

The Portrait of Confucianism in *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* 續高僧傳

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In an earlier article for this journal, I examined the treatment of Taoism in *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* 續高僧傳 (T. 2050), compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667). I found, as we might expect, that Taoism was often criticized as mere sorcery or as a complete fraud (i.e., it is not possible to become an immortal). Intriguingly, however, in a few biographies, the Buddhist monks encountered remarkable men who are clearly Taoist immortals, although not explicitly identified as such.

In this article, I shift my focus to the depiction of Confucianism in *Further Biographies*. I expected to find little, if any, overt conflict between Buddhism and Confucianism for two reasons. First, a Buddhist might have good grounds for thinking that the basic Confucian concerns scarcely intersect with those of Buddhism, thus minimizing conflict. Along these lines, the rosier interpretation would view Confucianism and Buddhism as complementary: Confucianism provides guidelines for political, social and ritual behavior, while Buddhism supplies cosmology and soteriology. The second reason I did not expect to find overt conflict between Buddhism and Confucianism was a political one: Confucianism was securely entrenched in Chinese government and society, and perhaps the Buddhists simply could not afford to challenge its privileged position. Among the “three teachings” (三教, a term used in *Further Biographies*), Confucianism was always in first place; Buddhism and Taoism had to fight it out for second place.

For the most part, my expectations were correct. Confucianism has a low profile in the biographies, and it is usually treated neutrally. But, happily, there were some surprises. In a few biographies, Confucianism is energetically attacked and takes a worse beating than is ever administered to Taoism.

During the sixth and seventh centuries (the period covered by *Further Biographies*), Buddhism and Taoism engaged in a series of polemical attacks against each other. Taoists, Buddhists (and at least one Confucian) composed essays criticizing one or both of the other

religions. Some of these writings are collected in another of Daoxuan's compilations, *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (T. 2103) (in English, see Livia Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao*; Princeton, 1995). Two of the monks in *Further Biographies* were especially prominent in these religious debates, and Daoxuan included their pro-Buddhist essays in *Guang hongming ji*. One of the Monks, Daoan 道安 (exact dates uncertain; biography=628b-630b), wrote *Treatise on the Two Religions* 二教論 (*Guang hongming ji*, 136-143) in 570. The “two religions” are Buddhism and Confucianism, but Taoism is also treated. Daoan's biography includes some references to this essay, including his statement that “Buddhism is the inner (teaching), and Confucianism is the outer (teaching)” 釋教爲內儒教爲外. The other monk, Falin 法琳 (572-670, biography=636b-638c), wrote *Treatise on Destroying Evil* 破邪論 (*Guang hongming ji*, 161-143). These works by Daoan and Falin certainly deserve attention, but in the limited space of this article I will concentrate on references to Confucianism in *Further Biographies* that are *not* part of a Buddhist monk's polished and polemical essay.

In the 700 biographies of different lengths (some are very short), covering 280 Taishō pages, there are about one hundred references to Confucianism, far fewer than to Taoism. Confucian references include: Confucius himself (孔子, 孔丘, 仲尼); Mozi (孟子); the Confucian School or teaching (儒學, 儒宗, 儒教); Confucian “arts” (儒術), which seems to refer to divination; Confucian texts (for example, *Analects* 論語, *Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經, histories [史 or 書], the six classics 六經 collectively or by name, *Odes* 詩 [經], *I Jing* 易 [經] *Record of Ritual* 禮記; Confucian scholars (博士); Confucian ritualists (祭酒).

Some of the Confucian items turn out to be red herrings (yet still somehow intriguing): a monk named Jewel Confucian 寶儒 (507a), whose short biography contains no mention of Confucianism and no clue as how he got his name; a Buddhist temple called the Temple of Benevolence and Filial Piety 仁孝寺; another temple named Filial Love Temple 孝愛寺 (so named because it was the burial place of a certain king's beloved mother).

Many of the other references to Confucianism are of the following sort: monks are said to have come from Confucian families; monks studied Confucianism before Buddhism; or more positively, one monk was benevolent and filial 仁孝 as a child (and this child grows up to be Jingying Huiyuan 淨影慧遠 [see below]). These brief references to Confucianism mostly portray it as a passing phase in a monk's life, an inadequate philosophy that he outgrows. Taoism also is often treated as a limited religion, attractive only to those of immature spirituality. Significantly, Taoism is called “perverse” 邪, but Confucianism is not.

Below I present three “snapshot” examples of different portraits of Confucianism in *Further Biographies*. The three examples, taken together, are representative of the spectrum of images of Confucianism in the biographies, but each example is in itself an extreme case.

Example #1. Peaceful co-existence

The longest and most serious discussion of Confucian doctrine in *Further Biographies* appears in the biography of Jingying Huiyuan, a monk well known for his careful sutra commentaries and his meticulous and voluminous presentation of Buddhist doctrine. But Huiyuan is also known to posterity as a defender of the Buddhist faith against oppression by the state. The Kamakura monk Nichiren, who tirelessly haranged his own government, cited Huiyuan (among other monks) as inspiration. Huiyuan himself did not write about Confucianism or Taoism, so Daoxuan’s account is our only source for Huiyuan’s views on Confucianism. In 574, Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou instigated a persecution of Buddhism. He summoned five hundred Buddhist monks, and Huiyuan was the only monk who dared to argue with him. Since an English translation of this debate is available, I will not go into detail here (in English, see Kenneth K. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine*, SUNY, 1990, pp. 25-27; Japanese works include Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄, *中国仏教思想史研究* [1968] and Ocho Enichi 横超慧日, *中国佛教の研究* [1979]). Huiyuan’s defense of Buddhism included the following points: (1) Buddhist statues are no less “inanimate” than the images worshipped in Confucian ancestral temples; (2) Buddhism is no more foreign than Confucianism, since Confucius himself came from the country of Lu 魯; (3) Buddhism supports filial piety, just as Confucianism does. Whatever one thinks of these three arguments (and they did not convince the Northern Zhou emperor), there is no mistaking Huiyuan’s effort to harmonize Buddhism and Confucianism (at least for the practical aim of averting persecution).

Huiyuan had a disciple named Zhihui 智徽 (559-638, biography =541b-542a), who said, “My mother and father gave birth to my physical body. My dharma teacher gave birth to my dharma body” 父母生吾肉身。法師生吾法身。 Zhihui then implies that true filial piety means gratitude toward one’s Buddhist teacher even more than to one’s parents. Zhihui thus goes a step beyond his own teacher Huiyuan: it is not just that Buddhism does not conflict with Confucianism (as Huiyuan tried to convince the emperor), but Buddhism has a

deeper understanding of at least one of Confucianism's cardinal tenets, filial piety. Throughout the long history of Buddhism in China, Buddhists have more than once made the argument that all sentient beings have been one's parents so that filial piety should be extended beyond the family, but it is less common to find Zhihui's suggestion that a religious parent deserves more filial respect than a flesh-and-blood parent.

Example #2. Confucianism is the dregs

The exegete monk Huisong 慧嵩 (exact dates uncertain; biography =482c-483b), from remote Turfan, had an older brother who was a Confucian scholar and who did not believe in Buddhism. Huisong speaks of “rotten Confucians” and says that Confucianism is like “dregs” 糟粕. Huisong converts his older brother to Buddhism with one verse from the Abhidharma. In the biography of Huisong's student Zhihuan 志念 (534-608, biography=508b-509b), it is said that Huisong was known as, with what must have been delicious irony, “the Confucius of Abhidharma” 毘曇孔子.

In *Further Biographies*, there is only one other occurrence of the term “dregs.” It is again used to denigrate Confucianism, not Taoism (or anything else). In this instance, the meditator monk Benji 本濟 (562-615; biography=578a-b) is described as being well versed in Confucianism from an early age, but he suddenly awakened to the Buddhist truth and saw that Confucianism was the “dregs of the universe” 宇宙之糟粕. Benji became an important disciple of Xinxing 信行, the founder of the Three Levels Sect 三階教.

These two examples of nasty name-calling reflect none of the conciliatory spirit of Huiyuan. They lead into the third example, which describes a Buddhist animosity toward Confucianism that is far beyond mere name-calling.

Example #3. A Confucian Mocks Buddhism and Lives (but not for long) to

Regret It

In the biography of the seventh-century monk Huikuan 惠寬 (600c-601b) there is a remarkable story about a skeptical Confucian who gets his just deserts. Huikuan's biography is quite long and full of interesting details, but he, is, I think, otherwise unknown.

In 648, a certain man named Song Wei 宋尉 said, “I don't believe in Buddhism. I believe only in Confucianism” 我不信佛。唯信周孔。Song Wei added sarcastically, “However, I have twice experienced the powers of the Buddha. One time, people were urinating

beside my door. So I set out a Buddha [statue], and they stopped. The other time it was winter, and I burned a wooden Buddha [statue] to keep myself warm.” When Huikuan heard about these statements, he sent Song Wei a letter. After reading the letter, Song Wei said, “This man of the Way [Huikuan] seems to be a spiritual person. I will test whether has he spiritual powers or not. “So Song Wei used the part of the letter with Huikuan’s name and address to wipe himself after defecating. Then his anus (糞門) split open, and he could not stand up. Song Wei cried, “I am dying!” Then he summoned Huikuan to come. Although Song Wei repented his transgressions and made sutras and statues, he died at the next full moon.

This story is at once funny, scatological and surprising. Humorous anecdotes in *Further Biographies* are uncommon but not unknown (and a topic that deserves further study). However, toilet humor is very rare. Daoxuan uses the word “asshole” 糞門 only this once. (Interestingly, the only other example of bathroom humor is aimed primarily at the anti-Buddhist Emperor Zhou and secondarily at Taoists. Let me briefly summarize the story. The monk Tongjin 童進 [659b], who was constantly drunk and whose urine stank, imbibed a poison concocted at the order of Emperor Zhou. Although the poison-brewers had to wear leather clothing and lapis lazuli eye-protectors, Tongjin drank the poison and was unaffected. In fact, he joked as usual and tossed down another ladleful of the poison. Taoists were amazed; they ran in all directions when Tongjin offered them a taste of the poison. Afterwards, Tongjin took a nap on some rocks. He urinated in his sleep, and the urine shattered the rocks. There is more to be said about this story, but it will have to wait for a later publication.)

Turning away from the humor, let us look at the violence in the story about Song Wei and Huikuan. While it is true that the Buddhist monk did not kill the Confucian with his own hands, it is nonetheless surprising to find one of these eminent monks implicated in a murder. After all, the lethal toilet-paper seems like a kind of black magic, and Huikuan did not use any reverse magic to save Song Wei’s life, even after the Confucian’s conversion to Buddhism.

Huikuan, by the way, suffered no bad karmic consequences from his role in Song Wei’s death. When the time came for Huikuan himself to die, many auspicious and dramatic signs appeared: there was a radiance so bright that people thought the temple was on fire; the water in the lotus pond suddenly dried up; red lotuses turned white; blood flowed from a large camphor tree into a river, turning the river completely red; a seventeen-

story stupa became taller; a pair of geese appeared mysteriously, cried out, lay on the ground, refused to move, and later followed the funeral procession. Finally, Huikuan's corpse showed no insects, blood or decay.

There is no case (to my knowledge) in *Further Biographies* of a Buddhist monk murdering a Taoist. It is striking, if a bit disturbing, to discover that a Buddhist's murderous impulses are aroused by the challenge of a rude Confucian who doubts the powers of the Buddha.

No Hidden Confucians

In my study of Taoists elements in *Further Biographies* I discussed several biographies that featured remarkable men (not the monks themselves) who were not explicitly identified as Taoists, much less as immortals 仙, but who in fact had the characteristics of genuine immortals (living for hundreds of years, having very long hair, not eating regular human food, inhabiting a mysteriously remote valley, appearing and disappearing suddenly, and so forth). Through these cameo roles, Taoists are portrayed very attractively in the biographies. Confucians have no such luck. For one thing, Confucians have no particular "look" and so cannot hide in plain sight. More fundamentally, it may be that Taoist powers and charms were compelling, even to Daoxuan and the monks whose biographies he compiled, but Confucian virtues were less alluring.

Conclusion

This brief study of Confucianism in *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* illuminates some facets of the Buddhist view of Confucianism in sixth-and seventh-century China. For the most part, Confucianism is depicted as virtuous—but limited. Confucianism promotes tame virtues such as filial piety and benevolence but lacks the profundity of Buddhist doctrine. Nonetheless, in a few of the biographies, the eminent monks seem to have been infuriated by Confucianism (or by a particularly annoying Confucian).

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