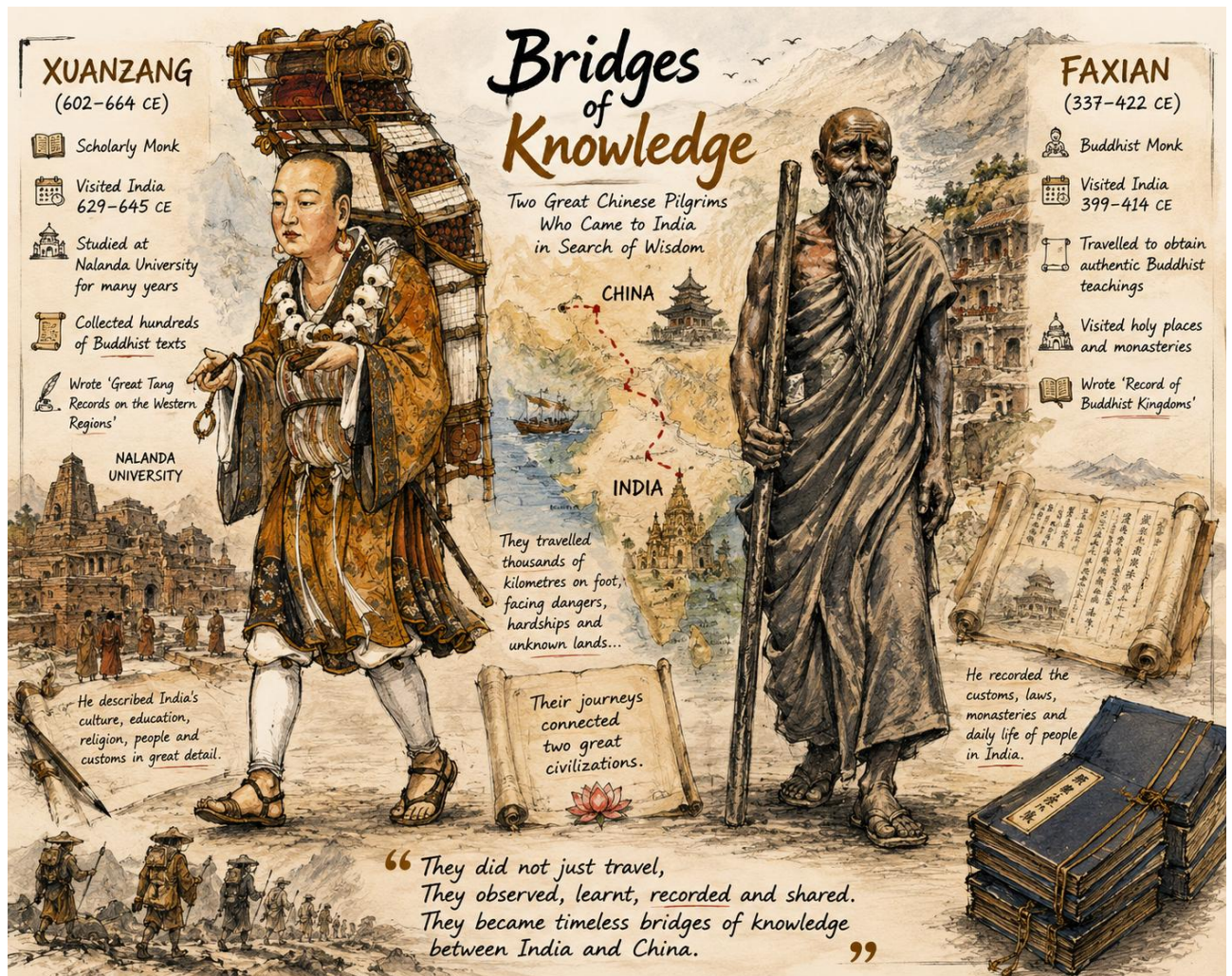


Qualitative Research Journey



Inquiry Question

How did Chinese pilgrims such as Faxian and Xuanzang experience and interpret Indian culture, religion, and education during their journeys to India?

This inquiry is qualitative because it does not ask how many monasteries the pilgrims visited, how far they travelled, or what percentage of their writings concerned education. Instead, it asks how they **experienced, understood, and interpreted** what



they encountered. The researcher is therefore interested in meanings, perspectives, descriptions, values, cultural encounters, and historical context.

The inquiry does not treat Faxian and Xuanzang as neutral cameras that merely recorded India exactly as it existed. It recognises that they observed India through their own religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, purposes, expectations, and personal experiences. Their writings are valuable historical evidence, but they are also interpretations of reality.

Introduction: Who Were Faxian and Xuanzang?

Faxian and Xuanzang were Chinese Buddhist monks who travelled from China to India in search of Buddhist knowledge, sacred places, religious teachers, and authentic texts.

Faxian lived between approximately 337 and 422 CE, while Xuanzang lived between approximately 602 and 664 CE. They travelled during different historical periods and therefore encountered different political, religious, and educational conditions.

Their journeys were extremely difficult. They crossed deserts, mountains, rivers, forests, and several kingdoms at a time when travel was slow, dangerous, and uncertain. They could not rely on modern maps, communication systems, vehicles, hospitals, or organised international travel. Their decision to undertake these journeys shows the depth of their religious commitment and their belief that knowledge was worth pursuing despite hardship.

Both pilgrims visited important Buddhist sites and learning centres. Xuanzang is especially associated with Nalanda, which was a major centre of Buddhist scholarship

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and intellectual debate. They observed monasteries, educational institutions, religious practices, social customs, political systems, languages, and everyday life.

Their writings are important because they provide firsthand accounts of Indian society from the perspectives of foreign travellers. Historians do not treat these records as perfectly objective descriptions. Instead, they ask what the pilgrims noticed, what they valued, what they ignored, how their Buddhist identities influenced their observations, and how they translated Indian experiences for Chinese readers.

Their travel accounts therefore help historians study two things at the same time:

1. What aspects of Indian society were visible during their journeys.
2. How Chinese Buddhist pilgrims interpreted those aspects through their own cultural and religious perspectives.

1. Assumption

Meaning

An **assumption** is a foundational belief that a researcher accepts as a starting point before beginning the investigation. It is not yet a final conclusion. It is a basic idea that shapes what the researcher considers worth studying and how the inquiry will be approached.

In this investigation, researchers begin with the assumption that people do not experience another culture in a completely neutral way. Their understanding is shaped



by what they already believe, what they expect to find, whom they meet, where they travel, what languages they understand, and why they undertook the journey.

Therefore, Faxian and Xuanzang did not simply “see India.” They experienced particular parts of India through the eyes of Chinese Buddhist monks. Their interests were mainly religious and educational, so they may have paid greater attention to monasteries, monks, sacred sites, texts, teachers, and centres of learning than to other aspects of society.

The foundational assumption is:

People’s understanding of another culture is shaped by their experiences, observations, beliefs, purposes, and interactions.

From this assumption, researchers infer that the travel accounts of Faxian and Xuanzang can reveal how Chinese visitors interpreted Indian civilisation. However, the accounts must be read carefully because they reveal both India and the pilgrims’ own viewpoints.

For example, if Xuanzang praised Nalanda, this may provide evidence about the institution’s scholarly importance. At the same time, it may also reveal what Xuanzang valued as a monk and learner. His description is therefore both historical evidence and personal interpretation.

2. Philosophy: Interpretivism and Constructivism

Meaning of Research Philosophy



A **research philosophy** is a coherent set of beliefs about reality, knowledge, and the best way to investigate a question. It shapes what researchers consider valid evidence and how they interpret that evidence.

This inquiry is closely connected with **interpretivism** and **constructivism**.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism argues that human experiences cannot be fully understood only by measuring behaviour or recording events. Researchers must interpret the meanings people attach to those experiences.

Faxian and Xuanzang may both have visited monasteries, but they may not have understood them in exactly the same way. Their interpretations could have been influenced by their religious goals, previous knowledge, personal expectations, and the historical periods in which they travelled.

An interpretivist researcher therefore asks:

- What did the pilgrims believe they were seeing?
- What meanings did they attach to Indian customs?
- Why did they admire certain institutions?
- How did their Buddhist faith influence their descriptions?
- How did they explain Indian society to Chinese readers?



Interpretivism is suitable because the inquiry is not only about what happened. It is about what those events meant to the travellers.

Constructivism

Constructivism argues that people actively construct meaning through language, culture, interaction, and experience. Meaning is not simply found waiting in the world; it is created as people interpret what they encounter.

When Faxian and Xuanzang travelled through India, their understanding developed through conversations with monks, observations of rituals, study of texts, visits to sacred sites, and participation in religious and educational communities.

Their knowledge of India was therefore constructed through interaction. They may have revised earlier ideas, learned new concepts, compared Indian practices with Chinese Buddhism, and carried these interpretations back to China.

Constructivism is appropriate because the inquiry examines how cultural understanding was produced through travel and exchange.

The researcher therefore does not assume that there was only one fixed meaning of “Indian culture” or “Buddhist education.” Instead, the researcher explores how the pilgrims constructed their own understanding of these realities.

Why These Philosophies Fit the Inquiry



Interpretivism helps researchers understand the pilgrims' meanings and perspectives.

Constructivism helps researchers understand how those meanings were formed through cultural contact.

Together, these philosophies lead to the view that historical travel accounts are not merely lists of facts. They are meaning-making documents shaped by experience, language, religion, and intercultural interaction.

3. Existing Theory: Optional

Meaning

In qualitative research, an existing theory may be used as a guiding lens, but it does not always have to be tested. The theory helps researchers notice possible patterns and interpret evidence, while remaining open to unexpected findings.

In this inquiry, researchers may use several theories.

Cultural Diffusion Theory

Cultural diffusion theory explains how beliefs, practices, technologies, languages, customs, and ideas spread from one society to another.

Faxian and Xuanzang did not merely observe Indian Buddhism. They helped carry Buddhist texts, ideas, stories, and interpretations back to China. Their journeys may therefore be examined as part of the movement of knowledge between India and China.



This theory helps researchers ask:

- What ideas travelled from India to China?
- How were Buddhist teachings translated and adapted?
- How did the pilgrims act as carriers of knowledge?
- Did Chinese Buddhism change because of these journeys?

Intercultural Communication Theory

Intercultural communication theory examines how people from different cultural backgrounds communicate, interpret one another, and negotiate differences.

The pilgrims encountered unfamiliar customs, languages, educational traditions, and religious practices. They had to interpret these experiences using concepts available to them.

This theory helps researchers study:

- How the pilgrims understood unfamiliar practices.
- How translation influenced meaning.
- How misunderstandings may have occurred.
- How cultural similarities and differences were described.

Civilisational Exchange Theory



Civilisational exchange theory examines how societies influence one another through travel, trade, religion, learning, art, diplomacy, and migration.

The journeys of Faxian and Xuanzang show that India and China were not isolated civilisations. They were connected through religious networks, intellectual exchange, translation, and travel.

This theory helps researchers move beyond the simple statement that “Buddhism travelled from India to China.” It helps explain the human processes through which that exchange took place.

Why Theory Is Optional

A qualitative researcher may begin with these theories, but should not force every piece of evidence to fit them. The pilgrims’ writings may reveal patterns that existing theories do not fully explain.

Therefore, theory guides attention but does not predetermine the conclusion.

4. Issue

Meaning

An **issue** is the broader problem, gap, tension, or area of uncertainty that makes the research necessary.



Historians already know that Buddhism travelled from India to China. They also know that Chinese monks travelled to India to study religion and collect texts.

However, knowing that the journeys occurred is not the same as understanding how the pilgrims experienced them.

The deeper issue is:

How did these travellers actually perceive and understand Indian culture, religion, education, and society?

A purely factual account may tell us:

- When they travelled.
- Which places they visited.
- Which texts they collected.
- How long they stayed.

A qualitative inquiry asks deeper questions:

- What impressed them?
- What surprised them?
- What did they admire?
- What did they criticise?
- How did they describe Indian scholars and monks?
- What meanings did they attach to educational institutions?



- How did their interpretations influence Chinese readers?

The issue therefore concerns the difference between knowing that cultural exchange happened and understanding how that exchange was experienced and interpreted.

5. Research Question

Research Question

How did Chinese pilgrims such as Faxian and Xuanzang experience and interpret Indian culture, religion, and education during their journeys to India?

Why This Is a Qualitative Research Question

This question is qualitative because it asks **how** people experienced and interpreted a phenomenon.

It is open-ended. It does not predict one fixed answer.

It allows researchers to explore:

- Personal experiences.
- Cultural meanings.
- Religious perspectives.
- Educational observations.
- Historical context.
- Multiple interpretations.



The question does not ask:

“Did Indian education cause an increase in Chinese Buddhist scholarship?”

That would require measurable variables and causal evidence.

Instead, it asks how the pilgrims understood what they encountered. The focus is therefore on meaning rather than measurement.

6. Sensitising Concepts

Meaning

Sensitising concepts are broad ideas that guide the researcher’s attention without dictating what the final findings must be.

They do not operate like fixed variables. They serve as flexible points of awareness.

In this inquiry, sensitising concepts may include:

Culture

Culture includes beliefs, customs, language, art, rituals, values, social practices, and shared ways of life. Researchers examine what parts of Indian culture the pilgrims described and how they interpreted them.

Knowledge

Knowledge refers to teachings, texts, ideas, explanations, and intellectual traditions.

Researchers examine how knowledge was produced, preserved, taught, and exchanged.

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Religion

Religion includes beliefs, rituals, sacred spaces, ethical systems, institutions, and spiritual practices. Since the pilgrims were Buddhist monks, religion is central to how they interpreted India.

Identity

Identity concerns how individuals understand themselves and others. Researchers may ask how the pilgrims' identities as Chinese monks shaped what they noticed and valued.

Education

Education includes teaching, learning, debate, scholarship, institutions, teachers, students, and the transmission of knowledge.

Learning

Learning refers not only to formal study but also to how the pilgrims changed through travel, observation, dialogue, and experience.

Cultural Exchange

Cultural exchange involves the movement of ideas, beliefs, practices, and knowledge between societies.

Perspective

Perspective refers to the viewpoint from which a person interprets reality. The pilgrims' accounts represent particular perspectives, not a complete or neutral picture of India.



These concepts help the researcher notice important aspects of the documents while remaining open to new themes.

7. Speculation

Meaning

A **speculation** is an early possibility considered before sufficient evidence has been collected. It is a starting thought, not a conclusion.

The researcher may initially speculate:

Exposure to Indian society may have influenced how Chinese pilgrims understood religion and learning.

At this stage, the idea is plausible but weakly supported. The researcher has not yet examined enough historical evidence.

The purpose of speculation is not to guess carelessly. It allows the researcher to identify a possible direction for inquiry.

For example, the researcher may wonder whether visiting Indian monasteries caused the pilgrims to revise their understanding of Buddhism. However, this possibility must be examined through their writings and other historical sources.

Speculation remains open to change. The researcher may later discover that the pilgrims were impressed by some aspects of India but critical of others.



8. Conjecture

Meaning

A **conjecture** is a more informed possibility developed after some preliminary evidence has been examined.

After reading selected travel records, the researcher may conjecture:

Indian centres of learning and Buddhist traditions may have impressed Chinese pilgrims and shaped their perceptions of India.

This is stronger than speculation because it is informed by initial evidence. For example, the writings may repeatedly describe monasteries, scholars, sacred places, or educational institutions with admiration.

However, the conjecture is still tentative. The researcher must continue investigating.

The researcher may ask:

- Was the admiration consistent across both pilgrims?
- Were there also criticisms?
- Did the pilgrims admire all parts of Indian society equally?
- Did their descriptions change across regions?
- Could translation have altered the meaning of their accounts?

A conjecture therefore represents a developing interpretation, not a final answer.



9. Proposition

Meaning

A **proposition** is a tentative explanatory statement that guides qualitative inquiry. Unlike a quantitative hypothesis, it is not a fixed prediction that must be statistically supported or falsified.

The proposition may be:

The journeys of Faxian and Xuanzang may have contributed to a positive Chinese understanding of Indian religion, scholarship, and culture by exposing them to influential centres of learning and vibrant Buddhist communities.

This proposition connects several ideas:

- Travel exposed the pilgrims to Indian institutions.
- Their experiences shaped their interpretations.
- Their writings communicated those interpretations to Chinese society.
- Their journeys contributed to cultural and intellectual exchange.

The proposition guides the inquiry by suggesting relationships that deserve exploration.

However, the researcher must remain open to complexity. The final evidence may show that their understanding was neither completely positive nor completely uniform.

A strong qualitative proposition is therefore flexible, evidence-sensitive, and open to refinement.



10. Research Design

Meaning

A **research design** is the overall plan used to answer the research question.

This inquiry uses a **qualitative historical research design** based mainly on document analysis and interpretation of primary and secondary historical sources.

The research design explains:

- What evidence will be examined.
- How sources will be selected.
- How texts will be interpreted.
- How themes will be identified.
- How credibility will be established.
- How bias and historical context will be considered.

Because Faxian and Xuanzang are historical figures, researchers cannot interview or directly observe them. Their experiences must be reconstructed through surviving texts and supporting evidence.

The design may include:

- Historical document analysis.
- Comparative analysis of the two pilgrims.
- Thematic analysis.



- Contextual interpretation.
- Source criticism.
- Triangulation with archaeological and historical evidence.

The design remains flexible because new themes may emerge as researchers study the documents.

11. Data Collection

Meaning

Data collection is the systematic process of gathering the evidence needed to answer the research question.

For this inquiry, researchers may collect:

Travel Accounts

The writings attributed to Faxian and Xuanzang provide direct descriptions of their journeys, observations, and interpretations.

Buddhist Manuscripts

Manuscripts may reveal which teachings were considered important and how religious knowledge circulated.

Historical Chronicles



Chronicles can provide political, social, and geographical context for the pilgrims' journeys.

Records Related to Nalanda

Accounts of Nalanda help researchers understand its educational importance and compare Xuanzang's descriptions with other evidence.

Temple Inscriptions

Inscriptions may provide evidence about religious institutions, patrons, teachers, sacred sites, and historical events.

Translated Buddhist Texts

Translations help researchers examine how ideas moved from India into Chinese intellectual and religious life.

Archaeological Evidence

Ruins, artefacts, inscriptions, coins, sculptures, and architectural remains can be used to compare written descriptions with material evidence.

Later Historical Interpretations

Secondary scholarship helps researchers understand debates, translation difficulties, and competing explanations.

The researcher must carefully record where each source came from, when it was produced, who created it, and what purpose it served.



12. Qualitative Evidence

Meaning

Qualitative evidence consists of words, descriptions, narratives, observations, symbols, interpretations, and contextual details that help researchers understand meaning.

The travel records become qualitative evidence because they describe what the pilgrims saw, experienced, valued, and interpreted.

For example, Xuanzang's descriptions of Nalanda may include observations about:

- The number of scholars.
- Areas of study.
- Intellectual debate.
- Monastic discipline.
- Teachers and students.
- The reputation of the institution.

Faxian's writings may describe:

- Monasteries.
- Religious rituals.
- Sacred locations.
- Social customs.



- Buddhist communities.
- Rules and practices.

These descriptions provide evidence, but they must not be accepted uncritically.

Researchers ask:

- Was the pilgrim an eyewitness?
- Was the account written during or after the journey?
- Could memory have altered the description?
- Was the text translated?
- What was omitted?
- Did the writer have a religious purpose?
- Was the description intended to inspire Chinese Buddhists?

Qualitative evidence is therefore valuable because it provides access to meaning, but it must be interpreted within its context.

13. Interpretation

Meaning

Interpretation is the process of explaining what the evidence may mean.

Description tells us what the pilgrim wrote.



Interpretation explains what that description reveals about values, perspectives, culture, identity, or historical experience.

For example:

Description

Xuanzang described Nalanda as a respected centre containing many scholars and students.

Interpretation

This may suggest:

- Respect for Indian scholarship.
- Admiration for organised education.
- Recognition of intellectual excellence.
- A belief that India was an important source of Buddhist knowledge.
- A comparison between Indian and Chinese educational traditions.

Interpretation goes beyond repeating the source. It connects the source to the research question.

However, interpretation must remain grounded in evidence. Researchers should not claim that Xuanzang admired all Indian institutions simply because he praised Nalanda.

Interpretation must also consider alternative meanings. His praise may reflect genuine admiration, but it may also reflect his religious purpose or the selective nature of his journey.



14. Themes

Meaning

A **theme** is a recurring pattern of meaning identified across the evidence. Themes are broader than individual codes or observations.

Researchers first identify small units of meaning and then group related ideas into larger themes.

Theme 1: Respect for Learning

Both pilgrims appear to have valued scholarship, religious study, teachers, and centres of education.

This theme may include descriptions of:

- Learned monks.
- Libraries or texts.
- Debates.
- Educational discipline.
- Centres such as Nalanda.
- Intellectual travel.



The theme suggests that education was an important part of India-China cultural exchange.

Theme 2: Religious Devotion

The pilgrims' journeys were deeply motivated by Buddhism.

This theme may include:

- Visits to sacred sites.
- Respect for relics.
- Descriptions of monasteries.
- Search for authentic teachings.
- Participation in religious communities.
- Collection of Buddhist texts.

This theme reveals that religion was not merely one topic among many. It shaped the entire journey.

Theme 3: Cultural Curiosity

The pilgrims observed customs, language, social practices, and forms of daily life beyond strictly religious matters.

This theme suggests that travel encouraged curiosity about another civilisation.



It may include:

- Clothing.
- Food.
- social customs.
- languages.
- political systems.
- festivals.
- regional differences.

The theme shows that intercultural understanding often begins with attentive observation.

Theme 4: Knowledge Exchange

The pilgrims did not only receive knowledge. They helped transmit it.

This theme includes:

- Collection of texts.
- Translation.
- Teaching.
- Interpretation.
- Movement of religious ideas.



- Preservation of manuscripts.
- Communication of Indian traditions to Chinese audiences.

Knowledge exchange was therefore an active process, not a one-way transfer.

Theme 5: Interconnected Civilisations

The journeys reveal that India and China were connected through networks of religion, education, language, travel, and scholarship.

This theme challenges the idea that ancient civilisations developed in complete isolation.

The pilgrims themselves became bridges between societies.

15. Theory Building or Theory Refinement

Meaning

Theory building occurs when researchers use patterns in the evidence to develop a broader explanation.

Theory refinement occurs when existing theories are modified or made more precise in response to new evidence.

After connecting the themes, researchers may develop this broader explanation:



Cultural exchange occurs when individuals travel, interact, observe, interpret, translate, and carry knowledge between societies.

This explanation deepens cultural diffusion theory. It shows that ideas do not move automatically. Human agents carry them.

Faxian and Xuanzang were not passive messengers. They:

- Selected what to study.
- Interpreted what they encountered.
- Chose what to record.
- Translated concepts.
- Explained them to new audiences.
- Adapted knowledge across cultures.

The evidence may therefore refine cultural diffusion theory by showing that cultural exchange is shaped by interpretation, identity, selection, and translation.

The findings may also contribute to intercultural learning theory by showing that travel can transform both the traveller and the receiving society.

16. Evaluation

Qualitative findings must be evaluated to determine whether they are credible, trustworthy, and responsibly interpreted.



Credibility

Credibility refers to whether the interpretation accurately represents the evidence.

The travel accounts are valuable because they contain firsthand observations.

However, credibility is increased only when researchers carefully examine authorship, translation, context, purpose, and consistency.

Dependability

Dependability refers to whether the research process is clear, logical, and transparent.

Researchers should explain:

- Which documents were selected.
- Why they were selected.
- How passages were coded.
- How themes were developed.
- How disagreements were handled.

A dependable study allows others to understand how the conclusions were reached.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to whether the findings arise from the evidence rather than the researcher's personal preferences.



Researchers should support interpretations with specific passages, compare multiple sources, and acknowledge uncertainty.

For example, they should not claim that all Chinese travellers admired India simply because they personally value intercultural harmony.

Transferability

Transferability refers to whether the findings may help explain similar cases of cultural or intellectual exchange.

The study does not claim that every traveller in every civilisation had the same experience. However, the findings may be relevant to other historical situations involving pilgrimage, translation, education, or cross-cultural learning.

Interpretive Validity

Interpretive validity refers to whether the researcher's interpretation accurately reflects the meanings expressed in the sources.

Researchers must avoid assigning modern meanings to ancient words without historical justification.

They must ask whether terms such as “university,” “nation,” “culture,” or “religion” had exactly the same meanings in the pilgrims' periods as they do today.



Triangulation

Triangulation means comparing evidence from different sources, methods, researchers, or theoretical perspectives to determine whether they support a similar interpretation.

In this inquiry, travel accounts may be compared with:

- Inscriptions.
- Archaeological remains.
- Manuscripts.
- Chinese chronicles.
- Indian historical sources.
- Translated texts.
- Other travellers' records.

If multiple sources converge, confidence in the interpretation increases.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity requires researchers to examine how their own beliefs, culture, nationality, education, and expectations may influence the interpretation.



For example, a modern researcher may wish to portray ancient India-China relations as entirely harmonious. Reflexivity requires the researcher to avoid forcing the evidence into that preferred narrative.

Researchers must also recognise that Faxian and Xuanzang were Buddhist monks. Their religious identity influenced where they travelled, whom they met, and what they recorded.

Authenticity

Authenticity concerns whether the study fairly represents the complexity and diversity of the historical evidence.

A trustworthy account should not portray the pilgrims as entirely objective, nor should it dismiss their observations simply because they were religious travellers.

It should represent admiration, difficulty, cultural difference, uncertainty, and possible contradiction.

Alternative Interpretations

Researchers should consider other plausible explanations.

For example, Xuanzang's praise of Indian Buddhist institutions may indicate intellectual admiration. Alternatively, it may partly reflect his desire to legitimise the importance of the texts and knowledge he brought back to China.



Considering alternatives strengthens the final claim because it prevents premature certainty.

17. Ethics, Responsibility, and Obligation

Ethics

Historical research also involves ethical responsibilities, even when the participants lived many centuries ago.

Researchers must represent cultures, religions, and historical communities fairly.

They should avoid:

- Cultural stereotypes.
- Nationalistic exaggeration.
- Selective quotation.
- Misrepresentation of religious beliefs.
- Ignoring contradictory evidence.
- Treating one traveller's account as the voice of an entire civilisation.

Responsibility

Researchers are responsible for checking translations, acknowledging uncertainty, distinguishing evidence from interpretation, and correcting misleading claims.



They must also explain the limitations of the sources.

For example, a pilgrim's account may represent specific regions and Buddhist communities rather than all of India.

Obligation

Researchers have an obligation to preserve intellectual honesty.

This includes:

- Citing sources accurately.
- Respecting historical context.
- Recognising source bias.
- Presenting competing perspectives.
- Avoiding present-day assumptions.
- Distinguishing fact, inference, and speculation.

Ethical historical inquiry protects the dignity of past societies and helps modern readers understand them more responsibly.

18. Knowledge Claim

Meaning



A **knowledge claim** is a justified statement about reality supported by analysed evidence.

The final knowledge claim may be:

The journeys of Faxian and Xuanzang reveal that cultural exchange between India and China was shaped not only by geography and trade but also by religious learning, intellectual curiosity, educational engagement, translation, and personal interpretation. Their accounts suggest that Indian Buddhist institutions, centres of learning, sacred traditions, and cultural practices significantly influenced how these pilgrims understood India and how they later communicated that understanding to Chinese society.

This claim is not based on one isolated quotation. It is constructed through a chain of evidence and reasoning.

The claim is supported by:

- Travel records.
- Buddhist manuscripts.
- Historical chronicles.
- Inscriptions.
- Educational and monastic evidence.
- Translated texts.
- Archaeological sources.



- Recurring themes across documents.

The claim is credible because it uses firsthand accounts.

It is strengthened through triangulation because different sources are compared.

It demonstrates interpretive validity because the themes are grounded in the meanings expressed in the texts.

It remains reflexive because researchers acknowledge that the pilgrims' Buddhist identities shaped their observations.

It remains provisional because new translations, archaeological discoveries, or historical interpretations may refine it.

The strongest knowledge claim therefore does not say:

“Faxian and Xuanzang proved that ancient India was superior.”

That would be simplistic, biased, and unsupported.

Instead, it says that their accounts provide evidence of how religious travel, education, and cultural interaction contributed to India-China intellectual exchange.

19. Confidence Quotient

Meaning

The **Confidence Quotient** expresses how much confidence researchers should place in the knowledge claim after evaluating the quality and limitations of the evidence.



Confidence may be increased by:

- Firsthand observations.
- Agreement across multiple sources.
- Archaeological support.
- Clear thematic patterns.
- Transparent analysis.
- Careful translation.
- Consideration of alternative interpretations.

Confidence may be reduced by:

- Missing documents.
- Translation difficulties.
- Religious bias.
- Selective observation.
- Later copying or editing.
- Uncertainty about historical terminology.
- Differences between the two pilgrims' periods.

A high Confidence Quotient does not mean absolute certainty. It means the claim is strongly supported relative to the available evidence.

A possible judgement might be:

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Confidence Quotient: High but provisional, because the accounts provide rich firsthand evidence and are supported by other historical sources, but they remain selective, culturally situated, and shaped by religious purpose.

20. Wider Understanding and Implications

The findings produce understanding beyond the lives of two pilgrims.

How Ideas Travel Across Civilisations

Ideas move through people, texts, translation, teaching, memory, and institutions.

The journeys show that knowledge does not spread by itself. Individuals carry, interpret, and adapt it.

How Education Connects Societies

Centres of learning attract students and scholars across regions.

Nalanda may therefore be understood not only as an Indian institution but as part of a wider intellectual network.

How Religion Facilitates Cultural Exchange

Religion can motivate travel, scholarship, translation, and dialogue.



Buddhism created networks connecting teachers, monks, texts, sacred sites, and communities across Asia.

Why Intercultural Dialogue Matters

The pilgrims' experiences show that contact between cultures can generate curiosity, respect, learning, and reinterpretation.

Intercultural dialogue does not require cultures to become identical. It allows them to learn from one another while preserving difference.

How Knowledge Is Adapted

Ideas transferred from India to China were not copied without change.

They were translated linguistically and culturally. Chinese scholars interpreted Indian Buddhist concepts through Chinese intellectual traditions.

Knowledge exchange therefore involves transformation as well as transmission.

Student A Versus Student B

Student A

Student A knows:

Faxian and Xuanzang travelled from China to India to learn about Buddhism.



This student possesses an important historical fact.

However, the understanding remains descriptive and limited. The student knows what happened but not how historians constructed deeper knowledge about it.

Student B

Student B understands:

- Who the pilgrims were.
- Why they travelled.
- How their religious identities shaped their observations.
- Why their travel records count as qualitative evidence.
- How historians interpret descriptions.
- How codes become themes.
- How evidence is triangulated.
- Why alternative interpretations matter.
- How bias and translation affect historical knowledge.
- How broader theories of cultural exchange are built or refined.
- How a knowledge claim is evaluated.
- Why historical conclusions remain provisional.



Student B therefore understands not only the historical content but the **architecture of knowledge construction**.

The Complete Qualitative Knowledge Journey

Reality

India-China cultural interaction existed as a historical reality.

↓

Ontology

Researchers ask what kind of reality is being investigated: lived, cultural, religious, educational, and historically interpreted reality.

↓

Epistemology

Researchers ask how that reality can be known through documents, narratives, inscriptions, translations, and interpretation.

↓

Assumptions

People interpret other cultures through their own beliefs, purposes, identities, and experiences.

↓



Research Philosophy

Interpretivism and constructivism guide the investigation.



Phenomenon of Interest

Chinese Buddhist pilgrimage and India-China cultural exchange.



Optional Theory or Sensitising Concepts

Cultural diffusion, intercultural communication, religion, education, identity, knowledge, and perspective.



Research Question

How did Faxian and Xuanzang experience and interpret Indian culture, religion, and education?



Speculation

Exposure to India may have influenced their understanding.



Conjecture

Indian Buddhist institutions and learning centres may have shaped their perceptions.





Proposition

Their journeys may have contributed to Chinese understanding of Indian religion, scholarship, and culture.



Research Design

Qualitative historical document analysis.



Data Collection

Travel accounts, manuscripts, chronicles, inscriptions, translations, and archaeological evidence.



Qualitative Evidence

Descriptions, narratives, observations, and interpretations recorded in historical sources.



Coding

Researchers label recurring ideas such as scholarship, devotion, curiosity, and translation.





Categories

Related codes are grouped into education, religion, culture, and exchange.



Themes

Respect for learning, religious devotion, cultural curiosity, knowledge exchange, and interconnected civilisations.



Interpretation

Researchers explain what the themes reveal about the pilgrims' perspectives.



Alternative Interpretations

Other possible explanations are examined.



Theory Building or Refinement

The findings refine explanations of cultural diffusion and intercultural learning.



Evaluation

Credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, reflexivity, authenticity, interpretive validity, triangulation, and source limitations are examined.





Ethics, Responsibility, and Obligation

Historical voices are represented fairly, contextually, and transparently.



Knowledge Claim

The journeys contributed to religious, educational, and cultural exchange between India and China.



Confidence Quotient

Confidence is high but provisional because the evidence is rich yet historically situated and interpretive.



Implications

The study explains how people, travel, education, religion, and translation connect civilisations.



Knowledge

A deeper and more trustworthy understanding of India-China cultural relations is constructed.



New Questions



- How did Chinese readers interpret the pilgrims' accounts?
- How were Indian Buddhist ideas transformed during translation?
- Did Indian scholars form similar interpretations of China?
- How did the experiences of Faxian and Xuanzang differ?
- Which parts of Indian society were absent from their accounts?
- How did political conditions shape their journeys?



The next qualitative inquiry begins.