

The Factors of Lotus Belief Affected on Buddhism in Northwest India and West China

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Many Buddhism Schools had been influential over Gandhāra since 7th century. Considering that Mahāyāna Buddhism had risen and developed in and around this area, Gandhāra must have been the very place where the growth of many Buddhist Schools and Mahāyāna took place.

As Lotus Sūtra contains the main ideas of Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is not difficult to presume how important the Sūtra was for spreading Mahāyāna Buddhism. Furthermore, Lotus Sūtra had become the base of the new religious culture there.

The temples in Northwest India appears to have been built basing on the manual on the Lotus Sūtra. Since the Sūtra presented the guideline for building stupas with the relics of the Buddha, the guideline appears to have been applied to the practice of building temples and statues in the region.

As the essence of Mahāyāna Buddhism of memorizing and reciting had a great influence on spreading into Northwest India, the manual building Buddhist architecture in the Sūtra appears to have become the foundation of new temple style in the area.

When Buddhism spread into China, the belief based on Lotus Sūtra made a huge progress. The statue of cross-legged Maitreya and wall paintings of celestial nymphs with musical instruments in the caves located in Kucha on Southern Route of Tianshan provide evidences. Moreover, the style of building two statues sitting side by side are obviously based on the Lotus belief.

It is possible to think that there is no connection between the order of temples in Northwest India, to be exact in Gandhāra, and the style of architecture in Kucha. However as the matter of Lotus belief, the religious basis for those two remote places were the same. Especially the cultures which had been built based on the Lotus Sūtra are presumed to have been influential over Chinese Buddhism in many ways.