Introduction

Sinicizing Buddhism

Pondering the cultural context wherein a particular society's spirituality grows, is nourished and matures, is indeed a difficult task. The history of the ideas, sentiments, symbols, experiences and various dynamics that take place within a particular cultural setting is often a fragmentary picture at best to the researcher. This is compounded when we understand that any great culture has within it a multitude of subcultures which mutually interface and interact fostering constant long-term change but often achieve a stable relational pattern in the short-term which may be referred to as a norm. An excellent example of this is the African-American subculture influencing mainstream American music such as jazz, blues, doo wop and more. If into this dynamic situation there are assimilated significant elements of another culture, the historic developments in areas such as philosophy, arts and sciences, social structure, *et cetera* may reach noticeably impressive heights but the breadth and the subtlety may be extremely difficult to fathom.

The region of the Asian continent we identify as "China," has constantly changed in terms of the areas actually under a central government's or group of governments' control. Yet the region often provided the culturally dominant force influencing its neighbor in different ways. It is evident at many levels how Chinese culture influenced its neighbors but the effect of other cultures on China is expansive and profoundly subtle at times as well. The difficulty of foreign ideas influencing Chinese culture was intensified by the fact that although "China" was never really isolated it

was insulated by the geography of the region. As noted by Needham, "… China was, among the ancient civilizations of the Old World, the one which was most isolated from the others."[1] The great Takla Makan to the west, the eastern extent of the Tien Shan mountains to the northwest, the Kunlun Shan mountains to the southwest, the expanse of the Gobi desert to its north, the rugged mountains in the southeast (Ailoushan, Wuliangshan, *etc.*), and the seas in the east allowed China to foster a unique, solid cultural foundation with limited influences from outside. This limit of foreign influences is more apparent in the earlier centuries of China's advancement than in the latter. This is certainly in part due to the fact that the Silk Route was not established until the closing centuries before the Current Era, over a millennium after much of that foundation was well in place.

Foreign influences did come both in terms of new technologies and new ideas. Until recent times, the single greatest influence has been from Buddhism. In general, China was the equal to India in terms of cultural development in ancient times. So unlike Buddhism's movement into Thailand or Tibet, both of which were culturally less advanced than India, Buddhism's movement into China was far more complex and required multiple approaches. For example, Tibet had no writing system until its encounter with Buddhism. This allowed for the creation of a new technical literary language; clearly built upon the preclassical Tibetan but created specifically for translation and to accommodate the sophistication of Sanskrit in Buddhist text. Although attempts to do the same occurred in China (perhaps Xuanzang's 玄奘 translations may well be understood within this light) overall significant movement from the literary standards set by the literati were not looked on favorably. Thus, translated Buddhist

texts had to fit within the existing linguistic parameters. The coinage of new terms was limited but accepted. New grammatical expressions in attempts to mimic Sanskrit syntax were seen as cumbersome however. It is not that these and other strategies were not employed but they were viewed as "not Chinese enough." Hence, Kumārajīva's translations which better conform to those parameters are still favored today as being better Chinese over Xuanzang's translations.

What, then, is sinicization? The simple answer of "making things Chinese" opens up more questions than it answers. "Chineseness" was never just one thing, belonging to one group of people, in one time or place. Classical Chinese culture in its totality was an aggregate of forces and was never static. The people themselves were not completely homogeneous but were of mixed origins as the dominant group intermingled with other tribes and ethnic groups. Homogeneity in culture was also lacking. For example, although we normally think of China as being patrilineal, it also has matrilineal groups. Many people often confuse making things "*Han*" (漢族; the largest ethnic group) as sinicization. However, the *Han* are only one such group and even within that group there are major differences in sub-cultures. Furthermore, the whole concept of *Han* was and is a construct. Even the languages spoken in "China" were not all from the same linguistic family and the spoken tongues that did belong to the dominant family were often highly regionalized. As one can glean from these brief statements this opens up a door to many topics.

We could also raise the question of which "Buddhism" are we discussing? Although we are comfortable in thinking in terms of some phenomena called "Buddhism," there are really many different Buddhisms. As noted by Derris and

Gummer:

> Numerous studies have demonstrated that Orientalist definitions of "Buddhism" reflected to a large degree the assumptions, preferences, and agendas of Western scholars, and have explored the ongoing legacy of these earlier definitions in recent scholarship on Buddhist traditions.[2]

As the process of sinicization involved many different Buddhist traditions, I simply use the word "Buddhism" and "Buddhist" as a collective umbrella term. For most of the details found in these studies I speak of particular individuals, traditions and texts. Understanding the process of the sinicization of Buddhism is further complicated by the fact that each scholar, myself included, really presents his or her interpretation of "Buddhism." Therefore, the dialogue regarding Buddhism or Buddhisms is an on-going process. I try to address some of the issues that arise from these considerations by making my studies focused in the above mentioned ways. This does not necessarily dismiss these concerns but it is hoped they will be somewhat mitigated.

Here I wish to be clear on my use of the word "sinicization." In part, I mean specifically making things Buddhist acceptable to the Chinese cultural elite. In classic times, although linguistically the Chinese were challenged with oral communications, they shared the written language both in terms of grammatical expression and lexicon. The Chinese characters and the Chinese *Weltanschauung* that it encapsulated proved to be an overwhelming influence on the whole project of transforming Buddhism into something Chinese.

This literary homogeneity was fostered by a group of men who had received extremely similar educations so that they could pass national level exams in the time period under consideration.[3] Thus, someone studying in the far southeast was educated to the same standards as someone from the extreme northwest in terms of required abilities and texts studied. Having achieved rank in society, these elite were the arbitrators and directors of not only literature but ethics, good government, public works, "religion," diplomacy, the military and more. In short, they set the standards that things Buddhist had to meet to be accepted in high society. Things once accepted trickled down to the other classes and were even fostered. A good example of the elite's importance in the formation of Chinese Buddhism, was the monk's or bhikṣu's position *vis-à-vis* the emperor.

In India, Buddhist bhikṣus were understood to be outside of society. Having the power to renounce social conventions and comforts even emperors would bow to them and set them on high. In China, there were debates about whether or not bhikṣus were under the emperor and should bow to him. The final outcome was that not only did bhikṣus bow to the emperor but the government controlled who became a *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣunī*. This clearly demonstrates that the Confucian norm of all being under the emperor overruled the Indian Buddhist norms.

There were less than 200 individuals that could speak authoritatively from experience about Buddhism in India and Central Asia who worked in China over a period of about 1,000 years that we know.[4] Most of these were foreign monks and a few were Chinese who traveled to India and/or Central Asia and returned. The spread of Buddhism in China was far more reliant on the translation of Buddhist texts and

the propagation of the Buddha's teachings by native Chinese than on a Chinese person meeting a foreign master. The famous translators of the fifth and sixth centuries were usually government sponsored and assisted. Erik Zurcher has pointed out that the Chinese individuals who worked to make foreign Buddhist materials available to the Chinese in the Sui (隋朝 589–618) and Tang (唐朝 618–907) dynasties were of a very similar ilk and some were even government officials.[5] Many of the Chinese bhikṣus and others who helped in the translation projects were educated in the same manner as all literati.[6] With regard to Chinese exegesis he further states:

> Without going into details, it may be said that also in this sector we again find the combination of (i) a very small élite of highly educated monks; (ii) an important role played by imperial sponsorship; and (iii) a concentration of activities in a limited number of large, richly-endowed monasteries.[7]

This well demonstrates the ability that the literati had to influence how Buddhism progressed in the Middle Kingdom.

In part, by "sinicization" I also mean the process whereby some phenomena created by Chinese Buddhists answered a need in the general community at a particular time and place and eventually spread coming to be accepted by various levels of society. This process is much more difficult to trace because of the lack of documents that support research of this nature. Scholars must depend on anthropological, archaeological, art historic, architectural and other similar types of studies in an effort to create a more comprehensive

picture. A good example of this may be the elaboration of several forms of the Bodhisattva Guanyin not attested to in canonical works.[8] In this volume, I provide an example in depth on two performing arts that have significant Buddhist elements.

This naturally leads one to question just how the Chinese made Buddhism into a Chinese phenomenon. Other researchers have presented information on this topic from different vantages. For example, Paul Demiéville periodizes the movement of Buddhism into China and called the third stage "*le Bouddhisme recommencera a se sinister*."[9] Zurcher provided a historic study of the beginning centuries of Buddhism in China presenting both accounts of some of the most important people and the challenges they faced in bringing Buddhism to the Middle Kingdom.[10] Another approach is the detailed study of an individual master's writings as found in Peter Gregory's work on Tsung-mi.[11] However, perhaps the best work providing focused studies on a spectrum of topics demonstrating sinicization is Kenneth Ch'en's publication wherein he takes up five major disparate areas in his investigation. This included: ethics, politics, economics, literature, education and social life.[12] Robert Sharf's study of the *Treasure Store Treatise*[13] demonstrates the appropriation of Buddhism by the Chinese. This last work was a more detailed analysis of Chinese material than the previously published *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* which was a collection of topical essays.[14] James Whitehead's detailed study of sinicization with regard to one text, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, presented yet another approach.[15]

The overall methodological approach I attempt in these pages is to present germane information on a particular topic from the Indian Buddhist perspective. Sometimes this may

involve non-Buddhist information to properly locate the Buddhist position within the Indian cultural and philosophical context. I do this providing information both from textual and cultural sources. I look at the same topic in the Chinese setting and again investigate textual and cultural sources. The generalized goal is to show the "movement" in ideas or phenomena and how those ideas progressed once in China. I am not attempting to present here a thorough and comprehensive investigation of each of the topics under consideration. Although such would be a worthy publication, it makes presenting an array of examples of sinicization in one volume impossible. This volume is trying to demonstrate some of the strategies that were used in the sinicization process, which at times only requires a broader approach to the topic as we view two different cultures. This was the same approach use by Ch'en that acted as an overarching model for this work. In these studies, I do not posit or imply that Indian Buddhism is the standard from which Chinese Buddhism is to be measured. That is certainly not the goal of my studies. However, it is necessary to recognize that the sources of the topic under investigation originate in India and then to show the movement or maturation that transpired in China. Personally, I hold it is very difficult to have an appreciation of Chinese Buddhism in whole or part, if it is not approached on Chinese terms.

Specifically, the following work investigates a number of discrete phenomena in an attempt to understand in greater detail some of the processes that came into play in the development of Buddhism in China. Since an array of topics is presented, there has been a mixed methodological approach utilized in the production of these studies. Some aspects of the studies are based on a history of ideas—that is the tracing of particular notions from India to China through assorted

primary sources in the main. Some aspects of the material presented herein are based on careful literary analysis noting sources that were influential. In one chapter there is a study of performing arts and in another chapter a study on the fine arts both using methodologies appropriate to each undertaking. The overall work attempts to show how Buddhism changed both through adaptation and in the creation of new phenomena as the culture of China embraced Buddhism. This, it is hoped, will shed needed light on the ways that Buddhist ideas, teachings, art, and more were able to move from culture to culture and how China was able to accept something so very foreign and make it its own.

The time period under consideration spans the Han (漢朝) to the Song (宋朝) dynasties (*i.e.*, 206 BCE–1279 CE) al-though at times minor information from both before and after this period is pertinent to the presentations. The focus however is primarily from the Sui to the Song dynasties (*i.e.*, 581–1279). The tracing of influences from Chinese literary sources is in general limited to a small collection of indigenous works. These are the Confucian classics, the *Dao de jing* (*Tao Te Ching* 道德 經) and the *Zhuangzi* (*Chuang Tzu* 莊 子). It is not the case that other texts had no influence in the process of making Buddhism Chinese. It is to say that the selected texts in particular had a sustained significant impact on this process. It has been repeatedly claimed that the Buddhist "borrowed" from the above texts. So my examination of textual influences is in part an attempt to argue that our notion of "borrowings" needs to be far more nuanced.

Ch'en, as well as others, noted the application of the *geyi* (*ko-yi* 格義: "matching meaning") method in the expounding of Chinese Buddhism, and specifically in the translation and explanation of the prajñāpāramitā sūtras, on Chinese

soil.[16] Perhaps Zenryū Tsukamoto expressed this notion most succinctly, "...(Buddhism) then proceeded to the stage of *ko yi*, at which Buddhist doctrine was interpreted by resort to the ideas of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu;..."[17]

Leaving aside the question of how a particular translator undertook the job in classic times, Tsukamoto and Ch'en note the fact that it is the works of Laozi and Zhuangzi that are overwhelmingly employed in these endeavors. Ascribing the translation and exegetic endeavors (certainly not a "stage") to borrowings from the Daoist religion, perhaps reads too much into the status of these sources. It would be a very different situation if extensive borrowings from the inner chapters of the *Bao pu zi* (抱樸子)[18] and similar Daoists alchemical texts were found in the Buddhist canon, for example. It seems to be more prudent to think that the translators and commentators of Buddhist tracts in the main were using standard works that were available in their intellectual tradition. As a counter-balance, one should note that Buddhist works translated and composed in the same time period also used Confucian terminology and ideas. An excellent example would be the *Mou zi li huo lun* (牟子理惑論).[19] Almost three quarters of a century ago, Fung Yu-Lan notes that the *Yi Jing* (*I Ching* 易經), usually classified as one of the Confucian works, was also used by some monks to explain Buddhist concepts.[20] Further, Sharf in chapter two of his book provided an excellent discussion of how Chinese cosmology played a significant role in the fostering of Chinese Buddhism.[21]

The *Dao de jing* and the *Zhuangzi* are both classic works that enjoyed a wide readership among literate individuals. This is not to say that these two works were not used by Daoists and that they did not provide some of the philosophical

foundation for Daoism. It is to say that just because two long-term popular works are quoted or paraphrased, does not prove that Daoism as a religion was influencing Buddhism to a degree unmatched by other influences. This would be the equivalent of saying that some playwright quoting the famous *locus communis* from Dante's *Inferno*: "Abandon every hope, all you who enter,"[22] was trying to use Christian doctrine to drive home his/her point completely disregarding the long diverse use of this quote by such authors as Cray, Longfellow, Norton, Carlyle-Wicksteed, Singleton, Mandelbaum, and Saunders to mention a few. Given that the *Dao de jing* was included in the national exams in the Tang dynasty, certainly every educated person had to memorize it. Even after it was no longer required examination material, it still enjoyed a large readership amongst the Confucians and others. Further, even Confucians were influenced by the *Dao de jing* and the *Zhuangzi*.[23]

Finally on this point, Mair's excellent chapter investigating "*geyi*" demonstrates that our way of viewing this technical device has been inappropriate. He states:

> From this investigation, it emerges clearly that *geyi* had nothing whatsoever to do with translation, but that it was instead a highly ephemeral and not-very-successful attempt on the part of a small number of Chinese teachers to cope with the flood of numbered list of categories, ideas, and so forth (of which Indian thinkers were so much enamored) that came to China in the wake of Buddhism.[24]

I have also endeavored to provide ample annotation for each chapter. One of the earliest studies undertaken for this volume was "Dragons, Lions and Buddhas." Through researching the Dragon and Lion Dances, I discovered that there was actually little previous research on some aspects and some previous research, while still relevant, was dated. In trying to be both sufficiently thorough and systematic, I have included notes that provide some useful references to historically important studies, although overwhelmingly, I have referenced sources from the later part of the twentieth century. Further, I have tried to document much of my information with adequate annotation particularly primary sources that were utilized. There is also on occasion further explanation in the notes where needed. These materials are placed here as part of the scholastic apparatus.

Finally, each chapter presents material on how the same or similar topic or phenomena were understood and utilized within Chinese Buddhist circles. This is undertaken by looking at how particular traditions (*e.g.*, Chan, Pure Land, to a lesser extent others) have employed or understood the phenomena in question. Not every chapter delves into these traditions with a compare and contrast format and the chapters do not try to present a balance between the traditions. The intent here is simply to provide examples of similarities and differences with regard to the topic under consideration. Because of this, comprehensive studies of a particular topic in a selected tradition are not presented. Further, these chapters are not designed to be studies into Chan, Pure Land or any other tradition. Although the chapters do provide sometimes considerable information with regard to a tradition, exemplifying the development is sufficient for our intended purposes of studying sinicization.

Two of these studies began as conference papers. In these cases there have been considerable advances made from the original presentation. This reflects my own thoughts on the topic as more research and reconsiderations progressed particularly in light of comments made by colleagues. The other chapters are all original studies undertaken for this volume.

Chapter one, "Buddhist Historiography in China," is an investigation into the notion of historiography that was advanced in Chinese Buddhist writings. Beginning with recent psychological research, I present materials showing that Indian Buddhist were cautious with the use of memory as a source. It continues by pointing out some interesting dynamics in the acquiring of a "sense of history" that are encountered in Indian Buddhism in its formation. Finally, an explanation of some of the key concepts that are of concern in Indian Buddhist historiography is presented. It next looks into Chinese historiography in pre-Buddhist China with regard to the use of memory as acceptable source material. Then an investigation into some of the key concepts in Chinese historiography is elaborated upon. This is followed by a general description of Chinese Buddhist historiography with a focus on how the Indian and Chinese concepts were complimentary. The chapter concludes by looking at how two Chinese Buddhist traditions used history in their sectarian literature.

Chapter two, "What self?" is an exploration of the notion of "self" and its use in China. It begins with an overview of the Indian notion of self (*ātman*) as found in the Upaniṣads. It next looks into the Buddhist idea of no-self (*anātman*) and discusses various interpretations. The chapter discusses some textual and philosophical problems that a radical interpretation of the no-self doctrine generated and how different

Indian Buddhist groups attempted to address these problems. Next, a brief view of the pre-Buddhist Chinese idea of self is presented. This is followed by a detailed investigation of parallel technical vocabulary between early Chan teachings and the *Zhuangzi* with a focus on looking at the notion of self as found in the Chan tradition based on the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*.

Chapter three, "Dragons, Lions and Buddhas," is an investigation into two different performing arts which have considerable overlapping ritual space. The Dragon Dance is a puppet show created to bring about rain by means of sympathetic magic ritual producing general good fortune. Although existing before the arrival of Buddhism it was modified with the addition of the "pearl of wisdom" based on Buddhist influences. The Lion Dance, also a sympathetic magic ritual, is a masked dance requiring two people in costume. The existence of this good luck dance is well documented in Tang sources. This chapter traces the origin of the lion to the Indian motif of Mañjuśrī's mount.

Chapter four, "Buddha Play" is an investigation into the notion that by the four means of reaching the goal, the four applications of mindfulness, the four meditational states, the four stages, the four appropriate exertions, the four marvelous signs, the four resolutions, the four ways of cultivating concentration, the four dharmas that deal with happiness, and the four measureless the buddhas play. This chapter progresses to document the use of "play" in the Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist literature and then to present the multiple attempts to translate the idea into Chinese. It is argued in this chapter that the multiple attempts at translation indicate the possibility of the Chinese having difficulties with the concept that an august being like a buddha would see his spiritual mastery

as "play". The chapter ends with examples of how the concept of "buddha play" was used in the Pure Land and Chan literature.

Chapter five, "A Comparison of the Ritual Creation and Use of Chan and Pure Land Art in China," presents information on the use of ritual in the creation and viewing of Buddhist art. It initiates this presentation by looking at Indian Buddhist art and how art functioned in that cultural context. The chapter briefly looks at how Tiantai Pure Land teachings used art ritualistically and compares this with how the Pure Land teachings expounded upon by Shandao and his "lineage" used Pure Land art. This, then, is contrasted with the ritual production and viewing of art (primarily landscapes) in the Chan tradition. The conclusion is that the Tiantai uses art in a manner similar to that found in India. Shandao's line of teachings uses art for pedagogic and inspirational reasons. Finally, Chan breaks new ground by using art in a manner similar to a *gong'an* (公案).

The sixth chapter in this volume is "Buddhist Activities in early Chan." The *Er ru si xing lun* (*Erh-ju ssu-hsing* 二入四行論) and Tanlin's "Preface" form the primary source. With layman Xiang's, Huike's and other letters providing a more expanded view of early activities that are investigated. The chapter produces information on what these activities entail and identifies the sutra sources for these Buddhist activities along with explanation where needed. In conclusion, this chapter documents that the majority of activities mentioned in these beginning Chan texts are all traceable to standard Buddhist activities presented in the sutras.

Chapter seven, "Buddhist Praxis in Light of Eschatology," is an in-depth look at Buddhist eschatology and how

the notions of the "End of the Dharma (teachings)" are addressed in Buddhist praxis. This chapter opens with a detailed explanation of the cosmos and exactly what is destroyed at the end of the *kalpa* (eon). Chapter seven then looks at the different ages of Dharma how this is understood and the mechanisms advanced within Indian Buddhism to address concerns generated by this theory. I next investigate the tripartite system that became popular in China and developments upon which it is based. The chapter concludes by analyzing the Pure Land and Chan response to this theory.

The whole of the work draws to a close with a conclusion illuminating the approaches, strategies, and advances in sinicizing Buddhism that were highlighted in the forgoing chapters. Approaches such as using native ideas of history, incorporating Indian motifs into preexisting Chinese forms, and others help make different aspects of Buddhism more closely identifiable and located within the parameters of the spiritual dialogue of Chinese culture and not just Indian forms grafted on to a Chinese trunk. It is hoped that these chapters have helped bring to the fore certain pertinent information that demonstrates how an originally foreign spiritual system became such an integral part of the Chinese landscape. In addition to providing information on the sinicization of Buddhism as it entered the Chinese consciousness, the conclusion also presents a summation of how different Chinese Buddhist traditions viewed and utilized the developments detailed in the preceding chapters.

Chapter One

Buddhist Historiography in China[1]

Introduction

It is indeed curious that any sense of history was acquired in Buddhism. There are unambiguous statements in the sutras declaring that expending effort on the usual materials employed in the historic project is a waste of time. Further, since it was rare that actual recordings of events took place while they were transpiring, histories often relied on memories. The use of memory in the creation of history ought to have been questioned in ancient times because the Indian Buddhists were quite aware of faulty memory.

This chapter investigates the praxis-oriented approach that Buddhism has employed in the use of history by first presenting information on faulty memory based on modern research. Second, the chapter shows that in ancient times Indian Buddhists were aware of some of the problems with memory. Further, there is a discussion on the prohibition placed on the historic project by Śākyamuni Buddha and an argument for a praxis-oriented understanding of the development of histories in Buddhism. Finally, the way historiography was understood and interpreted within the context of Chinese Buddhism with a comparative analysis between Pure Land use of history and Chan use of history is presented.