

Buddhist Reaction to Christianity in Late Ming China

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The Jesuit missionaries in China during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries quickly realized that if they were to make any headway in the propagation of Christianity among the educated classes, they would have to provide written accounts of their faith. The most successful of the early missionary apologists was Matteo Ricci.¹ Not only did he master the Chinese language, but he also elaborated, through his publications, the techniques to be employed in presenting the Christian faith to the Chinese nation. These techniques, which were to serve as a norm for many of his colleagues and successors, and which have, of course, major implications for the Christian theologian, came to be summed up in the expression *Ch'u Fo Pu Ju*, "Remove Buddhism and Augment Confucianism".²

Ricci's most influential publications in the theological field were *the T'ien-chu shih-i* (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven),³ the *Chi-jen shih-p'ien* (Ten Essays on-Extraordinary Man),⁴ the *Chiao-yu lun* (On Friendship),⁵ and his writings published posthumously under the title *Pien-hsueh i-tu* (Collected Documents on Dialectics).⁶

In these works, and particularly in the *T'ien-chu shih-i*, Ricci quoted widely from the Confucian classics in order to emphasize his thesis that early Chinese thought and religion centred on belief in a supreme deity, and that Christianity was a natural fulfilment of all that was best in Confucianism. Although he disapproved of certain of the teachings of neo-Confucianism, which he regarded as degenerate and excessively influenced by Buddhism, it is noteworthy that none of his converts found it necessary to regard himself as cut off from the

1. 1552-1610. Born in Macerata, Italy, Ricci arrived in Macao on 7th August, 1582. From 24th January, 1601, until his death on 11th May, 1610, Ricci lived and worked in Peking.
2. Louis J. Gallagher, S. J., *China in the 16th Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci*, New York, 1953, p. 448. As is well known, Ricci and his colleagues also made use of their scientific knowledge to win the interest of Chinese scholars and officials. See especially J. Needham, *Chinese Astronomy and the Jesuit Mission: An Encounter of Cultures*, London, 1958, and P. M. D'Elia, S.J., *Galileo in China*, Harvard, 1960.
3. Begun in 1593, it was published in its final form in 1603.
4. Published in 1608.
5. Composed in 1595.
6. Finally published under this title in 1629. See P. M. D'Elia, S.J., *Fonti Ricciane*, Rome, 1949, Vol. II, p. 306.

Confucian tradition.

In the *T'ien-chu shih-I* Ricci not only indicated that Confucianism was incompatible with Buddhism and Taoism, but he also went on to attack specific teachings of these two faiths. Among the doctrines he singled out as being particularly opposed to both Christianity and Confucianism were

1. The Buddhist doctrine of *Sunya*, "Voidness", and the Taoist doctrine of *Wu*, "Non-Being".
2. The Buddhist concepts of Heaven and Hell which, said Ricci, were borrowed from Christianity and then distorted.
3. The Buddhist doctrine of metempsychosis which, he maintained, was first developed by Pythagoras, only to make its way subsequently into India where it was adopted by the Buddha.
4. The Buddhist prohibition against the killing of all living beings. Ricci went to some lengths to show that animals were created by God for man's benefit, and that it was right to slaughter them for food, etc.

Ricci's hostility towards Buddhism did not pass unnoticed by the educated Buddhist community. Debate and discussion regarding the relative merits of the two religions took place between Ricci and San Huai⁷ in Nanking, and between Ricci and Huang Hui⁸ in Peking.

The first written response to Ricci's publications, however, was a letter to Ricci from the retired official Yu Shun-hsi.⁹ In this letter, triggered off by his reading of Ricci's *Chi-jen shih-p'ien*, Yu began by noting that, although a foreigner, Ricci had acquired a reputation as an astronomer and mathematician. He then remarked on the fact that Ricci had introduced a divinity from the West, and asserted that in his writings he had belittled the Buddha and defamed Confucius. Yu noted Ricci's comments on Heaven and Hell, but informed him that he had failed to understand Buddhist teaching on the subject. What was really required, he said, was that Ricci should study the whole collection of Buddhist scriptures. If he had not the time to do this, he should first read the *Tsung-ching lu* (Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine),¹⁰

7. 1545-1608. Also known as Huang Hung-en and by his religious name Hsueh-lang Hung-en. San Huai was born in the region of Nanking. See Ch'en Yuan, *Shih-shih I-nien lu*, p. 375; Peking, 1964. D'Elia, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. II, p. 75.
8. A *chin-shih* of 1589, Huang retired from official duties in 1602. A friend of the Buddhist clergy, Huang was deeply interested in Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism. See D'Elia, *ibid.*, p. 180.
9. Native of Ch'ien-t'ang in Chekiang. Yu's *tzu* was Chang-ju, but he also went by the name Yu Te-yuan. Yu took his *chin-shih* degree in 1583 and served as an official in the Board of Civil Office.
10. A Sung dynasty work by the monk Chih-chueh.

the *Chieh fa-yin* (Commentary on Bodhisattva Commandments)¹¹ the *Hsi-yu chi* (Record of Western Regions),¹² the *Kao-seng chuan* (Biographies of Leading Monks),¹³ and the *Fa-yuan chulin* (Cyclopaedia of the Buddhist System).¹⁴ Yu pointed out that such outstanding Confucian scholars as Lu Hsiang-shan¹⁵ and Wang Yang-ming¹⁶ displayed a close affinity with the Buddhist position in their writings; that the founder of the current dynasty had revered the Buddha,¹⁷ and that many high officials were presently devoted to Buddhism.¹⁸ It was wrong, said Yu, to encourage one group of Chinese to attack other Chinese as Ricci seemed to be doing.

Ricci prepared a long reply to this letter and in it made the following points:

1. His skills in astronomy and the instruments he used in connection with this science were mere end-products of the civilization of his own country. He would hardly have travelled by sea for three years and undergone untold hardships merely to supply China with the knowledge she lacked in this direction.
 2. The chief reason for his coming to China was to propagate the Way of God so that all men might become filial sons of the "Great Father and Mother",¹⁹ and be suitably rewarded for their service.
11. Composed by Chu-hung (see note 22) the full title of this commentary in five *chuan* is *Fan-wang ching hsin-ti p'in p'u-sa chie* *i-shu fa-yin*. It is published as the first part of Chu-hung's collected works, the *Yun-ch'i fa-hui*, Chin-ling K'e-ching ch'u, 1897.
 12. Arthur Waley describes this work as "a guide book to India". It was compiled in 646 at the Emperor's suggestion by the great Buddhist traveller Hsuan-tsang (602-664). See A. Waley, *The Real Tripitaka*, London, 1952, p. 89.
 13. This title was no doubt meant to cover all the biographical studies of Buddhist monks up to the Ming dynasty.
 14. Completed in 668 by the monk Tao-shih, this work contains 120 *chuan*. It is primarily concerned with revealing the principles governing happiness and misfortune in human life.
 15. 1139-1193. See Siu-chi Huang, *Lu Hsiang-shan*, American Oriental Series, Vol. 27, 1944.
 16. 1472-1529. See Wing-tsit Ch'an, *Instructions for Practical Living*, Columbia, 1963.
 17. Chu Yuan-chang, the founder of the Ming dynasty, spent some time in a Buddhist monastery prior to embarking on a military career.
 18. Cf. K. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, Princeton, 1964. In chapter 16 Ch'en draws attention to the great influence of Buddhism on the educated classes during the last years of the Ming dynasty.
 19. Ricci no doubt intended this expression to refer to God. It commonly denotes "Heaven and Earth" or the "Emperor".

3. The Christian religion had ten commandments, the first of which was violated by Buddhism.
4. After coming to China he had approved of Yao, Shun, the Duke of Chou²⁰ and Confucius, but he had opposed Buddhism. He had taken this stand because the early Confucians served Shangti.²¹ Buddhists, on the other hand, reviled Him, seeking to elevate the Buddha above Him.
5. To elevate anything above God was to be guilty of the gravest of sins. There was no need to thumb through more than 5,000 *chuan* of Buddhist scripture to discover the truth of this.
6. As for the Buddhist scriptures, if these advocated the worship of Shangti he could not afford to ignore them; but, if they did not, he was not going to change his mind about Buddhism.
7. His comments on Heaven and Hell were aimed chiefly at the doctrine of metempsychosis.
8. The essential difference between his position and the Buddhist lay in their respective notions of "substance". He insisted on its reality, whereas Buddhism denied its existence.
9. Buddhism had existed in China for some two thousand years, yet there was no sign that the Chinese people were any better now than they had been without Buddhism. On the contrary, Chinese scholars frequently stated that the present age showed a decline from ancient standards.
10. He lamented his failure thus far to have the Christian scriptures translated into Chinese. He pointed out, however, that if he were to be denied comment on Buddhism because he had not been able to study the *Tripitaka*, Buddhists should refrain from criticism of Christianity since they had not read the Christian scriptures.
11. If Buddhists could claim that the sages and worthies of classical China would have embraced Buddhism had they known of its teachings, he could also claim that had Christianity existed in China over the same period as Buddhism, worthies and sages of post-Han times would have accepted it. Arguments such as this, however, were inconclusive, and could not clarify the truth or falsity of Christianity and Buddhism.
12. He was deeply conscious of his ignorance of Buddhism and regretted that Buddhism and Christianity were not in total harmony. "What greater blessing could there be" he said, "than that, despite outward differences, Buddhism and Christianity should be found to be of the same family."

20 Yao, Shun and the Duke of Chou were regarded as ideal rulers by the Confucian school.

21 The title of the supreme deity in early Chinese religious thought.

13. He had travelled eighty-thousand *li* in search of new friends and to seek out those things that would be of benefit to him. Far from wanting to be different from other men, he sought for all to be as he was. "Having fled into a deserted valley, it is a joyful thing to hear the footfall of another man."

Yü Shun-hsi sent Ricci's letter to his religious mentor, abbot Chu-hung,²² for comment. In his brief reply Chu-hung noted that the style of the language in Ricci's letter was much superior to that in the *T'ien-chu shih-i* and *Chi-jen shih-p'ien*. He concluded that the letter had been written for Ricci by a Chinese scholar, and noted the fact that educated Chinese were being drawn into Ricci's orbit to act as his "wings"- a matter of some concern since it indicated the danger of the "heresy". Nevertheless, said Chu-hung, the reply was shallow in content; the letter itself too long, and the arguments unworthy of refutation.

Despite Chu-hung's somewhat casual treatment of Ricci's communication, Yu Shun-hsi later devoted a brief article²³ to Ricci's arguments in favour of the slaughter of animals. Ricci had affirmed that a distinction was to be made between the human soul, which was immortal, and the souls of animals and plants, which were perishable. Yu asserted that Ricci's fundamental error was his failure to see that the world of phenomena was essentially a unity. Arguments about grades of souls were meaningless in the light of this "truth".

Other comments and criticisms directed against Ricci and fellow Christians by Yu Shun-hsi were as follows:

1. Rewards were given to Chinese Christians who brought others into the Church. These varied according to the social status of the convert.

22. 1535-1615. A native of Jen-ho hsien, Hangchow, Chu-hung's surname was Shen, his courtesy name Fo-hui, and his style Lien-ch'ih. He is commonly referred to as Yun-ch'i Ho-shang, a name derived from the monastery in which he spent most of his religious life. Although his aim in early life was to qualify himself for an official career, he finally became a Buddhist religious at the age of thirty-one. In 1568 he settled in an abandoned monastery on Mt. Yun-ch'i in Hangchow, and was there to become one of the four leading clerics of his day, commanding the respect of large numbers of monks and laymen alike.

23. The article entitled *T'ien-chu shih-i sha-sheng pien* (Refutation of the Teaching on the Killing of Living Beings in the *T'ien-chu shi-i*), preserved in chuan 5 of the *Sheng-ch'ao p'o-hsieh chi* (Collect Documents for the Countering of Heterodoxy), edited and published by Hsu Ch'ang-chih in 1640. See D. Lancashire, "Anti-Christian Polemics in Seventeenth Century China", *Church History*, XXXVIII, 2, June, 1969, p. 219 ff. for a fuller treatment of these Collected Documents hereafter referred to as SCPHC.

2. The Church could easily grow to the point where it would be as great a menace as the White Lotus Society.²⁴

3. Confucians had always revered Heaven. China, therefore, had no need for information from Barbarians on how to do this. For a thorough understanding of Heaven, however, it was necessary to examine the Buddhist scriptures.

Although Chu-hung had shown contempt for Ricci's teachings in his letter to Yu Shun-hsi, Yu noted in his article that on one occasion Chu-hung had said that should there be many conversions to Christianity he would compose an attack upon it. No doubt shocked by the friendship of a growing number of scholars and officials for the Jesuit mission, Chu-hung finally decided to launch his attack in 1610.²⁵ That Ricci had died on 11th May of the same year may have led him to believe that this was the most propitious time to strike. Chu-hung's strictures took the form of four brief articles under the general heading *T'ien shuo* (On Heaven).²⁶

In his first article Chu-hung discussed the term *T'ien-chu*, "Lord of Heaven", employed by the Jesuits to designate God. This term, he said, was quite familiar to Buddhists since it appeared in the Buddhist scriptures as the title of Indra, the king of the *Trayas-trimsas*, "Heaven of the Thirty-three Devas". Since, however, the Heaven or World of Indra with its four continents surrounding a Mount Sumeru was only one out of 1,000,000,000 similar worlds, its ruler stood in relation to the *Mahabrahma devaraja*,²⁷ in much the same way as a feudal lord of the Chou dynasty (1122-206 B.C.) stood in relation to the Chou monarch.

The Jesuits had gone further, however, and had claimed that their Lord of Heaven was without form, appearance or sound. If this were so, said Chu-hung, then God would have to be equated with *li*, "Principle", and if God were no more than "Principle", it was difficult to see how He could exercise government over man or mete out rewards and punishments.

24. A secret religious sect which had rebelled against the Mongols during the Yuan dynasty (1206-1368) and which renewed its political activities in the 1620s.

25. There is much controversy over the dating of Chu-hung's written attack on Christianity. I have here followed Ch'en Yuan, *op. cit.*, p. 371, and have therefore changed my mind on this matter since writing "Anti-Christian Polemics in Seventeenth Century China". In that article I stated that "Chu Hung composed his anti-Christian essays as early as 1608 . . ." See Lancashire, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

26. Incorporated in Chu-hung's *Chu-ch'uang san-pi* which has a preface dated 1615. These articles are also found in the SCPHC, *chuan* 7, and in the *Pien-hsueh i-tu*. For translations of the most important passages in these articles see Lancashire, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-7.

27. Supreme creator and first person of the Hindu Trimurti.

Chu-hung's second, third and fourth articles dealt chiefly with the Buddhist prohibition against the taking of life and the related question of metempsychosis. The Jesuits had pointed out that the ban on killing all living beings was due to fear lest one kill parents from a former existence, now reborn in a new form, it should follow that marriage was impossible since one might equally take a former parent to wife. Chu-hung insisted that the cases were quite different. If, he said, there should be any doubt regarding the precise nature of the prospective marriage partner, a person could always resort to divination - as did Confucians when they were uncertain whether the two persons concerned were of the same family. Nor was there any point in the Jesuits' suggestion that if divination were to be accepted as the technique for solving problems of this kind it might equally be used to determine the status of a living creature about to be killed. The difference between marriage and killing was that the one was natural to man, and the means by which the human race continued, whereas the other was unnatural to man, and had always been regarded as an evil. Killing, he said, poisoned the mind of the killer in addition to destroying life.

As to the continued existence of the soul after death, Chu-hung stated that if the human soul did persist he would have expected the souls of the sage-kings to have appeared to evil monarchs to admonish them. Clearly this had not happened.

A number of counter-arguments purporting to come from the hand of Ricci, but probably composed by the eminent scholar-official and convert Hsu Kuang-ch'i²⁸ were later appended to each of Chu-hung's major arguments.²⁹ In them the author refuted the claim that the Christian

28 For a detailed account of the life of Hsu Kuang-ch'i see A. Hummel (ed.), *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, Vol. I, Washington, 1943, p. 316.

29 In the *Pien-hsueh i-tu*. The *Pien-hsiieh i-tu* contains Yu Shun-hsi's letter to Ricci together with Ricci's reply; Chu-hung's letter to Shun-hsi; Chu-hung's four brief articles interspersed with answers purporting to come from the hand of Ricci; a post-script by Li Chih-tsao (see note 35) and in some editions a second post-script by Yang T'ing-yun (see note 36). Clearly, if Chu-hung's *T'ien shuo* were written after Ricci's death Ricci could not have replied to them. Comparison of Ricci's letter to Yu Shun-hsi with the ripostes to *T'ien shuo* confirms the fact that the latter are from a different hand. We may note (i) that whereas Ricci's letter to Yu is written in the first person, the ripostes are not. (ii) Reference is made in the ripostes to Christian publications. Among those mentioned is the *Ch'i ko* (The Seven Triumphs Over Sin) by Diego de Pantoia, published in 1614. We may conclude that the ripostes were composed in response to the publication of the *T'ien shuo* in 1615, and that they probably emanated from the hand of Hsu Kuang-ch'i. Cf. D'Elia, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. II, p. 306.

Lord of Heaven was the same as the Lord of Heaven in Buddhist scripture. Christianity, he said, regarded the Lord of Heaven as supreme lord whereas Buddhists thought of the Buddha as supreme Lord. Since reason could not admit of more than one lord, those who were mistaken would be sure to endure the sufferings of the deepest Hell - a matter of no small moment. Debate on this crucial question was welcome, said the author, provided it did not degenerate into mere recrimination and threats of violence. "If the bell is not struck it will fail to ring; if the drum is not beaten it will not sound. Without debate there can be no clarity." Reliable conclusions, he went on, could only proceed from reliable premises. Western geographers had shown that the world contained five continents, one of them having been discovered as recently as the Hung-chih reign-period (1488-1506). Buddhist teaching concerning worlds of four continents surrounding a Mount Sumeru was therefore clearly erroneous. One had only to compare the map of Jamal al-Din, details of which were given in the History of the Yuan Dynasty, with those of modern geographers to see how man's knowledge had increased. Buddhist geography was clearly based on the old four continent theory, and the Buddhist notion of a mountain set at the centre of the four continents was obviously derived from the view that the K'un-lun mountains separated Europe from Asia.³⁰

But it was not only Buddhist geography that was wrong. Buddhist theories of the universe had also to be called in question as a result of the findings of Western astronomy. These findings, said the writer, were based on experiments employing appropriate instruments, and revealed a totally different picture of the heavens from that put forward by the Buddhists.³¹ Western missionaries had passed through India on their way to China, yet nowhere had they heard that the Buddhist scriptures contained teachings such as these now being put forward in China. It seemed highly likely, therefore, that only the Chinese *Tripitaka* contained such material.

Some of the teachings found in Buddhism were not new to Westerners who had frequent intercourse with India. Metempsychosis was a doctrine as old as Pythagoras; but when it found its way into China, many scholars had become intoxicated with the idea and had helped to

30. Details of the terrestrial globe and of other scientific instruments brought by the Persian astronomer Jamal al-Din to China in the thirteenth century are given in the History of the Yuan Dynasty, *chuan* 48, pp. 6ff. (Ssu-pu pei-yao edition). See also J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Cambridge, 1959, Vol. III, pp. 372-4.
31. For an account of Buddhist cosmography see Needham, *op. cit.*, pp. 565-8.

spread it. Chinese Buddhism was also full of religious notions current in early Chinese history, but which no longer existed except as incorporated in Buddhist scripture. The fact that these teachings were unknown in India was an indication of this. What was needed was a comparative study of Indian and Chinese Buddhist scriptures to determine what was genuine and what spurious.

Having pointed to a number of alleged inconsistencies in the Buddhist scriptures, the writer proceeded to state that the Buddha was a man created by the Lord of Heaven, and that to elevate the Buddha above his creator was to introduce confusion. As to Chu-hung's claim that the Christian Lord of Heaven appeared to be nothing more than an impersonal principle, the author pointed out that God's lack of form, appearance or sound indicated only that He was spirit: dependent on nothing, but with all phenomena dependent on Him. There was no reason to conclude that He could neither govern mankind nor mete out reward and punishment. Principle or law, said the writer, was dependent and secondary. It was impossible, therefore, to equate God with principle. Further, the Buddhists themselves claimed that the Buddha was free from his "reward-body" once he had entered *parinirvana*. Were they now about to claim that he still possessed a body?

On the question of divination, the practice of which Chu-hung seemed to condone when confronted with the danger of breaking the laws of exogamy, the author noted that this was expressly forbidden by Buddhist precept. Moreover, divination was totally unreliable; it was obvious that neither past nor future events could really be discovered in this way. In any case, the Lord of Heaven was not a God who would cause people to be reborn and thereby run the risk of sinning against parents and relatives. But the major task, said the writer, was still to determine whether or not metempsychosis was true. So far, the Buddhists had merely claimed its truth in the same manner in which they had insisted on the reality of their chiliocosms. It was on the ground of reason, on the other hand, that Christians denied rebirth and asserted the right of people to marry and to kill animals for human consumption. Similarly, it was on the ground of reason that Christians believed that the soul persisted after death. If Buddhists insisted that there was no soul, what was it that became a Buddha or was consigned to Heaven or Hell?

Returning to the question of divination, the author of the ripostes suggested that once the principle of divination was allowed, there was no reason why it should not be employed in all cases of doubt, including the existence or otherwise of the worlds in the Buddhist universe.

As to the killing of animals, there was no truth whatsoever in Chu-hung's claim that mankind had always regarded slaughter as an evil. No such view was to be found either in ancient China or in the West. The fact was that man had been created by God to be lord over all phenomena and had been instructed to make use of phenomena. Man was originally out-numbered by all kinds of ferocious beasts which had to be slaughtered if man was to survive. The flesh was devoured as food, and skins provided clothing. One had only to turn to the Chinese classics to see how China's early sage-rulers strove to improve man's physical environment, regulating the land, rivers and wild beasts. Without this control of environment man would have perished long ago, he said. There was no truth in Chu-hung's claims, and no need to feel guilty over the killing of animals.

Abbot Chu-hung died in 1615. Despite the challenge to Buddhists, contained in the ripostes to his four articles, to debate major issues of doctrine, the gauntlet seems not to have been taken up until the 1630s.

A sudden interest in the task of refuting Christianity was awakened in Buddhist circles by a certain Huang Chen of Hsiachang in Chekiang. Huang, a Confucian, was deeply disturbed by the arrival of Fr. Giulio Aleni in his home town in 1633. He had heard Aleni speak on the Christian faith on a number of occasions and was concerned that he could find no argument with which to refute his teachings. Huang seems to have experienced something of a mental crisis since he stated that he became ill for four or five days, and only after this was able to see where the Christian "heresy" lay.³² This discovery, he said, made him feel happy, and he determined to ignite a torch which would shed the "light of truth" for 10,000 generations. "Each time I paid reverence to Heaven" he said, "I prayed silently and said: 'I, Chen, vow to repay Confucius and Mencius, my sovereign and kinfolk, with my useless body. With it, too, I vow to save all living beings in the world for 10,000 generations so that they will not be harmed by this foreign heresy and will all return to Chinese custom and tradition'." "I also vowed" said Huang, "to strengthen my will and said: 'Although these heretics may be skilful, have much money and a large following, and even though they may pulverize my body and smash my bones, I will not fear... So, no matter whether they be Confucians or Buddhists, or whether they agree with me or not, I shall employ all my powers and plead with them to support me'."

32. Huang Chen's account of his mental crisis is incorporated in *chuan* 3 of the SCPHC. A translation of part of Huang Chen's discussions with Aleni is given in Lancashire, *op. cit.*, pp. 225, 231.

Huang made his way to Kiangsu and Kwangtung to seek support. He obtained copies of the memorials to the throne composed by Shen Ch'ueh and others during the first major attempt to have Christianity legally destroyed (1616-1622), and arranged to have them printed and circulated.

Despite his fervour Huang seems initially to have elicited little enthusiasm for his cause. "At first" he said, "the majority were more concerned to protect body and home. It was like running against the tide. I wept each time I thought of the matter. Some laughed and said: 'This is a matter for those paid to do it; why should you concern yourself with it?'. I replied that those in the pay of the government were unwilling to act and so I had to do something." Others, Huang continued, reminded him that he was only one man, and a mere lowly scholar at that. Even if he were a high official he would not be able to oppose the Christians. Some, he said, tried to frighten him by saying that the highest officials in Nanking and Peking and in each province defended the Christians and that he was therefore risking his neck. Huang's answer to this was that he was willing to take such risks. Some advised him to concentrate on improving his own personal character, assuring him that the Christians would then disappear of their own accord; but Huang said he feared they might kill him first. No matter what the advice, Huang was not to be deflected from his purpose. Apart from composing written attacks on Christian doctrine and the Jesuit missionaries, he sought support from local Confucian scholars and gentry and pleaded with the Buddhists to take some action.

In his plea to the Buddhists Huang noted that Chu-hung had sought to refute Christian teaching, but that although there was no shortage of those who used Chu-hung's name when it could be of benefit to them, they ceased to be true friends when there was a need to defend him. The followers of Ricci, said Huang, numbered tens of thousands and were to be found in almost every province. He therefore asked the leading teachers of the Buddhist community to use all their powers to persuade the people to repudiate Christianity and to turn to Buddhism.³³

Goaded into action by Huang's rebuke, the monk Yuan-wu of the T'ien-t'ung monastery composed three articles entitled *Pien-t'ien shuo* (Debate on Heaven).³⁴ In the first, Yuan-wu

33. Huang Chen's appeal to the Buddhists; Chu-hung's *T'ien shuo*, and Buddhist documents relating to the subsequent controversy outlined in this article are to be found in *chuan 7* of the SCPHC.

began by referring to Huang's attack on Christianity, and stated that Huang had shown him some of the books written by the Jesuits. Although he felt inadequate to the task of confuting Christianity, he noted that the author of the ripostes to Chu-hung's articles had stated that Buddhists were unwilling to debate with those opposed to Buddhism, and that they therefore failed, as Buddhists, to fulfil their fundamental vow to win over all living beings. He felt it his duty to say something, although his only comment at this stage was that despite the possession of *Tathagata* wisdom by all living beings, Christians had not yet learnt to witness to it. Their insistence that the Ego, the Buddha and the Lord of Heaven were to be distinguished from each other was, he said, their fundamental mistake.

Approximately three weeks after he had written his brief article, Yuan-wu learnt that a certain Chang Kuang-t'ien had obtained a copy of it. Chang had taken the article to a church where the priest in charge, according to Chang, seemed not to understand it completely. Once the meaning of the text had been explained, however, the priest inquired as to the identity of the Huang T'ien-hsiang (i.e. Huang Chen) referred to in the document. Chang said he did not know him. Chang was then told to ask Yuan-wu to visit the church so that a direct discussion could take place between the priest and the monk. Chang replied that Yuan-wu was in Ningpo, and that it would be best therefore to provide a written answer. According to Chang, when he called for a reply three days later the priest refused to see him. He was told that the monk had attended the church the previous year; had been defeated in debate, and had left in anger. He was further informed that Yuan-wu had provided no proofs for his assertions, and that he

34 Some confusion has arisen over the dates of these three articles and over the events arising out of their composition. Fang Hao in his *Chung-hsi chiao-tung shih*, Vol. 5, Taipei, 1959, states on p. 120 that the events subsequent to Yuan-wu's first article took place in 1617. On p. 129, however, he speaks of three *Pien-tien shuo* which, he says, were written in 1635 by the monk Mi-yun of the T'ien-t'ung monastery. In fact, Mi-yun and Yuan-wu were one and the same person, and there was only one set of *Pien-t'ien shuo*. The dates given in the three articles are (a) the fifth day of the eighth month in the eighth year of the Ch'ung-chen reign period, (b) the ninth month of the eighth year of the Ch'ung-chen reign period, and (c) the eighth day of the twelfth month in the eighth year of the Ch'ung-chen reign period. The eighth year of the Ch'ung-chen reign period was 1635. Perhaps influenced by Fang Hao's datings, George H. C. Wong states on p. 199 of his article "The Anti-Christian Movement in China: Late Ming and Early Ch'ing", in the *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, I, May, 1962, that the events stemming from these articles led immediately to "the Nanking Religious incident, 1616-1622..." . See also Lancashire, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-3.

merely repeated the words of others. "He is afraid," Chang was told, "that his followers will become Christians, and so writes this as a blind."

Stung by these criticisms, Yuan-wu immediately wrote the second of his *Pien-t'ien shuo*. In it he said: "If you will not debate, I will. What do I depend on? Reason. Thus I rely on reason and use it as evidence. I rely on supreme reason which is the unchanging *Tao* (i.e. Way, Principle) of all things. I stated that you falsely hold on to things like the Lord of Heaven, the Buddha, and living beings as separate realities. You do not know that the Buddha was enlightened, and that when people are enlightened they too attain to Buddhahood. There are therefore no distinctions. The Buddha has no fixed form; He cannot be seen and utters no sound. He is the summation of all things".

Yuan-wu finally pointed out that Christians had ten commandments of which the eighth said "Thou shalt not bear false witness . . .". He had not, he said, left the T'ien-t'ung monastery for five years except for the briefest of journeys. He could not, therefore, have attended the church in the previous year as asserted by the priest.

In the third of his articles Yiian-wu reported that Chang returned to the church with his first two documents and there met a Chinese convert. This convert stated that although Buddhism emphasized man's spiritual nature, it also held that his nature lacked substance. Christianity, on the other hand, made it very clear that the soul was real and was derived from God. Buddhism, like Christianity, employed the notions of Heaven and Hell to change people for the better. The two religions, therefore, could be regarded as two physicians prescribing their medicines. The important thing was to effect a cure. "Why say this is right and that is wrong?" said the convert. "Why have only one physician? If one of them is unable to come up with a cure the patient can change him for another." Chang asked: "How can there be two principles of medicine? And why do your books attack Buddhism?" The convert did not give a direct reply but simply said: "It is hard to enter Christianity and therefore difficult to leave it - unlike Buddhism. Yun-ch'i (i.e. Chu-hung) got the worst of it when he wrote his four articles. Can the T'ien-t'ung monastery produce anyone better?"

In his answer to the convert's comments on substance and the soul Yiian-wu explained that the Buddhist doctrine of "Voidness" applied to phenomena only, and that what the Buddha taught concerned reality, not unreality. The soul, said Yuan-wu was the sign of *samsara* or the round of birth and death, and was termed in Buddhism the "Spirit of the Intellect". The trouble

with the Westerners and their followers was that they were unaware of the means whereby this "Spirit" came into existence. Only the fundamental nature of man, i.e. his Buddhature, was free from change. The soul, by contrast, was unstable, and therefore subject to birth and annihilation. If, as the Christians claimed, the soul was bestowed by God, how could they account for the great differences in character and fortune even among members of the same family? Surely God would have regarded all parts of his creation with equal favour.

As to Heaven and Hell, Christians were wrong in supposing that Buddhism used these concepts as goals to bring about a moral transformation in individuals. Christians might do this, but Buddhists, who understood the origins of Heaven and Hell, knew that they were called into existence by the power of the *karma* of living beings and were symptoms of man's sickness.

In addition to providing a first-hand account of his role as an intermediary between the monk Yuan-wu and the Catholic priest, Chang Kuang-t'ien, in his *Cheng-wang shuo* (On Confirmation of Fallacy), described how he came into possession of the most controversial collection of documents published by the Catholic Church in China in the seventeenth century. This collection, the *Pien-hsueh i-tu*, was compiled, as we have already noted, by Li Chih-tsao³⁵ and circulated under this title from about 1629.

Chang stated that he was presented with the *Pien-hsueh I-tu* on his first visit to the church. He gave an account of the contents of the work, and said that he was surprised and shocked by what he had read. He was even more distressed, however, when the monk who had provided him with Yuan-wu's first *Pien-t'ien shuo* showed him his edition of the collection which had been published in Fukien and which contained an additional epilogue by Yang T'ing-yun.³⁶ This epilogue, which was signed Michael, Yang's Christian name, asserted that the author had heard that as Chu-hung was about to die he had repented and said: "I have travelled the wrong road and, further, have misled many people".

Chang pointed out that the abbot's four articles appeared at the end of his last collection of published writings, the *Chu-ch'uang san-pi*, that his preface to this collection was dated the "Forty-third year of the Wan-li reign period (1615), Spring"; that Chu-hung died on the fourth day of the seventh month of the same year, and that his writings were not in fact printed and circulated until after his death. Chang then drew attention to the fact that Ricci had died in

35. A detailed account of the life of Li Chih-tsao is to be found in Hummel (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 452-4.

36. Hummel (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 894-5.

1610 so that five years had elapsed between his death and the publication of Chu-hung's collection. How, asked Chang, could Ricci have carried on a debate with Chu-hung when he could not have seen the *T'ien shuo*? As to Chu-hung's alleged confession, Chang stated that on the day the abbot died a vast number of scholar-officials gathered about him, both inside and outside his room, and that Chang himself was in the room. After the crowd had listened in silence to his final instructions, the abbot had uttered the name of Buddha, turned his face to the West and expired. Chang noted that it was only in an edition of the *Pien-hsueh i-tu* published at some distance from the place where the events had taken place that the Christians had dared to include Yang's epilogue.

In a post-script to his *Cheng-wang shuo* Chang reminded his readers that in Chu-hung's day Christianity was not as widespread as at the time of his writing. He pleaded with the followers of Chu-hung to rise up and defend Buddhism. "They will die for a false faith" he said, "will no one die for the truth?" Chang went on to say that he had no hate for the Christians, and that he actually admired the way the missionaries had left their countries and had travelled great distances to help people avoid evil and to encourage them to do good. The fault of the Christians he said, was that they failed to understand the nature of phenomena. Moreover, their attitude to killing put them in danger of Hell. By slandering the Buddha they only slandered themselves, for all living beings were possessed of Buddha-nature.

Of the half-dozen or so monks who attempted, during the years 1634-6, to defend Chu-hung and to attack Christianity, and whose writings have been preserved for posterity, the most outstanding, apart from Yuan-wu, were Fei-yin and P'u-jun.³⁷ Yet, despite the inclusion of an occasional technique, such as the employment of the syllogism to prove that God could not exist, there is little in their writings which differs from the arguments outlined above. Fei Yin analysed the *T'ien-chu shih-i* in some detail and commented separately on its major themes. Over and over again, however, the writer returned to the assertion that Ricci was seduced by the diversity of phenomena into concluding that each object possessed an individuality all its own. The attribute of "without a beginning and without an end" which Ricci claimed for God alone belonged properly, said Fei-yin, to the supreme reality which was complete in all men and permeated all phenomena. "It cannot be added to in sages, and cannot be reduced in the

37 The most pertinent articles of these two monks are preserved in *chuan* 8 of the SCPHC. These are titled *Yuan-tao p'i-hsieh shuo* (An Investigation into the Way and an Exposure of Heresy), by Fei-yin and *Chu tso-chi yuan-ch'i* (Origin of the Collected [Essays] Devoted to the Eradication of Heresy), by P'u-jun.

lowly" he said. "In heaven it is Heaven, in man it is man, and so it is with all things. There is no differentiation, and to be aware of this is to be a sage." Unaware of this truth, said Fei Yin, Ricci employed that level of his mind which differentiated between one thing and another to produce all kinds of logical inferences - such as the teaching that God had one type of character, man and the angels another, and animals and plants still others. Thought, said Fei-yin, was momentary, and since all phenomena, together with concepts and distinctions applied by the mind to phenomena, depended on man's thought processes, it was obvious that they could have no permanent independent reality of their own. The employment of terms like "voidness" by Buddhists, and "non-being" by Taoists, did not imply that final reality was nothing. What it did imply was that it was beyond all definition. Ricci's assertion that Buddhists regarded "voidness" as the originating source of phenomena was particularly annoying to Fei-yin since nothing could be further from the truth. For Buddhists causation was a feature of the world of relativity and could never involve the Absolute.

Yang T'ing-yun died in 1627, Li Chih-tsao in 1630 and Hsu Kuang-ch'i in 1633. With the passing of these "three pillars" of the Catholic Church, the men who might have contributed to a continuing debate with Buddhism were removed. What does emerge from the confrontation between Buddhism and Christianity at the end of the Ming dynasty, however, is that a fundamental cleavage existed between the two positions on both the psychological and philosophical levels. For the Buddhists, a clear distinction had to be made between the levels of consciousness in man, which analysed human experience of phenomena, drew logical inferences and were prone to conceptualize, on the one hand, and that deepest level of consciousness which, when an individual underwent the experience of "enlightenment", revealed the essential unity underlying the seeming diversity of phenomena. By

contrast, Ricci and his followers displayed an optimistic trust in the reality of sense data, and in the power of reason to draw trustworthy conclusions from sense experience.

What was really in dispute between Ricci and his Buddhist opponents, and what remains today as the chief issue between Buddhism and Christianity, was their respective doctrines of man. For Buddhism, man (and by extension all phenomena, including deities) is a temporary collocation of mental and physical elements held together by ignorance and moral blindness, and lacking any permanent reality that he can call his own, whereas for Christianity he is

a

creature possessed of a distinctive, if dependent, reality, and a being who need never be totally deprived of an awareness of his moral relationship with his creator. For the former, salvation lies in an enlightenment experience which reveals what is believed to be the true nature of phenomena, and which opens the way to the cessation of rebirth and misery. For the latter, it depends on participation in human life renewed, and being renewed, by its creator.

POSTSCRIPT

As is well known, official action taken against Christianity during the years 1616-1622 was initiated by Shen Ch'ueh, the vice-President of the Board of Rites in Nanking. What is not known for certain is whether an interest in Buddhism or friendships with Buddhist monks and laymen were among factors immediately contributing to his feeling of animosity against the Church.³⁸

An examination of the political, religious and philosophical circumstances of the time would suggest that Shen Ch'ueh's motives were in fact highly complex. The declining years of the Ming dynasty were marked by political and philosophical factionalism which extended to the highest governmental institutions in the land. The Grand Secretariat (Nei-ko) itself could not remain exempt, and was, in fact, a battle-ground in the intensifying inter-party struggles. Normally comprised of four to six Grand Secretaries, the Secretariat was able to exercise an enormous influence on the sovereign, and was naturally, therefore, the supreme goal of the politically ambitious scholar-official. The fact that the balance of power in the Secretariat could affect the lives of countless officials serving in the provinces meant that membership of the institution was of wide concern.³⁹

The major conflict of the time was between the Tung-lin movement, which, on its political side, may broadly be described as a group of scholar-officials devoted to good government, and a heterogeneous opposition which included representatives of regional interests and groupings, but also opportunists and disaffected and disgruntled individuals.

38. Some details of Shen Ch'ueh's life are given in Hummel (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 453. For a complete biography of this official it is necessary to refer to the official-history of the Ming dynasty: *Ming shih*, 218, 11b. (Ssu-pu pei-yao edition).

39. For the summary of the political and philosophical movements given here I am deeply indebted to the excellent article by Fr. Heinrich Busch entitled "The Tung-lin Academy and Its Political and Philosophical Significance" in *Monumenta Serica*, XIV (1949-55), 1-163.

Between 1608 and 1614 the Tung-lin movement was fortunate in having the Chief Grand Secretary of the Grand Secretariat, Yeh Hsiang-kao, as a supporter. At the same time, Yeh was a friend and patron of the Jesuit mission. In 1614 Yeh was succeeded by Fang Ts'ung-che who served as sole member of the Grand Secretariat from 1614 to 1620, and who, by contrast, was on the side of the opposition. Fang, according to the official history of the Ming dynasty, was an intimate friend of Shen Ch'ueh, by this time vice-President of the Board of Rites in Nanking.⁴⁰

Towards the end of Emperor Shen-tsung's reign (1573-1620) Fang requested that more officials be appointed to the Grand Secretariat, and among those nominated by him was Shen Ch'ueh. With the death of the emperor, however, there was a change in the political scene. Wang An, the chief eunuch of the new emperor Kuang-tsung and a confidant of the Tung-lin Party agent Wang Wen-yen, arranged during the succeeding two years for most of the surviving members of the "righteous circles"⁴¹ to be recalled to the court. Yeh Hsiang-kao was summoned to head the Grand Secretariat once again, and remained in office until 1624.

Meanwhile, Kuang-tsung died on 28th September, 1620, having reigned for less than a month, and was succeeded by the boy emperor Hsi-tsung.

In the autumn of 1621 Wei Chung-hsien, the notorious eunuch and fierce opponent of the Tung-lin Party, murdered his former benefactor Wang An, and together with the emperor's wet-nurse K'o, determined to gain complete political control of the state. Opponents of the Tung-lin Party flocked to Wei's support.

According to his biography in the official history of the Ming dynasty Shen Ch'ueh finally took up his appointment as a Grand Secretary in the sixth month of the first year of Hsi-tsung's reign.⁴² Following his arrival in Peking he became an intimate of Wei Chung-hsien who, it seems, had been Shen's pupil when Shen had served as a teacher in the official school for eunuchs.⁴³ Shen's period of service in the Grand Secretariat lasted only until 1622, but during this time he strongly opposed the efforts of Hsu Kuang-ch'i and Li Chih-tsao to dispatch Western armaments and gunners to Liao-tung where the Chinese front was crumbling under the repeated attacks of the Manchus. He also seized upon an incident in Peking, in which two of four foreign-made cannon exploded and killed several Chinese, to renew his attacks on

40. *Ming shih*, c. 218, 12a.

41. An appellation applied to members of the Tung-lin movement.

42. *Ming shih*, c. 218, 12a.

43. *ibid.*

Christianity⁴⁴

Despite his close association with Wei Chung-hsien, an increasing number of complaints against him finally forced Shen out of office. He died in 1623.

At the beginning of 1623 Wei had attained such power that he was able to have two more of his own friends appointed to the Grand Secretariat. Yeh Hsiang-kao's power was steadily eroded, and in 1624 he was forced to resign. In the great purge of Tung-lin officials which followed, Hsu Kuang-ch'i was dismissed from office. Li Chih-tsao, who was listed among the Tung-lin officials "who in 1622 pronounced Fang Ts'ung-che punishable on account of his attitude in the so-called Red Pill and Removal cases"⁴⁵ had retired from public service in 1623 and seems for this reason to have escaped punishment.

From the necessarily brief account of events given above, it is possible to conclude

1. That whatever their "official" relationship to the Tung-lin Party, Hsu Kuang-ch'i and Li Chih-tsao were well disposed towards the movement. Shen Ch'ueh, on the other hand, allied himself with the chief symbol of all that the Tung-lin officials opposed.

2. That a feeling of animosity existed between Shen Ch'ueh and Hsu Kuang-ch'i; an animosity, moreover, which, on further investigation, can be shown to have existed for many years. In his first memorial to the throne attacking Christianity, for example, Shen inveighed against the work of calendar reform; a cause promoted by Hsu as early as 1610 following the failure of the imperial astronomers to make a correct prediction of an eclipse. On that occasion Hsu Kuang-ch'i had "persuaded the Board of Rites to petition the emperor to entrust ... the emendation of the Calendar to the Jesuits".⁴⁶ The emperor agreed to do this, and Hsu with Li Chih-tsao helped the Jesuits translate a work on planetary theory into Chinese. By asserting in his memorial that Western astronomy was opposed to the astronomy of the *Shu ching* (Classic of History), Shen indirectly accused Hsu and Li of betraying the Chinese tradition.⁴⁷

Clearly, should anyone wish to make an indirect attack on any Tung-lin supporter who at the same time was a friend of, or convert to, Christianity, the Church would serve as an obvious

44. Hummel (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 453.

45. Busch, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

46. George H. Dunne S.J., *Generation of Giants*, London, 1962, p

47. Shen Ch'ueh's memorials on Christianity, the first of which was composed in 1616, are preserved for us in chuan 1 and 2 of the SCPHC.

target, particularly since its right to exist on Chinese territory was still open to question in the minds of many Chinese.

Hsu Kuang-ch'i, Li Chih-tsao, Yeh Hsiang-kao and many other prominent scholar-officials were all in a vulnerable position when Fang Ts'ung-che became sole member of the Grand Secretariat. An oblique attack by Shen on these supporters and friends of the Tung-lin movement and the Church would serve to indicate to his close friend that he was firmly in Fang's camp, and that if Fang were looking for active supporters of his anti-Tung-lin policies in the Grand Secretariat, he need look no further than Shen. Subsequent events suggest that Shen judged correctly since, as we have seen, he was eventually nominated by Fang for membership of the Secretariat.

The question arises, however, as to whether Buddhist attitudes, and in particular the ripostes of Hsu Kuang-ch'i to Chu-hung's *T'ien shuo*, had any influence on Shen's actions. So far, we have been unable to find evidence of a direct link between Shen Ch'ueh and Chu-hung. There are reasons, nevertheless, why we can suspect Shen of acting out of some concern for the Buddhist faith, and perhaps for Chu-hung himself. The Tung-lin scholars, whilst divided among themselves over the relative merits of the teachings of Chu Hsi (1130-1200) and Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529), were firmly united in their opposition to Buddhism and to those of the Wang school who advocated extreme subjectivism. We can assume, therefore, that Shen, as an enemy of the Tung-lin movement, and like so many Confucians of his day, was a defender of the widespread syncretistic movement which professed to see a harmony between Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. That this assumption is not unwarranted is confirmed by Shen's first memorial in which, after dutifully stating that Confucianism was the orthodox ideology of the state, and noting that heterodoxy was strictly forbidden, he then went on to say: "Since Buddhism and Taoism have been part of the Chinese tradition over so great a period of time, it is as if they run side by side with Confucianism. Shamanism and the Magical Arts, on the other hand, cater for the desire for novelty, and should be severely curtailed so that the common people cannot be led astray".

Although, as we have noted, there does not appear to be any proof of a direct link between Shen Ch'ueh and Chu-hung, it may be regarded as significant that Chu-hung too asserted the compatibility of Buddhism and Confucianism.⁴¹ Hsu Kuang-ch'i's ripostes to Chu-hung's articles on Christianity, probably composed towards the end of 1615 or early in 1616, must

48 See, for example, Chu-hung's "Ju Fo Chiao-fei" in his *Chu-ch'uang erh-pi*.

therefore be regarded as another likely factor in persuading Shen to memorialize the throne against Christianity, and may, if Chu-hung was a friend of his, have been the trigger which caused Shen to act when he did. It is not surprising that Hsu responded to Shen's memorial with a counter memorial of his own in which he not only leapt to the defence of the Jesuit missionaries, but also launched a further attack on Buddhism in language somewhat similar to that found in the ripostes.⁴⁹

To sum up then, we may list Shen Ch'ueh's motives for his attack on Christianity in 1616 as follows:

1. Shen aspired to membership of the Grand Secretariat.
2. He was antagonistic towards Hsu Kuang-ch'i and towards all friends and supporters of the Tung-lin movement.
3. He saw the possibility of discrediting his enemies and promoting his own interests through an oblique attack on Hsu Kuang-ch'i and Tung-lin supporters who were also friends of the Jesuit missionaries.
4. The time was favourable for such an attack since his close friend, Fang Ts'ung-che, was Chief Grand Secretary and sole member of the Grand Secretariat.
5. Hsii had indicated his opposition to Buddhism, which Shen was concerned to defend, and through his ripostes to the *T'ien shuo* he had attacked Chu-hung, who may have been Shen's friend.

That such indeed were Shen's motives seems to be confirmed by Camillo di Costanzo who, in a letter written from Macao on 15th January 1618, and summarized by George Dunne in his book *Generation of Giants*, said that Shen was hostile to the mission because "(1) One of Shen's closest friends, a priest, had published an attack upon Christianity to which Hsu Kuang-ch'i is said to have responded so effectively that the Buddhist died of chagrin . . . (2) Shen had himself been worsted by both Hsu Kuang-ch'i and Yang T'ing-yun in several disputations in Peking on the subject of religion. (3) His resentment, caused by these encounters was deepened by the sponsorship by Hsu and Yang of the proposal to entrust the calendar reform to the Christian missionaries. (4) He had his eye fixed upon the high office of grand secretary, which post he hoped to attain by acquiring, through his exposure of the supposedly subversive character of Christianity, the reputation of a zealous and fearless defender of the state."⁵⁰

49. Fang Hao, "Adaptation by Catholics of Confucian Tenets during the Late Ming and Early Ch'ing Dynasties" in *Bulletin of the College of Arts*, National Taiwan University, XI, August, 1962, p. 156. E.C. Bridgman, "Paul Su's Apology on behalf of the Jesuits", *The Chinese Repository*, XIX (Canton, 1850), pp. 118-126.

50. Dunne, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

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