

A REVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA

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ABSTRACT

India and China are the oldest civilizations of the world. The similarities and the associations of both the countries are great, friendly and cherished. There are more similarities between India and China than dissimilarities. Both the countries treasure their ancient existence since the world's earliest civilizations. The account of India - China relationship and resemblance of culture were found in various Chinese books such as "*Lieh-tsu, Thou- shu-dui-yi* or the ((the Book on Wonders of China).

In the light of the above statement, this paper attempts to throw light on the ancient historical cultural and religious bondage between India and China since the time immemorial. Though the facts are recorded historically, there is a need to bring them to the surface in order to establish the faith among each other, among the people of both the nations.

The objective of this paper is to unfold the cultural and religious collaboration of both the nations. To establish that the interchange and intermingling of these two great civilizations have contributed greatly in enriching and enlightening each other. This paper presents a brief history of the mutual contact; development, shared religious interest, influence of Indian arts, culture, language, mythology, education, philosophy on the Chinese people's lives. There is hardly any branch of Indian knowledge existed then which has not left its impression of the Chinese people.

Besides discussing the impact of India on Chinese culture and vice versa, the paper highlights and stress on the need to enhance their collaboration in maintaining peace, growth, and prosperity to establish their strength in South Asia. The 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and China started in 1950 was marked on 1st April 2020. There is a need to negotiate further and strengthen their relationship which continued to survive through millennia.

Keywords:- India China Relationship, Cultural ties, Religious influence, Exchange of Arts, Literature, Medicine, Science.

HISTORY OF INDO-SINO CULTURAL EXCHANGES:-

Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Yuxi (2004-2007) had said "I believe China and India are two countries in the world that share the most in common. Both are located in Asia, are proud of their own individual long civilization that goes back to 5000 years, both suffered colonial rules, he further stated that Indian - Chinese share similar moral ideas, in fact Chinese owe a lot to India", Sun said. Both the countries are situated in the continent of Asia where the soils are fertile with vast agricultural lands where they reap their agricultural production. People are industrious, honest and their yields make them self-sufficient also contributing to the international supply. The eventful pre-history period was long enough where there were inventions, discoveries, discourses and enlightenments. Old books claims that our rudiment culture evolved some 5000 years ago. Indians and Chinese grew up simultaneously and shared their cultural traits since the advent of human history. Prior to the transmission of Buddhism, the Shang-Shou civilization and the ancient Vedic civilization in 1500-100 B.C shared the conceptual and linguistic entities as per the evidence, ex:-" Wumengzhi" (nameless finger) in Chinese, called (anamika) in Sanskrit and Pali. Some ancient Indian literature mention the word Chinas referring to the Chinese people.

Commented [u1]: The Shang was the earliest dynasty in Chinese history ,can be verified through written evidence. It was established in1600 BCE.

In the 5th C B.C, Mahabharata referred to China. Chanakya of the Maurya dynasty [350-283 B.C] mentioned the Chinese silk as ‘Chinamsaka’ (Chinese silk dress) and Chinapatta - (silk bundles from China) in his Arthashastra. Similarly the great historians of Zhang Qian and Sima Qian recorded the reference to ‘Shendu’ referring to the ‘Sindhu’(Indus river) in Sanskrit. It is noteworthy that a number of Chinese book such as Lie Sien or [The Biography of Fairies], Shih-Lao-Chih or [Sketches of Buddha”] and Laotze-Tsi-Hu or [The Seven Records]; Ching-Hu or [The Classical Records] and Fu-Tsu-Tung-Chi or [The Seven Accounts of Buddhism] etc. record the earliest certitude regarding India and China’s cultural relationship.

In the 6th C B.C, a new era of cultural bondage began with the birth of Confucius and Shakyamuni, Emperor Ashoka’s propagation of Buddhism started in 256 B.C which brought the civilizations even closer. Buddhism spread in China and Central Asia which continued during the period of Kanishka in 1st C A.D. During his regime the Buddhist pilgrims, scholars, traders travelled through the historic ‘silk route’. The great scholar Kumarajiva initiated effort to translate important Buddhist texts in Chang’an (present Xi’an) where he lived till last and translated 98 major Buddhist works into Chinese. He is the one who brought in the Mahayana Buddhism and Madhyamika doctrine into the Chinese philosophy.

An Indian Buddhist scholar, Dhamakshama arrived in China in 5thA.D with Mahaparinirvana Sutra’ which was translated into Chinese. At the same period the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien, (Faxian, a Chinese monk) visited India along the ‘silk route’ and reached in 405 A.D at Batao (464-495), stayed at the prestigious Nalanda University for 10 years and translated many Sanskrit, Buddhist texts into Chinese. His record of journey Fo Guo ji (Record of Buddhist Kingdom) is an important historical source which establishes the religious connections between the two countries.

Xuan Zang (Hein Tsang) visited India during Harsha Vardhana’s reign in the 7th C A.D in search of Buddhist scriptures. His journey is narrated as a traditional lore in Chinese in the book called “A Journey to the West. Hiuen Tsang travelled extensively throughout India, visited Taxila and lived in Mathura, where he observed the sacred traces of Lord Buddha at Kashi. From there he went to Kapil Vastu, Kuhinagar, Pataliputra, Vaishali, Mahabodhi and stayed at Nalanda University. He also travelled to South India and visited Sri Lanka. He acquired profound learning, devotion, warm hospitality, immense respect in Nalanda wherein he studied, learnt logic, grammar, linguistics, medicine, crafts and Vedas extensively.

While returning to China in 645 A.D he carried with him a few relics, golden and sandalwood statues of Lord Buddha, 224 books of Sutras, 192 Shastras, 15 works of the Sthavira schools, 67 books of the Sarvastivada school and 17 works of the Kayapiya school . The Emperor of China had preserved the entire collection in a Pagoda built by him. That noble act of the Chinese emperor is still appreciated for enabling the scholars to study the valuable Buddhist history. The Silk Road played a significant role in facilitating India-China cultural, commercial and technological exchange.

It was not that only religious and Buddhist Teachings were transmitted to China, both the nations also shared the scientific knowledge. In the 8thC an Indian astronomer Aryabhata’s astronomical signs were translated into Chinese book called “Kaiyuan Zhanjing” compiled by Gautam Siddha, an astronomer in Chang’an of Indian descent. He is believed to have translated the Nabagraha calendar into Chinese.

Indo-Sino Cultural Collaboration in the Perspective of Various Historical Sources:-

The Mahabharata refers to China several times giving a reference of the gifts brought by Chinese to the Rajasuya Yajna of Pandavas. Arthashastra and Manusmriti too mention China, numerously.

According to Terence Duke, China received the martial arts from the Kshatryas, the warriors from India. Arnold Toynbee and Sir L. Wooley believe that China got a readymade ‘Vedic culture from India. Gerolamo Emilo Gerini [1860-1913], observed that the Chinese literature of the 3rd century is full of geographic and mythological elements from India.

In his book, “The Way and Its Power,” Arthur Wooley commented that the ‘holy mountain men” (Sheng-hsein) described by Lieh Tzu are Indian Rishis, we read in Chuang Tzu of certain Taoists practiced movements as per the Asanas of Hindu Yoga and that knowledge of yoga techniques of the Rishis had also passed into China”.

Commented [u2]: Chanakya was a teacher, economist and statesman who wrote the book Arthshastra. He played an important role in forming Maurya Dynasty.

Commented [u3]: A Chinese official and diplomat served as an imperial envoy., regarded as “the father of silk road”.

Commented [u4]: He was a Chinese historian in Han dynasty who is noted for writing Shiji; “Historical Records”,

Commented [u5]: A Chinese philosopher.

Commented [u6]: It is the name given to Gautam Buddha who lived from 566 to 485 BCE.

Commented [u7]: Kanishka was the ruler of Kushan dynasty who ruled the northern region of Indian subcontinent.

Commented [u8]: He was a Buddhist monk, scholar,(c.401CE) who translated many Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Chinese.

Commented [u9]: This term is usually refers to ultimate state of Nirvana ie everlasting peace.

Commented [u10]: He was the first Chinese traveler to visit India in search of sacred texts on Buddhism in 5th C.

Commented [u11]: Nalanda was an acclaimed large Buddhist monastery, was a centre of learning, from 5th C CE to 1200 CE.

Commented [u12]: He is famous for his 16 years pilgrimage to India as a translator of Buddhist scriptures.

Commented [u13]: Historical cities of India.

Commented [u14]: shastras are the books of rules,, a religious treatise, a book of knowledge which explains regulations of a subject.

Commented [u15]: It means teaching of the elders, it was one of the early Buddhist schools.

Commented [u16]: It is a Sanskrit term means” the theory of all that exist”.

Commented [u17]: According to Hindu ism Nabgraha are the nine heavenly bodies that influence human life on earth.

Commented [u18]: It is a king’s inauguration sacrifice which is a ritual of Vedic religion.

Commented [u19]: He was an Italian geographer, an archeologist, a linguist and a scholar besides a Military General.

Commented [u20]: A Chinese Philosopher who wrote the foundational texts of Taoism

The Chinese religious and cultural life had a profound effect of Hinduism and Buddhism since they had many things in common with a Pantheon of deities. The story of Sun Hou Tzu is similar to that of the Hindu epic of Ramayana. **Source:-** “Eastern Wisdom” by Michael Jordon (P-134-151).

Source:- The Wisdom of China and India by Lin Yutang (1895-1976) author of the Wisdom of China and India, India was China’s teacher in religion, imagination literature and the world’s teacher in Trigonometry, Quadratic equations, Grammar, Phonetics Arabian Nights, Animal fables, Chess as well as Philosophy.

Kakuzo Okakaru observed that in the province of Lo-Yang there were more than 30,000 Indian monks and 10,000 Indian families that practiced their religion and art in the Chinese soil. **Source:-** “The Ideals of the East With Special Reference to The Art of Japan” (1904) by Kakuzo Okakaru-p-113.

Hu Shih- (1891-1962) a Chinese Philosopher who was ambassador to the U.S (1938-1942) and Chancellor of Peking University (1946-1948) said “India had culturally conquered China since 2000 years without sending a single soldier across her border” The religious life of Chinese has been enriched, deepened, broadened and made more meaningful in terms of human sympathy, love and compassion for all living creatures” The concept of Karma is found in Chinese literature, poetry and in the tales also.

Chinese coins found at Mysore dated 138 B.C suggest that maritime relations between the countries existed since 2nd C B.C. Albert Etienne Terrien de Lacouperia, the author of ‘Western Origin of Chinese Civilization, stated that the maritime association between India and China dates back to 680 B.C, The sea traders had founded a colony called ‘Lang-ga’ after ‘Lanka’. **Source:-** (Milinda Panha, p-127-327).

Trade and Commerce:-

The Chronicles of ‘Sung-Chu’ states that all the precious things of land and water came from India. Gems, Serpent pearls, Asbestos, Cloth and innumerable other varieties were imported into China. In the 6th C saffron was traded from India to China and India was a good market of Chinese silk which was in great demand in the regime of Harshavardhana. **Source:-** Cultural Heritage of Ancient India” by Sachindra Kumar Maity- (p-119-124). Porcelain was also in high demand in India. Indian arts were carried to China along with Buddhism, images of rock, cut caves, sculpture and the fresco paintings show distinct Indian influence in the Chinese art. Indian astronomy, mathematics, medicine were also carried there. **Source:-** Ancient Indian History and Culture by Chidambaram Kulkarni; (p-233 - 234).

The following paragraph gives a brief account of the contributions made by India:-

Literature:- The Buddhist scholars left an ever lasting impact on Chinese literature. A Chinese scholar Lai Mang views that the Buddhist literature had an immense influence on the development of all spheres of Chinese literature since Eastern Chin Period (317 A.D).

The Noble Prize Winner “Amartya Sen wrote in the Times of India, “It is not often realized that even such a central term in Chinese culture as Mandarin is derived from Sanskrit word namely Mantri which went to China via Malaya”. The first printed book in the world was the Chinese translation by Kumarajiva of a Buddhist Sanskrit text. **Source:-** India, According to Amartya Sen by M.V.Kamath Publication [2003].

Mythology:- The monks had carried most of the fairy tales to China in the first millennium, Ex:- ‘A Play of Thunder Peak’, A Dream of Butterfly’ and ‘A Record of Southern Trees’ which were Indian in origin.

Grammar:- The Chinese vocabulary was enriched by more than 35,000 words coined by Buddhist scholars which in use even today. The word ‘Deva Putra’ a Sanskrit word is an exact translation of ‘Son of Heaven’ for Chinese Emperor. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru commented that ‘It is interesting to note that some Chinese scholars tried to introduce Sanskrit phonetic into Chinese language. Ex: The monk Shan Wen of Tang Dynasty tried to develop an alphabetical system along these lines in Chinese. **Source:-** “The Discovery of India’ by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru (p-197-198).

Art:- Monks and their disciples, traders carried statues and models of Hindu temples from India. Fa Hein made drawings of images, Hein Tsang returned with several golden and sandalwood figures of Buddha and Hui- Lun with a model of Nalanda Mahavira. Wang Huan Tsi visited India several times, collected many images and a copy of the Buddha Image at Bodhgaya. Along with numerous Buddha statues, images of Hindu deities from

Commented [u21]: He was a Chinese inventor, novelist. Linguist and a translator who translated classic Chinese texts into English.

Commented [u22]: He was Japanese Art critic, scholar and author of many books.

Commented [u23]: Was a sinologist (1844- 1894) and a French Orientalist specializing in comparative philology.

Commented [u24]: It is a Buddhist text dating back to 100BC. It is an important book of Buddhist doctrine.

Commented [u25]: It was an ancient International Monastic University established in 5th century BC, which taught Vedas, Logic, Grammar, Medicine, Meta-Physics, Prose Composition and Rhetoric.

India such as Shiva on Nandi and Vishnu on Garuda were found painted in Caves called “Caves of Thousand Buddhas”.

Music:-- Indian music was very popular in China. Joseph Needham, a well known supporter of Chinese cultural and scientific priority observed that “Indian music came through Kucha to China. By the end of 6thC Indian music was given state recognition.

Science:-- The Indian doctrine of Karma (tri-yeh) influenced Chinese thought, Buddhism had also introduced a theory of logic and epistemology. Tantric Buddhism reached China in the 8th C, the greatest Chinese astronomer and mathematician I- hseung (682-727) was a tantric Buddhist.

Astronomy:-- Astronomy and calendar studies were carried on during the Tang dynasty. The three astronomical schools studied then at Chang-a were Gautam (Chutan), Kkashyapa (chiayeh) and Kumara (Chumolo).

Medicine:- Ayurveda influenced Chinese medicines which include the use of natural herbs. **Source:**--‘Balm from the East’ by Jenny Hontz - Los Angeles Times. Terence Duke writes that ‘Many Buddhists were familiar with good knowledge of surgery common to Indian medicine. There are several other fields including Acupuncture, Martial Arts, Education where Indian impact on Chinese Culture is visible.

India China Bilateral Relation - The Tradition Continues:

During the modern Phase of Cultural exchange, Rabindranath Tagore visited China in 1924. Since 1911 Chinese scholars and intellectuals have been studying Tagore’s life, work and Philosophy. China has been publishing collected volumes of Tagore’s writings in Chinese language as part of 150th Birth anniversary celebration. Tagore had set Cheena Bhavan in Vishwa Bharathi University in 1937 under the guidance of Prof Tan Yanshan.

Sending the Medical aid to China in 1938 through a mission with Dr. Kotnis by Indian National Congress is noteworthy. There are missions to collaborate with Chinese institutions like Peking University, Yunnan University, Chinese Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and many others to hold seminars, exhibitions and movie screenings in Tagore’s honor. A Chinese transcript of Rabindra Sangeet in China was released in 2013 by the Ambassador of India at the Central conservatory of music. The tradition of cultural exchange and bilateral relation continues.

Since 1960’s and 1970’s Bollywood movies named ‘Do Bigha Zameen, ‘Awara’ and ‘Sri 420’ of Raj Kapoor and Noorie were extremely popular in China. Even latest movies like 3 Idiots, ‘The life of Pie,’ ‘Dangal, ‘Sultan, have also become very popular.

In 2003, a centre for Indian studies was set up in Peking University. Chairs of Indian Studies were setup in Shenzen University, Jinan University and Fudan University. The 60th anniversary of the establishment of India-China diplomatic relations was celebrated with enthusiasm in both the countries in 2010.

The 2014 was declared as the year of Friendly Exchange between India and China. During the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to China in Oct 2013, both the countries renewed their Cultural Exchange Program which provided for cultural development, facilitated the visits of artists, officials, writers, archives and archeologists.

During President Ho Jintao’s Visit to India for BRICS Summit in March 2012, leaders from both the sides decided to celebrate 2012 as a year of Friendship and Co-operation. Young Chinese expressed their desire to know Buddhism, Bollywood and Yoga and young Indians admire the Chinese economic progress.

The past years witnessed several activities in the Cultural Wing Auditorium to facilitate the learning of Hindi, Indian Classical Music, Dance Forms, Yoga and the screening of popular Hindi movies. The Wing conducted several events every month, lectures, films, documentary shows, performances, book talks associated with Indian culture and heritage and have opened a library with 8000 books. There’s a growing desire in China to learn about Indian Culture and traditions.

Commented [u26]: He was a Bengali polymath , a poet, writer, playwright, composer, philosopher, social reformer and painter. He reshaped Bengali literature and music as well as Indian art with Contextual Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Commented [u27]: Dr. Kotnis 10 October 1910 in India – 9 December 1942 in China, also known by his Chinese name Ke Dihua, was one of the five Indian physicians dispatched to China to provide medical assistance during the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1938.

Commented [u28]: Hindi cinema, popularly known as Bollywood and formerly as Bombay cinema, refers to the film industry based in Mumbai, engaged in production of motion pictures in Hindi language. The popular term is Bollywood

Discussion:- Are the bilateral relations between China and India improving? The details presented in the above paragraphs gives a comprehensive chronicle of how India and China had been maintaining relations since centuries and throw light upon the longest cultural, religious, literary associations both the countries cherished.

The distinguished diplomat Kishore Mahbubani from Singapore described India China Relation as ‘the most important bilateral relationship of 21st C. In his article Major General Depankar Banerjee-2010 observed “Indeed historically, civilization wise, from the perspective of economic benefits to the region, from peace and security in Asia and the World, this is the relationship likely to shape the global future; it has to be based on carefully balanced self-interest which requires careful negotiations based on our respective genuine interests”.

Commented [u29]: Kishore Mahbubani is a Singaporean diplomat and geopolitical consultant who served as Singapore Permanent Representative to the United Nations between 1984 and 1989, and between 1998 and 2004, President of the United Nations Security Council between 2001 and 2002.

It is noteworthy that since 1980s both the countries have reconstructed their diplomatic relations. The year 2010 marked the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relationship with the strategic and co-operative partnership for peace, sound and steady growth. The year 2011 observed a frequent High Level Exchange and a growth in the bilateral trade. The areas of economic co-operation kept expanding with India being an important overseas contract market. Cultural and people to people contact reached new level, the China Festival in India and India Festival in China were successfully conducted. The two countries had built an agreement and co-operation on major international and regional issues which helps them coordinate and establish positions in the international affairs, energy, food security on behalf of the interest of the developing countries. China had been India’s largest trading partner during 2008 to 2021.

Conclusion:- India-China cultural exchanges dates back to many centuries and there are evidences that conceptual and linguistic exchanges existed in 1500- 1000 B.C between the Shang-Zhou civilization and the ancient Vedic civilization. During the first, second and third centuries A.D, several Buddhist pilgrims and scholars traveled to China on the historic ‘silk route’. Kashyapa Matanga and Dharmaratna made the White Horse monastery at Luoyang their abode. Ancient Indian monk-scholars such as Kumarajiva, Bodhidharma and Dharmakshema contributed to the spread of Buddhism in China. Similarly, Chinese pilgrims also undertook journeys to India, the most famous among them being Fa Xian and Xuan Zang.

In the recent times the bilateral relations have expanded and strengthened, both the sides have redefined their bilateral engagement as Closer Developmental Partnership. In addition, a total of 16 agreements were signed in various sectors including, commerce and trade, railways, space- cooperation, pharmaceuticals, establishment of industrial parks etc. An MoU to open the Nathu La route for Kailash Mansarovar Yatra was also signed.

Commented [u30]: Nathu-La is a mountain pass in the Himalayas in East Sikkim district. It connects the Indian state of Sikkim with China’s Tibet Autonomous Region.

In 2015 Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited China, held meetings with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang. During the visit, Prime Minister Modi and Premier Li Keqiang also addressed the opening session of the First State/Provincial Leaders’ Forum in Beijing wherein 24 agreements were signed between the two nations, 26 MoUs on the business-to business side and two joint statements, including one on climate change. Prime Minister had also announced e-visa facilities for Chinese tourists.

President Pranab Mukherjee visited China in 2016 and visited Guangdong and Beijing to meet with the Chinese leadership and had signed ten MoUs in the area of education and research. The year 2018 witnessed an uplift in the bilateral ties.

In April 2018 Prime Minister Modi and President Xi held the first Informal Summit in Wuhan to discuss the issues of bilateral and global importance and shared their respective visions regarding national development. The bilateral ties continued to strengthen and deepen in the year 2019 with the Second Informal Summit between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi held in Chennai in October 2019. The Summit recognized that India and China are the pillars of stability in the current international scenario and that both the nations should sort out their differences and avoid disputes in future.

More than 100 Chinese companies have established their offices in India including the Chinese state-owned companies and projects in India. Besides this, Chinese students are annually awarded scholarships to study Hindi at the Kendriya Hindi Sansthan (KHS), Agra. For the year 2020-21, six Chinese students were selected to study under this scheme. The Embassy maintains regular communication with MoE in China and all the universities where a good number of Indian students.

SUGGESTIONS:-

The leaders of India and China continue to meet on the sideline of regional, lateral and multilateral gatherings and conferences. India – China Political relations are enhanced and strengthened by various methodologies. There is and there has to be further interactions between strategic and foreign policies. Both the nations look forward for their exchanges to continue in following years by resolving their issues of LAC.

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