

Xuanzang: A Determined, Yet Limited Political Actor

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Abstract. Existing scholarship regarding Xuanzang's contributions to the spread of Buddhism as a dedicated scholar that crucially contributed to the spread of Buddhism in China through translating and documenting various sutras of the Mahāyāna school, versatile diplomat who maneuvered the rulers of the states of the western region to support him, and a courageous explorer who risked his life for the Buddhist creed. Those aspects of Xuanzang were extensively studied, documented, interpreted, and analyzed upon. However, Xuanzang's role as a political actor is seldom explored. This study find Xuanzang as an active political actor in his role of promoting Buddhism particularly during the reigns of Taizong and Gaozong emperors because he showcased Buddhism's utility in ruling, persuaded Tang emperors to patronize Buddhism through involving them into Buddhist text translations by inviting them to write prologues, and even attempted to make the eldest son of Gaozong emperor and Empress Wu a Buddhist monk by employing close-reading of primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: Xuanzang, Buddhism, Tang Dynasty, Political Actor, Scripture Translation

1. Introduction

Existing scholarship regarding Xuanzang's contributions to the spread of Buddhism identify him as a dedicated scholar that crucially contributed to the spread of Buddhism in China through translating and documenting various sutras of the Mahāyāna school, versatile diplomat who maneuvered the rulers of the states of the western region to support him, and a courageous explorer who risked his life for the Buddhist creed [1]. Those aspects of Xuanzang were extensively studied upon. Xuanzang is the foundational figure in Chinese Yogācāra, and translated vast amounts of Buddhist scripture he brought from India [2]. One of the scriptures includes the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra, a sacred text that contains information about the implementation of Buddhist ideologies in governing royal subjects [3]. The identity of Xuanzang as an active political actor was seldom explored by secondary literature although primary evidence could be utilized to showcase Xuanzang's political shrewdness in his aim of legitimizing Buddhism in China during tumultuous times. Hence, this paper aims to showcase and emphasize Xuanzang's role as a determined, yet limited political actor in his life's work of advocating Buddhism.

To accentuate Xuanzang's identity as a political actor particularly during the reigns of Taizong and Gaozong emperors, it is crucial to understand the development of Buddhism in China and the situation it faced from the Northern dynasties and the early Tang dynasty before Xuanzang's

pilgrimage. Doucheng Du and Fuxue Yang states that since the early days of Buddhism in China, there had been strong opposition regarding its existence [3]. This including being targeted two times by states of Northern Wei and Northern Zhou during the Northern dynasties period [3]. Emperor Taiwu of Northern Wei conducted the first large-scale destruction of Buddhism [4]. According to Wei shu, 魏書, though Taiwu Emperor embraced Buddhism and revered its monks, he never delved into the scriptures of Buddhism [4]. He then became a follower of Daoism after finding the ideals of transcendence, purity and non-action attractive. Kou Qian, the minister of culture, land, and personnel, also adheres to Daoism [4].

His conversation with the Emperor in Kou Qianzhi's Daoism that denounces Buddhism as a deceptive religion and wasteful burden upon the state made the emperor accept his views [4]. Later on, when the Emperor went to inspect the horses that were groomed in the wheat field next to the Chang'an, his attendants were served wine which then entered a private chamber of the monastery that contains bows, arrows, spears, and shields [4]. Angered by the reports, the emperor then ordered authorities to investigate the monastery community, which uncovered much brewing equipment, valuables deposited for safekeeping by provincial officials, local governors, and wealthy families [4]. In addition, the monks had engaged in illicit relations with noblewomen [4]. Incensed, the emperor ordered the persecution of monks in Chang'an, burning of Buddhist texts, and destruction of Buddhist statues, with the decree ordering all regions to follow suit [4]. The emperor later on issued another proclamation that stated that monks who failed to return to worldly life would be executed and those who sheltered them would have their whole clan exterminated [4]. This violent destruction of Buddhism by Emperor Taiwudi stopped when he died and Emperor Wencheng ascended the throne, who proclaimed Buddhism to be revived [4]. Later in the Northern Zhou dynasty, Emperor Wu issued the prohibition of Buddhist and Daoist rituals and the clergy of the two religions to return to worldly life [5].

Although Buddhism quickly recovered after every destruction, Buddhists became apocalyptic by the early Tang dynasty due to the previous crises and threatening voices against Buddhism [3]. In the Sui and Tang dynasties, Buddhism has revived and recovered through imperial support [2]. Yet, even in the early Tang dynasty, threatening anti-Buddhist voices still haunts Buddhists, leading to Buddhist apocalyptic beliefs such as declining of the dharma to be popular [3]. Thus, it is clear that other than the need for better translated texts stated in the Jiu Tangshu (Old Book of Tang), Xuanzang aims to legitimize Buddhism with imperial support from the emperor to ensure a peaceful environment for growing the religion [6]. Therefore, Xuanzang is a political actor, undoubtedly affecting Tang emperors' position on religion despite not holding any formal political role. This paper aims to present Xuanzang's identity as a determined, yet limited political actor in his role of promoting Buddhism particularly during the reigns of Taizong and Gaozong emperors. Admittedly, Xuanzang's role as a political actor is limited due to the eventual suspension of translation after his death, but his determination could be shown by he showcased patronizing Buddhism's political benefits, sought Tang imperial support in promoting Buddhism, and even attempted to make Prince Lixian of Gaozong emperor and Empress Wu a Buddhist monk.

2. Demonstrating Buddhism's utility in politics

Whether in his translation and reorganization of Buddhist texts or his composition of Datang Xiyuji (The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions), Xuanzang intended to convince Tang emperors of the political benefits of endorsing Buddhism. This section would first discuss Xuanzang's translation and reorganization of Buddhists texts and subsequently his intentions in composing Datang Xiyuji.

One of the purposes of Xuanzang's pilgrimage is to bring the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra to Tang China, and volume 61 of Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra is titled Section on the Analysis of Decisions [3]. Like its namesake, volume 61 outlines and illustrates the faults and virtues that a king could make [3]. The volume listed out ten faults as follows: lacking nobility, not attaining true freedom, exhibiting violent and resentful natures, prone to fierce and sudden anger, lacking in kindness and generosity, trusting in deceitful and wicked counsel, acting without reflection and proper conduct, neglecting virtuous principles, failing to discern and forgetting kindness, indulge and surrender oneself to recklessness [3]. The volume then listed out a king's virtues: possessing high status, possess great sovereignty, has no cruelty, able to exhibit mild and controlled anger, bestows benevolence, accepts honest advice, acts with careful thought and conduct, cherish virtuous teachings, discern distinctions and acknowledging kindness, not indulging and reckless [3]. Another part of the volume is the “可爱法” or “Keaifa” and the last law of it states that if the king believes, endorses, and protects Buddhism, then there would be long term benefits [3]. Due to the great length of the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra, Xuanzang prioritized and finished the translation on the sections of the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra that focuses on governance during the time when Taizong emperor just died and Gaozong initially ascended to the throne, and named it Treatise on the Right Principles of Royal Law (Wangfazheng lilun) [3]. Wangfazheng lilun kept most of the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra, but deleted the first fault and virtue of the kings, as the Tang ruling family does not exhibit too high of a nobility [3]. Xuanzang's intentional translation and reorganization of the Buddhist sacred scripture effectively showcases the political benefits of Buddhism towards imperial rule in a more collected fashion with edits that aim to suit the Tang emperors' needs. Xuanzang's flexibility demonstrates to the Tang emperors the versatility of the religion that certain doctrines could be sacrificed for political function.

Furthermore, Datang Xiyuji that Xuanzang composed effectively showcases the utility of Buddhism for politics by depicting vivid examples of rulers of the western regions utilizing Buddhism for their rule for various means and purposes. Xuanzang's accounts of the Western Regions also accounted for geographical features with Buddhist stories embedded with them, therefore alluring the Tang emperor to read Buddhists texts to gain geographical information of the Western Regions. The following segment will focus on explaining key parts of Xuanzang's composition that illustrate Xuanzang's political incentives.

In Xuanzang's account of the King Kaniṣka of Gandhāra, he believed in Buddhism, studied it during his leisure hours, and has large influence over great lands. The monks within his realm belonged to different schools that held opposing views that in times clashed with once another. After a venerable monk brought this up to him, he replied that

by the remnant blessedness of my ancestors I am lucky enough to have succeeded to the exploits of my predecessors...I venture to forget my vulgarity and incompetence and wish to propagate the Dharma... [7]

This account showcases the inclusiveness of Buddhist doctrine and the cooperation between the Buddhists and the states; Kaniṣka is the one who has the decision regarding the disputes between Buddhist monks of different schools, deciding to expanding the Tripiṭaka according to tenets of different schools, in which the venerable monks complied. However, archaeological finds of the Rabatak inscription provides the information that Kaniṣka, in fact, was not Buddhist [8]. Buddha is absent from deities Kanishka commissioned the inscription for, which is Iranian and dynastic gods. While Xuanzang depicts Kanishka as a devout Buddhist, he may only patronize Buddhism out of political motivations. Therefore it could be inferred that through depicting Kaniṣka as a devout Buddhist and commences authority in Buddhism, Xuanzang aims to communicate to Emperor

Taizong that Buddhism is a powerful tool to reaffirm the authority of his rule, his humility towards subjects, and his authority over Buddhism.

Likewise, Xuanzang also presented the utility of Buddhism to the ruler to claim authority over subjects through declaring themselves to be descended from Buddhist deities. For instance, in Xuanzang's account of the country Gostana, he includes that

[t]hey esteem the buddha-dharma and there are over a hundred monasteries.... The king ... claims to be a descendant of the deity Vaiśravaṇa [7].

In his account of the country Gostana, Xuanzang included the details that there are "over a hundred monasteries" and king claims himself to be a descendent of the deity Vaiśravaṇa [7]. Vaiśravaṇa, also known as Hearer of Many Teachings in Chinese, is one of the four heavenly kings in Buddhist mythology [9]. He lives halfway up the northern side of Mount Sumeru, protects where Buddha preaches, and shields the votaries of the sutra(mentioned in "Dhāraṇī," the twenty-sixth chapter of the Lotus Sutra) [9]. Through claiming to be descended from Vaiśravaṇa, it gives the King (Aśoka) the ability to justify political and military incentives in the name of guarding the Buddhist doctrines. Xuanzang likely uses this to allude to Taizong that if he embraced Buddhism and utilized it in his rule, he could enjoy the same functions of Buddhism King Aśoka of Gostana did.

The account of Xuanzang regarding the nation of Kuci is a typical account of mingling the wealth of nations, Buddhist elements, and illustrating the political benefits of Buddhism. Right after the information giving out the location of the two monasteries in Kuci, Xuanzang gave the description that

In the buddha hall of Eastern Cakuri Monastery there is a jade stone about two feet in width, yellowish-white in color, in the shape of a sea clam. On the stone there is a footprint of the Buddha, one foot eight inches in length and more than six inches wide [7].

Through describing the lavish Buddhist monasteries and well-crafted images of the Buddhists, Xuanzang effectively communicates the substantial wealth and power the country of Kuci possesses, which is an integral piece of information for the Tang rulers to discern which nations they should engage more diplomatic relations with. Then, Xuanzang moves to describing the Buddhism's political benefit of supporting imperial rule:

[t]here are two standing statues of the Buddha, more than ninety feet in height, one at each side of the road...[at the]capital city...[A]t this place...the great quinquennial congregations [are held]... all the monks in the whole country come here to attend [it]... The king always discusses state affairs after consulting with the eminent monks about their discussion, they make a proclamation [7].

By establishing two magnificent statues of the Buddha at the west gate, Xuanzang emphasizes the dignity and imperial authority the religion boosts at the capital city. Through displaying the holding of quinquennial congregations each year for several ten days around the autumnal equinox at the capital and making proclamations for imperial policies, Xuanzang purposely demonstrates the king's authority is heavily supported by Buddhism and allows the king to commence authority through holding large ceremonies and Buddha's divine endorsement. Since the target audience of Xuanzang's *Datang Xiyuji* is emperor Taizong, it is safe to deduce that he is suggesting to the emperor that if Tang emperors support Buddhism, Buddhists could elevate Tang rulers prestige and authority by carrying out grand public ceremonies.

Moving on, geographical features of regions are oftentimes embedded with Buddhists myths. To acquire more information about the geographical features of the Western Regions, Tang rulers, such as Taizong, had to read parts of Buddhist myths regarding the area. For instance, in his account of the PO-HO, Xuanzang tells that

to the north-west of the capital about 50 li or so we arrive at the town of Ti-wei; 40 li to the north of this town is the town of Po-li ... In old days, when Buddha first attained enlightenment after advancing to the tree of knowledge, he went to the garden of deer...

Some 70 li to the west of this town is a stupa about two chang (20 feet) in height. This was erected in the time of Kasyapa Buddha [10].

As this account showcases, Xuanzang intertwines the geographical information and Buddha's early stories in between, forcing Tang rulers such as Taizong and Gaozong to read both the Buddhist stories and geographical information. After mentioning geographical information of the PO-HO's capital and towns, Xuanzang subsequently then tells myths about the Buddha's enlightenment, then followed by other segments about the town's geographical information. In this way, Xuanzang combines geographical information about the Western regions along with Buddhists myths of the Buddha's enlightenment as well as stupas erected in the time of Kasyapa Buddha, forcing the Tang rulers such as Taizong and Gaozong to read and know Buddhist traditions. Through combining Buddhists myths and stories with geographical information, Xuanzang creates an image that Buddhism is omnipresent in the Western Regions, giving the example that and may allude to the Tang rulers to follow suit.

To conclude this segment, through reorganizing and editing texts carried from India by the pilgrimage and intentionally including stories during his composition of *Datang Xiyuji*, Xuanzang points out clearly to Tang emperors that Buddhism serves well as a tool for political and military incentives.

3. Seeking Tang imperial support for Buddhism

Recognizing that Tang imperial support and patronage for the promotion of Buddhism is crucial, Xuanzang decided to involve Tang emperors into Buddhist text translations to promote Buddhism. His first step is to form good relations with the emperor Taizong. When Xuanzang returned to Tang China, the first problem he needed to face was to explain his pilgrimage without any permission [11]. This act made him officially a fugitive in his homeland. When Taizong emperor questioned him on this matter during their interview at Chang'an, Xuanzang addressed it with an apology, writing that

I ventured to go in a private manner. For my guilt in taking action without authorization, I feel deeply ashamed of myself and fearful [11].

Hence, it could be shown from Xuanzang's response that he desperately tried to address the law-breaking origins of his pilgrimage. Without the justification and acceptance of his pilgrimage, it would be certain that Xuanzang would not have received state-sponsorship for his translation works. Accepting the apology, the Emperor subsequently asked him about how he traveled the vast distances with the great dangers of mountains, rivers, and peoples with different mentalities. Xuanzang, continuing the goal of seeking imperial support for his works, replied that

Since Your Majesty...pacified the Four Seas, your virtue prevailed in the Nine Regions and your benevolence covered the Eight Areas ... I have been able to go and return without difficulty [11].

Inherent in his reply, Xuanzang praised the emperor, stating that because of his pacification, prevailment of virtue, and demonstration of benevolence, the countries along the way respected him and did not cause trouble to his pilgrimage. Through praising the Emperor, Xuanzang undoubtedly aims for imperial support in his works of promoting Buddhism by affirming the Emperor's long-extended virtue and authority over all nations. There is another reason in which Xuanzang had made this response to affirm the Emperor's authority. When Xuanzang had initially arrived at Chang'an, the residents of Chang'an packed the streets, burned incense, and threw flowers everywhere

[11].Xuanzang's great degree of popularity made himself into a threat in the eyes of Taizong emperor, who fears the group worship of Xuanzang utilized by any political power [11]. To illustrate this aspect further, Xuanzang was denied the request of entering Shaoling monastery for his translation but sent to Hongfu monastery located at Chang'an for this reason [11].Xuanzang, who understands Taizong's lack of trust, accepted it [11]. Therefore, by making this response and subsequently asking for guarding Hongfu monastery where the translation work is based in, Xuanzang not only seeks imperial support but also yields power to emperor Taizong. Although Xuanzang's first meeting with Emperor Taizong did not go by smoothly, yet he reached his goal of gaining imperial support [11]. The Jiu Tangshu affirms Taizong's support of Buddhism, stating that Taizong welcomed Xuanzang personally, and issued the translation of 657 books at Hongfu monastery, and ordered the prime minister Fang Xuanling, Xu Jinzong, and fifty monks to aid the translation of Buddhist texts [6]. Furthermore, Xuanzang is able to report to the emperor regarding the progress of translating Buddhist text by letters [11].

Perhaps, the boldest of Xuanzang's actions is his request for the Taizong emperor to write a preface for a collection of Buddhist texts to seek further imperial support by involving the emperor directly with the translation productions. Xuanzang writes in his attached letter to the translated scriptures and treatises that

The words written by Your Majesty will last as long as Heaven and earth, to be read and sung for a hundred generations without limit and to be seen with admiration for a thousand years without end [11].

However, Xuanzang's first attempt of inviting Taizong to write a preface failed. Taizong declined subtly, writing that

As for your request that we write an inscription for your translations of the scriptures, that is something we have not heard of [11].

Despite the reluctant refusal of Taizong, Xuanzang made another attempt in asking Taizong to write a preface for the collection of scriptures, this time writing in a more humble tone. Xuanzang wrote

I humbly beg that Your Majesty will condescend with the might of thunder to grant me the favor of writing a composition that will shine like stars in the sky...[It] depend upon the Divine Pen for their propagation... [11]

This time, Xuanzang's request, which was more humble and showcased more reverence towards the emperor, was granted. The act of the Taizong emperor writing a preface for the newly translated scriptures officially shows the imperial support for Xuanzang's translation efforts in addition to sending officials to aid the translation efforts. It should also be mentioned that Xuanzang surrendered Buddhism for political support, as he mentioned the teachings of Buddhism depended on the Emperor's support. Through Xuanzang's determined persistence for Tang imperial support by befriending Taizong led to the smooth promotion of Buddhism during the reign of Taizong. In the close end of his life, Emperor Taizong said that he met Xuanzang too late, and could not promote Buddhism much [12]. Gaozong, in his initial years, continued Taizong emperor's support for the translation works to aid Xuanzang, made Yuhua palace into a monastery, and built a monastery next to Taizong emperor's Zhao tomb [11].

In summary of this segment, Xuanzang had been able to assure a stable political environment for his works of spreading Buddhism during the period he had lived. This ensured that Buddhism is more intertwined with the Chinese populace and royalty.

4. Making Prince Li Xian (later Zhongzong) a “Monk”

In order to further imperial support for the promotion of Buddhism, Xuanzang decided to make the son of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu, Li Xian, to be “佛光王” or “Prince of Buddha Light.” [11] When Empress Wu was a concubine of Taizong, she witnessed Xuanzang’s return at Chang’an herself and knew the intricacies of Taizong and Xuanzang [12]. She was sent to be a nun after Taizong died, and kept good relations with the Buddhists when she returned to the palaces with Gaozong [12]. When she was pregnant with Lixian and was expecting birth, she resided in Triple Gem, and prayed for spiritual protection. Xuanzang said to the emperor that “Her Majesty will certainly be safe in childbirth; but should the infant be a boy, I wish that he be allowed to become a monk after he is born in safety.” [11] Then, to further convince the Emperor and Empress in making Li Xian a monk, he added on in his letter that “the sagely baby was still in the womb, it showed signs of renunciation of home, so that the Buddha with ten titles manifested spiritual power to accept the child with great compassion” and that “seven flowers raised their heads to support his first steps, and nine dragons spouted water to bathe his body heads to support his first steps, and nine dragons spouted water to bathe his body.” [11] Hence, with the justifications of the alluded Buddhist myths, Xuanzang aims to convince the Emperor and Empress regarding Li Xian’s monkhood.

In addition, Xuanzang’s political motives in making the Prince a monk could be shown in this sentence in the letter he wrote three days after the birth of the Prince. In the letter, Xuanzang writes that

After that he will ... strike the drum of the Dharma to defeat the heavenly devils, wave the superior banners to subdue the heretics... [11]

In the excerpt from the letter, Xuanzang it could be shown that the Prince, as Buddha Light Prince, would “strike the drum of Dharma to defeat the heavenly devils,” “subdue the heretics.” This, in fact, is what Xuanzang wished for Buddhism in a political sense; if a prince becomes a monk, then the survival of Buddhism would be ensured due to the close imperial ties the religion have with the Tang ruling family.

After Lixian is born, the Emperor wrote the following letter, saying that

[Empress Wu and I] will certainly not go back on our promise... [11]

This letter from the Emperor assures Xuanzang with the decision that Lixian will be Prince Buddha light. Then, when Lixian was born for three days, Xuanzang then wrote a letter to defend the decision for Lixian to be prince Buddha light. Filial piety is one of the most foundational pillars of Confucianism, which the act of sending a son to be a monk violates. However, with the justification that when a son becomes a monk he could bring more filial piety, this could be nullified. To support this statement, he then provided an example of Sakyamuni, who is the Buddha, abandoned his kingdom and gained enlightenment.

However, it is also important to mention that Lixian did not end up to be a monastic monk. Certainly, he was accompanied by Xuanzang and five scripture-translate monks to Jicui Palace in the year 657 CE, but he did not become a monk in the end despite undergoing Buddhist rituals of shaving hair and ordination [11]. Despite so, it should be judged that Xuanzang’s attempts of Making Li Xian a monk marks him a bold political actor who was willing to directly influence the beliefs of the ruling family to assure a stable environment for the promotion of Buddhism.

5. Limited results as a political actor

Although Xuanzang has worked extensively with Tang rulers in order to ensure a safe political environment for the sake of promoting Buddhism, it has only been met with minimal results. During

the reign of Gaozong, he continued the policies of Taizong towards Buddhism, yet lacked the close bonds that Taizong had with Xuanzang [11]. It is important to remember the Tang ruler's doctrine when it comes to religion. The Tang rulers claim that Laozi as their forefather, so hence Laozi's name, position, and titles, and his religion Daoism should be more important than those of Buddha and Buddhism [12]. Despite so, during Xuanzang's interactions with Taizong, Taizong supported translation efforts due to Taizong's personal desire of salvation due to his violent past of usurping the position of Crown Prince [11]. When it comes to the toleration and support of religions, Gaozong based it on practicality [3]. Since Buddhism benefits Tang rule, then it is supported. Though Gaozong supports Buddhism, he adheres more to Daoism, the national religion of Tang ruling family [12]. He practices the Daoist tradition of concocting pills of immortality, which its lethality is one of the factors that cause him to pass away in 684 CE [12]. When Empress Wu came into power in 656 CE due to Gaozong's vertigo, she utilized Buddhist scripture that contain the notion of a female reincarnate of Chakravartin, the ideal universal ruler who benevolently rule over the world, such as Mahāmegha Sūtra and Ratnamegha Sūtra to justify her rule [12]. In the year 657 CE, Gaozong and Empress Wu ordered Xuanzang to go along the trip to Luoyang to promote the city as the eastern capital [12]. In the summer of the year 657 CE, Xuanzang was ordered to accompany Gaozong and Empress Wu to Minde palace [12]. Due to a sickness that occurred one year ago, Xuanzang then fell sickness again [12]. This allowed him to return to Chang'an to continue focusing on his scripture translations and teachings [12]. When Empress Wu came into power during the later reign of Gaozong, Xuanzang treats her as a concubine of the emperor, not just an emperor [12]. Xuanzang welcomes Empress Wu's support and protection of Buddhism, but aimed not to flatter [12]. In the year 659 CE, Gaozong and Empress Wu moved to Luoyang, allowing Xuanzang to focus on his scripture translations, but lost his influence regarding Tang politics [12]. Regarding the bloody power struggles that happening within the Tang courts and palaces, Xuanzang did not interfere.

When Xuanzang had passed away, Gaozong issued the following decree, suggesting that Xuanzang's

translation work should be suspended ... Those of the Master's disciples and co-translators who were not formerly resident monks at Yuhua Monastery should be allowed to return to their original monasteries [11].

To conclude this segment, Gaozong's decree seals the end of the scripture translations by Xuanzang, which ruined what he hoped to achieve during his lifetime and after his death: translating scripture and having a political environment suitable to spread Buddhism. With Empress Wu becoming in power, she utilized Buddhism to justify her authority, yet Xuanzang's efforts played only a minimal role.

6. Conclusion

Xuanzang as a limited, yet determined political actor could be illustrated with his showcase of the political benefits of patronizing Buddhism, seeking of political support for Buddhism, and the bold attempt to make Prince Lixian a monk. However, Xuanzang's role as a political actor is limited due to the eventual suspension of translation by the Emperor after his death. Despite this, Xuanzang should not be held accountable for this. He tried and succeeded to establish a political environment during his lifetime for Chinese Buddhism to grow, spread, and be more connected with Chinese culture through his adaptation of Buddhism to the Chinese context and personal acquaintances with Tang emperors. The continuity of Buddhism as a popular religion revived during Empress Wu's reign, though hampered by Gaozong after Xuanzang died. Despite being a slightly limited political

actor by Gaozong, Xuanzang's value as a historical figure should not be judged upon by his limited Xuanzang enjoyed much posthumous legacies. His life-risking journey to the Western Regions are adapted into the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West*, by Wu Chengen and his stories painted throughout Chinese Buddhist temples and Dunhuang Murals. Moreover, Xuanzang is a weaver of the Silk Road, a tapestry of great human legacy woven by fearless pioneers like him who risked their lives to exchange culture, commerce, technology, and religions. It is one of common human destiny, interconnectedness, and potential, that should be continued despite differences across nations' political differences and increasing eagerness to become geopolitically dominant. Today, when tourists visit the Great Wild Goose Pagoda located at Xi'an, they will pass through the great statue of Xuanzang in the background of subtle scripture hums from the temple, denoting Xuanzang's contributions to Buddhism. Xuanzang's He risked his life, he gave his best shot, what more could he have done?

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