

Buddhism as Stimulus to Neo-Confucianism¹

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The basic thought of Confucianism, whether orthodox Confucianism or Neo-Confucianism, is concerned mainly with human relations, moral values, and concrete life, which places it in great contrast to Indian thought. The latter, is highly speculative, full of imagination, and other-worldly. Or to put the difference more succinctly, Chinese thought *affirms* life and the world; Indian thought negates them. Buddhism as a religion and as an institution was in conflict with the Confucian pattern of life. Consequently, at first there was much opposition to it.

But in spite of official Confucian antagonism, Buddhism's theoretical system proved attractive to Chinese scholars. Moreover, when it was introduced, China was in disorder and in the grip of civil wars. Confucianism had lost its validity, and the people were ready to devote themselves to a doctrine which emphasized the other-worldly.

It is interesting to see how Buddhism influenced Chinese thought. Prior to the age of the formation of Neo-Confucianism there was in China an era of Buddhist fermentation. With the growth of the work of translation of Buddhist texts, and contemporaneously with the period from the split of China into north and south (317 A.D.) to the commencement of the Sui Dynasty (589), there developed in China nine Buddhist schools or sects. Then in the T'ang Dynasty (618 to 906 A.D.) there developed four more Buddhistic sects or schools in China, making up the total number of thirteen, though eventually two disappeared (numbers 4 and 7 above), leaving only eleven.

Buddhism was a powerful stimulus to Chinese thought if for no other reason than that it provided the concepts of *Śūnyatā* (void), *Non-ātman* (no-self), Impermanence, Twelve *Nidānas* (causes of dependence), Five *Skandas* (aggregates), *Bhūtatathātā* (suchness), *Bodhi* (awakening) etc., which gave the Chinese mind a great deal of material for reflection. Then, when the various schools arose, the Chinese mind was given further opportunity to explore the nuances of meaning among them.

Among the thirteen (or eleven) schools there were three which were pure Chinese products, grown on the native soil of China. These were (1) the *Ch'an* sect, (2) the *T'ien-t'ai* sect, and (3) the *Avataṃsaka* sect. *Ch'an* is the Chinese equivalent of the Sanskrit *Dhyāna* and the Japanese *Zen*. Every Buddhist school has to do with *Dhyāna*, which means meditation, but the devotees of *Ch'an*, besides being concerned with this work of *Dhyāna* in

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general, had their own peculiarities. Thus their doctrines may be examined separately as constituting a special sect.

The *Ch'an* School was founded by the first Indian patriarch, Bodhidharma. The date of his arrival and stay in China is a controversial question, because his life is colored by innumerable legends and reports very often in conflict with one another. What Bodhidharma taught the Chinese may be summed up in the following lines:

"This is a special transmission which goes beyond the Scriptures,
There is no use in setting it down in writing,
Better to appeal directly to the mind of man.
When one knows what nature is, Buddhahood will be attained."^[1]

Later, the *Ch'an* school became the most influential in China and swept away all the other Buddhist sects.

The fundamental tenets of *Ch'an* taught are the doctrines essential to Buddhism in general, and it puts aside such merely incidental teachings as the *Skandas*, the *Nidānas*, and epistemological analysis. It emphasizes emptiness. The work of mind is to grasp the idea of emptiness. This word "emptiness" was expressed by Bodhidharma in the following conversation with Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (A.D. 502—556); Emperor Wu asked: "What is the first principle of the Holy Doctrine?" Bodhidharma's answer was: "Vast emptiness, and there is nothing in it to be called Holy." The emperor again asked: "Who is it then that is now confronting me?" The reply he received was: "I know not." Emptiness, therefore, is the basic idea of the *Ch'an* school.

How this idea of emptiness was elaborated is very interesting, and may be comprehended with some degree of clarity by a study of the conversations, or Koans, of the *Ch'an* believers. For instance.

A layman worried about his disease and went to the second patriarch, Hui-k'e, and begged: "Pray cleanse me of my sins". Hui-k'e said: "Bring your sins here and I will cleanse you of them." This means that sins are neither within, without, nor in the middle. Only mind counts.

Again: Tao-hsin begged of the second patriarch: "Pray show me the way to deliverance." Hui-k'e said: "Who has ever put you in bondage?" Tao-hsin said: "Nobody". Then the Master said: "If so, why should you ask for deliverance!"

Suzuki rightly says that *Ch'an* is a product of Chinese thought. But I want to add some remarks about the relation of *Ch'an* to Neo-Confucianism. (1) This sect believes in the goodness of human nature — just as was taught by Mencius. Here is a fundamental kinship between *Ch'an* and Confucianism. (2) According to *Ch'an*, every sentient being possesses Buddhahood. Mencius taught a doctrine that every man can be a Yao or Shun. (3) The *Ch'an* insists that anyone can understand Buddhism who makes a direct appeal to mind. This approach, by direct appeal to mind, was adopted by the great

[1] 教外別傳,不立文字,直指本心,見性成佛.

Sung Neo-Confucianists Lu Chiu-yüan and Yang Chien. In these three aspects one may have some idea of the intimate connections between *Ch'an* and Neo-Confucianism.

We come now to the second Buddhist sect indigenous to Chinese soil, namely *T'ien-t'ai*. The very name of this school shows its Chinese origin, although there have been attempts to trace it back to the Indian Nāgārjuna as its first patriarch. A group of students proceeded to set up their own system. The real founder of the *T'ien-t'ai* school or sect was Chih-i (531—597). Its distinguishing characteristic is interest in finding a key to the heterogeneous mass of Mahāyāna literature, and for this purpose it proposed the principle known as "Assignment of the Buddha's Teachings to the Five Periods". If a student keeps this key in mind he will learn that the various aspects of Buddhist thought are not in conflict, but that they complement each other.

The *T'ien-t'ai* sect has a formula for summarizing its system of thought: (a) In one mind there are three kinds of contemplation; (b) in a single thought there are 3,000 aspects of 10 *Dhātus* [worlds]. I shall now say a few words about the *T'ien-t'ai* analysis of the three kinds of contemplation, and in doing so I shall present the dialectic of the Mādhyamika sect. There are three view points from which contemplation may proceed. These and the dialectic by which they all culminate in the revelation of the Truth of the Middle, are more or less self-explanatory in the following table:

A.

From View point of Emptiness

1. Negation of Being	Truth of Emptiness.
2. Negation of Emptiness	Falsehood.
3. Negation of both Being and Emptiness	Truth of the Middle.

B.

From View point of Falsehood

1. Positing of Being	Falsehood.
2. Positing of Emptiness	Truth of Emptiness.
3. Positing of both Being and Emptiness	Truth of the Middle.

C.

From View point of Middle

1. Negation of both Being and Emptiness, in sense of non-duality, — Truth of Emptiness.
2. Positing of both Being and Emptiness, in sense of non-duality, — Falsehood.
3. Non-negating of both Being and Emptiness, and Non-positing of both Being and Emptiness, — Truth of Middle.

This system as briefly outlined above was created by Chih-i. It spread throughout China, and beyond China into Korea and Japan. It exists to this day.

We now come to the third Buddhistic sect indigenous to Chinese soil. This was the school based on the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. "Though no *Avataṃsaka* or *Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra* has come down in Sanskrit, there is a *Gaṇḍavyūha-Mahāyāna Sūtra*, which corresponds to one of the Chinese translations of the *Avataṃsaka*. The main contents of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* are the wanderings of the young Sudhana, who travels all over India on the advice of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, in order to attain to the highest knowledge essential for Enlightenment. He wanders from land to land, seeking instruction from various persons, monks and nuns, lay adherents both male and female, from a merchant, a king, a slave, a boy, also from the goddess of the night, from Gopā, the wife of Śākyamuni and from Māyā, the mother of Śākyamuni, until, finally, by the favor of Mañjuśrī, he attains to perfect knowledge through the instrumentality of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra".

Such is the story of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. Though the school was based on the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, its philosophical principles were worked out by Tu-shun, Chih-yen, and especially Fa-tsang, who has often been regarded as its true founder, and after whom (in his second name) the school is sometimes called the H'sien-shou sect.

This school, like the *T'ien-t'ai*, also strove to find a formula by which the mass of Buddhist literature could be brought together into a unity. In contrast to the *T'ien-t'ai*, which classified Buddhist literature into five periods of preaching by the Buddha, the *Avataṃsaka* divided Buddhist literature into five categories, as follows:

- (1) The Hīnayāna school, the doctrine of which is based on the theory of being as perceived by the six senses (sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, body, will).
- (2) The first stage of Mahāyāna Buddhism, based on *Ālaya-vijnāna* (a kind of consciousness).
- (3) The final stage of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which is presented as the theory of *Bhūtatathātā* (suchness).
- (4) The stage of sudden conversion, based on the *Vimalakīrti-nirdēśa*.
- (5) The stage of perfection, based on the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*.

By this way of thinking all sects of Buddhism are covered, and yet each is left to its own view point. For the *Avataṃsaka* sect, the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* contains the all-embracing doctrine.

The school we are considering tried to build a system in which there would be no contradiction between the phenomenal world and the world of reality or of 'emptiness' in the Buddhist conception, and in which all kinds of universe would be melted together into one great harmony.

The system of the *Avataṃsaka* is based upon three basic perceptions: (1) the perception of true emptiness, (2) the perception of no barrier between fact and truth, (3) the perception of all-inclusive comprehension. These three perceptions are more elaborately set forth in the ten metaphysical principles:

1. Everything is simultaneously sufficient unto itself and yet complementary to every other thing.

2. The One and the Many, though different from each other, are compatible. The Many is reducible to a common denominator called Being. Yet each being stands by itself, and so is Many.
3. All kinds of beings may develop themselves without mutual frustration.
4. The cosmic whole is a net of Indra. It is like the thousands of lamps in a room. The thousands of lamps constitute the light of the room, yet each lamp is, in itself, a light. The light of one lamp is helped by the light of the others, and so a unitary system of light is evolved.
5. All beings, great and small, feel "at home". The principles of interpenetration and affinity are complex, yet a simple sense of security is ubiquitous.
6. What is visible and what is invisible are mutually complementary.
7. What is homogeneous and what is heterogeneous are mutually interpenetrant.
8. The beings of the three times: past, present and future, constitute a unity.
9. All beings are nothing but transformations of the mind of the *Bhūtatahātā* (suchness).
10. The principles here enunciated are not speculative only, but may be found manifested in the phenomenal world.

So much for the three sects of Buddhism indigenous to Chinese soil: *Ch'an*, *T'ien-t'ai*, *Avataṃsaka*. Their birth is remarkable evidence of the intense activity of the Chinese mind in the Middle Ages. Having learned from Indian Buddhism, the Chinese created their own systems, but always, of course, remaining close to the fundamental concepts of the parent religion.

Besides these three schools, another sign of the maturity of the Chinese mind was the *Yogācārya* school founded by Hsüan-tsang. This school was heavily engaged in translation, but among the translation a book entitled *Vijnaptimātratāsiddhi-śāstra* was accomplished, which was an abstract, rather than a translation, of the Ten Commentaries. In the old days, before the time when the Chinese mind became active such an *abstract* would have been impossible.

Leaving behind the story of the progress of these Buddhist schools, I shall now give a picture of how the Confucianist scholars lived with and felt towards the monks who introduced Buddhism into China. The Chinese scholars perceived that the Indian and Central Asian monks had left their own country in order to propagate the faith, and they respected them highly for their consecrated courage and devotion, and assisted them in their work. Indeed, the Confucian literati were on better terms with the Buddhist monks than were the Taoists. From the age of Tao-an, cooperation between Chinese scholars and Buddhist monks was intimate and uninterrupted.

By the time of the T'ang Dynasty Buddhism was already a constituent part of Chinese cultural life. Buddhist monasteries were institutions approved by

the government, translation of Sanskrit texts was sponsored by the emperors, and Buddhist monks, who generally could write Chinese prose and poetry, were able to mix pleasantly with Chinese scholars as intimate friends. Since the monks devoted themselves to their private tasks, were aloof, and took a highly detached view of human affairs, the Confucian literati regarded their friendship as congenial.

I have shown elsewhere how bitter Han Yü was towards Buddhism. But it should be remembered that this was, as it were, his official attitude, his attitude in public life as a government policy-maker. In private life, he maintained pleasant relations with a monk called Ta-tien. He was apologetic about this relation. Is this "Apology" of Han Yü good enough to provide him adequate clearance? In Chu Hsi's opinion it was death-blow to Han Yü's fight for the *Tao*. Editing Han Yü's *Collected Works*, Chu Hsi said that though the great stylist wrote the *Inquiry into Tao*^[2], he had never undergone a thorough training in understanding *Tao*, and hence his susceptibility to Ta-tien's arguments.

This case of Han Yü is a proof of how Buddhism penetrated into the inner circle of Chinese scholars. The connection of Li Ao, Han Yü's disciple, with Buddhism is indicated even more clearly in his essay *Return to Human Nature*^[3].

Another Confucian worth mentioning for his relation to Buddhism was Liu Tsung-yüan, a contemporary of Han Yü, and second only to him in literary prestige. Liu Tsung-yüan seems not so much an antagonist of Buddhism as a converted believer. He was one of the very few who presented Buddhist doctrine in a fair and objective way. He reminds us that Hui-neng begins with the theory of the innate goodness of human nature, and ends with the same. In this remark we find proof of the mutual interpenetration and cross-fertilization of *Ch'an* and Neo-Confucianism.

The greatest stimulus which Buddhism gave to the Chinese mind was that it induced Chinese scholars to go back to the home-base of Confucianism and build their own system there. When they found in Buddhism a gigantic system, they soon conceived the idea that they, too, must have a cosmology, a theory of human nature, an attitude towards human life, family and government. In other words, they must have metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, etc. Some problems they were able to unravel by re-interpreting texts in their own ancient books. Other mysteries could be resolved only by original inquiry.

I shall now proceed to show how the concepts of Neo-Confucianism were related to Buddhism.

Without question there was a nationalistic element in the cause of the Neo-Confucianist movement. Chinese scholars considered it a disgrace that they should have lived for centuries under an Indian *Weltanschauung*.

At first, there was an attempt at reconciliation. Interpreters liked to insist that the Buddha and Confucian preached the same *Tao*. But this

[2] 原道

[3] 復性

attitude actually was an effort to disguise the Chinese weakness of not having a philosophical background. From the time of Han Yü until the Sung founders of Neo-Confucianism, a new system began to ripen. In an essay by Li Ao, for instance, is the saying that the essence of human nature is tranquillity, and that evil comes from the stirrings of the emotions. This idea is clearly of Buddhist origin, and is simply a Chinese expression of the Buddhist dogma that emotions and desire are defilement. But when we come to the accomplishments of Neo-Confucianism in the Sung Dynasty, such as the *Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate* by Chou Tun-i^[4], and the discussion of the Great Harmony by Chang Tsai, we find the Chinese mind offering counter-proposals to the Buddhist idea of emptiness. Later the Ch'eng brothers arose and established the Sung philosophy on a rational basis, so that Chinese philosophy no longer could be said to be without a firm theoretical foundation. Such a vast speculative structure could not help but provide a background revived for discussion of the moral values as envisaged by Confucius and Mencius. In this sense, Confucianism itself was put upon a new foundation, because it was provided with a propaedeutic of speculative, theoretical, and systematic study, — something which had never been done before.

Let us follow out a little further the relationship between the concepts of Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism.

On the whole, the Neo-Confucian system was built up under the influence of Buddhism, but despite this it never lacked the basic Chinese attitude of world- and life-affirmation. The Chinese resisted the concept of emptiness, and stood firmly on their own ground of the affirmation of moral values. They interpreted the Buddhist ideas of all-embracing love and all-knowing intelligence in the sense of *Jen* and *Chih*, which are the sources of human activity.

Under the influence of the Indian way of thinking speculatively and gigantically, what the Chinese had formerly thought of in a personal and concrete way, they now re-conceived in terms of the entire universe as background. Thus, after having learned from Buddhism that Mother-earth in her oneness creates diversities of seeds and yet knows no discrimination in her innermost being, Chang Tsai in his Western Inscription said: "My body reaches as far as the borderline of heaven and earth; the commandment of heaven and earth constitutes my nature; men are my brothers; animals and inanimate objects are my fellow-creatures"^[5]. Chang Tsai meant that love must be as wide as the universe. Again, just as for Buddhism the *Tathāgata* reveals itself in the infinity of worlds and preaches the Law universally, so for Neo-Confucianism the *Tao* and the representative of the *Tao*, the Sage, are everywhere and omnipresent, and the latter is enlightened and impartial.

Following the Buddhist advice that the heart of all beings should be kept bright and calm, the Neo-Confucian philosophers revived the saying of

[4] 周敦頤太極圖

[5] 天地之塞吾其體，天地之率吾其志，民吾同胞，物吾與也。

the *Li*^[6] *chi* (*Book of Rites*): "Tranquillity at the time of a man's birth is his nature."

The Neo-Confucianists, like the Buddhists, taught the people that one must, as far as possible, stay away from lust, desire, and stirrings of the heart. In other words, elimination of desire and observance of the dictates of reason were recommended.

That is, the moral law should be the goal of life.

Besides *Jen* and *Chih*, the Neo-Confucian equivalents to the Buddhist virtues of *Karuṇā* (love) and *Bodhi* (intelligence), the Neo-Confucians added a new virtue, *Ching*^[7], which has a close affinity to the Buddhist *Samādhi* or meditation.

In this connection three other important concepts should be discussed. These are *Hsing*, or self-essence in the Buddhist sense, *Hsin* or mind, and *Hsing* as human nature. The Buddhists believed that the world is an illusion, and that the *Ātman* (the self) or substance is the product of conditions and is not intrinsically real. Now the Chinese term *Hsing* was used in this context, as the selfessence which has no reality. But the Chinese, through misunderstanding the original Sanskrit term for self-essence or self-substance, became intensely interested in this term *Hsing*, taking it as the equivalent for the Chinese word for human nature. This is why the discussion of human nature became wide-spread among scholars like Han Yü and the founding fathers of the Sung Dynasty. The Chinese never believed that the world is an illusion. On the contrary, they were incurably convinced of its reality. Thus, in their speculations they commenced with the Supreme Ultimate, which on the one hand was nothingness, but on the other hand was *Tao* or *Li*. They began, that is to say, with reality, not the void. When, in their speculations they came down to man, they maintained that the discussion of human nature could have no meaning unless it was concerned with concrete man as actually born. Accordingly the question of human nature was not only metaphysical, but was inseparable from universal reality.

In this connection I may mention the four Chinese words: *Ming-hsin-chien-hsing*, meaning "the knowledge of mind, and the vision of reality", the advice of the *Ch'an* Buddhists. The last two words, *Chien-hsing*, stand for the inquiry into whether the universe is real or empty, or rather this is what the Buddhists originally *intended* by the meaning. However, the Chinese misunderstood it, and interpreted the words as referring to man's own nature, to human nature, rather than to universal nature, or to nature as such. Thus, paradoxically, what is prominent in Chinese philosophy and the question of nature which in China is conceived as exclusively related to man, arose from a failure to comprehend the full meaning of the Sanskrit term for self-essence. Yet, because mankind is a part of the universe, this

[6] 人生而靜,天之性也。

[7] 敬

misunderstanding produced a discussion which was partially meaningful for the subject as a whole.

Next let us look for a moment at the concept of mind. From the time of Mencius, Chinese philosophers recognized in *thinking* as the function of mind; but this function was understood in the main as limited to logical inference and to approval and disapproval of the morally right and wrong. The Chinese never awakened to the idea of the wonderful work of mind which Bodhidharma revealed to them.

Ch'an advice of this kind put the mind in a more self-reliant and responsible position than any to which Chinese philosophers had formerly assigned it. The Chinese had become accustomed to thinking of books as the basis from which knowledge is derived. But for Bodhidharma it was no use to depend on books. By this insight, Bodhidharma meant three things: (1) A man knows what is right and wrong without being able to read. (2) A man *originally* knows what is right and wrong; that is to say, he is innately good. (3) By appealing directly to the mind, without recourse to ready-made knowledge, the mind is trained to greater alertness. This discovery of the active role of mind would have been impossible without the introduction of *Ch'an* thinking.

I may add, also, that *Ch'an* furnished a powerful stimulus to the revival of Confucianism in China. Though the *Ch'eng-Chu* school fought bitterly against the *Ch'an* sect, the fact is that few *T'ang* or *Sung* scholars were without contact with *Ch'an* monks or Buddhist books. After the *T'ang* Dynasty, *Ch'an* was the only sect fit for survival among all the Buddhists schools, and it became the most powerful. It had such great influence over the *Sung* philosophers because they were fond of fraternizing with its monks.

The last concept I shall deal with in this paper is *hsing*, as human nature. From the age of Mencius, the Confucian school believed that human nature is born with the four cardinal virtues: *jen* (human-heartedness), *i* (righteousness), *li* (propriety) and *chih* (knowledge or wisdom). These are the standards of what is morally right and wrong. As long as he is equipped with them, he cannot do otherwise than know what is right and wrong. When the *Sung* philosophers came on the stage, they called these four virtues *li*, or reason or heavenly reason. The human mind they looked upon as operating at two levels: The transcendental level of heavenly reason, which sets up the standard of right and wrong; and the empirical or natural level, which feels, wills and decides. This was the theory of the *Ch'eng-Chu* school---although among the Neo-Confucianists there was also the *Lu-Wang* school, which took the contrary point of view that mind performs both of these functions, to be sure, but at one level.

Now this ancient Chinese conviction that human nature is born with a kind of moral standard, has received much reinforcement from the Buddhist doctrine that the *Tathāgata* womb is the treasure in which the essence of *Tathāgatahood* remains; or from the doctrine of the *Yogācārya* school that

Ālayavijñāna or *Manovijñāna* is the all-embracing Intelligence; or from the teaching of Ch'an that everyone possesses the nature of Buddhahood. If in the *Tathāgata-garbha* all mental possibilities are stored, Mencius cannot have been wrong when he maintained that man is born with moral standards in his nature. Buddhist doctrines of the sort we have just been considering cannot help but serve as props to the Chinese house, making it unshakeable on its foundations.