

PRINCIPLES OF BUDDHIST ECONOMICS

HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM AS SEEN IN THE HSIANG-FA CHURH-I CHING

Computer filed as HK-Gernet

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FGS supports this Center and its Buddhist studies. I have seen a pie-diagram of FGS expenditure in the area of education and culture—quite remarkable an example of its Buddhism-inspired economics. This paper is a personal thank you by way of showing how that recent philanthropy is as much rooted in an application of principles of Buddhist Economics; it is a curiously modern extension, in that sense, of certain injunctions in Mahayana bodhisattva precepts¹

Jacques Gernet's book (in French published 1956) on Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the 5th to the 10th century, is a classic in modern European Buddhist studies. It is now available in an English translation (1995). A fairly comprehensive study of Chinese medieval Buddhist temple economy, it has one curious lacuna. Even the updated (1995) bibliography does not list Tomomatsu Entai's Japanese study on the "Buddhist principle of equal distribution" which

1. In an October conference here at CUHK, I hope I can attend and present another paper, this time linking this FGS principle, chieh-yuan or tying up karmic connections, with a Sung Pure Land evangelical practice of an ideal. I have written on Buddhist and Christian charity before in the journal Buddhist-Christian Studies but I have to admit that when I start collecting materials on Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in 1986, I had not heard of FGS and did not include it in the survey I made with Michael von Bruck on that theme. This is a good occasion to do some catching up.

looks at Buddhist economics, as it were, more "from inside" as the expression of certain foundational principles. Gernet's book cites the Hsiang-fa chueh-i ching a number of times. [This is the text that I analyzed 20 years ago and said analysis will be appended to this talk.] But Gernet had dated this work (HFCIC) for short to the T'ang dynasty and regarded it as coming out of the Three Stages Sect of Hsin-hsing. As the full appendix will show, I have narrowed down its compilation date to between 517 and 520. The Index to Gernet's book selected out a complaint in the HFCIC against new patrons building new stupas instead of repairing preexistent but crumbling stupas built by another patron. With Tomomatsu's help, we can better unlock the socio-economic changes that lay behind that complaint. Tomomatsu's absence in Gernet's book is doubly ironic because this Soto monk had studied in France, then returned to Japan, published his study in Japanese, and set up a journal titled Buddhist Economics. (He also became as the Radio Priest.) It may be argued that Tomomatsu's focus on the Buddhist "logic of equal division and distribution" (of donated property) seems so idealistic that few historians would follow him in looking for the unfolding of said principle of "equal distributional justice." That would be like writing a Church history while keeping in mind this principle and practice of "communism" (holding property in common) observed by the primitive church. Yet that is precisely what Tomomatsu sought to do. And it is what Gernet did not do. I will show what Tomomatsu "idealism" can help us to uncover what most "realist" historians would slight and thereby overlook. Even how FGS's global Buddhism might fit into that larger picture and project.²

2 Before my Weberian application of Tomomatsu's thesis to analyzing the Sangha economics from the 5th to the 8th century, I need to mention a more recent, stylishly "post-modern" work, Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism, ed. By Donald Lopez (Chicago: 2005). In a chapter reviewing the notion of Dana (donation, charity), the author spent more time on the paradox of Intention—from how an act is good because of the goodness of the intent (Dhammapada I) to how Mahayana somehow emptied conscious intent as there is truly neither giver, giving, nor recipient—than on the hard data on how donations are to be handled equally and fairly by the Sangha community. There is also discussion on Mauss' theory of Gift-Making but no follow-up on

Tomomatsu's Thesis: As he himself admits from the outset, he has a focus different from Weber. Weber focused on the work ethics of the Puritan which has to do with production. Tomomatsu targets instead the equal division and distribution of donated goods.³ Simply put, the principle of "equal distribution" means, in principle, that everyone should share and share alike. As recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, the Christian Church knew the same. The early Church held the donated property in common, but that "primitive communist" did not last. So at first glance, Tomomatsu's focus on this principle and practice of "equal distribution" seems just too idealistic to make good economic sense and too good to last. Even what he dug up about the early practice would surprise most of us. It seems, for example, that in the very early days, the Buddha shared the donations he received, not just with the monks that followed him but also, with any (non-Buddhist) sramana in the vicinity. But then the Us vs. Them mentality (viz. Buddhists vs. non-Buddhists) probably had yet to crystallize. At times, even the later standard of a monk/lay distinction was not so insisted upon. So on occasions, laymen also got their equal share of, say, a donated communal meal. Back then, the rule of an "equal share" could

its higher forms, viz. a shift from the unwritten law governing primitive pot lash (so called "pot-luck") feast to the written law that calculate and tabulate merits physical and spiritual as embodied in tertiary institutions or banks that store such merits. The problem with this trend in Buddhist studies is that while it seeks to (as well it should) deconstruct modern, Eurocentric, conceptual biases, it often stays in the realm of ideas and never gets to the not-so-elusive hard facts. Max Weber is out of fashion, and that is for good reasons. Yet there is this gap between principle and behavior, or ideal and reality, that the deconstructing of conceptual prejudice helps only to perpetuate. I hope to show how that divide can, in an updated Weberian exercise, be overcome.

³ Since the monks who lived off such donated food lived very simply—they consumed very little and were themselves non-productive—the Buddhist ethos would not be going into maximizing the means of production, which is what Weber drives towards to account for the rise of capitalism.

even be taken very literally. For example, a young novice (a boy serving more like a page) who does not need as much food still gets an amount equal to that given to a growing young man or a robust adult monk. The Buddha himself was so even-handed that he supposedly would disdain at getting more food or the better food. Insisting on "share and share alike," the Buddha would even share gifts earmarked specifically for him with others. Today, we generally would assume that it is natural for a Trappist monk to live a very simpler life and the Pope to have more comfortable quarters. So likewise, from Chinese records, we know the famous Kucha monk Kumarajiva had, in Central Asia as at Ch'ang-an, a special allotment of attendants and of food.⁴ Yet we cannot discount the principle of "equal distribution" as an idyllic fiction, left over from the early days, being kept alive wherever it becomes necessary and is feasible: as with the death of a monk, esp. one who had not deeded this possessions to others.⁵ Do the goods go to the "home" monastery or to the "full" (four-cornered) community, and so on. In other words, the monastery still kept up the ideal of "sharing alike" as much as it could. The problem is with the donors. Donors could specify that his gift go specifically a particular person (usually a relative who retired into a monastery) and had to be persuaded to be more even-handed, viz. to offer a general gift to the whole monastery. But as with imperial gifts earmarked for Kumarajiva, the Sangha could not go

⁴ Few would consider that to be a violation of the vinaya. Buddhahadra did later. But it should be noted that the special allotment was willed, not by the Sangha but, by the various kings who so housed Kumarajiva as a resident holy man. And given the arrangements at the time, the Sangha was in no position to so abrogate a royal decree on the ground that the allotment went against the design of monastic vinaya. Buddhahadra who protested did so by eventually leaving for the South. More in imperial and other patronage disruption of monastic self-rule later.

⁵ Gernet and others have looked into this; so I will not rehash the details. Major immovable (un-deeded) properties often go to the monastic community; moveable, divisible, personal goods may be divided among fellow monks; indivisible goods would be auctioned off with the dividend going to the community, and so on. There would be the necessity of defining the recipient community in question:

counter to the king's will. Regal will thus often disrupt the ideal equity of gifts. But even when a layman seeking merits offers a meal to the monks, the "monks" need specifying. Sometimes, it means that only monks "present at said occasion" (visiting that layman's home) would be eligible. Now an pre-announced maigre feast offered by some danapati (donor) might just feed ten monks. If so, ten monks would be dispatched to the donor's home, with the monastery rotating such invitations evenly among its members in time. Monks too sick to go begging for food could count on his brethrens returning and sharing a part of their food with him. Such conscientious adjustments show that the spirit of "equal distribution" was being recognized, respected, and observed as much as it is feasible.⁶

For our Weber-esque enterprise, it is (1) how ideals impact and modify reality accordingly that calls out for attention. More than that, it is (2) when two ideals internal to the Buddhist tradition coming into conflict that we might hope to witness and understand the creative solutions offered. Still more intriguing is (3) when what seems to be sensible ideals somehow in juxtaposition procure an unforeseen action with unintended consequence. The third case, after all, is the charm of Weber's Puritan thesis. The Puritan did not intent to become a Capitalist; he was not greedy after gold. That he works hard and willingly delays earthly gratification is what procures this reinvestment of his earning as capital in his business. That result was unplanned. I will now illustrate the dynamics of those "three case scenarios" with Tomomatsu's principle and incidents in the Buddhist tradition.

The principle of "equal distribution" would, in the first case, induce a social equality within the monastic brotherhood. Seniority by the date of entering the order trumps seniority by age or caste background. A new hierarchy, however, might emerge based on spiritual achievement, such that a monastery would recognize leadership in sila, samadhi, and

⁶ This Buddhist ideal of "distributory justice" explains why most modern SE Asian modern Buddhists favor socialism; FGS is a departure in this regard in endorsing the freedom warranted by the open market of the capitalist system.

prajna, and designate such a trio of masters or bhanakas accordingly. This first social outcome is an example of a direct impact of the egalitarian Ideal on Reality. The secondary outcome comes with the new, spiritual brotherhood generating a new hierarchy that would have the abbot (like the Catholic Pope) residing in a room better furnished than the average monk quarter. Faced with that inequality (an internal conflict), the tradition might offer creative resolutions. The Ch'an abbot chose to live just as simply, ate the same food, and his successor might be a monk who worked in the kitchen or the gardens like any other monk. When the conflict was due an external factor, like Kumarajiva was being treated better by his patron king (his "thatched hut" was just a euphemism), a critic like Buddhahadra would protest by leaving that community and the domain of the patron, Yao Hsing. He found new refuge at Mount Lu under Hui-yuan.⁷

With the second case scenario, two equally Buddhist principles contradict each other. This occurred when the equal yet separate nature of the Three Jewels coming into a conflict. Now there is a doctrine accepted among the sectarian Buddhists (and therefore their vinaya) known as the Separation of the Three Jewels. Instead of the Triune formula in Christianity whereby the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost could be three and yet one, this Buddhist doctrine would keep the three jewels apart, each discrete and distinct. When tied to the issue of equal distribution, an unexpected problem came up. Ideally speaking, the faithful takes refuge in the Three Jewels, so he should always sponsor the trio in tandem and equally so. That is the ideal. Thus although the earliest legend of Han Emperor Ming has him dreaming about this golden man (the Buddha) flying into his palace, the fullest narrative would have the Emperor's envoy into Central Asia bringing back, not just one or two but, all Three Jewels. The envoy supposedly brought back a Buddha image, the Sutra in 42 Sections,

⁷ Unlike the European Church, the Buddhist Sangha posted no single Pope but remained decentralized, so when Tao-sheng was kicked out of the same community later for going against the buddhavacana of the sutra—he said icchantikas had Buddha-nature before the final portions of the Mahaparinirvana sutra arrived—this excommunicated monk was received unblemished at Lu-shan too.

and two foreign monks to the White Horse temple. [Ten monks is the minimum quota for a Sangha but two would have to do here; one would not.] That rule of equal distribution would also apply to their endowments: So when a donor donates certain items to the Three Jewels, the gift must be divided equally among the three. [Not all goods are physically divisible, of course; reasonable adjustments will have to be made.] The Three Stages sect observed this equal distribution. It divided its effort into three equal programs: to refurbish any stupa left unattended and in need of repair, to provide charity and aid to all those in need; and to propagate the teachings of the sect. These three went, one each, to the Buddha, the Sangha, and the Dharma. But what happens if, out of no single person's ill will or machination, these Three Jewels ended up competing for donations to the detriment of the human community?

An Aside: I am working on the Jatakas (hopefully for children's TV cartoons). If we compare the more folkish and earlier Pali Jatakas with the later, more polished Jatakamala from northwestern India later, the Jatakamala kept on reminding us how meritorious it is to donate to the Sangha. That is the refrain in Pali circles: the Sangha is the foremost of merit fields. Meaning: you get more merits donating the same item to the Sangha than, say, to an actually more needy beggar. The justification is based on the spiritual meritocracy alluded to above: the monk, being more pure, can do more good with that donation than a beggar can.⁸ By the time the proclamation that the Sangha is the foremost of merit field was made, the institutionalized distinction between monk and laic, Buddhist and non-Buddhist sramana, elder monk and junior novice, etc. were set. At a maigre feast, the laymen feast the monks; the two do not usually share a common meal. The word "Sangha" then meant proverbially the bhiksu-sangha; it could no more be used to include the laymen. A spiritual two tier (or two class)

⁸ Purity is now becoming an ascribed trait so that even a rule-violating monk is still purer than any layman. Some people credit that justification to a sensible form of Utilitarianism that counterbalance the Kantian ethics seen in Dhammapada I. This way, an act is deemed good because of both the qualitative intent and the quantifiable outcome.]

structure had risen.⁹ The problem is that when the formula about the Sangha being the foremost merit-field was being preached (no doubt, in solicitation of lay support), everybody knows that that is not entirely true. If donation to pure monks garnished the donor more merits, then with the Buddha being purer than the monks, donation to the Buddha (at his stupa) would garnish the donor even more point. Everybody knows this. Even now, a fund drive to build a Buddha temple usually gets more public support than a fund drive to furnish fresh clothing for the monks. With this, a situation would rise wherein the building of Buddha stupas could be draining the available amount of donations away from the Sangha. That could translate into monks going hungry even as bags of rice or millet donated to the Buddha (who does not need to eat as monks do) were rotting away near the stupa. That food source would go to waste and by law, the monks could not touch it. The reason for that? Because the principle of the separation of the Three Jewels states that the property of the Buddha belongs to the Buddha and as such cannot be freely transferred to and used by the (separate) Sangha Jewel. [Not without the Buddha's permission and there is no easy way to get that. The reverse is more flexible: Sangha property can be transferred to the Buddha if the whole Sangha agrees to it.] This is not an imagined situation that I cook up; it was a real dilemma for the Buddhists in the late fifth century. We have a fragment from a monastic code issued by the Wei Emperor that cites from the Mahasanghika Vianaya precisely this rule about having to let the rice rot at the stupa. This dilemma is a repeat of the same that, according to Hirakawa Akira, haunted the sectarian Buddhists back in early Indian Buddhist history. It appears that in order to circumvent the rule about the Separation of the Three Jewels (so that the Sangha could make use of donations that went to the Buddha), one group tried to argue that the Buddha is [countable still as] a member of the Sangha. And another group tried to argue that the Buddha is the "head of the Sangha." All of that sounds like scholastic fine points until it is read in

⁹ All that, in a sense, is to be expected; that is how the routinization of personal charisma often ends up with; and taking refuge in the full set of the Three Jewels required that elevation of the Sangha to some "metaphysical" ideal.

context, viz. as attempts to absorb the Buddha back into the Sangha so that the monks could get their hands on the donations lost to or being wasted at the Buddha stupa. The Wei imperial edict of 493 AD relived that dilemma. It also shows up an economy that was still primarily agrarian and not yet into the kind of prosperous urban commercial enterprise. We will see how the HFCIC witnessed this shift from village to city economy and how it creatively proposed an ingenious solution to this problem in the Economy of Liberation. The following section is a summary of a longer textual study of the HFCIC.

THE HFCIC ANALYZED IN CONTEXT

Northern Wei Buddhism was dominated, not by Kumarajiva who attracted the more “wisdom/gnosis” types in the South but, by Dharmakṣema. Dharmakṣema introduced Bodhisattvic precepts which drew monk and laic closer together than the Hinayana vinaya would; he translated the Golden Light sutra which in being “nation-protecting” brought the two wheels of the Dharma (of King and of Buddha) closer; and he translated the Mahayana Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra which got very different receptions North and South. In the South, this work was seen as offering the surety of everybody having this Buddha-nature. This became a dogma that defines later Sinitic Mahayana. In the North, this gnosis of a universal Buddha-nature was not in the forefront. (The HFCIC is situated as a sutra at the Buddha’s parinirvāna, but it has little use for Buddha-nature.) That universalism, accepting all men as one, came late in the sutra and its seeming optimism rested on the opposite: a world divided as Buddhists faced a very real crisis in NW India. As this once strong Mahayana base suffered under a Hindu revival, it was the imminent decline of the True Dharma that was on the mind of its composer and the North China readers. The presence of evil (in the doomed, un-enlightenable icchantika) was so real that this sutra justified the need for the laymen to take up arms to defend the Dharma. They did in Liang-chou, The sutra also found that killing an icchantika was no sin. [The generous welcoming of the icchantika as one with seeds for future enlightenment came late in the sutra.] North China repeated the experience of Northwest India. There was indeed an anti-Buddhist persecution in 444-446. It was stirred up, in part, by some

Indians (Hindus) informing the Wei prime minister how they had never heard of the historical personage that was the Buddha. We need not rehash that history. Our story here really begins with the post-persecution Buddhist Revival headed by T’an-yao. T’an-yao’s Buddhist “surname” should place him in the Dharmakṣema lineage. In keeping with the principle of (equal) attention on the Three Jewels, T’an-yao revived all three, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. To the glory of the Buddha Jewel, he helped sponsor the Yun-k’ang Buddha caves. This was made possible because since 439 when the Wei took Liang-chou and reunited China, Buddha images finally flowed uninterrupted into the Central Plain.¹⁰ To revitalize the Dharma, the circle around T’an-yao translated (it also compiled/composed) new sutras. One of the latter type is the Ti-wei Po-li ching (Trapusa Bhallika Sutra) which became the means for administering the five lay precepts to peasants who then came together to form these i-i societies.¹¹ I prefer to read the prefix “i” which can mean “charitable or voluntary” as meaning “adopted” like with adopted sons etc. If true, that would mean that these lay peasants became part of the extended household (thus hu-jen) of the Sangha or seng chia as Monk Family. That way, the peasants could coopt seng or monk status as, to quote HFCIC, willing and proud “serfs of the Three Jewels.” That would go with T’an-yao’s third project at equal distribution: to rebuild the Sangha by adopting these “fathers and mothers, sons and daughters” of the i-i societies. This move liberalized the membership of Sangha and return the word Sangha to being the broader community and not just the bhikṣu-sangha. We have later, T’ang, local Tun-huang documents showing signatures of these uneducated commoners who donned monks’ garb and sometimes coopted seng (for monk and sangha) as their “surname.” I take the Tun-huang records to be a later, locally modified, legacy of T’an-yao’s liberalization of the Sangha identity.

¹⁰ The phrase hsiang-fa tung-liu in the Wei-shu Shih-Lao-chih can mean “images and teaching flowed East” or “the semblance Dharma flowed East”; we can do with both readings.

¹¹ . These societies were known for communally sponsoring small Buddha-images now found in Yun-k’ang but the dated ones are from T’ang.

T'an-yao chaired other projects. One of them involved answering the "Indian/brahminical" charge that there never was a Buddha. His group translated the Fu fa-tsang yin-yuan chuan: it explained how the transmission of the Dharma was broken in India when the last continuous patriarch Bhiksu Simha was killed by an evil king. This would serve to explain why there seems to be no (unbroken and authentic) record of the historic Sakyamuni. This patriarchal lineage would later be borrowed by T'ien-t'ai and by Ch'an (Zen) to become part of their (now unbroken or secret) transmission. For our purpose, the importance of this Fu-fa-tsang yin-yuan chuan is that it reinforced the Northern Buddhists' acute sense of living then in the Age of the Semblance Dharma. We see that awareness in the HFCIC, but up to 520, the concern was with the age of the Semblance Dharma. Something happened in 520 that sped up the fear of the coming of the last age, viz. the final Decline and total Absence of the Dharma.

The recruiting of peasants as adopted son and daughters of the monk (seng) family created a spiritual fellowship. It was given a boost, a physical embodiment, when T'an-yao got the Emperor to donate an imperial estate—worked by an enslaved population—to the Sangha. The manorial "serfs" and what they produced (millet) went into the new Sangha-household program. The grain became Sangha-grain, put aside for storage and, ideally speaking, made available to the peasants in case of lean years. Emperor Kao-tsu did siphon some off for funding a yearly retreat for the monks. Monks being of the Sangha jewel, I would not count that as a severe breaking of the rule. With the Sangha in the North being centralized and bureaucratized, the grain did not stay with the home temples but was being channeled upward to the Clerical Bureau at the capital. Prisoners of war and common criminals were, by a parallel proposal, turned into Buddha household members; they provided the labor to move that grain. As service personnel; they did not produce Buddha-grain that by vinaya would go to the Buddha—and therefore be wasted. This innovation by T'an-yao produced expected and unexpected, consequences. The Sangha became wealthy; the number of monks (read: laymen claiming seng status) skyrocketed—which is good. But even as the lower clerics (often the itinerant monks of old) served the people, the higher monk officials (ultimately approved or appointed by the throne) aligned themselves with the ruling class.

Some of these officials lined their own pockets, so much so that openings in their ranks even went to the highest bidder. The ruler sided with these "high priests" who were registered with the state. Set in their official positions, these became the sedentary monastics who could hold or own impure property. But they became such a norm that an imperial edict went out to condemn the "wandering monks" whose itinerancy was actually the norm during early Northern Wei. They were called "unregistered" (and trouble-making) because they had grown in numbers. For working among the people and for the people, they were not always helpful in serving the interest of the changing state. [Some of these led rebellions later: the situation is not that unlike the times of the European Reformation when the Church was itself divided among the high clerics working close to the kings and the lower clerics who worked among the people.]

The HFCIC registered this change that was accompanied by a shift from rural manorial economy to the new urban revival. The revival was basically in one city though, the capital of Loyang. In one telling passage, it maps the sequence of corruption as follows:

- (1) the monastery became wealthy; monks held impure goods;
- (2) youths were made personal servants of these monks;
- (3) people lost respect for the sangha; at the same time,
- (4) laymen and monk competed in building stupas,
- (5) until they overflowed into polluted city alleys, etc.

The sequence tells first of the enrichment of the clerics. Instead of serving the people as property-less itinerant monks would do, these new monastics lived in clover, in seeming comfort, taking now to initiating novices improperly (into young pages that attended to their calls and needs). As the Sangha, human and fallible, lost respect, the Buddha jewel proved the most alluring. This cult of personal devotion to the Buddha or Buddhas went with the increasingly ease in acquiring Buddha images in the second half of the fifth century. Now suddenly, it seems, everybody, monk or lay, was caught up in Buddha devotion.

Stupas were mushrooming all over, especially in cities (meaning Loyang), even in narrow and dirty alleyways

This passage from the HFCIC listing a sequence of abuse also hides and reveals a fatal flaw among the Three Jewels. The Buddha who outshone the Sangha (being purer than the monks) was drawing donations away from the Sangha. We know that Loyang with its showcase Buddha temples was draining the resources of the countryside, and within that, also from the rural Sangha households. There was this notorious case of two high monk officials who pressed so hard for those “donated” Sangha-grains they they caused dozens of deaths among the peasantry. For that, the two were reprimanded in public; but one of them became subsequently the Head of the Sangha. A darling of the state, he was well known for helping with the funding and building of gorgeous temples in Loyang. Buddha-devotion however admirable proved, in this case, detrimental to public welfare. Not that many people complained because everybody, it seems, was caught up with this Buddha-devotion fever. Many beautiful cathedrals were built on the hard labor of the willing and the eager donation of even the economically disadvantaged. This works as long as there was overall economic prosperity and the promise of the “rewards in heaven” was not disputed.

The HFCIC distinguishes itself in generally siding with the countryside. It accused secular officials (easily also secular “monk” officials) who stole the Sangha-grain from the peasant sangha-householders and who freely drove the farm carts, rode the farm animals, and ordered about the serfs of the Three Jewels. The protest held on to a degree of independence of the Sangha from the State but, did so, sadly, at a time when the high clerics and the high officials were in collusion, so much so that some lower clerics would collude with some peasantry in revolts to rise in the horizon. The HFCIC did not witness any such wars of persecutions. It could be safely dated to the heydays of the Loyang temples (peaking around the second decade of the sixth century). We can further narrow its date down because of this baffling reference to stupas being built in dirty alley ways [see above]. It is not entirely clear until it is shown [in the longer essay herein] that that was paraphrased from a 517 memorial to the throne regarding how stupas were found far

all too close to slaughter houses in the Loyang marketplace. The dirty alley refers to the blood (a dire pollution) of slain animals flowing a bit too freely down the streets and alleys in said vicinity of sacred sanctuaries. [By law, the slaughterhouses had to be moved later—not the sanctuaries.] In 520, there was another hua-hu debate between the Buddhists and the Taoists as to who came first, the Buddha or Lao-tzu?. The consequence of that court-sanctioned outcome is that the Buddha’s parinirvana was pushed liberally all the way back to the 10th century BC. The HFCIC used a more conservative dating for its own softer eschatological placement (1,100 years or so post-parinirvana). This 520 event help to clinch the dating of its composition to the three years, between 517 and 520. Japanese scholars had dated it to the second half of the third quarter of the sixth century. Gernet accepted a still later T’ang date, confusing it with the Yogacara Dharma-Mirror Sutra (YCFCC), an early eighth-century rewrite of the HFCIC by the Three Stages sect. The *Fo-shuo shih so-fan-che Yu-chia fa-chien-ching* is a sutra spoken by the Buddha (viz. sacred buddhavacana) on the Yogacara Dharma Mirror that Exposes the Transgressions. A comparison of these two texts will show that the latter knew the kind of commercial activities Gernet highlighted in his study, activities not yet so developed in the short-lived heydays of the Loyang of 500-520. HFCIC still worked with the economy of sangha-grain; YCFCC adjusted itself well to a full, city economy, in response to which it set up a banking and lending system. But we cannot go into the details here.

The HFCIC could not—no Buddhist could—reject Buddha-devotion. But it witnessed the following lay abuse of monks that was possible only with the new setting. A lay patron could build a temple dedicated to the Buddha, intending it into his own private merit cloister, and towards the end, he hired in monks to perform the necessary rites. But, as the HFCIC dramatized it, the patron failed to feed them (i.e. fail to properly upkeep the Venerables). It is a situation unthinkable in the Sangha-households wherein the faith is communal (not personal or patron-centric) and the monk is a natural elder (not a paid performer). Thus would Loyang temple piety reversed their roles. And a stupa/relic/icon-centric piety, which made one-on-one faith in the Buddha more feasible, would fuel this status-seeking competition at building more and more stupas at grander and grander scales—and

refusing to help with the upkeep of any fallen ones started by others because "those were built for others' merits." All the while, the poor and the destitute (in the faceless crowd of the city) were being neglected and ignored in ways not that was not possible in clan-based rural community. How should one correct this inequity that was born, not just out of selfishness but, an unforeseen disparity within the Three Jewels itself? As structural inequity requires structural corrections, so the ingenuity of the HFCIC is that it could address that problem with resources innate to the Buddha-Dharma itself. Simply blaming the neglect at Loyang of the widowed and the orphaned to individual greed is like accusing the Puritans who got wealthy to their worshipping money from the start.

The fact is that this wasteful fever to build stupas was one response to the crisis that was the Age of the Semblance Dharma. Since impure monks corrupted the transmission of the True Dharma, some people turned to and some sutras proposed taking refuge in the higher and purer Buddha. Others called for a retreat into the hills and meditate. Still others called for trusting the Buddha-nature within. But witnessing the inequities of the times, the HFCIC recalled a principle spelled out in the Mahayana bodhisattva precepts found in the Upasaka-Sila Sutra that would correct the ills of the then-current donative piety. There are these two types of merit-fields to donate to, (a) the deserving one based on the merit of the recipient whose merits would rub off on the donor and (b) the needy one based simply on the recipient being poor and requiring dire help or charity. The former goes well with the Three Jewels. The latter best describes the plight of the poor beggar; tending to him first is putting need above desert. Whereas in general, Hinayana would subscribe to an ethics of Purity, thus always regarding the Sangha to be the foremost field of merit, the spirit of Mahayana works to make sure that the bodhisattva works for the deliverance of all, and the truly needy deserves even more his compassion. In that spirit, the HFCIC remade those two merit-fields into (a) the field of reverence and (b) the field of compassion. All Three Jewels deserve reverence, but since the Dharma is Truth eternal and the Buddha has no physical need, it is the human Sangha liberally understood as involving all mankind, especially those in need, that calls out for a show of Compassion. The latter is the worthier cause. The

cure to the ills, the iniquities and inequities of the Semblance Era is, not meditation, not wisdom, but the observation of the Mahayana precepts. Above all, it is about this act of Perpetual Donation. The whole HFCIC teaching was thus put in the mouth of the Bodhisattva Perpetual Donation who so preached at the parinirvana of the Buddha. The donation would then flow (in and out) without ever ending or stopping. And the adjective "without end" later became the namesake of the Inexhaustible Treasure run by the monks of the Three Stages sect. (By then, the early Wei heydays of non-attached, property-less, freely wandering monks being past, the Three Stages monks reside in cities, in a separate lodge detached from the larger resident temple. Unaffiliated with any one temple, these ascetic (self-demanding) monks could then serve best the "catholic" (four-cornered, universal) Sangha. They observed in principle the equal distribution of the donations to the Three Jewels: one-third of their funds and efforts go to restoring Buddha-stupas (doing so for the welfare of all), one-third goes to their social charity works (to the benefit of the great, liberal, Mahasangha), and one-third goes to Dharma activities (fa-shih) spreading the Three Stages teaching. However, should an imbalance occur like having temple projects draining donations from social charity, the Three Stages followed the lead of the HFCIC in curbing such imbalance by "donating continuously" to ensure that the "aid to the widowed and orphaned" was not disprivileged. Since powerful donors (like kings) had once disrupted "equality in distribution" by specifying the recipient of royal favors, one way to avoid his mishap is to teach the donors to "donate universally," that is, with no designated recipient so as to allow the "inner circle" of the sect leaders to allocate the resources where need is most pressing. Shades of that universal policy may be found in FGS. Perhaps this is a good point to reflect on the next heading of a topic.

HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM, THEN AND NOW

(Use a modified form of the announced content of the talk.)

*Appended fuller analysis of the HFCIC to follow
(not yet edited or readied 2/21/2006)*