

A Study on the Creative Integration Model of the Tiantai Repentance Rituals

Kuo-ching Huang

Abstract

In this article, I will focus on explaining the repentance rituals according to Zhiyi (智顛), in order to broaden and deepen our knowledge of the tradition of the Mahāyāna practices in repentance, and to highlight the religious value of those practices. The fundamental purpose of Mahāyāna practices in repentance is to release or liberate ourselves from karma-effects resulting from our ‘wrong doings’; yet, it also implies a tendency for pursuing worldly benefits. During the Southern and Northern Dynasties, practices of repentance had become popular, yet no case has been found where repentance ritual and meditation were combined in that period. When Zhiyi studied under Huiguang (慧曠) and Huisi (慧思), he experienced and achieved a deep understanding of the religious sense of practicing repentance. Later, he integrated the methods of practicing repentance and meditation to create an advanced model of Buddhist practice. The characteristics of Tiantai repentance rituals embrace the subsequent practices: (1) applying the repentance rituals to the methods of meditation, (2) proceeding to repentance in terms of true principle (理懺) from repentance based on rituals (事懺), (3) integrating a variety of methods to cope with different obstacles, (4) setting standards to engender the best result in practicing Buddhist cultivation, (5) presenting a detailed guidance based on personal religious experiences. This kind of creative integration-model is provided with the practice-scheme of a “low to high order of

repentance-meditation,” which has evidently enriched the long tradition of Buddhist cultivation.

Keywords: Tiantai repentance ritual, Zhiyi, repentance practice, meditation

