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The Spread of Buddhism during Ancient China

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Senior Thesis

Professor Millar

December 7, 2014

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Stories contain the power to be able to pull people in and engulf them with the teachings and enjoyment they possess. Storytelling is used in many different manners and one of those is through Religion. It is through the telling of stories, and eventually the writing of them, that major religious beliefs have successfully spread to other parts of the world instead of staying in one place. Buddhism is one of the religions that is well-known and practiced by many because of the spread of its stories to other parts of the world; especially Asia. During ancient China, Buddhism flourished among the Chinese people because it was not suited just for the elites. Lay people were able to enjoy and relate to Buddhist doctrines as well. Through different tales and explanations, Buddhism was able to flourish among not just one class, but all classes because it related to many aspects of life. Stories played a key part.

The story of Siddhartha Gautama (500 B.C.E), or also known as Shakyamuni,¹ is an important narrative to Buddhism because of his journey of becoming the Buddha and reaching full enlightenment. Siddhartha had been born into a family of wealth and power. After his birth it was said that he had two different paths of outcome for his future once he became older. The first was either to become a great ruler after his father or to become an enlightened being who gives up the great power and wealth that could be his to become a wonderer. By knowing the background that Siddhartha came from and how one of the two paths would be the outcome of his future, allowed people from different classes opportunities to be able to relate to the journey he went through before becoming enlightened.

With the news of the two different paths that Siddhartha had, his father wanted to make sure his son was to never leave the palace. That way Siddhartha would grow up to become a great leader along with great wealth rather than a wondering ascetic. This part of the story plays

¹ Patricia Ebrey, *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2009), 55.

a huge role because it shows people that even if someone goes out of their way to protect someone or prevent them from seeing the ugly sides of human nature, that person cannot always be protected. After a certain point, even the grandest things in life can become boring and curiosity can become too strong, like it had for Siddhartha. Being sheltered at the temple caused him to become more curious of what was outside the palace. Which made him find ways to get around his father's orders to be able to explore outside the castle walls.

By doing so Siddhartha encountered the three main sufferings that humans generally end up seeing sometime during their lives. Those three sufferings Siddhartha saw were age, sickness, and suffering in general. What he had witnessed made him realize that he no longer wanted to live the life of a wealthy, powerful person. Witnessing the sights he saw caused immense sadness on him after seeing the suffering that people will inevitably experience at one point or another during their lifetime. The telling of Siddhartha's explorations outside of the castle are key points because it allows people to be able to relate to him and understand that feeling of curiosity he felt. Wondering what is beyond someone's walls or border is not a bad thing. It can open the eyes to new experiences that could have been lost if the desire to explore new paths has not fulfilled.

After deciding the rich lifestyle that Siddhartha was born into did not satisfy him, he chose the path of becoming an ascetic. He decided to leave home to discover his true self and become more enlightened in the nature of life. After quite a bit of time and many journeys, Siddhartha had become the most enlightened being from his wonderings and meditations. From those experiences he gained, Siddhartha had taken on the name Buddha. From then on his ways became a practice among his followers in which his practices became a religion that could easily suit any person that was interested. Thus was the beginning of Buddhism and its journey from

India to other areas of Asia like China for instance because of the stories that had been created about him.

It was stories like the Buddha's rebirth that emphasized and created important key points of the life experiences the Buddha had gone through.² Those played significant roles in other countries as the birth stories reached them. Although that is only one of many genres that can be found in Buddhist narratives, it helps show how different genres are able to relate to different aspects of people in other countries other than India. It was also through those stories that Buddhism was able to travel to new areas of the world as it made its way outside of India.

Buddhism's importance in India had thrived until about 1200 C.E. After that its significance began to decline along with the number of followers that India once had in Buddhism.³ Although the popularity of Buddhism did not stick within India itself as well as one would have imagined, it began to spread to other parts of the world where it was able to expand and become a huge part of other cultures. It was mainly within the surrounding Asian countries⁴ where the spread of Buddhist tales played a large role in neighboring countries taking on Buddhist doctrines and participating in the practices that Buddhism has.

During the rule of the Han in ancient China, there was the story about Emperor Ming having a dream where he "...saw a divine personage, his body sixteen feet tall and the color of yellow gold, his head surrounded by a radiance like sunlight"⁵. After having such a dream Ming was unsure of what it meant so he had gone to his ministers to discuss it, in hopes of getting some answers. Ming learned from his ministers that the person who appeared in his dream was

² John S. Strong, *The Buddha: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 19.

³ Patricia Ebrey, *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2009), 57.

⁴ Ibid. 57.

⁵ Robert Ford Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 68.

the deity of the Buddha from the West (India). Once Ming found out where he could find this deity, he set out for India in search of whatever he could find on the Buddha to learn more about him. By the end of his journey, Ming brought back many copies of Indian sutras and images of the Buddha to China along with some monks as well. This was done so that the Buddha's teachings could be more easily spread throughout China and by bringing the depictions, he was able to display and show the people of his court what the Buddha looked like too.⁶

The story of Emperor Ming's dream of the Buddha is important because it shows how it was highly important to China for the image that Ming saw in his dream to be authentic and true to his description and of the images be brought back. "...The very structure of the story shows a concern to 'match' Chinese images and practices to Indic originals... when the Han envoys return from the West with an image of the Buddha, it resembles what the ruler had seen in his dream."⁷ Which shows an example of why the *Mingxiang ji* stories seemed to have been so "...concerned to show that the terms in which Buddhism was practiced in China were authentic..."⁸ The worry about that authenticity can also be seen surrounding other Buddhist text from the ancient period of China⁹ showing that it was a big concern for many people for there to be something to prove the authenticity of Buddhism.

Emperor Ming's vision started out as a dream, but turned into an action of going and finding the Buddha in India, which led to the discovery of Buddhism. Then by bringing back Indian sutras and images of the Buddha into China, not only helped fulfill Ming's curiosity of who was in his dream, but also a new way of thinking was introduced to his country.

⁶ Ibid. 68.

⁷ Ibid. 61.

⁸ Ibid. 61.

⁹ Ibid. 61.

After Buddhism continued its journey and growth among the people in China, there were many new aspects that were added in to the Chinese culture that also assisted in enhancing certain areas. Styles of writing and writing skills in general along with language grew within China because of the process of translating Indian sutras to Chinese. This also brought the creation of new genres of stories as well.

Through the different areas that Buddhism touched on, it was able to interact "... with all levels of Chinese culture such as literature, philosophy, mores and behavioral norms, arts, and architecture, and religions of all classes."¹⁰ With the popularity of art growing because of the importance that many people put on the image of the Buddha, a lot of portrayals of him were emerging. Then the need to have sacred buildings, like stupas, to be able to go worship and pay homage to the Buddha as part of their practice, it helped enhance their architecture and the significance of Buddhism too.

As translating sutras from Indian to Chinese progressed because of growing interest in Buddhism among people in China, so did their writing skills. It was through the translating of Indian script to Chinese that began the discovery of new vocabulary and methods writing. Being able to write more stories in new manners that had not been seen by many people in China created a rise in writing.

It was during the Sui Dynasty Buddhism began to take a better hold in China though in comparison to when it was first introduced during the Han dynasty. The Tang Dynasty was also one of the most pivotal times for Buddhism. At this time Buddhism had reached its highest point

¹⁰ Xing Guang, "Buddhist Impact on Chinese Culture." *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2013): 315. (accessed December 4, 2014). 305. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2013.831606>.

in practice and gaining of more followers among Chinese people.¹¹ A reason for the huge rise in popularity of Buddhism during the Sui and Tang dynasties was because at those times different schools of thought were becoming more active and gaining more maturity to them as they grew.¹²

As the different schools of thought got bigger and matured, it gave people in China a better grasp on what Buddhism was and what it meant to them and their country in terms of incorporating it into their culture. By incorporating Buddhism into China's culture in a better manner, it meant there was less of a chance of people feeling like Buddhism was being forced onto them. Having Buddhism be more relatable to their culture, made it easier to understand in some aspects for people compared to when it was first introduced during the rule of the Han. There was still much to learn in general about the religion during the Han and how it could be integrated into peoples' lives.

Learning more about Buddhist script was also advancing in popularity to the point that some of the well-respected Chinese monks began to translate more sutras from Sanskrit to Chinese. This meant the desire to travel to India to find more sutras grew. By traveling to India for more of the sutras, this meant China could have their own copies of them and have the opportunity to more easily spread the word of Buddhism further into China and other nearby places.¹³ This allowed people better accessibility to the doctrines in Buddhism. It also offered a simpler way of being able to learn more of the many practices and levels that are involved in it rather than having to travel to outside sources too often.

¹¹ Ling Haicheng, *Buddhism in China* (Beijing: China International Press, 2004), 15.

¹² Ibid. 15.

¹³ Patricia Ebrey, *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2009), 73.

As translating peaked more of an interest, Chinese literature and language also rose. By translating from Indian to Chinese, Chinese people gained a lot of knowledge and advancements to their own writing that they did not have before. Since translating just about anything from one language to another can be difficult, there can be different words at times that do not necessarily exist in the other language. Because of that, the meaning or sound to a written piece can be lost in translation unless there can be a new word made or found that could be an equivalent to the original piece in hopes of the true meaning not getting lost.

The many journeys that monks had gone on to go to India were for the purpose of discovering more about Buddhism. From these pilgrimages, more stories and tales had been written. It is from those new stories that had been created and spread among Chinese people that helped keep their interest as they heard about the new adventures. Hearing stories of traveling to new lands and how Buddhism became the way it did in China can strike an interest in people that may not have been there before hearing the tales that were told. Through the stories they were able to gain more knowledge of Buddhism and make it more their own by learning about its origin. This helped in creating a style of Buddhism that could better fit their needs compared to taking on Buddhism exactly how it was done in India.

There have been many other positive impacts that Buddhism had brought into China other than China's growth in writing and their language. An area that was drastically changed after the introduction of Buddhism was the option for an alternative life for women. Rather than one of marriage if they did not wish to marry or be remarried was the choice of joining a monastery and become a nun if they would have liked. Because before Buddhism was brought in, females mostly just had the option of either marriage or staying at home to take care of their family.

China's visual arts and architecture also rose. As more artwork was created to depict the Buddha in homes and temples, the need of Buddha's images rose. The building of numerous temples also grew steadily as more people began to follow Buddhism and there became more of a need for a sacred place to be able to go to for prayer and donations. They were also made as a place for the Buddha to stay and live as he passed through and visited.

Buddhism also gave people in China new reasons to travel and explore other countries as well.¹⁴ It gave them the freedom to learn more about surrounding areas while enhancing their knowledge of the world. The desire to travel had encouraged Chinese monks on their trips to seek out what they could in India to be able to learn as much as they could. This gave the monks opportunities to visit the holy places of Buddhism in India. Getting to see India's sacred places and buildings gave Buddhism an even deeper meaning to the monks as they learned and witnessed the sacred places that are in the Buddhist stories from India. By making their way to Buddhism's place of origin, Chinese monks were able to have the opportunities of gaining new knowledge from the learned teachers in India¹⁵ to take back home and share among their people.

As more and more trips were taken to India the interest of translating Sanskrit text to Chinese heightened again. Although the desire in translating Buddhist work began during the Han dynasty, the practice continued on and grew for more than 1,000 years¹⁶ after the fall of the Han. Much advancement followed because people in China were discovering more ways to enhance their writing and language skills as time went on. Having the capability of getting to build one's writing and language skills as well, was more than very likely exciting for China as their literacy continued to improve more as time went on.

¹⁴ Ibid. 70.

¹⁵ Ibid. 70.

¹⁶ Xing Guang, "Buddhist Impact on Chinese Culture." *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2013): 315. (accessed December 4, 2014). 315. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2013.831606>.

Many renowned monks have been known for doing great works in translating pieces from Sanskrit to Chinese to continue the spread of Buddhist word. It is from those works of translation that new styles of writing and speech were fully established. Having the different practices of Buddhism written in Chinese also made it more readily available for those who did not know Sanskrit as well or at all, like monks for example, and only knew Chinese. That way they would be able to practice Buddhism in the correct way.

Since the monks were translating from another language, there were many words that were used in Sanskrit that the Chinese language did not have which showed "...that the translators had become aware of the fundamental difficulty inherent in all Buddhist translation work..."¹⁷ Even though the translators did not want to lose the meaning of the text they were working on, they still wanted to create a Chinese version to better suit their audience. "... A Buddhism for the Chinese readers, adapted to the taste of the literate Chinese public..."¹⁸ that way there would have been a better chance of it being read. Having to make sure that it was written in the correct manner did not discourage Chinese translators. Rather, it did the opposite and encouraged them to find ways to have it suitable to for their readers. The translators also had to keep in mind in finding words that could be given the same meaning or at least an equivalent to any Sanskrit words that were not able to be translated in Chinese so that nothing would be lost in translation. This made huge advancements on not only the Chinese language, but in their writing as well¹⁹ especially in the way they told stories after a certain point in time.

¹⁷ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 47.

¹⁸ Ibid. 47.

¹⁹ Xing Guang, "Buddhist Impact on Chinese Culture." *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2013): 315. (accessed December 4, 2014). 315. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2013.831606>.

With the new discoveries this allowed for “...new ideas and thoughts, new concepts and theories...”²⁰ to be introduced into China that had not been seen before and assisted in widening their knowledge within the world of writing and literature. Xing Guang, a scholar in Chinese studies, did a good job in describing how it brought change and new findings to China by explaining that “in order to express these new ideas, thoughts, and concepts, the translators created a large amount of new vocabulary...”²¹ which helped widen and enrich not just their language, but their culture too. It also helped change the way Chinese people had previously been writing in terms of novels because before translating Buddhist text, they did not really know what novels were beforehand.

With the new information that Chinese monks and writers obtained through translating Sanskrit, they were able to see the distinct differences of India’s writing compared to China’s. Because of the differences Chinese people began to play around more with their own exploration of writing in new styles to see what they would be able to create. Some of the new styles of writing that was explored by Chinese writers were novels and finding ways to incorporate it into their culture since it was still a relatively new idea. By trying to write in novel form though, it gave Chinese writers new ways to express “...abstract ideas and thoughts”²² in a manner that they did not know how to do previously since the idea of novels had not existed before. Or at least in the older styles before Buddhism was brought in.

Guang also references a well-known Chinese linguist by the name of Wang Li. Li had explained that “...Buddhist terminology had contributed to Chinese vocabulary tremendously”. This meant that some of the Buddhist terms used in the Chinese language had already embedded

²⁰ Ibid. 315.

²¹ Ibid. 315.

²² Ibid. 316.

itself into it and many had never realized that those terms were originally from Buddhist literature.²³ This shows how large of an impact Buddhism had in China from the very start and how it assisted in the growth of the Chinese language and its literature. It opened doors that may not have ever had the chance to be opened or just not realized until much later in time for Chinese writers. Which in the long run could have affected their stories and tales by not learning what they had from going through the process of translating the different works that were brought in by monks and foreigners from India.

An example of how Buddhist Sanskrit literature had influenced the Chinese language was with the word ‘world’. In China, people now use 世界 (Shìjiè) for ‘world’²⁴ in which Shì means time and jiè means space while during ancient China they used to use 天下 (Tiānxià)²⁵, Tiān meaning sky and xià meaning under. Separately each word for world means something different compared to the other. It is easy to see how and why the word combinations were chosen in the manner they had been to express world though. Each grouping of words in a way fits for the ‘world’, but it makes sense as to why 世界 (Shìjiè) became the main usage for world because separately the words better explain it, it seems like.

Because of the impact that Buddhist Sanskrit literature had on China’s language, Chinese translators were able to create new words with either the same meaning or close enough that it did not matter, with the words they already had in Chinese. Combination wise because the new word had a better fit for the Sanskrit word they were trying to mimic, it helped expand and widen the usage of their own vocabulary. Which in cases like with the word ‘world’, there was a transition of the new word becoming the preferred one as time passed.

²³ Ibid. 315.

²⁴ Ibid. 315.

²⁵ Ibid. 315.

During the Tang Dynasty, they had many known great achievements made involving Buddhism with their progression of writing for this period in time. “Tang monks had made unprecedented achievements in Buddhism study and research...”²⁶ in this period as well. One great contributor who played a big role in that had been the monk known as Xuan Zhuang²⁷ along with another well-known figure who went by the name of Wan Yan. Most of Wan Yan’s independent work had been recovered and re-assembled by one his disciples known as Daoshi. Although Wan Yan’s work had been re-assembled, it still gives good insight into the Buddhist literature that had been translated and written during the time of the Tang Dynasty²⁸ which can help when comparing different dynasties and the writing styles.

It is amazing what can be learned and gained when a new language and culture interacts with another. In some cases, it does not always work out, but in terms of ancient China there were many gains and discoveries made. The new knowledge that was learned was because of the openness they had to Buddhism along with going and exploring India itself. It brought not only change to their literature and writing styles, but also China’s culture. Buddhism itself also assisted in helping integrate its ways of thought into China by not being a culturally bound religion. “... It makes use of and adapts to local culture and thought”²⁹ which allows Buddhism to be able to keep its main points and ideas, but can adapt in the way that it needs to, to gain followers. The biggest reason Buddhism and China were able to mix well with one another had

²⁶ Ling Haicheng, *Buddhism in China* (Beijing: China International Press, 2004), 16.

²⁷ Ibid. 14.

²⁸ Robert Ford Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012), 6.

²⁹ Xing Guang, “Buddhist Impact on Chinese Culture.” *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2013): 315. (accessed December 4, 2014). 306. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2013.831606>.

been because of “... the liberal attitude of mind in both China and Buddhism... because for a culture or thought to integrate in another culture, both must be liberal and receptive...”³⁰

In terms of people who created some of the different genres of Buddhist tales, it was mostly monks and lay people from what has been found throughout China by scholars. Miracle tale genres is one of the collections of stories that had been found with quite a few stories in the collections. Many of those tales consisted of a mix of Buddhist doctrines and aspects of Chinese culture, like key people, places, and other things in relation to China. By mixing Buddhist doctrines and cultural references within the stories, it can better ensure the interest of Chinese people wanting to learn more about Buddhism and mixing it into their daily lives. Especially for those that were not aiming to become monks or nuns necessarily, but still had an interest in Buddhism.

The main purpose of the miracle tale genres is to make sure that Chinese people are able to better understand how Buddhism is relatable and relevant to their lives. It is through the creation of these stories and many others that have given people ways to stay involved with Buddhism. Because if the stories did not hold peoples’ interests very well, Buddhism would not have done as well as it did. One of the stories that Campany has translated is a good example of how Buddhism was kept interesting.

The story takes place during the Han period when Buddhism had first begun. A woman had been at a well getting water when she had given a Westerner some of it to drink. After he had drank the water he suddenly disappeared and the woman got pains in her belly. Once the pains subsided and she began speaking again she was speaking in the Western language. No one

³⁰ Ibid. 306.

knew what she was saying, but after having asked for paper she wrote a lot of things out that shared characteristics to some Chinese characters but no one understood the meaning still. The only person around that was able to understand the Western language also was a young boy who could read what she wrote. Many people did not know what had taken place among the woman and the boy. When it was investigated and the script was taken to a monastery to a Westerner that dwelled there, he was amazed at what it was. It was a missing part to a Buddhist sutra that he could not remember fully, but now that he had it he would be able to memorize and copy it.³¹ With that story China gained a missing part to a sutra that may have not been completed until a lot of time had passed or a trip to India had taken place.

Even though the likelihood of the incidents being true, the message still gets across to readers. The need to travel for foreign writings can mean losing important passages that could take a long time to be discovered again or even lost. By having “spirit writing”³² taking place, it can be assured that the information would not get lost since it can take place in the area that it is needed.

Having tales like the one mentioned above shows that even though Chinese translators did a lot of great works in terms of translating sutras and other pieces, there were still times where it was difficult to have everything that was needed. By having to travel back and forth between different countries and new lands, many things can get lost between stops. The huge differences among languages also did not help. Especially if there was not always someone there who may have knowledge in both languages too. Which is one of the reasons this miracle tale and others, say that “... textual transmission was sometimes claimed to occur by means of a kind

³¹ Robert Ford Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 71-72.

³² *Ibid.* 72.

of spirit writing”³³ to help lost pieces be found again and assured that it would not be lost forever.

John S. Strong made a key point about the birth stories of the Buddha that are from India. Even though it is a different genre than the miracle tales, Strong’s point is able to suit stories in general. The birth stories from India are called *jatakas* and they serve “... to amplify and popularize the lifestory of the Buddha by associating him— in his previous lives — with many folk heroes and divinities in India and beyond”³⁴. The *jataka* tales are a specific genre found in India. Those stories show readers how having stories that are fairly easy to be modified to fit a different culture and still have it relatable, but with the same message can fit among many cultures. As Buddhism expanded it “...provided opportunities for accommodating local cultural and religious beliefs”³⁵ beyond India. Which supports Guang’s point as well of how Buddhism has not “... caused any conflict with hosting local culture, but absorbs local cultures wherever it had been transmitted”³⁶ because of the flexibility that it has.

By having stories told in a way that people are able to easily relate to or envision happening to themselves, helps the story to be remembered better. It also creates more of an impact on the person because it is not ideas or events that have occurred so out of the ordinary that no one would not be able to make some kind of sense out of it. Having a plot where the readers could imagine themselves in similar circumstances gives the opportunity to see how something new, like Buddhism, could end up in their homeland to begin with.

³³ Ibid. 72.

³⁴ John S. Strong, *The Buddha: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 20.

³⁵ Ibid. 20.

³⁶ Xing Guang, “Buddhist Impact on Chinese Culture.” *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2013): 315. (accessed December 4, 2014). 307. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2013.831606>.

Through the many tales that have been written about Buddhism, it was able to flourish and gain many new followers in China. After the fall of the Han where Buddhist faith had been imported from India during the middle of the first century A.D. Buddhism had gained a lot of new adherents while state Confucianism went into a decline”.³⁷ A big reason Confucianism began to go into a decline while Buddhism grew³⁸ was because of the many different ideas Buddhism offered Chinese people that was not found in Confucius beliefs. By giving different viewpoints on how to live and being able to have more control over one’s own life, especially in the cases of women, Buddhism attracted many Chinese people to its teachings.

Buddhist stories focused more on bettering oneself rather than a specific group or class of people. It also did not limit followers like other religions had when they were introduced into new lands. Before Buddhism had entered China, they used to use a pretty hierarchical system where social classes were very much differentiated from one another. Buddhism helped teach the equality of people though. Mahayana Buddhism was the main branch that explained the importance of equality among all sentient beings because they all had the potential to be able to attain enlightenment and become Buddhas.³⁹ This gave the lower class people of China hope of having something to aim for by becoming enlightened. That had been a big reason Buddhism was able to spread as quickly as it did among them which had not always been the case with other religions.

Christianity for example, when it had taken over pagan religions in Europe had not been the most welcome among many of the people. Christianity did not take in consideration pagan religious views and was directed more towards those that were literate/educated. This generally

³⁷ John King Fairbank, *China a New History* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 72.

³⁸ Patricia Ebrey, *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2009), 69.

³⁹ Xing Guang, “Buddhist Impact on Chinese Culture.” *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2013): 315. (accessed December 4, 2014). 312. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2013.831606>.

meant it was for the upper class, with power who would follow the new religion that had been brought in. A lot of the time the upper class would use it to their advantage against the illiterate since they did not yet understand the new religion and its teachings. In terms of Buddhism though, it did not specifically cater to the upper or lower class. Instead it challenged a person in how they viewed and understood themselves through a religious perspective and was flexible enough to fit many needs which helped in its success among other countries.

The Silk Road, where much of the trading that China participated in took place, had become one of the key factors of how Buddhism spread to China. Foreign merchants, refugees, envoys and hostages⁴⁰ that passed through the Silk Road helped spread Buddhism by word of mouth. With the interactions of different peoples, not only did the acceptance of Buddhism increase, but it was also able to gradually transform into a native religion to China "... under the leadership of foreign and indigenous monks."⁴¹ It was through the telling of different stories and preaching of different Buddhist doctrines to those that were interested in it that Buddhism started on one its journeys in China.

During ancient times, that was one of the best and easiest way for new ideas and different cultures to come together and learn more about one another because of the diverse people and interactions that would come along with trade. By having interactions with new and different people from other areas of the world, it allowed the opportunity to share one another's ideas and beliefs, enriching each other with new perspectives.

⁴⁰ Nahal Tajadod "The Role of Iranians in the Spread of Buddhism, Manichaeism and Mazdaism in China." *Diogenes* 50, no. 4: 61-68. 61. (accessed December 4, 2014). www.sagepublications.com.

⁴¹ Angela F. Howard "From Han to Tang: The Acculturation of Buddhist Images in China." *Orientalism* 35, no. 7 (October 2004): 47-56. 47. (accessed November 17, 2014). Art Full Text (H.W. Wilson), EBSCOhost

Another big reason Buddhism was able to succeed as well as it did in China was because it offered something to just about anyone who had an interest of learning more about it.⁴² For the educated it offered "...intellectual stimulus of subtle cosmologies, and rulers a source of magical power and a political tool to unite Chinese and non-Chinese".⁴³ This was especially beneficial during the Sui and Tang Dynasties because they took the opportunity to intermarry their people with nomadic tribal families who then became Sinicized⁴⁴ (made Chinese and put under Chinese influence). This helped bring the Chinese and non-Chinese together and "civilize" the non-Chinese in a sense by influencing their ways and turning them into true Chinese people.

Buddhism also had adapted to Chinese ways through their education.⁴⁵ When Buddhism had first been introduced, there were some ideas that were similar enough to Confucianism which had helped make Buddhism easier to incorporate into certain areas of a Chinese person's life. In terms of education, if someone was thinking of becoming a monk, it was similar to Confucianism in the sense that there were many rules of conduct and vows found in Buddhism. The struggle that comes with going against sin, desire, and attachment⁴⁶ in order to stay true to the vows and teachings that are found in Buddhism is similar to some of the vows in Confucianism.

Buddhism also offered upper classes "...an explanation and solace, intellectually sophisticated and aesthetically satisfying, for the collapse of their old society"⁴⁷ since "emperors and commoners alike sought religious salvation in an age of social disruption."⁴⁸ Noblewomen

⁴² Patricia Ebrey, *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2009), 69

⁴³ Ibid. 69.

⁴⁴ John King Fairbank, *China a New History* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 77.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 79.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 79.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 75.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 75.

participated in Buddhist practices as well, like the bodhisattva precepts for example. Lower class women also practiced the precepts, "... which shows that at the time, acceptance of the bodhisattva precepts among women was very widespread"⁴⁹ no matter the class and it was not just among males.

It did take some people of the upper classes a little longer to see how Buddhism was suitable for them though. Erik Zurcher explains that "...although they must have been aware of its existence by that time, proves that Buddhism, though rapidly spreading... had not yet penetrated into the gentlemen's life... it was still something lying outside the sphere of their activities and interests."⁵⁰ That shows that although Buddhism flourished among some of the higher class, it still took some time for the interest to become enough for others within that social group to explore further into it. Because "...nowadays the rulers and highest (dignitaries) venerate the Buddha and personally take part in religious affairs: the situation has become different from former times"⁵¹. It just took time before most took of them took on Buddhism.

It also benefitted China in the sense that because Buddhism was able to suit many different people within separate social classes and genders, it had not been forced among many people like how some social changes are in some situations. Instead it was the person's personal decision on whether they thought Buddhism was for them or not rather than having Buddhist practices and thoughts forced upon them. Which can a lot of the time push people away from the new ideas.

⁴⁹ Yan Yaozhong. "Buddhist Discipline and the Family Life of Tang Women." *Chinese Studies In History* 45, no. 4 (Summer2012 2012): 24-42. 26. (accessed November 18, 2014). Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost

⁵⁰ Erik Zurcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 71.

⁵¹ Ibid. 72.

Buddhism was also able to give everyone "...an appealing emphasis on kindness, charity, the preservation of life, and the prospect of salvation"⁵² for themselves and others around them. With the introduction of karma from Buddhism, it had reinforced the "... long-standing Chinese ideas of cosmic and divine retribution for one's good and bad actions... and providing fresh perspectives."⁵³ There are tales that can be found where the Buddha himself throughout different points in his life had moments of struggle on making good deeds towards others and himself. Which when bad deeds are done, it creates bad karmic results even for the Buddha.⁵⁴

Having stories where even the Buddha struggles with trying to do good deeds as well and that negative karma can also affect him gives readers the perspective that the Buddha has his hard times as well. It also reminds them "...of his humanity by recalling that he too had his shortcomings"⁵⁵ like any other person does. This gave people a way to relate to the Buddha as they went through their struggles of following through with having their minds set on thoughts of kindness, charity, or wanting to preserve life along with the importance of salvation.

Those were ideas that were not a main part of the way many Chinese thought because of their previous ways of thinking coming mostly from Confucianism. Buddhism helped Chinese people to become more open to new views and ideas on life and how to act towards one another in a kind manner. Having the consequences of collecting negative karma also helped reinforce better acts of behavior towards each other.

⁵² Patricia Ebrey, *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2009), 70.

⁵³ C. Peirce Salguero. "Fields of Merit, Harvests of Health: Some notes on the Role of Medical Karma in the Popularization of Buddhism in Early Medieval China." *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (Routledge 2013): 341-349. 341. (accessed December 4, 2014). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2013.831537>.

⁵⁴ John S. Strong, *The Buddha: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 44.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 44.

A story that gives the message of keeping in mind others is the Chinese version of how many living beings at once suffered from just a simple task of ploughing fields during the ploughing festival. The story had emphasized even more on the suffering that the Buddha experienced at that time when he was younger and still at home during the celebration where the young bodhisattva experienced his first deep meditation.⁵⁶ Because of the chain effect of suffering that took place while the workers ploughed the earth where worms were getting uncovered by the plough and snapped up by frogs, which were then swallowed by a snake, then eaten by a peacock⁵⁷ and so on, it shows how suffering acts in a chain reaction. Even though someone may think they are not doing harm to more than one thing, it is actually untrue. The story makes the reader stop and think about their actions in a way they probably had not before.

The story shows that if one is not aware of the actions they are doing, there is a very likely chance that there is not just one animal or person that is affected in a negative since it does act in the manner of a chain reaction. It is through stories like those that are used to help get the point across to make people think twice before they do something and it keeps their mind on the right track in terms of some of the different teachings that are found in Buddhism.

Through the miracle tales that Robert Ford Campany translated and talked about, miracle stories were some of the ones that helped teach the importance of moral lessons to Chinese people along with the importance of life and death too. Within the miracle tales, there are different categories the stories are organized into. One of the story types deals with the meaning of death. The layout of the story generally deals with a deceased relative visiting loved ones that

⁵⁶ Ibid. 60.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 61.

are still alive.⁵⁸ The message of the deceased person coming back to interact with the living is to warn them “... of the real existence and fearsome nature of the purgatories, the gravity of sin, and the urgency of proper Buddhist practice.”⁵⁹ It is through stories like that where the need and drive to practice Buddhism can be heightened because of negative consequences that could take place if not done correctly or full heartedly.

In the miracle tales that deal with life and death, it is easy to tell that the overriding concern being reflected through these Buddhist texts is how one could draw upon their practical efficacy when it comes to life and death. It is within the terms of karma, rebirth, and participating in practices like devoting oneself to a protective bodhisattva⁶⁰ that a person could find help with staying on the right track to not fall into the negative aspects that can occur if Buddhism is not practiced in the correct and right manner.

Some of the other main types of tales involve a person in dire distress calling upon a Bodhisattva for help and someone dying and coming back to life to share with people what it is like in the afterlife. Then a highly important one where it involves the protagonist making a direct assault against the Buddha and/or the words he is trying to teach and being punished in a negative and sometimes gruesome manner⁶¹ is used for the purpose of showing what can happen when someone did not fully believe in or what the Buddha had said. This teaches people to not go against the Buddha, otherwise they would be severely punished for their behavior.

Although the categorizing or typing of the stories may seem to be a strange manner of organizing them, it has helped Campamy and other scholars figure out an idea of who the writers

⁵⁸ Robert Ford Campamy, *Signs from the Unseen Realm* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 45.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 45.

⁶⁰ John S. Strong, *The Buddha: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 31.

⁶¹ Robert Ford Campamy, *Signs from the Unseen Realm* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 46.

could have been writing for. It is through the miracle tale narratives that a better understanding of why the stories are told in the way they are through social manners. "... Emergent narratives are socially formed from the very beginning; stories circulated in society are fashioned in context of social interactions..."⁶² Which through the intensively social nature of sharing stories a "...narrative formation and narrative exchange ensures the typedness of stories... because people in any given social and cultural setting often tell the same types of stories repeatedly..."⁶³ to make sure that they are remembered correctly.

In many of the tales there would also be quite a bit of emphasis put on certain areas in China where sacred spaces would be created. People would be able to go to and make a personal connection with those areas because that sacred space that is explained in the stories are actually physically accessible to them creating a deeper meaning and relation among the people and their land.

"...Each story contributed to the enterprise of "making Buddhism Chinese" and "making China Buddhist" simply by virtue of constituting a piece of historiography."⁶⁴ That helped with making connections with Buddhism for Chinese people to be able to see it as theirs easier. By creating stories and adding in certain landmarks or artifacts that are relatable for people in a particular country, like China in this case, it helps create the idea that Buddhism was truly Chinese rather than Indian. Simply having specific landmarks that are in China and artifacts that are made by other Chinese people so that it is from their homeland rather than from an outside country makes it easier for them to have in their lives without too many changes.

⁶² Ibid. 47.

⁶³ Ibid. 47.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 37.

If Buddhism had not been as easily integrated and modified to fit into China's way of thinking compared to India's outlooks and culture, it would not have done as well as it did. There could have been the thought process among some that it was trying to make China be more Indian rather than letting them stay truly Chinese in their ways of life and thinking. Since Buddhism was able to mold itself and become a part of China's culture and land, it made it much easier for Chinese people to want to engage themselves more in Buddhism's practices. This allowed Buddhist ways to be better integrated into their lives as many Chinese people began to follow the path of Buddhism.

"Each story shows... how some practices from the Buddhist repertoire were confirmed as true---in striking ways--- at an identified Chinese place in the presence of named Chinese individuals" can be seen in Campany's view as a "...basic mode of sinicization... likened to the claiming and marking of particular sacred sites on the landscape as Buddhist."⁶⁵ Which helped to confirm that although Buddhism may have originated in India, it had become very much Chinese. It can be proven through the stories that have been told throughout history because of the sacred sites that have been mentioned specifically in China and can be traveled to and seen in person with their own eyes.

By having an actual land site that can be visited, it helps make Buddhism seem that much more real for people because it is a real physical place. Like in China, a person can go to a sacred area in their homeland rather than having to visit a far off mysterious place that is described in a story that found in foreign land. Which can also make one wonder whether it is real or not. It could also be difficult to get to if it is real, which can make it that much harder to create a personal connection to if it is unreachable.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 37.

An example of that is the footprint relics that Strong mentions in his book. It is said that there are footprint relics that the Buddha had left behind as he traveled on his journeys through different lands.⁶⁶ When the footprints were discovered throughout the different places that have them, the footprints have become famous destinations for locals and non-locals to go to. Many like to look for the footprints just to see them or for pilgrimages as well.

Because of the footprint relics “it would seem... that we have here in the story of this journey of the Buddha and footprints... in distant lands... another example... in which the biography of the Buddha was developed to enhance indigenous Buddhism”.⁶⁷ This shows that along with stories, landmarks and relics can also play a huge role in how a country is able to make Buddhism theirs and different in comparison to another country. Although there may be similarities in the stories, landmarks, and relics, it is the small differences that help differentiate Buddhism among countries and their different cultures.

For China though, it was especially the miracle tale genre that helped spread Buddhist doctrine among the people there. Especially lay people at the time because of the cultural connections that were made in those stories through the people that were used in the tales, landmarks, sacred artifacts, and images by the authors that wrote them. “The very genre of the miracle tale, in its concerns and in the worldview and competencies it assumes in readers, not only seems to have been created by laymen, but also presumes a lay audience”⁶⁸. Company believes that it seems like many of the protagonists used in the tales are generally members of the gentry⁶⁹ because of the point of views the stories are told in.

⁶⁶ John S. Strong, *The Buddha: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 161.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 161.

⁶⁸ Robert Ford Company, *Signs from the Unseen Realm* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 31.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 31.

Then in many cases “...images, when referred to, played a major role in the narrative, which goes to show that images were not merely incidental accompaniments to devotional action: they were companions... the subject of dreams and visions... they were regarded as being alive...”⁷⁰ which shows the high importance that people had put on images that were depicted within narratives. Because without depictions, there would not be anything to go along with the narratives.

Miracle tales were also made for the purpose of the Chinese audience to have stories that could be relevant to them and their cultural ideas rather than talking about stories and incidents in India. If a Chinese person were to talk about stories that were based in India and the sacred places they have there, there would be a good chance that the Chinese person would lose interest because there are not any relatable components that is intriguing enough for them to continue listening.

Wang Yan, the writer of a collection of miracle stories in *Mingxiang ji* had explained the reasoning and thought process that he had put into the making of his tales saying that he “...tracked down more such signs and visions and stitched them together...”⁷¹ so that he would be able to create narratives that would better suit his audience. Because miracle tales are better suited for lower classes the stories tell tales of incidents that are better suited for them which makes understanding easier as well. Those tales “...helped domesticate Buddhism through narrative demonstration of its responsive efficacy on the home territory and in the home

⁷⁰ Ibid. 56-57.

⁷¹ Ibid.19.

society... individuals whom their audience would have recognized as being more or less like themselves”.⁷²

Even though Buddhism had something to offer for anyone and was beginning to flourish in certain parts of China, there were still skeptics who did not like the new ideas and changes that was being brought to their country. It was because of the differences Buddhism had in comparison to Confucianism and Daoism. Those that did not like Buddhist teachings believed that it was “...immoral because it severed family ties and posed a threat to the state since monastery land was not taxed” and monks did not participate in either labor work or military service.⁷³

Those ideas are much different ones compared to how ancient China usually thought since most people followed Confucianism. Which is where Company’s comment of how the “sinicization” of Buddhism in China could be “...thought of not so much as a compromising modification of Buddhist teachings to fit the Chinese context, but...an unyielding and self-conscious clarification... where Buddhist teachings sharply conflicted with elements of non-Buddhist religion”⁷⁴ since before Buddhism was introduced, most of China followed Confucianism and in some ways, Buddhism was backwards in thought compared to certain aspects in Confucianism.

By shifting the focus to individual choices instead of having the family in mind as a whole, it allowed the person to focus more on bettering themselves. This got people to consider

⁷² Ibid. 37.

⁷³ Patricia Ebrey, *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2009), 70.

⁷⁴ Robert Ford Company, *Signs from the Unseen Realm* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 38.

“... the individual responsibility for the conditions of one’s own punishment or liberation”⁷⁵ in terms of their bad or good karma that they have collected throughout their lifetime.

China is very much family orientated and it was through the family that many of the decisions were made and it was also how land was handed down as well; through the family name/lineage. Since Buddhism gave the option of becoming a monk and becoming celibate along with cutting ties from one’s family because of the joining of the monastery, it is understandable as to why those who opposed Buddhism frowned upon some of the practices that are required. Not only did it change some of the traditional values, but in some of the eyes of Chinese people it also lessened the value of family which was an idea that was hard for many to be able to grasp and understand since so much emphasis was put on it. But in the long run, it helped individualization take place which was good.

It was also difficult still for some people among the upper class to accept Buddhism as part of their belief system because in the beginning China had never recognized the clergy or priesthood as a distinct social group⁷⁶ so it took time to get used to that concept as well. As time went on and more was being learned about Buddhism, many who supported it in China felt that Buddhism could be validated as “... the highest perfection of both Confucianism and Daoism”⁷⁷ because of sharing similarities in ways of thoughts. That had helped Buddhism make a lasting mark in China since it shared characteristics with the other two main ways of thought.

⁷⁵ C. Pierce Salguero, “Fields of Merit, Harvests of Health: Some Notes on the Role of Medical Karma in the Popularization of Buddhism in Early Medieval China.” *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2013): 341-349. 341. (accessed Decemeber 4, 2014). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2013.831537>.

⁷⁶ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 254.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 256.

Having a religion that can be practiced by almost anyone with limited restrictions allows those that would like to participate feel like they can instead feeling out of place which happens in some cases when it comes to religion. It also creates a better sense of equality among people and can help lessen discrimination on some levels that may have been there before. Even though religion, and in this case Buddhism, may be the only similarity between the wealthy and the poor, or the literate versus the illiterate it still allows for a common ground that can bring people that generally would not be brought together a sense of unity. Especially through the tales that have been told about Buddhism and its impact within China.

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