

## **A Harmonious Synthesis of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism in the Matrix of Chinese Culture: An Overview**

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### **Abstract**

This paper proposes a process of synthesis based on Chinese socio-historical context in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the synthesis of three major religious traditions of East Asia such as Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. At the same time, to be considered is the syncretic approach through which these religions have attained popularity throughout all Eastern and Far Eastern parts of Asia. Thus, in order to make a reasonable justification for the current study, an attempt is made to explore how these religions have appeared to be more or less similar to each other in case of their beliefs and practices. The purpose of the current paper is to decipher the points where and how these three religions interact with each other in terms of belief and practice that is based on a cultural bridge between China and other East Asian countries. This paper offers an overview of the harmonious synthesis of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism in the matrix of Chinese culture. In conclusion, it points out a new mode of syncretism which can be called "Hybridization"- a new insight into the process of synthesis.

**Key words:** Three Traditions, Syncretism, Assimilation, Incorporation; Imitation, Accumulation.

### **Introduction**

East Asia has turned to be a lucrative place for researchers to decipher the cultural diversity in a larger geographical setting. As Sino-culture has a tremendous impact on this region, the researchertake China as a model to analyze the harmonious synthesis in Chinese Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. One of the reasons to analyze these traditions is that these are common in all East Asian countries, and they all represent more or less Chinese characters.<sup>1</sup> Regarding the predominant Chinese culture, Reischauer compared the relationship between China (especially Northern China) and East Asia to that of Greco-Roman civilization and Europe.<sup>2</sup> Huntington

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<sup>1</sup> East Asian cultural sphere, Retrieved from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East\\_Asian\\_cultural\\_sphere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Asian_cultural_sphere), (accessed on 4 August 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Edwin O. Reischauer, "The Sinc World in Perspective", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 52(2), 1974, pp. 341-348.

presents the Sinic world as the only one that is based on a cultural rather than religious identity.<sup>3</sup> This influence of Chinese culture makes it a model to understand the religious syncretism in East Asia. Hence, the researchertake China as a measuring scale to understand the synthesis of three traditions. In China, culture is not influenced by religion, rather all Chinese religions are more or less influenced by culture. The influence of Chinese culture is so strong that it cannot be erased from people's minds.<sup>4</sup> But it is important to mention that Confucianism was the most prominent force in shaping the culture of the world's most populous nation for more than two thousand years.<sup>5</sup>

The ways in which syncretism happens in three East Asian traditions are very peculiar. At this point, it is important to note that although these old traditions are syncretic in nature, they never mix together to become a unified whole. Rather, they stand with their own identity even after they are influenced by one another. This is the point to be further clarified that how the three creates a one synthetic concept after being unchanged with their persistent themes. Thus, the current paper demands a thorough study to reassess the concept of syncretism in the light of East Asian traditions i.e., Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism.

#### **Historical Upheavals in China**

During the course of about 3500 years of history, the Chinese developed their own distinctive ideas concerning man's origin, nature, destiny and his relation to the universe in which he lived. Therefore, no such religious system is found in China as in the West.<sup>6</sup> Thus, lacking the idea of a personalistic creator external to the cosmos, the Chinese developed an approach to religious life that led to the rejection of monotheism.<sup>7</sup> Although traditional Chinese religiosity does not embrace the Abrahamic concept of One God, this certainly does not mean that supernatural beings are not venerated or worshiped, especially in the traditions of Chinese origin. These entities may take the form of deities, saints, immortals, trees, animals and other aspects of nature, fairies, spirits etc.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (Simon & Schuster 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Wang Dunqin, *The Influence of Confucianism on Molding Zhang Jian's Cultural Character*, (Nangtong University Press 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Tse-shying Chen, "The Confucian View of World Order", *Indiana International & Comparative Law Review*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 1991, pp.45-69.

<sup>6</sup> Howard Smith, *Chinese Religions*, (The Trinity Press, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> Derk Bodde, 'Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy', Arther Wright (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Thought*, 3rd ed., (University of Chicago Phoenix Book, 1967), pp. 20-24.

<sup>8</sup> Eileen Barker, 'Religion in China: Some Introductory Notes for the Intrepid Western Scholar', Yang, F. and Lang, G. (eds.), *Social scientific studies of religion in China: methodology, theories, and findings*, (Brill 2011), pp. 109-132.

Historically, the rise of the great Han dynasty marks the end of the Classical Period of Chinese religious and philosophical thoughts. This period is divided into two segments: The first half is known as the "Spring and Autumn" period (206 BCE-9 CE), named after the Spring and Autumn Annals, a chronicle covering the years 722-481 BCE supposedly written by Confucius.<sup>9</sup> The classical period saw the birth of Confucianism and Taoism as a native religious philosophy of China. The Han period was the witness to the rise of Confucianism as a state cult, the development of Taoism as a mystic cult, and the advent of Buddhism.<sup>10</sup> However, Buddhism is not mentioned separately in the dynastic history during the Han period. The reason is that Buddhism is considered as a part of Taoism, not a different religion. Therefore, Han Buddhism remained under the shadow of Taoism. But various intermixtures are found to have happened during this shadowy period<sup>11</sup> that have remained persistent to continue to do so until today. Thus, in spite of having many philosophical and ethical differences among Chinese Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism we can see a harmonious coexistence of these three religions in modern-day China. At this point, however, a thorough study is called for with a view to discovering a common ground where these religions stay together with their internal differences.

### 1. Synthesis in Buddhism

One of the outstanding facts of Buddhism in the history of Chinese philosophy has been its tendency and ability to synthesize<sup>12</sup>. Although various Buddhist schools arrived in China from India, only those schools which tempered themselves with Chinese culture endured. More interesting fact is that the schools which originated in China are much more popular than those which originated in India.

#### 1.1. Synthesis with Chinese Culture

As a foreign religion, Buddhism has many aspects that do not match with traditional Chinese culture, such as the concept of suffering, existence as an illusion, living celibate life etc. In the long history of its journey throughout China, it has synthesized its philosophy with traditional Chinese culture.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Buddhism which in the beginning knew no god and had no worship, came to present to the Chinese a

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph A. Adler, *Chinese Religions*, (Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Ian Mabbett, "The Beginnings of Buddhism", *History Today*, Vol. 52, Issue, 1, 2002, Retrieved from: <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/beginnings-buddhism>, (accessed on January 12 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Adler, *Op.cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Xinyi Ou, "The Successful Integration of Buddhism with Chinese Culture: A Summary", *Grand Valley Journal of History*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2012, pp. 1-6, Retrieved from: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvjh/vol1/iss2/3> (accessed on 12 January 2023).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

multitude of new divinities, and a whole new system for making them real to the people.<sup>14</sup> Various new concepts are introduced in it as an impact of the dominant Chinese culture. As for the strong influence of the concept of filial piety in Chinese culture, Buddhism had to absorb it. Whereas the main motto of Buddha is to liberate the soul from the burden of this world, Chinese Buddhist deities give earthly instruments as blessings.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.2. Humanisation of Deity

The humanization of Chinese Buddhist deities is surely a Chinese influence. As a result, the historical Buddha (Gautama the Buddha) lost his popularity in China and also in other Eastern countries. In such a case, the historical Buddha appeared to the Chinese as the manifestation of their popular deity *Kuan-yin* or *Kuan-shai-yin* who is well known as Avalokiteshvara. It is important to note that *Kuan-yin* is the short of *Kuan-shai-yin*, a phrase signifying "a being who hears the cries of man."<sup>16</sup> Historically, from the T'ang period (618-907 AD), he turned to a woman, or the Goddess of Mercy. At the same time, Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva also transformed into a deity with feminine features and he is also worshiped as the female deity.

### 1.3. Ancestral Cult

As for strong Confucian influence, various Chinese Buddhist Schools were bound to adopt the concepts of "linking the two worlds". As far as human relation is concerned, followers of the Pure Land School of Buddhism transfer their merits to their ancestors with a view to linking the two worlds. Thus, transferring one's merit to one's ancestors is considered the most meritorious act in Pure Land School.<sup>17</sup> As there is a filial obligation toward parents who have died, the Chinese Buddhist scholars develop a concept of purgatory or hell. A purgatory is a place where the dead rests for a short period after the departure of this world. Purgatory gives some kind of certainty that one can communicate with the ancestors and transfer merits to them. By means of the priesthood, it is possible to make contact with them, and through their mediation, the beloved dead can surely and speedily be liberated from the pains of purgatory.<sup>18</sup> It is important to mention that the Buddhist concept of rebirth is also linked with the ancestral cult of Confucians. The Buddhist monk, therefore, claims that one should not do harm to plant and animal life.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, at

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<sup>14</sup> Karl Ludvig Reichlet, *Religion in Chinese Garment*, (Lutterworth Press 1951).

<sup>15</sup> Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, (Cambridge University Press 2000).

<sup>16</sup> S Beal, *Buddhism in China*, (Princeton University Press 1884), p.119.

<sup>17</sup> Moor, *Op.cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Reichlet, *Op.cit.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.110.

each of the large Buddhist monasteries there are ancestral tablets. There is a special room where the tablets for the soul are placed when a monk dies, where offerings and prayers are made in a thoroughly Confucian manner.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Synthesis in Taoism

Taoism is the religion which has an intimate relation with Buddhism from the very beginning. Although Buddhism borrowed elements from Taoism right after the former grew strong, the later acquired more Buddhist concepts to put impact over the masses. Ultimately, in East Asia, Taoism acts like a melting pot where concepts from Buddhism, Confucianism, and indigenous beliefs find their own places.

### 2.1 Synthesis with Buddhism

Taoism as a religion became established at a time when Buddhism was infiltrating into China. At first, Buddhism seems to have been accepted as a foreign teaching with great similarities to Taoism. Friendly contacts grew up in which Taoists assisted in the translation of Buddhist texts, and Taoist terms were taken over to explain Buddhist concepts.<sup>21</sup> For it could not be concealed that Buddhism became increasingly the leading religion for the masses of China. The only salvation for the Taoist community was to lean upon the one that was stronger and adopted as many Buddhist elements as possible. Because it was not easy to maintain oneself alongside the dominant Buddhist community.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, various concepts of Buddhism are borrowed by the Taoists to make it at the same pace as its contestant.

### 2.2 Deification of Lao-tzu

Taoism, like Buddhism, has no permanent central authority to which all believing Taoists can submit. The Taoists, in order to prove both the antiquity and the superiority of their religion, place the birth of Lao-tzu before the creation of heaven and earth. They claim that as creation resulted from his departure, like the Buddha, Lao-tzu answers the prayers of the people for protection and salvation.<sup>23</sup> At a certain stage, the Taoists developed both the idea of the Supreme Tao and the idea of incarnation. The historic Lao-tzu, therefore, was considered one of these incarnations. It is clear that the Taoist idea of incarnation is undoubtedly a Buddhist

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.118.

<sup>21</sup> Jiahe Liu, Dongfang Shao, "Early Buddhism and Taoism in China(A.D. 65-420)", *Buddhist-ChristianStudies*, Vol.12,1992,pp.35-41,Retrieved from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1389953> (accessed on 12 January 2023). <https://doi.org/10.2307/1389953>

<sup>22</sup> Reichlet, *Op.cit.*,1951, p.88.

<sup>23</sup> Smith (1968), *Op.cit.*, p.108.

importation of the doctrine of the two bodies of the Buddha: the *Dharmakaya*, or the body of essence, and the *Nirmanakaya*, or the body of manifestation.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.3 Taoist Pantheon

Faced with the Buddhist teaching in relation to innumerable Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* the Taoists proclaim that their immortals are divine instructors “*t’ien-tsun*,” who teach the Taoist adepts to follow their footsteps. They now begin to surround their universe with a hierarchy of innumerable gods who match up to the Buddhist pantheon. The shadowy figure of Huang-Lao, for example, is replaced by a triad of ‘Celestial Honored Ones’ (T’ien Tsum), who is raised far above the human sphere and has never been incarnated as men. Under these ‘Celestial Honored Ones’, there is a host of superior and inferior divinities such as station-gods, genii, deceased heroes, good men and virtuous women. All these became objects of worship.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.4 Concept of Underworld

While Buddhism<sup>26</sup> espoused beliefs in Karma and rebirth, it notably lacks concepts associated with an afterlife or an underworld<sup>27</sup>. As Buddhism gained traction in China, particularly through its Mahayana branch, its adaptable nature allowed it to incorporate elements from Chinese pantheons into its teachings. Through this process

<sup>24</sup> K.S. Ch’en, *Buddhism in China- A Historical Survey*, (Princeton University Press 1964).

<sup>25</sup> Smith, *Op.cit.*, p.108.

<sup>26</sup> To proceed, it is important to note that Buddhism is primarily characterized by its two major schools: Theravada (or Hinayana) Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism, also known as Hinayana Buddhism or the "Small Vehicle," is considered the earliest form of Buddhism closely aligned with the founder's original vision. It is often referred to as the "Teaching of the Elders." While its founders are believed to have been closest to the Buddha, it's worth noting that the term "Theravada" or "Hinayana" was commonly used in India to denote any monastic sect, which directly applies to this tradition. On the other hand, Mahayana Buddhism, or the "Great Vehicle," emerged approximately 400 years after the passing of Gautama the Buddha. It has become the most widespread and popular form of Buddhism in the world today, spreading from its initial acceptance in countries such as China, Korea, Mongolia, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Tibet to various points worldwide. The Mahayana school holds the belief that all human beings possess a Buddha nature and can attain transcendent awareness, with the aspiration to become a Bodhisattva. This perspective contrasts with Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism. For a good discussion, see J. J. Mark, "A Short History of the Buddhist Schools", *World History Encyclopedia*, (2020, September 29). Retrieved from: <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/492/a-short-history-of-the-buddhist-schools/>(accessed on 6 November, 2023); S. A. Hai, 2007, *Indian Philosophy*, (The University Press Limited 2007); N. K. Chakma, *Buddhism in Bangladesh and Other Papers*, (Abosar, Dhaka 2007); and নীলকুমার চাকমা, বুদ্ধ ধর্মগুরুদর্শন, (অবসর, ঢাকা ২০০৭).

<sup>27</sup> The underworld was conceived as a vast parallel or alternate version of the earthly realm, replete with its own houses and furniture, streets and gardens. It was a realm teeming with souls in transition as they journeyed toward their eventual reincarnation in the world of the living. Retrieved from: <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/cosmos/prb/underworld.htm#to>(accessed on 6 November 2023).

of assimilation, Mahayana Buddhism integrated notions of heaven and hell, commonly referred to as the 'Underworld,' along with various other Chinese elements. This shift contrasts with the original tenets of Hinayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism's assimilative approach facilitated a harmonious adaptation to the new culture and effectively connected its own concept of rebirth with the Chinese concept of the Underworld. Consequently, the assimilation of Buddhism in China gave rise to Sino-Buddhist syncretism. The Mahayana schools of Buddhism, for instance, have embraced the Indian concept of continued personal existence, either through transmigration into animals or other living entities, or through the Chinese belief in translation into one of the numerous heavens or hells, where souls are rewarded or punished based on their earthly conduct. However, over time, this concept of a future state within Mahayana schools was embraced by the Chinese mind and integrated into Taoism. Consequently, Taoists borrowed the overall structure of their underworld from Buddhism and incorporated it into Taoism.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.5 Taoist Ethics

In the blend of Confucian and Buddhist ethics, Taoism also developed a code of ethics. *The Book of Secret Blessing*, for example, contains a whole series of ethical statements. It makes no pretense of lofty philosophy, but presents the rules of life in Confucian thought and tone. Such as practice of righteousness, filial piety, loving younger ones and respect toward elders, being merciful toward the orphan, and compassionate toward the widow etc. Sincerity is given the foremost place as it is considered to be the root of all good instincts in Taoism.<sup>29</sup> In addition to confession of sin, in the attempt to bring about prohibition of the slaughter of animals, as well as in the designation "The Religion for the Promotion of Peace in the Universe" are gleams of the influence of Buddhism.<sup>30</sup> As per these ethical statements, we can assume that both Confucianism and Buddhism had a strong influence on Taoism.

### 2.6 Taoist Literature

Before the coming of Buddhism, the Chinese had a lack of imagination in thinking. In the early stages of Taoism, the Taoist scholars worked primarily on alchemy, divination, hygiene, and breathing exercises and so forth. But the sources for this kind of literature were limited. Meanwhile, the Buddhist sutras gave them a huge supply of thought. Specially, the Mahayana Sutras gave them a rich granary of imaginations. For this reason, the Taoists in the 5<sup>th</sup> century just borrowed and copied the Buddhist scriptures and named it as their own. Sometimes they were so careless

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>29</sup> Reichlet, *Op.cit.*, 1951, p.92.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

in their copying process that they unconsciously forgot to omit even the name of Buddha. For example, some lines are cited from so-called Taoist works:

Of all the teachings of the world, the Buddha's teaching is foremost.  
Our master is called the Buddha, who follows the incomparable teaching.  
The host of saints and immortals has already realized the way of the Buddha.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, they combined a biography of Lao-tzu similar to that of Buddha. And in line with three parts of the Buddhist *Tripitok*, the Taoists also developed a canon consisting of three parts.<sup>32</sup>

### 2.7 Image Worship

To worship a statue or a pictorial image was totally unknown to pre-Buddhist China. Lao-tzu did not even mention the worship of gods, much less the worship of images. Buddhism brought with it the art of making statues and a rich heritage of cave painting. In mountainous China, for an instance, this skill flourished rapidly. Although the Taoists borrowed the idea of making statues and images from the Buddhists, they never bother to admit it.<sup>33</sup> When Buddhist monks ascended to the position of *Arhats* (lo-han), they were so much venerated in China. And after their death, the cult of worshipping their images became popular. This is the primary ground of justification for the idea of image worship borrowed from Buddhism. Thus deep spirituality in original Taoism soon disappeared, and in its place appeared the fantastic dream stuff about the wonderlands of East and West such as local gods, guilds and nature deities.<sup>34</sup>

### 2.8 Hermitage and Monk

Buddhism brought with it the concept of monastic life, which was previously unknown to China. The monastic life contrasts with the traditional Chinese social structure. In spite of this, the number of Buddhist monasteries grew so wide that Taoism soon adhered to it.<sup>35</sup> Under the influence of Buddhism, thus, gradually the Taoists raised their monasteries throughout China. But it is true that most of the Taoist priests live in the society, not in the monasteries. However, during the sixth century, in imitation of Buddhism, Taoist priests who lived in monasteries became celibate, and at the same time, nunneries were established for women.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ch'en, *Op.cit.*, p.234.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>34</sup> Reichlet, *Op.cit.*, p.94.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

<sup>36</sup> Smith (1968), *Op.cit.*, p.109.



## 2.9 Concept of Karma

The Buddhist concepts of Karma and rebirth were likewise appropriated, as indicated in the following passage:

The Taoist saints, since countless aeons in the past ...have all depended on the merits of their past lives to attain the Tao of the present; they have, without exception, reached their present state through the accumulation of merits derived from their former careers...<sup>37</sup>

This was in contrast with the earlier Taoist doctrine of the transmission of the burden. The concept of rebirth previously existed in Taoism, but there was no inclination of Karma of previous birth. With the influence of Buddhism, Taoism took the concept that one has to take the burden of his or her previous birth.

## 3. Synthesis in Confucianism

Originating in the same land, there are many similarities between Confucianism and Taoism. Thus, Confucianism and Taoism have much in common. However, the best picture of synthesis of the three religions is depicted in the movement of Neo-Confucianism.

### 3.1 Harmony of Heaven, Earth and Humanity

The goal of establishing a harmony of heaven, earth, and humanity is emphasized in both Confucianism and Taoism. At the abstract level, the ideal state is considered a harmony of heaven, earth, and humanity. However, the collapse of the political order indicates that something is wrong in the cosmos as a whole. In Confucian cosmogony, man is considered an organ in a vast organism. This vast organism, as for their belief, is the universe. Arguably, he is a part, though small but has functional relationships to larger whole (like organs in organisms). To make it plain, in Confucian cosmogony, the human body is represented as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm of the universe.<sup>38</sup>

### 3.2 Neo-Confucianism

In China it is often called “Sung-Ming lixue” often shortened to “lixue”, as it originates in the period of Song and Ming dynasties. Although the Neo-Confucians were critical of Taoism and Buddhism, the two did have an influence on the Neo-Confucian philosophy. In addition, a good number of terms and concepts are found to have been borrowed from both Taoism and Buddhism.<sup>39</sup> Actually the motto of Neo-Confucianism is to cut the extravagant element that penetrates into the Confucian belief system due to a long attachment with Taoism and Buddhism. However,

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<sup>37</sup> Ch'en, *Op.cit.*, p.123.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Op.cit.*, p.101.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

although Neo-Confucians were very critical to Taoism and Buddhism, they unconsciously adopted various Taoist and Buddhist concepts. And ultimately, they gradually went further from the old teaching.

### 3.3 Combination of Naturalism and Humanism

As far as the concept of a combination of naturalism and humanism is concerned, the Neo-Confucian philosophers directly accepted a naturalistic cosmology of Taoist origin. There was little cosmological explanation in early Confucianism. For this reason, to build a logical cosmology, Neo-Confucian scholars borrowed the naturalistic philosophy of Taoism.<sup>40</sup> It was the Neo-Confucian movement which can be called a second attempt to combine Taoist naturalism and Confucian humanism. It was a conscious movement that revived the thought and culture of pre-Buddhist China. They returned directly to the humanist teaching of Confucius and his school with a view to overthrowing and replacing much Indian and non-Chinese thought and culture of medieval China.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.4 The Tai-chi Symbol

An instance of the combination of Taoist naturalism and Confucian humanism is the use of the concept of *Tai-chi*. Actually, *Tai-chi* is a Taoist symbol. *Tai-chi* is a circle with a white and black part, embracing one another. The white is named as Yang and the black is named as Ying. They hold the opposite character. Yang is for light, good, heaven and male elements while Ying is for dark, evil, earth and female elements. As the opposite character embraces one another, there is eternal tension. And with this tension, the creation runs. *Tai-chi* is mainly used by the Taoist to explain the activity of the universe. Also, the Chinese martial art system is very much Taoist in nature because it uses the concept of *Tai-chi* as a system of fighting against the enemy.<sup>42</sup> Also the Neo-Confucians use this symbol (though in a different way), to discuss their creation theory.

### 3.5 Study of Principle or *Li*

The concept of *li* was borrowed from *Hua-yan* Buddhism. According to the Neo-Confucians, every object of the world has *li*. Briefly stated, *li* is the universal principle underlying all things, the cause, the form, the essence, the sufficient reason for being. Such an idea is close to *Hua-yan* doctrine of interpenetration and intermutuality i.e., the all in one and one in all. The *Hua-yan* theory presents a totalistic

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.111.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.

<sup>42</sup> Jian-sheng Wen and Min Su, "The Historical Origin of the Chinese Taoist and Tai Chi", *Journal of Department of Physical Education*, (Northwestern Poly Technical University 2012).

theory which brings all things to one center- the Buddha. This is the reason for which *Hua -yen* Buddhism is favored by the Japanese emperor because it provided a sanction for their totalitarian schemes.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.6 Meditation on Things and Mind

The emphasis of mind by the Neo-Confucians leads it to an unconscious connection with Buddhist practice over one's self as religious significance. Actually, this emphasis is placed on the seriousness or the state of consciousness that corresponds to Buddhist meditation. At this point, it is important to note that Neo-Confucians are found to have interpreted the state of consciousness on the basis of Buddhist meditation such as *dhyana* and *prajna*. This is the way how the Buddhist idea of meditation slowly takes place in Neo-Confucianism. This influence makes a strong position in the school of mind. In their advocacy of concentration of mind, the Neo-Confucians also appear to have been influenced by the Buddhists. Buddhist mental discipline emphasizes mindfulness, meditation and equanimity.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.7 Explanation of Sagehood

Sagehood is a popular term for all three traditions. But a Confucian sage is different from that of the Taoist and Buddhist ones. Sagehood was an important tenet of the Neo-Confucian movement. According to them, a sage is enlightened when he gains control of his emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, dislike and greed. It is understood that this process of the attainment of sagehood in Neo-Confucianism probably corresponds to the process of the attainment of Bodhisattvahood in Buddhism.<sup>45</sup>

### Conclusion

The above discussion is an attempt to clarify the idea of syncretism of three traditions in East Asian Context. In spite of their internal rivalry to catch popularity, they unconsciously create a syncretic whole. With the amalgam of three traditions, the Chinese gradually lose to think about religion separately. Every new imagination more or less is crossed by others. Buddhism, from the beginning, has been desperately attacked by Confucianism. Taoism, though at first gives a helping hand to it, gradually turns to a strong rival which is visible in the persecution of 574 and 845 AD. These instances prove that there remains no long-term friendly relation among the three. In spite of that, they borrowed elements from each other. In this Supremacy of Confucianism, it is very difficult for both Taoism and Buddhism to

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.138.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.138.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

flourish with an independent identity. For this reason, they both assume a Chinese Character as a solution.<sup>46</sup> Basically, the three traditions present three solutions to one great problem. They see things from three different perspectives. The Buddhists look upon the universe as a “sea of waves”; the Taoists, as “a great transformation”; and Confucianists, as “a great current”.<sup>47</sup> With the combination of these three ideas there arises a separate body which cannot be called as fully Taoist or Fully Buddhist or fully Confucian. The Tao of Taoism, the Chen Ju or “Thusness” of Buddhism and the Li (Reason, law, principle) of Confucianism are blended in a common truth.<sup>48</sup> However, it is important to note that the modern Chinese are mainly atheist. Religion does not play any vital role in their lives. What remains are the relics of the golden years of the medieval age. The synthesis that occurred in medieval China has its root so deep that it is reflected in the modern day in the means of film, picture, proverbs, language etc.

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<sup>46</sup> Chan Master Sheng Yen, *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism, A Contemporary Chan Master's Answers to Common Questions*, Trns: Douglas Gildow and Otto Chang, (North Atlantic Books 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Moor, *Op.cit.*, p.134.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Op.cit.*, p.180.