



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Indic civilization and Chinese Culture influence in Southeast Asia

**Name: Dr. Rakesh Kumar,**

Designation: Assistant Professor

Centre for Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies, JNU,

Affiliation :Jawaharlal Nehru University

### Abstract

More than 20 million overseas Chinese and Indian diaspora are living in the Southeast Asian countries. Historically, Southeast Asia has been hugely influenced by both India and China in the realms of art, culture, architecture, court etiquettes, religion and many other things. The mythological stories and mythological Indian figures are seen in the the old monuments of Indonesia and Thailand and other southeast Asian countries. The Ramayana and other Indian mythological stories has been localised in the art -craft as-well as in their folk literature. One can feel the presence of Indic culture in the everyday life of the southeast asian people . India continue to be regarded as “Vishwa guru” in the heart of these people.

Chinese civilization which has a written history of 5000 years and witnessed various Philosophical scholars such as Confucius’s confucianism , lao zi ,s Taoism and others religions as well various important inventions in the past has very less influence in these countries in present days southeast Asia. The Chinese who considers China as “Center of the world 《中国》” send fleet of ships under the leadership of Zheng He to expand the dominance of the Ming dynasty in southeast asian region. During his voyage , Zheng He visited these island countries and paid visit to their kings , offered them precious gifts to them , however , this could not make any deep impact on the social life of the people. Thereafter, trade started between China and Southeast asian Countries , however, Chinese culture could not find much place in comparison to Indic culture.

China being the Second largest and Indian economy being the fifth in the world , China still could not established it cultural dominance in these region is a matter of introspection.

This Paper will try to address the answers to the following :

1. What are the factors that lead to the popularity of Indic Civilization in Southeast Asian Countries?
2. What are the factors that became barriers for Chinese Civilization /culture gaining popularity in the Southeast Asian Countries?
3. Why Indian Culture has more influence over Chinese Culture?

Keywords: Indic Civilization , Chinese Civilisation , comparative studies

## **Introduction :**

India is one of the oldest living civilization in the world and believed to have history of more than 5000 years. It is situated in the south Asia and is surrounded by mountains, sea and ocean and blessed with beautiful rivers and fertile lands. This geographical settings has provided India with abundance of natural resources, which has catered to the basic need of food, shelter and clothing. The reason of mentioning these three basic needs "Food, Clothing & Shelter" is to argue that India people were never had to live in scarcity of resources and due to the fertile lands, our peasants which used to be the drivers of agro economy in the past, had enough time to work and maintain their social life in form of entertainment, organising any cultural activities as well as religious activities. The existing various folktales and folk songs, religion and diverse philosophy are the testimony of the glorious and happy life our ancestors has lived and passed on the legacy to their offsprings that till date, each Indian has "Smile on their Faces". Indians are viewed as intelligent and compassionate by nature and are always ahead in extending help to the needy with the people from different culture. Western cultures cannot be equated with the vast and prosperous culture of India. India teaches collective values and always believes in the common growth and development i.e a sense of "collectivism" however, the west has more "Individualism" in life and their approach. Therefore, one can witness so many devastation and imperialistic misadventure carried out by the western countries. India is one of the victims of their aggressive and colonial pursuits. India has never been aggressors and has never been colonialist in the past. It has attracted the world in general and humanity in particular through its kind deeds and its efforts to relieve people from their sufferings (both mental and physical) miseries. The existences of the respect of multicultural in "Hinduism", "Buddhism" and other religion has created an environment of peace and tranquility in the social fabric of India. People are happy as they have someone to rely upon when they are in pain and undergoing any kind of situation which is beyond human control. They believe in supernatural powers "God" and they have full confidence in the deity that "God will never let them in pain and god will definitely come to his /her rescue". Therefore, people have assured protection from any eventualities which they might come across in their life. Indian epics and mythological stories have always promoted 'vegetarianism' and denounced those civilization /society promoting and practicing Non-Vegetarian in their food habit. India has one of the best traditional medicine and practitioners, Ayurveda, Unani, which has promoted peaceful rejuvenation of the body and mind. Indian Ayurvedic teachers and monks have even visited China in the early period to cure prevailing diseases in ancient China.

If one looks into the invention made by the Indian scientist in the past, it has always had the people-centric motives and didn't have any hegemonic pursuits.

It has always believed in philosophy of "Vashudeva kutumbhikam" and has always taught the world across about the love and benevolence towards the humanity.

China is also one of the oldest and living civilizations of the world and is also believed to have a history of more than 5000 years old with written /documented history of 3000 years. It is geographically located in the East Asia and has been blessed with diverse natural resources, with rivers, sea and mountains, however, it has very less arable land. The scarcity of arable land resulted in food scarcity in China and the components of Chinese cuisines are the testimony of this. The major portions of Chinese cuisines use non-vegetarian raw materials. The eating habits of the Chinese people and the manner of hurriedness shown while eating a meal too has a great impact on their past life. The way in which they behave and talk is totally different from people of Indic civilization. Indian people are very quiet and composed while eating and drinking food. China had multiple languages and still has, however, there is state-sponsored "Mandarin" compulsory language that everybody has to study creates some kind of irritants in the normal life of the Chinese citizen. China as of the early inventor of gun powder, however, this invention points towards pursuits of survival or points towards the mindset of insecurity that made them to explore the possibilities of violence for keeping themselves safe.

## **Comparative Analysis of Two Great Civilisations :**

There are many similarities and dissimilarities between the two ancient civilizations. Both these civilizations have existed side by side. Both the civilizations primarily have agrarian economies and share common issues and difficulties to deal with as everything depends on the will of nature. Two great centres of civilization, ranking second and first in size of population among the nations in the world, dominate the map of Eastern Asia. For more than two millennia cultural influence has flowed into Southeastern Asia from India and China. For thousand years Indian and Chinese merchants have traded along the coasts of what are now Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. The very peopling of the peninsula appears to have been a result of movements of groups pressed outward by the expanding Indian and Chinese nations. In most of the cities of Southeast Asia today there are settlements of Chinese and Indians who compete for trade and jobs.

These connections can also be traced in the folktales and folklore of India and China. The story of Young Hanuman eating nine suns in Indian mythology finds similarity in Chinese folktales. There is a similar story of a great archer shooting down nine suns from the sky as ten suns appearing at the same time created lots of hardship for the common people.

The Silk route which had its origin in Luoyang ,China which crossed Indian subcontinent to reach Central Asia and subsequently connected various regions of the world . The cultural influence of China can be seen in the folktales those countries that came in the route of the silk Road. The Chinese traders using this route not only introduced Chinese products to outside world , it also helped to spread the Chinese culture to the outside world.The story of Afanti of China and Mulla Nasiruddin can be one among many cultural influence .

India and China at present has different political structure and are practicing different governance model. However, their difference in political and governance model cannot take away the civilisation and cultural linkage which these two countries of the past. It has been observed that that the Indic civilisation has wider acceptance in various parts of the world in comparison of the Chinese civilization especially in the southeast asian region. There are Nine countries out of eleven countries in southeast Asia practice Indic culture. This prepare is a modest approach to understand

why Indic civilization has greater influence in these southeast Asian countries in comparison of Chinese civilization ?

Why China being second largest economy of the world could not culturally influence these countries ?

### **Challenges / Barriers existed between India and China With Southeast Asian Nations;**

Geographical advantage :

In Past, the rugged mountains existing between Laos, Thailand, Burma and Cambodia became one of the factors that became a natural barrier in cultural interaction between China and southeast Asian countries.

India is directly connected through the maritime route witness these island nations. Therefore, these nations witnessed frequent visit of Indian traders, who visited these nation to do business . During their visit , Indian Hindu traders brought Hinduism and Buddhism to these countries.Hindu kingdoms arose in Burma, Thailand , Malaya, Cambodia , southern Vietnam , southern Borneo, Sumatra , java, Bali and Lombok. With the passing of time many Indian traders started settling in these countries.On the side of southeast Asia that faced India the influence of India became stronger than the influence of China. ecame more entrenched and were more widely disseminated .As the communities grew their ideas about religion became more entrenched and were more widely disseminated . Khmer Civilization at Bangkok wat began as Hindu civilization. The Pallava kingdom ruled much of the south India from A.D.350 to 880, as the Indian culture arrived in Southeast Asia In addition to religion, religion, style of dance , its stories ,architecure and gaudy colour schemes were introduced . The first written language for much of southeast Asia was Pali, a derivative of Sanskrit. Many written language of sSoutheast Asia were based on it..

### **Political Reasons:**

Distress Migration due to political environment prevailing in the past. Chinese people witnessed the era of blood shed during Warring States Period () where The emperors were fighting and killing to obtained the ownership that finally led Qinshihuandi (Yellow emperor ro Unfy China in 221BC. The very existence of Great Wall of China reminds the political upheaval and suffering of Chinese people in history.

In modern period, Chinese society was engulfed in darkness of superstitions and class exploitation The civil war and other movements and policies was the one of the major factors that led Chinese people to move out of China in the past. These movements forced people to move out of China in early 17th & 19th century.

In contemporary China, the Great leap forward and anti-rightist movement to forced Chinese people to move out of China in order to save themselves from the atrocities of State.

India never had such kind of distress migration where people had to forcefully leave their country and seek refugees in other countries. India has always welcomed people from other countries in-spite of herself becoming victims of external aggression from outside such as Mughals, Portuguese, Dutch and finally the British which colonised India for more than three decades. Indic civilization has always stood for “Universal Brotherhood” Therefore, whoever came in contact with Indian civilization could not resist to be part of it.

### **Cultural Advantages of India over China:**

There is no doubt about the richness of Indian and Chinese Culture. However, the India culture has wider acceptance than the Chinese Culture in the international community. The prominent reasons are;

1. India was considered to be the centre of knowledge & wisdom.

India has given world best philosophy in the form of Hinduism and Buddhism, both of these philosophies has made inroads in the culture of various countries across the globe including China.

2. India is centre of religion

India is a holy place which has witnessed birth of religion such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and presently has followers of almost all religion on the earth.

3. Land of Yoga and Ayurveda :

India is the origin of Ayurveda and Yogic Practices that has been curing mental and physical illness. Yoga has been widely accepted and other religions. Indian Ayurveda especially Yoga has travelled across the world and received wider acceptance. Indian culture has always taught “ simple living and high thinking.

China due to various reasons have suffered a lot due to pandemic since time memorial. There are many records of Indian Acharyas visiting Chinese emperor and curing its people from Epidemics.<sup>1</sup> Chinese traditional medicine has acupuncture which relives pain by using pain I.e through its pin therapy.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.theaustraliatoday.com.au/how-indian-acharyas-controlled-epidemics-in-china-earlier/>  
accessed at 2:38 pm on November 15, 2021



4. In spite of having Confucianism and other philosophies existing in China since the warring state period, Buddhism made inroads in China is one of the testimonies of Indic Civilisation's superiority over Chinese. Chinese people had to find solace in Buddhism as this Buddhism became the remedies of all the miseries which common people in China was going through. Indic civilization has always talked and propagated and shown remedies of all evils and suffering through peaceful ways and Chinese people wholeheartedly accepted this civilisational teaching and values.

5. Zhou people are originally nomadic tribe, and it is believed that the worship of Tian was brought into China by Zhou which personified god.

6. China right from early Ming dynasty, the famous voyage of Zheng He (1371-1435) southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent was more kind of expanding Chinese emperor influence to other nations a kind of expansionist approach, which created some kind of apprehension among the people of southeast Asian region. One can also see the various policies of present Chinese regime to expand Chinese influence in each and every part of the world. The Confucius Institutes, Belt and road initiative are the current example and are being viewed with apprehension and mistrust about the Chinese motives.

7. Scanty mythic development: In general, Confucianism is presented as the main reason for scanty development of Chinese literary mythology. For, Confucian rationality, which is based on the humanistic tradition, has belittled myths as frothy stories.

8. The first Hindu arrived as traders while the first Chinese came as merchant and colonisers. Strong independent empires established themselves in Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. Vietnam on the other was controlled, at war or recovering from a war with China.

9. Coming to the modern period which witnessed domestic upheavals in China and especially war against Japanese aggression, Indian medical good will team visited China to help and cure the victims of the war. Dr. Dwarka Nath Kotnis is still remembered in China and is in the heart of common Chinese.

10. Indic Civilization believes rule of principles where in Chinese Civilization propagates the rule of law. The basic difference is lack of compassion in the later teaching. People believes and love compassion rather than strict laws that led to fear and anxieties among the common masses.

### **Conclusion:**

Indic and Chinese civilisation has many similarities and dissimilarities, however, the teaching and philosophy of Ahimsa (Non-Violence) / Philosophy of let everyone be healthy on this earth verse the Centre of the world /Mandate of heaven /putting the world under the heaven through war and violence can never be substituted by the teaching of brotherhood, harmony, peace etc. therefore, Indic civilization has received more influence and appreciation the the southeast asian region in comparison of the Chinese culture. India is Viswaha guru in true sense and its increasing popularity right from the ancient time till present, is the testimony of its cultural superiority over the other culture. Its needless to mention that at present in ongoing geopolitical crisis and

challenges faced by the world due to Russia Ukraine war, every body is looking towards India “the great living Indic civilization” to show some new path to end the crisis in the manner in which it has been curing people in the past from their physical and mental pain and agony. India has always been ahead in its spiritual pursuits and it has united its people with a common string of love and compassion. India as a spiritual civilization can well explained by its following pursuits “ Incredible India” , “Unity in Diversity” and with our **G-20 ‘One Earth, One Family . One Future’**. Therefore, with the reasons discussed in the paper, it can be argued that ,China being the one of the economic power in present day, still could win over the spiritual and cultural heart of the people of the southeast asian region. India will remain the “Vishwa guru” forever and it has strong Indic Civilization foundation.

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