

# On Feng Zikai's Buddhist Life

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**Abstract**—In Feng Zikai's life course of near a decade, Buddhism entered into his spiritual life and nourished his soul with a systematic and complete Buddhist ideology, accompanying him through his critical period of moral concept being. Under the guidance of Buddhist thought, Feng Zikai deeply pondered and realized his life, so that he obtained three major inspirations in a life: the first is the self-adapting way of life depending on destiny; the second is generous perception of life and death; the third is transcendental life attitude.

**Keywords**—Buddhism; adapt self depending on destiny; perception of life and death; transcendental life

## I. WAY OF BEHAVIOR TO ADAPT TO DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES

The Buddhists do things depending on destiny and advocate the transcendental life attitude, comprehend the life ambience by doing things and experience the truth of earthliness, not attach themselves to worldly affairs or make themselves blinded by earthly life, to master the fundamental way of life, letting all go with their nature. In 1933, Feng Zikai realized the meaning of "Uncertainty is Certainty" from Ma Yifu, he became optimistic from former pessimistic attitude by the influence of Buddhism on him, changed his worries about the reality into real treatment of the reality, and therefrom he goes a natural and fated way of life. Feng Zikai has his first collection of essays called *Essay on Yuan Yuan Tang*, and afterward he wrote *Another Essay on Yuan Yuan Tang* and *Continued Essay on Yuan Yuan Tang*. The so-called "Yuan Yuan Tang" is the honorary name of Feng Zikai's apartment, rewarded by Master Hong Yi, for Feng Zikai took the character of "Yuan" twice when he drew lots before the statue of Sakyamuni. Later, Ma Yifu wrote the Buddhist's chant: "make improvement under the influence of Buddhism and the arts; have concern about everything in the world and carefully comprehend the life" and intitled "Yuan Yuan Tang" to Feng Zikai's apartment, which seems a coincidence and actually contains a profound meaning, because "Yuan" is an important Buddhist concept and the "Theory of Yuan Origin" is the foundation of all sects of Buddhism to make sutra. "Yuan Origin" is also known as "Yuan Generation", that is all things are in common causal link and change according to the certain conditions. The *Agama Sutra* says: "all things generated from the karma and die out for the karma" and the *Samyuktāgama* says: "Everything is not in single and independent existence but is concerned with and supported by each other; Nothing will stay the same forever in the world." Thus, it is easy to infer the concept of "emptiness is form" from the "Theory of

Yuan Origin" that is all things in the world are fluky. "The boundless universe is in this manner, and then the tiny life that accounts for only one in the six courses of reincarnation is certainly constrained and teased by the uncertain fate". Just for the Buddhist theory of karma, Feng Zikai firmly believes: "It can be said that all human life is of 'religion'."

On the way of fleeing from the war of resistance against aggression, Feng Zikai was unexpected rescued from the calamity as he was "drying poetic couplet in the sun", for which his friend reputed his refuge is "artstical" and he very emotionally said it "religious" rather than "artstical". In the life course, "people are really poor animals! A very tiny 'Yuan (luck)', such as the thing of "drying poetic couplet in the sun" can master your destiny and control your life and death. And these 'lucks' are created by nature, beyond human's control". Feng Zikai was sentimental in his childhood and became calm for everything, not depressed or disappointed" after he entered in his thirties years of age. And even in his journey of refuge, he was not worried while he drank for fun every day to comfort the young and old, by which we have to say the Buddhist Theory of Yuan Origin influences him greatly. After the Cultural Revolution began, Feng Zikai was designated as the "authority of reactionary academy" and was denounced time after time, but he kept calm and cold in manner, played jokes that sitting in bullpen is practising meditation and that being denounced in Pudong is "night traveling for Pujian". During the period, his beard for many years was cut by the "rebels" but he made self-mockery that "no prairie fire can destroy the grass; it shoots up again with the spring breeze blows." At his ripe old age, he was forced to work in the countryside, and his youngest daughter felt sad and wept by finding the scene, but he bantered that "The earth is my bed, the sky my quilt and the river my washing water. All of them can be used freely, and they are the endless possession bestowed by the creator". In the stormy times, he let it be and kept calm. He silently observed the changes unfolded to preserve the meaning and value of life, worthy of a wise way of life!

## II. LIFE PERCEPTION TO OPEN-MINDED LIFE AND DEATH

In the Buddhism, life trend is concluded in two opposite ways: one is in a course of transmigration, creating various industries and suffering from various pains, going with the stream and allowing any arrangement of the environment, known as the "Liu Zhuan (wander about for transmigration)"; the other is the reaction to "Liu Zhuan" that will destroy, change and reverse the "Liu Zhuan", called as the "Huan Mie

(return for nirvana)". "Mie" means quietus and relief of sufferings in life, which is the ideal end-result, the highest ambit and the ultimate goal for the life. Early Buddhism indicated the highest ideal ambit by dint of brahminist nirvana concept. Nirvana, is interpreted as "quietus" or "nirvāna" by Kumārajīva, and as "Parinirvana" by Monk Xuanzang of the Tang Dynasty. The so-called "quietus" and "nirvāna" means the relief of troubles and comeuppance of life and death; and the so-called "Parinirvana" means all are eternal around nirvana. The theory of Buddhist Nirvana regards life as a great bitterness, and for the purpose of relief of life bitterness, it thinks people can remove worry after practice of Buddhism, that is the cause and effect of life and death are both eliminated. At the moment of success to nirvana by personal experience, the nature becomes clear and everything around is beyond the six course of metempsychosis, which is just the highest ambit of life. Therefore, for the earthly people, death seems a great sorrow, the decadence and end of life, but for the gymnosophists, death is quietus and parinirvana, the perfection and the highest ambit of life. In the influence of the Buddhist view of death, Feng Zikai said in the Autumn: "if I have to take time to describe the life and glory as well as death and destruction in the world, I think the life and glory are inappreciable, and I preferably praise all death and destruction. ... Until now, by dint of Buddha's glorious reflection in my fall of years and kind fostering of anima for death, I just aware of the bittersweet for life, which is the hackneyed theme of hundreds of millions of times in the world, unworthy of treasure? I only beg for peaceful "Songdu (leave)" and "Tuochu (quietus)" of my life. Many scholars think, Feng Zikai thinks a lot of death rather than life due to the influence of Buddhist pessimism and nihilism. Actually, this is a misunderstanding, as the above quoted really means Feng Zikai appreciates the Buddhist view of death that regards death as the highest ambit of life, and at the end of the text, the two words of "Songdu" and "Tuochu" obviously contain the meaning of Buddhist "nirvana". If you don't believe this, we can look again at Feng Zikai's letter to Ban Hou. In this letter, he wrote that: "Master Hong Yi demonstrated his theory with "Spring is just in bloom and the moon just in the culmination", to represent the parinirvana with the most beautiful ambit, I appreciated it very much." Certainly, Feng Zikai appreciates the Buddhist view of death, and believes that death is the highest ambit of life, but he does not purpose to get in parinirvana in practice because he believes the people in the world will lose their nature and only death can make people away from the pollution of worldly wisdom. In his memorial essay A'nan written for the child who was abortive for misbirth, he said: "A'nan, this is your life. How hasty and short your life is". However, "you have no dust from the world. You are completely naive, natural, clean, bright and clean. People in the world are supposed to have the life as na ĩve and innocent as yours, but they are confused and hazed, got crazy once they enter in the world, till they are exhausted to death, and finally escape to the hometown of life in a flurry. This is what a confused and ignorant idiotic state! Your life is only a jump, and you end your life in the earth in a second, not polluted by the earth. I have been a man in indulgence and disorder of behavior, as if

meeting demon, and how dare I yearn for the naiveness and wisdom as you have?"

According to the "Theory of Yuan Origin", every thing in universe is changeable. All living organisms will inevitably move towards the finality--death. For death, life seems so small and fragile. Just because death has inevitability, humans go to explore the meaning of life and then have the fear towards death. However, "Buddhism does not agree to be afraid of death because of this. It emphasizes the true meaning of life that death enlightens people, understanding birth and death through death and not holding on to birth and death." Feng Zikai follows Master Hong Yi to believe in the Pure Land Buddhism. The Pure Land Buddhism stresses to read Amitabha and pursue the western Elysian Fields. "Those who cultivate themselves according to the Pure Land Buddhism regard going into the western Elysian Fields as the goal", so "ordinary people think that the goal of the Pure Land Buddhism is to let people die". They don't know that the Pure Land Buddhism belongs to Mahayana Teachings and encourages people to set noble ambition. If persons can meet the Amitabha and understand and separate themselves from birth and death, after he becomes Buddha, he will come back to the saha world full of sufferings to deliver all living creatures from torment. So Master Hong Yi emphasizes constantly, "we must go to the Pure Land early, witnessing the Buddha-fruit and come back to the saha world to save living creatures", "the time is very short between death and birth". Just because he believes in the Pure Land Buddhism without a shadow of doubt, Master Hong Yi remains calm when he dies. But different from the religious attitudes of Master Hong Yi, Feng Zikai clearly knows that the so-called the state of "Nirvana" and the Pure Land of Buddhist are the biggest lies even though they say monks don't tell a lie. He is against superstition when someone dies and he says, "the superstitious things that monks do not only have nothing to do with Buddha doctrine, but also impede the Buddha doctrine." The reason why he uses the principles of Buddhism to explain the meanings of death and thinks death is the highest state of life is that in the aspect of his personality, he want to use this belief to form fearless, regretless and detached attitudes towards death.

### III. DETACHED ATTITUDE TOWARDS LIFE

Buddhism realizes that everything is empty by sighing with regret of the suffering of life. And it pursues a nibbanic state without birth and death. This kind of mysterious pursuit obviously doesn't care about the matter of the secular. But there is no denying that the foothold of Buddhism still exists in the world. The thing that it pays close attention to is the problem of human existence. The Mahayana doesn't give up the world and devotes itself to liberate all living creatures. Although the Hinayana proves the birth and death by itself, its purpose is to save people and break away from the abyss of misery of birth and death. So both of them have the active side of going into the world to save people. Chinese Buddhism gives priority to Mahayana. Mahayana means big vehicles or long journey. Mahayana not only emphasizes the salvation of itself but also the salvation of people, demanding "showing mercy and forgiving and benefiting all living

creatures". Bodhisattva is a stylite who uses wisdom to learn the truth of wisdom and mercy of salvation of all living things, for the purpose to save others and achieves Buddhahood in the future. The full name of Bodhisattva is Bodhi and Sattva. Bodhi has the meaning of awareness, wisdom and Sattva has the meaning of sentient beings. "Bodhi and Sattva" means enlightening all living creatures. The behavior that Bodhisattva cultivates is Bodhisattva-carya. Tan Sitong, Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan carry out research on the Buddhism and what they strongly advocate is this concept of Bodhisattva-carya loving kindness and wisdom and benefiting all living creatures with Anatman. Feng Zikai follow Master Hong Yi to believe in Pure Land, "One who cultivating himself according to Pure Land Sect must have large Bodhi Heart". Bodhi Heart means the heart to benefit all living creatures, "having a positive maha karuna and the noble ambition to save all living creatures", "willing to suffer on behalf of all living creatures". The influence that Master Hong Yi has on Feng Zikai is profound, only except for the concept of bodhisattva-carya? During the period of anti-Janpanese War, Master Hong Yi gifted a painting quoting from Avatamsaka Sutra, "One should have a patient heart to save all the evil living creatures. Feng Zikai thought that this sentence was "the most suitable sentence to encourage people of today", and "in this life, evil living creatures is as much as the hair of dog. Only having a patient heart can we save them. Those hermits are brilliant but lack of patient, so it is not the behavior of great mercy." During the process of fleeing from calamity, he experienced "terror, worries, discomfiture and humiliation in life to the fullest extent, so he could use the heart of mercy of Buddhist to forgive the boss who rob him in the tea house, "I caught a glimpse of his shabby cotton-padded jacket. Maybe his righteousness was caused by poverty. This world is a great abyss of misery! I cannot see the evildoing but the sufferings of all living creatures!" Does the feelings of mercy that pursue the personal "inspiration and wisdom" and have sympathy for the "confusion and ignorance" of all living creatures have any difference from the concept of Bodhisattva-carya?

The early essays of Feng Zikai show pessimism, for example, Gradually exclaims over the transience of human life, and the Big Book of Account and Autumn sigh mournfully over the changes of affairs of human life and life itself, and Twilight Dream sends out the stirring strains "Alack! Life is just like a dream". All these works prove this. It is related to his life experience, personality trend and social background as well as the understanding of Buddhist. This kind of negative emotion reached the summit one or two years in 1930s after his mother died. In 1933, Feng Zikai moved from Shanghai to "Yuan Yuan Tang" located in Shek Mun Bay. He saw the poor life of rural civilians and began to pay attention to social reality, advocating cares for humanitarian. The growing meaning of not caring about the matter of the secular came into being. Therefore, even though his early essays Informal Essay of Yuan Yuan Tang, the Twenty Informal Essays are filled with words of grey cool colors, such as "transience", "misery", "emptiness", "death", "fantasy", every now and then they showed up the indignation of not forgetting the affairs of human life,

describing the suffering, misery, odiousness and cruelty of society. For example, Thirteen Jottings, Eating Melon Seeds, Songs of Workers Themselves, the Society of Carriage dissected the deep-rooted bad habits of citizens. And Fat Legs criticized the difference between the rich and the poor, and class exploitation.

The period of anti-Japanese War has profound influence on Feng Zikai. It is an important part of Feng Zikai's life, and it is many Chinese writers' and artists' as well. When the gunfire of Japanese troops reached Shek Mun Bay, Yuan Yuan Tang was destroyed, which made Feng Zikai "the bitter hate for the broken of both the country and home come into being, and flames of fury and gunfire burn in his heart", such as jottings Returning Yuan Yuan Tang to Me, Consoling the Spirit of the Dead Yuan Yuan Tang, sharing a bitter hatred of the enemy, full of indignation. "Even though I am old and weak, as long as not fighting in the ravine, I can confront the savage enemy through pens." What One Sees and Hears in Bomb Shelter, Records of Going Back Home After Victory are accusations of crime that Japanese invaders bomb Chinese citizens excessively. The Corrupt Cat, the Record of Exterminating the Gangster from the Mouth are allegories and denounces of corrupt officials. The Words of Wu Yuan discloses miserable reality of currency inflation and difficult life of people. From all of these works, we can see that he care about the society and people. The author thinks that Feng Zikai's wish to become a hermit is not weak. What "More and more weak" is the negative effect that Buddhism has on him. He is never a real hermit and what he has is a detached heart. His life track changing from negative situation to the cares for the society is related to his comprehension for "the theory of impermanence", "the theory of Anatman" of Buddhism.

During the period of the Great Cultural Revolution, Feng Zikai now and then showed that he wanted to temporarily escape from this mortal life. In the letters sent to his friends and his youngest son, Xinmei, he wrote, "I remain within doors and shallow drunk and sleep leisurely everyday." "I write during four o'clock and seven o'clock in the morning and remain shallow drunk and sleep leisurely in the rest of the time." Here, "remaining shallow drunk and sleeping leisurely" does not mean negative and decadent attitudes towards life, but means the tenacious defend of true life. In the Informal Essay of Yuan Yuan Tang, he talks about drinkers' wager game, fortune-telling, Fengdu Ghost Town and recalls visiting a grave to honor the memory of the dead in Tomb-Sweeping Day etc. However, those leisurely and comfortable works definitely show worried and indignant attitudes towards the ignorance of people and criticize it silently. Maybe some people will say that Feng Zikai "temporarily escaping from this mortal life" is escaping from social problems. In reality, at that time, "any involvement to enter the social practice will become foam in the huge whirlpool, and it is easy to become a shadow without thoughts when it adapts to the tendency." It is impossible to wake up the crazy and irrational society at that time only through the efforts of one person. When a righteous intellectual is thrown into jail and powerless, the only thing he can do is to call back the humanity suffocated by the era.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Buddhism runs through the whole life of Feng Zikai, meanwhile, makes him form the way of behavior to adapt to different circumstances, obtain the life perception to open-minded life and death and pursue the detached attitude towards life. The life of Feng Zikai is an indifferent, actual and positive one.

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