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When Buddhism was introduced into China around the beginning of the Christian era, it was confronted with a civilization that was opposed to many of its prevailing tenets and practices. Buddhism looked upon life in this world as suffering; the Chinese regarded earthly life as something to be enjoyed to the fullest, since this was the only life that he had. Buddhism aimed at terminating the continuous cycle of rebirths with its incumbent suffering to seek the tranquillity and peace of nirvana; the way to accomplish this was withdrawal from society to lead the religious life. The Chinese aimed at fulfillment of his destiny by leading an active life to achieve what the late Hu Shih once called the immortality of the three *W*'s (work, words, and worth).[1] The Buddhist believed that family life should be abandoned and celibacy regarded as the highest virtue; the Chinese, on the other hand, regarded family life as the backbone of Chinese society, therefore considering the perpetuation of the family line to be the highest duty of every Chinese. The Buddhist advocated that members of the monastic community should be freed from the burdens of earning a living and should subsist only on alms donated by the faithful; the Chinese strongly held that every able-bodied male should till the

[1] Hu Shih, "Concept of Immortality in Chinese Thought," *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin* 43, no. 3 (1946): 40–41.

soil and every able-bodied female should weave. The Buddhist contended that the community of monks enjoyed an extralegal position, not subject to the jurisdiction of secular law; the Chinese maintained there is no separation of church and state, that all monks should obey the laws of the imperial state.

Faced with this kind of opposition, it was no wonder that the newly introduced Indian religion experienced great difficulty in gaining a foothold on Chinese soil. After some two centuries of propagation, the foreign religion could claim only three known centers, one in east China,[2] one in south China,[3] and one in north China in the capital of Loyang.[4] The number of monasteries could be counted upon the fingers of one hand, converts were few, and translations of texts meager. In a way, the religion survived the first couple of centuries mainly because many Chinese considered it as but another branch of Taoism.

With the downfall of the Han dynasty in A.D. 220, China entered an era of division between north and south lasting three and a half centuries, until the unification achieved by the Sui dynasty in 589. This Sui was short-lived and was followed immediately by the powerful and glorious T'ang dynasty, which lasted for three centuries.

While the political fortunes of the Chinese were at a low ebb during these centuries of disunity, the fate of Buddhism took a sharp turn upward. It seems that the disunity and attendant turmoil were just the conditions needed for the religion to gain adherence among the Chinese. There is not time here to discuss the various factors contributing to this spread among the Chinese. Suffice it to say that by the beginning of the T'ang, Buddhism had gained converts from all groups in Chinese society, from the peasantry at the bottom, through the gentry and the educated, to the members of the imperial family at the top. According to a T'ang catalog of Buddhist sutras, the *K'ai-yüan-lu*, at the end of the Han dynasty in 220, there were 200 items in 292 *chüan* translated into Chinese, whereas in 730 the number had risen to 2,278 items

[2] Center in P'eng-ch'eng, kingdom of Ch'u in what is now parts of Kiangsu and Shantung. See biography of Prince Ying of Ch'u, *Hou Han-shu*, chüan (hereafter "c.") 79; biography of T'ao Ch'ien in *Hou Han-shu* c. 103; *San-kuo-chih Wei- chih* c. 8.

[3] Tonkin in present-day North Vietnam. See preface of *Mou-tzu li-huo-lun* in *Hung-ming-chi* c.1, *Taishō tripitaka* (hereafter *Taishō*) 52. 1b.

[4] See memorial presented by Hsiang K'ai in 166, *Hou Han-shu* c. 60 *hsia;* H. Maspéro, "Les origines de la communauté bouddhiste de Loyang," *Journal asiatique* 225 (1934): 87–107; biography of An Shih-kao in *Kao-seng-chuan* c. 1, *Taishō* 50. 323a–24b.

in 7,046 *chüan*.[5] Monasteries were now to be found all over the land, in the teeming population centers of the great cities, or in remote sparsely settled areas, on the summits of famous mountains far away from human habitation, or in luxuriantly shaded valleys alongside rushing waterfalls. The fervent and passionate devotion to the religion was expressed most concretely by the thousands of Buddhist images carved on the cave walls in Tun-huang, Yün-kang, and Lung-men, and in the widespread popularity of the Pure Land School, while the intellectual vigor of the religion was exemplified by the development of such highly philosophical schools as the T'ien-t'ai, Hua-yen, San-lun, and Wei-shih.

One of the main reasons why the religion was able to develop and gain widespread following among the Chinese was its ability to serve the needs of all elements of Chinese society. The institution through which the religion carried out its various functions in serving the people was, of course, the monastery, which served as the center for the religious life of the monks and faithful laymen. Besides the spiritual blessings which the monasteries dispensed to all, each group in Chinese society was able to derive special benefits from the presence of these Buddhist monasteries in their midst. Far from being institutions separated and detached from the activities of the mundane world, the Chinese monasteries played active and multifaceted roles that touched the lives of a large proportion of the Chinese during the T'ang dynasty. Let us now turn our attention to these different roles of the Buddhist monasteries.

At the outset, we shall limit ourselves by excluding from discussion certain functions of the monasteries. For instance, it is self-evident that the monasteries were centers for the religious training of novices initiated into the order. Again, all monasteries provided opportunities for worship by the laity, burning incense, reverencing images of the Buddhas, seeking aid and solace from the bodhisattvas, etc. Furthermore, the monasteries were centers of Buddhist thought. Famous teachers were associated with certain monasteries, and students wishing to master a certain school of philosophy would converge on them. All these may be called the normal religious activities carried on in a Buddhist monastery, and we see no need to stress them. What we would like to emphasize are those functions which are to some extent unique with the Chinese monasteries.

[5] *K'ai-yüan shih-chiao-lu* c. 10, *Taishō* 55. 579c.

First, monasteries were regarded as the spiritual arm of the imperial government. Just as the imperial armies served as the military arm to protect against internal rebellion and external invasion, and the imperial bureaucracy as the political arm to ensure the enforcement of law and order, so Buddhist monasteries served as the spiritual arm—first, to promote the spiritual welfare of the empire and the well-being of the emperor; and second, to ensure that the protective influences of Buddhist deities would be extended to the imperial family and empire. The Chinese world consisted not only of the people and the objects that we see around us, but also of spirits and unseen forces that are everywhere. Such unseen forces had to be propitiated in order that they would not bring misfortunes and calamities to the people and the ruling dynasty. To make sure that unseen forces were operating for the dynasty's benefit, T'ang emperors prudently patronized those religions, Taoism and Buddhism, whose deities claimed to have the powers to protect the realm against the unseen evil forces. They were taking out a kind of insurance policy to protect against the unknown.

In the case of Buddhism, the instruments developed were the national monastery,[6] created by imperial edict and located all over the empire, and palace chapels[7] established by the ruling family within the imperial precincts. The national monasteries were accorded preeminent status in their respective communities; they were inhabited by highly educated monks, the elite in the monastic community; and they were supported by funds from the imperial treasury. We might say that the monks in these national monasteries were treated like members of the civil bureaucracy in having all their needs supplied by the state; they had no need to depend upon alms from ordinary laity for sustenance.

In these national monasteries were staged a number of ceremonies which had nothing to do with Buddhism but which were performed for the welfare of the imperial state. These ceremonies included the celebration of the imperial birthday and the observance of memorial services in honor of deceased emperors. Firsthand accounts of these ceremonies are furnished by Ennin, a very observant Japanese monk who traveled extensively in north China during the years 838–47. The usual method of celebration

[6] *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi* c. 39, *Taishō* 49. 359c; c. 40, *Taishō* 49. 375a; *Chiu T'ang-shu* 6. 3b; *Hsin T'ang-shu* 4. 5a; *T'ang-hui-yao* 50. 20b.

[7] Tsan-ning, *Seng-shih-lüeh*, *Taishō* 54. 247bc.

was to stage vegetarian feasts for the clerical community and the civil and military dignitaries of a locality.

On the eighth day of the twelfth month, 838, Ennin recorded in his diary that, this being a national memorial day, fifty strings of cash were donated by the throne to the national monastery in Yang-chou to prepare a vegetarian feast for 500 people. In the ceremonies which began at 8:00 A.M., the minister of state and the commanding general led the procession to worship the Buddha. Those participating in the ceremonies burned incense, waved pennants, and chanted psalms. After the ceremonies, everyone partook of the vegetarian feast.[8]

When foreign invasions threatened the empire, the emperors would call for assistance in repelling the invaders not only on the military forces but also on the protective influences of Buddhist deities. This was achieved through the recitation in the monasteries or the palace chapels of a sutra entitled *Jen-wang-ching* [Sutra on the benevolent kings].[9] For this recitation, images of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats would be assembled and placed on elaborately decorated high seats within the monasteries, accompanied by an elaborate display of lamps, pennants, and flowers. If the sutra were recited twice a day amidst such arrangements, then all the protective spirits in the kingdom would assemble to defend the empire against external aggression.[10] We read in the Buddhist chronicles, for instance, that in 765 the Tibetans crossed the borders and threatened the capital. This prompted the emperor to order the *Jen-wang-ching* distributed to the monasteries and recited there. The emperor himself attended the meeting in the capital. Within a short while, we are told, the invading Tibetans were pacified.[11]

Another group of monasteries figured prominently in this role as the spiritual arm of the empire; these were located on top of Mount Wu-t'ai in north China and dedicated to the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom.[12] According to Chinese Buddhists, this bodhisattva had a habit of making periodic visits to those monasteries. Once he appeared in the form of a pregnant woman at a

[8] Ennin, *Nittō-guhō junrei gyōki* 1. 14, in *Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho*, vol. 113.

[9] There are two translations of this sutra, one by Kumārajīva, *Taishō* 8. 825a–34a, and one by Amoghavajra, *Taishō* 8. 834a–45a.

[10] See Kumārajīva's translation, *Taishō* 8. 829c–30a.

[11] *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi* c. 41, *Taishō* 49. 377c–78a.

[12] For description of Mount Wu-t'ai, the monasteries located on the mountain, and the legends concerning Mañjuśrī's visits to the mountain, see Hui-hsiang, *Ku Ch'ing-liang chuan* 2c., *Taishō* 51. 1092c–1100c; Yen-i, *Kuang Ch'ing-liang chuan* 3 c. *Taishō* 51. 1101b–27a.

vegetarian feast and asked for two shares of food, one for herself and one for the unborn child within. The donor of the feast understandably refused to give her two shares, saying that the unborn child was not there to eat its share. An argument followed, and the pregnant woman then resumed her original shape as Mañjuśrī, flying away in the air to the consternation of the assembly. Because of this legend, we are told that thereafter participants in the vegetarian feasts on Mount Wu-t'ai were given whatever they requested.[13] The monks in these monasteries were constantly looking for signs that would indicate the appearance of Mañjuśrī. Such signs might be a pervading fragrance in the mountains, the appearance of strange lights on dark nights, or the sight of a colored cloud in the cloudless sky. Whenever such signs appeared, they were immediately reported to the throne, for they were regarded as auspicious omens boding well for the welfare and prospects of the empire and the imperial family. It is not surprising, therefore, to read in Ennin's diary that the imperial treasury would make immense donations to these monasteries dedicated to Mañjuśrī. In 840, for instance, we are told that the donations consisted of 500 fine robes, 500 packages of silk floss, 1,000 pieces of scarf, 1,000 ounces of incense, 1,000 catties of tea, and 1,000 hand towels.[14] These gifts were part of the premium paid by the empire to the Buddhist monasteries for the protection offered against the unseen world.

Second, the monasteries were havens for the literati. In the writings of many outstanding poets of the T'ang dynasty, we find a constantly repeated theme, a longing to get away from the ills of the world, to seek refuge in the serenity and tranquillity of a Buddhist monastery. These poets, products of the rigorous system of Confucian education, had capped their long and arduous years of preparation by winning the highest degrees in the civil service examinations and by being appointed to office in the imperial bureaucracy. As such, these men were the pride of their family and clan, for they were the elite of the empire. One would expect them to bask in the glory of their exalted positions. Such was not the case, however, with a considerable number of such literary figures. These men knew only too well that their positions, status, and prestige so often depended upon the fate of men at the top of the power structure. If the chief ministers whom they supported enjoyed imperial favor, their positions were secure; but this secu-

[13] E. O. Reischauer, *Ennin's Diary* (New York, 1955), pp. 258–59.
[14] Ennin (n. 8 above), 3. 70.

rity could be lost immediately if the chief ministers lost out in the ceaseless power struggle at the top. To the literati, officialdom was always fraught with risks and dangers; it is therefore not surprising that so many literary figures expressed a yearning to escape from the temporal struggles and to seek a peaceful haven in Buddhist monasteries.

To these men, the Buddhist monastery offered ideal conditions to pass away the time. Removed from the competition and rivalry that entangled official life in the cities, they could roam about the mountains or valleys where the monasteries were usually located, sit beneath whispering pines and listen to the twitterings of birds, wet their feet in the cool rushing waters of the mountain streams, get lost in mountain paths shrouded in clouds, or just relax and drink wine in the secluded monastery courtyard. Listen to the sentiments expressed by one T'ang poet, Wang Wei (699–759):

> Monk Chung-fan, Monk Chung-fan,
> You left in autumn to go to Mount Fu-fu,
> Now it is spring and you have not yet returned.
> [You must be fascinated by] the bustling scene of falling
> flowers and singing birds,
> [You must be enjoying] the solitude, surrounded by brooks
> and mountains just outside your door and window.
> Surrounded by hills, who cares anything about the cares
> of the world?[15]

Another poem by the same author while staying at a monastery goes as follows:

> In this quiet valley one hears nothing but the gentle
> sighing of pines,
> In the recesses of the mountains there is no crying of birds.
> When one opens the door, one sees the snow-covered mountains
> clearly delineated.
> The singing of the golden brook permeates the forest.[16]

And still another poem:

> Not knowing the location of Hsiang-chi monastery,
> I walk several *li* over cloud-covered peaks
> And through forests of ancient trees never treaded by
> human feet.
> Whence come the peals of bells in the deep hills?
> The spring water gurgles as it is blocked by jutting rocks,
> The sun shines, but it is cool in the shade of the green pines.
> In the evening, by the side of the quiet pool,
> I sit in meditation, to drive away the poisonous dragon
> [of disturbing thoughts].[17]

[15] *T'ang Wang Yu-ch'eng chi* 1. 2b (*Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an* ed.), and K. Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism* (Princeton, N.J., 1973), pp. 180–81.
[16] Ibid., 5. 19b, and Ch'en, p. 181.
[17] Ibid., 4. 20a and Ch'en, p. 183.

Wang Wei had already attained the high post of prime minister in the civil bureaucracy, but he was also a devout Buddhist who called himself Mo-chieh, after the famous Buddhist layman Vimalakīrti (in Chinese, Wei Mo-chieh). After his wife died, he refused to remarry, choosing to lead a celibate life to indicate his devotion to Buddhism.

Another T'ang poet who extolled the joys of living in a monastery was Meng Hao-jan (689–765):

> Where he [the monk] lives is indeed most elegantly secluded,
> And the people who live there have all attained tranquillity.
> Dense groves of bamboo line both sides of the road,
> The clear brook flows by the hut.
> How free and relaxed is the monk,
> Having abandoned all the worry and anxiety of the world.
> The four meditations unite him with suchness,
> So that he regards everything as illusory.[18]

The best example of a poet seeking haven and tranquillity in the Buddhist monastery is that of Po Chü-i (772–846).[19] During his lifetime he held numerous posts in the government—imperial censor, governor, president of the palace library, vice-president of the board of punishments, etc. His official appointments took him to different parts of China, the capitals Ch'ang-an and Loyang, central China, and west China. Everywhere he went, he befriended monks and stayed in monasteries.

In 815, Po was involved in a political assassination of the chief minister in Ch'ang-an, and his enemies took advantage of this situation to have him exiled to a minor post in Chiang-chou, Kiangsi. This was a traumatic experience for Po. Whereas formerly he was actively and closely identified with the affairs of state in the capital, in touch with the leading statesmen of the empire, now he was exiled to a region far from the center of political power. Being powerless to exercise political influence, he decided to treat his exile as a sort of semiretirement from the struggles of the political arena.[20] To this end, he began to write verses on things he could enjoy the most in that area—mountains, waterfalls, landscapes, luxuriant vegetation, etc. Chiang-chou was admirably suited for such a pastime, for nearby was the mountain Lu-shan, already famous as the site of one of the best-known monasteries

[18] *Meng Hao-jan chi* 1. 2b (*Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an* ed.), and Ch'en, p. 181.

[19] For Po's biography, see *Chiu T'ang-shu* 166. 9a–20a; *Hsin T'ang-shu* 119. 4a–6a; A. Waley, *The Life and Times of Po Chü-i* (London, 1949); E. Feifel, *Monumenta Serica* 17 (1958): 255–311.

[20] Chiang-chou ssu-ma t'ing chi, in *Po-shih ch'ang-ch'ing-chi* 26. 1b–3a (*Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an* ed.).

in Buddhist history, the Monastery of the Eastern Grove, established in the fourth century by Hui-yüan. So much congeniality and community of interest did Po find here with the monks that he decided to spend whatever time he could spare from his official duties in their company. To this end, he built a simple grass hut near the monastery, where he could live and enjoy the superb scenery of Lu-shan to the utmost. In a letter sent in 817 to his closest friend Yüan Chen, he wrote that after three years in Chiang-chou, his mind was completely at ease, he was enjoying good health, and the food in the area was excellent. He then elaborated in great detail on the pleasures of living in his grass hut next to the monastery. Here the clouds, water, rocks, and falls were more beautiful than in any other part of the mountain. In front of the hut were pine trees and tall bamboos. Whenever he went there, he forgot about the rest of the world, wishing he could remain the rest of his life.[21]

Many of the poems Po wrote during this period in Chiang-chou described the joy and contentment he experienced living on Lu-shan, and revealed some of the lessons he had learned from his Buddhist friends.

In one piece he wrote:

> The guest at Hsün-yang is a layman,
> His body is like the floating cloud, and his mind is like ashes.[22]

On another occasion, he plucked out a strand of hair from his head and found that it was white. He immediately wrote to a monk at Lu-shan:

> Since I do not possess the powers of an immortal,
> How can I escape this fate of old age and death?
> There is only the gateway to emancipation,
> Which can carry one over this decrepit and painful peril.
> I cover the mirror and gaze at the Monastery of the Eastern Grove,
> Subduing my mind, I thank the masters of meditation there.[23]

The last seventeen years of Po's life were spent in the eastern capital of Loyang; while he still held official positions, these were mainly sinecures with no duties involved. This afforded him all the leisure he wanted, which he spent lolling in laziness, versifying, and visiting monks in the Monastery of the Fragrant Mountain, a

[21] *Ch'ang-ch'ing-chi* 28. 21a–22a.

[22] Ibid., 17. 7a. He likens his mind to ashes in the sense that it is no longer consumed by the fires of passion. See also Ch'en, p. 203.

[23] Ibid., 10. 24ab, and Ch'en, p. 203.

setting which became the center of Po's attention and activities during his declining years in Loyang.

First, he contributed funds for an extensive repair of the monastery.[24] Second, he put together a library of Buddhist scriptures he had collected from other monasteries and presented it to the monastery.[25] Finally, he donated to the monastery all the poems he had written since moving to Loyang.[26] He called himself the layman of the Monastery of the Fragrant Mountain, and in his poetry he frequently alluded to his delightful sojourns there. In one, he wrote: "The five sensual pleasures are dispelled, all worries extinguished; I am no longer tethered to anything in the world."[27]

Another:

When I first arrived in Hsiang-shan, which became my home
in old age,
It was autumn, and the white moon was full.
From now on you are part of my home,
Let me ask whether you are aware of this or not.[28]

This life of leisure was shared in large measure with the monks living in the monastery. He referred to these clerical friends in the following poem:

A white haired old man, wearing purple robes,
I do not mix with the world but consort with the Tao.
Three times I have been assigned to Lo-yang on special
duty as an official,
Half of my friends are among the monks.
One must eventually withdraw from this wealth-conscious world,
Long have I yearned for my karmic friends of the incense.
After the vegetarian feasts, what can I offer you in return?
Only the springs, rocks, and the moist wind in the western
pavilion.[29]

We have referred to only two T'ang poets, Wang Wei and Po Chü-i, but they are representative of the attitudes and activities of those T'ang literary people who were attracted to Buddhism and to life within the Buddhist monasteries. The anthology of T'ang poems contains literally thousands of pieces which could be used to illustrate our theme, but there is no need to belabor the point further. We must proceed to stress another role which the Buddhist monasteries played for the literati.

[24] Ibid., 59. 25b.
[25] Ibid., 70. 12b.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 58. 24b.
[28] Ibid., 66. 10b, and Ch'en, p. 218.
[29] Ibid., 64. 8a, and Ch'en, pp. 218–19.

During the T'ang dynasty there was considerable traveling on the part of scholars to the provincial and imperial capitals to take part in the civil service examinations. While these scholars were on the road, they very often spent the night in Buddhist monasteries. And, after their arrival in the capital, they were also often put up in the national monasteries while taking the examinations. Scholars preparing for the examinations also found the Buddhist monasteries, with their quiet and secluded surroundings, the ideal place to concentrate on their studies.

So much for the role of the Buddhist monasteries in the literary life of the Chinese. Let us turn to the economic role, where the monasteries were deeply involved in such diversified activities as owning land, operating industrial installations, and managing financial transactions.

If we are to believe Confucian memorialists, the Buddhist monasteries were among the major landowners of the period.[30] They acquired their land through donations, purchases, mortgage foreclosures, appropriations, and grants by the imperial state. And, by arranging connections with officialdom or influential laymen, they were often able to claim tax exemptions for their property. The fact that monastic lands were typically tax-exempt led large landowners to resort to subterfuge to get their own holdings registered as monastery land. One common method was for the landowner to establish his private burial ground and shrine within the limits of a monastery, and thus to claim the monastery as his own. This would be called his merit cloister, for, by donating his land to this merit cloister or monastery, he could claim tax exemption for it. Ostensibly, the land had been donated, but actually the merit cloister was his own creation in the first place, and so the land remained his private possession. In the eyes of the state, however, the land was now monastic land.[31] It is difficult to estimate just how much land the monasteries possessed, for the figures concerning the area confiscated during the persecution of Buddhism in 845 are not precise. One memorialist charged that the land in the vicinity of the capital was largely in the hands of monasteries, while another complained that monasteries controlled 70–80 percent of the wealth of the empire.[32] Such lands were cultivated by temple slaves, tenant farmers, and novices and probationers in the monastery. Out of income derived from these extensive holdings,

[30] *Chiu T'ang-shu* 118. 6a; *T'ang-hui-yao* 48. 12b.
[31] For these merit cloisters, see Ch'en, pp. 140–42.
[32] For these memorials, see the citations in n. 30.

the Buddhist monasteries accumulated the capital to establish a number of industrial and commercial enterprises which in turn produced further income to augment the economic wealth of the monastery.

Of the industrial installations, two shall be singled out, the water-powered mill and the oil press. The former was one of the most lucrative enterprises sponsored by Buddhist monasteries and by rich families during the T'ang. The mills, used to remove husks or to pulverize grains, were usually powered by water. Herein arose the problem, for the water to operate the mills was also needed by farmers for irrigation. This led to frequent controversies between the mill owners and the peasants in the surrounding areas, resulting in the government's restricting the use of water by the mills only to certain months during the year.[33]

The monastery-owned mills were usually operated by lay families called miller families, whose duty was to provide monks in the monastery with the flour they needed. The grains from which the flour was produced were obtained by the monastery through donations, rentals from monastic land, or interest from loans. Sometimes, the flour made by the miller exceeded the amount needed by the monks for food, in which case the flour would be sold by the monastery for a profit. Besides milling for the monastery, the miller could also carry on private business during his spare time, but he was obligated to pay a portion of his private income to the monastery for the use of the mill. For the lay miller as well as the monastery, the water-powered mill was therefore a profitable industrial enterprise.[34]

The same may be said for the oil presses operated by the monasteries. Because so much oil was needed for the countless lamps in the monastery and for cooking, it was an indispensable item; to produce it, the monastery established oil presses which were also operated by lay families. The arrangements between the lay oil pressers and the monastery were similar to those in the case of the millers. Hence we often read in the financial reports of the monasteries, "Hempseed, two *shih* eight *tou*, delivered to the oil

[33] *T'ang-liu-tien* 7. 9b. See also Pelliot 2507, entitled T'ang-tai Shui-pu-shih. This is a manuscript recovered in Tun-huang by the French Sinologist Paul Pelliot and now kept in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.

[34] For a more extended discussion of these water-powered mills, see Ch'en, pp. 151–56. A selected list of important articles by Japanese and Chinese scholars dealing with these mills may be found in K. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton, N.J., 1964), pp. 524–25.

pressers to be pressed into oil"; "Hempseed, four *shih* three *tou*, delivered to the oil presser to be pressed into oil."[35]

As for the commercial enterprises operated by the monasteries, probably the best known is the Inexhaustible Treasury (*wu-chin-tsang*). Previously we have mentioned the vast areas of monastic land from which the monasteries derived considerable income. Rich families who were devout followers of Buddhism, wishing to accumulate meritorious karma to ensure a better rebirth in the future, would make outright gifts to the monastery. The donations made to the monastery for consumption by the monks would sometimes exceed the amount needed by them, resulting in a surplus of goods. These three items (income, gifts, and donations) constituted the bulk of the capital owned by the Inexhaustible Treasury in the monasteries. Why the term "inexhaustible"? Because there was a continuous flow of wealth into the treasury that could be used indefinitely and generate interest thereby.

With the capital that it held the treasury could make loans to borrowers, charging interest at the prevailing T'ang rates, about 4–5 percent per month.[36] Very often the borrowers would be peasants living nearby the monastery who needed grains for seedlings in the spring, and who promised to repay the amount with interest in the fall. On occasion, the treasury would sell some of the goods, the proceeds to be used for promoting the dharma.

Of these Inexhaustible Treasuries, the most famous was one established in the Hua-tu Monastery in Ch'ang-an, concerning which some fairly detailed descriptions exist. It enjoyed a history of well over a century, during which the money, silk, and embroidery stored in the treasury were, we are told, beyond calculation. People from as far away as present-day Ssu-ch'uan, Kansu, and Hopei went to the treasury to borrow; and regardless of the amount borrowed or the interest charged, nothing was committed to writing. The earnings of the treasury were divided into three portions: one was used for repairs to the monasteries throughout the empire; one, for the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor; and one, for offerings to the Buddha. We are told also that the faithful vied with one another in making their donations, bringing

[35] Examples of such reports may be found in such works as Naba Toshisada, "Chūban Tōjidai ni okeru Tonkō chihō bukkyō jiin no tengai keiei ni tsuite," *Tōa keizai ronsō* 1 (1941): 552–65; J. Gernet, *Les aspects économiques du Bouddhisme* (Saigon, 1956), pls. 3–5.

[36] *T'ang-liu-tien* 6. 13b; *T'ang-hui-yao* 88. 21a.

their goods in cartloads, and departing without leaving their names.[37]

Besides the Inexhaustible Treasuries, some monasteries and individual monks also indulged in financial transactions. In documents recovered from Tun-huang, numerous records exist of such transactions. Loans were usually in the form of grains, cloth, silk, and, in rare cases, money; contracts covering such loans were drawn up between the two parties. In one contract, we read that a certain Mr. Ts'ao, in need of some grains for seedlings, borrowed about two *shih* of beans from monk Hai-ch'ing of the Ling-t'u Monastery on the first day of the third month, with a promise to pay on the thirteenth day of the eighth month. If he does not pay by that time, the amount payable shall be doubled. Or, the creditor may also seize his belongings to pay for the value of the beans.[38]

While this contract contained no indication of the interest charged, only the penalty for default, interest was unquestionably charged. Some contracts found in Tun-huang contained the phrase, "The interest shall be in accordance with rates prevalent in the area,"[39] while in other documents the rate of interest is clearly indicated. For instance, one person borrowed two *shih* of millet in the spring, returned three *shih* in the autumn.[40] Another borrowed seven *shih* of wheat in the spring, repaid ten and a half *shih* in the autumn.[41] In these instances, the interest rate was a uniform 50 percent for half a year, a rate far beyond what was allowed under T'ang regulations (i.e., 4–5 percent a month).

How extensive were such commercial loans carried out by the monasteries? Fortunately, we have some concrete data for one monastery. It was the custom for accountants in monasteries to present financial reports at the end of each year to the entire congregation of monks in a monastery. The report for the Ching-t'u Monastery in Tun-huang for 924 has been preserved; from this document we learn that during that year, 366.9 *shih* of grains were received by the monastery. Of this amount, revenue from temple lands constituted 44.4 *shih* or 12 percent; interest income was 200 *shih* or 55 percent of the total; while donations amounted to 120

[37] Wei Shu, *Liang-ching hsin-chi* 2. 15ab (*Yüeh-ya-t'ang ts'ung-shu* ed.). See also *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi* 493. 4047–48 (Peking, 1959).

[38] Stein 1475. This is also a Tun-huang manuscript recovered by Aurel Stein and now kept in the British Museum.

[39] Pelliot 3565; Stein 4445.

[40] Pelliot 3959.

[41] Ibid.

shih or 33 percent. For that one year, interest from loans represented more than half the income of the monastery.[42] Loans in money were rather rare, although instances have been found. In one case, the individual borrowed 1,000 cash, promising to pay an interest of 200 cash each month, an astronomical rate of 240 percent per annum.[43] One may conclude from this that it was far more expensive to borrow money than goods from the monastery.

The foregoing discussion has provided us with some idea of the extensive economic activities carried out by Buddhist monasteries in T'ang China. These economic activities, and the wealth they earned for the monasteries, were one of the chief factors behind the widespread suppression of Buddhism ordered by Emperor Wu in 845.[44] That the motives were in large measure economic and not religious may be noted in the nature of the suppression. Not all Buddhist monasteries were destroyed; in each of the two capitals four Buddhist monasteries were permitted, while in each of the major prefectures one monastery was permitted. Those images of the Buddha made of clay, wood, or stone were not to be destroyed, presumably because they possessed no economic value. However, ritual utensils and images made of bronze were to be converted into coins; images of iron were to be converted into farming implements; while images made of gold, silver, and jade were to be confiscated and turned over to the bureau of revenue. All monastic lands were to be appropriated by the government.[45] All this indicates that the state was primarily interested in confiscating the enormous wealth held by Buddhist monasteries.

Let us turn next to the monastery's role as a center of religious education for the masses of Chinese. Previously, we have noted the widespread popularity of Buddhism among all classes of Chinese society. Such popularity stemmed in large measure from the program of religious education that the monasteries carried out to reach the great masses of people. For the educated laity, the problem of transmitting Buddhist teachings was not too difficult. Such people could read the sutras themselves, or they could attend sessions in the monasteries where masters of the law could preach on their favorite scriptures. Occasionally, there would be debates between these masters on intricate points of dharma; for those laymen who were familiar with the controversial issues, such

[42] Pelliot 2049.

[43] Stein 5867. See also Gernet (n. 35 above), pp. 179–80.

[44] K. Ch'en, "Economic Background of the Hui-ch'ang Persecution," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 19 (1956): 67–105.

[45] *Chiu T'ang shu* 18A. 23b.

debates could be very informative. Of greater concern to the monasteries was the problem of reaching the large masses of simple uneducated people living in the vicinity of the monasteries. For these masses, the exposition and exegesis of a sutra would not be suitable; the audience would not have the understanding or the patience to sit through such formal presentations. What was needed were some new approaches which would combine entertainment with presentation of the rudiments of the religion. Through the centuries, the monasteries evolved a number of novel methods, and by the time of the T'ang dynasty these methods were refined and utilized on an extensive scale.

First was the creation of a new type of preacher whom we shall call by the general term popular lecturer. He might remain in a monastery, or he might travel from place to place. For the popular lecturer, four prerequisites were valued: voice, eloquence, talent, and profundity. In other words, he must not only be learned in the law, but he must also possess the voice and eloquence to be a sort of spellbinder, who could amuse the audience and keep them awake with all kinds of stories, anecdotes, and parables. Equipped with clever tongue and smooth language, these popular lecturers were very successful in getting across the message of the Buddha through amusing and entertaining stories.[46]

We are fortunate to have some contemporary accounts of one of the most famous popular lecturers at work, Wen-hsü, who lived during the early ninth century. He is described as an outstanding individual, a monk of great virtue, proficient in chanting the sutras, and possessing a soft pleasant voice which moved people. Ignorant men and fascinated women delighted in listening to him; they filled the monasteries whenever he spoke.[47] However, a Confucian critic charged that he discussed nothing but base and vulgar subjects, and that true followers of the Buddha all ridiculed him.[48] This criticism provides good insight into the nature of the audiences that attended the popular lectures. They consisted mainly of the unlettered and rustic masses, who were delighted in having the message of the Buddha embellished in the earthy and robust vernacular so well understood by them.

These popular lectures were enlivened by a very important literary innovation created by monks in the T'ang dynasty, the

[46] *Kao-seng-chuan* 13, *Taishō* 50. 417c.

[47] Tuan Ch'eng-shih, *Yu-yang tsa-tsu hsü-chi* 5. 11a (*Hsüeh-tsin t'ao-yüan* ed.); Tuan An-chieh, *Yüeh-fu tsa-lu Wen-hsü t'iao*, *Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng* ed., 1659:38; Ennin (n. 8 above), 3.84.

[48] Chao Lin, *Yin-hua-lu* c. 4, *Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng* ed., 2831:25.

pien-wen (or text of marvellous events). A *pien-wen* is a modified version of a Buddhist sutra consisting of a mixture of prose and poetry. The monks took a short episode in a sutra and expanded it to tremendous lengths by adding all kinds of stories of marvellous events. By so doing, they converted the sutra into an entertaining vehicle for spreading the Buddha's message. As one example of such expansion, a passage of fourteen characters in the Vimalakīrti was increased to 630 characters in prose and sixty-five lines of poetry, each line consisting of seven characters.

Probably the best known of these *pien-wen* is the *Mu-lien pien-wen*, which recounts the adventures of the monk Mu-lien in searching for his mother, who was reborn in the deepest Buddhist hell because of her deceit and avariciousness. We can well visualize the gripping interest with which the audience would follow a master storyteller describing Mu-lien rescuing his mother from hell only to have her reborn as a hungry ghost, then as a black dog, and finally as a deity in heaven.[49]

The second method by which the monasteries reached the masses was via the numerous festivals throughout the calendar year. Such celebrations were the expression of deep religious fervor by the Chinese; the intensity of this fervor was a good indication of the degree of acceptance of the religion by the Chinese as a whole. In celebrating the festivals collectively, the Chinese of the T'ang dynasty were drawn together in unity through a common faith engendered by the Mahayana emphasis on compassion and universal salvation.

The first popular festival in the Buddhist calendar was the lantern festival, celebrated on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth days of the first month of the year.[50] Ordinarily, the gates connecting the different wards in the capital of Ch'ang-an were closed during the night, thus restricting travel from one ward to the other, but during the festival the gates remained open all night and all restrictions were suspended.[51] This permitted people to wander from monastery to monastery, viewing the gorgeous

[49] Many different versions of this *pien-wen* have been found in Tun-huang. I have personally looked over Pelliot 2193, 2319, 3107, 3485, and 4988; Stein 2614 and 3704. Stein 2614 is published in *Taishō* 85. 1307a–14a. Numerous manuscripts are also in the Peking Metropolitan Library; see Ch'en Yüan, *Tun-huang chieh-yü-lu* (Peking, 1931), pp. 541 ff. For a discussion of this *pien-wen*, see Ch'en, *Transformation*, pp. 24–28. There is an English résumé in A. Waley, *Ballads and Stories from Tunhuang* (London, 1960), pp. 216–35.

[50] *T'ang-hui-yao* 49. 8b–9a: "Every year in accordance with established precedence, the markets shall be opened and the lanterns lit on the evenings of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth days of the first month."

[51] *T'ang-lü su-i* 26. 13a.

display of lights in each one. The Japanese monk Ennin described a spoon and bamboo lamp which he witnessed in Yang-chou. It was about seven or eight feet tall, with a thousand metal or clay spoons tied to the ends of bamboo branches. Each spoon was filled with oil and when lighted gave the effect of a gorgeous Christmas tree.[52]

Next on the calendar was the celebration of the Buddha's birthday— the eighth day of the fourth month—featured mainly by the bathing and parading of the Buddha images.[53] During some of the birthday celebrations over the years there took place another ceremony, that of welcoming and reverencing the relics of the Buddha. When this happened, the emotional reaction of the Chinese was indeed astounding. On the pretext that they were making offerings to the relics, the Chinese would abandon their occupations and exhaust their fortunes, or they would burn their heads and cauterize their arms. In the celebration of 873, a soldier cut off his left arm, and holding it in his hand he reverenced the relic each time he took a step, his blood sprinkling the ground all the while.[54]

The third important festival was All Souls' Feast, held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month to commemorate the rescue by Mu-lien of his mother from hell. It was believed that offerings made to the Buddhist monks on this festival would result in meritorious rebirths for all ancestors extending seven generations back. Because of this identification with the important Confucian virtue of filial piety, the festival became most popular and widespread during the T'ang era.[55]

On these festival days, when the monastery grounds would be filled with visitors and spectators, the monastery would present different kinds of programs that offered entertainment as well as religious instruction. For instance, there would be dramatic performances based on themes taken from the scriptures or from episodes during the previous lives of the Buddha. There would be

[52] Reischauer (n. 13 above), p. 71.

[53] *Wei-shu* 114. 10a; *Lo-yang ch'ieh-lan-chi* c. 3, *Taishō* 51. 1010b; Meng Yüan-lao, *Tung-ching meng-hua-lu* 8. 1a (*Hsüeh-tsin t'ao-yüan* ed.); *Shih-shih yao-lan*, *Taishō* 54. 288c.

[54] Ennin gave a detailed account of the reception of a tooth relic in Ch'ang-an in 841 (see Ennin [n. 8 above], 3. 84). For the 873 celebration welcoming the finger bone relic in Ch'ang-an, see *Chiu T'ang-shu* 19. 21a; Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (n. 34 above), pp. 280–82.

[55] The scriptural basis for the celebration of the All Soul's Feast is the *Yü-lan-p'en ching*, translated by Dharmaraksha during the Western Chin dynasty (265–316) and published in *Taishō* 16. 779a–779c. Throughout his diary, Ennin describes the observance of this festival in the different places he visited (see Reischauer, pp. 268–69, 344). Imperial participation in this festival for the year 768 may be found in *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi* 41, *Taishō* 49. 378c; *Chiu T'ang-shu* 118. 6b.

storytelling by talented raconteurs and performances of magic feats by monks proficient in such arts.[56] Such feats undoubtedly assisted in attracting attention and spreading the Buddha's message; the Buddha himself once remarked that a magical feat quickly captures the mind of worldlings.

Yet another method of propagating the religion was through vegetarian feasts arranged by the monasteries throughout the year. The occasions for such feasts might be the birthday of the Buddha or the reigning emperor, the date of nirvana, memorial days for deceased emperors or patriarchs, commemoration of the completion of an image or a monastery, expression of gratitude for some good fortune, boon, or benefit.[57] To such feasts were invited monks and laity on a basis of equality. The donors of such feasts might be members of the imperial family, some rich laymen, or the monks and monasteries themselves. Attendance varied from a small company to the tens of thousands.[58]

Finally, the monasteries sought to popularize Buddhism through organizing societies or clubs for laymen under the leadership of monks. Such societies fulfilled a variety of purposes—constructing images of Buddhist deities, copying or reciting sutras, preparing for vegetarian feasts, or performing pious deeds for the accumulation of merits. They varied in size, from a few to over 1,000 members, depending mainly on the purpose for which they were organized.[59] If the purpose was to carve an image of the Buddha out of the walls of caves, then the number tended to be fairly large. We have on record a Society for the Recitation of the *Hua-yen* (*Avataṁsaka* [Garlands of flowers]) *Sutra*, which claimed to have a membership of 100,000 and which met quarterly in separate places, with each member reciting one chapter of the *Hua-yen Sutra*.[60]

During the T'ang dynasty, such societies became rather common. On certain occasions during the year, such as during the popular lectures or the vegetarian feasts, the members of societies would

[56] *Lo-yang ch'ieh-lan-chi*, *Taishō* 51. 1003b.

[57] Ch'en, *Transformation*, pp. 276–78.

[58] *Hsü Kao-seng-chuan* 19, *Taishō* 50. 581b, a feast for 10,000 people; *Ts'e-fu yüan-kuei* 52. 5a, a feast for 10,000 people in the Tz'u-en Monastery staged by Emperor Tai-tsung in 773; *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi* 39, *Taishō* 49. 367a, feast for 5,000 people in Tz'u-en Monastery staged by Emperor Kao-tsung in 656; ibid., 44, *Taishō* 49. 404b, feast for 30,000 people staged by Emperor Chen-tsung in P'u-hsien Monastery on Mount Omei in 1011.

[59] For a more extended discussion of these societies, see Ch'en, *Transformation*, pp. 281–94.

[60] For Po Chü-i's account of the organization and activities of this organization, see *Po-shih ch'ang-ch'ing-chi* 59. 7a–8b.

offer their services to the monasteries. After the event, the monasteries would usually reward the members with a feast in which there would be much merrymaking, eating, and drinking.[61] It is interesting to note here that, while Buddhism prohibited the monastic community from drinking intoxicating liquor, the Chinese Buddhist monastery made no attempt to discourage devout laymen in these societies from drinking liquor.

Numerous documents have been recovered in Tun-huang concerning these societies, most of which were notices announcing meetings of the societies. The following is a typical example: "It is requested that all members reading this circular will gather at the entrance of the Tuan-yen Monastery at 6:00 A.M. on the fourth day of the coming month for a vegetarian feast. The last two to arrive will be fined one beaker of wine; while those who are absent will be fined half a flask of wine. This circular is to be circulated rapidly among the members, and no one is permitted to hinder its circulation."[62]

These societies afforded, therefore, the lay people in the vicinity of a monastery opportunity to participate in the religious program of the monastery. Through such activities as raising funds, assisting the popular lectures, preparing vegetarian feasts, or copying the sutras, they performed constructive deeds for the development of the monastery. In turn, the society members gained status in the community as well as spiritual instruction and benefit from the clerical community.

Finally, there is the role of the monastery as a charitable institution. In a religion emphasizing the doctrine of karma, it would not be strange if it were to take little interest in the sick, the needy, and the unfortunate of society. For such people, after all, are mainly reaping the rewards of their past karma, and one can do little to help them. However, that same religion in its Mahayana aspect also stresses compassion, altruism, and the unity of all life. In line with this emphasis on compassion, the Buddhist monastery in T'ang China carried out a program of charitable activities on behalf of the unfortunate members of society. One of the instruments to achieve this was the field of compassion. In India this was no more than an abstract concept, but in China, with the Chinese propensity for rendering the abstract into the concrete, there were established actual fields of compassion connected with

[61] See the following Tun-huang manuscripts, Pelliot 2032 and 2049, for notices about the monasteries providing wine for society members.
[62] Pelliot 3372.

the monasteries, which yielded income used for altruistic purposes.[63]

Among the charitable institutions established by Buddhist monasteries, we might mention hospitals and dispensaries to care for the sick, the decrepit, and the needy. We have a decree issued by authorities calling upon hospitals to gather beggars and feed them.[64] Orphanages, feeding stations for the hungry, and havens for the aged were established, and burial services were provided for those who were indigent and without relatives.[65]

These charitable activities were primarily for the benefit of those less fortunate in life. It must be added that monasteries also carried out projects for the public weal, such as building roads and bridges, deepening river channels to facilitate navigation,[66] digging wells and planting trees on roadsides, or maintaining inns and comfort stations for the welfare of pilgrims traveling to sacred spots. To honor the public-spirited monks who promoted such activities, a special section entitled "Section on Monks who Increase Merits" was set aside in the collections of biographies.[67]

It appears that the imperial government was cognizant of the valuable contributions made by these fields of compassion. In 845, when Buddhism was persecuted, a fear arose among the officials that confiscation of monastic lands would jeopardize the social welfare program supported by the fields of compassion. The throne hastily approved a proposal advanced by one of the chief ministers calling for a continuation of such fields of compassion, with the proviso that they be administered by venerable trustworthy old men.[68]

This rapid survey has, we hope provided a glimpse of the varied roles carried out by Buddhist monasteries in T'ang China. They touched almost every group of Chinese society in one way or another. For the dynasty and imperial family, the monastery with its clerical community provided the avenue to seek for protective influences bestowed by forces in the unseen world. For the literati, the monastery afforded a haven of retreat and tranquillity in which they could contemplate the ills of the world. For the rich families, the monastery was a means to escape the onerous tax burden on

[63] *T'ang-hui-yao* 49. 9a–10a; *Chiu T'ang-shu* 18A. 15b.
[64] *T'ang-hui-yao* 49. 9b; *Ch'üan T'ang-wen* 704. 3b–4a.
[65] *T'ang-hui-yao* 49. 9b.
[66] For Po Chü-i's account of the deepening of the I River near Loyang, see *Ch'ang-ch'ing-chi* 71. 4a.
[67] *Hsü Kao-seng-chuan* c. 29, *Taishō* 50. 691b–700c; *Sung Kao-seng-chuan* c. 27–28, *Taishō* 50. 878b–88c.
[68] *T'ang-hui-yao* 49. 10a; *Chiu T'ang-shu* 18A. 15b.

the land. For the masses of people, the monastery offered financial assistance when needed, entertainment during the festivals to lighten their toils, social companionship in the various clubs, and a refuge in case of illness, poverty, or infirmity. To every Chinese, high or low, it offered the spiritual message of Buddhism, that all life is one, that our destinies are all interrelated and intertwined, that we live according to the fruits of our acts, and that, if we are devout enough, we shall eventually be reborn in the Western Paradise.

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