



International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage

Volume 4

Issue 6 *Pilgrimages in India: Celebrating journeys of plurality and sacredness*

Article 14


2016

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Recommended Citation

McIntosh, Ian S. (2016) "Xuanzang and Bodhidharma: Pilgrimage and peace-building in Buddhist China and India," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 4: Iss. 6, Article 14.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/D71130>

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol4/iss6/14>

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Xuanzang and Bodhidharma: Pilgrimage and peace-building in Buddhist China and India

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In the study of pilgrimage and peace-building, case studies deemed to be influential in initiating positive change in the world are in the spotlight. A novel example in which people with different ethnicities, cultures and walks of life have come together with a common purpose is associated with the spread of Buddhism from India to China beginning in the early centuries of the Common Era. Unlike other instances of the expansion of a world religion beyond its homeland, the spread of Buddhism along the maritime and overland 'silk roads' was not linked to domination or conquest. Rather, it was linked to the uplifting of the human spirit, the search for enlightenment, and the betterment of society. Facilitated by 'dharma-seeking' and 'preaching' monks, commercial caravans, and diplomats, bridges of understanding and cooperation were forged between India and China that, despite the decline in Buddhism in later years, would last well into the 20th century. In this paper, attention is focused on two astonishing figures from this period of economic, cultural and religious exchange - Chinese scholar-monk Xuanzang (602-664 CE) and Indian Chan/Zen master Bodhidharma (~6th century CE). I examine both their lives and contributions as peace-builders, and also the work of bricoleurs (or myth-makers) who have transformed their earthly pilgrimages into fantastic odysseys. Why the need for mythopoesis? Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss coined the term 'intellectual bricolage' to describe this process of myth-making; just as a handyman (or bricoleur) will draw upon 'odds and ends' to construct 'things', so too does the myth-maker. My goal is to analyse a sample of narratives and related pilgrimage sites associated with Xuanzang and Bodhidharma in order to show how the bricoleur (by incorporating in myth the ruminations of countless pilgrims) inspired generations to travel to places associated with our 'hero monks' and to pursue the ideals they embraced. Myth-enhancement has empowered and given meaning to the lives of pilgrims and, in so doing, helped build a transnational relationship that has endured for more than a thousand years.^[1]

Key Words : pilgrim, pilgrimage, hero, myth, bricoleur, Xuanzang, Bodhidharma, Chan / Zen, Buddhism, Emperor Wu, Faxian, Silabhadra, Bodhisattva.

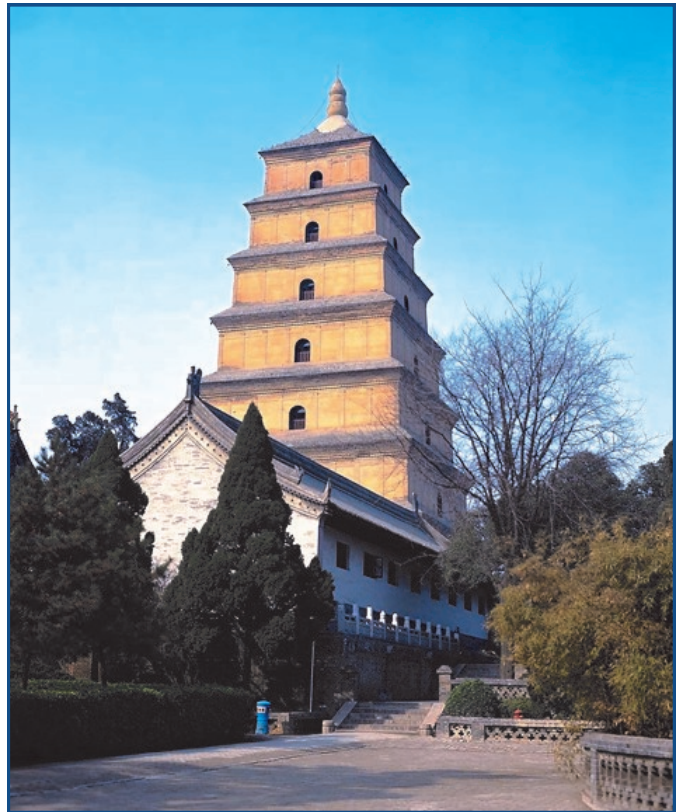
Introduction

I situate this essay comparing the lives and legacies of Xuanzang and Bodhidharma in the pilgrimage literature (Greenia, 2014; Coleman and Elsner, 1995), studies in time and narrative (Ricoeur, 1990), the idea of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949), and the history of Sino-Indian diplomacy (Grousset, 1932; Kieschnick & Shahar 2014; Tansen, 2003; Wang & Tansen, 2011). Pilgrimage is often viewed in terms of a movement towards what might be termed 'the centre' for either spiritual or secular purposes. The goal is to attain or achieve something of great worth beyond the mundane realm. It might involve purification, redemption, or

even re-birth. Pilgrimages are journeys for personal transformation, for the strengthening of faith, or for deepening one's appreciation of the transcendental. Pilgrimages may also help bolster one's sense of belonging within the imagined community that gives definition to one's life. Role models for such journeys are often described in heroic terms. The prototypical hero figure as described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* shows the hero setting forth on his life-changing journey both for adventure and for the greater common good. The quest is filled with danger, excitement, accomplishment, and renewal. As I will describe, these same elements are also present in the actual and myth-enhanced versions of the narratives of the Chinese scholar-monk Xuanzang and the Indian Chan / Zen master Bodhidharma, arguably among the most influential monks ever to visit each other's countries (See Waley, 1952; Ferguson, 2012).

1. See the 2016 Indian tribute to the 'world citizen' Xuanzang in his online memorial to his travels and legacy. <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/exhibit/xuanzang-memorial-n%C4%81land%C4%81/-gLylBey76EHJA?position=0%3A0>

Figure 1: (Left) Xuanzang from a 14th century rubbing from a stele near Xian, close to his birthplace. (Right) The Great Wild Goose Pagoda built by the Tang Emperor to house the precious artefacts Xuanzang brought from India.



In this paper I look at each ‘hero monk’ in the light of both what is known about them in the historical record, and what is known through the lens of mythology. The goal is to elicit a deeper understanding of the role of myth in three areas: Sanctifying our heroes; endorsing sites of pilgrimage associated with them; and making relevant or ‘alive’ their message of peace and deliverance. As I will show, Xuanzang and Bodhidharma provide today’s pilgrims not just with sites in the landscape to visit in order to satisfy a desire for inner peace, but also an opportunity for contemplating peace on a grander scale, an ideal for which the heroes are closely associated.

Monks as Heroes

Xuanzang was born in central China in 602 CE and he is the most well-known of the monks who headed west to India, to the centre of the Buddhist world, in search of deeper understandings and better translations of the *sutras* (or ‘seeds’) - the ancient Buddhist texts or scriptures. He was a self-described pilgrim and was motivated by the fact that his people were in need of relief from their suffering. In his journey he would visit all the great Buddha pilgrimage sites in Indu (Yin-tu)

or India, including what is now Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan. He did not go to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) like some of his predecessors including the noted monk-traveller Faxian, but from the Indian coastline he claimed in his report *Xiyou-Ji* (*Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*) to have seen across the waters the glittering rays of the precious gem that sits atop the Temple of Buddha’s Tooth. Its appearance was described by him as being like that of a shining star in the midst of space.

After a journey of 19 years, Xuanzang returned as a hero to China’s royal court in Xian bearing *sutras*, sacred statues of the Buddha, and over 100 Buddha relics. Several years later, the Great Wild Goose pagoda was commissioned by the Tang Emperor to house these sacred objects and it became a great centre of Buddhist learning, with pilgrims coming from all over East Asia to study.

Bodhidharma’s journey from India to China had a completely different trajectory. Travelling about 100 years before Xuanzang, Bodhidharma brought with him both *sutras* and a meditation technique and philosophy that is known throughout the world as Zen.

Figure 2: (Left) Illustration of Bodhidharma. Ukiyo-e woodblock print by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, 1887. (Right) Pathway leading to Bodhidharma's Cave.



Bodhidharma was said to be from Kanchipuram in what is now Tamil Nadu, the third son of a Pallava king, but there are numerous variations of this story, including one that stresses his central Asian origins. Bodhidharma was both a pilgrim and a missionary, sent to China by the famous monk Prajnatara to spread Buddhism, as predicted by the Buddha himself according to Hsuan Hua (1999:7). Places in China associated with Bodhidharma have become major pilgrimage sites, including the cave on Bear's Ear Mountain where he meditated for nine years.

While Bodhidharma is virtually unknown in India, apart from the controversial 2011 film, *7am Arivu*, his legacy in China, Japan and Vietnam is very considerable. As mentioned, he is honoured for bringing 'Chan' (pronounced 'Chen') Buddhism to China, and 'Zen' thereafter - by a succession of hands - to Japan, though contemporary scholarship suggests a much earlier introduction of Zen to the East (Red Pine, 1989). It is also claimed on the website of the US Shaolin Temple and numerous other sources that Bodhidharma, the author of such memorable meditations as the 'Bloodstream sermon', also brought Kung Fu to China's Shaolin monks (Ferguson, 2012:267), but again there are no substantiating records. The Shaolin headquarters that sits on Mt Song, one of China's holy mountains - which was built to honour an earlier Indian monk - is a major pilgrimage destination for devotees of Bodhidharma, and for Zen Buddhists as a whole (See Red Pine, 1989).

Sacred Journeys

There were many Chinese monks who travelled to India to learn about Buddhism and gather *sutras*.^[2] They were known as dharma-seeking monks. Two hundred years before Xuanzang's journey, the middle-aged monk Faxian had made his extended pilgrimage to India and Sri Lanka and his travel accounts are featured today in Indian school curriculums. But Faxian did not attract the same attention of myth-makers or hagiographers as Xuanzang. Does this mean we should reject the exaggerated tales of Xuanzang as irrelevant? Arthur Waley (1952), in his book, *The Real Tripitaka*, says:

In narrating these [astonishing] episodes I do not necessarily accept them as history. But we should be quite wrong to dismiss as monastic fiction all the dreams, visions, and forewarnings in which the tale of [Xuanzang's] life abounds . . . [for] in those days it was considered as a mark of the highest sanity and perspicacity to have visions; a sign of craziness to ignore them (Waley, 1952:130).

2. Other travelling monks included Faxian, Yijing, Tanyu, Shanxing, Sengzhe, Xuanyou, Lingyun, Zhengu, and Dharmodatta. The latter, in 420CE, convened 25 monks to travel to the west for scriptures (Wang Xiaoling, 2010: 116).

Well before Bodhidharma, other Indian ‘preaching’ monks had journeyed to China as missionaries.^[3] The most famous story regarding the introduction of Buddhism to China comes from the Han Dynasty Emperor Ming who saw in a dream a flying God whose body had the brilliance of a sun (Maspero, 1981:402). When he asked what God is this, he was told that there was a man in India who had achieved the Tao or ‘the way’, as understood in Taosim. The Emperor sent envoys to India to make inquiries about this God and *sutras* were returned on the backs of white horses to the then capital of Luoyang. In short order, the first dedicated Buddhist site in China, known as the White Horse Temple, was constructed. Two Indian monks named Dharmaratna and Kasyapa Matanga returned with the entourage.

In the following years, an Indian monk named Kumarajiva achieved acclaim throughout China as one of the four great translators of the Buddhist *sutras*. His father, also a monk, had come from Kashmir as a missionary with the goal of converting all the various peoples of China to Buddhism. Kumarajiva lived about 200 years before Bodhidharma, and while he and other monks were held upon high for their supposed supernatural powers - the Buddha was believed to hold the secret of eternal life - there are no surviving hagiographies of the sort associated with our hero monks. Only Xuanzang and Bodhidharma have been raised to the level of saints in popular mythology and in the literature. In relation to the former, for example, Coleman and Elsner (1995:177) report that the hagiographies began soon after Xuanzang’s death when his students composed the book, *Life of Hsuan-tsang*, in which they refer to him as the ‘Master of the Law’ with a pedigree going back to the Han Emperors.

Xuanzang created very detailed records of his travels in India in the 7th century and some of the accounts in his *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* are the only records that exist describing what South Asia was like 1400 years ago before the coming of Islam. His detailed description of the peaceful and prosperous cosmopolitan court of King Harsha who ruled over much of northern India, and of his fabled meeting with the King of Assam, for example, are both

accomplished and illuminating. Xuanzang was also the first person to record the ritual behaviour, albeit in negative terms, of Hindu pilgrims at Allahabad, one of the four locations of today’s Kumbh Mela pilgrimage - the world’s largest human gathering. He also speaks of the naked Jains and Brahmins, and of immense Buddhist centres of learning with thousands of young men (Grousset, 1932:152; Waley, 1952:54).

But in Xuanzang’s records we also see the beginning of the myth-making that would later flourish. Xuanzang spent a number of years at the ancient university of Nalanda in what is now the Indian state of Bihar studying logic, grammar, Sanskrit, and the Yogakara - the yoga based school of Buddhism for which he would become identified. Here he met his guru, the venerable Silabhadra, then the most prominent monk in all of India. Several years earlier, Silabhadra had dreamed of Xuanzang’s arrival in Nalanda and how together they would help to spread Buddhism far and wide. Silabhadra, who was then old and frail, had wanted to leave the mortal realm, but in the dream he was visited by three Bodhisattvas - exalted spiritual entities - who told him that it was not his time. Rather, he should await the coming of the Chinese monk. And as the story goes - and it is a most compelling one - Xuanzang had a dream that very night that convinced him to travel to India (Waley, 1952:45). When Xuanzang eventually arrived in Nalanda, 10,000 monks were present to greet him, and a delegation led him, all crawling on hands and knees, for a meeting with Silabhadra.

By contrast, for Bodhidharma, there are virtually no records, and what we lose by way of fact is made up by a wealth of invention. On the banks of Guangzhou’s Pearl River where Bodhidharma is said to have landed from his long sea voyage on the maritime silk route via Sumatra (in either the Liu Song Dynasty, 420-479, or the Liang Dynasty, 502-557CE), a gateway identifies the spot where he stepped ashore (Ferguson, 2012:25). Similarly, the nearby Hualin Temple in Guangzhou marks the place where Bodhidharma began his teaching.

Bodhidharma’s subsequent journey north to meet the ‘Bodhisattva Emperor’ Wu and their conversation, is legendary, though it may be apocryphal (Red Pine 1989:xii). It is important to understand that Emperor Wu was one of the most zealous patrons of Buddhism in China’s history (Broughton, 1999:2-3). He modelled himself after the Indian Emperor Asoka who had instituted Buddhism as the state religion in India. Like Asoka, Emperor Wu built many monasteries, ordained

3. Some of the many monks travelling from India to China included: An Shigao, Kalasivi, Kalaruci, Jivaka, Zhi Fafang, Dharmayasas, Fa-tu, Nandi, Pui-to, Gunavarmam, Gunabhadra, Fa-chuan, Sanghavarman, Nagasena, Dharmagatayasas, Mahayana, Jnanbhaishajya, Parmartha, Rizhao, Ratnacinta, Pramiti, Vajrabodhi, Pankaja, Prajna. (Wang Xiaoling, 2010: 110-113).

monks, arranged for *sutras* to be copied, and commissioned artisans to reproduce famous Buddha images. When Emperor Wu summoned Bodhidharma to his presence around 520 CE, the monk's fame was already very widespread. As Ferguson (2012:313) reports:

. . . when the emperor and his court heard [Bodhidharma's] name, they honoured him like the vast heavens . . . [for] he was like a leaping fish in the sea of wisdom.

The Emperor told Bodhidharma about all that he had done to promote Buddhism, but Bodhidharma, an advocate of the 'doctrine of emptiness', was unimpressed. He asked Bodhidharma about the meaning of 'noble truth' (*arya-satya*) and Bodhidharma said, 'There is no noble truth.' Finally, the Emperor asked how much *karmic* merit he had gained by his saintly actions in honour of the Buddha. Bodhidharma replied 'None whatsoever' (Red Pine, 1989:xii). Perplexed, and possibly irritated, the Emperor then asked the eminent monk who he was to say such a thing, to which Bodhidharma answered, 'I don't know' (Hsuan Hua, 1999:29-35).

After this fateful meeting Bodhidharma is said to have sailed across the Yangzi River on a hollow reed or blade of bamboo grass and sat in a cave for nine years practicing the meditation technique of 'wall gazing', or emptying one's mind (Ferguson, 2012:279-282).

Mythopoesis

Structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1966:7) coined the term 'intellectual bricolage' for the work of the bricoleur or myth-maker in his classic text *The Savage Mind*. Bricolage, a French term, is defined as a construction based on a diverse range of available 'things'. It is an apt description for the myth-making process for it describes the way that myths are cobbled together by a range of self-selecting storytellers, each building on the work of others and adding to the composition 'brick by brick' or with whatever odds and ends are available to them, to narrate something of importance. As William Skeen (1871:20) remarks in his exegesis on Sri Lanka's Adam's Peak, a holy mountain for Buddhists and others, such was the inspiration with acquiring and orally delivering the sacred words of the Buddha from age to age that there were constant additions of a marvellous sort, with tales of the miraculous in abundance. This diversity of opinion and emphasis would lead, inevitably, to the various schools of Buddhism, including Mahayana, Theravada and Hinayana.

Various authors have commented on Xuanzang's account of the vigorous debates that ensued between these various 'schools' of Buddhism, and also between Buddhists, Jains and Hindus, which often featured the threat of violence. Likewise, Bodhidharma's gentle criticism of Dharma Master Shen Guang over his reliance on the spoken word led the latter to shatter Bodhidharma's teeth with a set of prayer beads (Hsuan Hua, 1999:60-67).

What we see in the legacy of Xuanzang and Bodhidharma in the hands of the myth-maker is the transformation of their extended albeit heroic journeys into vast odysseys, with the stories always being open to deeper, dream-inspired or divine interpretations. Sally Wriggins (1996:190) for instance, says:

Something about Xuanzang and his exotic travels stirred the Chinese imagination. His seventh-century exploits became folktales, part of a living oral tradition told first in Chinese monasteries. 'Do you know how the Chinese monk subdued the demon in the cave? How did he get away from the pirates?' Later they were repeated in Chinese inns. In nearly a millennium of development, the story of Xuanzang . . . was told, retold, and written down in short poetic tales, stories, plays, and partial narratives. Finally, there was . . . the [extraordinary] epic Ming Dynasty novel, Journey to the West.

Wu Cheng'en is attributed with authoring this book in the 16th century and it is regarded as one of the four great classical novels of China. The author draws upon a wealth of background information, including folk religion, mythology, Taoism, Buddhism, and the 13th century textual precursor, *Poetic Tales of Triptaka Fetching of Sutras* (Muir, 2014:19), to tell the story of Xuanzang's journey to India. In Cheng'en's rendition, Xuanzang not only visits Buddhist sacred sites in India, he also meets Gautama Buddha. Along the way, demons and monsters of all varieties haunt our hero and he is always at the risk of being eaten by spirits and evil-doers for his flesh is deemed to be the ultimate recipe for immortality. I will return to the 16th century classic shortly.

Andy Ferguson (2012) also describes the input of the bricoleur when he discusses how Bodhidharma's legendary life grew in mythical detail as time passed and his fame spread. Indeed, it was only the writings of the noted Tang Dynasty historian Daoxuan that kept '...Bodhidharma's life planted on the earth instead of floating in mythical clouds' (Ferguson, 2012: xi). Even so, Ferguson says that Bodhidharma's actual existence

as an historical figure has been called into question, and there is a suggestion that he perhaps represents a composite of other religious figures. Despite Bodhidharma being the founder of the main religious current in one of the world's oldest civilizations, and Zen being considered the essence of Chinese culture, Ferguson (2012:xi) despairs that in Zen scholarship Bodhidharma has been reduced to a religious and textual paradigm with his life:

strangely marginalized, demoted to the status of a footnote appended to an obscure place and time (Ferguson, 2012:28; see also Broughton, 1999:2).

Some modern Chinese historians of Buddhism in China, including Tansen (2011), fail to mention Bodhidharma at all. Indeed, McRae (2014:129) says that if you peel away all the 'rings of the onion' of Bodhidharma hagiography there is nothing left at the centre, which is particularly apt for a monk who personified emptiness.

Nevertheless, in the generally accepted narratives, China embraced the teachings of Bodhidharma and his life story was crafted by a series of inspired myth-makers in such a way that it came to resemble the life of the Buddha himself e.g. the son of a king who leaves a life of wealth and privilege to become a monk (See Hsuan Hua, 1999). Further, in order to lend legitimacy to the reign of Chinese Emperors who had embraced Buddhism, it was decreed that Bodhidharma was a reincarnation of the Buddha, the 28th ancestor in the:

transmission of the lamp of enlightenment from the Sakyamuni Buddha and the six Buddhas preceding him (Broughton, 1999:4).

Additionally, or perhaps alternatively, he was viewed as an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara^[4] (the embodiment of infinite compassion) and the transmitter of the seed of 'Buddha mind'. Even today he is known as the 'First Patriarch' or 'First Ancestor' of Buddhism in China (Broughton, 1999:3; Ferguson, 2012).

The origins of Xuanzang, living perhaps just 100 years later than Bodhidharma, were also manipulated by powerful storytellers. As Wriggins (1996:190) writes, there is an astonishing parallel to the Biblical story of Moses with the baby Xuanzang being put in a basket to float down a river, where he is eventually picked up by monks.

There was no limit to the creative potential of these stories in the hands of Chinese myth-makers. They would, for example, accredit Xuanzang's towering achievements, including crossing the deserts of Samarkand or the high Himalayan Mountains, to no less than the intercession of heavenly beings. His undoubted charisma, great learning, and extraordinary stamina, would come to resemble the epic journeys of Don Quixote or *The Pilgrim's Progress*, even to contemporary commentators.

Xuanzang's status in *The Journey to the West* (or *Monkey* as the book is known in the English translation) is quite at odds with this heroic portrayal. Here he is depicted as a reclusive scholar-monk thrown helplessly into the wilds of the unknown. To help him on his journey towards enlightenment by way of India, was a stone monkey god (Sun Wukong), a fish spirit, a pig spirit, and a dragon horse. Their journey was filled with constant terrors and untold dangers and they were challenged 81 times in what appears to be in accordance with the Buddha's wish. In the end, Xuanzang succeeds, fetched the *sutras*, and becoming a Buddha in the process, but only because the rebellious monkey, the real hero of the story, saved his life time and time again.

At one level this book is a comedy, but there are also deep spiritual insights, and the many episodes have been the subject of popular television programmes, movies and stage plays both in China and Japan. In these portrayals, Xuanzang, a reincarnation of the Buddha's pet 'Golden Cicada',^[5] is chosen by the Bodhisattva Guanyin to travel to India.

Coleman and Elsner (1995:180) argue that through these popular stories, especially those of the anti-social monkey god (Sun Wukong) whose name means 'monkey enlightened about emptiness', the Buddhist doctrine of *karma* (of cause and effect) was made accessible to the Chinese lay person. Sun Wukong bears some resemblance to the monkey god Lord Hanuman of the *Ramayana* in Hindu mythology in that he is a slayer of evil doers and also immortal. As one screen rendition describes it (Nippon Television, 1978), the monkey pilgrim was the most powerful force in the universe apart from the Buddha within each of us. And he was able to conquer his animal spirit, as we all do through a process of enculturation, to also become a Buddha at the end of his pilgrimage.

4. The 14th (current) Dalai Lama is also considered to be an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.

5. The cicada is an insect that sheds its shell, just as a person sheds his or her many lives before attaining *nirvana* (liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth).

In the *Journey to the West*, the notion of emptiness that features so powerfully in the narratives of Bodhidharma is reinforced when the fictionalised Xuanzang was given *sutras* by the Buddha which had no writing on them. These were considered the ‘true’ *sutras*, because the teachings of the Buddha did not rely on either the spoken or written word. However, the people of China were deemed to not be ready for them and the fictive pilgrims had to turn around and request parchments inscribed with text in order to complete their journey home (Grousset, 1932).

Bodhidharma has not been the subject of popular films or theatre like Xuanzang although he is immortalised in Chinese popular novels by authors such as Jin Yong in his *The Legend of the Condor Horses* where our hero is known as Damo, the ‘blue eyed barbarian’. As I mentioned earlier, legend says that Bodhidharma sat for an extended period in a cave near the Shaolin monastery, and a number of gruesome stories are associated with this period of seclusion. After seven years, Bodhidharma fell asleep and he was so disturbed by his weakness that he cut off his own eyelids to prevent it happening again. In mythology, those eyelids fell to the ground and became the very first tea leaves. While the Chinese Emperor Shen Nong is honoured with the discovery of tea in 2737 BCE, there are no origin myths for tea leaves other than the Bodhidharma

story. And in remembrance of Bodhidharma, monks, especially in Japan, drink tea in order to stay awake during their meditation. From Japan there are also stories that say that after nine years of meditation in the cave, Bodhidharma’s arms and legs fell off, and that is why he is depicted as a ‘Daruma’ doll in that country.

Bodhidharma’s cave, about a mile from the Shaolin Temple, is a focal point for the bricoleur. In one narrative, our hero stared a hole right through the wall with the power of his gaze. In another, he cast his shadow on a rock and his image was imprinted upon it. That rock is one of the holy relics in the Shaolin monastery.

Another holy relic of the Indian monk is associated with a bizarre tale linked to his final days. At an advanced age Bodhidharma wanted to return to India, but before he could do so, he was poisoned by a jealous monk and buried on Mt. Hsiungerh. But as with Jesus, the sacred narratives indicate that he had conquered death. He would not be denied passage to India. On his way home, barefoot and carrying a single sandal tied to his walking stick, he encountered a young Chinese merchant in the Pamirs Mountains coming from India (Broughton, 1999:4). Now, if I was the myth-maker I would have made sure that it was Xuanzang coming the other way. It is not too far-

Figure 3 : A depiction of Bodhidharma as a Japanese ‘Daruma’ wishing doll.



Note : Owners will paint in one eye, make a wish, and when it comes true, paint in the other. Daruma dolls are made so that they will wobble but never fall, regardless of the physical disturbance.

fetched to think that Xuanzang and Bodhidharma might have met if we accept that Bodhidharma lived for 150 years! But, in the story that we have, the Chinese envoy Song Yunfeng greeted Bodhidharma on the road and asked who he was and why he was carrying a single sandal. The Indian identified himself but would not explain the sandal. When the young Chinese merchant reached the royal court and relayed his story, he was denounced as a liar because Bodhidharma was dead and buried. An order was given to exhume the monk's body, but in so doing the Emperor's men found in the grave only a single sandal. That sandal was venerated as a holy relic in the Shaolin monastery but its present location is unknown (Ferguson, 2012:359).

Xuanzang lived a long life and dedicated himself to translating the Buddhist *sutras* into Chinese. Some of his translations, for example of the *Heart Sutra*, are still in use today. He also started his own school of Buddhism but it was short-lived. Xuanzang refused all offers by the Tang Emperor for higher service and such was his aura and mystique that his fame grew and grew. Following his death, various pieces of his body were venerated as holy relics. His skull, for example, was held in the Temple of Great Compassion in Tianjin until 1956 but is now in Nalanda in India.^[6] Other pieces of his body are said to be elsewhere in China and in Japan.

By contrast, there are relatively few factual accounts of Bodhidharma's dwelling places beyond Guangzhou and Nanjing, and only a handful of commemorative sites, but many of these did not survive the Japanese invasion or the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The cave on Bear's Ear Mountain is the most prominent in terms of pilgrimage, but it is also the focus of more grisly tales. The aforementioned Chinese monk Shen Guang wished to learn from Bodhidharma but was repeatedly rejected. According to Hsuan Hua (1999), this monk who had once physically abused Bodhidharma now stood outside his cave in the snow, day after day, seeking an audience. Finally, Bodhidharma relented and offered Shen Guang a challenge. He would take him on as a pupil only when the snow turned red. Shen Guang responded by cutting off his own arm as a show of his utmost dedication to the search for enlightenment. Bodhidharma, impressed by this show

of faith, would go on to entrust this man, renamed Huike, with the robe and bowl of his lineage. Today Huike is recognised as the 'Second Ancestor' of Chinese Buddhism (Ferguson, 2012:x).

How much of all this is truth and how much is fiction, and to what extent does it matter? At the very least, it is known that Xuanzang and Bodhidharma represent two distinct sects of Mahayana Buddhism. The former, of the Imperial-Way School, believed in gradual enlightenment, while the latter believed in sudden enlightenment (Ferguson, 2012:350). Furthermore, they were also divided in their attachment to the imperial court. Xuanzang was intimately linked to the Tang Dynasty royal family, whereas Bodhidharma completely avoided the imperial court except for his famed meeting with Emperor Wu.

If factual detail regarding the lives and legacies of our heroes is not of critical importance, then what is the purpose of the extensive myth-making? As philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1990) reminds us, the story defines the identity of our heroes, not the heroes themselves. To rely solely on the one lone historical reference to Bodhidharma, for example, where he comments on the architectural merits of the nine-level Yongningsi pagoda is, according to McRae (2014: 129), to miss the point of the narratives entirely. The hagiographical identity of Bodhidharma has functioned dynamically within Chinese culture and religious traditions over many centuries. The same is also true of Xuanzang, as I will explain.

The Pilgrim's and the Myth-Maker's Legacy

The rich history of economic, religious and cultural exchange between India and China – two countries separated by immense geographical barriers – represents an outstanding case study in a type of diplomacy and cultural interaction that is all too rare in the world today. These trade routes, both the overland and maritime, were named in honour of a single commodity, silk, but the road was also illuminated by a different commodity; narratives of a most inspiring and extraordinary nature. For the Chinese, India was a fabled land of perfection at the centre of the Buddhist world. The old Chinese word for India in Sanskrit was Yin-tu or 'moon'. According to Xuanzang, India was spoken of as the moon since the 'sun of Buddha had set' and a succession of holy people had followed teaching his lessons just as the moon sheds its bright light and influence. Many Chinese monks suffered from what has been called a 'borderland

6. In 2007, the Xuanzang Memorial in Nalanda was jointly inaugurated by dignitaries from India and China to celebrate the historical connection between the two countries and to be a platform for the exchange of ideas in the future.

complex' (Kieschnick and Shahar, 2014: 5) and beginning in medieval times, the Chinese would try to replicate the sacred landscape of the west in both the people's imaginations and in their sacred architecture.

But China, too, was a fabled land for the peoples of the West. In Indian culture, the east represented hope, and it was the direction of prayer and worship. Attar's 12th century Sufi classic *Conference of the Birds*, attributes China's many blessings to a 'feather' of the God or heavenly king (represented by a phoenix) landing in that country late one moonless night at the dawn of time. As the text outlines, it was in China that God first appeared to human sight and rumours of his fame spread everywhere. As Attar (1984) says:

Throughout the world [people] separately conceived an image of its shape, and all believed their private fantasies were true. In China this feather is still on view, whence comes the saying . . . Seek knowledge, even in China.

What has been the role of the imagination and of myth-making in cementing this long-lasting peaceful relationship between India and China? What is the role of pilgrims and pilgrimage? In this paper I have focused on both the 'truth' and the various myth-enhanced accounts of our self-described ambassadors of peace and enlightenment. Myth, like language, is dynamic and 'democratic'. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, 'Language is a city to the building of which every human being brought a stone.' When people find a particular word or myth useful in describing a new situation, even if they have to borrow from elsewhere, they will do so. They will repurpose these 'things' for new challenges and opportunities. But if myth is more than just an explanation of the world, of history, and of destiny, as Paul Ricoeur (1990) argues, then what is the message of our bricoleur? In our case studies, the mythologised accounts of Xuanzang and Bodhidharma elevate what were already powerful stories onto a higher plane, allowing pilgrims to appreciate more fully the teachings of the Buddha and also the magnitude of our heroes' devotion. The myths also provide guidance and direction for all those who came afterwards, those individual pilgrims searching for those ultimate truths that are beyond words. But this reification process has obscured the manner in which our heroes' ongoing legacy is orchestrated by the pilgrims themselves, for when they give their animated and miracle-filled accounts of their journeys, they inspire others, and in so doing help maintain Buddhism's relevance and ascendancy.

Conclusion

In summary, it is evident that the bricoleur has made heroes of Xuanzang and Bodhidharma not just to teach people about Buddhism, but also to give pilgrims the courage to live up to the timeless ideals that they embraced. The Buddha preached peace and an end to greed, hatred and delusion, and on pilgrimage the noble task of easing the suffering of humankind comes into focus. But journeys of this nature are challenging; both of our heroes were threatened with violence in the historical and pseudo-historical accounts that have been handed down to the present. Pilgrims embracing the legacy of our heroes will be forced to verify and validate their own motives and desires along the difficult path and, in so doing, their faith and beliefs, even their life's purpose, will be called into question (Senn, 2002:132).

Long ago Xuanzang and Bodhidharma became immortal instruments of a greater purpose; the turning of the wheel of *dharma* (law). The extraordinary narratives of their exploits, which are always open to revision and enhancement, ensure that the monks' lives remain immediate and accessible to all. Pilgrims today who are yearning for the divine will seek to find through their journeys what Bodhidharma described as the 'wordless truth'. For him this truth was like a bright candle in a dark room, or the bright moon when the clouds open (Ferguson, 2012: 312). And it was this jointly-held sacred Buddhist vision that would form the basis of peaceful engagements between South and East Asia along the Silk Road that would last for well over a millennium.

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