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The Birthplace of Buddha Described in the 5th Century Chinese Buddhist Literature

(Abstract)

Buddhism has had a history of 2, 000 years long in China. Through mutual communication, adoption and mixture with the Confucianism-oriented native culture, it gradually became an organic part of the traditional Chinese culture and still plays an important role in social life day.

When the Indian Buddhism came into China in the Eastern Han Dynasty the Chinese people regarded as “Western God” similar to Chinese Gods such as Laozi, Huangdi, and did not exactly know his motherland and all his life. With the accumulation of the translations of Buddhist scriptures they were gradually getting better knowledge of the birthplace of Buddha, and could tell the differences between Buddha and the Chinese Gods.

In 5th century a Chinese pilgrim Faxian visited the birthplace of Buddha, and recorded the real situation of Kapilavastu in his famous book “Report from Motherland of Buddha”. A Chinese Buddhist historian Sengyou made a systematic research on the life of Buddha in his famous book “Genealogy of Sakya”. The description of the aforesaid two important books completely mirrors Chinese people’s view on the Bbirthplace of Buddha.

Faxian recorded many Buddha’s sites in his book. He explained the meaning of these sites in accordance with Buddhist scriptures which were known very well by Chinese monks in his times. It is more important that he noted down his impressions of Kapilavastu. He said that there were only several decades of households and monks, and the roads in this district were dangerous. This wild scenery of Kapilavastu is different from flourishing situation in ancient times described in Buddhist translations.

Making extracts from many Buddhist scriptures which were translated in different times and districts and putting them into thirty-four sections in his book, Sengyou paid particular attention to the all life of Buddha. According to the description of Buddhist

translations, Buddha was born to the noble warrior Suddhodana and the Princess Maya in Kapilavastu. He was a member of the Sakyatribe belonging to the Goutama clan. Sakyamuni appears in the world for the many to destroy suffering disease, old age and death. As the motherland of Buddha, Kapilavastu in remote antiquity was regarded as a utopia. In Kapilavastu there were very large population, its territory was very vast, and people were leading a happy life and living in harmony with equality between the sexes. Under each section of his book Sengyou made a Brief comment. According to his comments, he thought that these records from Buddhist translations were all real situation not fabrication.

Both Faxian's book and Sengyou's book are important influential in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Chinese Buddhist monks understand the motherland of Buddha through these books.