call you a bird or a beast? Yet you possess a human face. What a fate to be born with such base qualities!"[11]

As the crisis of the peasant economy deepened and signs of social and political malaise appeared for all to see, three kinds of reactions occurred: an intensified power struggle around the throne, intellectual efforts to diagnose and prescribe for the ills of the times, and mass alienation and revolt among the peasantry. These three sets of reactions worked themselves out in the last desperate years of the Han and under its feeble successor states. In doing so they left a society shaken and riven to its foundations—a promising seed-bed for the implantation of alien ideas and institutions.

[11] Quoted and translated, *ibid.*, p. 112, from an essay by Ts'ui Yin written in the period A.D. 89–106. For the text, cf. *Ch'uan Shang-ku san-tai . . . wen* (reprint of 1894), ch. 44, p. 5.

Wright: Buddhism in Chinese History I

CHAPTER TWO

THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION

A poet-official, writing about A.D. 130, evokes for us a scene of imperial revelry in the old Han capital of Ch'ang-an. After describing the course of a gay entertainment, he speaks of the dancing girls:

> Kicking off their vermilion slippers among the trays and flagons, they flapped their long flowing sleeves. Their handsome faces, their sumptuous clothes, were radiant with beauty. With their lovely eyes they cast bewitching glances upon the company. One look at them would make one surrender a city. Even if one were as sternly upright as old Liu Hsia-hui or a Buddhist Śramana, one could not but be captivated.[1]

In these lines we have evidence that Buddhist monks were an accepted part of the life of Ch'ang-an, well enough

[1] *Hsi-ching fu* ("Rhyme-prose on the Western Capital"), by Chang Heng (78–139), *Wen-hsüan,* ch. 2, pp. 59–60. Professor Wada Sei believes this to be the first casual reference to Buddhism in China and thus the earliest incontrovertible evidence of its presence there. Cf. Wada's article "Concerning the Date of the Eastward Transmission of Buddhism," in *Sasaki kyōju koki kinen shukuga rombun bunshū* ("A Collection of Essays in Honor of Professor Sasaki's Seventieth Birthday") (Tokyo, 1955), pp. 491–501. But the Buddhist observances of Ying, Prince of Ch'u, in the year A.D. 65, are established beyond reasonable doubt. Cf., *inter alia,* H. Maspero, "Le Songe et l'ambassade de l'empereur Ming," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient,* X (1910), 95–130.

known for their ascetic lives to figure in a poet's imagery. There is other evidence that Buddhism had, by this time, been making its way slowly into China for more than half a century. Yet there are, in these early years, few signs of its influence on Chinese life and thought. When we seek an explanation for this, we find that on two quite different levels the preconditions for the spread of its influence had not yet developed. On one level the breakdown of the Han synthesis of thought and institutions had not yet so alienated Chinese of all classes as to make them responsive to new ideas and institutions, particularly those of alien origin. On another level Buddhism had not yet gone through the preliminary process of adaptation which would make it accessible and intelligible to the Chinese. These two processes are the subjects of this chapter, and as we follow them down to the end of the third century, we shall discover some of the grounds on which it seems appropriate to call this period the Period of Preparation.

In resuming our account of the decline and collapse of the Han synthesis, we shall deal first with the deepening crisis as it affected the life and thought of the elite and then turn to the effects of breakdown on the peasant masses.

The many-sided struggle for power around the decaying Han throne became more and more intense in the second half of the second century.[2] Entrenched families of great wealth and an assured hold on lucrative offices watched with alarm the rise of new families whose rapacity

[2] In what follows I draw heavily on Etienne Balazs' brilliant article "La Crise sociale et la philosophie politique à la fin des Han," *T'oung-pao*, XXIX (1949), 83–131.

was unchecked by any commitment to the welfare of the realm. Many of these families established themselves through the favor of a member who became empress, and they manipulated the imperial succession for their own selfish ends. The eunuchs, personal servitors of the ruler, used their position of proximity to power to enrich themselves and to secure favors, not only for their relatives but also, as Balazs suggests, for a considerable clientele of merchants and manufacturers. The eunuchs and their group matched in avarice the clans of the empresses' relatives.

Against these powerful groups were ranged the literate provincial gentry who had claimed and rationalized their access to public office in the early days of the Han. As they were successively deprived of power by the contending groups at the capital, they sought collectively to check and repair the decline in their fortunes. As they agitated ceaselessly for reform, their denunciations of their rivals, their prophecies of doom, their outcries against an extravagant and iniquitous government, echoed in the capital and in the provinces. Throughout the country their criticisms of corrupt officials cast in the form of character estimates (*ch'ing-i*) helped to rally the disaffected to the literati cause.

The struggle among the four groups—the entrenched great families, the eunuchs, the *nouveaux riches*, and the intelligentsia—broke into violence in A.D. 166 when the eunuchs moved against the intelligentsia. The sordid sequence of slander, massacre, and assassination which followed weakened the whole upper stratum of Chinese so-

ciety. Split by conflicting power interests, by violent hatreds and vendettas, by the constant struggle for wealth and property, the upper class oppressed and abused the peasant masses without check or restraint. As the countryside sank further into chaos, the peasantry were without recourse, and waited in sullen discontent for the moment to rise in mass rebellion.

In these years of crisis, reflective Chinese speculated on what had befallen their state and society, on the precarious and unsatisfying lives they led. They sought to diagnose the ills of the time and to find prescriptions. In the early phases of this searching reappraisal of the values and institutions of the Han, they carried further the naturalistic critique of Han Confucianism, but they were reluctant to renounce all the principles of order, hierarchy, and stability which that synthesis had provided. What we then find is a humanizing of Confucianism, a stripping away of the religious and symbolic accretions of the early Han, a search for a new immanent principle of order in the universe, a concentration on the individual human being and the ways in which he might hope to understand and to realize himself. In this quest many thinkers turned to the long-neglected "classics" of Taoism, the *Chuang-tzu* and the *Tao-te ching*, and it was this tradition of Chinese thought—used first to refine and reform Confucianism—that was to become dominant from about the year 250 onward.

But meanwhile scholars were reviving other schools of thought, in an effort to provide an explanation of the ills of the dying Han regime and a formula for the restoration

of a workable polity. The School of Alliances (*Realpolitik*) attracted a following among the contenders for power, while others of more speculative temper turned to the long-neglected works of the Logicians for their ideas as well as for their techniques of disputation. The Legalist or Realist tradition commended itself to some who saw harsh and uniform laws as the only means of eliminating abuses and restoring the strength of the state. Wang Fu (ca. 90–165) was led to this view by his searching critique of the society from which he had withdrawn in protest. Ts'ui Shih (ca. 110–?), from his intense practical activity within the decaying political structure, developed a dislike of Confucian homilies equaled only by his hatred of the idle and extravagant holders of capital sinecures. His experience led him to feel that only strong and uniform laws could rebuild state and society, that addiction to ancient formulas would produce nothing but inanition and final disintegration. Such Legalist prescriptions for an ailing society contributed directly and indirectly to discrediting still further the already tarnished Confucian tradition. Yet it was the cataclysm of mass revolt and political collapse which inspired further and more searching attacks on the old orthodoxy, bringing it at last into something like total disrepute.

The peasantry toward the end of the second century was in a mood of desperation. As we noted earlier, the numbers of displaced persons steadily rose, and serious drought and famine brought further suffering and disaffection. The leaders who now appeared offered much to the oppressed and bewildered peasants: religious faith

centered on the cults of popular Taoism, the security of a religious community, functions and careers in that community, a reorganized and stable society at the local level. The leaders of religious Taoism set up what we might call sub-governments, regimes which offered the masses those essentials of life which the Han government had long ceased to provide. It was not surprising that the new organizations grew and spread throughout much of the empire. One source says that the leader of the Taoist communities in eastern China commanded the allegiance of the masses in eight provinces which then constituted two-thirds of the empire.[3] As the Taoist leadership consolidated its power, it came to command sufficient resources to challenge the enfeebled Han government. It did so in the Yellow Turban rebellions of 184 in the east and 189 in the west.

For a brief moment the quarreling factions at the Han court united in an organized military effort to crush this threat to their privileged positions. What followed was a holocaust which cost millions of lives and laid waste province after province. The Han forces triumphed, but, instead of uniting in the restoration of orderly government, the warring factions again turned on one another. The literati and the noble families combined to liquidate the eunuchs and their followers, but the structure and authority of government were completely eroded, and power passed to a series of strong men, military adventurers who had built up personal armies and regional bases in the war against the Yellow Turbans. As Balazs says, "With their bands

[3] Cf. Howard S. Levy, "Yellow Turban Religion and Rebellion at the End of Han," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, LXXVI (1956), 214–27.

of tattered and starving mercenaries, vagabonds, ex-convicts, landless peasants, nondescript intellectuals without occupations, men with neither faith nor law, they dominated the scene for thirty years."[4] One of these military adventurers, Ts'ao Ts'ao, at last managed to gain control of North China, but his efforts to reconstitute a unified centralized state were in the end frustrated by the great landed families which had fastened their hold on local wealth and power in the declining years of the Han. The Chin dynasty, which seized power from Ts'ao Ts'ao's heirs in 265, made its peace with the great families, but in acknowledging the degree of refeudalization which had occurred, the Chin fatally compromised its effectiveness as a central government. It was powerless to carry through necessary economic and social reforms. It was soon weakened by a many-sided struggle for the succession known as the War of the Eight Princes (290–306), and in much of North China, as the fourth century opened, the Chin had only a shadow of effective control over large areas ravaged by famine, plague, drought, and mass migrations of starving people.

This somber sequence of events had worked the ruin of a once great empire. Economically, the empire had fallen far from the height of Han prosperity. Socially, it was divided, with the great landed families working masses of sullen serfs in any way they pleased, and with a few literati families clinging precariously to the shreds of their traditions in conditions of poverty and insecurity. It was politically weak and unstable—a prey to internal divisions and external threats. The breakdown of the ecumenical

[4] Balazs, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

order of the Han was virtually complete, and it was this breakdown, as we suggested earlier, which permitted the spread of Buddhism throughout the Chinese world.

Before turning to an account of the ways in which Buddhism was simultaneously being prepared for this expansion, we should consider briefly some of the ways in which thoughtful Chinese continued to analyze their ailing society and to seek solutions to their problems; for it was this urgent quest for a new basis for life and thought that created a favorable climate for the spread of Buddhism among the elite.

Among all the philosophies that were revived in the crisis of the declining Han, it was a form of Taoism that proved to have the strongest appeal in the subsequent period of social and political cataclysm. For a generation thoughtful men only gradually and reluctantly abandoned their efforts to reconcile ideas of order and hierarchy from the Confucian tradition with the ideas they had rediscovered in the classics of philosophic Taoism. But as hope for the restoration of a Han order faded and as Confucian ideas became part of the ideology of the tyrannical but incompetent rulers of a divided China, the interest of intellectuals focused directly on the ideas of philosophic Taoism. They sought in the Taoist classics some clue to their collective plight, some answer to the problems of a civilization in crisis, some formula for the life of a thinking man in a dark and uneasy age. As their search continued, their rejection of earlier Confucian ideals became sharp and complete. Here is a bitter criticism of the old Confucian stereotype of the princely perfected man which stresses his inadaptability in an age of cataclysmic change:

> Have you never seen a louse living in a pair of trousers? He flees from a deep seam and hides in a break in the padding, and he regards this as a good home. When he travels he dares not leave the seam; when he moves he dares not come out of the trousers. He feels that he has attained a well-regulated life. When he is hungry he bites a man and regards this as an inexhaustible food supply. But flames overrun the hills, fire spreads, villages and towns are burned up. And all the lice will perish in the trousers, being unable to get out. As for your "princely man" [*chün-tzu*] living in a world of his own, how does he differ from a louse living in a pair of trousers?[5]

The rejection of discredited rules and conventions was complete, but what did these bitter and disillusioned men seek and what did they find in the Taoist tradition? The central idea which they developed and found irresistibly attractive was "naturalness," (*tzu-jan*), which, as Balazs has pointed out, has three associated meanings: (1) nature without human intervention—the self-perpetuating balanced order of nature; (2) the spontaneous liberty of the individual—the endowment, as it were, of the natural man, free of the restraints of convention; (3) the "Absolute"—another name for *Tao*, the principle of harmonious vitality which informs all phenomena.[6]

The men whose thought centered on this principle expressed themselves in a variety of ways. At the most intellectual level they speculated brilliantly about the nature of

[5] *Chin-shu* ("History of the Chin Dynasty"), ch. 49, p. 6b. I have modified my earlier translation in the light of Balazs', which appears in his "Entre Révolte nihiliste et évasion mystique: Les Courants intellectuels en Chine au III^e^ siècle de notre ère," *Etudes asiatiques*, II (1948), 40.

[6] Cf. Balazs, "Entre Révolte nihiliste . . . ," pp. 34–35.

life and the social and individual malaise which they found around them. They did this in the form of dialogues or conversations known as *ch'ing-t'an*, in which the vocabulary and the metaphors—the range of problems—were defined by the three books which they found most meaningful: the *Chuang-tzu*, the *Lao-tzu* (*Tao-te ching*), and the *I-ching* or Classic of Changes. They also expressed themselves in behavior, and as one would expect, this often meant the dramatic flouting of authority, social conventions, and family morality. They proclaimed the primacy of "naturalness" over man-made rules whose futility was evident in the corrupt society around them:

> Liu Ling was an inveterate drinker and indulged himself to the full. Sometimes he stripped off his clothes and sat in his room stark naked. Some men saw him and rebuked him. Liu Ling said, "Heaven and earth are my dwelling, and my house is my trousers. Why are you all coming into my trousers?"[7]

Yet for all their brilliance and courage the neo-Taoists found no positive means of restoring a viable society. As time went on, some retreated into pure escapism; others made a cynical peace with the corrupt tyrants they despised. And after the great flowering of neo-Taoist thought in the years 240 to 260, its creative vitality waned and its ideas became accepted topics of polite conversation in the palaces of the rich and powerful. Its mode of discourse—*ch'ing-t'an*—was no longer a speculative instrument but a plaything of vacuous and cynical aristocrats who watched idly as China slid further into chaos. Arthur Waley has characterized one of these men, the prime minister under whose regime all of North China was finally lost to the barbarians:

> He belonged to one of the most distinguished families in China . . . and was descended from a long line of high officials. He was famous for his great beauty and in particular for the jade-like whiteness of his hands. He subscribed to the theory that though exceptional people acquire transcendent powers through the cult of *le néant* (to use M. Sartre's convenient term) inferior people (among whom he modestly ranked himself) must be content if through their cult of the *néant* they manage (in a dangerous world) to save their own skins. He did his best to take a negative line towards everything, merely to drift with the tide of events.[8]

This suggests the atmosphere among the elite on the eve of the catastrophic loss of North China—a debacle which, as we shall see in the next chapter, had incalculable psychological, social, and cultural consequences in the centuries that followed. Clearly the final breakup of the Han system and the failure to find an acceptable basis for a new order provided conditions in which an alien religion might be expected to find a following.

Throughout this period of the decline and disintegration of the Han order, Buddhism was slowly spreading and taking root in scattered centers throughout the empire. The geographical distribution of these centers testifies to the

[7] *Shih-shuo hsin yü*, by Liu I-ch'ing (401–44), ch. IIIA, p. 29. On Liu Ling and his contemporaries, see Donald Holzman, *La Vie et la pensée de Hi K'ang* (Leiden, 1957) and "Les Sept Sages de la Forêt des Bambous et la société de leur temps," *T'oung-pao*, XLIV (1956), 317–46.

[8] Arthur Waley, "The Fall of Loyang," *History Today*, No. 4 (1951), p. 8.

fact that Buddhism spread from the Indo-Iranian and Serindian kingdoms of Central Asia along the routes of trade between those kingdoms and China proper; in China itself, the new religion then moved along the main routes of internal trade and communication. And many of the early missionaries had names which clearly indicate that they came from one or another of the great trading centers of Central Asia. The northwestern entrepôt of Tun-huang figures early as a Buddhist center, and there is evidence of early communities in Ch'ang-an and Loyang, in southern Shantung and Anhui, in the lower Yangtse valley, and in the area around the modern Wu-ch'ang. On the far southeast coast Indian traders brought Buddhism to the Chinese outpost of Chiao-chou.

In these early years of its slow penetration, Buddhism did not influence the major social and intellectual movements we have described. There is no evidence that the great thinkers of neo-Taoism knew of it, and the religious Taoism which spread among the disaffected masses was wholly of Chinese origin. Early Chinese princes and emperors who gave Buddhism limited patronage were persuaded for a time that this Buddha might be a divinity of sufficient power to be worth propitiating, and he is often called Huang-lao fou-t'u—a name which suggests that his worshipers saw him as part of the growing pantheon of religious Taoism. The range of the early imperfect translations of Buddhist writings indicates that the few Chinese who became interested in the foreign religion were attracted by its novel formulas for the attainment of supernatural powers, immortality, or salvation and not by its

ideas. This early Buddhism was generally regarded as a sect of religious Taoism. And, indeed, as Maspero suggested, Taoist communities may have served to spread certain Buddhist symbols and cults, thus playing a role somewhat analogous to that of the Jewish communities which helped spread early Christianity in the Roman world.

Keeping in mind these rather unpropitious beginnings, we might pause to consider the cultural gulf which had to be bridged before this Indian religion could be made intelligible to the Chinese. No languages are more different than those of China and India. Chinese is uninflected, logographic, and (in its written form) largely monosyllabic; Indian languages are highly inflected, alphabetic, polysyllabic. Chinese has no systematized grammar; Indian languages, particularly Sanskrit, have a formal and highly elaborated grammatical system. When we turn to literary modes, we find that the Chinese preference is for terseness, for metaphors from familiar nature, for the concrete image, whereas Indian literature tends to be discursive, hyperbolic in its metaphors, and full of abstractions. The imaginative range expressed in Chinese literature—even in the Taoist classics—is far more limited, more earthbound, than in the colorful writings of the Indian tradition.

In their attitudes toward the individual the two traditions were poles apart at the beginnings of the invasion of Buddhism. The Chinese had shown little disposition to analyze the personality into its components, while India had a highly developed science of psychological analysis. In concepts of time and space there were also striking dif-

ferences. The Chinese tended to think of both as finite and to reckon time in life-spans, generations, or political eras; the Indians, on the other hand, conceived of time and space as infinite and tended to think of cosmic eons rather than of units of terrestrial life.

The two traditions diverged most critically in their social and political values. Familism and particularistic ethics continued to be influential among the Chinese even in an age of cataclysmic change, while Mahayana Buddhism taught a universal ethic and a doctrine of salvation outside the family. Whereas Chinese thinkers had long concentrated their efforts on formulas for the good society, Indian and Buddhist thought had laid particular stress upon the pursuit of other-worldly goals.

It was in the third century—when the certainty of the Chinese about their ideas and values was progressively undermined—that these cultural gulfs began to be bridged. It was in that period that there began in earnest the long process of adapting Buddhism to Chinese culture, preparing it for a wider and fuller acceptance among Chinese of all classes.

The first we hear of Buddhist worship combined with a social program for a whole community is the case of a Han local official who, in 191, built a temple in northern Kiangsu and instituted community welfare services designed to ameliorate some of the ills of an impoverished and demoralized peasantry.[9] Significantly, this short-lived

[9] See T'ang Yung-t'ung, *Han Wei liang Chin Nan-pei Ch'ao Fo-chiao shih* (*"History of Buddhism in the Han, Western and Eastern Chin, and Nan-pei Ch'ao periods"*) (Ch'ang-sha, 1938), pp. 71–73. Maspero has suggested that this community may have been historically linked to the early Taoistic-Buddhist community at P'eng-ch'eng fostered by Prince Ying of Han, who died in A.D. 71. See "Les Origines de la communauté bouddhiste de Lo-yang," *Journal asiatique*, CCXXV (1934), 91–92.

experiment was carried on in an area which had recently been a center of Yellow Turban dissidence and revolt. It is possible to see in the sketchy record of this community something of the pattern of adaptation to local Chinese society which was to be more fully developed in the following centuries.

Early efforts to translate Buddhist scriptures were carried on under difficult conditions. Patrons of this work were superstitious and fickle; wars and rebellions disrupted many such enterprises. The early missionaries knew little if any Chinese, and their Chinese collaborators knew no Indian or Central Asian language. There was little communication among scattered Buddhist centers, and hence little chance for one translator to profit from the experience of others. These undertakings recall the efforts of the early Christian missionaries in China; both were hopeful poolings of faith, enthusiasm, and ignorance, and the results in both cases were very imperfect translations of alien ideas into Chinese. Little by little the technique of translation improved. But it was not until 286, in Demiéville's view, that a translation appeared which made the speculative ideas of the Mahayana accessible and reasonably intelligible to literate Chinese.[10] This was the work of Dharmarakśa, who had been born in Tun-huang and had spoken Chinese

[10] See Paul Demiéville, "La Pénétration du Bouddhisme dans la tradition philosophique chinoise," *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, III (1956), 19–38. This was Dharmarakśa's translation of one of the visions of the *Prajñā-pāramitā sūtra*.

from childhood. Associated with him were a father and a son—two Chinese lay adherents—who were the first serious Chinese Buddhist exegetists. Their efforts were uncertain and fumbling, but they began the long and important Chinese tradition of commentary which interpreted Buddhist ideas in Chinese terms.

In these early efforts—in oral discourse, written translation, and exegesis—to present Buddhist ideas in Chinese language and metaphor, there was necessarily a heavy reliance on the terms and concepts of indigenous traditions. Buddhism had somehow to be "translated" into terms that Chinese could understand. The terms of neo-Taoism were the most appropriate for attempting to render the transcendental notions of Buddhism; also useful were the Confucian classics, which continued to be studied despite the waning authority of the state orthodoxy. Thus, for example, the ancient and honored word *tao*, the key term of philosophic Taoism, was sometimes used to render the Buddhist term *dharma*, "the teaching"; in other cases it was used to translate *bodhi*, "enlightenment," or again *yoga*. The Taoist term for immortals, *chen-jen*, served as a translation of the Buddhist word *Arhat*, "the fully enlightened one." *Wu-wei*, "non-action," was used to render the Buddhist term for ultimate release, *nirvana*. The Confucian expression *hsiao-hsün*, "filial submission and obedience," was used to translate the more general and abstract Sanskrit word *śīla*, "morality."

In the process of translation some passages and expressions deemed offensive to Confucian morality were bowdlerized or omitted. Thus words like "kiss" and "embrace"

—Indian gestures of love and respect for a Bodhisattva—were simply eliminated. The relatively high position which Buddhism gave to women and mothers was changed in these early translations. For example, "Husband supports wife" became "The husband controls his wife," and "The wife comforts the husband" became "The wife reveres her husband."[11]

These examples must suffice to suggest the subtle ways in which Buddhism was prepared and adapted for a Chinese audience through "translation." A more formal and overt kind of adaptation is found in the system known as *ko-i*, "matching concepts." This device, which was prevalent in the second and third centuries, was probably favored in the oral exposition of Buddhist teachings. Typically it consisted of choosing a grouping of Buddhist ideas and matching them with a plausibly analogous grouping of indigenous ideas. We noted earlier the tendency in Han Confucianism to analyze phenomena in terms of the five elements, the five colors, and so on. In *ko-i* the process is taken up to "explain" Indian ideas, to present the unknown not only in familiar terminology but also in familiar numerical groupings. For example, the Buddhist Mahābhūtas (four elements) were "paired" for explanatory purposes with the Chinese five elements (*wu-hsing*), and the five normative virtues of Confucianism (*wu-ch'ang*) were equated with the five precepts for the behavior of Buddhist

[11] Nakamura Hajime, "The Influence of Confucian Ethics on the Chinese Translations of Buddhist Sutras," *Sino-Indian Studies: Liebenthal Festschrift* (Santiniketan, 1957), pp. 156–70. The equivalence *śila–hsiao-hsün* as found in the *Nāgasena-sūtra* is noted by Demiéville in *T'oung-pao*, XLV (1957), 263.

lay adherents. Many of these pairings were forced. In the words of a Buddhist monk writing in the early fifth century, "At the end of the Han and the beginning of the Wei . . . worthies who sought the essence of Buddhist ideas had, for the first time, fixed lecturing places. They inflated their lectures with *ko-i* and distorted them with paired explanations."[12]

Still another means of adapting and explaining Buddhism to the Chinese was apologetic writing. In such writing generally there was a defense of the alien system which not only extolled its merits but also pointed to ways in which it was either consonant with certain indigenous ideas and values or complementary to them. An apologetic has a special value for the study of the interaction of two traditions because the points at which defense is felt to be necessary are invariably the points of greatest conflict between the two systems of ideas. The earliest apologetic which has come down to us was written at the end of the second century by a Chinese scholar-official who had fled to Chiao-chou (in modern Tongking) to escape the social and political upheavals in his native province. His volume is a kind of cyclopedia of the points at which Buddhism had to be reconciled with or adapted to Chinese tradition. In question-answer form he considers the claims of an alien tradition versus the claims of a native tradition, familism versus monasticism, Sinocentrism versus Indocentrism, the ritual and behavioral prescriptions of the Chinese classics versus those of the Buddhist canon, Chinese prudential economics versus Buddhist generosity, and Chinese conceptions of finite human existence versus Buddhist ideas of transmigration. The apologist in his defense of Buddhism is supple and adroit; he reaches into the varied texts of both Confucianism and Taoism to find passages which appear to sanction a Buddhist belief or practice. At last his questioner taxes him:

[12] Cf. T'ang Yung-t'ung, "On 'Ko-yi,' the Earliest Method by which Indian Buddhism and Chinese Thought were Synthesized," *Radhakrishnan: Comparative Studies in Philosophy Presented in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday* (New York, 1950), pp. 276–86. My translation from the *Yü-i lun* of Hui-jui (352–436) in *Taishō Daizōkyō*, LV, p. 41b, differs slightly from Professor T'ang's.

> "You, sir, say that the Buddhist scriptures are like the Yangtze and the Ocean, their style like brocade and embroidery. Why do you not draw on them to answer my questions? Why instead do you quote the *Classic of Poetry* and the *Classic of History*, bringing together things that are different to make them appear the same?"

The apologist replies:

> "I knew that you were familiar with the ideas of the Chinese Classics, and for this reason I quoted from them. If I had spoken in the words of the Buddhist scriptures or discoursed on the essence of inaction [philosophic Taoism], it would have been like speaking of the five colors to a blind man or playing the five sounds to one who is deaf."[13]

This process of explaining the unknown in terms of the known was universal in this period of preparation. It would be mistaken to attribute to these scattered apologists, missionaries, and native propagators of the faith anything like a

[13] The text of the *Li-huo-lun* here translated is found in *Taishō*, LII, 5. Cf. the translation by Paul Pelliot in "Meou-tseu, ou Les Doutes levés," *T'oung-pao*, XIX (1920). The passage also appears in the draft of chap. 15 of *Sources of the Chinese Tradition*.

common strategy, but they all had a common inclination to graft the alien onto native roots. They might well have been following the dictum of the Jesuit Father Bouvet, who wrote some 1,400 years later: "I do not believe that there is anything in the world more proper to dispose the spirit and the heart of the Chinese to embrace our holy religion than to make them see how it is in conformity with their ancient and legitimate philosophy."[14]

As we suggested in our survey of the breakdown of the old order, the ensuing age of questioning, of social and intellectual discontent, rendered Chinese of all classes receptive to a great variety of new ideas and attitudes; to these Buddhism was more readily adapted than it ever could have been to the rigid closed system of the Han.

We may close this chapter with a summary of the progress that Buddhism was making in the increasingly favorable social and intellectual climate of the third and early fourth centuries. The first Chinese Buddhist pilgrim had journeyed to the west and returned with sacred texts. Foreign translators came in increasing number, and Chinese learned to work with them more effectively than ever before. The volume of translated works steadily increased; from an average of only 2.5 works translated per year in the period up to A.D. 220, it rose to 9.4 works per year in the period 265–317.[15] While the range of early translations had been

[14] A letter dated August 30, 1697, quoted in Henri Bernard-Maître, *Sagesse chinoise et philosophie chrétienne* (Sien-Sien, 1935), p. 145.

[15] The figures on total number of known works—whether lost or extant—are drawn from Tokiwa Daijō, *Yakugyō sōroku* ("General List of Translated Scriptures") (Tokyo, 1938), pp. 11–17. These numbers are 409 for the period ca. 65–220, 253 for the period 220–265, and 491 for the period 265–317.

narrow and unrepresentative, by the end of the third century a variety of both Hinayana and Mahayana works had been translated. The Prajñā sutras had been introduced, the texts which were later to form the basis of the Pure Land faith had appeared in their first Chinese translations, and basic rules for ordination and the conduct of monastic life were made available for the first time. Buddhist psalmody was introduced, though the story that this was the work of a prince of the Wei ruling house has recently been called into doubt.[16]

Geographically, Buddhism continued to spread, and toward the end of this period it became solidly established in the middle Yangtze valley, as well as in the older centers of the north. By about the year 300, Buddhist establishments in the two northern capitals of Ch'ang-an and Loyang numbered 180 and their clergy some 3,700.[17] There is evidence that Chinese architects had begun to translate the Indian stupa form into the pagodas that were eventually to dot the landscape of the empire, while sculptors and painters had taken the first steps toward the development of a Sino-Buddhist art.

In turning to the next period, we shall emphasize the continuity of this process of cultural interaction. There were no sharp breaks, but rather a slow complex interweaving of Chinese and Indian elements in the steadily changing context of an evolving Chinese society.

[16] Cf. K. P. K. Whitaker, "Tsaur Jyr and the Introduction of Fannbay into China," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XX (1957), 585–97.

[17] *Pien-cheng lun*, ch. 3, in *Taishō*, LII, 502. The figures are for the Western Chin period, 265–317.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PERIOD OF DOMESTICATION

> And, Sir, the last Emperor—so they say—fled from Saragh [Loyang] because of the famine, and his palace and walled city were set on fire. . . . So Saragh is no more, Ngap [the great city of Yeh, further north] no more!

In these words a Sogdian merchant, writing back to his partner in Samarkand, recorded the destruction of the Chinese capital—an imposing city of 600,000—and the shameful flight of the Son of Heaven before the oncoming Huns. The year was 311, and it marks a turning point in Chinese history comparable, as Arthur Waley has suggested, to the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410. Within the next few years, the Chinese had lost their second capital and the whole of North China—the heartland of their culture—to the Huns. The steady erosion of the central power and the refeudalization which was both its cause and its corollary had progressively weakened Chinese control of the northern and central provinces. The effete aristocrats who served the enfeebled throne had neither the will nor the talent to reverse the tide. Wang Yen, the last Prime Minister—he of the jade-white hands and the addiction to the neo-Taoist principle of *le néant*—was taken prisoner and protested to

his captors that he had never been interested in politics. The rude chief of the barbarian forces is said to have rebuked him, saying, "You took office when you were quite young, made a name for yourself everywhere within the Four Seas, and now hold the highest office. How can you say that you have never had political ambitions? If any one man is responsible for the ruin of the Empire, it is you."[1]

After the catastrophic loss of the north, members of the Chinese elite fled in large numbers to the area south of the Yangtze, and for nearly three hundred years thereafter the country was politically divided between unstable Chinese dynasties with their capital at Nanking and a succession of non-Chinese states controlling all or part of the north. In the south the Chinese developed a new culture. They clung tenaciously and defensively to every strand of tradition that linked them with the past glory of the Han. Yet they lived and worked in an area that had been a colonial province of the Han—a land whose aboriginal peoples were only gradually converted to Chinese culture. In climate, landscape, crops, diet, and architecture and in many other ways, it contrasted sharply with the northern plains on which their ancestors had begun to shape a distinctive Chinese civilization. Those ancestral plains were now the scene of wars between rival barbarian chiefs, of a succession of institutional experiments designed to perpetuate the rule of alien minorities and

[1] The above is drawn from Arthur Waley, "The Fall of Loyang," *History Today*, No. 4 (1951), pp. 7–10. The contemporary Sogdian letter, found in the ruins of a watchtower west of Tun-huang, was translated by W. B. Henning. The account of Wang Yen's interview with the Hun chief Shih Lo is found in *Chin-shu chiao-chu*, ch. 43, p. 25; the rebuke may well have been attributed to Shih Lo by later historians moralizing on the loss of the north.

keep the Chinese in their place. Thus in this period Buddhism had to be adapted not to one but to two evolving cultures, one in the north and one in the south, with different needs. In the following pages we shall examine these two patterns of interaction from the beginning of the age of disunion to the sixth century, when they converged and culminated to usher in the great period of independent growth.

THE SOUTH

When we speak of the area of the Yangtze valley and below in the period of disunion, we must banish from our minds the picture of the densely populated, intensively cultivated South China of recent centuries. When the aristocrats and the remnants of the Chin ruling house fled to the Nanking area early in the fourth century, the south contained perhaps a tenth of the population of China. There were centers of Chinese culture and administration, but around most of these lay vast uncolonized areas into which Chinese settlers were slow to move.

The old provincial families of the Yangtze valley tended to be conservative; they clung to the traditions of Confucian learning which the northern aristocrats had long since discarded in favor of neo-Taoist speculation. Indeed, some southerners blamed the pursuit of "naturalness" among northern statesmen for the catastrophe which had befallen the empire.[2] Tension between the southern Chinese and the

[2] See the accusation against the neo-Taoists made by Yü Yü in *Chin-shu chiao-chu*, ch. 82, p. 15. He goes on to say that the barbarian occupation of North China is worse than the decay of the Chou dynasty. On the southern provincial gentry as preservers of Confucian learning, see T'ang Chang-ju, *Wei Chin Nan-pei Ch'ao shih lun-ts'ung* ("Essays on the History of the Wei, Chin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties") (Peking, 1955), pp. 371–81.

immigrants from the north arose quickly and persisted for several generations, but in the end both contributed to an elite southern culture. In this culture the literary traditions of the Han were continued and developed; Confucian learning was preserved to provide links with the proud past and an ideology of dynastic and cultural legitimacy which in a measure reassured those who now controlled only the periphery of a once great and united empire. The supremacy of birth over talent, a concept which had gained ground in the last years of the Han, was here affirmed as the social basis of the only remaining "Chinese" state. At the same time the Neo-Taoism brought in by the northern émigrés fitted congenially into the picturesque and dramatic scenery of the Yangtze valley and found devotees among those aristocrats whose shaken confidence was not to be restored by hollow claims that they were the "legitimate" masters of the "Central Kingdom"; these were men who sought something immutable in a time of disaster, or perhaps an escape into nature from a human scene they found intolerable. It was in this cultural milieu that a characteristic southern Buddhism developed in the period of disunion.

This Buddhism was initially molded—in its concepts, its centers of speculative interest, its vocabulary—by neo-Taoism. Much of the discussion of Buddhist ideas was carried on in neo-Taoism's favored mode: the dialogue or colloquy known as *ch'ing-t'an*. As we have seen, the philosophic vitality of neo-Taoism was already a thing of the past,

and *ch'ing-t'an* had been transformed from a speculative instrument into the drawing room pastime of an effete and disillusioned aristocracy. But despite its philosophical failures and the political and personal failures of its devotees, neo-Taoism had broken the anachronistic shell of Han Confucianism and widened and deepened the speculative range of Chinese thought. It had gone on to raise questions which could not be answered by reference to the poetical images of its favorite texts, the *Chuang-tzu* and the *Lao-tzu*.

The Chinese converts to Buddhism who began to move among the salons of the southern capital and then to Buddhist centers as these became established throughout the south were men of a certain definable type. Demiéville has suggested that Hui-yüan (334–416) was typical of the Chinese literati who turned to Buddhism.[3] His early training was in Confucian classics, and he taught for a time at a Confucian school. But along with this he developed a strong intellectual interest—or problem interest—in the *Lao-tzu* and the *Chuang-tzu* and achieved a mastery of these texts. Then one day when he heard a famous monk lecture on the Prajñā-pāramitā, Hui-yüan exclaimed that Confucianism, Taoism, and all other schools were but chaff compared with Buddhism. He became a monk, studied, and began to preach. In both his teaching and his writing he relied heavily on Taoist terms and concepts to expound, and thus to modify, the Buddhist ideas that he presented.

Another famous monk who contributed to the spread of Buddhism in the south was Chih-tun (314–66). He

[3] Paul Demiéville, "La Pénétration du Bouddhisme dans la tradition philosophique chinoise," *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, III (1956), 23–24.

was brilliant, witty, and personable, and a great favorite among the émigré aristocrats at Nanking. He spoke the language of neo-Taoism, and he excelled in the light repartee so esteemed in *ch'ing-t'an* circles. He selected certain ideas from the available Buddhist sutras and related them to the problems of neo-Taoism. Thus, for example, he made a spirited attack on an authoritative commentator who saw in Chuang-tzu's parable of the phoenix and the cicada the meaning that the secret of personal liberty (*hsiao-yao*) lay in conforming to one's lot in the universal order. Chih-tun affirmed that one could and should escape into the infinite like the phoenix and like the Buddhist who frees himself from worldly ties.[4]

Demiéville traces to Chih-tun certain philosophic innovations which were to have far-reaching effects in the subsequent development of Chinese thought. One of these was investing the old Chinese naturalistic notion of *li*, "order," with a new metaphysical meaning drawn from Mahayana philosophy; in this new sense the term came to mean the transcendental absolute principle as opposed to the empirical data of experience, and this form of dualism—new to China—was to appear centuries later as the central conception of a new Confucianism.

Again, one finds in Chih-tun's works, and more fully expressed in the writings of Chu Tao-sheng (365–434), an important polarization which had been prefigured in earlier Chinese thought but only now became explicit. The two poles were gradualism (*chien*) and subitism (*tun*). Chu Tao-sheng and his contemporaries were troubled by the ap-

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

parently conflicting formulas of salvation offered in the Hinayana and Mahayana texts that had by now been translated. The former appeared to prescribe an age-long and arduous accumulation of positive karma leading to ultimate release into nirvana. The Mahayana texts, on the other hand, offered the seeker after salvation the help of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and the possibility of a single and sudden moment of enlightenment. Chinese Buddhists thus felt that they discerned in Buddhism two paths to truth and liberation. Gradualism (*chien*) was an approach to the ultimate reality (*li*) by analysis, the accumulation of particulars, long study; it also implied a sense of reality which presupposed plurality, a set of spatially and temporally defined aspects of reality to which a succession of graded methods provided the key. Gradualism, though elaborated with a subtlety unknown to pre-Buddhist China, is basically akin to the native Confucian tradition with its prescriptions for the slow accumulation of knowledge and wisdom. Subitism (*tun*), on the other hand, meant the one as opposed to the multiple, totality as opposed to particulars, the complete apprehension of reality in a sudden and complete vision. Subitism, in Demiéville's view, was clearly associated with the indigenous Taoist tradition; at the same time it was a peculiarly Chinese reaction—found among many who studied Buddhism—against the prolixity of Buddhist writings, their attenuated chain reasoning, and their scholastic rigor of demonstration. This polarization was later to be the center of controversy within the school of Ch'an (Zen), and still later characterized the principal division within a revived Confucianism.[5]

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 28–35. Cf. also Walter Liebenthal, "The World Conception of Chu Tao-sheng," *Monumenta Nipponica*, XII (1956), 87–94.

In addition to such developments in the philosophic realm, Buddhist monks in the south introduced certain practical and doctrinal innovations that were in keeping with the intellectual climate of their time. Hui-yüan, by reason of his versatility, exemplifies in his career many of these innovations. He and men like him did not merely cater to the capital aristocrats but built their own centers of devotion and teaching, often in a mountain fastness. They attracted lay patrons, and the number of temples steadily increased. Hui-yüan was the first to teach the attainment of salvation through faith in Amitābha and thus laid the foundations for the great Pure Land sect, which was eventually to become the most popular form of Buddhism in eastern Asia. While his own writings are full of Taoist thought and terminology, he was indefatigable in his search for a sounder and fuller understanding of Indian Buddhist ideas. To this end he sent disciples to Central Asia to bring back texts, and was in touch with at least six foreign translators.[6]

Hui-yüan was also called upon to defend the Buddhist clergy against the threat of government control or suppression. In his defense one can discern many of the points of conflict between Chinese views of life and society and the principles of the imported faith. Hui-yüan was not militant; he sought a *modus vivendi*, and, by dexterous appeals to the Taoist classics, he managed to make a far better case than he would have been able to make if Confucianism had maintained its erstwhile authority. He argued strongly that a subject who becomes a monk cuts his ties with the world of

[6] Cf. Leon Hurvitz, "'Render unto Caesar' in Early Chinese Buddhism," *Sino Indian Studies, Liebenthal Festschrift* (Santineketan, India, 1957), pp. 87–88.

material gain and personal reward; since he does not seek to benefit from the arrangements maintained by secular authority, he should not be obliged to pay homage to the reigning prince. But, he conceded, lay Buddhists do seek worldly goals and owe secular authority full respect:

> Those who revere the Buddhist teaching but remain in their homes are subjects who are obedient to the transforming power of temporal rulers. Their inclination is not to alter prevailing custom, and their conduct accords with secular norms. In them there are the affections of natural kinship and the proprieties of respect for authority. . . . The retribution of evil karma is regarded as punishment; it makes people fearful and thus circumspect. The halls of heaven are regarded as a reward; this makes them think of the pleasures of heaven and act accordingly. . . . Therefore they who rejoice in the way of Śākya invariably first serve their parents and respect their lords. . . .[7]

Buddhism was interpreted by Hui-yüan as acquiescent in the political and social arrangements of a world of illusion: Buddhism ameliorates and assuages but it does not seek reform. Yet Buddhists worked hard and skillfully to win the favor of the southern rulers, offering them not only the hope of personal salvation but new, potent, and colorful rituals invoking the help of Buddhist divinities for the well-being of the realm, for the warding off of evil. The treasure-trove of Buddhist legend also offered a new model for kingly behavior—that of the Indian Cakravartin-rāja, the king who rules well and successfully through devotion to Buddha and

[7] *Hung-ming chi* 5, in *Taishō*, LII, 30. My translation differs somewhat from that of Hurvitz, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

his teaching—and the related model of the munificent donor, the Mahādānapati, whose gifts to the Buddhist order for the benefit of his fellow creatures make of him something akin to a living Bodhisattva. These models had a strong appeal to monarchs whose life and power were always uncertain, whose claims to "legitimate" descent from the Han were scant reassurance after decades of political instability.

Among the monarchs who embraced and promoted Buddhism, the best known is Emperor Wu of the Liang (reigned 502–49). He himself took the Buddhist vows and on several occasions literally "gave himself" to a Buddhist temple, requiring his ministers to "ransom" him with huge gifts to the temple. On the Buddha's birthday in 504 he ordered the imperial relatives, the nobles, and the officials to forsake Taoism and embrace Buddhism. In 517 he decreed the destruction of the temples of the Taoists—whose religion had steadily grown in power and influence (partly through its selective borrowing from Buddhism)—and ordered the Taoist adepts to return to lay life. He patterned himself after the new Buddhist model of kingly behavior, and his efforts won him titles which suggest the fusion of Chinese and Buddhist political sanctions. He was called Huang-ti p'u-sa (Emperor Bodhisattva), Chiu-shih p'u-sa (Savior Bodhisattva), and P'u-sa t'ien-tzu (Bodhisattva Son of Heaven).[8]

Yet neither wealth nor political power in the south was concentrated in the throne. Rather the great territorial fami-

[8] On this ruler, see Mori Mikisaburō, *Ryō no Butei* ("Emperor Wu of the Liang") (Kyoto, 1956), especially pp. 134–69.

lies came to control and manipulate the throne, and to monopolize the selection of officials. Among these great families and among the less well-to-do but literate families Buddhism gradually attracted a large following. The metropolitan officials and the leaders of the intellectual and social life of the capital were greatly impressed by Vimalakīrti, central figure in one of the most influential Buddhist scriptures of the time. He was not a naked ascetic but a rich and powerful aristocrat, a brilliant talker, a respected householder and father, a man who denied himself no luxury or pleasure yet possessed so pure and disciplined a personality that he changed all whom he met for the better. Here was a new model for aristocratic lay Buddhists who were attracted by the ideals of Buddhism but had no desire to renounce their worldly pleasures. There was also, for the rich and powerful, new satisfaction in the lavish building of temples and retreats in the developing style of Chinese Buddhist architecture. Here was an opportunity for display, for "conspicuous consumption," which had the added charm of accumulating merit toward future salvation. And, in many cases, the temples built and endowed by the rich served both as their personal retreats and as shrines for the perpetual performance of their family rites.

Others among the literate were deeply moved by the new Buddhist vision of reality and salvation, became the disciples of certain noted monks, and entered the order. Still others took orders simply out of disgust with the corrupt political life which denied them the satisfaction of a public career, or out of disillusionment with the threadbare formulas of neo-Taoism. As Buddhism became more and more

generally accepted, the literate monks found in it counterparts of those scholarly and cultural satisfactions which their ancestors had found in Confucianism. Many collected books; some became noted calligraphers or writers in a particular genre. Others became antiquarians or historians of Buddhism or specialists in one or another Buddhist text, just as in an earlier day they might have specialized in one of the Confucian classics. A life of devotions and scholarship in some temple set in the midst of lovely scenery not only offered satisfactions which the troubled world outside could scarcely provide, but was fully sanctioned by the Bodhisattva ideal of renunciation and work for the salvation of all creatures. This conception of the monastic vocation—withdrawal, gentle contemplation, scholarship, and speculation—proved perennially attractive to literate Chinese in the centuries that followed.

Of popular Buddhism in the south we know far less than we know of the Buddhism of the elite. There is evidence of a sharp clash in the countryside—often cast as a contest of charismatic and magical powers—between the Buddhist clergy and the Taoist adepts. The Taoists had established roots in parts of the south from the time of the Yellow Turban uprising, and in these places Buddhism had to struggle to win a mass following. Monks from various temples would spend part of each year working among the populace. Their rituals and charms, their promise of salvation cast in simple terms, perhaps driven home by one of the stories which dramatized the working of karmic law, undoubtedly won them adherents. As often as possible, in both south and north, they deftly introduced Buddhist elements into the old

village associations which existed for the support of fertility rites or other observances.[9] Many commoners attached as hereditary serfs to the growing landholdings of the Buddhist temples must have increased the number of Buddhists among the masses. So perhaps did the increasingly large and diversified class of artisans which catered to the needs of the temples and monasteries.

As Chinese colonists slowly moved into the old aboriginal areas, they brought Buddhism with them, often in the person of officials or incoming gentry who combined Buddhism as a personal religion with old Confucian-rooted ideas and techniques for bringing Chinese civilization to "the natives." Buddhism was seen as a "civilizing" competitor against native shamanistic rites—a field of competition in which Confucianism was ill-equipped.[10]

In the south, then, we find Buddhism adjusting to elite and popular culture, interacting with southern philosophical and literary traditions, developing its beliefs and practices in response to a society which was inadequately served by the traditions it had inherited from the dying Han empire. Let us now consider the concurrent progress of Buddhism in North China.

THE NORTH

The area north of the Yangtze which was relinquished to alien rule in 317 was not, we should remind ourselves, the

[9] See Jacques Gernet, *Les Aspects économiques du Bouddhisme dans la société chinoise du Ve au Xe siècle* (Saigon, 1956), pp. 245–69. I have reviewed this important study in *Journal of Asian Studies*, XVI (1957), 408–14, under the title "The Economic Role of Buddhism in China."

[10] Cf. Hisayuki Miyakawa, "The Confucianization of South China." To appear in *The Confucian Persuasion* (Stanford, 1959).

North China of today. For Chinese of that time it *was* China, referred to in their writings not only as "the central plain" (*chung-yüan*) but by the historic and value-laden term *chung-kuo*, "the Central Kingdom." It was the scene of the great cultural achievements of the Chinese people, the homeland of their philosophers, the land on which the great empires of Ch'in and Han had first given political unity to the people of China. The loss of this land to despised barbarians reduced the émigré aristocrats of Nanking to tears of remorse and self-pity. Their relatives who remained in the north—and they were an overwhelming majority of the literate class—endured a succession of alien regimes which outdid one another in tyranny, rapacity, and incompetence. Chinese invariably served these regimes, partly out of self-interest—the protection of family property—but partly in the hope that they could meliorate the harshness of the barbarians and work toward the reestablishment of a Confucian polity and society.

The society of North China, in the early years of disunion, was a deeply divided one. The fissures ran in many directions. The alien minorities—generally, at first, horsemen contemptuous of farmers—were shortly divided into two groups: those who favored different degrees of Sinicization and those who clung to the traditions of their steppe ancestors. Often before they had resolved this difference they were overwhelmed by new invaders from beyond the Great Wall. Racial hatred between one non-Chinese group and another was ferocious, and between the Chinese and the alien intruders it often broke into violence and mass slaughter. Endless wars laid waste the land; levy after levy tore

the peasant from his fields. The great landed magnate of today would be killed tomorrow, and those who had sought his protection would become the slaves of a stranger. It is against this background of tension and insecurity that Buddhism began to find its way into this society.

The pioneer missionary in the north was a Kuchan, Fo-t'u-teng. He was on his way to the Chin capital of Loyang, probably with the aim of becoming a translator in one of the imperially supported temples there. Instead he arrived just as the great capital was sacked and burned, and he found himself in the camp of a rude, illiterate Hun who was on his way to control of most of North China. The instinct of the true missionary was equal to the occasion. "He knew that Lo (the Hun chieftain) did not understand profound doctrines but would only be able to recognize magical power as evidence of the potency of Buddhism. . . . Thereupon he took his begging bowl, filled it with water, burned incense, and said a spell over it. In a moment there sprang up blue lotus flowers whose brightness and color dazzled the eyes."[11] Lo was deeply impressed, and for the next two decades he was an ardent patron of Buddhism.

Throughout the north the initial foothold was won for Buddhism by the demonstration to credulous barbarians of its superior magical power, the charisma of its monks which helped to win battles, bring rain, relieve sickness, and assuage the spasms of remorse which overcame the simple barbarian chiefs after some particularly ghastly slaughter. With the favor thus won Buddhist monks began to establish

[11] Cf. A. F. Wright, "Fo-t'u-teng: A Biography," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, XI (1948) 321–71.

centers, to teach, and to spread their religion throughout the north. In the long run this foreign religion commended itself to alien rulers on a number of grounds besides that of its superior magical power. First of all, it was a religion alien to China. When the barbarian chiefs learned enough to know that their own tribal ways would not long sustain them in control of North China, they were reluctant to adopt the Confucian principles urged on them by wily Chinese advisers; this course might well mean the loss of cultural identity, the cession of a fatal amount of power to the subject Chinese. Buddhism provided an attractive alternative, and its monks—many of them foreigners—seemed, in their total dependence on the ruler's favor and their lack of family networks, to be useful and trustworthy servants. A further point in favor of Buddhism was that its ethic was universalistic, applicable to men of all races, times, and cultures; it thus seemed the very thing to close some of the social fissures that plagued these regimes and to contribute to the building of a unified and pliable body social.

These apparent advantages won for Buddhism the support and protection of a succession of autocratic rulers and, through this support, an unequaled opportunity to spread throughout the whole of society. From the mid-fourth century onward, we find extraordinary expansion at all levels. At the topmost level the rulers and their families became lavish patrons of the Buddhist church, making munificent gifts of treasure and land to the clergy, building sumptuous temples and monasteries, supporting such great works of piety as the cave temples of Yün-kang. In many of the great temples, regular official prayers were said for the welfare of

the ruling house and for the peace and prosperity of the realm. Upper-class Chinese followed the pattern of their counterparts in the south: a substratum of solid Confucian training at home, unsatisfying experiments with neo-Taoism, and then conversion to a faith which seemed to explain the ills of a stricken society and to offer hope for the future. It is from this class that the great thinkers and teachers of northern Buddhism in this period were recruited.

The grandees—alien, Chinese, or of mixed stock—took as much delight in lavish building as the southern aristocrats. Some sought to expiate past crimes, others to win spiritual credit, others to impress the populace or their pious overlords. There was a veritable orgy of temple-building, monasteries were heavily endowed, new Buddhist statues and paintings were commissioned, and the sacred texts were copied and recopied with loving care. Many of these buildings and pious works reflected a family interest, and Buddhist monks became the priests of the ancestor cults of their patrons.

Among the masses, both alien and Chinese, Buddhism found a wide following. As in the south, it was often grafted onto existing rural cults. But in the north, at least in the early part of this period, Buddhist monks did not have the competition of an entrenched religious Taoism, and the peasantry were converted *en masse*. The Buddhist clergy not only offered the consolation of a simple faith, but, as favored instruments of government, often brought into the rural areas medicine, relief grain, and other practical benefits which in an earlier day might have been provided by local officials or rural gentry. The great monasteries, as Gernet has shown, became entrepreneurs; at first they were

given relatively infertile highlands, often in localities which were economically undeveloped or in decline. Later, however, they expanded and developed their holdings into the lowlands, and, in addition to bringing more land under cultivation, they developed water mills, oil presses, and local manufactures. They increased their wealth by establishing pawnshops, holding auctions, and sponsoring temple fairs. Often they came to control villages or clusters of villages, whose people became hereditary serfs of the temple.

In many respects the Buddhist faith in North China cut across class lines and helped to unite a divided society. The local maigre feast, held on a Buddhist holiday, was an occasion of community fellowship in which social frictions were forgotten. Contemporary inscriptions show that Chinese and alien officials, local notables, the Buddhist clergy, and commoners often collaborated in building temples, making votive images, and other pious works. Moreover, Buddhist inscriptions—from the monumental cave-temples of Yün-kang and Lung-men to the crudest images—testify to the fact that Buddhism was everywhere reconciled to and interwoven with the family cult. A typical inscription of the period might read: "We respectfully make and present this holy image in honor of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and pray that all living creatures may attain salvation, and particularly that the souls of our ancestors and relatives [names given] may find repose and release." The favored object of faith and devotion was more and more the Buddha Amitābha, who presided over the Western Paradise.[12]

[12] Tsukamoto Zenryū, tables in Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu no kenkyū* ("A Study of the Buddhist Cave-Temples at Lung-men") (Tokyo, 1941), following p. 449. Although these tables record only changes in the objects of

The growing strength of the Buddhist faith and its organizations inevitably caused the rulers of North China some misgivings. These misgivings were deepened by widespread abuses of clerical privilege, by mass retreat into holy orders to escape the corvée and taxation, and by the wholesale and often fraudulent transfer of land-titles to the tax-exempt monasteries and temples. There were further grounds for uneasiness in the rise of uneducated and undisciplined village clergy who often in their preaching exploited the apocalyptic vein in Buddhism for subversive purposes.

The two principal opponents of Buddhism were quick to point out these abuses. The clergy of religious Taoism, who invaded the north in the fifth and sixth centuries, hoped thereby to undermine state support of Buddhism and wrest control of the populace from their Buddhist rivals. Chinese officials, striving always to persuade their alien masters to reconstitute a Confucian state in which the educated gentry would have the key role, drew on the arsenal of argument in their own tradition of political economy; they argued with increasing conviction that the Buddhist church was parasitic and subversive, a blight and an anomaly.

The efforts of these two groups, playing upon the fears of the rulers, brought two developments in Buddhist-state relations that are characteristic of the north. One was the setting up of a clerical bureaucracy whose head was responsible to the throne for all matters relating to ordination standards, conduct of the clergy, and the management of Buddhist property. This system of control, modeled on the

devotion in the Lung-men caves, there is reason to believe that the trend toward Amitābha worship was general.

Chinese civil bureaucracy and guided by similar rules of procedure and organization, was to persist until recent times. The other principal development was an attempt, made in 446–52 and again in 574–78, to impose drastic restrictions on Buddhist organizations and activities. These two attempts were made in different circumstances, but they have some common features which are worth noting. The considerations which led to both were mainly political and economic; the instigators in both cases were Taoists and Confucians in uneasy alliance against their common rival; the suppressions were both ineffective, and both were followed by the rehabilitation of Buddhism and dramatic expiatory acts on the part of the rulers who succeeded the would-be suppressors. Both illustrated northern Buddhism's heavy dependence on the favor of autocratic rulers, but the aftermaths of both demonstrated that Buddhism had become too much a part of the culture and life of the north to be eliminated by imperial edict.

The northern Buddhist solutions to the problem of the relation between secular and religious powers were notably different from those advocated in the south by Hui-yüan and his successors. The southerners had to reconcile Buddhism with an aristocratic state and society, while the northerners had to deal with an autocracy. In the Northern Wei the simple proposal had been made to regard the reigning emperor as a Buddha incarnate and thus resolve the conflict of loyalties. In arguing for the suppression of Buddhism in 574, one group maintained that it was not the Buddhist religion but the church that was bad, and that if the church were eliminated, the state would become one vast and har-

monious temple—(P'ing-yen ta-ssu)—with the ruler presiding over his believing subjects as a Buddha.[18] Northern Buddhism was, in sum, far closer to Caesaro-papism than that of the south, where Buddhists had been content to make of the politically feeble emperors great lay patrons (mahādānapati) and wielders of kingly power for the good of the faith in the manner of the Indian Cakravartin-rāja.

The north, in these years, was the major center of translation and of the dedicated pursuit of a deeper understanding of Buddhism. Despite its political instability, the north was more open to foreign missionaries arriving from Central Asia than the relatively isolated south. These great missionaries came in increasing numbers through the fourth and fifth centuries, and more and more learned Chinese joined with them in the immense effort to translate Buddhist ideas into Chinese terms. One of the great Chinese monks was Tao-an (312–85), a disciple of the pioneer missionary monk Fo-t'u-teng. Tao-an worked indefatigably with foreign translators, and it was he who developed a mature theory of translation which recognized the danger that Buddhist ideas might be dissolved beyond recognition into the neo-Taoist concepts first used to translate and interpret them.

The emancipation of Buddhist ideas from Taoism, which was still incomplete at Tao-an's death, was to be furthered by Kumārajīva, the greatest of the missionary translators and perhaps the greatest translator of all time. Kumārajīva arrived at Ch'ang-an in 401 after learning Chinese during a long captivity in northwest China, where the local warlord

[13] See A. F. Wright, "Fu I and the Rejection of Buddhism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XII (1951), 34–38, for references to Tsukamoto Zenryū's three important studies of the Northern Chou suppression.

had held him for his charismatic power. Fortunately he found a royal patron, and Chinese monks were assembled from far and near to work with him in translating the sacred texts. This was a "highly structured project," suggestive of the cooperative enterprises of scientists today. There were corps of specialists at all levels: those who discussed doctrinal questions with Kumārajīva; those who checked the new translations against the old and imperfect ones; hundreds of editors, subeditors, and copyists. The quality and quantity of the translations produced by these men in the space of eight years is truly astounding. Thanks to their efforts the ideas of Mahayana Buddhism were presented in Chinese with far greater clarity and precision than ever before. Śūnyatā—Nāgārjuna's concept of the void—was disentangled from the Taoist terminology which had obscured and distorted it, and this and other key doctrines of Buddhism were made comprehensible enough to lay the intellectual foundations of the great age of independent Chinese Buddhism that was to follow.

Toward the end of the period of disunion we have been considering, the cultures of north and south were tending to influence each other and thus to reduce the differences which had developed in the course of their separate evolution over nearly three centuries. Buddhist monks from the north migrated to the south, and southern monks went north. The great translations made in the north were soon circulating in the temples of the south. Buddhists of north and south thus developed common philosophical and textual interests, and styles of Buddhist art in north and south began to affect one another.

Socially and politically the north tended, toward the end of this period, to become more and more Sinicized. Rulers of alien stock still occasionally asserted their separateness and insisted on their dominance, but intermarriage had broken down many of the barriers between Chinese and barbarian, and the rehabilitation of China's agricultural system had made the Chinese increasingly indispensable to the alien rulers. Most important of all, many of these rulers dreamed of conquering the south and reuniting China under their sway. To this end they schooled themselves in Chinese history, political ideology, and statecraft, and in so doing they inevitably came to adopt Chinese ideas and attitudes in these spheres. Yet cultural and institutional differences in the late sixth century were still many and great. Buddhism, as we shall see, played an important role in reducing these differences and thus in laying the foundations of the unified, and eventually Confucian, society that was to come.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PERIOD OF INDEPENDENT GROWTH

When a young official of the non-Chinese state of Chou seized the throne from his lord in 581, he proclaimed the dynasty of Sui. By ruthlessness, tenacity, and good luck he consolidated his hold on North China and began to plan—as so many northern rulers had before him—the conquest of the south and the unification of all China under his sway. His planning was careful; his military, economic, and ideological preparations were thorough. In 589 his forces overwhelmed the last of the "legitimate" dynasties at Nanking, and after nearly three hundred years China was once again politically united.

Yet military and political conquest alone was not sufficient to destroy the effect of centuries of division, of diverging traditions, of varying habits, customs, and tastes. Life in the north tended to be more austere; food, clothing, and manners were simpler; monogamy and the extended family prevailed in contrast to widespread concubinage and the conjugal family in the south. The southerners considered northern literary style crude and cacophonous, "like the braying of donkeys and the barking of dogs." The northerners regarded southern literature as effete, the work of dilet-