Japanese Explorers in the Footsteps of Xuanzang

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Abstract: The excavation of Buddhist sites in Chinese Central Asia is a fascinating chapter in the history of modern exploration. Fueled by the British and Russian colonial rivalry in Central Asia, European scholars and explorers embarked on a series of expeditions to investigate the desert sites of northwestern China. The only major non-Western participant in this quest was Ōtani Kōzui, abbot of the largest Buddhist sect in Japan, who organized three expeditions to excavate the Buddhist ruins of Xinjiang. A recurring theme in publications related to the expeditions was the figure of Xuanzang, who had traveled through Central Asia on his way to India more than twelve centuries earlier. This paper examines the context in which Ōtani and his followers evoked Xuanzang, showing how different their perspective was from Aurel Stein's, who also made frequent references to him. The differences reflect not only personal attitudes towards history, religion, and geography but also contemporary intellectual trends in Britain and Japan.

Keywords: Xuanzang, Ōtani Kōzui, Aurel Stein, Central Asia, exploration

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The excavation of Buddhist sites in Chinese Central Asia is a fascinating chapter in the history of modern exploration. Fueled by the British and Russian colonial rivalry in Central Asia, European scholars and explorers embarked on a series of expeditions to investigate the desert sites of northwestern China. The only major non-Western participant in this quest was Count Ōtani Kōzui 大谷光瑞 (1876–1948), abbot of the largest Buddhist sect in Japan, who organized three expeditions to excavate the Buddhist ruins of Xinjiang. The participants of this project acquired a spectacular collection of manuscripts and artifacts which proved highly valuable for reconstructing the past of the region, contributing to our knowledge in a variety of fields and disciplines, including linguistics, philology, art history, Buddhist studies, and economic history. The field diaries, notes, and correspondence produced in connection with the project have been essential for reconstructing the context of the artifacts at the time of their discovery.[1] A recurring theme in publications related to the expeditions was the figure of Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), who had traveled through Central Asia on his way to India more than twelve centuries earlier. The references to the Tang monk represent an intriguing case because he also commonly featured in the writings of M. Aurel Stein (1862–1943).

This paper examines the context in which Ōtani and his followers evoked Xuanzang, showing how different their perspective was from Stein's. The differences reflect not only personal attitudes towards history, religion, and geography but also contemporary intellectual trends in Britain and Japan.

1. The Great Game

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the province of Xinjiang lay on the western periphery of the Qing Empire and was largely inhabited by a non-Han population. It was located between

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[1] E.g. Galambos, 'Buddhist relics from the Western Regions', Jacobs, *The Compensations of Plunder*, Kohl and Green, 'In Search of Textual Treasures'.

Imperial Russia and British India who, eager to safeguard their colonial dominions against each other, were vying for influence in the region. Their rivalry was known as the Great Game, a term popularized in Rudyard Kipling's (1865–1936) novel *Kim*.[2] Although Kipling used the term primarily in reference to the clandestine espionage network of the two powers, it later came to denote their competition in general, extending to the spheres of commerce and science.[3] Clearly, exploration was never independent of colonial aspirations, reconnaissance, and intelligence gathering, and so it is not surprising that many of the explorers came from a military background. On the Russian side, this included officers such as Nikolai M. Przhevalsky (1839–1888) and his protege Pyotr K. Kozlov (1863–1935), whose exploration of Inner Asia was closely linked to Russia's Central Asian expansion and the desire to mitigate the British threat.[4] Similarly, Baron Carl Gustaf Mannerheim (1867–1951), who would years later become the president of Finland, began his career as an officer of the Imperial Russian Army, journeying across Xinjiang in 1908 on a secret intelligence mission.[5]

From their base in India, the British were equally active in exploring and mapping Chinese Central Asia, striving to sustain presence

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[2] See Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*.

[3] As Alexander Morrison ('Beyond the "Great Game"', 694) argues, the Great Game paradigm of Central Asian history primarily assigns agency to Russia and Britain, seeing local rulers and actors as 'mere victims of the whims and maneuverings of the European great powers'. It is also apparent, however, that this was how at the time both sides saw the events and developments in the region, which is why this perspective remains relevant for their competition in the realm of 'scientific exploration'.

[4] Brower, 'Imperial Russia and Its Orient'; Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800–1917*, 72–75; and Andreyev, Baskhanov, and Yusupova, *The Quest for Forbidden Lands*.

[5] For Mannerheim's own narrative of his journey through Central Asia, see *Across Asia from West to East in 1906–1908*. For an overview of Western exploration of Xinjiang in the early twentieth century, see Jacobs, *The Compensations of Plunder*.

in this sensitive region. British officers were encouraged to spend their leave hunting in the Pamirs and adjacent areas, an activity that generated not only a host of internal reports but also popular narratives targeting a wider readership.[6] One of the most impactful visitors was Sir Francis Younghusband (1863–1942), who traveled across China in 1890 and at the end of his journey left behind in Kashgar his assistant and interpreter George Macartney (1867–1945).[7] For the following two decades Macartney served as the British representative, until in 1911 he was promoted to Consul General.[8]

Among the better known explorers to work in Chinese Central Asia was the Hungarian-born British scholar M. Aurel Stein, who led no less than four expeditions to Western China, each time entering from the direction of India.[9] Even though Stein himself was not an officer, he had received military training as a young man in his native Hungary, where he learned the skills of surveying and cartography.[10] Once in British service, the majority of the funding for his expeditions came from the Government of India, which had a vested interest in being informed about Xinjiang and maintaining influence there. Surveying was always a major part of Stein's work and he invariably traveled in the company of Indian surveyors with a military background.[11]

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[6] See, for example, books on hunting in the Pamirs and Chinese Central Asia by Major C. S. Cumberland (*Sport on the Pamirs and Turkistan Steppes*) and Percy Thomas Etherton (*Across the Roof of the World*). A few years later, between 1918 and 1924, Etherton (1879–1963) was to hold the post of British Consul in Kashgar. On the connection of hunting with imperialism, see MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature*.

[7] Everest-Phillips, 'British Consuls in Kashgar'; and *The Heart of a Continent*, 322.

[8] On Macartney, see Skrine and Nightingale, *Macartney at Kashgar*. For a more personal account of their life, see the recollections of his wife Lady Macartney (*An English Lady in Chinese Turkestan*).

[9] For a biography of Aurel Stein, see Mirsky, *Sir Aurel Stein, Archaeological Explorer*.

[10] Iklé, 'Sir Aurel Stein', 145.

[11] These included Lal Singh, Ram Singh, Afraz Gul Khan, and M. Ayub Khan; see Oldham, 'Sir Aurel Stein', 342.

Inspired by the example of European explorers, Ōtani Kōzui, leader of the Nishi Honganji 西本願寺 branch of the Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 sect in Japan, also organized and financed three expeditions with the aim to locate Buddhist ruins and relics, hoping to contribute to the study of the history of Buddhism in Central Asia and its transmission to China.[12] This grand project stretched over twelve years (1902–1914), during a period that saw monumental changes in Central and East Asia.[13] These included the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) with Japan's unexpected victory; the Chinese revolution bringing down the Qing Dynasty (1901); and the transition from the Meiji 明治 (1868–1912) to the Taishō 大正 era (1912–1926) in Japan. The changes in Ōtani's own life were just as momentous. The first expedition began when he was twenty-six years old, still heir to the leadership of his sect. With the death of his father in 1903, he became the twenty-second abbot of the Nishi Honganji, but was forced to resign from his post in 1914 in connection with a financial scandal.[14] Following this, he left Japan and spent the following thirty-five years in China and other parts of Asia, only to return to Japan shortly before his death in 1948.

In terms of the quantity and quality of the excavated material, the Ōtani expeditions were among the most successful expeditions at the time, making invaluable contributions to our understanding of the history of Buddhism in Central Asia. This is the case even if Ōtani's sudden resignation prevented the manuscripts and artifacts from being studied and publicized to the extent this would have otherwise been possible. The original collection became dispersed—partly sold and partly transported to various collections in Kyoto, Tokyo, Seoul, Lüshun 旅順, and other locations.[15] Even so, the catalogue the team

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[12] On the general background of the Ōtani expeditions, see Shirasu, *Ōtani tankentai to sono jidai*.

[13] Ōtani himself provides a concise overview of the dates and routes of the three expeditions in his preface to the catalogue of the collection; see Kagawa, *Saiiki kōko zufu*, 1–4.

[14] Küçükyalçın, 'Ōtani Kozui and His Vision of Asia', 182–83.

[15] For example, on the part of the collection that ended up in the National

managed to publish contains many important pieces that were highly valuable for scholarship.[16] These include the *Zhu Fo yaoji jing* 諸佛要集經 (Skt. *Buddhasaṃgīti sūtra*) with a colophon from 296, which is still the earliest dated Buddhist scripture in Chinese; fragments of draft letters from the ruins of Loulan 樓蘭, written in 328 by Li Bai 李柏, chief administrator of the Western Regions (*Xiyu zhangshi* 西域長史); a multitude of fragments in Central Asian languages ranging from Old Uyghur to Sogdian; as well as a variety of paintings and artifacts. Even today, large portions of the original collection continue to appear in print and generate new scholarship.[17]

2. Buddhist Manuscripts and Ruins

Fragments of ancient manuscripts from Xinjiang began making news since the end of the previous century, starting with the Sanskrit medical fragments acquired in 1890 in Kucha by Lieutenant Hamilton Bower (1858–1940). The fragments, which turned out to date to the fifth or sixth century and were thus the earliest Sanskrit manuscripts in existence, were written on birch bark and contained medical texts, divination manuals, and a Buddhist dhāraṇī. They were studied by

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Museum of Korea, see Kim, 'A History of the Central Asian Collection at the National Museum of Korea' and Kim et al., 'New Research on Central Asian Paintings in the National Museum of Korea'.

[16] Kagawa, *Saiiki kōko zufu*.

[17] The most recent publication in this respect is Wang, Meng, and Rong, *Lüshun bowuguan cang Xinjiang chutu Hanwen wenxian*, which contains color photographs of 26,000 manuscript fragments held at the Lüshun Museum. In terms of its quantity and academic value, this is a publication of highest importance, likely to have a major impact on the study of Central Asia. Papers by scholars who had worked on the organization and publication of the fragments, as well as those participating in the commemorative conference, were published separately in two edited volumes: Wang et al., *Sichou zhi lu yu Xinjiang chutu wenxian*, and Meng and Wang, eds., *Lüshun bowuguan cang Xinjiang chutu Hanwen wenshu yanjiu*.

the Calcutta-based indologist Rudolf Hoernle (1841–1918), who published his findings in successive articles and books.[18]

Having learned about the discovery of the Bower manuscript and its exhibition at the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Russian scholars at the November 1891 meeting of the Imperial Russian Archeological Society decided to write to Nikolai F. Petrovsky (1837–1908), the Russian Consul in Kashgar, asking whether he knew about similar manuscripts in the region and whether it was possible to acquire those from locals. Another question was how feasible it would be to conduct archeological excavations without being obstructed by either locals or the authorities.[19] Petrovsky's positive response paved the way for the organization of several Russian archeological missions, including Dmitry A. Klementz's (1847–1914) 1898 expedition to Turfan.[20]

The manuscript discoveries and the Russian initiative had a stimulating effect on the Indian side as well, and Hoernle persuaded the Government of India to issue a directive to George Macartney in Kashgar to purchase any ancient manuscripts offered to him and forward those to Calcutta.[21] These efforts led to the accumulation of a group of important manuscripts in Khotanese, Sanskrit, Tocharian, Old Uyghur, and Persian. The stream of fragments reaching India was the catalyst pushing Aurel Stein to seek government funds for his first expedition to Khotan and other sites along the southern edge of the Tarim Basin. Overall, it was the manuscript discoveries, coupled with the subsequent wave of publications, that triggered the archeological exploration of Northwest China.

It is apparent that the main inspiration for Ōtani came from recent European research on Buddhist remains in Xinjiang, especially

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[18] E.g. 'Remarks on Birch Bark MS', and *Bower Manuscript*.

[19] Bukharin, 'The "Maîtres" of Archaeology in Eastern Turkestan', 88. In a private letter to Viktor von Rosen (1849–1908), Petrovsky wrote in early 1892 how disappointed he was that it was not him who acquired the Kuchean fragments; instead, this fortune fell to Bower, a mere 'tourist' in the region; Petrovsky, *Turkestanskie pis'ma*, 223.

[20] *Turfan und seine alterhümer*.

[21] Sims-Williams, 'Rudolf Hoernle and Sir Aurel Stein', 1–2.

the ongoing expeditions of Sven Hedin (1865–1952) and Aurel Stein. When Ōtani arrived in London in March 1900, the scramble for the manuscripts of Chinese Turkestan was already picking up momentum. News of the discovery of Buddhist fragments and ruins have been in the media and scholars discussed the finds at the meetings of learned societies, while also publishing translations and interpretations. The March 30, 1901 issue of *The Times* ran a story of Aurel Stein's archeological discoveries in Chinese Turkestan, pointing out their scientific significance. The newspaper expressly identified the ruins he excavated as Buddhist and stated that the manuscripts confirmed a connection with the civilization of ancient India.[22] There were also periodic news reports of the progress of Sven Hedin through Xinjiang and Tibet, until his arrival in Ladakh at the end of 1901.[23]

In Europe, particularly Britain, the growing awareness of Central Asia at this time was tied to the Great Game and the recent Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–1880).[24] British military involvement and the perceived threat of Russian aggression had thrust this region into the public consciousness, turning it from a relatively obscure corner to a place of intrigue, danger, and exotic allure.[25] Reading reports about the maneuvers of troops and the travel accounts of army officers and Christian missionaries, British readers were becoming increasingly accustomed to news about Central Asia.[26]

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[22] 'Discoveries In Chinese Turkestan'. Stein was elected member of the Royal Geographical Society in June 1900, while still doing fieldwork in Xinjiang. See 'Court Circular'.

[23] 'Exploration In Central Asia'; 'Dr. Sven Hedin's Second Expedition In Central Asia'. This latter story, which mentions his discovery of a Buddhist temple with a wooden Buddha, also appeared across the Atlantic as 'Sven Hedin's Second Expedition In Central Asia'.

[24] On the Second Anglo-Afghan War in light of the Great Game narrative, see Morrison, 'Beyond the "Great Game"'.

[25] The Royal Geographical Society, for example, described Central Asia as an essentially unknown region. See 'Tartary'; see also Watson, 'Siting the Stage', 98.

[26] This was, of course, true of many other places across the globe where British

The discoveries of Buddhist ruins and manuscripts undoubtedly captivated Ōtani. During the Meiji period, Buddhist institutions and Buddhism in general had come under attack, forcing them to redefine themselves and their relationship to the state.[27] Trying to find a solution to resolve the crisis, Japanese Buddhist groups were eager to examine how other religions managed to function within modern nation states.[28] Thus, even though Ōtani had come to London to study the religious systems of modernized nations, he maintained a deep interest in the geography of Central Asia and the historical spread of Buddhism to China.[29] He was soon elected member of the Geographical Society on account of his exploratory journey a year earlier through inland China.[30] During his two-year sojourn in London (1900–1902), he embarked on a series of shorter trips across continental Europe, where he met with renown scholars such as the sinologist Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918) and indologist Sylvain Lévi (1863–1935). Their discussions typically centered on the

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colonial interests were at stake.

27 Blum, 'Shin Buddhism in the Meiji Period', 825–36.

28 Richard M. Jaffe shows how Japanese Buddhist scholars and clerics traveled not only to the United States and Europe but also to other Buddhist regions in Asia, and how these interactions 'played a significant role in the formation of radical anticolonial solidarities between the Japanese and Asian peoples but also contributed to the emergence of Japanese imperialism'; Jaffe, 'Seeking Śākyamuni', 68.

29 Ōtani departed from Japan in December 1899, leading a small group of followers. Stopping in Ceylon, they ventured inland to India. They visited Benares and Bodh Gayā, as well as Calcutta and Darjeeling. From Bombay, they sailed to Egypt, before traversing the European continent, passing through Milan, Geneva, and Paris, finally arriving in London. See Katayama, 'Ōtani Kōzui no Ōshū ryūgaku'.

30 His being a member of the Geographical Society is repeated in contemporary news reports about the first expedition; see, for example, 'Japanese Exploration in Central Asia'. 'Meetings of the Royal Geographical Society, Session 1901-1902' lists Ōtani among the participants of the Annual Dinner of the Society at the Hôtel Métropole on May 26, 1902.

history of Buddhism in Central Asia.[31] As early as the beginning of 1901, Ōtani begun contemplating a return journey to Japan by way of Central Asia.

The first expedition departed on August 16, 1902, the very day of the Coronation Review at Spithead, a grand celebration held in honour of the newly crowned King Edward VII. Ōtani set off from Victoria Station with a party of five on a train to St. Petersburg, then passing through Baku, Samarkand, and Osh. The travelers reached Kashgar in about five weeks and soon after divided into two teams. Ōtani himself led one team across the pass to Gilgit and Srinagar, eventually returning to Japan by sea.[32] The other team remained in Xinjiang, traveling along the southern periphery of the Taklamakan Desert. They stayed in the area of Khotan for three months, before crossing the desert to explore at the sites along its northern edge. They remained in the area of Kucha the longest, excavating the caves at Subashi, Kizil, and Kumtura. This team ultimately returned to Japan via the overland route, via Hami and Xi'an.

Although *The London and China Express* only reported their departure briefly, *The Times* a couple of weeks later went into more detail, stating that the purpose of the expedition was 'to search for the Buddhistic remains in Central Asia, India, and China, and to trace as far as is possible the course of Buddhism from its source northwards and eastwards to Japan'.[33] In other words, the expedition planned to explore the history of Buddhism in this region. It is also apparent that there was an effort to present the trip as a scientific expedition, introducing each participant as an expert in different disciplines, languages, or religions. This sentiment is even more noticeable in the opening paragraph of the report in *The Anglo-Japanese Gazette*:

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[31] Katayama, 'Ōtani Kōzui no Ōshū ryūgaku', 100.

[32] Despite Ōtani's plans to explore historical sites in India, his father's untimely death in January 1903 forced him to return to Japan.

[33] 'Home Intelligence'; 'Japanese Exploration in Central Asia'. See also Katayama, '1902 nen 8 gatsu, Ōtani Kōzui no Rondon shuppatsu'.

> Count Otani Kozui and Watanabe Tetsushin, members of the Japan Society of London, have just organised an expedition for exploring in Central Asia, which promises to be of much archaeological interest—one, moreover, which should show the world that the savants of New Japan have enthusiasm for original work quite as keen as that which Europeans possess.[34]

This sentence placed Japan on a par with modern industrialized nations, which organized expeditions to traverse and study less developed parts of the world. Indeed, the expedition's departure from London, rather than Japan, was symbolic and conveyed a similar sentiment. This was a modern scientific expedition just like those of European explorers, except that it aimed to discover a forgotten chapter in Buddhism's history. While the narrative on the one hand celebrated Japan's rise in the international arena, on the other, it also spoke to the situation Buddhist institutions were facing in Japan. Locating tangible evidence of the origins and prosperity of Pure Land teachings in Western China authenticated historical precedents that were valuable for the legitimation of the Jōdo Shinshū in Meiji Japan.

This first expedition (1902–1904) was followed by a second one (1908–1909), and then a third one (1910–1914). The last two were both led by the young priest Tachibana Zuichō 橘瑞超 (1890–1968), who spent several months in London between the two trips. After his return to Kyōto, his account was serialized in a major newspaper. The installments were later published as a separate book under the title *Chūa tanken* 中亞探検 [Exploration of Central Asia].[36] The choice of the title, once again, established the journey as a modern

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[34] *The Anglo-Japanese Gazette*, September 15, 1902, 37. The signature 'C.L.B.' underneath the report likely referred to Clarence Ludlow Brownell (1864–1927), who published the following year the popular book *The Heart of Japan* (1903); see Katayama, '1902 nen 8 gatsu, Ōtani Kōzui no Rondon shuppatsu', 112–110.

[35] After Tachibana's return, his companion Yoshikawa Koichirō 吉川小一郎 continued the expedition until January 1914.

[36] *Chūa tanken*.

scientific initiative, similar to those carried out by Sven Hedin and Aurel Stein. The title referred to Xinjiang using the Western concept 'Central Asia' and used the word *tanken* 探検, which was a translation of the English word 'exploration'. Chūa 中亞 (Central Asia) was an abbreviation of Chūō Ajia 中央亞細亞, a term which had been used in Japan from around the 1870s, primarily in translations. This was a new concept initially reflecting a Russian perspective of geography.[37]

To cite another example of the symbolism of the toponym in the title is the book *Tenjiku kōroji shoken* 天竺行路次所見 [Things Seen En Route to India] by the Jōdo Shinshū priest Kitabatake Dōryū 北畠道龍 (1820–1907). The narrative detailed the author's three-year journey around the world (1881–1884), mostly traveling across various parts of Europe and the United States, only to stop in India for a month on the way home.[38] Yet the title highlighted the central significance of India for the journey. Kitabatake opted for the name Tenjiku 天竺 (Ch. Tianzhu), which was the designation of India in medieval Buddhist writings, including the travelogues of Faxian 法顯 (337–422) and Xuanzang. This elevated his stopover and his visit to Bodh Gayā to the level of a Buddhist pilgrimage.

Tachibana, however, had a different focus. He used the title of his book to position the journey as a cutting-edge scientific expedition similar to those organized by celebrated European explorers. Fittingly, he began the account by taking London's Liverpool Station as the starting point, punctuating the narrative with a series of reference points:

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[37] Among the early examples is Takasu Jisuke's 高須治輔 translation of Mikhail A. Terent'ev's book *Rossiya i Angliya v Srednei Azii* [Russia and Britain in Central Asia; 1876], the Japanese edition of which bore the title *Chūō Ajia Roei kankeiron* 中央亜細亜露英関係論 [On Russian and British Relations in Central Asia; 1885]. This term also features in the title of the travel account by the diplomat Nishi Tokujirō 西徳二郎 (1847–1912), who journeyed across both Chinese and Russian Central Asia in the early 1870s; *Chūajia kiji*. A later example is Ōba Kakō's 大庭柯公 (1872–1924?) book about his journey around the world in 1910, which includes a chapter titled 'Chūa yūki' 中亞遊記 [Record of Travel in Central Asia].

[38] Jaffe, 'Seeking Śākyamuni', 72–73.

> Before leaving London, I had met with the British scholar Dr Stein and the Swedish scholar Dr Hedin, both of whom gave me encouragement and support. Especially the Lord Abbot (i.e. Ōtani) was thorough in giving me specific instructions and guidance. I carefully brought with me some equipment, such as expedition watches, a compass, a barometer, and some other small instruments, but mostly watches. I had already used some of the watches on my first expedition and now purchased three more silver open-face chronometers from Herbert Blockley in London, which were both reliable in showing the time and highly durable.[39]

In the following, Tachibana went into great detail itemizing the various types of clocks, compasses, clinometers, and barometers, stressing how expensive (and, therefore, state-of-the-art) they were. All this goes to show that the expedition relied on the latest and most accurate scientific instruments and, by extension, was a cutting-edge scientific initiative. The departure from London, underscoring the same point, is noticeably a key element of the setting. Finally, Stein and Hedin's blessing of Tachibana's venture works almost as a rite of passage, confirming the young man as the person best suited for the task. Thus, even though this was a Japanese expedition financed by a Buddhist organization with the aim of exploring the Buddhist sites of Central Asia, Tachibana's account emphasized the modernity and the scientific aspect of the journey. Without doubt, this was useful for reaching a wider Japanese readership, which was receptive of the ideas of 'catching up' with the West and modernization in general.

3. Xuanzang

In his book, Tachibana seems to have underplayed the Buddhist background of the project. Such references were still present but appeared in a less obvious manner. For one, him being a Jōdo Shinshū priest would have not gone unnoticed. More importantly, the

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[39] *Chūa tanken*.

beginning of the book featured Ōtani's calligraphy with a quote from Emperor Taizong's 太宗 (r. 626–649) preface to one of Xuanzang's translations. The quote read: 'With great zeal, disregarding exertion, he strove to reach his goal' (誠重勞輕, 求深願達). The preface exemplified Taizong's support for Xuanzang and the dharma, which became a precedent several emperors emulated in the Song period (960–1279).[40] Similarly, Song Buddhist histories extoled this instance of imperial patronage, with Zuxiu 祖琇 (fl. 1126–1164) comparing Taizong to the sage kings Yao 堯 and Shun 舜.[41] Xuanzang had initially departed on his pilgrimage violating state restrictions, but after his return, he attained the reverence and support of the emperor. His was a triumphant return that greatly elevated his status.

Apart from its significance for the development of Buddhism in later dynasties, Taizong's preface was a popular text among calligraphers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so in a sense it was not an unusual choice for a motto. Yet it is evident that Ōtani's selection was deliberate, intended to evoke the preface's symbolism in connection with the relationship between the state and the saṅgha. It also linked Tachibana's journey with the prosperity of Buddhism at the height of the Tang dynasty, drawing attention to this well-known and often-cited precedent of imperial patronage. Without question, this was a timely concern for Buddhist institutions in Japan.

Tachibana's other book, published the same year, corroborates Ōtani's intentionality in choosing these words. It was titled *Shinkyō tanken ki* 新疆探檢記 [Record of Exploration in Xinjiang], referring to the region using its modern Chinese name. The beginning of the book featured another piece of Ōtani's calligraphy, consisting of sixteen characters from Taizong's preface. Moreover, the quote came from the same passage that contained the eight characters at the beginning of Tachibana's other book. The entire passage, with the text of the two quotes underlined, reads as follows:

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[40] Liu, 'The Waning Years of the Eminent Monk Xuanzang and his Deification in China and Japan', 269–70.

[41] Ibid., 270.

> He therefore yearned for the Pure Land and made the journey to the Western Regions. Braving dangers, he traveled to distant lands, with his staff as his sole companion. When the piled-up snow whirled in the morning, the road in front of him would disappear; when sand storms arose at night, they would blot out the sky. Across ten thousand *li* of mountains and rivers, he pushed aside mist and smoke; through constant fluctuations of heat and cold, he pressed onward across frost and rain. With great zeal, disregarding exertion, he strove to reach his goal. 是以翹心淨土, 往遊西域. 乘危遠邁, 杖策孤征. 積雪晨飛, 途閒失地; 驚砂夕起, 空外迷天. 萬里山川, 撥煙霞而進影; 百重寒暑, 躡霜雨而前蹤. 誠重勞輕, 求深願達.[42]

The two quotes are part of a single line of thought, emphasizing Xuanzang's difficulties on his journey and his relentless drive to move forward towards his goal. There can be no question that even in the Tang period this passage would have functioned as a metaphor and was meant in a symbolic sense. The same way, although Ōtani drew a parallel between Tachibana's expedition and the pilgrimage of Xuanzang, he was referring not to the young explorer's problems along the way but to the difficult position in which the teaching and the saṅgha were in Japan. The image of having to persevere despite not being able to see the road ahead or the sky above epitomized the concept of exploration as the act of discovering or uncovering what lay hidden. Although technically the words 'Pure Land' at the beginning of this passage do not appear in either of the two quotes, by selecting his quotes from the vicinity of each other, Ōtani clearly intended to draw attention to the entire passage. In this context, the idea of Pure Land as Xuanzang's ultimate goal established a direct link with the Jōdo Shinshū sect in Japan, further heightening the relevance of the quotes to the situation at hand. The expedition intended to uncover the forgotten traces of the dharma's spread to China, and eventually to Japan.

A major publication related to the Ōtani expeditions was a two-volume picture catalogue of the artifacts and manuscripts recov-

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[42] *Shinkyō tanken ki*, i.

ered in Xinjiang. This came out in 1915, a year after Ōtani's resignation, and was not a popular narrative but a high-quality publication for an academic audience. It bore the title *Saiiki kōko zufu* 西域考古圖譜 [Images of the Archeology of the Western Regions], mixing the pre-modern Buddhist notion of Western Regions with that of the modern science of archeology.[43] These two volumes had a major impact on the development of research fields associated with the study of languages and religions in Central Asia.[44] The title likely catered to the intended audience, which would have been much more specialized than that of Tachibana's popular accounts. In the preface, Ōtani presented a justification for his expeditions.[45] He characterized the Western Regions as an area where Buddhism had once prospered and which was a pivotal point in its spread eastward. It was also a cultural nexus where Indian and Chinese elements intertwined. Regarding the project's concrete objectives, he outlined the following points:

- to understand the route along which Buddhism spread to China;
- to explore the traces of Chinese monks who traveled to India in search of the dharma;
- to assess the damage of Islamic rule to Buddhism in Central Asia;
- to resolve uncertainties about the history of Buddhism;
- to study Buddhist doctrine

These points all focus on the study of Buddhist history. Perhaps the sole exception is the last item concerning doctrine, but even this was likely meant from an academic perspective. While being a Buddhist leader undoubtedly shaped Ōtani's interest in Buddhist history, in this place he primarily emphasized the expeditions' contribution to scholarship. He mentioned no political or evangelical concerns. In addition to the above goals, he also highlighted the value of the finds

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[43] Kagawa, *Saiiki kōko zufu*.

[44] One of these fields was the study of Old Uyghur manuscripts; see Röhrborn, 'The Beginning of Turkish Philology and Linguistics in Japan'.

[45] Kagawa, *Saiiki kōko zufu*, 1–4.

for disciplines such as archeology, geography, geology, and meteorology, once again stressing the scientific aspect of the collection.[46] Reflecting the same orientation, in the closing part of the preface Ōtani described how he had invited scholars from Kyoto Imperial University and Tokyo Imperial University to study the manuscripts and artifacts. The list included eminent figures such as Matsumoto Bunzaburō 松本文三郎, Kuwabara Jitsuzō 桑原隲藏, Kano Naoki 狩野直喜, Naitō Torajirō 内藤虎次郎 (i.e. Natō Konan), and Haneda Tōru 羽田亨.[47]

The image of Xuanzang remained essential in the title of the massive two-volume collection of the field diaries and reports of the Ōtani expeditions, which appeared in 1937, a quarter of a century after the last expedition ended and Ōtani left Japan. The collection was entitled *Shin Saiiki ki* 新西域記 [New Records of the Western Regions],[48] drawing a direct parallel between the expeditions and Xuanzang's journey.[49] The preface was written by Ōtani's long-time friend, right-wing journalist Tokutomi Sohō 徳富蘇峰 (1863–1957), who was also the person who suggested the title *Shin Saiiki ki*.[50] With this, the Ōtani expeditions were portrayed as a modern pilgrimage comparable in scope and significance to Xuanzang's journey more than twelve hundred years earlier. The title made no mention of scientific exploration or archeology, probably because these were no longer the buzzwords of the time. By this time, the manuscripts

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[46] On the use of Western science and thought for the propagation of Buddhism, see Snodgrass, 'The Deployment of Western Philosophy in Meiji Buddhist Revival'.

[47] As part of this effort, Naitō wrote an introduction in the *Ōsaka Asahi News* about the material recovered by the second expedition; 'Nishi Honganji no hakkutsu-mono'. In the following years, Haneda Tōru also published a series of studies on Uyghur and Chinese texts from the collection.

[48] *Shin Saiiki ki*.

[49] Xuanzang's original travel narrative was *Da Tang Xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 [Records of the Western Regions during the Great Tang], or in abbreviated form just *Xiyu ji* 西域記.

[50] *Shin Saiiki ki*, 1.

and artifacts acquired in Xinjiang had become dispersed, either sold to raise funds or transported to Ōtani's residence in China. The two volumes were an attempt to preserve and revive the legacy of the enterprise while it was still possible.

The above examples demonstrate that Xuanzang played a major role in how Ōtani himself understood the objectives and the significance of his expeditions. His references and allusions are also interesting because we can contrast them with how Aurel Stein wrote about the Tang monk in his publications. Stein saw Xinjiang as 'a region which once served as the main channel for the interchange of the civilizations of India, China, and the classical West'.[51] Thinking about his fascination with documenting the ancient connections between these three great civilizations, it is hard not to notice that Stein himself was a representative of two of these. He was a European-born scholar who lived and worked in India.[52] Even though he saw himself as an archeologist whose scientific work made manuscripts and artifacts available for scholarly research, he understood that being compared to Xuanzang helped to open some doors in Xinjiang.

Stein wrote on a number of occasions about the Tang monk as his saintly guide and patron. When first visiting the Mogao caves, he quickly realized that Xuanzang's name made his communication much smoother with Abbot Wang, the self-appointed caretaker of the library cave.[53] Stein understood that it was useless to talk to Wang about archeology and science, because the abbot knew very little of such matters and had no interest in them. This was a change from his experience with local officials who were always eager listeners when Stein discussed the scientific merits of his excavations. With Wang,

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[51] *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, vol. 1, vii. Elsewhere, he wrote about as 'an ancient civilization developed under the joint influences of Buddhist India, China, and the Hellenized Near East'; 'A Third Journey of Exploration in Central Asia, 1913–16', 97.

[52] Even his given name Marc Aurel exemplified a direct link with the classical West.

[53] On the discovery of the cave with the manuscripts, see Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 79–84.

however, he needed to adopt a different perspective and so he focused on the parallels between his own journey from India and Xuanzang's pilgrimage there. He explained that it was by tracing the footsteps of the Tang monk that he was able to discover many ancient sites in Xinjiang. Finally, just like Xuanzang, he had to travel across treacherous mountains and deserts to bridge the great distance between China and India.[54]

Nothing of this was untrue, of course, as Stein indeed came from India in search of manuscripts and relics. He routinely relied on Xuanzang's description to identify ancient sites and routes as part of his exploratory work. At the same time, Stein's writings reveal that he went into great effort to present himself in a way that would allow him to win the abbot over, as this would grant him access to the treasures of the library cave. Being a Daoist priest, the abbot had no interest in Buddhist lore but was luckily familiar with Xuanzang's story from the popular novel *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 [Journey to the West]. Having maximized on these connections, Stein 'instinctively felt that a new and more reliable link was being established' between him and the abbot.[55] In the end, by presenting himself as the modern Xuanzang, he was able to purchase from Wang a substantial quantity of manuscripts. With time, these generated a wealth of scholarly research, leading to the decipherment of unknown languages and a new understanding of Buddhist history.

4. Conclusions

The end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries was a period of imperialistic rivalry between Russia and Britain, which also contributed to the discovery of ancient manuscripts in Chinese Central Asia. The early finds of Buddhist fragments and artifacts inspired Ōtani to participate in the exploration of Xinjiang, hoping to find materials related to the Buddhist past of the region.

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[54] *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, vol. 2, 169.

[55] Ibid., 170.

Ōtani believed that this was the land where Pure Land Buddhism had come from and thought that by exploring these remains he and his men were in essence researching their own history. A recurrent motif in publications related to the expeditions was the figure of Xuanzang, and the references served to establish a link with his pilgrimage more than twelve centuries earlier. Just as importantly, Ōtani drew attention to Taizong's support of Xuanzang by quoting from the emperor's preface to his translation. The references to this famous precedent of imperial support had urgent relevance for the revival of Buddhism in Japan.

Although focusing on much the same geographical area and excavating similar kinds of manuscripts and artifacts, Stein's principal concern was to uncover traces of contacts with Indian and Hellenistic cultures. He used Xuanzang's narrative as a primary source for identifying ancient ruins and topographical features, but had little interest in how the Tang court had treated the monk after his return. It was in his dealings with Abbot Wang that he realized that being in a similar situation with Xuanzang had the practical advantage of building rapport with the abbot. Thus, both Stein and Ōtani used Xuanzang as a point of reference, and in a sense, the Tang monk was a saintly patron for both of them. Yet they did this to entirely different ends, reflecting their own intellectual interests and political realities.

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