

On Master Tanxu's Thought of the Middle Way^{*}

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This paper discusses Master Tanxu's Thought of Middle Way from three aspects: interpreting the Middle Way with the Tiantai Sect's thought of "Three Truths as a Unity" (三諦圓融), discussing "the Truth of the First Meaning of the Middle Way" (中道第一義諦) from the relationship between "the One Mind" and the Middle Way, and discussing gradations of practice of the Middle Way.

Keywords: Master Tanxu, the Thought of the Middle Way, the Truth of the First Meaning of the Middle Way, the One Mind

Prologue

Master Tanxu (1875-1963), as a prominent monk in the history of modern Chinese Buddhism, once promoted Buddhism in the Northeast, the North, Hong Kong, and other regions of China for a period of time, educating and guiding the people of these places. Today, we explore and study the Buddhist thoughts of the Master, in order to appreciate the profound achievements of the master's Buddhism and inspire later scholars to inherit the aspiration of this previous master to promote Buddhism. The Buddhist thought of Master Tanxu is extensive and profound, and the article only provides a glimpse into his Thoughts on the Middle Way.

Master Tanxu Interpreted the Middle Way With the Thought of "Three Truths as a Unity" of the Tiantai Sect

Master Tanxu was a master of the modern Tiantai Sect, and it was natural for him to interpret the Middle Way through the ideas of the Tiantai Sect. When explaining various classics, the master often discussed the Middle Way through the perspective of "the Three Truths as a Unity" (三諦圓融); Of course, the

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Madhyamika's concept of the Middle Way, which serves as the foundation of Tiantai Buddhism, was often naturally revealed by the Master during his teachings. Here are a few examples:

Example 1: In "the Lecture Record of The Universal Gate of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara" (妙法蓮華經觀世音菩薩普門品講錄) (Master Tanxu, 2019a, pp. 7-8), the Master used the example of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara's practice of "hearing the sound of the sea tide and entering the Tao" to explain the order of the Tiantai Sect's Three Meditations and the "Meditation of the first meaning of the Middle Way" (中道第一義觀), that was, to demonstrate the Middle Way through the harmonious perspective of "the Unity of Emptiness and Phenomenon" (空假不二), and emphasized the "incredible" of the "Meditation of the first meaning of the Middle Way".

Example 2: During his presentation of "the records from personally listening to the Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita-sutra" (金剛般若波羅密經親聞記) (Master Tanxu, 2019b, pp. 187-188), Master Tanxu interpreted the meaning of "all things that is said, that is, not all things, but its name is all things", which enables us to understand the meaning of the structure of "××× that is said, that is, not ×××, but its name is ×××" in the Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita-sutra. The master interpreted "all things that is said" as "its unreal name is all things and its essence is Samvrti-staya" (俗諦, ordinary truth); interpreted "that is not all things" as "it is not obsessed with illusions and its essence is Paramartha-satya" (真諦, supreme truth); interpreted "its name is all things" as "it shows its nature without departing from its phenomena, which is the Truth of the First Meaning of the Middle Way" (中道第一義諦).

Example 3: When giving the lecture on "the handout of the Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita-sutra" (金剛般若波羅密經講義) (Master Tanxu, 2019c, p. 117), the master used the thought of Tiantai Sect that "all things are void, are phenomenal, and are medial" (一切諸法即空即假即中) to interpret the characteristics of the Dharma spoken by the Tathagata (如來)—without reality or emptiness, outstanding and transcending opposition, and in line with the Truth of the First Meaning of the Middle Way; It can be seen that the Truth of the First Meaning of the Middle Way is to transcend all opposing realms such as "Existence and Nothingness" (有無) and "Emptiness and Reality" (虛實).

In the same narrative (Master Tanxu, 2019c, p. 133), the Master explained that the Middle Way is a Prajna state of double destruction of the "Boundary View" (邊見) of "View of Existence" (有見) and "View of Emptiness" (空見).

In the same narrative (Master Tanxu, 2019c, pp. 135-136), Master Tanxu interpreted "the correct views of all things" with the idea of "the Three Truths as a Unity" (三諦圓融) of the Tiantai Sect—the appearance of all things is neither avoid nor phenomenal (非空非假), and cannot be said; And this highlights "the incredible Middle Way".

Example 4: When giving the lecture on the "the handout of the *Mahayana-shraddhatpada-shatra* (Part 2)" (Master Tanxu, 2009, pp. 109-110), the Master elaborated on the practice method of the Sequential Three Meditations (次第三觀) of the Tiantai Sect: from the "Meditation on all as Void" (空觀) that contemplates the non-self nature of the all things to the "Meditation on all as Unreal" (假觀) that "although there is no self nature, it does not destroy cause and effect", further to stop each side of "the Emptiness" (空) and "the Phenomenon" (假) and to show the Middle Way alone, and further more, integrate the Emptiness and Phenomenon and to reveal the Middle Way in a harmonious manner.

Example 5: When the Master gave the explanation of “the Annotations on the notes of mental impression of the transmitting Dharma of Tiantai Sect” (天台傳法心印記注釋要) (Master Tanxu, 2019d, p. 171), he emphasized that the so-called “Middle Way” in the Tiantai Sect is different from other teachings of “stopping the two sides and only showing the Middle Way” and used the complete and immediate dharma method of “the Three Dogmas in One Mind” (一心三觀) to immediately break through ignorance and not to fall into order.

In the same narrative (Master Tanxu, 2019d, pp. 176-177), Master Tanxu first revealed that Buddhism must be practiced and cannot be talked about in empty words; Secondly, explained the principle of the practice of the Tiantai Sect that “although the two aspects of both emptiness and existence are negated, the Middle Way is not solely be manifested (the Middle Way cannot be persisted)”.

The Master's Discussion on the Relationship Between the Middle Way and “the One Mind”

Master Tanxu provided a profound interpretation of the relationship between the “One Mind” (一心) (Tathagata-garbha, 如來藏) Thought of the Dharma Sects (法性宗) and the Middle Way. In a certain sense, the Master's Middle Way Thought is a fusion of the Middle Way Thought of the Madhyamika (大乘空宗) and the “One Mind” Thought at a higher level. Here are a few examples:

Example 1: Master Tanxu interpreted the “solemn Buddhakshetra (the realm of a Buddha, 佛土)” in the middle way during his presentation of the “the records from personally listening to the Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita-sutra”:

The Buddhakshetra is the Mind. It is not solemn but solemn, belonging to the Samvrti-staya; It is solemn but not solemn, that is, the Paramartha-satya. It does not give up one Dharma, does not receive one Guna (Dust, 塵), merges two Truths, and all belong to the Middle Way. (Master Tanxu, 2019b, p. 166)

This involved the problem of the status of the “Mind”. The *Vimalakirti-nirdesha-sutra* (維摩詰經, 淨名經) elevates the status of “Mind” to a high level—“How can there be a indirect result of the previous life (依報) for solemnity without the Mind!” However, Master Tanxu did not explicitly discuss the ontological issue of “Mind” here.

In the same narrative (Master Tanxu, 2019b, p. 167), Master Tanxu emphasized the core of the *Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita-sutra* (金剛般若波羅密經)—the idea of “Impermanence” (無住), where “Apratishthita” (無所住) refers to the true Voidness (真空) state. And “the Mind of Apratishthita” has never had any Birth (生) or Extinction (滅), No coming or No going since its inception, and its Birth is essentially Anutpatti (Non-birth, 不生); This Birth is Birth with Non-birth. And the Impermanence does not hinder the Birth of Mind, and the Birth of Mind still be Impermanence; Siddhanta (Reason, 理) and Phenomena (Things, 事) do not hinder each other, and the Truth (真) and the Ordinary (俗) can be harmoniously integrated, which is the Truth of the First Meaning of the Middle Way. It can be seen that Master Tanxu always used the concept of “Impermanence” to dispel the potential “substantial” understanding of “Mind” among human beings, that is, “Mind” is in the sense of “the Middle Way”.

Example 2: Master Tanxu explained “the Truth of the First Meaning of the Middle Way”—“One Mind” during his lecture on “the handout of the Mahayana-shraddhatpada-shatra (Part 1)” (Master Tanxu, 2019c, pp. 11-12). The “One Mind” originally embodies the Birth and Extinction of the Bhutatathata (真如), and the one thing does not come from outside the idea of that All Things are Produced by Mind (萬法唯心); All things is only “One Mind”. To give a random example of a thing, it already embodies the Birth and Extinction of the

Bhutatahata. Moreover, the One Mind Bhutatathatathe (一心真如) is the overall meaning of the Substance (體), the Birth or Extinction of One Mind (一心生滅) is the overall meaning of the Function (用), the Birth or Extinction of One Mind Bhutatathatathe (一心真如生滅) is the overall meaning of the Phenomena (相). These three, the one is the three, the three is the one; And the three, the one, is neither inseparable nor separable from each other (不即不離), is neither the thing itself nor something else (不一不異), and will come together in One Mind. From the perspective of practice, faithing and explaining this meaning is the achievement of obtaining purpose of one's own Mind from one's own Mind, consciously understanding this meaning is the achievement of obtaining ideas of one's own Mind from one's own Mind; This is called "One Mind Shamatha-vipashyana (Cessation and Insight, 一心止觀)".

The Master's Discussion on Gradations of Practice of the Middle Way

Master Tanxu pointed out that any sect of Buddhism has its own Idea of Middle Way; The Ideas of Middle Way of different sects contain different gradations of practice. Here are a few examples:

Example 1: Master Tanxu stated in the "Lecture on the Prajnaparamita-hridaya-sutra (2nd Article)" (Master Tanxu, 2019e, p. 330): "The Awakened True Emptiness that all things are themselves unreal (體法真空)" is practiced and demonstrated by the Bodhisattva of General Teaching (通教菩薩), is not complete; And the thorough one is "neither biased towards existence nor towards emptiness", which is the "meaning of the Middle Way", also known as "the First Meaning of Emptiness" (第一義空), which reaches the "Wonderful Existence" (妙有) of "non-existence but existence" (不有而有) and "the True Emptiness" (真空) of "nonemptiness but emptiness" (不空而空).

Example 2: Master Tanxu made judgments and analyses on the meaning of "Emptiness" among different ideological factions from the perspective of the Tiantai Sect during his presentation of "the records from personally listening to the Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita-sutra" (Master Tanxu, 2019b, pp. 138-139), And he pointed out that achieving "the Prajna's Super-natural Existence and True Emptiness" (般若之妙有真空) (the Super-natural Existence of Middle Way in Perfect Teaching 圓教中道妙有) requires different levels of practice. Master Tanxu divided the meanings of "Emptiness" in different schools of thought into five categories: The first category is "the Stubborn Emptiness" (頑虛空) adhered to by ordinary people, and the second category is "the Deny of Emptiness" (斷滅空) adhered to by the non-Buddhist Schools. Both of these belong to the idea of "evil". The third type is "the Analytical Emptiness of things" (析法空) adhered to by the Tripitaka Teaching (藏教), which belongs to prejudice. The fourth type is "the Awakened Emptiness that all things are themselves unreal" (體法空) of General Teaching (通教) as a convenient method, which is close to the correct principle. The fifth type is "Super-natural Existence and True Emptiness" (妙有真空), which is "the first Truth of Meaning of the Middle Way" of Perfect Teaching. Those whose natural endowment is blunt must go through "the Awakened True Emptiness that all things are themselves unreal" of General Teaching as their initial gate, and then undergo orderly practice through "the Phenomenon coming out of the Emptiness" (從空出假) principle of Differentiated Teaching (別教) in order to achieve "the Truth of the First Meaning of the Middle Way" of the Perfect Teaching.

Example 3: Master Tanxu elaborated on the order of the practice of the idea of the Middle Way in "the Mysterious main idea of Shurangama-sutra" (大佛頂首楞嚴經妙玄要旨) (Master Tanxu, 2009, p. 56), that is, from the "one-sided refutation and manifestation" of "the Analytical Emptiness of things" to the "double-sided refutation and manifestation" of "the Awakened Emptiness that all things are themselves unreal", and then to

the “overall refutation and manifestation” of “the Super-natural Existence and True Emptiness”; It takes ten times of discernment and exploration to reveal the First Meaning of the Great Buddha Summit (the Truth of the First Meaning of the Middle Way). At each stage of these 10 discernments, the level of the Middle Way is different.

Conclusion

Firstly, Master Tanxu discussed the principles of Buddhism from the perspective of Tiantai Sect, including the doctrine of the Middle Way; The master always adhered to the principle of integrating the practice of vipashyana and cultivate with the hearing and thing about the doctrine.

Secondly, the Master perfectly integrated the thought of “the One Mind” (Tathagata-garbha) with the Doctrine of the Tiantai Sect, which not only conforms to the Madhyamika's concept of the Middle Way, but also highlights the Tiantai Sect's concept of “the Truth of the First Meaning of the Middle Way”.

Thirdly, the Master arranged the ideas of the Middle Way of different Sects in order, and corresponded them to different levels of cultivation.

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