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## Chinese Buddhist Responses to Contemporary Problems

Poverty, social inequality, exploitation of nature, population explosion, the erosion of moral values under the impact of mass media are some of the topics singled out for attention when we talk about contemporary problems. We may readily add the threat of the nuclear war and the wide disregard for human rights to the list. The crises facing us today surely do not come about overnight. Furthermore, there are manifold and complex causes contributing to their rise. Social, economic, political and technological factors have all played their parts in the creation of our present fear and suffering. But secularism, and with it, the accompanying loss of man's sense of awe and wonder, has certainly been a major reason why modern man has fallen to his current state!

Modernity has given us many material benefits, scientific and technological advances, insights into our psyches and minds. Telecommunication and international travel have indeed brought all of mankind within reach of one another. Global community has become a fact, and not a vision briefly glimpsed within the walls of the United Nation. But modernity has also given us secularism. Modern man has a hard time regarding anything as sacred, absolute or ultimate. The tragic consequence is the secular man's seeing everything as a means but not an end, as an object, but not as a subject, as an "it", but not a "thou". Nature, man, reality, and God are all devalued and relativized. We have fortunately progressed beyond the dark age of religious wars. But instead of fighting against other men's religions and dying for one's own, secular men often regard all religions as equally irrelevant. In his tolerance of pluralism, he also speaks of the relativity of all truths. His tolerance often does not come out of genuine empathy, but rather careless indifference.

If the religious traditions are to contribute to the solutions of our contemporary problems, I suspect that the direction will not be in the

area of any specific, concrete programme of action. Rather, it will be the insight they can impart to modern men enabling him to have a new way of looking at the world and his fellow men. He must be helped to experience the sacred again. Only when man regards his fellow men and his environment with ultimate worth and true wonder will he be able to treat them with care and reverence. He must also realize that religious pluralism does not necessarily lead to a relativization of all religions, but a genuine understanding of the truth authenticated by and mediated through each religious tradition.

Chinese Buddhism does not have ready answers to the many problems we have mentioned above. However, it does declare eloquently the sacredness of this world, and the uniqueness and value of each individual. While advocating harmony and unity of various religious traditions, Chinese Buddhists have at the same time retained their faith in the ultimate reality which each religion tries to decipher and describe. In this essay, I shall attempt to present and elaborate what Chinese Buddhists have said on these points.

To say that Chinese Buddhism regards this world as sacred and individual human beings as unique and valuable may be at first surprising, for the general impression the public have about Buddhism is often the opposite. As Father Chethimattam pointed out in his background paper to our conference, "Buddhist scholars had a hard time, especially in China and other countries, in proving to their detractors that on account of its emphasis on Nirvāna, universal momentariness and emptiness it did not become a world denying and anti-social religion." Chinese Buddhism was frequently criticized as being other-worldly and having no positive and concrete programmes for social reform. The central Buddhist teaching of void (*kung* of *Sūnyatā*) was often taken as negativism, or even worse, nihilism, by the unsympathetic critic. Individual Chinese Buddhist monks and nuns were, moreover, faulted for their renunciation of familial ties and withdrawal from productive participation in the affairs of society.

Ch'eng I (1033-1107), the Sung Neo-Confucian thinker who was regarded as the founder of the school of Principle, criticized the Buddha and the Buddhists for their renunciation of human relationships.

In deserting his father and leaving his family, the Buddha severed all human relationships. It was merely for himself that he

lived alone in the forest. Such a person should not be allowed in any community . . . The Buddhists themselves will not abide by the principles of the relationship between the ruler and minister, between father and son, and, between husband and wife, and criticize others for not doing as they do. They leave these human relationships to others and have nothing to do with them. They set themselves apart as a special class. If this is the way to lead the people, it will be the end of the human race.<sup>1</sup>

Ch'eng I therefore condemns the Buddhists for their selfishness. The Buddhists are selfish, moreover, for another reason. Ch'eng thinks that the Buddhists try to escape from life and its inherent problems instead of attempting to deal with them.<sup>2</sup> Chu Hsi (1130-1200), the great synthesizer of the Neo-Confucian school of Principle, attacked Buddhism from a philosophical angle. He contrasted Buddhism with Confucianism this way. "The Buddhists are characterized by vacuity, whereas we Confucianists are characterized by concreteness. The Buddhists are characterized by duality (of Absolute Emptiness and the illusory world), whereas we Confucianists are characterized by unity (one principle governing all)."<sup>3</sup> Chu Hsi characterizes Buddhism as empty and dualistic, the former because of its teaching of the void, the latter because of its supposed dichotomy between this world and the absolute reality. I think on both points Chu Hsi is mistaken. Chu Hsi does not understand the meaning of Void, but takes it literally as "non-existent" or "nothingness". This is how he interprets the famous statement, "matter itself is voidness, voidness itself is matter", found in the *Heart sutra* as well as other Mahayana scriptures. Chu says, "But according to the doctrines of the Buddhists, everything is

1. *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy*, translated and compiled by Wing-tsit Chan, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 554-555. This is from *The Complete Works of the Two Ch'engs (Erh-Ch'eng i-shu)*, 15: 5b.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 555. "In the world there cannot be birth without death or joy without sorrow. But wherever the Buddhists go, they always look for an opportunity to tell subtle falsehood and exercise deception, and to preach the elimination of birth and death and the neutralization of joy and sorrow. In the final analysis this is nothing but self-interest." (*Erh-Ch'eng i-shu*, 15: 7b).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 648. This is from Chu Hsi's *Complete Works (Chu Tzu ch'uan-shu)*, 60: 14b.)

'non-existent'. What has gone by is non-existent, and what today lies beneath our eyes is also non-existent. Phenomenal matter is the same as 'emptiness' and 'emptiness' is the same as 'phenomenal matter' . . . One may eat rice the livelong day, and they (the Buddhists) will say that one has not chewed a single grain. One may wear clothes the livelong day, and they will say that one has not put on a single piece of fabric."<sup>4</sup>

Ch Hsi is not alone in mistaking voidness for nothingness. As Robert Thurman pointed out in the introduction to his translation of the *Vimalakīrti sutra*, this is unfortunately a common misunderstanding held by many people in regard to this fundamental teaching of Mahayana Buddhism.

Indeed, a great many scholars, ancient as well as modern, have mistaken the Middle Way taught by Vimalakīrti, Nāgārjuna, and the Mahāyāna Buddha as leading to the annihilation of all values, mundane and spiritual . . . The key lies in the concept of "voidness". The word is carefully chosen, and does not mean "nothingness". Thus, the equation of "matter" with "voidness" tells us something about the condition of matter, not that matter does not exist at all. And the equation of "voidness" with "matter" emphasizes the fact that this teaching is, far from being nihilistic, the very cure for nihilism.<sup>5</sup>

The teaching of voidness is the cure of nihilism because "Our immediate, relative reality *is* ultimate, it cannot be escaped or negated and must be accepted as it is—at least to start with, before we try to do something about it in a relative way—with no false hope of ever making it ultimate, since it already is so"<sup>6</sup>. If we understand the meaning of voidness correctly, the insight will lead to the sacralization of the mundane, secular world, a task which urgently requires our attention, as I argued earlier.

4. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, translated by Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) Vol. II, p. 567. This is from Chu Hsi's *Conversations (Chu Tzu yü-lei, 126: 6)*.
5. *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti, A Mahayana Scripture*, translated by Robert A.F. Thurman (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976); p. 1.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 3

In the light of the Middle Way which expresses the insight of voidness, there is no dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, or the Ultimate Reality and the illusory world. The dichotomy is created by man's habitual pattern of thought, and it is born out of his ignorance. Enlightenment lies in the elimination and non-production of such dichotomizing. All major Chinese Buddhist schools such as the Hua-yen, T'ien-t'ai and Ch'an would therefore object to Chu Hsi's characterization of Buddhism as maintaining a philosophy of duality. They would instead emphasize the exact opposite. The ultimate reality which can be called by different names (One Mind, True Suchness, Dharmadhātu or simply Buddha nature) is non-dual. The non-duality of the noumenal and phenomenal is eloquently set forth in the *Awakening of Faith in Mahayana*, a classic text influential in all the school of Chinese Buddhism. The work is traditionally attributed to Aśvaghosha, but as Yoshito Hakeda, the translator of the English version, says, "It might be wiser to regard the work as an original composition in Chinese rather than a translation from the Sanskrit."<sup>7</sup> In this work, Reality is called True Suchness (*chen-ju*, Bhūtatahatā). One Mind (*i-hsin*) or the Womb of the Tathāgata (*Ju-lai-tsang*, Tathāgata-garbha). "The Mind includes in itself all states of being of the phenomenal world and the transcendental world."<sup>8</sup> We are told that this Mind has two aspects. "One is the aspect of Mind in terms of the Absolute (*tathatā*, Suchness) and the other is the aspect of Mind in terms of phenomena (*samasara*, birth and death). Each of these two aspects embraces all states of existence. Why? Because these two aspects are mutually inclusive."<sup>9</sup> *The Awakening of Faith* uses three terms, *t'i* (substance), *hsiang* (attributes) and *yung* (function) to explain the different aspects of the Mind.<sup>10</sup> Chih-i (538-597), the great T'ien-t'ai master, follows the usage. However, he only uses *t'i* and *yung* to refer to the two aspects of the Mind.

7. *The Awakening of Faith Attributed to Aśvaghosha*, translated with commentary by Yoshito S. Hakeda (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 7.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

10. This occurs in the section where the author explains that "Mahayana" is great in three ways: the "greatness" of the essence (or substance), of the attributes and, finally, of the influences (or function). *Ibid.*, p. 29.

This mind embodies the functioning of the two natures, impure and pure, so that it is capable of generating both this-worldly and other-worldly things . . . The storehouse in its substance (*t'i*) is everywhere the same, and in actual fact is undifferentiated. In this respect it is the "empty" Tathāgata-garbha. In its functioning (*yung*), on the other hand, it is unimaginably diverse, and therefore embodies the natures of all things and is differentiated. In this respect, it is the "non-empty" Tathāgata-garbha.<sup>11</sup>

While the *t'i* or essence of the Mind is void, original enlightenment, ultimate truth (*chen-t'i*, paramārtha satya), the *yung* or functioning aspect of the Mind can be regarded as the phenomenal world, non-enlightenment, and relative truth (*su-t'i*, samvrtti satya). The two aspects do not stand for two separate realms or two distinct realities. Rather, "Ignorance does not exist apart from enlightenment."<sup>12</sup> *The Awakening of Faith* uses the simile of ocean and its waves to illustrate the relationship between the two aspects.

This is like the relationship that exists between the water of the ocean (i.e. enlightenment) and its waves (i.e. modes of mind) stirred by the wind (i.e. ignorance). Water and wind are inseparable, but water is not mobile by nature, and if the wind stops, the movement ceases. But the wet nature remains undestroyed. Likewise, man's Mind, pure in its own nature, is stirred by the wind of ignorance. But Mind and ignorance have no particular forms of their own and they are inseparable. Yet Mind is not mobile by nature, and if ignorance ceases, then the continuity of deluded activities ceases. But the essential nature of wisdom (i.e. the essence of Mind, like the wet nature of the water) remains undestroyed.<sup>13</sup>

Ignorance and the agitation of the mind created by ignorance are the reasons why we see a world of phenomena separate from Reality. The Chinese Buddhists, following this view, stress the non-duality of the two and thereby give a more positive value to the phenomenal world in relation to the Mind.

11. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 363-364. This comes from Chih-i's *Ta-ch'eng chih-kuan fa-men*.

12. *The Awakening of Faith*, p. 41.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

In Chinese Buddhism, man's tendency to create and cling to wrong views, which is the function of ignorance, serves as much the cause of our suffering as our greed and passion. Again we read in the *Awakening of Faith*: "...all ordinary people are said not to be enlightened because they have had a continuous stream of deluded thoughts and have never been freed from their thoughts; therefore, they are said to be in a beginningless ignorance. If a man gains (insight into) that which is free from thoughts, then he knows how those thoughts which characterize the mind (i.e. deluded thoughts) arise, abide, change and cease to be, for he is identical with that which is free from thoughts."<sup>14</sup> The entire path of training set forth in Ch'an Buddhism can be said to be based on this understanding. How to eliminate delusive thoughts and to arrive at its non-production became as important as, and perhaps even more crucial to one's salvation than, the control of desires. Non-attachment to views, the refusal to regard any view as ultimate and absolute, came to be emphasized as much as the non-attachment to material things.

The teaching of voidness is soteriological. I will mention in this connection three religious consequences of this teaching arrived at by Chinese Buddhists. The first is spiritual freedom and personal autonomy. Ch'an Buddhists see all words and scriptures as provisional. One should rely upon oneself to realize his true nature. One should not be dependent on external authority, even if it comes from the Buddha, for if one does so, he will be enslaved by it instead of being helped by it. Master Lin-chi (d. 867) said, "Don't take what someone else has said and on the basis of it make judgements on what is false and what is true. Even if they be (the sayings of) patriarchs and Buddhas, they are no more than written traces . . . If he makes himself master in all circumstances, then any place he stands will be the true one. No matter who comes along, do not accept anything that he says. An instant of doubt on your part and a demon will steal into your mind, just as doubt on the part of even a bodhisattva will give an opening to the demon of birth and death. Just stop your thoughts and do not seek things on the outside! Penetrate whatever comes before you! Have faith in your own activity right now; there is no other thing."<sup>15</sup>

14. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

15. This is from the *Recorded Sayings of the Ch'an master Lin-chi in The Buddhist Tradition*, edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: The Modern Library, 1969), pp. 230-231.

The iconoclastic stance of Ch'an has indeed a firm anchoring in the teaching of the Buddha. In one sermon, Buddha told the parable of the raft. A traveller comes to a river, the bank on this side dangerous and frightening, but the other shore secure, not frightening. There is neither boat nor bridge to cross over to the other side. So the traveller makes a raft by tying together sticks, grass, branches and foliage. Striving with his hands and feet, he crosses over to the other shore. Buddha then asks the monks what the man should do with the raft after he finishes the crossing. Thinking that the raft has been very useful to him, should he put the raft on his head or lift it to his shoulder as he continues his journey? Or should he leave the raft on the dry ground or submerge it in the water and continue his journey unencumbered by the burden? The monks are told that the latter would be the correct way of treating the raft. Then the Buddha compares the raft to the Dharma. "Even so is the Parable of the Raft Dhamma taught by me for crossing over, not for retaining."<sup>16</sup>

These words are especially worth repeating and remembering in our time. In the twentieth century mankind have lived through two world wars and are not free from the threat of a third one. We saw the evils of totalitarianism and the cult of personalities. We know well the loss of human dignity and the deprivation of human rights which invariably occur as a consequence of authoritarian control. According to Ch'an Buddhism, we are free beings who enjoy ultimate autonomy because we do not reify (and thus deify) anything or anyone.

The second consequence of realizing voidness is the attainment of the glorious vision of the identity and interdependence of all things in the universe. The Hua-yen school of Chinese Buddhism calls the universe *fa-chieh* (dharmadhātu) and teaches that it arises simultaneously. "All harmas are in the state of Suchness. In its static aspect, Suchness is the Void, the noumenon, the realm of Principle (*li*). In its dynamic aspect, it is manifestation, the phenomenon, the realm of Facts (*shih*). The two realms are so interpenetrated and interdependent that the entire universe arises through reciprocal causation."<sup>17</sup> A favourite image used by the Hua-yen school to illustrate the relationship existing

16. *Majjhima-nikāya* I, 134-135 contained in *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*, edited by Edward Conze, I.B. Horner, David Snellgrove and Arthur Waley (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 87.

17. *The Buddhist Tradition*, p. 167.



between all things is the "Jewel Net of Indra." Francis Cook describes the image this way:

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected *all* the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring. The Hua-yen school has been fond of this image, mentioned many times in its literature, because it symbolizes a cosmos in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all the members of the cosmos. This relationship is said to be one of simultaneous *mutual identity* and *intercausality*.<sup>18</sup>

In such a universe, everything exists dependent on everything else and is in turn depended upon by the latter. Voidness is the ground and condition for this relationship. A bodhisattva who realizes the wisdom of voidness does not flee from the world, for there is nowhere for him to flee from and nowhere for him to flee to. On the contrary, the world is the only arena where he can carry out his great compassionate work of universal salvation. Only when he gives himself totally to others and serves selflessly the needs of the suffering sentient beings can the bodhisattva finish his training as a bodhisattva. Self-transformation is thus not separated from helping the sentient beings and transforming the world from defilement to pure land. Just as the Confucian paradigm is forcefully represented by the sage, the Chinese Buddhist one is most vividly seen in the figure of the bodhisattva. Of the many bodhisattvas, Vimalakīrti and Avolokiteśvara are most popular among Chinese Buddhists. It is perhaps instructive to note that

18. Francis H. Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism, The Jewel Net of Indra* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p. 2.

while the former is a layman who is very much in the world, though not attached to it, the latter bodhisattva manifests in China as a woman. Therefore, the highest ideal in Buddhism can be achieved by every man and woman.

The third consequence of realizing the void is the patient, even joyful performance of all tasks. Since all things are equal on the level of ultimate truth, one does not discriminate by elevating some tasks and downgrading others. Layman P'ang (?740-808), a famous Ch'an figure, expresses this attitude well in this poem of his.

My daily activities are not unusual,  
I'm just naturally in harmony with them.  
Grasping nothing, discarding nothing.  
In every place there's no hindrance, no conflict.  
Who assigns the ranks of vermilion and purple?  
The hills' and mountains' last speck of dust is extinguished.  
(My) supernatural power and marvellous activity—  
Drawing water and carrying firewood.<sup>19</sup>

Confucians criticized Chinese Buddhists for not meeting the responsibilities required by the five human relationships. But for Layman P'ang, carrying out the ordinary daily activities could be as meaningful as the fulfillment of ethical living. In the long history of interaction with Confucianism, Chinese Buddhists have always stressed the complementarity and compatibility between the two. Chinese Buddhists do not negate the cardinal virtues emphasized by Confucianism. On the contrary, they want to extend and deepen them. Unlike their Confucian critics, Chinese Buddhists believe that the two religions are not that irreconcilable. Not only Confucianism, but Taoism also, basically attest to the same vision of truth as Buddhism. But because of the differences of the times and the needs of the people, the three religions express their teachings differently. Tsung-mi (780-841), a Buddhist master revered and claimed by both Hua-yen and Ch'an as their patriarch, puts forth a classic formulation regarding the relationship between the three teachings.

19. *A Man of Zen, The Recorded Sayings of Layman P'ang*, translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki, Yoshitaka Iriya and Dana R. Fraser (New York: Weatherhill, 1971), p. 46.

Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Shakya Buddha were perfect sages. They established their teachings according to the demands of the age and the needs of the various beings. They differ, therefore, in their approach. Buddhist teachings and non-Buddhist teachings, however, complement each other: they benefit people, encourage them to perfect all good deeds, clarify the beginning and end of causal relationship, penetrate all phenomena (*dharma*), and throw light on the relationship between root and branch by which all things come into being. Although the teachings reflect the intentions of the sages, differences exist in that there are real and provisional doctrines. Confucianism and Taoism are provisional doctrines: Buddhism consists of both real and provisional doctrines.<sup>20</sup>

Buddhism contains both real and provisional doctrines because it teaches two levels of truth. On the level of ultimate truth, everything is void, but on the level of conventional truth, everything exists provisionally. Although we should not regard anything as independent and permanent, we should not abolish and obliterate anything either. Human society and moral obligations are not absolute, but neither are they to be negated. Criticisms of Buddhism as nihilistic usually come from a confusion of the two levels of truth.

Buddhist thinkers after Tsung-mi in later generations generally continued this "ecumenical" tradition. A favourite way to explain the relationship among the three teachings is to use the pair of concepts *l'i* and *jung*. In essence, the three are the same, but in the functioning, the three differ. Han-shan Te-ch'ing (1546-1623) would say that the difference is one of degree, not of kind.<sup>21</sup> There is also a general feeling that in the realm of ethics, there is close identity between the Buddhist precepts and Confucian virtues. For instance, Han-shan, along with other Buddhists, argues that "the five Buddhist precepts are the same as or equivalent to the five Confucian virtues of *jen* (benevolence), *i* (righteousness), *li* (propriety), *chih* (wisdom), and *hsin* (truthfulness). Thus in practising the five Confucian virtues, one is also practising the five Buddhist precepts."<sup>22</sup> The rivalry and belittling

20. *The Buddhist Tradition*, p. 181.

21. Sung-peng Hsu, *A Buddhist Leader in Ming China* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), p. 151.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

of religions is a mark of ignorant man, for in fact truth can manifest in different guises and contains both secular and ultimate teachings. Han-shan castigates inter-religious bickering:

A Bodhisattva who has attained Buddhahood takes the forms of the ten realms to appear in the world. Whatever form or teaching he has to take in order to save sentient beings, he takes that form or teaching to do it. Therefore, does not the Buddhist Dharma contain secular teaching? Is not all secular learning the Buddhist Dharma? It is because man does not understand the subtlety of the great Tao that he draws a line to make the distinction between the inside and the outside . . . This is like making the value judgments of nobleness and baseness with regard to an image, like drawing boundaries in the empty space, and like recommending or condemning the lights of the sun and moon.<sup>23</sup>

Chinese Buddhists clearly feel that Buddhist teaching does not contradict Confucian teaching. Moreover, they also believe that Buddhism deepens and broadens Confucianism. Take the example of filial piety, a cardinal teaching of Confucianism. There is a considerable body of literature written by Chinese Buddhists on the subject. We will look at the views of two Buddhist thinkers. Chung-feng Ming-pen (1238-1295), a Ch'an master of the Yüan dynasty, says:

All parents of this world nurture and love their children. Therefore sages and worthies teach us to be filial to our parents. . . . Children imitate parental nurturing and repay their parents with nurturing. Children imitate parental love and repay their parents with love. However, there are two ways of nurturing and two ways of love. To serve parents with grain and meat, to clothe them with fur and linen is to nourish their physical body. To discipline oneself with purity and restraint, and to cultivate blessedness and goodness for them is to nourish their *dharma* nature. The nourishment of their physical body follows human relationship, but the nourishment of their *dharma* nature conforms to heavenly principle. . . . To inquire after one's parents morning and evening and dare not leave them for any length of time is what I

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23. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

call love with form. To engage in meditation effort whether walking or sitting, to vow to realize the Way within the span of this life and with this, to repay the kindness of parents is what I call formless love.<sup>24</sup>

Even though a Buddhist monk cannot nurture his parents' physical body, he practises filial piety by nourishing their spiritual nature. Chu-hung (1535-1615), the Ming dynasty master, also affirms filial piety while giving it an additional Buddhist dimension. In his commentary on the *Sutra of Brahma's Net*, Chu-hung establishes filial piety as the basis for the entire Buddhist discipline.

If one is filial to his parents, he will naturally be pleasant in his voice and will not say crude and unreasonable things. This is the discipline for the mouth (*k'ou chieh*). He is forever solicitous and never disobeys: this is the discipline for the body (*shen chieh*). He is full of sincere love and his mind will not harbour disloyal thoughts: this is the discipline for the mind (*hsin chieh*). Filial piety has the power to stop evil, for one fears to disgrace one's parents: this is the discipline for proper conduct (*lü-i chieh*). It can also induce the performance of good, for one wishes to glorify one's parents: this is the discipline for good *dharma* (*shan-fa chieh*). Finally, filial piety also has the power to save others. Because of one's love for one's own parents, other people can often be moved to follow one's example. Thus, this is also the discipline for saving sentient beings (*she-sheng chieh*). To sum up, as long as one can be filial, his conduct will naturally be perfect. It is no wonder that the discipline is so interpreted. Aside from filial piety, is there any other discipline?<sup>25</sup>

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24. Chun-fang Yü, "Chung-feng Ming-pen and Ch'an Buddhism in the Yüan", in *Yüan Thought, Chinese Thought and Religion Under the Mongols*, edited by Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 459. This is from his essay entitled "Admonition on Filial Piety".
25. Chun-fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China, Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 90.

Nor does Chu-hung just stop here. He goes on to suggest that the other five perfections (paramita) in which a bodhisattva must train himself can all be subsumed under filial piety.<sup>26</sup>

Yet the love for one's own parents is not enough. One contribution of Buddhism to the Chinese spiritual consciousness is its emphasis that we must extend this same love to all sentient beings. Chinese Buddhists, like Buddhists everywhere, have always emphasized the importance of compassion. Moreover, they have traditionally exemplified this compassion through non-killing and "release of life". These lay practices are encouraged in the *Sutra of Brahma's Net* which contains the ten grave and forty-eight light bodhisattva precepts. As the basic precepts addressed primarily to lay believers, this set of fifty-eight precepts has always enjoyed great popularity as well as authority in China. The 20th in the group of forty-eight light precepts reads:

All men are my fathers and all women are my mothers. All rebirths of mine without any exception, from one rebirth to another, I receive from them. Therefore, all the beings in the six paths of existence are my parents. If I should kill and eat them, it is the same as killing my own parents. It is also the same as killing my own self.<sup>27</sup>

The implication of such a belief is radical and profound. Starting with the transformation of the self, the Chinese Buddhist endows the world with ultimate worth and regards all beings as his parents and eventually, himself.

I do not know what the Chinese Buddhist would or could do specifically to solve our contemporary problems. But I think their

26. *Ibid.*, p. 90. Chu-hung explains, "In accordance with the mind of compassion, one does not indulge in stinginess; this is filial piety as charity. In accordance with the mind of submission, one does not indulge in anger: this is filial piety as patience. In accordance with the mind of perseverance, one does not indulge in laziness. this is filial piety as energy. In accordance with the mind of quietude, one does not indulge in absent-mindedness: this is filial piety as contemplation. And finally, in accordance with the mind of luminous knowledge, one does not indulge in delusion, this is then filial piety as wisdom."

27. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

insights about the world and human existence can help us when we try to confront the situation facing us today. Chinese Buddhists, like sensitive men everywhere, would undoubtedly be distressed by the poverty, sicknesses, injustices, war and suffering of all sorts in the world. They would remind us that it was precisely in order to solve the problem of human suffering that the Buddha left his comfortable life as a prince and set out on his religious search for enlightenment. The first sermon on the Four Noble Truths delivered by the Buddha explains the cause of human suffering and its elimination. From its very beginning, as the Chinese Buddhists would say, Buddhism is intensely concerned with the problems of men living in this world. It is a soteriology, a religion of salvation. Since our suffering is caused by ignorance and desire, the way out of suffering lies in self-transformation which is brought about by wisdom and manifests in compassion. Chinese Buddhists have always emphasized the primacy of transforming oneself. Only when human beings give up egoism and realize the fundamental unity of all beings can there be lasting peace and happiness in the world. Short of this radical change, all blueprints for political, social and economic reforms can only be temporary and piecemeal.