

BUDDHISM LINKS MORE THAN EAST ASIA

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The Terms Culture and Civilization

The English terms culture and civilization go via French back to Latin terms. Just as the great Chinese philosophers (Kongzi 孔子, Zhuangzi 庄子) are the beginning of Chinese thought and civilization today, so Greek and Latin thought and civilization are at the beginning of European civilization today. The word culture comes from *cultura*, and from the verb *colere*, meaning “to cultivate”(e. g. agriculture), “to foster.” Many people now limit the meaning to material culture. Civilization comes from *civilitas* “courteousness, civility, restraint.” It is the nature of a citizen. The two mentioned terms are quite different from the Chinese *wenhua* 文化, *bunka*, culture, and from *wenming* 文明, *bunmei*, civilization. The term *wenming* already occurs in the *Yijing* 易经, *Book of Changes*. There we read: “*jian long zai tian, tianxia wen ming* 见龙在天, 天下文明 Seeing a dragon in the field, the land under heaven has literacy and brightness.” The famous Sui-Tang 隋唐 Confucianist Kong Yingda 孔颖达 (574–648) explains *tianxia wen ming*: “*Yangqi zai tian, shi sheng wanwu, gu tianxia you wenzhang er guangming ye* 阳气在天, 始生万物, 故天下有文章而光明也 Because when the force of yang is in the fields, beginning to make all things grow, in the land under heaven there is literature and brightness.” Kong Yingda is the author of the authoritative commentary on the five classics: *Wu jing zheng yi* 五经正义 *Correct Meaning of the Five Classics*. This work has been the basis for so many later commentaries. It offered the basis for the curriculum for imperial examinations. The text at once explains the term *wenhua*, namely the becoming literate. Literacy is the basis for Chinese culture.

Chinese thought traditionally has Confucianism, Rujiao 儒教, and Daoism, Daojiao 道教. They express the two traditional aspects of Chinese culture. Confucianism shows the *yang* 阳 aspect, the active aspect, and Daoism shows

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the *yin* 阴 aspect, the passive aspect. Having these two, there is *dao* 道, the path, principle, the complementary relation of *yin* and *yang*. Nothing else is needed. Chinese traditional thought is complete with *yin* and *yang*. Of course, these aspects can be found in Korea and in Japan too. But there is an international dimension to Chinese thought missing. That is Buddhism. I can immediately say that Buddhism did not begin as a religion. I am convinced that Gautama Siddhārtha did not know that he was starting a religion. He just diagnosed his world and showed an ethical path to perfect rest, ending intentional action, *karma*, in this life. He explained the *buddhadharma*, *dharma* meaning law, doctrine. The word religion is said to come from Latin *religare*, “to bind.” Religion is a bond between humans and gods. It relates humanity to the supernatural. Based on this insight, Buddhism becomes a religion when the belief in celestial bodhisattvas begins. The Chinese *zong* 宗 in *zongjiao*, *shūkyō* 宗教 originally was an ancestral temple (roof plus omen). Then come the meanings “ancestor, clan, cult, to honour or worship.” The Chinese term for religion links humans with their ancestors. This is quite different from philosophy, which basically means being a friend, φίλος, of wisdom, σοφία. Philosophy is rendered in India as *darśana*, view, quite different from *dharma*, which renders “religion” in Hindi today. Buddhism is seen as an important world religion, linking more than East Asia. Chinese Buddhism is the Chinese adaptation of Indian Buddhism to the Chinese cultural environment. It went East to Japan, where, again, it adapted to the Japanese cultural environment. More recently, Buddhism has taken root in the European cultural area, no doubt adapting to its new cultural environment.

The International Dimension of East Asian Culture

There is no doubt that Buddhism went from China to Korea, and on to Japan, via Korea or directly to Japan. It also links East Asia to South-east Asia. and to South Asia. I was very much aware of that when I was in Canada in 2004 as the Numata Chairholder in Calgary. I wrote a brochure called *The Sūtra ‘School’ in Nara Japan*. In Nara 奈良 Japan there was a Buddhist school which we would now call Sautrāntika, i. e. non-Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivāda. In China Sarvāstivāda doctrine, *shuoyiqieyou bu* 说一切有部, was almost exclusively Sautrāntika, *Jingliang bu* 经量部. During the Tang 唐 (618–907) China was never closer to Japan. One may study the period of Nara Japan, ca. 710, as a source for Chinese culture.

Indian Buddhist literature reached China, Luoyang 洛阳, Chang’an 长安, Jiankang 建康, and many more places. Together with the philosophical and religious texts and culture also came such sciences as medical science, architecture, etc. . The Indian contribution to Chinese culture is more important than just Buddhism. Buddhism became thoroughly Chinese. We have

Chinese Buddhist texts which were written or composed in China, not brought from India. Sometimes an Indian brahmin composed a Sanskrit text in China. Guṇabhadra's *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, *Lengqie jing*, *Ryōga-kyō* 楞伽经, is a good example. Chinese catalogues of the Tripiṭaka say that the brahmin Guṇabhadra is the translator, but he actually composed a Sanskrit text for Baoyun 宝云 to translate. Guṇabhadra did not know Chinese. So, he proposed a method of teaching without words. This text was given by Bodhidharma (in China ca. 479-died ca. 534) to Huike, Eka 慧可 (487–593). Chan 禅 or Zen began this way. Chan just is a phonetic rendering of the Gāndhārī word *jhāna* or *jhāṇa*, often translated as “meditation.” This kind of meditation became very popular in China, especially during the difficult times of the Southern Song 南宋 (1127–1279) and the Yuan 元 (1279–1368). I do not have to explain the importance of Zen in Japan. Let me just add that in India a Buddhist school, *nikāya*, *bu* 部, is defined by its *Vinaya*, by the rules for monks and nuns. *Nikāya* means a separate (*ni*^o) body (*kāya*). The Chinese *bu* means a division, i. c. of the *saṅgha*, of the monastic order. In one school different doctrinal opinions were quite common. In China and in Japan a school is a doctrinal school, *zong* 宗. The rules for monks and nuns were the *Si fen lü* 四分律, the rules in four parts, the original Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*. Different doctrinal schools could add some specific rules. *Chan*, *Tiantai* 天台, etc. could add some specific rules.

Another famous Indian who is known to have offered original compositions in China is the brahmin Paramārtha (499–569), Zhendi, Shintai 真谛. He is responsible for the *Qixin lun*, *Kishin ron* 起信论, sometimes given the Sanskrit title (*Mahāyāna*) *śraddhotpāda-śāstra*. If Xuanzang 玄奘 or any other later translator did not offer a new version, the Chinese text may well be based on an oral instruction. The master gave oral instruction and Chinese monks, who constantly accompanied him, translated under his guidance. Paramārtha also brought an overview of Buddhist schools, known as *Bu zhi yi lun* 部执异论, *Treatise about the Differences held by the Schools*. Because we have a new version by Xuanzang, Paramārtha must have written a text, or he may have brought an Indian text from Funan 扶南 (mainly Cambodia) to China. The Chinese catalogues of the Tripiṭaka, beginning with Sengyou's 僧祐 catalogue of 518, the most reliable of them all, always mention the Indian who is responsible for the Chinese text, but the actual translating was mostly done by Chinese. It is quite understandable that the Indians upon their arrival in China did not know Chinese. Bilingual monks were the exception. I mention Zhu Fonian, Jiku Butsunen 竺佛念 (fourth century), and Kumārajīva, Jiumo (surname) Luoshi (given name) 鸠摩罗什, Rajū 罗什 (344–413?), and also Xuanzang, Genjō (602–664). Usually the Chinese monks were the real translators, attributing the text to the Indian master. These last few years I

interpret the Chinese phonetic rendering of a name as offering a surname and a given name.

The texts which were most popular in China were those which were best adapted to Chinese culture. The Chinese were not waiting to be civilized, but, just as any civilized people, they were open to and not afraid of any contribution from abroad. The most successful texts were the *Lotus Sūtra*, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, *Miaofa lianhua jing*, *Myōhō renga-kyō* 妙法莲花经, and also the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, *Wei Mojie jing*, *Yuima-kyō* 维摩诘经. Kumārajīva was seen as the most popular translator. Also the *Heart Sūtra*, *Xin jing*, *Hannya shin-gyō* 般若心经, must be mentioned. We now know that this brief text most likely was a Chinese composition, given by a sick person in Sichuan to Xuanzang before his departure for India. I always offer both the Chinese and the Japanese to show the common culture. Sometimes the transmission went from Japan to China. I especially think of the re-introduction of esoteric Buddhism, *Mizong* 密宗, to China. Japanese *Shingon* 真言, meaning *mantra*, “true words”, was re-introduced to China. That is why even in China one speaks about *Zhenyan* 真言 today.

The case of Pure Land Buddhism

The most popular form of Buddhism in East Asia today is so-called Pure Land Buddhism, the cult of Amitābha. In China the Pure Land is known as *Jingtu* 净土, and in Japan as *Jōdo*. In India a Buddhist paradise is known, called *Sukhāvātī*, Happy Land. A Chinese rendering of this Indian term could be *Jile*, *Gokuraku* 极乐, Extremely Happy. *Jile* actually means *Abhi* (or *ati*^o) *rati*, Akṣobhya’s Mahāsāṅghika paradise, which, already before Christ, was associated with Amitābha’s Western Paradise, *Jingtu*. But there is no Indian school with the name *Jingtu*. It is immediately clear for any scholar that *sukha*, happy, does not mean *jing*, pure. The Chinese *jing* is an ancient translation for Sanskrit *śubha*, pleasant. Chinese knows three periods of translations from Indian literature: 1. Ancient translations, *gu yi* 古译, based on Prakrit, Middle Indian languages, mainly Gāndhārī, the language of the Gandhāran cultural area, known in China as *Jibin* 闐宾. *Jibin*, by the way, is not just Kaśmīra, but mainly Gandhāra (Pakistan) and Bactria (northern Afghanistan). Kaśmīra is part of *Jibin* from the time of king Kaṣka (155–179) on. This first period has translators such as the Parthian An Shigao 安世高 (Ashkani), active in Luoyang ca. 148–170. At the end of this period one notices such famous Indians as Saṅghadeva, Sengqie Tipo 僧伽提婆. He arrived in Chang’an ca. 383, was with Huiyuan 慧远 on Mount Lu 庐山 in 391, and died in Jiankang (Nanjing) ca. 400. 2. Old translations, *jiu yi* 旧译, based on Sanskrit. This period begins with Kumārajīva, who arrived in Chang’an on the eighth of February, 402. At the end of this period one

notices Paramārtha, Zhendi, Shintai 真谛 (499–569). 3. New translations, *xin yi* 新译, based on Sanskrit. This is the time when Xuanzang (602–664) was active in Chang’an, after his return from India in 645. It must be mentioned that the terminology of Kumārajīva remained more popular. E. g. Avalokiteśvara is better known as Guanshi Yin 观世音, or as Guanyin 观音 (Zhu Daosheng’s, 355–434, 竺道生, term, a disciple of Kumārajīva), than as Guan Zizai 观自在, Xuanzang’s term. Guanyin looks very much like a monastic name. At the end of the third period we see the translations of the Translation Bureau, *Yijing Yuan* 译经院, of the Song 宋 in Bianliang 卞梁 (Kaifeng 开封), ca. 1000.

The term *jing* actually translates *śubha* in ancient translations. Already during that first period some texts of this kind of Buddhism were brought out. *Jingtu*, known in Sanskrit as *Sukhāvatī*, actually means *Śubhāvatī*. At the time this term was pronounced in Gāndhārī, and written in Kharoṣṭhī script. Kumārajīva, translator of the *Smaller Sukhāvatīvyūha*, *Amituo* (A-Mituo?) *jing*, did not change the Chinese terms. Ever since, we have been using *Jingtu*, of which Pure Land is a fine English translation. The name of Amitābha offers a fine example of acculturation in China. Amituo, or A-Mituo, is just a phonetic rendering of the Sanskrit name. We see this term in northern China, in Chang’an. In the south the influence of Daoism was quite strong during the period of division (420–589), known as Nan-Bei Chao 南北朝. The Daoist paradise of immortals was seen as a prototype of the Buddhist paradise, *Jingtu*. As long life, immortality, was a prominent goal of Daoists, the name of Amitābha, Immeasurable Light, developed to Immeasurable Life, *Wuliangshou* (or *Wuliang Shou*?). The *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha*, as translated by Baoyun in the south in 421, has the Chinese title *Wuliangshou* (*Wuliang Shou*?) *jing*. By the way, Daoism and the prominence of the female may also explain why Avalokiteśvara became female from the fifth century on in southern China. In the seventh century he is completely female. Images of Avalokiteśvara show his evolution to a fully female bodhisattva. It must also be pointed out that the name Guanyin did not leave out the *shi* 世 because of a taboo, *shi* being in the name of the Tang emperor Li Shimin 李世民, Taizong 太宗 (599–649). The term Guanyin precedes the Tang emperor by quite a long time. When Kumārajīva changed the Chinese terminology, because the Indian original language had changed to Sanskrit, he could not afford to change too much. He kept some previous “mistakes” in order not to alienate Buddhist believers at the time.

Some Final Remarks

Buddhism, as a world religion today, links East Asia close together. I can clearly remember my first visit to China in 1980, when I visited the Chinese

Buddhist Association, *Zhongguo Fojiao Xiehui* 中国佛教协会, in the Fayuan Si 法原寺 in Beijing. The much regretted Li Rongxi 李荣熙 was a vice-president at the time. When I visited the library, I could see that about half of the amount of literature had to do with Japanese Buddhism. I had just spent time in Tōkyō under the guidance of Nakamura Hajime 中村元. I was fortunate enough to have him as my guide during his final year in the University of Tōkyō, *Tōkyō Daigaku* 东京大学. He was preparing his dictionary *Bukkyōgo Daijiten* 佛教语大辞典 and establishing his Eastern Institute, *Tōhō Gakuen* 东方学院. I really wanted to see if Nakamura's work was in the library in Beijing. Yes, it was. I was very aware of the importance of language knowledge. The main Buddhist language ever since 400 is Sanskrit. These days, however, Pali, the language of the new Vibhajyavāda “orthodoxy” in Śrī Lankā and in Southeast Asia, is very influential, also in India. The language of most believers in the world today is Chinese. For scientific purposes Japanese and English are the leading languages.

As a world religion Buddhism links more than East Asia. It is well studied in Europe and in the USA, the so-called West. I hesitate to use this term. Going west from California one arrives in Japan. India historically is the west for Chinese. Central Asia is known as the Western Regions, *Xiyu* 西域. Bactria, the westernmost part of the Indian cultural area, is a part of *Xiyu*. It is safer to define East and West as cultural areas. One could define West as the European cultural area. New Zealand is a part of that cultural area. In Asia-another term of Greek origin-there is a Chinese cultural area. There is a fine Confucianist habit to correctly define terms, *zheng ming* 正名, before actually beginning a discussion. It is actually just common sense to do that. Emotions are not a solid foundation for a harmonious discussion. Seeing how the terminology of Indian Buddhism was explained and interpreted in China teaches us a great deal about Buddhism. Let us try to correctly understand terminology, not only Buddhist terminology.

As a conclusion I can safely say that Buddhism and its culture are a very strong link in East Asia, not only among the different areas in East Asia, but also between East Asia and the rest of the world. Today we are in a time of globalization. We study global history and developments. In order to do that one may focus on common cultural phenomena. I am convinced that peaceful development is possible. *Nirvāṇa*, *niepan* 涅槃, was meaningfully interpreted as perfect rest, *yuanji* 圓寂 in China. This goal is not limited to any culture in the world.