

# DBQ: The Response to Buddhism in China

**Directions:** Now that you are familiar with the main developments of the spread of Buddhism to China, you are ready to use that context to help you analyze primary source documents on the same topic. These documents will actually be the same documents you will be using for your upcoming DBQ essay, so here you have a great opportunity to become familiar with them and analyze them thoroughly so that you can make the most use of them when you begin planning and writing your essay. Read the documents closely, and pay special attention to the source for each document, as that can tell you a lot of important information. Then, answer the questions as thoroughly as you can on a new loose leaf.

## Document 1

**Source:** According to Buddhist tradition, “The Four Noble Truths,” the first sermon preached by the Buddha (563 B.C.E.-483 B.C.E.), India, fifth century B.C.E.

The First Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of Sorrow. Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow, contact with the unpleasant is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow.

The Second Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of the Arising of Sorrow; it arises from craving, which leads to rebirth, which brings delight and passion, and seeks pleasure—the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for continued life, and the craving for power.

The Third Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the complete stopping of that craving, so that no passion remains, leaving it, being emancipated from it, being released from it, giving no place to it.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of the Way that Leads to the Stopping of Sorrow.

1. Who is the speaker in this text, when was it from, and where was it from?
2. Why would this text be relevant to a discussion on Buddhism in China during the Tang Dynasty?

## Document 2

**Source:** Zhi Dun, Chinese scholar, author, and confidant of Chinese aristocrats and high officials during the period when northern China was invaded by central Asian steppe nomads, circa 350 C.E.

Whosoever in China, in this era of sensual pleasures, serves the Buddha and correctly observes the commandments, who recites the Buddhist Scriptures, and who furthermore makes a vow to be reborn without ever abandoning his sincere intention, will at the end of his life, when his soul passes away, be miraculously transported thither. He will behold the Buddha and be enlightened in his spirit, and then he will enter Nirvana. \*

\*Nirvana: the extinction of desire and individual consciousness

3. What promise is being made in the document?
4. Examine the date of the document. What is the socio-political situation in China during this time?
5. Given the political context, why might an audience be more receptive (open) to this message?

### Document 3

**Source:** Anonymous Chinese scholar, "The Disposition of Error," China, circa 500 C.E.

Question: If Buddhism is the greatest and most venerable of ways, why did the great sages of the past and Confucius not practice it? In the Confucian Classics no one mentions it. Why, then, do you love the Way of the Buddha and rejoice in outlandish arts? Can the writings of the Buddha exceed the Classics and commentaries and beautify the accomplishments of the sages?

Answer: All written works need not necessarily be the words of Confucius. To compare the sages to the Buddha would be like comparing a white deer to a unicorn, or a swallow to a phoenix. The records and teachings of the Confucian classics do not contain everything. Even if the Buddha is not mentioned in them, what occasion is there for suspicion?

Question: Now of happiness there is none greater than the continuation of one's line, of unfilial conduct there is none worse than childlessness. The monks forsake wives and children, reject property and wealth. Some do not marry all their lives.

Answer: Wives, children, and property are the luxuries of the world, but simple living and inaction are the wonders of the Way. The monk practices the Way and substitutes that for worldly pleasures. He accumulates goodness and wisdom in exchange for the joys of having a wife and children.

6. The author presents both questions and answers regarding Buddhism in the Chinese cultural context. Keeping in mind that the author is writing both sides of the conversation, what is his perspective about Buddhism? Is he for or against it?

7. What perspective do you think the author is trying to show through the words of the questioner?

### Document 4

**Source:** Han Yu, leading Confucian scholar and official at the Tang imperial court, "Memorial on Buddhism," 819 C.E.

Your servant begs leave to say that Buddhism is no more than a cult of the barbarian peoples spread to China. It did not exist here in ancient times.

Now I hear that Your Majesty has ordered the community of monks to go to greet the finger bone of the Buddha [a relic brought to China from India], and that Your Majesty will ascend a tower to watch the procession as this relic is brought into the palace. If these practices are not stopped, and this relic of the Buddha is allowed to be carried from one temple to another, there will be those in the crowd who will cut off their arms and mutilate their flesh in offering to the Buddha.

Now the Buddha was a man of the barbarians who did not speak Chinese and who wore clothes of a different fashion. The Buddha's sayings contain nothing about our ancient kings and the Buddha's manner of dress did not conform to our laws; he understood neither the duties that bind sovereign and subject, nor the affections of father and son. If the Buddha were still alive today and came to our court, Your Majesty might condescend to receive him, but he would then be escorted to the borders of the nation, dismissed, and not allowed to delude the masses. How then, when he has long been dead, could the Buddha's rotten bones, the foul and unlucky remains of his body, be rightly admitted to the palace? Confucius said: "Respect ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance!" Your servant is deeply ashamed and begs that this bone from the Buddha be given to the proper authorities to be cast into fire and water, that this evil be rooted out, and later generations spared this delusion.

8. Who is the speaker in this document and who is the intended audience?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

9. What is the speaker's purpose/goal in what he is saying in this document?

10. What is his perspective on Buddhism? Why might he feel this way?

## Document 5

**Source:** Zong Mi, a leading Buddhist scholar, favored by the Tang imperial household, essay, "On the Nature of Man," early ninth century C.E.

Confucius, Laozi and the Buddha were perfect sages. They established their teachings according to the demands of the age and the needs of various beings. They differ in their approaches in that they encourage the perfection of good deeds, punish wicked ones, and reward good ones; all three teachings lead to the creation of an orderly society and for this they must be observed with respect.

11. How does the speaker in this document have a similar degree of influence as the speaker in document 4?

12. What is the speaker's purpose/goal in what he is saying in this document?

## Document 6

**Source:** Tang Emperor Wu, Edict on Buddhism, 845 C.E.

We have heard that the Buddha was never spoken of before the Han dynasty; from then on the religion of idols gradually came to prominence. So in this latter age Buddhism has transmitted its strange ways and has spread like a luxuriant vine until it has poisoned the customs of our nation. Buddhism has spread to all the nine provinces of China; each day finds its monks and followers growing more numerous and its temples more lofty. Buddhism wears out the people's strength, pilfers their wealth, causes people to abandon their lords and parents for the company of teachers, and severs man and wife with its monastic decrees. In destroying law and injuring humankind indeed nothing surpasses this doctrine!

Now if even one man fails to work the fields, someone must go hungry; if one woman does not tend her silkworms, someone will go cold. At present there are an inestimable number of monks and nuns in the empire, all of them waiting for the farmers to feed them and the silkworms to clothe them while the Buddhist public temples and private chapels have reached boundless numbers, sufficient to outshine the imperial palace itself. Having thoroughly examined all earlier reports and consulted public opinion on all sides, there no longer remains the slightest doubt in Our mind that this evil should be eradicated.

13. What is the emperor's perspective on Buddhism in China? How is the influence of Buddhism on China characterized in the document? Give specific examples.

14. Considering what you know of the historical context from outside knowledge, how does this statement by the emperor represent a shift in official imperial policy on Buddhism?