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## BUDDHISM UNDER THE T'ANG

*Buddhism Under the T'ang* is a history of the Buddhist church during the T'ang dynasty (618–907), when Buddhist thought reached the pinnacle of its development. The three centuries spanned by the T'ang saw the formation of such important philosophical schools as the Fa-hsiang and Hua-yen, the consolidation of the T'ien-t'ai school, the introduction of Esoteric Buddhism from India, and the emergence of the Pure Land and Ch'an schools as the predominant expressions of Buddhist faith and practice.

Professor Weinstein draws extensively upon both secular and ecclesiastical records to chronicle the vicissitudes of the Buddhist church. The main focus is on the constantly changing relationship between the Buddhist church and the T'ang state. Among the topics discussed in detail are the various attempts to curb the power of the Buddhist monasteries, the governance of the Buddhist clergy, the use of Buddhism to promote secular political ends, and the violent suppression of Buddhism by Emperor Wu (840–846) and its formal restoration under the last T'ang emperor.

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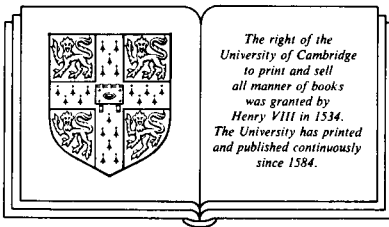
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# *Buddhism under the T'ang*

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*To the memory of*  
Professor Hosaka Gyokusen: 1887–1964  
*and*  
Professor Masunaga Reihō: 1902–1981  
*with respect and gratitude.*

*Ikkū no on nao hōsha subeshi.*  
Dōgen Zenji, *Shōbōgenzō gyōji*

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## PREFACE

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The present study started out as a chapter for the second of the two volumes devoted to the Sui and T'ang dynasties in *The Cambridge History of China*. Since I was writing for readers whose interests were primarily in the history and institutions of T'ang China, I decided to focus on these two areas, placing special emphasis on the vicissitudes in the relationship between the central government of the T'ang and the Buddhist church at large.

Having been trained as a Buddhologist, I would, ideally, have preferred to treat both the political and doctrinal aspects of T'ang Buddhism in at least equal measure, but practical considerations weighed against this, the most important being the inevitable limitation of space imposed upon the author of a single chapter in a multivolume work. In view of the prominent position that Buddhism occupied in T'ang society and the extraordinary richness of its philosophical and religious traditions, I became convinced that an attempt to cover all of the major aspects of Buddhism under the T'ang would most likely result in a superficial survey.

Obviously some hard choices had to be made. Considering that a growing body of articles, including several books, already existed in English on some of the major T'ang schools – Ch'an, Pure Land, T'ien-t'ai, Fa-hsiang, Hua-yen, and Mi (Esoteric) – it seemed that, personal preferences aside, if the scope of the coverage had to be narrowed as was clearly the case, this was the area in which it could be done with least loss, since the reader who wished to supplement his knowledge of T'ang Buddhist doctrine could do so to some extent with the materials already at his disposal. On the other hand, the reader would not be able to find in any Western language – or in Japanese for that matter – a comprehensive history of the Buddhist church that covered the three centuries of the T'ang.

I am of course not suggesting that no work has been done on the secular side of T'ang Buddhist history. On the contrary, Jacques



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Gernet, Kenneth Ch'en, and D. C. Twitchett in the West, Michihata Ryōshū, Yamazaki Hiroshi, and Tsukamoto Zenryū in Japan, to name only a few, have published seminal studies of the economic or institutional aspects of the Buddhist church in T'ang times. My enormous indebtedness to the pioneering efforts of these scholars is evident. What was lacking – and hence what I have attempted to supply in the present volume – is a chronological survey of the Buddhist church, particularly its relations with the central government, throughout the course of the T'ang dynasty. Although discussion of such important subjects as Buddhist doctrine, scripture, ritual, liturgy, and popular beliefs cannot, and should not, be totally excluded from a history of the Buddhist church, the reader should bear in mind that the present study does not seek to emphasize these aspects of T'ang Buddhism.

I began work on the manuscript in the summer of 1969 and finished it in the fall of 1976. I had of course intended that the manuscript be published shortly after its completion, but owing to various circumstances there was an intervening delay of eight years. One who is unfamiliar with the pace of scholarship in the field of T'ang Buddhism could hardly be faulted for assuming that a study whose publication had been held up for so long a time might have been rendered obsolete by other works that have appeared in the interval.

Such, however, is not the case. Only two works on relevant themes have been published in the West during this period: Antonino Forte's brilliant study, *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century* (Naples, 1976), which is an exhaustive examination of primary source materials pertaining to Empress Wu's use of Buddhism for her own political ends, and Raoul Birnbaum's *Studies on the Mysteries of Mañjuśrī* (n.p., 1983), which is largely concerned with the cult of this divinity in T'ang China. In Japan only one relevant work has appeared, Osabe Kazuo's *Tō Sō Mikkyōshi ronkō (Essays on the History of Esoteric Buddhism Under the T'ang and Sung)* (Kyoto, 1982), which, despite the title, deals mainly with Esoteric Buddhism in T'ang times.

In addition to these works mention should be made of four books by Chinese scholars: Fan Wen-lan, *T'ang-tai Fo-hsüeh (Buddhism Under the T'ang Dynasty)* (Peking, 1979); Kuo P'eng, *Sui T'ang Fo-chiao (Buddhism Under the Sui and T'ang)* (Shantung, 1980); Yen Shang-wen, *Sui T'ang Fo-chiao tsung-p'ai yen-chiu (A Study of the Buddhist Sectarian Lineages Under the Sui and T'ang)* (Taipei, 1980); and T'ang Yung-t'ung, *Sui T'ang Fo-chiao shih kao (A Draft History of Buddhism Under the Sui and T'ang)* (Peking, 1982). It should be noted that of these four

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recent publications in Chinese the first two are largely polemical, reflecting the strong ideological bias against Buddhism; the third is basically an attempt to trace the specific sectarian lineages in the Sui and T'ang; and the fourth comprises a collection of drafts for lectures given by Professor T'ang in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

There is little in these recent Chinese publications that would have led me to alter radically what I wrote eight years ago, although I certainly would have benefited from the extremely detailed chronology compiled by Chang Tsun-liu covering the years 581–959 that is appended to Fan Wen-lan, *T'ang-tai Fo-chiao*. Two other works that likewise would have facilitated my research and saved me much drudgery had they been available at the time of writing are Volume 29 of the *Taishō shinshū dai-zōkyō sakuin*, published in 1982, which is the index to volumes 51 and 52 of the *Taishō* edition of the Chinese Buddhist scripture, and the three-volume *Dōkyō (Taoism)*, published in 1983, which contains an eighty-four page index of Taoist names and terms.

No one is more aware of the shortcomings of the present study than its author. In the best of all worlds a history of the Buddhist church in T'ang China would have been written by someone who is at once a historian in the broadest sense of the term and also a Buddhologist. Unhappily few persons, myself included, possess equally valid credentials for both areas. Not being a historian, I think it only fair to alert the reader to the likelihood of errors in my interpretation of T'ang official documents – edicts, decrees, ordinances, legal codes, and the like. I very much regret that volume 3 of the monumental *Cambridge History of China*, which offers a detailed account of the political history of the Sui and T'ang dynasties, was not yet in print when I was undertaking my research.

It hardly needs saying that I do not conceive of this study as being definitive in any sense. Since there was no systematic history of T'ang Buddhism to fall back upon aside from such skeletal Sung and Yüan church chronicles as the *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi* and the *Fo-tsu li-tai t'ung-tsai*, I had to collect my data for the most part from what proved to be an intimidating array of sources. On the secular side there were the Standard Dynastic Histories, the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*, Sung encyclopaedias, collections of imperial edicts, and fragmentary legal codes. The Buddhist sources included the several collections of biographies of eminent monks, catalogues of the canon, sectarian histories, apologies, and encyclopaedias of church institutions and practices.

In the course of my research I no doubt overlooked much of significance, but rather than delay publication still further, I have decided to

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release the manuscript, with all its shortcomings and blemishes, in the hope that it will illuminate at least the contours of the Buddhist church in T'ang times and perhaps stimulate others to undertake further studies in this area. It is for this reason that I have allowed the text to be burdened with rather copious annotation, which will identify the sources of most of my material and, I trust, provide leads for more detailed research by others.

I have followed the usual conventions of Sinological writing: surnames of Chinese and Japanese persons precede their given names; ages cited in Chinese traditional sources have been converted to their approximate Western equivalents, which is generally one year less than the age stated in the Chinese source; years given in the traditional era-name (*nien-hao*) system have been equated with the nearest corresponding year of the Julian calendar; the 'moons' of the Chinese year have been uniformly rendered as 'months'; the English translations of titles of rank and office have generally, but not always, followed the French versions in Robert des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires et traité de l'armée* (Leiden, 1947).

Unfortunately it is not possible to name each of the many teachers, scholars, and friends who deserve thanks for their guidance and encouragement over the years. I am pleased, however, that I do have this opportunity to acknowledge publicly my gratitude to the late Professors Hosaka Gyokusen and Masunaga Reihō of Komazawa University, Tokyo, who gave unstintingly of their time and energy to introduce me to the vast riches of the Chinese Buddhist scripture. Kind teachers and devoted scholars, they embodied in their own lives the bodhisattva ideal.

I also wish to express my appreciation to Professor Yūki Reimon, who supervised my studies in Chinese Buddhist doctrine during the two years that I spent as a graduate student at the University of Tokyo. I count myself fortunate to have had the privilege of receiving instruction from so distinguished a scholar. More immediately, I have benefited greatly from the many fruitful discussions that I have had with Professors Hirakawa Akira and Kubo Noritada, both now retired from the University of Tokyo, who were kind enough to meet with me repeatedly during my annual visits to Japan over the past few years. Their moral support, and that of my good friend, Professor Yokoyama Kōitsu of Rikkyō University, have been sources of constant encouragement. I must also acknowledge my indebtedness to the late Professor Arthur F. Wright of Yale University and to Professor Denis C. Twitchett of Princeton University, who both encouraged me to undertake the

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present study. I am grateful to Yale University for granting me two six-month leaves of absence to work on the manuscript and to the National Endowment for the Humanities for making it possible for me to devote an additional uninterrupted year to this project.

Finally, on the personal side, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my wife, Lucie, for her sympathetic understanding, unwavering support, and seemingly boundless patience.