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BUDDHISM AND THE CHINESE TRADITION

Probably the most momentous experience in the contacts and mergings among civilizations in the Far East—one shared by China, Japan and Korea—is the introduction of Buddhism from India. This is, of course, a subject on which much has already been written, and even when narrowed to China alone its complexities do not lend themselves readily to summary treatment. Ideally one should have a clear conception of what "Chinese Buddhism" and the "Chinese tradition" represent before proceeding to discuss their interrelations. The most that we can hope for here is that by examining specific points of contact or friction batween Buddhism and the more articulate spokesmen of Chinese tradition some reciprocal identification may emerge.

The most ambitious attempt to clarify the relations among Oriental thought systems is that of Professor Hajima Nakamura in his *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples.*[1] Nakamura rejects the notion that there is a common denominator in Oriental thought, and seeks to identify the characteristic tendencies which differentiate Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan

[1] Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, Tokyo 1960.

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thought, using their common experience with Buddhism as one of his principal yardsticks. According to this view there is a degree of universality in various thought systems of East Asia, among them Buddhism, but their expression in different countries is strongly conditioned by historical circumstances in each era and by ways of thought particular to the respective national traditions. In the case of China, Nakamura's analysis identifies no less than eleven general attitudes that are typically Chinese,[2] each with several sub-characteristics. I cannot comment here on each of them. My remarks will relate most closely to what Nakamura describes as the "anthropocentric attitude" of the Chinese, which for him is only one aspect of a general attitude, the "tendency toward practicality."

One of the most quoted saying of Confucius came in response to a question about the worship of ghosts and spirits: "Not knowing how to serve the living, how can one serve ghosts and spirits?" "Then what about death?" "Not knowing yet about life, how can we know about death?" (*Analects* XI, 11). In the light of Confucius' other comments on ancestral spirits and the proper observances for them, we need not conclude that the Master thereby expressed a completely agnostic or rationalistic attitude. Rather we should recognize here both his skepticism of prevailing superstitions concerning the spirit-world and his more positive belief that true respect for the dead implies service of the living. The ultimate destiny of the individual, for Confucius, is inseparable from the personal fulfillment attained through facing the immediate needs and responsibilities of human life. It is "this" life—man in his concrete situation, in his normal human relations—that Confucius' thought centers around. If this does not make him irreligious, it is precisely because Confucius recognizes the inseparability of religion and human life. If, at the same time, he is inspired by a lofty moral idealism, the basis for it is found not in supernatural revelation but rather in the natural revelation of the Heavenly order in man's moral sense.

[2] 1) perception of the concrete; 2) non-development of abstract thought; 3) emphasis on the particular; 4) conservatism expressed in exaltation of antiquity; 5) fondness for complex multiplicity expressed in concrete form; 6) formal conformity; 7) tendency toward practicality; 8) individualism; 9) esteem for hierarchy; 10) esteem for nature; 11) reconciling and harmonizing tendencies.

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Confucius may be called "life-affirming" in that his whole thought expresses the value of human life, of what it can mean truly to be "a man among men" (*Analects* XVIII, 6). In spite of his personal disappointments and hardships he never lost the conviction that life was worth living, that it could come to some fruition in terms of what was noblest in human nature, and that whatever the failure of his worldly ambitions his old age need not be marked by bitterness and frustration. The Will of Heaven was by then so much a part of him that he "could follow my heart's desire without transgressing." (*Analects* II, 4)

Thus, Confucius' affirmation of life can be considered "this-worldly," but only if we recognize that for him "this world" was not opposed to Heaven. Indeed, the common term for this world was "All-under-Heaven," reflecting both man's dependence on the physical heavens and the supremacy of the Heavenly order in the affairs of men. For Confucius, however, if this order were recognized and followed, it should be possible to achieve good government and world peace. The perfecting of the individual in society, and of society through the cultivation of the individual, would bring about something very much like Heaven-on-Earth.

Of the more common religious view, which sees an after-life in Heaven as the end of personal salvation, Confucius would have little reason to speak. Heaven for him is not an after-life, a separate sphere or state of being; it is the moral order, the ruling power in *this* world. And it is in this life that salvation, personal or social, comes about.

No doubt there is much optimism in Confucius' belief that the perfect society was attainable in this world, more optimism than one would expect from his generally sober and realistic estimation of man. In fact, however, there is more than mere optimism here. There is mysticism too—a vision of the oneness of man and Heaven which transcends the purely human sphere. This mysticism was to be given fuller expression in *Mencius* and *The Mean*, and, far from attenuating in later centuries as Confucianism became established in the secular order, remained a potent inspiration for Neo-Confucianism.[3]

[3] *Cf.* Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 1, Princeton 1952,

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The other major strain of native Chinese thought, Taoism, departed from the man-centeredness of Confucianism, insofar as man was defined so largely in ethical and social terms, and viewed human life in relation to a transcendent, all-pervading Way (or *Tao*) which was the ultimate principle of all life. It need not concern us here in how many respects naturalistic and mystical Taoism contrasted with Confucian humanism; what is significant for our purposes is that Taism, no less than Confucianism, was fundamentally life-affirming. It might differ on the proper methods of self-cultivation and the governing of society, and it might even dispute the high place Confucianists gave man in the universe, but it did not question that life was worth living. The question was rather whether Confucian values and ideals were conducive to a long and satisfying life. A more spontaneous enjoyment of life, drawing on the inexhaustible riches of the Tao; a looser form of government, permitting greater freedom of human activity; a serene life, extending to the utmost a man's natural span of years—these are the ideals which Taoism opposed to the human cares and concerns of the Confucianist. Mystical and religious though it was in spirit, Taoism manifested the same this-worldliness and practicality in combination with its nature-mysticism that Confucianism had with its ethical idealism.

It was its love of life that led Taoism, whether in its more sophisticated philosophic or its cruder religious forms, to the aspiration for immortality. In this case, immortality meant the indefinite extension of *this* life and was not conceived, any more than Confucian salvation had been, as an after-life. Transcendence of the world was of course implied in the desire to rise in some sense above change, but there is no suggestion of contempt for the world, disgust with life.

When we turn to Buddhism, as a religion that had undergone manifold developments before reaching China, it is more difficult to characterize its basic attitudes. In the so-called Four Noble

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p. 130; E. R. Hughes, *The Great Learning and the Mean in Action*, New York 1943, pp. 126 ff.; Thomas Berry, "The Spiritual Form of Asian Civilizations" in de Bary and Embree (ed.) *Approaches to Asian Civilizations*, New York 1963.

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Truths, however, we have a formulation of the teaching in its simplest terms. 1. The Truth of Suffering (existence is suffering); 2. The truth of the cause of suffering (suffering is caused by desire or attachment); 3. The truth of the cessation of suffering (through the extinguishing of desire, or non-attachment); and 4. The truth of the way that leads to the cessation of suffering (the Noble Eightfold Path).[4]

Taken together, these Truths express succinctly both Buddhism's initial pessimism about life and its final optimism. What could be more starkly in contrast to the Chinese attitude than the initial premise that existence is suffering, that to be born into this world involves inevitable pain, and that even death brings no cessation since rebirth involves one again in the endless cycle of transmigration? Surely, if pessimism be thought a characteristic of Indian religions, Buddhism manifests it most uncompromisingly here. There is no avoiding or mitigating the harsh confrontation with pain which Buddhism insists upon. Whether in its philosophical analyses, its meditations on human corruptibility, or its religious legendry dramatizing the young prince Siddhartha's own schocking experience of suffering as he came out of his palace—in all of these ways Buddhism compels its followers to face the inherent suffering of life without any illusions or sentimentality. Nowhere in the early Chinese experience is there any parallel to this radical confrontation of human suffering. There is Chuang Tzu, whose mysticism soars closest to the Indian, but his experience is of the absurdity of life, not its pain or anguish. And there is Hsün Tzu, who among Confucianists argued the evil nature of man from the anarchic state of his selfish desires, but Hsün Tzu was still optimistic that human desires could be educated, refined and harmonized, without the need to extinguish them.

Nevertheless, if Buddhism focuses sharply on the painfulness of life at the outset, it more than balances this pessimism by its optimistic assertion that deliverance may be had through the extinguishing of desire and the attainment of the peace of Nirvana. In the Mahayana form of Buddhism, which was to have the greatest influence in China, this positive aspect of

[4] *Cf.* E. J. Thomas, *Early Buddhist Scriptures*, London 1935, pp. 30-31.

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Buddhism is most emphasized. In the Theravada or Hinayana the goal of Nirvana seemed to some too negative or lifeless, and was easily mistaken for annihilation; in the Mahayana the resplendent attributes of Buddhahood as the ultimate end of religious aspiration are brought into the foreground. Technically, Buddhahood was a state transcending "existence" in the ordinary sense. To the believer, however, it could easily be understood as a higher form of life, a flowering out of the seed nourished in this existence.

A third-century Chinese Buddhist meditation text, recently studied and translated by Professor Arthur Link, vividly illustrates the initial pessimistic thesis of Buddhism as it was conveyed to China. There is set forth the need of the aspirant to meditate on the corrupt and painful character of human life:

> The ascetic engages in contemplation of himself and observes that all the noxious seepage of his internal body is impure. Hair, skin, skull and flesh; tears from the blinking of the eyes and spittle; veins, arteries, sinew and marrow; liver, lungs, intestines and stomach; feces, urine, mucus and blood: such a mass of filth when combined produces a man. It is as if a sack were filled with a leaky bag. Carefully observing it one distinguishes each of the various items. When one understands that a man is such as this, contemplating internally one's body, one perceives that each item of the four elements (*mahābhūta*) are nominal, and all of them taken together do not constitute a (real) person (*pudgala*). Because he contemplates without desire he perceives the basic emptiness of all things (*sūnyatā*), and thus concentrating his mind, he gains *dhyāna.*

And again:

> Or internally contemplating (his body), he deeply ponders on how below it is constrained by excrement and urine, and above it is oppressed by cold and heat, and awakened to the detestability of the body, concentrating his mind, he gains *dhyāna.*[5]

There seems to be no precedent in earlier Chinese literature for the morbid picture of man's bodily existence which is fixed

[5] *Liu-tu chi ching* 7 in *Taishō daizōkyō*, III, 39ab, from manuscript translation by Arthur E. Link.

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as the starting point of this meditation. And it is not surprising that in the early dialogues which reveal the doubts and difficulties of the Chinese in accepting Buddhism there should be resistance to Buddhism's deprecation of the body. The closest Chinese approximation of immortality had been closely bound up with biological reproduction and survival. A prime filial duty of the Confucianist was to keep his body intact and unscarred and to assure the continuity of the family line through successive generations. Chinese conditioned by this kind of thinking had to be re-educated to a far more spiritual view of life before they could believe that conformity to the Buddhist way of celibacy and ritual acts of bodily mortification rendered a higher service to their parents than preservation of the body and perpetuation of the family.

How did Buddhism succeed in overcoming these natural reservations of the Chinese? It was, I believe, only in part because it offered a new explanation for the sorrow of life, which Confucianism and Taoism dealt with less squarely, and a new articulation of an experience the Chinese now felt so deeply. Even more than this, it was because the positive aspect of Buddhism, its faith in ultimate deliverance, exerted a powerful attraction in terms more familiar to them. To a considerable degree, in fact, the initial reception of Buddhism was based on a misunderstanding. The Chinese interpreted this religion as offering another method for attaining personal immortality of the kind which popular Taoism strove to obtain or for achieving the kind of identification with the Absolute which was the ideal of the more sophisticated thinkers of third and fourth century Neo-Taoism.

In time serious students of Buddhism came to realize the inadequacies and inconsistencies in this corrupt form of the teaching, and to desire a more accurate understanding of its original doctrines. With the assistance of missionaries from India and Central Asia, including some who brought new interpretations of the traditional faith in the Mahayana form, great advances were made in comprehending alien ideas that sometimes radically challenged traditional conceptions. Thus the growth of the new religion in China was not a simple process whereby the total absorption of Buddhism into Chinese tradition

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transformed it out of all resemblance to its Indian antecedents. From the fifth to perhaps the ninth centuries strong transfusions of Mahayana thought continued to stimulate the development and strengthen the authentic character of Buddhist thought and practice in China. Yet, at the same time, Chinese attitudes and preferences were operating on this new material—neither distorting nor perverting it, but always emphasizing the more positive or affirmative aspect of the Indian product.

This is not the place to summarize the considerable scholarly discussion which has already highlighted the distinctively Chinese characteristics of Chinese Buddhism. A few examples, however, may suffice to illustrate our central theme. If we take the Madhyamika philosophy of Nagarjuna as the Himalayan peak from which the streams of Mahayana Buddhism flowed into China, we may see how its devastating critique of reason and of the intellect's capacity to apprehend reality—so much at odds with the Chinese' commonsense belief in reason—stood as the watershed for new developments in philosophy, devotional faith and mysticism.

Among these the cult of Amita and the Pure Land was one of the first to demonstrate its congeniality to Chinese tastes. Amita was the Buddha as the personification of limitless life and light; the Chinese rendering of his name used the character *shou*, "longevity," which, paired with the character *fu*, "felicity," represents one of the most common symbols of Chinese life ideals. Amita presided over a Pure Land paradise in the West vividly pictured as the "land of peace and happiness," in concrete terms that appealed to the realistic religious imagination of the ordinary Chinese. And where "birth" or "rebirth" in original Buddhism had connoted only suffering through endless cycles of transmigration, in Pure Land Buddhism the painful associations were gone when rebirth meant, for the faithful believer in Amita, to be reborn in his "happy land."

In philosophy it was the *T'ien-t'ai* school which, with one short step, moved from the principle of indeterminacy enshrined in the Madhyamika dialectic of negation to the positive ground of the Three-fold Truth, upon which the most elaborate philosophical structure of Chinese Buddhism was erected. As Tsukamoto has said, this philosophy is "the Chinese expression of the

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Buddhist theories of the Indian Nagarjuna."[6] And again, linking *T'ien-t'ai* and the *Huayen* philosophy in this respect, he says:

> As a result of the continued speculation on the meaning of the Buddhist scriptures in Chinese translation, both the *T'ien-t'ai* sect of south China and the *Hua-yen* sect of north China went beyond the absolute denial of reality to its absolute affirmation. The Chinese Buddhists were dissatisfied with the negative expressions of emptiness and substancelessness so essential to Mahayana Buddhism, which stands squarely on the rock of dependent causation and denies that anything that has only dependent existence can have substantial reality. The Buddhists of China laid special emphasis on the notion that the religious state at which they aimed must be a state of mind in which concrete reality is absolutely affirmed. This is what makes Chinese Buddhism Chinese.

In the sphere of mysticism there is the Meditation (*Ch'an* or *Zen*) sect, which likewise sprang from the Madhyamika and fulfilled its mystical tendencies in a typically Chinese manner, eventually becoming the most widespread form of Buddhism in China. The key teaching here is that this meditative method—so traditionally Buddhist—is understood as "pointing directly to the heart of man," enabling the individual "to see into his own nature and directly attain Buddhahood." Nakamura identifies this attitude as completely alien to Indian Buddhism and, in its reliance on "the direct experience of the individual inexpressible in words," as a manifestation of the non-logical, non-abstract tendency in Chinese thought.[7] Dumoulin, in discussing the great Ch'an master Hui-neng, acknowledges that the basic concepts of self-nature and Buddha-nature are anticipated in the great Mahayana sutras, and therefore not peculiarly Chinese, but he regards as typically Chinese the elimination of all preliminary stages and the renunciation of all preparatory exercises for the attainment of enlightenment. He cites the view of Hui-neng's disciple Shen-hui that this sort of instantaneousness is a mark of the Chinese character, which in affairs of state permits the rapid rise of the common man.[8] It is perhaps not too much to see

[6] Tsukamoto, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

[7] Nakamura, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

[8] Heinrich Dumoulin, S. J., *A History of Zen Buddhism*, New York 1963, pp. 94-96.

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here an impatience with Buddhism's original pessimism in regard to human nature, bursting into a spontaneous upsurge of the Chinese confidence in life and man's innate potentialities for good. Thus Dumoulin concludes that in the high period of Ch'an's development "the Chinese feeling for life has been assimilated."[9]

The assimilation referred to is that of Chinese attitudes into Buddhism, from which it is clear enough that Buddhism in China acquired a characteristic flavor or coloration. There is a further question which we may ask, however: To what extent did this adaptation to Chinese tradition make Buddhism itself acceptably Chinese? To what extent was Buddhism itself assimilated or absorbed into the Chinese tradition? The answers to these broad questions lead further into the history of Chinese religion that we would be able to follow here. A few general facts may suffice to set the stage for our own particular inquiry.

One is that Buddhism survived in China without totally surrendering its identity, without being totally absorbed in the manner of the popular misconception about "China always absorbing its conquerors." Buddhist elements did diffuse into the heterogeneous mass of Chinese popular religion and thus became virtually lost in a mixture more recognizably Chinese than Buddhist. But Buddhism itself maintained an independent existence down to modern times in the form given to it by the Ch'an school, which in the Sung and after became predominant over all the other schools. It may be difficult to judge how far the temples and monasteries which identified themselves with Ch'an Buddhism lived up to the standards set in the earlier period; no doubt the tendency toward syncretism prevailed to greater or lesser degree in many of these establishments and discipline may often have been lax. Nevertheless certain Buddhist traditions sharply at variance with deep-rooted Chinese attitudes persisted, among them vegetarianism, abstinence from liquor, and monastic celibacy. In Japan, by contrast, where organizationally and culturally speaking Buddhism remained a more significant part of national life, orthodoxy in such matters was more loosely adhered to or else totally abandoned. The

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

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persistence of celibacy in China is especially striking. Long after it had yielded to the family system in Japan, through the adoption of a married clergy and hereditary succession of religious authority, celibacy continued to be the rule for the Chinese clergy. Significantly, Chinese monks adopted the first syllable of the Buddha's name, Sakyamuni, as their "family" name, thus revealing their powerful instinct for some kind of family association, but it was the name they changed rather than the form.

A second general fact is already implied in our discussion of the first. It is that, although sustaining an independent life, Buddhism went into serious and steady decline from the late T'ang dynasty (10th century A.D.) onwards. In the succeeding Sung dynasty Ch'an Buddhism was still a vital cultural force, particularly in literature and the arts, and this influence dwindled only gradually in later centuries. Nevertheless, from the Sung onward a Confucian revival wrested the intellectual initiative from Buddhism, strengthened its own hold on the political establishment, and became the dominant ideological factor in Chinese society and culture. Buddhism was relegated to an almost insignificant corner of the national life—a refuge for the dissenter and the disillusioned, a service for the deceased and bereaved.

Just why Buddhism should have fallen to this low estate is less clear than the fact that it did. We are not concerned with the causes themselves, which involve a wide range of historical factors, but with the symptoms. What was it about Buddhism that, in spite of the adaptations already made to Chinese tradition, eventually disqualified it from the allegiance of most educated Chinese? What prevented Buddhism from finding a secure place within the dominant thought tradition of China? Can we discern here not so much alleged weaknesses of Buddhism as characteristic differences or even limitations in both Buddhism and Chinese tradition? These are large questions, and any adequate treatment of them would cover the whole spectrum of Chinese social and cultural life in the later dynasties. My own observations must be confined to the narrower ground of the reactions to Buddhism in Neo-Confucianism, the ideology of the educated elite.

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The debt of Neo-Confucianism to Buddhism is already well-recognized, not only by modern scholars judging from a greater distance and with greater detachment, but even by later Confucianists of the seventeenth and eighteenth century who deplored the unconscious but insidious influence of Buddhism on their Neo-Confucian predecessors. This debt is of two types: first, the concepts and terminology appropriated from earlier philosophic discussions of the Chinese Buddhists; and second, the benefit deriving from the response Neo-Confucianists were forced to make to the challenge of Buddhist metaphysics, which extended them well beyond the limits of classical philosophical discussion and compelled them to seek higher ground from which to defend tradition.

To defend tradition, however, was their conscious aim, not to synthesize Confucianism with Buddhism and Taoism. Elsewhere I have discussed the basic impulses and tendencies of the Neo-Confucian revival in the Sung.[10] Here I shall only reiterate their belief in certain fundamental ideas: the ethical precepts founded on the primary human relationships and obligations; the world-view which saw these precepts as integral with an immutable cosmic order, both rational and moral in character; the possibility of reforming human society in accordance with this rational and moral order; and the conviction that the study of history, both for its moral lessons and for what it reveals of the development of human institutions, could serve as a guide to the conduct of life and government.

With all of these values most Neo-Confucianists considered Buddhism incompatible. There was a small, but not insignificant, minority in the period of Neo-Confucian ascendancy who expressed a belief in the compatibility, the "oneness" of the "three religions," (Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism). This eclectic movement was especially widespread in the late Ming dynasty (16th century) and achieves its finest expression in some of the vernacular literature of the time (e.g. the *Journey to the West (Hsi-yu-chi)* of Wu Ch'eng-en); but except for affirming

[10] "A Reappraisal of Neo-Confucianism" in A. Wright (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Thought*, Chicago 1953, pp. 81-111; "Some Common Tendencies in Neo-Confucianism," in A. Wright and D. Nivison (ed.), *Confucianism in Action*, Stanford 1958, pp. 25-49.

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that these several teachings all lead to one ultimate Truth, which is a commonplace also in Chinese popular religion, such eclecticism, so far as I know, never succeeded in formulating any view of the complementarity of these teachings sufficiently articulate and accurate so that each was recognizable to itself. Those flexible enough in their interpretation of Confucianism to find in it much convergence with Buddhism soon lost their credentials as orthodox Confucianists. And no-one ever mistook *Journey to the West* as expressing an authentic Confucian view of life.

On the other side, Neo-Confucianists outspoken in condemning Buddhism rarely showed a comprehensive or profound knowledge of Buddhist teachings. Their new metaphysics may have served as an answer to the challenge of Buddhism, but it is not the product of a direct philosophical dialogue between the two. Much less does it provide a philosophical synthesis based on a genuine desire to assimilate Buddhism.[11] Although many Neo-Confucians had some exposure to Buddhism and some actually studied it, few were sufficiently well versed in the doctrine and its literature to discuss key points with any precision. Probably the typical Neo-Confucian attitude is expressed by the Sung philosopher Ch'eng Yi, who advised his followers: "You must simply put it [Buddhism] aside without discussing it; do not say 'We must see what it is like,' for if you see what it is like you will yourselves be changed into Buddhists. The essential thing is decisively to reject its arts." Or again: "If you make a complete investigation of Buddhist doctrines sorting out the good from the bad, before you have finished you will certainly have changed into a Buddhist. Only judge them by their practice; their practical teaching being what it is, what can their idea be worth?"[12]

The Neo-Confucian rejection of Buddhism, then, starts from a practical judgment that Buddhism is incompatible with the Chinese way of life and then proceeds to a defense of what it considers most essential to that way of life. Of the two major

[11] *Cf.* Galen E. Sargent, "Tchou Hi contre le Bouddhisme" in *Mélanges publiés par l'Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises*, I (1957), pp. 42-43.

[12] *Cf.* A. C. Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, London 1958, pp. 84, 88.

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criticisms which it makes of Buddhism, one, that Buddhism is life-denying while the Chinese Way is life-affirming, bespeaks not merely a Confucian but more broadly a Chinese attitude. To cite Ch'eng Yi again, "Man is a living thing; the Buddhists speak not of life but of death. Human affairs are all visible; the Buddhists speak not of the manifest but of the hidden. After a man dies he is called a ghost; the Buddhists speak not of men but of ghosts. What man cannot avoid is the ordinary Way; the Buddhists speak not of the ordinary but of the marvellous. That by which the ordinary is as it is is principle; the Buddhists speak not of principle but of illusion. It is to what follows birth and precedes death that we should devote our minds; the Buddhists speak not of this life but of past and future lives. Seeing and hearing, thought and discussion are real evidence; the Buddhists do not treat them as real, but speak of what the ear and eye cannot attain, thought and discussion cannot reach."[13]

These charges, which are echoed by later Neo-Confucianists, reaffirm the centrality of "this" life and "this" world in the sense we have understood them in earlier Chinese tradition, while Buddhism is considered to deprecate life in this world especially through its attack on the senses and sense experience. The Buddhists do not "speak of what is manifest" to the senses; they do not regard "seeing, hearing and thought as real"; they seek what is "beyond the ordinary life" and faculties of man. One may question whether this characterization is as true of the more developed forms of Buddhism, particularly Ch'an Buddhism, in which it has already been asserted that "the Chinese feeling for life has been assimilated."[14] How for instance do we reconcile such a charge with the statement of the Ch'an master Lin-chi (I-hsüan, d. 867): "Followers of the Way, the Law of Buddha has no room for elaborate activity; it is only everyday life with nothing to do. Evacuate, pass your water, put on your clothes, eat your food; if you are tired lie down."?[15]

The explanation for this apparent discrepancy is to be found

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

[14] See note 9.

[15] *Lin-chi Hui-chao ch'an-shih yü-lu*, in *Taishō daizōkyō*, XLVII, 498a, from manuscript translation of Philip Yampolsky.

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perhaps in the broader context of Lin-chi's statement, which suggests the acceptance of ordinary life on the simultaneous condition that one recognize its "emptiness." Thus, in the same sermon he admonishes: "Followers of the Way, do not acknowledge this dream-like, illusory world, for sooner or later death will come. Just what is it that you are seeking in this world that you think will give you emancipation? Go out into the world, and seeking only the barest minimum of food, make do with it; spend your time in the shabbiest of garments and go to visit a good teacher." From this we see that the significance of this world derives solely from the freedom one achieves over it. This life is real only insofar as one also recognizes it to be illusory and identifies Samsara (the transmigratory world) with Nirvana.

We are reminded in this way that Ch'an is still Buddhist and that behind every Mahayana affirmation stands either Madhyamika skepticism or Hinayana pessimism. Dumoulin thus reports of Ch'an (Zen):

> In this connection mention must still be made of two aids to contemplation which survive in Zen, though all other practices of Hīnayāna have disappeared completely. The schematic objects of consideration (*kammatthāna*), detailed especially in the *Mahāsattipatthāna Sutta*, are directives to psychic technique rather than to spiritual reflection. And yet they place the monk in that grave mood, engendered by contact with the fundamental truths of the transitoriness of life (*anicca*), the unreality of existence (*anattā*), and universal suffering (*dukkham*), which is a prerequisite to success in all Buddhist meditation.[16]

Similarly, the great meditation on concentration and insight in *T'ien-t'ai* Buddhism involves contemplation of the emptiness of things and the contamination of the senses, through the so-called Ten Objects of Contemplation. Starting with the various components of the empirical self and its environment, this contemplation rises through the cravings, passions, afflictions, distractions, hallucinations and delusions which are hindrances to emancipation until it passes beyond the dangers even of the Boddhisattva state to attain Buddhahood.[17]

[16] Dumoulin, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[17] *Cf.* Leon Hurvitz, *Chih I*, Columbia Ph. D. Dissertation 1959, pp. 366-367.

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Finally, in the cult of Amita we find a stark contrast between life's perilous sea, pictured in the darkest, most terrifying terms, and the positive goal of peace, bliss and limitless life beckoning from the "other shore." Here, truly, is an other-worldly refuge from "this" world seen as a flaming sea of passion, delusion and suffering. Shan-tao, explaining the human predicament in his parable of the White Path, shows man beset on all sides by evil beasts, poisonous vermin and vicious ruffians, symbolizing the sense organs, the consciousnesses, and the various psychic and physical constituents of the ordinary human self. The white path is "comparable to the pure aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land which arises in the midst of the passions of greed and anger."[18] It is little wonder that, as Nakamura relates, "many people committed suicide in order to be born in the Pure Land among the followers of Shan-tao who taught the doctrine 'loathe this defiled world and desire to be reborn in the Pure Land.' "[19]

From this we may conclude that even in the most "Chinese" of the Mahayana schools there was still enough of Buddhist pessimism regarding the human condition to render plausible the Neo-Confucian view that Buddhism held to a morbid view of life. Parenthetically, we may wonder how the Neo-Confucianists, for their part, could have been so immune to tragedy and suffering as not to feel more poignantly what the Buddhists sensed so deeply; but this fact only underscores the stubborn optimism of the native intellectual tradition.

The second charge against Buddhism, and probably the most crucial, is that it is an inherently "selfish" approach to life. Almost every generation and school of Neo-Confucianism has turned in this same indictment. Ch'eng Yi says:

You cannot say that the teachings of the Buddhists are ignorant, for actually they are quite profound. But essentially speaking, they can finally be reduced to a pattern of selfishness. Why do we say this? In the world there cannot be birth without death or joy without sorrow. But wherever the Buddhists go, they always want to pervert this truth and preach the

[18] *Taishō daizōkyō*, XXXVII, p. 273a.

[19] Nakamura, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

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elimination of birth and death and the neutralization of joy and sorrow. In the final analysis this is nothing but self-interest.[20]

Lu Chiu-yuan (Lu Hsiang-shan 1139-93), whose School of the Mind is often spoken of as influenced by Buddhism, unequivocally supports the idea that the "selfishness" of Buddhism derives from its escapist view of human life. "They consider life to be extremely painful, and so inquire how to escape from it... Therefore they say 'Life and death are a great matter.' And as for what you have spoken of as 'the development of the Mind of the Boddhisattva,' it is directed solely toward this one great matter [of life and death]. The teachings of Buddhism are established in accordance with this; that is why it is spoken of as selfish and concerned with gain. Being righteous and unselfish, Confucianism deals with the world; being selfish and concerned with gain, Buddhism withdraws from the world. The Buddhists, even when they strive to ferry souls across the sea of suffering, always aim at withdrawing from the world."[21]

There is no need to proliferate examples of this point of view, which may be found equally in the writings of the great Chu Hsi[22] (1130-1200), his most important latter-day rival, Wang Yang-ming[23] (1472-1529) and many others. It is a charge which touches at the heart of Buddhism—at the Hinayana, for which selflessness had been the supreme ideal of personal virtue; and at the Mahayana, which, having itself accused the Hinayana of a selfish preoccupation with individual salvation, set forth the ideal of the compassionate Boddhisattva who seeks to save all beings. It is the Boddhisattva that answers to Lu's description of one who "strives to ferry souls across the sea of suffering." How then is he to be considered selfish? The

[20] *Cf.* W. T. de Bary, W. T. Ch'an and B. Watson (ed.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, New York 1960, p. 533.

[21] *Cf. Hsiang-shan hsien-shen ch'üan-chi* (SPTK), 2/2ab Letter to Wang Shun-po, translation adapted from Siu-chi Huang, *Lu Hsiang-shan*, New Haven 1944, p. 154, and Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton 1953, Vol. II, p. 578.

[22] See G. E. Sargent, *op. cit.*, p. 11 ff.

[23] See W. T. Ch'an, "How Buddhistic is Wang Yang-ming?" in *Philosophy East and West*, XII, No. 3 (October 1962), pp. 205, 212-213.

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Boddhisattva, having attained enlightenment and the right to Nirvana, nevertheless foregoes the reward of his own meritorious efforts in order to make the "great return" to the *samsara* world and voluntarily take upon himself the sufferings of others. How is he accused of an escapist "withdrawal from the world"?

Here the discrepancy between the Confucian and Buddhist views on the question of "selfishness" may be clarified—though probably not resolved—by considering the meaning of "self" in each. For the Confucianist "cultivation of self" (*hsiu-shen*) was a basic ideal in life. As set forth in the so-called *Four Books*, especially the *Great Learning*, it meant development of the individual's total personality, with equal emphasis on his physical growth, intellectual attainment, moral training and aesthetic refinement. The ideal of self-renunciation, so strong in Indian religions, had no place here. For according to the strongly ethical view of man in Confucianism, his nature and personality were defined very largely (though not exclusively) in terms of his natural social relationships. Fulfilling his inescapable obligations to his parents, his family, his teacher and his ruler, the individual subordinated to them his personal selfish desires—but never his personality. Rather such discipline constituted the essential and natural means of developing his "self" or "person." Selfishness only became a problem if the individual attempted to renounce these obligations, and egotistically thought of his own self as independent of the familial, social and political relations that in fact sustained human life (his own as well as others).

Buddhism in China challenged this whole system of values from the outset, not out of any special disrespect for family and society but out of a primary insistence on the individual's freeing himself from any attachment to or dependence upon externals which would prevent realization of his true nature or self. However, this unconditional drive for the attainment of the unconditioned state allowed for no more definition of the "self" or "one's nature" than was discovered in the final intuition of "Enlightenment" or "Buddhahood." This was an insight that transcended all logical categories or moral judgments. It passed beyond the realm of "good and evil."

Again, we need not look further than the texts and teachers already cited for confirmation of this view and illustration of its

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seeming "selfishness" in Confucian terms. The aforementioned meditation text of the 3rd cent. A.D.,[24] strongly Hinayanist in flavor, already speaks of the second stage of trance as no longer requiring one "to advance good in order to reduce evil. When the two thoughts of delight and good are both themselves extinguished, the ten evils vanish like smoke." Much later the Ch'an Master Lin-chi, who explains the significance of "true monks who have left their homes" (a conventional term for the Buddhist who has cut his attachments—attachments to the world in general but also more pointedly to his family) identifies his ultimate goals as follows: "If you wish to attain freedom in moving through the world of life and death, then know the man who right now is listening to the Law. He is without shape, without characteristics, without root, without basis, yet always brisk and lively. There is no trace of the activity of all his many devices. If you try to find him he is far away; if you seek him he goes against you. Given a name this is a mystery."[25]

It is not difficult to see how such language as this would appear to corroborate the assertions of our Neo-Confucianists that Buddhism was "directed solely to the one great matter of life and death," that it spoke "not of what is manifest but of what is hidden,...not of the ordinary but of the marvellous." And had they read Shan-tao's parable, how must they have reacted to his equation of human greed with human affection, likening these to two great rivers of fire and water which threaten to engulf man? The Confucianist, no less than the Buddhist, disdained sensuality and sought to restrain lust, but affection (*ai*, love) was another thing. The natural affections constituted the basis of human relations for him, and the perfection of virtue—humanity or benevolence—which Neo-Confucianists like Ch'eng Hao and Chu Hsi raised to the level of a cosmic principle, was often defined as "love" (*ai*).[26]

If the Boddhisattva transcended good and evil, human affections, and the natural obligations of human relationships,

[42] See p. 107, note 1.

[25] *Lin-chi Hui-chao ch'an-shih yu-lu*, in *Taishō daizōkyō*, XLVII, 498c. From manuscript translation by Philip Yampolsky.

[26] *Cf.* de Bary, Ch'an and Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 530-531, 556-557, 559.

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then in the eyes of the Confucianists his compassionate activity, his "ferrying of souls to the other shore," likewise must be understood as helping them to rise above rather than to face personal and social responsibilities. His function was to enlighten the deluded and free them from attachment, not to grapple with the problems of human society. Moreover it was a condition of his reentry into the world that he feel no obligation to help and no sense of attachment to those helped. Whether he served this or that good cause (in humanitarian terms) was ultimately a matter of indifference.

One of the most famous sayings in Neo-Confucian literature is by the Sung statesman, Fan Chung-yen (989-1052) who offered as the motto of the Confucian gentleman or Noble Man (*chun-tzu*) that he should be "First in worrying about the world's troubles and last in enjoying its pleasures." Arthur Wright comments: "This element of ethical universalism which found expression in the new Confucianism was appropriated from Mahayana Buddhism. It cast in secular Chinese terms the Boddhisattva ideal so eloquently stated by Santideva: "May I become an unfailing store for the wretched and be first to supply them with the manifold things of their need. My own self and my pleasures, all my righteousness, past, present and future, I sacrifice without regard, in order to achieve the welfare of beings."[27]

It may indeed be that the pervasive influence of Buddhism on the thought climate of eleventh century Sung China accounts for the strong tone of self-denial in the second half of Fan's motto. His highly idealistic offer "to be last in enjoying the world's pleasures" no doubt goes well beyond secular altruism and is reminiscent of the extravagant gesture of the Boddhisattva to take upon himself "the whole mass of the suffering of all beings."[28] But the actual language of Fan's motto is that of Mencius, who yields nothing to Santideva in the universality of his human concerns. "When a ruler rejoices in the joy of his people, they also rejoice in his joy; when he grieves at the sorrow of his people they also grieve at his sorrow. Rejoicing

[27] *Cf.* A. Wright, ***Buddhism in Chinese History***, Stanford, 1959, p. 93.

[28] *Cf.* Edward Conze, ***Buddhist Texts through the Ages***, London 1954, p. 131.

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with all under Heaven, grieving with all under Heaven, he of the people rather than simply enjoying power for himself. reference thus emphasizes the importance of the ruler having a social conscience, of having an active concern for the welfare of the people rather than simply enjoying power for himself, But Boddhisattvahood has nothing essentially to do with this kind of moral responsibility. The Boddhisattva endures suffering and he enlightens the ignorant; he does not, however, become "involved" or "engagé." For the Boddhisattva to be "worried about the world's troubles" would be a contradiction in terms.

As Dumoulin has said: "The ideal of Bodhisattvahood is engendered by the spirit of India, which is indifferent as to whether or not its concepts correspond to reality. Or rather, concepts, desires, wishes and vows are to be considered realities as fully as are men and their deeds. In the face of Buddhist negativism and idealism all things vanish into the Void. What does it matter whether a Bodhisattva ever existed or whether he can exist?..." Consequently, "The unreality of the Bodhisattva ideal impairs considerably the value of the great compassion. The admirable heroism of these enlightened beings shows itself primarily in wishes and vows. Their deeds, which achieve the salvation of sentient beings, are magic wonders performed by fantastic powers. While the Bodhisattva saves all beings, no form of a sentient being enters his mind since his knowledge abides in emptiness. As an embodiment of the cosmic wisdom, he is, at least theoretically, an impersonal being."[30]

For the Confucianist an impersonal, intangible ideal of this sort could never substitute for the solid ground of moral principle as the basis for personal cultivation and social welfare. Wang Yang-ming says: "The Buddhist attaches himself to a state in which neither good nor evil exist,[31] and disregards all else, so

[29] My colleague, Mr. Pei-yi Wu, points out a similar thought in *Mo Tzu*, "Universal Love" Part III, where however the verbal parallelism is not quite so close: "I have heard that to be an enlightened ruler under heaven one must serve the interests of the people first and his personal interests last. Only then can he be an enlightened ruler." (*Mo Zzu*, "Chien ai" 3, p. 26, l. 39-40. [Harvard-Yenching Index edition No. 21]

[30] Dumoulin, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

[31] Technically speaking this misrepresents the Buddhist view, which insists

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that he is unable to deal with the world. Whereas in the case of the Confucian sage the absence of good and evil means simply that he neither acts because of personal likes nor acts because of personal dislikes...To say of someone that he does not act according to likes and dislikes, means simply that in his likes and dislikes he wholly conform to Principle..." And conforming to Heavenly Principle, says Wang, "he can assist in its creative activities."[32]

For Wang and his fellow-Confucians there can in reality be no state beyond good and evil, because (as we have seen) the human order and cosmic order are truly one. Conforming himself to Heavenly Principle, and thus growing in accordance with the moral order uniting Heaven and man, the Sage achieves fulfillment in a creative process that is no less mystical for being practical. As Lu Hsiang-shan explains, man has his five senses precisely because they enable him to discern right and wrong, fulfill the Way of Man, and thus unite himself to Heaven-and-Earth.[33] Given this faith in the perfectability of man in society, partaking in a cosmic harmony of life and love, it was difficult for the Confucianist to see the value of Emptiness and easy to believe that Buddhist wisdom or compassion had no place in his universe. Nakamura says: "How ethical practice can be established on the basis of *sunyata* (Emptiness) is a big problem."[34] And Dumoulin asserts: "The interconnection of illuminative knowledge (*prajna*) and compassion (*karuna*) in the Bodhisattva is logically inexplicable. It remains an unsolved riddle."[35] For the Confucianist this problem or this riddle re-

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upon non-attachment even to the state beyond good and evil. So strong, however, is the Confucian sense of moral choice and life commitment that it allows no middle ground here.

[32] *Cf.* Fung Yu-lan, *op. cit.*, II, p. 617. Adapted from the translation of Derk Bodde.

[33] Huang, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

[34] Nakamura Hajime, "A Brief Survey of Japanese Studies on the Philosophical Schools of the Mahayana" in *Acta Asiatica*, Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture, Tokyo 1960, Vol. I, p. 66.

[35] Dumoulin, *op. cit.*, p. 26. Nakamura seems to believe that such a connection does exist but not on the logical plane. "Japanese scholars... assert that the

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mained an irreducible barrier to the assimilation of Buddhism into his world-view.

If from this point of view the Way of the Boddhisattva and the ideal of the Noble Man remained mutually exclusive, still this very incompatibility may suggest to us how and in what manner Buddhism could survive in the face of such hostility. Set apart from the dominant political and social ethic, it could provide for those whose experience of life did not confirm the lofty Confucian ideal, who could not be caught up in its Utopian vision or be sustained any longer by its optimistic view of human perfectability. These may not have been the majority, and yet in every age of later Chinese history there were some who found themselves overpowered by personal misfortune, by the evil and weakness in man, by the contradictions and frustrations of life in society, or by the oppressive weight of external sanctions which constantly threatened the delicate balance Confucius had struck between the respective claims of the individual and the group. For such as these—perhaps dedicated officials thwarted by corruption and tyranny in government, perhaps sensitive souls recoiling from the grossness of human passions and ambitions, or perhaps parents from whom death had suddenly taken the son upon whom their hopes of posterity and security in old age depended—for these Buddhism provided an alternative outside the established forms of social organization which had become inhospitable or intolerable. Within this larger context of Chinese life then, Buddhism had indeed its own role, and while at odds with the dominant tradition, at the same time complemented it.

wisdom of Non-Dualism constitutes the keynote of the whole Mahayana; that the selfless deed of donation harmonizes with the fundamental conception of Buddhism, and that Buddha's supreme wisdom is transformed into his great compassion." *Cf.* Nakamura, *Ibid.*, p. 66.

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