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## Religion and Modernization in China

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## Religion and Modernization in China

SATŌ Kimihiko

*Tokyo University of Foreign Studies*

My topic for this symposium is the relationship between religion and modernization in Chinese civilization. It is meant to serve as a contrastive example for the examination of Japanese religion from the perspective of comparative civilization studies. This symposium proceeds from the notion of civilization as "a human device/institution system." From this point of view, a brief overview of the religious device/institution of late imperial China may be helpful.

As a world empire with expansive territories, the Ch'ing dynasty (1644–1911) had a mammoth religious device/institution system. At its core was the state cult, according to which the autocratic sovereign was required to offer up sacrifices to Heaven and Earth. On the day of the winter solstice, when the earth begins to leave the domain of death and move into realm of life, when *yin* yields to *yang*, the emperor, who ruled over the Central Kingdom as the Son of Heaven, would make sacrifices to Heaven with an entourage of civil and military officials at the Altar of Heaven on the south side of the Forbidden Palace (the direction of *yang*). In the same fashion, at the Altar of Earth on the north side of the place (the direction of *yin*), he would worship the Earth to repay it for yielding grains to nourish his subjects. In this way, the reign of the emperor, who ruled by virtue of the Mandate of Heaven, was sanctified and legitimized religiously. Moreover, ever since Shih-huang-ti of Ch'in (259–210 B.C.) climbed up to the top of Mt. T'ai to perform the Legitimation Rites (*feng-shan*) and to report personally to Heaven his ascension to the throne, Mt. T'ai and other major peaks that were thought to support Heaven have come to be revered as sacred places, for they bridge Heaven and Earth. At the same time, these peaks were objects of popular Toaist cults, and many Taoist deities were worshipped there.

Furthermore, the patrimonial bureaucracy, the pillar of the imperial reign, was itself supported by Confucianism and the cult of Confucius. All bureaucrats who had studied the Confucian classics, been trained in the classical tradition, and passed the civil service examination were required as disciples to worship their master, the sage Confucius. As concrete expressions of the cult, the throne put up a splendid Confucian temple and Confucian residence in Ch'üfu, Confucius' native place. Temples dedicated to Confucius were established in each prefecture and county, and his images were installed in each institution of learning, from the National Academy (Kuo-tzu-chien) to private schools. Both bureaucrats and students (who were prospective bureaucrats) were required to participate in the cult. Thus the

civil service examination and the patrimonial bureaucracy rested squarely on a foundation of Confucianism and the cult of Confucius. In contrast, Buddhism and Taoism, which were under state control through the ordination certificate system, were much weaker devices and institutions.

But in order to understand Chinese religion from the standpoint of modernization, it is important to investigate the foundation that supports these systems of humans, devices, and institutions, namely the fundamental features of the religion of the Chinese people (hereafter "Chinese" refers to the Han Chinese and not the Muslim population). As a result, our focus shifts somewhat toward the human factor, and we will examine our theme with reference to problems in the domain of cultural theory such as Chinese religious consciousness, thought, morality and ethics.

I would like to begin with the problem of religion in Taiwan, which is the Chinese society most advanced in capitalistic modernization. While economic development in recent years has brought about modernization and social changes, it has also produced two prominent religious phenomena. According to Li yi-yuan [Li 1984], they are the two trends of utilitarianism and devotionism. Broadly speaking, those who hold traditional beliefs value monetary reward and success in their careers. They also expect their children to succeed in these areas. To them, education and self-improvement are but *means* to the achievement of advantages measured in economic and career terms. Christians and followers of other non-traditional faiths regard educational opportunities and other ways of self-improvement as *ends* in themselves.

Against this background of traditional religious attitudes characterized by utilitarianism and the pursuit of personal benefit and business prosperity, there has been a notable increase in the popularity of spirit mediums (*t'ung-chi*) in recent years. Catering to a clientele afflicted by troubles, anxieties and a sense of disorientation, shamans demonstrate the protective power of divinities by performing rituals that induce spirit possession in front of their audience. Rites utilizing charms and incense ashes to obtain cures of a supernatural kind, and divinatory methods that tap supernatural forces for answers on behalf of the puzzled and perplexed are also widely practised. This phenomenon has appeared at a time when people who are no longer able to cope with their situation try to obtain supernatural solutions from deities by means of occult arts and magic because the traditional beliefs or values they once held have become shaky in the face of rapid social change, or when they need personal remedies to a whole range of new problems confronting them, problems such as physical and mental ailments, poverty and a feeling of relative deprivation, frustration and separation from a secure, traditional social network. The appearance of this kind of religious phenomenon in response to social change resembles the sudden rise of new religions in post-war Japan. Although utilitarian and mystical tendencies are much stronger in the case of Taiwan, the two are similar in character.

Fanatic devotionism can be found in a variety of temples (*miao*) where members of mystical, ecstatic sects personally experience "sympathetic communication with divine beings" and try to retain the spirits in themselves during sessions of collective trance. Followers of these sects are mostly low-income people who have moved into the cities from elsewhere. Subsisting at the bottom of society, they are cut off from their social network, belonging nowhere, having lost their identity, and playing no clear role in society. They show a tendency to dissolve their selves in a state of religious frenzy and ecstasy that includes bodily contact, while at the same time trying to rebuild intense human relationships. The Pentecostals are actively proselytizing among the mountain tribes, and since they emphasize anti-ritualistic and direct communication with God, a feeling of union with the Holy Ghost, their efforts have also been successful. The above phenomena may be grouped under the rubric of mystical religion, which is marked by the spirit mediums of popular cults and the technique of inducing trance.

Opposing the rapid spread of utilitarian religion are devotional sects such as the Unified Way (I-kuan tao or T'ien-tao) and various types of the En-chu-kung cult. Seen as movements aimed at reviving traditional morality, these sects stress the practice of Confucian morality and the observation of religious precepts. But the Unified Way also shares some similarities with the mysticism of popular religion. At the core of its religious activities are secret rites of spirit possession by the three shamans called Heavenly Excellence (*T'ien-ts'ai*), Earth Excellence (*ti-ts'ai*) and Human Excellence (*jen-ts'ai*). Spirits convey "sacred injunctions" to the faithful through the mouths of the shamans. That the followers are required to study these sacred injunctions of a moral nature shows that this sect has taken the first step toward assuming an intellectualistic character.

In short, religion in Taiwan is in a charged state created by the co-existence of shamanistic, magical, ritualized utilitarian religions and religious movements that are revivals of traditional morality. Both are attempts to adapt to rapid social change. If we were to represent them schematically, at one extreme we would have the continued existence of Confucian moralism, which has been the "religion" of the elite and was supported by the literati class. At the other extreme would be popular cults of the supernatural which are marked by magical trance techniques such as spirit possession performed by shamans and collective ecstasy, techniques peculiar to an agrarian culture. Devotional moral revivalism as seen in the Unified Way would occupy position between the two extremes, for it bases itself upon supernatural cults as well as adopting elements of Confucian moralism, the "religion" of the elite. In other words, it is syncretic in character. The structure of the religious consciousness that renders this kind of syncretism possible will be discussed later, but I believe this analytical scheme will be very helpful as we begin pondering the problem of Chinese religion and modernization.

In my view, there are two things fundamental to Chinese religion: ancestor worship, which is closely related to the patrilineal family and lineage systems that

characterize Chinese society, and a system of supernatural beliefs that are connected with the cult of Heaven or the Universe.

Let us begin by looking at the cult of Heaven and the systems of supernatural beliefs. These distinctive features of Chinese religion rest on the foundation of peasant religiosity among the agrarian Chinese people. Since peasant life was largely at the mercy of the natural elements, supernatural forces operating behind nature were postulated, represented, and worshipped. Attempts to manipulate these forces gave birth to magical techniques. In addition, there was a religious life punctuated by orgies at harvest festivals. Peasant festivals were as much a pursuit of harmony among people as an expression of human cooperation toward maintaining harmony in nature. From the milieu of this peasant culture emerged a religious sentiment that conceived of the agrarian natural world as inextricably linked to the human world, and a worldview in which the natural order and the human order were seen harmoniously, as one organic reality.

The universal existence that spans both the natural and the human worlds was Heaven. As the sayings "The great virtue of Heaven is to engender" and "Heaven is the origin of the ten thousand things" reveal, Heaven was taken to be the source of all things, and it is the innate nature of Heaven to give birth to and nourish them. The human race was similarly born of Heaven, and therefore it was believed that it was the nature of human beings to act in accordance with the will of Heaven.

In ancient times, Heaven was represented anthropomorphically as the Emperor on High (Shang-ti or Hao-t'ien shang-ti), the master of natural forces, regulator of seasonal changes, the deity who commanded the rains, a local god, an insightful and authoritative judge and savior. He was the sovereign embodying the sole source of divine power, the ultimate source of charisma. Heaven or the Emperor on High, adopted a charismatic person as its son (hence the Son of Heaven) and invested him with its power so that he could harmonize the order of the human world with the order of nature. If the emperor's virtues, which were given by Heaven to him as the most excellent person, were complete, and if his life was in accord with the order of the Universe, the natural order and natural time would change smoothly.

However, should he fail to act according to the Mandate of Heaven, when his virtues became wanting and his rule less than perfect, the Emperor on High would issue warnings in the form of natural disasters. It was through mystical sympathy that the judgements of the Emperor on High were made known to human beings, either by means of "natural" forces or by dreams in which he gave warnings or blessings. Divination was the means of communication by which people could pose questions to Heaven and obtain answers. Turtle shells, ox shoulder blades, and other objects believed to possess divine power were utilized to that end. The belief was that by following the will of Heaven thus revealed, harmony would be preserved both in the realms of nature and of human beings.

It is possible to find in this a concept of monotheistic belief in an omnipotent sovereign, namely Heaven or the Emperor on High. But instead of progressing

towards a rationalism that made the "commands" of the transcendent Heaven or the Emperor on High into directly spoken "words", the Chinese attempted to fathom the will of Heaven by resorting to magical means such as dream interpretation, oracles, and other forms of sympathetic communication. Striving to decipher the import of movements of heavenly bodies, configurations of constellations, and changes in nature and the symbolic meanings of oracles and the eight trigrams, they proceeded in the direction of rationalizing the occult arts and further elaborating on a mysticism aimed at nonempirical knowledge (vague in meaning and concept) based on magical sympathy. Moreover, the cult of Heaven overlapped with fertility cults of the earth which were linked to peasant harvest cults and the cult of the ancestors, whose power affected not only people's lives but also their souls. This fact prevented monotheistic belief from proceeding along a road that would have led to a world of monistic rationalism. For this reason, the Chinese religious worldview developed a naturalistic pantheism holding that there are numerous gods, spirits, and demons inhabiting this world, with a background of a cosmic animism.

By putting human actions and motives on a par with Heaven in importance, that is, by stressing the role of ethics in about cordial human relations, Confucius injected a new spirit into the ancient monotheistic cult of Heaven and the emphasis on rituals that harmonize and preserve order. What Confucius understood as morality is this: since man receives from Heaven a nature endowed with wisdom (*chih*, that ability to distinguish good and evil) and humanity (*jen*, the emotional function of loving one's fellow men), he is able to examine his own conduct and intuit the dictates of his heart. When filial piety (*hsiao*) and brotherly love (*t'i*), the purest forms of love between father and son, and between brothers, are extended to include the whole of society (through the progressive steps of self-cultivation, managing one's household, governing a country and finally bring peace to the realm), the practice of humanity and virtue will cause the members of a society to love each other and to live in peace.

Even though Heaven occupies the center of Confucius's moral thought, he never tried to systematize his teachings into a philosophy based on Heaven; it was the Confucians of a later age who accomplished the construction of a philosophical system utilizing the Book of Changes (*Yi Jing*). From the presence of male and female in the human world as well as from nature, this school deduced the concepts of *yin* and *yang* as the constituting principles of all things. The alternation of *yin* and *yang*, just like the coming and going of the warm and cold seasons, was taken to be the operational principle of Heaven in a cosmology founded on the formula, "One *yin* and one *yang* constitute the Way". Everything was thought to be explained by this abstract principle according to which human beings are also defined as concrete manifestations of *yin* and *yang*. Accordingly, at the source of human morality is the Way of Heaven, the waxing and waning of *yin* and *yang* that generates all beings, for even moral wisdom and humanity become human nature

only by virtue of the interactions of *yin* and *yang*. Since the Mandate of Heaven (*t'ien-ming*) manifests itself as humanity and wisdom in human nature, it is possible to cultivate oneself, to follow the Way of Nature, by following the natural dictates of one's moral nature without artificial interference; it is possible to "to banish the perverse while preserving sincerity." In other words, it is the function of nature, the Way of the Universe or the Way of Heaven, to engender and nurture the myriad things, and it is man who is endowed with this generative potential, which is his nature. To give full play to the nature receive from Heaven and to participate in and contribute to the growth of Heaven-and-Earth is man's duty and is morality. This can be accomplished by observing at every juncture in one's life the ethical precepts governing the five human relationships (*wu-lun*) ranging from that between a lord and his officers to that between friends.

In this fashion, Confucian moralism reaches the point of being a complete philosophical system built on the foundation of the abstract metaphysical principle of the Way of Heaven or the order of the Universe. Influenced by Buddhism, the Neo-Confucians of the Sung dynasty (960–1270) further rationalized and synthesized Confucianism and strengthened its moral idealism and moralistic rigorism. Their system made *li* (Principle or Reason) a metaphysical principle of universality, the foundation of all things. Man receives his original nature, his moral nature, from this Principle, and thus human nature was equated with it. However, the instinctive nature of human beings, which is clouded by the Material Force (*ch'i*) that is both impure and turbid, obscures their Principle. One's duty is to recover morality by overcoming this nature that is marred by Material Force and to go back to one's conceptual root, the original nature.

By contrast, the school of Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529) argued that it is impossible to separate the human mind (*hsin*) from Principle (*li*) and held instead that the heart is Principle, and that the two constitute an inseparable unity. It advocated a subjective moralism that calls for people to apply their moral wisdom, an innate conscience innate to everyone, to concrete situations so that they may reach correct judgements and act in accordance with them.

Members of the elite literati class regarded this rationalist moralism as the essence of Chinese culture and preserved it; gradually, it trickled down from the upper classes to the middle and lower social strata. As peasant orgies slowly disappeared, it began to exert its influence on popular attitudes toward life. Yet this moralism never tried to battle deep-rooted beliefs regarding spiritual beings such as ghosts and deities. The educated class merely advocated a cautious agnosticism, and the result was that primitive beliefs in spirits, beliefs that had been handed down from ancient times, survived as popular beliefs held by people of all classes. This animistic cult upheld a symbolic structure of a world that is undfined in nature, a cosmic continuum saturated by the interactions of magical forces. But this is not to say that all Chinese thinking and actions became mystical. There was also the possibility of progressing to a certain degree towards a kind of Confucian rationalism: "Respect the spirits but keep them at a distance." We must admit, however,

that the supernatural cults which recognized the existence of numerous spirits in the world survived into the late imperial period.

Next let us take up the subject of ancestor worship, regarded by many as the very foundation of Chinese religion as well as a salient element that can be found throughout all of Chinese society. It has gained such a central position because ancestor worship and the fertility cult of the earth were the cornerstones of primeval peasant religion.

In primitive ancestor worship, family and family land were understood in the following way. A family was made up of two components: the living and the dead. In ancient times the dead were buried within the family grounds, where the corpse decomposed and blended with the soil. In one section of the same lot was the couple's bed, where the mother gave birth to and nurtured new lives. Therefore, newborn babies were regarded as having received their flesh from the flesh of the ancestors. Children were seen as ancestors who had been interred in the ground coming back to life to rejoin the living half of the family. This direct link was postulated between the living and the dead of the same family. Before long, the dead came to be associated with corpses of individual ancestors in the family graveyard, and the dead as a collective gave way to a belief in individualized souls. Then ancestral spirits assuming the role of tutelary gods for the kin group began to receive offerings of meat, grains, and wine in autumn and spring, the time when nature renews itself.

By virtue of the worship that descendants rendered to the ancestors, the dead enjoyed a peaceful life in the spirit world, the Yellow Springs. But in return for affection and respect, the ancestors were expected to grant blessings pertaining to this-worldly matters such as good fortune, wealth, and longevity. Chinese ancestor worship thus differs from other forms of worship of the dead focusing on the other world. Through a close bond between the living and the dead, the cult not only serves to consolidate the ties among the living but also brings them this-worldly benefits.

Since familial ties based on filial piety extend to include the dead, descendants and ancestors constitute one united kin group. In making offerings to the ancestors, the nature of the relationship between the worshipped and the worshipper is such that the grandson makes offerings to the grandfather, for the son is inferior to the father while the grandson enjoys a special affinity with the grandfather. By possessing the grandson, a worshipper with an innocent soul, or through other means, the spirit of the grandfather uses the grandson as mediator to invest his authority in the father. Accordingly, memorial tablets on the altar are divided into two groups, one on the right and another on the left, based on the grandfather-grandson relationship. One group consists of tablets 1, the great-great-grandfather, 3, the grandfather, and 5, the self, while the other group consists of tablets 2, the great-grandfather, 4, the father, and 6, the son. Therefore, the first duty of filial piety calls for the son to marry and produce a grandson who will be charged



with the special duty of offering sacrifices to his grandfather.

Confucianism, which stressed the importance of human relations centered around filial piety, overlapped with the ancestral cult that supported the kinship institution. Perhaps we can even say that it is on the foundation of the latter that Confucianism advocated filial piety. However, mysticism such as direct rapport with the dead was gradually banished by the rationalism of the Confucian literati class to the domain of grave-side worship. Ancestral graves became associated with geomantic belief in wind and water (*feng-shui*) and were constructed in accordance with those principles in order to capture the divine forces in nature. These forces would then render beneficial influences in the ancestral remains capable of bestowing blessings upon all the living members of the family. That is to say, Confucianism also recognized the world as being interspersed by supernatural forces; the divine forces of nature, the ancestral spirits, and the living members of a family are all seen as bound by mystical media into a continuum, and all these factors are connected with the this-worldly interests of the living, such as wealth, good fortune, and longevity.

The utilitarian aspect of Chinese religion is strikingly illustrated by the conceptual pairings that associate providing for the ancestors with receiving blessings, and ignoring the dead with suffering adversities. The funerals and burials are carried out with an eye for personal benefit shows that even though Confucianism upholds a kind of social moralism, as a personal religious ethic it accepts both animistic mysticism and this-worldly utilitarianism and has been unable to overcome them. By virtue of its animistic nature, Taoism has successfully accommodated itself to ancestor worship without creating any internal contradictions, but Buddhism and Christianity have only been able to operate in China by compromising with the cult of the ancestors, the pillar that sustains family unity.

In terms of Confucian ethics, "One's flesh, skin, and hair are received from the parents," and a son must avoid injuring his body by any means. This is because a person's body is only a part of the indivisible kinship entity to which, when the time comes, the borrowed body must be returned. That the living and the dead of the family together constitute a single unity is a very strong belief in China. Punishments such as holding the nine grades of kin liable for one member's crime and exposing the ancestral remain of person guilty of high treason were designed to hurt the kinship entity, to reduce a family's collective capital; they were devised in a context of social values in which such punishments were deemed unbearable. Seen from this perspective, even Confucian social moralism is built upon ancestor worship, animism, and the this-worldly utilitarianism of the Chinese people.

Taoism, which showed little concern for individual social obligations and human relations emphasized by Confucianism, took the goal of personal salvation as its starting point. Maspero argues that Taoism represents the Chinese attempt to create a religion of the self out of the ancient cults of social groups, a soteriological religion that leads its believers (the Taoists) to immortality [MASPERO 1978]. It ad-

vocated the realization of salvation from death, the one thing nobody can escape, by transforming the human flesh into something imperishable. For the body that is made up of three heavenly and seven earthly souls to transform into something that does not succumb to death, training in the techniques of "form nurturing" (*yang-hsing*) is necessary. Therefore, dietary methods such as the abstention from grains (*p'i-ku*), breath control such as embryonic breathing (*t'ai-hsi*), alchemy such as the manufacturing and taking of "golden elixirs" (*chin-tan*), sexual techniques such as "the art of the inner chamber" (*fang-chung*), and gymnastics were practiced. At the same time, the human body was understood as a microcosm corresponding to the macrocosmic world, which is then related to the deities dwelling inside the body through an internal visualization method known as "nurturing the spirits" (*yang-shen*). In a state of ecstasy, the practitioner attains an impersonal *tao* which is the real ruler of the world, superior even to the Emperor on High. The Ultimate of the Universe, this *tao* is later personified as the Venerable Supreme Lord (T'ai-shang lao-chun). It is through the supreme sensation of being fused into the mystery of the Universe that a mystical union with the *tao* is accomplished. At this point, the body achieves unity with the mind, and the self dissolves and becomes one entity with the *tao*. Since the *tao* is immutable and imperishable for eternity, it will not die.

Thus Taoism is a religion that seeks to realize immortality by enriching man's "destiny" (*ming*), which is an individual's original nature, and by obtaining boundless power. But owing to the influence of Confucian moralism, Taoism also holds that immortality is attainable only by maintaining a conscientious heart, and in a later stage of development it teaches cultivation of the original nature, which is understood as the golden pill (*chin-tan*) or internal elixir (*nei-tan*) in the human heart.

According to Taoist cosmology, every part of the Universe is occupied by deities. These powerful beings are saviors, preachers, tutelary gods of particular professions, and territorial gods, and together they make up the Taoist pantheon. Furthermore, it is understood that by virtue of a mysterious medium known as the Material Force (*ch'i*), the individual's body and the Universe form a cosmic continuum. This animistic religion created and filled the world with immortals who have attained immortality by gaining supreme power. Taoists may escape death by receiving teachings and training from the immortals through spiritual communication.

This form of salvation was out of the reach of the masses, however, and slowly but surely popular beliefs diverged from the religion of the Taoists. Taoists techniques were believed to bring the common people this-worldly benefits: techniques for nurturing the body would bring good health, the practice of morality would bring happiness, and sexual techniques would yield descendents. But this was not all. Frenzied collective rites, gatherings where men mixed freely with women, and the use of spells and charms also took place, giving rise to a trend of popular Taoism that invoked deities dominating the external world to bring about salvation, which

was considered equally external to the believers. This development was probably also influenced by the existence of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas in Mahayana Buddhism.

Although Taoism adopted a materialistic view of nature, we must admit that for the common people it paved the way toward a magico-religious salvation. The immortals who had attained immortality and supreme power were sometimes depicted as magicians doing battle with demons in this world, and deified natural forces were seen as beings in possession of divine powers. Thus, for the masses, the world was permeated with supernatural forces. By showing them respect and submission, or by manipulating them through some means, it was thought possible to bring about good or bad fortune in this world. This led to the birth of a utilitarianism that was marked by the attitudes of accommodation and manipulation. In the many situations where manipulation proved impossible, an attitude of fatalism, of accepting one's fate, prevailed. This amounted to a shrewd opportunism that was submitted to imperial control and subjugation. We can even say that it was state control that was responsible for the production and reproduction of such an attitude toward life. In China no community ever existed that was based on a religious ethic antagonistic to the domination of the autocratic state; perhaps the only exception, although imperfect itself, was the White Lotus sect.

There was no soteriology in Confucianism. Its goal was to perfect the moral self by nurturing the original nature through self-cultivation, scholarly deliberation, and self-reflection. It thus produced an accommodating attitude toward the laws of the natural order as well as toward the paternalistic social order. On the other hand, by means of moral and technical cultivation methods designed to increase the power of the individual's original nature or destiny, thereby bringing about immortality, an unlimited extension of the present life, Taoism attempted to realize an impossible this-worldly salvation solely through the power of the individual. Both persuasions searched for a proper model of human existence in complying with the eternal and immutable function of Heaven and the ever-lasting order of society and the universe. In this sense, both were religions of an agrarian culture conceived within an order of universal peace stretching between an unchanging Heaven and Earth. Confucianism and Taoism were thus adaptive as well as being strongly attached to the world and very concerned with material gains.

Once Buddhism had entered the magnetic field of Chinese religious culture, it was so well received that it seemed as if it were being pulled into China. But what role did it play in Chinese society? And what position was accorded it? Putting aside for the time being Buddhism's association with the state and its escapist monasticism, I believe we can discover Buddhism's role by focusing on how it raised the question of soteriology among the masses and in Chinese society at large.

Chinese Buddhism began as lay Mahayana Buddhism, but it later produced Ekayana (I-sheng, One Vehicle) Buddhism through an apparent synthesis of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools. Although its doctrines were mainly based on T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen teachings, it engendered its own style of practical

Buddhism in the Ch'an and Pure Land sects. In the process, it introduced into the religious culture of China new elements such as preaching and proselytizing among the masses, belief in an afterlife and in the Pure Land (elements essential to a soteriology), the pursuit of personal salvation among the populace, and an explanation of the Universe based on the theories of karmic retribution and reincarnation.

Buddhist activity pioneered the way for new movements in the history of Chinese religion, especially after the founding of Hui-neng's (638-713) new Ch'an school that approved of lay practice. A lay religious culture gradually took shape; in the Confucian tradition, Neo-Confucianism arose in the Sung dynasty, whereas sects like the Way of Preserving Authenticity (Ch'uan-chen), Veritable Great Way (Chen-ta-tao), the Supreme One (T'ai-i), and the Pure and Bright (Ching-ming) emerged from the Taoist tradition. The Buddhist theory of karmic retribution inspired the production of the widely circulated Taoist text *Ledger of Merits and Demerits* (Kung-kuo ko) in the Sung period; lay societies dedicated to the recitation of the Buddha's name came into existence in this period, too. Popular religious life had undergone dramatic changes.

The popularization of Buddhism resulted in the further sinification of a religion that was originally accepted either as a variation of the Huang-Lao philosophy or as a technique for longevity. For this reason, Chinese Buddhism manifested a strong pantheistic tendency, and nothing comparable to the True Pure Land sect of Japan was ever created. By the Ming (1368-1644) and Ch'ing periods, the meditation method once peculiar to Ch'an Buddhist cultivation had become indistinguishable from Taoist meditation techniques and customary quiet sitting; both aimed at creating the power of the individual. And the fact that they were associated with breathing methods or health techniques indicates their transformation into practices that were basically Chinese in nature. Ch'an asceticism was de-emphasized, while lay practitioners came to regard sudden enlightenment as the acquisition of wisdom or the quickness of mind that provided solutions to concrete problems of life.

The practice of Ch'an was thus turned into a very Chinese way of pursuing material ends. Consequently, we can see the chanting of the phrase, "I pay homage to the Buddha Amito" (Sanskrit, Amitabha; *nan-mon a-mi-to-fo*) alone as characteristic of Chinese Buddhism. In fact, the Pure Land sect, which advocated simultaneous practice of Ch'an and Pure Land methods, is said to have been the center of Chinese Buddhism. But even for the lay followers of this sect, escaping from this world of suffering and being reborn in the Western Paradise were not the objects of their prayers. Instead, they prayed for longevity in this lifetime at the same time that they prayed to enter the Pure Land. This is because the Chinese in general did not distinguish sharply between the other and the present worlds. The two were conceived of as inseparable, and little attention was paid to the next life. The Bodhisattva of the Western Paradise appeared in China as the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin, a motherly figure of mercy and sympathy who was the guardian of

women and children. She resembled the Taoist goddess Queen Mother of the West (Hsi-wang-mu) in possessing this-worldly characteristics. Moreover, the chant "I pay homage to the Buddha Amito" was used for all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and in many cases it was actually used to address the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin rather than Amito. When it referred to the Buddha Maitreya who appear in this world to save people, that Buddha was conceived of as a golden figure with a protruding pot-belly and holding a Ch'ien-k'un with both hands, all very distinct marks of this-worldly salvation.

We must admit that the pursuit of the internal mind or the authentic spirit of man, the search for liberation that was an aspect inherent in Buddhism, was pulled toward Chinese secular values and this-worldly benefits and thereby weakened. The Chinese monastic community, too, was very different from that of Japan. Far from being made up of learned monks of superior character, it was a refuge for outlaws and the poor. Its corruption was a well-known fact. The monastic community failed to systematize the popular religious desire for salvation, to create a national religious institution, to play the role of an educational institution for the public, and to provide guidance to or take care of people's yearning for salvation. Together with the Taoists, Buddhist monks came to be much despised.

Buddhism's diffusion among the masses was brought about during and after the Sung dynasty by groups such as lay associations that devoted themselves to the chanting of the Buddha's name and religious groups in the tradition of the "Precious Scrolls", religious movements that were later connected to the activities of the White Lotus sect. Through their efforts, the people were taught doctrines concerning the three-stage eschatology (a soteriological theory of historical evolution based on the three stages of past, present, and future), liberation from the six paths of transmigration, religious precepts such as no killing, and the idea of the Home of the Authentic Void (*cheng-k'ung chia-hsiang*), the return to humankind's original home that is presided over by the Venerable Eternal Mother (Wu-sheng lao-mu). Although it was Pure Land Buddhism that provided the underlying religious worldview that made popular salvation possible, the temples and monks never wielded much popular influence.

Ming and Ch'in popular Taoism exhorted the masses to do good and have pure thoughts while cautioning them against malicious actions and evil ideas. The *Book of Utmost Sympathetic Responses* (T'ai-shang kan-ying p'ien) is representative of the morality tracts produced by this tradition. While maintaining that Heaven monitors every happening in the human world, this book tries to establish a normative way of life for the common people by furnishing a wide range of concrete, normative examples applicable to all aspects of life. However, the tract is characterized from beginning to end by a strongly realistic and utilitarian attitude toward life. The norms expounded tend to be unrelated and situation-oriented and thus do not constitute a general philosophy of life sustained internally by a consistent ethic.

If we trace Confucian moralism back to its foundations, we find that it is based

on a theory of Heaven or the Universe. And we find that Taoism was an animistic, individual soteriology which sought eternal life through union with the order of the universe and its impersonal master, the *tao*. After the success of Ch'an and Hua-yen Buddhism in the late T'ang, people's Buddha nature, original nature, and immutable, constant, true nature were seen as residing in all things in the universe. All three of these religions are based on the idea that the original or human nature of people in this world is in accord with the true existence of the universe (Principle in Confucianism, the *tao* in Taoism, Ultimate Reality in Buddhism). Moreover, Heaven, or the Universe, and human beings are taken to be mutually responsive and continuous, and one's original nature is attainable through bringing them into harmony with each other (by obeying Heaven, by following the *tao*, by obtaining Buddha nature). This was the central theme of Chinese religion. With this Heaven/Universe-original human nature relationship as its axis, Chinese religion has been able to unify the Three Teachings, the Five Teachings (the United Way), and even the Six Teachings.

The above demonstrates the special character of Chinese syncretism, a religious "Central Kingdom ideology" structure that swallows and mixes together all religions. De Groot calls it "universism" [DE GROOT 1987]. This religious structure has supported the Chinese empire internally in the past and will not be easily dismantled. With such a structure and its emphases on the living and the present world, Chinese religion cannot be called soteriological.

This cosmological religion of human nature that held the relation between Heaven (the Universe) and human nature as central and made no distinction between the other world and this world was informed and supported by the intellectualism and non-mystical thought of the literati class. Popular religion, on the other hand, fills the space between Heaven and human beings with thousands of idols, hero-deities, patron gods of particular professions, territorial gods, gods of natural forces, and founders and deities of both Buddhism and Taoism. These spirits together form a hierarchy that is modeled after the imperial bureaucracy, and the world is represented as the arena where these divine powers interact. The common people visit temples of all sorts to pray for material gain, making no distinction between idols of sages, deities, Taoist immortals, and Buddhas in their forms of worship or offerings. Over ninety per cent of the Chinese people behave in this fashion.

Since all parts of the world are thought to be connected sympathetically through a mystical medium, people believe it is possible to change or manipulate their destinies, which are controlled by the spirits, for selfish ends by using a variety of occult means such as dream reading, horoscopes, numerology, spirit possession, and calendar calculation. Ethical injunctions from the gods do not come to humankind as fixed laws; rather, a person turns to the gods in order to receive blessings. In other words, the gods are merely objects of occult practices and are worshipped by those seeking material reward. This phenomenon is a sign that the masses have received no systematic, collective religious education from religious

organizations.

In principle, this religion accomplishes its ends when, as the rites of a patrimonial empire, the Son of Heaven worships and makes offerings to Heaven and Earth (in this case, the worship of Heaven coincides with ancestor worship) and thus brings the order of Heaven to completion, causing the grace of Heaven and Earth to permeate the realm. The cultivation of human nature was left to Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, all of which espoused the unity of the Three Teachings. Therefore, the "emperor-papalism" of the Chinese Empire was not favorably disposed toward heterodox sects that challenged its own religious authority by organizing the people and giving them religious education. It subjected religion to state control and tended to keep it separated from society. For this reason, the masses were deprived of religious training within an established religious institution or organization and were abandoned to the various animistic popular cults.

It is difficult to find a motivating force for modernization in this religious context. Even the Chinese merchant ethic [YU 1987] was a rationality based on credit that was itself founded on human relations. It was thus fundamentally different from the motivating force for a rational and impersonal economy.

In modern times, the traditional religions of China are unable to respond to social change and can be described as being in a state of disintegration. Destruction of the empire and suspension of the civil service examination have caused the dissolution of the literati class which had been the bearer of Confucianism, and Confucian moralism came under attack as a "cannibalistic feudal morality." However, the communist compatriot ethic, born of the smelting furnace of revolution and once seen as a substitute social ethic, was devastated by the Cultural Revolution and has since been losing its effectiveness in society. Nationalistic socialism will likely be emphasized and maintained as a unifying principle, but as economic modernization progresses, the entailing ethical confusion will intensify. When that time comes, Confucian moralism that advocates cultivation of human nature but which is detached from any philosophical cosmology will emerge as a subject that must be dealt with by the socialist government. This is because Chinese religion has generated no alternative rational social ethic. Yet it is thought that the religious needs of the people will exceed even this ethic.

If we recognize the characteristics of capitalistic modernization as being the depopulation of rural areas, emigration and urbanization (people gradually losing touch with the villages), the formation of nuclear families, atomization and depersonalization resulting from industrialization, the weakening of interpersonal bonds, and rationalization of social institutions and social life, then the only possible refuge for those who are afflicted by poverty and other adversities amid these social changes is occult beliefs in the spirits, the cults of the supernatural that were described at the beginning of this article. Or, it might be said that magical religion which provides one-shot solution to problems of poverty and misfortune without imposing a coherent worldview is more suitable than soteriology for an advanced in-

dustrial society. Taiwan is a good example of this development, and Taiwan also shows the tendency of people to form religious communities around particular individuals in possession of secret methods. In socialist China, for reasons of political ideology, these religious tendencies are being suppressed and forced into the framework of recognized major religions. But as long as China cannot avoid modernization, social changes will take on different forms as social institutions evolve, and sooner or later the country will experience a resurgence of popular religion of the same kind as that witnessed in Taiwan. And I believe we have already seen the portents of this change.

Translated by Timothy Tsu

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