

# The Origin of Siddham Learning in India

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## Abstract

Siddham Learning, developed by Chinese monks and literary agents, produced powerful effects in China. It works on two different planes. One is the linguistic nature of the Sanskrit phonetic letters, and the other is the level of religious doctrines implied in them, especially dharaoa and mantra. It is very easy to find all kinds of sources or literatures about the Sanskrit alphabet and its spellings, while we could hardly find any information about Siddham script in traditional Sanskrit literature. Dharaoa and mantra seem to have almost the same forms and powerful functions according to Siddham Learning. But regarding their origins in India, we find that dharaoa only belonged to Mahayana Buddhism, while mantra has been widely used from Vedic times to the present. As Buddhism caught up with Brahmanism or Hinduism step by step, dharaoa and mantra also began to have the same shapes and uses gradually.

## 1. Introduction

Together with Buddhism, when the Siddhirastu—a book teaching the Sanskrit alphabet and their spellings—spread into China, they developed a new type of learning which studies the phonetics, semantics, and pragmatics of Sanskrit letters. This is called Siddham Learning. On the basis of Siddhirastu, mixed with Buddhist doctrines, the core of Siddham Learning is to study the mutual-hermeneutical relationship between Sanskrit phonetic letters and Buddhist doctrines and practices.

As a concrete, vibrant example of cultural exchange between India and China, Siddham Learning is not only inseparable from the doctrines and practices of Chinese Buddhism. It is also concerned with some important topics in the field of Eastern Asian language and literature, and gets more and more attention from scholars.

In Siddham Learning, the main research achievements are about the relationship between Sanskrit phonetic letters and Buddhist doctrines, as well as the relationship between Sanskrit linguistics and the languages and literatures of Eastern Asian countries, while the origin of Siddham Learning in India got meager attention.

## 2. On Siddham

Siddham, a Sanskrit word, has varieties of transliteration in the Chinese Buddhist Canon, such as “悉檀”、“悉谈”、“肆昙”、“七昙”etc. It comes from the verbal root  $\sqrt{\text{sidh}}$ , meaning “to succeed, be successful, be accomplished, or fulfilled.” While in the context of Chinese Buddhism, when people refer to Siddham, it has a different set of meanings.

### 2.1. Sanskrit alphabet and spellings (Siddhirastu)

In his *Nan-Hai-Chi-Kuei-Chuan*, I-Ching, a Chinese monk who made a pilgrimage in Naranda for eleven years, recorded that the Siddhirastu is the first word of a prime Sanskrit textbook which teaches the Sanskrit alphabet and its spellings. Some regard it just as a lucky sign for good wishes or learning achievements. Ancient Chinese monks regarded it, however, as the title of this book of teachings, calling it *His-T'an-Chang* or *His-T'an* (Siddham).

Because of different Indian dialects, as well as different transmission of Chinese monks, there are many variations of its alphabet, ways of spelling, chapters, as well as its transliteration to Chinese characters.

### 2.2 A typical brāhmā script (Siddhamāṭṭkā)

In *His-T'an-Tzu-Chi* (An Account of Siddham Letters), Chih-kuang introduced Siddham to China, as taught by Prajñābuddhi, a monk from South India. He wrote that in South India, they used the script of Mahesvara; in central India, the Nagari script which is somewhat different from that used in south India. But the main features are identical. Yet all Indian scripts are based on Siddham. With the wide spread of Siddhirastu in ancient China, Siddham script also became the standard and authoritative Sanskrit script for Chinese ideas.

### 2.3 Siddham Learning

Aside from the two meanings discussed above, the third meaning of Siddham in the Chinese Buddhist context is Siddham Learning. What is Siddham Learning? What objects does it study? Not much has been discussed on these issues. At most, what has been covered seems ambiguous.

In my opinion, Chinese monks and translators developed Siddham Learning while studying Siddhirastu in China. Flourishing during the Tang Dynasty and growing into a latent branch even until modern times, Siddham Learning mainly studies:

1. Sanskrit phonetic-letters (including Sanskrit alphabet, spellings, and Sanskrit script), as well as the necessary correlative knowledge of Sanskrit grammar;
2. The mutual-hermeneutical relationship between Sanskrit phonetic-letters and Buddhist doctrines;
3. Its spread and influences in Chinese culture, as well as special hermeneutics relating to the first two.

Among these three parts, the third one was developed in China, while the first two originated from India. The main content of Siddham Learning, therefore, is to study the linguistic phases of Sanskrit phonetic-letters, as well as their forms and functions in Buddhism.

### 3. Siddham as Siddhirastu

Siddhirastu, formed by siddhir (feminine, single, 3<sup>rd</sup>, success or achievement) + astu (imper, single, 3<sup>rd</sup>, let it be, be it so), literally means “success or good luck”. In ancient Indian times,

many Sanskrit inscriptions or manuscripts usually begin with “siddham” or “siddhirastu” as auspicious words.

*Siddhirastu* mainly teaches the Sanskrit alphabet and its spellings, which belongs to Sanskrit phonetic field. It is connected to three different branches of Sanskrit linguistics, namely Vyākaraṇas, ōikūà and Prāti-ākhyas. Vyākaraṇa is equal to modern grammar, Sikūà to phonetics, and both of them are contained in six Vedāigas. While regarding the matter of ancient Indian phonetics, the Prāti-ākhyas are more authentic and highly valuable.

### 3.1 Vyākaraṇa

Vyākaraṇa [vi+à+√kç+lyut(=ana)] literally means analysis, separation of one from another. It is the first and most important of the sciences and constitutes the foundations of all others. Since the Siddhirastu is the basis of Vyākaraṇa, most of the important Vyākaraṇa involves its contents. The correlated treaties of different Vyākaraṇa will be checked as follows.

#### a. The fourteen ōivasātras of Pānīni’s Aūñādhyāyā

The Aūñādhyāyā (eight vol.), written by Pānīni, is the oldest Vyākaraṇa work now available in the field. The Aūñādhyāyā is preceded by a list of sounds divided into fourteen parts commonly called the ōivasātras or mahesvarasātras, which alludes that these sutras were revealed to Pānīni by the lord ōiva. These sātras are:

- (1) a, i, u ō; (2) ç, ē, k; (3) e, o, ī; (4) ai, au, c; (5) h, y, v, r, ñ; (6) l, ō; (7) ɔ, m, ī, ō, m; (8) jh, bh, ɔ; (9) gh, óh, dh, ù; (10) j, b, g, ó, d; (11) kh, ph, ch, ñh, c, ñ, t, v; (12) k, p, y; (13) ÷, ù, r; (14) h, l.

It can be seen that the sounds listed in ōivasātra are quite different from the classic Sanskrit alphabet, either in its order and number. There are 43 sounds in ōivasātra, nine of them are vowels, and the others are consonants.

#### b. Varōasamāmnayan of the Katantra-Vyākaraṇa

*Katantra-Vyākaraṇa*, written by a Buddhist scholar named ōarvavarman who lived during the reign of Sātavāhana kings, is probably the oldest grammatical work that does not obey Pānīni’s system. The first section of Chapter 1 has the title *Siddho Varōasamāmnayap*. It is very particular for its 14 vowels/sounds, which gave a wide and deep influence to Chinese linguistic and literature, it can be looked as the early form of the Siddhirastu pre-Tang Dynasty in China.

#### c. Varōasātra of the Càndra-vyākaraṇa

Càndra Vyākaraṇa is believed to have been written by Candra or Candragomin, a famous Buddhist Sanskrit grammarian who lived in north India in 5<sup>th</sup> century. The work consists of six chapters of four Pādas each. In addition to the Sātra in six chapters, it also has some appendixes, the last one is called *Varōasātra*, it is a very short treaties corresponding to the Pānīnāya -ikūà and gives in about 40 sātra the points of the articulation (Sthāna) and efforts (Prayatna) to produce the sound of alphabets.

#### d. Varōsātra of Jainism.

The oldest of these works is the Jainendravākraḍa, written by Devanandin who lived about 7<sup>th</sup> century. Without the book in our hands, we can't know how the basic phonetic units are sounded. But G. Buhler in his *Indian Paleography* had discussed a basic sound list or alphabet which is the extract from the lost *Dçivāda* belonging to Jaina, it contained 46 basic sounds.

### 3.2 øikùà

As one of the àávedaīgas, øikùà deals mainly with the particular aspects of phonetic subjects of Vedic texts. The Pàðināya øikùà is the most authoritative among them, dealing with general aspects of phonetics. In the beginning two couplets, Pàðināya øikùà enumerates the basic sounds (varōas), and the total number of its basic sounds is 63 or 64.

### 3.3 Pràti÷àkhya

The Pràti÷àkhya works deal mainly with phonetic classification, changes, and Vedic morphophonemic from the point of view of Saūdhi. It had a much wider scope than øikùàs. At present, only five or six Pràti÷àkhyas (Prt.as follows) are available.

On the basis of 43 sounds given by the øivasātras, the èg Prt. adds 4 sounds, viz. Visarga, Jihvàmālāya, Upadhmanāya and Anusvāra, mentioning 47 basic sounds. The Taittirāya Prt. mentions 52 letters, viz. 16 vowels, 25 class consonants, 4 semivowels, 6 sibilants (÷, ù, s, h, jhivàmālāya and upadhmanāya) and anusvāra. The Varōasamāmnāya of Vājasaneyi Prt. mentions sixty five basic sounds or letters, and the èktantra gives fifty seven letters in two different serial orders, the common (Udde÷a) and the traditional (Upade÷a).

From the exploration above, we find that the Sanskrit alphabet has the same cardinal sounds or letters, but their number and order differ in the different traditional enumerations.

Like the varieties of the alphabet, their spellings also assumed different forms with different parts or chapters and the amount of spellings. The Bāraakharā (Skt. Dvāda÷akūarā), a table featuring combinations of the consonants with the twelve vowels, was still taught in modern Indian elementary schools.

## 4. Siddam as Siddhamàçkà

Both the orthodox and the heterodox sects of India ascribe the invention of writing to the creator Brahmā, and named the Indian script running from the left to right as brāhmā.

Given the archaeological evidence available to us today, Brahmā seems to have appeared suddenly as an almost fully developed system in the Asokan inscriptions of the mid-3rd century B. C. As to the origin of Brahmā, opinions generally fall into two camps: the proponents of a foreign, i.e., Semitic derivation, and those who propose an indigenous Indian origin, either as an independent invention, or by derivation from the Indus script. In other words, the riddle of the origin of the Brahmā still remains highly controversial to us.

#### 4.1 The development of brahmā

As the older type of the Brahmā, the writing system in the Asoka inscriptions opened the real history of Indian paleography. From then on, different varieties of the script arose in different eras and different regions. Among these varieties, a notable point is the difference between the north Indian style and south Indian style. The southern Indian scripts follow rounded form of Brahmā, while the northern brahmā scripts became very angular.

#### 4.2 On Siddhamātṭka.

From the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Brahmā script received more attention from the Chinese Buddhists. Siddham script, as one typical brahmā in mediaeval times, became the standard and sacred script. It occupied a predominant position in Chinese Buddhism, known as Xi-Tan (Siddham), which was regarded as the base of all Indian scripts.

While enjoying popular designation in the Chinese Buddhist context, Siddham as the name of Brahmā script does not seem to occur in Sanskrit literary sources, and did not find its way in classical Sanskrit. Beside Chinese Buddhist records, the name Siddhamātṭka, reported by Al-Bāṛānā in his famous *INDIA*, appears to be corroborated by the term “Siddham”. From Alberuni’s records, we may conclude that Siddham continued to be popularized in the Middle and Northwest Indian, and undergoing a gradual transformation into Devanāgarā during the latter part of this period.

As one typical Brahmā, Siddham script follows the same basic principles of graphic representation of all Indian script. At the same time, Siddham script also has its particularities:

- (a) It is principally characterized by a strongly angular aspect, with a sharp angle (whence the term “acute-angled script”) at the lower right corner of each letter, reflecting the influence of pen-and-ink writing on the epigraphic script;
- (b) By the extension of the head mark into wedge like or triangular forms (whence it is sometimes referred to as nail-headed);
- (c) By a strong tendency toward calligraphic elaboration, especially in the treatment of the vowel diacritics and subscript consonants.
- (d) Some of the vowel signs are highly developed; in particular, the curves of diacritic

All of these characters above gave a profound effect on the subsequent development of the northern Indian scripts and other East Asian scripts, such as Tibetan. It is necessary to note that the Siddham script kept in China and Japan acquired new styles for their writing way and instrument. These changes include the up-to-down writing way which replaced the left-to-right Indian script. Another change is that the Chinese brush made the Siddham script appears more free and richer in expressive force.

#### 5. Siddham as the way to liberation

The Sanskrit phonetic-letters, either the Siddhirastu (phoneme) or Siddhamātṭka (script), approached from the linguistic plane, is just one side of Siddham Learning. On the other side, the Buddhist doctrines and practicing ways implied in it could be found on a more sacred and

subtler plane. As to the origin of the sacred plane of Siddham Learning, viz. the forms and functions of Sanskrit phonetic-letters in Indian ancient thoughts consequentially constitute another aspect of my studies.

It was used for reciting or writing dhàraõã, mantra, or even to understand and grasp their meanings. Chinese Buddhists were stirred up to study the Sanskrit phonetic letters and developed the Siddham Learning. Therefore, dhàraõã and mantra are certainly two typical forms of Sanskrit phonetic letters.

### 5.1 Siddham as dhàraõã

The word Dhàraõã derives from a Sanskrit root √dhṛ, which means “to hold, or maintain, keep out of disremembering.” As a particular term in Buddhism, dhàraõã generally refers to a range of spells, syllables, words or sentences implying abundant right doctrines and powerful merits on Buddhism. Nàgàjuna, the greatest Mahàyàna Buddhist monks, had discussed different aspects of dhàraõã in detail, he argued that dhàraõã is some which can be hold, or which can be restrained. That is, collect all kinds of true dharma, and hold them without dissipation; restrain all kinds of false dharma, and keep them out of effect in mind.<sup>1</sup> From that time, dhàraõã became an important ability to Boddhisattva.

#### 5.2.1 The history of dhàraõã

The dhàraõãs constitute a large and important part of Mahàyàna Buddhist literature. Its origin is also probably connected to or accompanies Mahàyàna Buddhism. Therefore, Nàgàjuna deemed that dhàraõãs belong to the Mahàyàna dharma, while øràvakayàna Buddhists couldn't grasp it.

The *Pañcaviññati-sàhasrikà-prajñàpàramita-sãtra*, an earlier Mahàyàna Buddhist Text, gave more words to dhàraõã. It mentions about 500 kinds of dhàraõãs which were looked upon as transmundane dharma to Boddhisattva, and also gave out the basic dhàraõã or the entrance for 500 dhàraõãs ---42 syllables or syllabary.

From then on, dhàraõã continued to be an important dharma or technique in Mahàyàna scriptures, either in Mādhyamaka School or Yogàcàra School.

Later, with the rise of Esoteric Buddhism, dhàraõã became indistinguishable from mantra in general, although it is generally of greater length than ordinary mantra. In his *Note on Dhàraõã Meanings and Hymn*, Amoghavajra, the greatest Indian monk who propagated Mantrayàna Buddhism in Chinese Tang Dynasty, mixed dhàraõã with mantra, vidya, and other secret words, and noted four distinguished categories of dhàraõã above in esoteric hermeneutic.

#### 5.2.2 Different forms of dhàraõã

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<sup>1</sup> Nàgàjuna, *Mahà-prajñàpàramita-sãtra*, volm. 5, T25/95c.

The meaning of a dhàràõã is often very difficult to determine and may sound to the uninitiated like a string of meaningless letters, syllables, words or sentences, their accurate meanings were passed on only from teacher to pupil.

Indeed, most of dhàràõãs were often considered to be summary versions of long texts. Hereby, dhàràõã can be understood as a mnemonic device that encapsulates the meaning of a section or chapter of a sutra into syllables or words. The 42 syllabary contains 42 different syllables. Each of them is the encapsulated form of one word which is just the keyword of correlated Buddhist doctrine. And then, the relations between them can be listed as A=B, B=C, then A=C. Once a syllable was recited or chanted, the Buddhist doctrine appended on it will be expressed or transmitted.

Like the 42 syllabary, many dhàràõãs were encapsulated into incoherent letters or syllables; it is impossible or very difficult for common people to understand their meanings without the guidance from Upadhyàna (teacher). Sometimes, some dhàràõãs were encapsulated into incoherent words, one still couldn't understand meanings contained in them even he or she knows the meanings of all the words.

To sum up the exploration above, we find that dhàràõã, as the condensed form of Mahàyàna Buddhist Text, is usually constructed with incoherent syllables or words which contain different Buddhist doctrines or views. On this point, dhàràõã is a meaningless form with meaningful meanings.

### 5.2.3 Different functions of dhàràõã

At the beginning, dhàràõã was just a mnemonic device that helped those who were practicing it to grasp and remember Buddhist doctrines. Once the practitioner grasps the technique, he will know the right dharma and keep it in his mind for long time. He can also distinguish the false dharma, then his wisdom and intellect will be improved to a higher level. According to Buddhist doctrines, the wisdom is particular technique that is able to extinguish afflictions (dupkha) and bring about enlightenment or liberation. Namely, dhàràõã become a special device or method leading to enlightenment. While to illiteracy or common people, dhàràõã looks like sacred and powerful sounds, which also can be regarded as a consolation, even they couldn't understand its meanings. Step by step, the function of dhàràõã was enlarged, and got more and more functions.

Later, with the rise of esoteric Buddhism, when dhàràõã became indistinguishable from mantra in general, its function also expanded up as mantra, which constituted the necessary part of the esoteric Buddhist ritual.

## 5.2 Siddham as mantra

Mantra, which derives from a Sanskrit root  $\sqrt{\text{man}}$  ( to think) and the suffix -tra means "tool". Hence a literal translation would be "instrument of thought, speech, sacred text". I-Xing, a great Chinese Mantrayàna Buddhist, explained that the so-called mantra literally means true

words, real words, unillusioned and undiversified sounds.<sup>2</sup> As a mystical and sacred utterance, in the form like a syllable, word, or verse, mantra contains magic power or strong energy to bring about spiritual or temporal results when it is repeatedly recited or contemplated by the practitioner.

### 5.3.1 The history of mantra

Mantra has a long history in India. In the context of the Vedas, the term mantra refers to the metrical texts of *ṛg*, *Sāman* and *Yajur*, as opposed to the prose *Brahmana* commentary. Since these Vedas were chanted in ritual sacrifice, mantra can be understood as ritual language. In Vedic times, if ritual acts and ceremonies are to be performed successfully, mantra playing in a right way is an indispensable requirement.<sup>3</sup>

The Vedas were the origin of Indian ancient scriptures, encompassing all thoughts and scripture that evolved and developed. Mantra, too, was elucidated time after time. From the Upaniṣads Era, ancient Indians began to give philosophical consideration to mantra, which got more and more rich meanings.

With the transition from ritualistic Vedic traditions to mystical Indian schools of Yoga, Vedānta and Tantra, mantra played more and more quite an important and powerful role in Indian religious life. Perhaps, the definition of mantra given by Jan Gonda truly explains its real nature. He said that, mantras are “word(s) believed to be of 'superhuman origin', received, fashioned and spoken by the 'inspired' seers, poets and reciters in order to evoke divine power(s) and especially conceived as means of creating, conveying, concentrating and realizing intentional and efficient thought, and of coming into touch or identifying oneself with the essence of the divinity which is present in the mantra”.<sup>4</sup>

### 5.3.2 The type of mantra

From ancient Vedic rituals to modern mysticism religions, mantra has been widely applied in different forms, which contains numerous types or systems. In Vedic times, mantra, *sāuhita* of Vedas in verse, were divided into *ṛg-veda*, *Sāma-veda*, *Yajur-veda*, according to their uses or playing way in sacrifice ritual, viz. *ṛg-veda* was collection of hymns for Gods by reciting, *Sāmaveda* was collection of melodic songs for Gods by singing, and *Yajur-veda* was collection of unmetrical words to Gods by muttering.

Mantra, departing from that of ordinary language, seems to have its own particular semantic and linguistic rules, which are transmitted from teacher to pupil. While most of the mantras usually are divided into single syllables or letter when they are chanted, they would seem as incoherent phonemes or meaningless words to ordinary listeners. In Tantrism, there are many monosyllable mantras, such as *hrim*, *hāü*, *÷rāü*, *krāü*, *vaü* etc. which couldn't be understood

<sup>2</sup> I-Xing, *Exegesis on Mahāvairocana-sātra*, vols, 1, T39/579b.

<sup>3</sup> Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology, Hinduism and Sacred Sound*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1995. p30.

<sup>4</sup> J. Gonda, *The Indian Mantra*, Oriens, Vol. 16 (Dec. 31, 1963), p255.

according to their etymology. Verily, these mantras are abbreviations of the names of deities, or condensations of the whole mantra, from which, the deities or the full mantra can be summoned. Generally, the type of monosyllable mantra is named as bāja (seed), means from which generates the full mantra, its correspondent deity and other correspondences.

### 5.3.3 The functions of mantra

From the start, mantra was regarded as an efficacious tie between Brahma and the temporal world. Ancient Indian priests used it to intercommunicate between the Gods and the human race. In Atharva-Veda, a collection of Mantra that came later than the three other Vedas, mantra was regarded as a powerful and efficacious. It had absolute value, which can dispel disaster, increase benefit, vanquish enemy. After that, mantra was widely used in Indian religious life, and its function also was involved to an omnipotent and omnipresent level in Tantrism and Mantrayāna Buddhism, especially.

In different phases, from prime to last, the practitioner usually plays different mantra. Curiously, both the Mantrayāna Buddhism and Tantrism follow almost the same procedures when they cultivated themselves accompanied with mantras playing according to their own respective doctrines. From those various practised forms of mantras, we can understand their real or concrete functions for the practitioner on his way to liberation.

According to the Mahāvairocana-sātra, mantra, indeed, played three different roles or functions during the whole procedure: entering the gate of letters, contemplating the letters ring, and allotting the letters inside the body.

#### a. Entering the gate of letters

In Mantrayāna practices, the prime step is grasping the dharma doctrine implied in every Sanskrit phonetic letters, which was termed as “Entering the gate of letters”, a basic doctrine of Mantrayāna.

It is notable that only 34 basic letter of Sanskrit alphabet, viz. “a” and 33 consonants, are listed, vowels besides “a”, viz. à, ì, ã, u, â, ç, é, ë, í, e, ai, o, au, ä, aḥ, are omitted. The text doesn’t say whether this means that other vowels are not gate-letters. According to ōubhakarasiūha’s oral teaching, I-Xing’s sātra explained the different functions of every Sanskrit phonetic letters.

According to I-Xing’s *Exegesis to Mahāvairocana-sātra*, all the Sanskrit phonetic letters of the alphabet are divided into basic letters, additional letters, and dotted letters. The basic letter, a and former four of five-five consonants, implies the seed, masculine and wisdom; the additional letter implies grower, feminine, concentration, which are denoted by dot or stroke on basic letters when being written with consonants, and excluded of the gate-letters; the dotted letters contains five nasal consonants which implies great empty, witness door, and three varieties of “a” which are denoted by additional dot or stroke on “a” when they are written, and à implies boddhi practice, ä implies boddhi achievement, aḥ implies perfect stillness.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I-Xing, *Exegesis to Mahāvairocana-sātra*, T39/ pp.754c-755a.

### **b. Meditation the cycle letters (akùaracakra)**

In Mantrayàna teaching, when the trainee grasps the doctrine implied in each letter, and stays in this gate of letters, he should try to constitute the mutual relation between the whole gate-letters. The practice had always been so: dispose the gate-letters in counter-clockwise like wheel, contemplate one after another, and meditate correlated doctrines at the same time, until grasp the correlations between all the gate-letters. This is called “meditation on the cycle letters”, which also can be named as “meditation on the cycle letters mantra”. When the practicer meditates on the cycle letters, he also recites or mutters above mantra repeatedly.

### **c. Disposition of letters inside body**

During the last phase of his practicing procedure, the trainee will dispose the letters or bājas to different parts inside his body as follows:

1. the letter ka is below the throat
2. the letter kha is above the gum.
3. the letter ga is in the neck. ....<sup>6</sup>

Once the practicer dispose the letters inside his body, then he should meditate on the deities and dharmas correspondent to each letter inside his body. He will find that all the dharmas and deities preside upon him. In other words, he will be united with all the dharmas, united with the deities. He becomes the dharma, the deities, and then he attains enlightenment.

### **Conclusion**

From the above studies, we find that Siddham Learning, which the Chinese monks and reading teachers developed, produced powerful effects in Chinese linguistics and literature. While it looks mainly at the forms and functions of Sanskrit phonetic letters in the Chinese Buddhist context, its origin is from India. Accordingly, it contains two different planes: one is the linguistic nature of the Sanskrit phonetic letters; the other would be the religious doctrine implied in them.

Unlike the tradition of Chinese that emphasizes writing and downplays the oral, India has paid more attention to oral transmission, accounting continually for the expression of inner feelings from ancient to modern society. Therefore, it is very easy to find all kinds of sources about Siddhirastu, the Sanskrit alphabet and their spellings, while the situation of the history of brāhmā is ambiguous. As the basis of Sanskrit traditional phonetics (Sikùà and Pratisàkhya), Siddhirastu can be found as early as the Vedic Times. From then on, it was discussed periodically and acquired different forms in different sects. As to the history of Siddhamàṭṭkà (Siddham script), we could hardly find any information about it in traditional Sanskrit literature. As a living calligraphic and decorative art in China and Japan, Siddhamàṭṭkà writings, however, offers valuable information about Indian Paleography and Epigraphy studies.

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<sup>6</sup> Mahāvairocan-sātra, Vol. 5, T18/30b-c.

Dhàràõã and mantra almost have the same forms and powerful functions according to Siddham Learning, while dhàràõã only belonged to Mahàyàna Buddhism. At the beginning, it was a mnemonic device for keeping the Buddhist doctrine in mind. Mantra has been widely used from Vedic times to the present, assuming more varieties and all kinds of finished systems. Yet Buddhism gradually caught up with Brahmanism or Hinduism. This allowed dhàràõã and mantra to acquire the same shapes and uses gradually.

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Siddhaá'f is an abugida or alphasyllabary rather than an alphabet because each character indicates a syllable, but it does not include every possible syllable. If no other mark occurs then the short  $\tilde{a}$  is assumed. In time, other scripts, particularly Devanagari, replaced Siddhaá'f in India, leaving East Asia as the only region where Siddhaá'f is used. Chinese use of the Siddhaá'f script for the Pratisara Mantra, from the Later Tang Dynasty. 927 CE. The Siddham alphabet was used by Buddhists for writing Sanskrit, especially mantras and sutras, during the 6th to 12th centuries in India, China, and Japan. Siddham means perfected, and at the time of its use was considered the perfect script. Ancient Indians did not use writing for spiritual purposes. Scripture was heard at the foot of the master, and committed to memory. Writing was introduced, probably from Persia, by merchants who used it for commerce. King Aśoka (273-36 BCE) chose writing to communicate his message by having it carved on large pillars. He wrote in a vernacular Prākṛit and mainly used the Brahmi script, although Kharośṭhī and even Aramaic and Greek scripts were also used. IAST|Siddhaá'f is an abugida or alphasyllabary rather than an alphabet because each character indicates a syllable, but it does not include every possible syllable. By the time Kāśyapa learned this script, the trading and pilgrimage routes over land to India, were closed by the expanding Islamic empire of the Abbasids. In Japan the writing of mantras and copying of Sutras using the IAST|Siddhaá'f script is still practiced in the esoteric Buddhist schools of Shingon and Tendai as well as in the syncretic sect of Shugendō. In Japan the characters are known as nihongo|"shittan"|æ,%æ·‡ or nihongo|"bonji"|æçµ— . The Taisho edition of the Chinese IAST|Tripiā'aka preserves the IAST|Siddhaá'f characters for most mantras, and Korean Buddhist still write seed Abstract Siddham Learning, developed by Chinese monks and literary agents, produced powerful effects in China. It works on two different planes. One is the linguistic nature of the Sanskrit phonetic letters, and the other is the level of religious doctrines implied in them, especially dharaoa and mantra. But regarding their origins in India, we find that dharaoa only belonged to Mahayana Buddhism, while mantra has been widely used from Vedic times to the present. As Buddhism caught up with Brahmanism or Hinduism step by step, dharaoa and mantra also began to have the same shapes and uses gradually. Though the origins in India of public debate (pariā'ṣad), one form of rational inquiry, are not clear, we know that public debates were common in pre-classical India, for they are frequently alluded to in various Upaniā'ṣads and in the early Buddhist literature. A better known, but much later, example of such engagements is the Buddhist works, Milinda-pañho (Questions of King Milinda) and Kathā-vatthu (Points of controversy). Public debate is not the only form of public deliberations in pre-classical India. Assemblies (pariā'ṣad or sabhā) of various sorts, comprised of relevant experts, were regular