

Budhism to bring life's balance in the troubled times following the han dynasty

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Document Based Question

During the period of political instability after the fall of the Han Dynasty around the year 220 C. E. China was exposed to Buddhism, a religion and a lifestyle that questioned some of the Confucianist ideals. As Confucianism was the main religion in China many people refuted Buddhism, however because of such troubling times many others turned to Buddhism as an escape to what they had endured while Confucianists. As Buddhism spread into China it was mainly accepted by poor, because of the teachings that money and material possessions were not necessary to a fulfilling afterlife, however Buddhist ideals were typically refuted by the rich upper class because they were successful under Confucianism and they were afraid to change.

The lower class of China was not well represented in the documents likely because the typical peasant could neither read nor write, however it would be very useful to have an additional document from a Chinese peasant at the time. This would be helpful because it would allow insight on how the lower class truly felt about Buddhism and the Buddhist monks. Even without such a document historians would be able to deduce such information about the peasants. The peasants at the time are very poor living under warlords and those who cannot defend their crown based on the gods. So in an attempt to stop what is likely great sorrow they turn to Buddhism. Document One is a record of Buddha's actual words, saved to teach future generations with the same words Buddha himself used. It was made hundreds of years before this political instability in China. The document was created as a way for Buddha

to set a precedent for what his new religion would be based upon. Document one mainly discusses the ending of sorrow and what true sorrow it and this gives us some insight into the appeal that Buddhism had on Chinese peasants. If the peasants were sorrowful Buddhist teachings about sorrow and how to end sorrow could heavily influence them. Mainly religions including Confucianism taught that the rich would have the most fulfilling afterlife and in document two it states that whoever gives their life to Buddha and serves him will see Buddha and be enlightened before entering their afterlife. document four is a Confucian scholar discussing the reaction of the oirr to Buddhism. He states that people are cutting off their arms as an offering to Buddha, which gives us insight into the peasant class this tells us that a great number of Chinese peasants were very devoted Buddhism. This document however is very biased as it comes from a Confucian scholar.

The upperclass and the rich were not very tolerant of Buddhism. Document six was written by the Tang Emperor Wu who says that Buddhism makes people throw away their money, weaken their spirit, leave their parents, and abandon such essential ideals as man and wife. The Emperor makes it very clear his stance that Buddhism is destroying Chinese culture, while many historians believe that Buddhism is shaping the Chinese culture. Document four is from Han Yu a Tang Dynasty Confucian scholar. And he speaks similarly to the emperor saying that Buddhism is an infection that needs to be stopped. He speaks of servants begging him and other lords to leave to follow their true calling of Buddhism, and how he believes that Buddhism is an attack on Confucian ideals, when in fact Buddhism compliments the teachings of Confucius as discussed in Document five. Document five is

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written by a Buddhist scholar and discusses how Confucius and Buddha both preached and taught about effective ways to keep a society a just and fair one. One would think that because of this complementary nature between the two religions that Confucianists would accept Buddhism but this wasn't the case. Document three discusses how one Chinese scholar saw Buddhism as greater than Confucianism comparing Confucianism to a deer and Buddhism to a unicorn. These differences between Chinese scholars likely led to different reactions within their followers.

Buddhism's spread into China evoked several reactions from the previously Confucianist China. The Chinese peasants mainly accepted and practiced Buddhism because they had very few material possessions and Buddhism teaches about relinquishing material possessions. The wealthy class however refuted Buddhism because of these same teachings. They did not want to give up their wealth riches and gold. Buddhism was reacted to differently because it challenged the classical Confucian ideas.