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<i>For completion by student:</i>		
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Module code: SIC7022	Student ID number: 2015607	Educational support needs: No
Dissertation title: A Study on the Intercultural Communication of Han Buddhism in the Case of Naga's Transformation into Loong 漢傳佛教跨文化傳播研究——以那伽成龍為例		
Supervisor: Venerable Shengmiao		Word count: 3269
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Signed Shite Li.....		
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Reflective Review of the Dissertation

The topic of my dissertation is *A Study on the Intercultural Communication of Han Buddhism in the Case of Naga's Transformation into Loong*. I started my research long before the end of the MA programme, the dissertation phase. Looking back over the past 19 months, the challenges came along with different stages of my research. I'll explain the difficulties I encountered and how I overcame them by breaking up my study into three phases for ease of reading. Finally, I will discuss the lessons I have learned from my research.

Stage 1 09.2022-07.2023

How I prepared for my research (direction and research ability)

In September 2022, I arrived in Lampeter to join the community of the Academy of Sinology. Before this MA study, I already had two bachelor's degrees in Chinese language and literature (editing and publishing direction) and law. After that, I worked for a Sino-US website for two years, which gave me an interest in the export communication of Chinese culture. Therefore, when I decided to study Buddhist textual studies in the UK, I thought I should focus on how Buddhism transports to the West. Apart from that, I also have an academic interest in mythology and metaphysics.

One day, when I was in the library of the academy, I encountered an unpublished novel, maybe written by the late Prof. Williams, *Two Dragons East*. It's about a Welsh man's experience in China before 1949. The story sparked my curiosity about my dissertation direction. I'm in a Chinese academy in Wales, and as a pre-Harry Potter fan, the Common Welsh Green impressed me a lot. If I can work on the Welsh or British culture, that will be meaningful work for the academy. However, there is no direct connection between British Culture and my MA programme. The research needs to be based on Buddhist texts and most of the work involves indoor text processing.

As for my study background, I haven't had systematic learning about Buddhism before. What I have read is a small number of Buddhist classics. The Tripitaka is enormous and complicated. It's hard to know where to start and which one is more important. There's no exact completion time for Buddhist texts, and the timeline in the sutra is also confusing. Usually, there would be a disciple coming out of the audience in the middle of the lecture to ask the Buddha what the name of this sutra is, but Buddhist history says Buddhist classics were memorised and assembled after the Buddha's death. Besides, the history of Buddhism is also complicated. There were so many sects, and Chinese Buddhism emerged with Confucianism, Taoism, and even Tibetan Bon religion, which are also new to me. These kinds of chaos brought me a fear of dealing with Buddhist texts. What's worse, there are only two Buddhist scriptural courses in the final term of the MA study.

This constituted my first challenge. How did I handle it? Compared to undergraduate education, MA study requires more self-direction, which means I need to learn independently.

And the courses are only to give you some methods and viewpoints to learn. So, I saw this big research as an interesting investigation of a journalist's work. To give myself plenty of time to prepare, I dissected the task into several pieces that can be completed in different courses.

In my first and second courses, Governing Principles of Ancient China, and the Four Books, I started to get in touch with and process Confucian texts. Confucian texts are also confusing. For example, in the Analects, there's no clear timeline, and I cannot recognise his multiple disciples. What's more, some ambiguous concepts have different meanings in different contexts, such as 天, 仁, and 聖人. The different states and rulers of the pre-Qin period were also a nightmare to me, which is why I was not good at history when I was a younger student. However, I considered this study as training for dealing with complicated and abstract items.

In the meanwhile, I kept looking for essays on religious communication, Buddhist communication and the sinicization of Buddhism in CNKI 知網. I read them as a dessert to fulfill my curiosity. I also watched some videos on YouTube introducing Buddhist and Christian history.

In April 2023, during the course the Methodology of Sinology, I saw a video of Thai Nakee¹. It told a love story of a Naga with a human. I didn't realize how popular the Naga worship is in Thailand. And Naga is a very important dharma protector in Buddhism, which has been translated and transformed into Loong, the Chinese dragon in China. This video led me in a new direction, and I kept dreaming about Naga for two nights. Since then, I thought it was God, or some spirit asked me to do this research.

To study Naga and Loong, I must become familiar with their cultures. Loong is another rich and complicated phenomenon in Chinese culture. So I set my essay for this course to study the origin of Loong from the perspective of Philology, so that I could have ample time to read materials about Loong.

I applied the same study strategy and mindset to the other three courses: Sinology English, Diamond Sutra, and Infinite Life Sutra. In Sinology English, we needed to proofread the differences between the classics from the two editions. In the second course, my essay is about the dissemination of the Diamond Sutra in the West. In the last one, I made a comparison of five editions of the Infinite Life Sutra. That's my first and effective use of CBETA. I also gained knowledge of China's early history of Mahayana Buddhism.

Stage 2 07.2023-08.2023

Proposal phase (determining the topic)

In the summer of 2023, I was told to prepare the proposal for my dissertation. Inspired by

¹ Nakee is the Thai name of nagini, female naga.

some essays I read, such as *The Loong from the Great Tang Records on the Western Regions—A Comparison Study on the Dragon Image of Chinese and Indian Traditions*²; *Discussion on the Sinicization of Buddhism from the Interpretation History of the Diamond Sutra*³; and *The Wheels Sutra and Ksitigarbha Belief in the Tang Dynasty: A Discussion on the Sinicization of Buddhism*,⁴ it came to my mind that I should base my study on a sutra so that the research scope will be small, and I can discuss it thoroughly.

At the very beginning, I chose *The Ten Wholesome Ways of Action Sutra* as my bound research object. I tried to attribute all communication phenomena to this short sutra. The content includes 1. the introduction of this sutra, including analyzing different editions and introducing the doctrines of Five Disciplines and Ten Virtues 五戒十善; 2. the Loong totem in this sutra. Discussing the Loong and Naga cultures, the metaphor and symbolic effect of the Loong king in this sutra, as well as the influence of Buddhist Loong on China's society; 3. the communication strategies that were shown in the sutra, including the fusion with local culture, promotion of star idols, divinization of the human kings, and introduction of proper teaching that accords with its audience's demand.

Compared to my final dissertation, the content of my first proposal basically conveyed all the issues I would like to discuss. However, my tutor, Venerable Shengmiao, was not satisfied with it. He thought this sutra was too short and simple to reflect these kinds of communication phenomena. Then I thought maybe I could find another longer text, *The Buddha Said The Sea-Dragon King Sutra*. But this was not a good solution either. There seems to be logical chaos between the document text and the communication phenomena. It's hard to find records to show how Buddhism developed because of this sutra. This was the second challenge I faced.

There were so many cultural phenomena that were linked to and derived from Buddhist Loong. How to systematically arrange them? In my second edition of the proposal, I considered those phenomena as some deriving products of Naga's transformation in name and Buddhist scriptures.

I found my mind restricted by the examples of graduated students; most of them discussed the teachings and philosophy in the scriptures; therefore, they referred to a lot of classics in their dissertations. But one day I read the dissertation of Zhu Yuanzhen⁵, whose work got the highest mark last year. She discussed about the candle in Liji 禮記. She not only applied literature evidence, but also mentioned a lot of pictures in archeology and made charts herself.

² 蘇智：〈從《大唐西域記》中走出的「龍」——中印文化傳統中龍形象的比較研究〉（蘭州：蘭州大學碩士學位論文，2012年）。

³ 閔軍：〈從《金剛經》解經史看佛教中國化〉，《中國社會科學報》第2515期（2002年10月），第3版。

⁴ 湛如：〈《十輪經》與唐代地藏信仰——兼議佛教中國化〉，《佛學研究》2002年第1期（2002年1月），頁24-30。

⁵ 朱元珍：〈《禮記》燭之類型考證及功用分析〉（威爾士三一聖大衛大學碩士學位論文，2023年）。

One day, I applied the 7W communication model⁶ of Richard Braddock to the process of Naga's transformation into Loong. I found that the transformation not only happened in translation but also in other cultural phenomena such as art, literature, religion, etc. They were derived from the transformation in names and scriptures but were not only the subsequent effect. The Naga could not transform into Loong without the combined efforts of other communities of society, the court, the intellectuals, and the ordinary. Further, I also found the concept of sinicization 中國化 is not that appropriate in this process. This view is based on the position of sinocentrism 中國中心主義, which influenced me unconsciously. I used to think it's in nature that foreign cultures should localise if they were going to root in a new continent. What I missed is that communication is two-way. The local culture will also be changed and shaped by foreign cultures. Therefore, I changed my topic to *A Study on the Intercultural Communication of Han Buddhism in the case of Naga's transformation to Loong*. I especially defined my observing range as Han Buddhism, not only because there's not much space to discuss but also because I have no resource in Tibetan and Theravada Buddhism.

Stage 3 01.2024-03.2024

Dissertation phase(processing and writing)

In January 2024, I entered the dissertation period, but I should admit that I started to write it only two weeks before the due submission time for the first draft. I mainly finished it in 10 days and submitted it at the final time spot. It's a rush and thrust. I'm not pleased and proud with it because there were lots of logic and format mistakes, although the judges in the oral presentation gave some positive reviews on it. Why did I procrastinate? Apart from having assessed my ability and the writing plan (I won't write excessive content for interest), and having done some preparation work before the dissertation period (actually not much), the main reason was my depression evoked by the weather, sickness, and some other stuff. This was a non-academic but realistic and influential challenge. My mind was messy, and I could not compose a word. I could only wait until the Rain Water solar term came. My status changed at that spot.

But what did I do before I was better? As I mentioned, my topic was connected to many fields, and I downloaded lots of essays. There are at least 350 papers. Some of them are similar in content but arranged in different structures. How did I process this data and find useful information? This was the fourth challenge. I thought it was not easy to write a research review of predecessors without reading all of them. Apart from that, I also needed to search CBETA and the Chinese Texts Project to collect data about Naga and Loong in Buddhist scriptures and ancient Chinese literature.

⁶ Richard Braddock, 'An Extension of the "Lasswell Formula"', *Journal of Communication*, 8.2, (1958), pp. 88–93. "Who, says What, to Whom, under What circumstance, through What medium, for What purpose, with What effect."

I solved them in the most basic ways. Firstly, I classified those essays into different folders under different topics. Then I used Excel to make different sheets, named after them, such as Loong Essays, Intercultural Communication, The Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils 天龍八部, etc. When I read an essay, I scanned it quickly and judged whether it was valuable. I ranked them. If it was useful, I would put their author's name into their document name. If it would strongly contribute to my essay, I would put it in another folder. If it was not valuable, I would delete it. This made my evidence base clear. I also recorded the useful one in a sheet, which will be easier to refer to later. And I made short notes after the copyright information, in case I forget what it's about later. As for those sentences I picked from the database, I recorded their completion time, affiliated dynasties, translators, etc. This helped me to analyse and find out some secrets that were not recorded in history. For example, I found that An Shigao may be the first man to translate Naga to Loong. He also created the item 天龍八部. Although he mentioned Loong in 20 sutras. But he didn't talk much about Loong and other dharma protectors, because he focused on Hinayana Buddhism, which is more realistic. However, the other translator in his time, Lokaksema 支婁迦讖, translated a lot of Mahayana scriptures, of which characteristic is mystification. Lokaksema was the first to introduce all dharma protectors in Han Buddhism. He also translated the first sutra in which the protagonist was not human, *The Samadhi Sutra of the Tathagata asked by Drumakinnara king* 佉真陀羅所問如來三昧經. The kinnara king 緊那羅王 visited the Buddha accompanied with his subordinates Gandharva 乾闥婆 and Mahoraga 摩睺羅伽. I suppose this sutra influenced the creation of *The Sea-Dragon King Sutra* 150 years later in the Western Jin Dynasty. I also learned that these 8 tribes of dharma protectors were probably human tribes in ancient India during my research. This took me back to the very beginning of Buddhism and helped me understand the complicated Buddhist history as an anchor.

The analysis work helped me to ease my stress. Those impressive and persuasive statistic charts I made were also attributed to it. Apart from those four challenges above, there were still two worth mentioning. The first is the reference. There were so many footnotes, bibliographies and appendices in my paper—approximately 28000 words. The most annoying thing was the reference format was too diversified. And the difference may vary slightly. So it was confusing and easy to make mistakes when I was not sober after looking at the screen for a long time. The solution I used to deal with this was not only to be cautious. A week before the deadline, I struggled with the dissertation and could only write a few lines. It suddenly occurred to me that I should not waste time. I could do the reference part first as an amusement and relaxing game. Because it didn't need much logical and critical thinking. This helped me to make full use of my 24 hours.

The final challenge is my contradiction as a religious believer and religious scholar. As a devoted or qualified Buddhist, you need to have a strong belief in what the priests and the scriptures say. You are not encouraged to question or doubt. One reason that the dissertations of some graduated students lacked critical thinking is that this would disobey what they believed. If they doubted, or drew a wrong conclusion, it would cause bad retribution. This sin is Defamation of the Three Jewels 毀謗三寶. A famous example is the story of a fox spirit, he was a monk in his previous life. The monk misspoke one word when answering someone's

question. Therefore, he had reincarnated into a fox for 500 generations.

In my first edition, I wrote that it was because Naga and Loong were fictional that the ancient Buddhist monks changed their identity and setting easily. Regarding the localised scriptures, such as the Four Seas Loong Kings 四海龍王, I defined them as being forged by monks to develop Buddhism. And this conclusion would challenge the authority and authenticity of Buddhism. I also wrote that Nagas were a human tribe. My tutor said there was not enough evidence to prove, and you couldn't tell the Nagas people and Naga, the serpent god, which one appeared first. I need to be cautious about the words and terms I use. So in my final edition, I changed my description; I wrote, 'They developed localised scriptures' and I deleted the saying about authenticity. These changes would not affect my main body because my dissertation is about the communication process and its effects.

How did I deal with this contradiction? I thought I should separate religious belief from academic research. In my religious view, I believe there are supernatural spirits in the world; they will talk to psychic mediums, and the mediums will write down their teachings. But they don't have carnal bodies, so people will describe and depict them under people's emotions and value needs. I got this result when I compared the same teaching in the Hinayana and Mahayana scriptures. If a religion wants to influence as many believers as possible, in ancient times, it was a good method to tell myths and deify the idols. But in modern times, people are more sensible and skeptical. So it's a good method to demystify the myth and grasp the core teaching for this kind of audience. But we can still keep the myth for those who need it.

I was a truth-seeker when I was doing research. Based on the evidence, I would make deductions. After that, it would come to an end. It's not about getting the perfect answer; what matters most is how near I can come to the truth. Even if my opinion is later shown to be incorrect, it will still assist my successors in arriving at the correct conclusion.

Conclusion

This is my third time to write a dissertation, and I enjoy the process of investigation. However, this is just a glimpse and the first trial in professional research. Although my topic is more suitable for a doctor's research, and I don't have a base in South and Southeast Asian languages, I still chose this topic because who knows whether I will have more opportunities to do academic research in the future. Here is what I have learned from the process of writing:

1. To assume boldly and verify carefully.

This is what Prof. Chu Chianing taught in the first month I was in Lampeter. He then told me again when I asked for his suggestions about my dissertation. I know the evidence chain is not complete enough in my paper, but I have tried to make it more persuasive. In the future, I think I can investigate this topic more thoroughly. I need to read more materials and do field studies.

2. Do the research work in your daily time.

In this writing, I learned how to process abundant literature and found some useful methods to analyse. It's good to systematically arrange all the information I encounter in my daily life. It will help to write the paper faster.

3. Stay calm in any condition.

During the writing, even when I was not in good status and got stressed, I was calm in my mind. I tried to find a way to ease my stress because I knew it wouldn't help if I got worried. But if I want to keep this peace, I need to make plans and adjust to changing circumstances. I think another reason that I can keep calm is that I did preparation work in advance. Therefore, at least I could estimate how long it would take me to finish the work and to what extent I could reach it.