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HOW CAN ONE BE A TAOIST-BUDDHIST- CONFUCIAN?

--A CHINESE ILLUSTRATION OF MULTIPLE
RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

For many people in the West, a person's religious affiliation is a matter of total commitment; choosing one religion implies one's being excluded from other religions. People in the West may think this characteristic is one of being religious itself.

Can a person integrate two or more distinct religions into his life? This essay aims to enhance a dialogue and hence mutual understanding between the West and East on this matter by showing how the Chinese practice of religion is different from that of most Westerners. My task is not merely to point out a fact or to present historical examples in this matter. It is rather to help Westerners at least make some sense of the practice of Chinese multiple religious participation by putting my case in words most accessible to lay persons. I will show that in the Chinese culture there is a fairly harmonious interplay between these three religions, not only in society as a whole, but in individuals as well.

I. The Question

For many people in the West, a person's religious affiliation is a matter of total commitment; choosing one religion implies one's being excluded from other religions. A religious person is either affiliated with religion A or religion non-A, not both. One is either a Christian or a non-Christian, e.g., a Judaist. Within the Christian tradition, one is either Catholic or Protestant. If you, of one affiliation, want to be affiliated with another, you need to be converted to another. Although there are ecumenical conferences and organizations (mainly within Christianity), few people are ecumenical or interfaithful across different religions. People in the West may think this characteristic is one of being religious itself.

Can a person integrate two or more distinct religions into one's life? Our exploration into multiculturalism and religious pluralism must answer this question. The issue is not whether one can integrate or combine elements of various religions together to make up a new religion, which is certainly possible and has been done.¹ It is rather a matter of subscribing to different religions by the same individual without being converted from one religion to another. The renowned theologian Hans Küng called this question that of "dual citizenship in faith,"² or, as I will discuss in this essay, more appropriately, it is "multi-citizenship in faith."

In recent years, along with the multiculturalism movement there have been louder voices among Western theologians talking about religious pluralism and religious diversity. For example, in support of his position of religious pluralism John Hick, one of the most prominent contempo-

rary Western theologians, recently quoted from the Chinese Taoist Classic *Dao De Jing* (*Tao Te Ching*) and embraced the idea that "the Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao." For him, it means that the Ultimate Reality or Truth can never be adequately expressed and grasped by humans. Hick proposes that a distinction be made between, on the one hand, the transcendent Ultimate and, on the other, a plurality of masks or faces or manifestations of this Ultimate "as Jahweh, as God the Father, as the Qur'anic Allah, as Brahman, as the dharmakaya, and so on."³ The transcendent Ultimate (the Tao?) cannot be directly expressed or grasped in any particular religion. For Hick this distinction is analogous to the one "between the kantian noumenal Transcendent or Real or Ultimate, and its plurality of phenomenal manifestations within human consciousness."⁴ Accordingly, every one of the (major) religious traditions can be true, yet no one has the ultimate truth. While this understanding appears to open a door for multiple religious participation, Hick shows a distaste:

"we have to ask concerning these primary affirmations whether they conflict with each other. They conflict in the sense that they are different and one can only centre one's religious life wholeheartedly and unambiguously upon one of them... but not more than one at once."⁵

John Hick's distaste for multiple religious participation is, of course, not untypical among Western theologians. Hans Küng maintains that one can hold multi-citizenship culturally and ethically, but not religiously. He claims that "even with every cultural and ethical possibility for integration, the truth of every religion extends to a depth that

ultimately challenges every person to a yes or no, to an either-or... Therefore, ... a religious dual citizenship in the deepest, strictest sense of faith should be excluded--by all the great religions." 6

One might be able to find support for this kind of exclusionism from the scriptures. In the Holy Bible, for instance, the first of the Ten Commandments is that "You must have no other god besides me." In Exodus 20 it states:

"God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You must have no other god besides me. You must not make a carved image for yourself, nor the likeness of anything in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You must not bow down to them in worship; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me." 7

This passage clearly demands a total devotion from the worshippers. If a worshipper of this god is to follow these words, he or she cannot but reject all other gods. Of course, for such a person, this god is not just a god; it is the god, or simply, God. Therefore, it is no surprise that the idea of multiple religious participation has been rejected almost entirely in the Western Christian circle. As John H. Berthrong observed, "For most Christians, that people can belong to more than one community of faith seems at best confusing and at worst, damning." 8

But exclusionism certainly is not characteristic of religion per se. For example, a recent article on Buddhism in *USA Today* specifically points out that "Buddhists can be

involved in other religions." 9 As a matter of fact, as I will show in this essay, "multi-citizenship" in religion for the Chinese is nothing new but a part of everyday life.

My purpose here is to enhance a dialogue and hence mutual understanding between the West and East on this matter by showing how the Chinese practice of religion is different from that of most Westerners. For this purpose, my task is not merely to point out a fact or to present a historical example in this matter. It is rather to help Westerners at least make some sense the practice of Chinese multiple religious participation. Therefore I will have to put my case in words most accessible to lay persons; I will have to avoid as much as possible technical language, which may be more accurate but not easily accessible to most Western readers. Since Küng has listed Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism as religions,¹⁰ I will show that, in the Chinese culture there is a fairly harmonious interplay between these three religions, not only in society as a whole, but in individuals as well. The question I attempt to answer here, then, is, how multi-citizenship across these religions is possible; namely, "How can a person be a Taoist-Confucian?" "How can a person be a Buddhist-Confucian?" "How can a person be a Taoist-Buddhist?" or even "How can a person be a Taoist-Buddhist-Confucian?" Here I do not differentiate between being a Taoist-Confucian and a Confucian-Taoist, etc., even though there might be some differences. My concern is rather how the two or three can come together in one person. For the sake of simplicity, I will discuss these questions under one title: "How can a person be a Taoist-Buddhist-Confucian?"

2. The Religiousness of Chinese Religions

At the outset it must be pointed out that the term "Taoism" has two but closely related denotations. It refers both to an organized religion and a religio-philosophic tradition which can be traced back to the canon *Dao De Jing*. Whereas the latter is characterized by the ideal way of life as *wu-wei* (non-contention, non-striving) the former puts paramount value on longevity and immortality through *wu-wei* and other means. The two are closely connected though. Taoism as a religio-philosophy is the theologic source of religious Taoism. Lao Zi, the author of *Dao De Jing*, is also believed to be the founder of religious Taoism. *Dao De Jing* is the scripture of religious Taoism. They both take the Tao to be the Ultimate. In this essay I treat them as a single value system. ¹¹

In order to make my discussion in the rest of the essay relevant, I need also to address the issue of the religiousness of all three Chinese religions. Even though Taoism and Buddhism do not embrace a god in the strict sense, their resemblance to Western religions in institution and societal function has convinced most religious scholars that the two are indeed religions. Little concern has been expressed in regard to the religiousness of Buddhism and Taoism. Therefore there is no need for me to argue for the religiousness of Taoism and Buddhism here.

There have been much discussion and even debates about the religiousness of Confucianism. Confucianism in many ways appears too secular to be a religion. It does not have a god, nor an organized way of worshipping in the way in which many other religions do. Nevertheless, today a major-

ity of scholars have accepted Confucianism as a religion. Then, what is its religiousness?

Tu Wei-ming, a new-Confucian at Harvard University writes: "We can define the Confucian way of being religious as ultimate self-transformation as communal act and as a faithful dialogical response to the transcendent."¹² According to Tu, being religious, for the Confucian, means being engaged in the process of learning to be fully human. Tu's definition is in accord with John Hick's statement about religion:

"the function of religion in each case is to provide contexts for salvation/liberation, which consists in various forms of the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness."¹³

Religion bears a fundamental concern for the ultimate in life. It is this ultimate, which is transcendent, that defines value in life and provides the direction for one to strive for in life, which in turn makes life meaningful.

Specifically, I think the religiousness of Confucianism can be seen in two ways. First, Confucianism, as any other religion in the world, establishes the ultimate through a leap of faith. Confucianism as an ethical system provides guidelines of a moral life. The foundation of Confucian ethics is its belief in the Tao (Way) or Heaven. The *Doctrine of the Mean*, a canon in Confucianism, starts by stating:

"What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature.

To follow our nature is called the Tao. Cultivating the Tao is called education." (Chapter 1)

Human nature, or the destiny of human life is given here without a demonstration of any form. The Confucian would

argue that human nature requires that one be moral or to endeavor to transform oneself in accordance with the Tao. But why not something other than the Tao? The Confucian does not offer a further argument or demonstration. ¹⁴ The Tao is both an "is" (i.e., a given from Heaven in unfixed form) and "ought" (i.e., a moral prescription or decree by Heaven). No rational argumentation is offered in this regard. And not surprisingly so. As Kierkegaard has persuasively argued, in religion (he meant specifically Christianity), such a rational "proof" is impossible. There one can always ask the unanswerable question "Why God (or Why Tao)?" The only thing to which we can appeal here is "a leap of faith." Confucianism is no exception in this regard. The Tao is taken as a given in the first place and the rest is ordered accordingly. This leap of faith puts Confucianism into the same category with many other world religions.

Second, a primary function of religion is to give meaning to people's life and Confucianism provides an answer to the question of the meaning of life. Unlike believers in many religions, Confucians do not believe that the meaning of life lies in another world. Confucius himself refused to speculate about afterlife and gods. His concern was almost exclusively in this life. Confucians in general are very this-worldly and believe that a this-worldly life alone can be meaningful. The meaning of life, according to the Confucian, lies in one's self-transformation through building human relationships with one's fellow human beings. Among these relations, one can be a good son/daughter, a good brother/sister, a good father/mother, a good friend, a good partner, etc. Confucius once defined his central idea

Jen or humanity as "to love people (*Analects*, 17:22)." The value of human life lies in the creation of a community in which one loves, and is loved by, other people. Love by others is a source, if not the only source, of the meaning of life. Life cannot be meaningful without this kind of love. Since this kind of love is most likely found in the family, the Confucian takes the family life to be the most basic and meaningful way of life. Through one's self-transformation into being fully human, one earns the love in the family and the enlarged family--the community. When one dies, one will be remembered with love by others. In the family as in the community, one takes over the heritage that the ancestors have passed down and carries it on and then passes it over to later generations. By doing this one joins one's own life, which is finite and temporary, into the stream of the (hopefully) infinite and eternal.

That which gives a person's life meaning may not be necessarily religious. But the Confucian's meaningful life has an important dimension which extends into religiousness. Common people by nature have an unconscious wish for immortality and in immortality we find life meaningful. In some religions this wish is expressed in the form of an eternal afterlife or an eternal cycle of reincarnations. One may say that in Confucianism the wish for immortality is expressed in the family and communal life. In this sense, one can understand the Confucian religiousness by following Herbert Pingarette in characterizing it as "the secular as sacred." ¹⁵ That is, taking one's daily secular experience such as family life and social dealings as religious experience. One can equally understand it by putting it the other way around: "the sacred as the secular." For if

the meaning of life is a sacred matter, the Confucians only find it in the secular everyday life, not in a Sunday church or anywhere else. Because the Confucians can find the sacred in the secular, they can, following their Master, afford to not talk about afterlife and immortality. Like Blaise Pascal, the Confucians may wager on this issue, but in the opposite way: If there is no afterlife, this life is the only life we have; If there is afterlife, this life would be an extra bonus if we take it seriously. So, either way we must take this life very seriously.

Some people may still question the religiousness or spirituality of the Confucian life. Being religious, they may think, consists in possessing in a person's mind some belief in a certain deity or deities, the belief that such a deity must indeed exist somewhere in the world, or for that matter, beyond the world. This understanding of religion, I contend, is too narrow. Religion primarily has to do with grand principles or ways of life. These principles may not be ultimately justified anywhere other than a transcendent belief system. In other words, even though one can justify some general principles in life, the ultimate principle itself is not justifiable by other principles. It has to land in a transcendent realm. In this way, religion is a belief system that connects us to the transcendent realm. Understood this way, Confucianism, as well as Taoism and Buddhism, is indeed religious.

3. The Distinctiveness of Three Religions

Needless to say, the idea of multiple religious participa-

tion presupposes the existence of different religions. The distinctiveness of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as three different value systems can be seen in their different attitudes toward life.

The Confucian model of personhood is "jun zi" (chun tzu, "gentleman"). A jun zi is a person of Jen, who is conscientious ("zhong"-loyal to one's cause) and considerate ("shu"-altruistic) (Confucius, *Analects*, 4:15). Such a person is devoted to her person-making commitment and holds a persevering determination toward her goal. She would take every step in her life seriously and work very hard to make steady progress in order to make her dream come true. Such a person is seldom relaxed; she is cautious and watchful over herself even when she is alone (*Great Learning*: Chapter VI). She is also considerate of other people. She would not do to others what she would not want others to do unto her (*Analects*, 12:2); and she would think about and bear in mind what others would like when she is pursuing her own advancement (*Analects*, 6:28). She would take rules and rituals seriously and insist on them. While she likes good people, she would overtly express her disapproval of bad actions and bad people (e.g., *Analects*, 4:3). In this way, a Confucian will be able to make good progress in her endeavors and achieve success through hard-working. She may get along well with other people because she is considerate. Devoted to her goal, she would evaluate her life almost solely on the progress she has made toward the goal. She would feel splendid happiness by sharing her success with her family and friends. At an extreme, she might prefer death to fruitlessness. Such a person rarely lives at ease. She may have too much tension, too little

relaxation in life. She rarely feels self-content. Because she works hard and also likes others to work hard, people may feel pressured around her.

In the eyes of the Taoist, the Confucian is too desire-driven. The Taoist would feel that one should follow the flow of nature. He would follow the notion of "non-contention." His attitude towards things in the world is one of "either-way" (Jiang xing, "walking two roads")¹⁶ In Chinese it is called "wu ke wu buke" ("it's okay if okay, and it's okay if not okay"). His life philosophy is being "water-like." water, being shapeless and soft, can fit itself into and put up with almost any environment. More importantly he can have things accomplished this way. The Taoist Zhuang Zi's (Chuang Tzu, between 399-295 B.C.) narrative character cook Ding can preserve his knife like new after cutting up thousands of oxen because he follows the natural way by only inserting his knife at the joints.¹⁷

Cook Ding would laugh at the Confucian when she cuts up the ox by trying harder (i.e., using more strength) instead of following the way of nature. For the Taoist, tactics is more important than strength. Or to put it in a different way, real strength can only result from good tactics. Like Zhuang Zi, the Taoist would not take personal goals so seriously as the Confucian does. After all, we can never be so sure about the goal we choose. If he has a goal, it would be a realistic one, one that takes into consideration his particular circumstances. The ideal of "non-contention" always reminds him to take one step back in a situation, and by doing so he is able to find ample room for him to maneuver. He would never push hard, but in achieving his goal he would always find forces in his opposites or the

environment to work to his advancement. However, in focusing this way, a less than mature Taoist may not establish himself on a solid ground. The idea of "non-contention" may cause him to miss opportunities in life; believing tactics is all that matters, he may not work hard to acquire positive knowledge. He may waste his youth and end up accomplishing nothing. Hence, he may not find such a life as fulfilling as he would wish. Seeing all others as being misled, a Taoist from the religious group may concentrate on longevity. But by doing so he may not be as productive as the Confucian.

The Buddhist would stick to his conviction that the world is empty (sunyata). In his eyes, even the Taoist is too this-worldly. After all, there is not anything in the world that is substantial enough for us to fight for, one way or another. Because of the empty nature of the world, he has no reason to feel joy or sorrow for things in our daily life. All we should have is peace of mind. In the mind, he finds everything he needs. He may have a good sense of humor which Confucians and Taoists usually lack. While the self-disciplined Confucian is working hard, the Taoist is speculating on tactics or contemplating the usefulness of the useless,¹⁸ the Buddhist would feel very much content with doing nothing. The Buddhist finds contentment by reducing his desires to the minimum. His slogan would be "Less desires, less striving, more contentment." But in real life a normal person can hardly maintain a Buddhist mind all the time. People often feel the need to be happy and they can only obtain happiness through fruitful hard-working or intelligent and successful business-dealings. Unless a person has a very broad (open) mind, he cannot

find the good life in Buddhism.

The above three are idealized stereotypes. In real life few people are exclusively Confucian, Taoist, or Buddhist in such a typical way. The point is that the three religions exemplify three clearly different attitudes towards life.

4. Tension and Complementarity

4.1. As different religions coexisting in the same land, the relationships between them are twofold: conflicting and complementing. Conflicts can be seen mainly between Confucianism and Taoism and between Confucianism and Buddhism, probably because Confucianism has been mostly the dominating among the three. As early as in the pre-Qin era (before 221 B.C.), conflicts between Confucianism and Taoism were already evident. As two philosophies, Confucianism values "being" (you) whereas Taoism values "nothing" or "non-being" (wu). This difference has resulted in a direct conflict in their political philosophies. While Confucianism advocated positive moral construction in society by stressing the concepts of Jen and Yi (benevolence and righteousness), Taoism opposed this kind of moral construction. The *Dao De Jing* states:

"When Tao is obliterated, we have benevolence and righteousness. Prudence and circumspection appear, and we have much hypocrisy. When family relations no longer harmonize, we have filial piety and paternal devotion. When the country and the clans decay through disorder, we have loyalty and allegiance." (Section 18)

The Taoist believed that the Confucian's advocacy for benevo-

lence and righteousness indicated that these virtues were already lost in society, and the talk about these virtues merely made them hypocritical labels. Against Confucianism, the Taoist's solution is to return to simplicity:

"Abandon your saintliness; put away your prudence; and the people will gain a hundredfold! Abandon your benevolence; put away your righteousness; and the people will return to filial piety and paternal devotion. Abandon smartness; give up greed; and thieves and robbers will no longer exist." (*Dao De Jing*, Section 19)

The direct conflict between Confucianism and Taoism in this regard is whether, as a solution to an allegedly demoralized society, we should enforce moral rules or turn people back to simplicity through *laissez faire* government. The Confucian was for the former whereas the Taoist the latter.

After Buddhism was introduced into China, there was a prolonged battle between Confucianism and Buddhism. The battle was primarily centered on three issues. First, whether monks living a monastery away from home, hence away from their parents, violated the traditional (Confucian) belief in filial piety. Second, whether monks should kowtow to the emperor. In the Confucian tradition the emperor symbolized the highest power on earth and kowtowing to him was the necessary ritual to recognize this symbolization. While the monk as a religious symbol was supposed to stand for a religious power (the Buddha?) which is supposedly higher than the secular, including the emperor. Thirdly, whether human spirit survives our physical death. Confucius himself refused to talk about spirit or soul after death. Confucian scholars such as Wang Chong (Wang Chung, 27-100 A.D.) explicitly denied that the spirit could

survive the physical death. While the Buddhist, particularly of the Pure Land school, relied substantially on the idea of human spirit after death. These conflicts clearly indicate the difference between Buddhism and Confucianism.

4.2 On the other hand, these three religions also complemented each other. In the pre-Qin era there was the so-called "Confucianism-Taoism complementarity" (*ru dao hu bu*), which can be seen in that, while Confucianism provides an active and positive attitude toward life, Taoism provides a largely passive and even perhaps negative attitude. Because of this difference, a person can retreat from the former to the latter. One may follow the idea of "In office a Confucian, in retirement a Taoist."¹⁹ That is, as a participating citizen, one should contribute one's part to the country and be conscientious with one's social duties. Once retired, one should not keep worrying about official business, instead one should follow and enjoy nature.

The complementarity between Confucianism and Buddhism is evident in that, whereas Confucianism encourages a person's success in life, both economical and intellectual, Buddhism encourages a life which values neither but internal peace. Also, whereas Confucianism offers little help or consolation for human desire for afterlife, some versions of Buddhism do. As H.G. Greel observed, "traditional Chinese thought had been almost silent on life after death. Buddhism offered at least a hope, and at times when men were living in a hell on earth it was much to be able to hope for heaven after death."²⁰ In fact, the complementarity between Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism partly explains why Buddhism, a foreign religion to start with, has found roots in the largely foreign-resistant

Chinese culture. It is this kind of complementarity between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism that provides a foundation for their harmonious coexistence in China.

In practice, efforts were made to reconcile different faiths, particularly by Buddhists during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) when Buddhism flourished. The efforts were to show the commonalities and common grounds between the three religions. For example, the Buddhist Zong-mi (Tsong-mi, 780-841 A.D.) stated that:

"Confucius, Lao Zi, and Sakyammuni all attained Saint-hood. They preached the teaching in different ways in accordance with their time and place. However, they mutually helped and benefitted the people by their teachings."²¹

Chi-chung, another Buddhist, stated:

"All of three teachings are good. All the ways taught by saints are right----The good and right teaching is not only Buddhism, not only Confucianism, not only this, not only that. Buddhism and Confucianism are only offshoots of the original truth."²²

According to Hajime Nakamura, till the Five Dynasties (907-960 A.D.) and Sung Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), the theory that "the three religions were the same was widely believed and supported by the general public."²³ This belief and the pragmatic philosophy along with it greatly facilitated the commoners in accepting all three religions.

While these reconciling remarks sound similar to John Hick's view of the Ultimate-many manifestations, unlike in Hick, the Chinese view has led directly to multiple religious participation. The co-existence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism is not merely an existence side

by side in the same land, they also have co-existed in the same mind. That is, the same individual may subscribe to all three value systems at the same time. The Taoist Ko Hung (Ge Hong, 283-363 A.D.), in his classic work *Bao-pu Zi* (*Pao-pu Tzu*), advocated the view that while Confucianism is to be used for social affairs, Taoist method of body-maintenance should be used for personal internal needs. Zhao Shen, the emperor Xiao Zong of South Song (1163-1189 A.D.), proposed that one should use "Buddhism for the mind, Taoism for the body, and Confucianism for organizing society." ²⁴ As a symbol of this integration, today there are at least seven temples in Taiwan where incense is offered to Confucius, Lao Zi, and the Buddha. ²⁵

Today it is no longer new to many Westerners that the Chinese practice multiple religious participation. Henrik Kraemer, for example, observes that:

"(In China) The religious allegiance of the average man is not related to one of the three religions. He does not belong to a confession or creed. He participates unconcerned as to any apparent lack of consistency, alternatively in Buddhist, Taoist, or Confucian rites. He is by nature a religious pragmatist." ²⁶

4.3 It should be noted that "multiple religious participation" must not be confused with syncretism. "Syncretism" may be defined as "the borrowing, affirmation, or integration of concepts, symbols, or practices of one religious tradition into another by a process of selection and reconciliation." ²⁷ There certainly has been syncretism in China as has been in any major tradition. But multiple religious participation is different from syncretism in that multiple religious participation practices more than one reli-

gion with a recognition that they are different religions, and does it without making an effort to integrate them into one single religion. John Berthrong is right as he writes:

"(In China) A person can be a Taoist, Confucian and Buddhist more or less at the same time. But this is a question slightly different from syncretism per se. It is more properly the question of dual or multiple membership." ²⁸

Here Berthrong of course is using "membership" metaphorically for none of the three religions in China is strictly a membership religion. To this multiple "membership" of Chinese way of being religious now we turn.

5. A Taoist-Buddhist-Confucian

Now, how can the same person be a Taoist-Buddhist-Confucian today? The question here is not merely whether the same individual can pay tribute to a Taoist temple today and participate in a Buddhist ceremony tomorrow. It is rather how the same individual can subscribe to three different value systems in a persistent and sensible way.

5.1. We can understand this practice in two ways. The first is basing multiple religious participation on one's multiple dimensions of existence. The second is dialectical co-existence within the same dimension of one's existence. First, as discussed earlier, the three religions occupy different dimensions of a person's life and perform different functions. Since a person has more than one dimension in life, one can incorporate different religions. By Zhao Shen's model, a person can have the peace of mind of a Buddhist, take good care of his body like a Taoist, and be a good citi-

zen as a Confucian. A person may go on pilgrimage to the Guanyin at a Buddhist monastery for having an heir, invite a Taoist master to help get evil spirit out of his home, and ask Confucius to bless his loved one to get into a top university.

The Chinese historian Chen Yinke (1890-1969) observed that, "those who outwardly observe Confucian norms may inwardly follow the principles of Buddhism or cultivate themselves according to the way of Taoism; there is no conflict between them."²⁹ A contemporary exemplar of "*Buddhist-Confucian*" was Liang Shuming (1893-1988). Liang was a major Confucian in this century, spending most of his life practicing and reviving Confucianism, but he himself also claimed that "(my whole) life belongs to Buddhism."³⁰ In Liang's final years he maintained that he was still a Buddhist while also accepted the title "the Last Confucian."³¹ Many have been perplexed by this apparent discrepancy. How is this possible? Liang was after two different issues in his life. One was the ideal of life, a question of personal existence; the other was the problem of China's future, which demands a social solution to its modern predicaments. These two problems were intertwined in Liang and he was so troubled that he attempted suicide at the age of nineteen.³² As an individual, he found meaning of life in Buddhism; as a citizen he found that the only solution to China's modern predicaments was Confucianism.³³

5.2. But the first way of multiple religious participation in one's multiple dimensions of existence is not the whole picture. Different religions do come into the same dimension and thus create tensions between each other. I

suggest that in the second way there is a dialectical tension-complementary relation between these religions, which is far more important in understanding the complementarity of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. A Confucian scholar has said that Buddhism is like floating on the water, drifting wherever the current takes you, Confucianism is like having a rudder in the boat to guide it in a certain direction.³⁴ This simile was meant to show the advantage or superiority of Confucianism over Buddhism. But if we read it from a different perspective with an open mind, we can find new meanings. Is it always so bad drifting along the current? Perhaps it is better to drift for a while before using the rudder again. Sometimes it may be better to follow both ways alternately. Reading the simile this way may help us understand how one can employ both Confucianism and Buddhism. How can Taoism fit into this simile? Taoism may be best understood in this picture as using the force of the current to determine and get to the desired direction. For the Taoist, it would be foolish to fight the current head-on. He should make the current work to his advantage; in this case, moving him towards his destiny.

Similarly, for a person, even though it is hard to act like a Taoist, a Buddhist, and a Confucian simultaneously at every moment, the three can work in the same person. One example is the famous Chinese poet Tao Qian (Tao Yuanming, 365-427). Tao was a Confucian, but his Taoist conviction made it possible for him to quit the post of the magistrate of Pengze county for a simple life close to nature and to write the poetry that few of his contemporaries could really appreciate. As Donald Holzman points out, Tao Qian's great achievement describes a complex but

original attitude towards life and towards the world in general "that enabled him to remain faithful to traditional values of loyalty and respect for the social order while realizing, thanks to his poetic imagination, a new kind of fulfillment of his ambitions in retirement." 35 The traditional values of loyalty and respect for social order were undoubtedly Confucian values, while the Taoist attitude in him made it possible for Tao Qian to fulfill life away from society. Zhang Longxi comments:

"Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism .. are not incompatible with one another in Chinese culture, and it would be pointless to argue that Tao Qian's thinking is exclusively Confucian or Taoist. He never had to choose between those different schools of thought but was able to incorporate, as so many Chinese intellectuals have done throughout the centuries, the various elements into a healthy eclectic outlook. In that very eclecticism the Chinese mind is able to keep itself open to the different possibilities of thinking." 36

Without entering Tao Qian's mind or having a personal account from himself, it may be still difficult for a Westerner to see how Confucianism and Taoism were incorporated in him. I will offer another way, much closer to home to Westerners, to illustrate how this may take place in a modern person. Suppose you are the coach of a basketball team. You want to win. You take the job of coaching seriously. You inspire your players to be confident of winning and give them a strong desire to win. You make your players practice hard. But that is not enough. You need to study not only the strength of your team, but perhaps more importantly the weaknesses of your oppo-

nents. By applying the Taoist idea of wu-wei, you may be able to turn their strength into a weakness and make it work to your advantage. You may also want to give individual players more room for their own growth, let them find their unique place in following the flow of the world. After the game is over, either win or lose, your Buddhist mind (and perhaps Taoist mind as well) would remind you that you should not make a big deal of it. If you lose, you should not feel too bad about it. If you win, it is not a big deal either. After all, it is only a game.

I must not be misunderstood as meaning in the above that as long as a person uses alternately the three life attitudes he or she must be a Taoist-Buddhist-Confucian. No. Not so simple. Whether a person practices a way of life religiously does not depend on individual actions. It depends on the larger picture in which a person lives his or her life. It depends on the significance a person makes of his or her actions. Specifically, it depends on the connections one makes between one's chosen attitudes and actions on the one hand and fundamental values in life on the other. Just as one can eat bread with wine without being a holy communionist, one can do things in ways similar to the Taoist without being a Taoist, similar to the Buddhist without being a Buddhist, and similar to the Confucian without being a Confucian. But, if one makes the fundamental connections and thereby makes one's actions a consciously religious practice, one is being religious. If one consciously chooses to follow the Taoist, the Buddhist, and the Confucian ways of life alternately or even simultaneously, one is a Taoist-Buddhist-Confucian.

I am not suggesting this is the only way for the three

to come together. They can be at play everyday. On the one hand, you need to take things seriously and work hard, i.e., to be conscientious. On the other it is important not to go against the current. And it is also important to relax and enjoy peace of mind. In my opinion, when a person is growing up, she should probably practice more Confucianism. It will give her the motivation and driving force to learn and develop her potentials fully. After she is ready for and enters the real life in society, she should have more Taoism. Together with her skills and knowledge learnt in her early years, Taoist strategies will enhance her career. After she becomes old, she should have more Buddhism. In order to have a good older life, she should not be overburdened by her success or failure in her early years. With a mind of emptiness, she will be able to have peace with herself.

Clearly, a good combination of all three is most desirable. Of course, all three cannot interplay in a harmonious and beneficial way unless one masters some kind of practical wisdom (phronesis), to borrow Aristotle's terminology, unless one knows when and how to choose which. The issue of practical wisdom, however, is beyond our present concern in this essay.

6. Some Philosophical Considerations

6.1. Then, what is the philosophical foundation for Chinese multiple religious participation? I think the foundation can be found in all three religions. One psychological obstacle for multiple religious participation is a strong hold-

ing to the self, which is lacking in all three religions. The Buddhist believes that the self is unreal and non-substantial. The Taoist advocates a "water-like" attitude. Lao Tzu said "the sage does not have a constant mind (*Dao De Jing*, Ch. 49)." Confucius said that "the gentleman is not an implement (qi/chi) (*Analects*, 2:12)." An implement is something fixed, unchanging, and inflexible. The idea of not being an implement leaves room for flexibility to incorporate other things, including Taoism and Buddhism.

Human psychology is not a unitary process. It may need different things and take different courses under different circumstances and at different times. This characteristic of the Chinese mind is well-illustrated in Archie J. Bahn's comparison of the Western, Indian, and Chinese attitudes towards activity and passivity. Bahn observes that while Europeans encourage activity, Hindus encourage passivity, Chinese accept the need for both activity and passivity, each in turn. He explicates:

"Why accept both activity and passivity, each in turn? Observe everyday experience. There is a time to arise and a time to go to bed, a time to work and a time to rest. The sun rises, and the sun sets. Initiation of activity is symbolized by yang. Completion of activity or rather achieving of passivity is symbolized by yin. Every being (tao) consists of both yang and yin... Being and doing are equally important, equally natural, equally good." 37

The Chinese have a tendency to strive for a balance by harmonizing different aspects of things. They tend to let each aspect have its turn and thus, instead of mixing them together, let them alternately work together. In the

Chinese mind, since different religions have different strengths and weaknesses, they may play respective roles in the same person's life.

Conceptually and philosophically, both Confucianism and Taoism believe in the Way as the *Tai Chi* (Great Ultimate), which literally means the highest or greatest utmost. The highest utmost cannot be exhausted by a single teaching. When Buddhism was first introduced to China, it was put in the language familiar and congenial to Confucianism and Taoism.³⁸ Therefore, regardless of the apparent discrepancies between the three religious doctrines, scholars could bring all three under the Way with relatively little difficulty. After all, no one can claim to have exhausted the Way.

G.2. Now one may want to ask: How can one believe in different things? What about truth? The rationale here seems to be that, if A is true, then non-A has to be false. If you believe in A, you cannot at the same time rationally believe in non-A. Here perhaps lies one of the greatest differences between the Chinese and the Western mind. The Chinese do not regard epistemic/semantic truth as highly as Westerners. As Chad Hansen put it, Chinese moral theories have "the requirement that our utterance be appropriate as opposed to being true."³⁹ The Chinese have never assigned an unconditional value to truth as has been done in the West.

In Chinese culture the problem of epistemic/semantic truth has not traditionally been an issue of philosophical significance.⁴⁰ In Chinese classics, the word "true/truth" ("zhen") was used to express the meaning of "cheng" ("sincerity" or "being truthful to what you are destined to

be"). It is primarily a metaphysical as well as an ethical concept (See *Tao De Jing*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean*). The term for truth is "zhen li." "Li" can be translated as "principles," "laws," or "patterns." They are the manifestations of the Tao/Way. In this sense, to live truthfully is to live an authentic life, to follow the Tao, and hence to manifest the Tao through one's own way of being. The message from the Chinese is similar to the one R.C. Zaehner has read from Hinduism. It is worthwhile to quote in full what Zaehner writes at the end of his remarkable book *Hinduism*:

"What, then is the message of Hinduism? If it has a message at all, it would seem to be this: to live out your dharma which is embedded in the conscience, to do what is instinctively you know to be right, and thereby to live in harmony with the dharma of all things, so that in the end you may see all things in yourself and yourself in all things and thereby enter into the eternal and timeless peace which is the dharma of moksha, the 'law' of 'freedom' that has its being outside space and time yet comprises and hallows both."⁴¹

If one can see all things (including people) in oneself and oneself in all things, then one has become one with the Tao or dharma. All distinctions are distinctions within one's being, not without. This, then, is the truth of life.

Therefore, unlike Aristotle, a Chinese philosopher would not say "Although I love my teacher, I love truth more than I love my teacher." For the Chinese, the most important thing is to participate in creating a better world for everyone, not to find out something objectively true. So to questions like "Who is smarter, Lao Zi or Confucius?" the

Chinese may answer "They are both very smart." Is that not enough? Does it really matter that much if we have an either-or answer? Not at all. This non-obsession with truth partly explains why the Chinese have no problem having in them the "trinity" of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

6.3. Another reason for embracing different religions is that "breadth" has been a traditional Chinese virtue. Breadth is not merely tolerance. To be tolerant means to be able to put up with different things. Breadth requires more than tolerance. It means being tolerant with a genuine understanding. Therefore, with this attitude, even if one finds discrepancies between different religions one may reserve them and concentrate on what is important in these ways of life. In Chinese this is called "qiu tong can yi" or "seeking common grounds while reserving differences." It is an important aspect of Chinese wisdom.

Finally, one most important Chinese value is harmony (he/ho). The Chinese believe that harmony is a value in itself and is preferable to conflict. In the Chinese view of dialectic harmonization, the Tao or Way is a process of harmonizing differences of things. The Tao is one and is the source of all polarities. It has two complementary elements or aspects, yang and yin. A harmonious interplay of yang and yin is most desirable. The world is full of polarities. When we find ourselves at one of the polarities and at the edge of a conflict, we can and should, through understanding and re-understanding of reality and ourselves, "project ourselves into a situation where conflict and antagonism will disappear through an overall process of adjustment of ourselves to the world." ⁴² For instance, Ming Tai Zu (*Tai-tsu*), the first emperor (1368-1398?) of the

Ming Dynasty, attempted to harmonize the three religions by saying that while Confucianism is the Way of yang or manifest virtue, Taoism and Buddhism are yin or hidden virtue. For him, the yang virtue is the culmination of this-worldly doctrine and can be relied upon for countless generations, the yin virtues are secret aids of the kingly Way; together the two comprise the Way of heaven. ⁴³ The Chinese pragmatic minds tend to take principles, particularly theoretical principles, not so rigidly. Between the option of "harmonizing differences" and "fighting it out" they tend to choose harmonization. This is perhaps the ultimate reason for Chinese embracing multiple religious participation.

7. Conclusion

Then, what lessons can be drawn from all this? Today we are promoting multiculturalism. Cultures include religions. In order to promote multiculturalism we need first of all to be tolerant towards different religious beliefs and practices. We need to be able to put up with religious practices other than our own. But that is not enough. We need to look beyond tolerance. We cannot live with our neighbors of different religions unless we have a genuine understanding of them. And we cannot have a genuine understanding of them unless we understand their religions. One way to understand different religions is to try to understand different religions from our own is to try to practice different religions. A Chinese Christian with a strong Confucian background may understand both better than a mere Confucian or a mere Christian. She may be

better equipped for promoting both cultures and living across the two cultures. Some people may think she is being incoherent. But what is wrong with such an "incoherence?" The Chinese lessons indicate that as long as we keep an attitude of breadth, we will be able to accommodate different religions. This attitude toward religion is "multiple religious participation," and I believe it is an important dimension of multiculturalism.

John Hick and others have explored, in theory, the possibility of coexisting religions which are valid respectively on their own account. This theory can be used to support the idea of multiple religious participation. If no single religion has the ultimate truth and each only reflects a facet of the Ultimate as Hick maintains, then no one is absolute or perfect. If with religion is the human drive for perfection, then one ought to embrace different religions in order to make one's spiritual life as perfect/fulfilling as possible within human limitations. Of course there is a provision to it -- there must be a productive way to put them all to work. The Chinese case I have presented provides a practical illustration of how some religions, even though seemingly contradictory to each other, can be integrated into an individual's life. Our case is a practical demonstration for multiple religious participation.

Although my thesis in this essay can be prescriptive, it is first of all descriptive. It describes the way in which millions of Chinese have lived their lives. So, the question here is not whether multiple citizenship in faith (*multiple religious participation*) is possible, but whether it is desirable. I do not claim multiple religious participation is the only way for multiculturalism. But it is one way. And

very likely a good way. 44

Notes

1. For instance, Theosophy "brings together elements from Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Spiritualism, Egyptian Hermeticism, perhaps something from Jewish Kabbalism, and occultism generally." *These Also Believe*, Charles Braden, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949, p.243.
2. Hans King and Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, New York: Doubleday, 1989, "Epilogue: Dual Religious Citizenship: A Challenge to the West," pp.273-283.
3. John Hick, "A Religious Understanding of Religion: a model of the Relationship between Traditions," in *Inter-Religious Models and Criteria*, edited by J. Kellenberger, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, pp.25-26. A similar idea was expressed in his *God and the Universe of Faiths*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973.
4. *Ibid.*, p.27.
5. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989, p.373.
6. Hans Küng and Julia Ching, 1989, pp.281-282.
7. Quoted from the *Oxford Study Bible: Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha*, edited by M. Jack Suggs, K.D. Sakenfeld, and J.R. Mueller, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p.82.
8. John H. Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transformation Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1994, p.27. For a discussion of this rejection, see Berthrong's Introduction in this book.
9. *USA-Today* (US), "Nirvana in the '90s: Buddha Beckons the Material World," by Marco R. della Cave, August 10, 1994, 1D.
10. There is the question of what religion is. It is not my intention to provide a definition of religion here. For the purpose of this essay I use "religion" in the sense in which Confuciansim can be called a religion. In this sense, religion must be understood very broadly to extend beyond the understanding of religion in many ordinary believers in the West.
11. For the difference between Taoism as a philosophy and as a religion, see Ren Ji-yu, "the Taoist and Taoist Religion," in *Taoism and Traditional Culture* (Dao Jiao yu Chuan Tong Wen Hua), edited by the Editorial Board of Cultural Knowledge, Beijing: China Books Publishers, 1992, pp.3-9.
12. Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989, p.94.
13. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989, p.14.
14. In this regard, Mencius' effort in the *Book of Mencius* (2A:6, 6A:1-6) is more an illustration than an argument. In contrast, one can say that Xun Zi's case that human nature is evil is just as forceless or forceful as Mencius'.
15. The title of Herbert Fingarette's little but influential book is "Confucius -- The Secular As Sacred," Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1972.
16. Zhuang Zi: *Making All Things Equal*.

17. See *Chuang Tzu: Inner Chapters*, translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p.55.
18. The Taoist believes that everything can be useful, depending on how you look at it.
19. Holmes Welch, *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1966, p.158.
20. H.G. Grell, *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-tung*, the University of Chicago Press, 1953, p.197.
21. Zong Mi, Yuan Ren Lun, quoted from *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*, by Hajime Nakamura, published by the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, 1960, p.288.
22. *The Way of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*, by Hajime Nakamura, published by the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, 1960, pp.288-9.
23. *Ibid.*, p.288.
24. Zhao Shen, "Treating All Three Doctrines Fairly" (San Jiao Ping Xin Lun), Book A. Quoted from *Taoism and Traditional culture* (Dao Jiao yu Chuan Tong Wen Hua), edited by the Editorial Board of Cultural Knowledge, Beijing: China Books Publishers, 1992, p.39.
25. Cheng Chih-ming, *Chung-kuo shan-shu yu tsung-chiao* (Chinese Morality Books and Religion), Taipei: Student Book Store, 1988, chapter 13. Also in Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993, p.218.
26. Henrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, London: Edinburg House, for the International Missionary Council, 1938, p.201. Quoted from Judith A. Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-*

- en, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p.1.
27. Judith A. Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p.9.
28. John H. Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1994, p.178.
29. Chen Yinke, "the Relation between Tao Yuanming's Thought had 'Clear Talk'" (Tao Yuanming zhi sixiang yu qingtian zhi guanxi), in *Jinmingguan cenggao chubian* (Chen's Essays, First Series), Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1980, pp.196. Quoted from Zhang Longxi, *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1992, p.121.
30. *Collected Works of Liang Shuming*, vol.1, Shandong Publishing House, 1989, p.528.
31. Guy Allitto, *the Last Confucian: Liang Shuming and the Chinese Modernity*, the University of California Press, Berkeley, Ca., 1986, 337-338.
32. Jiang Jin, "Liang Shuming and the Emergence of 20th-Century New Confucianism," *Chinese Historians*, Vol.VI, No.2, pp.1-26.
33. For some insightful discussion see Zheng Jiadong, "The Religiousness of Confucian Thought," (Rujia Sixiang de Zongjiaoxin Wenti) in *New-Confucianism Forum* (Xinrujia Pinglun), Vol.2, edited by Zheng Jiadong and Ye Haiyan, China Broadcasting Publishing House, 1995, pp.187-245.
34. This metaphor is attributed to Chang Shih, a colleague of Master Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi, 1130-1200). See Wm. Heodore De Bary, "Neofucianism as Traditional and

- Modern," in *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, edited by G. Larson and E. Deutsch, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 188, p.306.
35. Donald Holzman, Book Review on Six Dynasties Poetry by Kang-i Sun Chang, Harvard Journal of Asian Studies, Vol.48, June 1988, pp.244-250.
36. Zhang Longxi, *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1992, pp.123-4.
37. Archie J. Bahm, *Comparative Philosophy: Western, Indian and Chinese Philosophies Compared*, World Books, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1977, p.54.
38. For instance, Hajime Nakamura gave some very detailed examples of how sinified Buddhism was made in the process of being translated into Chinese. See his *The Way of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*, Japanese National Commission for Unesco, 1960, "Part III: They Ways of Thinking of the Chinese."
39. Chad Hansen, "Chinese Language, Chinese Philosophy, and "Truth,"" *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. XLIV, No.3, 1985, p.515. In this article Chad Hansen argues outrightly that "Chinese philosophy has no concept of truth," p.492.
40. Therefore, they did not need a Nietzsche to ask the question astonishing to most Westerners, "What is the good /value of truth?"
41. R.C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968, p.192.
42. Cheng Chung-ying, *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, SUNY press, Albany, 1991,

- P.195.
43. Judith A. Berling, 1980, pp.46-7.
44. This essay was presented at the 4th Interfaith Dialogue Conference, October 7-8, 1994, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and at Monmouth College Faculty Colloquium, spring of 1995. For valuable comments and suggestions, I would like to thank my audience on both occasions and my colleagues Farhat Haq, Douglas Spitz, Virginia Hellenga, and especially Robert Cathey, whose critiques have helped revising later drafts.