

Brief Comments on Shi Yinshun's *A Study of Buddha Dharma* Based on *Buddha Dharma*

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Abstract

The reality-seal and the three-dharma-seals are the principles originally used to examine whether a discourse is the Buddha dharma or not, but Shi Yinshun used them as the methods to study Buddha dharma instead. One of the outcomes of his research, most especially, is the classification of Buddha dharmas of the great-vehicle into three different categories. He classified the traditional Chinese Buddhism, which is centered on the practice and realization of Tathagatagarbha, into the category of true permanent mind-only and regarded the traditional Chinese Buddhism as having the Divine-self thought of non-Buddhism. The followers of Shi Yinshun also continue taking the same approach to “studying Buddha dharma based on Buddha dharma” and accepting his research result of the three categories of Buddha dharmas.

However, “studying Buddha dharma based on Buddha dharma” itself is in fact a logical mistake, which regards the result as the cause. Shi Yinshun underestimated too much the difficulty of the unique reality-seal and the three-dharma-seals, and thought them easy to understand once a hint was provided. No doubt his view violates the teaching of sutras and the fact. Actually, he took the incorrect understanding of the unique reality-seal and the three-dharma-seals to study Buddha dharma, and categorized every that did not agree with his personally prejudice into the non-Buddhist, questionable or false group.

Another mistake Shi Yinshun made was to consider the unchangeable Buddha dharma to be the changeable worldly truth. For the “textual research” of worldly philology he wrongly praised it as the method that can be used to personally realize the tranquil nirvana. The consciousness-only theory is a deep research primarily on the fact that can be experienced by the mind consciousness of sentient beings. However, he considered the theory as an evolving thought and totally ignored the fact that the functions of the mind consciousness of sentient beings are not changed forever. Besides, he claimed that the “realization methods” are not the objects that should be studied with efforts. With this view he was limited to the imagination of the “teaching methods” and not able to personally realize the Buddha dharma. Therefore, his study of Buddha dharma becomes the self-subjective conjecture and illusion and his followers cannot avoid the same fault either.

In fact, in the Buddhist sutras, there are already a method of studying Buddha dharma, which is personal realization that “the four kinds of reliance and the four kinds of non-reliance,” and the

three-ways-of-knowing of the Buddhist treatises indicate. Even for the present academic standards, these principles, with the scientific spirit of research, are still correct and applicable to academic research without much adjustment.

Keywords: research method, methodology, the four kinds of reliance and the four kinds of non-reliance, the three-ways-of-knowing, proposition, fact, principle, truth, thought, realization method, teaching method