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Buddhist Influence on the Neo-Confucian Concept of the Sage

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Buddhist Influence on the
Neo-Confucian Concept of the Sage

1. Introduction

Buddhism is generally thought to have been introduced into China around the Eastern or Later Han period (25-220 I.E.), and reached its highest growth during the T'ang Dynasty (618-906 I.E.). It continued prospering in China until around the eleventh century. Thus, there is no doubt that the influence of Buddhism on Chinese life and thought was tremendous. However, in the course of time, some Chinese scholars, who were deeply concerned with the Confucian sense of this-worldliness and social responsibility, arose to protest against the Buddhist emphasis on other-worldliness and an illusion of phenomena, and wanted to bring people back to early Confucianism. This movement became known as Neo-Confucianism. Emerging in the Sung Dynasty (960-1280 I.E.) as a strong intellectual movement, Neo-Confucianism became an effective mechanism for circulating and preserving the Confucian doctrines of loyalty, social responsibility, and conformity to a traditional way of life. Through this school of thought, Mencius became the greatest sage after Confucius; the Four Books and the Five Classics constituted the intellectual focus of scholars over seven hundred years.

There are three lines of thought that can be traced as the main sources of Neo-Confucianism.¹ The first is Confucianism itself. The second is Buddhism, via the medium of the Ch'an sect, for of all the schools of Buddhism, Ch'an was

the most influential at the time of the formation of Neo-Confucianism. The third is the Taoist religion, of which the cosmological view of the Yin-Yang school formed an important element. The cosmology of the Neo-Confucianists is chiefly connected with this line of thought.

Since Buddhism had become an intimate part of Chinese intellectual life for several centuries, it was impossible for the Sung reformists to replace Buddhism entirely by their new philosophy. While using concepts found in the Confucian Classics, the Neo-Confucianists interpreted them in the light of Buddhist understanding. To limit the topic of study, this paper will examine only the influence of Buddhism on the Neo-Confucian concept of the sage, focusing on sagehood as an attainable goal and self-cultivation. The study of the concept of the sage in Neo-Confucianism will show not only the Buddhist influence, but also the development of the concept from early Confucianism.

2. Sagehood as an Attainable Goal

The Neo-Confucian concept of the sage was thoroughly described in the Reflections on Things at Hand (Chin ssu lu) of Chu Hsi (1130-1200 I.E.). The second chapter of the book begins with a quotation from Chou Tun-i (1017-1073 I.E.):
"The sage aspires to become Heaven, the worthy aspires to become a sage and the gentleman aspires to become a worthy."²
This passage explicitly shows the possibility of achieving sagehood. It is presented as something that can be attained

through proper cultivation.

Traditionally, early Confucianism had always placed an emphasis on the role of sagehood but in terms of sages of the past. The sages as they appeared in Confucian orthodox texts were considered sage-kings or ideal rulers, teachers of antiquity, original sources of the Way (Tao), transmitters of the orthodox succession and also models of virtue.³ In this sense the Confucian sages were lofty figures who stayed far away from ordinary people. Consequently, the state of sagehood was unattainable for most people. R. L. Taylor thought that "the idea that sagehood was something that could be cultivated and sought after took the concept of sagehood out of the past making it a goal one could realistically aspire towards."⁴ Thus, it would seem that sagehood acquired a new connotation in Sung Neo-Confucianism.

Even though the idea that sagehood became an attainable goal was a strong emphasis in Sung Neo-Confucianism, it had already been mentioned in the works of Han Yü (768-824 I.E.) and Li Ao (d. ca. 844 I.E.), who were considered to be forerunners of Neo-Confucianism in the T'ang Dynasty.

Han Yü and Li Ao combined the Doctrine of the Mean's definition of the sage as "a metaphysical absolute, (and) as a spiritual hero at one with the universe,"⁵ with the Mencius' notion of human nature as originally good. Then they presented a new image of the sage as a spiritual figure who had identity with common people.⁶ This reinterpretation of the concept of the sage was derived from the fundamental idea that men are equal and have abilities to develop

themselves to reach the state of sagehood. It is quite certain that their reinterpretation was partly a result of Mencius' teaching that all men could be Yao and Shun (sages),⁷ and partly was influenced by Taoism, and Buddhism. The reason is that the Taoist teaching that all men possess Tao in their nature and therefore could attain sagehood, and the Buddhist teaching that all men had Buddha-nature in them and therefore could become Buddhas, were universally accepted in the time of Han Yü and Li Ao.

Han Yü, in On the Origins of Slander, writes, "Shun was a man. I am a man. What he could do, I should be able to do also."⁸ Similarly, Li Ao, in his Essay on Returning to the Nature (Fu-hsing shu), states that, "Absolute Sincerity (ch'eng)⁹ is the Nature (hsing) of the Sage." "So, then do common folk not have this nature? The nature of the common folk is not different from that of the Sage."¹⁰ "Alas! All men are capable of reaching this condition, yet because they act not,¹¹ none rest in it."

Such a viewpoint is stated with equal clarity in the work of Liang Su (753-793 I.E.), whose idea was derived from Chan-jan (d. 772 I.E.), the ninth patriarch of the T'ien-t'ai sect of Buddhism.¹² Liang Su, in General Principles of Cessation and Contemplation, states:

Can the state of supreme Sagehood (sheng) be separated and far distant, cut off from the realm of ordinary men (fan)? Both have but a single nature. Those who attain it become enlightened (wu), those who lose it become deluded. There is only one Principle (li), but delusion makes ordinary men, and enlightenment makes sages. 13

The same notion is basic to Ch'an Buddhism. The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch (Liu-tsu-t'an-ching) maintains,

Therefore we know that, unawakened, even a Buddha is a sentient being, and that even a sentient being, if he is awakened in an instant of thought, is a Buddha. . . .¹⁴ From the outset our own nature is pure. If we perceive the minds and see our own natures, then of ourselves we have achieved the Buddha Way.¹⁵

From the quotations above, it is hard to reject the assumption that Buddhism had influence on these two forerunners of Neo-Confucianism. In Han Yü's case, Wing-tsit Chan argues that although Han Yü interpreted that sagehood in the Mencius is an attainable goal, this does not suggest that Han Yü borrowed the idea from Buddhism, because there is no¹⁶ evidence that he had studied Buddhist texts. On the contrary, Carsun Chang cites the fact that Han Yü maintained a good relationship with Ta-tien (732-824 I.E.), a Ch'an monk¹⁷ who was a disciple of Shih-t'an (700-790 I.E.). However, this discrepancy between these two pieces of evidence seems to be a minor argument because the problem of Buddhahood or sagehood was widely debated among Buddhists and regarded as being significant by men of Han Yü's time. Thus, whether consciously or unconsciously, the Buddhist idea of Buddhahood was absorbed in Han Yü's thought. In Li Ao's case, it is certain that he was interested in Buddhism, especially in the Ch'an sect, and also had an intimate friendship with Liang¹⁸ Su. Therefore, though his effort took the form of discussion in Confucian terms, the driving influence of Buddhism behind him is quite clear, particularly on the topic of self-

cultivation which will be discussed later.

The idea of sagehood as an attainable goal became central to the Neo-Confucianists of the Sung Dynasty. Starting with Chou Tun-i's phrase cited at the beginning of the chapter, Chang Tsai (1021-1077 I.E.), Ch'eng Hao (1032-1085 I.E.), Ch'eng I (1033-1107 I.E.), and Chu Hsi (1130-1200 I.E.) followed the same track. Chu Hsi, like his precursors of the T'ang Dynasty, presented the image of the sage as a secular model who aspires to achieve sagehood. In the Reflections on Things at Hand, Chu Hsi says, "The essential training [of government] should be the way of choosing the good and cultivating the self until the whole world is transformed and brought to perfection so that all people from the ordinary person up can become sages." ¹⁹ Thus, any aspirant to become a sage has the ability to achieve this goal. This marks a big difference between the early Confucian sage and the Neo-Confucian one. The way of the sages in the past had rarely been thought of as something to which anyone could aspire, or as a practical program of cultivation and action by which even "a young man in an isolated village who has the will to learn," ²⁰ will be able to find the Way. In the Sung Dynasty, the way of the sage-kings was shifted to the way of an individual's moral and spiritual cultivation. So the practice of sagehood was to be found in the ordinary pursuit of scholars, officials, rulers, fathers, and so on, not merely in the sage-kings' activities. As a result, the Sung Neo-Confucianists tended to give relatively little attention to the ancient sages and their great achievements in terms of

wealth and material goals.

De Bary points out two historical reasons behind the emerging emphasis on the individual cultivation of sagehood. The first reason is the relation between Buddhism and Neo-²¹Confucianism. He finds it difficult to accept either that Neo-Confucianism tried to construct its metaphysical system out of Buddhist philosophy or that it tried to challenge²² it. A. C. Graham and Carsun Chang, on the other hand, follow the argument that Neo-Confucianism was a reaction to Buddhist metaphysics,²³ such as the concept of emptiness. De Bary sees the influence of Buddhism as "a deeper subjectivity in the practice of self-cultivation."²⁴ His main comment on this point is that in the Sung Dynasty Buddhist metaphysics was in a state of decline and unlikely to pose a direct challenge. He states that, "Just as Ch'an Buddhism, the dominant form among intellectuals, was a system of practice rather than a system of metaphysics, so Neo-Confucianism was, I believe, unconsciously emulating the spiritual training and character formation of the Ch'an monk at his best - but, of course, domesticating and secularizing it."²⁵ Such an interpretation opens a new understanding of the relation between Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism.

The second historical factor in the emphasis upon individual cultivation of sagehood was derived from the program for social and political reforms in the early Sung²⁶ Dynasty. This movement had as its aim the hope for realization of the Confucian ideal of the Great Society. For

example, Chang Tsai thought that the well-field system and feudalism should be based upon the Rites of Chou by which the sage could manage the empire by sharing his power with other men.²⁷ For Ch'eng I, humanity (jen) was to be furthered by good government.²⁸ For Wang An-shih (1021-1086 I.E.), reform was to bring about the reemergence of the way of the sages of antiquity.²⁹

Those reforms, however, failed. In another respect, the collapse of the reform movement resulted in a turning away from the construction of the ideal society to the cultivation of the individual by the next generation of Neo-Confucianists. Chu Hsi recognized that the ideal reforms of Chang, Ch'eng, and Wang were too difficult to be put into practice during that period.³⁰

For these reasons, I tend to agree with de Bary that Neo-Confucianism mainly placed an emphasis on sagehood as an attainable goal in society. The most eloquent expression of the quest for this goal appears in the Reflections on Things at Hand, as follows:

The Way of the Sage is to be heard through the ear, to be preserved in the heart, to be deeply embraced there to become one's moral character, and to become one's activities and undertakings when it is put into practice. 31

3. Cultivation of Sagehood

For the Neo-Confucianists, sagehood became a goal whose achievement was considered possible through the correct means of cultivation. At this point I would like to turn to a discussion of how to attain sagehood.

From the time of Han Yü until the Sung Neo-Confucianists, a new system of thought began to ripen. Although each thinker had his own formula for personal cultivation, they all had many things in common. First, they believed in human nature which is essentially good. Second, emotions or desires, which appear when man comes into contact with the outside world, can be removed. Then the mind becomes bright and calm, and can reflect everything objectively and impartially. Third, to keep the mind bright and calm, man has to cultivate himself seriously in order that he can achieve Absolute Sincerity which is the nature of the sage. Generally, three main methods are used in the cultivation of sagehood.

3.1 Elimination of Desires

Although Chinese thinkers from Mencius to Han Yü considered man's desires as something that obstruct personal cultivation, they believed that the first step of rectifying the mind was to have only a few desires. However, from the time of Li Ao to the Sung Neo-Confucianists, this concept changed to the elimination of desires, particularly selfish desires.

According to Han Yü, the sage was the person who had attained the highest state, called Absolute Sincerity. He affirms, in On the Origin of the Nature, that this state could be attained through nourishing the mind and having fewer desires. ³² This point was developed further in Li Ao's Essay on Returning to the Nature, in which Buddhist

influence became quite clear. He says:

That which may make a man a Sage is his Nature (hsing). That which may make a man betray his Nature is Feeling (ch'ing). Joy, anger, pity, fear, love, hate and desire: these seven are all the operation of Feeling. When feeling obscures, the Nature is thereby drowned. This is not the fault of the Nature, but because, owing to the endless revolution and intermingling of these seven, the Nature is unable to gain its fulfillment. When Feeling does not operate, the Nature will gain fulfillment. 33

A sage is not a man without emotions. A sage is a man who is a master of his emotions and keeps calmness of mind. . . . Though he has emotions, he does not seem to have them. Ordinary people have their human nature too. It is not different from that of the sage. But they can be blinded by their emotion and then do not know what human nature is. 34

These lengthy quotations are Li Ao's main ideas of the way to become a sage. The ideas are purely Chinese, but Li Ao's interpretation is remarkably close to Buddhist doctrine, particularly that of the Ch'an sect. 35

Li Ao's concept of feeling is similar to the Buddhist idea of craving and passion (tanhā and klesā in Sanskrit), and what he called "nature" resembles the Buddha-nature. According to Ch'an Buddhism, all sentient beings are equal with the Buddha himself. They possess completely the Buddha-nature and can attain perfect wisdom. However, there may be some interruptions in this process. That is, their Buddha-natures are covered by so many passions and desires that they are unable to shine forth. Thus, passions are not opposite to the Buddha-nature, but it is out of this fundamental nature that these passions arise. It is in the same way that Li Ao interprets people's blindness to their fundamental nature when they indulge themselves in emotions. "Nature and

Feeling cannot exist one without the other. Thus without the Nature, Feeling would have no source from which to come into being, because Feeling comes forth out of the Nature."³⁶

For Li Ao, a sage is a man who understands this reality and becomes awakened. That is why a sage has feelings without feeling, thoughts without thinking. Although a sage in such a state of mind participates in all sorts of activities or is subject to various changes, his real nature remains unchangeable. The state of mind in this condition is what Li Ao called "Absolute Sincerity." "Having Absolute Sincerity in thought, the mind is then rectified. The mind being rectified, the person becomes cultivated."³⁷ This concept is the same as what is described in the Great Learning as "the extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things," which, according to Li Ao, means that when things come before a man, his mind should clearly understand and distinguish among them, and yet at the same time should not be moved by them.³⁸

It is evident that Li Ao spoke the language of Confucius, but the influence of Buddhism is implicit in his explanation of the absence of thought. It is the same as the idea of absence of thought (wu nien) in the Ch'an sect. The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch, which purports to record the conversations of Hui-neng (638-713 I.E.) who was regarded as the sixth patriarch of the Ch'an sect, reads, "The formless (wu hsianq) lies in the formal (hsianq), and yet is separate from the formal. The absence of thought (wu nien) lies in thought (nien), and yet in it thought is

absent." ³⁹ The absence of thought, according to Buddhism, really means freedom from false and conflicting thoughts, and not an absolute mental vacuum. ⁴⁰

3.2 Extension of Knowledge

For the Neo-Confucianists, there are two major ways of interpreting the Great Learning's concept that "the extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things," which is the most significant method of self-cultivation. The Ch'eng-Chu School, which became known as the School of Principle, emphasizes the extension of knowledge through the investigation of things and mind, whereas the Lu-Wang School, which became known as the School of Mind, places an emphasis on the investigation of mind only.

3.2.1 The School of Principle

In the Ch'eng-Chu School, Ch'eng I and Chu Hsi introduced in their theory an immaterial and unchangeable principle inherent in all things, which gives them their forms and constitutes their essence. This is called "Principle" (li). This principle in man, fundamentally good, is his true nature. Man's mind is in essence one with the mind of the universe, capable of entering into all things and understanding their principle. Consequently, according to Chu Hsi, the practice of sagehood is an all-embracing system of understanding this principle. He suggested a twofold method: the extension of knowledge through the investigation of things, and the attentiveness or reverence (ching) of the mind which is man's inner moral nature. ⁴¹ This method was

traced back to Ch'eng I who advised that it should not be necessary to investigate everything in the world. If man investigates one thing or one event exhaustively, the principle in other things can also be revealed. And there are many ways to investigate things: by reading ancient texts, by discussing historical events, and by dealing with things and people properly.⁴² The last method cannot be utilized unless man cultivates his mind to the utmost.

Chu Hsi followed Ch'eng I in the investigation of things but also saw that the investigation of things and the cultivation of mind are the two ways of realizing one's nature to the fullest extent. Since all things in the universe have the same principle, it is man's duty to comprehend their principle in order to understand his true nature.

For Chu Hsi, the first step of learning is to investigate things. By "things," Chu Hsi means the matters of conduct, human relationships, political problems and so forth, which are revealed in the orthodox Confucian texts. But this is not enough to get a full understanding of principle. Man must also cultivate his true nature, humanity (jen), which is the same principle as that of the universe. To cultivate his true nature, man's mind must be sincere (ch'eng) and reverent or serious (ching) in order that he can become one with the principle of the universe. At the same time, he can deal with things and people in society impartially. Therefore, according to Chu Hsi, man must

Pratoom Angurarohita, "Buddhist Influence on the Neo-Confucian Concept of the Sage" devote his efforts both to investigation of things and cultivation of his mind to the utmost. "Neither seriousness nor knowledge can be overemphasized or neglected,"⁴³ Chu Hsi concludes.

Looking particularly at the concept of humanity, which is essential to the cultivation of sagehood, we can see its development from early Confucianism. There is no doubt that this development reflects Buddhist influence.

From the time of Mencius, the Confucian tradition maintained that human nature is born with the four virtues: humanity (jen), righteousness (i), propriety (li), and wisdom (chih). They are standards of moral conduct. When the Sung Neo-Confucianists appeared on the scene, they collectively called these four virtues "principle" or "li," and applied it to all things,⁴⁴ saying specifically, however, that humanity is the root of the other three virtues. Humanity comes with a person from the very beginning. Chu Hsi, in the Complete Works of Master Chu, sums up the concept of humanity by saying that humanity is "the character of the mind and the principle of love."⁴⁵ W. T. Chan explains that "humanity" here "not only means the love of all people but the love of all things as well."⁴⁶ Chu Hsi, in the Reflections on Things at Hand, also adds the idea that a man of humanity would be impartial and altruistic.⁴⁷ His idea was mentioned before by Ch'eng Hao and Ch'eng I.

When we turn to the Buddhist idea of the bodhisattva, we can see the similarities between these two teachings. Har Dayal, in the Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit

Literature, cites the characteristics of a bodhisattva to the effect that he has no selfish motive for his charitable deeds, and is inspired only by love, pity, mercy, and compassion.⁴⁸ "He desires enlightenment first for all beings and not for himself."⁴⁹ "He desires the good and welfare of the world."⁵⁰ "The bodhisattva should not think of self at all, when he asserts himself for the good of others. He should be filled with love, and love alone, without any admixture of self-interest."⁵¹

A sage is like a bodhisattva in the sense that he lacks selfish desires and wants to extend his humanity to all things. Ch'eng Hao says, "To be charitable and to assist all things is the function of the sage."⁵² This idea already occurs in the Bodhisattva Bhūmi in which it is described that "only the perfect Buddhas and very advanced bodhisattvas can act from purely altruistic motives, as when they condescend to be born in a lower world for the good of the living beings."⁵³

Since the Neo-Confucian concept of humanity covers the whole realm of existence, it is quite certain that it reflects Buddhist influence, because in early Confucianism, love had been confined mainly to the mundane world, whereas the object of moral consciousness in Buddhism is the entire universe as expressed in the bodhisattva's compassionate activity.

3.2.2 The School of Mind

Now let us move to the School of Mind. In the Ming

Dynasty interest in the cultivation of sagehood continued and developed but in a new way. The Ch'eng-Chu School emphasized broad learning together with the cultivation of mind, whereas the Lu-Wang School stressed the direct realization of sagehood through "innate or intuitive knowing" (liang chih). Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529 I.E.) shifted the center of study from the investigation of things to what he considered a primal source, the mind itself. For Wang Yang-ming, through avoiding dependency upon the investigation of things and by emphasizing inner realization, the goal of sagehood suddenly became more accessible.

Accepting the basic idea of the Ch'eng-Chu School that all things in the universe have the same principle, which is good because it is the sum total of moral value in the universe, the Lu-Wang School rejected its doctrine of knowledge-seeking. Since the principle is endowed in man's nature, he can realize his nature fully by only cultivating his mind. This thesis was initiated by Ch'eng Hao, who placed an emphasis on concentration of mind, but firmly established by Lu Hsiang-shan (1139-1193 I.E.), and later elaborated by Wang Yang-ming.

Lu Hsiang-shan says that, "The mind is one and the principle is one. Perfect truth is reduced to a unity and the essential principle is never a duality." ⁵⁴ Thus, one can approach Perfect Truth by restoring the purity and brightness of the mind, and not by seeking more knowledge. Because man is complete in himself, it is not necessary to seek knowledge

from the outside." At this point, one can see that Lu Hsiang-shan based his idea on the supremacy of mind and the elimination of desires not on knowledge-seeking such as reading books. For him, all the Six Classics are the footnotes of the mind.⁵⁵

It may be safe to say that the influence of Ch'an Buddhism was behind his idea. Traditionally, the Chinese had become accustomed to thinking of books, particularly the Confucian texts, as the basis from which knowledge was derived. Later, however, Ch'an Buddhism, introduced by Bodhidharma, came into existence in China and it opened a new way of learning. For Bodhidharma, it was no use to depend upon words or sutras.⁵⁶ By this he meant that man knows what is right or wrong without having to read. Man is originally good, and by appealing directly to the mind, without seeking ready-made knowledge, the mind is trained to greater alertness.⁵⁷

It would seem that Lu Hsiang-shan could not help but be attracted and influenced by these ideas since he lived at a time when Ch'an Buddhism flourished. For him, "The reality of the mind is infinite. If one can completely develop his mind, he will become identified with Heaven."⁵⁸ The ways of developing the mind to become a sage, according to Lu Hsiang-shan, are "to be his own master,"⁵⁹ and not necessarily "to follow other people's footsteps nor repeat their words."⁶⁰

These are simple words but they try to get at the innermost point of the mind. However, like other Neo-Confucianists, Lu Hsiang-shan abandoned the negative attitude

toward life of Ch'an monks but kept their method of seeking the original mind. Carsun Chang argues that "Lu (Hsiang-shan) may be called a believer in Ch'an thought only in the methodological sense."⁶¹ By this he means that Lu Hsiang-shan, methodologically, applied the Ch'an technique by calling the mind directly to attention in the interest of moral perfection, and also for the sake of Confucianism.

The Ch'an influence of original mind became evident in Wang Yang-ming's cultivation of sagehood. Wang Yang-ming, in the Record of Discourse, says that the sage has the same knowledge as the common people from birth.⁶² That is intuitive knowledge. "Intuitive knowledge of good (liang-chih) is characteristic of all men. The sage, however,⁶³ guards and protects it so that nothing obscures it." According to Wang Yang-ming, intuitive knowledge is the original substance of the mind, or in another sense, the Principle of Nature. Originally, the mind of man is always shining and reflecting things as things come without being stirred. But it is obscured by means of selfishness, and therefore its original character is lost.⁶⁴ Thus, it is necessary to cultivate the mind in order to get back to the original nature. He suggests that:

The tranquility resulting from the dominance of natural law is a state in which no discrimination is made between good and evil; while the stirring of the passion nature is a state in which both good and evil are present. If there are no stirrings of the passion nature, there is neither good nor evil, and this is what is called the highest good.⁶⁵

The fact that there are Buddhist elements in Wang Yang-ming's doctrine is undeniable. The original mind which

is realized at the time of neither good nor evil is a good example to show Ch'an influence on his doctrine. It seems that Wang Yang-ming also spoke of the absence of thought which is very similar to that of Shen-hui (670-762 I.E.), who elaborated Hui-neng's doctrine of no-thought. In the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch, the absence of thought simply means that the mind would return to its original state of tranquility and be free from attachment to the differentiated characters of things.⁶⁶ However, Wang Yang-ming rejected this concept entirely because the absence of thought is impossible while we are awake. He says, "From morning to evening, and from youth to old age, if one wants to be without thought, that is, not to know anything, he cannot do so unless he is sound asleep or dead like dry wood, or dead ashes."⁶⁷ It would appear that Wang Yang-ming misinterpreted Shen-hui's absence of thought. Actually, what Shen-hui meant was that the doctrine of absence of thought leads to an indifference to things.⁶⁸

3.3 Quiet-sitting

An important adjunct to this kind of spiritual guidance was the practice of quiet-sitting. It is a method of exercise most conducive to the attainment of sagehood.

The Confucianists in general had a tendency to deny this kind of practice since it was the way of controlling mind in Buddhism which they attacked. However, Chu Hsi himself spoke of spending half a day on quiet-sitting and half a day reading books.⁶⁹ In the Reflections on Things at Hand,

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Chu Hsi also referred to it in such a way as to approve and encourage the practice. The Ming thinkers later adopted Chu Hsi's suggestion of quiet-sitting. Chu Hsi writes:

One day Ch'eng Hao said, "When there is nothing to put into practice, go and sit in meditation. For while sitting in meditation, we can cultivate our original mind and become calm to some degree. Although we are still not free from chasing after material things, when we come to an awakening, we can collect and concentrate on our mind and then there will be a solution. 70

The Neo-Confucian adoption of sitting in meditation shows the most pervasive influence of Buddhism on its doctrine, in spite of the fact that it stood in such a strong opposition to Buddhism. There are several reasons why meditation was adopted by the Neo-Confucianists. De Bary explains that if sagehood was just an ideal that one admired, a purely descriptive approach would have sufficed. But since Neo-Confucian sagehood became something to which everyone should aspire, some definite method of practice was necessary.⁷¹ That Chu Hsi spoke of two activities, namely knowledge-seeking and contemplating, supports his teaching of the search for principles and the practice of reverence. In consequence, Neo-Confucian cultivation places an emphasis on the individual, and this meditative practice leads to a deep interiorization of personal cultivation and to belief in the achievement of self-realization.

In terms of practice, it is not accurate to identify Neo-Confucian meditation practice with sitting in meditation in Ch'an Buddhism, because even though there is something in common, some features are different. What the two practices

share is the sitting. However, the position of sitting, for the Neo-Confucianists, was not as strict as that of Ch'an.⁷² It could simply take the form of sitting on a chair. For the Neo-Confucianists, the most important thing in the practice was to control the breath with or without counting of each respiration. Regulation of the breath was recommended as a means of nourishing one's vital spirit or physical nature. It is known that a manual on this subject was attributed to⁷³ Chu Hsi.

In addition, Neo-Confucian quiet-sitting could be practised at home, not necessarily in a Buddhist meditation hall. This is what de Bary called, "the secularization of meditation,"⁷⁴ which means a practice of daily life in connection with one's normal activities. The rigid practice of Ch'an monks was never encouraged because, for the Neo-Confucianists, quiet-sitting was to be used for calming one's emotions, and filling one's mind with principles of right action in order that one could fulfil one's responsibilities⁷⁵ to the family as well as in society at large. In relation to quiet-sitting, it was found that Neo-Confucian scholars often lit an incense stick to time their period of sitting by the burning out of the stick.⁷⁶ The use of incense sticks was common among Buddhists who wanted to pay homage to the Buddhas or bodhisattvas, but the Neo-Confucianists adopted it later for a different purpose.

4. Conclusion

As a whole, the Neo-Confucianist system was built up

under the influence of Buddhism, particularly the Ch'an tradition. However, Neo-Confucianism never lacked the basic Chinese attitude of this-worldliness and life-affirmation.

In conclusion, there are two topics that I want to discuss: first, the close relationship between Ch'an Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism; second, two major criticisms which Neo-Confucianism made of Buddhism in relation to self-cultivation.

First, as we have seen, among many schools of Buddhism, Ch'an was the most attractive sect to Neo-Confucianism. In addition to the fact that Ch'an was the most popular Buddhist sect at the time of the emergence of Neo-Confucianism, Ch'an has something in common with early Confucian teachings. This is a major reason why Ch'an doctrine was easily absorbed by the Neo-Confucianists. First of all, Ch'an Buddhism believes in the goodness of human nature, just as was taught by Mencius. Here is a basic relationship between Ch'an and Confucianism which was adopted later by the Neo-Confucianists. Secondly, according to Ch'an, every sentient being possesses Buddha-nature and can become enlightened by making a direct appeal to mind, while Mencius taught that everyone can be a Yao or Shun by nourishing one's mind. Eventually, mind cultivation became central to Neo-Confucianism. Thus, it was more convenient for the Neo-Confucianists to utilize Ch'an ideas to reinterpret the concepts of the sage and self-cultivation in the Confucian texts.

Second, although Neo-Confucianism, to some extent, is very close to Buddhism, the Neo-Confucian scholars attempted

to distinguish their teachings from Buddhism. They often considered two main Buddhist notions to be incompatible with the Chinese way of life: life-denial, and a selfish approach to life.

In the case of life-denial, the Neo-Confucianists criticized the Buddhist doctrine of renouncing the world in contrast to the Chinese preference for life-affirmation. For example, Ch'eng I says, "Man is a living thing; the Buddhists speak not of life but of death. . . . Buddhists speak not of principle but of illusion."⁷⁷ And also Wang Yang-ming states:

In nourishing the mind, we Confucianists have never departed from things and events. . . . On the other hand, the Buddhists insist on getting away from things and events completely and view the mind as an illusion, gradually entering into a life of emptiness and silence, and seem to have nothing to do with the world at all. 78

From the Neo-Confucian viewpoint, Buddhism deprecates life in this world. However, we can argue that this characterization may not be as true of the more developed forms of Buddhism, particularly Ch'an Buddhism. As stated before, the Buddhas or bodhisattvas can live in this world as ordinary people but remain indifferent to things that come before them. Lin-chi (d. 867 I.E.), a Ch'an master, suggested the acceptance of ordinary life in so far as one recognizes its ultimate reality or emptiness.⁷⁹

The second charge against Buddhism, and probably the most crucial, is an accusation of selfishness. Almost every generation and school of Neo-Confucianism had a similar attitude that Buddhism teaches people to cultivate only one's mind and discard human affairs. In consequence, the

Buddhists fail to understand the human relationships taught by Confucius. Chu Hsi says that, "Now the Buddhists discard everything and seek only enlightenment in the mind, therefore it is asked, 'Can that be right?'"⁸⁰ Lu Hsiang-shan had an idea that the "selfishness" of Buddhism was derived from its escapist view of human life. He cites that, "The Buddhists, even when they strive to ferry souls across the sea of suffering, always aim at withdrawing from the world."⁸¹

This criticism lies in the fundamental idea that Confucianism strongly emphasizes an ethical view of man largely in terms of his social relationships. For the Confucianists, self cultivation, which is a basic ideal of life, would lead man to understand the five social relationships, whereas Buddhism teaches people to renounce the world. As a result, the Buddhists tend to neglect the obligations to their families, parents, rulers, and so forth. Thus, in the eyes of the Neo-Confucianists, this kind of doctrine could be reduced to a selfish approach to life. Chu Hsi concludes,⁸² "In the final analysis, this is nothing but self-interest."

It might be true to say that this criticism touches at the heart of Buddhism, but at the Theravada (Hinayana) tradition of which personal awakening is the supreme goal of life. But if we look at the Mahayana tradition, we find that its ideal goal is to become the bodhisattva who seeks to save all beings. I think that it is the bodhisattva ideal that overcomes Lu Hsiang-shan's charge against those who "strive to ferry souls across the sea of suffering."

Notes

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3. Arthur Waley, tr., The Analects of Confucius (New York: Vintage Books, 1938), pp. 17-19, 135.
4. R. L. Taylor, The Cultivation of Sagehood as a Religious Goal in Neo-Confucianism: A Study of Selected Writings of Kao P'an-lung, 1562-1626 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), p. 1.
5. Charles Hartman, Han Yü and the T'ang Search for Unity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 178.
6. Ibid., p. 190.
7. Leonard A. Lyall, tr., Mencius (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1932), p. 68.
8. Hartman, Han Yü and the T'ang Search for Unity, p. 186.
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10. T. H. Barrett, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism in the Thought of Li Ao, Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1978, p. 229.
11. Fung, "The Rise of Neo-Confucianism and Its Borrowings from Buddhism and Taoism," 112.
12. Ibid.

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14. Philip B. Yampolsky, tr., The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 151.
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18. Ibid., p. 104.
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23. A. C. Graham, Two Chinese Philosophers: Ch'eng Ming-tao and Ch'eng Yi-chuan (London: Lund Humphries, 1958), p. xvi, and Chang, The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought, vol. 1., p. 129.
24. De Bary, The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism, p. 161.
25. Ibid., p. 162.
26. Ibid.
27. Wm. T. de Bary, W. T. Chan, and B. Watson, ed., Sources of Chinese Tradition, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 405.
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30. Chan, Reflections on Things at Hand, p.237.
31. Ibid., p. 35.
32. Fung, "The Rise of Neo-Confucianism and Its Borrowings from Buddhism and Taoism," 96.
33. Ibid., p. 100.
34. Chang, The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought, vol. 1., p. 106.
35. Ibid., p. 104.
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39. Ibid., p. 102.
40. William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1937), p. 379.
41. Chan, Reflections on Things at Hand, p. 65.
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45. Quoted from Chan, Neo-Confucianism, ETC: Essays, p. 255.
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- Sanskrit Literature (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1932),
p. 178.
49. C. Bendall, ed., Śāntideva's Śikṣā-samuccaya (St. Petersberg, 1897-1902), p. 146., quoted from Ibid.
50. S. Lefmann, ed., Lalitā-vistāra (Halle, G.S., 1902-1908), p. 180., quoted from Ibid.
51. Ibid., p. 180.
52. Quoted from Chan, Neo-Confucianism, ETC: Essays, p.153.
53. Quoted from Dayal, The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, p. 180.
54. Quoted from Chan, Neo-Confucianism, ETC: Essays, p. 173.
55. Ibid., p. 174.
56. The Lankāvatāra Sūtra was one of the main texts transmitted by Bodhidharma to his successor, Hui-k'o (484-590 I.E.). It teaches that words are not necessary for the communication of thoughts. See Kenneth Ch'en Buddhism in China (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 352.
57. Chang, The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought, vol. 1., p. 133.
58. Chan, Neo-Confucianism, ETC: Essays, p. 174.
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63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., p. 154.
65. Ibid., p. 115.
66. Yampolsky, The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch, p. 153.
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74. Ibid.
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