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A BRIEF EXAMINATION AND COMMENTARY OF BUDDHISM'S INTRODUCTION TO CHINA IN TERMS OF SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

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Abstract

Changing the habits of societies has always involved challenging processes. Especially when the phenomenon in question is religion, the situation becomes even more complex. In this context, China's encounter with Buddhism is discussed. As China-a country with a deep-rooted tradition and state structure-encountered, Buddhism also went through the aforementioned processes. Both charismatic individuals and the influence of trade played a significant role in the transmission of Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent to China. Role model individuals who came from the Indian subcontinent and drew attention with their lifestyles represented Buddhism well in China. Consequently, these individuals, who became the center of attention in China due to their lifestyles and approaches to events, facilitated the peaceful conversion of the masses to Buddhism. Thus, the process of converting or adopting a new religion, which is generally quite challenging, did not manifest in a bloody and oppressive manner as seen in other societies. Additionally, traders from the Indian subcontinent also stood out as a significant factor in the transmission of Buddhism to China. Buddhism, which was initially foreign to the Chinese region, gradually became widespread among the masses due to the influence of these factors. Since this phenomenon encompasses many different factors, it necessitates a multidisciplinary perspective for evaluation. This study was undertaken with such a necessity in mind. The phenomenon, which lies at the intersection of the disciplines of Sinology and the phenomenon, which lies at the intersection of the disciplines of Chinese Studies, History, and the Sociology of Religion, has been examined from a historical/sociological perspective. The research adopted a qualitative method, and document analysis was used as the data collection technique. The collected data were evaluated using an interpretive and explanatory approach.

Keywords: Buddhism, Indian subcontinent, Chinese region, Sociology of religion, Sinology.

Budizm'in Çin'e Giriş Süreci ve Din Sosyolojisi Bakımından Kısa İncelenmesi ve Yorumu

Öz

Toplumların alışkanlıklarını değiştirmeleri her zaman sancılı süreçler barındırmıştır. Hele ki değişen şey olgu din olacaksa ilgili daha da karmaşık bir hal almıştır. Bu bağlamda köklü bir geleneği ve devlet yapısı olan Çin'in ve Çin coğrafyasının, Budizm ile tanışması da işaret edilen süreçlerden geçerek gerçekleşmiştir. Gerek karizmatik şahıslar gerekse de ticaret etkeni Budizm'in Hint coğrafyasından Çin'e taşınmasında önemli bir çarpan etkisine sahip olmuştur. Hint coğrafyasından gelen ve yaşantılarıyla dikkat çeken bazı şahıslar Çin'de Budizm'i güzel temsil etmişlerdir. Dolayısıyla yaşantıları ve olaylara yaklaşımlarıyla Çin'de ilgi odağı olan söz konusu şahıslar, kitlelerin Budizm'e barışçıl bir şekilde geçmelerini sağlamıştır. Bu bakımdan oldukça sancılı bir süreç olan din değiştirme ya da yeni bir dine girme olana nitelenen süreç farklı toplumlarda olduğu gibi kanlı ve baskılı bir şekilde tezahür etmemiştir. Yine Hint coğrafyasından gelen veya Çin coğrafyasından Budizm'in doğduğu topraklara çeşitli nedenlerle giden kişiler, tüccarlar da Budizm'in Çin'e taşınmasında önemli bir faktör olarak dikkat çekmektedir. Çin coğrafyasına başta doğal olarak yabancı olan Budizm, sonrasında ilgili etmenlerin etkisiyle kitlelere mal olmuştur. İlgili olgu farklı birçok fenomeni barındırdığından multidisipliner bir bakış açısıyla değerlendirilme zarureti taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma da böyle bir zorunluluktan yola çıkmıştır. Sinoloji ile Din Sosyoloji disiplinlerinin ortak kümesinde yer alan söz konusu olgu tarihi/sosyolojik bakımdan ele alınmaya

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çalışılmıştır. Araştırmada nitel yöntem benimsenmiş olup, veri toplama tekniği olarak belge analizi kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen verilen anlayıcı/açıklayıcı yaklaşımla değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Budizm, Hint alt kıtası, Çin bölgesi, Din sosyolojisi, Sinoloji.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on one of the most fundamental elements of humanity and its most important companions: belief and the instinct to believe (Aydın, 2009, p.88). No matter where in the world humanity exists, belief and the instinct to believe have persisted their existence. In this regard, our study examines Buddhism, the process of its transition from its birthplace to China, and its spread (Chan, 1957, pp. 107-110). The existence and origin of religion, as an inseparable part of humanity, with regarding this, the importance of belief or religion is discussed mainly focusing on Buddhism (Aydın, 2009, p.88; Yaran, 2001, pp.84-85). The study explains the transition of Buddhism from its birthplace to China, its initial recognition, The first individual who facilitated this transition, and the translated texts that contributed its spread (Chan, 1957, p. 107; Demirel, 2015, pp.127-138).

The process of religion spread, with a particular focus on Buddhism, has been examined, along with how people have adopted a belief system, religion, and an element unique to a different culture that did not originate within their own society (Demirel, 2015, pp.127-138). Furthermore, the acceptance of a religion, belief, or the replacement of an existing belief with a new one is an extremely challenging process. At this point, the study aims to demonstrate the sociological, philosophical, and cultural factors underlying humanity's transition to a new religion, exemplified by Buddhism. Indeed, Buddhism was transmitted to China from India (Aktaş, 2022, p.564; Overmyer, 1987, pp.1594-1596; Walker, 1998: 64-66; Demirel, 2015, pp.127-138). However, the reality behind its widespread acceptance also involves elements that need to be explained in terms of the philosophy and sociology of religion.

As it is known, studies are constructed on the basis of problems in academical research articles (Şimşek & Alptekin, 2024, pp.28-30). In this study, Sinology and Sociology of Religion disciplines are brought together. Besides, as in our native database, there is no study carrying a similar perspective that brings these two disciplines together among academical studies, therefore there is no possibility of comparison with the literature and with this respect this article possess of being original and innovative. A qualitative research method was adopted and document analysis used as the data collection technique. The findings were interpreted through an explanatory and interpretative approach.

In this context, the transition of Buddhism to China, its adoption to China, the fundamental reasons and factors influencing its acceptance have been addressed and explained from the perspectives of the philosophy and sociology of religion. An interdisciplinary approach has been adopted, with a comparative analysis conducted in light of Sinology and the discipline of Sociology of Religion. Chinese words (characters; Hanzi 汉字) have been used and described in the Pinyin system .

The item and topic selection of this study, primarily situated at the intersection of the disciplines of Sinology and Sociology of Religion is significant in terms of originality besides uniqueness. For this reason, during the constructing process, multidisciplinary perspective has been developed, and apart from the importance of the subject as it mentions the introduction of Buddhism into the Chinese region, introduction and first stepping period has been examined through a historical/sociological comparative approach (Chan, 1957, pp. 107-116). These facts, especially the interdisciplinary feature holds the importance and uniqueness of this article.

2. Methodology

In this research, a qualitative method has been adopted. The technique used for data collection is document analysis. Through document analysis, various sources regarding the introduction of Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent to the Chinese region have been gathered. The data obtained were then interpreted using an interpretive/explanatory approach. The comparative approach, which holds a significant place in the discipline of the Sociology of Religion, has been particularly emphasized in this study. As is well known, comparison can be conducted in three different ways, which are as follows:

- a) Comparison in a historical context,
- b) Comparison in an ethnological context,
- c) Comparison in a statistical context (Günay, 2012, pp. 84-85).

In this research, historical comparison has been prioritized. In this context, the introduction of Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent to the Chinese region has been compared from a historical perspective, with the adoption of different religions in various other regions. The similarities and differences between these phenomena have been critically analyzed. The aim here is to identify how a foreign belief system influences the regions it enters. Additionally, the study considers whether a typology could be developed based on the findings of these observations.

2.1. Research Ethics

In this study, titled "*A Brief Examination and Commentary on Buddhism's Introduction to China in Terms of Sociology of Religion*," relevant sources were accessed, and the research was completed in full compliance with ethical guidelines. Furthermore, this research does not require an ethics committee report. For all these reasons, ethical research permit was not needed for this research article. However, our study was prepared by paying attention to all ethical rules and principles of academical article writing.

3. Research Findings

3.1. The Emergence of Buddhism and The Process of Its Entering to China

The emergence of Buddhism in India, or in other words, its founding or birth, dates back to the 6th century BCE (Güç & Sert, 2023, p. 7; Shen, 1988, p. 79). In addition to the views of Shen, Güç, Sert and Demirel also states that Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, who was born as the son of a ruler in Northern India (Demirel, 2016, p. 916). Demirel describes the key events that paved the way for the foundation of Buddhism as follows: "Upon witnessing the suffering of the people, Siddhartha began to search for a path to salvation. He abandoned his country and the comfort of palace life and engaged in a long struggle for enlightenment. After attaining enlightenment, he was called 'Buddha,' a term in Sanskrit meaning '*the enlightened one*' or '*the awakened one*'" (Demirel, 2016, p. 916). From this, it can be understood that, like in every belief and religious system in human history, Buddhism also stems from the desire to offer salvation and solutions to society, to humanity, and to masses suffering from distress (Aydın, 2009, pp. 88, 89, 92, 93; Yaran, 2001, p. 81). In addition to his study, Aydın addresses the human need for belief. He examines humanity's inclination towards belief, the presence and position of religion in human life, and the reasons behind it. Aydın elaborates on the topic in his work by stating, "The believer knows that they are not alone in this world, that there is a being who hears, sees, is closer to them than their jugular vein, and who helps them in times of distress. This feeling is so powerful that it prevents the believer from falling into spiritual despair. Link also told his patients suffering from spiritual distress that belief in God brings inner peace and confidence"

(Aydın, 2009, p. 89). However, since the topic is only discussed within the framework of Islam, it remains incomplete. On the other hand, another academic study provides explanations that address this gap. In Sadık Yaran's 2001 article, we see an analysis of that the existential aspects of human beings that differentiate them from other living creatures. In this work, Yaran explains that the human need for belief, devotion, or reliance is grounded in an existential foundation. Yaran explains this as follows: "A human being is not a necessary being that carries the reason for its existence within itself, but a being that needs external entities to attain, preserve, and sustain its existence. Therefore, human beings, along with other contingent beings, are primarily and most importantly beings with needs" (Yaran, 2001, p. 81). In another section of the same work, Yaran defines the human need and desire for belief as a need for meaning, understanding, and purification (Yaran, 2001, pp. 79-96). This desire has been one of the fundamental reasons why many belief systems and religions have been adopted, whether in their place of origin or in the societies they later spread to. However, the process of cultural phenomena originating in one nation or tribe and then spreading to other societies has been made possible by interaction, communication, and mutual contact between different cultures and societies. In this regard, the process of Buddhism spreading from its birthplace to the Chinese region (*to avoid digressing from the main topic, it should be noted that the region we refer to as China in this study corresponds to the Warring States period (战国时期) in terms of the political organization or dynasty of the era that began through such interactions and exchanges. Initially, during that period, due to frequent trade exchanges between the inhabitants of the Five River Basin (五河), Hotan (于阗; Yutian (于阗) was one of the four garrisons during the Tang Dynasty and a region where a Western Region oasis state was established during the Han Dynasty. It was also a location where a Regional Command was stationed during the Tang Dynasty, referred to in Chinese as "Dudu Fu" (都督府). In Chinese, Yutian (于阗) in Turkish known as Hotan. Today, it is located in the southern part of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. It is also referred to in Chinese by the names Hetian (和阗) and Hetian (和田). Cun Rui Xiong, Victor, "Medieval China", Scacecrow Yayınları, Lanham Maryland, Toronto, Plymouth United Kingdom, 2009, p. 653.), and Xinjiang (新疆), Buddhism began to spread from Kashmir (克什米尔) to Hotan in the 1st century BCE, facilitated by these favorable conditions (Shen, 1988, p. 78). Prior to this, however, Buddhism had already reached and spread to Xianyang (咸阳) (Shen, 1988, p. 78). In other words, Buddhism had already reached Xianyang and had become known in the Chinese region and among its people. This situation is somewhat analogous to the presence of the Turks in Anatolia. The spread and recognition of Buddhism in China, as well as its acceptance by the Han people (Chinese), did not occur overnight, just as the entry of the Turks into Anatolia and their establishment of it as their homeland did not happen in a single day. Such phenomena, whether political, social, sociological, or cultural, are not simple events that occur in one day or one period. About the process of formation and development of the Turkic presence in Anatolia, which we compare with the spread of Buddhism and its recognition and spread by the Warring States Period Han people (Kılıç, 2018, pp: 727-736). While there may always be a significant date that stands out, it is certain that there are always preceding events that can be considered as precursors to these developments.*

The spread of Buddhism to Central Asia, China, Korea, and Japan occurred over an extended period. The process of Buddhism's transmission from its birthplace in India to China is documented through a series of preceding and subsequent events (Demirel, 2015, pp. 131-136). Shen also notes that the process of Buddhism's introduction to China has been recorded (Shen, 1988, p. 78). Among these records are "The Genealogy of Buddha" (佛祖统纪), "Records of Zhu Shixing" (朱士行), the 35th volume of "The Annals of Buddha," "Records of Buddha" (经录), and the "Records of the White Horse Temple" (白马寺记). According to these sources, in 242 BCE, 18 people, including Shamen Shi Lifang,

brought Sanskrit manuscripts to Xianyang from the Western Region. However, the dissemination of these texts throughout China did not occur as a result of this event (Shen, 1988, p. 78). According to the document recorded in the Tibetan book of the Hotan State, "*Yutian Guoshou*," 165 years later (*This date corresponds to 80 BCE.*) the founding of the Hotan State, in the fifth year of Vijayasambhava's reign, the Kashmiri Arhat Vairocana arrived in Hotan to propagate Theravada Buddhism (Shen, 1988, p. 78). A story about the introduction and recognition of Buddhism in Hotan in the early 6th century is found in the annals of Huisheng (hui). Originally, the people of Hotan did not believe in Buddhism, but some Indian merchants brought Bhikkhu Vairocana, who was said to have invoked the spirit of Buddha, and the ruler of Hotan had a temple built under a peach tree in the southern part of the city (Shen, 1988, p. 78). Similar stories and legends can be found in Xuanzang's travel records. According to another claim, the Great Jalan, located more than ten miles south of Hotan, was a city founded by the first ruler of Hotan for Pilukhena Arhat (arahan). The *Book of Wei* (魏书) in the section on the Western Regions describes Zanno Temple (赞摩寺), located fifty miles south of Hotan, as the place where Bhikkhu Lujai first spread Buddhism (Shen, 1988, p. 78). Mark Aurel Stein (full Chinese equivalent of his name is 马尔克·奥莱尔·斯坦因), during his work at the ruins of Niya (尼雅), discovered a number of wooden inscriptions written in Sanskrit. These inscriptions are believed to date back to the 1st century BCE (Shen, 1988, p. 79). Not long after Buddhism's spread to Hotan, Sanskrit classics began to be copied and transcribed using Chinese writing techniques, although they had not yet been translated (Shen, 1988, p. 79). In accordance with all these symptoms, it's possible to conclude that the recognition of Buddhism somehow happened in Han territories and besides some efforts to grasp the meaning and doctrines of Buddhism were made.

3.2. The Transmission of Buddhism to Central Asia and China, and the Translation of Buddhist Texts

One of the most fundamental aspects of the transmission of Buddhist texts from their birthplace to different cultures and geographies was their translation. Focusing on the process of the transmission and translation of Buddhist texts reveals a fascinating and historically significant period (Demirel, 2015, pp. 130-132). In the first year of Emperor Ai's reign during the Western Han Dynasty (Yuanshou, 2 BCE, Ai Di Yuanshou Nian, 哀帝元寿年), a medical student named Jing Lu (景卢) learned the Buddhist teachings and doctrines orally from the Da Yuezhi diplomat Yicun (伊存), who was appointed as an envoy to transmit these teachings (Shen, 1988, p. 79). At that time, the Da Yuezhi were living under the protection of Qiu Jiuxi (邱就郤) in a region that also included the lands of Jibin (鬲宾). Buddhism in the Jibin region was prosperous and well-developed at the time. Yicun (伊存) was a Buddhist envoy sent by Qiu Jiuxi (邱就郤; *Qiu Jiuxi: (Kujurakara), also known as Qiu Jiuque (邱就却), was one of the five noble families of the Yuezhi. He attacked and destroyed the other four Linghou clans and established his own kingdom under the name "Kushan." He invaded Anxi, seized the land of Gaofu (an ancient city in the Western Region), and destroyed Puda and Jibin, taking control of their territories. He died in his eighties. His son, Ziyan Gaozhen, ascended the throne and later conquered Tianzhu. After Yan Gaozhen's son, King Kanishka, came to power, he became the co-lord of northern Central India. [History of the Later Han: Biographies of the Western Regions]. Quoted from <http://m.fodizi.tw/f05/65776.html> on 01.04.2024.) with the mission to spread the teachings of Buddhism (Shen; 1988, p. 79). The upper echelons of the Han Dynasty leadership placed great importance on the study of Buddhist classics. In the eighth year of the Yongping reign of the Eastern Han Emperor Ming (65 CE, Prince Ying, Ying Chongfeng Futu- Fotuo (英崇奉浮屠- 佛陀) of Chu worshipped Buddha, prayed to him, secluded himself in a chamber for atonement of his sins, and offered sacrifices to Upasakas and Cramanas (Shen, 1988, p. 79). Because of this, Emperor Ming, one night reportedly had*

a dream (*see the dream topic in the second section on dreams, pp:12-20*) of a golden man with a white light on his head. Influenced by this dream, it is said that he later learned how to make statues unique to Indian Buddhism. Emperor Ming then sent a delegation of 18 people, including Cai Yin and Qin Jing, to the Da Yuezhi to acquire Buddhist images and scriptures. This delegation returned to Luoyang in 68 CE, accompanied by Kasyapa Matanga (天竺沙门摄摩腾) and Dharmaratna (竺法兰) from India, and they established the “*White Horse Temple*”. Later, Shema Teng translated the “*42 Section Sutra*”, recording them on “*Fourteen Stones*”, upon which a pagoda was erected. Zhu Falan also translated five works, including “*The Breaking of Ten Bonds*,” “*The Birth of Buddha*,” “*Treasures of the Dharma Sea*,” “*The Movement of Buddhism*,” and “*The 42 Sections* (Shen, 1988, p. 79).” During the reign of Emperor Huan between 158-166 CE, during the Yanxi era, it is said that he worshipped Buddha (Futu, 浮屠; Fotuo, 佛陀) in his palace. This indicates that Buddhism had spread significantly and that its acceptance had become more pronounced. Furthermore, it is particularly noteworthy that Emperor Huan made offerings to Futu (浮屠; Fotuo, 佛陀) and that similar devotion was shown toward Huanglao, highlighting these actions as significant practices of the time (Shen, 1988, pp. 78-79).

On the other hand, with the promotion and spread of Buddhism, the need for translating Buddhist texts also increased. Many countries in the Western Regions, including India, the Yuezhi (月支-氏), Anxi (安西), and Kangju (康居), began to shift eastward, and cooperation was established in Luoyang with Buddhist monks (汉族沙门) and devoted believers from the Han nation. This group, involved in the translation and transmission of Sanskrit classics, is noted for their efforts in this work. The translation of Buddhist scriptures became one of the largest translation projects in ancient China, from the Han Dynasty to the Tang and until Song periods (Shen, 1988, p. 79). With the Eastern Han period, Indian Buddhism and culture began to enter Han territory. In 179 CE, during the second year of Emperor Ling's Guanghe (*Lingdi Guanghe Er nian* 灵帝光和二年) reign, two Sanskrit texts, including the “*Dao Xing Jing* (道行经)”, reached Luoyang and were translated. In the final years of the Eastern Han Dynasty, Indian figures such as Wei Zhinan (维祇难), Zhu Luyan (竺律炎), Zhu Dali (竺大力), Tan Guo (昙果), Tanke Jialuo (昙柯迦罗), and others arrived in Luoyang and translated classical texts. Zhu Dali (竺大力), Tan Guoceng (昙果曾), and Kang Mengxiang (康孟祥) collaborated on these translations (Shen, 1988, p. 79).

Buddhism reached its most prosperous and culturally vibrant period in the Han (Chinese) territories, where it migrated and thrived under the political presence of the Da Yuezhi. In India, during the reign of Emperor Kanishka (迦膩色伽王), Buddhism received significant support, both in terms of promotion and development (Demirel, 2015, p. 131). Kanishka became the protector and patron of Buddhism. On the other hand, in the Han territories, the Da Yuezhi were the primary advocates and adopters of Buddhism, particularly in collaboration with Yicun, who played a key role. Yicun came to China and helped spread the Buddhist classics. Between the Eastern Han reigns of Guanghe and Zhongping Jian (The years are 178-179 CE; Shen, 1988, p. 79), Lokaksema's Chinese name was Zhī Lóu Jiā Chàn (支娄迦讖) and he was also known as Zhi Chen (支谶). He was one of the monks involved in the translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese during the Han Dynasty. (Teiser, 2009, p. 212). He arrived in Luoyang to explain and translate the “*14 Manuscripts* (in some sources, it is also reported as *23 Manuscripts* (二十三部)). Along with Zhi Chen, Yuezhi nationals Zhi Yao (支曜) and Zhi Liang (支亮) also came to China during the reigns of Emperors Huandi and Lingdi to translate the classics (Shen, 1988, p. 79). Between 223-253 CE, numerous Buddhist classics translated by Zhi Qian (支谦) emerged. Zhi Qian was a Chinese Buddhist monk of Yuezhi descent who translated a wide variety of Indian Buddhist texts into Chinese. He was the grandson of an immigrant from the land of the Great Yuezhi (

大月氏-支), a region that overlapped, at least to some extent, with the territories of the Kushan Empire. He grew up in China, and his great-grandfather, Fadu (法度), along with hundreds of others, had migrated from their homeland to China (Shen, 1988, p. 80).

During the reigns of Emperors Huan and Ling, among those who came to China from the Anxi people to translate Buddhist classics were An Qing (安清) and An Xuan (安玄). An Qing's original name was Shi Gao (世高), and he was the son of Kesilao (Kesilao (科斯老); reigned between 106-130 CE.), the ruler of Anxi (*Part; Aşkar*) after ascending to the throne, he sent his uncle, Vologases II (*Wolajiasesi* (沃拉加色斯), also known as *Vologases II*, was a Parthian ruler who reigned between 131-147 CE), to many countries to gain deep knowledge about the classics and sacred texts of those regions (Shen, 1988, p. 80). In 148 CE, Shi Gao traveled to Luoyang, where he learned the Han (Chinese) language and spent over 20 years translating millions of Buddhist words. It is said that he translated about 95 texts, though only 54 have survived until the present day (Shen, 1988, p. 80). His Chinese proficiency was exceptional, and he traveled through cities such as Yuzhang, Danyang (丹阳), Huiji (会稽), and Guangzhou, spreading the teachings, explaining and interpreting Buddhist classics, and gaining people's trust. He translated Sanskrit texts without requiring additional explanations or translations, thanks to these efforts he came into prominence as the most successful translator of the Han Dynasty (Shen, 1988, p. 80). He died between 184 and 189 CE, during the Zhongping years of Emperor Ling's reign. His translations, including those of the Great and Small Mahayana scriptures, were widely disseminated. Dao'an and others in the Southern Dynasties explained how these texts, which were broadly circulated and had significant influence, promoted the development of Buddhism in the Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties. An Xuan (安玄) was a prominent and wise ruler of the Parthian Empire (Anxi). He came to Luoyang in the final years of Emperor Ling's reign to sell goods. During this visit, he was appointed as a cavalry captain and subsequently learned the Han (Chinese) language. After becoming proficient in Chinese, he collaborated with Yan Fodiao (严佛调), a native of Linhuai (临淮), to translate two volumes of Buddhist classics.

During the reigns of Emperors Ling and Xian, two individuals from the Kangju people, Kang Ju (康巨) and Kang Mengxiang (康孟祥), selected "Kang" (康) as their surname after coming to Luoyang for translation work. According to *Nei Dianlu*, the majority of Indian immigrants at that time were from the Kangju. In this context, many translation projects were undertaken by individuals from this lineage. Kang Ju (康巨) translated part of the manuscripts in 187 CE, while Kang Mengxiang translated six volumes between 194-199 CE. Buddhist monks from the Kangju lineage were also highly skilled in utilizing Chinese classical texts (Shen, 1988, p. 80). In the final years of the Han Dynasty, Tandi (曇帝), who also adopted the surname Kang (康), migrated to Wuxing, and his great-grandfathers were from the Kangju lineage. Later in his life, he taught *Liji* (礼记), *Zhouyi* (周易), *Chunqiu* (春秋), and *Fahua Dapin Weimo* (法华大品维摩) at Huqiu Temple (虎丘寺) in Suzhou (苏州). He then returned to the mountains of Wuxing, where he spent the last twenty years of his life. During the final years of the Yuanjia era (*corresponds to the year 152 CE.*), he passed away at the age of over sixty (Shen; 1988, p. 80). In addition to this explanation, it would better to open the meaning of "pass away" in accordance with the terminology of Buddhism, its stated that he term used for "passing away" in the relevant source is Yuanji (圓寂). In relation to our subject, this expression is both fitting and intriguing. Although there are many words that express death or passing away, Yuanji has been used because it perfectly captures the concept of death in the context of Buddhism and Buddhist thought. This is both a new piece of knowledge we have learned during our research and provides insight into how the concepts of death and passing away are approached in Buddhist philosophy.

In the final years of the Eastern Han Dynasty, Chinese scholars also began engaging in Buddhist studies. During the reign of Emperor Xian (*Emperor Xian is also known as Xiandi (獻帝)*). Since the term "Di" (帝) means emperor or sovereign, both "Xiandi" and "Emperor Xian" are acceptable usages), the Confucian scholar Mou Rong (牟融; his other name is Ziyou (子优). He was promoted to the position of Grand Minister of Agriculture. He held high-ranking bureaucratic and political positions. He was skilled in negotiation and debate. It is said that Emperor Shu sighed with regret, remarking that he was of a caliber equal to, and deserving of, the title of Prime Minister) fled from the chaos and turmoil of the Zhongyuan region, settled in Jiaozhi (交趾) to explain and teach Buddhist doctrines and scriptures. While continuing to transmit Buddhist classics, he faced criticism from others and wrote the *Theory of Causality and Confusion* (理惑论), which consists of 37 chapters. This was the first work in China focused on the study and teaching of Buddhist theory. Its dissemination and discussion across the country during the Wei-Jin and Southern-Northern Dynasties marked it as a pioneering work and contributed to the peak of Buddhism in Chinese history (Shen, 1988, p. 80).

3.3. Sociological Interpretation of the Introduction of Buddhism to China

When closely examining the phenomenon of Buddhism's introduction to China, the first issue to address is the occurrence of religious conversion. As is known, religious conversion can be defined as the act of a society renouncing its current religious beliefs and adopting a different religious understanding or structure. In this context, it is understood that there are two dimensions to the phenomenon of religious conversion. The first dimension can be positioned as a change resulting from the failure to fulfill the obligations of the religion one belongs to. The second dimension, as can be inferred from the above definition, is based on the rejection of the existing religious structure. In both cases, it can be argued that both the individual and society undergo a complete transformation of their current social assumptions. However, sometimes the situation may unfold differently. An example of this would be an individual who previously had no known religious beliefs but later turned to the religion adopted by their own society (Kirman, 2011, p. 88).

The history of religious conversion for societies is known to be as old as the history of the phenomenon of religion itself. Furthermore, it is difficult to claim that religious conversion is an easy or routine process for societies. From the outset, this process has significant implications both at an individual and societal level. Additionally, the fact that it is based on various different reasons makes it a highly complex phenomenon. Entering or leaving a particular belief system in the context of religious conversion is fundamentally parallel in nature. In this respect, changing or abandoning an existing religious structure implies the rejection of all existing values. Therefore, this single point alone is sufficient evidence to demonstrate how challenging and consequential religious conversion is for an individual or society (Kirman, 2004, pp. 75-76).

In the phenomenon of religious conversion, the nature of the existing religious structure is a crucial point. A rigid and non-permeable structure will make conversion more difficult. Conversely, a more flexible structure will facilitate the transition to a different belief system. In this context, two different situations arise in the process of religious conversion. If the existing structure is inflexible, it means that when conversion occurs, the old structure will be completely rejected. However, if the opposite is true, it is possible to talk about a synthesis or fusion between the old and new religious structures in the society. At this point, it is important to differentiate between local religions and institutionalized, widespread religions. Local religions tend to be more open to integration with different beliefs, while institutionalized and widespread religions are known to be more rigid in this regard (Asan, 2023, p. 354). The principle of total rejection of past religious beliefs when adopting institutionalized and widespread religions is a challenging process for societies from a sociological perspective.

Another important parameter in the phenomenon of religious conversion is the concept of dominant culture. In this context, it is understood that belief systems with strong cultural elements have a significant multiplying effect in transforming individuals or societies. A religion embedded with strong cultural motifs tends to attract more adherents. As a natural result, the coding and adoption of a particular culture as superior or dominant have both individual and social implications. In other words, religions that possess a positive image or strong cultural elements tend to spread rapidly, particularly among individuals within a certain age group (primarily young people) (Zavalsız, 2012, pp. 191-192). When considering the phenomenon of Buddhism's introduction to China, which is the subject of this study, it becomes clear that the same social reality repeats itself. Buddhism, transported from the Indian subcontinent to China with strong cultural elements, experienced a rapid phase of expansion. Therefore, the significant influence of Indian culture played a key role in the establishment of Buddhism in China. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain the widespread social impact of Buddhism without considering this cultural influence.

When examining the phenomenon of Buddhism's introduction to China, which is the subject of this study, it becomes apparent that a smooth transition occurred. As emphasized in the historical process of Buddhism's introduction to China, Buddhism was mostly transmitted through trade and charismatic individuals (for example Xuanzang, Tang Sanzang, Aktaş, 2022, p. 566). In this respect, the entry of Buddhism into China via social interaction channels such as trade and charismatic figures facilitated the spread and acceptance of this belief. For information on the societal impact of important figures such as Tang Sanzang and Wu Zetian in the spread and acceptance of Buddhism (see: Quoted from <http://henan.sina.com.cn/tour/hngb/2009-07-21/114918680.html> on 09.08.2024). From another perspective, it can be said that the introduction of Buddhism through highly reasonable means played a significant role in providing a foundation for the belief to take root in China.

The role of charismatic individuals in the establishment of Buddhism in China requires further exploration. The key question here is: what qualities did these charismatic individuals possess that made them the center of social attention and influential in helping Buddhism find a foothold in China? As is well known, the concept of charisma was introduced into sociological literature by Max Weber. In this context, Weber bases the concept of charisma on the idea that, during difficult times, individuals emerge who, through their abilities, overcome the challenges faced by society and attain victorious status. These exceptional figures, who help society overcome its hardships with their skills, gain a deserved reputation and privilege. As a natural consequence, these extraordinary individuals gain greater influence over others in the social sphere. The exceptional status they achieve is often explained by society as being due to divine powers. In this sense, these charismatic individuals become vital reference points for their society, aided by the divine qualities attributed to them. However, Weber introduces an important caveat here: the nature of charisma is not perpetual. In some cases, these extraordinary individuals may lose their status. Strategic mistakes made by highly successful individuals can serve as an example of this. In such cases, their followers may abandon the charismatic figure as quickly as they once rallied around them. Therefore, if a charismatic individual wants to sustain their success derived from charisma, they must continuously maintain the qualities that draw their followers. Otherwise, things can take a completely opposite turn. In other words, the point of greatest success can quickly evolve into the point of greatest failure (Weber, 2012, pp. 475-479).

The concept of charisma provided significant opportunities for the introduction and establishment of Buddhism in China. The exceptional individuals who brought Buddhism from India to China stood out due to their remarkable qualities. The Chinese could not remain indifferent to these individuals, who were seen as mirrors reflecting the new Buddhist faith in a positive light. As a result,

they quickly embraced the teachings of these representatives of the new religion, which they admired and approved of.

Another significant factor that played a dominant role in the phenomenon of Buddhism's introduction and spread in China was commercial activities. In this context, it becomes apparent that trade actually served as a precursor to the arrival of charismatic individuals. Initially, merchants came from the Indian subcontinent to the Chinese region. Due to the nature of trade, the increasing intensity of social relations between these two geographies and societies opened the door for the parties involved to focus more on each other socially and culturally. As a result, relationships on the social and cultural plane followed an upward trajectory. Ultimately, Buddhism—which was born in the Indian subcontinent and whose social affiliation was with India—left significant religious and social impressions through charismatic individuals who came via the trade routes from India, the land where it could not find refuge, to the Chinese region (Demirel, 2015, pp. 127-138).

Trade has a significant impact on cultural interaction and on the transformation of existing religious or cultural elements within a society. This has been observed not only in the case of Buddhism's transmission from India to China, but also in similar instances across different societies. For example, Alexander's expedition to India and the subsequent cultural exchange established by those who remained, through trade with the Asian region, laid the groundwork for developments that would later influence even the Islamic world (Özcan, 1998, p. 75).

Another example can be found in pre-Islamic Arab society, where trade activities made Arabs aware of distant regions and cultures that were otherwise unfamiliar to them. Among these trade activities, the Ukaz fair, established near the city of Taif, held a particularly important place. This fair, located in a fertile region, was not only a center for trade but also a venue for various social activities, such as literary competitions. Thus, this location became a significant point where both local and foreign cultures interacted, serving as a hub for commercial exchanges and cultural interactions (Azizova, 2012, pp. 61-62).

It would be appropriate to conclude the discussion of the interaction between trade and religion with a reference to Max Weber. As is well known, Weber argued that the capitalist mindset found the opportunity to develop and thrive in Protestant societies (Weber, 2013, pp. 54-56). In this context, Weber, unlike his contemporaries, traced the impetus behind the Industrial Revolution in the West to the Protestant belief system, which promoted a disciplined way of life by rejecting worldly pleasures. In other words, individuals had to avoid all worldly pleasures and continuously work to be among the saved (Slattery, 2014, pp. 79-81). As a result, in such a worldview, individuals minimized their needs and focused on constant work and productivity. According to Weber, this way of life played a crucial role in the formation of a capitalist economy and, consequently, a capitalist worldview.

As seen from Weber's perspective, there is a strong connection between religion and society (Keskin, 2004, pp. 7-21). Sometimes trade or economic life influences religion, while at other times, religious life can be a determining factor for the economy. Indeed, trade activities played a crucial role in facilitating the introduction of Buddhism from India to China. Similarly, Protestantism, which began in countries like England and the Netherlands, had a significant impact on the development of capitalist economies in Europe. In this context, the relationship between religion, society, and economy forms an important equation for the social sciences.

Another significant phenomenon observed on the social level following the introduction of Buddhism into China was the surge in translation activities. In this context, Buddhism acted as a major cultural carrier, transferring Indian culture and civilization to China through the factor of religion and

the channel of translation. As the awareness and recognition of Buddhism increased in China, translation activities also intensified proportionally, reflecting the growing influence of the new faith.

The phenomenon of Buddhism's spread from India to China through translation activities can be seen as parallel to the validation of general social theories in practice. As is known, during the Abbasid period, when they encountered various cultures and civilizations, a significant translation movement was observed. Notably, it is appropriate to mention the Iranian and Indian civilizations in this context. To better understand and familiarize themselves with these different cultures, the Abbasids established a translation center known as the *Bayt al-Hikma* (House of Wisdom). The roots of this institution can be traced back to the reign of Caliph al-Mansur, and it is well known that many classical Greek philosophical works were translated into Arabic there (Kaya, 1992, pp. 88-90).

Another characteristic of *Bayt al-Hikma* was that it had to rely on individuals from traditions such as Greek, Persian, Indian, and Syriac cultures backgrounds. This was necessary because those involved in translation work needed to come from different linguistic and cultural traditions than the Arab elements, which formed the foundation of the Abbasid state. Therefore, to carry out the translation activities properly, a deep understanding of the relevant languages was essential. Naturally, those most capable of performing this task were individuals who belonged to these linguistic traditions. For this reason, *Bayt al-Hikma* relied on non-Arab individuals who lived under the Abbasid rule. However, this also led to *Bayt al-Hikma* becoming a center where these non-Arab individuals, who faced discrimination and sought equality within the Abbasid state, expressed themselves and their struggles. Eventually, translation activities were transformed into a form of propaganda. For instance, this becomes more evident when examining some of the translations from Persian. While there are very few exceptions reflecting the features of Indian and Greek literature—indicating minimal translations from these traditions—there is a significant number of translations that deeply capture the local and detailed qualities of the Persian and Sasanian traditions. This highlights that, in addition to its cultural mission, *Bayt al-Hikma* was also a platform for certain propaganda-based initiatives, particularly in the context of Persian culture and nationalism. This is because individuals from the Sasanian tradition were unwilling to fully accept the fall of their state. Thus, the translation center provided them with a significant opportunity to preserve their culture. Through this, they believed they had found a way to alleviate the pain of living under another culture, which they considered a disaster (Demirci, 1996, pp. 200-205).

Similar social events that occurred during the translation activities at *Bayt al-Hikma* in the Abbasid state can also be observed during the introduction of Buddhism from India to China (Shen, 1988, pp. 77-79). With the arrival of this new belief system in China, there was a significant surge in translation efforts. These activities were largely undertaken by individuals with charismatic qualities who came from Indian culture. Furthermore, this intense translation effort not only facilitated the transmission of the new belief system to China but also brought Indian culture along with it. As a result, elements of Indian national identity, intertwined with Buddhist beliefs, reached the Chinese territories, leading to a synthesis between the two civilizations. Consequently, the change in belief significantly influenced social life as well. As previously mentioned, religious conversion often leads to a complete transformation of social norms and codes. This blending of Buddhism and Indian culture with Chinese civilization created a new cultural and religious landscape in China.

Another notable aspect in the transmission of Buddhism from India to China through human and social channels is the significance of dreams. As previously mentioned, Emperor Ming had a dream, and under the influence of this dream, he initiated the creation of statues in his country based on Buddhist tradition of India and culture. What stands out here is the emperor's action prompted by the impact of

his dream, directing him toward a specific course of action. This illustrates the important role that personal experiences, such as dreams, played in the cultural and religious shift during this period.

As is well known, although his ideas have been criticized, Freud is one of the foremost figures to take dreams seriously and offer some of the most notable interpretations of them (Fromm, 2019, pp. 105-106). In this context, Freud views dreams as the medium where suppression and neurosis emerge. According to him, a past conflict, that is, a repressed emotion or thought, can be transformed into neurosis. Freud approaches the resolution of this problem by considering dreams as puzzles to be solved. Initially, he finds the puzzle challenging, but later identifies the core of the confusion, or the starting point, and develops an understanding accordingly. Since the nature of the problem experienced by the individual is unique, the meaning of the dream is also shaped according to the person. In this framework, understanding and interpreting the dream based on the individual's context becomes relatively difficult. However, when clues are correctly evaluated, and the center of the confusion or the beginning of the tangled thread is accurately identified, the analysis of the problem becomes easier (Tura, 2010, pp. 55-56).

Within the framework of the ideas discussed above, it is possible to interpret Emperor Ming's dream in a similar manner. In his dream, the emperor saw themes related to Buddhism, and afterward, he initiated the construction of statues representing the Buddhist faith in his country. Thus, he accepted the dream as a valid source of guidance and applied what was shown to him as good in the dream to his own land through the channel of Buddhism. Here, the charismatic personality of Emperor Ming played an important role in the acceptance of his dream as a decisive factor. It is clear that the dream of an ordinary member of the Ming state would not have led to such a significant change. Therefore, the emperor's unique combination of charismatic authority and traditional power, along with his acceptance of the dream as both a reality and a source of knowledge, which he then adapted to his country, stands out as a particularly noteworthy aspect.

To make the concept of dreams more understandable, it would be appropriate to provide examples from history where rulers made significant changes in their societies as a result of or influenced by dreams. For instance, in the Qur'an, it is mentioned that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) interpreted the dream of a king, which led to his release from prison and subsequent rise to a position of power within the kingdom (12/Yusuf/46-56). Similarly, in the Bible, it is noted that Prophet Daniel interpreted a dream for King Nebuchadnezzar, which elevated his status in the kingdom (Daniel, 2:24-48, Kutsal Kitap, pp. 922-923).

As can be seen, dreams emerge as a tool used by the ruling class, who often consult wise individuals, to help govern their people and country. In this context, rulers justify their important decisions by having them interpreted by those considered wise, thereby establishing a seemingly legitimate foundation for their actions. By doing so, they ground their decisions in metaphysical elements. The use of the dream as a tool in governance, from the dream interpreted as predicting the birth of Alexander the Great, to the Abbasid, Ghaznavid, Seljuk, and Ottoman periods (Yüksel, 2014, pp. 3-10), across various cultures, times, and regions, is particularly noteworthy (Çetin, 2012, pp. 44-63). Despite the differences in cultures, time periods, and even geographical locations, the element of dreams remains constant. This suggests that the dream phenomenon can be understood as a cross-cultural element.

4. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

Throughout the history of religions, many beliefs, philosophies, and sociological events have spread to other cultures, societies, and regions, influencing them significantly. Buddhism, which has inspired the subject of this study, is one such phenomenon. Initially, Buddhism developed as a belief

system in India aimed at providing salvation and peace to a society in distress. Over time, through cultural as well as societal interaction and exchange, it spread to neighboring regions. One of the most significant examples of this spread is Buddhism's transmission to China and its surroundings. The transmission occurred through various channels from its place of origin, including traders, cultural and political envoys, and charismatic individuals. Among the most prominent of these figures was Xuanzang, also known as Tang Seng or Tang Sanzang. Xuanzang is an essential figure in Chinese classical literature and culture, as he is famously featured the main character in the novel *Journey to the West*. This makes him a vital example in the study of the charismatic individuals who played a role in the spread of Buddhism to China.

Another important factor to consider is the translation of Buddhist texts, which helped in spreading Buddhist teachings in China. However, alongside these developments, Buddhism also introduced Indian culture to China, acting as a cultural transmission that reached new territories. The critical question remains: How was this new belief system perceived? What factors and reasons contributed to its acceptance? The facilitating elements of this adoption are vital to understanding the process. A key factor may be that neither India nor China acted with imperial motivations, and the non-coercive spread of Buddhism was likely influenced by one of its core principles: *ahimsa*, meaning non-harm toward all living beings. If the process had been driven by imperial ambitions, it likely would not have been welcomed and embraced by Chinese society.

A parallel can be drawn with the spread of Islam in Turkistan, where Islam's acceptance was facilitated by respect and tolerance for different beliefs and cultures, which reflects a similar process to that of Buddhism's spread. Buddhism, like Islam in Turkistan, was not just a religious transmission but also a cultural one, spreading elements of Indian culture alongside its religious teachings. Interestingly, despite Buddhism's roots in India, there is no indication that India aggressively or forcefully attempted to the spread of the religion during its transmission to China. Instead, it was peacefully transmitted through various means, particularly charismatic figures, and was met with understanding and acceptance.

Regions like Gansu (甘肃), present-day Xinjiang (新疆), the Hexi Corridor (河西走廊), Dunhuang (敦煌), and beyond saw the spread of Buddhism, leaving historical traces visible in local ruins. These traces reflect the cultural synthesis that arose when Buddhism blended with local traditions, producing new cultural and religious expressions. Despite its struggles in India, Buddhism found fertile ground and acceptance in other cultures. The transmission was made possible through the efforts of charismatic figures and the translation of Buddhist scriptures, which helped to make Buddhist teachings more accessible to the public.

In addition to trade, charismatic individuals from India played a crucial role in bringing Buddhism to China. These figures charmed the admiration of the people because of their lifestyles and approaches. They peacefully introduced Buddhism to the Chinese, helping large segments of the population adopt the religion. Therefore, unlike other societies where religious conversion often involves violence or coercion, the process in China was peaceful. Traders from India also played a significant role in this process, bringing Buddhism to a land initially foreign to that but gradually became integrated into Chinese society.

Since there is no interdisciplinary study that brings together the two different disciplines of Sinology and Sociology of Religion, in the construction process of our research, it could not be available to compare our research with a similar article especially from the point of articles published in our country. Apart from this fact, this article possess the uniqueness as it puts forward the China's process of making Buddhism its own with a national interpretation and perception. In addition to this, this study

is just a entrance to understand the History of Buddhism in Chinese territories. How did China assimilated Buddhism, what sort of facts effected Chinese people adopted Buddhism and while proceeding to understand, the methods utilized by China in making Buddhism its own can be addressed in other studies. Given the multidisciplinary nature of this phenomenon, it requires an analysis that encompasses multiple fields. This study, motivated by such a necessity, examines the historical and sociological aspects of Buddhism's transmission to China, which is situated at the intersection of Sinology and the sociology of religion.

In order to understand a society's background, knowing or observing its present situation, being able to speak its language, getting an easy contact with its mainland is not sufficient a way to deepen on clutching its culture, civilization and gigantic history. With this respect, as China, one of the most unique and huge civilization of the World, such academical research articles, observation and survey studies are also main way of analyzing Chinese culture and history. This kind of efforts are tiny steps but by giving such little tiny efforts and products proceed to understand China and Chinese historical manners, beliefs or attitudes towards other nations, cultures, societies and etc.

5. References

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