THE INTERACTION OF CONFUCIANISM, BUDDHISM AND TAOISM IN CHINESE HISTORY, AND ITS RELEVANCE TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

MISS. WANG FEI

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY OF THAILAND

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Abstract

The 21st century is an era which faces political, economical, cultural and many other effects of globalization. Whether you like or dislike, accept or not accept it, it is still inevitable. Religion does also face the same effects and problems with the changing and developing of the society. Contemporary religious issue of interfaith dialogue faces the challenge of religious diversity. This is not the simple understanding as we have known before and religious dialogue cannot maintain only some models as we have known before as well. With the interaction between ideology and culture, the relations of each religion also undergo subtle changes. These changes influence the harmony and development of the society.

As we all known, the traditional model of interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels.
However, in contemporary society religious dialogue does not only try to achieve the common ground but also for self-understanding through dialogue to understand itself through the other. In ancient China, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism had a very drastic struggle with each other, but became harmony finally especially during Han to Tang Dynasty. It is really helpful in contemporary society to do religious dialogue without doubt. However, we cannot easily to copy all the historical experiences but also need a critical way to rethink of it and try to find the good way for contemporary China and other countries.

This dissertation tried to use a critical and historical study of Chinese religious history during Han to Tang Dynasty to rethink how to make religions from conflict to harmony under the religious pluralism. Chapter one was the brief introduction of this dissertation and its structures; chapter two talked about the evolution and interaction of Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism in Han dynasty; chapter three talked about the evolution and interaction of the three religions in Sui and Tang dynasty; chapter four discussed about the new model of interfaith dialogue in contemporary society and chapter five was the conclusion.
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Chinese Dynastic History

BCE

Xia 夏 2070-1600
Shang 商 1600-1046
Zhou 周 1046-254
Western Zhou 西周 1046-771
Eastern Zhou 东周 770-256

Spring and Autumn area 春秋 770-476
Warring States period 战国 475-221

Qin 秦 221-206
Han 汉 206BCE-220CE
Western Han 西汉 202BC-8CE

CE

Xin 新 8-23
Eastern Han 东汉 25-220
Three Kingdoms 三国 220-280

Wei 魏 220-265
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People’s Republic of China 1949-until now
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Significance of Research

With the effects of globalization, the whole world faces many contemporary social issues, concerning politics, economics, cultures and religions. With the world becoming smaller, various cultures of different countries are interacting more and we are mixing the different cultures from each country, learning more and more from each other, and accepting more from each other as well. There is much more immigrants, studying overseas, and even converting from one religion to another. It seems that when people are faced with the all kinds of pluralism or globalization, they learn to adapt for the new situations or environments, however, in the real situations, people also face many struggles or conflicts where they need to accept or enter in to a new culture, a new language, new diets and especially a new religion. Because when a person is so familiar with his or her surroundings, including all aspects as I mentioned above, it is difficult for him or her to change habits. They need to adapt to new surroundings and understand it. It is really a long and difficult process for most people. Some people would prefer to have this challenge but some people hate change. For culture, language or diet pluralism, I think it is much easier for people to adapt as it is easy to understand and have experience on that. But how about adapting to religious pluralism? This is a more complex and difficult process. Most people have their own religious believes or faiths and when people believe one religion, follow all the rituals.
and the requirements that religion requires, it is really a very profound thing in their lives. So how do they accept another religion and how do they break the rules what they follow before when faced with another belief system? However, under the background of globalization, we have to face this issue no matter we like it or not. We are not isolated in religious communities, so the contemporary religion issue is the reality of religious pluralism. The contemporary religious issue of interfaith dialogue also needs to face the challenge of religious diversity. It is not the simple understanding as we have known before, and religious dialogue is not only some models as we learnt before as well.

The traditional model of interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels. However, in contemporary society religious dialogue does not only try to achieve common ground but should be a process that leads to development and self-understanding of one’s own religion leading to better cooperation and coexistence.

With effect of globalization and religious pluralism, we can no longer only use the traditional model to treat all the religions. Also, each country has a different religious and cultural background; it is difficult to decide what model of religious dialogue we need to use to face the reality of contemporary religious plurality. Meanwhile, western countries and eastern countries also have different ways of thinking of different religions based on their own cultures; for example, in the Western world, most countries have a simple religious type, like monotheism, and the religion always
separate from politics. But in the Eastern world, most countries have diverse religious types including monotheism, polytheism or atheism. And, most of the time they mix together in one society and some of religions have connections with politics. This leads to problems in applying Western models exclusively to interactions between western and eastern world. So, what model for religious dialogue apply in contemporary society is very important for us to think of today.

In Asian countries, there is much more diversity among religions and many of them live in the same regions. One country can have many religions. So the dialogue model also needs to be more complex and diverse. We cannot only use the same model or method as traditional Western world to treat different religions as in Asia religion is not only related to theology, but also mixed with ideology, politics, and philosophy and culture as well. Like in East Asia, there are Chinese religions (Confucianism, Taoism), Japanese religion (Shintoism) and so on, and have the same external religions from other area such as Buddhism, Christian etc. In Southeast Asia also from earliest times has been a region with a variety of peoples, social structures, means of livelihood, cultures, and religions. But nowadays, even in Western countries, people also faced with religious pluralism, there are more and more immigrants, but the traditional interfaith dialogue models cannot easily adapt to the new situation. So how we conduct interfaith dialogue in contemporary society is very important for us to rethink today.

We should appreciate that there are many scholars discussing interfaith dialogue, no matter if they are philosophers or theologians, no matter they have religious beliefs or
not, their work helps promote religious relations and help people understand the importance of interfaith dialogue. However, there has been too much focus on the importance of interfaith dialogue, but not enough on the historical process of dialogue. So although we realize the importance of interfaith dialogue, we still don’t know how it has worked in history and its effectiveness, and how can we make dialogue more effective today as well.

During my research of interfaith dialogue, I read many documents from Western scholars and Chinese historical documents as well. I found an important period of interfaith relations occurred in ancient China, especially between the Han dynasty (206BC-220AD) to Tang dynasty (618-907).

Nowadays, in China we accept the harmonious relationship of three religions which are Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism¹. But since the Han dynasty, these religions were in conflict. Confucianism and Taoism originated in China, they were usually depicted as embodying ideas, values, and orientations that were at the core of Chinese social and cultural constructions of reality. Buddhism is a pan-Asian religion which originated in India, and then came to China. At the beginning, some people thought Buddhism was of sect of Taoism and the others thought it was an exotic religion. But as Buddhism became easily appropriated by the Chinese people, the other two religions felt threatened by Buddhism. So, they criticized Buddhism as an exotic religion and tried to destroy Chinese cultural development. The ruler at that time tried to destroy Buddhism and force people who became monks and nuns to resume secular

¹ The order to mention the three religions in this research is according to the Chinese idiomatic usage, not refers to their order of appearance in history.
life again. But at the same time, the Chinese adaptation and acculturation of Buddhism continued. Some Buddhism scholars used Confucianism and Taoism’s language to translate Buddhism scriptures to make them accessible to the people. Consequently, in its fully sinicized form Buddhism also came to represents a religion that is quintessentially Chinese.

In the Han dynasty, one of the famous scholars, Dong Zhong Shu, suggested the emperor “reject all schools but Confucianism” to established Confucianism as the state worship of Confucius. Meanwhile, Taoists remained isolated into small groups of hermits who attempted to achieve immortality through breathing exercises and use of medical elixirs. Its followers believed that the sage philosopher Laozi was holy prophet who would offer salvation and good health if his devout followers would confess their sins; ban the worship of unclean gods who accepted meat sacrifices and chant sections of the Daodejing.

After Han, China experienced a long disunity period, China separated into some small warring states until Sui dynasty (581-618) which China unified to be one country again, but there was only 37 years then replaced by Tang dynasty (618-907) in which the three religions developed a lot. In Tang dynasty, Confucianism as the state religion continued playing its important role in Chinese history and safeguarded the status of the empire. Taoism absorbed many theories and rituals from Buddhism to perfect itself and developed closer connections to Confucianism to oppose Buddhism. At the same time, Buddhism continued to be chinicized and created many sects of Buddhism such as Pure Land sect, Tian Tai sect and Chan (Zen) sects of Buddhism.
But there were more struggles and conflicts in this period as well. Because the rituals are different, scriptures are different, and three of them always struggled for the status in Chinese society in the Tang dynasty, different emperors had different attitudes and policies to treat the three religions. Some emperors conducted anti-Buddhist persecutions because they believed Buddhism blocked economic development, such as Wu Di who forced more than 260,000 Buddhists to convert in the later Tang dynasty. Some emperors supported Taoism as the most important belief of the state because it could extend people's life, such as Tang Gao Zu (Li Yuan) and Tang Tai Zong (Li Shi Min) who were the first and second emperors of Tang dynasty. Some emperors regarded Buddhism as holding a higher position among the three religions to demonstrate that their rule was totally different from the other dynasty emperors, such as Empress Wu Ze Tian, who is the only empress in Chinese history. But all of them developed a view that none of them can easily deny or support only one of the religions, as it would threaten their rule, so in the Tang dynasty, emperors organized interfaith dialogue in the palace to invite the delegates from each religion to join this dialogue. The most important was the empress Wu Ze Tian who is the Female leader in Chinese history, she advocated the three religions made dialogue, and let them ask each other questions, criticize each other and try to arrive at answers concerning the rituals, scriptures and view of life which the other could not understand. All of them argued and criticized the others in order to prove their own importance, however, in the process they developed a deeper self understanding. Through dialogue they learnt and absorbed from each other and in turn this knowledge developed their own religion.
Gradually, throughout much of Chinese history the three teachings were perceived as being complementary rather than antithetical to each other. And the three religions later developed a very interesting status which looked like a triangle, they learnt from each other and criticized each other as well. But the most important thing is they could not destroy each other but respect one another. I think none of the emperors in Tang dynasty had the ideas of religious pluralism or interfaith dialogue, they just realized the importance of dialogue to consolidate their rule. But this process of dialogue had additional consequences of leading to a deeper understanding of other religions and one’s own religion.

Because of this interesting historical processes of interfaith dialogue in Chinese history, I decided to chose to study of the interaction of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in Chinese history as a case study, especially studies from the Han dynasty in which Buddhism had just come to China, until the Tang dynasty in which the three religions became harmonious to find the reasons why religions can make dialogue in ancient China, and how they made interfaith dialogue from conflict to harmony under the ancient religious pluralism background. What we can learn from the historical research for interfaith dialogue in contemporary society especially with regards to globalization. And this study shows that there are certain conditions that allow for dialogue to take place and allow it to lead to understanding conflict which leads to a deeper understanding of other religions and also one’s own religion. As Mario Poceski said in his book:

"The study of Chinese religions brings us in contact with a prevalent
tendency to construct a range of open-ended or hybrid religious identities, which stand in contrast to the common Western and Islamic patterns of constricted or singular religious identities and affiliations, which are primarily defined by allegiance to a church, a revealed dogma, or a sacred scripture. Exploration of China's religious past also familiarizes us with intriguing models of religious pluralism, in which a variety of religions share common social and cultural spaces." (Mario Pocesi, 2009, xix)

So, through the study of religious history of China we can develop new ideas concerning the process and purpose of interfaith dialogue and perhaps a new/old model of dialogue which will aid in peace building in contemporary society.

1.2 Thesis Statement

The critical study of the ancient Chinese process of interfaith dialogue between Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism from the Han dynasty to the Tang dynasty has relevance to interfaith dialogue in contemporary society.

It shows that the purpose of interfaith dialogue should not only be for reaching a consensus, finding common grounds or setting aside differences, but should be a process that leads to the development and self-understanding of one's own religion leading to better cooperation and coexistence.

1.3 Research Objective

1.3.1 To study the history of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in China during the Han dynasty to Tang dynasty.

1.3.2 To study the transformation from the conflict to harmony among Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in ancient China.

1.3.3 To study the implications for a model of interfaith dialogue useful for contemporary society under the background of globalization.
1.4 Preceding Relevant Researches

In the book *God has many names* written by John Hick described three phases in the development of the Christian attitude to the other world religions. The first phrase is total rejection which means in the dogma that non-Christians are consigned to hell. The second phase which is called the early epicycles arose out of a growing awareness among Catholic thinkers of the reality of religious faith, first among Protestant Christians and then among devout men of the great non-Christian religions. And the last phase particularly since Vatican II, they called “later” epicycles, which they hold together the two propositions that outside Christianity there is no salvation, and that outside Christianity there is salvation. But even outside Christianity there is salvation based on their “anonymous Christianity”. And later he gave us the three types of religious attitude which are exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. (John Hick, 1982, 51) This book helped me to better understand the traditional Christian attitudes toward other religions, John Hick as one of the famous pluralists offered us the basic idea and model of religious dialogue.

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa developed a personal view that rejected specific religious identification and considered all faiths as principally one. From the earliest period of his religious studies, Buddhadasa utilized a comparative approach and sought to be able to explain “Buddhist’s teachings through other doctrines such as Tao, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Natural Science.” In his *No Religion* Buddhadasa famously remarked that there is no Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam. Therefore, how can they be the same or conflicting? Thus the phrase “No religion!” is actually dhamma.
language at its highest level. Whether it will be understood or not is something else, for this depends upon the perception of the listener. (Buddhadasa, 1996) This book offered me a Buddhist understanding of religious pluralism, which could help me better understand the attitude of religious pluralism in eastern world.

Paul F. Knitter in his book *One Earth Many Religions* mentioned

"If we use anthropologists view to look at pluralism, each society has its own filter, its own worldview, and if we could only enter into that culture we would realize that it functions much more effectively and adequately than we on the outside can imagine. Each filter must be judged within its own context, according to the needs of its own world; we cannot use the filter of one culture to evaluate—or to denigrate—another. To hold up some universal standard of reason or logic by which we can judge all cultures is to think, naively and dangerously, that we can have a "filterless take" on the world. Thus, the diversity of filters wins out over the possibility of a universal filter. (Paul F. Knitter, 1995, 26)

For this book, I think Paul Knitter offered us a new perspective for looking at the religious pluralism and used a lively metaphor to show us how to make religious dialogue.

Lindbeck wrote a book *The nature of Doctrine* where he mentioned:

"A religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought....Like a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities.... A religion is above all an external word, a verbum externum that molds and shapes the self and its world, rather than an expression or thematization of a preexisting self or of preconceptual experience." (Lindbeck, 1984, 33)

So, religions are like languages which form experience, not experience searching for religions. If we don’t have the same religion, we cannot have the same experience, we are different in ultimate reality. And Lindbeck also mentioned:
"...an inner experience of God common to all human beings and all religions. There can be no experiential core because, so the argument goes, the experiences that religions evoke and mold are as varied as the interpretative schemes they embody. Adherents of different religions do not diversely thematize the same experience; rather they have different experiences." (Lindbeck, 1984, 33)

For Lindbeck, he also offered me an understanding of religious pluralism and religious diversity, in which it is not easy to find the same ultimate reality, but different experiences.

Julia Ching, who wrote Chinese Religions, used a comparative way to divide the Chinese religions into three parts:

"The indigenous traditions (including the religion of antiquity, Confucianism and Taoism); the religions of foreign considered as China's response to Buddhist influences, and the legacy of syncretism representing the fruits of union between the native and the non-native. And this could enable us to focus clearly on the religious character of ancient Chinese society, explained the early development of Chinese humanism and highlight its religious dimension. (Julia Ching, 1993, 9)

So, for this book, I learnt how Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism went from conflict to harmony in Chinese history, which could help me to get more information for my writing.

Daniel L. Overmyer wrote a book named Religions of China where he mentioned that:

"Most religious activities and feelings are special forms of things many people do and feel, even if they are not religious, so all have an opportunity to understand if they wish. Of course, someone who does not practice a particular religion can't feel about it the same way as a person who does, but with careful study we can go a long way toward understanding and appreciation. The place to begin is to try to let the religion speak for itself without bringing in our own
ideas and reactions too soon. Once we better understand what is going on, and why, then we are free to accept, reject or just enjoy without getting involved.” (Daniel L. Overmyer, 1985, 1)

Through this book I began to understand westerner’s view of Chinese religious history and how outsider looked at the ancient Chinese religious pluralism and dialogue from this book, which could help me better write my paper as an Eastern researcher or an insider.

Mario Poceski in his book *Chinese Religions* said:

“The study of Chinese religions brings us in contact with a prevalent tendency to construct a range of open-ended or hybrid religious identities, which stand in contrast to the common Western and Islamic patterns of constricted or singular religious identities and affiliations, which are primarily defined by allegiance to a church, a revealed dogma, or a sacred scripture. Exploration of China’s religious past also familiarizes us with intriguing models of religious pluralism, in which a variety of religions share common social and cultural spaces. (Mario Poceski, 2009, xix)

Mario Poceski used a comparative approach to show us the difference between Eastern and Western religions, and what model could we learn for religious pluralism from Eastern world, especially from Chinese religious history.

1.5 Definitions of Terms Used in the Research

1.5.1 Interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions (i.e., "faiths") and/or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels. It is distinct from syncretism or alternative religion, in that dialogue often involves promoting understanding between different religions to increase acceptance of others, rather than to synthesize new beliefs.
1.5.2 Exclusive means not divided or shared with others. But in religions it relates to salvation exclusively to one particular tradition. According to this definition, salvation is limited to one special group, while the rest of mankind is either left in the hell or explicitly excluded from the sphere of salvation. The most obvious and influential expression of this idea appeared in the Catholic dogma Extra ecclesiam nulla salus (outside the Church, no salvation).

1.5.3 Inclusive means including much or everything; and especially including stated limits. In religions it in common with exclusive, holds that there is one absolute way for salvation that can be realized in only one religion. The way of salvation is open to people only because they meet special criteria revealed in one true religion. On the other hand, inclusive, in common with pluralism, holds that God can be encountered and his grace manifested in various ways through diverse religions. Everyone can experience salvation, regardless of whether they have heard and acknowledged the basic doctrines of the one true religion.

1.5.4 Pluralism has many explanation:

1. a social organization in which diversity of racial or religious or ethnic or cultural groups is tolerated

2. the doctrine that reality consists of several basic substances or elements

3. the practice of one person holding more than one benefice at a time

Here in religions it means that both truth and salvation are available in a variety of the world’s religions. The definition of religious pluralism is
required to be both general enough to cover the variety of pluralist models and specific enough to distinguish it from some of the radical inclusive.

1.5.5 Interaction have two meanings:
1. a mutual or reciprocal action; interacting
2. (physics) the transfer of energy between elementary particles or between an elementary particle and a field or between fields; mediated by gauge bosons

1.5.6 Acculturation has three meanings, they have subtle differences:
1. the adoption of the behavior patterns of the surrounding culture
2. all the knowledge and values shared by a society
3. the process of assimilating new ideas into an existing cognitive structure

1.5.7 Symbiosis: 1. Albert Bernhard Frank used the word symbiosis (which previously had been used to depict people living together in community) to describe the mutualistic relationship in lichens. 2. The German mycologist Heinrich Anton de Bary defined it as "the living together of unlike organisms."

1.6 Research Scope

This study focuses on the interaction of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in Chinese history, especially studies from the Han dynasty in which Buddhism just came to China until the Tang dynasty which the three religions to be harmony, and to analysis the relations transformation among three of them. This research information is collected from primary and secondary sources including Internet sources which are
related to the research objectives.

1.7 Research Methodology

This research presents and illustrates the textual approach to qualitative research.

The research methodology can be divided into five stages as follows:

1.7.1 Collecting data to be analyzed and categorized from the primary sources, the secondary sources of the books written and composed by well-known scholars, thesis, dissertations, and academic articles and essays.

1.7.2 Analyzing the raw data as well as systematizing the collected and analyzed data to give a clear picture of the issue of religious pluralism in ancient China and its application of the lesson of interfaith dialogue among Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism to help contemporary society to use proper way to make interfaith dialogue under globalization.

1.7.3 Documentary research and historical approach.

1.7.4 Constructing the entire outline of the research.

1.7.5 Critically discussing and interpreting the problems encountered.

1.7.6 Formulating conclusions and identifying significant areas for further research.

1.8 Expectations

1.8.1 To find the reasons why religions can make dialogue in ancient China.

1.8.2 To find how they made interfaith dialogue from conflict to harmony under the ancient religious pluralism background.

1.8.3 To find what we can know from the historical research for interfaith dialogue in contemporary society with globalization.
1.9 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

1.9.1 Theoretical frameworks

When we talk about interfaith dialogue we normally refer to cooperative, constructive and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and/or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels, in which dialogue often involves promoting understanding between different religions to increase acceptance of others, and setting aside differences. However, under globalization religious dialogue should not only try to achieve the common ground but also lead to self-understanding through dialogue. One religion should understand itself through the other.

I choose to study the interaction of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in Chinese history as a case study. Especially during the period Han dynasty where Buddhism just came to China until Tang dynasty where the three religions came to achieve harmony in order to find the reasons why and how they conducted interfaith dialogue and moved from conflict to harmony. This is for the purpose of understanding the task of interfaith dialogue in contemporary society especially under the globalization.
1.9.2 Conceptual Frameworks

Introduction of Chinese history background and Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism

The evolution and interaction of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in Han dynasty

The struggle of three religions
The interaction of three religions
The transition of the relations among Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism in Sui dynasty

The transition of the relations among Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism in Tang dynasty

The influence of the three religions interaction towards interfaith dialogue
Inspiration from the interaction of Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism
Lesson from the interaction of Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism

The new model of interfaith dialogue

The new model of interfaith dialogue for contemporary society under the background of globalization

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5.1 Summary

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CHAPTER II

THE EVOLUTION AND INTERACTION OF CONFUCIANISM, BUDDHISM
AND TAOISM IN HAN DYNASTY

2.1 Historical background of Han dynasty

When we talk about Chinese history, we have to recall its more than 5,000 year
history and 18 dynasties and periods. From the Xia dynasty to the Qing dynasty,
China faced many wars and periods of conflict. However, the early dynasties
appeared around 1500 B.C, we can not find many documents which recorded them.
What we can know is Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties were merely the unity of
neighboring tribes because during that time people still had no concept of country. So,
that era, we call it kingdom where the kings ruled over nobles with semi-independent
territories of their own, all of them holding power by inherited right. Until the Qin
dynasty appeared, China for the first time united into a country. But in the beginning,
the Qin was also one of the states in the Zhou dynasty. Daniel L. Overmyer described
Qin dynasty that:

“...The Zhou kings continued to rule their own little domain, but not much
else. The period of competition and warfare between independent states lasted
for several hundred years. Many of the smaller states were swallowed up, so
that by 300 B.C. only seven large ones were left. One of these was Qin (Ch’in),
in the far west, which was very well organized and had been steadily growing
in power. In 256 B.C. Qin took over the royal domain, thus ending the Zhou
period, and by 221 it had conquered all the remaining states and set itself up as
an empire that included much of what we now call China. Our name China
comes from the word Ch’in.” (Daniel L. Overmyer, 1986, 19)

We can see that the Qin dynasty saw the first real unified country in Chinese history,
and the first emperor of Qin worked very hard to control China by unifying laws and
ways of writing, building the Great Wall, using the unified currency, and raising large armies to attack non-Chinese tribes. It was the first time that united Chinese people but it also destroyed itself because of cruel administration which produced the Han dynasty. The Han Dynasty started from 206BC and ended in 220AD. It played a very important role in history of China. During this period the Chinese culture and civilization developed a lot. Before the Han Dynasty, the Qin Dynasty which was overthrown by a peasant rebellion. There were two leaders who fought for the leadership of this regime position are Liu Bang (刘邦) and Xiang Yu (项羽), it was finally Liu Bang who defeated Xiang Yu and became the first emperor of the Han dynasty and the capital city became Chang’ an (长安). The new empire retained much of the Qin administrative structure but retreated a little from centralized rule by establishing vassal principalities in some areas for the sake of political convenience. Since Liu Bang as the first emperor, he worked hard for stable political situation. Until Han Wu Di (汉武帝), the country was the most developed period in this dynasty. However, it was briefly interrupted by the Xin Dynasty (9–23 CE) of the former regent Wang Mang(王莽). This interregnum separates the Han into two periods: the Western Han (206 BCE – 9 CE) and Eastern Han (25–220 CE).

During the Qin Dynasty, the emperor Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇) used a very cruel regulation and laws to rule people, however, in the Han Dynasty the rulers changed the way to treat people compared with previous dynasty. During the Han period, there were some of the most famous historians, literature and art, one of the famous historian is Si Ma Qian (司马迁) who wrote Shi Ji (《史记》) which provides a
precious collection of historical records until today for scholars to do the historical research. And technological advances also marked this period. Two of the great Chinese inventions, paper and porcelain, date from Han times.

Religion was also developed very quickly in the Han Dynasty. Han Wu Di adopted the suggestion from one of the famous scholars named Dong Zhong Shu, who advocated he “reject all kinds of theoretical schools but Confucius”. For example, the Han Empire adopted the Confucian ideals of government as the creed in the Han Dynasty, and Confucian scholars gained prominent status as the core of the civil service. It reproduced the classics which were destroyed in the previous dynasty and encouraged their study. Later, the Han Empire even treated Confucianism as a religion for the first time and established the state worship of Confucius. It based its laws and regulations upon the ideals and power under this dynasty which led to a gradual deterioration in the character of the rulers and officials. For example, no matter whether you are the elites or farmers, all Chinese people have the same world view at that time. Daniel L. Overmyer described in his book that:

“Everyone assumed the same world view: everyone venerated ancestors, practiced feng-shui, carried out funerals, and enjoyed the same annual festivals.”

(Daniel L. Overmyer, 1986, 22)

So we can see that all the regulations or laws were adopted in a superficial way, which allowed the other religions a chance to develop by themselves, for example,

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1 Dong Zhong Shu was a Han Dynasty Chinese scholar. He is traditionally associated with the promotion of Confucianism as the official ideology of the Chinese imperial state. Dong Zhongshu's thought integrated Yin Yang cosmology into a Confucian ethical framework. He emphasised the importance of the Spring and Autumn Annals as a source for both political and metaphysical ideas, following the tradition of the Gongyang Commentary in seeking hidden meanings from its text. He is also considered the originator of the doctrine of Interactions Between Heaven and Mankind, which lays down rules for deciding the legitimacy of a monarch as well as providing a set of checks and balances for a reigning monarch.
Han-era Taoists assembled into small groups of hermits who attempted to achieve immortality through breathing exercises and use of medical elixirs. By the 2nd century AD, Taoists formed large hierarchical religious societies such as the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice (五米斗道). Besides this, another very important religion which appears in the Han Dynasty was Buddhism which first entered China during the Eastern Han and was first mentioned in 65 AD. But later, Buddhism was treated as one of the most important religions in China and plays a very special role in Chinese religious history.

2.2 Confucianism

Confucianism is one of the most important schools in ancient China. It originated in the Spring and Autumn period, became Chinese orthodox thought since the Han dynasty, especially starting from the Han Wu Di. Confucianism has four stages of development: Pre-Qin period, Han period, Song and Ming period, and contemporary period. Here, we focused on the Han until the Tang periods. Since the Han dynasty, Confucianism as the state religion played its important role in Chinese history and safeguards the status of the empire. Tang Yi Jie gave the particular descriptions in the book “Chinese Religions” that:

“Confucianism begins with Confucius, whose Chinese name was Kong Qiu (孔丘) and who lived from 551 to 479 B.C.E. Confucianism is a Chinese ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Confucianism originated as an "ethical-sociopolitical teaching" during the Spring and Autumn Period, but later developed metaphysical and cosmological elements in the Han Dynasty. The core of Confucianism is humanism, the belief that human beings are teachable, improvable and perfectible through personal and communal endeavor especially including self-cultivation and self-creation. Confucianism focuses on
the cultivation of virtue and maintenance of ethics. Confucianism is the Chinese traditional philosophy and has the profound influence even today not only in Chinese daily lives but also in Chinese social politics. It guides people to cultivate their virtue, to deal with different relationship correctly in the society and respect the different hierarchy." (Tang Yi Jie, 1991, 90)

It’s not difficult to see that Confucianism emphasized self-cultivation, through benevolence. Harmony is achieved by human beings through cultivating their virtues and respecting the maintenance of ethics. Confucius’s teaching was a guide for the Chinese people, it had become a part of people’s lives. Especially since Han dynasty, Confucianism was adopted as an ideology through which the harmony of the country can be maintained. That’s why Confucianism had the stable status all the time.

Another scholar Donald S. Lopez in his book introduced Chinese religions, he evaluated Confucius teaching and Confucianism:

“What does emerge from the earliest layers of the written record is that Kong Qiu sought a revival of the ideas and institutions of a past golden age. Employed in a minor government position as a specialist in the governmental and family rituals of his native state, Kong Qiu hoped to disseminate knowledge of the rites and inspire their universal performance. That kin of broad-scale transformation could take place, he thought, only with the active encouragement of responsible rulers. The ideal ruler, as exemplified by the legendary sage-kings Yao and Shun or the adviser to the Zhou rulers, the Duke of Zhou, exercises ethical suasion, the ability to influence others by the power of his moral example.” (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 89-90)

From these descriptions we can know that Confucianism actually is not a creative idea for Confucius but a proposal of restudying or following the ancient Chinese traditions and applied in that time.

“To the virtues of the ruler correspond values that each individual is supposed to cultivate: benevolence toward others, a general sense of doing what is right, and loyalty and diligence in serving one’s superiors. Universal moral ideals are
necessary but not sufficient conditions for the restoration of civilization. Society also needs what Kong Qiu calls *li*, roughly translated as "rituals". Offerings to the gods are highly regulated: the sacrifices of each social class are restricted to specific classes of deities, and a clear hierarchy prevails. The few explicit statements attributed to Kong Qiu about the problem of history or tradition all portray him as one who "transmits but does not create." Such a claim can, of course, serve the ends of innovation or revolution. But in this case it is clear that Kong Qiu transmitted not only specific rituals and values but also a hierarchical social structure and the weight of the past." (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 89-90)

Confucius proposed some core values and ethics that suggested the emperors and common people to learn from past time. We can feel that through Confucius's teaching and dissemination of Confucianism in the Han dynasty, people were easy to accept the hierarchical social structure; emperors were pleased to use it to govern people as well because its teaching of hierarchical social structure catered to ruling class.

As we all known, China had a lot of local and folk religions among different ethnic groups and people had different religious beliefs of their own in different periods. In the beginning of the Han Dynasty, the emperors use Taoism as the way to govern the country until Han Wu Di. Because in the early Han, emperors absorbed the lessons from Qin dynasty, they believed Wu Wei (无为) which means no-action is the best way to govern the country. Until the period of the Han Wu Di, the scholar Dong Zhongshu who was instrumental in promoting Confucian ideas and books in official circles. He advocated using Confucianism as the laws and regulations to rule, which named "reject all kinds of theoretical schools but Confucius", gradually made Confucianism as regime and religion. As Donald S. Lopez mentioned:
“...It was only with the founding of Han dynasty, however, that Confucianism became Confucianism, which the ideas associated with Kong Qiu’s name received state support and were disseminated generally throughout upper-class society. Kong Qiu’s name was implicated more directly in the second example of the Confucian system, the state-sponsored cult that erected temples in his honor throughout the empire and that provided monetary support for turning his ancestral home into a national shrine. Members of the literate elite visited such temples, paying formalized respect and enacting rituals in front of spirit tablets of the master and his disciples.” (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 90)

From Han dynasty, Confucianism developed in upper-class society at the beginning, and through studying Confucianism, building Confucius temples and developing disciples, Confucianism gradually became a religion in ancient China.

“Dong Zhongshu drew heavily on concepts of earlier thinkers – few of whom were self-avowed Confucians – to explain the workings of the cosmos. He used the concepts of yin and yang to explain how change followed a knowable pattern, and he elaborated on the role of the ruler as one who connected the realms of Heaven, Earth, and humans. His theories proved determinative for the political culture of Confucianism during the Han and later dynasties.” (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 90)

Dong Zhongshu portrayed “Tian (Heaven)” which Confucianism mentioned as the supreme god, and advocated “Tian (Heaven)” has the power to response to human beings, and the emperors just followed the mandate of heaven to govern people. He used Confucius teaching to explain the connection of “heaven”, “earth” and “humans”, which was easy to be accepted by people and emperors can steady their regime. Finally, His theory accelerated Confucianism religious evolution.

2.3 Buddhism

Buddhism is a nontheistic religion based on the teachings attributed to Siddhartha Gautama, who is known as “Buddha”, namely Sakyamuni since 6th century B.C. He is
recognized by Buddhists as the enlightened teacher who taught and helped his disciples to understand life, end their suffering and eliminate their ignorance and finally achieve nirvana. There are two main branches of Buddhism which are called “Theravada (The small Vehicle)” and “Mahayana (The Great Vehicle)”. Theravada which follows the traditional Buddha’s teaching developed in Sri Lanka later and widespread in Southeast Asia including: Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos etc. Mahayana which entered to China and other East Asia countries such as Korea, Japan etc. developed in China with Chinese local culture and became one of the main religions in Chinese religious history and generated many sects of Buddhism including: the traditions of Tiantai, Huayan, Pure Land, Zen and Tibetan Buddhism (Vajrayana Buddhism) and so on. Buddhism as one of the most important foreign influences entered China in Han dynasty. It identified itself with native religious practitioners. Buddhism met certain social needs and often accorded with the natural development of Chinese thought. It was superior to native Chinese systems of thought. It can act as a stimulus in the development of Chinese culture. There was a legend described about the time of Buddhism entered China:

According to my understanding, this recounts a story of the Eastern Han Dynasty.
where the emperor Ming Di dreamed of the image of Buddha. Not knowing the Buddha, he asked his ministers. One of the ministers was a brilliant man of wide learning, who answered that it must be the Buddha, because he heard that Buddha in India was omnipotent. So Ming Di assigned 18 people to India to learn Buddhism and bring it to China. After 3 years, this group of people learnt Buddhism and came back to China with many scriptures through white horses, and also invited two important Indian Buddhists who were Kasyapa Matanga and Dharmaraksa. Ming Di was pleased of that, so he ordered to build “White horse temple” for them to accommodate and develop Buddhism in China. Although it is a legend, we knew Buddhism first entered to China during the Eastern Han during 65 AD. Since Han Dynasty, China started to trade with other countries and regions, which needed to build the way to help trade. There were two transportation routes used which were by sea and by road. Traders from Sri Lanka, Java, Malay island, Vietnam to China by sea, and the other way was through south Asia to west China which we usually called “Silk Road”. Buddhism began to trickle haphazardly into China through these ways during that period.

However, at the beginning Buddhism teachings were faced with dilemma in China. The most difficulties is how to make the non-Indian audience understand the Buddha’s teaching, first they needed to explain the understanding of human existence which Buddhism always tried to provide the answer. Donald S. Lopez mentioned the way Buddhists explain reincarnation in his book:

“All human beings are destined to be reborn in other forms, human and
nonhuman, over vast stretches of space and time. While time in its most abstract sense does follow a pattern of decline, then renovation, followed by a new decline, and so on, still the process of reincarnation is without beginning or end. Life takes six forms: at the top are gods, demigods, and human beings, while animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings occupy the lower rungs of the hierarchy. On the one hand, Buddhist teachers tried to convince their audience that human existence did not end simply with a funeral service or memorial to the ancestors, which humans were reborn in another bodily form and could thus be related not only to other human beings but to animals, ghosts, and other species among the six modes of rebirth. To support that argument for rebirth, it was helpful to draw on metaphors of continuity, like a flame passed from one candle to the next and a spirit that moves from one lifetime to the next.” (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 98-99)

Buddhism firstly tried to explain how people did the reincarnation after they died and explained the different levels people would go according to their karma. And Buddhist teachers tried to make the non-Indian understand human existence do not end simply as what they thought in China, but their life would continued through rebirth.

“On the other hand, the truth of impermanence entailed the argument that no permanent ego could possibly underlie the process of rebirth. What migrated from one lifetime to the next were not eternal elements of personhood but rather temporary aspects of psychophysical life that might endure for a few lifetimes-or a few thousand- but would eventually cease to exist. The wisdom of Buddha is neither intellectual nor individualistic. It was always believed to be a soteriological knowledge that was expressed in the compassionate activity of teaching others how to achieve liberation from suffering.” (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 98-99)

Buddhists teachers secondly tried to explain the reincarnation and the meaning of life for Buddhism and the purpose of nirvana, which can help Chinese people easily understand it, and can compare with Confucianism or other local religions. In Chinese Classics “Mou Zi”(牟子), which also used Taoism and Confucianism language to explain Buddhism. For example:

“佛乃道德之元祖，神明之宗绪。佛之言觉也，恍惚变化，分身散体，或存或亡；能小能大，能圆能方，能老能少，能隐能彰。蹈火不烧，履刃不伤；在污不辱，在祸无殃；欲行则飞，坐则扬光。故号为佛也。”

“天道法四时，人道法五常。” — 《弘明集》卷一
In my understanding, the first sentence described Dharma was the source of all things, it could be everywhere and could be everything. The way Mou Zi used to explain was similar as the way Lao Zi talked about Tao. And the second sentence talked about the law of nature was the four seasons, and the law of humanity was five things which were Kindness (仁), righteousness (义), propriety (礼), wisdom (智) and trustworthiness (信), the five things here were the teaching of Confucianism. So it used Confucianism to explain Buddhism.

2.4 Taoism

Taoism is a philosophical, ethical, and religious tradition of Chinese origin that emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao. Taoism draws its cosmological foundations from the School of Naturalists, such as Yin and Yang and the Five Phases, which developed during the Warring States period (4th to 3rd centuries BC). Taoism is an important religion in Chinese history; it has had a profound influence on the Chinese culture and society for centuries. As Tang Yi Jie described in his book:

“Taoism is another Chinese traditional philosophy which refers to a philosophical or religious tradition in which the basic concept is to establish harmony with the Tao, which is the mechanism of everything that exists. Taoist propriety and ethics emphasize the Three Jewels of the Tao: compassion, moderation, and humility, while Taoist thought generally focuses on nature, the relationship between humanity and the cosmos; health and longevity; and wu wei (action through inaction). Harmony with the Universe, or the source thereof (Tao), is the intended result of many Taoist rules and practices. Taoism influences Chinese people’s outlook on life, which lead Chinese people do everything always in accordance with its natural tendency, try to not break the balance.” (Tang Yi Jie, 1991, 147)

Most of time, people are easy to misunderstand Taoism as philosophy and Taoism as religion, actually, the two are different. When we do the research we need to
distinguish it clearly. Donald S. Lopez in “Asian Religions” points out that:

“Taoism as the philosophy portrays a state of chaotic wholeness which we called “hundun” in Chinese, translated as “chaos.” Taoism regards everything exists and possible, for example there is no distinction before birth for Taoism, but once birth happens the world descends into a state of imperfection. And Taoism as the religion developed in the late 2nd century AD, one of the movements called the Way of the Celestial Masters, which named “Tianshi dao” in Chinese, possessed mythology and rituals and established a set of social institutions that would be maintained by all later Taoist groups, and because it divided itself into a number of parishes, to which each member-household was required to pay an annual tax of five pecks of rice, so it is also called as the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice. Finally, Taoists formed large hierarchical religious societies with time.” (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 93-94)

Because I did the research of the interfaith dialogue which focuses on religions, in this research I treat Taoism as religion in Chinese history. Even before the Han dynasty, Taoism as religion was in a chaotic state which had no systematic teachings. From Han-era, Taoists assembled into small groups of hermits who attempted to achieve immortality through breathing exercises and use of medical elixirs. Its followers believed that the sage-philosopher Laozi (6th century BC) was a holy prophet who would offer salvation and good health if his devout followers would confess their sins; ban the worship of unclean gods who accepted meat sacrifices and chant sections of the Daodejing.

2.5 The struggle and interaction of the three religions

2.5.1 Buddhism entered Chinese society

Before the Han dynasty, the Chinese encouraged the blossoming and contending of all schools of thoughts. No matter Confucianism or Taoism or other school of thoughts, it’s difficult to prove which was more important than the others. And even
there was no clear differentiation between the thoughts of these schools and religion. Until Qin dynasty, the emperor conquered people with violence, and so destroyed all schools of thoughts. Only since Han dynasty, Confucianism as the state religion guided people, Taoism as another local religion affected the society and Buddhism as the exotic religion first appeared in China. We can imagine it must have been a difficult thing in that period. How was the ruler to face this situation? How can local people embrace these religions at the same time? How did religions affect people and society during that period? All of these questions need to be answered. However, I have to say that Buddhism's arrival occurred during a special time which allowed it to enter society. The Han dynasty which was the beginning of Buddhism in China was a time of war. Every new dynasty started, there were always many rivals opposed the new rulers or regime, and in the Han dynasty, this was also the case. In a country focused on wars and fighting, peoples' lives were hard no matter in ancient times or nowadays, Buddhism's coming and its teachings offered spiritual ballast. According to Buddhism teaching, the foundation beliefs are the Four Noble Truths which are: 1. All lives are suffering. 2. The cause of suffering is ignorance and clinging. 3. There is a way to end suffering. 4. The way to end suffering is the Eightfold Path which includes: right understanding, right aspiration, right effort, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right mindfulness and right concentration. As Daniel L. Overmyer talked in his book "Religions of China":

"What Gautama believed he had found is the way life really is, always changing and full of suffering, yet offering hope to those who accept things as they are and do their best to live a moral life. Most other religions teach that
there is something solid and eternal behind the changes of life, something they call God, or Dao, or Brahman. But for the Buddha such solidity is an illusion: it is just something we want to believe to feel secure and assure ourselves that we can last forever too. He thought it was better to accept the fact that life is basically impermanent and stop trying to deny the inevitable, ever-changing character of life and death. In his experience such acceptance eventually brought a new peace of mind and a new sense of compassion for other living things, all of whom are caught in the same situation." (Daniel. L. Overmyer, 1986, 40)

So Buddhism during these special war times played the role of comfort for people’s tough lives through its teaching, which made it easy to enter Chinese society and became one part of Chinese religious history. People used its way to find a new way to live their lives, during difficult times. However, at the beginning of Buddhism’s coming, Taoists even thought it was a sect of Taoism, which is another factor help Buddhism as an exotic religion entered to China easily. During Buddhism is entry, China, Taoism as a religion was just beginning, so it didn’t have a mature system, teachings and rituals and so on. So it was difficult for Taoism to distinguish Buddhism as exotic religions.

2.5.2 The struggle of three religions in the Han dynasty

As an increasing number of people became Buddhists, Confucianists and Taoists gradually felt threatened. Even as this exotic religion came to China and was easily accepted by local people, Confucianism and Taoism united to resist and they criticized Buddhism together. As the state ideology, Confucianism does not want any religions to shake its status and influence in ancient China. At the same time, Taoism as a local burgeoning religion was just beginning to develop and didn’t want the exotic Buddhism make any threat to it as well. So both Confucianism and Taoism attacked
Buddhism through various arguments. Firstly, it was the conflict of rituals. Buddhism was in pursuit of standing aloof from worldly affairs, and was opposite to humanism. But as a go-into-society religion, Confucianism is easily conflict with Buddhism, especially in rituals. Daniel Overmyer described life of Buddha in his book:

"The Buddha traveled around northeastern India for about forty years after his enlightenment, preaching and instructing small groups of disciples. To ordinary people he taught a life of discipline, compassion, and devotion to spiritual leaders, but to his closest followers he taught a path of meditation, mind control, and intense discussion. It was through months and years of inward-looking, seated meditation that one could train the mind in the new way of seeing. Such meditation demanded a quiet lifestyle free of worries about money, success, and family, so the Buddha's disciples left their families, or military service. Some disciples who had "left the household life" lived in monasteries (for monks) and nunneries (for nuns) and devoted themselves to meditation and study, sharing the work of cleanup and repair, begging every day for food in nearby villages. They were not allowed to raise their own food, because such labor could distract them from meditation, and furthermore it involved killing insects and animals, which creates owned, took new religious names, and wore simple robes." (Daniel. L. Overmyer, 1986, 42)

So we can see that for Buddhism, moving far from society with a simple life, leaving family and taking new religious names, and practicing Buddha's teaching and meditation was a way of practice for achieving nirvana. However, Confucianism has the opposite attitude to treat the relations between individual person and human community. The scholar of Confucianism Tu Wei Ming talked the relations in his book:

"The Confucian perception that human beings are earthbound yet strive to transcend themselves to join with Heaven clearly indicates that Confucians see humanity as more than an anthropological concept but as an anthropocosmic idea. Reciprocity is seen by the Confucians as the human way par excellence. It connects the individual person to the human community. The basic dyadic relationships, including the five cardinal relationships (parent-child,
husband-wife, sibling-sibling, friend-friend, and ruler-minister), are all governed by the principle of reciprocity.” (Tu Weiming, 1989, 103-104)

For Confucianism, family and human relations is very important. In Mencius, it explains these five relationships exactly: to serve my father as I would expect my son to serve me; to serve my ruler as I would expect my ministers to serve me; to serve my elder brother as I would expect my younger brother to serve me; to be the first to treat friends as I would expect them to treat me; to serve my wife as I would expect her to serve me. (Mencius, XIII) We can see that filial piety has parallel principles in the Confucian anthropocosmic, family and marriages are very important for Chinese people and culture. So, what Buddhism advocates to devote the whole life to temple and practice to achieve nirvana is totally opposite to Confucianism’s teaching as it is the expression of non filial piety for Confucianism. This inevitably caused the conflicts between Buddhism and Confucianism. Besides this, to worship emperors and ancestors are also very important rituals in Chinese society, but Buddhism taught there were no idols to worship, so it also caused conflicts between Buddhism and the local religions.

Secondly, it is the conflict of recognition. Buddhism as the exotic and mature religion entered into and developed in China, it stimulated the development of Taoism, but it was an exotic religion, the more it developed the more it was criticized by local religions. Under this situation, both Confucianism and Taoism as the local religions queried the significance and validity of Buddhism’s exist in China.

Thirdly, it is the conflict of social status. Taoism started and developed from the Eastern Han period, although it could not shake the important status of Confucianism
in Chinese society, it had its social status as well. With Buddhism’s coming, more and more Chinese became Buddhists, which opened the possibility of Buddhism exceeding the others. So the status and rank of each religion in Chinese society also caused the conflict among these three religions.

2.5.3 The interaction of three religions in Han dynasty

2.5.3.1 The positive attitude toward Buddhism

Chinese Buddhists spent a long time concentrating on translating the scriptures although they faced many difficulties in spreading the teachings in China. These translations were a great task, from translating according to pronunciations to translating according to its meaning, which furthered the development of the art of translation in general. In the Han dynasty, most of the translators were foreign Buddhists, such as An Shih-kao (安世高) who was crown prince of Parthia (波斯国) and Lokaksema (支娄迦谶) who was from Indoscythae (大月氏国). They came to China and helped to translate the early Buddhism scriptures.

During that period, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism criticized each other furiously but most of the conflicts were just based on some exterior rituals. Besides this, Buddhism still held the attitude that the three religions must be coherent, so it tried to cater to the other two religions which helped it adopt a positive attitude to face conflicts.

2.5.3.2 The fusion of the translations

In order to let common people easily understand its teaching, Buddhism used simple words and stories which were suited for Chinese understanding to translate its
scriptures, and there are some similar teachings among the three religions. For example, in Buddhist teaching, in order allow for the cessation of suffering and achieve nirvana people need to eradicate greed, hatred, and delusion. W. Rahula described the middle path in his book that:

“The Fourth Noble Truth is that of the way leading to the cessation of suffering, which is known as the “Middle Path”. The Middle path is generally referred to as the Noble Eightfold Path because it is composed of eight categories namely, right understanding (Samma ditthi), right thought (Samma sankappa), right speech (Samma vaca), right action (Samma kammanta), right livelihood (Samma ajiva), right effort (Samma vayama), right mindfulness (Samma sati), right concentration (Samma samadhi). (W. Rahula, 1988, 45)

So it taught people using a right view to have right behavior, and when it was translated to Chinese, it used many simple words which can be used in Taoism or Confucianism to explain the Buddhism scriptures.

Taoism also mentioned morality in its teaching. Donald S. Lopez described the morality of Taoism as:

“Taoism has also always stressed morality. Whether expressed through specific injunctions against stealing, lying, and taking life, through more abstract discussions of virtue, or through exemplary figures who transgress moral codes, ethics was an important element of Taoist practice.” (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 96)

And for Confucianism, in Mencius, it also talked about moral teaching:

“In practicing the ordinary virtues and in the exercise of care in ordinary conversation, when there is deficiency, the profound person never fails to make further effort, and when there is excess, never dares to go to the limit. His words correspond to his actions and his actions correspond to his words. The profound person is indeed earnest and genuine.” (Mencius, XIII:4)

In a word, the teachings of three religions all taught us to be good with right views
and right behaviors no matter which way they used or which expression they tried. Although they used different approaches to explain and teach people ethics, the main idea and the purpose was the same.

2.5.3.3 The interaction of the three religions in arts

The interactions of the three religions did not only focus on teaching and rituals but also the arts, such as the importation of Buddhism having had a great influence on the culture of China. From its importation in the early history, Buddhism has developed and passed from generation to generation. It has a deep connection in China’s history.

Li Ze Hou in his book “The Path of Beauty” said that:

“The Western and Eastern Hans witnessed a momentous ideological reform in the reign of Emperor Wudi (156-87 B.C.), which “banned all schools and worshipped only Confucianism.” In this way, the rational spirit of the Pre-Qin, whose hallmark was Confucianism and whose content was historical experience, gradually pervaded the south’s art and literature and the thoughts of its people resulting in the fusion of northern and southern cultures into a unique heterogeneous congeries. The myths and fantasies of southern Chu and the historical tales of the north, the absurdities disseminated by the Taoists and the moral principles of the Confucians were interwoven, and in a parallel way they fluctuated, mixed, and were expressed in human thought and the world of art. The dead, the living, fairies, ghosts, historical figures, worldly scenes, myths, fantasies – all existed together; and primitive totems, Confucian teachings, divinations, and superstitions lived side by side in a process that was more amalgamation than supplantation. It was still a romantic world of the imagination, rich but chaotic, and of passions ardent and undisguised.” (Li Zehou, 1999, 101)

In following dynasties, Buddhism has been used as a spiritual administrative tool to control thought and behavior. Many Chinese operas and stories were written about it and connected with it. It is rooted deeply in every Chinese’s thought although Chinese people did not choose it as their religion and most of Chinese don’t believe in the
Buddhist doctrine. But the Buddhism thought has given Chinese people a new connotation and it was connected to the peace and quiet that many Chinese people wished their life-style. However, it is just the beginning of the interaction of the three religions in Chinese religious history, until the Tang dynasty the development of the three religions was up to accelerate though conflicts, and fierce struggles are also more and more fiercely.
CHAPTER III

THE EVOLUTION AND INTERACTION OF CONFUCIANISM BUDDHISM
AND TAOISM IN SUI AND TANG DYNASTY

3.1 Historical background of Sui dynasty

In the last chapter I talked about the Han dynasty when Buddhism entered to China, and the three religions first time communicated and interacted with each other. However, after Han dynasty China experienced a long disunity period which included the three kingdoms period, Jin dynasty, and Southern and Northern dynasties. During these dynasties China was separated into many small states which attempted to conquer each other through wars. So there were seldom interactions among the three religions until the Sui dynasty which China unified the Country again. So I skip over this period of disunity in this research, and this chapter I would talk about the evolution and interaction among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in Sui dynasty.

The Sui dynasty was a very short-lived Imperial Chinese dynasty, which was preceded by the Southern and Northern dynasties, and it unified China for the first time after over a century of north-south division. It was followed by the Tang Dynasty. The Sui dynasty was founded by Wen Di, and the capital city was Chang’an but later moved to Luo Yang. Emperors Wen Di and Yang Di absorbed the lessons and experiences from the Southern and Northern dynasties, they started various reforms such as equal-field system to reduce the gap between rich and poor; they also built the Three departments and Six ministries system to improve the management of the
empire. Religions developed a lot as well in this dynasty. Buddhism was spread and encouraged throughout the empire, uniting the varied peoples and cultures of China. In the Sui dynasty, Buddhism was sinicized in China and developed many new sects according to Chinese cultural background and social demands. Meanwhile, with the long time conflicts and struggle within these three religions since the Han dynasty to the three kingdoms period and until the Jin dynasty and the Southern and Northern dynasties, the emperors of Sui dynasty realized it was impossible to destroy any of the religions and it was important to absorb the good qualities from each religion. This made the Sui dynasty a very important new beginning for religious development in Chinese history. However, not every emperor had the developing idea to help religions dialogue or coexist regardless of what dynasties. Before the Sui dynasty there were some emperors who tried to destroy some of these religions as pre-dynasties, which also influenced the transition of the relations among the three religions.

3.2 The transition of the relations among Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in Sui dynasty

3.2.1 The Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution

When we talk about the transition of the relations among the three religions in the Sui dynasty, I have to talk about two important great anti-Buddhist persecution events which happened in the Northern dynasty first, because it influenced the attitudes of emperors towards religious relations in the Sui dynasty more or less.

The first event happened in North Wei period (386-534 AD). The North Wei was
built by a ethnic group named Xian Bei (鮮卑族) and the capital city is Ping Cheng, which located in Da Tong, Shan Xi province today. In order to let people obey the ruler, the North Wei copied the management system from last dynasty and followed most of the Han people’s culture and system. Buddhism in the North Wei was popular as well because the ruler regarded it as a way to show how they respect local people’s belief. So they built many temples and Buddha statues in the capital city, recognized Buddhism as one of the legal religions at that time. Many famous Buddhist monks were invited to give lectures. However, this situation did not continue too long. The Wei Wu Di (魏武帝) listened to and believed rumors from the Taoists named Cui Hao(崔浩) and Kou Qian Zhi(寇謙之) that Buddhism was trying to conspire against the state and criticized Buddhism as an exotic religion, it was not suited for the emperor’s policy to follow Han culture. Under this situation, Wei Wu Di encouraged an anti-Buddhist persecution which burned all temples and killed all monks and nuns, and forced Buddhists to be common people and so on. Meanwhile, he advocated building Taoism temple and supported Taoism as one of the most important religions during that period. This lasted until 452 AD, when Wen Cheng Di (文成帝) succeed to the throne. Wei Wu Di was killed, Buddhism was restored again.

The second important event happened in North Zhou (567 AD), Zhou Wu Di (周武帝) ordered to Anti-Buddhist Persecution with the similar reasons as Wei Wu Di, destroyed all Buddhism temples and Buddha statues. But this Anti-Buddhist Persecution was a little bit different from the previous time. This time the emperor only reluctantly made the decision to be anti-Buddhist, and recognize Confucianism
as the state religion, and abolished both Buddhism and Taoism. This time they only
destroyed the temples and statues, but did not kill the Buddhist monks and nuns but
forced them to be common people.

These two events both related to politics, and were negative influences on the
development of Buddhism. However, Buddhism developed more and more after the
two events, which proved the importance of Buddhism for local people at that time.

3.2.2 The contributions of Sui dynasty for the three religions

During the Sui dynasty, emperors also faced the same problems as the Han and
other dynasties, concerning how to solve the conflicts among these three religions and
how to balanced their relations with politics. But they also received lessons and
experiences from previous dynasties, especially from the two anti-Buddhist
persecution in the North dynasty in which they learnt it was difficult to destroy any
religions through military force. To the contrary, used military force to deal with it
would push religions develop more. So the emperors in Sui dynasty started to rethink
the attitude to treat the three religions. During that short 37 years, each of the
emperors used a positive way to promote the three religions and help them develop
very fast, which also constructed a good foundation for the Tang dynasty. From the
Sui dynasty, the three religions started to coexistence in a society. Especially, Sui Wen
Di agreed with the ideas from the book named “History Three Treasures” that:

門下法无内外，万善同归；教有深浅，殊途共致。— 《历代三宝记》卷一二
According to my understanding, this sentence means that all religions should not be judged according to their differences, they all teach to be good; religions’ teaching can be difficult or simple, but the function is the same. So we can see the emperors in Sui dynasty had a broad mind to treat religions and made great contributions. The most important contributions they did including three aspects:

Firstly, it continued establishing the status of Confucianism as the state religion. Confucianism was treated in a very high status in Chinese history since the Han dynasty, which made itself seem like the child of royal lineage, and Confucianism talked about heaven and the mandate of heaven, emperors as the executor of the mandate of heaven whom in accord with Confucianism. So its status was undisputed in the Sui dynasty. Meanwhile, Chinese traditions are based on humans, it is a human-centric society. The teaching of Confucianism taught people how to be live within their own position in their society effectively. Such as in Analects, it wrote:

子曰：“吾十有五而志于学，三十而立，四十而不感，五十知天命，六十耳顺，七十而从心所欲不逾矩” – 《论语》

“After fifteen, I was intent on learning; at thirty, I had established my stand; at forty, I was without doubts; at fifty, I knew the mandate of Heaven; at sixty, I was in accord with things; at seventy, I could follow my heart’s desires without transgressing conventions.”

*Analects 2:4; trans. Adapted from Lau 1979:63, and Sommer 1995:43*

We can see that Confucianism taught people what they can do in different periods at their lives, which helped the rulers develop a systematic way to guide people’s behavior. That is also a reason why it had its high status in ancient China.
Secondly, it promoted the chinization of Buddhism and created many new sects of Buddhism. Since Buddhism entered to China in Han dynasty, it has to adapt new ways to fit into Chinese society gradually in Sui dynasty. For example, the rulers combined the Northern Buddhism and Southern Buddhism in China, helped them mixed together and improved each other. In Southern and Northern dynasties, Buddhism in China also separated to Southern and Northern. The Southern Buddhist focused on the scriptures and metaphysics and the Northern Buddhist focused on building the temples, Buddha statues and meditations. So in the Sui dynasty, the rulers helped them interact through building temples and Buddha statues, translating scriptures, doing meditation and allowing common people to be Buddhists and so on. Besides these, advocated Buddhist scholars innovating Buddhism, created many sects of Buddhism during that period and later developed these sects to other Asian countries. Buddhism finally became to Chinese Buddhism. Some of the sects are very famous until today, such as Tian Tai sect (天台宗), San Lun sect (三论宗) and San Jie sect (三阶宗). Tian Tai sect is the most famous Buddhism in Sui dynasty, the founder of Tian Tai sect is Wise Master named Zhi Yi who lived in Tian Tai mountain, and it was based on the Nagarjuna’s (龙树) madhyamak (中观宗) philosophy. Later, it created its own scriptures including ‘Method HuaXuanYi’ (法华玄义), ‘Contemplating the Great Stillness’ (摩诃止观) and ‘Fa Hua Wen Ju’ (法华文句) etc., which are all famous until now. The founder of the San Lun sect is Ji Zang (吉藏) and this sect was based on Kumarajiva’s (鸠摩罗什) Buddhism scriptures translation. The founder of San Jie sect is Xin Xing (信行) who was influenced by Saddharmapundarika Sutra
So three of them had the important influence on Chinese Buddhism in the Sui dynasty, and their appearing stated Buddhism sinicized from traditional Indian Buddhism.

Thirdly, it allowed Taoism to develop in a more advanced way through absorbing Buddhist thought and fused the thoughts of the three religions. Early Taoism as a religion in the Han dynasty followed crude rituals such as drinking water containing signed papers to cure disease. But it later developed some new philosophical practices in the Jin dynasty such as the use of breath to lead to immortality. However, all the teachings and scriptures they possessed had were still very rough and imperfect. So in order to develop Taoism itself and compete with Buddhism, Taoism tried hard to improve itself through absorbing the advanced thoughts and teaching from Buddhism. For example, Taoism began to teach people of immortality, it learnt from Buddhism that Taoists need to dedicate themselves and give up the common lives to be Taoists lived in Taoism temple, learning from master, chanting scriptures, sila as Buddhism and practicing to find the Tao. All of these rituals were learnt from Buddhism and created its own scripture such as ‘Sheng Xuan Jing’ (升玄经) which had a complete teaching of Taoism fused with Buddhism teaching ideas.

For Buddhism, it also absorbed the thought from Taoism. For example, in ‘The theory of mahayana xuan’(大乘玄论) it wrote:

> 若于无所得入，不但空为佛性，一切草木并是佛性也。-- 《大乘玄论》卷三

[3]《中国道教基础知识》，《中国佛教简史》
In my understanding, this sentence means for Buddhism, if the “empty” has Buddhata so all natural beings have Buddhata as well. This idea was absorbed from Taoism especially from Zhuang Zi who proposed the idea that Tao is everywhere.

So, since the Sui dynasty the three religions started a new development and new relations to each other. Although conflicts still existed, each of them gradually became to assimilate and absorb each other’s teachings. As Ebrey describes about religions in Sui dynasty as below:

“Buddhism was popular during the Six Dynasties period that preceded the Sui dynasty, spreading from India through Kushan Afghanistan into China during the Late Han period. Buddhism gained prominence during the period when central political control was limited. Buddhism created a unifying cultural force that uplifted the people out of war and into the Sui dynasty. In many ways, Buddhism was responsible for the rebirth of culture in China under the Sui dynasty.” (Ebrey, Patricia; Walthall, Ann; Palais, James 2009, 89)

Buddhism experienced a long journey to China in Han period and started to be recognized and developed in Sui dynasty after a long disunity time. It would influence Chinese culture and religious history.

“Emperor Wen and his empress had converted to Buddhism to legitimize imperial authority over China and the conquest of Chen. The emperor presented himself as a Cakravartin king, a Buddhist monarch who would use military force to defend the Buddhist faith. In the year 601 AD, Emperor Wen had relics of the Buddha distributed to temples throughout China, with edicts that expressed his goals, ‘all the people within the Four Seas may, without exception, develop enlightenment and together cultivate fortunate karma, bringing it to pass that present existences will lead to happy future lives, that the sustained creation of good causation will carry us one and all up to wondrous enlightenment’. Ultimately, this act was an imitation of the ancient Mauryan Emperor Ashoka of India.” (Ebrey, Patricia; Walthall, Ann; Palais, James 2009, 89)

The Sui dynasty learned from previous dynasties, and all the emperors tried to take
a positive attitude in treating the three religions’ relations. No matter whether they presented themselves as a Cakravartin king or as a son of heaven, they begin to realize the importance of religion for the state and started using military force to defend certain faiths in order to consolidate the regime. So it was an important new beginning for religious interaction among Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism though Sui dynasty maintained a very short period. That is why I wanted to mention about this dynasty before I started discussing Tang dynasty which the three religions became harmony.

3.3 Historical background of Tang dynasty

There were a lot of improvements of the three religious interactions in the Sui dynasty. However, it only sustained 37 years and replaced by Tang dynasty. Since Tang dynasty, the three religions developed very fast and their interactions achieved to the peak state in Tang dynasty. So Tang dynasty was a very important period for religious dialogue in Chinese history.

Tang was an imperial dynasty of China preceded by the Sui Dynasty and followed by the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. It was founded by the Li family, who seized power during the decline and collapse of the Sui Empire. The dynasty was briefly interrupted when Empress Wu Zetian seized the throne, proclaiming the Second Zhou Dynasty (October 8, 690 – March 3, 705), and becoming the only Chinese empress regnant.

The Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907) is regarded by historians as a high point in Chinese civilization—equal, or even superior, to the Han period. Its capital city is
same as the Sui in Chang’an which we called Xi’an today. It is one of the greatest
dynasties in Chinese history, which expanded its territory through the military and
even greater than Han dynasty. According to the introduction from “History of China”,
by the middle of the eighth century A.D., Tang power had ebbed. Domestic economic
instability and military defeat in 751 by Arabs at Talas, in Central Asia, marked the
beginning of five centuries of steady military decline for the Chinese empire. Misrule,
court intrigues, economic exploitation, and popular rebellions weakened the empire,
making it possible for northern invaders to terminate the dynasty in 907. The next
half-century saw the fragmentation of China into five northern dynasties and ten
southern kingdoms.

Religious development in Tang dynasty became a very important period in Chinese
history, and it created religious dialogue in ancient China as well. During the Tang
period, it bordered on India and the Middle East in the West, in which Buddhism
originated. Buddhism came to China since Han dynasty, developed in various
dynasties but flourished during Tang dynasty and became a permanent part of Chinese
traditional culture.

However, as I mentioned above that before the Sui period, there were some
emperors who tried to destroy some of these religions as pre-dynasties. In the Tang
dynasty, the anti-Buddhism persecution also happened, which proved again that it is
impossible to destroy any religions completely. This also led Tang rulers to rethink the
religious coexistence and promoted them use a positive way to deal with religious
conflicts.
3.4 The transition of the relations among Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism in Tang dynasty

Because of the rulers in the Sui dynasty made a good foundation for the relations of this three religions, in Tang dynasty most of the emperors continued following the way to treat three religions. However, the conflicts among them still exist but more from an academic perspective.

3.4.1 The conflicts of the three religions in Tang dynasty

In the Tang dynasty, religions were still divided by religious identity and struggled with one another. The biggest conflict was still based on the rituals and teachings. But also, the conflict of the three religions was more and more caused by economic factors.

Firstly, people still argued based on the rituals. For Confucianism, every person should worship the emperors and their parents. The refusal to do so was considered unfilial behavior. Buddhist monks or nuns believed that they should not worship anyone. So the rituals of these two religions totally contradicted to each other, which caused much conflict.

Secondly, the Confucianism scholars criticized Buddhism concerning its bad influences on the economy and development of the country. One of the most famous scholars was Han Yu⁴ (韩愈) who was a minister in Tang dynasty, he criticized Buddhism for economic reasons. There were three reasons that Buddhism harmed the economy. One is that the function of government is to help people have a good life.

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⁴ Han Yu was born in Henan, China, was a precursor of Neo-Confucianism as well as an essayist and poet, during the Tang dynasty.
and keep the government stable, but in order to develop Buddhism, there were more and more temples were built which was costly Buddhist monks and nuns were not required to pay taxes, and so cost government’s money. At the same time, the Buddhist monks and nuns did not worship emperors and their parents which disobeyed filial piety of Confucianism. Another reason is he thought the six countries in Southern and Northern dynasties short reign was caused by Buddhism. Because all the emperors only focused on how to develop Buddhism, none of them cared about the countries’ development. The last but not the least is many people who committed a crime just fled to be a monk and avoided punishment. Some Buddhists even cooperated with governors to do business and intervene affairs of the state. All of these issues had a negative impact for the country.  

3.4.2 The attitudes of emperors towards the three religions in Tang dynasty

In most dynasties in China, emperors usually used the same policies to rule the country and treat religions in each dynasty because in Chinese culture people believed that rulers followed their ancestors was the expression of filial piety, they only broke the rules when a new dynasty started. But in Tang dynasty, because of the preference of each emperor towards religions, different emperors had totally different attitudes to each religion, which also caused religious struggle especially for their status in the society.

The founder of the Tang dynasty (618-907), Li Yuan (李渊) (lived 566-635, reigned 618-626, known as Tang Gao Zu (唐高祖), for instance, claimed to be a descendant of

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5 《中国佛教简史》
Laozi’s. In the book “Asian religion” writes:

“At various points during the reign of the Li family during the Tang dynasty, prospective candidates for government service were tested for their knowledge of specific Daoist scriptures. Imperial authorities recognized and sometimes paid for ecclesiastical centers where Daoist priests were trained and ordained, and the surviving sources on Chinese history are filled with examples of state sponsorship of specific Daoist ceremonies and the activities of individual priests. Later government continued to extend official support as a particularly innovative period: it saw the development of sects named “Supreme Unity” (Taiyi), “Perfect and Great Dao” (Zhenda dao), and “Complete Perfection” (Quanzhen). In the early part of the fifteen century, the forty-third Celestial Master took charge of compiling and editing Daoist ritual texts, resulting in the promulgation of a Daoist canon that contemporary Daoists still consider authoritative.” (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 96)

We can see from the record, during the Tang Gao Zu period, the teaching of Taoism as the test for government service, which means anyone who would like to work in government must learn Taoism. So Taoism had a very high reputation and status even over Buddhism.

When Tang Tai Zong (唐太宗) succeed to the throne, he still followed Tang Gao Zu and promoted Taoism, restraining the Buddhism development. Until 645 AD, the famous Buddhist monk Xuan Zang⁶ (玄奘) finished studying and brought the original scriptures from India, the attitude of Tang Tai Zong towards Buddhism changed. He started to support Buddhism and offered special places to translate Buddhism scriptures, and because of Xuan Zang won a high reputation in India, this led to China and India developing a good relationship at the first time in the history. So it also

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⁶ Xuanzang was a Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveller, and translator who described the interaction between China and India in the early Tang dynasty. Born in what is now Henan province around 602, from boyhood he took to reading religious books, including the Chinese classics and the writings of ancient sages. He became famous for his seventeen-year overland journey to India, which is recorded in detail in the classic Chinese text Great Tang Records on the Western Regions, which in turn provided the inspiration for the novel Journey to the West written by Wu Cheng'en during the Ming dynasty, around nine centuries after Xuanzang’s death.
another important reason why Tang Tai Zang would later support Buddhism. Even some legends describe that before Tang Tai Zang died, he talked to Xuan Zang many times but that this was too late for him to promote Buddhism too much. Since Tang Tai Zong, Buddhism status gradually surpassed Taoism which made the conflict between Taoism and Buddhism more intense.

During 656-661 AD, a unique moment appeared in Chinese history. The first and only female leader empress Wu Ze Tian we also called Wu Hou who ruled officially in the Tang dynasty under the name of her self-proclaimed "Zhou dynasty", from 690 to 705. She was the only female emperor to govern China and one of the greatest patrons of Buddhism. In order to distinguish her reign from the Family Li, empress Wu changed the policy of Tang Tai Zong, who placed Taoism at a higher status than Buddhism. She reversed their positions. She used Buddhism to support her regime and national religion. Mario Poceski in his book described Wu Hou as

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7 Wu Ze Tian or Wu Hou during the Tang dynasty as Tian Hou (天后), and in English as Empress Consort Wu, or by the deprecated term, "Empress Wu", was a Chinese sovereign. She had previous imperial positions, however, under both Emperor Taizong of Tang and his son Emperor Gaozong of Tang, of the Tang dynasty of China. Wu was a concubine of Emperor Taizong. After his death she married his successor and ninth son, Emperor Gaozong, officially becoming Gaozong's furen (variously translated as "empress", "wife", or "first consort") in 655, although having considerable political power prior to this. After Gaozong's debilitating stroke in 690, Wu Zetian ruled as effective sovereign until 705. She is the only recorded woman to rule China in her own right. The importance to history of Wu Zetian's period of political and military leadership includes the major expansion of the Chinese empire, extending it far beyond its previous territorial limits, deep into Central Asia, and the completion of the conquest of the upper Korean Peninsula. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wu_Zetian)

8 Taizong had fourteen sons, including three to his beloved empress Wende (601–636), but none with Consort Wu. Thus, according to the custom by which consorts of deceased emperors who had not produced children were permanently confined to a monastic institution after the emperor's death, Wu was consigned to Ganye Temple (感业寺), with the expectation that she would serve as a Buddhist nun there for the remainder of her life. In colloquial Chinese, becoming a nun was known as "having one's hair shorn". Wu was to defy expectations, however, and leave the convent for an alternative life. But the former emperor's son, Li Zhi, had begun an affair with Wu earlier, while still his father's concubine. After his father's death Li came to visit her, and found her more beautiful, intelligent, and intriguing than ever before, and decided to bring her back as his own concubine. Because she had become a concubine at age 14, she was now in her feminine and sexual prime, but also had spent time learning patience, control, and meditation on her will for power and superiority over men who had so easily had her vanquished to a nunnery. In her machinations to secure absolute governmental control, she had to contend with a prevalent Confucian-based ideology that was unabashedly patriarchal and precluded the possibility of a female ruler. She went around that by turning to Buddhism, the most prevalent religious tradition among her subjects, as a key source of political legitimacy (although she also did not shy away from using Taoism and popular religion for the same purpose, when opportunities presented themselves). The pious yet shrewd
follows:

“In her machinations to secure absolute governmental control, she had to contend with a prevalent Confucian-based ideology that was unabashedly patriarchal and precluded the possibility of a female ruler. She went around that by turning to Buddhism, the most prevalent religious tradition among her subjects, as a key source of political legitimacy (although she also did not shy away from using Taoism and popular religion for the same purpose, when opportunities presented themselves). The pious yet shrewd empress publicly proclaimed herself an incarnation of Maitreya, the Buddha of the future. She also widely publicized a prophecy about the imminent coming of a righteous female monarch, which was presented in an obscure apocryphal scripture that was conveniently brought to her attention by some of her close cronies.” (Mario Poceski, 2009, 126)

In the famous Chinese historical book ‘History as a Mirror’ (资治通鉴), it recorded that:

（天授二年）夏，四月，癸卯，制：以释教开革命之阶，升于道士之上。

-- 《资治通鉴》卷 204

According to my understanding, this sentence means that according to the mandate of Heaven, from now on the status of Buddhism became higher than Taoism. Meanwhile, empress Wu ordered to construction of many Buddhist temples and asked more Buddhist monks to translate scriptures to impart Buddhism to more people. So during her period, some Taoists even converted to be Buddhists.

However, in Chinese history, there were three periods of anti-Buddhist persecution. The first two times happened in the Southern and Northern dynasties and the last one happened in the Tang dynasty. Empress Wu promoted Buddhism which caused an
economic depression because more and more people became Buddhists lived in temple and less people did the normal work such as farming, fishing and so on. So in 842 AD when Tang Wu Zong (唐武宗) governed China, he started an anti-Buddhist persecution again. He destroyed many small temples, and only left a few big temples and forced Buddhist monks and nuns to revert to common people. His action blocked the development of Buddhism, also make it less dominant over the other religions.

3.4.3 The progress of the relations among the three religions

Although during Tang dynasty there were still conflicts and struggles among three religions, there were many great progresses. The First progress is the way to translate Buddhism scriptures from individual translation to state organization. In Tang dynasty, there were 372 Buddhism scriptures totally 2159 files translated by more than 20 Buddhism scholars including foreign and local Buddhist monks, such as Spo Vbor (波颇), Xuan Zang (玄奘), Bhagavaddharma (伽梵达摩), Divakara (地婆诃罗) and so on. All of them concentrated on translating Buddhism scriptures which promoted the development of Buddhism very quickly. Meanwhile, Buddhism actions stimulated the other two religions to develop themselves.

Secondly, there were many new Buddhism sects were created in Tang dynasty. After three new sects created in Sui dynasty and continued developing in Tang, there were Vijnaptimātratā School (唯识宗), the Hua-yen school (华严宗), Chan school (Zen in Japan) (禅宗), Vinaya school (律宗), Pure Land school (净土宗) and Vajrayana Buddhism (密宗) created in China. During Tang dynasty, Buddhism

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introduced into Tibet and formed the Vajrayana Buddhism and in Yunnan province which located in southwest of China the Theravada Buddhism was introduced in, which means Chinese Buddhism had formed already in Tang dynasty.

Thirdly, there was more and more interaction among the three religions. As Tang Tai Zong said all the three religions taught people to be kind and merciful, they should be equal. So in the Tang dynasty, most of the emperors realized the three religions were very important for their governing, it was impossible to destroy any of them. The best way to treat them was using them as the tools assist to manage China. So the shape of religious dialogue first time appeared in the Tang dynasty. Emperors organized the dialogue in the palace, each religious delegate attended this meeting and argued each other with one controversial question each time, one party asked questions and other parties answered questions. They tried to argued and criticized to each other but they absorbed from each other at the same time. The way Tang governors used in Tang dynasty helped ease the conflicts among Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism.

3.5 The interaction of the three religions and interfaith dialogue

The attitudes of most emperors to treat the three religions in the Tang dynasty were similar, which Confucianism was the ideology of the state; it guided people to be moral and judged people's behavior. Buddhism and Taoism as very important religions assisted to govern the people. Because emperors supported both Buddhism and Taoism in Tang dynasty, the two religions struggled never stopped during those

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10 “三教慈心，均异同于平等。”
11 《中国佛教简史》
more than 100 years. Their conflicts not only concerned religious status and their support by emperors but also the teachings. In the beginning of the Tang, the policy was Taoism was ahead of Buddhism, governors protected Taoism because the family names of emperors were traced back to Lao Zi, which helped Taoism possess a more honorable status. But because of the lessons from pre-dynasties, the governors knew that it was not easy to destroy or support any religion directly. So from the beginning of the Tang, governors adopted a policy of restraining Buddhism to allow the three religions to coexist peacefully. Later, with the big influence of Xuan Zang and the stable status of Tang Tai zong, the governor changed the policy. This changed with the empress Wu Ze Tian, she supported Buddhism and helped lift the status of Buddhism ahead of Taoism. The Three religions struggled during the whole Tang period, for Buddhism and Taoism, but the biggest conflict was about the similarity and difference of the teaching between “Tao” and “Bodhi”. And the conflict between Confucianism and Buddhism focus on whether Buddhism’s tonsure and temple life was moral compared to the more socially oriented Confucianism. Buddhism criticized Confucianism as too focused on the society, however, Confucianism never cared about what Buddhism or Taoism criticized because it was adopted by Chinese governors. As Damien Keown wrote:

“Buddhism spread north from India into Central Asia and reached China by the middle of the first century. At this time the later Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220AD) had consolidated Chinese power in Central Asia, and Buddhist monks travelled with caravans which traversed the silk route, the primary artery for the transmission of luxury items from China to the West. To the pragmatic Chinese, Buddhism was both strange and fascinating.” (Damien Keown, 1996, 75-76)
It was true that when Buddhism appeared in Chinese society, it was really strange and fascinating. China was a very conservative country at that time, everyone was so familiar with traditions which had hundreds years' of history, the new religion's emergence was a challenge for ancient China. Meanwhile, Confucianism was the dominant ideology at that time, so if Buddhism’s teaching was not same as Confucianism, it must cause the conflicts. As Damien Keown described:

"The dominant ideology in China was Confucianism, a system of socio-ethical principles deriving from the teachings of the sage K'ung fu-tzu, or Confucius (550-470 BC). On certain matters Buddhism seemed in conflict with Confucian values. Confucianism regarded the family as the foundation of society, and the Buddhist invitation to sons and daughters to leave their families and renounce the world caused it to be seen with the same suspicion as certain cults today. The Buddhist Sangha, moreover, as a corporation of renunciates, seemed like a state within a state, a challenge to the power of the emperor and a threat to the seamless fabric of social life which was the Confucian ideal." (Damien Keown, 1996, 75-76)

Therefore, the most visible conflict was the view of values. Confucianism treats the state and family as very important unity. Family as the example of state, it teaches family members how to be filial piety and moral. However, Buddhism is totally different than Confucianism, as it shook the values of Confucianism and threatened the governors. What was more serious and threat to Confucianism was the different rituals.

"Monks also refused to bow before the emperor, since in India monks were deferred to by laymen. Cultural differences of this kind gave rise to conflict and misunderstanding, and fuelled hostility towards the new religion. On the other hand there was much about Buddhism that attracted the Chinese. It seemed to take up where Confucianism left off, and described an unseen world about which Confucianism had little to say." (Damien Keown, 1996, 75-76)
So the relation among the three religions is very complicated and changed constantly with different emperors. However, this struggle gradually allowed an interaction of religions in Chinese history, it made it possible for religions to have dialogue. Many lessons from Han dynasty to Sui dynasty showed that governors’ negative attitude in dealing with religious conflicts could never solve these problems. By the Tang dynasty it was realized that only dialogue could help them keep their regime stable. So it was the first time to use a very positive attitude to deal with religious conflicts in Chinese history. And also, it offered a sample for later China how to deal with religious conflicts with more and more religions appearing there after Tang dynasty.

From Han dynasty when Buddhism first time entered into Chinese society until Tang dynasty, Buddhism became Chinese Buddhism through a long transformation and development. This special religion not only changed itself but also influenced Confucianism and Taoism. Three of them struggled and criticized each other all the time, but learnt from each other as well. It is difficult to say that this is model of religious dialogue that we follow today, however, it leads the way to dialogue between religions. I agree with Li Ze Hou who wrote in his book as below:

“Religion is a very complex phenomenon. So is religious art which, generally speaking, is an object of faith and worship, not of enjoyment. Beauty and aesthetic form in religion are to serve its spiritual content. In China, the main form of religious art handed down from ancient times is that seen in the Buddhist rock grottoes. And Buddhist rock grotto art also changed and developed along with the changes in the times, the rise and fall of social classes, and the progress of social life, reflecting in its imagery how the Chinese nation accepted Buddhism, assimilated and reformed it.” (Li Zehou, 1999, 142)
We can see that in ancient China, religions interacted and assimilated to each other even through Chinese art, which was a very beautiful process of religious dialogue. Of course, the success of harmony among the three religions has its special condition. As Julia Ching described in ‘Chinese Religions’:

“It is perhaps to be expected that the ruling dynasties of native origin would tend to favour Confucianism (and Taoism), whereas those of alien or mixed backgrounds offered more protection to Buddhism. Taoism and Buddhism offered a sense of escape and consolation during times of disunity, whereas Confucianism contributed more directly to social and political cohesion during times of national unity. The ‘three religions’ actually complemented one another, since they attended to different areas of human concern.” (Julia Ching, 1993, 222-223)

Firstly, these three religions existed together in a very tough period, which people needed different spirit supporting with war and tough lives. So Taoism and Buddhism offered a sense of escape and consolation during a chaotic period. But it was not enough to help the three religions achieve harmony.

“True, there was rivalry even acrimony, among these three traditions, and yet it appeared that they were usually able to coexist and complement one another. We see here a spirit of harmony and reconciliation which, when compared to religious developments in the West (or the Middle East), is perhaps most characteristic of traditional Chinese culture—a harmony of parts within a whole, in which each religion serves a socially useful function. In Confucianism, such harmony has been directed to human social relationships; in Taoist philosophy, it has been turned to man’s relationship with the rest of nature. Taoist religion presents a difficulty, since the desire for physical immortality prompted proto-scientific experiments in exploitation of nature, consciously undertaken against the spirit of harmony, to wrest from nature its precious secrets of life and longevity. In the case of Buddhism, the tradition offered an entirely new outlook on life and the world, only to become itself conditioned by the pervading Chinese culture. It filled a certain spiritual vacuum, by addressing questions largely ignored by both Confucianism and Taoism.” (Julia Ching, 1993, 222-223)
I cannot say what Julia Ching explained here was absolutely correct because it was history which would never happen again the same as before. But I agree with her that the traditional Chinese cultures helped the three religions coexist harmoniously in ancient China. Each of them complemented the others and had different social functions to support and guide people. Chinese culture laid emphasis on harmony, no matter harmony with society or nature, this idea always imprinted in people’s mind. So Confucianism helped people learn to be harmonious with society, Taoism help people learn to be harmony with nature, Buddhism help people learn a new outlook of life and world, and three of them learn to be harmony with each other.

“So finally, even outside any particular syncretistic cult, many Chinese have found it possible to follow all three teachings at the same time. For example, a man could be a Confucian in his active life, responding to multiple social responsibilities, a philosophical Taoist in his leisure hours, reading poetry and enjoying nature and wine, while also practicing some health regimen associated with religious Taoism, and both he and his wife – or at least, she – would frequent the Buddhist temple to offer prayers for special intentions. The coexistence of all three religious traditions, and the possibility for the same people to be involved in all of them, testifies to a certain pluralism within the Chinese – and the East Asian – civilization, a pluralism that was hardly know by Europe and the Middle East.” (Julia Ching, 1993, 222-223)

It is really an enviable and ideal state that a man uses a Confucian responding to multiple social responsibilities in his active life and a philosophical Taoist in his leisure hours, reading poetry and enjoying nature and wine, at the same time as going to Buddhist temples to offer prayers. However, the religious issues and interfaith dialogue in contemporary society is not so perfect. We now face more realistic problems while we expecting the ideal states, such as we are more multicultural than before; we have more religions exist in one society; we face globalization challenges;
we have more immigrants and emigrants from different countries, which make interfaith dialogue became more complicated. So, how can we learn from ancient Chinese interfaith dialogue model and how can we build a new model of interfaith dialogue for contemporary society becomes an important issue to think and deal with.
CHAPTER IV

A CONTEMPORARY MODEL FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

4.1 Inspiration from the interaction of Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism

The interaction of Confucianism Buddhism and Taoism from Han to Tang dynasty lasted more than 1,000 years; although history would not be repeated again, it's a long and complicated struggling and fusion way offered us an important historical inspiration for today's interfaith dialogue.

4.1.1 The purpose of interfaith dialogue

Since interfaith dialogue has existed, the main purpose for dialogue usually has been understood as the reaching of consensus, finding common grounds and setting aside differences. However, most of the time, religious delegates do not recognize each other. Hence it is difficult to really reach a consensus or find common grounds. But through an understanding of history, we can see that the purpose of interfaith dialogue should be a process that leads to development and self understanding of one’s own religion leading to better cooperation and coexistence. When the Buddhism first entered China, no one knew and accepted this new religion, and other religions were slow to recognize this new religion as a part of Chinese society. But as Buddhism struggled to survive in Chinese society; it started to learn other religions and translated its scriptures using the language that local people were familiar with. Finally, it adapted to the Chinese culture and began to be accepted by Chinese people. However, as the local established religions, Confucianism and Taoism were resistant,
but gradually the three religions absorbed each other and learnt from each other through this process of struggle. Each of the religions understood itself better through learning the others and finally they came to coexist in Chinese society. Their fundamental differences never changed but they knew the other and themselves better than before. So we can see the process of interfaith dialogue actually is a process of learning and understanding other religions, finally leading to self understanding of one’s own religion, and allowing better cooperation and coexistence.

4.1.2 Conflict is the beginning of communication

From the Han to Tang dynasty, religious conflicts never stopped among the three religions in China. They struggled with each other, sometimes even tried to destroy the others through politics of local governors. But conflicts don't mean that the final result must be violent and unending dispute because violence can never solve problems. In our daily life, conflict happens everywhere and every moment no matter about our religions or cultures and societies. Maybe it can be solved through violence sometimes, but this is temporary because it leads to more conflicts. Most of the time people need to communicate with others because of misunderstanding or cultural shock. Since we are different and we do not understand the other with different backgrounds, we may have conflicts sometimes. But it does not mean conflicts result in violence. Conflict is the beginning of communication. Through communication we can know the real meaning of the others want to express and understand the others more; through communication we can know what is the reasons behind conflict. Same as human relations, religious relations is also very complicated, religious conflicts
caused by long history, cultural differences, which need people to know and understand the others more. If people only use violence to deal with conflicts, the conflicts will never be solved. So conflict among different religions is not completely negative, it is opportunity for each of the religion to communicate with each other.

4.1.3 Dialogue is based on the irresolvable differences

During the interaction among Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism in Chinese history, three of them had some essential differences which could not find any agreement at all. However, they tried to show their unique difference to the others in order to prove its importance and appreciate the difference. Religions are like different parents, parents in each family have different way of raising their children, some parents like telling their children what is right and what is wrong directly, but some parents like inspiring their children indirectly. However, all the parents have the same aim which is to teach their children to be good. It is difficult to judge which parents’ way of guidance is good or bad, because their ways are totally different. So we no need to force them to use the same way to guide their children and require their children achieve the same goal, and we no need to worry about the differences as all of them are good for their children. Religions are similar. There are different religions, and they indeed have the irresolvable differences. None of them need to be the same; each of them has their unique characters and virtues, which make them special and uniqueness in the world. They should appreciate of this uniqueness of themselves and be proud of it. So each religion stands for each parent who should have the courage to face the irresolvable differences between religions and not only the points of
agreement.

Although the three religions retained their differences, throughout much of Chinese history, the three religious teachings were perceived as being complementary rather than antithetical to each other. Every religion has its special characters support it existing in the world even some aspects overlaps with others. For example, in Damien Keown’s book, he compared Buddhism with Taoism to show how the two different religions shared the similarities while maintained their difference at same time. He wrote:

“Buddhism shared certain similarities with another Chinese philosophy, Taoism, a form of nature-mysticism founded by the legendary sage Lao-tzu. The goal of Taoism is to live in harmony with nature by learning to balance the complementary forces of Yin and Yang which are believed to pervade the universe. Yin is the female principle which finds expression in softness and passivity, while Yang is the male principle which manifests itself in hardness and strength. Both these qualities are present in individuals and all phenomena in varying degrees, and the interaction of these forces is what gives rise to change in the world. The sage is one who knows how to keep Yin and Yang in equilibrium and to live in harmony with the changing circumstances of life. A person who could integrate these forces in his own person was thought to gain deep spiritual peace as well as magical powers and longevity.” (Damien Keown, 1996, 76-77)

From this aspect, I think Taoist tried to discover one’s own original nature and live in harmony with nature. For Buddhism, it is similar which he wrote:

“In certain areas Buddhism and Taoism overlapped, and Buddhist meditation seemed geared to the same goal of inner stillness and ‘actionless action’ (wu-wei) sought by the Taoist sage. A school of Chinese Buddhism know as Ch’an (the ancestor of Japanese Zen), was born from this interaction.” (Damien Keown, 1996, 76-77)

From this aspect, Buddhism, especially Chan Buddhism represents an effort to
return to the sources of Buddhist inspiration and through practicing meditation in order to save oneself by one's own efforts. So both Buddhism and Taoism are similar in some perspectives. However, both of them are also different in their essential characters, which he described as below:

"...Yet while Taoist teachings were unsystematic and emphasized quietism and inspiration, Buddhism offered a systematic philosophical framework and a tradition of textual scholarship. This aspect of Buddhism appealed to the Chinese gentry with their love of scholarship and learning, and in due course Buddhism was adopted as the third of the 'three religions' of China, although never quite managing to shake off its foreign associations. The fortunes of Buddhism in China have waxed and waned over the centuries. It reached its high point under the T'ang dynasty (AD 618-907)." (Damien Keown, 1996, 76-77)

We can see Buddhism finally became the third of the 'three religions' of China. However even Buddhism has some similarities with Taoism, each of them never lost their identities in religious history but learned from each other to improve themselves and their belief systems. Again, once religions have the uniqueness of their own, even they overlapped in some part; they are still themselves that no one can take place of them. So religions need not worry that interfaith dialogue might cause them to lose their identities. It is the same as two friends with different characters communicating with each other. We never worry that them characters might merge. They can talk and share their ideas to the other and same time they can argue and criticize the other. Even they have conflicts sometimes or maybe they agree with each other, they are still themselves whom never lose identities through communication or dialogue and can still be friends all the time. Religious identity is the same. Religions always seem mysterious before they get more information about it, the less people known the more
fear people have because of ignorance. But religions often maintain this mystery and to maintain their unique identity. They worry about dialogue and resist it. But interfaith dialogue will not result religions losing their identity or their fundamental mystery. As Daniel L. Overmyer said:

“The best approach to a different religion or culture is the same as the way we try to relate to another person; polite, attentive and sympathetic, but still having our own point of view. Just as we can learn from friends and teachers, so we can learn from other human traditions, even if it is only to decide that we still like our own better.” (Daniel L. Overmyer, 1985, 1)

4.2 Lessons from the interaction of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism

In Chinese history, there are three instances of religious persecution against Buddhists in different dynasties, which tried to use violence to force Buddhism leaving China. However, it was not successful in solving the conflict and the unending dispute was never solved, but to the contrary helped Buddhism developed more, because the violent actions aroused more Buddhists resistance. Religion as religious people’s faith, gave people the hope of their lives, most religious people can get the courage or support from their religions. So each religion has its own significance for its believers. It is impossible to destroy the other religions, to the contrary, it is very important to learn and absorb from the others to improve and develop ourselves are most important.

In Chinese history, Confucianism and Taoism used to look down upon Buddhism which was regarded as an exotic religion. However, Buddhism helped Taoism improve its teaching through learning Buddhism integrated scriptures and system, and Buddhism learnt from Confucianism and Taoism, which help Buddhism using
Chinese religious language to translate Buddhism scriptures for Chinese people.

Finally, these three religions as a stable triangle coexisted in China and even developed in other countries.

4.3 A new model of interfaith dialogue for contemporary society against the background of globalization

Before describing a new model of interfaith dialogue, I would like to talk about the traditional model of religious dialogue. As we all know, in most Asian countries, there are diverse religions and many of them existing in the same regions or one country has many religions, most of the time people don’t have problems to get along and dialogue with different religious person and communities. So it’s difficult to say what exactly model for them to make dialogue and the dialogue models are more complex and diverse. We cannot only use the same model or method as the Western world to treat different religions as in the Asia religion is not only related to theology but also mixes with ideology, politics, and philosophy and culture as well. So here I just concentrated on the traditional western model of religious dialogue, especially based on Paul Knitter’s classification of the Christian attitude to religious pluralism.

4.3.1 The traditional Western model of religious dialogue

In western countries, Christianity as one of the most important monotheism religions in the world has big influence in the world. Meanwhile, its attitude towards other religions also influences the western world, so I choose it as the representative to explain the traditional Western model of religious dialogue. I would like to describe about the threefold paradigm of Christian responses to religious pluralism.
Firstly, exclusivism relates salvation exclusively to one particular tradition. According to this definition, salvation is limited to one special group, while the rest of mankind is condemned to hell or explicitly excluded from the sphere of salvation. The most obvious and influential expression of this idea appeared in the Catholic dogma Extra ecclesiam nulla salus (outside the Church, no salvation).

However for exclusivism, it is commonly accepted that there is something seriously wrong with exclusivism. Morally speaking, religious exclusivism has the result of making those who have the knowledge of unique religion to be religious elites, while punishing those who happen to have no access to the correct religious view. The exclusivists are ethnically arrogant. They always think their own religion is the only real one, which is superior to others. However, they seldom carry any deep study of, or dialogue with other religions. Epistemically, exclusivism is narrow-minded and irrational, and the exclusivists only see the “tree”, but lost sight of the whole “forest”. Each religion, viewed as a historical process spanning many centuries, is a unique mixture of virtues and vices. There are no grounds or criterions to prove that certain religion is superior or advanced than the rest. Moreover, if each religion claims that its own road to salvation is the only efficient and real, then it will look down upon others. Inevitably, this will be harmful to the whole religious dialogue and communication.

Secondly, since exclusivism has so many problems, many scholars have moved to inclusivism. Paul Knitter as one of the famous theologians and religious person used to describe Christian’s inclusivism as below:

“Inclusivism, in a variety of forms, describes the dominant attitude toward
followers of other religious paths...... If God's love reaches out to all people, then it must be made concretely, actually, available to all peoples. Evidently, the religions of the world – despite their corruption and because of the evident fruits of the Spirit among them – will be the vehicles of God's love and presence.” (Paul F. Knitter, 1995, 27)

Inclusivism for Knitter, on the one hand, in common with exclusivism, holds that there is one absolute way for salvation that can be realized in only one religion. The way of salvation is open to people only because they meet special criteria revealed in one true religion. On the other hand, it is in common with pluralism, holds that God can be encountered and his grace manifested in various ways through diverse religions. Everyone can experience salvation, regardless of whether they have heard and acknowledged the basic doctrines of the one true religion. This is the soft inclusivism. Inclusivism extends beyond exclusivism, although it makes exclusive claims for the absolute truth of one religion, it admits that adherents of other religions can be saved. Both forms of inclusivism involve certain inner strains and certain awkward implications. The theologian Karl Rahner argues that persons can be saved only because a particular salvific event has occurred. Christianity is an absolute religion to provide the way of salvation. To realize this salvation, Jesus Christ died on the cross for all humans. God desires that all persons can be saved, and can apply the results of Jesus’ atoning to all human beings even to those who have never heard of Jesus or have never acknowledged his teaching still can be saved. Rahner calls these persons “anonymous Christians” because they lack an explicit Christian faith; they consciously or unconsciously seek and worship God. This method can be applied to inclusivist advocates in other religions. For inclusivism, it admitted that beside
Christians, other people also can be saved. But the other religions have the lower status than Christianity. It also causes the religious inequality, so people gradually moved to the third one which named pluralism.

Thirdly, when faced with the indisputable fact of diversity, those who conclude that the various major world religions should be viewed as roughly of co-equal soteric or truth value are known today as pluralists.

“The general claim of religious pluralism is that both truth and salvation are available in a variety of the world’s religions. The definition of religious pluralism is required to be both general enough to cover the variety of pluralist models and specific enough to distinguish it from some of the radical inclusivism. According to this principle, the following definition is satisfactory: the view that most religions function as salvific paths toward Ultimate reality on their own terms and apart from any other religious system.” (Eddy Paul Rhodes, 2002, 15)

It is not only important to distinguish pluralism from “exclusivism” and “inclusivism” on the one side, but also from “relativism” on the other side. Pluralists differ from the pure relativists in that they retain a place for some sort of inter-religious evaluation.

This is not faced by the first two types, because each religion merely claim their own is the true ultimate reality. But the challenging issue, which faces adherents of

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12 There are different views towards religious pluralism from different pluralists. For John Hick who moves Christ center to God center, which he called ‘the Real centeredness pluralism’ to open for other religions because of different seeing on Ultimate Reality (Hick, 1982, p36); for Paul Knitter who proposed ‘unitive pluralism’, which is a unity in which each religion, although losing some of its individualism (its separate ego), will intensify its personality (its self-awareness through relationship). Each religion will retain its own uniqueness, but this uniqueness will develop and take on new depths by relating to other religions in mutual dependence. (Knitter, 1985, p9); for Mark Heim who proposed ‘Multiple Religious End pluralism’, he believes there are many true religions and every religion has its own way to each end and proposes religious end is not one but many. He thought one set of religious ends might be valid a given goal, and thus final for that end, while different ways were valid for other ends. (Heim, 1995, p3); for David Ray Griffin, he distinguished pluralism into two group which were Identist pluralism and differential pluralism. Identist pluralism refers to the idea of John Hick, Paul Knitter and Wilfred Cantwell Smith that religions are lead to ‘the same religious object’ whatever we call God, Brahmin, the Transcendent, Nirvana and the Real, differential pluralism emphasizes a deeply differences of religions and proposes different religions lead to different religious objects. (Griffin, 2005, p24)
the pluralist model, involves the conflicting truth-claims of different world religions. The problem is this: if all the great world religions are roughly equal in terms of their soteriological efficiency and religious truth, how does one explain the fact that their various conceptions of ultimate reality are so different, sometimes even contradictory in essence? So the success of a pluralism model depends on whether it can provide a convincing answer to this puzzle.

4.3.2 Accepting religious pluralism as a reality

As I discussed at the beginning, pluralism as a fashionable word began to appear everywhere in connection with many parts of our lives with globalization. Whether culture, food, politics or religion, the idea of pluralism permeates each of them. In most cases there is no big problem with pluralism. However, religious pluralism always causes problems or conflicts because of its mystery and difference. But we cannot avoid of it, but accept it because it is also a part of the reality of globalization. Since it is reality, all we can do is face it.

However, various scholars have various attitudes to religious pluralism. There is a wide variety of types of pluralism and reactions to the pluralist position. For example, John Hick thinks there are many ways to God, but the Eternal One is the same, but because different religious communities have different culture, history, geography, climate and economic background, so the form of Eternal One is also different. So for him, people can try to use a friendly attitude to treat each religious tradition, to get along with different religious persons, and to share each understanding of God, the attitude is religious pluralism. Just as John Hick mentioned in his book:
“Among Semitic peoples therefore, whose traditions are those of herdsmen, the sacred is thought of in male terms: God the father. Among Indian peoples whose tradition has been for many centuries, and even millennia, agricultural, it is in female terms that the sacred is understood: God the mother. Now one could, as I mentioned earlier, react to this kind of evidence by concluding that the belief in God is entirely a human projection, guided by cultural influences. But the alternative interpretation is that there is some genuine awareness of the divine, but that the concrete form which it takes is provided by cultural factors. On this view these different human awarenesses of the Eternal One represent different culturally conditioned perceptions of the same infinite divine reality.” (John Hick, 1982, 51-52)

Both John Hick has the same opinion that no matter what form do the different religions have, all of them have the same ultimate reality. This opinion also relates to the traditional model of interfaith dialogue which is trying to achieve a consensus, finding common grounds or setting aside differences.

However, some have a completely negative attitude towards religious pluralism. Such as Lindbeck who criticized that we should not try to use a common ground to erase the particularity and personality of each religion. He wrote in his book that:

“A religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought....Like a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities.... A religion is above all an external word, a verbum externum that molds and shapes the self and its world, rather than an expression or thematization of a preexisting self or of preconceptual experience. (Lindbeck, 1984, 33-34)

So, for him religions are like languages which form experience, not experience search for language. If people don’t have the same religion, people cannot have the same experience, because each of them has different ultimate reality.

Besides Lindbeck, Paul Knitter also a famous pluralist who tried to show us another
way to look at religious pluralism, he said in his book that:

"If we use anthropologist view to look at pluralism, each society has its own filter, its own worldview, and if we could only enter into that culture we would realize that it functions much more effectively and adequately than we on the outside can imagine. Each filter must be judged within its own context, according to the needs of its own world; we cannot use the filter of one culture to evaluate—or to denigrate—another. To hold up some universal standard of reason or logic by which we can judge all cultures is to think, naively and dangerously, that we can have a “filterless take” on the world." (Paul F. Knitter, 1995, 40)

Thus, the diversity of filters wins out over the possibility of a universal filter. So the religious diversity cannot be reduced to one foundation. He also affirmed the importance of the diversity and difference.

Also some scholars criticized the religious pluralism might become imperialism. As Paul F. Knitter mentioned in his book that: “1. they too quickly presuppose or describe the common ground that establishes unity among religions. 2. They too easily draw up common guidelines for dialogue among the religions.” (Paul F. Knitter, 1995, 44) And William Placher reminds his pluralist friends that:

“By insisting on nonabsolute positions they can become quite absolutist, and by insisting on all-inclusion they can end up being exclusive. The danger is that pluralists will close themselves to those who close themselves to other. They end up with a seemingly smug viewpoint: “I announce that I am willing to take your point of view seriously. If you are not willing to do the same, then I am ‘open’ and you are ‘closed’, so it turns out that I do not have to take your point of view seriously”. (Placher, 1989, 64)

Besides that, there is another strong voice from Carl Schmitt, he is resistant to pluralism from a political perspective. He thought pluralism erodes the unity of the political. Yet religion is necessary for the cohesion of the state. He showed his ideas in
his writing:

"All significant concepts of the theory of the modern state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development — in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipresent God became the omnipresent lawgiver - but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology." (Schmitt, 1996, p36)

It seems that theological concepts are the original basic principles of the concepts of thought of modern states, so religions play an important role in political areas. Therefore, religious pluralism would lead to political pluralism which would result to erode the unity of the political. So he strongly criticizes pluralism, as he wrote:

"The pluralist theory of state is in itself pluralistic, that is, it has no center but draws its thoughts from rather different intellectual circles (religion, economics, liberalism, socialism, etc.). It ignores the central concept of every theory of state, the political, and does not even mention the possibility that the pluralism of associations could lead to a federally constructed political entity. It totally revolves in a liberal individualism. The result is nothing else than a revocable service for individuals and their free associations. One association is played off against another and all questions and conflicts are decided by individuals. In reality there exists no political society or association but only one political entity - one political community. The ever present possibility of a friend-and-enemy grouping suffices to forge a decisive entity which transcends the mere societal-associational groupings. The political entity is something specifically different, and vis-a-vis other associations, something decisive. Were this entity to disappear, even if only potentially, then the political itself would disappear. (Schmitt, 1996, 44-45)

I think he criticized pluralism because he was against individualism, and was afraid the result of pluralism would be a liberal individualism which would easily to shake or assault the stable situation of the state. As Schmitt described in the book 'The Concept of the Political':

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“As is well known, the theory of pluralism maintains that an individual is a member of many rather than just one human association, and no association, including the state, is necessarily the decisive and sovereign one. In the competition among associations for the loyalty of individuals, the individual is left to decide for himself the extent to which he may desire to become involved. Precisely such a doctrine, according to Schmitt, helps to undermine the state as the highest and most decisive entity. (Schmitt, 1996, 12)

So we can see according to Schmitt, pluralism helped to undermine the state. If we follow his idea that theological concepts are the original basic principles of the concepts of thought of modern states, then we would conclude that religious pluralism could also undermine religion itself.

I think he was right that pluralism would lead to liberal individualism where each individual or group could express their importance, their existence, and even try to persuade or desire other entities to recognize it. Of course, it would be possible to cause conflicts among different individual entities as well. However, conflicts do no mean undermining entities. The result or even the process of making conflict just reminds different entities to rethink the causes and rethink themselves as well, which can help these entities better understand themselves and others. So conflicts would not shake the state of each entity but create an opportunity for communication. I believe that Schmitt should have worked harder to understand pluralism before he criticized it. He was faced with the reality of pluralism needed to accept to its reality before rejecting it. Pluralism is not merely an intellectual principle to be rejected. The more he understood pluralism, the more he could show his thought clearly. So I think none of us can be easy to avoid pluralism in our lives. Since we can’t avoid pluralism, what we can do is face it bravely. Back to religion, religious pluralism appears in our life.
more and more with globalization, we cannot be easy to deny or assault the others just try to protect our own identities. We need to use conflicts to learn each other, and respect each other and more important to remind ourselves rethinking ourselves.

No matter people support religious pluralism or oppose it, one truth without doubt is pluralism is the reality which we have to accept and face in contemporary society. And in the traditional model of religious dialogue, people are focused on the theology more than any other factor, such as ideology or politics, and the aim of religious dialogue is only for reaching a consensus, finding common ground, and setting aside differences. However, this model or attitude could not solve the difficulties of interfaith dialogue for nowadays. We need to rethink about the model of interfaith dialogue with new attitude of religious pluralism in our contemporary era.

4.3.3 Understanding the significance of religious pluralism

Although there are many religious conflicts in the history, we cannot deny that the contact, fusion and conversion of different religions always happen as well. It is common that some people convert from one religion to another. However, no matter this happen on individual or groups, it is still a complex and meaningful process among religions. Different religious conversion is not only because the one is advanced than the other or the one is more close to truth. In fact, set Christian as example, in last hundreds years Western countries used Christianity as a tool to colonize the other part of the world. But finally they realized the other religions in different region of the world could not be displaced by Christianity. We cannot define a religion by the standard of Christianity, which is evident from their continued
strength survivals one can survive because they never disappear.

Also, many historical religious movements happened under religious pluralism and interaction and they respected and absorbed the difference from each other, finally creating their own special belief. They made an important contribution for human civilization. If the religious community can take advantage of the religious pluralism surrounding, it will help them to probe themselves more deep and up to a new state. For example, the early Christian supported abundant cultural resources from Judaism and ancient Greek philosophy so that it experienced the absorbing, digesting and refusing processes, and finally it formed its own Christian traditions. Also, back to the research, in ancient China religious pluralism had existed already; Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism had a very turbulent struggle with one another for a long period, but none of them disappeared even today. As we know, Confucianism and Taoism are the local religions in China, and Buddhism came from India, each of them tried to survive or even dominate in China, so they struggled with each other and absorbed the difference from each other and finally play their own functions in the same society. For example, Tang Yi Jie wrote in his book:

"The core of Confucianism is humanism, the belief that human beings are teachable, improvable and perfectible through personal and communal endeavor especially including self-cultivation and self-creation. Confucianism focuses on the cultivation of virtue and maintenance of ethics. Confucianism is the Chinese traditional philosophy and has the profound influence even today not only in Chinese daily lives but also in Chinese social politics. It guides people to cultivate their virtue, to deal with different relationship correctly in the society and respect the different hierarchy. Taoism is another Chinese traditional philosophy which refers to a philosophical or religious tradition in which the basic concept is to establish harmony with the Tao, which is the mechanism of everything that exists. Taoism influences Chinese people's
outlook on life, which lead Chinese people do everything always in accordance with its natural tendency, try to not break the balance.” (Tang Yi Jie, 1991, 147)

Buddhism as one of the most important foreign influences entered China in Han dynasty. “It identified itself with native religious practitioners. Buddhism met certain social needs and often accorded with the natural development of Chinese thought. It was superior to native Chinese systems of thought. It can act as a stimulus in the development of Chinese culture.” (Ch'en, Kenneth Kuan Sheng, 1972, 35) So these three religions fight with each other, reject with each other, but none of them lose in the religious pluralism game, they sustained this deadlocked situation for a long time. Later they change their strategy and they understood that if they want to kick the other out of the game they need learn from the other to enrich themselves to be stronger. But what interesting is that after they absorbed from each other, they permeated into each other, so each of them need the other’s support to survive in Chinese society. In other words, religious pluralism is an indisputable fact, and we need to acknowledge its significance for interfaith dialogue and development.

4.3.4 A contemporary model for interfaith dialogue

As religious pluralism is a global phenomena, but the religious dialogue in west and Asia is different from each other, we cannot easy to use any single dialogue model to achieve the aim what we want in contemporary religious world with the effect of globalization because the dialogue model is more complex and diverse. We cannot only use the same model or method as western world in the past to treat different religions today because today’s religious situation is not only related to theology but also mix with ideology, politics, and philosophy and culture as well. So the right view
of religious pluralism is more important than to give a single way to make interfaith dialogue.

The direction and aim of interfaith dialogue for us is based on each religious character or what we can say about their differences. Although religious cooperation and reaching a consensus is an ideal aim for us, religious culture, religious language and religious imagery for each community are limited by cultural regions. Meanwhile, it creates different religious traditions and identities of religious believers based on these limit. So to recognize and respect the differences is the most important premise to harmonize religions for contemporary human civilization. All the religious traditions create their identity under different historical and cultural and social background to find the different answers for themselves through the faith, language and images within their respective religious community. The significance of one religious systems form must rely on its community hermeneutic special historical experience and religious language. Therefore, when one religious community describes their religious experience, any description and hermeneutics reflects their own abundant significance and creative imagination. If this inference is right, religious pluralism has already been operative in human historical culture without any doubt. In many periods, the significance of religious tradition is rooted in an existing tradition, but because the new circumstances appear all the time, the religious community also needs to rethink of the existing traditions or even change, criticize or sublate. It always involves a hermeneutics a process for creating a new significance. So for the religious community the “new” significance is continuous with the “old”,

which is also important to recollect through the new. However, religious pluralism also has the negative affect that may appear contrary to religious system, creed, authoritativeness and organization and so on under a certain historical period. So when one religious meaning is limited by its own historical, cultural and language traditions, it is impossible for them to accept the other religious identity and worldview which have their own historical, cultural and language traditions as well. Even we suppose one religion uses a universal language to transmit the religion they treat as the supreme truth, it is also difficult to be accepted by the others. Oppositely, unidirectionally preaching their religions might cause religious conflict.

The inflexibility of religious language has the direct relation to religious conflict. The difference between religion and other any kinds of culture is its special religious language. Religious language is not formed base on the universal languages. For example, a Bible, starts as the word of God, so it as the product of God, and believers start to learn it but later the religious believers contact with God through the Bible and finally achieve self-understanding. It has the special meaning for each believer. But we cannot use the universal language to define it and judge it is the same as other religious classics or not because each religious classics has its own language.

I agree with John Hick's opinion that religious pluralism is a good way to promote different religions communicating with each other. Religions are the form or methods to teach people how to find their own truth, just as the fingers point to the moon, we have many ways to point it such as point to the moon in the sky, point to the moon in the water or even point to the moon in our picture, but the final aim or purpose is the
moon. We no need fight nor have conflict not because of the wisdom but forms. And I think religious pluralism is a way to let different religions understand each other, learn each other, share with each other and finally respect and recognize each other in a multicultural context, and to be harmony as well. And in John Hick’s book, he said despite the various ways to God, there is just only Eternal One, but we can have many ways or names to call it because of the different context, history, geography, climate and economic environmental reasons. (John Hick, 1982, 51-52) For this view, I don’t think all the religions have the same Ultimate Reality; however it doesn’t hamper us to make dialogue or understand each other. Sometimes the difference indeed exists; we no need to intend to obliterate it in order to achieve consistency. It is like we will never give up our friendships with our best friend just because they have different personality or worldview, on the contrary, we still can be good friends and meanwhile we can influence each other. Religious dialogue is the same; we must admit the difference among each other and affirm it so that we can have a just dialogue but not only find consistency, the way to dialogue must be based on the differences or conflicts.

4.3.5 Improving people’s ability to understand religions

Under the globalization and religious pluralism, the world becomes smaller and smaller, we can easy to receive news and information from outside, meanwhile we can easy to send news and information to outside no matter the messages are true or fake. We can easy to know or give people the truth through new technology; we also can easy to create conflicts through technology. How to improve interfaith dialogue in
contemporary society is also what we need to think about. Of course, it is difficult and impossible to say what model is absolute good for interfaith dialogue today, what we can do just try to help people have a better view to treat religious conflicts and make interfaith dialogue effectively.

4.3.5.1 Broad mind

Broad mind is very important for people in contemporary society. We live in the information era; we can know what we want very easily. Religion is not a mysterious topic for us at all. No matter we have religion belief or not, we can easy to know and learn different religions from internet or other media easily. We need a broad mind to accept all the religions not only people's own religion or none. We should not use a narrow thinking to treat religious pluralism as ancient time. The world becomes smaller that help us easy to know more the others, so only broad mind could help us to adapt to this change and development. We should treat different religions as different knowledge to study and digest. Only open mind can let us never refuse the opportunity to get more information and knowledge, and to know each other better.

Figure 4.1. Chinese Writing  Figure 4.2. the three religious symbols on the parapet wall
This four pictures described religious dialogue respectively from different angles and ways. The first one is Chinese traditional writing which means "Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism" (儒释道), it used the writing to express the three religions can coexist in one society. The second picture is the architecture in one Chinese temples, it carved the three religious symbols on the parapet wall. The third one is the statues of Confucius, Buddha and Laozi in a temple, the three statues put in one place together. Actually, this kind of statue existed in most temples in China, people through the architecture to show the harmony of the three religions. And the last picture, it was designed by Zhu Zai Yu (朱载堉) who was living in Ming dynasty. Through this picture, if we only see the left side it is Laozi which stands for Taoism, only see the right side it is Confucius which stands for Confucianism, and if we combine them together, we can see in the middle is a monk which stands for Buddhism. So this artwork showed us even in ancient China, people had the broad mind to accept religious pluralism already through architectures, writings and arts and so on. So for modern people, why not try to use an open mind to learn different cultures, religions and lives?
4.3.5.2 Conflict among religious people is not the same as religious conflict

I think this is very important for us to treat different religions when we make interfaith dialogue. Religious person's conflict is not equal to religious conflict. Most of the time, when people face the conflicts between two religions or more, they always think it is religious conflict. But actually some of the conflicts are made by religious person not religion itself. As we all known, all religions teach people to be good, the purpose of each religion has no problem for different believers. For example, filial piety is the foundation as well as the highest norm in Confucian ethics and all morality and civilization come from it. But filial piety in Buddhism is not the foundation of its ethics although it is an important ethical teaching of the Buddha. Instead, the concept of Karma and Samsara are the bases of Buddhist ethics. And for Taoism, Donald S. Lopez described:

"Taoism has always stressed morality. Whether expressed through specific injunctions against stealing, lying, and taking life, through more abstract discussions of virtue, or through exemplary figures who transgress moral codes, ethics was an important element of Taoist practice." (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 96)

The Three of them all teach people ethics and to be good through their own ways. However, sometimes religious leaders mislead religious followers when explaining religions and preaching, which can easily cause conflicts among different religions. For example, in the Tang dynasty, the attitude of different emperors towards religions directly leads to religious relations absolute differently. Their attitudes can easy cause conflicts among religions and followers. Meanwhile, religious conflicts also caused by politics, economic and social ideology. So people can not rashly to make a
conclusion that it is a religious conflict or not. People should make a clear distinction whether it is religious conflict or religious person’s conflict, which can help people to solve the problem correctly and make interfaith dialogue effectively. Like the doctors in hospital, only suit the remedy to the case can cure patients correctly.

4.3.5.3 Education

With the development of society, more and more people obtain high education from different educational institutes, which help more and more people can treat problems rationally. People who live in contemporary society realize peace building is very important for our time. Interfaith dialogue as one of the most important peace building issues needs people should have a deeper and broader view and attitude to deal with. However, educational level of religious group is still very low, according to ARIS (Achievement Reporting and Innovation System) 2001 data, there is a figure illustrating differences in educational attainment by religious groups in the U.S. as follows:
Educational Ranking by Religious Groups

(percent college graduates)

We can see that the college graduates educational level of people in most of the religious group was not up to 50%, 33% of Catholic up to college level; Muslim was 46% and Buddhist was 42%, etc., which means most of the religious people had low education.

So what is the way to improve people's awareness to be more rational and philosophical? The answer is education. As Plato said “Better be unborn than untaught, for ignorance is the root of misfortune”. Education can help religious people know more about themselves and other, and can be rational to treat other religions not blind and unquestioning. When people work hard for interfaith dialogue, they can use
a rational and peaceful way to dialogue and solve conflicts not violence and war.

4.3.5.6 Attitude of interfaith dialogue

During interfaith dialogue, even if emerge a new understanding of view of religion it doesn't mean that former religious view will be replaced by the other. Oppositely, the former one might be enriched, revised or transmitted by the new one. So the purpose of interfaith dialogue is not to chose only one as the truth or must give up one religious identity or follow another religious traditions. A real interfaith dialogue can make a religious believer be a good religious person who can possess the local culture field of vision. India's Christian theologian palmer Seneca once said: "in my heart, I was able to hold two religious, a mixture of me to do my personal." Let me give a simple example, religious dialogue is the same as making a good friend. Religion is like a growing up process for a person. When we were young, we learn everything from parents or teachers, but with our growing, we would face many kinds of new situations and have our own experiences, so we will have our own opinion to treat all of these situations and deal with all kinds of problems, and when we are adult or become old, we would use our experience to teach our children. Religion also has this process with each subtle change with environment and globalization. And interfaith dialogue just as a person knows a new friend, who can talk with you, understand you and get along with you, but also criticize you with your growth all the time but never want to hurt you. So you could understand your friend and learn from your friend and most important is you also could understand yourself and know your advantage and disadvantage through your friend, we will not worry if our friend would convert us to
be he/she, because we were still ourselves, it just makes us improve ourselves all the time. Through interfaith dialogue, we can understand ourselves more, and make ourselves better and never worry about losing our identities. As John Hick said:

"'Religious pluralism' is a contested concept across national, political, and disciplinary contexts. In theology the term often suggests harmony, convergence, or compatibility across religious traditions— in opposition to religious exclusivism. In sociology, pluralism can refer to the diversity of different religious traditions within the same social or cultural space." (John Hick, 2004, 50)

We should appreciate we have a good opportunity to learn different religious traditions in the same society and cultural context, which teach us how to have mutualistic symbiosis. And Thomas Banchoff also showed his view of religious pluralism as below:

"Here, religious pluralism refers to patterns of peaceful interaction among diverse religious actors— individuals and groups who identify with and act out of particular religious traditions. Religious pluralism, in this definition, does not posit different religions on diverse paths to the same truth, as it does in some theological contexts. And the term implies more than the social and religious diversity explored in much sociological analysis. Religious pluralism is the interaction of religious actors with one another and with the society and the state around concrete cultural, social, economic, and political agendas. It denotes a politics that joins diverse communities with overlapping but distinctive ethics and interests. Such interaction may involve sharp conflict. But religious pluralism, as defined here, ends where violence begins." (Thomas Banchoff, 2008, 4-5)

He thought religious pluralism was the interaction of religious actors, which might involve conflict but might end conflict also. Yes, even we tried to avoid to make any interaction among different religions, the conflict was still there, why not try to make dialogue which at least could help us know the cause of conflict and then solve it.
Donald S. Lopez wrote in his book “One of the earliest references to the Trinitarian idea is attributed to Li Shiqian, a prominent scholar of the sixth century, who wrote that:

“...Buddhism is the sun, Daoism the moon, and Confucianism the five planets. Li likens the three traditions to significant heavenly bodies, suggesting that although they remain separate, they also coexist as equally indispensable phenomena of the natural world. Other opinions stress the essential unity of the three religious systems.” (Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 1999, 88)

I agree with what Li Shiqian wrote that Buddhism was the sun, Daoism the moon, and Confucianism the five planets. Although we do not know which is more important among sun, moon and planets, we know none of them can be neglected. All of them coexist equally and remain separately. Religious relations are the same; they exist separately and prove their importance through the others.
Chapter V  CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism coexisted in ancient Chinese society, they influenced and absorbed from each other while struggling with each other. During this long struggles and conflicts, Confucianism and Taoism improved and completed their own religious system against the challenge from Buddhism; Buddhism gradually became enculturated as “Chinese Buddhism” under the pressure of Confucianism and Taoism, and by the influence of Chinese economic and politics. Through long period from the Han to Tang dynasty, the three religions helped ease the social contradictions and maintain social order according to their different social functions, which help them built a stable social base for coexistence. Confucianism focused on the human relations in society; Taoism focused on man’s relations with the rest of nature; and Buddhism offered new outlook on life and the world, all of them together constructed the Chinese spiritual world.

In the world history, Chinese traditional culture not only possessed a strong idea of identity but also happily absorbed elements from other cultures. This character allowed Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism to develop very quickly coexisted very well in China, Buddhism offered the model of a peaceful mind; Taoism emphasized health regimens and Confucianism guided to social responsibilities. As Daniel wrote in his book:

“Chinese contribution is religious egalitarianism: a conviction that the potential for enlightenment is universal that ‘the man on the street can become a sage.’ Confucian philosophers have long taught that we all have the seeds of
goodness within us and need only encourage them to grow. They also teach that the real worth of a human being is his or her moral character, something that can be developed by anyone through dedication and hard work. The Taoists believe that cosmic energy and rhythm are present in all of us as the basis of our life, even if we have forgotten it. All we need to do is return to this Tao (Way) within us to find a new sense of peace and harmony with all things. Buddhists proclaim that everyone has the basic ability to understand life in a completely objective and unselfish way. This understanding was first consciously discovered by the Buddha, which means that we all have the capacity to become Buddhas ourselves. Thus the three major streams of Chinese religion agree that all of us have the potential to become better persons, psychologically secure, understanding, and compassionate.” (Daniel L. Overmyer, 1985, 112)

Some people might think the idea of the Chinese interfaith dialogue model is similar to Jürgen Habermas's 'Universalism'. For him, the purpose of dialogue is a searching for universal consensus where all speakers can come to an agreement. However, when we review the interaction of the three religions in Chinese history, we can find they actually had radical differences and cultural backgrounds. So when there is no common ground to share, there is no universal concept of reason that can solve the conflict. While the three religions have common ground which teach people to be good, each of them also has its special function in a society to support itself to exist in a society with others. Their dialogue was based on their differences and started from their conflicts. I agree with Lyotard who criticized Habermas's conception of consensus, he thought the knowledge of right or wrong was embraced in different language-games and social practices. It would be an unjustifiable dogmatic imposition of a moral concept of what is right or wrong and what is true or false if we try to establish a meta-discourse which includes all of the language-games.

But it does not mean that I have the same opinion as postmodernism which thinks
there is no unity to various kinds of discourse and perspectives on reality, and convergence is neither necessary nor desirable. What I want express is the relation among the three religions in Chinese history actually was independent and interdependent at the same time. They are different and complementary from each other.

Ninian Smart proposed symbiotic approach, he suggested that we should learn from the nature of "symbiosis" in religions. And he used Chinese historical case as the example that "in China the three systems was worked out and implied a form of symbiosis between Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism... this may have much to teach us in the new global pluralism." (Smart, 1993, 10) I think it is a good attitude for us to rethink the relations among religions, and Chinese historical model might be a good example for contemporary society.

In contemporary society, religious pluralism is one of the most important topics influencing the world peace and political stability. And with globalization, it not only brings resource sharing with each other but also brings cultural shock and religious "immigration or emigration". Therefore we cannot avoid the religious pluralism issue. So it is not difficult to find that interfaith dialogue is a necessary condition to improve social harmony and make world peace. As history has proven, only when different culture and religions can do a real and equal dialogue, the conflicts with each other can be decreased. And if different religions are strange to the others, suspicion and hostility will increase or even cause conflicts. Because of the religious exclusivism, religious relations are not often peaceful. But because of the historical lessons of
religious conflicts, people know that without interfaith dialogue, there is no religion of peace; without religious peace, there could be no peace between countries; without interfaith dialogue and peace, there could be no peace between different civilizations, and there can be no world peace. The core concept differences between different people actually are from the religious differences between different ethnic groups. Because of this, the important way to solve the conflicts between different ethnic groups should be centered on interfaith dialogue. Experience tells us the rejection or avoidance of other religious beliefs are irrational, the best solution is communication and dialogue between different religions, on the basis of mutual respect for the essential differences from each other. Different races, different countries, more than 6 billion people inevitably full of voices from different religious, some religious beliefs are worldwide, some religious beliefs are national. The attributes of the religious beliefs are not unique. Nowadays, more and more religious communities start to dialogue with each other, whether the dialogue is in region or worldwide, religious people realize that if only any of them they cannot solve social problems and difficulties but need the other religions to come together.

Today's world, globalization can be understood as a process of intensification of information exchange delivered and received across national borders. This process increases the number of confrontations among people or communities from different

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13 For some religions it is difficult to accept the idea of 'interfaith dialogue'. The Catholic faith has begun to use idea of intercultural dialogue to avoid the problem of religious relativism. But I think interfaith dialogue also can promote intercultural dialogue among different ethnic groups, as Benedict XVI mentioned "today the possibilities of interaction between cultures have increased significantly; giving rise to new openings for intercultural dialogue: a dialogue that, if it is to be effective, has to set out from a deep-seated knowledge of the specific identity of the various dialogue partners." (Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate, n. 26) No matter interfaith dialogue or intercultural dialogue, both of them could achieve their aim by respecting the difference of each religion or culture.
religions and cultural backgrounds. These conflicts often occur in areas where there is no shared understanding of norms and morals among different religions and cultures. So in case there is no common ground of shared social norms and disputes in some way may lead to problems and conflicts may still unresolved. For sure, the traditional model of interfaith dialogue could not solve these kinds of conflicts. No matter for China or other Countries in this world, they are all facing Challenges from such religious issues. For example, globalization brings big impact towards the traditional religious identity, which causes more religious fundamentalism. Imbalance of economic development blocks religious dialogue and understanding such as the case of the Nigerian religious conflict between south and north. Religious pluralism brings more nationalism problems, such as the latest ISIS issue, and the conflicts and wars in Israel and Palestine, this ultimately leads to more innocent people dying and more people displaced and homeless. More and more countries participated in this aid and fight against terrorism. However, no military strike really can solve the religious conflicts. Too many lessons told us it might result more and bigger conflicts, no matter 911 events, Israeli-Palestinian conflict or war in Afghanistan, there were too much bloods and tears taught us the importance of peace. It also taught us religious communication and interfaith dialogue is so important for us today.

Today, we should pay more attention to interfaith dialogue, and try to make more practical religious communication. We should realize interfaith dialogue is not only academic topic but also social topic. We should realize the purpose of dialogue is not to force other to follow our own faith, also not to prove our own religion is true and
the other are wrong or not perfect. The purpose of dialogue is also not only to find common ground and achieve consensus while putting aside disputes. The purpose of dialogue should be a process that leads to self-improving and self-understanding of one’s own religion based on their differences leading to better cooperation and coexists. As Raymond said, religion can be symbiotic, and dialogue can not only light up oneself, it also can illuminate others, honest and serious dialogue to illuminate each other.

All religions in the world should respect and help each other based on their difference. Buddhism teach people love is compassion, Christian teach people love God love people, Confucianism teach people filial piety is very important for people, etc. All religions try to help people to be perfect under a pluralist cultural background. Pluralism is not just an academic theory but a reality. The contemporary world is a multicultural and religious pluralistic era, and we must have a multicultural and religious pluralistic worldview to understand and learn from one other. And learn our religious traditions meanwhile learn the other religious classics and creeds to enrich our understanding of religious pluralism. As Max Muller said concerning religion: "you know one know none". At present, facing the subject of the era of peace and development, all religions should realize the complementary advantages, mutual benefit and win-win situation, to help people solve the problem of survival and social conflict and global ecological problems. Religions through sincere dialogue between each other can let all religions reflect themselves that whether some content is outdated or wrong, make every religion develop better. We should vigorously
advocate improving the social, cultural, spiritual cooperation on issues such as implementation. In a word, interfaith dialogue, for solving the problems between each other and promoting each other is a sign of a mature development of religion in contemporary society; interfaith dialogue provides a way for religious pluralism.

5.2 Research limitations and recommendation for future research

This research focused on the Chinese religious historical development, especially on Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism from the Han to the Tang dynasty. So it doesn't contain the religious research in other periods and other regions. And because this research is based on the historical documents and contemporary religious pluralism issue and try to find a better way to face religious pluralism challenge, so here I didn't describe all the details of each religion too much. This research focused on the relations among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and the historical transition of their relations, so it did not involve other religions too much, such as Christianity and Islam, etc.

However, with the globalization, each religion has more opportunities to interact with the others, Chinese historical model of interfaith dialogue must be part of interfaith dialogue for all religions. I think it also can expand to other religions and it also could be a way for other religions to consider and reference.

For the future research I will continue this research and compare each of the main religious characters in detail and keep using critical thinking to give better suggestions for the promotion of religious pluralism. The discussion of the model of interfaith dialogues maybe just the beginning; it is a long process, and maybe never has an
ending. However, if we keep working on this, we must come closer to an answer.
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