

# Foreword:

## Integration of Locality and Globality in the Transborder and Crosscultural Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism in Aisa and Beyond

JINHUA CHEN

*University of British Columbia*

Contact between the East and West began as early as antiquity. Alexander the Great, for instance, brought Greek culture to India where Greek aesthetics would heavily influence Buddhist—especially Gandhāran Buddhist—art. Similarly, Roman coins circulated to the Chinese capital Xi’an as early as the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), while Christianity had already spread China in the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Within Asia, intense cultural exchanges also took place constantly, notably including the spread of Buddhism to China in the first century CE. Accompanying cultural exchanges are also conflicts. Encounters between Eastern and Western civilizations were especially combustible due to their vast political, economical, linguistic, and cultural differences. Scholars like Samuel P. Huntington even suggest that the primary cause of conflicts in today’s world will not primarily happen between countries, but between cultures or civilizations. According to Huntington, cultural differences are so deeply entrenched that they will be the indelible source of conflicts, and that these conflicts will manifest most intensely between the dominant modern Western civilization and other civilizations that share distinct ideologies and cultures. This opinion, however, is somewhat prejudiced in that it portrays civilizational clash as inevitable; it even runs the risk of becoming a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ worsening the global

situation. In reality, conflict is far from the normal mode of inter-civilizational interaction. To the contrary, the advancement of human civilization is deeply indebted to the exchange and merging of cultures.

At this critical juncture of our own time when globalization faces an unprecedented crisis, history can serve as a mirror for us to understand the nature of inter-civilizational conflict and cooperation. In particular, the history of the transmission of Buddhism from India to China, its subsequent appropriation by Chinese culture, and the transmission of the Sinicized form of Buddhism to the rest of East Asia is especially revealing of the mechanism of cross-cultural interactions.

From the perspective of global history, when the teachings of Buddhism first arrived in the heartland of China around the first century CE, East Asia had just started what would become an ongoing exchange with Central and South Asia. Influence from the Han Empire already had spread to Central Asia, and as a result, at least two civilizations communicated with one another through various channels to allow for diverse cultural interactions and fusion. Buddhism, in this context, was one among many players to participate in this rich cultural dynamic.

Buddhism, as a product of a foreign culture from the Chinese perspective, underwent an extended period of adaptation and intermingling with indigenous cultures before many teachings were altered by the seventh century, which gave rise to a distinct Chinese Buddhist tradition that embodied the spirit of a new and vibrant host culture. Meanwhile, Chinese Buddhism spread across East and Southeast Asia, generating a novel Chinese Buddhist sphere of influence with the classical Chinese language as its lingua franca. Against this backdrop of world history and globalization, the spread of Buddhism transcends a singular cultural phenomenon in one defined region, and instead represents a grand religious and cultural transformation with profound and far-reaching implications.

The Sinification of Buddhism, or more specifically the Chinese metamorphosis of core Indic cultural elements, transpired within several domains, including philosophy, religious practice, and the construction of Buddhist institutions. During the migration from its homeland in South Asia to China, Buddhism retained many core

doctrines, such as the doctrines of independent origination and of the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths, and the threefold training in discipline, concentration, and wisdom. But when it comes to the exegetical traditions that interpreted the many Indian classics, the process of Sinification is evident. In the early period, Chinese Buddhists digested Indian concepts by clumsily relating them to indigenous Chinese terms. Even later on, as Chinese Buddhists developed sophisticated insights about the nature of reality as ultimately unconditioned, they could not restrain a powerful urge to integrate Indian elements into systems of Chinese thought, especially by infusing Buddhism with Confucian and Daoist teachings. Furthermore, Buddhist teachers were often learned masters of both Chinese and foreign traditions of learning and exegesis. These teachers symbolize cultural fusion at a time when Buddhist teachings were understood with uniquely Chinese characteristics. In addition, for a thousand years after the fall of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 CE), Chinese Buddhists not only translated and interpreted texts imported from India, but also many composed apocrypha and treatises that in turn generated many original doctrines, institutional codes, and historical narratives. In contrast to the Tibetan Kangyur and Tengyur that mostly comprise translated texts, the Chinese Buddhist canons incorporate many texts written originally in the Chinese language. The formation of the Chinese Buddhist Canon, therefore, is another key part of the process of Sinification.

Chinese Buddhists were also deeply affected by indigenous popular religious beliefs. Many secular followers were understandably more concerned with worshipping deities than with obscure doctrinal formulations. On this non-elite level, we find intriguing connections between Indian Buddhist and indigenous Chinese practices such as those techniques preached in the Huang-Lao school, and particularly the goal of spiritual immortality and the worship of ghosts and gods. Meanwhile, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and especially the Buddhas of the Three Ages and the four Bodhisattvas, emerged as central objects of worship in Buddhist rituals. After the Tang Dynasty, Bodhisattva cults acquired their own theoretical and institutional bases, and even absorbed the practices of mountain worship

to produce a uniquely Chinese sacred geography that attracted not only Chinese pilgrims, but also pilgrims from across East and Southeast Asia and as far as the cradle of Buddhism itself in India. Within the context of this transformation, it seems that the axis-mundi of Buddhism gradually shifted from India to China.

The process of Sinification can be equally applied to the study of Buddhist institutions.

Indigenous Chinese religions did not conceive of any system of monastics, which only came into being during the Liu Song Dynasty (420–479) when Vinaya texts were translated and, with them, the Indian Buddhist institutional rules and regulations were transplanted to Chinese soil. But this relocated system experienced countless problems of varying severity within a new cultural milieu, especially when we consider conflicts with the dominant Chinese state. For instance, should monks dine while crouching or should they sit down? Should monastics eat with their hands or with chopsticks? Should they kneel before the ruler? Even trivial habits, such as washing one's hands, brushing one's teeth, and relieving oneself generated considerable debates. These examples attest to the drastic differences between the Indic and Chinese cultural environments. But Chinese Buddhists eventually dictated their own terms for monastic life. In Chan Buddhism, for instance, agrarian-influences upon Buddhism can be seen in teachings such as 'one day without labouring, one day without eating' (一日不作, 一日不食), which is at odds with Indian monastic codes that explicitly preclude any agricultural work. Though not without controversies and occasional reversals of fortune, the Sinification of Buddhism proved to be inexorable over time.

The reason that Buddhism was able to establish such deep roots in China—when China was the source of the teachings of the religion after the seventh century in neighbouring kingdoms—has to do with a mutual attraction that bound the teachings of Indian Buddhism and Chinese culture together. The latter shaped the former in accordance with its philosophy, culture, and institutions, creating a form of Buddhism instilled with myriad Chinese features.

Not only shall we address our contemporary inquisitiveness by returning to the well-trodden path concerning the topic of the

Sinification of Buddhism; we will address the process of Sinification against the backdrop of global history. We will also, therefore, reassess the potential uses of the term ‘Sinification’ to serve as a historical precedent that may be able to teach us new lessons relevant to our own time. Today, we are witnessing the trend of globalization being forestalled. Given this challenge, the study of the localization or indigenization and globalization (the so-called ‘Glocalization’) of Buddhism carries an implication beyond academic research, for it could impart historical lessons for our own time that is increasingly threatened by a reversal of globalization and by the hostility between cultures and states.

In the hope of better exploring all these related issues, the Glorisun Global Network for Buddhist Studies has taken advantage of the special occasion of the first annual Glorisun Forum on ‘Beyond Civilizational Clash: The Coalescence of Human Civilizations’ held in Hong Kong from August 9 to August 12, 2023, by including ‘Paradigm Shifts in the Study of Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism in Asia and Beyond’ as one of the three themes for the Forum (the other two themes are: 1) ‘Engaged Buddhism for an Engulfed World: New Perspectives on Humanistic Buddhism’ and 2) ‘Buddhism, Science and Technology: Challenges to Religions from a Digitalized World’. The sub-forum on ‘Paradigm Shifts in the Study of Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism in Asia and Beyond’ was enthusiastically supported by scholars all over the world, and a total of forty-four papers were received. Except for Todd Lewis of College of the Holy Cross, who delivered a keynote speech titled ‘Towards a Transcultural Historiography of Buddhism’s Trans-Asian Expansion and Its Importance in Understanding the Situation of Modern Buddhism’ to the whole forum, forty-three papers were presented and discussed in the following nine panels:

1. Sinification of Buddhism, Again: Big Picture and Individual Cases 佛教中國化再思考：大圖景與小個案；
2. China vs. Japan and Korea 東夏之與東海及東瀛；
3. Textual Transborder Travelling 文本的跨境遊；

4. Transcultural Transmission and Transformation of Thoughts 思想的跨文化傳播與嬗變;
5. Tubo and Turfan 吐蕃與吐魯番;
6. See Far and Hear Deep: Artistic Amplification 視遠聞深: 藝術形式的展播;
7. Transmission of Buddhist Practices: Meditation, Vinya and Rituals 佛教實踐的傳播: 禪修、戒律與類書;
8. Buddification or Sinification?: Buddhist Elements in Chinese Political Institutionalization 佛教化抑或中國化?: 中古中國政治體制中的佛教因素;
9. Globalization by Localization 由地域化而達致國際化.<sup>1</sup>

The sub-forum turned out to be a great success, with participants not only giving but also receiving constructive comments from each other, and truly achieving the goal of ‘those who benefit will always be benefited’. Not only did the scholars actively participate during the forum, but their enthusiasm for the theme of the forum even continued beyond the forum, so that within a short period of three months after the forum, most of the scholars submitted revised versions of their papers to the conference organizer for official publication. After further selection and editing, some of these papers have been published in special issues of journals.<sup>2</sup> Most of the

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<sup>1</sup> Featured at <https://glorisunglobalnetwork.org/buddhism-science-and-technology-schedule/>.

<sup>2</sup> Two of them, by Ashwini Lakshminarayanan and Changchun Pei, have been published in the Special Issue, ‘Localization, Globalization and Glocalization: Paradigm Shifts in the Study of Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism in Asia and Beyond’ for *Religions*, an AHCI indexed academic journal. This special issue ([https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special\\_issues/BZ666O9UOP](https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/BZ666O9UOP)) is co-edited by the two co-editors of the present volume. Five other participants—Sung-Eun T. Kim, Jingjing Li 李晶晶, Jackson Macor and Kiril Solonin—had their papers published in another special issue on the theme, this time hosted by the *Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies* (first issue of volume 7), which is co-edited by the two co-editors of this volume too:

thirteen papers collected here are published for the first time, with the exception of a few that have already been published in journals.<sup>3</sup> We believe that the above research results from the sub-forum on ‘Paradigm Shifts in the Study of Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism in Asia and Beyond’ will be a powerful impetus to the exploration of related issues.

On the occasion of the publication of this volume, the editors would like to express their deepest respect and gratitude to the Glorison Charitable Foundation and Dr. Charles Yeung, who have generously sponsored the convening of this forum and the publication of this collection of papers.

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<https://glorisonglobalnetwork.org/hualin-international-journal-of-buddhist-studies/e-journal/7-1/>.

<sup>3</sup> Finally, it is worth mentioning that this collection of essays has a sister volume, *Zhiliang yongzhong: Dong Xi fang wenming pengzhuang zhong de Fojiao Zhongguo hua yu guoji hua* 執兩用中：東西方文明碰撞中的佛教中國化與國際化 [Sinification and Globalization of Buddhism in the Course of the Encounter between the Eastern and Western Civilizations], which is also being released this year by the same publisher, the Singapore-based World Scholastic Publishers.