

Religion and Politics in Early T'ang China: Taoism and Buddhism in the Reigns of Kao-tsu and T'ai-tsung

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I. Introduction

In T'ang China, religion was a complex cultural and organizational structure. Even though the dominant value of Chinese traditional society was not religious, yet, Chinese society was not an entirely secular society, because most of the Chinese social activities took place in a religious-cultural complex. On the whole, the early T'ang emperors were pragmatic rulers, wishing to employ religious influence as an aid in consolidating the empire.¹ The early T'ang rulers formed their religious policies, at least in part, to promote their own legitimation, to enhance their prestige, and to establish their supremacy. Emperors Kao-tsu 高祖 and T'ai-tsung 太宗 both tried to portray themselves as the bearers of the religious-cultural traditions. The early T'ang rulers sought to control Taoism and Buddhism, while at the same time encouraging and patronizing religion, especially when religion provided support for the legitimation and unity of the new dynasty.

II. The Background and the Various Facets of Taoism²

The theory of the great and little traditions, introduced by Robert Redfield and expounded by Arthur Wright, is appropriate for the present study.³ While the great tradition was perpetuated by the elite literati,⁴ the little traditions sprang from the general population. Religious Taoism was predominant in the little traditions, whereas philosophical Taoism was in the core of the great tradition. In philosophical Taoism, there were "contemplative Taoism" and "purposive Taoism." According to H.G. Creel, contemplative Taoism represented "the

1 S.N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (Glencoe, Ill., 1963), chapter 4.3: "Major Characteristics of Chinese Religious Organizations as Crystallized during the T'ang Regime," pp.58-60; see also Frederick Hok-Ming Cheung, "The Political Role of Religion in Medieval Empires," *Asian Culture Quarterly*, XIII:3(1985), 35-53.

2 Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, ed., *Facets of Taoism* (New Haven, 1979); Roger T. Ames, *The Art of Rulership* (Honolulu, 1983).

3 Arthur F. Wright, "A Historian's Reflections on the Taoist Tradition," *History of Religions* 9:2/3(1969/70), 248-55; Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (Stanford, 1959), p.6.

4 Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, p.6

(Taoist) philosophy in its original purity.”⁵ It was evident throughout the *Chuang-tzu* 莊子, one of the main scriptures of Taoism. Purposive Taoism, in which Taoism was treated as a means to power, a method of control, was prominent in the *Lao-tzu* 老子, another basic scripture of Taoism. In the *Lao-tzu*, it was said that “the Sage, in governing, practices inaction (*wu-wei* 無爲), and as a consequence there is nothing not properly governed.”⁶ Thus, this important Taoist concept of *wu-wei*, to Creel, could be considered “a technique of government,”⁷ as *wu-wei* “enables the ruler truly to rule, because he never becomes immersed in the detailed administration of the government.”⁸ In the *Han-shu* 漢書, Taoism was considered “the method by which a ruler governs.”⁹ Ever since the third century B.C., China was predominantly bureaucratic, characterized by the “impersonal controls that bureaucracy invokes to maintain centralized control.”¹⁰ Taoism has contributed much to the development of Chinese administrative practice and political thought in this respect.¹¹ Some scholars think that certain concepts of Taoism might serve as a theoretic base to construct a system of authoritarian rule.¹² According to Arthur Wright, “In general, (a certain) strain of Taoism served to justify and support the absolute power of the monarch.”¹³

There was another facet of Taoism: the “*hsien* Taoism” 仙道 (sometimes called religious Taoism).¹⁴ The followers of *hsien* Taoism had a consistent aim: the achievement of immortality, and in their pursuit of that aim, they often practised alchemy and invoked mystic forces. There was the belief that some men, by “divers regimens—mystical, dietary, sexual, alchemical—can attain a kind of transcendence, which manifests itself in longevity, invulnerability, charisma, the ability to know and manipulate the forces around them.”¹⁵ This aspect of Taoism merged with the folk religions to form the numerous little traditions of Taoism.¹⁶ These little traditions, which include faith-healing techniques from local folk practices, were the pulling together of elements from folk religion into a loose

5 H. G. Creel, *What is Taoism?* (Chicago, 1970), pp.4-6, and 43-47.

6 *Ibid.*, p.55; *Lao-tzu* (Peking, 1954), 3.2b; see also D.C. Lau 劉殿爵, tr., *Tao Te Ching* 道德經 (London/Hong Kong, 1963), and Ames, *The Art of Rulership*.

7 Creel, p.56.

8 *Ibid.*, p.66.

9 Pan Ku 班固, *Han-shu* (Chin-Ling shu-chü ed. 金陵書局版, 1869), 30.16a.

10 Creel, p.158.

11 *Ibid.*, vii; cf. Ch'en Yin-k'o 陳寅恪, “Ts'ui Hao yü K'ou Ch'ien-chih,” 崔浩與寇謙之 *Ch'en Yin-k'o hsien-sheng wen-shih lun-chi* 陳寅恪先生文史論集, II (Hong Kong, 1972), pp. 81-115, and “T'ien-shih Tao yü pin-hai-yü chih kuan-hsi,” 天師道與濱海域之關係 I (Hong Kong, 1972), pp.141-81; T'ang Yung-t'ung 湯用彤 and T'ang I-chieh 湯一介, “K'ou Ch'ien-chih ti chu-tso yü ssu-hsiang,” 寇謙之的著作與思想 *Li-shih yen-chiu* 歷史研究, 5(1961), 64-77.

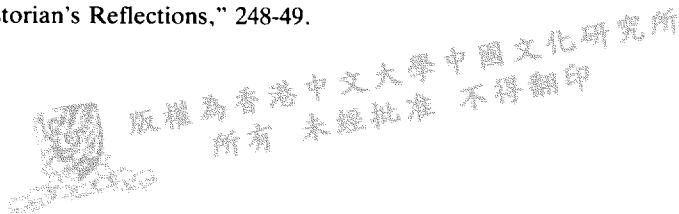
12 Creel, pp.37-38, 70.

13 Wright, “A Historian's Reflections,” 250.

14 Creel, pp.7-24.

15 Wright, “A Historian's Reflections,” 248-49.

16 *Ibid.*, 251.



system.¹⁷ These various facets and traditions of Taoism intermingled and influenced the social, cultural, and political history of China.

By the end of the second century A.D., there was a Taoist movement known as the *T'ai-p'ing tao* 太平道, which drew its inspiration from various sources, such as the philosophical and religious Taoism, the yin-yang and "Five Elements" cosmology, and the ideal of *t'ai-p'ing* ("great peace" 太平). Another sect, the *T'ien-shih tao* 天師道, also known as the *Wu-tou-mi tao* 五斗米道, which drew its inspiration from a variety of sources, such as the great and little traditions, and philosophical and religious Taoism, became a prominent sect of Taoism in medieval Chinese history. According to Richard Mather, with this sect of Taoism operating,

the state claimed its ultimate authority from a supernatural power and maintained an external religious establishment whose hierarchy and rituals served as a kind of authentication of its faithfulness to the Heavenly Mandate, as well as providing it with direct access to the ultimate source of power.¹⁸

Emperor T'ai-wu 太武 (r.424-52) of the Northern Wei 北魏 was probably interested in assuming the role of the *T'ai-p'ing chen-chün* 太平真君.¹⁹ The idea of an established Taoist religion with an authoritative leader could be helpful to the court, too.

Taoism also had considerable knitting functions in society, since the great and little traditions of Taoism intermingled, thus narrowing the gap between the elite literati and the general population. For instance, the *T'ien-shih tao*, which mingled the great and little traditions into a Taoist sect, might have had the function of breaking the barrier between the elite and the peasants who then had a common faith. Ch'en Yin-k'o found instances such as a Sun 孫 family (relatively poor in status) intermarrying with the renowned great Lu 盧 family of Fan-yang 范陽 in the Southern Dynasties. Ch'en's study shows that the two families, though differing greatly in social status, both believed in the same *T'ien-shih tao* sect of Taoism.²⁰

III. Taoism in Early T'ang China

According to Ch'en Yin-k'o, the traditions of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534) were passed through the Eastern Wei 東魏 (534-550) and Northern Ch'i 北齊 (550-576) Dynasties, as well as through the Western Wei 西魏 (534-556) and Northern Chou 北周 (556-581) Dynasties, on to the Sui 隋 (581-617) and T'ang 唐

17 *Ibid.*, 254.

18 Richard Mather, "K'ou Ch'ien-chih and the Taoist Theocracy at the Northern Wei Court, 425-451," *Facets of Taoism* (New Haven, 1979), p.103.

19 *Ibid.*, pp.103-22; cf. Yang Lien-sheng 楊聯陞, "Lao-chün yin-sung chieh-ching chiao-shih," 老君音誦誡經校釋 *Chung-yang yen-chih-yüan*, *Li-shih yü-yen yen-chiu-so chi-k'an*, 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 28:1 (1956), 17-54; and Ch'en Yin-k'o, "Ts'ui Hao yü K'ou Ch'ien-chih," pp.81-115.

20 Ch'en Yin-k'o, "T'ien-shih Tao," pp.151 ff.

(617-906) Dynasties.²¹ Certainly, the Taoist social and political knitting functions and other aspects continued operating in the early T'ang Dynasty. The traditional great aristocratic families (such as the Ts'ui 崔 and the Lu) of north China were still so snobbish and arrogant that they despised those who come from "the dust," including the Li royal family from the northwestern frontier. The great elite families (such as the Wang 王 and the Hsieh 謝) of south China, too, refused to mingle with those officials who came from "families of nowhere."²² Confronting these problems, Emperor T'ang T'ai-tsung not only ordered the compilation of a new handbook, the *Chen-kuan shih-tsu chih* 貞觀氏族志,²³ listing the new order of aristocratic families with Li among the top ranked, but also traced his ancestors back to the Taoist legendary founder Li Erh 李耳 (Lao Tzu). If the royal family was descended from Lao Tzu, the masses would respect the T'ang rulers and the social order of their new dynasty.²⁴ Indeed, the prestige of the royal family was enhanced by the promotion of Taoism. In fact, "the claim to be descended from Lao Tzu was built into the state ideology of the T'ang Dynasty."²⁵

The Taoist traditions evidently had a strong foothold throughout the Northern and Southern Dynasties, and in the Sui and T'ang Dynasties, especially in the Kuan-chung area of western China.²⁶ One of the Taoist developments was messianism: during the chaotic period from late Han through the Six Dynasties, there was the expectation that a messiah would establish a perfect kingdom of great peace. According to Anna Seidel, Emperor T'ang Kao-tsu "may well have felt himself to be the fulfillment of these messianic Taoist hopes that had reechoed throughout the whole Six Dynasties: a Lord Li, emissary of Lao Tzu, was to be ruler."²⁷ Actually, in the reign of the Sui Dynasty, when Li Yüan 李淵, the future Emperor T'ang Kao-tsu, was still the Duke of T'ang, he had already believed in Taoism and performed certain Taoist liturgies.²⁸ During the Civil War before the founding of the T'ang Dynasty, a Taoist priest who was good at facial and palm reading had said of Li Yüan, "the Duke's bones were unusual: he must be the master of the masses in the future." It was recorded that

21 Ch'en Yin-k'o, *Sui T'ang chih-tu yüan-yüan lüeh-lun-kao* 隋唐制度淵源略論稿, (Hong Kong, 1971).

22 Denis C. Twitchett, "The Composition of the T'ang Ruling Class: New Evidence from Tun-huang," *Perspectives on the Tang* (New Haven, 1973), pp.47-85.

23 Kao Shih-lien 高士廉, one of Emperor T'ang T'ai-tsung's trusted bureaucrats, was the chief compiler. A revised version (with the imperial family in the first rank, the maternal relatives of Emperor T'ai-tsung, second, and the Ts'ui clan, originally first, third) was completed and submitted to the Emperor in 638. This was obviously a political attempt to deflate the status of the old aristocratic families, and enhance the prestige of the imperial family.

24 Sun K'o-k'uan 孫克寬, *Han Yüan Tao Lun* 寒原道論 (Taipei, 1977), p.72.

25 Wright, "A Historian's Reflections," 250; Anna Seidel, "The Image of the Perfect Ruler in early Taoist Messianism," *History of Religions*, 9:2/3 (1969/70), 244; Woodbridge Bingham, *The Founding of the T'ang Dynasty* (1941, reprinted in New York, 1970), p.118.

26 Bingham, pp.108, 118, and 132; cf. Seidel, 216-47.

27 Seidel, 244.

28 Sun K'o-k'uan, p.72.

Li Yüan was quite proud of that.²⁹ The Taoist myths and prophecies might have inspired and supported the uprising of Li Yüan and his family.³⁰ It was also said that in the thirteenth year of the Ta-yeh 大業 period (617), Lao Tzu was rumoured to have descended in Chung-nan Shan 終南山.³¹ Lao Tzu then reportedly told Li Ch'un-feng, 李淳風,³² a renowned Taoist priest, that Li Yüan should receive the Mandate of Heaven. Hence, Ch'un-feng became a supporter of Li Yüan.³³ When the Duke of T'ang started his campaigns at Chin-yang 晉陽, his daughter (Princess P'ing-yang 平陽公主) also rose up correspondingly, and stationed her army at the Hsüan-shou Palace 宣壽宮 in Ch'ang-an 長安. It was said that Ch'i P'ing-ting 岐平定, a Taoist priest, felt that the *chen-chu* 真主 was appearing in front of him, so he gave the Princess' army all the temple's provision, and sent eighty Taoist priests to help the Princess.³⁴ Thus, the Taoist prophecies and myths seemed to have played a vital role in the founding of the T'ang Dynasty.

The influence of the Taoist myths and prophecies continued after the founding of the T'ang Dynasty. In 620, Emperor T'ang Kao-tsu visited the Lou Kuan 樓觀 near Ch'ang-an. Ch'i P'ing-ting, the Taoist priest, led the masses to welcome the Emperor. Emperor Kao-tsu then summoned all the priests, saying, "my ancestor had descended here. I am now the master of the world. Can there be no construction here?"³⁵ The temple was then renamed Tsung Kuan (Ancestral Temple) 宗觀. The Emperor probably wanted to remind the public that the Li royal family was descended from the Taoist Sage, Lao Tzu, and that the Emperor was the *chen-chu*. According to the *T'ang hui-yao* 唐會要, in 620, Chi Hsien-hsing 吉善行 passed by the Goat Horn Hill, and saw an old man riding on a white horse. The old man reportedly said, "I am telling the Son of Heaven of T'ang: I am the ancestor of the Li royal family. This year, after suppressing the rebels, our descendants will enjoy a thousand years of reign."³⁶ Emperor T'ang Kao-tsu then established a Taoist temple at the site.³⁷ Later, (on the eighth month in 620), the old man appeared again and told Chi Hsien-hsing, "I am the supreme god, named Li styled Lao Chün, the ancestor of the Emperor. Now the rebels are suppressed, peace is on earth, the reign of T'ang will last much

29 *Chiu T'ang-shu* 舊唐書 (Peking, 1975), ch.1, The Annals of Emperor T'ang Kao-tsu, pp.1-19; see also Sun K'o-k'uan, p.67.

30 Bingham, pp.108, 118; Seidel, 244.

31 Fang Yung-hsiang 方永祥, "T'ang-tai huang-shih yü Tao-chiao kuan-shi yen-chiu," 唐代皇室與道教關係研究 *Ching Feng* 景風 18(1968), 33; see also Sun K'o-k'uan, pp. 70-71.

32 *Hsin T'ang-shu* 新唐書 (Peking, 1975) ch.204 pp.5798-99; *Chiu T'ang-shu*, ch.79, pp.2717-19.

33 Sun K'o-k'uan, pp.70-71.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*, it was also apparent that the mix-blooded T'ang emperors felt a special affinity with Taoism, as they bore the same surname, "Li," as did the Taoist legendary founder whom they claimed to be their ancestor, thus, proving that they were not semi-barbaric (though their female lines for generations had been Central Asians, that is non-Chinese) but pure Chinese.

36 *T'ang hui-yao* (Chung-hua shu-chü 中華書局 ed., Peking, 1957), ch. 50, p.865.

37 *Wen-yüan ying-hua* 文苑英華 (Taipei, 1965; reproduction of 1567-72 ed.), ch.779.



longer.”³⁸ Evidently, the T'ang Emperors had continued to associate themselves closely with the Taoist myths.

The close relationship of the T'ang ruling house with Taoism could also be seen in some of the activities of the T'ang princesses. For instance, Princess T'ai-p'ing had been a Taoist priestess at the T'ai-p'ing Kuan 太平觀;³⁹ the Ching-lung Kuan 景龍觀 had once been the home of Princess Ch'ang-lung 昌隆公主; and the Fu-t'ang Kuan 福唐觀 was originally the home of Princess Hsin-tu 新都公主. Later on, when the son of Princess Hsin-tu became a Taoist priest, the place became a *kuan* 觀.⁴⁰ The Chin-hsien Kuan 金仙觀 and the Yü-chen Kuan 玉真觀, respectively, were established when Princess Hsi-ning 西寧公主 and Ch'ang-lung became Taoist priestesses.⁴¹ There are many other instances indicating the close relationship between the T'ang ruling house and Taoism. According to the *Hsin T'ang-shu*, “In the tenth month of the seventh year of the Wu-te 武德 period (624), the Emperor visited the Lao Tzu Temple at Chung-nan Shan again.⁴² In the fourth month of the eighth year of the Wu-te period (625), T'ai Ho 太和 Palace was built at the Lao Tzu Temple in Ch'ang-an.⁴³”

The close relationship continued through the second, third, and later reigns of the T'ang Dynasty. In 632, Ch'eng-ch'ien 承乾, the Heir-Apparent, was sick. Chin Ying 秦英, a Taoist priest, was ordered to do the praying service for the Heir-Apparent. Afterward, the Heir-Apparent recovered, and the Lung Hsing Kuan 龍興觀 was built. In 638, services for Lao Tzu were established at Hao-chou 濠州.⁴⁴ Emperor T'ang Kao-tsung continued to worship Lao Tzu with the title “Most High Emperor of the Mystic Origin.”⁴⁵ In 682, Emperor Kao-tsung 高宗 ordered that Taoist monasteries be built throughout the empire.⁴⁶ Emperor T'ang Hsüan-tsung 唐玄宗 (r.712-56) was also renowned as an ardent believer in Taoism.

On the other hand, the early T'ang emperors were conquerors from the north. Their acceptance of the Mao Shan 茅山 sect of Taoism, which mingled various Taoist sources, could have a certain knitting function. The Mao Shan sect was established by Hsü Hui 許翽 (341-c.370) in the Chü-ch'ü Shan 句曲山. Soon, many members of this Mao Shan sect of Taoism became spiritual masters of

38 Cf. Sun K'o-k'uan, p.65; Fang Yung-hsiang, 33-34.

39 *T'ang hui-yao*, ch.50, p.870; *Hsin T'ang-shu*, ch.83, p.3650.

40 *T'ang hui-yao*, ch.50, pp.870-71.

41 *Ibid.*, and *Hsin T'ang-shu*, ch.83, pp. 3656-57.

42 *Hsin T'ang-shu*, ch.1, The Annals of Emperor T'ang Kao-tsu, pp.1-20; see also Sun K'o-k'uan, p.69.

43 Sun K'o-k'uan, p.69.

44 *Ibid.*

45 According to *Tu Kuang-t'ing* 杜光庭, in 666, Emperor T'ang Kao-tsung visited the Temple of Lao Tzu and issued an edict proclaiming Lao Tzu the supreme High Emperor of Mystery (“Tao-te chen-ching kuang-sheng-yi,” 道德真經廣聖義 *Tao-tsang* 道藏, reproduction of the 1445ed., Taipei, 1962, 440/2/24b-25b). See also Liu Ts'un-yan 柳存仁, *On the Art of Ruling a Big Country* (Canberra, 1974), p.4.

46 *Tao-tsang*, 441/2/27a; cf. Fang Yung-hsiang, 33.

emperors and influential aristocrats.⁴⁷ One of the founders of the Mao Shan sect, T'ao Hung-ching 陶弘景 (456-536), was a renowned alchemist who inherited and synthesized various traditions of Taoism.⁴⁸ T'ao, familiar with the bureaucracy because of his court career, continued his influence at court even after his retirement to Mao Shan in 492. One of T'ao's followers: Wang Yüan-chih 王遠知, whose father had been the governor of Yang-chou 揚州 in the Ch'en 陳 Dynasty, was a good friend of Emperor T'ang T'ai-tsung. Wang later became the abbot of the tenth generation (the first under the T'ang) of the Mao Shan sect.⁴⁹ In 635, Emperor T'ai-tsung showed concern for the sect, and ordered that a T'ai-p'ing kuan be established in Mao Shan, and twenty-seven Taoist priests were ordained.⁵⁰ Wang's followers included Pang Shih-cheng 潘師正, Ssu-ma Ch'eng-ch'en 司馬承禎, and Li Han-kuang 李含光, the abbots of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth generations, respectively. These competent leaders expanded their sect which then became one of the influential sects of T'ang Taoism.⁵¹

IV. Buddhism in Early T'ang China

Since Buddhism was also popular in the T'ang society, the early T'ang rulers had made use of its influence,⁵² too. By patronizing Buddhism, the T'ang emperors presented themselves to the populace as open-minded, cosmopolitan rulers, who also realized that Buddhism had its political function for assuring social stability and unity. Emperor T'ai-tsung in an edict to the monasteries of all provinces in early Chen-kuan 貞觀 period, tried to console the families of the dead soldiers by sponsoring the building of Buddhist temples.⁵³ In 628, the Emperor

47 Chou I-liang 周一良, "Nan-ch'ao ching-nei te ko-chung jen chi cheng-fu tui-tai te cheng-ts'e," 南朝境內的各種人及政府對待政策, *Wei-Chin Nan-pei ch'ao shih-lun chi* 魏晉南北朝史論集 (Peking, 1963), pp.30-93; Michael Strickmann, "The Mao Shan Revelations. Taoism and the Aristocracy," *T'oung Pao*, 63:1 (1977), 14. According to Strickmann, we could, by studying the members of the Mao Shan sect of Taoism (who were scholars, calligraphers, pharmacologists, alchemists, and spiritual masters), clarify much "the Taoist penetration of and liaison with the governing elite, and the increasing institutionalization of the religion (Taoism)" (Strickmann, 39).

48 Strickmann, 1-64, and Strickmann, "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," *Facets of Taoism*, pp.125 ff.

49 *Chiu T'ang-shu*, ch.192, Biography of Wang Yüan-chih 王遠知, pp.5125-26.

50 *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi* 太平廣記 (Taipei, 1962), ch.23.

51 Fang Yung-hsiang, 35.

52 Buddhism, in early T'ang, had a wide following among the peasants and the elite in north and south alike, a force that the politicians could not afford to ignore. In fact, the whole of the northern society was said to have suffused with Buddhism, and according to Arthur Wright, Buddhism "penetrated economic life and affected customs at all levels of society" (Wright, "T'ang T'ai-tsung and Buddhism," pp.241-42). Buddhist monasteries and shrines spread all over the T'ang empire. The Buddhist clergy assumed many social roles: as preacher, teacher, doctor, chanter of magic spells, and guardian of temples which also served as family shrines. Some elite families were followers of Buddhism. They made contributions to monasteries and shrines, used clergy for family and seasonal observances, and had the lay vows administered to their sons (*Hsin T'ang-shu*, ch.79, 3540); cf. Ts'en Chung-mien 岑仲勉, *Sui-shu Ch'iu-shih* 隋書求是 (Peking, 1958), p.364.

53 "Building Monasteries for those who died in battles," *Ch'uan T'ang-wen* 全唐文; *T'ang hui-yao*, ch.48.

ordered the Buddhist temples in the capital and other big cities to observe seven days fasting and to hold services of consolation for the dead soldiers. The Emperor also ordered the Buddhist monks to pray for the harvest of the farmers, and to recite the *Jen-huang-ching* 仁皇經 and the *Ta-yün-ching* 大雲經 for the prosperity and stability of the T'ang empire.⁵⁴ In 629, Emperor T'ai-tsung ordered the construction of seven stupas and shrines on battlefields where he had triumphed, in memory of his soldiers who were killed in battle.⁵⁵ Some historians, such as T'ang Yung-t'ung, have argued that Emperor T'ai-tsung was exploiting such activities for religious effect and political purpose.⁵⁶

Buddhism was also used by the T'ang emperors for the psychological conditioning of the soldiers. The Chinese tradition of filial piety and the Chinese concept of the afterlife had had a negative effect on martial enthusiasm: the Chinese were unwilling to die disfigured since they believed that the same figure would appear in the afterlife. It was also the son's duty "to return his body intact upon his death and thus to show gratitude to his parents who had given it to him."⁵⁷ Furthermore, it was believed that the descendents of the dead person could communicate with or pay respect to him through ancestral worship in the family graveyard, or in the ancestral temple at home-village. Hence, Chinese soldiers "had a horror of a disfigured death in battle and of burial far from home."⁵⁸ Buddhism helped relieved this psychological knot. According to Wright,

The Chinese Buddhist conception of a soul brought with it a new notion of immortality, and the Sui and T'ang Dynasties made a practice of building battle-field temples at the scenes of major engagements and endowing perpetual services for the repose of the souls of the war dead and their ultimate salvation.⁵⁹

Like Taoism, Buddhism was also used by the T'ang rulers as a socio-political tool for knitting together the two very different cultures of north and south China.⁶⁰ The elite in the south thought of themselves as having a separate identity from the northerners, whom they despised as semi-barbaric. The northerners were indeed racially mixed and were influenced by the Central Asian cultures. On the contrary, the southerners considered themselves as pure Han-blooded and preservers of the Han tradition.⁶¹ While the northern women worked hard in

54 Cf. Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton, 1964), p.217.

55 Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, p.217; cf. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, pp.74-75; T'ang Yung-t'ung, p.15.

56 T'ang Yung-t'ung, pp.14-16; *Tzu-chih t'ung-ch'ien* 資治通鑑 (Chung-hua shu-chü ed., Peking, 1956), ch.189; the fourth year of the Wu-te period (621).

57 Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, p.74.

58 *Ibid.*

59 *Ibid.*, pp.74-75.

60 Mou Jun-sun 牟潤孫, "T'ang-ch'u nan-pei hsüeh-jen lun-hsüeh chih i-ch'ü chih ch'i ying-hsiang," 唐初南北學人論學之興趣及其影響 50-88.

61 Cf. Richard Mather, "A Note on the Dialect of Loyang and Nanking during the Six Dynasties," in *Wen-lin: Studies in the Chinese Humanities*, (Wisconsin, 1968), pp.247-56.

the fields, and were physically strong, the traditional southern women were delicate and refined.⁶² The southerners were highly cultivated. They were renowned for their refined literary style and their sophisticated philosophy. Yü Hsin 庾信, a renowned southern poet in the fifth century, commented that "the northern literary production is simply like the braying of donkeys and the barking of the dogs."⁶³

The intellectual differences between northern and southern scholars could also be found in their opposite interpretations of the following events. Yao Ssu-lien 姚思廉 (a southern scholar), in his *Liang-shu* 梁書, praised the southern Emperor Liang Wu-ti's 梁武帝 (r.502-49) intellectual achievements.⁶⁴ On the contrary, Wei Cheng 魏徵 (from the northeast), condemned the interests of Liang Wu-ti in "mystical doctrines and studies" as harmful to the affairs of the State.⁶⁵ In another case, Yao Ssu-lien, in the *Ch'en-shu* 陳書, praised Emperor Ch'en Hou-chu 陳後主 (r.582-89) for his literary talents.⁶⁶ Again, on the other side, Wei Cheng pointed out the mistakes of Ch'en Hou-chu, and even added that if a ruler is too fond of flowery literature, his state is likely to be doomed.⁶⁷ Similarly, Ling-hu Te-fen 令狐德棻,⁶⁸ another leading historian among the northern academic circle, in his *Chou-shu* 周書, vigorously attacked Yü Hsin, the renowned scholar from the south.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Buddhism, commonly accepted by both the north and the south, could help bridge the gap between the two.

Buddhism, for the first hundred years of the T'ang, flourished as never before. According to Wright, the period of T'ang China was "the golden age of Chinese Buddhism."⁷⁰ The period of early T'ang witnessed the flowering of eight doctrinal schools of Buddhism. Imperial patronage, though perhaps for political reasons, might be one of the many factors for the flowering. The eight schools were the T'ien-t'ai 天台, the Fa-hsiang 法相, the Hua-yen 華嚴, the San-chieh 三階, the Ching-t'u 淨土, the Ch'an 禪, the Mi 密, and the Lü 律. According to Stanley Weinstein,

Although the T'ien-t'ai, Fa-hsiang, and Hua-yen schools each had highly complex metaphysical systems, each, in fact, also served a clearly definable political

62 According to Yen-Chih-t'ui 顏之推 (531-91), northern women went about attending to all manners of practical affairs. See Teng Ssu-yü 鄧嗣宇, tr., *Yen-shih chia-hsun* 顏氏家訓 (Leiden, 1968), p.19.

63 Arthur Wright, *The Sui Dynasty* (New York, 1978), p.34.

64 *Liang-shu* (Chung-hua shu-chü ed., Peking, 1973), ch.3: The Annals of Wu-ti, pp.63-98.

65 Mou Jun-sun, 51-52.

66 *Ch'en-shu* (Chung-hua shu-chü ed., Peking, 1975), ch.6: The Annals of Emperor Ch'en Hou-chu, pp.105-20.

67 Mou Jun-sun, 55, 87.

68 *Hsin T'ang-shu*, ch.101: Biography of Ling-hu Te-fen, pp.3982-84.

69 *Chou-shu* (Chung-hua shu-chü ed., Peking, 1975), ch. 41; cf. Mou Jun-sun, 56. Since Emperor T'ang T'ai-tsung was fond of Yü Hsin's prose, which was highly delicate and flowery; it is believed that Ling-hu Te-fen purposely attacked Yü Hsin in order to warn the Emperor that being too deeply interested in flowery literature (of the south) was dangerous.

70 Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, p.70.

end. Hence, abrupt changes in the political situation immediately affected the standing of these schools. The philosophical schools were not formulated by monks who were immured in remote monasteries, but rather reflected, to a considerable degree, albeit in the recondite terminology of Buddhism, the political needs of their imperial patrons.⁷¹

The travels of Hsüan-tsang 玄奘 may be yet another example reflecting the delicate relations between the T'ang Emperor: T'ai-tsung and Buddhism. Hsüan-tsang (600-64) was a Chinese Buddhist monk who travelled to, and was well-received in, India. On his way back to China, in 645, he wrote to Emperor T'ang T'ai-tsung, apologizing for having left China in 629 without authorization, and describing in details fascinating accounts of his travels abroad. Hsüan-tsang also mentioned that he had "proclaimed the virtue of His Majesty so as to win the respect and admiration of the foreign people."⁷² Emperor T'ai-tsung, perhaps thinking that Hsüan-tsang, with his unique first hand knowledge of Central and South Asia, could be useful to the empire in statecraft, welcomed the Buddhist monk in a letter. But when Hsüan-tsang arrived at Ch'ang-an, in 645, the Emperor was in Loyang 洛陽, preparing for his forthcoming campaign against Korea.⁷³ When Emperor T'ai-tsung had time to meet Hsüan-tsang, the Emperor did not ask about Buddhism in India, but about the climate, products, customs, and situation in Central and Southern Asia. Impressed by Hsüan-tsang's oral report, T'ai-tsung asked for a written account of the travel. The Emperor was probably more interested in the information that the monk brought back that might have strategic values for the understanding of the western regions than in Buddhism *per se*. We may say that his interest was in the man who has a unique knowledge of the geography, customs, and politics of India and Central Asia. Emperor T'ai-tsung even tried to persuade Hsüan-tsang to abandon the religious life as a monk so that Hsüan-tsang could advise him at court on political affairs.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Hsüan-tsang refused to return to lay life, but continued undertaking the translation of the major scriptures of the Fa-hsiang school into Chinese.

All in all, the early T'ang rulers gave limited patronage to Buddhism. Sometimes, they permitted the ordination of a few thousand priests and nuns. At times, they even dedicated Buddhist temples to offer prayers. Nevertheless, the early T'ang emperors' interests in Buddhism seemed to have been limited to those areas in which they met the political interest of the T'ang empire. With the history of recent dynasties in mind, the T'ang emperors were cautious "to guard against the resurgence of a Buddhist church as an *imperium in imperio*."⁷⁵ In my

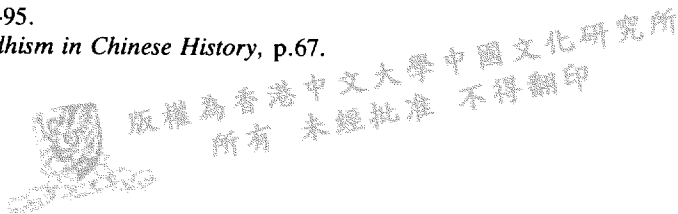
71 Stanley Weinstein, "Imperial Patronage in the Formation of T'ang Buddhism," *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), p.305.

72 Samuel Beal, *The Life of Hsüan-tsang* (London, 1911), p.203; cf. T'ang Yung-t'ung, pp.18-22.

73 Weinstein, p.294.

74 *Ibid.*, pp.294-95.

75 Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, p.67.



opinion, the history of T'ang China witnessed a period when Buddhism became increasingly dependent on the state. In T'ang times, the ceremonies for Buddhists to be converted, monks to be ordained, the building of temples and monasteries, and other Buddhist activities, were under the control of the government. There were instances that prestigious official positions were given to renowned Buddhist monks; hence some Buddhist monks were attached, to a certain extent, to the secular government.⁷⁶

V. Conclusion

Both Taoism and Buddhism had great influence on T'ang China. Taoism, in addition to many social and political functions, even had the political role of legitimizing the Li royal family, who would be happy to promote the religion. Buddhism was also significant in many social, cultural, and psychological aspects (as discussed above), and it was, thus, patronized. The early T'ang emperors were clever in making full use of them religiously, spiritually, socially, culturally, and politically while keeping both religions under state control. Indeed, both religions contributed much to the consolidation of the newly founded T'ang empire. In addition to their religious functions, I would like to stress that Buddhism and Taoism in early T'ang proved to have political and socio-psychological functions, too. Both religions helped knit up the socio-political differences between the north and the south. Indeed, Taoism and Buddhism were influential in their respective societies, especially in the process of imperial consolidation in the reigns of Kao-tsu and T'ai-tsung.

76 Huang Sheng-fu 黃聲孚, *T'ang-tai fo-chiao tui cheng-chih chih ying-hsiang* 唐代佛教對政治之影響 (Hong Kong, 1959), pp.67-68.

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初唐的宗教和政治

道教及佛教在高祖和太宗兩朝的政治角色

(中文摘要)

張學明

本文主要探討道教和佛教在初唐所扮演的政治角色。

唐代的宗教是一個複雜的文化、宗教組合。一般來說，初唐的帝王是務實的統治者，他們常利用宗教，鞏固自己的帝國。他們的宗教政策，若干程度上是爲了(一)支持李唐的正統地位、(二)提高皇室的聲譽、和(三)建立帝王的至尊威望。高祖和太宗都以宗教、文化傳統的保護者姿態出現。他們一方面控制著道教和佛教，而另一方面又鼓勵這兩個宗教發展——尤其是在這兩個宗教能夠協助唐初的一統或鞏固皇室的正統地位時。

總的來說，道教和佛教在初唐都有很大的影響力。道教除了有很多社會和政治上的功能之外，更有令「李」唐皇室確立正統地位和威信的政治功能，因爲道教的始祖姓李，所以唐初帝王樂於鼓勵道教的發展。佛教在社會、文化、政治等方面均極有影響力，因此亦受到皇室的獎勵推廣。初唐的帝王不只能夠充份利用這兩個宗教在宗教、精神、社會、文化、政治上的功能，而且又令它們受到管制。無可否認，道、佛二教對鞏固初唐帝國的皇室勢力、化解南北的政治社會分歧，都有很大的效力。

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