

On the Thought “kṛtajñā” or “知恩” in Buddhism

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The word *kṛta* is the past passive participle of a Sanskrit verb *kṛ* (=to do, to make). In literal translation, therefore, it is “done” or “made,” or “performed.” The equivalent Chinese character is 恩 or 所作. Since this word “恩” is a peculiar thought to oriental ethics, the English translation is sometimes “blessing,” sometimes “favour” or “benefit,” and in other cases “obligation” or “goodwill.”

The thought “恩” existed in China even before the beginning of the first century when Buddhism was not yet introduced. Then it meant “blessing of Heaven.”⁽¹⁾ This was naturally derived from the fundamental Chinese thought of Heaven. The secondary meaning, as it is shown in a Chinese idiom “恩愛” (=love, tender feeling), is to love. In *The Shi-King* (or the Book of Songs) there is an idiom “恩斯” which means to love this. In the old China which was not influenced by Buddhism, the character 恩 had two meanings explained above, i. e. blessing and to love.

Now let us consider the thought in Buddhism. Four Pāli Āgamas, the fundamental material of southern Buddhism, often use the words “*kataññuta*” or “*katavedita*” (=to be sensible of kindness, to feel obliged). Moreover, *Puggala-Paññati*, a book of Buddhist discussion in Pāli, has the following passage (PTS Text, p. 26).

Katame dve puggalādullabhā lokasmin. Yo ca pubbakārī yo ca kataññukatavedī ime dve puggalādullabhā lokasmim.

(Who are two kinds of people that are rarely met with? They are those who do first and those who feel and requite others' kindness.)

1. 孟子梁惠王上

It is interesting to notice that the monument of King Aśoka of the third century B. C. shows that the thought *kṛta* was practised as a code of conduct in the Indian society.⁽²⁾ The moral thought *kṛta* practised in the ancient Indian society had a different meaning from the Chinese thought “恩” that is, “blessing of Heaven.” *Kṛta* meant “benefit conferred by others” or “favours bestowed by others.” It included a meaning of being sensible of the benefit or of feeling obliged.

In Sanskrit Buddhist literature “*kṛtajñatā*”⁽³⁾ or “*kṛtaveditā*” are often used. “*Upakāra*” is also used with the same meaning as *kṛta*. These words are frequently found in the Mahāyāna-sutras in early Buddhism. A note in the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* says

niṣpāditōpakāra-smaraṇa-dakṣaḥ kṛtajñāḥ.⁽⁴⁾

(Those who are sensible of others’ kindness are those who can keep in mind the benefit that was bestowed on them by others.) In this passage jñā means “to know” or “to be informed of” and *smaraṇa* means “to remember” or “to keep in mind.” In the early mahāyāna Buddhism the feeling of being indebted to or being obliged to others existed, but it did not develop into a more positive thought of repaying kindness.

As Mahāyāna Buddhism came into maturity, a practical idea of requiting kindness developed out of a merely passive attitude of feeling kindness. This development is shown in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika-sūtra* and the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*.⁽⁵⁾ For example, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika-sūtra* has the following passages :

Ko nāma śaktaḥ *pratīkartu* tubhyam udyukta-rūpa bahukalpa-koṭyaḥ/
suduṣkarān idṛśakā karoṣi suduṣkarānyān ‘iha martya-loke//
Hastehi pādehi śireṇa cāpi *pratipriyaṃ* duṣkarakaṃ hi kartum/

2. Vipule tu dāne yasa nāsti sayame bhāvasudhitā va katamñatā va daḍhabhatitāca nicā baḍhaṃ. (A. C. Wool Aśoka Text and Glossary, pp. 14-15)

3. Nalinaksha Dutt, *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, London, 1934.

4. U. Wogihara, *A bhisamayāṇkāra*, p. 135.

5. Gajin Nagao; Index of the Mahāyānarūtrālamkāra. p. 79.

śīreṇa aṃsena ca yo dhareta paripūrṇa-kalpān yatha Gaṅgavālikāḥ//
(*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* by Profs. U. Wogihara and C. Tsuchiya,
1934-1935, p. 111)

naivam-putrās kadā-cit *pratikartu* śākyam (*Ibid.*, p. 112)

kalu-putrās tathāgatānām *pratikāraḥ* kṛto bhaviṣyati (*Ibid.*, p. 393)

Pratikāra or *pratikṛta* means *prati* √*kṛ* to return or to reply (Monier, *The Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 664). *Pratipriya* means *prati* √*pṛi* to bestow in return or to satisfy (*Ibid.*, p. 667). As compared with the *kṛta* and *upakāra* explained in the preceding paragraphs, those words have a more positive meaning of doing something to repay an obligation.

Thus in Mahāyāna Buddhism the thought *kṛta* (sometimes with a passive meaning, sometimes with a positive meaning) had an important position. Especially in its late period it was made into a precept. The *Yogacārabhūmi*⁽⁶⁾ gives a full explanation about this point.

A Chinese character 恩 meant “blessing of Heaven” before Buddhism had a strong influence. At that stage the relation between what gave blessing and what received blessing was the relation between the super-subordinate and the subordinate, that is, the relation between the super-human existence and human beings. In other words it was the relation between the absolute superior and comparative inferiors. The thought *kṛta* in Indian Buddhism was produced in a different background from the Chinese society. In India the thought was based on the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (or the causality theory) *pratītyasa-
mutpāda*. According to this doctrine nothing exists without others. Every one of us as well as other things exist in this world for some cause and occasion. All existence in the universe is interrelated and interdependent. Nothing exists with its own power; everything exists under some obligation. Robert N. Bellah explains that the human actions for the god that is the merciful and super-subordinate existence readily form the thought of 恩 (benefit, obligation)⁽⁷⁾. His discussion, however, is about religion in

6. *Taisho-Shinshu Daizokyo*, Vol. XXX, p. 520 a.

modern Japan and should not be directly applied to the growth of the Indian thought of *kṛta* which is clearly based on the doctrine of dependent origination or causality.

The most systematic explanation of the Buddhist thought of *kṛta* is given in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna* and 大乘本生心地觀經. There is no Sanskrit manuscript of the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna* but there is a Tibetan translation. A Chinese translation was made by 般若流支 in 539 A. D.. 大乘本生心地觀經 was translated into Chinese by 般若三藏 in 811 A. D. (the sixth year of the Genwa period in the Tang Dynasty). There is neither Sanskrit manuscript nor Tibetan translation of this sūtra, and it is doubtful whether this sūtra was ever edited in India. In this paper, however, it is assumed that this sūtra contains some Indian thought.

In the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna* the following explanation is given.⁽⁸⁾

有_二四種恩_一 甚爲_二難報_一 何等爲_二四_一 一者母 一者父 三者如來 四者說法師 若有_二供養_一此四種人_一得_二無量福_一;

(There are four graces or debts of gratitude. It is difficult to repay them. Who are the four people to whom you owe debts of gratitude? They are mother, father, Buddha, and a preacher. If you can serve all of them, you will be very happy.)

The Tibetan translation has the same explanation as this.⁽⁹⁾

大乘本生心地觀經⁽¹⁰⁾ points out

父母恩 衆生恩 國王恩 三寶恩

(debts of gratitude to father and mother, to all living things, to the king, and to the Three Treasures in Buddhism)

Two are newly added here to what is already explained in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna*: one's debt of gratitude to all living things and one's debt of gratitude to the king.

The first of the four debts is to a person's father and mother who

7. Robert N Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion; The Values of Pre-industrial Japan*.

8. *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, Vol. LXI, p. 359.

9. *Tibetan-Tripitaka*, Pekin Ed. HU. 52 a.

10. *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, Vol. III, p. 297.

gave birth to him, fostered, educated and dressed him, and saw that he had some means to live by.

The second is to all living things both of the past and the present, which enable his present existence. The theory of dependent origination or causality and the principle of mercy of Buddhism naturally evoke one's deep feeling of gratitude or obligation to all living things unrestricted by time. In other words, the debt of gratitude is not limited to a special person but is extended to all.

The third is to a political leader who is able to build a happy, peaceful and orderly state. This thought contributed greatly to religious ethics of Chinese society from the fifth to the ninth century. In Japan, also, from ancient times to modern times ⁽¹¹⁾ this thought has had an important ideological role as a contact point of religion and politics.

The fourth is to the Three Treasures: Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha; that is, the Enlightened One, the Truth, and the Community of Holy Orders, respectively. Equality of the four classes was expounded and the Indian caste system was strongly opposed. Dignity of human beings was stressed. The rank of priests in their community life was not decided by personal ability or power or money, but by the order they entered the community. Then in what pattern is the value of the thought *kṛta* described from the point of religious ethics? Debts of gratitude are divided into two categories: diffused or specified. To the former belongs one's indebtedness to all living things. To the latter belongs the rest: one's indebtedness to mother and father, to the king, and to the Three Treasures. Among them one's indebtedness to mother and father is individually specified. One's indebtedness to the king is socially specified. In these two cases indebtedness is particularized, but in the case of the Three Treasures indebtedness is universalized.

11. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 1946.

DIFFUSENESS

(Indebtedness to all living things)

(Indebtedness to the Three Treasures)	(Indebtedness to the King)	(Indebtedness to father and mother)
<i>Universalized</i>	<i>Socially Particulari- zed</i>	<i>Individually</i>

SPECIFICITY

The Chinese society which had had the thought of “blessing of Heaven,” gradually received the Buddhist thought *kṛta* (=favours, benefit, gratitude, obligation), as Buddhist manuscripts were translated into Chinese. In 425 A. D. a temple called Hoonji (=repaying kindness temple) was built. The *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna* was translated in 535 A. D.. The Chinese acceptance of the thought of one’s indebtedness to father and mother presents an interesting problem.

It is already explained that the word order “mother and father” is used in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna*. However, the word order of the equivalent Chinese idiom is usually “father and mother,” as the titles of the sūtras such as 父母難報經 and 父母恩重經 show. A sentence “Father and mother become united and bring forth a child” is often quoted to show how the expression “father and mother” is used. In Sanskrit *mātā-pitr-samyogo* (Bendall, *’Sikṣāsamuccaya*, p. 225, etc.) the word order is just the reverse. Both in Sanskrit Buddhist literature and non-Buddhist literature the expression *pitṛmātr* is rarely found (Monier, *The Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 626).

The following passage is in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika-sūtra*, a famous Mahāyāna Buddhist sūtra.

Mā ’mātrjñā mā ’pitṛjñā mā ’sramaṇya mā ’brahmaṇya mā mithya-dṛṣṭayo (Wogihara Text, p. 356).

(Isn’t there anyone who is not dutiful to his mother? Isn’t there anyone who is not dutiful to his father? Isn’t there anyone who does not respect Buddhist priests? Isn’t there anyone who does not

respect Brahmans? Isn't there anyone who has wicked ideas?)

The Chinese translation of this passage is

無不孝父母 不敬沙門 邪見不

(Do you obey your father and mother? Do you respect priests? Do you have any wicked ideas?)

Further, the *Abhidharma-kośa-vyākhyā* explains the Five Great Sins as follows:

tṛtīyam arhad-vadhaḥ tan-mātāpitṛ-vabhādrujām gurutaraṃ prathamam
mātṛ-vadhaḥ tat pitṛ-vadhāt gurutaraṃ. ten 'āha. sarvalaghuḥ pitṛvadha
iti. (Yaśomitra's *Abhidharma-kosavyākhyā*, p. 428)

(To kill a Buddha's disciple is a heavier sin than to kill your mother and father. To kill your mother is a heavier sin than to kill your father. Therefore, to kill your father is the lightest of the three.)

Thus a great concern for one's mother is expressed in Indian Buddhist manuscripts as a natural result of the maternal family system in India. In China, Granet explains,⁽¹²⁾ the paternal system based on the urban nobles' community life developed, supported by the emperor's power, and formed the feudal class structure. That is why “mātṛpitṛ” in Indian manuscripts is translated into “father and mother” in Chinese. The social background is revealed even in such a small change of expression.

The next question is how the Tibetans received the thought *kṛta*. The equivalent Tibetan word for *kṛta* is *byas-pa*. It is the past form of Tibetan verb *byed-pa* and is, therefore, the literal translation of *kṛta*. Most of *Tṛpitakas in Tibetan* is a literal translation from Sanskrit. It is said that the loss of the original manuscript is not totally fatal to the reconstruction of the original from, if there is a literal Tibetan translation. *Kṛta* is sometimes translated literally into Tibetan *byas-pa*.

There are examples in which *kṛta* is not translated literally.

1. kṛtajñā (Haribhadra's *Abhisamayālaṃkāraloka Prajñāpāramitā-vyākhyā*, ed. by U. Wagihara, pp. 1932-1935, p. 135)

12. Paul-Marcel Granet, *La Religion des Chinois*, 1922.

- = bkaḥ-drin gzo-ba (Narthan Ed. Mdo-ḥgrel Cha 76 b)
2. upakāra (Yaśomitra’s *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*, p. 428)
= phaṅ-ḥdogs-pa (Pekin Ed. Mdo-ḥgrel Chu 86 b)
3. pratikartu (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, p. 111)
= lan-ḡlon (Rekin Ed. Mdo Ca 53 a)
4. pratipriya (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, p. 111)
= lan-du-phan-pa (Pekin Ed. Ca 53 a)
5. pratikāra (*Ibid.* p. 393)
= lan-lon (Pekin Ed. Mdo Ca 228 a)

Bkaḥ-drin (1) is a polite form of *drin* and means “favour,” “benefit,” “grace,” or “kindness.” *Phaṅ-ḥdogs-pa* (2) means “use,” “benefit,” “profit,” or “blessing.” *Lan-ḡlon* (3) means “to return” or “to reply” and is the same as Chinese “報恩” (to repay kindness). *Lan-du-phan-pa* (4) and *lan-lon* (5) are the same as *lan-ḡlon*. What is induced from these examples is that Tibetans used not only a literal translation *byas-pa* but they also positively tried to find their own way to express the meaning. They were surely concerned with the thought.

Mi-chos bcu-drug or *Mi-chos gtsaṅ-ma* shows how much emphasis the Tibetans put on the thought, *Mi-chos* means the human ethical rules as opposed to *Lha-chos* which is the law of heaven. *Mi-chos* is not the secular law of the king *Rgyal-Khrims*.⁽¹³⁾ There are several versions of *Mi-chos* and, moreover, there are two kings who are considered to have possibly established the law: Sroṅ-btsan sgam-po who was famous in the seventh century and Khri-sroṅ lde-btsaṅ who was active in the late eighth century. The *Mi-chos* quoted below is from *Maṇi-bkaḥ-bum* (Lhasa Ed., p. 190 b).

1. Believe and respect the Three Treasures.
2. Seek and follow the right rules.
3. Requite the favours and kindness of your father and mother.

(In the Tibetan language: *Pha dan ma la drin-gyis lan-lon*

13. Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, p. 13.

14. Prof. Taishun Mibu, “Buddhist Thought in the Tibetan Law, *Mi-chos bcu-drug*,” *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, Vol. X, p. 86.

-*par bya ho.*)

4. Respect virtuous people.
5. Be affectionate, thoughtful, and good to the nobles and the old.
6. Be affectionate, thoughtful, and good to relatives and friends.
7. Help your brothers and neighbours.
8. Use honest words and be careful.
9. Follow the way of the nobles and do not go near the way of the pagans.
10. Be moderate in food and money.
11. Never forget those who were kind to you in the past.
(In the Tibetan language: *Sṇa-drin-can gyi yid-mi-bcad-par bya ho.*)
12. Return what you borrowed before the date due and be fair in measurement.
13. Be fair to all and never be jealous.
14. Do not listen to wicked people and defend yourself against disasters.
15. Use gentle words and never be talkative.
16. Be lofty and noble in behavior and be generous in mind.

The fact that there are two items in the sixteen Tibetan Laws that refer to the thought of remembering and requiting others's kindness, clearly shows that the Tibetans were greatly concerned with such thought.

In *Mi-la-ras-pa Rnam-thar*, an eleventh century popular book of religious literature in Tibet, such words as *bkaḥ-drin*⁽¹⁵⁾ (=favour, obligation) and *bkaḥ-drin can*⁽¹⁶⁾ (=a person to whom one is indebted) are often found. The word *byas-pa* is not found in this book which was originally written by a Tibetan. The Tibetan ethical thought grew out of the Indian understanding of *kṛta*. The Sanskrit expression of one's indebtedness to mother and father is sometimes translated into Tibetan literally in the same word

15. J. W. De Jong, *Mi-la-ras-pa rnam-thar*, 1959.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

order and is sometimes put in a Chinese word order "father and mother." The expressions "*pha dan ma*" (father and mother) and "*pha-ma*" (parents) in *Mi-chos* suggest that Tibet also has a paternal family system like China.

A study of *kṛta* in Indian Buddhism and the process of its being accepted into China and Tibet might be some help for better understanding of the inner relation between religion and ethics in oriental society. A discussion on the Japanese thought of "恩" (=favours, benefit, gratitude, obligation) is not included here because the time is limited.

Here is a list of reference books published in Japan.

(I) Chinese Studies

Kawai, Teiichi, *On no Kenkyu* (A Study on the Thought "*kṛta*" or "恩").

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(II) Buddhist Studies

Nakamura, Gen, *Shukyo to Shakai-rinri* (Religion and Social Ethics).

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Mibu, Taishun, *Shion ni tsuite* (On the Four Graces or Four Debts of Gratitude).

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Sasaki, Kentoku, *Bukkyo no On-shiso o Kiwamete Jodomon no Sore ni Oyobu* (To Reach Paradise after Fully Understanding the Buddhist Thought *Kṛta*).

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On the Thought “*kṛtajñā*” or “知恩” in Buddhism

Michihata, Yoshihide, *Chugoku-Bukkyo ni okeru Hoon-shiso to sono Jissen* (Development and Practice of the Thought of Repaying Kindness in Chinese Buddhism.)

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(Ⅲ) Sociological Studies

Sakurai, shotaro, *On to giri* (恩 or *Kṛta* and *Giri* or a sense of duty).

Kawashima, Takenobu, *Ideorogi to shite no Kazoku-seido* (The Family System as an Ideorogy).

Suzuki, Munenobu, *Nihon no Kindaika to On no Shiso* (The Modernization of Japan and the Thought *Kṛta*).

(Ⅳ) Psychological Studies

Ushijima, Yoshitomo, *Iwayuru Toyoteki Seiyoteki Shinsei ni tsuite* (The So-called Oriental Western Mind).

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