

Editor's Note: Prof. Lokesh Chandra is currently the Director of the International Academy of Indian Culture which is a premier research institution for Asian culture. He has been the President of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research. He is a well-known historian and a renowned scholar of Tibetan, Mongolian and Sino-Japanese Buddhism. He has also served as a member of the Indian Parliament. In 2006 he was recognized with India's Padma Bhushan award. He is the son of the world-renowned scholar of Oriental Studies and linguistics Prof. Raghu Vira. He was born in 1927, obtained his Master's degree in 1947 from the Punjab University at Lahore, and followed it with a Doctorate in Literature and Philosophy from the State University of Utrecht (Netherlands) in 1950. Starting with an understanding of the most ancient of India's spiritual expression enshrined in the vedic tradition, he has moved on to the interlocution between India, China and its Tibet, Mongolia, Korea, Japan, South East Asia, and the Indo-European languages. He has studied over twenty languages of the world. He has to his credit 604 works and text editions. Both father and son are well-known scholars in India who have devoted their lives to cultural exchanges between China and India. With the consent of Prof. Chandra, we hereby reprint his 2002 publication "Tun-Huang AS POWER AND VIRTUE" originally published in *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Vol.55, No. 1/3: 89-98, to express our great respect to the author.

TUN-HUANG AS POWER AND VIRTUE

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The paper places the history of the Dunhuang caves and the Buddhist material found in them in the broader context of Asian history. It deals with the role of the Yuezhi (Yueh-chih) in the introduction of Buddhism, further with the role of Khotan in the spread of the Buddhist literature. After the conquest of Khotan by the Muslims the Buddhist monks fled to the region of Dunhuang. The paper ends with discussing the threat by the Tanguts and the walling up of the famous library of Dunhuang.

Key words: Dunhuang, Tun-huang, Buddhist literature, sūtra, Yuezhi, Khotan.

As early as Emperor Mu (reigned: 1001-945 BC) the Chinese State became interested in Central Asia. He was the fifth sovereign of the Chou dynasty, who reigned for fifty-five years from 1001-945 BC, and toured around the "world" by marking kingdoms under the sky with the wheels of his chariots and the hoofs of his horses. His eight steeds carried him a thousand *li* a day. On a visit to the Kunlun mountains he had an entrancing encounter with the goddess Queen Mother of the West. The Emperor named the place the "Mountain of the Queen Mother of the West" (Mirsky 1965, p. 9). There is a famous painting of the Eight Horses of Emperor Mu by Han Kan of 750 AD (Williams 1976, p. 225). Emperor Mu laid the foundations of Chinese power in the deep sands, the role of fine steeds, and the Queen Mother of the West. The West should be the kingdoms of Western Central Asia.

Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty, who ruled from 140 to 87 BC, sent Chang Ch'ien to find out the Yueh-chih and to enlist their support to wipe out the Hsiung-nu, who were a constant threat to the empire. The Yueh-chih had lived between Tun-huang and Ch'i-lieu to the southwest. Their king was killed by Lau-chang, the king of the Hsiung-nu and he made a drinking bowl out of his skull. They migrated to the river Oxus. Chang Ch'ien went to Ferghana (Ta-yuan), Sogdiana (K'ang-chu), and other kingdoms. The Sogdians sent him to the Yueh-chih. Southern Sogdiana was under the political influence of the Yueh-chih. He

could not persuade the Yueh-chih to move against the Hsiung-nu. In a report to the emperor he said that Ferghana has many good horses that come from the stock of the Heavenly Horse. He also noted that Khotan contains much jade.

To defend the empire, control over the barbarians required fine breed horses, which came from Ferghana (Ta-yuan) and from the Yueh-chih. The Yueh-chih horses were famous as "Heavenly Horses" or T'ien-ma. On being settled the Yueh-chih created their powerful kingdom by conquering Bactria and their economy prospered by trading in horses. The fame of their horses had spread as far as Southeast Asia. Between 240 and 245 AD the king of Funan (Cambodia) had sent one of his relations to a Murunda king on the Ganges, who sent four Yueh-chih horses as a present to him (Coedes 1968, p.46).

Tun-huang was founded under the reign of Emperor Wu as one of the four military commanderies (chun) in 111 BC, along with Chiu-ch'üan (Su-chou), Wu-wei (Liang-chou) and Chang-i (Kan-chou). Their foundation is attributed to the Light Horse General Ho Ch'u-ping, who also brought colonists to people the territory (Giles 1933, p. 553). Tun-huang became the crowning centre of China's military power, which lent glory to the desert and oases of Central Asia. It was here that the great civilisation of China shared with the Central Asian peoples' scriptures and sculptures, horses and garrisons, jade stones and jade beauties. It was both her wound and her wonder. Here blossomed the Power and Virtue of China. Tun-huang was a symbol of Han power.

Two military barriers were set up for the protection of Tun-huang, which are known as Yü-mên or Jade Gates:

(i) Yang Kuan or Jade Gate Barrier in the Nan-hu Oasis, constructed as the furthest outpost of the Chinese Empire from about 111 to 100 BC. It was 30-40 miles west-southwest of Tun-huang.

(ii) The later Jade Gate was on the extension of the Great Wall, 50-60 miles west of Tun-huang. The Great Wall could reach this point as late as 96 BC.

The nomenclature Jade Gate connotes that jade was imported through this area. Jade symbolised the perfection of human virtue. Confucius said in the *Li Ki* 45.13: "In ancient times men found the likeness of all excellent qualities in jade."

The emperor could commune and consult with Heaven through the medium of the jade disc (*pǐ*). A piece of jade worn on the body was believed to prevent a person from being thrown from his horse. Jade from the Han dynasty (*Han yǐ*) is famous.

Emperor Wu built a line of military watchtowers to the north and west of Tun-huang, which were discovered by Stein in 1907. T'ang poets like Li Po (705-762) evoked the aching loneliness of garrison soldiers who fought against the barbarians to the west beyond the Jade Gate of the Han in westernmost Kansu. Whitfield (1995b, pp. 262, 265) cites a poem by Wang Changling (698-c.765):

Where the lingering clouds of Qinghai shade the snow-clad ranges

The lonely wall gazes afar to Jade Gate Barrier.

Yellow sands of a hundred battles clog our golden armour,

Not until we have stormed Loulan will we ever return!

The poet goes on to say that men march a thousand miles, none have yet returned. But no barbarian horse will cross Yin Mountain!

As one of the four military commanderies, protected by the two Jade Gates, Tun-huang was a sensitive strategic centre for thirteen or more centuries and a crucial link in the defence of the empire, being a purchasing centre for horses and jade, the latter having been a must for imperial rites.

Emperor Wu despatched an army of 40,000 men in 102 BC to demand a supply of horses from the Court of Ferghana (Ta-yuan, now in Uzbekistan). The Han army was defeated. A second force of 60,000 men under General Li Guangli was sent to bring back 3,000 blood-sweating horses to Ch'ang-an. A marriage alliance was concluded between a Turkish Khan and a Chinese princess for 50,000 horses, camels and sheep. The Yueh-chih sent fine horses from the Ferghana kingdom which reinforced the military capability of Han China, so that they could eliminate the menace of the Hsiung-nu and expand their power into the Korean peninsula, Nanyue and Yunnan. A topographical text from Tun-huang, no. 788 in the Stein Collection, refers to the legend of the Êrh-shih Spring, where men and horses could drink, as its flow was never interrupted (Giles 1933, p. 545). As late as

the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) Horse Trading Offices were established at Tun-huang, Hami and other places.

Yueh-chih introduced Buddhist sūtras

The Yueh-chih were great scholars of Buddhism. A Yueh-chih crown-prince gave oral instructions to Ching Lu on Buddhist Sūtras in 2 BC. Ching Lu was a student at the Imperial Academy. The Chinese term for a Buddhist monastery 寺 exclusively means 'government office, bureau' in Han texts. The phonetic transcription of Buddhist terms can be traced to the government system of transliteration of former Han times. It points to a connection between the Department of Foreign Relations and the Buddhist Saṅgha (Zürcher 1972, pp. 39-40). The Yueh-chih who once lived near Tun-huang, traded in horses, and were close to the government, must naturally have been influenced by official terminology while translating Buddhist works. Lokakṣema(?), the Yueh-chih (in China 168-188 AD), introduced Mahayana Buddhism into China (Zürcher 1972, p. 35). I would like to restore the Chinese Chih Lou-chia-ch'ien to Laukāṣin, and not Lokakṣema. The family name Laukāṣa occurs in the Divyāvadāna (632:23, 25). Chih Ch'ien (active 221-252 AD) was the grandson of a Yueh-chih who came to China in 168-188 AD. He translated 36 works of which 23 have survived. His translations of the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa and Sukhāvati-vyūha have been the most highly venerated sūtras. The greatest Buddhist translator before Kumārajīva was the Yueh-chih Dharmarakṣa (active ca. 266-308 AD). He was born in Tun-huang around 230 AD where his family had been living for generations. He was called the 'Bodhisattva from Tun-huang'. While staying in Tun-huang he got Sanskrit texts from Kashmir, Kucha and Khotan. In 265 AD he left Tun-huang for Ch'ang-an. Around 280 AD, his Chinese disciple Fa-ch'eng came to Tun-huang and founded a large monastery. Thus we see that Tun-huang was in touch with other Buddhist kingdoms and a large monastery came up in Tun-huang which became an important centre for the translation of Buddhist texts. In 373 AD Chih Shih-lun translated the Surata-paripṛcchā at Lanchou in Kansu. Ever since the Yueh-chih were defeated by the Huns in 170 BC they established themselves in the north of Oxus, conquered Sogdiana and Bactria. Though they stopped to engage against the Huns, they continued to supply horses to China, but above all to communicate