

SUNDRY NOTES ON FA-HSIEN*

Travel accounts of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims who visited India during the early centuries of the Christian era are an important component of the Buddhist literature of China. Having heard about the founder of Buddhism and the places consecrated by his presence from about the first century A.D., when Buddhist books were received in China, these pilgrims visited India, to see the places associated with the Buddha's life, to learn the doctrine from teachers in the country of its origin, and to collect sacred books which they translated into Chinese. The accounts of their journeys left by a few of them are valuable sources as contemporary records of historical events, social customs and traditions, popular forms of Buddhist worship and belief, and the religious atmosphere that prevailed in the host countries.

A study of these Chinese sources in modern times is said to have been inaugurated with the publication of C.J. Neumann's work (1833) on the Buddhist pilgrims who came to India.¹ One of the earliest of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims was Fa-hsien, the known period of whose activity is placed between the years 399 and 418 A.D.² His memoir, called the *Foe Koue Ki* or *A Narrative of Buddhist Kingdoms*, was translated into French from the Chinese, and commented upon by Abel Rémusat. This translation and the commentary were revised and published with additional details by Klaproth and Landresse in Paris, in 1836, after the death of Rémusat.³ The translation of Fa-hsien's account of his journey given there, divided into forty chapters, is preceded by a lengthy introduction by Landresse, while it is followed by two appendices: (1) a geographical résumé of the important places mentioned by Fa-hsien and (2) the itinerary of Hiuan Tshang, who visited India in the seventh century A.D. A map prepared by Klaproth, dated 1833, given

* The name of this Chinese pilgrim is variously spelt. The spelling I have adopted is that given in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion* ed. by Mircea Eliade. Vol 5. New York. 1955. p. 245. Variants are used such as Fa-Hien, Fa-hian, Fa-Hian, Faxian.

¹ Bhattacharyya, N.N. (1993). *Buddhism in the History of Indian Ideas*. New Delhi. p. 3.

² Jan Yün-hua (1995). Fa-hsien (fl. 399 - 418). *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* edited Mircea Eliade. Vol. 5. New York. p. 245 (fl. = flourished).

³ Rémusat, Abel (1836). *Foe Koue Ki ou Relation des Royaumes Bouddhiques: Voyage dans la Tartarie, dans l'Afghanistan et dans l'Inde, exécuté, a la fin du IV^e siècle, par Chy Fa Hian*. Traduit du Chinois et commenté par M. Abel Rémusat. Ouvrage Posthume. Revu, complété, et augmenté d'éclaircissements nouveaux par MM. Klaproth et Landresse. Paris. A L'imprimerie Royale. M DCCC XXXVI.

at the end of the book, purports to convey an idea of Fa-hsien's voyage made between the years 399 and 414 A.D. The information given on the title-page of this publication, viz. that Fa-hsien's Narrative was written at the end of the fourth century A.D., is inconsistent with the dates of the duration of his voyage given on the map. Four plates giving (1) a map of India as perceived by the Chinese and showing the itinerary of Hiuan Tshang; (2) paintings depicting the birth and an incarnation of Śakyamuni described on pages 222 and 201 respectively of Rémusat's text; (3) and (4) kingdoms in India visited and described by Fa-hsien are also appended to this work. An English translation of Rémusat's French text, with additional notes, titled *The Pilgrimage of Fa Hian*, is known to have been published by J.W.Laidley, in Calcutta, in 1848.⁴ According to Vincent Smith, it was published anonymously with additional notes and illustrations, which deserved to be consulted.⁵

Reverend Samuel Beal gave an English translation of Fa-hsien's Chinese text in his book *Buddhist Pilgrims* published in 1869.⁶ This book is listed in the bibliography of the text and translation of the memoir of a Korean monk who visited India in the eighth century as: S.Beal. *Travels of Fa Hian and Sung yün*, London, 1869.⁷ A paper on Indian

⁴ Jan Yün-hua (1995) *op.cit.* p. 246.

⁵ Smith, Vincent A. (1957). *The Early History of India* (first published 1924) 4th edition. Oxford 1957. p. 25. The name of the author is spelt here as Laidlay.

⁶ I have not seen this book. It is referred to in Beal's introduction to his translation of *Si-yu-ki*, the travel account of Hiuen Tsiang. See notes 9 and 10 below.

⁷ *The Hye Ch'o Diary: Memoir of the Pilgrimage to the Five Regions of India*. Translation, text and editing by Yang, Han-sung; Jan, Yün-hua and Iida, Shotaro; Laurence W. Preston. Religions of Asia Series. Number 2 ed. Lewis R. Lancaster and J.L. Shastri. Berkeley, California. Asian Humanities Press and Seoul, Korea. Po Chin Chai Ltd., No. date. p. 31. The copy of this book available in the Library of the University of Peradeniya was received on 15.02.1991. Also in Hazra, Kanai Lal: *Buddhism in India as described by the Chinese Pilgrims*. A.D. 399 - 689. New Delhi, 1983. Bibliography p. 110.

Travels of Chinese Buddhists was printed by Beal in *The Indian Antiquary* in 1881.⁸ Here he gave a brief summary of the history of some Chinese Buddhist monks who visited India during the early period of the T'ang dynasty (618 A.D. - 907 A.D), based on a Chinese book written by I-tsing of the same dynasty. Beal re-published his translation of Fa-hsien's text in the Introduction to his two-volumed translation of *Si-yu-ki*, the travel account of Hiuen Tsiang (629 A.D), first published in 1884,⁹ and reprinted in 1906.¹⁰ The narrative of Fa-hsien, comprising forty chapters, given here, is titled *Fo-kwo-ki, The Travels of Fa-Hian. Buddhist-Country-Records, by Fa-hian, the Śākya of the Sung (Dynasty). (Date, 400 A.D.)* Beal refers the reader to the original edition (1869) of his *Buddhist Pilgrims*, "my little book" in his own words, for many notes and explanations of Fa-hsien's text, which he did not reproduce for want of space in his publication of the *Si-yu-ki*,¹¹ while Vincent Smith states that Beal gave an amended and much improved rendering of Fa-hsien's text in this publication.¹²

Beal reproduced a few notes on some doubtful or obscure passages which he had made while going over Fa-hsien's text afresh in a paper read at the monthly meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland on 20th December 1886. This paper entitled *Some Remarks on the Narrative of Fa-hien* was published in the Society's Journal

⁸ Beal, S. (1881). Indian Travels of Chinese Buddhists. *The Indian Antiquary*. Edited by Jas. Burgess. Vol. X-1881. Bombay. pp. 109 - 111; 192 - 197; 246 - 248.

⁹ Beal, Samuel (1884). *Si-yu-ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World*. Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629) in two volumes. London: Trübner and Co.

¹⁰ Beal, Samuel (1906). *Si-yu-ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World*. Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629) in two volumes. London. Kegan Paul, Trench Trübner and Co. Ltd.

¹¹ *ibid.* vol. I. p. xxii.

¹² Smith, Vincent A. (1957) *op. cit.* p. 25.

in 1887.¹³ That there was a contemporaneous interest in Fa-hsien among American Orientalists is attested by C.R.Lanman's report on "An incident in the life of the illustrious Chinese Buddhist monk Fa-hsien" in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1894.¹⁴

Samuel Beal, one of the earliest scholars to venture on Chinese studies, was a graduate of the University of Cambridge, a retired chaplain, a rector of Wark, Northumberland etc. and Professor of Chinese, University College, London.¹⁵ That his work continues to be recognised as authoritative is attested by the Indian editions of his translation of the *Si-yu-ki*, published in Calcutta in 1957 and 1958 and reprinted in 1963,¹⁶ and in Delhi in 1981.¹⁷

In 1877, H.A.Giles presented a new translation of Fa-hsien's text, which was

¹³ Beal, S. (1887). "Some Remarks on the Narrative of Fa-hien". *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. New Series. Vol. 19. London. pp. 191 - 206.

¹⁴ Lanman, C.R. (1894). "An Incident in the Life of the Illustrious Chinese Buddhist Monk, Fa-hsien." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. pp. cxxxv-cxxxix. These pages are missing in the copy of vol. 16 of the Journal (published in 1895) kept in the library of the University of Peradeniya. The page giving the contents of the journal lists this article.

¹⁵ Beal, Samuel (1906). *op.cit.* title page; *The Indian Antiquary*. Vol. X. 1881. p. iii giving the contents of the volume in which Beal published an article. See note 8 above.

¹⁶ Beal, Samuel. (1957; 1958; 1963). *Si-yu-ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World* translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang. Second edition. Vol. I. Calcutta 1957; third edition 1963. Vols. 2,3 and 4. Calcutta 1958. The publisher's note in Vol. I states that it is a verbatim reprint of Book I of the original edition (London 1884), the subsequent portion of which was to be completed in three more volumes.

¹⁷ Beal, Samuel (1981). *Si-yu-ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World*. In two volumes. Reprint of the London 1884 edition. Delhi. Motilal Banarsidass.

published in London and Shanghai,¹⁸ where he says he corrected many of Beal's glaring mistakes. Unfortunately, Giles left behind some of his own.¹⁹ Herbert Allen Giles (1845 - 1935) is said to have spent twenty-six years in China in consular service and subsequently become Professor of Chinese in the University of Cambridge.²⁰ Vincent Smith remarks that the notes in Giles' translation, which are largely devoted to incisive criticisms on the early work of Beal, afford little help to the reader who desires to study the pilgrim's observations from an Indian point of view. But he values Giles' "scarce little volume" as an independent rendering of the difficult Chinese text by a highly qualified linguist. He also notes that some of the errors in Giles' work were corrected by Watters in his article 'Fa-hsien and his English Translators', in Volume VIII of the *China Review*.²¹ T. Watters, British Consul at Ichang, is credited with a series of articles on this theme in the *China Review* of 1879 and 1880, which are said to be "of the highest value, displaying an accuracy of Chinese scholarship and an extensive knowledge of Buddhism."²²

Almost a decade later - in 1886, to be precise - James Legge, Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at Oxford, who had been a missionary among the Chinese people

¹⁸ Smith, Vincent A. (1957). *op.cit.* p. 25. (I have not seen Giles' publication of 1877).

¹⁹ Giles, H.A. (1923). *The Travels of Fa-hsien (399 - 414 A.D.) or Record of the Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Retranslated. Cambridge. Bibliographical Note. p. xiii.

²⁰ Giles, Herbert A. edited (1965). Cover of *Gems of Chinese Literature*. 2 volumes bound in one. New York 1965. (Republication of the second edition of 1923). The first edition of Vol. I - prose was published in 1883, according to the Preface to the First Edition signed on 16th October 1883. vide Giles (1965) p. xiv; Vol. II - verse was first published in 1898. *ibid.* p. 290.

²¹ Smith, Vincent A. (1957) *op.cit.* p. 25.

²² Legge, James (1886). *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Being an account by the Chinese Monk Fa-hien of his Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399 - 414) in search of the Buddhist *Books of Discipline*. Oxford. Preface p. xii.

for about thirty years, published his translation of Fa-hsien's *Travels in India and Ceylon*,²³ which was reprinted in New Delhi in 1993.²⁴ In the Preface to his book, Legge says that he tried to read through the 'Narrative of Fa-hien' several times during his long residence in Hong Kong, but without much success, due to some difficulties. Though one of the difficulties was removed with the appearance of Dr. Eitel's *Handbook for the Students of Chinese Buddhism* in 1870, he did not "look into the book" for many years. In 1878, when he began to lecture in Oxford on the *Travels* with his Davis Chinese scholar, who was at the same time Boden Sanskrit scholar, he wrote out a translation in English of nearly half the narrative. In 1885, when he lectured on Fa-hien again, he wrote out a second translation, independent of the former and completed translating the whole text. Besides the translation of Fa-hsien's Narrative and copious notes, Legge's book has a reproduction of the Chinese text from a Korean recension,²⁵ sent to him from Japan by his friend Bunyiu Nanjio. While acknowledging that he made frequent reference to previous translations, Legge highly commends Watters' articles on 'Fa-hsien and his English Translators,' and regrets that Watters had not published his own version of Fa-hsien's Narrative. Stating that the Chinese narrative runs on without any break, Legge says that it was Klaproth who divided Rémusat's translation into forty chapters, a division which he notes is helpful to the reader. Smith, whose opinion of the previous translations of Fa-hsien's *Travels* we have noted above, refers to Legge's work (1886) as the latest at the time he wrote (1924) and considers it on the whole the most serviceable. However, he expresses his reservation about the notes which, he says, leave much to be desired.²⁶ Legge has recently (1995) been described as "the only British Chinese scholar of his generation with a claim to real and

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Legge, James (1993). Reprint of the 1886 edition. *op.cit.*

²⁵ The Korean edition of Fa-hsien's work is dated 1246. Other important editions of the text are: the Northern Sung edition from Tung Chan Monastery, Foochow, A.D. 1104; the Northern Sung edition from Kai Yuan monastery, Foochow, A.D. 1148; the Southern Sung edition from Ssuhsi, Huchow, Chekiang, A.D. 1239. vide Li Yung-hsi (1957). *A Record of the Buddhist Countries by Fa-hsien*. Translated from the Chinese. Peking. The Chinese Buddhist Association. p. 10.

²⁶ Smith, Vincent A. (1957) *op.cit.* p. 25.

lasting distinction", whose work is still widely quoted.²⁷

A translation of Fa-hsien's *Travels*, that has escaped the attention of Smith in 1924, is the re-translation of Giles, the first edition of which appeared in July 1923, followed by a reprint in November of the same year indicative of the demand for it.²⁸ In the Bibliographical Note in this work, Giles states that Rémusat's French translation of Fa-hsien's text is a brilliant performance, considering the difficulty of the text and the date 1836, at which it was published; that Beal's translation of 1869 is really an English translation of Rémusat's work, in which he reproduced all Rémusat's mistakes while adding many more of his own; that his own translation of 1877 corrected many of Beal's glaring mistakes but left behind some of his own; and that Legge, in his translation of 1886, borrowed largely his corrections of Beal without acknowledgement and managed to contribute mistakes of his own. In his "closely revised" translation of 1923, Giles claims to give a strictly literal and accurate rendering of the Chinese text "so far as possible," without footnotes and references to authorities, so that "there will be no check to the enjoyment of the reader as he travels along with Fa-hsien on his stupendous journey", a succinct statement of the extent of which he gives in the Introduction, where he says that Fa-hsien "practically walked from Central China across the desert of Gobi, over the Hindu Kush, and through India down to the mouth of the Hoogly, where he took ship and returned by sea, after manifold hairbreadth escapes, to China, bringing with him what he went forth to secure - books of the Buddhist Canon and images of Buddhist deities."

Fa-hsien's work continued to receive the attention of scholars in different countries. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi discussed Fa-hsien's translations and writing in Volume I of his work on the Buddhist Canon in Chinese, which appeared in Paris in 1927.²⁹ The Japanese scholar Kiroku Adachi published an annotated text with the results of his researches in 1936 and a revised edition in 1940, as reported in the foreword to a

²⁷ Twitchett, Denis (1995). Chinese Studies in Britain. A Review Article of Barrett, T.H. *Singular Listlessness: a Short History of Chinese Books and British Scholars*. London. 1989. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*. Vol. 5. Part 2. 1995. p. 246.

²⁸ Giles, H.A. (1923) *op.cit.*

²⁹ Bagchi, Prabodh Chandra (1927). *Le Canon Bouddhique en Chine. Les Traducteurs et les Traductions*. Sino-Indica. Publications de l'Universite de Calcutta. Tome Ier Paris 1927. pp. 347 - 348.

translation of the *Travels* from the Chinese by Li Yung-hsi, published in the People's Republic of China in 1957.³⁰ Li Yung-hsi's translation was sponsored by the San Shih Buddhist Institute, Peking, to commemorate the 2500th anniversary of Buddha's Nirvana. There is evidence of a publication entitled, *Fa-hsien, the Unassuming Pilgrim and his Contribution to the History of Buddhism*,³¹ by Dr. Thich Minh Chau, a Vietnamese monk, who spent much of his time at the Nava Nalanda Mahavihara in India in the early 1960s, enjoying its peaceful atmosphere and making use of its rich library.³²

Fa-hsien's text was translated into Tamil and published in Chennai (Madras) in 1963.³³ This translation by Irakavan, edited by Mahavidvan Cindamanichelvar Vernugopalapillai, has three appendices: I. giving place names in Tamil, English and Chinese; II. giving names of people; and III. giving common names. These appendices are followed by a comprehensive index.

Josef Kolmas' translation of Fa-hsien's *Travels* into a Slavic language, namely Czech, appeared in Prague in 1972.³⁴ Previous translations of Fa-hsien's text are listed on pages 131 - 132 of Kolmas' translation,³⁵ a reprint of which was published, also in Prague,

³⁰ Li Yung-hsi (1957). *A Record of the Buddhist Countries by Fa-hsien. Translated from the Chinese. Peking.* The Chinese Buddhist Association. p. 10.

³¹ Noted in a list of publications of Bhikshu Dr. Thich Minh Chau of Vietnam in his book: *Hsuan Tsang. The Pilgrim and Scholar.* Vietnam. Nha-Trang. Vietnam Buddhist Institute. No date. The Introduction is dated 15th April 1963.

³² *ibid.* p. xvi.

³³ Irakavan, V.S.V. (1963). *Fa-hien. A.D. 399-414. Translated.* Madras. Valluvar Pannai.

³⁴ Kolmas, J. (1972). *Fa-sien. Zápisky o buddhistických zemích.* Praha. Odeon.

³⁵ De Jong, J.W. (1981). *Fa-hsien and Buddhist Texts in Ceylon. Journal of the Pali Text Society.* Vol. IX. ed. K.R. Norman. Bibliography p. 115.

in 1995.³⁶ This translation is accompanied by a Preface and a commentary in Czech.³⁷ Nancy Elizabeth Boulton's doctoral dissertation on *Early Chinese Buddhist Travel Records as a Literary Genre* submitted to the Georgetown University (USA) will no doubt contain a discussion of Fa-hsien and his Travels.³⁸

Samuel Beal, one of the earliest translators of Fa-hsien's account of his travels, gives the following information about Fa-hsien's early life. His original name was Kung. When he assumed the religious title of Fa-hsien, he took also the appellation of *Shih* or Śākyaputra, the disciple of Śākya. He was a native of Wu-yang, of the district of Ping-Yang, in the province of Shan-si. He left his home and became a *śrāmaṇera* at three years of age. The source of Beal's information is the work called *Ko-sang-chuen*, which, according to Beal, was written during the time of the Liang dynasty, and belonged to the Suh family (502 - 507 A.D.)³⁹ Beal's information about Fa-hsien's early life can be supplemented by that given in Legge's Introduction to his translation of Fa-hsien's text. Fa-hsien had three brothers older than himself. When they died young, the father "had him entered as a *śrāmaṇera*, still keeping him at home in the family." When he fell dangerously ill, the father sent him to the monastery where he soon got well and refused to return to his parents. When Fa-hsien was ten years old, his father died; an uncle urged him to return home to his mother but he refused to do so, saying that he chose monkhood because he "wished to be far from the dust and vulgar ways of life." When he had finished his noviciate, Fa-hsien, which clerical name means 'Illustrious in the Law,' or 'Illustrious master of the Law,' undertook his journey to India, of which he left a record. Legge's sources of information are the accounts of Fa-hsien given in the "*Memoirs of Eminent*

³⁶ Praha. Aurora Publishers.

³⁷ I am indebted to Dr. Stefan Faller of the Classics Department of the University of Freiburg for giving me information about this publication through the kind help of Prof. D.P.M. Weerakkody of the Department of Classical Languages of the University of Peradeniya.

³⁸ Boulton, Nancy Elizabeth. (Date ?). *Early Chinese Buddhist Travel Records as a Literary Genre*. Dissertation for Ph.D in Chinese. Georgetown University (USA) 518 pp. This note is from an entry in my card catalogue. I was unable to get further information about this study.

³⁹ Beal, Samuel (1906) *op.cit.* pp. xi, xii.

Monks", compiled in A.D. 519, and a later work, the "*Memoirs of Marvellous Monks*", by the third emperor of the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1403 - 1424), the content of which he says "is nearly all borrowed from the other."⁴⁰ The first of these sources seems to be the same as that used by Beal, though there is a discrepancy in the dates given by the two scholars. Fa-hsien's biography in this source, the *Kao-seng-chuan*, has been translated by Robert Shih in his *Biographies des moines éminents (Kao seng tchouan) de Houei-kiao* in Louvain in 1968.⁴¹

The initial paragraph of Fa-hsien's text, which states the aim of his travels and the names of some of his fellow-pilgrims, is as follows: "Fa-hian, when formerly residing at Ch'ang-an, regretted the imperfect condition of the *Vinaya piṭaka*. Whereupon, afterwards, in the second year of Hung-shi, the cyclic year being *Chi-hai*, he agreed with Hwui-king, Tao-ching, Hwui-ying, Hwui-wu, and others, to go to India for the purpose of seeking the rules and regulations (*of the Vinaya*)."⁴²

The account that follows describes the places they visited, the rulers, the monks and others they met, what they saw and heard, and their varied personal experiences. Fa-hsien's arrival at the town of Pāṭalīputra, described in chapter XXXVI of his *Travels*, was a significant event best described in Fa-hsien's own words as follows:

The purpose of Fa-Hian was to seek copies of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*; but throughout the whole of Northern India the various masters trusted to tradition only for their knowledge of the precepts and had no originals to copy from. Wherefore Fa-Hian had come even so far as Mid-India. But here in the *saṅghārāma* of the Great Vehicle, he obtained one collection of the precepts, viz., the collection used by the Mahāsāṅghika assembly. . . . Moreover, he obtained one copy of precepts from dictation, comprising about 7000 *gāthās*. This version was that used by the assembly belonging to the school of the Sarvastivadas:

Besides these, Fa-hsien found some Sanskrit texts and a copy of the *Abhidharma* belonging to the Mahāsāṅghikas, here in Pāṭalīputra, so that he spent three years there,

⁴⁰ Legge, James (1993) *op.cit.* pp. 1-3.

⁴¹ On pages 108 - 115 as noted by Jan Yün-hua (1995) *op.cit.* p. 246.

⁴² Beal, Samuel (1906) *op.cit.* p. xxii.

engaged in learning to read the Sanskrit books, and to converse in that language, and in copying the precepts. His ambition fulfilled, Fa-hsien continued his journey to return to his homeland, alone, as his only companion at the time. To-ching, (others had parted company or died *en route* earlier) much impressed by the strict decorum and the religious behaviour of the *śramaṇas* of Mid-India, took up permanent abode there. After spending two more years in India, in the kingdom of Tāmralipti, "writing out copies of the sacred books (*sūtras*) and drawing image-pictures," Fa-hsien "shipped himself on board a great merchant vessel," sailed for fourteen days and nights "and arrived at the country of the lions (Sinhala, Ceylon)."⁴³

The event of the arrival of Fa-hsien in Sri Lanka is recorded in chapter XXXVII of his *Travels*. This and the next two chapters and part of the last chapter, the fortieth, contain his description of the island - its length and breadth, the small islands surrounding it, the agreeable climate and the formation of a kingdom as a result of visits of merchants to the island, which originally had no inhabitants other than dragons and demons. Among other matters mentioned or described are a visit of the Buddha to the island to convert a malevolent dragon; the existence of a monastery for five thousand monks called Abhayagiri, where there was a hall which housed a resplendent jasper figure of the Buddha about twenty-two feet in height; Fa-hsien's emotional reaction on seeing a merchant offer a white taffeta fan of Chinese manufacture, to the image: the sacred Bodhi Tree grown out of a slip of the 'Pei-to' tree brought from India; the 'chapel' of the Tooth of the Buddha in the capital of the city; the noblemen and the rich householders who resided in the city; the proclamation made ten days before bringing out the Tooth of the Buddha in the middle of the third month and taking it to the Abhayagiri Vihāra in procession, where it was worshipped for ninety days before returning it to the vihāra within the city; the Mahāvihāra in which lived three thousand monks; the funeral ceremony of an eminent monk who resided at the Mahāvihāra; the discourse of a 'religious brother' from India, which he repeated by word of mouth; the mention of Fa-hsien's residence in the country as being two years; his obtaining a copy of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* according to the school of the Mahīśāsakas, a copy of the *Dīrghāgama*, the Miscellaneous *Āgama* (*Samyuktāgama*), and also a collection of the *Piṭaka* (*Sannipāta*), all these works being in the original language (*Fan*); and how Fa-hsien protected these along with other sacred books and images during the perilous and adventurous sea-voyage in a merchant vessel bound for his home country.⁴⁴

⁴³ *ibid.* pp. lxx - lxxii.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* pp. lxxii - lxxxiii.

The final paragraph of Fa-hsien's text, which gives in summary form the duration and extent of his travels and the reason that motivated him to write down his report, is as follows:

Fa-hsien started his journey from Changan and spent six years on the way to the Middle Kingdom, where he stayed for six years; and he spent three years on his return journey before he reached Chingchow. He travelled through nearly thirty countries, from the west of the Desert to the land of India. No complete account can be given of the excellent conduct and religious teaching of the monks he met on his journey; but it was to inform the monks in China of these things that Fa-hsien crossed the seas at the risk of his humble life, and braved many hardships and dangers to return home. Thanks to the spiritual protection of the Three Precious Gems, he was able to come safely through many perils. So he has put down this outline of his travels on bamboo and silk, in order that the devout may share all his experiences. This was in the cyclic year of Chia Yin,⁴⁵ which year has been identified as A.D. 414.⁴⁶

The incidence of Fa-hsien narrating in detail what he had related in brief earlier, as recorded in the following post-script by another monk, is of interest.

It was at the end of the summer retirement in the twelfth year of the era of Yi Hsi of the Tsin dynasty, and the year of Canopus,⁴⁷ that we welcomed the venerable Fa-hsien. While he remained with us, preaching, we questioned him again about his travels, and found that he was an unassuming, affable man, who answered truthfully. We therefore urged him to give a more detailed account of what he had previously narrated so briefly. Thus he related his story once more from beginning to end.

"When I look back on what I have been through," he said, "my heart begins to pound and I start to sweat. I risked all those dangers with no thought for myself, because I had a fixed purpose and, simple as I am, was single-minded. That was why I embarked upon a journey in which

⁴⁵ Li Yung-hsi (1957) *op.cit.* pp. 92 - 93.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 93.

⁴⁷ Identified by Li Yung-hsi as A.D. 416. *ibid.*

death seemed almost certain, and I had one chance only in ten thousand of surviving."

We were moved by what he said. Such men as this are rare, whether in ancient times or at the present day. Since the Great Religion travelled east, there has been no one to equal Fa-hsien in his selfless search for the Law. From this we may know that all things are possible to the sincere of heart, and all things can be accomplished if a man has determination. For is it not true that he succeeded because he disregarded what others value, and valued what others disregard?⁴⁸

The language of the Buddhist texts that Fa-hsien found in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) has received the attention of J.W.de Jong in his contribution to Volume IX (1981) of the *Journal of the Pali Text society*, published as part of its centenary celebrations.⁴⁹ De Jong opens the discussion by citing E.W.Adikaram, who says: "When Fa Hien left Ceylon, he took with him a copy of the Vinaya Piṭaka of the Mahāsāhaka school, the Dīrghāgama and the Saṃyuktāgama (sūtras) and also the Saṃyuktasañchaya-pitaka, all written in Sanskrit."⁵⁰ Adikaram published his book in 1946. The authority he gives for his statement on the texts that Fa-hsien took with him when he left Ceylon and the language in which they were written is James Legge's translation (1886) of Fa-hsien's text, where Legge describes the books Fa-hsien obtained in Ceylon as Sanskrit works.⁵¹

The word used by Fa-hsien to denote the language of the texts he found in Ceylon is *fan*. De Jong draws attention to K.R.Norman's view on the meaning of this word,

⁴⁸ Li Yung-hsi (1957) *op.cit* pp. 93 - 94.

⁴⁹ De Jong, J.W. (1981): *op.cit.* pp. 105 - 116.

⁵⁰ Adikaram, E.W. (1946). *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*. Colombo, 1946. pp. 94 - 95; The second impression of this book, used by de Jong, appeared in Colombo in 1953; a third impression, wrongly described as the second by the publishers: The Buddhist Cultural Centre, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka, was released in 1994.

⁵¹ Legge, James (1886) *op.cit.* p. 111.

published in an article in 1978.⁵² There Norman pointed out that the word *fan*, as used by Fa-hsien himself, means 'Indian (language)', and that without further evidence there is no way of saying whether the language was Sanskrit, Prakrit or Pali.⁵³ De Jong states that the only further evidence available is to be found in the Chinese translations of the texts, which Fa-hsien took to China. After a discussion of such evidence, de Jong concludes as follows: "The Chinese sources show that in the first half of the fifth century, contacts between Buddhist communities in India, Ceylon and China were very close. It is therefore quite probable that Buddhist texts composed in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit were available in Ceylon and were brought from there to China."⁵⁴ In 1997, Jonathan S. Walters equates the word *fan* with Buddhist Sanskrit, when he says: "Faxian specifically mentions that his long-term hosts at the Abhayagiri gave him texts in Buddhist Sanskrit (Fan)."⁵⁵ Walters does not refer to any discussion based on which he came to this conclusion.

The value of Fa-hsien's visit to Sri Lanka and the record he made of it has been widely recognised. The nineteenth century writer, James Emerson Tennent, makes much use of Fa-hsien's personal testimony as a source in his book on Ceylon.⁵⁶ D.P.M. Weerakkody, who examined the Greek and Roman notices of Sri Lanka and their historical context in a recent publication (1997), says that "None of them can claim to a deep understanding of Sri Lanka's life and thought as revealed in a Chinese writer such as Fa-hsien."⁵⁷ S.G.M. Weerasinghe, who published a book entitled: *A History of Cultural*

⁵² Norman, K.R. (1978). "The role of Pali in early Sinhalese Buddhism", in Heinz Bechert (ed.) *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries*. Göttingen 1978 (The reference as given by de Jong).

⁵³ *ibid.* p. 39 as noted by de Jong (1981) *op.cit.* p. 105.

⁵⁴ De Jong, J.W. (1981) *op.cit.* p. 113.

⁵⁵ Walters, Jonathan S. (1997). "Mahayana Theravada and the origins of the Mahavihara." *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*. Vol. XXIII Nos. 1 and 2. University of Peradeniya. Sri Lanka. pp. 106 - 107.

⁵⁶ Tennent, Sir James Emerson (1859). *Ceylon. An Account of the Island, Physical, Historical, and Topographical*. Vols. I and II. London.

⁵⁷ Weerakkody, D.P.M. (1997). *Taprobanê. Ancient Sri Lanka as known to*

Relations between Sri Lanka and China, states that Bhikṣu Fa-hsien, who lived at the Abhayagiri Vihara for two years (411 - 412 A.C.), was in fact the historical architect of the establishment of the amicable relations between the two countries.⁵⁸ In a Prologue to Weerasinghe's publication (1995), the then Minister of Education, Higher Education and Cultural Affairs echoes the same sentiment, when he says that Fa-hsien's visit "seems to be the beginning of the mutual understanding between Sīhaladīpa and China."⁵⁹ This point of view is affirmed in the message from H.E. the Ambassador for China in Sri Lanka, dated Colombo, 1st June 1994, printed on page VII of Weerasinghe's book, which reads as follows. "The Chinese Buddhist monk Fa-Hsien (5th century A.C.) and the Sinhala navigator Nandi (5th century A.C.) were the architects of the cultural relationship that developed between the two lands." Page 22 of Weerasinghe's publication contains a picture of "Fa-Hsien Maha Thera". The name of the artist or the source from which it is reproduced is not indicated. An imaginary portrait of Fa-hsien, by Kushan Mañjuśrī, appears on page 20 of *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea*, published in Colombo in 1990.⁶⁰

Local tradition associates the Buddhist cave temple called Fahiengala or Pahiengala with the name of our pilgrim Fa-hsien. S.U. Deraniyagala, the present Director General of Archaeology in Sri Lanka, who first examined this cave site in 1968, says that this cave, situated in Yatagampitiya village near Bulathsinhala in the Kalutara District in the lowland Wet Zone, is probably the largest cave in the country, and that excavations were undertaken at this cave site by W.H. Wijepala, Director (Excavations) of the Archaeological Survey Department in 1986 and 1988.⁶¹ Wijepala and N. Perera (Technical

Greeks and Romans. Brepols. p. 16.

⁵⁸ Weerasinghe, S.G.M. (1995). *A History of the Cultural Relations between Sri Lanka and China. An Aspect of the Silk Route*. Colombo. Ministry of Cultural Affairs. p. 103.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* Prologue (B). p. XI.

⁶⁰ Bandaranayake, Senake et al. ed. (1990). *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea*. Colombo. The Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO and the Central Cultural Fund.

⁶¹ Deraniyagala, S.U. (1992). *The Prehistory of Sri Lanka*. Memoir Vol. 8. Department of Archaeological Survey. Government of Sri Lanka. Part II.

Assistant) directed field operations at this and two other cave sites, namely Belilena Kitulgala and Batadomba-lena. Deraniyagala, who sketched the salient results of their operations as addenda to his publication, *The Prehistory of Sri Lanka*, in 1992, expected the reports prepared by them to add a new dimension to prehistoric archaeology in Sri Lanka.⁶²

W.H.Wijayapala (whose name was spelt as Wijepala by Deraniyagala), has evaluated the data that emerged from the cave sites he excavated in a thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, in October 1997.⁶³ Chapter 3 of this thesis the title of which is: *New Light on the Prehistory of Sri Lanka in the context of recent investigations at cave sites*, discusses the Fa-hsien cave under the following topics: Fahienlana at Bulathsinhala: The Excavation; Fahienlana Stratigraphy and Chronology; Stone Artefacts; Bone Artefacts; Faunal Remains; Human Skeletal Remains and the Conclusion.⁶⁴ Appendix III of Wijayapala's thesis contains information on the stratigraphy of sites A and B that he excavated, and lists and illustrations of stone and bone artefacts found at the sites.⁶⁵

Wijayapala noted that the Buddhist temple known at present as the 'Pahiengala Ancient Historic Cave Temple' is famous on account of the belief that the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien had stayed there on his way to Adam's Peak (Sri Pāda). While pointing out that there is "no evidence at the site, in the chronicles or from epigraphical or archaeological data" in support of such a belief, Wijayapala says that according to some scholars the word Fahienlana or Pahiengala could be a linguistic derivation of *Pa-him-gala*, which in the Sinhala language means the 'lower boundary rock.' However, Wijayapala concedes that

Addendum 1. p. 695.

⁶² *ibid.* Part I. Acknowledgments. p.XIV.

⁶³ Wijayapala, W.H. (1997). *New Light on the Prehistory of Sri Lanka in the context of recent investigations at cave sites*. Ph.D thesis submitted to the University of Peradeniya in October 1997. Vol. I. i - vii 467 pp. Vol. 11. pp. 470-733.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* Listed under contents on p. v. of Vol. I.

⁶⁵ *ibid.* Vol. 11. pp. 652 - 681.

no one can deny the possibility of the Buddhist monk Fa-hsien's stay in this cave on his way to Srī Pāda or the Samanala area.⁶⁶ The word Srī Pāda, which literally means the auspicious or glorious footprint, is used to denote a mountain peak in Sri Lanka called Samantakūṭa. It is said that the Buddha left the mark of his footprint on this mountain when he visited the island for the third time, resulting in the mountain becoming a sacred place of pilgrimage.⁶⁷ That Fa-hsien knew this legend is clear from a statement in chapter XXXVIII of his text describing Sri Lanka, which James Legge translated as follows: "When Buddha came to this country, wishing to transform the wicked nāgas, by his supernatural power he planted one foot at the north of the royal city, and the other on the top of a mountain, the two being fifteen yojanas apart."⁶⁸ D.T. Devendra says that when the distance as given by Fa-hsien is reckoned in terms of modern measurement, the mountain he refers to is "situated in a straight line exactly where Srī Pāda lies."⁶⁹ Weerasinghe, who describes Pahiyangala as a place in which are found "cloistered caverns, ponds of purest water and ruined cetiyas" refers to the belief of the villagers that Fa-hsien lived there in a cave "about 350 feet up on the rock",⁷⁰ and also to the recent discovery of a 'Chinese tray' on which the "tortoise story" is said to be depicted, in a cave in this rock.⁷¹

Translations of Fa-hsien's account of his travels into the Sinhala language also

⁶⁶ *ibid.* Vol. 1. p. 366.

⁶⁷ Malalasekera, G.P. (1937). *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*. Reprinted 1960. s.v. Samantakūṭa.

⁶⁸ Legge, James (1886) *op. cit.* p. 102.

⁶⁹ Devendra, D.T. (1960). "Fa-Hsien in Ceylon." *Ceylon Today*. December 1960. pp. 22 - 23. Reprinted in the Sri Lankan newspaper *Daily News* on February 17, 1998.

⁷⁰ Weerasinghe, S.G.M. (1995) *op.cit.* p. 73.

⁷¹ *ibid.* p. 91. The source Weerasinghe cites for this information is: Gunaratne, Rohan. *Sino- Lankan Connection*. Colombo. 1987. p. 85.

attest his popularity in Sri Lanka. W. Charles de Silva, Advocate, published his translation with notes in 1921.⁷² The title of the text given on the cover page as *Fa Hien's Buddhist Kingdoms and Travels* (399 - 414) has been rendered into Sinhala as *Pāhiyange Bauddha Rājadhāni saha Vandanā Gaman Vistaraya* (Chr. era. 399 - 414). N.J.Coorey and Sons were the printers of this book. In the Preface, de Silva acknowledges with gratitude the help he received from Venerable Kahave Ratanasara of the Vidyodaya Pirivena at Maligakanda. Six short appendices included in this publication deal with the following themes: the biography of Fa-hsien; Fa-hsien's Buddhist Kingdoms and Travels; (the Bodhisattva) Mañjuśrī; the cities of Kanauj and Nalanda; Fa-hsien and Anuradhapura; and (the measure of distance) *yoduna* (*yojana*). A general index is given at the end of the text.

Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya Sthavira published a translation of Fa-hsien's record along with that of another monk, Sung Yun, in 1958.⁷³ In the Foreword to this translation, which he calls *Fa-hsien Sun Yum Denamage Gaman Vitti*, Ananda Maitreya Sthavira refers to the previous translations of Rémusat, Beal, Giles, Legge and Li Yung-hsi. Of these he found the translations of Beal and Li Yung-hsi more acceptable. He based his own translation on that of Li Yung-hsi. Referring to the Sinhala translation of Charles de Silva, Venerable Ananda Maitreya says that he found many discrepancies between de Silva's translation and the English translation he (Ananda Maitreya) used.

A third Sinhala translation of Fa-hsien's *Travels* appeared in Colombo in 1958,⁷⁴ the same year in which Ven Ananda Maitreya's translation was published. This translation, made by Venerable Balagalle Wimalabuddhi Thero, Professor of Sinhalese at the Vidyodaya University of Ceylon at the time, won the UNESCO award for literature for 1958. Wimalabuddhi Thero made use of the Korean edition of Fa-hsien's Chinese text printed by Legge in 1886, in addition to the translations of Beal, Giles, Legge, Kiroku

⁷² De Silva, W. Charles (1921). *Pāhiyange Bauddha Rājadhāni saha Vandanā Gaman Vistaraya* (399 - 414). (The place of publication is not mentioned.)

⁷³ Ananda Maitreya Sthavira, Balangoda (1958). *Fa-hsien Sun Yum Denamage Gaman Vitti*. Maharagama Saman Mudranālaya. (Maharagama is a suburb of Colombo).

⁷⁴ Wimalabuddhi Sthavira, Balagalle (1958). *Bauddha Rājadhāni Pilibandha toraturu namvū Fa-hien-ge Deśāna Vārtāva* (Sinhalese Translation of *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* or *The Travels of Fa-hsien*, Colombo. M.D.Gunasena and Co. Ltd., Second edition 1960).

Adachi and Li Yung-hsi.⁷⁵ The Sinhala translations of de Silva and Ananda Maitreya Thero are not referred to in Ven. Wimalabuddhi's work. The popularity of his translation, which was sold out in a short time, led Wimalabuddhi Thero to bring out a second edition in 1960. In an introductory note to this edition, Ven. Wimalabuddhi says that the UNESCO award made for this publication in 1958 was a great source of encouragement to him.

All three Sinhala translations discussed above include the report of another monk appended to Fa-hsien's text. This report has lent support to a speculation that Fa-hsien wrote two accounts of his travels. A second and longer account, if it was ever written, has not come down to us.⁷⁶

Fa-hsien has received attention in D.P.Ponnamperuma's publication in Sinhala entitled *Videshīn dutu Purāna Lanḱāva* (Ancient Ceylon as seen by foreigners), published in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1961. The sources he used for the section on Fa-hsien⁷⁷ in this book are the Sinhala translations of Balagalle Wimalabuddhi Thero and Ananda Maitreya Mahathero and the English translations of Legge and Beal.

Fa-hsien continues to attract the attention of Sri Lankans. Bandula Jayawardhana published a dramatised semi-documentary version of Fa-hsien's account of his travels in 1994 under the title, *Barefoot to Immortality*.⁷⁸ Here, as is stated in the Preface, Jayawardhana's aim was "to highlight the very human story that underlies Fahsien's record of his travels," and to breathe "life into the figures and events" that appear in it. That he has succeeded in doing so is best expressed in Lakshmi de Silva's description of Jayawardhana's episodic drama as "a vivid and sensitive recreation firmly based on historical events in dramatic terms, of the Quest of Fa-hsien," which "finely evokes the perils and splendours of the journey from the desert ways to the colourful courts of Eastern

⁷⁵ *ibid.* Foreword.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Ponnamperuma, D.P. (1961). *Videshīn dutu Purāna Lanḱāva*. Mahanuvara. Arya Mudranālaya, pp. 56 - 68.

⁷⁸ Jayawardhana, Bandula (1994). *Barefoot to Immortality*, Colombo. S.Godage and Brothers.

princes and to the idyllic monasteries springing up from the sanddunes of the Gobi," and in which "it is the human element that is most realistically presented, with Fahsien and his companions sharing the length of space and time, poignantly bounded by the ties of friendship and aspiration."⁷⁹ An earlier radio version of Jayawardhana's drama, submitted by the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation for an international competition, won the comment that it was a plea for peace among mankind.⁸⁰ Dramas based on Buddhist themes are few in number and Jayawardhana's contribution to this literary genre is commendable.

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⁷⁹ *ibid.* Note on the back-cover.

⁸⁰ *ibid.* Preface.