

## Exploration of Cultural Exchanges in Buddhism between China and ASEAN

*Li Hujiang*

*Center for Chinese Historical Post-Doctoral Studies  
Fujian Normal University, China*

Since the establishment of the China-ASEAN strategic partnership, exchanges and cooperation have been strengthened in various fields. Among them, cultural exchanges in Buddhism have played an important role, as Buddhism is the main religion in most of the ASEAN member states. Firstly, the cultural exchanges in Buddhism between China and ASEAN have enjoyed a long history. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, there have been various forms of cooperation and exchanges between Buddhist Association of China and the ASEAN member countries. Secondly, Buddhist exchanges between China and ASEAN have realistic foundations. China is a leading country of Buddhism and has three systems of Buddhism, namely: Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism and Theravāda Buddhism. In various aspects of the Buddhist culture exchanges lies enough room for China and ASEAN members to carry out more projects. Buddhism will then serve as a bridge to promote the friendship and the understanding between China and ASEAN members.

### **Introduction of Buddhism in China and ASEAN:**

Nowadays, Chinese religions are in a diversified developing trend. The freedom of religious belief is protected by constitution. There are five major religions authorized by Chinese mainland official: Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, together with folk religion. As one of the five major religions, Buddhism originated in India and was introduced to China between the Western Han and Eastern Han Dynasties. Combined with Chinese local culture, it gradually evolved into part of Chinese traditional culture. According to the website of the Buddhist Association of China, the developing state of the contemporary Chinese Buddhism is as followed: "By 2012, the sites for the three language traditions of Buddhism had reached more than 33,000 with approximately 240,000 Buddhist monks and nuns in total. Specifically, Chinese Buddhism had more than 28,000 monasteries with over 100,000 monks and nuns; Tibetan Buddhism had more than 3,000 monasteries with over 130,000 monks and nuns; and Theravāda Buddhism had more than 1,600 monasteries with almost 10,000 members of the Sangha. Currently there are 38 Buddhist Colleges of different levels, over 100 Buddhist periodicals and nearly 200 Buddhist websites with substantial influence. Each local Buddhist community has its own charity organization and cultural institution. Incomplete statistics show that currently there are over 100 million Buddhists in China."<sup>1</sup>

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established in 1967, including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. The Article 7 in ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint points out that the ASCC shall respect different cultures, languages, and religions of the peoples of ASEAN and that their common values in the spirit of unity in diversity shall be emphasized so as to adapt to present realities, opportunities and challenges. The Article 43 indicates that the Strategic Objective of ASCC is to create a sense of belonging, to consolidate unity in diversity and to enhance deeper mutual understanding among ASEAN Member States about their culture, history, religion and civilization. Chinese scholar Liu Jinguang believes that the integration and

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/js/jj/2012-04-20/869.html> (2015/1/30)

reinforcement of the ideology based on religion plays a positive role in the formation of “Asian Consciousness” and “ASEAN Consciousness” and the promotion of further strengthening unity, cooperation and communication among Southeast Asian countries.<sup>2</sup> Among the ten ASEAN countries, the population numbers for Muslims is the largest. Islam is regarded as the state religion in Malaysia and Brunei. Nearly 87% of the Indonesians believe in Islam, which makes Indonesia the world’s most populous Muslim nation. Philippines, the only Catholic country in Asia, has about 85% of Filipinos believing in Catholicism. Although Buddhism is not the major religion in the other nations mentioned above, yet a significant proportion of Buddhism followers still exists. Within the ten ASEAN countries, Theravāda Buddhism is regarded as the major religion in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. While in Vietnam and Singapore, Mahayana Buddhism is one of the major religions. In accordance with the statistics of Liu Jinguang “the number of the Buddhist believers accounts for one third (over 34%) of the [ASEAN] population. In the Indo-China Peninsula, Buddhism has absolute superiority, making up... about 94% of the Southeast Asian Buddhists. The largest Buddhism religious group is in Thailand, accounting for about 34% of the total number of Buddhists in Southeast Asia, with Vietnam taking up 28.4%, Myanmar 22%, Cambodia 7%, Laos 2.7%, Malaysia 2%, Indonesia 2.6%, Singapore less than 1% and other countries even less. As for the individual country, Cambodia holds the highest percentage of Buddhists, accounting for 93% of the total population, Thailand 92%, Myanmar 82%, Laos 77%, Vietnam 76%, Singapore 40%, Malaysia 20% and Brunei 13.5%.”<sup>3</sup>

### **The Buddhist Sarira and Public Diplomacy:**

Sarira, with the appearance of bead or flower, refers to the solid substance [cremation-relics] after the cremation of Buddha, Bodhisattva, Arhat, monks and so on, which is thought to be the crystallization of their merits due to constantly practice precepts, meditation and wisdom. Among them the color of bone sarira is black. The color of the blood and flesh sarira is red and the hair sarira is black. The most famous Buddhist sariras in China are the Sakyamuni tooth sarira and the Sakyamuni finger sarira. It is said that after Shakyamuni’s parinirvana and cremation, there appeared many bone sariras, blood sariras and hair sariras together with some Sakyamuni tooth sariras. Only two Sakyamuni tooth sariras exist nowadays, one of which is consecrated in the Sarira Temple in Kandy City, Sri Lanka and the other in the Lingguang Temple in Beijing. The only one exiting Sakyamuni finger sarira is enshrined in the Famen Temple in Xi’an City, Shaanxi Province, China. “Based on the historical records, this Sakyamuni finger sarira was sent to China by the envoy appointed by Ashoka the Great. It bore the worship of all the dynasties before it was buried underground in Tang Dynasty. More than 1000 years later, it finally reappeared. It is undoubtedly the most sovereign and cherished treasure to all the Buddhists all over the world.”<sup>4</sup> In the spirit of friendly communication between China and the ASEAN members, the Buddhist Sarira used to play an important role in the field of public diplomacy.<sup>5</sup> The scope of

---

<sup>2</sup>Liu Jinguang: *the Characteristics of Southeast Asian Religions and the Effects on the implementation of External Strategy in the Research on Southeast Asian Religion and Social Development* ed. Zheng Xiaojun, (Beijing: Social Sciences Publishing House), January 2013, 1st edition, p.21.

<sup>3</sup>Liu Jinguang: *the Characteristics of Southeast Asian Religions and the Effects on the implementation of External Strategy in the Research on Southeast Asian Religion and Social Development*, ed. Zheng Xiaojun, (Beijing: Social Sciences Publishing House), January 2013, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p.24.

<sup>4</sup>Ye Xiaowen, *100 Collected Works of Xiaowen*, (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, December 2008), 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p. 270.

<sup>5</sup>Editor’s Comment: ‘China’ sponsors temple-exhibitions of the ‘sacred-relics’ in various important temples. Recently another relic-tour came through Thailand, re-verifying the author’s claim.

public diplomacy covers “all the external exchanges besides the ‘government diplomacy’, which includes all kinds of official and the folk two-way communication. The purpose of communication is to directly promote the foreign public awareness of native country in order to influence society through communication and affect the government through society.”<sup>6</sup> The pattern of public diplomacy contains the following categories: people’s diplomatic mode, strategic diplomatic mode, ethnic diplomatic mode, trade and economic diplomatic mode and religious diplomatic mode, etc. The Buddhist exchanges between China and the ASEAN members belong to the religious diplomatic mode, with the aim of promoting the knowledge of the ASEAN members towards the state of Chinese Buddhism and the policy of Chinese Buddhism, etc.

Take the example of the exchanges between Chinese Buddhism and Burmese Buddhism. With the request of Myanmar Government, the Sakyamuni tooth sarira stored in the Lingguang Temple has been sent to Myanmar to be consecrated four times successively. The first time was from October 1955 to June 1956. The Burmese delegation and the Burmese cultural delegation were given a warm welcoming banquet by Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai when they came to China for the Sakyamuni tooth sarira.<sup>7</sup> On their arrival in Yangon Myanmar, the Burmese President Ba U and Prime Minister U Nu came to the airport to welcome the arrival of Sakyamuni tooth sarira in person and led the government official to hold a grand greeting ceremony.<sup>8</sup> The Sakyamuni tooth sarira was consecrated in Myanmar for nearly 8 months.<sup>9</sup> Some scholar commended this event as followed: “The trip to Myanmar of Sakyamuni tooth sarira adds splendor to the new China on the Buddhist diplomacy. As the friendly messenger for Chinese Government and Chinese people, Buddhist sarira is taken abroad on the royal progress to help China establish the friendly and good-neighborly relationship with the surrounding Buddhist countries and to eliminate misunderstandings about China in the international society.”<sup>10</sup> It was in 1994 that sarira arrived in Myanmar the second time, consecrated for 45 days. The third time was from the end of 1996 to the beginning of 1997, lasting for 90 days. The last consecration lasted 48days, from 6<sup>th</sup> November 2011 to 24<sup>th</sup> December. All these pilgrimages and consecrations created quite a stir in Myanmar. The Sakyamuni tooth sarira, regarded as the symbol of wisdom and peace, bridges the friendship between China and Myanmar.<sup>11</sup> What’s more, this Sakyamuni tooth sarira once responded to the invitation of Thai Government and was consecrated for 76 days, from 15<sup>th</sup> December 2002 to 1<sup>st</sup> March 2003. However, in 1994 the Sakyamuni finger sarira, kept in Famen Temple Xi’an City Shaanxi Province, was sent to Thailand for worship and consecration for more than 2 months. During the time, about 3 million persons, from all walks of life, including members of the royal-family and common-people, came to worship.<sup>12</sup> Besides the Sakyamuni tooth sarira and Sakyamuni finger sarira, China has the eminent monk sarira. On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2012 the elderly monk Master Benhuan, who was considered as the leading authority in Buddhism, passed away. After cremation, a number of precious sariras appeared. On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2013, Thai Buddhists observed the grand ceremony of

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cpdcea.com/pdnews/> (2015/1/29)

<sup>7</sup> Zhang Qi, *the Great Events of Buddhism in New China*, (Beijing, Jincheng Press, November 2013), 1st edition, p.39.

<sup>8</sup> Xue Yu, *Diplomatic and Political Propaganda of Contemporary Chinese Buddhism, International Journal for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism*, (2013), 5<sup>th</sup> issue, p.133.

<sup>9</sup> Zhang Qi, *the Great Events of Buddhism in New China*, (Beijing, Jincheng Press, November 2013), 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p. 39-46.

<sup>10</sup> Xue Yu, *Diplomatic and Political Propaganda of Contemporary Chinese Buddhism, International Journal for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism*, (2013), 5<sup>th</sup> issue, p.135.

<sup>11</sup> Ling Hai Cheng, *Chinese Buddhism*, (Beijing: Five Continents Diffusion Press, January2004), p.204-206.

<sup>12</sup> Sangchi, *the Exchanges of Buddhist culture between China and Thailand*, (the Voice of Dharma, 2013) 1<sup>st</sup> issue.

welcoming Master Benhuan Sarira in Sukhothai Province. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March, the Master Benhuan Sariras were enshrined separately in the Thai Royal Temple and the Temple of Dawn. Qin Yusen, the Culture Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in Thailand, claims exchanges of religious culture are exactly the exchanges that human-beings appreciate, when interviewed by reporters. Buddhism plays a special part in communicating what is inside the human mind and it encourages the promotion of social harmony and our common development. The overseas enshrining ceremony of Master Benhuan Sarira accelerates these cultural exchanges, although it is in the manner of Buddhist exchanges, which plays a significant part in promoting exchanges between people around the world.<sup>13</sup> The perpetual enshrining ceremony of Master Benhuan Sarira in Thailand is of great importance in public diplomacy: the prominent Chinese monk's sarira was first sent and enshrined in Thailand, and was considered as an influential event, and a witness and symbol of friendship between Thai and Chinese. This event served as an impetus to achieve more understanding and friendship between Thai and Chinese, as well as a fellowship and propaganda to the surrounding Buddhist countries."<sup>14</sup> On the morning of 5<sup>th</sup> September 2014, the fourth Phra Sangharaja of Cambodia paid a visit to Hongfa Temple in Shenzhen with his fellows, where he showed great expectations to welcome Master Benhuan Sarira to Cambodia.<sup>15</sup>

### **Scenic spots of Buddhism and Cultural Transmission:**

There are four famous Buddhist mountains in China, i.e.: Putuo Mountain, Wutai Mountain, Emei Mountain and Jiuhua mountain. There are numerous other scenic spots for Buddhism in both China and the ASEAN countries. Endowed with great holiness, these spots are different from the other natural and cultural landscapes. Therefore, a Buddhist trip is always carried with an aim of pilgrimage together with sightseeing and entertainment. Duan Yuming points out that the natural environment is absorbed in the Buddhist universe mode, as a result of being involved with Buddhist element. "Thereby the places selected by Buddhism separate themselves from the middlebrow space and are inlaid in a universe order established in Buddhism. They were no longer the natural environment but the marvelous realm as they are called in Buddhism."<sup>16</sup> Those middlebrow places are then transferred into scared places. "From the believers' points of view, these holy lands are the center of the sacred space. Therefore, visiting the centers in person is of sacred significance which makes them find a sense of affiliation and belong to the sacred space."<sup>17</sup> Every Buddhist holy land carries a specific culture connotation. They are cultural carrier, silently spreading the extensive and profound Buddhist culture in the static state.

China's Four Major Buddhist Mountains enjoy high reputation both at home and abroad. Putuo Mountain in Zhejiang Province, the Bodhimanda for Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, Mount Wutai in Shanxi Province, the Bodhimanda for Manjusri Bodhisattva, Mount Emei in Sichuan Province, the Bodhimanda for Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, and Jiuhua Mountain in Anhui Province, the Bodhimanda for Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, have become the sacred lands visited by Buddhists around the world, who go on a pilgrimage and pray for divine blessing, and the tourist destinations for the people from all over the world, who are attracted by their beautiful natural scenery and

---

<sup>13</sup> Hong Fa Net, *Buddhist Diplomacy: the Grand Worship of Master Benhuan Sarira in Thailand*, published in 24<sup>th</sup> March 2013 – the quotation was removed and grammar edited by the Editor.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.hongfasi.net/special/23/index.html> (2015/1/30)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2014-09-09/6833.html> (2015/2/13)

<sup>16</sup> Duan Yuming, *On Buddhist Environmental Protection Technology - On the Basis of Mount Emei*, *Yunnan Social Science*, (2009), 1<sup>st</sup> issue.

<sup>17</sup> Zhang Jun, *the Holy Space and Belief*, *Fujian Forum*, (Humanistic and Social Science Edition, 2010), 7<sup>th</sup> issue.

rich cultural heritage. The core of the Avalokitesvara culture in Putuo Mountain is that Avalokitesvara is infinitely merciful and compassionate who assists the needy and relieves the distressed. Its practical significance is that Buddhism can cope with the suffering of individuals as well as social crisis, consoling souls and resolving disaster. The core of the Manjusri belief in Mount Wutai is that wisdom is the foremost, which suggests that people should learn to be tactful in attending to business and skillful in handling the complex human relationships. The core of the Samantabhadra culture is Ten Great Vows, embodying the mettā of “seeking bodhi above and enlightening sentient beings below.” Its practical significance is to guide the followers of Buddhism to practice mettā and bestow favor on sentient beings. The vow of Ksitigarbha in Jiuhua Mountain is: “I swear not to be Buddha unless the hell is empty.” The core of the Ksitigarbha culture is karmic samsara, which reminds the world to forsake evil and promote good and pray for the karmic rewards in this life and afterlife.

There are many famous Buddhist holy lands in ASEAN countries, which possess profound cultural deposits, for example, the Emerald Buddha Temple in Bangkok. “Thailand has served as the Buddhism stage for the Thai Royal since it was established in 1784. The Emerald Buddha is enshrined in the Emerald Buddha Hall, the walls of which are painted with pictures illustrating the stories of Shakyamuni before becoming Buddha. It is said that the Emerald Buddha is the incarnation of Shakyamuni, which used to be stored in a plaster Buddha figure and was regarded as national treasure after being discovered. The king ordered people to make three gold-thread garments, *one for each season*, for the Emerald Buddha and changes the garment personally (Editor’s Note: *except in recent times when His Majesty, King Bhumibol Adulyadej appoints the Crown Prince to perform the ritual*), on the day of the seasonal changes. There is a Former-king Hall for consecrating the former kings in Thailand, a Buddha Bone Hall, a Tripitaka Sutra Pavilion, a bell tower, the pagoda and so on. On the walls of the one-kilometer-long gallery pictures of Indian Epic Ramayana are painted. ... The wall paintings in the temple are considered as the complete works of the Buddhist art.”<sup>18</sup> Thailand’s Nakhon Pathom, located 50 kilometers to the west of Bangkok, is a famous Buddhist city with a history of more than 3000 years (Editor’s Note: ... and was said to have been visited by the missionary monks from Emperor Asoka, and features a large chedi, which is one of the important national monuments). “The Buddhist holy land Pagan in Myanmar was founded in the first century and became the center of the Pagan Dynasty and the Theravāda Buddhism, known as a city ‘full of 4 million pagodas’. According to the statistics in 1973, there are 2217 Buddhist buildings altogether.”<sup>19</sup> The Shwedagon Pagoda nearly the Yinya Lake in Yangon Myanmar and the world peace pagoda in the eastern suburbs of Yangon Temple are very famous. “The Angkor Wat in Cambodia is located in the southern suburbs of Angkor in Siem Reap City Cambodia, founded during the time from 1112 to 1201. More than 10 main buildings and over 10 additional buildings make up the temple, with a total area of more than 40 thousand square meters...”<sup>20</sup> Apart from these mentioned above, there are still a lot of Buddhist holy lands, such as the Wat That Luang Square in the northeast of Vientiane in Laos and the famous Buddhism Pagoda Borobudur in Indonesia which are considered as the three Buddhism historical sites together with the Angkor Wat and the Shwedagon.

These Buddhist holy lands attract numerous tourists and believers, paying a visit and worshipping. They must have enjoyed the feast for their eyes and must have been

---

<sup>18</sup> Chen Bing, *New Dictionary of Buddhism*, (Beijing: China Esperanto Press, 1994), 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p.684.

<sup>19</sup> Chen Bing, *New Dictionary of Buddhism*, (Beijing: China Esperanto Press, 1994), 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p.680

<sup>20</sup> Chen Bing, *New Dictionary of Buddhism*, (Beijing: China Esperanto Press, 1994), 1<sup>st</sup> edition, p.682

edified by the Buddhist culture. Therefore, Buddhist trip can achieve the goal of Buddhist culture transmission. According to an early news report, Guiping City in Guangxi Province planned to build the “China—ASEAN Buddhism Culture Center”. “Some expert suggested that the Western Hill Park should be built into a large scale Buddhist culture theme park, which can help in carrying out Buddhist culture tours through cooperation with the surrounding Buddhist countries along the Mekong River. The Greater Mekong Sub-region flows through Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, which are all the traditional Buddhist countries. The religious features characterized with Buddhism are very distinctive. Religious culture tour is always the main part of travel. Therefore, strengthening the exchanges of Buddhist culture is significant to boost the development of bilateral tourism.”<sup>21</sup> If these measures are implemented well, it is beneficial to diffuse and exchange Buddhist cultures between China and ASEAN.

### **The Buddhist education and cultural exchanges:**

There is no standard answer to the connotation of Buddhist education. Wise see wisdom. Wang Leiquan defines Buddhist education in his essay *My Humble Opinion on Walking out from the Dilemma of China Buddhist Education* as followed: “it is the pattern and method to transmit the opinion, experience, rites and system of Buddhist Doctrine to all sectors of the world and to continue the life of Buddhist Community itself.”<sup>22</sup> He also points out that there are three patterns of Buddhist education: lectures in translation workshop, edification in jungles and professional academy. The primary president of Buddhist association Master Yicheng put forward another classification method on Buddhist education in his speech at the meeting of the seventh national representative of the Buddhist Association of China: “by the academy education, temple education and lay-Buddhists education to cultivate the qualified Buddhism talents is the key to the rise and fall of Buddhism.”<sup>23</sup> However the modern Buddhist education generally refers to academy education in the narrow sense, namely the monks receives education in the Buddhist College or the Buddhist University. In this paper, Buddhist education refers to the academy education. Master Yicheng once mentioned his wishes on several occasions: “to build an internationally top-ranking Buddhist University in China.” However, there is no Buddhist University in China at present. The previous text mentioned that there are 38 Buddhist Colleges on different levels, among which the Buddhist Academy of China and Buddhist College of Minnan are rather influential. The exchanges and cooperation between China and ASEAN on Buddhist education is still in a beginning stage. The exchanges and cooperation on this aspect are not common: in 1996, per the invitation of the Myanmar Government, the first batch of Chinese monks were sent to study abroad in a state-run Buddhist university in the capital city of Myanmar – the first group since the founding of modern China.<sup>24</sup> On 25<sup>th</sup> May 2001, according to the agreement between Vietnam Buddhist Circle and Chinese Buddhist Association, four Vietnamese Buddhist nuns were sent to study in Buddhist College of Minnan.<sup>25</sup> On the afternoon of 4<sup>th</sup> December 2011,

---

<sup>21</sup> <http://nntb.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/shangwxw/200708/20070804984950.html> (2014/8/27)

<sup>22</sup> Wang Leiquan, *My Humble Opinion on Walking out from the Dilemma of China Buddhist Education, the Voice of Dharma*, (2001), 10<sup>th</sup> issue.

<sup>23</sup> Yi Cheng, *Inheriting the Last Will of President Zhao Puchu and Starting a New Situation of Chinese Buddhist Career in a Concerted Heart*, the In-house Literature of Chinese Buddhist Association: *Conference Communication*, (2002), 1st issue p.29.

<sup>24</sup> Huang Yunjing, *Chinese Communication of Buddhism towards ASEAN, Public Foreign Affairs*, (2011) Journal of Winter, (the 8<sup>th</sup> issue in general).

<sup>25</sup> Zhang Qi, *the Great Event of Buddhism in New China*, (Beijing: Jincheng Press, October 2013) 1<sup>st</sup> edition p.301-302.

Shenzhen Hongfa Temple Buddhist College (now renamed as Benhuan College) concluded and signed a cooperative intention with Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, in the Congress Hall of Thai Premier House.<sup>26</sup> Given approval by the National Religious Officials, Fuzhou Kaiyuan Temple will build the Research Center of Mahayana Buddhism together with the Buddhist Sangha University of Thailand in June 2014.<sup>27</sup> From 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> December 2014, the delegation from the Chinese Buddhist Association paid a visit to the Pannasastra University of Cambodia, with the aim for both sides to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in Buddhist education and to cultivate monk talent and exchange students.<sup>28</sup> Thanks to the developed information, more communication channels have been added over these recent years. The importance of cooperation in Buddhist education is gradually realized from all sides; therefore, the work gradually shows signs of improvement.

Cultural exchanges and transmission are characterized with bi-directionality, instead of uni-directional input or output. The exchanges and transmission of the same-type cultures can maintain and strengthen this cultural system. As for the different-type cultures, cultural integration is a result, and for another culture it blends in with their own culture; therefore, cultural exchanges and transmission serve as the impetus for cultural development.<sup>29</sup> From the aspect of Buddhist cultural output, China owns abundant Buddhist culture resources, including Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism and the Theravāda Buddhism. Among these, Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism originated in China; therefore the output of Buddhist culture is embodied in the influence on ASEAN countries from Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. As for the current situation, Tibetan Buddhism has seldom effected Buddhist followers in ASEAN countries, while Chinese Buddhism has rooted in many ASEAN countries where there is a diaspora community, such as in: Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, where Chinese Temples and followers can be seen abundantly. “In 2009, the Thai Royal Sixth Foundation invited Shenzhen Hongfa Temple to set up Chinese temple in Phuket Island in Thailand, which created a new opportunity for Chinese Buddhism.

In the past, the Chinese Mahayana temples in Southeast Asia were all built by the ethnic Chinese settling down there and then the Chinese prominent monks were invited to preside. The followers are mainly ethnic Chinese so the influence was limited to those basically living in the local neighborhood. This time, Chinese Buddhism monks are invited to build a temple by the Thai Royal Sixth Foundation, which means Chinese Buddhism is thought highly of within the Buddhist circle around the world. In 2012 Master Yinshun from Shenzhen Hongfa temple was awarded the title of “Prominent Chinese Monk” by the King of Thailand, which was the first priesthood given to Mahayana Monks from mainland-China by the Thai government.<sup>30</sup>

Concerning Theravāda Buddhism: from the aspect of Buddhist cultural affects, Yunnan Province is heavily influenced by Theravāda Buddhism. Yunnan province and the neighboring ASEAN countries of: Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia form a cultural circle of Theravāda Buddhism. As a result of this close contact in geographical relationships, affinity relationships, and clan relationships - Yunnan Buddhism is bound

---

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.mldc.cn/sanskritweb/news/thai/thai.htm> (2015/1/30)

<sup>27</sup> Leading-edge Information, *Fuzhou Kaiyuan Temple Will Set up the Mahayana Buddhist Research Center, The Chan's Civilization in 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (2014), 1<sup>st</sup> issue.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2014-12-27/7494.html> (2015/1/30)

<sup>29</sup> Wang Xiaozhao, *15 Fundamental Lectures on Religious Studies*, (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2003), 1st edition, p.228.

<sup>30</sup> Huang Xianian, *Give Full Play to the Function of People to People Diplomacy of Buddhism on External Service, Studies in World Religions*, (2012), 3<sup>rd</sup> issue.

to be affected.<sup>31</sup> According to scholar Zheng Xiaojun's textual research: the managing model of Theravāda Buddhism has a key point in management, involving the grassroots community and the religion, of course, is absorbed into any social managing system, which effectively promotes the orderly development of Buddhism in local society. The manage-mode is exactly influenced by that of Southeast Asia Buddhism, which ensures the orderly social development of Southeast Asia."<sup>32</sup> Additionally, large-scale international Buddhist conferences are another project and opportunity for Buddhist cultural exchanges, for example: three "World Buddhist Forum" have been successfully held in China; in 2014, the 27<sup>th</sup> "World Fellowship of Buddhists" was held in Baoji City Shaanxi Province, in which delegations from ASEAN Buddhists were sent to attend. On the other hand, a delegation from the Buddhist Association of China will be sent to attend important grand meetings - such as this one, the United Nations Day of Vesak, held by Mahachulalongkorn University, organized by the International Association of Buddhist Universities, and sponsored by the Government for the Kingdom of Thailand, or wherever the event may alternatively be held. The cohesive force generated from the same Buddhist belief enables to ensure exchanges among believers from both China and ASEAN so as to transmit similar, yet different cultures. Therefore, the exchanges of Buddhist culture can first bridge the friendship among the believers on both sides and finally the friendship between China and the ASEAN.

---

<sup>31</sup> Zheng Xiaojun, *the Contemporary Situation, Characteristics and Developing Strategy of Southeast Religion, Southeast Religion and Social Developing Research*, (Beijing, China Social Sciences Press, January 2013) 1<sup>st</sup> edition p.41.

<sup>32</sup> Zheng Xiaojun, *the Contemporary Situation, Characteristics and Developing Strategy of Southeast Religion, Southeast Religion and Social Developing Research*, (Beijing, China Social Sciences Press, January 2013) 1<sup>st</sup> edition p.38.