

# Essence of Chinese Philosophy in the Indian Context: A Literary Review

**Dr. Anirban Ghosh**

Assistant Professor in Chinese Language, Centre for Foreign Language and International Studies (CFLIS), School of Language, Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University (MGIHU), Post – Hindi University, Gandhi Hills, Wardha – 442001 (Maharashtra)

## **Introduction:**

Buddhism marked the beginning of India's interactions with China around two thousand years ago. Buddhism was brought to the Han Court during the Han Dynasty and slowly grew in popularity. Academic and cultural contacts between China and India were launched in this manner. Between the fifth and ninth centuries, Chinese pilgrims brought Buddhist writings and manuscripts that were eventually translated into the Chinese language, along with Indian monks and academics including Kumarjiva, Kashyap Matanga, Dharmaraksha, Xuan Zang, and Fa Xian. Indian intellectuals conducted research on Chinese philosophy, Confucius, Laozi, Mozi, the influence of Buddhism in China, and other topics throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. In the 20th century, Chinese scholars visited India in Santiniketan, Benares, Bombay, Delhi, Sarnath, etc to carry out research work. Similar to this, Chinese language was learned by few Indian research scholars, who later traveled China to study Chinese philosophy, literature, painting, history etc. Therefore, following points are necessary to discuss:

- i) Indian Philosophers and Scholars' Academic Contributions to Chinese Philosophy
- ii) Academic Contribution of Chinese Scholars to Indian Culture
- iii) Literary Works on Chinese Philosophy in the Santiniketan Cheena-Bhavana
- iv) Literary Works on Chinese Philosophy in Hindi Literature
- v) Conclusion

## **Indian Philosophers and Scholars' Academic Contributions to Chinese Philosophy:**

Following the collapse of Buddhism in India, academic, cultural, and religious exchanges between the two countries slowed down before gaining up again in the nineteenth century. **Swami Vivekananda** is one of India's most well-known and important philosophers of the modern era. On his route to Chicago in America in June 1893, he stopped through China, particularly Hong Kong. He may have been the first person in modern history to have seen China in the beginning of the 20th century and to have understood that 'Chinese culture will surely be resurrected on a day like a phoenix and undertake the responsibility of the great mission of integrating the Western and the oriental cultures'. Chinese Historian Huan

Xinchuan wrote an article about Vivekananda's impression about China which is an important document<sup>1</sup>.

Following the visit of **Rabindranath Tagore** to China in 1924, bilateral academic and cultural exchanges between India and China grew. In 1937, a center for Chinese studies known as Cheena-Bhavana was founded at Santiniketan as part of the Sino-Indian Cultural Society's activities in 1934. As both countries were suppressed by European colonial powers, academic and cultural exchanges increased more and more and scholars also visited each other's countries.

Indian President **Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan** visited China during May 6 to May 21, 1944 in the Chinese capital Chong Qing and delivered series of lectures. His lectures included "Religion in China: Confucianism", Religion in China: Taoism, "Gautam the Buddha and His Teaching", "Buddhism in China" and so on. Radhakrishnan pointed out that the ancient religion of China, which termed as Siniticism by the Chinese scholar Dr. Hu Shih, includes the worship of a Supreme God, the worship of the spirits of the dead, the worship of the forces of Nature, a belief in the idea of retribution of good and evil, and a belief in the efficacy of divination in various forms. According to him, the three chief exponents of the Confucian doctrine are Confucius, Mencius (second sage) and Chu Xi who was the great commentator of the Confucian canon. By the middle of the eighth century B.C., Confucianism was divided into eight schools, each professing to be the sole repository of the Master's teaching. Mo Zi influenced considerably Mencius and other writers, though he is not himself a follower of Confucius. In conclusion, he says that if Confucianism in its later forms serves as a religion, it is because its social emphasis was backed by a spiritual faith. The satisfaction of the metaphysical need and the spiritual aspirations of man was secured by the acceptance of the religious postulates of Daoism and Buddhism. These were not altogether alien to the Confucian doctrine which recognised an invisible power, Heaven and other spirits, originating and controlling man's destiny.

In another speech on Daoism, Radhakrishnan tried to find similarities between Dao De Jing and Buddhist scriptures. The central ideas of Daoism are those of the Upanisads. The contingency of the world and the reality of an absolute are common of both and developed on more or less the same lines. Taoism gave China a transcendental mysticism and thus attempted to fulfil a deep-rooted yearning of the Chinese mind for attaining release from the fetters of the outer world, Radhakrishnan pointed out. Daosist metaphysics is close to the Upanisadic thought and its discipline to the Yoga technique. If Confucian ethics teaches how to live together in harmony and good order, Taoist transcendental mysticism helps us to get out of society and realise the Tao. Therefore, it is require to develop a system of thought and belief which combines the strong points of these two cults, Radhakrishnan concludes. These speeches were later on compiled together and published as a book titled "India and China" in October 1944. This book was translated into Hindi Language by Sri Gangadhar Pandey in 1956.

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<sup>1</sup> Xinchuan, Huan. (1979). **Vivekananda on China**. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 40, pp. 876-877, Retrieved from:

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/44142039.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A9bc0efda0d9f720837169a084f28c702&ab\\_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/44142039.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A9bc0efda0d9f720837169a084f28c702&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1) (website accessed on March 21, 2020)

### Academic Contribution of Chinese Scholars to Indian Culture:

Rabindranath Tagore met Professor **Tan Yunshan** in Singapore in 1928, and he extended an invitation for him to visit Santiniketan. Tan Yunshan, the founding director of the Visva-Bharati Cheena- Bhavana, published numerous books, translated priceless Chinese materials into English, and contributed to journals and newspapers in India. His books include '*What is Chinese Religion*'; *India's Contribution to Chinese Culture*; *The Spirit of Indian and Chinese Cultures*; *Ahimsa in Sino-Indian Culture* etc. He had profound knowledge in languages, philosophy, Buddhism, History, literature. One of his book was translated into Bengali titled '*Adhunik Cheen*' (Modern China) by Birendra Chandra Bannerjee in 1946. His English books include '*What is Chinese Religion*'; *India's Contribution to Chinese Culture*; *The Spirit of Indian and Chinese Cultures*; *Ahimsa in Sino-Indian Culture* etc. He explained several examples of ahimsa tradition in ancient Chinese philosophy like Analects of Confucius, Works of Mencius, Works of Mo Zi and Dao Dejing of Lao Zi. One such article titled "What is Chinese Religion" published as a separate Pamphlet from Santiniketan in 1938. Another article "China's Civilisation" was published in the Sino-Indian Journal, Vol. I, July 1947. Tan Yunshan wrote another long piece titled 'Ahimsa in Sino-Indian Culture' that was first written for the 'Mahavir Jayanti Commemoration Volume' edited by Dr. Kamta Prasad Jain, published by the Mahavir Jain Society in 1949. Later on it was reprinted as Sino-Indian Pamphlet – No. 14 separately in the same year (Yunshan 1949: 1-2). In addition to producing books and papers, he made a significant contribution by founding Sino-Indian Journals and a team of researchers from China and India who translated a large number of materials.

Chinese Scholar **Xu Fancheng** joined in Cheena Bhavana in 1945. Xu Fancheng was a Chinese scholar, translator, indologist as well as philosopher. Before coming to India, Xu studied History at the Zhongshan University and Western Literature in Fudan University during 1927-29 and later on studies Fine Art and Philosophy at the University of Konigsberg in Germany<sup>2</sup>. During 1945-50 he stayed in Cheena Bhavana where he studied and conducted research work on Philosophy on Ouyang Jingwu, which is combination of pure Buddhism and Confucianism with original consciousness theory as the focus. Later on, he shifted to Pondicherry and stayed till 1978. He was first Chinese scholar who introduced Indian Philosopher Aurobindo and his works in China. He translated *The Life Divine* (1984), *On Yoga* (1988), *Internal Yoga* (2005), *Yoga Letter set* (2005). He also translated Fifty Upanisads in 1984. He successfully recounted Confucius's thought's represented by Lu Wang's philosophical school of the Ming dynasty by basing on the philosophical thought of Sri Aurobindo. The major ideas and theories contained in the Upanisads spread in China along with Buddhism gave a major impact on Chinese philosophy. He introduced Indian culture to China through translation work of Bhagavad Gita, Upanisads, Kalidas's Sakuntala from Sanskrit to Chinese. He introduced Chinese culture to the world by translating Confucianism and Corpus of Seng Zhao to English. In 2006, his works were published by the

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<sup>2</sup> Sarkar, Sonia. (2020, November 8). *Can Chinese Scholar Xu Fancheng's Legacy in India be a Bridge in Tense Times?*. South China Morning Post. Retrieved from: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3108626/can-chinese-scholar-xu-fanchengs-legacy-india-be-bridge-tense> (website accessed on December 12, 2020)

Chinese Academy of Social Science in 16 volumes. He is the first Chinese Scholar who systematically represented the Upanishads in China<sup>3</sup>.

Another scholar Professor **Ji Xianlin** was a Chinese indologist, historian who translated Ramyana from Sanskrit to Chinese in 2012. Besides this translation work, Ji wrote short history of India, history of Chinese sugar cane etc. The Ji Xianlin Collection consists of 24 volumes which consists articles on ancient Indian languages, Sino-Indian cultural relations, Buddhism, comparative and folk literature, essays, translation of literary works etc. in January 26, 2008, Professor Ji was awarded Padma Bhushan and became first Chinese to receive the honour. Chinese scholar Lin Yutang wrote a book titled 'Wisdom of India and China' in 1942, which describes which is a remarkable contribution. Few other scholars who contributed largely in bringing together Chinese and India philosophy through their academic contributions were Wei Fengjiang, Zeng Shanti, Ba Chou, Jin Kemu, Chen Hansheng, Ba Chou, Fa Fang, Wu Xiaoling etc.

#### **Literary Works on Chinese Philosophy in the Santiniketan Cheena-Bhavana:**

In the middle of the 20th century, Professor Tan Yunshan and a few other scholars made significant contributions to the authoring of books and articles. Numerous Chinese writings had been translated into Hindi, English, Bengali, and Chinese by Cheena Bhavana research scholars in Santiniketan. These articles appeared in contemporary journals and newspapers of China and India, as well as Sino-Indian Journals and Sino-Indian Pamphlets.

**Dr. Vasudev Gokhale** was Professor of Sanskrit and Tibetan who served for short time in the Cheena-Bhavana where besides teaching and guiding the students, he translated an important Chinese book into Sanskrit and English which was 'San – Chiao – Pin – Hsin – Lun, by Liu Mi. The book was an important treatise on Three Religion-Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.

**Prabodh Chandra Bachi** (November 18, 1898 – January 19, 1956) was the most notable Sino-Indologist in the 20th century. He had worked in many languages like Sanskrit, Pali, French, Chinese, English and Bengali. In 1944, he wrote '*India and China: A Thousand Years of Cultural Relations*, a textbook for Indian students to date. Some of his books in Bengali were '*Bouddha Dharma o Sahitya*' (Buddhist Religion and Literature), '*Bharat o Cheen*' (India and China), '*Bharat o Madhya Asia*' (India and Central Asia) etc. Some of his English books were '*Studies in the Tantras, Part – I*' (1939), '*India and Central Asia*' (1955), '*She-Kia-Fang-Che*' (1959), '*Indological Studies – A Collected works of Dr P. C. Bagchi, Vol I*' (1982). His works primarily included recovering ancient Chinese Buddhist text, translation of manuscripts, exploring ancient coins, scripts etc. for developing many unknown documents of Buddhist literature and Indian culture. In 1947, he was sent to the Peking University for

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<sup>3</sup>Ashok, Showmiya. (2020, February 9). *Why a Chinese scholar translated the Upanishads*. The Indian Express. Retrieved from: <https://indianexpress.com/article/express-sunday-eye/why-a-chinese-scholar-translated-the-upanishads-6254677/> (website accessed on March 21, 2020)

two years as the first Chair Professor of Indian History and Culture<sup>4</sup>. In May 1952, he visited China as a member of the Indian Cultural Delegation led by Vijaylakshmi Pandit<sup>5</sup> ((Mukherjee, 2010)

**Amitendranath Tagore** (1922 – 2021) studied the Chinese Language in the early phase of Cheena-Bhavana. He traveled to China as part of the Chinese Cultural Studies Program, which was supported by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, and attended Peking University from 1947 to 1950. He wrote several articles and books on Chinese philosophy and literature in Bengali among which '*Lun Yu: Confucius er Kathopokathan*' (Lun Yun: Conversation of Confucius, 2007) is popular. He had translated '*Tao Teaching* (Philosophy of Laozi, 2007) from original Chinese into Bengali which was originally published by the Sahitya Academy in New Delhi and later on it again re-published in 2007. Some other scholars of Cheena Bhavana also contributed largely in the field of philosophy and literature of India and China like Narayan Sen, Krishna Kinkar Sinha, Satiranjana Sen, Birendra Chandra Bannerjee, P. V. Bapat, Shanti Bhikshu Sastri, Sujit Kumar Mukhopadhyaya, Prahlad Pradhan etc.

#### **Literary Works on Chinese Philosophy in Hindi Literature:**

There were few references are available in the Hindi literature also. It is known that **Mahendulal Garg** (1870 – 1942) wrote few articles on China and Chinese civilization to Hindi readers in the beginning of the twentieth century. He had participated in the Buxar War in China and in 1899, he authored a book named '*Cheen Darpan*' (Chinese Mirror), through which Hindi readers got an initial introduction about China and Chinese civilization. In a note from the Bengali periodical 'Prabasi' it is known that the printing quality of *Cheen Darpan* was bad. In the twentieth century, followed by the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty and founding of New China in 1912, curiosity about China and its religion, civilization, history, geography and literature increased among Hindi readers.

In 1938, a special '*China Volume*' was published in the "*Jagrit Cheen*" (Rising China) periodical which had wide range circulations and became text book in the Normal and Middle schools of Bihar, Orissa, Panjab, Gwalior, Jaipur, Jodhpur etc. regions. In this periodical **Shri Bhagwatiprasad Srivastav** authored an article titled, "*Mahatma Confucius*" (Sage Confucius) and **Kumbar Madhavendra Pratap Singh** authored another article titled "Cheen ki Dharmik Vyavastha" (Religious Systems of China). Both these articles contains nearly 3000 words each and gave detailed systematic conditions about Chinese civilisation.

**Krishna Kinkar Sinha** was a research scholar of Visva-Bharati Cheena – Bhavana who was sent to the Oriental Languages College in Kunming for teaching Hindi in 1944. Hindi Language was taught along

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<sup>4</sup> "With a view to strengthen the bonds of friendship between China and India the Government of India have decided to endow a Chair of India History and Culture to the Peking National University, China, for two years in the first instance. Dr. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, Director of Research Studies in the Visva-Bharati has been appointed to the post as the First Visiting Professor under the scheme. Dr. Bagchi will proceed to Peiping towards the end of February 1947 to assume his new duties from the 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1947".

----- Visva – Bharati News, January 1944, Volume XV, Number 7, News and Notes, Page 60

<sup>5</sup> Visva – Bharati News, May 1952, Volume XX, Number Eleven, News and Notes, Page – 147

with others (Sanskrit, Pali, Bangla, Tibetan and Chinese) to the Chinese monks and students from the very beginning<sup>6</sup>. Chinese Ministry of Education requested Professor Tan Yunshan to send a teacher as Hindi learning was already started in 1942 Kunming. After returning from China, Krishna Kinkar became a Lecturer of Hindi in Cheena Bhavana and translated a lot of documents into Hindi. Among his translated documents there were ‘Cheeni Darshanik Mo Zi’ (Chinese Philosopher Mo Zi) in the Visva-Bharati Patrika. Krishna Kinkar translated Tan Yunshan’s article “Chin ki Sabhayata our Sanskriti ki Vikas” (Development of Culture and Civilisation of China, 1943). Tan Yunshan’s article on ‘Chin valo ka Dharm kya hai?’ (What is the Religion of Chinese People) was translated by Krishna Kinkar which was published in the Vishvavani periodical (October 1949, page 386 – 396). The article gives detail analysis on Confucianism and Taoism. He had translated articles of Tan Yunshan and other Chinese scholars of Cheena Bhavana from English and Chinese into the Hindi Language.

**Dr Jagadish Chandra Jain** was a Hindi Chair Professor at Peking University in the 1950s. He had translated a book titled ‘Path Ka Prabhav’, which was a translation work in Hindi from the Chinese Language of Dao Dejing. There are many books and articles available in Hindi on Chinese philosophy and religion and a bibliographical list as well as book review will be part of this article.

Another author **Satyaketu Vidyalankar** authored a book titled ‘Madhya Asia Tatha Chin Mein Bharatiya Sanskriti’ (Indian Culture in Central Asia and China, 1950) in which a special chapter was there on the impact of Buddhism in China and Indian cultures in Dunhuang caves.

The Hindi translation Buddhist Pilgrim’s travelogues in India were made by some authors like **Thakur Prasad Sharma** ‘Cheeni Yatri Hiuen Tsang ki Bharat Yatra’ (India Tour of Chinese traveller Xuan Zang, 1971); **Atman** ‘Chini Bouddhadharma ka Itihas’ (History of Chinese Buddhism, 1926); **Brajmohan Sharma** ‘Fahien our Hiuen Tsang ki Bharat Yatra’ (India Tour of Fahien and Hiuen Tsang, 1974) etc.

### Conclusion:

The majority of Chinese philosophy-related literary works in India covered the Chinese religion, Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, Buddhism etc. The academic article also covers biographical article on Confucius and Lao Zi. There are numerous periodicals and journals that have published articles on these subjects, which are yet less well-known, in Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, and other regional languages. Similar to this, articles on the Indian subcontinent, philosophy, literature, etc. used to be published in Chinese newspapers, journals, and publications. Although Lao Zi and Confucius are revered by the Chinese, the

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<sup>6</sup> “Studies and researches are being carried on especially in Buddhism as revealed through the different schools of philosophy which crystallized round the doctrines of Buddha in different countries. Some lost Sankrit works have been restored from Tibetan and Chinese and are now awaiting publication. Tan Yunshan, Director of the department has written several interesting as well as informative pamphlets on the subject of the cultural relationship between China and India. Some have already been issued while others are ready for the press. China – Bhavana provides for the teaching of the following languages: Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi, Bengali, Tibetan and Chinese.....”

----- Visva – Bharati News, April 1943, Volume XI, Number X, Santiniketan and Srniketan, Page 137

caste system, religious practices, and worship practices are distinct in India. However, there are many parallels between Chinese and Indian traditions as well, which can be seen in Tan Yunshan's and Tan Zhong's writings. Therefore, it is crucial that experts from the two countries conduct research on a comparative analysis of the various cultures, literatures, and philosophical traditions of China and India.

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