

中國近代思想研討會論文專輯

Buddhism and the Late Ch'ing Intellectuals

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This article attempts to explore the political and cultural implications of Buddhism on late Ch'ing intellectuals during the crucial transitional period between 1890 and 1911. The importance of this religious thought in the intellectual history of modern China cannot be overstated. This is clearly revealed in Liang Ch'i-ch'ao's "Preface" to his book entitled *Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Period*:

In the intellectual world of the late Ch'ing, there was an undercurrent; namely, Buddhism. During the early Ch'ing, Buddhism had been extremely weak; . . . Later Kung Tzu-chen received instruction in Buddhism from P'eng Shao-sheng and accepted the Bodhisattva vows late in life. Wei Yüan, also, did so late in life, and changed his name to Cheng-kuan 承貫, among his writings was the *Wu-liang-shou-ching hui-i* 無量壽經會譯. Both Kung and Wei received acclaim from New Text Scholars, many of whom subsequently studied Buddhism also . . . T'an Ssu-t'ung joined his [Yang Jen-shan's] circle for a year and drew upon what he learned there to write the *Jen-hsiieh*. T'an quite frequently urged his friend Liang Ch'i-ch'ao to study Buddhism also. The latter, though unable to learn very much about it, was nevertheless inclined towards it, and his writings often held Buddhism in esteem. K'ang Yu-wei had always been fond of discussing religion, and it was not unusual for him to twist Buddhist sayings to fit his own meaning; Chang Ping-lin also was interested in the Dharmalaksana Sect, and wrote about it. Thus, among the late Ch'ing "Scholars of New Learning," there were none who did not have some connection with Buddhism and true believers in general clustered about Yang Wen-hui.¹

This account by Liang Ch'i-ch'ao on the study of Buddhism among the late Ch'ing intellectuals indicates first, that it was fashionable for scholars of the New Text School to read the Buddhist literature; second, that Buddhism was widely employed in their political thinking, either by infusing into their works some Buddhist elements or by recasting the original Buddhist doctrines to suit their purposes; and third, that Yang Wen-hui was instrumental in the promotion of religion and the education of a new breed of intellectuals with strong interests in Buddhism. Such a short description, however, is clearly inadequate to allow a genuine appreciation of the role Buddhism played in the thought of the late Ch'ing intellectuals. The following pages seek to sketch briefly how the intellectuals came to have an interest in Buddhism and how the religion was related to their main schools of thought and political concerns.

Late Ch'ing intellectuals, to begin with, seemed to share two views of Buddhism. First, they regarded Chinese Buddhism as something which not only had the name and form of a religion, but also had an abstruse philosophy in which they were interested.

¹ Quoted from Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, *Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Period*, tr. Immanuel C. Y. Hsü (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 116-117.

To them no religion could be the equal of Buddhism in scope and depth. However, while the Chinese intellectuals admired, studied and used Buddhism in their own ways, they expressed their disapproval of the superstitious attitude that people took towards the religion upon which some laid great stress.² It was deemed essential to strip Buddhism of its mystical crust before any hope of revitalizing the Buddhist philosophy could be realized. Secondly, they claimed Buddhism as Chinese. Though having its origins in India, Buddhism was still looked upon as an indigenous religion. It had been transplanted, had developed and had grown to maturity on Chinese soil. Whereas the Indians were largely Hinayanistic, the Chinese were Mahayanistic. Since these two were greatly at variance Mahayana Buddhism was largely Chinese. An exception was the Wei-shih School, for it had been accepted as it was from India. The intellectuals held that since the school enjoyed popularity only in China, it should also be regarded as Chinese.³ In this way, they legitimized Buddhism as an integral part of the Chinese cultural heritage.

Buddhism began to attract considerable attention in the late nineteenth century as the fear of losing the Chinese indigenous teaching—Confucianism—loomed large in the minds of the reformers. In an effort to find out where the real strength of the Western nations lay, Chinese intellectuals noted that the success of the West was bound up with their “Religious Reformation” which brought about the restoration of their ancient teachings.⁴ Religion, they concluded, was the foundation of modern civilization. Motivated by the example of Christianity, they began to work out the possibility of founding a state religion. In this respect, intellectuals considered Buddhism and Confucianism as two possible choices. Some, notably K’ang Yu-wei, tried to re-interpret Confucianism for that purpose; while others looked to Buddhism for national ideological unity. No one, to be sure, thought to use Christianity which seemed to them doctrinally inferior to the others. K’ang Yu-wei, for instance, maintained that Christian teachings came entirely from Buddhism. He held that similarities in rites and practices, including celibacy, renunciation of mundane life, and worship of the image of the religious founder indicated that Christianity had its roots in Buddhism.⁵ What is more, all that was taught in Christianity could also be found in the ancient Chinese teachings, particularly in Confucianism. In the Confucian books, as in the Christian books, there were detailed doctrines concerning heaven, the soul, and mending evil ways and doing good.⁶ As such, it was clear that there was no room for Christianity in China. For K’ang Yu-wei, the only religion that could answer the needs of China was the “Confucian

²For a general analysis of the late Ch’ing intellectuals’ interests in Buddhism, see Shih Tung-ch’u 釋東初, *Chung-kuo fo-chiao chin-tai shih* 中國佛教近代史 (A history of modern Chinese Buddhism). Taipei: Chung-hua fo-chiao wen-hua-kuan, 1974, p. 549.

³Liang Ch’i-ch’ao, “Lun Chung-kuo hsieh-shu ssu-hsiang pien-ch’ien chih ta-shih” 論中國學術思想變遷之大勢 (On the major changes in Chinese intellectual thought, in *Yin-ping-shih ho-chi, wen-chi* 飲冰室合集。文集 (Collected works of the Ice-drinking Studio: Articles) (Shanghai: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1941) [Hereafter abbreviated as *YPSHC-WC*], *chüan* 3, No. 7, pp. 75-76.

⁴Liang Ch’i-ch’ao, “Lun Chih-na tsung-chiao kai-ko” 論友那宗教改革 (On religious reform in China, in *YPSHC-WC*, *chüan* 2, No. 3, p. 55.

⁵Hsiao Kung-chuan, *A Modern China and A New World: K’ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858-1927* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), pp. 133-134.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

religion". It contained all the truths imperfectly revealed in Buddhism and Christianity, while possessing merits denied to them.⁷

Intellectuals also looked to other means of undermining the foundation of Christianity and decrying the contribution that Christianity made towards the strength and wealth of the modern West. They distinguished the secular culture of ancient Greece and Rome from Christianity and argued that the power and wealth of the modern West stemmed solely from the former and had little to do with the latter. In the same vein, they argued that the expansion of Christianity as a world religion was not due to its own merits but was dependent on the power of the Western nations.⁸ With the passage of time, reformers gradually came to realize that the most effective way of invalidating Christianity was to question the many issues surrounding God. Such inclinations can be gathered from Chang Ping-lin's article entitled "On Atheism,"⁹ which set out to disprove God as immortal, omnipotent, omniscient, absolute and all-embracing. He explained that the existence of God was in fact groundless, it was simply the result of an image created by people's "nature of mere-imagination" 徧計所執性.¹⁰ Many Western philosophers, Francis Bacon for one, shared his views.¹¹ But Chang could not agree with Immanuel Kant's idea that since God fell beyond our cognizance, there was no way of knowing whether he existed or not. To assume anything that could not be cognized by the human mind as not existing ran contrary to reason. In another article, "On Founding A Religion," Chang made use of the three natures (*svabhavas*) 三性 of Wei-shih School, namely, the nature of mere-imagination (*parikalpitasvabhava*), the nature of dependence on others (*paratantrasvabhava*), and the nature of ultimate reality (*parinispannasvabhava*) to refute theism and polytheism, since they were but the projection of the eighth consciousness.¹² This also applied to God being the ultimate, and the self and the physical world being existent. Religion, in the final analysis, must be founded upon the nature of ultimate reality — in other words, upon Buddhism.

That Christianity was inapplicable to China was also shown by the fact that it was not properly understood by her people, and this produced ill effects.¹³ Different people followed the Western religion for different reasons, but seldom were they loyal to their belief. For some, Christianity meant identifying with things Western which gave them a sense of superiority over their fellow countrymen. Others relied on the distribution of charity by church for their livelihood. Many others adhered to Christianity and enjoyed privileges denied to ordinary people. Even Christianity in its true form, many asserted, would not do much good to China. The religion would be of

⁷ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Nan-hai K'ang hsien-sheng chuan" 南海康先生傳 (A biography of K'ang Yu-wei of Nan-hai), in *YPSHC-WC*, No. 6, p. 70.

⁸ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, *Tu hsün-hsü shu fa* in *Chih-hsüeh ts'ung-shu ch'u-chi* (Chih-hsüeh Hui, 1986), *ts'e* 10, pp. 14b-16a.

⁹ Chang Ping-lin, "Wu-shen lun" 無神論 (On atheism), in *Chang-shih ts'ung-shu* 章氏叢書 (Collected works of Chang Ping-lin) (Chekiang: Che-chiang t'u-shu-kuan, 1917-1919, reproduced in facsimile in Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chu, 1958), pp. 864-869.

¹⁰ Chang Ping-lin, "Chien-li tsung-chiao lun" 建立宗教論 (On founding a religion), *Chang-shih ts'ung-shu*, p. 872.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 873.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 869-879.

¹³ Chang Ping-lin, "Yen-shuo lu" 演說錄 (Lecture notes), *Min-pao* 民報, No. 6 (January 1907), pp. 5-6.

great help to a primitive society still untouched by civilization, but to culturally advanced societies like China, it gave rise to irrationality and dogmatism—as had been the case with the Roman Empire. Clearly, China could do without Christianity.

Intellectuals, therefore, had to choose between the two indigenous philosophies of Confucianism and Buddhism for a state religion. Among late Ch'ing intellectuals, K'ang Yu-wei favoured the teaching of Confucius. It was generally believed that he looked upon himself as the Martin Luther of the Confucian religion, taking up the cudgels for the teaching of Confucius and trying to transform it from a mere moral philosophy into a religion.¹⁴ He also borrowed ideas from the Buddha, Jesus and Western science to build his own theory. Apparently, K'ang placed all religions on the same footing, but in the end he insisted on the doctrinal and practical superiority of Confucianism over Buddhism and Christianity. He came to the conclusion that owing to its intrinsic superiority, the "Confucian religion" was theoretically most suitable for all mankind, and that it was the only "religion" suitable for China under the existing conditions.¹⁵

But K'ang's suggestion did not go unchallenged. Some intellectuals maintained that Buddhism was better qualified as a religion which could maintain world peace. T'an Ssu-t'ung, in his treatise entitled *An Exposition of Benevolence (Jen-hsiieh)*, also compared the Christian, Confucian and Buddhist doctrines with the length of the orbits of planets and discussed the environmental factors that shaped the emergence of the three religious founders Jesus, Confucius, and the Buddha. His conclusion was that if religions in this world were to be united, Buddhism would be most qualified to do so.¹⁶ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, on the other hand, bluntly stated that Buddhism was a religion the acceptance of which was grounded on reflective thinking and the utility of which was most beneficial to mankind.¹⁷ These two reformers held the opinion that the teaching of Confucius was most praiseworthy and would have been the guiding ideology for modern China if it were not tampered with by scholars like Hsün Tzu and was too closely bound up with autocracy. Another intellectual, Chang Ping-lin, believed that the religion which would replace Christianity in the West and Confucianism in China was Buddhism.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Buddhism as it stood at their time seemed to them still inadequate to be a national ideology. The religion had to be remoulded; in other words, only a "Neo-Buddhism" could be the basis of a new faith, and a new Chinese civilization.

¹⁴ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Nan-hai K'ang hsien-sheng chuan," *YPSHC-WC*, *chüan* 6, p. 67.

¹⁵ Hsiao Kung-chuan, *A Modern China and A New World*, p. 118. For opinions objecting to the establishment of Confucianism as a state religion, see Chan Wing-tsit, *Religious Trends in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), pp. 5, 12ff. Cf. Howard D. Smith, "The Significance of Confucius for Religion," *History of Ideas*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter 1963), pp. 242-255.

¹⁶ See T'an Ssu-t'ung 譚嗣同, *T'an Ssu-t'ung ch'üan-chi* 譚嗣同全集 (Complete works of T'an Ssu-t'ung), ed., Ts'ai Shang-ssu 蔡尚思 and Fang Hsing 方行 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1981) [hereafter abbreviated as *TSTCC*], Vol. 2, p. 351.

¹⁷ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Lun fo-chiao yü ch'ün-chih te kuan-hsi" 論佛教與羣治的關係 (On the relationship between Buddhism and social order), in *YPSHC-WC*, *chüan* 4, No. 10, pp. 45-52. See also D. T. Huntington, "The Religious Writings of Liang Ch'i-ch'ao," *Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 9 (September 1907), pp. 470-474.

¹⁸ Chang Ping-lin, "Chien-li tsung-chiao lun," *Chang-shih ts'ung-shu*, p. 878.

Yet this could not be achieved at one stride. Confidence in the religion had to be boosted by showing it to be compatible with other major strands of thought. In this framework, it was not unusual for intellectuals to draw parallels between Confucianism and Buddhism. T'an Ssu-t'ung showed in his work *An Exposition of Benevolence* how ideas from the *Great Learning* could be compared to four transcendental wisdoms in the Wei-shih School and the four dharma-realms of the Hua-yen School; he therefore concluded that Buddhism embraced all the principles expounded in the Confucian classics.¹⁹ K'ang Yu-wei also plainly stated that "the teaching of Confucius was Hua-yen Buddhism,"²⁰ since both of them were oriented towards the search for happiness in this world and not in the other world, and both were "other-regarding" as well as "self-regarding". He therefore took upon himself the mission of guiding others to the land of bliss, and of achieving of benevolence in so doing. Also in K'ang's mind, the "realm of non-obstruction of facts and principles" and the "realm of the non-obstruction of all facts" of the Hua-yen School were not different from the teaching of universalism in Confucianism: they all fell within the realm of mutuality. In the vocabulary of K'ang, the difference between Great Unity and Small Peace was akin to that between the Mahayana and Hinayana Schools in Buddhism.²¹

Not only was Buddhism compatible with Confucianism, it could also embrace Western learning. T'an Ssu-t'ung believed that all Western learning originated in Buddhism and that the function of the cerebrum and cerebellum were respectively the functions of the eighth and the seventh consciousness in the Wei-shih School.²² His friend Liang Ch'i-ch'ao made an even more elaborate comparison between the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and the doctrines of the Wei-shih and Hua-yen Schools.²³ He eulogized Kant's major work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, as one which ushered in a new epoch in European intellectual history, namely, the foundation of the critical school. But Liang asserted that what Kant regarded as the two functions of mind—theoretical and practical reasoning—were the equivalent of the mental functions of the eighth consciousness. Kant divided all existing beings into appearances and things-in-themselves, namely, phenomena and noumena. Phenomena referred to manifestations perceivable through senses while noumena were those which could not be. This Liang regarded as corresponding to the first five kinds of consciousness and the sixth consciousness often mentioned in the *Lankavatara-sutra*. The Kantian division of the functions of mind—sensibility, transcendental deduction and judgment—were also analogous to Buddhist epistemology. Like Buddhist philosophy, Kant maintained that sensibility had to arise from "space" and "time", but to form real knowledge, transcendental deduction was essential. The principles of judgment were three: the principle of sufficient reason, the principle of coherence and the principle of conservation of energy. These principles explained how manifold were

¹⁹ See *TSTCC* II, pp. 331-333.

²⁰ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Nan-hai K'ang hsien-sheng chuan," *YPSHC-WC*, *chüan* 6, p. 83.

²¹ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Lun Chih-na tsung-chiao kai-ko," *YPSHC-WC*, *chüan* 3, pp. 59-60.

²² *TSTCC* II, pp. 317, 364-365.

²³ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Chin-shih ti-ta che K'ang-te chih hsüeh-shuo" 近世第一大哲康德之學說 (The philosophy of Kant, the best philosopher of modern times), *YPSHC-WC*, *chüan* 5, No. 13, pp. 47-66.

integrated as a web which was dependent on each other. Liang immediately drew parallels between Kantian and Hua-yen philosophy. The principle of sufficient reason could be seen as one of the "ten mystery gates" mentioned in the *Garland sutra*, namely "the mystery of the perfect illuminating host and guests." The principles of coherence corresponded to the Realm of Non-Obstruction of Fact and Principle. Lastly, the principle of conservation of energy was simply another way of expressing the idea of neither increase nor decrease in the self-sufficient sea of nature in Buddhism. Hua-yen Buddhism denoted the net of Indra (*Indra-jala*) with the Realm of Principle, and Kant adopted the symbol of the web to depict the co-existence of all appearances. Liang further pointed out that Kant's concept of phenomena being the synthesis of appearances, or the co-existence and interdependence of all beings, was also found in Buddhism in which it was said that saving others was as important as saving the self: the self could not remain undefiled when others were defiled, happy when others were suffering. The third function of reason was the capacity for deduction, which was the means of transcendental apperception. Transcendental apperception had three aspects: the soul, the world and God. Liang said that they were equivalent with the cosmological ideas expounded in Buddhism. He went on to equate "thusness" in Buddhism with Kant's idea of "the real self", and "ignorance" of the "cycle of life" with Kant's idea of "the manifested self". Chang Ping-lin also asserted that Kant's idea that morality had value only within and not without was close to pure wisdom in Buddhism.²⁴ For a bodhisattva who vowed to save all sentient beings would not make a difference between the self and others as their intrinsic nature was all the same. As such, morality was both within and without.

Kant, however, was not the only one to receive attention from the Chinese intellectuals. The utilitarian concepts of Jeremy Bentham, for instance, were not only introduced but commented on.²⁵ Admitting that the doctrines of Bentham were by and large beneficial to mankind, intellectuals believed that Buddhism was even better. Instead of seeking to attain happiness in this world, Buddhism looked for it in the realm of Hua-yen. The Buddha knew a long time ago that no happiness was permanent, for it was always followed by suffering. The solution lay in freeing the self from the root of moral affliction, enduring a moment's pain to attain lasting happiness. In this sense, Bentham could be regarded as one who invented the method of measuring happiness, while the Buddha was one who most thoroughly understood what was meant by happiness.

Exponents of Darwinism also found themselves face to face with Buddhism. Chinese intellectuals, for example, compared Thomas Henry Huxley's (1825-1895) idea that the universe was formed upon blind motion with that of the Twelve Causes (*hetu*) in Buddhism:²⁶ blindness was inaction; motion was action. They seemed to perceive in Chinese and Western learning some common grounds of knowledge which enabled comparisons to be made. Separately, people, however, interpreted them

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Lo-li chu-i t'ai-tou Pien-ch'in chih hsüeh-shuo" 樂利主義泰斗邊沁之學說 (The philosophy of Bentham, the leading figure of utilitarianism), *YPSHC-WC, chüan* 5, No. 13, pp. 30-47.

²⁶ Chang Ping-lin, "Wu-shen lun," *Chang-shih ts'ung-shu*, p. 868.

differently. Good examples were Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Chang Ping-lin. While the former held that the concept of karma was **supplementary to Darwinism**, the latter employed Buddhism to play down the idea of **progress**. Liang Ch'i-ch'ao began by saying that the doctrines of karma taught that the **physical existence of everything in the world was only evanescent**. What was left behind was a karma that would last forever. The karma of an individual being was the **aggregate of all the deeds and actions of one's life**, while the karma of a society would be the **collective spiritual heritage** which would determine what were to come in later generations.²⁷ He found a close parallel to this collectivistic view of karma when he pondered on the **Darwinian belief** which stated that improvements in human adaptability could be carried on from one generation to another through hereditary transmission. This **collective heredity** Liang called national psychology or social psychology, the formation of which every member of the nation shared and of which each contributed a part.²⁸

The same school of Buddhism, however, gave rise to a totally different attitude towards Darwinism in the case of Chang Ping-lin. He admitted that Herbert Spencer's (1820-1903) theory of "progress as differentiation" was close to the Buddhist concept of change, but his conclusions were **completely Buddhistic**.²⁹ As the world evolved, he said, good and evil also evolved from consciousness. The capacity of the consciousness that evolved was in direct proportion to the extent of joy and pain. By extension of this principle, it was clear that such a **weak country as China** would not be able to do more harm than the imperialistic Western powers. Thereby increase in consciousness would only result in meddling deeper into the **illusory physical world**. In reality, everything was but the projection of mind. By saying so, Chang flatly rejected Darwinism.

Buddhism was not only useful as a religious and cultural counterweight to the West, but it also served as a morally uplifting force in the cause of national salvation. In the minds of the "Buddhist" intellectuals, the religion was not world-abnegating.³⁰ Contrary to what most Sung Neo-Confucianists maintained, Buddhism regarded inactivity and non-involvement to be directly at odds with the central spirit of Mahayana teachings. Only Hinayana Buddhism was to be despised, for like Christianity, it projected a paradise which could not be attained by man. In truth, the nirvana that the Buddha spoke of was without form and was not beyond this world; it lay instead within one's mind. Clearly, Buddhism regarded both Hell and Heaven as the Pure Land. In fact, the intellectuals stressed, Buddhism featured a strong this-worldly activism which was expressed at its clearest in the Buddha's reply to his disciples' question as to who should descend into Hell to save people: "The Buddha should descend into Hell; not only descend into Hell but also stay constantly in Hell, but also always enjoy Hell; not only always enjoy Hell, but also to make Hell perfect and dignified." With bodhisattva's zeal to descend into Hell and turn it into a habitat, a good number of dedicated souls could save not only a country but also the whole world. Intellectuals

²⁷ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Yü chih ssu-sheng kuan" 余之死生觀 (My views on life and death), *YPSHC-WC*, *chüan* 6, No. 17, pp. 1-12, 2-3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

²⁹ Chang Ping-lin "Chü-fen chin-hua lun" 俱分進化論 (Darwinism on a divided course), *Min-pao*, No. 7, pp. 1-13.

³⁰ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Lun fo-chiao yü ch'ün-chih te kuan-hsi," *YPSHC-WC*, *chüan* 4, No. 10, pp. 47-48.

also intended to dismantle people's erroneous view that Buddhism was predominantly a pessimistic philosophy of life. They held that Buddhism divided the illusory world into two: first, the "vessel world" (ch'i shih-chien 器世間),³¹ where there were no sentient beings in the three realms: the realm of sensuous desire, the realm of form and the realm of pure spirit;³² and second, the world of "sentient beings" (yu-ch'ing shih-chien 有情世間). Buddhism was world-abnegating; but the world it negated was the vessel world and not the world of sentient beings. The Buddha deplored the fact that the world of sentient beings had descended to the vessel world, and thus He strove to save all sentient beings from the three realms. To criticise Buddhism as world-abnegating was not to realise the division of these two worlds.

Many intellectuals also seemed to have been inspired by Buddhism to save the nation. To them, the world was becoming more and more a sea of moral affliction, the task they were to undertake was to save all people and to have them achieve nirvana. The Buddhist intellectuals therefore regarded themselves as bodhisattvas willing to dwell in this defiled world for the sake of saving all sentient beings from falling into Hell. In the last few pages of T'an Ssu-t'ung's *An Exposition of Benevolence*, such intentions were expressed in detail.³³ In K'ang Yu-wei's *Ta-i'ung Shu*, it was asserted that the suffering of the world should be alleviated to pave the way for achieving a blissful utopia.

If Buddhism provided the Chinese intellectuals with an end to pursue, it also furnished them with the means of achieving it. Religion in general had the effect of fostering the morality essential for great undertakings on the national level. As compared to philosophical wisdom, which might help men to understand things better, religion was far more important as far as action was concerned. As Liang Ch'i-ch'ao aptly pointed out, many heroic figures in the past were motivated more by religious zeal than by philosophical wisdom. Such figures included Oliver Cromwell, William Gladstone, Joan of Arc, William Penn, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Giuseppe Mazzini, Count Camillo Benso di Cavour, and Saigo Takamori.³⁴

The religious means by which morality could be generated from Buddhism for national salvation were several.³⁵ Firstly, Buddhism as a religion could provide unity of thought. Since human beings at present had not yet attained Buddhahood, they were still unable to live without a unifying ideology. Buddhism was a way to condition people when tempted by selfish desires, and it would serve like a martial spirit that could bind an army together. Secondly, it would provide an unending source of hope. Hope was the pabulum of life. It offered expectations to be fulfilled in the future, and it spurred man on to undertake all kinds of projects; however, the results were often disappointing and disheartening. With the Buddhist belief in karma and in the world

³¹ For the meaning of this term, see William Soothill ed., *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, p. 446.

³² Chang Ping-lin, "Chien-li tsung-chiao lun," *Chang-shih ts'ung-shu*, pp. 876-877. For the meaning of the term, see *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, p. 70.

³³ *TSTCC* II, pp. 371-372.

³⁴ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Lun tsung-chiao chia yü che-hsüeh chia chih ch'ang-tuan te-shih" 論宗教家與哲學家之長短得失 (Comparing the strengths and merits between religionists and philosophers), *YPSHC-WC*, *chiian* 4, No. 9, pp. 44-50.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

beyond, men would never lose hope, or be disheartened, but always remain devoted to their work. Thirdly, Buddhism could disentangle people from worldly vexations. Beneficial undertakings were not performed largely because of selfish considerations of status, of vested interests and of privileges. Buddhism could teach people that the vessel world was formed merely by karma consciousness (*yeh-shih* 業識 *karmavarana*),³⁶ and that the body itself was nothing more than a combination of the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. This being understood, people would no longer held on to their physical existence, and they would be ready to give up their lives for great causes. Fourthly, Buddhism could prevent reckless behaviour. Intellectuals who did not thoroughly understand what was meant by "the new morality" propounded in the West were inclined to dismiss traditional morality lightly. They must understand that though classics were no longer highly revered in the West, Christianity had nevertheless served as a moral sanction for all people. Christianity, however, had the danger of losing its ground as it was in many ways incompatible with modern science. On the other hand, Chinese Buddhism, with its doctrines falling in line with scientific principles, would have a long survival. Once this was understood, it was unlikely that people would still behave recklessly, while Buddhist laws could also help to edify public morality. Lastly, Buddhism could foster audacity. For what Buddhism had set great store upon were such concepts as "heroism", "fearlessness", and "power"; and it summarily manifested this with the symbol of the lion.³⁷ The religion taught people to overcome the greatest fear of man—death—by saying that men were neither created nor destroyed, they simply lived in the wheel of life. True followers of Buddhism were, therefore, full of bravery to undertake great deeds. This was why in 1906, when anti-Manchuism was fast gaining momentum, Chang Ping-lin emphatically pointed out the necessity of employing Buddhism to bolster up faith and morality.³⁸ He also condemned those who championed utility but did not give any thought to the usefulness of a religion. If everyone were simply bent on pursuing his selfish interests, morality would be forgotten. As both Christianity and Confucianism would not serve the purpose—the former for being alien, and the latter for being bound up with autocracy, Buddhism would be the religion to bring democracy to China.

Among all Buddhist sects, the Wei-shih was given great emphasis for it was generally considered to be compatible with modern studies and to be more pragmatic and analytical.³⁹ For intellectuals found in Buddhism the sort of attitudes which corresponded with what was often regarded as Western scientific and analytical methods. The Buddhist assertion that both the self and the dharma were unreal because they were but the evolution of mere ideation, resembled pragmatism in the West, which maintained that the self and all phenomena were without real nature. The Buddhist

³⁶ See William Soothill ed., *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, p. 404.

³⁷ The wording of this paragraph bears close resemblance to T'an Ssu-t'ung's treatise entitled *An Exposition of Benevolence* (see *TSTCC* II, p. 321). It should also be remembered that while T'an's treatise was written during late 1896 and early 1897, this work by Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, entitled "Lun tsung-chiao chia yü che-hsüeh-chia chih ch'ang-tuan te-shih," was written in 1902.

³⁸ Chang Ping-lin, "Yen-shuo lu," in *Min-pao*, No. 6 (July 1906), pp. 4-5.

³⁹ Chang Ping-lin, "Ta T'ieh-cheng" 答鐵錚 (A letter in reply to Lei Chao-hsing 雷照性), *Min-pao*, No. 14 (June 1907), pp. 113-114.

idea that the eighth consciousness had both **perceiving and perceived divisions** (*chien-fen* 見分 and *hsiang-fen* 相分) **struck a responsive chord with Western epistemology**, which differentiated **subjectivity and objectivity**. Moreover, the Western concept that **subjectivity had three syllogisms—sense inference, logical inference and transcendental inference—which was also central to the Wei-shih School**, was similar to the idea of relating knowledge to truth with **intuitive, inferential and transcendental knowledge**.⁴⁰

The Wei-shih School also **helped to promote the idea of equality**. It was only because of **parochialism that differences between sexes and ranks were created**. They were all the projection of **ideation**. All, in fact, were equal. Even the Buddha and all living beings were **potentially not different**. The attainment of Buddhahood was nothing more than realizing one's Buddha-nature and **performing on the basis of this**. Buddhism had a strong dislike for the **unequal relationship between the ruler and the ruled**.⁴¹ Now that the Chinese people were **being maltreated by the Manchus**, they should overthrow the government as this was **in line with Buddhism**.⁴² What is more, **autocracy was disliked by Buddhism**. The Mahayana Schools agreed that if rulers maltreated the people, then bodhisattvas had **the right to depose them**. This meant that to kill the one for the benefit of the many was **like benefitting the self and benefitting others**, and this was exactly the democratic concept of the **people's rights** (*min-ch'üan*). In this way, Wei-shih Buddhism was wedded to modern Chinese nationalism.⁴³

The Hua-yen School also **gave much inspiration to late Ch'ing intellectuals**. One source came from the concept "One is inclusive of All" which was a manifestation of the notion of the **interpenetration and mutual compatibility of different phenomena**. T'an Ssu-t'ung used this concept to **dismantle the conventional thinking of relativity** and thus affirmed the need for people in the **higher and lower levels to communicate**. K'ang Yu-wei also asserted that **there was no gap between morality and nirvana**: thus nirvana need not be sought beyond the realm of mortality. The world was not dualistic but monistic; the realm of **phenomena and the realm of noumena were merged into one**. Thus K'ang sought to **build a paradise in this world**, not in the world lying beyond it.⁴⁴ The idea of salvation therefore found its way into late Ch'ing political thought.

As a branch of Mahayana Buddhism, the Hua-yen School naturally put strong stress on the ideal of a **compassionate Buddha**. Thus the Buddha was seen by this school as possessing not only **supreme wisdom** but also immense compassion. T'an Ssu-t'ung believed that the **idea of compassion was central to all religions**, but it was most strongly emphasized in **Buddhism**. The **idea of mental power had its basis in compassion** and was motivated by it to seek **universal perfection**. Thus the concept of the bodhisattva came to play a part in late **nineteenth century political thought**. In the minds of the Buddhist intellectuals, a **bodhisattva was one who cared for the sufferings of the world and vowed to save others before saving himself**. For the sake of

⁴⁰ T'ang Chün-i 唐君毅, *Chung-kuo che-hsüeh yüan-lun* 中國哲學原論 (Sources of the Chinese philosophy), *chüan* 3 (Hong Kong: Hsin-ya yen-chiu-so, 1974), pp. 1191-1192.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-60.

⁴² Chang Ping-lin, "Yen-shuo lu," in *Min-pao*, No. 6, p. 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Nan-hai K'ang hsien-sheng chuan," *YPSHC-WC*, *chüan* 6, No. 6, pp. 83-85.

saving others, a bodhisattva was even willing to sacrifice his highest aspirations. Nothing could better illustrate how highly the ideal of universal salvation was prized in Mahayana Buddhism. The Chinese intellectuals thought that the same spirit of selfless devotion to the welfare of others, the ideal which the bodhisattva inspired, could be utilized to foster patriotic feelings and a sense of social responsibility.

The Hua-yen idea of having all human beings achieve the land of nirvana was most useful to foster revolutionary morality. It taught people that in order to save the country, even beheading would be willingly accepted.⁴⁵ Like Confucianism, Hua-yen Buddhism was "other-regarding" as well as "self-regarding", seeking the perfection of the universe as its ultimate goal.⁴⁶ Only when this stage was reached could there be happiness throughout the world.⁴⁷

Ch'an Buddhism also contributed greatly to the cultivation of a revolutionary morality. As far as political actions were concerned, the most influential concept of the Ch'an sect was "to rely on the self and not on others" (*i-tzu pu i-t'a* 依自不依他). It meant that nothing but one's own efforts could help one to attain salvation. This emphasis on self-reliance could be clearly seen in the law of karma. The ineluctable cause-and-effect relationship between one's moral deeds and one's fortune meant that national economic and political recovery could only come by China's own efforts and not through foreign help.⁴⁸

The Ch'an School's dictum of "relying on oneself" was also useful in heightening the Chinese people's "self-awareness" in revolutionary times. Viewed historically, its emphasis upon the individual human mind as opposed to reliance on the supernatural flowed directly into the mainstream of Chinese thought. For despite the important issues that divided Mencius and Hsün Tzu or the Ch'eng-Chu and Lu-Wang Schools, they all had as their common point of origin the phrase "rely on the self and not on others." This saying had instilled in the Chinese people the courage and confidence to act, and to act with an awareness of their identity and destiny. It was in this way that Buddhism was made to serve the cause of national reform.⁴⁹

The above discussion shows how a curious variety of Buddhist ideas found expression in the revolutionary movement. It was the utilitarian, motivational and spiritual functions of Buddhism that the Chinese intellectuals found to be most beneficial to foster morality for revolution. This mentality was well underlined by Chang Ping-lin in the following passage:

The present age is not the age of Chou, Ch'in, Han and Wei. In those times things were far simpler, and even the commonplace sayings of Confucius and Lao Tzu were adequate for teaching the people and perfecting customs. Today, however, conditions are different. Even theories of transmigration are inadequate. If we do not explain immortality (*wu-sheng* 無生), we shall be unable to eliminate the fear of death. If we do not eradicate the idea of personal possession (*wo-shu* 我屬), we shall be unable to eliminate the worship of wealth. If we do not speak in terms of equality, we shall be unable to eliminate the salve

⁴⁵ Chang Ping-lin, "Yen-shuo lu," in *Min-pao*, No. 6, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Shih-chung te-hsing hsiang-fen hsiang-chen i," *YPSHC-WC, chüan* 6, No. 5, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁷ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Lo-li chu-i t'ai-tou Pien-hsin chih hsiieh-shuo," *YPSHC-WC, chüan* 5, No. 13, p. 36.

⁴⁸ Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Lun fo-chiao yü ch'ün-chih te kuan-hsi," *YPSHC-WC*, No. 10, p. 50.

⁴⁹ Chang Ping-lin, "Ta T'ieh-cheng," *Chang-shih ts'ung-shu*, pp. 849-853.

mentality. If we do not make it clear that all living things are potential Buddhas, we shall be unable to eliminate the sense of inferiority that leads men to yield in the face of adversity. If we do not exalt the three wheels [Buddha's deeds, words and ideas] and the purity of [the Buddha], we shall be unable to eliminate the belief that one deserves credit for good deeds.⁵⁰

Intellectuals anticipated that they would be asked to explain why Buddhism, which had been practised in China for more than two thousand years, had not produced any significant political influences, as well as why India, the home of Buddhism, had fallen under foreign rule. In promoting Buddhism, was there not the danger of losing one's nationhood as India did in the past? Chang Ping-lin replied that religions fall into three types: polytheism, monotheism and atheism—just as in polity, there was the division of aristocracy, autocracy, and democracy. There was an order for the progress from aristocracy to autocracy and finally to democracy.⁵¹ If democracy were achieved through aristocracy by skipping autocracy, then evil effects could result. This was also true of the religious transformation from polytheism to atheism. Taoism in China was polytheistic and Buddhism, atheistic. The introduction of Buddhism to China with its prevalent Taoism meant that China had not gone through the necessary stage of monotheism. Thus in China, Buddhism was adulterated with superstitious elements and the Pure Land Sect, which popularized such elements, was widely followed. That was why Buddhism had not exerted a healthy influence on China as it ought to have. At present, as monotheistic Christianity enjoyed popularity, and as remnants of polytheism were swept away, the time was ripe for the advent of the atheistic Buddhism. It could be anticipated that Buddhism would generate a totally different effect on China.

Intellectuals also found it necessary to explain to people how Buddhism was related to the "fall" of India. They gave two explanations. Firstly, contrary to what the people may have thought, it was rather the lack of growth of Buddhism in India that had brought about the loss of her nationhood. History tells us that a decade after the death of the Buddha, Buddhism, cramped by Brahmanism and Islam, was virtually non-existent in India.⁵² Secondly, no matter how profound a religion such as Buddhism may be, it could never save a country which did not have highly developed political and legal institutions. India fell into this category. But China was surely different. She had sophisticated political and legal institutions which ensured her survival in the family of nations.⁵³ Japan served as a good example that Buddhism and the national political power could go hand in hand. The relationship between Buddhism and China should also be the same. The crux of the problem, they believed, lay in the extent and the ways Buddhism was employed to serve their diverse political and cultural purposes.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Chang Ping-lin, "Chien-li tsung-chiao lun," *Chang-shih ts'ung-shu*, p. 872. Quoted from Michael Gasster, *Chinese Intellectuals and the Revolution of 1911* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), p. 208.

⁵¹ Chang Ping-lin, "Yen-shuo lu," in *Ming-pao*, No. 6, p. 8.

⁵² *TSTCC* II, p. 352. See also Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, "Lun fo-chiao yü ch'ün-chih te kuan-hsi," *YPSHC-WC*, *chiian* 4, No. 10, pp. 51-52.

⁵³ Chang Ping-lin, "Yen-shuo lu," in *Min-pao*, No. 6, p. 8.

⁵⁴ See Hsü Kao-yüan ed., *K'ang Yu-wei te wu-chih li ts'at chiu-kuo lun* (Hong Kong: Tien-hua shu-tien, 1970), pp. 20, 57.




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佛學與晚清知識份子


(中文摘要)

陳 善 偉

本文旨在探討一八九〇至一九一一年間佛學對晚清士人在政治理想方面所產生的影響。近代中國在西潮湧下，儒家思想大受時代考驗，不少晚清士人認為佛學在對應基督教思想方面較諸其他學派更具說服力，而在建立國教方面亦較儒家優勝。此外，佛學又足以對應西學——如康德學說、功利主義者邊沁學說、進化論者赫胥黎、斯賓塞等學說。在實際行動方面，佛教勇於救世救民的思想對革命事業起了積極的作用。在這一方面，唯識、華嚴與禪宗三派學說最受重視。



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