

Journey to India with Story of Books

On My Visit to 2016 New Delhi World Book Fair

by **Lizhi He** (May 2016)

When a friend of mine in India invited me to join the 2016 New Delhi World Book Fair in January, I was overjoyed: Wow, India, and, books! This would be the first time in my life visiting India – a place always mysterious and sacred in my mind since my childhood, and YES, my longing for it indeed started from a book – *Journey to the West* – the famous classic Chinese novel about a Buddhist monk in the Tang Dynasty travelling to India to obtain the Buddhist scriptures. Now, how exciting – I would be making a journey to India, on a mission of books too!

Speaking of *Journey to the West*, I dare say virtually everybody in China knows it from childhood, not to mention that the hero or main protagonist in the novel, “Tang Monk,” became a household name, as a result of tradition of storytelling by parents or school teachers. Published in the 16th century during the China’s Ming dynasty, *Journey to the West* is one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature, and widely known as *Monkey* in the English-speaking countries. The novel is an extended account of the legendary pilgrimage of Hiuen Tsang in the Tang dynasty who made an arduous, 17 year (629 C.E. – 645 C.E.) overland journey of 40,000 miles to obtain the original sacred text (sutras) of Buddhism from India. On his return to China, Hiuen Tsang brought back 657 Buddhist scriptures in Sanskrit and hundreds of other treasures, and then dedicated himself to the translation of scriptures. Historically, Hiuen Tsang had a great influence on the development of Buddhism in China and his perseverance in seeking the truth inspired many in his and later generations.

What’s more, Hiuen Tsang’s travelogue, *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, which provided a detailed historical account of India and Central Asian countries at that time, became one of the primary sources for the study of India in medieval times. To honour this famed Buddhist monk, scholar, traveller and translator, there is a Hiuen Tsang Memorial Hall built in Nalanda, Bihar, India. During his stay in India, Hiuen Tsang lived in Nalanda for a few years and

studied Buddhism with many famous masters, for which he believed the aim of his journey had been achieved. The ancient Nalanda had been a large Buddhist monastery and famous centre of Buddhist learning, and attracted numerous scholars and students from near and far. In later centuries, Nalanda gradually declined, was ransacked and destroyed by invading armies, and finally became abandoned. Efforts to excavate and restore the ruins have been made in recent decades, relying greatly on the descriptions of Nalanda in the 7th century and in the writings of pilgrim monks from East Asia, such as Hiuen Tsang, Yijing, and others.

Interestingly, I once had felt very close to this historical figure. Back to 1980's, I was attending my university in Xi'an, the same city that used to be called Chang'an, the capital of China in the Tang Dynasty. My university was just a few bus stops away from the Temple of Great Compassion where Hiuen Tsang lived and did the translation of the sutras after his return to China, and as well the Great Wild Goose Pagoda where his collections from India were kept and protected. However, even though I had known the story of Hiuen Tsang when I was a little boy living in the remote countryside, it was unfortunately not until the year of my university graduation that a print copy of *Journey to the West* became available from bookstore shelves in the city of Xi'an, because classical literatures had disappeared for many years in China due to the influence of the notorious Cultural Revolution (short for "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution").

This is a reminiscent of my unfortunate childhood in a time when there was not a single valuable book available for reading, which blanked out my exposure to traditional Chinese culture as a teenager. I was born in the mid-1960's, then befell the 10 year long Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), during which China's 5,000-year-old culture was almost entirely wiped out. A typical and routine campaign was sweeping the country, setting fire to the ancient relics and antiques, calligraphy and paintings, classic books and scriptures, burning it all up. Temples and statues were smashed to dust. The education system was also brought to a virtual halt.

In my hometown, a rural area in a northwestern province, the only books from my home or neighbors or relatives were all sorts of "Quotations of Chairman Mao." As a result of the nationwide Mao's cult of personality established in the Cultural Revolution, these were the only literature available, although such

“quotations” meant nothing more than nonsense to villagers. I do not remember any book for children to read before I entered primary school. I looked forward to growing up to a full 7 years of “legal” age to be officially allowed to attend school.

The exciting moment came on the first school day – the registration day – when I received my first ever textbook with a refreshing and pleasant smell of the paper and print. The whole book had more or less a dozen lessons, each being one single line of text, sometimes paired with an illustration or picture, on a fairly white page. I rushed home after the school and could not wait to be taught to read by my parents. To my disappointment, my mom told me she could not read as she never had an education. Oh poor Mom! To my surprise though, while flipping the pages on, Mom was able to figure out what some of the lessons were about, as the same text had been present in very large size on many rammed earth walls, such as those of cottages, village school, field enclosures, or wherever possible to be painted text on with whitewash – all the texts were political slogans. Political Quotes and slogans, ubiquitous in every aspect of daily life, were part of propaganda to support various political campaigns of Chinese Communist Party (CCP). That is to say, what I was to be taught or learned from school was simply a set of political slogans, ranging from a “long live” chant to the dictators, to “down with” an enemy that the communist party defined as target of “class struggle” to justify the existence of its power, so on and so forth.

After Mao died in 1976, the CCP began to carry out a so-called “reform and opening up” policy, and declared the official end of the Cultural Revolution. Universities were re-opened, and students could continue their education after finishing a high school. In 1978, I was able to enter the best high school in my county which was a couple of hours’ travel from home by bicycle on bumpy dirt roads. In addition to the conventional classes of (Communist) Politics, Chinese, Math, Physics, and Chemistry, there were two more entries in the curriculum in the new school, namely, History and Geography, which were appealing to my thirst of knowledge. On opening the books, however, I was in for a shock, as the way in which the Chinese characters appeared in the textbooks were totally different. Here, let me digress a little bit, to an introduction to the Chinese language and characters.

Chinese language is the carrier of our splendid Chinese culture. Thanks to the

Chinese language, Chinese culture has been the only culture in the world to have a continuously recorded history of 5,000 years, with countless literary classics and historical documents. The system of Chinese characters was formed in ancient China. Legend holds that it was a deity named Cangjie who created Chinese characters. Unlike most of other languages in the world in which a group of letters make up a word to give a meaning, each Chinese character has meanings on its own. According to linguists, Chinese characters may derive from pictures of the objects (pictographic) they denote, or direct iconic illustrations (ideographic), or combinations of two or more pictographic or ideographic characters to suggest more meanings. Each Chinese character has its own intrinsic structure associated with meanings with a reason behind, thus, taking its place in the language with its uniqueness. To me, each Chinese character presents itself like a living being with a personality (character) of its own.

It is known that as early as in 1930s, the former Soviet Union began to cooperate with the Chinese Communist Party to make Chinese Latinized, assisting the abolition of Chinese characters. After the CCP established its regime in 1949, it began to implement the use of simplified Chinese. Critics point out that today's simplified Chinese is just a political product of the CCP on its way to the systematic destruction of Chinese characters and the eradication of history and culture. Simplification of Chinese characters has resulted in many problems for the language, such as increased ambiguity, inability to render the inner meaning and explain the etymology, loss of artistic beauty, etc. One has to learn the traditional Chinese characters if one wants to read the ancient literature or books written in traditional characters.

My new books of History and Geography came with a set of characters that were further chopped off or simplified even to the point of being disfigured. Upon the first sight on the page, the disfigured text shocked me like a view of battle field strewn with mutilated corpses – the characters were so dismembered they were too scary to behold. Reading became suffering. Due to the terrible result, this even uglier set of Chinese characters was abandoned afterwards. The affected text books were abandoned by the school accordingly. Unfortunately, we were not given new textbooks as substitutes. So, the courses were cancelled. Period.

This very experience exemplified the helpless reality of how I, despite of being a native Chinese, like others who were born in communist China, had been

deprived of the right to learn and understand the authentic Chinese culture and civilization. Instead, our time to receive education of our own culture in school was filled up with brainwashing propaganda, hatred, lies, distorted and falsified history. The essence of culture was labeled as backward and superstitious, and civilizations were depicted as decadent and dark. Violence and hatred were viewed as the drive to create progress for humankind.

In the second year of high school, I dwelled on the paradox of two claims the CCP made. The first claim was that the launch of the Cultural Revolution proved "the CCP is forever Great, Glorious, and Correct," and the second, the ending of the catastrophic Cultural Revolution once again proved "the CCP is forever Great, Glorious, and Correct." How could both be true? Racking my brain in reasoning and finally deciding not to brook the absurdity, I chose to believe that CCP is a big liar, unscrupulous and shameless, even though such a thought was of "anti-revolutionary" nature in communist China and if overtly expressed, could have endangered my life. My other observations during later years at the university deepened my insight into it. Determined not to be deceived by the Party any more, I started in 1980s to seek the truth by reading books on traditional Chinese culture, which paved the way to my personal cultivation towards a spiritual development.

Known as the "Celestial Empire" since ancient times, China has a "divinely inspired" culture, with the religions of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism being its bedrock. In Chinese culture, there is a fundamental belief that everything that exists is governed by the "Tao" (term of Tao school), meaning the Way, or "Fa" (term of Buddha school), meaning the Law, or the principle of nature, heaven and universe. Tao is the source of everything and the force behind everything; Man should live in harmony and balance, and become at one, with nature, or ultimately, the Tao. It is a process of living the principles or up to standards to upgrade one's moral level towards the ultimate goal of attainment of the Tao or personal salvation.

Moral standards for discernment of what is good and what is bad have perpetually been the determinant of the fate of humanity as an existence in the universe. Sage's teachings have advised caution and lessons of history have repeatedly demonstrated that moral corruption will have devastating outcomes to mankind. All major Chinese religious and philosophical schools have investigated the correct Way to go about a moral life, and as a result, there has formed in

Chinese culture not only a rich and profound system of values and ethical codes for governance, family, and individual conduct in social life, but also different ways or disciplines of spiritual practice in seeking the true Tao or personal salvation, often coupled with the practice of meditation. Such spiritual practices, generally referred to as “cultivation practice,” or simply “cultivation,” have had a history of thousands of years or even longer, and constitute an integral and essential part of traditional Chinese culture.

Over 15 years of exploration into traditional Chinese culture and seeking the best cultivation way led me to practice of Falun Dafa, with *Zhuan Falun*, the teaching of Falun Dafa, becoming THE BOOK for my life. Also known as Falun Gong, Falun Dafa is an ancient cultivation way that was passed down through the ages from a master to a single disciple in each generation. It was introduced to the public in China in May 1992 by Master Li Hongzhi. With the book *Zhuan Falun* and five sets of exercises, Falun Dafa teaches people to follow the principle of Zhen-Shan-Ren (Truthfulness – Compassion – Forbearance) to elevate their moral standards and improve their physical health. Falun Dafa is the only complete advanced-level cultivation practice in the world that has not had its exercises and books altered by the interpretations of students and practitioners of later generations.

It was amazing to become enlightened as to why China has such a unique and divinely inspired culture, how the history of Chinese civilization has systematically and exquisitely prepared a profound culture with moral and spiritual cultivation as its essence and emphasis, and finally people today come to learn, understand, and practise Falun Dafa, all these developing as a matter of predestined course toward the Grand Finale. In my understanding, the book *Zhuan Falun* gives the answer to the most fundamental question in the history of mankind for anyone with any background in spiritual practices, religious beliefs, or philosophical approaches, who endeavor to seek the ultimate truth, the Tao, the Buddha Fa, the principle of the universe, or the standards to live up to. Let me respectfully quote as follows from *Zhuan Falun*:

“What is the Buddha Fa, then? The most fundamental characteristic of this universe, Zhen-Shan-Ren, is the highest manifestation of the Buddha Fa. It is the most fundamental Buddha Fa”ⁱ

“This characteristic, Zhen-Shan-Ren, is the criterion for measuring good

and bad in the universe. What's good or bad? It is judged by this."ⁱⁱ

"As a human being, you are a good person only if you can follow this universe's characteristic of Zhen-Shan-Ren. A person who deviates from this characteristic is truly a bad person"ⁱⁱⁱ

"As a cultivator, if you assimilate yourself to this characteristic you are one who has attained the Tao—it's just such a simple principle"^{iv}

"Our Falun Dafa is based upon the highest standard of the universe, Zhen, Shan, and Ren, all of which we cultivate simultaneously."

In the book, *Essentials for Further Advancement*, "Broad and Immense," Master Li wrote:

"The principles of Falun Dafa can provide guidance for anyone's cultivation practice, including for one's religious beliefs. This is the principle of the universe, the true Fa that has never been taught. People in the past were not allowed to know this universe's principle (the Buddha Fa). It transcends all academic theories and moral principles of human society from ancient times to this day."^{vi}

The practice of Falun Dafa has had tremendous impact on individuals and society. By 1999, seven years after the introduction, Falun Dafa had reached a popularity in China of estimated 70 to 100 million practitioners by word of mouth because of the huge body-and-mind benefits to practitioners. With the rapid spreading of the practice in those years, the demand for the book *Zhuan Falun* was huge as well. For example, in the year of 1996 in Beijing, *Zhuan Falun* was among the bestselling books in both January and February, and Top Ten Bestselling books in April. Because of the book easily getting out of stock from the publishers, there emerged unauthorized printers to produce large volume of supply to the book market in Beijing and other areas as well. I still remembered freshly the experience of helping correct the print errors from time to time for new practitioners I met who obtained the books from an unauthorized printer. This period of Falun Dafa popularization and the effect of great enhancement of social morality wrote a page of glory and magnificence in history, which when turned over, was unfortunately followed by a chapter of darkness and injustice in China.

Out of personal jealousy over the popularity of Falun Dafa and paranoid of

losing power, the then CCP head Jiang Zemin, launched a crackdown on this peaceful and non-political spiritual practice in July of 1999. Falun Dafa books were confiscated and burned nationwide, and even possession of Falun Dafa books was viewed as a reason to be convicted, replicating the Cultural Revolution or even worse. Falun Dafa practitioners have been systematically abducted, arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and even murdered with their organs pillaged, for the past 16 years and to date.

I was imprisoned in China for three and a half years for telling friends by mail that Falun Dafa is good. One day in the summer of 2001 during my imprisonment, after a surprise search, prison guards found a book of Falun Dafa teaching among my belongings. I was then forced into a room, with my arms forced behind my back, hands handcuffed, and squeezed to sit against walls in a corner. Two policemen stepped on my legs with their boots so that I could not move. Then both of them waved electric batons, shocking my forehead, face, neck, and wherever they believed they could inflict the most pain. The batons shot out blue flashing arcs like infuriated snakes biting violently. My skin felt like it was being torn into pieces with cracking sounds of shocks like continuous explosions. Even though restricted by walls and with boots stepping hard on my legs, the strong electric current forced me down on the ground. I did not know for how long I had been struggling helplessly till they stopped the shocking, and I was finally put back into the prison cell with entangled dirty clothes and bruises on my body. Afterwards, as further punishment, for many days I was deprived of sleep and food. However, the brutal torture could only help me with even stronger determination in my faith and led me to understand more deeply the evil nature of the CCP: who else in the world could be so desperately afraid of a book that teaches how to become a good person following the principle of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance?

Despite the relentless brutal persecution in China for the past 16 years, Falun Dafa is spreading worldwide and practiced in over 100 countries now. Falun Dafa books have been translated into over 30 languages and not only are they available electronically for free downloading,^{vii} but also exhibited internationally since as early as 2000. Just to name a few: April 27, 2001, annual world book fair in Geneva; June 2 – 10, 2001, 16th world book fair in Singapore; June 20 – 22, annual national book fair in Australia; Feb. 19 – 24, 2002, world book fair in Taipei; June 18 – 21, 2002, in APA Australian book

fair; May 30 – June 1, in Los Angeles US book fair and so on. Starting with August 12 – 20, 2000, annual book fair in Delhi, Falun Dafa books have been showcased in many book fairs in every city of India till the present one in New Delhi, which I was invited to.

I could not wait to fly to Delhi for the book fair after I was granted a visa by the Indian consulate in Toronto – by the way, I moved to Canada in May of 2004 after my illegal imprisonment in China, with help from Amnesty International and the Canadian government. During my visit to India, I was more than happy to learn that the editions of *Zhuan Falun* in Bengali and Tamil were going to be published. The translations in Hindi, Telugu and Kannada are already available,^{viii} not to mention many Indians can read the English edition as well. This is an opportunity to express my sincere wish that more and more Indian people will benefit from practicing Falun Dafa, the greatest blessing in one's life.

To conclude my story of books, I would like to mention a book that has been exhibited in the 2016 New Delhi World Book Fair – *Nine Commentaries on the Chinese Communist Party*.^{ix} Since published in November 2004 by The Epoch Times, this book has brought about a quiet movement within the iron walls of China – more than 224.5 million Chinese people, as of Jan. 10, 2016, announced openly on the Epoch Times website to quit the Chinese Communist Party and affiliated organizations,^x which loudly predicts the collapse of the communist regime in China.

Nine Commentaries offers readers an insight into the creation of the Communist Party and its unscrupulous nature, why it is an anti-humanity force and an evil cult, how the tyranny destroyed traditional Chinese culture, killed tens of millions of Chinese people, and persecuted Falun Gong. By reading this book, I believe, Indian people will get an answer to many questions they might have about China – the Guest of Honour country of this year's book fair.

P.S. I was able to bring a book as gift to 2016 New Delhi World Book Fair from Canada. It is *Bloody Harvest: the forced organ harvesting from living Falun Gong practitioners*,^{xi} by two great Canadians – David Matas and David Kilgour, and

published and printed in Canada.

[i] *Zhuan Falun: Lecture One, Zhen-Shan-Ren is the Sole Criterion to Discern Good and Bad People,*

<http://en.falundafa.org/eng/zfl2014/ZFL2014-023.htm>

[ii] *ibid.* <http://en.falundafa.org/eng/zfl2014/ZFL2014-024.htm>

[iii] *Ibid.* <http://en.falundafa.org/eng/zfl2014/ZFL2014-025.htm>

[iv] *ibid.* <http://en.falundafa.org/eng/zfl2014/ZFL2014-025.htm>

[v] *Ibid.* <http://en.falundafa.org/eng/zfl2014/ZFL2014-026.htm>

[vi] *Falun Dafa: Essentials for Further Advancement, "Broad and Immense",*
<http://en.falundafa.org/eng/jjyz03.htm>

[vii] Falun Dafa website, <http://falundafa.org/>

[viii] Falun Dafa books in Indian languages,
<http://hi.falundafa.org/falun-dafa-books.html>

[ix] *Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party,* by The Epoch Times,
<http://en.tuidang.org/the-nine-commentaries-on-the-communist-party.html>

[x] Global Service Center for Quitting Chinese Communist Party,
<http://en.tuidang.org/home>

[xi] *Bloody Harvest: Organ Harvesting of Falun Gong Practitioners in China,* by David Matas & David Kilgour,

<http://seraphimeditations.com/portfolio-posts/bloody-harvest/>

Lizhi He is an award-winning engineer from China who was imprisoned for

practising Falun Gong in July of 2000. His wife, also Falun Gong practitioner, managed to get to Canada in 2001 after being detained in China three times. With help from Amnesty International and Government of Canada, Lizhi was reunited with his wife in Canada in May of 2004.

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