

BUDDHISM IN THE T'ANG HUI-YAO

I. Introduction.

The *T'ang Hui-yao*,^{a)} or "Collection of Important Documents from the T'ang", is one of the first topical collections of historical materials. A work of one hundred *chüan*, it was compiled by Wang P'u^{b)} in 961 from three separate sets of materials. The first of these was the *Hui-yao* by Su Mien^{c)}, in which was assembled, under classified items, material dating from the beginning of T'ang down to the year 804, in forty *chüan*. The second was compiled in 853 by Yang Shao-fu^{d)} and others as a forty-*chüan* supplement to the *Hui-yao*; it covered the period from 804 to 852. The third set, compiled by Wang P'u himself, was made up of material covering the period from 853 down to the end of the T'ang. Wang P'u combined this last collection of materials with the first two books to make the *T'ang Hui-yao* as it now stands¹⁾.

The section pertaining to Buddhism is called "*I Shih-chiao*"^{e)}, "Discussions on Buddhism", in the forty-seventh and forty-eighth *chüan*. The subject matter may be divided into three categories for our own purposes (although these do not exactly correspond to the subdivisions within the book itself); namely, 1) materials pertaining to the relations between the sangha and the state from the early T'ang down to the year 778; 2) materials pertaining to the events of the Hui-ch'ang and post-Hui-ch'ang periods (i.e., from about 845 onwards); 3) information concerning specific Buddhist temples. The material dating from early T'ang down to 778 correspond to those found in the old *Hui-yao* of Su Mien; it is with these that I shall deal in this paper. A summary of the contents of this portion is as follows:

1) Fu Yi's attack on Buddhism, dating from the reign of Kao-tsu (r. 618-627);

2) A discussion at court involving T'ai-tsung (r. 627-650) and his minister Wei Cheng, on the question of the status of the clergy at court;

3) An edict proclaimed by Kao-tsung, the third emperor (r. 650-684) forbidding monks to receive homage from their parents or elders;

4) An edict issued by Hsüan-tsung (r. 713-756) early in his reign, requiring monks to pay homage to their parents;

5) A memorial by the official Yao Ch'ung calling for caution in the ordaining of monks; this, too, is from the early part of Hsüan-tsung's reign;

6) A proposal made under Tai-tsung (r. 763-780) to purge the clergy, and a memorial recommending that monks be subjected to corvée labour and taxation like ordinary people.

I have translated all of the material from this section, except for the piece dealing with Fu Yi's attack on Buddhism, since this has already been covered by Professor Arthur Wright in his article, "Fu Yi and the Rejection of Buddhism", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XII, 1957. The translations are preceded by historical summaries of the specific issues with which the documents are concerned.

II. *Political Status of the Sangha.*

The first group of documents translated herein – those from the reigns of T'ai-tsung and Kao-tsung – are concerned primarily with the official status of members of the monastic community vis-à-vis the state. Are the monks and nuns to be regarded as normal citizens, with the right to take part in politics, and the duty to pay homage to their rulers and to their parents according to traditional customs? Or are they to be regarded as a group of persons separated from their society, a group which has "renounced the world", and thereby not subject to temporal laws and usages? Such questions as these had been discussed since the beginnings of the Buddhist religion in India, and had been carried into China. As Buddhism grew in power and influence through the Six Dynasties period, the problem of the political status of the sangha came to be resolved in different ways according to historical circumstances.

In north China during the Six Dynasties period, Buddhist monks frequently came to serve the rulers of the "barbarian" kingdoms as their advisers and ministers, taking a very active part in political affairs. Perhaps the most famous examples are Fo-t'u-teng, who served as imperial adviser to the rulers of the Later Chao state in the fourth century; Tao-an, who came to serve Fu Chien of the Former Ch'in kingdom at Ch'ang-an as imperial adviser; and Dharmakshema, who served in the Pei-Liang kingdom at Liang-chou in the early fifth century. "The fame of Dharmakshema as a royal adviser and Buddhist monk was so great that the T'o-pa Wei rulers made repeated attempts to lure him away from Liang-chou"³⁾. The northern "barbarian" rulers, who were generally uneducated, came to rely on Buddhists for matters of state policy because of their high level of culture. Furthermore, the foreign invaders of the north had a sympathy for Buddhism, which also was foreign to China. Typical of the attitude of many northern rulers is the reply given by Shih Hu, the ruler of the Later Chao kingdom, to a minister's remonstrance against Buddhism on the grounds

that it worshipped a foreign deity. Shih Hu stated that since the ruler and the people were foreign in origin, the Buddha who was a foreign deity should be the very one they should worship ⁴). Furthermore, the monks themselves certainly recognized the importance of aligning themselves with state power and thereby gaining the favour of their rulers, even at the cost of absolute submission to them: they knew that Buddhism had an assuaging and civilizing influence on these rough peoples.

A very different situation prevailed in the South, in which Chinese culture and traditional institutions were much stronger than in the north. There, officials were chosen from among the ranks of the aristocracy, and not from the Buddhist clergy. As is well known, many of the officials and some of the rulers came to be extremely devoted lay adherents of Buddhism; but the two roles, "monk" and "statesman", seldom came to be fused in one person, as was so often the case in the north. The rulers, for their part, had no need for the service of monks in government. The sangha, furthermore, clung tenaciously to its independence from the world of temporal obligations. This becomes clear when we examine the long history of the debate over whether or not monks ought to pay homage to their parents and their rulers – a debate which took place primarily in the South.

In India, members of the clergy had been accustomed to receiving reverence from their rulers, and not vice-versa; rulers were generally disdained by the clergy, as they were seen as symbols of power lust and attachment to the world of phenomena which Buddhists were taught to reject ⁵). The clergy in south China took this point of view as an historical justification for the avoidance of subjection to temporal rule, which was symbolized by the act of homage to rulers and to parents.

In 340, Yü Ping, regent for the Emperor Ch'ing of the Eastern Chin dynasty, argued that monks should be made to pay homage to the ruler on the grounds that they were subjects of the emperor, as were all other persons; and just as a son ought to show respect to his father, so a subject must show respect to his ruler. His purpose for insisting that the clergy pay obeisance was that he wanted to keep order in the state. Ho Ch'ung, the leader of the faction opposed to Yü, defended the sangha by successfully arguing that the teachings of the monks were helping to keep order in society rather than disrupting it, and that to require the monks to pay homage to the ruler would be tantamount to destroying their religious teaching ⁶). The second large confrontation took place in 400, when Huan Hsüan, who had rebelled against the Chin and set himself up as an independent ruler in south China, insisted that the sangha be purged of bullies, vagabonds, and tax evaders, and that the monks be made to pay homage to him. He took the position that the ruler represented the suprapersonal Way of the Sage, and that therefore he should be revered by all. Hui-yüan, the famous cleric of the Lu-shan community, whom Huan Hsüan respected, responded to

this attack by clarifying the difference between the Buddhist layman and the monk. The layman, he argued, is subject to all temporal laws; whereas the monk, who transcends human life, also transcends its laws. This argument constituted the second victory for the sangha, as monks were not required to pay homage to the ruler after all ⁷⁾.

During the fifth and sixth centuries, the debate was taken up again from time to time; in general, the clergy was not forced to pay obeisance to the rulers. In 607, Yang-ti of the Sui issued a decree calling upon Buddhist monks to render homage to the emperor and imperial officials. In doing so, he sought to eliminate the southern tradition of monks not honouring their earthly rulers – but the clergy refused to comply ⁸⁾.

The debate over the status question continued on into the T'ang. As one can see from the material translated below, T'ai-tsung was troubled by requests from the public that he, the emperor, regard the heads of the church to be on a par with the highest ministers. The issue came to a point of particular intensity during the reign of Kao-tsung, who felt compelled to issue two edicts: that of 658, translated below, forbidding monks from receiving homage from their parents or elders, and that of 662, requiring monks to pay homage to the emperor, empress, crown prince, and to their own parents. This last edict sent the sangha into an uproar; the prominent cleric Tao-hsüan and others countered the edict with some forty memorials, using basically the same arguments as had been used during the Six Dynasties period ⁹⁾. As a result of this protest, a court debate was held, and the edict was rescinded – that is to say, the monks did not have to revere the ruler; nevertheless, they still had to pay homage to their parents, like other citizens ¹⁰⁾. Even on this point, it seems that the sangha did not fully comply; for in 714, Hsüan-tsung found it necessary to proclaim in an edict that monks – both Buddhist and Taoist – all must pay homage to their parents (see below). Thus we see that, down to the middle of the T'ang, the sangha fought hard to maintain its southern pattern of independence and dignity. At the same time, (as can be seen in T'ai-tsung's court discussion below), Buddhists continued to demand that monks be regarded as officials, according to the Northern pattern.

Discussion between T'ai-tsung and Wei Cheng (translation):

In the eighth year of the Chen-kuan period [reign of T'ai-tsung; A.D. 635], the emperor said to Chang-sun Wu-chi ¹¹⁾: “Outside the palace, it seems that the great majority of the people worship Buddhism. They send up memorials telling me to allow the ten senior monks of the capital to enter together with the highest ministers and to lead me to worship [Buddhism] ¹²⁾. From this I can

discern that these memorials are sent up under the monks' instructions". Wei Cheng, the President of the Chancellery, said in remonstrance: "The Buddhist doctrine originally valued purity and tranquillity with a mind to doing away with pointless struggle. In former times, even one who was as famed for his virtue as the monk Tao-an¹³⁾ was rebuked by Ch'üan I for riding together in the same chariot with [the ruler] Fu Yung¹⁴⁾. [Moreover], the monk Hui-lin¹⁵⁾ was certainly a man of unusual talent; Emperor Wen of Sung brought him into the palace, [but] Yen Yen-chih¹⁶⁾ said: "How can a eunuch [i.e., a celibate person, one distinct from ordinary persons] occupy a place reserved for the highest officials?"¹⁷⁾. Even if Your Majesty wants to worship¹⁸⁾, there still is no need for you to consult with monks every day¹⁹⁾.

Edict of 658

In the second year of the Hsien-ch'ing period [reign of Kao-tsung; 658], an imperial edict was issued, which said: "Buddhist principles are concerned with such things as emptiness and the rejection of both Being and Non-being; Buddhahood is achieved through stillness, and through the negation of the distinction of subject and object. How is it possible, then, for one first to exalt his own self, and then practice the Buddhist dharma?"

"To the mind of the Buddhist sages, the most important principles were compassion and filial piety; the relationship of father and son, of ruler and subject; the deference accorded the old by the young: these [sages] walked a different path from that of the Duke of Chou and of Confucius, but arrived at the same destination²⁰⁾.

"Now we simply cannot tolerate the rejection of reverence and the neglect of virtue. The monks and nuns, claiming that they have departed from the life of wordly affairs, exalt their own selves above all else. [Although] the parent-child relationship is the most important of all human relationships, [the monks] truss themselves up and sit pompously, receiving reverence from their parents. Down to the last of the elders, there are no relatives who do not [pay homage to the monks]. [The monks] are ruining the good name of Buddhism, and are actually destroying relations among men.

"From today on, monks and nuns are not to receive homage from their parents, nor from any person of superior social standing. Those concerned are to make the law well-known - these practices should be stopped immediately".

Edict of 714

In the second year of the K'ai-yüan period, [reign of Hsüan-tsung; 714], intercalary month, thirteenth day, the following edict was issued:

“From today onward, Taoist priests, Taoist nuns, Buddhist monks and nuns, and the like, all are required to pay homage to their parents. The degree of formality of funeral rites is to be determined by the rank of the family member [for whom the rites are performed]: the same standard applies for all [i.e., for the monks just as for ordinary people]. [The current] evil is to be removed from the people, in order that the laws may be made clear”.

III. *State Control of the Sangha.*

It may be said that the sangha was largely successful in maintaining a theoretical independence from the state during the T'ang as witnessed by the fact that it successfully avoided repeated attempts by the emperors to force monks to pay homage to them. In the long run, nevertheless, the sangha came more and more under the direct control of the state, until its institutional power and independence were completely crushed during the Hui-ch'ang suppression. The sources in the *T'ang Hui-yao* down to that period are concerned with two of the main ways through which the state sought to keep the sangha in check: the control of ordination procedures, and the “purging”¹⁾ of “bogus” monks and nuns from the ranks of the clergy.

Originally, ordination was a private matter: “... the individual (was) free to apply to the sangha if he so desired, and the sangha after investigation and examination would accept him into the order through the regular ordination procedures ...”²⁾. As the sangha became increasingly powerful, and as China came once again to be unified under a central authority in the Sui and T'ang, this was no longer possible; therefore in the T'ang, ordination was placed directly under state control²⁾. Already in the Six Dynasties period, monks had been required to keep an identity card, mainly for the purpose of travel. This can be seen as the forerunner of the state-issued certificate of ordination²³⁾.

In T'ang, three procedures came into use: 1) Ordination by imperial favour³⁾. This had existed before T'ang, but was used most extensively by T'ai-tsung under the influence of the monk Hsüan-tsuang. Later emperors used this method as well, as we shall see below. 2) Ordination through special examinations for clergymen. The first recorded instance of these examinations was in 705²⁴⁾. 3) Ordination through the purchase of a monk certificate from the state. This practice was not instituted until 757, when the government needed funds badly in order to supply its army, in the wake of the uprising of An Lu-shan.

Aside from simply restricting the number of persons entering the clergy, the state, finding that the growing number of monks and nuns were ever increasingly becoming a drain on the economy, attempted on several occasions to weed out degenerate and useless persons from the monastic community. Probably the first ruler to order a purge was Shih Hu (r. 335-349) of the northern kingdom of Later Chao, on the grounds that many worthless persons had become monks in order to avoid corvee duties. Huan Hsüan, of whom we spoke above, criticized the monastic community for tax evasion, extravagance, and lewdness. In the T'ang, Kao-tsu in 627 issued an edict calling for the defrocking of all monks and nuns failing to observe the religious disciplinè; and in 714, Hsüan-tsung, as a result of Yao Ch'ung's memorial (translated below), ordered the purge and laicization of "bogus" monks and nuns (to use Professor K. K. S. Ch'en's apt term). In 727, he began to use the examination system as a means of weeding out uneducated monks. The final step, of course, was the massive purge of the Hui-ch'ang period.

Yao Ch'ung's Memorial

In the first month of the second year of K'ai-yüan [reign of Hsüan-tsung; 714], the President of the Secretariat, Yao Ch'ung, submitted a memorial, which stated: "From the Shen-lung period onward [707-709, when Chung-tsung returned to the throne], the princes and the maternal relatives of the Emperor have been petitioning the throne for permission to have people ordained, and they have been expending private funds to build monasteries. Every time that an imperial edict has been issued ²⁵⁾, they follow upon it with wrongdoing and disorderly action. Rich families and able-bodied men thereby manage to avoid corvee taxes ²⁶⁾. They are all over, [these people who] desecrate the halls of worship.

"Moreover, Buddhahood does not dwell in externals; it is found inside the mind. Only by developing the compassion in one's heart, doing things beneficial to others and causing sentient beings to be peaceful and happy - only thus is the Dharmakaya realized. Therefore, of what use is it to ordain corrupt men in at houghtless manner, letting them ruin the rightful law?"

The emperor then ordered that those concerned take the greatest care in the selection [of men for the monastic life]. The number of false monks and nuns who returned to the laity was over thirty thousand in the empire.

In the thirteenth year of Ta-li [reign of Tai-tsung; 778], fourth month, Li Shu-ming, the civil governor from Tung-ch'uan in Chien-nan, requested that both Buddhism and Taoism be purged. The emperor sent [this memorial] down to the Secretariat to discuss it in council. The Under-secretary of the Central Section, P'eng Yen, presented his advice, as follows:

“The way of kingly rule is thus: [if a ruler] can influence the minds of men – that is the highest way. [If a ruler] responds to men's minds, that is the next best way. If a ruler neither influences men's minds nor responds to them, but merely follows the old prescribed ways – that is the inferior way. It follows that [the ruler] who does not have the vision of the lone innovator cannot accomplish extraordinary things. Now Your Majesty is setting a standard for ten thousand [future] generations with a new administration. If you don't change the old [evil] ways and lead [men] back to the correct paths, you are doing wrong.

“Today, the Taoist priests are priests in name only, not in substance; the current trend [among the people] is to give them little importance; the trouble they cause the government is still quite insignificant. It is only the *Buddhist* monks and nuns who are really harmful. Since the time when the religion from the West [i.e., Buddhism] first became prevalent in China, the distance from saintliness gets greater by the day. Buddhism is supposed not to follow the way of the world²⁷⁾, and yet the monks engage in vulgar practices. From the latter Han down to the Ch'en and Sui, the teaching of the monks has been annihilated on various occasions. Some have even been killed in persecutions: [often] there were almost no more monks left. Why did the emperors and princes of past generations despise the way of the monks? They hated the monks to such a degree because the harm they caused to people was serious indeed.

“In addition, the teaching established by the Buddha consists of quietude and non-action. If it is taken only as external appearance, then it is heresy. There is only one gate by which enlightenment may enter [the mind]; this is why the followers of the Three Vehicles [in Buddhism] are compared with heretics. How much worse, then, are the monks of today – a flow of vile ignoramuses.

“Even if the ruler performs austerities and behaves in a pure and noble manner, it would be of no use by now. Now [Li] Shu-ming's intentions are good to the utmost. But I fear the deceit and trickery of the base officials²⁸⁾. And those [monks who, accord-

ing to the proposal], are cast out will not necessarily be the bad ones, whilst those who stay will not necessarily be the good. There will be no advantage for the kingdom. You will not be able to put an end to the evil – and not only will you be unable to change men's minds; you will not be responding to them either. If, [furthermore], you try to use force, it will be difficult to get long-lasting effects.

“I have heard it said that the masses to which Heaven gives birth need to have *work*. Kingly rule has always prohibited people from wandering around and living like vagrants. Therefore those who have talent are rewarded with noble titles and salaries, whilst those who are inferior pay taxes [i.e., they are made to work]. This is the constant way of old.

“In our times, the Buddhist and Taoist clergy do not plough, and yet they are fed; they do not weave, and yet they are clothed. They widely disseminate dangerous talk, by which they deceive the simple-minded. It takes thirty thousand cash per year to feed and clothe one monk; that is more than what five men can produce [in a year]. If you take one monk as a basis to calculate the cost for all of the monks in the empire, the immensity of the wasteful expense can be known.

“Your Majesty toils late into the night, worrying over how to get rid of the causes of harm to the people. If such a state of affairs as this exists and cannot be remedied, how can [your reign] be called government?

“I respectfully ask that [Buddhist] monks and [Taoist] priests below the age of fifty be made to pay four bolts of silk per year, and that Buddhist and Taoist nuns under fifty be made to pay two bolts of silk per year, and that miscellaneous and special corvee duties be applied to them exactly as they are for ordinary people. Those who are talented and those who have wisdom ought to be ordered to undertake official service. Those who wish to return to the laity to become ordinary citizens should be permitted to do so. If the monks are simply ordered to take part in corvee labour and are made to pay taxes, how can being a monk do harm [to the country]? I estimate that what they would pay would amount to not less than one-third of the taxes collected at the present time. Your Majesty's kingdom would thus be enriched, and the sources of harm to the people would be eliminated.

“I request that you exempt all those over fifty. Confucius said: ‘At fifty, I knew the dictates of Heaven’. Lieh Tzu said: ‘He whose hair be not grey, knoweth not the Way’. In people over fifty, the desires of the flesh have already petered out. Even though they

may not have left home [to enter the clergy], their hearts [or minds] have already drawn near to the Way. How much more, then, would the Buddhist discipline cause them to regulate their nature and their feelings.

“ I think that once this law will have been put into effect, certainly the majority of monks and nuns who have been avoiding the duties will return to the laity. Those who are old and those who are cultivated all will become teachers. If this law is enacted, the two religions – Buddhism and Taoism – will become very illustratious indeed ”.

The emperor heartily commended this statement ²⁹⁾.

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1) E. Balasz, « L'histoire comme guide pratique ... », p. 93, in Pulleyblank and Beasley, eds., *Historians of China and Japan*; also Teng and Biggerstaff, *An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Chinese Reference Works*, pp. 116-117.

2) The Hui-ch'ang period has been covered in detail by K.K.S. Ch'en in his article, « The Economic Background of the Hui-Ch'ang Suppression of Buddhism », *HJAS*, XIX (1956).

3) *BC*, p. 88.

4) *Ibid.*, p. 80.

5) *CTB*, p. 65.

6) *Ibid.*, p. 70.

7) *Ibid.*, p. 72.

8) *Ibid.*, p. 78.

9) Thirty-two such memorials may be found in the *Chi sha-men pu ying pai su ting shih* (T52.455b-464a).

10) *CTB*, p. 80.

11) Ch'ang-sun Wu-chi⁸: One of T'ai-tsung's chief ministers, a man who was very close to the emperor, having been his comrade in youth.

12) ¹ « the ten senior monks in the capital » – S. Weinstein, « Imperial Patronage in T'ang Buddhism », in *PT*.

13) Tao-an¹, (312-385). According to Professor Zürcher, he became one of Fu Chien's trusted advisers on political matters after he had been brought to Ch'ang-an. The incident mentioned here has been found in at least two other accounts: the *Chin-shu*, the history of the Chin empire, and Tao-an's biography in the *Kao-seng Chuan*, where it is told « ... how Tao-an had the special privilege of sharing the imperial chariot with Fu Chien, and how the ruler, when the minister Ch'üan I^m protested against granting such an honour to a monk, compelled the unfortunate dignitary to support Tao-an when he mounted the vehicle ». (Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, p. 261).

14) Fu Yung²: (Fu Chien^o, 337-384), ruler of the northern kingdom of the Former Ch'in, 351-394.

15) Hui-lin², a southern monk of the fourth century. He is famous in history for having abandoned the clergy to attack Buddhism severely in his *Pai-hei-lun*⁹. *BC*, p. 139.

Were it not for this fact, it would be somewhat difficult to explain how a monk in the southern dynasties during the fourth century could be elevated to high government rank.

16) Yen Yen-chih⁷, 384-456. A famous essayist, poet, and statesman of the Liu Sung dynasty. He was known as, « Wild Yen »⁸, for his brazen speech on all matters; therefore, the remark quoted in the memorial comes as no surprise.

17) This statement implies an analogy between the inferior social status of eunuchs and that of monks.

18) See Arthur F. Wright, « T'ang T'ai-tsung and Buddhism », in *PT*, for a detailed discussion of the extent of T'ai-tsung's involvement in Buddhism.

19) The dialogue in this passage gives some indication of the atmosphere at court under T'ai-tsung. It bears witness to the trust he had in his ministers, and the freedom with which they were allowed to remonstrate with him – this in spite of the fact (pointed out by Professor Wright) that he was becoming more dictatorial in his middle and later years.

20) I.e., compassion and filial piety.

21) *CTB*, p. 86.

22) *Ibid.*, p. 86.

23) *Ibid.*, p. 87.

24) *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

25) Calling for ordination, presumably. See *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

26) In addition, rich and powerful families were frequently able to avoid the taxation of their land through the establishment of connections with a monastery. See *CTB* for a discussion of land tax exemption.

I include this note because *ching kuan*⁹ in the phrase *ching kuan pi i*¹⁰ implies more activity than merely the sale of monk certificates in order to avoid corvée¹¹.

27) A Buddhist technical term¹², is used here. Literally, it means « the five stages of decay of the Dharma », but in this context, it can be understood to mean the way of worldly life.

28) Here it is implied that local officials would plot with the clergy (as must have often happened) to maintain the corrupt practices.

29) Another version of the final section of this memorial is translated in Professor Gernet's *Les aspects économiques du Bouddhisme ...*, p. 29. Prof. Gernet adds at the end of the translation: « ... L'empereur, dit-on, approuva hautement ces paroles, mais il est certain qu'aucune mesure du genre de celles que proposa P'eng Yen ne fut appliquée ».

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- , « Fu Yi and the Rejection of Buddhism », in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XII, 1957.

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