

A Preliminary Study on the Influence of Buddhism on Traditional Chinese Legal Thought

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Abstract. Since its eastward spread, Buddhism has interacted with and integrated into traditional Chinese culture, gradually becoming localized and sinicized, flourishing during the Sui and Tang dynasties. The Buddhist doctrines and precepts, such as the concepts of equality of all beings, compassion, the notion of hell, and karma, have increasingly influenced traditional Chinese legal thought. These ideas have altered or reinforced the legislative, law enforcement, judicial, and law-abiding perspectives of emperors, officials, and even the common people. The introduction of Buddhism brought new legal concepts, enriched the cultural connotation of Chinese law, and contributed to the formation of China's unique legal philosophy.

Keywords: Buddhism, Legal thought, Influence

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of legal development in any nation, the relationship between law and religion is an unavoidable topic. After Buddhism was introduced into China during the Eastern Han Dynasty, it experienced development during the Jin and Southern-Northern Dynasties and reached a peak of prosperity during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Over nearly two millennia of cultural evolution, Buddhism has profoundly influenced China's politics, economy, culture, and legal systems. It has become deeply embedded in the lifeblood of Chinese civilization and a significant component of traditional Chinese culture. On one hand, Buddhism gradually integrated into traditional Chinese legal thought through conflict and assimilation. On the other hand, Buddhism absorbed elements of traditional Chinese legal thought, leading to its sinicization and localization.

Currently, academia has achieved high-quality research results on the interactive relationship between law and Buddhism. However, the scope of discussion is not extensive, and the research focus is not primarily on this topic. Exploring this subject not only opens new avenues and perspectives for the study of traditional Chinese legal thought but also demonstrates the inclusiveness and diversity of China's outstanding traditional culture.

2. The Influence of Buddhism on Traditional Chinese Legislative Thought

Legal thought, defined as "people's views, demands, and evaluations regarding the social phenomenon of law," [1] provides a "creative life force" for the formulation of laws [2]. During the Northern Wei Dynasty, Buddhism developed rapidly due to government protection and promotion. The emperors of the Southern Dynasties, including the Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen, were mostly devout Buddhists. In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, national unification, political stability, and economic prosperity facilitated the dissemination of Buddhist doctrine and the establishment of various Mahayana sects. The influence of Buddhism gradually spread from the upper classes to the common people, gaining numerous followers. The acceptance of Buddhism inevitably brought Buddhist doctrines into people's consciousness, shaping their legal awareness and legal thought [3].

From emperors to commoners, those who embraced Buddhist teachings inevitably reflected these beliefs in their actions. From the perspective of legislators, whether they accepted or opposed Buddhism, their attitudes toward Buddhism inevitably influenced legislative activities to varying degrees.

According to Xiaoyi Wang, during the Han and Wei Dynasties, Chinese intellectual circles regarded Buddhism merely as a foreign technique and considered monks as itinerant magicians. It was not until the Jin Dynasties that Buddhism truly entered the intellectual elite [4]. During the Wei and Jin Dynasties, Buddhist Prajñā (wisdom) teachings merged with the prevalent metaphysical thought, creating uniquely Chinese schools of Prajñā philosophy. In the early development of Wei and Jin

metaphysics, leading theorists such as Yan He and Bi Wang were influenced by Buddhist scriptures, which brought profound innovations to ancient Chinese philosophical theories. These influences included ideas of "non-being" transcending beginnings and ends, eternal existence beyond creation and destruction, and the rejection of a creator deity.

Although metaphysicians were not directly involved in legal studies, they profoundly influenced penal theory and legislators' thoughts. The Book of Jin: Treatise on Laws and Punishments records Fei Zhang's Annotations on Laws, in which he states: "The essence of law lies in carefully adapting to changes and examining principles; principles are the profound mysteries of metaphysics and cannot be universally applied; the essence of law is the depth of hidden principles and cannot be rigidly adhered to as a single entity." Compared with the Han Dynasty's legal studies, Fei Zhang innovatively adopted the Wei and Jin metaphysical methods of analyzing names and principles. Thus, it is evident that Wei and Jin metaphysics had a significant influence on Fei Zhang's legal research [5].

During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Buddhism exerted even greater influence on Chinese law. After its introduction to China, Buddhism quickly recognized that "without the support of the state, Buddhist affairs cannot be established." [6] Gaining the support of rulers was essential for its development; losing such support would lead to its demise. Consequently, Buddhism sought to align itself with imperial authority, arguing that Buddhism, like Confucianism, could maintain and legitimize imperial rule, emphasizing that "Confucianism governs the world; Buddhism governs the heart; different paths lead to the same goal." [7] This subservience to imperial authority gained recognition from rulers, even from anti-Buddhist emperors like Emperor Wuzong, who conceded that "Buddhism has devout believers at all levels of society; therefore, the court cannot completely ignore or suppress it, lest it provoke strong resistance." [8]

The emperor, as the initiator and promulgator of legislation, might not directly participate in legislative processes, but the content and thought behind the laws inevitably reflected their attitudes [9]. Therefore, the emperor's stance toward Buddhism could directly determine whether Buddhist ideas were incorporated into legislative thought and secular laws. Take the Tang legal code as an example: by the Zhenguan and Yonghui periods, it had taken its mature form. Ji Pei, Yu Xiao, Wuji Zhangsun, and Xuanling Fang, the key figures in revising the Tang Code, all had connections with Buddhism, with Ji Pei and Yu Xiao being particularly devout Buddhists. During the Wude era, when someone proposed abolishing Buddhism, Ji Pei strongly opposed the suggestion, arguing: "Your Majesty once relied on the Three Jewels to establish righteousness and vowed to uphold the profound teachings. Now, with the empire at peace and prosperity, it is unthinkable to harm the faith of the people by abolishing Buddhism. This would betray your former vows and disappoint your people." [10] Yu Xiao, a descendant of the Liang Emperor Wu and from a Buddhist family, was also a devout practitioner who participated in legal reforms. At the time, "state ceremonies and court rituals were also entrusted to him." [11] Whether they supported or opposed Buddhism, emperors and officials involved in legislative activities were inevitably influenced by Buddhist ideas to varying degrees.

The core legislative principles of the Tang Dynasty emphasized fairness, simplicity, and leniency. The Tang emphasis on mild punishments and careful application of the death penalty was influenced not only by Confucian ideals of benevolent governance but also by Buddhist principles of equality and compassion. Firstly, Buddhist compassion influenced the concept of leniency in legislation. Buddhism advocated "great compassion to bring joy to all sentient beings and great mercy to alleviate their suffering." [12] This ethos translated into legislative practices that emphasized tolerance and leniency toward crimes. For example, during Emperor Taizong's reign, the "Five Reconsiderations for Death Sentences" policy was established, requiring multiple reviews of death penalty cases. When Emperor Taizong discovered that "the final review of death penalty cases was often rushed and lacked careful consideration," he implemented the system to ensure that cases involving death sentences were thoroughly scrutinized [13].

Secondly, the Buddhist emphasis on life inspired the Tang Dynasty's reductions in capital punishment. The Tang emperors abolished the death penalty twice. The first instance was in the sixth year of the Tianbao reign when Emperor Xuanzong declared: "I have followed the teachings of the Dao and embraced the virtue of cherishing life. Thus, the extreme penalty has been abolished. Although certain offenses remain in the law, they are no longer enforced." [14] The second instance, during the Yuanhe reign, involved converting death sentences to exile, except for serious crimes such as the "Ten Abominations" or homicide [15]. Finally, Buddhist compassion and the ideal of universal salvation led to an increase in acts of amnesty. Buddhist rulers, influenced by the doctrine of alleviating suffering and bringing joy, often granted amnesties during significant Buddhist ceremonies. For instance, during the fourteenth year of the Xiantong reign, Emperor Yizong, despite opposition from his ministers, welcomed relics from Famen Temple and issued an amnesty for prisoners, excluding those guilty of the most heinous crimes [16, 17].

3. The Impact of Buddhist Egalitarianism on Traditional Concepts of Loyalty, Filial Piety, and Hierarchy

In ancient India, the caste system was rigidly enforced, dividing society into four classes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The first class, the Brahmins, were religious teachers responsible for rituals and, in old age, would retreat to the forest to live a monastic life as religious clergy. The second class, the Kshatriyas, were the nobility and rulers responsible for internal governance and external defense. The third class, the Vaishyas, consisted of farmers, artisans, and merchants, also referred to as commoners. The fourth class, the Shudras, were slaves and outcasts, the lowest social rank. Their status as slaves was hereditary, and no amount of effort or ambition could allow them to ascend into the upper classes.

Despite these strict class divisions, the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, advocated for equality among all beings, rejecting class distinctions and asserting that anyone could achieve Buddhahood. After renouncing the world and attaining enlightenment, the Buddha traveled widely to preach his teachings, gaining widespread respect and acceptance among the people. When residents of his hometown saw the respect he commanded, they invited him to deliver sermons there. Moved by the Buddha's teachings, many men and women from his hometown shaved their heads and joined the monastic order as his disciples. However, this led to a situation where many families were left with only elderly women and children, creating challenges in local production and daily life. Gradually, dissatisfaction arose among the villagers. In response, the Buddha instituted a rule requiring anyone seeking to join the monastic order to obtain the consent of their parents first. Among those who became monks was Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother and successor to the throne after the Buddha's renunciation.

Once ordained, monastic disciples no longer sat in hierarchical order based on age, status, or class but instead followed the sequence of their ordination. Prince Nanda, who had been a proud and haughty member of the nobility, now found himself living as a mendicant monk, humbly begging for alms at others' doorsteps. Adjusting to this new reality was challenging, and he struggled to shed his former arrogance. Observing his difficulties, the Buddha advised him: "Just as rivers flow into the ocean and lose their individual names, so too do those who come to the Buddha share the same name and identity." The Buddha emphasized that while rivers such as the Indus and Ganges each had distinct names before reaching the ocean, once merged, they became indistinguishable. Similarly, despite the societal divisions into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, all who entered the Buddhist monastic community shared the same name, "Shakya." This reflected the equality of all beings in the Buddhist view: everyone possesses Buddha-nature and can attain enlightenment regardless of class or social status. This concept of equality begins with the "mind," requiring individuals to transcend attachments to self and personal interests to achieve true internal equality. This foundational principle of Buddhist teachings was extraordinary, particularly in a context of severe caste antagonism in ancient India.

Buddhist egalitarianism manifests in two main aspects: equality among people and equality among all beings. Regarding equality among people, Buddhism advocates the "Six Harmonies," which include shared understanding, joint observance of moral precepts, equitable sharing of resources, harmony in speech without contention, unity in residence, and mutual joy in intent. These principles were aimed at opposing social inequality. In terms of equality among all beings, Buddhism posits that all living creatures, including animals, are equal, extending this equality even to plants, mountains, and rivers, asserting that all possess Buddha-nature. This perspective promotes complete parity between humanity and the environment. The Buddhist concept of equality, therefore, represents a unique human rights movement against caste discrimination and class oppression in ancient India. In summary, Buddhist egalitarianism encompasses equality among people, equality between humans and the environment, and equality among all life forms, offering a profound and comprehensive vision of universal equality.

3.1. The Concept of Loyalty and Filial Piety

During the Tang Dynasty, despite the flourishing of Buddhism, Confucian philosophy, emphasizing "virtue and propriety as the foundation of governance and punishment as its tool," remained the guiding principle for the Tang legal code. The Tang Dynasty continued the trend of Confucianization in law established during the Han, Wei, and Jin periods, leading to the evaluation of the Tang Code as being "entirely aligned with propriety." [18] From this point forward, Confucianism became the "orthodox" philosophy in Chinese thought, and the mainstream legal ideology of China was primarily based on Confucian principles. These principles incorporated the strengths of other schools of thought and adhered to the patriarchal system, emphasizing family-centric values, the unity of family and state, and the integration of loyalty and filial piety [19]. In Confucian thought, filial piety originates from the natural parent-child relationship. It encompasses natural affection, such as respecting ancestors and repaying the roots of one's existence, social responsibilities, such as continuing the family lineage, and ethical requirements, such as serving parents well and providing for their old age [20].

However, the Buddhist egalitarian view, which advocates for "the equality of all sentient beings," directly challenged Confucian ideals. Buddhism opposed prostration before monarchs and parents and even encouraged ordination and renunciation of familial ties, violating the Confucian admonition that "among the three greatest acts of unfilial conduct, failing to produce an heir is the worst" [21] and "one's body, hair, and skin are received from one's parents and must not be harmed—this is the beginning of filial piety." [22] More critically, Buddhism's stance against bowing to monarchs and parents not only contradicted Confucian ethical standards but also violated state laws. Refusing to bow to a monarch was classified as "great disrespect," while refusal to bow to parents was considered "unfilial," both of which were listed among the "Ten Abominations" in the Tang Code and carried severe penalties with no chance of amnesty. The introduction of Buddhist egalitarianism diminished the absolute authority of monarchs over subjects and parents over children, leading to a fundamental challenge to traditional Chinese ethics and exerting a sustained impact on the hierarchical order of Chinese society [23].

3.2. Hierarchical Order

Orthodox Chinese legal thought emphasized distinctions between social ranks and statuses, exemplified by privilege systems such as the "discussion, petition, redemption, reduction, and substitution" framework and the principle that "propriety does not apply to commoners, and punishment does not apply to officials." These principles upheld the privileges of the nobility.

In contrast, Buddhism advocated for "the equality of all sentient beings," rejecting existing hierarchical structures and seeking to break down authority, thereby encouraging individuals to transcend their personal and social limitations. While innovative, the Buddhist concept of equality clashed sharply with the orthodox legal thought dominated by Confucian ideals. Buddhist philosophy emphasized self-transcendence and spiritual liberation, requiring practitioners to overcome desires and detach from familial, social, and national constraints. Early societal structures inherently established unequal hierarchical relationships, posing challenges to Buddhist practice. Against this backdrop, Buddhism rejected the binding nature of traditional social hierarchies on practitioners, promoting an ascetic lifestyle detached from worldly obligations.

When Buddhism spread eastward to China, its practices retained elements of original Buddhism, emphasizing asceticism and the autonomy of monastic communities [24]. The eminent monk Huiyuan wrote *On Why Monks Should Not Bow to Kings*, arguing that "monks should not show reverence to kings": "Those who have renounced the world begin with the vow of cutting off worldly ties, committing to the pursuit of their spiritual goals. Therefore, all who have taken monastic vows retreat from society to fulfill their aspirations and depart from worldly customs to achieve enlightenment. Departing from worldly customs means that monastic attire should differ from secular standards of propriety; retreating from society means maintaining a noble detachment." [25]

To achieve transcendence, Buddhist practitioners had to break free from traditional hierarchical structures, even challenging these structures outright. They were no longer bound by the ethical duties between monarchs and subjects or between fathers and sons. The Buddhist notion of equality made them question the applicability of Confucian rituals that placed "the father above all in family affection and the monarch above all in respect." The spread of such ideas undermined the absolute authority of monarchs and fathers while diminishing the role of traditional loyalty and filial piety as the sole guiding principles for human behavior.

Consequently, the Buddhist concept of equality fundamentally challenged traditional Chinese ethical concepts, prompting individuals to reevaluate and rethink the essence of identity, rights, and obligations.

4. The Influence of Buddhist Precepts on Public Law-Abiding Awareness

Aristotle once said, "The effectiveness of law depends entirely on public obedience." [26] People obey the law for two main reasons: internal recognition and voluntary compliance or external pressure due to the adverse consequences of violating the law. Buddhist concepts of good and evil, karma, and retribution contribute significantly to cultivating public awareness of the law and regulating behavior.

4.1. Fostering Public Awareness of Law-Abiding Behavior

The phrase, "Confucianism governs external conduct, while Buddhism governs the heart," [27] inscribed on Tang Dynasty epitaphs, reveals the era's integration of Confucian teachings for external behavior and Buddhist principles for inner peace. While Buddhist principles initially influenced only compliance under compulsion, it is undeniable that Buddhism also strengthened the public's voluntary adherence to the law and inclination toward virtuous behavior.

A famous verse from the *Dhammapada*, known as the "Universal Precept of the Seven Buddhas," states: "Do no evil, cultivate all good, purify your mind—this is the teaching of all Buddhas." This verse encapsulates the core spirit of Buddhism's ethical framework, emphasizing virtuous conduct. Central to this framework is the concept of the "Ten Virtues and Ten Evils," which categorize human actions as either virtuous or evil. The Sutra elaborates: "Sentient beings commit good deeds through ten actions and evil deeds through ten actions. The three physical actions are killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. The four verbal actions are divisive speech, harsh speech, false speech, and frivolous talk. The three mental actions are jealousy, ill will, and ignorance." [28] The Buddhist doctrine further refines these ten actions into subcategories. For instance, "killing" includes ten specific acts, such as personal killing, inciting others to kill, celebrating killing, endorsing killing, killing in pregnancy, inducing abortion, revenge killing, castration killing, opportunistic killing, and coerced killing [29]. These precepts urge individuals to heed the teachings of the Buddha, cultivate moral character, and live uprightly. Such principles help the public regulate their behavior, enhance self-discipline, and cultivate a stronger sense of responsibility toward adhering to legal and moral norms.

Beyond the "Ten Virtues and Ten Evils," Buddhism, influenced by Confucian and Daoist thought in China, introduced the "Five Precepts," which align with traditional Chinese cultural values. The Five Precepts are: no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and no intoxication. These precepts serve as the foundation for other Buddhist rules and closely correspond to provisions in the Tang Code addressing killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. These laws aimed to regulate behavior, maintain social order, and uphold moral standards.

No Killing: This precept prohibits the killing of all living beings, including humans and animals. In the Tang Code, this principle extended to specific prohibitions, such as hunting wild animals, mistreating domestic animals, or cruelly slaughtering animals in rituals. For instance, the Tang Code: Commentary on Stables and Storehouses stipulates: "If animals raised for grand sacrifices are improperly cared for and become malnourished or injured, the responsible party shall be punished with sixty strokes of the cane, with an additional grade for each subsequent violation, up to a maximum of one hundred strokes. If the mistreatment leads to death, the punishment is further escalated." [30] The *Old Tang History: Five Elements Chronicle* records that Emperor Xuanzong intervened to curb excessive hunting, commanding: "All extraordinary garments from the palace shall be burned in the

court. Officials and commoners are prohibited from wearing embroidered clothing adorned with jewels. From then on, hunting diminished, and societal morality improved daily." [31] These regulations highlight the ancient Chinese respect and protection for life.

No Stealing: The prohibition against stealing in the Tang Code was strict. It extended beyond theft of property to include violations of property rights, such as unauthorized occupation of land or housing and the misappropriation of others' labor. The Tang Code: Commentary on Theft specifies: "Anyone who takes natural resources from mountains or fields that have already been processed or harvested by others without permission shall be treated as a thief." [32] Violators faced severe penalties, including corporal punishment, exile, or imprisonment.

The Five Precepts, as religious guidelines, governed the conduct of Buddhist practitioners, while the Tang Code, designed for practical governance, had broader applicability and enforceability. While the content of the Five Precepts aligns with certain provisions of the Tang Code, the latter aimed to maintain societal order and moral standards comprehensively. Both systems emphasized the importance of human morality and social order. The overlap between Buddhist Five Precepts and the Tang Code reflects the convergence of different cultural and social frameworks in shaping moral and legal standards. Both underscored core values such as benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom, and integrity, providing moral and legal support for harmonious and stable societies.

4.2. The Role of Moral Education in Preventing Crime

To guide people away from evil and toward good, Buddhism employs concepts such as karmic retribution and the cycle of reincarnation as theoretical foundations, creating vivid depictions of hell filled with endless and horrific punishments. The Buddhist portrayal of hell includes terrifying themes such as mountains of knives, seas of fire, freezing ice, and utter darkness, evoking fear and dread. The Questions About Hell Sutra provides specific descriptions of 64 levels of hell, detailing punishments such as treading on knife mountains, embracing swords, boiling sand, iron cauldrons, starving ghosts, iron beds, icy caves, scalding hot water, skinning, hanging upside down, piercing eyes with arrows, stabbing, and being spun in iron whirlpools [33]. The Buddhist view of hell teaches that those who commit evil in life will experience the torments of hell after death, as determined by their karma. The severity and duration of suffering are directly proportional to the gravity of their actions during their lifetime. The purpose of propagating the concept of karmic retribution in hell is to admonish people against committing evil deeds, so they may avoid falling into such realms of suffering in the afterlife. This doctrine serves as a deterrent, encouraging virtuous behavior in daily life.

Buddhism posits that the root cause of crime lies in human afflictions such as greed, hatred, and ignorance, along with the influence of karmic forces. By understanding these underlying causes, individuals can gain deeper insight into their motivations and the consequences of their actions, thereby reducing impulses and the likelihood of criminal behavior. The Buddhist doctrine of karmic retribution emphasizes the principle of "good deeds bring good results, and evil deeds bring bad results," instilling fear of negative consequences and discouraging criminal acts. Karma, in this context, refers to the rewards or punishments one receives based on their good or bad actions. It asserts that every thought and deed leads to corresponding outcomes, which are manifested through the cycle of rebirth in the six realms of existence: gods, humans, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. Driven by their karma, sentient beings continuously revolve through these realms, much like the perpetual turning of a wheel. Those who perform virtuous actions are reborn into favorable realms, while those who commit evil deeds are led by their karma into realms of suffering.

Under the Buddhist belief of karmic retribution, summarized as "actions leave consequences even after they seem to disappear; hidden virtues yield visible rewards," many people are inspired to accumulate hidden virtue. This belief encourages acts of kindness, participation in charity, and helping others as a means to accumulate merit. Such actions aim to increase blessings and reduce the potential for future suffering due to negative karma.

4.3. Reinforcing Legal Nihilism in Traditional Chinese Legal Consciousness

Legal nihilism is a doctrine that denies the social role and value of law, advocating for the abolition of laws and legal regulations within society, even regarding law as the root of all evils. For instance, ancient Chinese Daoist philosophers like Laozi and Zhuangzi emphasized "governing through non-intervention," advocating minimal interference and legal imposition to achieve social harmony. They believed that laws and systems disrupt the natural state of humanity, leading to chaos and conflict—an embodiment of legal nihilism.

The Jurisprudence Forest (Fayuan Zhulin) recounts the following story: "In the past, there was a king in Jambudvipa named Fazeng, who delighted in generosity. He upheld precepts, listened to Buddhist teachings, showed compassion to all beings, and refrained from harming life. He ruled justly for twenty years. During a leisure moment, he played dice games with others. At that time, someone committed murder, and his ministers reported the crime to the king. While engrossed in the game, the king casually replied, 'Follow the law of the land.' In accordance with the law, the murderer was sentenced to death and executed immediately. After finishing the game, the king inquired about the criminal. His ministers replied, 'He has been executed.' On hearing this, the king collapsed in grief and fainted. Once revived with water, he wept, saying, 'Palace concubines, entertainers, elephants, horses,

and treasures remain here, but I alone am condemned to hell. By ordering the execution, I have become a Chandala king. What suffering awaits me in future lives! I now renounce kingship and will retreat to the mountains for solitary cultivation." [34] This story implies that Buddhist law transcends royal law, and the king's execution of the death penalty in accordance with royal law violated Buddhist principles.

Master Huiyuan's *On Why Monks Should Not Revere Kings* also discussed the relationship between Buddhist teachings, royal authority, and royal law: "The primary tenet of Buddhism lies in renunciation. Those who renounce the world fall into four categories. In disseminating teachings and guiding beings, their merit rivals that of emperors, and their moral transformation complements state governance." Lay Buddhists were expected to abide by royal law and Confucian ethics, but monks, as disseminators of teachings and moral guides, were seen as comparable to emperors in their merit and influence. Consequently, monks were exempt from adhering strictly to secular etiquette, including reverence toward kings. This perspective aligned with the traditional Chinese legal notion that "there is a law above the law," echoing Confucian ritualistic thought that often downplayed the practical functions of law [35]. From this perspective, although Buddhism submitted to royal authority, it upheld the special status of monks, thereby reinforcing the legal nihilism prevalent in traditional Chinese legal consciousness.

Buddhism's influence on ancient Chinese legal thought was profound and multifaceted. Its introduction brought new legal concepts that enriched the cultural connotation of Chinese law. Buddhist principles of compassion, equality, and justice blended with traditional Chinese legal culture, forming a unique legal philosophy. Additionally, Buddhist ideas of karmic retribution and reincarnation shaped ancient Chinese legal philosophy. In considering punishment for crimes, people often factored in the consequences for both the individual and their future reincarnations. Moreover, the dissemination of Buddhism contributed to raising the cultural and moral standards of the general populace, thereby helping to maintain social order. This influence was not one-directional; rather, it interacted with China's existing legal systems and cultural frameworks, resulting in a legal system and legal culture uniquely characteristic of China.

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