Ideas that travelled

Learning about world views and religions

History, Years 7 and 8

Sample unit of work

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Overview

Introduction

This sample unit of work should be located within a broader unit of work that focuseson the times from the earliest human communities to the end of the ancient period (60,000 BCE/BC – c.650 CE/AD) and then through till the beginning of modern history (1750 CE/AD) when major civilisations came into contact with each other (including via the Silk Road). The three lessons build on that learning, taking a particular focus on one major way civilisations came into contact with each other: the transmission of ideas from religious and secular worldviews as travellers moved along the various routes of the Silk Road.

What students will learn

Students will learn about:

* where and how religious world views interacted along the Silk Road
* the influence of the ideas of religious world views upon different cultures along the Silk Road
* the development of one religion (Buddhism) along the Silk Road.

The purpose of these three lessons is to explore a part of the Silk Road experience that may not have been previously considered – the involvement of religious and secular worldviews in the interaction of peoples along the Silk Road. The three lessons engage students with some of the ideas of religions that spread as travellers passed through the places along the Silk Road while the visitors themselves learned from the cultures they came across.

In Lesson 2 students evaluate the role and achievement of an individual who travelled the Silk Road between China and India, during the seventh century CE/AD, through the case study of one individual, Xuanzang, from one religious tradition, Mahayana Buddhism. The reason for choosing Xuanzang (pronounced Shwanzang) (602–664 CE/AD) is because his influence on religion, culture, learning, politics and government and his use of power was so broad and deep. Students study his motives and actions and evaluate his continuing significance. The challenges Xuanzang faced were some of the shared experiences of many travellers.

Links to the Victorian Curriculum F–10

This sample unit of work is not intended to teach the whole of any content description nor fully prepare students to meet an achievement standard. Rather this unit of work:

* contributes towards teaching a range of content descriptions (as described below)
* supports students to demonstrate their learning (as described in the relevant extracts from the achievement standard, below).

The unit of work utilises the Victorian Curriculum F–10 document [Learning about world views and religions key premises](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/static/docs/Learning%20about%20World%20Views%20and%20Religions.pdf).

**Curriculum area:**  History

**Curriculum band:**  7 and 8

**Content descriptions:**

Historical Concepts and Skills:

Historical sources as evidence

* Analyse and corroborate sources and ask questions about their accuracy, usefulness and reliability ([VCHHC099](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/history/curriculum/f-10#level=7-8&search=f5f212b5-aa3f-41bf-bf29-3110b81db808))

Cause and effect

* Analyse the causes and effects of significant events that caused change and/or a decline over the period ([VCHHC103](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/history/curriculum/f-10#level=7-8&search=bf419cb5-483e-4dd0-aa76-13aa7cd48caf))

Historical significance

* Evaluate the role and achievement of a significant individual, development and/or cultural achievement that led to progress ([VCHHC104](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/history/curriculum/f-10#level=7-8&search=787e837f-5125-41e5-aafd-6b8b0a29a1f1))

Historical Knowledge:

Ancient world and early civilisations – 60 000 BC (BCE) – c.650 AD (CE)

* The role and achievements of a significant individual in an ancient society ([VCHHK113](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/history/curriculum/f-10#level=7-8&search=bc2fecbe-4c24-4424-a1fa-0492ad203081))
* Changes in society and the perspectives of key groups affected by change including the influence of law and religion ([VCHHK110](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/history/curriculum/f-10#level=7-8&search=fcda31a3-cda9-46c1-a125-281668e40306))

**Achievement standard (extracts):**

[Students] identify the motives and actions of people at the time. Students evaluate the significance of individuals and groups and how they were influenced by the beliefs and values of their society.

… Students construct an explanation using sources of evidence to support the analysis. In developing these texts, and organising and presenting their findings, they use historical terms and concepts, evidence identified in sources, and acknowledge their sources of information.

Structure

This sample unit of work contains five key elements:

* focus questions for each lesson
* guiding information for each lesson, outlining knowledge students will be explicitly taught and other information for teachers
* suggested learning activities for students, including worksheets (see the appendices)
* suggested assessment, for formative or summative purposes
* a list of resources for teachers and students.

Teacher notes

Teachers will determine the duration of the three lessons, what prior student learning is necessary, the pedagogical methods and the resources used to teach the unit.

Duration

There is no prescribed time for the unit of work. Teachers will determine the duration through the time they devote to specific teaching points and the associated learning activities and assessment. A suggested duration is 3 × 50-minute lessons.

Pedagogy

The lesson content provides suggested teaching and learning activities, assessment tasks and resources to use – and the pedagogy in these lessons reflects the time allocation of 3 × 50-minute lessons – but teachers will make pedagogical choices about how students can best be engaged in the content learning. These pedagogical choices will be about individual, group or paired work, research and the use of student-generated or teacher-derived research questions, use of resources, guided reading, scaffolded inquiry using questions, teacher-directed learning, the degree of teacher control over content and assessment tasks compared to the degree of student choice, and the use of extension learning activities for interested students and those needing further challenges.

Prior learning

Teachers will determine what background learning would prepare students for undertaking these lessons. Any prior learning should be drawn from relevant Victorian Curriculum F–10 curriculum areas. For example, students could develop understanding of the following History Levels 7 and 8 content prior to these lessons:

* the causes and effects of significant events that caused change over the period (related to History [VCHHC103](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/history/curriculum/f-10#level=7-8&search=bf419cb5-483e-4dd0-aa76-13aa7cd48caf))
* the accuracy and reliability of sources (related to History [VCHHC099](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/history/curriculum/f-10#level=7-8&search=f5f212b5-aa3f-41bf-bf29-3110b81db808))
* the role and achievement of a significant individual that led to progress (related to History [VCHHC104](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/history/curriculum/f-10#level=7-8&search=787e837f-5125-41e5-aafd-6b8b0a29a1f1))
* the role and achievements of a significant individual in an ancient society (related to History [VCHHK113](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/history/curriculum/f-10#level=7-8&search=bc2fecbe-4c24-4424-a1fa-0492ad203081)).

Resources

Teachers will decide which resources from the included list they want to use, and they could also use resources not listed here. Some of the resources on the list are web-based. Some sample teacher-written resources such as worksheets have been included in this document, but these resources should not be considered a kit or a package of pre-digested resources. Teachers have the flexibility to adapt these resources to student needs and to link to multiple world views and perspectives related to the context and the content descriptions.

List of resources

General

[Learning about world views and religions](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/static/docs/Learning%20about%20World%20Views%20and%20Religions.pdf), Victorian Curriculum F–10 document

Lesson resources

Lesson 1

* [The Silk Road and Ancient Trade: Crash Course World History #9](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfe-eNq-Qyg), a YouTube video narrated by John Green (specifically 0:00–2:16 minutes and 6:17–9:13 minutes)
* Activity 1, Part A worksheet ([Appendix 1](#Appendix1))
* Activity 1, Part B worksheet ([Appendix 2](#Appendix2))

Lesson 2

* Activity 2, Report on a journey along the Silk Road ([Appendix 3](#Appendix3))
* [Interactive map of the cities along the Silk Road](http://en.unesco.org/silkroad/network-silk-road-cities-map-app/en), UNESCO

Internet access will be required for further research on the place of origin of selected religions.

Lesson 3

* Assessment task, Xuanzang: The story of my life and legacy ([Appendix 4](#Appendix4))
* Assessment activity, Xuanzang and Buddhism ([Appendix 5](#Appendix5)) – *note, this is an activity for the alternative assessment*

Further information for the teacher

* *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions* (1996), translated by Li Rongxi.
* Tansen Sen, [The Travel Records of Chinese Pilgrams Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing: Sources for cross-cultural encounters between ancient China and ancient India](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/travel_records.pdf)
* Sally Hovey Wriggins (2004) *The Silk Road Journey with Xuanzang*, Basic Books.
* [Xuanzang Pilgrimage route](https://goo.gl/maps/idggivLaYEQ2), an interactive Google map tracing the journey of Xuanzang.

There are numerous films, documentaries and television series based on Xuanzang.

Lessons

Lesson 1

Focus questions

Which religions interacted along the Silk Road, and where, when, why and how did they?

Guiding information

The recommended video to start Lesson 1 is from the series ‘Crash Course World History #9’ narrated by John Green (see the [List of resources](#Listofresources) for the link). He presents an overview of the causes, effects and sequence of significant events related to the Silk Road. In his interpretation Green emphasises the Silk Road’s importance, not only for trade but also for the exchange of ideas and the development of peaceful cultural relations between civilisations and empires.

Certainly the exchange of trade goods changed the wealth of individuals, cities and possibly even countries, either positively or negatively. Some settlements may have been abandoned because they were not on a profitable trade route or because they were on a trade route and they experienced invasions or wars that changed who had power in the region.

The information and the interpretations offered by Green are presented in clear narration, text and images, in a light-hearted and stimulating way. Nevertheless, students should question whether Green offers sufficient evidence to support his interpretations of the Silk Road experience and influence.

In the first section of the video John Green states that the Silk Road did not start trade but it expanded the scope and scale of trade. He claims that the merchants, through their trade of goods and exchange of ideas, had more influence and impact on the world than religious or political leaders.

Teachers might like to explain that multiple world views travelled the Silk Road along with the people who practised them. In places where a significant number of followers gathered together, they formed a community and they often created a place for worship or discussion and lectures.

Learning activities

Activity 1, Part A

This [worksheet](#Appendix1) covers the first 2.16 minutes of the video on the Silk Road.

The questions on the worksheet ask students to identify the claims about the Silk Road made by Green and evaluate the evidence he offers.

Activity 1, Part B

This [worksheet](#Appendix2) covers a later section of the video on the Silk Road (6.17–9.13 minutes).

The questions on the worksheet ask students to identify the claims made by Green about Buddhism as one of the world views that travelled the Silk Road. Again students are asked to evaluate the evidence offered by Green.

Students begin a concept map on causes and consequences. This can be added to during Lesson 2.

Assessment

This will be done in Lesson 3, referring to the learning from the chosen assessment task and the completed worksheets from Lessons 1 and 2.

Lesson 2

Focus questions

How did ideas, religions and goods actually travel the Silk Road?

Guiding information

In this lesson students explore one example of what Green means by the Silk Road changing the world. Other commentators on this period of history have said that the Silk Road was the world’s first ‘information superhighway’.

Traders and travellers along the Silk Road came from many cities, states and countries, and their cultures – including religious and secular ideas – travelled with them and were part of the discussions and exchanges along their journeys. Merchants usually traversed the same ‘leg’ (or section) of a route and back, buying at one city and selling for a mark-up (raised price) at the destination city, but goods and ideas travelled the full distance of the various routes of the Silk Road. An example of cultural exchange on the Silk Road was the spread of Buddhism through the trade of silk and travellers giving the Buddhist monasteries money to provide a kind of ‘supernatural insurance’ during dangerous journeys, according to Green. It was traditional for diplomats and monks to accompany the caravans for a leg of the journey and be given food, water and safe travel. In return merchants sought Buddha’s blessings from monks for the safety and success of their trade missions.

Some major religions that are still here today began and travelled the Silk Road during the seventh century CE/AD (at the time of Xuanzang, studied in Lesson 3), for example, Hinduism, Judaism, Hellenism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Others, such as Shamanism and Zoroastrianism, are in serious decline today but were more popular during the heyday of the Silk Road. Even if some religion and secular world views were not spread widely on the Silk Road, their adherents lived among communities in which sharing ideas and understandings was increasingly part of trade, diplomacy and even interfaith debate.

Map starting points for Activity 2 worksheet

Once the student selects a religion for their traveller for Activity 2, the teacher will identify an appropriate place for the journey to begin. See the [Interactive map of the cities along the Silk Road](http://en.unesco.org/silkroad/network-silk-road-cities-map-app/en), UNESCO. The following list notes some places where religions intersected with routes of the Silk Road:

* Hinduism – Fatehpur-Sikri (India)
* Judaism – Alexandria and Aleppo (Middle East)
* Buddhism – Fatehpur-Sikri (India)
* Christianity – Alexandria and Aleppo (Middle East)
* Islam – Aleppo, Jeddah, Isfahan, Yazd, Bam (Middle East), Zanzibar (Africa)

These places do not represent the places of origin of those religions. They were places where different religions coexisted.

The world views of Secular Humanism and Rationalism are not included in this period of time of the Silk Road.

The Silk Road facilitated not only the trade of goods. As Green explains in the video, in his second point on how the Silk Road impacted ordinary people, perhaps most importantly the Silk Road led to the wholesale exchange of ideas. For Humanists and Rationalists, this free flow of competing ideas is essential to the growth of human knowledge. It is through this exchange and the critical comparing and contrasting of ideas that less tenable ideas are weeded out. The kind of exchanges of ideas that flourished thanks to the Silk Road laid the groundwork for the explosion of cross-communications and critical thinking that marked the Enlightenment.

Learning activities

Activity 2, Report on a journey along the Silk Road

Students fill in a [worksheet](#Appendix3), first choosing one religious world view from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Students use the interactive UNESCO map to help them develop a narrative for a traveller from this religion travelling the Silk Road.

Students could add to the concept map they developed in Lesson 1.

In order to begin to understand how various kinds of connections between cultures and religions might have been made, as they develop their narrative students could have the traveller grapple with one or more of the challenges below:

* A desert tribe attacks a merchant’s caravan and steals their goods. What do the beliefs about the traveller’s religion suggest about the way they might react? Imagine that the tribe are puzzled by this reaction. What does the traveller tell them?
* The traveller has just arrived at a city that does not allow entry to people with their religion. Imagine that the city authorities hold some mistaken ideas about the traveller’s religion. How can the traveller persuade this city to allow them entry?
* The king of the country they are travelling through demands the traveller attends a royal audience to explain their religion. What does the traveller tell the royal audience?
* The traveller has tried to cross the desert but has lost their goatskin water container. According to their religion to whom or from what does the traveller seek guidance and why?

In keeping with the period being studied students could present their report by creating a journal or an illustrated scroll of their trip entitled ‘A Traveller’s Tale’, including information, questions, reflections and conclusions.

Assessment

This will be done in Lesson 3, referring to the learning from the chosen assessment task and the completed worksheets from Lessons 1 and 2.

Lesson 3

Focus questions

Why and how did Xuanzang develop Buddhism?

Guiding information

Teachers should read ‘Xuanzang: The story of my life and legacy’ found on [Assessment task 1](#Appendix4).

The focus question is, how and why did Xuanzang develop Buddhism? By studying Xuanzang’s journey, two areas that contributed to how he developed Buddhism can be identified:

* Political network – This is evidenced in the stories of Xuanzang receiving the protection of kings who are Buddhists or sympathetic to Buddhism.
* Trade infrastructure – ‘Wherever Buddhism flourished, traders were prominent patrons of shrines and monasteries. One incarnation of the Buddha, the compassionate Avalokiteshvara, became a kind of patron saint of traders and travellers.’ (Steward Gordon, 2008, *When Asia Was the World: Traveling Merchants, Scholars, Warriors, and Monks Who Created the ‘Riches of the East’*). As trade grew and the Silk Road network expanded, cultural and religious diffusion spread further too.

If conducting the alternative activity, teachers may need to conduct research on using a Socratic circle, if this approach to chosen.

Learning activities

Choose **one** of the assessment tasks for students.

Assessment task 1

This [assessment task](#Appendix4) asks questions that requires answers based on the contextual information provided.

Students read ‘Xuanzang: The story of my life and legacy’.

They complete the questions presented on the worksheet.

1. From which type of Buddhism is Xuanzang?

2. What was Xuanzang’s motive when he began his pilgrimage?

3. What strategies did Xuanzang use to achieve his motive?

4. What did Xuanzang notice about Buddhism as he travelled the routes of the Silk Road?

5. As Xuanzang travelled, what historical skills did he use to record the state of Buddhism?

6. Describe one danger for Xuanzang or one of his accomplishments.

7. According to Xuanzang, what is this world and what could Buddhism do for it?

8. Using this source of Xuanzang’s life story, describe his relationship with and influence on emperors and kings.

9. Which historical and contemporary sources and evidence are available that allow us to evaluate Xuanzang’s ongoing legacy?

Assessment task 2

This [assessment task](#Appendix5) asks questions that requires answers based on the contextual information provided.

Students refer to the information given and also to the overview of Buddhism in [Learning about world views and religions](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/static/docs/Learning%20about%20World%20Views%20and%20Religions.pdf) (Victorian Curriculum F–10 document).

Students participate in a class dialogue or a Socratic circle, conduct a short oral presentation or create a storyboard on some of the following questions and statements.

* Does suffering exist?
* How can we escape suffering?
* Is winning or losing a debate more important than the quality of points and arguments raised?
* Is it better to be feared or revered as a ruler?
* Nothing is real.
* Everything changes.
* Can tolerance and love overcome violence?
* Is it preferable to change one person or a group for the better?
* Is the world real but the way we see it unreal?

Socratic circle dialogues are for 2**–**3 minutes, or when the conversation naturally ebbs. Then the members of the circle change. All students should have the opportunity to be in a circle to voice their thinking and justify their answer by giving an example.

Assessment

By the end of Level 8 it is expected that:

* students can identify the motives and actions of people at a particular time
* they can evaluate the significance of individuals and groups and how they were influenced by the beliefs and values of their society
* they construct an explanation using sources of evidence to support the analysis
* in developing these texts, and organising and presenting their findings, they use historical terms and concepts, evidence identified in sources, and acknowledge their sources of information.

Assessment should refer to the learning from the chosen assessment task and the completed worksheets from Lessons 1 and 2.

In undertaking Assessment task 2, whichever means the discussion is presented, students could be assessed on:

* inclusion of historical material
* inclusion of Xuanzang’s Buddhist beliefs
* understanding of his influence on the development of Buddhism.

Appendix 1

Activity 1, Part A

Watch the first section (1.00–2.16 minutes) of [The Silk Road and Ancient Trade: Crash Course World History #9](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfe-eNq-Qyg), a YouTube video narrated by John Green.

* Watch the video without pause and without taking notes.
* Complete this worksheet. Re-watch the video if needed.

1. Identify what John Green claims the Silk Road did for trade.

2. According to John Green, connections by mostly unknown merchants ‘arguably’ changed the world more than any political or religious leaders.

a. What is meant by ‘arguably’?

b. What kind of connections might merchants have had with each other?

c. Why could these connections be seen as having more influence than political or religious leaders?

3. Identify what John Green claims the Silk Road did for rich people.

4. Select one of the claims made in Questions 1–3 above.

a. Is the explanation offered convincing?

b. Is the explanation enough to support the claim made or is more evidence needed?

c. Brainstorm what evidence you would want or need to support such a statement.

Appendix 2

Activity 1, Part B

Watch the second section (6.17–9.13 minutes) of [The Silk Road and Ancient Trade: Crash Course World History #9](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfe-eNq-Qyg), a YouTube video narrated by John Green.

* Watch the video without pause and without taking notes.
* Complete this worksheet. Re-watch the video if needed.

1. What does John Green claim was most important in terms of what was traded along the Silk Road?

2. John Green claims that the ideas of a particular religion became prominent in the history of the Silk Road. What is that world view?

3. What evidence does Green offer to support his claim?

4. Where does Green say this religion was in decline?

5. In which countries does Green claim this religion was growing?

6. Which variation of this religion does Green say became prominent in Central Asia?

7. Write bullet points for some of the features of this world view that Green mentions.

8. What did wealthy people who funded trading missions, merchants who travelled the routes and market stallholders give to the monasteries of this world view?

9. What did the monks give the wealthy people, merchants and market stallholders in return?

10. Select one of the claims made by John Green.

a. Is the explanation offered by Green convincing?

b. Is the explanation enough to support the statements made or is more evidence needed?

c. Brainstorm what evidence you would want or need to support such statements.

Appendix 3

Activity 2, Report on a journey along the Silk Road

This activity may be done individually, in pairs or in groups of three or four.

You may need to do some additional research.

1. Select a religion from the following: Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism.

Religion chosen:

2. The starting point for the journey of a person along the Silk Road is:

(The teacher will identify a place for the journey to begin according to the religion chosen.)

3. Identify which ideas of the religious view that will travel. (Refer to the premises of the religion in [Learning about world views and religions key premises](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/static/docs/Learning%20about%20World%20Views%20and%20Religions.pdf), Victorian Curriculum F–10.)

4. Decide which routes on the Silk Road the traveller will take and identify the cities and cultures encountered. (Use [*Interactive map of the cities along the Silk Road,*](http://en.unesco.org/silkroad/network-silk-road-cities-map-app/en) UNESCO.)

5. Identify the civilisations with which interaction will take place on the journey.

6. As the travel unfolds various challenges are experienced. How will the traveller use their religion to respond to such challenges? (Your teacher will specify a challenge/s during the lesson.)

7. Write a report of the traveller’s journey so that others may learn from these experiences. Plan your ideas here. When finalised convert your information to a journal presentation or an illustrated scroll entitled ‘A Traveller’s Tale’.

Appendix 4

Assessment task 1

*Xuanzang: The story of my life and legacy*

I am Xuanzang (602–664 CE/AD), one of Mahayana Buddhism’s most famous monks. I began studying the texts of Buddhism that had made it to China, but they were full of influences and ideas from other world views, such as Confucianism. I wanted to remove those ideas and influences from Buddhism and find an authentic form of my religion. I wanted to have a true understanding of my own religious world view.

I wanted to visit India but a decree by Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE/AD) forbade it. I escaped China in 629 CE/AD, from Chang’an (Xian), the capital city. I travelled 25 000 kilometres over four years. Along the way I saw the desolation of Buddhist sites. Sadly, my world view, which I believed had the potential to save the world, was in decline. Everywhere I went I documented in writing or drawing the decline of significant Buddhist sites I passed on the routes of what later became known as the Silk Road.

Along the way I:

* was almost killed by a disciple called Vandak
* had arrows shot at me from the emperor’s forts, which guarded oases
* nearly died of thirst in the Gobi desert until my horse found an oasis
* was nearly forced to stay at Gaochang and teach Buddhism for King Qu Wentai
* was given my own caravan by the same king of Gaochang
* was robbed by bandits
* met many kings and queens as I travelled through 110 kingdoms
* taught many people in lectures and a number of them became disciples
* crossed permanently snow-capped mountains and faced avalanches (some disciples died making the crossing in caravans, due to the cold and avalanches)
* saw the degraded state of many Buddhist sites, including Gandhara/Kandahar, Bodh Gaya and others
* saw visions of demons, giants and the Buddha himself
* was nearly sacrificed to a Hindu goddess called Durga but prayed and a typhoon appeared, which convinced the pirate captors not to sacrifice me and they then converted to Buddhism
* travelled through perilous deserts and then over the Tian Shan mountains, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and finally to northern India
* made sculptural copies of images of the Buddha.

The religious debate

For half a decade I travelled to Buddhist sites in and around India. When I eventually arrived at Nalanda, the last Buddhist university left in India, Abbot Silabhadra (Head Monk) said that my coming to Nalanda had been foretold to the abbot three years earlier in a vision by Bodhisattvas called Maitreya and Manjusri (holy people who choose to remain at a level just below achieving the ultimate goal of Nirvana to guide others).

After travelling to more holy sites where Buddha went around India, my knowledge was tested. I was invited by King Harsha Vardhana of Assam (India) to debate scholars from different schools of Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. When tested by the abbot, I could explain Mahayana (Great Vehicle) as opposed to Hineyana (Small Vehicle). Harsha was to become the last prominent Buddhist king of India before his country adopted Hindusim and later Islam in great numbers.

The debate was held during the Kumbh Mela (major festival honouring religious leaders) at Kanyakubja in 642 CE/AD. Religious scholars, 18 kings and their wives attended. Both King Harsha and I made use of the eighteen-day debate to reach a large audience. My intelligence, logic and wit during the debates won many enemies and King Harsha had to issue orders protecting me from physical harm and death threats. Harsha sought to immortalise his reign by becoming a patron of Buddhism. I defended both the honour of Nalanda University, Harsha’s kingdom and the Truth of Dharma (Buddhist teaching) itself. Arguments were printed on banners and scholars could read my defences of Mahayana Buddhism and choose which verses to argue with. After presenting such coherent arguments and through my protection by royal decree, King Harsha declared me the winner.

For me winning was not as important as promoting Buddhism. I taught that the material world and our perceptions of it are illusions. I also taught that killing another being is prohibited in Buddhism and that by presenting the tolerance and love promoted in Buddhism, eventually all violence would cease to be in the world.

Coming home

Afterwards in 643 CE/AD I made the treacherous journey back across the Himalayas, along routes of the Silk Road, back to Emperor Taizong. My fears of punishment for disobeying the Emperor’s decree 16 years earlier turned out to be unwarranted. I entered the city to a hero’s welcome. The Emperor wanted to know about the kingdoms along the Silk Road through which I had passed for military campaigns he was planning. So, as a compromise, I wrote a travelogue of the Silk Road. As part of that deal, the Emperor agreed to write the preface to my translation of over 600 Sutras of 1335 verses from Sanskrit to Chinese. I had brought these Sutras and verses from India. In 652 CE/AD I persuaded Emperor Taizong to build the Wild Goose Pagoda, which still stands today.

My legacy

My influence on Buddhism was great. Buddhism was saved for future generations and is a very large world view today. I founded a school call Weishi (Consciousness only) and I was immortalised in the book *Journey to the West*. This book was allegedly written by Wu Cheng’en, a Chinese diplomat, during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE/AD), although it has little in common with his other writings. In this work I appear as a fictional character, the monk Tripitaka, whose disciples include a stone monkey king, a sand demon, a pig spirit and a horse that turns out to be a dragon. They are on a pilgrimage, or journey, to bring Buddhist scriptures from India. It is a riotous comedy in which the animal instincts of the main characters are constantly getting them into and out of trouble. Demons constantly try to consume Tripitaka’s flesh and corrupt officialdom plays a part in attempting to divert the pilgrims. *Journey to the West* is considered one of the four major classic texts of Chinese literature. My journey has been turned into numerous documentaries and a film, and Tripitaka’s journey and disciples have been made into a number of Chinese and Japanese television shows and films.

More information

Typically, goods and ideas, rather than people, travelled the full distance of the various routes of the Silk Road. Merchants usually traversed the same ‘leg’ (or section) of a route and back, buying at one city and selling for a mark-up (raised price) at the destination city. It was traditional for diplomats and monks to accompany the caravans for a leg of the journey and be given food, water and safe travel. In return merchants sought Buddha’s blessings from monks for the safety and success of their trade missions.

Questions for consideration

1. From which type of Buddhism is Xuanzang?

2. What was Xuanzang’s motive when he began his pilgrimage?

3. What strategies did Xuanzang use to achieve his motive?

4. What did Xuanzang notice about Buddhism as he travelled the routes of the Silk Road?

5. As Xuanzang travelled, what historical skills did he use to record the state of Buddhism?

6. Describe one danger for Xuanzang or one of his accomplishments.

7. According to Xuanzang, what is this world and what could Buddhism do for it?

8. Using this source of Xuanzang’s life story, describe his relationship with and influence on emperors and kings.

9. Which historical and contemporary sources and evidence are available that allow us to evaluate Xuanzang’s ongoing legacy?

Appendix 5

Assessment task 2

1. Read this account of why and how Xuanzang developed Buddhism.

*Xuanzang and Buddhism*

* ‘he heard the discussions of various schools and made a study of their propositions, finding that they were vying with each other to emphasise their own specific theories and were jealous of the teachings of their rivals. This aroused his desire to go to the root of the doctrine of Buddhism, and he determined to make a thorough study of the matter.’ (*The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*, 1996: 391–392)
* He preferred Mahayana because it was less about individual perfection and more about salvation for all, which was achieved by significant individuals who were worthy of attaining Enlightenment and Nirvana but chose to remain one level below it. They are called Bodhisattvas.
* Bodhisattvas remain attached to the world by reincarnating in order to guide others towards reaching their own enlightenment (for example, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas).
* He identified inconsistencies in the translations at his monastery in China that led to many variants of Buddhism. So he wanted to make a more unified and authoritative interpretation of Mahayana Buddhism.
* He resisted pressure by emperors, kings and abbots to stay with them rather than continue his journey.
* He thought Buddhism could cure the world of violence and suffering.
* At sites on his journey he lectured, debated and won disciples.
* He saw and sketched historically significant images and sculptures of the Buddha.
* In India he travelled to every site of significance to Buddhism and where there were monasteries he collected Sutras, statues, images and teachings.
* He participated in a public debate in which his 1,600 word defence of Mahayana Buddhism was published, challenged by scholars from other world views and defended victoriously by Xuanzang.
* He returned to Chang’an (Xian) with more than 600 Sutras, statues and Buddhist relics.
* He spent the remainder of his life translating the Sutras, of which it was said ‘The Master is dexterously conversant with the Sanskrit Language … strictly sticking to the Buddha’s meanings, he does not add any embellishments to his translations’ (*Eulogy*,Li 1996: 395).
* He wrote his knowledge of the 110 kingdoms along the Silk Road routes he had traversed, which the emperor needed to plan military campaigns, in *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*. Years later archaeologists found the lost cities of the Silk Road.
* Xuanzang commissioned the Emperor Taizong to write the preface to his translation of the Sutras, thus giving them official authority.
* Xuanzang’s monumental efforts translating 1335 works, including the Heart and Lotus Sutras, effectively moved the spiritual home of the world view of Buddhism from Nepal and India to China.
* He was an authoritative translator of Sanskrit. Buddhist scholars have used and still do to use his works to clarify Sanskrit documents.

2. Now using both the information above and to the overview of Buddhism in [Learning about world views and religions](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/static/docs/Learning%20about%20World%20Views%20and%20Religions.pdf) (Victorian Curriculum F–10 document), discuss some of the following questions and statements. This discussion could be conducted as a class dialogue or in a Socratic circle, or students could conduct short oral presentations or create storyboards to present to the class.

3. Write your key points in the spaces below during the discussion.

Does suffering exist?

How can we escape suffering?

Is winning or losing a debate more important than the quality of points and arguments raised?

Is it better to be feared or revered as a ruler?

Nothing is real.

Everything changes.

Can tolerance and love overcome violence?

Is it preferable to change one person or a group for the better?

Is the world real but the way we see it unreal?