

A Survey of Indian Studies in Ancient China

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China is the close neighbour of India. This geographical position has provided a background favourable to the development of long-standing historical ties between India and China and the forging of profound friendship between their peoples. The religious as well as the cultural interflow between India and China had taken place as early as over two thousand years ago. Since the former and later Han Dynasties, these contacts have become more and more frequent. Despite impediments to the relations between India and China, as a result of Western colonialism, in the periods of Ming and Qing (Ching) Dynasties, the cultural interflows between the Indian and Chinese peoples have never come to a stop. Now, these overflows are going on with new contents on a larger scale. The influences of Indian Buddhism on China are well known, and there have been exchange between Indian Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism for over 2000 years.

China and India, both are among the ancient civilizations in the world, have made important contributions to the world, the Yellow River, the Ganga and the Indus have all bred and given birth to the most splendid cultures in the world, which have in turn exerted influence upon each others and produced the most colourful panoramas on earth. By learning a lot from the peoples of India and combining our own national characteristics, we, Chinese people too have proved to have grown wonderful flowers in the garden of science, art, religion, philosophy and culture.

In the course of our contacts with the Indian peoples we have accumulated rich data on the history of India and, in the fine tradition of patient and meticulous investigation, brought out several hundred kinds of spectacular works on Indian studies. There are references to India in the official histories of almost every dynasty of China. In the twenty-four or twenty-five dynastic annals, compiled by the imperial governments, there are special sections devoted either to India as whole or to one of the countries of this region. These sources include detailed accounts of the China-India relations from the 2nd century B.C. to the 20th century A.D. and record the natural environments, geography, climate, customs, religious beliefs, economic and political conditions etc. In addition, these Chinese classified books or series of books compiled by the government also contain references to the Indian sub-continent.

Buddhism spread into China at the beginning of the Christian era, ideological and cultural exchange between China and India was further expedited by the efforts of Chinese monks, who not only translated a good many Indian Buddhist scriptures but

also studied and annotated Buddhist doctrines and canons in a big way. According to statistical data, the Buddhist scriptures that have been translated into the Han language and are still available total about 5,428 fascicles in 1,692 works. Of course, quite a few scholars from India have also made valuable contributions in this respect. Facts show that from the end of the Later Han Dynasty to the end of the Northern Song Dynasty, i.e. during the millennium from the 2nd to the 12th century A.D., there were 150 well-known translators among those who were directly involved in the translation task; and out of them, 71 were referred to in history books as monks or scholars from Indian continent. Among them, Kumārajīva, Fo-tu-cheng, Buddhbhadra, An Shigao, Dharmarakṣa Bodhiruci, Paramārtha, Amoghavajra, Vajrabodhi, etc. were more famous. The achievements in the translation of Buddhist scriptures in China is also shown by the fact that, according to the Beijing version of the Tibetan Piṭaka, there are 1,055 volumes in the main Piṭaka (*bka-gyur Kanjur*) and 3,962 volumes in the subsidiary Piṭaka (*bs Tan-gyur Tanjur*), a considerable portion of these being direct translations from their Indian originals. Besides, we have had in China the Mongolian, Manchurian, Xixia and Pāli versions of the Piṭaka, which are translated from Sanskrit, Pāli, Han and Tibetan languages. With the translation of Buddhist scriptures, Indian philosophy, literature, etc. were disseminated far and wide in China.

Chinese Tripiṭaka Contains :

Sūtras (total 688 works in 2790 fasc.)¹

Ratnakūṭa Section

Prajñā Section

Avataṃsaka Section

Nirvāṇa Section

Āgama Section

Vinaya: (total 210 works in 879 fasc.)

Abhidharma (total 196 works in 1094 fasc.)

Dubious works (19 fasc.)

Tantrics (total 88 works in 639 fasc.)

Dubious works (total 7 works in 26 fasc.)

As a result of the development of governmental relations, the ideological and cultural exchange and the expansion of marine transportation and trade between China and the South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, and particularly as a result of the strenuous efforts on the part of large number of monks and scholars, traders and envoys

1. See. F.C. Hsu's *On the theory of Conscious*, p44, New World Press Beijing 1990.

who went to the above mentioned countries travelling from place to place for on-the-spot observation and investigation, a great mass of comprehensive reports and monographs on the India were written during the period from Southern and Northern dynasties up to the Ming and Qing Dynasties and most of the writings deal with the geography, social conditions and customs, institutions of society,, the religious doctrines and practices, and the historical events of Hinduism outside India. For instance, Fa Xian, a famous monk of Eastern Jin Dynasty, went to India on pilgrimage and he stayed in India from 399 A.D. to 414 A.D. In his *Fo Guo Ji* (Records of the Buddha's Land) Fa Xian narrated that the general prosperity of the people under the rule of Vikramāditya was that the people were virtuous, rich and prosperous, the bulk of the people was vegetarian and followed the principle of Ahimsā, the people in general had no want and criminal tendency is testified by the pilgrim. He also narrated the revival of Brahmanism in the Gupta Period. "The Brahmin is the highest caste among Five Indians. There are 96 professed sects in Madhyadesa (middle Ganga's Valleyquarter), and each sect has a number of followers who adhere to the doctrine of 'this world and the after-world'. They are begging without a bowl and they are praying for blessedness. By the side of desolate roads they set up boarding house for travellers, monks and all those who are travelling along the road providing them with lodging as well as with food and drink. But what they aim at is something more than this."

In the 7th century, Xuan Zang in his *Records of the Western Countries* recorded with the utmost accuracy whatever he had heard and seen in the 138 states stretching from the region west of the then borders of the Tang Empire to the whole of South Asian, whatever he wrote about the direction distances of road, city size, population and scenic spots and historical sites of every states he had visited has been found to be basically coincident with the results of the later research on Indian history and archaeological excavation in modern time. Besides, he gave an detailed account of Hinduism, which was flourishing in the Sub-continent and Central Asia. He stated, "Varanasi is about 4000 *li* in circuit... of Deva-temples there are above 100, and there are more than 10000 professed adherents of different sects the majority being devotees of Siva, some of the have their hair cut off, others have it made into a top-knot; some go about naked and some have their skin smeared with ashes; they all perceive in austerities seeking release from mortal existence." He told us that in the country of Prayāga (modern Alahabad), where Ganges and Yamuna meet, "there are non-Buddhists." In 671 A.D. Yi-jing (I Ching) went of pilgrimage to India and different regions of Southeast Asia. He also said something about Buddhism and Hinduism in his records

such as *Nan Hai Ji Guei Nei Fa Zhuan* (A Record of the Buddhism religion as practiced in India and Malay, *Tang Xi Yue Qie Fa Gao Sheng Zhuan* (A collection of the Biography of the Chinese and Korean Priest who went to Central Asia and India in search of Buddhist Dharma. A historian of Song Dynasty Zhao Rushi recorded something about the practice of Hinduism in his *Zhu Fa Zhi* (History of the Vassal States of China) (published 1225).

In Chinese History books, there are abundant sources of South Asia and Southeast Asia, such as *Jing Shu*, *Nan Qi Shu*, *Liang Shu*, *Shui Shu*, *Xin Tang Shu*, *Tong Dian* and *Wen Xian Tong Kao*. In A.D. 428 Chandragupta had sent a diplomat Nīthada to China. Presenting his credential, the diplomat described the richness and high morality of his people in Kapilavastu (see *Soon Shu*, Vol. 97). In A.D. 502, Kumārgupta had sent his follower Ruda to visit the capital of Liang Dynasty - Nanking (see *Liang Shu*, Vol. 54).

Brahmanism-Hinduism spread into China about the same as Buddhism. There are records in the Buddhist, and Hindu scriptures, either systematic or piecemeal, which were translated into Chinese in different periods. China has preserved abundant historical record and relics of Hinduism as well as those of Buddhism. But so far, these records and relics have not yet been sorted out systematically. They may be classified approximately into five categories : (1) the numerous Sanskrit. Hindu scriptures prevalent in China, such as "**Bhagavadgītā**", Purāṇa, the epics "**Rāmāyaṇa**" and "**Mahābhārata**", the Sanskrit scriptures, which were dated back to the 11th century; (2) the scriptures and doctrines of Hinduism that were translated into Chinese or recorded by the Chinese monks and the writings on the influence of Hinduism on China in thought, culture, science arts, etc.; (3) the historical records on the struggle and interflow of thought between Hinduism and Buddhism, (4) the historical records and relics that reflect the activities of Hindus, such as their building of temples on the Chinese border land and coast land; (5) the abundant records on the spread of Hinduism in the Central Asia and Southeast Asia, which are important reference material in studying the spread of Hinduism.

In different periods, China produced different versions of the basic scriptures of Hinduism. As seen in Chinese historical records, the "Vedas" are translated freely as *Ming-Lun* (the science of knowledge), or *Zhi-lun* (the science of intelligence), or translated as *Feituo*, *Pituo*, *Weituo*, *Pituo*, *Fetuo*, etc. The Chinese equivalent for the Saṃhitā also varies in different texts, and in different periods.

Xuan Zuang, in his record of the Western countries made the following comment: "The Brahmins study the four Vedas. The first is called *shou* (longevity, the Ayurveda), that imparts the knowledge of nourishing life and keeping the constitution in order, the

second is called *Ci* (worship, the Yajurveda) that imparts the knowledge of making offerings and supplication; the third is called *ping* (making even, the Sāmaveda) that imparts the knowledge of ceremonial etiquettes, divination, and military tactics; the fourth is called *shu* (art, the Atharvaveda). There are Chinese historical sources on Vedāṅgas (or the limbs of the Veda), the title of which is (*Ming Lun Zhi Jie Lu*). It consists of six treaties, which are regarded as auxiliary to, and in some sense even as part of, the Veda. The Vedāṅgas deal specifically with religious ceremonies, phonology, metric and grammar, etymology, astronomy, etc. The thought of the Vedas and Upanishad was recorded in the Han versions of a large number of scriptures, in different periods, there are various records written by our monks on the thought and practices of Brahmanism-Hinduism, either systematic or piecemeal, especially on such orthodox Indian philosophy as Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Pūrva-mimāṃsā, Vedānta, Vaiśeṣika and Nyāya; all those are important documents for the study of the development of Indian philosophy. Today China preserved some of the scriptures whose Sanskrit original are either lost or not to be found in India, such as *Jin Qi Shi Lun* (Daśapadārthaśāstra translated by Paramārtha), *Sheng Zong Shi Ju Lun* (Moticandra's Suvarṇa-Saptati-Śāstra translated by Xuan Zang). As identified by scholars from both home and abroad, *Jin Qi Shi Lun* is the earlier form of **Sāṅkhya-Kārikā** of India. *Sheng Zong Shi Ju Lam* enumerates ten categories of world-outlooks instead of the six forward by Praśastapāda's Padārthadharmasaṅgraha, which is preserved in India. For the study of Indian scriptures, Chinese monks compiled in different periods a number of dictionaries and lexicons. Among the many Chinese versions of the Indian epic Rāmāyaṇa, there is a Tibetan version; and there are the Han version of Daśaratha Jātaka (Nidāna of king Ten-Luxuries, translated in 427 A.D.) and that of Jātaka of an unnamed king (translated in 251 A.D.), which are all earliest Han version of "**Rāmāyaṇa**".

In the early days when Brahmanism-Hinduism was predominant in India, all knowledge of science and culture was monopolized by the Brahmin. In the course of performing rituals and interpreting the Vedas, the Brahmin developed many auxiliary disciplines, such as astronomy, philosophy, linguistics, logic, medical therapy, crafts, etc. The above-mentioned different branches of practical knowledge were introduced into China at the same time with Buddhism and Brahmanism-Hinduism and they had certain influence on China. For instance, in 718 A.D. Gautamasita of India translated the Indian Calendar into Chinese and compiled Kai Yuan Zhan Jin using his Calendar as reference, our Buddhist master Yi-Xing produced Da-yuan Calendar. In Sui and Tang Dynasties a large number of Indian works were translated into Chinese such as

different varieties of Śūlvasūtra, Śūlvaśāstra" and the description of Brahmin ṛṣi-s. Unfortunately, some translation works on astronomy and medical, science were lost. The interflow of folk medicine and medical therapy between the Tibetan and the Indian peoples is even more active. China has been influenced by India in language, literature, painting and sculpture. In Chinese phonology we learnt from the Indians the method of indicating the pronunciation of a Chinese character by using two other Chinese characters (the first having the same consonant as the given character and the record having the same vowel and tone). In the end of Tang Dynasty (c. 9th century) the Chinese Buddhist monk Shouwen, developed, on the basis of Sanskrit, the Chinese alphabet of thirty-six letters. The Tibetan alphabet is related in certain degree to the Indian Gutpa alphabet prevalent in northwest India in the 7th century. The Tibetans translated into Chinese two of the important Indian classics; the Indian grammar Pāṇini Sūtra (Vyākaraṇam) and the epic **Rāmāyaṇa**, *Shi Shou Wng Yuan* (The Nidāna of King of "Ten Luxuries"), the First volume of the Chinese version *Zai Bao Zhang Jing* (*Tso Pao Tsang King*), translated into Chinese by Kekaya and *Qu Yao* in 472 A.D. and *Wei Ming Weng Jing* (The Sūtra of the unnamed King), the 46th fascicle of *Liu Du Ji Jing* (Six-Pāramitā-Collection Sūtra). Translated by Kang Shenghui in 251 A.D., these two are the earliest versions of the legend of **Rāmāyaṇa**. Before the Liberation of China, a number of different Chinese versions of **Rāmāyaṇa** and **Mahābhārata**" had appeared, and recently we are translating these two epics directly from Sanskrit. The story of Rāmāyaṇa is popular among our people. In fact, Sun Wukong in our famous legendary novel *Xi You Ji* (Travels in the Western Region) is moulded on the model of the monkey spirit Hanūmān of Rāmāyaṇa.

The above essay is sketchy and it may be concluded with the comment of Lu-Xun, the great literature of modern China. He said "India has had contracts with us from ancient time and showered us with very auspicious gifts - thought, belief, morality, art, literature, and what not, and even brothers and kinsfolks do not surpass her magnanimity." "If there should be anything that would endanger the two countries, I should worry about it. If the two countries should fall, I would cry for them. If there is no disaster, I would pray to God, so that they could remain perpetual along with my China."

