



Religious Syncretism in Eastern and Far-Eastern Countries

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MD. Ashikul Islam

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Thesis submitted to the University of Dhaka for
the Degree of Master of Philosophy

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Acknowledgement

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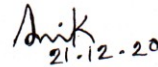
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Declaration

The thesis titled “Religious Syncretism in Eastern and Far-Eastern Countries” has been submitted to the University of Dhaka for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy. This is my own work that has been carried out under the supervision of Dr. Mohammad Jahangir Alam, Associate Professor, Department of World Religions and Culture, University of Dhaka.

I, hereby, would like to declare that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been published previously.



(Md. Ashikul Islam)

M. Phil. Researcher

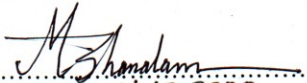
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Approval of the Supervisor

This is to certify that the thesis titled “Religious Syncretism in Eastern and Far-Eastern Countries” is accomplished by MD. Ashikul Islam under my guidance and supervision as a partial fulfillment for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in World Religions and Culture of the University of Dhaka. This report is a record of the bonafied work that has been carried out by the researcher successfully.


.....
21.12.2020

Dr. Mohammad Jahangir Alam

Associate Professor

Department of World Religions and Culture

University of Dhaka

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Research Problem

This thesis proposes a process of synthesis based on Chinese socio-historical context in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the synthesis of three major religious traditions of East Asia –Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. At the same time, the syncretic modes of these religions have been taken into consideration to understand their popularity throughout East and Far East Asia. Thus, to make a reasonable justification for the current study, an attempt has been made to explore how these religions have appeared to be more or less similar to each other in case of their beliefs and practices.

1.2. Background of the Study

Synthesis among various religions has been regarded as an important topic in the academic arena of the world. East Asia is also a lucrative place for the researchers who want to decipher the cultural diversity in a larger geographical setting.

The researcher takes China as a model to analyze the East Asian religious synthesis because this country has a tremendous effect over this region. The reason to take the three religious traditions of East Asia is that these are common in all East Asian countries and they all assume a Chinese character. Therefore, in the guise of three religious traditions of China, the researcher wants to depict the picture of syncretism that takes place in the whole part of East Asia.

China has some characteristics which help it to play a vital role in the religious and cultural history of East Asia. China is situated in the middle of East Asia and as the largest country it occupies a greater part of this region. It has boundaries with all other East Asian countries. The influence of China is so pervasive that it creates a Chinese sphere in East Asia. It is called "Sinosphere" or "East Asian cultural sphere." It refers to a grouping of countries and regions in East Asia those were historically influenced by the Chinese culture- a Confucian ethical philosophy, Buddhism, Taoism and a common writing system. The core regions of the East Asian cultural sphere are Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.¹

The American Sinologist and historian Edwin O. Reischauer grouped China, Korea and Japan together into a cultural sphere that he called the Sinic world. These countries are centralized states that share a Confucian ethical philosophy. Reischauer states that this culture originated in Northern China and compared the relationship between Northern China and East Asia to that of Greco-Roman civilization and Europe. The elites of East Asia were tied together through a common written language based on Chinese characters, much in the way that Latin had functioned in Europe.²

The American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington considered the Sinic world as one of many civilizations in his "The Clash of Civilizations." Huntington's Sinic civilization includes China, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. Of the many civilizations that Huntington discusses, the Sinic world is the only one that is based on a cultural, rather

¹ East Asian Cultural Sphere. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Asian_cultural_sphere. Accessed on- 4/10/18.

² Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Sinic World in Perspective*, Foreign Affairs 52.2 (January 1974): 341-348.

than religious, identity.³ And this is China which has a very deep impact over every Sinic country. This influence of Chinese culture makes it a model to understand religious syncretism in East Asia. Hence the researcher takes China as a measuring scale to understand the synthesis of three traditions throughout the whole East Asia.

Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are three major religious traditions of East Asia. Though some countries of this region have its native religion such as Shinto in Japan and Cao-dai in Vietnam, these three are the most pervasive ones. Researcher takes these three religions in the context of China because they all take a Chinese form due to the dominance of China to all over East Asia.

The three main religions of China- Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are not revealed religions as compared to the Abrahamic tradition. Basically, there is no concept of God in these three religions (though the founders of these religions later adorned as God). They stressed on human effort rather than heavenly assistance. All these three are more akin to philosophy than to religion. Though they present three different kinds of solution but standing a longer period of time with this inner similarity they unconsciously create a synthetic worldview.

In China, culture is not influenced by religion, therefore all Chinese religions are more or less influenced by culture. For thousands of years, the influence of Chinese culture is so strong that it cannot be erased from people's minds.⁴ It is true for all other East Asian countries. Confucianism and Taoism are two indigenous religions in China. As men of Chinese soil, both Laozu and Confucius borrowed many ancient Chinese concepts in their philosophy, such as –Tao, Tien, Yin and Yang etc. After the departure of the founder, both traditions lean themselves in the dominant cultural

³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996, p. 45.

⁴ Wang Dunqin, *The Influence of Confucianism on Molding Zhang Jian's Cultural Character*, Nangtong University Press, China, 2002, p.2.

stream. Though Confucianism is not a religion, it has had a unique place in the culture of mankind. For more than two thousand years Confucianism was the most prominent force in shaping the culture of the world's most populous nation.⁵

Buddhism, the most popular religion in China, is not in Chinese origin. It enters into East Asia from India through China. As a foreign religion, it has many aspects which do not match with traditional Chinese culture, such as- concept of suffering, concept of illusion, concept of celibate life etc. In the long history of its journey throughout China, it synthesized its philosophy with traditional Chinese culture. In China Buddhism is molded so radically into a new form that scholars have to identify it in a different name as “Chinese Buddhism.” This writing is an effort to analyze the impact of Chinese culture over these three traditions of East Asia.

The syncretism that happens among these three traditions is very peculiar in character. These three religious traditions do not mix together to become a unified whole. Rather they stand with their own identity but influenced so much by one another that the three create a one synthetic concept. So there is a need to clarify the concept of syncretism in the light of East Asia to understand researchers' views about the context.

1.2.1. Syncretism in East Asia

Literally syncretism indicates a process of synthesis where two or more religions or cultures, because their close contact, gradually borrow concepts from each other and in turn lose their own identity and put a new one of their own. Syncretism is the last stage of synthesis. Synthesis is the process where two or more religions are influenced by one another but are able to hold the individual position. Syncretism is the process

⁵ Frederick Tse-shyang Chen, *The Confucian View of the World Order*, Ind. Int'l &Comp, Vol. 1:45, 1991, p.45.

where two or more religions are influenced by one another so deeply that they all lose their individual position and turn to a new whole.

In Japan, a Far Eastern country, the native religion Shinto is synthesized with Buddhism and gradually both religions lose their individual identity. In this case, an adherent practices both religions at the same time. Therefore, elements of both religions stand in the same place without any clash.

In Vietnam, another East Asian country, a syncretic religion named Cao Dai tradition arises with the blending of several religions which previously existed in Vietnam. In this case, elements from several religions blend in a separate platform and create a totally new faith.

The syncretism which originates among the three main religious traditions in East Asia is different from the traditional concept of syncretism. In the case of the intermixture of the three traditions, which originates in China and later spreads through all over East Asia, things are not the same as in Japan and Vietnam. In China, although the three religions do not lose their individual identity physically, they lose all kinds of individuality in their thinking. Whenever there originates a school of thought within a religion, it entails elements from the rest of the established thoughts. Individual thinking is therefore replaced by what the researcher calls "Hybrid Thinking."

In the case of China, first the synthesis among Cultures happens and then this synthesis turns into syncretic ideas. Thus in this research work, the term 'synthesis' connotes syncretism as its output.

1.3. Objective of the Study

The objective of the Study is to decipher the points where and how these three religions interact with each other in regard to belief and practice.

It should be noted that numerous research works have been done to analyze the effect of these three religions over one another. The researcher wants to analyze the topic from a different point of view. In this regard, the researcher has made an attempt to prove this research work a unique one on the basis of the following ideas:

1. It is based on a cultural bridge between China and other East Asian countries.
2. It discusses the three main religious traditions of East Asia and Far East Asian countries.
3. It points out a new mode of syncretism which can be called "**Hybridization.**"

1.4. Research Questions

In order to address the current problem from socio-historical perspective, the researcher has made an attempt to explore the background of cultural elements that are responsible for the synthesis of three traditions in East Asia. In this connection, however, the researcher tends to ask three guiding central questions:

Central Questions

1. To what extent have the three traditions been influenced by the Chinese Culture?
2. What are the main reasons behind this synthesis?
3. What is the nature of synthesis?

In the light of these three questions, the researcher tends to make clear the picture of the intermixture of three religions of East Asia (Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism).

1.5. Literature Review

Since the present study explores the role played by the process of synthesis in the three religions in China, the researcher has already reviewed a good number of Chinese and East Asian sources to gain an insight into the key concepts of the current study.

For developing a thoughtful understanding on the topic, the researcher tends to consider a number of historical and contemporary documents. By analyzing some of those scholarly literatures, the researcher has found that it has received different levels of attention at different stages of development by scholars and researchers. These scholarly works have attempted to advance researcher's knowledge about East Asian religious tradition and thereby clear ideas of religio-cultural syncretism from different points of view. The research has indicated a wide range of data on three traditions. In fact, the inquiry was basically made on the basis of some Western and Chinese scholars with expertise on China. Karl Ludvig Reichlet is a prominent scholar on this field who published his book *Religion in Chinese Garment* in 1951. He is followed by several scholars as Kenneth K.S. Ch'en with his book *Buddhism in China- A Historical Survey* (1964), Charles A. Moor with his book *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture* (1967) and Howard Smith with his book *Chinese Religions* (1968). The research work on this topic is ongoing in the modern times as Joseph A. Adler publishes his book *Chinese Religions* in 2002. From these sources the researcher collects important information.

More importantly, this research work covers a wide range of literatures such as online full text books, articles, magazines, journals, images, encyclopedia etc. that provide the researcher with sufficient information on history, organization, philosophy and

practices of China. All of these works, therefore, give insights and information that are valuable for a better understanding of the current research.

Finally, in preparation for the researcher's work, specific reading is done from social, political, philosophical and anthropological perspectives that present a very good theoretical framework for the analysis. Thus, the scope of this dissertation, with its major emphasis on East Asian syncretism of three traditions provides a valid justification for continuing research on this topic.

1.6. Importance of the Study

The present research offers a new insight into the process of synthesis. In fact, this is an old issue to the literary society of the West and hence various works have already been done in this field. Presently the synthesis of three religions occupied a crucial position in the field of academic study of religion in the mid-twentieth century and thereby, it has become a considerable issue of further research for both the western and the eastern scholars in the present time. The following cases, for example, create a good scope in order to make this study fruitful and valid:

- An analysis of syncretism from a modern perspective.
- A good understanding of the setting and the nature of Chinese social structures, its traditions, values and norms of behavior.
- A good scope to be acquainted with the religious terms, concepts, practices, beliefs etc. of China and of East Asia.

This thesis, therefore, will be an important source for future researchers as well as useful reading for students, academics and scholars seeking to understand the intermixture among Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism with a new insight from the socio-historical perspectives.

1.7. Research Methodology

A methodology indicates a way to study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying research problems systematically along with the logic, assumptions and rationale behind them.⁶ In order to conduct this research work the researcher has adopted the qualitative method because of its nature and subject matter. In this section there is an effort to narrate the data collection and data analysis method, library research and research limitations to gain an insight about the whole procedure of this research.

1.7.1. Role of the Qualitative Method

As research problems differ for qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies, the particular type of problem actually varies depending on the approaches. For the current research work qualitative methods are adopted in order to address the problem so that it can be understood by exploring a concept or phenomenon.⁷ The strength of qualitative studies could be found in research which is descriptive, exploratory and stresses the importance of the context and the subject frame of reference. For such a very practical reason it is essential to present a detailed view of the subject matter.

⁶ M. Nurul Islam, *An Introduction to Research Methods*, Dhaka: Mullick and Brothers, 2008, p.4.

⁷ Qualitative type of research. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qualitative_research. Accessed on 9/11/18. Qualitative research is a scientific method of observation to gather non-numerical data. This type of research "refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and description of things" and not to their "counts or measures." Qualitative research approaches are employed across many academic disciplines, focusing particularly on the human elements of the social and natural sciences.

1.7.2. Methods of Data Collection and Data Analysis

As the approach of the current research is qualitative, the following methods are adopted to serve the objectives and aims of this research. In this research, the researcher has used secondary sources for data collection. Therefore, it is important to mention that this research work mostly depends on secondary sources that will be thoroughly followed by analysis, assessment and evaluation.

In general, with a view to analyze data the researcher relies on non-numerical and unquantifiable elements. Here, the researcher does not need to adopt any numerical technique in analyzing facts (or information) as information is considered qualitative in nature. Thus, according to the nature of the present study, the researcher has adopted an analytical method. This is the reason, the researcher has intended to use facts and information (from available sources) and analyze these in order to make a critical evaluation of the materials (already collected).⁸ The method of data analysis will be concerned with explanation of the status of some factors on the basis of times and circumstances which can serve the current purpose in adding knowledge to related areas of exploration and explain all important aspects from social and historical perspectives. In addition, on the basis of research design, the researcher has adopted an exploratory method. As exploratory studies do not attempt to offer final and conclusive answers to research questions, the researcher only aims to explore his research area.⁹

Documents to be used in this study will be subjected to the same careful types of criticism employed by historians and sociologists. Finally, it should be noted that

⁸ Types of Research Methods according to the nature of the study, available at: https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-types/#_ftnref4. Accessed on 14/06/2018.

⁹ Ibid.

throughout the entire research project there will be an earnest endeavor to protect the confidentiality of all data that has already been collected.

1.8. Research Limitations

The researcher faces some obstacles and challenges in conducting the current research.

First to be mentioned, the researcher has got no chance to visit his research areas. Thus, in order to collect information, the researcher has to depend only on written documents which include books, journals, articles, thesis etc.

Second, there is a shortage of written documents, especially the hard copy of the reputed books regarding this topic. For this reason, the researcher cannot conduct for a vast range of literature. But in that case, the researcher goes through plenty of information retrieved from online.

Finally, the researcher did not have any scope to learn Chinese language and therefore he could not access information in such a particular language. That is why the researcher had to depend only on the English language for data collection and analysis.

1.9. Organization

This dissertation contains seven chapters that are partly interconnected and partly independent. **Chapter One** gives a brief description of the research problem and presents data on the basis of literature review that how religious syncretism took place in China and created such a social milieu in spite of the rivalry among three traditions. It equally sheds light on the methodology and data analysis including the role of the qualitative method, categorizing relations, library research and research limitations.

Chapter Two traces the historical events which act as a catalyst to create a syncretic form of the three traditions. In this chapter a socio-political approach is made with an emphasis on the growth of various syncretic religious schools of three traditions. **Chapter Three** explores the synthesis which Buddhism has faced in the course of time. In **Chapter Four**, an in-depth study is made to clarify syncretic features of Taoism. **Chapter Five** examines the historical and philosophical discourse of Neo Confucian movement and how it consists of Buddhist and Taoist elements. **Chapter Six** demonstrates the most interesting part of this thesis with its analysis of the film Kung Fu Panda to depict the present picture of synthesis in modern day China. **Chapter Seven** includes the findings and conclusion of this research work.

Chapter Two

Historical Upheavals in China

The religious history of China is not a history of harmony and unity. There are many philosophical and ethical differences among Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in China. In spite of these differences, we see a harmonious coexistence of these three religions in modern day China. Here raises a question about how these religions with their internal differences can stay together.

During the course of some 3500 years of history, the Chinese have developed their own distinctive ideas concerning man's origin, nature, destiny and his relation to the universe in which he lived. There is in China no independent religious heritage comparable to that of the Hebrew tradition and no such solid organization of priests as that of Christendom. Therefore no such religious system is found in China as in the West.¹⁰The Chinese are unique among all peoples, ancient and modern, in having no creation myth, no supreme heavenly ordainer. Lacking the idea of a personalistic creator external to the cosmos, the Chinese developed an approach to religious life that led to the rejection of monotheism.¹¹

Traditional Chinese religiosity may not embrace the One God of the Abrahamic traditions, but this certainly does not mean that supernatural beings are not venerated or worshipped. These entities may take the form of deities, saints, immortals, trees, animals (the Chinese dragon is particularly important) and other aspects of nature,

¹⁰ Howard Smith, *Chinese Religions*, The Trinity Press, London, 1968, p.x.

¹¹ Derk Bodde, "Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy", in Arther Wright, ed., *Studies in Chinese Thought*, Chicago, 1953, pp.20-24.

fairies, spirits, demons or ghosts, the latter occupying a special place between humans and the pantheons of assorted gods.¹²

The interests of early Chinese philosophy are far more practical than are those of the earliest systematic Western thinkers, the Greeks. Whereas Greek thought seems to have begun with highly theoretical inquiries concerning Nature, Chinese thought begins with a social problem connected with Warring States¹³ political chaos. The central issue for Chinese thinkers was, how did China fall into this state of chaos, how can it get out of it, and what is the proper conduct for individuals in times such as these?¹⁴

Religion in China has always been in the close control of centralized government. The secular power wanted to win over religion because it is a means to win over the masses. Major religious groups also tried to win the patronage and active support of emperors for propagating their respective faiths, attracting the populace and building temples and monasteries.¹⁵

The patronization of the emperors to a specific religion sometimes resulted in rivalry among the groups. Here State power was always an active catalyst of synthesis among multiple religious cultures. To know the synthesis requires a full analysis of the history of patronization through different dynasties. We divide the history of religion in China into four major periods to analyze the synthesis among the three religions in China.

¹² Eileen Barker, "Religion in China: Some Introductory Notes for the Intrepid Western Scholar" in Yang, F. and Lang, G. (eds), *Social scientific studies of religion in China: methodology, theories, and findings*, Boston, USA: Brill, 2011, pp. 109-132.

¹³ *Infra*, p. 15.

¹⁴ "Confucius and the Origins of Confucianism," Class text readings, History G380, Indiana University, 2010. Available at: www.iub.edu/~g380/1.9-Confucius-2010.pdf.

¹⁵ Smith, *op.cit*, p.x.

2.1. Han Period (206 B.C.E-220 C.E), the Period of Unity

The rise of the great Han dynasty marks the end of the Classical Period of Chinese religious and philosophical thought. This period is divided into two segments-

The first half is known as the "Spring and Autumn" period (206 BCE -9 CE), named after the Spring and Autumn Annals, a chronicle covering the years 722-481 B.C.E supposedly written by Confucius.¹⁶

The latter half is aptly called the "Warring States" period (23-220 CE). It is called so because in this time there was no unified state system in China. There remained rivalries among various feudal lords. This time of social and political chaos was a fertile period in the history of Chinese religion and philosophy and produced the traditions that we associate with classical Chinese civilization. Confucianism and Daoism were the best-known and most influential of these traditions.¹⁷

The classical period saw the birth of Confucianism and Taoism as a native religious philosophy of China. The Han period was the witness of the rise of Confucianism as a state cult, the development of Taoism as a mystic cult and the advent of Buddhism.

2.1.1. Rise of Confucianism

The Han period was the most favorable period for Confucianism. As Confucianism deals with social and political structure, the Han rulers took it as a means to strengthen their regime. Confucius himself did not support feudalism and wanted to unite China under one supreme ruler. There was an important role of Confucianism in the background of the unification of China by the Han rulers. On that account Confucianism became the warm advocate of imperial rule.

¹⁶ Joseph A. Adler, *Chinese Religions*, Laurence King Publishing Ltd, London, 2002, p.30.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.30.

2.1.1.1. Han Administration

Under the unified rule of the Han emperors, there was a need for a large number of officials and administrators. For this reason, Confucianism was adopted by the Han rulers as the intellectual basis for its system of government and its educational program for training officials. Thus men trained in the Confucian tradition came largely in the administration.¹⁸

Confucius' followers were known as *ru* or "scholars," because they came to be the experts in the rituals and arts thought to be necessary for good governance and a cultured life. There was never until modern times a Chinese equivalent for the term "Confucianism; "the tradition was called the "teaching of the *ru*" (*rujiao*) or the learning of the *ru*(*ru xue*). After Confucius' death, three or four generations of his followers compiled his oral teachings into a book called the *Lunyu* or *Analects* of Confucius.¹⁹ With the establishment of the Han Dynasty and its elaborate administrative system, a school was established to train civil servants. The *Analects* became part of the instructional material of this academy and students were required to pass examinations on Confucianism in order to work in government. This requirement continued up until the fall of the imperial system in China.²⁰

¹⁸ Smith, *op.cit*, p.141.

¹⁹ Adler, *op.cit*, p.2.

²⁰ Charles A. Rarick, *Confucius on Management: Understanding Chinese Cultural Values and Managerial Practices*, Journal of International Management Studies, Andreas School of Business, Barry University, 2007.

2.1.1.2. Han Education

To recruit the officials the Han Emperors inaugurated a civil service examination system. Through their influence, Confucianism became the ideology for knowledge and education. Extensive works had been done in collecting, editing and compiling the Confucian classics. There appeared six Confucian disciplines -poetry, history, rites, music, the book of changes and the spring and autumn classics.²¹

These six disciplines became the required study of all who wished to enter upon an official career. Chinese official life and thought become predominantly Confucian. Education in China came to be conceived largely in Confucian terms. Also the social and individual life was based on the ethical principles derived from Confucius.²² When the Hun emperor Wu-ti carried out the plan of the Confucian scholar Tung Chung Shu that 'all not within the field of the six disciplines should have been cut short and not allowed to progress further.'²³

In modern days the influence of Confucianism is strongly noticed. The Chinese educational system is highly structured and the perceived successful path is well defined. The Chinese perceptions of the educational system are built in a way that there is little room for differences. Educational success is clearly defined. Alternative paths are less recognized.²⁴

²¹ Adler, *op cit*, p.141.

²² Ibid, p.64.

²³ Smith, *op cit*, p.140.

²⁴ Grace Hui-Chen Huang and Mary Gove, "Confucianism and Chinese Families: Values and Practices in Education," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 2, 2012, p.13.

2.1.1.3. Han State Cult

In the time of Emperor Wu Ti (140-87 BC) the ritual and sacrificial system was elaborated. The Emperor, "Son of Heaven", was given a large place by Confucius. It is, in fact, Confucius who first clarifies in theory the idea of the Emperor as the incarnation of divine power on earth. There emerged elaborate rituals centering the Emperor. In these rituals the Emperor acted as a head priest. To manage the elaborate rituals, there emerged a separate ministry or department of the state named "Department of Rites." Thus established what might be called a Confucian state cult which had been continued till early decades of the twentieth century.²⁵

No wonder that the imperial house in China had constantly felt itself under obligation to Confucius and has constantly shown descendants the greatest favor. Confucius has been considered not only as a supreme sage but also as 'uncrowned king' appointed by heaven. Confucius himself has come to be honored and worshipped and Confucian principles are adopted in government.²⁶

Confucianism could not meet all the religious needs of Chinese people. It was one sided, dealing mainly with ethical and social matters. The other important side, the desire for deeper religious thought and the urge toward a holy mysticism, found its fulfillment in another personality, and in a quite different thought system.²⁷

²⁵ Smith, *op.cit*, p.140.

²⁶ Karl Ludvig Reichlet, *Religion in Chinese Garment*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1951, p.44.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.47.

2.1.2. Rise of Religious Taoism

The growth of Taoism in the Han era was not the same as the philosophical thought of Laozu. In this period Taoism became popular with its mysterious practices. The philosophical Taoism could never gain popularity in China. The philosophical Taoists were not a group, but a handful of authors.²⁸ It was the cultic system of a mystical group which gave Taoism a religious mode. The longest possible earthly life became the principle motto of it in the Han era. Several practices were included to achieve this goal. There was-

- a 'hygiene school', which cultivated longevity by means of breathing exercises and the control and exercise of the body.
- a practice of alchemy.
- an intense interest in the search for an elixir of life.
- a practice of sex techniques. They believed that special sex techniques can enlarge life.

According to the early Taoist, life was a harmonious relationship of material elements appertaining to the Yin and the Yang. Then if those elements could be held together in perfect harmony, life would be prolonged indefinitely. Unfortunately, that interior harmony was continually being disturbed by evil conduct, by passion and appetite and by taking into the body disruptive elements which were the materials by discipline, dieting, fasting, breath-control, etc., would lead to the prolongation of life indefinitely.²⁹

²⁸ Nathan Sivin, *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China*, Variorum, Chicago, 1995, p. 305.

²⁹ Smith, *op.cit*, p.99.

There developed the idea that one must seek to grow within oneself an invisible, immortal 'embryo'. This 'embryo', properly nourished and growing stronger throughout life, was the real 'self' of which the body was but a shell. At death it emerged as a butterfly from its chrysalis or as a snake from its sloughed-off skin, to wander at will in perfect freedom through the universe, or make its way to the realm of the blessed hsien (immortals). Through a Taoists death, what was buried in the tomb was not his true body but only a resemblance.³⁰

So to be a hsien, the adept entered upon an impossible task. Refraining from cereals, meat and wine, he gradually restricted his diet until, in theory; he existed only on breath and saliva. He purified his body by never eating solid food, by performing gymnastics and by respiratory techniques by means of which he believed he could create an inner embryo. He sought for an interior vision which will enable him to see the gods within his body. By uniting a mysterious embryo which, nourished on breath, develops a new and pure body within the old one and this new body, released on death, was immortal.³¹

Their own bodies became experimental labs as well. These oriental magicians attempted various athletic practices to strengthen their life-force -yoga like gymnastics and stretching exercises. They prepared and quaffed magical elixirs. They dose themselves with the germ of gold Cinnabar (a red compound of mercury and sulfur) and jade. They valued gold-one of the few substances known to be indestructible. Cinnabar was thought to have magical potency because it could be turned into a silvery liquid and then back into a solid. They experimented with jade, which traditionally had preservative powers against decay. They believed that these

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

three elements make them indestructible, transformable and unchangeable. Thus, they would be capable of spiritual transcendence as immortals or "hsien."³²

If religious Taoism had only been represented by these searchers after immortality, it would probably have remained an esoteric cult confined to comparatively few Taoist scholars, who, under the guidance of skilled 'masters' practiced alchemy. Taoism would never have attained recognition as one of the main religious systems of China. It was only by the popularization of Taoist teachings, and by linking them to the semi-religious, semi-political mass movements of the second century AD that a Taoist cultic organization came into being. It was however a great popular movement which swept over China in the second century AD that Taoism became established as one of the most significant religious movements, to exert a permanent influence on the Chinese people.³³ Taoism as a religion became established at a time when Buddhism was infiltrating into China. At first Buddhism seemed to have been accepted as a foreign teaching with great similarities to Taoism.

2.1.3. Entrance of Buddhism in China

The Han period was one of the great imperial expansions. The boundaries of China were extended westward and southward and more and more aboriginal and non-Chinese tribes were brought under the control of Chinese emperor. The imperial policies of the Han emperor had opened up the long central Asian trade routes to Parthia and Bactria and many other kingdoms of western Asia. It was along the great trade routes (the continental silk-road) through central Asia that Buddhism began to infiltrate into China.³⁴

³² The Tao and Taoism (Dr. L. Kip Wheeler) Available at: http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/chinese_taoism.html. Accessed on 10-10-2018.

³³ Smith, *op.cit*, p.112.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.113.

Interest in Buddhism also grew as Silk Road trade stimulated an interest in exotic merchandise. The great caravan roads allowed for interchange of ideas as well as of goods. The transmission of Buddhism from India to China paralleled an active trade between the two countries. As luxury trade goods like coral, pearls, perfume, and incense came flooding in from India, Buddhism accompanied it.³⁵ The first Buddhist monks arrived with shaved heads, begging bowls and robes at a time when the only people in China that dressed and acted in such a manner were criminals and beggars. Buddhism eventually caught the interest of Han Emperor Ming, who sent an envoy to India. Around 67-68 CE, Buddhist scriptures and two Indian monks arrived at the emperor's request, and they began the translating of Buddhist texts. So began the official establishment of Buddhism in China. By the end of the first century CE, there was a Chinese Buddhist community in the Chinese capital of Loyang.³⁶

With the rise of religious Taoism and the entrance of Buddhism into China there occurred three changes for the first time in Chinese religious era. These are-

- membership to a certain religion. It was previously unknown to China.
- religious conversion and
- individual voluntary choice.³⁷

What began as an insignificant movement, confined mainly to foreign traders, became within a few centuries the dominant faith of the majority of the Chinese people.³⁸ It was because; there were some lacking in the indigenous traditions. Buddhism just plays the role of "filling the gaps."

³⁵Jagdish P. Sharma, 'Review of Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges, A.D. 1-600 by Xinru Liu', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (Feb., 1991), p. 230.

³⁶ Ian Mabbett, 'The Beginnings of Buddhism', *History Today*, Vol. 52, 2002, p.6.

³⁷ Smith, *op. cit.*, p.114.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.115.

2.1.3.1. Strong Point of Buddhism in a Foreign Land

As Confucianism and Taoism both were philosophical movements rather than religion, there were many lacking in the religious arena of China. Confucius had never been able to satisfy the religious needs of the Chinese with his logical system of ethics. No answer was given to the deepest problems of existence. On the other hand, Taoism guides toward a way which was esoteric and very much undefined.³⁹

Taoism itself is the embodiment of paradoxes and contradictions. The sage acts without action and the ruler rules without governing. The intelligent person is like a little child. Being and nonbeing produce each other; each derives its meaning from the coexistence of the other. Not only the early Taoism but also the later development of mystical Taoism also retains its esoteric character. It is very difficult for a general person to cultivate an "inner embryo" with a food habit consisting only of breath and saliva.⁴⁰

During the final years of the Han Dynasty, peasant uprisings along with corruption and political infighting between the eunuchs, clans of the empresses and Confucian officials shattered what was left of the already fragile power structure. After the last Han emperor was forced to abdicate the throne in 220, China was not to be unified again for three and a half centuries.⁴¹ This tumultuous 'Age of Disunity' prepared a psychological foundation for the introduction of Buddhism. Buddhism offered salvation to all people; the seeking of nirvana, peace and other non-violent Buddhist doctrines would have appealed to people at a time when China was a brutal and dangerous place. The universal creed even gained popularity with the warlords, who

³⁹Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.12.

⁴⁰ David Y. F. Ho, "Selfhood and Identity in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism: Contrasts With the West," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, Blackwell Publisher Ltd. 1995, p.119.

⁴¹ Mike Edwards, 'The Han Dynasty', *National Geographic*, 205.2(Feb. 2004), p. 2.

as foreign and relatively uneducated rulers would have been, devalued to the lower echelons of Chinese culture by Confucian standards.⁴² The doctrines of Buddhism held a universal appeal to almost every class of people: from peasants to the elite.

Buddhism offered an irresistible appeal just where Confucianism and Taoism had failed. It satisfied religious aspirations, brought solace in sorrow and disappointment, offered divine assistance through ever-compassionate Buddha and bodhisattvas, and rewarded for meritorious living in some heaven of supreme bliss. The idea that all creatures possess the Buddha-nature and are capable of attaining to Buddhahood, linked to the doctrine of karma and the belief in rebirth was attractive to rich and poor alike. Buddhist scholars were all the time seeking to interpret their religion in such a way as to make it attractive to the Chinese.⁴³ Before the entrance of Buddhism there were little metaphysical explanations in Chinese philosophy. Confucianism and Taoism only deal with ethical, social, and political problems. Metaphysical problems—such as God, universe, space and time, matter and spirit etc were developed only after Buddhism from India.⁴⁴

One of Buddhism's greatest attractions to the Chinese was its promise of eternal life in paradise, for there had been no such idea in China. The belief in paradise was especially strong in the Pure Land School founded in China in the fourth century. It had been the most popular Buddhist sect in China for the last 800 years, testifying to the strong belief in and the earnest hope on the part of millions of Chinese for rebirth in the Pure Land.⁴⁵ But to make a place in the mind of the Chinese was not so easy because as a foreign faith Buddhism had many traits that seemed peculiar to Chinese.

⁴² Craig Benjamin, 'Intellectual Developments in China during an Age of Disunity', Lecture 11B, (11/16/11).

⁴³ Smith, *op.cit*, p.121.

⁴⁴ Charles A. Moor(Edt), *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, East west Center Press, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1967, p.132.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.23.

2.1.3.2. Dissimilarities of Buddhism with Chinese Culture

The growth of Buddhism was achieved in spite of the fact that in several respects its ideas and teaching were opposed to indigenous culture.⁴⁶ Though Taoism was friendly to it, at least in the beginning, it was Confucianism which never accepted it from its beginning to the last. Buddhism was criticized under four heads:

- (a) It is unfilial,
- (b) It encourages celibacy and results in the neglect of wives and children,
- (c) It permits the eating of impurities, i.e. the taking of cow's urine as medicine,
- (d) It promotes begging.⁴⁷

The first fact which was an alien concept to Chinese social system is the monastic life lead by the Buddhists. This was totally a new concept and also very destructive to the prevalent social order of the Chinese. With the influence of Confucianism, the Chinese always emphasized on family life and on numerous progeny.⁴⁸ With its celibate system and its renunciation of worldly matters, Buddhism offered a special challenge to Confucianism. Buddhism drew people away from home whereas Confucianism pointed the individual to his place in the home, there to practice filial piety and fulfill the obligations of life.⁴⁹ According to the Confucianists, the Buddhist theory of renunciation is untenable because though a man might desert his family, he can never escape from society so long as he sets his feet on earth. They show that even the Buddhists cannot get away from human relationships, while they severed their kinship with their parents; they organized themselves in a society of masters and

⁴⁶ Smith, *op.cit*, p.123.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.125.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.45.

⁴⁹ Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.106.

pupils.⁵⁰ The mendicant monk was an object of scorn. It seemed that those who search escape from the difficulties and burdens of life turned to a monk. The concept of a monastic community possessing its own government and laws was entirely unacceptable to the Confucians who believed in the unity of the empire under one supreme ruler.⁵¹ They condemned the Buddhists as unjust cowardly, because they work for their own interest and avoid social responsibility.⁵²

The Chinese hold the view that life is good and to be enjoyed and this is counter to the Buddhist teaching that all is suffering and illusion.⁵³ They criticized the Buddhists for mistaking concrete reality for emptiness, because the Buddhists regard all things, including clothing and food, as void and yet they live on those things every day.⁵⁴

For this reason, Buddhism was not fairly welcomed in the foreign lands. From the beginning it had to face strong opposition from the prevalent Confucian social order. But, it was warmly greeted by the Taoist who thought that the new faith was nothing but an extension of Laozu's teaching. The Han period saw an intimate relation between Buddhism and Taoism.

⁵⁰ Moor, *op.cit*, p.56.

⁵¹ Smith, *op.cit*, p.121.

⁵² Moor, *op.cit*, p.56.

⁵³ Smith, *op.cit*, p.121.

⁵⁴ Moor, *op.cit*, p.57.

2.1.3.3. Buddhism in the Shadow of Taoism

Buddhism is not mentioned separately in the dynastic history during the Han period. The reason is that Buddhism is considered as a part of Taoism, not a different religion. Therefore Han Buddhism is under the shadow of Taoism. Various intermixtures are happened during this shadowy period.

2.1.3.3.1. Similarities between Buddhism and Taoism

First there were some external similarities that hid the doctrinal differences between the two. In their public ceremonies both systems practiced worship without sacrifices. In their private practices both emphasized concentration and meditation, control of respiration and abstinence from certain kinds of food. A special factor of Buddhism was its emphasis on the control of passion and the avoidance of luxury. Though the Han Taoists had their own practice of "cultivating the inner embryo," some of them followed the Buddhist in favoring control of the passions.⁵⁵

The Buddhists taught the indestructibility of soul and rebirth in the Brahma heavens; the Taoists believed in the land of the immortals in the eastern seas or sought immortality in the Grand Purity. Because of these numerous elements of similarities between the two, the Buddhists and Taoists joined forces. For the Buddhists this union was an advantage because it enabled them to gain a hearing among the Chinese; by presenting their religion as one aspect of the native Taoist system, they were able to overcome some of the prejudice against a foreign faith.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ K.S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China- A Historical Survey*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1964, p.49.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.49.

2.1.3.3.2. Han Translation of Buddhist Scriptures

In the beginning, the translations of Buddhist terminology and text were very vague and confusing. The various forms of Buddhism that were introduced by importation of missionaries from various countries created a formidable challenge.⁵⁷ Adding to the perplexity, people could hardly tell the difference between Buddhism and Taoism. The first Buddhist text, *Sutra in Forty two Sections*, was translated during the Eastern Han. This sutra, like similar Taoist texts, taught people to purify their minds and to reduce their desires.⁵⁸

Another factor that tended to draw the two systems together was that the Chinese who assisted in the early Buddhist translations were usually drawn from among the Taoists. This could be seen in the choice of texts translated and in the terminology used.⁵⁹

If we examine the Han translations, we are confronted with a curious situation. Not many of the translations are concerned with the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism. Rather most of them are concerned with concentration practices and breathe control, subjects of interest to the Taoists. One example of such a translation by An Shih-kao is the "Chiu-heng-ching" (Sutra on the Nine Causes of Unexpected Death, Taisho Tripitaka, 880,883). In this sutra the Buddhist teaches that there are nine causes which prevent life from being successfully completed. By avoiding these, one can obtain longevity and an opportunity to hear the words of the teacher. The total subject matter is Taoistic than Buddhistic.⁶⁰ The reason for this translation work is probably that the translators want to present Buddhism in such a way that the readers or listeners could

⁵⁷LatikaLahiri, 'Interpretation of Buddhist Terminology at the Background of ChineseTraditional Thoughts', <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebdha180.htm>

⁵⁸Jiahe Liu and Dongfang Shao, *Early Buddhism and Taoism in China (A.D. 65-420)*, *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 12, (1992), p. 35-36.

⁵⁹ K.S. Ch'en, *op.cit*, p.49.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.50.

understand. The foreign term of Nirvana, Sunyata and Karmic Cycle would seem complex to general people. These terminologies were totally uncommon in Chinese philosophy. So the early translators want to present the familiar terminology such as longevity, paradise, good action etc.

Another problem arises to the early translators that sometimes they find no synonyms for Indian Buddhist terms. In this case they transliterated the Indian term. Such as Nirvana is transliterated into Nie-pan, Shakyamuni as Shi-gia-mu-ni, Khana as Chana etc. In this process an Indian word holds its original sound.⁶¹

But transliterated words cannot turn to a popular one as the translated words. For this reason the early translators use Taoist terminology to translate the Indian Buddhist terms. This process was called "Ke-yi" or the method of matching the meaning. This method was only applicable to the students so that a student already familiar with Chinese concepts could gain an understanding of the newly introduced Buddhist ideas.

After Kumarajiva arrived in 401 to present the authoritative interpretation of Buddhist thought and translated the Buddhist texts correctly, the ke-yi method was no longer used.⁶² (See Appendix 1, Figure 1)

After the fall of the great Han Dynasty, Buddhism gradually wakes up as a separate belief system. So the relationship which grew in the Han period soon turned to a new mode.

⁶¹ Dr. Chou Hsiang-Kuang, *A History of Chinese Buddhism, Indo-Chinese Literature Publications*, India, 1956, p.2.

⁶² K.S. Ch'en, *op.cit*, p.49.

2.2. Period of Disunity (220-589 A.D)

With the downfall of the Han Dynasty in 220 China entered a period of disunity that did not end until 589. In this time the barbarian Huns captured the capital Lo-yang. With the fall of Chinese civilization in the north there began an exodus of literati, officials and learned monks from the north to the south. There they assist in the establishment of Western Chin dynasty. The loss of the heartland of the Chinese culture raised some questions as to whether the traditional ideology (Confucianism) was sufficient as a strong force for the recovery of the north. In this mode the Ching rulers turned their favor to Buddhism.⁶³

2.2.1. Buddhist–Taoist Intermixture

In the Han period, Buddhist schools in China consisted of both Hinayana (Dhyana School) and Mahayana (Prajna School) traditions. The Dhyana School centered on control of the mind, concentration and suppression of the passion which was similar to Taoist practice. On the other side, Prajna School deals with the nature of the Buddha and the ultimate reality behind the external appearance of things. Among these two, Mahayana or Prajna School became popular in South China.⁶⁴

2.2.1.1. Prajna School and the Neo-Taoists

As a result of the vicissitude which followed in the wake of the breakdown of Han imperial authority, the intellectual persons of Taoism gave birth to a new movement named Neo-Taoism. They represented the dominant trend of thought among literary circles in South China during the 4th century. There was much evidence of intimate relationship between Neo-Taoists and the Prajna school of Buddhism. There were much common in the doctrine of the two. The Buddhists hold that all things in nature

⁶³ Ibid, p.297.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.298.

are empty or void, while the Neo-Taoist maintains that the myriad things have their origin in non-being. Buddhist emptiness was equated with non-being and both were considered as ultimate truths. Just as the sage of Neo-Taoism is said to be identified with non-being, so is the Buddha said to be identified with Sunyata or emptiness. The Taoist sage once united with the supreme Tao or non-being, becomes eternal and can assume any shape or size, just as the Buddha is eternal and can manifest himself in any form and in any place.⁶⁵

The man who attained nirvana and the sage in Taoism are the same in this sense that both have the same attitude towards the world. A writer named Fan Yeh (398-445) in his book Hou-Han shu said that, "If we examine closely its (Buddhist) teachings about purifying the mind and gaining release from the ties of life and its emphasis upon casting aside both emptiness and being, we see that it belongs to the Taoist writings."⁶⁶

Once this affinity of these two groups was discovered, the stage was set for a period of close relationship and interplay of ideas between the two groups. Such an interchange was carried on chiefly in the southern capital, Chien-k'ang and in K'uai chi in east China. The Neo-Taoists including their pure conversations began to play with Prajna ideas, while the Buddhist monks also began to look into the various aspects of Taoist philosophy. This close relationship between the Buddhist and Neo-Taoists was based also on the fact some of the monks arose out of the same social class, the gentry and aristocracy, as did their counterparts.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.59.

⁶⁶ Ibid,p.60.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.61.

2.2.1.2. Ch'an School and the Neo-Taoists

The Ch'an school in China originates during a period of close contact with the Taoists. The Ch'an school emphasizes in the practice of dhyana or meditation. In China, Tao-an (312-385) and Hui-yuan (334-416) are among the earliest Chinese monks to emphasize the importance of dhyana exercise.⁶⁸

The Ch'an school has many traits of Taoism. According to Ch'an masters as the mind is full of various preconceived ideas so it is difficult for a person to discover the Buddha nature within him. In order to apprehend the Buddha nature one must calm the mind and have to delete all pre conscious thought. Where there is conscious thought there is the ego at work. Conscious thought produces karma which causes rebirth on earth. To worship Buddha is also a conscious thought and therefore should be abandoned. Instead of worshipping Buddha one should allow the mind to operate freely and spontaneously. Here we find a strong Taoist tone.⁶⁹

Certain aspects of philosophical Taoism unquestionably played some part in the development of this movement. Ch'an writers and artists emphasized spontaneity and naturalness as against artificiality. The masters guided their followers' to live natural lives, to eat, drink, and pass water and sleep whenever they wish -all illustrate this characteristic. The Ch'an followers built a tradition of art where artists executed his brush in swift, spontaneous movements without any forethought. In this emphasis on naturalness and spontaneity the Ch'an was closely akin to Philosophical Taoism.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid,p.306.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.307.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.308.

The Ch'an emphasizes that the essence of the Buddha may be found in everyone and everything. This is also a close parallel in the Taoist emphasis on the immanence of the Tao.

Both Taoism and Ch'an stress the idea of the "beyond explanation" doctrine. In explaining Tao, Laozu says, "There is a thing confusedly formed, born before Heaven and Earth. Silent and void it stands alone and does not change, Goes round and does not weary. It is capable of being the mother of the world. I know not its name so I termed it -the Way." Parallel to this the Ch'an slogan is- "Truth is not expressed in words or written in letters."⁷¹

The Chan masters in China broke the Indian legacy of sacred scripture, object of worship, rituals and metaphysical speculations. They built one kind of native Buddhism with a simple and practical approach of enlightenment. They abandon the abstract language of Mahayana treatises and use the everyday colloquial language which can be understood by any Chinese listeners. Because of these traits, only this school can escape the persecution of 845 and emerge as a vigorous movement in Sung Dynasty.⁷²

2.2.1.1. Debate and Persecution

The friendly contact between two groups did not last long. It was a picture of South China where the intimacy preserves. In the Northern dynasty the two groups launched an acrimonious debate that led to a severe persecution by the ruler.⁷³

During the Han period, the Taoists developed a legacy of Laozu which led to a doctrine named "Hua-hu" or "the Conversion of the Barbarians." According to this

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid, p.309.

⁷³ Ibid, p.309.

doctrine, Laozu, after disappearing in the west, went all the way to India, where he converted the barbarians and became the Buddha. Therefore the founders of Buddhism and Taoism are one. So there is no difference between them.⁷⁴ At first Buddhist scholars accepted this doctrine due to their weakness in a foreign land. But after the fall of the Han Dynasty when Buddhism stood into its own feet, they began to refute this doctrine which resulted in a subsequent debate between the two groups. Situation became more severe when Emperor Wu (561-577) of the Northern Chou Dynasty was influenced by Taoists. There was a reason for his support of Taoism. The Chou ruling house had a non-Chinese origin. Emperor Wu wanted to be Chinese in his thinking and action. To him the foreign religion Buddhism was inimical to Chinese customs and institutions and should be opposed. He was strongly motivated by a Taoist monk Wei Yuan–Sung. In 574 AD he launched a destructive persecution to the Buddhists which continued till 577 AD. According to the *FeiCh'ang-fang* of the Sui Dynasty, Emperor Wu destroyed all the stupas, images and shrines build by the people for several hundred years, over three million monks and nuns were returned to the laity and over forty thousand temples were captured by the members of the imperial family and aristocracy.⁷⁵

As soon as Wu died in 578, a ruler more sympathetic to Buddhism succeeded him. Three years after that the Northern Chou was replaced by Sui in 581. In 589 the whole China was unified by the Sui Dynasty. Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty was an ardent Buddhist. This dynasty was in a way favorable to Buddhism. Situation soon changed when the Sui Dynasty was defeated by the Tang in 618 AD. The Tang rulers were neutral to all religions. So the Taoists got a chance to recapture the imperial favor that they lost in the time of the Sui and became again a rival of the Buddhists. When Li

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 60.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 60.

Shih-min founded the T'ang dynasty in AD 618, the Taoists were not slow to suggest that he is a descendant of Lao-tzu. Li Shih-min himself was inclined towards Buddhism, many of his successors became active patrons of Taoism. They bestowed titles and dignities on Lao-tzu. Emperor HsuanTsung (AD 712-56) ordered that a Taoist temple should be built in every city and that every noble family should possess a copy of the Tao-te-Ching. During his reign Tao teChing, Chung-tzu and Lieh-tzu were regarded as classics, and for a time were accepted as suitable studies for the civil service examinations.⁷⁶

The Tang rulers were anxious about the growing influence of the Buddhist monasteries. The previous Sui patronization made the monasteries fabulous in size. Each monastery had its own economic activities. They employed vast numbers of free laymen and temple slaves to cultivate their estates and to provide labor for water-powered rolling-mills, oil presses, hostels, pawnshop, etc. The monasteries served as charitable institutions caring for the aged and the sick. Monasteries ran dispensaries and hospitals, established bath-house and rest-houses, arranged for the feeding of the hungry and engaged in communal projects such as road-mending, bridge-building, digging wells and planting trees. It was like an empire within an empire.⁷⁷ The T'ang rulers saw it practical to bring the Buddhist sangha under the strict control of the state. Serious crimes committed by monks were now judged by the civil authorities. Throughout the eighth century a number of measures were introduced to regulate and control Buddhism.⁷⁸ In 747 the monastic order was restricted by the granting of government certificates to ordained monks.⁷⁹ When in AD 840 Wu Tsung came to the throne, he was under the influence of Taoist priests and alchemists. Largely through

⁷⁶ Smith, *op.cit*, p.123.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.123.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.123.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.124.

the machinations of Taoist advisers, Wu Tsung instituted a most virulent persecution in 845 to all 'foreign' religions, and especially Buddhism.⁸⁰ Though the persecution did not last long it had a disastrous effect from which Buddhism in China never completely recovered.

2.3. Patronization of Song and Ming Dynasties

It is not until the rise of the Song dynasty (960-1279) that there arise such a resurgence of the Confucian culture that there was a reassertion of the classical Confucian religion centering in the supremacy of heaven and the place of the emperor as True Son of heaven. This state cult was based upon a reinterpretation of the Confucian classics by neo-Confucian scholars who had been greatly influenced by the philosophy of Buddhism.⁸¹ A detailed picture of the Song-Ming patronization of Confucianism and the blend of the three traditions will be discussed in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.124.

⁸¹ Ibid,p.124.

Chapter Three

Synthesis in Buddhism

One of the outstanding facts of Buddhism in the history of Chinese philosophy has been its tendency and ability to synthesize. Various Buddhist schools arrive in China from India. Only that school which tempers itself with Chinese culture endures. More interesting fact is that the schools which originate in China are much more popular than those which originate in India. The history of Chinese philosophy is usually divided into periods, and each period ended in some sort of synthesis.⁸²

3.1.Synthesis with Chinese Culture

As a foreign religion, Buddhism has many aspects which do not match with traditional Chinese culture, such as- concept of suffering, existence as an illusion, living celibate life etc. In the long history of its journey throughout China, it has synthesized its philosophy with traditional Chinese culture. All the Buddhist schools were introduced, preserved, and developed in China, but only those consonants with the Chinese temper lasted.⁸³ Thus Buddhism, which in the beginning knew no god and had no worship, came to present to the Chinese a multitude of new divinities, and a whole new system for making them real to the people.⁸⁴ Various new concepts are introduced in it as an impact of the dominant Chinese culture.

⁸² Moor, *op.cit*, p.133.

⁸³ Ibid, p.52.

⁸⁴Reichlet,*op.cit*,p.110.

3.1.1. Concept of Good and Evil

According to Buddhism the world in essence is illusory. Therefore, human existence is also illusory. The world is full of suffering therefore, every man has to make an effort to escape from this world. This idea is opposite to that of Chinese. Traditional Chinese thought has always been interested more in a good life and a good society than in organized knowledge. The Chinese held the view that life is good and to be enjoyed and this went counter to the Buddhist teaching that all is suffering and illusion. For this reason, from the beginning, the Hinayanaist tradition could not flourish in China. It is Mahayana, which synthesizes itself with Chinese concept of inner goodness of this world.⁸⁵

The Chinese translation for the Buddha name, Sakyamuni, was neng-jen, literally the ability to be good. Temples dedicated to him were called jen-tzu, temples of goodness.⁸⁶ Both Laotze and Confucius hold to the opinion that "the human heart is originally good". They seem to have no understanding of the terrible heritage of evil inclinations.⁸⁷

3.1.2. Humanization of God

The humanization of Chinese Buddhist deities is surely a Chinese influence. The historical Buddha is not very popular in China and also in other eastern countries. In fact, the Chinese people worship three Buddha's or the Buddha in three bodies. But the most popular Buddhist deity in China has been Avalokitesvara or Kuan-yin, almost humanized. Kuan-yin is the short of Kuan-shai-yin, a phrase signifying "a

⁸⁵ Smith, *op.cit*, p.121.

⁸⁶ Moor, *op.cit*, p.20.

⁸⁷ Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.82.

being who hears the cries of man."⁸⁸ In India and also in Japan he retains his transcendental and heavenly features, but in China he has been devoid of these qualities and has become a human figure. From the T'ang period, he became a woman, or the Goddess of Mercy. Kuan-yin holds a flower vase from which all kinds of blessings are poured over all of humanity. And these blessings are not nirvana, a world transcending our own, but such human blessings as health, wealth, long life and most important of all children (the Chinese always put emphasis on numerous progeny). Instead of sitting in the high heavens looking upon us with compassion, she is likely to be sitting by a bamboo grove, carrying a baby or holding a fish basket. A story has even been invented in the eleventh century that she is originally a girl who becomes a goddess due to her practice of filial piety. Kuan-yin is so close to mankind as to be almost human.⁸⁹ With the influence of Confucianism, the concept of filial piety is so strong in Chinese culture that Buddhism has to absorb it. Whereas the main motto of Buddha is to liberate the soul from the burden of this world, Chinese Buddhist deity gives earthly instruments as blessings.

The main concern of Confucius was with humans and with the fundamental principles of humanity. He devoted himself wholeheartedly to solving human problems. On the one hand he kept a distance from religious matters such as serving the spirits or discussing life after death. Though he always dignified Heaven and related all his theory to Heaven but he never want to create a religious tradition. What he did was to transmit the knowledge of the ancient culture which he believed as a model for present and the guarantee for the future.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Rev. S Beal, *Buddhism in China*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, USA, 1884, p.119.

⁸⁹ Moor, *op.cit*, p.20.

⁹⁰Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.26.

For Confucius, much discussion was devoted to the essence of human nature and its development. The Chinese word *Xing* can be translated as “human nature” and the word *Xi* corresponds to “nurture” or “habits”, which are formed by environmental influences. In the texts of the times, there was a discussion of the relationship between *Xing* and *Xi*, and of which one played a more crucial role in human development.⁹¹

Confucius himself emphasized again and again that ritual itself was important. But it was only for the sake of human relationship. That through ritual, people could learn proper relationships.⁹²

3.1.3. Ancestral Cult

The Confucian influence is so strong that various Chinese Buddhist Schools adopt the concepts of “linking the two worlds”. Nirvana means to cease the relation from earth and the elimination of rebirth. But in East Asia it is altered. The Pure Land School is the most popular Buddhist sect. While in India rebirth in the pure Land meant a complete break with earthly life, in the Chinese Pure Land School it means an extension of earthly living. There is no deprecation of mundane life. Human relations are continued in the pure Land. This is why one should transfer his merits to his ancestors. To transfer one's merit to ancestors is considered the most meritorious act to Pure Land School.⁹³

As there is a filial obligation toward parents who have died, the Chinese Buddhist scholars develop a concept of purgatory or hell. A purgatory is a place where the dead rests for a short period after the departure of this world. Purgatory gives some kind of

⁹¹Qicheng Jing and Xiaolan Fu, "Modern Chinese psychology: Its indigenous roots and international influences," *International Journal of Psychology*, International Union of Psychological Science, 2001, 36 (6), 408–418.

⁹²Robert Oxnam and Irene Bloom, "Three Confucian Values." Available at: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/eacp/asiastite/topics/CTeaching/Values/Text.htm>. Accessed on: 10-10-2018.

⁹³ Moor, *op.cit*, p.20.

certainty- that one can communicate with the ancestors and transfer merits to them. By means of the priesthood it is possible to make contact with them and through their mediation the beloved dead can surely and speedily be liberated from the pains of purgatory.⁹⁴

The Buddhist concept of rebirth is also linked with the ancestral cult. The Buddhist monk claims that one should not do harm to plant and animal life. No life must be destroyed, no flower crushed, etc. The reason is clear: these various forms of life are often nothing but souls in transition. With the Chinese the foremost thought was naturally the ancestors!⁹⁵At each of the large Buddhist monasteries there are ancestral tablets. There is a special room where the tablet for the soul is placed when a monk dies. Here there are offerings and prayers in a thoroughly Confucian manner. People often desire to have the tablets of their loved ones placed in the monasteries. These are kept in a special room and regular services of worship are held there.⁹⁶

3.1.4. Importance of Earthly Body

In the Meditation school the most important tenet is the belief that Buddha nature is inherent in one's own mind. The best means to salvation is to look into one's mind to see Buddha nature there. Thus they developed the doctrine of salvation by oneself – “salvation is to be achieved here and now, in this very body. Here comes the importance of the earthly human body. Confucians have always regarded the body as a gift from parents and a sacred trust and therefore to be well taken care of. The Taoists tried many ways to make the body suitable for everlasting life on earth.⁹⁷With the influence of Confucianism, Chinese Buddhism is more humanistic than its Indian

⁹⁴Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.110.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.110.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.118.

⁹⁷ Moor, *op.cit*, p.21.

counterpart. Humanism is blended with Chinese blood as a result of Confucius's humanistic philosophy.

Humanism is the keynote in Chinese thought. As early as Confucius, man was considered the most important element in government. "The administration of government depends on men"- declared the Sage. "Let there be men, and the government will flourish" he said "but without men, the government will decay and cease." Up to modern time, government in Chinese history has been based on man rather than law or system. Man was considered the deciding factor, not law or system. The great Confucian saying in this regard is: "It is man that can make the Way great, and not the Way that can make man great." He frankly put the welfare of men before religion. Man, and man alone, engaged his primary attention.⁹⁸ The Buddhists concept of non existence or illusion becomes very faint in China and is replaced by a strong humanistic approach throughout East Asia.

In the early 20th century, Buddhism in China took a humanistic form named "Renjianfojiao (Buddhism for the Human Realm or Humanistic Buddhism)." From the 1980s, it has become a leading trend of Buddhism in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The total collapse of the Qing Dynasty has opened a new era in the political history of China. The unreal nature of Indian Buddhism now turns to a realistic one in China and in East Asia. ⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ibid, p.23.

⁹⁹Yinshun, *Fozairenjian: Renjianfojiaoxuyan*[Buddha is in the Human World: An Introduction to Buddhism for the Human Realm], Zhengwen Press, 1998, p.18.

3.1.5. Concept of Being and non-Being

According to Buddhism, to "be" is impossible, because in order to "be", a thing has to come either from itself or from others, both of which are absurd. Furthermore, to "be" means to have self-nature. But a thing is nothing but an aggregate and as such has no self-nature. Consequently, being is an illusion. By the same token, non-being is also an illusion. Both may be granted "dependent reality."¹⁰⁰

Instead of denying both being and non-being, Taoism reduces all to non-being- "Wu". "Heaven and Earth and all things come from being," says the Tao-te-ching, "and being comes from non-being." Early Taoists understood Wu to mean "having no name, that Tao cannot be described. Tao has no activity. Tao is merely to say that it comes from nowhere or from nothing. In truth, it comes from itself. It should be noted that Taoists are not arguing for nihilism. Rather, they are arguing for the doctrine of "self-transformation" that a thing comes from itself; this is Tao.¹⁰¹

Neo-Confucianists do not deny being or non-being, but affirm both. To them the nature of a thing or man consists in production. It is interesting to note that the Chinese word for the nature of things or man, "hsing," has the word "sheng" meaning birth, life, or production. Production is possible due to the interaction of yin (being) and yang(non-being). Reality then is possible only because of the interaction of being and non-being.¹⁰²

Those Buddhist schools in China that combine tendencies of both being and non-being, however, continue to live up to this day. This synthetic tendency, which affects practically all indigenous Chinese philosophers, also affects Buddhism in China. Thus

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.134.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.136.

¹⁰² Ibid, p.136.

we see that the Tien-tai school originating in India but chiefly developed in China, represents a culmination of both being and non-being.¹⁰³

While both the Avatamsaka and the Mystical schools start from the position of being, the T'ien-t'ai (ca.580) starts from the position of non-being. Beginning with the negativistic doctrine of the Void, this school finally arrives at the "perfectly Harmonious Triple Truth" of the Void (things have no reality), Temporariness (but they have temporary state). It calls itself the "Round Doctrine." This synthetic spirit must strongly appeal to the imagination of the Chinese, for T'ien-t'ai is still the strong Buddhist sect in China today.¹⁰⁴

3.1.6. Concept of Paradise

The Buddhist concept of Nirvana seems strange to Chinese people. The term Nirvana, is brought into the Chinese not by translation, but by transliteration. It becomes Niepan. This is also seen in the transliteration of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha as-"Shi Gia-mu-ni." The term which does not enter into the Chinese heart, will not receive a Chinese name, rather transliterated.¹⁰⁵

As a foreign, and rather mysterious term, Nirvana has not played as much of a role in China as in India. To make their philosophy popular to the masses, the concept of paradise gradually takes place. Chinese Buddhist scholars invent a term called "the Western Paradise". For the Chinese, with their more practical inclination, this was an exceedingly attractive concept.¹⁰⁶

Confucian religion has a very limited and uncertain knowledge of futurity, with merely a hint or two that the souls of their departed friends are in heaven ; with no

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.54.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.56.

¹⁰⁵ Reichlet,*op.cit*,p.106.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.106.

account of what sort of a place or state heaven is ; with no intimation of a discriminating retribution for the good and evil of the life on earth in the life beyond. No doubt the barrenness of their religion in this respect disposed of the Chinese to give heed to the teachings of Buddhism about transmigration, and to fall victims to the cruel representations of Taoism in its courts of purgatory and the horrors of hell.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷James Legge, *Confucianism and Taoism Described and Compared with Christianity*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1880, pp.270-271.

Chapter Four

Synthesis in Taoism

Taoism is the religion which has an intimate relation with Buddhism from the very beginning. At first Buddhism borrowed from Taoism. But when the former grew strong it is believed by the latter that the more they acquire Buddhist concepts the better they can put impact over the masses. Also it has many traits which also resemble Confucian notes. In East Asia, Taoism acts like a melting pot where concepts from Buddhism, Confucianism, indigenous beliefs all find their own places.

4.1. Synthesis with Buddhism

Taoism as a religion became established at a time when Buddhism was infiltrating into China. At first Buddhism seems to have been accepted as a foreign teaching with great similarities to Taoism. Friendly contacts grew up in which Taoists assisted in the translation of Buddhist texts and Taoist terms were taken over to explain Buddhist concepts.¹⁰⁸

For it could not be concealed that Buddhism became increasingly the leading religion for the masses of China. The only salvation for the Taoism community was to lean upon the one that was stronger and adopt as many Buddhist elements as possible. Because it was not easy to maintain oneself alongside the dominant Buddhist community; stronger and ever stronger medicine is needed.¹⁰⁹

Various concepts of Buddhism are borrowed by the Taoists to make it in the same pace of its contestant.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *op.cit*, p.97.

¹⁰⁹ Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.88.

4.1.1. Deification of Lao-tzu

Taoism, like Buddhism, has no permanent central authority to which all believing Taoists can submit. The Taoists, in order to prove the antiquity and therefore the superiority of their religion, place the birth of Lao-tzu before the creation of heaven and earth. They claim that creation resulted from his departure from chaos and that, like the Buddha, Lao-tzu who answers the prayers of the people for protection and salvation.¹¹⁰

During the periods of disunity the Taoist had already developed the idea that the supreme tao. In order to instruct deities and men in the world, from time to time would assume a human form to perform this function. The historic Laozu was but one of these incarnations. Such a Taoist idea was undoubtedly based on the Buddhist doctrine of the two bodies of the Buddha- the Dharmakaya or the body of essence which is the only true and the real body of the Lord and the Nirmanakaya or the body of manifestation which is the manifestation of the Dharmakaya on earth.¹¹¹

4.1.2. Taoist Trinity

It may be noted here that as Buddhism presents its Buddha in three persons (Tathagata, for the three periods, past, present and future) and in three existential forms (The Basic Body, The Body of Heavenly Glory and The Earthly Appearance). So the Taoist Trinity is represented by three images as San Tsing, the "Three Pure Ones", often expressed as Tai-tsing, San-tsing and Yu-tsing (The Basic Body, the Manifestation, and the Activity).¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Smith, *op.cit*, p.108.

¹¹¹ K.S. Ch'en, *op.cit*, p.123.

¹¹² Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.94.

4.1.3. Taoist Pantheon

Face with the Buddhist teaching that there are innumerable Buddhas and bodhisattvas (whose mercy encourages the faithful and whose merit guarantees to them salvation) the Taoists proclaim that their immortals are divine instructors “t’ien –tsun,” who teach the Taoist adepts to follow in their footsteps. They now begin to people their universe with a hierarchy of innumerable gods who would match up to the Buddhist Pantheon. The shadowy figure of Huang-Lao is replaced by the triad of ‘Celestial Honoured Ones’ (T’ienTsum), who is raised far above the human sphere and has never been incarnated as men. Under these ‘Celestial Honoured Ones’ are a whole host of superior and inferior divinities each with his or her appropriate station-gods, genii, deceased heroes, good men and virtuous women. All these became objects of worship, even to the goddesses of smallpox and measles. All receive their share of attention.¹¹³

4.1.4. Concept of Underworld

The Mahayana schools of Buddhism have adopted the belief in a continued personal existence, either by transmigration into animals or other living entities, or by translation into one of the numerous heaven or hells, where souls are recompensed in accordance with their conduct while on earth. This concept of a future state is seized upon by the Chinese mind and incorporated into Taoism. Taoism thus borrowed the general framework of its underworld from Buddhism. The number of internal judges is fixed at ten, one of whom sit at the entrance to the next life to direct each soul to its appropriate place of torment, eight presides over the different hells, whilst a tenth sit

¹¹³ Smith,*op.cit*, p.108.

at the exit in judgment and send off those who have completed their penance along the various paths of transmigration.¹¹⁴

4.1.5. Taoist Ethics

In the blend of Confucian and Buddhist ethics Taoism also develops a code of ethics. "The Book of Secret Blessing"- contains a whole series of ethical statements. It makes no pretense of lofty philosophy, but presents the rules of life in Confucianism thought and tone. Such as-practice of righteousness, filial piety, love younger ones and respect toward elders, be merciful toward the orphan, and compassionate toward the widow etc. Sincerity is given the foremost place. It is the root of all good instincts.¹¹⁵

"Three Religions" are set side by side in this book. Even the Buddha is mentioned as one to be worshipped. Vegetarianism is praised. Some ethical speeches of this book are- "clothe the naked," "bury the dead," "feed the hungry," "Use honest weights and measures," "Save the life of animals, and keep from shedding blood," "Keep a lighted candle in the window, that the wayfarer may find his way," "Keep a boat in readiness, that the traveler may cross the river," etc. This is the line of thought that continues throughout the 540 characters that make up the book. Do harm to no one, nor to insects, plants or trees.

In these ethical statements it is clear that Buddhism has had a strong influence over Taoism. In admonition to Confession of sin, in the attempt to bring about prohibition of the slaughter of animals, as well as in the designation "The Religion for the Promotion of Peace in the Universe", there are gleams of the influence of Buddhism.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.108.

¹¹⁵ Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.92.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.94.

4.1.6. Taoist Literature

It is in the field of literature that the Buddhist contribution to Taoism is most obvious. In the early stages of Taoism as a religion it was a relatively simple matter for the Taoist to build up a body of literature of their own. Their work was then primarily on alchemy, divination, hygiene, and breathing exercises and so forth. But the sources for this kind of literature were limited. Meanwhile the Buddhist sutras gave them a huge supply of thought.

Before the coming of Buddhism the Chinese had a lack of imagination in thinking. But the Mahayana Sutras gave them a rich granary of imaginations. For this reason, the Taoists in the 5th century just borrowed and copied the Buddhist scriptures and named it as their own. Sometimes they were so careless in their copying process that they unconsciously forget to omit even the name of Buddha. Here some lines from these so called Taoist works-

"Of all the teachings of the world, the Buddha's teaching is foremost."

"Our master is called the Buddha, who follows the incomparable teaching."

"The host of saints and immortals has already realized the way of the Buddha."

Also they combined a biography of Lao Tzu similar to that of Buddha. As the three parts of the Buddhist *Tripitaka*, the Taoist also develops a canon consisting of three parts.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ K.S. Ch'en, op.cit, p.234.

4.1.7. Concept of Soul

Under the influence of Buddhism, the aim of Taoism comes to be not mere longevity or physical immortality. With Buddhism there is introduced the concept of soul as something differing from the material body. Main concern comes to be, not how to survive, but how to ensure for oneself a happy existence in heaven rather than having to endure the sufferings of hell.¹¹⁸

4.1.8. Image Worship

To worship a statue or a pictorial image was totally unknown to pre-Buddhist China. Buddhism brought with it the art of making statues and a rich heritage of cave painting. In the mountainous China, this skill flourished rapidly. The Taoists themselves admit that they borrow the practice of making statues and images from the Buddhists. The first Taoist images of their deities appeared about the middle of the fifth century under the Northern Wei Dynasty.¹¹⁹

There were Buddhist monks who through a previous monastic life were supposed to have ascended in the position of Arhats (lo-han). These Arhats were so venerated in China that after their death the cult of worshiping their images became popular. This was the justification of image worship. Laozu did not even mention the worship of gods, much less the worship of images. The keynote of deep spirituality in original Taoism soon disappeared, and in its place appeared the fantastic dream stuff about the wonder lands of East and West- state and local gods, guild and nature deities-all were given their place. And so the unthinkable thing happened that the one religion in

¹¹⁸ Smith, *op.cit*, p.102.

¹¹⁹ K.S. Ch'en, *op.cit*, p.85.

China which was most clear and spiritual at its source came in the course of time to be loaded down with the baggage of magic and polytheism more than any other.¹²⁰

4.1.9. Hermitage and Monk

Buddhism brought with it the concept of monastic life which was previously unknown to China. It is previously discussed that monastic life contrasts with the traditional Chinese social structure. In spite of this, the number of Buddhist monasteries grew so wide that Taoism soon adhered to it.

There was a concept of immortality in Taoism. Taoists believed that immortality was clinging to specific places e.g. in mountains or forests. It was exceedingly praiseworthy to undertake long journeys and find those virgin regions of the earth which have not yet been trodden by the foot of man. In such places they were to live in colonies. In these colonies of spiritualized people life should be lived on the highest and most spiritual plane, on a co-operative basis.¹²¹

Thus gradually they raise Taoist monasteries throughout China. But it is therefore true that most of the Taoist priests live in the society, not in the monasteries. During the sixth century, in imitation of Buddhism, those Taoist priests who lived in monasteries become celibate and nunneries are established for women.¹²²

¹²⁰Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.94.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.94.

¹²² Smith, *op.cit*, p.109.

4.1.10. Food Habit

With the rise of monasteries, they raise a food habit similar to that of Buddhism. Asceticism-particularly fasting and meditation -was an excellent means. By means of a vegetarian diet one could gain mastery over oneself and obtain immortality. The whole process was called ni lei-t' an: "to cultivate the inner embryo".¹²³

4.1.11. Concept of Karma

The Buddhist concepts of Karma and rebirth were likewise appropriated, as indicated in the following passage, "The Taoist saints since countless aeons in the pasthave all depended on the merits of their past lives to attain to the Tao of the present; they have without exception reached their present state through the accumulation of merits derived from their former careers...." This was in contrast with the earlier Taoist doctrine of the transmission of the burden...¹²⁴ The concept of rebirth previously existed in Taoism but there was no inclination of Karma of previous birth. With the influence of Buddhism Taoism took the concept that one has to take the burden of his or her previous birth.

4.2. Synthesis between Confucianism and Taoism

Originated in the same land, there are many similarities between Confucianism and Taoism.

4.2.1. Time of Birth and Goal

Though Laozu is senior to Confucius, there is a proverb in China that Confucius was at one time a student of and an apprentice to the older philosopher, Lao Tzu, whose influence in the direction of a naturalistic conception of the universe and of a laissez-faire (wu-wei) philosopher of government can be observed in the thinking of

¹²³Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.84.

¹²⁴ K.S. Ch'en,*op.cit*, p.123.

Confucius himself. They both arose in the Warring States period as proposed solutions to the social and political chaos then gripping China.

4.2.2. Scripture

It is very important to realize clearly the source of Taoism. The basic documents of Confucianism, the Five Classics are also the reference book for Taoism.¹²⁵ The Five Classics are-

1. Shu-ching-The Book of History.
2. Yi-chng -The Book of Changes.
3. Shi-ching -The Book of Odes.
4. Li-chi-The Book of Ceremonies.
5. Ch'un-ch'iu- The Spring and Autumn Annals.

As might be expected, the Yi-ching, with its bold speculation and combinations, became a landing source for Taoism.¹²⁶ These five classics are popularly called the Five Kings.¹²⁷

4.2.2. Discussion about Tao

Both Confucius and Lao Tzu build their theory upon the doctrine of Tao. But Confucius describes it in a different way that of Laotzu. Confucius's theory can be called as a political explanation of Tao and Laotzu's theory can be called as a naturalistic explanation of Tao. The chart given below will be helpful to understand the difference of philosophy of these two great Chinese philosophers.

¹²⁵Reichlet, *op.cit.*, p.42.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.42.

¹²⁷ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: Translated into English with Preliminary Essays and Explanatory Notes*, Vol. 1. The Life and Teachings of Confucius. Second Edition, N. Trübner and Co, London, 1869, p.2.

Confucianism	Taoism
There is chaos in society because the ideal socio-ethical-political order of the ancients was eclipsed. Human beings should model their behavior on ancients to restore peace. ¹²⁸	There is chaos in society because the ideal socio-ethical-political order of the ancients was eclipsed. Human beings should model their behavior on ancients to restore peace. ¹²⁹
Ethical ideas are drawn from the ancients. ¹³⁰	Ethical ideas are drawn from Nature.
Let life take the moral rule to unite with heaven. ¹³¹	Let life take the rule of nature to unite with heaven. ¹³²
Rule over society to make it a fruitful one.	Leading things but not dominating them. ¹³³
Humanity, righteousness and knowledge- are the key to unite with Tao. ¹³⁴	"....when the Great Way (Tao) declined, the doctrine of humanity and righteousness arose. When knowledge and wisdom appeared, there emerged great hypocrisy." ¹³⁵

¹²⁸ Ibid, p.41.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p.41.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.40.

¹³¹ Ibid, p.38.

¹³² Ibid, p.38.

¹³³ Ibid, p.38.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p.40.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p.40.

The measure of all things is man. ¹³⁶	The measure of all things is Nature.
Make law to build society.	To make law is a contradiction. All law exists in nature. Man has to discover the law. ¹³⁷
Human beings are essentially social beings. ¹³⁸	Human beings are essentially natural beings.
The realistic state view of Confucius is to unite China as an empire ruled by one emperor. ¹³⁹	The ideal utopia of Lao Tzu was a small state with a small population, "which always let the people have no knowledge, and therefore no desires." ¹⁴⁰

With this discussion it is clear that though Confucius and Lao Tzu both discuss Tao but the path of discussion is totally different. Though Confucius always stressed upon personal effort and made one's life according to state law, but sometimes his sayings contain a strong Taoist flavor. Such as-

“If it is the will of heaven that the way shall prevail, then the way will prevail.” (Analect: 14:38) “Set your heart upon the Way, support yourself by its power.....”(Analect: 7:6) “.....If the Way prevailed under heaven, I should not be trying to alter things.” (Analect: 14:38)

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.40.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.40.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.40.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.42.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p.42.

In these sayings we see that Confucius supports a spontaneous action or surrenders himself to natural law. There is a popular story regarding this matter that how Confucius takes teaching from nature.

“Confucius was observing the cataract at Spine ridge where the water fell from a height of thirty fathoms and the mist swirled for forty tridents. No tortoise, alligator, fish or turtle could swim there. Spotting an older man swimming in the water, Confucius thought that he must have suffered some misfortune and wished to die. So he had his disciples’ line up along the current to rescue the man. But after the man had gone several hundred yards he came out by himself. With disheveled hair, he was walking along singing and enjoying himself beneath the embankment.

Confucius followed after the man and inquired of him, saying, "I thought you were a ghost, but when I looked more closely I saw that you are a man. May I ask if you have a special way for treading the water?" "No, I have no special way. I began with what was innate, grew up with my nature, and completed my destiny. I enter the very center of the whirlpools and emerge as a companion of the torrent. I follow along with the way of the water and do not impose myself on it. That's how I do my treading." This is surely a great Taoist teaching of "go with the flow."¹⁴¹

4.2.3. The Rise of Philosophical Taoism

The rise of philosophical Taoism or neo Taoism marks a strong influence of Confucianism over Taoism. This movement is associated with the Taoist scholars named Wang Pi (249 AD), Ho Yen (249 AD) and Kuo Hsiang (312 AD). Rather than Lao-tzu, they regard Confucius as a perfect sage. To them the ideal person is a sage who is ‘sagely within and kingly without’ and who travels in both the transcendental and mundane worlds. According to the neo-Taoists, Lao-tzu traveled only in the

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

transcendental world and was therefore one-sided, whereas Confucius was truly sagely within and kingly without.¹⁴²

4.2.5. Discussion about Ruler

Though Laotzu always avoids artificial law or manmade law, he does not avoid the ruling policy of the state. According to Laotzu, a state will be ruled by the theory of inaction. *Tao Te Ching* carries advice for rulers to be a perfect ruler: "We should look upon the world's suffering and distress as we regard our own members with sincere compassion." "When a king regards his people as his own body and then only is he a real king."

There are illustrations from the heavens and the heavenly bodies in *Tao te-ching* as a divine teacher for the ruler: "When they have done their part they leave without boasting (as the sun and moon)."

A ruler has to take lessons from water: it flows ever onward, nourishing and refreshing; it does not stop to admire its work. "Therefore," he adds, "when you have done your socially beneficent work, and then withdraw quietly!" "It is good for a person to hold himself back in the beginning; he will more easily reach the foremost ranks. The reason that the sea is king (i.e., the great gathering place) of the many rivers and streams is that it occupies the lowest place."¹⁴³ The Way (Tao) does nothing yet it leaves nothing undone." It became the cornerstone of a political theory of non-activity, non-interference, *laissez faire* (wu-wei). "The best ruler is one whose existence is scarcely noticed by the people "The supreme good is likened to water which benefits all things and resists none."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Smith, *op.cit*, p.107.

¹⁴³ Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.79.

¹⁴⁴ Moor, *op.cit*, p.110.

The diversity between Taoism and Confucianism is due to their approaches to achieve Tao. On the one hand, Confucius saw the ruler's ignorance of and reluctance to pursue Tao, hence his taking action; on the other hand, Laozi saw the ruler's many actions other than pursuing Tao, hence his taking no action.¹⁴⁵

4.2.6. Harmony of Heaven, Earth and Humanity

Confucianism and Taoism have much in common. They both emphasize the goal of establishing a harmony of heaven, earth, and humanity. The ideal state is a harmony of heaven, earth, and humanity; the collapse of the political order indicates that something is wrong in the cosmos as a whole. Man is an organ in a vast organism. This vast organism is the universe. He is a part, though small but has functional relationships to larger whole (like organs in organisms). They represented the human body as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm of the universe.¹⁴⁶

4.2.8. Innate Goodness of Being

Both Lao Tzu and Confucius hold to the opinion that "the human heart is originally good". They seem to have no understanding of the terrible heritage of evil inclinations. In Lao Tzu's system the concept of God is rendered still more abstract and still farther removed from reality, especially by the blending with Tao.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵UCLAN Confucius Institute, University of Central Lancashire.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *op.cit*, p.101.

¹⁴⁷Reichlet, *op.cit*, p.82.

Chapter Five

Neo-Confucianism

The best picture of synthesis of three religions is depicted in the movement of Neo-Confucianism. In China it is often called “Sung-Ming lixue” often shortened to “lixue”, as it originates in the period of Song and Ming dynasties. Neo-Confucianism was an attempt to create a more rationalist and secular form of Confucianism by rejecting superstitious and mystical elements of Taoism and Buddhism that had influenced Confucianism during and after the Han Dynasty. Although the Neo-Confucianists were critical of Taoism and Buddhism, the two did have an influence on the philosophy and the Neo-Confucians borrowed terms and concepts from both.¹⁴⁸

5.1. Schools of Neo-Confucianism

In China, Neo-Confucianism developed in three phases, namely,

1. The School of principle in the Sung period (960-1279)
2. The School of Mind in the Ming period (1368-1644) and
3. The Empirical school in the Ch'ing period (1644-1911).¹⁴⁹

This movement is inaugurated by Ch'eng brothers (Ch'eng I, 1033-1107 and Ch'engHao, 1032-1085) and Chu Hsi. The central idea of the movement is focused on the idea of "Li" or principle. Everything in the world has the same principle. Though each object has different characteristics and different activities, in essence they are executed by one supreme principle. Thus they all form one body. As there is one moon in the sky, the rivers and ponds show numerous moons as only a manifestation;

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Moor, op.cit, p.57.

these are not the original moon. As such, the myriad things are only the manifestation of one great principle. So the duty of a pupil is to investigate the things and understand their principle. When the full understanding of principle grows in one mind, he will find that "all people are my brothers and sisters and all things are my companion." This is called the 'Jen' or humanity. To achieve a life of jen is the ultimate goal of the followers of the school of principle. To achieve the end of full understanding of principle and a life of jen, the human mind must go through severe discipline. The mind must be sincere (ch'eng) and serious (ching). When a mind becomes serious, it is perfect to investigate the thing. Thus the Neo-Confucian movement became an inward movement as the mind gradually assumed importance. With the role of the mind, Neo-Confucianism passed on from its first phase to its second, from the school of principle to the school of mind.¹⁵⁰

Wang Yang-Ming (1472 1529) is the main advocate of the school of mind. According to him, "the mind is principle. Is there any affair in the world outside the mind?" Take the example of filial piety. The principle of filial piety lies not in one's parents but in one's own mind. If there is no sense of filial piety in my mind, then there will be no filial piety in my action. "The master of the body is mind. What emanates from the mind is the will.....Therefore I say there is neither principle nor things outside the mind." So one should not spend time to investigate things but to investigate. All things are already complete in oneself. There is no greater joy than to examine oneself. To exercise our minds fully is to know our nature and to know our nature is to know Heaven. This extreme idealistic theory of Wang Yang-Ming marks a clear

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p.58.

deviation from the original teaching of Confucius and reveals a picture of outer influence, especially from Buddhism.¹⁵¹

As a reaction against the teaching of the school of principle and the school of mind, there arises the empirical school. By rejecting the extreme position of both schools it presents a picture of harmony. According to them, one has to harmonize one's feelings with principle. If the mind does not reach in the position of harmony with principle, then how can it create harmony with the universe? When we harmonize the feelings of our mind with principle, we then come into harmony with the universe. It is the fulfillment of the way.¹⁵²

5.2. Synthesis of Three Religions

Actually the motto of Neo-Confucianism is to cut the extravagant element which penetrates into Confucian belief system due to a long attachment with Taoism and Buddhism. Thus go back to the original teaching of Confucius and Mencius. From the beginning of the movement, they are very critical to Taoism and Buddhism. But unconsciously, it adopts various Taoist and Buddhist concepts and thus gradually goes further from the old teaching.

5.2.1. Combination of Naturalism and Humanism

It was essentially a Confucian movement, but it must be noted that the Neo-Confucian philosophers frankly accepted a naturalistic cosmology of Taoist origin. There was little cosmological explanation in early Confucianism. For this reason to build a logical cosmology, neo Confucian scholars borrow the naturalistic philosophy of Taoism.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.59.

¹⁵² Ibid, p.59.

Whenever China has sunk deep into irrationality, superstition and otherworldliness, as she has done several times in her long history, it was always the naturalism of Lao Tzu and the philosophical Taoists or the humanism of Confucius, or a combination of the two, that would arise and try to rescue her from her sluggish slumbers. The State Religion of the Han Empire was the first attempt to combine the naturalistic philosophy of Taoism and the spirit of doubt and intellectual honesty that was the most valuable heritage handed down from Confucius and Mencius. But in the period of disunity this combination destroyed fully and in this gap various non Chinese thought occupied this land fully.¹⁵³

It was the Neo-Confucian movement which can be called a second attempt to combine the Taoist naturalism and Confucian humanism. It was a conscious movement to revive the thought and culture of pre-Buddhist China, to go back directly to the humanist teaching of Confucius and his school, in order to overthrow and replace the much Indian and therefore un-Chinese thought and culture of medieval China.¹⁵⁴

5.2.2. The Tai-chi Symbol

An instance of the combination of the Taoist naturalism and Confucian humanism is the use of the concept of Tai-Chi. Actually Tai-chi is a Taoist symbol. Tai-chi is a circle with a white and black part, embracing one another. The white is named as Yang and the black is named as Ying. They hold the opposite character. Yang is for light, good, heaven and male elements while Ying is for dark, evil, earth and female elements. As the opposite character embraces one another, so there raises eternal tension. And with this tension the creation runs. The Tai-chi is mainly used by the

¹⁵³ Ibid, p.111.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p.115.

Taoist to explain the activity of the universe. Also the Chinese martial art system is very Taoistic in nature because it uses the concept of Tai Chi as a system of fighting against enemies.¹⁵⁵ The Neo-Confucianists use this symbol (though in a different way), to discuss their creation theory.¹⁵⁶ (See Appendix 1, Figure 2)

The creation theory of the neo-Confucianists is as follows: "The Great Ultimate (Li) through movement generates **Yang**. When its activity reaches its limit, it becomes tranquil. Through tranquility the Great Ultimate generates **Yin**. When tranquility reaches its limit, activity begins again. So, movement and tranquility alternate and become the root of each other, giving rise to the distinction of yin and yang and the two modes are thus established. By the transformation of yang and its union with yin, the Five Agents of water, fire, wood, metal, and earth arise. When these five material forces (ch'i) are distributed in harmonious order, the four seasons run their differentiation, while the two material forces constitute their actuality. The two forces are fundamentally one. Consequently, the many are [ultimately] one, and the one is differentiated in the many. The one and the many each has its own correct state of being. The great and the small each has its definite function."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵Jian-sheng Wen and Min Su, "The Historical Origin of the Chinese Taoist and Tai Chi", *Journal of Department of Physical Education*, Northwestern Polytechnical University, ShaanxiXi'an, 2012.

¹⁵⁶ Moor, *op.cit*, p.56.

¹⁵⁷ Moor, *op.cit*, p.56.

5.2.3. Study of Principle or Li

The concept of li was borrowed from Hua-yen Buddhism. According to the Neo-Confucianists, every object of the world has Li. Briefly stated; li is the universal principle underlying all things, the cause, the form, the essence, the sufficient reason for being. Such an idea is close to Hua-yan doctrine of interpenetration and intermutuality, the all in one and one in all.¹⁵⁸

The basic teaching of the Hua-yen school centers on the theory of causation by the universal principle or the "dharma dhatu." According to this, all the dharmas or objects in the world arise simultaneously. Each has two aspects –the principle or Li and the phenomenon or Chih. Every phenomenon has Li within it and therefore they mutually identified with one another.

The Hua-Yen ideology is based on the scripture "Essay on the Golden Lion." In this sutra, the whole universe is compared with a lion made of gold. Here gold is the symbol of Li or principle and lion is the symbol of Chih or phenomenon. Gold (Li) has no shape of its own; it may assume any form according to conditions assigned to it. It is the lion through which the shape of the gold manifests it. Though it has no shape but it presents in all parts of the Lion. Also there is no gold outside the Lion. The gold (Li) and the Lion (phenomenon) are therefore the same. Every object of the world is a manifestation of Li. So the many are one and the one is many.¹⁵⁹

The Hua –Yen theory presents a totalistic theory which brings all things to one center—the Buddha. This is the reason for which Hua -Yen Buddhism is favored by the Japanese emperor because it provides a sanction for their totalitarian schemes.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p.136.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p.138.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p.138.

5.2.4. Meditation on Things and Mind

The emphasis of mind by the neo Confucianists led it to an unconscious connection with Buddhist practice over one's self. The emphasis on seriousness, soon assumed almost religious significance. Some of their followers frankly explained it terms of Buddhist meditation- dhyana and prajna. Thus slowly Buddhist ideas of meditation take place in Neo-confucianism. This influence makes a strong position in the school of mind. In their advocacy of concentration of mind the Neo-Confucianists also appear to have been influenced by the Buddhists. Buddhist mental discipline emphasizes mindfulness, meditation and equanimity.¹⁶¹

5.2.5. Explanation of Jen

The term **Jen** or **Humanity** is a key term of Confucianism. According to Confucius, the highest ethical goal to be achieved is humanity (jen). As Confucius taught, The man of jen, wishing to establish his own character, also tries to help others to succeed. It is a central Chinese idea that a good man must also be a good member of society. Significantly, the Chinese character for jen consists of two parts, one meaning man himself and the other meaning many, that is society.

Jen as explained by the Neo-Confucianists –embrace all under heaven. It is more than likely that in this extension the Buddhist conception of the universality of life and the all compassionate Bodhisattva, ever ready to save all sentient beings.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p.138.

¹⁶² K.S. Ch'en, Kenneth, *Buddhism in China- A Historical Survey*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1964.

5.2.6. Explanation of Sagehood

Sagehood is a popular term for all three traditions. But a Confucian sage is different from that of the Taoist and Buddhist one. The man who is well versed in all of the Confucian classics and practice the good qualities eg. Sagehood was an important tenet of Neo-Confucian movement. According to them, a sage is enlightened when he is master of his emotions i.e. joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, dislike and greed. This Confucian preoccupation with sagehood was probably a response to the Buddhist emphasis on the attainment of Bodhisattvahood.¹⁶³

5.3. The Vinegar Tasters

A well known Neo-Confucian motif is paintings of Confucius, Buddha and Lao Tzu all drinking out of the same vinegar jar, paintings associated with the slogan "The three teachings are one!" (See Appendix 1, Figure 3).

The "Vinegar Tasters" is a traditional subject in Chinese religious painting. The allegorical composition depicts the three founders of China's major religious and philosophical traditions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The three men are dipping their fingers in a vat of vinegar and tasting it; one man reacts with a sour expression, one reacts with a bitter expression, and one reacts with a sweet expression. The three men are Confucius, Buddha and Laozi respectively. Each man's expression represents the predominant attitude of his philosophy: Confucianism saw life as sour, in need of rules to correct the degeneration of people; Buddhism saw life as bitter, dominated by pain and suffering and Taoism saw life as fundamentally good

¹⁶³ Ibid.

in its natural state. Another interpretation of the painting is that, since the three men are gathered around one vat of vinegar, the "three teachings" are one.¹⁶⁴

5.4. Synthesis Reflected in Chinese Proverb

There are many references that in medieval China, scholars of Taoism, Confucianism and of Buddhism met together and made conversations about the religious dogma. This intimate relation gives birth of many stories and proverbs. ``Three laughs at Tiger Brook"-is a Chinese proverb which refers to the image that the three men, Huiyuan (a renowned Buddhist monk), Tao Yuanming (a taoist priest) and Lu Xiuqing (a Confucian scholar) laugh together when arriving at Fuki (Tiger Brook) of Mount Lu. This concept represents the ideal harmonious relations of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in ancient China.¹⁶⁵ (See Appendix 1, Figure 4)

The proverb came from the story of the recluse monk Huiyuan (334–416) who never used to go farther than Fuki, even for a walk or a friend's visit. Moreover, the tiger hiding in the forest would roar to warn him once he crossed the brook or river. One day, on the visit of the poet Tao Yuanming (365–427) and Taoist Lu Xiuqing (406–477), Huiyuan had a congenial talk with them. As a result, they only realized they had passed the brook when they heard the roar of the tiger. They laughed wisely together, which represents the desired relationship among the three main religions of that time, namely the harmony among Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.¹⁶⁶ This story began as early as the Tang Dynasty and became popular during the Song Dynasty.

¹⁶⁴ Vinegar tasters. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vinegar_tasters. Retrived at: 4-10-2018.

¹⁶⁵ Three laughs at Tiger Brook. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ThreeLaughs_at_Tiger_Brook. Retrieved on 10-11-2018.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Chapter Six

The Film Kung Fu Panda: an Analysis of Synthesis

The analysis of a film is not our subject. Our main interest is the synthesis of three religions which is depicted by the film. Kung Fu Panda is a 2008 animated film (action-comedy-martial arts oriented) produced by DreamWorks Animation. After the premier show this film attracts the populace resulting in the number one position at the box office.¹⁶⁷

6.1 Story of Kung fu Panda

It is a story of a place named the Valley of Peace of ancient China populated by anthropomorphic talking animals. The name of the central character is Po, a very lazy and bulky giant panda. He works in a noodles restaurant run by his adoptive goose father Mr. Ping. His father has a dream that one day Po will manage the restaurant and learn the secret ingredient to his famous "secret ingredient soup." But Po is very reluctant to this job and aspires to be a kung fu master.¹⁶⁸

The other part of the story is in the Jade Palace, a Kung fu training place in the mountain top where the legendary Kung fu masters dwell. The head of the masters is Oogway, the Grand Master (a sage old tortoise). The responsibility to teach the students lies to Shifu, a small red panda. Oogway has a vision that Shifu's former student, the corrupted snow leopard Tai Lung, will escape from prison and return to the Valley of Peace to exact his revenge. Panicked to this news, Shifu then holds a tournament so that Oogway can identify the Dragon Warrior, the one kung fu master worthy of the Dragon Scroll, which is said to hold the secret to boundless power. The

¹⁶⁷ Kung Fu Panda. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kung_Fu_Panda. Accessed on 12.10.2018.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

candidates of this tournament are the Furious Five (Tigress, Monkey, Mantis, Viper, and Crane). Charmed by this news, Po rushes to the Jade Palace but fails to arrive at the arena before the doors are closed. Desperate to see the Dragon Warrior, Po straps himself to a set of fireworks, rockets into the sky and crashes into the arena. He opens his eyes to see Oogway pointing his finger at him. Much to the shock of everyone there (including Po), Oogway proclaims Po as the Dragon Warrior.¹⁶⁹

Unwilling to accept Oogway's decision, Shifu tries to dispose of Po with an harsh training regime bordering on torture coupled with constant belittlement of his physique and personality. Following in Shifu's footsteps, the Furious Five similarly berate and mock Po as simply an enthusiast with no potential in the martial art. Po considers resigning, but after receiving encouragement from Oogway, he endures his training.¹⁷⁰

Meanwhile, Tai Lung escapes from prison as foreseen by Oogway. But ironically the earthly time of Oogway has come to an end. After taking a promise from Shifu to believe in Po, Oogway passes on to the heavens in a stream of peach blossoms.¹⁷¹

Still unable to grasp the basics of kung fu, Po despairingly admits that he has no chance of defeating Tai Lung. However, Shifu discovers that Po is capable of impressive physical feats when motivated by food, and takes advantage of this in order to successfully train Po by incorporating these feats into an effective kung fu style.¹⁷²

Meanwhile, the Furious Five set out to stop Tai Lung themselves. But they all are defeated by him. Following their return, Shifu decides that Po is ready to receive the Dragon Scroll, but the scroll reveals nothing but a blank reflective surface. Unable to

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

understand the message of the scroll, Shifu orders Po and the Five to evacuate the valley while he faces Tai Lung, knowing that he will most likely forfeit his life. As Tai Lung arrives and fights Shifu, a distraught Po finds Mr. Ping. In an attempt to console his son, Mr. Ping reveals that the secret ingredient to his famous "secret ingredient soup" is "nothing" (explaining that "to make something special, you just have to believe it is"). Po realizes that this is the message of the Dragon Scroll and goes back to confront Tai Lung.¹⁷³

Po becomes a formidable challenge for Tai Lung, frustrating him with confusing fighting techniques on top of a physique that renders him immune to Tai Lung's nerve strikes. Tai Lung momentarily bests Po and retrieves the scroll, but he is unable to understand it. When Po explains to Tai Lung that the true secret to becoming the Dragon Warrior is to just believe in yourself, he refuses to accept it and continues attacking Po.

Eventually, Po defeats Tai Lung in combat before using the mysterious Wuxi Finger Hold to vanquish him. Po is praised by the Valley of Peace and earns the respect of the Furious Five, who fully acknowledge him as a true kung fu master. Po then finds Shifu, who finally attains inner peace, now that the valley is safe once more.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

6.2. Synthesis Reflected in Kung fu Panda

This is a poster of the film Kung fu Panda. Here we see the three main characters of this film- Oogway, Shifu and Po. These three characters represent the three pillars of Chinese Culture - Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Oogway is supposed to take on the role of Laozi, Shifu of Confucius and Po takes on the role of the Laughing Buddha since he has the size for the role.¹⁷⁵ (See Appendix 1, Figure 5).

6.2.1. Oogway as Laozi

Oogway is a very old Galapagos Tortoise. His seniority and old age reflects the seniority and old age of Laozi. There is some reason to choose tortoise as a symbol of Taoism. The longevity of earthly life is a central Taoist motto. Tortoise is the longest living animal in the world. In the poster we see Oogway wearing a yellowish gown and hat and also a brush and a stick in the hand. All these are the present day garments of a Taoist priest. (See Appendix 1, Figure 6)

Not only in the physical appearance but also in the activity, Oogway reflects Laozi. When Po is accidentally chosen as the Dragon Warrior, Oogway says “there is no accident.” But the most important part is his ascending with the peach petals. At the last time of his life, when talking with Shifu, his body turns into peach flowers and then vanishes with a wave of wind. That particular part of the story is inspired by the Taoist mythology of enlightened people reaching immortal status and becoming one with the universe (ascending to another world, away from the earthly things).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵

Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism In The Film Kung Fu Panda. Available at: <https://brightkite.com/.../confucianism-taoism-and-buddhism-in-the-film-kung-fu-pan>. Retrieved on 10-10-2018.

¹⁷⁶

6.2.2. Shifu as Confucius

Shifu is basically a Taoist term meaning "Teacher Father." It is an honorific term to address the Taoist teachers.¹⁷⁷ In the film, Master Shifu takes on the role of Confucius which is seen in his disciplined and arduous training.

The mastery of Kung Fu requires rules and order which fits with Confucian system. According to Confucian belief, there should be discipline in each person, family, society and state. Anything which is out of discipline is deviation and there should be no chance for a situation which can create a deviation. For this reason, Shifu does not recognize Po as a Dragon Warrior because it is a deviation from the disciplinary legacy of Kung fu training. Oogway has assigned Shifu the task of molding Po into the Dragon Warrior. Therefore, a clash emerges when the irresistible force of Shifu's Confucian methods meet the Taoistic natural state of Po's talentless, gelatinous belt.

But the real struggle is not between the Po the pupil and Shifu the master. It is actually between the pure Taoism of Master Oogway and the essential Confucianism of his pupil Master Shifu. Oogway compels the resistant Shifu to accept Po for what he is and allow him to blossom into the Dragon Warrior, a notion that defies everything Shifu knows about Kung Fu.¹⁷⁸

In this clash we see the modern day portrayal of the Vinegar Tasters (minus the Buddha). In this concept, it is Shifu who reacts bitterly upon tasting the vinegar. He is Confucius. Oogway is Lao-tzu, smiling sweetly because the vinegar or the Essence of Life – is being what it is supposed to be. Vinegar is bitter and the Taoist Oogway recognizes it as such, so he smiles pleasantly.¹⁷⁹

Confucianism, Taoism, And Buddhism In The Film Kung Fu Panda. Available at: <https://brightkite.com/.../confucianism-taoism-and-buddhism-in-the-film-kung-fu-pan>. Retrieved on 10-10-2018.

¹⁷⁷ Louis Komjathy, *The Daoist Tradition: An Introduction*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, p.5.

¹⁷⁸ Confucianism, Taoism, And Buddhism In The Film Kung Fu Panda. Op.cit.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

After the ascension of Master Oogway, Shifu becomes alone with hard work to transfer Po as a Dragon Warrior. Shifu trained Po with food as motivation, which fits one of Confucius' quotes of "teach according to the student's ability/characteristic". Predictably, Shifu takes the lumpy clay that is Po and attempts to mold him in the way he knows best.¹⁸⁰

6.2.3. Po as Laughing Buddha

Po, a Giant Panda, is the protagonist of the film. The choice of the animal Panda for Po can be compared with the similarity of color. A Giant panda has two colors as the Tai Chi Symbol has two colors –black and white. If we carefully see the portrait of Po in the poster of the film Kung fu Panda, a fat, pot bellied, jovial figure wearing a piece of cloth and a garland in neck comes to us. This figure is very much similar to the figure of Laughing Buddha.¹⁸¹ (See Appendix 1, Figure 7).

The concept of “Laughing Buddha” was developed during the Sung dynasty. Popularly called Budai, Hotei or Pu-Tai is the metamorphosis of Maitreya (Mi-lo-fo), the Future Buddha. Today in almost all Chinese temples, the image of this jovial figure, greets the visitors as soon as he enters the temple.¹⁸²

Po takes on the role of the Laughing Buddha since he has the size for the role. It is a Chinese folkloric deity. Budai is traditionally depicted as a fat, bald man wearing a robe. He carries his few possessions in a cloth sack, being poor but content. His name means "Cloth Sack" and comes from the bag that he is conventionally depicted as carrying. He is usually identified with or seen as an incarnation of Maitreya, the future Buddha. He is almost always shown smiling or laughing, hence his nickname in

¹⁸⁰Ibid.

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

Chinese, the Laughing Buddha. He is often depicted entertaining or being followed by adoring children. His figure appears throughout Chinese culture as a representation of both contentment and abundance.¹⁸³

The maitreya cult was established in China in the 4th century, during the period of Tao-an. In the 5th and 6th centuries when China was undergoing a critical and confusing era, people were convinced that the last period of Dharma was at hand. Consequently they waited for maitreya to purify and restore the Dharma on earth. Images of Maitreya were fairly common as a large and heroic figure. After the 7th century, the cult declined to be replaced by the cult of Amitava and Avalokitesvara. And when the image of Maitreya was reappeared in the time of the Sung, it assumes the figure of Laughing Buddha.¹⁸⁴

There is a legend about Budai that Maitreya arrived in the guise of a potbellied, laughing, fool, wandering monk. No one knows his true identity. Undignified and eccentric in conduct, his words were full of wisdom. In the potbellied figure can see various Chinese life ideals. The huge belly and the sack denote prosperity and a wealth of material goods, for only a rich person would have enough to eat and be fat. The smiling face indicates the spiritual contentment and relaxation of one who is at peace with himself and the world. Finally the large number of Children surrounding him symbolizes a large family with many children. When these features are combined together then it is easily understood why Budai is so popular to Chinese. When the Chinese look at him, they see not just a Buddhist deity but also a good representation of many of the things after which they aspire. This is another instance of the Chinese

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ K.S. Ch'en, *op.cit*, p.123.

appropriating an Indian Buddhist element and adapting it to the Chinese environment.¹⁸⁵

All Buddhists have a belief that in the last age when the world is becoming full of tyranny and sin, the maitraya will come to restore the Dharma. In the film, the producer wants to depict that the maitraya or Mi lo fo comes in the form of Budai but at the same time it consists of the Tai Chi symbol of black and white. This is an instance of “Hybrid Thinking” that even the maitraya has to wear a Taoist colour.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p.123.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

The above discussion is an attempt to clarify the idea of syncretism of three traditions in East Asian Context. In spite of their internal rivalry to catch popularity they unconsciously create a syncretic whole. With the amalgam of three traditions, the Chinese gradually loses to think of religion separately. Every new imagination more or less is crossed by others.

Buddhism from the beginning has been desperately attacked by Confucianism. Taoism, though at first gives a helping hand to it, but gradually turns to a strong rival which is visible in the persecution of 574 and 845 AD. These instances prove that there remains no long term friendly relation among the three. In spite of that, they borrow elements from each other.

As a state religion, Confucianism always gets privilege from the ruling class. In the whole world, China is known after the philosophy of Confucius. Max Kaltenmark in a preface for the book "Taoism and Chinese Religion" by Henri Maspero says that –“to the West, China has appeared as essentially Confucianists. Among the three religion, Confucianism was the best known even though the religious character of this system is questioned. The importance of Confucian doctrine in the official ideology of the imperial era and the enormous scholarly literature about the classics are responsible for this situation.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, Trans- Frank A. Kierman, Quirin Press, Melbourne, 2014, p.xl.

In this Supremacy of Confucianism, it is very difficult for both Taoism and Buddhism to flourish with an independent identity. For this reason, they both assume a Chinese Character as a solution. Buddhism as a foreign religion always has a tension to survive in a foreign land. According to Chan Master Sheng Yen—"It cannot be denied that in regions where Mahāyāna Buddhism is practiced, especially in China, authentic Buddhism has largely been the privilege of isolated, eminent monks and small numbers of gentry-scholars. Buddhism has seldom been correctly understood and practiced by the general populace, whose religious practice is actually a potpourri of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism."¹⁸⁷

Taoism is never a popular religion in China. It is mainly full of superstitions and has popularity among the grass root people. But the philosophy of Laotzu, though not practiced, makes a major component of Chinese thought. As Huston Smith, a famous researcher in this field says, "Circling around each other like *yin* and *yang* themselves, Taoism and Confucianism represent the two indigenous poles of the Chinese character. Confucius represents the classical, Lao Tzu the romantic. Confucius stresses social responsibility; Lao Tzu praises spontaneity and naturalness. Confucius' focus is on the human, Lao Tzu's on what transcends the human. As the Chinese themselves say, Confucius roams within society, Lao Tzu wanders beyond. Something in life reaches out in each of these directions and Chinese civilization would certainly have been poorer if either had not appeared."¹⁸⁸

Basically, the three traditions present three solutions to one great problem. They see a thing in three different perspectives. The Buddhists look upon the universe as a "sea of waves"; the Taoists, as "a great transformation"; and Confucianists, as "a great

¹⁸⁷ Chan Master Sheng Yen, *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism, A Contemporary Chan Master's Answers to Common Questions*, Trns: Douglas Gildow and Otto Chang, Edt: Douglas Gildow, Dharma Drum Publications, New York, 2007, p.20.

¹⁸⁸ Taoism by Huston Smith. Available at: www.worldwisdom.com/public/library/default.aspx. Accessed on 10-10-2018.

current." Buddhists devote all their effort to crossing the sea of waves to arrive at the "Other Shore" where the perpetual becoming will cease. Taoists, comparing the universe to a "galloping horse," view the drama fatalistically, often with a sense of humor, always in the spirit of indifference. Confucianists, on the contrary, intend to take a leading role in the drama and to like it.¹⁸⁹ With the combination of these three ideas there arises a separate body which cannot be called as fully Taoist or Fully Buddhist or fully Confucian. The Tao of Taoism, the Chen Ju or "Thusness" of Buddhism and the Li (Reason, law, principle) of Confucianism are blended in a common truth. A practitioner of this truth is a 'perfect sage' in Confucianism, an 'immortal in Taoism and a 'bodhisattva' in Buddhism.¹⁹⁰

Rev. Joseph Edkins in his book "Chinese Buddhism," by realizing this truth says that, "These three religions are truly national, because the mass of the people believe in them all. They are far from feeling it inconsistent to do so. What is the cause of this indifference? The reason is this, that the three systems occupy the three corners of a triangle- the moral metaphysical and material and are supplementary to each other. They are therefore able to coexist without being mutually destructive."¹⁹¹

It is important to note that the modern Chinese are mainly atheist. Religion does not play any vital role in the lives of them. What remains are the relics of golden years of medieval age. The synthesis which occurred in medieval China has its roots so deep that it is reflected in the modern day in the means of film, picture, proverbs, language etc.

¹⁸⁹ Moor, *op.cit*, p.134.

¹⁹⁰ Smith, *op.cit*, p.180.

¹⁹¹ Rev. Joseph Edkins, *Chinese Buddhism*, Trubner and Co., Ludgate Hill, London, 1880, p.

Appendix 1



Figure 1: The spread of Buddhism in the Han Dynasty.¹⁹²



Figure 2: Tai Chi Symbol.¹⁹³

¹⁹² K.S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China- A Historical Survey*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1964, p.41.

¹⁹³ Tai Chi is a symbol or diagram in Chinese philosophy representing *Taij*"great pole" or "supreme ultimate" in both its monist *wuji* and its dualist *yin and yang* aspects. Retrieved (10-10-2018) from www.pinterest.vinegartesters.com.



Figure 3: The picture of Vinegar Tasters, from the left –Confucius, Buddha and

Laozu.¹⁹⁴



Figure 4: Picture of "Three Laughs at Tiger Brook."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴Picture of Vinegar tasters, retrieved (10-10-2018) from www.pinterest.vinegartesters.com.

¹⁹⁵ Three laughs at Tiger Brook. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ThreeLaughs_atTigerBrook. Retrieved on 10-11-2018.



Figure 5: Poster of the film Kung fu Panda.¹⁹⁶



Figure 6: Modern Taoist Dress up.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Poster of Kungfu Panda. Available at: www.pinterest.vinegartesters.com. Retrieved on 10-10-2018.

¹⁹⁷ Taoist Dress. Available at: www.pinterest.taoistdress.com. Retrieved on 10-10-2018

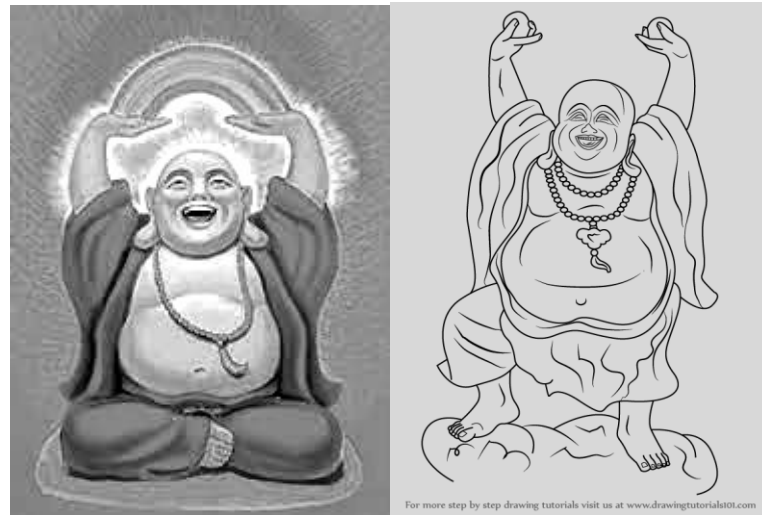


Figure 7: Picture of “Laughing Buddha.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸Laughing Buddha. Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/laughing-Buddha>. Accessed on 10-10-2018.

Appendix 2

The Syncretism of Three Religion in China at a Glance

Buddhism (Synthesis with Confucianism)	Taoism (Synthesis with Buddhism)	Confucianism (Synthesis with Taoism)
Concept of Good and Evil	Deification of Lao-tzu	Time of Birth and Goal
Humanization of God	Taoist Trinity	Scripture
Ancestral Cult	Taoist Pantheon	Discussion of Tao
Importance of Earthly Body	Concept of Underworld	The Rise of Philosophical Taoism
Concept of Being and non-Being	Taoist Ethics	Discussion about Ruler
Concept of Paradise	Taoist Literature	Harmony of Heaven, Earth and Humanity
	Concept of Soul	Innate Goodness of Being
	Image Worship	
	Hermitage and Monk	
	Food Habit	
	Concept of Karma	

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