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The Concepts of *Paoying* and *Karma*: An Example of Syncretism

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THE CONCEPTS OF PAOYING AND KARMA:
AN EXAMPLE OF SYNCRETISM

by

Alexander S. Levy

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THE CONCEPTS OF PAOYING AND KARMA: AN EXAMPLE OF SYNCRETISM

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Western Michigan University, 1995

This thesis will trace the evolution and modification of the Chinese concept of retribution, or paoying, with the Buddhist concept of karma through three periods of Chinese history: (1) the indigenous phase which comprises the time until Buddhism was introduced to China, (2) the period in which Buddhism was introduced to China and its immediate aftermath, and (3) the post-Buddhist phase in which there was a conscious effort to equate Chinese concepts with non-Chinese concepts, culminating in something that was not singularly Chinese nor wholly Buddhist.

To illustrate the concepts of retribution I will draw upon folk, or popular literature, although philosophical literature, especially for the earlier periods, will be discussed. In the final chapter I will provide a detailed analysis of syncretism, examine factors which may contribute to its formation, and present a developmental theory which may account for phenomenon of syncretism.
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Alexander S. Levy
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CHAPTER I

THE THEORIES OF PAOYING AND KARMA

By the first century C.E., Buddhism had secured a firm foothold within China.¹ This new religion from India would exert tremendous influence upon Chinese philosophy and thought. Nevertheless, Buddhist ideas may not have been so easily accepted if similar corresponding ideas had not existed within Chinese thought. Because there were certain similarity of ideas and concepts displayed by the two cultures, Buddhist ideas were more palatable to the Chinese and this commonality most likely contributed to the ease of its assimilation.

One example of similarity of ideas between the two cultures involves the Buddhist notion of karma and the Chinese concept of paoying. In China the notion of pao, or reciprocity, governed all social relations (Yang 1969, 3). Additionally paoying, or retribution, an extension of the concept of pao, governed the relations between humans and the supernatural. The Buddhist conception of karma, therefore, was viewed as compatible because similar ideas already existed within Chinese thought. Karma, though, was

¹The exact date for Buddhism's entrance into China has been widely debated. The traditional date cited is the first century C.E.; however, Chan (1963, 336) cites a record from the second century B.C.E. in which a Chinese official is receiving Buddhist instruction. Ching (1993) assesses that Buddhism, then, was introduced only some time before the first century C.E., roughly five to six hundred years after the death of Gautama.
more intricate and elaborate than the Chinese concept of *paoying* and sometimes served to supplement similar indigenous Chinese ideas that were hazy and unclear.

**The Concepts of Pao and Paoying**

The concept of *paoying* shares a close connection with *pao*. Yang states that although various meanings have been employed to define *pao*, the center of this area of meanings is "response" or "return" (1969, 3). Reciprocity exerted a strong and continuous influence upon maintaining social relations in China. While reciprocity plays a role in every society, it differs in China due to the long history, the high degree of consciousness of existence, and the wide application and tremendous influence reciprocity has maintained upon social institutions (Yang 1969, 3). The *Li-chi* (Ritual Records), an early Chinese text culled from various texts from the Chou, Ch'in, and Han dynasties and compiled in the early part of the first century (Watson 1962, 140), unequivocally describes the close connection between reciprocity and ritual. The first section of the *Li-chi* contains a summary of the rules of propriety. Its thirty-one paragraphs address such topics as reverence, proper gravity and choice of speech that must accompany propriety, and the indispensability and the progression of propriety and other similar topics. Propriety is depicted as essential and the defining characteristic between man and beast. Chapter twenty-three discusses the development of propriety:

> In the highest antiquity they prized (simply conferring) good; in the time next to this, giving and repaying was the thing attended to. And what the rules of propriety value is that of reciprocity. If I give a gift and nothing comes in return, that is contrary to propriety; if the thing comes to me,
and I give nothing in return, then that is also contrary to propriety (Legge 1966, 27:65).

_Pao_ is expected and seen as an inevitable result in social relations. Since the earliest times, the Chinese have believed that the reciprocity of actions between human beings, and as well between supernatural beings, should be as certain as a cause-and-effect relationship (Yang 1969, 3). Therefore an appropriate and correct response to a given action is not only desired but expected. Many Chinese proverbs attest to an expected response. Some examples are: reciprocity signifies that if one person honors another person a foot, the other person should in return honor him ten feet

你敬我一尺, 我敬你一丈
ni jing wo yi chi, wo jing ni yi zhang

and that reciprocity means giving a horse in return for an ox, and a case of presents received to be acknowledged by a case of presents in return (Smith 1965, 290).

得人一牛, 還人一馬, 一盒子來, 心須一盒子去
de ren yi niu, huan ren yi ma, yi hui zi lai, xin xu yi hui zi qu.

_Paoying_, an extension of the concept of _pao_, is also used to maintain proper social relations between humans and supernatural beings and is essential. In the _Shu-ching_ (Book of Documents), which according to tradition was compiled by Confucius, the following dicta may be gleaned: the way of Heaven² is to bless the good and punish the bad (Legge 1960, 3:186); _the ways of_ God are not invariable; --on the good-doer He sends

²The Chinese term _t'ien_ corresponds to the English word "Heaven" in that it encompasses the ideas of Providence, Nature, and God (Waley 1989, 49). Confucius is very conscious of Heaven which "created the virtue in him." Heaven, then, serves as a moral example for man who can only attain his complete human development through the discipline of moral steadfastness (Thompson 1987, 509).
down all blessings, and on the evil-doer He sends down all miseries (Legge 1960, 3:198; original emphasis); and, that good and evil do not wrongly befall men, because Heaven sends down misery or happiness, according to their conduct (Smith 1965, 46). The I-ching (Book of Changes) further extends the concept of paoying as affecting not only the individual but the family as well, because in traditional China the family was viewed as the smallest social unit. Accordingly, we read, that the family that accumulates goodness will be sure to have an excess of blessings, but one that accumulates evil will be sure to have an excess of disasters (Lynn 1994, 146). A well-known proverb also juxtaposes the relationship between paoying with familial relationships: a family that has produced generals for three (i.e., several) generations will bring disaster to its descendants (Yang 1969, 10). Paoying was not only embraced by the general population but even the literati and the officials themselves ascribed to this notion. Wang Ch'ung, a strategist and politician of the Former Han dynasty, remarked "I have done too much secret plotting. My sons and grandsons will not flourish" (Yang 1969, 298).

The Theory of Karma

With the advent of Buddhism, a similar concept to paoying was introduced known as karma. The theory of karma, in its simplest definition, states that all actions have consequences which will effect the performer of the action in the future. Upon cursory examination this seems similar to the theory of universal causation which states that "every [action] produces pleasure and pain which either (1) lies outside the individual person, in the environment, or (2) extends through and is effect of a set of causal
conditions" (Reichenbach 1990, 1). Although these two ideas share a similarity, both theories acknowledge that actions have consequences, the law of *karma* seems to be more limited in scope and application. *Karma* not only considers bodily actions but takes intention, specifically moral intention, into account. Some differences between causation and karmic theory are that in the theory of *karma*: (a) the results of a given action are concentrated upon the actor to a greater extent, or that individuals are held more responsible for the specific acts that they commit; (b) that intentions play a pivotal role in deciding karmic consequences; and (c) moral considerations are emphasized.

The law of *karma* operates in more restricted scope than causation and exists within a philosophical and religious milieu to a greater degree and, as such, tends to be permeated with a stronger moral outlook which seems not to be as stressed, or differently stressed, in universal causation. In other words the focus of *karma* seems to be more concerned with an individual's salvation while that of causation seems to be a neutral cause-and-effect relationship. Although both theories are concerned with consequences, causation is concerned with general actions whose consequences do not specifically focus upon the actor but the action itself—an extreme case being that even the air that one breathes affects the universe and other living things. *Karma* seems to be concerned less with general concerns and stresses individualistic concerns. As such intention is important for even though the same action might be performed by different actors or even the same action performed at different times by the same actor different karmic results may occur because of different intentions that precipitate these actions.
Every action produces karmic consequences, which can be one of three different types: (1) good, (2) bad, or (3) the absence of karma, sometimes called barren karma. It is the quality, or type of karma which determines whether punishment or reward is merited, or whether the deed will have no karmic consequences. The determining criterion is based upon the intent of the actor. In the Bhagavad-Gita we read that:

> to those who have not yet renounced the ego and its desires, action bears three kinds of fruits--pleasant, unpleasant, and a mixture of both. They will be reaped in due season. But those who have renounced ego and desire will reap no fruit at all, either in this world or the next (Reichenbach 1990, 199).

The attitude toward the invalidation of karma can also be glimpsed in the Anguttara-Nikaya, a Buddhist text which discusses fruitful and barren karma, which states that if specific conditions are present then certain karmic consequences will result. If the motivations that give rise to actions include such negative qualities as covetousness, hatred, and infatuation then the deeds "ripen" and "wherever they ripen, there he experiences the fruition of those deeds" (Warren 1953, 216) but when these negative qualities are absent conditions of hatred, infatuation, and covetousness do not give rise to the action performed then the resulting karma which is accrued is barren:

> When a man's deeds, O priests, are performed without hatred, . . . are performed without infatuation, arise without infatuation, are occasioned without infatuation, originate without infatuation, then, inasmuch infatuation is gone, those deeds are abandoned, uprooted, pulled out of the ground like a palmyra tree, and become non-existent and not liable to spring up again in the future (Warren 1953, 217).

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3It is important to note that the word translated as "barren" does not possess the negative connotations implied in the English word but simply means not present.

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Lastly, *karma* is closely entwined with morality: good actions produce like results and bad actions also produce like results. This also may occur in the law of causation but not necessarily so. The nature of *karma*, therefore, seems to have a more metaphysical outlook than that of causation wherein morality is emphasized and takes precedence over physical actions themselves in determining the consequences for one's deeds.

The Buddhist idea of *karma* is intricately connected with the notion of the transmigration of souls. According to the tenets of Buddhism life is seen as a circle that has no beginning or end; the goal is to break the circle at some point and to cease the cycle of births and rebirths. Five states of existence occur which one can be reborn as: (1) deities, (2) people, (3) animals, (4) hungry ghosts, and (5) denizens of Hell (Chen 1968a, 33). The first two states of existence are seen as meritorious; however, it is important to note that deities are still subject to karmic law and once their good *karma* is depleted they will be reborn in a lower state. Only as a human being can the birth cycle be abrogated and salvation finally attained. *Karma* is the determining factor for the basis of transmigration. If one has generated good *karma* then one's next birth will be auspicious but if negative *karma* predominates then one's rebirth will occur on a lower level. However, theories of *karma* suffer from a major pragmatical flaw: they do not always seem to coincide with historical reality. Sometimes people who perform good deeds suffer while those who commit evil acts prosper. This fact was resolved with the concept of a chain of lives. According to Shih Hui-yuan, a fourth century Buddhist scholar:

There are (pious people) collecting good *karma* and yet disaster accumulates; there are others, cruel and deceitful, who come to fortune. In
these cases *karma* (that should appear) in this life is late and former deeds are still bearing fruit (Liebenthal 1950, 256).

He concludes that people are short-sighted, for *karma* operates not only in the present lifetime but spans to future lives as well. Therefore *karma* is always at work whether the results are immediately perceived or not.

The major objective of Buddhism is to attain salvation which occurs when the continuous cycle of rebirths ceases. In order to break the cycle and to achieve salvation, which is physical non-being, one needs to "extinguish the fires of lust and desire that generate *karma* and [keep] the individual hankering for continued existence" (Chen 1968a, 31). Consequently, the aim is not to generate good *karma*, although that is preferable to generating bad *karma*, but to perform deeds that will generate no karmic consequences. All *karma*, then, is excess baggage which will hinder a person from attaining salvation. In short, good *karma* should still be avoided for it can produce desire that will keep one longing for continued existence and, thereby, prolong the cycle of rebirth.

**Differences Between Paoying and Karma**

According to de Bary the doctrine of retribution resembles the Buddhist doctrine of *karma* in some ways (1960, 302). Both doctrines share a concern for the actions performed by an individual. However, the major difference concerns the underlying concepts that produces both doctrines. The doctrine of *karma* is closely connected with religious concepts of rebirth, transmigration of souls, and reincarnation. As such *karma* comprises an integral segment of a religious system designed for the betterment of the human...
condition. The main thrust of the theory of *karma* is to determine the effects worldly concerns have on salvation and to provide guidelines on how humans may ultimately attain salvation. *Karma*, being salvation-oriented, focusses upon the individual and, as such, all the rewards or punishments serve for the betterment of the individual.

*Paoying* is also concerned with actions and their results and has an intimate connection with morality, but the system that comprises it does not exhibit rebirth or other features exhibited by the Buddhist religion. The prime function of *paoying* serves seems to be the maintenance of social relations and achieving harmony between people. *Karma* seems to be based upon an underlying threat whose punishment seems to be returning again, possibly as a lower lifeform whereas the threat in *paoying* seems to be more immediate punishment in this life to the person performing bad actions or to their family.

The Layout of This Study

With the advent and continued presence of Buddhism that took place during and after the first century, the ideas which constituted *paoying* began to undergo a change. At first, Buddhist symbols were adopted uncritically. Many reasons exist for the phenomenon of wholesale adoption: among them attraction to something different, the problem of accurate translations, or an incomplete understanding of the underlying concepts and bases of ideas. Gradually, after Buddhism had become rooted within China, the idea of retribution again changed which was neither wholly Buddhist nor wholly Chinese.

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4See Chen (1964) 473-476 for examples.
The Chinese concept of retribution therefore evolved over time with the introduction of new ideas and those which previously existed. The focus of this thesis will be to trace the evolution and modification of the Chinese concept of retribution through three periods of Chinese history: (1) the indigenous phase which comprises the time until Buddhism was introduced to China, (2) the period in which Buddhism was introduced to China and its immediate aftermath, and (3) the post-Buddhist phase in which there was a conscious effort to equate Chinese concepts with non-Chinese concepts and coming up with something that was not wholly Chinese or wholly Buddhist. To illustrate the concepts of retribution I will draw upon the realm of folk and popular literature where a vast array of examples of the effects of moral retribution, or paoying, frequently occur because it was a plausible theory to account for apparent injustice. Although in real life it is more likely for the virtuous to suffer while the wicked prosper, this inequality could be balanced, and even skewed, in the realm of literature to portray a moral lesson.

This thesis will be divided into five chapters. Chapter II will examine the Chinese concepts of pao and paoying. To illustrate these concepts I will draw upon philosophical and historical texts. Chapter III will draw upon the stories found with the introduction, and immediate aftermath, of Buddhism. Buddhist concepts, concerning karma and individual salvation will be given. In Chapter IV we can see how karma and paoying became mixed. The advent of religious Taoism contributed to the resurgence of nativistic traditions which became fused with Buddhist ideas. In the final chapter I will present some theories which can account for the mingling of Chinese and Buddhist ideas as well as provide a model which may explain cross-cultural borrowings.
CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL WRITINGS:
THE INDIGENOUS PHASE

The fundamental idea underlying the concept of retribution is that every action produces consequences that affects not only the intended recipient of the action but also, eventually, recoils upon the actor, or doer, of the action. Although retribution engenders both positive and negative effects the portrayal of retribution, at least in the popular literature, seems to have focused upon negative consequences to a far greater extant. This may be because such a portrayal provides a more suspenseful atmosphere and produces heightened anticipations for the reader. However, it would be a mistake to perceive retribution as only negative, for one’s actions can never be always negative. This reciprocal attitude can be observed in the Lun-yu (Analects) of Confucius and the Tao Te Ching (The Classic of the Tao) of Lao-tzu. Attitudes concerning retribution also occur in historical writings. In these writings a new factor of retribution appears, specifically, the avenging ghost which serves as a tool of justice to avenge a wrongful death.

The Lun-yu and the Tao Te Ching

The view that one’s actions engender a corresponding effect in others can be seen in one of the earliest philosophical classics, the Lun-yu, attributed to Confucius. The
prevailing theme encompassing the entire work is that when virtuous behavior is displayed then similar virtuous behavior by those who perceive it will follow. For example, in the twentieth chapter of the second book, Ji Kang Zi, a ruler of Lu, asks Confucius how to induce the common people to be respectful and loyal to their ruler. The Master (i.e., Confucius) responds:

If you oversee them with dignity, they will be respectful. If you are dutiful towards your parents and kind to your children, then they will be loyal. If you promote good and instruct the incompetent, then they will be encouraged (Dawson 1993, 8).

The response that virtuous behavior will generate a like response pervades the whole atmosphere of the Lun-yu. In commenting upon the nature of the government the theme of setting a good example is stressed, "If you desire good, the people will be good" (Dawson 1993, 47) and:

If their superior is fond of ritual, then none of the people will dare not to behave with reverence; if their superior is fond of what is right, then none of the people will dare not to be obedient; if their superior is fond of good faith, then none of the people will dare not to go by the true circumstances (Dawson 1993, 49-50).

The general attitude is that to secure the loyalty and the goodness of the people a ruler should "himself submit to ritual" and when that is accomplished everyone under heaven will respond to his goodness (Waley 1989, 162). The people, a collective whole, are passive and are only active inasmuch as they are responsive to the initiatives set by the rulers. Thus, it is of prime importance for the ruler to be morally upright, for the people will likewise emulate his example. The virtue of filial piety is stressed as important and which causes positive actions to follow. In book one chapter nine it advises one to show
solicitude for parents at the end of their lives and continue this with sacrifices when they are far away, [then] the people's virtue will be restored to fullness (Dawson 1993, 4). Legge also comments that the force of the character which stands for "to return" (guei) is to show that this virtue is naturally proper to the people (Legge 1960, 1:142).

Thus, one's actions are of paramount importance in determining the actions or conditions of others. By the very fact that one's behavior is virtuous, pious, or respectful not only engenders like behavior in others but also ensures it as a natural and inevitable outcome: "If you lead them by means of virtue and keep order among them by means of ritual, they have a conscience and moreover will submit" (Dawson 1993, 6). Echoes of this theme, that good, virtuous behavior will engender positive results can also be seen in the *Tao Te Ching* which describes the perfect individual, the sage, who is the ideal ruler (de Bary 1960, 52). A sage does not call attention to what he does, is not proud and does not dominate over the state; therefore the people who are governed by him are content. In chapter fifty-eight it says "if you govern with a generous hand, then your people will be good people (Kwok, Palmer, and Ramsay 1993, 142). However, it is important to note that virtue (*te*) does not have a moralistic meaning as in the modern English word. For as Waley states although *te* is frequently translated as virtue, this translation is not entirely satisfactory, for *te* can be bad and also good. It is closer in meaning to the Latin word *virtus* corresponding to "essence." Also the fruits of *te* are experienced here and now (Waley 1958, 31). Thus retribution is alluded to in both the *Lun-yu* and the *Tao Te Ching*.\*
Ching in that the fruits of one's actions have a decisive influence upon actions that are performed in the present.

Historiography

Two distinctive characteristics seem to underlie the portrayal of pao so far. The first is that the examples are portrayed in a more positive atmosphere. The situations discussed instruct without depicting instances of negative behavior and punishment which can arise from actions. The second characteristic that can be seen is that pao seems to operate primarily in the physical world where supernatural intervention plays little part in deciding the outcome except very abstractly, where Heaven is pleased. Confucius was a humanist and therefore his writings focus upon the actions of people instead of supernatural beings. Although Confucius mentions "Heaven" and the "Will of Heaven" these concepts are not elaborated.

With the writing of the Ch'un Ch'iu (Spring and Autumn Annals), also attributed to Confucius, the motivations for writing history underwent a change from only being an account of past events and a listing of deeds by great persons (Cohen 1979, 97) to one where ethical and moral considerations become more prominent. Because historiography became so intimately a part of traditional Confucian culture (Beasley and Pulleybank 1961, 2), there arose a strong impulse for history to be instructive to posterity which would serve as a guide for future generations to correctly administer the state or to properly maintain personal relationships. Therefore, the presentation of history tended toward
the didactic and the moralistic. However, Chinese historical writings should not be regarded as simply moralistic propaganda or a collection of half-truths or lies concocted to prove a point, for the historians who compiled these works regarded objectivity as a paramount concern. But the rewards of good and evil could be made evident through cause-and-effect relationships of events within the narrative. Also more overt personal observations which entailed morality were included in the summary or consigned to a preface. For example, through juxtapositions and interconnections within the narrative it could be made clear that a ruler's state which was destroyed was a direct result of his cruelty or that people who gained their position through assassination would suffer a similar fate. However, historical events do not always, and frequently do not, coincide with philosophical theory. Good may not always be rewarded with good, and an evil person may prosper due to position and influence. In fiction, this problem can be solved by the author's conscious intervention to successfully apply the theory of retribution so that a positive outcome occurs; in philosophy this problem can be addressed by stating that retribution is what should happen; but in dealing with factual historical events it is difficult to reconcile the philosophy of retribution with actual events.

In historical writing the concept of the avenging ghost (yuan-hun) was introduced and given credence. Avenging ghosts differed from other ghosts, demons, or spirits, in that they had received express permission from Heaven to carry out their vengeance as an act of justice (Cohen 1979, 99). They had suffered "bad deaths" and as "perturbed spirits" they rectified the wrongs done to them. This belief was accepted by all classes
within Chinese society (Cohen 1979, 99). One of the earliest sources which describes this belief is the *Tso-chuan* (Records of Tso) compiled in the third century B.C.E. When Duke Chaou inquires about the circumstances in which a person can become a ghost, he is told that "when an ordinary man or woman dies a violent death, the soul and spirit are still able to keep hanging about men in the shape of an evil apparition" (Legge 1960, 5:618). This idea is more tersely expressed in the philosophical text of the *Chuang-tzu* which states that "whoever does wrong openly will be seized and punished by men; whoever does it in secret will be seized and punished by ghosts" (Ware 1963, 157). The concept of the dead coming back to confront the living can be seen in many popular Chinese proverbs, such as "the spirits of those who have died wrongfully tangle the legs of the murderer" (Smith 1965, 323):

 冤魂纏腿
 yuan hun chan tui

and "the spirits of those who have died wrongfully will not disperse" (Smith 1965, 322):

 死的屈，冤魂不散
 si de qu, yuan hun bu san

possibly indicating that once a spirit has exacted revenge it may still exert an unhealthy influence upon the mortal world. The theme of the avenging ghost was viewed, albeit skeptically, as a fairly plausible account. However, historians could not make frequent appeals to this belief without risking their readers' disbelief. The motif for the avenging ghost, although rare, occurs with enough frequency suggesting that they are not random fictional episodes "but rather are expressions of a carefully and consciously used motif
expressing both the moral judgment of the historian and the moral ideals of Chinese historiography" (Cohen 1979, 101-102). Cohen (1979) upon examining Chinese dynastic histories from the Shih-chi (Records of the Grand Historian, 86 B.C.E.) through the Hsin T'ang-shu (New History of the T'ang Dynasty, 1060 C.E.) has ascertained at least sixty-four distinct accounts of avenging ghosts. The inclusion of the avenging ghost motif provided continuity between events which, upon cursory glance, would seem to have no relationship with each other. One reason for the lack of continuity between events consisted of broad expanses of time. For example the Shih-chi relates the following story: Lord Huan of the State of Lu and his wife went to visit his sister and her husband in a neighboring state. Previously Lord Huan had sexual relations with his sister and did so again upon his arrival. Her husband found out and remonstrated his wife, who then complained to Huan. Thereupon Huan had his brother-in-law killed. Eight years later while on a hunting expedition Huan came upon a wild boar who stood up like a man and screamed. Huan's retainers all shouted "It's P'eng-sheng (the murdered brother-in-law)" whereupon Huan, in a state of agitation, fell from his carriage and injured his foot. Upon his arrival at the castle, a group of dissatisfied officers attacked him and murdered him. Huan was unable to flee because of his injured foot. An eight year period separates the murder of Hsiang P'eng-sheng and the assassination of Huan. Huan's assassination would appear to have been due to unfortunate circumstances but by knowing the true identity of the boar the reader can see the wounding was intentional and that justice triumphed in the end. The time span separating the two pivotal events is not the longest recorded interval;
however, such lengthy intervals were not common and the majority of the avenging ghost accounts usually range from half-a-year to a year (Cohen 1979, 107). Another example showing how the historian infuses meaning into a situation also comes from the *Shih-chi*. Tou Ying, an honest and competent official who rose to the post of Prime Minister was executed, along with his friend Kuan Fu, by a jealous rival named T’ien Fen through slander and deceitful means. About half a year later T’ien became extremely sick, continuously crying out "I am guilty of the crime." A medium, called in to investigate, discovered that the ghosts of Tou Ying and Kuan Fu were beating him to death. The point of this story is that the historian, Ssu-ma Ch’ien, could have written that T’ien died of sickness and hallucinations but instead he tried to discover the cause of the sickness: thus it is clear that T’ien’s evil deeds resulted in his bitter death.

The *Yuan-hun Chih* (Tales of Vengeful Souls) written in the sixth century C.E., seems to lie outside of the scope of pre-Buddhist literature. Compiled by Yen Chih-t’ui, this work consists entirely of avenging ghost stories. There has been much speculation on Yen’s motive for compiling this work. Because of Yen’s devout Buddhist inclinations and that mention of Buddhist beliefs can be found in some of his other works and in some of the tales¹ some critics have asserted that the *Yuan-hun Chih* is merely an apology for

¹The best-known of Yen’s works is the *Yen-shih Chia-hsun* (Family Instructions for the Yen Clan) in which he gives advice to his children. There is a strong defense of Buddhist values as well as adherence to Confucian ones. Concerning the tales, Cohen (1982) points out that Buddhist motifs are quite rare.
Buddhism. Recent scholarship, though, has cast doubt upon this assertion and suggests that the **Yuan-hun Chih** is not merely Buddhist propaganda. Dien (1968) argues that Yen was a Confucian who lived in a Confucian society, and since Buddhism did not supply a code of behavior for the lay person, he evolved a pattern of life which did not conflict with his Buddhist beliefs. Since the notion of divine or supernatural punishment for murder is also native to Chinese morality (Cohen 1982, viii-ix) the Buddhist rationale involving *karma* would have seemed to Yen to support the ancient tradition of morality rather than to supplant it (Dien 1968, 228) and that:

> to consider the [**Yuan-hun Chih**] merely as Buddhist propaganda is to impose on the thought of Yen’s time clear categories which did not exist in Yen’s mind or his time. It [would] make a distinction between Buddhism and Confucianism which would in effect obscure the position of Yen Chi-t’ui and the other literati of the period who believed that faith in Buddhism was no obstacle to their acceptance of the Confucian tradition (Dien 1968, 228).

Cohen (1982) also agrees that the **Yuan-hun Chih** is an example of a long tradition in which non-Buddhist retribution stories are used. Dien’s study categorizes the theme of retribution present within the stories as: (a) ghostly appearances, (b) physical retribution, (c) indirect retribution, (d) appeals to heaven, (e) written charges, (f) formulaic curses, (g) references to Buddhism, and (h) no obvious cause (1968, 222). In some of these tales the pattern of a formulaic curse appears. The earliest extant source available illustrating

2Teng (1968) declares Yen as an "amateur" Buddhist whose interpretation is superficial and probably influenced by the fact that Buddhism was in fashion at this time.
the formulaic curse can be found in the philosophical text of the *Mo-tzu* written in the fifth century B.C.E.:

King Hsuan of Chou (827-783 B.C.E.) put his minister Tu Po to death though he was innocent. Tu Po remarked: "the king puts me to death while I am innocent. If man loses his consciousness after his death, then all is over. If I shall still retain my consciousness after death I shall let the king know of this in three years." In three years, King Hsuan assembled the feudal lords at P'u T'ien. At noon Tu Po in red garments and headgear appeared riding in a plain chariot drawn by a white horse, holding a red bow and carrying red arrows. He pursued King Hsuan and shot him on his chariot. The arrow pierced his heart and broke his back. . . . Rulers instructed their ministers with it [the incident] and fathers warned their sons with it, saying: "Be careful, be respectful. All who kill the innocent are speedily and severely visited by misfortune and punished by the ghosts and spirits like this" (Mei 1974, 163).

In tales where the formulaic curse motif appears the unjustly convicted person will say "if there is no cognition after death, then that is all, but if there is cognition, then you will suffer for this" or other such similar words. It seems that explicit recognition for one's crime by the actor is necessary in order for punishment to accrue. This idea can also be seen in a proverb which states "Those who are intentionally good, though good, will not be rewarded; those who are unintentionally evil, though evil, will not be punished" (Scarborough 1964, 279):

有心為善雖善不賞, 無心為惡雖惡不罰
you xin wei shan sui shan bu shang, wu xin wei e sui e bu fa.

In the following story in the *Yuan-hun Chih* the formulaic curse, as well as an explicit appeal to heaven, appears. A robbery was committed and the district Commandant arrested an artist, who was innocent, along with the robbers, and charged all of them with the crime. Even though the artist had a sound alibi and that the commandant knew he was
committing a grave injustice, he had the artist executed along with the robbers because it was more politically expedient. Before the artist was to be executed she said:

Although I am a lonely vagabond and seldom cherished good qualities, still I have never before acted wrongly and I have never committed robbery. Commandant Taur already knows all of this but I am still to be unjustly executed. If there are no ghosts after death then all is finished. But if there are ghosts, then I myself will lodge an appeal-for-justice against him (Cohen 1982, 16).

The following month, Taur dreamed of the artist who told him that she had obtained a rightful judgment from heaven; she then jumped into Taur’s mouth and dropped down into his stomach. Taur immediately woke up and fell into convulsions. Four days later, he died. However punishment did not cease with his death but "his family became poor and miserable," his only son died young, and his grandson remained so impoverished that he had to beg by the roadside.

Perhaps one of the most popularly known examples of the formulaic curse can be found in the *Sou-shen Chi* (In Search of the Supernatural), another collection of supernatural tales about avenging ghosts. This story concerns an unjustly murdered filial daughter-in-law. Although the basic plot is in the *Sou-shen Chi* and in earlier antecedents, the story's popularity stems from Kuan Han-ch’ing’s play *Tou O Yuan* (Injustice to Tou O) written in the thirteenth century, although by this time the original storyline had been changed to display the secularized Buddhist belief of retribution (Cheung 1978, 265). The basis for the story, which first appeared in the *Han-shu* (History of the Han) and later in an expanded version in the *Sou-shen Chi* recounts the story of Chou Ch’ing who devoted herself to caring for her mother-in-law. One day the old lady said "Your
dedication in caring for me has made your own life miserable. I am old and do not cherish 
what years remain to me. You have been fettered to me for too many of your youthful 
years" whereupon she hanged herself. The daughter of the old woman then went to the 
authorities accusing Chou of murdering her mother. Despite the warden's plea that Chou 
was filial and devoted to her mother-in-law the magistrate had her tortured until she 
"confessed." When she was about to be executed, she pointed to some flags above her 
and said "If I am guilty I die willingly and my blood will flow into the ground. If I die 
unjustly, let my blood flow upward." No sooner had the axe fallen than her blood 
streamed up the pole to the highest pennant. Subsequently, for three years afterward, the 
prefecture experienced continual drought until a new magistrate, recognizing that an 
injustice had occurred, performed sacrifices on the grave of Chou Ch’ing (Dewoskin 
1977a, 111-112). Another story illustrating the formulaic curse comes from the Yuan-hun 
Chih. A merchant named Hung obtained some rare timber to build a monastery for the 
emperor. However, a local official who was envious and wanted to ingratiate himself 
with the court heaped false accusations on Hung, who was subsequently executed. 
Before he died, Hung swore that if he retained consciousness after death, he would take 
revenge. A month later Meng, the envious official who had Hung sentenced to death, saw 
Hung approaching him. Meng admitted guilt, begged forgiveness and finally vomited 
blood and died. The jailers and clerks who took part in the case also died within the year 
and the monastery was completely destroyed by fire from the sky (Yang and Yang 1974, 
126-127).
In this chapter we have seen some of the defining characteristics of the concept of retribution as viewed in pre-Buddhist times. We have seen that in the philosophical texts, a more positive approach to retribution was maintained. That is punishment for doing wrong is not given except by inference while maintaining personal virtue and uprightness is touted as ensuring that harmony and goodness will follow from those who perceive it.

However, in the historical annals and some philosophical works, consequences for doing evil deeds are more specifically illustrated in a negative fashion. The theme of the avenging ghost who returns because it had suffered injustice on earth is stressed. The belief in the avenging ghost served many purposes. It helped to reaffirm the Chinese belief in justice, especially when the elaborate judicial system failed. It served as a convenient and convincing explanation for inexplicable illnesses, such as stroke, heart attack, tuberculosis, stomach cancer, internal hemorrhaging and other such ailments. Most importantly, the element of an avenging ghost provided a coherent and rational explanation to otherwise disjointed events. The ghost is the causal link which provides the retributive justice of a villain’s fate (Cohen 1982, xii). The inclusion of an avenging ghost, therefore cannot be dismissed by simply assigning it to the fanciful and eccentric whim of an overzealous historian ardently trying to establish a moralistic dynamic where one did not exist. Indeed the historian was bound to be truthful or else would be dismissed as prejudiced or dogmatic. Therefore the historian was constrained by the ideas.
that were in circulation at the time. One of the widely-held beliefs involved the intervention of Heaven in response to great national misdeeds and that the ghosts of the dead intervened in individual affairs in retribution for crimes specifically committed against them (Cohen 1979, 107).

Another aspect that can be seen is that the punishment and retribution is not solely limited to the individual of the crime. Since in ancient Chinese thought a man lived on through his children, their suffering, was by extension, his suffering as well, and:

There was no greater punishment than the termination of one’s family line, for then the sacrifices by the living to the departed ancestors would be brought to an end, leaving the souls of the departed uncared for and forgotten (Cohen 1982, xiii).

As seen in some of the stories even the grandsons and prefectures are held accountable. Salvation is not present, while maintaining social harmony is. Even though heaven does appear, as well as a "Divine Theocrat" which hears the case of people who suffered injustice and who imparts authority to redress wrongs, these divine concepts, when mentioned, are still abstract and the focus seems to be more on the circumstances entailing the retribution and the actual method of retribution itself.
CHAPTER III

THE CHINESE BUDDHIST MIRACLE TALE: 
THE MING-PAO CHI

The traditional date given for the introduction of Buddhism into China is the first century C.E. and it is not until the year 65 that the first mention of Buddhism can be found in the historical literature of China (Zurcher 1959, 1:26) although, undoubtedly, Buddhism had been known in China for some time before. The introduction of Buddhism brought many changes to Chinese concepts and ideas. Notably, the concepts of the afterlife and how retribution and paoying operated underwent a transformation.

Between 653-655 C.E. T'ang Lin, a high official of the empire, collected and wrote some fifty-seven tales depicting Buddhist retribution. Known as the Ming-pao Chi (Records of Miraculous Retribution) these stories illustrated the genre of the Chinese Buddhist miracle tale. Some of the major characteristics exhibited by Buddhist miracle tales are: (a) they are extremely didactic in nature; (b) they place heavy, as well as differing, emphasis upon piety and devotion; and (c) that the performance of pious acts will accrue merit. These tales also vividly portray popular Buddhist practices and evince an elaborate Buddhist cosmology. The earliest known collection devoted solely to the Buddhist miracle tale appeared sometime before 399 C.E. Gjertson (1981, 288) assigns two major influences which gave rise to the Chinese Buddhist miracle tale: the indigenous Chinese tale writing that existed, and Buddhism itself.

25
Influences

With the fall of the Han dynasty (220 C.E.), China remained chaotic for the three and a half century interregnum that followed (Dewoskin 1977b, 21). Many radical social and cultural changes appeared as a result during this period of political instability. The literary sphere also did not go untouched. A gradual demystification of writing occurred, changing its formerly reserved status for sacred matters, exemplified by the Shang oracle bones, to one for pedestrian use. Writing, previously justified as being for the public good, was becoming more flexible and seen as a private act, as literature, and as art. With the chih-kuei stories, as this new writing was labeled, prose evolved to new forms and new subjects were tackled which included descriptions of extraordinary people and events, legends, and practical jokes. Strange inhabitants from other countries were described and cautionary tales warning of disastrous consequences appeared. The chih-kuei story was not only a phenomenon reserved to the lower and the uneducated class but:

intellectuals turned increasingly to a more speculative and escapist ways of thought, and this was accompanied by an increasing interest in the supernatural and in man's relationship with the unseen world (Gjertson 1981, 288).

The structure of the chih-kuei tale differed from the traditional Chinese writing which preceded it. The story, presented with straightforward narrative simplicity, was uncharacteristic of the more elaborate classical writings which featured rigid grammatical structures, utilized classical and literary allusions, and were highly embellished. Although the chih-kuei tale was not written in colloquial language the elaborate grammatical styles
and structures, common in the literary style, were not always adhered to (Gjertson 1981, 299).

The second primary influence which characterized the Chinese Buddhist miracle tale was drawn from the Buddhist religion itself. Technical and specialized Buddhist terms, an elaborate cosmology, and a heavy didactic style of writing permeated these new Chinese writings. Didactic styles already present in the Indian *avadana* tale were adopted. The *avadana* tale narrates an incident occurring during the Buddha's life and then explained by the Buddha as the result of some heroic act (*avadana*) done in a previous existence (Thomas 1951, 280).

**Characteristics**

Chinese Buddhist miracle tales can be divided into three general types: (1) accounts of divine intervention in times of need, (2) illustrations of Buddhist piety, and (3) miracles and prodigies associated with one who has demonstrated a high degree of spiritual attainment (Gjertson 1989, 39). The feature which seems to be the defining characteristic in the Chinese Buddhist miracle tale is its emphasis upon the attainment of salvation.\(^1\) Acts of Buddhist piety could allay previous bad acts. Central to popular Mahayana doctrine, and very appealing to the Chinese during the period of widespread

\(^1\)The way of salvation, or soteriology, is not unique to Buddhism, but can be found in many religions and doctrines which stress that a defective condition in humanity is normally prevalent; see Smart (1987). Ching (1993, 12) even views the quest for sageliness present within Confucianism as "soteriological."
warfare and social upheaval, was the idea that salvation could be obtained through worship and invocation (Gjertson 1981, 291). Simply the pious recital of the name of the Buddha or a bodhisattva could be sufficient to ward off disaster. The following story, summarized below, originally appeared in the Kuang-shih-yin Ying-yen Chih (Records of Miracles concerning Avalokitesvara), the earliest surviving collection of Chinese Buddhist miracle tales, and which illustrates the efficacy in making a direct appeal to the divine:

Chu Chang-shu moved to Loyang during the Chin dynasty. He was a devout Buddhist and was especially fond of reciting the Avalokitesvara Sutra. A fire started at his neighbor's house directly behind him and Chu's house was directly downwind. The fire was very near and there was no time to remove his belongings. According to the Avalokitesvara Sutra, when one is endangered by fire one should invoke the bodhisattva with all one's heart. Subsequently, he ordered his servants to cease moving things and recite the sutra with all their hearts. The fire destroyed his neighbor's house but when it reached Chu's house the wind suddenly changed direction. Everyone considered it to be a miracle. However there were four evil and dangerous youths who simply did not believe and called it a coincidence. On a dry and windy evening, they tossed burning torches on Chu's house saying if he can put out the fire then we will believe. After their torches went out three times, they ran away frightened. The following morning they confessed to Chu who replied "I myself have no miraculous powers, therefore I recited the sutra and invoked Avalokitesvara. His miraculous power came to my aid. You fellows should merely cleanse your hearts and learn to believe." Everyone considered with reverence the strange incident that happened there (Gjertson 1981, 297).²

In the Ming-pao Chi another invocation for divine intervention can be seen in the story titled "The Nun from Ho-Tung":

²Unless otherwise noted, all stories have been edited by the author of this thesis.
In the city of Ho-tung there was a nun who often recited the *Lotus Sutra*. She engaged a copyist and, giving him several times the normal payment and specially providing him with a clean room, asked him to make a copy of the sutra. When the copying of the seven rolls of the sutra was completed after eight years, the nun honored it with great respect and accorded it with the utmost reverence. When Fa-tuan (a neighboring monk) and others opened the sutra to read it, all they saw was yellow paper with no writing at all. Crying tears of grief, the nun accepted the sutra, washed the case with perfumed water, and, after bathing, held the sutra up reverently before her and worshiped while walking round and round an image of the Buddha. She continued her worship for seven days and seven nights without stopping to rest, and when she finally opened the sutra to look, the writing was as it had been originally (Gjertson 1989, 162-63).

Another story, also taken from the *Ming-pao Chi*, attests to the efficacy of invoking the divine:

Lu Wen-li was returning home when he became seriously ill. His belly swelled up like a stone and he could neither eat or drink. Doctors and medicines had no effect and Wen-li thought he would surely die. Without hope for living, he invoked the help of Avalokitesvara who appeared and said "Because you have single-mindedly invoked me, I have come to save you. I will now rid you of the disease in your bowels." Wen-li was cured (Gjertson 1989, 195).

In the *Hsi-yu Chi* (Journey to the West), a novel of the Ming Dynasty, divine intervention, especially by Kuan-yin\(^\text{3}\), makes the completion of the journey to India in order to obtain the sutras possible. When the Monkey-king wants to rebel, Kuan-Yin gives Tripitaka the means to properly control the Monkey-king. Many of the tales found in the *Ming-pao Chi* focus on illustrating the effectiveness of Buddhist acts of piety and retribution is made

\(^3\)The Chinese name for the Indian deity Avalokitesvara.
appropriate to the action. The following story is taken from the *Hsuan-yen Chi* (Records of Revealed Miracles):

The ruler of Wu, Sun Hao, was by nature cruel and brutal, and when doing things he had no regard for other peoples feelings. One day, while overseeing repairs to his garden, a large gilt statue with a dignified appearance was unearthed. Hao had it set up in his privy, where it served to hold the toilet scraper. On the eighth day of the fourth month[^4] he pissed on the statue’s head saying "Today’s the eighth, so here’s your birthday baptism!" Sometime later, his scrotum became very large and painful. From nightfall to daybreak the pain was so severe that he begged to die. Doctors, medicines, and prayers at the Imperial Ancestral Temple proved useless. One of the emperor’s concubines, who believed in the Buddha, beseeched the emperor to remove the statue from the privy and to worship it. When the emperor did, even washing the statue’s head with his own hands, the pain and swelling subsided (Gjertson 1981, 297).

Another act of Buddhist piety that appears in the Buddhist miracle tale is the sponsorship of a vegetarian feast for the monastic community. By doing this merit could be accrued. However, in the *Ming-pao Chi* the sponsorship of vegetarian feasts produces more tangible results in the present world. In "A Man from Chi-chou" a man lead a campaign against a group of invaders. He was captured in battle and his parents assumed he was dead and so they sponsored a vegetarian feast for several hundred monks and laymen in order to accrue merit for their son. Just as they were sitting down to eat, a knocking was heard at the door. A monk was begging for some gruel to be wrapped in a handkerchief to take with him and for some shoes. Soon afterwards there came another knock at the door. When the door was opened the parents were astonished to see their son, with the handkerchief and the shoes they had given to the monk (Gjertson 1989, 167-169). In

[^4]: The traditional date of the Buddha’s birthday.
another story, "A Man from Yeh-hsia" a man was trapped in a collapsed mineshaft. His father, who was very poor, hearing that his son was dead, went to the monastery to ask if a monk would eat a bowl of coarse rice as a "vegetarian feast." Finally a monk did and then muttered a prayer for the dead. On the same day, a monk appeared to the man trapped in a cave and gave him a bowl of rice. More than a decade later, when the cave was unearthed the man was discovered in the cave, still alive (Gjertson 1989, 167). As in all food-offerings, the food is not only used to nourish the monks who eat it, but "reappears" and sustains those for whom the act of sponsoring a vegetarian feast was performed.

Another example of a pious act reflected in the Ming-pao Chi is that the copying, reciting, or even a close proximity to a Buddhist sutra can obtain for the person blessings in the present and future lives. The following three examples are all taken from the Ming-pao Chi:

During the Wu-te period (618-626 C.E.) Su Ch’ang was made prefect of Pa-chou. Ch’ang took his family with him to take up his position, and when they were crossing the river a wind came up in midstream and sank the boat. More than sixty men and women sank at once into the river and drowned. But there was one concubine who often read the Lotus Sutra and as the boat was sinking into the water she clasped the sutra case to her head and swore they would sink together. The concubine was the only one who did not drown—she went along the waves and after some time reached the bank. When she emerged, she opened the case and found that the sutra was not even wet (Gjertson 1989, 208),

Tung, a devout Buddhist, had been implicated in a criminal affair, and was thrown into prison where he was securely shackled. Tung, a pious Buddhist, began reciting the "Universal Gate" portion of the Lotus Sutra. After reciting it three thousand times, the shackles opened of their own accord. When his companions, who were non-Buddhists, emulated his actions by reciting the names of the eight bodhisattvas thirty thousand times, their shackles also opened. All three men were eventually
exonerated and the two non-believers became devout believers (Gjertson 1989, 208-210),

When Li died, he was subsequently arrested and brought before the king of the netherworld. When the king asked him what he did to produce good karma, Li answered that he sponsored many vegetarian feasts and could recite two rolls of the Lotus Sutra. The king asked him to recite the sutra. When Li began, the king stopped him after a couple of lines. The king then showed him the courtyard where there had previously been a number of prisoners. "The merit produced by your reciting the sutra does not benefit you alone" said the king "it also caused all those prisoners in the courtyard to be pardoned because they heard the sutra." He then ordered Li to be shown the prisons. When they reached the first one, Li became grieved and afraid at the punishments contained therein, and exclaimed "Namo Buddha." This exclamation, he later found out, brought the people being punished one day of rest (Gjertson 1989, 215).

Different emphases and values emerge from the Chinese Buddhist miracle tales differing from earlier indigenous conceptions. One difference involves the criteria constituting a moral act. In the Ming-pao Chi an act was judged according to a moral code known as the five precepts which were considered basic rules of conduct for Buddhist monks and lay believers (Gjertson 1989, 126). The five precepts designed for attaining salvation are to refrain from: (1) killing living beings, (2) taking what is not given, (3) improper sexual conduct, (4) speaking falsehoods, and (5) the use of intoxicants (Thomas 1951, 25). Over one fourth of the stories in the Ming-pao Chi illustrate the first precept concerning taking a life, be it human or animal (Gjertson 1989, 127). Hunting is censured, as shown in the following two tales:

5I.e., "I devote myself to the Buddha."
Duke Hui of P'u-shan was fond of hunting and usually kept several tens of falcons. Later he fathered a son whose mouth was a falcon's beak (Gjertson 1989, 235).

Chang Lueh was fond of hunting when he was young and skilled at using falcons. Later he became ill, and saw a flock of more than one thousand birds, all of which were headless. They encircled Lueh's bed, screeching and crying, "Hurry up and give us back our heads" (Gjertson 1989, 235).

The precept also applies to killing animals for food:

Cheng Shih-pien upheld the five precepts, but after several years someone encouraged him to eat some pork, and he could not avoid eating one chop. That night he had a dream in which he turned into a *rakassa*. He had fangs and claws which were several feet long, and he caught live hogs and devoured them. When he awoke he became aware of a rank taste in his mouth and spat out some blood. He had someone look, and his mouth was full of coagulated blood. Becoming alarmed, Shih-pien was not again willing to eat meat (Gjertson 1989, 12).

There are stories where animals have lodged a complaint for justice in the otherworld for being unjustly killed. Eating eggs can also be cause for punishment, as this is killing potential living beings.

The precept of taking what is not given, or stealing, is also explicitly illustrated in many of the tales. Punishment for breaching this precept can also occur in this life or the next life:

The Emperor Yuan of Liang during his sixth year saw some large pearls in his mother's jewelry box. He took one of the pearls and put it in his mouth, accidentally swallowing it. His mother noticing the absence of the pearl, questioned all of her attendants, but no one confessed. She then placed a curse upon the thief. The following morning the emperor passed the pearl during his morning toilet, whereupon he became blind in one eye (Gjertson 1989, 232),

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6 An ogre.
Kuo was returning home with several other youths and found a sheep that someone had left there. Kuo and his companions caught it and were returning home with it, when the sheep began to bleat. Fearing the owner might hear it, Kuo ripped out its tongue and afterwards cooked it and ate it. A year later Kuo’s tongue began to grow smaller until all that remained was a lump the size of a pea (Gjertson 1989, 240-241),

Scholar Chao was giving a banquet. One of his guests, upon going to the toilet, saw a young girl tied next to a rice-hulling machine by a cord. Sobbing, she told the guest that before she died she stole some money from her parents, but died before she could spend it. Then she turned into a grey sheep. The astonished guest told the parents, who confirmed that she died two years prior. They then found the money where the girl had said she hid it. The sheep was given to some monks at a monastery and no one in the family ever again ate meat (Gjertson 1989, 240).

The last precept I wish to illustrate involves the retribution for telling falsehoods:

When Emperor Wu of Liang was young, he was acquainted with a poor scholar. Later, when he became emperor, he again met this scholar who was as poor and humble as before. "Tomorrow you may come for an audience," the emperor commanded, "and we shall give you a position as a district magistrate." But every time the scholar went for an audience, he found himself unable to receive an audience. Questioning a Buddhist monk he was told that "you will never get the position, it’s only an empty promise. Previously, when the emperor held a vegetarian feast you promised five hundred strings of cash but never paid up. So now you have been promised a position but will never obtain it (Gjertson 1989, 169).

Another characteristic introduced in the Chinese Buddhist miracle tale involves retribution as occurring during this life. For example in the story about the emperor and the statue, the punishment for desecrating the statue was immediate. In other many of the other stories as well, the effects of actions are either felt immediately, or shortly after. Rarely do we see the effects of karma extending beyond this life or in the immediate next,
certainly not of matters that took place "innumerable ages ago" which seems to dominate Buddhist avadana tales (Gjertson 1989, 11).

Summary

The tales we have been examining, are examples of Chinese Buddhist miracle tales, not Buddhist avadana. This means that a mixture of ideas and concepts, both Chinese and Buddhist, are already becoming evident. What are some of these Chinese influences? In the introduction to this study, I mentioned about the three types of karmic consequences that an act could produce: good, bad, and neutral. It was concluded that according to Buddhist belief the ideal was to perform acts which generate no karma; for karma, good or bad, generates "baggage" which ties you to this world. However, there is a pervasive pattern that runs through the Chinese Buddhist miracle tales that karma works more like credits and debits—that what counts is the proportionality between good and bad karma and that this ratio is what is decisive and not the Buddhist concept of being free from karma. Another concept which I shall explain more in detail in the following chapter is the concept of the transfer of merit. This is where by performing pious act you can relieve the suffering of those who are being punished. I have cited examples of this in the above stories where prisoners became free after a part of the Lotus Sutra has been recited, or when a pious invocation gives temporary respite. Another Buddhist concept which influenced the Chinese view is that of samsara, a cycle of repeated births, according to which an individual would be reborn repeatedly as a result
of good and evil deeds performed (Chen 1968a, 4). With the concept of *samsara* a firm connection between the individual and the past, present and future was established. Prior to the introduction of Buddhism, an attitude of fatalistic uncertainty was appearing. A proverb, which was derived from the *Chuang-tzu*, states:

竊鈎竊國
qie gou qie guo.

Literally translated as "steal a hook, steal a kingdom" it refers to the unequal punishment or reward not being dependant upon the things one does (Zhang 1993, 1129). The thief who steals a hook is far more likely to receive a harsher penalty than the king who successfully usurps a throne. Also, during the Han dynasty the philosopher Wang Ch’ung noted that:

in conducting affairs men may be either talented or stupid, but when it comes to calamity or good fortune, there are some who are lucky and some who are unlucky. The things they do may be right or wrong, but whether they meet with reward or punishment depends on chance (Fung 1952, 2:163).

The attitude that reward or punishment was simply determined by chance was never satisfactorily addressed until the appearance of Buddhism with its concepts of *karma* and the transmigration of souls (Yang 1969, 298-299). With the concept of rebirth if a person in this lifetime suffered misfortune it could be attributed to bad actions committed in a previous lifetime and that good actions, if not rewarded in this life, would later appear in future lives. With the introduction of the Chinese Buddhist miracle tale, we can see the pervasive influence that Buddhist thought had on Chinese ideas. We can also see that the karmic notions in Buddhism shared some similarity to the indigenous notion of *paoying*. 

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We can see that even now some Buddhist ideas are being sinicized. In the next chapter, I shall show how Chinese ideas and Buddhist ideas were further assimilated in religious Taoism.
CHAPTER IV

THE TALES AND NOVELS OF THE MING DYNASTY:
RELIGIOUS TAOISM

The third category of our survey concerns the modification of paoying which is neither characterized wholly by concepts found during the indigenous, or pre-Buddhist phase, nor exclusively from Buddhist ideas, but contains elements extracted from both these influences. I do not wish to suggest that elements were randomly selected from each tradition and haphazardly combined into a cacophonous mixture, but that isolated specifics, either complementary to each theory or which sufficiently replaced gaps in either theory, were utilized and adopted. This new mode of thought can best be seen in the phenomenon of religious Taoism which although still retaining many distinctly Chinese modes of thought also adapted and modified many Buddhist concepts as well.

The Characteristics of Religious Taoism

The philosophy of Taoism, best characterized in the Tao Te Ching and the Chuang-tzu, had existed centuries before Buddhism was introduced to China but comprised only one of the influences upon the formation of religious Taoism. Many other influences that also contributed were of Chinese origin, with one notable exception—the characteristics of Indian Buddhism. Although Taoism displayed certain religious characteristics, it was not viewed as a religion replete with a body of doctrines and beliefs
preserved in a corpus of literature. However, after Buddhism had secured a foothold in China many Buddhist ideas and beliefs were adopted by Taoists. The borrowing of religious ideas, divinities, and cults by religious Taoism from Buddhism had begun as least as early as the fifth century and continued at an accelerated pace throughout the next millennium (Wright 1959, 97). In the realm of literature the formation of a Taoist canon was limited because most of their literature was extracted from the extant Confucian corpus. Although Taoism possessed works pertaining to alchemy, divination, hygiene, breathing exercises, and other works whose authorship was invariably attributed to its founder, Lao-tzu, these were limited and in need of new sources of stimulation. Buddhist sutras provided an alternative to the orthodox Confucian texts. Sometimes these sutras were borrowed or copied in their entirety, the only change being that the name of Buddha was replaced with Lao-tzu (Chen 1964, 474). This new body of literature was organized into a canon modeled according to the Buddhist *tripitaka* which consisted of three sections subdivided into twelve parts. Another borrowing from Buddhism was that of statues and images of deities and saints. The elaborate pantheon of Buddhist deities, along with elaborate structures of cosmology, provided tremendous impetus for Taoism and led to a replication of such concepts. Although buddhas and bodhisattvas were easily and readily adapted into the local temple cults by adopting attributes of local gods, these

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1This date most certainly refers to the first known Taoist copying of Buddhist images appearing during the Northern Wei dynasty; however, Taoist borrowings of Buddhist concepts must have taken place much earlier—probably during the Han Dynasty when Buddhism started allying itself closely with Taoism. See Chen (1964).
Buddhist deities however were gradually sinicized which began as early as the Sung dynasty (Wright 1959, 98). Euhemeristic practices arose and the nature of the deity itself was transformed from more metaphysical symbols into gods who were devoted to a specific earthly concern, e.g., guilds, expectant motherhood, etc. Although Taoist depictions of heaven and hells shared similarities with Buddhist ideas they differed in some aspects. Most notably, the Chinese penchant for an elaborate bureaucracy endowed and permeated its structural organization. Even the location for hell was sinicized where it became associated with the traditional, and earthly, Chinese world of the dead beneath Mt. T'ai (Gjertson 1989, 126). The idea of a priestly hierarchy, monasticism, and the concept of karma were all adopted by religious Taoism.

However religious Taoism was not Buddhism under a different name whose ideas were perfectly or imperfectly adapted by the Taoists. Elements predating Buddhism and popularly ascribed to were not neglected and served to modify or supplement Buddhist concepts, or vice versa. A great flexibility was shown by the Taoists concerning the melding of various traditions. Arguably the major reason for Taoist flexibility was due to the total outlook of the religion. Unlike Buddhism, whose tenets viewed the world as one of suffering and pain which must be overcome, Taoists viewed this world, replete with pleasures, as not undesirable. Therefore, their goal was to acquire material immortality. Thus, unencumbered with so much of the "intellectual baggage" (Wright 1959, 97) that Buddhists ascribed to, religious Taoism was much more flexible and therefore found greater appeal among the popular mentality. Like Buddhism, religious Taoism was a
salvation-oriented religion and advocated the theory that existence, whether in this world or not, was not as important as happiness. Unlike Buddhism, where salvation consisted outside this world, religious Taoism viewed leaving this world as unnecessary. Extending the time on earth, or the quest for immortality, was a prime concern. The spirit, viewed by the Taoist, is entwined with that of the physical body and:

man is [seen as] entirely material, consisting of constituent elements that disperse at death. Immortality is achieved by conquering these constituent elements that compose the body and by preventing them from dispersing (Chen 1964, 25).

The consequences for committing bad deeds was similar to *karma* except the effects tended not to pertain to future lives as much as to the present life. Complex calculations were devised which foretold one’s lifespan. The *T’ai-shang Kan-ying P’ien* (Folios on the Vibrant Responses of the Most High) illustrates what actions must be performed to prolong one’s earthly life. Written (Wong 1994, xxvii) or annotated (Boltz 1986, 171) by Li Ch’ang-lin in the twelfth century, the tractate illustrates that one’s actions can either prolong or detract specific amounts of time from the longevity of one’s life which, according to Legge, is the greatest quest for the Taoist (1962, 2:236). Taoist propensities for astrology and the virtue of a long life can be observed. Both indigenous Chinese concepts, such as *paoying* and familial responsibility, and Buddhist concepts such as intentionality and repentance can be observed. An exact counting of days is levied against an offender which subtracts from one’s allotted lifespan for moral wrongdoings:

There are guardians in Heaven and on Earth whose job it is to record the misdeeds of each person. According to the seriousness of these deeds,
years of life are taken away or misfortunes are assigned... . When their years are all taken away from them, they will die (Wong 1994, 5).

A precise number of good deeds was required which ensured immortality:

Those who wish to become immortals in Heaven should accumulate one thousand three hundred good deeds. Those who wish to become immortals on earth should accumulate three hundred good deeds (Wong 1994, 17).

The tractate lists for five pages transgressions, such as crimes for ruthlessness, slander, deceit, illicit conduct and other violations, saying that:

In the case of crimes such as these (The Spirits) presiding over the Life, according to their lightness or gravity, take away the culprit's periods of twelve years or of one hundred days. When his term of life is exhausted death ensues (Legge 1962, 2:244).

However, the ancient Chinese concept of the unity of the family is also present. Family members and progeny could still be held accountable for a man's misdeeds--death did not automatically wipe the slate clean for judgment could, and did, extend to his posterity for all the unpunished guilt that remained: "When all your years have been taken away from you, you die. If you have debts, your children and grandchildren will have to pay them" (Wong 1994, 27). As in Buddhism, where intentionality is linked with karma, so too does religious Taoism stress this concept as well:

If the heart is rooted in goodness, then even before you do a good deed, the gods of fortune will follow you. If the heart is rooted in evil, then even before you do an evil deed, the gods of misfortune will follow you (Wong 1994, 29).

The themes of immortality and subtracting days for the performance of evil deeds is also stressed in the alchemical text of the Nei P'ien (Inner Chapters) of the Pao P'u Tzu (The
Master who Embraces Simplicity) written by Ko Hung around 320 C.E. Besides stressing the quest for immortality through alchemy, the imperative of practicing what can be termed as good Confucian virtues is emphasized:

Those wishing to seek geniehood\(^2\) should think of loyalty, filial piety, friendliness, obedience, the human ideal, and trustworthiness as basic. If they do not perform meritorious actions but solely pursue the esoteric techniques, they will never attain Fullness of Life... No benefit is to be derived from taking the geniehood medicine before the full quota of merits is acquired (Ware 1966, 66-67).

The stories and the novels we shall examine differ from the Buddhist tales we saw in the previous chapter in that they are less didactic in nature. Also elements peculiar to religious Taoism, such as the view that life is good and to be enjoyed, and the main functions of exorcisms and protection of the mortal world from the attacks of ghosts and demons (Thompson 1989, 99) combined with traditional Confucian values such as filial piety, loyalty, and obedience, are stressed. Although Buddhist notions of karmic retribution and reincarnation, do not disappear, other Buddhist values such as vegetarianism, killing, and intoxication, are muted or even parodied.

Tales of the Strange

The *Liao-chai Chih-yi* (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio) was written in the seventeenth century by P’u Sung-ling. The *Liao-chai* contains 431 short stories depicting ghosts, fox-fairies, and other supernatural phenomena. The literary style used to write

\(^2\)I.e., immortality
these stories is derived from the *chih-kuei* stories of the Six-dynasties period and the *chuan-chi* tales of the T'ang period. We have already examined the *chih-kuei* stories which were short anecdotes which gravitated to supernatural events or things outside the realm of the ordinary. The *chuan-chi* style of the T'ang story was indebted to its *chih-kuei* predecessor in that its theme gravitated to the supernatural but also displayed the following characteristics: (a) a more complex articulation of story lines, (b) the liberal use of incidental poems, (c) a narrator who is an objective observer, (d) the tale concludes with a didactic commentary at the end, and (e) it is a conscious effort to improve the craft at fictional narrative (Hsieh 1989, 5). The stories, themselves, do not display such a pronounced didacticism as seen in the Buddhist tales, yet the moral message can be seen in their cumulative effect. At the end there is a commentary by the "recorder of the strange."³ Traditional Confucian virtues such as filial piety are stressed as in the case of Sung Tao who postpones his appointment to be a guardian angel for the city of Honan because of his filial obligations to his aged mother (Giles 1978, 1) or in the case of the faithful tiger of Chao-ch'eng who proved to be more filial than her own son (Giles 1978, 137-138). Stories about the law of retribution can be found in a great many tales of the *Liao-chai*, and should be viewed as a general statement on the authors part more than a specific element in each story (Hsieh 1989, 11). In the story of Meng-lang (Dream of Wolves) retribution for one's actions is given:

³I.e., P'u Sung-ling
An old man had a bad dream about his eldest son, who was a magistrate in a distant district. In the dream, the old father visits the son's yamen and finds it thronged inside and out with wolves and a great heap of white bones lying in the courtyard. Then the old man sees his son changed into a tiger and hounded by two warriors in gilded mail. Worried, the old man dispatched his younger son, with a letter full of warnings and good advice, to visit his elder brother. Upon arriving, the younger son witnessed many corrupt runners and bribe-givers streaming into the yamen day and night. The younger son, tears in his eyes, pleaded with the magistrate to mend his ways, but the elder brother replies "My brother, your life has been passed away in a small village; you know nothing of our official routine. We are promoted or degraded at the will of our superiors, and not by the voice of the people. He, therefore, who gratifies his superiors is marked out with success; whereas he who consults the wishes of the people is unable to gratify his superiors as well." Unable to persuade his brother, the younger brother returns home. Soon after the magistrate was promoted but while travelling to his new post, bandits waylay him. Fearing for his life, he offers all his money and valuables, but is told before he is killed "We have come to avenge the cruel wrongs of many hundreds of victims; do you imagine we want only that?" (Giles 1978, 309-313; original emphasis).

Punishment for one’s actions can also be discerned in "The Talking Pupils" where a man is made temporarily blind because of his immodest and rude behavior towards a young lady (Giles 1978, 3-5). Buddhist values of the efficacy of reciting sutras is stressed in "Chang’s Transformation" where a girl who has died is able to be reborn in a higher station because of her lover’s recitation of the Diamond Sutra for a prescribed number of times (Giles 1978, 148). Stories describing Taoist priests skilled in alchemy and the black arts who exorcise maleficent spirits that trouble the mortal world are given (Giles 1978, 8). For example, in The Painted Skin a man, Wang, gives shelter to a young lady who, unknown to him, is really a hideous devil. When Wang goes into town the following

4 Government office
morning a Taoist priest stops in astonishment and asks "what have you met?" When Wang insists he had met nothing he is told "you are bewitched" (Giles 1978, 47-51). Eventually the evil spirit is captured by the priest. In the following story, not only is retribution for one’s actions broached but also the Buddhist concept of reincarnation is addressed:

Kao Fan insisted on marrying a girl named Chiang-ch’eng. Because of his love for her, he had to tolerate her bad-temper and capriciousness. Chiang-ch’eng tried every way she could to torture her husband which causes her own parents to die in anger. One day Kao Fan’s mother dreamed of an old man who tells her that she should not worry about it because "all this is due to what happened in their previous lives. Chiang-ch'eng was a long-life fairy-mouse raised by Monk Ching-yeh. Your son was a scholar who killed the mouse by accident when he went to the temple. Now he is just suffering retribution for his evil deed; no one can do anything about it. But it will help if you chant the sutra of the bodhisattva Kuan-yin one hundred times every morning when you get up" (Hsieh 1989, 20).

Examples of how the tales from the Liao-chai differ from the Chinese Buddhist miracle tales include the following. The vocabulary itself has undergone a transformation in that longer Indian names and terminology have either been sinicized or have been abandoned altogether. Another modification seems to be less reliance upon the magical characteristics of the Buddhist religion which was expressed in the miracle tales. For example the recitation of a name is no longer stressed, or the copying of a sutra for expiation of guilt is not as prominent. The indigenous Chinese concept of a complex bureaucratic structure is imposed upon the supernatural hierarchy. Also it seems that to be reborn as a human is the most desirable future and the final desirable outcome. As in the Chinese Buddhist tales we see that pains are taken by the author to depict the
recounted events as actual and true and heavy emphasis upon the Confucian virtue of filial piety is stressed.

_Shui-hu Chuan_ and _Chin P’ing Mei_

The mixing of Buddhist and indigenous Chinese practices are also apparent in classical novels of the Ming dynasty. These novels, a thousand years later than the Chinese Buddhist miracle tales, show how deeply ingrained Buddhist concepts have melded with Chinese ones. In the novel _Shui-hu Chuan_ (Water Margin or All Men are Brothers), the entire premise of the book rests upon the theme that actions influence and cause other actions. The novel opens with a plague that has destroyed half the population around the Eastern capital. Marshal Hung is dispatched by the emperor to fetch the Divine Teacher of the Taoists who will be able conduct a great prayer service which will save the people. Hung is told, when he reaches the abbey, that he must ascend a mountain in order to see the Divine Teacher and is told that he "must never retreat, if you are to save the people . . . just push on piously" (Shapiro 1981, 7). However, he returns before he sees the teacher. Back at the abbey he is given a tour where he sees a large building whose doors are sealed by strips of paper and heavy red seals. A plaque above the door reads "Suppression of Demons Hall." Upon Hung's inquiries, he is told that the hall has been locked for ages and contains demons. The marshal intimidates the abbot to break the seals and open the building. Immediately, a great ripping sound is heard and a black cloud shoots out. The abbot, in great agitation, tells him:
In this hall, the Master of the Way left a written warning. It said: "Thirty-six stars of Heavenly Spirits and seventy-two stars of Earthly fiends, a total of one hundred and eight demons, are imprisoned here... If they are released on earth they will cause no end of trouble" (Shapiro 1981, 1:13).

What follows is a fictionalized version of the exploits of a bandit uprising in the twelfth century. The number of outlaws, which earlier historical accounts has placed as thirty-six (Yang, Yang, and Mao 1978, 46), has been increased to 108, which coincides with the number of troublesome demons let loose by Hung. In the following chapters the virtues of loyalty, justice and perseverance against corruption are illustrated. Though the heroic code endorses every Confucian virtue, it actually abolishes finer ethical distinctions by insisting that the dictates of friendship, or yi, are paramount (Hsia 1968, 86). In this novel, we see both the elements of Buddhism and that of earlier Chinese beliefs being mingled. The demons loosed by Hung are stars which have been a popular belief since very early times in China (Hou 1979, 193). Also the notion of universal causation, where acts precipitate other acts, can be seen. Other Buddhist concepts, especially those precepts which concern refraining from intoxicants and killing, are not followed and even ridiculed.

In another classic Ming novel, Chin P’ing Mei (Golden Lotus), further evidence of Buddhist thought can be seen. For example sayings that conceptualize payments for one’s debts or obligations for ones actions are often stated. In chapter ten, the opening epigraph reads:

In the morning you may read the yogaça sutras; in the evening recite disaster-dispelling dharanis. If you plant melons you will surely harvest melons; If you plant beans you will surely harvest beans. Sutras and
dharmis have no minds of their own; Once you have made your \textit{karma}
how can it be unmade (Roy 1993, 188)?

Besides the frequent appearance of \textit{karma}, other Buddhist attributes can be seen such as
reincarnation, where Hsi-men is reborn in the character of his son upon his death and who
joins a Buddhist monastery. However, the novel has had detractors who, if not main-
taining that the didactic framework of the Buddhist message is nothing more than a
pretentious sham—the author's lame excuse for writing a work of pornography and for
hiding from the censors his more prurient interests—at the least rejects the simplistic
notion of the Buddhist interpretation of karmic retribution as unable to justify the complex
unfolding of human action. Plaks (1987) suggests that although such ideas of guilt and
retribution clearly smack of the popular Buddhism that was current during the later Ming,
it should not be overlooked that this reinterpretation of the Buddhist framework in terms
of essentially moral rather than metaphysical meaning raises the possibility that the same
ideas could just as well be explained in Confucian terms and believes that:

we can interpret the entire vast text as a kind of negative reflection—in
fact, a parody—of the ideal of self cultivation. In this sense, what is
"wrong" with Hsi-men Ch'ing's world can be explained as the failure to
understand and practice the central teachings of the Four Books\textsuperscript{5} on this
all important question (Plaks 1987, 157).

\textsuperscript{5}The \textit{Ssu-shu} (Four Books) were combined during the Sung dynasty by the Neo-
Confucian scholar Chu Hsi as providing the foundations for their system of thought. The
books consist of the \textit{Lun-yu}, the \textit{Meng-tzu} (Book of Mencius), and two essays from the
\textit{Li Chi}: the \textit{Ta-hsueh} (Universal Learning), and the \textit{Chung-yung} (Doctrine of the Mean).
See de Bary (1960).
Roy (1993) sees Hsun-tzu's particular brand or orthodox Confucianism as central to the value system espoused by the author of *Chin P'ing Mei*. The philosopher Hsun-tzu's fundamental tenet was that human nature was basically evil and reiterates the Confucian beliefs that moral example moves downward from the apex of the social pyramid. In this view, moral virtue must be cultivated at the top of the pyramid and those below, who witness the moral behavior, will follow by example. Therefore if moral virtue is lacking, or non-existent, at the apex the inevitable result will be the collapse of the social order. *Chin P'ing Mei*, which minutely depicts the collapse of an ordinary household, according to Roy, has an analogical relationship with society as a whole.

Summary

Certain aspects of the Taoist tales differ from those found in the Chinese Buddhist miracle tales. No doubt the influence of Mahayana Buddhism greatly influenced Taoism. For example, the concepts of reincarnation, the succession of lives, that *karma* pertained not just to this life alone but in a chain of lives, the transfer of merit, which stipulated that good deeds could be done on other's behalf, and most importantly, individual responsibility versus collective responsibility are emphasized. When Buddhist thought was first introduced these concepts seemed to be adopted without reservations due either to bad or incomplete translations or the ideas may not have been fully grasped, but as Buddhism exerted influence over the centuries, more reconciliations were found needed to be made. Beliefs which existed were found to be, although similar, to have some differences.
Sometimes an anomaly that existed between both modes of thought was simply not reconciled. For example the Buddhist concept of *karma* and retribution was not exactly the same as Chinese beliefs. The ancient notion of *cheng-fu* where the burden of sins was inherited from ones ancestors, was denied by Buddhism. The ambiguity is mentioned by many Taoist scriptures which make no attempt at explaining how the Chinese notion of collective responsibility can coexist simultaneously with the Buddhist notion of individual responsibility (Zurcher 1980, 138). Indigenous Chinese concepts appear much more frequently in the tales of the post-Buddhist period—such as an elaborate and complicated bureaucratic structure of heaven and hell which "can hardly be found in Medieval Chinese Buddhism which even in its Chinese environment retained much of its Indian utterly un-bureaucratic background" (Zurcher 1980, 136).
CHAPTER V

THE PHENOMENON OF SYNCRETISM

In the preceding chapters we have seen that the Chinese concept of paoying was changed and modified with the introduction of the Buddhist concept of karma. The resulting transformation, as characterized in religious Taoism displayed elements extracted from both concepts. This process of blending, borrowing, or merging, known as syncretism, seems to be an inevitable occurrence when two religions, the host or the indigenous religion and the guest, or the foreign religion, come into contact with each other.

This concluding chapter will be divided into two parts: the first shall be a summary of attitudes and changes we have seen in the concepts of paoying and karma. In the second part, I shall explore some reasons for the development of syncretism. After giving a definition of syncretism, I will examine some key properties which seem to favor to the development of syncretism. These properties, which will be further elaborated, include:

(a) orthodoxy—that is the guest religion is seen as being more orthodox in nature and thereby having a greater sense of legitimacy which the host religion wishes to appropriate;
(b) deficiencies in concepts—in which the guest religion may clarify or supplement certain deficiencies, omissions, or unclear ideas that exist within the host religion; (c) appeal—the guest religion may enjoy a wider appeal to prospective adherents; and (d) harshness—the strictures of a guest religion may be less harsh or "toned-down" as compared with the
host religion. I shall conclude by citing a plausible model adopted from developmental psychology which may explain the development of syncretism.

Summary

During the indigenous phase, which predated the arrival of Buddhism, the concept of retribution in China was portrayed in two ways. The first way can be seen in the philosophical writings where retribution is shown through positive examples. If the ruler sets a virtuous example, then the conduct of the people will necessarily be similar, i.e., virtuous. Therefore proper conduct by the ruler is essential for the people will emulate it. Dire warnings or threats for misbehavior are not illustrated, except by inference—that the people will likewise emulate the wrong conduct displayed by the ruler. The examples given stress positive actions which will necessitate harmonious responses.

The second method for portraying retribution can be seen in historical writing. Here, as opposed to the portrayal of retribution by Confucius and Lao-tzu, the emphasis seems to stress negative consequence in order to keep the people in line. The consequences for doing bad acts are elaborately depicted. In both cases retribution is seen as happening immediately and in the present life. Also the concept of retribution is more socially-oriented. The results benefit society and are not for the betterment of the individual. Even in the examples of the avenging ghost chronicled in the Mo-tzu, the purpose is an instruction for rulers to be just and not to kill innocent people. Finally, the
family is viewed as the smallest social unit and wholly responsible for the acts of its members.

With the introduction of Buddhism the indigenous theory of retribution met with the Buddhist theory of *karma* and was supplemented by it. *Karma*, however, was only a component of the Buddhist’s world-view whereas *paoying* was not part of an elaborate religious world-view. Buddhism was concerned with the importance of the individual and *karma* was the process through which the individual attained salvation. The Buddhist concept of the transmigration of souls helped to supplement and modify some of the indigenous Chinese concepts which were becoming fatalistic. Also we see the appearance of "magical" qualities which benefitted the individual in the present life. For example reciting a sutra for a prescribed number of times, holding a sutra or honoring a statue of Buddha is beneficial. We can also see the notion of *karma* changing from the Buddhist concept and reflecting more Chinese concerns. For example, the accumulation of good *karma* and that this accumulation produces benefits, more or less immediately, in the present life.

As time went on elements from both these traditions, Chinese and Buddhist, come together in religious Taoism. The individual is stressed, but the notion of familial responsibility is still present. The primary emphasis seems to be concerned with the present life. Heaven seems to be more of a transient stopover between lives rather than a final goal. Magical elements still abound, such as performing a precise number of good deeds to ensure immortality. The Buddhist concepts have been modified to highlight Chinese values and ideas and the Confucian virtues of filial piety and brotherhood are reasserted.
According to Light (1994) a guest religion, in this case Buddhism, provides the overt symbols stressed in a religion and the ostensible topic. The host religion, in this case the Chinese religions, then provides the interpretation for the appropriated symbols; but only selective interpretation. The criterion used in the selecting of the guest's symbols is based upon cursory familiarity by the host. Because the concept of *paoying* was present within China, the Buddhist concept of *karma* seemed to be similar.

The Folktale Model

Throughout this study the concept of *paoying* has been seen to be a dynamic one which has been interpreted and reinterpreted according to different generations with the introduction of concepts drawn from differing traditions. These (re)interpretations have been portrayed and transmitted through various literatures throughout Chinese history. To illustrate these changes I have primarily concentrated upon the use of folktales, where possible, instead of doctrinal materials in the assumption that folktales have a broader appeal, and a wider dissemination, than those of doctrinal or theological import which appeal to a smaller specialized class. Folk literature is replete with concrete examples and practical illustrations and subscribe to a broader range of experiences. Where doctrinal materials tend towards the explanatory and minutia, folk literature seems to show by example. The phenomenon we have been discussing, that of the changing, modification, and portrayal of Chinese/Buddhist/Taoist concepts are not the syncretism itself. Rather the literature we have discussed shows a written reflection that a syncretism has taken place;
the syncretism had to come first—in this case with the indigenous religions of the Chinese and of Buddhism. The reflection of the syncretism, as portrayed in the literature, signifies the acceptance, on the popular level, of the syncretic patterns already present. In the next section I shall discuss some previous concepts of syncretism, followed by a look at what factors may give rise to and the acceptance of syncretism, and finally I will present a model which may help to explain how syncretism occurs.

A Definition of Syncretism

A tentative definition of syncretism would be a borrowing, affirmation, or integration of concepts, symbols, or practices of one religious tradition into another by a process of selection and reconciliation (Berling 1980, 9). The concept of syncretism as a dynamic force in the (re)evolution of religions has been the subject of much criticism, primarily hostile. The orthodox feel that their "pure" religion is being "corrupted." Syncretism has often been characterized as being random and superficial. The reason for this hostility, according to Berling (1980) is due to an outlook which views the religious sphere as territorial—that religious groups have clear doctrinal boundaries and mutually exclusive memberships. However, in cultures where religions are not credal or exclusivistic, the territorial model is not suitable. Syncretism, according to Ching, can be seen as that nebulous affair between indigenous traditions and foreign intrusions with progeny that are not always easy to identify (1993, 205). She correctly ascertains Chinese
Buddhism as a product of syncretism but maintains that Taoism, which also shows the imprint of heavy Buddhist influence, "remains somehow native" (1993, 205).

One example which shows the dynamics of syncretism concerns the concept of *hsiao* (filial piety). To the Chinese, family existence, clan harmony, social peace, and the preservation of Chinese culture all rested upon the proper observance of this virtue (Chen 1973, 14). Buddhism, on the other hand, extolled the virtues of individualism, of a celibate life, and it magnified the misery and suffering inherent in family life as due to attachment to wife and children. From the beginning Buddhism was attacked by the Chinese as being unfilial (Chen 1968b, 82). Buddhists were condemned for shaving their heads, a practice which violated precepts found in the *Hsiao Ching* (Classic on Filial Piety) which states that the body, hair and the skin are gifts from our parents and should not be injured in any way (Makra 1961, 3), and the Buddhist monastic practice of celibacy was condemned because it discontinued the family line. The Buddhists, realizing the Chinese emphasis upon filial piety, replied by stressing that Buddhism also emphasized this virtue. Numerous examples from sutras were compiled illustrating filial piety. Some of these stories were so exemplary that they provided popular entertainment by being recited by story-telling monks, or ballad singers, at temple fairs and festivals (Chen 1968b, 91). Another way in which Buddhism refuted the charge of being unfilial was by stating that the Buddhist practice of filial piety was more pious than Confucian concept which was limited (Chen 1969b, 93). The Buddhists maintained that the Buddha instructed the filial son not only to attend and serve his parents, as Confucianism likewise
stressed, but also to convert his parents to Buddhism. Therefore, the filial son would not only bring benefits to his parents in this lifetime but in future lifetimes and that because of this his parents would attain salvation and end the cycle of transmigration. As for the celibacy of monks, they argued that monks practiced da hsiao, or great filial piety, because their aim was to attain salvation for all humanity and not just the salvation of their parents.

Characteristics Favorable to Syncretism

In the above section, an example of syncretism has been illustrated. But the question still remains why syncretism develops. Is it inevitable that when two religions meet that they will meld together and the lines of demarcation between them become blurred? Do certain factors invite syncretism more than others? In this section I will speculate upon certain aspects which appear more favorable toward syncretism.

When two religions come into contact with each other, one of these may be viewed by the surrounding community as more established or more orthodox. The foreign religion, referring to the newly introduced religion, may be seen as more divinely sanctioned and whose traditions and rituals are more potent than those of the host religion. For a host religion to adopt concepts, terminology, or other factors from this foreign religion may lend more prestige to the host religion than previously enjoyed. For example Buddhism was viewed as having more legitimacy than that of religious Taoism, which drew from an amalgam of sources including from sources which were seen as more
unorthodox and credulous such as alchemy, astrology, and other elements viewed as superstitious. Taoism borrowed heavily from the Buddhist tradition and in doing so gained more prestige than otherwise might be the case. Thus a legitimacy was conferred upon that which formerly was restricted to a limited sphere, or viewed as a fringe element by the majority of people or a certain class. The prestige model can be seen in the folktale model. At first, folktales are oral and passed down through repeated tellings, which include necessary variations, and, sometimes, different material. The culture which utilizes the folktale does not have an exclusively literary tradition. However, over time, these folktales may attract a different class of people where the literary tradition is more stressed and these folktales may be transcribed and systematically disseminated via the printed document. These written versions will allow for little or no change and will be accepted as orthodox not only by people outside of the formerly limited sphere where the oral tradition predominated, but also by that limited sphere where the oral tradition was supreme as well. They are now known to a wider audience rather than a limited scope of people. Because of the legitimacy conferred by the literary milieu it is readapted by the popular milieu.

Another reason that may cause syncretism to occur is that the host religion may be deficient in a concept, or whose concepts are less-clearly defined, than those of the

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1One example in which Taoism tried to force a direct connection with Buddhism was to assert that Lao-tzu had gone to India after he disappeared from China and became the Buddha. This insistence led to the famous Buddhist-Taoist debates lasting over a thousand years (Matsunaga 1969, 100-101).
foreign religion. Yang (1969) cites the example of fatalistic uncertainty concerning the certainty of retribution that was developing and which was never satisfactorily resolved until Buddhism converted China and concepts of *karma* and the transmigration of souls was introduced. Thus retribution was now understood as not only occurring in one life but in a chain of lives. The Buddhist concepts seemed to have helped answer an enigma which existed in Chinese thought.

The foreign religion also may consciously adopt principles and concepts of the host religion in order to broaden its appeal to a wider spectrum. Certain elements may enjoy such a popular acceptance that they cannot be ignored by the more orthodox religion without risking rejection. An example of this would be in the acceptance of deeply ingrained popular beliefs by religious Taoism concerning such elements of various popular cults which concerned ancestor worship, the worship of the soil god, and the worship of the stove god. These popular cults enjoyed widespread adherence by the Chinese people --the literati and peasants alike. Taoism, instead of prohibiting these beliefs instead not only permitted their use but even recommended them, however within fixed limitations (Stein 1979). The foreign religion may adopt some of the hosts religions precepts but sublimate them. Religious Taoism adopted the idea of sacrifice, but unlike the practices in the cults of Li and Po which stressed sacrifice, forbade blood sacrifices which were seen as excessive and thus not acceptable.

The host religion may willingly conform to the ideas of the foreign religion because they may not only have similar ideas but that the accompanying strictures may not
be so harsh. Religious Taoism allowed the followers of popular religions to free themselves from the grip and demand of their gods. An example would be found in the case of Hua Chia who constantly experienced dreams where he feasted with them to a point of excess. Upon awakening he would be physically sick. Being worn out he joined the Taoist religion with the effect that the dreams ceased and that he was visited by the Taoist immortals who did not make as many physical demands upon him.

Berling (1980) gives three reasons why syncretism may occur in what she labels as acculturative, adversarial, and defensive. In acculturative syncretism the foreign religion intentionally becomes more flexible in order to broaden its appeal to the host religion. An example of this has been cited above where Taoism adopted the soil and kitchen gods. Another reason can be seen as more pragmatic. The Chinese state viewed itself as having the right to condone religious institutions and define acceptable religious practice. If a foreign religion deviated too far from the accordance to Chinese practices, it was subject to being persecuted, its books burned, temples destroyed, and its followers killed. Thus Chinese notions of ancestor-worship and the soul, whose existence the Buddhists denied, were accommodated by Buddhism. Adversarial syncretism refers to similar elements which are shared by both parties but are reconciled to their own specific traditions. However these polemical arguments tend to lead to the integration of borrowed elements which, in turn, are reflected upon, reexamined, and reformulated. An example here was the insistence by the Taoists that Lao-tzu left China and became the Buddha in order to convert the Indians and the subsequent Buddhist claims that Lao-tzu
did indeed come to India but converted to Buddhism because he was disillusioned with Taoism. While this controversy was being debated, each side adopted many deities from the other side and both plagiarized the writings of the other side to assimilate concepts and rituals into their spiritual territory (Berling 1988, 27). Defensive syncretism is akin to acculturative syncretism except that there is less accommodation due to a new culture rather than adopting a subservient attitude to the current dominant values that exist. One side actively attacks the other side, which subsequently tries to defend itself.

A Developmental Model

Karmiloff-Smith (1992) presents a model of learning and performance which she labels as Representational Redescription (RR) where development is characterized by phases in which specific domains of knowledge are acquired. Although her approach is geared to the development of the infant to the middle childhood stages, her concern of how one processes and manipulates data seem to have far-ranging consequences over all areas of learning. Her aim focuses on how humans manipulate knowledge cognitively and:

exploit internally the information that it has already stored (both innate and acquired), by redescribing its representations or, more precisely, by iteratively re-representing in different representational formats what its internal representations represent (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 15).
She posits three effective levels of representations: (1) the implicit phase, (2) the explicit acquisition 1 phase, and (3) the explicit 2/3 phase. Both the implicit and the explicit 1 phases are not conscious while the explicit 2/3 phase is conscious and, hence, accessible to verbal reporting. In the implicit phase information received is static and have no references to any other information systems. The information is stored in the brain as independent and has no relationships to previously stored data. In this phase there is a certain inflexibility present, precisely because there is an ignorance of what is important and what is not. For example when a non-writer is writing a word, extreme care is taken in the formation of the characters because any variation or differentiation is seen as necessarily incorrect and might invalidate the meaning. In the second phase, the explicit 1 phase the information is not perceived as rigid and inflexible. The beginnings of understanding have appeared and the stored information can be manipulated to a degree, but this manipulation can lead to new errors because it is still pre-conscious. Information may be abstracted and analogous relationships may be seen and utilized. In the third phase the information, now fully and consciously internalized, can be directly conveyed through language. The information can be fully manipulated, is flexible, and is able to be retrieved in various ways. According to Karmiloff-Smith, development is primarily a cognitive one in which ideas that have come into contact with each other are absorbed and reconciled by the individual and are connected within the existing thought-process.

2 She initially posits four levels, but then collapses them into three effective levels, see Light (1995a).
Light (1995a; 1995b) applies Karmiloff-Smith's cognitive theories of human development to account for religious change. He also uses three stages which moves from single-point, or discrete, learning to integrative learning which include: (1) discrete point acquisition, (2) integration and, (3) webbing. Light's theories, like Karmiloff-Smith's, also rely on a developmental theory in which time seems to comprise a major factor.

Taking ritual acts by way of example, single acts are learned which are isolated and not linked to other forms of religious knowledge. Within time, the integration stage is reached in which multiple single ritual acts are able to be linked together. However, these acts and concepts are not accessible to verbal reporting. I would take this to mean that information is intuitively known to be connected and linked, but cannot be sufficiently explained to a third-party why they are connected. Finally over a passage of time, information becomes not only completely linked together but is connected and linked as in a web to the rest of perceptions and religious knowledge. Also, the assimilation is so complete that it is accessible to verbal reporting.

In regards to the Chinese assimilation of Buddhism which this paper has addressed, when Buddhism was first introduced into China it was readily adopted. However it was not Indian Buddhism, for not even the Buddhist terminology was completely understood. The Chinese had some concepts which were more or less similar to the corresponding Buddhist concepts and it was therefore assumed these corresponding concepts were the same. But after a time it was realized, through better translations and
understandings, that even though a similarity might exist, concepts within the two traditions, Chinese and Buddhist, were not interchangeable and discrepancies needed to be reconciled. Thus, syncretism is not a static process which involves beliefs and attitudes that are separate from current attitudes or practices, but a dynamic process that is interrelated with a person's cognitive facilities which interprets and reinterprets concepts.

If our theories of developmental syncretism are correct, as I strongly suspect they are, then a degree of syncretism, it would seem, is an inevitable occurrence which proceeds from the acquisition of any new knowledge which, given a timely manner, is reconciled with one's previous knowledge.
Appendix A

Chinese Characters for Romanized Terms
ch'eng-fu 承負
chi-kuei 志怪
Chin P'ing Mei 金瓶梅
chuan-chi 傳奇
Chuang-tzu 莊子
Chung-yung 中庸
Ch'un Ch'iu 春秋
da hsiao 大孝
guei 養
Han-shu 漢書
Hsi-yu Chi 西遊記
hsiao 孝
Hsin T'ang Shu 新唐書
Hsuan-yen Chi 宣驗記
I-ching 易經
Kuan-yin 觀音
Kuang-shih-yin Ying-yen Chih 觀世音應驗記
Li-chi 禮記
Liao-chai Chih-yi 燕齊語異
Lun-yu 論語
Meng-tzu 孟子
Ming-pao Chi 冥報記
Mo-tzu 墨子
Nei P'ien 內篇
pao 報
Pao Pu Tzu 抱朴子
paoying 報應
Shi-chi 史記
Shu-ching 書經
Shui-hu Chuan 水滸傳
Sou-shen Chi 搜紳記
Ssu-shu 四書
Ta Hsueh 大學
Tai-shang Kan-yung 太上感應篇
Tao Te Ching 道德經
te 德
't'ien 天
Tou O Yuan 竇娥冤
Tso-chuan 左傳
yi 義
Yuan-hun 冤魂
Yuan-hun Chih 冤魂志
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