

IN THE COURSE of the spread of the Buddhist religion from India to China, which had begun quietly during the first century of the Common Era, there came a point at which it began to arouse the opposition of certain members of the gentry who saw it as a threat to China's traditional values. By the end of the fifth century, resistance was especially strong among representatives of China's indigenous religion of Taoism in the Southern Dynasties of Qi (479–502) and Liang (502–557), whose rulers actively supported the foreign faith. Their resistance is the more interesting in view of the traditional Chinese belief, shared by both Confucianists and Taoists, that a Central Harmony, or Unitary Force, called “the Way” (Tao) pervades the entire universe, and that following the Tao is not only natural, but is the only principle by which the universe can run smoothly. Because of this Unitary Force, all apparent differences are treated as “outward manifestations” (*ji* 跡), which, if traced to the Center, will be found to be in harmony with the Tao. This basic characteristic of the Chinese world-view has made it possible for most Chinese to reconcile any variance from their own traditions as merely a superficial aberration. Even the harshest critics of the foreign religion insisted that they had no quarrel with Buddhism's ultimate goal of Enlightenment. What offended them most was the introduction of barbarous customs (*su*), such as monks and nuns deserting their families, and shaving off the hair bestowed on them by their parents, and, yes, squatting on their heels or in chairs instead of sitting respectfully on the ground.

The resulting crossfire of polemic attacks by members of the Taoist and Confucian gentry and defenses by Buddhist apologists, including occasional rejoinders by the original attackers, has filled large sections of two anthologies: the *Collection of [Documents] on the Propagation and Illumination [of the Dharma] (Hongming ji)*, compiled by the monk Sengyou (see selection 42) around 510, and its sequel, the *Expanded Collection [of Documents] etc. (Guang hongming ji)*, by Dao Xuan, a century later (both may be found in vol. 52 of the *Taishō Tripitaka*).

To give some sense at first hand of the issues involved, and the emotional intensity of the disputants, we have selected the greater portion of the “Treatise on Barbarians and Chinese” (Yixia lun) by the Taoist priest (*daoshi*) Gu Huan (d. after 483), included in his official biography in the *History of the Southern Qi (Nan Qi shu*, 54), followed by a rebuttal by the Liu-Song Director of Instruction, Yuan Can (420–477), through his friend, the monk Shi Huitong, and, finally, Gu Huan's rejoinder, all from the aforementioned biography.—RM

Gu Huan's “Treatise on Barbarians and Chinese”

In distinguishing between truth and falsehood it is appropriate to base one's opinion on sacred scriptures (*shengdian*). If one researches the sources of the two traditions (Buddhism and Taoism), indeed one finds that both point to scriptural passages. A Taoist scripture states, “Lao Zi entered the Pass (i.e., the Hindu Kush) and proceeded to the kingdom of Kapilavastu ([Jia-] wei-[luo]-wei). The wife of the king was named Māya (Jingmiao). Lao Zi, taking advantage of her daytime nap, entered into Māya's mouth riding on the essence of the sun (*rijing*). Later, on the eighth day of the fourth month, at midnight, he (Lao Zi/the Buddha) was born by opening up her left

armpit. The moment he dropped to the ground, he walked seven paces. It was at this point that Buddhism came into being.” This passage comes from the *Inner Chapters of the Mysterious Wonder* (*Xuanmiao neipian*).¹

A Buddhist scripture says, “Śākyamuni became the Buddha as many times as there are numberless *kalpas*.” [This passage] comes from the section “The Infinite Life Span” of the *Lotus Sutra* (*Fabua, Wuliangshou*).² [Another passage states,] “He became a National Preceptor, a Master of the Tao, the Ancestor of the Literati.” “[This passage] comes from the *Sutra on the Auspicious Fulfillment of the Crown Prince* ([*Taiṣi*] *ruiyi benqi jing*).”³

My thoughts on this are as follows: During the reigns of the Five Thearchs and Three August Ones,⁴ none of these rulers was without an adviser. Among National Preceptors and Masters of the Tao, none ever surpassed Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. As for the Ancestor of the Literati, who would have surpassed the Duke of Zhou and Confucius? If Confucius and Lao Zi were not the Buddha, then who were they? Thus, what the two traditions say are like the two halves of a tally. Tao is the Buddha; the Buddha is Tao. In their ideal of sageliness (*sheng*) they are identical; only in their outward manifestation (*ji*) are they at odds. One is the “Tempered Light” (*heguang* [of the Tao]), which illuminates what is near; the other is the “Radiant Spirit” (*yaoling*) [of the sun], which reveals what is distant.⁵ The Tao sustains all under heaven; there is no quarter where it does not penetrate. [Buddha]-wisdom pervades all creation; no being is unaffected. But since their entrances have not been the same, their effects are also bound to differ. In each tradition [the adherents] fulfill their own natures (*xing*), and thus do not alter the things they do (*shi*). Ceremonial caps and robes, with tablets of office tucked in their sashes, are the fashion of Chinese [officials]; shaved heads and loose garments are the habit of Barbarian [monks]. Kneeling reverently and bowing from the waist are expressions of respect within the [Chinese] royal domain; crouching like foxes and squatting like dogs are deemed to be dignified postures in the wilds. To be buried in a double coffin is the rule in China; to be incinerated on a funeral pyre or submerged under water is the custom among the western Barbarians. To preserve one’s body whole and observe the proper rituals is the teaching that aims at perpetuating goodness; to disfigure one’s appearance and alter one’s nature is the study that seeks to terminate evil. Since [the latter] link up with strange beings, are they the same as humans? [Thus,] the kings of birds and the lords of beasts are often buddhas.

Through endless generations sages have arisen one after another. Some have expounded the *Five Canons* (*Wudian*); others have propagated the Three Vehicles (Sansheng).⁶ Among birds [the sages] have chirped like birds, and among beasts they have roared like beasts. When instructing the Chinese they have spoken Chinese, when converting Barbarians they have spoken Barbarian, that’s all. Although boats and carriages are equal when it comes to traveling distances, still there are limitations imposed by whether one is traveling by rivers or overland. Buddhism and Taoism are on a level when it comes to “achieving transformation” (*dabua*). However, there are distinctions between Barbarians and Chinese. If one thinks that since the ends are the same, therefore the means are interchangeable, does that mean that carriages may cross rivers or boats may travel overland?

At present [some misguided people] are trying to make the nature of the Chinese conform to the doctrines of the western Barbarians. These two peoples are, on the one hand, not entirely the same, nor, on the other, are they entirely different. [The Barbarians] abandon their wives and children, and have done away with ancestral sacrifices. On the other hand, things to which they are attached and which they desire are promoted by their rituals; it is only the canons of filial piety and reverence that are suppressed by their doctrines. They have rebelled against the rites and violated compliance with them without ever being aware of it. Weak and lost, they have forgotten to

return home. Who among them recognize their past? Furthermore, that which is most honorable in the noumenal world (*li* 理) is the Tao; that which is most contemptible in the phenomenal world (*shi* 事) is custom (*su*). To reject the Chinese (Hua) and imitate the Barbarians (Yi)—where can morality be found in that? Should we follow the Tao? The Tao is definitely in accord with [our tradition]. Should we follow [Barbarian] custom? [Barbarian] custom is greatly at odds [with it].⁷

I have frequently observed “gunwale-notching” (*kexian*) Buddhist monks and “tree-trunk-guarding” (*shouzhū*) Taoist priests⁸ arguing back and forth over which is greater or smaller, taking potshots at each other. Some delineate the Tao, considering it [and vulgar custom] to be two [different things]. Others obfuscate vulgar custom, considering it to be one and the same [with the Tao]. This is dragging together things that are different and considering them the same, and destroying things that are [really] the same and considering them different, with the result that they become the source of conflict and the basis of confusion. Even though [these two traditions] are the same in seeking sagehood (*xunsheng*), their methods [in doing so] are as far apart as left and right. Their beginnings have no starting-point and their final goal no ending-point. Attaining nirvana (*nibuan*) and becoming a transcendent being (*xianbua*) are each distinct techniques. Buddhists call theirs “Correct Truth” (*zhengzhen*); Taoists call theirs “Correct Unity” (*zhengyi*). “Unity” results in “No Death” (*wusi*). “Truth” coincides with “No Rebirth” (*wusheng*). In name they are in opposition; in reality they are in agreement. But the doctrine of “No Rebirth” refers to a postponed future (*she*), while the transformation of “No Death” deals with the immediate present (*qie*). A doctrine of immediacy may be used to encourage humility and gentleness (*qianruo*), whereas a doctrine of a postponed future may be used to discourage bragging and violence (*kuaqiang*).⁹ Buddhism is elaborate and diffuse; Taoism is plain and refined. The refined is not something crude people believe in, nor is diffuseness something refined people are capable of. Buddhist words are flowery and attractive; Taoist words are truthful and forbidding. If it is forbidding, then only the intelligent make progress; if it is attractive, then the unintelligent compete to move forward. Buddhist scriptures are prolix and obvious; Taoist scriptures are terse and obscure.¹⁰ If it is obscure, then the “Subtle Gate” is hard to see; if it is obvious, then the “Correct Path” is easy to follow. These are the distinctions between the two doctrines.

The sage craftsman has no [prejudicial] thoughts (*wuxin*), but square and round each has its [own distinctive] shape. So, just as each tool (whether a square or a compass) has its own special function, doctrines also have different applications. Buddhism is a formula for destroying evil; Taoism is a technique for encouraging goodness. To encourage goodness, naturalness (*ziran*) is paramount; to destroy evil, courage and ferocity (*yongmeng*) are valorized. The outward traces of Buddhism are brilliant and massive, suitable for converting living beings. The outward traces of Taoism, on the other hand, are secret and subtle, beneficial for use in self-development. The superiority or inferiority of one in relation to the other lies, for the most part, in these distinctions.

As for the posture of squatting on their heels (*dunyi*) and talking gibberish (*louluo*), each of these comes out of their customs, which they understand among themselves. It’s like the chirping of insects and twittering of birds. Why would it be worth transmitting or imitating?

Yuan Can’s (420–477) Response to Gu Huan through the Monk Shi Huitong

When the sun halted its beams and the constant stars hid their light—the fulfillment of [the Buddha’s] descent and birth—this event took place before [the time of] Lao Zi, so it would appear that [Lao Zi] did not first enter the Pass before this portent was manifested.¹¹ Furthermore [in

the teachings of] Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi, [the Duke of] Zhou, and Confucius, if there is the possibility of survival [after death], it is like the fading rays of the sun. According to Śākyamuni's bequeathed teachings, an ox-thief who falsely claims to be good will, on the contrary, become a worm [in his next incarnation]. If you examine the original sources [of Taoism and Confucianism], in the end they simply differ from the way our [Buddhist] community practices the Tao, that's all.

[According to] records from the Western Regions (*xiyu*) and statements in the Buddhist sutras, it is customary (*su*) to consider crawling on hands and knees (*xixing*) to be a ceremonious act (*li*). [Buddhists] do not favor squatting on their heels (*dunzuo*) as a respectful posture. And in their religious worship they consider a threefold circumambulation (*sanrao*) to be a sign of respectful humility. They do not esteem squatting haughtily (*ju'ao*) to be dignified. Why would it be only in the land of the Rong Barbarians [that this is done]? Indeed, it also happens here. When Xiang Tong (identity uncertain) paid a visit to the emperor, he approached him crawling on his knees. When the King of Zhao had an audience with the King of Zhou, he circumambulated [the throne] three times before stopping. At present, ever since Buddhism has been in China, those who have accepted it are always peaceful and law-abiding. Their rules of conduct are good in regard both to personal behavior and in relations with others, and those who walk in them are always in compliance. When King Wen founded the Zhou (ca. 1045 B.C.E.), and Taibo (King Wen's father) established Wu (in the Yangtze Delta), they totally transformed the Rong and the Yi, so that they no longer followed their old customs. How can Chinese and Barbarians be [compared to] boats and carriages, whose principles are not mutually interchangeable? As Buddhist doctrines have come down and evolved, some have been followed and some changed. Followers of "pure faith" (*qingxin*, a literal translation of *upāsaka*, or lay believer), have not changed their appearance or clothing. In the case of those "of tranquil mind" (*xixin*, a literal translation of *śramaṇa*, or monk), their clothing and appearance are changed by necessity. The change basically follows the Tao, and does not conform to local custom. The mores (*feng*) of the two religions are naturally divergent; there is no need to complain about any confusion.

Confucius, Lao Zi, and Śākyamuni, as persons, were in some respects the same. In their viewpoints, and in establishing their doctrines, [what each deemed to be] the "Tao" was necessarily different. For Confucius and Lao Zi, governing the world (*zhishi*) was their starting point. For Śākyamuni transcending the world (*chushi*) was his ideal. Since their starting points were divergent, their destinations were also different. The notion of their "matching like two halves of a tally" (*fube*) naturally proceeds from [unsupported] opinion.

Furthermore, "transformation into a transcendent being" (*xianhua*) puts "changing the body" (*bianshen*) in the ascendancy, whereas nirvana (*nihuan*) puts "molding the spirit" (*taoshen*) first. For those who change the body, their white hair may change to black, but they will never be able to become immortal. Those who mold the spirit, causing its dust and delusion daily to diminish, in a profound way will survive forever. When the Taos of Nirvana and of the Lands of Immortality are as diametrically opposed as this, how can you say they are the same?

Gu Huan's Rejoinder

In regard to the creation on the Taoist scriptures, they were written during the Western Zhou (ca. 1045–771 B.C.E.), whereas the coming [to China] of Buddhist scriptures began only during the Eastern Han (25–220 C.E.). The number of years that the Taoist scriptures preceded the Bud-

dhist is thus more than eight hundred, and the reigns during that interval numbered several tens. If you think that, even though the Yellow Emperor and Lao Zi are ancient, it is still excessive [to claim they came] before Śākyamuni, this is [like saying] Lü Shang (who aided in overthrowing the Shang ruler, Zhou Xin) stole Chen Heng's state of Qi,¹² or that Liu Xiu usurped Wang Mang's state of Han.¹³ The classic¹⁴ states, "The Rong Barbarian temper is violent. They capture people and commandeer carts. Furthermore, the Yi Barbarian custom of kneeling upright is different from that of the Chinese. Their left knee sticks up and their right knee splays out, just as though they were 'squatting on their heels.'"

Also, in regard to the Yi Barbarian custom of constantly squatting, the way they do it is different from that of the Chinese, who raise the left [knee] and kneel on the right. The Barbarians always squat on their heels (*dunju*). It was because of this that the Duke of Zhou first outlawed the practice,¹⁵ and Confucius denounced it after him.¹⁶ Furthermore, boats are for crossing streams and carriages for traveling on land. Buddhism (a religion that claims to rescue the deluded) originated among the Rong Barbarians. Doesn't this mean that the customs of the Rong Barbarians are habitually bad? Taoism (a religion that encourages self-development) originated in China. Doesn't this mean that Chinese customs are basically good? Today, now that Chinese customs have changed and become just as bad as those of the Rong and Di Barbarians, the fact that Buddhism has come here to destroy [these evil customs] is only natural. The Tao of the Buddha is indeed valuable, and therefore its commandments and practices are to be honored. But the customs of the Rong Barbarians are truly despicable; therefore their speech and their appearance should be rejected. Today all the Chinese gentlemen and ladies, as well as the common people, have not changed [their natures], but they insist on squatting with exposed heads, wantonly using the manners of the Yi Barbarians. They talk to the shorn-headed crowd, all of them Hu Barbarians. The state has its own long-standing mores; its laws are not to be altered.

Again, if we observe the Fashionable Teaching (*fengliu jiao*),¹⁷ its Tao is bound to be different. Buddhism is not the Tao of the eastern Chinese, nor is Taoism the religion of the western Rong. Fish and birds from different bodies of water never have contact with each other. How is it that we get the two religions, Taoism and Buddhism, dealing with each other in all directions? Today, ever since Buddhism has spread eastward, Taoism has also moved westward. Thus we know that in the world there are the refined (*jing*) and the crude (*cu*), and among all religions there are the elaborate (*wen*) and the plain (*zhi*). Since this is so, then [we may say] Taoism grasps the root (*ben*) in order to control the branches (*mo*), while Buddhism rescues the branches in order to preserve the root.¹⁸ I would like to ask: wherein do the differences lie? Of what do the [respective] goals (*gui*) consist? If we take shearing the head to be the difference, then chain-gang convicts (*xumi*) also have have their heads sheared. If we take setting up images to be the difference, then ordinary shamans (*sunu*) also set up images. These are not the [ultimate] goals. The [ultimate] goal [for both] consists in eternal life (*changzhu*). The symbol of eternal life—wherein does it differ from the Eternal Tao (Changdao)?

[To say that] Gods and Transcendent Beings (*shenxian*) are mortal is a statement of expedience (*quanbian zhi shuo*). "Gods" and "Transcendent Beings" are general terms for the Great Transformation (*dahua*; i.e., stages along the way to union with the Tao). They are not the Ultimate Name (*zhiming*) of the Totally Mysterious (*qiongming*; i.e., the Tao itself). The Ultimate Name is nameless (*wuming*). The ones that have names are the Twenty-seven Stages (*ershiqi pin*); Transcendent Beings (*xian*) become Realized Beings (*zhen*); Realized Beings become Gods (*shen*) or Sages (*sheng*). Each of these [three stages] has nine further gradations of its own (low-low, mid-low, high-low; low-mid, mid-mid, high-mid; low-high, mid-high, high-high). At the pinnacle of these gradations

one enters Empty Silence (*kongji*), which is actionless and nameless. If one ingests [macrobiotic] herbs and polypores (*ruzhi*), one will prolong one's life span ten-thousand-fold or a million-fold. But when the life span is ended, one dies. When the herbs are exhausted, one withers away. These are merely gentlemen who cultivate longevity; they do not belong in the company of Gods and Transcendent Beings.¹⁹

—RM

Notes

1. Although the title of this scripture definitely has a Taoistic ring to it (the term *xuanmiao* was used in the *Daode jing*, and *Neipian* is a section of the *Zhuang Zi*), no such work can be found in the Taoist Canon. Gu Huan seems rather to be loosely misreading a passage from Zhi Qian's (320 C.E.) translation of the life of the historical Buddha, *Taizi ruiying benqi jing*:

[The Bodhisattva] was reborn in the Kingdom of Kapilavastu in Sindh. The name of his father, the king, was Śuddhodana (Baijing), a wise and worthy man. The name of his mother, the queen, was Māya (Miao). . . . When the Bodhisattva first descended [to Earth] he transformed himself into a white elephant, crowned with the essence of the sun. While his mother was taking a daytime nap, he revealed himself to her in a dream, whereupon he entered [her body] through her right side. When she awoke from her dream she realized she was pregnant. . . . On the night of the eighth day of the fourth month, when the bright stars had come out, he transformed himself again and was born through her right side. The moment he dropped to the ground he walked seven paces.

2. Words to this effect may be found in section 16, "The Lifespan of the Tathāgata" (*Rulai shou*), of the *Lotus Sutra* (*Miaofa lianhua jing*): "Since I actually achieved Buddhahood there have been numberless, infinite, hundreds, thousands, myriads, millions of *ayutas* of *kalpas*."

3. This passage does, indeed, come from the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing*: "As for [the Buddha's] transformations, he appears according to the times: sometimes as a Sage Thearch (*shengdi*), sometimes as the Ancestor of the Literati (*rulin zhi zong*), or as a National Preceptor (*guoshi*). Places where he has appeared or been transformed are more than can be recorded."

4. There is no unanimity regarding the identity or dates of the Five Thearchs (*wudi*) and Three August Ones (*sanhuang*), except that they go back to dim antiquity and include such luminaries as Fu Xi, Shen Nong, the Yellow Emperor (Huang Di, trad. r. 2698–2599 B.C.E.), and the Sage Kings, Yao (trad. r. 2357–2258 B.C.E.), Shun (trad. r. 2255–2208 B.C.E.), and Yu (trad. r. 2208–ca. 2195 B.C.E.).

5. See *Daode jing*, 4: "[The Tao] . . . blunts its sharpness, unties its tangles, tempers its light, identifies itself with the [world's] dust." See also the section entitled "Questions to Heaven" (Tianwen) in the *Lyrics of Chu* (*Chuci*): "When dawn has not yet broken in the lunar mansion, Horn (Jue), where has the Radiant Spirit (i.e., the sun) been hiding?"

6. See the *Zuo Commentary* (*Zuozhuan*, twelfth year of Duke Zhao): "Here is a good historiographer; . . . he can read the *Three Mounds* (*Sanfen*), the *Five Canons* (*Wudian*), the *Eight Rules* (*Basuo*), and the *Nine Hills* (*Jiuqiu*) (ancient lost works on government and morals attributed to the above-mentioned Five Thearchs and Three August Ones)." The Three Vehicles (Sansheng) are the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna), so called because it carries all living beings to Enlightenment; the Disciple's Vehicle (Śrāvakayāna), which carries only monks and nuns, and is therefore called the "Lesser Vehicle" by Mahāyānists; and an intermediate category, the Pratyekabuddha-yāna, for those few who attain Buddhahood on their own without assistance from compassionate bodhisattvas. Though the correspondence with the "Five Canons" is not perfect, "Three Vehicles" is a convenient Buddhist numerical category to match one taken from Chinese tradition.

7. The somewhat tortured argument seems to be as follows: The Tao is the True Principle governing the universe. Chinese culture is built on the idea of following the Tao. For Barbarians, at least, human "affairs" (*shi*) are based on mere "custom" (*su*), which, for them, since they do not consciously follow the Tao, tends