

Trade and Religious Exchanges in East Asia, 200-1400

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“Some people might suspect that because the teaching of Buddhism developed in the Western Regions it is nothing that would suit China. This would mean that the former sages selected a [particular] territory to establish their teachings instead of establishing a teaching in order to transform the customs [of all the people].

In olden times, the Three August Ones practiced non-action, the Five Emperors transformed [the people] through their virtue, the Three Kings ruled with ceremonials and penal law, and the seven states relied on their destructive power. The territory remained always China (Zhuxia 諸夏), but the teachings of the world changed according to the times. [...]

Yü 禹 emerged from among the Qiang in the West, and Shun 舜 was born among the Yi 夷 in the East. Who would dare to say: Because the land is inferior we dismiss its sages. [Kong] Qiu 孔丘 wanted to live among the Yi and [Lao] Dan 老聃 set out to live among the Rong 戎 in the West. How could it be possible that the land determines where the Dao is? An ordinary sage establishes his teaching without confining himself to either China or the barbarian's [land], not to speak of the Buddha, who embraces the whole universe. How could he limit the transformation to the Western Regions?

In *Li[ji]* 禮記, chapter *Wangzhi* 王制, it is said: “The territory within the Four Seas covers three thousand square *li*.” The territory of the central plain is already less extensive. The rivers Yi 伊 and Luo 洛 were originally Chinese, but now they completely belong to the deserted land of the Rong barbarians. Wu 吳 and Chu 楚, originally belonging to the territory of the Yi barbarians, have been transformed into Chinese districts. While the Dao is flowing endlessly, the land does not change continuously. Moreover, [the earth] generously supports [the innumerable beings] without limitation, while political divisions separate what makes up a whole.

The North Star is in the Northwest; therefore one knows that India occupies the center. Now, the tiny area of the central plain is designated as “Glorious [Land]” (Hua 華) in order to ward off the true Law. But even if one wants to ward it off, the spiritual transformation will still be universal.” (*Hongming ji* 弘明集 14, T.52.95c6-20)

Characters

Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664); author of the *Da Tang Xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 (Records of a Journey to the Western Regions under the Great Tang)

Jianzhen 鑑真 (jap. Ganjin, 688-763)

Xu Gaoseng zhuan 續高僧傳 (Further Biographies of Eminent Monks)

Further Reading:

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