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ATHEISTIC NOTIONS CONVEYED IN BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES
(JOTTINGS TAKEN IN STUDYING)

By Chin Hui

- COMMUNIST CHINA -

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ATHEISTIC NOTIONS CONVEYED IN BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES
(JOTTINGS TAKEN IN STUDYING)

2. COMMUNIST CHINA .

[Following is the translation of an article written by Chin Tai, in Hsien-tai Fo-hsueh (Modern Buddhism), Peiping, No. 5, 1960, pages 25-27.]

In Buddhist teachings, there is no God (the creator of the universe), nor is there a collection of classics implying the will of God. Virtue is based on good or evil deeds. Those who believe in God regard virtue as obedience to God's will: what God bids to be done is good and what he forbids is evil. In this respect, the Buddhist view is different. Buddhism differentiates good and evil on the basis of the "people's interests and the people's happiness". (Hsi-ling's translation: "Buddhist Dialectics" in "Learning Translations", No. 3, 1957).

The above quotation is taken from the writing of a Hindu scholar, "La-hu-erh, Sang-k'o-li-t'e-ya-yang"

[transliteration of Chinese]. These words were written in the first few lines of his essay on "Buddhist Dialectics". If Buddhism here refers to the early stage of Buddhism, saying that Buddhist teaching never involves the idea of a creator of the universe, Buddhism might have attracted more followers then. A member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Shcherbatskoy, a noted scholar on Hindu Buddhism agrees with this view. He says: "An early Buddhist analysis discovered that the world is made up of countless floating elements, including all that we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch on the one hand, and on the other hand, includes all those feelings that accompany our emotions, views, and will, no matter whether they are good or evil. But generally speaking, there is no soul, no God, no matter, that is to say, no permanent reality". (Yu Yu, "Buddhist Philosophy" in Modern Buddhism, No. 2, 1959. Same reference for the following quotations from Shcherbatskoy).

As to the non-existence of God, we must undoubtedly agree that Shcherbatskoy is correct in his judgment. Indeed, it was so. In the early Buddhist classics, even such expressions as "the rivers and the earth exist only in our mind", symbolizing the creator or pantheistic ideas, were very hard to find. But there were many

passages refuting the theory of a God in heaven (creator). Even in the later stage of Buddhism, Shcherbatskoy says, "It abandons the idea of the human Buddha, which, in the lifeless nirvana, is being substituted by a spiritual Buddha"... "Buddha is different from man. Under the name of the highest being, it becomes the real ruler, but he is not the creator". This shows no matter how great was the difference between early Buddhism and later Buddhism, they had one basic agreement, that there was no creator.

But Shcherbatskoy seems to point out that when Buddhist teaching developed to the period of the Yogacara School, the creator idea was substituted by the "right concentration" concept (see below). The Yogacara scholars believed that the "right concentration" is the general source of every one who has an external world and an internal mind, and without it, nothing exists. It divides all elements in this world, the subjective consciousness and the objective realization of the elements reflecting in the mind, into two groups, the *darsana* and the *lakshana*. These two groups are "transformed by ideation". In Hiuen Tsiang's translation of the "30 Odes of Ideation", it says "The transformation made by the eight paths, the differentiation made by differentiation, all point to non-existence, therefore, all elements of existence are mere

ideations".

In Hiuen Tsiang's translation of the "Wei-shih" Theory, Volume VII, the above ode is explained as follows" [In its original form the following passage is in abstruse Buddhist terminology; only its general meaning is given here].

"It is said, the triad can transform the eight paths (right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration) and what is in the mind into something like the darsana and the laksana. That is, all elements are nothing but ideas and perceptions, which are merely in name and have no actual existence. So the world is void".

The first six paths seem to stress the reflections on the mind. They reflect the realities in the external world, which, as far as "right concentration" is concerned, is the effect of perception, because everything comes from the "right concentration". Consequently, Shcherbatskoy's analysis is correct. He says: "Just like the supposition made by European rationalists, it is possible that all elements are infinitely included in God's wisdom. Through selection, God gives these elements to the world--a limited number of things. In Buddhism the

idea is the same except God's wisdom is substituted by the "right concentration" and the will by "right mindfulness."

As such, if we say the "right concentration" is the name used in the creator's stead, we would rather say that every creature that has life is a creator, because every creature has his own "right concentration". But in transforming the elements, the "right concentration" must have certain conditions, the cause and effect. Therefore, the Yogacara scholars, under the premise that all elements are the effects of various causes, refuted the theory of a heavenly creator. In Volume VII of the "Teachings of Yogacara School", the author gives an analysis of the origin of the theory that a heavenly creator created the world. He says:

"When a Veda or a Brahman cannot attain what he desires in this world of cause and effect, when he wants to do something good in this world and he gets not good but evil, when he cannot cherish his good desires and when he wishes to acquire something pleasant and he gets pain instead, all these reasons force him to conclude that there must be a creator, a transformer, a father of all the elements in the world, because this being has power greater than that of man".

Here the author points out that it is not the "creator" that creates the world, but man creates the "creator". The reason for this is that man creates a "creator" when he wants to do or get something in this world, and when it cannot be done in accordance with his wish and when he cannot understand why there are pleasure and pain, good and evil in the world, then he imagines that there must be a "father of all elements" in heaven.

After the Yogasari scholars analyzed the origin of the heavenly creator theory, they began to refute this erroneous theory. They presented four arguments to contradict it:

1. When the heavenly creator created the world, did he rely on action?

"If action is the cause for creation, only God has action for cause to create any thing, while the rest of the world cannot have action as a cause. This is unreasonable".

2. If God created the world, did he belong to the world or out and above the world?

"If God belongs to this world, how can he create it? If he does not belong to this world, he is liberated (in the sense of void) and how can he created the world?"

3. Did God create the world to satisfy his wants?

"God is a non-being, while the world is a reality, how can a non-being make use of a reality? If we say God does not want to make use of the world, why should he create it then?

4. What elements did God use to create the world?

"If God is the element from which the world is created, there would be endless worlds created, because God is there constantly. If God uses other elements to create the world, how can he use these elements of the world before he even creates them? God is non-existent while the world is existing, how can a non-existent create something existing?"

These arguments are very powerful and are worthy of further study. The Vishnu theory of a creator can be refuted by the theory of cause and effect.

The "A-pi-ta-ko-sha-the" (transliterated name of book originally in Sanskrit) theory also contains arguments disputing the existence of a heavenly creator. In its Volume VII, an analysis says that all elements are created under four conditions (four causes give rise to all elements). It stresses the contradiction against the erroneous theory of a heavenly creator. These arguments are similar to those outlined in the above. There is no need for repetition, but, the following short

passage is sufficient to show its reasoning:

"After God created the world, what benefit does he get? If God creates the world because he likes it, he must wait until the world is created before he can like it. This is not so. Or, if God creates hell with all its pains for the purpose of persecuting man, and if he derives pleasure out of this, what kind of a God is he, why should we have him?!"