

The First Chinese Pilgrim Monk Went to India and Comparison with the Travelling of Hsuan Tsang

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Abstract: *Buddhism is found by Gautam Buddha in 6 BC, ancient India. During time of Asoka it spreaded wide to many areas outside as Ceylon, Suvarnabhumi (the Golden Land). Since 1 AD under Kanishka dynasty Buddhism had stretched far to the other countries as Mongolia, Japan, Korea, China... Gradual Chinese Buddhism flourished with raising number of monasteries and monks. Need of Buddhist studying was important and impacted to many classes in society. However there was big problem for Chinese Buddhism which was missing Buddhist texts or having some shortcomings and discrepancies in the body of translations. Therefore there were many Chinese monks ventured a danger to go to homeland of Buddha to bring back their country these sacred materials. Fa hsien was appreciated as a first Chinese monk go to India. In this article will explain about biography, the purpose, journey, precious works of Fa hsien and special discuss about the difference between travelling of Fa hsien and Hsuan Tsang. Im sure that His diary during journey will be nice, useful writing for historians, archaeologists who want to understand clearly about the background of India Buddhism at that time*

Keyword: The first Chinese Pilgrim, Fa hsien, comparison with travelling of Hsuan Tsang

1. Introduction

In the beginning of era with the opening and developing of Silk route. It started from the eastern of Chang'an spread to the West Mediterranean connected China with the ancient Roman Empire. In 1877 a famous geography German Ferdinand von Richthofen was set namely Silk route because the major product trading was almost Silk material and other products. It conveyed goods and exchanged cultures between India, China, Persia, Arabia, Greek far to Rome... Therefore Buddhism was spreaded via Silk route to Central Asia regions: Mongolia, Tibet, China etc... by missionaries and Buddhist pilgrims also came home land of Buddha same on this road

Chinese Buddhism can be believed for raising in 1 AD which the dream of Ming emperor (58-75 AD) of the Han dynasty has often been connected with the first time Buddhism into China. Gradually Buddhism was developed during reigns late. For example the period of Eastern Chin Hsiang-yang in Hupei and Lu-shan in Kiangsi were important localities in south China that made impression in the prosperity of Buddhism. Attached to these centers were two of the most illustrious names in Chinese Buddhism, Tao-an (312-385) in Hsiang-yang and Hui-yuan (344-416) in Lu-shan. Associated with Hui-yuan for a time in Lu-shan was Tao-sheng. Tao-an, Hui-yuan, Tao-sheng were eminent monk who were to stand above the host of clerics and by their learning and example open new vistas and herald a new age for Chinese Buddhism at that time

Actual Buddhism had also made such deep in roads into China and attracted so many pious devotees that many Chinese desired to go to the fountain head of their religion and drink deeply of the sources asking, merchant, farmers, not only scholars but also common people. When the religion was so widespread and influential in China, there was a noticeable increase in the number of Chinese pilgrims venturing forth to India in 4-5 AD

Why did these pilgrim travelers Chinese come to India?

The pilgrims went to homeland's Buddha for many purposes as:

- 1) For some pilgrims who wished to visit the holy sites of Buddhism: Lumbini grove, birth place of Sakyamuni; Bodhgaya, the scene of enlightenment; Benares, where the wheel of the law was first turned; and Kusinara, Nibbana place of Gautama Buddha etc...
- 2) For still others who wanted to search for Indian teachers and invite them to come to China to preach the law. Moreover for seeking some famous Indian masters who could teach them more about the religion and the true Dharma which they loved so much
- 3) In India the teachings of Mahayana masters Asanga and Vasubandhu were gaining prominence, serving as a powerful magnet to draw Chinese pilgrims there
- 4) In search of the sacred text which these pilgrims brought back a mass of materials to be translated during the following century.
- 5) At that time China had more or less digested these materials, and having found shortcomings and discrepancies in the body of translations, they felt the need for renewed stimulus from India and wanted to learn the original teaching of Buddha.

All these factors resulted in a burst of increased activity on the part of the Chinese pilgrims went to Ancient India. Some went singly, other traveled in groups. Many started, but few reached their destinations and accomplished their objectives; even fewer returned to China. They had to pass many days without food, water. On the long trek, many died from sheer physical exhaustion or sickness and some had to leave their bones in desert sands or somewhere out in India. It was wondered that under such difficult conditions, these pilgrims could keep up their morale and spirit, they never faltered nor wavered, such was their indomitable spirit and wished to come the land of Buddha. Never did men endure greater suffering by desert, mountain and sea and exhibit such courage, religious devotion and powers of endurance. The pioneer among them was Fa hsien

FA HSIEN (337-422) went to India and return back (399-414)

It was while Yao Hsing was ruling in north China also was contemporary with Chandra Gupta II that the first important Chinese monk Fa hsien left China to India in 399 in search of the holy law. During the third and fourth centuries the number of religious establishments and of monks and nuns in China had grown very rapidly. With this rapid growth had come a certain relaxation in the rules governing the religious community, and signs of moral laxity and decay had begun to appear. One of the main reasons Fa hsien made the pilgrimage to India to obtain the Vinaya, or rules of religious discipline, so that order could be restored to the Chinese Buddhist community

Shih Fa-hsien namely was Kung, his home was in Wu-yang town, Shansi province. His name Fa-hsien means who will be light in the Dhamma. The Shih was general name of Buddhist monk abbreviation of Sakyamuni. There are three brothers in his family but they all died. There is a special point that keeping him in the family. At home, he was always complained about his bad health and suffering from one or two diseases. So his father sent him to monastery where was no health problem in here. Unfortunately at ten years old he had to give up novice's life to return his home when his father passed away. The short time late his mother also died Fa hsien decided following monkhood forever

There is a legend story about Fa hsien that he was cutting rice with some novices-his friend, some hungry thieves came to take away rice. While other his friends all run away but he still kept calm and said to the thieves: "If you must have the grain, take what you please. But, it was your former neglect of charity which brought you to your present state of destitution and now, again, you wish to rob others. I am afraid that in the coming ages you will have still greater poverty and distress. I am sorry for you beforehand". With these words he followed his companions into the monastery, while the thieves left the grain and went away¹. Some people said that this story is considered only legend not real but it is interesting lesson about moral value: if a poor person try to steal they will not be richer, on contrary they become bad and poorer. Through this story proved Fa hsien had intelligent when he was a little boy. That impressed that he was an endurance to go to ancient India

Fa hsien connected his company's name: Hui- king, Tao-ching, Hui-ying, Hui-yu and others to India. Departed from Ch'ang-an in 399 AD, they walked till reached Chang-yeh where they met another group under guided of Pao-yun and Sung-king also on the way to India. After spending the rainy treatment together in here they continued to Dunhuang along the Takla Makan desert. The resident people supported them some things to cross the desert and Fa Hsien's party started out first on their long trek across the Takla Makan desert. They continued their trip south west across the desert. On the road there were no houses no people. He depicted that "In the desert were myriad of terrible spirits and hot winds, reason of none could not return their home or attain purpose. Above there were no birds no animals on ground only the

dried bones of the dead. Their pilgrimage was with numerous of difficulties, disadvantage of the road and rivers exceeded human's imagination. They spent more one month before reached the richly city of Khotan. The ruler suggested them with accommodation in a monastery where they lived for 3 months and observed the grand performance of images which started on 1st day of the fourth month and lasted for fourteen days.

From Khotan the pilgrims lost 25 days to Yarkand where they stayed for 14 days previous continuing their journey. After another 25 days of walking they arrived at Kashgar. Leaving Kashgar to Tajikistan crossing the Pamir mountains for a month and entered south west for half month over a difficult, precipitous and dangerous road

After crossing the river they came to Udyana nowadays Northern Pakistan. It was a centre of Buddhism more 500 monasteries following Hinayana. They spent at Udyana to participate Vassa. After 5 days they arrived at Gandhara. From there they went to Peshawar for seeing stupa of king Kaniska and alms food bowl of Buddha

Fa hsien went alone western to Nagarahara. On the borders in Hadda he visited stupa of skull bone relic of Sakyamuni Buddha. At Nagarahara he worshiped sanghati (long robe), stupa of the religious staff of Buddha and Gopala Naga cave. After 2 months of winter they departed with great difficulties and extreme cold crossing the Safed Koh mountain range. Hui-king was a friend of Fa hsien got illness. He died of exhaustion in Fa Hsien's arms. Hui-ching could also not go any further. Water running from his mouth he said to Fa-hsien, "I cannot live any longer. Go away immediately, so that we may not all die here" and with these words he died. Fa-hsien stroked the corps and cried out piteously, "our original plan has failed it is fate. What can we do?"². With great effort, the surviving pilgrims came to Afghanistan

After the rainy retreat they crossed the Punjab where they saw the Buddhist religion flourishing and after passing many monasteries with myriads of monks, the pilgrims reached Mathura country. Then Fa hsien visited in succession Sankasia, Kanauj, Saketa or Ayodha and Savatthi where the monks at Jetavana garden monks surprised to see them as these first Chinese monks to India. They visited Sakyan state, capital Kapilavasthu, two sites of Kakusandha Buddha, Kanakagamani Buddha and saw the Asokan pillar

From Kapilavasthu the pilgrims travelled to Kusinara, scene of the Buddha's *Mahaparinibbana*. Moving onwards they continued to Vesali where found Bhikkhuni Order and Pataliputta belong to Magadha. From there they moved to Nalanda, Rajagaha, Buddhagaya scene of the Buddha's Enlightenment, Deer Park at Sarnath where the Buddha taught the First discourse, Varanasi and lastly Kosambi in Allahabad district where they visited the ruins of Ghositarama monastery. Returning to Pataliputta, Tao-ching decided to take up permanent residence in India after seeing the strict decorum observed Vinaya by local monks more

¹<http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat2/4sub8/entry-5446.html>

² Chou Hsiang Kuang, A History of Chinese Buddhism, Page 53

completely than in China

The main purpose of Fa hsien got copies of Discipline to carry back his country but could not have them because rules were recited by oral. However he attained a Vinaya of Mahasanghikas. Fa hsien spent three years for studying Sanskrit and copying out Disciplines. He was also able to obtain the Vinaya of Sarvastivada school and the Mahaparinibbana sutra. He obtained his objectives and decided to return to China. So belong to the Ganges river in eastern direction he travelled to port Tamralipti (West Bengal) for 2 years drawing image pictures, copying discourses. From here he sailed to Sri Lanka for 2 years to collect and copy sacred texts as the Vinaya of Mahisasaka, unknown in China

Fa hsien has completed his goal returning his country. On the sea he had several miraculous escapes. His ship sprung a leak during a violent storm and was driven to the island of Java, where he spent five months. He went to Canton but storm took him to Shantung Peninsula. Finally he arrived Nanking with numerous of Buddhist texts

Fa hsien experienced 15 years and met many perils, dangers in his journey through nearly thirty different countries during time 399 AD to 414 AD. He overcame all the perils of the sea, he had managed to return home safely with his precious cargo of the sacred texts intact. He died at the age of eighty five after completed translating all Buddhist texts to Chinese which he carried back from India.

Comparison between the Travelling of Fa Hsien and Hsuan Tsang

Event	Fa hsien	Hsuan Tsang
-Time	- Fa hsien (337- 422) went to India and return back (399- 414) When he was 65 ages	- Hsuan Tsang (596 - 664) left the country stealthily in 629 when he was twenty six and returned China in 645 AD after leaving of sixteen years
-Mainly purpose visited India	- Fa hsien went to India in searching copies of disciplines which was necessary for Buddhist order. During the time of Fa hsien missing having any Rules	- Before his departure he was already interested in Buddhist philosophy, especially the idealism of the Vijnanavadin School which is found by scholars Asanga and Vasubandhu in 4-5 AD, but many unsolved problems such as discrepancies in the text bothered him, and it was to search for an answer to these problems that he set out.
	- He focused on his mind about the Vinaya. He observed carefully the life of monks in India with hope helping to improve the life of monk at his homeland. Even though on the way to India he met much hardship but he still followed treatment of summer in Vinaya: Crossing the river one reached the kingdom of Woo-chang, which was indeed a part of Northern India. Hui-ching, Hui-ta and Tao ch'en moved to Buddha's shadow site in Nagara while Fa-hsien and some one endured in Woo-chang, and had the rainy retreat. After they descended south and arrived to the State of Soo-ho-to ³ . That means Fa hsien noticed and loved on Vinaya pitaka very much.	- Hsuan Tsang focused on philosophy in suttras and special Abhidhamma. Hsuan Tsang was known founder Fa Hsiang school in China which was based on Vijnanavadin. One of his particular aims to obtain a complete copy of the work known as the " <i>Stages of Yoga Practice which</i> " legend asserts that the great fifth century Buddhist scholar Asanga miraculously ascended to the Tusita Heaven of bodhisattva Maitreya and received the text of the Stages and other works from the bodhisattva. Scholars now surmise that in fact Asanga received these works from a historical person, presumably his teacher who happened to bear the name Maitreya. Hsuan Tsang translated it into Chinese, producing the one-hundred-chapters version of the work that is now current.
- Journey	-Fa hsien visited a total around twenty seven states in his journey. Fa hsien began his departure from Chang'an crossing Takshasila to these regions Kibi, Ju tan, Chang Yeh, Tun Huang, Shen Shen, Agni, Khotan, Chakuta, Chakika, Agzi, Khalcha Darada, Udyana, Suvastu, Gandhara...	-Hsuan Tsang adventured with long route and visited many regions more than Fa hsien. He also started from Chang'an passing through Chin Chou, Lan Chou, Liang Chou, Kua Chou, Yi Wu, Pali Li, Wu Pan, Tu Ching, Agni, Kucha, Baluka, She Che, Bing Yul, Talas, Kuyu, Nejkend, Chaj, Sutrisna, Samarkand, Kochania, Kharaghan, Bokhara, Betik, Khwarism, Kesh, Tukhara, Kunduz, Bahlika Tapassu. Bhalluka, Gachi, Mamian, Kapisa, Lampaka, Nagarahara, Gandhara, Puskaravati, Udakakkhanda, Udyana, Takshasila.
	-From Takshasila desert to Sravasti, Fa hsien went through: Purushapura, Nagarahara, Lakki, Vaisakha and Sravasti	-While Hsuan Tsang went around Simhapura, Urasa, Kasmira, Punack Rajapura, Cheka, Jayapura, Sakala, Cinabhukti, Jladhara, Kuluta, Satadru, Pariyatra, Mathura, Sthanvasara, Srughna, Brahmapura, Ahichhatra, Vilasana, Kapiitha, Kanyakubja, Ayodhya, Ayamukha, Prayaga, Kausambi, Visoka before to Sravasti.
	-In Kosala and Magadha, Fa hsien mentioned Pataliputra as central to connect Sravasti, Napika, Kapilavastu. Ramagrama, Kalapinaka, Rajagrha, Gaya, Kukkunapada, Pataliputra, Varanasi, Kamsambi, Dakhina, Pataliputra	-Hsuan Tsang mentioned Nalanda as central to connect Sravasti, Kapilavastu, Kusinagara, Varanasi, Yuddhapati, West Bengal.
	-Fa hsien only visited Nalanda in short time therefore he described very less it	-Hsuan Tsang stayed in Nalanda for the first time in 15 months for his learning when Silabhadra was president of Nalanda. After that he returned Nalanada second time.
	-Fa hsien went to Ceylon where he spent two years for searching Vinaya	-Hsuan Tsang could not visited Ceylon because there was war in this island.
The works	-The famous work namely: " <i>Record of Buddhist Kingdom</i> "	- He also wrote the work: " <i>Records of the Western Regions</i> "

³ Chou Hsiang Hsiang Kuang, Modern History of China, Page 53

<p>- Both two works of Fa Hsien and Hsuan Tsang have been of great value to historians and archeologists for the data them contains. "The Records of the Western Regions" of Hsuan Tsang give big account information to reader about culture, political, economical more than the "Record of Buddhist Kingdom of Fa hsien. However the work of Fa hsien recorded clearly, real the background practice the Vinaya of monasteries in sangha during 4-5 AD which Hsuan Tsang forgotten</p>	<p>- The work of Hsuan Tsang applied more information. But it contains more the legend stories than the work of Fa hsien. For example: Hsuan Tsang states that Sri gupta was at first a persecutor of Buddhists but later on became a follower of Buddhism. But the Buddha performed a miracle and Sri Gupta became his disciple. It shows that he was a contemporary of the Buddha. But it may be conclude the pilgrim may have hazarded such a statement on hearsay evidence only</p>
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FA HSIEN'S Work and the Important Significance of Travelling

It is no doubt to say that makes Fa-hsien's *Record of Buddhist Countries* of such great significance because it preserves an account of the lands of India and Central Asia at a time when Buddhism was at the golden age of its influence and flourishing in those areas. In contrast Hsuan Tsang came the same area in 6-7 AD tell us Buddhism in a period of decline and is depicted with a writing of autumnal sadness. The propagation of the Buddhist teachings that had begun in India in Shakyamuni's time, had reached its peak of development in these areas in the fourth and early fifth centuries during time of Fa hsien

One very important aspect of Fa-hsien's account is that in the course of his travels through over twenty different states he did not once encounter an incident of warfare or military strife. These states of Central Asia and India, one of the great cultural crossroads of the world were all firm adherents of the Buddhist faith and appear to have carried on their cultural relations in perfect peace. This is a fact of history that has too often been forgotten in later ages. Fa-hsien seems not only to have been able to travel freely and without danger, but actually to have received material assistance from the rulers of the states through which he passed. Supplied in this way with the food and traveling equipment that he needed, he was able to move across the desert regions from one oasis state to another until he completed. In Fa-hsien's time there were no facilities for public transportation and the geography of the regions that he traveled presented difficulties and perils at every turn. But the states through which he passed were all supporters of the Buddhist faith and because peace prevailed in the area, he was able to pursue his arduous journey to a successful conclusion. Fa-hsien and the others of his party carried no passports, as travelers do nowadays. Their status as Buddhist monks was the passport they needed to insure that they would be welcomed and assisted on their way at every stage of the journey. We may note with regret that today, if one were to attempt to follow the same route that Fa-hsien took, he would find his way repeatedly impeded by the barriers of modern nationalism and bureaucratic red tape

Fa-hsien visited India in 4-5 A.D. We receive information about the progress of Buddhism during Chandra Gupta's period. His account is very helpful to draw a definite conclusion relating to the administrative system, social condition and the position of Buddhism in the reign of Chandra Gupta II. Buddhism was influenced to spiritual life during his rule. From the pilgrim's account⁴ we know that no one killed any living thing or drank wine or ate onions or garlic. Nobody ate meat or chicken. There were no

slaughterer's shops or intoxicant alcohol in the markets. The Buddhist Sangha was supported by the king, his officials and his subjects. The Chinese pilgrim's statement shows that Buddhism made a massive contribution to the social and religious history of the country and it prospered in Chandra Gupta's kingdom as a popular religion

Fa-hsien at Pataliputra saw two monasteries, one was Hinayana and the other was Mahayana which were occupied by 600-700 Buddhist monks. There lived at the latter monastery the famous Buddhist teacher Revata "a strikingly enlightened man of much wisdom, there being nothing which he did not understand. All the country looked up to him and relied upon this one man to diffuse widely the Faith in Buddha"⁵. The above mentioned two Buddhist institutions became well known for their reputed teachers whose valuable services to Buddhism had established it at the height of its popularity in this part of northern India. The main object of Fa-hsien's visit was to collect copies of sacred works, legends, miracles and to study Buddhism in India. He noted that "in various countries of north India, the sacred works were recited by mouth from one monk to another, there being no written volume which he could copy." Most probably at Pataliputra he found a copy of the Discipline, "a further transcript of same running to 7,000 stanzas as used by the Sarvastivada school which also had been handed down orally from Patriarch to Patriarch, extracts from the Abhidharma in about 6,000 stanzas, and a complete copy of a Sutra in 2,500 stanzas as well as a roll of the Mahaparinibbana Sutra in 5,000 stanzas"⁶. It was for this reason he spent about three years at Pataliputra. There he studied Sanskrit and engaged himself in copying out the Disciplines.

He narrated, the annual procession of Buddha and Bodhisattva statue in the city on 8th day of the 2nd month. He relates that "Pataliputra is the biggest capital. The citizens are rich, prosperous and support together in performing good deeds. They use a four-wheeled cart on which five tiers are constructed in bamboo, with a halberd-shaped central post about twenty feet high, the whole structure resembling a pagoda. This is covered with white woollen cloth, printed with various devas in colour, adorned with gold, silver and glass and hung with silk pennants and canopies. There are four shrines sides, each containing a seated Buddha, attended by standing Bodhisattva. The elders and laymen of this country have established charitable clinic to which all the poor, homeless, deformed and ill can go. Here all their wants are supplied and the physicians who attend them prescribe the food and medicine they require. When cured,

⁵ R. K. Moonkerji, The Gupta Empire, pp 62-63

⁶ Ibid, p. 64

⁴ H.A. Giles, The Travels of Fa hsien, p. 322

they are free to leave⁷

Fa-hien, in course of his journey visited the Punjab where he saw monasteries with 10,000 monks. He visited Mathura on Jamuna. Here he found about twenty monasteries with some 3,000 monks. At Benares he saw two monasteries which were inhabited by monks. Then he reached to Tamluk, a seaport in Bengal where he lived 2 years also travelled 24 monasteries. This place was an important centre of Buddhism at the time of his journey to India

2. Conclusion

The journey took him some fourteen years to complete, and he accomplished the purpose for which he had set out returning to China in 414 with a copy of the rules of discipline of Mahasamghika, Mahasasaka set and the famous work namely "*Record of Buddhist Kingdom*". Fa-hsien visited a total of twenty seven states in the course of his travels. In the account that he kept of his journey, he has left a terse but highly informative record of the states that existed in Central Asia and India in 4-5 AD. His work is therefore of inestimable value to scholars engaged in reseaching of the history and geography of the area and has been translated numerous times into Western languages.

Needless to say, Fa-hsien's account and his journey required reading for all those in later ages who aspired to make a similar pilgrimage. Indeed, the book may well have inspired monks who had no previously considered making such a journey. For all later monks set out for India such as Hsuan-tsang (629- 645) and I-ching (635-713). Fa-hsien's text served as a guidebook along the way. Thus I-ching, in the opening words of his own travel account, *The Account o f the Eminent T'ang Monks Who Journeyed to the Western Region in Search of the Law*, acknowledges his debt to Fa-hsien saying that " Ven Fa-hsien was the first one explored way through the wasteland"

Fa Hsien also made significant contributions to the knowledge of Indian history and geography for scholars trying to reconstruct the history of India a coin dug out from the earth or a stray remark by some Greek mariner or Chinese traveler was more important. The four sacred places and four places of miracles were called *Atthamahathanani* or the Eight Great Places. Great king Asoka came to these 8 sacred places "*Dhammayatra*" or a visiting of devotee on his twentieth regnal year in 249 BC. Wherever he visited he made stupas and pillars with scription to memory visiting of Asoka to these holy places. Actual these Asokan pillars or holy Place Lumbini, Kapilavatthu, Bodhigaya, Sarnath, Vesali , Savathi, Rajagaha, Sankasia were ruined and forgot in long time. Fortunately for later historians and archaeologists, Chinese travelers to Buddha's land and surrounding of Central Asia have left behind fairly detailed records of their journeys. Fa-hsien was the earliest of such Chinese pilgrims had done. Because of the records of the Chinese pilgrims are the only available writings describing the condition of Buddhism and the Buddhist sites as they existed at that time and have proven to be invaluable in

locating their ruins during excavations in nineteen century by Alexander Cunningham together with another archaeologists

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⁷ J. Legge, A Record of Buddhist Kingdom by Chinesse Monk, Fa hsien, pp. 60- 61