

A Process Analysis of the Evolution of Psychic Power Thought and the Sinicization of Buddhism

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Abstract: Psychic powers refer to the ability to make one's mind go as one wishes, while observing others' mind without being affected. Without psychic powers, there will be no flexible way to teach people in accordance of their aptitudes to make them realize the true meaning of Buddhism. Without a flexible way to teach people, Buddhism can't protect living beings of six paths and make them happy to practice Dharma. In a word, it means that all kinds of extraordinary abilities which are not dominated by natural law, social law and thinking law. They are not only the external manifestations and necessary conditions for obtaining liberation, but also the important means of propagating the Buddhism and spreading Dharma, and the product of the combination of "meditation" and "wisdom". In Chinese Buddhism, it not only adapts to the Confucian system of "not talking about weirdness, bravery, rebellion, ghosts and gods", but also inherits the basic content of psychic powers.

1. Introduction

Supernatural power occupies a very important position among Buddhists. It helps the spread of Buddhism. It is an important part of the introduction of Buddhism and an important ability of Buddhist practice to achieve liberation. However, it should be noted that supernatural power is only a by-product of spiritual practice, not the root of spiritual practice. It is not the purpose of spiritual practice, so it is not possible to over-promote and spread supernatural powers, otherwise it will lead to "strange power and chaos."

2. The Status of Psychic Power in the System of Buddhist Practice

2.1 The Meaning of Psychic Power

In Chinese version of Buddhist scriptures, "psychic power" can also be translated into supernatural power, divine power, almighty power, etc. The corresponding Sanskrit words are *abhijnā*, *adhishthāna*, *rddhi*, *vikurvita* and so on. Generally speaking, psychic powers refer to the special ability acquired by believers in the process of Buddhist practice. With these special abilities, they can know everything and be unpredictable. In other countries, such as ancient India, most religions believed that a practitioner could acquire certain magical powers through specific practices. For example, it is mentioned in the Brahmani *Yoga Sutra* that through practicing yoga, practitioner can know the fate of the past and present life, be invisible, predict the future, increase their strength, aware of other people's mind, walk in the air and so on. In the process of obtaining liberation, a practitioner will definitely possess the above psychic powers. However, the practitioner shouldn't be too obsessed with these special abilities, otherwise the process of achieving ultimate liberation will be affected.

Buddhism, as a branch of ancient Indian religion, was deeply influenced by its culture, which was embodied in the six psychic powers of Buddhism. First, divine eye. People who possess this psychic power can see the appearances of life and death, pain and happiness of all living beings in the three realms and six paths, and all the entities and forms of the world without obstacles; second, divine ear. With this power, people can hear the language of suffering and joy of all living beings in the three realms and six paths, and hear all the sounds of the world without any obstacles; third,

mind-penetrating knowledge. This power can make people know what people think in their minds in the three realms and six paths; fourth, remember one's former abodes, which also named Su Zhu Tong (causal memory). It can make people know destinies and deeds for hundreds of thousands of their own and all living beings in three realms and six paths; fifth, higher powers, which also called Shen Tong (divine power), Shen Ru Yi Tong (travel at will), Shen Zu Tong (divine feet). It refers to the ability to be free and to be emerged at will; sixth, extinction of mental intoxicant. Only when one cut off all the Jianshihuo (Buddhist term refers to illusory or misleading views and thoughts) of the three realms and his life and death are not affected by the three realms, can he obtain extinction of mental intoxicant. Only the last one of the six psychic powers is unique to Buddhism. Buddhism believes that psychic powers come from meditation. Therefore, numerous corresponding psychic powers exist in the presence of countless kinds of meditation.

2.2 The Effect of Psychic Powers on Buddhism

In the period of Mahayana Buddhism, the psychic power served as an indispensable factor of liberation and becoming a Buddha was greatly exaggerated. The supernatural laws of Buddha and Bodhisattva and the concept of the change of psychic power were also described and discussed in detail. Psychic power further became the necessary condition for the success of liberation. For example, in the Avatamsaka Sūtra classics, the Bodhisattva who was set up as an example of cultivating and becoming a Buddha can integrate with dharmakaya, and the key to integration is psychic power. In the period of Mahayana Tantrism, the emphasis on psychic power reached its peak, and the pursuit of which was almost equal to the pursuit of liberation. The basic practice methods of Tantrism have various functions of psychic powers, such as Mantra, Madra and Platform.

Although psychic power is necessary for Buddhist practice and is a special ability to be acquired at a specific stage, it is not the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. Besides, the utilization of them require certain conditions. In the initial period of primitive Buddhism, the Buddha didn't advocate excessive use of psychic powers. For example, in the *Dirghagama-sutra-Kevatta Sutta*, the Buddha earnestly taught the Bhikkhs: "I do not teach Bhikkhs to show their Shengzut power for Brahmins, elders and lay Buddhist. I only teach my disciples to meditate quietly in their spare time. If they have merit, they should hide it; if they have faults, they should reveal themselves." According to Karma theory in Buddhism, psychic power possess limitations. Just as Sakyamuni was powerless when encountered with the demise of Scythians. Mahamaudgalyayana, who was famous for his psychic powers, tried to save them, but finally found that "moral divine power cannot escape their fates.". Similarly, when a Buddhist disciple presents the psychic powers to those who need to be enlightened. It is also because the person planted the corresponding cause in his previous life, which shows the limitations of psychic powers.

3. The Universality of Chinese Buddhism Preaching Relies on Psychic Power

3.1 Basic Concepts of Buddhism

In ancient Indian society, there are two deep-rooted basic concepts in the hearts of people, which safeguarded by the vast majority of religions, namely the Samsara of life and death and the reincarnation of cause and effect. The so-called Samsara of life and death refers to the fact that all living beings (of five or six paths) are in a state of reincarnation without beginning and end before they are liberated. Different beings come back to life after death, and live and die ceaselessly. Karma means that the place and specific circumstances of all living beings in the reincarnation of life and death are completely determined by their own Karma. Good Karma will have good retribution. If the power of good Karma is great at death, it will be drawn to good places (Man, Heaven, etc.); whereas, bad Karma will have bad retribution. If the power of evil Karma is great at death, it will be drawn to the evil places (Hell, Hungry Ghosts, etc.).

Based on this belief, various spiritual and supernatural phenomena were widely accepted by human beings. Chinese culture has long established the concept of "A man only lives once".

Although there were also worship of gods and supernatural phenomena, the concept of “utilize superstition of ghosts and gods as a means of education” has always been dominant as the purpose of enlightenment. People's attention to life is usually limited to a lifetime (life), and through kindred, it forms a strong bond, fixing people in the position of repairing different relationships from near to far. With most people actively engaged in earthly life, life and relationships become critical issues, and those supernatural powers are becoming less important, especially in times of social stability. Once great changes have taken place in the social structure, and life and death become people's personal feelings, some people will re-evaluate the value of life, and supernatural things will be appreciated at this time. Generally speaking, Chinese culture attaches great importance to reality and interpersonal relationship, and its acceptance and examination of supernatural phenomena are limited.

3.2 Introduction of Buddhism

The introduction of Buddhism provided a new way for Chinese people to research life phenomena. Although Buddhism was introduced into China in the Han Dynasty, its theory and practice authentically engendered a certain effect on the society in the late Eastern Han Dynasty. After 150 or 160 years of An Shigao and Zhi Lou Jia Chen, the dynasties collapsed and whole China fell into chaos, and the unified Han Dynasty disintegrated likewise. It was reflected in the period from the separation of the Three Kingdoms to the short unification of the Western Jin Dynasty and the establishment of Jiankang as Eastern Jin Dynastys' capital. The migration of a few ethnic minorities into the Central Plains led to social unrest, and the classic order established by Confucianism began to fluctuate. People explored the true meaning of life in pain and hesitation. With the rose of metaphysics and the establishment of Taoism, Buddhism was finally presented the opportunity to manifest its ability. As a foreign religion, how can Buddhist causality theory be convinced by Chinese people? This was a significant issue faced by missionaries. The translation of Buddhist scriptures provided new ideological resources for the intellectuals. However, for masses or monarchs who care about material interests, its direct role was constantly limited, because they needed something more direct and effective. It was through the psychic powers such as curing diseases and saving people, predicting good or ill luck, sending gods to drive away ghosts to open up a considerable way for Buddhism to enter Chinese society. Many missionaries regarded psychic power as a mean of preaching and an essential ability in the process of practice to attract and inspire believers, and to obtain their recognitions and supports. Furthermore, the combination of psychic power and the profound and systematic theory of Buddhism has aroused more people's attentions and beliefs, which has transformed the lineament of Chinese culture to a certain extent.

3.3 Integration of Buddhism and Confucianism

If Buddhism intended to stand firm in Chinese culture, it definitely requires to be reconciled with the mainstream culture of Confucianism in the society. From the perspective of Confucian culture, psychic power was contrary to the Confucian tradition of “not talking about weirdness, bravery, rebellion, ghosts and gods”. Excessive promotion of psychic powers was not conducive to propaganda of Buddhism in China. With the development of Buddhism, some visionary monks gradually realized this problem and made various efforts. Master Dao'an, who has significant position in the history of Chinese Buddhism, was one of the most outstanding representatives. The Dao'an monk group he founded occupies momentous position in the history of Chinese Buddhism, which is closely related to the rational spirit of the group. Master Dao'an himself and Dao'an monk group never employed psychic powers to confuse the masses. On the contrary, they relied on practical practice to purge the monks. However, we should also realize that Dao'an is convinced of the psychic power of Buddhism as a Buddhist.

4. Conclusion

Generally speaking, the psychic power is an indispensable part of Buddhist theory. Without its function, neither can we achieve the ultimate liberation, nor can we carry forward Buddhism more

effectively and strive for more believers from all walks of life. Nevertheless, the psychic power is only a mean, not an end. They hope to promote Buddhism and create a good environment for the spread of Buddhism through these psychic powers' manifestations, so that it can be more easily accepted by ordinary people. For those who want to solve their own practical problems, especially women with low education level, the psychic power has great attraction. However, the appearance of psychic power is conditional. If the psychic powers are publicized excessively, it will lead to "weirdness, bravery, rebellion, ghosts and gods", which are not conducive to promotion of Buddhism.

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