

An Evaluation of Chongqing's Peculiar Geography's Impact on the Development of Buddhism

Zhang Ailin

Institute for Religious Studies,
Southwest University, Chongqing, **China**

Abstract

It can be said that mountains form the backbones and rivers form the vessels of Chongqing, and the mountains and rivers that depend on each other generate an unique landscape culture, which exerts distinct influence on the development of Buddhism in Chongqing. Firstly, Buddhism was introduced to Sichuan through an overland route which centered upon Sichuan instead of the Silk Road northward. There was a Yunnan-Burma Road crossed from north to south before entering Sichuan. What's more, a northbound road, Gansu-Qianhai Road started from Chengdu to Golmud of Qinghai Province all the way along the Minjiang River till it headed west to the Western Regions at that time (the west area of Yumenguan, including what is now Xinjiang and parts of Central Asia). Besides, there were two ancient plank paths, namely Baoxie Path and Jinniu Path stretching eastward coming out of Sichuan. Secondly, the architectural layouts of temples in Chongqing are greatly impacted by the topographic feature, which can be shown by numerous ancient towns and Buddhist Cliffside Images complex, such as Dazu Rock Carvings. Thirdly, the geographical location of Chongqing makes it easy to hold but hard to attack, which delivers a distinct advantage to Chongqing in the history of warfare. During the War of Resistance against Japan, eminent monks followed to arrive in Sichuan as the National Government of the Republic of China moved to Chongqing, creating a glorious period in the modern history of Buddhism in this city. In 1930, the Buddhist Taixu set up the Han-Tibetan Buddhist Teaching College in Jinyun Mountain, Beibei, Chongqing. It was in the year of 1937 that the Chinese Inner Studies Institute established by Ouyang Jingwu was relocated to Jiangjin in Chongqing from Nanjing. Therefore, Chongqing became the center of Buddhist culture in China at that time.

Keywords : Geography, Chongqing, Buddhism

Introduction

The Route by Which Buddhism Introduced into Bashu Area It can be said that mountains form the backbones and rivers form the vessels of Chongqing, and the mountains and rivers are depending on each other around this city. Layer upon layer of mountains like the Ta-pa Mountains, the Wushan Mountain, the Jinfo Mountain, the Zhenwu Mountain roll all the way up while the Yangtze River, the Jialing River, the Qujiang River, the Wujiang River and so on make a crisscross network. Embraced on east, south, and north three sides by rivers, Chongqing is more or less an island, thus gaining the name Jiangzhou in ancient times, an island among rivers literally. And since the Jialing River was known as the Yushui River a very long time ago, Chongqing then is called Yu for short. The city is shut in by high hills on every side as various rivers make their way out of this place by cleaving gorges. During the period from Yin and Shang Dynasties to the Qin and Han dynasties, Chongqing remained the territory of the Ba people, known as the Ba Prefecture. During the reign of Emperor Hui of the Northern Song Dynasty, given the punitive expedition to traitors led by Zhao Shen, the imperial court worried that the inauspicious word “Yu” suggested mutiny, so the court changed Yuzhou into Gongzhou, meaning respect and obeisance to the court. In the 16th year of Chunxi period under the Emperor Xiao’s regime in the Southern Song Dynasty(1189) , Zhan Dun, son of Emperor, was crowned as Prince Gong in the first month of the lunar year ascended the throne posing as “double jubilation” and promoted Gongzhou to Chongqing Prefecture. Thereafter, this name was carried forward.

Shaped by its geographical conditions, civilization in Chongqing generates an unique landscape culture. Different populations situated beside mountains and rivers passed their heritage from generation to generation and preserved the remains of cliff-side images and stone inscriptions dating back to ancient times. However, politics changes the central plains of China, and foreign wars never ceased to get involved and interrupt the original cultural forms. Meanwhile, new cultural elements were brought to integrate with the old one and create a brand new cultural style, which was able to remain stable for quite a long period thanks to the close geographical environment before it was broken again. Greatly impacted by the topographic features, history and wars, Buddhism in Chongqing is uniquely

localized, so is the spreading and development of Buddhism in Chongqing. Chongqing shares a close relation with Sichuan that the former has been part of the latter for a long time. It was in the year of 1997 that Chongqing became a municipality. That's why one can use "Chuanyu" or "Bayu" to represent the two places that have much in common culturally and geographically.

Generally, scholars agree that Buddhism made its first entry to China as early as the end of the Western Han Dynasty along the ancient Silk Road through the Western Regions at that time (the area west of Yumenguan, including what is now Xinjiang and parts of Central Asia). Later, Buddhism continued its influence eastwards and southwards, which generated the Buddhism in Ba and Shu areas. However, the theory of the Maritime Silk Road proposed by scholars such as Liang Qichao, Tang Yongtong early and Ji Xianlin later believed that the maritime road came before the overland route and that the Buddhism originated from India directly begun to influence the Yangtze River valley by the southern way. And recent archaeological findings seem to increasingly prove this idea. Starting from India, the Maritime Silk Road traveled through Simhalauipa (Sri Lanka), Yāva-dvīpa (near Sumatra and Java), the South China Sea, Cochin (belong to Vietnam today), Guangdong and so on before going ashore. And monks also followed the trade route to beg for alms. After the Three Kingdoms period the Eastern Jin dynasty, a growing number of monks came to China by taking this route. Guṇabhadra, Paramārtha and such arrived at Guangzhou, QiuNaBaMo went ashore at Cochin while Fa Xian drifted to Laoshan Mountain (Shandong) instead of Guangzhou before landing on his way home.

Trade and business activities between Bashu and India can be traced back to as early as the Western Han Dynasty. According to Shi Ji (Historical Records) Records of the historian biography of Southwestern Yi, there was a shortcut connecting Bashu and India but no one would locate it, which also indicates the existence of some challenging and remote overland route channeling south and north apart from the Silk Road in the northern land and the maritime Silk Road in the South.¹ As for merchants longing for make a fortune and Sadhus good at hitting the grit, however, these paths, beginning from Sichuan to India through Yunnan and Burma, would never be difficult enough.

¹ Sima Qian. Shi Ji. Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company, 1959, 2995-2996.

The southwest area was incorporated into the territory of the Han Empire in the Eastern Han Dynasty. And it was not until then that the Silk Road in the southwest area was officially established by the government. Therefore, the governance of officeholders all the way along the road helped to lubricate trade and promote exchange. According to *History of the Later Han Dynasty-History of Ethnic Minorities in Southwest Areas*, foreign countries constantly sent envoys with tribute for emperors of Han Dynasty hoping to forge a friendly relationship. Among them, King of Shan(Burma), Yong You Diao , was offered the official post as “Da Du Wei” and awarded him silk ribbon used to fasten seals and correspondence, gold and silver, colorful silks and such. Thanks to this route, quite a number of Indians were able to visit Yongchang Prefecture of the Eastern Han Dynasty. *Chronicles of Huayang-Yongchang Prefecture* also noted that there were lots of foreigners from many countries such as India in Yongchang Prefecture.²

Researchers have found that archaeological materials related to Buddhism earlier in China concentrated on Sichuan, upper reaches of Yangtze River while later archaeological findings show up in the middle and lower reaches. Buddhism in Bashu failed to make its way northwards for geographically blocked by mountains. Additionally, since civilization in this place was less developed compared with the central plains of China, inadequate written records gradually faded away until the emergence of more archaeological objects demonstrate the existence and condition of Buddhism in Bashu.

Through an overland route centering upon Sichuan (including Chongqing) northward, there was a Yunnan-Burma Road crossed from north to south before entering Sichuan. What’s more, a northbound road, Gansu-Qianhai Road started from Chengdu to Golmud of Qinghai Province all the way along the Minjiang River till it headed west to the Shanshan, Ku-stana connecting the Silk Road. Besides, there were some ancient trade routes such as Jinniu Path and Micang Road stretching eastward coming out of Sichuan. More attention should be paid to the Micang Road which leads to Yuzhou(Chongqing)³ by water through Bazhong, Quxian, Guangan and Hechuan after entering Nanjiang from Hanzhong by

² See Yang Weizhong. “On the Three Routes that Buddhism Introduced to China Again”. *Researches on Chinese Culture*. 2014, 30-31.

³ Lan Yong. *The History of Traffic Route in Ancient Sichuan*. Chongqing: Southwest University Press, 1987, 59-61.

land route. Micang Road has enjoyed a time-honored history that even the famous story about Xiao He pursuing Han Xin by moonlight happened along this way.⁴ Xiao He was a politician in the early Western Han Dynasty, and Han Xin was a militarist in the early Western Han Dynasty. History has it that Xiao He believed Han Xin was a vital talent to help the Emperor with dominating the country so that he attempted to chase after Han Xin when the latter fled. Having been defeated by Cao Cao at the end of Eastern Han Dynasty, Zhang Lu retreated to Bazhong from Hanzhong by taking the famous Micang Road as well.⁵ During the Tang and Song Dynasties, the Micang Road became a traffic artery serving for both business and military purpose. Du Fu, a famous poet in Tang Dynasty, in his letter to officialdom Yan, also mentioned that courier stations along the Micang Road could be connected northwards outside of the Ta-pa Mountains. *Yu Tang Xian Hua* from Song Dynasty also documented that Wang Xingyan, a Shaanxi native, earned his living by doing business and he always traded salt along the Micang Road.⁶ Such examples do prove how Micang Road benefited the ordinary people. When it comes to the military function of this route, evidence can be found in the History of Yuan Dynasty that Mongol armies went south through Bazhou and Quzhou following the Micang Road before heading for the Fishing Town.⁷ Therefore, it became possible for Buddhism to spread around along the trade route as well as the Micang Road. Henceforth, Buddhism in the north finally entered Bazhou.

Part two

Influence of Stone Inscriptions in Chongqing on the History of Buddhism in China Mountainous Chongqing is an ideal place to cut grotto temples and cliff side images. By cliff side images, it means stone inscriptions to document by using natural stones. Cliff side carvings are the earliest form of stone inscription in China that can be traced back to before Shang and Zhou Dynasties. Cliff side carvings enjoy unique and prominent features. From the perspective of constructing, cliff side carvings draw on local resources instead of laborious quarrying to economize cost. From the point of contents, cliff sides boast substantial contents ranging

⁴ “Yu Tang Xian Hua”. Vol. 397.. Tai Ping Guang Ji.

⁵ Hua Yang Guo Zhi Jiao Bu Tu Zhu•Han Zhong Zhi. Shanghai: Shanghai Gu Ji Press. 1987. 72.

⁶ “Yu Tang Xian Hua”. Vol. 433.. Tai Ping Guang Ji.

⁷ Vol. 154. The History of Yuan Dynasty. Beijing: Chung Hwa Book Company. 1976. 3638-3639.

from eulogies, documents, inscriptions, autographs to poems and so forth.

Ba and Shu enjoy rich grotto temples and cliff side images, which concentrate on the three rivers valley of Jiangling River, the Tuojiang River and the Minjiang River with the greatest number and the widest distribution. This area begun to build Buddhism grotto statues from the Northern and Southern Dynasties before this practice gained great popularity in Tang Dynasty. Noticeably, stone carvings found in Chongqing are dominated by works from the Middle-Later period of the Northern Song Dynasty. Grotto statues and cliff side carvings faithfully documents how Buddhism was spread in Chongqing, among which Esoteric Buddhism grotto statues in Dazu and Zen rock cave statues in Hechuan stand out most prominently.

Esoteric Buddhism came into prosperity in India around between 4AD and 5 AD, and classics of Esoteric Buddhism begun to influence China since the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Eminent monks such as Subhakarasiṃha, Amoghavajra and Vajrabodhi visited China to spread Esoteric Buddhism one after another, bringing much prosperity to this religion in China as well, which was known as the Esoteric Buddhism in Tang Dynasty. Esoteric Buddhism in India traveled all the way by various ways through the South China Sea, Tubo, Nanshao and some other places in the Western Regions at that time (the west area of Yumenguan, including what is now Xinjiang and parts of Central Asia) till entering Bashu. And it was not until the Emperor Wu of Tang Dynasty launched a great anti-Buddhist persecution that the Esoteric Buddhism in Tang Dynasty turned to be on the wane in central plains of China. It is said that monks from Zangraosa Temple arrived at Xikang (western Sichuan) with a large quantity of Vinaya, ancient books and records. During the Five Dynasties (907-960), even Liu Benzun from Jiazhou purposely took Da Lun Wu Bu Incantation came to Bashu to spread the Esoteric Buddhism, which had tremendous impact that stones inscriptions in Anyue and Dazu record in great fidelity places where the Esoteric Buddhist rites are performed, particularly how Liu performed his missionary work and the belief condition in this area. Generally, it is believed that carvings in Anyue and Dazu contribute a lot to carrying through the history of the Esoteric Buddhism in China for another four centuries before it withered away in Yuan Dynasty.

Located in Hechuan, Chongqing, the Er'fo Temple is a major site

for doing rites of Zen, in which set more than 1700 Buddhism statues in multiple poses showing Buddhas are standing, walking, sitting, laying, laughing, angry, sad or joyful. And three sites of cliffs all exhibit typical stone inscriptions. Respectively, the north cliff is represented by the Er'fo statue and the shrine of Avalokitevara while the south cliff by three carved Buddha Statues and bhagavan Bhaisajya-guru-voidUrya-prabha-rAjAya shrine as the west cliff by statues of six founding monks of Zen and the Sixteen Arhats. The main statue in this temple is Buddha Shakyamuni and there are a grand scale of complex of Zen images covering all the representative figures of Zen in earlier time, including the first founding monk Bodhidharma and the sixth one Hui Neng, which is rarely seen nationwide.

Epigraph found in the Buddhist pagoda of master and apprentice in the Er'fo Temple makes up for the inheritance of the Fayan School. Here is one of the inscriptions on the gravestones of Zen Master Zaixue:

This is the tomb of Zen Master Zaixue,

He inherited and spread the orthodoxy of the Fayan School,

And he took the 17th cremation⁸ for eminent monks of this school,

According to the master's wish,

He ordered to build this pagoda as what his predecessors did,

To remember his disciple Hong Shen,

And Hong Shen's disciple Tong □, and Tong □'s disciple Li and Tong 's brother's disciple Tong .⁹

According to inscriptions on the gravestones of Master Zaixue and Master Yonggui, during and after their service as abbot, the Er'fo Temple was an important site to perform rites of the Fayan School of Zen. And Master Zaixue was the seventeenth Master of the orthodoxy the Fayan School, after which was the Master Yonggui. However, as China's Buddhist literature points out that the Fayan School actually withered away when the seventh Master Xiangfu Liangqing inherited till Master Xuyun became the eighth one. In addition, the Fayan School mainly carried out its activities around Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Fujian while impacting Jiangxi and Shanxi, but it never made its way to Ba nor Shu.

⁸ There is an error in Laitan Stone Carvings. The correct meaning here should be cremation for monks.

⁹ Huang Li. Laitan Stone Carvings. Chongqing: Chongqing Press. 2012. 105-106.

Part three

The Relationship between the Provisional Capital and the Development of Buddhism in Chongqing

The geographical location of Chongqing makes it easy to hold but hard to attack, which delivers a distinct advantage to Chongqing in the history of warfare. During the War of Resistance against Japan, eminent monks followed to arrive in Sichuan as the National Government of the Republic of China moved to Chongqing that became the provisional capital, creating an unprecedentedly glorious period for Buddhism research and the development of Buddhism in Chongqing. What influences Buddhism in Chongqing, and in China at large most should be the establishment of the Han-Tibetan Buddhist Teaching College, while the Shu Institute of the Chinese Inner Studies Institute relocated to Jianjin, Chongqing exerted the most impact on studying Buddhism in China.

On November 1930, initiated by the Buddhist Taixu, the Han-Tibetan Buddhist Teaching College was established in Jinyun Mountain, Beibei, Chongqing and Tai Xu served as the president as Commander of Sichuan Army became the honorary President with over 30 members of the school board. This institute unswervingly adopted the tenet of “connecting Han -Tibetan culture, uniting Han- Tibetan spirit, solidifying the west frontier defense and maintaining China’s territory”. The Song of Sanbao was chosen to be the song of the Institute with music composed by Taixu and lyrics written by Hongyi. And even till today, it remains a classical song of Buddhism popularly sung by temples nationwide. Teachers in the Han-Tibetan Buddhist Teaching College were influential monks selected from famous temples in Shanghai, Fujian, Kangting, Lhasa and so on. For example, Master Fazun was teaching history, Master Guankong Tibetan, Tibetan teaching history and geography as well as Chinese Buddhism studies, Master Mandu teaching Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism studies, Master Yanding translating and teaching Tibetan Buddhism and Master Wei Fang teaching history.

During the period of the War of Resistance against Japan, the Han-Tibetan Buddhist Teaching College collected young student-monks and outstanding Masters of various sects of Buddhism nationwide with respective merits. For instance, Master Fafang was specialized on Abhidharmakosa-sastra of Hinayana Buddhism, Master Xuesong was good

at Vijñāptimātratāsiddhi of Hetuvidyā , Master Chenkong at Study of Vinaya , Master Benguang at Zen and Master Yukun at history. Besides, the monk at home named Chen Jianmin and Yuyu were accomplished in literature, Zhang Chunyi in Mohism, Lv Jiong and Pan Huaisu in natural science. In a word, rich teaching resources helped to cultivate the atmosphere of researching and studying to a greater extend.

The first enrollment of students registered 60 as students for various departments were selected from societies of Buddhism from different places. The four-year educational system of academic study was equal to the degree of middle school or technical secondary school. It was in the year of 1935 that the two-year specialized training class was set up which matched the degree of junior college. Great efforts had been made for preparations to set up the Han-Tibetan Buddhist Teaching College. And the first school terms begun on August 1932 till the college was closed in 1950, lasting near 20 years, during which a large number of talents of Buddhism research were fostered. The total enrollment amounted to around 400 but the entire graduates turned to be near 200 due to strict discipline weeding out the less qualified ones.

The Chinese Inner Studies Institute established by Ouyang Jingwu, Lv Cheng and such at Nanjing in 1922, serving the purpose of preaching Buddhism, teaching, inscriptions and Buddhism studies. It focused on researching Vivekananda while covering Sanskrit, Karma Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. In a word, this institute played the role of driving force for the renaissance of modern Vivekananda and Buddhism research. The July 7 incident of 1937 marked the beginning of Japan's invasion on China. Schools were ruined and books ruined. Ouyang Jingwu led his disciples to move to Jianjin in Chongqing from Nanjing on November and established the Shu Institute of the Chinese Inner Studies Institute, which was rebuilt in Sichuan in 1939, learning from traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and Indian Buddhism with five types of teaching contents, namely Abhidharma, Upalaksa, Yoga, Prajna and Nirvana. Attention had been drawn to compile and print *Tripitaka*. It was in the year of 1940 that Ouyang Jingwu passed away because of illness and his disciple Lv Cheng took over as the dean three years later, continuing his teaching and researching in Sichuan. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the institute was closed down in 1952. Importantly, the Chinese Inner Studies Institute and the Shu Institute later did exert substantial impact on Buddhism in China and they can be regarded as the direct

source of thoughts for studies of Buddhism for colleges and universities in modern China.

References

Shi Shengfu. *Buddhism in Chongqing*. Chongqing: Chongqing Press, 2000.

Guo Xiangying. *Collections of Epigraph of Dazu Stone Carvings*. 1999.

Huang Li. *Laitan Stone Carvings*. Chongqing: Chongqing Press. 2012.

Thapar Romila., *A History of India vol. 1*, New Delhi, Penguin Publications 1977

Thapar Romila., *From Lineage to State* New York, OUP 1992