

Earliest Xuanzang Portrait ?: Identifying the ‘Chinese’
Figure in Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram
ภาพเหมือน พระถังซำจั๋ง ที่เก่าแก่ที่สุด?: การระบุอัตลักษณ์
ภาพเหมือนแบบ ‘จีน’ ในตึรุ ปารเมศวรา วินนาคาราม

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Abstract

Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram, also known as Vaikunta Perumal Temple, is located in Kanchi (also known as Kanchipuram) in Tamil Nadu, a state in the southern part of India. Exquisite carvings are sculpted on the walls of the front porch of this temple. Some extraordinary details of certain carvings, like several Eastern Asian-like figures (with Mongoloid facial features) among the sculpture reliefs, are noteworthy. The intellectual-cultural exchanges between India and China had a long history and reached their height during the Sui-Tang period (broadly from the 6th to early 10th centuries A.D.). A large number of Chinese pilgrims, like monks, were sent to India to study Buddhism, and in return, many Indian monks and pilgrims also came to teach in China. In addition, Kanchi, where Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram is located, had been an important port connecting India with other foreign countries (including far-east countries

like ancient China) in ancient times. Thus, it is understandable that Chinese travellers were depicted in Indian ancient art. However, one question would be raised: Who might be these figures? In this paper, I attempted to identify two important Chinese figures carved in Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram, respectively, Xuanzang and Wang Xuance, who travelled to India during the 7th century A.D., by utilising some important clues and details observed.

Keywords: Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram, Chinese travellers, Xuanzang, Wang Xuance

บทคัดย่อ

มหาวิหารติรุ ปารเมศวรา วินนาคาราม หรือ วัดไวณุกุนตาปรูมาล ตั้งอยู่ ณ เมือง กาญจิปุรัม รัฐทมิฬนาฑู ทางตอนใต้ของประเทศอินเดีย ณ วัดแห่งนี้มีงานสลักนูนต่ำอันวิจิตรงดงามบริเวณกำแพงด้านหน้าทางเข้าของวัด งานสลักบางชิ้นของวัดแห่งนี้เชื่อว่ามีความพิเศษ ตระการตาและหาชมได้ยาก กล่าวคือ ภาพสลักนูนต่ำรูปคนที่มีรูปลักษณ์เหมือนชาวเอเชีย ตะวันออก ภาพชาวเอเชียตะวันออกที่เรียงรายหลากสีส้น ทั้งหลายเหล่านี้ชวนสะดุดตาเป็นอย่างมาก การแลกเปลี่ยนทางวัฒนธรรมและภูมิปัญญาระหว่างประเทศอินเดียและประเทศจีนนั้นมีประวัติศาสตร์อันยาวนาน และเกิดการเปลี่ยนแปลงอย่างรุ่งเรืองสูงสุดในสมัยราชวงศ์สุ่ยถึงราชวงศ์ถัง นักแสวงบุญชาวจีน เช่น พระสงฆ์ ถูกส่งไปยังอินเดียเพื่อศึกษาพระพุทธศาสนา และในทางกลับกัน พระและนักแสวงบุญชาวอินเดียจำนวนมากเดินทางมายังประเทศจีนเช่นกัน ยิ่งไปกว่านั้นในเขตกาญจิ พื้นที่ตั้งแห่งมหาวิหารนี้ในอดีตเป็นพื้นที่ท่าด่านที่สำคัญที่เชื่อมระหว่างประเทศอินเดียกับนานาประเทศ ดังนั้น จึงอนุมานได้ว่า งานสลักที่พบข้างต้นเป็นภาพเหมือนของนักเดินทางชาวจีนที่เดินทางไปแลกเปลี่ยนภูมิปัญญาและถูกวาดลงในงานศิลปะโบราณของอินเดีย อย่างไรก็ตาม หนึ่งในคำถามที่เกิดขึ้น คือ ใครคือบุคคลในภาพ? ในบทความชิ้นนี้ ผู้เขียนพยายามจะระบุอัตลักษณ์บุคคลของชาวจีนในภาพวาดสำคัญสองชิ้นงานที่ถูกสลักในมหาวิหารติรุ ปารเมศวรา วินนาคารามตามลำดับ ได้แก่ พระถังซำจั๋ง และ

วังชวน นักการทูตจีนคนสำคัญ ตามลำดับ ทั้งสองถือเป็นสองบุคคลสำคัญที่เคยเดินทางไปเยือนประเทศอินเดียระหว่างช่วงคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 7 โดยระบุอัตลักษณ์ผ่านร่องรอยข้อบ่งชี้และรายละเอียดสำคัญบางประการที่สามารถสังเกตเห็นได้

คำสำคัญ: มหาวิหารติรุ ปารเมศวรา วินนาคาราม, นักเดินทางชาวจีน, พระถังซำจั๋ง, นักการทูตวังชวน

Introduction

Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram, a temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu, is considered the second-oldest extant temple in Kanchi, which was built during the reign of the Pallava dynasty. There are 108 such temples dedicated to Vishnu (known as Divya Desam), and Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram is one of them. This temple is believed to have been built in the 8th century A.D. during the reign of King Narasimhavarman II. However, the locals and some scholars like Hultzh claimed that it was built much earlier.¹ It is based on a rectangular plan and has a stepped pyramid-shaped roof with three levels. Each level has one sanctuary, and each sanctuary houses one

¹ See B.V., Ramanujam, *History of Vaishnavism in South India Upto Ramanuja*. Annamalai University, 1973. Hultzh believed this temple was constructed in 690 A.D. According to the local priest Mr Devarajan, who has been serving inside the temple for many years, this temple was constructed from the 6th to 8th centuries A.D. (not later than the 8th century A.D.) (See the video clip of the interview of Devarajan shot by the author Huang Lele).

statue of Vishnu. The temple's external walls consist of cloisters with the carvings of sculptures depicting the history of the Pallava dynasty, the life of the Pallava kings, the battle scenes or important events during the rule of the Pallavas, the humans and gods.

Among the sculpture reliefs on the walls, the author found some extraordinary details of certain carvings, as the images show below, are noteworthy. As we can see from Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, among a group of Indian figures, one non-Indian figure with Mongoloid features is following behind an Indian figure who is shown with folded hands facing the god or king sitting on a throne, with his body slightly bent, and face turned to another direction. This man is depicted with a thin body, elongated eyes, a flat and small nose, a moustache above his lips and an elongated beard on his chin, which shares resemblances with the facial features of a Chinese man (Fig. 3). As a matter of fact, there are few studies on Chinese figures in ancient Indian art.

Fortunately, Prof. Rajarajan's discourse on the imagery of monks-Bodhidharma and Aravana-Atikal in visual art, he examines the facial anatomy of the Buddha with reference to monks who propagated Buddhism, to an extent, providing a way of identifying the Chinese faces. (Rajarajan, 2019, pp. 4 - 17) "The faces in Chinese and Japanese art are square or oblong with sharp eyes, thinly sprouting hair moustache and beard that are Mongoloid..." (Ibid., p. 5) However, "faces in Indian art...are with broad eyes and with prominent noses..."

(Ibid.) Prof. Rajarajan finds out that “none of the faces in Pallava art is akin to what we find among the Chinese, Cambodian, Vietnamese or Japanese visuals” (Ibid., p. 7) and “the faces are mostly of the Indo-Aryan type pan-Indian, Gupta to Vijayanagara-Nayaka through Pallava and Chola”. (Ibid.) Besides, he mentions that racial miscegenation was discouraged in Indian society, and it is easy to differentiate an Indian from European-American, Chinese-Japanese and African. (Ibid., p. 12) Due to the continuing tradition that the Pallava contact with China since time immemorial, Prof. Rajarajan’s observation precisely helps to prove that the Mongoloid-featured figure is most probably a Chinese.

Certain questions could be raised: Why was a Chinese person depicted in such an ancient Brahmanical Temple in South India? Who could this Chinese person be? Since no such study has been aimed at identifying the figure, therefore, in this paper, I attempt to identify the antecedents of this figure by analyzing the available historical records and archaeological evidence.



Fig. 1 Carvings on the wall of Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram Temple
Source: Photo by Author



Fig. 2 Carvings on the wall of Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram Temple
Source: Photo by Author



Fig. 3 Seven Sages and Rong Qiqi, Brick Relief, 5th century,
Nanjing Museum

Source:

<http://www.kaogu.net.cn/html/cn/kaoguyuandi/kaogubaike/2014/1022/47934>

Exchanges between ancient India and China have witnessed a long history with a time span of thousands of years, and the cultural ties between the two countries can be traced back to a very early period. China was mentioned many times as “Cina” in Indian Sanskrit epics and texts like Mahabharat, Ramayana, Arthasastra, Manusmruti and etc.² Archaeological evidence also proves that the region of Shu (now Sichuan Prov.) had material exchanges with neighbouring regions such as India and Myanmar during the period of Spring and Autumn-

² In terms of Arthasastra, “silk and silk clothing is produced in Cina (now China)”. According to Mahabharat, “the gift is brought by the people from Cina in Rajasuya Yajna of the Pandavas”.

Warring States (770 B.C.-220 B.C.).

Early connections between ancient India and China mainly rely on four routes. The first route is a northwestern way (known as the Northwest Silk Route), starting from the Xinjiang area and crossing Central Asia to reach India; the second is in a southwesterly direction (known as Southwest Silk Route), starting from Sichuan Prov. and passing Myanmar to arrive India; the third one (known as Tubo Route) started from Tibet and crossed Nepal to reach India, and the fourth one (known as Silk Route on Sea) started from Chinese ports (like Guangzhou and Quanzhou) in south China to south India by sea.

According to Chinese historical records, Buddhism was transmitted to China around the 2nd century B.C., and Emperor Ming of the Han dynasty sent missionaries through the Silk Route to acquire the Buddhist sutras and invite Indian Buddhist masters around 67 A.D.³ Afterwards, a large number of Chinese pilgrims and missionaries were sent to India to study Buddhism, and in return, many Indian monks and pilgrims also came to teach in China. Intellectual-cultural exchange between India and China also reached its height during the Tang period (618-907 A.D.), around the same time period as the reign of King Narasimhavarman II. Thus, it is necessary to ascertain the

³ See Fan Ye, *Houhan Shu (Book of Later Han)*, written in 398-445 A.D. Or see *Zizhi Tongjian (Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance)*, Vol. 45, compiled by Sima Guang, published in 1084 A.D.

identities of missionaries who could have come to India before or during the time period of the construction of Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram.

As per historical records like *Fo-guo Ji (Biography of Faxian/Records of Country of Buddha)*, *Gao-seng Zhuan (Biographies of Eminent Monks)*, *Nan-hai Ji-gui Nei-fa Zhuan (A Record of Buddhist Practices Sent Home from Southern Sea)* among others, monks like Monk Huirui (420-479. A.D.), Zhimen (404 A.D.), Tanzuan (404 A.D.), Faxian, Xuanzang, Yijing and etc., missionaries like Li Yibiao (643), Wang Xuan'ce, (643 A.D., 646 A.D., 657 A.D.), Jiang Shiren (646 A.D.) among others, other pilgrims and merchants had travelled to India before and during the time period of the construction of this temple. There is evidence concerning the movements of multiple Chinese monks and pilgrims in this time period; hence it might be challenging to plot the exact identity of the figures.

People who could be sculpted on the wall of a sacred Brahmanical Temple ought to be those who are either important, famous or had been to the place where the temple was located. Particularly in Fig. 2, the Chinese figure, large in size, is sitting in a “royal ease” pose with a group of people surrounding him and showing their respect to him. Thus, among all travellers, Monk Faxian, Xuanzang, Yijing and Envoy Wang Xuan'ce met the requirements. Among these candidates, who could be the Chinese represented on the wall? In the following section, I will compare the historical records

of the above-mentioned figures with the physical representation of the Chinese figures on the wall, along with the related events of Kanchi during that time period, to identify the figures represented on the wall. Do these two depict the same figure in that they are doubly represented in a continuous scene on the wall? Or are they actually two different Chinese figures?



Fig. 1-1

Source: Photo by Author



Fig. 2-1

Source: Photo by Author

First of all, as we can see in the images from Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, the one in Fig.1 is portrayed as being thinner, without a round belly compared with the other in Fig. 2. Furthermore, the headwear or the hairstyles of the two figures are totally different. The figure in Fig. 1 is depicted as bareheaded or as covered with a thin layer of cloth, unlike the other one who is sculpted with a cap or helmet-like object

or hair bun on top of his head, which again indicates the fact that the artist consciously underlined that these two are different persons. Moreover, as far as I am concerned, the figure depicted in Fig. 1 actually is a Chinese travelling monk. The Chinese viewers definitely will consider the person in Fig. 1 as either wearing a small round cap or wearing a thin piece of cloth. However, archaeological evidence of the portraits of Indian monks with the same depiction of the head (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5) precisely proves my assertion.



Fig. 4 Buddha and Five Monks, Gandhara
2nd -3rd centuries A.D.



Fig. 5 A Panel Piece, Gandhara
2nd -3rd centuries A.D.

Source (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5): Provided by Prof. Y. S. Alone

But one still may ask: according to the records of Buddhist sutras, monks have to shave their hair- moustache and beard, but why does the Chinese monk have a moustache above his lips and a

long beard on his chin? Do Chinese monks not have to shave their moustache and beard? Then why is this monk here still depicted with a moustache and long beard? From my point of view, there could be some reasons to explain this kind of phenomenon. First of all, the artisans intentionally carved him with a moustache and long beard to emphasize his identity of being a Chinese who visited India, highlighting him among a group of a crowd of Indian locals.

Secondly, as the early Gandharan art shows, some statues of Buddha and Bodhisattvas are depicted with a moustache. Thus, the sculptors might have been inspired by the aesthetic of Gandhara art and incorporated their own understanding of the Buddhist monk with the representation of the physical appearance of a Chinese, which combines both Indian and Chinese aesthetics together on this Chinese monk. “Early medieval centuries also witnessed the emergence of urban centres of relatively modest dimensions, as market centres, trade centres (fairs, etc.) which were primarily points of the swap network... These centers were brought into a network of intra-local and inter-local trade as well as overseas trade through itinerant merchant organizations and the royal ports”.⁴ Thus, massive trade centres as such were set up with the support of royal families from the 5th century A.D. onwards and reached the peak from 8th century to 12th century A.D.

⁴ See *India from 8th Century to Mid 15th Century*, NIILM University.

In South India, Kanchipuram of the Pallavas, with their royal port at Malallapuram, served as a part of pilgrimage and trade centres, together with Madurai. Throughout these centuries, these royal ports and pilgrimage centres linked the coast cities like Kanchipuram with Central and North India, even the countries of South Asia, Southeast Asia, Arab countries and China. Thus, it is not surprising to see the artefacts from the Gandhara region in the pilgrimage and trade centre Kanchi. Archaeologist Gopinatha's discovery precisely verifies my speculation. Kanchi in ancient India was known as a famous Buddhist centre, and archaeological evidence also proves that the vibrant presence of Buddhist vestiges still remains in Kanchi.

Gopinatha observed that the standing Buddha (dated to 5th century A.D. and now housed in Chennai Museum) resembles both Amravati and Gandhara statues in style, (T.A. Gopinath Rao, 1915, p. 127) which indicates the fact that Gandhara art had reached Kanchi in ancient times and people in Kanchi had a chance to see the Gandhara style Buddhist icons and aesthetics. Thirdly, the non-Chinese garment this Chinese monk is wearing, more like an Indian dhoti, precisely proves the possibility that artisans and sculptors would integrate some other non-Chinese cultural elements into the imagery of this traveller.

If this argument is still not convincing enough to identify him as a monk, the following evidence that will be given might be solid enough. Though this Chinese figure possesses some special elements

like a moustache, beard and non-Chinese garment and etc., which creates confusion in identifying his identity as a Chinese monk, I observed that this figure (Fig. 1-2) shares striking similarities with Xuanzang (Figs. 6, 7, 8) and travelling monks (Figs. 9-17) represented in Chinese art, even Korean and Japanese art. Travelling monks, also called itinerant monks, are known as Xingjiao Seng in ancient China. The portraits of itinerant monks started to be popularized in the 9th century A.D. (late Tang dynasty) in China and became a new genre of Buddhist paintings in other Asian countries like Korea and Japan.



Fig. 1-1

Source: Photo by Author



Fig. 1-2

Source: Photo by Author



Fig. 6 Xuanzang stele⁵
Xingjiao Temple, Xi'an



Fig. 7 Xuanzang, 1185-1133 A.D.⁶
Tokyo National Museum

Source (Fig. 6):

<http://zhoubao.minghui.org/mh/haizb/media/files/2012/01/xuanzang.jpg>

Source (Fig. 7):

https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%8E%84%E5%A5%98#/media/File:Xuanzang_w.jpg

⁵ According to the inscription of the stele, it was carved in 1933 by Guo Xi'an. It is also mentioned in the Record of Reconstruction of Ci-en Pagoda that this is a copy of a Tang painting of Xuanzang.

⁶ According to the illustration of this painting from Japan, this painting was copied from a sample of China.



Fig. 8 Xuanzang, 1185-1133 A.D.



Fig. 8-1 (detail) Namyoji (Nanming Temple), Nara

Source:

<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/fayin/dharma/2011.1/g2k1101f08.htm>



Fig. 9 Itinerant Monk, 9th century
No. 1138, Louvre Museum



Fig. 10 Itinerant Monk, 9th century
E0.1141

Source (Fig. 9 and Fig. 10): Photo by Leonard Kheifets



Fig. 11 Itinerant Monk, 9th century
Dunhuang, British Museum



Fig. 12 Itinerant Monk, Ch. 00380
Hermitage Museum

Source (Fig. 11 and Fig. 12): Photo by Leonard Kheifets



Fig. 13 Itinerant Monk
9th century
MG. 17683, Guimet Museum



Fig. 14 Itinerant Monk,
1038-1227 A.D.
Cave 308, Mogao grottoes

Source (Fig. 13 and Fig. 14): Photo by Leonard Kheifets



Fig. 15 Itinerant Monk, 9th century
P. 4518, National Library of France



Fig. 16 Itinerant Monk
National Museum of Korea

Source (Fig. 15 and Fig. 16): Photo by Leonard Kheifets



Fig. 17 Itinerant Monk, carved on tower brick
Northern Song dynasty (960-1127 A.D.)
National Museum of China



Fig. 18 Itinerant Monk
15th century
Tibet

Source (Fig. 17 and Fig. 18):

<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/fayin/dharma/2011.1/g2k1101f08.htm>

According to the extant images, the iconography of the

itinerant monks could be mainly categorized into two types: Han Chinese style and Hu⁷ style. Han Chinese style, as its name implies, depicts the representation of the monk as associated with Han Chinese elements, no matter his face, clothing or even depiction of his attendants. On the contrary, the Hu style is connected with the features of non-Han Chinese like the deep and pointed nose, foreign face (to Han Chinese) or alien garments and a tiger as an accompaniment.

Though the imagery of Xuanzang in Fig. 7 undoubtedly is depicted in the typical Chinese style, surprisingly, we still can see him depicted with some special elements like skeletons and earrings. Matsumoto Eiichi held the idea that the phenomenon of monks travelling to the western regions allows people to associate these two styles with each other. Thus, Xuanzang sometimes is represented in the Hu style.⁸

⁷ Hu, a collective designation given to the non-Han ethnic group by Han Chinese, mainly refers to the nomadic people on the Eurasian steppe. However, till the Tang dynasty, “Hu” particularly referred to the people from the West Regions (Xi-yu in Chinese) with deep noses in terms of *Fan-yin Ming-yi Ji* (*The Collection of the Translated Names* in English).

⁸ Matsumoto Eiichi, *The Study of Paintings of Dunhuang* (Volume of Iconography, Chapter 4), Dohosha Printing, 1985 (or Chinese version, see

Wang Jingfen assumed that the Hu style imagery of itinerant monks inspired the artists to represent Xuanzang in the same way.⁹ Tucci believed that the earrings Xuangzang is wearing were the ornaments of Indian or Tibetan ascetics. (Giuseppe, 1988) Besides, Prof. Li Ling considered that the skeletons he is wearing is associated with Xuanzang 's protector, Shen-sha Da-shen (God of Deep Sand) and might have esoteric influences. (Li Ling, 2012, pp. 40 - 53) For me, Matsumoto Eiichi, Wang Jingfen and Prof. Li Ling' s ideas again prove that it allows the person in Fig. 1 to absorb some other foreign influences and elements. Thus, the monk with a moustache and beard in Fig. 1 might be inspired by that in Fig. 18.

In spite of the weathering of this icon, we still can easily point out the umbrella (marked in red) held above the Chinese figure's head (Fig. 1) and the whisk (marked in yellow) just beneath the umbrella in his left hand are the same objects as those of Xuanzang and itinerant monks holding in Fig. 7- Fig. 10. As a result, there is no doubt that the figure depicted is a travelling monk. Besides, it seems that there is one round-shaped object near his right shoulder, and I speculate that it is most probably the scroll of a Buddhist manuscript

Zhejiang University Press, 2019). Or see Wang Huimin, *New Exploration on the Itinerant Images of Dunhuang*, (Journal) Chinese Culture Quarterly, 1995.

⁹ See Wang Jingfen or Wong Dorothy C., *The Making of a Saint: Images of Xuanzang in East Asia*, History-Early Medieval China, 2002.

or text housed in his bamboo backpack. The uneven backside of this Chinese figure might suggest that something is behind him.

In addition, one tiny detail we should note is the slightly bent body of this Chinese monk. Why is this figure bending? In my view, on the one hand, this body pose shows his respect for the king or god on the left side. On the other hand, it seemingly indicates that he is carrying something so heavy on his back that he has to bend to hold the weight of the burden. Thus, I believe the bamboo backpack was supposed to be there on his back, but now it is missing due to the weathering of the sculpture. The above evidence and analysis show the fact that the Chinese person in Fig. 1 is definitely a Chinese itinerant monk who travelled to India.

Till now, it has become easier to ascertain the exact identity of the Chinese person in Fig. 1 once we have proved him as a Chinese monk. Then who might be this monk? Faxian? Xuanzang? Or Yijing? Though both Faxian and Yijing are renowned Chinese monks who had travelled to India for acquiring Buddhist sutras and texts and made a great contribution to the development of Buddhism in China, in terms of historical records, both Faxian and Yijing had not been to the state of Tamil Nadu in south India where the Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram is located.

As a point of interest during his travelling in India, Xuanzang stayed in Kanchi for some time to study Theravada Tripitaka and Yogacara-bhumi-sastra around mid-7th century A.D. and gave a

detailed description of the Pallava Kingdom in his travelling account,¹⁰ which accords with the scene depicting Xuan-zang as a travelling monk who has come to acquire and learn Buddhist sutras and texts in this Buddhist centre. Besides, Xuanzang had also participated in grand events like preaching Yogacara-bhumi-sastra in Nalanda and debating with masters from Brahmanical and other religious sects in Qu-nv Cheng (All-women Kingdom), which made him well known in entire India.¹¹ All the evidence proves that the Chinese monk carved in Fig. 1 most probably is Xuanzang.

It is interesting and necessary to note that up to now, the iconography of itinerant monks did not appear before Xuanzang's journey. After Xuanzang's success in travelling to India, seeking Buddhist law and preaching Buddhist law became active; thus, people would see lots of Chinese or foreign illiterate monks travelling around and started to become familiar with the images of itinerant monks. The extant earliest iconography of illiterate monks is dated to the 9th century A.D., and afterwards, these kinds of images began to be

¹⁰ See Xuanzang, *Da-Tang Xi-yu Ji (Great Tang Records on the Western Regions)*, Tang dynasty. Or see *Da-Tang Da Ci-en Si San-zang Fa-shi Zhuan Xu (The Preface of the Biography of Tripitaka Masters of Great Tang)*, compiled by master Huili (Xuanzang's disciple).

¹¹ See Xuanzang, *Da-Tang Xi-yu Ji (Great Tang Records on the Western Regions)*, Tang dynasty.

popularized. It is believed that the images of Xuanzang served as the prototype for the later imagery of itinerant monks. However, due to the absence of the early images of Xuanzang, we can only speculate with respect to how he was depicted in the earlier period through the iconography of these travelling monks.

However, with the discovery of the Xuanzang image (Fig. 1) carved on the wall of Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram Temple in India, one could have a glimpse of Xuanzang's early images. Though it could not be confirmed whether Xuanzang in Fig. 1 was portrayed with a bamboo backpack or not due to the weathering of the sculpture, it seems that in the 8th century A.D., Xuanzang at least was depicted with similar objects as an umbrella and whisk with the latter ones.

After Xuanzang's return back to China, the emperor of Tang appointed Wu Zhiming (a Chinese painter) to paint portraits of ten masters, which were meant for worship, and Xuanzang was one of the ten masters.¹² Unfortunately, all of the ten paintings were lost. But why was he portrayed together with the other nine masters instead of being portrayed alone since he was well known in the entire country and had important status? Does it suggest the real attitude of the royal court towards Xuanzang or even Buddhism? In

¹² See *Da-Tang Da Ci-en Si San-zang Fa-shi Zhuan Xu (The Preface of the Biography of Tripitaka Masters of Great Tang)*, Vol. 8.

China, a country with a long history and tradition of portrait painting, as such a great, famous and successful person, why was Xuanzang barely portrayed?

Then his portrait later appeared Yulin caves of Dunhuang (Gansu Prov.) during the late Western Xia period (1038-1227 A.D.). Xuanzang returned to Chang'an (now Xi'an) in 645 A.D. after his journey to India, but why does his portrait start to appear only after several centuries? Why was his image seemingly absent from Chinese art? How could such a renowned person not get portraits made at that time? How come, even in distant regions where a large number of Buddhist caves were constructed, his images seem absent for around 500 years? Here, the new and important discovery of the itinerant monk Xuanzang (Fig. 1) found in Tiru Parameswara Vinnagaram Temple located in Kanchi of South India most probably is the earliest extant image of both Xuanzang and itinerant monk in art history. Here, some questions could be raised: Is this image of Xuanzang the only representation of him in India? Did the artisans carve it by following the missing Chinese painting of Xuanzang in China? Or did this image of Xuanzang serve as the prototype of the Chinese depiction of Xuanzang and itinerant monks? It requires further study.

In the following part, I am going to try to identify the Chinese figure in Fig. 2 . As I have discussed earlier, his head with a cap or helmet-like object or hair bun on top and the Chinese style ribbons

dropping from his seat indicates that he is a different Chinese person from Xuanzang in Fig. 1. Since no obvious evidence can prove him to be a monk, therefore, I prefer to consider him as an ordinary Chinese. Besides, he is portrayed in a larger size and is surrounded by a group of people, which suggests that he is someone who either had high status or had made a contribution to the Pallava Kingdom or even India. Who is this person? Why is he carved on the wall?

In the Tang period, in terms of historical records and literature sources like *Xin Tangshu (New Book of Tang)*, *Jiu Tangshu (Old Book of Tang)*, *Tongdian (Comprehensive Institutions)* and etc., there were many official contacts between China and India and both the countries had sent many envoys and messengers to each other. Among all the Chinese envoys sent to India, Wang Xuance, was an envoy from China to India during the Tang dynasty three times,¹³ is

¹³ In 643 A.D., Wang was first time sent to India as Li Yibiao's deputy or assistant ("Fushi" in Chinese) and returned back in 646 A.D. During this visit, he met King Jieri (known as Harshavardhana in India) and travelled to many Buddhist sites and went to the Jiamolu Kingdom. Till 647 A.D., he was sent to India as ambassador along with his deputy Jiang Shiren and other 30 mounted subordinates. With support from Tibet and Nepal, he defeated A-luo-na-shun (also known as Arunasva)'s rebellion after the death of Harshavardhana and captured and brought Arunasva to Chang'an (now Xi'an), the capital city of Tang dynasty. In 657 A.D., Wang was third time sent to India to present the cassock and attended the dharma assembly organized for him in Mahabodhi Temple in 660 A.D. Some scholars like Ji Xianlin held the idea that he had been sent to India four

the most renowned one in history. Importantly, he defeated A-luo-na-shun (also known as Arunasva)'s rebellion after the death of Harshavardhana with support from Tibet and Nepal, ending Arunasva's incursions into other kingdoms of ancient India. His great feat definitely had widely spread within India, and the Pallava Kingdom would also have heard about his heroic deeds. Thus, it is reasonable to see Wang Xuance carved on the wall of an Indian temple.

According to Chinese historical records and literature resources, China had maintained maritime trade with India for more than one thousand years. Especially during the Tang dynasty, the Silk Road became riskier and obstructed due to the fierce fight between Tang and Tibet from the end of the 7th century. As a result, the Maritime Silk Route got highly developed. This is the reason why later, so many travellers like Yijing and merchants chose the sea route to visit India after Xuanzang's return. Moreover, the connection between the Pallava Kingdom and Tang was very closely mapped in history. As one of the major ports of the Pallava Kingdom, Mamallapuram had trade ties with China and had been the meeting point of the Spice Road and Silk Route between India and China.

times and he was sent a fourth time to India in 662 A.D. to call the Master Xuanzhao back to China and look for Lujia Yiduo.

Tansen Sen observed that Mamallapuram had had more than 1700 years old historical defence and trade ties with China. This ancient port town had a defense pact between Pallavas and the Chinese aimed at securing Chinese territory from Tibet. Besides, Tansen Sen again put forward that around 720 A.D., Narasimhavarman II sent a diplomatic mission to China for requesting help to resist Arabian and Tibet's invasion of South Asia.¹⁴ Kayal Barabhavan claimed that the “Chinese declared Narasimhavarman II as the general of South China to take on Tibet” and “a piece of silk cloth with the printed declaration was sent by a Chinese delegation to Narasimhavarman II”. (Times of India, 2019, online)

In addition, there is another Chinese figure, depicted as being smaller in size and bending his body, on the top-right corner of the sitting Chinese in Fig. 2-2, if one observes clearly. As mentioned previously, Wang Xuance was sent to India 3 times and was appointed as the ambassador of a delegation of 30 mounted subordinates along with his deputy Jiang Shiren in 647 A.D.¹⁵, which explains the appearance of a tiny Chinese figure beside him. Thus, in my opinion, the tiny figure around him might be his assistant Jiang Shiren.

¹⁴ See Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400*, University of Hawaii Press, 2003.

¹⁵ See my footnotes No. 15 of this paper or see *Jiu Tangshu (Old Book of Tang)* and *Xin Tangshu (New Book of Tang)*.

Regarding the military cooperation and the trade ties between the Pallava Kingdom and Tang, it sounds quite convincing that King Narasimhavarman II commanded the artisans and sculptors to record the historical events to emphasize the great importance and contribution of Xuanzang and Wang Xuance in history.



Fig. 2



Fig. 2-2 (with red mark)

Source: Photo by Author

One more interesting detail that could be touched upon is that at the beginning, apart from Wang Xuance, there was another option considered for the Chinese person in Fig. 2 when I read the historical records that “the King of Qie-mo-lu Kingdom sent the delegation to Tang to acquire the image of Laozi/Lao Tzu (an ancient philosopher and the founder of Taoism) and *Daode Jing*” mentioned in *Jiu Tangshu* (*Old Book of Tang*) and *Xin Tangshu* (*New Book of Tang*). Thus, Emperor Taizong of Tang commanded Xuanzang to

translate *Daode Jing* into Sanskrit and got both the images of Laozi and the Sanskrit version of *Daode Jing* sent to India. However, there has been no further information regarding whether the image of Laozi and the Sanskrit version of *Daode Jing* was spread.

Nonetheless, the location of the Qie-mo-lu Kingdom is still deputed: scholars like Yang Mingkao considered it as an ancient name of Kashmir;¹⁶ scholars like Feng Chengjun assumed that it was an ancient name of Assam.¹⁷ However, personally speaking, seen from the available historical materials, there is not enough evidence to prove that Laozi was associated with the Pallava Kingdom or Taoism was once prevalent and worshipped in South India. If more direct archaeological evidence is to be unearthed in the future, the identity of the Chinese person in Fig. 2 might open up for Laozi (with one of his disciples beside him) too.

¹⁶ See Lin Meicun, Jin Wenjing, Chai Jianhong, Zhang Guangda, Rong Xinjiang, Zhao Feng, Qi Dongfang, Cai Hongsheng and Cui Wei, *Western Regions: The Transit Station of the Exchange of Chinese and Foreign Civilization*, A City University of HK Press, 2009.

¹⁷ See Feng Chengjun, *Collection of Academic Works of Feng Chengjun's*, Shanghai Ancient Book Publishing House, 2015.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in terms of the analysis above, I speculate that the Chinese figure in Fig. 1 is the travelling monk Xuanzang, and the Chinese person in Fig. 2 most probably is Wang Xuance, and his attendant beside him might be his deputy Jiang Shiren. The process of identifying the Chinese figures helps to explore the cultural and intellectual exchanges between India and China during ancient times. Furthermore, this paper also attempts to convey a suggestion to some scholars, especially Chinese scholars who are doing Buddhist studies, that it is better not to limit oneself to Buddhism itself or avoid the reference to Brahmanism. One may find something astonishing in non-Buddhist sites instead of restricting oneself to accessing Buddhist archaeological sites and data.

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