

The Hindu Temple in China

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Abstract: With the spread of Hinduism, the Hindu temple was introduced into China. The Hindu temple was introduced into China mainly through the Overland Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road, the Hindu temples in border and coastal areas of Chinese territory were mainly patronized by wealthy individuals and commercial guilds. The Hindu temple was localized and assimilated in the courses of spread and gradually became an integral part of Chinese architecture culture.

1. Introduction

The Hindu temple is the abode of gods on earth, it links the world of man and the world of the gods. The Hindu temple is essential to understand the Indian culture, art, economy, politics, etc. A Hindu temple incorporates all elements of Hinduism- symbolism, cosmology, the goals of life, the caste system and henceon. In the course of history, with the spread of Hinduism to alien lands, the Hindu temple architecture was alhencespread to many regions and countries outside the South Asia Subcontinent. And China was one of these regions and countries, the Hindu temples in Chinese territory built by Indian immigrants and merchants witness the cultural exchange between Indian and China.

2. The Spread of Hinduism to China

Hinduism was introduced into China around the first century AD when the Indian immigrants and merchants migrated to some border areas and coastal cities of the Chinese territory. Most scholars agree that Buddhism and Hinduism can not separated from each other, in a sense, Buddhism is just a branch of Hinduism. Xiannian Ji, an outstanding Chinese scholar believes that Buddhism was introduced into China in the first century AD. Therefore the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism to China was simultaneous and of the same directions. According to Mingzhong Zhu, Hinduism was introduced to China through four routes, i. e. , the Overland Silk Road, the Maritime Silk Road, the Yunnan-Burma Route and the Nepal-Tibet Route. It should be noted that the Overland Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road were the main routes, and there still exist many Hindu architecture relics , tombs of Hindu immigrants and merchants along the two routes.

With the spread of Hinduism, the Hindu temple was alhenceintroduced into China . Under the patron of rich individuals and commercial guilds , some Hindu temples were built by Indian craftsmen and Chinese labors. Those Hindu temples, in the course of time, were localized and assimilated and thus became an integral part of Chinese architecture cultures. But due to some unknown reasons, those Hindu temples were destroyed. Today only some architecture parts, stone statues and rock carving of those Hindu temples remain and are in the possession of public museums and individual collectors. The following passages of this paper discusses those once existed Hindu temples in some regions during the long history of cultural exchange between Indian and China.

3. The Hindu Temples in Border Areas

The border areas in this paper refer to some Chinese regions along the Overland Silk Road or bordering India, i.e. Xinjiang Province, Tibet and Yunnan Province. In history, the believers of Shiva Sect, Vishnu Sect and Shakti Sect were active in the above three areas, and some Hindu

temples were built by these devotees. Unfortunately these Hindu architectures were destroyed by the force of nature and human, only some ruins remain there silently.

Xinjiang Province is a vital point of the Overland Silk Road and is the link of China and Inner Asia. In the 7th century of the common era, a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim named Xuanzang went to India through Xinjiang Province, after the journey he composed a book called *Buddhist Records of the Western World*. A fact must be noted that this book is a valuable historical material of Hinduism and Hindu architectures. In his work, Xuanzang utilized the term Tianci(天祠) instead of Hindu temple, and the author saw a great many of Tiancis(Hindu temples) during his trip in Xinjiang. As a pious Buddhist monk, Xuanzang spontaneously described the Buddhist monasteries in more detail more than the Hindu temples. The Indian Buddhism, however, was in decline in Xuanzang's time, and even the famous Nalanda Monastery was in ruin on his arrival there. Therefore a conclusion can be made, i.e., of the temples Xuanzang visited, most of them were the Hindu temples even if he rarely described these architectures in details.

In addition, the Buddhist cave temples around this region show convincing evidences of the once existed Hindu buildings especially the Hindu rock-cut temples. A great number of statues, murals in these Buddhist grottoes are the features of the Hindu temple art. Some Hindu deities were assimilated into Buddhism and gradually became parts of Buddhist pantheon. In colonial times, western explorers and archeologists discovered a large number of Hinduism statues in Buddhist sites. For example, Marc Aurel Stein once excavated a woodcut in Dandan Oilik and there was a three-headed deity on it. Some scholars esteem that the three-headed deity is Shiva of Hinduism. Actually as a crucial section of the Overland Silk Road, Xinjiang Province possesses a lot of Hindu iconographies. This has been verified by the achievements of archeology and is the witness of the existence of the Hindu temples in this border area of China.

Tibet has had tight connections with the Indian Subcontinent geographically as well as culturally since ancient times. As a result of bordering India, Indian religious architectures naturally spread to Tibet Plateau and there remain many Hindu temple features in Tibetan religious buildings. A fact must be emphasized that the Hindu temple especially the stone-built temple symbolizes high mountain. In Hindu doctrine, Mountain Kailash is the abode of Shiva and his wife Parvati, and Mt. Kailash is located in the Western Tibetan plateau. In a sense, the conceptual Hindu temple has an inseparable, intrinsic connection with Tibet Plateau. It is the Indian artists, architects and craftsmen inspired by the high snow-covered mountains in Tibet Plateau who created this unique religious building. From ancient times to today, uncountable pious Hindus have been visiting the various tirthas(sacred sites), for these believers a Hindu temple is a micro universe and Mt Kailash is indeed a temple of Shiva as well as his spouse Parvati.

Yunnan Province has been a close link with India due to geographical proximity. It is hard to date the arrival of Hinduism and Hindu temple to this border area, but historians agree that the Hindu culture was flourishing there during the reign of Nanzhao Kingdom. It is this period of time that the Hindu temples were built in Dali which is the capital of Nanzhao Kingdom. There are some Hindu iconographies such as Yoni and Ganesh in Jianchuan Grottoes, the face may prove that some Shizhong Mountain Grottoes are and/or at least own some features of the Hindu rock-cut temples. Yonghui Qiu believes that the religious cultures of Yunnan area were profoundly influenced by the Shiva sect of Hinduism in history. Even though there are rarely remains of the Hindu architectures in Yunnan Province, their once existences long time ago can not be denied. A few of Hindu deities' iconographies are still worshiped by local people around Dali, the statues of Mahakala were housed in many temples along Erhai Lake.

4. The Hindu Temples Along in Coastal Areas

South China, in history, has been closely linking with the South Asia Subcontinent in various areas such as culture, commercial trade. As a result of the flourishing trade, wealthy individuals, commercial guilds, and royal family members patronized some Hindu architectures in some port cities. Among these port cities are Guangzhou and Quanzhou.

As one of the starting points of the Ancient Maritime Silk Road, Quanzhou city in Fujian Province occupies a special position in the cultural exchange between South China and Far South India. Risha Lee, who was PhD student majoring in Indian art, documented the Quanzhou Hindu temples in her PhD dissertation in detail. She argues that the Indian Ocean trade links South India and South China, the Hindu temples in South India and Quanzhou were constructed by the Ainunrruvar (An Indian commercial guild). Chinese scholars analyze the Quanzhou Hindu temples from a different perspective. For example, Mingzhong Zhu puts the Quanzhou Hindu temples in the context of the Maritime Silk Road. Zhu's major points of view with regard to the Quanzhou Hindu temples are as follows: (a) these Hindu architectures were constructed by the Indians resided in Quanzhou during Song and Yuan dynasty, and (b) there remain many relics of Hindu architectures in Quanzhou which witness the cultural exchange between China and India.

Liangwen Wu, an indigeous scholar, had been collecting stone building parts of the Quanzhou religious architectures in which large numbers are of the Quanzhou Hindu temples. After his death, Wu's families donated all his collections to the Quanzhou Overseas Transportation History Museum. Liangwen Wu argues that there was once a Hindu temple (Fanfo Temple, 番佛寺) in Yuan Dynasty, and this Hindu temple was destroyed in the rebels against Yuan Dynasty by Persian army. Today, there is still a place named Fanfo Temple (番佛寺) in Quanzhou. The large rectangular water tank there more or less demonstrates the existence of the Hindu temple in history. The fact that each Hindu temple has a rectangular water tank in the front or inside of the main building and the water tank in Quanzhou is the remaining building part of the once-existed Hindu temple there. We must acknowledge that Chinese treated foreigners as barbarians and other religious architectures as Buddhist temples. The reasons behind this phenomenon either may be out of the long tradition of cultural chauvinism or may be due to ignorance of alien cultures. Therefore, the Fanfo Temple is just a Hindu architecture borne a Chinese name, which reflects the indigenous people's misunderstanding and ignorance on the Hindu architecture. In addition, over 300 Hindu stone inscriptions have been found and are respectively collected by the Quanzhou Overseas Transportation History Museum, the Anthropology Museum of Xiamen University, Quanzhou Kaiyuan Temple, Quanzhou Tianhou Temple and some personal collectors like Zhixiong Wu. These Hindu stone inscriptions are indeed the remaining parts of the Quanzhou Hindu architectures and demonstrate the Quanzhou Hindu temples' existence, which arises a great deal of academic debates and many scholars' curiosity.

Guangzhou of Guangdong Province is also a vital starting point of the Maritime Silk Road, and there existed some Hindu temples in this seaport city. Up till now, historians and archaeologists did not discover remaining parts of Hindu architectures in Guangzhou. Studies insofar as the history of the Hindu Temples' existence in Guangzhou must rely on the written literatures especially the Buddhist literatures. A Japanese scholar argues that the Buddhist monk Jianzhen saw three Brahmanic temples there in the ninth year in Tianbao. We know that the above-mentioned Brahmanic temples are actually the Hindu temples and the ninth year in Tianbao refers to 750 of the common era. Therefore there did exist some Hindu temples in Guangzhou during Tang Dynasty. Knowledge about the introduction of the Hindu Temples into Guangzhou, however, is still scarce, and what is "known" is more or less speculation than fact. Much efforts need to be done in order to explore the cross-cultural communication between port cities and alien countries. In fact, historians, archaeologists, anthropologists need each other more than ever before.

5. Conclusion

The Hindu temples in China has remained a footnote in the long, complicated, written history of India and China with ancient civilizations. With the publication of works by the likes of Mingzhong Zhu, Risha Lee, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Yonghui Qiu and Wenliang Wu, that began to change. There now exists a body of researched scholarship with detailed accounts about the Hindu temples along the silk roads, i.e. the Overland Silk Road, the Southern Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road.

The Hindu Temples in China is a big topic which needs long, painstaking research. This article just aims to give the readers a brief review of the Hindu architectures in border areas and coastal areas of Chinese territory. As an alien building type, the Hindu temples were introduced into China with Buddhism and Hinduism as such. Due to some unknown reasons, those unique architectures were destroyed and only ruins remain in a few locations like the port city Quanzhou. Much work needs to be done in order to explore questions such as the patrons, the artisans, the architects and so on.

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