



Anne Cheng and Sanchit Kumar (dir.)

India-China: Intersecting Universalities

Collège de France

Foreword

Anne Cheng and Sanchit Kumar

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Foreword

Anne Cheng and Sanchit Kumar

- 1 This collection of articles is partly the result of an international conference organised by the Chair of Chinese Intellectual History at the Collège de France in June 2017, which has benefited from the scientific collaboration of Mr. Sanchit Kumar, the technical contribution of Mr. Jean-Michel Roynard, and the financial support of the Fondation Hugot du Collège de France. The conference, entitled “India-China: Intersecting Universalities”, came after a first one, held two years earlier and entitled “Intellectual Encounters between India and France, 17th-19th centuries”. The 2017 session brought together scholars from Asia, America and Europe, who have been interested in one aspect or other of the cultural interactions between India and China. For various reasons, some presentations made at the conference have not been turned into written papers, while some articles integrated in this volume have not been presented at the conference. However, the diversity of the topics treated both in oral and written forms testifies to the lively interest raised by the intersection of two heavyweights of area and cultural studies. China and India have already been explored in depth by major scholars whose works are cited and referred to throughout this volume¹.
- 2 One may wonder, however, why a chair dedicated to Chinese studies should have been tempted to look towards India, which is – to say the least – another huge field of research. At a time when China is widely (and wildly) assumed to be “on the rise” and looms large, not to say threatening, in the global picture, it has been our firm and long-standing conviction that it is more than ever necessary to stop considering it as a self-contained and self-sufficient entity, and to place it within a regional context by taking into account its historical relationships with its equally influential neighbours, be it Japan, South-East Asia or India.
- 3 What makes the relationship between “China” and “India” so remarkably interesting is that one can hardly imagine two civilisational worlds as radically different from each other, which yet managed somehow to come into contact and interact. One should naturally be aware from the very start that both “China” and “India” are problematic denominations at any point in time before their modern transformation into nation-states. These terms are here used to designate two vast areas of civilisation on either

side of the Himalayas, the contours of which kept fluctuating over the centuries but between which there has been a constant circulation of people and ideas. The first and foremost case that readily springs to mind is the vast overhaul of Buddhism from India to China over the first millennium of the Common Era, which implied a massive and unprecedented effort of “translation” of Buddhist scriptures and literature into Chinese. However spectacular and grandiose as this process might appear in retrospect, it would certainly be naive to believe in the simplistic and reductive narrative of two great and ancient civilisations coming either into direct contact or just through a single defining moment.

- 4 The aim of the present volume is to look at various aspects of the cultural interactions between India and China at different points of history which may be roughly distributed into two large periods: first, the period running from the early centuries of the Christian era, when Indian Buddhism started seeping into the Chinese soil, down to early Tang times (7th-8th centuries), when Buddhism can be said to be transferred from India to China. The second period takes the story into much later times, from the late 17th to the early 20th centuries, when India came under British rule while China came under Manchu rule. The volume therefore does not claim to cover the whole ground, nor does it claim to break new grounds, the main purpose being to envisage China as integrated in a larger vista and landscape.
- 5 The articles included here all endeavour to broach the subject from very diverse angles, and to bring in slightly more subtle and nuanced views that tend to question the notion of “direct contact”, as well as the reality of the awareness and knowledge that these two worlds actually had of each other. This is the main thrust of the two erudite and finely-wrought articles contributed by Timothy Barrett, the first on the Chinese perception of Jainism and the second on the early modern origins of Chinese Indology. Both topics have been largely overlooked by mainstream scholarship. The way they are dealt with here has the great merit of providing interesting insights based on genuine curiosity and accurate knowledge, mixed with enduring preconceptions and fanciful imaginations which make up the Chinese perceptions of Indian cultures and religions over the centuries.
- 6 Two other articles do tackle the unavoidable subject of Indian Buddhism in China, more specifically in Chinese textual sources, but both do so from a rather paradoxical viewpoint. Béatrice L’Haridon taps on her expertise as a translator into French of the *Mouzi li huo lun*, which features among the earliest Chinese sources testifying to the presence of Buddhist influence in Han territory around the end of the 2nd century of the Common Era. Her contribution shows that what is usually presented as an apologetic text in favour of the Buddhist faith is actually based on the argumentative authority of the Confucian Classics and the Confucian *Analects* in particular. Anne Cheng focuses on a slightly later source, the *Foguo ji* by Faxian, one of the earliest Chinese Buddhist monks to have travelled all the way to India in search of Vinaya texts in the 4th century. Faxian makes a rather strange and surprising use of the term *Zhongguo* (the “Middle Country”), not as a designation of China as would have been expected, but as a Chinese rendition of the Sanskrit *Madhyadesa*, the heart of the land of the Buddha, thus displacing the age old notion of centrality attached to China to a new centre located in India. This recognition for the very first time in its history that China not only was no longer the only centre of civilisation in the known world, but actually found itself

relegated to the periphery, was symptomatic of a “borderland complex” that was to leave a deep imprint in the Chinese minds.

- 7 Matthew Mosca, whose book *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford University Press, 2013) has been a major breakthrough, chooses to trace the very individual and isolated itineraries of Indian mendicants (*gosains*) prompted by spiritual or commercial or both motivations into Chinese territory and to delve into a variety of sources bearing testimony to the way these travellers coming from India were perceived by the Chinese. It is interesting to note that more often than not, the *gosains* were assumed to be on their way to some Buddhist pilgrimage sites, which means that to the Chinese mind, anyone coming from India would tend to be spontaneously associated with Buddhism, making Timothy Barrett’s considerations on the Chinese perception of Jainism all the more relevant. One aspect of the circulation of men and goods between India and China that had nothing whatsoever to do with spiritual or religious motivations is of course the Parsi merchants’ prosperous trade running to and fro from Mumbai to Canton during the 19th century which is described in refined detail by Madhavi Thampi, the author of numerous works on the subject².
- 8 Finally, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, one major field of both convergence and contention between colonial India and Manchu China is the shared feeling of Asian fraternity and solidarity, but at the same time, of competition on the way to modernisation. While Nicolas Idier retraces the travels of the great Confucian thinker and reformer Kang Youwei (1858-1927) to India in the midst of his many years of peregrinations around the world after the fiasco of the 1898 reform movement, Joseph Ciaudo recalls the visits of the Bengali poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) to China. It remains a mystery why these two exact contemporaries and monumental figures of their time never came to meet, although they did visit each other’s country and even place of residence (Calcutta and Shanghai, respectively). One cannot help thinking that this *rendez-vous manqué* was a highly significant premonition of what was to follow, namely, the 20th century history of a complex relationship between India and China that would vary from aborted attempts at establishing friendly relations to open hostility as was the case in the brief but deeply traumatising 1962 war. This is reflected in an indifference of sorts to each other which seems to prevail today among the elites. It is precisely to try and remedy such indifference and mutual ignorance that we bring forward this collective volume with the hope of offering to our readers alternative approaches to the connections between India and China, other than the merely geopolitical ones that fill our media today.

NOTES

1. See among others Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 (1893-1964), Tan Yun-shan 譚雲山 (1898-1983), Ji Xianlin 季羨林 (1911-2009), Tan Chung 譚中 (b. 1929), Victor H. Mair (b. 1943), Wang Bangwei 王邦維 (b. 1950), Tansen Sen (b. 1967). It is to be noted that, whereas the Chinese scholars aforementioned have been mainly interested in the Buddhist interactions between India and

China, Tansen Sen is one of the rare scholars of Indian origin who has endeavoured to take the inquiry into other fields and modes of interaction such as the ones he explores in *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2003 and in *India, China, and the World: A Connected History*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2017.

2. See in particular Madhavi Thampi, *Indians in China, 1800-1949* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005). Also, with Shalini Saksena, *China and the Making of Bombay*, Mumbai, The K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 2009.

One important aspect of that trading activity based in Bombay was the opium trade with China, on which one can refer to the book by Amar Farooqui, *Opium City: The Making of Early Victorian Bombay*, Gurgaon, Three Essays, 2006.

AUTHORS

ANNE CHENG

Anne Cheng holds the Chair of Chinese Intellectual History at the Collège de France in Paris. Born to Chinese parents, she was educated in France, studying classics and European philosophy before focusing on Chinese studies. For over forty years she has been involved in teaching and research on the intellectual history of China. She has translated the *Analects of Confucius* into French, and has written a study of Han Confucianism, as well as a history of Chinese thought which has been translated into numerous European and Asian languages. She has also edited several joint publications and is the chief editor of a bilingual series of works written in classical Chinese at Belles Lettres.

SANCHIT KUMAR

Sanchit Kumar was educated at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He also attended Sciences Po Paris, National University of Singapore and E.H.E.S.S. (School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences) in Paris. He has collaborated with researchers at Harvard University, University of Tokyo and Collège de France. His recent interests are in intercultural, and more specifically, inter-Asian studies.