

'Little India' in China

Ka-Kin Cheuk

LOCATED IN EASTERN ZHEJIANG PROVINCE as a district under Shaoxing municipality, Keqiao is not only a global trading hub, but also a 'Little India' in China. Its wholesale market accounts for one-third annual turnover of a bewildering variety of fabrics: the semi-finished, lightweight textiles that are industrially woven, knitted, dyed, and printed in China before being exported to over 180 ports around the world. In the local market, around 5000 Indians have established intermediary trade businesses in Keqiao. Together with other foreign traders, these traders have brokered a large amount of fabric trade for their buyers in different parts of the world, mostly in the Global South.

Drawing on long-term fieldwork in Keqiao (2011-2012; 2016-2017), this ethnographic study explores the everyday work experience of Indian traders in the local fabric market. It unpacks the economic niche that they have created through local market engagements, as well as the transnational trading networks that have sustained this niche in the global value chain of textiles. As such, it aims to explore the significance of Indian-Chinese fabric trade in Keqiao in the global economy.

In 1998, the first Indian came to open a trading office in Keqiao. But Keqiao's fabric market existed long before that. It proliferated in the late 1970s, when a large part of Zhejiang Province was still plagued by poverty and underdevelopment. Many local Chinese peasants and fishermen became peddling traders selling fabrics, while others converted their houses into household factories supplying fabrics to the traders. The local traders organized a fabric bazaar along the main canal area. It later became the central marketplace accommodating over 20,000 wholesale shops and distributing more than 10,000 types of fabrics. The continuous inflow of Chinese migrant traders, particularly those from the rural areas in Wenzhou and Sichuan, has further enhanced the local supply chain, as they have connected Keqiao to a sales network across the whole nation.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, such developmental dynamics from below have received institutional support from the local government, in a time when state's support was not



common in the local market economy. The local government, for instance, played a crucial role in improving the infrastructure of Keqiao, facilitating the robust growth of its fabric trade economy. In recognizing the economic achievement and national importance of Keqiao's fabric industries, in 1992, the central Chinese government named the marketplace area 'The China Light Textile City' (中国轻纺城).

Indian-Chinese connections

In Keqiao, it is well-recognized that the arrival of many Indian traders drastically transformed the local trade landscape. The first wave of Indian migrants to the city coincided with its exponential growth of fabric exports in the early 2000s. Since then, the value of fabric exports has overtaken that of the domestic trade, thereby making international fabric trade indispensable to the economic development of Keqiao. From the perspective of the Indian traders, their relocation to Keqiao was largely a market choice. These Indian traders usually operate their transnational business on limited budgets. Most of them specialize in the intermediary trade of low-grade fabrics for the price-savvy buyers, particularly those frequenting the re-export market in Dubai. Living in Keqiao

Above: Fabric marketplace buildings along the main canal in Keqiao. Photo by author.

enables the Indian traders to establish stronger networks with suppliers. It allows them to negotiate better prices and higher commission fees for the trade orders. In so doing, the Indian traders capitalize on the unique market structure of Keqiao's fabric industries: over 80 per cent of Chinese suppliers are running small and medium-sized enterprises.

In Keqiao, most of these suppliers only manage to supply cheap and low-quality fabrics, which is a crowded market that inevitably faces intense price competition. The local price competition, however, turns out to be a market strength in the low-end export sector, given that the Indian traders are also extremely price-sensitive in their purchases. With both sides being so much strained on the price factor, their everyday encounters in Keqiao tend to be fraught with tension and conflict. Nevertheless, holding to a dual commitment of cutting cost and maintaining partnership, Indian-Chinese trade in Keqiao is a resilient force in sustaining the grassroots connections between China and the Global South, especially so in the time of on-going global economic uncertainties.

Ka-Kin Cheuk, Postdoctoral Researcher, Leiden University (k.k.cheuk@hum.leidenuniv.nl).

Sanskrit Studies at Peking University

THE ORIGINS OF SANSKRIT STUDIES at Peking University can be traced back to 1921, when the German scholar Alexander von Stael-Holstein created a Sanskrit course for PKU students. After him, Walter Liebenthal, also a German, taught this course in the 1930s. They helped train a number of Chinese students in Sanskrit; this included the noted intellectuals Lin Likouang and Wu Xiaoling. In 1946, after returning from Göttingen, Germany, Ji Xianlin established the Department of Oriental Languages at Peking University, marking the beginning of the discipline of Indology in modern China. Two years later, Jin Kemu joined Peking University and worked together with Ji Xianlin to promote India Studies in China. Due to their reputation in the academic community, and because of their excellence in teaching and scholarship, the 1950s witnessed a rapid development of Sanskrit Studies at Peking University.

The first undergraduates majoring in Sanskrit and Pali were enrolled in 1960, most of whom pursued academic careers after graduation. Among them Jiang Zhongxin and Huang Baosheng, who became celebrated scholars for their contributions to the field. Jiang was among the first scholars who paid attention to the study of Sanskrit manuscripts found in Tibet and he translated the Hindu text *Manusmṛti* (Laws of Manu) into Chinese. Huang played a vital role in completing the translation of the Indian epic *Mahābhārata* and made major contributions to the study of Sanskrit poetics. In 1978, shortly after the Cultural Revolution, Ji Xianlin became the vice president of Peking University and the director of the Institute of South Asian Studies, established jointly by Peking University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Since then BA, MA, and PhD degrees in Sanskrit and Pali have been offered at Peking University. As of now, Peking University remains the only institution where a comprehensive program in Sanskrit and Pali is offered to undergraduate and graduate students. Additionally, minor options are available in Tibetan language and literature. In 2004, the Research Institute of Sanskrit Manuscripts and Buddhist Literature was established at the university. This expanded the disciplinary coverage to new areas, including Tibetan and Sanskrit manuscript studies, and the translation and interpretation of Sanskrit, Kharoṣṭhī and Khotanese documents found in Xinjiang. Three series of publication have been launched to disseminate the research outcome of the Institute, including the series on Sanskrit manuscripts and Buddhist literature and on Buddhist texts in Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese languages. In 2009, an MoU was signed with Dhammachai Institute in Thailand to jointly translate the Pali Tipitaka into Chinese. The main idea behind this project is to introduce the Pali Buddhist canon to the Chinese audience and to develop an educational program on the Pali Buddhist tradition at Peking University. This effort has resulted in the publication of the Buddhist text *Dīghanikāya* in 2012.

For more information contact Associate Professor Shaoyong YE 叶少勇 (yeshao Yong@pku.edu.cn) or Assistant Professor Jingjing FAN 范晶晶 (fanjingjing@pku.edu.cn) at the Dept of South Asian Studies at Peking University.

West Heavens: India-China cultural exchange program

West Heavens is an integrated cross-cultural exchange program. It aims to untangle and compare the different paths of modernity taken by India and China, to facilitate high-level communication between the two countries' intellectual and art circles, and to promote interaction through social thoughts and contemporary art. Since 2010, the program has organized more than 100 events including forums, exhibitions, film screenings and workshops, and published more than ten books.

China has been in the grip of modernization for over a century. From Revolution to Cold War, and now capitalist globalism, China has been unable to shake off paradigms set by the West. Even Chinese discourse about modernity has so far been trapped by dichotomies of 'East/West' or 'China/West'. No wonder that efforts at developmental self-reliance have only led to increasingly Westernized economic and political institutions and lifestyles. Today the West that China emulates as the model of an 'advanced civilization' is no longer suitable for guidance, and yet access to China's own historical resources has been blocked by the framework of these models. To establish a position for itself outside of the two Western Cold War ideological paradigms, to develop historical resources beyond Western ideals, China must make connections elsewhere. Among Asian countries that have struck off on different paths of modernization, but still successful by the parochial standards of 'prosperity', India has much to offer its neighbors. For more than a century, challenges of imperialism and capitalism have forced India and China to develop political strategies that have profoundly transformed both societies. Sharing this experience is valuable for Indians and Chinese alike.

China had experienced one other profound cultural turn long before the seismic cultural shift towards the West. The Buddhist turn did not bring comparable destructive fervor as the past century of revolutions, but its influence was just as far reaching; Buddhist learning took many centuries before it was fully absorbed into Confucian scholarship in the Song dynasty (10-13 C). Today, after a century of revolutions, it is important to remember this history of cultural self-transformation. At this age of global change it is critical for China to remind ourselves that in our imagination of the world there is not just the West, but also the 'West Heavens'.



Amitav Ghosh at the Youth Round Table in Mingfu Library, Shanghai; photo by Zhou Shengjie, provided by West Heavens.

China tour with Amitav Ghosh

In Fall 2016, West Heavens curated a one month visit to China with Indian writer Amitav Ghosh, in collaboration with NYU Shanghai and the publishers of the Chinese editions of *In An Antique Land* and *River of Smoke*. Ghosh's travel covered major cities throughout China – including Kunming, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai – giving talks on the relation between history and writing, the Opium Wars and India-China trade relations. Ghosh also met with local authors, critics, press, and in particular with Chinese readers, and presented at two major book fairs, Beijing Book Fair and Shanghai Book Fair. In addition, West Heavens curated a Youth Round Table on history and writing, in Mingfu Library in Shanghai, with Amitav Ghosh and young writers, artists, and researchers from inside and outside of academia. During his talks and roundtables, Ghosh left the Chinese readers with a vivid impression of a contemporary Indian literature. Indian literature is not sufficiently translated into Chinese, and only those who won major Western literature prizes have so far attracted the attention of Chinese publishers. The question of how and why certain literature should be introduced to readers shall be further discussed among academics, critics, publishers and readers.

For more information contact: Yun CHEN 陈韵, researcher and project manager at West Heavens (chenyunrhyme@qq.com).