

INTERPRETERS IN XUANZANG'S PILGRIMAGE IN SEVENTH-CENTURY ASIA

Intérpretes en el peregrinaje de Xuanzang en el Asia del siglo diecisiete

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ABSTRACT: The documented achievements of Xuanzang (600–664), a seventh-century Buddhist pilgrim, centre overwhelmingly on his voluminous Chinese translation of sutras, his practice of team translation, his translation methods, and his participation in the oral translation tradition of Buddhist texts. However, his 17-year pilgrimage in South and Central Asia, chronicled in the biography and travelogue of Xuanzang, incidentally also provides significant clues to interpreting records of historical value. In his pursuit of the Right Dharma (Buddhist Path) in his pilgrimage passing through 110 Asian states, how did Xuanzang cope with problems arising from language barriers? Who were the interpreters assisting Xuanzang regarding language and communication issues? Who were the patrons, if any, of these interpreters? Or did these interpreters, in the capacities of guides and cross-borders traders in Xuanzang's travelling company, simply volunteer to be his linguistic go-betweens? This article attempts to answer these queries in a bid to explore the nature of interpreting practice at the time. These findings not only shed light on the general study of interpreting history in Asia in the first millennium, but also provide substantial archival evidence that captures interpreting scenarios in the Buddhist context.

Keywords: history of interpreting, Xuanzang's interpreters, first-millennium interpreting, Central Asian interpreters, interpreting assistance of the steppe tradition.

RESUMEN: El conocimiento documentado de Xuanzang (600-664), un peregrino budista del siglo séptimo, gira alrededor, mayoritariamente, de su voluminosa traducción de los sutras, su hábito de traducción en grupo, sus métodos de traducción, y su participación en la tradición de traducción oral de textos budistas. Sin embargo, su peregrinaje de diecisiete años por Asia central y meridional, narrado con detalle en la biografía y libro de viajes de Xuanzang, de tanto en tanto también suministra claves fundamentales para interpretar el valor de los hechos históricos registrados. En su búsqueda del buen Dharma (el camino budista) mediante su peregrinaje a través de 110 estados asiáticos, ¿cómo se enfrentó Xuanzang con los problemas que surgirían por causa de las barreras lingüísticas? ¿Qué intérpretes le ayudaron para superar las dificultades lingüísticas y de comunicación? ¿Quién contrataba, si es que lo hizo alguien, a dichos intérpretes? O más bien se trataba de guías y comerciantes transfronterizos que como sus compañeros de viaje se ofrecerían voluntarios para ejercer el papel de intermediarios lingüísticos. Este artículo intentará dar respuesta a estas preguntas y con ello explorar la práctica de la interpretación en aquel tiempo. No solo se ampliará el conocimiento de la historia de la interpretación en Asia durante el primer milenio, sino que se aportarán datos documentales que ayuden a describir la práctica de la interpretación en un contexto budista.

Palabras clave: historia de la interpretación, intérpretes de Xuanzang, interpretación en el primer milenio, intérpretes centroasiáticos, recurso a la interpretación en la tradición de las estepas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since Edward Said (1983) put forward the concept of the travel of theories between places, cultures, and disciplines, the metaphor of travels has been adapted in and applied to various areas of study in the humanities. The imagery of travels and its relation to translation has been a popular theme in the cultural study of translation in recent decades. Not only has 'travel' been used conceptually as a metaphor for the act of translation (Clifford 1997), the more concrete link between travel and translation has also been further extrapolated by Cronin (2000), using examples from different travelling contexts. In an anthropological perspective, Clifford poignantly relates the mindset of finding oneself in an alien country as follows:

The diasporic and hybrid identities produced by these movements can be both restrictive and liberating. They stitch together languages, traditions, and places in coercive and creative ways, articulating embattled homelands, powers of memory, styles of transgression, in ambiguous relation to national and transnational structures (1997: 10).

Foreign travels are restrictive for the obvious reason that one is required to operate in a strange environment in which your native language is of rather limited use. Yet, the travelling experience can be highly creative and liberating when one tries to survive and operate by overcoming the linguistic and cultural hurdles. Theoretically, the confrontation with the alien context would quite fruitfully enable one to think more critically, and therefore more creatively, about one's native language and culture (Hermans 2007). Yet, travelling to different countries was an extravagant and luxurious pursuit in pre-modern times, and certainly not the pastime of ordinary people. In fact, many bourgeois travellers in medieval Europe engaged in their romantic foreign adventures, chaperoned by servants, were probably secured with a well-developed infrastructure of guides, assistants, suppliers, and translators (Fabian 1983).

A more specific travel with religious connotation is pilgrimage, the discussion of which is not overlooked by translation scholars in the European tradition. Carmine Di Biase's (2006) edited volume on travel and translation, taking a historical perspective of the subject, puts together studies of various pilgrimage records in England and Europe from the 13th through 18th centuries. Included in this volume also are personal adventures made by some British gentlemen to experience life in 'remote' Italy during the Romantic Period.

Translation is a fact of life in these overseas travelling experiences. And being a stranger in foreign places reminds oneself constantly of the needs to bridge linguistic and cultural barriers, either in the gestures you make or the words you utter.

Rarely documented, however, is that long before the European pursuit for extended travels and foreign adventures, dozens of Buddhist itinerant monks, from China, Yamato (known as Japan after 700 AD), and Silla (part of the Korean peninsular), in the early part of the first millennium, had undergone difficult sojourns to reach, or attempt to reach, India, where Buddhism originated (Beal 1911). The most prominent of such pilgrim monks of all time was Xuanzang 玄奘 (600–664), who was a household name in East Asia and India. Although Xuanzang is notable in his systematic sutra translation and translation principles, this study chose to examine Xuanzang as a user of interpreting services at the time. This article introduces Xuanzang,¹ an oriental monk in the seventh-century, and hopes to discuss his interpreting encounters in Central Asia, based on his biographical and travelling records. It is relevant to Translation Studies, since it presents interlingual contexts as witnessed and archived by this observant monk on his return to China at a time so far back into history, before translation or interpreting theories even exist. The presentation of Xuanzang's interpreting encounters serves to engage readers to the norm of interpreting as practised in a remote time and space, authentically documented by the pilgrim himself. The importance of thinking historically is that one would be forced to examine the process of locating oneself in an unfamiliar context, to the extent that a location is not simply a site on the itinerary, but a site that triggers and facilitates a series of encounters and translation needs (Clifford 1997). Theo Hermans, in his extrapolation of a new meaning of thick translation, also points out the necessity to examine translation concepts and practices in non-Western cultures, before one is sufficiently equipped to be self-reflexive and self-critical in the development of Translation Studies (2007). The case of Xuanzang's Indian pilgrimage in the seventh century therefore provides not just a picture of interpreting encounters in Central Asia at the time, but would also offer us a chance to refresh our understanding of a pilgrim's travel without planned infra-structural provision as well-off romantic adventurers did a millennium later in Europe.

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2. WHO IS XUANZANG?

Xuanzang is prominent in Asia as Marco Polo is in the West, but the monk's extensive travels came half a millennium earlier than that of his western counterpart. He spent 17 years in a pilgrimage from China to India via Central Asia from 627 to 645, in pursuit of the Buddhist wisdom by means of active learning from Indian masters and seeking original Sanskrit sutras.²

Xuanzang was the youngest of the four sons born into a Chen family in Henan, a family with generations of civilian official positions, thanks to the family's eminent Confucius and classical learning. Bright with a gift in intellect, he started to receive Buddhist instruction and study various sutras in his early teens, as his elder brother was a monk. He was soon given a special permission, by an official who could discern Xuanzang's exceptional talent, to enter monastic life at Luoyang, Henan, at an unusual age of thirteen (only fourteen youth were selected across the country at the time). Eager to broaden his Buddhist knowledge, he listened to the lectures of Buddhist masters from different monasteries with the intent to grasp the essence of various sutras.

His learning from the mentors, however, was interrupted by the political turmoil in the last years of the Sui dynasty (589–618), which had disrupted the normal operation of most monasteries in China. Xuanzang and his brother then moved on to other areas, from Chang'an at first, and then, later on, to Sichuan, then a remote and less civilized region of China. Within three years, he thoroughly mastered the Buddhist texts of different schools. Yet, the more he learned, the more he was aware of, and troubled by, the contradictions existing in the various interpretations of Buddhist doctrines in Chinese sutras, which were co-translated by Central Asian and Chinese monks, not directly from Sanskrit but from Sogdian or Bactrian, centuries ago. Unfortunately, the Buddhist masters he listened to could neither give convincing answers to his queries nor unblock his confused mind. At a loss of which interpretation to follow on a range of fundamental issues in his Buddhist learning, such as the presence of Buddhist traits in people and if everyone has the chance to achieve nirvana, he decided that the existing Chinese translation of sutras might be mistranslated and misleading, if not fragmented. Thus, at the age of 27, he was

² Since the spread of Buddhism around the early Second century in China, the various Chinese sutras being circulated were mostly a result of indirect translation, via languages of Central Asian region, such as Sogdian and Tocharian, not direct translation from Sanskrit by competent bilingual of Sanskrit and Chinese.

determined to approach the crux of the problems by making pilgrimage to India to learn from Indian masters and seeking authentic Sanskrit sutras to learn thoroughly.

Yet, at a time when the Tang dynasty (618–907) was newly established, and the border region of China was not entirely pacified, Xuanzang's attempt to travel to India through Central Asia was viewed with much scepticism and altogether banned by the government. With much struggle and sneaking around, Xuanzang succeeded to leave China and embarked on his pilgrimage. Xuanzang was distinct for his reputation as an extraordinarily learned and insightful monk, having impressed the Indian monks and Hindu Brahmins in numerous religious debates. Not less notable was his scale of translating Sanskrit sutras into Chinese over twenty years on his return to China.

He did not return until 645 when ironically—thanks to his fame among Asian and Central Asian rulers—he was greeted with elaborate imperial ceremony in China. He collected no less than 657 volumes of Sanskrit sutras and numerous Buddhist relics from his pilgrimage. These turned out to have left an important legacy to the intellectual history of China and East Asia for the centuries to come. Xuanzang pursued the Chinese translation of Sanskrit sutras, with teams of translators, for the rest of his life that ended in 664.

3. DATA SOURCES: XUANZANG'S BIOGRAPHY AND TRAVELOGUE

Most studies of Xuanzang, in relation to translation, focus on his procedural and segregated methods of translating Buddhist sutras and his promotion of Buddhist translation assemblies on his return.³ Taking a less conventional perspective in Xuanzang's study, this article proposes to study the interpreters having been deployed to facilitate his pilgrimage. My primary sources of reference are *A Biography of the Tripitaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty* (thereafter, the biography), and the *Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang Period* (thereafter, the travelogue). His travelogue, commissioned by emperor Taizong of Tang China, was completed in 646, within a year upon his return. It was an oral account given by Xuanzang, while his disciple, Bianji, put it down in writing. His

³ The translation of sutras in the form of translation assemblies, with fine division of labor, had, by Xuanzang's time, been in existence for about three centuries. Yet, Xuanzang was unprecedented in convening such assemblies as a monk competent in both Chinese and Sanskrit.

biography was completed in 688, five chapters in all, written and compiled by Xuanzang's disciple, Huili, primarily. The whole text was fine-tuned and polished by his other disciple, Yancong who supplemented the text with five more chapters, to cover the monk's life after his return to China, in his editing process. These works document, based on Xuanzang's observation and recollection, his encounters with foreigners, the geography, climate, local products, people, spoken and written languages, history, politics, economic life, religion, culture, and ethnographic customs in 110 countries and city-states stretching from present-day Xinjiang to Sri Lanka.

Michael Cronin points out that "travel implies return and the accounts are the fruits of that return" and ultimately, the traveler would return to language to recapture the journey verbally (2000: 35). The history of translation activities in first-millennium Asia is a fascinating and yet largely under-researched topic in Translation Studies. It is under-researched because of the absence of archival evidence before the second millennium whence written languages were either not yet developed in most Asian states, or historiography was not given due attention in those days in Asia. This is not the case for China. China prides itself for its time-honoured historiography tradition that goes back to three millennia. Other Asian countries, such as Japan, India, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Korea, in fact, need to refer to the Chinese archives to reconstruct their earlier and yet unrecorded, if not unknown, histories. Building on this archival advantage, this article aims to explore the nature of historical interpreting activities during Xuanzang's pilgrimage, as documented in his biography and travelogue. In particular, this article attempts to examine the polyglots in the Western Regions, where they thrived as ad hoc interpreters and mediated verbally, for peoples criss-crossing national, cultural or linguistic boundaries there at the time.

4. XUANZANG'S LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

As a young monk, Xuanzang had been visiting different monasteries to learn from eminent monks. In Chang'an, he made acquaintance with an Indian scholar and learned from him about the *Yogācārabhūmi* sutra that might clear Xuanzang's troubled mind. Knowing that the chief-monk in the Nālandā Monastery, Śīlabhadra, known to have expounded this sutra well, Xuanzang decided to go to India and learn from this master.

In preparation for his Indian trip, Xuanzang spent three years learning Sanskrit and Indian vernacular tongues from Central Asian monks and civilians residing in the capital (Beal 1911: xxvii; Waley 1952 / 2005: 15). What he had learned in China might have been more basic Sanskrit. It was mentioned in his biography that his linguistic learning continued during his sojourn in Central Asia and India. In Kashmir from 629–630, for instance, he devoted to secular studies such as Sanskrit grammar, phonology, and logic in the evenings in a monastery, while attending master Vasubandhu's lectures during the day. It was recorded that Xuanzang had conversed, lectured, and debated in fluent Sanskrit and Indian dialects during his Indian pilgrimage. When Xuanzang stayed in the Nālandā monastery, he also attended courses in grammar and Sanskrit. Three pages of Sanskrit grammar in summary were quite awkwardly included in his biography. In his verbal account with Huili, who put together contents for this biography, Xuanzang notes that one who is skilled in Sanskrit may write his compositions precisely and may express himself elegantly (Wriggins 2004). This nice appreciation of Sanskrit, which Xuanzang had been studying for so many years in China, Kashmir, and India, certainly prepares his later career as a Sanskrit translator into Chinese, and occasionally, at the emperor's requests, translating India-bound diplomatic missives from Chinese into Sanskrit.

In his record on pilgrimage around India, there is no reference of his need for Sanskrit interpreters, or interpreters for any Indian vernacular either. He seemed to have made his way around just fine in different parts of India. His exchange and interaction with fellow Indian monks, as found in his biography, displays a sense of immediacy and transparency. In short, linguistic barrier was not a problem for Xuanzang in India. However, this was not the case for Xuanzang on his way to India through the various Central Asian states, since he left the kingdom of Gaochang (Turfan) in 627.

5. MACRO LINGUISTIC CONTEXT IN FIRST-MILLENNIUM ASIA

Two background factors are important considerations in the analyses of interpreting events documented in Xuanzang's pilgrimage record. First, written Chinese was a recognized medium for wider communication among a good number of Asian countries in the first millennium under the cultural impact of the Chinese learning sphere. This learning sphere is characterized by Asian countries' active learning of China's political and legal institutions via its written histories and classics. Thus, written Chinese was considered a tool for

higher learning among these Asian counterparts. A case in point is that diplomatic letters presented to imperial China by many Asian rulers were, in fact, written in classical Chinese. But how far into the Western Regions, among the numerous states, did the written Chinese extend its impact? How common was it being used as one of the written media in diplomatic discourse? These questions can be indirectly addressed by an examination of how far Xuanzang could ease his way off communicating with peoples in different states in Central Asia.

Second, Xuanzang's pilgrimage coincided with the consolidating stage of the Tang dynasty in China. Tang China's cosmopolitan mindset had encouraged large scale of political, cultural, and commercial exchanges with other countries. There was an unprecedented presence of Central Asian settlers in the profession of merchants, traders, trading agents, or interpreters in major cities in China. In the capital alone, there were hundreds of thousands of taxable residents of non-Chinese ethnicities during emperor Taizong's reign (626–649). How well these Central Asian merchants, traders or mediators might have mastered the spoken Chinese, taking the broad sense of the term, having settled in China for generations, is a related issue. Such sizeable foreign traders or mediating agents travelling along the Silk Road, from Chang'an to Central Asia, must have been a major channel through which the spread of the Chinese language into the region was promoted. That might have an impact on Xuanzang's communication ease in his pilgrimage in part of the Western Regions as well.

6. LINGUISTIC LEVELLING ON OASIS STATES ON CHINA'S WESTERN FRONTIER

In Liangzhou, a border city of western China, the biography reads, “[it] was a linking place with the western tribes and the various countries located to the east of the Pamirs. Merchants came and went from there without intermission” (Li 1995: 19).

Here, Xuanzang noticed the trading activities between China and the western tribes. Wondering how he could leave China without being caught by soldiers in the watch towers, Xuanzang ran into a Sogdian (ancient Iranian by ethnicity) called Shi Pantuo, in a monastery. This Sogdian promised to take the monk across the border to Yiwu (the oasis kingdom of Hami), yet he was cold-

feet and threatened Xuanzang to drop the plan, which was a blatant violation of China's law to forbid its nationals from leaving for the Western Regions. The monk's exchange with this Sogdian guide seemed to have been conducted smoothly in Chinese, considering that Sogdians travelling between Central Asia and China in those days were mostly well-versed in the Turkic and Chinese languages as well.

The impact of Chinese also extended to some border states outside China in present-day Xinjiang province. It took the monk two days to walk from China's border to Yiwu, where Xuanzang was greeted by the King and three Chinese monks residing there. It seems, again, that Chinese was still used there apart from other languages, given the presence of, and naturally contact with, Chinese residents in this neighbouring kingdom of China. On learning the arrival of Xuanzang, the king of Gaochang, named Qu Wentai 麴文泰 (r. 624–640), whose country worshipped Buddhism, requested that the monk pay his kingdom a visit. Gaochang, inhabited by multi-nationals and multilinguals, was then a key juncture between the East and the West, in a more microscopic sense of the words, with plenty of foreign merchants trading there. Trading receipts thus far unearthed in China suggested that these trades involved at least peoples from Kucha, Western Turks, Sogdian, and China. Gaochang served at the time as a resting point for traders on the road and a centre for stocking up material supplies for subsequent journeys.

These oasis kingdoms were often vassal states of, or heavily influenced politically and culturally by, either the Western Turks or China (sometimes both) in the early to mid-seventh century. As such, these states were usually caught between nomadic hordes from the north-west and the sedentary civilization of China to the south-east. In a study of Gaochang, Meng Xianshi (2004: 215) points out that the Gaochang people were “ancestrally from Han Chinese primarily, and the Han Chinese culture was the dominant culture there” (my translation). The chapter on Gaochang in the *Zhoushu* (History of Zhou China, 636/1971: 915) says that “its written language is the same as that of China, but the Sogdian writing is also used there” (my translation). The *Liangshu* (History of Liang China, 636/1973: 811) records that, “[Gaochang] people's language is somewhat similar to that of China” (my translation). Recent archaeological finds in a tomb, in the region, uncovered a transaction note regarding the sale of a Sogdian girl, made in 639, between a Tashkent and a Samarkand Sogdian, and the note was written in Sogdian obviously (Lin Meicun, 1992). This note indicates the use of the Sogdian language in

Gaochang in the seventh century, coinciding the time of Xuanzang's visit. Considering Gaochang's bilingual usage of Chinese and Sogdian, it seems that Xuanzang could easily converse with the royal pair and people there. In response to the king's generous provision prepared for Xuanzang's further journey to India, the monk actually wrote a long letter to express his gratitude, and that letter was written in classical Chinese.

7. INTERPRETING NEEDS FROM GAOCHANG TO THE WESTERN TURKS

On leaving Gaochang for the camp of the Western Turkish khan though, Xuanzang would be passing through a number of oasis states that spoke different languages. That is why the Gaochang king commissioned his officer as a special envoy, Huanxin (Chinese transliterated term of a foreign name), to conduct the monk to the audience of the khan. The king also arranged to have twenty four letters of introduction be prepared for rulers of those states Xuanzang would probably visit. The letter to the khan reads,

The Master, who is my younger brother, wishes to seek the Dharma in the Brahmanic countries. May the Khan treat him with kindness, as he would treat me. I would also request that you issue orders to the countries in the West to send the master out of their domains from stage to stage by corvée horses (Li 1995: 33).

These letters and other gifts would work to facilitate the monk's journey with necessary supplies and relays of horses, apart from protection. Whatever language these letters were written, they served to communicate the pilgrim's desire to travel to India to seek Buddhist wisdom and authentic sutras.

According to Xuanzang's biography, the languages spoken in the several countries he visited after leaving Gaochang were different and alien to him. Regarding the language of Karashahr (also called Agni), the travelogue records, "[its] language was taken from that of India, with minor alteration" (my translation). As to the language of Kucha, Xuanzang's record says, "[its] language is taken from that of India, with some marked changes" (my translation). This is an indirect piece of evidence in support of Xuanzang's competence in Indian languages. If not, he would not be constantly using the Indian language(s) as a reference point to differentiate other Central Asian

languages. Xuanzang's linguistic knowledge of the Indian language(s) must have reached a certain level to have detected subtle differences and etymological relations between the languages he encountered. As Xuanzang noted, unlike the king of Gaochang, the king of Kucha and his wife were not of Chinese descent, nor were their appearance Chinese at all. The Kucha king, according to Xuanzang, had red hair and blue eyes. These facial features seem to be representative of an Indo-European people in race. It is quite likely that Xuanzang would need Huanxin's mediation to converse with the royal pair, although his account did not specify such intermediation.

The next country Xuanzang visited, in the chaperon of Huanxin, were Bālukā (Gumo in the Chinese archive), whose "language only displayed minor difference from that of Kucha, and their grammar was the same" (Wriggins 2004: 28). We cannot say for sure, but the named official, Huanxin, might have been someone who could speak the language used in these small kingdoms and mediated, possibly in relay, for the monk. As such, despite the marked foreignness of their languages as noted by Xuanzang, he seemed to display no trace of communication difficulties there. Having no written evidence to document the exact interpreting situation, we can only conjecture based on the circumstantial factors. However, more specific references to interpreters were twice mentioned during Xuanzang's exchange with the khan and at the end of the monk's visit.

Soon after Xuanzang reached the city of Sūyāb (Sogdiana), he came across the Turkish khan, Yehu, who was proceeding to a hunting expedition with two hundred officers. It was a brief greeting encounter with polite exchanges. Xuanzang's biography did not mention that the exchange was mediated by interpreters from the Turkish camp. But it must have been the case, since in fact the use of interpreter for their exchange was overtly referred to, for the first and only time, three days later when the khan formally welcomed the monk's visit to his tent for a feast attended also by other envoys from China and Gaochang. The khan came out to greet Xuanzang when he still had thirty steps to take to reach his tent. After relating his regards to Xuanzang through the interpreter (傳語慰問訖, Xuanzang 646: 28), the khan led the monk to his seat. If this was indeed the case, I believe the interactions between the khan and Xuanzang must have been mediated by an interpreter throughout, although the interpreter's presence was not indicated in Xuanzang's record of their initial and accidental encounter.

The sudden reference to the interpreter at this point in Xuanzang's biography is not entirely surprising. Unlike his pilgrimage in several little kingdoms since he left Gaochang, Xuanzang was actually regarded quite highly by the khan, who at the time headed a prominent steppe empire, with extended influence in north and central Asian regions. Xuanzang was aware of the khan's military prowess, and therefore the pilgrim was rather elaborate in his description of the khan's banquet thrown for him and other envoys. None of the English translators (Beal 1884; Li, 1995; Wriggins, 1996/2004) of this part of the pilgrim's record, however, captures the subtle documentation of this interpreter found in Xuanzang's Chinese biography (Huili 688: 28).

Interpreters were not just required of in the khan's exchanges with the monk; they were also essential to Xuanzang's ongoing journey to Kapisa before reaching India, his final destination. This linguistic need was well considered by the khan in his preparation for the monk's departure. On hearing that Xuanzang was about to continue his pilgrimage onto India and learning the route he was planning to take,

可汗乃令軍中訪解漢語及諸國音者，遂得年少，曾到長安數年，通解漢語，即封為摩啜達官。作諸國書，令摩啜送法師到迦畢試國。
(Xuanzang 646: 29)

...the khan then instructed his military unit to locate someone with a spoken knowledge of the Han (Chinese) language and the vernacular of other states [in Central Asia]. A young man was identified to have lived in Chang'an for several years, and was able to understand Chinese. [He was thus] immediately bestowed an official title. [He was asked] to come up with letters of introduction for various states and was instructed to chaperone the Buddhist master to Kapisi (or Kapisa, present-day Afghanistan). (Lung's translation, 2009)

This young soldier was singled out from the khan's military unit because of his Chinese knowledge and his years' of living experience in China's capital. He was also deemed to be the monk's interpreter and chaperone thanks to his competence in the spoken languages of a range of oasis states. This new task to send the monk to Kapisa came with the award of an official title.

Samuel Beal (1884) translated this part a bit differently. It goes as follows:

The khan then ordered inquiry to be made in his army for any one who could speak the Chinese language and that of other countries. So they found a young man who had lived for many years at Chang'an, and thoroughly understood the Chinese language. He was appointed, under the title of Mo-to-ta-kwan, to prepare letters of commendation for the different countries and to accompany the Master to the kingdom of Kapisa. (1884: 44)

Li Rongxi's (1995) translation of the same text in English is a bit different. It goes as follows:

Thus the khan issued an order to find among his army men someone who could speak the Han language and the dialects of different countries. A young man who had stayed in Chang'an for several years and understood the Han language was found and appointed official translator. He was asked to write letters of introduction to various countries and to escort the Master to the country of Kapisa. (1995: 44)

Samuel Beal (1884) refers the new title bestowed to the young soldier as Mo-to-ta-kwan, a sound translation of the Turkic term. Li was more specific in suggesting that the soldier was appointed official translator, which after all was what his task would be like when he was with Xuanzang enroute to Kapisa. Given the existing evidence, however, I cannot say for sure Mo-to-ta-kwan refers directly to the title of translation official, although "ta-kwan" did denote "officials" in the Turkic language. Nothing explicit was said about interpreting or interpreters from this point onwards in the biography.

8. IMPLICATIONS

8.1. ROYAL PATRONS OF XUANZANG'S INTERPRETERS

As the monk walked westward further from China, the impact of written Chinese seemed to have weakened. The role of the interpreter was therefore getting more critical. The known interpreters for Xuanzang in his Central Asian sojourn were affiliated to, and sent for by, state rulers to facilitate the monk's pilgrimage. Seen from this angle, Xuanzang's interpreting assistance was bestowed by these royal patrons. The monk who had fled China—in defiance of its law to forbid nationals leaving for the Western

Regions—would now, ironically, have official standing in Central Asia, although the mandate came from the steppe brotherhood states of Gaochang and the Western Turks, not Tang China. Most of the petty oasis kings and the khan of the Western Turks were at his service (Wriggins 2004). The khan's explicit instruction to arrange an interpreter from his camp was a thoughtful favor. This design ensured that the monk would not be inconvenienced by communication breakdowns in Central Asia, where different languages were spoken.

This privileged treatment is of course due to the monk's previous patron when he visited Gaochang, which was a vassal state of the Western Turks and had a right to claim protection, in the spirit of brotherhood for his "brother" (Li 1995: 32), Xuanzang. As a typical practice in the Central Asian oasis politics and tradition, the Gaochang king gave Xuanzang twenty-four letters of introduction to be presented to different kingdoms, requesting that they provide assistance and protection to the pilgrim monk. One of these letters was addressed to the khan. Linguistic mediation, apart from other material necessities, was understandably crucial on Xuanzang's way through the various oasis states before he reached India. Likewise, in line with the steppe tradition, the khan also prepared him with more letters of introduction to the petty princes of the Gandharan region. This is why, in Xuanzang's record, special emphasis was placed on documenting the khan's deliberate effort to smooth the monk's way further ahead. In short, the state rulers were the ultimate patron of Xuanzang's interpreters. These interpreters served Xuanzang's linguistic needs in the capacity of an official, Huanxin as the special envoy, and the young Turkish soldier as a Mo-to-ta-kwan.

8.2. OASIS TRADERS AS AD HOC INTERPRETERS

The khan's deliberate effort to arrange an interpreter for Xuanzang was the only distinct reference to interpreting assistance in the monk's pilgrim record. However, I believe there must have been occasions on his way outside the realm of the Indian subcontinent where language mediation was on and off called for. Mediating events were not consciously documented in his travelogue, given its dominant task to document foreign places and peoples. It seems that Xuanzang was more elaborate in his record of encounters with the rulers and a lot milder with his coverage of civilian interaction on his travel through the Central Asian states. There are two possible reasons to justify such

a textual arrangement in the monk's record. First, the travelogue was commissioned by the Chinese emperor, and presumably the ruler would be more interested in the political dynamics and horizon of the oasis states and the Western Turks, a Tang China enemy. In his planning for this travel record, Xuanzang might have put forward the throne's interest in mind and tailor its contents and focus accordingly. Second, Xuanzang's elaborate account of the Gaochang king and the khan might very well have been a reflection of his scale of gratitude for these steppe patrons who closely attended to his needs with provisions sufficient for another twenty years of his pilgrimage.

Yet, we should not overlook the frequent appearance of 'border peoples', peoples who cross borders frequently to make a living, in Xuanzang's record. These probable multilinguals, making entrance to the monk's pilgrim journey, might have served as interpreters for Xuanzang in time of needs. The documentation of these anonymous border characters may have been additional and yet subtle evidence for the traces of intermediation in Xuanzang's pilgrimage (Li 1995: 162). In fact, cross-borders trader was one of the three major categories of travelers on the Silk Road in the first millennium, apart from monks and envoys. These travelers were frequently documented in Xuanzang's biography in contexts other than language mediation, since there were indeed many of them on the move along the Silk Road. Many of them traveled in relay between various oasis states for their trading chiefs to serve the transportation of goods and supplies. These traders were sometimes Xuanzang's caravan companies on the road at different times. For example, when Xuanzang was on his way to the Kathiawar Peninsular (Gujarat), he found more traders than farmers, suggesting that petty traders or diasporic traders as a major means of living at the time in that region. The people of the kingdom of Valabhi on the peninsula, for instance, lived on its trade with the Persian Gulf. It was believed that these traders, in fact, were efficient agent to spread Buddhism in those days when transport was not well developed.⁴ Apart from royal patrons in the Western Regions who had lent mediation experts to

⁴ Religious faith is crucial to these Silk Road traders having to be on the road constantly to make their living, while risking their lives from potentially being ambushed by bandits and jeopardized by tough weather and landscapes. They made extremely strenuous journeys to weather through sandstorm, bandits, and desert solitude. The Buddhist fatalist theory about life and death sinks in well with these caravan traders. According to Xuanzang's biography, two rich merchants, Trapusa and Bhallika (Li 1995: 48), had brought Buddhism to Balkh. This information was verified by shrines, associated with these two nomad traders, being built in the northwest of the city.

Xuanzang to resolve potential communication problems, traders traveling with the pilgrim on part of his way to and from India must have bridged language differences for him as well.

Despite Xuanzang's records of oasis merchants traveling alone or in groups, there is not the slightest mention of the mediation function of these merchant or caravan companies. But these traveling traders, mostly of the Sogdian ethnic origins, were known to be multilingual trading agents, since they traded commodities and regional produce, in relay, to oasis states, along the Silk Road. Most of these traders were Sogdians originated from Samarkand and Tashkent areas. If language mediation was warranted at all in Xuanzang's journey, these Sogdian traders in the monk's company would surely come in handy. The constant documentation of the traveling traders in Xuanzang's biography, apart from its ethnographical validity, might have given us a subtle reference to the linguistic reality in Central Asia at the time whereby these cross-borders traders, in fact, crossed also linguistic and cultural boundaries.

8.3. INTERPRETERS IN RELAY

In Xuanzang's time, the sea route to visit India was not quite explored yet. He took on the journey when there were over a hundred small states, speaking alien tongues, clustering in Central Asia. I noted that the monk, although trained in Sanskrit and Indian languages, met with linguistic barriers that were beyond his will power or spirituality to overcome. He was fortunate to have been a revered monk of high standing. In most states he passed through, either in the Western Regions or Central Asia, he received favorable treatment from the oasis royal rulers. His smooth journey across states that spoke various strange languages was only facilitated with state patronage, notably first endowed by the king of Gaochang, then the Turkish khan. These two rulers, related in vassal term, seemed to have both anticipated the linguistic blockades Xuanzang might face.

The case for the Gaochang king to arrange an official, Huanxin, the only one being named, to chaperon the pilgrim to the Turkish camp was more straightforward, since people in Gaochang also spoke Chinese anyway and the location of a Chinese-speaking interpreter was not difficult. The case for the Turkish khan was more complicated. The khan had to consciously look for someone in his military camp who spoke Chinese as a second or third language. In the case of Xuanzang's sojourn in Central Asia, interpreters with linguistic

knowledge of different vernacular were summoned for distinct segments. If different segments of Xuanzang's journey in Central Asia were viewed from a bird's eye, his use of interpreters, in relay, to make his ways across different linguistic regions suggested the existence of numerous language zones and his contingent needs for regional interpreters there.

9. CONCLUSION

Xuanzang's achievements, having been attained as early as the seventh century, should not be slighted as Marco Polo's journey to China, historically or culturally. Xuanzang's physical vigor and perseverance had been tested by extremes of temperature and landscapes in his pilgrimage. His adventures in pursuit of the authentic sutras have met with huge difficulties. Yet he completed his pilgrimage with all his goals achieved.

This article introduced the more macro political and linguistic background of Xuanzang's Central Asian and Indian pilgrimage. It also provided background information to the retrieval of interpreting history with reference to his biography and travelogue. Although the interpreting traces to ruminate remain relatively limited, the examination of such evidence has given us space to ponder on the unique context in which interpreting operated in the seventh century in Asia. As Michael Cronin remarks,

Interpreters are valuable not only because of what they do but because of who they are. They are generally part of the host community and as such are conduits for privilege 'inside' information on the society and culture. They confer authenticity and verisimilitude on the account. For this reason, the interpreter may become as much an object as an instrument of inquiry in travel writing. (Cronin 2000: 72)

In the present inquiry of interpreters and the history of interpreting in seventh-century Central Asia, the focus on interpreters as an object of study is certainly pertinent. Of no less significance are the authenticity of such interpreters thus located, and crucially the reliability of textual materials from which these interpreters were located. Given the known accuracy and sharpness of Xuanzang's meticulous description of objects, customs, languages, and peoples in his accounts, his depiction of interpreters and interpreting events in his travel account was accorded with a good degree of validity. As Samuel Beal notes in the preface of his English translation of Xuanzang's biography,

His record of these years of travel is a priceless one, for through it we are able to reconstruct the world and ways of Buddhist India of the centuries that have passed. Yet far more priceless still is that record, read between the lines, of a human soul dauntless in disaster, unmoved in the hour of triumph... (Beal 1911: xiii-xiv).

If the rulers in Gaochang and Western Turks had arranged ad hoc interpreters for the monk in the spirit of steppe brotherhood and in realistic anticipation of specific linguistic needs, it is likely that they must have done the same for their diplomatic missions in those days. If that was the best possible manpower resources these rulers could mobilize within their countries, it seems that there was practically no regular interpreting officials in their government framework. Instead, interpreting personnel appeared to have existed and operated only on a need basis in Central Asia at the time. It seems also that the chosen polyglot, in his new capacity as Xuanzang's interpreter, would be given a royal mandate to either take up a new title as a special envoy, or granted a promotion, from a soldier to an officer. Either way, interpreting duties came with instant personal advancement in situation where the state chiefs were, in principle, the interpreting patrons. Unlike interpreters privately hired by civilians whereby monetary reward is expected, interpreters with royal mandate would often be rewarded with official titles.

Travel has been used as a metaphor to denote translation, moving from one language or culture to another. The extended travel of Xuanzang passing through numerous states aptly testified the critical need for interpreters to level out communication obstacles. Some may question the limited capacity to make any generalization based on such interpreting encounters whereby the state rulers were the patrons. It is true that what happened in the interpreting arena among civilians seems to be lacking in Xuanzang's records. However, as I conjectured earlier on, the cross-borders traders, usually of Sogdian ethnic origin, might have been the linguistic go-betweens for civilians. This aspect can only be better understood with further research in this historical time frame and direction. In this connection, the archival value of Xuanzang's travelling records, of pertinence to the history of interpreting, is not as flimsy as it appears. With careful examination, his account might have provided critical hints to the understanding of interpreting activities at the time. This certainly warrants further analyses of Xuanzang's records and different national archives that capture exchanges with Central Asian countries in the first millennium.

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