



Kingly Exchange: The Silk Road and the East Eurasian World in the Age of Fragmentation (850-1000)

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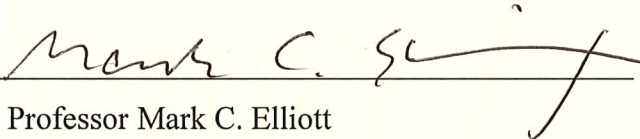
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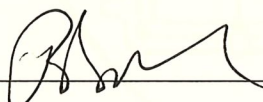
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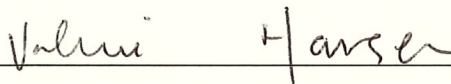
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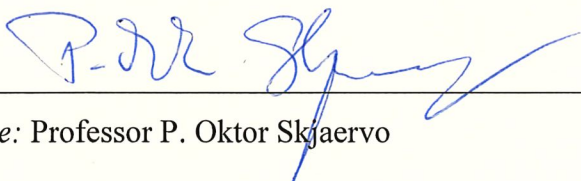
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candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and hereby
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Signature 
Typed name: Professor Mark C. Elliott

Signature 
Typed name: Professor Peter K. Bol

Signature 
Typed name: Professor Valerie Hansen

Signature 
Typed name: Professor P. Oktor Skjaervo

Date: April 28, 2017

Kingly Exchange:

The Silk Road and the East Eurasian World in the Age of Fragmentation (850-1000)

a dissertation presented

by

Xin Wen

to

The Committee on Inner Asian and Altaic Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

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The Silk Road and the East Eurasian World in the Age of Fragmentation (850-1000)

Abstract

This dissertation is a cultural history of travel on the Silk Road in East Eurasia in the ninth and tenth centuries from the vantage point of Dunhuang, an oasis town situated between China proper and Central Asia. Following the near-simultaneous fall of the Tibetan empire, the Uyghur empire, and the Tang empire in the mid-ninth century, the East Eurasian world experienced a long period of political fragmentation. Such political fragmentation, together with the collapse of the extensive Sogdian diasporic network around the same time, is generally considered to have resulted in a relatively inactive period of travels on the Silk Road. In this dissertation, by examining medieval manuscripts in Chinese, Tibetan, Uyghur, Khotanese, and Sogdian discovered in the sealed library-cave in Dunhuang and reading them in the contexts of transmitted Chinese texts produced in China proper, I argue that activities on the East Eurasian Silk Road during this period of political fragmentation not only persisted, but also took on a distinct and non-commercial form.

Informed by anthropological theories on gift exchange and hospitality, I argue that trans-regional travels in my sources were primarily the results of state endeavor: travelers were predominantly described as state envoys rather than private merchants, and that these envoys participated not in economic networks of commodified exchange, but in

diplomatic networks of competitive gifting. That is to say, contrary to widespread assumptions about the Silk Road as a busy trading highway, the movements of people and goods in the area under my investigation were motivated primarily by the royal pursuit of glory rather than interest in profit. Political fragmentation and the presence of a much greater number of state entities in East Eurasia in the ninth and tenth centuries only enhanced such pursuit. Through investigating the non-commercial aspect of travel and the mechanism of negotiating social life on the road, I argue that the networks of competitive diplomacy through long-distance personnel and material exchange were as effective as commercial networks in facilitating trans-regional connections on the Silk Road.

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Introduction

Wang Yande's Trip to Central Asia

In the early months of 981, an envoy from the Uyghur kingdom of Xizhou (Turfan) visited Kaifeng, the capital of the Northern Song state (960-1127). He informed the Song emperor that the head of the Uyghur kingdom had adopted a new title: “the Nephew [from] Xizhou, the Lion King Arslan Khan (*xizhou waisheng shiziwang asilan han* 西州外生師子王阿廝蘭漢).”¹ As a response to this envoy, the Song court dispatched a group of envoys headed by Wang Yande 王延德 and Bai Xun 白勛 in the fifth month of 981. It took them almost a year on the road before they arrived at Gaochang (an older name for Xizhou, modern Turfan) in the fourth month of the following year. They spent almost another year in the Uyghur kingdom and only started on their return trip in the spring of 983. This time, more than a hundred envoys from the Uyghur kingdom accompanied them on their way back with the task of “expressing gratitude for the favor” (*xie'en shi* 謝恩使). This larger group of travelers spent yet another year on the road and arrived at Kaifeng in the fourth month of 984.²

¹ This new title signifies the renewal of a diplomatic relation in direct imitation of the Tang-Uyghur relation in the eighth and ninth centuries, in which the relation between the Uyghur khan and the Tang emperor was customarily seen as one between the nephew and the uncle. It also indicates the nature of the Uyghur kingship. As *arslan* in Turkic meant “lion,” these two titles “Lion King” and “Arslan Khan.” are essentially identical, with the first spelt out potentially for the convenience of the Song government.

² Tuotuo 脱脱 et al., *Songshi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 14110-13.

This exchange of envoys was not uncommon. Many more similar cases were recorded in the Song dynasty official records and are preserved in *Song huiyao* 宋會要 and the *Songshi* 宋史.¹ What is exceptional about this particular case is that one of the head envoys, Wang Yande, left us with a report about his trip with considerable detail, now included as *a Record on an Embassy to Gaochang* 使高昌記 in *Songshi*. Along with the later Jin (936-947) envoy Gao Juhui's 高居誨 trip to Khotan in 938,² the record of which is preserved in *Xin Wudaishi* 新五代史, Wang's trip is one of the best documented journeys in this period between China and Central Asia. Wang's trip took him and his companions from the Chinese capital of Kaifeng to the oasis kingdom of Gaochang/Turfan in Central Asia and back. This itinerary fits the classic profile of what is collectively considered the "Silk Road." Yet other aspects of his story seem to be inconsistent with many of the fundamental assumptions we currently have about the history of the Silk Road. These inconsistencies serve as good starting points for the discussions in this dissertation.

First, that the Uyghur envoy's trip to the Song and Wang Yande's to Gaochang and back occurred at all is surprising, because the tenth century – a period of Eurasian-scale political fragmentation after the fall of the Tang dynasty (618-907), the Turco-Uyghur, and the Tibetan empires in the mid-ninth century – was considered an era of

¹ For such records in *Song Huiyao* see Guo Shengbo 郭聲波 ed, *Song Huiyao jigao: Fanyi Dao-Shi* 宋會要輯稿:蕃夷道釋 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2010).

² For a discussion of this trip, see Chapter 1.

decline in trans-regional communications on the Silk Road. According to James Millward:¹

The eras of the most intense silk-road communications were those when not only the sedentary states of the Eurasian rim but also the nomadic confederations on the Eurasian steppe were relatively centralized. Centralized states and confederations promoted trade and diplomacy, and invested in communications and economic infrastructure (secure roads, water depots, inns, reliable coinage, standard weights and measures). They assessed taxes and tributes from travelers and subjects, but it was easier and safer to pay a few larger powers for safe passage than to risk a shakedown or worse from numerous bandit gangs along the way.

Many scholars on the history of the Silk Road share this belief, which insists that communications were more intense under unified empires.² If that is the case, then political fragmentation should in theory deter travel. Yet during these large-scale trips in the late tenth century, when the places Wang and others passed were divided among several different kingdoms, no trace of hindrance by these kingdoms can be found. Was Wang's case exceptional? Or does the common assumption about the positive role of large, unified states need revisiting?

Second, since Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (1833-1905) coined the term "Silk Roads" in 1877 (see below), it has always been almost inseparably connected with another group of people, namely merchants. Merchants were assumed to have been the main travelers on the Silk Road, and the very reference to the term "Silk Road" seems to invoke an image of caravans of merchants on camels loaded with goods traveling

¹ James Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20.

² For an example, see Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 105.

between major civilizations at both ends of the Eurasian continent.¹ In volume 7 of his monumental 19-volume *La Nouvelle Géographie universelle, la terre et les hommes*, one of the early works that helped popularize the term “Silk Roads,” Élisée Reclus (1830-1905) described the Silk Road in this manner:

Greek and Chinese merchants met on the Silk Road; Buddhist missionaries, Arab traders, the great Venetian Marco Polo, as well as other European travelers of the Middle Ages all had their stay in the oases of Chinese Turkestan before resuming their difficult march...²

Clearly, merchants or traders were seen as major players in the history of the Silk Road from the very beginning of this concept’s use. Since then, scholars have explored the various aspects of the role of merchants in the trans-regional communications and connections in pre-modern Eurasia. Yet in Wang Yande’s long trip, lasting for about four years and involving hundreds of travelers, no trace of merchants can be found. Wang did not travel with merchants, nor did he witness any commercial activities. If the merchants were such crucial parts of the history of the Silk Road, why do we not see them in Wang’s account?

Finally, instead of being merchants, most of the travelers we find in Wang’s account were envoys from the states involved in this matter. Although Wang was mindful about the exotica in this far-flung land, his primary concern was diplomatic. Wang’s trip

¹ This image, common in contemporary imagination, actually already began in as early as the North Wei period (386-535). See Elfriede Regina Knauer, *The Camel’s Load in Life and Death: Iconography and Ideology of Chinese Pottery Figurines from Han to Tang and their Relevance to Trade along the Silk Road* (Zürich: Akanthus, Verlag für Archäologie, 1998).

² “marchands grecs et chinois se rencontrèrent sur la route de la Soie; missionnaires bouddhistes, négociants arabes, le grand Venitien Marco Polo, puis les autres voyageurs européens du moyen âge eurent tous a séjourner dans les oasis du Turkestan chinois avant de reprendre leur pénible marche...” *La Nouvelle Géographie universelle, la terre et les homes* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1882), 104.

was organized because of a redefinition of his relation with the Song initiated by the Uyghur king. In this short account, he used the most words to detail the ways he was treated as an envoy by the Uyghur king. The only two conversations reported both deal with the reception of envoys. The first of these conversations occurred when Wang Yande arrived at Gaochang (Turfan), but realized that the “lion king” had gone north to escape the heat and the uncle of the king was in charge. The uncle sent a greeting party to Wang Yande, and the two said:¹

I am the king’s uncle, does the envoy bow for me?
Yande said: I came bearing the edict from the court, [therefore] I should not bow according to the ritual.
[The uncle] again asked: would you bow when you see the king?
Yande said: I should not bow either according to the ritual.

“我王舅也，使者拜我乎？”
延德曰：“持朝命而來，禮不當拜。”
復問曰：“見王拜乎？”
延德曰：“禮亦不當拜。”

This exchange reminds one of the famous controversy involving the British embassy headed by George Macartney (1737-1806) at the Qing court in 1793.² As in the case of Macartney, Wang Yande was tasked with establishing a relationship on mutually acceptable terms. As revealed by the travel account, Wang’s primary concerns were diplomatic strategy (in particular the relation between the Uyghur kingdom and Khitan) and the political status of the Song. For Wang Yande, the Silk Road was not a road for merchants, but one for envoys.

¹ Tuotuo, *Songshi*, 14112.

² See James Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

Was Wang’s case exceptional? Or does his trip exemplify a pattern of travels on the Silk Road that has yet to be rigorously investigated? In this dissertation, I place Wang’s trip in historical context by examining many trips that, like his, occurred between China and Central Asia from the second half of the ninth century to the early eleventh century. I show that Wang’s trip was in fact representative of exchanges on the Silk Road during this period. It was the shared practice of the competitive performance of diplomacy and the search for secular and religious prestige – rather than the commercial pursuit of profit by merchants – that stimulated the exchanges of people, goods, and ideas and sustained the medieval exchange network of the “Silk Road.”

History of the Silk Road

In 1877, the German geographer Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (1833-1905) coined the term “Silk Road” on the basis of the geography of Marinus of Tyre transmitted through the works of Ptolemy.¹ The term’s popularity among both scholarly and popular readers, however, was due more to figures like the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin , whose account of his travels in Central Asia and Tibet in *The Silk Road* was published in many languages in the 1930s and 1940s.² That this concept is still in scholarly use attests to the insightfulness of Richthofen’s and Hedin’s intuition. Nonetheless, it is true that neither Richthofen nor Hedin studied sources from the area supposedly traversed by the Silk

¹ Tamara Chin, “The Invention of the Silk Road, 1877,” *Critical Inquiries* (Autumn 2013): 194-219.

² Sven Hedin, *The Silk Road* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1938). This was translated by F. H. Iyon from Swedish: *Sidenvägen. En bilfärd genom Centralasien* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1936); German ed, *Die Seidenstrasse*. 10. Aufl. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1942).

Roads. Their sources, like those of most other earlier proponents of the concept of the Silk Road, are either classical works in the European tradition or modern experiences of traveling in the region. Both are external rather than internal sources. Subsequently, the history of the study of the Silk Road after Hedin can be viewed as a continuous effort to locate aspects of the admittedly foreign concept of the “Silk Road” in the historical and artistic sources discovered from ancient Central Eurasia.

Scholars have done this in many ways. Liu Xinru focused on the object of silk, and detailed the history of its production and exchange between China, India, and the Mediterranean world.¹ Hans-Joachim Klimkeit described the transmission of an idea in the religious context.² Étienne de la Vaissière concentrated on a group of people, the Sogdians, and their migration from Central Asia to East Asia.³ Valerie Hansen collected examples from seven locations in Central Eurasia and argued that the short-distance movements among these places were the mainstay of Silk Road travels and that, contrary to common belief, much of the goods were moved by the state and commerce was local and small in scale.⁴ Sam van Schaik and Imre Galambos close-read a single trip that was documented in detail in both Chinese and Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang.⁵ These studies show that the “Silk Road” was not an entirely anachronistic invention, and travels

¹ Liu Xinru, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges, A.D. 1-600* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); Liu Xinru, *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 600-1200* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

² Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road: Gnostic Texts from Central Asia* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

³ Étienne de La Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: A History*, Handbuch Der Orientalistik. Achte Abteilung, Handbook of Uralic Studies; v. 10 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005).

⁴ Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵ Sam Van Schaik and Imre Galambos, *Manuscripts and Travellers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-Century Buddhist Pilgrim*, Studies in Manuscript Cultures; v. 2 (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2012).

on the Silk Road before the Mongol empire did result in the great exchange of people, goods, and ideas in Eurasia.

My dissertation builds on these works in several different ways. In terms of chronology, I examine the era immediately following what was the focus of de la Vaissière and Hansen and describe the situation of trans-regional travels after the breakup of the Sogdian immigrant network and the end of the Tang empire. I argue that, as a result of the political fragmentation of East Eurasia in the ninth century, a diplomatic network of the numerous newly independent states, most of which controlled no more than a few oasis towns, replaced the Sogdian immigrant network of the previous centuries. This new network was founded on diplomatic relations that emphasized the shared road as the rationale for the participants' coexistence. As most existing works on the Silk Road focus on periods of Eurasian political unity during the Tang and the Mongol period, this chronological focus allows me to examine how the Silk Road functioned in times of political fragmentation.

The almost complete lack of reference to travelers as merchants in the Dunhuang collection compelled me to rethink the social identities of these travelers.¹ I argue that, contrary to the claims of most historians on the Silk Road,² merchants, whose profession is the for-profit exchange of commodities, were rarely a major component of the traveling population on the Silk Road. Instead, most of the travelers were envoys or monks that

¹ Valerie Hansen has noticed this absence, see *The Silk Road*, 195.

² Annette L. Juliano, *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China Gansu and Ningxia, 4th-7th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams with The Asia Society, 2001); Luce Boulnois, *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors & Merchants on the Silk Road*, English ed. (Hong Kong: Odyssey Books & Guides, 2012).

were considered “guests” when they were on the road.¹ Examined from this perspective, the dominating social dynamic on the road was not one of commercial competition, but of reciprocal relations between guests and hosts.

These travelers were not designated as merchants also because the goods they carried were not bought and sold. Instead, documents in various languages found at Dunhuang almost uniformly refer to these goods as “gifts.”² The exchange of these goods was characterized by the process of “competitive gifting” among social elites in urban centers along the Silk Road, who desired the fame that accompanied the acquisition and distribution of exotic goods as gifts and counter-gifts.³ It is this desire for prestige and recognition of one’s status, rather than the pursuit of profit, that incentivized travels in and around Dunhuang. These goods – jade, jewels, books, exotic animals, artisans – formed a group of goods distinct from another group including cows, donkeys, foods, lands, silk, and clothes, which are found in economic documents such as lending deeds and contracts.⁴ These two groups of goods thus formed different spheres of exchange in

¹ My reading of this relationship is inspired by Valene L. Smith, *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

² Many existing works already emphasize this, see Rong Xinjiang, “Khotanese Felt and Sogdian Silver: Foreign Gifts to Buddhist Monasteries in Ninth- and Tenth-Century Dunhuang,” *Asia Major*, 17.1 (2014): 15-34; Valerie Hansen, “International Gifting and the Kitan World, 907–1125,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 43, no. 1 (2013): 273–302.

³ The insight about the competitive nature of gift-giving was first noted by Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le Don, Forme et Raison de l’Echange dans les Sociétés archaïques.*, Année sociologique; 1923-1924 (Paris, Alcan, 1925); *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: Norton, 1967). See also Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972) and Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. Nora Scott (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999). Godelier revises Mauss’s work by showing the importance of the unexchangeable and the sacred. The gifts and gift exchange process I describe in this dissertation find more parallels in the social dynamics described by Mauss and Sahlins.

⁴ My description of the circulation of these two groups of goods owes much to Arjun Appadurai et al., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

the Silk Road economy: the former group was transmitted internationally as gifts; the latter locally as commodities. It was the former rather than the latter that distinguished the Silk Road economy from other regions of less cultural diversity and transcultural connections.¹

In seeing goods on the Silk Road as primarily functioning in the form of gifts, I also reassess the role of silk in the Silk Road economy studied by Liu and Hansen. In addition to being the most coveted commodity item from the East to the West and to its function as currency, I argue that silk is also central to the Silk Road economy because it mediated the boundaries between gifts and commodities.² It is the only type of goods that were both frequently used as diplomatic and religious gifts and exchanged as commodities in contracts and other economic documents. In this way, I reaffirm the usefulness of the concept of the “Silk Road,” while defining it with additional historically locatable evidence.

Ultimately, my dissertation differs from previous works on the history of the Silk Road in that it describes the mechanism rather than the results of traveling. Instead of focusing on what things, people, or ideas traveled, I ask *how* did they travel. In doing so, I reach a much more circumscribed definition of the Silk Road. Rather than an all-encompassing term for the conduits of premodern cultural and material exchange in Eurasia, the “Silk Road” in my use indicates a network of informal land routes connecting urban centers of different cultural and linguistic traditions in Eurasia, over

¹ In this regard, I am inspired by the idea of separate “spheres of exchange” from Paul Bohannan and Laura Bohanna, *Tiv Economy* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

² Helen Wang, “Textiles as Money on the Silk Road?” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, no. 02 (2013): 165–74.

which secular and monastic travelers made trans-regional, mostly short-distance, and usually well-patterned round trips, bearing and exchanging gifts of luxury goods. The gift-competition for prestige among lords, kings, and emperors was the primary incentive for traveling. This explains why, contrary to common assumptions of a decline,¹ travel activities in and around Dunhuang persisted in the tenth century following the fall of the Tang.² This persistence of travel activities in the exchange of goods (as gifts) on the Silk Road, I argue, is the result of a politically fragmented East Eurasia where many more royal and imperial claims were being made and had to be bolstered by the use of exotic gifts. This redefinition of the term “Silk Road” suggests that it was not a road of commerce, but a road of gifts and grandeur.

Sources

This dissertation is possible because of the scholarly effort of more than a century since the discovery of the Dunhuang library cave in 1900. The cataloguing, publication, transcription, translation, dating, and interpretation of these manuscripts represent the combined results of European philology and Chinese and Japanese Sinology. My understanding of the Chinese documents is informed by the works of, among many others,

¹ Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, Studies in Comparative World History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 105.

² Based on Yang Rui's calculation of times of envoys that visited the Chinese capital preserved in the Chinese official documentations, he shows that there was actually an increase in the numbers of envoys who traveled from Central Asia to China in the early Song than the late Tang. See Yan Rui, *Sichouzhilu de Huihu shidai* 絲綢之路的回鶻時代 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2015). However, one needs to be mindful that we have more detailed records about the Song than the Tang, in particular the late Tang. What these records do show is a persistent and significant flow of travelers from Central Asia to China in the late ninth and the tenth centuries.

Ikeda On¹, Tang Geng'ou,² Hao Chunwen,³ and Rong Xinjiang⁴, whereas my use of non-Chinese documents owes great debts to philologists who initiated the research on these documents. The philological works on Sogdian,⁵ Khotanese,⁶ Uyghur⁷ and Tibetan⁸ in particular inform my understanding of these documents. Importantly, the accessibility to these manuscripts has recently been greatly increased by the digital work of the International Dunhuang Project.⁹

¹ Ikeda On 池田温, *Chūgoku kodai sekichō kenkyū: gaikan, rokubun* 中國古代籍帳研究：概觀、錄文 (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo, 1979); Ikeda On and Tatsuro Yamamoto. *Tun-huang and Turfan documents concerning social and economic history* (Tokyo: Committee for the Studies of the Tun-huang Manuscripts, The Toyo Bunko, 3 vol. 1978-1987).

² Tang Geng'ou and Lu Hongji, *Dunhuang shehui jingji wenxian zhenji shilu* 敦煌社會經濟文獻真跡釋錄, 5 vol. (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1986-1990).

³ Hao Chunwen et. al. eds., *Yingcang Dunhuang shehui lishi wenxian shilu* 英藏敦煌社會歷史文獻釋錄, 13 vol. (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2001-2015).

⁴ Rong Xinjiang, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu: Tang Song shidai Dunhuang lishi kaosuo* 歸義軍史研究：唐宋時代敦煌歷史考索 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996).

⁵ Nicolas Sims-Williams & James Hamilton, *Documents turco-sogdiens du IXe-Xe siècle de Touen-houang* (London: Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, 1990).

⁶ R. E. Emmerick, *A Guide to the Literature of Khotan*, 2nd ed. (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1992); Prods O. Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library: A Complete Catalogue with Texts and Translations*, Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum; Pt. 2, v. 5, Texts 6 (London: British Library, 2002).

⁷ James Russell Hamilton, *Manuscrits ouïgours du IXe-Xe siècle de Touen-houang* (Paris: Peeters, 1986).

⁸ Uray G., "L'emploi du tibétain dans les chancelleries des Etats du Kan-sou et du Khotan posterieurs à la domination tibétaine," *Journal Asiatique*, CCLXIX, (1981): 81-90; Uray "New Contributions to Tibetan Documents from the post-Tibetan Tun-huang," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 4th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies Schloss Hohenkammer – Munich 1985*. eds. Helga Uebach and Jampa L. Panglung. (Studia Tibetica: Quellen und Studien zur tibetische Lexicographie 2). (Munich: Kommission für Zentralasiatische Studien Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften), 514-528; Takeuchi Tsuguhito, "A group of old Tibetan letters written under Kuei-I-Chun: a preliminary study for the classification of old Tibetan letters," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 44.1-2 (1990): 175-190; Wang Yao and Chen Jian, *Dunhuang Tufan wenxian xuan* 敦煌吐蕃文獻選 (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1983).

⁹ <http://idp.bl.uk/>

This manuscript collection, discovered in the library cave (cave no.17) at Dunhuang, is usefully complemented by two other large groups of archaeological discoveries. First, numerous mural paintings (together with colophons) are preserved in the Buddhist caves complex, where the library cave was only one among hundreds of other, often much larger caves. These paintings offer key art-historical evidence for some of the arguments I make in this dissertation. Second, Dunhuang was not the only place where a substantial amount of manuscripts were discovered. Areas to the west of Dunhuang in Central Asia in particular have produced many equally spectacular findings.¹ Most of these manuscripts tend to be older than the Dunhuang manuscripts, but they still provide important contexts in which the documents from Dunhuang can be read more profitably.

Nonetheless, the dissertation is heavily relying on a single collection of manuscripts from Dunhuang discovered in a small cave. It is conceivable that the selectiveness of this small cave might have a serious impact on the story I tell and the arguments I make in this dissertation. For this reason it is worth considering the nature of this collection. These manuscripts were all discovered in a single cave (cave no.17) in the Dunhuang Mogao Buddhist complex.² Various scenarios have been proposed to explain the assembling of the manuscripts, their deposition into the cave, and the sealing of the

¹ Aurel Stein, who discovered many of these documents in his trips to Central Asia, left us with extensive records of these discoveries. See Aurel Stein, *Ancient Khotan. Detailed report of archaeological explorations in Chinese Turkestan*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907); idem, *Serindia. Detailed Report of explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*, 5 vol. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921); idem, *Innermost Asia. Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia, Kan-su and Eastern Iran*, 4 vol. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928.

² There are Dunhuang manuscripts discovered in other areas of the Mogao Buddhist caves complex, in particular the northern parts of the complex. But these manuscripts are much smaller in number, and many among them are to be dated to later than the 10th century. The majority of the Dunhuang manuscripts used in this dissertation are from cave no.17. Therefore, when I use the term “Dunhuang manuscripts,” I primarily mean manuscripts discovered from this cave in 1900.

cave; these explanations then lead to different understandings of the nature of the manuscripts collection from this cave. Broadly speaking, the most accepted proposals can be divided into two types. Scholars either view the collection as a Buddhist library (most likely for the nearby Sanjie monastery),¹ or a reliquary of “sacred waste”: Buddhist sūtras that were no longer being used.² Yet these two functions were not completely incompatible. Recently, Sam van Schaik and Imre Galambos proposed a compromise between these two theories:

It may be misleading to perceive the cave’s function as split between two incompatible options of waste repository on the one hand and library storeroom on the other. In fact these uses may have overlapped. The cave contains many manuscripts that somehow fall in between the categories of waste and library holding...³

While there has not been a scholarly consensus regarding the reason and the nature of the collection, the view I cited here does help better explain some of the inconsistencies in both popular proposals. But it poses a difficulty regarding the nature of the secular documents, which are the focus on the present dissertation. If the Dunhuang collection is primarily a deposit – be a waste repository or a library – for Buddhist texts, why did so

¹ For a representation exposition of this view see Rong Xinjiang, “The Nature of the Dunhuang Library Cave and the Reasons of Its Sealing” (tr. by Valerie Hansen), *Cahiers d’Extreme-Asie*, 11 (Nouvelles études de Dunhuang), ed. J.-P. Drège, Paris/Kyoto (1999-2000): 247-275.

² For a representation exposition of this view see Fang Guangchang, “Dunhuang Canjingdong fengbi yuanyin zhi wojian” 敦煌藏经洞封闭原因之我见, *Zhongguo shehui kexue*, (1991-5): 213-23.

³ *Manuscripts and Travellers*, 24.

many secular documents end up in this cave? How should we understand the nature of these secular documents?¹

This question of determining the nature of the secular documents in the Dunhuang collection is a difficult one because unlike the canonical Buddhist texts, there does not seem to be any internal consistency among the secular documents in the Dunhuang collection. Fang Guangchang argues that many of these documents were preserved because they were used as supporting papers for Buddhist texts, which I generally agree.² This observation would seem to suggest that the secular documents were preserved in a more or less random fashion, as Buddhist monks preserved and used whatever pieces of paper they could get their hands on. Such randomness is of course a blessing for our purpose, because, if the collection of secular documents Dunhuang was indeed random (or at least more random than the Buddhist texts, most of which might very likely have been from a single, small monastery), it will show us a more extensive picture of the society in Dunhuang beyond the monastery that owned these manuscripts, in theory without favoring any particular institution.

In order to test if this theory about the randomness of the Dunhuang collection of secular documents is valid, I will look at several other collections of secular documents in the East Eurasian world in roughly contemporary periods and compare the types of documents represented in these collections. In this process, I adopt the typology of Dunhuang secular documents (or “socio-economic documents” in their term) Tang

¹ What I mean by “secular documents” include not only non-canonical and non-literary texts and documents about daily life produced by secular people, but also documents about the daily functions and secular aspects of the life in a monastery. Therefore, a contract made between a monk and a layperson would be a secular document in my definition. The term “secular documents” in this sense is therefore more or less equivalent to “social and economic documents” used by most scholars.

² Fang, “Dunhuang Canjingdong,” 216.

Gen'ou and Lu Hongji developed in their extensive collection of these documents.¹ I have chosen four other major collections of secular documents: the Turfan collection, the Khotan collection, the Kucha collection and the Kharakhoto collection in this exercise. Here I use the term “collection” in a loose way, because unlike the Dunhuang collection from a single cave,² these four cases were not really single collections but rather groups of documents discovered in extensive regions.³ In particular, the Khotan and Kucha collections were essentially documents buried in various sites that survived to us because of the extreme low precipitation rate of the region. While none of these collections can be simplistically regarded as “random” on its own, the provenance of the documents in these collections was demonstrably more diverse than the Dunhuang collection appears to be. A comparison among them might tell us the ways and extent each collection is biased. To limit the scope of this exercise, for the Turfan collection, I only compare the collection of Chinese documents found in tombs from the sixth to the eighth centuries. The later Uyghur and Chinese documents discovered in the Turfan region are equally important, and I shall consider them in the future when I can explore this issue in a more extensive and comprehensive fashion.

¹ Tang and Lu, *Dunhuang shehui jingji wenxian zhenji shilu*.

² I am not dealing with the Dunhuang manuscripts found beyond cave 17 in the Dunhuang area.

³ The Khotan, Kucha, and Turfan collections were found in these three kingdoms. The Kharakhoto collection is more restricted. But most of the secular documents in the Kharakhoto collection were found in the ancient Kharakhoto city and not – as many of the Buddhist Kharakhoto documents were – in the single stupa outside of the city.

Table 0.1: Dunhuang secular documents in context

	Dunhuang	Khotan ¹	Kucha ²	Turfan ³	Kharakhoto ⁴
Date of the majority of documents	9 th and 10 th centuries	7 th and 8 th centuries	7 th and 8 th centuries	6 th to 8 th centuries	10 th to 14 th centuries
Main languages of documents	Chinese, but also Tibetan and Khotanese, Sogdian and Uyghur	Khotanese, but also Chinese, Tibetan, Hebrew, and Sogdian	Tocharian B, but also Chinese and Tocharian A	Chinese, but also Sogdian	Tangut and Chinese, but also Tibetan and Jurchen
Main types of secular documents					
Geography and travelogue	✓				
Genealogy	✓			✓	
Household Register	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Corvée labor records	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
She community documents	✓				
Water management documents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Account books (including for government and monasteries)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Contracts (for purchase and lending)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

¹ The assessment is based on Harold Walter Bailey, *Indo-Scythian Studies: being Khotanese Texts Volume IV* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961); R. E. Emmerick, & M. I. Vorob'eva-Desjatovskaja, *Saka Documents, Text Volume III*, (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, London: 1995); P. O. Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan*. I benefited from Zhang Zhan's recent work on the internal relations among a group of Khotanese documents found in Khotan. See Zhang Zhan, *Between China and Tibet: A Documentary History of Khotan in the Late Eighth and Early Ninth Century* (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2016).

² The assessment for the Chinese documents is based on Éric Trombert ed., *Les manuscrits chinois de Koutcha. Fonds Pelliot de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* (Paris: Institut des hautes études chinoises du Collège de France, 2000); for the Tocharian documents I consult Ching Chao-jung 慶昭蓉, *Tuoholuo yu shisu wenxian yu gudai Qiuci lishi 吐火羅語世俗文獻與古代龜茲歷史* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2017).

³ The assessment is based on Tang Zhangru 唐長孺 ed., *Tulufan chutu wenshu 吐魯番出土文書*, 10 vol. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1981-1990), and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 et al. eds., *Xinhua Tulufan chutu wenshu 新獲吐魯番出土文獻*, 2 vol. (Zhonghua shuju: Beijing, 2008).

⁴ The assessment for the Chinese documents is based on Du Jianlu 杜建錄, "Heishuicheng Hanwen wenxian zongshu" 黑水城漢文文獻綜述, *Xixia xue* 4 (2009): 3-14; for the Tangut documents see the articles by Shi Jinbo 史金波 such as "Heishucheng chutu Xixiawen maidiqi yanjiu" 黑水城出土西夏文賣地契研究, *Lishi Yanjiu* (2012.2): 45-67, "Xixiawen maixu qi guxu qi yanjiu" 西夏文賣畜契僱畜契研究, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* (2014.3): 1-53 and many others.

Table 0.1 (continued)

Family and marriage management documents	✓			✓	
Land management documents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Legal documents	✓			✓	✓
Governmental administrative documents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Monastic administrative documents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Official letters	✓		✓		✓
Personal letters	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Military documents	✓	✓		✓	✓
Utility documents	✓				✓
Mortuary documents				✓	

This table represents a clearly over-simplistic picture. Each of these “collections” needs to be examined much more closely to compare not only these broad categories but also sub-categories within them; documents in different languages should also be further differentiated within each collections; a more precise quantitative value of each of the categories represented would also greatly increase the usefulness of this exercise. Nonetheless, for my purpose here, the table seems to suggest that, in terms of the types of documents represented, the secular documents in the Dunhuang collection are not drastically different from secular documents in other major collections. Though the Dunhuang collection includes genealogy, geography, and travelogues not represented in most other collections, the majority of the types of documents were widely represented in all of these collections.

Therefore, at least in terms of genres represented, the Dunhuang collection of secular documents seems to have been as random a selection as any of these four other collections. Unlike the Dunhuang collection, these four collections were all deposited (most likely accidentally) at different places and in different times. So it is

understandable that, different from a collection made up of a single deposition (which some would argue that broader Dunhuang collection is), they should be closer to being a random selection. The observation I made above in the table seems to confirm what Fang Guangchang's point about the role of the secular documents in the Dunhuang cave. We can perhaps think of the process as one in which secular documents from various social institutions in the Dunhuang society were continuously given to a monastery (most likely the Sanjie monastery), perhaps in the form of paper donation. If this scenario were anywhere close to what actually happened, then we can think of the accumulation of secular documents in the Dunhuang collection as a process of these documents being deposited from different places and in different times, which would make the Dunhuang collection not fundamentally different from the other collections, and therefore no less of a random selection.

But this similarity does not mean that these collections were not biased. In fact, we can detect traces of biased representation by looking at the difference in the number of each type of documents preserved in these collections. The Kharakhoto collection of secular documents includes proportionally a lot more secular documents produced by the government than Dunhuang. The *corvée* labor records and military documents, while extent in all five collections, are proportionally speaking very poorly represented in Dunhuang. The large proportion of documents dealing with the daily functions of the government (orders, petition, notes etc.) found in Khotan and Turfan are also relatively speaking less prominent in Dunhuang. Conversely, the secular documents dealing with life in Buddhist communities are best represented in the Dunhuang and Kucha collections and less so in others. What this rich array of information tells us cannot be fully explored

here. But my very rudimentary comparisons seem to suggest that the Dunhuang collection of secular documents is a bit less concerned with the internal workings of the local government and a bit more with that of the local monasteries than these other collections. Most scholars believe the Dunhuang collection was intended to be a collection of Buddhist texts after all; and in my proposed scenario described above, secular documents came into a monastery (and the Dunhuang collection) were given to them from various people and institutions, including of course this monastery and other monasteries. So it is not surprising that we see more secular documents concerning Buddhist institutions than in these other collections.

From this examination and comparison, I argue that the collection of Dunhuang secular documents does not seem to have an evident bias, except for a closer affiliation with Buddhist institutions. At the very least, it does not seem to have been clearly more biased than any of the other major collection of secular documents. This would enable us to compare with more confidence the story I tell about Dunhuang and the Silk Road in the region around Dunhuang to stories scholars have discussed about other places. The story I tell in the dissertation might be different or similar to other places and times on the Silk Road, but it will not have been so because the collection of documents I use were kept on the whim of one person or one institution. Because of the diverse origins of the secular documents in the Dunhuang collection, we can hope that my story will reflect situations in various parts of the society in Dunhuang and its adjacent areas.

By juxtaposing these multilingual secular documents, it is also my hope to improve the understanding of key trans-lingual concepts in these documents, which have been largely worked on by experts in one or two languages. Instead of treating these

documents as specimens of early Chinese, early Tibetan, and early Uyghur social and economic history, I show that they collectively reflect the history of a group of frequently interacting people, who despite linguistic differences, conducted much of the same social and economic activities and therefore shared many similar terms and ideas. This dissertation is one of the first historical works on the Dunhuang collection to make use of documents in all genres and languages.

As I mentioned above, records about Dunhuang and adjacent regions were produced not only locally, but also by courts in more distant regions. In particular, records composed by the Song dynasty in China are the most important because of their abundance as well as their accuracy. In particular, Song texts such as the *Song huiyao*, *Songshi*, and *Xu Zizhitongjian Changbian* preserve records about envoys from the west, many of whom were from Dunhuang, to China. The information contained in these records can often be put in profitable dialogue with Dunhuang manuscripts. These transmitted texts in the Chinese tradition are almost as important as the Dunhuang manuscripts in my reconstruction of the traveler's world of the Silk Road. To a much lesser extent, Islamic geographies and travelogues also provide pieces of important information for our understanding of the Silk Road during this period.

Temporal Scope: After the Empire

A combination of the nature of the sources and my specific historiographical interest determined the temporal scope of the dissertation. As the library cave at

Dunhuang was sealed up in the early eleventh century,¹ the majority of the manuscripts – in particular the secular documents – date to the previous two centuries. The existence of these manuscripts therefore allows a particularly detailed reconstruction of social life during these two centuries. Since the presence of external sources, primarily Chinese historical records produced in China proper, was fairly evenly distributed over the preceding and following centuries, the two centuries prior to the turn of the millennium became a brief window in which internal (Dunhuang-produced) and external sources are both abundant and can be read in conjunction with one another.

But the more important reason that I chose to limit myself to the 150 years between 850 and 1000 has to do with the political history of the time. The ninth century was an era of political transformation in the history of medieval Eastern Eurasia. From the middle of this century, the three great empires that once dominated Eastern Eurasia began to crumble one after another: in 841, the Tibetan Empire began its long process of disintegration with the assassination of Tsanpo Langdarma; in 848, the Kirgiz drove the Uyghur Empire out of the Steppe, causing the diaspora of Uyghurs in Central Asia; from 874 to 884, the declining Chinese Empire, the Tang dynasty, was decisively wounded by the rebellion of Huang Cao and eventually replaced two decades later. Why these empires successively failed in this rather short period of time still eludes us, but we do know that during the later ninth and the tenth centuries, Eastern Eurasia was a much-changed world, as areas formerly under the rule of great empires now began to assume independent

¹ Rong Xinjiang, “The Nature of the Dunhuang Library Cave and the Reasons of Its Sealing”(tr. By Valerie Hansen), *Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie*, 11, Nouvelles etudes de Dunhuang, ed. J.-P. Drège, Paris/Kyoto (1999-2000): 247-275.

political as well as cultural identities. The age of empires came to an end.¹

Also coming to an end, it seems, was the “Golden Age” of trade on the trans-Eurasian land routes collectively known as the “Silk Road.” Scholars generally agree that the ninth century pan-Eurasian political fragmentation was disastrous for traveling on the “Silk Road.” For instance, according to Liu Xinru, “[i]t seems that this section (western Central Asia) of the Silk Road had sustained its economy under the Turkish Islamic regime of Khwarazmshah but may have lost its commercial ties with China after the fall of the Tang in the early tenth century.”² Similarly, Philip Curtin sees this period as one of decline in his general chronology of the Silk Road, which highlights three periods of imperial domination when the Silk Road was relatively open: “[t]he simultaneous power of the Abbasids and the Tang made it comparatively easy for long-distance traders to make the whole journey across Asia and North Africa, in effect from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Relatively open trade across Asia had occurred once before, in the Han-Parthian-Roman period at the beginning of the Christian era. It happened again in the Tang-Abbasid period of the seventh and eighth centuries. It was to happen for a third time with the establishment of the Mongol Empire over most of northern Asia after 1250 – the opportunity that made it possible for Europeans like Marco Polo to visit China freely for

¹ Edouard Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-Kiue (Turcs) occidentaux. Recueillis et commentés, suivi de notes additionnelles* (Paris, Adrien-Maisonneuve 1942); Maeda Masana 前田正名, *Kasei no rekishi-chirigakuteki kenkyū* 河西の歴史地理学的研究 (Tōkyō, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1964); Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese during the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Michael Robert Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire: A Documentary History*, Brill’s Inner Asian Library; v. 13 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005).

² Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History*. New Oxford World History (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

about a century afterward.”¹

This periodization of the history of the Silk Road – three successive high points featuring “relatively open trade across Asia” interrupted by periods of decline – found general support, especially among historians working on global history. In an article titled “Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History” published in the *American Historical Review*, Jerry Bentley of the University of Hawaii not only relates the fate of the Silk Road to that of the state in a way similar to that of Curtin, but goes one step further and divides world history into six periods following the rise and fall of the Silk Road, which according to him reflects the ebb and flow of state support.² Abu-Lughad was more specifically talking about the post-Tang-Abbasid period when she noted that the “[r]estoration of the land route during the period of Islamic hegemony was continuously threatened by the northern tribes, against whom the Great Wall had originally been built. (These threats were not eliminated until Genghis Khan conquered northern China in the opening decades of the thirteenth century.) Intermittently denied access across the steppes, China was of necessity drawn more to the sea.”³

Therefore, the assumption that only in the Han-Rome, Tang-Abbasid, and Mongol periods do we find “relatively open trade across Asia” is a commonly held one that is essential in the current assessment of the history of the Silk Road, with potential ramifications for a general understanding of world history. Under this assumption, the history of the Silk Road tends to be described as being in sync with the rises and falls of

¹ Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, 105.

² Jerry Bentley, “Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History,” *American Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (1999): 749–70.

³ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 303-4.

the large empires on both of its ends. The main difference between the periods of prosperity on the Silk Road – aptly connected to imperial existence by terms such as *Pax Mongolica* – and the periods of decline is related to the amount of transcultural communication thought to have been occurring: between the heyday of the Tang and the Mongol periods, because of the lack of a centrally controlled postal and intelligence system, the Silk Road was thought to have been “closed” or nearly so, and trans-Eurasian traveling on the Silk Road became very difficult. Tansen Sen remarks, for instance, that:

From the mid-ninth to the mid-tenth centuries, the woeful state of trade across Central Asia remained unchanged. The political fragmentation of the region not only hindered long-distance trade but also made it perilous for Buddhist monks to travel between India and China ...¹

These characterizations, it must be emphasized, are generally based not so much on empirical evidence as on an unexamined assumption of the positive and facilitating role of the state, particularly large empires, in transcultural communication. According to this assumption, the state supported the travelers not only with horses and postal stations, but also with maps and interpreters; without such support, trans-regional traveling became exceedingly difficult, if not outright impossible.

Yet I believe this assumption and the scholarship founded on it need revision for two reasons. First and foremost, empirical evidence does not support a decline of travel on the Silk Road after the end of the Tang.² A meticulous calculation conducted by Yan

¹ Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400*, Asian Interactions and Comparisons (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 212.

² Michal Biran has recently shown the Silk Road was still open and active between the Tang and the Mongol eras. See her "Qarakhanid Eastern Trade: Preliminary Notes on the Silk Roads in the 11th-12th Centuries," In Jan Bemmam and M. Schmauder, eds., *The Complexity of Interaction along the Eurasian*

Rui on the basis of records about the Tang and the Song dynasties indicates that the number of tributary missions to the courts of the Song and the Liao from Hexi and Central Asia in the tenth century *increased* to at least twice what it was during the Tang dynasty.¹ Second, very few attempts have been made to understand the *mechanism* of this supposed “decline.” How exactly did the absence of large empires and the lack of imperial support result in the decrease of the number of people traveling on the Silk Road? To date, their correlations have been presumed rather than argued. By focusing on this period after the end of the age of empires in East Eurasia, I shall be able to address some of these issues.

Spatial Scope: The “Dunhuang sphere”

Geographically, this dissertation focuses on activities on the road at Dunhuang and adjacent regions. Much like the choice of the temporal scope explained above, the choice of this spatial scope is also both incidental and intentional. It is incidental because the existing sources allow a most extensive and thorough treatment of this particular spatial unit; but to limit myself to this unit and not to expand or contract reflects my conscious effort to address a set of previously underexplored issues.

I use the term “Dunhuang and adjacent regions” to describe this geographical unit, because I rely on Chinese and Islamic sources as well as the multi-lingual

Steppe Zone in the first Millennium CE. Empires, Cities, Nomads and Farmers, Bonn Contributions to Asian Archaeology 7. (Bonn: Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität Bonn, 2015), 575-95.

¹ Yan Rui, *Sichouzhilu de Huihu shidai*.

collections of medieval manuscripts in Chinese, Tibetan, Uyghur, Sanskrit, Khotanese, and Sogdian discovered in the sealed library at Dunhuang. The central importance of the group of sources found in a single cave in the Dunhuang cave complex unquestionably puts Dunhuang at the focal point of this dissertation, but I have chosen also to include the broader Dunhuang oasis, the Hexi Corridor, and the region between Central Asia and China, that is, the entire region of East Eurasia.

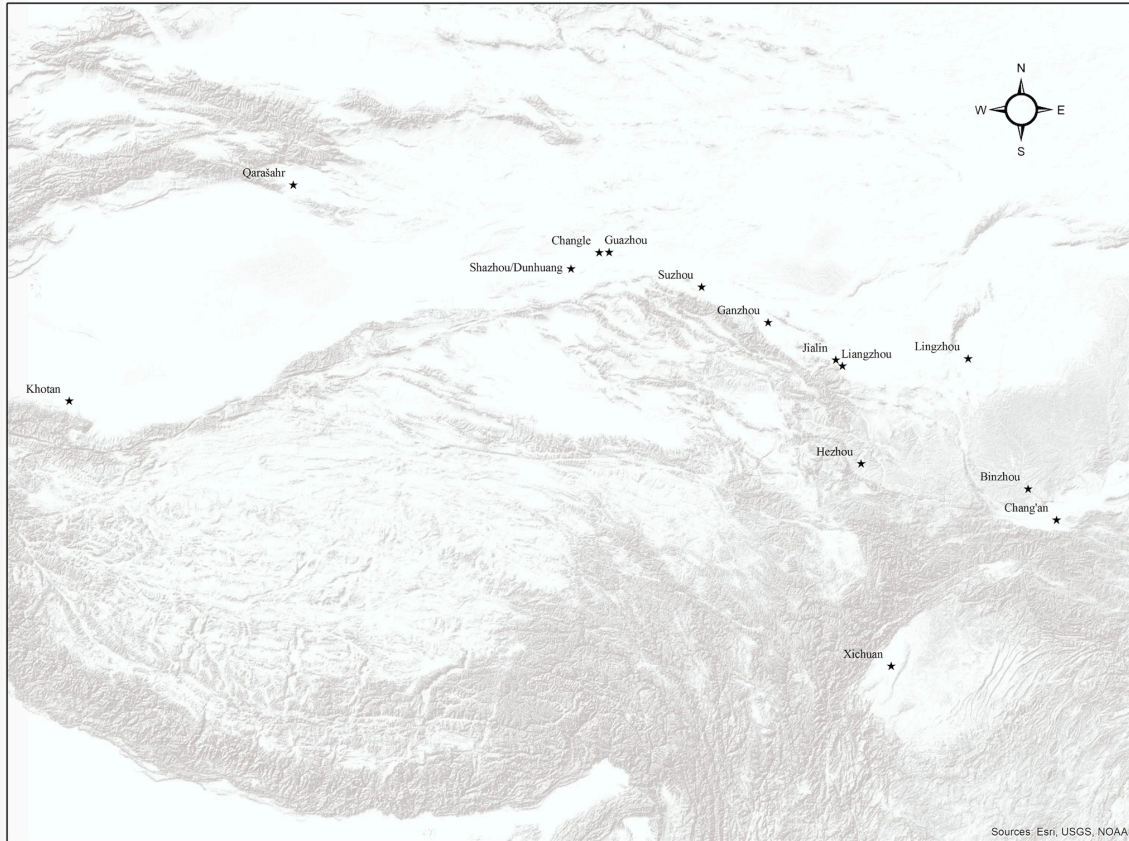
To determine a meaningful geographical unit for the discussions in this dissertation, I have asked two questions of my sources: 1) what places do manuscripts from Dunhuang refer to? 2) what places produced texts that refer to Dunhuang? The texts from the Dunhuang library cave are understandably focused on Dunhuang, as a majority of geographically locatable events found in these texts occurred at Dunhuang. References to the neighboring cities of Ganzhou and Guazhou to the east and Xizhou (Turfan) and Khotan to the west are also reasonably frequent. Significant places further afield, such as Mount Wutai and India, usually appear in specific (in this case religious) context, commonly in accounts about Buddhist travelers; a similar case can be made for the occurrence, in the political context, of Chang'an and other Chinese capitals as well as Lhasa. Finally, the most distant places attested in these manuscripts include Korea to the east and Persia to the west. These places form several broadly concentric yet occasionally overlapping regions around Dunhuang.

Interestingly, the answer to the second question charts a broadly similar geographical picture. After the establishment of the “four prefectures of the Hexi (河西四郡)” — Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan, and Dunhuang — at the end of the second century BCE, Dunhuang remained a key reference point in the geographical records in Chinese.

In the era treated in this dissertation, Dunhuang was politically not part of any regimes in Central China. Yet its significance did not subside in the Chinese geographical imagination. Indeed, one might even argue for its increased importance: as Chinese power retreated from Central Asia, Dunhuang, more than any other cities previously under Chinese rule in the region, became the reference point as the westernmost edge of an imagined Chinese ecumene. Tibetan texts began referring to Dunhuang when the Tibetan empire conquered it in the eighth century CE. Dunhuang also appears in Turkic and Persian sources, many of which will be used in this dissertation. For instance, a Persian geography produced in the tenth century in Central Asia mentions Dunhuang (as “Shazhou,” its official name during the Tang dynasty) and many of the places around Dunhuang in its section on China.¹

Therefore, the answers to these two questions about Dunhuang generally overlap, and both point to a broadly similar region of Western China and Eastern Central Asia between Chang’an in the east and Khotan in the west. This region, which I term the “Dunhuang sphere (see Map 0.1),” will be the geographical unit in which the discussion in this dissertation unfolds.

¹ Vladimir Minorsky, *Hudūd Al-‘Ālam = “The Regions of the World”: A Persian Geography, 372 A.H.-982 A.D.*, (London: Luzac & co, 1937).



Map 0.1: The “Dunhuang sphere”¹

It is important to note that I focus on the “Dunhuang sphere” not because of its historical or geographical uniqueness, but merely because of the availability of sources. The circumstances of the preservation and the discovery of manuscripts in the Dunhuang caves determined the accidental nature of this choice in the geographical scale of this dissertation. Each of the cities and states on the Silk Road would have similar spheres of influence that, given sufficient sources, would allow us to paint pictures of a “Turfan-sphere,” “Khotan-sphere,” etc. This dissertation’s intensive focus on the “Dunhuang sphere” will hopefully provide a window that allows us a peek at some of the ways

¹ Maps used in this dissertation are made by me using the ArcGis software or Google Map.

people traveled on the Silk Road, which can then be compared to practices in other less well-documented places. Only by connecting these different spheres of influence and intense interaction, as many pre-modern travelers certainly did, can we hope to bring out the global significance of an admittedly regional history.

Global Perspectives

One area of study this dissertation draws its inspiration from is the study of global history. Most practitioners of this comparatively new field focus their efforts on the early modern period and beyond. This is because it was during the early modern period, for the first time in history, that overlapping networks of knowledge, people, and goods of truly global scale emerged. Although scholars do not agree on the exact dates of the early modern period, there seems to be some consensus on what it means to *be* early modern. According to Jerry Bentley, it was “a period during which all the world's regions and peoples ultimately became engaged in sustained encounter with each other, thus a period that inaugurated a genuinely global epoch of world history.”¹ Similarly, a recent synthesis asserts that “[h]istorians refer to this age, extending from roughly around 1400 to 1800, as the early modern period. Though peoples from Africa, Asia, and Europe had engaged one another intermittently since ancient times, early modern cross-cultural exchange was distinctive in its worldwide scale and its ongoing regularity.”² Therefore, connections in

¹ Jerry Bentley, “Cross-Cultural Interaction,” 769. He does not distinguish the early modern from the modern.

² Charles H. Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age, 1400-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

world history would need to be both “global” and “regular” for them to qualify as early modern connections, and pre-modern (or rather pre-early modern) connections were either regularly sustained on a regional basis, or global in scale only intermittently.

Recent scholarship, however, has indicated that, even in times widely regarded as early modern, connections of truly global scale were relatively rare.¹ What is important and distinctive seems to be not necessarily global practices, but the knowledge of the global sphere, meaning that, in the early modern era, even regional connections were made with the knowledge of the global in the background. Consequently, the defining feature of pre-modern trans-regional connections was not that they were limited in their geographical reach, which the continent-wide spread of religion (Buddhism and Manichaeism), technology (horse domestication), and language (the spread of Indo-European languages), or the global reach of homo sapiens show they were not. What distinguishes pre-modern connections from early modern ones, I would argue, is the lack of the understanding of a “globe” as a spherical and finite entity.

In this sense, insights gained from works on “global history” could apply to studies of the pre-modern world just as well as to those of the early modern. The emphasis on connections transcending national borders and nationalistic historiography could benefit historians of the pre-modern. It is for this reason that the idea of a “global medieval” was proposed in several recent works.² As the “Silk Road” is frequently used as the defining framework of a medieval global world, a better understanding of the

¹ Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), ch.6.

² Robert I. Moore, “A Global Middle Ages?” in *The Prospect of Global History*, ed. James Belich et al. (Oxford University Press, 2016), 80–92. See also the report on an Oxford-led initiative, Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, “Defining the Global Middle Ages,” *Medieval Worlds*, 1 (2015): 106-117.

mechanism of travel on the Silk Road enables us to rethink what “globalization” meant in medieval Eurasia. Most current works of synthesis on this subject see the Silk Road as a precursor of the more familiar story of commercial globalization beginning in the sixteenth century, only on a much smaller scale.¹ Because of the perceived sporadic nature of the Silk Road connection, global historians of early and medieval Eurasia often choose to focus on comparisons rather than connections.² In this framework, the “global medieval” was one link in the lineal and incremental development of an increasingly more connected world between the largely isolated world of antiquity and the genuine globalization during the early modern period.³

In my dissertation, however, I argue that globalization in medieval Eurasia was not merely smaller in scale than early modern globalization; it also involved a different group of players with a different set of rules. With the exchange of gifts through diplomatic means on the Silk Road from Chang’an and Samarkand to Baghdad and Constantinople, the competition among these kings and emperors for prestige and grandeur defined globalization in the medieval Eurasian context. The transition from global medieval to global early modern involved not only incremental increases of the frequency of contact and commerce, but also a paradigm shift in the ways these contacts were made.

My investigation of this kingly competition for prestige through gift exchange can be connected to recent works by Jonathan Skaff and Matthew Canepa, both arguing for

¹ Liu Xinru, *The Silk Road in World History*; Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*; Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*, (New York: Alfred AKnopf, 2016).

² For instance, Walter Scheidel ed., *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³ Bentley, “Cross-Cultural Interaction.”

the existence of trans-regional cultures of kingship.¹ Such culture of kingship, which both imported exotica and exported claims of kingly generosity to boost claims of legitimacy, is found in almost every court in medieval Eurasia. The competitive gifting (both secular and religious) among these states constituted the foundation of material exchange on the ancient Silk Road. In this sense, this pre-Mongol “world-system” differs fundamentally from the one in the era of the Mongol empire described by Janet Abu-Lughod.²

Ultimately, I agree with Peter Brown’s insightful assessment of the nature of the ancient Silk Road. He suggests that on the Silk Road “elements of an ‘archaic globalization’ were brought to the fore by constant diplomacy and warfare, and not by the invisible hand of the market,” and that “from one end of Eurasia to the other, the game of the day was the game of the competing glory of the kings.”³ By analyzing actual cases of travel and exchange of goods found in Dunhuang manuscripts, my dissertation demonstrates that this “game of the competing glory” was the main reason underlying the vitality of the ancient Silk Road and the connectedness of medieval Eurasia.

Chapter Synopsis

¹ Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power and Connections, 580-800*, Oxford Studies in Early Empires (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Matthew P. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage; 45 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

² Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

³ Peter Brown, “The Silk Road in Late Antiquity,” in Victor H. Mair, *Reconfiguring the Silk Road: New Research on East-West Exchange in Antiquity* (Philadelphia, PA, USA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) 15-22.

The dissertation is organized into three parts. They answer the following three questions: How was travel possible in this politically fragmented world? How did the travelers behave when they were on the road? What were the consequences of such trans-regional travel for the regions traversed by the travelers? Each part has two chapters that address distinct yet connected aspects under these three broader questions.

Part I, “Maps and Diplomacy: Opening the Road,” discusses the ways travel was made possible in tenth-century Eurasia. Chapter 1 focuses on the production of geographical knowledge. In this chapter, I investigate the ways the Hexi region, of which Dunhuang was the western terminus, was represented in the ninth and tenth centuries in geographies or travel accounts in Chinese, Persian, Uighur, Tibetan, Khotanese, and Sogdian and how these texts reveal a “shared peripherality” in the geographical productions of East Eurasia prior to unification under the Mongol Empire. By “shared peripherality” I mean that the Hexi region was peripheral to all of these traditions of geographical understanding: it constitutes, for instance, the western end in the Chinese geography *Taiping huanyu ji* and the eastern end in the Persian geography *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*, both composed in the tenth century. Yet this periphery was “shared” because in *Taiping huanyu ji* and *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*, among others, the many cities of Hexi were recorded with accurate details that corroborate each other. Such corroboration is visible through my analysis of the multilingual documents from the Dunhuang library cave situated at the western end of the Hexi region. I argue that the intensive production, translation, and transmission of geographical works and information found in these local documents enabled the interactions and connection among different systems of knowledge, thus creating a pan-East Eurasia geographical intelligibility. It was through

the shared knowledge of the Hexi region that the world of East Eurasia became known to all.

But to know how to get somewhere does not in itself guarantee successful travel. Various social connections have to be made for the travel to happen. Chapter 2 — “By the Road we become one family” — explores the diplomatic relations established among states along the routes between China and Central Asia. I first provide as context the ways the Tang, the Tibetan, and the Uyghur empires conducted their diplomacy, and then argue that much of the vocabulary of what I term “imperial diplomacy,” if not also its practices, was inherited in the tenth century among a network of a dozen or so smaller states. These states continued, for instance, to use diplomatic marriage as a tool of negotiating interstate relations. What changed was the rationale for the establishment of such diplomatic marriages. For the states in tenth century Dunhuang and adjacent regions, the fact that they shared a road provided a strong rationale for the necessity of diplomatic relations. Therefore, embedded in the regional diplomacy was the significance of traveling: interstate relations were necessary because, at least in part, they provided a secure network for travelers. And since there were many more states in this region than in the previous centuries, and these states were generally interested in and sometimes enthusiastic about maintaining trans-regional connections, traveling became more frequent than in previous centuries, when the entire region was under the control of one or two large states such as the Tang and the Tibetan empire.

After Part I establishes the prerequisites for successful travel, Part II – Gifts and Guest: Networks of Prestige – turns to the “trip” itself and asks what kind of social relations travelers formed when they were on the road. How were these social relations

negotiated? This part addresses these issues by following the movements of goods and people. Chapter 3 reexamines the material exchanges on the road and argues for the importance of gift rather than commercial exchanges. I show that the exchange of goods as gifts permeated every aspect of life on the road. Gifts were not only customarily attached to personal as well as diplomatic letters; they were also given to travelers from their arrival to their accommodation and their departure. On all of these social occasions, gifts served two distinct yet related purposes. First, the use of gifts created a social bond in the form of debts that guaranteed the successful exchange of letters and the accommodation of guests. Second, the pursuit of particularly exotic and rare gifts was often the very goal of letter-exchange and traveling. These gifts were not exchanged to produce profit; instead, the exchange of gifts was a competitive process in which each party tried to outperform the other to accrue prestige. Therefore, material exchange in the form of gifting on the road served as both the end and the means of traveling.

Chapter 4 turns to the travelers themselves and investigates the relations between travelers and their local hosts. By examining evidence in Buddhist stories popular in the region, travelogues by Ibn Faḍlān and Marco Polo, and concepts about traveling revealed by the eleventh century *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* (Compendium of the Turkic Languages) by Maḥmūd al-Kashgarī, this chapter charts the basic principles and vocabulary of social relations on the road in medieval East Eurasia. I argue that, at least in principle, the appropriate relations between travelers and the people they meet on the road was a reciprocal one: that between a guest and a host. This principle is then tested against actual cases of traveling recorded in Dunhuang manuscripts. In particular, I focus on how travelers were made “known” in a process in which strangers were transformed to guests.

I argue that prior introduction, hospitable accommodation, the exchange of gifts, and the celebration of the fame and prestige of the hosts constituted the crucial steps in establishing and maintaining a guest/host reciprocity. Violations of these practices deterred such reciprocity and resulted in the faltering and failure of travel. In extreme cases, violating guest/host reciprocity ended up with the travelers not being considered guests, but bandits. In this way, I argue that instead of commercial principles of profit-making by merchants, the adherence to and the violation of the guest/host reciprocity constituted the central theme of social relations on the road.

Having examined the practice of travel in Part II, Part III — “Economy and Politics” — turns to the results of travel. The two chapters discuss the economic and political impacts of the frequent trans-regional exchanges of people and goods in two different locations. Chapter 5 looks at the economy of Dunhuang on the basis of a group of 200 Chinese and Tibetan contracts and argues that there were two ways in which the economy at Dunhuang can be described as a “Silk Road economy.” First, building on the observations made in chapter 3, I show that the economy of Dunhuang in this era consisted of two spheres: a local sphere of commodities and a trans-local sphere of gifts. By analyzing the goods dealt with in these contracts, I show that most of the commercially exchanged goods were household items of relatively low value, whereas goods exchanged as gifts consisted of mostly non-necessity and – in some cases – rare and exotic items. The only category of goods both used as gifts and exchanged as commodities were various types of silk and other textiles. Silk connected the two spheres of economic activities at Dunhuang, thus making this economy a characteristically Silk Road economy.

The second way the economy of Dunhuang became unique because of the exchanges on the Silk Road was the integration of the ways in which contracts from different linguistic and cultural traditions were made. By comparing contracts from the ninth to the eleventh centuries at Dunhuang and Turfan with similar earlier contracts from this region and adjacent areas, I show that the earlier contracts show differing ways of conducting business. By the tenth century, however, the frequent communication and exchange resulted in a congruence of contractual practices, the result of which was that Chinese, Tibetan, and Uyghur contracts produced in this period and region, despite their cultural and linguistic differences, essentially followed the same formulae. By analyzing these two aspects of economic life at Dunhuang, I argue that “Silk Road economy” in Dunhuang meant a coherent economic system that on the one hand centered around the distribution of silk among different spheres of economy, but on the other hand transcended linguistic and cultural boundaries in its practices.

The last chapter turns to another aspect of the impacts of frequent trans-regional travel, namely, in the domain of state ideology and kingship. As I argued in the previous chapters, the competitive performance of diplomacy and the pursuit of prestige through exotic gifts by the kings were the main incentives for these travels. In this process, the kings on the Silk Road formed a network of diplomatic connections that secured the exchanges of goods and people. Because these exchanges were conducted primarily by and for the governments and kings, it is not surprising that, beyond a “Silk Road economy” observed in chapter 5, we see a “Silk Road ideology” in the realm of kingship. This last chapter looks at the kingdom of Khotan in the political context of the fall of the Tang empire, and shows that, thanks to the frequent exchanges between this Central

Asian state and China and their exclusive ownership of jade – a widely coveted luxury in East Eurasia – the kings of Khotan acquired tremendous political prestige. Such prestige allowed them to develop a new kingship ideology that blended Indo-Iranian concepts with Chinese ones, whereby they claimed to be “king of kings of China.” These measures not only altered the face of the middle-Iranian-speaking Buddhist kingdom of Khotan, but also influenced profoundly how “China” was conceived of among Khotan’s neighbors, in particular in the Islamic world. By uncovering this previously ignored claim in the political history of tenth century East Eurasia, I argue that, just as a network of commerce often results in negotiations and redistributions of wealth, a network of gifts and guests among states on the Silk Road resulted in negotiations and redistributions of political prestige.

In the Conclusion, I first summarize my findings regarding several key units of analysis regarding the history of the Silk Road, from “goods” and “people” to “road” and “exchange.” In doing so, I show that trans-regional travels on the Silk Road were motivated mainly by the kingly pursuit of glory rather than commercial interest in profit; travelers were predominantly recorded as envoys from the state rather than private merchants, and these envoys exchanged the goods they carried in a diplomatic network of competitive gifting. Therefore, the medieval “Silk Road” in the Eurasian heartland was not primarily a commercial network, but a network of prestige. This observation, when placed in the context of pre-modern trans-regional travels on the Eurasian continent, provides new ways of understanding not only the history of the Silk Road, but also the world of pre-modern Eurasia.

Part One – Geography and Diplomacy: Opening the Road

Chapter 1: Through Broken Geographies: The Re-creation of Geographical Intelligibility between China and Central Asia

1.1: Introduction

In the Tang, imperially commissioned, locally produced *tujing* 圖經 (illustrated geography) connected the courtly imagination of geography with its local variants.¹ The knowledge thus manufactured guided Tang travelers in their trips between the capital and Central Asia, among other places. However, the fall of the Tang and the “loss” of Central Asia in the eighth century severed such connections. This chapter considers the ways in which a coherent and mutually intelligible geographical understanding in the high Tang eventually gave way to fragmented realms of knowledge in the tenth century.

As I shall show in this chapter, for post-Tang historians and geographers, the memory of places in the then lost Hexi Corridor lingered, but their exact locations grew increasingly vague. In the meantime, local production of geographical works about Hexi also shifted focus from one that adopted a hierarchal place in the imperial geography to one that stressed the centrality of the Hexi region. By juxtaposing Song geographies, maps, and travelogues with similar works produced in and about the Hexi region in Chinese, Tibetan, and Khotanese languages, all of which are found at Dunhuang, I argue that fragmented geographical knowledge did not necessarily lead to fragmented traveling experiences. Instead, empirical investigations by the travelers, memories of the Han and Tang places, and the resurgence of previously obscure non-Chinese traditions all

¹ See Xin Deyong 辛德勇, “Tangdai de dili xue” 唐代的地理學, Li Xiaocong 李孝聰 ed., *Tangdai diyu jiegou yu yunzuo kongjian* 唐代地域結構與運作空間, Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2003, 439-463.

contributed to the creation of a new geographical knowledge which, while not assuming imperial monopoly, was no less efficient in practice.

The Hexi Corridor offers an ideal site for the investigation of geographical knowledge about the Silk Road (Figure 1.1) Its western terminus is Dunhuang (or Shazhou 沙州 or Sha Prefecture during and after the Tang). In the east, the road is much more open. One could see its end as Liangzhou 涼州 (Wuwei 武威), Lanzhou 蘭州 (Jincheng 金城), or Lingzhou 靈州 (Shuofang 朔方/Lingwu 靈武). The Hexi region was incorporated into the Chinese ecumene during the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE). The measure aptly captured by the phrase *lie sijun, ju liangguan* 列四郡據兩關 (lay out four prefectures, hold two passes) not only greatly expanded the Han empire, but also provided the Hexi region, which is comprised of the “four prefectures” of Wuwei, Zhangye 張掖 (Ganzhou 甘州 during the Tang), Jiuquan 酒泉 (Suzhou 肅州 during the Tang) and Dunhuang, with a certain cultural coherence. This coherence was maintained during the era of fragmentation in Chinese history between the Han and the Sui dynasties, and, for the majority of this period, various Liang 涼 states ruled the Hexi region. In the early Tang this region was incorporated and designated as part of the Longyou 隴右 circuit. The An Lushan rebellion, however, greatly weakened Tang control, and the Tibetan empire took the chance to occupy much of the region. After the disintegration of the Tibetan empire in the mid-ninth century, former prefectures in the region began to reclaim their independence from the Tibetan overlords. Some of them recognized a nominal affiliation to the aging Tang state. But Tang attempts to exert effectual control

were doomed to fail, and this region would not return to the direct rule of a regime from Central China until the conquest of the Xixia state by the Mongols in the 13th century.¹

The term “Hexi,” meaning “West of the [Yellow] River,” was already widely in use during the Tang and gave the region a more or less distinct coherence. This term gained currency not only among Chinese speakers, but was also borrowed into Tibetan. In a letter written to the Khotanese king by the lord Cao of Dunhuang in the tenth century, for instance, the lord Cao titled himself as “ha se byang ngos kyi tser to tshe’u de’i po,” the “Juedu shi (governor) Cao taibao of Hexi the north.”² Evidently, the Khotanese king shared the understanding of this term as well. In its non-Chinese use, the term was clearly deprived of its original geographical meaning of “West of the [Yellow] River,” and became a pure toponym. Such a region of distinctive geographical coherence serves as a good specimen for the study of the transformation of geographical knowledge in and about it. In this chapter, I would further argue that in the tenth century, from the perspective of different realms of geographical knowledge, the Hexi region indeed became a coherent unit distinctive from Central Asia, the Tibetan Plateau, the Inner Asian Steppe, and China proper. Most importantly, it also connected these four large regions and became the nexus of East Eurasia.

¹ For a summary of the history of this region, with a focus on Dunhuang, see Rong Xinjiang, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, Brill’s Humanities in China Library; 5 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013).

² P.t.1284. Cf. the bilingual vocabulary in P.t.1263.



Map 1.1: The Hexi Corridor

If one visits the Hexi Corridor, which corresponds to the western part of the modern province of Gansu, or looks at a map of it, it is impossible not to notice the serpentine shape of this region. Such administrative contours were, of course, constructed by politicians, who decided how to draw a province, and cartographers, who put the idea on maps. But they were also not without their topographical basis. That western Gansu looked like a passage, aptly captured in its name *Hexi Corridor*, is due to the steep mountains to its north and south. The lower region between the mountains stretches more than five hundred miles from southeast to northwest, but is only a few dozen miles wide. Most areas in the region are very dry, and only in places where rivers flow from the southern mountains do we see oasis-towns. Major towns were lined up one after another at roughly equal distance, unmistakably summoning the image of a route dotted with conveniently situated halting places for travelers. In this sense, one may regard the Hexi Corridor as essentially a road pretending to be a region. The dynamic between these two ways of seeing the geography of Hexi informs much of the discussion in this chapter.

A central concept that I deal with in this chapter is what I call “geographical intelligibility.” For a traveler, geographical intelligibility means the ability to know where one is and where one is going even before embarking. Particularly in times of political fragmentation, when the production and renewal of geographical knowledge were sometimes hindered by state boundaries, travelers might not always know where they were going or how to get to their destination. It is only with a dynamic network of geographical knowledge can people who were separated from each other communicate intelligently. A place is geographically intelligible to a traveler when the knowledge about that place can be connected to known places through various means (geography books, tales, guides, supernatural interventions etc.). A collection of mutually intelligible places enables successful travel among these places.

In other words, geographical intelligibility is the status of being “known” through a network of knowledge that connects one place to other places. In this way, it differs from simple geographical knowledge as the latter describes a static type of knowing. Many networks of different socio-historical provenance often overlap with each other, the movement from one network to another usually determines the success or failure of a trip. In this chapter, my description will focus on the reconstruction of this intelligibility in an era of political fragmentation following the fall of the Tang.

1.2: The Silk Road and Imperial Knowledge

Wang Fengxian 王奉仙 was in trouble. In the first month of the 21st year of the Kaiyuan reign (February of 733), he was captured by the soldiers in Sour Date Fort

(*suanzao shu* 酸棗戍) on the western border of the Turfan region (Xizhou 西州 during the Tang) in present day eastern Xinjiang.¹ His arrest was not due to any crime in the conventional sense. Rather, the 40-year old man was discovered to be traveling without proper documentation and so was arrested.²

This was not meant to happen. In the third month of the previous year, this resident of the capital Chang'an 長安 joined a "camel-leader," who was working in turn for a certain official travel supervisor (*xinggang* 行綱) Li Chengyin to transport military provisions (*bingci*) from the capital to Kucha (Qiuci 龜茲), a city to the north of the Taklamakan desert in modern Xinjiang. Everything seems to have proceeded smoothly, and Wang Fengxian was able to reach Kucha in the summer, as he was given all the documentation necessary to return to the capital on the 29th day of the eighth month. More than one month later (on the tenth day of the eleventh month), he reached Turfan on the return trip and was given further permission to go eastward. A smaller stop, the Crimson Pavilion Garrison (Chiting zhen 赤亭鎮) gave him another document three days later. But then he became sick, and was unable to continue on the journey. Therefore, he rested in the "chariot ward" of the garrison and then went to Puchang 蒲昌 with a hometown friend and stayed with one of his servants for fifty days. When he received the

¹ For the places mentioned in this case, see Wu Xinhua 巫新華, *Tulufan Tangdai jiaotong luxian de kaocha yu yanjiu* 吐魯番唐代交通路線的考察與研究 (Qingdao: Qingdao chubanshe, 1999).

² In cave no.166 in at Dunhuang, under a painting of the Prabhutaratna Buddha we find the inscription that reads "passing guest Wang Fengxian devoted offered." See *Dunhuang mogaoku gongyang ren tiji* 敦煌莫高窟供養人題記 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), 78. As the cave was carved in High-Tang around the 8th century, it is not impossible, as Wang Huimin suggested that this could have been the same Wang Fengxian. See Wang Huimin 王惠民, "Du Mogaoku gongyan ren tiji zhaji," 讀莫高窟供養人題記劄記, *Wenxian*, (1994-3): 269-274. If that is the case, then he must have passed Dunhuang either on his way to Kucha or back.

news that someone who owed him money was passing through the region, he decided to go after him, possibly with the intention of hitchhiking along. But when he reached the Sour Date Fort on the 25th of the first month, he did not find this person. Instead, he was arrested for travel without proper documents (*xingwen*) 行文. His route is shown in Figure 1.2.



Map 1.2 – Wang Fengxian’s Geographical World

We know the story of Wang Fengxian because his case was reported to the Xi Prefecture, which later gave the case a verdict. This document, together with many other documents of similar nature, were then used as burial covers in a tomb that would will later be named 73TAM509 by modern archaeologists, whose excavation brought this document

and Wang's case to life.¹ I recount this exceptional case with all its rich details because it reveals much about the Tang official transportation system. Wang was originally traveling in an official or semi-official capacity and covered over 4000 kilometers without any problem. But when sickness hit him and his original company had to leave him behind, he was forced to use a more private network of travel, staying with a fellow townsman and chasing passing debtors. This form of travel, however, was not sanctioned by the government. The first part of Wang's trip was partially official in nature and was thus supported by the Tang postal system. Every 30 *li*, according to the Tang code, there should be a postal station. Each station possessed a certain number of horses and/or boats, and one staff was allocated to handle three horses, whereas three people were needed to manage one boat. The provisions used in the station came partly from the national household tax and partly from local levies. Official travelers were usually provided for when they passed through these stations.² This is why, when Wang Fengxian got sick in the Crimson Pavilion Garrison, he was allowed to stay there for about fifteen days. Yet as we have seen, this system did not simply facilitate all types of travel. When a glitch occurred in Wang's private network and he was left alone, the officially established postal stations turned from facilitators to obstacles for him, requiring documentation that he obviously did not have.

¹ *Tulufan chutu wenshu*, vol.9, 51-70. For a detailed narrative of this incident based on the documents, see Guo Pingliang 郭平梁, "Tangchao Wang Fengxian bei zhuo an wenshu kaoshi," 唐朝王奉仙被捉案文書考釋 *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 (1986-1): 136-45. A reconstruction of the original document, which runs to 188 lines and contains many interesting cases, is found in and Cheng Xilin 程喜霖, *Tangdai guosuo yanjiu* 唐代過所研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 62-71.

² Liu Xiwei 劉希為, *Suitang jiaotong* 隋唐交通 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1992).

More pertinent to the present topic, however, is the means by which Wang tried to exonerate himself. In the process of the interrogation, Wang Fengxian was asked two main questions: “what type of person are you?” and “where did you come from?” He answered that he was from Huayuan County 華原縣 of the capital region of Chang’an and he was not an absconder from a military garrison or someone with a “shadow name,” meaning false identity. After he told them about his hometown and the purpose and process of the trip, Wang Fengxian assured them that “if in the future (my testimony) can not be substantiated, I shall beg for severe punishment.”

Even though the Sour Date Fort was a relatively obscure establishment on the outskirts of Turfan at the western border of the Tang empire, that it stood as a small knot in the Tang transportation network enabled its officials to record, and to substantiate if necessary, the places where Wang Fengxian originated from and passed by in his long trip. That he was from thousands of miles to the east of Turfan in the region of the capital Chang’an and traveled hundreds of miles to the west of Turfan to Kucha did not seem to have posed any difficulty in terms of geographical knowledge for the officials in the Sour Date Fort and their superiors in the Xi Prefecture.

In figure 1.2, I have marked the places that were known, communicated, or presumed to have been known in the case of Wang Fengxian. These places collectively form a network of knowledge, and such nation-wide geographical intelligibility was supported by the Tang system of imperially commissioned, locally produced *tujing* (illustrated geography).¹ Every three years, each county (and sometimes each prefecture

¹ We know that this system covered to the point of Central Asia because of discovery of actual copies of these text including *Xizhou tujing* (西州圖經 Pelliot chinois 2009) in Dunhuang. “Xizhou” is the name for Turfan in the Tang.

or even circuit) was required to submit a new version of the local geography, and on the basis of this triennial documentation, a nation-wide text was then composed.¹ The knowledge thus manufactured guided Tang travelers on their trips. The literatus Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824), when traveling to Shao Prefecture 韶州, borrowed the *tujing* from a friend. His motive is revealed in a poem composed on this occasion:²

曲江山水聞來久，	The hills and rivers of Qujiang I have long heard,
恐不知名訪倍難。	But not knowing their names I fear visiting will be difficult.
願借圖經將入界，	I wish to borrow the <i>tujing</i> and to bring it with me into the border,
每逢佳處便開看。	so that I can open it whenever I encounter a pleasant place.

In this case, the use of the *tujing* connected the empirical experience of traveling with established knowledge for a visitor from the capital area such as Han Yu, and it rendered new places geographically intelligible. On the other hand, the absence of a record in the *tujing* often meant the loss of certain geographical knowledge. In a commemorative record composed by Cui Geng 崔耿 (active in the ninth century) on the occasion of the construction of a villa, he expressed doubt regarding the naming of a part of the villa, citing the fact that “the *tujing* does not record it, nor do the elders communicate anything.”³ The use of a *tujing* in the remembering and forgetting of places

¹ Zhao Zhen 趙貞, “Lun Tangdai tujin de bianzuan,” 論唐代圖經的編纂 *Shixueshi yanjiu*, (2013-4): 88-98.

² Qian Zhonglian, *Han Changli shi xinian jishi* 韓昌黎詩系年集釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), 1179.

³ 圖經無記，宿老味傳 see *Tangwen shiyi* 唐文拾遺, in Dong Hao et al. eds., *Quan Tang wen: fu Tang wen shi yi, Tang wen xu shi, Du Quan Tang wen zha ji* 全唐文、附唐文拾遺、唐文續拾、讀全唐文札記 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990) ch. 30.

made it a powerful tool for travelers. In a letter to the emperor appended on a newly composed *tujing*, Han Yu's contemporary Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831) fittingly summarized these *tujing*-type texts as “on the carpet, prefectures and cities are visible as one stretches back and forth; on a royal trip, mountains and rivers are manifested as one leans on the horse.”¹ In another words, having a *tujing* and the knowledge it created made possible both the mental and the physical traveling. Thanks to this type of imperially created geographical intelligibility, the officials in charge of the Wang Fengxian case at the Sour Date Fort could mobilize various types of knowledge about places far removed from each other, and make sense of Wang's case.

Yet geographical intelligibility does not naturally translate into a successful traveling experience, and state support was only available to travelers that were sanctioned by the state. A most famous example in this regard is that of Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664), the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim par excellence. When he was leaving China for India, traveling through the Hexi area already under the Tang rule, at one post-station after another, he was stopped, cross-examined, and required to return to where he started. Only through a network of fellow Buddhist monks as well as Sogdian travelers was he subsequently able to barely evade the Tang postal system, which in this case was in place to stop him from traveling. His return to China was, however, greatly facilitated by the state because he was already a well-established religious figure and was invited, in a sense, by the emperor himself.

¹ 衽席之上，敬枕而郡邑可觀；遊幸之時，倚馬而山川盡在。Yuan Zhen 元稹, *Yuan shi Chang qing ji* (Beijing: Wenxue guji kanxingshe, 1956): 492.

The Tang institutions' obstructionist aspect for travelers did not only affect the likes of Xuanzang. It is also well documented in a seventh century passport, in which a Sogdian caravan answered questions through an interpreter of the Chinese authority at a checkpoint.¹

Question: "Where are the travelers' documents?"

Answer: "They did not run into any government check point and therefore they did not have any documents."

The assumption accepted by both parties was clearly that traveling beyond a "check point" was quite unhindered precisely because of the *lack* of state power. This runs against the consensus regarding the generally positive and facilitating role of large states mentioned in the introduction. If anything, this example, read in the context of the Xuanzang case, shows the exact opposite: the absence of state power made traveling easier and not harder.

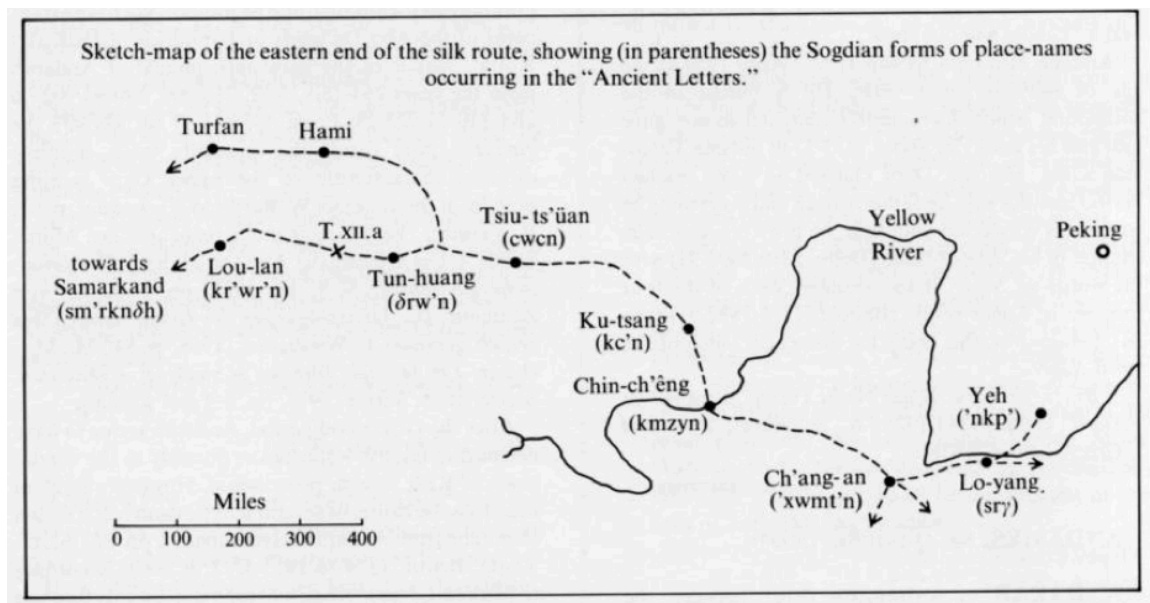
Additionally, what we do not see in this seemingly smooth system of Tang imperial geographical knowledge, even when it reaches deep into Central Asia, is the non-Chinese elements of geographical knowledge. To be sure, non-Chinese places names were incorporated – although in the Tang there was a tendency to change non-Chinese names into Chinese ones, such as Dunhuang to Shazhou ("Sand Prefecture") – but that they had non-Chinese origins was quickly forgotten when the names were recorded only in the Chinese sources.² It is certain that such systematic, non-Chinese geographical

¹ *Tulufan chutu wenshu*, vol.7, 88-94.

² Mair, V. H., "Reflections on the Origins of the Modern Standard Mandarin Place-Name 'Dunhuang' - with an added Note on the Identity of the Modern Uighur Place-Name 'Turpan'," *Ji Xianlin jiaoshou bashi huadan jinian lunwenji* 季羨林教授八十华诞纪念论文集, vol 2 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1991), 901-954.

knowledge existed during and prior to the Tang. Indeed, the 4th-century Sogdian ancient letters found near Dunhuang mention not only cities in Sogdiana such as Samarkand, but also Dunhuang (*δrw'n*), Wuwei (Guzang, written as *kc'm*), and Chang'an (*'xwmt'n*), sometimes in a single letter. Figure 1.3 shows the realm of geographical knowledge covered by these letters. Evidently, the diasporic Sogdian communities in Central Asia and Western China maintained connections that were based at least in part on a shared knowledge of geography among Sogdians in East Eurasia. Therefore, by establishing a system of geographical knowledge, the Tang *tujing* system was also replacing and obscuring other systems of knowledge, thus creating a geographical intelligibility only for its sanctioned travelers.

Map 1.3: Places in the *Sogdian Ancient Letters*. (Source: *Encyclopedia Iranica*)



Nonetheless, the *tujing* system did provide coherence in geographical information that was crucial for successful traveling. Specimens of geographical works produced in the framework of the *tujing* system are found at Dunhuang at the western end of the Hexi Corridor,¹ whereas documents dealing with the information collection activities for these geographies have been discovered as far as Khotan in southern Xinjiang.² With the fall of the Tang empire, all of this was about to change: this intricate system of imperial knowledge could not, and did not, persist without the empire. The story of the rest of the chapter occurs amid the *destruction* of the Tang *tujing* system and the creation of a new system. The next section deals with the status of geographical knowledge between China and Central Asia from the mid-ninth to the tenth century after the fall of the Tang Empire; and the following section further asks whether new types of geographical intelligibility were created within this state of fragmented information and, finally, if the answer to this question is yes, how new geographical intelligibility was produced for travelers on the ground.

1.3: Broken Geographies

According to *Zizhi Tongjian* 資治通鑑, in the twelfth year of the Tianbao 天寶 reign (753), “China (Zhongguo) was at the height of power. From the Anyuan gate of

¹ Zheng Binglin 鄭炳林, *Dunhuang dili wenshu huijiao jizhu* 敦煌地理文書匯校集注 (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1989).

² Wen Xin, “Hetian xinchu Tang Yutian zhenshoujun kanyinli kaoshi” 和田新出〈唐于阗镇守军勘印历〉考释, *Xiyu lishi yuyan yanjiu jikan* 西域历史语言研究所集刊, vol.2 (2009): 111-23.

Chang'an, the Tang domain extends 12,000 *li* westwards. (With its) connecting households and uninterrupted fields of mulberry and hemp, the Longyou region is the richest place under heaven.”¹ The eastern part of the Longyou region corresponds to Hexi, our area under of investigation.² Apparently, for Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019 - 1086), the editor of *Zizhi tongjian*, the Hexi region in the mid-eighth century was characterized by a flourishing agriculture that produced great material wealth.

However, less than two centuries later, we see a quite different assessment of the physical appearance of the Hexi region. A monk named Guiwen 歸文 visited the region in 924. He was ordained in Dingzhou 定州 in Hebei, and decided to go west for pilgrimage “without regard for life or death.” He wrote a letter to a certain honorable monk in Lingzhou 靈州 (Lingwu 靈武 in modern day Ningxia) before his departure further westward.³ In this letter, he described his imminent trip as facing “ten thousand *li* of yellow sands,” and therefore the next message would have to wait till he “returns east.”

These two observations, “uninterrupted fields of mulberry and hemp” and “ten thousand *li* of yellow sands,” are describing the same region of the Hexi Corridor. How did this drastic change occur in less than two centuries? It was not the result of a change in the natural environment itself, because as any traveler to this region would testify, neither description fits particularly well with the actual landscape, which is characterized by barren patches of sandy lands with frequent interruptions of arable fields and oases.

¹ Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi Tongjian* 資治通鑒 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 6919.

² Li Jifu 李吉甫, *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡县图志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983).

³ The letter is S. 529.

Both Sima Guang and Guiwen's characterizations are therefore probably not based on direct observation, but are reflections of geographical imagination.

In the monk Guiwen's letter, the image of the sands and desert was invoked to show that the road ahead would be treacherous and uncertain and that knowledge of either the place or the people would become difficult to obtain. The passage of official geography in *Zizhi tongjian*, on the other hand, appears in a general description of the domain of the Tang empire, the purpose of which was to aggrandize the military and political accomplishment of the empire. Therefore, the difference between "mulberry fields" and "yellow sands" was not the result of empirical observation, but of a changing geographical understanding. It was the Chinese retreat from Central Asia after the Tang that turned the region from "fields of mulberry and hems" into "ten thousand *li* of yellow sands." These were sands of unintelligibility in a newly fragmented state of geographical knowledge.¹

In this section, I shall now further discuss this fragmented state of geographical knowledge in and of the Hexi region from various perspectives using the following sources: 1. Geographical works and maps produced by the Song state in China; 2. A Chinese itinerary to India; 3. The records in Tibetan about the trips of a Chinese monk; 4. Geographical works produced locally in the Dunhuang state; 5. The Khotanese itinerary around Hexi; and 6. The Persian geography of the world. Reading these sources in the context of Tang imperial knowledge about Eastern Eurasia discussed in the first section, the most salient feature of the status of geographical knowledge collectively reflected by these works is perhaps that they were all, compared to the Tang knowledge, fragmentary.

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space* (Oxford UK; Cambridge, US: Blackwell, 1991).

None of these realms of knowledge alone can be used to make sense of the travels of Wang Fengxian in 733. Clearly, a coherent and self-sufficient (in the area of Eastern Eurasia) Tang geography in the eighth century gave way to several overlapping realms of “broken geographies.”

1.3.1: The Disappearance of the Hexi Region from Chinese Geographical Works

The emergence of this new status of “broken geographies” began with the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763), when the Tang empire’s effective control of the Hexi region as well as of Eastern Central Asia gradually eroded and eventually collapsed. Indeed, nowhere else is the break and the destruction of the Tang geographical information system more complete and severe than in the northwest. From the late-eighth century, the Hexi Corridor was already under Tibetan control. Even though some of the places in this region, notably Dunhuang, nominally “returned” to the Tang central government by the mid-ninth century, after the collapse of the Tibetan Empire, they were treated more like foreign vassal states than integral parts of the empire.¹ The Song dynasty (960-1279) “reunited” a large part of the land formerly under Tang rule, but the North and Northwest were permanently “lost.” By the tenth century, unlike in the case of Wang Fengxian in

¹ This sentiment is captured by the poems exchanged between Dunhuang monks and monks in Chang’an at the time. See P.3720, P.3886, S.4654 (documents in the Pelliot collection in Bibliotheque Nationale and the Stein collection in the BL), in Xu Jun 徐俊, *Dunhuang shiji canjuan jikao* 敦煌詩集殘卷輯考, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 339.

the seventh century, the road from the Chinese capital to Central Asia was broken into many sections, both geographically and epistemologically.

The ways that this loss was dealt with can be clearly seen in Song geographies and maps. *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰宇記 is a monumental work dealing with the domain of the Song during the Taiping xinguo 太平興國 era (976-983). It includes a section on the Longyou circuit (chapters 150-156). On the surface, this section looks no different from most other sections of the book, which include prefectural regions together with their geographical location, history, and various other local features and information. But a closer reading of the contents in the entries of Hexi region reveals a picture that distinguishes it from other regions covered by the book. The entry for the major city Ganzhou, for instance, clearly indicates that it was “abolished 廢.” This is of course a judgment made from the Song perspective, as we know that the Uyghur state was alive and well in the Ganzhou region during the time that the Song geography was composed.¹

More pertinent to the current topic is the geographical information on the Hexi region contained in *Taiping huanyu ji*. The entries for each of the prefectures in Hexi contain, among other things, the distances to Kaifeng (the Eastern Capital), Luoyang (the Western Capital), and Chang’an. This again gives the impression that these regions were more or less geographically intelligible to Yue Shi 樂史 (930-1007), the editor of the text. However, an investigation into the actual numbers of distances recorded indicates a much messier state of knowledge. In the following table, I have listed the distances to the three major cities recorded in *Taiping huanyu ji*:

¹ James Russell Hamilton, *Les Ouïghours à l'époque des cinq dynasties d'après les documents chinois*, Bibliothèque de l'Institut des hautes études chinoises, v. 10 (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des hautes études chinoises, 1988).

Table 1.1: Cities in Hexi and their distances to Kaifeng, Luoyang, & Chang’an

Places	Distance to Kaifeng	Distance to Luoyang	Distance to Chang’an
Liangzhou	3290 (derivational)	2870 (Tongdian)	1800 (New)
Ganzhou	3780 (Tongdian, distance from Luoyang to Suzhou) ¹	3760 (copied from Suzhou entry in Tongdian)	2500 (Yuanhe junxian tuzhi)
Suzhou	4180 (derivational)	3760 (Yuanhe junxian tuzhi)	2900 (Yuanhe junxian tuzhi)
Shazhou	5029 (derivational)	4609 (Tongdian)	3859 (Tongdian) ²
Guazhou	4726 (derivational)	4306 ³ (Tongdian)	3384 (Tongdian)

The numbers followed by (Tongdian) indicate that they were copied from the Tang encyclopedia *Tongdian* composed by Du You’s 杜佑 (735-821);⁴ whereas the ones followed by *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* were taken from the geographical work by Jia Dan 賈耽 (730-805). But Du and Jia, of course, only recorded the numbers relating to the two capitals during the Tang: Chang’an and Luoyang. The way that Yue Shi came up with the distance to Kaifeng was, in fact, by simply adding 420 *li* to the distance to Luoyang.⁵ All of the numbers calculated in this manner are marked “derivational” in the chart.

Therefore, in this set of fifteen numbers, only one was based on new information: the distance from Chang’an to Liangzhou. Indeed, Yue Shi flagged this point by clearly saying that his information was based on traveling on a newly opened road. While such manipulation of numbers might not seem to have been too strange to us, for geographers

¹ This is an interesting example where the Song editor made a double error. First, he copied the information for Suzhou into the Ganzhou entry, which shows that his knowledge about these two places and their distance was shaky. But the second and more interesting error is that he then confused the Tang eastern capital (Luoyang) with the Song eastern capital (Kaifeng), and copied the distance to Tang Luoyang and used it as the distance between Ganzhou and Kaifeng.

² The Tongdian number here is 3759.

³ This number is corrected from an original 4360.

⁴ Du You, *Tongdian* 通典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 1988.

⁵ In chapter one of this same text, Yue Shi clearly indicates that the distance between Luoyang and Kaifeng was 420 *li*.

during the Tang it is a practice generally avoided, because the distances they recorded were based on numbers of *li* covered by travelers reported by local officials, rather than absolute geographical distances. For instance, the numbers in the Tang texts *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* and *Tongdian* are clearly derived from rather different sources and are therefore consistently different from each other. No effort was made to eliminate these differences.

This growing unfamiliarity with the geographical information in the Hexi region continued in subsequent Song geographical works. *Yuanfeng jiuyu zhi* 元豐九域志, which was composed in 1080, got rid of the pretense of *Taiping huanyu ji*, and listed *all* the cities tabulated above in the last chapter, titled “*Combined or Eliminated Prefectures and Military Commandaries* 省廢州軍,” in the section of the Anxi Military Commandery 安西都護府 of the Tang. It did so even though, during the Tang, they were parts of the Longyou circuit and never included in the Anxi Commandery. Unlike entries of other official prefectures, the entries for cities from Liangzhou to Shazhou did not list their distances to the capital Kaifeng. This trend was continued in Southern Song geographical works. Neither *Yudi jisheng* 輿地紀勝, by Wang Xiangzhi 王象之, or *Fangyu shenglan* 方輿勝覽, by Zhu Mu 祝穆, contains any information about this region. The geography of Hexi, by the Southern Song, became a historical relic, recoverable only from existing Tang sources, and was no longer being updated.

This state of knowledge is partially reflected in contemporary Song maps as well. An 1136 stone carving includes a map on either side. The recto is the *Yuji Tu* (禹跡圖 Map of the Traces of the King Yu) and the verso is *Huayi Tu* (華夷圖 Map of China and

the Barbarians).¹ These names reveal the basic nature and difference between the two maps: the first one, recording the traces of the legendary king Yu, charts what the Song cartographers considered to be part of the Hua/Chinese ecumene; the second one outlines *both* the Chinese (*hua*) and the foreign (*yi*) lands. In order not to lose the claimed proportionality of the map, the mapmakers went out of their way to include the farthest-flung place of Shazhou (Dunhuang), which resulted in the large empty space in the southwest (See Figure 1.1). Yet on the other map, *Huayi tu*, the proportion was greatly distorted to fit more places on the map (See Figure 1.2). In the *Huayi tu*, not only were “Chinese” places included, but also most of the known non-Chinese places.

Accompanying the Hexi area in the *Huayi tu* we find the following inscription recounting its history:

The five prefectures (beginning with) Liang and Gan were (the area where) the Emperor Wu of Han took the land of the Hunye and Xiutu kings and established four prefectures of Hexi. To the south it shields against various Qiang peoples; holding the two passes, the right arm of the Xiongnu is cut off and the Western Regions are connected. Tribute came in uninterruptedly since the early Song.

涼、甘五州即漢武時取渾邪休屠王地置河西四郡，南隔諸羌，據二關，斷匈奴右臂，以通西域。宋初以來朝貢不絕。

The story told here about the history of the “five prefectures” is very similar to the one we possess according to the research of modern historians cited in the introduction, with one very significant exception: the most immediate predecessor of the Song, the Tang, was not mentioned at all; and the transition from being part of the Han to being outside the control of the Song is only seen in the subtle change of subject: whereas during the

¹ See Hilde De Weerdts “Maps and Memory: Readings of Cartography in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Song China,” *Imago Mundi*, 61:2 (2009): 145-167.

Han it served important strategic purposes, in the Song the relation became a tributary one: “tribute came in uninterruptedly since the early Song.” This change is stated in a matter-of-fact fashion, in stark contrast to the strongly irredentist sensation felt about the land in the northwest, the sixteen Prefectures of Yan-yun region.¹ By attaching this short descriptive passage to the Hexi region, the Song cartographers were implying that, just like other regions with such explanatory notes on the *Huayi tu*, the Hexi region was also not part of the world known geographically as being within the Chinese state, none of whose regions bear any description in the map. The Hexi region turned from an “unmarked” land within the Tang empire to a land on which the audience of the map had to be instructed. The juxtaposition of the two maps conveys the ambiguity of the transitional status of the Hexi region clearly: whereas in the *Yuji tu*, the Hexi region was included in the Chinese ecumene, in the *Huayi tu* it was excluded and clearly distinguished from the more properly “Chinese” regions.

¹ David Curtis Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Parity in Eleventh-Century China: Sung's Foreign Relations with Kitan Liao*, History of Warfare, v. 33 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 39-99.

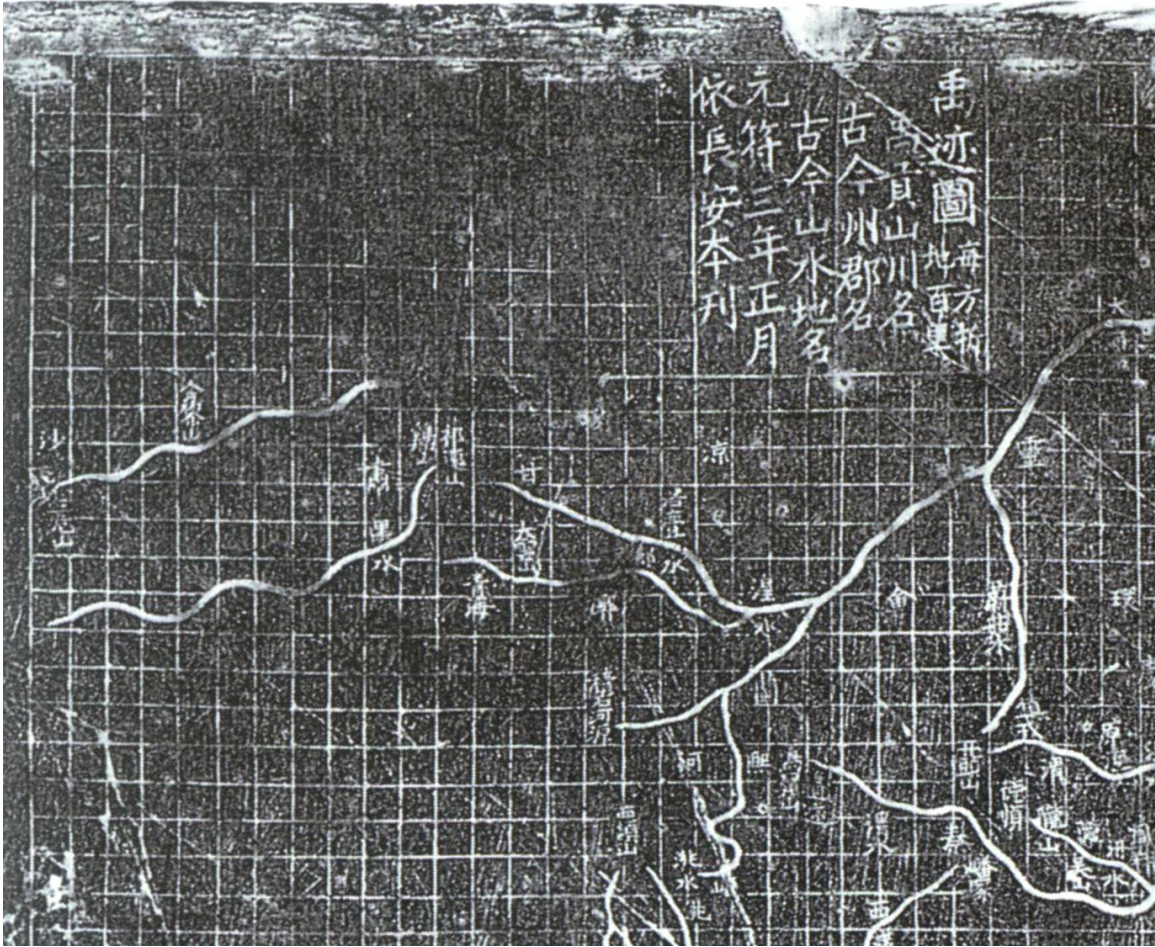


Figure 1.1 – Yuji tu (Map of the Traces of King Yu)¹

¹ Dunhuang (marked by 沙 Sha for Shazhou) is on the left edge at the middle of the map, on the first line of water. This image is based on an 1100 version of what is essentially the same map.



Figure 1.2: The upper left (Northwest) section of the *Huayi tu*

The Song understanding of the status of the Hexi region reached canonical form in the first extant map collection in Chinese history: *Lidai dili zhizhang tu* 歷代地理指掌圖 (Handbook of the Geography of the Successive Dynasties), composed from 1098-1100 by Shui Anli 稅安禮.¹ Curiously, the region under discussion was, in these maps as well as several other Song maps, placed *between* two great walls (see Figure 1.2). The northern segment of the great wall purportedly described the Han wall and the southern

¹ Shui Anli 稅安禮, *Song ben lidai dili zhizhangtu* 宋本歷代地理指掌圖 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe), 1989.

segment the Qin wall.¹ This manner of representation, dubiously founded in history, betrays a sense of ambiguity that was generally felt about this region by the Song intellectuals. As Arthur Waldron and Nick Tackett argued – the former in the general treatment of the Great Wall and the latter in a paper written on the Song great wall in particular – a continuous Great Wall as such was never a historical reality but rather a cultural construction summoned most frequently by the need of the state.² This map is no exception: the long, continuous Great Wall separated China from Barbarians in the mind of the geographer and his readers. Within the great wall, routes are closely connected to each other, weaving the entire Song state into a geographical body intelligible anywhere within itself. Beyond the great wall, the routes became sparse, disconnected, and in some places non-existent. Therefore, this map echoes the worldview exemplified by the previous two maps in the sense that they are not only maps of China and the Barbarians, but also maps of the known and the unknown in geographical terms. And the Hexi region enjoyed an ambiguous place in this dichotomy.

¹ For a study of the Northern Song concept of the Great Wall, see Nicolas Tackett, “The Great Wall and Conceptualizations of the Border under the Northern Song,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, no. 38 (2008): 99–138.

² Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth*, Cambridge Studies in Chinese History, Literature, and Institutions (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Tackett, “The Great Wall.”

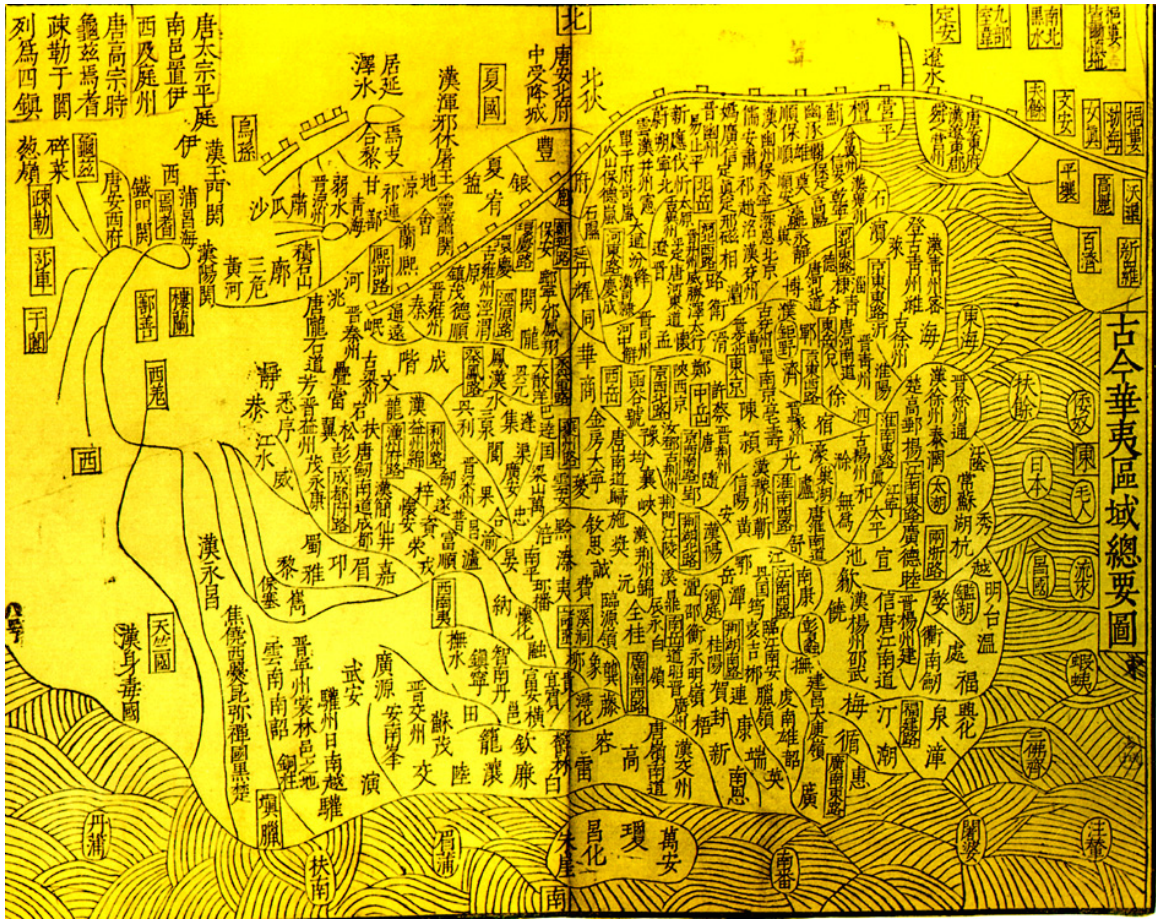


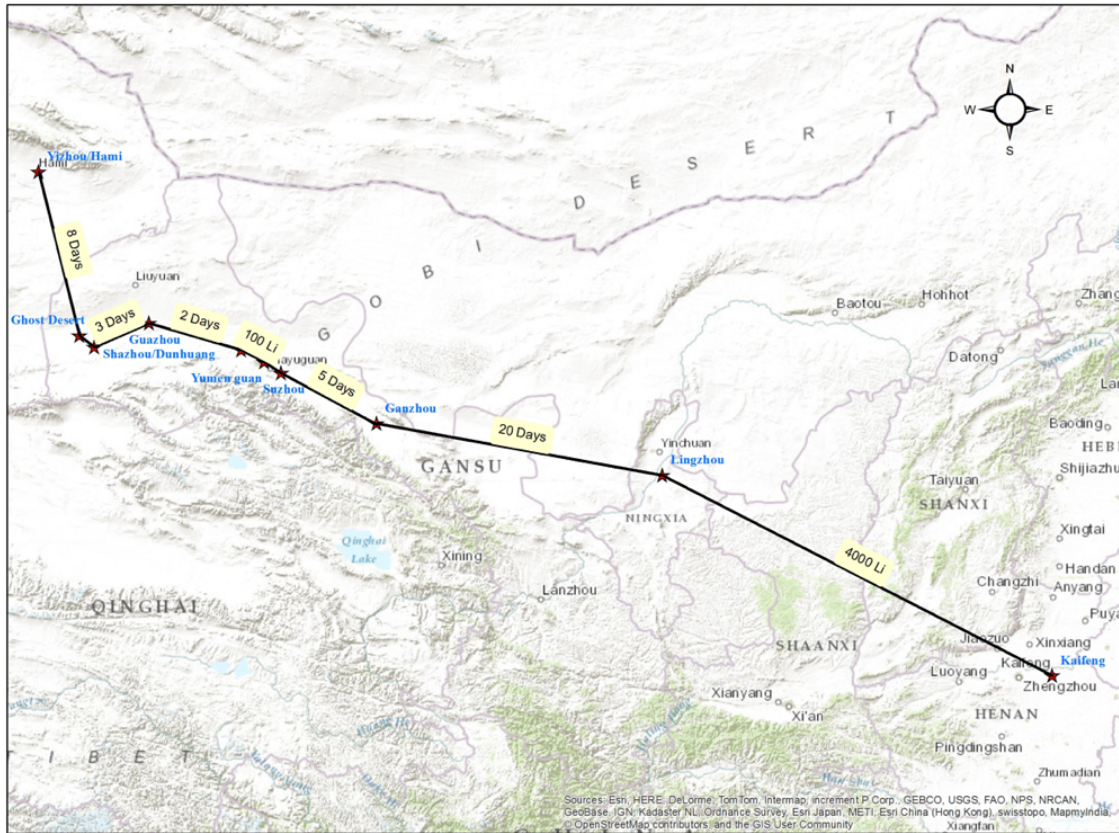
Figure 1.3: A Complete Map of China/Barbarians from Antiquity to the Present

1.3.2: “Broken Geographies” Produced at Dunhuang

Such diminishing intelligibility about the Hexi region in the Chinese records produced in the Song can be constructively read against other records produced outside of China proper. The status between the known Chinese world and the unknown non-Chinese one is, for instance, complicated in a manuscript discovered at Dunhuang (Stein

383) titled *A Path to India* (*Xitian lujing* 西天路徑).” (See Map 1.4) As the title of the manuscript indicates, it is a record about the road for the use of Buddhist pilgrims in China leading eventually to India. It begins, as most of this type of writing does, with the capital of the China at the time, the city of Kaifeng of the Song dynasty. The second stop in this guide is, however, quite surprising. It was not anywhere close to the capital, but was about 1000 miles away at Shuofang. Only after Shuofang does the text become a real guide in the sense that it starts listing days a traveler would have to spend to reach the next stop. The distances between these stops also become drastically shorter. The text lists, after Shuofang, four stops before it reaches Dunhuang (this section is marked light blue).

The strategy of showing information in this text is essentially the same as for the maps I discussed earlier, particularly the *Huayi tu*, in the sense that only unknown places are explained. Presumably, a traveler using this text would have already had knowledge about all the places between Kaifeng and Shuofang, all of which were within the political domain of the Song state. The geographical knowledge for places between Shuofang and Kaifeng was largely similar to the *tujing*-based system of knowledge produced in the Tang dynasty. But the places west of Shuofang formed a different group that had to be made known in a different manner. *A Path to India* therefore complements this existing knowledge in the Song state with new information about places beyond Shuofang. In this way, the old Tang system was broken into two parts, the part that was well known to the Song as well as the part that needed to be learned in travel manuals such as *A Path to India*. The point of fracture is the area of Shuofang (also known as Lingzhou).



Map 1.4: First section of “A Path to India”

This situation of “broken geographies” is not only found in Chinese geographical texts, but also in non-Chinese sources. A Tibetan manuscript from Dunhuang about a Chinese monk’s route to India begins in this manner:

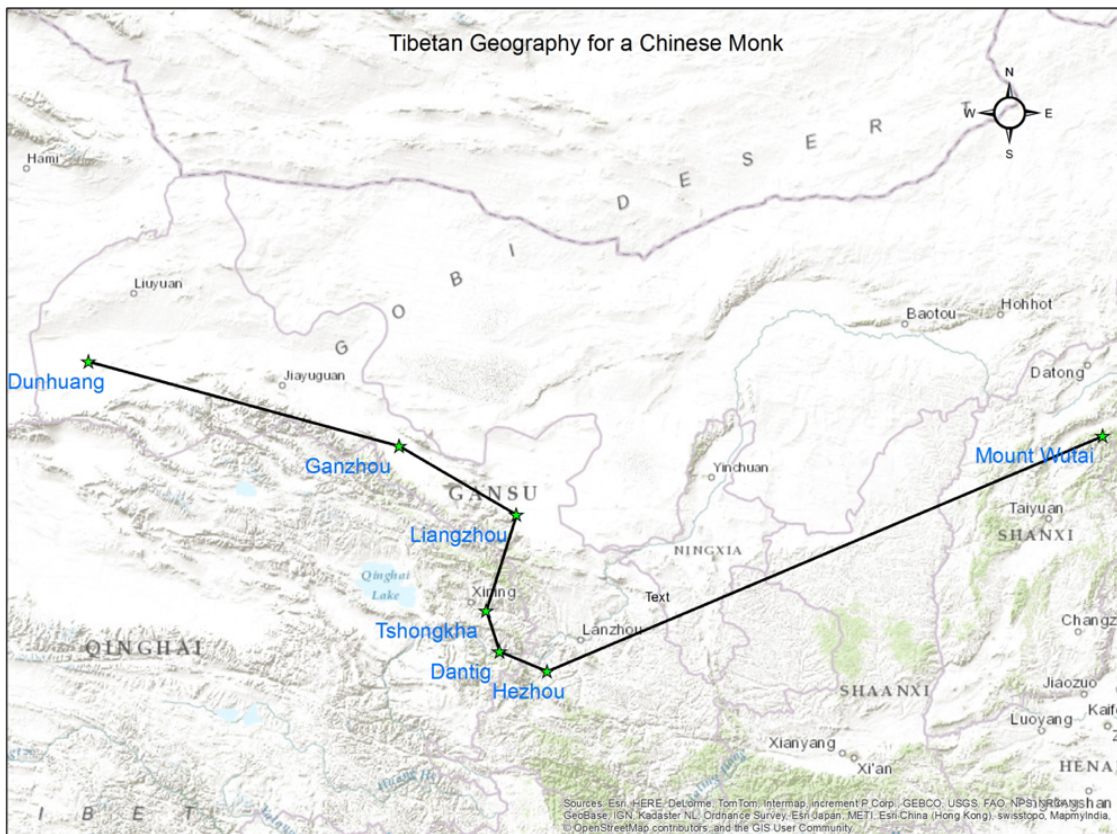
Proceeding from Wutaishan he arrived at the gold and turquoise halls of Hezhou; after that he arrived at the mountain of Dantig Shan; after that he arrived at the gold and turquoise halls of Tsongkha; after that he will arrive at the palace of Liangzhou; after that he will arrive at the castle of Ganzhou; after that he will arrive at Shazhou. After that he will certainly go to see the great teachers of Śrī Nālandā and the relics of Śākyamuni at the Vulture’s Peak in India.¹

¹ van Schaik and Galambos, *Manuscripts and Travelers*, 161-62.

Here again, we see that the long distance between Mount Wutai in the heart of north China and Hezhou at the Song border is eliminated from the record (See Map 1.5). The scope of both works are similar in very interesting ways. According to the record of the Chinese monk in Tibetan, “[p]roceeding from Wutaishan he arrived at the gold and turquoise halls of Hezhou.” While both records seem to have no interest in recording where the paths were between their first two destinations, the rationales behind these two maps are perhaps slightly different. The first record left out the parts in “China proper” because they were familiar to the readers of the text, whereas the second one left them out most likely because they were *unfamiliar* or irrelevant. Although this text is about a Chinese monk, it is part of a letter between Tibetan monasteries from a Tibetan monk requesting help from other monasteries. That the monk must have passed many places within China therefore did not matter much to the writer. What did matter were the places and monasteries passed by the monk that would make sense to the recipient of the letter: the Tibetan monasteries along the way. In a rather different manner, this letter also illustrates the break between a Chinese Buddhist world and a Tibetan one that mirrors the broken state of geographies exhibited in *A Path to India*. In this case, the juncture of two realms of knowledge is Hezhou, another area on the Song border to the south of Lingzhou/Shuofang.

These cases show that the fragmentation of geographical knowledge did not happen in a haphazard fashion. Instead, as Chinese knowledge retreated to only managing China proper and non-Chinese knowledge about geographies to its west became more visible, a clear boundary in the modern Ningxia and east Gansu region between two realms of knowledge also emerged. What is interesting about the Tibetan record is that it

not only has a beginning (Mount Wutai), but also a terminus: Dunhuang. And the only places that were recorded in this passage in detail are places between Hezhou and Dunhuang. Although the monk must have been walking further west, as his stated destination was India, this letter only recorded one section of the road, indicating that the Hexi Corridor, effectively the region between Hezhou and Dunhuang, did form a single unit of geographical knowledge. This region was shown as distinct from both the Chinese geography to its east and the Central Asian geography to its west.



Map 1.5: Tibetan Geography between Mount Wutai and Dunhuang

The other disjunction from knowledge of Central Asia at Dunhuang can be illustrated by a geography of the Dunhuang area found in P.2695 (See figure 1.4), which contains a section that lists the Six Routes that belong to the prefecture.¹ The record on these routes not only includes fairly detailed lists of the places these routes passed, but also information on the existence or absence of springs, water, and grass, as well as the status of the road (dangerous, closed, etc.). The most interesting aspect of this section of the geography is, however, what is *not* there. As we know, the main road that leads to Dunhuang was likely the one that connected it to its eastern neighbors, most prominently Guazhou but also many others. Yet in this list, only routes that lead to the south and west were included. Here, I argue, is another example of what one may term “educated omission,” because the routes that connect Dunhuang to the east were very well known through other sources, and there was no need to put them in this geography. This fact also implies that this geographical work was made for practical use, and the inclusion of superfluous information was carefully avoided to save space in a manuscript culture where paper was extremely cherished. Therefore, the geographical knowledge was further broken into smaller sections at Dunhuang, with the routes to the east of Dunhuang being known and unmarked and the routes to its west unknown and therefore marked.

¹ The “P” in P.2695 is short for Pelliot. In this dissertation, I use the generally accepted shorthand of P. (Pelliot collection at the Bibliothèque nationale de France) and S. (Stein collection at the British Library) to refer to the documents I cite. With a number such as P.2695, more information on the document can be easily found in catalogues such as Dunhuang yanjiu yuan ed., *Dunhuang yishu zongmu suoyin xinbian* 敦煌遗书总目索引新编 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), and their images can, in most cases, be found on the International Dunhuang Project website.

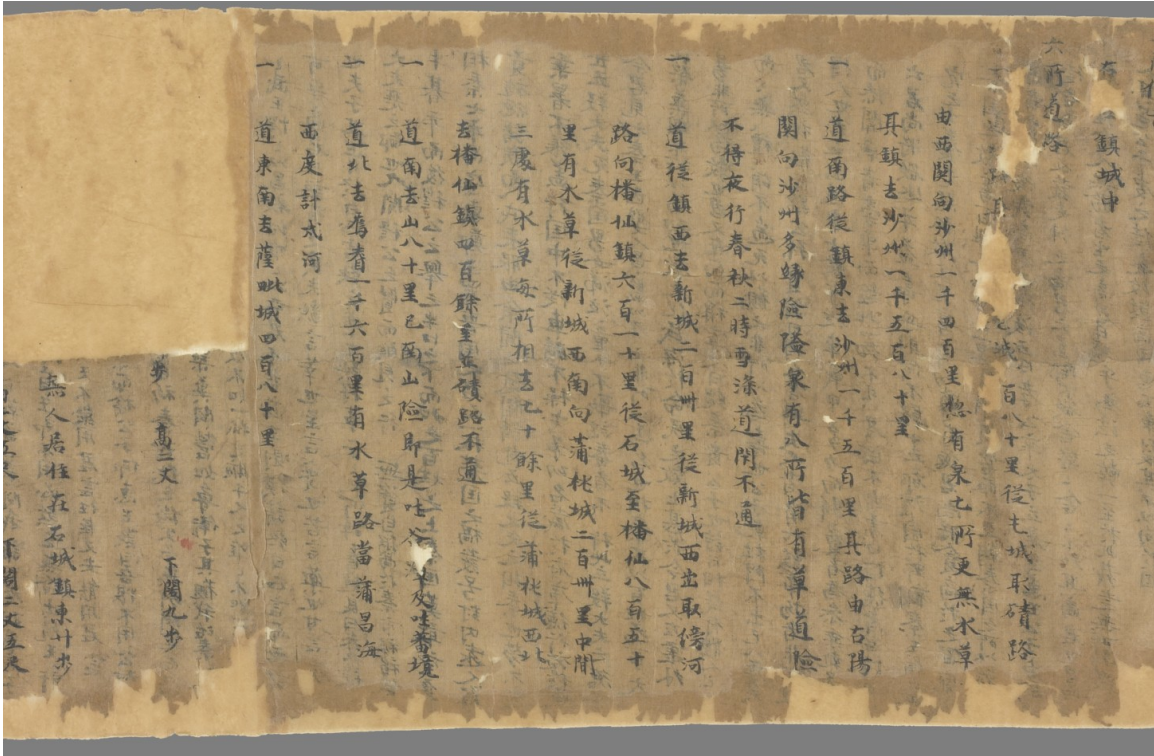


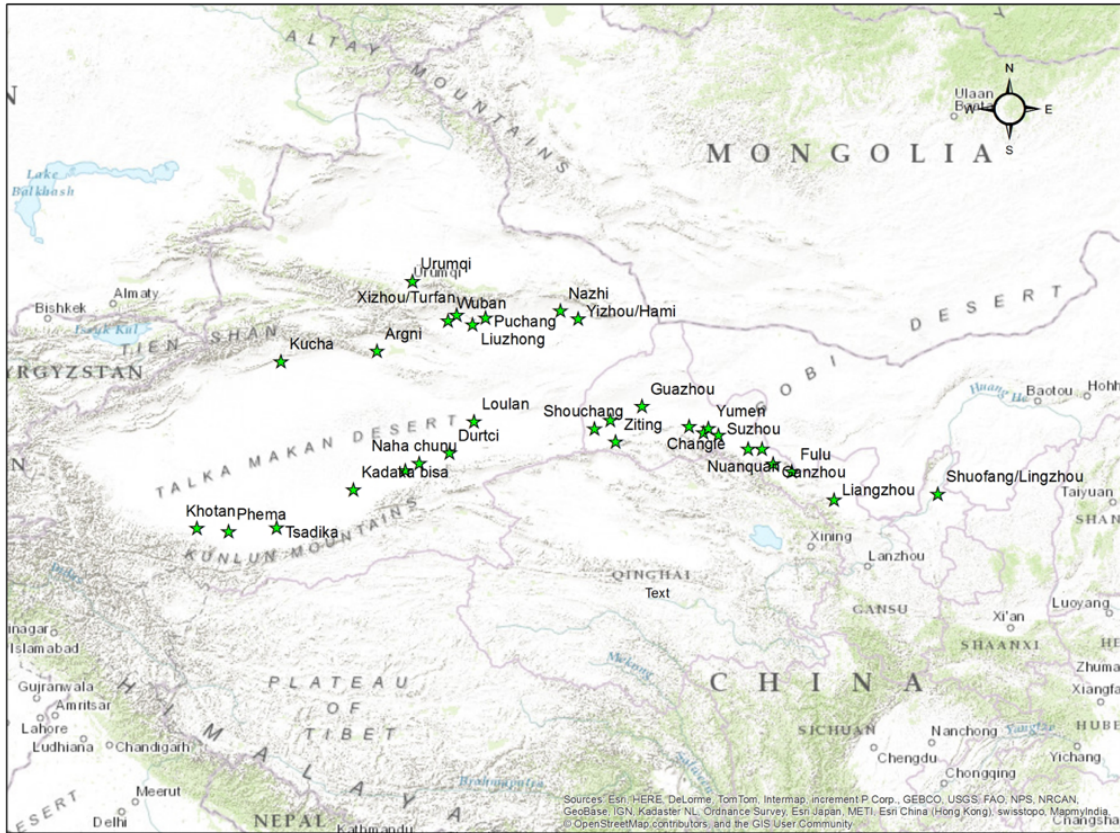
Figure 1.4: Dunhuang Geography found in P.2695

A similar case is found in the famous Staël-Holstein Miscellany, which includes a Tibetan and a Khotanese part.¹ The Khotanese part contains four sections that are not apparently connected to each other. The second section has to do with a group of envoys and their geographical knowledge. It is divided into two parts. The first part is a list of the places one would have to pass going from Khotan to Shuofang/Lingzhou; and the second part is a list of all the “cities of Xizhou (Turfan).” In this manuscript, clearly, the roads were divided into two sections that are only internally meaningful. The two sections do not intersect with each other. Therefore, for the Khotanese travelers from Central Asia,

¹ F. W. Thomas & S. Konow, “Two Medieval Documents from Tun-huang,” *Oslo Ethnografiske Museums Skrifter*, vol. 3, hefte 3 (1929): 1-40; H. W. Bailey, “The Staël-Holstein Miscellany,” *Asia Major*, n. s., II.1, (1951): 1-45. Translations of texts are revised by me.

the area between Shuofang and Khotan formed one unit of geographical knowledge, whereas the areas around Turfan formed another.

Several other features of these lists are of interest. First of all, although many of the names in the list were originally Chinese, the list itself did not follow the administrative divisions made by the Chinese; instead of using concepts such as prefecture or county, places were defined as “city” or “large city.” There are also a number of names that cannot yet be identified. Some of them are clearly of non-Chinese origin. These places were once obscured in Chinese geographies in the Tang works treating the same region and only appeared now in these non-Chinese sources. Therefore, the fragmentation of the Tang geographical understanding did not merely result in the loss of knowledge. In this and many other cases involving non-Chinese sources, the lack of a coherent Chinese geography in fact facilitated the preservation of non-Chinese alternatives.



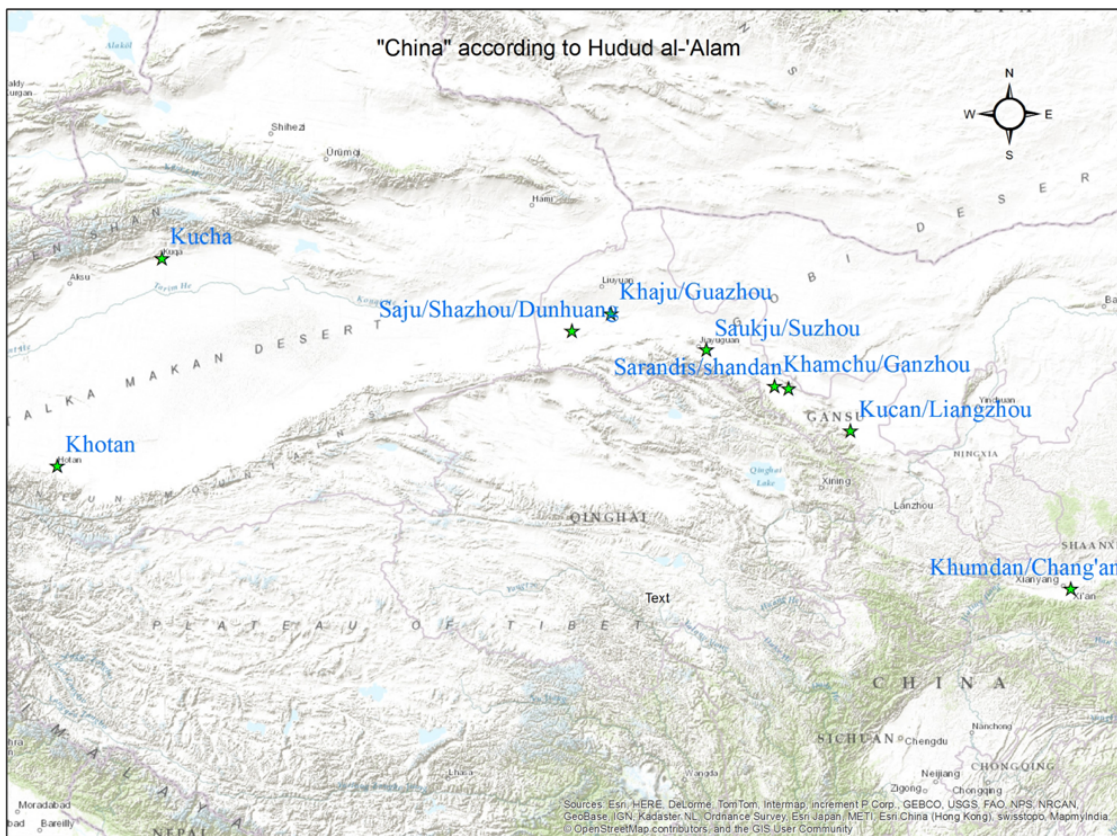
Map 1.6: Geography of the Staël-Holstein Miscellany

1.3.3: A Persian Geography of “China”

This status of fragmentation of preservation is, finally, also visible in contemporary Islamic geographical works. *Hudūd al-‘Ālam* (“Regions of the World”) was a Persian geography composed in 982 CE by an anonymous author. It contains, among other things, a most detailed description of the geography of the eastern border of the *Dār al-Islām*, and the section on China is particularly relevant for us. This section

includes the following places (for the sake of clarity, I have left out Central Asian places such as Khotan and Kucha):¹

- Khumdan (Chang'an)
- Kašan (?)
- Sājū < Shazhou
- Xājū < Guazhou
- Kūymar (?)
- Burj-i Sangīn “stone-tower” < translation of Chinese 石堡城 Shibao cheng
- Sōkjū < Suzhou
- Xāmčū < Ganzhou
- Xālbak (?)
- Kučān < Guzang, the older and likely non-Chinese name for Liangzhou
- Bayšūr < Tibetan ‘Bug-chor



Map 1.7: “China” according to *Hudūd al-‘Ālam*

¹ Vladimir Minorsky trans., *Hudūd Al-‘Ālam*. For a general view of the interaction between Chinese and Islamic geographies, see Hyunhee Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds: Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-Modern Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Evidently, what the author of *Hudūd al-‘Ālam* understood to be “China” was essentially the Hexi region plus the capital Chang’an. This mirrors in an intriguing way the Song knowledge of the West, which included practically the Hexi region and some places in Central Asia. Therefore, the Hexi region was evidently an integral part of the geographical knowledge of both the Chinese and the Islamic worlds in the tenth century. Additionally, although most of the recognizable names were transcribed from Chinese, we still see older non-Chinese names such as Kučān for Liangzhou (transcribed in Chinese as 姑臧), which was already found in the 4th century Sogdian Ancient Letters. The Islamic geographer seems to have had a slightly different view of the Hexi region, incorporating place-names that are not found in the Chinese sources. What was shared by these two traditions in the tenth century was that neither of them covered the entirety of Eastern Eurasia in the way that the Tang did in the eighth century.¹

From Chinese and Persian geographies to Khotanese and Tibetan travel accounts, the examples I have discussed in this section indeed show that the Tang system of knowledge and the geographical intelligibility it produced was by the ninth and tenth centuries broken into smaller pieces. Yet what these examples also show is that they were not meaningless pieces. Indeed, it was in the breaking-down of the old system that the regional coherence of the Hexi Corridor and its significance in the production of geographical knowledge in East Eurasia became immediately visible. The Song geographical works (no.1) and the Persian geography (no.6) are similar in that both

¹ A similar case can be made for the understanding of geography by al-Marvazī, see Vladimir Minorsky, *Sharaf al-Zamān Tāhir Marvazī on China, the Turks, and India; Arabic Text (circa A.D. 1120)*, James G. Forlong Fund (Series); Vol. 22 (London, The Royal Asiatic Society, 1942).

included the Hexi region in its entirety in addition to their respective “proper” regions. Clearly, Hexi in the tenth century became a place well known to both Chinese and Islamic worlds as a shared periphery. More importantly, both traditions seem not to have felt the need to know anything beyond the Hexi region. The coherence of the Hexi region is also illustrated by other examples, where the records of places end either at the western end of the region of Shazhou/Dunhuang or at the eastern end of the region. Therefore, I argue that the fragmentation of Tang imperial knowledge led to several internally meaningful and coherent broken realms of geographies. For travelers on the Silk Road, China Proper, the Hexi region, and Central Asia were clearly distinctive realms that were often known from different sources of geographical knowledge. How, then, did these realms speak to one another? Did this state of broken geographies hinder people’s ability to travel? This issue will be addressed in the next section.

1.4: New Sites and New Knowledge

The preceding section shows that, after the fall of the Tang, geographical knowledge about the Hexi region and adjacent areas ceased to be the monopoly of the Chinese empire, and various different types of geographical works collectively replaced the older Tang system. In this section, I shall demonstrate how new geographical intelligibility was produced within the framework of “broken geographies.” The older system was replaced by several newer systems that, I argue, closely connected to and communicated with each other at key junctures through knowledge production of various

kinds. This diverse yet connected new system of geographical knowledge enabled travelers to make sense of where they were and where they were heading.

How exactly did these broken realms of knowledge connect and communicate as a meaningful and operative whole? And more specifically, *where* did such processes of connection and communication take place? The old imperial system of knowledge was based on governmental geographies contributed triennially by local officials of from every region of the empire. The integration of these diverse sources of information occurred in the capital city of Chang'an, where the *tujing* (illustrated geographies) from different regions were edited and put together as Records of the Ten Circuits (*shidao lu*).¹ But as I have indicated above, the Song capital officials were increasingly unaware of the situation of the Hexi region and beyond, and the same situation most likely held true vice versa. Therefore, the location of geographical knowledge production was no longer solely the Chinese capital. Where else, then, did such knowledge production take place?

1.4.1: Geographical Knowledge Production in Lingzhou

A fragmentary piece of a letter written in 850 by the Dunhuang envoys to the Tang court offers important insight into this question.² Although about half of each line is missing, we can still gather important information from what is left: seven of the envoys from Dunhuang reached Lingzhou 靈州, and with one missing, for reasons unknown, six

¹ For an example of this type of document see Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, "Dunhuang ben *Tianbao shidao lu* jiqi jiazhi 敦煌本<天寶十道錄>及其價值," *Jiuzhou* 2 (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1999), 116-129.

² P. 2748.

of them offered a map of Hexi to the court. As we know from other sources, Lingzhou was by the late Tang the crucial stronghold for Tang dealings with its western neighbors and remained so throughout the tenth century.¹ Envoys from the west usually had to stop at Lingzhou first, and then a decision was made as to who among them could be allowed to proceed to China proper.² The offering of the map by envoys from Dunhuang at Lingzhou, a clear sign of political submission, indicates that knowledge about the Hexi region during late Tang was already becoming less clear. The existence of the map of Hexi as well as the many people with geographical knowledge about the Hexi region in Lingzhou would therefore allow travelers departing from Lingzhou to make sense of the areas further afield to the west.

Other sources corroborate such a significance for Lingzhou. Following is a letter (P. 2958) written by a “Prince of Shuofang” named Hva Pa-kyau to the King of Khotan written in Khotanese. Shuofang was an alternative name of Lingzhou:³

To the great king of the land of China (meaning Khotan, see Ch.6 of this dissertation) over Ratna-janapada (Jeweled state, meaning Khotan), ruling in Jambudvīpa, famous among the four dvīpas (continents). There so I make a report, the humble *pravrajita* the prince of Śvāhvām, Hva Pa-kyau. ... The road to Ttāṃhtta has been disrupted. I shall go away to Ratna-janapada. These things (worth) two hundred śaca I have brought to Thaśa from far away. I was going as messenger to Ratna-janapada so that I might make a report as (?) the donation for the court.

¹ Maeda Masana, *Kasei no rekishi-chirigakuteki kenkyū*; Zhen Zhao 趙貞, *Guiyijun shishi kaolun 歸義軍史事考論* (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010).

² P.3547.

³ The text reads as follows: tcarrvā dvīpvā nama tsalaka jabvī dvīpa baida rāauysanauda ranījai janavai vīra maistyai caiga rauda vara tta haṣḍa yanai ṅaśa prravai śvāhvām raispūra hva pakyaū ṅaśa ... ttāhtta-vadā pada narrvai ttāṣṭa janavai vīrāṣṭa hāysa tsai ttu dvī-sa śaca hai'ra tha śa ttāṣṭa hāysa buḍai ttāṣṭa ttā janavai vīrāṣṭa tsamadai hvai na yai ca ttā rrvī va tcainahū haṣḍa yanīna.

Although it is difficult, at the moment, to know where this place Ttāmḥtta is or the exact context in which these events occurred, the letter clearly is concerned about geography. Just like the previous case, information about the Khotanese envoys and monks would have been exchanged in Lingzhou, and was then sent out by the “prince” of Lingzhou to the king of Khotan. The prince subsequently informed the king of Khotan about the situation of the road to Ttāmḥtta. Similarly, the Chinese monk Guiwen who described the areas west of Lingzhou as a stretch of “ten thousand *li* of yellow sands” wrote his letter home to China proper at Lingzhou. If we recall, in addition, the itinerary in *A Path to India* that I discussed in the previous section, which begins its account of the path at Shuofang (=Lingzhou), it is not difficult to see that Lingzhou by the late ninth century had become a new center for the exchange and production of geographical knowledge. This is the result of its status as a border region for the Chinese state from the Late Tang through the “Five Dynasties” to the Song. Travelers within the Chinese domain could make use of the Tang style imperial knowledge still operative under the Chinese dynasties and knew where they were and were heading; upon reaching Lingzhou, they acquired new knowledge about places further west through various means.

It is in the same vein that a Song official, Zhou Wenzhi 周文質, implied that the general area around Lingzhou was a place of geographical transition. In his policy suggestion regarding Arabic travelers to China, he described their land-path as follows:¹

Now they take the path of Shazhou to enter the capital (Kaifeng). After passing the realm of Xiazhou they can reach Weizhou.

¹ 今取道沙州入京，经历夏州境内，方至渭州。See *Song Huiyao jigao* “Fanyi 4” ch.91.

Following this sentence, he offered his suggestions as to how these travelers should best be regulated. It is interesting that he only listed three names among all the places an Arabic traveler had to have passed to get to the Song court. This short list is clearly not meant to serve as a guide, only as a summary of stops that Zhou deemed important. The choice of these places is interesting when put in the context of the “broken geographies” described in the previous section: Xiazhou was very close to Lingzhou/Shoufang, and this choice serves as yet another example of the significance of the Lingzhou area; the significance of Weizhou, located in the modern southern Gansu province, can be similarly understood. More curious are the inclusion of Shazhou/Dunhuang and the expression of “taking the path of Shazhou.” Presumably, by “taking the path of Shazhou,” Zhou Wenzhi was talking about the path through the Hexi Corridor from Shazhou/Dunhuang to the Lingzhou/Shoufang area, namely from the western end to the eastern end of the Hexi Corridor. Zhou’s inclusion of Shazhou (=Dunhuang) indicates the significance of the Dunhuang area as a key part of his geographical information on the Arabic travelers.

1.4.2: Geographical Knowledge Production at Dunhuang

Indeed, Shazhou/Dunhuang was significant because a process of geographical knowledge production similar to that in Lingzhou was occurring there. At the end of a geographical work on Shazhou and Yizhou (Hami), we find the following colophon:¹

¹ S.367.

On the 25th day of the twelfth month of the first year of Guangqin era (885-886), on the occasion of the arrival at our prefecture (Shazhou=Dunhuang) of Gentleman Si, the Pacifying Envoy from Lingzhou, Zhang Daqing copied this document from Gentleman Si.

Therefore, when the envoys headed by Gentleman Si from Lingzhou came to Dunhuang, a local official named Zhang Daqing (張大慶) took the chance to copy this geographical account from the envoys. The text contains extensive information not only on Dunhuang itself but also on Yizhou/Hami, an important city to the northwest of Dunhuang. The activity of copying geographical works is a crucial and perhaps the most direct aspect of the transmission and production of new geographical knowledge. We know that local geographies such as the *Illustrated Geography of Shazhou (Shazhou Tujing)* provided tremendously detailed information on places one might.¹ What is especially interesting with this manuscript (S.367) is the directionality of its content. The first half of the manuscript included information on the counties and places to the south and southwest of Shazhou, whereas the second part turns north and records the route and domain to the northwest of Shazhou. This of course reminds one of the geographical text on P.2695 which, as I have shown, records only routes west of Shazhou. In a very similar way, S.367 could serve as a detailed compliment to geographies such as P.2695 to be used by people traveling to the west of Shazhou.

It is also worth noticing that the envoy from whom Zhang Daqing copied this text was said to have been from Lingzhou. As the Hexi region began to constitute a coherent geographical unit, the production of geographical information about places beyond unsurprisingly occurred most intensively in two areas on both ends of the region: the

¹ Y. Edmund Lien, "Dunhuang Gazetteers of the Tang Period," *Tang Studies* 2009, no. 27 (2009): 19-39.

Shazhou/Dunhuang and the Lingzhou/Shuofang areas. The largest city of the region, Liangzhou (also known as Guzang or Wuwei), rarely featured in these activities of new geographical knowledge production, precisely because its central location in the context of the Hexi region meant that not very much interaction between people with immediately new information was occurring there.

But this is only one of the many ways geographical information was exchanged in Shazhou. Personal letters were widely used to report on the situation (usually political) of a certain region, with implications for the possibility of traveling.¹ Sometimes letters would advise coming to one place rather than another. In this manner, they formed a much less rigid network of knowledge than standard geographies and could adjust to the changing nature of the road in real time. In Pelliot 2786, the lord of Shazhou known as Linggong (“*ling*” being derived from the title *zhongshu ling*) transmitted a piece of information about the road to the Khotanese envoy:

The Linggong issued an order to us [stating] that: “the (Ganzhou) country is in ruins. Therefore, the *ācāryas* will fall on a ‘non-road’, and at the Royal Court anger will arise in the divine mind. The blame will come to us. You did not know the condition of the road. Why did you (= the king?) send the monks out?”

ḍīkau vā vā pārau tta tta pastā sa bījsāttā bāḍa ṣṭai u kaṇa āśa’rya ḡvādāya
kāśārai u rrvī vī vā jastūña ḡsmya ysārā ḡmai āravā hīṣṭa: pada hīyai habā na
baustī āśa’ ḡṣṭai kaiṇa pašāvai:

In this short message, the lord of Shazhou instructed the Khotanese envoy on a number of matters. Most importantly, the land of Ganzhou was “in ruins” and the monks would be traveling on a “non-road (*ḡvādāya*).” This intriguing expression cannot be

¹ James Russell Hamilton, *Manuscrits ouïgours du IXe-Xe siècle de Touen-houang* (Paris: Peeters, 1986).

found, as far as I have seen, in texts in other languages and has to be treated as a Khotanese idiosyncrasy. What it means is nonetheless fairly clear: it is the opposite of a “road” that one can travel. Therefore, the lord of Shazhou is providing information on the changing road to its east to envoys from the kingdom of Khotan. The question at the end (“You did not know the condition of the road. Why did you (= the king?) send the monks out?”) seems to suggest that it was normal practice to “know” the condition of the road before departing. This knowledge clearly is not limited to what is contained in geographical works but also includes more immediate and political situations of the places one proposes to pass by. Reading this passage in conjunction with the previous discussion, Shazhou’s pivotal position in transmitting geographical information about its neighbors to the west (in the form of the copying of geography) and the east (in the form of the instruction to the envoy of Khotan) becomes clear.

Moreover, the transition and production of knowledge often occurred at borders that were not only geographical, but also linguistic. Some privileged travelers, such as Xuanzang, with a tremendous amount of resources at their disposal might hire a guide, a person who presumably would provide geographical information. Other less fortunate travelers might have to rely on textual guides such as bilingual phrasebooks.¹ Such documents found in Shazhou also allowed the flow of newly produced geographical knowledge. A tantalizing record in this regard of approaching the Hexi region from the Perso-Arabic perspective is evident in the account of a traveler, probably in the ninth

¹ Tokio Takata, “Multilingualism in Tun-Huang,” *Acta Asiatica* 78 (2000): 49-70.

century, named Sallām, which is preserved in Ibn Khurdādbih’s *Book of Routes and Kingdoms*:¹

“Then we came to a town called Igu. Its quadrangle is ten *parasangs*, and it has iron gates. ... The journey between this place and the barrier is three days [stages], and between it and the barrier are fortresses and villages, until one arrives at the barrier on the third day [stage]. It is a circular mountain-range. People relate that Gog and Magog dwell in it, and that the two are of two kinds. ... Then we came to a high mountain on top of which was a fortress. The barrier built by ‘the two-horned one’ is [in] a pass between two mountains, 200 cubits wide. That is the road along which they [Gog and Magog] will come out and spread over the earth.”

While the exact location of this “barrier” is elusive, that Sallam passed Igu (clearly from Chinese Yiwu 伊吾 or Yizhou, modern Hami) and journeyed three days eastward passing “fortresses and villages” suggests strongly that he was looking at one of the barriers at the western end of the Hexi region. This route would have been the exact same one recorded in the second half of the geography copied by Zhang Daqing. Emeri van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt in their recent book on Sallam’s travel identified the barrier built by ‘the two-horned one’ as none other than the famous Jade-Gate Pass 玉門關 about fifty miles west of Shazhou.² While a more cautious reader might decide to reserve direct identification, the general location of this barrier is nevertheless still clear. Sallam did not pass this barrier, but he was informed about it and the people living there: they were the Gog and Magog, an elusive group of people already known from the Old

¹ E. J. van Donzel, Andrea B. Schmidt, and Claudia Ott, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources: Sallam’s Quest for Alexander’s Wall*, Brill’s Inner Asian Library; v. 22 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 129.

² Ibid, 220-228.

Testament.¹ In a way similar to the Chinese traveler Gao Juhui, who resorted to old Chinese legends (see the next section), Shazhou was made geographically intelligible to Sallam as well.

Therefore, the two areas where the production of the new system of geographical knowledge in and about the Hexi region was the most active were Lingzhou and Shazhou. Recognizing the significance of these two places in the production of geographical knowledge from the mid-ninth century through the tenth century supports the treatment in this dissertation of the Hexi region as a meaningful entity. More importantly, it shows that, without the support of imperial geographical knowledge supplied from the Chinese capital, local centers of such knowledge began to emerge. Activities such as oral inquiry, official report, copying of geographical works, and submission of maps collectively shaped the contours of a new understanding of geographical knowledge on the Silk Road when it was not under the rule of a large empire. In the next section, I shall use a traveler's account to show how the production of new knowledge was put into practice on the road.

1.5: A Trip through Broken Geographies

Before looking in detail at an account of travel between China and Central Asia that actually occurred in this period, let us consider a more general insight offered by a different account. In the preface to his travelogue from China to Turfan in 982, Wang

¹ Sverre Bøe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38-39 as pre-text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

Yande 王延德, a Song envoy, gave the following rationale for composing this work: “although this is recorded in the imperial histories, it is not well known to the world. Therefore, I write it down so that envoys to the nine *yi* and eight *man* may draw upon this.”¹ Here Wang made explicit the common problem with the geographical knowledge of this time: although the places in the west that were once part of the Tang were well known through historical works, in practice, people knew very little about them. Knowledge about this region should therefore be improved and further disseminated for future travelers. Apparently, Wang Yande thought that historical records of places were not enough for travelers to navigate themselves and that geographical knowledge, instead of being based on history, had to be constantly updated.

But because Wang did not pass through the Hexi region, I shall focus more on another traveler, Gao Juhui, who composed *An Account of the Trip to Khotan*, describing a trip he made with other envoys from the Later Jin dynasty 後晉 to Khotan in 938. This text is preserved in the *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史,² and offers one of the most cohesive narratives about a passage through the Hexi Corridor in the tenth century. The ways Gao Juhui negotiated with imperial and local versions of geographical knowledge serve as ideal examples of how a trip was successfully conducted “through broken geographies.” In the following, I translate in full his account from the beginning until the party reached Dunhuang and discuss its implications. I divide this account into several sections for the sake of clarity.

¹ The text reads: 延德之自敘云: “此雖著於國史, 而世莫熟知, 用書於編, 以俟通道九夷八蠻將使指者, 或取諸此焉”.

² Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), ch.74: 917-18.

1: From Lingzhou we crossed the Yellow River. After traveling for thirty *li*, we reached the border of the Tanguts (Dangxiang), (passing places) such as Xiyao (Narrow Waist) Dune, Shendian (Divine Spot) Dune, and Sangong (Three Ministers) Dune, spending the night at the tent of Yuezhi Commandery (*dudu*). From here on, traveling in deserts for 400 *li*, we reached Heibao (Black Fortress) Dune, which was particularly extensive. Thence we climbed the Shaling (Sand Ridge). In Shaling was the Tangut military camp (*yazhang*), and their leader was called “Nianya Son of Heaven.”

自靈州過黃河，行三十里，始涉沙入党項界，曰細腰沙、神點沙至三公沙，宿月支都督帳。自此沙行四百餘里，至黑堡沙，沙尤廣，遂登沙嶺。沙嶺，党項牙也，其酋曰捻崖天子。

It is significant that, like so many of the other travel accounts I have discussed here, Gao’s account begins at Lingzhou. The passage contains a number of place names, particularly those of sand dunes that Gao and his companions passed. It serves not only as a record of a trip, but also as a potential guide for future travelers. The reason for the inclusion of these places is that they were not part of the established reservoir of geographical knowledge in Five-Dynasties China and were therefore not well-known to Gao’s readers.

2: Crossing the Baiting (White Pavilion) River, traveling west of Liangzhou for 500 *li*, we reached Ganzhou.

渡白亭河至涼州，自涼州西行五百里至甘州。

This section is interesting because of its brevity. For Gao Juhui, the largest city in the Hexi region, Liangzhou, and the route between Liangzhou and Ganzhou did apparently not merit any detailed description except for the distance traveled. This may imply that this part of his trip was already well known, which is possible given that

Liangzhou had been the largest city in the region since the Tang. Such brevity, which mirrors other travel accounts that almost all gloss over the Liangzhou area, stands in stark contrast to the strategy of description the Gao adopted for his next few stops.

3. Ganzhou is the military camp of the Uyghurs. The mountain more than 100 *li* to its south is the old land of the Minor Yuezhi during the Han dynasty. (Now) there is another tribe called Shatuo of the Deer Antler Mountain, which is said to be the descendants of the Zhuye tribe. We first encountered rocky desert (*qi*) to the west of Ganzhou. There is no water in the rocky desert, and we had to carry water in order to proceed. Ganzhou people taught (us), the (Later) Jin envoys, to make wooden horse shoes for the hooves. Four holes should be drilled on the horse shoes as well as on the hooves so that they match one another. For the camels, their hooves should be wrapped by yak skin so they can walk (more comfortably).

甘州，回鶻牙也。其南，山百餘里，漢小月支之故地也，有別族號鹿角山沙陀，云朱耶氏之遺族也。自甘州西，始涉磧，磧無水，載水以行。甘州人教晉使者作馬蹄木澀，木澀四竅，馬蹄亦鑿四竅而綴之，駝蹄則包以犛皮乃可行。

A number of things are discussed in the section on Ganzhou. The mountain to the south of Ganzhou and the people currently living on that mountain were both unknown to Gao, but were made intelligible through historical associations: the former with the Yuezhi people of the Han dynasty, and the latter with the Zhuye tribe, famous during the Tang. Additionally, the envoys also acquired from the local “Ganzhou people” useful tricks on how to make comfortable shoes for the horses and camels. The travelers were therefore constantly updating their knowledge on various aspects of the trip to the west. The places and landscape were made intelligible in this process.

4. Traveling northwestwards for 500 *li*, we reached Suzhou. After crossing the Gold River, (we proceeded) to the west for 100 *li* to go through the Tianmen Pass, and another 100 *li* to go through the Yumen Pass. Then we crossed the

border of Tufan (or Tubo = Tibetan). Tufan men wore Chinese hats, whereas women braided their hair and wore *sese* beads. One excellent bead, it was said, could be exchanged for a quality horse.

西北五百里至肅州，渡金河，西百里出天門關，又西百里出玉門關，經吐蕃界。吐蕃男子冠中國帽，婦人辮髮，戴瑟瑟珠，云珠之好者，一珠易一良馬。

After the expected information on distances between the stops, all of which were presumably too familiar to require any explanation, the account assumes an ethnographical tone in describing the attire of Tibetan men and women, a typical excursus on the exotica of the west. Suzhou apparently impressed Gao with the presence of the foreign people. And he was then, when he reached his next stop, equally impressed by the presence of the Chinese.

5. Further to the west we reached Guazhou and Shazhou. There were many Chinese people in these two places. Upon hearing of the arrival of the Jin envoys, the Regional Chief (*cishi*) Cao Yuanshen and others welcomed us in the suburbs and inquired into the health of the Son of Heaven (of Later Jin). There is a Mingsha (Drumming Sands) Mountain 10 *li* south of Guazhou. It is said that in winter and summer thundering sounds can be heard there. (This place) is said to be the Flowing Sands (*liusha*) recorded in *Yugong*. The Sanwei Mountain is located 10 *li* to its southeast. It is said to be the place where the Sanmiao people fled (from the army of the great Yu). Further west, when one crosses the Duxiang River, (one reaches) the Yang Pass. To the west of Shazhou there is a people called Zhongyun, and their military camp is located in Hulu Desert. It is said that Zhongyun are descendants of the Lesser Yuezhi people. They are brave and prone to fighting. The people of Guazhou and Shazhou all feared them. Hulu desert (is so named because) when emperor Mingdi of Han dynasty sent an army against the Xiongnu, the army opened a military farm (Ch. *tuntian* 屯田) in a place named Wulu, which is this place (Hulu). There is no water there, but once it gets cold, there is plenty of snow, and only when the weather warms up and the snow melts do people acquire water.

西至瓜州、沙州，二州多中國人，聞晉使者來，其刺史曹元深等郊迎，問使者天子起居。瓜州南十里鳴沙山，云冬夏殷殷有聲如雷，云禹貢流沙也。又東南十里三危山，云三苗之所竄也。其西，渡都鄉河曰陽關。沙州西

曰仲雲，其牙帳居胡盧磧。云仲雲者，小月支之遺種也，其人勇而好戰，瓜、沙之人皆憚之。胡盧磧，漢明帝時征匈奴，屯田於吾盧，蓋其地也。地無水而嘗寒多雪，每天暖雪銷，乃得水。

This section on Shazhou (Guazhou was a part of the Guiyijun state in Shazhou) is the longest section on one place in this account except for the destination Khotan. It is interesting that after this account of Shazhou, Gao Juhui continued with “we went further west into the border of Zhongyun.” Evidently, the information about Zhongyun recorded in this section of the account was acquired in Shazhou *before* he even entered the Zhongyun region. Although the story that Gao heard in Shazhou was that the Zhongyun were descendants of Minor Yuezhi (thus non-Chinese) who were dangerously violent, the experience of Gao when encountering the Zhongyun people himself was entirely different: once they entered the border, Zhongyun people sent four Prime Ministers (*zaixiang*) and 37 Military Commanders (*dudu*) waiting for the Later Jin envoys. After the Jin envoys bestowed on them the royal edict, they all kneeled to the east, the direction of the Chinese emperor.¹

Therefore, Gao Juhui’s party acquired in Shazhou information about the immediate western neighbor. In fact, they acquired many other pieces of information, including the origins of the two mountains they encountered, both of which were connected with the legendary king of Yu. Gao was also made aware of the state of water supply further west, a crucial piece of information for successful traveling. Equally curiously, he even engaged in a bit of folk etymology: the patch of rocky desert known at the time as Hulu was connected to a military farm outpost during the Han named Wulu.

¹ The original text reads: 仲雲遣宰相四人、都督三十七人候晉使者，匡鄴等以詔書慰諭之，皆東向拜。

In acquiring all this information, the unfamiliar turned into the familiar and the trip became geographically as well as culturally intelligible.

In a manner not unlike the Chinese envoy, Sallam was able to make sense of an unfamiliar place by associating it with well-established legends in his own cultural tradition. Instead of being marked by the endeavors of the Great Yu, the same region (or at least the eastern end of the region) appeared as the wall of Alexander the Great. It is not a coincidence that the legendary San Miao people and Gog/Magog people were believed to have lived in around the same place: Dunhuang. While the mere recording of foreign place names makes them known to the readers of both texts, their association with canonical legends makes these places, as well as the trips themselves, *intelligible*.

What we do not see in this new and fragmented realm of knowledge is the extremely capable role of the imperial state in policing traveling, as I have shown in the case of Xuanzang and others during the Tang period.¹ Because there was no longer any monopoly on the path between China and Central Asia, each small state could only manage the section under its control. Diplomatic relations among these small states orbited towards a consensus in maintaining the smooth passage of the road.² Not unlike villages sharing a river, the interests of these states on the Hexi Corridor were served best by keeping the road open. Underlying this political decision was the new kind of geographical knowledge discussed in this chapter. As the case of Gao Juhui and others indicates, fragmented geography does not necessarily lead to fragmented traveling experience. In different ways, Lingzhou and Shazhou, the two ends of the Hexi Corridor,

¹ See section 1.2: The Silk Road and Imperial Knowledge

² I discuss this in chapter 2 of my dissertation.

became new sites of geographical knowledge-making after the end of Tang control in this region. This process of knowledge-making became possible (and necessary) because of the end of imperial rule.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that fragmented geographical knowledge did not necessarily mean that traveling was difficult or impossible. When the imperial system of geographical knowledge in and about the Hexi region during the Tang dynasty changed into a network of interrelated “broken” geographies from the late ninth to the tenth centuries, the number of travelers did not necessarily abate. In fact, a quick survey of Song sources, particularly *Song huiyao* in conjunction with Dunhuang manuscripts such as P.2629, which is a long list of numerous envoys visiting Dunhuang in the span of a few months in the tenth century,¹ indicates that the number of people traveling on the Hexi section of the Silk Road most likely increased from that during the Tang dynasty. What enabled this continued travel through the Hexi Corridor was the ability of the travelers to adapt to the new state of geographical knowledge and create new geographical intelligibility. Although one could no longer obtain access through official means to information on far-flung places as one could during the Tang, the smaller units of the new geographical knowledge proved more easily adjustable to the vicissitudes of political change. In this chapter, I argue that the imperial monopoly of geographical knowledge gave way to a more fragmented, yet at the same time more connected network

¹ Feng Peihong 馮培紅, “Kesi yu Guiyiju de waijiao huodong 客司與歸義軍的外交活動,” *Dunhuangxue jikan* (1999-1): 72-84.

of geographical intelligibility, which was no longer solely produced in the imperial capital. Instead, cities and regions on the border of larger geographical units (Lingzhou between China Proper and Hexi, Shazhou between Hexi and Central Asia) became the sites for the production of new geographical intelligibility. Such intelligibility connected fragmented realms of geographical knowledge into meaningful and operative entities, enabling travelers to move among these regions with even greater flexibility. Therefore, instead of hindering trans-Eurasian land travel as is generally assumed, the new, broken geographies in the late ninth and tenth centuries in fact enabled equally, if not more, active and diverse traveling experiences on the Silk Road.

After discussing the informational aspects of this fragmentation, in the next chapter, I shall further demonstrate that the political aspects of the fragmentation were conducive to increased activity among travelers on the Silk Road.

Chapter 2: “By the Road We Become One Family”: Diplomacy on the Silk Road

2.1: Introduction: Diplomatic Images

In the summer of 1972, the dark corridor to the main chamber of a great tomb was first officially opened again after more than 1200 years. As archaeologists made their way into the 71-meter long burial complex, they unveiled on both sides of the corridor what proved to be the most glorious of the Tang dynasty mural paintings.¹ Soldiers, maids, servants, and officials lined these walls that led to the main chamber, where the body was placed. Among the people depicted in these images, the most discussed are six variously dressed foreign envoys led by Tang government officials, three on each side of the corridor. On the basis of their clothing, scholars have identified the origins of these envoys: on the east wall stand envoys from the Byzantine Empire, Korea, and some unidentified Northeast Asian state (Figure 2.1); on the west wall facing these envoys are their counterparts from Turfan, Tibet, and the Umayyad Caliphate.² These states were different in stature: the oasis kingdom of Turfan was in no way comparable to the Byzantine Empire. Yet in the images of the corridor, their envoys seem to stand on more or less equal footing: the figures are of comparable size, and no exceptional pictorial ornament is accorded to any one of them.

¹ Shaanxisheng bowuguan 陝西省博物館 ed., *Tang Li Xian mu bihua* 唐李賢墓壁畫 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1974).

² Wang Weikun 王維坤, “Zhanghuai taizi mu bihua keshitu bianxi 章懷太子墓壁畫客使圖辨析,” *Kaogu* (1996-1): 65-74.

This pictorial equity, however, is a mere illusion. Even though the person to whom these envoys were led to by the officials is not included in the painting, the structure of the tomb makes clear that all of them, officials, envoys, and many other similar figures, are walking toward the heart of the burial chamber, where we find the son (and, posthumously, the crown prince) of the third emperor of the Tang dynasty.



Figure 2.1: East Wall of the Corridor in Li Xian's Tomb

This hierarchical structure of diplomacy finds its expression in another famous Tang painting *Bunian tu* (Figure 2.2), which depicts the encounter between the Tang

emperor Taizong (r.626-649) and mGar sTong bTsan, the minister-envoy from the Tibetan empire.¹ The figure of the Tang emperor is slightly elevated, making him, even while sitting, higher than that of mGar sTong bTsan. Nine female courtesans surround the emperor, two of whom hold ceremonial fans that served as a backdrop for the emperor. In contrast, the Tibetan envoy stands between two male officials, against a blank background. The hierarchy in the image is designed in a way that would be unmistakable to any viewer.



Figure 2.2: *Bunian tu* by Yan Liben (Possible Song Dynasty Repaint)

Roughly contemporary paintings of diplomatic matters can be found in Afrāsiāb at Samarkand in a completely reversed context. Here the central figure was Varkhuman,

¹ Now housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing.

the seventh century king of Samarkand. The status of Varkhuman as the king of Samarkand was certified by the Gaozong emperor of the Tang, who was the father of the owner of the tomb and the son of the Taizong emperor in *Bunian tu* discussed above. Yet on the west wall of the building usually known as “Ambassador’s Hall” (Figure 2.3), opposite its entrance, he is seen as looming large above the procession of Chinese, Iranian, Turkish, and Korean envoys, all of whom, according to the most accepted interpretation, are participating in the Norooz celebration.¹ This painting is clearly different from the Tang painting of *Bunian tu* in many respects, but they are similar in their subject matter: the encounter between visiting envoys or ambassadors and a hosting ruler. Even though, during the late seventh and early eighth centuries, the Tang dynasty was the more powerful state, wielding imperial control over places such as Samarkand, the Afrāsiāb painting still unmistakably honors the king of Samarkand. Therefore, what the paintings have in common is that the hosting ruler, regardless of his political status, is given pictorial prominence and is placed at the top of a clear hierarchy. The actual difference in political and military strength rarely matters in these paintings. Diplomacy comes in strict hierarchy. So does its pictorial depiction.

¹ Frantz Grenet, “What was the Afrasiab Painting about?” *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 78 (2005): 43–58. For an interactive reconstruction of the paintings, see <http://www.orientarch.uni-halle.de/ca/afra/index.htm>

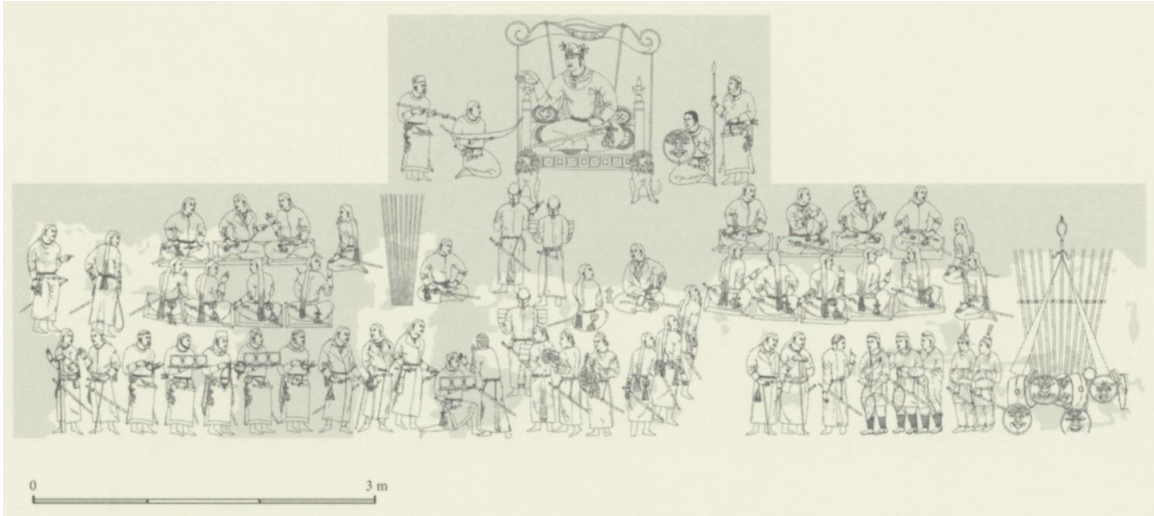


Figure 2.3: Reconstruction of the Western Wall of the “Ambassador’s Hall” at Afrāsiāb

It is in this context of the highly hierarchical world of diplomatic painting (and thinking) that the murals from cave 98 of the Dunhuang complex come into play (Images 2.4-2.7).¹ This large cave was constructed from 923 to 925 by Cao Yijin 曹議金, the king of Shazhou (=Dunhuang), and was decorated with 10 transformation paintings (bianxiang 變像) on its main walls, and on both sides of the corridor leading up to the main hall, life-size portraits of Chinese rulers preceded by Cao Yijin greeted one’s entrance. Only the depiction of the female consorts of these male rulers disrupts the order one might assume: the local Chinese queens of Cao were placed behind the Uyghur queen from Ganzhou, a neighbor of Shazhou. This minor disruption of diplomatic order is, moreover, eclipsed by a major one that no visitor of this cave can miss. When one enters through the corridor and turns left, a figure labeled as the king of Khotan standing 2.92 meters high – by far the largest donor image in all of Dunhuang mural paintings –

¹ *Dunhuang shiku jianshang congshu* 敦煌石窟鑒賞叢書, series 1, vol.9, (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin meishu chubanshe, 1990).

immediately commands attention. Without the textual label that appeared next to this image, one would not know who the central figure of this painting program is just by looking at the mural paintings themselves. How could these foreign figures (Khotanese king, Uyghur queen) exist in the same ceremonial space as the king of Shazhou without showing their submission? How could the Khotanese king assume a more prominent position than the Chinese king of Dunhuang? If hierarchy favors the local ruler in both Chang'an and Samarkand in the seventh and eighth century, what changed in tenth-century Shazhou? To explain the change in diplomatic thinking and practices in Shazhou in the tenth century, I shall begin with a description of how diplomacy in East Eurasia worked in the previous centuries in the age of empires.



Figure 2.4: Cave 98 at Dunhuang
(donor images painted in lower edges on the sides not visible in this image)



Figure 2.5: Donor Image of Chinese Lords of Dunhuang



Figure: 2.6: Donor Image of the Uyghur (right) and Chinese (left) Queens



Figure 2.7: Donor Image of the Khotanese King and Queen

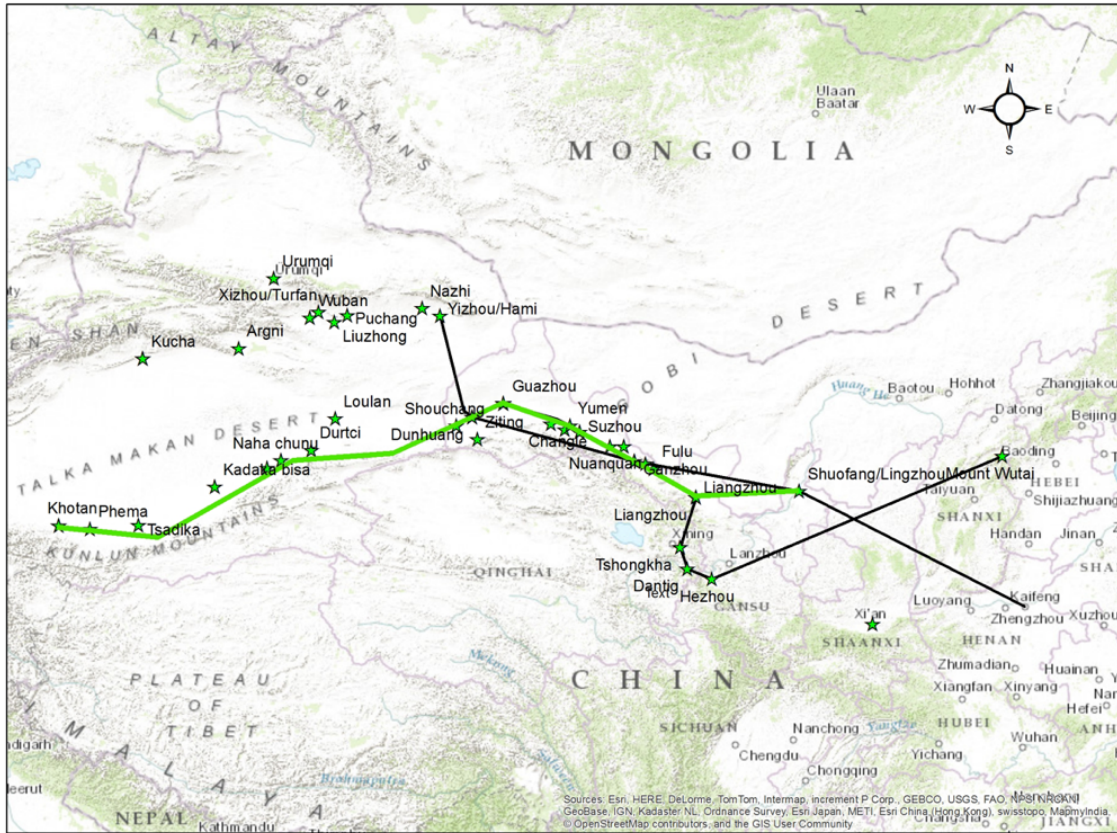
2.2: The End of the Eurasian “Imperial Diplomacy”

As I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, the tenth-century political history of the Hexi Corridor – a land bridge between China proper and Central Asia – has to be understood as the aftermath of the great decline and fall of empires in the ninth century in Eastern Eurasia: the fall of the Tibetan empire, which had ruled the Hexi region since mid-eighth century, deprived this region of its last recognizable overall political structure, with the immediate retreat of the Tibetan overlord and the much more prolonged retreat

of Tibetan tribes.¹ The replacement of the Tibetan imperial political system was partially a return to the Chinese system, as the lord of Dunhuang attempted to control the entirety of Hexi and return to being part of the Tang dynasty. Yet the remnants of the collapsing Uyghur Empire thwarted his effort when a large number of Uyghurs moved into the oasis cities of Ganzhou and Xizhou (Turfan) from the late 860s.² By the mid-880s, Uyghur states were firmly established in these places, and the Iranian kingdom of Khotan regained its independence from Tibetan rule around the same time. In the last decades of the ninth century, a multi-state political map began to emerge where, if one were to travel from west to east (Map 2.1) like Gao Juhui, discussed in the previous chapter, one would have encountered the kingdom of Khotan, the Uyghur state of Xizhou (Turfan), the Chinese state of Shazhou, the Uyghur State of Ganzhou, the Tibetan state of Liangzhou, and the Chinese state of Lingzhou. At the far edges of the region, the declining Tang Empire and the Abbasid Caliphate loomed large.

¹ Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang Studies*.

² Hamilton, *Les Ouïghours à l'époque des Cinq Dynasties d'après les documents chinois*.



Map 2.1: Routes of three travelers

(The route taken by Gao Juhui in 938 in green)

The end of the imperial-era in Eastern Eurasia is accompanied by the end of the “imperial diplomacy” that flourished from the sixth to the ninth centuries. The term “imperial diplomacy” captures the two interacting aspects of diplomatic dealings in Eastern Eurasia. On the one hand, imperial centers (such as Lhasa, Baghdad, and Chang’an) commanded disproportionate political and military power, and the relations between these imperial centers and other lesser states were generally hierarchical. On the other hand, not all aspects of these interstate relations were hierarchical. When the Chinese empire was managing its relations with other imperial powers, such as the

Uyghur and the Tibetan, the language, if not also the actual procedures, was usually much less biased and affairs were conducted more or less as between equals in a way that can be regarded as diplomacy.¹ Such ritual pretense of equality is perhaps nowhere better represented than the carefully measured and inscribed Sino-Tibetan treaty steles constructed and installed in both the Chinese and the Tibetan capitals in the ninth century.² Jonathan Skaff's recent work offers a thorough treatment of this subject.³ The importance of his work lies in that it not only distances itself from the trite political histories of the relations among the Chinese, Tibetan, Turkic/Uyghur, and Arab empires, but also departs from previous scholarship on diplomacy that centers on the problem of tribute relations (and more specifically from the debate about the nature of this kind of diplomacy being between the tributary and the Westphalian models).⁴ Instead, Skaff argues that there existed in medieval Eurasia a shared vocabulary and practice of diplomacy that enabled states geographically far removed from each other to communicate meaningfully. Writing primarily from the perspective of the Tang dynasty,

¹ This is of course not always the case. As pointed out by Yang Shao-yun, the judicial language of diplomacy could and did easily slide into demeaning discriminatory slurs once covenants were broken and blame was assigned. See Shao-Yun Yang, 'What Do Barbarians Know of Gratitude? The Stereotype of Barbarian Perfidy and its Uses in Tang Foreign Policy Rhetoric', *Tang Studies*, 32 (2013): 28–74. This observation about the exceptions nevertheless confirms that a less discriminatory and mutually acceptable way of discussion was the norm. This norm has recently been discussed by Wang Zhenping as a "pragmatic" attitude in Tang diplomatic thinking. See Wang Zhenping, *Tang China in Multi-Polar Asia: A History of Diplomacy and War*, World of East Asia (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013).

² Li Fang-kuei, "The inscription of the Sino-Tibetan treaty of 821-822," *T'oung Pao* XLIV/1-3 (1956): 1-99.

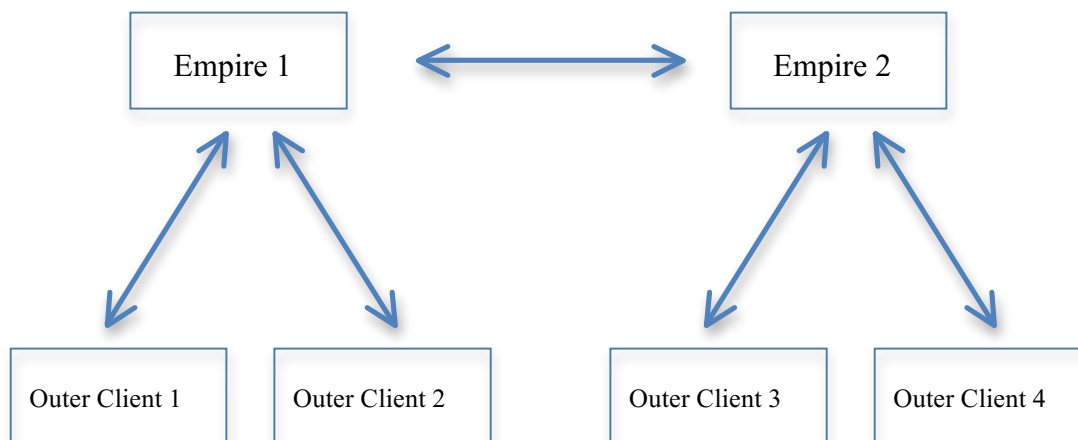
³ Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*.

⁴ John King Fairbank ed., *The Chinese World Order; Traditional China's Foreign Relations.*, Harvard East Asian Series; 32 (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968); Morris Rossabi, *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Yihong Pan, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan: Sui-Tang China and Its Neighbors*, Studies on East Asia; v. 20 (Bellingham, Wash: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1997); Zhenping Wang, *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals: China-Japan Relations in the Han-Tang Period*, Asian Interactions and Comparisons (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies; Honolulu, 2005).

he divides states that would potentially enter a diplomatic relation with the Tang into two categories: equal powers and outer clients.¹

Therefore, what defines “imperial diplomacy” is a network consisting of a handful of great powers that conduct their relations relatively equally among themselves, while many smaller states were treated as diplomatic subordinates.² Two types of diplomatic relations characterize such a network: “Type 1” indicates the relation between relatively equal states of comparable political and military strength; this relation was generally mediated by diplomatic marriage, as in the case of Tang relations with the Tibetan or the Uyghur empires; in “Type 2” diplomacy, however, diplomatic hostages are the most common mediators in a relationship that is clearly hierarchical, as in the case of the Tibetan relation with Khotan or Tang relations with Nanzhao or Korea. This relationship can be shown in the following diagram.

Diagram 2.1: Imperial Diplomacy



¹ See also Wang Zhenping, *Tang China in Multi-Polar Asia*.

² In Chinese sources, the status of these states is sometimes clear in the words used to describe them. For the Chinese state of the Tang and the Song, an “equal state” (*diguo* 敵國) meant another Eurasian empire such as the Uyghur or the Khitan, whereas a “small state” (*xiaoguo* 小國) indicated an outer client, with whom the assumptions, procedures, and languages of diplomacy were systematically different from those with the first group.

The main problem with our understanding of this this model is that while much scholarship has been devoted to elaborating on the relations among large empires and between a large empire and a lesser state (“outer client”), very few studies exist that deal with the outer clients’ relations among with Eurasian empires.¹ The lack of sources is the primary reason for this lacuna; but the conceptual overemphasis on empires from the sixth to the ninth centuries has also helped push the histories of these lesser states into an obscure background.

Yet as the turbulent years of the late 800s almost everywhere in Eastern Eurasia brought an end to these empires, smaller states with status comparable to the “outer client” states in Diagram 2.1 emerged more visibly both historically and historiographically. More specifically to the current topic, from the copious records in the Song-dynasty court materials and documents discovered in the Dunhuang library caves, we know that the states in the Hexi region maintained a long period of relative peace, especially in the tenth century, when no major military conflict occurred from the 920s to the 1020s² and a large number of travelers passed through the region between its eastern and western neighbors. What we do not know clearly is how.

How did these states, with their different cultural traditions and languages, manage to devise a kind of mechanism that was both mutually intelligible and acceptable? How was the new kind of diplomacy among these small states different from the imperial

¹ Rossabi, *China among Equals*; Valerie Hansen, “The Tribute Trade with Khotan in Light of Materials Found at the Dunhuang Library Cave,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 19 (2005): 37–46; Michal Biran, “Unearthing the Liao Dynasty’s Relations with the Muslim World: Migrations, Diplomacy, Commerce, and Mutual Perceptions,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 43, no. 1 (2013): 221–51; Valerie Hansen, “International Gifting and the Kitan World, 907–1125,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 43, no. 1 (2013): 273–302.

² Feng Peihong 馮培紅, *Dunhuang de Guiyijun shidai* 敦煌的歸義軍時代 (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2013), 231-454.

diplomacy that existed in previous centuries? How did the location of these states on the trans-Eurasian trade route retrospectively known as the Silk Road affect their ways of conducting diplomacy? To answer these questions, we need to first look at how the end of the empire and its diplomatic assumptions were dealt with in the Hexi region, and then at the ways these diplomatic assumptions gradually morphed to form new ones.

2.3: Imperial Diplomacy and its Local Adaptations in the Hexi Region (850-925)

2.3.1: The Case of Dunhuang

The need for diplomacy in the Hexi region began officially in 848, when a local strongman, Zhang Yichao 張議潮, revolted against the Tibetan ruler of the region and established his own government in Shazhou (Dunhuang). His first diplomatic action was perhaps not unexpected: in the seventh month of the year 851, three years after his initial rebellion, Zhang Yichao sent his brother Zhang Yitan to the Tang court, bearing the “maps” and “household registers” of the 11 prefectures that this new regime claimed for itself.¹ In the eleventh month of the same year, the Tang court recognized this state as “the Garrison of Returning to Allegiance 歸義軍” and appointed Zhang Yichao as the Governor (*jiedushi* 節度使). This measure invoked the court-province vocabulary that

¹ Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*.

was the primary mode of defining center-periphery relations in the early- to mid-Tang.¹ However, as many scholars have pointed out, the actual relation between Zhang's polity and the Tang central government was much more complicated and confrontational than one might assume under a court-province framework.² Most significantly, that his brother had to stay in the Tang capital as a political hostage put Zhang's state in the category of "outer client" rather than province to the Tang court. Because the Tang court was too weak and otherwise occupied to extend much military influence to anywhere near Shazhou, the nominal relationship of central and provincial governments in reality played out intermittently as that of either indifferent neighbors or bitter rivals.³

This type of relationship is not only operative between that Tang court and *de facto* independent Chinese statelets, but is visible in other non-Chinese states in the region as well. A contemporary example is one branch of Uyghurs active in Ganzhou (modern Zhangye, a city to the east of Shazhou, see Map 2.1): after offering their allegiance, they were given the very same name as Zhang Yichao's regime: "the Garrison of Returning to Allegiance" or Guiyijun.⁴ The efforts these states put into acquiring such titles indicates that even though the Tang court could not exert direct control over any of these places, its prestige as the generally recognized center of political power was still significant enough that it offered the claimant of such titles as "governor" a kind of

¹ Zhang Guogang 張國剛, *Tangdai fanzhen yanjiu* 唐代藩鎮研究, revised 2nd edition, (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2010).

² Li Jun 李軍, "Wantang zhengfu dui Helong diqu de shoufu yu jingying 晚唐政府對河隴地區的收復與經營," *Zhongguoshi yanjiu*, (2012-3): 113-33.

³ Andrew Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 411–533* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴ See Zhao Zhen, *Guiyijun shishi kaolun*.1-24.

political legitimacy that could not be obtained anywhere else. Therefore, for Shazhou and its neighbors in the late ninth century, the most important aspect of “diplomatic” relations was their relation, respectively, with the Tang court. Similar to Shazhou, states such as that of the Ganzhou Uyghurs also belonged to the “outer clients” in their dealings with the declining Tang dynasty, even though their language of diplomacy occasionally resembled that of a province.¹

However, the assumption of morality and loyalty embedded in titles such as “the Garrison of Returning to Allegiance” became much less effective when relations were conducted among these provincial contenders themselves. Because each state had placed priority on its relation with the Tang court, their relations among one another sometimes became problematic to define. In a petition to the Tang court preserved in the Dunhuang library cave, Zhang Yichao suggested that the Tang court should put more effort into restoring Liangzhou, the biggest city in the Hexi region, so that the Uyghurs in Ganzhou would not take advantage of the power vacuum:²

Zhang Yichao reports: ... Humbly, I think Liang Prefecture is the border of the country, and the commoners of Wenmo used to be people and soldiers in Hexi and Longyou (west of Long river) lost (to Tibetan rule). The country (i.e., the Tang) abandoned them and therefore they became tribes. ... If the Liang Prefecture is deserted, the lands west of Lingwu will be occupied by tents, and the toils of the prefectures and counties will be for the benefit of the Jie barbarian (= the Uyghurs). It is painful to talk about this ... (Liang Prefecture) holds the strategic spot of the western barbarians (Rong) and serves as the defense of the eastern Chinese (Xia)...

¹ The Ganzhou kingdom see Elisabeth Pinks, *Die Uiguren von Kanchou in der Frühen Sung Zeit (960-1028)*, Asiatische Forschungen 24 (Wiesbaden : O. Harrassowitz, 1968).

² S.6342.

Here, the Ganzhou Uyghurs are described as “Jie” 羗, a generic term for “barbarians.”¹ In addition to names of existent non-Han powers, such as Tibet, Tuyuhun and Wenmo, etc, historical terms for the non-Chinese such as Rong 戎 (“western barbarian”) are used, with clear discriminatory intention. The petition was delivered to the Tang court asking for military assistance, and the emphasis on the distinction between Chinese and non-Chinese evidently served the purpose of inviting sympathy. That the lords of Shazhou held such a view of their neighbors as being non-Chinese or barbarian finds many other expressions; in one famous poem, Shazhou is described as “surrounded in four directions by six barbarians. (四面六蕃圍)”² Therefore, even though Shazhou and its non-Chinese neighbors all subscribed to a Tang-centered diplomatic imagination and all identified themselves as “provinces” in relation to the Tang, while acting more like client states, the ruler of Shazhou did not consider his non-Chinese neighbors as diplomatic or moral equals. Rather, the discriminatory language reveals his belief that only his state, being self-identified as Chinese, had the right to favorable relations with the Tang court.³ Given this attitude, it is natural that Shazhou’s relations with its neighbors were largely expansionist and confrontational during this period.

2.3.2: The Case of Uyghur and Tibetan States

¹ This term was often used, for instance, to refer to the rebellious army of the An Lushan.

² Ren Bantang. *Dunhuang geci zongbian* 敦煌歌辭總編, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 45.

³ On this issue, see Yang Shao-yun, " 'Stubbornly Chinese?' Clothing Styles and the Question of Tang Loyalty in Ninth-Century Dunhuang," *International Journal of Eurasian Studies* 歐亞學刊 5 (2016): 152–187.

Other states' take on regional relations is unclear because our records center heavily on Shazhou. Only occasionally are incidents beyond Shazhou preserved in Dunhuang manuscripts. One such incident involves the establishment of the Uyghur state in Ganzhou.¹ In late 884, the area around Ganzhou, formerly settled by various Tibetan tribes such as Longjia (also known simply as Long) and Wenmo, was in disarray. The Uyghur invasion had forced the Tibetan residents to leave and to return to their homeland. The Longjia people who were still in the region, evidently under coercion, resigned themselves to maintaining strained relations with the Uyghurs:²

The Uyghur king declared that he needs the younger brother of the king of the Long(jia) as well as fifteen families to serve as hostages, only then (will he) agree to a treaty. But the younger brother of the king of the Long would not agree to serve as hostage (claiming): "If I were sent among the Uyghurs as hostage, I would rather kill myself!" Because of the younger brother's refusal, the king of the Long dispatched another group of envoys, on the pretext that the younger brother was suffering from apoplexy (fengji) and could not serve as a hostage. Moreover, (the king of the Longjia) has another brother still younger and two sons. One of them could be dispatched together with fifteen households as hostages. Whether or not this will suffice is up to the (Uyghur) Khaghan to handle.

¹ The timeline of this prolonged incident is summarized here:

Time(884)	Event	Provenance
7 th day of the 10 th month	The Tang Emperor returns to Chang'an.	S.2589
Mid-10 th month	Song Shulue and other Shazhou envoys travel from Binzhou, via Hezhou, to Liangzhou.	S.2589
Late-10 th month	Tibetans and others in Ganzhou do not reach a treaty with the Uyghurs, resulting in Uyghurs marauding around Ganzhou.	S.389
18 th day of the 10 th month	Bai Yongji and Yin Qing'er reach Jialing peacefully.	S.2589
30 th day of the 10 th month	Grand Master Cui arrive at Suzhou.	S.389
1 st day of the 11 th month	The composition of the first document (S.2589).	S.2589
1 st day of the 11 th month	Tibetans and Tuyuhun people return to their countries.	S.389
6 th day of the 12 th month	Suo Ren'an leaves Suzhou as an envoy to the Uyghurs.	S.389
7 th day of the 12 th month	Yang Luenu and others arrive at Suzhou as envoys.	S.389
9 th day of the 12 th month	Longjia and other peoples flee to Ganzhou.	S.389
Late to Mid-12 th month	The composition of the second document (S.389).	S.389

² S.389. I translated the entire document, which was included in Nicolas Sims-Williams, *Turco-Sogdian Documents from 9th-10th Century Dunhuang*, (London: Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, 2015), 97-101.

其迴鶻王稱：須得龍王弟及十五家只（質），便和為定。其龍王弟不聽充只（質）：“若發遣我迴鶻內入只（質），奈可自死。”緣弟不聽，龍王更發使一件。其弟推患風疾，不堪充只（質）。更有迪次弟一人及兒二人。內堪者發遣一人及十五家只（質），得不得，取可汗處分。

The basis for this proposed agreement was diplomatic hostage-taking, with only the weaker one of the convening parties offering hostages to the stronger one. The protest of the younger brother, who refused to serve as a hostage and would rather kill himself, indicates the severity of the situation and a relationship based on hostility and mistrust. Yet even after “another brother still younger and two sons” were chosen instead, the security of the agreement was never guaranteed. The informant to the governor of Shazhou, from whose record we know this episode, indicates: “Whether or not this will suffice is up to the (Uygur) Qaghan to decide. The envoys have not returned up to now.” The uncertainty of the situation impelled the king of Longjia to arrange for a back-up plan:¹

(According to) the private intention of the king of the Long, a monk was sent to serve as envoy to the leader of the Wenmo in Liangzhou. (He) carried a document saying: “Even after we Longjia have negotiated a treaty with the Uygurs, we are (still) afraid that the Uygurs would attack us. (Therefore) for the sake of the Ganzhou matter, (you) need to send three hundred Wenmo families to live in Ganzhou together. (In this way) the matter should be secure. If you don’t come, we (people of) Ganzhou will join the Uygurs as one family and attack the Wenmo. Don’t complain then that you have not been forewarned.

¹ Ibid., 100-101.

其龍王衷私，發遣僧一人，於涼州嗚末首令（領）邊充使，將文書稱：“我龍家共迴鶻和定已後，恐被迴鶻侵凌，甘州事須發遣嗚末三百家已來，同住甘州，似將牢古（固）。如若不來，我甘州便共迴鶻為一家，討你嗚末，莫道不報。”

In this case, a more extensive network of relations is visible. Yet another group consisting of “Tibetan slaves” named Wenmo in Liangzhou was brought into what one might have expected to be a bilateral relation. Even though, as indicated above, Longjia-Uyghur relations were far from securely established, the king of Longjia wasted no time in using this relationship against the Wenmo in Liangzhou and presented two options: either the Wenmo people send three hundred families as hostages to secure a common defense against the Uyghurs, or they run the risk of facing a Longjia-Uyghur collision.

Importantly, the basis of the proposed Longjia-Wenmo relations was similar to the Longjia-Uyghur one: diplomatic hostages. Only in this case, instead of a few high-value subjects, a large number of households were required.¹ And in both cases of diplomatic relations, the stronger parties requested the supply of hostages from the weaker ones.

These two cases, together with the Tang court’s insistence on hostages from Shazhou, reveal a broader picture: the principle of imperial diplomacy and its assumption of clear hierarchy between a superior power and an inferior power supported by hostages was still the general norm in East Eurasia at the time. Even though none of these states in the Hexi region possessed the military and ideological power of an empire like the Tang and the Tibetan empires in previous centuries, they nevertheless attempted to adopt the

¹ How much of this plan was actually put in place is doubtful, as the Longjia people decided very soon afterwards that no amount of hostages and threats could guarantee their position in Ganzhou and left *en masse* for Suzhou.

fundamentally hierarchical principle of empire-outer client relation (rather than the more equal one among different empires).

The insistence on an empire-outer client model is seen not only in the terms of the diplomatic agreements, but also in the language in which these agreements were made. An interesting example of how imperial diplomatic vocabulary was adopted can also be found in a Sogdian letter written around the same time as the dispute between Uyghur and Longjia peoples:¹

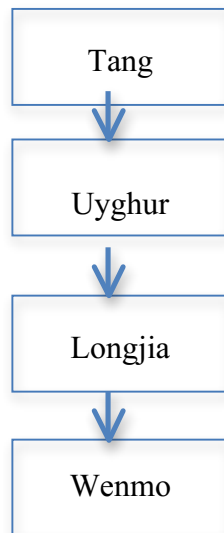
“The next message (is) thus: Today, in the blessed Uyghur kingdom, the establishment of a partnership and the observance of a partnership document by the hearts (of all?) have been decided. Whatever order of State comes from Tang Qara to me, that (will be?) a “partnership document.” When I had arrived at the seat of the administration, Tang Qara came saying: “The edict-bearer was bringing that document.” I, together with Tang Qara, having taken (it), we brought the edict to the monk Kwr’k. He was sitting observing a fast. When the two (of us) together (= Tang Qara and I) had brought (the edict), I handed (it) over. What the two together (= Tang Qara and Kwr’k) may have done (then) (only) they know.”

This message is contained in a letter sent by Tämär Quš to a Christian church leader George. It describes the treaty established between the Longjia people and Uyghurs invading the Ganzhou region. The edict proclaiming the peace agreement was sent to a Monk known as Kwr’k. But Tämär Quš, the writer of this letter, also conveyed the contents to the Christian clergyman George. As many aspects of the local society were affected by the outcome of diplomacy, many people were involved in the transmission of relevant information. Significantly, both the word for “edict” (Sogdian *ywzy* < Ch. *yuzhi* 諭旨/御旨 “imperial order”) and the phrase “to establish (a treaty)” (Sogd. *tnk* < Ch.

¹ See the English translation of the text in Nicolas Sims-Williams, *Turco-Sogdian Documents from 9th-10th Century Dunhuang*, 78.

ding 定) were borrowed from Chinese into Sogdian. In this case, the royal edict perhaps came from an Uyghur official to a Sogdian official. The Uyghurs, in issuing their documents regarding their relations with the Longjia, adopted the strong language of an “imperial order.” It is only natural that any agreement made with such language could only have been modeled on one between an empire and a subordinate state. Even though we possess no direct evidence of Shazhou asking Ganzhou Uyghurs for hostages, the discriminatory language used by the governor of Shazhou in describing the Uyghurs makes clear that he did not intend to consider them on equal terms diplomatically. Therefore, in this *very brief* moment of the mid-880s, the diplomatic relations in the Hexi region can be illustrated by the following diagram (Diagram 2.2):

Diagram 2.2: Diplomatic relations in the last months of 884



The diplomatic framework described in diagram 2 is clearly not sustainable. The Uyghurs became the main force that restructured such unstable relations. This group of Uyghur people described in both Chinese and Sogdian documents was the remnant of the

Uyghur empire. They initiated a local state that lasted for more than a century and would prove to be, at different times, the greatest foe and closest friend of the state in Shazhou. This new state very quickly defeated and absorbed local forces such as Longjia and Wenmo, and acquired the recognition of the Tang state, which is evident from P.8444, a list of gifts returned to Ganzhou by the Tang court. By the late 890s, the Tang court even agreed to the marriage of a princess to the Uyghur Khan, a gesture reminiscent of the heydays of Tang-Uyghur relations and an example of diplomatic relation between equals.¹ Thus, unlike the Tibetan tribes in previous decades, the Uyghurs in Ganzhou became a force to be reckoned with for the lord of Shazhou in the last decade of the ninth century.² An order from the governor of Shazhou in 899 thus directed the envoy to Ganzhou that “you should establish goodness and associate as one family (with Ganzhou). The citadels, forts, and cities you pass should be able to preserve their own ritual and law. You should only receive the verbal instructions from the head envoy (of Ganzhou?) and are not allowed to recklessly talk of right and wrong.”³ Such caution accompanying the pragmatic attitude was aimed at “establishing goodness and associating as one family.” Even though the cooperative relationship between Shazhou and Ganzhou remained tentative, the language of “associating as one family” does seem to point to what was to come in the tenth century.

¹ Colin Mackerras, *The Uighur Empire (744-840) according to the T'ang Dynastic Histories.*, Australian National University, Canberra. Centre of Oriental Studies. Occasional Paper, No. 8 (Canberra, Centre of Oriental Studies, Australian National University, 1968); Michael Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire: A Documentary History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

² Rong Xinjiang, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 298-350. See also Yang Jidong, “Zhang Yichao and Dunhuang in the 9th Century,” *Journal of Asian History* 32, no. 2 (1998): 97-144.

³ P.4044-2 reads: 使帖甘州使頭某甲、兵馬使某曹、更某人數。右奉處分，汝甘州充使，亦要結耗（好）和同一家，所過砦堡州城，各須存其禮法，但取使頭言教，不得亂話是非。沿路比此回還，仍須收自本分，如有拗東揆西，兼浪言狂語者，使頭記名，將來到州，重當刑法者。某年月日帖。

However, the formation of less confrontational regional relations hinted at in this text was interrupted by an event of trans-regional significance: the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907.¹ Given the role of the Tang dynasty in the geopolitical imaginations of states in the Hexi region described above, it is not unexpected that its demise should bring ideological as well as political turbulences in the region. But the specific form this turbulence took might be a bit surprising. Immediately following the dethronement of the last Tang emperor, the lord of Shazhou at the time and the founder Zhang Yichao's grandson Zhang Chengfeng dispatched a group of envoys to the newly established Liang dynasty. Perhaps encouraged by the chaos they saw, Zhang Chengfeng decided, in 909, to sever the tie with the court in Central China and proclaimed himself the "Son of Heaven of the Golden Mountain Kingdom of Western Han." This new claim came with a renewed ambition of "restoring" to the rule of his Shazhou government the entire Hexi region as well as many places under Tibetan rule. In one panegyric poem, the proposed domain of the new regime was to extend to as far as Lhasa.

This ambition, from a diplomatic point of view, was a local disaster. Any hope of "associating as one family" with the Uyghurs was of course abandoned as the newly ambitious king and generals of Shazhou planned invasions of their neighbors that seemed well justified to themselves. Their first attempt was directed at a sparsely inhabited region to the west and was apparently successful. But that was the maximum extent of their victory. When they turned their expansionist ambition toward the Uyghurs in Ganzhou to their east, reality soon shattered the illusion of a regional "empire." As the Uyghur army counterattacked and approached Shazhou city, what amounted to a mutiny broke loose, in

¹ Robert M. Somers, "The End of the Tang," in *The Cambridge History of China* vol. 3.1, ed. Denis C. Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 682–789.

the form of a letter of surrender authored by “Ten Thousand Commoners, Chinese or Tibetan, of Shazhou,” in which a new diplomatic order was proposed on the condition that the Uyghur army would retreat back to Ganzhou:¹

... Diyin requested that the Son of Heaven come out (of the city) and bow on his knees. And then he would agree to a verbal covenant. Elders and commoners of Chenghuang repeatedly discussed: the Khaghan is the father, the Son of Heaven is the son, if the peace agreement is reached, we will dispatch the Prime Minister, the Great Virtuous among the monks, as well as aristocrats and elders of Dunhuang, bearing the National Seal and the document for a covenant, to Ganzhou. When the letter was issued, the Son of Heaven knelt down and bowed towards the East. This is only reasonable, and we dare not be dishonest. How can one bow down to the son before he bows down to the father?

狄銀令天子出拜，即與言約。城隍耆壽百姓，再三商量：可汗是父，天子是子，和斷若定，此即差大宰相、僧中大德、燉煌貴族、耆壽、資持國信，設盟文狀，便到甘州。函書發日，天子面東拜跪，固是本事，不敢虛誑。豈有未拜其耶，先拜其子？

As a sign of acceptance of defeat, the elders of the city propose that the lord of Shazhou, who still enjoyed the title “Son of Heaven” in this letter, was to become, diplomatically speaking, the son of the Uyghur Khan. This unique document reveals much about how a new diplomatic agreement was reached. Diyin, the Uyghur leader (perhaps a son or younger brother of the Khan), initially ordered Zhang Chengfeng (the “Son of Heaven”) to come out of the city and bow on his knees. After this gesture of defeat, a verbal covenant (yanyue) should be reached. Zhang Chengfeng likely rejected this plan. But he was clearly unable to prevent his subjects (“the elders”) from establishing private contacts with the Uyghur leader. The “elders and commoners” in fact decided to act independently of the king while nonetheless representing him. In this new proposal, local luminaries (instead of the king himself) including “the Prime Minister, the

¹ P.3633.

Great Virtuous among the monks, as well as aristocrats and elders of Dunhuang” would travel to Ganzhou with the National Seal and the document for the covenant. The duty of the king was reduced to kneeling down and bowing towards the East.

Even though the relationship between a father and a son is clearly not equal, for a number of reasons it resembles more the relationship between equals than the one between an empire and a subordinate. First of all, unequal as it is, the connection between a father and a son is still one of a fictive family. The relations between the Tang empire and its Tibetan and Uyghur counterparts – the de facto equals of the Tang – often took on this father-son (or its variant uncle-nephew) relation through diplomatic marriages as well.¹ Although no marriage proposal is mentioned here, the fairly amicable language of “peaceful agreement” (*heduan*) points to a resumption of the earlier wish of “associating as one family.” Secondly, no diplomatic hostages from the family of the king are mentioned in this letter. Instead, the “national Seal and the document for a covenant” were offered to the victorious Uyghurs. Even though the “Son of Heaven” would kneel to the east, he was not required to actually go to Ganzhou. The lords of Shazhou were repeatedly asked to, and did, go to the Tang court in the late Tang; the new relationship without hostage-taking is therefore less hierarchical than the one between Shazhou and the Tang court. Finally, no language invoking the ethnic difference between the Chinese and the Uyghurs is anywhere to be found in the letter. Instead, the primary ethnic other was said to have been Tibetans all along. The redirection of ethnic sentiment formed a basis of mutual trust and respect. Therefore, this short proposal shows signs of a

¹ Wang, *Tang China in Multi-Polar Asia*. Yamaguchi Zuiho, “Matrimonial relationship between the T’u-fan and the T’ang Dynasties (part I),” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, 27 (1969): 141-166. Yamaguchi, Zuiho, “Matrimonial relationship between the T’u-fan and the T’ang Dynasties (part II).” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, 28 (1970): 59-100.

fundamental shift in diplomatic thinking: in defeat, the elders of Shazhou regarded themselves as being on an equal footing with the Uyghurs in Ganzhou.

We do not know the immediate reaction of the Uyghurs to this proposal. But judging from the relations between Shazhou and Ganzhou a decade or so later, this proposal was most likely accepted and followed into the 920s. A more profound consequence of this episode was the eventual dethronement of Zhang Chengfeng himself in 914, which given the rebellious actions taken by the elders of Shazhou, is not unexpected. With this development, the establishment of new relations with the Uyghurs marked *the* major watershed in local history in Shazhou during this period: in the close to two centuries of Shazhou's history of, it was ruled first by the Zhang family (848-914) and then the Cao family (914-1036). The beginning of Cao family rule introduced, after the defeat at the hands of the Uyghurs, a new diplomatic policy that was grounded much more in a local and limited role of Shazhou as opposed to its relations with the Chinese court in China proper or an imagined regional empire with Shazhou as the center. It was with this new policy that the region enjoyed about one century of relative peace.

But there was one exception in the century of peace and relative diplomatic parity. This is the second crisis initiated from afar that affected, but did not fundamentally alter, local diplomatic relations in the Hexi region. As I pointed out earlier, the first crisis – the ambition of Zhang Chengfeng – was the result of the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907, and the second resulted from its “restoration” as what was eventually known as the “Later Tang” (923-936) in 923.¹ While these two incidents (the founding of the Later Tang and

¹ Naomi Standen, “The Five Dynasties,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 38–132; Richard L. Davis, *From Warhorses to Ploughshares: The Later Tang Reign of Emperor Mingzong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press,

Shazhou's expansionist military campaign under the Cao family) in themselves are well known to historians,¹ there has not been any attempt to read the latter in the context of the former. Scholars mostly ascribe the reason for Cao's new ambition to the death of the Khan of Ganzhou. But as I shall show in more detail in the next section, the death of a ruler, although certainly posing the potential danger of upsetting the existing diplomatic order, could be and usually was resolved without much incident, often resulting in the renewal of the covenant. No evidence has been presented as to why this particular death of a ruler in the early 920s was so crucial. In the context of my previous discussions of the ideological effect of the fall of the Tang on the region, I argue that what made this period different was not what was happening in the Hexi region, but what was going on in Central China.

Historians armed with retrospective wisdom generally discount the importance of the claim of the "Later Tang" to restore the Tang dynasty in 923 and reduce it to obscurity of the "Five Dynasties" (907-960). This is of course not without its reason. Li Cunxu, the founder of the Later Tang dynasty, was evidently not biologically related to the old Tang royal family. His new dynasty only lasted for a little more than a decade, becoming eventually one of the less significant ones in the already insignificant Five Dynasties that interrupted the master narrative of Chinese history from the Tang to the Song. But at the time, people could not anticipate the brief life of the dynasty, and the

2014); Ouyang Xiu, *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

¹ Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 309-27.

argument for the legitimacy of its restoration of the Tang dynasty was taken seriously.¹ Therefore it is quite conceivable that Cao Yijin's decision to wage war against the Uyghurs was triggered by the knowledge of the restoration of the Tang dynasty and the reignited idea, like that of Zhang rulers before him during the Tang, of becoming the sole representative of the Chinese regime in the Hexi region. In fact, we find evidence for just that in a poem written on the occasion of this campaign:²

河西是漢家舊地， Hexi is the old land of the Han family
中隘獫狁安居。 As a block in the middle live the Xianyun (Uyghurs)
數年閉塞東路， For several years, the road to the east was blocked,
恰似小水之魚。 (making) Shazhou like a fish in a small pond.
今遇明王利化， Now we encounter the fortunate transformation of the sage king
再開河隴道衡。 to reopen the road and boulevard of Hexi and Longyou,
太保神威發憤， The Taibao thus initiated rage with his divine might,
遂便點緝兵衣。 subsequently counting military armor for soldiers.
略點精兵十萬， 10,000 select soldiers he summoned,
各各盡擐鐵衣。 each and every one wearing an iron armor.
直至甘州城下， (The army marching) all the way up to the city of Ganzhou,
回鶻藏舉無處。 there was nowhere for the Uyghurs to hide.

The first line of the poem – “Hexi is the old land of the Han family” – defines the rationale for the campaign against the Uyghurs in 925. They were seen as a “block” to the road east that trapped Shazhou “like a fish in a small pond.” Yet before the “fortunate transformation of the sage king,” the people of Shazhou did not seem to have done much about the situation. “Sage king” was, as scholars have pointed out, referring to the

¹ Fang Cheng-hua. “The Price of the Orthodoxy: Issues of Legitimacy in the Later Liang and Later Tang,” *Taida lishi xuebao* 台大歷史學報 35 (June 2005): 55–84. See also Johannes L. Kurz, “On the Southern Tang Imperial genealogy,” *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134, no. 4 (2014): 601-20.

² P.3270.

emperor of the newly restored Tang dynasty, Li Cunxu.¹ Evidently, without actually reengaging in any way in the area, the restoration in China proper of a descendent state of the Tang exerted a tremendous ideological impact in the Hexi region: it was with the news of the restoration that Cao Yijin (the Taibao in the poem) decided to launch a major military campaign. The poem then continues with the envisioned result of this campaign against the Uyghurs:

已後勿愁東路， Thereafter, one worries not about the Eastern Road,
便是舜日堯時。 as (one lives) in the age of (the Sage Emperors) Shun and Yao.
內使新降西塞， Envoys from Inner (China) newly descend upon (our) Western
garrison,
天子慰曲名師。 and the Son of Heaven congratulates our righteous army.
向西直至于闐， To the west all the way till Khotan,
納貢獻玉琉璃。 all offer tributes such as jade and glass.
四方總皆跪伏， All four directions kneel in obedience,
只是不絕漢儀。 without interrupting the Han ritual.

The favorable outcome of the campaign was therefore a restoration of the “Han/Chinese ritual,” with the frequent and timely visits of heavenly envoys from the central plain (zhongyuan 中原) and the offering of precious gifts from the western vassal states. Such a vision, had it been realized, would have brought the diplomatic order of the region back to the early years of Zhang rule in Shazhou in the late ninth century. This goal would not have made any sense without the existence of a recognized empire in China proper. Therefore, with the restoration of the Tang, very briefly, the premises of relations among the different states in the Hexi region shifted from the perspective of the rulers of Shazhou. For them, the relation with the Tang became, yet again, the most

¹ Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, 321.

significant and almost the only meaningful one. This emphasis on a court far away in China proper meant neighbor states were suddenly viewed, not as potential partners, but as “obstacles” that needed to be removed.

Yet removing them was, again, not easy. The military campaign met with some initial setbacks, with Hun Ziying, a key general of Shazhou, being killed on the battlefield. But eventually, the persistent effort from Shazhou started to bear some fruit. Although the Uyghur state of Ganzhou could not be eliminated altogether, the Cao family rulers of Shazhou did succeed in altering the relationship with Ganzhou that, as a result of Zhang Chengfeng’s defeat described above, assumed Ganzhou supremacy. In this new relationship, Shazhou and Ganzhou became more or less equal. There are even indications of this relationship being utterly reversed, with Shazhou becoming the diplomatic father and Ganzhou the son.¹

Other than these two periods of around six years, the tenth century in the Hexi region was remarkably peaceful. No other major military events are known to have occurred. This does not mean that no friction among different states in the region ever existed. But it is testimony to the flexibility and strength of the new diplomatic network that such friction was usually resolved without resorting to major warfare. More importantly, the assumptions and vocabulary of diplomacy for the next century continued and solidified the shift already visible in the letter from the “Dunhuang elders” to the Uyghur Khan. A network of states in and around the Hexi region finally agreed to a common method of co-existence based on the assumptions and vocabulary of “diplomacy among equals.” Attempts to treat other states as subservient “outer clients” subsided as

¹ Rong Xinjiang, “Cao Yijin zheng Ganzhou Huihu shishi biaowei 曹議金征甘州回鶻史事表微,” *Dunhuang Yanjiu* (1991.2): 10-11.

diplomatic marriage replaced hostage-taking as the major method of negotiating new relations. The rest of this chapter is devoted to a detailed description of the manner of this co-existence under the new diplomacy. Travel on the Silk Road, I argue, did not merely persist but even prospered under this new diplomacy.

2.4: A New Diplomacy (825-1020)

In this section, I argue that a new kind of diplomacy was operative in and around the Hexi region in the tenth century among states such as Khotan, Xizhou (Turfan), Shazhou, Ganzhou, Liangzhou, and Lingzhou. What made the diplomatic dealings during this era different were the ways old diplomatic ideas and idioms were redefined and reused in new contexts. In the process of this redefinition, the characteristics of these states as being “on the Silk Road” became more prominent. As I have shown in the previous section, in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, states such as Shazhou and Ganzhou had already begun a shift from treating each other as subordinate to accepting, often under coercion, mutual equal status. This trend solidified in the tenth century into a sustainable yet flexible system of diplomacy that enabled unprecedented peace and prosperity in the region: as noted above, in the century between the 920s and 1020s, no major warfare occurred despite repeated friction among these states, and the regional peace thus produced was more lasting than when the entire region was under the control of any large empire. Most interestingly, a keen awareness among these states of their status of being “on the same road” that binds them as “one family” began to emerge. This

awareness served as the basis of the new diplomatic thinking and practice that, I argue, are the characteristics of “diplomacy on the Silk Road.”

2.4.1: From Hostages to Brides: *Heqin* in a New Context

Ever since the Han dynasty, *heqin* (literally: “peace-marriage”) had had a central role in defining how the Chinese states dealt with some of their most formidable neighbors. This institution of marrying a daughter (real or ritual) of the emperor to an often non-Han ruler is seen sometimes as a wise diplomatic maneuver and at other times as a humiliating moral concession. In this context of often-conflicting understandings, many of the heroines of these marriages epitomized the contrasting lives in two worlds and became some of the most celebrated figures in the Chinese (and in the case of the Tang princess Wencheng, the Tibetan) historical tradition.¹

The purpose of such marriages was at least in part to guarantee the diplomatic agreement between the marrying parties.² This explains another feature of the *heqin* marriages: they were exclusively the domain of the royal family. Officials central or

¹ Bacot, J. “Le mariage chinois du roi tibétain Sron bcan sganpo,” *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, III, Paris (részlet a Mani Bka’-‘bum-ból), *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 3 (1935): 1-60. Pan Yihong, “Marriage Alliances and Chinese Princesses in International Politics from Han through T’ang,” *Asia Major* 10, 1-2 (1997): 95-131. Uradyn E. Bulag, *The Mongols at China’s Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002). Jennifer Holmgren, “Imperial Marriage in the Native Chinese and Non-Han State, Han to Ming,” in Rubie S. Watson, Patricia Buckley Ebrey eds., *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society* (University of California Press, 1991); Tamara T. Chin, “Defamiliarizing the Foreigner: Sima Qian’s Ethnography and Han-Xiongnu Marriage Diplomacy,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 70, no. 2 (2010): 311–54.

² This is already seen in perhaps the earliest use of marriage as diplomatic tool in the third kingdom of Ur (21st to 20th Century BC) in the Near East. See Amnon Altman, *Tracing the Earliest Recorded Concepts of International Law: The Ancient Near East (2500-330 BCE)*, Studies in the History of International Law (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 46.

provincial were not supposed to participate in the exchange of daughters in diplomatic dealings because they did not carry enough weight as assurance. This is the reason why, for the Zhang family of Shazhou as nominal governors of the Tang, *heqin* was not really an option in diplomacy; no known case of such diplomatic marriage occurred during the Zhang rule of Shazhou in the ninth and early tenth centuries. For the Zhang family, the central social institution in securing diplomatic relations was the use of hostages, as we saw above. Thus, upon the initial contact with the Tang court, the brother of Zhang Yichao, the first lord of Dunhuang, was sent to the capital of the Tang as a hostage. A clearer indication of the power of this institution occurred in 867: when the brother who was serving as a hostage in Chang'an passed away, Zhang Yichao himself was asked to come in as replacement. This move on the part of the Tang court was surprising because it did not hold any substantial control over Zhang's practically independent kingdom and therefore had no way of forcing Zhang to surrender himself. But more surprising was that Zhang Yichao actually agreed. He left his state to his nephew, went to the capital, and eventually died there, never to come back to Shazhou.¹ That such use of hostages was not limited to the "Chinese" states can be seen in the case of the Longjia-Uyghur relation discussed above. Evidently, the importance of hostages in securing trust in a chaotic world was recognized by most states in the Hexi region during this period in the ninth century and served as the primary means to guarantee diplomatic agreements.

After the fall of the Tang, however, the governing principle of diplomacy seems to have undergone a fundamental shift in this region. Never again do we see the use of hostages in diplomatic dealings; rather, *heqin* style marriage became the norm.

¹ Jidong Yang, "Zhang Yichao and Dunhuang in the 9th Century."

Particularly prominent in our sources are the marriages among Shazhou, Khotan, and the Uyghur kingdom of Ganzhou.¹ Labels on mural paintings of donor images in various Dunhuang caves serve as key evidence for these marriages. For instance, as mentioned above in the “Introduction,” Cave 98 was constructed by the lord of Shazhou, Cao Yijin from 923 to 925 and is among the largest caves in the entire Dunhuang cave complex. After entering the front passage, which is decorated on both sides with life-size portraits of the successive governors of Dunhuang, one only needs to turn left to see the prominence of such diplomatic marriage. Following the image of the Khotanese king stood four female figures:

大朝大于闐國大政大明天冊全封至孝皇帝天皇后曹氏一心供養
 Lady Cao, the Heavenly Empress of the Emperor of the Great dynasty, great jewel, kingdom Khotan, the great justice, great wisdom, mandated by heaven, extremely filial, wholeheartedly made donation.

敕受邢國公主是北方大回鶻國聖天可汗……
 The Royally Ordained Princess of Xing, the ... of the Sagely Heaven Sage and Heavenly Khagan of the Great Uyghur Kingdom of the North.

郡君太夫人鉅鹿故索氏一心供養
 The Late Lady Suo of Julu, with a provincial level title, wholeheartedly made donation

郡君太夫人廣平宋氏 一心供養
 Lady Song of Guangpin, with a provincial level title, wholeheartedly made donation

¹ There is evidence of marriages beyond these states. For instance, when the prince of Shuofang (Lingzhou) writes (ranījai janavai vīra maira hūśai’na khīvyaina aurga drrūnā pvaisauma haṣḍa yanai śvahvām raispūra hva pakyām khū tta vaña haysda vī śaika ṣṭāvai “To the Mother the furen Khī-vyaina in Ratna-janapada with reverence (aurga) I make a report, asking after her health, I the prince of Śvahvām, Hva Pa-kyām.” P.2958, lines 216-7), it is conceivable that this “mother,” who bears a Chinese title (“furen”), could have been married to Khotan and be the actual mother of the prince of Shuofang. However, cases such as these are sporadic and speculative. Therefore I shall focus on the cases among Shazhou, Khotan, and Ganzhou.

These five figures form, in a diplomatic sense, a family. The Uyghur princess, along with Lady Suo and Lady Song, are the wives of Cao Yijin (r.914-935). Likely a daughter of Cao Yijin and the Uyghur Princess, Lady Cao married the king of Khotan, Viśa' Saṃbhava. In this way, the three ruling families of Shazhou, Khotan, and Ganzhou were linked together with two marriages: the son of Viśa' Saṃbhava, a Khotanese prince, would have the lord of Shazhou as his grandfather and the Uyghur princess as grandmother. Two generations later, Cao Yinjin's grandson Cao Yanlu (r.976-1002) married a Khotanese princess and a Lady Murong of Tuyuhun (= Tibetan Azha) descent. Lady Murong was a member of the ruling family of Guazhou, at the time already independent of Shazhou. Similarly, Cao Yanlu's brother and predecessor Cao Yangon (r.974-976) also married a Lady Murong from Guazhou. Once again, an interregional network of diplomatic marriages connected more than two states.

Table 2.1: Rulers of Shazhou

Ruling Family	Name of Ruler	Reign Date	Diplomatic Marriage
Zhang	Zhang Yichao	848-867	No
	Zhang Huaishen	867-890	No
	Zhang Huaiding	890-892	No
[Usurpation]	Suo Xun	892-894	No
	Zhang Chengfeng	894-914	No
Cao	Cao Yijin	914-935	Yes
	Cao Yuande	935-939	No
	Cao Yuanshen	939-944	No
	Cao Yuanzhong	944-974	No
	Cao Yangong	974-976	Yes
	Cao Yanlu	976-1002	Yes
	Cao Zongshou	1002-1014	unknown
	Cao Xianshun	1014-1035	unknown

All these marriages, upon closer examination, seem to follow a general and unwritten rule. The generation of rulers of Shazhou between Cao Yuande (r.935-939), Cao Yuanshen (r.939-944), and particularly Cao Yuanzhong (r.944-974) never conducted diplomatic marriages of their own (see Table 2.1). They all married ladies from local aristocratic families in Shazhou. Was this simply a coincidence? Or did it have something to do with specific political and diplomatic considerations?

To answer these questions, one aspect of the institution of *heqin* has to be further clarified. *Heqin* marriage in the Chinese context is, by definition, a marrying *off* of Chinese princesses to male leaders beyond the Central Plain. It is thus a unidirectional institution.¹ Indeed, one might argue that this unidirectionality is the fundamental feature of this institution because, with its specific design, each party involved viewed its own aspect of the marriage deals as, by and large, diplomatic success. From the Chinese perspective, although marrying daughters to “barbarians” might have felt like an insult, and often did, the idea of these women wielding their cultural influence to “transform,” diplomatically if not also culturally, the “barbarians” seems to validate the ultimate moral superiority of the Chinese. On the other hand, acquiring a noble woman from one’s enemies, in ancient Eurasia more broadly, was generally seen as a sign of superiority. The *heqin* policy, pitched between these two ideological tendencies, provided with its uni-directionality the creative “misunderstanding” necessary for successful diplomacy.

No such convenient misunderstanding was possible in the case of Cao Yijin and his marriage to the Uyghur princess, however. Although possibly of Sogdian descent,

¹ This uni-directionality does not seem to have characterized diplomatic marriages in other traditions. See Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 137-44.

Cao Yijin must have been familiar with the norms of Chinese diplomatic practice. According to one norm, a *heqin* marriage occurred when one marries one's daughter to a non-Chinese king. Therefore, the result of a *heqin* marriage is, by definition, the establishment of a father-son relation, with the non-Chinese king becoming the son-in-law, but as discussed above, Cao Yijin inherited the political situation from the short-lived Golden Mountain Kingdom, when "the Khan (of Ganzhou Uyghurs) would be the father and the Son of Heaven (of Shazhou) would be the son." Within this political framework, when he married the Uyghur Khan's daughter, the norm of *heqin* was reversed, and both sides seemed to agree that this marriage was symbolic of Cao's relatively subordinate position (although still within the more equal framework of empire-empire relation) to the Uyghur Khan. This is why, in 925, when the military campaign of Shazhou inspired by the restoration of the Tang subjugated (but did not conquer) the Uyghur state in Ganzhou, one of Cao Yijin's first measures was to marry one of *his* daughters to the sitting Uyghur Khan. In the panegyric poem in P.3500v, the establishment of a reversed father-son relation by a new marriage was directly linked to the military campaign, as the poet acclaimed the fact that "the Khagan of Ganzhou personally sent envoys, willing to become the son of the father (i.e., Cao Yijin)."¹ In this case, it is even clearer that the one marrying a foreign princess was the politically and diplomatically subordinate. Cao Yijin's son in P.2992v would later, after the passing of Cao Yijin, invoke this new "father-son" relation to convince the Uyghur ministers to resume the established relations with Shazhou.

¹ The original text reads: 甘州可汗亲降使, 情愿与作阿耶儿.

With this background, it becomes easier to understand why the three lords of Shazhou at the height of its power never seem to have adopted *heqin* style marriage and why it reemerged as Shazhou's power declined in the last quarter of the tenth century. Cao Yuande (r.935-939), the son of Cao Yijin, was very much aware of the diplomatic marriages that existed at the time and indeed celebrated them when, in a prayer for the construction of a Buddhist cave, he praised successively 1. His father who just passed away, 2. Himself, 3. "Heavenly Princess," 4. Empresses of the Two States.¹ The "Heavenly princess" referred to the daughter of the Uyghur Khan, who married Cao Yijin, and the two empresses were the Cao princesses who married into the Uyghur and the Khotanese royal families. Therefore, the characters involved in *heqin* marriages were very much the center of the political structure of these states. As it turned out, both the Uyghur Princess in Shazhou and the Cao Princess in Khotan lived fairly long lives and therefore exerted tremendous influence in the political and cultural life of both places, but more importantly, although recognizing the significance of *heqin* marriage in his prayer, Cao Yuande did not attempt to marry a foreign bride, nor did his two brothers who ruled after him. This is a testimony to the power of the Cao family at the time. It was only when the heyday of the Cao family rule ended that, in the 970s and later, the Cao rulers again adopted such practices. Therefore, while the marriage between two states established a generally equal diplomatic bond, the directionality of the marriage determined the relative but nevertheless discernable hierarchy in this bond.

Beyond symbolically binding these states in a fictive family relationship, the queens and princesses who were married out of their state also performed more practical

¹ The original text reads: 故父大王，神識往生菡萏之宮；司空寶位遐長，等乾坤而合運；天公主、小娘子，誓播美于宮闈；兩國皇后又安，比貞松而莫變。

functions. The entourage of the princesses became, in effect, equivalent to modern embassies. Many traces of the activities of Khotanese princesses and princes, for instance, can be found at Dunhuang.¹ In the following table, I list the activities of Khotanese envoys at Dunhuang during a span of six days.

Table 2.2: A Reception of Khotanese Envoys at Dunhuang

Day	Reception	Amount of Provisions
19	Shouchang	Sixty shares of fine offering; one “barbarian” flatbread; one hundred “barbarian” flatbreads; four hundred oiled “barbarian” flatbreads; two <i>dou</i> of [] flour; oil one <i>sheng</i> .
20	Khotanese Prince	One hundred oiled “barbarian” flatbreads; two <i>dou</i> of [] flour; oil one <i>sheng</i> .
21	Maquankou	Thirty shares of fine offering; one “barbarian” flatbread; twenty “barbarian” flatbreads; intestine noodle three <i>sheng</i> .
21	Outside of the City	Twenty shares of fine offering; one “barbarian” flatbread; intestine noodle three <i>sheng</i> ; ten shares of medium and inferior offering.
22	Khotanese Prince	Fifteen shares of fine offering; one “barbarian” flatbread.
23	Great Court	Twenty-eight shares of fine offering, including two thirds of “barbarian” flatbread.
24	Khotanese Prince at Longxing Temple	Fifteen shares of fine offering; one “barbarian” flatbread; eighty-five “barbarian” flatbreads.

During the six days of the Khotanese envoys’ entry into the Shazhou city, the Khotanese prince offered three receptions for the envoys, leading the envoys all the way into the city and then to the Longxing temple. For the traveling envoys, who were perhaps not familiar with Shazhou, the princes (possibly sons of the Khotanese queens), as part of the marriage alliance, functioned as important intermediaries. Therefore the

¹ Kumamoto Hiroshi, “The Khotanese at Dunhuang,” *Cina e Iran*, Firenze 1996, 79-101.

heqin marriage sustained the diplomatic relations between the two states in two ways: conceptually, it provided a general framework of imagining a kind of relations that was non-confrontational, and, practically, it also served as the equivalent of modern embassies.

This wide spread practice of marriage among these states is different from the more famous *heqin* cases, such as those of Wang Zhaojun and Cai Wenji, in that these marriages were not limited to a Chinese lord marrying off his daughters to non-Chinese lords. This is partly because none of the states discussed here – Dunhuang, the Ganzhou Uyghur kingdom, and Khotan – are unequivocally “Chinese.” But I argue that these marriages should be considered *heqin* because the most important feature of this type of marriage, its uni-directionality, was clearly understood by the contemporaries. Marrying off a daughter was not a shame in need of being explained and excused, but a sign of power and a way of establishing a father-son relation with the son-in-law to be. As the many prayers involving princesses and queens attest, the participants in these marriages felt little uneasiness regarding the supposed moral complexity that we often associate with diplomatic marriages. Therefore, I argue, in the Hexi Corridor during the tenth century, the institution of *heqin* marriage was redefined to facilitate a political network in which no player had clear predominance. Every such marriage was a readjustment to the hierarchy of the network, without threatening to break it.

2.4.2: The Road that Binds Us: Letter Exchange and Diplomatic Networks

The newly peaceful international relations in Hexi from the 920s to the early eleventh century was the result of not only a redefinition of diplomatic marriage, but also a generally pragmatic understanding of diplomacy and its limits. Such an understanding was reached through the constant exchange of letters, many of which are fortunately preserved in the Dunhuang collection. Considering that, within this regional network of diplomacy, we find states ruled by elites speaking Chinese (Shazhou, Lingzhou, Central China), Uyghur (Ganzhou and Xizhou), Khotanese (Khotan), and Tibetan (Suzhou), one of the most interesting questions to ask is how they were able to communicate with one another to achieve diplomatic agreements. In this regard, the Hungarian Tibetologist Uray Geza's groundbreaking work showed that in the tenth century Hexi region, the Tibetan language became in a sense the international *lingua franca*.¹ Although this is certainly an important and illuminating discovery, there is a tendency to exaggerate the use of Tibetan.² In this section I shall show that there was not any widely recognized *lingua franca* that was used by every or most of the states in the region. Rather, the use of a certain language was determined by the sender and recipient and sometimes the intermediaries of the message and thus cannot be easily generalized. In the following table, I list these letters according to their language, sender, and recipient.³ It reveals the

¹ Uray Geza, "L'emploi du tibétain."

² Takata Tokio, "Multilingualism in Tun-huang," *Acta Asiatica* 78 (2000): 49-70.

³ The most direct testimonies to the diplomatic dealings are letters written in Chinese, Tibetan, Uyghur, Khotanese, and Sgodian, sometimes between rulers of states. Yet their interpretation poses some serious problems. Beyond the philological difficulties in reading the multi-lingual corpus and the always-vexing issue of precise dating, the nature of these letters is the key issue. Was a certain letter the *original* one actually sent, or was it a *draft*? While the idea of an original letter is quite straightforward, scholars disagree widely, as to which letters should be considered drafts. Adding to the complexity is the widely used genre of "letter formats," many of which, although supposedly formulaic for pedagogical purposes, clearly derive from letters actually used. To explore the amount of information contained in these letters, I do not limit myself to what I consider "original" letters, but include in the following discussion many texts that are judged to be "letter drafts" or "letter formats."

complex interaction among half a dozen regional powers. I shall select a few representative letters and explain the content and discuss the diplomatic network that these letters epitomized.

Table 2.3: Diplomatic Letters in Hexi Region¹

Signature	Time	Sender	Recipient	Content	Language
P.2826		King of Khotan	Governor of Shazhou	Gift-Giving	Chinese
S.1156	887	Shazhou envoy in Chang'an	Governor of Shazhou	report	Chinese
P.3547		Shazhou envoy in Chang'an	Governor of Shazhou	report	Chinese
P.3281		Ma Tongda	Shazhou	difficulty in going to China	Chinese
P.3633	911	Commoners of Shazhou	Uyghur Khan	request for peace	Chinese
P.4638		Cao Rengui	?	Gift	Chinese
P.4638		Cao Rengui	?	Envoy	Chinese
P.2675		Cao Yijin	Minister in China	?	Chinese
P.3260		Cao Yuande	?	Gift	Chinese
P.2992v		Governor Cao	Uyghur Minister	Traveling envoys	Chinese
P.2992v		Governor of Shuofang	Uyghur Khan	Traveling envoys	Chinese
P.2992v		Governor of Shazhou	Uyghur Khan	Traveling envoys	Chinese
S.4398		Governor of Shazhou	?	Gift	Chinese
P.2703		Governor of Shazhou	?	Greeting	Chinese

¹ I have tried to compile a “complete list” but eventually decided not to, because the nature of some of the more fragmentary letters are difficult to access. This group of sources will have to be worked on more closely elsewhere.

Table 2.3 (Continued)

P.2703		Cao Yuanzhong	?	The passage of a traveling monk (Great Master of Xitian [India])	Chinese
P.2155v		Cao Yuanzhong	Uyghur Khan	safe passage	Chinese
P.2155		Cao Yuanzhong	Uyghur Khan	return greetings? Time of travel?	Chinese
P.3016		Suo Ziquan (Shazhou envoy to return gift to Khotan)	Khotanese king	return gift	Chinese
P.3016		Fuzhu	Khotanese king	about Suo Ziquan, etc.	Chinese
P.3016		Governor of Shazhou ?	Uyghur Khan ?	about Zhang Baoshan	Chinese
P.3272		Cao Yuanzhong (carried by Yan Wucheng envoy leader from Shazhou)	Ganzhou	about situation on the road	Chinese
P.3827		Cao Yanlu	?	Political Situation	Chinese
P.3660		Cao Yanlu	?	?	Chinese
S.5917		Cao Yanlu	?	?	Chinese
S.5946		Cao Yanlu	?	?	Chinese
P.4525-9		Governor of Shazhou	“Barbarian leaders” (Tibetan Tribes?)	safe passage	Chinese
P.2945		Governor of Shazhou	various people		Chinese
P.4065		Governor of Shazhou	various people		Chinese
P.3931		Uyghur Khan	Later Liang court	renew relation	Chinese
Ch.73.iv.14		Liangzhou	Shazhou and Guazhou		Tibetan
Ch.85.ix					Tibetan
P.t.44 P.t.981		Khotanese king			Tibetan
P.t.984-2			Khotanese king		Tibetan

Table 2.3 (Continued)

P.t.1003					Tibetan
P.t.1081					Tibetan
P.t.1082		Uyghur Khan of Ganzhou			Tibetan
北 182 皇 字 47					Tibetan
SI O 141					Tibetan
SI O 142					Tibetan
P.5538					Khotanese
P.2909		Turfan	Shazhou		Uyghur
Pelliot Sogdien 28					Sogdian
P.4091		King of Khotan			Khotanese

As one can see from the table, the content of the letters ranges from the general and the mundane to the specific and sometimes the extraordinary. But even the most uninteresting letters offer important lessons on their ways of communication. For instance, a Chinese letter from the king of Khotan to the lord of Shazhou reads:¹

One Lump of Jade

Offered to Governor of Shazhou, my son, the Linggong. Please accept properly, and please do not complain about the lightness and scarceness (of the gift). Wait for a large patch of envoys and know that there will be other objects of testimony (*xinwu* 信物).

As for the carpenter Yang Junzi, please make sure to send him to the west, regardless of the cost.

Whenever a letter arrives, please check two seals: one large jade seal and one small jade seal. There are no other seals.

In this letter, with the gift of a lump of jade, the Khotanese king asks the Governor of Shazhou, who is his son-in-law, to send a carpenter to the west, “regardless

¹ P.2826.

of the cost.” In a sense, the lump of jade served as a payment for sending the carpenter. The significance of carpenters is also seen in Pelliot tibetain 1082, a Tibetan letter written by the Uyghur Khan of Ganzhou to the Puye (Cabinet Minister) of Shahzou. The Khan praised two carpenters for being particularly diligent (shIng bzo de rnam gnyis las la 'grus par gyur). In this letter, he also mentioned the works of goldsmiths (gser mgar) as well as other artisans (bzo bo) and painters (ri mo mkhan) among the repair of the city of Ganzhou.¹ Therefore, the diplomatic connections among these states seem to have enabled a constant flow of skilled workers and artists, whose services are the central issues in some of these letters. Another common theme in the letters is the situation of traveling envoys. At the end of the same Tibetan letter:

“When the envoys come back, (please) send the gift and do not harm the body. When the envoy from the Chinese kingdom returns, do send my envoy (back).”

Clearly, the writer of the letter was extremely concerned with the safe return the envoys, which, curiously in this case, seems to have depended upon the timely offering of gifts and the return of another envoy from China. Therefore, within the framework of a given diplomatic agreement (discussed in the next sub-section) the safety of the passage of an envoy depended upon the reciprocal treatment of another envoy from the other state. Again, gifts seem to be a powerful means of securing passage of envoys as well.² Indeed, the safety of envoys is often an issue for these communicating parties. In a letter by the

¹ The original text reads: kam cu zhIg ral du gyur pa 'I mkhar pho brang bgyIs // bzo bo ma mchIs bzo bo g.yar pa las bzo bo brdzangs pa glo ba dga'.

² This point is discussed more fully in chapter 3 of the dissertation.

lord of Shazhou to Liangzhou, he is negotiating the safe passages of envoys through Liangzhou.¹

Letter to Liangzhou: Now that the envoys are returning, the relevant garrison also dispatches envoys. [Since] the path they took passes your great province, how dare we not bother you? Last year, upon the directives of the Khaghan, I started to dispatch specific officers to pay tribute (to the capital). But not endowed with the generous favor of the Puye (the official title of the ruler of Liangzhou), they were robbed on the road by Wenmo. Now that these officers are traveling with the envoys, I hope that the Puye could make the arrangement so that they can arrive at their next stop, and enjoy peaceful trips back and forth. If we are offered this favor 恩德, how can we forget it?

“涼州書”: 今者使者回轍，當軍兼差使人。路次經過大藩，豈敢轍無匪違。前載得可汗旨教，始差朝貢專人，不蒙僕射隆恩，中路被溫末剽劫。今乃共使臣同往，望僕射以作周旋，得達前程，往迴平善，此之恩得(德)，何敢忘焉。

How did he attempt to negotiate a safe passage? First, he explained the reasons for his envoys to pass Liangzhou: the reference to Uyghur Khan and his directive indicates that the trip through Liangzhou was not merely the initiative of Shazhou, but also that of the Ganzhou Uyghurs. The implication is, therefore, that if the lord of Liangzhou attempted to block the envoys, he would be offending two states instead of one. The writer mentions a case of disturbed passage to enhance his argument. However, in this case, the envoys were not stopped by the Puye (Cabinet Minister) of Liangzhou, but were “robbed on the road by Wenmo.” The Wenmo people, a group known as “slave tribes of the Tibetans,” feature prominently in stories about robbery on the road in the Hexi region. How was the Puye of Liangzhou to blame? The letter does not specify,

¹ P.2945.

which indicates that the Puye must have had some degree of control of the Wenmo people or, at least, that the pacification of these robbers within his domain was to be his duty. The lord of Shazhou ends the letter with a rhetorical question: “If we are offered this favor, how can we forget it?” Here, the idea of *ende* 恩德 (favor) is interesting because the security of the road was considered a blessing that should not be forgotten. This indicates that, in due course, such a favor would be returned in some way. This type of reciprocity is spelled out even more clearly in a letter written to the Uyghur ministers by Cao Yuanshen in the year 943.

Ministers: Please ponder that (our) two places are not from different state, and by the road we become one family (途路一家). On the day the envoy arrives, if you allow him to return to the west, it would be a great favor 恩幸. Indeed, since the road to the Court (of Central China) passes Ganzhou, do our two places only have this one occasion of envoy passing? Or do we expect the passage in the future as well? As for the dispatch of Heavenly envoys, I wish you would allow the passage to the west. (If that occurs,) people hearing it from near and far, (would they) not consider felicitous this name of “pain and heat?” That would be fortunate! Now I am sending Buddhist monk-manager Qingfu, Dutou Wang Tongxin and companions to tie our happiness and express the goodwill. For the Ministers I have attached 10 *pi* of white flower-braided wool, one *pi* of white silk, as a token of the memories of my father the great king. When they arrive please check and collect. Since the Ministers have established with the Great King the relationship between a son and a father, now that the Great King passed away, such feeling of “pain and heat” cannot be abandoned. Please wisely consult and report to the Khan, the Son of Heaven so that he agrees with all of the affairs of the world. (If so) it would be thanks to the ability of maneuvering of the Ministers. Not exhausting my intent, I humbly petition.

衆宰相念以兩地社稷無二，途路一家，人使到日，允許西迴，即是恩幸。伏且朝庭路次甘州，兩地豈不是此件行使，久後亦要往來？其天使般次，希垂放過西來。近見遠聞，豈不是痛熱之名？幸矣！今遣釋門僧政慶福、都頭王通信等一行結歡通好。衆宰相各附白花綿綾壹拾疋、白縹壹疋，以充父大王留念。到日檢領。況衆宰相先以（與）大王結爲父子之分，今者縱然大王奄世，痛熱情義，不可斷絕。善咨申可汗天子，所有世界之事，並令允就，即是衆宰相周旋之力，不宜謹狀。

This letter is one of the most complete and important of diplomatic letters preserved during this period and deserves an extensive quotation and a close analysis. At the beginning of the letter, Cao Yuanshen reminds the ministers of the established relations between Shazhou and Ganzhou by describing this relation as “our two places are not from different state, and by the road we become one family.” This is significant in that it combines the two most important elements of this regional diplomacy (road and family) into a single argument. For him, being on the same road turned them into one family. This was the principle on which diplomacy operated among these states. Since similar expressions are also found elsewhere in the Dunhuang manuscripts, I argue that the significance of the road that binds both parties in a diplomatic relation is one of the defining features of the diplomatic thinking of this region, and perhaps of places connected by the Silk Road in general.

After stating this general diplomatic principle, Cao Yuanshen then delves into the practical matter this letter was trying to accomplish: the passage of envoys. Here, he uses a similar kind of language as the preceding letter: “if you allow him to return to the west, it would be a great favor (*enxing* 恩幸).” To bolster the request for a favor, he points out the obvious: “do our two places only have this one occasion of envoy passing?” The implication is that to return the favor, he will allow their envoys to pass areas under his rule. One monk and one official were sent to the ministers to ask for this favor, which indicates the importance of Buddhism in diplomacy in the region. But more importantly, he invokes a strange expression of “pain and heat (*tongre zhiqing* 痛热之情).” As this term appears again later in the letter, it is clear that it refers to the relationship between

Shazhou and Ganzhou. Why this strange term, which only appears in contemporary sources as a description of a disease, occurs in this context is unknown. But I would argue that, similar to the cases of loanwords, the new diplomatic scenarios necessitate the use of unfamiliar indigenous terms to describe new relations. Cao Yuande argues that “feeling of pain and heat cannot be abandoned” during a delicate time, when his father, the founder of the Cao family rule at Dunhuang passed away. Perhaps because of this, but certainly in line with the general diplomatic practice of the time, fine gifts of silk and wool were given to the ministers. Invoking precedence, sending envoys, and offering gifts, the diplomatic relations with the Uyghur state in Ganzhou were thus reestablished.

Letters were not only exchanged between lords of different states, but also between the envoy and his own government or the lord of that state or those of another state. P.2786 contains several reports from a Khotanese envoy named Ana Saṃḡaa to the royal court in Khotan. These reports deal with various issues including travelers’ provision, their missions and the situation of their fulfillment of these missions, as well as local conditions on the road. These matters will be treated more fully in the next few chapters in this dissertation. Pertaining to this chapter is a report on what can be called diplomatic dealings:

I did not dare to make a report. It does not please the servants to uphold the order, (if that is the case) I shall come to blame. When, at the Royal Court, in the divine mind there would be such (an idea as): “When the road is opened, when the favor of (only) a small gift extends towards Ganzhou, then it will not be fitting as the Royal favor.”

haṣḍä na darrvai yaḥ bīsām parau na kṣama hagrtauttai u āra baida hīsūṃ khu tta rrvī vī jastūña aysmya tta tta īyai sa khu ṣaḥ pada pprahīṣta khu vā kamacū vāṣṭā-lakyai śkyaisa hīyaḥ mvaiṣḍa’ haraysdai’ tī vā rrvīyaḥ mvaiṣḍa’ na habū(sa)na

ṣṭāvai:

In this passage, Ana Saṃgaa postulates an idea that would supposedly have been in the divine mind of the king of Khotan that “When the road is opened, when the favor of (only) a small gift extends towards Ganzhou, then it will not be fitting as the Royal favor.” Here, the word for “gift,” (*skyaisa-*) is derived from Tibetan *skyes-*, “gift.” This is not any ordinary gift, but specifically the one exchanged between lords of different states. Note that the same word is used in Pelliot tibetain 1082 for the gift from Uyghur Khan of Ganzhou to the Puye of Shahzou. More important is the notion, in Ana Saṃgaa’s view, that the “opening” of the road is contingent upon the appropriate amount of gift. In other words, gifts were exchanged not merely for the maintenance of Khotan’s relation with Ganzhou, but specifically for the opening of the road. The direct connection between diplomacy and the maintenance of the road is again made explicit.

A few lines later in the same document, we see another reference to what seems to be the same situation:

If the favor of the Royal present (to) Ganzhou should not be appropriate, when their favor then extends, as for those who should conduct the matter of upholding the royal order, we shall take care of their agreement with each another, so that the Royal order is maintained.

khu vā kamacū rrvī śkyaisa hyī mvaisḍa’ na habūsana ttāvai khu vā ttyau (ttyāṃ) pā jsā hīya mvaisḍa’ ḥaraysdai ca va rrvī parau hagrrihāmivai haira tsīyai sūjai bai’da samaiyāṃ ādara yanau khu rrvī parau dara hamai

Here, Ana Saṃgaa is reiterating that the gift from Khotan to Ganzhou is not appropriate (*habūsana*). And only when the favor of the present is extended, will the royal

order be upheld. Intriguingly, Ana Saṃḡaa then continues with the claim that “we shall take care of their agreement with one another, so that the Royal order is maintained.” While it is still tentative, one is rather tempted to read “their agreement” (*samaiyām*) as a diplomatic agreement. The context seems to suggest that this is a plausible reading because the previous part of the letter is discussing the diplomatic gift to Ganzhou. But regardless, the passages cited make clear the close connection between interstate relations, gifts, and the peace on the road.

To summarize, the content of the diplomatic letters revolves around the sending of envoys, the exchange of gifts, and safety on the road. These are some of the features of not only the letters but also the kind of diplomacy that underlined the use of these letters. The exchange of letters thus formed a social network among lords, officials, and envoys. The key relation, of course, is the one among lords or heads of different states, and the practice of *heqin* marriage described above played a key role in defining these relations. For instance, Pelliot tibetain 1082 was sent in the late ninth century, when *heqin* marriage still did not dominate the diplomatic discourses of the region. Therefore, the sender of the letter referred to himself as “Tengri Uyghur Khagan (*deng re hve pur kha gan*)” and to the recipient merely as “*bog ya* (from Ch. Puye 僕射).” In contrast, Pelliot tibetain 1106, a letter from the king of Khotan to the governor of Shazhou refers to the sender as “older brother” (*gcen po*) and to the recipient as “younger brother” (*gcung*). Such familial terms include father-son, uncle-nephew, and older brother-younger brother, mother-son, etc. These uses of these terms testify to the power of diplomatic marriage and reinforce the notion that is expressed most clearly in Cao Yuanzhong’s 934 letter, which I argue conveys the essential assumptions of the diplomatic practices during this period: “by the

road we (meaning different states) become one family.” It was with such assumptions that diplomatic covenants were made.

2.4.3: We Swear in front of the Buddha: Treaty Making and Breaking

In 974, after making an unknown amount of offerings to the Buddha, Cao Yuzhong, the lord of Shazhou at the time, prayed that, with such offerings, he wished:
language? where?

The current emperor will pacify the heaven and earth, so that the road will be kept open and the traffic be smooth, and the due duty of tribute for officialdom will be offered without shortage.

These lines would have found sympathetic ears in many states discussed here, as one commonality of almost all these rulers (with the possible exception of the ruler of Turfan, who was Manichean for a brief period in the ninth century) is that they were all Buddhist. Therefore, Buddhism also played a crucial role in defining the ways diplomacy was conducted. P.t.1189r is a letter written to the governor, Cao, of Shazhou (who bore the title “ha se tser to” < Ch. 河西節度) by the governor of Suzhou (Tib. sug cu). In this case, four groups — Shazhou, Tartar (da tar), Zhongyun (ju ngul), and Ganzhou Uyghur (hor) — swore an oath in the Dayun Temple (de’i yun zi ’i gtsugs lag khang) of Suzhou in the presence of Vaiśravaṇa. Each person performed a whipping for this occasion. Following the ceremony, the letter then preserved a precious piece of the actual testimony:

“At yar-sha-cab, from today onward, we will not show the horse heads nor make any noise. Whoever goes secretly or runs and loads horse gear, if one commits robbery and rape in the direction of (meaning towards) Shazhou, if the son does it, may the father die; if the younger brother does, may the older brother die.”

yar sha cab phyogs su di ring phan cad // rta mgo myi bstan sgra myi
rgyug par bgyis // gang zhig rkog nas song 'am / snga rgyugs byas te rta sga bstad
de / sha cu phyogs jag byi pa yod na / bu byas na pha bsad par bgyis // nu bo song
na pho bo bsad par bgyis //

The initial treaty-making process was conducted in the Dayun Temple in Suzhou. It was Empress Wu who, in the late seventh century, ordered the construction of a Dayun Temple in both capitals (Chang'an and Luoyang) and in every prefecture in order to store the Buddhist text *Dayun jing*. By the tenth century, these Dayun temples in Hexi had become some of the largest Buddhist institutions regionally. Grand, yet somewhat apolitical, a Dayun Temple was a suitable place for such a ceremony. More specifically, the ceremony was performed in front of Vaiśravaṇa, the guardian of the north and one of the four lokapālas “world protectors.” The ability of Vaiśravaṇa to guard the peace of the area was well known. In a rare endeavor of the time, Cao Yunzhong, the lord of Dunhuang, commissioned the printing of a number of images of Vaiśravaṇa. Underneath the images he included a prayer, in which he prayed for “peace in the state, fortune with the people, long-lasting prosperity with the government, safety on the road.”¹ While the wish for the country, the government, and the people to be secure and prosperous is quite generic, it is important that he mentioned safety on the road. Evidently, Vaiśravaṇa was seen as having the ability to provide security on the road. While the exact meaning of the phrases such as “showing horse heads” in the treaty awaits further investigation, the

¹ The original text reads: 國安人泰，社稷恒昌，道路和平，普天安樂.

general sense expressed is fairly clear: any secret use of horses was not allowed, because these riders were committing robbery and rape in Shazhou. Therefore, Vaiśravaṇa in the making of the covenant was witnessing and protecting a treaty that guarded against illicit activities on the road, thus keeping the road secure.

Even more interesting is the penalty clause in this covenant, which explicitly uses familial terms: “if the son does it, may the father die; if the younger brother does, may the older brother die.” These terms are severe in a very specific way. They include the collateral capital punishment of one’s closest relatives. According to the Tang dynasty legal code, only the most heinous of public crimes, such as high treason, would result in collateral punishment of one’s family members; but even in these cases, very rarely were there capital punishments. Therefore, for the parties involved in the treaty, the illicit use of horses in robbery and rape were not merely severe crimes, but ones punishable by the death of one’s father or brother. Evidently, such actions were not merely private matters, but serious violations of public good. Additionally, when we read it in the context of the diplomatic marriages described above, where the lords of these states described each other using the same vocabulary of father/son, older brother/younger brother, this clause assumes additional significance. A strict reading of this clause would indicate that, if the lord of Shazhou conducts such a crime, the rulers of the entire region, his family by diplomatic marriages, would be liable to punishment by death in the eyes of Vaiśravaṇa.

While such strict reading is only theoretically possible, it is the reason, I argue, that in almost every one of the letters, when we encounter cases of disturbance on the road, the writers of the letters went to great length in suggesting that at most the crime being committed was resulted from negligence and was not intentional. The lord of

Shazhou, for instance, never accused the lord of Ganzhou of disturbing the road himself except when Ganzhou was planning to attack Shazhou militarily in the 920s. It is possible that such soft language was used because of the mutually held understanding that actual disturbance of the road was one of the most heinous crimes possible, and one therefore took great care in where such accusations were directed. Often, some anonymous “bandits” were singled out as the real culprit. Therefore, by acknowledging (if perhaps not fully abiding by) these clauses, the states connected by the road became one family in a legal sense.

Just as the creation of a diplomatic treaty was announced in front of a Buddhist deity, so was the annulment of a treaty. In the Chinese document P.3412, we find another case of treaty making that potentially involved treaty breaking occurring at the exact same location: the Dayun Temple of Suzhou.¹ A number of officials in Guazhou heard from a traveling monk, a novice monk, and a military clerk that in the tenth month of the year 981, the Uyghur, Tartar, and Suzhou people met at the Dayun Temple to “set a treaty in front of the Buddha. 對佛設誓” The goal of the treaty was to conduct a military campaign towards the west, i.e., Shazhou and the regions under its control. We do not have sources to prove or disprove that such a treaty actually materialized, but the action alone was a clear violation of the diplomatic relations that had been established.

Therefore, the annulment of the older treaty and the establishment of a new treaty that

¹ The original text reads: 都頭安再勝、都衙趙再成、李衍悉雞等：右今月廿日寅時，孔僧正、沙彌定昌、押衙唐慈兒等三人走來，況再勝等聞訊向東消息，言說回鶻、達坦及肅州家相合。就大雲寺對佛設誓，則說向西行兵。其僧正身患，且住三五日瓜州將患，便取西來。更有微細事理，僧正等來且分說。謹具狀陳聞，謹錄狀上。牒件狀如前謹牒。太平興國陸年十月日都頭安再勝、都衙趙再成等。

excluded Shazhou would also have to take place in a Dayun Temple in front of the Buddha for it to be effective.

While very few actual texts of treaties are preserved, sometimes we possess indirect yet useful information. For instance, the text of a negotiation about a covenant is preserved in P.2786, the letter by the Khotanese envoy Ana Saṃḡaa. The Khotanese envoys not only managed the relation between Khotan and Ganzhou, but also acted as intermediaries. In his letter, Ana Saṃḡaa reports the following incident that occurred on the road between Ganzhou and Shazhou:¹

Then, in Cvāvaja (first) month, on the thirteenth day, 5 envoys, Tcyauvā Aṃmāga and others, left. In their hands, the Linggong (lord of Shazhou) sent a letter to Ganzhou, as follows: “As for the old hostility, I no longer seek it nor ask (about it), if indeed a good time should please (both of us). Those who are our men, to all (of them) fame and peace. You are not controlling even one of them. You will also open the road to China.”

pātcā ttā cvāvāja māštā draisamyai ḥaḍai tcyauvā aṃmāga āstaṃna ḥaḍa tsvāṃda pajsā : ttakyau gauštā jsā hā kamaçū vāštā pīḍakaḥ hajsāda ḍīkau tta tta sḡ : ca magāra ḡmanā ttura[~ ttara]-u pā ḡ na kūsū na pvaisūṃ khvai śaikā bāḍa kṣamīyai cai ttā būnā hvāṇḍḍā īdai be’šavā vāštā paśā śau ttā sḡ na a’haijā : ttī jsā caigā-kṣīrāštā padā prahājā :

According to this letter, five Khotanese envoys have left Shazhou with a letter from the Linggong of Shazhou to Ganzhou. The Linggong proposes to look beyond old hostility and reestablish relations with Ganzhou. In exchange for his forgetting the old hostility, the Uyghur Khan in Ganzhou should, according to the Linggong, control the enemy and open the road to China. The result would be that “our men” would obtain

¹ For a thorough study of this letter and related documents, see Kumamoto Hiroshi, *Khotanese Official Documents in the Tenth Century A.D.* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1982).

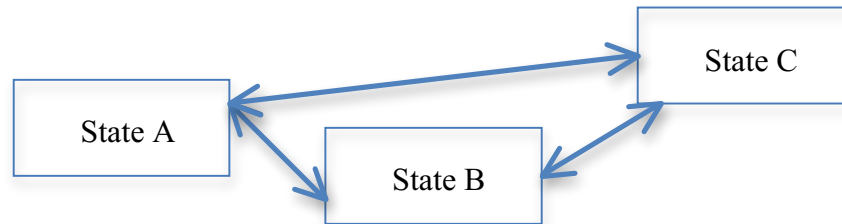
“fame and peace.” The wording of the letter (“You are not controlling even one of them (i.e., enemies). You will also open the road to China.”) seems to suggest that the enemies in question are those who stood in the way of opening the road to China. This corroborates the observations made above in my discussion of the Chinese letters written by lord of Shazhou to Ganzhou. In both letters, the primary goal of the peaceful diplomatic relation is the maintenance of a road suitable for traveling. This letter is only one of many similar texts in different languages that deal with the renegotiation of treaties or agreements. By simply saying that one does not intend to seek old hostility, one frees the other party from the unfulfilled responsibility and opens the possibility of new agreements. It was by this constant cycle of making and remaking of treaties that peace on the road was sustained.

2.5: Conclusion: Diplomacy on the Silk Road

Now, back to the questions I raised at the beginning of this chapter: What changed in the tenth century Hexi region? What features of this new diplomacy were distinctively connected to the functioning of the Silk Road? The analysis in the previous sections indicates several salient features of this new diplomatic relation that took shape “on the road.” First of all, this new diplomacy represented a partial inheritance of the old diplomatic practices and vocabularies during the imperial periods from the sixth to the ninth centuries. It is partial because between the two possible options of ordering diplomatic relations, namely the one among equals (Type 1) and the one between an empire and a subordinate state (Type 2), the former was adopted among the states in Hexi

as the guiding principle. The most important feature of this principle is the institution of diplomatic marriage, which replaced earlier practices of hostage exchange and became the new foundation of interstate relations. Yet the adoption of the institution of diplomatic marriage was also not a direct replica of older practices. Instead, ethnic elements were eliminated from consideration as Chinese lords in Shazhou, unlike the Chinese emperors in the Han and the Tang dynasties, married foreign princesses. This redefinition is important because it turned this institution from a rigid uni-directional one that often caused moral dilemmas into a flexible indicant and modifier of relations. Any rearrangement of a diplomatic marriage meant the establishment of a new relationship that, although generally equal in nature, still involved often unspoken assumptions of hierarchy (for instance, the one marrying *out* a princess becomes the father and the one marrying a princess becomes the son). In this sense, the relations among these states are best described as “hierarchical among equals” as illustrated in Diagram 2.3. The key feature in this new system is its flexibility: unlike the “Imperial Diplomacy” described earlier, these three states were more or less equal, with only a slight difference in status. And even this slight difference was constantly subject to renegotiation and redefinition ,primarily through the change of the directionality of the diplomatic marriage. With this understanding of the diplomatic culture of the time, my question at the beginning of the chapter about the apparently strange arrangement of Khotanese and Uyghur figures in the Chinese cave 98 can be easily answered.

Diagram 2.3



Another feature of this new diplomacy is the keen awareness that it was a road that closely connected these states, which thus necessitated peaceful co-existence. This recognition did not come without a heavy price. In the early years of the region’s political fragmentation, many states attempted to overpower one another, and it was only after the repeated failure of such attempts that the inability of any one state to control this entire region from Khtoan to Lingzhou (roughly one third of the landmass of the P.R.C.) became the norm. More specifically, the recognition that all of these states were situated on the same road served as the most important rationale for the need to maintain peaceful coexistence. Phrases such as “by the road we (two states) become one family” found their way into official diplomatic covenants and letters and highlight the status of these states “on the road.” As a connecting force, the road was the reason for close relations among the states that thought of themselves as being “on the road.”

The final feature of the diplomacy on the Silk Road is its hybridity, which finds its expression in many aspects of the diplomatic practices. Instead of an established group of “ambassadors,” people from all walks of lives and all possible cultural and linguistic backgrounds traveled on the road as envoys. The letters were not written in any exclusive *lingua franca*, but in any language deemed convenient for the people involved at any

given time. Therefore it does not necessarily correspond to the language in predominant use in a certain state. In some cases, when a Khotanese envoy decided to write a letter in Uyghur to the local state of Shazhou, we simply do not know enough to understand the mechanisms involved. The subtlest form of hybridity is possibly the trans-lingual intermingling of diplomatic vocabulary. The borrowing of the Tibetan word for “gift” in Khotanese and of the Chinese word for “making a covenant” in Sogdian are perhaps the best testimonies to this hybrid feature of diplomacy on the Silk Road.

Most essentially, I argue that, contrary to the claims of many scholars about political fragmentation and its assumed detrimental effect on traveling, the states in and around the Hexi region in the tenth century were remarkably successfully in maintaining peace and keeping the road open, and no major warfare occurred for about one century. Admittedly, there was occasional friction, particularly regarding the envoys traveling on the road. But such friction was usually resolved fairly quickly by the establishment and adjustment of family relationships, the offering of gifts, and the signing, sometimes by rulers of the states involved facing each other in person, of new agreements. The result was that the Silk Road in and around the Hexi Corridor was more peaceful in the tenth century than it was in the ninth century, as most of the warfares during this period recorded in Dunhuang documents as well as from external Chinese sources occurred in the ninth century. The absence of imperial power did not plunge these Silk Road states into utter chaos, but rather introduced a more intimate and flexible system of diplomacy that enabled an unprecedented era of peaceful exchange of various kinds.

Part Two: Gifts and Guest: Practices of Travel

Chapter 3: Moving Gifts

3.1: Introduction

In 943, Cao Yijin, the lord of Dunhuang, sent a letter to the ministers of the Uyghur kingdom in Ganzhou.¹ In the letter, “the older brother,” Cao Yijin, expresses his gratitude to “the younger brother,” the Khaghan, for allowing the envoys from China (“the heavenly envoy”) to pass by Ganzhou and reach Dunhuang. At the end of the letter, he attached “a slight token” (*qingxin* 輕信) of his gratitude, which included the following items:

1. One piece of first class carmine-surface jade, eight *jin*;
2. White silk, five *pi*;
3. Anxi (Kucha) silk, two *pi*;
4. *Liji* silk, eighteen *pi*;
5. Government [produced] cloth, sixty *pi*.

上好燕脂表（鑲）玉境（鏡）壹團重捌斤、白綿綾伍匹、安西繼兩匹、立機細繼拾捌匹、官布陸拾匹，

To put this “slight token” into context: items 2, 4, and 5 are common goods sold and bought in the markets of Dunhuang. It is easy to assess that together they would be worth approximately 1335 *shi* of grain.² This amount of grain would have been enough to feed a

¹ P.2992v.

² The calculation is based on Zheng Binglin, “Wan Tang Wudai Dunhuang maoyi shichang de wujia 晚唐五代敦煌貿易市場的物價” *Dunhuang xue jikan* (1997.3): 14-32.

couple for about 111 years.¹ But these are not the most rare and precious items in this list. The *xie*-cloth from Anxi, the name for the Taklmakan desert area in the Tang, was an exotic product not sold in the market at Dunhuang, so there is no way to know exactly how much it cost. For the same reason, it is hard to know the value of the highlight of the list, the “first class carmine-surface jade” weighing eight *jin*. There is almost no doubt that this piece of jade originated from the kingdom of Khotan, as Khotan was the only place where jade was produced in the region. Given that this is not a letter addressing an emergency or a serious crisis, but is just an expression of gratitude for a common practice, the value of the gifts offered was quite substantial. It is safe to say that this list of gifts is by no means “slight.”

Yet the gifts *were* slight in another sense. While potentially worth more than all the rest of the gifts on the list combined, the piece of carmine-surface jade is not particularly heavy, about 5 kilograms.² A few donkeys or horses would have easily carried the total list of goods. Therefore, this list is a perfect specimen of goods transported on the Silk Road: it was given by the lord of Dunhuang to the Khaghan of Ganzhou; it has considerable value yet is fairly light in weight; several items in the list are also clearly exotic goods. Yet it differs in a key way from what we have come to think of goods on the Silk Road. Instead of being exchanged as commodities, these goods were gifts.

In scholarly discussions, the transportation of goods on the Silk Road has been considered almost exclusively in terms of commodities and commerce. This is clearly

¹ The data is based on Huang Zhengjian, “Dunhuang wenshu yu Tang Wudai beifang diqu de yinshi shenghuo 敦煌文書與唐五代北方地區的飲食生活,” *Weijin Nanbeichao Suitang shi ziliao*, 11 (1991), 271.

² Each *jin* in the Tang is about 650 grams. And 8 *jin* is therefore 5.2 kg.

seen in the vocabulary historians use in describing goods exchanged on the Silk Road: things were “bought” and “sold,” while using “money.” The debate centered not on whether there was anything in the ancient trans-Eurasian material exchanges that could be considered money or currency, but *what* the money or currency was.¹ Yet such a scholarly search for money has not always been successful. The title by Moriyasu Takao reads: “From Silk, Cotton, and Copper Coin to Silver: Transition of the Currency Used by the Uighurs During the Period from the 8th to the 14th Centuries.”² While these kinds of works certainly shed new light on the circulation of the goods regarded as money, one cannot help but wonder, if what can be regarded as money or currency was indeed so unstable, how useful was it to use “money” for historical analysis?³ Are we not anachronistically projecting an omnipresence of commerce and trade that never was?

Historians have not failed to notice that goods transported on the Silk Road were often described in terms of gifts rather than commodities. In one of the earliest discussions of this subject, Owen Lattimore argues that “the celebrated Silk Route trade through Inner Asia was a long-distance trade in a luxury commodity passing over the oases rather than entering into their economic life. At the same time, however, oasis rulers carried on trade in a disguised form, by sending embassies with gifts to the Chinese

¹ Helen Wang, “Textiles as Money on the Silk Road?” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, no. 02 (2013): 165–74.

² *Turfan Revisited: The First Century of Research into the Arts and Cultures of the Silk Road*, ed. D. Durkin-Meisterernst et al. (Berlin, 2004), 228–39.

³ In the context of the period under discussion, money was the product of a state. Stable currency requires a strong state. It was perhaps suitable to talk about money in the context of the Tang, the Tibetan, or the Uyghur empires, because each had the capacity, if not always to willingness, to regulate the use of currency in their respective domain. Yet in the study of the Silk Road, where the systems of currency ran into one another, it is difficult, and unhelpful, to talk about currency.

Court.”¹ The idea of “trade in a disguised form” is echoed in more recent works. To read source material incompatible with the trade paradigm as “disguise” is an easy way of explaining this inconsistency and incoherence. But this reading does not help us understand the nature of the transportation of goods on the Silk Road, which more often than not, was described in the language of ritual and gifts rather than of commerce and commodities.

In this chapter, I describe the goods exchanged on the Silk Road without assuming them to be commodities. Instead, I pay particular attention to the ways these goods were portrayed in the documents and propose that the language used to describe their transportation should be taken seriously on its own. What I have found is that, in the excavated documents from Dunhuang as well as transmitted texts, goods exchanged on the Silk Road were rarely designated or treated as “commodities.” Instead, in documents in several languages, a new set of vocabulary – that of the “gift” – emerges. Therefore, to describe these goods as gifts reflects more closely how they were written about in these documents and viewed in the original contexts of the social lives surrounding these goods.²

More importantly, this change of terminology reveals an underlying social principle in the exchange of goods on the Silk Road that has not been investigated in depth. If a significant portion of these goods were not exchanged as commodities, but as gifts, what does it tell us about the social structure that enables such exchange? What was the motivation for gift giving? How did the giving of gifts shape the relationship between

¹ *Pivot of Asia; Sinkiang and the inner Asian frontiers of China and Russia* (Boston: Little Brown, 1950), 171.

² Valerie Hansen, “International Gifting;” Jeongwon Hyun, “Gift Exchange among States in East Asia During the Eleventh Century” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2013.

the giver and the receiver? How did the specifically transcultural context of the Silk Road affect the practice of gift giving? These are all questions that would not be raised if one assumes that most exchanges of goods on Silk Road were commercial and the motivation was profit. I shall show in this chapter that, in the majority of cases, the exchange of rare goods cannot be seen as commercial and that the non-commercial nature of these exchanges reflected the non-commercial nature of traveling itself.¹

If the motivation for the gift exchange was not necessarily for profit, then why did people conduct these exchanges? I argue in this chapter that, at least partially, what the parties involved in gift exchanges were seeking was prestige rather than profit. “Prestige” is a central concept, which I shall explore in this and the following chapter, and it requires a bit of explanation. In my analysis, I follow sociologist William Goode’s definition of “prestige” as “the esteem, respect, or approval that is granted by an individual or collectivity for performances or qualities they consider above the average.”² In this sense, prestige differs from power in that it is something granted by other people, and the production of prestige is inherently embedded in a reciprocal relation between two people or parties.

One of the main reasons for the exchange of gifts was the confirmation or negotiation of social status. In gift exchanges, giving more is more desirable than giving less. The party offering more valuable gifts acquires a greater amount of prestige and higher social status. As pointed out by the behavior psychologist (and zoologist) Robert Hinde, “prestige and status are determined by the magnitude of the gifts exchanged ... It

¹ This will be the subject of chapter 4.

² William Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 7.

is obligatory to give, to receive, and to repay: each is conducive to a good relationship, and refusal can be taken as signifying enmity. Thus giving is not simply to be equated with generosity, but is self-interested, a means of gaining prestige.”¹ It is for a similar reason that Marcel Mauss, the founder of the anthropological inquiries into gift exchange, asserts “[t]he rich man who shows his wealth by spending recklessly is the man who wins prestige.”² In this sense, the logic of the gift seems to be exactly the opposite of the logic of a commodity. In commercial exchanges, the parties involved compete in offering the lowest amount of goods in order to acquire the maximum amount of gain. Gift exchanges were similarly competitive, but the competition was not to give less, but to give more. I argue that it was the desire to acquire prestige and to sustain social status – more than the pursuit of profit – that served as the most potent incentive for people to travel on the Silk Road.

In this chapter I shall first define what I mean by “gifts” in the context of the Dunhuang manuscripts, with a description of the vocabulary used to discuss “gifts” in various languages. Then, I will describe the use of gifts in letter writing, as well as in various stages of travel from departure to arrival. In the process, I argue that gifts were central to the travelers’ activities on the road and to the functions of the Silk Road in general because their wide use facilitated the transmission of information and people, and frequently, gift exchange was the main reason for travel in the first place. In my discussion of the various cases of gift exchange, I pay particular attention to how these exchanges were driven by the pursuit of prestige and how they often reshaped the relative social status among parties involved. These frequent exchanges of gifts among travelers

¹ Robert Hinde, *Why Good is Good: The Sources of Morality* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 78.

² Mauss, *The Gift*, 35.

and their hosts created a network of a non-commercial nature. I argue that the Silk Road during the period we are considering, rather than being primarily a “network of commodities,” should be more appropriately understood as a “network of prestige.” In this chapter, I explore the material aspect of this network through a discussion of gifts and gift exchanges. In the next chapter, I shall turn to the people who traveled and further explore the social aspect of this “network of prestige.”

3.2: What is a Gift?

The modern study of gifts and gift exchange began with Marcel Mauss’s influential thesis.¹ Although he never gave a clear definition, his work argues for several fundamental features of a gift: it creates and re-creates social relations; the donor of the gift assumes a higher social status than the receiver; and there is no “free” gift in the sense that even though recompense is not guaranteed, it is generally expected. As summarized by Natalie Zemon Davis in her study of gift exchange in France:²

Every gift produces a return gift in a chain of events that accomplishes many things all at once: goods are exchanged and redistributed in societies that do not have distinct commercial markets; peace is maintained and sometimes solidarity and friendship; and status is confirmed or competed for, as in the potlatch among Indians of the Northwest coast of North America, where clan chiefs rival each other to see who can give away the most goods.

¹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*.

² Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, The Curti Lectures (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 4.

While the general contour of this summary does apply to the gifts on the Silk Road, the particular relation these gifts maintain as well as the exact status that was competed for are specific to pre-modern Central Eurasia. In the following discussion, I shall examine how closely these general features align with the empirical evidence in my case. In particular, I shall pay attention to how gifts interacted with the movements of people, goods, and information.

The primary reason why I decided to examine the goods transmitted on the Silk Road in this period as gifts is that most of them were described in documents as such. In the following table, I list some of the most common terms for gifts in some of the main languages represented in Dunhuang social and economic documents.

Table 3.1: Word for Gifts found in Dunhuang manuscripts

Language	Chinese	Tibetan	Khtoanese	Uyghur	Sogdian
Gift	li 禮, gong 貢, xin 信	bya-sga/bya-dga', skyes	skyaaisa, mu'sda	beläk	p'l'k

These terms were not always used interchangeably. Instead, some of them seem to point to specific aspects of gift exchange, while others denote general features. For instance, the Chinese term *li* 禮 indicates a generic gift without delineating the social hierarchy between the giver and the receiver. The term *gong* 貢, on the other hand, indicates an upward social movement of the gift and is used almost exclusively for gifts to the emperor. Its downward equivalent *ci* 賜 has a broader semantic spectrum, denoting not only gifts from the emperor specifically, but also any gift from a person considered to be socially more prestigious in the giver-receiver relationship.

Terms in other languages do not show this clear distinction. For instance, in Khotanese, the word *skyaisa* is used both for the gifts that were attached to letters and for gifts given to establish diplomatic relations. Among the Sogdian texts discovered at Dunhuang, the term for gift is *p'l'k* (or *pyr'k*) which was derived from the Turkic *beläk*. Interestingly, in both Sogdian and Khotanese, one of the common terms for “gift” is a loanword, in the former case from Uyghur and in the latter from Tibetan. According to the eleventh century *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects* (*Dīwān lughāt al-Turk*) by Maḥmūd Kāshgarī, *beläk* means a gift “which a traveler brings his relatives, or which is sent from one spot to another.”¹ This word is different from other terms for gift. For instance, the term *ärtüt* also means a gift, but one “such as a horse, or the like, offered in the presence of emirs, or other; then every gift came to be called.”² Other terms for gift also show the close connection gifting had with traveling. For instance, *armāyan* means a gift “which a man returning from a successful journey brings for his relatives.”³ Hence, it is perhaps not surprising that the term *beläk*, the meaning of which was intimately connected to travel, was borrowed into Sogdian. As I shall show in the next section, gifts and travel were often inseparable in practice, and any serious study of the latter has to involve an analysis of the former.

3.3: Gifts, Road, and Travelers

¹ Maḥmūd Kāshgarī, *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects = Dīwān Lughāt at-Turk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Printing Office, - Sources of oriental languages and literatures; 7), 295.

² Ibid. 138.

³ Ibid. 162.

The terms for gifts cited in the previous section were used in descriptions of goods in a diverse variety of social contexts. In this section I focus on these contexts and describe the circumstances and processes of gift exchange, as well as the intended outcome of such exchange. Many social events including marriages and funerals required the giving of gifts;¹ gifts to and from Buddhist institutions were equally prevalent.² In this section, however, I shall only discuss gift exchanges that are relevant to travel and trans-regional communication. Exchanges of a purely local nature will be considered in Chapter 5 when I discuss the shape of the “Silk Road economy” observed from the vantage point of Dunhuang.

A great variety of gifting that can be seen as relevant to travel. According to their social roles and the timing of their use in travels, gifts can be divided into 1. gifts attached to letters, 2. gifts given to travelers before they depart, 3. gifts given to travelers when they arrive, 4. gifts carried by travelers to their destination, and 5. gifts exchanged among travelers on other occasions during their trips. Similarly, a different kind of distinction among these gifts is equally significant. Whereas the gifts attached to letters and gifts given to travelers were distinctive because of the way they were presented, diplomatic gifts and personal gifts were distinctive because of the people among whom they were exchanged. This section will deal with each type of gifts and examine their roles in the experience of traveling on the Silk Road.

Through my description of these various categories of gift exchange, I argue that the relationship between gifting and traveling is two-fold: the exchange of gifts facilitated

¹ S.6981v is for instance a *she*-community circular about marriage gifts.

² Hao Chunwen 郝春文, *Tang houqi Wudai Song chu Dunhuang seng-ni de shehui shenghuo* 唐後期五代宋初敦煌僧尼的社會生活 (Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998), 241-253.

travelers' passage to an unfamiliar place; without gifts the mutual trust that enabled such region-crossing activities could not be sustained. At the same time, the acquisition of new and rare gifts through a process of "competitive gifting" is one of the main purposes of traveling. In this sense, gifts served both as the means and the end of traveling on the Silk Road.

3.3.1: Gifts attached to letters

One of the most common occasions for the exchange of gifts was with letters. Both personal and diplomatic letters were customarily accompanied by gifts.¹ At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed an example of a list of gifts attached to a diplomatic letter. The diplomatic case is somewhat of an exception, however: the majority of gifts attached to letters were not of particularly high value. For instance, a high-ranking monk in Turfan wrote the following letter to three other monks at Dunhuang:²

Qutluy..., [who is] endowed with purple [robe], golden seal, in charge of the non-Chinese and Chinese monks and nuns, serving at the court, said in person: Monastic Administer Song, Administrative Assistant Suo, and Preceptor Liang. In winter it is cold, how is the bodily energy? Are you healthy or not? Since we parted, it has been several years. There was no lack of envoys traveling back and forth, yet I have not received a word of greeting. The human feeling is extremely slight. Recently, on the fifth day of the tenth month, the decree from the Sage Heaven appointed me as the Dutong Dade (Monastic Chief) endowed with golden silk in charge of a thousand monks. For this reason I am sending the

¹ Scholars who study Chinese letters have noticed the close connection between letters and gifts. See Tian Xiaofei, "Material and Symbolic Economies: Letters and Gifts in Early Medieval China," in Antje Richter ed., *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 135-186.

² P. 3672 bis.

letter of greeting. Now, with the departing envoy, I am sending a slight and local gift: three Rangtao (watermelon) from the Western Land in the same bag. Please each take one. Now, with the envoy, I am sending this single letter. Not more should be said. Cautiously I send this petition.

賞紫、金印、檢校廿二城胡漢僧尼事、內供奉、骨都祿沓密施鳴瓦伊難支都統大德面語：

沙州宋僧政、索判官、梁校授。冬寒，體氣何似？健好在否？自別以後，已逕所年，人使來往不少，無一字慰問，人情極薄。昨近十月五日，聖天恩判，補充都統大德。兼賜金印，統壓千僧。為緣發書慰問。今因履使，薄禮土信西地瓢桃三課，同一袋子，各取一課。今因使行，略付單書(for 丹书?)。不宣，謹狀。

This monk, the Monastic Chief of Turfan, bears a typical Uyghur name, but the letter is written in Chinese. In this regard, it is perhaps noteworthy that the letter begins by explicitly stating that it is “said in person.” Perhaps the Monastic Chief spoke in Uyghur and his message was translated into Chinese? In any case, the message is clear: the letter was written because of the recent promotion of this Monastic Chief. The necessity of informing other monks at Dunhuang of the change in the monastic order of Turfan attests to the close connection of these trans-regional monastic communities, and, curiously, the secular governments of both places seem to have been excluded in this process. This important piece of information is wrapped in the language of friendship and the practice of gifting. The lack of letters from the Dunhuang monks, in spite of the frequency of traveling envoys, is described as showing the slightness of “human emotions.” Incidentally, the gifts that accompanied the letter, three locally produced watermelons, were similarly described as “slight 薄.”

While sending a watermelon with this particular letter might seem to be idiosyncratic to a monk from Turfan, where watermelon was a staple fruit, the practice of sending gifts with letters was omnipresent at the time. Because of the necessity of gifts in

letter exchanges, the offering of inadequate gifts was customarily acknowledged in the letters. A Sogdian letter ends in this way:

I have sent (this letter) saying: Until (I,) his servant, may come (myself), may (my) letter not be empty. Having checked (it), (kindly) accept (my) small gift, (which is) in the hands of the head of the church, the priest Wanu čor. Don't be angry!

In this Sogdian letter from Tämär Quš to a Christian clergyman named George, Tämär Quš echoes the letter cited above in describing his gift as “small.” Perhaps because the gift was considered inadequate, he added “Don't be angry!” at the end of the letter. Interestingly, the writer also indicates that a letter without gifts was considered “empty.” According to Sims-Williams, “it would seem that this epistolary formula was in origin Chinese, that it was first borrowed by Turkish in an abridged form, and that subsequently it was translated directly from Turkish into Sogdian. Clearly, the formula indicates that a letter is accompanied by a gift showing that the sender is not ‘empty’ or ‘devoid’ of warm feelings towards the addressee.”¹ For the same reason, in another letter, the writer gives the gift of “one šay (of) mulberries,” but adds, “I have not sent you a finer gift.”³ His explanation for the reason of such a meager gift is too fragmentary to be fully understood, but that the writer felt the need to explain shows the central significance of gift-giving in the practice of letter writing.

If an inadequate gift was something in need of excuses, even more so were letters without gifts. An Uyghur letter states “As for me, I am at Sügču. For this reason I was not able to send you a gift. Do not be angry because there is no gift. In the next caravan I

¹ *Turco-Sogdian Documents from 9th-10th century Dunhuang*, 89.

³ Pelliot Sogdien 28.

shall send you the greatest gift.”¹ Similarly, in a Tibetan letter from a certain Khug gong ‘bug from Suzhou to a Co (< Zhao 趙) sing lyug (< Senglu 僧錄) in Shazhou, the former confesses that after the death of his wife, he married another woman who had carried debt with her. Because of this new debt and the fact that he had to take care of his children, he was unable to send any gifts. He hoped that Co Singlyug would not be angry with him. In another letter, anger played a different role.² When a certain Bäg Bars *tarqan* wrote to a certain Kübin toyun, the sender complained:

I have heard that you are in Shazhou. You are in Shazhou, why do you not come to me? Your way of acting is thus. Because you do not come over here I got angry, and that's why I do not send letters or gifts.

According to the sender of the letter, the receiver should have visited him since he was in Shazhou (and hence close to the sender). As a result, he became angry and sent neither letters nor gifts. It is significant that in this case, letters and gifts are mentioned in connection with each other. Similarly, in another Uyghur letter: “Now send the news as numerous as they are! I said, ‘there with Yegan (nephew) gifts and letters in all its fullness (or there with Toli Tukul yegan gift and letters).’ Then I asked, and I did not find a gift or letter.”³ Clearly, in these personal letters, the offering of gifts was inseparable from the exchange of letters.

¹ Pelliot Ouïgour 6, Uygur text in Hamilton, “*Manuscripts ouïgours*,” 154, ll. 9-10: menämä sügçuda erür men ann beläk itu umatım.

² Pelliot tibetain 1129.

³ Pelliot Ouïgour 12.

The same can be said about diplomatic letters. Following is a letter written by “Seven Princes” – a group of Khotanese envoys – to the court of Dunhuang about their trip to China:¹

All the animals our men had are lost. Our clothes are lost. ... there is for the animals, nor for clothes. As there is no one with whom we can get out (and go to?) Ganzhou. And the animals Ttaya-sām had, they were since lost. There is nothing any more for the horses, nor any clothes. Neither Chīkā the *prramām* nor Ḍū the *puye* has any animals. How (can) we then come to Shuofang, since we have neither gift nor letter for the Chinese king? Things for food and drink will go ... How can even so much(?) favor extend to us? Till now there in Ganzhou many men have died. We have no food. How were then an order to come? How can we have to enter a fire (from which) we can not bring ourselves back!

In this report by the “seven princes” to the court of Khotan, they complain that they could not go further east according to the original order because they had lost everything they carried with them. Of importance here is the sentence “How (can) we then come to Shuofang, since we have neither gift nor letter for the Chinese king?” Apparently, the lack of a gift and letter (“neither gift nor letter” Khot. *na... skyesä u na pīdakä*) prevented the seven princes from traveling to Shuofang. From these letters, it is clear that the attachment of gifts to letters was an accepted and expected social practice. I argue that in both the private and the official domain, the use of gifts with letters was common among people of all cultural backgrounds.

If a letter without a gift is “weightless,” a gift without a letter is meaningless. In *Song Huiyao*, there is an interesting eleventh-century record of the Khotanese tribute to the Song:

¹ Skjaervo, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan*, 513-514. See also Skjærvø, “Turks (Uighurs) and Turkic in the Khotanese Texts from Khotan and Dunhuang,” in *Turks and Iranians: Interactions in Language and History. The Gunnar Jarring SCAS Program at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study*, ed. Éva Á. Csató, Lars Johanson, András Róna-Tas, and Bo Utas (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016), 22–26.

Office of Investigation of the Xihe circuit reported: “The kingdom of Khotan came and offered tribute without letter and petition from its king. According to the law (the tributes) should not be accepted. I have already ordered them to leave.” The imperial edict ordered: “if they insist on offering the tribute, just allow it.”

熙河路經略司言：“于闐國來貢方物而無國主表章，法不當納，已諭使去。”詔如堅欲奉貢，可聽之。¹

In this case, the local Song official contended that the law prohibited the acceptance of the tribute/gifts without appropriate letters accompanying them. As several of the examples quoted above show, the letters usually include a section describing the content and quantity of gifts attached, as well as the purpose of these gifts. Without the letters, the social significance of the gifts cannot be properly understood. That is why the Song official refused to accept the Khotanese gifts. Therefore, gifts and letters complemented each other in their roles in not only interpersonal communications, but also in diplomatic ones. Neither could exist on its own.

Thus, the use of letter and the communication of information required gifts, and gifts sent with the letters created debt on the part of the receiver, which could only be repaid by a return-letter and a counter-gift. Therefore, gifts sent with letters created an obligation on the part of the receiver, as we see from the fact that previously sent gifts are frequently mentioned in follow-up letters as a perhaps not-so-gentle reminder of the unfulfilled duty of the receiver of the letter. In a letter written by a certain Li Chou'er at Dunhuang to his younger brother Li Nuzi in Yizhou (Hami), the implied future debt a previous gift created can be clearly seen.³

¹ Guo Shengbo ed., *Song hui yao ji gao*, 136.

After the customary expressions and good wishes at the beginning, Li Chou'er first acknowledges the two previous letters and gifts he received from his younger brother. Then he proceeds to ask the brother to contribute some silk as gifts to the marriage of his niece (Li Chou'er's daughter). Perhaps as an effort to balance the relation, he then asks if his brother received the gift he sent with his previous letter, a letter in response to the first letter from his brother. At the same time, he also acknowledges that this time, he is sending an "empty" letter. The sequence of letters and gifts is shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Gift Exchange between Li Chou'er and Li Nuzi

	Gift	Counter Gift
First Round of Exchange	A bag of dried chili 干羹	One corner of green silk, two (?) of fermented beans
Second Round of Exchange	two <i>chi</i> of cloth, three pieces of paper	"empty letter"

In the process of writing this "empty" letter, Li Chou'er confirms receipt of gifts, and demands a similar confirmation from his brother. Interestingly, the purpose of writing this very letter seems to be his wish for the brother to give him more gifts, in this case for the wedding of his daughter. This case therefore illustrates the dual purposes of gifting in trans-regional communications. They were indispensable in facilitating such communications, but were often the very reason for these communications in the first place.

³ S.4685.

3.3.2: Gifts for Travelers at Departure

In addition to accompanying with the movement of letters, gifts were also intimately connected to the physical movement of travelers. Before leaving for another location, one usually receives what is known as “road goods (送路物).” This practice is found at Dunhuang as well as other parts of the Tang world. In the Diary of Ennin (794-864):

“The Censor Li’s farewell presents to us were ten bolts of *shao-wu* damask, one piece of fragrant sandalwood, two sandalwood boxes with images, a bottle of incense, a five-pronged silver *vajra*, two felt hats, one scroll of the *Diamond Sutra* in silver characters (at present a Palace possession), a pair of soft slippers, and two strings of cash.”

“Again he said. ‘I ask that you leave with your disciple the Buddhist robe and scarf you wore that I might take them home and burn incense and make offerings to them for the rest of my life.’ Upon these words, I gave them to him.”¹

As a Buddhist monk of recognized prestige, Ennin received fairly luxurious “road goods,” but the Censor Li did not offer these gifts without asking for some type of counter-gift. The counter-gifts, the robe and scarf of Ennin, might not seem on their own of value comparable with the original gifts. But Censor Li’s plan to “make offerings to them for the rest of my life” increased the symbolic value of the robe and scarf: Ennin was not merely giving him a set of clothes that surely did not match the material value of the original gifts; he was giving Censor Li an object for veneration.

¹ Edwin Reischauer, *Ennin’s Diary; the Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law* (New York: Ronald Press Co, 1955), 367-8.

This practice of offering gifts for departing travelers is very commonly found in Dunhuang manuscripts. The following is a model letter, composed on the occasion of departure of a traveler. In it, the traveler expresses gratitude for the gift of a horse.¹

Letter [expressing] the gratitude for horse:

Humbly I received the private favor with this specially offered gift (of a horse). Because of the long road ahead, it is hard to decline this gift; and the “speedy-feet” (meaning horse) is no different from Quanqi. Upon accepting this gift, I feel doubly profound gratitude. Thus carefully I constructed this note to express my gratitude. Humbly I hope you pay attention. Carefully petitioned.

謝馬書

右伏蒙恩私，特此寵賜。遠路既難於辭讓，逸(足+是)莫匪於權奇。收受之時，兢兢銘倍切。謹專修狀陳謝。伏惟照察。謹狀。

The language of this model letter is in line with the one described above, but unlike in the case of Ennin, the writer of the letter does not mention a counter-gift for the horse. The only response to the gift of the horse for the upcoming trip seems to be the letter itself. Whether or not there were other supposed means of compensation is unclear.² What is clear is that the horse was not “bought,” but offered without requiring the traveler to pay for it. That this narrative served as a model letter suggests it was not a unique occurrence, but an accepted social practice at Dunhuang.

Among other Dunhuang documents, we see many more examples of this type of “road goods.” They were similarly given to the travelers without an immediate request for or expectation of compensation. Several of the references to this type of road goods appear in accounts of expenditures, especially those of the various monasteries at

¹ P.3931, lines 116-119.

² The social context that enabled such apparently uni-directional offer of favor is the often delayed guest-host reciprocity, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Dunhuang.¹ There are also a number of sporadic references to this practice elsewhere in other types of accounts. In the following table, I list all these references, including the type of gifts given, the people they were given to, and the occasion of gifting.

Table 3.3: “Road Goods” (路物/送路物) at Dunhuang Account Books

Giver	Gifts	Given to	Sig.	Notes
Jingtu Monastery	Liji Brocade, one <i>pi</i> ; Government Cloth, one <i>pi</i> .	a certain Bingmashi (officer of foot soldiers and horses)	P.2032v	
Jingtu Monastery	Millet, two <i>dou</i>	monk Zhang Sengzheng	P.2032v	
Jingtu Monastery	oil, half <i>sheng</i>	guest monk and guest envoy	P.2032v	
Jingtu Monastery	fried flour (<i>mian</i>), one <i>dou</i>	monk Zhang Sengzheng’s trip to the east	P.2032v	
Jingtu Monastery	fried flour (<i>mian</i>), one <i>dou</i> and five <i>sheng</i> , made into “small food”	for the use of Sikong	P.2040v	
Jingtu Monastery	fried flour (<i>mian</i>), three <i>shi</i> and five <i>sheng</i>	for the accommodation of Shangshu	P.2040v	
Jingtu Monastery	fried flour (<i>mian</i>), one <i>dou</i>	for the accommodation of Shangshu	P.2040v	
Jingtu Monastery	millet, one <i>shi</i> and two <i>dou</i> (used to purchase wine)	Gao Dutou’s trip to the Southern Mountain	P.2040v	
Jingtu Monastery	millet, one <i>shi</i> and one <i>dou</i> (used to purchase wine)	Situ’s trip to the east	P.2040v	

¹ For examples: P.2032v, P.2040v, P.2049v, P.2629, P.3234v.

Table 3.3 (Continued)

Jingtu Monastery	millet, two <i>dou</i> and three <i>sheng</i> (used to purchase wine)	for Gao Vinaya and Zhang Ācārya's trip to the east	P.2040v	
Jingtu Monastery	millet, two <i>dou</i> (used to purchase wine)	for Gao Vinaya and Zhang Ācārya	P.2040v	
Jingtu Monastery	oil, two <i>sheng</i> (used to cook)	for Gao Dutou's trip to the Southern Mountain	P.2040v	
Jingtu Monastery	oil, one and a half <i>sheng</i> (used to cook)	for Gao Vinaya and Zhang Ācārya	P.2040v	
Jingtu Monastery	oil, half <i>sheng</i>	monk Zhang Sengzheng's trip to the east	P.2040v	
Jingtu Monastery	millet, two <i>dou</i>	for Kong Sengtong and others	P.2049v	
Jingtu Monastery	oil, one and a half <i>sheng</i>	Sengtong's trip to the east	P.2049v	“offered to the government”
Jingtu Monastery	?, two <i>dou</i> and four <i>sheng</i>	monk official's trip to the east	P.2049v	“offered to the government”
Jingtu Monastery	millet, four <i>dou</i>	Jia Dutou's trip to the east	P.2049v	
Jingtu Monastery	millet, three <i>dou</i>	for Linggong's trip and Shangshu's reception	P.2049v	
Jingtu Monastery	millet, two <i>dou</i>	for commoner's use for Linggong's trip to the east	P.2049v	
Guiyijun government	wine, four <i>dou</i>		P.2629	
	cloth, 240 <i>chi</i> , exchanged for three lacquered bowls		P.2638	
A certain monastery	millet, one <i>shi</i> and two <i>dou</i> (used to purchase wine)	Preceptor Liang's trip to the west	P.2642v	

Table 3.3 (Continued)

	cooked cloth (?) one <i>pi</i>	for Gao Vinaya and Zhang Ācārya's trip to the east	P.3234v	
Jingtu Monastery	Liji brocade, one <i>pi</i>	for official use	P.3234v	
Jingtu Monastery	millet, three <i>dou</i>	for the use of Khotanese monks	P.3234v	
Jingtu Monastery	oil, half <i>sheng</i>		P.3234v	
Guiyijun government	wheat, one <i>shi</i> (used to purchase wine)	for Shangshu's meal	P.3763v	and the accommodation for the monks
Guiyijun government	millet, one <i>shi</i> and four <i>dou</i> (used to purchase wine)	for Shangshu's meal	P.3763v	and the accommodation for the monks
Guiyijun government	wine, one <i>dou</i>	for the use of mason	P.4697	
Guiyijun government	white fried flour, three <i>dou</i>	for the use of shepherds	P.4906	
A certain monastery	wine, one <i>jiao</i>	for Cao county administrator	S.1519	
Guiyijun government	fried flour, five <i>dou</i> (for cooking)	for He Vinaya and Dong Vinaya	S.4642v	
Guiyijun government	oil, two <i>sheng</i> (for cooking)	for He Vinaya and Dong Vinaya	S.4642v	
A certain monastery	millet, three <i>dou</i>	for the use of Puye	S.4649	
A certain monastery	millet, two <i>dou</i>	for the use of Cao Sengtong	S.6330	given by Anguo monastery
A certain monastery	millet, three <i>dou</i> ; oil, half <i>sheng</i>	for the use of Cao Sengtong	S.6330	
A certain monastery	fried flour, four <i>dou</i>	to make "road food" for Tartar envoy(?)	S.6452	
A certain monastery	?, three <i>dou</i> ; oil, one <i>sheng</i>		S.6981v	
Guiyijun government			S.8426	

A number of features stand out in this list of “road goods.” Although monasteries gave out a large number of the goods, the recipients were not always monks. Many, like Gao Vinaya 高法律 and Zhang Ācārya 張闍梨, were certainly part of the monastic community, but people like Jia Dutou 賈都頭 (dutou meaning a type of military officer) were not. The mixture of monastic and non-monastic personnel in the list of recipients of “road goods” indicates that the social functions of monasteries extended far beyond the monastic community.¹ Some gifts, such as the ones given to Situ, Sikong, and Shangshu, all of whom were high officials or lords of Dunhuang, were perhaps not entirely voluntary. As I shall show later in this chapter, the reason these monasteries offered a great amount of materials for the trips of Dunhuang officials is perhaps that the benefits of these trips – the counter gifts – were regularly donated to these same monasteries. In this way, they participated in the exchange of (usually diplomatic) gifts in an indirect manner.

From a material perspective, in these cases, the “road goods” seem mostly to have been necessities travelers would use when on the road, including food, oil, and wine. Therefore, they seem really to have been meant to be of practical use for the travelers. There are cases of giving silk and other luxury items, but they are the exceptions in these account books. In certain other documents, however, silk constituted the bulk of “road goods.”

P.3985 is another list of road goods that includes various types of clothes or silk given by as many as ten individuals or families.² Here, the responsibility of the receiver is

¹ Jacques Gernet, *Les aspects économiques du bouddhisme dans la société chinoise du Ve au Xe siècle*, Publications de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient; v. 39 (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1956).

² *Dunhuang shehui jingji wenxian shilu*, vol.4, 9.

not specified, but the term “song lu (送路 ‘sending off on the road’)” implies that what was listed were gifts. In this case, the gifts were given not by individuals, as in the case of the account books, but by a collection of families.

The collective nature of road goods can be seen in other contexts, as well. At Dunhuang during this period, people were sometimes organized into mutual-help communities called *she* in order to shoulder risks collectively.¹ In one of the model contracts of a *she* community, one finds the following responsibility of the *she*-community members:²

If one travels to the east or west as envoys, regardless of the distance, the departing should be (properly) sent off, and the arriving should be (properly) received. This situation happens to each (members of the *she* community).

若有東西出使，遠近一般，去送來迎，各自總有。

The offering of “road goods” should therefore be seen as a part of the proper sending off ritual this model contract discusses.

It is possible that P.3985 is a list of people performing this type of duty within a *she* community, but the gifts listed suggest that they were not meant to provide for the basic needs of the traveler, since the majority of them were various types of cloth and silk. What then was the purpose of such non-essential gifts? This document (P.3985) itself does not specify. One might speculate that they would serve the travelers in other ways, perhaps as gifts or merchandise used on the upcoming trip. 'It appears that “road goods”

¹ Imre Galambos, “She Association Circulars from Dunhuang,” in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, ed. Antje Richter (Boston: Brill, 2015), 853–77.

² S.6537v.

included the travelers' daily needs, as well as some more valuable goods to be used for other purposes.

3.3.3: Gifts for Travelers on Arrival

If travelers receive gifts upon departure, what happens when they arrive at a new place? What are the ways in which the traveler can establish relations with the host? The following texts from a model letter provide some insights. According to this letter a host is supposed to treat a traveler who has just arrived in the following manner:

Offer to guests (who are) passing envoys “lowering the carrying pole”: Yi-silk one *pi*, Ling-silk one *pi* and other listed goods. The aforementioned goods are cautiously ordered to be quickly sent, just to cover the value of the fodder for the next day. (I am) very ashamed of the small number (of the goods), they only serve to show my heartfelt feeling. Please do not blame it as an offense, and grant me your acceptance (of the goods).

送客下擔橫過使：絁壹匹，綾壹匹等色目。右前件物謹令馳送，聊充翌日草料當直。多慚寡鮮，用表衷誠。伏惟不責輕觸，俯賜領納。何要進發，專候留行，郊外奉送，謹狀。¹

The term “lowering the carrying pole” is an expression that indicates the arrival of travelers, whereas the term “hengguo 橫過 (passing straight [through])” indicates that the guest is only passing through and has not reached the destination. Hence, underneath the extremely humble language on the part of the host, the basic matter dealt with in this letter is the following: the traveler who is simply passing through the region is given two types of silk and perhaps other goods “to cover the value of the fodder for the next day.”

¹ S.5636.

The reason for the host's offerings is said to be that "they only serve to show my heartfelt feeling." From this letter alone, it is difficult to tell what this traveler contributed to deserve such offerings. Fortunately, a model response letter that follows this letter on the same manuscript offers some insight in this regard:¹

Because of certain matters of business, I have arrived at your famous state. Because of my old yearning, I had the pleasure of glancing at your face. Not having offered even a tiny bit, my trepidation has greatly increased. Bequeathed by the invitation of the host, how dare I accept it? I wish to go to your mansion and express my gratitude in person for the mountain-like favor. But after reconsideration I fear it might be bothersome. Therefore I shall wait for you to grant me a letter. Cautiously I petition.

偶因營運，得達名邦，思慕故流，幸窺顏色，未施纖許，悚惕尤增。蒙賜主請，豈敢當此。欲趨高第，面謝丘恩，轉慮饜煩，專侯展訴下宣，謹狀。

This model response letter indicates that the guest does not need to contribute anything, as the guest claims, "not having offered even a tiny bit, my trepidation has greatly increased. Bequeathed by the invitation of the host, how dare I accept it?" The expression about the "trepidation" (Ch. 悚惕) of the guest seems to mirror that in the previous letter about gifts serving to express "my heartfelt feeling." Such language of personal feelings is intimately involved in the actual exchange of gifts.

This type of model letter is not rare among Dunhuang manuscripts. 'Such models were used for actual actual letters in cases of traveling. For instance, the following text is another example of a letter of gratitude sent by a guest upon arrival:

¹ Ibid.

Gratitude for “lowering the carrying pole”:

A lowly certain someone and others, by the command of our own governor, arrived in your honorable land. Before we had the honor of paying respect (to you), (you) have offered lamb and wine for (the occasion of) “lowering the carrying pole.” This certain someone and others feel unbearable gratitude and trepidation.

謝下擔：

△乙等庸賤，奉本使驅馳，幸達貴土，未蒙伏拜。特賜下擔羊、酒。△乙等無任感恩戰懼。¹

The term “certain someone (mou yi)” in the letter indicates the place where one should write one’s name when the model was used to compose actual letters. This “certain someone” is supposed to have felt “gratitude and trepidation” upon receiving lamb and wine. In this sense, this letter is similar to the previous examples in that the guest does not seem to have contributed in any material sense to the host. What sets this letter apart is that another letter written by a certain Huiguang 惠廣,² this time a letter actually used and not a model, is essentially a verbatim copy of the model letter cited here, with the name “Huiguang and others (Huiguang *deng* 惠廣等)” replacing the “certain someone.” This letter shows that the model letters were indeed used in the ways they were supposed to be, and the social practices seen in these three model letters were widely accepted to the point of being formulaic. The offering of gifts from hosts to guests upon their arrival without material contribution from the guest seems to have been the social norm.

¹ P.3691.

² S.5713.

3.3.4: Gifts from Travelers

The previous two sections demonstrate that travelers accepted gifts in various social settings during their entire lives on the road. Frequently, however, they also came bearing gifts. Thyai Paḍā-tsā, a Khotanese envoy, and sent a letter to the Khotanese court about his trip to the east. He reported his activities upon arriving in the Uyghur kingdom of Ganzhou (Kh. Kamacū):¹

I the humble servant went from Şacū to Kamacū on the 28th day of the month of Skarhvāra. We came to Kamacū on the fifteenth day of month Rrāhaja. And on the third day they conducted us into the presence of the Khan. And what I had as royal favor for the Khan, that I presented according to the order. And the next day in the morning I gave the orders and favor meant for the ügäs (an Uyghur official). And when they understood that the state business was finished, then the officer named Ttuḍīsā Saḍācī ttättāhā: came to me.

On the third day after arrival, he met with the Khan of Ganzhou and offered the “royal favor,” a term for gift to the Khan. On the next day, he gave the official letters and additional gifts to the ügäs, who were high officials in the Uyghur kingdom. Importantly, after these gift-offering activities, the ügäs “understood that the state business was finished.” Apparently, the “state business” involved, at least on the surface, only the meeting and the offering of gifts.

The offering of gifts is worth mentioning because, unlike some gifts accompanying personal letters that often consisted of no more than a few bags of dried fruits, diplomatic gifts were often very expensive. At the end of P.5538, a well-preserved

¹ P.2741.

royal edict from the king of Khotan to the lord of Dunhuang reporting the recent Khotanese victory over the Karakhanids to its west, we find a list of gifts:¹

Now we have deigned send for you, o Great King, the following gifts:

First, one piece of medium jade of 42 *jin* (斤);
And second, a piece of pure jade, 10 *jin*;
and third, jade, 8.5 *jin*, which amounts to three pieces of jade
60 and a half *jin*.
and one leather *baṃgāma*;
and one hammer fitted with a handle made of horn;
and one wagon and one drum.

viña ttā tteyi hvām' vaski tvā buri mu'sdā' pastāṃdū hajsāmde,

paḍauysā myānī īrā 69 śau dvāritcihaisā kīṇa u še' vasve īrā dasau kīṇa u dīdā īrā
haṣṭi 70 kīṇa hālai drai māṇḍi īrā hamye (which amounts to three pieces of jade)
kṣa'ṣṭā kīṇi hālai u kaṃgīnai baṃgām 71 śau u ṣvīnā (nail) daṣṭānya byaṣṭi līka
mārsalā śā u byaṣṭi līkā paraśā' śau 72 u bārai (wagon) śau u kūśā śau,

Several of the words in this list, as in many other lists of this nature in Chinese and Tibetan, have not been deciphered. The difficulty of knowing what they mean points to a significant feature of these diplomatic gifts: they were usually lesser-known goods of exotic nature. Hence, they are not common in daily usage, do not appear in standard glosses of the time, and subsequently became obscure to us. Such obscurity often implies their potentially very high value. But judging only from the terms we do understand, this list already is not humble. Three types of jade were accompanied by hammer, wagon and drum, befitting the status of the king.

Like the gifts from Cao Yijin quoted at the beginning of the chapter, this list also accompanied a letter. Therefore, it would not have been unreasonable to assume that these were merely considered “attachments” to this particular edict, making it more

¹ P.5538.

appropriate to include them in the first category (gifts attached to letters). But I would argue that since travelers often carried letters with them, gifts from travelers are difficult to be distinguished with certainty from gifts accompanying letters. Several of the examples I discussed in the first group might have been such cases. There are other cases, however, where the gifts from envoys were clearly not merely “attachments.” A letter from an official in Shuofang states:¹

“I hoped to prepare the proper ritual through envoys. But since the dispatcher (*zouma*) left straightaway, I did not send gifts (*li*) beyond my duty, though I do have a small token (*xin*), which will be contained in another letter.”

冀因人使備情儀，但緣走馬徑行，不果分外馳禮。雖有微信，別狀披伸。

As I have explained above, *xin* in these contexts does not mean letters themselves, which were called *shu*, but specifically the small token or gift that conventionally accompanies the letter. In this letter, the contrast between such a token (*xin*) and a gift (*li*) is clearly expressed. Compared to a proper gift, a “token” sent with a letter is, in theory at least, lighter in weight and value.

The gifts offered by travelers could sometimes take on extreme forms. In the third month of 924, a certain monk named Zhiyan from Fu Prefecture (鄜州, modern Shaanxi province) arrived in Shazhou.² Like many before him, Zhiyan was on pilgrimage to India for the procurement and transmission of Buddhism.³ After stating his purpose and

¹ P.2992.

² S.5981.

³ More information about this person can be found in a colophon (Shangbo 48) now preserved at the Shanghai museum.

wishing the well-being of the Chinese emperor, the Cao governor of Shazhou, and the officials as well as commoners in Shazhou, he went on to make a solemn vow:

The day when Zhiyan returns, I vow to devote this vulgar body as an offering to the Great Sage Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī and burn this body, in order to repay the favor of protection on my way forth and back.

智嚴回日發願：將此凡身，於五台山供養大聖文殊師利菩薩。焚燒此身，用酬往來道途護衛之恩。

Here, the monk Zhiyan vows to give the ultimate gift: his own body. According to James Benn, self-immolation in medieval China was inspired by the *Lotus sutra* and other jātaka stories about the sacrifices of bodhisattvas. The purpose of self-immolation was to achieve *anuttarā samyaksambodhi* (complete and perfect enlightenment),¹ but, in the case of Zhiyan, the goal of his proposed self-immolation was much more secular. It was to be done so that he can “repay the favor of protection on my way forth and back.” This confirms the suggestions I made earlier about the principle of hospitality: the guests do not seem to need to immediately repay the debt incurred by accepting the gifts and accommodations from the hosts. Instead, there are ways to repay this debt after leaving the host. To spread the good name of generosity is certainly one way, which I shall discuss in the next chapter. Zhiyan’s case offers another way of paying the debt. His vow shows that the relationship between him and his host were taken so seriously, that he was willing to sacrifice his life to pay the debt to his host.²

¹ James Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 60.

² It is possible, judging from the wording, that Zhiyan could be talking about a post-mortem immolation. But the context seems to suggest a proactive action that he would take on when he reached Mount Wutai. So I think it is more likely that he was implying a voluntary self-immolation.

3.3.5: Gifts as the Goal of Traveling

Sometimes, the acquisition and the return of gifts became the very reason and goal for traveling. For instance, in 969, a Khotanese envoy named Zhimoshan traveled to the Song court and reported that in his own country of Khotan, there was a piece of jade that weighed 237 *jin*. “[The Khotanese] wanted to offer it, and begged [the Song court] to send an envoy to acquire it. [Later, the Khotanese] monk named Shanming came [to the Song court] again, and offered Aweizi 阿魏子.¹ [The Song court] ordained him as the Zhaohua Master and ordered him to return in order to get the jade.”² In this case, the sole reason for these several rounds of diplomatic back and forth was to acquire the piece of jade from Khotan. Interestingly, the party that initiated the interaction was not the one receiving the gift, but the one giving it, which shows that gifting, particularly competitive gifting, was not only the material incentive for travel; it frequently was the very goal of travel.

Such gift exchange not only facilitated the transportation of material goods. It also provided a channel for transferring other types of “goods.” For instance, in 866, Zhang Yichao submitted to the Tang court “four pairs of Qingjiao eagles from Ganjun mountain, two horses from Yanqing, two Tibetan women.” And the monk who accompanied the envoy submitted a Buddhist text titled *Dacheng baifa mingmen lu* (大乘百法明門論).³ In

¹ It is unclear what this term means.

² Tuotuo, *Songshi*, 490.14107.

³ *Jiu Tangshu*, 660.

this list, together with the usual exotica of animals, people as well as books were also given to the Tang court.

In 1004, the governor of Dunhuang, Cao Zongshou, made the routine offering of jade and horses to the Song court, together with the following explicit request for gifts:¹

Furthermore he (Cao Zongshou) said that the monk Huizang begged to be granted the master title and that the Longxing and Lingtu temples were constructing statues (of Buddha) that (required) 100,000 pieces of gold leaf. It was his wish that these be granted. Furthermore, he also begged that a bell maker as well as Chinese pearl collectors should be sent to his province to teach them the techniques.

且言本州僧惠藏乞賜師號，龍興、靈圖二寺修像，計金十萬箔，願賜之。又乞鑄鐘匠及漢人之善藏珠者，至當道傳授其術。

The Song emperor granted Huizang the master title, offered a certain amount of gold leaf, but refused the rest of the demand. Evidently, the requests of Cao Zongshou, in particular the part demanding the exorbitant amount of gold leaf and the artisans, were deemed inappropriate. Nonetheless, it shows that the exchange of people was routinely a part of the gift-giving process and not clearly distinguished from other material goods.

As the exchange of gifts became a regular practice among states in the region, envoys were also sent for the sole purpose of recompensing previous gifts. There are two fairly complete documents about a “gift-recompensing envoy (廻禮使)” from Dunhuang to Khotan. In the first document Suo Ziquan, an official from Dunhuang, wrote in an extremely flattering manner to the officials of Khotan, calling the king of Khotan the “emperor” and acknowledging Dunhuang as its “vassal.”² This message was sent as part

¹ *Song huiyao*.

² P.3016.

of the delegation that was designated to send tribute to the king of Khotan and maids to the queen, who was also the sister of the lord of Dunhuang. Suo Ziquan's delegation left Dunhuang on the seventh day of the seventh month of 956 and arrived at Khotan on the 22nd day of the eighth month. This trip of about 1800 km took them a month and a half to complete. This letter was written in the eleventh month of 956, after Suo Ziquan had already been in Khotan for sometime.¹

But this document does not mark the end of this gift exchange. Another document on the other side of the same manuscript by someone named Fuzhu was written in the ninth month of 958, about two years after the first document. Fuzhu's delegation left Dunhuang on the 26th day of the sixth month of 958 and arrived in Khotan in less than a month on the 23rd day of the seventh month. The sole purpose of this delegation, it seems, was to report that Suo Ziquan's delegation had arrived safely at Dunhuang on the fifth day of the fifth month. Therefore, the gift-giving action from Khotan to Dunhuang some time before 956 triggered a series of further exchanges of personnel and gifts. Even though other information must also have been transmitted, the exchange of gifts was the central theme of these trips.

Indeed, the exchange of gifts was sometimes seen as a central goal of diplomacy, and not its by-product. In a letter written by the Khitan khan to the Maḥmūd of Ghazna in 1026, the former described the goal of the trip. He claimed that the envoys were sent in order that

¹ Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 and Zhu Lishuang 朱麗雙, *Yutian yu Dunhuang* 于闐與敦煌 (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2013), 129-32.

“we may inform him (Maḥmūd) of how things stand with us, and communicate with him on what there is in the world, while establishing the custom of mutual donations, in friendship with him.”¹

For the Khitan khan, the exchange of diplomatic gifts through this “custom of mutual donations” was as important to the proposed diplomatic relations as the exchange of information. Even though his proposal was ultimately rejected by Maḥmūd, the central importance of gifts in diplomatic traveling is nonetheless evident.

3.4: The Principle of Gifting

The discussions above show that the exchange of gifts was prevalent in the lives of travelers. Travelers offered and received gifts at different junctures of their life on the road. But were these exchanges equal transference of gifts and counter-gifts? What was the underlying social principle of gifting? For these questions a letter written by a certain Wang Ding to the governor of Dunhuang (太保) provides some answers:²

Previously I acted out of order and offered rough grass, only with the hope of receiving your honorable examination. How could I have hoped for the bestowment (Chin, meaning the gift given to him)? Now, because of the governor who widely opened the treasury, and particularly bestowed *qiong-yao* jade. ... Since I dare not refuse or decline, I can only hold it with trepidation.

¹ al-Marwazī, *Sharaf Al-Zamān Ṭāhir Marvazī on China, the Turks, and India; Arabic Text (circa A.D. 1120)*, 20.

² P.3438.

The language of this letter is clearly overtly embellished: the gift given to the lord was simply described as “rough grass,” whereas the return-gift was the *qiong-yao* jade, a glimpse of which, according to Wang Ding, reminds one of the look of the autumn moon. But underneath the flowery language, Wang Ding revealed the social principle for such gift exchange. According to him, his offer of “rough grass” was made “only with the hope of receiving your honorable examination.” This statement means that at least rhetorically, he did not initially expect counter-gifts. But had the governor not responded by opening the treasury and offering the gift of jade, Wang Ding would probably not have been satisfied. From the perspective of the governor of Dunhuang, the gifts from Wang Ding had to be recompensed with gifts of greater value, because of the governor’s higher social status. With his offering of counter-gifts, he fulfilled his social duty, reaffirmed his superior status, and essentially “won” this gift competition. Yet this is not the end of the gift exchange, Wang Ding had to write this letter to show that he recognized the superiority of the governor’s gifts, which also implies that he recognized the superiority of the governor himself. Only with this note of gratitude was the gift exchange process complete, with the status of both parties reaffirmed and their relationship strengthened. To terminate the process at any earlier point (for instance, if the governor did not respond with counter-gifts or Wang Ding did not write the note) would have disrupted the equilibrium of the relations between the governor and Wang Ding.

Therefore, gift exchange was never about the exchange of goods of equal value. This is one of the most important ways these exchanges differ from the exchange of

commodities. This principle is revealed in a manuscript at Dunhuang on the various kinds of proper conduct:¹

If one is blessed with the accommodation of another, till death does he remember the kindness; if one accepts salary and the place of honor, even the perishing of one's body would be sufficient in expressing the gratitude ... *One would much rather that others owe him than he himself owe others* (emphasis mine).

蒙人引接，至死銜恩；受祿居寵，滅身非謝。傷虵過藥，尚有存報之心；困雀逢箱，猶報養之重。是以寧人負己，而莫己負人。

The last sentence concisely sums up the principle of gifting. In the gift exchange, it is generally considered better to give without receiving in return than to receive without giving. This poses a clear contrast to the principle of commerce, where debts are to be avoided rather than celebrated. The ability to give gifts generously is closely connected to the prestige and fame of a ruler. In a letter to the king of Khotan, he is addressed as:²

To him, endowed with the experience of the great gift (mistyi haurä), from the four directions, in many lands, his great name had gone (mestyi nāṃma tsva)

Evidently, the king's fame was connected to his ability to give gifts. As in many other cases studied by anthropologists, giving more and superior gifts meant that the giver would achieve or solidify higher social status.³ If many of the gifts discussed in this

¹ S.1920 (Treatise on a Hundred Conducts 百行章) no.51.

² IOL Khot S.22.

³ Such as the Moka exchange. See Andrew Strathern, *The Rope of Moka: Big-men and Ceremonial Exchange in Mount Hagen New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1971).

chapter seemed “free,” it was because the prestige gained by the gift givers was in most cases left unsaid.

3.5: Conclusion

In this chapter I argue that gifts served the dual function of both the means and the end of Silk Road travels. They were the means because gifts were indispensable in the transmission of letters; they were also exchanged at every stage of trans-regional travels, from departure to arrival. The amount and types of gifts used on these various occasions might vary, but they all created certain kinds of social bonds that enabled the transmission of information and people. Adding gifts added weight to a letter and created a debt-relation that obligated the receiver to return a letter and gifts. The gifts by non-travelers to travelers similarly created a debt-relation in which the travelers became more inclined to share whatever goods or information they acquired on the road. As Marshall Sahlins famously said: “if friends make gifts, gifts make friends.”¹

If gifts facilitated the smooth transmission of information and people, the other role of gifts is arguably even more important for the functioning of the Silk Road: for many travelers, the exchange of gifts was the very goal of travel. In certain cases, such as the example of the Khotanese envoy to the Chinese court, the acquisition of gifts was recognized as the main reason for travel. In other cases, such as the envoys from Dunhuang to China, gifts served as important incentives for travelers even though their official goal was ostensibly political. In both of these cases, gifts were not only given but

¹ Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 186.

exchanged. And the exchange of gifts was not equal, but competitive. The offering of a gift of greater value was a challenge to the receiver to acknowledge the superior status and the prestige of the gift giver. When the relative value of gifts and counter gifts reflected the relative status of the parties involved, gifting served to reaffirm the existing hierarchical relations. When no clear hierarchical relations existed, people competed to give more valuable gifts in order to gain more prestige and higher social status. It was in this context of competitive gifting – or the “custom of mutual donations” as the letter from the Khitan khan to the Ghaznavid court puts it – that the majority of the luxury items on the Silk Road were transmitted in this period.

I do not, however, intend to say that all goods exchanged by and among tenth-century travelers in the Dunhuang sphere should be regarded as “gifts.” There were clearly cases when goods were traded either through purchase or lending, but as I shall show in Ch.5, when these goods were traded in commercial exchanges, the exchanges usually happened locally, while most of the trans-regional exchanges took the form of gifting. Goods involved in commercial exchanges also differed systematically in type from goods given as gifts. Such trans-local gift exchange had important ramifications for the local economy of Dunhuang, in which the market still played a significant role.

If, as I have tried to show, many of the luxury goods exchanged trans-regionally on the Silk Road in the Dunhuang sphere were gifts rather than commodities, what does it tell us about the people who carried these goods? Can they still be regarded as “merchants?” And more broadly, how should we understand the identities of the travelers and the social relations they formed on the road? These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Welcome the Guest, Praise the Host

Social Reciprocity on the Silk Road

4.1: Introduction

Who were the people traveling on the Silk Road? This fundamental question has not been addressed with the same kind of vigor as other aspects of the history of the Silk Road, largely because it is deceptively simple. When describing travelers in the pre-modern “trading networks” in Asia, Tansen Sen listed “itinerant merchants, proselytizers, artisans, nomads, and other travelers.”¹ Other scholars tend to see monks and merchants as the main types of travelers on the Silk Road.² Such a characterization is significant because it gives the impression that the distinct identities of the travelers were clear, constant, and meaningful in their contexts. It also logically follows that when we make such clear distinctions, we assume that people with different identities should have acted and been perceived differently and that there could be a history of merchants on the Silk

¹ Tansen Sen, “The Intricacies of Premodern Asian Connections,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 4 (2010): 992. This type of exclusionary language is also found elsewhere. For instance, when discussing Persian and Arab travelers, Sen remarked that “[w]hile some were involved in the transmission of religious ideas, including Buddhism and Manichaeism, others traded in commodities within the vast Afro-Eurasia network.” (994) Historically speaking, such a distinction is almost impossible to make.

² Annette L. Juliano and Judith A. Lerner, *Monks and merchants: Silk Road treasures from Northwest China Gansu and Ningxia, 4th-7th century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams with The Asia Society, 2001).

Road, of monks on the Silk Road, and so forth, although the specifics, for instance, of how a merchant traveled differently than an envoy were rarely spelled out.¹

The purpose of this chapter is not to elaborate upon the different ways in which different peoples traveled; instead, it questions the usefulness of seeing these differences in the first place. I argue that categorizing the travelers on the Silk Road as “monks,” “merchants,” etc., can be misleading because this approach fails to see two features of such identities.

In the first place, these identities were transactional, because many travelers only assumed these identities when they reached their destinations and conducted affairs pertaining to such identities. For instance, a monk from Central Asia to Mount Wutai and an envoy from the Chinese court to Dunhuang might have very different things to do when they reached their final destination. But did they really behave differently when they were actually traveling on the road? Were there any fundamental similarities? In this chapter, I argue that regardless of the various intentions and goals for traveling, there was an underlying social principle for *all* travelers.

In the second place, seeing travelers as “monks,” “merchants,” and “envoys” is problematic in that such identities are often labels for different *aspects* of one’s activities rather than for different *groups* of people. Individual cases uncovered on the Silk Road regularly illustrate this point. For instance, in a lending contract made in preparation for a trip to Khotan, a monk named Huide states that:²

¹ Susan Whitfield’s influential and vivid accounts in *Life Along the Silk Road* (University of California Press, 2001) tend to essentialize many of the differences found among different groups of peoples.

² This text is made up of two fragments of manuscript S.8702 and S.8681v. Only the beginning of the contract is extant.

“Last year, I served as [envoy] to Ganzhou, ... and returned to my homeland (i.e., Shazhou). In the fifth month of this year, for the expense of my trip as an envoy to Khotan, I have returned to Official Deng 鄧馬步 one *pi* of white *lian* 練. Now I am dispatched to Xizhou (Turfan) as an envoy, but I have nothing at hand. I have returned the previously mentioned goods, which is not really worth mentioning. Because I am dispatched to go to the west, but my home is poor and empty...”

The document breaks off at this point, and we do not know what happens next, but from other similar documents discovered at Dunhuang we know that this is a contract to borrow certain goods, likely silk, in order to prepare for a trip.¹ Upon his return from Xizhou (Turfan), he would be required to return the borrowed goods with interest, while presumably having also acquired himself a certain share of the benefit. Therefore, the document can be read essentially as being about a traveler who gained benefit from dealing in silk exchange between Shazhou (Dunhuang) and Xizhou (Turfan), perhaps a typical “commercial” activity on the Silk Road. Yet as the document makes clear, the person conducting this business was a monk named Huide who was traveling as an envoy (*shi* 使) to Turfan. What this document shows is not an exceptional case, as Huide mentioned that he conducted similar business three times more within the span of two years between Ganzhou, Khotan, and Xizhou. Other similar situations are also preserved in Dunhuang manuscripts.² In all of these cases, “merchants,” “monks,” and “envoys” indicate categories of activities that all travelers could be engaged in, rather than categories of people. To see Huide, and many others like him, as merely monks or merchants is to misrepresent the nature of his activities.

¹ For similar documents, see P.3451, P.3501v.

² S.4504v, P.3051v.

How, then, can we categorize the common experience of travelers on the Silk Road? This is the central question of this chapter. I propose that underlying the numerous commercial, religious, and political activities, the most fundamental feature of a traveler on the road is that he or she is someone who goes to a new and foreign place, which in turn makes the traveler “foreign” to both the new place and people of that place. In the first section of this chapter, I shall introduce the processes in which an unknown foreign traveler can be turned into a known guest by analyzing three stories found in and around the Dunhuang sphere at this time. Many aspects of these stories may seem unrealistic and outlandish, but they help establish a general principle of guest-host relation, against which the actual cases of traveling can be read more profitably in the following sections of the chapter.

This foreignness of the traveler can be understood in two different ways. When it is recognized or even praised, the traveler becomes a guest (often bearing gifts) and enters a reciprocal relation with the hosts he or she encounters. The idea of the “guest” evokes a set of terms and concepts for describing the practices of traveling that differ from the ones generally used in histories of the Silk Road.¹ Instead of involving the exchange of goods and services, the social principle according to which the guest/host relations operated was that of reciprocity. The rituals involved in traveling, such writing letters of introduction and thank-you notes, can only be understood in the context of guest/host relations. More importantly, in local documentation in Chinese, the most

¹ The idea of a guest-friend is common among early Indo-European societies. See Gabriel Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge University Press, 1987). Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*, Oxford University Press, 2001, 71-72. See also Emile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes, tome 1: Economie, parenté, société* (Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1969).

commonly used term for a traveler was that of *ke* “guest” 客. In the second section of this chapter, I analyze the process in which travelers were recognized as guests and in which the foreignness of the travelers became something that was not only accepted, but often celebrated. The ritual of turning a traveler into a guest is one that renders unknown foreignness knowable and acceptable.

But not all foreignness is acceptable. In fact, there are many cases where travelers encounter difficulty precisely because their foreignness is not recognized or accepted. Whenever this occurs, the guest-host reciprocity is not established, and a traveler becomes an unknown figure or even a threat. That not all foreignness is equally recognized helps explain why certain travelers succeed while others fail. It also helps us incorporate understudied groups in our consideration of travelers on the road. Bandits, a group of people practically ignored in previous studies of the Silk Road,¹ can in certain contexts be regarded as guests that did not follow the established rules of reciprocity or travelers whose foreignness were feared and defended against. The examination of these failed trips and travelers constitutes the third section of this chapter.

In the fourth and last section of this chapter, I apply my analyses in the previous two sections to the conventional categories of travelers including merchants, monks, and envoys. If we do not see the travelers as merely merchants, monks, and envoys, but as “guests,” as they were more likely to have been presented in the sources, we have the possibility of synthesizing the various artificial typologies into a new understanding: merchants were guests who carried goods; monks were guests who lived in monasteries;

¹ In existing works, “bandits” or “raiders” usually appear as nameless groups of vague figures. The rationale for their existence has not been properly examined. See Whitfield, *Life along the Silk Road*, 77, 171; Victor H. Mair and Jane Hickman eds., *Reconfiguring the Silk Road: New Research on East-West Exchange in Antiquity* (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 2014), 2.

and envoys where guests among states. Despite my emphasis on their shared features of foreignness, of course I recognize that there were genuine differences between the *kind* of guest-host relation a successful traveling envoy established and the one that a traveling monk established. These differences can be more clearly isolated and better understood only if one recognizes the similarities in their experiences of traveling.

This largely qualitative analysis also helps explain certain quantitative phenomena. By describing the various ways proper guest-host relations can be established for travelers with different goals and destinations in the ninth- to tenth-century Dunhuang sphere, I explain why the destruction of the Sogdian merchant network did not result in the decrease of trans-Eurasian traveling.¹ A Sogdian-style merchant network was only one of the many ways in which the recognition of foreignness could be formalized (or even routinized), and guest-host relations easily established. Travelers in the ninth- to tenth-century Dunhuang sphere often did not rely on the pre-established trans-regional networks seen in the Sogdian case. Instead, that they often shared ideas about the norm of guest-host relation could enable a person without such networks to travel successfully on an often *ad hoc* basis. In particular, the diplomatic relations among various people traveling with the title of “envoy” played a central role in replacing the Sogdian merchant network. This is one of the reasons that activities on the road seem to have increased in this era of political fragmentation.

4.2: Ideals of Guest-Host Relations: Three Stories

¹ For the destruction of this network, see Étienne de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: A History*, 261-331.

4.2.1: The Story of the Good Prince

What was the agreed upon social norm in the Dunhuang sphere that made traveling possible? This question is difficult to answer directly by analyzing social and economic documents discovered on the ground, because most of these documents deal with very limited and specific aspects of the experience of traveling and do not offer comprehensive narratives. Such narratives can be found, however, in travelogues and stories that offer a broader picture of the widespread understanding of the social principle of traveling that people in East Eurasia during the tenth century would have understood. They offer the crucial intellectual and social context in which the documents from the Dunhuang library cave can then be more properly read. In this section, I make use of three such stories and travelogues to chart out the broad principles of traveling operative in tenth-century East Eurasia. In the next section, I shall examine locally discovered documents from Dunhuang to test whether and how these principles were applied in actual cases of traveling.

The first story is that of the “Good and Evil Princes.” It is one of the longest and most elaborate travel stories in Buddhist literature, and it is particularly important for us because it is found in Buddhist sutras in Chinese,¹ Uyghur,² Sogdian,³ and Tibetan⁴

¹ This story appears in the chapter on “Evil Friend” (惡友品) of the *Bao'en jing* 報恩經 and the chapter on the Prince Virtuous's trip to the sea (善事太子入海品) of the *Xian yujing* 賢愚經.

² J. Hamilton, *Le conte bouddhique du Bon et du Mauvais Prince en version ouigoure. Manuscrits ouigours de Touen-houang*, Paris 1971.

³ D. N. MacKenzie, *The 'Sūtra of the Causes and Effects of Actions' in Sogdian*. Oxford University Press, 1970.

⁴ mdo mdzangs blun, see Pelliot tibetain 943.

discovered in the library cave at Dunhuang. It was also depicted in mural paintings as well as in silk paintings from Dunhuang (see, for example, Figure 4.1) and performed, according to the *jiangjing* manuscripts, for the public. It was a familiar or at least known story to many travelers I discuss in this dissertation, and the principle of traveling revealed in the story should therefore also have been familiar to them.



Figure 4.1: Scene from the story of the Good and Evil Princes (Cave 85, Dunhuang)

This complex story has many twists and turns.¹ But the main plot follows the Good Prince who, after seeing the suffering of the people, made a vow to travel into the sea to acquire a Mani pearl that would cure all the woes in the world.² The Good Prince then traveled to the palace of the Nāga king and acquired the pearl, but upon his return, his brother the Evil Prince tricked the Good Prince, blinded him, and took away the pearl. It was only with the help of a cowherd, as well as a princess of another kingdom destined to marry the Good Prince, that he regained his eyesight and his proper status as both the heir to his father and the hero who brought the Mani pearl for the benefit of the world.

Therefore, this story is essentially a morality tale told in the form of a travel story. Two episodes of this widely popular story are worth considering for the current purpose. The first episode is when the Good Prince arrived at the palace of the Nāga king. After hearing the report about the prince at the gate of the palace, the Nāga king thought: “if not a virtuous and purely noble person, who would have traversed such a risky road”; he then invited the prince into the palace. This thought seems to suggest that long-distance travel itself, even without knowing or taking into consideration its purpose, is considered a virtue by the Nāga king. And a virtuous stranger, in the mind of the Nāga king, had the potential to become a proper guest. The Good Prince subsequently confirmed the king’s assumption by speaking skillfully about the Dharma. The Nāga king then asked him: “having deigned to travel from afar, what do you wish to acquire?” The prince responded that he wished to get the Mani pearl stored in the left ear of the king for the benefit of all

¹ My account of the story is based on “Evil Friend” (惡友品) of the *Bao'en jing* 報恩經, T.156.

² There are many variations in the exact details of this story.

sentient beings in Jambudvīpa. Hearing the request from the prince, the Nāga king demanded:

“If you receive my insignificant donation for seven days, I shall present (it) to you.”

The prince then obliged, stayed for seven more days, and left with the pearl. This process of the actual acquisition of the much-desired pearl almost seems anti-climatic after a long and difficult journey that involved, among other things, the departure and death of all five hundred of the prince’s travel companions. In this way, it serves to illustrate a principle between guest and host: as the Nāga king made explicit, the seven-day duration of ‘the gift exchange alone was worth enough for him to give the prince the pearl. In other words, the guest offered his stay in exchange for the pearl from the host. This idea is entirely inexplicable if we see this guest-host relation as a commercial one, as the prince paid nothing other than his willingness to accept offerings from the king. For a virtuous guest like the Good Prince, his stay itself was his contribution to the host, who needed to make a proper contribution in return. That the seven-day stay of the Good Prince was worthy of the world-saving Mani pearl only served to emphasize the status of the Good Prince.

But not every traveler could be an esteemed guest. Accepting seven days of offering only counted as a gift to the Nāga king in this case because of the demonstrated ability of the guest to expound the Dharma. What about other, more ordinary travelers? In fact, a later plot in this same story offers some clues to this question. After the Evil Prince took away the pearl and blinded the Good Prince, the latter was left to his own devices. His aimless wandering took him – now calling himself a “blind mendicant” – to a

cowherd. The cowherd observed that he had extraordinary features and invited him to stay in his home. For a month, the cowherd instructed his family to treat the blind mendicant as they would treat himself. Other members of the family, however, grew to detest this mendicant, presumably unaware of his extraordinary features, and complained about his stay. The prince, having heard of these complaints, engaged in the following conversation:

[He] told the host: “I intend to leave now.”

The host responded: “is there anything not proper that you want to leave me?”

The Good Prince said: “[according to] the principle of the guest and the host, this cannot last long. (客主之義，勢不得久)”

The cowherd tried to keep the Good Prince, who nonetheless insisted that he had to leave. For the prince, this relation could not last because, unlike the episode in the Nāga king’s palace, he was no longer a guest of great virtue who could provide reciprocal service for the accommodation. In this case, we see two different attitudes toward the Good Prince. The cowherd who recognized his extraordinary features treated him as a proper guest and offered him necessities without expecting anything in return other than his stay. Yet the family of the cowherd treated him as a blind mendicant rather than as a proper guest. For them, his stay was a mere burden. Apparently, both the cowherd and the Good Prince recognized that a mendicant staying at someone’s house for a month without contributing anything was a violation of “the principle of the guest and the host.” It was because of this violation, the prince contended, that the guest/host relation could not last. The cowherd acquiesced and sent the prince to the city of Lishiba with a zither. In this city, after several twists, the prince met the princess whom he was originally meant to marry,

was cured of his blindness, and revealed his true identity to the king of Lishiba, who became his father-in-law. The king, realizing that he was the prince, apologized for not recognizing him. The prince forgave him, and as the first demand after regaining his status, asked the king to “acquire goods for me so that I can give them to the cowherd.” The king then gave the cowherd gold, silver, pearls, clothing, and food. With this offering, the prince repaired the guest/host relation. His month-long stay with the cowherd was more than lavishly repaid, and the reciprocity was restored. For this reason, after receiving such abundant gifts/payments, the cowherd exclaimed:

Alas, the offering is the *yin* and the repayment is the *yang*! The matter of giving offers has extensive karmic payback.

夫陰施陽報，布施之事，果報弘廣。

These two episodes in the story indicate that the status and skills of a traveler sometimes dictate the way reciprocity operated. For a virtuous person like the Good Prince, to honor a host with his presence is already a gift that establishes the initial guest/host relation. This relation is reciprocated by the accommodation of the guest. His “gift” extends further the longer he stays at the house of the host, which then necessitates a further counter-gift from the host, which in the present case, is the coveted Mani pearl.

But not every traveler is a virtuous or famous one, particularly considering that the Good Prince is revealed ultimately to have been the Buddha in a previous life. For an ordinary traveler, the blind mendicant’s experience is more relevant. In this case, the “principle of the guest and the host” persists, but its fulfillment becomes more difficult. The mendicant’s inability to repay the accommodation became the reason for his being

expelled. It is important, however, to note that the host initiates the establishment of the guest/host relationship, without the guest first giving him anything. This host-initiative is explained in a Buddhist manner: as the cowherd's last line shows, the Buddhist concept of karmic gift (dāna) and fruit (phala) conveniently points to guest/host reciprocity. One has to give first to expect a return later. In this context, importantly, the initiator of the reciprocity relation ultimately receives greater benefit.

4.2.2: "The Turkic Friend"

We can observe the central role of the guest-host reciprocity in a different context of travel in tenth-century Central Eurasia. Ibn Faḍlān, in his journey to the Rus, passed through the "Land of the 'Turks'" between 921 and 922. His interaction with this group of Inner Asian people might serve as a good example to see if there was a shared Inner Asian culture in guest-host relations. He took note of the ways guests behaved in his travel account:¹

No Muslim can cross their country without having made friends with one of them, with whom he stays and to whom he brings gifts from the lands of Islam – a robe, a veil for his wife, pepper, millet, raisins and walnuts.

Here, the term "friend" indicates an amicable relation between a guest and a host, as it is used to describe "Turks" "with whom he (a Muslim) stays and to whom he brings gifts from the lands of Islam." The action of staying with such a "friend" is closely associated

¹ See Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone trans., *Ibn Faḍlān and the land of Darkness: Arab Travelers in the Far North*, (New York: Penguin, 2012), 14.

with that of gifting. It is the first round of reciprocity: the gift from the guest is repaid by the “friendship,” which primarily meant accommodation. This reciprocal relation is mirrored by the one established upon the guest’s departure in Ibn Faḍlān’s account:

If one of the Muslims wants to leave and some of his camels or horses are unwell, or if he needs money, he leaves the sick camels with his Turkish friend, borrows the camels, horses and money he needs, and sets out. When he returns from his journey, he pays off his debt and gives him back his camels and horses.

The borrowing of “camels, horses and money” occurs between the Muslim and “his Turkish friend” after the guest-host relation between them has already been established. Because of this relation, the departing guest can be trusted with lendings of livestock and money, which are expected to be repaid when the Muslim came back. This account may seem odd because it is easy to assume the possibility of the guest leaving with “camels, horses, and money” and never repaying them. Why then is the “Turkish friend” generally willing, at least according to Ibn Faḍlān, to lend his property? This question is difficult to answer, partly because Ibn Faḍlān’s account was undeniably idealized, but as I shall show in actual cases of borrowing and giving upon departure found at Dunhuang, a more pragmatic version of this practice did exist there in some form. The key to understanding the willingness of the “Turkish friend” to lend the stranger his property lies in the expectation that the Muslim will pay it back “when he returns from his journey.” The significance of the return trip is highlighted in this account, and will be discussed in more detail below.

The establishment of the guest-host relation sometimes takes on much cruder forms that are difficult to understand:¹

Similarly, when an unknown man comes to a Turk and says to him: ‘I am your guest and I want your camels and horse and dirhams’, he gives him what he wants.

Even in this idealized account, this story strikes one as somewhat unrealistic: if the Turk gives this “unknown man” what he wants, what is the Turk getting in return? As far as we can tell, the only thing that the “unknown man” offers is the pronouncement of the status of guest. Apparently, this pronouncement alone turned an “unknown man” into a guest who can then require certain benefits befitting the status of guest. One can only assume that claiming to be a guest did not only involve privilege but also responsibility. What this responsibility involved, however, is difficult to judge from this passage. The story was told by Ibn Faḍlān to illustrate the generosity of the Turkic people; how much it reflects the relationship of traveling in practice will be examined in the next section.

Naturally, the reciprocity between guest and host becomes a problem when one of them dies. It is in his account of such a situation that Ibn Faḍlān reveals some of the most fundamental features of guest-host reciprocity. He states:²

If the merchant dies on the journey he has undertaken, the Turk goes to the people in the caravan when it returns and says to them:

‘Where is my guest?’

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., 15.

If they say: ‘He died!’ ... he takes “exactly the money that is owing to him and nothing more. Similarly, he takes several of his camels and horses, and says to him: “He was your cousin, and you are the most appropriate person to pay his debts.”

Therefore, the cousin of the dead traveler would shoulder the responsibility of paying back what was owed, be it money or livestock. Importantly, Ibn Faḍlān emphasizes that the debtor only requires “exactly the money that is owing to him.” Does this statement imply that under normal circumstances, an additional amount of fee or goods would have been given to the host? It is impossible to be certain judging from this passage alone. I shall explore how such a relation operates using actual cases from Dunhuang contracts in the next section.

But what this case does tell us is that, even with the death of a guest, the guest-host reciprocal relation still persists, and any relative is bound to honor the contract made between them. Such equity in reciprocity no longer holds, however, when the guest is viewed as violating the principle of the guest-host relation. Ibn Faḍlān continues with this scenario:¹

If he does not find his Muslim guest along the caravan route, he asks his companions:

“Where is he?”

Once he has been told where to look, he sets out in search of him, traveling for days until he finds him. He then takes back his possessions in addition to any gifts he may have given him.

¹ Ibid.

Not finding the Muslim implies that he has escaped, thus avoiding the return trip back to the “Turkic friend” and his duty as a guest. In this case, if the Turkic host manages to find the Muslim guest, he takes back what he has lent his guest. Moreover, importantly, he also takes back “any gifts he may have given him.” The action of the runaway Muslim violates the reciprocal principle of a proper guest-host relation and relieves the host of his duty as a host. Therefore, any prior sign of such duty can be rescinded as well. In this case, reclaiming the gifts signaled the end of guest-host reciprocity. The difference between this case of running away and the previous case of death is crucial: while death does not automatically mean the end of the guest-host relation, running away from the host and avoiding returning does. The reclaiming of property in these two cases differ in that in the runaway case, not only the lent possessions are taken back, but also the gifts given to the Muslim. Whether or not the gifts must be returned marks the difference between a proper end of the guest-host relation and a punitive one.

4.2.3: Marco Polo and the Hosts in Camul (Hami)

This reciprocity can be observed in a third story that took place in a region just west of Dunhuang. In the late thirteenth century, when Marco Polo traveled to the city of Camul (Hami), he recorded a scandalous local “custom”:¹

If a stranger passes through the region and comes to him to his house to lodge, he is too much delighted at it, and receives him with great joy, and labours

¹ A.C. Moule and Paul Pelliot, trans. *The Description of the World*. 1938; rpt 1976 (New York: AMS Press), 2 vols, 154.

to do everything to please. And he tells his wife, daughters, sisters, and other relations to do all that the stranger wishes more than for him; and he leaves his house and his wife for the stranger, and goes immediately to do his work and stays two days or three on the farm or elsewhere, where he will. And from there they send all that their guests need (nonetheless with payment for them); nor do they ever return home while the stranger stays there. And the stranger stays with his wife in the house and does as he likes and lies with her in a bed just as if she were his wife, and they continue in great enjoyment.

The local men, according to Marco Polo, acted in this way because “[it is] very pleasing to their idols when they give so good a reception to wayfarers in need of rest, and that for this reason all their goods, children, and wealth are multiplied and kept from all dangers, and all things succeed for them with the greatest happiness.” The Mongol Khan, however, considered such a custom scandalous, and issued an edict so that this province would “not dare to lodge the strangers any more in that way.” Instead, to preserve “the honour of their wives,” travelers should be put in “publick lodgings.”¹ The prohibition in the edict of the Khan was twofold. It was clearly a decree against this particular custom that violated norms of family relations. But more importantly, it was also a re-direction of the ways of traveling. Private lodging to strangers was considered immoral and illegitimate. “Publick lodgings” should be the appropriate places for travelers to stay when they were on the road. It is tempting to connect this public house concept to the extensive postal service in the vast Mongol Empire, but it seems doubtful whether this system would be able to sustain any travelers other than those on state business.

In this particular context, such concern is unnecessary because this injunction met with strong resistance. The local men claimed that because they failed to observe “that which by their old fathers and grandfathers had been left them with such solemnity,”

¹ Ibid., 155.

during the three years this practice was banned, for the reason that “their lands were not yielding the accustomed fruits and that in their houses many misfortunes followed one another.” Evidently, in their minds, this practice of hospitality was connected with deities who would offer blessings to families who performed these acts and condemn those who did not.

Thus, the principle of reciprocity was operating on two different levels. The first level is the clearly materialistic one. The hosts “send all that their guests need (nonetheless with payment for them).” The materialistic reciprocity seems to be fairly limited. It only pertains to the necessities that travelers would need when they stayed in the hosts’ houses. The second, and broader, level of reciprocity operates among the guests, the hosts, and deities. As long as the hosts provided the guests with accommodation and companions – for both of which, importantly, no payment is said to have been necessary – the deities reciprocate by ensuring the well-being of their family. The first level of reciprocity, in which the travelers had to make payment, was clearly secondary to the second level. It was the reciprocal relations among the guests, the hosts, and deities, rather than the law of commerce and economy, that governed the experience of traveling in this context.

These three stories are extracted from texts from different cultural and linguistic traditions and written in different places and at different times. Even though, broadly speaking, they likely pertain to and might even be familiar to the travelers in the Dunhuang sphere we are discussing here, they cannot be seen as directly reflecting actual people’s beliefs, much less their practices. They do, however, illustrate the ideal types of guest-host relations, in the context of which actual cases of traveling can now be further

analyzed. The three stories are broadly similar in illustrating the existence and central importance of the principle of guest-host relation for travelers. None of the relations established in these stories involved straightforward and impersonal monetary payment for accommodation; instead, the arrival of a guest initiates a *personal* relation with the host. After the arrival, both the guest and the host make their contributions to this relationship, but also share certain responsibilities.

These stories differ, however, in the specific ways this relation is negotiated between the two parties. In the case of the Good Prince's stay with the Nāga king, because of the recognized virtue of the guest, his stay in itself constitutes his contribution to the host and requires a counter-contribution from the host. In all of the other cases, when the guest is not recognized universally as having great virtue, the stay at the host's place does not constitute a contribution to the host. Instead, the reciprocity happens in the form of exchange of gifts and commodities.

The most curious feature these stories reveal is the role of accommodation in the equation of guest-host reciprocity. It is perhaps no coincidence that the beginning of Marco Polo's story echoes that related by Ibn Faḍlān. While according Marco Polo's record, "If a stranger passes through the region and comes to him to his house to lodge, he is too much delighted at it, and receives him with great joy, and labours to do everything to please," Ibn Faḍlān tells us that "when an unknown man comes to a Turk and says to him: 'I am your guest and I want your camels and horse and dirhams', he gives him what he wants." The expression of the desire to have lodging and accommodation is immediately met, just as when a stranger claims to be a guest. They seem to describe broadly similar situations: the announcement of one's intention to stay

and the assumption of the role of a guest seem to immediately warrant accommodation without any immediate payment.

In the next section, I shall examine relevant information on traveling found in Dunhuang manuscripts and test whether and to what extent the features of guest-host relations revealed in these three stories also applied to travelers found among Dunhuang manuscripts.

4.3: How to be a Guest?

The Dunhuang manuscripts from the “library cave” are primarily Buddhist texts. Much, if not most, of the information that can be gleaned from these manuscripts on traveling was preserved when social (including both private and official texts) and economic documents containing such information were reused to paste and support Buddhist texts, providing piecemeal glimpses of the practice of traveling. In the following section, I use such documents to discuss the relation between travelers and the places they visited. The picture is a composite one and does not deal with a single group or a single trip. My discussion will generally follow the logical timeline of a trip, from pre-arrival introduction, to the arrival, the stay, and finally the departure. In this discussion, I pay particular attention to discrepancies seen in these diverse sources, as well as their departure from the ideal types of guest-host relation seen in the stories analyzed above. By clarifying discrepancies, I hope, the commonalities of the way people traveled will emerge.

4.3.1: Letter of Introduction:

The key difference between a traveler and a guest is whether or not a person is known by the host. A traveler who becomes known has the potential of being treated as a proper guest. Therefore, the process of being introduced to a potential host is the initiation of a guest-host relationship, as in this letter of introduction:¹

“This is a petition from the patron Ngog Luzhi Namka. A Chinese monk from China who is unequalled as a great ascetic, a great scholar and a great upholder of virtue is going to India to see the sites of Śākyamuni. His route is as follows... Up to this point [in the monk’s journey] both Chinese and Tibetans have [treated him] honorably ... and conducted his stage by stage. From this point onward ... [he should be treated] honorably. Treat him as an object of veneration and conduct him stage by stage. [If] anyone harms him or obstructs his virtuous activities, be they Chinese or Tibetan, ... the news will be carried away on the winds in the ten directions. This is Namka’s message: let nobody hurt [the monk]!”

The letter contains information about the identity of the traveler (a Chinese monk), the credential of the traveler (a great ascetic, a great scholar, and a great upholder of virtue), and the purpose of the trip (visiting the sites of Śākyamuni), as well as the route that he took. It also specifies the host’s duty, which includes the protection of the person while he is a guest and during his further journey, as well as the appropriate veneration.

The most interesting part of the letter, however, is the supposed consequence for not treating this traveler as a venerable guest. If he or his trip is obstructed, Namka claims, “the news will be carried away on the winds in the ten directions.” The implication is, of course, that the news of this particular host’s unacceptable behavior would be enough of a deterrent for any potential inappropriate behavior on the part of the host. The theme of the host’s fame playing a central part in the host-guest relations will be seen in many

¹ *Manuscripts and Travellers*, 161-62.

other documents in other languages in the following discussion. The wish to gain fame through displays of generosity was one of the most important incentives for the favorable treatment of guests.

The need for a letter of introduction clearly is not limited to the monastic realm. In a letter written to an unspecified “barbarian leader 蕃官,” the Governor Cao of Dunhuang states:¹

“Now I am dispatching people to pay tribute at the court. On the path they take, when they reach the region of your tribe, please follow the custom and offer manpower for security and assistance. Regarding the leader of my dispatch, make sure nothing is delayed or mishandled. Now I bestow on you slant-woven felt... and three yak tails, which you will receive when (the dispatch) arrives.”

In exchange for security and assistance, the barbarian leader received “slant-woven felt... and three yak tails.” The recipient of this letter was clearly not under the direct control of the Governor of Dunhuang. Therefore, it was necessary for him to make the plea that the “barbarian leader” should “follow the custom” (zhunli 準例) in the treatment of the travelers. The custom in this case must have been certain established precedence, which was further boosted by the offering of gifts. A “barbarian leader,” who in other contexts of encounters on the road would have been considered a possible threat to travelers, became a potential proper host of the travelers dispatched by Governor Cao because of the letter of introduction from him.

Although we only have letters of introduction addressed to the hosts, and not the direct responses of these hosts, it is conceivable that these cases of introduction of guests would have been to a certain extent binding on the potential hosts, who were then

¹ P.4525-9, *Tang Geng'ou, Dunhuang shehui jingji wenshu zhenji shilu*, vol.4, 305.

compelled to act in a certain way because of either the consideration of their good name or the established precedence of gift exchange. After these often invisible forces are taken into consideration, the actions of travelers and their hosts after the arrival become easier to understand.

4.3.2. Accommodation

The host is supposed to offer the guest accommodation and various types of supplies including food, oil, cloth, paper, and wine. The Dunhuang collection offers fairly extensive records on this matter, primarily in the form of account books, which record the income and/or expenditure in the form of a certain commodity (such as oil) in a certain institution (such as a monastery) within a certain period of time ranging from a few weeks to a few years. Therefore, the manuscripts offer snapshots of the accommodation of travelers in the context of other types of expenditures by certain institutions. For instance, P.4640v is an account of the expenditure of cloth and paper by the Dunhuang government from 899 to 901.

Table 4.1: Cloth provided to travelers by the Dunhuang government (899-901)

person	date	type	amount
Blacksmith Suo Haiquan	3.?	fine cloth	1 <i>pi</i>
Canwei envoy monk Wenzan	3.16	fine cloth	1 <i>pi</i>
Papersmith	4.14	coarse cloth	1 <i>pi</i>
surrendered person Yepeng Tanlvluo	5.2	coarse cloth	1 <i>pi</i>
Canwei envoy (two people)	6.10	coarse cloth	1 <i>pi</i>
Suzhou monk (two people)	6.12	coarse cloth	2 <i>pi</i> (1 <i>pi</i> per person)
Zhang Gougou the “runaway catcher” 捉生人张苟苟 and another	6.21	coarse cloth	2 <i>pi</i> (1 <i>pi</i> per person)
Tuihun dead envoy	7.20	coarse cloth	1 <i>pi</i>
imperial envoy	9.20	吹丹布	1 <i>zhang</i>
Yumen 口承人(?) Liu Youzhu	9.29	coarse cloth	1 <i>pi</i>

Table 4.2: Paper provided to travelers by the Dunhuang government (899-901)

person	date	type	amount
Bootmaker An Adan (for his funeral)	4.3	coarse paper	1 <i>tie</i>
Tuihun prophet	5.28	paper	5 pieces
Suzhou envoy	7.4	fine paper	1 <i>tie</i>
Chinese monk	7.4	fine paper	1 <i>tie</i>
hawk catcher Cheng Xiaoqian	7.22	drawing paper	1 <i>tie</i>
Shi Xiaozhong for his trip to the east	8.13	drawing paper	30 pieces
Beidi envoy Liang Jingru	10.13	drawing paper	15 pieces
Envoys to Shuofang	10.20	drawing paper for 赛神 on the road	1 <i>tie</i>
Chinese monk	12.12	fine paper	1 <i>tie</i>
envoy Kang Boda	12.17	drawing paper for 赛神 on the road	10 pieces
Song Yanhui from Ganzhou	3.7	drawing paper	20 pieces
Cheng Wenwei's trip to the east	7.14	drawing paper	20 pieces
arrow maker Dong ??'s mother (funeral)	10.9	coarse paper	2 <i>tie</i>
Zhang Xibao's trip to Ganzhou	11.9	drawing paper	30 pieces
Deng Liuzhu's trip to the east	12.14	drawing paper	30 pieces
Suzhou monk	1.15	fine paper	1 <i>tie</i>
Gold/Silversmith Wang Shenshen's wife's funeral	1.16	coarse paper	2 <i>tie</i>
Office of the imperial envoy (for constructing letters)	1.16	fine paper	1 <i>tie</i>
Fuyuan from Guazhou	2.20	fine paper	1 <i>tie</i>
For the use of passage-letters(?)	2.21	coarse paper	1 <i>tie</i>
Liu Xishaochuling Road Guide of Canwei	2.27	fine paper	2 <i>tie</i>
Wang Bao'an's trip to the east	3.3	drawing paper	15 pieces
Heavenly envoy	3.4	coarse paper	1 <i>su</i>
Ganzhou envoy	3.6	fine paper	4 <i>tie</i>
Gentleman Ma from Shuofang	3.7	fine paper	1 <i>tie</i>
Zhang Liangzhen from Khotan	3.11	drawing paper	1 <i>tie</i>
Heavenly envoy	3.11	coarse paper	5 <i>tie</i>
Liang Mingming from Khtoan	3.12	fine paper	1 <i>su</i> 8 <i>tie</i>
Gentleman Ma from Shuofang	4.4	fine paper	1 <i>tie</i>
imperial envoys (for writing)	4.11	fine paper	2 <i>tie</i>
Fan Zhongxin's trip to the east	4.15	drawing paper	15 pieces

Some account books run to 284 lines and include many more expenditures than those listed here. I have left out records about expenditures within the Dunhuang government, which account for the majority of the total expenditure, and have chosen to focus on what was given to people who were not part of the government at Dunhuang. The Dunhuang government provided cloth and paper to several groups of travelers: 1. envoys from various neighboring states, 2. monks from various neighboring states, 3. people about to travel elsewhere, 4. various types of artisans. 5. certain people who had died, particularly envoys who were staying at Dunhuang, for their funerals.

The account books include records for cloth given to travelers over six months and for paper for about two years. It is evident that over these two years, a substantial number of visitors requested paper from the Dunhuang government. The majority of these records have to do with envoys from another state or Dunhuang envoys (such as Zhang Xibao and Wang Bao) who were traveling to another state. There are also references to monks, but as the record “Canwei envoy monk Wenzan” shows, the identity of monks and envoys frequently overlapped.

There are also specialized accounts from the “Office of Banquets 宴設司” in the Dunhuang government.¹ In this account, envoys from as far as China, India, and Persia, as well as from the closer neighbors – Khotan, Ganzhou, Hami and Turfan – were given specific shares of food. As in the previous example, the majority of the food expenditure was directed to either local affairs such as various types of rituals, artisans in charge of governmental as well as religious projects, and many people with only names but no

¹ S.1366.

explicit identity. The following table only summarizes the pertinent information about envoys found in this manuscript.

Table 4.3: A List of food provided to travelers by the Dunhuang government

people	time	type	amount	
Princess Amopinaci 阿磨偏次		cooked flour	5 <i>dou</i>	
Ganzhou envoy	17	fine supply	15 share	
Diyin and other envoys	17	fine supply	10 share (mian 4 <i>dou</i> 7 <i>sheng</i> 5 <i>he</i> , oil 2 <i>jin</i>)	
Yizhou envoy	17	fine supply and cooked flour	fine supply 2 share, mian 5 <i>sheng</i> (mian 8 <i>sheng</i> 5 <i>he</i> , oil 1 <i>he</i> 6 <i>shao</i>)	arrival gift
Xizhou and Yizhou envoy	9	fine supply and medium supply	fine supply 25 shares and medium supply 15 shares (cooked flour 6 <i>dou</i> 5 <i>sheng</i> 5 <i>he</i> , oil 2 <i>sheng</i> 6 <i>he</i>)	for their visit to the caves
Khotanese monk's funeral		fine supply and <i>hu</i> cake	fine supply 10 shares and <i>hu</i> cake 50 pieces (mian 4 <i>dou</i> 4 <i>sheng</i> , oil 8 <i>he</i>)	
Chinese (準舊相撲漢兒)		cooked flour	5 <i>dou</i>	
Persian monk from Ganzhou		cooked flour	7 <i>dou</i> per month	
Persia monk offering medicine 納藥波斯僧		cooked flour and oil	cooked flour 1 <i>shi</i> , oil 3 <i>jin</i>	
Khotanese envoy		cooked flour and oil	cooked flour 1 <i>shi</i> , oil 3 <i>jin</i>	
Ganzhou envoy Huiyuan		fine supply, medium supply, coarse supply	fine supply 20 shares, medium supply 10 shares, coarse supply 10 shares	
Ganzhou envoy Huiyuan (?) accommodation		fine supply, medium supply, coarse supply	fine supply 10 shares, medium supply 10 shares, coarse supply 5 shares	
Ganzhou envoy		fine supply, medium supply, coarse supply	fine supply 5 shares, medium supply ? shares, coarse supply 17 shares; morning and night mian 4 <i>dou</i> 5 <i>sheng</i> (mian 1 <i>shi</i> 7 <i>dou</i> 5 <i>sheng</i> , oil 3 <i>sheng</i> 8 <i>he</i> 4 <i>shao</i>)	arrival gift
Three Chinese monks, one Khotanese monk, one Brahman monk, one Liangzhou monk		cooked flour	2 <i>dou</i>	

This account shows that not only was the Dunhuang government responsible for the envoys' need for particular goods, it also took care of accommodation. When envoys from Xizhou (Turfan) and Yizhou (Hami) visited the caves (presumably the Mogao caves), the Dunhuang government offered substantial support of food for this relatively short trip.

Similarly, the government also provided the envoys with wine, as can be seen in the following table:¹

Table 4.4: A List of wine provided to travelers by the Dunhuang government

	Start Date	End Date	Number of Days	Number of people	wine per day	wine total	
Xizhuo envoys	3.22	4.23	32	35	8 <i>dou</i> 6 <i>sheng</i>	45 <i>weng</i> 5 <i>dou</i> 2 <i>sheng</i> ²	
Canwei envoys	3.22	4.23	32	6	1 <i>dou</i> 6 <i>sheng</i>	8 <i>weng</i> 3 <i>dou</i> 2 <i>sheng</i>	
Liangzhou envoys	3.22	4.23	32	3	8 <i>sheng</i>	4.5 <i>weng</i> 1 <i>dou</i> 8 <i>sheng</i> ³	
Liangzhou wenmo envoys	4.2	4.15	14	11	2 <i>dou</i> 4 <i>sheng</i>	5.5 <i>weng</i> 6 <i>sheng</i>	arrival wine 1 <i>weng</i>
[?]smith Wang Zhuan and others	3.23					1 <i>weng</i>	

¹ P.3569. Shilu 3.

² 6 *dou* = 1 *weng*.

³ The math is wrong here.

The first record stands out because of the sheer amount of supplies. The envoys from Turfan, 35 of them, required 32 days worth of wine while at Dunhuang. This offers a glimpse into the scale of trans-regional exchanges of envoys taking place at Dunhuang at the time and shows that many of the envoys likely lived at Dunhuang in a semi-permanent fashion.¹

Such extensive gift-giving on behalf of the Dunhuang government of paper, cloth, food, and wine to various types of travelers indicates that this was a standard practice. Just as friends of departing travelers usually sent gifts to them, the hosts of an arriving traveler provided accommodation and allowances. As in the cases discussed in the previous chapter on gifts, these goods were not exchanged with the travelers as commodities, but were simply offered. That, in the case of both departure gifts and arrival gifts, these goods appear in the account books almost certainly shows their non-commercial nature, because had they been exchanged, the goods they were exchanged for should have been recorded in the account books too, since many of them explicitly listed both income and expenditure (Ch. 入破曆). That these records do not show such received goods indicates that it is appropriate to see the outgoing goods as gifts.

4.3.3: Departure

The non-commercial nature of the guest-host relation is probably best seen in actions guests take when they leave their host, as in a commercial context, the guests

¹ The type of situation regarding the Khotanese envoys has been discussed by Kumamoto; see Kumamoto Hiroshi, "The Khotanese in Dunhuang," in A. Cadonna and L. Lanciotte, eds., *Cina e Iran: da Alessandro Magno alla dinastia Tang* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1996), 79–101.

should not have to take any action, because their relation with the host would have ended upon departure. This is not the case reflected by records in Dunhuang. Following is a model letter for the occasion of a departure:¹

Gratitude for accommodation in the prefecture passed:

A lowly certain someone (*mouyi* 厶乙) and others, by the command of our own governor, passed your honorable land. Humbly we received double the normal amount of specially granted accommodations in the prefectures and garrisons within your jurisdiction along the road. This certain someone and others humbly feel unbearable gratitude and trepidation.

謝所到州供給：

厶乙等庸賤，奉本使驅馳，幸過貴土。伏蒙訟（浴）路管界州鎮特賜供備倍常。厶乙等下情無任感恩惶懼。

Practically, this letter serves as a “thank-you” note. In the note, the traveler is supposed to express gratitude because “humbly we received double the normal amount of specially granted accommodations.” As mentioned above, model letters were frequently used for actual letters found at Dunhuang. Therefore, the expression of gratitude through such a letter seems to have been a regular practice. Similarly, in another model letter on the same manuscript, we have another type of thank-you note. The one cited above targets the accommodation a host provided, while the following one is directed at the gifts the travelers received:

Gratitude for returning granted goods

A lowly certain someone and others paid respect upon departure from the governor. Humbly we received specially granted offerings. This certain someone and others humbly feel unbearable gratitude and trepidation. [Note: as for this

¹ P.3691.

aforementioned gratitude-gift, (one) should discuss with the guide (通引) depending on the situation, and ask about the taboo and its weight, and express gratitude timely and accordingly.] If this is not included in the custom, [Note: then there is no need for the gratitude-gift.]¹

謝回賜物：

△乙等庸賤，離使拜奉。伏蒙特賜優給，△乙等下情無任感恩惶懼。[其上件謝禮，看臨事與通引商量，問諱兼輕重，隨時謝之。]如例不管，[并不用謝。]

The content of this model letter is not surprising in light of my discussion in the previous chapter about gift exchange. But what is interesting about this text is the note regarding the gift of gratitude. It spells out the need to offer a counter-gift to the gifts given to the traveler: “should discuss with the guide ... and ask about the taboo and its weight, and express gratitude timely and accordingly.” Evidently, the process of responding to gifts with gifts upon one’s departure was also standard procedure. At the end of the letter, the note indicates that there is a “custom” (*li* 例) that governs such activities, and if the custom does not cover a certain scenario, there is no need for return gifts.

But not all departures were pleasant. In the following case, the guest annoyed the host so much after departure that the host wrote a letter to him essentially scolding him for his behavior. It is a rare example of a fairly long and intact letter written about a traveler and is cited in full here:²

Your disciple, (this) lady, has a small matter to report to the honorable one. I hope you grant me your attention. Previously, when you were going to the east, your disciple expressed the deepest feelings of attachment (to you), and provided

¹ The notes were written in smaller scripts following the main texts.

² S.526.

accommodation and service to the best of my abilities. Even with such invitation, you were not allowing (the possibility) of stay. Hence you went on ahead and departed from this confused person. Later, however, some officials said in person that upon departure, the monk talked excessively about the inappropriateness of my lord. My lord soon heard about this and became very upset. This is because, when the monk was here, briefly (?) (we were) like old brother and younger brother, like water and fish, and treated each other with respect without hearing any unbecoming matters. Now for unknown reasons, (you) proclaim a bad name (for us). When people around you hear, our fame will not be great. [...] We hope that the monk will return, and we will know your inner feelings. The disciple now longs for the honorable one to return to your monastery, which would fulfill my wish.

弟子夫人別有少事上告尊慈，幸望甫垂聽念。前者東去之時，弟子情多戀切，意極思深，盡力接待，竭心侍足。如斯邀勒，不可聽留。便是前行，違背迷士。已後諸官人口說：和尚去時於阿郎極有唱說不是。阿郎尋自知聞，轉甚煩惱。只為和尚在此之日，小來如兄如弟，似水似魚，遞互謙恭，不聞弱事。今者為甚不知唱說惡名，左右人聞，名價不善。倍多羅塞，欲得和尚再要迴來，要知腹事。弟子如今渴仰法慈，請歸上府，即為滿願矣。

This letter written by a certain Lady Yin 陰 expresses her complaint as well as that of a certain lord (阿郎), who likely was her husband. The complaint is directed to a monk who traveled from somewhere west of Dunhuang to the east, and stayed with Lady Yin on his way. This monk, it is said in the letter, enjoyed accommodation and service to the best of the abilities of the host, and their relation appeared to have been very close, like that between “old brother and younger brother” and “water and fish.” In spite of this, after the monk departed, he apparently slandered the host (gave them a “bad name”) for some unknown reasons. This slander prompted Lady Yin to compose this letter of inquiry, because “when people around you hear, our fame will not be great.” In this case, as in the Khotanese letters cited in Ch. 3 and the Tibetan letter cited above, we see the “fame” or “good name” of the host being viewed as a crucial part of the relation between a guest and a host. If nothing else, a guest who enjoyed the accommodation of a host should

proclaim the “good name” of the host. When this assumption is broken, it warranted an inquiry. Therefore, underneath the extremely humble language of the letter lies a rather damning accusation. This accusation was made with the understanding that the monk most likely would return to his own monastery from somewhere to the west of Dunhuang, and that on his way back he might revisit Lady Yin. It is not difficult to see that if the monk cannot give a reasonable explanation for what happened, he will not receive the same kind of accommodation on his return trip. The monk failed as a guest because he was seen as not fulfilling the reciprocal duty of spreading the good name of the host.

This expression of the reciprocal link between a proper accommodation of the guest and the spread of the good name of the host mirrors similar records found in another, roughly contemporary text. In the *Compendium of Turkic Dialects*, Mahmud al-Kashgari made extensive remarks on the relation between a host and a guest. For instance, under the entry for the word *ōz* (self), he quotes the following maxim:¹

Put on fine garments for yourself;
Make tasty food as a portion for others;
Honor the guest,
So that he spread your fame among the people.

Conversely, in the entry for *uγra* (going toward, intend), he quotes another maxim:²

When the guest asks you for provisions and comes to you for it, give it to him;
The guest will curse if his reception is bad.

¹ *Compendium of Turkic Dialects*, 95.

² *Ibid.*, 232.

The reciprocal relation between a guest and a host is made abundantly clear by these sayings: if the host provides proper accommodation and provision, the guest reciprocates in spreading the good name of the host; but if the host fails to provide such support, the guest reciprocates by spreading “a bad name.” That these ideas were crystalized in maxims indicates that they were as widely known, at least in the Turkic-speaking world, as in the Chinese, Khotanese, and Tibetan texts. The letter from Lady Yin quoted above shows that such an idea was not only shared by residents at Dunhuang, but affected the actual behavior between a host and a guest.

4.4: Ungrateful Travelers: Understanding Bandits

If a traveler that observed these established rules was considered a guest, then how was one that did not observe these rules regarded? The Dunhuang collection offers little direct information on this question. Nonetheless, in one of the collections of conversation and proverbs (S.5949 下女夫詞), we find one type of person being directly contrasted to guests:

When a bandit comes, he should be beaten;
When a guest comes, he should be looked after.

賊來須打、客來須看。

I regard guest-host reciprocity as the key social principle that governed the experience of traveling because it helps explain this important category: bandits. Scholars have noticed

the existence of bandits on the Silk Road. Yet most of them treat bandits as yet another group of people in addition to merchants, monks, and envoys, and their role in the historical narrative of the Silk Road is seen as purely disruptive. In this section, however, I argue that “bandit” was as much a social phenomenon as it was a cultural construct. Bandits were not born as bandits, nor did they always act as such. Mere obstructionist actions are not enough to categorize banditry. Rather, to be called a bandit depended as much on the perspective from which these actions were viewed as on the actions of those involved. The Tang government, which took away Xuanzang’s possessions and tried to prevent him from embarking on his famous trip to India, was generally not regarded as conducting banditry, because their actions were legitimized from the perspective of most historical accounts based on texts written by and for the Tang government.¹ Context mattered as much as conduct.

Simply put, whereas a traveler who engaged in the reciprocal act of hospitality was deemed to be a proper guest, one who did not was often accused of being a “bandit.” Like any social principle, the principle of reciprocity on the Silk Road was broken as often as it was followed. Various types of actions could be interpreted as breaking certain rules in the process of traveling, rendering the perpetrators of said actions “bandits.” The examination of what was inappropriate also helps us understand more intimately what was considered appropriate. Admittedly, there are not many materials that deal directly with bandits beyond fleeting references to their existence, but by analyzing the few substantial lines that I could find, I hope to establish some basic ideas about how they functioned on the road.

¹ Even Xuanzang’s account of his trip, which he composed and had his disciple write down after he came back to China, was primarily politically and not religiously motivated.

That banditry is not entirely about conduct is clear from some of the accusations of banditry we find in existing sources. P.2155 verso is a letter Cao Yuanzhong wrote to the Uyghur Khan. In the letter he complains about three disturbances on the road. In the first incident, “bandits” robbed his embassy led by Cao Yanding, who was on his way to return gifts to the Uyghurs. They killed one person and looted two or three horses. Upon further investigation, it was made known that these bandits were Uyghurs who alleged that they were chasing after runaways. The second incident occurred seven days after the first one. According to Cao Yuanzhong, eighteen “bandits,” half on horse and half on foot, pretended to be envoys and marched on the main road to the town of Xuanquan. Similarly in this case, the perpetrators were Uyghurs who claimed that they were chasing after runaways. In the third incident, a certain Yiji Xizhou from Suzhou worked as a road-guide for one hundred Tartar bandits who attacked Guazhou and Kuaiji on the same day and carried off people as well as cattle.

The juxtaposition of the first two cases and the third in this one letter is interesting, as the last incident in fact had nothing to do with the Uyghur Khan. Cao Yuanzhong himself said as much when he noted “this (the third) incident is not the fault of people from your honored province (meaning the Uyghur state of Ganzhou).” Yet by putting them together in the same letter, Cao implied to his recipient that these incidents were of the same nature: these travelers behaved in inappropriate ways.

But this letter reveals much about how complicated it was to define what was illegal. In the first incident, from the perspective of Cao Yuanzhong, Uyghur bandits attacked Cao Yanding, the “legal” envoy from Shazhou. Yet the reported claim of these “bandits” having been on a mission to retrieve runaways and Cao’s appeal to the Uyghur

Khan strongly indicate that they were likely officials from the Uyghur government. It is even possible that the claim of motive might be genuine, and that they truly mistook Cao Yanding as a Ganzhou runaway. The possibility of confusion in this regard is confirmed by the second incident where eighteen “bandits” successfully pretended to be envoys up to the point that they marched to the town of Xuanquan. While there is no corroborative account from the Uyghur side to confirm or refute Cao Yuanzhong’s version of the story, the manner in which these supposedly pretend envoys marched blatantly to the town, only to be caught without committing any apparent crime, is indicative. If they were truly bandits pretending to be envoys, should they not have taken more precautions? And without their actually doing anything illegal, how could Cao claim that they were “bandits?” Clearly, in these cases, the term “bandit” did not always mean someone who committed a crime. In the case of the second incident, the only crime these bandits committed was that they “marched directly to the gate of the city.” They claimed to be envoys, but were not properly identified. This fact alone makes them “bandits.” Details aside, this case is an example of how identities such as envoys or bandits were transactional and subject to negotiation.

One of the most significant features of bandits is that they were not properly introduced as guests, and therefore their appearance often seems abrupt. In the following report, the bandits were described in this manner:

On a certain day this month, from a certain place, robbers and thieves suddenly emerged and came to the gate of the city. The robbers commanded more than three hundred mounted horsemen...

“今月某日，從某處寇盜慕突出來，直到城下，賊有三百騎已來……”¹

This text is not an actual letter sent out, but a model letter called (in the original manuscript) “Petition on the loss and oversight in case of banditry.” Therefore the date and place of the letter were left unspecified, allowing the writer of an actual petition to fill in the blanks. What is specified, however, is how these generic “robbers and thieves” acted: they emerged out of nowhere, rode on horses, and marched quickly to the city. These features of thieves contrasted drastically with that of a proper incoming guest. As many letters of introduction have shown, a proper guest should, first and foremost, be known; and unexpectedness was considered inappropriate.

Sometimes, however, the reference to banditry becomes a trope for general hardship on the road and is devoid of any specificity. In a letter written to the king of Khotan, a Dunhuang envoy named Fuzhu stated that: “along the road, even though we encountered vile behavior and danger, bandits and killings, none of our group suffered any damage, and the gift (*xinwu*) to the great dynasty is also intact.”² But of course, if the group did not suffer any damage, then they must not have encountered “bandits and killings.” One might suspect that many other similar references to bandits fall into the category of rhetorical devices.

There is not a substantial number of records about bandits, and many of them use “bandit” or “banditry” as a way of describing the hardship on the road. Yet from the limited number of records that do exist, it is clear that the identity as bandit should not be

¹ S.5606.

² The original text reads: 于陆月贰拾壹日出于不道 (non-road?), 沿途虽逢奸危贼杀, 上下一行并无折欠, 其于国朝信物亦无遗失, 于柒月贰拾叁日得达西朝.

essentialized. There were not “numerous bandit gangs” on the Silk Road.¹ If we follow the guide of the saying that “When a bandit comes, he should be beaten; When a guest comes, he should be looked after,” then a bandit should at least in some ways resemble a guest. Both were strangers who traveled to a new place. The difference is primarily that guests were involved in the reciprocal relation with hosts, whereas bandits disrupted such reciprocity.

4.5: Conclusion

In his work on the Sogdians on the Silk Road, Étienne de la Vaissière made the following remarks on an architectural feature of the site of Panjikent:²

At Panjikent notice has been made of the attention that the Sogdian nobles gave to greeting and reception in the superbly decorated halls planned for this sole purpose, which formed a significant part of the area of noble houses. The underlying ethic is the same: a noble has a duty to appear and accommodate guests at his home.

What was visible in a physical manner in Panjikent is more clearly visible among texts preserved at Dunhuang and adjacent regions. By analyzing texts produced at various stages in the progress of a traveler, I show that each step of the way, the reciprocal relation with the host was the key to a successful trip. The host provided the guest with food, wine, and various items of daily use, in addition to accommodation and gifts. The

¹ Millward, *Silk Road*, 20.

² *Sogdian Traders*, 92-93.

guest responded with gifts, letters expressing gratitude, and in the case of the monk discussed above, the promise of sacrifice of one's life.

Importantly, as attested in Chinese, Turkic, Tibetan, and Khotanese sources, the hosts were particularly invested in receiving a "good name" for the favorable treatment of guests. Hence, to spread such good name was part of the duty of the guest. And the dereliction of such duty would risk, as in the case of Lady Yin, breaching the guest/host relation. On the other hand, the fulfillment of this duty, like the gracious acceptance of gifts described in the previous chapter, reaffirms and reproduces the guest-host reciprocity for a future trip.

These principles of travel and guest/host relations found in Dunhuang manuscripts agree in broad terms with those revealed by the three stories I discussed at the beginning of the chapter. In both cases, travelers and the people they meet on the road seem to enter into a non-commercial relation. The travelers were made "known" in various ways. In the story of Ibn Faḍlān, somebody's mere claim of being a guest appears to be sufficient to qualify as one. In reports of travel found at Dunhuang, travelers often need a letter of introduction. But once a traveler becomes a "guest," the host does not seem to hesitate in providing for the traveler. Indeed, in Marco Polo's account of Camul, the local men considered inviting the guests into their house to be "great honor and glory."¹ In much the same way, cases at Dunhuang show that being a good host generally should bring fame. Therefore, the ideal type of guest/host relations is largely mirrored by actual reports of travelers found at Dunhuang.

Also clear from the discussions above is that very few merchants were recorded as travelers in our sources. It is unlikely that such an absence is the result of the bias of

¹ Moule and Pelliot. trans. *The Description of the World*, 154.

the sources because, as I shall show in the next chapter, Dunhuang documents do show plenty of people being involved in commercial activities, although most of the people who carried goods trans-regionally did so as envoys. As the account books tabulated in this chapter indicate, the governments of the states along the Silk Road were heavily invested and deeply involved in promoting the trans-regional travels of their representatives – envoys. Many of the monks who did travel also traveled within the rubric of state-support. Therefore, within the world of guest-host reciprocity on the Silk Road, large or small governments produced the majority of guests, and were also themselves the most important hosts. The relative importance of the networks of guest-host vis-à-vis the commercial networks of merchants is difficult to gauge. My purpose here is to offer an analysis of the working of the former, in order that it can be compared to that of the latter, which we have a much better understanding.

Part Three: Economy and Ideology: Results of Travel

Chapter 5: Reconsidering The Silk Road Economy

5.1: Introduction:

The “Silk Road” has always been conceptualized as either primarily an economic phenomenon or at least as having significant economic implications. This economy is often described as prospering or shrinking at different times of history, which in turn influences how people interacted on the Silk Road.¹ The impact of Silk Road economy on the regions connected by the Silk Road has also been explored.² Yet there has been no rigorous examination of what “Silk Road economy” means exactly. Specifically, how was the “Silk Road economy,” if this term is at all meaningful, different in nature from economies in culturally homogeneous and monolingual regions? What economic features most prominently set places like Dunhuang and Turfan apart from regions in, say, northern China or central Tibet?

To answer this question, this chapter uses Dunhuang as a case study to explore the features of “Silk Road economy” in the ninth and the tenth centuries. I argue that two features define the economy at Dunhuang during this period as an economy “on the Silk Road.” First, the economy at Dunhuang regularly saw a large influx of non-local, often luxury goods. As I described in Ch.3, as far as we can see in extant documents, most of

¹ Ch. Beckwith, *Empires on the Silk Road*, 139; Hansen, *Silk Road: A New History*, 241.

² Ch. Beckwith, “The Impact of the horse and silk trade on the economics of T’ang China and the Uighur Empire,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 34 (1991): 184-98.

these entered and left Dunhuang as gifts. The ways they interacted with different aspects of the local economy is the first defining feature of a Silk Road economy.

While the first feature concerns the products exchanged in the economy, the second feature is about the practices of exchange. Specifically, the more people of different cultural and linguistic traditions conducted exchanges, the more similar the ways in which they conducted business became — so much so that, by the ninth and tenth centuries at Dunhuang and adjacent regions, regardless of whether the people involved were Chinese, Tibetan, or Uyghur, the rules they agreed upon in conducting their business were largely the same.

Because of these two main features, I argue, “Silk Road economy” should not be defined as simply the economy of regions considered to be on the Silk Road. Instead, the influx of luxury goods and the congruence of business and legal practices are distinctive features of the economies on the Silk Road that are not widely seen in other culturally more homogeneous regions.

Since the goal of the chapter is to seek a definition of “Silk Road economy” by isolating features in economic entities like Dunhuang on the Silk Road that made them unique, it is less concerned about the changes in the Silk Road economy itself. As Eric Trombert has shown, there was a clear and sharp decline in the use of coins in Dunhuang from the end of the eighth century.¹ Evidently, Dunhuang in the ninth and tenth centuries was a unique case among Silk Road economies, most of which used coins. But as Helen Wang and many other contributors have pointed out in the same volume where

¹ Éric Trombert, “The Demise of Silk on the Silk Road: Textiles as Money at Dunhuang from the Late Eighth Century to the Thirteenth Century,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 23.2 (2013): 327–347.

Trombert's article appeared, textile or even grain were often used "as money." So whether or not the lack of coin can necessarily be equated to an economic decline is still debatable. In this chapter I describe these two features that I believed distinguished Dunhuang from places not generally considered to have been on the Silk Road. But if these features can then be seen as common features for other places on the Silk Road remains an open question.

The main corpus I use in discussing this issue consists of 200 contracts in Chinese and Tibetan found at Dunhuang, as well as other social and economic documents from Dunhuang.¹ To delineate the features of the economy at Dunhuang using these documents, I also adduce contracts and documents from before the ninth century and after the tenth century. These documents were discovered at various Central Asian archaeological sites from Afghanistan to Dunhuang. They were written from the third to the thirteenth centuries in various languages including Prakrit,² Bactrian,³ Sogdian,⁴

¹ For these contracts, see Zhang Chuanxi 張傳璽, *Zhongguo lidai qiyue huibian kaoshi* 中國歷代契約彙編考釋, 2 vol. (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe), 1995; Sha Zhi 沙知, *Dunhuang qiyue wenshu jijiao* 敦煌契約文書輯校 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe), 1998; T. Yamamoto and O. Ikeda. *Tun-huang and Turfan Documents concerning Social and Economic History*, III. Contracts (A)(B), Tokyo 1987; Takeuchi Tsuguhito, *Old Tibetan Contracts from Central Asia* (Tokyo: Daizo Shuppan), 1995.

² M. A. Boyer, E. J. Rapson & E. Senart, *Kharosthi Inscriptions discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in Chinese Turkestan, I-III*. Oxford 1920-1929; T. A. Burrow, *A Translation of the Kharosthi Documents from Chinese Turkestan*, London 1940.

³ N. Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan I: Legal and Economic Documents*. (London; New York : Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press), 2000.

⁴ Yoshida Yutaka 吉田豊 and Moriyasu Takao 森安孝夫 "Kikushi Kōshōkoku jidai Sogudo-bun onna dorei baibai monjo," 麴氏高昌国時代ソグド文女奴隷売買文書, *Nairiku Ajia gengo no kenkyū* 4 (1988): 1-50.

Khotanese,¹ Tocharian B,² Chinese,³ Tibetan, and Uyghur.⁴ Reading the Dunhuang materials in the context of this broader group of socio-economic documents highlights the regional and chronological features of the Silk Road economy in ninth-tenth centuries Dunhuang.

In this chapter, I shall first discuss the goods exchanged at Dunhuang. I show that the spheres of the trans-regional gift economy and the local market economy co-existed and often interacted at Dunhuang. Then I shall analyze the ways in which different traditions of conducting business revealed in earlier contracts – especially slave-selling contracts – eventually became integrated into a single system in areas around Dunhuang in the ninth and tenth century. Finally, I shall reassess the significance of a key group of goods — silk and other similar textiles — in the economy of the Silk Road. I argue that it was because of not only its value, but also its ubiquity, and especially its role in connecting the sphere of gifts and the sphere of commodities, that silk and other similar textiles should be rightly regarded as the staple goods in the economy of the Silk Road.

5.2: The Products of The Silk Road Economy: The Entanglement of Gifts and Commodities

To begin defining a “Silk Road economy” at Dunhuang, one first needs to

¹ Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library*; Duan Qing 段晴, *Yutian, fojiao, gujuan* 于阗、佛教、古卷 (Beijing: Zhongxi shuju, 2013).

² Ching Chao-jung & Ogihara Hirotohi “A Tocharian B sale contract on a wooden tablet,” *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology*, 5 (2010): 101-128.

³ Tang Zhangru ed., *Tulufan chutu wenshu*.

⁴ Yamada Nuobu 山田信夫, *ウイグル文契約文書集成 Sammlung uigurischer Kontrakte*, 3 vols. Ed. by J. Oda / P.Zieme / H. Umemura / T. Moriyasu. (Osaka, 1993).

categorize the various types of goods exchanged in different social contexts. I shall show in this section that traded goods, or “commodities,” differed from gifts in systematic ways: certain types of goods tended to be traded primarily as commodities, while others tended to be exchanged as gifts; commodities were largely exchanged locally, while gifts traveled much further afield; commodities were most typically sold and bought between the commoners of Dunhuang, while gifts were exchanged primarily by state envoys and eminent monks. These distinct features show that the exchange of gifts and the exchange of commodities at Dunhuang belong to different “spheres of exchange.”¹

This description of the “Silk Road” economy is inspired by Paul Bohannon and Laura Bohannon’s conceptualization of the economy of the Tiv people in eastern Nigeria. They show that there were three “spheres of economy” in this society. The first sphere, the subsistence sphere, consisted of everyday necessities, and these goods were bartered in local markets. The second sphere consisted of goods of high prestige that did not circulate on the market. The third sphere consisted of people like women and children who could be exchanged. These spheres of exchange were generally separated from each other. But occasionally, certain goods like brass rods, which were usually regarded as belonging to the second sphere, could be used in the subsistence sphere.²

There are, I think, many similarities between the Tiv economy and the economy of Dunhuang. In addition to the fairly clear distinction between different spheres of exchange at Dunhuang, as in the Tiv economy, the spheres of gifts and commodities at

¹ For a similar way of looking at Silk Road economy, see Valerie Hansen, “The Impact of the Silk Road Trade on a Local Community: The Turfan Oasis, 500-800,” in Eric Trombert and Étienne de La Vaissière, *Les sogdiens en Chine*, Études thématiques; 17 (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2005), 283-310.

² Laura Bohannon and Paul Bohannon, *The Tiv of central Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press), 1953. Paul Bohannon. “The Impact of money on an African subsistence economy.” *The Journal of Economic History* 19.4 (1959): 491–503.

Dunhuang also were not completely separate, but constantly interacted with one another. But the specific ways these interactions played out have not been properly investigated, and in this chapter I will attempt to do so. For instance, did the luxury items acquired by the Dunhuang government from China enter the realm of circulation when they arrived at Dunhuang? If so, how were they circulated? Conversely, one may also ask, did travelers use any of the commodities we see recorded in contracts as gifts? Moreover, as I shall show, gifts and commodities were exchanged in certain cases with the same person at the same time, as one exchange involved both gifting and purchasing. Therefore, the “sphere of gifts” and the “sphere of commodities” are not entirely distinct from each other, and in my discussion of these two spheres of economy, I am particularly mindful of and interested in the places where they intersected and interacted.¹

Gift exchange is different from exchange in the market for a number of reasons: goods are exchanged without the intermediary of money; the exchange happens in a personal rather than impersonal way, meaning that the exchange establishes a personal relation between the giver and the receiver; the exchange also does not always happen instantaneously, as frequently gifts are given without *immediate* expectation of a return gift. Yet the existence of a gift economy does not necessarily preclude commerce. Even though Karl Polanyi sees a “great transformation” from a gift-based economy to a market economy, which did not appear until the 18th century in England, recent works have shown that even in pre-modern societies, a market economy could play central roles in

¹ Another difference between the Tiv and Dunhuang economy is that at Dunhuang, the slave trade did not constitute a separate sphere. As I shall show in the second half of this chapter, slaves at Dunhuang can be exchanged both as commodities and as gifts. But importantly, when they served as gifts, they were exchanged trans-regionally.

certain aspects of people's economic lives.¹ Therefore the task at hand in this chapter is not only to describe the sphere of the gift economy at Dunhuang, but also to locate the market economy in the economic lives on the Silk Road and elucidate its place vis-à-vis gift economy.

A more pragmatic question has to be answered before the discussion in this section is possible: how to distinguish between gifts and commodities? The exchanges of gifts I described in Chapter 3 can be identified as such not because any particular type of goods are involved, but because they appear in texts that use the vocabulary and record the processes of gift exchange. Similarly, if the explicit language of “buy,” “sell,” or “borrow/lend” is used in a document that also shows signature features of market exchange, we will be more certain about this certain transaction as embodying a market at work. A good example of such a distinction is the Sogdian slave-selling contract discovered at Turfan that is dated in 639:²

The monk Yansyan is to buy the female slave Upach thus as an unredeemable [slave who is] without debt and without possessions (?) [and who is] an unpersecutable and unrepachable permanent possession [of] his sons, grandsons, family, and descendants [as well]. Accordingly, the monk Yansyan himself and his sons, grandsons, family, and descendants may at will hit her, abuse her, bind her, sell her off, pledge her, give her as a gift, and do whatsoever they may wish to [do to her]. [They are entitled to treat her] just as a female slave inherited from their father or grandfather or a female slave [who was] born in their house, born on their side (?), or born at home, or as permanent property purchased with money.

¹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, 2nd Beacon paperback ed. (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 2001).

² Yoshida Yutaka, “Translation of the Contract for the Purchase of a Slave Girl found at Turfan and dated 639,” (Appendix to Hansen, V., review of de la Vaissière, Etienne, *Histoire des marchands sogdiens*, and Rong, Xinjiang, *Zhongguo Zhongguo yu wailai wenming.*), *T'oung Pao* LXXXIX/1-3, 2003, 159-161.

This contract is clearly a transaction conducted in a market and thus part of a market economy. The clause explaining the rights of the new owner states that he and his descendants may “hit her, abuse her, bind her, sell her off, pledge her, give her as a gift, and do whatsoever they may wish to [do to her].” Excluding the last part of the sentence, which is a general claim, this list of rights can be divided into two categories. The first one – the first three actions – is a statement about the possible physical treatment of the slave. The second category includes three additional rights that concern the further management of the female slave. Therefore, by purchasing her, the buyer Yansyan not only owned her physically, but also owned the right to redistribute her. According to the contract, the three modes of redistribution include sale (“sell her off”), lending (“pledge her”), and gift exchange (“give her as a gift”). Therefore, to the seller and buyer in this contract, these three modes were all means of exchange of people and goods. The first two modes belong to the sphere of commodities, the third to the sphere of gifts.

These spheres often intersected each other in the context of travel. For instance, a certain Luo Xianxin borrowed one *pi* of raw silk before his trip as an envoy. According to the contract written on that occasion, he was to return to the debtor two *pi* of raw silk upon his return.¹ The entire transaction seems to have been purely a commercial one, guaranteed by several witnesses. At the end of this contract, however, a note was added, apparently written by the same hand, that “one jade belt and one piece of fine silk” were given as “road goods,” the same term for gifts given to travelers discussed above. While not a certainty, some argue that same debtor gave these gifts.² Regardless, the

¹ P.3458.

² Luo Tonghua, “Guiyijun qi Dunhuang siyuan de yingsong zhichu 歸義軍期敦煌寺院的迎送支出,” *Hanxue yanjiu* 21.1 (2003), 200.

juxtaposition of the commercial activity of lending and the non-commercial one of gift giving indicates that they should not always be treated separately. It was the combination and interaction of these two spheres that defined the Silk Road economy at Dunhuang.

5.2.1: The Sphere of Gifts

As I have shown in Chapter 3, goods were exchanged as gifts in various ways in the lives of travelers. But exactly what kinds of goods were exchanged as gifts? How did these goods end up affecting the economy of Dunhuang as a whole? These are the questions one needs to answer before addressing the relation between gift economy and market economy. A Dunhuang manuscript titled *Essentials of Household Life* 記室備要 conveniently offers a list of 74 types of common gifts.¹ The first dozen or so give an idea about the type of goods used commonly as gifts:

Books, poetry, medical prescriptions, painted screens,² painted screens with birds, maps of prefectures and counties, ivory *hu* tablets, wood *hu* tablets, swords, pieces of clothing, pieces of felt shirt, *putou* hats, grains, boots, carrying tools, bananas, bamboo shoes, zithers, Ruanxian lutes, mirrors, chess, bows and arrows, bamboo walking sticks, horse saddles and bridles, whips, writing papers, cups (?) made from animal horn, porcelain from Yuezhou (Shaoxing), ink stones ...

送书籍、送诗篇、送药方、送障子、送鸟障、州县图、送牙笏、送木笏、送剑、送衣段、毛袄段、送朴头、送穀子、靴、载具、送生蕉、送竹鞋

¹ For this text, see P.3723, P.3451(bis).

² For the meaning of the term Zhangzi, see Yangzhishui 揚之水, *Tang Song jiaju xunwei* 唐宋家具尋微 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2015), 94-95.

、送琴、送阮咸、送镜子、送棋局长行局、送工剑、竹柱仗、送鞍轡、送鞭、送笺纸、送角器、送越器、送砚瓦……

A number of these kinds of items appeared in the discussion of gifts in the previous section, including different types of fruits and animals as well as objects for daily comfort and enjoyment. The majority of items included in the list are not household necessities, however; rather, they were objects of pleasure and personal enjoyment.

The nature of this text – a kind of guide for proper household life – confirms that the list is one of personal gifts. Therefore, the values of the gifts are generally fairly modest. How different were the diplomatic gifts? Unfortunately, no such list exists among our sources, but scholars have collected references to the gifts contributed to the Chinese court by states in the region under discussion in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The following table presents this collection of diplomatic goods.

Table 5.1: Diplomatic Gifts to China from Central Asia (900-1100)¹

Provenance	Types of Gifts
Khotan	Jade, glass, “barbarian” brocade, horse, elephant
Ganzhou Uyghur	Jade, horse, coral, rhinoceros, fur, yak tail
Turfan	Buddha teeth, vaiḍūrya (beryl), amber lamp stand
Dunhuang	jade, coral, camel, horse, amber, incense

Judging from this list, it is evident that diplomatic gifts used among these states were similar to household or personal gifts recorded in *Essentials of Household Life* in a number of ways. They were not daily essentials, and they were also fairly light in weight

¹ The data for this table is collected from the following books: Wu Liyu and Baoyu Yang, *Gui yi jun zheng quan yu zhong yang guan xi yan jiu: yi ru zou huo dong wei zhong xin* 歸義軍政權與中央關係研究：以入奏活動為中心 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 2015); Rong Xinjiang and Zhu Lishuang, *Yutian yu Dunhuang*; Yang Rui, *Huihu shi dai*.

but high in value. There were even some intersections between these two lists. One feature among the diplomatic gifts is not particularly obvious for personal gifts: the emphasis on exotic gifts. Diplomatic gifts are regularly recorded together with the name of their supposed place of origin: the brocade from Persia, incense from Central Asia. The exoticism of the gifts is front and center in the presentation of them. For instance, Cao Rengui, the lord of Dunhuang gave an unspecified recipient a list of gifts that included one piece of jade, five pairs of antelope horns, and five *jin* of *lu-sha* 礪砂. In the short text following this list, he explained the reason to offer these gifts.¹

The Qixi region is distant, and the ‘barbarian land’ is barren. The land does not produce anything precious, and the tributes given lack exotic items. The goods listed above all came from faraway places. Traveling through the Lang mountain they arrived at Dunhuang. [These goods] were transmitted from foreign lands, and across the Hanhai region they reached Shafu (i.e., Dunhuang).

伏以磧西遐塞，戎境枯荒，地不產珍，獻無奇玩。前物等並是殊方所出，透狼山遠屆敦煌；異域通儀，涉瀚海來還沙府。輒將陳獻，用表輕懷。干黷鴻私，伏乞檢納，謹狀。

In this letter, Cao Rengui humbly recognizes that Dunhuang itself does not produce many rarities. But his gifts were still worthy because they came, not from Dunhuang, but from places more to the west. In particular, he emphasized that these goods traveled very far to reach Dunhuang. Their further transportation would likely only increase their value. Hence, the value of these gifts lay primarily in their exoticism. Such an explicit claim seems to substantiate the idea that Silk Road economy is one that is primarily concerned

¹ P.4638.

with luxury goods. My main contention is that these luxury goods were not primarily bought or sold, but exchanged as gifts.

Such exotic gifts were mostly exchanged by and for the highest echelons of social elites, in particular the court. But occasionally, in certain limited ways, they did become available or at least accessible to the general public and reached a broader spectrum of the population within the state. In a document produced by Cao Yijin, the lord of Dunhuang, when he made a massive offering for a bodhimaṇḍala in 933, we see various types of gifting activities all visible in a single event.¹ In this case, Cao Yijin contributed gifts to a Buddhist monastery at Dunhuang. This list of gifts included seventeen days of sutra-turning ritual, communal meals for 1750 people, the initiation of seventeen monks and nuns, and gifts of fine clothes and silk. The number of people involved in this ceremony indicates that it was a public event.

Among the material gifts given to the monastery, one finds a “purple brocade jacket with coiled dragon.” Next to this line a note was added indicating that it was a gift from the Khotanese envoy. Cao Yijin re-gifted this clearly extremely extravagant item with imperial symbols to the monastery. That it was the first mentioned in the list of material gifts highlights the significance attached to it. With this practice in mind, it is not surprising that monasteries regularly provided gifts to travelers, including, in particular,

¹ P.2704. The text: 請大眾轉經一七日，設齋一千五百人供，度僧尼一七人，紫盤龍綾襖子壹領，紅宮錦暖子壹領，大紫綾半臂壹領，白獨窠綾袴壹腰。布壹拾陸疋，細縹壹疋，縹壹疋。右件設齋轉經度僧捨施，所申意者，先奉為龍天八部，調瑞氣於五涼；梵釋四王，發祥風於一郡。當今聖主，帝業長隆。三京息戰而投臻，五府輸誠而向化。大王受寵，台星永曜而長春。功播日新，福壽共延於海岳。天公主抱喜，日陳忠直之謀。夫人陳歡，永闡高風之訓；司空助治，紹倅職於龍沙。諸幼郎君，負良才而奉國；小娘子姊妹，恆保寵榮。合宅宮人，同霑餘慶。然後燉煌境內，千祥並降於王庭；蓮府域中，萬瑞咸來而自現。東朝奉使，早拜天顏；于闐使人，往來無滯。今日大眾，親詣道場，渴仰慈門，幸希迴向。

government officials, as I have shown in chapters 3 and 4. Cao Yijin's offerings served as a spectacular compensation to the monastery.

These gifts were not, however, merely meant for the monastery. As the text states, the goal of this event was to wish for fortune and prosperity from the emperor in China to the lord at Dunhuang. In particular, peace on the road was one of the more specific goals of these prayers: "May the envoys to the Eastern Court soon sight the Heavenly Countenance; may the envoys from Khotan come and go without interference." The gifts transported on the Silk Road from places like Khotan were not only redistributed into the local economic life at Dunhuang, but also contributed to a collective vow to support peace on the road that would enable further transportation of similar goods. At the end of the text, Cao Yijin expressed the wish that the merit accumulated from this event could be further transferred to the general public. In this way, an exotic gift item from a prime minister of Khotan became not only the actual possession of a monastery, but also had symbolic significance to a much greater number of the public.

5.2.2: The Sphere of Commodities

Even though the exchange of material goods on the Silk Road tends to be discussed in terms of trade and commodities in general works on the Silk Road, specialists on Dunhuang have pointed out that merchants rarely appear in Dunhuang manuscripts¹ and that a commercial tax did not exist at Dunhuang.¹ As I show above and

¹ Hansen, *The Silk Road*, 195.

in Ch.3, many of the most precious goods exchanged in and around Dunhuang were not commodities. This does not mean, however, that commerce and the exchange of commodities did not occur. In fact, the Dunhuang collection includes a considerable number of documents pertaining to commerce (only contracts in Chinese and Tibetan are preserved). Among them, by far the most important and numerous are various types of contracts for purchasing, borrowing, and renting. In the following two tables, I have collected the types of goods exchanged in the contracts to show the kind of economic activities unfolding at Dunhuang at the time:

Table 5.2: Commodities in Tibetan and Chinese Contracts from Dunhuang

Language	Signature	Type	Exchanged For	Exchanged By	Notes
Tibetan	P.t.1297-4	hire	labor	grain	
Tibetan		rent	land	grain	
Tibetan		rent	land	grain	
Tibetan	P.t.1095	purchase	cow	grain	
Tibetan	P.t.1297-3	purchase	horse	silver	
Tibetan		purchase	cow	silver	
Tibetan		purchase	person	silver	
Tibetan		purchase	cow	silver	
Tibetan	P.t.1086	purchase	house base	grain	
Tibetan	P.t.1297	lending	grain	grain	
Tibetan	P.t.1297	lending	horse	horse	
Tibetan		lending	grain	grain	
Tibetan		lending	grain	grain	
Tibetan		lending	cloth	cloth	
Tibetan	P.t.1203	lending	grain	grain	
Tibetan	P.t.1104	lending	grain	grain	
Tibetan	P.t.2127	lending	grain	silk	
Tibetan		lending	grain	grain	
Tibetan		lending	grain	grain	
Tibetan		lending	coin	coin	
Tibetan		lending	paper	paper	

¹ Liu Jinbao, *Tang Song zhiji Guiyijun jingjishi yanjiu* 唐宋之際歸義軍經濟史研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007).

Table 5.2 (Continued)

Tibetan	P.t.1115	lending	grain seed	grain	
Tibetan		lending	cups, tablets, cotton cloth	cups, tablets, cotton cloth	
Tibetan	P.t.1101	lending	grain	grain	
Chinese	S.1475va	sale	grain	land	
Chinese	S.2092v	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	P.3394	sale	donkey, grain, cloth	land	both parties and monks
Chinese	P.2595	sale	?	land	
Chinese	S.3877va	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	S.3877vb	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	S.3877vc	sale	grain, land, house	land, house	
Chinese	Дx1414				
Chinese	P.2161p3	sale	?	house	
Chinese	S.3877vd	sale	raw silk	land	
Chinese	S.1285	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	北乃 76	sale	grain	house	sold to a "house guest"
Chinese	P.3331	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	P.3649va	sale	?	land	
Chinese	P.3649vb	sale	grain, raw silk	land	
Chinese	北生 25v	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	S.1398va	sale	grain	land	
Chinese	S.1398vb	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	S.3835	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	S.2385	sale	?	land	
Chinese	Дx1355+Дx3130	sale		garden	
Chinese	P.3156p2	sale	grain	land	
Chinese	S.9930	sale	?	house	
Chinese	S.4707+S.6067	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	S.8691	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	S.9456	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	P.4017	sale	horse	land	contract model
Chinese	S.5700	sale	grain	house	
Chinese	S.5820+S.5826	sale	grain	cow	
Chinese	S.6233v	sale	cow	donkey and fine cloth	博换 (barter)
Chinese	S.1475v	sale	grain	cow	
Chinese	S.1350	sale	cloth	hairpin	

Table 5.2 (Continued)

Chinese	P.4638v	sale	cart, cow	silk	
Chinese	S.2710	sale	cow	cloth	
Chinese	北周 14	sale	grain	pan	
Chinese	P.4083	sale	cow	raw silk	
Chinese	敦 298+299	sale	raw silk	slave	
Chinese	S.3877ve	sale	grain	slave	
Chinese	P.3573p1	sale	raw silk, sheep, grain	slave	
Chinese	S.1946	sale	raw and "cooked" silk	slave	
Chinese	P.4053va	lending	wheat		
Chinese	P.4053vb	lending	wheat		
Chinese	北齋 59va	lending	wheat		
Chinese	北齋 59vb	lending	wheat		
Chinese	北齋 59vc	lending	wheat		
Chinese	北齋 59vd	lending	wheat		
Chinese	北齋 59ve	lending	wheat		
Chinese	北齋 59vf	lending	wheat		
Chinese	沙州文錄補	lending	wheat		to feed the workers in the reconstruction of the monastery
Chinese	S.5833	lending	wheat		to feed the painter of the monastery
Chinese	Chinese History Museum	lending	wheat		
Chinese	S.1475vb	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.1475vc	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.6829v	lending	wheat	bamboo tea container	预支
Chinese	S.1475vd	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.1475ve	lending	pea	pea	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled

Table 5.2 (Continued)

Chinese	S.1475vf	lending	wheat	wheat	
Chinese	S.1475vg	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.1475vh	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.1475vi	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.1475vj	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.1475vk	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.1475vl	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.1475vm	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.1475vn	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	P.4686	lending	millet	millet	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	P.3444+P.3491p2	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	P.3444v	lending	pea	pea	
Chinese	P.2502va	lending	wheat	wheat	
Chinese	P.2502vb	lending	wheat	wheat	grain previously used for purchasing horse?
Chinese	P.3422	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	P.2686a	lending	wheat, millet	wheat, millet	pawned iron pan
Chinese	P.2686b	lending	millet	millet	
Chinese	P.2686c	lending	wheat	wheat	

Table 5.2 (Continued)

Chinese	P.2964v	lending	millet	millet	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	P.3730v	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	P.4192v	lending	wheat	wheat	if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.1291	lending	pea	pea	pawned iron pan, if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	Дх.1374	lending	wheat	wheat	
Chinese	P.2482p5	lending	wheat	wheat	pawned wok, if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	S.3437v	lending	wheat	wheat	
Chinese	P.3192v	lending	wheat, millet	wheat, millet	pawned agricultural tools
Chinese	S.5811	lending	wheat	wheat	part of the payment was a hairpin
Chinese	北收 43v	lending	millet	millet	
Chinese	北殷 41v	lending	wheat	wheat	pawned silk skirt, if the payment was not made in time, it will be doubled
Chinese	P.3666v	lending	millet	millet	one of the documents listed a donkey as a pawn
Chinese	Дх.1270	lending	?	wheat	
Chinese	S.11599ab	lending	millet	?	
Chinese	S.8350v	lending	pea	?	
Chinese	S.10607	lending	pea	?	
Chinese	S.5244	lending	cloth	?	
Chinese	Дх.1303+6708	lending	silk	silk	
Chinese	P.2161p1	lending	silk	silk	land as pawn, debtor travel to Khotan, interest only accumulates if he goes to Khotan?
Chinese	P.2633v	lending	silk	?	

Table 5.2 (Continued)

Chinese	P.2817v	lending	silk	silk	interest paid with wheat and millet
Chinese	北殷 41a	lending	silk	silk	to be paid when envoys from Hami arrive
Chinese	北殷 41b	lending	cloth	cloth	
Chinese	Дх.1377r/v	lending	silk	silk	interest paid with wheat and millet
Chinese	S.4445a	lending	silk	silk	
Chinese	S.4445b	lending	he-cloth	he-cloth	for sale in Nanshan
Chinese	P.4093a	lending	silk	?	
Chinese	P.4093b	lending	silk	silk	interest paid with wheat and millet
Chinese	P.3124	lending	silk	silk	
Chinese	S.4504va	lending	silk	?	
Chinese	S.4504vb	lending	silk	silk	interest paid by Liji silk and government cloth after the debtor's return from Turfan
Chinese	Дх.2143	lending	horse	horse	interest paid by silk after the debtor's return from Khotan
Chinese	P.3603v	lending	silk	silk	
Chinese	P.3458	lending	silk	silk	for trip to China
Chinese	P.3453	lending	silk	silk	interest paid by Liji silk and government cloth after the debtor's return from Turfan
Chinese	P.3627+3867	lending	silk	silk	
Chinese	上博 44057	lending	silk	?	
Chinese	P.3004	lending	silk	grain	silk acquired as gifts from the government
Chinese	P.3472	lending	silk	silk	contract made on the occasion of one party's departure to Turfan
Chinese	P.2504p2	lending	silk	silk	mirror as interest
Chinese	P.3501v	lending	silk	silk	interest: liji silk one pi

Table 5.2 (Continued)

Chinese	S.5632	lending	silk	silk	interest: wheat four shi
Chinese	P.3565	lending	silk	silk	interest: millet four shi
Chinese	New Dehli	lending	silk	silk	
Chinese	P.3649vc	lending	silk	?	
Chinese	S.4884	lending	cloth	silk	repaid upon return from Ganzhou
Chinese	S.5652	lending	?	silk	
Chinese	S.766va	lending	silk	silk	interest: wheat four shi
Chinese	S.766vb	lending	silk	silk	interest: millet four shi
Chinese	Дx.1322	lending	carpet, silk	?	
Chinese	S.4901v	lending	silk	?	penalty: barley
Chinese	P.2119v	lending	silk	?	
Chinese	S.11359	lending	silk	?	
Chinese	S.5881	lending	silk	?	

I have included in this table cases of both sale and lending, because sale is sometimes difficult to distinguish from lending. The following case serves as an example:

On the eleventh day of the first month of the Dingsi year, a commoner of the Tongjia tribe Tang Qingnu, because of the lack of cattle in his household, bought a five-year-old farm cow from commoner from the same county Yang Hulvyuan. It is decided that the price will be one *pi* of raw silk, with the length of three *zhang* and seven *chi*. The cow and the price is respectively determined on that day, and will be used for future proof. The silk will be paid in the tenth month of the Wuwu year with interest. If it is not paid at this deadline, (further) interest will accrue according to county custom.¹

丁巳年正月十一日，通頰百姓唐清奴為緣家中欠少牛畜，遂於同鄉百姓楊忽律元面上買伍歲耕牛壹頭，斷作價直生絹一疋，長三丈柒尺，其牛及價，當日交相分訖為定，用為後憑。其絹限至戊午年十月利頭填還，若於時限不還者，看鄉元生利。

¹ P.4083.

In this contract, Tang Qingnu bought a cow for one *pi* of raw silk. Even though he was not supposed to pay until the tenth month of the next year, almost two years later, the exact amount that was supposed to be exchanged was clearly determined on the same day of the sale, and the whole sale was recorded on this contract, “for future proof.” The words used in this contract, such as “buy” and “price,” indicate that the cow was not given as a gift, but was purchased or borrowed, with silk in this context functioning as money. The extended payback time would give the buyer the chance to make a profit from the cow and then pay back the lended amount. This transaction is one that sits between a purchase and lending deal, and shows that the distinction between the two modes of exchange is fluid.

The list of goods found in this table is no doubt incomplete, as the existing contracts were preserved accidentally, and it is by no means guaranteed that they are representative. Nonetheless, certain generous features of the goods exchanged through purchase or lending can be observed: they tend to be essential goods in daily use, such as land, houses, cattle, grain, and clothes. Only when these contracts involved travelers or traveling, do we see a slight expansion of the goods that would include horses, slaves, and silk.¹ In particular, there are many cases where the objects of exchange were different types of grain. This indicates that the commercial sphere of the Dunhuang economy was concerned primarily with the common needs of daily life, rather than with the enjoyment of a small group of elites. None of the items we would usually consider to be luxuries,

¹ For instance, In the first month of the year 982, a certain military assistant (yaya 押衙) named Su Yongjin was to go to Khotan as an envoy. Since he lacked means of transportation, he had to borrow a six-year old male camel from a man named Deng Zailian, and the price was decided to be that of a *pi* of large purple silk. In this and many similar contracts involving traveling, the type of goods used as commodities and their geographical distribution were both expanded.

with the noteworthy exception of silk, find their way into this fairly extensive list of goods exchanged through contracts. The distinction between a sphere of gifts and a sphere of commerce, at least in terms of the goods involved, therefore seems quite clear. Therefore, my analysis of the case of Dunhuang supports Valerie Hansen’s observation that “the Silk Road trade was often local and small in scale.”¹ How, then, did this local commercial economy interact with a demonstrably trans-local gift economy?

5.2.3: The Interactions between Two spheres

The “sphere of commerce” and the “sphere of gifts” did not exist independent of each other. As the sociologist James Carrier points out: gifts and commodities are “polar terms that define a continuum along which one can place existing transactions and friendships.”² In fact, I would contend that the interaction between these two spheres is one of the defining features of the economy of Dunhuang. To explain the interaction between these two spheres, I shall tell the story of a particularly well-documented embassy from Zhang Huaishen, Lord of Dunhuang, to Chang’an, the capital of the Tang, in 878.³ On this trip, the envoys of Dunhuang were bearing the following gifts:

Petition in envelope: one
Jade: one piece

¹ *Silk Road: A New History*, 238.

² James G. Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism since 1700*, Material Cultures (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 190.

³ Both sets of gifts are recorded in P.3547. For a discussion of this trip, see Hansen, *Silk Road, a History* 191-92.

Antelope horn: one
Yak tail: one

These were goods not found in China, and they therefore fit the general feature of diplomatic gifts being exotic. Compared to the various lists of gifts discussed above, however, this is a rather meager list. On numerous occasions the envoys from Dunhuang and other kingdoms in the region went to the court in China and offered gifts many times the value of these gifts. In most of these records we only have details of gifts from the envoys, and not the counter-gifts from the emperor of China, so what makes this particular case interesting is that the manuscript records extensively the counter-gifts from the Tang court, thus allowing us a rare peek into the mechanism of diplomatic gift exchange. As a return to the gifts from the Dunhuang envoys, the Tang court offered the following gifts:

To the Shangshu: as an answering token: 70 *pi*, as an asking token, 50 *pi*, one set of clothing, silver cover one set, silver bowl one set, imperial edict one. To the Administrative Assistant and the Chief Lackey each: 25 *pi*, one set of clothing, one silver bowl. To the eighteen military officers: for five of them, 15 *pi* and one set of clothing each; for the other five, 10 *pi* and one set of clothing each; for the remaining eight: 7 *pi* each.

尚書答信物七十疋，寄信物五十疋，衣一副，銀（榼？）一具，銀蓋碗一具，敕書一封。判官一人，都押衙一人，各物二十五疋，衣一副，銀碗一口。軍將一十八人內：五人，各一十五疋，衣一副；五人，各一十疋，衣一副；八人，各七疋。

To the envoy celebrating the new year (*hezhen shi*) Yin Xinjun and others, high and low, altogether 29 people, as the price for a “carrying horse” (馱馬價), each 3.336 *pi* silk.

賜賀正使陰信君等上下廿九人馱馬價絹，每人各卅三疋三丈三尺六寸。

To the three *yaya* each: 15 *pi*, one silver bowl, one set of cooked cotton-silk clothing; to the thirteen generals each: 10 *pi*, silver wine cup, one set of (?) cotton-silver clothing; to the thirteen companions each: 5 *pi*, one set of cotton clothing.

押衙三人，各十五疋，銀碗各一口，熟綿綾綿衣各一副。軍將十三人，各一十疋，銀屈卮各一枚，楊(揚?)綾綿衣各一副。長行十三人，各五疋，絀綿衣各一副。

The gifts from Dunhuang to the Tang court were one piece of jade, an antelope horn, and a yak tail. In return, the Tang court offered mostly silk, both in the form of a certain *pi* of raw silk and in the form of clothing, as well as silverware. Therefore, this trip accomplished in broad terms the exchange of jade and other exotica on the one hand, and silk and silver on the other.

In terms of their value, the return gifts clearly exceeded the gifts from Dunhuang, showing once again the unequal and competitive nature of gift exchange. But, more importantly, the return gifts were not lumped together as a whole, but clearly categorized into three parts. Even though it officially was Zhang Huaishen who gave the gifts to the Tang court, the return gifts were not merely for him. He (the “Shangshu” in the letter) did get his fair share, but so did his senior officials, the Administrative Assistant (*panguan*) and Chief Lackey (*duyaya*), who were given a large share of the return gifts. The second part of the return gifts was given to the 29 people who actually traveled to Chang’an on behalf of Zhang Huaishen. They were given, for the price of a “carrying horse” (meaning the effort of carrying the gifts to Chang’an), the same amount of compensation each. In the third part of the list of gifts, these same 29 peoples were given additional gifts according to their rank. The second and third parts of the return gifts combined include a much greater amount of silk than the first part. This indicates that in diplomatic dealings,

the return gifts were given as much to the ones who transported the diplomatic gifts as to the ones who nominally gave them. In this way, the exchange of diplomatic gifts affected not only the court, but also a broader range of officials and local elites.

The information from this document about return gifts can profitably be read together with a contract made in the year 941 by an envoy to the Chinese court.¹

General Luo Xianxin [will] enter [China proper] as an envoy to report [to the emperor in China]. Because he lacks silk, he borrowed one *pi* of raw silk from Lackey Fan Qingzhu. The piece is three *zhang* nine *chi* long, and one *chi* nine *chun* wide. When the Lackey (Luo Xianxin) comes back, he should return – the borrowed amount with interest – two *pi*.

押衙羅賢信入奏充使，欠闕疋帛，遂於押衙范慶住面上貸生絹壹匹，長三丈（丈）玖尺，幅闊壹尺玖寸。其押衙迴來之日還納，於（依）疋數本利兩疋。

Read in isolation, this contract might suggest that Luo Xianxin was going into China to conduct some business with a very good return of profit, so much so that he would agree to 100% interest in order to borrow silk at Dunhuang. If we consider the information provided in the previous case, however, where a *yaya* (lackey) was given “15 *pi* of silk, one silver bowl, and one set of cooked cotton-silk clothing,” in addition to the price for a “carrying horse,” which was 3.336 *pi* of silk, the action of Luo Xianxin seems less audacious. If we assume that the price for a “carrying horse” was the amount one had to spend to travel there, Luo borrowed in this contract about a third of what he would need in order to go to the Chinese capital; but the estimated return (about 5 times, not

¹ P3458.

including the silver bowl and the clothing) from the gifts given by the Chinese emperor was so great that 100% interest seems fairly reasonable.

There are other examples of contracts made at the beginning of other trips to China that can be compared with regard to the specific amount of the price for a “carrying horse” (3.336 *pi* of silk) mentioned here. Dong Shantong and Zhang Shanbao, for instance, hired one camel for their trip to the Chinese capital.¹ The price was six *pi* of raw silk. In another example from 896, Feng Wenda spent five *pi* of *juan* silk on a similar trip.² Therefore, the numbers generally align with one another. In all these cases, the price the travelers paid for their means of transportation at Dunhuang was more than sufficiently compensated for in the form of counter-gifts from the court in China. The spheres of gifts and commodities not only intersect; it was the promise of gift exchange and the great profit that could be generated from it in China that provided the incentive for economic activities at Dunhuang such as borrowing camels and horses. In the case discussed above, in addition to compensation for travel expenses the travelers were given from five to fifteen *pi* of silk as well as various types of silverware.

Similarly, knowledge about the exact process of diplomatic gift exchange helps us understand a number of other Dunhuang manuscripts. P.3440 is a list of goods collected on the occasion of the tribute visit to the Chinese emperor.

On the sixteenth day of the third month of the Bingshen year, currently the ones who submitted the goods [in order to] celebrate the Son of Heaven include: Commander of the Monasteries Zhang (who submitted) small brocade one *pi*... [followed by about 20 more names, each contributing one *pi* of silk]

¹ P.3448v.

² P.2825v.

丙申年三月十六日見納賀 天子物色人：張僧統白小綾子壹疋 ...

Again, when read in isolation, this text might seem to indicate a kind of tax collected among members of an embassy to the Chinese court, but if we compare the case found in this text with the 878 trip discussed at the beginning of this section, it becomes apparent that this collection of silk would not have been a great burden for the officials involved. What this document shows is the collective nature of these large-scale diplomatic activities. All participants contributed their share of the gifts; all received their (considerably more valuable) counter-gifts. Hence, the diplomatic gift exchange, from the perspective of the participants, made economic sense, and in this way, the economic effect of the exchange of diplomatic gifts was not limited to the court at Dunhuang but reached a broader group of the population.

5.3: The Practices of the Silk Road Economy: The Change of Business Law

While the previous section elucidates the distinction between the sphere of gift economy and the sphere of market economy at Dunhuang, this section focuses on the latter sphere, and asks a different question: Beyond the products involved in the commercial dealings at Dunhuang, are there any features about the ways these dealings were conducted that distinguishes the economy of Dunhuang from other culturally more homogenous places?

To answer this question, I make full use of the group of contracts I collected in Table 5.2. In addition, to put into context the Dunhuang contracts and the ways of conducting business these contracts revealed, I also include a larger group of contracts discovered across Eastern Central Asia and Western China (see Map 5.1) order. Previous scholarship on Central Asian contracts has largely been philological in approach, with the main purpose being to understand the content of these texts.¹ Historical investigations have largely centered on Chinese contracts discussing the procedures and principles of conducting business,² as well as people's relationship with the state revealed in these contracts.³ In this section, I shall make use of the results of much of the philological works and examine the practices of the Silk Road economy revealed by these contracts.

¹ For example, see Ching Chao-jung & Ogihara Hirotoishi "A Tocharian B sale contract on a wooden tablet."

² Éric Trombert, *Le Crédit à Dunhuang: Vie Matérielle et Société en Chine Médiévale* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'institut des Hautes études Chinoises, vol.XXIV, 1995).

³ Valerie Hansen, *Negotiating daily life in traditional China: how ordinary people used contracts, 600-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).



Map 5.1: Places of discovery of pre-Islamic contracts in Eastern Central Asia and Western China

Since this broader group of Central Asian contracts, which includes ones discovered at Dunhuang, Turfan, Khotan, and other places, is fairly substantial in number,¹ I shall only focus on a small subset of them: 35 slave selling contracts, by my preliminary count, written in eight different languages (Gandhari Prakrit, Chinese, Khotanese, Sogdian, Bactrian, Tocharian B, Tibetan, and Uyghur). These contracts are particularly interesting because, among the different types of contracts used in the period, slave-selling contracts are usually the lengthiest. Since they dealt with the exchange of people, the parties involved were very keen on every clause of the contract being clear and comprehensive, and casual notes common in other types of business dealings are

¹ My preliminary count of these contracts amounts to something around 700. An exact count is difficult because: 1. many of these excavated texts have not been properly studied or explained, so it is difficult to know if they are contracts; 2. many texts that we do understand are fragmentary, and can be categorized into different types according to different views of the author.

rarely found. These contracts therefore provide a rich set of vocabulary and expressions, on the basis of which the legal system underlying the ways business was conducted in medieval East Eurasia can be reconstructed. In the following table, I list the key information about these contracts.

Table 5.3: Slave-selling contracts in pre-Mongol East Eurasia

Time	Language	Signature	Place of Discovery	Slave	Price of the Slave	Penalty
264 (11 th year of Amgoka)	Prakrit	589	Niya	Female slave and her son	one one-year old camel (valued at 40 muli)	not mentioned
270 (17 th year of Amgoka)	Prakrit	590	Niya	Female slave	two camels and two carpets	not mentioned
285 (32 nd year of Amgoka)	Prakrit	592	Niya	Female slave	one camel and one Khotanese kojava	not mentioned
287 (34 th year of Amgoka)	Prakrit	437	Niya	Female slave	45 muli	one four-year-old gelding and fifty blows
293 (4 th year of Mahiri)	Prakrit	324	Niya	slave captured by Supi	two golden staters and two drachmas	fragmentary
304 (15 th year of Mahiri)	Prakrit	591	Niya	male slave	one camel, one horse, 25 atya	one castrated horse, and fifty blows
322 (3 rd year of Vesmana)	Prakrit	209	Niya	Female slave	one camel	one horse, seventy blows
?	Prakrit	328	Niya	?	?	?
477	Chinese	97TSYM1:5r	Turfan	30 years old male barbarian slave	137 <i>pi</i> xingdie silk	274 <i>pi</i> xingdie silk
509	Chinese	75TKM99:6(a)	Turfan	25 years old female slave	3.5 <i>pi</i> of Kucheian brocade	7 <i>pi</i> of Kucheian brocade

Table 5.3 (Continued)

627	Chinese	60TAM338:14 2(a)	Turfan	a working slave in his twenties	380 silver coins	double the amount of the price of the slave
639	Sogdian	60TAM135:1	Turfan	female slave	12 drachmas	not mentioned
650	Chinese	60TAM337:11/10	Turfan	male slave	?	?
661	Chinese	64TAM4:44	Turfan	15 years old male slave	6 pi of water silk (水練) and 5 coins	?
678	Bactrian	P	Afghanistan	boy	3 drachmas	fragmentary
695= Viśa'Vākrraṃ 4 th year	Khotanese	National Library of China	Khotan	male slave	4000 mūra	not mentioned
717 = Viśa' Sīhya first year	Khotanese	IOL Khot Wood 1.1	Khotan	male slave	2500 mūra	not mentioned
720 = Viśa' Sīhya fourth eyear	Khotanese	Urumqi I	Khotan	male slave	2000 mūra	blow with stick according to state law
mid-8th century	Chinese	敦 298+敦 299	Dunhuang	13 years old male slave	21 pi raw silk	21 pi raw silk (?)
late 8 th century	Khotanese	WBH1	Khotan	female slave and her son	700 mūra	not mentioned
late 8 th century	Khotanese	Or.9268b	Khotan	three years old male slave	500 mūra, 3 chā white silk worth 200 mūra	200 mūra given to the government and 50 blows
9 th century	Tibetan	M.I.xlix.7	Miran	40 years old male slave	three dmar	not mentioned
916 (?)	Chinese	S.3877verso	Dunhuang	7 years old male slave	30 <i>shi</i> of grain	not mentioned
923	Chinese	P.3573p.1	Dunhuang	10 years old male slave	raw silk 1.5 <i>pi</i> , great liang-silk for summer, one 2 year old sheep, grains worth 0.5 pi Juan silk	wheat 10 <i>tu</i>
991	Chinese	S.1946	Dunhuang	28 year- old female slave	5 pi of juan Silk	1 pi of lou brocade, two sheep
11-13 th century	Uyghur	Sa19	Turfan	15 year-old male slave	one horse, 11 qanpu	fragmentary
11-13 th century	Uyghur	Sa21	Turfan	male slave	47 silver	two slaves
11-13 th century	Uyghur	Sa22	Turfan	female slave	50 silver	two slaves

Table 5.3 (Continued)

11-13 th century	Uyghur	Sa23	Turfan	female slave	sealed cotton cloth 80	two slaves
11-13 th century	Uyghur	Sa24	Turfan	male slave	9 chau	two slaves
11-13 th century	Uyghur	Sa25	Turfan	female slave	cotton cloth 100	not mentioned
11-13 th century	Uyghur	Sa26	Turfan	male slave	60 gold	two slaves
11-13 th century	Uyghur	Sa27	Turfan	13 year-old male slave	50 coarse cotton cloth	silver and horse
11-13 th century	Uyghur	Sa28	Turfan	female slave	150 cotton	two slaves
11-13 th century	Uyghur	Sa29	Turfan	female slave	50 cotton	two slaves

5.3.1: Early Central Asian Contracts

To establish a baseline for the ways a slave-selling contract was made, I shall first analyze in some detail Niya 591, which is typical among the earliest examples. This document was made “at the request of the *kala* Rokitsi” and “to be carefully kept by Lyipeya” on the occasion that *kala* Rokitsi sold a man named Prusdhaya to Lyipeya and Bosarsa. The transaction itself is fairly straightforward: the price was agreed by both parties as “one camel five years old and one horse five years old, further twenty-five *atya*” and paid in full. But the framing of this transaction and the actual making of the contract require a bit more explanation.

In terms of the structure of this contract, it can be divided into seven parts, each serving distinct purposes in the fulfillment of this transaction.

1. Dating:

“In the 15th year of his majesty the great king Jetugha Mayiri, son of heaven, in the first month, 11th day.”

2. Information about the two parties involved
“In this reign, Lyipeya and Bosarsa bought a man called Prusdhaya from the *kala* Rokitsi.”
3. Price of the slave
“The *kola* Rokitsi received as price one camel five years old and one horse five years old and further twenty-five *atya*. They agreed on equal terms.”
4. The right of the new owner
“From now on Lyipeya has ownership of that man, to sell him, to pledge him, to exchange him, to give him to others as a present, to do whatever he likes with him.”
5. Penalty Clause
“Whoever at a future time informs or disputes about this, his bringing up again of the matter shall be without authority at the king's court. Whoever at a future time stirs up a dispute and wishes to make it otherwise, shall receive a penalty (*muyesa*) of (a fine of) one castrated horse, and fifty blows.”
6. Witness and Scribe
“Witnesses to this are Tsmaya, brother of the *cozbo*, and the *vasu* Saluveya. This was written by me Sugamta, son of the scribe Ramsotsa, at the request of the *kala* Rokitsi.”
7. Physical treatment of the document¹
“This document concerning a man Prusdhaya is to be carefully kept by Lyipeya. This is the seal of the *Lila* Rokitsi.”

Variants of these seven parts are found in most slave-selling contracts. Two points are particularly relevant to my current purpose. First the penalty clause of this contract states: “Whoever at a future time informs or disputes about this, his bringing up again of the matter shall be without authority at the king's court. Whoever at a future time stirs up a dispute and wishes to make it otherwise, shall receive a penalty (*muyesa*) of (a fine of) one castrated horse, and fifty blows.” Doug Hitch was the first to notice that contracts

¹ In this particular case, this part was written at the beginning of the contract.

written in several different languages had similar penalty clauses.¹ This similarity becomes even more striking when we look at the clauses spelling out the rights of the person who purchased a slave:

Prakrit 590: “From now on the scribe Ramsotsa has ownership of that woman, to beat her, to bind her, to sell her, to give her to others as a present, to exchange her, to pledge her, to do whatever he likes with her.”²

Prakrit 592: “From now on Ramsotsa has ownership of the woman Lyimisoae, to beat her, to bind her, to sell her, to exchange her, to pledge her, to do whatever he likes with her.”³

The Sogdian slave selling contract found at Turfan: “Accordingly, the monk Yansyan himself and his sons, grandsons, family, and descendants may at will hit her, abuse her, bind her, sell her, pledge her, give and offer her as a gift, and do whatsoever they may wish to [do to her].”⁴

Bactrian P. “So now, may the boy described herein belong properly and well to you, Fanz, and to you, Wind-marg, with (your) brothers, sons and descendants thereafter, from now to eternity. And as you have the right (to do) whatever it may suit you to do, to keep (him) yourself, to sell (him), to pawn (him), to give (him as) a gift, to put (him for) purchase (or for) hire, to detain (him) for a misdeed, to let (him) free (in return) for service.”⁵

Bactrian T. “you have the right to keep the woman whose name (is) Warag in the house, (or) afterwards to sell (her), to give (her) away, to detain (her) for a

¹ D. A. Hitch, “Penalty Clauses in Tumshuqese, Khotanese and the Shanshan Prakrit,” *Studia Iranica* 17:2 (1988), 147-52

² M. A. Boyer et al., *Kharosthi Inscriptions discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in Chinese Turkestan*, 223; T. A. Burrow, *A Translation of the Kharosthi Documents from Chinese Turkestan*, 125-26.

³ M. A. Boyer et al., *Kharosthi Inscriptions discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in Chinese Turkestan*, 224-25; T. A. Burrow, *A Translation of the Kharosthi Documents from Chinese Turkestan*, 126-27.

⁴ Yoshida, Yutaka, “Translation of the Contract for the Purchase of a Slave Girl found at Turfan and dated 639.”

⁵ Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan I: Legal and Economic Documents*, 84-85.

misdeed, (or) to make (her) the recompense (of freedom in return) for service, just as may suit yourself.”

It seems beyond coincidental that these contracts written thousands of miles apart and in different languages shared almost identical wording about the allowed treatments of a sold slave. There must have been a shared origin that underlined this common practice, and I agree with Hitch that such similarity in the contractual language was a legacy of the Kushan empire.¹

Another feature of contracts revealed in the penalty clause of document 591 is the involvement of the local Niya government. The penalty for breaching the contract was carried out by the government, which dealt physical punishment with sticks. The whole contract was also made with the witness of governmental officials. Whether or not they served in their official capacity is not known. At the end of many such contracts, a peculiar expression, “cut the string” (*sutra cind-*), was used to describe the final act performed by an official to authenticate the contract. Most likely, this refers to the cutting of the string that binds the wooden tablets together. After the string was cut, the knot of the string was fixed with a piece of clay, on top of which a seal was then applied (see Figure 5.1). Finally, a summary of the contract was written on the tablet, while the detailed content became sealed. In this way, the Niya government was involved not only in the making and the authentication of the contract; it also was in charge of any dispute that might arise afterward.

¹ D. A. Hitch, “Kushan Tarim Domination,” *Central Asiatic Journal*, 32:3-4 (1988): 170-92.



Figure 5.1: Prakrit contract

The contract was sealed to make sure that its content would not be altered. This is also a common feature of contracts under Kushan influence. The confidentiality of the contract is closely connected to the fact that only one copy of the contract was made. After the contract was made, it was sealed by officials, without whose permission it could not be reopened. The person who purchased the slave then took this copy back, partially as a certificate for the status of this newly purchased slave. In the case of a dispute, the contract was taken back to the government and reopened to check its content.

This process can be seen in both the Bactrian and Khotanese contracts, as well, but in different ways. The Bactrian contracts typically have two copies. But these two copies were not separated. Instead, they were kept together, with one copy sealed (“sealed copy”) and the other one open (“open copy”). In case of doubt, the open copy could be checked for information. But if the parties could not agree with what was

written in the open copy and suspected tampering, the other officially sealed copy could then be opened in the presence of government official to determine the authenticity of the open copy. In this way, the open copy functioned similarly to the summary of the contract written on top of the wooden tablets in the Prakrit case, both served to record the content of the sealed contract.

The Khotanese contracts were made in a much more similar fashion to the Niya Prakrit ones, only the shape of wooden tablet differed. Just as in the Prakrit contracts, the government played a key role in drawing up the contract. Or.9268b (Figure 5.2) is a contract about the purchase of a male slave.¹ On top of the tablet, two short lines indicate that the contract was signed by a *pharṣa* official Suda- (name incomplete) and that “the document (was made) for the reason that ... (pāḍa [tṭye] pracaina cu).” Because this part was exposed, the writing is no longer clearly visible. But the sealed part, much clearer, reveals the content of the contract, which involves the sale (or adoption) of a young male slave for the price of 500 *mūrās* and 3 *chās* of white silk (worth) 200 *mūrās*. At the end of the contract, it is remarked that “Whoever may change this case from (what has been) prepared and construed, to the court he will pay 200 *mūrās* and receive 50 strokes of the stick.” And finally, “this deed of adoption shall become authoritative when the *parramais* put their seals on it.” Clearly, the Khotanese case, which dates to the late eighth century, well into Tang rule of Central Asia, still followed the Kushan tradition, even though the typical line about the right of the new owner discussed above was eliminated.

¹ Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library*, 68-69.



Figure 5.2: Or.9268b Khotanese slave-selling contract

5.3.2: Early Chinese Contracts

The earliest slave-selling contracts in Chinese are preserved in transmitted texts. Wang Bao's *Tongyue* 僮約, for instance, begins with “on the 15th day of the first month of the third year of the Shenjue reign (59 BCE), an adult man Wang Zi from Zizhong purchased from the adult woman Yang Hui – who is from the Anzhi ward of Chengdu – a bearded slave named Bianliao, who belonged to her household when her husband was alive. The price was decided to be 15,000 [coins].” After this beginning, however, it goes into a lengthy discussion about the duties of the slave, which ends with “if the slave does

not follow the instructions, he shall be whipped 100 times.”¹ Clearly, if this transaction was indeed recorded in a real contract, which is unclear, there must have been more technical terms that were unfortunately deleted as the contract was recorded as a literary text. The same can be said about a late third-century contract made by the notoriously rich official Shi Chong.² One of the earliest actual slave-selling contracts was found in a tomb in Turfan in 1997.³ This text shows the typical ways a Chinese slave-selling contract was made (see Figure 5.3).

Transcription:

- 1 永康十二年潤（閏）十四日，張祖從康阿醜
- 2 買胡奴益富一人，年卅，交與賈行縹百叁
- 3 拾柒疋。賈即畢，奴即付。奴若有人仍（認）
- 4 名，仰醜了理，祖不能知。二主和合，共成券
- 5 書之後，各不得返悔，悔者罰行縹貳
- 6 百柒拾肆疋，入不悔者。民有私要，要
- 7 行，沽各半。請宋忠書信，
- 8 時見祖疆、迦奴、何養、蘇高昌、
- 9 唐胡。

If we look at this document through the lens of the seven parts of a slave-selling contract discussed above, this contract can be divided in the following way:

1. Dating:

“In the 12th year of the Yongkang reign, on the 14th day of the leap month”

¹ See *Guwen yuan* 古文苑 ch.17.

² Zhang Chuanxi 張傳璽 ed., *Zhongguo lidai qiyue huibian* 中國歷代契約彙編 (Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2014), 87.

³ Rong Xinjiang et al. eds., *Xinhua Tulufan chutu wenshu* 新獲吐魯番出土文書 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局: Beijing, 2008).

2. Information about the two parties involved
“Zhang Zu purchased a 30 year-old male barbarian slave from Kang Achou”
3. Price of the slave
“offered as price 137 *pi* of xingdie silk. The price was made and the slave was given”
4. The right of the new owner
Not stated
5. Penalty Clause
“Should anyone claim ownership of the slave, [Kang A]chou will deal with it, and [Zhang] Zu will not be responsible. The two owners agreed and made this contract. After the contract is concluded, none should regret. The one regretting the transaction will be punished with 274 *pi* of circulating silk and be offered to the one not regretting. The people cherish the private agreement, which took effect (between these two owners). The purchased [wine] will be shared [by the two parties].”¹
6. Witness and Scribe
“The hired scribe Song Zhong wrote this.
The Witnesses are: Zuqiang, Jianu, He Yang, Su Gaochang, Tang Hu.”
7. Physical treatment of the document
Signed “A text agreed [by two parties] 合同文” on the back of the contract.

There are several differences between the Chinese contract and the ones under Kushan influence. Most importantly, this Chinese contract claims that “the people cherish Chin the private agreement, which took effect (between these two owners).” In similar contracts, this phrase was used together with another, forming a set phrase “the government has its official laws, but the people follow their private contracts. 官有政法, 民從私契.” This is a drastic contrast to the Central Asian cases, where the government was in a sense in charge of how the slave-selling contracts were drawn up.

¹ This is the common practice of purchasing wine for the middle man of the transaction. Here it is likely just a remnant of an older expression.

Related to this first feature, another signature feature of this contract, and indeed of most early Chinese contracts, is that two copies of the same contract existed. In fact, on the back of this contract, half of three large characters 合同文 “contractual text” can be found, indicating that the other half should have been written on the other copy (see Figure 5.3). These two copies would have been given to both parties of the transaction. In case of a dispute, they could then be compared to verify each other’s authenticity. For this reason, there was no need to keep a sealed version of the text.

故履一政故中派之故屏一之故初
一五故裙一故故大翅家一之故去
黃金千斤白銀万斤度身結百
还糸千斤錦万斤

97TSYM1:5 背面

Figure 5.3: 477 Slave-selling contract in Chinese, verso (the left half of the three large characters 合同文 can be seen as faint traces under an unrelated text written with darker, much smaller characters)

Furthermore, the penalty for breaching this contract is double the amount of the price paid for the slave. Unlike the Prakrit contracts, no corporal punishment ordered by the government is mandated in this case. Every aspect of this Chinese contract shows the lack of governmental interference: both the making and breaking of this Chinese contract took place in largely private spaces.

5.3.3: The Congruence of Business Practice

The congruence of these two different traditions of contract making had already begun with the famous 639 Sogdian slave-selling contract already mentioned a number of times in this dissertation. As Étienne de la Vaissière observed: “[t]he characteristic features of this text place it midway between the Iranian tradition—going back to Babylonian law, inherited by the Achaemenid chancellery—and Chinese law. The general organization of the contract and the stereotyped formulae belong to the former heritage. But the text also incorporates some provisions which are specifically Chinese, in particular the mention of the consent of Upach.”¹ I agree with his observation that the text is a synthesis of two traditions, except that instead of “Iranian tradition,” I think “Kushan tradition” would have been a historically more meaningful term.

Rather than strictly following the “stereotyped formulae,” there are new elements in this contract. In the penalty clause we find the following expression: “Whoever may bring and hold this female-slave contract, may receive and take this female slave [named]

¹ *Sogdian Traders: A history*, 170.

Upach, and may hold her as his female slave on this condition, [i.e.] such condition as is written in this female-slave contract.” Therefore, even though there was a chief scribe of Gaochang signing the contract, it was not entirely made under governmental supervision. Instead, the contract itself acquired the function of a voucher. And to hold the contract means to hold the right to own this slave.

At the same time, the Chinese contracts also began to change. The first significant example of this change is found as early as the fifth century, when a contract was made when Zhai Shaoyuan purchased a female slave from a certain Shi Anu.¹ As Zhang Chuanxi has remarked, it is the earliest example in Chinese contractual practice that a single copy of a contract was used rather than double copies.² This is clear from the last line of the text, which reads: “this *quan* document has only one copy, and it is with (Zhai) Shaoyuan (the buyer).” Importantly, this line was added at the end of the contract after the entire text was written and seemed to be detached from the main content. Clearly, it was still not a common practice.

By the ninth and tenth centuries, however, Chinese contracts, especially contracts dealing with more expensive goods, such as slaves and cattle, all adopted the single contract system. Yet it was still not quite under governmental control. Even though, as Valerie Hansen has shown, by the Song dynasty in China proper, the government became for the first time intimately involved in monitoring private contracts and began taxing them.³ This change from the Kushan/Central Asian tradition and Chinese tradition to an

¹ 75TKM99:6(a), Yamamoto and Ikeda, *Tun-huang and Turfan Documents concerning Social and Economic History*, III., 3.

² *Zhongguo lidai qiyue huibian*, 90.

³ *Negotiating daily life in traditional China*.

integrated way of making contracts is illustrated in the following table.

Table 5.4: Main features and developments in slave-selling contracts in East Eurasia

	numbers of copies	made by the government	Confidential	penalty paid to the government
Early Central Asian Contracts	1	yes	Yes	yes
Early Chinese Contracts	2	no	No	no
Integrated Type	1	no	no	no

Takeuchi Tsuguhito noted in his study of the Tibetan contracts from Central Asia (Dunhuang and Miran): “The similarity between the Tibetan and early Chinese formulae may point to borrowing; namely, there is more likelihood that the Tibetan contract formula was influenced or modeled on the early type Chinese contract formula used before the eighth century.”¹ The same can be said about the Uyghur contracts made in the twelfth century at Turfan as well. In the following table, I compare a Chinese slave-sale contract discovered at Dunhuang and an Uyghur one from Turfan. For all their differences in the details about the specific case, the structure of the texts and the assumptions regarding business dealings, especially the crucial parts of the rights of the new owner and the penalty clauses, are generally similar. Both statements about the rights of the owner indicate that the slave would belong to the new owner forever. The penalty clauses are divided into two parts. The first part of both clauses deals with the

¹ Takeuchi Tsuguhito, *Old Tibetan Contracts from Central Asia* (Tokyo: Daizo Shuppan), 1995.

right of the relatives of the old owner, whereas the second part deals with the role of government and officials in different ways. Scholars have pointed out many loanwords and borrowed expressions from Chinese in the Uyghur contracts.¹ I show that in terms of formatting, the Uyghur slave-selling contracts must have originated from or been heavily influenced by the Chinese ones as well.

Table 5.5: Comparing Chinese and Uyghur contracts

	S.1946 (Chinese)	Sa23 (Uyghur)
Dating	The contract was made on the 12 th day of the 11 th month of the Xinmao year, the 2 nd year of the Chunhua reign (991).	On the tenth day of the tenth month of the year of dog
Information about the two parties	Because Military assistant Han Yuanding was worried about the spending of the family for the lack of cloth and silk, he is now selling the girl of the house named Jiansheng, who is 28 years old, to the regular resident, commoner Zhu Yuansong and his wife and sons.	I, Qalın qara ači, for the reason of needing transmittable cotton, sold reasonably and legally my 12 year-old female slave [named] Taq Küng to Äniçük.
Price of the slave	On that day, three <i>pi</i> of raw silk was paid; as for the 2 <i>pi</i> of processed silk, it must be fully paid before the fifth month of the coming year. The person and [her] price were mutually given.	We thus agreed on the [price of the] cotton as 80 [pieces] that can circulate on the market and bore six seals of the emperor. On the day this document was made, I, Äniçük paid price for the slave 80 cotton in full; I, Qalın qara ači also received in full.
The right of the new owner	After the purchase, the men and women of the Zhu family will forever be [her] masters.	As for this slave, she will for thousands and [ten thousands] of days belong to Äniçük. If he is satisfied he can manage her himself; if he is not satisfied he can resell her to others.
Penalty clause	If any close and old relative comes to seek this person out, Han Yuanding and his wife Lady Seven should look for a good person [to be offered] instead. Or in the case of a royal favor, it is not to be considered.	I, Qalın qara ači, [and my] brother, family, relatives cannot argue. If they want to reply on powerful officials, claiming the wish to redeem, to cause dispute, they have to give two slaves equal to this one that would satisfy Äniçük in order to redeem.

¹ Liu Ge 劉戈, *Huihu wen maimai qiye yizhu* 回鶻文買賣契約譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006).

Therefore, all the contracts made at Dunhuang and adjacent regions in the ninth and tenth centuries, regardless of whether they were written in Chinese, Tibetan, or Uyghur, had broadly similar structures. Why do we find such similarity in business practices? It is of course possible to seek the answer in the general historical background: the frequent activities of and contacts among travelers on the Silk Road must have made such convergence possible or even likely. But here I would like to propose a more specific answer, which lies, I suggest, in a contract discovered at Khotan kept in The Oriental Institute, St. Petersburg. This contract – now torn into three incomplete pieces (Дx 18926 + SI P 93.22 + Дx 18928, see Figure 5.4) – is important because it is one of the only existing bilingual contracts found in the region.¹

¹ For a study of this contract, see Kumamoto Hiroshi, “Sino-Hvatanica Petersburgensia (part I),” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 7, 2001, 3-9.



Figure 5.4: Chinese-Khotanese Bilingual Camel-Selling Contract

This contract was made in 781. The interlineal Khotanese part corresponds to the Chinese part very well, until the very end of the text, where the Chinese text reads “both parties have consulted (each other) and mark their finger-seal 兩共平章、畫指為記.” This part is not translated into Khotanese. The first half of the phrase “both parties have consulted (each other)” is a remnant from the time when Chinese contracts were made into two copies and given to both parties, but at this time it had already become superfluous. The second half of the phrase is also formulaic, because no finger-seals are found in this contract. It is conceivable that as more and more similar types of bilingual documents (or monolingual documents produced for bilingual parties) were being made, the remnants of

an older system that no longer had any correspondence in the other language were eliminated, and the two systems became more and more similar.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter uses ninth- and tenth-century Dunhuang as a case study and analyzes two characteristics that I think define a “Silk Road” economy. First, the “Silk Road” economy at Dunhuang was characterized by two distinctive yet interacting spheres of exchange. The sphere of commodities tended to be local, where goods were exchanged through the medium of various types of “money”; the sphere of gifts tended to be trans-local, where goods were exchanged without the intervention of money. It is the latter that was the predominant mechanism of the long-distance exchange of expensive goods that justifies the use of the term “Silk Road.” As the Silk Road is generally seen as a road of precisely these exotic and rare goods exchanged over long distance, one may legitimately see it as a road not of commodities, but of gifts.

The second characteristic is the congruence and integration at Dunhuang and adjacent regions in the ninth and tenth centuries of different traditions of legal norms in business dealings. As I show in the second half of this chapter, a single-copy contract system conducted beyond the supervision of the government became the norm in dealings of expensive goods including slaves and livestock. This practice transcended linguistic and cultural units and was shared by Tibetan, Chinese, and Uyghur contract makers. Such congruence of business practice is another aspect of the Silk Road economy that has not been properly understood.

Finally, in the cases discussed above, regardless of whether they were commercial or gift exchanges, sales of slaves or grain, or in Chinese or Tibetan, one thread that runs through all of the dealings was the significance of silk. Large amounts of silk and other textiles were given as gifts to the envoys from Dunhuang to China proper. At the same time, local contracts show that envoys regularly bought or borrowed silk before their journey. Silk was also frequently used in the purchase of slaves and livestock. Silk oscillated constantly between the roles of gift and commodity, providing a crucial link between these two forms of exchange in the local economy at Dunhuang.

This special status of functioning regularly *both* as commodity and as gift derived from silk's dual features of both being a household item and being easy to transport and of relatively high value. Silk was not only a coveted treasure in itself, it also served to mediate various other types of exchange among people from different cultural and numismatic traditions. Previous scholarship has illustrated the religious significance of silk on the "Silk Road,"¹ as well as its use as "money."² In reassessing the additional role of silk as mediating between different spheres of economy, I also reaffirm the usefulness of the concept of the "Silk Road."

¹ Xinru Liu, *Silk and Religion*.

² Helen Wang, "Textiles as Money on the Silk Road."

Chapter 6: King of Kings of China: Hybrid State Ideology

6.1: Introduction

A curious host was waiting for Gao Juhui 高居誨 and his companions when they traveled to Central Asia in 940. An envoy of the Later Jin 後晉 dynasty (936-946) in what is commonly known among historians of China as the “Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms” 五代十國 period (907-960), Gao was on a mission to the Central Asian kingdom of Khotan. In 938, an embassy from Khotan paid tribute to the Jin court at Kaifeng 開封 in Central China. As a return gesture, Gao was sent as a part of a group to confer the title “king of the great jeweled kingdom of Khotan” on the Khotanese ruler. Yet after two years on the road through regions inhabited by Uyghur and Tibetan settlements, Gao found in “the great jeweled kingdom” deep in the arid land of Central Asia something strangely familiar:

(The Khotanese King) [Li] Shengtian’s clothes and hats were like those of the *Zhongguo* (“The Middle Kingdom”). His palaces all faced east and were called *Jince Dian* (Golden Ordained Palace). There was a mansion called *Qifeng Lou* (Mansion of Seven Phoenixes)... There were fifty monks dressed in purple in attendance at the king’s abode. The year was the 29th year of the *Tongqing* reign. In the southeast of the country, there were Yin Prefecture, Lu Prefecture, Mei Prefecture; in the south, 1300 *li* away (from the capital) there was Yu Prefecture. It was said that the mountain (there) was the jade-rich mountain witnessed by Zhang Qian of the Han dynasty when he traced the origin of the (Yellow) River.

聖天衣冠如中國，其殿皆皆東向，曰金冊殿，有樓曰七鳳樓。……聖天居處，嘗以紫衣僧五十人列侍，其年號同慶二十九年。其國東南曰銀州、廬州、湄州

，其南千三百里曰玉州。云漢張騫所窮河源出于闐，而山多玉者，此山也。¹

As Gao observed, the king of Khotan assumed a Chinese name Li Shengtian, 李聖天, with the surname Li signifying a claim to membership of the Tang imperial house.² Many distinctively “Chinese” features of the Khotanese government – from the king’s “clothes and hats” and his royal palaces, to the Chinese reign names and provincial toponyms – seem to be in line with this name choice. One of the prefectures in Khotan was even named after a Han dynasty legend involving Zhang Qian and the origin of the Yellow River. The matter-of-fact tone of Gao’s record reveals little surprise. Yet as we know from manuscripts discovered in Khotan and Dunhuang, the people Gao met in fact spoke Khotanese, an Eastern Middle Iranian language; they wrote their documents in the Brāhmi script and organized their political and religious thinking around Indian – and largely Buddhist – words and concepts.³ How did these features square with their king dressing and acting so “Chinese?”

This chapter addresses this question by contextualizing Gao Juhui’s unique observations within the tenth-century history of the East Eurasian world (Map 6.1). The tenth century was a time of political transformation following the nearly simultaneous fall in ninth century of the three great empires that had dominated East Eurasia since the seventh century: the Tang, Tibetan, and Turco-Uyghur. From Kaifeng to Khotan, Gao’s Central Asian trip took him through the heartland of East Eurasia, where the fall of these of empires was being grappled with in one way or another. In this context, perhaps unsurprisingly, previous scholarly works on post-imperial

¹ Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩, *Xin Wudaishi* 新五代史, 74 *juan* in 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), vol.3, *juan* 74, 918.

² Tuotuo, *Songshi*, 14106.

³ H. W. Bailey, *The Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan*, (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1982).

East Eurasia in the tenth century usually operate within the framework of empires and paint paths from “fragmentation” to “reunification” or “resurgence.”¹ In this framework, the tenth century is generally regarded as a transitional era of insignificance, in which either end of the story of transition matters more than that of the transition itself.



Map 6.1: East Eurasia

In this chapter, I wish to revisit this historical framework by showing that the supposedly fragmented world of tenth-century East Eurasia was in fact forming unprecedented and unexplored new connections. Like many of the newly independent states in other parts of East Eurasia, the kingdom of Khotan in the tenth century came into being as a direct response to the

¹ Wang Gungwu, *Divided China: Preparing For Reunification 883-947* (River Edge: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2007). See also Naomi Standen, “The Five Dynasties,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, bk. 1: *The Sung Dynasty and its Precursors, 907-1279*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakob Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 38–132; Hugh Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms between the T’ang and the Sung, 907-979,” *Ibid.*, 133-205; Peter Lorge, *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011). For the study of post-imperial eras in Turco-Uyghur and Tibetan history, see Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*, *Turcologica*, Bd. 9 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1992), 163-69; W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet, a Political History*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967), 54-60; Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 61-83.

end of imperial rule. During the eighth and ninth centuries, Khotan had been ruled successively by the Tang and the Tibetan, but with the assassination of the Tibetan tsanpo (emperor) Langdarma (r.838-841) and the disintegration of the Tibetan empire, Khotan regained its independence sometime in the mid-ninth century and remained an independent state until the Turkic Karakhanid conquest in the early eleventh century. As Khotan became militarily independent from former imperial centers, it formed new connections in the realm of political ideology. According to the tenth-century Persian geographical text *Hudūd al-‘Ālam*, the Khotanese king claimed to be “lord of Turk and Tibet” (*‘aẓīm al-Turk wa’l-Tubbat*).¹ While the validity of this claim is difficult to judge due to a lack of corroboration, another claim by the Khotanese king can be seen much more clearly from existing sources, and can help us understand the question raised by Gao Juhui’s travel account. The king of Khotan appeared in such a “Chinese” manner in Gao’s record because, I argue, he claimed to be the emperor (Ch. *huangdi* 皇帝) and “king of kings of China” (Khotanese: *caiga rāṃdānā rrādi*).

In my use, the term “China” – an etic, trans-dynastic concept – does not serve as a translation of any Chinese terms such as *zhongguo* 中國, *hua* 華, *han* 漢, or *tang* 唐.² As scholars have shown, “Zhongguo” – the modern word for China – cannot be uncritically

¹ *Hudūd al-‘Ālam*, 85.

² I use “China” in this chapter because I believe that, for the following two reasons, it is the most appropriate term to translate the Khotanese word *ciṃgā-* (late Khotanese *caigā-*). First, *ciṃgā-* is the Khotanese equivalent of the Sanskrit term *cīna*, which is likely derived from the Chinese dynastic name Qin. The Khotanese term is therefore etymologically connected to the Persian and Arabic word for China (*chin*) and the word for “China” in European languages. To translate it as “China” reflects these etymological connections. Second and more importantly, since this chapter looks at the inheritance and adoption of the political apparatus of the Tang state in a Central Asian setting, when Central Asia was not under the control of any “Chinese” state, the perspective is essentially exogenous. This perspective is in line with the etic nature of the term “China” in the Sanskrit context as well as its later use in the Islamic world and Europe. In fact, I shall show that what the Khotanese imagined as “China” profoundly influenced what China came to mean in the Islamic world.

translated as “China” for the period we are discussing; neither can terms such as *Han* or *Tang*.¹ Instead, the histories of the idea of “Zhongguo”, “*Han*,” and “*Tang*,” should be treated separately from the history of the idea of “China.”² These co-existing and sometimes competing histories manifested themselves in the political settings of tenth-century Khotan, because in addition to Khotanese and other non-Chinese (Tibetan and Uyghur) records, the Khotanese government produced Chinese records of its own. It also appeared in the records by Chinese observers: Gao Juhui’s report cited above, for instance, claims the Khotanese King Li Shengtian’s “clothes and hats were like those of *Zhongguo*.” Both Chinese and non-Chinese records reflect certain aspects of the Khotanese state ideology, and the multiple stories in these records cannot be simplistically seen as one single account of “China.”³ In the discussions that follow, I pay particular attention to when terms such as *Zhongguo* or *Han* were used in the Chinese context to describe what was in the Khotanese political imagination. I argue that the claims to be “Zhongguo” or “Han” in this story were subsidiary to and descriptive of the claim made by the kings of Khotan to be “China,” and they should be understood in the context of the specific Khotanese claim as well as the general histories of these terms in Chinese.

One might reasonably question how the ruler of an oasis state on the southern rim of the Taklamakan desert could credibly claim to be the emperor (or king of kings) of China, but this

¹ Hu Axiang, *Wei zai si ming: "Zhongguo" gujin chengwei yanjiu* 伟哉斯名：“中国”古今称谓研究 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000).

² Peter K. Bol, “Geography and Culture: The Middle-Period Discourse on the *Zhong guo* - the Central Country,” *Kongjian yu wenhua changyu: kongjian zhi yixiang, shijian yu shehui de shengchan* 空間與文化場域：空間之意象、時間與社會的生產, ed. Huang Ying-kuei (Taipei: Center for Chinese Studies; 2009), 61-106.

³ A direct translation of the term *cīna* has long existed in the Chinese (in particular Buddhist) sources as *zhina* 支那 (also 至那, 脂那) from *cīna* and *zhendan* 震旦 (also 真丹) from *cīnasthāna*. Yet in contemporary Chinese texts, produced either in the kingdom of Khotan itself or by observers from China proper such as Gao Juhui, these ready transcriptions for the Sanskrit term were not used. Instead, more conventional Chinese terms for “China” such as *Han* 漢 and *Zhongguo* 中國 were used.

notion seems to have permeated almost every aspect of political life in tenth-century Khotan: not only did their monarchs call themselves king of kings of China, but many important aspects of the Central China government of the tenth century were “translated” into the Khotanese context. The Khotanese kings signed their letters with the Chinese word *chi* 敕, meaning imperial edict, and wore the headdress of Chinese emperors shown in pictorial representations at Dunhuang. Most intriguingly, their apparently outlandish claim seems to have been accepted and even celebrated by Khotan’s neighbors.

In this chapter, I shall describe in detail the various ways in which the Khotanese kings claimed to be “Chinese.” I will thereby argue that this claim was deemed credible because of the specific manner in which the term “Chinese” was understood in tenth-century East Eurasia; instead of being a cultural, linguistic, or ethnic designation, being “Chinese” meant first and foremost the adoption of a set of vocabulary and ideological elements and the practices of a certain type of government. This understanding of the term “Chinese” resembles the post-imperial re-imagination of “Rome” more than it does the contemporary understanding of “Chinese.”¹ Only with the realization that “China” invoked a political apparatus rather than any cultural or linguistic claim can we understand the political re-imagination of “China” in Khotan.

Khotan was not the only state trying to claim the legacy of the Tang empire. For all its claim of being “China,” Khotan differed from its contemporary Chinese-speaking competitors for the Tang imperial legacy – the five “dynasties” and ten “kingdoms.” The task of the kings of Khotan was not merely to elevate an existing Chinese provincial governmental apparatus to an imperial one, but to graft expressions of Chinese kingship onto an existing Indo-Iranian structure.

¹ Jonathan Conant, *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439-700*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). The book argues that for North African peoples after the fall of the Roman empire, being “Roman” was primarily a political identity.

In investigating this process, I join several recent works in arguing for a “Eurasian continuum” in ways of conceptualizing kingship. Jonathan Skaff argues persuasively that the Tang and the Turkic empires, although politically opposed, sometimes shared the vocabulary of kingship through frequent diplomatic interactions.¹ A similar link can be observed between the Greco-Roman and Iranian worlds, as shown in the work by Matthew Canepa on the Byzantine and Persian empires.² I want to show that in the case of Khotan, the two realms of imperial imagination described by Skaff and Canepa intersected as the Indo-Iranian imagination of kingship met the Turco-Chinese one, producing a hybrid imperial culture in Central Asia.

Among the many states claiming imperial legacy in the tenth century, the Khotanese case is particularly worthy of investigation because we possess a fairly large number of sources of various types relevant to the Khotanese political imagination.³ Documents from the Khotan area, though dating to before the ninth century, give us a background of Khotanese kingship through which the tenth-century developments can be contextualized.⁴ The “library cave” at Dunhuang preserved hundreds of Khotanese documents as well as tens of thousands of Chinese and Tibetan documents, including edicts from the Khotanese king (written in Khotanese, Chinese, and Tibetan) and panegyric poems written for the king, as well as official documents from and about the Khotanese government.⁵ Transmitted Chinese and Islamic sources also offer limited though

¹ Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*.

² Matthew P. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth*.

³ For instance, the famous state of Kucha, which, more than any other state, was the center of medieval East Central Asia, left us virtually no indigenous sources to reconstruct its history in the tenth century. In this case, we have to rely solely on the Chinese annals, however prejudiced they are.

⁴ Kumamoto Hiroshi, “The Khotanese Documents from the Khotan Area, with an Appendix by Saito, Tatuya,” *Memoir of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 54 (1996): 27-64.

⁵ R. E. Emmerick, *A Guide to the Literature of Khotan*; Prods O. Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library*.

crucial reports on Khotan. In addition to textual evidence, the Buddhist caves at Dunhuang and adjacent regions preserve several images of the kings, queens, and princesses of Khotan, which complement and complicate the textual records in startling ways.¹ These various types of royal representations in different contexts make possible a uniquely nuanced portrayal of Khotanese state ideology among the many states of tenth-century East Eurasia.

In the first section of this chapter, I shall contextualize Khotanese kingship in the history of this oasis and discuss the changes that occurred in the tenth century. The single most important change, I argue, is that the Khotanese kings claimed to be “emperor” or “king of kings,” sometimes even being referred to specifically as “Chinese” emperor/king of kings. The second section of the chapter discusses the more concrete ways that the role of the kings of Khotan as “Chinese emperor” or “king of kings of China” were embodied visually in mural paintings as well as in royal edicts. The third section then turns to the Khotanese government and discusses how “Chineseness” was translated into a formerly Indo-Iranian governmental apparatus. In the last part of this chapter, I consider several “reception” stories and ask how the neighbors of Khotan reacted to this new ideological identity. A survey of four neighbors of Khotan indicates that this new identity was acknowledged and even embraced, with a particularly lasting impact in the Islamic world.

I have argued above that travels on the Silk Road in East Eurasia in the ninth and tenth centuries were primarily driven not by commercial interest, but by the kings and social elites and their desire for diplomatic glory and exotic gifts. Such state-sponsored intensive trans-regional exchanges on the Silk Road resulted in 1) the frequent transmission of goods and people and 2) communication among various traditions of court culture and state ideology. Chapter 5 discusses

¹ Chen Suyu 陳粟裕, *Cong Yutian dao Dunhuang: yi Tang Song shiqi tuxiang de dongchuan wei zhongxin* 從于闐到敦煌：以唐宋時期圖像的東傳為中心 (Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 2014).

the first aspect of the impact of trans-regional exchanges by delineating the making of a “Silk Road” economy at Dunhuang. This chapter now turns to the second aspect of the impact of such exchanges by telling the story of “king of kings of China” in Khotan.

6.2: A New Claim

Khotan was an oasis state situated on the southern edge of the Taklamakan desert.¹ Before its conquest by the Kharakhanids in the early eleventh century, Khotan was a largely Buddhist kingdom where Khotanese, a middle Iranian language, was used. Its geographical location between the great powers of Asia exposed this state of meager resources to successive external threats and conquests, although, occasionally, Khotan would also enjoy periods of greater autonomy. The history of pre-Islamic Khotan can thus be divided roughly into three periods on the basis of the nature of its government in relation to external powers. During the first period, from its earliest recorded history in the second century BCE to the early seventh century CE, despite notably Kushan but also Han dynasty and Rouran (Ch. 柔然) influences, the kingdom of Khotan seems to have retained a high level of autonomy, and no discernable trace of massive foreign occupation is found.² This autonomy was lost in the second period, from the late seventh to the late ninth centuries, as Khotan became the battleground of the great powers of

¹ For a new study of pre-Islamic Khotan, see Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road*, 199-234. The most complete bibliography of secondary works is found in Zhang Guangda & Rong Xinjiang, *Yutianshi Congkao*, 2nd edition (Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2008).

² For the traces of Kushan rule in Khotan, see D. A. Hitch, “Kushan Tarim Domination”, *Central Asiatic Journal*, 32:3-4 (1988): 170-92. The role of the Rouran is only hinted at in Chinese sources, which merely record a message from Khotan asking for military assistance. See *Weishu* 魏书, 114 *juan* in 8 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), vol.7, 102 *juan*, 2263.

Central Asia and was long occupied by both the Tang and Tibetan empires.¹ With the fall of these imperial powers, however, Khotan regained independence in the third phase of its pre-Islamic history, lasting from the late 800s to early 1000s.² This last phase is the focus of this chapter.

To contextualize the new claim of kingship in the tenth century, it is first necessary to examine the claims made in the first and second periods of Khotanese history. Although we do not have any direct treatises on the subject of kingship in Khotanese (as we do, for instance, in the Chinese and Indian cases), the ways in which Khotanese kings were represented in administrative documents offer the possibility of investigating the idea of kingship in practice.

The earliest local reference to the state in Khotan appears in documents in Prakrit, a middle-Indic language, written in Kharoṣṭhī script and discovered at Niya, a neighboring state to the east of Khotan.³ The Niya documents deal with the local Cadho'ta kingdom, but they also offer scraps of information about Khotan. However, the most direct evidence comes from a document discovered in Endere, a region within the kingdom of Khotan. Though written in Prakrit, it was composed in the kingdom of Khotan and the dating formula of the document reveals basic assumptions about the political ideology of Khotan. In this document the king is called:

The Khotanese great king, king of kings, general Vij'ida Siṃha.

¹ Prods O. Skjærvø, "Iranians, Indians, Chinese and Tibetans: the rulers and ruled of Khotan in the first millennium," in *The Silk Road. Trade, Travel, War and Faith*, ed. Susan Whitfield and Ursula Sims-Williams (Chicago, IL: Serindia Publications, 2004), 34-42.

² Rong and Zhu, *Yutian yu Dunhuang*.

³ Christopher Atwood, "Life in Third-fourth Century Cadh'ota: A survey of information gathered from the Prakrit documents found north of Minfeng (Niyä)," *Central Asiatic Journal*, 35.3-4 (1991): 161-99.

khotana maharaya rayatiraya hinajhasya¹ vij'ida simhasya.²

The language and political terminology were parts of a legacy of the rule (direct or indirect) of the Kushan Empire, as the royal title was clearly derived from earlier Kushan “maharaja rajatiraja.”³ But “king of kings” also continued a much older tradition found in the Mesopotamian and Iranian worlds, reflecting a general Indo-Iranian understanding of kingship: a great king was not only the king of one people or one state; he was the king of many other “kings.” In this sense, it often serves as an equivalent of the Roman concept of “emperor.”⁴ In Khotan, such an understanding was clearly still semantically alive, rather than preserved in a fossilized manner, as the specific wording survived the shift of administrative language from Indic to Iranian (more specifically, from Prakrit to Khotanese) and of the writing system from Kharoṣṭhī to Brahmī. Into the eighth century, the king of Khotan was still known as “king of kings of Khotan.”⁵

It is only with Tang and Tibetan rule in the second phase of Khotan’s pre-Islamic history that the title of “king of kings” was apparently dropped, and the kings Viśa’ Vāham and Viśa’

¹ For the translation of this term, see T. A. Burrow, “Iranian Words in the Kharosthi Documents from Chinese Turkestan,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, 7.3 (1934): 514.

² T. A. Burrow, *A Translation of the Kharosthi Documents from Chinese Turkestan* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society), 1940, 137.

³ maharajasa rajatirajasa devaputrassa Khushanasa. For a Bactrian document that refers to the Kushan king in similar terms (although in a different language), see Nicolas Sims-Williams, “The Bactrian Inscription of Rabatak: A New Reading,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, new series 18 (2004): 53-68.

⁴ Beate Dignas and Engelbert Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 232-41.

⁵ Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library*, 124, 557-8.

Kīrta were addressed merely as “king of Khotan.”¹ The reason for this downgrading of royal titlature is unstated, but one suspects that the heavy Chinese and Tibetan military presence in Khotan might have contributed to this more sober acknowledgement of Khotanese monarchs’ political status.² Such acknowledgement of foreign rule is clearly seen in a panegyric poem about king Viśa’ Kīrta (IOL Khot 50/4), which states: “(There is) abundance here in every thing because of the merits of the king, as well as because of the Master Tibetans, who are guarding this land of Khotan.” (subhikṣi mari paṃne hirna rruṃdi hīyau jsi pūñau jsa ttāguttyau hvāṣṭyau pātcī ci ṣṭāṃ ttū hvaṃ kṣīri kai’ di).³ Here the well-being of the land was determined not only by the merit (*pūñau* < Skt. *puṇya*) of the Khotanese king, but also by the “Master Tibetans” who, from the wording of the text, seem to have been directly involved in the actual governance of the kingdom. This and many other similar documents demonstrate that the king of Khotan was subject to the Tang and Tibetan overlords in both fact and perception. The relatively modest way in which the king was addressed offers a drastic contrast to what we will see in tenth century documents.

In 842, the last Tibetan Tsanpo Lang Darma was assassinated. With his death Tibetan domination in Central Asia soon came to an end.⁴ The kingdom of Khotan may already have regained its independence in the latter half of the ninth century, but this is not directly attested in our sources. The first Khotanese king after the Tibetan rule we know of is Viśa’ Saṃbhava,

¹ Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library*, 3, 4-5, 9. Emmerick and Vorob’ëva-Desjatovskaja, *Saka Documents, Text Volume III*, 96, 145, 156.

² Takeuchi Tsuguhito, “The Tibetan Military System and its Activities from Khotan to Lop-nor.”

³ Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library*, 285.

⁴ Christopher Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 169-172.

whose long reign lasted from 912 to 966.¹ He is the king with the Chinese name Li Shengtian 李聖天 that Gao Juhui visited in the opening episode of this chapter. Among the limited textual sources, we find that his royal titles included “lion king” and “king of kings.”² The lion image was connected with the king in the Indian tradition (cf. Skt. *rājasimha*).³ More importantly, the grand title of “king of kings,” abandoned more than a hundred years earlier, was revived. His claim to be the descendant of the Tang imperial house could have been related to the revival of this grand title. These titles of king Viśa’ Saṃbhava/Li Shengtian thus signified a new political identity for the Khotanese state after independence: no longer was the kingdom merely local in its political orientation; rather, the Tang legacy in the use of the imperial surname Li was combined with the trans-local ambition of “king of kings” to offer the Khotanese kings new possibilities of state ideology. Such possibilities became more substantiated in the titles of Viśa’ Saṃbhava’s son, the next Khotanese king, Viśa’ Śūra:

“In the happy time of the reign of *Tianzun*, sheep year, *Ttuṃjārā* month, 17th day, dwelling in the palace, ruling in the Law, the bodhisattva Viśa’ Śūra, king of kings of China”.

...theyna tcūnā sūhye bāḍi pūhye kṣuāṇā pasa sālya ttaujiṛā māstā hādūsāmye haḍai naḍava kūṣḍvī āṇā dā rāyṣānāṃḍi baudhasattu vīśa’ śūrā caiga rāṃḍānā rrādi.⁴

¹ The kingdom of Khotan restarted intense diplomatic dealings with Dunhuang in the early years of the tenth century, which might explain the lack of records about Khotan in Dunhuang manuscripts in the ninth century.

² H. W. Bailey, “The Staël-Holstein Miscellany,” *Asia Major*, new series, II.1 (1951), 2-3; *Indo-Scythian Studies, being Khotanese Texts, vol. II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 123.

³ Lions appear frequently, either accompanying the king or serving as his throne, in Kushan arts. See Giovanni Verardi, “The Kushan Emperors as Chakravartins, Dynastic Art and Cults in India and Central Asia: History of a Theory, Clarification and Refutations,” *East and West*, Vol. 33, No. 1/4 (December 1983): 225-94.

⁴ Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library*, 551-553.

This is an unambiguous example where the king of Khotan is seen as the “king of kings of China.” This title combines the previous king’s claim as a descendant of the Tang royal family with the title of a trans-regional ruler.¹ Further substantiation of this new claim can be found in a Chinese letter written by the Khotanese king to the Commander in Shazhou (Pelliot chinois 2826). Here, a Chinese seal reads “Seal Commissioned by the Han Son of Heaven of great Khotan 大于闐漢天子製印.”² The Chinese title *tianzi* (Son of Heaven) can be seen as an equivalent of the Khotanese “king of kings”; both denoted a supreme political figure of trans-local power.³ The appearance of such term on a seal, which was official in its nature and meant to be reused, tells us a great deal about the ways Khotanese kingship was conceived: the idea that the king of Khotan was a Chinese “king of kings” and “Han son of heaven” became a formal part of the routine functions of Khotanese official documents. In the same Chinese manuscript to which the seal was applied, the term used for the Khotanese king’s gift-giving to the leader of Shazhou was *ci* 賜 “offering”, befitting his imperial self-designation as “Han Son of Heaven.”

¹ The story might give the false impression of a clear development from Viśa’ Saṃbhava’s claim to Viśa’ Śūra’s claim. But it is important to note that I am dealing with a fairly small number of texts; and these texts are in no way comprehensive in their coverage of the Khotanese political ideology. Therefore it could very well be the case that Viśa’ Saṃbhava already claimed to be the “king of kings of China” but did not leave any documents at Dunhuang that explicitly state this. Judging from the extant documents from him, it was indeed more likely than not that he would have made such a claim.

² *Facang Dunhuang Xiyu wenxian* 法藏敦煌西域文獻, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994-2005) vol.19, 9. Color images of many manuscripts cited in this article can be found on the website of the International Dunhuang Project (<http://idp.bl.uk/>). For a study of this and other seals by the Khotanese, see Takatoshi Akagi, “Six 10th Century Royal Seals of the Khotan Kingdom”, Yoshiro Imaeda, Matthew Kapstein and Tsuguhito Takeuchi ed. *New Studies of the Old Tibetan Documents: Philology, History and Religion* (Tokyo: University of Foreign Studies, 2011), 217-229.

³ Chen Sanping, “Son of Heaven and Son of God - Interactions among Ancient Asiatic Cultures regarding Sacral Kingship and Theophoric Names”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 12.3 (2002): 289-325.

Perhaps more interesting than the claim to be “son of heaven” is the claim to be “Han.” While this term generally corroborates the observation that the king was seen as “king of kings of China” in the Khotanese text, it also raises an important question: What did “Han” mean in this context, since during this era, the term “Han” could denote the historical Han dynasty as well as a trans-dynastic or non-dynastic idea of “Chineseness”?¹ Which meaning did the writers of the manuscript and the users of the seal have in mind? They could of course very well have been thinking about the Han dynasty. In fact, as I show below, a letter from the state of Dunhuang does compare the king of Khotan to the Gaozu emperor (256-195 BCE), the founder of the Han dynasty. Yet this understanding would contradict the claim that he was a descendant of the Tang and the adoption of the Tang royal surname Li. The Khotanese government, discussed below, also borrowed a mix of titles from the governments in the late-Tang to Five Dynasties period, rather than the historical Han dynasty. In this light, it would be perhaps more appropriate to understand “Han” here in a trans-dynastic or non-dynastic sense: by claiming to be “Han,” the kings of Khotan did not have in mind particularities of the historical Han dynasty, but a general, if somewhat tangled, sense of “China.”

Variants of “king of kings of China” appear in several documents as well. The Khotanese text P.2958 consists of two parts: the Aśoka story (lines 1-120) and a miscellany of government documents (lines 120-228). The first document is a report (*haṣḍa*), addressing “the court of the mighty Cakravartin, Chinese king of kings” (*balacakrriarttā ciṃgā rruṃḍānā rruṃḍā hīvī haṃḍaṃnāṣṭā*). Harold Bailey concluded that this referred to the Chinese ruler in Shazhou

¹ The former case is clear. For the latter case, see Mark Elliott, “Hushuo: The Northern Other and the Naming of the Han Chinese” in Thomas Mullaney et al. eds., *Critical Han Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 185.

(Dunhuang),¹ but, *hamdamnāṣṭa* is a unique Khotanese institution and it is unlikely that it denoted the Chinese government in Shazhou.² Moreover, to support his argument, Bailey also interpreted the phrase “Golden Land (*ysarnai bāḍä*)”, which appeared in the elaborate title of the recipient, as referring to Shazhou. It is quite firmly established, however, that this was a name for the Khotanese kingdom.³ Bailey’s difficulty disappears once we take into account that it was the Khotanese king – rather than the lord of Dunhuang – who was known as the “Chinese king of kings.” Similarly, a Khotanese letter written by a “Prince of Shuofang” named Hva Pa-kyau was addressed to “the great king of the land of China, [king] over Ratna-janapada, ruling in Jambudvīpa, famous among the four dvīpas (continents).”⁴ Ratna-janapada is an alternative name for Khotan, so the king ruling over the “land of China” can be none other than the king of Khotan. In another manuscript, Pelliot 2739, it is specified that the recipient was “the heavenly envoy of the mighty Cakravartin Chinese king of kings” (*balacakrivrarttā ciṃgā rruṃḍānā rruṃḍä hīvī thyīnā-ṣī*); the composer of the letter, Yā pūhi:ya, expressed his wish to see his home, “the Great Jewel kingdom of Khotan (*ttayi-pū yūttyenä kuhä*).”⁵ It would make little sense to interpret the “Chinese king of kings” here as anyone other than the king of Khotan. These examples show that the title “king of kings of China” was not an accidental occurrence, but was,

¹ H. W. Bailey, “Altun Khan,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, S XXX.1, (1967): 95-104.

² For an example of this term in the Khotanese government, see P. O. Skjærvø, “An Account Tablet from Eighth-century Khotan”, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* ns. 15, (2001): 1-8.

³ Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang, *Yutian shi congkao* (zengding ben) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2009), 17-20.

⁴ *Facang Dunhuang Xiyu wenxian*, vol.20, 248.

⁵ *Facang Dunhuang Xiyu wenxian* vol.18, 37-39. Kumamoto Hiroshi, “More Khotanese Letters and Verses”, *Tokyo University Linguistics Paper* 13, (1993): 146-149.

much like the seal by “the Han Son of Heaven of Great Khotan,” consistently used in official documents from the kingdom of Khotan.

The incorporation of Chinese elements in the titles of the kings is also seen in the form of Chinese loanwords. At several places in P.2787, the Khotanese king Viśa’ Saṃgrāma was known as *śaina-kūna*, from Chinese “*shengjun* 聖君” (Divine Ruler).¹ In P.t.1120, a Tibetan letter addressed to one of the Khotanese kings, he was known as “*she-zhin then-[ce]*,” a transcription of the Chinese “*shengshen tianzi* 聖神天子” (Divine Son of Heaven).² The use of such Chinese imperial titles as loanwords in Khotanese and Tibetan indicates that the readers and producers of these documents were likely familiar with these titles. In the eyes of the producers and readers of these official documents and letters, the Khotanese king was not merely a divine ruler; he was a divine ruler in the “Chinese” sense.

Thus, in the multi-lingual official documents – Khotanese, Chinese, Khotanese transcription of Chinese, Tibetan transcription of Chinese – the Khotanese king in the tenth century was seen as a supreme “Chinese” ruler in the form of the “Han Son of Heaven” or the “King of Kings of China.” How did this claim manifest itself in other aspects of the cultural and political activities in the kingdom? To answer this question, the next section turns to images of and edicts from the kings of Khotan.

6.3: Embodying the King of Kings of China

As archaeological finds from Khotan itself date largely to before the ninth century, our

¹ *Khotanese Texts* II, 103-104.

² Uray Geza, “L’emploi du tibétain.”

knowledge about Khotan in the tenth century comes primarily from manuscripts and mural paintings found in the caves at Dunhuang. After the fall of the Tang and Tibetan empires, Dunhuang and Khotan both experienced increasing political and ideological independence. In the process, the two states formed an alliance on the basis of diplomatic marriages: not only was a group of Khotanese envoys resident in areas around Dunhuang, daughters of the Khotanese kings also regularly married the lords of Dunhuang; monks in both states frequently visited one another, sometimes with the hope of traveling to holy sites further away.¹ Some of the texts they brought to or produced at Dunhuang were sealed up in a cave in the Mogao Grotto complex, opened in 1900, and serve as the major textual sources for our retelling of Khotanese history in the tenth century.²

But Dunhuang holds much more than just textual treasures. The cave where the manuscripts were discovered (cave no.17) was only one of many hundreds of caves of various sizes and designs that house the greatest collection of Buddhist painting from this period. Among the pictorial representations of various Buddhist themes, the presence of Khotanese people, particularly Khotanese kings, is strongly felt.³ To date, scholars have identified two types of images of the Khotanese king in Dunhuang mural paintings. In the first type, the Khotanese king holds *the reins of the Bodhisattva's lion*, replacing the Kunlun servant of earlier traditions of *Mañjuśrī* images. *As this role was traditionally played by a non-Chinese figure, these depictions*

¹ Kumamoto Hiroshi, "The Khotanese in Dunhuang", *Cina e Iran. Da Alessandro Magno alla Dinastia Tang*, eds. A. Cadonna e L. Lanciotti, (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1996), 79-101. Rong Xinjiang and Zhu Lishuang, *Yutian yu Dunhuang*.

² Rong Xinjiang, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*.

³ Ning Qiang "Diplomatic Icons: The Social and Political Meaning of the Khotanese Images in Dunhuang Cave 220", *Oriental Art* XLIV: 4 (1998/1999): 2-15; Chen Suyu, *Cong Yutian dao Dunhuang*.

of the Khotanese kings show elements of non-Chinese-ness too.¹ In the second type of images, however, the Khotanese kings assume an entirely different identity: that of a Chinese emperor.

Figures of the Khotanese king as Chinese emperor have been identified in cave nos. 4, 98, and 454 in the Mogao Grotto complex and no. 31 in the Yulin Grotto complex, about 100 km east of Dunhuang.² These four images are similar in broad terms: all depict the Khotanese king wearing the headdress and robe typical of a Chinese emperor. Of the four images, the largest and best-preserved is found in cave no.98 near the center of the Mogao Grotto complex. Because of the rich details of depiction and the complete Chinese inscription identifying the figure, this image offers the best specimen for understanding the pictorial representation of the Khotanese king and will therefore be the focus of my analysis.

Constructed by the lord of Dunhuang named Cao Yijin 曹議金 in 924, cave 98 was, according to Lilla Russell-Smith, “political propaganda on an unprecedented scale.”³ Solemnly donning a crimson outfit standard for high Chinese officials at the time, Cao Yijin’s life-sized portrait and those of previous lords of Dunhuang flank the corridor of the cave. Through this corridor, one enters the main chamber with massive transformation paintings representing various different Buddhist sūtras on all four walls. Underneath these transformation paintings are more than two hundred smaller images of Dunhuang luminaries as donors. Among such an extremely crowded display of power, however, there is one image that no visitor to this cave could miss: on the eastern wall of the main chamber, south of the entrance, the image of the king

¹ Chen Suyu 陳粟裕, “Xinyang Wenshu zhongde Yutian wang xingxiang yanjiu” 新樣文殊中的于闐王形象研究, *Yishu sheji yanjiu* 藝術設計研究 23.2 (2014): 16-23. For *Kunlun*, see Don J. Wyatt, *The Blacks of Premodern China*, Encounters with Asia (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

² Sha Wutian 沙武田 “Dunhuang shiku Yutian guowang huaxiang yanjiu” 敦煌石窟于闐國王畫像研究, *Xinjiang shifandaxue xuebao* 新疆師範大學學報 27.4 (2006): 22-30.

³ Lilla Bikfalvy Russell-Smith, “Wives and Patrons: Uyghur Political and Artistic Influence in Tenth-Century Dunhuang,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 56, no. 2/4 (2003): 409.

of Khotan stands at 2.92 meters (Figure 6.1). As such, it is the largest donor image among all Dunhuang mural paintings. The more than two hundred other donor images in this cave, including those of Cao Yijin and other lords of Dunhuang, are dwarfed by the image of the king of Khotan – and not only because of its height. More importantly, it is the ways in which the Khotanese king is depicted that set him apart from the lords and officials of Dunhuang.



Figure 6.1: Emperor and empress of Khotan from cave 98 at Dunhuang

According to the inscription to its left, this portrait is that of “the Great Virtue, Great Luminosity, the Son of Heaven of the Great Regime, the Great Jeweled kingdom of Khotan (dachao dabao yutian guo dasheng daming tianzi 大朝大寶于闐国大聖大明天子).” Scholars generally agree that this is an image of the king Viśa’ Saṃbhava/Li Shengtian, whom Gao Juhui met on his trip to Khotan.¹ In this image, the king is supported by an earth deva, indicating a status similar to that of Bodhisattvas or Buddhas. Above him, two flying apsaras hold a parasol that shelters the king. However, between the earth deva and the apsara-supported parasol, both significant in Buddhist iconography, we find what is essentially a Chinese emperor.

Viśa’ Saṃbhava/Li Shengtian has the typical trappings of Chinese imperial status. His image resembles the canonical depictions of Chinese emperors found in, for instance, the work of Yan Liben 閻立本 (601-673). Figure 6.2 is one image of Yuwen Yong (543-578), emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou, from Yan’s celebrated *Portraits of Generations of Emperors (Lidai diwang tu 歷代帝王圖)*.² This tradition was mirrored locally in Dunhuang art as well: the portrait of the Tang emperor in cave 220 (Figure 6.3) in a scene in the transformation painting of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* agrees closely with Yan’s depiction of a Chinese emperor.³ Read in the context of both imperial and local traditions of portraying the Chinese emperor, the identity of the image in Cave 98 is clear. His headdress *mian* 冕, used exclusively by Chinese emperors, has the bejeweled *liu* 旒 strings dangling in both front and back; the number of strings (12) shows that these were headdresses used for the most solemn of occasions. Similarly, the

¹ Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 ed., *Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji 敦煌莫高窟供養人題記* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), 219.

² Ning Qiang, “Imperial Portraiture as Symbol of Political Legitimacy: A New Study in the Portraits of Successive Emperors,” *Ars Orientalis*, 35 (2008): 97-128.

³ Ning Qiang, *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China: The Dunhuang Cave of the Zhai Family*.

robe (*yi* 衣) and lower garment (*shang* 裳) of the king of Khotan bear the auspicious symbols (*zhang* 章) of Chinese emperors seen in Figures 6.2 and 6.3. For tenth century viewers of the cave, what was depicted in this image was unambiguously a Chinese emperor.



Figure 6.2: Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou (543-578)
from *Lidai diwang tu* by Yan Liben (601-673), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Figure 6.3: Chinese emperor in a scene from *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* from cave 220 at Dunhuang

Yet there are two slight but notable departures. First, the number of dragons in the image of the Khotanese king is matched nowhere else. In both Yan's portrait and the image of the emperor in Cave 220 (Figures 6.2 and 6.3), the emperor's clothing is adorned with one dragon, while on the Khotanese king's clothing, one finds as many as six dragons of different sizes and postures on the top of his headdress, the sides of the headdress, and the robe. Second, unlike the other two images, where the Chinese emperors are barely wearing any jewelry, the image in cave 98 is lavishly decorated with jade: both the top of the headdress and the twelve *liu* strings are dotted with turquoise-colored jade pieces. He is even wearing jade rings on both hands. These two features make the image of the Khotanese king even more visually luxurious and prestigious

than the standard images of Chinese emperors, while at the same time showing local Khotan features, as Khotan was one of the main sources of jade in all of East Eurasia at the time.¹ Therefore, in the case of the donor image in cave 98, the Khotanese king was not merely a Chinese emperor; he was a visually exaggerated version of one.

Such exaggeration in adopting imperial trappings is also seen in the edicts issued by the Khotanese king, the best-preserved example of which is the manuscript Pelliot chinois 5538.² Despite its current library signature, this is not a Chinese manuscript, but a royal edict from the king of Khotan written mostly in Khotanese. However, at the end of the manuscript, we find a Chinese character *chi* 勅 large enough to occupy the entire paper (See Figure 6.4). This is immediately reminiscent of manuscripts written by Tang emperors, such as Stein 11287, an edict issued in 711 by the Ruizong emperor (r.684-690, 710-712) of the Tang (Figure 6.5).³ In this case, as in the Khotanese case, the character also occupies the entire width of the paper, symbolizing the all-encompassing scale of imperial authority. The character *chi* is traditionally the only part actually written by the emperor in an edict, thus serving as a type of personal signature. Unlike the fluent calligraphy of emperor Ruizong, the character supposedly penned by the Khotanese king looks clumsy and unpracticed. Interestingly, to the left of the large character *chi* by the Khotanese king, we find a miniature version of the same character. The similarity in directionality and stroke order between these two characters indicates that the smaller one might have been written first as a model on the basis of which the king drew the larger character. This

¹ Berthold Laufer, *Jade: A Study in Chinese Archaeology and Religion* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1912), 24. James Lin, “Khotan Jades in the Fitzwilliam Museum Collection,” *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* 2 (2007): 117–22.

² *Facang Dunhuang Xiyu wenxian*. Vol.34, 214-17.

³ *Yingcang Dunhuang wenxian* 英藏敦煌文獻, (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1995), vol.13, 199.

reconstructed process of writing seems to indicate that the Khotanese king who issued this edict was partially literate in Chinese.

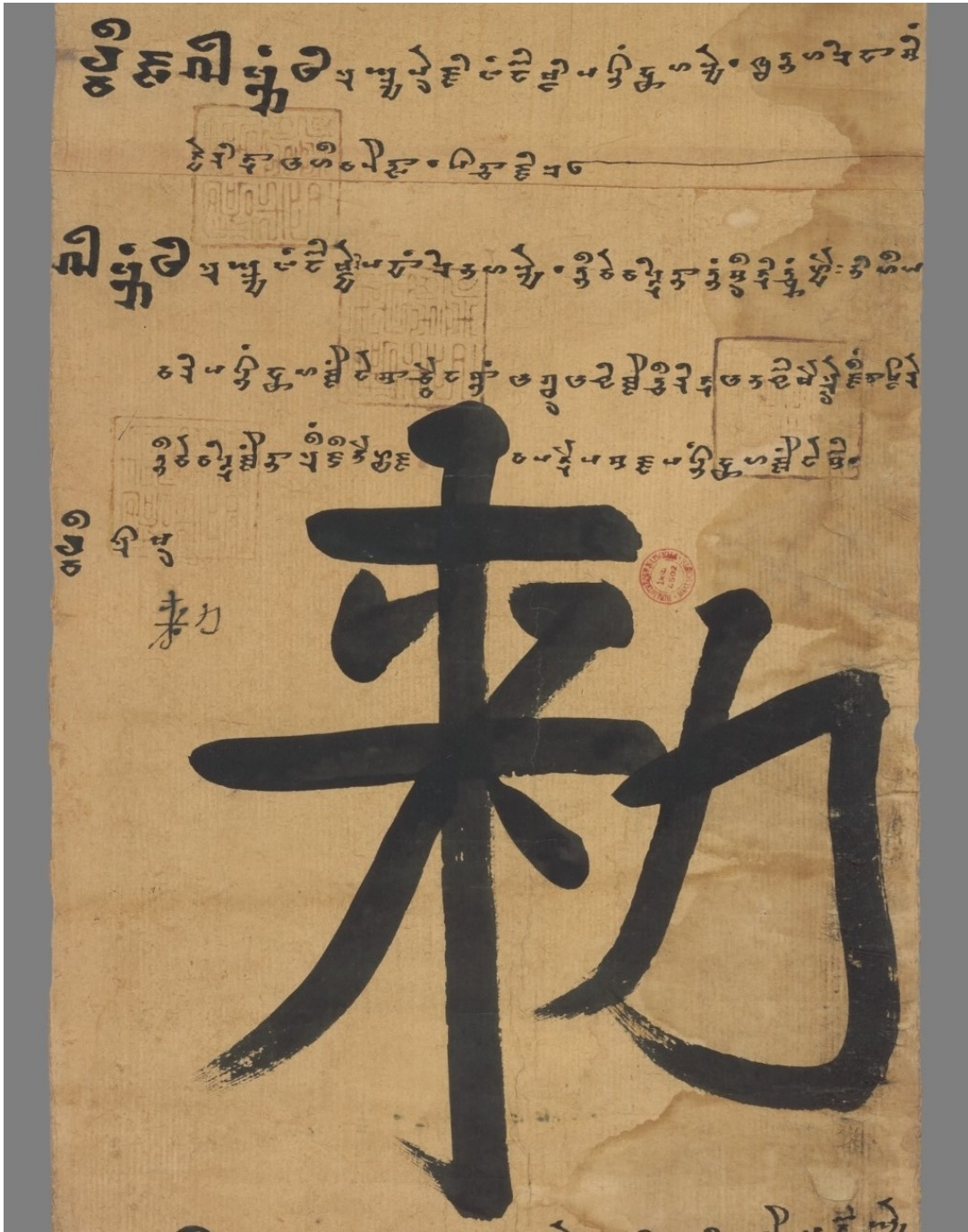


Figure 6.4: End of a Khotanese royal edict (Pelliot chinois 5538, Bibliothèque nationale de France, the smaller character *chi* 勅 is found to the upper left of the large *chi*)



Figure 6.5: End of the imperial edict from Ruizong emperor of the Tang
(Stein 11287, British Library)

Additionally, this Khotanese royal edict (Figure 6.4) exhibited curious features of indentation, spacing, and manipulation of character size similar to, yet not identical with, Chinese practices. The Tang dynasty “Code of Paragraphing and Spacing” (*ping-que shi* 平闕式) dictates that twenty terms including “Emperor 皇帝” and “Son of Heaven 天子” belonged to the *ping* (short for *pingchu* 平出) category, meaning that a new paragraph should begin whenever these terms were encountered in a text. Other less honorable yet still prestigious terms such as “edict 勅旨” and “court 朝廷” receive the treatment of *que*, a blank space placed in front of them.¹ Instead of

¹ *Tang Liudian* 唐六典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 113.

maintaining this differentiation between two different degrees of scribal honor, the Khotanese scribe only opted for the higher form of *ping* category and emphasized it further with large, bold letters usually not found in Chinese writings. The Khotanese words that received such scribal honor include *bā'ya* “ray” (meaning the Khotanese king), *gyasta* “divine,” *parau* “edict,” *rrūšta* “reign, kingdom,” and *rrvī* “court,” all related to the person of the king. Accompanying this feature, every line truncated by the necessity to start a new paragraph was finished with a long line to prevent forgery or unauthorized additions, which is also a common feature in contemporary Chinese official documents. Another way of preventing forgery in the royal edict is the use of seals. In P.5538 we find a seal that reads “Newly Cast Seal Upon (Royal) Edict (*shuzhao xinzhu zhiyin* 書詔新鑄之印).” Just like its Chinese counterparts, the seal was applied to multiple places in the edict, in particular on seams connecting two pieces of paper (thus the name “Seam Riding Seal” *qifeng yin* 騎縫印) as well as more intensively at the end of the edict.

While P.5538 is an exceptionally well-preserved specimen, other documents of similar nature do exist. Pelliot chinois 4091 is also a Khotanese edict from the Khotanese king and therefore has a very similar style to P.5538, with the appropriate words receiving similar honorary scribal treatment. But since only a fragment of it exists, whether a royal signature is attached at the end cannot be confirmed. More interesting is the Tibetan booklet Pelliot tibetain 44 that contains one of the earliest references to Padmasambhava in Tibetan literature (Figure 6.6). As Takeuchi Tsuguhito has noted, this booklet was made in part from a Khotanese official edict written in Tibetan.¹ The existence of a Khotanese royal edict written in Tibetan attests to further more to the status of Tibetan as a *lingua franca*. In fact, by putting together the seal, split among three pieces, we can reconstruct part of the manuscript. The large trace at the end of the

¹ Takeuchi Tsuguhito “Sociolinguistic Implications.”

reconstructed manuscript could be, as Takeuchi shrewdly observed, a part of the Chinese character *chi* found at the end of P.5538. Supporting this suggestion, he points out that a loose piece also in the booklet which originally belonged to this manuscript contains the Tibetan word *bka'*, meaning order/word/decreed and frequently used to describe the word of the Buddha. These documents are not as complete as P.5538, but show similar features in the adoption and exaggeration of Chinese imperial practices in the production of royal manuscripts.

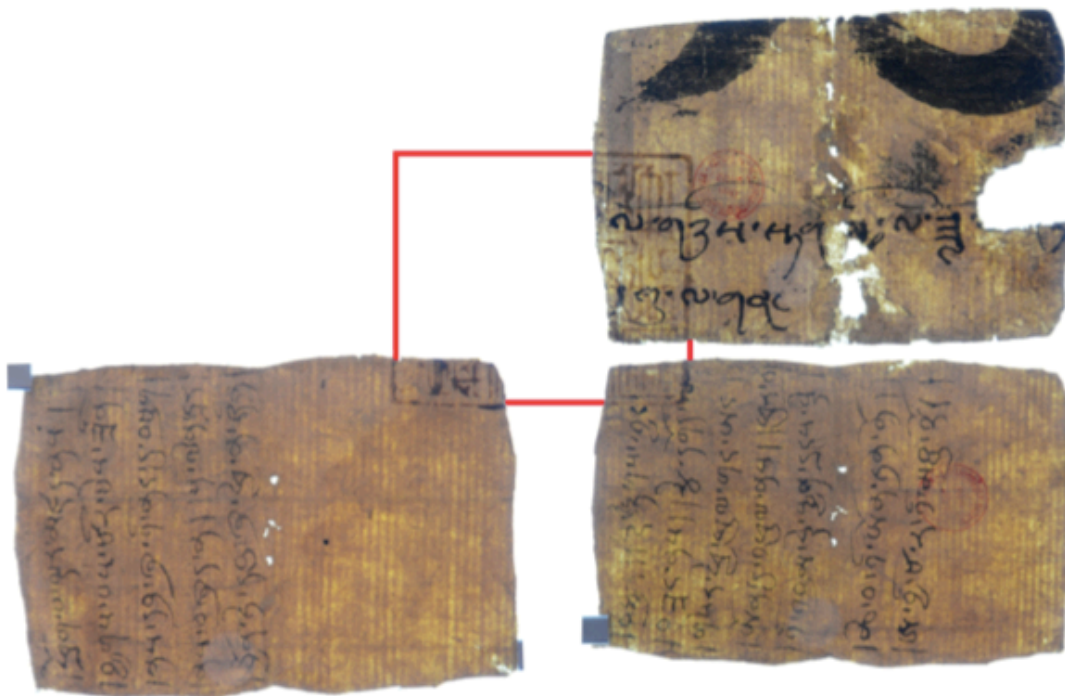


Figure 6.6: Reconstruction of a royal edict from Khotan written in Tibetan (Pelliot tibetain 44, Bibliothèque nationale de France, red square indicates the reconstructed shape of the official seal, photo by me)

Mural paintings of and edicts from the Khotanese king both illustrate a carefully curated image: the king of Khotan did not only assume the title of “Son of Heaven” or “king of kings of China,” he also embodied these titles in the day-to-day practices of his government. In this embodiment,

the Khotanese king did not merely copy physical and administrative images of the Chinese emperor. He retained the main contours of these images, but exaggerated them with local features of Khotanese production and Khotanese writing practice. As I shall show in the following section, such “exaggerated borrowing” was not only limited to depictions of the person of the king, but extended to other aspects of the Khotanese government.

6.4: Translating the Chinese Imperial Government

Although singularly elevated in his status, the Chinese emperor was never an isolated institution. The imperial family, governmental officials, and a set of ritual language and practices surrounded the person of the emperor to form the imperial government. Did the claim to be “king of kings of China” extend beyond the person of the king to the Khotanese government as a whole? In this section, I address this question by examining the administrative structure and language revealed in documents from the tenth century and argue that along with the new claim of the Khotanese kings, many characteristics of Chinese imperial government from the Late Tang through the “Five Dynasties” to the early Song eras were also transplanted and translated, often with similarly exaggerated features.

The most conspicuous aspect of the new identity of the Khotanese government is seen in its new way of dating. Previously in Khotan, years were counted as “x year in the reign of x king”.¹ This system was entirely abolished in the year 912, when a Chinese-system reign name *Tongqing* 同慶 was adopted. The timing of this measure is meaningful, as it occurred merely

¹ For instance, Or.6392/1 in Skjærvø, *Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in the British Library*, 3.

five years after the fall of the Tang dynasty. Around the same time, in the first decade after the fall of the Tang, several states in “China proper” also implemented their own reign names.¹ Apparently, the kingdom of Khotan, despite its non-Chinese linguistic and cultural traditions, acted no differently from many of the more properly “Chinese” heirs of the Tang dynasty. The use of Chinese reign names in Khotan lasted through the entire tenth century (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Khotanese reign names in the tenth century

Time	912-949	950-962	963-966	967-977	978-982
Kh.	thū-khī	thyina-hīña	thyaina-śiva	thyaina-tcūnä	cū-hīña
Ch.	同慶	*天興	天壽	*天尊	*中興

It is important to note that, even though these reign-names were all originally in Chinese and transcribed into Khotanese, only two (*Tongqing* and *Tianshou*) are actually attested in Chinese documents. The other three are found in Khotanese only, and their Chinese originals are phonetically reconstructed (hence the asterisk). Clearly, this Chinese method of dating was profoundly embedded in the Khotanese government and not merely its Chinese-speaking part. The continuous use of the Chinese reign names throughout the tenth century shows that the adoption of certain features of Chinese government was not the whim of one particular Khotanese king, but a consistent and long-term policy of the kingdom.

With the adoption of Chinese imperial dating methods, the Khotanese system of government also underwent a profound transformation. Prior to Khotanese independence in the late ninth century, this system was, much like that of the Khotanese kingship, an Indo-Iranian one. The most senior officials in the government were called *āmāca*, derived from Sanskrit

¹ One of the first states in the post-Tang world to adopt a new reign name was the kingdom of Shu in Sichuan, see Wang Hongjie, *Power and Politics in Tenth-Century China: The Former Shu Regime* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011).

āmātya, “minister.”¹ This title is a clear indication of the Indian origin of the Khotanese conceptualization of government. Other officials, according to their relative ranking of importance, include *ṣṣau*, *spāta*, *pharṣa*, *chaupam*, *auva-ḥaṃdasta*, etc.² Although the origin of some of these titles cannot be securely identified, they seem to have been produced indigenously in Central Asia.³ Even though Khotan was under Chinese or Tibetan rule for about two centuries in the eighth and ninth centuries, the introduction of Chinese or Tibetan elements into the Khotanese government was fairly limited during this time. The only significant Chinese title found in Khotanese documents is that of *tsīṣī*, from Chinese *cishi* 刺史 “prefect.”⁴ Other cases such as *cāṃṣṣī* (from Ch. *zhangshi* 長史) and *phaṃṣa-kvaṃṣa* (from Ch. *panguan* 判官) seem to occur only in Khotanese descriptions of Chinese officials working in Khotan.⁵ In the majority of the cases, indigenous Khotanese official titles were transcribed into Chinese when the tasks of these officials involved the writing of documents in Chinese. In Table 6.2, I show how these titles were transcribed in the documents discovered in Khotan that date to around the eighth century.

¹ Patrick Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India, King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India: Kautilya's Arthashastra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 40.

² Yoshida Yutaka 吉田豊, *Kōtan shutsudo 8-9 seiki no Kōtango sezoku monjo ni kansuru oboe gaki* コータン出土 8-9 世紀のコータン語世俗文書に関する覚え書き (Kobe: Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, 2006).

³ For instance, Yoshida Yutaka argues that *chaupam* might have been a remnant of an older Hepthalite institution. See Y. Yoshida, “Some Reflections about the Origin of *čamūk*”, Moriyasu Takao 森安孝夫 ed., *Chūō Ajia shutsudo bunbutsu ronsō* 中央アジア出土文物論叢 (Kyoto: Hōyū Shoten, 2004), 132-134.

⁴ H. W. Bailey, *Indo-Scythian Studies: being Khotanese Texts Volume IV* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 21-23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 32, 118.

Table 6.2: Khotanese official titles in the eighth century and their Chinese transcriptions

Kh.	āmāca	spāta	pharṣa	chaupam
Ch.	阿摩支	萨波	破沙	叱半

Therefore, in the eighth-century corpus of Chinese and Khotanese texts, Khotanese titles are generally transcribed into Chinese. This situation is reversed in the tenth century after the king of Khotan assumed his new identity as the “king of kings of China.” In Table 6.3, I list the major Chinese titles borrowed into Khotanese in the tenth century.

Table 6.3: Tenth century Khotanese officials’ titles from Chinese

Ch.	樞密	宰相	夫人	走馬
Kh.	chū-bīra	tcaisyāṃ	hūsai’na	tcauta-bava

The administrative center of the government, to which many Khotanese documents are addressed, is *chū-bīrā* < Ch. *shumi* (樞密), while the highest official in the Khotanese governmental system was *tcaisyāṃ* < Ch. *zaixiang* (宰相).¹ In the preface to a Khotanese *Jātakastava* written in the tenth century, the writer expresses the wish that copying this text will help protect various luminaries in the kingdom. The list of luminaries in the preface begins with the king, the queen, and the princes, who are followed by *zaixiang*, *āmāca*, and others of various status.² Evidently, *zaixiang* superseded *āmāca* to become the highest ranked official in Khotan. The match between the institution of *shumi* and the official of *zaixiang* is not, however, a perfect one from the Chinese perspective, because in the Chinese context, *zaixiang* was not the head of a *shumi*. The

¹ For *chū-bīra* (*shumi*), see P.2786; for *tcaisyāṃ* (*zaixiang*), see P.2786, P.5538.

² Mark Dresden, “Jātakastava or ‘Praise of the Buddha’s Former Births’”, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* NS. 45:5 (1955), 397-508.

proper institutional base of *zaixiang* such as *zhongshu-menxia* 中書門下 is never found in the Khotanese texts. Therefore, the simultaneous adoption of *shumi* and *zaixiang* as the highest office and official reveals an imperfect knowledge of the Chinese system practiced at the time. But an even greater departure is the number of *zaixiang* found in documents from Khotan. In the colophon to a painting of Buddhas by some Khotanese, we find a reference to as many as eight *zaixiang*.¹ This exceeds the Chinese practice of one to three *zaixiang* at any given time.² It is conceivable that, lacking the context of a long tradition of Chinese official institution, the Khotanese government merely opted for the most illustrious of the titles and conferred them much more liberally than their Chinese counterparts. In this case, the adoption of Chinese government institutions in the Khotanese context was also exaggerated.

The strange mixture of Chinese terms in the Khotanese administrative system also reveals the time and context of the borrowing. The *shumi* institution in the Chinese governmental system was of marginal importance until the late ninth century; it only became one of the central branches of government during the tenth century.³ Therefore, the use of *shumi* as the central institution of government in the case of Khotan shows that the borrowing did not take place during Tang rule in Khotan in the eighth century, but most likely after the fall of the Tang in the tenth century. Similarly, the term *zouma*, as far as we can tell, also signifies an early Song

¹ Jao Tsong-yi, *Peintures monochromes de Dunhuang (Dunhuang baihua): manuscrits reproduits en fac-similé, d'après les originaux inédits conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris* (Paris: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient: Dépositaire, A. Maisonneuve, 1978.), vol.1, 24-5; vol.2, 44-45.

² Zhuge Yibing 諸葛憶兵, *Songdai zaifu zhidu yanjiu* 宋代宰輔制度研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000), 15.

³ Billy Kee-long So 蘇基朗, “Wudai de shumiyuan” 五代的樞密院, *Tang Song fazhishi yanjiu* 唐宋法制史研究 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1996), 1-38. Li Quande 李全德, *Tang Song biangeqi shumiyuan yanjiu* 唐宋變革期樞密院研究 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2009).

official.¹ Such contemporary use of Chinese official titles indicates that the Khotanese project of translating Chinese imperial government was, like the use of Chinese reign names, a response to the fall of the Tang dynasty.

Aside from governmental officials, the most significant group of people in the Khotanese government was the king's family. This family consisted of the king's wives and children, as well as people with whom he had marriage alliances. Among these people, his principal wife had the most noble status. In cave 98, following the Khotanese king we find an image of Lady Cao (Figure 6.1) who, according to the accompanying inscription, was given the title "Heavenly Empress (*Tian Huanghou* 天皇后)."² Shorter than the Khotanese king in stature, the "empress" is adorned in a way that is no less magnificent. Her outfit agrees in broad terms with the established regulations for the outfit of empresses.³ In particular, her "phoenix headdress" (*fengguan* 鳳冠), extravagantly decorated with many pieces of jade, sets her apart from the many other female figures in the cave, all of whom wear the headdresses of "ordained women" (*mingfu* 命婦), clearly of inferior status. The depiction of the Khotanese queen in other caves, such as 61 and 454, follows that of cave 98 as well.⁴ Reference to the Khotanese queen can also be found in Chinese manuscripts such as Pelliot 4518, where she assumes the informal yet still honorary title of *hūsai'na* (< *furen* 夫人). These pictorial and textual sources represent the principal wife of the

¹ Wei Zhijiang 魏志江, "Songdai 'zouma chengshou' shezhi shijian kao" 宋代"走馬承受"設置時間考, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中國史研究, 48.4 (1990): 166.

² Dunhuang yanjiu yuan 敦煌研究院 ed., *Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji* 敦煌莫高窟供養人題記 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), 32.

³ Zhang Xiaogang 張小剛, Yang Xiaohua 楊曉華, and Guo Junye 郭俊葉, "Yutian Caohuanghou huaxiang jiqi shengping shiji kaoshu" 于闐曹皇后畫像及其生平事跡考述, *Xiyu yanjiu* 西域研究 (2015-1): 59-68.

⁴ *Cong Yutian dao Dunhuang*, 239-43.

Khotanese king not merely as queen, but as a Chinese empress.

Princesses of Khotan also wore the imperial phoenix headdress, but with a reduced number of flower hairpins (*huachai* 花釵), indicating a status lower than the empress. In cave 61, next to the image of the daughter of the Khotanese king we find the following inscription: “Lady Li, the Heavenly Princess, third daughter of the Heavenly Ordained Emperor (*huangdi*) of the Great Regime, the Great kingdom of Khotan.”¹ Similar to the empress’ status, the status of the princess depended on that of the emperor of Khotan. Comparatively speaking, few images of the Khotanese princes are still extant.² But fortunately there is more textual evidence for the princes. In Khotanese documents from the tenth century, these are known as *rrispura*, which literally means “king’s son.” But in the Chinese documents used by the Khotanese government, they are, without exception, known as *taizi* 太子 (heir apparent).³ Many *taizi* existed simultaneously, indicating that the term was not used in its original sense of “heir apparent,” and merely meant son of the king in the Khotanese context. Thus, the use of *taizi* exhibits numerical exaggeration similar to that seen in the use of *zaixiang*.

The offices mentioned above – *shumi*, *zaixiang*, prince, or princess – collectively point to the depth of the adoption of Chinese political institutions. Yet the understanding of their functions in the Chinese context seems to have been fairly limited. For instance, even though the central governmental institution was called *shumi*, the old Khotanese officials such as *spāta* continued to function. No officials like those in the Chinese office of the *shumi* (*shumi yuan*) were introduced into the Khotanese kingdom. Similarly, the use of *zaixiang*, an informal

¹ *Dunhuang mogaoku gongyangren tiji*, 22.

² The exception is that of cave 244, where the young Khotanese prince Congde was depicted as a small boy in a Chinese costume.

³ Zhang and Rong, *Yutian shi congkao*.

appellation rather than a formal official title, also betrays a rather superficial grasp of the Chinese official system. Therefore, while the adoption of Chinese imperial practices in the case of Khotanese kings and queens was rather profound and affected many aspects of these institutions, other Chinese offices were adopted in name, but rarely in substance.

Another feature in the use of Chinese offices in the Khotanese context is in line with the imperial prestige accorded the Khotanese king, however. As mentioned in the previous section, the images and writings of the kings of Khotan imitated those of the Chinese emperor in a rather exaggerated fashion. Such exaggeration is also visible in the other aspects of Khotanese government discussed in this section. The titles of *zaixiang* and *taizi*, for instance, were used to designate people that, in the Chinese context, would not be worthy of such status. Therefore, compared to other contemporaries claiming Chinese imperial prestige, the lack of tradition and context paradoxically enabled the king and government of Khotan to use these elevated Chinese titles in a very liberal manner and to appear even more “imperial” than a Tang or Song emperor.

The kingdom of Khotan did not exist in a vacuum; rather, it was one player in the international network of kingdoms in East Eurasia in the post-imperial age (for the discussion of diplomatic relations among these kingdoms, see Chapter 2). The grandeur with which Tang and post-Tang institutions were translated into the Khotanese government did not go unnoticed, and in the next section, I shall discuss the implications of these new political claims by the kingdom of Khotan and the ways in which they were perceived by Khotan’s neighbors.

6.5: “King of Kings of China” in East Eurasia

In a tightly knit network of diplomacy, Khotan had connections with the self-styled Tang

heirs in Central China east of the Hexi region and with the smaller independent or semi-independent states to the west of China, as well as with the Turkic Kharakhanid kingdom in Central Asia. Our extant sources, scanty as they are, reveal a surprising amount about the reception in East Eurasia of the new hybrid state ideology in the kingdom of Khotan. In this section, I shall examine four of Khotan's neighbors and discuss their reactions to the new "kings of kings of China" in Khotan.

6.5.1: The "Five Dynasties" and the Song Dynasty

If we believe that Khotan claimed, at least at some point, to be "China," it would of course be interesting to examine if and how the supposedly "real" China, or the governments in "China proper," reacted to this claim. It is worth noting that information about their reaction comes from official histories composed during the Song dynasty. As recent studies by Naomi Standen and Johannes Kurz have shown, the writing of histories in the early Song, which was still struggling with its own identity in relation to the great empires such as the Han and the Tang, was highly political and sensitive to its own legitimacy.¹ Therefore, when references to Khotan enter the Song records, they are usually framed in a way that conforms to pre-existing patterns of imperial domination. For instance, in the year 971, according to the Song record, a monk from Khotan named Jixiang 吉祥 visited the Song court. He delivered a message from the king of Khotan, stating, "[Khotan] defeated the Kharakhanid state in Shule (Kashgar) and

¹ Johannes L. Kurz, *Das Kompilationsprojekt Song Taizongs (reg. 976-997)*, Schweizer asiatische Studien. Monographien; Bd. 45 (Bern; New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Johannes L. Kurz, "The Consolidation of Official Historiography during the Early Northern Song Dynasty," *Journal of Asian History* 46, no. 1 (2012): 13–35. Naomi Standen, 'Integration and Separation: the Framing of the Liao Dynasty (907-1125) in Chinese Sources', *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 24:2 (2011): 147-98.

acquired a dancing elephant, which Khotan intends to offer as tribute.”¹ Incidentally, the Khotanese royal edict P.5538, written in 970 (shown above in Figure 6.4), mentions the capture of an elephant from the Kharakhanid state. Given the rarity of elephants in the region and the close correspondence of time and circumstances, it is fairly certain that these two texts are referring to the same event, but while in P.5538 the capture of the elephant is mentioned as a part of the royal achievement of the Khotanese king who signed the edict in the manner of a Chinese emperor, the very same elephant in the Song record, as “tribute,” symbolizes a different kind of relationship: one between the emperor (the Song) and the vassal (Khotan).

Where did the transition from the king of kings of China to a vassal kingdom occur between these two records? Did the Khotanese monk/envoy present the king of Khotan as a vassal, or did the Song record depict him as such? Given our extant sources, the answer to these questions might be impossible to find. What we do know is that, even in the heavily edited Song texts, that Khotan claimed some degree of “Chineseness” does come through. In the official *Song History*, it is said that:

During the Tianfu era of the (Later) Jin Dynasty, its king Li Shengtian claimed himself to be a descendant of Tang and offered tribute.

晉天福中，其王李聖天自稱唐之宗屬，遣使來貢。²

The Song record is careful in explicitly pointing out that being of Tang imperial descent was a claim made by the Khotanese king himself and not necessarily factual. The obvious contradiction between somebody who claimed Tang imperial descent and the status of a tribute-paying vassal

¹ Tuotuo, *Songshi*, 490, 14107.

² *Ibid.*, 14106.

king was conveniently ignored. In this manner, the Song record mirrors that of the Persian geography, which relates that the king of Khotan “*calls himself* (emphasis mine) Lord of the Turks and Tibetans.”¹ The suspicion in traditional centers of power about the king of Khotan’s new claims is apparent in both cases.

The clearest indication of the “Chineseness” of the king and kingdom of Khotan found in records produced in China proper is the account of Gao Juihui cited at the beginning of the chapter. In the context of my discussion of the claims and images of the Khotanese king in the previous sections, Gao’s record that “[Li] Shengtian’s clothes and hats were like those of China” should make more sense. Additionally, the names of the Khotanese king’s palaces recorded by him are also worthy of notice. The “Mansion of Seven Phoenixes” reminds one of the “Gate of Crimson Phoenix 丹鳳門,” the southern and main gate of the Daming Palace (大明宮) in the Tang capital of Chang’an, where the most solemn of royal ceremonies, such as enthronements, were held. The name of the palace, “Golden Ordained Palace (金冊殿),” deserves some explanation. The term “ordained” 冊 indicates that the dweller in the palace was ordained by heaven; in a similar fashion, the king was also known as “Heaven ordained Emperor” (天冊皇帝) in the inscription of the Khotanese princess cited above. But what does “golden” mean? A possible explanation may be found in the five-element theory and the idea of transmission of the Mandate of Heaven.² According to this theory, the Tang dynasty corresponded to the virtue of Earth (*tude* 土德), and whatever state succeeded the Tang should therefore correspond to the

¹ *Hudūd Al-‘Ālam*, 86.

² The standard treatment of this subject is Gu Jiegang 顧頌剛, “Wude zhongshishuo xia de zhengzhi he lishi” 五德終始說下的政治與歷史, *Gushi bian*, vol.5 (Shanghai guji chubanshe reprint, 1982), 404-617. See also Hok-lam Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China: Discussions under the Jurchen-Chin Dynasty (1115~1234)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 1984.

virtue of Metal (*jinde* 金德). The claim to be corresponding to “gold” can be found in other self-styled Tang heirs in the tenth century, such as Wang Jian 王建, the ruler of Sichuan, Liu Gong 劉龔, the ruler of Southern Han in Guangdong and even Zhang Chengfeng 張承奉, the emperor of the short-lived “Golden Mountain Kingdom of Western Han” at Dunhuang. It is therefore also significant that the kingdom of Khotan is regularly known as the “Golden land” in tenth-century Khotanese sources.

These scattered references indicate that, although the “five dynasties” and the Song dynasty in China proper considered themselves the rightful heirs of the Tang and the legitimate imperial dynasty of China, the claims made by the king of Khotan nonetheless found subtle expression in the heavily edited historical records. Such expression became much less subtle when we move our gaze westward out of China proper.

6.5.2: Shuofang (Ordos)

Shuofang, corresponding to the Ordos region of modern Ningxia and Inner Mongolia, was under the rule of local warlords during the tenth century. Few records are preserved about this region. The reason we know something regarding the attitude of Shuofang local rulers to Khotan is that two Khotanese letters sent by a Shuofang official named Hva Pa-kyau to Khotan were discovered at Dunhuang. The beginning of one of the letters (P.2958) reads:

To the great king of the land of China over Ratna-janapada, ruling in Jambudvīpa, famous among the four dvīpas (continents). There so I make a report, the humble *pravrajita* (mendicant) the prince of Śvahnām (Shuofang), Hva Pa-kyau.¹

¹ *Facang Dunhuang Xiyu wenxian*, vol.20, 248.

tcarrvā dvīpvā nama tsa-laka jabvī dvīpa baida rāuysanauda ranījai janavai vīra
maistyai caiga rauda vara tta haṣḍa yanai ṅāśa ppravai

As noted above, Ratna-janapada (land of jade/jewel) is an alternative name for Khotan. Harold Bailey, who was the first scholar to work on this document, saw the phrase “the great king of the land of China over Ratna-janapada” as problematic and suggested that here for “China”, one should just read it as meaning “Khotan.” After our discussion above, it is clear that the Khotanese king did claim to be the emperor of China. Therefore, there is no need for an emendation, and it is understandable why this particular wording was used. Indeed, it shows that even in Shuofang, a state with which Khotan shared no border, the notion of the king of Khotan as “great king of China” was accepted at least in certain contexts.

6.5.3: Dunhuang (Shazhou)

The most direct and best documented reaction to the new claims of Khotan is that of Dunhuang. The oasis state of Dunhuang experienced a history process from imperial domination to independence very similar to the kingdom of Khotan’s. It was under Tang, then Tibetan rule until the year 848, when Zhang Yichao 張議潮 led the state of Dunhuang to virtual independence. Despite the ebb and flow of its influence, Dunhuang functioned as an independent state until the Tangut conquest in 1036. In the tenth century, Dunhuang became Khotan’s closest political ally, and the existence of Khotanese images and texts in the Dunhuang caves is testimony to this relationship, as we have seen. Among the handful of letters from the lords of Dunhuang to the kings of Khotan preserved in the “library cave,” the following (P.4065) is

contemporary with – and possibly a direct response to – the edict of P.5538 cited above.¹

Because of its considerable interest, it is quoted in extenso here:

Humbly I have received the specifically issued edict from the Emperor together with gifts. I cannot bear the extremity of my gratitude. Also, I have heard that the Western Prince led the Dashi (Tajik) army to invade the Great State ... Even the Uyghur, Qarluq and other Barbarian (Tibetan) tribes will not be able to fight him. Humbly I know that Your Highness the Emperor is multiplied (倍 or cultivated 培) and assisted by Heaven, and is endowed with great virtue and supported by deities. Why else would you receive the submission of the myriad multitude of the populace? Using the teachings of Zhang Liang, plotting the schemes of Han Xin, you did not allow (him) in your realm. The head of the rebels conducted his plan like a moth flying into fire, (he) became ashes immediately. ... The fame as such has spread around the world. Previously the lord of Han dynasty [accomplished] this achievement. What is happening now is very similar. Moreover, generations of rulers could not reach Your Highness the Emperor. Not only did the Karakhanids (Dashi of the Black Clothes) fear the Emperor, [everyone] up to the Tang kingdom feared your power, too. ... I am certain that the state founded by the Emperor will last for tens of thousands of years...

伏蒙 皇帝陛下特降宸翰，兼惠信物，不任感銘之至。兼聞西太子領大石兵馬來侵大國……直回鶻、葛祿及諸蕃部族，計應當敵他不得。竊知皇帝陛下，天倍（培）天補（輔），聖得（德）神扶，若不如斯，豈得萬民順化？作張良計較，設韓信機謀，不放管界之中，逆頭便施作略。如蛾撲火，尋即灰燼，……如此聲名，傳揚（揚）天下。昔時漢主□□功業，今日恰同。更有代代君王，趁皇帝不及，非論黑衣大石怕怯皇威，直至唐國以來尚懼勢力。……必料皇帝基業，萬歲千秋
……²

This letter is distinct from other letters from Dunhuang to Khotan because of not only its length and relative completeness, but also its portrayal of Khotan and Khotan's relation with Dunhuang in the context of the East-Eurasian politics of the time. In a manner consistent with the Khotanese texts discussed above, the king of Khotan is addressed in this letter by the lord of

¹ It is not the original document, which presumably would have been sent out to Khotan, but a copy by a student who used the text as a model for writing.

² *Facang Dunhuang Xiyu wenxian* vol.31, 69.

Dunhuang as *huangdi* (emperor). He is compared to Liu Bang 劉邦 the Gaozu emperor (256-195 BCE), the founder of the Han dynasty; his military victory over the Kharakhanids is extolled as the result of assistance from Khotanese officials comparable to the legendary Zhang Liang 張良 and Han Xin 韓信, both instrumental figures in the founding of the Han dynasty. As mentioned above, in an official seal from Khotan, the king was addressed as the “Han Son of Heaven of great Khotan 大于闐漢天子.” The term “han” in the seal could be read both as the general concept of “Chinese” or the historical Han dynasty. The latter reading, it seems, finds support in abundant references to the Han dynasty in the letter cited above. However, the most startling part of this letter is, in my opinion, its treatment of the Tang. It states, “[everyone] up to the Tang kingdom feared your power too.” Here, the term *Tangguo* “Tang kingdom” refers to the traditionally Chinese regime in China proper, as the Tang dynasty no longer existed when the letter was written. The use of the category of *guo* (kingdom) demoted the status of the Tang to that of a vassal state. The Chinese world order – with the emperor residing in the Central Plain and vassal kingdoms surrounding its borderlands – is thus turned on its head.

Such an expression of the new regional political hierarchy is also seen elsewhere among the correspondence between Dunhuang and Khotan. P. 3016 verso contains a petition by Suo Ziquan 索子全, a Dunhuang envoy in charge of the return gift to Khotan. In this petition to Khotanese officials, Suo Ziquan described his trip in the following terms:

On the seventh day of the seventh month, I left my circuit (*dao* 道, referring to Dunhuang). After riding fast for over a month, I arrived at the court (*chaoting* 朝庭). On the 22nd day of the eighth month, the decree (*zhi* 旨) was issued that there will be a reception and (I) was ordered to attend the royal presence (*chaojian* 朝見). The emperor (*huangdi* 皇帝) deigned to see me (*xing* 幸) at the summer palace. Waving my sleeves, (I) proclaimed our vassal status (*chengchen* 稱臣).

爰於柒月柒日，告辭本道，星馳朔餘，達於朝庭。捌月貳拾貳日，宣旨迎接，便令朝見。皇帝幸於暑宮，儻袖稱臣。¹

Whereas the event described in the petition, a meeting between the Khotanese “emperor” and the Dunhuang envoy, was fairly simple, the language used is anything but. As I have marked in the translation, the Dunhuang envoy mobilized a full array of royal terminology in his dealings with the Khotanese. A few sentences later in this petition, the reign of the Khotanese emperor was said to have surpassed not only the Golden Age of the Tang (*kaitian weiyou* 開天未有: not seen in the *Kaiyuan* and *Tianbao* reigns), but even the primordial eras of sage rule under the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors (*chao san mai wu* 超三邁五, literally “surpassing the three [sovereigns] and the five [emperors]”).

This status of the king of Khotan is also evident in texts written in Tibetan. Here I cite the opening of two letters. The first letter is from the lord of Dunhuang (known as Shazhou in these letters) to the king of Khotan, the second letter vice versa.

“A message spoken by the king of Shazhou, Cao Shangshu to the presence of the Shengshen (Holy and Heavenly) Tianzi (Son of Heaven) of Khotan.”²

[yu-then-gyi she-zhin then-[ce] /-'i zha-snga-na/ sha-chu'i dbangs-po jo shang-shi-gyis mchi[d] gsol-ba

“The Older Brother, Son of Heaven, King of Khotan informed the Younger Brother, Linggong (of Shazhuo)”³

¹ *Facang Dunhuang Xiyu wenxian*, vol.21, 61-63.

² Uray G., “New Contributions to Tibetan Documents from the post-Tibetan Tun-huang.”

³ *Ibid.*

gchen-po lha-sras li-rjes...gchung le-kong-la gsol-pa['] gyis...

In the Tibetan context, the Khotanese kings similarly assumed the title “Son of Heaven,” a common epithet for king in the Chinese and Steppe world. This term was spelled out in Tibetan in two different ways: 1. transcription, *then-ce* (from Ch. *tianzi*), 2. translation: lha-sras. It is important to notice that, in the first letter, the transcription of the Chinese word was used, whereas in the second, the Chinese concept was translated into Tibetan. This distinction is not unexpected, because the first letter was written by the Chinese lord of Dunhuang. These letters corroborate my observations on the letters written in Chinese and indicate that, at least at Dunhuang, the Khotanese king’s status as the emperor or “king of kings” of China was accepted, and even celebrated.

6.5.4: The Islamic World:

Ever since the beginning of the study of early Islamic Central Asia, considerable attention has been paid to the use of the name for “China”. V. V. Barthold, recognizing a general confusion between “China” and “Khotan”, explained it as a scribal error.¹ Omeljan Pritsak also remarked that “in the Islamic geographical literature Khotan is always recorded as *Sin*, that is, China.”² Wheeler Thackston, in his translation of Rašīd-al-Dīn Faḍl-Allāh’s *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh*, noted that: “The Persian *Chin*, essentially the same word as our China, has several varying and distinct meanings. When coupled with other large geographical areas of the world, as here

¹ Preface to *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam* translated and explained by V. Minorsky (London: Luzac & co. 1937), 24.

² Omeljan Pritsak, “Von den Karluk zu den Karachaniden,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 26 (1951): 295, footnote 3.

(meaning in *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh*), it normally designates Chinese Turkistan, Khotan, etc.”¹ Monika Gronke had already hinted at the origin of this confusion when she pointed out that “The title *malik al-Mašriq wa'l-Sīn* (King of the East and China) was first adopted by the Qarakhanid ruler Yusuf Qadir Khan after he had conquered and Islamized Khotan in the Tarim basin shortly after 1000.”² Rian Thum further clarified that “[t]he conquest of Khotan is commemorated on the coinage of Yusuf Qadir Khan, who expanded his titles in 1016-7 to include ‘*malik al-mashriq wa al-Sin*’ (King of the East and China) ‘The East’ referred to Ferghana and Kashgaria. ‘China’ referred to Khotan.”³

How did this confusion of Khotan and China (more specifically, the Persian *chin*) come about? Recently, Michal Biran revisited this old problem in her study of Karakhitay institutions. She identified the adoption of the title “King of the East and China” by Yusuf Qadir Khan as one of the most important sources of the later confusion regarding the idea of China and explained that the identification of “China” as somewhere in Turkestan was a “memory of Chinese occasional sovereignty in pre-Mongol Muslim Central Asia”, tracing it back to as far as the Battle of Talas in 751.⁴ The reason she opted for this explanation based on an event in the distant past is presumably that the Chinese essentially left Central Asia in the decades after the battle of Talas, but, this does not explain why Khotan, and not the entirety of Central Asia, was

¹ Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb, *Rashiduddin Fazlullah’s Jami‘u’t-Tawarikh = Compendium of Chronicles*, Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures; 45 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1998) 24.

² Monika Gronke, “The Arabic Yārkand Documents,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49.3 (1986): 484.

³ Rian Richard Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2010), 23.

⁴ Michal Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 99.

specifically associated with the idea of “China”.

In light of the discussion above, one might look for a more contemporary solution for the Khotan-China confusion. As we have discussed, Khotan was under threat from the Karakhanids during the tenth century and was eventually conquered by them in the early eleventh century. Therefore, the Karakhanids had intimate relations with Khotan. If Khotan itself and its many neighbors accepted that it could be regarded as *being* China, then it became only natural for Yusuf Qadir Khan to add the title of “king of China” to his existing titles immediately after the conquest of Khotan. This indicates that the shift of political ideology in Khotan had far-reaching consequences, contributing to a confused picture of what “China” was in Islamic writings.

6.6: Conclusion: Imagining Political “China”

This case of Khotanese adoption of the political apparatus of Chineseness might seem unique, but it becomes easier to understand when it is placed in the post-imperial context of East-Eurasian history. Even at the end of its three centuries of rule, the much-enfeebled Tang dynasty remained a widely recognized, if not always honored, center of the political world of East Eurasia. Therefore, various political figures in the early tenth century were confronted for the first time in 300 years with a world without the Tang. With the disappearance of a recognized Chinese imperial order, even basic concepts such as “China” and “emperor/son of heaven” lost their semantic stability. For instance, Liu Yan (889-942), the emperor of the Southern Han dynasty (917-971), famously asked: “now that the Central Plain (*zhongyuan* 中原) is chaotic,

who can claim to be the Son of Heaven?”¹ Such instability provided the king of Khotan and many of his contemporaries with the opportunity to adopt these prestigious, but previously unavailable ideas. A similar case occurred in Korea in 904, when Gung-ye (弓裔 r.901-918) “changed the state-name to Majin (摩震 < 摩訶震旦 < Skt. *Mahācīnasthāna* meaning “great China-land”) and began using the reign-name Wutai 武泰, the first use of an independent reign-name since 650.² Although this state name was later changed and Gung-ye’s state itself was taken in 918 by Wong kon (Taejo Wang Geon), who founded the Goryeo dynasty, the resemblance to the political culture in Khotan is still revealing. It was not a coincidence that these two states on the borders of the former Tang empire decided to claim to be “China” (but not “Zhongguo” or “Tang”) while the Tang was disintegrating. These claims were conceivable because the very ideas of what constituted “China” and “Chineseness” became uncertain.

The case of the Khotanese post-Tang state ideology differed from those of other successor states in China proper in that it was transdynastic or non-dynastic. Most of the states in the “Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms” period recycled historical dynastic names as the names of their new states. The names of the two longest unified dynasties, the Han and the Tang, were particularly popular. The former was used by three states including the Southern Han (917-971), Later Han (947-951), and Northern Han (951-979), whereas the latter was used by the Later Tang (923-936) and Southern Tang (937-975). In all of these states, the appropriate royal surnames – Liu for the “Han” dynasties and Li for the “Tang” dynasties – were used. In the case of Khotan, however, traces of claims to be both the Han and the Tang can be found. The former

¹ 今中國紛紛，孰為天子？ *Zizhi tongjian*, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 8799.

² Kim Pu-sik 金富軾, *Samguk sagi* 三國史記, (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1998) 326. See also Richard D. McBride II, “Why did Kungye claim to be the Buddha Maitreya? The Maitreya cult and royal power in the Silla-Koryō transition,” *Journal of Inner and East Asian Studies* 2.1 (2004): 35-62.

includes the use of the term “Han son of heaven” in the official seal as well as the comparison of the king of Khotan to Gaozu emperor of the Han in the letter from Dunhuang; the latter includes the use of the Tang royal surname Li. These features cannot all be accommodated in any strictly dynastic understanding of the Chinese political legacy. Instead, I argue that such a transdynastic or non-dynastic imagination of China was in line with the use of the term *cimгаа*- (rather than transcribing “Han” or “Tang”) in official Khotanese documents. The imaginations of “China” in Khotan were not limited to any specific dynastic restrictions.

The Khotanese political imagination as “China” was also unique because it was limited to only a few areas, including imperial titles, royal images, and edicts, as well as key titles of officials in the Khotanese government. What was left out in the transformation of the Khotanese state is equally interesting. Despite the claim of being “China,” the Khotanese language and writing were preserved, as were many Khotanese official titles. The Khotanese kings, although adopting Chinese names in the Chinese context, such as in encounters with envoys from China proper, kept using their Khotanese names when writing in Khotanese.¹ More importantly, little evidence can be found of Chinese texts and concepts being translated into Khotanese. In this sense, the kingdom of Khotan differed from the states of Khitan and Xixia, both also contenders for the Tang political legacy, where a large number of Chinese classics were translated and studied. For the Khotanese understanding of “Chineseness,” the headdress of the emperor was more important than the teachings of Confucius.

This understanding of “China” might be compared to the heir of the “Romans” after the fall of the Roman Empire.² In both cases, to assume the identity of a lost imperial power meant

¹ See Xin Wen, “What’s in a Surname? Central Asian Participation in the Culture of Naming in Medieval China,” *Tang Studies* 34 (2016): 73-98.

² Conant, *Staying Roman*.

the assumption of a particular set of political language and governmental apparatus, rather than of any ethnic or cultural claims. The difference is that with the limited but very real restoration of the Tang Empire by the Northern Song (960-1127), concepts like “China” and “emperor” experienced only a brief period of turbulence. The dominance of the massive number of historical works from the Song – itself a contender for the Tang political legacy – obscured this era’s ideological fragmentation through historiographical submission and exclusion.¹ One after another, from Sichuan to Guangdong, from Korea to Khotan, the claims to being “emperor” and/or “China” were dropped or forgotten, leaving the Khitan as the only tangible contender for the imperial legacy. The tenth-century world of many “Sons of Heaven” gave way to the eleventh-century world of “Two Sons of Heaven.”² Unlike the concept of “Rome,” which eventually, with the fall of the Roman empire, lost much of its actual geographic association, because of the historical enterprise under the Song, “China” remained in China. The story of tenth-century Khotan, however, takes us back into the brief and unfamiliar moment when the political “China” did not have to reside in the cultural “China,” but was imaginable in Central Asia in an Indo-Iranian cultural context. While the other heirs of the Tang in China proper could only claim to be *huangdi* of the Han or the Tang dynasties, the king of Khotan could, in a unique fashion, claim to be “king of kings of China.”

Such unique grafting of Chinese kingship onto an Indo-Iranian idea of kingship in Central Asia also provides new insights into our understanding of pre-modern connections in the

¹ Johannes L. Kurz, “The Invention of a ‘Faction’ in Song historical writings on the Southern Tang.” *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 28 (1998) 1-35; Richard L. Davis, “Images of the South in Ouyang Xiu’s Historical Records of the Five Dynasties.” In *Shixue yu wenxian* 史學與文獻, edited by Dongwu daxue lishixi 東吳大學歷史系, vol.2 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1998), 97–157.

² Jing-shen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven: Studies in Sung-Liao Relations* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988).

broader Eurasian world. A recent volume of *The Cambridge World History* that deals with the world between 500 and 1500 sees courtly cultures as important forms of “Eurasian commonalities.” But these medieval Eurasian courts – according to the authors – seem to cluster into two groups:¹

“The Chinese court formed the model for Eastern courts such as the Japanese, while the Byzantine, which had absorbed aspects of Persian courts before the Islamic conquest as had those of India, provided a model for Western Christian and Islamic courts, which in turn influenced each other.”

In this chapter, I have investigated a case in which, as a result of the frequent exchanges of diplomatic personnel and material goods on the Silk Road among states of East Eurasia in the tenth century, a “Eurasian continuum” of kingly imagination and state ideology transcended such east-west divides and integrated elements of kingship from East Asian, Indian, and Near Eastern traditions. This case signifies the existence of a unique and truly Eurasian cultural complex at the courts on the Silk Road. Only within the context of such Eurasian integration of state ideologies was the claim to be “king of kings of China” conceivable.

¹ Patrick Geary et al. “Courtly Cultures: Western Europe, Byzantium, the Islamic world, India, China, and Japan,” in Benjamin Z. Kedar and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks ed., *The Cambridge World History, Volume 5: Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conflict, 500CE – 1500CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2015, 201.

Conclusion

How connected was the Eurasian world in the centuries prior to Marco Polo (1254-1324) and the Mongol empires (1206-1368)? If many of these connections were made through the trans-Eurasian overland network of the Silk Road, who or what motivated these connections? What was the nature of these connections? How did these connections on the Silk Road materialize in the activities of both the travelers and the people they met on the road? These are some of the broad issues that inspired this dissertation, which begins to address them by investigating trans-Eurasian connections from the vantage point of Dunhuang in the ninth and tenth centuries. In this dissertation, I analyze the informational and diplomatic prerequisites of successful travel, the practices of and the discourse about experiences of travel across different linguistic traditions, and the economic and ideological implications these traveling activities had on places on the Silk Road. These investigations contribute to our understanding of the unique place the ancient and medieval Eurasian land-routes – the Silk Road – had in global history.

As a conclusion, I shall summarize my main findings regarding some of the key units of analysis concerning the history of the Silk Road – from people and goods to road and state. These findings, when placed together, point to a picture of the Silk Road around Dunhuang in the ninth and tenth centuries that is much less commercial than we usually assume. Because most current works on the Silk Road deal with commerce and the role it played in shaping the pre-modern connections on the Eurasian continent, I believe the my elucidation of the non-commercial aspects of the traveling activities on the Silk Road around Dunhuang in the ninth and tenth centuries will usefully complicate

the present consensus by showing how the Silk Road could function without networks of merchants. It is certainly still an open question as to how much the picture I draw on the basis of Dunhuang manuscripts can be applied to other eras and places on the Silk Road. This question can only be answered with similar case-studies on other locations with other collections of materials I discussed in the “Introduction” as well as comparative studies of multiple places. The case of Dunhuang and the ways trans-regional connections were made on the Silk Road around Dunhuang would at least serve as a useful reference point for comparative studies that will reach a more nuanced reading of the nature of the pre-modern connections on the Silk Road.

1. People

This dissertation questions our conventional view about the people on the Silk Road in three ways. First, the records from 9th- and 10th-century East Eurasia (Dunhuang manuscripts and transmitted Chinese texts from the Song) show that the majority of trans-regional travelers on the Silk Road were either monks or envoys. There is almost no record of merchants traveling trans-regionally in the sources I have examined. In many cases, people with monastic names served as envoys as well. The network of these travelers was therefore not a commercial one, but one organized either by the state or by monasteries. I show that these non-commercial institutions were just as capable as the commercial institutions such as the Sogdian diasporic network in organizing the long-distance connections on the Silk Road.

Second, I also show that when people were traveling, identities such as monk, merchant, and envoy, were sometimes overshadowed by the universalizing identity of “guest” that was more pertinent for the life on the road. Even when documents clearly describe commercial, religious, and diplomatic activities on the road, the travelers themselves were often not directly recorded as merchants, monks, or envoys. Instead, the most commonly used term was “guest.” The social principle according to which a guest interacted with the host was not commercial competition but reciprocal hospitality. Within this reciprocal relation, the host was supposed to welcome and accommodate the guest and offer gifts, and the guest was supposed to give counter-gifts and to praise the good name of the host. In this process, the relationship between the guest and the host was reaffirmed or renegotiated. The rituals involved in traveling, such as writing letters of introduction and thank-you notes, can only be understood in the context of guest/host reciprocity.

The analysis of the “guests” led to groups of travelers that have practically been ignored by most works on the Silk Road. If guests were legitimate travelers, then their counterparts were illegitimate travelers. These illegitimate travelers were often regarded as “bandits.” The relation between guests and bandits is most clearly illustrated in the Chinese axiom cited in Ch.4: “When a bandit comes, he should be beaten; when a guest comes, he should be looked after.” “Bandits” were often just travelers who did not observe the principle of guest/host reciprocity sponsored by the state and were therefore considered generally illicit and often dangerous. But just as often, as in the case of Lady Yin and the ungrateful monk who spread her husband’s “bad name,” illegitimate travelers also include those who could not properly adhere to guest/host reciprocity.

2. Goods

Regarding goods that traveled on the Silk Road, this dissertation also offers three main findings that depart from conventional understanding. First, I show that, just as the majority of travelers recorded in Dunhuang manuscripts were not merchants, the majority of recorded goods we see in these manuscripts were gifts and not commodities. Like goods in commercial exchanges, these gifts were also exchanged competitively, but in a reversed manner. Each party of the exchange tried to “out-gift” the other party in order to confirm or establish a superior status. The party whose status was mutually recognized as higher – as in often the case for the Chinese emperors of the Tang or the Song – still needed to offer superior gifts. In return, the party with the lower status would often praise the “good name” and generosity of the other party. In this way, the status of both parties was reaffirmed and re-created.

But the central importance of gifts in trans-regional exchange does not exclude the role of commodities. As my second main finding, I show that the trans-regional sphere of the gift economy and the local sphere of the market economy involved two broadly different sets of goods. Yet these two spheres also interacted with each other. As I show in Ch.5, the massive infusion of luxury gifts into Dunhuang from trips to the Chinese capital could incentivize local commercial activities, as, for instance, when envoys took up high-interest loans in order to travel because they knew that the gifts they would acquire could easily offset such interest. Most importantly, the only major type of goods exchanged extensively *both* as gifts and as commodities was silk. I argue that it is

the ubiquity, rather than the value, of silk in these trans-regional exchanges that justifies calling them “Silk Road” exchanges.

The third finding concerns not the goods themselves but the procedures in which these goods were exchanged as commodities. As I show with the analysis of contracts in various different languages in Chapter 5, by the 9th and 10th centuries in Dunhuang and adjacent regions, because of the frequent movements of people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, legal practices became more and more integrated. With regard to the business procedures involved in contract making, it does not make sense to speak of a “Chinese tradition,” “Tibetan tradition,” etc. Instead, the congruence of these different traditions produced a new vocabulary and formula that were common across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

3. Road

Unlike the previous two categories, the “road” has rarely been subject to any analysis in existing scholarship on the Silk Road. Most scholars now agree that there were multiple “roads,” so that the Silk Road ought to be called the “Silk Roads” (as Richthofen did). Beyond this type of suggestion, however, the history of the road itself has not been written.

Because of the lack of sources, this dissertation cannot pretend to be a history of the road that covers its planning, construction, and use. But I do tell two stories *about* the road that I believe shed new light on how “the road” can become a useful conceptual unit. First, I describe the ways of knowing about the road, namely, geographical knowledge.

The successful application of such knowledge produces what I call “geographical intelligibility.” In the 9th and 10th centuries, no single system of geographical knowledge governed the regions around Dunhuang. Yet the fragmented pieces of knowledge constantly spoke with each other, making the “broken geographies” intelligible to travelers.

While the first story is about how people on the Silk Road knew about the road, the second story is about how they used this knowledge, not physically, but intellectually. In my analysis of the diplomatic network among the small states in the region, I show that the shared road often became the rationale for these states to maintain friendly relations, because if such relations deteriorated, the connection not only with one state, but also with many other states beyond would be severed or at least affected. The role of the road in the political imaginations of these states suggests that, while the “Silk Road” was clearly a 19th-century invention, the idea about a transcultural “route” whose significance went beyond its practical daily use existed already in pre-modern times.

4. State

Looming large behind the travelers, the gifts, the geographical knowledge, and the diplomatic dealings, was the role of the state. Scholars have long emphasized the significance of imperial powers in maintaining the functioning of the Silk Road. The states in my discussion, however, are not empires. They are the states that were sprinkled along any map of the Silk Road and the ones any travelers of the Silk Road would pass through. Each of the first five chapters of this dissertation can be read as an aspect of the

positive role of these smaller states in promoting travels and other activities on the Silk Road.

By highlighting this positive role, I show that travels and trans-regional connections could persist and even be fairly robust during eras of political fragmentation and ideological instability, when and because more states existed and were incentivized to participate in such competition. This proposition challenges the existing view on the history of the Silk Road and the versions of global history organized around this view, which generally assume that large, unified empires were more effective in promoting trans-regional exchanges.

But the smaller states along the Silk Road were not merely agents of exchanges on the Silk Road, they were themselves also transformed by these exchanges. Ch. 6 uses the case of Khotan, a Central Asian neighbor of Dunhuang, to show that, parallel to the congruence of different traditions of business practices I show in the analysis of contracts, there was in Khotan also a congruence of different traditions of kingship ideology. The “Kingly Exchange” on the Silk Road was not only promoted by the kings, it also changed them. Just as an active network of commerce often led to the concentration and redistribution of wealth, the network of prestige I describe in this dissertation led to, in the case of the kingdom of Khotan, the concentration and redistribution of prestige.

A Dunhuang story or a Silk Road story?

Finally, a key question should be acknowledged: How much of what I have described here would apply to other regions and other periods in pre-modern Eurasia?

For this question, I can only offer some tentative hypotheses, which will have to be tested by further empirical studies on a case-by-case basis.

Two specific features of the temporal-spatial unit treated in this dissertation are, I believe, not generally applicable to other regions and other times. First, ninth- and tenth-century East Eurasia saw the destruction of the Sogdian merchant network. The once prosperous Sogdian traders that feature in many Tang stories all but disappeared in this period. When one looks at the seventh- and eighth-century records both in transmitted Tang texts and in excavated manuscripts from Turfan, one sees much more frequent references to merchants.¹ Other types of merchant networks existed in other parts of Eurasia in other times.² The almost complete absence of reference to merchants conducting trans-regional trade was likely a specific result of the destruction of the Sogdian trade network in the 9th and 10th centuries and not a general rule. But even during times of more visible commercial presence, the non-commercial ways in which people traveled on the Silk Road can still be significant. I hope my examination of the non-commercial aspects of activities on the Silk Road can also help reach a more nuanced understanding of eras when the non-commercial aspects were much less important and visible than in the case of Dunhuang.

Second, the degree of political fragmentation seen in this region during the 9th and 10th centuries is also unusual. Even though this region was not always ruled by a single empire, in the preceding and following centuries, the regions of western China and eastern Central Asia were ruled by two or three imperial forces. Before the 9th century,

¹ A prime example is the famous Sogdian merchant named Shi Randian, see Hansen, *The Silk Road*, 104.

² For instance, Scott Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its Trade, 1550-1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

the Tang, the Tibetan and the Turco-Mongol empires ruled this region; after the early 10th century, the Tangut state became the overlord of the eastern part of this region, while the Uyghur kingdom of Qočo ruled much of its western half, before this entire region was incorporated into the Mongol empire. Therefore, the 9th and 10th centuries saw a brief moment of extreme political fragmentation, when practically every sizable oasis town became its own kingdom. The result of such proliferation of independent political units was that diplomacy became not only a way to display royal prestige, as was largely the case in the relation between the Tang and oasis kingdoms in Central Asia. Diplomacy also became the basis of survival for many of these states. It is therefore not surprising that the exchange of envoys played a possibly outsized role in the trans-regional connections in this era.

Nonetheless, a preliminary look at travels in the same region in a much earlier time found in the Xuanquan wooden documents¹ seems to corroborate the main point of this dissertation.² Similar to the situation found in the Dunhuang documents, most travelers in the Xuanquan documents were dispatched by governments, and references to merchants are comparatively rare.³ This is due to the nature of these trips. As traveling on the Silk Road in pre-modern times could be exceedingly difficult, it was very often the case that, only social elites with ample resources, in particular kings, could hope to

¹ Jidong Yang, "Transportation, Boarding, Lodging, and Trade along the Early Silk Road: A Preliminary Study of the Xuanquan Manuscripts," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol. 135, No. 3 (July–September 2015), 421-432.

² A good example of such overestimation is Étienne de La Vaissière's inclusion of essentially anyone with a "Sogdian" surname into his book *Sogdian Traders*. Many of the people with such surnames as Kang, Shi, and An in the 7th and 8th centuries, if they lived in China proper, were probably neither Sogdian (anymore) nor traders.

³ The nature of the Xuanquan collection – a postal station – certainly contributed to this fact. In this way, the Xuanquan collection is perhaps an extreme example of an archive of governmental documents. How the nature of this collection can be compared with that of the Dunhuang secular documents as well as those from Khotan, Kucha, Turfan, and Kharakhoto will be an interesting project to pursue.

participate in these trips. And the goods exchanged on these trips were then consumed by social elites in various parts of Eurasia. In this sense, the Silk Road existed because of these elites and for these elites. As these basic features of the Silk Road continued to be constant for pre-modern Eurasian land travel until the advent of the modern era, the picture of the “Silk Road” I have painted, where trans-regional travel was motivated mainly by the pursuit of prestige – be it political, social, or religious – rather than by commercial interest in profit, would be in principle relevant to other parts and times of the pre-modern Silk Road, even when commercial activities were more predominant.

I emphasize that these features apply only to the overland Silk Road, because what is generally called the “maritime Silk Road” functioned somewhat differently. The ability of water transportation to maintain the exchanges of large quantities of goods for both luxury and daily consumption is a defining feature that differs fundamentally from the overland Silk Road. As some of the recent discoveries of shipwrecks in Southeast Asia and South China have shown, porcelain was the most important product transported on the “maritime Silk Road.”¹ While this is not the place to conduct a thorough comparison between these two types of exchange networks, I want to point out anecdotally two differences that I have observed: 1. While the silver discovered in the overland Silk Road tends to be silver coins, many of which were found in ceremonial contexts, the silver discovered in these ships often comes in large ingots. 2. While the Tang and particularly the Song governments in China extracted a tremendous amount of tax from maritime trade on its southeastern borders, no significant tax income is found on its northwestern borders. These two phenomena point to a deeper distinction between the

¹ Denis Twitchett and Janice Stargardt, “Chinese Silver Bullion in a Tenth-Century Indonesian Wreck by Denis Twitchett and Janice Stargardt,” *Asia Major* 3rd series, 15.1 (2002): 23-72.

maritime and overland Silk Roads. The former tends to resemble a network of commerce because of its ability to maintain the exchange of large quantities of goods, whereas the latter, because of its general focus on luxury items that could only be consumed by a small elite group in various states in Eurasia, should be more appropriately described as a network of prestige.

Silk Road and Medieval Eurasia

The picture I present in this dissertation not only represents a major revision in how we understand the history of the Silk Road; it also provides an opportunity to examine the broader history of Eurasia in general. If the states of Eurasia were often connected primarily through a “network of prestige” rather than through profit-seeking merchants, then the significance of the Silk Road in the history of Eurasia should be more appropriately considered in cultural and ideological terms, rather than merely in economic ones. For instance, medieval globalizing forces in Eurasia through the Silk Road did not seem to have created an economic ruling class. Instead, within this network of prestige, kings and elites in far-flung places of the Silk Road shared a common culture of luxury and exotica that distinguished them from the populace they ruled. Certain aspects of this shared elite culture, from polo playing and hawk hunting to the use of silk and musk, found their way into almost every court in medieval Eurasia.¹ Indeed, the only

¹ Royal courts have been identified as some of the most intensely transcultural places in medieval Eurasia, see Patrick Geary et al., “Courtly cultures: western Europe, Byzantium, the Islamic world, India, China, and Japan,” in Benjamin Z. Kedar and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks ed., *The Cambridge World History Volume V: Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conflict, 500 CE–1500 CE*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 179-205.

widely shared way, found in Chinese, Indian, Turco-Uyghur, Arabic, and Tibetan language sources, in which “Eurasia” was imagined during the medieval period as a land of “Four Emperors.”¹ Exploring this shared medieval elite culture in Eurasia will help contextualize my findings about the trans-regional history of the Silk Road, and offer new ways of understanding global history in the pre-modern era.²

¹ Paul Pelliot, “La théorie des quatre Fils du Ciel,” *T'oung Pao*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (May, 1923): 97-125.

² For a recent work along this line of argument, see Matthew Canepa, "Distant Displays of Power: Understanding Cross-Cultural Interaction Among the Elites of Rome, Sasanian Iran, and Sui-Tang China." *Theorizing Cross Cultural Interaction*, ed. M. Canepa *Ars Orientalis* 38 (2010): 121-54.

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