

A SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL ANALYSIS OF BUDDHIST SHRINES ALONG THE SILK ROUTE

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism has existed and survived for centuries in Central Asia, therefore, the geography of diffusion of religion required the study of the historical pattern of its spread. This research analyses the spatial and temporal development of Buddhist Shrines in Central Asia. The present study delineates the geography of diffusion and spread of Buddhism in Central Asia. The temporal dimension of diffusion adds a timeline to the spread of the religion. Because a strict chorological and chronological survey of the process of diffusion and spread of Buddhism would be little more than collection of facts. Present thematic study presents an analysis of the Buddhist Shrines in the Oasis Cities of Central Asia.

This paper aims to explore cultural geography of urban settlements of Central Asia with a new perspective. The purpose of this study is to produce location-based analysis of Buddhist Shrines of Central Asia and to analyze the process of spatial diffusion and the patterns of spread of religion as a consequence of the spatial interaction.

Keywords: Buddhist shrines, agglomeration of Buddhist shrines, diffusion of Buddhism, silk route, the oasis cities of Central Asia

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism has had a long history in Central Asia. The existence of ruins of Buddhist shrines are reminder of a strong presence of Buddhism in Central Asia. During the beginning of the Christian era, the cultural contacts between two civilisations (through trade and travel) provided common ground for cultural exchange. The Merchants and Monks travelling through the silk route, from India to Central Asia, spread this religion in the oasis cities of Central Asia along the Silk Route. The formation of the great power (Kushan Kingdome), during the Kushan period, also helped in the process of diffusion of religion in Central Asia. The royal patronage contributed to the rise and expansion of Buddhism. It helped in the rapid spread of Buddhism in the great historical region and beyond its territory.

The Ancient Trade Route and the Spread of Buddhism

Although little is known about the development of Buddhism in Central Asia, it is believed that Buddhist influence must have come from the northwest of India (Afghanistan). The earliest diffusion of the religion can be traced back to the 1st century A.D. A few centuries later, Buddhism spread over the major part of Central Asia, in oasis cities and towns, all along the trade route. The trade contacts created possibilities for the expansion of religion and contributed to the *spread* of Buddhism.

THE STUDY AREA

The Central Asia

The study area of the present research includes the oasis cities of Central Asia. Located in the cultural space of Central Asia these oasis cities represent the great geographical and historical region. The cultural space of Central Asia was defined by the Turkish civilizations. Then it was known as Turkistan. Presently, it includes the lands of Tadjik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Kazakh.

Scattered through the vast expanse of deserts of Central Asia there are several oases. These oases represent a unique 'desert landscape'. It is characterized by physical feature of desert, but the uniqueness of this landscape is convergence of sand with fresh water springs. The oasis is geographical or ecological area that exists in desert. (only deserts have real oasis) (Han Delin and Meng Xuey An, 1999) It is fertile wilderness with water.

The Oasis of Central Asia;

Oasis of the Amu Darya;
The oasis of the Amu Darya, is spread over the middle course of the river, the oasis formed by the Amu Darya, in contrast to other oases, it stretches almost without interruption for miles and miles, it is almost entirely cultivated, the economic centre of the oasis is Charjew, the second largest city in Turkmenistan,
Oasis of the Syr Darya;
Since antiquity many fortified settlements existed in the valley of Syr Darya, during the first centuries A.D. many cities also existed in the Ferghana valley and the Karshi oases, smaller tributaries of the Syr Darya also had significant oasis settlement, Isfara, Sokh, Shahimardan (Margelan), Isfayram, Aravan and other mountain river had large sedentary settlements,

Oasis of the Surkhan Darya;
In the Surkhan Darya basin the oasis Angor developed as a major oasis settlement during the Kushan period, in south Uzbekistan, the town of Termez, Fayaz-tepe, Zar-tepe, Dalverzin-tepe were the major urban centre, between the Surkhan Darya and Sherabad Darya also many flourishing agricultural oases with fortified towns existed,
Oasis of the Zerafshan;
Sogdiana was centred in the lower reaches of the Zerafshan and the Kashka Darya, the ancient Maracanda (Samarkand), was the main settlement of the Zerafshan oasis, the oasis of Geoksiur is located on the Tedzhen delta, is also in the Zerafshan valley, along with <i>Bukhara, Samarkand</i> is one of the oldest inhabited cities in in the Zerafshan valley,
The Murghab oasis;
The Murghab oasis is spread in the lower reaches, on the broad delta of the Murghab River, it is also called Margiana, setteled in this oasis Merv has the oldest history of settled agriculture, Merv was a major oasis city in Turkmenistan, on the Silk Road, it was situated on the east-west caravan route, connecting it to Bukhara and Samarkand,
The Oasis of Chach (Tashkent);
An ancient settlement existed in the region of the Chach (Tashkent) oasis, it has always been a major city in Central Asia, the city started as an oasis settlement, on the Chirchik River, in the foothills of Tian Shan, it was situated on the great Silk Road, the oasis was especially favored because of its central location,

(Harmatta Janos, 1994, Litvinsky B. A. 1996, Buryakov Y.F, and Others, 1999)

The oasis is not a cultural desert but a fertile land and oasis of culture. It is a living space. It is the main region of human activities in deserts. (Liu Hailong and others, 2015) The oasis settlements have formed the socio-cultural, religious, economic and political centre for centuries. The environmental fragility, natural variability, sociocultural and economic diversity are characteristics of these oasis settlements.

These settlements are self-sufficient but dependant on other oasis settlements; a reciprocal relationship exists between oasis cities. Because of the locational limitation of oasis, generally it appears that the oasis cities develop with water (in isolation) and expand with trade.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to re-evaluate the diffusion of Buddhism along silk route. Besides the diffusion of religion, the present study explores the cultural history of the oasis cities of Central Asia to create the cultural geography on the basis of the cultural landscape of Buddhist shrines;

stupas and monasteries. In this research the cultural landscape of the oasis cities of Central Asia has been interpreted and reinterpreted.

The present study focuses on the Geography of Buddhism;

- To trace the spread of Buddhism beyond the Hindu Kush Mountains and recreate the Cultural Geography of the oasis cities of Central Asia.

The basic objectives of the study are to analyze diffusion of Buddhism;

- To study the exchange along the silk route, spread of culture and transmission of beliefs;
- To inquire into the impact of Buddhism on the civilizational history of the oasis cities of Central Asia.

THE HYPOTHESIS

The spread of Buddhism in Central Asia was the most apparent geographic phenomena of the early history (during Kushan period). It was characterized by the concentration of Buddhist shrines in different oasis cities.

It is hypothesized that the spatial interaction among cities was one of the main driving forces of diffusion of religion. The hypothesis of the present research are as follows;

- The Spatial Interaction of Merchants and Monks helped spread the religion across the geographical space of the Central Asia.
- The regional potentiality or sustainability and political stability of the Oasis Cities facilitated the concentration of Buddhist shrines.
- The Proximity the Oasis Cities to the trade route led to the concentration and agglomeration of Buddhist shrines in Central Asia.

The hypothesis states that the spatial interaction of the oasis cities, essentially, caused isolated cities to integrate with one another. The 'Cultural Contact' of Merchants and Monks helped spread the religion across the geographical space of oasis cities. Indeed, it led to the 'Cultural Convergence' that helped Buddhism to transcend cultural and political boundaries and spread into the oasis cities along the trade routes in Central Asia.

METHODOLOGY OR THE APPROACH OF THE STUDY

In the backdrop of *Cultural Diffusion*, the time and space of this research are the oasis cities along the trade routes in Central Asia, during 1st century A.D. to 7th century A.D. that is the timelines of major changes in the cultural landscape of the region.

This research has been carried out using various techniques; it explores the landscapes and recreates the cultural geography of Buddhism on the basis of available archaeological evidences and textual sources; primary or secondary, printed or documented, published or unpublished. In this respect, the memoirs of the Buddhist Monk, Xuanzang, became a scientific evidence.

The Spread of Buddhism and Diffusion of Buddhist Culture

The spread of Buddhism and diffusion of Buddhist culture was a multifaceted phenomenon. It included both, the activities of Merchants and Monks. Spatial interactions of Merchants and Monks (Contact and Exchange of Ideas and Ideologies), extended the diffusion of culture in several directions (with temporally varying rates in spatial domain).

It is believed that the interactions of oasis cities determined the location of the Buddhist shrines. It is based on the assumption that the intensity of the spatial interaction of oasis cities determined their attraction (gravitation) for location and agglomeration of Buddhist shrines. (The gravity model is useful for locational analysis and interaction too. It constitutes an important reference to determine the interactions of oasis cities.)

The documentary sources as well as the archaeological evidence prove the contact between the oasis cities and external regions. Notwithstanding the great mountain barriers of Himalayas, Hindu Kush and Karakoram, there existed overland trade links between India and Central Asia since ancient times. It exerted strong influence on the socio-economic developments in both the regions. The caravan traders acted as the medium of exchange of art and culture, ideas-ideologies and technology (Warikoo, K, 1996) thereby assisting in the process of cultural diffusion.

The Origin, Spread and Decline of Buddhism in Central Asia

The archeological research has revealed the existence of numerous Buddhist shrine in the oasis cities along the trade routes in Central Asia. This area was part of historical region of Parthia, Bactria and Sogdiana.

Buddhist shrines were also located in the city of Marv (Litvinsky B. A. 1996, Buryakov Y.F, and Others, 1999). Marv was under Buddhist influence in the late Parthian period (during the 1st-2nd centuries A.D.). Large number of other buddhist shrines were concentrated in and around Termez (Litvinsky B. A. 1996, Buryakov Y.F, and Others, 1999). In the northwestern part of Termez, adjacent to the Amu Darya, there was a large Buddhist center called Kara Tepe (Kara Tappe) (Litvinsky B. A. 1996). Adjacent to the Kara Tepe, there was another monastery. It was situated at Fayaz Tepe (Fayyaz Tappe) (Buryakov Y.F, and Others, 1999). There was a stupa, situated inside the monastery. The Fayaz Tepe monastery had painted walls, covered by paintings Buddha. It has also revealed different sculptures. In the vicinity of Shurkhan Darya, the

Zurmala Tower, is a big stupa (it had its existence during II-IV AD), (Litvinsky B. A. 1996, Buryakov Y.F., and Others, 1999) A Buddhist complex was also found in Ayrtam, close to the Amu Darya, in the west of Termez. The Buddhist chapel and a stupa of Zar Tepe also reveals the existence of Buddhist monuments (Litvinsky B. A. 1996).

A small town now known as Dalverzin Tepe on the border of the Surkhan Darya and the Hissar river valleys in Uzbekistan was another large Buddhist center (Litvinsky B. A. 1996, Buryakov Y.F, and Others, 1999). At the confluence of the Kafirnigan River and the Amu Darya there was a Buddhist monastery of Kushan period. This place is known as Ustur-mullo. There was a huge monastery in Ustur Mullo (Litvinsky B. A. 1996). It had a huge stupa situated inside the monastery. The monastery was decorated with paintings and murals.

Another significant Buddhist center existed at Adjina Tepe. The Adjina Tepe had a Buddhist monastery (Buryakov Y.F, and Others, 1999). In Khuttal area also, Buddhist complexes dating to the 7th-8th centuries were discovered. Other Buddhist sites include the Khisht Tepe monastery, the Kalai Kafirnigan and Kafyr Kala sanctuaries.

In the upper Zeravshan valley (in Tadjikistan) Penjikent has yielded fragmentary representation of Buddha and Sogdian Buddhist inscriptions. (Litvinsky B. A. 1996) Close to Bishkek, ruins of Buddhist monastery and two temples has been found from Ak Beshim (ancient Suyab). (Buryakov Y.F, and Others, 1999) Buddhist monuments were also found in Kuva in Ferghana and especially in Semirechye (Kyrgyzstan) in the Chu Valley, (Litvinsky B. A. 1996). Although Buddhism was not widespread in these areas.

The Oasis Cities and Towns

The Inherent Factors, Responsible for Spatial Expansion of Buddhism

Natural Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">resources (available land and water resources)
Social and Cultural Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">population size of the oasis cities and towns,
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">social and cultural attribute in urban space,sociocultural diversity, (multi-cultural society)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">inherent adaptability of Buddhism (due to their intrinsic characteristics)
Economic Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">economic activities in arid areas and the capacity of production,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• sustainable agricultural and pastoral economy,
Other Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• advantageous location along the trade route,
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• accessibility to the location

The location and Agglomeration of the Buddhist Shrines

The traditional location theory and spatial interaction theory reveals different dimensions of the location of Buddhist shrines in oasis cities. It can be illustrated by means of several examples; The oasis cities of Turkestan, such as Balkh, Menv (Mary), Termez, Samarkand, Chach (or Shash, present-day Tashkent) and Khorezm (Khiva) were well-known center of trade and culture. These oasis cities were linked by trade routes for millennia. The great silk route made these oases cities to become an integral part of the regional economy. Buddhism spanned from Indian and spread in to the Chinese cultural realms by moving along these trade routes - across the deserts and mountains and the oasis cities of Central Asia.

The agglomeration of Buddhist shrines within the regional space indicates the relationship between potential of settlements (attraction of settlements) and their spatial interaction (regional interaction).

Major Themes in the Spatial Distribution or Location of Buddhist Shrines

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The spatial distribution or spatial location of oasis cities is largely restrained and influenced by its natural condition. Thus, scattered over the large area at the edges of oasis or along river and clustered along the trade route.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The spatial distribution or spatial location of Buddhist shrines exhibits a typical pattern of agglomeration in urban areas. Its spatial clustering in the oasis cities exhibits the obvious preference to the agglomeration in urban areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The spatial distribution or spatial location of Buddhist shrines also depends on the carrying capacity of the oasis cities (the carrying capacity of resources and environment of the oasis, the size of population and aggregate economy of the oasis; based on the premise that the carrying capacity decides the sustainability of the city)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The spatial patterns of distribution or agglomeration of Buddhist shrines reveals that it was dependant on the spatial interaction of oasis cities along the trade route in the Central Asia. [the spatial interaction of oasis cities depends on the reciprocal relationship (trade) between oasis cities]

- The geography, i.e. place and space of Buddhist shrines makes the oasis cities a powerful core and the radiant source to impel the spread of Buddhism in the regional space.
- The diffusion of Buddhism in the oasis cities was dependent on the interaction among cities. The spatial interaction among the oasis cities determined or defined the location of Buddhist shrines. The spatial interaction essentially causes isolated cities to spatially integrate with one another.
- Agglomeration and concentration of Buddhist shrines in oasis cities along the trade route increased the spheres of influence of Buddhist shrines. The neighbourhood influence on the surrounding space helped in diffusion of Buddhism in Central Asia and even beyond its boundaries.
- The phenomenon of diffusion or the spread of cultural elements of Buddhism was facilitated by the frequent movement of Merchants and Monks. The spatial interaction of monks and merchants affected the spatial expansion of Buddhism in Central Asia.
- The spread of Buddhism in Central Asia was dependant on the regional sustainability (socioeconomic sustainability) and political stability. It was supported by the favour extended by the Kushan Kings. It is an important determinant in the spread of Buddhism in Central Asia.
- The spatial interaction among the oasis cities can explain the concentration of Buddhist shrines along the silk route. The diffusion of Buddhism in different oasis cities was the effects of spatial interaction of the oasis cities. Thus, we can argue that spatial interaction among oasis cities defined the spread of Buddhism in Central Asia.

CONCLUSION

In the Central Asian region, Buddhism flourished in the oasis cities along the silk route. These oasis and other great cities contributed in the expansion of Buddhism.

It offered a new religious and philosophical alternative to the societies and communities existing and surviving in the cultural space of Central Asia. It influenced the cultural and religious life of the societies and communities living in different oasis cities along the silk route. It fostered peaceful co-existence and added religious or cultural pluralism in the cultural space of Central Asia. Thus, it left deep impact on them. The Buddhism also witnessed a new phase of creativity in these cities.

Buddhism has had its impact on societies and communities of Central Asia for several centuries. The main contribution of Buddhism to the cities of Central Asia is in the domain of literature, art (sculptures and paintings), architecture, music and other spheres of life.

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