

## **Sinicization of Indic Loanwords in Chinese Language: Foreignization to domestication**

Noel Dassanayake \*

(Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka)

**Abstract:** Indic loanwords in Chinese language account for the largest number of loanwords in Mandarin Chinese. These loanwords have become an important integral part of the lexicon of Chinese language and throughout decades have undergone assimilation, semantic extension and phonological adaptation. The present study is an investigation into the modes, levels and history of Sinicization of Indic loanwords in Chinese language. Fundamentally, it is evident from the literature and historical accounts that Sinicization of these loanwords is a process from foreignization to domestication. Native-Chinese doctrines and philosophies, essentially Taoism and Confucianism have had multifaceted influences on the Sinicization process which has resulted in semantic extension, semantic change or total diminution of original meaning. While less used high culture-sensitive loanwords have completely disappeared from modern Chinese, loanwords of higher Sinicization level have completely secularized. It is observed that foreignized loanwords have very less tendency of being absorbed into modern Chinese and many such terms have been excluded in modern Chinese dictionaries.

**Keywords:** Indic loanwords, translation, Chinese language, Sanskrit, Sinicization

### **1. Introduction**

After the introduction of Buddhism into China probably around 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, Indic loanwords started gradually infiltrating into Chinese lexicon triggered by sutra translations. This gradual influx had a dramatic escalation by the Eastern Han Dynasty which is widely accepted as the age of institutionalization of Chinese Buddhism and by the Tang Dynasty, commonly known as the golden age of Buddhism, Buddhist scripture translation was at full flow and had an immense impact on Chinese language. Early translations of the Buddhist sutras and other Indic texts were mostly unintelligible to native Chinese readers who had little or no knowledge of Indic culture since the rapport between source concepts and target

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\* Dr. Noel Dassanayake: Senior Lecturer, Department of Languages, Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, PO Box 02, Belihuloya, Sri Lanka. E-Mail: noel@ssl.sab.ac.lk.

### *Sinicization of Indic Loanwords in Chinese Language: Foreignization to domestication*

text was relatively poor and therefore domestication was inevitable.

Although Buddhist sutras are fundamentally religious in nature, sutra translation could not only be considered as merely a process of religious dissemination. According to Guo Li (2013), Buddhist sutra translations not only promoted the spread of religion, but also injected new elements into Chinese culture. Translation of Indic *sutras*, could be considered as one of the significant turning points in Chinese literature, translation, philosophy and culture. Zhang Yuan (2019) claims that the Buddhist sutra translation was the first climax in Chinese translation history and it extends well beyond merely translations to an act of cultural translation. One of the most important contributions of *sutra* translation was the introduction of a number of culture-loaded words to Chinese language. These culture-loaded Buddhist words have played a vital role in Chinese literature. As claimed by Gao Qinghua (2002), the rich imagination and vivid metaphors in Indian works have served as creative material for native-Chinese literature.

A considerable number of Indic loanwords in Chinese, mostly the ones which became relatively popular, underwent phonological and semantic adaptations which are typically referred to as Sinicization. Sinicization of Indic loanwords in Chinese language clearly manifests some of the most significant linguistic developments of Chinese language such as the disyllabification of Chinese words. Zhang Ye & Xin Zhifeng (2016) claim that the translation of Buddhist scriptures was a process of code-switching and true Sinicization is confirmed to Chinese culture by overcoming cultural differences. This paper is a discussion of the Sinicization of Indic loanwords in Chinese language with the aim of critically analyzing the Sinicization process from the perspectives of translation methodology, semantic transformation and external influences.

## **2. Indic vocabulary in Chinese language – A review of literature**

It is worth discussing the term ‘Indic loanwords’ in this paper since it has been rarely used in research whereas the term ‘Buddhist loanwords’ is the commonly used term for these words of Indic origin in Chinese language. The fair argument behind using the term ‘Indic loanwords’ is that although Buddhist terminology account for a significant proportion of Indic loanwords, a considerable number of other Indic words was borrowed by Chinese language. For example, transliterations such as *pīshīnú* (毗湿奴, ‘Hindu God Vishnu’, <*Vishnu*), *shīpó* (湿婆, ‘Hindu God of Destruction’, <*Shiva*), *pólómén* (婆罗门, ‘Hindu God of Creation’, <*Brahman*) are of Hindu origin. Besides, it was not only from Sanskrit and Pali that Chinese borrowed words but also from other Indian dialects such as Magadhi and Gandhari.

### **2.1 Translation of Sutras**

Buddhist sutra translation was the first-ever contact of written language between

Mandarin and Chinese and Indic languages. According to Nattier, the first translations of scriptures occurred somewhere around the mid-second century CE which continued through the latter part of the third century CE at a dramatic phase. Nattier further claims that although there are few scripts left of these first scripture translations produced during the Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms period, those left provide a precious insight into the nature of early Buddhist translations (Nattier, 2008). Nattier's argument is testified by many facts. Firstly, Buddhist scripture translations underwent continuous changes in terms of translation methods and choice of words, etc. resulting in many versions of the same translation and a variety of character choices in translations. Secondly, the early Buddhist translations were the foundation for the development of transliterated Indic words in Chinese language.

According to Ma Zuyi (1999), the first stage of the translation of Buddhist scriptures in the late Eastern Han Dynasty mainly had four characteristics: the first is that the translators of the Buddhist scriptures were mainly foreign monks and Chinese monks of Hu ethnicity. The second is that the ancient Indian Buddhist scriptures were published very late, so early Buddhist scriptures were translated completely relying only on oral teaching of scriptures. The third is due to insufficient translation experience of early translators, translation of Buddhist scriptures during this period was done by literal translation. The fourth feature is to adapt to the needs of the rulers of the Han Dynasty to use the idea of magical magic to transform Buddhism.

Boucher argues that the early scripture translations are less reliable in terms of authenticity to their Indian source texts because both Indian and Chinese translators and missionaries had much less command in each other's languages (Boucher, 1998). When we examine the early Indic loanwords in Chinese language there is much evidence supporting this notion. Most early transliterations such as *nīliyé* (泥梨耶, 'hell', <*niraya*), *sūdūbō* (窣堵波, 'pagoda', <*stupa*), *wūbōpóshā* (邬波婆娑, 'fasting', <*upavāsa*), and most semantic loanwords such as *shēngzhī* (生支, 'sex organ', <{*aṅga-jāta*}<sup>①</sup>), *yǒuài* (有爱, 'worldly existence', <{*bhava*}), etc. have been long abandoned or substituted by new words due to their poor choice of characters and sounds in translation.

One of the key issues that the early translators faced was finding appropriate characters to introduce the whole new Indic concepts to the Chinese community who had no knowledge of the Central Asian languages or belief systems. The difficulty of reading and understanding Chinese characters made the process more arduous. By the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE, China had long been unrestrained from its folk belief system and had two well established

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<sup>①</sup> The word within the brackets { } denotes the word for which the meaning has been borrowed. The same below.

*Sinicization of Indic Loanwords in Chinese Language: Foreignization to domestication*

philosophies, namely Taoism and Confucianism. This has had a multifaceted effect on the novice Buddhist culture, language and its translation which had both positive and negative impacts. On the constructive aspect, some early translators resorted to Taoist and Confucianist terminology to represent Buddhist meanings. Xing Guang (2015) claims that Zhiqian's translations had clear signs of Taoism and *wúwéi* (无为, 'enlightenment', <*nirvāṇa*), *běnwú* (本无, 'truth', <*tathatā*), *zhēnrén* (真人, 'monk who has achieved enlightenment', <*arhat*) are some of the borrowings from Taoism. He also claims that while there was harmony on one side there was an ongoing conflict between the three religions, especially during the Han Dynasty.

According to Jiang Weiqiao (2013), Kumarajiva's *Mahāprajñā Pāramitā Śūtra* (大智度论), *Saddharmapundārika-Sūtra* (妙法莲华经), Tan Wuchen's *Mahāparinirvāna -Sūtra* (大般涅槃经) and Buddhahadra's *Mahā-Vaipulya-Buddhāvataṃsaka-Sūtra* (华严经) are among the earliest of Chinese Buddhist sutra translations. These early translations consist of many unintelligible transliterations and semantic matchings which lead to revising of terminology ultimately resulting in many forms of the same word. For instance, the Sanskrit word Stupa was initially translated as *sūdūbō* (窣堵波, 'pagoda', <*stupa*) which was later retranslated as *dūbō* (堵波, 'pagoda'); *shèlìtǎ* (舍利塔, 'pagoda') and finally as *tǎ* (塔, 'tower').

The recent archeological findings in the Uyghur Autonomous Region of China including the manuscript of *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* testify that the Golden Age of Chinese Buddhism, the Tang Dynasty (618-907) contributed much to the expansion of Indic lexicon of Chinese Language. According to Liu Tong (2013), along with the prosperity of Buddhism, the introduction of Buddhist scriptures and the frequent translation of Buddhist scriptures, a considerable number of foreign words of Indic origin were introduced to Chinese language during the Tang Dynasty. Xuanzang (602-664) the most revered translator and explorer of the Tang Dynasty was a major scripture translator of the period whose work included *Xīnjīng* (心经, 'Heart Sutra') and *Jīngāngjīng* (金刚经, 'Diamond Sutra'). Xuanzang's contribution to the development of Sino-Indic translation methodology had considerable impact on the Sinicization of Indic vocabulary in later retranslations of scriptures. His "five non-translatable" (五不翻) theory made clear limitations on which categories of words could be semantically translated.

Translation of Buddhist scriptures in China ended in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). By this time Buddhist sects had been fully institutionalized in China. The Sinicization and secularization of Indic vocabulary were accelerated during this period and would continue till the present times in China. According to Chen Lei (2019), by the time of the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Buddhism in China had eliminated its foreign appearance by completing the Sinicization and secularization processes. He further claims that after entering the Song

Dynasty, Buddhism continued to adjust its form and with the continuous interaction with the society, the “sacredness” started becoming more secularized.

The translation of Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit and Prakrit languages had a multifaceted impact specifically on Chinese language and China at large. According to Xu Shiyi, Liang Xiaohong & Chen Wuyun (2009), the sound and meaning of Buddhist sutras are treasure-troves which entail a wide range of contents. The influence of sutra translations extended its influence to many other spheres of Chinese culture and society including religion, philosophy, language, literature, and art. Buddhist sutra translations have also been instrumental in characterizing Chinese philology, linguistics and traditional culture studies. Recent studies in this field have drawn important research results into literature studies and linguistic studies.

## 2.2 Categories of Indic vocabulary in Chinese language

Indic vocabulary in Chinese language has been categorized according to several criteria. Origins have been a major contemplation in this regard scholars such as Wa have come up with the *fóhuàhàncí* (佛化汉词) category which refers to words which were originally Chinese but later became Buddhist words. For example, the word *fǎbǎo* (法宝, ‘righteousness’, <*dharma*) was originally used in Chinese mythology to refer to “a treasure in myth that can subdue or kill demons”. After the introduction of Buddhist *sānbǎo* (三宝, ‘Triple Gem’) concept, the word *fǎbǎo* (法宝) expanded its meaning to refer to *Dhamma*, which is one of the Triple Gems (Mo Wa, 2012). The previously mentioned *wúwéi* (无为, ‘enlightenment’, <*nirvāna*), *běnwú* (本无, ‘true’, <*tathatā*), *zhēnrén* (真人, ‘one who has achieved enlightenment’, <*arhat*), etc. Taoist and Confucianist words are also classified under this category.

The term *fóyuáncíhuì* (佛源词汇) which means words of Buddhist origin is more popular than the previous which is widely used in Chinese language to refer to Buddhist words which have been derived from Indian languages, such as Sanskrit, Pali. According to Guo Yankui (2016) the term *fóyuáncíhuì* (佛源词汇, ‘words of Buddhist origin’) is used to refer to new words that have been produced in the translation of scriptures or existing words that have extended their meanings with the influence of Buddhism. In this sense, the aforementioned *fóhuàhàncí* (佛化汉词), the words which are of Chinese origin but later extended their meaning into Buddhism, also belong to this category. The term *fójiàocíhuì* (佛教词汇) which means Buddhist terms is generally used to refer to all these categories.

Indic words in Chinese language are most commonly classified according to their translation method. At the early stages of sutra translations, due to the lack of Indic-Sanskrit linguistic knowledge added to poor translation skills, the most common method of translation was transliteration. Kanno, commenting on the Lotus Sutra argues that the Chinese sutra commentaries on the Lotus sutra and Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra, etc.

### *Sinicization of Indic Loanwords in Chinese Language: Foreignization to domestication*

mainly consist of explanations of proper names (Kanno, 2003). This is a clear indication of the fact that the early transliterations were of poor quality and thus intelligible. However, this erected the bedrock for the need for Sinicization of Indic terms.

According to Guo Yankui (2016), there are three special characteristics of transliterated Buddhist words: the first and most distinct characteristic is that there are multiple versions of the same word, secondly there are no strict rules for the choice of characters in transliterations, thirdly the transliterated category of words consists mostly of proper names, such as names of Buddhas, names of Bodhisattvas, names of arhats, names of kings and gods. The Sanskrit word *samadhi* is transliterated as *sānmèi* (三昧, ‘total self-collectedness’), *sānmóde* (三摩地, ‘total self-collectedness’) and *sānmótí* (三摩提, ‘total self-collectedness’). Both Guo Yankui’s first and second propositions are testified by the above example. These three transliterations have substituted Sanskrit /*ma:*/ syllable using two different characters, namely *mèi* (昧, ‘ignorant’) and *mó* (摩, ‘stroke’). Similarly, the end syllable /*ḍhī*/ is also substituted by two different characters: *de* (/tə/, 地) in the case of *sānmóde* (三摩地, ‘total self-collectedness’) and *tí* (/tʰi/, 提) in the case of *sānmótí* (三摩提, ‘total self-collectedness’).

The second category is the free translations which also account for a large collection of Indic terms. Qiu Mingchun (2015) argues that free translations are easier for Chinese people to comprehend compared with transliterations since they are closer to the thinking habits of Chinese people. When non-native concepts are introduced, the vocabulary expressing those concepts have to undergo not only linguistic adaptations but conceptual adjustments. Qiu Mingchun’s argument is worth further discussion because a number of Buddhist free translations have undergone the aforesaid conceptual adjustments. Miao Ruiqin (2005) classifies Indic free translations in Chinese into two main categories as word-to-word translations and newly constructed words. Free translations occupy the highest level in the Sinicization scale. However, this does not imply that all free translated words have fully penetrated into the Chinese language. As Qiu Mingchun (2015) further suggests, after the creation of new words for Indic concepts which are unfamiliar to the Chinese, they have to be further ‘screened’ and ‘reformed’ by the ‘Chinese system’.

There is quite a number of frequently used free translated Indic vocabulary in modern Chinese language which has already secularized and blended with daily used language. Some of these words have already partially or completely lost their Buddhist essence. Cheng Tao (2012) proposes that the words *guòqù* (过去, ‘past’), *xiànzài* (现在, ‘present’), and *wèilái* (未来, ‘future’), which were originally from Buddhist texts, penetrated into the Chinese language which later “became daily used words in modern vernacular, and moderately or fully lost their Buddhist essence”. Most free translated Indic words in modern Chinese language are single or two-character words. These words are fully

Sinicized words and most are no longer considered as Buddhist words except for rare occasions in which the speaker has a fair understanding of historical linguistics of Buddhist loanwords in Chinese.

Finally, there is the Chinese-Sanskrit combined phono-semantic word category. These words have had an escalating influence on the Chinese language due to their high production capability. Many of these phono-semantic matchings have a leading character which acts as a root word that can produce other words. The character *fó* (佛, 'Buddha'), has produced over 60 phono-semantic matchings such as *fójiào* (佛教, 'Buddhism'), *fótuó* (佛陀, 'Buddha'), *fófǎ* (佛法, 'Buddha dharma'), *fójīng* (佛经, 'Buddhist sutra'), *fóxué* (佛学, 'Buddhist studies'), *fóyán* (佛言, 'words of Buddha'), *fómíng* (佛名, 'names of Buddha'), *fódào* (佛道, 'path of Buddha'), *fótǎ* (佛塔, 'Buddha stupas'), etc. Similarly, the transliterated morpheme *sēng* (僧, 'Samgha') has produced a number of words such as *sēngyuàn* (僧院, 'abbey'), *sēngfáng* (僧房, 'monk's room'), *sēngsì* (僧寺, 'monastery'), *sēngzhǔ* (僧主, 'chief monk') (Zhang Yisan, 2006). Chen Shufen (2000) claims that there are three types of phono-semantic Buddhist loanwords in Chinese. Firstly, there are the half-transliteration and half-translation words such as *pútíshù* (菩提树, 'Bodhi') tree. Secondly, there are words with translation plus a semantic marker such as *xūmíshān* (须弥山, 'Mount Meru', <Sumeru) and finally there are double renditions such as *guānshìyīn zìzài* (观世音自在, 'Bodhisattva').

Apart from categorizing according to methods of translation, Buddhist vocabulary in the Chinese language is categorized according to its scope and usage as specialized Buddhist words and Buddhist words in vernacular. Some scholars such as Jiang Dongyuan (2005), Guo Yankui (2016), Wang Mai (2007) have categorized Buddhist idioms under Chinese Buddhist vocabulary. Buddhist idioms account for a large proportion of idioms in Chinese language and there are many frequently used Buddhist idioms in Chinese language *línshí bàofójiǎo* (临时抱佛脚, 'embrace Buddhism in hour of need'), *pǔdù zhòngshēng* (普度众生, 'deliver all living creatures from torment').

### 3. Sinicization of Indic vocabulary in the Chinese language

Just after the initial contact and fusion of Indic vocabulary with the Chinese language, these loan words started their Sinicization process. This was a long arduous process which spread through centuries and is still continuing. Due to the inconsistency in the translation of Indic vocabulary into the Chinese language, Sinicization also shows complexities in terms of methods, order and time.

#### 3.1 Domestication and foreignization

Kramersch (1998) suggests that language is a system of signs that has cultural value and that 'language symbolizes cultural reality'. Languages also signify social identities of the

### *Sinicization of Indic Loanwords in Chinese Language: Foreignization to domestication*

communities they are spoken by and thus occurs the constant and instinctive fight for survival when contacted with another language. Translation is the common battleground where this skirmish occurs and domestication and foreignization are the major hardware. Sinicization of Indic loanwords in Chinese is a process from foreignization to domestication, which could also be identified as from transliteration to free translation. Early translations had more Indic linguistic features in terms of syllable count and selection of sounds and characters which were later shortened and had more Sinitic features. This process occurred for over a span of 1500 years starting from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE when the first sutras were translated into Chinese up to the present times when Sinicization still continues.

According to Calabrese & Wetzels (2009), nativization occurs under two circumstances, namely nativization-through-production and nativization-through-perception though many scholars argue that nativization only occurs in language perception. Sinicization refers to the nativization or more commonly known as domestication of Indic vocabulary in the Chinese language. Some scholars suggest that the terms literal translation and free translation simply refer to domestication and foreignization. According to Yang Wenfen (2010), free translation and literal translation are not synonymous with domestication and foreignization. Literal translation and free translation are technologies that solve language forms. However, domestication and foreignization are related to these two cultures. The former means replacing the source culture with the target culture, while the latter retains the difference of the source culture.

#### 3.2 Levels of Sinicization

Wang Fade (2014) claims that domestication can bring the original work closer to readers and repel the negative interference caused by excessive ‘difficult unfamiliar cultural factors in the original’. He further suggests that foreignization is more appropriate for translating literary work but a combination of both methods is the best way of bringing the translations closer to the audience. One of the key issues of Indic-Chinese sutra translation is that in the first stages, the translators excessively foreignized the translations and later excessively domesticized them. The first resulted in unintelligible transliterations which neither the donors nor the recipients could understand.

For example, semantic translations such as *qīshì* (乞士, ‘monk’, <{*samgha*}), *fàn huáng* (梵皇, ‘Buddha or Indian emperor’) which means, and transliterations such as *sàpóruò* (萨婆若, ‘the all knowing’, <*sarvajnāna*<sup>①</sup>), *dùluòchā* (度洛叉, ‘millions’, <*lakṣa*) , *shìluómòniluó* (室罗末尼罗, ‘novice male monastic’, <*śrāmaṇera*.) have had very little or

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<sup>①</sup> *Sarvajnāna*: Refers to the full awareness of Buddha. A Buddha can see beyond all superficial differentiations and perceives the fundamental of all things as *Śūnyatā* or emptiness.



no linguistic impact on the Chinese language. These words are limited to the earliest translations and have been completely ignored by the later generations. Correspondingly, fully domesticized Indic words such as *è guǐ* (饿鬼, ‘hungry ghost’, <{pretha}), *dǎoshī* (导师, ‘master’, <{guru}), *gòngyǎng* (供养, ‘alms giving’, <{dana}), *fāngbiàn* (方便, ‘strategy’, <{upaya}), *qián yè* (前业, ‘former karma’, <{purva karma}), *fánnǎo* (烦恼, ‘impurity’, <{klesas}) have completely lost their Indic essence and except for a limited number of scholars, the commoners are rarely aware of their relationship with Buddhism.

There is a clear cohesion between levels of Sinicization of Indic vocabulary and their methods of translation. The strongest reason behind this consistency is the effect of evolution of translation methods on domestication. In other words, the development of Indic-Chinese translation methods brought new alien concepts closer to the Chinese community. Translation methods could be sequenced in ascending order according to their level of Sinicization as transliteration, phono-semantic matching and semantic translation. Most transliterated words are at the lowest level of Sinicization. For example, early transliterations such as *wěimùchīdì* (尾目吃帝, ‘liberation’, <vimukthi), *dìlìlùjiā* (帝利路迦, ‘triple world’, <triloka), *mónàpó* (摩那婆, ‘human’, <mānava), *píníyē* (毘尼耶, ‘discipline’, <vinaya), *nǐlǐyē* (泥梨耶, ‘hell’, <niraya), *luólúóná* (罗罗拿, ‘lady’, <lalanā), *lùgē* (路歌, ‘world’, <loka), *ājiāshě* (阿迦舍, ‘sky’, <akāsa,) and *duō tā* (多他, ‘truthful’, <thathā,) are at the lowest level of Sinicization. Most of these words have been replaced either by a simplified transliteration of the same word or a semantic translation. However, this does not necessarily denote that all transliterations are at the lowest level of Sinicization and some Buddhist transliterations such as *pútí* (菩提, ‘enlightenment’, <bodhi), *púsà* (菩萨, ‘wisdom-being’, <Bodhisattva), *sēng* (僧, ‘monk’, <samgha), *fó* (佛, ‘Buddha’, <Buddha), *tǎ* (塔, ‘pagoda’, <stupa) are at the higher levels of Sinicization.

Phono-semantic matchings are at a relatively high level of Sinicization and due to the high production capability of their root-words, there are many frequently used phono-semantic Indic loanwords in modern Chinese. For example, modifications of the root *chán* (禅, ‘meditation’, <dhyana) such as *chánjī* (禅机, ‘charm’, <{mantra}), *chánshī* (禅师, ‘Zen master’, <{bhavanacharya}), *chánxué* (禅学, ‘meditation’, <{bhavana}), *chánfáng* (禅房, ‘meditation hall’, <{bhavana kuti}), *zuòchán* (坐禅, ‘to meditate’, <{bhavana}), *chántáng* (禅堂, ‘meditation hall’, <{bhavana kuti}), *chányuàn* (禅院, ‘Zen temple’, <{bhavana kuti}) are frequently used in modern Chinese. These roots have the capability of coining even more neologisms for possible new concepts. Semantic translations are at the highest in the Sinicization scale due to their phonological and semantic conformity with the Chinese language.

However, the above elucidation does not imply that all words belonging to one category have similar Sinicization levels. Although it is generally accepted that transliterated Indic

### *Sinicization of Indic Loanwords in Chinese Language: Foreignization to domestication*

words have a lower Sinicization level and semantic translations have higher Sinicization levels, there are occasions which do not comply with this hypothesis. Similarly, semantic translations such as *yāotōng* (妖通) which means ‘the power to change miraculously into trees and animals’ (Soothill & Hodous, 2005) have lower Sinicization levels while the previously mentioned *pútí* (菩提, ‘enlightenment’, *Bodhi*), *púsà* (菩萨, ‘wisdom being’, *Bodhisattva*), *sēng* (僧, ‘monk’, <*samgha*), *fó* (佛, ‘Buddha’, <*Buddha*), *tǎ* (塔, ‘pagoda’, <*stupa*) belong to relatively higher Sinicization levels.

#### 3.3 Modes of Sinicization

Sinicization of Indic loanwords in the Chinese language occurred at different scales, at different periods of time and the modes of Sinicization are diverse. The main reason behind this was that there was no consistency in translation of Buddhist sutras. Many sutras were translated simultaneously by different translators and retranslated using different translation methods from the first draft. Lettère suggests that there is evidence to believe that Buddhist translators often dealt with theoretical and technical issues in the process of sutra translation (Lettère, 2015). The following is an analysis of the modes of Sinicization of Indic loanwords in Chinese language.

##### 3.3.1 Simplification of syllable count

Old Chinese consisted mostly of monosyllabic characters which were high in contrast with Indic loanwords which were largely multisyllabic. In the early translations of sutras, which were mostly works of Indian monks who had little or no knowledge of the Chinese language or its linguistics, multisyllabic words were transliterated into Chinese with least consideration of Chinese phonology or syllabic structure. *Móhēbōrěbōluómìduō xīnjīng* (摩诃般若波罗蜜多心经) which was one of the earliest translations of the *Maha Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra* was later simplified as *bōrě xīnjīng* (般若心经) and finally further simplified as *xīnjīng* (心经). Similarly, words such as *ānàbānnàshādì* (安那般那沙第, ‘a type of meditation’, <*Anapanasati*), *bōluómìduō* (波罗蜜多, ‘transcendent action’, <*paramita*), *pínpósuōluó* (频婆娑罗, ‘King Bimbisāra<sup>①</sup>’, <*Bimbisara*), *jūmóluóshí* (鸠摩罗什, ‘Kumarajiva’, <*Kumarajiva*), etc. words have been respectively simplified as *ānbān* (安般), *bōluómì* (波罗蜜), *suōluó* (娑罗) and *luóshí* (罗什).

However, scholars such as Zhang Yisan (2006) claim that Buddhist loanwords were instrumental in disyllabification of the monosyllable-dominated form of ancient Chinese lexicon since the Wei and Jin Dynasties. When Buddhism emerged in India and simultaneously Confucianism was established in China in 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC, Chinese language was in its Archaic (Old) Chinese stage and when Buddhism was first introduced

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<sup>①</sup> Bimbisāra was the king who ruled Magadha Kingdom during 545/544 BCE - 493/492 BCE) at the time of Buddha.

to China in 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD it had developed into Ancient (Middle) Chinese. Chinese philosophy, literature and language all were blooming in full swing in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) which is often considered as the golden age of Chinese literature and philosophy. Therefore, there is much reason to hypothesize that the Indic Buddhist literature had much influence on the characterization of the Chinese language.

There are many Indic monosyllabic roots in Chinese language such as *fó* (佛, 'Buddha', <*Buddha*), *chán* (禅, 'meditation', <*dhyana*), *mó* (魔, 'Lord of the Senses', <*māra*), *sēng* (僧, 'monk', <*samgha*), *yán* (阎, 'wrathful god', <*yama*) which also have their disyllabic counterparts as *fótuó* (佛陀, 'Buddha', <*Buddha*), *chánà* (禅那, 'mediation', <*dhayana*), *mówáng* (魔王, 'god of death', <*mara raja*), *yánmó* (阎魔, 'god of death' <*mara raja*) which share the same meanings. In modern Chinese, disyllabic words are more frequently used than their monosyllabic counterparts. However, trisyllabic Indic transliterations such as *ālúhàn* (阿罗汉, 'monk who attained enlightenment', <*arhat*), *yáyóunà* (摇尤那, 'River Yamuna', <*Yamunā*), *línbīnī* (林必尼, 'the city of Lumbini', <*Lumbini*), *bǐqīūnī* (比丘尼, 'nun', <*bhikshuni*), *pútīshù* (菩提树, 'the sacred fig tree', '*bodhi ruksha*'), *gāntuólúó* (乾陀罗, 'Gandhara Province in India', <*Gandhāra*), *zhāntúluō* (旃荼罗, 'an outcast', <*chandāla*), *sānfótuó* (三佛陀, 'Buddha', <*sambuddha*), *móxiǎntuó* (摩显陀, 'king', <*mahendra*), *xiūduōluō* (修多罗, 'Buddhist scriptures', <*sūtra*) have retained their syllable count since these cannot be further simplified. More examples are provided in Table 1.

### 3.3.2 Semantic change

Little had Chinese civilization known of cultures and languages of the Indian context before the introduction of Buddhism in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC. Therefore, many of the concepts introduced through sutra translation and Sino-Indian cultural exchanges were alien to Chinese people and this resulted in adaptation and assimilation than fully integrating new concepts into Chinese culture and language. Therefore, a change of meaning of loanwords was inevitable under these circumstances. It could be observed that change of meaning has occurred mostly in free translations than transliterations which mostly consist of proper names, such as names of sutras, persons and places. Change of meaning has occurred under two main circumstances, namely influence of native Chinese philosophy and influence of development. As mentioned in a previous section, the influence of native Chinese philosophies such as Taoism and Confucianism were major reasons behind the adaptation of Indic loanwords. The word *wénni* (文尼) which originally was referred to as the word *Muni*<sup>①</sup> in Buddhist terminology has lost its Buddhist essence

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<sup>①</sup> *Muni*: The word is a shortened form for *Shakyamuni* which is translated into Chinese as *Shìjiānūnī* (释迦牟尼).

### *Sinicization of Indic Loanwords in Chinese Language: Foreignization to domestication*

in modern Chinese and is often used to refer to the English proper name Vinny. Similarly, the word *qiélán* (伽蓝) which originally meant *Arāma* in Buddhist terminology has changed its meaning to gala in contemporary Chinese vernacular. More examples are given in Table 2.

#### 3.3.3 Semantic extension

New meanings are assigned to loanwords often by the new language companions and their cultures. The word *púsà* (菩萨, ‘Bodhisattva’) is often used to refer to people of virtue which is an extension of its original meaning, the person who is on the path towards Buddhahood. This may have been triggered by the influence of Mahayana definition of *Bodhisattva*, which refers to a person who is capable of attaining the ultimate *nibbana* but delays it out of pure compassion for human race. The word *fánnǎo* (烦恼) in Chinese is a translation of Sanskrit *klesa* which refers to impurities such as anxiety, fear, anger, jealousy, etc. which hinder the path towards *nibbana*. In modern Chinese it is widely used to refer to “annoy” or “worry”, but its original Buddhist meaning still exists. The word *fāngbiàn* (方便) is an Indic loanword which was originally used to refer to *upaya paramita* which is one of the ten perfections of an enlightened being. In modern Chinese it is frequently used to mean ‘convenient’. *píngděng* (平等, ‘evenness’, <{*samatā*}), *wúcháng* (无常, ‘impermanence’, <{*anitya*}), *tǎ* (塔, ‘pagoda’, <{*stupa*}), *yèchā* (夜叉, ‘devil’, <{*yaksa*}), *shìjiè* (世界, ‘world’ <{*loka*}), *xìqì* (习气, ‘habit’ <{*vasana*}), *chànmó* (忏摩, ‘acts of patience’, <{*ksama*}), etc. words have also undergone changes in the secularization process (Zhang Yisan, 2007).

#### 3.3.4 Dominance of the stronger translation method

Evolution of translation methods of Buddhist sutras could be chronologically ordered as transliteration, free translation and phono-semantic matching. Although the order of the second two is controversial, there is less doubt that transliteration occurred first. Omar, Haroon & Ghani (2009) suggests that functions of different texts must be precisely identified by translators in order to employ appropriate translation strategies. Operative text may require freer translation strategies whereas more literal methods have to be adopted for informative text. At the early stages of sutra translation, translation theory had not developed for translators to be able to choose between translation methods which resulted in an impromptu selection of translation strategies with less consideration of type and function of the text.

The theoretical foundation for Chinese translation was established along with the emergence of Xuanzang, Yijing, etc. translators in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. Xuanzang’s “five non-translatable” theory was a decisive strategy which established the boundaries between free translation and literal translation. The “five non-translatable” theory proposed five circumstances where translators should not employ free translation, namely words with

elusive meanings, homonyms, names not found in China, widely accepted transliterations and names that have been mixed with Taoism and Confucianism. Many early translations of Buddhist sutras were retranslated using more appropriate translation methods resulting in several transliterations and free translations for a single term. For example, the word *Arhat* was transliterated as *ālúhàn* (阿罗汉) in early translations and under the influence of Taoism and Confucianism it was free translated as *zhēnrén* (真人). The transliterated form is dominant whereas the free translation is rarely used in modern Chinese to refer to Arhat. Similarly, the word *típó* (提婆) was an early transliteration of Sanskrit *Deva* ‘God’ which was retranslated as *tiān* (天) in later translations. The first has totally disappeared from vernacular except old sutra translations. More examples are provided in Table 3.

It is worth evaluating what kind of impact Indic borrowings and their Sinicization had on Chinese language. Haspelmath & Tadmor (2009) suggest that if a large number of loanwords are borrowed from a single source language, donor language patterns will be imported instead of loan adaptation. They have taken Japanese language as an example for this which has borrowed phonological features from Chinese along with loanwords. Correspondingly, the sound /f/ was introduced to the Sinhala phonetic chart with the influence of a large number of borrowings from Indo-European languages. However, this hypothesis is highly in contrast with the case of Indic borrowings in Chinese language. Indic borrowings had very little systematic structural influence on phonology or morphology of Chinese language except for on previously mentioned disyllabification of Chinese words.

When we carefully analyze the process of Sinicization starting from early translations of Indic terms to the same items in modern Chinese, a gradual intensification of Sinicization could be observed. One indicator of this intensification is the removal of Indic loanwords from modern Chinese dictionaries. For example, the words *yèbào* (业报, ‘maturation of intentional actions’, <*karma vipāka*), *jiéhuǒ* (劫火, ‘the great fire at the end of the world’ <{*kalpa agni*}), etc. which are available in *Old Chinese Dictionary* have been excluded in *Dictionary of Modern Chinese Language*. The second indicator is that many Indic loanwords such as *shìjiān* (世间, ‘world’, <{*loka*}), *xiànzài* (现在, ‘present’, <{*varṭamāna*}), *wèilái* (未来, ‘future’, <{*anāgata*}), *guòqù* (过去, ‘past’, <{*atita*}), *yīnguǒ* (因果, ‘cause and effect’, <{*hetu pala*}) are usually not identified as words of Indic or Buddhist origin by a majority of contemporary Chinese people except for historical linguists. These words have been fully secularized and absorbed into Modern Chinese.

Table 1. Simplification of syllable count of Indic loanwords

Original	Altered	Sanskrit
<i>fótuó</i> (佛陀)	<i>fó</i> (佛)	< <i>Buddha</i>

*Sinicization of Indic Loanwords in Chinese Language: Foreignization to domestication*

<i>ālúohàn</i> (阿罗汉)	<i>luóhàn</i> (罗汉)	< <i>Arhat</i>
<i>sēng jiā</i> (僧伽)	<i>sēng</i> (僧)	< <i>Samgha</i>
<i>chán nà</i> (禅那)	<i>chán</i> (禅)	< <i>Dhyana</i>
<i>bōluómìduō</i> (波罗蜜多)	<i>bōluómì</i> (波罗蜜)	< <i>Paramita</i>
<i>fàn mó</i> (梵摩)	<i>fàn</i> (梵)	< <i>Brahman</i>
<i>sēng qiélán</i> (僧伽蓝)	<i>qiélán</i> (伽蓝)	< <i>Samgharama</i>
<i>wénshūshèlì</i> (文殊舍利)	<i>wénshū</i> (文殊)	< <i>Manju Sri</i>
<i>pútísàduō</i> (菩提萨埵)	<i>púsà</i> (菩萨)	< <i>Bodhisattva</i>
<i>bō duō luō</i> (钵多罗)	<i>bō</i> (钵)	< <i>Patra</i>
<i>jiébō</i> (劫波)	<i>jié</i> (劫)	< <i>Kalpa</i>
<i>jìtuó</i> (偈陀)	<i>jì</i> (偈)	< <i>Gatha</i>
<i>pínposuōluó</i> (频婆娑罗)	<i>suōluó</i> (娑罗)	< <i>Bimbisara</i>
<i>sūdūbō</i> (窣堵波)	<i>dūbō</i> (堵波)	< <i>Stupa</i>
<i>sānmèide</i> (三昧地)	<i>sānmèi</i> (三昧)	< <i>Samadhi</i>
<i>ānántuó</i> (阿难陀)	<i>nántuó</i> (难陀)	< <i>Ananda</i>
<i>tánnà</i> (檀那)	<i>tán</i> (檀)	< <i>Dana</i>
<i>jiūmóluóshì</i> (鸠摩罗什)	<i>luóshì</i> (罗什)	< <i>Kumarajiva</i>

Table 2. Semantic changes of Indic loanwords

Word	Sanskrit	Original Meaning	New Meaning
<i>wénní</i> (文尼)	< <i>Muni</i>	Buddha	Vinny
<i>qiélán</i> (伽蓝)	< <i>Arama</i>	Monastery	Gala
<i>fánǎo</i> (烦恼)	< <i>Klesa</i>	Klesas	Annoy
<i>fāngbiàn</i> (方便)	< <i>Upaya Paramita</i>	Upaya Paramita	Comfortable
<i>píngděng</i> (平等)	< <i>Samata</i>	Samata	Equality
<i>wúcháng</i> (无常)	< <i>Anitya</i>	Anitya (Samsara)	Impermanence
<i>tǎ</i> (塔)	< <i>Stupa</i>	Stupa	Tower
<i>yèchā</i> (夜叉)	< <i>Yaksa</i>	Yaksa	Demon
<i>shìjiè</i> (世界)	< <i>Loka</i>	Loka	World
<i>xìqì</i> (习气)	< <i>Vasana</i>	Vasana	Habit
<i>chàn mó</i> (忏摩)	< <i>Ksama</i>	Ksama	Confess

Table 3. Dominance of the stronger translation method of Indic loanwords

Transliteration	Semantic Translation	Sanskrit	Dominant Method
luòhàn (罗汉)	zhēnrén (真人)	<Arhat	Transliteration
típó (提婆)	tiān (天)	<Deva	Semantic Translation
nièpán (涅槃)	miè (灭)	<Nirvana	Transliteration
bīlǐduō (必哩多)	è guǐ (饿鬼)	<Pretha	Semantic Translation
dìlìlùjiā (帝利路迦)	sānjiè (三界)	<Triloka	Semantic Translation
yíduōpónà (移多婆那)	zhúlín (竹林)	<Jetavana	Semantic Translation
pīhēluó (毗诃罗)	sì (寺)	<Vihara	Semantic Translation
xiūduōluó (修多罗)	jīng (经)	<Sutra	Semantic Translation
dūduōjiā (闍多伽)	běn shēng (本生)	<Jataka	Semantic Translation
tuómó (驮摩)	fǎ (法)	<Dharma	Semantic Translation

#### 4. Influence of external elements on Sinicization

When people can fulfill their self-assertive goals from one religion in a particular period of time, that religion will develop. Along with social transformation, people will find that the doctrine they believed is not sufficient to fulfill their self-assertive goals which will direct them towards a new doctrine or the original belief system may also make changes to itself to adapt to the needs of the community (Cai Hengjin & Geng Jiawei, 2014). As mentioned in a previous section, by the time when Buddhism was introduced to China, Taoism and Confucianism had been well institutionalized in China. These belief systems had already contacted Chinese language for many years by then and had developed their own jargon. However, since many Buddhist principles have similarities with Taoist and Confucianist principles and since the newly introduced Buddhism did not have specific Chinese characters to represent its essence, the only option was to borrow from available sources.

The influence of Taoism on Chinese Buddhism and its vocabulary is worth investigating. Out of Chinese indigenous doctrines, Taoism and Confucianism, Taoism is the closest to Buddhism in terms of its basic principles. The concept *Dào* (道, Path) itself shares many similarities with Buddhist Eightfold Path. Hinayana methods of *chán* (禪, <*dhyana*) were much similar to the breathing exercises advocated by the Taoist schools. By Wei and Jin dynasties, Taoist metaphysical ideologies had taken shape which shared many similarities with Buddhist 'wisdom' principle (Tang Yijie, 2015). In fact, the Taoist word *dào* (道) is often substituted for *bāzhèngdào* (八正道, 'Buddhist Eightfold Path'). The culminating objective of both Taoism and Buddhism is to find the right way and follow the right way. Taoism had such heavy influence on Chinese Buddhism that at times the two doctrines

### *Sinicization of Indic Loanwords in Chinese Language: Foreignization to domestication*

were almost difficult to distinguish from each other. Chen (1973) argues that the Taoist canon and pantheon were directly derived from Buddhism.

The *yinyang* theory could be considered as one of the key concepts of Taoism that have had a multifaceted influence on Chinese philosophy. *Yinyang* refers to the dark and light aspects of all elements in the universe. Like most other Taoist principles, *Yinyang* too has been shared among both Taoism and Buddhism. In Chinese martial arts such as *Taiji*, *Yinyang* plays a vital role and according to Wang Zhendong & Wang Fengyan (2020) it has been defined in terms of both Taoist and Buddhist modes of self-cultivation. In the Taiji Model of Buddhist Self, the Yin part denotes the dusty self, and the Yang part denotes the pure self. Similarly, Taiji Model of Taoist Self, the Yin and Yang parts correspond to the soft self and hard self, respectively. Although Buddhism has its connotations to darkness and light, however, Buddhism in its original form did not have a *yinyang* principle in the form that has been injected into Chinese Buddhism.

Confucianism was one of the key challenges to Buddhism since early Confucianists perceived Buddhism which was based on self-centered enlightenment by inner transformation and moral perfection in contrast to Confucian ideology which promotes filial piety as a core principle (Xing Guang, 2012). Filial piety was also perceived as a core principle of good governance by the Confucianists. However, conflict and coexistence were essential characteristics of the early contact of Buddhism with native Chinese ideologies. Kang Senghui of the Three Kingdoms period was learned in Confucian teaching as he was born in Southern China, who has said, “Confucian sayings are also Buddhist teachings” (Xing Guang, 2015). While the early Confucianists attempted to detach their ideology from Buddhist philosophy, Neo-Confucianists had more liberal approaches towards Buddhism.

One of the key characteristics of Chinese philosophy and religion is the coexistence of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism which is clearly manifested through the literary masterpieces after the Tang Dynasty. According to Ye (2014) there are references to all these three philosophies in *Cai Gen Tan* written by Hong Zicheng in the Ming Dynasty. Most importantly, the convergence of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucianist concepts and principles could be clearly observed in this literary masterpiece. For instance, the Confucian reason, Taoist emptiness, and Buddhist mind have been amalgamated in this literary work.

Along with the introduction of market economy with socialist characteristics in 1978 to China, language policy changes were an essential aspect of reformation to prepare China for international exchanges and bilateral cooperation. As a result, modern Chinese language has borrowed a large number of loanwords from Indo-European languages and has coined many neologisms for western concepts. It is difficult to evaluate the extent of these transformations on the other loanwords such as of Indic origin, but the substitution of



proper names to Indic loanwords as mentioned in a previous section may accelerate with the swift acceleration of development. This is more a result of not having concrete rules for the selection of characters when forming neologisms.

From the above discussion, it could be concluded that the influence of external elements on Buddhism in China such as Taoism, Confucianism and modernization has not only produced a hybrid Buddhist vocabulary but also simultaneously developed a hybrid Buddhism. Language and its vocabulary play a vital role in philosophy and religion and in most cases language acts as a carrier of religions and philosophies. In other words, in order to understand, interpret and disseminate intricate concepts of philosophy, a wider knowledge of the target language and its lexicon is a prerequisite. In cross-linguistic and cross-religious contexts, this becomes even more complex since the interpretation of a concept in another language is a challenging task which often results in adaptation of the original meanings. In the case of Buddhist loanwords in Chinese language, Taoism and Confucianism have had a significant impact on the Sinicization process of them.

## **5. Conclusion**

Aitchison (1991) referring to Robert Mannyng's historical records claims that even the simplest vernacular of a history of several hundred years ago may sound very strange to us. Mid-fourteenth century English will be hardly comprehensible for a contemporary competent English language speaker. Thus assimilation, semantic extension, semantic reduction and coinage of neologisms are inevitable processes of language change. In this study, it attempted to evaluate the Sinicization process of Indic vocabulary in Chinese language. While early translators have allowed more foreign attributes to flow into their works, translations after the 6<sup>th</sup> Century have undergone significant semantic and systematic transformations to fit into Chinese lexicon. Phonological assimilation is the most dominant mode of Sinicization whereas semantic extension and reduction have also occurred simultaneously. Native Chinese ideologies and their evolution have influenced the semantic adaptation process of Indic loanwords in Chinese language and many philosophical terms have been shared by Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Although Indic loanwords haven't had major influences on the phonological, morphological and syntactic structures of Chinese language except for disyllabification of lexical items, they have been instrumental in the expansion of the Chinese lexicon, widening the conceptual boundaries of terminologies, including Chinese philosophy, culture, art, translation, etc.

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*Noel Dassanayake*

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