

The Buddha in Sophocles' Tragedy, King Oedipus: An Intertextual Analysis

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Abstract : Academics argue that Greek myths and legends have had an influence on Buddhist stories: Jataka tales, Theri Gata (Psalms of older Buddhist nuns), and even Mahavansa (a Sri Lankan historical chronicle). However, this article asserts that there is evidence in Sophocles King Oedipus to argue that the Buddha's life story and key Buddhist concepts have influenced pre-Christian Greek philosophy and literature, especially Sophocles' King Oedipus. When reading the text with the notion that there could be intertextual relationships or new texts are built on the existing texts and discourses, the reader may see that Sophocles' play contains incidents that remind them of the special occasions of the Buddha's life, his utterances and the key Buddhist concepts such as the truth of suffering, cessation of suffering, the three poisons (greed, hatred, and delusion), and finding the truth within one's own self. The present intertextual study explored only the special occasions of the Buddha's life to make it more focused and found that Sophocles alludes to the Buddha's life story in his attempt to raise a moral culprit to a moral hero with higher moral values. This article, however, acknowledges that one needs to cross-check the other historical and philosophical references when claiming that Sophocles has had influence from the Buddha's life story in King Oedipus.

Keywords : Buddhism, the Buddha's life story, King Oedipus, Greece, tragedy, Sri Lanka

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