

Tansen Sen. *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400*. Asian Interactions and Comparisons. Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai'i Press, 2003. xviii, 388 pp. Hardcover \$55.00, ISBN 0–8248–2593–4.

This is a splendid book. It has an overarching theme buttressed by immense detail. It has a central argument, one that defies and challenges a conventional view. Its scholarly appurtenances are superb, including notes, documentation, and index. It is well written and interesting. Indeed, I found it quite difficult to put down, despite its length, weight, and academic content.

Professor Tansen Sen tells us that his primary objective is to rectify an “outdated model of pre-modern Sino-Indian relations” (p. 12). In essence, this model says that, after reaching an apogee in the ninth century, Chinese Buddhism declined and with it trade and commerce between China and India. The famous persecution of Buddhism under Tang Emperor Wuzong in the 840s dealt it a blow from which it never fully recovered. Sen believes, on the contrary, that Buddhism continued to thrive in China under the Song dynasty and at the same time in eastern India. In addition, exchanges between the two countries proliferated in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and trade exploded during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He suggests that Chinese Buddhism became more indigenous in the tenth and eleventh centuries, meaning that it depended less on Indian Buddhism. However, this means only that Indian influence on Chinese Buddhism declined. It does not mean that Chinese Buddhism itself declined or that exchanges and trade between China and the Indian regions diminished.

I admit to having been raised in the school of thought that Sen believes is outdated. I was taught that Buddhism never fully recovered from Wuzong's persecution. Sen has a bit to say about this episode (for instance, on p. 74), but given its importance in the conventional view, I would have liked more attention given to it in the formulation of the new interpretation of history.

Yet I must concede that Sen has done a truly masterly job in presenting his alternative view of how Buddhism developed in China and the function it played in Sino-Indian relations. I commend his mastery over the sweep of history, the way he interrelates not only Sino-Indian relations but also the role of other neighboring states like Nanzhao and Khotan, and the way he balances out domestic conditions in both China and India.

Sen's scholarship is broad in its scope and sweeping in its coverage. One of the strengths of his approach is the way it links religion and mercantilism. In the seventh and eighth centuries, merchants “assisted the expanding number of Buddhist monks travelling across the overland and maritime routes, met the growing

demand for ritual items, and actively financed monastic institutions and proselytising activities” (p. 210). Although mercantilism thus had its place from the start, Sen believes that trade and markets replaced Buddhism as the crucial factor in Sino-Indian relations in the later period. He also takes the big-picture approach in the way he places the Sino-Indian trading relationship in the context of the broader trading patterns that emerged over the whole of the great Eurasian continent in the five centuries that began roughly in 1000 and ended in 1500. The combination of the big picture and minute detail is one of the factors that makes for good scholarship and contributes to making this an excellent book.

The last paragraphs in the book recapitulate the point that commercial relations between India and China played a different role between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries from what they had done in the early first millennium. In essence, the earlier period saw commercial relations stimulating the cultural infusion of Buddhism, but the later saw commerce *replacing* Buddhist interchanges, not encouraging them (see pp. 242–243). Sen has not omitted discussion of some theoretical considerations over how economics influences culture in premodern societies (for instance pp. pp. 413–145). What this means is that Sen’s book contributes not only to the historical interpretation of the interrelationship between two great world civilizations but also to insights on major theoretical issues.

It is of course entirely appropriate that Sen gives his book a title that refers to relations between the contemporary states China and India. Yet the fact is that over the period he deals with, both countries saw massive changes to the states lying within the territories we call China and India today. There were many small independent kingdoms in cities that are part of the present China or India. When we talk of China’s relations with India, we may in fact mean relations of a part of today’s China with a part of today’s India. China’s tradition of unified states and strong central governments is stronger than India’s, but that does not mean that the borders are constant or that borders meant as much in the period of concern to this book as they mean in the modern era. And, of course, the Mongol conquest saw China as just a part of a much larger entity, even though covering an enormous territory.

One of the things I like about this book is the way it puts forward unusual suggestions by paying attention to detail. One example perhaps suffices to illustrate the point. On page 19, Sen tells us of an audience in about 640 that the great Tang Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang held with King Harsha (r. 606–647), who had recently established a vast empire in Northern India. In the record, Harsha describes the Chinese Tang ruler of the day as a “saintly lord” and praises the Chinese people for having “performed good deeds” to get such a good ruler. But Sen points out that this saintly lord, Tang Taizong, had come to power by murdering his brothers and was anything but saintly. Sen suggests that Xuanzang was on good terms with Tang Taizong by the time he completed his diary and may sim-

ply have added the praise that Harsha appears to have showered on the Tang rule “merely to gratify the imperial audience” (p. 19). Sen’s interpretation is entirely plausible, even though it makes the Buddhist sage seem a rather sycophantic opportunist.

The documentation of this book is quite extraordinary. The bibliography covers forty-three pages. The primary sources are mostly in Chinese, but the secondary sources include some in Japanese and French as well as English and Chinese. Clearly, Sen has mastery over quite a few languages and cultures relevant to this subject.

There are several maps and illustrations that are a great help in explicating the main themes of the book and also contribute to making it more interesting and appealing as scholarship. The eleven maps are particularly significant, including broad regions and illustrating big-picture themes as well as much more detailed and microscopic ones. They follow the pattern of the book as a whole, which is to combine breadth of scholarship with minute detail.

Overall, this is a remarkable book. It is a real *tour de force* of religious and diplomatic history and has put forward a new and convincing historical interpretation. It is the most thorough book on the subject of Sino-Indian relations and Buddhism in medieval China and India yet written and will certainly become the standard book on the subject. I suspect it will retain that status for quite a long time. I strongly recommend this book to all those interested in the history of Buddhism, the history of China and India, and of the interrelationship among these topics.

Colin Mackerras

Colin Mackerras is Foundation Professor in the Department of International Business and Asian Studies, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia. He specializes in China’s ethnic minorities and has published widely on the history and contemporary times of China.