

Monk-Led Missions between Ming China and Malla Nepal

✍️ Ven. Kuan Sen

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Abstract

Buddhism has played an important role as a bridge and link in strengthening the friendship between China and Nepal. During the Ming Dynasty, official exchanges between these two countries were frequent. Based on an analysis of historical literatures, this study systematically organized the official communication records of both sides and identified their characteristics, including the temporal concentration, the predominantly monastic delegates, and the use of the Ancient Bo-Ni Road. The article examines and discusses these peculiarities, their causes and the remaining issues, in order to illustrate the essential role of outstanding monks in the history of Sino-Nepal diplomacy, and to provide a historical reference for modern exchanges in Buddhist culture.

Keywords: Monk, Mission, Ming Dynasty, Malla Dynasty

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Introduction

Relations between China and Nepal date back to the early spread of Buddhism and cultural exchanges. During the late Western Han Dynasty, Buddhism was introduced into the Central Plains along the Silk Road. A note in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* states: "In India, there was a divine man named Shalv. In the year 1 of the Yuanshou era under emperor Ai, Jing Lu, a disciple of the imperial university, received the Buddha Sutra orally from Yi-cun, an envoy of the Darouzhong King. It is said that this person was the "Fo Tuo". This Sutra describes in detail the birth of the Buddha and presents for the first time Lumbini in Nepal to China. With the opening of the Silk Road, Buddhism spread eastward. Many monks went to the regions to preach, translate scriptures, build temples and propagate the Dharma. Over 2,500 years, Buddhist culture has spread along the land Silk Road and maritime routes, gradually integrating with China's indigenous Taoism, Confucianism, and folk beliefs. This process completed the formation and transformation of Buddhism, making it an inseparable part of traditional Chinese culture.

The Ming Dynasty was founded in 1368, and lasted 276 years, from the first year of Hongwu reign (1368) to the seventeenth year of Chongzhen reign (1644), under the successive government of sixteen emperors. The Ming Dynasty extended over vast territories, experiencing considerable political and economic development. Commercial cities and the seeds of capitalism appeared, while literature and the arts enjoyed unprecedented prosperity. It inherited the Yuan Dynasty's sovereignty over Xizang, establishing military-civilian institutions in the region, including Dbus-Gtsang and Mdo-khams Commanding General's Office and E-li-si Army-Civilian Marshal Office. Local religious and secular leaders were appointed to serve as officials within these institutions. The state valued and supported the development of Buddhism, and both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Han Buddhism were revered by the dynasty.

The Malla Dynasty ruled the Kathmandu Valley from 1201 to 1769 AD. During the Ming Dynasty in China, the Malla kingdom experienced successive periods of unification and division. Under Jaya Stithi Malla (1382-95), a series of reforms were undertaken, allowing the kingdom to experience unprecedented prosperity. After the death of king Yaksha Malla in 1482, his sons each established their own kingdoms in different areas of the Kathmandu Valley. The Dynasty split into three kingdoms: Kantipur, Bhaktapur and Patan. During this period, kings practiced mainly Hinduism. Buddhism in Nepal gradually incorporated elements of Hinduism. The practitioners of Vajrayana and the temples were able to survive and continue. Buddhism was able to be passed down uninterrupted in Nepal. In the 14th century, Muslims invaded the region. Although many Hindu and Buddhist temples were looted and suffered severe damage, this invasion did not have a lasting impact: the Kathmandu Valley remained a vital center of Buddhism.

This article examines the official exchanges between Ming China and Malla Nepal, highlighting their temporal characteristics, related to the ambassadors and the routes used. It analyzes the reasons for their formation and discusses the questions in historical sources.

Literature Review

The official exchanges between the two countries over the course of history are sporadically documented in their historical archives, particularly clear and accurate in Chinese sources. For example, volume 331 of the annals of *the History of the Ming Dynasty* (Zhang Tingyu, Qing period) mentions "The Western Heavenly Kingdom of Nepal." *A Chronicle of Ming Dynasty* also contain references to the "annals of the first emperor Gao", the "annals of the second emperor Wen" and the "annals of the third emperor Zhang". In *Medieval Nepal* (Regmi), the section "Facts of the Nepal-China Relations of the Time" documents official exchanges between China and Nepal.

Modern scholars have touched upon relevant themes while tracing the history of cultural exchanges

between the two nations. In *Cultural Exchanges Between Ancient China and Nepal: 5th to 17th Centuries AD* (Chen Hansheng), the author chronologically details the diplomatic missions exchanged between the two countries. The book *Nepal and China* (Niranjan Bhattarai) details the general circumstances of Chinese missions to Nepal in its chapter "Relations Between Nepal and China During the Ming Dynasty." In the book *Buddhism: Cultural Connections Between Nepal and China* (Prem Kumar Pant), the article "An Overview of Nepal-China and Buddhist Relations" mentions that the Ming Dynasty once dispatched monks as envoys to Nepal, but does not provide specific examples.

In summary, current research on the subject is based on the situation of exchanges between official ambassadors as part of the study of the history of cultural exchanges between two countries, analyzing historical documents and exposing them according to a chronology.

Statement of the Problem

This article, which builds on previous work, does not merely take stock of diplomatic exchanges between the two countries during a specific historical period. It also analyzes their characteristics in three dimensions: occurrence time, envoy status, and diplomatic routes, examining their causes and meaning, while addressing the question marks. This is precisely the special feature of this paper.

Objectives

1. To analyze the official exchanges between Ming China and Malla Nepal, focusing on the timing of diplomatic missions, the subjects of the envoys (especially Buddhist monks), and the routes used for these exchanges.
2. To examine the role of Buddhism as cultural and geographical bridge in facilitating diplomatic, religious, and cultural relations between Ming China and Malla Nepal.

Methodology

This study mainly employs the literature analysis method. The Chinese texts selected in this article, such as *the Ming History* and *A Chronicle of Ming Dynasty*, constitute the most important sources for the study of the history of the Ming Dynasty. *The Ming history*, written in the Qing dynasty according to a biographical historical style, has great typicity and authority, which enhances the reliability and credibility of the research. *A Chronicle of Ming Dynasty*, a chronological compendium of historical materials, records major events during the reigns of previous emperors in chronological order. It is rich in content and facilitates the tracing of historical threads. The history of Nepal's Malla Dynasty is based mainly on the work of contemporary Nepalese researchers, such as *Medieval Nepal* by Dr. D.R. Regmi, as well as the publications of historians Niranjan Bhattarai and Prem Kumari Pandey, and Shankar Thapa.

For documents or historical sources that differ in their points of view, it is first necessary to trace the history of the event in order to extract more logically substantiated conclusions; At the same time, it is essential to rely on recognised and reliable historical sources. Based on the research and reading of these documents, this study extracts useful data, analyzes it, and synthesizes new perspectives.

Delimitation

This study focuses on official exchanges between Ming China (1368–1644) and Malla-era Nepal (1201–1769), particularly diplomatic missions, envoys, and routes. It excludes broader informal cultural and religious interactions, though Buddhist linkages are briefly acknowledged. The analysis is based mainly on historical records, which may contain gaps or inconsistencies. Geographically, it is limited to China and the Kathmandu Valley without extending to wider regional contexts.

Analysis and Discussion

Tbl.1: Diplomatic Missions between Ming China and Malla Nepal

Duration	Principal envoy	Sending State / King	Diplomatic behavior
1378-1384	Zong Le Master	Emperor Taizu of Ming Dynasty	Understanding Nepal
1384-1387	Zhi Guang Master	Emperor Taizu of Ming Dynasty	A gift of sealed sanction letter, silk goods, colored coins and so on.
1387	ambassadors	Ma-ta-na Lo-mo	Carrying presents consisting of little gold pagodas, sacred books of Buddha, renowned horses and productions of the country.
		Emperor Taizu of Ming Dynasty	Conferred on him a silver seal, a stamp made of jade, a letter, amulets, silks and colored coins
1388-1390	Zhi Guang Master	Emperor Taizu of Ming Dynasty	(Undocumented)
1390	ambassadors	Ma-ta-na Lo-mo	Convey the tribute
		Emperor Taizu of Ming Dynasty	A present of a seal made of jade and a red dais
After 1390		Ma-ta-na Lo-mo	One ambassador came for a period of several years
1402-1406	Zhi Guang Master	Emperor Chengzu of Ming Dynasty	(Undocumented)
1409	ambassadors	Ma-ta-na Lo-mo	Send the tribute
1413	Yang Sanbao/ Hou Xian	Emperor Chengzu of Ming Dynasty	A present of letters and gifts in silver and silk.
1414	ambassadors	Sha-ti-hsin-ko	Convey the tribute
		Emperor Chengzu of Ming Dynasty	Conferred on Sha-ti-hsin-ko the title of king of Nepal and handed him a diploma, embodying this investiture, a seal of gold and another of silver.
1418	ambassadors	Sha-ti-hsin-ko	Convey the tribute
	Deng-Cheng	Emperor Chengzu of Ming Dynasty	A present of a seal, silk goods and satin goods
1427-1429	Hou-Xian	Emperor Xuanzong of Ming Dynasty	Carrying gifts consisting of silk goods and cotton goods.

According to historical records such as the *Ming History* and *A Chronicle of Ming Dynasty*, official exchanges between Ming China and Malla Nepal exhibited distinctive characteristics in three dimensions: timing, the envoy subjects, and the routes taken.

Temporal characteristics and related discussions

Official diplomatic missions occurred during the first sixty years of the Ming Dynasty

The Ming Dynasty lasted for 276 years, with official exchanges between it and Malla Nepal primarily occurring within the first sixty years, during which interactions were exceptionally frequent.

The first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, the Ming Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang (r.1368-98), dispatched envoys to Nepal on three occasions; the third emperor, the Yongle Emperor Zhu Di (r.1402-24), dispatched envoys to Nepal on three occasions; the fifth emperor, the Xuanzong Emperor Zhu Zhanji (r.1425-35), sent envoys to Nepal once. The Malla Dynasty of Nepal during the same period saw four successive kings: Jaya Stithi Malla (r.1382-95), the triumvirate of Stithi Malla's three sons (r.1395-1403), Jaya Jyotir Malladeva (r.1408-28), and Yaksha Malla (r.1428-82).

The absence of diplomatic envoys after 1430 was linked to the political situation of the Malla Dynasty. During Yaksha's lifetime, Nepal's political unity began to fracture. His three sons jointly assumed power, but soon divided the realm into three kingdoms: Bhaktapur, Kantipur (present-day Kathmandu), and Lalitpur (present-day Patan). Additionally, dozens of chieftains engaged in constant rivalries. This fragmentation and internal strife weakened the Malla Dynasty. For three centuries, from the late 15th to the late 18th century, the Kathmandu Valley remained politically divided, while the eastern and western mountain regions were also long held by separate factions. Although trade with Xizang continued to develop in the northern areas, diplomatic exchanges between China and Nepal had ceased.

Discussion Regarding the King of Nepal

As we read through the literature, one thing worth noting is why were the kings of Nepal recognized by the Ming government as Ma-ta-na Lo-mo and Sha-ti-hsin-ko, and not Jaya Stithi Mala and Jaya Jyotir Malladeva of the Malla Dynasty ?

Mr. Chen Hansheng proposed that Nepal's historical dual monarchy system featured the coexistence of nominal kings and kings who held actual power. King Jaya Sthi Malla and his son served as regents during the Malla Dynasty, while King Jaya Simha Rama and his two successors, Ma-ta-na Lo-mo and Sha-ti-hsin-ko, held only nominal kingship (103). Mr. Chen's viewpoint is based on the book *Ancient and Medieval Nepal*. After reviewing the original text of the book, the author reached different conclusions. The Ming government recognized Ma-ta-na Lo-mo as the king of Nepal in 1384, and he sent envoys to pay tribute to the Ming government. According to *Medieval Nepal*, the Malla Dynasty of Nepal was under the rule of Jaya stithiMalla, and Jayasimharama was the chief minister of the dynasty and a very influential feudal lord of Nepal. Ma-ta-na rama was Jayasimharama's younger brother. The two brothers shared power in the Bhatta domain, with Jayasimharama being the more influential.

According to historian Luciano Petech, the Ming government was deceived. They claimed to the Ming mission that they were the rulers of Nepal and that the Mallas were only their vassal subjects. This also shows that JayastithiMalla, who had only recently assumed the throne of the Malla Dynasty, was very weak in actual power, with Jayasimharama actually controlling the powers. (Regmi 402)

Historian Regmi does not subscribe to Petech's view because, in fact, the influence of JayastithiMalla, the king of the Malla Dynasty, was very strong. The actual reason may be that the Rama Vardhanas ruled the Banepa-Palanchok-Chautara region. The Chinese mission entered Nepal from La-sa in Xizang, and as the Nepalese portion of the highway passed through Palanchok and Banepa according to the route of travel at that time, it was inevitable that the mission first visited the Palanchok region and made the first contact with the government of the Rama Vardhana feudatory. The Chinese mission must have given

the impression that they were the real rulers of Nepal. And it is likely that Ma-ta-na rama's position as minister in the capital of Nepal at the time also hid the subsidiary character of his rulership.

While Jaya Simha Rama, the elder brother, had more political influence in the region, the Ming government gave the title of king to his brother Ma-ta-na rama. The reason is that when the Chinese mission in Xizang talked about Nepal, they heard that the actual ruler of Bhottaraja was Ma-ta-na rama, so the Ming government gave him the title. This was in fact a mistake. The fact that Ma-ta-na rama sent envoys to the Ming government in the following years suggests that both he and the Ming government recognized this status. Both historians, Petke and Regmi, believe that this is an unsolved mystery, and that it may have been in accordance with some kind of internal arrangement and consideration between the two brothers.

Sha-ti-hsin-ko was the successor of the aforementioned Ma-ta-na rama. The king of the Malla Dynasty at that time was Jaya Jyotir Malladeva. Each of the two powerhouses had its own strength and weakness. The reason why Ming Chengzu appointed Sha-ti-hsin-ko the King of Nepal. According to Gegmi, the Ming government recognized the latter because they professed to acknowledge Chinese overlordship in Nepal. By obtaining Chinese recognition, they consolidated their position in their own territory against the sovereignty of the Malla Dynasty. It is reasonable to assume that the feudal lords were so powerful in Nepal that the Ming government of the time regarded them as the sovereigns of Nepal. (Regmi, 404)

Characteristics of the envoy's status and Related Discussions

Buddhist monks were dispatched as envoys to Nepal

Over a period of sixty years, the Ming Dynasty dispatched five individuals to lead diplomatic missions to Nepal. Aside from Yang Sanbao and Deng Cheng, the others Master Zong Le, Master Zhi Guang, and Hou Xian were all Buddhist monks.

Tbl.2: Monk-Led Missions between Ming China and Malla Nepal

Name	Duration	Mission Outcome
Zong Le Master	1378-1384	Master Zong Le completed his diplomatic mission and retrieved Buddhist scriptures. Their experiences were recorded in <i>Journey to the West</i> . This mission enabled the Ming government to gain insight into Nepal.
Zhi Guang Master	1384-1387	Venerable Zhi Guang convinced the others with his superb Buddhist attainments. King Ma-ta-na Lo-mo sent an envoy with Venerable Zhi Guang and his party on a return visit to China to pay tribute to the Ming court in the form of golden pagodas, Buddhist scriptures, and renowned horses and productions of the country.
	1388-1390	The emissaries from the State of Nepal came to China together with Venerable Zhi Guang's mission, and on this trip they would enter the capital together with the State Preceptor of Abhisheka of Wu-szu-tsang and other emissaries.
	1402-1406	He traveled to Guan-jue, Ling-zang, Wu-szu-tsang, Bi-li-gong-wa, Si-da-zang, Duo-si, and Nepal, etc., and gave them platinum and colored coins. In 1406, Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty sent Hou Xian to Xizang to welcome the Maharatna-Dharmaraja Kar-ma. It seems that Venerable Zhi-Guang returned to Beijing with Hou Xian on his way back from Nepal.
Hou Xian	1413	He was dispatched on a diplomatic mission to Nepal and Ti-yung-ta.
	1427-1429	He carried gifts consisting of silk goods and cotton goods to the Tsan-shan wang, Nan-ko-chien-tsang; the king of Nepal, Shati-hsin-ko; the prince (Wang-tzu) of Ti-yung-t'a, K'o pan, the Fu-Chiao wang, Nan-ko-lieh-Szu-pa-lo-ko-lo-chien-tsang-pa-tsang-pu, etc.

Master Zong-Le (1318-91) was born in Zhejiang Province, and as a child, he studied under the famous monk of the Linji Sect, Master Xiaoyin. At the age of 14, he became a monk. He lived in the Zhong Tian Zhu Monastery, the Jing Shan Monastery, and the Tian Jie Monastery. He commented on *the Heart Sutra*, *the Diamond Sutra*, and *the Lankavatara Sutra*, and thus became a leader of the Buddhists of his time. Zong Le had great achievements in poetry and literature, with works including *Quan Shi Collection*, *Journey to the West Collection*, and so on.

Venerable Zhi-Guang (1348-1435), a native of Wu Ding state in the Ming Dynasty. He became a monk at the age of 15 and took Buddhist monk Sahazan Shiri as his teacher. He was ordered to translate his teacher's work "*The Bodhisattva Precepts for the Four Disciples*", and traveled to the Western Region several times. In 1382, he was ordered to enter the capital, and resided in Chong-Guo Monastery, and later in Da-Jue Monastery. In Beijing, Venerable Zhi-Guang was honored by Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty, and was appointed as the chief of the highest institution of central management of Buddhist affairs. He served in six dynasties, and was conferred by Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Renzong of the Ming Dynasty, and Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty. However, he remained indifferent to fame and fortune and took the pure precepts. When he was in Nepal, he received the Vajrayana Mandala from Guru Mahabodhi, and after his return to his country, he translated a number of sutras, such as *the True name of Eight Limbs of definitive meaning*, *Rajapalaka Prajnaparamita Sutra*, and so on. Venerable Zhi Guang was sent to Nepal three times in his life and was very fruitful.

Hou Xian was a Tibetan who studied Tibetan Buddhism. There is a debate in the academic community about his identity. One says that he was a eunuch in the Ming Dynasty, the other says that he was a monk who studied Tibetan Buddhism and did not return to secularism, and he passed away in Hou Jia Monastery in his later years. According to the *Ming History*, Hou Xian was a talented and capable scholar, and was twice sent on missions to Nepal (7769).

Arguments for Master Zhi Guang's Three Diplomatic Missions to Nepal

Scholars remain divided over the number of diplomatic missions Venerable Zhi Guang undertook to Nepal, with some arguing for two missions and others for three. The central point of contention lies in whether a mission occurred between 1388 and 1390. Based on historical records, the author contends that the Venerable undertook three diplomatic missions to Nepal.

Venerable Zhi Guang returned from his first mission to the West in 1387. The inscription *on the Pagoda of the Great State preceptor of the Buddhist disciple of the Western heaven* records that "He returned and traveled again, then accompanied their envoys to an audience with the Ming court" (Yang Rong). This likely refers to his second diplomatic mission to Nepal in 1388.

According to the *examination of the deeds of Zhi-Guang, the great State preceptor of the Buddhist disciple in Western India of Ming Dynasty* (Deng Ruiling, 37), it seems that Venerable Zhi Guang went to Nepal again in 1388 and returned in 1390. This is also recorded in *A Chronicle of Ming Dynasty*, which states: "December of the twenty-third year of the Hongwu era (1390), the Western Regions, including Nepal, State Preceptor of Abhisheka Ji-la-si-ba-jian-zang-bu, An-buluo Auxiliary Regional Military Commission of Wu-szu-tsang and sent envoys to present tribute and local goods, congratulations on New Year's Day." (Hongwu-Ch206) According to these historical records, the emissaries from the State of Nepal came to China together with Venerable Zhi Guang's mission and on this trip they would enter the capital together with the State Preceptor of Abhisheka of Wu-szu-tsang and other emissaries.

The Reasons and Functions of Sending Monk Missions

The Ming government dispatched delegations of high-ranking Buddhist monks to Nepal, leveraging

the power of religious faith to effectively pacify the Xizang region and neighboring Nepal, thereby demonstrating its national prestige and strength. First, this was necessary for consolidating the Ming Dynasty's rule during its early years. The Ming emperors needed to project national prestige and dignity while winning over neighboring states. Consequently, they sought to strengthen interactions with surrounding nations and utilized envoys to proclaim the Ming government's authority, virtue and strength.

Second, fulfill the mission of obtaining Buddhist scriptures. The Ming government held Buddhism in high esteem and thus hoped to enrich China's Buddhist canon by sending envoys westward to obtain scriptures. As recorded in the *Newly Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, it records that Emperor Taizu, noting gaps in Buddhist texts and considering the master Zong Le's literary prowess and profound understanding of Zen doctrine, dispatched the master and thirty disciples to the Western Regions to seek scriptures (Yu Qian, 303). Master Zong Le subsequently returned, having translated scriptures such as the "Manjusri Sutra." Upon Master Zhi Guang's return from his mission to Nepal, the Nepalese delegation also presented Buddhist scriptures and other offerings to the imperial government.

Third, the monk missions traveled via the Ancient Bo-Ni Road, passing through Xizang both on the outward and return journeys. At that time, Tibetan Buddhism flourished in Xizang, and Buddhist cultural exchanges between Nepal and Xizang were frequent. While encouraging Han Buddhism, the Ming court also held Tibetan Buddhism in high esteem. Sending Buddhist monks as envoys to Nepal via Xizang held significant meaning. During their passage through Xizang, the missions also carried the task of visiting various regions and exerting political influence. Xizang venerates Buddhism, and the monks sent on missions communicate based on this shared faith, often impressing their interlocutors with their profound mastery of Buddhist doctrine. Moreover, according to historical records, these missions often represented the government in inviting Xizang monks to pay homage to the Ming court on their return journeys. Thus, the monks' expeditions not only helped establish diplomatic relations between China and Xizang, but also reinforced the Ming government's control over the Xizang region.

In short, the monastic envoys, thanks to their religious authority, their language skills and their knowledge of the cultures of both sides, managed to achieve their diplomatic objectives. These missions, in addition to the political role of tribute and investiture ceremony, were also accompanied by a rich exchange of goods and culture, indirectly promoting cultural interactions in the Ming-Xizang-Nepal triangle. As recorded in Medieval Nepal: "Thanks to the great knowledge he had of Buddhist books, Zhi Guang was able to translate into action the intentions of the Emperor and to make manifest his virtuous thought."

Discussion on the Diplomatic Mission Route

During the Ming Dynasty, three routes connected China and Nepal across the Himalayas: the western route traversed the territory of the Kingdom of Kasa; the central route passed through the Kingdom of Mustang and reached Lumbini via Tansen; the eastern route ran from Lhasa to the Kingdom of Malla via the Ancient Bo-Ni Road. Established during the Tang Dynasty, the Ancient Bo-Ni Road (Fig. 1) existed even before Princess Chizun's marriage to the Tibetan Empire. Originating in Lhasa and terminating in Kathmandu, the road connected eastward to the Tang-Bo Ancient Road linking Qinghai to Lhasa (Fig. 2) and westward to India. It served as a vital artery linking Lhasa to Nepal and India. The Ming-era route of the Ancient Bo-Ni Road, after crossing the border at Gyirong within China, proceeded through Nyalam, Dingri, Xiegar, Sakya, Lhaze, Shigatse, and finally reached Lhasa. During the Ming Dynasty, missions to Nepal almost exclusively traveled via the Ancient Bo-Ni Road.

Master Zong Le's poem "Gazing at the River Source" states: The old traveler passes by this place, gazing upon it, he sighs deeply. The master sighed deeply upon seeing the river source as he passed through. The river source served as an ancient transportation artery connecting the Central Plains to the Tibetan Plateau.

Yuan Dynasty traveler Du Shi identified the river source as being in "western MDo-khams." This indicates that Zen Master Zong Le traveled via the river source and Qinghai, a route corresponding to the Ancient Bo-Ni Road and the Tang-Bo Ancient Road .

No historical records have yet been found detailing Master Zhi Guang's diplomatic route. However, as analyzed earlier, during his second mission to Nepal, Master Zhi Guang returned to the capital in 1390 together with the State Preceptor of Abhisheka of Wu-szu-tsang and other emissaries. On the return journey from his third diplomatic mission to Nepal, he traveled back to the capital alongside Hou Xian, who had been sent to Xizang to welcome the Dharma King. Therefore, Master Zhi Guang likely also traveled via the Ancient Bo-Ni Road, passing through present-day Xizang and Qinghai.

Mr. Huang Shengzhang analyzed two imperial edicts from the 17th and 21st years of the Yongle reign at Xizang's Ladang Temple, concluding that Deng Cheng's diplomatic mission also traversed the Ancient Bo-Ni Road. Mr. Huang pointed out that although no specific mention of the route has been recorded in the historical archives, subsequent missions of Yang Sanbao and Deng Cheng have all taken this traditional route, making any exception for Zhi Guang's impossible. In addition, until the Qing dynasty, diplomatic exchanges between China and Nepal continued follow this route.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Xizang, due to its geographical location, became an important center for political, economic, and cultural exchanges between China and neighboring countries such as Nepal. In 634, Songtsen Gampo unified Tubo and married successively Princess Chizun of Nepal and Princess Wencheng of the Tang Dynasty, which also helped introduce Buddhism from Nepal and Han Chinese region to Xizang. During the Yuan and Ming Dynasty, Xizang formally became an administrative region subordinate to the central government. The Ming government sent monks on missions to Nepal; During their journey, they visited great monks and Xizang temples to foster Buddhist cultural exchange, which also testified to the power and virtue of the Ming government. At the same time, by following the old Fan route, Xizang fully leveraged its geographical advantage, allowing the official relations established between the Tang dynasty and Tibet to be revived, which is of great significance.

Conclusion

The exchanges of Buddhist missionaries between the Ming China and the Malla Nepal constitute a history of fruitful exchanges, bound by Buddhist faith, realized through material and cultural exchanges, and using Xizang as a geographical and cultural bridge. This study examines official exchanges between Ming China and Malla Nepal, with an in-depth analysis from three perspectives: timing, envoy subjects and routes taken. In terms of timing, official exchanges focused mainly on the sixties of the first period of the Ming Dynasty. Chinese and foreign historical sources present differences as to the identification of the Nepalese king during this period. This study discusses and confirms Dr. Regmi's conclusions that the Ming government's designation of "Madanasimha rama" and "Saktisimharama" may have been concealed, but also the result of a balance of mutual interests between the two parties. As for the envoy subjects, the Ming government sent monks to Nepal. This phenomenon is the result of comprehensive considerations of the Ming government, taking into account its political needs, its religious base and cultural exchanges. According to the analysis of historical documents, when choosing the route, almost all Ming Dynasty diplomatic missions to Nepal took the Ancient Bo-Ni Road. The interactions during the missions' return not only consolidated the Ming government's control over Xizang and fully utilized Xizang's geographical advantages, but also revived the official relations between Nepal and China established during the Tang Dynasty, which is of great significance. This study, from an innovative perspective, demonstrates that, during a particular historical period, diplomacy by sending monks on mission, linked to faith, has proven effective. The results of this research will provide valuable insights for cultural exchanges and civilizational exchanges between contemporary nations.

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Appendix

No.	Name	Source of Content
Tbl.1	Diplomatic Missions between Ming China and Malla Nepal	1. Ming History. Volume 331/304 2. Medical Nepal, P394-409
Tbl.2	Monk-Led Missions between Ming China and Malla Nepal	1. Ming History. Vol 331/304 2. Medieval Nepal, P394-409 3. A Chronicle of Ming Dynasty. Vol 260/184/187
Fig.1	The Ancient Bo-Ni Road	Garma Dorje. "The Ancient Path of Fan Ni, Spanning Millennia." Guangming Daily. 1.Feb.2018 https://www.mzfxw.com/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=19&id=97823
Fig.2	The Tang-Bo Ancient Road and the Ancient Bo-Ni Road	Li Ran, Lin Chanjuan. "How Did the Ancient Tang-Tibet Trade Route Become a Golden Bridge?" China Tibetology Research Center. 18, Dec.2022 http://www.tibetology.ac.cn/2022-12/18/content_42207890.htm