

## THE BUDDHIST HERITAGE OF EASTERN ASIA

INDIA'S cultural relationships with other peoples during the three millennia before our era will not be clearly known until the spade of the excavator has finished its work. From Mohenjo-daro come glimpses of relations with outside cultures interrupted and broken perhaps by the coming of the Aryans. After the third century B.C. there is increasing evidence of exchange with other peoples of goods, ideas and folk tales. The migrations of Indians after the first century A.D. to lands bordering on the bay of Bengal carried Hinduism, as religion and art, one step toward the East. But Hinduism thrives only in its native land. The essential spirit of Hindu culture, which dissolves time and space, nature and history in the ineffable peace of timeless spiritual Reality, belongs to India alone. But Buddhism, as a religion of salvation, could emigrate. It was India's great gift to the Orient. Transformed, assimilated, and finally absorbed in its own Hindu milieu, Buddhism in its many forms became, in other lands, a pervasive culture force, and for more than a millennium the one bond of cultural unity in all the farther East.

From the time when Gautama sent his disciples out, one by one, to preach the law, until today, when scholarly societies are spreading the gospel in Europe and America, Buddhism has been a missionary religion. Of Asoka's Buddhist missions in the third century B.C. the one sure result was the conversion of Ceylon by his son, Mahinda. After twenty-two centuries the modern Sinhalese Maha Bodhi Society is planning a campaign to reestablish the religion of Asoka in India. Missionary heroism adds glory to the history of Buddhism in all lands and ages. For wise tolerance, sympathy, patient endurance and willing self-sacrifice for a cause, many of the Buddhist missionaries deserve high rank among the greatest souls of the race. They included royal princes who exchanged a kingdom for the yellow robe, philosopher monks, popular preachers, translators and pilgrims braving the dangers of unknown lands in search of truth.

Sometimes through individual initiative, usually by invitation, Buddhism spread to Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia, Siam, Java, Sumatra, Kashmir, Nepal, Sikkim, Khotan, Bhutan, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and Mongolia. To the peoples of lower culture it



WORSHIP OF BUDDHA  
Indian

brought the practical arts, education, medical aid, and a kindlier moral ideal. The written language was in some cases the gift of the monks who invented an alphabet in which to present the sacred texts. Monastic institutions, temples and representations of the divine figures which were the necessary accompaniments of Buddhism wherever it went, introduced new motifs to create or stimulate architecture and art. The philosophic and religious ideas of the Buddhist teachers gave an entirely new view of life to the people of these lands, opened wide vistas into the unseen, and even to the high culture of China added another level of transmundane idealism. Everywhere Buddhism was tolerant, adaptable, adjusting its ideas, techniques and ideals to the problems and needs of each variant social structure, so that in every case it became an integral phase of the culture of the people. And always, by its persistent stress on mercy, merit, and non-injury it created a warmer and more humane social climate.

As an ever-present influence on thought and manners, Buddhism has contributed depth, richness and color to the cultural heritage of Eastern Asia. It is difficult to visualize the Far East without Buddhism but it is equally difficult, in any culture area, to define exactly what elements belong to the Buddhist account. Culture is a product of action, reaction, interaction continuously giving rise to novel syntheses. Many elements blend and are lost to sight in the new unity. The material and intellectual contributions of Buddhism may be recorded; the Buddhist influence escapes all neat tabulation. This is particularly true because of the non-aggressive, assimilating nature of Buddhism.

From the beginning, this religion has recognised two classes of candidates for the joys of perfect enlightenment—the monk who is willing to devote all his time and energies to the quest, and the layman, who has his eyes toward the goal and his feet in the path, but must still remain bound to the duties of society and therefore in the round of rebirth. The monasteries and the nature of the temple rituals give evidence of this distinction over all Asia. The relationship of monk and layman was one of mutual dependence and service. The layman gained merit by supporting the monks and building religious institutions. By the terms of his vow the monk could not win his own salvation without diffusing merit to others. He served in many ways. He was the bearer and transmitter of the sacred wisdom, the educator of

the people. His attainments in learning and character were an inspiration and example. In spite of the theoretical individualism of Buddhism, the monk-priest was a mediator between the masses and the divine forces of the unseen world, turning the wheel of the law for the benefit of humanity near and far, bringing to bear upon the problems of the laity in field and home the magical powers of the great gods, at death guiding the soul safely through the awesome experiences of the intermediary ghostly afterlife. While it is certain that the intellectual and moral influences of Buddhist institutions have been very important, this psychological factor of hope, comfort, consolation and escape was and is incalculable. Not only did Buddhism quiet the pain of life's inescapable tragedies by its soothing anaesthesia, but the monasteries were an ever-open frontier when the world became wearisome, crowded or cruel beyond endurance. The restless intellectual, the visionary, the life-surfeited aristocrat, all thwarted, tortured, disillusioned souls could find there a refuge, hope of a new way of life, and the thrill of adventure in an unexplored realm. It was a democratic fellowship inspired by the tradition of Arahats, saints and Bodhisattvas who had walked the path before them. Sometimes, as in ninth century China, these religious institutions became so attractive and so numerous as to be a threat to the state and the economic order. Sometimes, as in Japan, they were nests of political intrigue. They were often infected with the miasma of idleness, corruption and cupidity, but at their best they were centers of light and leadership producing administrators, scholars and saints whose achievements give lustre to the cultural heritage of Asia. In modern times the monastic organizations of the various lands differ greatly in social values, political power and religious influence. Between the institutions of Ceylon and Tibet, Siam and Korea, Burma and Japan or China lie the differentiating experiences of more than a thousand years. For the most part they are a force for conservatism, but the aggressive leadership of the Chinese monk T'ai-hsü and those who cooperate with him in the World Conference for Buddhism may indicate advance. Whether and how the staid monastic institutions will make adjustment to the problems of the new age no one can predict with certainty. Modern science and industrialism confront them with the threat leveled at all old structures attuned to a different world and world-view.

The religious philosophy of Buddhism in modern Asia includes

all the historic types from the Hinayana in Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia and Siam to the most extreme form of the Mahayana in the Tantrism of Tibet. Modern critical scholarship, especially in Japan, has tended to revive interest in the original form of Buddhism. For export to the West this seems to be the most effective type. In China and Japan the Mahayana of the Lotus Scripture, the Meditation, and Pure Land Schools predominate. Buddhism is as inclusive and versatile as Hinduism in accommodating its truth to all classes of men. Salvation may be won by works, by knowledge, by mystic meditation, or by faith in the power and grace of another. The ascetic Yogi in a lonely cave on Everest, the master of magic mantras acting as a psychopomp through the realms of the dead, the Madhyamika intellectual, the Chan mystic, the layman trusting in the mercy of Amitabha or Kuan-yin, all are included. Historically these different Buddhisms are the result of creative adjustments to changing environing social and intellectual situations. Theoretically they are all the same truth accommodated to the varied capacities of mankind. According to the theory of reconciliation, popular in China and Japan, attributed to the founder of the T'ien-T'ai school of the sixth century, the represented stages in the exposition of the gospel of Gautama himself. Fundamental to all are the ideas of karma and reincarnation, the five precepts of moral living, and the confidence that there is a way of escape from the transiency and sorrowful futility of the worldly life to a state of peace and bliss. The Hinayana is a code of behavior, not a system of theology or metaphysics. The eightfold path, faithfully followed, creates the habits of thought and living which yield at last the poise, detachment, self-mastery and insight of the Arhat. There are no gods to help and no heavens to win. The goal is Nirvana, but the way is lonely and may be long. The Mahayana is easier and more generous. It assumes an eternal Reality, the Dharmakaya (Tantric, AdiBuddha), the ocean of Being in which individual souls are as drops of water, tossed and driven in the waves of the generations. Reality is ineffable, consequently many kinds of philosophic idealism, and many forms of mysticism are possible. The task of living is to lift the veil, to wear away the separations of individuality, to still the whirling figures of the dance of time, that the soul may rest in the great peace of Buddhahood where all distinctions disappear. Solitary souls may win to salvation alone, but the gospel of the Mahayana in-

volves a generous sharing of merit. The climb to Buddhahood by the Bodhisattva path implies the complete acceptance of love and responsibility for all living beings on the wheel. Because of the vow of Bodhi and the identification of the self with others through compassion, the merit of one may be turned to the help of all. Consequently the Mahayana has a galaxy of glorious personal Beings, not yet Buddhas, who not only toil for the emancipation of souls, but will listen to the cry of individual need. Avalokiteśvara (Kuan Yin, Kwannon) the embodiment of divine compassion, and Ti-Tsang (Jizo) who has vowed to empty all the hells, are dear to the hearts of the common folk in all the Far East. Amitabha (Amida) is a Buddha, and therefore quiescent, but the merit of the vow by which he attained Buddhahood continues to work as a cosmic magic to bring all those who trust and call upon him to the western Paradise of bliss. From time to time great souls embody the truth in human form and, like Sakyamuni, reveal to man the way of life by teaching and example. Thus the truth of the Mahayana is adapted to every need. But all the kaleidoscopic forms point beyond themselves to the ultimate truth which is beyond words. The wisdom of the Chan (Zen), Madhyamika and Yogacharya schools, and of all mystics, leads through reason and speech to silence and realization. Symbolically the truth may be expressed by the divine figures, embodiments of wisdom, light, love, power and mercy. The Saviors of the Pure Land are real to the emotions of the masses, as are also the multitude of lesser gods and guardians, but the truth is that Reality is one, and all representations are but broken lights of the ineffable.

As religious philosophy and institution, Buddhism has exerted a powerful influence on all far-eastern cultures. Political vicissitudes, economic and social stresses, brilliant personalities, chance and geography have weighted the scales for and against the Buddhists in different lands. In Tibet, where every third man is attached to the religious orders, and religion in the person of an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, the Dalai Lama, controls the state, Buddhism has been a dominant force. In the Hinayana areas, the religion has greater influence and much brighter prospects for the future in Siam and Cambodia, where it is favored by state support and encouragement, than in Burma and Ceylon under foreign control.

The Japanese were still a primitive people when Buddhism en-

tered as the bearer of the elements of an advanced civilization and a higher culture. With the prestige of its conquests in continental lands, the support of the court, and its status as the official religion, it won the allegiance of the intellectuals in Japan to a degree that was never possible in China where it met an ancient and tested culture with a sophisticated philosophy of life. Its success in Japan was won through the versatile adaptability of the Mahayana forms. The philosophic Buddhism carried to poetic beauty the native Shinto naturalism. Zen was perfectly shaped to be the religious philosophy of the Samurai. The Amida gospel of the the Jodo and Shin sects flourished because it was able to meet the needs of an age of disorder, panic and social distress. The Nichiren sect drew its strength from alliance with the living force of Japanese patriotism. For twelve centuries Buddhism was the controlling influence in the development of the culture of Japan which shows its stamp of beauty and refinement everywhere. Yet there were always intellectuals who protested against it in the name of an idealized Shinto, or the common sense "gentleman's" code of Confucianism.

In China the intellectuals as a group were never captured by Buddhism. Its influence was with the masses to whom it opened the realms of heaven and hell, brought the help of powerful gods, and the psychological consolations of splendid ceremonies and magic rites. The basic pattern of life was the native Chinese family and community code. Buddhism deliberately set itself to reinforce the Confucian ethics, and building upon the central ideal of filial piety, adapted itself to the functional task of caring for the welfare of souls in the unseen realms beyond the gates of death. Its influence with the people so transformed the popular Taoism that it became a copy of Buddhism. Chucius noted the fact with sarcasm—"All that is valuable in Buddhism was taken from Taoism, and the Taoists in revenge have taken all the worst things from Buddhism." The magic of Buddhist ceremonial supplemented the stately Confucian cult of the seasons in times of agricultural distress, and Tantric Buddhism furnished innumerable spells for protection against the invisible forces of evil. From the fifth to the ninth century the influence of Buddhism was all-pervasive. Then it was checked by official decree, but has continued as an imponderable element in folk life until today. The colossal figures of Buddha cut out of the solid rock near Loyang

serve as a symbol for Reichelt's estimate of Buddhist influence—"For those who study the religious history of the East with spiritual insight these figures of Buddha, hewn out of the rock, speak a language of their own. In them we see a symbol of the profound impression made by Buddhism upon the soul of the Chinese people. Deep, deep have the lines been chiselled—in thought, in viewpoint, in hope for the future, in resignation, in unutterable pain and grief, in deep longing after enlightenment and peace, in inexpressible sympathy with all that lives, and in a quiet and strong hope for the salvation of all living. If one wishes to understand China, one must see it in the light of Buddhism." (Reichelt: *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism*, p. 340) This may be an overemphasis because it evaluates Buddhism as a "spiritual" influence, but it is clear that the two greatest Confucian philosophies after the tenth century, the Neo-Confucian naturalism of Chu Hsi in the Sung Dynasty and the pragmatic idealism of Wang Yang Ming in the period of the Ming were influenced by it. There are no means of measuring the meliorizing effect of Buddhism upon the life of the common people, but that it has been profound and lasting cannot be doubted.

To every culture Buddhism added the spiritual tone inherent in its own world-view and moral ideal. It was never intolerant and aggressive in its approach to existing customs. An easier and more successful way was to superimpose Buddhist ideals of behavior upon the approved indigenous code. The result was a humanizing and softening of human relations, because Buddhism continuously stressed the necessity of curbing passionate impulses, the repression of appetites, non-injury, sympathy, patience, pacifism, self-mastery and self-control even to the borderland of asceticism. Centuries of this intangible influence have been effective in producing a quality of life, a gentleness of manners, in all Eastern lands ranging from sensitive courtesy, through patient resignation, to quietistic self-effacement. Tibet is an illustration of the process.

Buddhist Tibet, with all its harshness, seems mild and attractive on the background of the Tibet of ancient times with its warfare, savage customs, fierce cruelty and the weird, terrifying magic of Pön religion. There, as elsewhere, Buddhism assimilated and transformed the earlier culture. This is the principle of *Upaya* (expediency) which Asanga praised as one element of the greatness of the Mahayana. It allowed Buddhism to seek truth everywhere

even disguised under the most absurd superstitions, to adapt itself to all conditions and use all means in the eager desire to save all. By tolerant sympathy and kindly pressure, the Buddhist idealism permeated all levels of society. In those lands where the monasteries have assumed responsibility as educators of the youth, the opportunity for developing attitudes and shaping social patterns of behavior has been much greater. This is particularly true of modern Burma and Siam.

The philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism has dictated the peculiarly indirect nature of the social influence of the religion. To the Western mind, accustomed to theistic dualism, the difference of nature between god and man, and an activistic program of social service, Buddhist religious activities seem strangely ineffective. When the practical world is taken at face value, and religious leaders emphasize the need of social reorganization as a means of winning the good life, it is difficult to comprehend the social significance of the chanting of sacred texts, the turning of prayer-wheels, the solitary meditation of monks and the hard, life-long discipline of lonely saints. Yet all these are effective, communal assets from the Buddhist point of view. In its Mahayana form, Buddhism assumes the solidarity of all souls in the unity of the ultimate Real. It takes as axiomatic the relative unreality and the real futility of life on the round of rebirth. To reform the practical world would be merely a palliative, for the root of our cosmic sorrow lies deeper. The goal of all souls is not happiness in the thraldom of desire but eternal bliss in emancipation. All are on a democratic basis in this quest. Distinctions of rank and caste are meaningless. The great leveler is the common need. Moreover to one who is able to see the truth, all souls are one in the togetherness of the eternal. This is the reason why ceremonies and meditations, apparently detached from the activities of life can help, and the attainments of solitary saints and Bodhisattvas may serve for the salvation of others. This is also the key to Buddhist compassion. The last words of the saintly Tibetan Yogi, Milarepa, spoken on the day of his death (1135 A. D.) will illustrate the point of view—

“Maintain the state of undistractedness and distraction will fly off ;

Dwell alone and ye shall find a friend ;

Take the lowest place and ye shall reach the highest ;

Hasten slowly and ye shall soon arrive ;

Renounce all worldly goals and ye shall reach the highest goal.

If ye tread the Secret Path, ye shall find the shortest way;  
If ye realize the Voidness, compassion will arise within  
your hearts;

If ye lose all differentiation between yourselves and others,  
fit to serve others ye will be;

And when in serving others ye shall win success, then shall  
ye meet with me;

And finding me, ye shall attain to Buddhahood."

(W. Y. Evans-Wentz: *Milarepa* [the Jetsun-Kahbum] p. 273)

Buddhism now faces the greatest test of all time in the necessity of meeting the challenge of modern sciences and the insistent popular demand for solutions of the maladjustments of the social order. The answers of the past will not avail, for the premises on which they were founded are dissolved. In 1925 Y. Y. Tsu wrote: "The future of Buddhism will be one of two things. It will die a natural death or it will become reanimated through a process of adaption and evolution. Buddhism cannot go on as a religion unless it reforms itself." Grave doubts have been expressed by Buddhist intellectuals as to whether monasticism can have any function in an industrialized society, especially since the philosophic idealism which justified it is in the same difficulty as all prescientific ideologies, when confronted by modern knowledge and the refusal to accept a religious opiate as a cure for social ills. But Buddhism has behind it an inspiring history of achievement. It has shown a marvellous capacity for adjustment to new situations through more than two thousand years, and at the present time it has an international fellowship of great leaders who are awake to modern needs. In Ceylon and Burma there is an active group of scholars who are convinced that Buddhism is the one religion that is capable of meeting the demands of the scientific world. Japanese intellectuals are not only doing intensive work in research, but are transforming Buddhism into a social religion by establishing civic centers and organizing an educational program oriented to the new age. The secular clergy of the Amida sects are close to the problems of the people and therefore in a position to give leadership. In China there is a demand for a more genuine religious life, for reformation of the monasteries, and a better educational training for religious leaders. Probably the most active figure in Chinese Buddhism in T'ai Hsü, editor of an important journal, president of Wu-

chang academy and a leader in the formation of the World's Buddhist Union. He is a typical modernist, rationalizing the T'ien-T'ai philosophy to meet modern science and sensitively aware of social problems. He is the moving spirit of the Buddhist revival in China, and it is significant that his program for educating leaders of the movement lays especial stress upon the necessity of social reform. The future of Buddhism in China is uncertain, for the great philosophic heritage of Chinese naturalism is awaking to new life with a vast indifference to world-transcending idealisms.

### THE HERITAGE OF THE FARTHER EAST

IN the age-old culture of China the human spirit faced the issues of life with smiling frankness. There is a sane, earthy quality in the native Chinese mood that is alien to the spiritual climate of India and the ethereal atmosphere of Buddhism. The human scene is central and not some mysterious, unseen glory of the gods. Attuned to the spiritual motif, the sages of India snubbed the earth, their eyes deep with dreams of things divine. Buddhism endured the world but pointed beyond it. Both Hinduism and Buddhism have revered the saint as the pinnacle of human attainment. China, on the other hand, loving the earth, clinging to it, has exalted as her ideal, the scholar, the wise man, rich in the experience of the ages in the fine art of living. The indigenous culture of China is secular and humanistic. In both India and China there is the same sense of unity, of community, of the solidarity of humankind in contrast with the individualism of the modern West. These oriental cultures ground human happiness in an inclusive unity rather than upon the precarious quest of individual satisfaction. But India has ever been homesick for a lost bliss in another and spiritual realm. China long ago learned the secret of blessedness in the warm fellowship and security of close human groups in intimate contact with the good earth.

The basic pattern of Chinese culture was established in a past so distant that changing climate, altered topography and moving peoples have drawn a veil between us and its origins. Mythology tells of a long climb from animal savagery to the human level. Legend attaches to the mythical figures of Fu Shi, Shen Nung and Huang-ti the honor of progressive achievements in practical mastery over nature—the cultivation of cereals, sericulture, invention