

Silk Road Traveler Identity Quest - Lesson Plan
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Introduction

In this lesson, students will explore intercultural contact in the Silk Road trade networks by examining the writings of Xuan Zang, a 7th century Chinese Buddhist monk who made a pilgrimage to India to collect Buddhist texts. The text used in this exercise is Xuan Zang's *Record of the Western Regions*, which was a text commissioned by the Tang Chinese Emperor. This text includes rich details of the communities Xuan Zang visited.

This lesson can accompany Chapter 12, "Cross-Cultural Exchanges on the Silk Roads," and Chapter 15, "The Resurgence of Empire in East Asia," from Jerry Bentley and Herbert F. Ziegler, *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*, Volume I, Fourth Edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008.)

Grade Level: 11-12

Relevant Topics/Course Units: Silk Road trade, history of India, history of Tang Dynasty China, Buddhism

Duration of activity: 45-60 minutes

Content Objectives:

- To understand that the spread of Buddhism originated in India in the 6th century BCE but had become immensely popular in China by the 7th century CE.
- To understand that the spread of religion was closely connected to the growth of Silk Road trade, particularly in the first millennium of the Common Era.
- To understand the multiple roles of pilgrims and missionaries beyond the scope of religion
- To understand how cross-cultural diffusion and syncretism shaped different societies

Skill Objectives:

- To develop proficiency in constructing questions about textual sources
- To develop proficiency in placing details of primary sources in specific historical context
- To develop proficiency in assessing bias and limitations in primary sources
- To develop proficiency in identifying intended purpose and intended audience of primary sources
- To encourage collaborative discussion

Instructions:

- Students must work collaboratively to determine the identity of the author of a specific primary source.
- Specific excerpts from this primary source will be revealed to the students throughout the duration of class. (The excerpts from this text have been broken down and copied to multiple PowerPoint slides. Instructors can choose to simply project the text slides, one by one, on the screen or distribute print outs of the slides, one by one, to the students).
- Depending on time, give students approximately 5-7 minutes to read and discuss, collectively, the contents of each individual slide. For each slide, students must do the following:
 - Discuss 2 specific details per slide
 - Discuss the possible intended audience of the text
 - Discuss the bias of the text
 - Discussion the possible time period in which the text was written
- Students will use their discussion of each slide to form their own opinions on the identity of the author. As the students work through each slide, remind them that they can always refer back to previous slides to come up with possible responses for the identity of the text's author. Prompt students to

- Reference relevant background reading you have assigned for them
- Discuss at least 2-3 potential authors
- Encourage everyone to participate
- Instructors can facilitate this exercise by
 - Asking some questions related to each slide (written in the notes section of the PowerPoint)
 - Introducing historical context as students progress through the activity
 - Asking students to articulate why they think their questions or comments are relevant to the quest
- Once students have determined the author of the text (or when they are close to it), wrap up the activity by discussing points about Xuan Zang on slide 8 of the PowerPoint.

Modifications:

- There are two ways instructors can lower the level of difficulty of this exercise
 - Give students a list of potential authors to choose from:
 - Xuan Zang, a 7th century Buddhist monk from China who traveled to India
 - Ibn Batutta, a 14th century Muslim scholar from North Africa
 - Zhang Qian, a Chinese official who went on a diplomatic mission to China's Western Regions in the 2nd century BCE
 - Faxian, the first Chinese Buddhist to travel to India in 4th century CE
 - Chandragupta, Mauryan emperor in India who reigned in the 4th to 3rd century BCE
 - Arrian, a Greek writer who lived in the Roman Empire in the 2nd century CE
 - Instead of having students name a specific individual author, have students determine the following details about the author: Which country/region the author is from and what kind of person was he (merchant, soldier, diplomat, monk, pilgrim, etc.)