The Road to Ankwa

When we left the little monk Fa Yi at the foot of the Wei Shan, we walked a hundred yards or so before I turned to watch the small figure slowly climbing back to the monastery. Even at that distance he looked lonely and pitiful. I knew how sad he was and I felt sorry for him, but Mao did not share this sentiment. "Jun-chih," I said, "look at little Fa Li. Don't you feel sorry for him?"

Mao glanced back quickly and remarked, "What's the good of looking at him? You're just too sentimental."

We were walking toward the town of Anhwa. Anhwa District was one of the important farming areas of Hunan Province and we figured that it would take us about two days to reach the town. However, we were in no hurry. Since there was beautiful scenery to admire and since we had plenty to talk about, we took our time.

We had many interesting impressions of Buddhist life from the Wei Shan monastery and when we came to a small teashop by the roadside, we decided to rest and write up our diaries. We had written only two or three lines, however, when we put down our brushes and started to talk.

"What a great influence Buddhism has been in China," I remarked. "Even the school of Confucius has been affected by it, especially in the T'ang and the Sung Dynasties."

"Why is it that Buddhism should have become such a great power?" Mao asked.

I explained, "First, because it represents one aspect of the universal truth and provides a satisfying philosophy of life; second, because of the religious instinct or philosophical leanings, whatever you may call it, of the Emperors of China."

"The religious instinct of the Emperors?" asked Mao.

"Yes," I replied, "especially the Emperors of the T'ang Dynasty. You remember, they conferred the posthumous honorary title of 'king' on Confucius and ordered that in every province and in every provincial district throughout China there should be established a
temple to him. This movement started in the T'ang Dynasty and at about the same time they conferred a similar honor on Lao Tzu, since his surname, Li, was the same as that of the royal family, and they proclaimed him the founder of Taoism. Taoist temples were officially established throughout the country in that dynasty. Then came Buddhism. Despite its being a foreign religion, it was welcomed, and temples and monasteries were set up everywhere in the same way. Thus in the T'ang Dynasty there were three official religions: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, all coexisting in harmony. . . ."

"Yes, I know," said Mao. "I remember reading that one of the Emperors of the T'ang Dynasty conceived the idea of transferring the mortal remains of Buddha from India to China."

"Then there was the famous scholar-monk Hsüan Tsang who spent more than ten years in India studying the theory of Buddhism," I continued. "He brought back with him more than six hundred and fifty volumes of Buddhist scriptures of which he and his students translated seventy-five into Chinese. Everyone has heard of Hsüan Tsang—that was also in the T'ang Dynasty."

"How very strange!" commented Mao. "It's as if three different religions sprang up in the T'ang Dynasty at the same time. Though, of course, Confucius was really a philosopher and not a religious leader."

"Yes," I agreed. "And Lao Tzu was also a philosopher, though later the followers of the Taoist movement firmly proclaimed him as a 'holy man' and the founder of a religion! It is interesting to note what realists the Chinese are! They may believe in a particular religion and guide their lives by it, but they seldom if ever become fanatics. That is why three different doctrines can exist side by side in perfect harmony."

"Well, it's a good thing for the country that several religions can co-exist in harmony," Mao contended. "That means there are no religious wars of the kind you read about in the history of other countries. Why, some of those struggles between followers of different faiths have lasted over a hundred years! We've never known anything like that in China."

"Yes, that is very true," I agreed. "But it's much more than that.
It's not only in this country that several religions can live together harmoniously, but also in the minds of individuals; and this has nothing to do with the T'ang Emperors. I know a very good example of this phenomenon in my own home: first, like everyone else, we had the p'ai wei, the ancestral tablet, on which was inscribed the order of worship or obedience—Heaven, Earth, Emperor, Parents, Teacher; but my grandmother wished to inculcate in us respect for the Sages, so she put up another tablet to Confucius. Then, as she had a certain weakness for Buddhism, she pasted up a picture of Buddha. Most interesting of all, however, is the fact that when she heard of the teachings of the European and American Christian missionaries, she supposed the doctrine of Christ must be important for people to have come from such distant lands to teach it, so she put up beside the Buddha another picture, of Christ on the Cross. I used to call my grandmother's tablet cabinet 'the religious republic.' This is quite typical of the religious beliefs of many Chinese."

"Not only is that a good example of our religious freedom; it also demonstrates what you said a while ago, that the religious instinct of the Chinese people is weak," said Mao. "Another example of that is the fact that Confucian philosophy has had more influence and is wider spread in this country than Taoism and Buddhism, which have come to be regarded as religions in the true sense of that word. How is it that the philosophy of Confucius has become such a dominating force? After two thousand years its influence is still as strong as ever. Why? Why did the early Emperors think so highly of Confucius? Was it because of his strong personality?"

"There are two reasons for the persistence of Confucianism," I explained. "It was by chance that the Emperors and indeed all public officials, held Confucius in high esteem. A profound knowledge of the principles taught by him was required to pass the higher examination; so if you hadn't studied and learned his philosophy, you had no possible chance of securing a good position in life! Also, his philosophy serves as a true guide for human relations. He tells exactly what one should or should not do. There are none of the theoretical speculations of Lao Tzu and the Buddhist teachers with their abstract conceptions. Confucius taught us how to live our daily lives with practical and concrete instructions."
"I think we should stop right now and put all this in our diaries," said Mao. "This is very important."

We stopped to write and when we had finished, it was nearly noon. We were beginning to feel hungry, too. We had so much to talk about after our visit to the Wei Shan and so much to write about in our diaries, that we had lost the rhythm of our long walks. Now we thought only of sitting still to talk. We decided to have our lunch in the teashop and then to take to the road.

Mao Tse-tung asked the woman owner if she sold rice. She did, but she had nothing to go with it: no fish, no meat, not even an egg—just some vegetables. We decided that was enough, since now we were accustomed to a frugal vegetarian diet. But did we have any money?

Mao was sure we still had some money in our bundles and suggested we spend all of it to satisfy ourselves with rice and vegetables. "Then we'll see what the future has in store for us," he said, and I agreed that it was an excellent idea.

After eating lunch, it seemed so hot that we could not resist the temptation to waste a bit more time by taking a nap in the shade of the teashop. When we eventually set off slowly along the road, it must have been four o'clock in the afternoon.

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A Night on the Sandbank

Not far from the teashop the road passed around the foot of a high mountain. Though we did not know the name of the mountain, we did know that now we were in the Anhwa District.

This mountain harbored two industries. Anhwa was famous for its tea, and the slopes were dotted with tea plantations. Also an important industry in fir bark for roofing and other purposes had been developed, and thousands of fir trees with the bark stripped off stood white and strange in their nudity.

We were successful in begging a very satisfactory supper from a little farmhouse, after which we wandered slowly along the bank