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# Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey

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Buddhism occupies a central place in the history of Chinese thought, as the system that attracted some of the best minds in the millennium between the Han and the Song (second to twelfth centuries). However, integrating Buddhist thought into Chinese philosophy poses some problems, because Buddhists worked from a different set of texts and spoke what seems to be a different language. Christianity began as a hellenized biblical faith whose theology combined *theos* and *logos* from the start; by contrast, long before Buddhism found its way into China there was an extensive history of reflection by Indians on the Buddhist *dharma*—so that Chinese Buddhists had to think through an inherited tradition before they could embark on their own Sinitic reading. As a result, much of the convoluted scholastic detail in Buddhism remains alien to most Chinese. The fact that the neo-Confucian Zhuxi (1130–1200) openly advised his students against debating with Buddhists (lest they be seduced into the Buddhists’ mind-boggling dialectics and thus defeated) also means that there was a calculated break between the two traditions. To this day, Chinese Buddhism remains isolated and is often left to Buddhologists. Also, because of the way the field has developed, Chinese Buddhism is often treated as an interim in a pan-Asian development beginning in India and ending in Japan. Integrating Chinese Buddhist thought into the history of Chinese philosophy did not begin until Fung Yu-lan. It is a formidable challenge to attempt

integration while fully recognizing the emerging findings of Buddhologists.

Certain paradigms describing the overall cultural interaction are still in use. People still speak of initial Indianization and subsequent Sinicization; of Buddhist conquest and Chinese transformation; of Indians as proverbially otherworldly and Chinese as, by inclination, down-to-earth. Under scrutiny, such generalizations often seem simplistic; but at some macrocosmic level they remain useful heuristic devices, and for certain ends they can even lend overall clarity. The same can be said of several periodization schemes. They all depict a rise, growth, and decline of Buddhism—that is, looking at it from the outside. For adherents of the faith, and for others who still perceive its vitality, the story is one of seeding, flowering, and continual tension or consolidation. The present overview will minimize historic and political details in order to suggest larger sociocultural implications. It will focus on the major developments and their contributions to a history of Chinese ideas and ideals.

## A Cultural History

Buddhism came into China sometime in the first century C.E. At first, it remained within the pariah communities of foreign traders and made few inroads into the larger Han Chinese society. Around 150 C.E., translators such as An Shigao began to leave a literary trace

of this tradition. Judging from the reception by the Han of the Hinayana works and from the early commentaries, it appears that Buddhism was being perceived and digested through the medium of religious Daoism (Taoism). Buddha was seen as a foreign immortal who had achieved some form of Daoist nondeath. The Buddhists' mindfulness of the breath was regarded as an extension of Daoist breathing exercises. The Buddhist law of karmic retribution impressed many and is said to have struck fear into the ruling elite; but it was also thought that to break free of the horror of multiple rebirths, a person had only to refine his vital force until his spirit realized nirvanic immortality.

### Emptiness and Nonbeing

The collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E. weakened the Han Confucian state ideology. The message of Buddhism then became timely and attractive. As there was a revival of Daoism during the Wei-Jin era (third century), there arose a philosophical appreciation of the Mahayana doctrine of emptiness. Since Laozi (ch. 40) had asserted that being comes from nonbeing, the neo-Daoist Wang Bi now made nonbeing the substance of being. And since the *Prajnaparamita (Transcendental Wisdom) Sutras* also declared that all forms are empty, it was widely held by the Chinese Buddhists that Laozi and Buddha had taught the same need to return to the roots of nonbeing, or emptiness.

Zhuangzi had praised the freedom of going along with nature (*jiran*, "self-being"). Now the Mahayana sutras seemed to speak of the same freedom as the ability of a bodhisattva to see or to abide with things just as they are. The term for this, *tathata*, or "thusness," was accordingly translated as *ru*, suggesting naturalness. With that, the Mahayana idea of a nonabiding nirvana (nirvana being anywhere) came to be associated with roving freely with the *dao*. The freedom exemplified by the householder bodhisattva Vimalakirti was especially appealing. A wealthy layman in the mercantile city of Vaisali, Vimalakirti lived in samsara as if it were nirvana. Since the neo-Daoist gentleman claimed to be dwelling in the forest even while holding political office, the urbane monks of renown then also claimed to be transcending the world even as they circulated among the wealthy and the powerful.

From such confluences of Buddhist and Daoist ideas came the *keyi* ("concept matching") Buddhism of the fourth century. Although Dao-an (312–388) objected to this dilution of *dharma* and urged his fellow monks to undertake a more diligent study of the analytical subtleties of *abhidharma* (Hinayana scholastics), he himself was not entirely free of Daoist assumptions. Only after the learned translator Kumarajiva arrived in

Chang'an in 401 would that situation be substantially changed. Only then did the treatises of Nagarjuna (c. 150), architect of the philosophy of the "middle path" or emptiness, become available in translation. Only then was the special status of the *Lotus Sutra* made known. Subsequently Sengzhao (374–414) became the first Chinese to master that Madhyamika philosophy, although—because he believed in the centrality of emptiness—he did not grasp the full import of the *Lotus Sutra's* teaching about the "singular reality" of the eternal Buddha.

### The Beginning of a Tenet-Classification Scheme

Another major doctrine, an extension of Buddha's omnipresence, concerns the universal "Buddha-nature." But this teaching was not known to Kumarajiva. It came in only after his death, when the Mahayana *Nirvana Sutra* was translated by Dharmaksema in northern Liangzhou. This, together with the later translation of the *Queen Srimala Sutra* in the south, proclaimed that the Buddha-nature or *tathagatagarbha* (embryo or seed of the Buddha) was Buddha's final, positive teaching. Instead of the Hinayanist no-self or no-soul (*anatman*), Mahayana finally revealed the "self" or "great soul" that is the Buddha-nature. Ultimate reality was not just empty (*sunya*) of self-nature but, in a more important sense, also not-empty (*asunya*) of the infinitely positive attributes of Buddha. With this, the stage was set for postulating a progression in Buddha's teaching following this basic teleological format.

1. Hinayana teaching of the "four noble truths": samsaric realities are many and impermanent.
2. Mahayana initial teaching of universal emptiness.
3. *Lotus Sutra's* further teaching of the "one vehicle" (that is, reality) of Buddha.
4. *Nirvana Sutra's* final doctrine of permanence.

There are variations to this scheme. Sometimes the *Vimalakirti Sutra* is placed between stages 2 and 3, mediating the "empty" and the "one vehicle," because Vimalakirti taught with his noble silence the truth of the nondual: that samsara and nirvana as well as any and all distinctions are "not two." Whatever the variance, the basic teleology of this tenet-classification scheme is to move from the impermanent, multiple realities of the mundane, through their universal emptying and the nondual, to seeing some transcendental, permanent principle.

### Gradual and Sudden Enlightenment

Although Daosheng (c. 360–430) had an inkling of this progression in the teachings, credit usually went to

his contemporary Huiguan for producing the seminal scheme. Daosheng, the last of the great neo-Daoistic Buddhists, had some notion of the doctrine of universal Buddha-nature even before the final chapters of the *Nirvana Sutra* arrived in the south. On the basis of the *Lotus Sutra*, he had already argued that if the truth is one, then enlightened realization of this truth of the “one vehicle” must also be sudden and total. He was opposed by Huiguan (and Sengzhao), who successfully defended gradual enlightenment. That Huiguan won the debate is not unjust. Tibetan Buddhism also adhered to that general consensus, which can be traced back to Indian Buddhism. Daosheng was ahead of his time. (Chan, or Zen, Buddhism later endorsed sudden enlightenment.) But then the southern Buddhists were also putting aside his type of neo-Daoist intuitionism and were showing a new patience in working through the intricacies of Indian Buddhist thought step by step. The Lushan circle under Huiyuan (344–416) had previously taken Dao’an’s advice and began studying Abhidharma with Sanghadeva, so much so that Kumarajiva saw them as sliding back into the analytical realism of Sarvastivada—a Hinayana atomist school which insisted that everything conceivable must be real in itself. The realist legacy survived Kumarajiva’s critique, and the southern Buddhists would spend the next century interpreting Nagarjuna through a lesser figure: Harivarman, author of the *Chengshilun (Satyasiddhi, Treatise on Establishing the Real)*, which the Chinese mistook as somehow overcoming the nihilism of the mundane by confirming as real the truth of a transmundane nirvana. (More on this later.)

### Should Monks Bow before Kings?

Meanwhile, from 316 on, the north had been overrun by barbarians. War and chaos were hardly the ideal environment for philosophical speculation, but they were a perfect setting for seeking out quietude and rebuilding a community life that could withstand them. Fotudeng, the founder of the northern Sangha, did not sit down and translate even a single text, but he was instrumental in converting the Chinese population en masse. The Chinese literally took refuge with this holy man, whose aura of sanctity held the bloody killers at bay. He could protect his flock and mediate effectively on its behalf before the barbarian rulers, who, being Buddhists, honored Deng as the “great reverent” and pillar of the state. This was based on a Buddhocratic ideal that kings who supported *dharma* would be protected by it and by the powers of the “four heavenly guardians.” Moral precepts, ascetic living, and social reconstruction became the forte of the northern monk

leaders, whose Sangha flourished under strong state patronage.

In this regard, the difference between north and south is seen in the careers of Faguo and Huiyuan. The north did not record any debates on the immortality of the soul; the south had many. Although Buddha had renounced the Hindu notion of a soul (*atman*), Chinese Buddhists long presumed that if there was to be rebirth, there must be a soul to be reborn, and if a person could attain nirvana, his soul must be what entered nirvana. They knew that the religious Daoists also taught a doctrine of an immortal soul, but they would have held that the Daoist soul sought a materialistic longevity whereas the Buddhist “soul” aspired to a transcendental, spiritual nirvana. Although this was an imperfect understanding, Huiyuan used it to justify the Buddhist calling. The quest for spiritual transcendence is what impels the monk to leave the world. And because the monk lives beyond the mundane, he is also beyond the jurisdiction of the “son of heaven” who ruled over everything within the mundane sphere. Thus would Huiyuan defend the monk’s autonomy (spiritual self-rule) and the Sangha’s right not to bow to the king. If anything, even the ruler should be grateful to the monk for working for the welfare of the world. With strong support from the magnate families, the southern Sangha successfully defied the state that wanted to subordinate it.

The Sangha in the north was well aware of the monastic rule that prohibited paying homage to kings. But then the relationship between king and Buddha—the two wheels of *dharma*—was much more intricate there. A custom had been established since the Kushan Empire in northwest India in the first century C.E. of paying homage to both king and Buddha. The idea that the ruling king is a bodhisattva destined for future buddhahood (e.g., Maitreya) was nothing new. What might have been new was that the barbarian ruler Holin Bobo went further and declared himself a living buddha. The idea of a *tathagata*-king was also endorsed by the Doba who founded the Wei dynasty in the north. The Wei emperor Taizu (r. 386–409) commanded the homage due him from Faguo; the leader of the Sangha he appointed around 396–398 acquiesced. This set a norm for the north, where the king would assume the dual roles of king of the domain and effectively also the vicar of the Sangha.

What scholars called state Buddhism can easily give the wrong impression that the state was in full control of the Sangha. Although it has become proverbial that *dharma* flourishes and declines according to the fortunes of the state, this does not mean that state support translated into state control or even into the Sangha’s prosperity. One clear proof that state Bud-

dhism repeatedly failed to police the Sangha is, of course, the state's repeated persecution of the faith. If the Sangha had been under the state's control, the use of force—the last political resort—would not have been necessary. In fact, often a pious ruler woke up one morning to find on his hands a state within a state. And even after persecution, the Sangha frequently rebounded. But all that belongs more to a sociopolitical history than to our concerns here.

### The Huahu Controversy

In 520, in Loyang, there was a court-sponsored public debate between the Daoists and the Buddhists over the *huahu* thesis: did Laozi leave China and reappear in India as Buddha? Or did Buddha will his own rebirth in China as Laozi? This debate was a product of the Han perception of Buddha and Laozi as equal sages, and each side sought to absorb the other. (Centuries later, the Hindus would also claim that Vishnu had masqueraded as a heretical Buddha in order to deceive and weaken the demonic hosts.) In the process of the debate, the Chinese Buddhists and Daoists pushed the relative dates of their respective founders farther and farther back until Buddha was said to have died in 1052 B.C.E. The Buddhists won the debate, but that also moved the date of the demise of the *dharma*, set by one popular count as coming 1,500 years after Buddha's death, which would move the beginning of the last age to 552 C.E. When 552 came around, reality seemed to confirm that prophecy. A civil war was raging, and the temples of Loyang had gone up in smoke. The darkest hour came with the anti-Buddhist persecution of 574–577. Yet out of that trial by fire, the Buddha *dharma* would rise like a phoenix, and a result would be the Sinitic Mahayana schools that flourished in the Sui and the Tang dynasties.

The mature Sinitic Mahayana synthesis was not like the earlier “concept-matching” syncretism. The period of digesting Indian subtleties had ended; a time of independent creativity had begun. But before we consider a philosophical analysis of the Sinitic Mahayana schools, we need to consider the building blocks of that edifice.

### Paradigm Shifts before 600 C.E.

The four major concerns of Chinese Buddhist thought before the Sui and Tang era were as follows.

1. Before 400: emptiness and the immortal soul.
2. After 420: “two truths and one reality.”
3. Around 500: speculations on Buddha-nature.
4. Around 550: synthesis under the “one” of *ekayana* (“one vehicle”).

Although these do represent significant shifts, their unfolding naturally overlapped.

1. *Beyond nihilism.* For the Han Chinese, the doctrine of karmic rebirth entailed the transmigration of the soul—a presumption that they could not do away with even when they accepted the doctrine of emptiness. Since nirvana was seen as a return to a pure origin, it was believed to be achieved by discarding the defiled. Refining one's inner self was thought to be a process of attaining a sublime *shen* (spirit) that would realize nirvanic immortality or nondeath.

Nearly all the early *keyi* Buddhists believed in refining the spirit by reducing being to nonbeing. The monk Mindu (fl. 340) was an exception, however. He became aware, first, that, Buddha had no doctrine of a soul; second, that emptiness was not a Daoist, nihilistic void; and third, that since emptiness was not other than form, one should never empty reality but could only empty the mind—and only if the mind was emptied would the world appear empty. A prophet is, proverbially, without honor in his own country, and Mindu was vilified for denying the existence of the soul. Still, because his daring concept of *xinwu* (emptiness of mind) challenged the concept of *benwu* (original nothingness), he provided the momentum for what are called the six *prajna* schools—each of which proposed how emptiness might be better understood.

Mindu, to repeat, held that there is no soul but that there is a real outer world, and thus that one should empty the mind, not objects or forms. The other schools never conceded the “no-self,” but they all knew better than to endorse naive nihilism, and nearly all of them incorporated Mindu's psychological argument. Zhi Dun (Zhi Daolin, 314–366) probably developed the most complex synthesis of opinions of his time. In three steps, he first reduced being to nonbeing ontologically; then blamed the distinction between being and nonbeing on a discriminating mind, which he duly emptied; and finally united this refined mind or spirit with the *dao*. Thus Zhi Dun roamed psychically in emptiness while abiding physically in the world of forms. In a sense, he combined the nonbeing of Laozi and the roving freedom of Zhuangzi.

The six *prajna* schools did not have the benefit of Kumarajiva's guidance. Sengzhao (374–414), who was tutored by the Kuchan master in the dialectics of Nagarjuna, reviewed the past attempts and found them all one-sided—they missed the “middle path.” He selected three schools to analyze, taking *benwu* to task for valuing nonbeing over being, faulting *xinwu* for emptying the mind without facing up to the problem of form, and accusing Zhi Dun of having espoused a causalist or a relativist reduction of form by form without tackling the inherent emptiness of all form. All

three, Sengzhao held, failed to see the inherent emptiness of the unreal. Sengzhao was well received in his own time but thereafter was soon forgotten. He was not even counted within the Madhyamika lineage by either the Sanlun or the Tiantai school and was not to be rediscovered later.

2. *Detour into a higher reality.* One reason for Sengzhao's eclipse is that when Nagarjuna introduced the notion of the "two truths," the Chinese evolved a new discourse. Instead of talking about being and emptiness at just one level, they became preoccupied with investigating two layers. As a result, the problem of form and emptiness was elevated to a problem of the mundane and the highest truth. An amateurish reading would consider the real to be the mundane truth and the empty to be the highest truth. But since that reading seemed to create a new dualism—between samsara and nirvana—it led to a search for a still higher, non-dual truth. We begin to hear of a third truth, and soon of higher and higher unions of two truths.

Zhou Yong once disputed with the Daoist Zhang Rong, arguing that whereas Buddha knew the emptiness of both being and nonbeing, Laozi knew only the reduction of being to nonbeing. In his treatise *Three Schools of Two Truths*, Zhou Yong exposed the biases of his contemporaries, avoiding the two extremes and staying with the middle path. After Zhou Yong, the southerners evolved more fanciful unities of the two truths. The early *prajna* schools, faced with the problem of explaining how things could be both real and not real, could offer only relatively simple metaphors such as dreams and magical illusions. The new theorists compared this duality to rolling and unrolling a lotus leaf, bobbing a melon into and out of water, or flipping a coin from front to back and vice versa. In this way, the Chinese were sharpening their earlier cosmogonic speculations on how the unity of the great ultimate (*taiji*) could evolve into the two aspects of *yin* and *yang*. Later, this would affect the way the Huayan school handled its pan-cosmic-Buddhist metaphysics.

Nagarjuna, however, never taught a third truth. Nor would the Chinese have taught this, if they had realized that the two truths were epistemic, not ontologic—that is, two ways of looking at the world and not two sides, aspects, or levels of some singular reality. It was Jizang (549–623) of the Sanlun (Three Treatises, Madhyamika) school who exposed that mistake. He reminded the Chinese that the two truths pertained to two modes of discourse; they did not denote principles in reality. Even so, Jizang himself had to fight fire with fire; he had to go along with an opponent's wrong assumptions in order to expose the fallacy. Jizang even developed a "fourfold two truths" (one more than the standard three), but his goal was not to pile up more

ontic unities: he called for an end to fixation on the *yin-yang* synthesis.

The Chinese did not embark on their quest for a higher "one truth" without a reason. They had gathered from the *Nirvana Sutra* that the final Buddhist teaching of a universal Buddha-nature constituted the one truth. This suggested to them that there was a "positive truth" above emptiness and the two truths. It was while they were looking for a way to reconcile emptiness and this one truth that they came across Harivarman's treatise *Chengshilun (On Establishing the Real)*. Harivarman reduced all elements to their finest parts until a virtual nil was reached. Also, among the Four Noble Truths, he considered the third one—about nirvana—the one truth. The other three—describing the nature, the cause, and the way out of the world of suffering—were too mundane to be considered transcendental truths. But using Harivarman's basically Hinayanist scheme to explicate the Mahayana emptiness of Nagarjuna and the one truth of Buddha-nature turned out to be a mistake, which Jizang, again, would later undo.

3. *Locating the Buddha-nature.* China was attracted especially to the doctrine of the universal Buddha-nature, so much so that Xuanzang's Yogacara school was later called Hinayanist simply for deviating from it. By teaching the Buddha-nature, the *Nirvana Sutra* seems to reverse the earlier Buddhist teaching of no-self and the initial Mahayana teaching of universal emptiness. Daosheng circumvented the problem, noting succinctly that there was no samsaric self of life and death but there was a nirvanic self, which was the Buddha-nature. Still, it was not always easy to keep the Buddha-self from being confused with the Daoist immortal soul, despite all cautions against this.

Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (r. 502–549), the King Asoka of China, once presided over a court debate that sought to refute Fan Zhen's denial of an immortal soul. The emperor wrote an essay establishing the spirit as that which would one day become enlightened. This essay has been criticized for confusing the transmigrating soul—a ghost tainted by karma and ignorance—with the transcendental seed of enlightenment that is the Buddha-nature. But the essay did forge a synthesis that anticipated a formula in the *Awakening of Faith in Mahayana*, a text compiled within the next half century in China that became a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy: in this text, the "one mind" has two aspects—suchness (or thusness), and birth and death (samsara). The emperor's essay also postulated a pure core (the enlightened spirit) that is somehow, inexplicably, trapped in darkness (ignorance). The spirit itself, being one with suchness, is destined for enlightenment; ignorance is what mires a person in birth and death. The emperor probably came

up with this ambiguous mixture by drawing on canonical references to the Buddha-nature as the innately pure mind that is somehow accidentally polluted, or on the idea that, like *tathagatagarbha*, it encompasses samsara and nirvana. The *Awakening of Faith* might have done nothing more than express this paradox in a more sophisticated way.

The similarities do not end there. The poet Shen Yue was asked along with other courtiers to comment on the emperor's essay. In Shen Yue's response—which was miscataloged by the *Guang Hongmingji* and broken into a number of independent short essays—enlightenment was a matter of putting an end to momentary thoughts. The same psychology is found in the *Awakening of Faith*, where *wunien* (no-thought, or a stripping away of delusions) is equated with suchness. This equation would later appear in the *Platform Sutra* of the sixth patriarch as a slogan of the southern Chan school. Sudden enlightenment is based on this sudden cessation of the thought process. To what extent Emperor Wu, who was a patron of both Daoism and Buddhism, had actually fostered a Sino-Buddhist synthesis of consequence still awaits investigation. But it is perhaps telling that he is also said to have written a commentary on the *Doctrine of the Mean*. The Buddhists were among the first to discover in this Confucian text, which later entered the neo-Confucianists' canon as one of the Four Books, a psychic depth that Buddhists could identify with and that neo-Confucians would regard as a distinct feature of their own philosophy.

Because humans are said to possess Buddha-nature, there was considerable speculation on its exact location in man. And because the *Nirvana Sutra* noted that this *atman* was somehow related to as well as separate from the human personality, there was ample room for debate. Like western attempts to locate the seat of the soul, this speculation could be stimulating but could also prove ultimately futile. In hindsight, any location is an expedient. As a synonym for emptiness and for wisdom, Buddha-nature is not an ontic entity but a function of intuition, not so much a knowable object as a metaphor for knowledge, awakening, and realization. The mistake of the nirvana school is that it read the text too literally—as Jizang was to explain.

4. *Resurgence of the Lotus ekayana*. If the early sixth century was known for its synthesis of the two truths and Buddha-nature, the century ended with a rediscovery of the unity of the middle path and the "one vehicle." Both Jizang and Zhiyi of the Tiantai school underscored this. It is customary to consider southern China as having excelled in theory while the barbaric north excelled in practice, but by the early sixth century that was no longer true. After the Doba

Wei had reunited the north in 439 and, by 493, moved the capital to Loyang, a sinicized emperor, Gaozu (Xiao-wendi, r. 471–500), initiated a cultural renaissance; and judging from the fragments of northern works that have survived, the north became at least equal to the south in intellectual achievements.

Unlike southerners—who worked almost exclusively on the *Nirvana Sutra* and followed the authority of Harivarman—northerners maintained their appreciation of the *Lotus Sutra* and Nagarjuna. Both the Sannun school and the Tiantai school had roots in the north, and both criticized the southerners' shortcomings and won. A merging of the northern and southern traditions was brought about in part by the anti-Buddhist persecution of 574–577 in the north. The Northern Zhou emperor Wu out-Chinesed the Chinese by returning to the ancient Zhou ideal, supporting only Confucianism, and banning Buddhism and Daoism. Many northern monks migrated to the south, and the Sinitic Mahayana schools were born in response to this historical crisis. North and south were reunited under the Sui emperor Wendi in 589. And the Parthian Jizang was honored in the capital. He took Harivarman to task, demolished various current theories of two truths, and returned the dialectics of the middle path to a neither-nor format that avoided both extremes. With a sharp eye for internal contradictions in the various theories on the what, how, and whereof of Buddha-nature, Jizang demolished their biases and revealed the true. Properly understood, positive Buddha-nature was none other than emptiness. In the end, there was nothing to gain (nil to ascertain) but the freedom that comes with the denial of pros and cons. Though committed to emptiness, Jizang also recognized the *Lotus ekayana*, or "one vehicle."

The metaphor of the one vehicle came from the *Lotus Sutra*. In the parable of the world as a burning house, the Buddha as father lured his children out of danger by a promise of three carts awaiting them outside. His final gift to them all is the large, white bullock cart. The parable is meant to show how the one Buddha vehicle (*ekayana*) replaces the three vehicles of the listener, the solitary buddha, and the bodhisattva. Kumarajiva's translation had referred to this *ekayana*—also known as Mahayana—as the Buddha vehicle. Kumarajiva also considered the *Lotus Sutra* as teaching Buddha's secret store, a teaching more profound than the bodhisattva vehicle of the *Emptiness* sutras.

By preferring the *Nirvana Sutra* to the *Lotus Sutra*, the Nirvana school missed the import of *ekayana*. It knew the one truth of the Buddha-nature as Buddha's final teaching. That "one" is a teleological one which came at the end of a progression of teach-

ings. With regard to the parable of the burning house, this is like saying that the three carts were once real options; it is only in the end that they were superseded by the white bullock cart. The preferred reading is that the three vehicles were never real; they were only expedients (white lies). From the very beginning, the truth was that there is only one vehicle, which subsumes all the other vehicles.

As a philosophical discourse, this means qualifying the ultimate “one” (the teleological cause) by making it also a genealogical and omnipresent one (the material and the efficient cause). As a gift of an all-pervasive Buddha-wisdom, it is a priori enlightenment that brings about a seemingly incipient enlightenment. If the one is the beginning, the middle, and the end, that would make an end of all the mundane, karma-driven, causal realities. Realizing the one would then bring an insight into the emptiness of one and all. It would entail dissolving the distinction between past, present, and future. *Ekayana*, then, absorbs all Buddhist teachings into one holistic teaching. In terms of intellectual history, it would imply that as China was reunited under the Sui, the fragmentation of reality that accompanied the age of disunity had been overcome by a synthesis of ideas and a realized harmony. The world as disparate elements and the self as the product of karma were no longer too far removed from the nirvanic “beyond.” In the words of the *Awakening of Faith*—which summarizes the essentials of Mahayana—self and world, mind and suchness, are integrally one. Everything is a carrier of that a priori enlightenment; all incipient enlightenment is predicated on it. The mystery of existence is, then, not, “How may we overcome alienation?” The challenge is, rather, “Why do we think we are lost in the first place?”

### The Sinitic Mahayana Schools

Four Buddhist schools emerged in China that had no direct, exact precedents in India. India produced the *Lotus Sutra*; Central Asia put together the *Avatamsaka* (“garland,” “wreath”) corpus; but only China produced the distinct schools of Tiantai and Huayan. Although it is customary to regard these schools, especially Chan (Zen), as Chinese, it should be kept in mind that they are first and foremost Buddhist. Not even Kamalasila at the debate in Lhasa, in Tibet, would deny that Chan was Mahayana or label it Chinese the way Hu Shi would.

Chinese Buddhism is often said to have reached its apogee in the Tang era. But in one sense, it only shared with Confucianism and Daoism the glory, the power, and the prosperity of the Tang. Confucianism would enjoy a revival, especially in the second half of

Tang; religious Taoism had the patronage of the ruling house, which considered itself descended from Laozi. Thus, during the Tang, Buddhism had to contend with serious rivals. Earlier, in the Six Dynasties, Buddhism was responsible for new social experiments. During the Tang, it had to come up with more sutras of filial piety, to accord with the family values of Confucianism. Buddhist monks in the Tang could still withstand the pressure to pay homage to rulers (as to parents), but the Sangha had by then lost much of its old autonomy. In the Northern Wei, the Sangha had a leader at the court; by the Sui, that office was replaced by a committee of ten elders; and during the Tang many of the vacancies were left unfilled. When the Japanese pilgrim Ennin came to China in the early ninth century, he needed permission to travel from the local authorities. The Sangha was effectively under the control of the civil authorities. Thus the Sangha—which had once been the mover and shaker—had become part of an entrenched establishment. It owned land and had peasants as tenants; as a result, it lost their support in the anti-Buddhist persecution of 845. This is not to say that Buddhism did not innovate during the Tang—it did, especially with regard to lay devotion and bodhisattvic vocation—but the most daring innovations came from the extraordinarily successful Three Periods sect. The state, however, disestablished this sect, with no protest from any of the major schools.

In the realm of ideas, we will focus on the Tiantai, the Huayan, and the Chan schools. The Pure Land school in China, which did not develop a philosophy of faith, will be covered only in passing, as an adjunct to Tiantai and Chan.

*Tiantai (Lotus, Saddharmapundarika) school.* The first Sinitic Mahayana school was Tiantai, whose third patriarch, Zhiyi (538–597), found favor with the Sui rulers (581–618). These rulers sought to live up to the Asokan ideal. They revered Buddha, divided the relics, and built a network of state temples. Zhiyi finally became a resident holy man in the capital, his hopes of returning to a meditative life at Mount Tiantai having been repeatedly dashed. Still, the capital was then once more the cultural center of a united China; as a trendsetter, it would also be the home of the later major Sinitic Mahayana schools.

Unlike the Tibetan Buddhists, who followed the Indian *sastra* (commentary) tradition in forming their schools, Chinese Buddhists built their schools directly on the words of Buddha in the sutras. By regarding a sutra as self-revelatory, they in effect produced their own style of commentary that, when necessary, could bypass the Indian authorities. For example, the Tiantai school—named after Mount Tiantai, where Zhiyi (Master Zhizhe) lived—claimed direct inspiration

from Buddha (to Zhiyi in a former life). It also claimed a direct transmission from Nagarjuna, so that it could circumvent Indian authorities such as Aryadeva and even discount Kumarajiva, who was the translator of the *Lotus Sutra* but was not considered a patriarch. Jizang, earlier, would not have made such presumptions.

The *Lotus Sutra* is an inspired work, but it is not a systematic treatise. To develop a philosophy out of it requires nothing short of turning mythopoeic narratives into rational discourse. To do that, first, a basic unity is assumed for the sutra; this principle had already been set by Tao'an in the fourth century. Second, a basic teleology is postulated for all sutras; this method of classifying tenets was initiated by Huiguan in the fifth century. To this Zhiyi added something new, a common essence for all Mahayana sutras; this ensured that they all would preach the "one form" of the real.

Zhiyi also innovated a new reading of the *Lotus Sutra*. He broke this work into two parts and located two principles instead of one. The first has to do with the "trace aspect"; this pertains to the absorption by the one vehicle (a singular truth) of three vehicles. The second has to do with the "root aspect"; this pertains to the revelation of the boundless life span of Buddha. This formula—original root and manifest trace—allowed the same one substance to be present in all three vehicles as functions. It solved the problems of the two truths of the transmudane, formless *Dharmakaya* (*Body of Law*) and the mundane, physical *Rupakaya* (*Body of Form*). It subsumed all other sutras under the *Lotus Sutra*. It proclaimed the presence of the omnipresent Buddha-wisdom (another term for Buddha-nature) in all things. It collapsed into the eternal Buddha the "three times"—past, present, and future. Whereas all sutras share this essence, only the *Lotus Sutra* knows it fully. In Hegelian terms, in this work Mahayana attains *ekayana* self-consciousness. That teleology, when spelled out, becomes the theory of the Four Periods and the Five Teachings.

Zhiyi developed a new Buddhist hermeneutics. He distinguished the words and sentences from the hidden meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*. He transformed *mythos* into *logos* by an extensive use of allegories. The budding, flowering, and falling of a lotus blossom carry many more shades of meaning for Zhiyi than the rather arid correlative paradigm of the five processes (*wuxing*) used in the Han. In his *Fahua xuanyi* (*The Hidden Meaning of the Dharma Flower*), he laid out the final mystery, wisdom, and insight: the telescoping of the limit of reality (3,000 worlds) into a single moment of thought. Scholarly details aside, this says that all

realities in time and space crisscross, and all can be made present to the mind at any time.

According to this cosmic vision, Buddha must be present at every level of reality, from the highest (nirvana) to the lowest (hell), the top and bottom of the "ten realms." From that came the Tiantai theory of essential evil. Even Buddha has this evil as an element of his nature. If he did not, he would be unable to manifest himself in the evil paths to help deliver sentient beings trapped there. Christian critics have accused the *Lotus Sutra* of Docetism; Zhiyi's reading here is an important corrective. His reading is firmly committed to an existential analysis of evil. It does not opt for a gnostic escape from the fallen world but instead works hard at accumulating merits in this life for realizing enlightenment in the here and now. All Sinitic Mahayana schools have this innerworldly activist component.

The cornerstone of Tiantai philosophy is the "harmony of three in one." China was already familiar with *yin-yang* harmony, but that is the harmony of a complementary pair, either member of which, by itself, would be considered a cause of discord. Tiantai "harmony" depicts perfection: a triadic round (*yuan*, "circle") in which all three members are equally holistic. This formula—three *qua* one—is the Chinese counterpart of Christian Trinitarianism, or three in one. However, there is a difference: the Chinese formula has no possibility of a procession (analogous to the the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Son and the Father); in Tiantai, there is no "first person in the three"—no apex but only the round. Any one of the three is equally eligible to be alpha or omega.

The framework of the round is provided by Zhiyi's reading of the following verse (as translated by Kumarajiva) in Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika-karika* (*Middle Treatise*):

What is produced by cause and condition  
Is what I mean by the Empty  
Known also as conditioned coarising.  
It is also what is meant by the Middle Path.

Nagarjuna intends the four descriptions—causation, emptiness, interdependence, and the middle—to be synonymous. Zhiyi, however, reads the passage as noting that (1) reality is (2) empty and (3) real yet (4) neither. This should not be considered a distortion of the original; it is Zhiyi's way of reconfiguring Nagarjuna's four-cornered dialectics. Instead of piling up a pyramid of two truths as the Chengshi masters would do or aiming at an ultimate negation as Jizang would require, Zhiyi rounded everything off.

Everything in the universe is thus seen as simultaneously empty, real, and neither. Any one of the



three, taken as a starting point, will be in sequence negated, affirmed, transcended, and returned to itself in a full circle, a perfect round. This became the Tiantai formula of the three truths: three perspectives on the one form of the real (*dharmata*). These three modes of knowledge are correlated with the “three wisdoms of one mind.” In order to make the picture complete, Zhiyi would insist that a person should always learn to look at reality from all sides: the positive, the negative, and neither. Ingeniously, Zhiyi had turned the four corners of an empty square into three points on an endlessly revolving round.

In so doing, Tiantai liberated the practitioner’s mind from all conceptual bias and gave him an exhilarating sense of utter freedom before the nondual. In that vision, every color, every aroma (any object that can be smelled or seen) is, as such, the middle path. Centuries earlier, Zhuangzi had pondered the question of the truth about things and the many theories of things. Are things different? Are they the same? Do I have the truth? Or do you? Do we just think we do? Does thinking make it so? And how can we ever be sure? In the history of ideas, it would appear that Zhiyi had reformulated and then resolved those questions, giving an answer that is clearly of the Mahayana and Madhyamika. He might have been inspired by Zhuangzi to “forget the pros and cons,” but he was, clearly, also more reassuring than Zhuangzi. In relatively recent times, Mou Zongsan’s philosophy produced something of a stir by reversing the traditional judgment, considering Tiantai with its perfect round as a more perfect teaching than Huayan. Unknowingly, Mou had revived an old controversy surrounding the advent of these two schools.

*Huayan (Garland, Avatamsaka) school.* Tiantai was patronized by the Sui rulers, and so when the Sui dynasty fell, it too fell into disfavor. The new Tang rulers, whose surname was Li, considered themselves the descendants of Laozi and gave Daoism official recognition and support. During the reign (627–650) of Emperor Taizong, the pilgrim Xuanzang (Master Tripitaka) returned from India and was much honored. A new, large-scale translation project began under him, with imperial auspices. Xuanzang had brought back the new Yogacara philosophy of “consciousness only,” which for a while was the rage of the capital, until it was superseded by the Huayan school supported by Empress Wu of Zhou (r. 684–705). To appreciate this ideological upheaval, we need to backtrack a little.

In India, Hinayana produced its own scholasticism, called Abhidharma, that reduced reality to a multiplicity of elements. Repudiating that, the Mahayana *Wisdom* sutras deemed all such ontic distinctions empty, and Nagarjuna (in 150 C.E.) systematized this

into the philosophy of emptiness. His “middle path” school taught universal emptiness. Around 400, the brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu built on other, later Mahayana sutras and founded Yogacara, the idealist school of Yoga masters who, while accepting the doctrine of universal emptiness, qualified it by declaring that everything is empty because it is of the mind or is known through representations only (*vijnaptimatratā*, “consciousness only”). This school of thought entered China in the early sixth century but was rejected by many because it seemed to have a subjective bias—i.e., it seemed to claim that there are no cognized objects; there is only cognition itself.

Zhiyi of the Tiantai school shared this opinion, so even though he knew Yogacara, he kept to Madhyamika. He held that his “round” would avoid both extremes: subjectivism and objectivism. He then pitted form against mind and subject against object, working out his threefold dialectics to ensure perfect harmony. That was important, for when it is applied to the problem of whether the “pure land,” the paradise that devotees of the Buddha Amitabha would seek to be born into, is real or not real, the Tiantai would typically answer yes-no-both-neither. Accepting it as real supports the piety of the Pure Land school. Reducing it to a correlate of the mind entails seeing the realm as pure only to the extent that the mind is pure; this accommodates what would be Vimalakirti’s understanding, a view typical of Chan (Zen). The Tiantai school on principle avoids both extremes of faith and wisdom; it observes the middle path and incorporates both. It regards the “pure land” as a real icon of perfection that can induce (or be induced by) a parallel perfection in the mind. Although it considers the mindless chanting of Amitabha’s name an expedient for lesser intellects, the Tiantai school has traditionally been supportive of Pure Land piety. That is true also of the Tendai school in Heian Japan. But in the Kamakura period in Japan, a sectarian Pure Land school developed that broke away from Tendai and produced a well-thought-out argument for relying solely on faith. Japan also developed an equally sectarian Zen school that in theory would not practice Pure Land devotion. In China, by contrast, Pure Land devotion and Chan wisdom went hand in hand. (For lack of a systematic critique, the Pure Land school will not be discussed further here.)

By the early Tang, Yogacara was gaining a sizable following. But it was divided by a difference of opinion concerning the status of the “storehouse” consciousness (*alayavijnana*, the deepest stratum of the mind, where all experiences and forms of knowledge are stored). The question was, Is this core psyche tainted or pure? Is it essentially defiled, in which case it cannot reach the fruition of enlightenment? Or is it the pure

Buddha-nature, destined for self-awakening? Tradition has it that Xuanzang, unable to find a definitive answer in China, sought one in India. What he learned at the Nalanda university, from an existing school headed by Dharmapala, was that the storehouse consciousness as such was tainted; the possibility of enlightenment existed in it as seeds, so that this eighth consciousness would not itself subsist as buddhahood. Also, there was—logically—a class of people devoid of this seed of enlightenment; in other words, Buddha-nature was not universal. Chinese had accepted Buddha-nature for a long time, so it is understandable that this new teaching of Xuanzang’s would eventually be rejected and even condemned as less than Mahayana.

The thinker largely responsible for that was the Huayan patriarch Fazang (643–712). According to legend, Fazang was a member of Xuanzang’s translation project but left after an open disagreement with Xuanzang. A change in political fortunes—the usurpation of Tang rule by Empress Wu, who founded her own Zhou dynasty—saw the rise of Fazang and the Huayan school. For Fazang, the right understanding of mind was found in the *Awakening of Faith in Mahayana*, which postulated a “suchness” mind (a true consciousness) at the heart of all realities. The Huayan formula—that the three realms are of mind only—is taken to mean that everything is derived from this “true mind.” As in the classic debate on whether human nature is evil (Xunzi) or good (Mencius), in this case the proponent of good, Huayan, won and the “consciousness only” school lost; the Tiantai doctrine of essential evil also lost. This victory of the “pure mind” would anticipate the later Mencian revival among the Song neo-Confucians.

Huayan philosophy is usually condensed into the formula “all is one; one is all.” It is called totalism, and it holds that any one part of the universe is immediately the numinous whole of that universe. To understand how this pan-cosmic-Buddhism came about, it is perhaps instructive to analyze how Huayan had remade the metaphor of the water and the waves that in the *Awakening of Faith* to explain how delusion arose from the pure mind. The argument is that the wind of ignorance ruffled up the calm ocean of the suchness mind; thereupon, the waves of phenomenal forms appeared. Although the rising and falling of the waves may create an illusion of samsaric change, in truth the waves, being no less watery, are identical in substance with the suchness of the pure mind. In this way, the Mahayana dictum “samsara is nirvana” is affirmed, but it is also given a new twist. Since in this paradigm, the forms (waves) and the abiding essence (water) are of the same substance, appearance and essence, phenomenon and noumenon, are fundamentally one.

However, this metaphor was from the *Lankavatara sutra*, where it served a slightly different end. There, the wind of phenomenal forms stirs up the waves of the corresponding six senses. The sutra describes a relationship between the (once calm) storehouse consciousness and the other (now active) consciousness; it is not about the consubstantiality of the suchness mind and samsaric reality. The latter came from a reinscribing of that metaphor in the *Awakening of Faith*, which is most likely a Chinese, not an Indian, compilation. Relying on this text, Fazang was able to undermine Xuanzang. Because it separated essence and form, the new teaching from India was called *faxiang* or *dharma-laksana*, while the old teaching (championed by Fazang) was credited with knowing *faxing* or *dharmata*. The former—“consciousness only”—was criticized, metaphorically, for separating a house from the ground that supports it (this is the classic Sanskrit reading of *dharma*). The latter was praised for seeing that fluidity between water and waves alone qualified as the (pure) “mind only” school. That Sinitic understanding of the nature and function of mind led to the following tenets in Huayan philosophy:

1. The mind is pure; everything generated from this suchness mind is likewise pure.
2. The genesis of the world is due to this interaction between ignorance (the wind) and wisdom (the sea). The true and the false interact, somewhat like *yang* and *yin*.
3. The discrete forms of things in the world (waves) may delude the unsuspecting but not the wise. The waves being no less watery, the wise can find in any form (such as Wordsworth’s blade of grass) a token of eternity (suchness).
4. Since pure suchness is the substance of the mind, the forms of things and the essence of mind, *dharma-laksana* and *dharmata*, are ultimately one.
5. Since every single wave encapsulates the wetness of the whole ocean, each wave is at the same time all other waves and the sum of all waves.

Thus the Huayan formula: “one is all and all is one.” With it, Huayan superseded the Tiantai harmonism based on three-*qua*-one, upholding instead the totalism of all-*qua*-one.

The final vision is hard to put into words. But if we imagine the ocean to be boundless and churning out wave after wave, incessantly, by itself, without even the aid of an external wind of ignorance, so that at any one time each part of this whole is contributing to the regeneration of itself and the whole, that would approximate what Huayan calls *dharmadhatu* causation. At one point, Fazang explained this perfect, sudden, tenfold (instead of threefold) mystery at court. He

pointed to a golden lion, saying that every speck of gold contained the whole lion, every hair encapsulated the whole, and every part reflected and captured every other part. It is like the jewels woven into Indra's net: every jewel reflects every other jewel. Totalism, which presumes a perfect fusion and interpenetration of part and whole, is predicated on the idea of the infinite. In an infinite universe, every part is identically infinite. This vision is inspired by a hologramic universe revealed in the rich mythopoeic language of the *Huayan sutra*. A faint echo can be detected in the philosophy of Hui Shi, the first Chinese thinker to become aware of the infinite.

The extravagant Huayan philosophy was patronized by Empress Wu, who ruled as a female Maitreya and who saw her realm as, and turned it into, an incarnation of Indra's net. She had a gigantic Sun Buddha built in the capital and miniature versions enshrined in every provincial state temple, symbolically creating an all-penetrating *dharmadhatu*, a Buddha-kingdom on earth. This vision was too good to be true, too perfect to last; when her dynasty fell, the Huayan school had to adjust itself to an imperfect reality. Just as Tiantai had always supported the Pure Land faith, Huayan had traditionally advocated Chan. The adjustment of Huayan theory to the more practical ends of Chan meditation was later completed by Zongmi (780–841), who was considered a patriarch by both the Huayan school and the Chan school.

*The Chan (Zen) school.* The Chan school is often said to be the most Chinese of all schools. In legend, Bodhidharma brought this teaching to China in the early sixth century. A certain Bodhidharma did arrive in Loyang, and the *Record of the Loyang Temples* described him as singing the praises of the spectacular Yongning pagoda. A different picture emerged a hundred years later, when Chan legends described a Bodhidharma who was highly critical of the kind of merit-making temple piety he saw in the southern capital. Instead of trying to decide which image of Bodhidharma is more authentic, we would do well to recognize that Chan was a school which claimed to rely on secret transmission, and so its early history cannot be determined one way or another by pitting esoteric against exoteric records. In other words, the Chan tradition is created by its own legends. These narratives depict Chan primarily as a school that began with monks of the forests and ascetics of the mountains who conflicted with city monks and popular lecturers—a very familiar tale in the history of Buddhism, and a conflict that went all the way back to the post-Asokan Sangha and to the birth of Mahayana itself.

What modern historians can ascertain is that Huike (487–593), a disciple of Bodhidharma (d. 532),

was an ascetic of some renown. This lover of the forest life was eclipsed by popular Buddhist lecturers in the city, according to the records, which blame one leading Loyang elder monk in particular. But then the anti-Buddhist persecution of 574–577 in the north effectively undermined this monk's urban base of support. It drove monks to take refuge in the hills, where, in retrospect, they criticized urban temple piety as superficial or shallow. The soul-searching undertaken in response to persecution called for a return to the fundamentals of the faith, and especially to meditation.

This beginning—asceticism—is clear. Huike was a *dhuta* (extreme ascetic) who schooled others, and one of his disciples was Sengzan (d. 606). However, the link between this pair and Daoxin (580–651, now deemed the fourth Chan patriarch) is far from clear and remains tenuous. This is perhaps unsurprising, because with Daoxin a new style emerged. A sizable fellowship now gathered at his East Mountain. It was supported by a powerful local lay patron. Extreme asceticism became outmoded; Daoxin even criticized a lone wayfarer who visited him—when the man left, Daoxin said he was not of Mahayana stock, i.e., not ready to rejoin the world. Daoxin's burgeoning community would rejoin the world, following a set of precepts he had compiled for bodhisattvas. Daoxin also taught a more relaxed form of meditation that would bring peace of mind to a wider and less hardy circle of monks and lay practitioners.

Daoxin and his disciple Hongren (601–674) co-taught at the Twin Peaks, from which their fame spread to the capital. Around 700 C.E., Empress Wu invited Shenxiu (c. 605–706), who had apparently succeeded Hongren, to come to Chang'an. Whether or not the tradition had actually begun with forest monks who rejected the world, it had by then matured into a force which the world had to reckon with—and which, in turn, had to reckon with the world. Considering the politicization of the tradition, it is not surprising that soon afterward, Shenhui (670–762), seeking imperial patronage, began a campaign in which he argued that the real sixth patriarch was not Shenxiu but his own master, Huineng (638–713).

Up to that point, the school did not call itself Chan (meditation), a rather colorless name. It was in fact still looking for a name, and the custom then was to tie a new teaching to a sutra. Huike used the *Srimala sutra*, but Daoxin later drew inspiration from the *Awakening of Faith*. Members of the East Mountain Teaching, realizing that the *Awakening of Faith* was a *sastra*, came up with the next best; they conjured up a lineage of *Lankavatara sutra* masters, this being the sutra that informed the *Awakening of Faith*. Shenhui then perpetuated the myth that Huineng favored the

*Diamond Sutra*. Actually, none of these labels really identifies the school's ideological affiliation, because this tradition apparently never used one sutra to legitimize itself.

Shenxiu, who used five *upayas* (expedients)—five formulas for wisdom excerpted freely from five or more sutras—is a good example of the school's typically loose practice. The formulas are the means; wisdom is the end. The intention was to bring meditation out of the cloister and make it accessible to the larger populace. Short, catchy dicta were used to encapsulate the teaching. The *Platform Sutra* describes itself, for example, as teaching no-thought, no-abiding, no-form. A school in Sichuan (Szechwan) would distinguish itself by modifying this slightly; there, even the unlettered could join large but intensive sessions lasting fourteen days over the new year and be tutored, receiving certified enlightenment with *dharma* names (previously given only to monks) as well. Today we might call this pop Zen or instant Zen; it was to bring many into a form of wisdom hitherto reserved for a few. This was accomplished by lectures on *dharma* like the one Huineng gave in the Dafan Temple in Canton, and by massive precept "platforms" like the one Shenhui presided over to raise money for the throne.

The *Platform Sutra* of the sixth patriarch gives the southern school's account of how Huineng composed the better "mind verse," for which he received—in secret, at midnight—a transmission from Hongren. The decline of the northern school, the success of Shenhui's campaign, and later the destruction of major temples (especially in the north during the anti-Buddhist persecution of 845) guaranteed the preeminence of two surviving southern lineages. Regional styles emerged, and an infusion of folk wisdom created a folk Zen tradition, which has rarely been studied.

Much has been written on the depth of Chan wisdom, and most of it is true. If we take a longer view, though, we see that there is nothing in Chan which was not present before. What was new in Chan is its effective and dramatic teaching. Whether one wanted to see one's own nature, achieve sudden enlightenment, or cut off all thought, these formulas for wisdom under the personal guidance of a master could provide liberation. Much as Luther's dictum "By faith alone" condensed a lifetime of profound reflection on the scriptures, so Chan slogans reduced Mahayana wisdom to its essentials. The following four lines are said to capture the essence of Chan:

No reliance on words.  
Transmission outside the scriptures.  
Point directly at the minds of men.  
See your (Buddha) nature and be enlightened.

This passage is attributed to Bodhidharma or to Huineng, but it actually appeared after Mazu Daoyi (709–788) and may better describe his innovation. In any case, however, the four lines would free many from the letter of Buddhist law and, with their reference to mind and nature, bring the Buddhist discourse back to an important Mencian concern. The fact that by now Buddhism—in decline in India—could offer little further inspiration to China meant that Chan would evolve its own indigenous, secondary scriptures: the colloquial Yulu and the Gong'an that would even more effectively connect the two traditions.

## Conclusion

What did Buddhism contribute to Chinese thought? Neo-Confucians in the Song era denied that they owed any debt to Buddhists, but their denial only underscored their indebtedness. The friendships some of them had with Chan monks tell us that, public polemics against Buddhism notwithstanding, personal exchanges continued. Buddhist terminology appears here and there in their writings, but it is often given a reading that is as much nonclassical as non-Buddhist. In fact, the intercultural dialogue had a hybrid nature. Drawing a line between what is Buddhist and what is Confucian is not easy. For example, it is well known that Li Ao (d. c. 844), a disciple of Han Yu (768–824), gave an evaluation to human emotions so negative that it was deemed too Buddhist by the Song masters. In turn, the Song masters were considered crypto-Buddhists by the Qing scholars who sought a return to Han scholarship. So the question remains.

In retrospect, the major innovation of medieval Buddhist thought had to do with probing the structure of the mind and the grandeur of metaphysical reality and considering how one reflected the other. In that sense, Buddhist thought is inherently idealist; it is—as Lovejoy recalled of William James—the mind taking a holiday from the seemingly fragmented realities of a world in chaos and discovering a refuge in monistic pathos. Over the long term, however, the strength of this inner self would return to, and bear on, changing reality for the better. The standard complaint of the Confucians is that the Buddhists neglect social ethics. That is not true—the Buddhists also had a sense of moral behavior and a moral code—but this is not the point. Rather, the point is that, to follow Foucault's last writings on ethics, the Buddhists delve into ethics understood (by Foucault) as the self's relationship to itself. In that internal arena of spiritual exercises seeking self-transformation, there are four concerns: ethical substance, mode of subjection, self-forming activity, and telos. For the Buddhist, the substance is desire;

the mode of control is dispassion; the activities are largely ascetic; the goal is liberation. It is ultimately this art of self-analysis and self-transformation that the Buddhists would leave as a gift to all those who came after.

See also Buddhism: Zen (Chan); Fazang; Hui Shi; Huineng; The Sixth Patriarch; Mazu Daoyi; Xuanzang.

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## Buddhism, Zen (Chan)

Hsueh-li CHENG

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Buddhism was founded by Gautama Buddha (563–483 B.C.E.) in India about 2,500 years ago. It became popular inside and outside India, and it developed from early Buddhism into Hinayana (Small Vehicle, also known as Theravada) and then Mahayana (Great Vehicle) Buddhism. Both conservative Hinayana and liberal Mahayana Buddhist teachings were introduced from India to China in the first century C.E. Chinese people have generally preferred Mahayana to Hinayana Buddhism. Since the fifth century, Chinese Buddhist masters have transformed Indian Buddhism to Chinese Buddhism and created many new Buddhist schools in China. Chan, or Zen (the Japanese transcription of the Chinese term), is a new Mahayana Buddhist school founded in China; one cannot find a counterpart in India.

Although Chan Buddhism—hereafter Chan—as established in China is a new school, orthodox Chan Buddhists have claimed that it is the real, original teaching of Buddha. According to Chan tradition, Gautama Buddha was the first patriarch of Chan Buddhism in India. He is said to have gathered his disciples to hear his holiest message at the Mount of the Holy Vulture. But instead of giving a verbal statement, he simply held up a bouquet of flowers before the assemblage. No one understood the meaning of his gesture

except the elderly Mahakasyapa, who smiled at Buddha as if he completely realized the master's teaching. At this moment, it is said, Buddha appointed Mahakasyapa as his successor by proclaiming, "I have the most precious treasure, spiritual and transcendental, which this moment I hand over to you, O venerable Mahakasyapa!" In Chan tradition this incident has been taken as the origin of the Chan school.

After Mahakasyapa, Chan Buddhism is said to have been transmitted through twenty-six chief masters. Bodhidharma (d. 532) was regarded as the twenty-eighth patriarch of Chan Buddhism in India. Yet he has been revered as the first patriarch of Chan in China because he came from India to China to bring the following special Chan teaching:

A special transmission outside the scriptures,  
No dependence upon words and letters.  
Direct pointing at the human mind,  
Seeing into the nature to attain buddhahood.

Bodhidharma came to south China during the reign of the Emperor Wu (520–550). He is said to have crossed the Yangtze (Chang) River on a reed, and he taught a new way of meditation. He lived at the Shaolinsi monastery, sat facing a wall, and meditated for nine years.