

I-Tsing at the South Sea – The Buddhist Learning Journey

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Abstract: *This paper takes a more informed look into the personal life learning experience aspect of narrative analysis. The research method of narrative analysis was analyzed along with a narrative from the original literacy text written by I-tsing himself, the Chinese historical record of the T'ang Dynasty, as well as other commentaries ascribed by scholars in the various period to better demonstrate its validity. The humanistic geography - phenomenological approach was employed for a better understanding of the human world by studying people's relation with nature, their geographical behavior, as well as their feelings and ideas with regard to space and place. The researcher has invented a combined data analysis framework of Polkinghorne's Narrative Analysis and Humanistic Geography – Phenomenological Analysis to study in-depth the central reason of why I-tsing decided to set foot at the South Sea (Śrīvijaya) for such a long time carrying out his mission before returning to China after the completion of his study in India. The researcher has articulated the analyzed outcomes into three insightful findings as a response to the research inquiry. The three findings are: (1) The disagreeable conditions for allowing I-tsing to return home; (2) I-tsing needed a conducive platform for his return to China; and (3) The supportive conditions in Śrīvijaya. Each of the findings was explicated in lengthy detail and supported with various valid and reliable references, documentary facts, and case-studies of real-life stories.*

Keywords: I-tsing, South Seas, Srivijaya, life-learning, return home

Background of the study

Buddhism, from its birth land of India, spread into China and can be traced back to as early as the Han Dynasty (A.D. 25-200) — reaching its glorious peak during the T'ang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907). Numerous Chinese Buddhist pilgrims initiated their westbound journey to deepen their Buddhist knowledge and practice in the Buddha Land (天竺佛国 India). Among the most prominent and outstanding Chinese pilgrims to India were Fa Xian (A.D. 334-420), Xuan Zang (A.D. 602-664), and also, I-tsing (A.D. 635-713), the central character of this study. Nevertheless, not many research works had been done on I-tsing compared to the first two prominent characters, i.e., Fa Xian and Xuan Zang. The reason given by most of the scholars was there were not many reference materials collated with I-tsing. Under this circumstance, the researcher was inspired to do this research knowing that something could be done to rectify the situation by excavating and unearthing all the possible reference materials from various sources, especially those concealed and hidden behind the vast Chinese historical literary texts.

Furthermore, among the present works done by the scholars on I-tsing, the researcher found that there was a notable missing puzzle considered as an incomplete mission to fully describe the life-learning journey of I-tsing. The missing puzzle meant here is “the most reasons and factors prompting I-tsing to spend over a decade residing in the countries of the South Seas, mainly in the Śrīvijaya Kingdom. Even though most scholars choose to pay less attention to it or ignoring it, the researcher would prefer to highlight it and place it on the table of discussion to revive its existence. The researcher would instead consider it as a vital and significant mission to be able to fill up this missing puzzle. This is the reason why this study was conducted.

As one of the scopes and emphasis on human resource development (HRD), learning is at the heart of the organization. Learning has the power to enable individuals and organizations to fulfill their personal and collective goals and ambitions. Individuals may be transformed by their learning and also through learning, they may gain the power to transform the context in which they find themselves or to create new contexts for themselves. Learning potentially is transformative and emancipative. It is through learning that we can acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes that may enable us to function and perform more efficiently and effectively and exercise greater choice in our working and personal lives (Blackwell, 2016). The position adopted in this study is that the vast learning experiences gained by I-tsing throughout his entire life mission has the potential to contribute to the development of individuals and organizations, to enhance their performance in worthwhile and meaningful ways, and that the benefits to be accrued by the individual, the organization and broader society can be significant and mutually reinforcing.

Therefore, as a sincere Buddhist learner and practitioner, the researcher felt such a pity and bad for not knowing well this prominent ancient master who had contributed his whole life for the Buddha-sasana, particularly in the Buddhist texts translation and interpretation works. Even today, his works still have such a significant influence and impact, and is beneficial reference material, especially when tracing back to the 7th century's transportation and cultural evolution in Central and South-east Asia. I-tsing throughout his life had translated a total of 56 Buddhist Sanskrit Scriptures and more than 230 volumes of Buddhist texts into the Chinese Language, covering three major Buddhist Literature Texts (Tipitaka), i.e., Sutta (Discourse), Vinaya (Disciplinary Code) and Abhidhamma (Commentary). Hence, I-tsing, in the aspect of the history of Buddhism or the history of cultural exchanges had made an outstanding contribution. Perhaps this was another reason for the researcher to conduct this study.

Statement of the problem

I-tsing had stopped over and spent more than ten years traveling and carrying out his mission in various places in the South Sea, particularly in Śrīvijaya. He was, therefore, very familiar with the social situations in the South Sea countries. The reliability of the description in his writings regarding the social situation of the South Sea is relatively high. Notably, his two authentic self-writings, i.e., the “*A Record of the Inner Law Sent Home from the South Sea*” 《南海寄归内法传》, and the “*Biography of Eminent Monks Who Went to the West Region in Search of the Dharma During the Great T'ang Dynasty*” 《大唐西域求法高僧传》, left us a very precious historical treasure. It has become the most authoritative historical source to date, which recorded the life situation, and the real scene of the South Sea in general, and Śrīvijaya in particular, during the 7th century.

The achievements and contributions of I-tsing throughout his life, from his major work of Buddhist texts translations, till his self-written works on the history of Transportation, Language and cultural exchange between China and the outside world were an outstanding and remarkable achievement. According to the book of *Kai-yuan Manual Buddhist Collections* 《开元释教录》, a total of 56 books and 230 volumes of Buddhist texts were translated throughout his life.

Nevertheless, in between studying I-tsing and his life learning journey, a most curious question that always arises in mind is, “Why didn't I-tsing directly go back to his country of origin, China, to carry out his missionary works after the accomplishment of his learning in India?” Instead, he set foot in Śrīvijaya, a nation totally different in every aspect of his life, such as the spoken language, living style, as well as cultural background and practice. Therefore, the

major problem which needed an in-depth search for resolving the question of what were the reasons and factors that made I-tsing spent such a long time in the South Sea before and after his learning in India. Perhaps this is the crucial and most relevant part throughout I-tsing's learning experiences on highlighting the personal and interpersonal skills development in him, as he had become one of the leading figures during his time inside and outside China.

It is worthwhile to mention that even though scholars had done much research work in a different period regarding the life journey of I-tsing rarely had they taken enough attention on this particular aspect, or they might likely have not been very interested in it. Moreover, this is the main intention I am conducting this study.

Purpose of the Study

The primary concern of this research is to explore the most urging factors and the strong motivation which brought I-tsing to spend over a decade in his life for carrying out his life mission in the South Sea (Śrīvijaya). Hence, specifically, this study is conducted for answering the following research questions:

Research Question

What were the most urging factors and the strong motivation behind I-tsing's setting foot and spending over a decade in his life for carrying out his life mission in the South Sea (Śrīvijaya)?

Significance of the Study

This study is a significant endeavor for exploring and discussing in-depth the entire life learning journey of I-tsing. The outcome is precise and inclusive, especially the notable missing puzzle that so far none of the scholars, either in the past or in modern days were interested in or paid much attention to.

Secondly, this research is also helping to fill up the incomplete part of the historical record of the ancient Malay-peninsula ("*Sejarah Kuno Nusantara*" in the Indonesian Language) in the 6th – 7th century. From the two important literary works of I-tsing, which were accomplished during his 12 years stayed at Śrīvijaya, had handed down all the essential records describing the real situations and the social conditions at that time. Unfortunately, we could not gather much further information from the local historical records. The local modern historians and scholars even opined that, if without the precise record of I-tsing through his two books, they could lose the entire piece of record for this particular period of time, even though the Śrīvijaya Kingdom was one of the brilliant and flourishing kingdoms in the history of Indonesia around the 7th century. Therefore, the outcome of this study is also indirectly carrying out this incomplete mission.

Thirdly, this study is thoroughly conducted in English, so the result and outcome are written and presented in English. Therefore, this can be a helpful and valuable reference for those who can only understand English as we know that almost eighty to ninety percent of the reference sources which correlate to I-tsing were written in Chinese. There are only limited reference materials to be found in languages other than Chinese, such as in French, Japanese, English, and Indonesian.

Research Design

A research design is a journey from the intensely philosophical through the procedural to the practical and on to the final step of the representational. It is a plan for collecting and analyzing data in order to answer the research question (Holsti, 1969).

Qualitative research was employed for this study. It is based on a constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2007), and a narrative strategy, plus a humanistic geography approach.

Narrative research has many forms, uses a variety of analytic practices, and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines. Chase (2005) described "narrative" might be the term assigned to any text or discourse, or, it might be the text used within the context of a mode of inquiry in qualitative research, with a specific focus on the stories told by individuals (Polkinghorne, 1995). As Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) suggest, narrative can be both a method and *the phenomenon* of study. As a method, it begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals. Writers have provided ways for analyzing and understanding the stories lived and told. The researcher will define it here as a specific type of qualitative design in which "narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of a series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). The procedures for implementing this research consist of focusing on studying the life of Master I-tsing, gathering data through the collection of his stories, reporting his experiences, and chronologically ordering (or using *life course stages*) the meaning of those experiences. Although narrative research originated from literature, history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and education, different fields of study have adopted their own approaches. In this study, the *humanistic geography approach* will also be employed.

Humanistic geography which achieves an understanding of the human world by studying people's relations with nature, their geographical behavior as well as their feelings and ideas regarding space and place. Also, the study of people's spatial feelings and ideas in the stream of experience (Tuan, 1976). Doing humanistic research is very largely a personal matter, therefore, involving intuition and imaginative interpretation (Johnston, 1983, p.75). The primary objective of the *phenomenological geography approach* is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions (Spiegelberg, 1975). The focus of phenomenology, therefore, is the understanding of human activity through the study of meanings allocated to the elements of the individual's life-world (Johnston, 1983, p.57-58).

Data Collection

In this research, the document review is used as a method of data collection. For the purposes of the study, researcher has collected and gathered a numerous of literacy documents from various sources, e.g. the official history records of China, Indonesia, as well as other Southern Sea countries in the 6th – 7th century, the autobiographies and biographies, also academic journals and articles which direct or indirectly related to the study. The researcher has conducted the following activities in order to collect all the relevant data:

1. Compiled any record which is directly related to the history of I-tsing in Chinese, Indonesian, or any other language, then, summarized them into English language.
2. Consulted two individual scholars who are an authority in I-tsing history for the complete information. The information from them has been transcribed into English.
3. Organized the information from those sources into an appropriate structure.

Data Analysis

The Combined Data Analysis Framework of Polkinghorne's Narrative Analysis and Humanistic Geography – Phenomenological Analysis

1. A direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions. It focuses on the events, actions, happenings, and other data elements to put them together in a plot.
2. It uses to-and-fro, recursive movement from parts to whole or from whole to parts.
3. It fills in the gaps between events and actions using a narrative smoothing process.
4. It maintains that narrative analysis is not merely a transcription of the data but is a means of showing the significance of the lived experience in the final story. As to phenomenological method, this is frequently summarized by a phrase 'to the things' - interpreted as implying that phenomena (i.e., the meanings are given to items in the individual's life-world) must be transmitted to the phenomenologist without intermediaries.
5. Doing humanistic research is very largely a personal matter, therefore, involving intuition and imaginative interpretation. It makes the range of disconnected data elements coherent in a way that it appeals to the reader.
6. It makes the final story congruent with the data while bringing narrative meanings that are not explicit in the data themselves. Having identified the contents of the natural attitude, it then seeks to articulate the general essences that underlie it and, from those, the absolute knowledge that resides in consciousness.
7. It emphasizes connotation and sustains the metaphoric richness of a story. The goal of the phenomenological approach is to reconstruct the worlds of individuals, the phenomena in those worlds which are there as repositories of meaning.

Findings

The primary aim and objective of this study, i.e., why didn't I-tsing return to his home country right after his mission in India but stayed such a long time in the South Sea, particularly in Śrīvijaya. There are two significant situations needed to be explored in order to unearth the primary causes of I-tsing not returning home immediately after India's mission. Firstly, the domestic situation in China at that time in line with the development of Buddhism. And secondly, the situation of the South Sea, particularly Śrīvijaya during that period of time. What were those factors inducing I-tsing to stay back and spend such a long time carrying out his missionary work in the South Sea?

The researcher learned that one of the genuine and core intentions of I-tsing's westbound journey to the birthplace of Buddhism was to obtain the Dhamma, the authentic scriptures in order to solve the problem of Buddhist monks' matter of practice. The "Buddhist monks' matter of practice" is referring mainly to the Vinaya or the Disciplinary Rules, the principal guide of shaping perfect conduct and behavior of a Buddhist monk. Even though the disciplinary codes had already been translated, it did not play its role in constraining the wrongdoings. The study of the scriptures was very prosperous, but a lack of genuine understanding and the ambiguity was chaotic. This is partly due to the socio-political conditions and the belief system during the beginning of the T'ang Dynasty.

Buddhism has reached its peak period, especially amid the T'ang Dynasty or after I-tsing's time. I-tsing lived in the early T'ang Dynasty. He was born in the year 635 and passed away in 713. Buddhism, since it was introduced and spread into China during the Western Han

Dynasty (AD 25-200), had been disorderly, and the teachings were not given in proper order and manner. Although there were many discourses and scriptures translated into Chinese, the Buddhist followers were generally ignorant of the central idea of Buddhist teachings, which led to a low level of faith towards Buddhism.

The eminent scholar and translator, Lahiri (1986) has observed that the Chinese Buddhists were greatly confused by multifarious forms of Buddhism introduced in China from India and Central Asia by importation of missionaries belonging to different schools and different countries, by translations of Mahāyāna sutras, like *Vimalakirtinirdeśa*, *Saddharmapuṣṭaka*, *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, and the *Buddha Avataṛsakanāma Mahāvaiṣṭya Sūtra* of two prominent Indian schools of Nāgājuna and Asaṅga and by translation of some Hīnayāna texts. Amidst this ever-growing confusion and uncertainty, the Chinese thinkers were groping in the dark for centuries and thus led to the departure of renowned pilgrims, like Fa-xian (AD 400), Xuan-zang (AD 629) and I-tsing (AD 671) and others for India in search of genuine texts and the true doctrines and to pay homage to the far-famed shrines of their religion. The confusion caused by erroneous translation of the Buddhist texts, the misunderstanding of subtle and mystic ideas of the Buddhist philosophy and lack of disciplinary codes for monastic life prompted the earnest pilgrims to undertake perilous voyages across the breadth of Asia to procure complete and purer sources. The eternal religious fervor of the monks to make a pilgrimage to India, the holy land of the Buddhists, was nonetheless significant.

Notably, I-tsing was born in the period of the immobilization, and towards the formalization stage of Buddhism. I-tsing who went westbound with the high motivation of seeking the “Dhamma”, the authentic scripture and teaching of the Buddha, as he at that time was not satisfied with the so-called “reforming form of Chinese Buddhism”. I-tsing found there were still many unsolved and ambiguous interpretations, especially those which were related to the Vinaya or Disciplinary Rules. I-tsing solicitously wanted to go to India to learn and to observe by himself the way of practice of the monks there. As a result of his learning experience in India, he had authored two self-writings, namely (1) “*A Record of The Inner Law Sent Home From The South Seas*” 《南海内法寄归传》; and (2) “*Biography of Eminent Monks Who Went to the West Region in Search of the Dharma During the Great T’ang Dynasty*” 《大唐西域求法高僧传》.

The book “*A Record of The Inner Law Sent Home from The South Seas*” 《南海内法寄归传》 was written by I-tsing while he was sojourning in Śrīvijaya after his completion of study in India. His motive in writing the *Record* was to provide his fellow monks at home (China) with information about the monastic rules and manner of living of the monks in India and the islands of the South Sea. In the course of his narration and by way of comparison, I-tsing did not forget to criticize those monks in China whose behaviors were not in agreement with the disciplinary rules, particularly the rules of the Sarvāstivāda School (Yijing, S., Li, R., & Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2000).

While another book of I-tsing, the “*Biography of Eminent Monks Who Went to the West Region in Search of the Dharma During the Great T’ang Dynasty*” 《大唐西域求法高僧传》 had recorded the biographies of the fifty-six eminent monks who had been passing through the immense hardship and perils the pilgrims braved during their travel, their indomitable spirit and desire for learning Buddhism in India. I-tsing’s main objective was to immortalize those self-

sacrificing monks who made a remarkable contribution to the propagation and the prosperity of the Dhamma bequeathed by the Buddha (I-ching, ., & Lahiri, L., 1986).

As articulated in the humanistic geography approach, the geographical activities and phenomena (e.g. social condition) reveal the quality of human awareness (Tuan, 1976). Hence, the researcher had observed duly the related archival reports, such as I-tsing's self-writing books and literary works, as well as the literary records and commentaries of China's T'ang Dynasty etc. to look into how geographical activities and phenomena influencing the decision making of I-tsing based on the current situation and the social conditions he was at that period of time. I-tsing had a twenty-five years (671-695) experience of traveling and learning abroad. Thus, he had a keen and powerful insight into his own situation and the development and trends of Buddhism in China at that time.

Finding (1): The unreadiness of conditions for allowing I-tsing to return home.

I-tsing's sense of place was acuity and strong. I-tsing was very aware and observant of what was happening in his homeland and the surrounding environment. His intention and indomitable motivation of west-bounding were to acquire authentic and pure Dhamma is to revive the defective Buddhist practice, particularly the practice of Vinaya or Disciplinary Rules of Buddhist monks in China. Nevertheless, I-tsing lived in the period of the immobilization of Buddhism, which means the Disciplinary Codes, which had been vigorously established in the early or even before T'ang (from the transition period of Sui Dynasty, entering to the T'ang Dynasty) gradually developing toward institutionalization and immobilization. This had intensified the attempt of I-tsing to return home immediately for bringing China back to the most genuine and original practice of Vinaya-rules as he has observed in India and the South Sea.

The Vinaya-Master Dao-xuan 道宣律師 (596-667), has mainly referred and adopted the traditional living codes established by the Buddha which has stated in the Vinaya-Pitaka, particularly the "*Four Parts of Vinaya*" 《四分律》 of Dharmagupta School 法藏部 on his strenuous efforts of establishing the Vinaya-rules suiting the Chinese monasticism. But whenever there is unclear or ambiguity, he will appropriately refer the other Vinaya-rules from different sects or schools, as well as Pāli Canon and Chinese Agama for removing the complexity and making suitable modifications. It is also an attempt to reflect the ultimate spirit of Mahayana, according to Dao-xuan (佐藤达玄, 1997).

Unfortunately, I-tsing does not agree with this way of setting up the Vinaya-rules. He opined:

"...upon close observation on the distinctions between the four schools and the differences in their Vinaya texts, we see that the grave offenses and light faults are dealt with quite differently by different schools. What is permitted by one school may be disallowed by another. The monks should observe the disciplinary rules of their respective schools and should not substitute the rules governing light faults of other schools for those dealing with grave offenses of their own school. They should also not detest the prohibitive rules of other schools, thinking that such affairs are allowed by their own school. Otherwise, the distinctions between the schools will not be apparent, and the reasons for permission and prohibition will be unclear. How can one and the same person observe the disciplinary rules of all four schools?" (Yijing, S., Li, R., & Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2000).

Such thought of I-tsing naturally formed a kind of confrontation and friction between him and the reality of the situation (social condition) in China. Moreover, I-tsing himself is a devoted practitioner of "*Mūla-sarvāstivāda Vinaya*" 《根本说一切有部律》, which he had learned and persisted its authenticity of the Vinaya practice in India, the birthplace of Buddhism. However, it

was obviously not in line with the mainstream of Vinaya practice, i.e., “Four Parts of Vinaya” 《四分律》 in China at that time, which was gradually becoming an institutionalized and immobilized monastic order in China. Thus, I-tsing’s personal thought and persistence had become the obstacle and containment for I-tsing to return instantly to his homeland after his mission in India. Since then, the South Sea, particularly Śrīvijaya, is the ideal place for him to set foot, and carry on with his mission of translating the scriptures and texts in the original Sanskrit language.

On the one hand, Śrīvijaya is a Buddhist kingdom during that period enjoying its glory with the Hīnayāna Buddhism, and with the majority of the followers practicing the *Mūla-sarvāstivāda Vinaya*. On the other hand, Sanskrit was the common practicing language in the kingdom. It seems the social conditions in Śrīvijaya is more conducive for I-tsing’s to continue his mission under his personal circumstances, as well as the social conditions in China at that period of time.

The researcher is analyzing and looking into I-tsing’s failure to return home immediately after his learning in India by utilizing the humanistic geography approach, i.e., the understanding of the human world by studying people’s relation with nature, their geographical behavior, as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to their environment (socio-politics, economic, cultural conditions etc.). Through this observation, an assumption can be made to illustrate further the I-tsing’s situation of setting his foot in South Sea. Moreover, the assumption made can also be supported by the narrations of life experience stories of others that had faced the same situation as I-tsing.

The researcher assumed that, if I-tsing insisted on returning home country right after his accomplishment of learning in India, he would face two possibilities or challenging situations under the current social conditions in China. They were either (1) I-tsing would be heavily criticized by the mainstream “localized-Vinaya” upholders and practitioners, because of his obstinate characteristics for persisting on what he had learned and observed in India and South Sea; or (2) I-tsing would have to eventually give up his mission of advocating the authentic and purest Vinaya practice, which he had acquired from the birthplace of Buddhism. I-tsing had to accept the conventional reality of the majority, or the collective voices were always a better influence on society.

Finding (2): I-tsing needed a conducive platform for his return to China

I-tsing, in his writing “Record of The Return to the South Sea” 《重归南海传》 (this is one of the chapters under his book of the “Biography of Eminent Monks Who Went to the West Region in Search of the Dharma During the Great T’ang Dynasty” 《大唐西域求法高僧传》), mentioned that, he went back to China (set foot at Guang-zhou in year 689 永昌元年), but only for a short stay (about three months) to acquire paper and ink, and a few assistants to help him in the South Sea. Even though I-tsing’s words are seemingly a little too far-fetched, but there is something else behind it. He wrote:

“At the mouth of the river of Bhoga (Śrīvijaya) I went on board the ship to send letters as a credential to Guang-zhou, in order to meet my friends and ask for papers and ink cakes, which are to be used in copying Sanskrit Sūtras and at the same time to find some means to hire scribes. Just at that time, the merchants found the wind favorable and raised the sails to their utmost height. I was in this way conveyed back (although not myself intending to go home). Even if he asked to stop, there would have been no means of doing so. By this, I see it is the influence of karma, which determines the fate is beyond human planning. It was on the twentieth day of the

seventh month of the Yung-ch'ang period (A.D. 689) that we reached Guang-zhou. The monks and laity as well met and received him with respect.” (Yijing, ., & Takakusu, J., 1966)

Among the modern scholars, Professor Wang Bang-wei (1988) has spotted this interesting scenario; he commented: “According to I-tsing himself, he seems to have been transported back home by chance. It would not be possible if I-tsing does not know when the monsoon is blowing and do not have enough time to get down from the ship. I-tsing’s word of his realization of “*the influence of karma, which determines the fate is beyond human planning*” is a bit overstated in this context. This is merely an excuse for I-tsing to go back home.” Moreover, if it is only to seek and acquire for ink and paper, as well as to find someone to assist him, then it is sufficient to write a letter for doing so. It is not necessary for I-tsing to again risk himself with the ups and downs on the sailing journey. I-tsing was aware of the difficulties and dangers of navigating the sea.

Furthermore, if he needs to go to Guang-zhou, he can go freely without such a pretext. But why I-tsing acted so? An envisage can be made that I-tsing wished and intended to return home, but not immediately. He wanted a reason to go back to Guang-zhou, let people know that he wanted to return, with the intention to translate the Buddhist scriptures. On the other hand, he was unwilling to say the obvious (义净原著、王邦维校注, 1988).

When he was in Guang-zhou, he sighed and said to the resident monks Zhi-zhi Monastery 制旨寺 that:

“I (I-tsing), went to the Western Country (西国, India) with a primary hope of transmitting and spreading (the Law). I came back and stayed on the island of the South Sea. Some texts are still wanting, though what I brought (from India) and left at Śrīvijaya amounts to 500,000 ślokas belonging to the Tripiṭaka. It is necessary under this circumstance that I must go there once again. But I am already more than fifty years of age; while crossing the running waves once more, the horses that pass-through cracks may not stay and protect the life would be difficult. If the time for the morning dew (for dying) comes suddenly, to whom should those books be entrusted? The sacred canon is indeed to be the important doctrine. Who is then able to come with me and take it over? The right type of person who could easily translate the Sūtras must be found out.” (Yijing, ., & Takakusu, J., 1966)

Again, from the above self-description of I-tsing, it showed his keen interest to return home, but somehow the time seemed not ripe. This was solely the self-observation of I-tsing himself. Indeed, if he had wished to carry out the canons’ translation work, it would be most appropriate to do it in China. Why bother searching for people from China to go far in the South Sea for carrying out the mission?

Furthermore, in another self-narration of I-tsing depicted from his book of the “*Biography of Eminent Monks Who Went to the West Region in Search of the Dharma During the Great T’ang Dynasty*” 《大唐西域求法高僧传》卷下《大津传》:

“I, I-tsing, met Ta-ts’in in Śrīvijaya (where he came AD 683). I requested him to return home to ask imperial favor in building a temple in the West. When he saw that benefits would be great and large (had this petition been granted), Ta-ts’in in disregarding his own life agreed to re-cross the vast ocean. It is on the fifteenth day of the fifth month in the third year of the Tien-shou period (692) that he takes a merchant ship to return to Chang-an. Now I send with him a new translation of various Sūtras and Sāstras in ten volumes, the “A Record of The Inner Law Sent Home From The South Seas” 《南海内法寄归传》 in four volumes, and the “Biography of Eminent Monks Who Went to the West Region in Search of the Dharma During the Great T’ang Dynasty” 《大唐西域求法高僧传》 in two volumes.” (Yijing, ., & Takakusu, J., 1966)

However, after another six years in Śrīvijaya, I-tsing made a direct request to the T'ang Ruler at the time, Empress Wu Ze-tian, to build a Chinese temple in Śrīvijaya. I-tsing sent the monk Ta-ts'in 大津 back to China to convey his request, as well as presenting his translations and his two self-writings, which had been accomplished in Śrīvijaya to Empress Wu. This was perhaps the best opportunity for him to do so, as he knew that Empress Wu promoted Buddhism over Confucianism and Daoism as the favored state religion. At the time, it was the second year of Empress Wu reign. Empress Wu was officially recognized as empress of China in more than two millennia.

Hence, from these two intentionally or unintentionally actions of I-tsing, it can be seen that he did not have a strong wish for a long-term stay in Śrīvijaya. He used various means to probe the response and acceptance of Buddhist community in China on his return, and significantly he was trying to attract the attention and the acknowledgment (on his existence) of the imperial, Empress Wu. As commented by Prof. Wang Bang-wei (1995), "*I-tsing must have heard about the favorable support of Empress Wu to Buddhism compared with the emperor(s) before her. Empress Wu made use of the name of Buddhism to claim that she was the reincarnation of Maitreya Buddha, and also used various legerdemains with the name of Buddhism to deifying herself. Perhaps this is the best chance for I-tsing to present himself and his works.*"

I-tsing was very observant and sensitive to his surroundings. He was incisive and able to define his present situation well, and most importantly, he knew how to accommodate and act appropriately according to the situation. This is what the humanities aspect of humanistic geography approach tries to explain, "Knowledge of the human world is acquired by examining social institutions. These institutions can be viewed both as an example of human inventiveness and as forces limiting the free activity of individuals." (Tuan, 1976)

I-tsing wished and wanted to be welcomed home by the imperial and the public. In this way, he could stabilize and consolidate his position, and would not be easily shaken and disturbed by the mainstream (those following the practice of "Four-part of Vinaya" 《四分律》) at the time. Moreover, I-tsing wished the condition in China could still allow him to continue to uphold and promote the *Mūla-sarvāstivāda Vinaya*.

Finally, I-tsing as his wish, returned home to China in 695 (midsummer in the month of 5th, the first year of Zheng-sheng 证圣元年). His biography recorded in the "Sung-Gao-Seng-Zhuan" 《宋高僧传》卷一《义净传》, enumerated the grand welcoming scene of I-tsing's return to the Capital Luo-yang:

"I-tsing was abroad for twenty-five years (671-695) and traveled to more than thirty countries, and that he came back to China at midsummer in the first year of the Zheng-sheng 证圣元年 (695) of Empress Wu (684-704). He brought home some four hundred different Buddhist texts, all in a total of 500,000 śloka, a real plan of the diamond seat (vagrāsana) of the Buddha, and three hundred of relics. Empress Wu herself welcomed him at the eastern entrance of the palace, and there was a prayer and hymns parade by numerous Buddhist monks from other temples to lead at the front row. I-tsing first resided at the Fo-Shou-Ji Temple 佛授记寺. He was initially working together with the monk Śikṣānanda 实叉难陀 to translate the "Mahā-Vaipulya-Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra" 《大方广佛华严经》. He started his self-translation after the first year of Jiu-shi 久视元年 (赞宁, n.d.).

Noticeable, it has been recorded in the “*The Collection of Quan T’ang - 914th volume*” 《全唐书》卷九百十四, saying that I-tsing successfully conducted a grand Dhamma-assembly of Higher Ordination transmitting the *Mūla-sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, which was granted permission by Empress Wu in the fourth month of the fourth year of Chang-an 长安四年的四月. The venue of the Higher Ordination Ceremony was at Song-shan Shao-lin Monastery 嵩山少林寺. This occasion, thus, indicates that I-tsing not only could stand firmly along with the mainstream but also able to spread and to sow the seeds of his advocacy.

Finding (3): The supportive conditions in Śrīvijaya

Śrīvijaya, a great Buddhist Empire, also a maritime and commercial kingdom that flourished between the 7th and the 13th centuries, mainly in what is now Indonesia. The kingdom originated in Palembang on the island of Sumatra and soon extended its influence and controlled the Strait of Malacca. Śrīvijaya’s power was based on its control of international sea trade. It established trade relations not only with the states in the Malay Archipelago but also with China and India (Britannica, 1998).

I-tsing, in his masterpiece of translation work, the ‘*Mūla-sarvāstivāda Vinaya*’ 《根本说一切有部百一羯磨》 asserted the following advice to exhort Chinese monks who wished to seek Dharma in the West (India) to stop at the passage of the Śrīvijaya. He wrote:

“In the islands of the South Sea, they are respecting and have faith in Buddhism. The Lord of man’s Kingdom is blessed with wellness and prosperity. In Śrīvijaya, there are monks more than a thousand. Learning is the priority, and they are practicing alms-round (begging food from the household). The learning attitude and the studying atmosphere is not much differed from India. The monastic disciplinary practices are the same. If the monks who are intending to pursue their study in the West, it is most advisable to set foot here (Śrīvijaya) for one- or two-years period to equip themselves before proceeding their journey to India.” (义净, T24n1453).

The narration above indicated that I-tsing was very familiar and has an in-depth knowledge of the overall condition of Śrīvijaya. He, through his own traveling experience, knew that Śrīvijaya was located at the very advantageous geographical location in between China and India. It was at the midway of the sea-route between China and India. Therefore, I-tsing was proclaiming Śrīvijaya the best “transit-hub 中转站” for Chinese monks who wished to travel westbound to India. Thus, on his record, as stated above: *“If the monks who are intending to pursue their study in the West, it is most advisable to set foot here (Śrīvijaya) for one- or two-years period to equip themselves before proceeding their journey to India”*.

I-tsing was very encouraging and invoking Chinese monks to stay for a short while before they continue their journey to India, as the condition of Śrīvijaya is very similar to India. This is what I-tsing said, *“In Śrīvijaya, there are monks more than a thousand. Learning is the priority, and they are practicing alms-round (begging food from the household). The learning attitude and the studying atmosphere is not much differed from India. The monastic disciplinary practices are the same.”* Therefore, the condition is conducive for a Chinese monk who was determined to study in India to first lay a firm foundation and do preparatory work in Śrīvijaya, including studying Sanskrit, as well as to observe and to learn about the daily practice of the monks there. This is undoubtedly a valuable contribution of I-tsing through his personal learning experience and observation to proclaiming the Śrīvijaya as the dynamic transit-hub to his fellow Chinese monks who had the same mission with him.

Furthermore, if viewing from the perspective of I-tsing himself, setting foot at Śrīvijaya was the right option while waiting for the right time and condition to return home in China. Under various advantageous circumstances, I-tsing was able to carry on his missionary works without wasting time. For instance, the advantage of Sanskrit language, allows I-tsing to continue carrying out his translation work, which he had started during the time he was studying at Nalanda University in India. Sanskrit, or also known as the Brahma-language in Śrīvijaya, was a common language practiced among the people there. Moreover, he had laid his firm foundation by learning Sanskrit for more than six months in Śrīvijaya during his first visit in 671, before proceeding to India. Hence, it is doubtless the advantage of the language is to be one of the predominant supports for him to set foot in Śrīvijaya before returning home.

The practice and the observance of *Mūla-sarvāstivāda Vinaya* is another advantage for I-tsing to set foot at Śrīvijaya. As stated in his Record, he found most of the monastics (Buddhist monks) in Śrīvijaya, upholding and observing *Mūla-sarvāstivāda Vinaya*. He asserted: “*In Śrīvijaya, there are monks more than a thousand. Learning is the priority, and they are practicing arm-round (begging food from the household). The learning attitude and the studying atmosphere is not much differed from India. The monastic disciplinary practices are the same.*” “the same” here is meant for the *Mūla-sarvāstivāda Vinaya*. I-tsing also authored and completed his first two books in Śrīvijaya. One of his books, named as “*A Record of The Inner Law Sent Home from The South Seas*” 《南海内法寄归传》, recorded every single detail of the monastic rules and manner of living of the monks in India and the islands of the South Sea as observed by him.

These were the two supporting resources, which I-tsing gained from the nature of the social conditions in Śrīvijaya to support his works. Of course, there were many other supportive conditions, for instance, the generous support of the Imperial provided I-tsing with all the basic necessities, such as food, lodging, transportation, safety and medication throughout his stay in Śrīvijaya. As Śrīvijaya was a flourishing Buddhist kingdom, the presence of I-tsing was celebrated and well-received by the imperial and the Buddhist community there.

Conclusion

The researcher has articulated the analyzed outcomes into THREE insightful findings as a response to the research inquiry. The three findings are as follows:

1. The disagreeable conditions for allowing I-tsing to return home.
2. I-tsing needed a conducive platform for his return to China.
3. The supportive conditions in Śrīvijaya

Each of the above findings was explicated in lengthy detail and supported with various valid and reliable references, documentary facts, case-studies of real-life stories.

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