

Three Religions Living Side by Side: A Senior Tibetan Buddhist Monk's View of the Central Plains Culture

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Abstract

With the Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism as the core, huvu-bkwan blo-bzang chos-kyi nyi-ma interprets the central plains culture generality. He makes a lot of breakthroughs in content of its systematic ness, Comprehensiveness and accuracy, Simultaneously rectifies some misunderstanding and prejudice in Tibet's thoughts about Central Plain Culture, which means a lot to the communication and dialog between Han and Tibetan culture. He interprets the Central Plain Culture in this way relies on not only his personal knowledge, but also the in-deep development of communication and dialog between Han-tibetan culture.

Key words: Huvu-bkwan blo-bzang chos-kyi nyi-ma; Central plains culture; Han-Tibetan cultural exchange; Tibetan historiography

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INTRODUCTION

In the Qing dynasty, with the development and consolidation of the unified multi-ethnic country, the multi-ethnic cultural exchange and interaction tends to

be frequent. Some minority scholars not only have a more in-depth understanding of the historical culture of the Central Plains, but also try to carry out more systematic interpretation on it based on their own cultural standard. Huvu-bkwan blo-bzang chos-kyi nyi-ma (1737-1802) from You Ning Temple of Qinghai Province is one of the representatives. *The Origin of Buddhism Sects* wrote by him in the sixth year of Jiaqing administration (1801) not only systematically expounds the historical origins and religious doctrines of Buddhism, Bon and other religions spread in Tibet in a major part, but also explains religions in India, Central Plains, Mongolia, Khotan, thatch and other places respectively, among which, the records on the Central Plains are detailed, showing an ancient Tibetan Buddhist monk's unique understanding, high degree of appreciation and recognition of historical culture of Central Plains. These records have a unique value and significance whether in the development context of historical records on the Central Plains in Tibetan history or in the terms of Han-Tibetan cultural exchanges and dialogue level.

1. MAIN CONTENTS RELATING TO RECORDS ON THE CENTRAL PLAINS IN "THE ORIGIN OF BUDDHISM SECTS"

The Huvu-bkwan discussed the Central Plains after the elaboration of Tibetan Buddhism and Bon in the book. He first analyzed different names of Han region in the the Central Plains, India and Tibet as well as their origins, and then pointed out that though there have been many religions in the Central Plains, only the Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism "can clearly reveal the truth and become large religion. Then with these three religions as the focus, he argued their historical origins, theoretical proposition, main content of typical books, representative characters, practice regulation and many other aspects respectively (Buddhism, 1985).

With regard to the Confucianism, Huvu-bkwan mainly elaborated five aspects. The first is Confucianism and the origin of Confucianism: Confucianism is originated from Fuxi Eight Diagrams, and *the Five Classics* is the foundation of Confucian knowledge; Confucius is a Confucian tutor and the founder of Confucianism, and disciples of Confucius and their disciples explained the meaning of Confucius's conversation, and developed Confucius's doctrines into *the Four Books*; the representatives of Confucianism after the Qin Dynasty include Xiao He, Zhuzi and so on. The second is the academia derived from Confucianism, which is mainly to sort out the evolution process of Zhouyi and introduce various inventions and cultural achievements of the Central Plains. The third is the theory held by Confucianism: focus on the secular life, and lack of attention to the life and death; the Confucian classics are talking about benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trust, but do not deny reincarnation and karma, and also imply some Buddhist practice theories. The fourth is the Confucian practice regulation: Scholars study *the Four Books and Five Classics*", and they may take official positions through the imperial examination or retire into the country, engaged in knowledge research and teaching disciples. The fifth is the Confucian view of Buddhism: Confucius did not talk about the merits and demerits of Buddhism, and Zhuzi highly praised the Dharma, but Zhouzi and so forth criticized that Buddhists disrespected parents and kings, which naturally would be contradicted by the Buddha.

For the interpretation of Taoism, Huvu-bkwan still started from its origin. The author believes that the Taoism came from the very high lord, and the founder of Taoism and Primus the very high lord incarnated spread the Taoism around the world. The Taoism advocates invisible, colorless, supreme and natural Avenue view, and the God it worships includes both Five Prison Mountain God, Four Ditch River God and the God of wind, rain, thunder and lightning, so various ceremonies are needed for the worship of these gods. Then he introduced Eight Immortals and Celestial Master, and pointed out that the practice of Taoists requires a lot of drugs as well as relies on practicing a variety of magic arts with mantra. Taoist priests include those practicing at home and in the Taoist temple.

Huvu-bkwan divided the Buddhism in the Central Plains into the one coming from India and Tibet, which are discussed respectively. The Buddhism coming from India actually refers to Chinese Buddhism that passed to the Central Plains through the western region and was formed through continuous absorption of Buddhist and Taoist culture. Huvu-bkwan still first talked about its historical origin, and then explained five major sects such as the Chan sect one by one. The so-called Buddhism coming from the Tibet to the Central Plains actually refers

to the dissemination of Tibetan Buddhism in the mainland since the Qing Dynasty. Although there are records on activities of various Tibetan Buddhist sects in the Central Plains, the political and religious activities of a number of senior monks of the Gelug sect in the mainland in Ming and Qing Dynasty as well as the Central dynasty's management of Dalai Lama, Panchen Lama and other Buddhist systems accounts for the majority.

Huvu-bkwan's elaboration of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism also involved many other aspects of the historical culture of the Central Plains. For example, when arguing the origin of Confucianism, he not only connected the origin of Confucianism with Chinese humanistic primogenitor Yellow Emperor, but also recorded the invention of characters by Chang Jie and Chinese characters evolving from seal character to cursive script in the form, from writing on bamboo with paint to writing on fine silk with the pen made by Penpower rabbit-fur, and to Cai Lun's invention of papermaking technology, etc. When speaking the academia developed from Confucian knowledge, he not only detailed the origin of Yijing, but also was not niggardly in introducing various inventions and cultural achievements, revealing his appreciation and worship for the cultural of Central Plains. He also indicated in the book that there were also Hundred Schools of Thought in addition to Confucianism in the Central Plains in the pre-Qin Dynasty, while he first briefly introduced the ideological views of Mozi, Liezi and Zhuangzi when talking about the Buddhism in the Central Plains. Moreover, there are slightly reviews on some other extraterritorial religions introduced to the Central Plains, such as Islam.

2. VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF RECORDS RELATED TO THE CENTRAL PLAINS IN "THE ORIGIN OF BUDDHISM SECTS"

2.1 Break through Many Deficiencies Longstanding in Tibetan Historical records on Historical Facts of Central Plains

Tibetan historical records on the Central Plains have long been in the early 7th century, but only a few words involve the Central Plains in individual record on the relationship of Tibetan empire and its surrounding areas. Since the late 10th century, the Tibetan historical books emerged with the revival of Buddhism in the Tibetan plateau have mentioned much about the Central Plains when reconstructing the Tibetan history, but the mention was still limited to the relationship between Tang Dynasty and Tibetan Empire, especially the Buddhist relationship between two countries. The "deb-ther-dmar-po" did not appear until the late Yuan Dynasty. It, with the outline

of change of dynasties, some emperors' genealogy and years of reign since Zhou Dynasty, inserted some stories and historical legends about Chinese Buddhist history, and blended the content about the relationship between Tang Dynasty and Tibetan Empire from "Tang Records · Legend of Tibetan Empire", thereby initiating the direct records on the historical facts of Central Plains in the special chapters (Caiba, 1988). Later Tibetan historical books mostly just copied the above records of "deb-ther-dmar-po" (Zhang & Zeng, 2012). Records in "The Origin of Buddhism Sects" obviously broke through many deficiencies longstanding in the Tibetan historical records on the historical facts of Central Plains.

The first is the expansion of scope recorded and breakthrough in the content systematicness. *The Origin of Buddhism Sects* involves very broad and rich religious culture of the Central Plains, among which most of the contents are absent in the Tibetan historical records in the Yuan and Ming Dynasty. Tibetan historical records before the Qing Dynasty hardly contained Confucianism and Taoism, and even the Central Plains Buddhism only recorded narrow and limited contents, which reflected in the indirect mention of some scattered items about the Central Plains Buddhism while describing the history of Tibetan Emperor. Even "deb-ther-dmar-po" and other books just flashbacks some stories from knowing the descending birth of Buddha during the reign of King Zhao of Zhou in the Buddhist history of the Central Plains during the early Tang period. As we all know, the Central Plains region has a long history and long-standing and well-established culture, which is extensive and profound. The contention among the Hundred Schools of Thoughts presenting a splendid sight during the Spring and Autumn Period, and the collateral, integrated and supplemented Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism gradually formed in Han, Jin, Tang and Song Dynasty jointly constituted the backbone of the Central Plains culture. The Buddha initially built interpretation system with a high degree of generality, and took up philosophers and various inventions and cultural achievements of the Central Plains, which actually sketched out a general outline of the basic features of Central Plains culture. This is undoubtedly an unprecedented contribution in the Tibetan history, and is also the important value of records on the Central Plains in *The Origin of Buddhism Sects*.

The second is the breakthrough in the objectivity and accuracy of the contents recorded. Tibetan historical records since the late 10th century were formed in the period where the Buddhism occupied a dominant position in the Tibetan society, and most of them came from the Buddhist scholars, so the contents put more emphasis on the description of religion, and regard the rise and fall of the Buddhism as the spindle of historical development. Records concerning the Central Plains are more of a

mixture of myth, legends and historical facts, which are vague, nebulous and full of deification color, and have fiction, imagination and strained interpretation with a lot of inaccuracies. However, when describing the Central Plains, huvu-bkwan can get rid of the shackles of this deep-rooted Buddhist history, take a relatively objective and rational attitude, and detail the Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism one by one from the relatively inclusive and equal perspective on the basis of the overall pattern jointly constituted by these three relations. Although the contents of the book are very extensive, involving many aspects of the Central Plains culture, they rarely give strained interpretation and draw farfetched analogies. Except for a little deviation of understanding of individual aspect, most of the contents fit in the cognitive category of the Central Plains, reflecting the commendable "accurate".

2.2 Unique Value in the Tibetan Cultural Exchange and Conversation

The value of huvu-bkwan's book in the level of Tibetan cultural exchange and conversation directly reflects not only on the more systematic generalization of the Central Plains culture with the focus on Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, but also on his comments on Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism as well as thoughts and ideas of Liezi, Mozi, Zhuangzi and other masters starting from the standard of Tibetan culture—of course, standing on the position and value of Tibetan Buddhism. The book compared these three religions with Tibetan Buddhism, explored the commonalities and mutual fit between Han and Tibetan culture, obtaining many unique and deepening ideas, which can be said to be an excellent text presenting a senior Tibetan Buddhist monk's view of Central Plains culture.

The more important value of the book also lies in the author's attention to the Han-Tibetan cultural exchange—not only specially recording the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the Central Plains region, but also analyzing the spread of the Central Plains culture in the Tibetan region and its social impact. Furthermore, the author paid much attention to analyzing and correcting some Tibetan misunderstanding, prejudice and even errors about the Central Plains culture. The book analyzed the change in the name of some important cultural vocabularies such as Confucius, Duke of Zhou, Shennong, King Wen, the Eight Diagrams and so forth after spreading into Tibet, so as to clarify some traditional misconceptions. It should be particularly noted that a greater amount of space in the book is used to prove that the so-called "enlightenment" is just a practice method of Chan sect of Buddhism in the Central Plains, and the Chan sect has similarities to some sects of Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore, the Buddhism of Central Plains cannot be simply denied or despised.

3. THE REASON WHY HUVU-BKWAN CAN SYSTEMATICALLY INTERPRET THE CENTRAL PLAINS CULTURE

The huvu-bkwan blo-bzang chos-kyi nyi-ma has been able to break through various limitations of historical records on the Central Plains in the previous generation of Tibetan history books, and made more systematic and objective interpretation of the Central Plains culture, which not only depends on his personal knowledge, including the inheritance to relevant Tibetan writings from some Mongolian and Tibetan scholars in the Qianlong period, such as *The Origin of Buddhism in Han Area* written by a Mongolian scholar Gongbuzhabu in Tibetan and records on the Central Plains in “Dpag-bsam ljon-bzan” written by the Buddha Sum-pa mkhenpo, but also is related to a particular space-time environment.

You Ning Temple, located in Tu Autonomous County of Qinghai Province, was presided by Youten Gyatso, 4th Dalai Lama from Tumote of Mongolia over the creation in the early 17th century. In the Late Ming Dynasty and early Ming Dynasty, the nomadic Heshuote of Mongolia in the south and north of Tianshan Mountain occupied Qinghai southward, who controlled the Tibetan area, and supported Gelugpa to get an absolutely dominant position in the Tibetan Buddhism sects. Guo Long Temple has thus developed rapidly, and there have been more than 20 living Buddha, over 7,000 monks, more than 2,000 yards and 49 affiliated temples by the reign of Kangxi in the Qing Dynasty, enjoying the reputation of “mother of temples in Huangshui north-bank”. As this temple is located in the region with multi-ethnic contacts and transition of Han, Mongolian, Tibetan, Tu and other nationalities, it can undertake the function of bridge and bond in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural relation pattern in the Ming and Qing Dynasty. More importantly, the Qing Dynasty took the policy of “revitalizing the Shamanism so as to stabilize the Mongolian”, focused on the positive role of Tibetan Buddhism in maintaining national unity and social stability in ethnic frontier, which was absorbed into the ruling structure. As a result, many senior monks of Tibetan Buddhism were able to take various official position in the royal court, preaching in Beijing, Chengde, Wutai Mountain and other places, which not only strengthened the relation between Tibetan area and the Central Plains, but also objectively promoted the cultural exchange and conversation of Han and Tibet to develop towards a deeper level. Under this historical background, the bridge and bond function of You Ning Temple was fully played out by akiyoshi, thuvu-bkwan, Sum-pa and other Buddhist monks of this temple in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural relation pattern. Among them, the most representative monk is the famous akiyoshi Buddha. Starting from the second lifetime, the akiyoshi of previous generations were all appointed as the

“national division” who was responsible for the Tibetan Buddhism in Beijing and Inner Mongolia region, acted as an important adviser for the Qing Dynasty to govern the Mongolian and Tibetan areas, and also contributed a lot to the communication among Han, Manchu, Tibetan and Mongolian culture.

Thuvu-bkwan is another reincarnated Buddha with strength and influence slightly inferior to akiyoshi in You Ning Temple. As he was the descendant of famous Officer Li (who is the descendant of Shatuo General Li Keyong in the late Tang Dynasty) in the central part of Huangshui area during his first lifetime, he was granted the title of “Chan master” when he an office in Beijing during his second lifetime. Thuvu-bkwan blo-bzang chos-kyi nyi-ma learned from akiyoshi III, Sum-pa III and other senior monks in his third world, and then went to Zhe Bang Temple in Lasa to learn the classics for seven years. In addition to the religious education principal of Ta Er Temple for three times, he also served as the Khenpo of Xia Lu Temple in Tibet and religious education principal of Ta Er Temple and Xia Qiong Temple in Qinghai. From the twenty-eight year of Qianlong administration (1763), thuvu-bkwan obeyed the imperial edict and went to Beijing three times on the twenty-eighth year (1763), thirty-sixth year (1771) and forty-ninth year (1784) of Qianlong administration. During his stay in Beijing, he participated in the compilation of “Si Ti Qing Wen Jian”, “Tibetan Tripitaka” and other large books communicating the Han, Manchu, Mongolian and Tibetan culture during Qianlong period. By three times of taking office in Beijing, thuvu-bkwan blo-bzang chos-kyi nyi-ma was able to directly learn, observe and comprehend the Central Plains culture. According to the introduction of thuvu-bkwan in the book, during his service in Beijing, apart from busy political and religious affairs, he not only exchange experience with surrounding scholars and leaned from them, but also asked others to read the Chinese classics in the case of understanding but not being proficient in Chinese, in order to further confirm and deepen his understanding of the Central Plains culture. In short, thuvu-bkwan can make a more systematic interpretation of the Central Plains culture is not only related to his knowledge and experience, but also the result of Han-Tibetan cultural exchange and conversation in the Qing Dynasty developed towards a deeper level.

CONCLUSION

Thuvu-bkwan blo-bzang chos-kyi nyi-ma broke through the limitation of traditional Tibetan historical records, and generally outlined the basic features of the Central Plains culture with the focus on Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. In addition, based on the position and value of Tibetan Buddhism, he discussed the similarities

and mutual fitting point of Han-Tibetan culture, and corrected misunderstanding of the Central Plains culture in the tradition of Tibet, obtaining a lot of unique and in-depth perception. The achievements obtained by Thuvu-bkwan are not only the results of in-depth development of multi-ethnic cultural exchange and conversation of Han, Tibetan, Manchu and Mongolian and other nationalities, but also related to the special position of You Ning Temple and Thuvu-bkwan's life experience.

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