

Preface

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How time flies! It has been almost two years since the first International Conference on Xuanzang and Silk Road Culture. The conference gathered close to one hundred specialists and scholars from many provinces in China and from over ten countries and regions, as well as over three-hundred attendees from all walks of life. We received academic papers from 52 scholars, among whom 28 are foreign scholars. This high rate of international participation speaks to the international character of the conference, as well as the enormous influences of Xuanzang and the Chinese Buddhist culture that he represents, as well as the cultural heritage of Xi'an, on both China and abroad alike.

The success of the conference is more than the result of our individual efforts, but is inseparable from China's rapid development that began 40 years ago. Guiyuan Monastery 歸元寺 in Chang'an, built during the Zhenguan reign (627–649) of the Tang dynasty, is an ancient and renowned monastery. To the west, the monastery borders on Feng River 灃河 and to the south, it faces Mount Zhongnan 終南山. It was the last monastery that Xuanzang visited before returning to Chang'an after his journey to Central and South Asia. Therefore, the karmic connection between Guiyuan Monastery and Xuanzang was formed as early as the days of Xuanzang's return to China. Even nowadays, every year on the 23rd day of the first lunar

month, people in the outskirts of Xi'an still gather and host grand festivals in memory of this historic event. During the pre-modern period, China became weakened and the monastery also suffered the fate of damage from incessant warfare, especially after the reign of Daoguang (1820–1850). Only the Hall of Resting Buddha 臥佛殿 survived. The monastery was not restored until after the late 1970s. In 2002, I assumed the role as the abbot of the monastery and I have since restored not only the Hall of Resting Buddha, but also built several new buildings, including the Hall of Merits 功德樓, the Chanting Hall 念佛堂 and the Lecture Hall of Guiyuan 歸元講堂. Meanwhile, the monastery also hosts a wide range of cultural activities: courses on the traditional culture, a winter/summer camp, lectures, meditation retreats, cultural and artistic festivals, cultural forums, memorial events, and more. Upholding the Buddhist spirit of compassion, we are also active in charitable causes. For instance, even at the time of penury, we still managed to run our care home, so that elders with special needs could enjoy a peaceful end of life.

Beginning in 2016, I also became the abbot of Xinglong Monastery 興隆寺 at Mount Jingtai 金臺山 in Zheng'an County 鎮安縣. The monastery can trace its founding to the Western Jin (266–316), and it prospered during the Tang (618–907). Emperor Xuanzong (r.712–756) ordered a Longxing Monastery 龍興寺 to be built in each state; Longxing Monastery in Zheng'an was thereby expanded and became a state monastery. For the next thousand years, the monastery experienced countless difficulties and was damaged by war on several occasions, only to be re-built each time. In 1944, just before the victory of the anti-Japanese war, Master Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947) issued an appeal by the media and thereby laid the foundation of the Buddhist Association in Zheng'an. Since then, the monastery changed its name to 'Xinglong', which is in use still today. But the true revival of the monastery became possible only recently, thanks to the support of the local government of Zheng'an of Shanxi Province. The monastery was then able to be expanded on its original site along the hill by adopting the ancient architecture style of the Tang dynasty.

During the three-day conference, I put forth a proposal. With scholars abroad, we signed a so-called 'Chang'an Declaration' 長安宣言 together. In this declaration, we acknowledge that the true

spirit of the ancient Chang'an lies in its inclusiveness and its calibre of optimism, tolerance and openness. By reviving the spirit of the old Chang'an, we hope that there will be plenty of opportunities for cultural exchange and merging, fostered by both specialists and the general population of different countries, who come from different social classes and varied ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. As the inheritor of the traditional Chinese culture, we have the responsibility to promote this spirit of inclusiveness to the world. This conference is only the beginning of our long-term mission to combine the promotion of the Chinese traditional culture with the promotion of the Chinese Buddhist culture, as well as to further support the in-depth studies of Chinese Buddhist culture initiated by the international academic circle of Buddhist Studies.

Lastly, I want to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to people of all walks of life who have selflessly supported us. No matter the change of international climate, we wish to continue cultivating this ecological sphere, in which we can mutually benefit and learn from each other across nations, across the academia-religion divide, and across the monastic-secular distinction. Our goal is to establish long-term collaboration and obtain a win-win outcome, and to encourage the force of peace in the world for the betterment of humanity's well-being.