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# Cultural Giving-back: A New Realm of the Exchange between Human Civilizations, with the Sinicization of Buddhism as a Case Study

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## I. New Concept: “Cultural Feedback” and Case Study

This essay attempts to present a new theoretical concept, namely, “cultural giving-back”. As the term suggests, the so-called “cultural giving-back” refers to a particular form of civilizational exchange that involves a return of cultural achievements back to its native place, with an attitude of gratitude or in the spirit of reciprocation.

If we see the history of human civilization as a long process of exchanges and mutual learning, clearly ever since basic ways of transportation and communication came into place, civilizations have started to make contact, and then regularly interact, in the meantime learning from each other and converging with each other (while of course also getting into contention, conflict, or even combat, etc.). Thus, as the age of globalization dawns and the global village becomes reality, such a phenomenon that we may tentatively call cultural giving-back is likely to become more and more common in the field of cultural exchange: one civilization had once learned from another civilization some excellent cultural elements or advanced cultural products, such as those in the realms of science, technology, literature, art, philosophy and religion, which, after processes of mixing and adaptation, have become assimilated into the learning culture, and, after still more hammering and tempering, become welded into the local culture in the form of new inventions, artifacts, works, theories, ideas, ethos and wisdoms that are characteristic of the new native culture - such is the instance of giving back, when the new results that are often more excellent and mature are contributed, i.e. “given back” to the human civilization as a whole.

As is well-known, the five-thousand-year history of the Chinese civilization contains a large number of records of Sino-foreign cultural exchanges and mutual learning. Those include but are not limited to such important moments as the “Silk Road” that originated in the Spring and Autumn Period and prospered during the Tang Dynasty, the two expeditions led by Zhang Qian to the Western Regions (referring to the area that includes present-day Xinjiang, parts of Central Asia and beyond) during the Han Dynasty, Zheng He’s seven voyages to the Western Seas (referring to the region west of the South China Sea), the transmissions to overseas of China’s “four great

inventions”, its porcelain and tea culture, the import of Indian Buddhist culture, Western Christian culture and Arabic Islamic culture into China, the great journeys taken by two Tang monks, Xuanzang (602-664) and Jianzhen (688-763), the former going west to bring Buddhist scriptures back from India and the latter travelling east to bestow them on Japan, the communication of Western learning to China and Chinese learning to the West in the early modern era, and much more recently, the introduction of Marxism from Europe to China, and so on. If, by taking a forward-looking and constructive approach, we would like to look at a positive moment in the history of Sino foreign cultural exchanges, not only as a nice example of the exchange and mutual learning between human civilizations, but also to explore the theoretical value and practical significance of the aforementioned concept of “cultural giving-back”, “the Sinicization of Buddhism” probably serves as the best case study possible. Let us start from Xuan Zang’s journey to India for the Buddhist scriptures.

Why do we want to use “the Sinicization of Buddhism” as an example and start with Xuan Zang’s journey to the West for Buddhist scriptures? As a matter of fact, a lot of research has been done by Chinese scholars on these two topics and their historical significance has been fully recognized. For instance, Wang Jienan, in his recently published *A History of Sino-Foreign Cultural Exchanges*, points out: “Buddhism is the oldest one of the world’s three major religions, and it is also the largest religion in China. Both Buddhism and the Indian culture that it represented are the first foreign cultures that the Chinese people came into contact with on a large scale in their national history. After the integration of the foreign Buddhist culture into Chinese culture, it has become an inseparable part of the Chinese traditional culture.”<sup>1</sup> Also, Lai Yonghai, in the fifteen-volume *The General History of the Chinese Buddhism* that he edited, points out that “in the history of Chinese Buddhism, even in the history of China, Xuan Zang should without doubt be regarded as one of the greatest Chinese individuals. As a senior Buddhist monk, he travelled alone in spite of all sorts of difficulties, all the way to Tianzhu to seek Buddhist scriptures for China. His significance has already gone beyond the scope of Buddhism, and he has become a symbol of the unyielding spirit of the Chinese nation, which for over a thousand years has inspired the Chinese nation in its striving. For Buddhism, Xuan Zang is not only the greatest scholar in the history of the propagation of Buddhism in China, but also a great synthesizer who has inherited orthodox Buddhist teachings from India. His translations of Buddhist scriptures and commentaries are both vast and refined. They are most effective in promoting the true teachings of Buddhism, and have left extensive and profound influence in the history of Chinese Buddhism, the history of Chinese culture and of Chinese thought.”<sup>2</sup>

It is of particular significance that during recent years, as the Belt and Road Initiative was

1. Wang Jienan, *A History of Sino-Foreign Cultural Exchanges*, Taiyuan: Shanxi People’s Publishing House, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2011, p. 85.

2. Lai Yonghai, ed. *The General History of the Chinese Buddhism*, Vol. V, Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing House, 2010, p. 381.

put forward and into practice, the significance of such themes as the Sinicization of Buddhism and Xuan Zang's journey to the west for Buddhist scriptures for promoting Sino-foreign cultural exchanges, and for presenting Chinese culture and Chinese religions to the world, have increasingly attracted the attention of the political, religious and academic circles of China. Xi Jinping, President of China, in his address delivered at the UNESCO headquarter, pointed out that Buddhism originated in ancient India, but since it came to China, it has gone through a long process of evolution, integrated with both Confucian and Taoist cultures, and developed a Buddhist culture with Chinese characteristics, which has profoundly influenced the religious beliefs, philosophy, art and literature, rituals and customs of the Chinese people. During the Tang Dynasty, Xuan Zang traveled through hardships to India for Buddhist scriptures, which demonstrates the determination and perseverance of the Chinese people to learn from foreign cultures... The Chinese people developed Buddhist thoughts based on the Chinese culture, formed unique Buddhist theories, and helped Buddhism spread to Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, etc. The exchange and mutual learning between civilizations is a strong impetus for the progress of human civilization and peaceful development of the world. Also, when President Xi Jinping greeted Prime Minister Modi of India at the Dacien Temple of Xi'an, he said to the latter, "last year you accompanied me to visit Gujarat Bong which is your hometown, and which you explained was where Xuan Zang the eminent Chinese monk had studied Buddhist scriptures. After Xuan Zang returned to China, it was here at the Dacien Temple where he translated those Buddhist scriptures. This temple thus has witnessed a history of friendly exchanges between China and India. The reason we reflect upon the exchanges and mutual learning between the civilizations of China and India, is thus to further promote friendly exchange between the two countries and to add new impetus to the development of Sino-Indian relations." Modi also said that Master Xuan Zang is a symbol of the cultural exchange between India and China. His journey to India has served as a connection that has linked the two nations ever since.<sup>3</sup>

The author believes that if we could combine the above two aspects in our consideration, it is possible to uncover a new academic perspective based on existing research, i.e. the "comparative study of Sinicization of foreign religions", which will be further discussed in the following sections.

## II. New Perspective: Comparative Study of the Sinicization of Foreign Religions

Among the five major religions in China today, only Taoism is both native and local, and the rest, which include Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Christianity (Protestantism), are all "foreign" by origin. Generally speaking, they were all imported through the northern and southern "land and maritime Silk Roads" to China: the entry of Buddhism can be traced back to the Han

3. See Xi Jinping: Address at the UNESCO Headquarter (03/37/2014), Xinhua Net ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2014-03/28/c\\_119982831\\_2.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2014-03/28/c_119982831_2.htm)); "Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Modi Visit Xi'an" (05/14/15), Xinhua Net, ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-05/14/c\\_127802254.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-05/14/c_127802254.htm)).

Dynasty (circa. 2 BC); that of Islam is during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Yonghui reign period of Tang Dynasty, which is 651 AD. In contrast, the arrival of Christianity in China had experienced twists and turns in a process of making “four entries”. This includes first the coming of the Nestorian sect during the Tang Dynasty, next that of what is known as “Yelikewen” during the Yuan, then the coming of Catholicism in late Ming and early Qing, and finally the (re)entry of Catholicism and Protestantism just before and after the Opium Wars. The above historical facts are sufficient to show that the ancient Chinese civilization has always been inclusive, and the world religions mentioned above have indeed been welded into the cultural tradition of China to various degrees. Although the Chinese academia has traditionally attached importance to the study of the localization or Sinicization of foreign religions, a comparative approach that is inter-disciplinary and comprehensive has been rather lacking. Therefore, building upon the related results of existing research, the comparative study of the Sinicization of foreign religions will surely help us to sum up and learn from the historical experiences and lessons from an academic perspective, and to develop new concepts, ideas and initiatives that are more positive and constructive for promoting Sino-foreign cultural exchange and mutual learning in the future. In order to expound the scholarly conception of this new perspective and its research potential, I ask for your patience and that we first peruse this long quotation included here below:

Christianity is different from Buddhism; Chinese people did not ask for Christianity... The westerners came to evangelize, their mission was internally compelled. Believing that their orders were from God, they focused on getting into China and did not ask where their power was coming from. As a result, Christian mission was protected by treaties, and backed by the political powers of the West. Zhang Bohuai, who is a friend of mine, once said, “Christian evangelization (in China) at the beginning of the nineteenth century was an act of aggression. The missionaries from the West, backed by the military power of their native countries, forced the religion that they believed in on China. As to whether the Chinese people welcome it, how Christianity may benefit the Chinese lives, they had hardly given any careful thought to them. The twentieth century started with the Boxer Uprising. Ever since then...the Chinese sentiment against Christianity started to grow everywhere imperceptibly... to the point of such indignation that “peace cannot be restored in China before this harm be eliminated”. As a result, the Great Anti-religious Alliance was formed in 1922, followed by anti-Christian propaganda and establishments after the Nationalist Party decided to ally itself with Soviet Russia and the Communists.” (see *Lu Duo*, Vol. 7, page 1.) As Christianity was propagated, not on its own merits, but relying on foreign forces, it was unavoidable that some Chinese believers tried to defend themselves, or bully others, with the help of foreign powers, and that the Chinese started to differentiate between the people and the believers, treating the latter as traitors, to the effect that “when Mount Kun is caught in flames, jade and stone are destroyed indiscriminately”. Since those Chinese that converted to Christianity came under suspicion of betrayal, surely the religion that they believed in could not integrate with and feed back to the Chinese culture. This is probably one unfortunate reason that Christianity and the Chinese nation

came to be at odds with each other.”<sup>4</sup>

This above passage was written 80 years ago. Only with a knowledge of its author's background could today's readers possibly understand his words correctly in its historical context. Zhao Zichen (1888-1979) is one of the most influential Christian thinkers in modern China. He is not only seen as “the founder of Chinese Christian philosophy and systematic theology”, and “the forerunner for the reform and innovation of the Chinese church”, but also known as “the pioneer thinker that advocates the Sinicization of Christianity”. Thus, it was from the bottom of his “Chinese heart” and out of deep “love for the nation” that Zhao Zichen reflected, in a strikingly “rational and critical” manner, on the particular background against which “Western Christianity” entered China just before and after the Opium Wars, and on the unfortunate consequences that we now all know of. The purpose of his theoretical reflection was thus to rediscover the “true Christianity”, i.e. the real face and true spirit of Christianity, so that the “Christianity as an excellent foreign culture” may truly integrate into the Chinese culture, the Chinese nation and the Chinese society.<sup>5</sup> This is the first thing that needs to be understood. Second, 80 years have passed by since the time of his writing, during which the Chinese society has undergone tremendous changes. It is possible to say that the Christian church in China has to a large degree localized or Sinicized. However, when speaking of “Sinicization of foreign religions”, the majority opinion of experts and scholars within China and abroad is that, Buddhism has already been integrated with the traditional Chinese culture, Islam has also become part of the large family that is called the Chinese nation, while comparatively speaking, the Sinicization of Christianity still seems to have a long way to go. This relatively shared view thus shows that we may still refer to the theoretical reflection that Zhao Zihun attempted many years ago for historical lessons. Next, it was when comparing the Sinicization of Christianity and Buddhism that Zhao Zichen originally made the discussion cited above. In his article “The Chinese Nation and Christianity”, Zhao has a detailed analysis of “the six reasons why Buddhism has been able to become a Chinese religion”. Although not all of his reasons may seem objective to us today, the conclusion that he arrives at through comparative analysis proves to be very thought-provoking: “The Chinese sought Buddhism, while the opposite was the case for Christianity - the Westerners brought it in through economic and political aggression.” Obviously, this statement has its historical limitation. That is, the observation about Christianity should be mainly limited to the activities of Western missionaries and their unfortunate consequences just before and after the Opium Wars.

4. Zhao Zichen, “Chinese Nationality and Christianity”, first published in *The Truth and Life* (1935), Vol. 9, Issue 5, 6; also in Zhang Xiping, Zhuo Xiping, eds. *The Journey of Enculturation: A Collection of Academic Essays on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese Christian Culture*, Beijing: China Radio and Television Publishing House, 1999, pp. 18-33.

5. It should be noted that this observation made here reflects less the sentiment of this author than Zhao Zichen's own thinking. In another famous writing entitled “Chinese Nationality and Christianity”, Zhao said, “we are Chinese, and live in the Chinese environment, but we also absorb the cultures of the world and Christianity, and have once lived comfortably in the realm of Chinese thoughts and ideas”; “What we should think carefully is how to retain the spirit of our culture, how to develop this culture so that it can harmonized with the world's cultures and continue to grow.” See for more details Zhao Zichen, “Christianity and the Chinese Culture”, in *The Journey of Enculturation: A Collection of Academic Essays on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese Christian Culture*, p. 2, 6.

Now that we are fully aware of this necessary qualification, we could give more careful thought to Zhao's historical insights, that is, the two terms of "qiu" (seek, or sought after) and "bu-qiu" (not seek, or not sought after) as he put it.

Zhao Zichen points out that if the Chinese need religion, they must seek it for themselves. There are three kinds of "seeking": "seeking in action", "seeking the Scriptures" and "seeking the text", meaning, respectively, "to practice what one preaches," "to seek the Scriptures and true teachings from their place of origin," and "to translate the Scriptures to his/her own native language". Zhao cites examples and shows that Chinese Buddhism has made great achievements in all the three aspects. It is my view, nevertheless, that if we could adjust the order of these three, it may appear more logical, and more consistent with the historical processes of the Sinicization of Buddhism, that is, first "seeking the Scriptures", next "seeking the text", and then "seeking in action". In this way, the critical significance of Xuan Zang's journey to India for the Buddhist Scriptures and his translation project become apparent.<sup>6</sup>

On the motivation, processes and achievements of Xuan Zang's journey to India and his translation project, there are a multitude of historical records and research works available. For the sake of brevity, I shall mainly offer the research of Fang Litian (1933-2014) as support for my argument: Xuan Zang (about 602-664) was born a bright child in a poor family. At the age of 13 he became a Buddhist monk. Before going to India, he had already visited everyone who could teach him, studied the teachings of all schools, and was elected one of the "ten elders of the Zhuangyan Temple". However, detecting variance between Buddhist doctrines taught in different places in China, he was keen on finding a solution and was determined to travel to India for the original scriptures. Historical records show that Xuan Zang spent 17 years on his trip to and back from India, which covered 25,000 kilometers in distance and spanned 110 countries and regions, and he brought back to China 520 boxes or 657 volumes in total of Buddhist scriptures in both the Mahayana and the Hinayana tradition. After Xuan Zang returned home, he declined Emperor Tang

6. On the significance of Xuan Zang's pilgrimage for the Scriptures and his translation project, Zhao Zichen points out: Fa Xian, Xuan Zang and hundreds of other monks took countless risks and endured severe hardships on their climb of Congling and many snow mountains on their way. They had to find a way where there was no way, and to survive where there was no life. Many of them died on their trip going there, or on their trip coming back, or in the foreign land, because of all sorts of dangers, diseases, lack of food, or the cold, in spite of which they pressed on, determined to seek the Buddhist Scriptures and teachings from the masters in its place of origin. They were forced to go to India by their heart, as if they received ineffable truths in the air. With such men doing so, the wide spread of Buddhism was simply unavoidable. This is the example of seeking a religion at its origin. As for the necessity of seeking the texts (meaning scriptures) of a religion, Buddhism can indeed claim having had great feats. In the beginning, the translation of scriptures were done by the foreigners at such places as Yuezhi, Anxi, Yutian, Tianzhu. Later, as the Chinese came to have a good knowledge of Sanskrit as well as the environment and background of Buddhism, and they also knew well Chinese literature and history, they started to translate the texts themselves. Thus, after such figures as An Shigao (安世高), Lokaksema (支娄迦讖), Zhiqian (支谦), Dharmarakṣa (竺法护), Kumarajiva (鸠摩罗什), Dharmakṣema (昙无讷), Paramartha (真谛) and Yan Cong (严琮), we find Xuan Zang Master of the Tripitaka and Yi Jing Master of the Tripitaka and others, whose translations are everywhere identical in the idea but all distinct in their voices. When we read the biography of Xuan Zang of Cien Temple, we will see how great his life achievements and his translation works have been. (Zhao Zichen, "Chinese Nationality and Christianity", in *The Journey of Enculturation: A Collection of Academic Essays on the 20th Century Chinese Christian Culture*, pp. 25-26.)



Taizong's suggestion that he resume secular life and take up a position at the imperial court. Instead Xuan Zang wrote as promised *The Account of a Journey From the Empire of the Great Tang to the West*, and devoted all his time and energy to the translation of Buddhist scriptures. With the support of the imperial government, he spent another 19 years in translating systematically into Chinese the key sutra texts and commentaries of the Yoga, Abhidhamma and Prajna traditions, including for instance the 200 volumes of Mahā-Vibhāṣā (大毘婆沙, the Great Exegesis) of the Hinayana branch of Buddhism, Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra (瑜伽师地论, Discourse on the Stages of Yogic Practice), and 600 volumes of *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (大般若经, Large Perfection of Wisdom Sutra) of the later Madhyamaka school. The translation project that Xuan Zang presided over dealt with the Buddhist theories that dated back to the peak years of the Nalanda Temple, which was the highest Buddhist institution of learning then in India. For that reason the Chinese translation is commonly known as "the New Translations", and is praised as "having ushered in a new era in the Chinese history of scripture translation". Since Xuan Zang brought the scriptures back and started the translation project, many talents came to study under him and work for him. As Xuan Zang was extremely knowledgeable in the Tripitaka (三藏, Three Treasures), he came to be called Master of the Tripitaka, which was an unprecedented recognition in his time. That he has been popularly referred to as the "Tripitaka of the Tang", or the "Tang Monk", is indeed the highest praise and respect for this venerable monk.<sup>7</sup>

To sum up the above discussion, we can see that as an example of Sino-foreign cultural exchange and mutual learning, Xuan Zang's pilgrimage to India for Buddhist scriptures and his translation project are symbolically significant for us in at least two ways. First, from the perspective of comparative study of the Sinicization of foreign religions, if the triple "seeking" discussed above has some academic value, and more over, for any foreign religion, "seeking the Scriptures" and "seeking the text" may be seen as the two indispensable premises or steps of localization, that is, only after the authentic scriptures are sought out and translated faithfully into another language could they be possibly "sought after in action", i.e. to be practiced, approved and spreaded, all in a different cultural context and social situation, we could perhaps compare the triple "seeking" to "three musical movements" during which foreign religions are able to take roots, blossom and bear fruits. Indeed, if without Xuan Zang's journey to India for the scriptures and his translation project as the "prelude" and "continuation", to still follow the metaphor of music, there is no way that we would ever reach a "climax" in the process of Sinicization of Buddhism.

Second, when reviewing the thousands of years of Sino-foreign cultural exchanges, previous researchers at home and abroad tend to discuss at length the "majesty of the Tang Dynasty". Generally speaking, the achievement of political progress, economy development and cultural prosperity during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) has its roots mainly in Tang China's open and friendly stance toward the outside world, and its readiness to accommodate their differences and

7. See for more detail in Fang Litian: *Chinese Buddhism and Traditional Culture*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1988, pp. 71-74.

learn from each other. Chang'an, which was the capital city of Tang Dynasty, may be regarded as the center of Sino-foreign political, economic and cultural exchange of the time. The land and maritime communication and transportation network, of which Chang'an was the focal point, extended in all directions. Tang China was in friendly exchange with more than 70 countries and regions.<sup>8</sup> Hence it had seen the "first peak" of Sino-foreign mutual learning and cultural exchange.<sup>9</sup> As mentioned above, the introduction of Indian Buddhist culture into China may be said to be the "first large-scale contact" between Chinese culture and foreign culture. As for the historical process of the Sinicization of Buddhism, since its entry into China during the Western and Eastern Han dynasties, Buddhism had gone through a long period of clashes and collisions but started to integrate into the Chinese culture from Eastern Jin dynasty on. During Sui dynasty and Tang dynasty, the eight major sects of Chinese Buddhism took shape, which include Tiantai, Sanlun (the Three-Treatise sect), Cittamatra, lüzong (the Vinaya sect), Huayan (the Garland sect), Tantra (the Esoteric Buddhism), Jingtu (the Pure Land sect) and Chan (the Zen Buddhism), and have gradually become an integral part of Chinese culture. The basic structure of China's traditional culture, which is also its distinct feature, i.e. the three traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism forming a tripartite balance, at once mutually constitutive and self-differentiating, was exactly formed during this extraordinary period of Tang Dynasty.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, in my opinion, if we can build upon the existing research by making a theoretical investigation into Xuan Zang's pilgrimage to India and his translation project during the majestic Tang period, and thus into the Sinicization of Buddhism, all within the macro context discussed above, we will be able to envision a desirable situation where civilizations engage in cultural exchange and learn from each other.

### III. New Realm: Theoretical Value and Practical Significance

The reasons that the author, starting with Xuan Zang's journey to India for the scriptures and his translation project, and using the Sinicization of Buddhism as the example, expounds the concept of "cultural giving-back", and moreover perceives it as a desirable state for the cultural exchange and mutual learning between human civilizations, are mainly as follows:

8. See Wang Jienan, *A History of Sino-foreign Cultural Exchange*, "Chapter IV: Sino-Foreign Cultural Exchange during Sui and Tang Dynasties".

9. Lou Yulie said, "the Tang Dynasty is the one period when China had absorbed the most from foreign cultures. Not only foreign religions but also literature, art and so on had integrated into the traditional Chinese culture, to the point that we were not even able to distinguish between them later on. Nowadays we can only tell from the name that something was originally foreign. For example, Hu Qin, which we see as a Chinese music instrument, is in fact brought in from the West. Why is it called Hu-Qin? It's because ancient Chinese called people from Western countries Hu-ren (men of Hu). So, foreign cultures poured in during the Tang and was absorbed and integrated, thus enriching the traditional culture of China. (Lou Yulie: *Lectures on the Methods for the Study of Religion*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2013, p.44.

10. For more details see Lou Yulie: *Lectures on the Methods for the Study of Religion*, pp. 34-46.



# 1. It helps to promote the idea of cultural exchange and mutual learning between human civilizations.

About the exchange and mutual learning between the Chinese and Western civilizations, Bertrand Russell, the famous British philosopher, who is also the most influential public intellectual of Euro-America in the twentieth Century, once said:

There is at present in China, as we have seen in previous chapters, a close contact between our civilization and that which is native to the Celestial Empire. It is still a doubtful question whether this contact will breed a new civilization better than either of its parents, or whether it will merely destroy the native culture and replace it by that of America. Contacts between different civilizations have often in the past proved to be landmarks in human progress. Greece learnt from Egypt, Rome from Greece, the Arabs from the Roman Empire, medieval Europe from the Arabs, and Renaissance Europe from the Byzantines. In many of these cases, the pupils proved better than their masters. In the case of China, if we regard the Chinese as the pupils, this may be the case again. In fact, we have quite as much to learn from them as they from us, but there is far less chance of our learning it. If I treat the Chinese as our pupils, rather than vice versa, it is only because I fear we are unteachable.<sup>11</sup>

The above quotation is from Russell's *The Problem of China* (1922), a collection of his essays on China published in the British newspapers after he visited the country between October 1920 and July 1921. Russell's visit took place during China's New Culture Movement and the May 4th Movement, when was a high point of the Chinese intellectuals' effort to learn from the Western culture, and the ideological trend of Westernization was at its height. Reading Russell's discussion today may still raise thought-provoking questions for us. For instance, what are the consequences of the encounter and collision of different civilizations? Is the progress of human civilization a process of "learning from the more advanced"? Whether there exists the phenomenon of "the pupil outdoes the teacher" in the processes of human civilizations? Obviously, Russell's own answers to those questions are rational and objective. He not only fully affirms the importance of learning from advanced cultures in the history of human civilization, but also avidly suggests that cultures switch the roles of teacher and student between themselves and learn from each other.

Since the ideas Russell put forward have become part of the international mainstream thinking or even basic consensus in the study of cultural exchange and intercultural dialogue, if we could introduce the concept of cultural giving-back, as well as the rich Chinese experience it contains, to the theories and practices of Sino-foreign cultural exchange and mutual learning, it will surely make a significant positive impact. In that regard, let us use the example of the Sinicization of Buddhism

11. Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1922, p. 185.

again for explanation. Just as Lou Yulie says, “Buddhism entered China, took roots, blossomed and bore fruits. That process has established an excellent paradigm for cultural exchange. It is the kind of cultural exchange that happens peacefully, which enables mutual absorption at equal status, whereby cultural exchange and self-enrichment takes place at the same time. Such is the general history of Chinese Buddhism. Although Buddhism died out in its native India during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it has continued in China and is still undergoing development.”<sup>12</sup> To follow Lou’s argument, we may say that although Buddhism almost disappeared from its land of origin, which is India, within China it has taken roots, blossomed and borne fruits. How wonderful if we could today communicate the Chinese spirit of Buddhism the other way around along the Silk Road, and thus give it back to the world of human civilizations!

It is worth mentioning here that in citing the Sinicization of Buddhism as a paradigm to elucidate the concept of cultural giving-back and its significance, this author does not mean it is the only model or even the best model available. Rather, it is his intension to stress that the Chinese civilization, which is at once whole and diverse, has always kept the tradition of learning from other excellent cultures, absorbing them and making them part of her own. There is a vast reserve of past experiences in the field of Sino-foreign cultural exchange that have yet to be tapped for historical lessons and theoretical generalization, all for the purpose that human civilizations may better enjoy friendly exchange and common prosperity in the age of globalization.

## **2. It helps to carry forward and develop the fine traditions of Chinese culture.**

Since the reform and opening up of China, as the nation’s comprehensive strength and international influence keeps increasing, the international academia has come to pay more and more attention to the study of the history of Chinese civilization. This is not only because of the tremendous progress made by the Chinese society during the past three decades, but also due to the recognition by a growing number of scholars within and outside China that the Chinese nation that is re-emerging in our era is a civilization with thousands of years of history, which, it may be said, is the only one that has not suffered disruption or rupture in the history of world civilizations. Therefore, if we regard “cultural identity” as the highest level of identification in any civilized society, academic inquiry into the cultural traditions of China will be of particular importance for in-depth understanding of the history and current situation of Chinese society.

As far as current research is concerned, scholars within China and abroad have not arrived at a unified, comprehensive representation of the excellent traditions of Chinese culture. Nevertheless, there have been quite a few sensible and inspirational characterizations of the essence or core values of the traditional Chinese culture, such as “people-orientedness” (以人为本, *yi-ren-wei-ben*), “morality-orientedness” (以德为本, *yi-de-wei-ben*), “harmony between the heaven and humans” (天人合一, *tian-ren-he-yi*), “a middle course” (中庸之道, *zhong-yong-zhi-dao*), “harmony

12. Lou Yulie: *Lectures on the Methods for the Study of Religion*, p. 37.

but not sameness” (和而不同, he-er-bu-tong). It is thus this author’s opinion that building on the current research on this matter, we may choose the following 20 words to both represent the excellent traditions of Chinese culture, and to feature the cultural spirit that has enabled the Chinese civilization to persevere and grow for several thousand years: “people-orientedness” (以人为本), “harmony but not sameness” (和而不同), “fully inclusive and equitable” (兼容并蓄), “all-embracing” (海纳百川, literally “all rivers run into sea”) and “capacious” (有容乃大, literally “capacity makes greatness”). That is to say, because the Chinese civilization boasts such a broad cultural vision, she has been able to continually integrate various local and foreign cultures in history; as she peacefully rises and opens to the world, she shall also be able to, today as in the past, take in and integrate all excellent cultural achievements of the other civilizations.<sup>13</sup>

In recent years, one hotly debated topic in the study of Sino-foreign cultural exchange and dialogue is whether or not “the more ethnic it is, the more global it becomes”. If argued simply from a nationalist or universalist point of view, this debate may not be of much theoretical value or academic inspiration. However, over a thousand years of Sino-foreign cultural exchange has demonstrated that cultural exchanges and dialogues in their true sense are rich and colorful. The practical and effective ways of interaction are never one-way import or export with a nationalist or universalist label, nor are they limited to two-way or even multi-directional learning, integration and complementation. Instead, they can develop into a more complex and meaningful approach toward cultural exchange and mutual learning, which is exactly the creative practice of cultural giving-back that is characteristic of Chinese culture, and is also what this essay sets out to propose. From this author’s point of view, this meaningful approach toward cultural exchange and mutual learning is not only in harmony with the aforementioned fine traditions of Chinese culture, but also able to represent the style of ancient Chinese civilization as “a state of ceremonies” (礼仪之邦) that abides by “courtesy demands reciprocity” (礼尚往来), in the international arena of cultural exchange in this age of globalization.

### 3. The cultural aspiration behind it helps to promote and deepen the exchange and mutual understanding of human civilization.

Since its reform and opening up to the outside world, China, grounded in its ancient civilization,

13. Zhang Qizhi recently pointed out that Chinese culture boasts a “spirit of integration”, and the history of Chinese thought and culture is rather a history of integration of thoughts and cultures. From the end of the Warring States period down through the Qin and Han dynasties to the Wei and Jin dynasties, the Confucian and the Taoist theories had integrated, and the metaphysics of Wei and Jin took its form. The next round of integration of Chinese thoughts and cultures started with the three religions coexisting side by side in the Tang dynasty, and culminated in the Neo-Confucianism of Southern Song dynasty. In the Tang dynasty, Buddhism absorbed some aspects of Confucianism and the Taoist thought of Lao Tzu. Some monks started to explain the Buddha nature with the Confucian idea that “all men can become a sage”. Buddhist texts that specifically preach filial piety also appeared, e.g. *Sutra of Filial Piety* (《父母恩重经》). The *Baizhang Rule* (《百丈清规》) is a book of precepts for the Chan Buddhist community and was created during the same period. In keeping the idea of loyalty and filial piety and taking the form of family organization, it has helped a certain Buddhist sects to become secularized, and thus secured a cultural footing for Buddhism in China. (Zhang Qizhi: “The Chinese culture has a spirit of integration”, *People’s Daily*, September 1, 2015, page 16.)

has both committed to its own way of development, and reached out to the world by engaging in extensive exchanges, cooperation, mutual learning and mutual benefiting activities in the fields of economy, politics and culture. The Belt and Road Initiative which has become a hot topic in the political and academic circles during the last couple of years is just one latest experiment in this context. The Initiative, known as “the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Maritime Silk Road” in the complete form, is originally a strategic economic and trade initiative. Nevertheless, after much discussion and probing on the topic during the last two years, men of insights across fields have come to the deeper understanding that what the Initiative envisions is not only a “road of mutual respect, mutual trust, and all-win cooperation” in the economic and political sense, but also “a road leading to friendly exchange and mutual learning between the civilizations”. At “the Host’s Partners Dialogue on Strengthening Connectivity Partnership” on November 8, 2014, President of China Xi Jinping solemnly suggested: “we should strengthen the social foundation of Asian connectivity partnership with cultural exchange as its link. China supports dialogue between civilizations and religions, encourages cultural exchange and contact between peoples of different countries, supports joint application by the Silk Road countries for world cultural heritage, and encourages more Asian countries, regions, provinces and municipalities to establish cooperative relations.” The mention of “cultural exchanges as the link”, and especially of the “dialogue between civilizations and religions”, is indeed worthy of more consideration here.

According to preliminary statistics, more than 60 countries alongside the Silk Road routes and international organizations have made it known that they will actively participate in The Belt and Road Initiative. Therefore, many experts have pointed out that The Belt and Road not only thread through many countries and regions, but also bring together different ethnicities, cultures and religions; The Belt and Road Initiative will bring about more convenient conditions and a better atmosphere, and, through strengthening the human and cultural exchange between different countries, regions, ethnic groups, cultures and religions, will enhance mutual understanding, respect and trust, and avoid mutual misconception and even conflict with each other, so that a plurality of human civilizations may live together in peace and enjoy common prosperity. In this regard, it is necessary for us to reconsider the important roles of major world religions in the history of cultural exchange between China and foreign countries. Just as Geng Sheng, a senior Chinese expert on this subject, points out, looking back on the history of cultural exchange between China and foreign countries, we will be surprised to find that the three major world religions have played bridging roles in that very process. For example, Buddhism, which originated in the Indian civilization, was brought to China during the Han dynasty. For nearly two thousand years, it has gone through assimilation and transformation, during which process it has not only become an integral part of the ethnic cultures in such regions as China’s Tibet and Inner Mongolia, but has played a bridging role in the cultural exchange between China and such regions as South Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Asia. For another example, Islam, as the cultural foundation of the Arabic-Persian world, came to China during the Tang dynasty. For more than a thousand years it has gone through assimilation

and transformation, and become not only the cultural component of many ethnic groups such as Hui, Uygur, Kazak, Kirgiz, Tajic, Tatar, Salar, Dongxiang and Bao'an, but also the channel of cultural exchange between China and the Persian-Arabic world. Again, Christianity, the landmark achievement of Greco-Roman civilization, first arrived in China during the Tang dynasty. After many periods of collision and running-in, it has by now become a part of Chinese national culture and a bridge for the cultural exchange between China and the West.<sup>14</sup>

Everywhere within or outside China, in the past or at present, people in their daily contacts hope for heartfelt exchange. Indeed, exchange of heart and mind, or of the soul and spirit, especially at the level of faith, is perhaps the most profound and significant kind of exchange in the world, and thus perhaps the most difficult to attain. However, as the Chinese saying goes, nothing is difficult if you put your heart into it. Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005), the eminent Chinese anthropologist, in his last years recapped his lifelong studies with a sixteen-word maxim, which conveys his hope for the future of human civilizations: "Each one appreciates her own beauty and recognize the beauty of the others. In sharing and celebrating the beauty of everyone, all under heaven bathe in great harmony". In presenting and expounding the concept of cultural giving-back, this essay is thus inspired by Fei's scholarly compassion, in the hope that the idea may add something new and useful to the cultural exchange and mutual learning among a plurality of human civilizations in our age of globalization.

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14. Geng Sheng, "A Word from the Translator," in Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact*, Chinese translation 中国和基督教—中国和欧洲文化之比较, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1991, p. 5.