

In the Footsteps of the Ancients 2025



If only (with a bow to NZ singer songwriter Teeks)

If only the mountains and deserts and rivers
could be clear and free for all

Yes to the delightful surprise of Crescent Lake

Yes to the awe-inspiring artists, practitioners and workers
creating caves and grottoes and temples and stupas

Yes to the teachers of the pilgrimage and this sangha

Yes to splendid Jack and all the guides

Oh if only all sentient beings

had peace and justice and happiness now

If only I could love the Dharma as I wish to do.

Suzanne Franzway

First and last days...



China Pilgrimage

Six Sense overload

Grasping for formulations -
to make sense of China old and new

Grasping for insights -
to make sense of Buddhism old and new

Grasping for views to cling to,
to sound clever, considered and wise.

Can I sit within the noisy turbulence of sense experience
without trying to contain and reduce it?

Can my pilgrimage end
without fixing a view on China or Buddhism?

Norma O'Flynn



*Once I held a scarlet leaf
And did not understand
The cycle of my own brief life
Lay symbolized in my hand.*

Oma Ott Martin

Once my Oma held my hand
And I did then not know
Her scarlet leaf within my heart
To many lands would go.

So now on China pilgrimage
With friends both old and new,
I share my wise old grandmama
Whose Buddhist words ring true.

Sherry Martin Woods

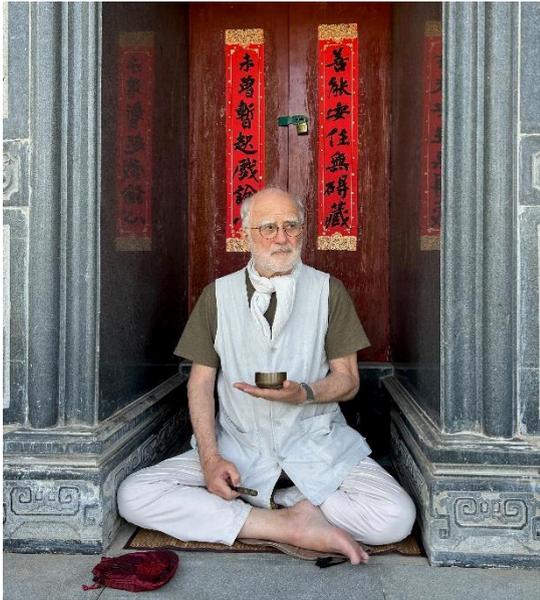
Anis seed tasting peanuts
Noodles like silk
Fog on east peak
Pilgrims smiling
Buddhas to buddhas

Martine Batchelor

Oh pilgrim,
Where do you go?
What do you see?
Breath rising and falling.

Reena Nath

Guides...



Inscription

The pilgrim is 157 cm in height,
originally weighing 49.6 kg.
Inscription preserved in the
heart mind of this very being:

25 wanderers, and gifted guides beyond number
all seeking the glint of the Buddha path illumination
(and the graces of holidaymaker heaven)
spared no effort
to commission a transient temple.

Scrambling this way and that,
(shuffling, shimmying, ascending)
and standing like mahatma trees
on solitary peaks
where birdsong sculpts the breezes
like countless pagoda roof edges

After pilgrimage they wished to soar
to meet 1000 gods of Sanity,
and to possess Sapience
pervading the Three Domains.

In future incarnations they hoped to
reunite with their China Pilgrims Family,
cast-off obstacles,
rejoice on the non dual path of co-creation,
and share this joy with all sentient beings.

Sherre DeLys

The everyday on a pilgrim's journey

- being moved in the grottoes
- seeing buddhas tiny and tall
- meditating in temples & the falling rain
- seeing the vastness of train stations, high rise developments, wind farms, and the desert
- people delighting in dress ups
- Chinese blue magpies
- an alpaca in a shopping mall
- generous banquets prepared for us
- listening to monks chanting in the mountain mists

And, with skillful guides and friends, aspiring to arrive with each step.

Ellie Fossey



Earlier pilgrims... Bodhidharma and Xuanzang

I initially wrote this predictable comment:

“In the old days, Chan Master Linji said to kill the Buddha if you meet him. Nowdays, he may say to eat the Buddha ice cream.”

However, it is not really poetic. But I’m retired and I wanted to do sightseeing instead of writing stuff so I asked ChatGPT to write several poems in the style of some famous poets based on my comment.

They were long so I asked for some haikus. This is one that ChatGPT wrote for me: “Buddha on the path—melting in my paper cup. No need to kill him.”

Frank de Leon



Arriving... arriving... arriving

*I've been out walking
I don't do too much talking these days
These days*

*These days I seem to think a lot
About the things that I forgot to do
And all the times I had the chance to*

*I've stopped my rambling
I don't do too much gambling these days
These days*

*These days I seem to think about
How all the changes came about my way
And I wonder if I'll see another highway*

*I'll keep on moving
I'm bound to be improving these days
These days*

*And if I seem to be afraid to live the life
That I have made and sown
It's just that I've been healing so long*

*I've stopped my dreaming
I don't do too much dreaming these days
These days*

*These days I sit on cornerstones
And count the time in quarter tones to ten
Please don't confront me with my failures
I've not forgotten them*

Lyrics - Glen Campbell, These Days

Kirk Purvis

Night out in Xi'an





A Billion Chinese on Mount Wutai

The more I know
Of Buddhism the less
I understand.
The more I watch
The pilgrim bow the less
I think I know.
Like Tolstoy's Father Sergius
I see my pride dissolve
In blessed anonymity.

Stephen Batchelor



2200 years ago Emperors mandated by God pray at the Temple of Heaven
A speaking Robot travels with me in a hotel lift

A beautiful Crescent lake shimmers
Among sand dunes

Centuries taken to make exquisite paintings in caves,
Super fast trains run at 340 km per hour

Doctor graciously feels the pulse of 20 tourists,
Policemen suspect our mats and shawls

Egotistical emperor sanctions Terracotta warriors
Woman prostrates in deep faith around a pagoda

Hallo Neehow , happy Chinese families interact with us
Preeti's loss - our loss

Gigantic Buildings of steel and concrete
Misty mountains with conifers

Mounds of food breakfast, lunch dinner, shining train stations, glittering markets,
Where are the poor hidden here?

Brash shouting and drinking
Confucian dignity and graciousness

Walking in the footsteps of the ancients
we honour the 2 monks, Xuangzhang, Bodhidharma;
1000 years later the same teachings are offered
by our teachers on this pilgrimage

The Longmen Grotto statue with Wu Zetian's exterior
While we search for the Buddha within

25 pilgrims from 11 countries find their peace and practice in the Middle Land
Chungwa 🙏

Thank you
Jack, Amanda, Roc, Bai, Florence and John

Gitu Seth

Just a moment in time

In northern, communist China
no birds, no birdsong
no insects, no weed,
no flowers in the fields
the water not suitable for drinking

Listen:

write no intention,
the music of life
makes me smile

Resting in the ordinary
simply being: Alive!
Peace in every step

Agathe Steinkilber



I still have feelings for you

We had a kind of romance
as Leonard Cohen might have written.
Strolling in the light rain.
China and I.
Rural, committed, kind.

And when we were reunited
two decades later,
you were different.
More modern, more controlling, more urban;
seas of apartments.
The cars glide along streets electric quiet;
the air less grit smog-bound; still,
few birds sang.

Am I an apologist for your bad and worsening behaviour?
(Have you always been this way?)
I see the range; especially heartfelt Jack or
the eager monk who invites
twenty-five of us to his dumpling lunch...
Your nature, not Buddha nature,
but your ambient Buddha nature.

We spin and spiral through the universes, changing,
occasionally grasping the marvels.
A cart offering decent pour over coffee,
in front of an imposing quiet temple.
A modern cypress tree in the courtyard.

Peter Morgan



Every pilgrimage is unique that's obvious to see,
With so many changes in people, places and things,
It's virtually a guarantee.
But somehow one thing remains the same,
With no poem to show I awaken again at 3am.

How much simpler last year round the Bodhi tree,
When only one name reigned supreme, Sakyamuni.
Now amid this kingdom's temples and caves dug deep,
A jumble of arms akimbo, astride and asleep,
Across not just one Buddha but five plus one oh three.

What is this?
A foreign graft attached askew?
A fungus which corrupts what was once pure and new?
Or a farce, a juvenile's prank gone too far,
Of TP (that's toilet paper for those who are posh),
Strewn across carts pulled by deer, sheep and ox.
Or maybe if you're so inclined,
The flowering of a tree finally bearing fruit?

Questioning along this line,
Picks up perhaps the thread Xuanzang left behind.
Who knows maybe three thousand years hence,
All may be giving unimaginable thanks,
To that merciful being, what's his name?
He who freezes suffering of the brain,
That ice cream buddha also known as Frank.

Future generations may need to pick,
Nimbly not just among Tang and Ming and Qin plus or minus G,
But Chris and Nell and Sherry(e) with or without Y or E.

But the question rings incessantly still,
With every turning of the round round wheel.
What is this?
Probably tofu or maybe not, I know squat,
If its green its good for you, just chew

What is this?
Here comes Martine now to save the day,
It's easy, become the question and breathe.
Be patient and soon you'll be free,
If not in your mind, then at least,
Of this honestly extremely questionable poetry.

Cindy Cheng



Haiku #4

quest in all directions
what is this
a ripe watermelon

Ronn Smith

China Couplets

We gathered as Sangha at first in Beijing,
Then flew northwest to where sands can sing,

Sights, sounds and strucks have filled the days,
And Buddhas constructed in so many ways,

Ethics and ambience come to the fore,
Of food we really couldn't want more,

Now as we depart to what may be beyond,
'What is this?' drops like a stone in a pond.

A Liberation Limerick

The Sangha that formed in Beijing,
Was a most extraordinary thing,
We've traveled by train,
By bus and a plane,
But the inward journey's the thing.

Graham Meadows



In the Footsteps of the Ancients

From the southern coasts of India, across the Deccan plateau and Gangetic plains,
crossing the high Himalayas, traversing the deserts, to the oases and capitals of China
came the wisdom teachings of the Buddha more than 2000 years ago...

Brought across on foot, horseback, camels and elephants by intrepid monks
and on the request of emperors.

Kashyapa Matanga, Dharmaratna, Emperor Mingdi, Kumarajiva, Bodhidharma, Fa Xien,
Xuan Zang, Empress Wu Zetian, Yijung, Padmasabhava and so many many more.

From Sanskrit and Pali to Chinese and Tibetan,
the Dharma embraced the cultures it met, in Taoism, Confucianism and Bon.

Developing Dhyana to Chan and possibly Kalari to Kung fu!
From Bodhi trees to Cypress trees in the front yard and from fingers to chopsticks!!

That Dharma spread to other parts of the world and so today we seek those ancestral teachings and
find that matured Dharma both living and ambient in temples, stupas and welcoming monks.. and in
constant change... with each prostration, each offering of incense and the resounding bell, the voice
of the Buddha calling us back to the present without filters.

Learning from teachers past and present and in our pilgrimage sangha,
Stephen, Martine and all us co-teachers, I bow.

We travel from 11 nations in 11 directions by aircraft, bullet trains and coaches, as pilgrims
imprinting our own transient mark on this sacred and secular landscape... and transforming within.
Some seeing the tail, some riding the ox and some arriving and arriving in the marketplace of home.

This is the Buddha path, on the Sutra Road with no beginning and no end.

So, why did Bodhidharma come from the west?

Thank you ChIndia



Shantum Seth

Beneath the numberless stones of worship
Through the fragrant veil of incense
And beyond the clamour of idols
The way is clear
One step a flower
one breath a cloud

Chris Ohrstrom



Signs of China

No leaning
No lying
No stepping
No crossing
No burning
No drinking on duty

Do not waste water
Hold out your hand and there will be water
Come with rushing leave with flushing
Rain gear for cold drinks
Unretrievable fruit skins

Polite Notice
Visitors to stop
Come and go in a hurry
Warning hands pinching
Beware of crowds and keep safe

If there is a fire, people will stay away, and the fire will go out
one can only leave with the fire being extinguished

Scattered passenger channel
Facilities of no obstacle
Retiring room
Third-party bathroom
Potty toilet

Thank you for being so beautiful, come and patronise the shop
Aid through consumption
Consumption assistance
Price complain telephone number

Be civilised
Carefully slide
Civilised courtesy, orderly queue
Civilisation and landscape coexist in harmony and landscape
Morality accumulates from little things; civilisation starts with you and me
Go safely on your way, be a civil creature

Nell Boule



On the Path

as we pass through this land
this land passes too through us
as we take photos
photos are taken too of us
as we see, we are observed
as we listen, we are heard

as we walk in footsteps
search for footprints
hunt for echoes
we leave too our own
on the places we visit
on the pilgrims we are with

in all these sights and sounds and stories
we each hear and see and learn
something different
a multiplicity of perspectives on
a multiplicity of paths

bowing and praying and offering
and burning and chanting and singing
and merely sitting
and breathing
and taking a moment

to close this journey, a few words of advice:
if, while on the path, you meet the buddha,
you must kill him, or her, or them;
but if frank meets the buddha,
made of ice cream, he must eat it;
and if martine meets the buddha,
she must ask only: what is this?
and if jack meets the buddha,
he will wait, patiently, as always,
for the buddha to catch up
with the rest of the group.

Nell Boule

