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Buddhism in a "Secular" Age:
An East Asian View

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Abstract

This paper explores the notion of "secularism" in the premodern East Asian, specifically Chinese, context with a focus on Buddhism. The first question entertained is the notion of premodern Chinese "secularism." Does premodern Confucianism qualify as such? Here one runs into the problem of applying modern concepts with premodern practices, not to mention the Western bias in the definition of categories like "religion" and "secularism." Although the secular orientations of Confucianism are well-known, I maintain that Confucianism maintains stronger religious inclinations than often acknowledged, via its commitment to ritual (*li* 禮), whereby one carries the reverence of religious ceremony into all aspects of life. The Confucian ritual program is based in a belief in a moral order pervading the universe and a world sympathetic to human goodness exhibited through moral behavior. A belief in the notion of "sympathetic resonance" (*ganying* 感應), a belief in a force that infuses the cosmos susceptible to human influence, provides an underlying basis through which each of China's three premodern traditions are contributing partners in maintaining the natural and social order. The Buddhist contributions and amelioration to the Chinese "secular" order are

examined through the specific writings of Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001), the leading Buddhist at the early Song dynasty court. His proposals offer a window of possibility into how Buddhism adapted to the Chinese "secular" milieux, became domesticated, and incorporated into the bureaucratic structure as an essential component of an overarching Chinese tradition. Ultimately, Zanning advocates for a tradition of Buddhist *Ru* 儒 and a program for Buddhist *junzi* 法門君子 as the pinnacle of Buddhist involvement in the Chinese secular context.

Keywords: Secularism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Zanning, *Ru*, Buddhist *Junzi*

Modern notions of Secularism

As typically conceived, modern secularism enshrines notions of the separation of religion from civil and state affairs, and may be expanded to incorporate positions that attempt to erase or diminish the role of religion in the public sphere.[1] Yet "secularism" includes a spectrum of connotations, and in broadest terms encompasses any stance that promotes the secular,[2] defined n such terms as anti-clericalism, atheism, naturalism, non-sectarianism, and a complete removal of religious symbols from public institutions. As a philosophy, secularism is characterized by human understanding derived solely from principles based on observations of phenomena in the material world, without recourse to religious

1) Galen 2016, 22-23.
2) Shook 2017, 10.

explanations.[3]

The modern nation-state, based on Western conceptions of international order typically enshrined in constitutions of Westerns nations and non-Western nations following Western precedents, confines religion to a private sphere, which may be encouraged but is nonetheless circumscribed by public, non-religious laws and regulations. Beyond the West and Westernized notions of secularism, there is what is known as "interventionist secularism," as in India, where the state exercises the power to intervene against religious practices that contravene constitutional principles.[4] In this case, religion is tolerated and may even be encouraged to the extent religious practice abides by principles the state has established.

China is often excluded from discussions about religion and secularism. This is unfortunate given the size and scope of China and its significance in the East Asian context. Another feature of the Chinese experience, one that is of particular interest to me in this paper, is the potentially long and deep experience of Chinese secularism and religion in the premodern context. A form of "secularism" determined by Confucian principles dominated China throughout its long history, until the beginning of the t*wen*tieth century. In addition, as the template of Chinese Confucian culture determined patterns of practice relating to religion and its relationship to the state throughout East Asia, my discussion is broadly informative of general patterns throughout the region during the premodern period. Chinese regional dominance was shaken and broken by events of the nineteenth century, which saw different reactions among East Asian nations to western modernization, and these reactions are evident down to the present day. But the broader premodern patterns of Chinese "secularism" and religion should not be overlooked. Premodern Chinese "secularism" offers, perhaps the most sustained experience of secular/religious interactions in human history, and by that measure alone deserves our attention.

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3) Yaniv 2017, 324.

4) Aysel 2015, 222–241.

Premodern Chinese (Confucian) "secularism"

The first question to be entertained is the notion of premodern Chinese "secularism." Does premodern Confucianism qualify as such? Here one runs into the problem of applying modern concepts with premodern practices, not to mention the Western bias in the definition of categories like "religion" and "secularism." Religion is a notoriously slippery category, and I have elsewhere touched on the subject, its applications to the Chinese context, and its relationship to secularism.[5] "Secularism" is no less elusive, as the spectrum of definitions above indicate, and the concept is made more difficult in attempts to apply it to premodern and non-Western contexts.

The secular orientations of Confucianism are well-known and do not need to be elaborated. Confucius' saying, "Respect ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance" (*Analects* 6:20), is frequently cited in this regard. Coupled with this marginalization of ghosts and spirits, however, was a cardinal commitment to ritual (*li* 禮), whereby one carries the reverence of religious ceremony into all aspects of life. Rituals were a primary means for the living to communicate with and pay respect to spirits, especially ancestors, and thus formed an essential capital in the world of socio-religious praxis.[6] For Confucius and later Confucian thinkers like Xunzi, the inner reverence (*jing* 敬) that the ritual evoked far outweighed the external object of reverence itself. In Confucian theory, the religious aspect of ritual did not necessarily extend to the worshipped object. According to the *Lunyu*, when sacrificing to the spirits, one should comport oneself as if the spirits were present, claiming that if one is not fully present at the sacrifice, it is as if they did not sacrifice at all. (3.12)

In my view, the case for Confucianism as a religion does not rest ultimately in the existence of spirits or deities, but in its belief in a moral order pervading the

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5) Welter 2017. 13-42.; Leerom Medovoi and Elizabeth Bentley 2021. 69-84.; Jason Ānanda Josephson 2012.

6) Kim 2014, 192.

universe.[7] In a world sympathetic to human goodness exhibited through moral behavior, ritual takes on a special meaning, as a means to order human activity in a way that parallels the moral order of the universe. Ritual conduct is more than a simple reflection of the natural order. It is a positive affirmation of the moral nature of the universe whereby proper execution of ritual is a necessary condition for the smooth functioning of the universe and prosperous human welfare.[8]

Xunzi's depiction of a universe governed by moral principles, susceptible to human virtue or lack thereof, resulted in a belief in strict laws governing moral phenomena. These laws were believed to determine proper behavior in human relations in the same way that natural laws determined relations among physical bodies.[9]

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7) See my comments on "Ritual and Civilization: Confucian Pretexts for Buddhist rites" (Welter 2008, 131-137)

8) According to Xunzi:
Through rites Heaven and earth join in harmony, the sun and moon shine, the four seasons proceed in order, the stars and constellations march, the rivers flow and all things flourish. … Through them what is fundamental and what is peripheral are put in proper order; beginning and end are justified; the most elegant forms embody all distinctions; the most penetrating insight explains all things. In the world those who obey the dictates of ritual will achieve order; those who turn against them will suffer disorder. Those who obey them will win safety; those who turn against them will court danger. Those who obey them will be preserved; those who turn against them will be lost. (Watson, trans., *Xunzi*, p. 98, with minor changes). 天地以合, 日月以明, 四時以序, 星辰以行, 江河以流, 萬物以昌, 好惡以節, 喜怒以當, 以為下則順, 以為上則明, 萬變不亂, 貳之則喪也. 禮豈不至矣哉! (*Xunzi* 荀子, *Lilun* 禮論 13-14; https://ctext.org/xunzi/li-lun).

9) According to Xunzi:
Thus, if the plumb line is properly stretched, then there can be no doubt about crooked and straight; if the scales are properly hung, there can be no doubt about heavy and light; if the T square and compass are properly adjusted, there can be no doubt about square and round; and if the gentleman is well versed in ritual, then he cannot be fooled by deceit and artifice. The line is the acme of straightness, the scale is the acme of fairness, the T square and compass are the acme of squareness and roundness, and rites are the highest achievement of the Way of man. Therefore, people who do not follow and find satisfaction with the rites may be called people without direction, but those who follow and find satisfaction in them may be called men of direction. (Watson, trans., p. 99, with minor changes). 故繩墨誠陳矣, 則不可欺以曲直; 衡誠縣矣, 則不可欺以輕重; 規矩誠設矣, 則不可欺以方圓; 君子審於禮, 則不可欺以詐偽. 故繩者, 直之至; 衡者; 平之至; 規矩者, 方圓之至; 禮者, 人道之極也. 然而不法禮, 不足禮, 謂之無方之民; 法禮, 足禮, 謂之有方之.

Premodern Chinese notions of secularism (multi-ideational model)

There is no way to resolve the religious suppositions implicit in Confucian ritual with modern notions of secularism, characterized by human understanding derived solely from principles based on observations of phenomena in the material world, without recourse to religious explanations. Modern science precludes the possibility of a moral order pervading the universe susceptible to human influence. If one accepts Confucianism as a species of secularism, one must do so in recognition of its religious inclinations, namely its faith in a moral order governing the universe. Admittedly, this will exclude it in the minds of many.

Yet, it is precisely the religious inclinations implicit in the Confucian notion of a natural moral order that allowed it to tolerate and acknowledge the benefits that other traditions might bring. On the one hand, the belief in harmony as a virtue that permeated the universe extended to human relations, not just among individuals, but also among traditions as a whole. This is the guiding principle behind the "harmony of the three teachings" (*sanjiao heyi* 三教合一) movements in premodern China, which sought cooperation between Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. In fact, all three traditions accepted the notion of "sympathetic resonance" (*ganying* 感應), a belief in a force that infuses the cosmos susceptible to human influence, differing only in terms of its application.[10] In addition, the argument for the utility of individual traditions is based in part on the

士. (*Lilun* 禮論 15)

10) According to Charles Le Blanc, the roots for the notion of *ganying* 感應 can be traced back to the *Yijing* 易經 (Huai-nan Tzu - *Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought. The Idea of Resonance (*Kan-Ying*). With a Translation and Analysis of Chapter Six* (Charles Le Blanc 1985, 9 and140).; The *Xiaojing* 孝經 has a section named *Ganying* 感應, and it is featured in the *Xunzi* 荀子 as well as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and other early texts. The Buddhist appropriation of the term is discussed in Robert H. Sharf, "Chinese Buddhism and the Cosmology of Sympathetic Resonance," in *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*(Robert H. 2002, 77–133).

contributions that each makes toward preserving and perpetuating the natural moral order governing the universe. Despite differences that may prevail among the three teachings in terms of their doctrines, methods, and aims, the belief in a moral order susceptible to human influence provided an underlying basis for agreement among them. To give but the simplest of indications, while each tradition could be seen to contribute in various ways, Confucianism was charged with maintaining harmony in the social and political order, Daoism with preserving harmony in the cosmos, and Buddhism with subduing the malevolent forces that threatened disruption. Each tradition was charged with key functions in preserving the harmony upon which human well-being depended. Maintaining harmony among the three teachings themselves was likewise deemed an asset in this cause.

The Three Teachings as Implements of the Chinese Emperor

Harmony is a laudable ideal. It projects seamless, frictionless interactions between entities cooperating in unison for an overall aim and purpose. Harmony in the Chinese context is not predicated on equality, a notion at odds with Confucian ideas about hierarchy. And in spite of Confucian avoidance of notions of equality on the grounds that equality generates confusion and unhealthy competition leading to disruption (witness Confucian critiques of Mohism), hierarchical relationships offer no assurance of harmonious social cohesion. The history of the three teachings in premodern China is one of factional infighting between Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, each vying for favored placement in the hierarchical order.

The perspective of Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001), the leading Buddhist monk scholar-official at the court of Song emperor Taizong, is especially insightful in this regard. Factional competition between Buddhism and Daoism is regularly noted in Zanning's compilation on Sangha affairs and administration,

the *Seng shilue* 僧史略 (Topical Compendium of the Buddhist Clergy).[11] The rivalry is sometimes alluded to by Zanning in his presentation of conventions relating to Buddhist practices, but the overall tenor of Zanning's presentation is to minimize rivalries between the three teachings.

> … the Three Teachings are the possessions of a single family, and the [commander of] ten-thousand chariots (i.e., the emperor) is the lord of this family. When [the emperor] sees his family, he mustn't be biased in his affections for them. When his affections are biased, it will produce competition. When competition is produced, it will damage the
> teachings. If this [biased affection] already exists within [the family], [the family] will naturally feel uneasy. And if there is uneasiness, it will, regrettably, damage His Majesty's teachings. If you do not want to damage the teachings, then you must be unbiased. When the Three Teachings are in harmony, the Dharma will obtain long tenure [in the world].[12] 三教是一家之物. 萬乘是一家之君. 視家不宜偏愛. 偏愛則競生. 競生則損教. 已在其內, 自然不安. 及已不安, 則悔損其教. 不欲損教, 則莫若無偏. 三教既和故法得久住也.

Through the Tang dynasty, the superiority of Buddhist teaching over its rivals was readily assumed. Confucianism and Daoism were embraced as complementary teachings, albeit as preparatory lessons leading to advancement to Buddhism (Fig. 1).[13]

(Fig. 1)

11) Welter 2018.
12) Welter 2018, 464.
13) Gregory 1995.

Zanning's vision was not of Buddhist superiority, but of the three teachings as the possessions, or implements (*wu* 物) of the emperor, working in cooperative harmony in support of the imperial mission, referred to as the "grand strategy of the three teachings" (*sanjiao zhi you* 三教之大猷). Zanning's "grand strategy" entailed four propositions entailing the positive role Buddhism plays in affairs of state:

(1) Each of the three teachings–Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism–have a legitimate position in the function of the state.

(2) The emperor, as the undisputed head of the Chinese state and leader of Chinese society, is the authorized supervisor of each of the teachings.

(3) Each of the teachings is useful to the emperor for conducting affairs of state.

(4) It is the duty of the emperor to supervise the activities of the three teachings, and direct them in accordance with the aims of the state.

(Fig. 2)

When each of the teachings operate in support of the imperial mission, it is likened to a tripod-like *ding* 鼎 vessel (Fig. 2) whose three legs supports their vessel as the three teachings support the emperor. If the emperor is biased in his approach to the three teachings, competition ensues that damages the teachings. Without unilateral support from each of the teachings, the vessel of the imperial mission becomes unstable and topples. So long as the emperor exercises his authority in supporting the three teachings in an objective and unbiased way, the three teachings, in turn, provide demonstrable support to the emperor and his

mission. To bolster his enterprise, the emperor is advised to honor the various sages of the Three Teachings and to be respectively attentive toward them. They constitute the emperor's implements in the way the arm moves the hand, or the hand moves the fingers. Sometimes the emperor constricts them and sometimes he allows them to move freely, directing them as tools befitting his larger aims.

Zanning's model for literati is to be conciliatory rather than partisan. Partisanship invites competition and encourages factionalism. Prior emperors suffered, according to Zanning, when swayed by partisan advice or giving free reign to their own ego. When the Qin emperor Shihuangdi burned and buried Confucians and their works, the deed was devised by Li Si 李斯, not the emperor.[14] When śramaṇa were slaughtered in the Later Wei dynasty, it was perpetrated by Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 and Cui Hao 崔浩, not the emperor.[15] When Emperor Wu of the Zhou dynasty suppressed both the teachings of Buddhism and Daoism, it was on account of his pride and being overly impressed with his own brilliance.[16] In a call to duty to his fellow literatus, Zanning suggests that these occurrences were the result of having no men of proper virtue at the courts of the emperors to advise them. When the leaders of the three teachings judiciously counsel the emperor in cooperative harmony rather than partisanship, each of the teachings can be made to prosper and the imperial mission will be enacted smoothly. For Buddhists, Zanning advises they emulate the models of Dao'an 道安 and Huiyuan 慧遠. Dao'an associated with Xi Zuochi 習鑿齒 and held

14) This refers to the famous episode recorded in Shi ji 史記 6, Record of Qin Shihuang 秦始皇本紀, where the emperor implements the Legalist policies of Li Si 李斯.

15) This incident involving Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 and Cui Hao 崔浩 is discussed in the Shilao zhi 釋老志, recorded in Wei shu 魏書 114. Kou Qianzhi, along with prime minister Cui Hao, worked to establish "New Code," a Daoist theology envisioning a renewed and purified society. Under their influence, Emperor Taiwu under*went* Daoist investiture rites, and changed his reign title to Perfect Lord of Great Peace (*taiping zhenjun* 太平真君). A massive persecution aimed at the Buddhist clergy was mounted in 446. Kou died in 448, and Cui was executed in 450, ending Daoist theocratic ambitions Livia Kohn.(Pregadio 2011, 601-602).

16) See Bei shi 北史10. In 567, a former Buddhist priest, Wei Yuansong 衛元嵩, submitted a memorial to Emperor Wu (r. 561-578) of the Northern Zhou Dynasty calling for the "abolishment of Buddhism." Emperor Wu called for the destruction of Buddhist and Daoist images in 574 and again in 577, and had their clergies returned to lay life.

Confucianism in high regard.[17] Huiyuan likewise associated with Liu Xiujing 陸脩靜, and held Daoism in high regard.[18] Zanning advances that even though Buddhists disparage him for being fond of Confucianism and admiring Daoism, he holds the two teachings in high regard, and that Dao'an and Huiyuan are the models to trust in.

Confucian anti-Buddhist agendas

The coexistence of Confucianism and Buddhism has a checkered legacy. Over a millennium ago, Buddhism thrived, even dominated to the extent that it was hardly possible to talk of East Asian culture without Buddhist dimensions. More recent centuries have seen a tendency for Confucianism to assert a hardened view, where tolerance toward Buddhism was maintained, at times, only with difficulty. In spite of attempts to minimize, even exterminate, the Buddhist presence, each purge was met with a subsequent revival and restoration of Buddhism.

Zanning was well aware of how factionalism had affected imperial policy in the past to the detriment of Buddhism. He reminds his readers regularly about competitions between Buddhist monks and Daoist priests for privilege of place and status at imperial courts. He cites imperial policy decisions restricting Buddhist institutions and inhibiting Buddhist activities. He recalls the checkered legacy of imperial decisions in this regard, noting the pattern of suppression and restoration that characterizes past imperial policy (see fig. 3).

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17) Dao'an's 道安 association with Xi Zuochi 習鑿齒 (?-384), noted literatus and historian of the Eastern Jin dynasty and author of the Han/Jin historical text, Han Jin chunqiu 漢晉春秋, is discussed in Dao'an's biography in *Gaoseng juan* 5.

18) Huiyuan's 慧遠 association with Liu Xiujing 陸脩靜 (406-477), a renowned Daoist priest of the Southern Song dynasty and compiler of the Catalogue of Lingbao Texts (comp. 437), contained in the Lingbao Daoist Canon, is noted in Lushan ji 廬山記 1, Xushan bei 叙山北.

Fig. 3: Pattern of Buddhist Suppressions & Restorations in China

- Emperor Wu of Northern Wei 北魏太武帝 (446)
- → Emperor *Wen*cheng 文成帝 restoration (454)
- Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou 北周武帝 (574/7)
- → Emperor *Wen* and Sui revival 隋文帝 (581–618)
- Emperor Wuzong of Tang 唐武宗 (845)
- → Emperor Xuanzong 宣宗 restoration (846)
- Emperor Shizong of Later Zhou 後周世宗 (955)
- → Emperor Taizu and Song 宋太祖 restoration (after 960)

To underscore the point that policies toward Buddhism in China vacillated, at times widely, we can look to the history of major Buddhist suppressions in China. Given the structural difficulties Buddhism presented as potential competition to the imperial role, anti-Buddhist policies in China are not hard to find. History speaks of four major Buddhist suppressions in Chinese history (listed above), in the Northern Wei, Northern Zhou, Tang, and Later Zhou in the Five Dynasties. To underscore the vacillation, each of these suppressions is followed by a revival and restoration of Buddhism, so that the effects of the anti-Buddhist policies are short-lived.

Motivations for Buddhist policies were complex. A pro-Buddhist emperor might, for example, patronize Buddhism purely for political expediency, to appease domestic or further diplomatic interests, as well as for personal feelings of faith and sympathy with Buddhist teaching. An anti-Buddhist emperor, by the same token, may adopt minor policies aimed at curbing Buddhist excesses, or he may mount a full-scale campaign of suppression aiming at exterminating the Buddhist presence in China, as in the cases of the major Buddhist suppressions listed above. At any rate, the imperial relationship with Buddhism in China, given ideological differences stemming from the emperor's theocratic role as Son-of-Heaven (tianzi 天子) and the Mahayana claim for the Buddha as omniscient or savior beings (e.g., Vairocana and Amitābha), was always potentially tempestuous.

The quasi-religious role of the emperor in maintaining harmony between heaven and earth, a kind of axis mundi, was crucial to the Confucian conception of a successful ruler who upholds the Kingly Way (*wangdao* 王道). Venerating the Buddha as an all-knowing master of the universe, provider of blessings, and savior of the people, undermined (or at least competed with) the power and prestige of the emperor as defined in Confucian terms.

The period that most concerned Zanning was the anti-Buddhist suppression of Emperor Shizong in the Later Zhou. Zanning encountered some of the architects of this policy when he joined the court of Song emperor Taizong (r. 976-997). The pattern of earlier suppressions suggests that this was followed by a Buddhist restoration in the Song dynasty. In some respects, this is true, and Buddhism did enjoy a revival in the Song. But in other respects, something had changed, and the situation of Buddhist eminence in Chinese society, enjoyed during the Tang dynasty, was altered. As Confucianism resurfaced in China with a new and more vibrant confidence, it threatened the way Buddhism was regarded in official circles. Anti-Buddhist agendas hardened around positions that came to typify Confucian attitudes. These may be summarized as follows (see fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Confucian anti-Buddhist agendas

- **Cultural**: Buddha as a foreigner who defied Chinese values
- **Political**: Devotion to Buddha contravenes allegiance to the Emperor
- **Economic**: Buddhist clergy burdens society with an additional unproductive class
- **Social**: Buddhism encourages unfilial & unpatriotic behavior, neglects social obligations
- **Moral**: Buddhist devotion to nirvāna is an idle, selfish fantasy that contravenes social obligations and promotes illicit behaviors

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Given these anti-Buddhist attitudes, how could Buddhism forge a legitimate place in Chinese culture and society? With the preeminent position of Buddhist teaching diminished with the fall of the Tang dynasty, how could Buddhism reas-

sert itself in he Confucian "secular," anti-Buddhist world?

Zanning as Buddhist *Ru*

Even though there was strong anti-Buddhist opposition at the Song court, Zanning commanded respect across the political spectrum. This had less to do with his Buddhist affiliation and was more reflective of his wide learning that won the admiration of non-Buddhists. Witness the opening lines of Wang Yucheng's 王禹偁 (954-1001) "Preface to the Collected Writings of Great Master of 'Comprehensive Wisdom' [Zanning], Buddhist Registrar of the Left Precincts [of the Capital]" (左街僧錄通惠大師文集序).

> Disciples of the Buddha refer to Buddhist writings as the internal (i.e., essential or orthodox) canon, and Confucian writings as external (i.e., peripheral or non-orthodox) learning. Many are skilled in poetry; few are skilled in literary culture (*wen*). The Great Master alone is [proficient in] all four of these. 釋子謂佛書為內典, 謂儒書為外學。工詩則眾, 工文則鮮. 並是四者, 其惟大師.

When viewed from the broader perspective of Songxue 宋學 rather than orthodox Confucian Daoxue 道學, the intellectual developments of the Song dynasty look quite different than how Daoxue advocates (and their followers in modern scholarship) view them. From this perspective, Daoxue appears as one current, albeit an eventually influential one, within the larger stream of Song intellectual thought. Yet, the alteration of our understanding of the meaning of Songxue and the role that it played still does not exhaust the intellectual possibilities available in the early Song. Buddhism was a significant component of the Song literati intellectual terrain. How should we account for it?[19] Buddhism is virtually absent from later documentation compiled under Daoxue and Confucian restrictions. Witness, for example the *Song shi* 宋史), dominated by

19) Halperin 2006, 960–1279.

a Daoxue Confucian perspective where Buddhism is hardly mentioned. Peter Bol provided a notable characterization of Confucian oriented activities between the Tang and Song dynasties.[20] What if we added a characterization of Buddhist activities to Bol's analysis of *wen* 文 perspectives on "this culture of ours"?[21]

Following Bol, Confucian proponents of *wen* in the early decades of the Song dynasty can be divided into three groups (see fig. 5). The first two groups were united in their dedication to the "*Wen* of antiquity" (*guwen* 古文), but differed in the exclusivity to which they adhered to it. Liu Kai 柳開 (954-1000) linked the *Wen* revival in the Song directly to the *wen* of antiquity, and positioned himself in a line of sages that extended from Mencius to himself, through Han Yu 韓愈. Han Yu was well-regarded in the early Song by many *wen* proponents, but people like Liu Kai distinguished himself by proclaiming the exclusivity of Han Yu's *guwen* for inculcating true values. According to Liu, the mind and *wen* are united: the mind represents the internal structure of *wen* as external appearance. As a result, the inner mind is master of external manifestations, suggesting a role for *wen* as an instrument for rectifying the mind and attaining sagehood. To affect this, the only proper *wen* models appropriate for Liu Kai are the writings of Confucius, Mencius, Yang Xiong 揚雄, and Han Yu. Other Confucian classics, histories, and the writings of the hundred schools are not open for consideration as true *wen*. In the context of early Song tolerance to different perspectives, a tolerance

precipitated by emperors Taizu and Taizong, Liu Kai's positions branded him as a strident moralist and exclusivist whose intolerance seemed extreme.

A second group included literary figures at the Song court that were dedicated to the *wen* of antiquity but represented more moderate positions, combining a firm moralism with wide literary and cultural interests. In contrast to Liu Kai, Wang Yucheng demonstrated how the moral resolve typical of gu*wen* advocates did not necessarily lead to a wholesale rejection of other types of *wen*. Wang maintained

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20) Bol *1992*.

21) I have written of this previously, beginning with Welter, "A Buddhist Response to the Confucian Revival: Tsan-ning and the Debate Over *Wen* in the Early Sung."(Gregory and Getz 1999, 21-61).; "The Buddhist School of Principle and the Early song Intellectual Terrain,"(Welter 2011, 203-221).

that only writings modeled after the Confucian classics and five constants deserved to be regarded as *wen*, but believed that a broad appreciation of writings that fell outside of the definition of *wen* were not necessarily harmful. Similarly, Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (917-992) was a stern and conservative Confucian by nature, but displayed a wide range of interests, including painting and calligraphy. In spite of their tolerance, literati in this group shared with their staunch *guwen* allies in group one a general antipathy toward Buddhism, seeing the Buddhist clergy as an idle and unproductive class, a burden to the Chinese economy, and as promoting false spiritual claims.

A third group (group 5) comprises secular literati who maintained positions contrary to gu*wen* principles, who openly espoused a new kind of *wen* built around freeing *wen* from artificial constraints. The influential early Song literatus Yang Yi 楊億 (974-1020) was an advocate of *wen* as literary refinement and individual creativity, and against the tide of anti-Buddhist Confuciains, saw Chan literature (*chanwen* 禪文) as a vehicle for true *wen* expression. Yang Yi is known for his editorial directorship of the classic Chan transmission record, the *Jingde Chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Jingde era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp).[22] Yang Yi's ambitions for Chan were actualized in the *Tiansheng Guangdeng lu* 天聖廣燈錄 (Tiansheng era Expanded Lamp Record), compiled by Li Zunxu 李遵勗 (988-1038) expressly to document the achievements of Linji faction monks, propelling Linji Chan literature to the forefront of the early Song *wen* movement. Yang Yi and Li Zunxu also both took up positions as Chan students and assumed the status as enlightened masters in the Chan lineage. Through their compilation of Chan literary records, Yang Yi and Li Zunxu strove to achieve a unique literary identity for the Song, fulfilling the ambitions of Song emperors Zhenzong (r. 997-1022) and Renzong (r. 1022-1063) to distinguish Song's cultural accomplishments. While Taizu and Taizong emulated the Tang dynasty through massive literary projects aimed at enshrining the legacy of the past (i.e., the so-called Four Great Books of the Song),[23] Zhenzong and Renzong sought to establish a new and

22) Welter 2021, 34 and 91–159.

23) *Taiping Yulan* 太平御覽, *Taiping Guangji* 太平廣記, *Wenyuan Yinghua* 文苑英華, and *Cefu Yuan-*

distinctly Song literary identity that incorporated the *yulu* 語錄 style writings of Linji Chan masters.

In addition to the secular *wen* groups that Bol described, there were also Buddhist groups who participated in the debates over the nature of Chinese culture in the early Song dynasty. Among these were Linji faction Chan monks that Yang Yi and his compatriots championed (group 6). The main expositors (in fact, the virtual creators) of Linji Chan in the early Song were Shoushan Xingnian 首山省念 (926-993) and his disciples, memorialized by Li Zunxu in the *Tiansheng Guangdeng lu*. These monks, along with their literati supporters, were responsible for establishing the classic image of Chan memorialized in the "records of sayings" (*yulu* 語錄) literature, especially through what have come to be known as "encounter dialogues" (*jiyuan wenda* 機緣問答).

There were also Buddhist monks who drew on the regular, pre-*yulu* corpus of Buddhist teachings and advocated conventional approach to Buddhist morality. Some of these Buddhist literati even *wen*t so far as to espouse adherence to *guwen* (group 3) though with an important proviso that Buddhism be admitted into China's *Wen* tradition. Sometimes referred to as "Literati (or "Confucian") monks" (*ruseng* 儒僧), the most prominent representative of this group in the early Song was none other than Zanning, but it also included monks like Zhiyuan 智圓 (976-1022). These were monks who established strong reputations among secular literati for their literary abilities, including an acknowledged expertise over Confucian classics. The likes of Zanning and Zhiyuan openly accepted the Confucian premises of Chinese society, even going so far as to teach *guwen* principles to members of the Buddhist clergy.

Another group of conventional Buddhists (group 4) were less inclined toward gu*wen*, preferring a standard approach to Buddhist teaching that precluded the necessity of incorporating Confucian proclivities. While members of this group worked closely with literati supporters, they maintained their integrity as traditional Buddhist masters providing teachings and ritual occasions to

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gui 册府元龜.

followers to enhance their religious cultivation. The Chan master Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904-975) provided a model for the preservation of traditional Buddhist practice in the Song. The programs of Tiantai school monks Xingchang 省常 (959-1020) and Zhili 知禮 (960-1028) aimed at furthering Buddhist piety also owe a debt to Yanshou's approach. This group provided an intrinsically Buddhist response to the debate over *wen* in the early Song dynasty context, suggesting that moral behavior was not merely the purview of gu*wen* Confucians.

Fig. 5 (adapted from Welter, *Yongming Yanshou's Conception of Chan in the Zongjing lu: A Special Transmission within the Scriptures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 211).

Typology of Confucians and Buddhists in the early Song
宋朝早期的道學儒家和文僧的類型

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
Intolerant *Guwen* 不妥協古文	Tolerant *Guwen* 寬容古文	Confucian Monks 儒僧	Doctrinal Buddhists 教理僧	Chan Literati 禪文人	Linji Chan 臨濟禪
(Han Yu)/ 韓愈 Liu Kai/ 柳開	Wang Yucheng/ 王禹偁 Xu Xuan/ 徐鉉	Zanning/ 贊寧 Zhiyuan/ 智圓	Yanshou/ 延壽 Xingchang/ 省常 Zhili/ 智禮	Yang Yi/ 楊億 Li Zunxu/ 李遵勗	(Yixuan)/ 義玄 Xingnian/ 省念

A full accounting of Buddhist-inspired contributions to the *Wen* debate in the early Song dynasty creates a markedly different picture of the intellectual landscape than the one depicted in the Daoxue narrative. Not only are there secular literati, following the model of Yang Yi and Li Zunxu, who avidly promoted Linji Chan Buddhism, there were also Buddhists who abided by *guwen* principles (i.e., Literati or "Confucian" monks 儒僧), not to mention Buddhists who

followed traditional Chinese Mahayana teachings and practices. All advocated for a legitimate place for Buddhism within China's *wen* culture. According to the Japanese scholar Araki Kengo 荒木見語, the influence of these positions lasted far into China's future, in both the Song and Ming dynasties.[24]

Buddhism in a Confucian "Secular" World

How might Buddhism fit in a secularly oriented world precipitated by the Song Neo-Confucian ascendance? This is an issue addressed by Zanning in the *Seng shilüe*. One might even say this is the reason behind its compilation. Here, I consider four ways in which Zanning proposed Buddhist integration: Buddhist inclusion in the Chinese administrative apparatus, Buddhist domestication into Chinese culture and society, Buddhist teachings as a component of Chinese *wen*, and Literati Monks as Buddhist *Junzi*.

Zanning concedes that Buddhism was initially treated as a foreign religion in China, and that the Buddhist clergy was administered through the Bureau of Guests (*Sibin* 司賓) or Court for Dependencies (*honglu si* 鴻臚寺). The Court for Dependencies continued the tradition of the Han era Chamberlain for Dependencies (*da honglu* 大鴻臚). These were government agencies responsible for managing the reception at court of tribute bearing foreign envoys. Buddhism was thus initially treated as a foreign religion in China, and treated accordingly. Eventually, however, it was decreed that Buddhist monks and nuns be attached to the Bureau of National Sacrifices (*cibu* 祠部), the central government agency responsible for imperial and state ceremonials. Buddhism was allowed into the inner sanctums, so to speak, of Chinese culture, and given place of privilege as an integral component in the execution of China's most sacred rituals, the imperial sacrifices and ceremonies of the Chinese state.[25] In this way, Buddhism *went* from

24) Araki 1975 39-66.; I consider the implications for Araki's Song-Ming typology, "The Buddhist School of Principle and the Early song Intellectual Terrain," (Welter 2011, 203-221).

25) *Seng shilüe* 37, "Administrative Jurisdiction of Buddhist Monks and Nuns" 管屬僧尼.(Welter 2018,

periphery to center in the Chinese administrative structure.

For Zanning, the positioning of Buddhism at the center of Chinese state ritual was a natural development stemming from the role that Buddhism had assumed during its long tenure in China. Zanning clearly embraced a "domestication model," suggesting that Buddhism had over the course of time assumed the role of a Chinese, rather than foreign religion within the broader context of Chinese culture and society. In support of his domestication model for Buddhism, Zanning draws on the analogy of evolving preferences for food flavoring and clothing attire in China: spicy pepper, once thought of as foreign and exotic, eventually became produced in China and became an accepted part of the Chinese diet; leather boots, once associated with exotic wear, came to be regarded as standard Chinese attire. Likewise, Buddhism, initially regarded as a foreign religion and administered through bureaucratic institutions charged with managing outsiders, came to be

administered through the Bureau of National Sacrifices and accepted into the inner sanctums charged with executing the central rituals of Chinese culture and society.[26]

Following Zanning's domestication model, he also argued for the inclusion of Buddhism in China's *wen* 文 (literary tradition). What teachings were to be included in China's *wen* tradition was a burning question in the early Song dynasty, as we have seen above. Strict gu*wen* definitions (following Liu Kai) favored a restrictive curriculum of writings by Confucius, Mencius, Yang Xiong, and Han Yu, and even excluded the Confucian classics. Tolerant Confucians like Wang Yucheng proposed a broader range of Confucian inspired works, and even conceded non-Confucian works (though excluded) may have some merit. The evaluation criteria that limit literary inclusion into Chinese *wen* is biased, Zanning contends, restricted by a Confucian moral agenda that posits Confucianism as the only true Chinese tradition. Zanning suggests that the evaluation of a teaching's merits in the Chinese context cannot be decided by

285-293).

26) Welter 2018, 291.

Confucian criteria alone. Non-Confucian teachings should be assessed by other criteria—discerned with the "eye of wisdom" (*zhiyan* 智眼).[27] Although Zanning suggests that this new criterion is free of ideological bias toward any particular religious or intellectual tradition, the eye of wisdom clearly has strong Buddhist connotations.

As a mark of a Buddhist monks ascension into the ranks of officialdom, and a culmination of Buddhist participation in China's literati culture, Zanning proposed a system of five ranks (*wupin* 五品), culminating in the career of what Zanning terms the "Buddhist *Junzi*" (*fǎmén jūnzǐ* 法門君子) (see Fig. 6).[28]

Fig. 6: Five Ranks (*wupin* 五品) of the Buddhist *Junzi* 法門君子

1. "Clergy Appointment" (*sengxuan* 僧選), when one meets the required standards for scripture recitation (*songjing* 誦經) and obtains a passing grade in the administered test;
2. "Buddhist Clothing" (*shihe* 釋褐), when one receives tonsure and dons the Buddhist kasâya robe;
3. "Official Rank" (*guanwei* 官位), when one is granted the formal and formless precepts by official decree ;
4. "Tathâgata Representative" (*rulai shi* 如來使), when one lectures on the teachings of the tripitaka; and
5. "Instructor of the People" (*limin* 理民), when one instructs people at both Buddhist and non-Buddhist assemblies.

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27) Welter 2018, 245. where Zanning asserts. "Isn't it much more appropriate to consider Buddhist writings as authoritative for rites that are beyond [the purview of] Confucians? It surely makes no sense to use Confucian texts to authorize activities that originated with Buddhists. Judged in terms of their own intrinsic criteria, [Buddhist rites] would at once be said to be reasonable (i.e., in accord with principle), but Confucians fail to allow this and instead cite Confucian writings [to deny their validity]"; Welter 2018, 32. "My request is that the measure for these [teachings], be they deep or shallow, be discerned with the eye of wisdom. Then, whether they be domestic or foreign, superior or inferior, will be naturally differentiated."

28) *Seng shilüe* 3.7, "[Ordination] Certificates from the Bureau of National Sacrifice" 祠部牒 (Welter 2018, 294 and 81)

The system of Five Ranks has in obvious parallel to Confucian *Junzi* training and is modeled after it. The ultimate goal of the Buddhist *Junzi*, according to Zanning, was not simply mastery of Buddhist scriptures, to be a "Tathâgata Representative" (*rulai shi* 如來使), but the ability to instruct congregations of both Buddhists and non-Buddhists, as "Instructor of the People" (*limin* 理民). This model for secular interaction that Zanning's Buddhist *Junzi* represents, marks an important category for Song Buddhism and served as a prevailing model throughout East Asian Buddhism. Buddhist *Junzi* are the antithesis of the spiritually focused meditation monk who eschews politics and society. They serve as a model for Buddhist abbots and elite monks who not only did not eschew society, but actively participated in it—as experts in literary and cultural arts (*wen*), as social and politically engaged activists, and experts in secular arts. Zanning, himself, epitomized this model of engagement with literary culture based on Confucian "secular" premises.

Buddhism in a "Secular" Age

The focus on the thought of one particular figure and his seemingly obscure work the *Seng shilüe* may strike many as an odd choice for exploring Buddhism in the "secular" context of China and, by extension, East Asia. I discovered Zanning and the *Seng shilüe* many years ago and his unique approach has continued to intrigue me. Even though his approach to the relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism and his notion of the tripartite harmony of the three teachings may be untypical, I find it a clarifying perspective in addressing secularism in the Chinese context and its relationship with religious inclusion. By pushing the boundaries of Buddhism and the normal array of Buddhist religious activities in secularly oriented directions, Zanning forces the vexing question of Buddhist inclusion in Chinese culture. Many will contend that Zanning's efforts were in vain. His vision of tripartite harmony gave way to official embrace of a unilateral Confucianism, as proponents like Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩 (1007-1072) asserted claims

for the imperial position that depended exclusively on a hallowed Confucian model, rendering Buddhist teaching outside legitimate Chinese culture. Whether regarded as legitimate or not, Buddhism continued as a powerful, often officially unacknowledged component of the Chinese cultural milieux.

Any investigation into Buddhism in a secular age in premodern China must contend with the question of whether Confucianism represents a species of secularism or not. There is no clear answer to this question, as it depends on how secularism is defined. The notion of secularism is imbued with modern, Western overtones that verge toward anti-clericalism, atheism, naturalism, non-sectarianism, and a complete removal of religious symbols from public institutions. In many respects, classical Confucian teaching embraces notions like these, but in my analysis, I contend that the case for Confucianism as a religion does not rest ultimately in the existence of spirits or deities, but in its belief in a moral order pervading the universe, in a world sympathetic to human goodness exhibited through moral behavior. This is exhibited through the central role that ritual plays, as a means to order human activity in a way that parallels the moral order of the universe. Beyond this, ritual reflects more than an affirmation of the natural order,

but is a necessary condition for the smooth functioning of the universe and prosperous human welfare. Many will exclude Confucianism as a species of secularism on this basis, and throughout this study I have referred to it as "secularism" (in quotations) to acknowledge this contention.

Yet, as I acknowledged in my introduction on "modern notions of secularism," beyond the West and Westernized notions of secularism there is what is known as "interventionist secularism," where the state exercises the power to intervene against religious practices that contravene constitutional principles. In this instance, religion is tolerated and may even be encouraged in states based on interventionist secularism to the extent religious practice abides by principles the state has established. This strikes me as the kind of secularism that Zanning participated in, and even in the face of Confucian exclusivism, represents a kind of secularism that premodern states in China actually practiced. It also is

reminiscent of the kind of secularism practiced by the contemporary, officially atheist, Chinese government, which officially recognizes five religious traditions (Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestant Christianity). The government officially tolerates and even encourages their activities so long as they abide by principles established by the state that enhance their mission and goals. The state retains control over what religious activities are sanctioned.

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