

JIBIN, JIBIN ROUTE AND CHINA

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Buddhism is an imported religion, therefore its doctrines were introduced to China by means of propagating and translating, which was the main reason why the propagating of Buddhism in China had been influenced by the communication route linking India and China in ancient times, even though the route was sometimes opened, sometimes blocked, sometimes changed its directions and sometimes a new route was opened.

According to a study by Mr. É.Chavannes, “there were two regions which can be considered as sacred places of Buddhism in a broad sense in India. One was the reaches of the Sindhu river and the other was the reaches of the Ganges river. The Buddhist monks and laymen from China in the most cases first visited the Sindhu, and then to the Ganges. So among all the communication routes between ancient China and India, the direct route to the central India via Nepāla was not well known before the Tang Dynasty (618~907A.D.). People at that time often adopted Jibin route because that was the only route from the Pamirs to Kāśmīra and Uddiyāna. Some of the Buddhist monks and pilgrims, like Song Yun and Huisheng never went to central India but with Puruṣapura or Takṣaśilā as their destinations. That is why Gandhāra was considered as playing a leading part of the dissemination of Buddhism in China”¹.

Kāśmīra and Uddiyāna were recorded as Jibin in some ancient Chinese documentations. As to the territory of Jibin, however, there has been a considerable disputation in the academic circles. In the Han Dynasties (206B.C.~220A.D.), Jibin laid to the west of Sindu river and also to the south of Hindukush Mountains, covering an area of the plains of the river valleys of the middle and lower reaches of Kabul River and its tributaries, Kapisa, Gandhāra, Takṣaśilā, Uddiyāna and some other kingdoms were included. And as for the territory of Jibin after the Jin Dynasties (265~420A.D.), Late Prof. Cen Zhongmian holds that Jibin which was called as Jimi in *Waiguo Shi (Records of Foreign Countries)* by Monk Zhi Sengzai, Kāśmīra in *Xi-Yu-Ki (Buddhist Records of the Western World)* by Xuanzang is present Kashmir.

¹ É. Chavannes, “Voyage de Song Yun dans l’Udyana et le Gandhāra (518-522), in: *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient*, III(1903): 379-441

In order to define the location and territory of Jibin, we would like to list Jibin and some related kingdoms here below on the basis of *Beishi (History of the Northern Dynasties)* by Li Yanshou in 659 A.D.

“Boluguo (Bolor) which lies on the northwest of Agouqiang is 13,900 *li* (6171km) from the capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty (Luoyang). The climate there is moist and sultry.

Xiaorouzhiguo (Gandhāra), situated to the southwest of Bolor, is 16,600 *li* (7370km) from the capital of the Northern Dynasty. Fuloushacheng (Puruṣapura) is its capital. 10 *li* (4.4km) to the east of the city, there is a Buddhist stūpa with a girth of three hundred and fifty *bu* (518m) and a height of eighty *zhang* (237m). People called it ‘a Buddhist stūpa of one hundred *zhang* (296m) in height’.

Jibinguo (Kāśmīra), situated on the southwest of Bolor with Shanjian town as its capital, is 14,200 *li* (6305km) from the capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty. Kāśmīra is surrounded by mountains and it is 800 *li* (355km) from east to west and 300 *li* (133km) from south to north.

Shemiguo (Syamaka) lies on the south of Bozhi (Zebak) and west of Boluleguo (Bolor). People who are non-Buddhist but believe in many other Gods live in mountains. The outgoing passage is dangerous, and people have to cross the chain bridge which is even more terrific because of the bottomless valley under it. In the middle of the Xiping era (516~517A.D.) of the Northern Wei Dynasty, Song Yun and his fellow pilgrims could not get to the kingdom.

Wuchangguo (Uddiyāna) is situated to the south of Syamaka with the Pamirs on the north and India on the south. The people there believe in Buddhism and many temples and stūpas were built up. Some of them are very resplendent. On the southwest, there is Tanteshan (Dandaloka) Mountain with temples on it.

Qiantuoguo (Gandhāra) is situated to the west of Uddiyāna. The king is Tegin whose family has been on the

throne for two generations. The kingdom is warlike and has been fought with Kāśmīra for three years without armistice. Cries of discontent raise all rounds for the war. 7 *li* (3.1km) on the southwest of the capital, there is a Buddhist stūpa seventy *zhang* (207m) in height and three hundred *bu* (444m) in girth. It is so called Queli Stūpa”².

From the above historical records, it is clear that Kāśmīra was on the southwest of Bolor and Xiaorouzhi was on the southwest of Kāśmīra. The distance between Kāśmīra and Xiaorouzhi was about two 2400 *li* (1066km). Both Syamaka and Uddiyāna were on the west of Bolor, and also on the west of Kāśmīra. Gandhāra is an alternative name of Xiaorouzhi and it was situated on the west of Uddiyāna. In other words, all these Buddhist kingdoms, Kāśmīra, Uddiyāna and Gandhāra were distributed from east to west.

During the period of the Wei (220~265A.D.), Jin (265~420A.D.), Southern-and-Northern Dynasties (420~589A.D.), “Jibin abounds with saints and wise men”. There were frequent exchanges between Jibin and China in the aspect of Buddhism during this period. Those, who came from Jibin to translate Buddhist sūtras and to propagate the doctrines of Buddhism in China and were recorded in *Chu Sanzang Jiji* (*Collection of Prefaces and Notes of the Translation of the Tripitakas*) by Sengyou (445~518A.D.), include more than ten eminent monks such as Saṅghadeva, Buddhayaśas, Buddhajīva, Guṇavarman, Dharmamitra, Puṇyātara, Vimalākāśas, Saṅgharākṣasa, Saṅghabhūti, Dharmapriya, etc. On the other hand, those who went to Jibin from China to seek for Buddhist sūtras and images or just make pilgrimages to the famous sacred places include Zhiyan, Zhimeng, Fayong and some others. Kumarajīva, moreover, traveled back and forth between Jibin and Kuche for several times. Thus it can be seen a close relation between Jibin and China in Buddhist cultural exchanges.

After a study on *Chu Sanzang Jiji* by Sengyou, *Gaoseng Zhuan* (*Biographies of Master Monks*) by Huijiao in 519A.D. and *Mingseng Zhuan* (*Biographies of the Famous Monks*) by Baochang in 514 A.D., we found that the territory of Jibin recorded in these books was far beyond present Kashmir. For instance, Fayong (Dharmodgata) and his fellow pilgrims “came into Jibin and then worshiped the holy alms bowl of the Buddha. They stayed there for more than one year and could understand the Hu language (a general term for all foreign languages) after they studied the local language in written forms. They entreated and got a set of Avalokiteśvara-mahāsthama-praptavyākaraṇa-sūtra in Sanskrit. Dharmodgata, together with his thirteen fellow

pilgrims, went westwards to Xintounatehe (Sindhu river) which was ‘Lion’s Mouth’ in Chinese, then they crossed the river and arrived in Rouzhiguo (Gandhāra) which was on the west side of the river, worshiped the holy u,s,nīs,a-śīraskatā of the Buddha, and saw a boat that had self-boiled-water. Then they went to a Buddhist temple named Southern Dādima-vihāra (Nan Shiliusi) in Dandaloka mountains where three hundred monks practiced Śrāvakayāna, Pratyeka-buddhayāna and Mahāyāna themselves. Dharmodgata stayed in this temple and obtained a complete ordination of upa-sampanna”³. Anyway, the Buddha’s alms bowl here was the very alms bowl seen by Faxian in Purusapura, Dandaloka mountain was the very mountain of Uddiyāna mentioned in *History of the Northern Dynasties*, and Rouzhi kingdom (Gandhāra) enshrined with the u,s,nīs,a-śīraskatā of the Buddha was the very kingdom of Najieguo (Nagarahāna) that had Buddha’s u,s,nīs,a-śīraskatā-vihāra recorded by Faxian. A particular emphasis should be made to the facts that neither the names of Wuchang (Uddiyāna) nor Qiantuo or Xiaorouzhi (Gandhāra) are mentioned as separate entities in *Chu Sanzang Jiji*, *Gaoseng Zhuan* and *Mingseng Zhuan*, so they were all grouped under a join-name of Jibin by the monks of China and the West Regions in ancient times⁴.

There were three main routes for the communications between India and China in the Tang Dynasty, the eastern route, the middle route and the northern route, recorded in *Shijia Fangzhi* (*A Geographical Record of Śakyamuni’s world*) by Daoxuan (?-667A.D.). Starting from Hezhou, the eastern route went through Shanzhou, Aza (T’u-yu-hun), Tibet, Marsyangbi Pass, and then went southeastwards, reaching Nepāla and central India. This route, never mentioned in *Si-Yu-Ki*, *Jiu Tangshu* (*The Old Book of the History of the Tang Dynasty*), *Xin Tangshu* (*The New Book of the History of the Tang Dynasty*) and other related materials of the Tang Dynasty and also had not been known to the people before that period, is extremely important nowadays in the study of communication history of China and foreign countries. Wang Xuance, a famous diplomatic envoy of The Tang Dynasty chose this route to Nepāla and the central India for three times from 643 to 660A.D. The northern route started from Anxi and went through Hami, Turfan, Karashahr, Kucha, Baluka, Tokmak, Talas, Binkath, Afrasiab, Kasanna, Tukhāra, Bactra, Bāmīyāna, Kapiśa, Nagarahāra, Gandhāra, Uddiyāna, Taks, aśilā, Kāśmīra and then went southwards to the Central India. This was the very

² Li Yanshou, *Beishi* (*History of the Northern Dynasties*), Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1974: 3228-33

³ Sengyou, *Chu Sanzang Jiji* (Prefaces and Notes of Translation of the Tripitakas), Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1995: 581

⁴ Cf. Charles Willemen, Sarvastivada Developments in Northwestern India and in China, in: *The Indian International Journey of Buddhist Studies*, 2001(2):167

route that Xuanzang took on his way to India (fig. 1). It is now known as the northern rout of the Silk Road. The central route started from Shanzhou and went through Liangzhou, Dunhuang, Charklik, Khotan, Kashgar, Pamirs, Tash-kurghan, Syamaka, Kurān, Himatala, Warwālīz, Khost, Andarāb, kapisa and when the route came to Varnu, it joined the northern route and turned southwards to India. This route, adopted by Xuanzang to return home (see fig.1), is now known as the southern route of the Silk Road. One thing should be stressed that the northern and central routes from China proper to the northern India must pass through the vast area under the control of Anxi Protectorate of Longyou Administration in the early Tang Dynasty. Diplomatic envoys, monk pilgrims and merchant travelers who often took these two routes, however, might seek some protection, offerings and supplies from the Anxi Protectorate of the Tang Dynasty.

In addition to the above three routes, Daoxuan also mentioned a route called "Darada Route" in his same book: "By end of Jianxing era (386~395A.D.) of Late Yan Dynasty, Monk Tanmeng (Dharmotikṣṇa) who went along Daqin route reached Rājagṛaha. When he returned, he took the Darada route to go back home"⁵. This "Darada" was the very Darada mentioned by Faxian and Darel recorded by Xuanzang. Darada was originated in present Darel which is located on the northern side of the Sindhu river and on the northwest of present Kashmir. Darel was the place one had to pass by on his way from Pamirs to India in ancient times. The "Darada Route" here, however, is just another name of "Jibin Route" known since the Han Dynasties.

The Jibin route was a branch line of the southern route of the Silk Road in ancient times. The first half of the Jibin route was more or less similar to the central route mentioned by Daoxuan in his book. But the second half led from Tash-Kurghan and then went southwards directly to Uddiyāna and Kāśmīra. The route was approximately opened during a period from 141 B.C. to 88 B.C. (equivalent to Wudi reign period of the Han Dynasty) when the communication between China and Jibin was just started. A Du Qin's quote in *Hanshu(History of the Han Dynasty)* by Ban Gu goes: During the time between 33 B.C. to 7 B.C., this branch line "started from the south of Guma (present Pishan, Xinjiang). Nearly half of the kingdoms along the route were not under the administration of the Han Dynasty. Travelers and merchants, who used donkeys to transport grains, had to live on charity. But some small and poor kingdoms could not afford to give more in charity while

others were stubborn or cunning that they were just unwilling to offer any. Those who were in border area between the Han territory and some other kingdoms failed to supplicate and beg for food and were disheartened and famished in the mountain valley. Most of them laid down their lives and the animals would die after ten to twenty days and could not come back again. Moreover, they had to go through Datoutongshan (Big Headache) mountains, Xiaotoutongshan (Small Headache) mountains as well as Sanchi (Three pools) and Panshiban slope. The mountain paths were very small and narrow, the widths of some paths were less than two feet and a path like this was 30 *li* (13.3km) long. Sometimes one had to face a bottomless valley just beside the narrow path, so it was very dangerous if horse riders and passengers met on the narrow path, they had to rope themselves together for safety. More than 2000 *li* (888km) of mountain path like this led to Xuandu (chain bridge). Draught animals dropped into the valley and had their body smashed to pieces just on half the way up to the mountains and when a man felled down into the valley, the others could not just take a look at him for fear of the bottomless valley. The paths were very dangerous and difficult, and things like these defy enumeration"⁶. Therefore, one thing was clear that during the time of the Han Dynasties, the branch line of the southern route of the Silk Road to Jibin was started from Guma. It did not go through Yarkand, but in stead, it directly turned to the southwest and passed the Karakorum Pass or Mingtagai Pass, and then went down southwards to the present Hunza Valley. After going through the Hunza Valley, the Jibin route went southwards along Gilgit river and then the upper reaches of the Sindhu river, and at last it arrived at present Bunji. Henceforth, the route, with several branch lines, went all the way along the Sindhu river to the northern India, which was approximately corresponding to the Karakorum Highway. Another route went southwards to Śrīnagar, the capital of present India-controlled Kashmir region, and then to the central India.

Up until the Wei, Jin, Southern-and-Northern Dynasties, Jibin route was still an important land route to south Asia, diplomats and Buddhist monks such as Faxian, Zhimeng, Fasheng, Fayong, Song Yun and Huisheng as well as Gu Weilong mainly chose this route (fig. 2).

In 399 A.D., Faxian and his fellow pilgrims left Chang'an, the capital of Late Qin Dynasty, and then went, along the Henan route, through Qianquiguo, Noutanguo, Zhangye, Dunhuang, Shanshanguo (Charklik), Karashahr and then they got to Khotan after crossing the desert. They went on

⁵ Daoxuan, *Shijia Fangzhi (A Geographical Records of Shakyamuni's World)*, Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1983:97

⁶ Ban Gu, *Hanshu (History of the Han Dynasty)*, Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1962:3886-87

and passed Zihoguo (Karghalik), Yuhoguo, Jiechaguo (Tash-Kurghan), "On passing the (Congling) Pamirs ranges, the travelers were in northern India. Just at the frontier there is a small kingdom called Tuoliguo (Darada)...Keeping to the range, the party journeyed on in a south-western direction for fifteen days over a difficult, precipitous and dangerous road, the side of the mountain being like a stone wall thousand *ren* (more than 2000 meters) in height. On nearing the edge, the eye becomes confused; and wishing to advance, the foot finds no resting-place. Below there is a river, named Sindhu. The men of former times had cut away the rock to make a way down, and had placed ladders on the side of the rock. There are seven hundred rock-cut steps in all; and when these and the ladders have been negotiated, the river is crossed by a suspension bridge of ropes. The two banks of the river are somewhat less than 80 *bu* (118m) apart. The route was dangerous and difficult, so there were not any tracks of human beings to be seen. Neither Zhang Qian nor Gan Ying of the Han Dynasty reached this place. According to an old tradition Indian monks began to bring the sūtras and vinayas across this river from the date of setting up the image of Maitreya Bodhisattva (in Darada)"⁷. Then, Faxian and his fellow pilgrims crossed a river and stopped in Uddiyāna for vars,a. They carried on going down southwards after vars,a and went through Śuvastu, Gandhāra, Taks,āsilā and Purus,apura. Then, he traveled and visited the western India, central India, eastern India and Simhala(present Sri Lanka). In 412 A.D., Faxian returned to China via a sea route and landed at Laoshan (present Laoshan, Qingdao).

In 404 A.D., Zhimeng organized fifteen of his fellow pilgrims who were determined to go westwards on a pilgrimage to India. They took the same route as Faxian did⁸. Fasheng, whose pilgrimage to India was influenced by Zhimeng, might have taken the same route⁹. And Monk Fayong (Dharmodgata), who organized twenty-five fellow pilgrims and collected patākā and pūjā-vyūha as well as daily utensils for the pilgrimage to India in 420 A.D., adopted the Jibin route, too¹⁰.

In the 11th month of 518 A.D., Empress Dowager Ling of the Northern Wei Dynasty sent Song Yun and Huisheng to the West Region for Buddhist sūtras. They climbed over the Chiling Mountain, passed through the desert and went through the kingdoms of Aza, Charklik, Charchan, Uzun-tati,

Khotan, and later on, Karghalik, Tash-Kurghan and Onkul. "From here westwards, the rugged mountains paths, vast bared deserts and high mountain cliffs made the way the most arduous and tortuous under heaven. The dangers of the Taihang Mountains and Mengmen Pass were noting and the roughness of the Xiaoguan Pass and Longshan Mountains were like flat land, compared with the hardships they had met with on their way to the West Region. When they began to climb the Pamirs, they found the path going higher and higher and it took them four days to get on the top. The Pamirs was high and precipitous with no trees and grass. It was very cold though it was only in the 8th month of 519 A.D. The piercingly cold wind drove the goose flying to the south and all land was in deep snow". In the middle decade of the 9th month, they entered Boheguo (Wakhan), in the first decade of 10th month, the territory of the Ephthalites, in the first decade of the 11th month, Bozhiguo (Zebak) and in the middle decade of 11th month, they arrived in Shemiguo (Syamaka). "This kingdom was situated in the marginal area of the Pamirs. The land was rugged and craggy and most of the people there lived in poverty. The passageways passing through the kingdom were narrow and rugged. Some of them were so narrow that only a single horse or a man could get passed. The only path to Wuchangguo (Uddiyāna) from Boluleguo (Bolor) was very dangerous. On the way there was a chain bridge over the valley. The valley was very deep that from the bridge one might feel that the valley was a bottomless abyss. What was worse, there were no handrail along the chain bridge that one might fell down into the valley and lose his life in any time. That was the reason why the passengers always had to check the wind-force and wind-direction before they tried to step on the chain bridge. In the first decade of the 12th month, they arrived in Uddiyāna, which was contiguous to the Pamirs in the north, and India in the south"¹¹.

The route Song Yun and Huisheng adopted could be divided into three sections. The first section was in accordance with Monk Faxian's. It started from Chang'an, and went along the Henan road to Khotan and then climbed over the Pamirs. Song Yun and his men arrived at Wakhan after their climbing-over of the Pamirs, then they visited Grand Tent of the Ephthalites and lately arrived at Bolor via Zebak and Syamaka. That was the second section which was similar to the route Gu Weilong, envoy of the Northern Wei, passed through the valley of Hunza river for his diplomatic purpose. And the last section was that of the Jibin route which started from Bolor and passed Xuandu, present Bunji as well as Chilas and reached Uddiyāna and Gandhāra and

⁷ Faxian, *Faxian Zhuan (Biography of Faxian)*, Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Press, 1985:26

⁸ Sengyou, op cit.:579

⁹ Baochang, *Mingseng Zhuan (Biographies of Famous Moks)*, in *Tripitaka*, vol.135, Japan, 1913

¹⁰ Sengyou, op cit.:581

¹¹ Yang Xuanzhi, *Luoyang Jialanji (A Record of the Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang)*, Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Press, 1978:197-98

so on. Thus, it proves the Buddhist monks and pilgrims who went westward for Buddhist sutrās or made their pilgrimages to India from 399A.D. to 518A.D. mainly adopted the Jibin route.

Moreover, when the Karakorum Highway was being built in the 1960's and 1970's, many stone carvings and cliff-carved inscriptions by travelers of different times were found along the highway, among which the sacred rock no. II of Hunza was a very important founding for its words goes like "Gu Weilong, envoy of the great Wei, is dispatched to Mimi (Maimargh) now"¹² (fig.3). The inscription can be dated to a period from 444 to 453 A.D. This also proves that Jibin route was one of the important land roads connecting China, south Asia, central Asia and west Asia from 2nd century A.D. to the 7th century A.D.

One of the important reasons of the opening of the Jibin route, in short, is that both Jibin and China had the same coherent Buddhist settings. For instance, stūpa used to be a center of a Buddhist temple in Uddiyāna and Gandhāra, which is also the main part of Kizil chētiyaghara. It really reflects a fact that Dharmagupta school which laid a strong emphasis upon the stupa worship was very popular and prevalent both in Jibin and Kuche¹³. However, with the shifting interest of the Buddhist monks and the political changes of the early Tang Dynasty, the three main routes recorded by Daoxuan became the main passageways in the communication between China and India. Hence, from the middle of the Tang Dynasty, the Jibin route was on its decline and gradually fell into disuse.

¹² A.H. Dani, *Human Records on Karakorum Highway*, Lohore: Sang-E-Meel Publications, 1995:95

¹³ Chongfeng Li, "Dirghāgama and Kucha Chētiyagharas", in: *The Way of Buddha: Cultures of the Silk Road and Modern Science*, ed. by K. Kudara, Kyoto: Ryukoku University Press(in press)

Abstract

There are two regions which can be considered as the sacred places of Buddhism in a broad sense: one is reaches of the Indus river; the other is reaches of the Ganges river. In the past, Chinese monks and laymen in most cases first visited the Indus and then went to the Ganges.

The route between ancient China and India, a direct road from China to Nepal and central India, seemed to be not open before the Tang Dynasty (618-907A.D.). At that time, however, Chinese and foreign emissaries, pilgrims and monks often took Kāśmīra (Kipin) route across the present Kashmir area. Many monks and pilgrims such as Song Yun and Huiseng of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534A.D.) did not make it to the Central India. Instead, they only reached Kipin kingdom including Kāśmīra, Uddiyana, Taxila, Gandhāra, Peshawar and Kapisa.

During the 3rd to 6th centuries, "Kipin kingdom abounds in saints". Those who came to China from Kipin kingdom by the Chinese documentation include more than ten monks such as Saṅghadeva, Buddhayaśas, Buddhajīva, Guṇavarman, Dharmamitra, Puṇyātara, Vimalākaśas, Saṅgharākṣasa, Saṅghabhūti, Dharmapriya, etc. On the other hand, those from China who went to Kipin area to search for Buddhist sūtras and images or just made a pilgrimage through the area include Zhiyan, Zhimeng, Fayong, etc. The famous monk Kumarajiva went to visit Kipin for many times. Kipin route, therefore, remained an important land route leading to the south Asian regions at that time, which runs almost the same with the present Karakorum Highway.

In the 1970's, when Karakorum Highway was being built, many stone carvings and inscriptions by travelers of different historical periods were found along the highway. No. 2 of Hunza inscriptions which records Gu Weilong, Emissary of the Northern Wei, on a mission to Mimi is one of the most important findings. This also proves that Kipin route is one of the important routes connecting China and south, central and west Asia during the 3rd to 7th centuries.

One of the important reasons of the opening of the Kipin route, in short, is that both Kipin kingdom and China have the same coherent settings, that is, Buddhist settings.