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Three Brief Essays Concerning Chinese Tocharistan

- a. The Significance of Dunhuang and Turfan Studies
- b. Early Iranian Influences on Buddhism in Central Asia
- c. History of Chinese Turkistan in the Pre-Islamic Period

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The Significance of Dunhuang and Turfan Studies

Abstract

There are well over a thousand scholars around the world who are working on some aspect of Dunhuang and Turfan Studies. Do these two remote places in Chinese Central Asia merit such intense interest on the part of so many? In the first instance, this paper attempts to show that Dunhuang and Turfan Studies, though focussing on texts and artifacts associated with these two particular sites, actually have broad ramifications for the history of East-West cultural and commercial relations in general. Another major factor is the unique quality of many materials discovered at Dunhuang and Turfan. Archeological finds from these locations have enabled us, for the first time, to obtain an essentially first-hand look at China and some of its neighbors during the medieval period. That is to say, we can now learn, for example, about popular culture during T'ang times *without being forced to view it through a Confucian historiographical filter*. In other words, the availability of primary materials for correcting the biases of traditional historians and materials which document the existence of phenomena (languages, religions, popular literary genres, social customs, etc.) that were completely overlooked -- or even suppressed -- by them. As examples of the vivid immediacy afforded by such materials, two texts from Dunhuang manuscripts S4400 -- a prayer by Cao Yanlu 曹延祿 -- and S3877 -- a contract for the sale of a woman's son -- are edited and translated. The paper concludes by stressing that, because of the complexity and vast scope of Dunhuang and Turfan studies, international cooperation is essential.

In China, Japan, Taiwan, Russia, Europe, America, and elsewhere, there are well over a thousand scholars actively engaged in some aspect of Dunhuang and Turfan studies. A tremendous amount of time, energy, and money is being expended on the study of materials from these remote and inhospitable places. How do we, as scholars of Dunhuang and Turfan, justify this large investment of resources?

In this short conference paper, I should like to concentrate on what we can learn from Dunhuang and Turfan that we cannot learn from anywhere else. Broadly speaking, there are materials from these and related sites that enable us to know, with far greater accuracy than before their discovery, the true state of affairs regarding language, literature, religion, art, music, architecture, society, politics, education, war, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and so on in China and its neighboring countries to the west during the medieval period. Since the first three of these fields (viz., language, literature, and religion) are the ones I have worked in most extensively, I will focus on them for the purposes of this paper, though I will also touch upon social and legal matters.

According to von Le Coq, texts of 17 different languages in 24 different scripts were discovered at Turfan alone.¹ The number of those discovered at Dunhuang is comparable. Among the languages from Dunhuang and Turfan that have been reported are Indo-Scythian Kushan (Rouzhī) and Hephthalitish (White Hunnish); Middle Iranian tongues such as Khotanese (Saka), Sogdian, Parthian, and Middle Persian; Indic Sanskrit, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, Prakrits, and Gāndhārī; as well as Indo-Germanic Tocharian A and B, Tibetan, Tangut, Gansu vernacular and various styles of classical Chinese, Uighur (Old Turkish), Syriac, Hebrew, and Mongol. Scripts discovered at Dunhuang and Turfan include Brāhmī (used for Tocharian, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Saka, northwestern Chinese, and Old Turkish), Kharoṣṭhī (Kushan, Prakrit, Gāndhārī, and Kuchan), Gāndhārī (Prakrit), Sogdian (Sogdian), Parthian (Parthian and Old Turkish), Bactrian (Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit), Hephthalite (Hephthalitish), Tibetan (Tibetan, Uighur, Gansu Chinese), Manichaen (Sogdian, Old Turkish), Xixia (Tangut), Chinese (for Gansu vernacular and classical Chinese), Uighur (Old Uighur, Mongol, and later adapted for Manchu), Runes (Old Uighur), Arabic (Old Uighur), Estrangelo (Syriac), and Phags-pa (Mongol). Many of these languages and scripts are known solely from the Dunhuang and Turfan finds. Their reappearance and decipherment in this century by patient, dedicated scholars have helped powerfully to reconstruct the historical development of several major linguistic families. The painstaking work of Indologists,

Tibetologists, Iranists, and others on the Dunhuang and Turfan manuscripts has borne enormously rich fruit for which we can all be grateful.

The reemergence of long-lost literary forms at Dunhuang and Turfan is also cause for celebration. Here I will speak only of a few representative popular Chinese genres. Anonymous, folkish rhapsodies (*fu*) and cantos (*quzi[ci]*), transformation texts (*bianwen*), and sutra lectures for laymen (*jiangjingwen*) were virtually unknown until Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot recovered them from the so-called "Caves of Unsurpassed Height" (Mogaoku). Were it not for these texts, we would be completely ignorant of the fact that extended vernacular writings were already being produced during the Tang period. This knowledge is of the utmost importance, not only for understanding the history of Chinese literature, but for understanding the nature of Chinese society as well. These vernacular (*baihua* or *kouyu*) texts raise a number of important issues, among them the relationship between classical and demotic Chinese styles, the difficulty in using tetragraphs (*fangkuaizi*) to record texts that have an essentially oral derivation, the precise sociological and ideological influence of Buddhism in fostering the creation of such texts, the reasons for their subsequent ostensible disappearance in China proper, their preservation in peripheral areas, and so forth. The rediscovery of Tang vernacular texts in Central Asia has probably done more to rectify our previous erroneous comprehension of the literary culture of that period than has anything else.

The third area of interest that I would like to discuss is that of religion. Dunhuang and Turfan are literally treasure troves of world religions. Through artifacts discovered at these and associated sites, our knowledge of Zoroastrianism (Xianjiao), Nestorian Christianity (Jingjiao), Manichaeism (Monijiao), Buddhism (Fojiao), Islam (Hujiao), and other religions has been immeasurably broadened. In addition to enabling us to gain a far more detailed picture of the doctrines and scriptures of specific religions than we had before, the Dunhuang and Turfan manuscripts permit us to achieve a vivid comprehension of local religious practices. Just to give one concrete example, we may examine Stein manuscript 4400 (preserved in the British Library) which includes a prayer by Cao Yanlu 曹延祿, Prince of Dunhuang (was *jiedushi* 節度使 ["Military Commissioner"] from July 30, 976 to sometime in the year 1002), concerning the protection of his house from evil spirits.²

I respectfully request the Central Yellow Emperor, the *Pater infamilias* and *Mater infamilias*, their apparitional sons and grandsons, (4 or 5 tetragraphs missing) the Lord of the Wind and the Master of the Rain, the Spirits of the Five Paths (Sanskrit *gati[s]*) of rebirth, and all of the various seventy-nine apparitional spirits, that they may together descend to this place. The seat of the host³ Cao Yanlu.

On the twenty-first (*renyin*) day of the second (*renwu*) month of the ninth (*jiashen*) year of the Nascent Kingdom of Tranquility reign period of the Great Song Dynasty (i.e., March 26, 984), the Prince Cao of Dunhuang, imperially appointed Military Commissioner of the Returning to Righteousness Army, Specially Advanced Acting Grand Preceptor⁴ and Concurrent Secretariat Director, respectfully submits that a hole has spontaneously developed in the ground of the bank next to the Hundred Foot Pool. Water flows into the hole constantly and this has been going on without intermission for ten days. Consequently, I became startled and felt flustered, not knowing whether Heaven Above were⁵ sending down a calamity or some prodigy were emerging from Earth. In spite of the fact that I humbly observed the hole as though it were the manifestation of a disaster,⁶ there is difficulty in knowing if a given event is suspicious or ominous. Since the hole has so many strange and marvelous aspects,⁷ I was only afraid that disturbances would come darkly. Thus I sent for Yinyang⁸ Masters to divine and examine the site and to look into illustrated books showing the hundred oddities.⁹ Some said that there would be sickness in the house, others that members of my family would die,¹⁰ others that my tongue and mouth would be joined together,¹¹ and still others that an incident would arise in my offices. There would be no place to escape from these hauntings.

Then I respectfully selected an auspicious day and month. In accordance with the Law (*fa*) I had many letters and charms prepared for the spirits. There were clear wine and mixed fruits, dried fish and venison. Money was used to buy food,¹² all of which was fresh. These things were offered as a sacrifice to the Emperors of the Five Directions,¹³ to the hidden God of the Earth, to the multitudinous deities of the mountains and rivers, to all of the various spirits of those who are already dead. Humbly I beseeched the apparitions of the east to return to the east, the apparitions of the south to return to the south, the apparitions of the west to return to the west, the apparitions of the north to return to the north, the apparitions of the center to return to the center, the apparitions from heaven above to return to the rafters of heaven, the apparitions from earth below to enter¹⁴ the deep womb of earth. The apparitions disappeared upon contact with the charms, entering into the earth without any impediment.

Moreover, I hope that the Commandery Governor may enjoy long life. May there never be any portents of disaster and may those living in his palace be secure and joyful. May his power grow ever stronger and may the communal altars prosper,¹⁵ experiencing good fortune for ten thousand ages. If anyone should be of a different opinion or of two minds,¹⁶ may misfortune automatically befall him. May all bogies and spooks be made incapable of inflicting harm¹⁷ so that even the people¹⁸ of the town will rejoice. Without and within,¹⁹ may there be perpetual peace. May all pestilence be far removed, and may blessings come to this our village. Further, should there be any demonic, evil outlaws, may they submit to their superior with confidence and esteem.

Today I bring this lone offering as a present²⁰ for the spirit kings. May disasters be eradicated²¹ and blessings achieved. I expressly request that you descend to partake, humbly waiting while you enjoy this food.

Here we see a fascinating, first-hand description of religious ritual that incorporates elements from Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and folk religion (both ethnic Han and non-Han). The immediacy of this text is both captivating and revealing. Were it not for such primary sources as this which were made available through the finds at Dunhuang and Turfan, it would be almost impossible to imagine what local religions were really like among Chinese and their neighbors of a thousand years ago. The vast majority of the records that passed down through normal bureaucratic channels to the present day were filtered through a Confucian historiographical outlook fraught with biases and subjected to censorship, whether conscious or not.

Another unusual document from Dunhuang that vividly reveals a side of local life about which we would be almost totally ignorant may be found on manuscript S3877:

Because of the early death of her husband, because her children are still²² small and, being without anyone to aid them, are in urgent need of food and clothing, and because she is deep in debt, Awu 阿吳, the wife of Wang Zaiying who was a commoner of Redheart Village 赤心鄉百姓王再盈, today (the fifth day of the Xth month²³ of 916²⁴) establishes this contract to sell her blessed seven-year old son Qingde 慶德 to Linghu Xintong, a commoner of Hongrun Village 洪潤鄉百姓令狐信通, at the current price of a total of 30 piculs of moist and dried grain. At the time of the exchange....²⁵ After the sale is completed, he shall forever serve the family of Linghu Xintong....²⁶ Even if the government declares an amnesty, he shall not become a matter for discussion....²⁷ Fearing that later on there would be no evidence [of our agreement], we have established this contract²⁸ as verification.

Though short, this document holds a world of grief. The fact that it is neither fiction nor second-hand history makes it all the more poignant. It is almost as though we were present at this

heart-rending transaction between the widow Wang and the slaveowner Linghu.²⁹

Judging merely from the fields of language, literature, and religion discussed above, not to mention socio-economic and legal aspects to which I have barely alluded, it is obvious that Dunhuang-Turfan studies occupy a crucial position in twentieth-century scholarship. As such, they deserve our support and encouragement. There is a real question, however, as to the best way of pursuing Dunhuang-Turfan studies. By way of conclusion, I should like to make several suggestions.

In the first place, we might better think of Dunhuang-Turfan studies more generally as Central Asian studies. Although Dunhuang and Turfan constitute by far the richest repositories, the types of materials found at these two sites have also been found elsewhere in Central Asia (Khotan, Kara-Khoto, etc.). Likewise, the kinds of issues these materials raise and the techniques for studying them are similar for finds from other Central Asian sites. Hence, when engaged in Dunhuang and Turfan studies, we ought not to focus too narrowly on artifacts and texts from these two places alone.

Secondly, we must not lose sight of the fact that Dunhuang and Turfan studies, by their very nature, are international in scope. Greek, Roman, Indian, Turkish, Iranian, and other objects and ideas were transmitted to China through Central Asia. Conversely, Chinese technology and motifs passed to the West through the same vital area. Central Asia is important as the connecting link for the whole, vast Eurasian mass. (In this context, I might add parenthetically that the original name for Dunhuang was something like Throana or Druvana and that Turfan has also been pronounced as Turpan and Turbat. It is obvious that both of these names derive from non-Sinitic sources.) Fortunately, Central Asia was blessed with ideal climatological conditions for preservation. Now that the human destructive factors that were formerly operative (in particular the threat from Islamic fanaticists) have largely been overcome, we are confronted with a mass of unique materials for the study of the development of civilizations during the first millennium and more of the International Era.

Just as the materials from Dunhuang and Turfan are intrinsically international, so are the methods required for their study. I would like to close merely by saying that we do a serious injustice to the precious remnants of the past if we divide up Dunhuang and Turfan studies along national lines. Dunhuang and Turfan, it so happens, are presently part of Chinese territory, so it is natural that the Chinese government and Chinese scholars would have a special interest in Dunhuang and Turfan studies. Yet many of the most important documents and works of art from these sites are now to be found in the libraries and museums of other countries. Consequently, it is absolutely essential that all of us -- governments and individuals alike -- adopt a spirit of international cooperation when dealing with the precious heritage preserved for us at Dunhuang and Turfan. Herein, perhaps, lies the most important aspect of Dunhuang and Turfan studies, namely that -- if carried out in the proper way -- they can be a powerful force for bringing nations and people together.

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Notes

1. *Auf Hellas Spuren*, p. 10.
2. The text has been published in Shangwu yinshuguan, ed., *Dunhuang yishu zongmu suoyin*, p. 200. My corrections appear both in the translation and in the following notes.
3. There are four small tetragraphs at this point in the text that are only partly legible.
4. 太師, an honorary title awarded to Cao Yanlu.

5. 是 is written as a small interlinear addition.
6. 灾 .
7. 股 = 般 .
8. Complementary bipolarity (the male and female principles).
9. 百怪圖書 . For examples of such books among the Dunhuang manuscripts, see S6261, P2682, and P2683.
10. 死亡 .
11. Cf. English "tongue-tied" or, in other words, "be struck dumb."
12. On the manuscript this is written 錢財來餽 (= 錢財來餽 [? for 飯]). This sentence appears to be defective.
13. North, south, east, west, and center.
14. 入 .
15. 興 晟 (= 晟 , i.e. 盛). The latter tetragraph, though indistinct, is visible on the manuscript.
16. The *Suoyin* editors have omitted 兩 意 .
17. The manuscript actually has 害 傷 .
18. 內 of the *Suoyin* text should be 人 .
19. 內外 has been omitted from the *Suoyin* text after 喜 慶 .
20. The *Suoyin* editors have omitted 奉 after 庸 犬 .
21. I suspect that the missing tetragraph is 消 (?).
22. The missing tetragraph may be 還 .
23. The second missing tetragraph is definitely 月 .
24. The text gives only the cyclical designation *bingzi*. Judging from the other dated documents on this scroll which are from the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth, it is virtually certain that this is the correct year.
25. There is a gap of 7 or 8 tetragraphs in the text.
26. Another gap.
27. Another gap.
28. The missing tetragraph may be 契 .

29. The Linghu s were among the wealthiest families of Dunhuang during this period.

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Early Iranian Influences on Buddhism in Central Asia

It is usual to imagine that the transmission of Buddhism from India to China was accomplished largely by Indian missionaries and Chinese pilgrims. Until recently, the role of Iranian-speaking peoples in this great process of intellectual and religious transformation has been little known and seldom recognized. Primarily as a result of archeological discoveries during the last century, however, the vital importance of Central Asian Buddhism has become increasingly clear. It is now possible to point to specific doctrinal, iconographic, and textual instances of Iranian influence upon Buddhism in Central Asia and, consequently, in China and elsewhere in East Asia. Here we shall touch upon only a few examples of the Iranian contributions to Buddhism. The items listed in the bibliography should enable the reader to locate many more without much difficulty.

The deep involvement with Buddhism of individuals from the very heartland of Iranian civilization is evidenced by the fact that the first known translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese was a Parthian of royal descent. His name was An Shih-kao (given in Modern Standard Mandarin pronunciation), the An standing for Arsacide or Arsakes. Indeed, he was in line for the throne but, upon his father's death, An Shih-kao ceded the position to an uncle and retired to a Buddhist monastery. He later travelled to China, arriving at the capital of Lo-yang sometime around 148. There he remained for the next twenty years of his life, immersed in the work of translating Buddhist scriptures and spreading his religion. Nor was An Shih-kao the only Parthian in this early Chinese Buddhist community. He was joined by An Hsüan, who significantly was originally in China for the purpose of trade, but subsequently devoted all of his efforts to the propagation of Buddhism. Other Iranian-speaking individuals from different countries were also key figures in the Lo-yang Buddhist community. These include the Scythian Chih Lou-chia-ch'an (Lokakṣema[?]) and the Sogdians K'ang Chü and K'ang Meng-hsiang. Given the preponderance of non-Indians in the early Buddhist enterprise of translation, it is not surprising that reliance on Pali or Prakrit and Chinese alone will not suffice for a full understanding of the first Buddhist sutras that were produced in China. Our appreciation for the impact of Central Asian peoples on Buddhism has been heightened by the discovery of texts in hitherto lost languages and scripts from such sites as Tun-huang and Turfan.

Within the last few decades, this remarkable textual information concerning widespread Iranian attachment to Buddhism during its formative stages in Central Asia has slowly begun to receive still more concrete archeological confirmation. For example, Soviet archeologists have undertaken extensive excavations at Dalverzin Tepe in modern Uzbekistan. There they found a Buddhist temple with a huge collection of sculpture including a very large statue of a Buddha placed on a foundation of unbaked brick. Also from Dalverzin Tepe is a remarkable head of a bodhisattva, exceeded in its beauty only by the exquisite piece from Fayaz Tepe with its pigment perfectly intact. Archeologists working at Dalverzin Tepe claim that numismatic evidence indicates a third century B.C.E. date. Although this seems almost unbelievably early, we do know that some Iranian peoples must have begun to follow Buddhism already by that time because the Kharoṣṭhī script was used for two of Aśoka's edicts in the northwest part of his empire. Here Indians, Greeks, and Iranians lived in close proximity, so it is natural that Iranian loan-words would be used in some of the edicts as well. There is no doubt that Aśoka (r. 273-232 or 265-238 B.C.E.) had adopted a deliberate policy of spreading Buddhism among the Iranian-speaking peoples and others who lived on the periphery of the Mauryan empire.

A favorable climate for the spread of Buddhism continued even after Aśoka's death. During the period from roughly 200 B.C.E. to 100 C.E., the Iranian people with whom Buddhism came in contact seem to have been quite tolerant of various foreign religions. The Parthians, the Sakas, and the Kushans all encouraged the Buddhists within their territories. To be sure, the most enthusiastic patron of Buddhism after Aśoka was the Kushan king Kanishka. The first definite representation of the Buddha on a coin is the famous Boddo image minted under Kanishka. The rise of Mahāyāna ("Great Vehicle") and the elaboration of Gandharan art also took place during the time of Kushan rule. Yet, even in later periods, there were monasteries belonging to Hinayāna ("Lesser Vehicle")

in places like Balkh and Bāmiyān. Among the Sasanians, however, Buddhism temporarily fell into decline after 224 when Zoroastrianism was declared the official religion.

Indian Buddhists, at least those living in the northwest, were well acquainted with what they called the *Maḡasāstra* ("teaching of the mages"), i.e. Old Iranian Religion after the Zoroastrian reformation. This can be gleaned from references to the religious practices of various Iranian peoples recorded in texts such as the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, a large Sarvāstivāda compendium compiled in Kashmir during the second century C.E., the very part of India whence Buddhism was transmitted to Central Asia. It is obvious from this and other types of evidence (inscriptions, art, music, dance, and so forth) that northwest Indian Buddhists who were responsible for the transmission of Buddhism to Central Asia were in close contact with Iranian religions.

The archeological record attesting to the presence of Buddhism among Iranian peoples is now virtually unbroken from the first century until the coming of Islam. To cite only a few locations, at Kara Tepe in the Surkhan Darya valley, a Buddhist cave monastery has been identified in the northwest corner of Old Termez. Supposedly dating from sometime between the first and third centuries, this monastic complex consists of caves hewn out of rock and displays Indian characteristics quite unusual for this area. Eight miles upstream from Termez in Airtam are the impressive remains of a fortified Buddhist settlement.

A stupa said to date from the third century or earlier has been excavated at Gyaur Kala near Bairam 'Ali in the Merv oasis. Fifth-century Sasanian coins from a later layer of the stupa certify that it was rebuilt at least once. This puts Buddhism much farther to the west than anyone had previously imagined. Birch bark manuscripts with rules of conduct for monks, nuns, and laity dating from approximately the sixth through eighth centuries have been recovered from Zang Tepe, also in the vicinity of Termez. The celebrated Chinese pilgrim, Hsüan-tsang, who passed through the region between Samarkand and Balkh in 630, notes that the religion practiced there was akin to Zoroastrianism and mentions two abandoned Buddhist monasteries.

Judging from the magnitude of the very important Buddhist monastery that has been excavated at Ajina Tepe farther east on a tributary of the Oxus, however, the fortunes of Buddhism in this part of the world were by no means exhausted. Dating from the seventh to eighth centuries, the Ajina Tepe monastery has a number of buildings, some of which exhibit local Bactrian architectural features, and many statues including one of the Buddha entering Parinirvāṇa that is twelve meters long.

Still farther east, Buddhism flourished among Iranian-speaking peoples such as the Khotanese. It was probably present in Khotan from about the first century B.C.E. and we know that the king of Khotan succeeded in converting the king of Kashgar to Buddhism by around 100 C.E. Khotanese missionaries were very active in the translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese. Khotan was an important center of Buddhist learning, literature, and architecture, attracting monks from as far away as China who came to study Sanskrit, collect stories, and copy Buddhist art. The place remained Buddhist until the Muslim conquest in the tenth century.

The importance of Khotanese, Sogdian, Kuchean, and other forms of Central Asian Buddhism for the development of Chinese religions has scarcely begun to be investigated. Yet their effect can be demonstrated in very specific terms. For instance, Vaiśravaṇa was the patron deity of the royal family of Khotan and was raised to prominence by them. Khotan was also the source of one of the most famous collections of Buddhist tales in China and Tibet, *The Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish*. The origins of the esoteric type of Buddhism known as Tantra, which appeared rather suddenly in China during the T'ang dynasty and had an enormous impact there, are still very obscure, but preliminary studies would seem to indicate that many of its rituals and doctrines were acquired in Central Asia.

More definite, although still in need of much research, is the vital importance of Iranian religious elements in the founding of the popular sect of Buddhism known as Pure Land. This sect was founded in China by T'an-luan during the sixth century and subsequently attracted a broad following both there and in Japan. The central conception of Pure Land Buddhism is that of Sukhāvati, the Western (N.B.) Paradise whose presiding Buddha is Amitābha ("Immeasurable Light") or Amitāyus ("Immeasurable Life"). It is of great significance that one of the first texts

translated by An Shih-kao into Chinese was the *Sukhāvāṭīvyūha*, the foundation scripture for Pure Land Buddhism, and that it was later retranslated at least three more times by other individuals of Iranian extraction. There are many aspects of this sect which point to Iranian religion, not the least of which is an apparent connection between the Pure Land triad of Amitāyus-Amitābha together with his attendant Bodhisattvas (Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāma) and comparable trinities centering on Zurvan Akaranak or Ahura Mazda in later Zoroastrianism. The very notion of a savior known as "Bodhisattva," which is so crucial for all Mahāyāna Buddhist schools, may have been inspired by the Zoroastrian figure of Saosyant. The prevalence of images concerning luminosity in Pure Land Buddhism most likely derive either from Zoroastrianism or from Mithraism, but in either case almost certainly from some form of Iranian religion.

Scholars have often pointed to the similarity between the name of Mithra and that of Maitreya, the future Buddha who became the central figure of various millennial movements in China. While the precise nature of the relationship between these two deities remains to be sorted out, it is clear that Iranian religious doctrines in Manichaeism had a tremendous impact on popular Buddhism in Central Asia and in China, in particular on apocalyptic cults focussing on Maitreya. Buddhism, in turn, had a definite effect upon Manichaeism as it spread eastward.

Buddhist iconography also owes much to Iranian religion. A good example is the nimbus and body-halo which are so characteristic of the representations of divine figures in Buddhism. They were probably acquired during the Indo-Scythian empire of the Kushans around the early second-century C.E. and may ultimately derive from the Avestan notion of *khvarenah* ("glory" or, more precisely, "radiant power"). Certain characteristic postures and garments of Buddhist images similarly reflect Iranian influence. The ubiquitous "Thousand Buddhas" of Mahāyāna Buddhism may likewise be linked to the thousand Zarathustras of the Persians.

Whether in art, ritual, or doctrine, Iranian-speaking peoples had a decided influence on Buddhism as it passed through Central Asia. The rather primitive nature of our understanding of these matters should only serve to stimulate further research. For it is in Central Asia that the solutions to so many puzzles concerning the evolution of Mahāyāna Buddhism and other religious movements will be found.

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The History of Chinese Turkistan in the Pre-Islamic Period

The first thing which needs to be pointed out about Chinese Turkistan (also spelled Turkestan) is that, for the period in question, the habitual designation is a complete misnomer. As will become obvious in the course of this article, the place was neither politically Chinese nor ethnically Turkish until after the establishment of Islam in the region. It is probably safest to refer to the area by more neutral geographic names such as the Tarim Basin and the Dzungar (also spelled Zungar and Jung[g]ar) Basin which, together with their associated mountain ranges, constitute the two main divisions of the area, or Central Asia in contrast to Middle Asia (Russian / Soviet Turkistan).

No matter how we refer to it, there is no doubt that this remote, largely desert part of the world is of extreme importance because it lies at the crossroads of Eurasia. From the dawn of civilization, trade and cultural exchange have been carried out by peoples living in and around this "heart of Asia." There were four main routes which transited the area, three of them passing east and west, the fourth running roughly north and south: 1. a route skirting the northern foothills of the Altun and Kunlun ranges, 2. another skirting the southern foothills of the Tian-shan, 3. one going to the west of Bogda Ula, then along the northern edge of the Tian-shan range and out through the Dzungarian Gate toward Europe, 4. from modern Semipalatinsk, Kuldja (Yi-ning or Ili), Muzart, Aksu, Khotan, Leh, and down into South Asia. Havens strung along the rim of the Taklimakan and Gurbantünggüt deserts (which fill the Tarim and Dzungar basins respectively), the oasis-states of Kamul (Hami), Turfan, Karashahr, Miran, Niya, and dozens of others provided a welcome respite from the rigors of travel in the inhospitable desert. In spite of the harshness of the environment, it was through this very region that all of the major civilizations of Eurasia were connected. Consequently, Central Asia has become a focus of contention to the present day.

Like the other major states surrounding Central Asia, the Chinese showed an early interest in controlling and exploiting it to their own advantage. King Mu of the Chou dynasty is reported to have travelled there around approximately 985-980 B.C.E., but the account of his journey (*Mu t'ien-tzu chuan*), the extant text of which probably dates to around 300 B.C.E., is extremely difficult to interpret in the light of information available from other sources. There are also vague references to peoples and places of Central Asia in other early texts such as the *Book of Documents [Shu-ching]* and *Shan-hai ching [Classic of Mountains and Seas]*, but these too are hard to correlate with archeological and historical reality.

The first reliable records of Chinese activity in this area have to do with the mission of the famous Chinese emissary, Chang Ch'ien, which lasted from 138 -126 B.C.E. He had been sent by Han Wu-ti ("Martial Emperor of the Han Dynasty") to forge an alliance with the Ju-chih (also spelled Jou-chih, Yüeh-chih, and Yüeh-shih, possibly intended to represent *Ywati) against the Hsiung-nu (related to the Huns) who had displaced them from their ancestral lands around Tun-huang (Ptolemy's Throana, Sogdian *Jruwān* or *Jruwan*, perhaps standing for Iranian *druvāna* ["fortress"]). He found them in Sogdiana (between the Oxus and Samarkand) where they had settled after conquering Bactria which they proceeded to divide up into five kingdoms. One of these was Kuṣāna (Kuei-shuang), a country that would grow to have enormous influence in India and in Central Asia during the next centuries. Chang Ch'ien failed to convince the Ju-chih to return to help the Chinese fight the formidable Hsiung-nu, but he did succeed in opening Central Asia to Chinese power and interests in a quite formal way. As a result of Chang Ch'ien's explorations, Han Wu-ti sent expeditionary forces into Central Asia, erected a line of limites and watchtowers, and created a network of governmental offices for dealing with the newly discovered Western Regions (Hsi-yü, the Chinese name for Central Asia until recent times). China's main concerns for looking westward were to keep the nomads from pouring into its heartland, to ensure an uninterrupted flow of commerce (chiefly exporting silk and importing jade, gold, glass, etc.), and, above all, to obtain the fabled blood-sweating "Celestial Horses" from Ferghana.

The Western or Former Han government referred to the area south of the Tian-shan as

consisting of 36 independent kingdoms and the area in the north as made up of the right flank of the Hsiung-nu to the east and the kingdom of the Wu-sun (**a[ɡ]sən*, perhaps the same as the Asi who later moved westward into the Caucasus) to the west. During the Eastern or Later Han period (25-220), the area north of the Tian-shan remained more or less the same, but the south was now considered to consist of more than 50 kingdoms. Regrettably, currently available information does not permit us to declare with any certainty what the ethnicity of these 50 kingdoms in the Tarim Basin was. The closest China came to exercising real authority in the Tarim and Dzungar basins for more than a few years at a time was between 73 and 102 when the extremely able general Pan Ch'ao, through a combination of clever strategy and ruthless machinations, supervised the installation of a number of local rulers who were, if only temporarily, more favorably disposed to Han overlordship than that of the other great powers. No sooner did he die, however, than Chinese influence in the region began rapidly to fade.

After the breakup of the Han dynasty at the beginning of the third century, China's ability to project its authority into the Western Regions was eclipsed almost entirely. Indeed, for most of the next four centuries until it was reunited again under the short-lived Sui dynasty, China itself (at least north of the Yangtze) was ruled by a succession of foreign peoples (mostly Huns, Tibeto-Burmans, proto-Mongols, and proto-Turks). The succeeding T'ang dynasty began from a position of strength and embarked on a series of conquests of the oasis-states surrounding the Tarim Basin that was largely the work of Turkish condottieri fighting on behalf of the Chinese. From the mid-seventh to the mid-eighth century, China sent huge armies into Central Asia. These campaigns were largely responsible for the decimation of the indigenous peoples, whose identities we shall discuss momentarily. The expansion of Chinese power in the region was brought to a sudden halt in 751 at the Battle of Talas River when T'ang troops under the Korean general, Kao Hsien-chih, were defeated by Arab and allied armies led by Ziyān bin Sa'leh. From that time until the expansionist Manchu policies of the Ch'ing dynasty, the Chinese presence in Central Asia was minimal. The name given to the region by the Ch'ing government in 1759, Sinkiang (also spelled Hsin-chiang and Xinjiang), which means "New Territories," is a good indication of the previous lack of a claim over it. Only in 1884 did the Manchus attempt to create a province out of Sinkiang, and there was continual resistance to Peking by Uighurs and other groups (including various Han and Hui [Chinese Muslim] warlords). Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, however, the situation has changed drastically. Massive immigration by Han people from the eastern part of the country (to reduce excess population in places like Shanghai) has so altered the demography of Sinkiang that it is now quite literally more firmly in Chinese hands than ever before.

Thus we see that, throughout history, a succession of Chinese governments has from time to time established nominal civil and military units of control for the Tarim and Dzungar basins, but they exercised little real and lasting authority beyond Tun-huang. China's determination to hold on to this strategic garrison town that lay at the end of the long Kansu Corridor and on the eastern edge of the Tarim Basin was premised upon a significant Han population that practiced sedentary agriculture. As a demonstration of Chinese resolve, Tun-huang was protected by an elaborate system of defensive works that constituted the westernmost extension of what is commonly known as the Great Wall. It was here that the true boundary between China and the Western Regions, between Han and nomad, lay.

Having determined that Chinese Turkistan was "Chinese" only in the most highly qualified and sporadic sense until after the middle of this century, we must now turn to an examination of the other half of its name. This is, of course, by far the most important and delicate part of the present article. Determining the ethnography of the Tarim and Dzungar basins is an extraordinarily complicated task, yet there are a few things that can be said with some degree of assurance even in the present imperfect state of our knowledge.

We now realize that the earliest known inhabitants of the Tarim Basin were speakers of Indo-European languages. The two most prominent groups were the Tocharians and the Iranians, but much historical, philological, linguistic, and above all archeological spadework remains to be done to identify them with more precision and to work out the relationships

between them. It would appear that the Tocharians, whose language resembles Celtic, Germanic, Italic, and Greek more closely in certain key features than it does Indo-Iranian, Armenian, Albanian, and Balto-Slavic, were already living in Central Asia from the fifth century B.C.E. and may well have been there from a much earlier period. This realization presents an excellent opportunity for better understanding the history of East-West relations, but we still have no reasonable explanation for how the Tocharians came to live so far east at such an early age. A large part of the problem hinges on the identity of the Ju-chih and the Wu-sun. It has been customary during the past century to refer to these groups, who are located around Tun-huang when Chinese records first make mention of them, as Indo-Scythians or Iranians, but Pulleyblank has tried to show that they were Tocharians.

True Iranian peoples were, however, present in Central Asia from an early age. The first that must be dealt with are the elusive Scythians. Since art objects and motifs showing a clear linkage to known Scythian pieces found in surrounding areas are widespread in Sinkiang, it is obvious that they were active in this region as well. The next prominent Iranian group to appear in the Tarim Basin are the Sakas who, judging from their name, must have been descended from the Scythians. They originally lived in the high Pamirs and spread eastward. Their primary settlement was at Khotan which was probably founded in the third century B.C.E. under impetus from the great Indian King Aśoka. Iranian-speaking individuals (*hvatana*-) seem to have become prominent in Khotanese ruling circles from about the third century C.E. and were influential all along the southern trade route leading to Tun-huang. Khotanese royalty developed an intricate web of intermarriage with the ruling Chinese and Tibetan families there. Some of the best sources for study of Khotanese history are, indeed, written in Tibetan (e.g. *Li yul lun-bstan-pa*). By 1006, the Turkish chieftain Yūsuf Qadir Khān (grandiloquently styled Malik i Šīn, "Lord of China"), brother of the ruler of Kashgar, Abū-'l Ḥasan Naṣr (Ḥasan Boyra Khān [from 993]), was in control of Khotan. As a result, the Khotanese language disappeared within a century.

Another Iranian people were the leading traders along the northern branch of the Silk Road. These were the Sogdians whose principal base of operations was the fertile Zeravshan Valley around Samarkand. Colonies of Sogdians were maintained at all of the vital entrepôts along the eastern portion of the Silk Road, including the Chinese capital. There was, for example, a large community of Sogdians at Tun-huang, attested by the numerous individuals living there who bore the surname K'ang (standing for K'ang-chū = Samarkand) and by the celebrated Sogdian letters. The latter (previously dated to the year 313 by Henning but this has been revised to 196-197 by Harmatta [p. 159]) describe in detail the economic activities of the Sogdians. So prominent were the Sogdians along the Central Asian trade routes that their language functioned as a virtual *lingua franca* until the thirteenth century when it was replaced by another Iranian tongue, Persian (Pelliot, p. 105), and Chinese ambassadors were dispatched to pay tribute at the court of the Sogdian king at Afrasiab during the seventh century.

A good instance of the mobility and historical significance of the Sogdians is the case of An Lu-shan (703-757). His surname, An, stands for Bukhara and ultimately derives from the Chinese transcription of Arsacid. His given name (Middle Chinese reconstruction *luk-ṣān*) was meant to represent the Sogdian word for "shining, bright" (*rwṣān*). An Lu-shan's father was a member of a group of Sogdians who were attached to the Eastern Turks in Mongolia and his mother was of a noble Turkish lineage. After an initially checkered but subsequently meteoric rise as a military man in service to the Chinese, he became a favorite of the T'ang emperor, Hsüan-tsung. Though weighing well over 400 pounds, he was renowned at the T'ang court for being able to dance the "Sogdian Whirl" (*Hu-hsüan wu*) and was said to have been fluent in six non-Sinitic languages. Around the end of 755, he rebelled against the corrupt T'ang government and proclaimed himself emperor of the new Yen dynasty. Although his forces succeeded in taking the capital, An Lu-shan was killed soon thereafter by a eunuch slave in collusion with his own son, An Ch'ing-hsü. The T'ang dynasty continued, but in a much weakened condition, and it can fairly be said that An Lu-shan was directly instrumental in its demise.

Less easy to treat than the Khotanese and the Sogdians are the Hephthalites. Beginning around the year 400, they created a large empire that included Samarkand, Khotan, and

numerous other small states in Central and Middle Asia, as well as parts of India. The Hephthalite empire was destroyed between 563 and 567 by an alliance of Western Turks (T'u-chüeh) and Persians. Strenuous efforts have been expended to connect the Hephthalites with proto-Mongols, proto-Turks, the Ju-chih, and other groups, but Enoki and Ghirshman have demonstrated through careful study of the textual and numismatic evidence that they were basically Iranian. It must be admitted, however, that their culture had definitely absorbed customs of marriage and dress, among other things, from the peoples with whom they were in contact in Central and Inner Asia over the course of many centuries.

We are now prepared to pose the question of why it is customary to refer to the Tarim and Dzungar basins collectively as Chinese or Eastern Turkistan. During the third through fifth centuries, proto-Mongols (e.g. Hsien-pei [*Särbi] and Ju-ju or Juan-juan [Avars]) began to make their presence felt in the Dzungar Basin and by the T'ang period (618-907) various Turkic groups had established themselves securely there and were moving down into the Tarim Basin. This initiated a gradual process of Turkization of the whole of Middle and Central Asia that continued up to the present century but has now been countered by Russification and Sinicization. As late as the eighth century, wall-paintings at Bezeklik (near Turfan) and Kumtura and Kizil (both near Kucha) unmistakably depict local people who have long noses, blue eyes, and red or blond hair. Their clothing and weapons, furthermore, have been noticed by many observers as being strikingly European and Persian in appearance. Still today, it is not at all uncommon to encounter Uighurs with deepset blue eyes, long noses, and light hair. Nonetheless, basic Turkization of the Indo-European stock in Central Asia was well advanced by around the year 1000 and Islamization was a *fait accompli* by approximately 1400. As such, our investigation of the history of Iranian peoples in pre-Islamic Central Asia draws to a close.

What, then, is the legacy of Iranian peoples for Chinese Turkistan? The number of Iranian speakers had been reduced there to 26,503 Tadzshiks by 1982, but this figure affords no idea whatsoever of the historical impact of their ancestors upon the region. Plants (grapes and clover), animals (goats and sheep), and musical instruments (the balloon guitar and the harp) are only a few of the many items that were brought to Central Asia and thence to China by Iranian peoples. Likewise, Iranian individuals were deeply involved in the transmission of Nestorian Christianity, Mazdaism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, and Islam (especially the latter four religions) through this region. The elaborate underground irrigation system in the Turfan Depression known as *karez* was also brought from Iran where it was invented a thousand years earlier.

Aside from the terminological difficulties involved in dealing with Chinese Turkistan, there is a very serious problem of inadequate archeological studies. Had it not been for a brief interlude of brilliant explorations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Russian, French, German, Swedish, English, and Japanese scholars, we probably still would not be aware of the fact that the first inhabitants of the Tarim Basin were Indo-European peoples. Although some spectacular isolated finds have been made in Sinkiang during salvage operations over the last thirty-odd years, they have not been adequately assimilated in terms of our pre-existing knowledge. There remains an urgent need for systematic and sustained excavations to be undertaken according to the most rigorous standards of archeological science. If projects comparable to those that have been carried out in Soviet Turkistan during the past half-century and more were launched by the Chinese authorities, it would be only a matter of decades before we would learn for certain the answers to such thorny yet crucial questions as who the Ju-chih were and what their relationship to the Hephthalites was.

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Previous Issues

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
1	Nov. 1986	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	The Need for an Alphabetically Arranged General Usage Dictionary of Mandarin Chinese: A Review Article of Some Recent Dictionaries and Current Lexicographical Projects	31
2	Dec. 1986	Andrew Jones <i>Hiroshima</i>	The Poetics of Uncertainty in Early Chinese Literature	45
3	March 1987	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	A Partial Bibliography for the Study of Indian Influence on Chinese Popular Literature	iv, 214
4	Nov. 1987	Robert M. Sanders <i>University of Hawaii</i>	The Four Languages of “Mandarin”	14
5	Dec. 1987	Eric A. Havelock <i>Vassar College</i>	Chinese Characters and the Greek Alphabet	4
6	Jan. 1988	J. Marshall Unger <i>University of Hawaii</i>	Computers and Japanese Literacy: Nihonzin no Yomikaki Nôryoku to Konpyuta	13
7	Jan. 1988	Chang Tsung-tung <i>Goethe-Universität</i>	Indo-European Vocabulary in Old Chinese	i, 56
8	Feb. 1988	various	Reviews (I)	ii, 39
9	Dec. 1988	Soho Machida <i>Daitoku-ji, Kyoto</i>	Life and Light, the Infinite: A Historical and Philological Analysis of the Amida Cult	46
10	June 1989	Pratoom Angurarohita <i>Chulalongkorn University Bangkok</i>	Buddhist Influence on the Neo-Confucian Concept of the Sage	31
11	July 1989	Edward Shaughnessy <i>University of Chicago</i>	Western Cultural Innovations in China, 1200 BC	8

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
12	Aug. 1989	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	The Contributions of T'ang and Five Dynasties Transformation Texts (<i>pien-wen</i>) to Later Chinese Popular Literature	71
13	Oct. 1989	Jiaosheng Wang <i>Shanghai</i>	The Complete Ci-Poems of Li Qingzhao: A New English Translation	xii, 122
14	Dec. 1989	various	Reviews (II)	69
15	Jan. 1990	George Cardona <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	On Attitudes Toward Language in Ancient India	19
16	March 1990	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Three Brief Essays Concerning Chinese Tocharistan	16
17	April 1990	Heather Peters <i>University Museum of Philadelphia</i>	Tattooed Faces and Stilt Houses: Who Were the Ancient Yue?	28
18	May 1990	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Two Non-Tetragraphic Northern Sinitic Languages a. Implications of the Soviet Dungan Script for Chinese Language Reform b. Who Were the Gyámi?	28
19	June 1990	Bosat Man <i>Nalanda</i>	Backhill/Peking/Beijing	6
20	Oct. 1990	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Introduction and Notes for a Translation of the Ma-wang-tui MSS of the <i>Lao Tzu</i>	68

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
21	Dec. 1990	Philippa Jane Benson <i>Carnegie Mellon University</i>	Two Cross-Cultural Studies on Reading Theory	9, 13
22	March 1991	David Moser <i>University of Michigan</i>	<u>Slips of the Tongue and Pen in Chinese</u>	45
23	April 1991	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	<u>Tracks of the Tao, Semantics of Zen</u>	10
24	Aug. 1991	David A. Utz <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Language, Writing, and Tradition in Iran	24
25	Aug. 1991	Jean DeBernardi <i>University of Alberta</i>	<u>Linguistic Nationalism: The Case of Southern Min</u>	22 + 3 figs.
26	Sept. 1991	JAO Tsung-i <i>Chinese University of Hong Kong</i>	<u>Questions on the Origins of Writing Raised by the Silk Road</u>	10
27	Aug. 1991	Victor H. Mair, ed. <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	<u>Schriftfestschrift: Essays in Honor of John DeFrancis on His Eightieth Birthday</u>	ix, 245
28	Sept. 1991	ZHOU Youguang <i>State Language Commission, Peking</i>	<u>The Family of Chinese Character-Type Scripts (Twenty Members and Four Stages of Development)</u>	11
29	Sept. 1991	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	<u>What Is a Chinese “Dialect/Topolect”? Reflections on Some Key Sino-English Linguistic Terms</u>	31
30	Oct. 1991	M. V. Sofronov <i>Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Academy of Sciences, Moscow</i>	<u>Chinese Philology and the Scripts of Central Asia</u>	10

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
31	Oct. 1991	various	Reviews (III)	68
32	Aug. 1992	David McCraw <i>University of Hawaii</i>	How the Chinawoman Lost Her Voice	27
33	Sept. 1992	FENG Lide and Kevin Stuart <i>Chuankou No. 1 Middle School and Qinghai Education College</i>	Interethnic Contact on the Inner Asian Frontier: The Gangou People of Minhe County, Qinghai	34
34	Oct. 1992	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Two Papers on Sinolinguistics 1. A Hypothesis Concerning the Origin of the Term <i>fanqie</i> ("Countertomy") 2. East Asian Round-Trip Words	13
35	Nov. 1992	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i> with an added note by Edwin G. Pulleyblank	Reviews (IV)	37
36	Feb. 1993	XU Wenkan <i>Hanyu Da Cidian editorial offices, Shanghai</i>	Hanyu Wailaici de Yuyuan Kaozheng he Cidian Bianzuan (Philological Research on the Etymology of Loanwords in Sinitic and Dictionary Compilation)	13
37	March 1993	Tanya Storch <i>University of New Mexico</i>	Chinese Buddhist Historiography and Orality	16
38	April 1993	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	The Linguistic and Textual Antecedents of <i>The Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish</i>	95

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
39	Aug. 1993	Jordan Paper <i>York University</i>	A Material Case for a Late Bering Strait Crossing Coincident with Pre-Columbian Trans-Pacific Crossings	17
40	Sept. 1993	Michael Carr <i>Center for Language Studies, Otaru University of Commerce</i>	<i>Tiao</i> -Fish through Chinese Dictionaries	68
41	Oct. 1993	Paul Goldin <i>Harvard University</i>	Miching Mallecho: The <i>Zhanguo</i> <i>ce</i> and Classical Rhetoric	27
42	Nov. 1993	Renchin-Jashe Yulshul <i>Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Kokonor (Qinghai)</i> and Kevin Stuart <i>Institute of Foreign Languages, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia</i>	Kham Tibetan Language Materials	39
43	Dec. 1993	MA Quanlin, MA Wanxiang, and MA Zhicheng <i>Xining</i> Edited by Kevin Stuart <i>Kokonor</i>	Salar Language Materials	72
44	Jan. 1994	Dolkun Kamberi <i>Columbia University</i>	The Three Thousand Year Old Charchan Man Preserved at Zaghunluq	15
45	May 1994	Mark Hansell <i>Carleton College</i>	The Sino-Alphabet: The Assimilation of Roman Letters into the Chinese Writing System	28
46	July 1994	various	Reviews (V)	2, 155

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
47	Aug. 1994	Robert S. Bauer <i>Mahidol University Salaya Nakornpathom, Thailand</i>	Sino-Tibetan *kolo “Wheel”	11
48	Sept. 1994	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Introduction and Notes for a Complete Translation of the <i>Chuang Tzu</i>	xxxiv, 110
49	Oct. 1994	Ludo Rocher <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Orality and Textuality in the Indian Context	28
50	Nov. 1994	YIN Binyong <i>State Language Commission and Institute for Applied Linguistics (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences)</i>	Diyi ge Lading Zimu de Hanyu Pinyin Fang’an Shi Zenyang Chansheng de? [How Was the First Romanized Spelling System for Sinitic Produced?]	7
51	Nov. 1994	HAN Kangxin <i>Institute of Archeology Chinese Academy of Social Sciences</i>	The Study of Ancient Human Skeletons from Xinjiang, China	9 + 4 figs.
52	Nov. 1994	Warren A. Shibles <i>University of Wisconsin Whitewater</i>	<u>Chinese Romanization Systems: IPA Transliteration</u>	20
53	Nov. 1994	XU Wenkan <i>Editorial Offices of the Hanyu Da Cidian Shanghai</i>	Guanyu Tuhuoluoren de Qiyuan he Qianxi Wenti [On the Problem of the Origins and Migrations of the Tocharians]	11
54	Nov. 1994	Üjjiyediin Chuluu (Chaolu Wu) <i>University of Toronto</i>	Introduction, Grammar, and Sample Sentences for Jegün Yogur	34
55	Nov. 1994	Üjjiyediin Chuluu (Chaolu Wu) <i>University of Toronto</i>	Introduction, Grammar, and Sample Sentences for Dongxiang	34

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
56	Nov. 1994	Üjjiyediin Chuluu (Chaolu Wu) <i>University of Toronto</i>	Introduction, Grammar, and Sample Sentences for Dagur	36
57	Nov. 1994	Üjjiyediin Chuluu (Chaolu Wu) <i>University of Toronto</i>	Introduction, Grammar, and Sample Sentences for Monguor	31
58	Nov. 1994	Üjjiyediin Chuluu (Chaolu Wu) <i>University of Toronto</i>	Introduction, Grammar, and Sample Sentences for Baoan	28
59	Dec. 1994	Kevin Stuart <i>Qinghai Junior Teachers College;</i> Limusishiden <i>Qinghai Medical College Attached Hospital, Xining, Kokonor (Qinghai)</i>	China's Monguor Minority: Ethnography and Folktales	i, I, 193
60	Dec. 1994	Kevin Stuart, Li Xuewei, and Shelear <i>Qinghai Junior Teachers College, Xining, Kokonor (Qinghai)</i>	China's Dagur Minority: Society, Shamanism, and Folklore	vii, 167
61	Dec. 1994	Kevin Stuart and Li Xuewei <i>Qinghai Junior Teachers College, Xining, Kokonor (Qinghai)</i>	Tales from China's Forest Hunters: Oroqen Folktales	iv, 59
62	Dec. 1994	William C. Hannas <i>Georgetown University</i>	Reflections on the "Unity" of Spoken and Written Chinese and Academic Learning in China	5
63	Dec. 1994	Sarah M. Nelson <i>University of Denver</i>	The Development of Complexity in Prehistoric North China	17

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
64	Jan. 1995	Arne Østmoe <i>Bangkok, Thailand, and Drøbak, Norway</i>	A Germanic-Tai Linguistic Puzzle	81, 6
65	Feb. 1995	Penglin Wang <i>Chinese University of Hong Kong</i>	Indo-European Loanwords in Altaic	28
66	March 1995	ZHU Qingzhi <i>Sichuan University and Peking University</i>	Some Linguistic Evidence for Early Cultural Exchange Between China and India	7
67	April 1995	David McCraw <i>University of Hawaii</i>	Pursuing Zhuangzi as a Rhymemaster: A Snark-Hunt in Eight Fits	38
68	May 1995	Ke Peng, Yanshi Zhu <i>University of Chicago and Tokyo, Japan</i>	New Research on the Origin of Cowries Used in Ancient China	i, 26
69	Jan. 1996	Dpal-ldan-bkra-shis, Keith Slater, <i>et al.</i> <i>Qinghai, Santa Barbara, etc.</i>	Language Materials of China's Monguor Minority: Huzhu Mongghul and Minhe Mangghuer	xi, 266
70	Feb. 1996	David Utz, Xinru Liu, <i>Taylor Carman, Bryan Van Norden, and the Editor Philadelphia, Vassar, etc.</i>	Reviews VI	93
71	March 1996	Erik Zürcher <i>Leiden University</i> Seishi Karashima <i>Soka University</i> Huanming Qin <i>Tang Studies Hotline</i>	Vernacularisms in Medieval Chinese Texts	31 + 11 + 8
72	May 1996	E. Bruce Brooks <i>University of Massachusetts</i>	The Life and Mentorship of Confucius	44

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
73	June 1996	ZHANG Juan, et al., and Kevin Stuart <i>Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Henan, Liaoning</i>	Blue Cloth and Pearl Deer; Yogur Folklore	iii, 76
74	Jan. 1997	David Moser <i>University of Michigan & Beijing Foreign Studies University</i>	Covert Sexism in Mandarin Chinese	23
75	Feb. 1997	Haun Saussy <i>Stanford University</i>	The Prestige of Writing: Wen ² , Letter, Picture, Image, Ideography	40
76	Feb. 1997	Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky <i>Bard College</i>	The Evolution of the Symbolism of the Paradise of the Buddha of Infinite Life and Its Western Origins	28
77	Jan. 1998	Daniel Hsieh <i>Purdue University</i>	The Origin and Nature of the “Nineteen Old Poems”	49
78	Feb. 1998	Narsu <i>Inner Mongolia College of Agriculture & Animal Husbandry</i> Kevin Stuart <i>Qinghai Junior Teachers’ College</i>	Practical Mongolian Sentences (With English Translation)	iii + 49 + ii + 66
79	March 1998	Dennis Grafflin <i>Bates College</i>	A Southeast Asian Voice in the Daodejing?	8
80	July 1998	Taishan Yu <i>Chinese Academy of Social Sciences</i>	A Study of Saka History	ii + 225
81	Sept. 1998	Hera S. Walker <i>Ursinus College (Philadelphia)</i>	Indigenous or Foreign?: A Look at the Origins of the Monkey Hero Sun Wukong	iv + 110

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
82	Sept. 1998	I. S. Gurevich <i>Russian Academy of Sciences</i>	A Fragment of a pien-wen(?) Related to the Cycle "On Buddha's Life"	15
83	Oct. 1998	Minglang Zhou <i>University of Colorado at Boulder</i>	Tense/Aspect markers in Mandarin and Xiang dialects, and their contact	20
84	Oct. 1998	Ulf Jäger <i>Gronau/Westfalen, Germany</i>	The New Old Mummies from Eastern Central Asia: Ancestors of the Tocharian Knights Depicted on the Buddhist Wallpaintings of Kucha and Turfan? Some Circumstantial Evidence	9
85	Oct. 1998	Mariko Namba Walter <i>University of New England</i>	Tokharian Buddhism in Kucha: Buddhism of Indo-European Centum Speakers in Chinese Turkestan before the 10th Century C.E.	30
86	Oct. 1998	Jidong Yang <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Siba: Bronze Age Culture of the Gansu Corridor	18
87	Nov. 1998	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Canine Conundrums: Eurasian Dog Ancestor Myths in Historical and Ethnic Perspective	74
88	Dec. 1998	Saroj Kumar Chaudhuri <i>Aichi Gakusen University</i>	Siddham in China and Japan	9, 124
89	Jan. 1999	Alvin Lin <i>Yale University</i>	Writing Taiwanese: The Development of Modern Written Taiwanese	4 + 41 + 4
90	Jan. 1999	Victor H. Mair et al	Reviews VII [including review of The Original Analects]	2, 38

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
91	Jan. 1999	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Phonosymbolism or Etymology: The Case of the Verb “Cop”	28
92	Jan. 1999	Christine Louise Lin <i>Dartmouth College</i>	The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and the Advocacy of Local Autonomy	xiii + 136
93	Jan. 1999	David S. Nivison <i>Stanford University</i>	The Key to the Chronology of the Three Dynasties: The “Modern Text” Bamboo Annals	iv + 68
94	March 1999	Julie Lee Wei <i>Hoover Institute</i>	Correspondence Between the Chinese Calendar Signs and the Phoenician Alphabet	65 + 6
95	May 1999	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	A Medieval, Central Asian Buddhist Theme in a Late Ming Taoist Tale by Feng Meng-lung	27
96	June 1999	E. Bruce Brooks <i>University of Massachusetts</i>	Alexandrian Motifs in Chinese Texts	14
97	Dec. 1999	LI Shuicheng <i>Peking University</i>	Sino-Western Contact in the Second Millennium BC	iv, 29
98	Jan. 2000	Peter Daniels, Daniel Boucher, and other authors	Reviews VIII	108
99	Feb. 2000	Anthony Barbieri-Low <i>Princeton University</i>	Wheeled Vehicles in the Chinese Bronze Age (c. 2000-741 BC)	v, 98 + 5 color plates
100	Feb. 2000	Wayne Alt <i>Community College of Baltimore County (Essex)</i>	Zhuangzi, Mysticism, and the Rejection of Distinctions	29

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
101	March 2000	C. Michele Thompson <i>South Connecticut State University</i>	The Viêt Peoples and the Origins of Nom	71, 1
102	March 2000	Theresa Jen <i>Bryn Mawr College</i> Ping Xu <i>Baruch College</i>	Penless Chinese Character Reproduction	15
103	June 2000	Carrie E. Reid <i>Middlebury College</i>	Early Chinese Tattoo	52
104	July 2000	David W. Pankenier <i>Lehigh University</i>	Popular Astrology and Border Affairs in Early China	19 + 1 color plate
105	Aug. 2000	Anne Birrell <i>Cambridge University</i>	Postmodernist Theory in Recent Studies of Chinese Literature	31
106	Sept. 2000	Yu Taishan <i>Chinese Academy of Social Sciences</i>	A Hypothesis about the Sources of the Sai Tribes	i, 3, 200
107	Sept. 2000	Jacques deLisle, Adelheid E. Krohne, and the editor	Reviews IX	148 + map
108	Sept. 2000	Ruth H. Chang <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Understanding <i>Di</i> and <i>Tian</i> : Deity and Heaven From Shang to Tang	vii, 54
109	Oct. 2000	Conán Dean Carey <i>Stanford University</i>	In Hell the One without Sin is Lord	ii, 60
110	Oct. 2000	Toh Hoong Teik <i>Harvard University</i>	Shaykh 'Alam: The Emperor of Early Sixteenth-Century China	20
111	Nov. 2000	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	The Need for a New Era	10

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
112	July 2001	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Notes on the Anau Inscription	xi, 93
113	Aug. 2001	Ray Collins <i>Chepachet, RI</i> David Kerr <i>Melbourne, FL</i>	Etymology of the Word “Macrobiotic:s” and Its Use in Modern Chinese Scholarship	18
114	March 2002	Ramnath Subbaraman <i>University of Chicago</i>	Beyond the Question of the Monkey Imposter: Indian Influence on the Chinese Novel, <i>The Journey to the West</i>	35
115	April 2002	ZHOU Jixu <i>Sichuan Normal University</i>	Correspondences of Basic Words Between Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European	8
116	May 2002	LIU Yongquan <i>Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences</i>	On the Problem of Chinese Lettered Words	13
117	May 2002	SHANG Wei <i>Columbia University</i>	<i>Baihua, Guanhua, Fangyan</i> and the May Fourth Reading of <i>Rulin Waishi</i>	10
118	June 2002	Justine T. Snow <i>Port Townsend, WA</i>	Evidence for the Indo-European Origin of Two Ancient Chinese Deities	ii, 75, 1 color, 1 b-w print
119	July 2002	WU Zhen <i>Xinjiang Museum, Ürümchi</i>	“Hu” Non-Chinese as They Appear in the Materials from the Astana Graveyard at Turfan	21, 5 figs.
120	July 2002	Anne Birrell <i>University of Cambridge, Clare Hall</i>	Female-Gendered Myth in the <i>Classic of Mountains and Seas</i>	47

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
121	July 2002	Mark Edward Lewis <i>Stanford University</i>	Dicing and Divination in Early China	22, 7 figs.
122	July 2002	Julie Wilensky <i>Yale University</i>	The Magical <i>Kunlun</i> and “Devil Slaves”: Chinese Perceptions of Dark-skinned People and Africa before 1500	51, 3 figs.
123	Aug. 2002	Paul R. Goldin and the editor	Reviews X	30
124	August 2002	Fredrik T. Hiebert <i>University of Pennsylvania</i> John Colarusso <i>McMaster University</i>	The Context of the Anau Seal Remarks on the Anau and Niyä Seals	1-34 35-47
125	July 2003	ZHOU Jixu <i>Sichuan Normal University</i> <i>Shanghai Normal University</i>	Correspondences of Cultural Words between Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European	19
126	Aug. 2003	Tim Miller <i>University of Washington</i>	A Southern Min Word in the <i>Tsu-t'ang chi</i>	14
127	Oct. 2003	Sundeep S. Jhutti <i>Petaluma, California</i>	The Getes	125, 8 color plates
128	Nov. 2003	Yinpo Tschang <i>New York City</i>	On Proto-Shang	18
129	Dec. 2003	Michael Witzel <i>Harvard University</i>	Linguistic Evidence for Cultural Exchange in Prehistoric Western Central Asia	70
130	Feb. 2004	Bede Fahey <i>Fort St. John, British Columbia</i>	Mayan: A Sino-Tibetan Language? A Comparative Study	61

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
131	March 2004	Taishan Yu <i>Chinese Academy of Social Sciences</i>	A History of the Relationship between the Western and Eastern Han, Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties and the Western Regions	1, 3, 352
132	April 2004	Kim Hayes <i>Sydney</i>	On the Presence of Non-Chinese at Anyang	11
133	April 2004	John L. Sorenson <i>Brigham Young University</i> Carl L. Johannessen <i>University of Oregon</i>	<i>Scientific Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages</i> CD-ROM	48, 166, 19, 15 plates
134	May 2004	Xieyan Hinch <i>Neumädewitz, Germany</i>	Two Steps Toward Digraphia in China	i, 22
135	May 2004	John J. Emerson <i>Portland, Oregon</i>	<i>The Secret History of the Mongols</i> and Western Literature	21
136	May 2004	Serge Papillon <i>Mouvoux, France and Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia</i>	Influences tokhariennes sur la mythologie chinoise	47
137	June 2004	Hoong Teik Toh <i>Harvard University</i>	Some Classical Malay Materials for the Study of the Chinese Novel <i>Journey to the West</i>	64
138	June 2004	Julie Lee Wei <i>San Jose and London</i>	Dogs and Cats: Lessons from Learning Chinese	17
139	June 2004	Taishan Yu <i>Chinese Academy of Social Sciences</i>	A Hypothesis on the Origin of the Yu State	20
140	June 2004	Yinpo Tschang <i>New York City</i>	Shih and Zong: Social Organization in Bronze Age China	28
141	July 2004	Yinpo Tschang <i>New York City</i>	Chaos in Heaven: On the Calendars of Preclassical China	30

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
142	July 2004	Katheryn Linduff, ed. <i>University of Pittsburgh</i>	<i>Silk Road Exchange in China</i>	64
143	July 2004	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	<i>Sleep in Dream: Soporific Responses to Depression in Story of the Stone</i>	99
144	July 2004	RONG Xinjiang <i>Peking University</i>	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	32
145	Aug. 2004	the editor	Reviews XI	2, 41
146	Feb. 2005	Hoong Teik Toh <i>Academia Sinica</i>	The -yu Ending in Xiongnu, Xianbei, and Gaoju Onomastica	24
147	March 2005	Hoong Teik Toh <i>Academia Sinica</i>	Ch. <i>Qiong</i> ~ Tib. Khyung; Taoism ~ Bonpo -- Some Questions Related to Early Ethno-Religious History in Sichuan	18
148	April 2005	Lucas Christopoulos <i>Beijing Sports University</i>	Le gréco-bouddhisme et l'art du poing en Chine	52
149	May 2005	Kimberly S. Te Winkle <i>University College, London</i>	A Sacred Trinity: God, Mountain, and Bird: Cultic Practices of the Bronze Age Chengdu Plain	ii, 103 (41 in color)
150	May 2005	Dolkun Kamberi <i>Washington, DC</i>	Uyghurs and Uyghur Identity	44
151	June 2005	Jane Jia SI <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	The Genealogy of Dictionaries: Producers, Literary Audience, and the Circulation of English Texts in the Treaty Port of Shanghai	44, 4 tables

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
152	June 2005	Denis Mair <i>Seattle</i>	The Dance of Qian and Kun in the <i>Zhouyi</i>	13, 2 figs.
153	July 2005	Alan Piper <i>London (UK)</i>	The Mysterious Origins of the Word “Marihuana”	17
154	July 2005	Serge Papillon <i>Belfort, France</i>	<i>Mythologie sino-européenne</i>	174, 1 plate
155	July 2005	Denis Mair <i>Seattle</i>	Janus-Like Concepts in the <i>Li</i> and <i>Kun</i> Trigrams	8
156	July 2005	Abolqasem Esmailpour <i>Shahid Beheshti</i> <i>University, Tehran</i>	<i>Manichean Gnosis and Creation</i>	157
157	Aug. 2005	Ralph D. Sawyer <i>Independent Scholar</i>	Paradoxical Coexistence of Prognostication and Warfare	13
158	Aug. 2005	Mark Edward Lewis <i>Stanford University</i>	Writings on Warfare Found in Ancient Chinese Tombs	15
159	Aug. 2005	Jens Østergaard Petersen <i>University of Copenhagen</i>	The <i>Zuozhuan</i> Account of the Death of King Zhao of Chu and Its Sources	47
160	Sept. 2005	Matteo Compareti <i>Venice</i>	Literary Evidence for the Identification of Some Common Scenes in Han Funerary Art	14
161	Sept. 2005	Julie Lee Wei <i>London</i>	The Names of the <i>Yi Jing</i> Trigrams: An Inquiry into Their Linguistic Origins	18
162	Sept. 2005	Julie Lee Wei <i>London</i>	Counting and Knotting: Correspondences between Old Chinese and Indo-European	71, map

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
163	Oct. 2005	Julie Lee Wei <i>London</i>	Huangdi and Huntun (the Yellow Emperor and Wonton): A New Hypothesis on Some Figures in Chinese Mythology	44
164	Oct. 2005	Julie Lee Wei <i>London</i>	Shang and Zhou: An Inquiry into the Linguistic Origins of Two Dynastic Names	62
165	Oct. 2005	Julie Lee Wei <i>London</i>	DAO and DE: An Inquiry into the Linguistic Origins of Some Terms in Chinese Philosophy and Morality	51
166	Nov. 2005	Julie Lee Wei <i>London</i> Hodong Kim <i>Seoul National University</i> and David Selvia and the Editor <i>both of the University of Pennsylvania</i>	Reviews XII	i, 63
167	Dec. 2005	ZHOU Jixu <i>Sichuan Normal University</i>	Old Chinese '帝*tees' and Proto-Indo-European “*deus”: Similarity in Religious Ideas and a Common Source in Linguistics	17
168	Dec. 2005	Judith A. Lerner <i>New York City</i>	Aspects of Assimilation: the Funerary Practices and Furnishings of Central Asians in China	51, v, 9 plates
169	Jan. 2006	Victor H. Mair <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Conversion Tables for the Three-Volume Edition of the <i>Hanyu Da Cidian</i>	i, 284
170	Feb. 2006	Amber R. Woodward <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>	Learning English, Losing Face, and Taking Over: The Method (or Madness) of Li Yang and His Crazy English	18

Previous Issues, *cont.*

Number	Date	Author	Title	Pages
<p>Beginning with issue no. 171, <i>Sino-Platonic Papers</i> will be published electronically on the Web. Issues from no. 1 to no. 170, however, will continue to be sold as paper copies until our stock runs out, after which they too will be made available on the Web. For prices of paper copies, see the catalog at www.sino-platonic.org</p>				
171	June 2006	John DeFrancis <i>University of Hawaii</i>	<u>The Prospects for Chinese Writing Reform</u>	26, 3 figs.
172	Aug. 2006	Deborah Beaser	<u>The Outlook for Taiwanese Language Preservation</u>	18
173	Oct. 2006	Taishan Yu <i>Chinese Academy of Social Sciences</i>	<u>A Study of the History of the Relationship Between the Western and Eastern Han, Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties and the Western Regions</u>	167
174	Nov. 2006	Mariko Namba Walter	<u>Sogdians and Buddhism</u>	65
175	Dec. 2006	Zhou Jixu <i>Center for East Asian Studies, University of Pennsylvania; Chinese Department, Sichuan Normal University</i>	<u>The Rise of Agricultural Civilization in China: The Disparity between Archeological Discovery and the Documentary Record and Its Explanation</u>	38
176	May 2007	Eric Henry <i>University of North Carolina</i>	<u>The Submerged History of Yuè</u>	36
177	Aug. 2007	Beverley Davis	<u>Timeline of the Development of the Horse</u>	186