Outline Lecture Fifteen—Buddhism in the Tang State

Key Focus:
1) What role did Buddhist rituals play in the Chinese state during the Tang?
2) How did Buddhist monasteries both contribute to and undermine the cohesiveness of the state?

I) Golden Age of Chinese Buddhism—Tang Dynasty (7th-9th centuries)
a) “Woven into every texture of Chinese life and custom”
   i) Fully integrated into local economies
   ii) Oversaw local rituals and community needs
   iii) Lay community gaining merit through patronage
b) “Nation-Protection Buddhism”
   i) E.g. “Scripture on Perfect Wisdom for Humane Kings”
      (1) Intercessional role of a “human king” as a chakravartin
      (2) Recitation of this sutra as a “spiritual defense shield”
   ii) The ambiguous legacy of this sutra
      (1) Allegedly a sermon given by the historical Buddha to King Prasenajit
      (a) Doctrine of “The Three Ages of Buddhism”
      (b) Apocalyptic idea of Mo Fa or “Extinguishing of Dharma” (Japanese Mappo)
      (2) In 765, a Tang Emperor (Daizong) commission to Bukong
      (a) Scripture functioned as “occult medicine” or “magical buffer”
c) Buddhist Ritual and Filial Piety
   i) Zannin in 10th century argument to reinstate incense ritual
      (1) Looked to precedents in antiquity of incense offering
      (2) Killing a sacrificial animal incompatible with the belief in rebirth
      (3) How filial are you towards your ancestors?
d) Difficult Reconciliation Between Buddhism and State
   i) Challenges from rival Taoists sects and Confucian scholars
      (1) Accused monasteries of abusing privileges
      (2) Emphasized subversive threat of some apocalyptic Buddhist ideas
   ii) Sporadic persecution or exclusion of temples and monasteries
      (1) Under Northern Wei (446-452)
      (2) Huichang Suppression (840-845)

II) Major Chinese Buddhist Sects
   a) Adaptability and diversity within the Mahayana tradition
      i) Maitreyism
      ii) Amitabha (O-mi-to-fo)—Buddha of the Western Paradise
         (1) a.k.a. Pure Land Buddhism
      iii) Lotus Sutra centerpiece of Hua-yen sect
      iv) Chan or Zen Buddhism

III) The Historical Development of Chan (Zen)
a) Origins of the tradition
   i) Sanskrit word dhyana—“meditation”
ii) Emphasis on lineage
   (1) Esoteric and secret form of transmission
   (2) Passing on the Bodhidharma robe and Teachings

iii) Role of Bodhidharma in Chan tradition in the 6th century
   (1) First audience with Emperor Wu of Liang
   (2) Bodhidharma’s summation of Chan
   (3) Established Shao-lin Temple
       (a) E.g. of his teaching: “Pacifying the mind”

iv) Compatibility of Chan with Chinese philosophical traditions
b) The Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng’s Approach to Self-enlightenment
   i) Buddha nature is intrinsic in all
   ii) Delusions as a parasitic “second nature” of our mind
c) Enlightenment in Chan
   i) Emancipating the Mind
      (1) How to achieve this?
         (a) Mindfulness through vipassana—insight meditation
         (b) The Function of Gong-an (Koans)
      (2) Examples of Koans
         (a) Purpose of koans
   ii) The Appeal of Chan or Zen
      (1) “To be born human is to be innately endowed with the seed of enlightenment”