

The Dharma, the Gospel, and Chinese Culture

1. Introduction

Popular Buddhist teacher Thich Naht Hanh has written movingly about what he called "rootlessness," and the danger that conversion to religions from the outside might separate people from their own cultural heritage. Young people in the modern world are like "hungry ghosts," he noted, because they lack a sense of connection with previous generations. "In our time, society is organized in such a way that we create thousands of hungry ghosts every day. . . We have to help hungry ghosts to be less hungry, to go back to their family and tradition, to be reintegrated." (Thich, 180-185) In a related context, the Dalai Lama has warned against putting "a yak's head on a sheep's body," confusing traditions that conflict. (Dalai Lama, 1996, 105)

The Christian is likely to argue, in response, that truth is more important than tradition. Anyway, the world is becoming unified, whether we like it or not: isolation is not longer an option. But the need for "rootedness" to one's traditions is intensely felt by many Chinese, and is one of the primary reasons Chinese reject Christianity. How can we as Christians show Chinese that we are not calling them to the life of a hungry ghost or a mad science project? One of the great needs of our time is for a culturally-transcendent ideal that saves local values, that integrates indigenous traditions within a system of universal truth.

The purpose of this paper is to consider how Buddhism and Christianity root themselves in the pattern of story, ritual, and symbol that is the Chinese culture. My thesis is that while Buddhism appears more "Chinese" than Christianity, (a fact that is partly our fault), Christian missions is, or should be, the solution both to the need for rootedness, and for cultural transcendence. Both by tapping into the deepest truths within every culture, and by unifying many aspects of tradition in one truth, The Gospel, believe, affirms and fulfills Chinese culture in ways that no merely human teaching could, that of Siddhartha Gautama being a case in point.

2. Three models of indigenization

In general, three fairly distinct models of relating a belief system to a new

culture are available missionaries of all faiths. The first is to popularize the new belief by borrowing elements of native tradition that tend to transform the original belief.

(*syncretism*) For example, early Chinese Buddhists adopted the Chinese story of Miao Shan. Miao Shan was a virtuous young woman whose father resented her goodness and her refusal to marry his (highly dubious) choice of suitors. Martyred for her virtue, she descended into *Yin Jian*. But when her presence threatened to transform hell into paradise, (a disaster in the eyes of the Powers-That-Be) she was expelled to the land of the living. When her father became sick, she used her own eyes to create healing medicine for him. By means of this story Buddhists (who identified Miao Shan with Guan Yin) adopted a Chinese commitment to filial piety that radically contrasts with the more negative attitude towards the family typical in early Buddhist literature.

Syncretism is like dropping a spoonful of food coloring in a pond. While it may alter the tinge of the water, it does not radically disrupt the action of the ripples on its surface, still less the chemical composition of the water as a whole.

But what is added, is diluted. Myths adopted in order to make a foreign faith more acceptable, overwhelm the core values of the faith itself. The Marxist myths of Lei Feng in China, the adoption of bloody Tibetan gods by the Tantric Indian Buddhist Phadmasambhava, and the substitution of a Guan Yin figure for Mary among hidden Christians in the Goto islands of Japan, are examples of this process. When confronted by new cultural challenges, all belief systems tend to undergo a similar metamorphosis. A similar process of watering down has been blamed by some for the disappearance of Nestorian Christianity between the Tang and Song dynasties in China. A number of syncretistic new "Christian" cults have also appeared in mainland China recently that join indigenous occult practices to a magical use of the Bible. (Bi, 1992, Lambert, 1992, 1997-8)

The second means of enculturation is to describe new truths in familiar language, underlining agreement between traditions, and translating beliefs into a new set of icons. (*contextualization*) This is better from a Christian point of view. The Hebrew name *Yahweh* was translated *Elohim*, *Theos*, then *God*, as faith crossed cultural borders, without any necessary change in theology. Early Jesuits like Matteo Ricci were adept

at such translation, though unfortunately they concentrated on the Confucian aristocracy, to the neglect of popular tradition. Buddhism similarly adopted and retooled the Taoist term *Wu Wei* to describe detachment. During the Song, Buddhist monks adapted literati painting styles to promote Zen realization. The Buddhist monk Mu Qi's naturalistic yet suggestively impressionistic paintings, such *Mother and Baby Gibbon in a Tree* and *Persimmons*, evoked the universal in the familiar with stunning brilliance; they "point to transcendence" yet "let the viewer know that all knowledge is but the foreground of something deeper and greater," as the Catholic historian of Zen, Heinrich Dumoulin, put it. Yet even while building artistically on established traditions, Mu Qi painted scenes you might come across on any foggy day on the outskirts of Hangzhou.

The third and most radical, but typically Christian, method of enculturation is to take the simplest and most basic traditional expressions of spirituality, and describe the "foreign" faith as a deepening or working out of meaning inherent in those icons or myths. One traces the Gospel to the deepest roots of the culture, bringing out new life and truth that, in retrospect, seemed latent in those roots from the beginning. Don Richardson popularized and developed the term *redemptive analogies* to describe this kind of insight.

This idea was not a novelty. As every attentive reader of the New Testament knows, early Christians saw the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as a fulfillment of many aspects of the Jewish tradition: Passover, atonement sacrifice, Messianic prophecy, the Exodus, episodes in the lives of Job, Joseph, Moses, and David. In addition, the idea that Christianity came not to "do away with" non-Jewish cultures, but to "fulfill" the best in them, is a persistent (if often overlooked) theme in the writings of Paul, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Augustine and other early church fathers. The ways in which Christianity rooted itself even in "pagan" cultures still seem remarkable two thousand years later, and help explain why Christianity caught on in Europe, Africa, Polynesia, and parts of Asia. (See Chesterton, 1925, Richardson, 1981, Pelikan, 1985, Marshall, 2000) Native peoples frequently saw the life of Jesus as a fulfillment of ceremonies, myths, even prophecies, within their own cultures, rather than "*yang jiao*," an alien and irrelevant set of dogmas.

Clement, a second Century Christian philosopher, described Greek teachings as a

"tutor" to bring the world to Christ. The various sects, he said, were not simply wrong. In fact, "All are illuminated by the dawn of Light." Each held a fragment of the truth, a piece of the puzzle that Christ, the Logos, had come to join. Just so, Chinese culture has shattered the Dharma, and the Dharma has fractured Chinese culture, and the Gospel joins these broken pieces of truth together.

2. The importance of indigenization

Ireland is Catholic and Scotland is Presbyterian *because* England is Anglican, and Poland is Catholic *because* her neighbors have been Orthodox, Lutheran, or Marxist. The same dynamic influenced the form of Buddhism that caught on in China, in a way that illustrates the challenge before us as Christians.

Two Tibetan Buddhists were given power in China under Kublai Khan: Sangha as head of government, and Yang-Lien-chen-chia under him. Yang was a devotee Buddhist who expropriated Taoist temples, used forced labor to build more Buddhist temples, and even dug up and desecrated the tombs of the Song emperors. (Rossabi, 16) (These insults reflect, perhaps, the situation ethics of esoteric tantras like *The Symposium of Truth*: "If for the good of living beings or from attachment to the Buddha's interest, one seizes the wealth of others, one is not touched by sin." (Snellgrove, 176) One member of the Chinese sangha described Tibetan monks leaving palaces on horse-back, crowds of syncophants surrounding them, and likened their "hautiness" to that of "kings and grandees." (Herbert Franke, 317) Christian missionaries, of course, have been known to "get on their high horses" in the same way, resulting in the same combination of public deference and private contempt.

In the early 20th Century, coincidental with the fall of the Manchurian dynasty, a revival of esoteric Buddhism began, forwarded in part by the politically-motivated patronage of a number of Tibetan lamas, in part, by the efforts of the retired KMT general who took the name Neng Hai, and in part by the reformist measures of the monk Tai Xu. (Welch, 1968) As the roles once played by ruling Mongols and Manchus and their Tibetan confederates on the one side, and subject Han Chinese on the other, have been reversed, esoteric Buddhism has become "cool." A few people

have joined new esoteric Chinese sects like True Buddha and Black Sect Tantra. The Daai Lama in particular (who has made efforts to reach out to the overseas Chinese community) and Tibetan Buddhism in general, have gained a lot of sympathy by their perseverance under hardship. A nun I interviewed in a Chinese Zen temple in Seattle lambasted the True Buddha sect, founded by Taiwanese Lu Shengyan, for its non-vegetarian diet. "They can teach what they want, as long as they don't call it Buddhism." But when I pointed out that Tibetan Buddhists also eat meat, she quickly excused them by noting that since Tibet's climate made the growing of vegetables difficult, eating meat was permissible for Tibetans.

Christianity is unpopular in many Asian countries not because Jesus is alien to Asian people, (it is not) but because he is associated with an alien and powerful culture. Christianity prospered in China best after the missionaries left. In countries like Taiwan, where Christianity is still associated with Westerners, it is our responsibility as Christians to get down off our high horses, to go the extra mile (on foot, if need be) to show Christ in Chinese culture.

3. Buddhism became Chinese by attempting to reinvent the Gospel.

The story of the young prince who left his father's palace to seek enlightenment and end the sufferings of all sentient beings, is well-known. Even evangelical Christians have testified to the psychological effectiveness of meditation and the training in mind and body Siddhartha taught. (Cathway, 1976) The doctrines of karma, reincarnation, impermanence, emptiness, "no self," and compassion in the Buddhist sense, and the Four Noble Truths -- the fact of suffering, its cause, and the details of Buddha's solution -- make for complex philosophy. Christians can affirm some of Buddha's insights, sometimes with appropriate qualification -- the deceitfulness of riches; the impermanence of earthly pleasures, the need for renunciation to gain joy. Christian song writer Michael Card expressed the Buddha's feelings well when he sang, "It's hard to imagine the freedom we find, from the things we leave behind."

As is the habit of intellectuals who discover neglected truth, however, I believe

Siddhartha oversimplified. All is impermanent? (Even God?) Selfish desire is harmful? (What desires, precisely, are helpful, then, and under what conditions?) Passion is an obstacle to happiness? (The sutra Defeat, part of the early monastic rule for Buddhist monks, punishes sex between married partners exactly the same as the ugliest perversion. Is passion, then, equally culpable in all situations?) The history of Buddhism is a grand quest to right the balance, to redeem good things too dogmatically rejected, and rediscover subtleties overlooked. Buddhism adapted itself to the Chinese "market" by adopting ideas that are absent from, or even antithetical to, the teachings of Siddhartha -- but not to Christianity.

Mahayana Buddhism and Divine Grace

Buddha, influenced perhaps by the new Advetic doctrine of an impersonal and remote Brahma, did not speak of God. He warned against relying on any savior but the self. "Raise yourself by your own efforts, O bhikshu; be your own critic. . . Be your own master and protector." (*Dharmmapada*, Chapter 25) F. N. Farquhar noted that while Advetic and Buddhist philosophy spoke of an impersonal ultimate reality, Indians quickly reacted against this doctrine. The new doctrine of divine incarnation:

"Found its way (into) almost every division of the Hindu people, and into every corner of Eastern Asia. . . . Nor can there be any doubt as to what element in the doctrine it is that has given the movement its power: it is the belief that God actually appeared as a man, was born, and lived and died among men."
(Farquhar, 1913)

For thousands of years, Chinese hoped for a Savior -- "Sheng Ren," Confucius called him. For Mahayana, the revised form of Buddhism that caught on in China, this impulse was expressed in the doctrine of Bodhisattvas. Buddhist thinker C. N. Tay explains:

"The Lotus states in moving dramatic terms that Kuan-yin protects merchants

bearing precious jewels from robbers, sailors from shipwreck, criminals from execution. By his help women obtain the children they desire. If one thinks of Kuan-yin, fire ceases to burn, swords fall to pieces, enemies become kindhearted, bonds are loosed . . . beasts flee, and snakes lose their poison." (Tay, 35)

The educated Buddhist, Tay believed, should interpret these tales as "iconographic possibilities," poetic images by which a Buddhist stilled his fears and reconciled himself to trouble, rather than an objectively existing being who solves them. But he admitted most Chinese wanted a Savior who was more than a metaphor.

Guan Yin became the most popular goddess in China. She was the Heavenly Queen who conquered the Monkey King, and having conquered him, made him a loyal vassal. Her figure adorned hot springs, fishing harbors, and temples. She rescued drowning fishermen, it was said, blunt the blows of swords, and turned bad men to good. Her thousand raised arms symbolized the common people felt for a salvation that they knew could only come from outside themselves, despite orthodox Buddhist beliefs to the contrary.

Buddhists themselves see the connection between this lovely myth and Jesus. The Dalai Lama called Jesus "either a fully enlightened being, or a bodhisattva of very high spiritual realization." (Dalai Lama, 2000) Christian missions transformed Asia by copying the acts of healing, mercy, and teaching modeled by Jesus. (see Marshall, 2000) As early as the late 16th Century, Japanese shogun Nobunaga noted with concern the contrast between Buddhism and Christianity on this score:

"The methods (of the foreign temple)are very peculiar. In Buddhism, contributions are made to the temples; but who ever heard of a temple that gave alms to the people. This new religion is gaining too much influence over peoples' hearts. I am considering the question whether it would not be better to destroy the temple and send the barbarians home." (Cary, 249)

The Dalai Lama (1990, 190)and D. T. Suzuki (Calloway, 147-8) suggest, by

contrast, that Buddhists reinterpret compassion in response. Buddhist charitable organizations like Ci Ji multiply the affect of the impact of Jesus' example by their competition in good deeds.

The stories of Jesus have two qualities distinct from those of Guan Yin that should recommend them to Chinese. First, Chinese share with the Jews a concern for historicity. (Confucius: "I can describe the customs of the Yin, but lack enough data on the Song to describe them." (*Analects* 3-IX) The stories of incarnations in the Indian tradition, or of Guan Yin in Chinese legend, do not fit Confucius' criteria for a flesh and blood Sheng Ren who brings tangible help, or for any honest person's need to go beyond myths to empirical reality.

The White Lotus Sect and Revolution

Another advantage of the Gospel, odd as it may sound, is its intolerance.

While occasional Buddhist sects like Bai Lian (White Lotus) preached rebellion, or (more often, perhaps) were accused of preaching it, Buddhism never succeeded in grass-roots social transformation in China. Since the time of Mo Zi, a radical critique of social injustice has, on the other hand, often been linked to theism. Mozi, the first Chinese egalitarian, believed that love of man followed from the fact that God is love. Zhu Yuanzhang, the revolutionary founder of the Ming, built a Temple of Heaven in Nanjing, and his son built the present Temple of Heaven in Beijing, the center of the worship of the Supreme God. The reformist Tai Ping rebels saw themselves as returning China to its ancient worship of "Huang Shang Di." Even the rebels of the *Water Margin* received a stone from Heaven as an emblem of their brotherhood and righteous cause. In modern China, Christianity continued this tradition. A high percent age of early revolutionaries against the Qing were Christians (Gu Weiming, 1996), as were, of course, Sun Yat-sen, Jiang Jieshi, and Li Denghui. A joint confession of faith between four major Chinese house church groups in November of 1998 stated that "We are opposed to the unity of Church and state or the intermingling of the Church and political power," (Lambert, 1999) The loyal independence of mainland Christians to church and state suggests the hope that the Church may serve China as the basis of a

healthy civil society.

At best, early Buddhism called for rulers to be "compassionate." (Ashoka was an outstanding example of one who took that advice.) But if all things are appearances, and equally a reflection of the one reality, why struggle to free the oppressed? It is hard to see how monism can serve as the basis for social reform, and easy to see how it can justify oppression.

Buddhist scholar Dharmachari Jhanavira described a Japanese monastic system of what could only be called institutional child abuse. He seemed to regret that "the present configuration of sexuality" in the West makes the hope of reestablishing such a system "inconceivable." Quoting from the *Dhammapada*, he portrayed the lack of an absolute moral standard in Buddhism as an advantage:

"The deed which causes remorse afterward and results in weeping is ill-done. The deed which causes no remorse afterwards and results in joy and happiness is well done. . . . ' Motivations were skillful or unskillful, not in relation to a Creator deity's designer realistic agenda, but in terms of the degree to which they resulted in a lessening of desire." (Jhanavira, 2001)

As Jhanavira rightly noted, the anger with which Catholic priests railed against perversion among Japanese monks underlines the differing assumptions of Buddha and Christ. While Buddhists use the term "compassion," the meaning they attach to it is the monist intuition that beings are not, after all, distinct. Thus Buddhist liberation, like Marxist, was largely a matter of definition. *The Diamond Sutra* describes the role of a Bodhisattva as follows:

"All the bodhisattva-mahasattvas, who undertake the practice of meditation, should cherish one thought only: 'When I attain perfect wisdom, I will liberate all sentient beings in every realm of the universe, whether they be egg-born, womb-born, those without form, those with perception, those without perception, and those with neither perception nor non-perception. . . . And yet although

immeasurable, innumerable, and unlimited beings have been liberated, truly no being has been liberated. Why? Because no bodhisattva who is a true bodhisattva entertains such concepts as a self, a person, a being, or a living soul. Thus there are no sentient beings to be liberated and no self to attain perfect wisdom." (Mo Soeng, 142)

If this is the case, then when confronted with injustice, better to react not with anger (like Jesus in the temple), but by meditation. Christians, by contrast, do indeed see the righting of wrongs as part of the Creator's "agenda." Jhanavira might not approve, but I think Confucius would have.

Perhaps the tolerance of Buddhism also obstructed spiritual liberation. One of the founding myths of Tibetan Buddhism is the story of how Phadmasambhava defeated the demons of Tibet -- and then having defeated them, made vassals of them. The autobiography of the Dalai Lama's mother, Diki Tsering, suggests that this approach did not solve the problem. She describes her experiences with a type of ghost called "kyirong," to which she attributed the deaths of four of her children, and which she called "the most frightening experience of my life." (Tsering, 54) Such experiences seem miles away from, and strangely irrelevant to, the philosophical writings of her most famous son. But both from the Dalai Lama's description of the state oracle, and from watching the thing itself on video, I see little difference between Tibetan Buddhism oracles, and spirit mediums (*tang ki*) in Taiwanese folk religion. Both practices suggest compromise or even collusion with the powers of evil, rather than the kind of victory over them that we are in need of.

Tantra and the Art of Love

Buddha showed little sympathy for the family. Jhanavira admits that Buddhism came into sharp conflict with East Asian cultures due to its disinterest in procreation, "which was, after all, seen as the mechanism whereby beings were chained to a constant round of rebirth."

In 1996, after a retreat at a temple in Puli, forty young people decided to stay

and become nuns. After scenes of parents falling on their knees and begging their children to come home were broadcast on television, an interesting editorial appeared in *Freedom Times*, noting that such conflicts had increased over the past few decades among "educated young Buddhists." (As the Chinese community in Taiwan has urbanized, and Taiwanese have come to have more in common with Siddhartha, a move towards more orthodox Buddhism has occurred. (Laliberte) The editorial pointed out that, "In the value system most people hold to, leaving your family is a serious violation of the natural human order." But at the same time, "People shouldn't forget that the principle teacher of Buddhism, Siddhartha, himself was a man who, abandoning his wife, escaped from the palace of his father in the middle of the night." Buddha also used 'magical powers' to prevent a worried father from meeting his son. Caught between respect for Buddhism and tradition, the editorialist gave the former a typically Chinese spin: "The final purpose of Buddhism is to mitigate human suffering. If practitioners begin by making a lot of people suffer, isn't this a betrayal of the original purpose of the founders of Buddhism?"

Note the words, "People shouldn't forget." Why should such a reminder be necessary in a country where most people call themselves Buddhist? Precisely because, in embracing Buddhism, China did choose to forget this aspect of Buddhist teachings. But in recent years, Taiwan has attained a measure of Siddhartha's own prosperity, with MTV for dancing girls and BMWs for elephants, to the point that even middle class teenagers can despise (like the American Baby Boom generation in the Sixties) the emptiness of material pursuits and the "grasping" tendencies of parents who grew up in a poorer and "less enlightened" Taiwan. Education, urbanization, and prosperity all weaken family ties, leading to the popularity (for the first time?) of something that resembles orthodox Buddhism.

Jhanavira admitted that Buddhism "did not validate women as mothers," nor at all, for that matter, but saw them as inferior and degraded beings. Tantrism represented a deliberate, but extreme, reaction to Buddhism's radical rejection of sex -- the idea that sexual union could be a psychic shortcut to enlightenment. But the Chinese, schooled by Confucianism to value modesty, were turned off by the ritual antics of Tibetan

monks. The Gospel affirms the tantric idea that sex could be a symbol of union between the individual and God. But it defines that union in terms of the loyalty, fidelity, and monogamy that Chinese traditionally valued, rather than momentary bliss between person of no permanent "attachments." The Christian concept of marriage as an image of Christ and the church thus bridges two traditions, the esoteric Buddhist and the Confucian, that are otherwise separated by a deep chasm.

Unlike Buddha, Jesus did preach an absolute moral standard. Christianity does not merely affirm the family, but deepens the concept of what family loyalty means (Marshall, 1996). Christ's standard, and the subversively respectful way Jesus treated women, is why, as the famous Chinese scholar and reformer, Hu Shih, admitted, the Gospel achieved what Confucianism and Buddhism had not for Chinese women:

"'Let women serve as oxen and horses.' This saying is not sufficient to describe the cruelty and meanness with which Chinese have treated women. . . . Our holy Scriptures were of no saving value. . . Suddenly from the West a band of missionaries arrived. Besides preaching, they also brought new customs and new ways of looking at things. They taught us many things, the greatest of which was to look at women as people." (Gu Weiming, 313)

Zen and the Kingdom of God

Reginald Blyth notes that, in Indian literature, "Zen is painfully absent." The riddles of Zhuang Zi and the paradoxes of Lao Zi introduced an element into Chinese tradition that would be developed in Zen -- and in Christ. Kenneth Leong called Jesus "One of the greatest Zen teachers." (Leong, 32)

"In contrast to the teachings of many Buddhist philosophers who are often caught up with abstractions and abstruse metaphysics, Jesus' teachings are poetic and not pedantic, simple and not laborious, intuitive and not analytical, humorous and not stodgy." (41)

Leong was particularly attracted to such sayings as that to enter the Kingdom of God, one must become as a child.

One attraction of Zen is that it allows many practitioners to see, as we seldom take the time to see after childhood, the beauty of a flower or a bird. A Zen expressed this state of mind by saying he wanted to "give thanks to all things." This brings to mind the suggestion of one of C. S. Lewis' characters that a misplaced preposition was responsible for what was wrong with the world. We would say no, give thanks for all things -- having found Someone to give thanks to.

Zen was also practical in a Chinese way. T. S. Elliot notes that, in contrast with upper-class Greek (and, one might add, Brahminic) thinking, that depended on slave owning or caste privileges, Christianity affirmed the nobility of labor. (Elliot, 126) So Zen, in its own way, affirmed that, "In the chopping of wood and the carrying of water, there lies the wonderful Tao."

Lao Zi, the founder of the Chinese tradition that led to Zen, noted, "A Sage . . . abandons his life and so preserves his life. Is it not through this lack of selfishness that his ambitions will be realized?" (Lao Zi, 7)) Christianity twice tried to win China through strength (gunboat diplomacy, and the Tai Ping rebellion). But only when the Gospel was stamped out, that it took root. Christianity fulfills the best in Zen in part because Jesus teaches us in Zen fashion, but even more, because at the heart of the Gospel is the paradox of ultimate strength made perfect through weakness. The ultimate riddle of divine love is Christ on the cross.

Buddha saw no need for sacrifice. This is probably not because (as Huston Smith seems to imply) sacrifice was unknown to him; in fact, the Rig Veda, the most ancient collection of Indian Scriptures, is almost an anthology of the purposes and means of sacrifice. Almost three thousand years ago, Buddha and the mystics who wrote the Upanishads recoiled from the slaughter of animals. Yet three millennia later, when Gandhi visited the temple of Kali in Calcutta, he had to call again for an end to it. He wrote, thinking of the Buddha, "To my mind the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being. . . It is my constant prayer that there may be

born on earth some great spirit. .. who will deliver us from this heinous sin, save the lives of the innocent creatures, and purify the temple." (Gandhi, 208)

Yet even today, Chinese and Indians both sacrifice, and Indians try to wash their sins away in the Ganges River. Perhaps it was precisely the unwillingness to differentiate between animals and humans, and the tendency among intellectuals to denigrate this need we all share for unmerited grace, that rendered the example of the Buddha, and the pleas of Hindus like Gandhi, ineffective. French sociologist Rene Girard notes that, in societies around the world, a "scapegoat" serves as a means of allowing regeneration of society by the catharsis of transferred recrimination. The death of Jesus both punctured the unjust illusions of society, (placing the blame on the "winners", where it belonged) and also served as the means by which God turned the devil's own weapon against him. (Girard, 1996) Buddha never ended sacrifices in China because he did not understand them: the awesome imperial ceremonies on the summit of Mount Tai that stretch back through Qing to Tang to Han, and is lost in the mist of pre-Confucian legend, the annual sacrifice at the Temple of Heaven, or the display of pigs in a village temple at New Year. Jesus, who saw one man as worth more than many doves, pigs, or lambs, nevertheless put an end to animal sacrifice. Gandhi's prayer for the lambs was answered before his birth but by the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." As in so many other ways, Christ did not put a full stop to ancient practice, did not simply abolish the Law and the Prophets, but brought them to a natural and redemptive fulfillment.

Buddhism and the Pure Land

Like John Lennon, Siddhartha imagined a world without heaven. Buddhism was part of the Upanishadic reaction against the ancient Indian desire to, as expressed in the Rig Veda, "Unite with the fathers, with Yama, with the rewards of your sacrifices and good deeds, in the highest heaven." (Rig Veda, 44) I once asked a young Dai restaurant owner, the walls of whose restaurant were decorated with pictures of monks and other signs of Buddhist piety, about his faith. "What do you see as the most important aspect of Buddhism?" I asked. "When you die, you go to heaven," he

replied. "If a child goes to be a monk, he can save his whole family to go to heaven and escape hell. It's like Chinese serving as soldiers." Such misconceptions, common even among Theravada Buddhists, show how contrary to human desire the Buddhist idea of nirvana as "snuffing out of the candle" is. The most popular form of Buddhism in China is Pure Land, which encourages hope not for cessation of desire, but for its fulfillment.

I think there is a lot we can (re)learn from the various Buddhist traditions. The emptiness of material obsessions. The concept of presence: that now is the moment of salvation, or of happiness. To use truth as a lure, rather than a harpoon, like Jesus and other Zen "fishers of men." Spontaneity. To see Creation in a grain of sand, a carp, a persimmon. (If creativity is a hallmark of Zen, then what is more Zen than the "ordinary magic" of nature?) Not to be shocked by chickens in the temple, exorcisms, or millennial cults, but to point through the honest needs that they express to their fulfillment in the Gospel. The art of adapting expressions of the truth to local conditions. (Contextualization, not syncretism.)

The history of Buddhism in China has been a gradual re-affirmation of truths in Chinese culture that point to Christ: God, heaven, redemptive sacrifice, the sanctity of marriage, the hunger for justice, patriotism, the hope for a Savior. Huston Smith notes, "This religion which began as a sharp revolt against ritual, speculation, grace, mystery, and a personal God . . . ended with all of these brought back in abundance." (Smith, 157) Indeed, item by item, China tried to invent the Gospel from scratch, as if to whittle a cross from a bodhi tree.

What would be more ironic and wrong-headed, then, than for us to see Buddhism as Chinese religion and Christianity as a foreign interloper? When we draw analogies between Christianity and Chinese culture, we're not pulling the wool (sheep or yak) over peoples' eyes, we're pulling it off so they can see what was there all along.

When we say Buddhism became Chinese, in general we mean China created a syncretic belief system that it called Buddhism. Buddhist thinkers also worked to contextualize, but those efforts bore less fruit, I think, because the doctrines of

Buddhism, rightly understood, were fundamentally out of sync with Chinese Culture. Syncretism permitted the rapid spread of something that often had only the most tenuous relationship, or none at all, to what Siddhartha taught. This is true of many forms of Buddhism. All the branches of Buddhism compromised with indigenous culture, and with human nature, in their efforts to win China, and became something radically new, and often richer, in the process. This is true of Vajrayana among the Tibetans, Theraveda among the Dai, and Mahayana among the Han Chinese.

While Chinese may sip coffee at Starbucks or eat burgers at McDonalds, the modernization of China creates a deep longing for "soul food," for roots, for connection to one's past. Buddhist and Taoist temples remain as ornate bastions of Chinese culture and of ethnic identity. It is assumed, on the other hand, that "yang jiao" (as 80% of Taiwanese identified Christianity in a poll I took about ten years ago) cannot be performed apart from suits and ties, wooden pews, organs, 19th Century English hymns, and other symbols of Western Culture. White statues of Mary outside Catholic churches in Taiwan look like Guan Yin or Ma Zu, only with a Western nose. Many pastors sprinkle English or Greek into their sermons to remind their congregations of their esoteric knowledge of the divine (Western)tongues. With each word, with each hymn, a wedge is driven between Chinese culture and the Gospel.

When people say "Buddhism is Chinese," to a large extent this is because Buddhism has become Chinese, watered itself down, in other words. When we say, "Christianity should become Chinese," we should mean, on the contrary, "The church needs to become more like Christ, and in being more Christ-like, it will become more Chinese." It is our job, as Christians who care about China, to do in Asia what Clement, Origen, and Augustine accomplished in the Mediterranean world: to show Christ as the fulfillment of truths already known, and thus the basis for a synthesis and radical new unity between the best in Chinese culture. In so doing, the roots of the Gospel spread to China's glorious past, and provide nourishment for a tree of life that, God willing, in the future will give shelter to many good things, and in giving them shelter, join China into a new and organic community of truth.

On recent visits to Taiwan and Mainland China, I seem to notice more signs of

Christians relating their faith to its roots in Chinese culture, both in terms of contextualization and of fulfillment. I saw some Spring Festival couples (Chun Lian) with Christian messages on doorposts in urban Taipei and rural Wenzhou. A professor gave me recordings of Hakka Christians songs he made. The *Discovery in Genesis* books, which trace latent Christian meanings in Chinese characters, seem popular too. In mainland China, I've visited churches that use Spring Festival couplets, Chinese rock gardens, and folk art to communicate the Gospel. All of these are an aid to communicating our central message: of the Tao become flesh, who lived among us, and calls all men and women to Himself, that the will of God may be done "On earth, as it is in heaven."

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(Ironically, considering its pacifist reputation today, from the Tang dynasty on, one of the most attractive things about esoteric Buddhism has often been the magical military powers it offered. The Nationalists "recalled that when the Mongols tried to invade Ja

pan in 1281, the Japanese had recited a mantra from the Jen-wang hu-kuo ching." (Scripture for Protecting the Nation.)(Holmes, 175)