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Land Route or Sea Route?  
Commentary on the Study of the Paths of Transmission  
and Areas in which Buddhism  
Was Disseminated during the Han Period

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# Land Road or Sea Route?

## Commentary on the Study of the Paths of Transmission and Areas in Which Buddhism Was Disseminated during the Han Period

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### I. Origins of the Debate

Buddhism, which originated in India, nevertheless cast its longest influence, spread to its widest extent, and continued for the longest period without interruption, during the history of ancient Chinese contact with the outside world. The successful infiltration of Buddhism far surpassed the *san yi jiao* (three foreign religions 三夷教), namely, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Nestorianism, which were introduced to China one after another in medieval times,<sup>2</sup> and even the native indigenous religions could not rival it. Hence, questions of how Buddhism arrived in China and how Buddhism gradually gained a firm foothold on Chinese soil not only arouse wide interest, but also merit prior attention in the study of the history of the contact between China and other nations. However, historical texts do not sufficiently reveal the early history of dissemination; consequently, there is no consensus and views are very divergent. By focusing on the paths of transmission and the embryonic phase of Buddhist dissemination during the Han period, this paper does not intend to claim that we have sufficient materials to answer these questions; rather, it offers ample evidence to guide discussions of these tough questions on a more logical path. In the spirit of academic contention, the commentator (Professor Rong Xinjiang) unavoidably criticizes some views which have deviated from the correct course.

In regard to the arrival of Buddhism in China, Liang Qichao 梁启超(1873-1929 A.D.) and Tang Yongtong 汤用彤(1893-1964 A.D.) are representatives of the two dominant views.

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<sup>1</sup> Rong Xinjiang, born in 1960, is Professor in the History Department, Peking University. This paper was published in *Clio at Beida* 北大史学, History Department, Peking University (He Shunguo 何顺果 and Fang Delin 房德邻, executive eds.), 2003(9):320-342.

<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: third to ninth century in Chinese history.

Liang claimed that Buddhism came to China via the sea route. He explained this view in the book *Early Transmission of Buddhism* 佛教之初输入 saying that "The arrival of Buddhism was not through the land road, but via the sea route. Its early base area was not in the city of Luoyang (京洛) but in the Yangzi-Huaihe Valley (江淮)."<sup>3</sup> Paul Pelliot 伯希和 (1878-1945 A.D.) held a similar view.<sup>4</sup>

In his book *Buddhist History in the Han Wei Liang-Jin Northern and Southern Dynasties* 汉魏两晋南北朝佛教史, Tang Yongtong voiced his view that Buddhism came to China via the land road. He wrote "The dissemination of Buddhism eastward went first through the states in the Western Regions including Greater Yuezhi (Da Yuezhi 大月氏), Sogdiana (Kangju 康居) and Parthia (Anxi 安息). It seems beyond doubt that they traveled primarily by the land road." By analyzing the geographic dissemination of Buddhism in the Han dynasty and clarifying the chronological sequence, Tang refuted the view held by Liang and Pelliot.<sup>5</sup> Tang's view was at one time considered nearly as an accepted conclusion to be followed in the field.

Tang traced the areas where early (Han) Buddhism had infiltrated in the fourth chapter, "The Dissemination of Buddhism in the Han Dynasty" 汉代佛教之流布, of the aforementioned book. He described a series of events recorded in the texts, starting from the instruction of (a) Buddhist sūtra(s) by Yi Cun 伊存, the observation of fasts and the performance of sacrifices to the Buddha by King Ying of Chu 楚英王 (25-58 A.D.), the payment of homage to both the Buddha and Laozi by the Emperor Huan 桓帝 (147-167 A.D.), the translation of Buddhist sūtras by An Shigao 安世高 (active in China ca. 148-170 A.D.) and Lokakṣema 支谶 (147-? A.D.) in Luoyang, the practicing of Buddhism by Ze Rong 竺融 (?-195 A.D.), the composition of "Li Huo Lun" 理惑论<sup>6</sup> by Mouzi 牟之 (Eastern Han, 25-220 A.D.), and so forth. Tang explained that "Luoyang, the capital of the Eastern Han, connecting to the Western Regions in the west, became the major town for Buddhism." Later Buddhism flourished exclusively in the Qi-Chu area (齐楚) and Yangzi-Huaihe Valley (江淮) because of the prevalence of esoteric arts (*fangshu* 方术) in these regions. The newly arrived Buddhism was also considered a mystical practice (道

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<sup>3</sup> Liang, v. 52, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Pelliot.

<sup>5</sup> Tang, pp. 57-61.

<sup>6</sup> Translator's note: translated as "The Disposition of Error" in William T. de Bary, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 274.

术). The geographic locations of King Ying of Chu, Ze Rong, and Xiang Kai 襄楷 (Late Han) were not far away from the place where Daoism originated. Therefore, Buddhism was practiced in the area together with Huanglao Daoism (黄老道教) and Huanglao practices (黄老之术).<sup>7</sup>

The scope of the historical texts cited by Tang Yongtong remains undisputed to this day. A Chinese academic rebirth began in the 1980's. Since then new archaeological materials have surfaced one after another, broadening the scholar's vantage point. Buddhist iconography on these recently unearthed materials has attracted attention from archaeologists, art historians, and other scholars. Newly discovered archaeological materials have expanded the early phase of Buddhism's dissemination area to include present-day Sichuan and the coastal areas near Jiangsu. Prompted by these new discoveries, the view of Buddhism coming to China via the sea route has resurfaced; moreover, it shows a tendency to replace the land-road view, seemingly making the sea-route view the final conclusion. The sea-route view holders interpret the texts concerning the dissemination of Buddhism from a perspective that especially emphasizes the situations in the coastal regions. They go so far as to deny the core status of Luoyang.

The discoveries of the last two decades merit a closer examination. Combining the new archaeological materials with a review of the pertinent discussions, the commentator intends to discern the genuine, discard the false, locate the issues clarified by the new materials and, at the same time, determine their limitations.

## II. Han Buddhist Iconography Depicted in Archaeological Materials

The last two decades have witnessed major progress in researching the early phase of Buddhism, thanks to archaeological discoveries, but the same sources may have muddied the water a bit. Detailed descriptions of the representative treatises and different viewpoints precede a fuller commentary below.

In 1980 Yu Weichao 俞伟超 published an article entitled "Examination of Eastern Han Buddhist Iconography" 东汉佛教图像考, in which he ascertained and summed up the evidence from pieces of early Buddhist iconography:

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<sup>7</sup> Tang, pp. 34-61.

1) In the tomb of Helinger (和林格尔), Inner Mongolia, the south wall of the antechamber ceiling is painted with a Buddha or Bodhisattva in a red robe riding on a white elephant. It is labeled "Transcendent riding on a white elephant" (仙人骑白象); the north wall is painted with four ball-shaped objects on a tray-like container, labeled *sarīra* (*sheli* 舍利 or 舍利). The entire tomb ceiling resembles the cosmos: the east wall is decorated with a blue dragon and the King Father of the East (Dongwanggong 东王公); the west wall is painted with a white tiger and the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母); the south wall is adorned with a vermilion bird, a transcendent riding on a white elephant and a phoenix following the *jiuzhao* (九昭) music; the north wall is highlighted by a black turtle, *sarīra*, *qilin* (麒麟) and the master of rain (雨师). The Daoist iconography of a transcendent riding on a white elephant and *sarīra*, as well as the King Father of the East and the Queen Mother of the West, are homologues and were offered for worship as transcendents. This tomb is dated between the reigns of Emperors Huan and Ling 灵帝 (168-189 A.D.) of the Eastern Han.

2) In the tomb with stone reliefs at Yi'nan (沂南), Shandong, the upper part of the four frontals of the octagonal main pillar in the central chamber is carved with the King Father of the East and the Queen Mother of the West on the east and west frontals, and standing images with halos over their heads on the south and north frontals. The archaeological report asserts that the standing figures are images of Kumāra<sup>8</sup> (童子像) but are influenced by Buddhist art forms.<sup>9</sup> However, Yu identifies them as Buddhas, citing their head halos, belts with tassels, drapery robes, and the placement of the King Father of the East and the Queen Mother of the West. In comparing it with other Eastern Han picture-stone tombs, Yu dates this tomb to before or after the Eastern Han Emperor Huan, instead of Wei and Jin Dynasties as suggested by other scholars.

3) The picture-stone fragment unearthed from the Teng county (滕县), Henan, bears the images of two six-tusked elephants (Liuyaxiang 六牙象), apparently depicting a Buddhist legend. Its date can be fixed to the late Eastern Han.

4) In the Eastern Han cliff tomb at Mahao (麻濠) in the outskirts of Leshan (乐山), Sichuan, the lintel of the central rear chamber is carved with a seated Buddha in low relief. The Buddha is ringed by a halo and sits crossed-legged with the hand gesture of "fearlessness"

<sup>8</sup> Translator's note: refers to the Bodhisattva.

<sup>9</sup> Zeng, pp. 65-66.

(*abhaya-mudrā* 无畏印). In addition, lintels in the two rear chambers of the Eastern Han tomb in Shiziwan (柿子湾) of Leshan are also each carved with a seated Buddha with a head halo.

5) A clay stand, originally designed for a money-tree, was excavated from an Eastern Han tomb in Pengshan (彭山), Sichuan. Its base carries the image of two dragons facing a ritual disk (*bi* 璧). The center of the stand is a seated Buddha with crossed legs, high and protruding *uṣṇīṣa* and hands gesturing *abhaya-mudrā*. The Buddha is attended by Mahāsthāma (大势至) and Guanyin Bodhisattva. It is also dated late Eastern Han.

6) Two pieces of waxed cotton fabric were excavated from the husband-wife combined tomb at the Niya (尼雅) site in Xinjiang. They are blue on a white background, and one of them bears the image of a Bodhisattva bust. It is dated to the end of the Eastern Han. Yu concludes that, no later than the reigns of Huan and Ling of the Eastern Han, Buddhist iconography had already spread to certain extent from Xinjiang to Shandong and from Inner Mongolia to Sichuan. Taking a subordinate position, the Buddhist belief blended with early Daoism, transcendent ideology and regional indigenous cults. Hīnayāna was the first to be introduced to China and the foreign-styled Buddhist art was integrated with local indigenous art.<sup>10</sup>

During his 1980 visit, Shi Shuqing 史树青 pointed out the Buddhist images on the carved stones at Kongwangshan in Lianyungang (连云港孔望山), Jiangsu, thus starting the discussions on the Kongwangshan Buddhist sculptures. The Lianyungang Museum describes the Buddhist carvings in the "Report on the Survey of the Cliff Sculptures at Kongwangshan in Lianyungang" 连云港市孔望山摩崖造像调查报告 and gives a preliminary date of the late Eastern Han.<sup>11</sup> The same issue also carries the article "Study on the Dating of the Cliff Sculptures at Kongwangshan" 孔望山摩崖造像的年代考察 by Yu Weichao and Xin Lixiang 信立祥. They believe that these cliff sculptures belonged to the Daoist monastery of the Eastern Han Emperors of Huan and Ling reigns and were carved for worshipping at the sacrificial altar of the East Sea Temple (东海庙). These carvings incorporate the Buddhist and Daoist images, indicating that Buddhism was subordinated to Daoism.<sup>12</sup> In his article, "The Subject Matter of Buddhist Sculptures at Kongwangshan" 孔望山佛教造像的题材, Yan Wenru 阎文儒 further examines

<sup>10</sup> Yu, 1980(5):68-77 or 1985, 330-352.

<sup>11</sup> Lianyungang Museum, 1-7.

<sup>12</sup> Yu and Xin, 1981(7):8-15.

the iconography, including depictions of *nirvāṇa* 涅槃, the Bodhisattva feeding himself to a hungry tiger, Buddhist images, and images of demigods 力士.<sup>13</sup> Other published articles include Li Hongfu's 李洪甫 "Contents and Background of the Buddhist Sculptures at Kongwangshan" 孔望山佛像造像的内容及其背景,<sup>14</sup> Yan Wenru's "Another Discussion on the Subject Matter of the Buddhist Sculptures at Kongwangshan" 再论孔望山佛教造像的题材,<sup>15</sup> Bu Liansheng's 步连生 "Preliminary Identification of the Eastern Han Cliff Sculptures at Kongwangshan" 孔望山东汉摩崖造像初辨,<sup>16</sup> and Li Hongfu's "Ascertainment of Selected Subject Matters of the Sculptures at Kongwangshan" 孔望山造像中部分题材的考订.<sup>17</sup> The authors of these articles firmly believe that the Kongwangshan cliff sculptures are the Eastern Han Buddhist images. Some researchers have connected Buddhist sites in this area with the sea silk route because Kongwangshan is located in the coastal region of the East China Sea.<sup>18</sup>

In his 1986 article, "Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art (2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries A.D.)," Wu Hung 巫鸿 articulates a need to define strictly the meaning of "Buddhist art work" in all the Eastern Han Buddhist iconography discussed since the 1980's. He argues that only those objects which propagate Buddhist ideas or serve in Buddhist ritual or institutional practices can be considered Buddhist art. One should not expect to determine the content of such art works by their forms only, nor by their limited similarities to comparable objects; one must also pay attention both to the function of the works, and to the cultural tradition and the social context in which they were created. He notices that contemporary researchers have been mainly preoccupied with identifying the features which these works share with standard Indian Buddhist images. It may be more important, however, to pay attention to the mixed or divergent features of these works. These, on one hand, may possibly indicate a relationship between Buddhism and Chinese traditional ideas; on the other hand, they may reveal the understanding of Buddhism on the part of the ordinary people during the Han period.

Wu Hung assesses the materials dated to the Eastern Han in the light of their Buddhist use. As far as the Mahao cliff Buddhist figure is concerned, he questions why the figure was

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<sup>13</sup> Yan, *Wenwu* 1981(7):16-19.

<sup>14</sup> Li, 1981(4):2-5.

<sup>15</sup> Yan, *Kaogu yu wenwu*, 1981(4):111-114

<sup>16</sup> Bu, 1982(9):61-65.

<sup>17</sup> Li, 1982(9):66-70.

<sup>18</sup> Jia E, 1982(9):53-60.



buried in a secular tomb. His belief is that this deity was no longer an object of worship on public occasions, but was a symbol for the deceased individual who had hoped to attain immortality after his death. After reviewing the materials from Yi'nan and Helinger, Wu Hung concludes that in the Han popular mind, Buddha was an immortalized foreign deity, he was capable of flying and transmutation, and he helped people. Therefore, Buddha, like other Chinese deities such as the Queen Mother of the West, was incorporated into the immortality beliefs popular during Han times, and was also absorbed into Chinese traditional funerary rituals. For the same reason, Buddha was incorporated into various local cults and appears on their objects of worship. Buddhist legends and symbols were taken as immortal omens and as animal omens, and were connected with auspicious thinking. Because of the unsystematic nature of these indigenous cults, the Buddhist art themes were absorbed and used in a piecemeal manner, becoming isolated icons and symbols. Although these elements came from Indian Buddhist art, they do not have an inherently Buddhist content, nor do they represent Buddhist religious functions. Rather, they served to enrich the representations of Chinese indigenous cults and traditional ideas. They reflect only a random borrowing of Buddhist elements by Han popular art and are not the Buddhist art in a strict sense. He also discusses in great detail the Buddhist art works ranging from Wu Kingdom 孙吴 (222-280 A.D.) to the Western Jin 西晋 (265-316 A.D.) period, including objects like bronze mirrors and soul vases (*hunping* 魂瓶). Wu Hung considers the sculptures in Kongwangshan Daoist art even though they contain Buddhist elements. Buddhist images and Chinese traditional transcendents were all components of the ten thousand deities (Wanshen dian 万神殿) hall in a Daoist monastery. They are but the representatives of the earliest Daoist art works.<sup>19</sup>

In 1991 Wu Zhuo 吴焯 published the book titled *Buddhism's Eastward Spread and Chinese Buddhist Art* 佛教东传与中国佛教艺术. In the fourth chapter, "Communication on the Silk Road and Buddhism's Spread Eastward" 丝路交通与佛法东渐, he discusses the transmission of Buddhism to China through new archaeological evidences. The chapter begins with the issue of a sea route, prompted by the Kongwangshan Buddhist sculptures. After examining the historical texts on the sea transportation between the Han China and India, Wu argues that "The earliest date for Indian Buddhism to come to China by sea was at the end of the

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<sup>19</sup> Wu Hung.

reign of Emperor Huan, when Buddhism was already being practiced in the Central Plain with foreign monks translating sūtras. It is beyond doubt that the sea route was used much later than the land road." The spread of Indian Buddhism to China by sea was not explicitly recorded in historical texts until the Western Jin. Therefore, "the earliest time for Indian Buddhism to come to China by sea was probably at the end of Han or early Wu. It was later than using the land road and also was limited to the areas covering Jiaozhi (交趾)<sup>20</sup> and Guangzhou." After further surveying the Buddhist practices of King Ying of Chu and Ze Rong in the region of Pengcheng and Xuzhou, Wu Zhuo points out that King Ying of Chu's practice of sacrificing to both Huanglao and Buddha continued to the end of the Han, hence the Buddhist images from the Xuzhou region including Yi'nan, Tengxian, and Kongwangshan were the products influenced by this tradition. Considering the dissemination of Buddhism as a whole, Xuzhou and its peripheral areas should be grouped together with the Central Plain dissemination circle which was centered in Luoyang. Buddhism arrived in this area, not through the sea route, but through the land roads.<sup>21</sup>

Wu Zhuo identifies characteristics of early Gandhāran art of northwest India on Buddhist images from the three places in Sichuan - Pengshan, Mahao of Leshan and Shiziwan. These images predate Buddhist images from Yi'nan and Kongwangshan and are certainly relics handed down from the Eastern Han. By comparing the three roads linking Sichuan with India, Wu Zhuo believes that the most plausible road is the Qiang-zhong road (羌中道), which went through the Western Regions (Xinjiang), Qinghai to reach Sichuan.<sup>22</sup> Some scholars suggest that the Sichuan sculptures were introduced from India through Burma and Yunnan road,<sup>23</sup> which is thoroughly criticized by Wu Zhuo in his article "Conceptual Errors in Research on the Southwest Silk Road" 西南丝绸之路研究的认识误区. Based on the original sources and pertinent historical events, Wu criticizes the view held by the French scholar Pelliot and scholars after him who argued that the ancient road linking Sichuan, Yunnan, Burma, and India was already open in the Han and was the road for spreading Buddhism. Wu's arguments are as follows:

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<sup>20</sup> Translator's note: Jiaozhi is an old place name referring to Guangdong, most of Guangxi, and the northern and central parts of Vietnam.

<sup>21</sup> Wu Zhuo, 1991, pp. 115-133.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-150. See also Wu Zhuo, 1992(11):40-50.

<sup>23</sup> Ruan, 2000.

1) According to historical texts, the Han Emperor Wu's 汉武帝 (140-87 B.C.E.) invasion<sup>24</sup> of the southwest was primarily targeted to control the southwest non-Chinese. The road linking southwest China to India, which Zhang Qian 张骞 (?-114 B.C.) sought, was actually not open.

2) The entry on Yongchang prefecture of the Nanzhong zhi section in the gazetteer of Huayang [i.e., Sichuan] (*Huayang guo zhi* 华阳国志, 南中志, 永昌郡) documents that there were "people from India" (身毒之民) at Yongchang (永昌). This has been used as an evidence for the arrival of Indians through the southwest silk road. According to the book *Annotations on Pronunciation and Semantics* by Huilin 慧琳音义, these "Indians" actually were people coming from the southwest non-Chinese tribes called Ailaoyi (哀牢夷) during the Eastern and Western Jin periods. They were not from India at all.

3) *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, "Biography of Huirui" 高僧传, 慧叡传 records that Huirui left from the western border of Sichuan to travel to various countries and finally reached south India. The term "western border of Sichuan" in this book refers to the path from Sichuan to Drug (or Drug-gu 吐谷浑) that crosses the Western Regions to reach India. It is irrelevant to the Yunnan-Burma road.

4) In the book *Biography of Eminent Tang Monks Seeking Buddhism in the Western Regions*, "Biography of Huilun" 大唐西域求法高僧传, 慧轮传, Yijing 义净 (an eminent monk of the Tang Dynasty) wrote that in ancient times more than 20 Chinese monks "passed through the Sichuan-Zangke road (蜀川牂柯道) and conducted religious services to Mahā Bodhisattva."<sup>25</sup> The opening of the Sichuan-Zangke road was targeted at South Guangdong (南粤), verifying that the Zangke road, irrelevant to the Sichuan-Yunnan-Burma-India road, was linked to India from Sichuan to Guangdong and then from Guangzhou by sea to India.

5) Regarding the argument that Indian Buddhism came through the Sichuan-Yunnan-Burma-India road to enter Sichuan and then reached the Central Plain, there is no text evidence to prove the availability of such a road in the Han period. The Indian state, Kāmarūpa (迦摩缕波

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<sup>24</sup> The original text uses the word "经略," but the translator believes this to be an error and translates it as "invasion 侵略."

<sup>25</sup> Original text: 从蜀川牂柯道而出,向莫诃菩提礼拜.

国), bordering Yunan and Burma, did not practice Buddhism when Xuanzang 玄奘 was there. So the possibility of transmitting Buddhism to China through this path is very slim.

6) Excavated barbarian figurines and imported items from Sichuan and Yunnan are found primarily in the coastal areas of Guangxi and Guangdong provinces, not along the Sichuan-Yunnan-Burma-India road. Therefore, Wu Zhuo invalidates all the aforementioned arguments by stating that Sichuan and India were connected, not by the Sichuan-Yunnan-Burma-India road, but by the Zangke road or Sichuan-Jiaozhi road (蜀交趾道), which reached Guangzhou or Jiaozhi, then took the sea route to reach India.<sup>26</sup>

Yang Hong, who is also concerned with early Buddhist relics, has published several articles. His view is well expressed in the chapter "Buddhist Plastic Art Objects of the Han and Wei Periods" 汉魏时期佛教造型艺术品 from his 1997 book *Half a Century of Fine Arts Archaeology* 美术考古半世纪, where he presents a complete description of early Buddhist art objects. As far as the Pengshan money-tree stand from a middle or late Eastern Han tomb is concerned, he firmly identifies the central figure as a Buddha flanked by, not Bodhisattvas, but two donors. The Buddhist images on another money-tree from an Eastern Han cliff tomb of Hejiashan, Mianyang (绵阳何家山), in Sichuan are identified as a transcendent and divine animals, used when people prayed for money and fortune, rather than being respected images (*zunxiang* 尊像) for religious worship or services. The first dating test of 1985 places the Mahao tomb 1 at Leshan to the late Eastern Han and Shuhan (蜀汉 221-263 A.D.), a period at which Buddhism was not an independent religion but was attached to the early traditional Daoism and transcendent ideology. The images from Yi'nan and Herlinger belong to the same category. Buddhist images found in the Wu State (222-280 A.D.) to the Jiangnan region of the Western Jin (265-316 A.D.) indicate that decorative motifs on many vessels had already been influenced by Buddhist art. Such Buddhist images were added to the list of familiar transcendent imagery but were not yet respected imagery for fervent religious followers to worship.<sup>27</sup>

A newly published article by Luo Shiping 罗世平 is entitled "Early Buddhist Imagery on Chinese Soil and Immigrant Residential Areas for Central Asians" 汉地早期佛像与胡人流寓地. Luo accepts Luoyang as the first place at which a Buddhist temple was erected. Starting from

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<sup>26</sup> Wu Zhuo, 1999(1)38-50.

<sup>27</sup> Yang Hong, pp.182-190.

Luoyang, Buddhism first spread to Pengcheng where King Ying of Chu resided, then to Yi'nan and Kongwangshan as evidenced by carved imagery in these areas. With Xuzhou as its center, these areas constituted an early Qi-Chu Buddhist art dissemination region. Commenting on the notion of Buddhism coming to China via the sea route, because of the coastal location of Kongwangshan, Luo makes it clear that "such a view lacks sufficient evidence after analyzing combined materials from various aspects concerning the early infiltration of Buddhism into China." In regard to the Buddhist arts in the Southern Wu region, the earliest date is Eastern Wu 东吴 (222-280 A.D.), a period when Buddhism, the King Father of the East, and the Queen Mother of the West were parallel and integrated with one another. This indicates that in the popular mind, understanding of Buddhism remained at the level of transcendent beliefs in praying for fortune and expelling evil. Since Buddhist relics from Sichuan feature Gandhāran-style elements and Sichuan is geographically close to the Western Regions, there are reasons to link Sichuan Buddhism to Western Regions Buddhism and to the Buddhist disseminators. Regardless of place, the earliest Buddhist dissemination was associated with the residence of foreign immigrants (流寓). Luo also summarizes the features of the early Buddhist iconography.<sup>28</sup> From the aforementioned, we can outline the progress gained in the following aspects:

First, we eliminate the materials obviously dated to the Three Kingdoms and the Western Jin. Among the Eastern Han Buddhist imagery mentioned by Yu Weichao, the so-called Buddhist image printed on blue and white waxed cotton fabrics has generally been identified as the Greek goddess of harvest 丰收女神像.<sup>29</sup> However, some scholars of iconography consider it a Buddhist image, some treat it as an isolated Buddhist image or an equivalent to a Chinese transcendent, while others deem it as consisting of Buddhist elements and a component of Chinese popular beliefs or Daoist belief.

Second, it is worth noting that the Gandhāran style reflected in Sichuan Buddhist imagery has attracted wide attention. Wu Zhuo further discusses the path which brought Buddhism from the Western Regions to Sichuan. He posits that Buddhism was disseminated through Qinghai and the Western Regions before reaching Sichuan, and rejects the possibility of its arriving in Sichuan via the southwest silk road.

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<sup>28</sup> Luo.

<sup>29</sup> Wu Zhuo, 1991, p.165; Lin, 2000, pp. 380-381.

Third, most of the archaeological materials are dated after the Emperor Huan (147 A.D.), which is later than the infiltration of Buddhism in the Eastern Han as recorded in historical texts. Most scholars still consider Luoyang the Buddhist center during the Eastern Han, and from Luoyang Buddhism spread to other regions (except Sichuan). The Kharoṣṭhī well-railing inscription (井栏佉卢文)<sup>30</sup> discovered in Luoyang can further support this view.

Finally, the Yi'nan stone reliefs and Kongwangshan stone imagery signify that the Qi-Chu region with Xuzhou as its center was the dissemination area for early Buddhist art. This was a consequence of the expansion of the Pengcheng Buddhism headed by King Ying of Chu. The Buddhist belief held by King Ying of Chu came from Luoyang and was irrelevant to the sea route.

### III. The Nature of Han Buddhism

The increasing appearance of archaeological material has led to a greater understanding of the nature of Han Buddhism. Erik Zürcher explores this issue in depth in his article "Han Buddhism and the Western Region." After reviewing textual evidence and archaeological materials, Zürcher summarizes the characteristics of Han Buddhism as follows:

1) hybrid court Buddhism: court circles performed sacrifices to both Buddha and the Huanglao, and Buddhism appeared to be only an exotic variant of the esoteric Daoism (方士道教) that had been practiced at the court since the Western Han. The earliest hard evidence is the 65 A.D. imperial edict issued by the Han Emperor Ming 汉明帝 to King Ying of Chu.

2) standardized monastic Buddhism with saṃgha as its nucleus: this featured formalized doctrines and strictly organized Buddhist monasteries, inside which resided foreign monks and Chinese lay believers. Its beginning is marked by the arrival of An Shigao at Luoyang in 148 A.D. Before that time, this religious community did not associate with the court Buddhism.

3) incorporation of Buddhist elements extensively and blindly into Chinese indigenous cults and religious worships: the geographic spread of Buddhist images stretched from the coastal area of Shandong to Sichuan and Inner Mongolia. There appeared to be no connection with the spread of monastic Buddhism. It may well be that such Buddhist visual traits were

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<sup>30</sup> Lin, 1995, pp. 387-404.

spread through the circulation of material objects that could easily find their way into far-away regions, and for that reason also easily lose their original meaning. Such images are often found in tombs serving as burial objects, which was not the original Buddhist intent. These images depict the Gandhāran art style started in the second century, and the Chinese features can be traced back to Han art traditions.

Zürcher points out that the diffusion of Buddhism requires certain conditions. The nucleus of religious life has always and everywhere been formed by the saṃgha. The diffusion of Buddhism amounts to the diffusion of a well-defined monastic institution. To establish a saṃgha is to set up a base area, which requires a supporting line, namely, food and supplies from donors. Once the supplies in one place become insufficient, surplus monks will wander away and seek for a new foothold. A large monastery needs a big city environment, where it has merchants, gifts from prosperous families and elites, and, best of all, support from the ruling class. During the period of Kaniṣka (迦膩色伽), Buddhism spread from northwest India and eastern Afghanistan to the regions of Bactria and Sogdian in the north. It was a civilized world with the far-reaching influence of Greek culture. Many second-century Buddhist monastery sites in this region provide answers to the arrival of earliest monks from Sogdiana and Parthia in China. By comparison, Buddhist influence did not extend to the Western Regions (states in the Tarim Basin 塔里木盆地诸国) in Han China, because they lacked a highly developed economy necessary to maintain the non-productive organization of the saṃgha. Comparing earlier and later versions of the *History of Han*, "Biography of the Western Regions" 汉书, 西域传, one finds that a population explosion during the second century in the Western Regions could be the result of a dense agricultural irrigation system introduced to the area and the opening up of wasteland to grow grain (*tuntian* 屯田). The development of agriculture facilitated the emergence of a city, the expansion of commerce and the establishment of city aristocracy. All these created an environment that could support saṃghas. In the third century, the vacuum of Buddhism in the Western Regions was broken. However, Han Buddhism is not the result of "contact expansion," which is characterized by proximity, continuity, and feedback; in this not only individual elements of a religious system are transferred but also coherent complexes: an integrated doctrine, a body of scriptures, a complicated organization, and other aspects are brought from one place to another with coherence. Rather, Han Buddhism is the result of "long-distance transmission." It has quite different features: contact is incidental and intermittent, and

communications are difficult. The transmission is defective and can easily take the form of an unsystematic borrowing of elements that are largely detached from their original context, and therefore are easily changed beyond recognition in their new cultural environment.<sup>31</sup>

Zürcher's analysis offers us a great deal of enlightenment, but his study of archaeological iconography has primarily been influenced by Wu Hung. He overlooks the view that Buddhism was brought from the court to local areas by bureaucrats, as suggested by the archaeological materials. We must be fully aware that archaeological materials are a necessary supplement to the understanding gained solely from textual evidence.

On the basis of Zürcher's analysis, we can further divide Han Buddhism into two systems. One system is the blind worship practiced by many—from officers of the court down to the various local levels. This is exemplified in the regions from Luoyang to Qi-Chu, where people treated Buddha as a transcendent and performed sacrifices to both Buddha and Huanglao. They created these circumstances without accepting the Buddhist doctrines, and without disseminating Buddhist knowledge for the sake of preaching. This theory is supported by other archaeological materials.

Another system is the saṃgha community, which was first established in Luoyang during the end of the Eastern Han. These non-Chinese monks, such as An Shigao, lived in monasteries and worked as Buddhist missionaries. They translated scriptures, lectured on doctrines, and instructed students.

These two main systems consistently characterized the development of Buddhism in China, combined together at times and independent at others. It is possible to say that since the Han, Chinese Buddhism had already born its own features: it had disciples blindly worshipping Buddhism as well as eminent monks who explored and studied to the bottom of the Buddhist doctrine and philosophy.

#### IV. Critique of the Transmission of Buddhism to China via the Sea Route

Archaeologists usually are very cautious, some are even critical, towards the view of Buddhism infiltration into China via the sea route, when discussing Buddhist archaeological sites discovered along the southeast coastal areas. It is interesting to note that, in recent years, those

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<sup>31</sup> Zürcher; Wu Xuling, pp. 291-310.



who advocate the idea of a sea-route are primarily historians and local scholars in the coastal regions. Their opinions are represented in the 1995 article entitled "Study of the Transmission of Buddhism to China via the Sea Route" 佛教海上传入中国之研究, written by Wu Tingqiu 吴廷璆 and Zheng Pengnian 郑彭年. These scholars advance seven reasons in their argument that Buddhism came to China via the sea route. These are listed as follows:

1) Wu and Zheng do not believe that Emperor Ming of the Eastern Han could have sought for Buddhism (or Dharma) during the Yongping reign 永平 (58-75 A.D.), because there was a disruption of traffic between the Central Plain and the Western Regions at that time. The actions of King Ying of Chu recorded in the *History of the Later Han* 後汉书 must be "the earliest and most reliable textual evidence pertinent to the spread of Buddhism in China." The Yunnan-Burma road initiated from Sichuan was opened late; however, the South Sea line was already open one hundred years earlier during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Western Han, therefore, the Buddhism worshipped by King Ying of Chu could have come from no other place but the sea."

2) Wu and Zheng state that "the Buddhism believed by King Ying of Chu did not come through the states of the Western Regions, but directly from India." The reason is that Xiang Kai from Shandong cited the *Sūtra in Forty-two Sections* 四十二章经, a direct translation from an Indian ancient vernacular language (suyu 俗语), in which "Buddha" (浮屠) instead of "Fo" (佛) was used. According to Ji Xianlin's 季羨林 research, "浮屠"—used earlier than "佛"—was translated directly from an Indian topolect (方言) without the intermediary of a language of the Western Regions.<sup>32</sup> Further, there is no mention of active Western Regions Buddhism anywhere in the *History of the Later Han*, "Account of the Western Regions" 後汉书, 西域传. This information was provided by Ban Yong 班勇 and his son, who lived in the Western Regions from the 16<sup>th</sup> year of Yongping (73 A.D.) of the Emperor Ming to the second year of Yongjian 永建 (127 A.D.) of the Emperor Shun 顺帝. This indicates that the states of the Western Regions did not practice Buddhism before 127 A.D.

3) When a foreign religion infiltrates a country, it must be combined with the inherent beliefs of the recipient country. Whether King Ying of Chu, Emperor Huan or Emperor Ling, all rulers treated Buddhism as an esoteric art of clairvoyants similar to Huanglao. The settling of

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<sup>32</sup> Ji, 1957:20.

Buddhism in the Pengcheng region was inseparable from the atmosphere and soil receptive to Buddhism. In the meantime, coastal regions of Jiangsu and Shandong were associated with the spread of Buddhism via the sea route.

4) Following Wu Zhuo's view that "the Buddhist relics from extant Western Regions are dated no earlier than second or third century," Wu and Zheng trust that the Buddhist relics excavated from southern China are earlier. For instance, A) the two bronze statues unearthed from the Han tomb 2 of the Song village of Shijiazhuang, Hebei, "are the earliest Buddhist statues found in China and could have been made in the late Han to Wei-Jin period, based on the tomb date." B) Several stone reliefs from a tomb in Beizai village, Yi'nan, central south Shandong, exhibit Buddhist influence. They can be dated to ca. 190 A.D., between late Emperor Ling (168-189 A.D.) to early Emperor Xian 献帝 (190-220 A.D.) C) The Buddhist sculptures from the cliff of Kongwangshan, Lianyungang, dated to the late Han, are the "earliest carved Buddhist imagery in Chinese Buddhist history."

5) Wu and Zheng affirm Liang Qichao's view that Chinese Buddhism was divided into two sects, namely the southern sect that advocated Hīnayāna and the northern sect that promoted Mahāyāna, and that the sea route preceded the land road. They further claim that Emperor Huan sacrificed to both Huanglao and Buddha in Luoyang, a practice that came from King Ying of Chu in the south.

6) Wu and Zheng disbelieve the *Biography of Eminent Monks* 高僧传 account of An Shigao, who came to China in 147 A.D. and became the first translator of the Buddhist sūtras. He probably came to China with merchants by crossing the sea.

7) A reliable account of the transmission of Buddhism to China via the land road was recorded no earlier than the end of the second century or the end of the Han. The Luoyang branch was established at the end of the second century, approximately 100 years later than the Jiangnan (south of Yangzi 江南) branch.<sup>33</sup>

One cannot help but feel disappointed that such a long [and unpersuasive] article was published in *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究. These seven arguments not only fail to refute the evidence provided by Tang Yongtong, but also create confusion, and even contradictions, on understanding the basic concepts. Let us discuss them one by one:

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<sup>33</sup> Wu and Zheng, 1995(2):20-39.

1) Wu and Zheng dispute the feasibility of seeking Buddhism (or Dharma) during the Yongping period, using the traffic block to the Western Regions during the Wang Mang 王莽 (99-23 A.D.) and Yongping (58-75 A.D.) periods as evidence. The interruption of political contacts between the Han court and the states of the Western Regions does not prove that other contacts were all blocked. Descriptions in historical texts are not always complete. For the same reason, the sea route leading to India, similar to the land road, had both been open during the reign of the Han Emperor Wu 汉武帝 (140-87 B.C.E.), but there are no records documenting the arrival of Buddhism in China through land road or sea route. King Ying of Chu was enfeoffed from Luoyang to the Pengcheng area; his practice of sacrificing to both Huanglao and Buddha might have come from Luoyang. The declaration that "the Buddhism worshipped by King Ying of Chu could have come from no other place but the sea" is not substantiated.

2) Wu and Zheng interpret Ji Xianlin's research on the word "Buddha" (浮屠), claiming that the first version of the *Sūtra in Forty-two Sections* 四十二章经 is a direct translation from an ancient Indian vernacular language and not from a language of the Western Regions. Five years before Wu and Zheng's article, Ji published another article entitled "Another Discussion of Buddha and Fo" 再论浮屠与佛 in the same journal. He points out that the word "浮屠" in the *Sūtra in Forty-two Sections* was originally spelled as *bodo*, *boddo*, or *buodo* in the Bactrian language 大夏语 popular in Central Asia (modern-day Pakistan and Afghanistan). The word "浮屠" arrived in China earlier than the word "佛," a translation from a language popular in the Western Regions (ancient Xinjiang).<sup>34</sup> In reality, in his article on "Buddha and Fo" 浮屠与佛, Ji did not state that the original word "Buddha" (浮屠) came from the sea route. Later it has been further affirmed that the word "浮屠" came from Central Asia via the land road.

3) In regard to the early acceptance of Buddhism by coastal regions of Jiangsu and Shandong, Tang Yongtong already has made that argument. Wu Zhuo and Luo Shiping provided further detailed analysis and interpretation. The prevalence of esoteric arts and the dissemination of early Daoism in this region made the region more receptive to foreign religions and enabled the foreign religion to be blended with local beliefs. The land road for Buddhism to reach Luoyang is easily a more plausible road than the much longer sea route. Further, King Ying of

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<sup>34</sup> Ji, 1990(2):3-11.

Chu, the earliest Buddhist believer in the region, came from Luoyang. Thus to claim that the Buddhism believed by King Ying of Chu was transmitted via the sea route lacks any grounds.

4) The three examples cited by Wu and Zheng all originated in the north, not in the south where the authors want to establish their argument. The first example of excavated material from Shijiazhuang was not cited by authoritative scholars in discussing the embryonic phase of Buddhism. The authors themselves admit that this material is dated from the late Han to the Wei and Jin. Since the time period reaches to the Wei and Jin, such material cannot be used as evidence for the earliest Buddhist relics. The second and third examples have already been discussed by other scholars and have been dated to late Han or even later, thus they lack the evidence to prove that these came earlier than those from the Western Regions. It is important to note that Buddhist imagery originated in northwest India, not southern India. The level of Buddhist development in southern India, particularly Buddhist art during the first century, is not clear. However, the Gandhāran Buddhist art prevailed in the Kushān 贵霜 region, and rulers of the late Kushān empire were all strong Buddhism supporters. The examples of early Buddhist imagery found in China bear the Gandhāran style. These accounts directly oppose the view that Buddhism was transmitted through the sea route. One must provide convincing explanations to establish the sea- route view.

5) Tang Yongtong has already critiqued the division into northern and southern sects. Sūtras and canons translated by An Shigao in Luoyang were generally considered to be Hīnayāna.<sup>35</sup> Recently some scholars believe that these sūtras belonged to Mahāyāna.<sup>36</sup> In reality Buddhism at that time was at the initial stage of dissemination, thus lacking strict differentiation between the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna as well as distinctive characteristics of the northern and southern sects. Liang Qichao's classification of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna seems a rudimentary conclusion in today's view. Wang Bangwei states explicitly that "In Chinese Buddhist history, there never occurred a situation in which Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna were juxtaposed and forced to confront each other, as occurred in India and Central Asia."<sup>37</sup> This view is worth adopting. It is merely a speculation that Buddhism as practiced by Emperor Huan came from the south, where King Ying of Chu resided.

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<sup>35</sup> Wang, 1993:84-92.

<sup>36</sup> Forte; Wang, 1998:107-114 and 1997:667-682.

<sup>37</sup> Wang, 1997:681.

6) Tang Yongtong studied the original sources of the historical accounts concerning An Shigao. Wang Bangwei's even more detailed analysis concluded that An Shigao could very likely have come from the eastern border of Parthia, where Buddhism was once popular. He spent the years between the second year of the Jianhe reign 建和 of the Emperor Huan (148 A.D.) to the Jianning reign 建宁 of the Emperor Ling 灵帝 (168-171 A.D.) in Luoyang, translating scriptures and preaching Buddhism. He moved to and preached in the south only when turmoil came to Luoyang at the end of the Han.<sup>38</sup> The basic deeds of his life are quite plain and there is no textual evidence to prove that An Shigao came to China via the sea route.

7) Wu and Zheng cite the scripture-translating monks who came to China at the end of the Eastern Han to mark the inception of Buddhism in the north as proof that Buddhism in the north was approximately 100 years later than the Buddhism in the Jiangnan region, without mentioning the archaeological materials from Luoyang, Inner Mongolia, Shandong and other places. Such a method to establish an argument can hardly be accepted.

To sum up, "Study on the Transmission of Buddhism to China via the Sea Route" recycles old views with its authors' own interpretations and fails to substantiate the old sea-route view. Unfortunately, this article was published in the influential journal *Lishi yanjiu* and has not been met with any critical response since its appearance in 1995. The commentator feels obligated to make this critique with the hope of redirecting the discussion of this topic to the correct course. The commentator does not oppose the possibility that Buddhism was transmitted by the sea route. But to establish such a view, one must provide solid and convincing evidence.

## V. The Western Regions and the Dawn of Han Buddhism

The fact that no Buddhist site found so far in the Western Regions (Xinjiang) can firmly be dated to the Han Dynasty has been used to argue for the sea-route transmitting Buddhism to Han China. In reality, unexplainable blank spots also exist between India and the coastal regions of southeast China, and the sea-route expands even longer in distance than that of the land road.

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<sup>38</sup> Wang, 1993:82-86.

Contacts through land roads between both the Western and Eastern Han periods and Central Asia were far more frequent than those between the Han China and India via the sea route.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, sea-route believers use the absence in the *History of Later Han*, "Account of the Western Regions" 后汉书, 西域传, of a description of Buddhism in the Western Regions as grounds to oppose the existence of early phases of Buddhism in that region. The *History of the Later Han* documents the events before Ban Yong's withdrawal from the Western Regions in the second year of Yongjian of the Emperor Shun (127 A.D.). Even if we consider 175 A.D. the year when Han influence completely withdrew from the Western Regions as the low point for the absence of Buddhism in the Western Regions, this still cannot explain whether or not the states in the Western Regions received the Buddhist belief after 175 A.D. An Shigao came to Luoyang in the second year of the Jianhe reign (148 A.D.) of the Emperor Huan, and many Buddhist archaeological materials excavated are dated after 147 A.D. Therefore, Buddhism could feasibly have spread to the Western Regions after 175 A.D. According to Zürcher, the years before 127 A.D., as recorded by Ban Yong, saw the development of agriculture in the Western Regions, which facilitated the emergence of cities, the expansion of commerce and the formation of city aristocracy, which were all the conditions needed for the establishment of the saṃgha. Therefore, it is plausible that during the latter half of the second century, namely, the late Eastern Han period, Buddhism began to spread in the Western Regions.

Further, the absence of Buddhism in the Western Regions (Xinjiang) does not necessarily indicate that Buddhists did not travel through that area to reach the Central Plain. The point is that we must not neglect the areas west of the Tarim Basin—the Buddhist situation in ancient Bactria 大夏 and the Kushān empire, modern-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. Textual evidence states that early sūtra-translating monks came primarily from the Kushān empire. It is recorded in the *Wei Lue*, "Account of the Western Barbarians" 魏略, 西戎传 that "in the first year of the Yuanshou (元寿) reign of the Emperor Ai 哀帝 (2 B.C.), Jing Lu, the student of an erudite received from Yi Cun 伊存, the envoy of the king of the Greater Yuezhi (大月支), oral instruction in (a) Buddhist sūtra(s)." Tang Yongtong considers this to be the earliest record explicitly documenting the arrival of Buddhism in China, a fact we must not overlook.

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<sup>39</sup> Besides the accounts in the *History of Han* 汉书 and the *History of the Later Han* 后汉书, recently discovered Han tablets from Xuanquan, Dunhuang 敦煌悬泉 reveal many accounts of contacts made by the envoys from Central Asia and the Western Regions. See Hu and Zhang, pp. 103-174.

The Aśoka 阿育王 (268-237 B.C.) stone stele, inscribed with both Greek and Aramaic scripts (阿拉美文) and found in the Bactrian region, indicates that Buddhism had already expanded to this region by the third century B.C.<sup>40</sup> Although this region was transformed from a Hellenized Bactrian empire to the Kushān empire of Greater Yuezhi, and underwent changes during other ethnic regimes, Buddhist influence persisted.

The Buddhist sūtra, *Milindapañha* 弥兰陀王问经, informs us that the Indian-Greek ruler Menander (r. 150-135 B.C.) had a special zeal towards Buddhism.<sup>41</sup> Further, towards the end of the Greek-occupation period of the Gandhāran area, a local governor, Meridarch Theodorus, worshipped Buddha's *śarīra* (佛舍利) in the Swat region.<sup>42</sup> Some scholars date the emergence of the first Buddhist image to the first century B.C., based on the excavation in the Swat region by the Italian archaeological team and scholars' re-evaluation of the materials from the Taxila site.<sup>43</sup>

Other scholars observe that the coin of Kujula Kadphises (r. 30-80 A.D.), the first king of the Kushān empire, bears Buddha's image because it is inscribed with the characters "believing in dharma (信法)." The same inscribed characters have been seen on the coin of Huviṣka, who did not believe in Buddhism, and the coin was discovered in Mathurā, so this evidence now cannot be established.<sup>44</sup> The Kaniṣka (r. ca. 100-126 A.D.) coin has a complete Buddha image and inscription of "Buddha 佛陀" characters in Bactrian.<sup>45</sup> This date is earlier than that of the Buddhist imagery of the Middle or Late Eastern Han. The Kushān 迦王 period was dedicated to the dissemination of Buddhism. The Buddhist sculptural art, rapidly developed in the Kushān empire sphere of Gandhāra and Mathurā, was then quickly spread to India, Afghanistan and other Central Asian cities and towns. They left behind a series of sites in Haḍḍa (south to the Jalalabad Plain) and Begram (64 kilometers northeast to Kabul), where numerous fine Buddhist images resurfaced.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the discovery of many archaeological images from the late Eastern Han probably is not accidental; it should be closely associated with the Kushān empire.

The more important material, relevant to the subject under discussion, is the historical documentation recently discovered in Afghanistan. In September 1994, an anonymous party

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<sup>40</sup> For convenient reference, see Harmatta, tr. Xu, pp. 316-326, 245.

<sup>41</sup> Harmatta, tr. Xu, p. 82.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>45</sup> Errington and Gribb, pp. 199-201.

<sup>46</sup> Harmatta, tr. Xu, pp. 259-315.

purchased five clay pots containing birch bark (桦树皮) Buddhist manuscripts<sup>47</sup> written in the Gāndhārī language (犍陀罗语) and in the Kharoṣṭhī script (佉卢文). It is said that they came from Afghanistan, probably from the Haḍḍa area. The anonymous party kindly donated the treasures to the British Library, which publicized this acquisition to the public in June 1996.<sup>48</sup>

Four years prior to this news release by the British Library, Kurita Isao 栗田功氏 of the Nichi-Futsu Kōekisha (日佛交易社) took photographs of several clay pots at Peshawar in Pakistan, and inside [one pot] were manuscripts written on birch bark. This pot bears a dedicatory inscription labeling it "in the possession of the Dharmaguptakas 法藏部所有." Professor Ding Fangsheng 定方晟 reported this discovery,<sup>49</sup> but did not know then that these treasures had been deposited in the British Library. Now it is certain that these birch bark manuscripts were dispersed from Peshawar.

The British Library entrusted the manuscripts to Professor Richard Salomon of the University of Washington in the United States in order for him to study them. In 1997 Professor Salomon published his research results in "A Preliminary Survey of Some Early Buddhist Manuscripts Recently Acquired by the British Library."<sup>50</sup> In 1999, he published and served as the chief editor of the book entitled *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra: The British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragments*, in which he gives an extensive account of the physical conditions and textual evidence of these manuscripts.<sup>51</sup>

According to these reports and research, this is a group of ancient scrolls written on birch bark and stored in five large clay pots.<sup>52</sup> The pots carry dedicatory inscriptions in Kharoṣṭhī. The manuscripts were originally thirteen bundles, containing thirty-two fragmentary rolls. The British Library received twenty-nine rolls and assigned twenty-nine numbers to them.<sup>53</sup> The manuscripts are written in the Kharoṣṭhī script of Gāndhārī or a northwest Indian vernacular language (Prakrit). After carefully considering the location at which the clay pots were found, the

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<sup>47</sup> Translator's note: "manuscript rolls were said to have originally been found inside one of the clay pots, but they had been removed from it." "...[T]he British Library scrolls were almost certain originally found inside pot D." See Salomon, 1999:15 & 21.

<sup>48</sup> Anonymous; John Darnton; British Library; Lin, 1998:115-130.

<sup>49</sup> Ding, 1996(10):20-23; Sadakata, pp. 301-324.

<sup>50</sup> Salomon, 1997(April/June):353-358.

<sup>51</sup> Salomon, 1999.

<sup>52</sup> See note 47.

<sup>53</sup> Translator's note: for several reasons, the total number of "fragments" (twenty-nine) does not correspond exactly to the number of original scrolls whose fragments are represented in the collection, nor to the number of texts represented in these scrolls. See Salomon, 1999:19.



inscriptions on the pots, the practice of writing sūtras on birch bark and placing sūtras in clay pots, as well as locations at which other Kharoṣṭhī scrolls were found, Professor Salomon believes that such manuscripts predominantly came from the Jalalabad Plain in east Afghanistan, particularly in the neighborhood of the village of Haḍḍa (also called Xiluo 醯罗 in the “Biography of Fa Xian” 法显传 and *Journey to the Western Regions in the Great Tang* 大唐西域记). He therefore concludes that these fragmentary scrolls must also originate from this area. This area was once the Buddhist center, but it was destroyed by Hephthalites (Yeda 嚙哒)<sup>54</sup> after the fifth century. In the 1920’s a French team excavated this area, finding an abundance of art works in the Gandhāran style.

Reduced to fragments in ancient times, these manuscripts originally belonged to a Gandhāran Buddhist monastery, which could well have belonged to the Dharmaguptaka sect (法藏部). The already known contents can be assigned to the following categories:

1. Sūtra texts and commentaries: there is a version of the *Samgīti-sūtra* (众集经) with an unidentified commentary, a sūtra-type text concerning the four stages of meditative trance (四禅定), and a sūtra text [canon] corresponding in part to the *Pali Aṅguttara-nikāya* (增支部).
2. Scholastic treatises and commentaries: there is a large number of such texts. Most of the verses cited in the texts correspond to ones found in the Pali canon in various texts of the Khuddaka-nikāya of the *Sutta-piṭaka* (巴利藏 “小部”), such as the *Sutta-nipāta* (经集), *Udāna* (自说), *Dhammapada* (法句), *Itivuttaka* (如是说), and *Theragāthā* (长老偈—[和尚唱词]).
3. Verse texts: included are a portion of the *Anavatapta-gāthā*, or *Songs of Lake Anavatapta* (无热恼池偈颂), part of the *Khaggaviṣāṇa-sutta* (or *Rhinoceros Horn Sutta*)<sup>55</sup> (犀角经) and part of the *Dharmapada* text (法句经).
4. Avadānas and relevant texts: one of the stories mentions Jihonika and Aśpavarman.
5. Other genres and miscellaneous texts: stotra, or hymn of praise, to the Buddha (佛赞) and an unidentified medical text<sup>56</sup> in Sanskrit.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Translator’s note: other versions of spelling include “Ephtalitai,” “Hephthalitai,” “Abdelai,” and “Abdel.” See Lin Meicun, 1998:138.

<sup>55</sup> Translator’s note: see Salomon, 1999, p. 33. It is spelled “Khaḍgaviṣāṇāgāthā” in Rong’s article.

<sup>56</sup> Translator’s note: “unidentified medical text in Brāhmī script and Sanskrit language” in Salomon, 1999:39.

<sup>57</sup> Salomon, 1999:15-55. The Chinese titles and names are translated with reference to Wang Bangwei, 2001:343-353.

There are clues to the age of these Buddhist canons. The dedicative inscription on one of the clay pots records that it was donated by one Vāsavadattā, wife of Suhasoma. The name Vāsavadattā is attested to be that of one of the sisters of the Apraca prince Indravarman in an inscription of 6 A.D. Suhasoma is the name of a royal kinsman and officer of Senavarman, Gandhāran King of Odi, mentioned in a Kharoṣṭhī inscription on a gold leaf. The gold leaf gives reference to the name Sadaṣkaṇa, the son of the Kushān ruler Kujula Kadphises (r. 30-80 A.D.). Therefore, these fragmentary scrolls are the relics handed down from the first half of the first century.

In addition, Jihonika and Aśpavarman mentioned in one of the fragments were historical figures who can be securely identified from unearthed coins or inscriptions. Jihonika appears on a coin and on a vase with an inscription dated 35 A.D., excavated from Taxila. Aśpavarman, the son of the Apraca prince Indravarman, also emerged in the inscription on a Taxila silver plate and on a coin issued for him. Hence, this evidence demonstrates a close relationship between Jihonika and Aśpavarman, and both were princes in the Indo-Scythian world of northwestern India. Further, it is not a matter of coincidence that both of them are associated with other historical figures mentioned in the dedicative inscriptions on clay pots.

Based on the aforementioned and their paleographic and linguistic features, Salomon trusts that these scrolls must have been written in the early first century. He is more inclined to give a firm terminus post quem at about the second decade of the first century (10 to 30 A.D.).<sup>58</sup>

It is worth paying special attention to the clay pot numbered D, which bears an inscription in Kharoṣṭhī stating that these sūtras and canons belonged to the Dharmaguptaka sect.<sup>59</sup> Apparently, these sūtras and canons, originally the property of a monastery under the Dharmaguptaka sect, were stored away for a purpose.

If 30 A.D. is the starting point for the establishment of the Kushān empire, then these Buddhist scrolls must be the relics from (a) Buddhist monastery(ies) of the small Indo-Scythian kingdoms in the Gandhāran region. The discovery of such early Buddhist canons from the Great Kushān region attests that early Buddhist monasteries and Buddhist sūtras and canons existed in the northwest Indian region. Among the rulers of small Indo-Scythian kingdoms, quite a few were staunch patrons of Buddhism.

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<sup>58</sup> Salomon, 1999:141-155.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151.

Let us return to the account in the *Wei Lue*, "Account of the Western Barbarians," which says that "In the first year of Yuanshou of the Han Emperor Ai (2 B.C.), Jing Lu, the student of an erudite, received from Yi Cun, the envoy of the king of the Greater Yuezhi, oral instruction in (a) Buddhist sūtra(s)." Under such circumstances, this event seems very plausible.

While we are thrilled with the acquisition of these extremely valuable Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts in Gāndhārī, there comes from London still more exciting news. It is said that a large number, probably more than 10,000 pieces, of manuscripts written in Sanskrit and Kharoṣṭhī from Bamiyan in Afghanistan made their appearance in a London antique bookstore. They were purchased by a Norwegian businessman, Martin Schoyen, who has kept them in a mountain village at the small town of Spikkestad, south of Oslo.<sup>60</sup> It is very fortunate that these manuscripts were quickly forwarded to scholars, and the research results have gradually begun to be published. In 1997, the research team headed by J. Braarvig started surveying these manuscripts and discovered that the manuscripts came from different sources. Some of them could have come from the Gilgit region in Pakistan. (In 1931 more than 3,000 pieces of birch-bark manuscripts were found at a Buddhist pagoda here.) The dating of these manuscripts ranges from the first century to the seventh or eighth century. More than 10,000 pieces of these manuscripts are in Kharoṣṭhī and various Sanskrit scripts and are written on *pattra* (贝叶), birch bark and animal hide. Some of them are very fragmentary. The manuscripts can be textually determined after comparative studies including *Mahāparinirvāṇa* 大般涅槃经 in Gāndhārī and Kharoṣṭhī script; *Kumārajīva's Abbreviated Version* 小品般若 in Sanskrit from the Kushān period; the Mahāyāna canon of *Śrīmālā-siṃhanāda-sūtra* 胜鬘经, *Sarva-dharmāpravṛtti-nirdeśa* 诸法无行经, *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodana* 阿闍世王经, *Lotus sūtra (Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra)* 法华经, and the rules on *Māhāsāṅghikāḥ* 摩诃僧祇部 and the *Buddha's Appearing in the World* 出世部, Bactrian Buddhist canons and so forth.<sup>61</sup> The decoding and transcription of these early scriptures and canons will certainly greatly improve our comprehension of the embryonic phase of Buddhism in the Han and Western Regions (Xinjiang).

The two groups of aforementioned manuscripts all contain the *Dharmapāda* (or *Dharmapada*). The Gāndhārī *Dharmapāda* acquired by the British Library bears even greater

<sup>60</sup> Fogg, pp. 46-49; Matsuda, 1997:24-28; 1998(7):83-88.

<sup>61</sup> Braarvig; Matsuda, 1999(5):4-19.

significance for the study of Western Regions Buddhism. We are aware that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Franco-Russian survey team and diplomats purchased a Gāndhārī *Dharmapāda* written on birch bark from Khotan. This was the earliest Buddhist manuscript before the appearance of the two groups of manuscripts aforementioned.<sup>62</sup> Due to the absence of specimens for comparative study, its dating has been uncertain. Opinions vary from the first to the third century.<sup>63</sup> Salomon believes that the Khotan Gāndhārī *Dharmapāda* is in a written language obviously affected by the process of translation. However, some of the newly discovered manuscripts also contain a "translation flavor," and some are characterized by the colloquial form of a spoken language.<sup>64</sup> Apparently, the Khotan *Dharmapāda* is later than the Haḍḍa *Dharmapāda*, but cannot be too much later because both are similar in script, languages and writing materials. Now that the Haḍḍa manuscripts are dated to the early first century, it is possible to assign the Khotan *Dharmapāda* to the second century.

Although we lack Buddhist canons and fine art objects bearing firm dates from the Western Regions, the decoding and transcription one after another of the manuscripts found in Afghanistan will surely help gradually to lift the veil of mystery from the Western Regions and Han Buddhism.

## VI. Concluding Remarks

The subject of transmitting Buddhism to China involves the study of historical documents 文献学, linguistics, history, archaeology, art history, transportation and other disciplines. The materials involved are abundant but sporadically scattered. Further, the information recorded in ancient texts is not clear and accurate. Clarification of the issue of whether Buddhism came to China via the land road or the sea route requires multi-disciplinary study of all the materials. The best approach is to bring forward the materials from all aspects and to ponder interpretations of experts from various fields. The view that Buddhism was transmitted to China by the sea route comparatively lacks convincing and supporting materials, and some arguments are not sufficiently rigorous.

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<sup>62</sup> Brough.

<sup>63</sup> Salomon, 1999:119.

<sup>64</sup> Wang, 2001:348.

Based on the existing historical texts and the archaeological iconographic materials discovered since the 1980's, particularly the first-century Buddhist manuscripts recently found in Afghanistan, the commentator believes that the most plausible theory is that Buddhism started from the Greater Yuezhi of northwest India (present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan) and took the land roads to reach Han China. After entering into China, Buddhism blended with early Daoism and Chinese traditional esoteric arts and its iconography received blind worship. After An Shigao arrived in Luoyang toward the end of the Eastern Han and began to engage in translating Buddhist scriptures and instructing students, Buddhism in the true sense was then spread throughout China.

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