# BODHISATTVA MAY BE AMONG THE TOURISTS! ---- THE REVIVAL OF BUDDHISM, EXEMPLIFIED WITH THE CASE STUDY OF KAIYUAN TEMPLE, XINGTAI HEBEI PROVINCE

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**Abstract -** Since the opening up to the world in the 1980, China has witnessed religious revival in China. Especially with the national strategy of One Belt One Road, several places in China are taking advantage of the strategy and its cultural legacies to build a stage of tourism for economy. This research, exemplified with Kaiyuan Temple at the city of Xingtai, through field studies and literature review, analyzes the interaction of Buddhist spirituality with city life, and concludes that local tourism may play an active factor to promote local economy, may also have possible impacton local culture.

**Index terms -** Buddhism, tourism revival, economy spirituality

## I. INTRODUCTION TO THE CITY AND THE BUDDHIST TEMPLE

The city of Xingtai①, located on the south Hebei province of North China Plain, is a city between cities of Handan and Shjiazhuang. It borders the Taihang Mountain on the west. Actually Xingtaiwas geographically at the place whereChinese nationalities began tointeract with and assimilate each other, which was regarded as in the Chinese historya painful period lasting for one hundred and thirty five years from the year 304 to the year 439, when the Chinese were troubled by five minorities living to the north.

Xingtai was also one of the places in China which first witnessed the introduction of Buddhism from Ancient India. The very first Buddhist pagoda and temples, proved by unearthed Buddhism items ( Wei, Liang &Zhang, 2012) leads to the fact that Buddhism was first introduced to Xingtai and its countiesnearby in the year 67 AD.

Xingtai used to be the capital city of a kingdom called Houzhaoor the Latter Zhao of a tribe called Jie, a tribe belong to Hun, in the 4th century.Hou Zhao established, centered around the city of Xingtai, 893 temples, with the command of Tucheng, a master monk who enjoyed extreme confidence and respectfrom the Emperor Shile and his dynasty(Wang, 2012 ).

The temple Kaiyuan, one of the oldest temples of the city Xingtaiat the center of the city was built 1,300 years ago in Tang Dynasty. Regarded as one of the original places for Chinese Buddhism school of Caodong (Soto) (Guan 2015),it played a very important role in the translation and spread of Buddhism, as a number of well-known masters of Buddhism worked there. For instance, the renowned monk Kongben from ancient Indiatranslated Buddhism classics from the year 911 to 915 into Chinese(Li: 1993).



*Entrance to Great Kaiyuan Temple by Jia Mingfang*

## II. REVIVAL AND EXPANSION: FROM KAIYUAN TO GREAT KAIYUAN

The original Kaiyuan Temple, covered an area of more than three hectares(Li, 1993),has been enlarged to Great Kaiyuan Temple Park, with a construction area as large as 54,000 square meters(Guan, 2015 ).The park serves as a city plaza with landscape designs like waterfalls and pavilions so that citizens may enjoy themselves there. The central part of the park is the new temple named Great Kaiyuan Temple, where Buddhist gods are worshiped, Buddhist ceremonies and activities are held regularly. The temple even has a decent library where visitors can read works of philosophy and religions.



*Secular city life at the sacred place with Buddhist air: seniors playing Taichi swords, playing chess, singing Peking opera, or even baby- sitting the offspring. Typical activities among the seniors in China by Jia Mingfang*

To the west of the Great Kaiyuan Temple is the original or old temple which seems to be preserved for academic studies. As a major life Zen temple at a city center, Great Kaiyuan Temple has played an active role in evolving common people in Zen since it was reconstructed in the year 2013.The temple holds three day Zen practices or Buddhist Retreat every month so that citizens interested in Zen philosophy can experience Zen life in terms of meditation, tea ceremony, enjoying temple bell, and chanting. The temple even organizes hikes totemples at Wutaishan, the sacred center seven hundred kilometers away in North China (GreaterKaiyuan Temple WeChat, the Facebook in China). The Zen Buddhism conception happens to cater to the contemporary belief in China: slow life to enjoy a simpler life pattern and longer life expectancy. Greater Kaiyuan Templevia its Webchat introduces to the public how to cook vegetables, which is in accordance with modern fashion currently popular in China. This vegetarianism may be in accordance with modern medicine as well. According to a medical study, to be a vegetarian is likely to have a healthier and longer life, since it reduces the risk of heart attack by 57%(Pu, 2006: 96). Those activitieswith practical value, together with its monks and nuns and laymen'shumble and helpful conducts, win acceptance and support among the local citizens as well as government officials. That may explain why as early as in the 1980s Buddhism began to revive in China, and by the beginning of 21 century"more and more people are becoming interested in Zen, especially young people and people with a college education"(Porter, 2010).



*Hike to WutaiFrom Kaiyuansi WeChat*

As a matter of fact, early at the beginning of the 21 century, with the popularity of Zen some senior monks have been so confident that they even consider spreading Chinese Buddhism to the other parts of the world(Porter, 2010). With kindness, tolerance and patience as it principle, Buddhism has played a remarkable role in cultivating positive social behaviors and conducts. In its history in China, few wars were caused by Buddhism. The writer of this paper was impressed whilecommunicating with the monks, nuns and even laypersons with their cultivated good manners of conduct.The religious people tend to be more friendly, more willing to help, more respectable. It is believed natural for the city of Xingtai to be proud of its history. Its history could be found around 35,000 years ago. And as the place where Buddhism was first introduced to China, Xingtai and its surrounding areas enjoy special position in the spread and maturity of Buddhism. It has the earliest Buddhist temples and pagoda, witnessedmaster monks translating the Dharmaor Buddhist doctrine into Chinese language. The city is hometown of LiuBingzhong(1216 –1271) a well cultivated monk who designed the capital city of Beijing. Guo Shoujing (1231–1316), a renowned scientist of ancient China was also born atXingtai and supervised by Liu.

## III. CONFIDENCE AND EXPECTATIONS

Cultural heritages like Kaiyuan temple have been viewed as the distinguished part for the popularity and reputation for the city. A study of the city blueprint plan would show that the local government seems rather eager to simulate local economy with the development of tourism. Andtemple visitation has been important in Chinese tourist industry, the local government of Xingtai has officially proposed the city development plan in which Buddhism Culture Part centered at Kaiyuan Temple and Guo Shoujing Parkwas listed as one of the city'smajor reconstruction projects (Xingtai Municipal Work Report: The Twelfth Five-Year Plan for National Economy and Social Development. Heritage like Buddhism and Buddhist temples have not, however, always been so popular in the history of China.Actually besides the period from the 1960s to 1970s, at the turn of the twentieth century Buddhist temples were also converted to public schools, security offices, tax administration. Furthermore back in history, Buddhism experienced at least three disastrous deconstructions during feudal dynasties.

Actually, the local government of Xingtai has been interested in boosting its economy with the help of tourism, which can be found at the journalist's interview with the chief director of the city tourist office. The municipal government has listed tourism as a chief industry since the city hopes to see 16,000,000 tourists and anannual tourism income as high as RMB 9.3 billion by the year 2015 (Hao, Meng, and Shi, 2013). According to statistics, the tourism income on a single national day in the year 2012 was as high asRMB 4,750million from 1.08 million tourists(Zhang, 2013). In the year 201621.09 million tourists contributed a total tourism income of RMB181.6 billion, which was 6.8% of the city's GDP. Tourism has been an vital section of the local economy (Qi, 2017). With the guidance of the municipal plan, the city of Xingtai has already taken more intensive measures to stimulate its tourist industry. For instance international conferences and forums on religions andZen Culture were heldat Xitai(Wang 2012). International events such as marathon or half

marathon, cycling competitions attracted public attention. All the national andinternational activities serve as commercials for the city.The local municipal government may have learned from its neighboring town Fanzhuang in which the Dragon Tablet has contributed to the local economy with academic and tourist attention ( Zhao & Zhu, 2016; Gao, 2016). The Dragon Tablet has won financial support from believers' donation as the annual income from donation was as high as RMB 80,000,and in the year 2003 the Tablet was officially raised as a temple with as cost of RMB260,000 which equals $35,000. The Dragon Tablet won the village great attention worldwide in the field of academy and trade. The annual temple fair for instance, is a good chance for trade, contributing to the local business (Gao, 2014). It intensifies the local identity and pride. Confidence is not confined only to common people but to local officials as well. Researches (Xu &Qiu, 2018)find that religious believes meet personal feeling of satisfaction, that to the society it raises social security.With long history of Buddhism, some of the important temples of Xingtai city and its neighboring counties are being re-constructed, mostly on their original sites. Among those revived Buddhist monasteries are the Pure Land Temple and the White Bird Temple for nuns to the south east of Kaiyuan Temple and Imperial Temple to the north. Local officials and congress representatives had proposals for developing its tourism in terms of accommodation, transportation, and towns of their own unique features (Xingtai Daily, 18 Nov.,2017). Current social conditions are encouraging for the city's plan. High ways running from the north to the south of China are being constructed around the city. High speed trains have a new stop built on the east suburb of the stop at the city. Politically, the whole country is working hard to carry out an international strategy, China Dream, the One Belt One Road, which shed lights on the city development. And Xingtai is not the only city who hopes to boost its local tourism with the help of historic legacy.Itsneighboring countiessuch as Heshun, Yushe and Wuxiangare making statues for emperorShile②, even though he has been regarded as a barbarian ruler, according to news and academic critics (Feng, 2017).



*A statue of Shile, at a Shile Culture Park --from Baidu*

## IV. DISCUSSION

Buddhism is popular at the city, as well as in other parts of China due to the more friendly and open social situation. As the famous master monk Tucheng put "it's hard to have Buddhism accepted were state leaders not relied upon"(Dai, 2008), the revival and popularity of Great Kaiyuan Temple is to a great extent the result from local government's approval and support.



*A grand worship ritual from Great Kaiyuan Temple*

Great Kaiyuan Temple, on the other hand, is found helpful in promoting spirituality life of the local community with its ceremonies such as Bodhimanda and other Buddhist services open to the city. The cultural heritage like Great Kaiyuan Temple has cultivated well- being for the local people including the alternative of life, better spirituality and moral standard. Considering China has already been in the aging society, it is regarded as a vital part for seniors to have a peaceful life. The healing power of believes seem to be partially accepted, while it used to be considered superstition. As Buddhism is comparatively more popular among middle-aged and senior people, the healing power of Buddhism and other religions helps to some degree to the Buddhism revival in contemporary China. When first arrived at China, Buddhism was accepted by adjusting to local spiritual forms of conducts such as folk believes and Confucius-like ceremony. With the aid from emperors until it was rooted in China in Tang Dynasty (618AD–907AD) and developed its varieties of Chinese Buddhism (Pu,2006). As a Buddhism story popular in quite a few places goes that the beggar walking along the street is just Bodhisattva in the image of a beggar, the Bodhisattva may also among the tourists!



*Library at Great Kaiyuan Temple by JiaMingfang*

As Chinese culture has been so flexible and accommodating or harmonious that Buddhism from India has been transformed into Chinese Buddhism.As a matter of fact, Chinese Buddhism has evolved to several schools such as Human Buddhism, and life Zen. That's why some researchers are concerned that the flexibility may result in uncertainty or even vulgarization. The combined developing mode of city officials, business men and monks is considered by some scholars destructive to temples and therefore may have severe effects (Ji & He, 2014）. Tourism, however, though contribute greatly and quickly to the local GDP, it may have negative impact on local community by visits of large number of tourists in terms of ecology and life stylewhich can be found from cities famous for tourism worldwide (Huang, 2011 ; Lombard, 2017; Xiao, Gao, & Wang, 2016). Buddhism may attempt to influence the city life. it sometimes might turn out, in fact, that the belief isinfluenced by its host city. That is one of the reasons why researchers are concerned that modern cities in China tend to take advantage of Buddhism or other religions for local income. The business or commercialized pattern composed of developers, officials and monks may actually impairBuddhism and thus lower the quality of this religion (Huang, 2005; Hong, 2000).

**Notes:**

1. The city of Xingtaihas a history of over 3,500years and a capital city for more than 800 years. Historians maintain it as the cradle of Shang dynasty of China and as the first city in the area of North China in history and as one of the oldest cities in China and even in the whole world (Qi, 2017).
2. Shile(274—333), emperor of Houzhao in 330 AD. Well known for his cruelty and massacres.(A History of Jin Dynasty, Biography No. 29") Zhonghua Book Company , 1996.

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