

#### IV. BUDDHISM IN CHINA

Buddhism entered China from India. It came in the Mahayana or "Great Wheel" form. Later some of the Tantric forms also entered China, but the major impact was through Mahayana.

Buddhism was the first major foreign religion to enter China. Its acceptance and accommodation to Chinese thought had several dimensions to it.

- The interaction led to distinctive forms of Chinese Buddhism and broadened the scope of Chinese understanding of human destiny through concepts such as karma, transmigration, etc.
- The moral of karma fit well with Confucian social concern.
- Taoism dealt with individual adjustment to life. Buddhism provided the people with hope for a future beyond life.
- The translation of Buddhist terms in Chinese terms derived from Confucianism and Taoism led to new connotations. For example, nirvana-samsara became wu-wei (nonaction) and yu-wei (action). The five precepts of Buddhism linked to the five virtues of Confucianism.
- Texts like Mou-tzu on the Settling of Doubts quotes from Confucian and Taoist texts to show no contradiction between the systems.
- Buddhism entered China about 4th - 5th centuries B.C. and was at first attacked as foreign and detrimental to the state.

##### 1. Buddhist Missionaries to China

###### 1.1 Emperor Wu of Han dynasty (140-86 B.C.)

- Chinese traveller, Chang Chien sent to deal with western and southern tribes. Encountered Buddhism.
- later some diffusion of Buddhism into China.

###### 1.2 A.D. 61 Emperor Ming had a vision of a huge golden figure flying down from heaven over his palace. Terrified. Minister interpreted it as Buddhism coming to China. Ming sent a delegation to India (63 A.D.) to find out about this deity. A.D. 67 the delegation returned with relics and writings on white horses. The first temple built was called the "White Horse Temple". Two priests were brought along:

- = Kasyapa Matanga who died shortly after his arrival.
- = Gobharana who translated works into Chinese until his death at the age of 60.

###### 1.3 A.D. 148. Anshikao (possibly Prince Arsaces from Parthia), knew Zoroastrian teachings and then became a Buddhist and went as a missionary to China. Translated the Amitabha Sutra (Book of the Eternal Time).

Joined by Indian Lokaraksha. Under them a great spread of Buddhism in China.

###### 1.4 A.D. 333-416 Hui-Yuan. Taoist who became a Buddhist and founded Pure Land School of Buddhism.

###### 1.5 A.D. 401 Indian monk Kumarajiva had a great influence and translated much into Chinese.

###### 1.6 A.D. 520 Bodhidharma came from India. He was the 28th patriarch in direct succession from Sakyamuni. Known in China as P'u-t'i-ta-mo.

1.7 Indian missionaries or monks sat in cells, copied the sutras, ate very simple vegetarian meals, meditated and were deeply religious. For them absorption was their main task.

## 2. Chinese Developments

2.1 After first 200 years of missionary control, power shifted to Chinese hands. Only then did a great increase in followers come.

- during this time there was governmental support, and Taoism was not antagonistic. Growth was slow and steady.
- 4th and 5th century A.D. growth very rapid in new northern states under Chou dynasty. Loyang had 42+ monasteries with temples and pagodas. By 381 9/10ths of the people in n.w. China were buddhists. The Early and Late Chin dynasties supported the faith.

2.2 420 A.D., after fall of Chin dynasty, persecution set in under Mongol dynasty of Wei in the north and Chinese Sung dynasty in the south. In 426 a.d. an edict to destroy all temples, images and priests. Many killed. But its power among common people so persecution failed and in 451 the persecution was stopped and accommodations reached.

2.3 By 471 spread was great. 13,000 temples in northern China alone.  
- continued opposition in south among literati who were for Taoism.

2.4 Liang Wu ti (502-550) strong emperor in support of Buddhism, Chinese Ashoka. Under him the 28th patriarch from Buddha left India and come to settle on Chinese soil (527 A.D.)

2.5 Between 594 and 616 three collections of Tripitaka produced.

2.6 Persecution under Tang dynasty.

2.7 From 730 A.D. little persecution and common people turned to Buddhism.

- brought a bone of Buddha in 819.

2.8 844 - 847 A.D. persecution by Taoists. Many "public disputations or wonder-working tests." 4,600 temples destroyed, 260,000 monks forced back into society. After this Buddhism was a **tolerated** religion though still very influential.

2.9 11th century influence of Lamaism and Tantric buddhism.

2.10 Wu Tsung (1308 - 1312) did much to build Buddhism in his empire.

2.11 After 1600 Jesuit missionaries came and tried to bridge across to Buddhists. Reaction by Dominicans and Franciscans led to an appeal to the Pope as to what name to use for God. He ruled against Jesuits. The Emperor K'ang Hsi, a linguist, thought he should make the decision, and when he was overridden he persecuted the Catholic mission. In 1742 the Pope Benedict XIV issued a bull forbidding any use of Chinese rituals.

2.12 After Revolution (1911) Buddhist schools were expropriated as schools but later an accommodation was reached.

### 3. Theoretical Developments

#### 3.1 400 A.D. Concern for the translation of "Buddha" into Chinese.

- The term by now in Mahayana had come to mean more than the historical Buddha. It referred to the "enlightened ones".
- Chose the term "Fu-t'o" - characters meaning "Man" and "Not". The deep meaning is that which is beyond the sphere of human life with its limitations.
- Buddhists in China explain the Fu as Chio , to perceive, and point to the deeper understanding of oneself and the universe. A metaphysical concept.
- not the term for gods, for these are only on the highest level of the transmigratory circle. Fu is to pass beyond all mutations and changes, and no risk of dropping back into the transmigratory existence.
- in Mahayana the historical Buddha withdraws into the background, and in Fu is replaced by a new metaphysical figure, clad in the garb of spiritual glory. In fact he is enthroned in endless light and radiance together with myriads of other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and holy masters.
- referred to as a Tathagata = he who is or appears in this manner. There is a Chen-ju or mysterious latent divine power that lies behind all existence. Then there is Ju-lai that signifies that this divine power has manifest itself, personified.
- when first Bible translators began in Mongolian they used Fu.

#### 3.2 Buddhist trinity:

- 1st reference in Hua-yen Ching where it says the Chen-ju develops itself in three directions: 1) spiritual substance, 2) phenomenal appearance, and 3) activity or "yung".
- later the three reappear in many forms. eg. personality of the law, personality of the revealer and personality of the activity.

#### 3.3 Rise of deified forms:

- Buddha increasingly deified in various forms. Then seen as one of many buddhas.
- Amitabha (O'mi't'o Fu) came to occupy a central place in worship. Not found in Hinayana. Some say he is 9th son of the Buddha of Wisdom. Others he was son of a prehistoric Buddha named Freely Existing King. He completed 48 vows and was born into Western Paradise. Sometimes he is seen as the great-grandfather of Sakyamni Buddha. Sometimes seen as the sum of all Buddhas.
- = Associated with Pure Land School.
- = If you follow the Amitabha idea to the limit, you end with your own heart. Highest monks in Amitaba Buddha say "Amitabha is myself" and lay their hands on their hearts.
- = Amitaba took on a more monotheistic form during era of Nestorians.

#### 3.4 Era of confusion:

- missionaries from north and south India brought in different schools.
- Chinese pilgrims brought back even more. A very confusing time. E.G. Fahsien 399, Sung-yun 518, I-ch'ing 634-713, and Hsuan'chuang 629-645.
- tremendous influx of magical Buddhism with mantras.

### 3.5 Attempts at Synthesis:

#### 3.51 Boddhidharma and the Meditation school.

This was a time of confusion in Buddhism, and he preached a strong and simple demand, "Seek meditation, for there you will find that clearness and peace which the study of scriptures alone can never give."

- An example: " he sat for nine years with his face to the wall in order not to be distracted." Meditated to the end.
- Held that "Buddhism is too deep and inclusive to be translated into writing and even less can it be completely understood merely by the study of the scriptures."
- He established the Meditation School of Buddhism in China.

#### 3.52 Chih-i. Founder of the T'ien-t'ai Tsung School.

- stressed study of scripture.
- claimed to have found the synthesis in the five periods of Buddha's life:
  - 1) 1st period: 3 weeks after enlightenment. Gathered bodhisattvas and heavenly beings and taught them his all-embracing teaching. Recorded in Hua-yen Ching.
  - 2) 2nd period: realized teaching too high, so simplified them and came came up with 4 truths and 8 fold path. 12 years of preaching and recorded in Hinayana scriptures.
  - 3) 3rd period: disciples thought this was whole teaching, so for 8 years had to expand teaching. Taught them they were to enter enlightenment, not only to be saints but also to make them coworkers in work of salvations - become Bodhisattvas. Mahayana texts.
  - 4) 4th period: When disciples realized common humans could not grasp all this, they thought Hinayana was only way for commoners. Buddha spent 22 years clearing away this misunderstanding and showed that Hinayana was only a preparatory stage. So Mahayana was simplified to the extreme in Ta Pan Jo Chin and Mahapragnaparamita Sutra.
  - 5) 5th period: When Buddha was 72 he began to preach the loftiest and deepest doctrine, that evry individual can attain Nirvana. He had come for this very purpose. Teachings in the Lotus Sutra. Later Pure Land Scriptures all added here.

### 3.6 New doctrines that set Chinese Mahayana Buddhism apart from Theravada Buddhism.

3.61 There is a new concept of an eternal deity. The Buddha emphatically repudiated the idea of such a deity. Now he himself was worshipped and deified.

3.62 The Boddhisattvas (Buddhas of the second grade) began to be of great importance. They were those souls who in their next incarnations are to become Buddhas, but who voluntarily defer their own elevation in order that they may assist others in working out their salvation.

3.63 Whereas the old ideal of the Arhat, or disciple, was one who went aside from the world to selfishly work out his own salvation, this new Boddhisattva ideal took its place, and even Arhats aspired to become Boddhisattvas in order to help others rather than for selfish reasons.

3.64 Real prayer began to be offered to the Boddhisattvas, instead of the older way of trying self-hypnosis to bring the mind to a steady state. The need for faith in the various Boddhisattvas was also taught. At times the result was practically polytheism.

3.65 Instead of the old idea of **nirvana** where the soul lapsed back into the ocean of life like a ripple upon the ocean's surface (as taught by Nagarjuna), there came in the doctrine of the Western paradise with its multitudinous-storied heavens and equally many horrible hells.

#### 4. "Six Schools and Seven Branches."

Several schools of thought developed in China, some of which had various branches. The early schools were concerned more with the nature of ultimate reality and was influenced by Taoism. Later there were moves to teach and interpret Buddhism in its own terms.

4.1 **Hua-yen school.** Fa-tsang (643 - 712 A.D.). He taught the principle of mutual interpenetration of all things as a result of their being manifestations of the one, all-embracing Buddha-mind. Things in the world have a degree of reality as expressions of the absolute Buddha-mind within things. Corresponding to aspects of objective idealism in the West, the teaching combined logical and psychological insights and made it one of the most influential schools in China and Japan.

4.2 **T'ien-t'ai school.** Named after a mountain in S. China. The founder was Chi-i (531-597 A.D.). This school has the Lotus Sutra as its sacred text. It espouses the central Mahayana doctrines such as

universal Buddha nature, interpenetration of all things, and the theory of instant enlightenment.

- this emerged when there was an influx of many different Buddhist schools, each claiming to be true. It sought a comprehensive historical-doctrinal organization of texts and doctrines.

- it held to the theory of 'five periods and eight doctrines':

- a) 1st 21 days Buddha preached, but the disciples could not understand him.

- b) 12 years he propagated the Hinayana doctrine to develop a higher aspiration of simple doctrine.

- c) then for 8 years he began to teach Mahayanist teachings and some were converted.

- d) then for 22 years he taught the Prajna Sutras (Wisdom) and Mahayanist doctrines of the void.

- e) finally for 8 years Buddha taught the Lotus and Nirvana Sutras as the supreme way.

- this schools stressed everything is the essence of every other thing from the stand point of ultimate reality. So the importance and reality of this world are stressed.

4.3 **Ch'an (Zen) school.** This was a reaction to the scholasticism and formalism of T'ang. It stressed meditation to bring full experiential and practical realization of the universal Buddha-nature and instant enlightenment. It focused attention on life in this world and fused in the Taoist idea of live of this world and nature. Emphasis on egolessness, nonduality, spontaneity and complete assimilation.

- stressed Zen = meditation.
- used the Platform Sutra.
- Hui-neg (638 - 713 A.D.) was the leader in the south; a poor wood cutter who gained enlightenment - so it advocated hope for the poor and taught that they too can be enlightened.
- stressed not alms and merit but inner seeing Buddha and outer reverence.
- the monastics carried it further:
  - "The master told the congregation: 'Seekers of the Way, In Buddhism no effort is necessary. All one has to do is to do nothing, except to move his bowels, surinae, put on his clothing, eat his meals and lie down if he is tired. The stupid will laugh at him, but the wise one will understand. An ancient person said, 'One who makes effort externally is surely a foo.'"
- there were spits which produced variants such as Lin-chi (novice catapulted into enlightenment by pondering a proverb).
- taught the five principles:
  - a) highest truth or 1st principle is inexpressible. Void. Only experienced by the enlightened.
  - b) spiritual cultivation cannot be cultivated. It must become instinctive. Don't practice buddhism, but be buddhist.
  - c) in the last resort nothing is gained. Nothing changes but our perception. "When I begin to study Zen mountains are mountains; when I thought I understood Zen, mountains were not mountains; but when I came to full knowledge of Zen, mountains were again mountains."
  - d) there is not much in Buddhist teaching: concepts, doctrines, and words are inferior to experience of enlightenment. From the highest perspetive there is no Buddha, Buddhists or Buddhism. The goal is to learn in experience what is taught in concept.
  - e) in carrying water and chopping wood; therein lies the wonderful Tao. There is a search for the texture of religious experience. The Buddha-nature can be realized anywhere.

#### 4.4 Chingt'u (Pure Land) School of Buddhism

This is the oldest of schools of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism.

- Foundations laid by Asvaghosha and Nagarjuna, leaders during the great renaissance that led to the formation of Mahayana.

- First books was "The Awakening of the Faith". This says:
 

"Consider those who begin to study th five methods of this chaptr and desire to get right faith but are timid and weak. As they live in this world of extreme suffering, they far they cannot approach Buddha continually and contribute personally to his service. Thus they fear thy cannot attain to this perfect faith and they have a mind to renounce the search of it.

Thae should know that Ju-lai (Tathagat) has most excellent means for strengthening their faith. By having the mind set only on the things of Buddha and being constantly with him far from all evil, one attains this end. As the stura says, ' If a man sets his mind to think only of Amitabha Buddha whois in the happiest realm of th West, and if his good deeds are in the right directin, and if he desires to be born in the happy paradise, he will then be born there, and as he is always in the resence of Buddha, he will never fall back!

If we refelct on the eternal nature of Amitabha Buddha and

constantly practice this method, we shall in the end reach the pae of future wisdom."

- Nagarjuna was a biting critic who cut rrough the philosophical underbrush to get at the lofty essence of Buddhism. He asked great quetions and emphasized negation:  
"No birth, no death, no continued abiding, no extinction, no unity, no multiplicity, no future, no past."
  - Nagarjuna's disciple, Vasubandhu added rich meaning to Pure Land.
- 4.41 Founding of Chinese Pure Land.
- Chinese founder was Hui-yuan (333-416). A zealous Taoist won over to Buddhism. A wandering pilgrim attached to the holy Lu Mountains in Kiangsi province.
  - gathered many followers, build a monastery with white lotus-blossoms before the temple. So the school got the name "White Lotus Religion". In 14th century secret society took this name, so it changed its name to Pure Land.
  - From Taoism Hui-yuan brought in the concept of the way (tao). So monks became known as "people of the way" , etc.
  - From Nestorian Christianity which was strong at that time came the concept of God with a notion of the trinity. This concept of a transcendent being became stronger as the movement grew.
  - 2nd leader was T'an-luan (502-549). He further elaboratd the concept of Amitaba.
  - 3rd leader Tao-ch'a, 4th was Shan-tao ( -681). The last lived close to the center of Nestorianm mission. He stressed monotheism.
- 4.42 Founding of Japanese Pure Land.
- First three leaders were Gonshin (941-1017), Genku Honen (1133-1198), and Shinran (1173-1263). They were all deeply influenced by the Christian mission in Japan.
  - Shinaran in particular promoted Pure Land (Jodo) in his Shin-Shu school with worship of Amida. He was the first to stress humans can be born again and ener Pure Land only through faith and calling upon the naem of Amitabha. He is sometimes refered to as the Luther of Buddhism.
- 4.43 The concept of Amitabha.
- The concept of Amitabha became equated with the transcendent unrevealed god with power and grace.
  - The two revealers of his nature were Ta-shih-chih and Kuan-yin.
  - The three were taken as a type of trinity and refered to as Ju-lai. Over time there was an increasing stress on monotheism, particularly in Japan.
  - There were a number of sacred books. It shared with other schools the Chinese Tripitaka. It also had its own texts such as Ch'an-men Jih-sung or book of common worship that had hymns and poems for use at various masses for evening, morning, confession of sin, penance, misery, renewal and consecration.
  - Much of Pure Land resembles Nestorian Christian materials from which it drew heavily. No other school in Buddhism was so deeply influenced by Chritianity.
  - Pure Land took on special significance in China after the 12th

century. It was a relatively small school, but its followers were in many of the other schools.

- Story of Amitabha: There was a line of 81 Buddhas beginning with Dipankara and ending with Lokeshvararaga. During the time of the latter, a bhikshu or monk named Dharmakara formed the pious intention of becoming a Buddha. He went to Lokeshvararaga and chanted the praise of Buddha, and asked him to become his teacher and to describe to him what a Buddha and a Buddha country ought to be. Lokeshvararaga gave him the information. Dharmakara asked that when he should attain Buddhahood all the qualities of Buddha countries should be concentrated in his own. He went away and after a long meditation, returned with 48 vows whereby he would undertake Buddhahood only on condition he be able to save all beings and to establish a kingdom of perfect blessedness in which all living creatures might enjoy age-long happiness and wisdom.

The 18th vow was "When I become Buddha, let all living beings of the ten regions of the universe maintain a confident and joyful faith in me; let them concentrate their longings on a rebirth in my Paradise; and let them call upon my name, though it be only ten times or less; then, provided only that they have not been guilty of the five heinous sins, and have no slandered or vilified the true religion, the desire of such beings to be born into my Paradise will surely be fulfilled. If this be not so, may I never receive the perfect enlightenment of Buddhahood."

- Pure Land was basically a devotional or "bhakti" type movement. As such it was never very "missionary" in nature, but it spread through the practice of its devotees.
- Pure Land after 12 century used drama extensively and this reached the common people.
- It appealed widely to the common people. It spread the common prayer "our Father": China "Nan-mo O'mi't'o Fu", Japan "Na-mo Amida Butsu", Korea "Na-mo Amida Pul". The prayer is "I turn to Amitabha, in reference and trust." It expressed the peoples needs and longings for divine help. It became associated with the concept of piety and hope. "O-mi-t'o Fu" became one of the most sacred terms in the consciousness of the people of east Asia.
- To determine whether a temple or monastery is Pure Land, one needs to check the great hall. If the Buddha is standing it is almost always Pure Land. Then Amitabha is in the center, with his right hand outstretched and his left enclosing a lotus-blossom or a small pagoda. Kuan-yin is on his left and Ta-shih-chih is on his right. They hold lotuses in one hand and the other hands hang down. Kuan-yin may hold her famous jar from which she pours out life-giving water to humanity. Ta-shih-chih is male.

#### 4.44 Period of Conflict.

- The freedom of Pure Land from the formalistic and legalistic systems of Buddhism led to free-thinkers who disregarded the most elementary things in the moral order of the world. Everything was spiritualized and the leaders of Buddhism were afraid that it explained away or destroyed the foundations of Buddhism. Nothing was certain any longer. The historical Buddha became only an enlightened man of no real importance. Amitabha became only a spiritual figure of speech dissolved in abstractions, and the Pure Land a spiritual condition like the old Nirvana. All beliefs were



purely human and relative. Hence there was a series of reactions to Pure Land.

- Several schools emerged to fight against it. The reaction moved the more orthodox schools back towards Hinayana, a movement still continuing in some circles.
- One such school was "Lu-tsung" or Legalistic School.
- Another such school was Ch'an Tsung or Meditation School. This sought to go back to meditation in the Indian sense as the method of salvation. It stressed two or three daily prayers in the main hall before the images of Amitabha, Sakyamuni Buddha and Yaoshih Fu. The citing of the "Father" prayer itself brought salvation, and one should hope to say it 5100 times. After this the monks were to meditate on such questions as "What was my original nature".
- In the conflict a confusion of ideas emerged within Buddhism. Pure Land, however stressed only one vision - to see things in the light of One, eternal in time, in light and in mercy Amitabha. It also began to undertake philanthropy, possibly in imitation of Christian missions that emerged in China again about this time with the coming of Matteo Ricci.
- With the coming of Catholicism, Pure Land had to defend itself and seek to retain its followers.
- Pure Land also appealed to women through opening of the way for nuns. Women became particularly effective missionaries carrying Pure Land zeal into their homes. Most of the money given to monasteries was from women.
- Pure Land also appealed through its "masses for the dead" to widows and others who were concerned about ancestors.

## 5. Popular Buddhism: The Masses for the Dead.

There are hints in Hinayana that one can get in touch with needy souls in the lower regions, but only with Mahayana do masses for the dead reach the level of importance they now have in Buddhism.

### 5.1 The Wheel of Existence: Buddhism adopted the concept of samsara and divided the cycle of existence into six great orders:

1) The highest is heaven and in this the gods (shen) collectively reside. Those here are good, but not perfect, for they can fall away and backslide. Only the Buddhahood is absolutely sure of nirvana. The heavens are inhabited by Buddha candidates on the way to the absolute. Their delay is usually to fulfill a promise to help the rest of creation where the terrors of darkness, sorrow, sin and perdition torture the soul. These bodhisattvas have compassionate hearts. Those below them worship these merciful Buddhas and bodhisattvas for they can help the suffering.

The Leng-yen Ching Sutra describes 33 heavens (8 for each direction and 1 central one), and 28 subsidiary ones divided into three spheres. One must progress through them to reach nirvana. The lowest level still has lust, the second still depends on external appearances and the senses, and sexuality and marriage, the third is above all temptation.

2) The next level is the human order or Jen-tao. Here is human existence with its rich and poor, stupid and clever. Here Karma rules

as the law or retribution (Yin-kuo). There are good people and saints with good hearts. Most, however are unholy and sensual.

3) Third comes the demon groups (O-hsiu-lo-tao) (Sanskrit = Asuras). These are half good and half bad beings. Therefore they are constantly in strife with God who is absolute goodness, holiness and justice.

4) Fourth is Hades or the Buddhist Hell (ti-yu). where punishment is carried out through long kalpas (chieh). Here there is terrible torture.

The 18 hells of the Iron-Encircled Mountain come first ranging from scorching heat to icy cold. 10 of these are ruled by the 10 famous hangmen-chieftains. Over them is the overlord whose nature is severity and inflexibility (Tung-yu).

5) Fifth is e-kuei or the order of hungry spirits and evils. They have sunk so deep they rejoice in evil and allow themselves to be used as assistants in all kinds of destructive enterprises led by the devil. They torture those in hades. These hungry devils rove about restless and unbles in hades. Most of the wicked in the world come from these spirits in their next lives.

6) Finally there is the ch'u-sheng or animal order. This is at the bottom and is recruited from the worst criminals and malefactors on earth. They go from horse and cow to snakes and crawling things. Hell is not everlasting, but aeons upon aeons may pass before souls emerge from this.

5.2 Justification for feeding the hungry ghosts of the dead is found in an old legend of Ananda who saw the spirits in hades asking Sakyamuni to relieve their hunger.

The custom also fits with the Chinese deep reverence and concern for their ancestors.

A third thread is the Nestorian church that had solemn masses "seven times a day for both the living and the dead", and on the "seven times seven days festival (every 49 days) and the 50th day of feasting.

Finally new mystical magical writings (mantras) were coming into China about the 8 - 9th centuries from India. Of particular importance is the monk Amogha Vajra (Pui-k'ung Chin-kang) who came in 719. He was given a very prominent place in the court. He spread the Feast of the Wandering Spirits as a great drama. (Yu-lan-p'en)