



Buddhism: An Ancient Point In The China - India Synergy

Raushan Kumar^{1*}, Nasan Bayar¹ Ravindra Kumar²

¹Deptment of Ethnology & Sociology, Inner Mongolia University

²Department of Buddhist Studies, Nav Nalanda Mahavihar, India

*Correspondence: kraushan@gmail.com

For both China and India, Buddhism is a useful enhancer of cultural soft power. The religion has, over the past decade, increased in importance for India as New Delhi tries to reenergize the religious tradition and integrate it into the country's cultural strength; for China, meanwhile, Buddhism is an important means of soothing domestic discontent and staving off risks to its territorial integrity. This article finds how Buddhism has strengthen the bilateral ties between two countries. Buddhism, which China has begun describing as an "ancient Chinese religion", and India which has started to incorporate genuine spiritual elements, now operates as a tool of synergise cooperation amongst two nations. Also, as both seek influence among Buddhist countries and international Buddhist organisations, this article finds that whether use of Buddhism by different means is straightforwardly tactical and influential enough or not.

Keywords: Chinese Buddhism, Indian Buddhism, Sino-Indian Cooperation, Buddhist Legacy, Buddhism

Introduction

The Buddha (Sakyamuni) is known as the founder of Buddhism^[1]. He was born as a royal prince in 624 B.C. in a place called Lumbani, which was originally in northern India but now part of Nepal. 'Sakya' is the name of royal family into which he was born and 'muni' means 'able one'^[2]. His parents gave him the same Siddhartha and there were many wonderful predictions about his future^[3]. In his early years he lived as a prince in his royal palace but when he was 29 years old, he retired to the forest where he followed a spiritual life of meditation. After six years he got enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya.^[4]

In all Buddha gave 8400 teachings. His intention in founding Buddhism was to lead living beings to permanent liberation from suffering^[5]. He realized temporary liberation from suffering and difficulties is not enough. Motivated by love and compassion his aim was to help living beings find lasting peace and Nirvana^[6].

Buddhism is the most important religion in China. It was generally believed that it was spread to china in 67 A.D. during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 B.C.) from Hotan in Xinjiang to central China during its development in China^[7]. Buddhism was indeed important in both the Indian subcontinent and China for approximately one millennium, and there was some interaction as Indian translators went to China and Chinese pilgrims travelled to India^[8] ^[9]. It is profound influence on traditional Chinese culture and thoughts and has become one of the most important Religion in China at that time. The first Buddhist temple in China was

established in 68 A.D, under the patronage of Emperor Ming in the eastern Han Dynasty capital city of Henan province Luoyang, was called as White Horse Temple (Baimasi)^[5].

China - India relations also called Sino- Indian relations or Indo- China relations, refers to the bilateral relationship between the People's Republic of China and Republic of India. Given this shared Buddhist setting, great stories have been generated by both countries of intimate Sino-Indian relations in the past, which are mooted as an example for present and future interstate relations. Such a portrayal of Buddhism's role as a bridge between India and China was first generated in the early twentieth century in the "discursive reconstruction of Asia"^[10] found in Pan-Asianism circles^[11].

Within these pan-Asian circles, a Buddhist-centred history as a model for China-India relations in the modern era was exemplified by^[12], Liang Chi Chao^[13], and Tan Yunshan^[14], the last having founded the Sino-Indian Friendship Society in 1933. Tan Yunshan's teacher, Taixu, led a high-profile Buddhist goodwill mission from China to India in 1940 in an attempt to shape further China-India civilizational unity, although he was hampered by the "dearth"^[15] of Indian Buddhist monks and monuments in India.

DEVELOPMENTS IN SINO-INDIAN TIES

Many a speech by politicians and diplomats from China and India has stressed the historical cultural linkages between the two countries, through their having been neighbouring Buddhist countries for many centuries in the past. Such a view



of history was evident when Wang Xuefeng, the Chinese consul at Kolkata, suggested to an Indian audience that “Buddhist culture has always had very special importance in the cultural exchange of the two countries. Historically, Buddhist culture has marked a magnificent chapter in the friendly exchange of China and India”^[16].

This reconstructed history is used as a model for the current relationship by Chinese officials. In such an irenic vein, the director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) in 2007, Ye Xiaowen, argued that “Buddhism played an important role in the process of the communication between the two countries” and that “such a role is continuing to function, and will function well in the future”^[17]. India’s previous minister of external affairs, Somanahalli Krishna, also stressed this bridge, saying, “Buddhism is a strong cultural bond between us”^[18]. He felt that the crisscross of travellers and Buddhist pilgrims were “powerful symbols of connectivity between our societies a powerful symbol of our shared history” and an illustration of “the power of culture to bring about perceptual changes”^[19].

The most famous of the Chinese pilgrims travelling to India was Xuan Zang, who stayed in India for 14 years in approximately the 630s, and who diplomats such as Le Yucheng consider “a household name in China and India”^[20]. The Chinese ambassador to India, Sun Yuxi, told a hard-nosed audience at the National Defence College of India that the “journey of Xuan Zang to India paves the way for the communications of soul and exchanges of emotion between the two great civilizations”^[21].

Consequently, in 2005, the Chinese and Indian governments pledged to work together on constructing a Xuanzang Memorial Hall at Nalanda. Chinese funding for the project was forthcoming. Chinese foreign minister Li Zhaoxing attended the opening of the memorial hall in February 2007, as did the Indian minister for tourism, Ambika Soni. Li’s audience included Ye Xiaowen and more than 100 Chinese Buddhist monks vetted by the Chinese government.

Further use of Xuan Zang as a bridge in China–India diplomacy has come with Narendra’s Modi’s advent to power, and his interaction with the Chinese leadership headed by Xi Jinping. This use of Xuan Zang was noticeable in Xi’s trip to India in September 2014, where he was taken to Modi’s home state of Gujarat. Modi’s stated reasons for taking Xi to Gujarat were partly political, partly economic, but also partly related to Buddhism:

“The monk Xuan Zang, who came to India from China in 600 AD, went to Gujarat and stayed in the village where I come from. Through the medium of Buddhism, India and China – especially China and Gujarat – have developed very close relations. From this perspective also, his coming to Gujarat reminds us of a relationship that is of special historic and cultural significance”^[22].

It was no surprise that the subsequent Joint Communiqué (India–China 2014) included promises that China would help India to promote its tourism products and the routes related to the travels of Xuan Zang to India. Xi reciprocated during Modi’s trip to China in May 2015, when he took Modi to the White Goose Temple in Xi’an, which commemorates Xuan’s return from India. Xuan Zang went on to take charge of the White Horse Temple in Luoyang, where he remained until his death, a temple which has been the venue for further Buddhist-related cooperation between China and India.

The White Horse Temple in the Eastern Han capital of Luoyang is traditionally, though probably erroneously, held to be the first Buddhist temple in China, established in 68 CE with the arrival of two Indian monks, Kasyapa Matanga and Dharmaratna. Dhar-maraksha, the Kushan translator, resided at the White Horse Temple from 289 to 290. In the fifth century, Bodhidharma, the famous founder of the Ch’an (Zen) school of Buddhism supposedly arrived at the temple from India. As noted already, on his return from India Xuan Zang remained as abbot at the White Horse Temple until his death. Five years later, the edifice was finished, complete with Sanchi Stupa and Sarnath Buddha replica statuary provided by India. The Indian president, Pratibha Patil, was the official guest of honour at its inauguration ceremony. Patil, of course, was diplomatic in the extreme.

INDIA’S BUDDHIST LEGACY

A bilateral project concerning the White Horse Temple was agreed upon at the highest level during Wen Jiabao’s visit to India in 2005. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) set out that the Indian government would assist with the funding in addition to providing the architectural design and construction material^[23]. In the Indian Parliament, government officials explained the project in glowing terms, whereby it is expected that the Temple, once completed, will become an enduring symbol of the centuries-old cultural exchanges between India and China, of which Buddhism is an important and integral part^[24]. Like China, India has deep historical connections to Buddhism, which modern policymakers can draw on in efforts to enhance the country’s soft power. Buddhism has provided a quiet but resilient foundation to India’s centuries-old cultural links to countries in South, Southeast, and East Asia.

India is the birthplace of Buddhism, and the religion is part of India’s spiritual heritage. When India was at the height of its power, Indian priests and scholars travelled abroad and spread Buddhism widely: across Tibet and China and then on to Japan, and throughout Southeast Asia via Sri Lanka. Tibetan Buddhism in particular spread northward to Tibet and China, while the Theravada school of Buddhism was promoted in South Asia and throughout Southeast Asia. Buddhism’s influence remains present in Indian art, culture, and architecture. The three lions of the Ashoka pillar, which independent India adopted as its national emblem, are a symbol of the impact of Buddhist thought on the country and

its people. As of 2015, there are over 10 million practicing Buddhists in India.

SINO-INDIAN CULTURAL COOPERATION

The symbolic importance of the temple for the ancient cultural relations between China and India was demonstrated when the Prime Minister of India P.V. Narasimha Rao visited the temple in 1993. In 2003, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee also visited the temple. By looking at Buddhism in the context of current Sino-Indian relations as an example of “faith diplomacy”^[25], this article furthers the wider move in research to “bring religion back into the study and praxis of international affairs”^[26] also^[27]. To enhance the Buddhist cultural links between India and China, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed on 11 April 2005. It stipulated that India would build an Indian-style Buddhist temple to the west side of the White Horse Temple, in the International Garden of the complex. Under this agreement, India was to provide the architectural design, material for construction, the Buddha statue, landscaping and technical advice from architects and experts during construction. Chinese authorities were to allot a piece of land of 2,666.67 square metres (28,703.8 sq ft). Following the MOU, a Buddhist shrine that is a close replica of the Sanchi Stupa was completed in 2008. Its presence in the precincts of China's first temple was inspired by Buddhist saints from India. The architectural features of the new temple closely recreate those of Sanchi's Stupa, including Sanchi's east gate. An image of the Buddha was transported from India and consecrated in the new temple, in conformity with the Indian Buddhist tradition. It is worth noticing that this temple was built on land donated by the Chinese government^[28]. The shrine is a two-storied structure with circular walls on both floors. Its circular walls are embellished with murals of scenes from the Jataka tales and the life of Buddha. The temple was executed in close co-ordination with the Indian design experts selected for the project, and Architects Akshaya Jain & Kshitij Jain made several visits to the site in relation with their work as consultants. The Buddha statue was designed following the pattern of the 5th-century image of the Buddha kept at Sarnath, and it has been consecrated in the temple's central congressional hall. The President of India, Pratibha Patil, inaugurated this temple on May 27, 2010. The new temple incorporates features from the most revered Indian Buddhist shrines of Sanchi and Sarnath.

Her remarks there began with the site's supposed past “symbolizing an intermingling of Indian and Chinese cultures,” in which as the resting place of two great cultural ambassadors from India, the monk-scholars Kasyapa Matanga and Dharmaratna, it is a re-minder of how our civilizations enriched each other. She finished with the present and future, whereby in realizing this monument of India-China friendship, I hope that this shrine will further enhance people-to-people contact between India and China by

encouraging greater exchange in the current age and in times to come^[29].

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

China's and India's use of Buddhism evinces some elements of bilateral cooperation between the two states. This article finds that India, despite its position of disadvantage in having a Buddhist community comprising less than 1 percent of its population, has been able to deploy Buddhism with regard to third countries more successfully than has China. Part of the reason for this lesser degree of Chinese success in its soft-power use of Buddhism has been China's hard-power.

Peter Martin^[30] argues that the tactical rather than normative use of Buddhism by China means that Buddhism's role as a genuine bridge between China and India leaves something to be desired. However, China's invocation of Buddhism may indeed be a pragmatic way for an authoritarian, non-Buddhist leadership to shape its image now, but what of the future? Here, the tactical use of Buddhism in China's public diplomacy feeds into a wider, related debate on China's “international socialisation.”

State socialisation theory concerns “the process by which states internalize norms originating elsewhere in the international system”^[31], an argument heavily influenced by constructivist arguments from Nicholas Onuf and Alexander Wendt. Such a process may beckon for China. Superficial adoption of particular norms by governments for short-term tactical reasons, if maintained through “logic of habit”^[32], may lead to norms being internalised at a deeper, more genuine level. Nevertheless, the article does accept that traditional hard-power territorial and military issues the stamping ground of IR realism imperatives together with economic issues such as trade and energy security are more immediate primary determinant forces in China-India relations. The exception to this secondary role played by Buddhism in China-India relations is the issue of Tibet, but it can also be resolved by joint Buddhist preservation and promotional activities, which resultantly would improve China-India relations. Buddhism is an intrinsic part of India's spiritual heritage. India's outreach to countries in Southeast Asia will be reinforced by Buddhism. Meanwhile, the presence of the heads of the various Tibetan Buddhist sects in India will enrich Buddhism and strengthen India's bonds with Buddhists around the world. The demographic changes taking place in China similarly make Buddhism increasingly relevant. China's leadership considers the return of its Tibetan Buddhist religious figures important for the country's stability. Beijing can be expected to continue to try and enhance its soft power by claiming a strong Buddhist heritage and strengthening its outreach to Buddhist populations within and outside its borders.

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