CHAPTER 4

India and China: A Saga of Sharing a Historical Heritage

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It is paradoxical that nowadays we often hear politicians both in India and China invoking the 'shared cultural heritage', while the scholarly circles, even those in favour of Indo-Chinese unity and fraternity, are at a loss as to what this shared heritage really is. In an attempt to discover the material evidence of historical events more than two thousand years old it is seen that the special Chinese inventions of paper, book making and type-printing helped to preserve historical memory faithfully. In addition, the age-old convention of luxurious burials wishfully furnishing the lamented with after-life comforts inside airtight coffins have made China the archaeologists' paradise. The unending fresh underground discoveries in China in the last five decades (and longer in the past) have facilitated newer and newer thinking on her civilizational past. While earlier, people always thought that the Chinese civilization originated from the middle and lower streams of the Yellow River, now this origin could shift five latitude degrees southwards to the northern foothills of the Himalyan heights.

HIMALAYO-CENTRIC PERSPECTIVE

Ramapithecus, the direct ape-ancestor of humanity, was first discovered in 1932 at Rama at the Indian foothills of the Himalaya (now lying with Pakistan). In recent years, a large quantity of fossils of this species has been discovered in Yunnan, giving this Chinese province a new reputation as the 'homeland of Ramapithecus.' This new reputation is added to its already honoured place as the homeland of the earliest apeman in China called the Yuanmou Man' (discovered at the Yuanmou County of Yunnan). These archaeological discoveries indicate that the trans-Himalayan regions covering both India and China (and neighbouring area) form an important cradle of human civilization. The civilizations of India and China are the twins emerging from this cradle.

Awaiting the confirmation about an even earlier ancestor of the Chinese race, who

might have lived at Wushan County in Sichuan Province at the upper-middle stream of the Yangtse River about 2 million years ago, the Yuanmou Man who lived around 1.7 million years ago qualifies as being one of the earliest identified human beings on earth. Archaeologists and historians can now conceive a line of human evolution in China from the Yunnan-born Ramapithecus to the Yunnan-born Yuanmou Man. The next earliest Chinese specimen so far discovered is the Lantian Man who existed about a million years ago (at Lantian County in Shaanxi Province, a thousand miles north of Yuanmou), while the famous Beijing Man came into existence much later—200,000–700,000 years ago. This lineage picture conveys a new proposition that human activities within the territory of present China first started in Yunnan very close to the Indian border and slowly spread northwards and north-westwards.

Incidentally, in 1982, Indian archaeologists also discovered in Hathnora village in Hoshangabad District in Madhya Pradesh, the fossilized skull of the earliest man of India (so far to our knowledge) who lived 1.8 million years ago approximately.[1] This 'Hoshangabad Man' (my term for convenience's sake) and China's Yuanmou Man are among the earliest of their kinds so far discovered on earth. We may add that both were the descendants of the trans-Himalayan Ramapithecus. It is this common ancestry that has bound the Chinese and Indian civilizations together.

Geologically, the Himalayan heights were created by the lifting of land-surface from the sea-bottom tens of millions of years ago due to the joining of the Indian continental plate with the Chinese continental plate—a process that had begun more than 50 million years ago. Recently, a joint study conducted by US and Chinese scientists have confirmed that such a hug has not been relaxed from the beginning till today—the Indian continental plate has moved at least 150 kilometres northward, according to the scientists.[2] No wonder then that the Himalayan peaks are growing by a few centimetres every year! The Himalayan heights are the children of a terrestrial rendezvous involving India and China.

By Himalayan heights I include the 'Roof of the world', i.e. the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, which was also created by the same India-China romance. Apart from its dominating influences on world climate and ecology, the Roof of the World' has been particularly vital to the conditioning of human activities in China. When we look at China's topography today, we find it made up with the 5,000 metres plus lofty altar (the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau) in the south-west going down step by step north-westwards to the sea coasts just above the sea level, and we see India's hand behind such a terrestrial deployment.

If we conceive the Himalayan heights (including the adjacent plateau) as the child of an India-China romance, the child has amply redeemed its filial gratitude by sending down from its mighty heavenly glaciers, rivers—cradling the earliest civilization chiefly the Indus and the Ganga southwards, and the Yellow River and the Yangtse northwards—the origin of two great civilizations, Indian and Chinese. We have here two geo-historical dimensions—the birth of two great civilizations as well as the ancestors of both civilizations being the descendants of Himalayan-centred apes. All this enables us to construct a new perspective in inquiring into the glorious past of the two countries. I don't mind it being branded as 'Himalayo-centrism' if it can cure the deep-rooted Eurocentrism in our intellectual make-up. However, we may better call it a 'Sino-Indian' perspective which, in fact, was first conceived by no other person than the half-forgotten, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

Proceeding from the holistic Himalayo-centric viewpoint we immediately realise a geo-historical vision which is illustrated by the diagram below:

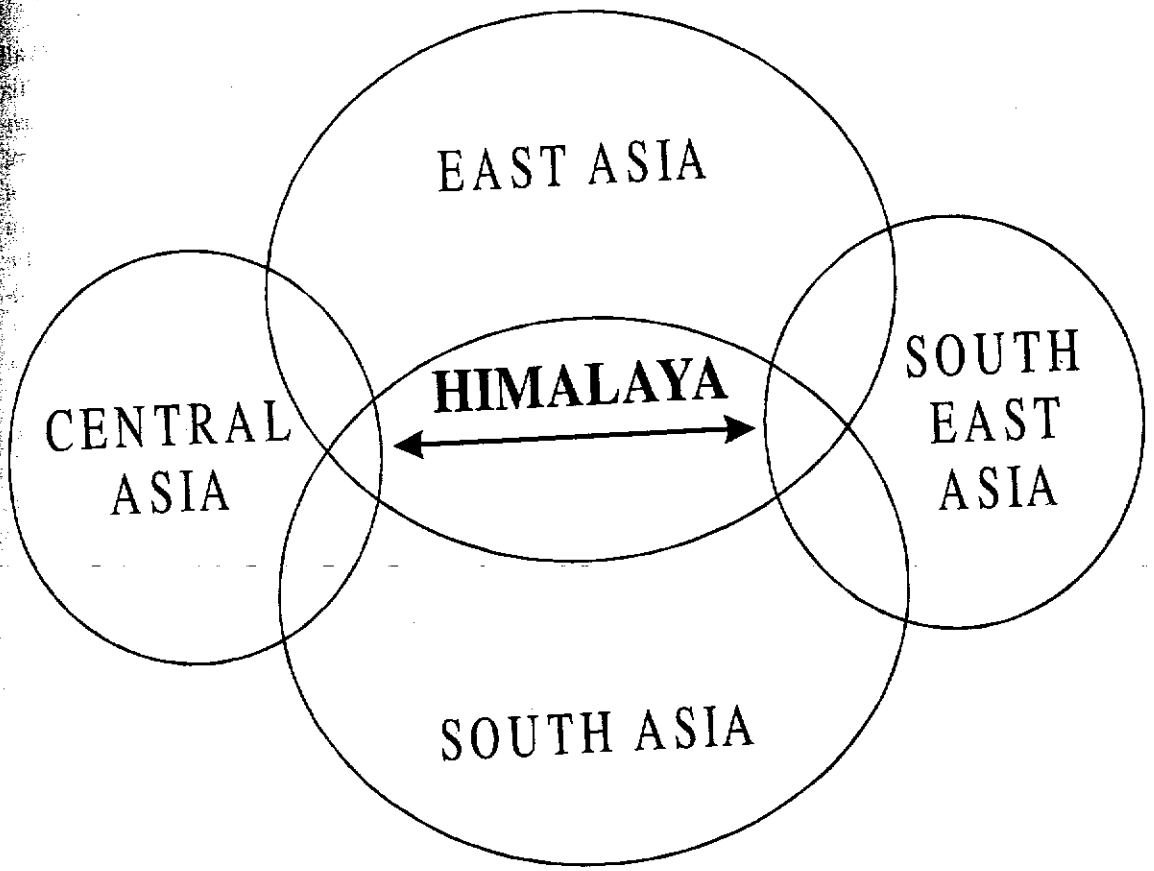

FIG I.

In this diagram, we see the convergence of Indian and Chinese cultures at both ends of the Himalaya. And the two focal points have been insightfully named by ancient and modern Europeans. The term 'Serindia' is hardly understood by modern scholars in either India or China. The ancient Greeks and Romans called China 'the country of silk'—'seres', 'serica', etc. Thus, 'Serindia' denotes 'China-India', the same way as saying 'Indochina'. Here is a vivid picture before us: The Indian and Chinese civilizations interacted with each other intensively to create two sisterly cultural zones around the Himalaya—zones of cultural synergy, synthesising the Indian, Chinese and local elements.

Like the real flame, the radiating culture also has an oxidising zone (which is the hottest part) in its frontier, hence the cultural synergy that has been witnessed at both the focal points of 'Serindia' and 'Indochina' is of great vigour and intensity. As 'Serindia', Central Asia has created a useful paradigm for deepening our understanding of inter-cultural history. The same can be said about South-east Asia.

THE 'SERINDIAN' DUNHUANG ART

Culture flows in two directions: vertical as well as horizontal. Some cultures—Buddhism, for example—flow more vigorously in the horizontal direction like a river. While not much water has seeped into the subterranean layers of the soil of its fountainhead, the tidal

waves of Buddhism have flooded many foreign lands, and cross-fertilised culture and art all over Asia, particularly in China. Let me illustrate this with an example. We know that India gave birth to cave art. Today, along the Vindyas in central India there is a necklace of cave art, starting from Elephanta on the western coast extending to the eastern limit of Maharashtra. Similarly, magnificent necklace of cave art exists in People's Republic of China too as starting from Turpan (also spelled as 'Turfan') and Kizil on the west (in present Xinjiang) extending to Gansu, Ningxia and Sichuan, ending at Yungang near the Sino-Mongolian border. And these two necklaces have their linkage at Bamian in Afghanistan—making the two necklaces of one and the same garland.

Among all these Chinese caves numbering several thousands, the Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang are undoubtedly the greatest. A marvellous treasure of wall paintings totalling 45,000 square metres was created and preserved in 492 caves, by ancient artists from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries—entirely for the dissemination of Buddhism. Most of them are intact even today though some of the oldest paintings may fade away in less than 50 years if no rescue measures can be adopted. Thus Dunhuang treasure is today under the priority protection of the UNO. Unfortunately, Indian scholars have shown little interest in closely examining such wonderful Chinese art treasure which can legitimately claim to be a part and parcel of the Indian cultural heritage.

The Mogao wall paintings have brought to life the much forgotten audio-visual methods invented by ancient Indian educators. The Chinese records, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, tell us that the Buddhist preachers during the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) and even earlier had resorted to story-telling performances with singing and action, and also painting exhibitions to vividly disseminate the messages of Buddha. The text of the story was called 'bianwen' (meaning 'a transformed writing'), and the picture was called 'bianxiang' (meaning 'a transformed image'). The latter, true to its name, transformed a sutra into a picture. Here, we see in the Dunhuang paintings hundreds of such pictures illustrating, say, 'Mile jing tubian' (the visual transformation of the scripture's description of Maitreya's Pureland Paradise), or 'Yaoshifo jingbian' (the visual transformation of *Bhaisajyaguruvaidurya-prabhasa*, i.e. the Scripture's version of the Medicine Buddha's paradise) etc.[3] The Mogao caves are universally regarded as a museum—a museum of paintings and stucco sculptures, also of Indian cultural heritage. The distance of Dunhuang from the Himalayan peaks is more or less the same between the latter and Delhi. Thus, we have now two magnificent museums for the shared heritage between India and China: The National Museum of India, south of the Himalaya, and the Mogao Grottoes north of it!

In inter-cultural studies geographical divisions can not be treated as watertight compartments. Whereas we often think of Dunhuang as the gateway of China in ancient times from a pure geographical or geo-historical perspective, culturally we can treat the Mogao Museum of Buddhist Art as the 'centre of India' or the 'centre of Serindia'—because, more than any place in present India, this is the 'centre' of Buddhist paintings, of illustrations of ancient Indian cultural heritage. Yet, this is not to deny its Chineseness—its being a wonderful Chinese creation and preservation, a magnificent achievement of Chinese art and culture. As described by the Chinese saying: *'Nizhong you wo, wozhong you ni'*, the deep Chinese understanding of the ancient Indian holistic mind, courtesy of the messengers of the Buddha, is conveyed in words which means: 'I in you and you in me'. Dunhuang is, thus, a typical example of 'India in China' to be understood in inter-cultural perspective sans any connotation of territorial claims or cartographic aggressions.

LEGENDS OF YUNNAN

Applying the same inter-cultural holistic perspective, we may describe Yunnan as belonging to both the Chinese civilizational realm and its Indian counterpart. Or, what is conceived as 'Indochina' is a concept which can be extended far beyond the boundaries of the peninsula bearing this name—to the entire South-east Asia and to Yunnan as well. As we have seen, Yunnan was the favourite habitat of the common ape ancestors of Indians and Chinese—the Ramapithecus. In the first century BC, when Yunnan became a part of the Chinese ruling Han empire, Indians (in Chinese records, 'Shendu') were one of the ethnic groups among the natives. From then, uptil the fourteenth century, the term 'Maharaja' had been in currency as the pronoun for some local kings of Yunnan—particularly the ruler of Dali. This fact has been documented in the official Chinese records of the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1279–1368) and Ming Dynasty (AD 1368–1644) featuring *'mokuo luocuo'*, the Chinese corruption of 'Maharaja'.

A Chinese book written by an author (whose name is lost) during the Yuan Dynasty contains a very interesting anecdote. The three sons of the great Indian king Ashoka, says the story, were chasing a golden horse which appeared in Magadha and ran eastwards. Finally, the third son caught the golden horse on a hill by the lake Dianchi (the big lake in Yunnan) which made the local people name the hill 'Jinmashan' (Hill of Golden Horse). Ashoka's first son also reached the bank of Dianchi Lake and obtained a green jade cock on another hill, bestowing on the hill the new name of 'Bijishan' (Green Jade cock Hill). The second son of Ashoka also reached the bank of Dianchi, and settled down there. Then, Ashoka sent his brother-in-law to look for them, who also settled down in Yunnan along with the three nephews. Later, their descendants intermarried with the Han people and created a new race—the Bai (white) people.[4]

Today, Yunnan is internationally known not only for tourist sights and cultural influence but also for the oral traditions among its various national minorities. A famous tourist spot is Jizushan (Cock's Foot Hill) at Binchuan County. The name is obviously borrowed from the Indian Buddhist legend, i.e. the 'Kukkutapadagiri'—a hill 50 kilometres away from the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya where Prince Siddhartha obtained his enlightenment and became Buddha. The Yunnan legend says that their Jizushan obtained its name because Lord Buddha had practised asceticism in Yunnan. Visitors to the holy shrine cam smell a mystic fragrance (because of the Buddha's holy presence), says the legend.[5]

Here is an inter-cultural phenomenon that resembles the specular reflection of the 'Conservation of Parity' which I venture to call the 'duplicating effect' of the horizontal flow of culture in which may be included: the Dunhuang-National Museum of India duplication; the Kukkutapadagiri-Jizushan duplication; and the Ashoka legend duplication. These are ramifications of very intense cultural interactions. They are just the examples to illustrate the India-China cultural synergy and affinity. In the case of Yunnan, it is the combination of the horizontal flow of culture and the commonality of anthropogenesis that has created the India-China cultural specular reflections. This may help us to demolish national boundaries for the moment, and see that long before the national identities of 'India' and 'China' came into existence there had been human activities in Yunnan—more than 1.7 million years ago (or even longer). Yunnan's 'Yuanmou Man' may, thus, be regarded as the common ancestor of the trans-Himalayan peoples, while Yunnan was a centre', not periphery of a trans-Himalayan civilization out of which the Indian and Chinese civilizations gradually came into being. When we think of 'Indochina' or 'Serindia',

we can also utter the name 'Yunnan'. In a word, Yunnan symbolizes the historical scenario treating India and China as civilizational twins.

BUDDHA IN CHINA

Religion was inseparable from vision as heralding events in India and China. Thus Mayadevi's seeing in her sleep the arrival of Prince Siddhartha on an elephant into her womb was in the same vein as by the introduction of Buddhism to China in association with another extraordinary dream. This was never recorded in the official history (hence many scholars doubt about its authenticity), but has always been recognised by the mainstream Chinese historiography. The Tang Emperor Taizong (reigning AD 626–49), for instance, believed the dream in AD 64 of the Han emperor Ming (AD 57–75), that a golden deity was flying over the palace. He asked the courtiers to explain this dream, and obtained the answer that it was a signal from the Buddha of India. The emperor, them, sent out a mission headed by Cai Yin to go to India to invite Buddhism to China. Thus marked the beginning of Buddhism in China as the convention goes.

Actually, the arrival of Buddha in China may be traced to the second century BC when General Huo Qubing (the Han commander fighting the Huns in present Xinjiang) vanquished a Hun chieftain, and obtained a metal statue as the booty in 121 BC. Han Emperor Wu (reigning 141–87 BC) treasured this rare artefact which could be an Indian-made statue of the Buddha and kept it in the palace for daily appreciation. This and another discovery of India by Zhang Qian prompted Emperor Wu to explore direct contacts by sending several missions to India. In Chinese historiography there was a general conclusion of 'Han Wudi tong xiyu', i.e. it was the Han Emperor Wu who had opened up the thoroughfare between China and the 'Western Regions' (*xiyu*) which definitely included India. One of the consequences of this opening up was the arrival of Indian magicians.[6]

With these episodes interfering with normal missionary records, the precise beginning of Buddhism in China has become a big question mark. What we should notice was an event that has found its place in the Han imperial records. In AD 65 Prince Yin of Chu, younger brother of Emperor Ming, confessed to the authorities before the imperial court that he had committed an offence by association with the Upasakas. We know that the ancient Buddhist society could be divided into four communities: Bhiksus (Monks), Bhiksunis (nuns), Upasakas (male lay followers), and Upasikas (female lay followers). Prince Yin's confession indicates that in the first century Christ, this four tier structure already existed in China's social fabric. Why Prince Yin felt that his association might be an offence indicates that this presence was as yet alien and without the formal patronage of the imperial authorities. However, Emperor Ming issued an edict to declare Prince Yin innocent, as this association did not constitute any legal offence. Naturally, the same Chinese ruler who had, a year ago, dreamt of the golden Buddha, and sent out a mission in search of the messengers of the Buddha would not have been dismayed that the followers of the Buddha had already arrived during his reign. Of course, the dream and the existence of Upasakas in the emperor's domain sounds contradictory. (If Buddhism had already come to China, why would a government search mission be sent out of the country to look for it?) But, this does prove that by the first century Buddhism had arrived in China, and its influence had penetrated around the Han imperial palace.

The arrival of the two eminent Indian monks, Kasyapa Matanga and Dharmaratna (Dharmaraksa) in AD 67 is conventionally regarded as the arrival of Buddhism in China

which may be historically incorrect as the Prince Yin episode has testified to). But, the arrival of the two Indian monks and the subsequent building of the Monastery of White Horses (*Baimasi*) in the suburbs of the capital city, Luoyang, does signify the obtaining of the official recognition and patronage for Buddhism in China. The Buddhist convention tells that the arrival of the two Indians also brought the Indian 'diwali' (festival of light) spirit to China—the emperor ordered a celebration in the capital by illuminating the buildings. Thus it was due to the introduction of Indian culture through Buddhism that the Chinese have been celebrating a second new year fifteen days after the Chinese new year day. And the second celebration has always been in the 'diwali' spirit. Even today, Chinese communities all over the world attach importance to two days in the lunar calendar—both prefixed by the syllable 'yuan', meaning 'first'. The first day of a year is called 'yuandan', meaning 'first morning', while the fifteenth day is called 'yuanxiao', meaning 'first night'. Why the Chinese 'First Morning' and 'First Night' are separated by fifteen days was because of the Chinese discovery that the Indians would begin a month on full moon day (while the Chinese full moon night falls on the fifteenth of the lunar month). Celebrating 'Yuanxiao' (the 'First Evening') amounted to celebrating the Indian new year. And the fittest way in celebrating it should be in the Indian 'diwali' style. This is how a new festival has been added to the Chinese way of life—the 'lantern festival' as it is internationally known. In Chinese literature, the festival was called 'Shangyuan Jie', literally 'the first night festival of superiority'. Here, the prefix 'Shang' (Superiority) is puzzling. Though this festival began during the Tang Dynasty, if not earlier, the name of 'Shangyuan' festival was probably a Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279) innovation. Also, it was during the Song period that the festival was celebrated with great gusto in the capital city with royal patronage and participation. The Song emperors were inclined to both Buddhism and material enjoyment. The input of the element of superiority in the name of the festival suggests a double involvement of the Buddha and the royal family. Thus, in the Shangyuan Festival we see another example of shared heritage between India and China.

It may be said that idol worship began with Indian Buddhists, but China could claim to have produced maximum portraits and statues (carved and stucco) of the Buddha. The earliest arrival of the Buddha portrait in China could be one painted by the King of Khotan and taken to China by Cai Yin's mission who had been sent to the 'western countries' in search of Buddhism by Emperor Ming. The emperor was very pleased to receive it and asked the court artists to copy the portrait to be placed in the palace.

Wang Xuance, the famous ambassador sent out by the powerful Tang Emperor Taizong, reported back that in India there was no dearth of Buddha's portraits and statues. He left behind an account, which alludes to his bringing back to China, a portrait of the Buddha. This portrait has a copy in Cave No. 231 and Cave No. 237 respectively of the Mogao Grottoes, (see Geng Yinzeng, 1990, pp. 161–62).

TWINNING INDIA AND CHINA

The conception of India and China as cultural twins from the same cradle calls for research endeavours to further establish the cultural affinity of the two civilizations. One common symbol is the powerful snake whose legendary image is known as *Nagaraja* in India, and *Long* (Dragon) in China. In Chinese Buddhist literature, these two symbols have merged into 'Long'. We see Chinese translators, like the famous pilgrim Xuanzang (also spelled as 'Hsuan-tsang'), rendering the supernatural Naga in ancient Indian texts into

long/dragon on purpose. Ancient Chinese had heard about the magical power of Indians to call rains whenever they wanted. Some Indian Buddhist monks, like Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra, and such others, demonstrated such a power by playing with the symbol of Naga/Dragon. We have records of Indian monks presiding over imperial rain-invoking ceremonies when China was visited by severe drought in the years AD 366, 726, 772 and 889, the last occurred in independent Yunnan—the state of Nanzhai. Both India and China were *agrocultures* (I have coined the term to replace the tongue-twister 'agricultural culture') where rainfall assumed great importance and the powerful Nagaraja/Dragon symbol played a definite role consequently. We can describe the two civilizations as Snake-Power Twins even before the advent of Buddhism in China.

I have taken this proposition of Naga-Long twinhood to the academic fora both in mainland China and in Taiwan, and have encountered furious opposition. My opponents argued that the Long/Dragon legend had had its independent existence for five-six thousand years, that China was always the 'Homeland of Dragon', and that the Chinese were famous for being the 'Progenies of Dragon' (*Longde chuanren*). Even the idea that a part of the social functions of the dragon symbol might originate from India was unacceptable because it hurt the Chinese pride in their thousand-year affinity with *Long*. This, in a way, underlines the daunting task of popularising the Sino-Indian perspective among Chinese (and also Indian) scholars while studying the history and culture of India and China. The Sino-Indian perspective is to treat Chinese and Indian cultures not as two separate entities having developed in isolation, but as the two faces of the same culture developing in different socio-cultural surroundings constantly benefiting by interface synergy. The mystification of the supernatural power of snake in India and *long* in China was the product of agriculture in both the countries. While we don't have concrete evidence for the Indian input in the imagination of the pre-Buddhist Chinese *Long*, we certainly can trace the Indian influence on the Buddhist Chinese *Long*. For one thing, there was the fierce look that typifies the Buddhist *Long* (like the Chinese say, '*zhangya wuzhua*', i.e. baring its teeth and waving its claws) which clearly demonstrates the inner social function of Long/Dragon as the guardian of the imperial system. But, the pre-Buddhist Chinese *Long*, as shown by the artefacts, were, by and large, free form such apparent ferocity. Buddhism took to China not only the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, but also the '8 categories of supernatural beings' (*tian long bazhong*) among whom the Nagaraja and Garuda existed prominently as the guardian angels of Buddhadharma. It is in this function that we clearly see the Indian contribution to the Chinese imperial power and Chinese visual illustrations of that power.

To recapitulate what I have spelt out elsewhere, during the pre-Buddhist period, even as late as the Han Dynasty, the Dragon/Long was treated as a 'beast' (*chu*). The famous Han scholar, Wang Chong (AD 27–97?), cited Chinese traditions like *Long* being reared so that people could eat its liver. But, in Indian legends, Siva was a Naga, Buddha was also a Naga, and the Indian traditions assign the duty of a guardian-angel for protecting the God/Buddha and the sacred treasure to Nagaraja. It was this message which was driven home in Chinese oral culture as well as literary tradition. Only after absorbing this cultural function from the Indian Nagaraja did the Chinese *Long* become a close companion of the Chinese imperial families in all dynasties from Sui-Tang till the Manchu (ending in 1911). Another clear Chinese borrowing form India is the 'Dragon-king' (*longwang*)—the Chinese reincarnation of the Indian Nagaraja. This cult of *Longwang* has settled deeply in China's socio-cultural chemistry as many penetrating studies suggest. Prasenjit Duara of Chicago University, for instance, has included *Longwang* in his projection of the 'cultural nexus of power' in China.[7] Longwang/Dragon King is indisputably the symbol of Sino-

Indian cultural twinhood that demonstrates the existence of Snake-Power Twinhood of India and China.

As India-China contact grew, the Snake-Power Twinhood transformed into a new and higher stage of twinning. This was brought about by the 'Great Carrier' Mahayana. Here, I use the Sanskrit word in both the religious and non-religious perspectives, viewing it as the carrier of a large treasure of Indian culture to China in the name of Buddha. From the religious viewpoint, India was the preacher and China, the convert. The Indian civilization is the world's greatest inventor of religion—having created four major religions of the world: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. In fact, Buddhism was the first perfect religious system on Chinese soil. Taoism resorted to heavy borrowing from Buddhist system to emerge as a full-fledged religion only during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)—the time when the Taoist Holly Book, entitled *Daozang* (meaning the 'Taoist Pitakas') was finalised.

China was not only a sisterly Buddhist country of India, she became a relay torch bearer of Buddhadharma, spreading Buddhism to other lands in East Asia and South-east Asia. Moreover, Mahayana Buddhism reached the zenith of its development only in China. I have developed elsewhere a theory that Mahayana Buddhism was a joint Sino-Indian (or multi-national) venture marrying the Indian-born universal empire.[8] Today, no research on Mahayana Buddhism can be pursued without studying the Chinese literature (including the translation literature), or without referring to the Chinese historical background. Another aspect to India-China Buddhist twinning is that it was in China that Buddhism had enjoyed maximum state patronage in term of quantity and grandeur, that at maximum number of Buddhist priests and followers were recruited, and a maximum of Buddhist shrines were built. Today, the richest resources of 'cultural pilgrimage' for a devout Buddhist tourist are in China—not India. Today, the 'Heavenly Abode' of four eminent Bodhisattvas—Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, Samantabhadra, and Ksitigarbha—are in China, not India (the motherland where the legends of these Bodhisattvas were born).

The synergetic relationship between China and Buddhism is too clear to be overlooked by any serious study dealing with India-China intercourse. On the one hand, China played an important role to put Buddhism on the world map, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. The share in the overall cultural assets of Buddhism is enormous—as heavy as India's. China also helped greatly to preserve the longevity of the Buddhist cultural movement so that when other trans-national religions, like Islam and Christianity, rose to their respective universal popularity, in the second millennium, there was the Buddhist world to keep balance. It was because of China that Buddhism has always maintained its position as the most popular religion of Asia. It was the Chinese civilization that helped to keep the flag of *dharmacakra* high and flying when India, the 'country of the Buddha' became a dominantly non-Buddhist country following the revival of Brahmanism, the wave of Islamic persuasion, and the more recent Christian colonisation.

On the other hand, Buddhism played an important role in making Chinese imperial system the longest living political governance tradition in world history. That the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) collapsed after four centuries of its establishment was due to the absence of a universal ruling ideology. State Confucianism could not cope with the mighty waves of non-Han cultural and ethnic communities that were drowning north China from the end of the second century onwards. It was at this juncture that Buddhism launched its movement of 'all roads leading to China'. With eminent Indian and other foreign monk-scholars settling in China, with Buddhist scriptures pouring into China from all direction of the world, and with the creation of a gigantic translation infrastructure to convert the Indian speech of Buddha's messages into the Chinese visual symbols for the book-loving

Chinese ruling elite, a new acculturation and centripetal force was generated to transform ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity into unity. Such a transformation helped south China maintain its political integrity under four consecutive dynastic banners. It also helped north China to sort out the confusion of the '16 Kingdoms', and rally around the centripetal 'Northern Dynasties' of which the Northern Wei was the linchpin. With both north and south developing a uniform Confucian-Buddhist synthesis, the way was paved for the reunification of China during the sixth century. From then on a second lease of life was given to the Chinese imperial system which never looked back, and survived until the last emperor of Manchu was overthrown in 1911. That Mahayana Buddhism was developed in China to fortify her imperial system is illustrated by the popular convention of using the word 'guo' (state) to name Buddhist temples, by the existence of Buddhist temples inside the imperial palace, by the embroidery of the symbols of Sumeru and Swastika on Chinese emperors' robes etc.

In the twentieth century, another dimension in the Sino-Indian twinning has appeared in the historical horizon—the two Snake-Power Twins and Buddhist Twins now become Anti-Colonial Twins. This new twinning episode is ably spelled out by Professor Lin Chengjie of Beijing University.[9] British colonialism had already twinned India and China by making them co-contributors to Britain's 'primitive accumulation' of the Industrial Revolution from the beginning of the nineteenth century—even earlier. China was brought into the picture by what I call 'opium imperialism'—the infamous 'triangular trade' directed by London that Britons enjoyed Chinese tea, Chinese *enjoyed* Indian opium, and Indians *enjoyed* British Raj.[10]

This overview of India-China twinhood is a sketching projection from Ramapithecus down to the 50th anniversary of the Republic of India (year 2000) and People's Republic of China (1999). In the last 2 million years, the two peoples have shared their common ape ancestry. In the last 20,000 years, they have shared a common Snake-Power culture. In the last 2,000 years, they have shared a fruitful Buddhist culture and art. In the last 200 years, they have, first, shared the bitter poison of Buddhist colonialism, and, then, united as anti-colonial twins. All this is the poetic content of 'Hindi-Cheeni Bhai Bhai', and it is always there whether we sing the song or not, whether we are aware of it and willingly acknowledge it or not.

SILK ROAD

The geo-cultural situation of India-China twinning (see Diagram I) is also a South Asia-East Asia twinning. This twinning, in turn, twins with Central Asia and South-east Asia. Professor Prasenjit Duara has a brilliant project in rescuing history from the narrow prejudicial mind of the nation-state.[11] While we may not deny the positive contribution of the concept of nation-state to the freedom struggles of the repressed people all over the world in recent centuries, the cultural and socio-economic dynamics of our earth are progressively demolishing the national boundaries that have been arbitrarily imposed on international relations. But, as we have already seen, the cult of Snake-Power, the horizontal movement of Buddhism etc., have never respected national boundaries. This calls upon us to constantly liberate our minds from narrow nation-state confines whenever we pronounce the word 'India' or 'China'. When I talked about the pivotal role played by India and China in a Himalayo-centric perspective, I used both 'India' and 'China' as mere symbols without wanting to overlook the existence of cultural initiatives and the contributions of ethno-

cultural identities which a narrow nation-state mind might overlook in discussing 'India-China' cultural interactions. Hence, Diagram I should be transformed into Diagram II.

Like a Hindu god who has four faces, so is the inter-cultural study of the four sub-continental facets inter-twinning with one another. The above diagram is clearly Himalayo-centric, viz., with India and China providing the locomotives of dynamism. I have already touched upon the horizontal expansion of Buddhist cultural force which has circulated the four (South Asian-Central Asian-East Asian-Southeast Asia) sub-continental inter-cultural synergetic dynamics. This cultural networking has had a corresponding movement of a two-way traffic of people and goods without which there would not have been any inter-cultural dynamism. This two-way traffic is epitomised by the fashionable term today—the 'Silk Road'.

Thanks to the imaginative nineteenth century German scholar, Baron Ferdinand von Ritchtofen, we have a romantic symbol coined by the German word 'Seidenstrassen'. It is meaningless to argue whether 'Silk Route' or 'Silk Road' is a better English translation. Today, Chinese scholars have conceived three such Silk Routes: the cross-border Eurasian thorough-fare linking Europe with eastern China, the maritime route between Chinese ports and eastern coast of Africa, and a southern Silk Road linking southwest China with South Asia and extending further west from eastern Indian cities and ports over land and seas. Obviously, no one has built any 'road' on the Central Asian deserts and mountains, or in the Yunnan-Myanmar-Indian jungles, or on the blue waters. Nor was any specific navigational sea course particularly allotted to silk and other inter-continental trade (there would be various courses). On the other hand, not even hundred thousands of troops could trample out a road, or a specific route in the Burmese and Assamese thick jungles, while the shifting sands of the Gobi and Taklamakan deserts would not allow any ground trace of footstep to remain in three seconds. Thus, I am using 'Silk Road' just as a symbol—a conceptual linkage between China and the outside world.

The starting point for the Eurasian Silk Road was Luoyang in today's Henan Province in eastern China. With a 3,000-year-old history, and as the imperial capital of the Eastern Han Dynasty (reigning AD 25–220), Luoyang was a hub of international trade and cultural

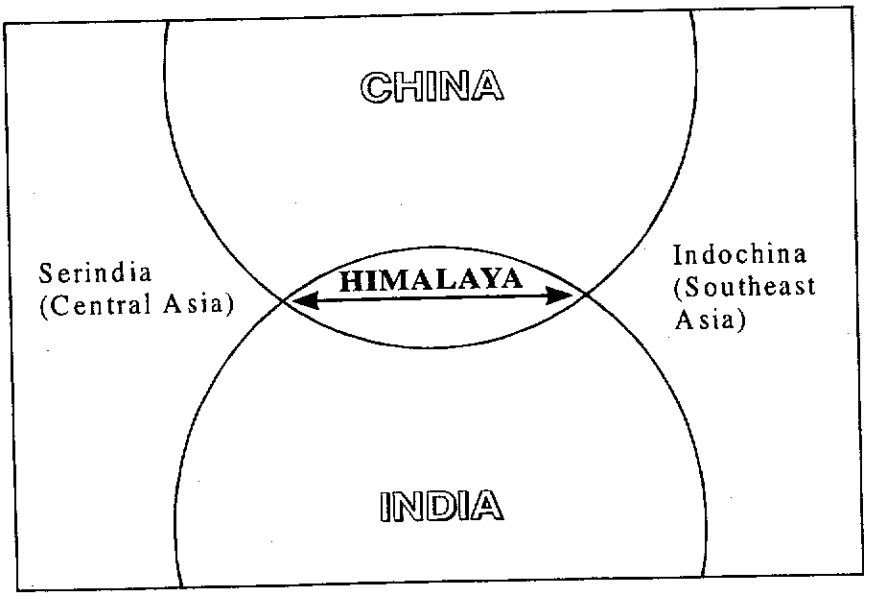

FIG II.

intercourse just as the trans-Eurasian Silk Road got inaugurated. Among the distinguished foreign visitors to Luoyang were two Indian Buddhist monks, Kasyapa Matanga and Dharmaraksa/Dharmaratna who arrived there on horseback (of white colour) in the first century as I have already alluded to.

During the period of Topa Wei (AD 386–534), particularly after the imperial city of Luoyang became its capital in AD 493, Buddhism was flourishing. Luoyang had a very large number of shrines, each magnificent and lavishly decorated with treasures from abroad. Bodhidharma whose feat I shall highlight later, was astonished by the marvels he saw in Luoyang in the second decade of the sixth century. These included a nine-storey high pagoda with a huge golden vase on top that was said to be visible from a distance of 50 km. It is said that when the pagoda caught fire in AD 534, a fire blazed in the sky for three months, and when it was finally razed to the ground, people at sea saw it reappear in the sky. All this symbolizes the linkage between Luoyang, Buddhism, and sea trade.[12]

The tarns-continental Silk Road starting from Luoyang ended in the other great cosmopolitan city of the Western Hemisphere—Rome. The famous saying that 'All roads lead to Rome' could be paraphrased into 'All roads lead to Luoyang and Chang'an (present Xian).' The last place was an equally famous political capital of China same as Luoyang. Particularly during the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) there were eminent gatherings and congregations of international envoys, traders and Buddhist monk-scholars, as well as Nestorians, Islamic and Manicaean priests and preachers. There were other important mid-way stop on this Eurasian thoroughfare, one of which was Tashkent. From Tashkent, those coming to India took a southward route entering the valleys of Kashmir and Punjab through the Khyber Pass. Most of the Chinese pilgrims came through this route which, for our purpose, is also a branch of the Silk Road.

India was not only at the end of the southern branch of the Eurasian Silk Road, but also on the thoroughfare of the southern Silk Road that connected southwest China with the European countries. As the Persian middle men charged their European customers the price of gold for the Chinese silk, their Roman buyers sought another outlet to reach China. They sailed out from the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean, and used the Indian coasts as to reach the Bay of Bengal. From there they could obtain Chinese silk transported through Yunnan and Burma (and through the Irrawaddy River to the coast). Burma and Malayan Peninsula which the ancient Greek and Roman traders frequented in their hunt for silk and other Eastern commodities were known in ancient European geography as 'khersonese'. A Chinese scholar has conceived another interesting 'Silk Road' starting from Chengdu (capital city of Sichuan), through western Yunnan and north-west India, along the Gangetic valley upto Khabur.[13]

Even if we concede that there was no road in the term 'Silk Road', the same cannot be said about the silk component in the concept. Chinese historians have attributed to the powerful Han Emperor, Wu the opening up of China's inter-continental linkages with 'Western countries'. The Emperor was engaged in a life-and-death fighting with some Hun chieftains who had disturbed the stability of the Han Empire from its inception. But, the Han-Hun wars inaugurated by Han Emperor Wu and carried out by many of his successors eventually drove the hostile Hun tribes out of sight. It was this protracted military operation that led the Chinese military presence to as far as the Mediterranean. The Silk Road was carved out as a by-product of these operations. I may add here that the Han Emperor's enthusiasm was backed by the enviable situation that China had invented the wonder fibre 'silk', that she had a monopolist position in producing it. Records said that when the Emperor sent his envoys (called 'Hanshi', i.e. 'Han envoys' most of whom were government-

appointed traders) abroad, he gave them neither gold, nor silver, but silk and silk fabrics as capital. These Han envoys used their silk cargo as travel expenses as well as payment for foreign goods. From Chinese historical records, we know that when the Han governments (Western and Eastern Han dynasties) were fighting their Hun enemies from the second century BC to the second century AD., they sent out many diplomatic missions to Central Asia to strike alliances with the local rulers to isolate the Huns. The success of these missions was mightily contributed to by lavish Chinese presents of silk products. In fact, it was this successful 'silk diplomacy' which served to advertise Chinese silk abroad and stimulate a foreign demand for it. Silk, thus, paved the way for the opening up of the Eurasian thoroughfare.

Though the shifting sands have buried millions of foot prints trodden on the Silk Road, the buried remains of those who had walked and died along the Silk Road were carefully protected by the Central Asian deserts. Archaeologists have been able to uncover some such remains, and find Chinese silk products of various periods from the second century BC to the fourteenth century AD. This discovery proves that silk was playing an important role on the Silk Road for more than a millennium. From archaeological findings, we see that the luxurious tapestries, brocades and silk shoes produced during the Han Dynasty before the third century AD—which only the royal families and aristocrats and the very rich in China could consume—were quite wide spread in Central Asia. Even the dead bodies from some Central Asian countries were wrapped with Chinese silk cloth in ancient times.

CHINESE SILK AND INDIA

Ancient Europeans could never figure out how silk had been created—some imagined that it was gathered from the magic tress! The arrival of silk in the Roman Empire revolutionised the apparel of the rich and the aristocrats who would at once discard the ugly home-spun. Cleopatra would not have attracted the attention of the Roman rulers if her beautiful body had not been highlighted by the elegant Chinese fibre. She had special workshops to turn imported raw silk into her gorgeous dresses. Similarly, the ruling elite of the Maurya and Gupta empires greatly used Chinese silk.

As a civilization that was born with an early enthusiasm for excellence in textiles, China met her match only in India. Evidence of textile skills was shown by archaeological discoveries of Mohenjo Daro and Harappan civilizations dating four thousand years back. Thread of mixed wild silk and cotton with a vintage of the second half of the second millennium BC has been found at archaeological sites at Nevasa and Chandoi.[14] With such a background, ancient Indians would naturally be active in looking for the Chinese silkworm—*Bombyz mori*—who had, before the Christ, no habitat outside China where it had been domesticated in the second or third millennium BC if not earlier. The Chinese Empire's releasing and sending out silk, in large quantities from the first century BC onwards must have been greeted in India as an opportunity to internalise the wonder yarn of the *Bombyz mori* into the local domestic trade and industry.

Aurel Stein, the famed modern discoverer of Dunhuang (who was sent by the Archaeological Survey of India to explore Central Asia at the beginning of the twentieth century), discovered at Yumen (the famous 'Jade Gate', i.e. the Gateway of China, in modern Gansu Province) a piece of silk cloth which had a line of Brahmi script of Kushana style written at one end:

stasya pata gisti saparisa,

which indicates the length of the cloth. According to Professor Ji Xianlin, doyen of Indology in China, this length tallied with the standard length of a roll of silk, hence this evidence of Indian traders' taking an active part in the trade along the Eurasian Silk Road.[15]

Henry Yule, in his famous book, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, written in the nineteenth century, related an interesting story (originally came from the writing of the sixth century historian, Pvocopius) that an Indian Buddhist monk, a resident of Serindia, went to Constantinople to meet Justinian I (the famed Emperor who never slept) and volunteered to help bring silk worms to the Byzantine Empire so that it could produce its own silk, instead of importing it through Persian and other foreign profiteers. The Emperor promised a fat reward if he could do so. The mission was achieved said the story. But, Chinese scholars thought that this was only a concoction without historical truth.[16]

That India was one of the first foreign countries to take a keen interest in China's silk industry has been well documented. Kautilya's *Arthasastra* written in the fourth century BC contains a sentence which deserves careful examination:

Kauseyam cinapattasca cinabhumijah.

This sentence has referred to 'Kauseya' and 'cinapatta' being the product of 'cinabhumi', i.e. China. Professor Ji Xianlin was a little puzzled by the first Sanskrit word and identified it with the Indian product from wild silk cocoons.[17] But, this would not be a correct reading of the above sentence from *Arthasastra*. Professor M.C. Joshi, eminent archaeologist and Member Secretary of Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, thinks that the word 'kauseya' means cocoon, as it is derived from the etymological root of 'kosa', meaning a round ball. He says that from many Sanskrit texts it is clear that 'kauseya' denotes the cocoon produced in China. Ancient Indians described that the Hindu gods wore nothing but garments made by the Chinese 'kauseya', and Lord Siva was particularly fond of the yellow-coloured Chinese cocoon.[18]

This new interpretation helps us to establish that Kautilya had a good knowledge not only of the Chinese silk, but also how it was produced (from the cocoon)—contrasting with the wild guess of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The above cited sentence, *'Kauseyam cinapattasca cinabhumijah'*, presents before its readers a vivid description of silk cocoons and silk floss in bundles being the products of China. Whether Kautilya had seen them, and whether the two Chinese commodities were available in India during his time are difficult to ascertain. At least, Kautilya's informant had seen them either in India or in China which shows how intimately in contact the Indian and Chinese civilizations were with each other many centuries before Christ.

Here I must mention the famous 'Chinese discovery of India' in the second century BC by Zhang Qian (also spelled Chang Ch'ien), personal envoy of Han emperor Wu to the Central Asian kingdoms. When he was in 'Daxia' (probably Afghanistan or north of it), he saw silk fabrics, the products of southwestern Chinese province of Sichuan, in the market place. He was told that the fabrics were re-exported by the Indian merchants to the hinterland of Central Asia. The likely route of the Sichuan silk's entry into India would be either through Tibet, or through Yunnan and Myanmar. Given the close cultural contacts between Yunnan and India (which I have already alluded to), the latter route was a higher possibility. This closeness, perhaps, was reflected in Kautilya's familiarity with and information about Chinese silk, due to the very early trade by Indian merchants in Chinese silk.

The Byzantine emperor Justinian I (whom I have mentioned above) was one of the keen seekers for Chinese silk from the Western Hemisphere. Records show that he tried Ethiopian merchants to get it from India.[19] This indirectly reflects the popularity of Chinese

silk in India and also the fame of India as an entrepot of Chinese silk. Professor Xinru Liu* of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has given a vivid account of Chinese silk in ancient India, which also figures prominently in Kalidasa's writings.[20]

Just as Chinese silk products had contributed to the luxury of living, elegant dressing and sense of aesthetics in the Roman Empire, so it did in ancient India. Silk has been as important as incense in Indian ceremonies from ancient times till today, and is an indispensable article in the pantheon of Indian traditions. Besides, next to China, India arose as the world's most important trader and producer of silk in history. The place of silk in the study on India-China historical contacts cannot be over-emphasised. Yet, we still do not have a clear idea about many crucial aspects of this Sino-Indian 'silk' twinhood. When did India begin to import silk from China? When did India start her own silk industry using *Bombyz mori*? A satisfactory answer to these questions will definitely enrich our insight into the shared cultural heritage between India and China.

THE INDIA-CHINA MARITIME CONNECTIONS

From ancient Chinese accounts comes evidence of close contacts between India and China through the sea. The Chinese described a distant country called 'Daqin' (denoting the Roman Empire) that appeared to be connected with India in two ways: the first was India's maritime trade links with 'Daqin', and the second, as a recent research has shown, was the confusion with its identity.[21] For instance, one ancient Chinese account mentioned that 'Daqin' was a country which produced elephant teeth and rhinoceros horns. However, we know that these commodities are not European, but Indian. Hence China's trade with 'Daqin' in ancient times must have touched India. So, when Chinese historical records suggest that 'Daqin' was keenly interested in Chinese silk, it actually indicates a triangular route with the Chinese export reaching India, and then Europe via India. In AD 166, the Han court recorded the arrival of an embassy, sent by the Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius Antonius. The deputation arrived by sea, landing close to what is now the Guangdong province in southern China, and then proceeded to the capital city of the Eastern Han Dynasty, Luoyang, overland. They presented the Chinese emperor with ivory, rhinoceros horn (a precious ingredient for Chinese medicine) and the shell of hawksbill turtles, all products of India. Was this disguised Indian delegation, or one with confused identity? Antonius, probably, never sent out such a mission to the Far East.

The possibility of confused identity at the Chinese end would all the more strengthen what is documented in the Greek writing. In *Periplus Maris Erithreae*, the first century maritime geography of East-West trade, the author mentioned a busy port of the Indus delta (at present in Pakistan) named 'Brbaricum', where silk figured as an important commodity. He also alluded to Greek and Indian traders actively bringing Chinese silk to India through perilous voyages.[22]

Ban Gu, the famous Chinese historian has located an account of a sea route linking Guangzhou (Canton) with Sri Lanka from as early as the reign of Han Emperor Wu, and included it in a chapter of *Han Shu* (the official annals of the Han Dynasty). According to this, Chinese merchants could stay and trade at 'Huangzhi' (also spelled Huang-chih) in

* Who had done her Ph.D. study on ancient contacts between India and China under Professor Romila Thapar of Jawaharlal Nehru University, and whose book published by the Oxford University Press in 1988 has not received due to attention it deserves.

what was probably a prosperous coastal Indian state in the couple of centuries both before and after Christ. Scholars are still undecided whether Huangzhi was located around Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu, or in Bengal, or in Orissa. The king of Huangzhi, states the record, had despatched pearls, rhino horns (even a rhino) and other products to trade with Chinese rulers. Of course, he and his aristocrats were recipients of Chinese silk that the Han envoys carried with them to exchange with foreign goods and to pay for their travelling expenses.

Rig Veda, the earliest Indian classics, contains references to eastern and western seas, and merchants going abroad in search of fortune. The great Indian epic, *Ramayana,* alludes to a foreign state 'Kosakorsa' (a silk producing country) among which Hanuman had gone to look for the missing Sita. This 'Kosakorsa' strengthens what I have discussed earlier about the information Kautilya had about the Chinese cocoon 'Kauseya' (derived from 'Kosa'), and the popularity of China as a producer of silk in ancient Indian oral literature. Early Indian visuals, enshrined on the seals of Mohenjo Daro, the sculpture of Sanchi Stupa, and the Ajanta wall paintings, etc. show sea faring scenes and ships. The one with three masts in Cave No. 2 of Ajanta has been identified by Professor Geng Yinzeng of Biejing University as a Chinese ocean liner.[23] If this is a true identification, then, Sino-Indian maritime trade must have been highly developed, and Chinese ocean ships must have come to India's western coast and made a great impression on the inhabitants from near and far by the middle of the first millennium.

Returning to confused identities of 'Daqin' in ancient Chinese records, *Wei Lue* (A brief history of Wei), an early Chinese book written in third-fourth century, gives a puzzling account about Daqin's intercourse with China:

Traffic routes with Daqin connect the northern land [of China] from the sea, and line up with Annam and other foreign lands via the sea in the south. There is also water routes linking [Daqin] with Sichuan and Yunnan. Earlier, people knew only the maritime routes, not the land routes.[24]

The Puzzling element is removed if we understand 'Daqin' here to mean India. What the passage indicates is the fact that India was connected with northern China through maritime traffic, while maritime link could also bring Indians to China's southern neighbours like Annam. One more connection was the Indian traffic with Yunnan and Sichuan through land routes which I have alluded to a little while ago. If many of the references to 'Daqin' in ancient Chinese records have supplanted their real identity, i.e. India, then, Chinese scholars must sift out what actually are of Sino-Indian contacts that have been mixed up with Sino-European contacts.

The beginning of a powerful naval force and merchant navy in China occurred during the reign of Sun Quan (AD 222–252), the king of Wu in the post-Han period of the 'Three kingdoms'. This Wu ruler inaugurated a period of Chinese history of 'Six Dynasties' centred around the city of Nanjing which functioned as the centre for political, economic and cultural activities uptill China's reunification in AD 589. That a separate centre of gravity was situated near the mouth where the Yangtse flowed into the sea was a stimulus for maritime intercourse between China and India. One historical annal (of the Liang Dynasty) belonging to this period depicts China's maritime linkages with foreign countries 'as near as 3–5 thousand *li* and as far as 20–30 thousand *li* away' through maritime traffic. Only two foreign countries figure in this account: Daqin and Tianzhu.[25] The latter is India ('Heavenly India'), and the former, as I have just alluded to, could be ancient Europe (Roman Empire) and other destinations including India. This further illustrates the prominent place occupied by India from the time of Christ (and even earlier).

The magnificent Buddhist resurgence in Luoyang, depicted earlier was matched by what happened in Nanjing, during the Liang Dynasty. The Liang Emperor Wu (AD 503–549) was a rare Chinese ruler who had almost transformed himself into a Buddhist monk, and enjoyed the reputation of a Bodhisattva emperor. In his zeal to use every penny from the state treasury towards the creation of a Buddhist temple, he ordered a state ceremony to receive a sandalwood Buddha status from Magadha (modern Bihar) in AD 502.

Shortly after the emperor was starved to death by a rebel, a Cambodian merchant ship from western India anchored at Nanjing with a precious cargo that is said to include a 20kg mirror made of beryl. It was rumoured that a mirror could turn coloured things invisible. Whatever the merit of such a fantastic invention, it is believed the Chinese ruler wanted to buy the marvellous mirror, but his treasury could not produce the money, a billion coins, demanded by the Cambodian merchant. The historical value of this fantastic anecdote is less significant than its indication of a very thriving maritime trade between India and China in which millions of coins could have been transacted.

Contrary to their modern images, India and China were advanced sea-faring powers in ancient times. China's maritime contacts with 'Huangzhi' indicates that many centuries before Christ there were brisk navigation activities from the shores of Indian Ocean to the China coasts. The famous Han Dynastic Annal, *Hanshu*, that gives us the reference of Huangzhi has also detailed the midway stations in South-east Asia where Chinese traders had passed through before reaching the Indian kingdom. These details indicate the existence of a network of coastal shipping facilities for relay voyages from coast to coast for India-going Chinese. The above story of a Cambodian merchant taking jewel from the western coast of India to the eastern coast of China for sale shows the continuance of this maritime service between India and China via Southeast Asian coasts.

During the eighth century, Japan's eagerness to adopt Buddhism as her ruling culture and ideology was epitomised in a Chinese monk, Jianzhen's (AD 688–763) arrival in Japan to become 'Kanchin', the personification of Renaissance in ancient Japan. This was achieved in AD 752 by the persevering efforts on the part of Japanese monks after five consecutive failures in crossing the sea. This episode is truthfully documented in an account written in AD 779 in Chinese (i.e. classical Japanese) script, entitled *Tang daheshang dongzheng zhuan* (The story of the great Tang monk's eastern expedition). In this account there is am interesting passage relating to the Kaiyuian Monastery in Guangzhou where Jianzhen and his Japanese companions had stayed, along with a description of the Guangzhou port. The passage reads:

> Some foreigners [Indians] had completed carving out the Buddha statues from white sandalwood according to the prescriptions of the *Avatamsaka-sutra*, having spent 30 years working on them. The statues were originally meant to be shipped to Heavenly India. After Governor Liu memorialised the imperial court, the Emperor issued an edict to let the statues be kept inside the Kaiyuan Monastery for mass worshipping. The statues were unbelievably magnificent being studded with seven kinds of jewels. The city also had three Brahmanic temples with Indian monks in residence. . . . In the river [Pearl River] there were innumerable ships from Brahmanic countries, Persia, Kunlun, etc. with perfumes and jewels piling up like mountains. The displacement of the ships went down 60–70 feet in water.[26]

The importance of this account is self-evident. From it, we have a picture of an Indian settlement at Guangzhou which must be the biggest port and maritime trading centre in the Far East in the first millennium. In the first place, there were three Hindu temples to cater for the religious life of Indians whose numbers must have exceeded many hundreds

(otherwise there would not have been the need for three temples, nor would there be sufficient donations for building them). Secondly, Buddhism was still a powerful cultural phenomenon in India during that time, and there was a substantial Indian investment in making jewel-studded white sandalwood Buddha statues to be shipped to India. The statues must be magnificent, indeed, to attract the Chinese imperial authorities to get an order issued to retain them inside China. That Indian ('Brahmanic countries') ships occupied a prominent position in Guangzhou's maritime trade further supports the substantial Indian settlement.

The Indian and other foreign ships at the Guangzhou port in the eighth century were quite advanced with a 70 feet displacement in water. Chinas's ship building industry had an early development like India. A shipyard of the third century BC was discovered in the 1980s at Guangzhou which seems to be capable of making nailed wooden ships with 50–60 tons of loading capacity. (Wen Jiang, p. 24) Chinese ships (generally very large) started to frequent the Indian Ocean from the first half of the first millennium upto the seventeenth centuries. These were the 'jewel taking ships' with which the merchants of Quilon and other south Indian ports did regular business. The Kerala ports, particularly Cochin and Quilon, lay on the main route between the far east and the far west. They saw a great number of famous travellers, such as Sulaiman (in the ninth century) and Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta (in the fourteenth century), on their way back from China to the Western Hemisphere. Marco Polo virtually retraced the contours of the enlarged triangle of the ancient Silk Road between Beijing, Kerala, and Venice. Interestingly, a sixteenth century Portuguese traveller, Hector de la Casa, called Quilon 'Koulang China'. Mis'arbin Muhalhil, an Arab traveller well before the thirteenth century, reported that the king of Quilon was appointed from China.[27]

A major event along the maritime Silk Road consisted of a series of seven Chinese naval expeditions into the Indian Ocean led by Admiral Zheng He (or Cheng Ho) between AD 1405 and 1433. The fleet consisted of a giant flagship and a dozen smaller ships with several thousand sailors and other personnel on board. The admiral and his officials conducted diplomatic and trading activities with thirty-seven countries and regions along the Indian Ocean rim up to Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. Zheng He's entourage visited several Indian ports on a number of occasions, especially Bengal, Cochin, Calicut, Quilon, and Chola, and left valuable accounts of these places.[28]

CHINESE ACCOUNTS ON INDIA

Hou Hanshu is a highly respected and reliable annal of the Han Dynasty originally compiled by a scholar, Fan Ye, in AD 445, but, the standard version of it that has been handed down to the present day, includes many other accounts from archival sources. It is this dynastic annal that has preserved the earliest introduction to India:

> *Tianzhu* [Heavenly India], also called *Shendu*, is situated several thousand *li* [1/2 km] away southeast of Yueche. Its culture is similar to that of Yueche, but is much more hot and humid. It banks on the sea. The Indian people fight wars on elephants. They are not as stout as the Yueche. They follow Buddhism which advocates *ahimsa*, so this becomes the Indian tradition. Going from Yueche and Gaofu state and towards the west [there is the land of India], reaching the Western sea on the south, and Panqi country on the east—all this is India. In India there are several hundred cities, each headed by a chief; and there are several tens of countries, each ruled by a king. Though they differ

from each other slightly, all of them bear the same name. At this moment they are subjected to Yueche rule. The Yueche has killed their kings and sent generals to rule over their people. The Indian products are elephants, rhinoceros, hawksbill turtles, gold, silver, copper, iron, lead, tin. They trade with Daqin, and get the prized goods of Daqin. They also produce fine cloth, excellent woollen blankets various perfumes, stone-honey, black pepper, ginger, black salt.

During the reign of Emperor He [AD 88–105], India sent several embassies to China. Later they stopped coming due to hostility in the Western Regions. In AD 159 and 161, their missions bearing presents arrived through Annam (Geng Yinzeng, 1990, p.17).

Here is an account on India which is obviously pieced together from several sources with some historical facts and some hearsay. But, its overall accuracy is commendable. The repeated reference to 'Yueche' is because of the Kushana Dynasty which must have played the role of a bridge between India and China. The last line about India-China diplomatic contacts through Central Asia [vaguely mentioned in the account as 'Western Regions' (*xiyu*)] during the end of the first and beginning of the second century, and in the years AD 159 and 161 through the sea (Indian envoys landed somewhere south of Guangzhou) is a very important historical information.

Of particular interest is the account's mention of Indian products in two different places separated by the reference to India's contacts with Daqin, which, as I have alluded to earlier, was an ambiguous term generally denoting Europe. The mention of 'fine cloth' (*xibu*) and 'excellent woollen blankets' (*hao tadeng*) is also interesting. *Cihai,* a famous Chinese encyclopaedic dictionary first published in 1936 and republished in 1979 (revised and enlarged), quotes a historical reference to say that the Indian blankets were imported by China during the Western Han Dynasty (206–22 BC). It is clear that this Indian commodity was highly treasured by its ancient Chinese consumers who must have been the royal family. That it is included in the above account along with 'fine cloth', 'stone-honey', perfume, black pepper etc. proves that these Indian products had been used by the Chinese nobility before the fifth century.

'Tianzhu' was the ancient Chinese word for India. Earlier India used to figure in Chinese accounts as 'Juandu' or 'Shendu' which seemed to be the Chinese corruption of 'Sindu'. The corruption was transcribed a little mindlessly (with good intention, though) in that the syllable 'du' in visual denotes 'poison'. This name rendering of India offended the sensitivity of those who looked upon India as the 'Kingdom of Buddha' (*Foguo*). then, we saw the words of 'Juandu' and 'Shendu' replaced by a new visual unit 'Tianzhu', with the first syllable 'tian' denoting 'heaven', and the second syllable 'zhu' connecting with 'bamboo' without any visible offensive indication. (The visual could be a new invention just for this purpose.) Since the replacement was intentional to erase the 'du' (poison) element in the Chinese names for India, 'Tianzhu' obviously appeared as a new symbol to equal India with 'Heavenly India'. This was, obviously, the handiwork of some devout Chinese follower(s) of the Buddha. But, 'Tianzhu', as a term, did figure in almost all Chinese official archives, and the above passage is one of the earliest evidences of it. We can safely say that from the fourth to fifth century onwards, the term 'Heavenly India' was established until it is popularly replaced by the modern Chinese version of 'Yindu' which was coined by no other person than the eminent pilgrim, Xuanzang, in the seventh century.

According to Chinese textual tradition, 24 dynastic annals have been regarded as 'Zhengshi', i.e. officially endorsed historical records of China. They were so treated partly because almost the entire material enshrined in these 24 chronological history books of

various dynasties were picked up from the government archives. We find that the dynastic annals that were compiled after *Hou Hanshu* (written after AD 445) invariably carry a chapter on 'Tianzhu' (Heavenly India) ritually, and with a lot of repetitions (copying the earlier annals). Even then, as good historians, the authors of these annals would also include some archival information about the contacts between India and the respective Chinese dynasty that the annal was particularly concerned with. Some accounts on 'Tianzhu' would also incorporate excerpts from the writings left behind by the Chinese pilgrims to India. The cited account on 'Tianzhu' might contain some 'hearsay' unintentionally. It was against the tradition of Chinese historiography to include information that the historian felt was baseless. But, if there was an Indian visitor who talked about his country, or a Chinese/foreign traveller who related what he had seen or heard in India it would be considered reliable information—qualifying a place in the officially endorsed dynastic annals. As verification was not possible, many fantastic descriptions survived self or government censorship (to which these annals were always subjected to). To illustrate:

Ouyang Xiu (AD 1007–1072) was not only an important scholar-minister of the Northern Song Dynasty (AD 960–1126), but also the compiler of the *New Annals of the Tang Dynasty* (*Xin Tangshu*) in collaboration with Song Qi. In his Annal, he gave a fairly detailed introduction of India. He began by saying that what people during the Han Dynasty called 'Shendu', or later as 'Mojietuo' (Magadha) was 9,600 *li* away from the Song Capital, Bainjing (the present Kaifeng City in Henan Province), and its territory was '2,800 *li*' (probably the width). It was divided into 'five Indias' of east, west, south, north and central, each had several hundred cities and towns. He described that in Benaras, people must regularly cut the horns of the ox which would die if the cutting was done beyond tens days. People drank the blood of the ox/cow, and both human and the animal lived as long as five hundred years! Another paragraph of Ouyang Xiu's *Annals* described that 'Central India' was rules by the Ksatriya caste, and there was never any killing of the king by usurpation. 'The climate is humid and hot. Paddy yields four crops in a year. It grows so tall that a camel can disappear in the field!' 'People are rich, and no government books register them. Those till the land of the king pay tax. When they salute [the seniors] they lick their [the latter's] feet and touch their heels. There are wonder musicians and dancers kept in the houses.' 'The country follows Buddhism. There is no slaughter. People don't drink alcohol. Everywhere people will show you the relics of the Buddha. They swear by god to maintain trust. They pass on charms, and can invoke the dragon to create clouds and rains.[29]

It is clear to see that Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi's descriptions of India are cumulative almost putting together knowledge of what the Chinese had admired India for in many centuries of the first millennium. Some of the admiration as well as the quinque-some division of India were inherited from the Buddhist literature where 'Central India' (often mentioned as *zhong tian*, i.e. 'Central Heaven') bear a Magadha-centric demarcation of the Ashokan days. In fact, all accounts on 'Tianzhu' in the Chinese dynastic annals are not devoid of fantasies that the *Xin Tangshu* has typified. Also, the Chinese had a keen desire (as shown from the above quotes) for economic information which would easily lead to out-of-proportion exaggerations. While some parts of India could yield four crops, no paddy or any grain could grow taller than the camel. If this did not originate from the boast of an Indian visitor to China, it must have been concocted by a zealous Chinese Buddhist who would like to depict the land of the Buddha as real paradise.

INDIA–CHINA DIPLOMATIC TIES

Ouyang Xiu's *Tang Annals* relate that when the luxury-indulgent Sui Emperor Yang (AD 604–617) sent out an embassy to all the 'western countries' and established exchanges with all except India and Byzantine he quite regretted it.[30] The *Annals* also give information about many India-China diplomatic contacts during the Tang Dynasty.

China, as a great country quite open to outside contacts, received numerous foreign missions in her capitals in the last two thousand years. The twenty-four dynastic annals are an important source of information about such contacts. Twenty years ago, I made an attempt to gather information from these annals about India-China diplomatic ties, and wrote an article in which a table was attached. I now reproduce this table with some additions.[31]

INDIA–CHINA DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS

India to China

Century	Number of Missions	Year	Remarks
2nd BC	1	Around 102 BC	Indian ambassador killed by the Huns before reaching China.
1st BC	1	(32–7 BC)	From Jibin
1st AD	Several	2 AD and later	From Huangzhi
2nd AD	2	159,161	
5th AD	9	428, 441,	
6th AD	68	455,466, 473,477, 502,503, 507,508, 509,510, 511,514, 517,518, 521,571, 574	Often several missions from different Indian states reached the southern and northern capitals of divided China.
7th AD	15	620,637, 642,644, 648,667, 672,691, 693	
8th AD	24	710,712, 713,714, 715,717, 719,720, 726,729, 730,731, 737,739,	

Contd...

Century	Number of Missions	Year	Remarks
		741,745, 746,753, 758	
10th AD	5	952,956, 982,983, 996	
11th AD	9	1015,1016, 1020,1025, 1027,1033, 1034,1036, 1077	
13th AD	2	1283,1286	From Madurai
14th AD	1	1360	From Madurai
15th AD	16	1411,1414, 1438,1439, 1409,1411, 1415,1419, 1421,1423, 1415,1416, 1423,1433	From Calicut From Kochin
		China to India	
2nd BC	Several	119,104,105	Some abortive and later
1st BC	At least 1	(48–33 BC)	Ambassador Zhao De to Jibin
1st AD	Several		Some abortive
7th AD	3	642–43,645–46,648	
8th AD	3	1280,1281, 1282	To Quilon
9th AD	3	1357,1359,1363	To Madurai and Quilon
15th AD	2	1412,1415	To Bangla

This is an old compilation made when sources of information were scarce. There is no time to scrutinise the above table except by adding a few entries to make up the obvious omissions. Omission will still remain. But, such a table, however, imperfect it is, will surely provide some new insight into the study on India–China contacts.

India–China diplomatic contacts opened up in the second century BC with a tragedy. An Indian envoy on his way to China was killed by the Huns before reaching the territory of Han Emperor Wu. The emperor mentioned this with condemnation in his letter to General Li Guangli whose troops were fighting the Huns. The Indian embassy to China in the first century BC also arose from the mishap. A Han imperial envoy had been killed in Jibin (a kingdom which encompassed Kashmir, Afghanistan, and neighbouring areas) along with more than 40 of his retainers during 48–33 BC. The king of Jibin sent an ambassador to the Han court to tender apology. After that, official contacts between Jibin (Kashmir) and China remained uninterrupted.[32]

Subsequently, the Gupta kings were in close contact with various courts in China in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (AD 386–589). In AD 502–503, a Gupta king sent a mission to the court of Liang Emperor Wu. The mission was led by the 'Zhuluoda' as recorded in the Chinese annals. The gifts presented to the Liang emperor included incense, perfume, cotton textiles, and a spittoon which was supposedly made of beryl but must have been an elegant vessel of coloured glass. The Indian envoy gave his Chinese host a detailed description of his country's geography and natural resources, of the five rivers and the Ganga, and the rock-salt deposits in the river bed of the Ganga.

An outstanding example of the cordiality between the two countries was the relationship that developed between the Indian King Harshavardhana and the Tang Emperor Taizong. We all know that it was during Harshavardhana's reign in north India that the celebrated Chinese traveller Xuanzang had a sixteen-year sojourn in India. Xuanzang's travel account, *Da-Tang xiyuji*, and his biography written by disciple, Huili, have become very important source-materials for the study of King Harsha's reign.

King Harsha and Xuanzang had many sessions of cordial discussion from which the king learnt about the second and most talented ruler of Tang Dynasty, Emperor Taizong. King Harsha, then, sent a mission to the Tang emperor's court in AD 641. And this marked the beginning of nearly a decade of cordial relations between the two monarchs which were terminated only by King Harsha's death.

The Tang emperor reciprocated King Harsha's gesture by dispatching a military man, General Liang Huaijing (also spelled 'Liang Huai-ching'), at the head of an embassy to India. The embassy arrived in King Harsha's capital probably in AD 643. This gave Harsha a pleasant surprise. He asked his courtiers: 'Did Maha-Cheena send any embassy to India before?' The courtiers answered in the negative. He, then, came out of his palace to receive Ambassador Liang. The warmth of the reception of the Chinese embassy in Harshavardhana's court is not detailed in the annals, but could be well imagined. When Liang's mission left India, the Indian king sent an embassy, probably in AD 643.

Liang Huaijing's report to the Tang emperor about his experience of Indian friendship and hospitality, and the presence of a second mission from India in the Tang court must have further strengthened Emperor Taizong's affection for his Indian counterpart. This led him to send a second embassy headed by Li Yibiao, (also spelled Li I- piao) to King Harsha. The arrival of the second Chinese embassy (probably in AD 645 or 646) in Harsha's capital city of Magadha further strengthened the friendship between the peoples of India and China. The annals give a glimpse of the rousing welcome which the Indian capital accorded to the Chinese embassy. While Harsha's courtiers waited outside the city to receive the Chinese guests, almost all the citizens of the capital came out of their houses and lined up along the route to the king's palace. Incense was burnt along the route. King Harsha warmly received the Chinese embassy, which later returned to China with Indian gifts of pearls, perfumes, and saplings of the Bodhi tree for the Tang emperor.

Emperor Taizong was so overwhelmed with affection for King Harsha that he sent a third mission to the latter's court without waiting for the arrival of a return mission from India (reciprocating the Li Yibiao mission). This was the Chinese embassy led by Wang Xuance (also spelled Wang Hsuan-ts'e) which left China in AD 648. Before the mission reached Magadha, Harshavardhana had died. A courtier, whose name is recorded in the Chinese annals as Na-fu-di A-luo-na-shun (sounds like 'Nafde Arora Shyam'), had usurped the throne. The usurper did not like the visit of a foreign mission which was too friendly to the late king. He ordered an attack on the Chinese mission which consisted of only horseman. With the exception of the ambassador and his deputy, Jiang Shiren (also spelled