

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL MULTIDISCIPLINES AND THEDEVELOPMENT OF SCIENCE

Homepage:https://jurnal.asrypersadaquality.com/index.php/ijmds

Email: internationalmultidicipline@gmail.com

THE HISTORICAL JOURNEY OF BUDDHISM FROM INDIA TO EAST ASIA

Rahmaini Tambunan[1] Haiqal Azizi[2]

[1-2]Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Studies, Al-Qur'an and Tafsir study program, State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Indonesia

rahmainitambunan74@gmail.com[1]haiqalazizi15@gmail.com[2]

KEYWORDS

of Buddhism, Silk Road, research methods, East Asia, History of civilization

ABSTRACT

This study examines in depth the historical journey of the spread of Buddhism from India to the East Asian region using a literature study approach to historical, archaeological, and philological sources. Based on the results of the study, the spread of Buddhism took place through long interactions involving the land routes of the Silk Road and the maritime routes of the Indian Ocean, which became important links between India, Central Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. The findings show that the process of diffusion of Buddhism did not occur suddenly, but through the journeys of monks, traders, and cultural ambassadors who brought sacred texts, artifacts, and ritual practices to various intellectual centers in East Asia. In addition, political support from major kingdoms such as Kushan, Han, Tang, Baekje, and Yamato had a significant contribution in strengthening Buddhist institutions through the construction of monasteries, translation centers, and patronage to scholars. This study also reveals that the adaptation of Buddhist teachings to local traditions in East Asia gave birth to new forms of Buddhism, such as Chan/Zen, Tendai, Shingon, and Pure Land schools, which developed through a process of syncretism with Confucianism, Taoism, and local traditional beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is one of the most influential religious traditions in the history of Asian civilization. Originating in India in the 6th century BC, this teaching developed in response to the social, political, and spiritual dynamics of the time(Hingga en Ke 2023). Buddhism not only served as a system of ethics and meditation practice, but also developed into a cultural force that gradually transcended the geographical boundaries of its originRahmalia, (2023).The introduction of Buddhism to East Asia—including China, Korea, and Japan—was a long and dynamic historical journey, influenced by trade routes, exchanges of ideas, missionary activity, and adaptation to local cultures. The complexity of this process makes it crucial to examine the migration of Buddhism from India to East Asia comprehensively.

The significance of this research lies in its ability to provide insight into how a religious teaching can transform when confronted with diverse cultural environments. The spread of Buddhism not only expanded religious practices in East Asia but also influenced the development of philosophy, art, political dynamics, and social structures in the region(Gunawan et al. 2023). By examining these historical processes, this research provides an understanding of how intercultural interactions and contact between communities contribute to the formation of new identities in the East Asian context. This kind of study also holds relevance for contemporary analyses of global religious dynamics and how spiritual teachings change when they enter different geographical and cultural spaces.

Within the framework of the research problem, several issues require further in-depth study. First, how did Buddhism adapt to Chinese cultural traditions previously influenced by Confucianism and Taoism? Second, to what extent did the Silk Road, both overland and maritime, play a role in accelerating the transmission of sacred texts, relics, and religious ideas? Third, how can the emergence of new traditions such as Mahayana, Chan/Zen, Seon, and Pure Land be understood as products of cultural interaction, local interpretations, and the spiritual needs of local communities? Fourth, how did the legitimacy and political support of East Asian kingdoms influence the growth of Buddhist institutions? All of these issues are the primary focus of this research analysis.

Literature review indicates that a number of studies have discussed the history of the spread of Buddhism in general(Hidayat 2023). Some studies highlight the importance of the Silk Road in the spread of Buddhism, while others focus more on the process of adaptation of Buddhism in China and the evolution of the Zen tradition in Japan (Thio, 2025). However, the majority of these studies are relatively limited; some only examine the development of Buddhism

in specific regions, others emphasize the philosophical aspects alone, or simply present a chronology of the spread without analyzing the interactions and cultural dynamics that underlie it.

The research gap that this study aims to fill lies in the absence of a comprehensive synthesis that combines three dimensions simultaneously: (1) historical journey, (2) cross-cultural adaptation, and (3) doctrinal transformation from India to East Asia. This study attempts to fill this gap by uniting historical analysis, cultural studies, and doctrinal interpretation in a single, integrated conceptual framework. Furthermore, this study highlights how Buddhism not only moved geographically but also underwent philosophical reconstruction during its interaction with East Asian cultures—an aspect that has not been comprehensively addressed in previous studies.

METHODE

This study employs a qualitative literature review approach to examine the historical transmission of Buddhism from India to East Asia (Adlini et al. 2022). OpinionRidwan et al., (2021) he research focuses on analyzing historical, archaeological, and philological sources relevant to the spread, adaptation, and transformation of Buddhist teachings. Data were collected from both classical and contemporary academic sources, including books, journal articles, historical records, and previous scholarly studies accessed through academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest. The selection of sources was conducted purposively, emphasizing credibility, relevance to the research topic, and contribution to understanding the historical and cultural dimensions of Buddhism in East Asia. The data analysis process involved three main stages. First, the collected literature was organized and classified according to historical periods, geographical regions, and major themes related to the transmission of Buddhism. Second, thematic analysis was applied to identify key patterns, including transmission routes, political patronage, cultural adaptation, and doctrinal transformation. Finally, the findings were synthesized to construct a comprehensive and coherent interpretation of the historical journey of Buddhism from India to East Asia.

Data Sources and Selection

Data collection was carried out through searches in physical and digital libraries, including the use of academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest(Islam 2024). The selection of sources was done purposively, emphasizing documents that are directly relevant to the theme of the spread of Buddhism and the evolution of its teachings in East Asia.

Data collection technique

Data collection was carried out through in-depth studies of texts and literature discussing the history of Buddhism, reviewing previous research to understand the development of current studies, and verifying the credibility of sources based on their authenticity, consistency, and the context in which they were written(Syahputra et al. 2025).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted through three main steps: organization and Classification: Grouping literature based on historical periods, regions, figures, and themes of the spread of teachings, Thematic coding: Identifying patterns and themes such as the path of spread, the role of kingdoms, cultural adaptation, and transformation of doctrine, synthesis and Conclusion Drawing: Developing a comprehensive understanding of the process of the spread and change of Buddhist teachings from India to East Asia(Prasetyo 2008).This method allows for the presentation of a deep and structured historical overview, while providing a strong scientific basis for answering research objectives and issues..

RESULTSANDDISCUSSION

RESULTS

Distribution Routes by Land (Silk Road)

The findings of this study indicate that the spread of Buddhism from India to East Asia occurred gradually through interconnected land and maritime networks(Sen 2014). One of the most important routes was the Silk Road, which linked India with Central Asia and China. Through this route, Buddhist monks, traders, and envoys transported religious texts, ritual practices, and artistic traditions across regions.

Several oasis cities(Xinjiang 2025), including Gandhara, Khotan, and Dunhuang, developed into significant centers of Buddhist learning and translation. Political patronage, particularly during the Kushan Empire under King Kanishka, played a crucial role in strengthening Buddhist institutions through the construction of monasteries and support for scholarly activities.

The transmission of Buddhism continued from China to the Korean Peninsula and Japan through diplomatic relations and cultural exchange. In Korea, the kingdoms of Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla adopted Buddhism at different times, integrating it into state ideology and governance(Hurvitz, Wayman, en Beyer 1978). From Korea, Buddhism entered Japan and received strong support from the Yamato court, leading to its institutional establishment by the sixth century CE.

The Role of the Kushan Empire and Key Figures

The Kushan Empire (1st–3rd centuries CE) played a major role in the spread of Buddhism from India to Central Asia and China(Loeschner 2014). Under King Kanishka, Buddhism received strong political and cultural support. Kanishka facilitated the construction of monasteries, large stupas, and centers of Buddhist learning in regions such as Gandhara and Bactria. His reign led to the Fourth Buddhist Council, which strengthened the development of Mahayana teachings. Furthermore, Gandhara art, with its blend of Indo-Greek styles, contributed to the spread of Buddhist iconography throughout East Asia.

Key figures from the Kushan period who played a role in the spread of the teachings to China were monk-translators such as:

- Lokakṣema – one of the first translators of Mahayana sutras into Chinese (2nd century CE).
- Dharmarakṣa – translated many important sutras, including the Saddharma Puṇḍarīka (Lotus Sutra).
- Kumarajiva – the most influential figure in translating sutras into beautiful and easy-to-understand Chinese.

It was the political support of the Kushans and the work of the translator monks that accelerated the entry and development of Buddhism into China, which then spread further to Korea and Japan.

The Entry of Buddhism into Korea and Japan

Buddhism entered Korea around the 4th century CE through diplomatic relations and cultural exchanges with China. The three major kingdoms on the Korean Peninsula—Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla—received it at different times:

- Goguryeo (372 AD). Buddhism was first introduced when King Sosurim received a Chinese monk named Sundo (Shun-dao). Buddhist teachings were then used to support the moral and administrative stability of the kingdom.
- Baekje (384 AD). This kingdom welcomed Marananta monks from Southern China. Baekje later became an important center for actively spreading Buddhism to Japan.
- Silla (527 AD). Initially, Silla was slow to accept Buddhism due to the resistance of the nobility. Its spread was only successful after the sacrifice of the monk Ichadon, who is considered a martyr. After that, Buddhism became the official religion of the kingdom.

In Korea, Buddhism developed in the form of Seon (the forerunner of Zen) and other Mahayana schools.

Transformation and Sinification of Teachings

The development of Buddhism in East Asia was not simply a transfer of teachings from India, but also underwent substantial changes to reflect local culture. Upon its arrival in China, Buddhist teachings were adapted to local traditions, resulting in a form more suited to Chinese ways of thinking and values. These adaptations are evident in the emphasis on meditation practices, family morality, and social harmony.

This adaptation process subsequently gave rise to various distinctive forms of thought, such as the development of the Chan school, which emphasizes direct meditative experience. Japan then developed new forms, such as Zen, which emphasizes discipline, inner stillness, and a simple aesthetic. Thus, the journey of Buddhism demonstrates a dynamic, ever-changing nature, adapting to the cultures it encounters.

DISCUSSION

The Spread of Buddhism as an Intellectual and Cultural Exchange

The spread of Buddhism from India to East Asia should be understood not merely as a process of religious expansion, but as a form of intellectual and cultural exchange(Rabbani, 2022). The Silk Road functioned as a dynamic space where religious ideas interacted with local philosophies, political interests, and social structures. Buddhism was able to gain acceptance in East Asia because many of its ethical teachings resonated with existing traditions influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, particularly values related to moral discipline, harmony, and self-cultivation.

As Buddhism entered new cultural environments, it underwent significant adaptation. In China, Buddhist doctrines were reinterpreted using familiar philosophical concepts, resulting in the sinicization of Buddhist thought. This process contributed to the emergence of Chan Buddhism, which emphasized meditation and direct experiential insight rather than strict textual study. In Korea and Japan, these teachings evolved further into Seon and Zen traditions, reflecting local spiritual sensibilities and cultural aesthetics. addition to Chan and Zen, other schools such as Pure Land, Tendai, and Shingon emerged as responses to the spiritual needs of broader segments of society. The Pure Land tradition, in particular, offered a more accessible path to salvation through devotion to Amitabha Buddha, making it widely accepted among lay communities. These developments demonstrate that Buddhism in East Asia was not a static inheritance from India, but a dynamic tradition shaped by continuous reinterpretation and cultural creativity.

The Formation of New Streams as a Result of Adaptation

The journey of Buddhism from India to East Asia not only brought its original teachings, but also triggered the birth of various new schools as a result of the process of adaptation to the culture, philosophy, and spiritual needs of the local community(Indonesia, Wijarnarko, en Mada 2023). As Buddhism interacted with Chinese intellectual traditions such as Confucianism and Taoism, a harmonizing of teachings occurred, producing new forms more suited to local characteristics. One of the most prominent examples is the emergence of Chan in China, which later evolved into Zen in Japan(Indonesia, Wijarnarko, en Mada 2023). This school emphasizes direct meditation practice and the experience of enlightenment without relying heavily on sacred texts, an approach heavily influenced by the practical and intuitive Chinese style of thinking. Furthermore, the Tendai and Shingon schools in Japan developed from Chinese interpretations of Indian teachings, later reincorporating them with distinctive Japanese symbolism and ritual.

Besides Zen, the Pure Land school has also become very popular because it offers simple teachings about salvation through faith in Amitabha Buddha(Oowakapta 2002). These teachings were readily accepted by the wider community because they offered spiritual hope without the demands of complex meditation practices. This adaptation process demonstrates Buddhism's high flexibility in adapting to local conditions. The interaction between Indian teachings and East Asian culture gave birth to new traditions that remained rooted in the core teachings but developed into unique and distinct forms from their original sources. Thus, the emergence of new schools in East Asia demonstrates that the spread of Buddhism was not simply a process of migration, but also a creative and dynamic transformation.

CONCLUSION

The historical journey of Buddhism from India to East Asia was a complex and dynamic process shaped by trade networks, intellectual exchange, and political patronage. Buddhism spread through peaceful means rather than coercion, relying on the activities of monks, scholars, and rulers who supported its institutional development.

The successful establishment of Buddhism in East Asia was closely linked to its ability to adapt to local cultural contexts and philosophical traditions. The emergence of diverse schools such as Chan/Zen, Pure Land, Tendai, and Shingon reflects the creative interaction between Indian Buddhist heritage and East Asian cultural environments. As a result, Buddhism in East

Asia developed into a distinct religious and intellectual tradition that has had a lasting influence on the region's history and civilization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Praise be to God Almighty for His grace and blessings, enabling the successful completion of this paper. The author would like to express his gratitude to his supervisor who provided valuable guidance, direction, and input throughout the process of writing this paper. He also extends his gratitude to all those who provided support, including information, references, and motivation, which enabled this research to be completed more perfectly.

The author realizes that this paper still has shortcomings. Therefore, constructive criticism and suggestions are highly appreciated for the perfection of this scientific work in the future.

REFERENCES

Adlini, Miza Nina, Anisya Hanifa Dinda, Sarah Yulinda, and Octavia Chotimah. 2022. "Qualitative Research Methods Of Literature Study." 6(1): 974–80.

Gunawan, Hery et al. 2023. "Buddhist Culture and Lifestyle 1,2,3." 1(1): 11–16.

Hidayat, Nurul. 2023. "Transformation of Nalanda Buddhist College into Nalanda Buddhist Institute: A Feasibility Study Review in a Socio-Cultural Context." 3: 4174–89.

Up to, Its Development, and Entering. 2023. "Al-Hikmah: Journal of the Study of Religions." 9(2): 156–67.

Xinjiang, Rong. 2025. "Rewriting the Silk Road : a New Chapter for Dunhuang Manuscript Studies"

Hurvitz, Leon, Alex Wayman, and Stephen Beyer. 1978. "Of The International Association OF". 1(1). Indonesia, *Journal Filsafat,* Andrean Ferry Wijarnarko, en Universitas Gadjah Mada. 2023. "The Emergence of Sects in Religion According to Richard Dawkins' Meme Theory". 6(3): 404–14. Islam, Grounding. 2024. "AL QOLAM Z NN Z". 8(1): 1–13.

Loeschner, Hans. 2014. "*Kanishka in Context with the Historical Buddha and Kushan Chronology*". : 1–69.

No, Vol, March No, en Thio Donald Sugiarto. 2025. "*Jurnal Theologi & Pelayanan Kerusso:* A Study of the New Age Movement: Philosophical and Spiritual Implications for Mandarin Churches". 10(1): 1–13.

Oowakapta, Di. 2002. "*pm5atwwdayaan tfpah **".

Prasetyo, Iis. 2008. "Data analysis techniques in research and development".

Rabbani, Mohammad Ali. "And The Spread Of Persian Culture And Civilization: Islamization in Southeast Asia." : 69–88.

Rahmalia, Ana. 2023. "*Table Manners in Japanese Society as a Form of Implementation of Confucian Teachings in East Asia."* (0341).

Ridwan, Muannif, Bahrul Ulum, Fauzi Muhammad, and Indragiri Islamic University. 2021. *"Jurnal Masohi."* 02.

Sen, Tansen. 2014. *"Maritime Southeast Asia Between South Asia and China to the* Sixteenth Century." 2(1): 31–59.

Syahputra, Heru, Nazwa Alfira Hsb, Aziddin Muhammad, and Muhammad Irsyad. 2025. "*Breaking the Cycle of Suffering: An In-Depth Study of the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism*." 7(9): 1113–26.