

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND INDIA AND THE OPENING OF THE SOUTHERN SILK ROAD DURING THE HAN DYNASTY

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When and how did relations between China and India begin? This issue has long been debated in China. The late Professor Ji Xianlin, a renowned Chinese scholar of Indian history and culture, pointed out that “Cina,” the Indian word for China, and the silk from “Cina” first appeared in the early period of the Mauryan dynasty (c.321–185 BCE) (Ji 1982, pp. 74–78, 114). The implication is that China may have been known by the Indians since as early as the fourth century BCE. But when China began to hear of India is another question. Some Chinese Buddhist texts composed after the Han dynasty assumed that Buddhism had been spread into China long ago. But as Professor Tang Yongtong has said, they are too boastful and erroneous to be reliable. In order to compete with Daoism and Confucianism, these Buddhists created some fictitious stories to extol the greatness of Buddha and claim an earlier arrival of Buddhism in China.¹ In my opinion, the earliest available information about India should be attributed to Zhang Qian (张骞), the first Chinese to explore the hitherto unknown Western Regions beyond the Tarim Basin. After him, the early direct political, commercial and cultural relations between China and a number of Indian kingdoms and others nearby were established, which led to the emergence of the Southern Silk Road that ran through the Pamirs to India and Southeastern Iran. Meanwhile, the close connection between India and China facilitated trade by sea from Egypt via India to the southernmost parts of China and vice versa during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). These relations are discussed in three early historical books: *Shiji* (史记, the *Records of the Grand Historian*), *Hanshu* (汉书, *History of the Former Han Dynasty*) and *Houhanshu* (后汉书, *History of the Later Han Dynasty*). Unfortunately, since portions of these accounts are unclear, to explain them we must turn to non-Chinese sources from India and the West.

I. Shendu (身毒), the first term used for India in China

The name of Shendu appears in “the Treatise on Dayuan” (“大宛列传”) of the *Shiji* by Sima Qian (司马迁), which is the earliest record about India among

Chinese historical documents. The great historian’s information came from the report submitted to Han Wudi (汉武帝) by Zhang Qian, who, as an ambassador of the Han court, had been sent to the West to establish an alliance with the Dayuezhi (大月氏) against the Xiongnu (匈奴) in 139–126 BCE. Zhang Qian states that he was surprised to have found in Daxia (大夏, Bactria) bamboo sticks from Qiong (邛) and cloth from Shu (蜀) – both in present-day Sichuan province in China. The Bactrians told him that these goods had come from a country called Shendu and provided some new information about it:

Shendu may be several thousand *li*² to the southeast of Daxia. The people there have fixed abodes and their customs are very much like Daxia; but the country is low, damp, and hot. The people ride on elephants to fight in battle. The country is close to a great river.³

The beginning of this description differs greatly from the historian’s introduction of other countries, like Dayuan (大宛), Dayuezhi (大月氏), Anxi (安息), Tiaozhi (條枝), and Daxia (大夏). First, Zhang Qian’s information is indirect, as he heard it from the inhabitants of Daxia. Second, he provides merely an approximate location of the country and the life-style and customs of the people. On three points, however, his information is quite specific: India has a damp and hot climate; there are many elephants; and the great river, which most likely is the Indus, was the country’s boundary. Since the bamboo sticks and cloth originated from Sichuan and got to Daxia via India, we can infer that there was a route that began in southwest China and ran through India before reaching Daxia. Having accepted Zhang Qian’s suggestion that he should explore the road from the southwest of China to India, the Emperor Han Wudi committed this task to him. But, because hostile barbarian tribes stood in the way, Zhang Qian failed in this mission. Nonetheless, Wudi continued to try to find a route that led directly to India. During his second mission (119–115 BCE) to the Western Regions, Zhang Qian sent several vice-envoys to Shendu from Wusun (乌孙). Later Han Wudi also sent envoys to Shendu

(*Shiji*, pp. 3169–70). Although we have no record of the reaction of the people in Shendu, it is certain that some more information about India should have been brought back by the Chinese envoys.

II. Jibin (罽宾), the first country neighboring India to establish diplomatic relations with China

Jibin appears in the “Traditions of the Western Regions” (“西域传”) of the *Hanshu* by Ban Gu (班固, CE 32–92). The book concerns only the history of the Former Han Dynasty, and thus its “Traditions of the Western Regions” serves as a continuation and supplement to “The Treatise on Dayuan” of the *Shiji*. Shendu is not mentioned in the *Hanshu*. Instead, a new country, Jibin (Kophen?), suddenly appears. Apart from giving a general description, Ban Gu emphasizes the political and diplomatic relations between the rulers of Jibin and China.⁴

Ban Gu describes the country’s location, its neighbors, and its distance to China:

The capital of the kingdom of Jibin is the city of Xunxian (循鲜), and it is 12,200 *li* from Ch’ang-an [长安], [the capital of China in the Former Han Dynasty]. The kingdom is not under the control of the Protector General (Duhu, 都护). The numbers of families, persons, and trained troops are very large, for it is a great kingdom. It is 6,840 *li* to the seat of the Protector General in the north-east, 2,250 *li* to the kingdom of Wuzha (乌秣国) in the east, and a nine days’ journey to the kingdom of Nandou (难兜国) in the north-east. The country borders Dayuezhi (大月氏) in the north-west and Wuyishanli (乌弋山离) in the south-west.

The seat of the Protector General, in charge of all affairs in the Western Regions, was in the city of Wulei (乌垒, in present-day Luntai county of Xinjiang province). Since Jibin was so distant to the southwest from Wulei, and its location was to the southeast of the Dayuezhi, there is little doubt that Jibin was in or bordering the land of Shendu beyond the Pamirs. Ban Gu also briefly mentions the history of Jibin and the race of its inhabitants. We thus learn that a people originally called the Sai in Central Asia were forced to migrate south into India. In Chinese, the term Sai Zhong (塞种, Sai race or Sai people) is used to indicate the Sakas.⁵ So, Jibin should be understood as a kingdom ruled by the Sakas, or Scythians, as they are traditionally named by the Western classical authors.

Ban Gu also discusses in some detail the land, climate, way of life of the people, and some special goods produced in the country. He especially takes note of Jibin’s currency: “They issue gold and silver coins. On the obverse is a man on horseback and on the reverse is a face or a head of a man” (*Hanshu* 1962,

p. 3885). This record is very important not only for the clues it provides for a comparison with the coins of the Indo-Greeks, but for the evidence on the commercial relations the country enjoyed with China.

Ban Gu’s primary interest, however, centers on the political relations between China and Jibin. Contact between the two countries began during the reign of Emperor Han Wudi (141–87 BCE). Due to events that took place during the Former Han Dynasty, relations between the two countries can be divided into four stages (for details, see *Hanshu* 1962, pp. 3885–87).

The first occurred in the reign of king Wutoulao (乌头劳) of Jibin. Although we do not know the exact dates of his rule, we are secure in placing it in the reigns of the emperors Han Zhaodi (汉昭帝, 86–74 BCE) and Han Xuandi (汉宣帝, 73–49 BCE). Assuming that China was too far from his kingdom for the Chinese to exact revenge, Wutoulao cruelly murdered a number of Chinese envoys on several occasions. Fortunately for him, he escaped from the revenge of these two emperors because, just as he had expected, it proved too difficult and too distant for a Chinese army to punish him.

The second event took place during the reign of Wutoulao’s son. We do not know what his name was or when he came to the throne, but only that he had been the king of Jibin in the reign of Han Yuandi (汉元帝, 48–33 BCE). Under the pretense of restoring friendly ties, he sent envoys with gifts to the Han court. The emperor accepted the request for pardon of his father’s actions and sent general Wen Zhong (文忠) to escort those envoys back to Jibin. Upon their arrival Wen Zhong learned that the king of Jibin was planning to assassinate him. So Wen Zhong formed an alliance with Yinmofu (阴末赴), the prince of Rongqu ([容屈], a city that may have been under Jibin’s authority). Together they attacked Jibin and killed the king. Yinmofu was then crowned as the new king of Jibin with the support of Wen Zhong and awarded by the Emperor Han Yuandi a seal and ribbon as a token of his subjection to China.

The third stage of relations transpired during the reign of Yinmofu, also in the reign of Han Yuandi. Ironically, relations between Jibin and China actually worsened under Yinmofu after he imprisoned the Chinese ambassador Zhao De (赵德) and murdered the vice-envoy along with more than seventy of his Chinese attendants. He then repeated the actions of his predecessor by sending envoys to the Han court to apologize. Han Yuandi, however, refused their request of friendship and the envoys were discharged, as the country was too distant and thus could not be directly placed under Chinese authority. Once again, relations between Jibin and China were severed.

The last stage happened during the reign of Emperor Han Chengdi (汉成帝, 32–7 BCE). In this case, envoys from Jibin arrived at the Han court bearing gifts and requested forgiveness of the country's previous transgressions. But this was also refused. In reality, the actual intention of Jibin was to obtain larger reciprocal gifts from the Han court and to profit from the silk trade with China. In fact, however, although political relations were not sustained, Jibin still managed to benefit from the silk trade, and, as noted, even occasionally sent envoys to China.

III. Chinese contacts with other countries near Jibin

Throughout this period, there were some other countries that were known to the Chinese and were also in direct contact with China.

Nandou (难兜国) was a dependency of Jibin which was 330 *li* away to its southwest. The location of Nandou was in the area neighboring the eastern parts of Dayuezhi. According to this orientation Nandou must have been an oasis-state in the Pamirs.⁶ Its products were similar to those of Jibin: five different types of grains, grapes and other fruits, gold, silver, copper and iron. It made weapons and issued coins (*Hanshu* 1962, p. 3884).

Wuzha (乌秣国) (*Hanshu* 1962, p. 3882) was located in the mountains, in all probability in the Hunza region of modern Pakistan (Yu 2005, p. 98, n. 181; cf. Hulsewé 1979, p. 98, n. 158). Wuzha was pronounced "Yazha" in ancient Chinese, thus close to the modern pronunciation of "Hunza." Several hundred *li* to the west of Wuzha was the well-known gorge of Xuandu (縣度), whose passage was very difficult and dangerous. To pass through it, travelers had to rely on ropes suspended or tied along the route.⁷ So, some scholars have rendered Xuandu in English as the "Hanging Pass." It was the shortest route between Jibin and China at that time. So those Chinese officials responsible for escorting envoys from Jibin back to their country usually advanced only to this point. The difficulty of the passage helps also to explain why Minister Du Qin (杜钦) successfully persuaded the supreme General Wang Feng (王鳳) to refuse Jibin's request for friendship (*Hanshu* 1962, pp. 3886–87). Xuandu should be identified as that portion of the road from either the Kilik or Mintaka Pass to Gilgit via Hunza.⁸

Wuyishanli (乌弋山离) was a kingdom adjacent to Jibin to the west and the terminal point of the Southern Silk Road. Ban Gu was quite familiar with it:

The capital of the kingdom of Wuyishanli is 12,200 *li* [?] distant from Ch'ang-an (长安). The state is not under the control of the Protector General. The numbers of families and trained troops quali-

fies it as a great kingdom. The seat of the Protector General lies to the north-east at a distance of a sixty days' journey. The country borders Jibin in the east, Pu-tiao (撲挑 Bactria) in the north, and Lijian ([犁鞞] (Alexandria in Egypt?) and Tiaozihi (條支) [the Seleucid Kingdom?]) in the west.

The climate of Wuyishanli is very hot and the land is flat and woody. It has herbs and trees, domestic animals, five kinds of grain, fruits, vegetables, food and drink, palaces and dwelling-houses, bazaars, a circulating currency, military weapons, gold, pearls, and the like, just as those found in Jibin. It has also the Taoba (桃拔),⁹ lion and buffalo. Killing innocent lives is forbidden according to its custom. On the obverse of their coins is a man's head, and on the reverse a man on horseback is depicted. They ornament their staves with gold and silver. Being extremely distant from China, envoys rarely journey there. From the Yu ("Jade") Gate (Yumen Guan, 玉门关) and the Yang Barrier (Yang Guan, 阳关), the southern road passing through Shanshan (鄯善) leads southward to Wuyishanli, which marks the terminus of the southern road. [*Hanshu* 1962, pp. 3888–89]

Compared with Jibin, Wuyishanli has some peculiarities, such as a hotter climate and different animals like the Taoba, lion and buffalo. The figures on its coins are the opposite of those of Jibin. Wuyishanli is probably equivalent to southern Afghanistan and southeast Iran, including Seistan, with Kandahar as its center. It had become a part of ancient India in the period of the Mauryan Empire.

It is worthy of note that Ban Gu did not refer to Shendu in his book. A possible explanation is that he knew that Shendu was a general name for the land beyond Congling (葱岭, the Pamirs); so he probably considered Jibin and the countries near it as the constituent parts of Shendu.¹⁰ Both Wuzha and Xuandu are in the Pamirs and thus on the road to Jibin and Wuyishanli from the Tarim Basin. Therefore, the southern Silk Road developed as the result of relations between China and India.

IV. Further developments of Chinese and Indian relations in the Later Han dynasty

"The Chronicle on the Western Regions" (西域传) of the *Houhanshu* (后汉书) by Fanye (范曄) introduces countries such as Dayuezhi-Guishuang (大月氏-贵霜), Gaofu (高附) and Tianzhu (天竺), which were entirely or at least in part in ancient India and had direct contact with China during the Later Han Dynasty (CE 25–220). His source was primarily from Ban Yong (班勇) (*Houhanshu* 1965, pp. 2912–13), a son of Ban Chao (班超, CE 32–102), who was a brother of the historian

Ban Gu and, as a cavalry commander had defeated the Xiongnu and secured control over the Tarim Basin, following which he was accorded the title "Protector General of the Western Regions." Ban Yong lived with his famous father and later oversaw the affairs of the Western Regions.¹¹ According to Fanye, what he recorded about the Western Regions since the reign of the first emperor of the Later Han Dynasty (Guangwudi, 光武帝, CE 25-57) was based on the reports of Ban Yong that had been presented to the Emperor at the end of the reign of Han Andi (汉安帝, CE 107-125) (*Houhanshu* 1965, p. 2913). Therefore, what Fanye provides should be viewed as highly credible.

After occupying Daxia for over 100 years, Dayuezhi people were united by the Kushan (贵霜, Guishuang), one of the five *xihou* (翕侯, Yabghu, or "allied princes"). Qiujiuque (丘就却, Kujula Kadphises), the first king of the Kushan Empire, invaded Anxi (安息, Parthia), occupied the kingdom of Gaofu, then conquered Puda (濮达)¹² and Jibin. The Kushan domain extended to northwestern India in the early first century BCE. After Qiujiuque died past the age of 80, his son, Yangaozhen (阎膏珍, Vima Taktu), succeeded him. He also conquered Tianzhu (in northwest India), and installed a general to rule it.

After annexing Gaofu, Jibin and Tianzhu, the Kushan Empire reached the height of its power and began to have frequent contacts with the Han Dynasty. At the same time, Chinese power was re-established over the Western Regions in the second half of the first century CE. General Ban Chao was sent to the Western Regions to take charge of the defense against the Xiongnu in CE 73. From that point on, he would be in charge there for more than 30 years. In CE 91 he was appointed as the Protector General responsible for all affairs in the Western Regions. In this period, besides his efforts to control or appease all kingdoms subjected to China and to hold back the Xiongnu, Ban Chao did his best to deal with the Kushans. The contacts and conflicts between the Chinese and the Kushans were recorded in detail in the "Biography of Ban Chao" of the *Houhanshu*.

In fact, changes in Chinese-Kushan relations depended on the growth and decline of each empire's power in the Western Regions. In the beginning, the Kushans were willing to establish friendly relations with China. In CE 78 in a report to the court, Ban Chao told the Emperor: "Now the kingdoms of Jumi (拘弥), Shache (莎车), Shoule (疏勒), Yuezhi (月氏), Wusun (乌孙), and Kangju (康居) all want to submit to China." Here the "Yuezhi" means the Kushan. When Ban Chao attacked the king of Shoule in CE 84, Kangju sent an army to help the king. With the help of the Kushans, Kangju withdrew so that Ban Chao took the

city controlled by the king of Shule. Previously, the Yuezhi had supported the Chinese attack against Jushi (车师), a kingdom on the northeastern rim of Tarim Basin,¹³ which probably indicates that an alliance of some kind existed between the Kushans and China. But when the king of the Yuezhi proposed a marriage alliance with the Han court in CE 88, Ban Chao categorically refused it. The Kushan king became so angry that he sent a viceroy (the underking, Fuwang, 副王) named Xie (谢) to lead seventy thousand soldiers through the Pamirs on a raid against Ban Chao. Ban Chao believed that such a large army, coming from so far away, could not remain for long. In order to prevent the Kushans from asking for reinforcement from other small states, Ban Chao sent an army to kill the envoys of the Kushans halfway to Kucha/Qiuci (龟兹), a state in the northern region of the Tarim that was on friendly terms with the Kushans. Finally, viceroy Xie had to apologize to Ban Chao for his invasion. Ban Chao forgave him and allowed him to withdraw his army. As a result, the Kushans became so frightened of the Han Empire's strength that every year the Kushan king sent ambassadors with gifts to China (*Houhanshu* 1965, pp. 1575-80). This is the only record of a Kushan invasion into the Tarim.

Tianzhu is another large country which had diplomatic and trade relations with China. It probably is the same Shendu mentioned by Sima Qian. Its location was several thousand *li* to the southeast of the Yuezhi. "Its customs are similar to those of the Yuezhi (Kushans), but the country is low, humid, and hot. This kingdom is close to a great river. The people ride elephants into battle."¹⁴ We are thus certain that this country was in India. In ancient Chinese, Tianzhu and Shendu pointed to the same country in different periods. According to the *Houhanshu*, Tianzhu was a great country bordering the Yuezhi and Gaofu (高附) in the west, the sea to the south, and the country of Banqi¹⁵ in the east. Its northern neighbor is not mentioned, but the region was evidently the Tarim Basin controlled by China at this time.

Tianzhu "has several hundred other towns. A chief rules each town. There are scores of other kingdoms in it. Each kingdom has its own king. Although the kingdoms differ slightly, they are all called Shendu. Now they are all subject to the Yuezhi.¹⁶ The Yuezhi killed their kings and installed a general to govern them" (*Houhanshu* 1965, p. 2921). Jibin, as an independent country, should not be regarded as one of "the other kingdoms." It once tried to control Gaofu in a struggle with Tianzhu and Anxi, but was defeated by the Yuezhi. Since Tianzhu, Jibin and Gaofu were all subject to the Kushans, the latter became the sole master of northwestern India, although it may be, despite the great extent their empire reached under

Kanishka, that the Yuezhi (the Guishuang or Kushan Empire) did not occupy the whole territory of Tianzhu. Therefore, the ambassadors from Tianzhu could come to China with gifts to the Chinese emperors Han Hedi (汉和帝, CE 89–105) and Huandi (汉桓帝, CE 147–167) by land or sea (*Houhanshu* 1965, p. 2922). Almost at same time, when the so-called ambassadors from Tianzhu reached the southernmost frontier of China by sea, merchants from Daqin (大秦) (the Roman Empire) also arrived at the same place by sea and presented themselves as ambassadors commissioned by the emperor Andun (安敦, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, CE 161–180).¹⁷ However, they may have departed from India, because the gifts they brought to China were products of India such as ivory, rhinoceros horn and turtle shell (*Houhanshu* 1965, pp. 2920, 2922).¹⁸ It was only from these direct and indirect contacts between the two countries that Tianzhu became known to the Chinese.

The author of *Houhanshu* is the first ancient Chinese historian to mention the popularity of Buddhism in India: “They practice the Buddhist Way (Dharma), not to kill any life or to wage war, which has become a custom in Indian society” (*Houhanshu* 1965, p. 2921). The birthplace of Buddhism was in the Ganges valley. It spread into the northwest of India, including the southern part of Afghanistan, in the reign of king Ashoka (c. 273–232 BCE). After converting to Buddhism, Ashoka felt so much remorse for his previous conquests and the pain that he had caused to his people that he later became the first king propagating pacifism through Buddhism in India. He not only issued rock and pillar edicts throughout his kingdom in India, but also sent five Buddhist missions to the Hellenistic kingdoms in western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean (Dhammika 1993, rock edict no. 13). In order to make Buddhism accessible for his Greek subjects in Kandahar, he even had his edicts translated into Greek in the city.¹⁹ When the Kushans ruled India, Buddhism was further enhanced, as the Buddhist art of Gandhara testifies. It was in this context that, according to a popular story, Emperor Han Mingdi (汉明帝, CE 58–75) sent ambassadors to Tianzhu to search out Buddhist doctrines (*Houhanshu* 1965, p. 2922). As early as 2 BCE during the reign of Han Aidi (汉哀帝), a Chinese doctor-scholar named Jinglu (景卢) was taught Buddhist sutras by an ambassador named Yicun (伊存) who had come from Dayuezhi, namely the Kushan Empire.²⁰ Moreover, Prince Ying of Chu (Chuwang Ying, 楚王英), one of the brothers of Han Mingdi, learned Buddhism and practiced it in his realm (*Houhanshu* 1965, p. 1428). He was perhaps the first person in China to have converted to Buddhism (*Houhanshu* 1965, p. 2922). Furthermore, according to that same story, when Han

Mingdi dreamed about a golden man and asked his ministers what it meant and who it was, one of his courtiers told him that it was a god from the West and his name was Buddha. This story seems to show that Buddhism was already known in China by the early first century CE. But it is strange that there is no record of it in the “Annals of Han Mingdi” in the *Houhanshu*. Consequently, it remains a mystery whether or not he sent an ambassador to Tianzhu for the express purpose of learning about Buddhism. The late Professor Tang Yongtong (1991, pp. 3–22) regarded it as probable.

Special attention was also paid in “The Chronicle of the Western Regions” of the *Houhanshu* to the particular items produced in Tianzhu as well as its trade with the outside world.

This region produces elephants, rhinoceroses, turtle shell, gold, silver, copper, iron, lead, and tin. To the west, it trades with Daqin [the Roman Empire]. Precious goods from Daqin can be obtained there. It also has fine [thin] cloths, excellent wool carpets, perfumes of all sorts, sugar loaves (its appearance resembles ice), pepper, ginger, and black salt. [*Houhanshu* 1965, p. 2921]

Although some of the items mentioned in this list originated in India, others might have come from Daqin or Anxi. These exotic items also might have been brought from Arabia or Egypt where “perfumes of all sorts” were produced. Some might have come from China and Central Asia, like “fine cloths” (Chinese silk?) and “excellent wool carpets,” the special product of nomads.

It is evident that the three historical books cited above provide very important clues and information about the relations between India and China during the Han dynasty. But unfortunately they are often not clear and some of them might be unreliable. In order to create a solid foundation for the history of this period and to be able to confirm what the ancient Chinese historians recorded, we must turn to new archaeological materials and the Western and Indian literature related to this subject.

V. Evidence from India and the West

As is well known, unlike in the case of China, few historically accurate works were written in ancient India. This does not mean, however, that historical information was not transmitted in other ways. Over the course of several generations, Indian and Western scholars have brought to light the history of South Asia from Alexander to the Kushans.

Alexander the Great invaded India in 327 BCE. After his withdrawal two years later, a new Indian dy-

nasty, the Mauryan, rose to power. In 305 BCE, Seleucus I, founder of the Seleucid kingdom and a former general of Alexander, crossed the Hindu Kush from Bactria and tried to recover India. But he failed and was compelled to form an alliance with Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan Empire, from whom he obtained 500 elephants in exchange for the territory that Alexander had conquered. In addition, both agreed on a marriage alliance (Strabo 1969, XV.2.9). Although most of Greco-Macedonians were forced to leave India gradually after the withdrawal of Alexander the Great, some of them did not, as Ashoka's Greek inscriptions at Kandahar indicate. In the middle of the third century BCE the satrap of Bactria, Diodotus I, declared his independence from the Seleucid Empire. At about the same time, the Aparni or Parni invaded the satrapy of Parthia and created the Arsacid Kingdom (Strabo 1969, XI.9.1). In 208 BCE, the Seleucid king, Antiochus III, undertook a campaign to reclaim the lands in the eastern part of his realm. By 202 BCE his advance in northwestern India was halted by a local prince or king, and he withdrew to the west after having received 150 elephants and some treasures (Polybius 1978, 11.34).

At this time the ruler of Bactria was a Greek known as Euthydemus I. He and his son, Demetrius I, invaded India in the early second century BCE (Strabo 1969, XI.11.1; XV.1.3). Around 171 BCE, Eucratides I became king of Bactria. He marched into India but was killed by one of his sons when he returned to Bactria (Justinus 1853, 41.6.1–5). In the reign of Demetrius I (r. ca. 200–190/180 BCE), known as “king of the Indians” (Ibid., 41.6.4), the Greeks began a second period of ruling in northwestern India that would ultimately last until the early decades of the first century CE. Collectively, they are known as the Indo-Greeks. In 145 BCE the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom was conquered by nomadic tribes from the north, one of which was the Dayuezhi, originally from the region of Dunhuang and the Qilian mountains in China. The Greeks in Bactria retreated to northwestern India. Menander (ca. 155–130 BCE) was a famous Indo-Greek king and patron of Buddhism. He was able to unite all the small kingdoms of the Indo-Greeks (Bopearachchi 1991, p. 453), and even marched to the capital of Pataliputra (Patna) of the Sunga dynasty.²¹ Upon his death, northwestern India was split into many small kingdoms and ruled by various Indo-Greek families. Possibly in the late second century BCE, the Scythians or Sakas (also known as the Indo-Scythians) entered India from the north and east, respectively. In the first century BCE the Parthians also invaded India. They took some areas controlled by the Indo-Scythians and Indo-Greeks, who were forced to migrate elsewhere into the subcontinent. However, with the coming of the Kushans,

the remains of these foreign peoples almost disappeared: some Indo-Scythians, however, still managed to hold areas near the mouth of the Indus, while one or two other Scythian kingdoms existed in the south of India (Casson 1989, pp. 46–47 and sections 38, 41 [pp. 73–77]).

There are some points of this historical reconstruction that can be connected with the Chinese records. One is the arrival of Sai people in India. The original homeland of the Sai people should encompass the areas from the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea to the Ili Valley in today's Xinjiang province of China (Strabo 1969, XI.8.2; *Hanshu* 1962, p. 3901). They were driven out of this region by the Dayuezhi and migrated westward, passing through Xuandu, northwest of India. It was during this migration that they founded the kingdom of Jibin. Moreover, some of the tribes belonging to this confederation remained in the Pamirs. According to the *Geography* of Strabo, one of the four nomadic peoples responsible for seizing Bactria from the Greeks was the Sacarauli (Strabo 1969, XI.8.2). The Sacarauli are possibly related to the Sai race who are mentioned in the Chinese records. Presumably these are the so-called Saka people who were first mentioned by Darius I.²² They originally lived in the north of the Persian Empire and were conquered by Cyrus. Because the lands of the Sai race are almost the same as or near the areas of the Sakas in the northeast of the Persian Empire, the Sai possibly were descendants or a branch of the Saka or Scythians. The Sai race in Chinese records should be identified as the Sacarauli referred to by Strabo. When the Sai people or Sacarauli moved south they presumably took two routes. Some tribes passed by Bactria on their way to southeastern Iran from where they subsequently migrated through southern Afghanistan, and other tribes traversed the Pamirs into the northwest of India where they founded the kingdom of Jibin. Wuyishanli to the west or southwest of Jibin might be another kingdom founded by the Sai people (Sakas).

The second point concerns the role of Indo-Greek kings. According to W. W. Tarn and others, Wutoulao and his son were the Scythian kings of Jibin. Wutoulao (乌头劳) was the transliteration of “*adelphou*” which is part of the inscription on the coins of the Scythian King Spalyrios (Spalyrisis). This king, when he was a viceroy, called himself “*adelphou tou basileos*,” namely, “brother of the King,” on his coins. Presumably, the Chinese General Wen Zhong did not know the meaning of “*adelphou*”; guessing that it was the name of the king, he transliterated it into Chinese as “Wutoulao.” As for the Rongqu Wangzi (容屈王子), Tarn thought that Rongqu (容屈) came from the Greek word “Yonaki” (“Greek-town”), and Wangzi (王子) means “Prince” in Chinese. Yinmofu (阴末赴) was supposed

to be Hermaeus (Hermaios), the prince of the Greek city and the last king of the Eucratid dynasty in the northwest of India.²³ Although some of these hypotheses have been rejected or shown to be impossible by A.K. Narain (1957, pp. 154–55) and Osmund Bopearachchi (1991, p. 453), it is evident that the Indo-Greeks still played a role in the affairs of the northwest of India. Some small kingdoms of Indo-Greeks still existed there in the beginning of the first century AD. The Greek-styled coins issued by Jibin and Wuyishanli show the influence of the Indo-Greeks' coins.²⁴

The third point concerns the kings in the early period of the Kushan dynasty. Two kings named Qiujiuque (丘就却) and Yangaozhen (阎膏珍) are mentioned in the *Houhanshu*. Another name of a Kushan King, Kanishka I (迦膩色迦), who reigned first half of the second century CE, was also known in ancient Chinese documents for his great contributions to the development of Buddhism. However, the coins of the Kushan kings of this period that are known to date mention five names of kings: Kujula Kadphises, Vima Taktu, Soter Megas (Great Savior, the so-called Nameless king²⁵), Vima Kadphises and Kanishka. Yet in the famous Rabatak Inscription, discovered in 1993, Kanishka, its author, refers to his great grandfather Kujula Kadphises, grandfather Vima Taktu, and father Vima Kadphises (See Cribb 1999, p. 180; Sims-Williams and Cribb 1996, p. 80). This means that there are only four kings from Kujula Kadphises (identified by the Chinese as Qiujiuque) to Kanishka in the early period of the Kushan (Yuezhi-Guishuan) dynasty. Previously, historians knew only the names of three Kushan kings from Chinese documents, and some scholars identified Vima Kadphises with Yangaozhen, and further with the Nameless King, Soter Megas. After the discovery and decipherment of the Rabatak Inscription, some scholars identified Vima Taktu with Soter Megas.²⁶ Since Vima Taktu is confirmed as the second king of the Kushan dynasty, and Yangaozhen is the son and successor of the first king Qiujiuque (Kujula Kadphises), it is natural for some scholars to consider Vima Taktu, Soter Megas and Yangaozhen to be the same king.

I cannot agree with this point of view. According to my research, Soter Megas should not be identified with Vima Taktu and Yangaozhen. This idea was first pointed out by the famous numismatist Osmund Bopearachchi (2007), who theorized that Vima Taktu might be identified with Yangaozhen, and that Soter Megas was another king of the Kushan dynasty who took the throne from the short-lived Vima Taktu and therefore should be regarded as a usurper. I agree with his identification of “Vima Taktu – Yangaozhen,” but I think Soter Megas was never a king of the Kushan dynasty and was only a local governor who presented

himself as a king. He should be thought of as a satrap of the Kushan Empire who had been assigned to govern India. Later he became so powerful that he arrogated to himself the status of a king. One of the reasons for his anonymity might be attributed to the fact that he knew clearly he was not the true descendant of the Kushan royal house. Therefore he did not dare to inscribe his name openly on his coins. There seems to be a historical confluence in the numismatic evidence and Chinese records. As mentioned above, according to the *Houhanshu*, a general had been sent by Yangaozhen to supervise Tianzhu (天竺, India). It is possible that Soter Megas was this general. Whether this general could be identified with the viceroy (the underking), Xie (谢), who had crossed the Pamir from India to attack Ban Chao, has not been proved yet on the basis of current evidence. Judging from the features of his coins – an image of a Greek, a legend only in Greek, and the Attic weight – he was possibly a descendant of Indo-Greeks.²⁷

The fourth point concerns the special products and the goods of Tianzhu listed in the *Houhanshu*. According to *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written around 70 CE,²⁸ there were numerous goods imported into or exported from the several ports of India at his time.²⁹ The exported goods included iron, steel, cotton cloth, costus, bdellium, lycium, nard, turquoise, lapis lazuli, Seric skins, silk yarn, and indigo, spikenard, ivory, agate and carnelian, silk cloth, mallow cloth, yarn, long pepper, fine pearls, ivory, silk cloth, spikenard, malabathrum, transparent stones of all kinds, diamonds and sapphires, and tortoise-shell. Among these, the cotton cloth, silk yarn and cloth were the main goods for export. The imported goods from Arabia, Egypt, Italy and the Eastern Mediterranean sea (Laodicea in Syria), and even from China and the steppes through the medium of Bactrians, Kushans and Parthians, included thin clothing, figured linens, topaz, coral, storax, frankincense, vessels of glass, silver and gold plate, and wine, copper, tin, lead, bright-colored girdles, sweet clover, flint glass, realgar, antimony, gold and silver coin, and ointment, silver, singing boys, beautiful maidens, fine wines, ointments, figured linens, antimony, crude glass, copper, tin, lead, orpiment, and wheat. These items not only confirm the records of the *Houhanshu*, but also include many products and goods unknown to the Chinese at that time, as well as indicating where and when they were imported into or exported from India. The Chinese silk yarn, even the thin clothing imported into India, certainly came from China. This is further evidence of the trade between China and India, even if it was indirect, through the medium of merchants along the southern Silk Roads and the maritime Silk Routes from Bactria, Parthia, and even Roman Egypt.

VI. Conclusion

Thanks to the three historical works, *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, *Houhanshu*, the archaeological materials, and the documents from India and the West, we now know more clearly the basic outlines of the relations between China and India during the Han dynasty. It is from Zhang Qian that the Chinese learned of Shendu, and formal ambassadors were sent there. China maintained political, commercial and cultural relations with Jibin, Tianzhu, and Kushan. Expanding into the Western Regions was a fundamental part of the foreign policy of the Han Dynasty since the time of the Emperor Han Wudi. It was inevitable that contacts and interactions took place between the two neighboring civilizations, India and China. The beginning of the increasing contact and exchanges between India and China established the Southern Silk Road. It started from Dunhuang (敦煌) in Gansu province of China, continued along the southern margin of the Tarim Basin, passed over the Pamirs into northwest India, then turned southwest to Wuyishanli. From there the road probably extended to the Persian Gulf (or Tiaozi) (*Houhanshu* 1965, pp. 2914–97). According to *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, there was a trade road from Bactria to Barygaza (Broach), a very important Indian port in the Gulf of Cambay. Chinese silk was exported to this place (Schoff 1912, Chs. 47, 49). Through the Southern Silk Road China not only established bilateral political relations with those countries of ancient India from the first century BCE to the early second century CE, but also began exchanges in trade and culture. Indian special products and wares, especially its great religion, Buddhism, spread into China during the Han dynasty. The political and cultural influence of the Kushan Empire also spread into the Tarim Basin. Apart from the relics of Buddhism, the writings in Kharosthi script and the issue of Sino-Kharosthi coins in Khotan/Hetian (和阗) provide the evidence that confirms the crucial role the Southern Silk Road assumed after the withdrawal of Han power from this region. It is worthy of note that all foreign elements (including the elements of Hellenistic heritage) in Indian culture flowed into the China as well. Buddhism even became one of the three mainstreams (the others being Daoism and Confucianism) of the Chinese cultural tradition after the Han Dynasty. Such a result could not have been imaged by those pioneers of the southern Silk Road like Zhang Qian, Ban Chao, and their successors.

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Notes

1. These fictions suggested many dates for the first appearance of Buddhism in China, such as in the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century BCE-771 BCE), especially in the age of Confucius (551-479 BCE), or in the periods of the Warring States (475-221 BCE), Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE) and during the Former Han Dynasty (206 BCE-CE 8). But it is only in the early period of the Later Han Dynasty,

exactly in the reign of Han Mingdi (汉明帝, CE 58–75) that Buddhism was formally brought into China. See Tang 1991, pp. 3–22.

2. One *li* (里) equals c. 0.416 kilometer.

3. Sima Qian, “*The Treatise on the Dayuan*,” in *Shiji*, 1982, p. 3166. The English translation is quoted from Hirth, 1917, p. 98. The spelling of some Chinese place names has been changed by this author.

4. Ban Gu, “Traditions (description) of the Western Regions,” in *Hanshu* 1962, pp. 3884–85. The English translations from this chapter are quoted basically from Wylie 1881. Some changes and adjustments, however, have been made in accordance with my reading of the Chinese text. [One should also consult the annotated translation by Hulsewé 1979 – *ed.*]

5. “Formerly, when the Xiongnu (匈奴) subjugated the Dayuezhi, the latter migrated to the west, and gained the dominion over Daxia (大夏 Bactria). As a result, the king of the Sai (Sakas?) journeyed south and ruled over Jibin. The Sakas were scattered, and at times formed several kingdoms. From Shule to the north-west are the kingdoms of Xiuxun (休循), Juandu (捐毒), and those consanguineous nations that are all descendants of the ancient Sakas” (*Hanshu* 1962, p. 3884).

6. Yu Taishan (2005, p. 104, n. 222) guesses that the seat of the king of Nandou was in present-day Gilgit in Pakistan.

7. In fact, the pathways – which are still used in parts of modern Hunza – are created by placing or hammering sticks into the rock cliff faces and placing flat rocks forming a narrow surface on them, so that people – though usually not pack animals – can cross them. They are locally known as *rafiqs*. [Note kindly supplied by John Hill; see also Hulsewé 1979, pp. 99–100, n. 169.]

8. The Khunjerab Pass is further to the southeast, where the modern Karakoram highway enters Hunza. The Khunjerab provided an alternate, but longer route. [Note kindly supplied by John Hill.]

9. 桃拔 or 符拔 *Fuba*, a strange animal. Some scholars identify it as a giraffe. See Yu 2005, p. 115, n. 285. John Hill (2009, p. 239, n. 10.5) identifies it as the Persian or Goitered Gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*).

10. Alternatively, the Chinese envoys did not get past Jibin and the neighboring countries as far as Shendu, which would explain why Ban Gu does not refer to Shendu.

11. For the life of Ban Yong, see Fan Ye, “The biographies of Ban and Liang,” in *Houhanshu* 1965, pp. 1583, 1587–1590. He was appointed as a general of lower rank (军司马) in CE 107, and the governor of the Western Regions (西域长史) in CE 123. Because of his late arrival on a battlefield he was accused and imprisoned. He possibly returned to the capital of Han China in CE 127.

12. Puda should be in the areas near Guishuang and Jibin. I agree with the theory of John Hill (2009, pp. 29, 506–16) that Puda might be in the lands between modern Afghanistan and Pakistan.

13. John Hill notes (2009, p. 109, n.1.22): “Jushi 車師. The peoples of the Kingdoms of Nearer and Further Jushi (the

Turfan Oasis and the region around Jimasa), were closely related. It was originally one kingdom called Gushi 姑師 (Wade-Giles: Ku-shih) until it was subdivided after the Chinese conquest in 107 BCE.”

14. This description was evidently taken from Sima Qian, but “Daxia” was changed to “Dayuezhi” because the former had been exterminated by the latter. The English translation of all quotations from *Houhanshu* is basically from Hill (2009, pp. 28–31), but I have made some changes and adjustments according to my understanding of the text.

15. Scholars have proposed various explanations for the location of “Banqi” (see Hill 2009, pp. 359–60). In my opinion the “Panchalas” located in the valley of Ganges is also possible. For their location, see Tarn 1951, Map 2.

16. According to the explanation of Fanye, “Although all the kingdoms call the ruler the kings of Guishuang (贵霜), Han Chinese still call them by their original name, as Dayuezhi.” In this paper both names are used alternately according to context. See *Houhanshu* 1965, p. 2921.

17. As John Hill notes (private communication): “On close reading of the original Chinese text it is clear that Han Chinese did not question their authenticity as envoys, but they wondered if the earlier, somewhat mythical, accounts they had heard of Da Qin were exaggerations.” That Daqin could be identified with the Roman Empire has been accepted by some scholars. But the description of this “Daqin” in *Houhanshu* seems more different from than similar to the true Roman Empire. The location of Daqin should point to Egypt, then a province of the Roman Empire. The author mentioned another name of Daqin, Lijian (犁鞬), which is generally regarded as the transliteration of Alexandria in Chinese. Although I do not completely agree with the current identity for Daqin, I cannot identify another country like so-called Daqin in the eastern Mediterranean regions. The identification of Emperor Andun of Daqin as Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus has been explained by the fact that the merchants arrived in southern China in CE 166 during his reign. See Hill 2009, p. 27.

18. As John Hill has suggested (private communication), “these products could equally well have come from Southeast Asia, or East Africa.”

19. Two edicts, carved on stones, were discovered in Kandahar in 1958 and in 1963 (1964). One is bilingual in Greek and Aramaic; the other is in Greek alone. See Wheeler 1968, pp. 65–69; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, pp. 101–102; cf. Burstein 1985, pp. 67–68.

20. See “The Peoples of the West” from the *Weilue* by Yu Huan (鱼豢), in Chen Shou (陈寿), *Wei Shu* 1982, p. 859.

21. This march is referred to by two ancient Indian documents. One is the *Yuga Purana* (“the Story of the Ages”) by Garge, another is the *Mahābhāṣya* by Patanjali. But neither mentions the name of the king of the Yavanas (Indo-Greeks). For Menander as the protagonist of this event, see Yang 2011, pp. 134–55.

22. “Saka” first appears in the Persian text of the Behistun Inscription. It is translated generally as “Scythia.” See Tolman 1908, pp. (2), 5, 10–11 (Cols. 1, 6; 2, 2).

23. The scholars who first proposed this theory were

Alfred von Gutschmid and A. Wylie. Tarn (1951, pp. 339–42, 418) thought that von Gutschmid’s explanations were correct and elaborated their points of view.

24. For details of the various kinds of Bactrian-Indo-Greek coins, see Bopearachchi 1991.

25. On his coins there is no name but only epithets such as “Soter Megas” and “Basileos Basileon” (King of kings). This is the basic difference from other coins of the Kushan kings. So numismatists call him the “Nameless king.”

26. Joe Cribb (1999, pp. 180–83) is the first scholar who put forward this hypothesis. Although this identification was doubted by some scholars, it was accepted by many catalogues of auction houses for coins and numismatic websites.

27. On the identity of the nameless King Soter Megas, see Yang 2009.

28. There are some different points of view about the date of the completion of this book. The earliest is in CE 30, and the latest is in CE 230. Most scholars agree on the second half of the first century CE. The name of the author is not known now, but he is presumed to be a Greek from Alexandria because of a phrase he uses in his book – “just as some of the trees we have in Egypt” (section 29, p. 67). He probably was a merchant engaging in sea trade. See Casson 1989, pp. 6–10.

29. See Schoff 1912, Chap. 6, 39, 49, 56, 63; cf. Casson 1989, pp. 55, 75, 81, 85, 91. There are a few differences between the names of some goods in the two translations.



The relations between China and India and the opening of the southern silk road during the Han dynasty. Yang Juping 13. Nankai University. Meanwhile, the close connection between India and China facilitated trade by sea from Egypt via India to the southernmost parts of China and vice versa during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). These relations are discussed in three early historical books: *Shiji* (史記, the Records of the Grand Historian), *Hanshu* (漢書, History of the Former Han Dynasty) and *Houhanshu* (後漢書, History of the Later Han Dynasty). Unfortunately, since portions of these accounts are unclear, to explain them we must turn to non-Chinese sources from India and the West. Trade on the Silk Road was a significant factor in the development of the great civilizations of China, India, Egypt, Persia, Arabia, and Rome, and in several respects helped lay the foundations for the modern world. Although the term the Silk Road implies a continuous journey, very few who traveled the route traversed it from end to end. For the most part, goods were transported by a series of agents on varying routes and were traded in the bustling mercantile markets of the oasis towns. The height of the importance of the Silk Road was during the Tang dynasty, with relative internal stability in China after the divisions of the earlier dynasties since the Han. The individual states have mostly been assimilated, and the threats from marauding peoples were rather less.