ontological speculation; secondly, it accounts as a paradigm of truth for all doctrines holding an epistemic-propositional status, in this function it becomes the fundamental hermeneutical principle, on which the classification of doctrines and the periodization of *sūtras* are based due to the Tiantai view; thirdly, it is the crucial concept that combines theory and practice.

30 See T 30.33b and T 25.147c

31 See MHZG T 46.55b, FHXY T 33.781b, 693b9-25, *Sījiao yī* T 46.728a. For a study about the ambiguity of the Chinese terms *yōu* and *wū*, see P. Swanson, *The Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy. The Flowering of the Two Truths in Chinese Buddhism*, 1989.

32 See FHXY T 33.705a5-7

33 Ibid.

Spoken in terms of practice it is called threefold contemplation (*sanguan*)³⁴ encompassing the “contemplation about entering emptiness from [unwholesome] provisional” (*cong jia ru kong guan*), “contemplation about entering [wholesome] provisional from emptiness” (*cong kong ru jia guan*), “contemplation of the middle” (*zhongdao guan*).³⁵ Threefold contemplation most skillfully conducted is the simultaneous application of the three modes of contemplation within one moment of mental activity. Zhiyi calls it the “threefold contemplation within one moment of mental activity” (*yixin sanguan*).³⁶ This type of contemplation is the highest level of all kinds of contemplation, expressed through the highest level of doctrinal articulation, called perfect teaching (*yuanjiao*). It also expresses the totality and unity of the infinite ways distinctively fitting to various conditions and thus leading to salvation. For, a person being able to realize this contemplation has accomplished the “universal and particular wisdom” (*yiqie zhongzhi*) ascribed to the Buddha only.³⁷ Universal wisdom (*yiqie zhi*) relates to ultimate emptiness of any object; this is the first mode of contemplation. It deconstructs (*po*) the unwholesome provisional illusorily considered as discrete entity that in turn is based on the false view of self-nature. Particular wisdom (*dao zhong zhi*) relates to the diversity of sentient beings that has to follow distinct paths of salvation because of their distinct faculties; this wisdom corresponds to the second mode of contemplation.³⁸ It establishes (*li*) the wholesome provisional in terms of expedient means, like doctrinal articulation of various *buddhadharmas* fitting to different sentient beings. The third mode combines the universality of ultimate emptiness with the particularity of the wholesome provisional considered as expedient means and distinctively fitting to the concrete and changing conditions of salvation. This third mode of contemplation pervades each moment of the practitioner’s course of acting due to the path of universal salvation for himself and others. It is neither exclusively deconstructing nor exclusively establishing, it is well aware of both the wholesome and unwholesome character of the provisional. Based on the contemplation of emptiness, it avoids unwholesome provisionality; based on the contemplation of wholesome provisionality, it avoids nothingness. It simultaneously applies the two modes of contemplation, without being attached to one of them

34 Originally this expression occurs in the apocryphical sutra *Yingluo jing* for the first time, see T 24.1014b19-23. A concise explanation of this concept from Zhiyi, see MHZG T 46.24b-c.

35 See MHZG T 46.24b-c and T 46.62b-83a.

36 See MHZG T 46.55b.

37 This expression is borrowed from the *Treatise of Great Wisdom*, it is one part of the threefold wisdom, see t 25.259a21-25.

38 Zhiyi matches together the concept of threefold wisdom from the *Treatise of Great Wisdom* and that of threefold contemplation from the *Yingluo jing*, see MHZG T 46.56c

exclusively, in this way it is the contemplation of the middle way, not exclusively contemplating either emptiness or the provisional but integrating both of them simultaneously. It is most fundamental because it contemplates the origin of phenomena shaped through mental activity. Its object of contemplation is the twofold nature of mental activity, firstly that ignorance originally is dharmanature, and secondly that there is no dharmanature beyond ignorance.³⁹

In virtue of this contemplation the indivisibility of dharmanature and ignorance becomes evident; the two are related to one another like emptiness and provisional existence too. Nature of all things [= *dharmas*] is ultimate emptiness paradoxically not being beyond the provisional that in turn is a product of ignorance, because it cannot be but perceived as a distinctive entity. Ignorance originally is dharmanature, and dharmanature is not beyond ignorance.⁴⁰ The attempt to escape the world of illusion and reach a transcendental sphere of dharmanature is based on an illusion caused through ignorance too. To understand illusion as illusion and to respond to it constantly in a proper way accords with this mode of contemplation. Even the distinction between the salvation of oneself and that of others is in the same way illusory. For that reason, Zhiyi says that it is contemplation neither for the exclusive benefit of oneself nor for exclusive benefit of others⁴¹, it is absolute contemplation (*juedui guan*) devoid of establishing fixed relations between distinct entities.⁴² Therefore, it is for the benefit of oneself and of others simultaneously, it contemplates the totality of universal transformation. Accordingly, it encompasses all infinite ways of properly responding to any kind of conditions.

The transformation of sentient beings' existence into their universal salvation through one's achievements of ultimate and universal wisdom consists of a process that involves transformation of one's own mental activity and that of others simultaneously.⁴³ Finally, one's own personal purpose of salvation and universally that of all sentient beings are indivisible from each other. This leads to another important link stressed in Zhiyi's idea of universal salvation. Compassion (*cibei*) is as much indispensable as wisdom too.⁴⁴ Zhiyi often emphasizes that compassion lacking wisdom is no

39 There are many examples throughout the works from Zhiyi, particularly see MHZG T 46.55c, 56b-c, 21b-c.

40 Ibid.

41 See MHZG T 46.80b16-80b25.

42 See MHZG T 46.22a.

43 See MHZG T 46.80b.

44 See MHZG T 46.81a7-a28.

compassion, and wisdom lacking compassion is no wisdom.⁴⁵ When he explains the contemplation of the middle, he says that the Buddha's compassion is the universal ocean into which the rivers of all dharmas flow.⁴⁶ Viewed from Zhiyi's standpoint, the indivisibility of the two necessarily belongs into the context of universal salvation.

THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN CONTEMPLATION AND THE SCHEME OF CLASSIFICATION

Based on the mode of contemplating the middle, Zhiyi speaks about the "threefold contemplation within one moment of mental activity (*yixin sanguan*)."⁴⁷ It expresses an immediate and proper responding to the needs for universal salvation during constantly changing conditions. The purpose of universal salvation permanently and ultimately remains the same, but its concrete expression has to be readjusted constantly due to the constant changing of conditions immediately.

Just for the same reason the Buddha had to preach the Buddhadharmas (*fofa*) according to different levels of doctrines, in order to adjust it to the need of the diversity of sentient beings. His teaching has to be understood in terms of a classification of doctrines, but in its ultimate purpose the Buddhadharmas is the only one vehicle of universal salvation (*yisheng jiao*), as Zhiyi quotes it from the *Lotus-sutra*. Zhiyi evaluates the sermon of the *Lotus-sutra* as the Buddha's most authentic way of preaching the Buddhadharmas and expressing its ultimate wisdom. According to his interpretation of Buddhist *sutras*, the *Lotus-sutra* preaches the unity of the ultimate purpose of all different doctrines and simultaneously pronounces the indispensability of the diversity of expedient means. Its teaching is regarded to be different from other *sutras*, because it "reveals the real by exploring the tentative" (*kaiquan xianshi, faji xianben*).⁴⁸

Accordingly, the third contemplation of the middle reveals the real truth of things by considering them as neither self-being nor non-existence, but as being both emptiness and provisional, whereas the two preceding modes are expedient means only, because of their bias to one side exclusively. But without the one sided expedient means the contemplation of the middle and the perfectly integrated threefold contemplation would be impossible. When Zhiyi says that ultimate wisdom means neither perfect nor one sided⁴⁹, he

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 See MHZG T 46.55b.

48 See FHX Y T 33.700b22-28, 713a25-28.

49 See MHZG T 46.61c.

wants to express that this wisdom is revealed in the exploration of the shortcomings marking the preceding one sided modes of contemplation.

The same structure of mutual dependence between the real and the tentative, the provisional and ultimate, the one sided and the perfect is expressed by his classification of doctrines. According to this scheme, all Buddhist doctrines can be considered from four levels, expressing four paradigms of truth: the teaching of the small vehicle (*sanjang jiao*), the common teaching of the small and great vehicle (*tongjiao*), the distinct teaching for the great vehicle (*biejiao*) and the perfect teaching (*yuanjiao*) establishing the preceding three and simultaneously transcending their shortcomings.⁵⁰ The small vehicle considers the arising and extinguishing within conditioned co-arising as real; the common teaching says that discrete entities of conditioned co-arising as such are empty and unreal, because they are compositions of impermanent conditions that in turn must be empty too. Even their arising and extinguishing is nothing but ultimate emptiness; the distinct teaching says that their non-existence is as unreal as their self-being, paradoxically ultimate emptiness is indivisible from provisional existence, it stresses the provisional in terms of the infinity of expedient means; the perfect teaching integrates all preceding three views but simultaneously transcends there one sidedness, it emphasizes the middle mutually being identical with conditioned co-arising, emptiness and the provisional.⁵¹ The perfect teaching expresses the unity and totality of the whole classification. This scheme is an extension of the threefold truth within the context of doctrinal classification, it follows the same principle of “revealing the one [perfect teaching] by exploring the three [preceding levels]” (*kaisan xianyi*).⁵² All fundamental Buddhist doctrines are viewed through this scheme of classification. From that standpoint they appear as a graduation of degrees in the achievement of practice. The doctrines of the four noble truths, the conditioned co-arising or the two truths are viewed differently from each of the four standpoints, yet expressing a graduation of degrees within one process.

This scheme matches the course of practice too. The teaching of the small vehicle and the common teaching corresponds to the “contemplation about entering emptiness from [unwholesome] provisional”; the distinct teaching corresponds to the “contemplation about entering the wholesome

50 Zhiyi's classification of doctrines occurs in all of his works. He particularly wrote one work about his scheme of classification, *The Meaning of the Four Doctrines*, *Sijiao yi* T 46, 1929; see also T 46.721a-722b, MHZG T 46.5b14-15, FHX Y T 33.700c-701c

51 See MHZG T 46.55b

52 See FHX Y T 33.770b-c.

provisional from emptiness”; the perfect teaching corresponds to the contemplation of the middle in terms of threefold contemplation. The subdivision of doctrinal classification stands in accordance with the graduation of contemplation, thus expressing Zhiyi’s idea of the unity of teaching and contemplation, theory and practice.

The threefold contemplation within one moment of mental activity denotes the single and concrete act of salvation comprising the virtual totality of the infinity of all expedient means. In the same way, the perfect teaching encompasses the preceding three standpoints, thus expressing the diversity and unity of the buddhadharma. Viewed from its ultimate purpose, the single and concrete act of salvation is essentially unchanging, but its manifestations are constantly changing. Its unchanging essence cannot be different from its manifestations; it is nothing but the totality of its infinite manifestations. The single and concrete act of universal salvation conducted due to the spirit of threefold contemplation could be described as the totality virtually encompassing all paths of salvation. Its realization due to the distinct conditions has always to occur in the mode of immediacy, because it never lacks any element necessary in the course of universal salvation, during its activity of responding to any kind of condition. Zhiyi calls this perfect act of universal salvation “perfect and immediate contemplation” (*yuandun guan*).

THE ABSOLUTE VALUE OF EXISTENCE

In terms of concrete practice, merits and achievements of universal wisdom mean skillfulness and virtuosity in respect to the realization of universal salvation. A person obtaining this wisdom is skilled in appropriately responding to the diverse kinds of affairs within sentient being’s life, in that concrete perception, thought, feeling, desire and acting of them are always involved. Finally, it is the skillful mastering of all the variously single moments of life, each of them experienced by each of the countless sentient beings. Originally, perception and experience of sentient beings are contaminated by ignorance, inverting non-abidingness into abidingness, real into unreal, the authentic mode into the conventional mode. Since existing things are not separate from sentient being’s perception being contaminated by ignorance, the manner in which an existing thing appears reflects the quality and degree of one’s contaminated perception. If perceived things reflect the degree and quality of one’s contaminated perception, the way to clean up this contamination becomes possible. By this way, every entity becomes an inversed indication of how to uproot the source of one’s illusions and suffering produced by fundamental ignorance.

Viewed from that standpoint, each of these moments manifests the perfect condition of universal salvation uniquely and differently in an inversed way. The single and particular moment itself is the state of universal salvation in an inversed way. Paradoxically, it thus becomes the virtual totality encompassing the infinite paths of universal salvation too. Zhiyi frequently expresses this thought by paradoxical articulation. When he comes to speak about the perfect teaching, it is always described by paradoxical identifications between *samsara* and *nirvana*, buddhanature and conditioned co-arising, wisdom and ignorance, dharmanature and ignorance etc., the middle way is the most general expression for all kinds of paradoxical identity.⁵³ The paradox between the partial singleness of one moment and the virtual totality of the infinity of all paths for sentient beings is expressed by his famous doctrine of “one moment of thought encompasses the totality of all things” (*yinian sanqian*). This doctrine firstly stresses the property of transformation within mental activity shared by all sentient beings; secondly, it includes the insight that transformation of oneself is indivisibly linked with that of others; thirdly, one moment of mental activity in its dynamic reality is dharmanature, the ground of immediate existence of all things, simultaneously, it is ignorance because of its distinctive content, thus it is the ground for the diversity of existing things.⁵⁴

As an inversion of universal salvation, each moment of existence manifests a particular way to realize universal salvation that in turn is the incarnation of the totality of all paths. This instructive component of each moment of existence makes it unique and absolutely valuable. Spoken in terms of totality this value is both indestructible and unproduced (*wuzo*), because it is originally linked with each moment of existence within the infinite course of conditioned co-arising. In contrast to impermanence, suffering, non-substance, impurity (*buchang, ku, wuwo, bujing*) marking discrete entities in the *samsaric* realm, it is marked with the virtues of *nirvana*: permanence, bliss, self and purity, although it is not beyond these discrete entities. Viewed from the perfect teaching, this absolute value of existence cannot be but paradoxically expressed.⁵⁵

The teaching (*jiao*) aims at the unobstructed, and insofar pure comprehension of the absolute value of salvation within each concrete moment of existence, perceived by sentient beings. This perception is

53 See FHX Y T 33.701b5-8.

54 See MHZG T 46.54a.

55 This thought and expression originally occurs in the *Mahaparinirvana-sutra* T 12.395b28. Zhiyi employs it in his theory of Buddhanature, see *Jingguangning xuanyi* (*The Profound Meaning of the Goldshine Sutra*) T 39.2a5-13.

supposed to be combined with the immediately proper acting and wholesome transformation caused through this comprehension. Contemplation is both the methodologically explored principle of evidence and the act of evidence within this kind of universal wisdom.

CONCLUSION

Ultimate wisdom is linked with universal salvation, because it firstly transforms unwholesome conditions into wholesome conditions, and secondly transformation of oneself is involved with transformation of others. Therefore salvation in terms of relief from suffering (*jietuo*) is also explained as the transformation of mental activity (*zhuanbian*) from ignorance into wisdom. The property of Mental activity of being both able to transform as well as being able to undergo transformation is the reason why Zhiyi makes it to the focus and main target of his teaching of universal wisdom resulting in universal relief of suffering. Contemplation of mental activity (*guanxin*) means introspection comprising all of the important aspects for the ultimate purpose of universal salvation within this teaching.

Universal salvation (*du zhongsheng*) is based on the idea of transforming others by transformation of oneself. This idea involves the concept of entelechy. We can find similar thoughts of entelechy in earlier Chinese texts of the Confucian school according to which one's own transformation based on cultivation is linked with transformation of others, thus constituting one common process of transformation. The most eminent example would be one of the initial phrases from the *Daxue*, emphasizing that social order has to be initiated by self-cultivation (*xiu shen*). The whole course from self-cultivation to peace in the world (*tianxia ping*) starts with investigation of things (*gewu*), followed by the succeeding links of knowing its utmost (*zhizhi*), trustworthiness of one's intentions (*yicheng*), straightforwardness of one's mind (*xinzheng*), self-cultivation (*xiushen*), order in one's family (*qiqia*), order in the state (*guozhu*) and as a final result peace in the world.⁵⁶ Even Confucius' ideal of humanity (*ren*), the ultimate of human virtue, encompasses a process initiated by one's filial piety (*xiao*) and resulting in social order.⁵⁷ In the *Analects* we find the phrase, "erecting oneself means erecting man" (*lijì liren*)⁵⁸, that explicitly express this idea.

Contemplation in Zhiyi's thoughts holds a position similar to the one of filial piety and self-cultivation in terms of Confucian traditions. Filial piety and self-cultivation is the initial virtue leading to general social order,

56 See *Sishu Duben Daxue*, Taipei 1999, p.2.

57 Ibid. *Lunyu*, p. 61.

58 Ibid. p. 82.

contemplation is the initial practice leading to universal salvation of sentient beings. Like in the case of practicing filial piety, the subsequent transformation initiated by contemplation is based on a certain kind of experience, which can be called as a comprehension of fundamental values. In terms of filial piety this experience consists of the comprehension of social-ethical values; in terms of contemplation it consists of a comprehension of the absolute value of existence in general. It might be no wonder that both traditions give very little room indeed to narrative interplay in the expression of their beliefs and principles.