

Research Proposal

Buddhists against Han Yu:

The History of Buddhist Critiques of Han Yu in China, Korea, and Japan

Han Yu (768–824) is one of the most celebrated Chinese—or better yet, East Asian—cultural heroes. Not only was he a prolific writer of poetry and prose, a prominent military leader and politician, but from the Song dynasty on he was also widely recognized as the harbinger and pioneer of the Neo-Confucian movement, which was destined to bear great influence on the entire region. But fame often invites controversy, and Han Yu has certainly not been universally admired. This research will examine the way Han Yu has been criticized, ridiculed, and demonized within the Buddhist tradition in China, Korea, and Japan. It will attempt to pin down the historical construction of Han Yu as the archetypal enemy, the Gargamel, the Dr. Evil, and the ultimate emblem of the Neo-Confucian abuses of the Buddhist tradition. This subject is essentially an expansion of a short section out of my forthcoming book on Buddhist apologetics in East Asia. Aside for gaining additional insights on the history of Buddhist anti-Confucian diatribes—which are certainly entertaining in and of themselves—this work will demonstrate the fascinating literary ties and cultural connections that endured between Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Buddhists throughout the second millennium AD.

To be sure, the Buddhist hatred for Han Yu did not appear out of thin air. Han authored two vehement anti-Buddhist treatises: the “Memorial on the Bone of the Buddha” (*Lun Fogu biao*, 論佛骨表), which argues that Buddhism was a foreign barbarian teaching that did not exist in antiquity and ever since it had arrived in China both the lengths of dynasties and the lifespans of rulers who accepted it had diminished; and “The Origin of the Way” (*Yuan dao*, 原道), which raised further ethical and economic criticisms of Buddhism, and called for the complete burning of the Buddhist scriptures, the laicization of the clergy, and the conversion of monasteries into regular homes.¹ While Han’s essays have been repeatedly studied, oft-translated, and widely referenced in contemporary scholarship, next to nothing is known of the Buddhist responses and counterattacks to these harangues. The fact is, however, that quite a few responses were written, and have continued to be written to this day. This project will focus on an analysis of the rejoinders against Han Yu found in six premodern texts, which were written by Buddhists in China, Korea, and Japan between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries, as well as on one additional

¹ For recent English translations of these essays see Justin Tiwald and Bryan Van Norden, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han to the 20th Century* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014).

contemporary Taiwanese Buddhist anthology. Put together, I believe the material found in these essays would be able to demonstrate both the continuous historical reproduction and development of the anti-Han Yu discourse, as well as the cross-national flow of texts and ideas that united the entire Sinitic world.

The source materials examined would be the following:

1. Qisong's (1007–1072) "Thirty Criticisms Against Han Yu" (*Fei Hanzi sanshi pian*, 非韓子三十篇): Qisong was a prominent Chinese scholarly monk who authored works on Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. He seems to have been the first Buddhist to offer a systematized counterattack against Han Yu. The thirty sections of the work do not only attempt to refute Han Yu's aspersions of Buddhism, but also to reveal his specious logic, misinterpretation of the classics, and unscrupulous personality. A couple of general studies of this text have been published, but neither a detailed summary of the thirty segments nor a translation are available to date.²
2. Zhang Shangying's (1043–1121) "In Defense of the Dharma" (*Hufa lun*, 護法論): Zhang was not a Buddhist monk but a politician who even served as the prime minister (*zaixiang*, 宰相) of the Song between 1110–1111. Yet, he seems to have been an ardent lay follower of Buddhism, and his "In Defense of the Dharma" was highly influential. It was incorporated into the formal Buddhist canon and cited over and over by later Buddhists in China, Korea, and Japan. I have already completed a full translation of this text, which includes several interesting polemical allegations against Han Yu.³
3. Li Chunfu's (1185–1231) "Response to the Collection that Illuminates the Way" (*Mingdao ji shuo*, 鳴道集說): Li Chunfu was a well-known Chinese bard, who died in his early forties, perhaps from over-indulgence in alcohol-induced poetic musings. He was also a lay Buddhist and

² In Japanese see Fujisawa Makoto 藤沢誠. "Kaisuu no Sōgaku nitaisuru kiyo—tokuni 'Hi kan' o chūshin to suru" 契嵩の宋学に対する寄与—特に「非韓」を中心とする [Qisong's Contribution to Song Studies: Focusing on his Fei Han]. *Shinshūdaigaku bunrigakubu kiyō* 9 (1960): 49–59. In English see Chi-chiang Huang, "Experiment in Syncretism: Ch'i-sung (1007–1072) and Eleventh-Century Chinese Buddhism," (Ph.D. diss., the University of Arizona, 1986), which although centers on another essay by Qisong, still provides a short preliminary discussion of this text as well.

³ The translation will appear in my forthcoming book *Buddhist Apologetics in East Asia* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). There are a few general studies of this work. In Chinese see Huang Chi-chiang 黃啟江, "Zhang Shangying Hufa lun de lishi yiyi" 張商英護法論的歷史意義 [The Historical Significance of Zhang Shangying's "In Defense of the Dharma"], *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 9 (1996): 123–66; and Jiang Yibin 蔣義斌, "Zhang Shangying Hufa lun zhong de lishi siwei" 張商英〈護法論〉中的歷史思維 [The Historical Thought in Zhang Shangying's "In Defense of the Dharma"], *Fuxue yanjiu zhongxin xuebao* 3 (1998): 129–50. In Japanese see Andō Tomonobu 安藤智信, "Chō shōei no Gohō ron to sono haikai" 張商英の護法論とその背景 [Zhang Shangying's Hufa lun and its Background], *Otani Gakuho* 42.3 (1963): 29–40.

his encyclopedic apologetic compilation includes 216 responses to a dozen individual Neo-Confucians, one of whom is Han Yu. Very little has been written about this text,⁴ but I located four short sections on Han Yu, which I plan to translate for this project.

4. Liu Mi's (dates unknown) "Viewing the Three Teachings with a Balanced Mind" (*Sanjiao pingxin lun*, 三教平心論): Liu Mi is believed to be an alias for an otherwise-unknown fourteenth-century Chinese Buddhist monk. Despite the title, which seems to convey a harmony among the three teachings, this treatise presents strong polemical arguments against the Neo-Confucians, and Han Yu is singled out in particular. In a recent study of this text, Lin Boqian identified no less than twenty-three criticisms of Han Yu, repeating and developing ideas found in the earlier writings of Qisong and Zhang Shangying.⁵ I plan to fully translate the sections regarding Han Yu for this project.
5. The Anonymous Korean "Probing the Doubts and Concerns between Confucianism and Buddhism" (*Yusök chirüi non*, 儒釋質疑論): The Chinese Buddhist-Neo-Confucian disputes were replicated with extra fervor in Chosön Korea, particularly between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. This treatise, written by an anonymous monk (or monks) in the fifteenth century, has been the longest and most comprehensive Buddhist apologetic work ever written on the peninsula, and it included several criticism of Han Yu as well.⁶ I have already translated this work in full for a previous project, and I plan to incorporate the Han Yu sections into this study.

⁴ In Korean see Kwön Sön-hyang and Kim Wön-myöng, "Myöngdojipsöl e nat'anan Chöngi üi Sönbulgyo pip'an yön'gu" 『鳴道集說』에 나타난 정(程)이의 선불교 비판 연구 [A Study of Cheng Yi's Critique of Chan Found in the Response to the Collection that Illuminates the Way], *Tongsö ch'örhak yön'gu* 69 (2013): 189–209. In Japanese see Keika Junsho 桂華淳祥, "Nadoshusetsu no ichi kosatsu" 『鳴道集說』의 一考察 [A Study of the Response to the Collection that Illuminates the Way], *Indogaku Bukkyögaku kenkyü* 28.2 (1980): 294–96. In English see Jan Yun-hua, "Li P'ing-Shan and his Refutation of Neo-Confucian Criticism of Buddhism," in *Developments in Buddhist Thought: Canadian Contributions to Buddhist Studies*, ed. Roy Amore (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979).

⁵ Lin Boqian 林伯謙, "Liu Mi Sanjiao pingxin lun chengshu shidai ji pi Han yuanyou kao" 劉謐《三教平心論》成書時代及關韓緣由考 [Analysis of the Publication Era and Reasons for Refuting Han Yu in Liu Mi's Sanjiao pingxin lun], *Wen yu zhe* 31 (2017): 309–46. See also a short introduction in Korean: Im Hyöng-sök, "Yumil üi Samgyo p'yöngsim ron e kwanhayö- han Pulgyodo üi sinyuhak üi paebullon e taehan panüng" 劉謐의 『三教平心論』에 관하여- 한 불교도의 신유학의 排佛論에 대한 반응 [Liu Mi's Viewing the Three Teachings with a Balanced Mind: A Response to the Neo-Confucian Critique of Buddhism], *Han'guk ch'örhak nonjip* 20 (2007): 67–100.

⁶ On this text see several introductions in Korean: Pak Yöng-ki, "Yusök chirüi ron yön'gu" 儒釋質疑論研究 [Research of the "Yusök chirüi non"] (M.A. thesis, Dongguk University, 1984); Yu Chöng-yöp, "Hyönjöng non kwa Yusök chirüi non üi hobul nollu pigyo" 顯正論과 儒釋質疑論의 호불논리 비교 [Comparing the Apologetic Logic of the "Hyönjöng non" and the "Yusök chirüi non"], *Wönbulgyo sasang kwa chonggyo munhwa* 36 (2007): 219–39; Küm Chang-t'ae, "Chosön ch'ogi üi Yu-Pul chohwaron" 조선초기의 儒·佛조화론 [The Harmonization Theories of Buddhism and Confucianism in the Early Chosön], *Chonggyo yön'gu* 18 (1999): 91–119.

6. Inkei Chidatsu's (1704–1769) "Discourse on Confucianism and Buddhism" (*Jubutsu gōron*, 儒佛合論): Close to a millennium after his death, Han Yu was evoked yet again in a faraway land and placed at the center of the Buddhist-Neo-Confucian debates of Tokugawa Japan. Inkei cites some of the Song Chinese Buddhist apologetic writers and adds his own unique refutations of Han Yu. As is the case for the previous treatises mentioned above, this text is little known and I plan to translate and analyze the relevant parts for this project.⁷
7. Hsing Yun's (1927-) *Chan Heart, Chan Art* (Taiwan: Buddha's Light Publishing, 2007): Hsing Yun is a contemporary Zen master and founder of Taiwan's largest Buddhist monastic organization, Fo Guang Shan. This book, published in English, includes an embellished account of a recurring theme in the Buddhist anti- Han Yu discourse—that of Han Yu's embarrassing encounter with Zen master Dadian—as well as a rather deprecating pictorial depiction of Han Yu, guaranteeing that he should be properly remembered as a Disney-style villain. This book will be utilized as evidence that Han Yu remains a key alter ego in the East Asian Buddhist narrative to this day.

The notion that “history repeats itself” may be both a cliché and a Billboard hit tune, but the continuous reenactment of the Neo-Confucian-Buddhist debates throughout East Asia for a millennium demonstrates that it is, surely, at times a reality. As I plan to illustrate using the texts above, Han Yu has been singled out as the eternal icon of “anti-Buddhism,” and as such repeatedly conjured up, criticized, mocked, and vilified by Buddhists. Reproaching Han Yu has thus become a symbolic apologetic gesture, not necessarily directed against Han himself, but toward other contemporary Neo-Confucian critics in China, Korea, and Japan who were perhaps better left unnamed. My hope is not simply to direct the spotlight toward this fascinating historical discourse, but also to glean out the diachronic development of the anti-Han Yu narrative. In addition, I believe that this study will be able to demonstrate the prospects for historical research that extends beyond the common national and dynastic delimiting categories, revealing broader regional literary trends. After all, let us not forget that until very recently, educated elites from Nanjing to Hansŏng (Seoul) and Edo (Tokyo) read the same books in the same written-language, and participated in a common literary-religious culture.

⁷ An introductory analysis of this text is available in Chinese: Zhang Kunjiang, “Shanqi Anzhai yu Yinxi Zhituo defu zhi bian ji qi yuxu” 山崎闇齋與隱溪智脫的儒佛之辨及其餘緒 [Yamazaki Ansai's Controversy with Inkei Chidatsu Surrounding Confucianism and Buddhism and Its Consequence], *Guowen xuebao* 62 (2017): 1–31.