

# *The Spread of Chinese-character Culture on the Silk Road During the Tang Dynasty*

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**Abstract:** The spread of Chinese characters and Chinese classic works during the Tang Dynasty presented diversified discourses of acceptance and development in different periods and regions. This was due to the differences in commercial, economic, political, religious, and cultural environments proportional to the real environment's demand for Chinese characters and Chinese classical works. Chinese characters were introduced to Gaochang, Qiuci, Khotan, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam as early as the Han Dynasty, with different development paths in these regions. It is easy to form a long lasting culture spread by Chinese language and characters, as long as official languages are consistent with national or religious languages of the regions. It is difficult to form a long lasting culture spread by official languages and characters if the official languages and characters are inconsistent with either languages of daily life or religious languages. Once there is replacement of official languages and characters, or a change in religious belief, it would cause incompatibility between official languages and daily life languages, Chinese-character culture is bound to decline and gradually fade away. But if there are Han people, they will retain the use of Chinese characters.

**Keywords:** Tang Dynasty; Chinese-character cultural circle; the Silk Road; Gaochang; Qiuci; Khotan; religious belief

## 1. Research purpose

The "Chinese-character Culture" refers to a culture with Chinese characters as the carrier. A Chinese character is square-shaped principally with a single syllable morpheme, word or notes. Over more than two thousand years, as a communication tool and cultural carrier in the vast regions of China and East Asia,

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Chinese characters helped to promote the unity of the Chinese nation, and has had a significant and far-reaching impact on the development of national cultures and character creation in the surrounding regions. The Han culture has been admired by surrounding nations and countries since B.C. With frequent exchanges between China and the Western countries and countries in East Asia, Chinese characters, as a carrier of cultural communication, were introduced to the Western countries, the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese islands as well as the Indochina Peninsula, thus forming the vast cultural circle of Chinese characters. In the past, the main research objects of the academic circles were Japan, Korea and Vietnam, focusing particularly on the traditional Chinese classics which had spread locally. Later, attention was gradually transferred to Chinese language literature like classic books and documents. In fact, many ethnic groups and countries along the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty, read and wrote with Chinese characters, and many Chinese classics spread in these regions. Many states were a part of the Chinese-character cultural circle, like the Gaochang State and Gaochang Prefecture in Turpan, Qiuci in Kuqa and Khotan in Hetian, and the Western Xia Regime founded by the Dangxiang People, and the Liao Dynasty founded by Qidan in the same period, where Chinese characters, Chinese classics and Chinese culture had a long-term impact. This cultural phenomenon is worth discussing.

The Silk Road was formed in the third century B.C. and here were multiple ethnic groups with different languages along the Chinese section of the Silk Road; Chinese, Tocharian, Khotan Saka, Kuchean, Turkic, Sogdian, Qocho Uyghur, Tibetan,

Tangute(Xixia), among others and characters were applied to record the written systems of these languages.

In the history of human development, language arises before characters. Each nation develops its own language, but it may not have characters of its own. In this case, some nations borrow characters from other advanced nations to record language, history, and culture, to inherit the knowledge and experience of its ancestors. This further draws in the essence of the more advanced nations and uses their development experience, through their classic books. There are many examples of nations along the Silk Road and East Asia borrowing Chinese characters, language and classics. Therefore, this paper intends to focus on the differences in the spread of Chinese characters among different ethnic groups along the Chinese section of the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty, and study the different phenomena produced in the acceptance and development of Chinese characters among the different ethnic groups, countries and regions, and try to put forward a reasonable explanation.<sup>①</sup>

## 2. The channel and people of the spread of Chinese characters along the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty

The Silk Road was a route of commercial activities. People naturally think of a company of travelling merchants shuttling back and forth on the Silk Road. The initial cultural exchanges between East and West took place with trade. There were small-scale folk activities in the preliminary stages, and later large-scale converted trades in the form of

① Rong Xinjiang discusses the Chinese classics spread in the West Regions and their state and spread channels, and explores the reason for failure in continuity based on Chinese documents unearthed in Kuqa and Hetian in the modern times. The same opinions will not be quoted to avoid repetition. Please refer to *Acceptance and Exclusion of the spread of Chinese Classics in the Western Regions of the Tang Dynasty* by Rong Xinjiang, in the *Silk Road and Exchanges between the East and the West* published by Peking University Press in 2015, on page 210–225.

tribute and reward (the border trade and tributary trade). Therefore, trade was the way of early cultural exchange, and merchants were the main disseminators of Chinese characters and culture at this stage.

The Silk Road refers to a specific route, while the Western Regions refer to specific regions. They are not equal to each other despite being closely related and mutually involved. But people usually unconsciously or habitually mix “the Western Regions” with the “Silk Road,” and even equate them. When talking about the “Silk Road,” people would associate it with the western border as well as with merchants. An army was required for guarding the frontier, and soldiers for garrisons were mainly from the central mainland, who also played the role of disseminators of Chinese characters and culture. When the two sides had exchanges or confrontations, diplomatic envoys were relied on to communicate or resolve disputes and diplomatic envoys became the main people for cultural exchanges and communications. In the event of a dispute, they appealed to arms. When the war was over, there was a flow of different cultures between both the conqueror and the conquered. So, the army was also one of the main disseminators.

In the middle ancient times, monks and missionaries shuttled back and forth on the Silk Road, who were also important cultural disseminators. Particularly, after Buddhism was introduced to China after the Eastern Han Dynasty, many works of Chinese translations of the Buddhist scriptures took place and Chinese Buddhism developed rapidly. The Chinese section of the Silk Road became an important region to spread Buddhism. Buddhism did not decline until

the eleventh century. Therefore, the monks on the Chinese section of the Silk Road played a critical part in the cultural communications of Chinese characters, in the process of lecturing, translating, and interpreting Buddhist scriptures. These were the most typical kinds of disseminators in the channels of cultural exchange and communications on the Silk Road with collective communications of four cultures and five religions.

Government officials were important disseminators of Chinese characters as well. Since the Han Dynasty, a large number of imperial edicts, decrees, documents delivered by posts, official and private correspondence between officials and envoys, income and expenditure accounts of land taxes, and records of vehicles and horses on the bamboo silk discovered at the courier stations set up at the vital communications hubs of the Northwest frontier like the Ruins of Xuanquanzhi Dunhuang, gradually developed into a superb collection of things like official and private documents discovered in the Western Regions of the Tang Dynasty under the system of legal articles, official documents, gaoshen(hierarchy), guosuo, banci, and shici issued by central and local administrative organs at all levels.<sup>①</sup>

Merchants, the army, monks, diplomatic envoys, and government officials were the major disseminators of Chinese characters, Chinese classics and Chinese culture during the Tang Dynasty. With different missions, these people spread different contents and focused on different tools, characters and classics. Today, the archaeological remains along the Chinese section of the Silk Road record the overall presentation of the cultural transmission in different historical periods,

① This issue can be referred to *Record of Khotan of Gao Juhai of the Five Dynasties*, and *Travel to Khotan of Wang Yande of the Song Dynasty (Annotations of Travel to Khotan by Wang Guowei)*, *Diplomatic Envoys to the Northwest Regions in the Late Tang Dynasty, the Five Dynasties and the Early Song Dynasty* of Zhang Guangda, in *Documents, Classics, and Historical Records of the Western Regions*, published by Guangxi Normal University Press in 2008.

of different people, for different purposes.

### 3. The key media of cultural exchange of the Silk Road in the Tang Dynasty

#### 3.1 Language: communication of translators

Historically, the activities of many ethnic groups impacted the Chinese section of the Silk Road, like Turpan, Qiuci in Kuqa, and Khotan in Hetian, and there were complex and diverse features in languages. In addition, these regions had close relationships with the Central Plains region, particularly, during the Tang Dynasty, these regions had long been under the control of the Central Plains regime, therefore, it can be inferred that there were languages like Chinese, and other ethnic languages which had contact with the languages of these regions.

Most Han people did not understand the Hu language, while the Hu people did not understand Chinese. So, “language translation personnel”<sup>①</sup> were required for communications between the Han people and the Hu people. The official position of translator was set up in the Central Plains Dynasty, for the convenience of contact with foreign countries and the surrounding ethnic groups. There was frequent communication between the great Tang Empire and the neighboring ethnic groups and countries. Due to multiple ethnic groups and different languages, translators were more urgently needed. These translators often appeared on the occasions like military, oath of alliance, trading and commercial activities. With the advantage of ethnic language, the Hu people mostly took the positions of

translators in the Silk Road regions during the Tang Dynasty.

During the Tang Dynasty, the organizations of translators of the central government were mainly for Court or State Ceremonials and Secretariats. There were also folk translators because of the demands for trades between merchants. Because of the limited number of official translators, practical and special needs of local authorities were done with the assistance of folk translators in handling related issues in the Frontier Regions.

In recent years, there has been a good deal of research regarding these translators.<sup>②</sup> The article *Translators of Xizhou (Turpan) in the Tang Dynasty*, written by Li Fang (Li, 1994, pp. 45–51), believes that people of ethnic groups mainly took the positions of translators through the formal establishment of the local authorities of Xizhou, with a majority of Sogdian, and Turkic people, and a few Han people. They acted as translators in military and trading activities, and sometimes, they acted as translators in the trials of the ethnic minorities. In *One Side of Translators in the Tang and Song Dynasties*, TakataTokio explored the real situation of translators in the Tang and Song dynasties from the perspective of social history, with the objects of Dunhuang, Turpan and the eastern coastal areas. He believes that the essence of the occupation of translators is closely related to commercial activities. In Turpan, most of the translators were Sogdian.<sup>③</sup>

Translators and commercial activities were closely related. There were frequent business travelers and heavy trade along the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty, so interpreters in Chinese language were in great demand, with the largest

① “Language translation personnel” are the translators of the Central Plains and neighboring ethnic groups.

② Please refer to *Translators of Changan in Tang Dynasty* by Hanxiang, published on *Historical Monthly* the first issue in 2003 on page 28–31; *Translators in Foreign Affairs of the Tang Dynasty* of Zhao Zhen, published on *Academic Forum of North City*, issue 6 in 2005 on page 29–33; *Translators on the Silk Road of the Tang Dynasty* of Zhu Lina, published on *Studies on Ethnic History*, issue 12 in 2015 on page 212–228.

③ *One Side of Translators in the Tang and Song Dynasties* by TakataTokio is a paper on the international academic seminar Outlook on Codicology of Dunhuang in the Next Two Decades held on September 6–8, 2014, in Princeton University of America.

translation demands for interpreters between the Turkic and Sogdian languages, and Chinese.

In addition to interpretation of trade communication, based on the needs of acceptance of credentials in the trading between the two parties, interpreters should have the abilities of literal translation and writing. A lot of monks became the main bilingual and multilingual translators on the demand of Chinese translation of the Buddhist Scriptures during the Tang Dynasty as well as foreign language needs of eminent monks' seeking scriptures in India. Bilingual Buddhist classics of Sanskrit and Chinese were compiled for translation and interpretation of Buddhist Scriptures (Chen, 2009, pp.58–68). These were the main media for communication and the spread of Chinese, but trading and missionary activities had different demands. The spread of the Chinese language classics contributed the most to the promotion of Chinese characters along the Silk Road.

### 3.2 Word: The appearance of a bilingual dictionary

Translators were responsible for literal translation besides oral interpretation. There were many bilingual documents unearthed along the Silk Road, like three documents obtained by Sven Hedin (1865–1952) namely Hedin 15, 16 and 24 (Zhang & Rong, 2008, pp. 48–69), the bilingual documents in Khotanscripts, and Study on and Differentiation of Chinese Language and Khotan Language collected at the Museum of Renmin University of China with serial number GXW0038.<sup>①</sup> The nature of these documents shows that translators were responsible for literal translations of legal documents as well as oral interpretations. So, they must be able to read and write Chinese characters besides listening and

speaking Chinese.

There are many bilingual books among the published Turpan documents, including one Chinese-Turkic bilingual document, 6 Chinese-Tibetan bilingual documents, 229 Sogdian-Chinese bilingual documents, and 76 Qocho Uyghur-Chinese bilingual documents, collected in the Otani documents of Japan, one Sogdian-Chinese bilingual document, 6 Tibetan-Chinese bilingual documents, and 3 Chinese-Qocho Uyghur bilingual documents, collected at the German National Library,<sup>14</sup> Qocho Uyghur-Chinese bilingual documents, 59 Chinese-Qocho Uyghur bilingual documents, collected at the St. Petersburg Oriental Research Institute of Russia, one Qocho Uyghur-Chinese bilingual document, one Sogdian-Chinese bilingual document, collected at the British National Library, and 12 Chinese-Brahmi bilingual documents, at the Buddhist Caves of Bezeklik China bilingual documents.

The multi-lingual translations of the different languages were required for the unsegregated long-term living together of the Hu people and the Han people. Therefore, it was necessary to implement bilingual education for the cultivation of two-way communication talents. It was more urgent to implement bilingual education in Dunhuang, under the special time and space of the intersection of Chinese culture and ethnic cultures, particularly during the Tibetan regime in the Middle Tang Dynasty and the regime of Xixia in the Early Song Dynasty. People mainly learned Chinese characters, Chinese language and Chinese classics locally in Dunhuang. Based on the actual needs of bilingual systems for ruling and daily life, bilingual education was centered in Dunhuang (Zhang&Zhu, 2007, pp.99–103).The Tibetan manuscript P.T. 1046(namely

<sup>①</sup> GXW0038 was named *Bilingual Agreement of Chinese and Khotan*, and was finally named *Study on and Differentiation of Chinese Language and Khotan Language* by Duan Qing, refer to *Money and Silk—Interpretations of Khotanese—Chinese Documents Collected at the museum of Renmin University of China* of Duan Qing and Li Jianqiang. The paper was published on *Research on Western Region*, the first issue of 2014, on page 29–38.



Chinese manuscript P. 3419) collected at the French National Museum is the Chinese-Tibetan bilingual version. The remaining *Thousand-character Classic* has 53 lines with 13 characters in each line. Line 2 to line 44 are in Chinese and written vertically. There are Tibetan annotations on the left of each character. On the back of P.T. 1263, there are 20 lines Tibetan-Chinese characters. The Tibetan language comes before the Chinese language. Tibetan characters are written horizontally, while Chinese characters are written vertically. The content roughly falls into three categories; daily life words like “the four corners of the world,” nouns of locality like “the lunar January and February,” and names of months; names of the tribes and their chiefs of the Han, Tibetan and Uighur; names of animals like camel, cattle and sheep. On the whole, they are mainly the practical words of daily life and social communication at that time. (Tokio Takata, 1988).

*Fan Han He Shi Zhang Zhong Zhu*, the Xixia (Western Xia, 1038-1227) document, is a Tangut-Chinese Bilingual Dictionary, which is a basic textbook of Tangut characters, as well as a reference book of Tangut and Chinese languages. This book was compiled by GuleMaocai, a Tangut Scholar, in the 21st year of Qianyou of the Western Xia Regime (1190). It says in the preface, “People today should be proficient in both the Tangut and Chinese languages. The Han people cannot communicate with the Tangut people if they do not speak the Tangut language; the Tangut people cannot integrate into the Han people if they don’t speak Chinese. The Han people do not respect the wise Tangut people, while the Tangut people do not admire the distinguished Han people, due to the language barrier.”<sup>①</sup> This



*Fan Han He Shi Zhang Zhong Zhu*

clearly suggests that this bilingual dictionary is for language and cultural communication between the Tangut people and the Chinese people.

### 3.3 Chinese classic books: Transmission of education and culture

Chinese classic books were the sum and main carrier of history, thought and culture in the Central Plains. In the spreading process in extraterritorial regions, the Chinese classics played an important role in education and cultural instillation. Foreign countries and nationalities could have a deep understanding of the core and essence of Chinese culture through reading and learning Chinese classics.

Since the 19th century, the Chinese section of the Silk Road has been the region for archaeological activities by the Western powers, Hetian, Kuqa, Turpan, the surrounding areas of Lop Nor, Dunhuang and Khara-khoto have been the places for competitive explorations of archaeologists of many countries. Large-scale excavations in the long term enable hundreds of thousands of pieces of ancient Western cultural relics to be discovered, and provide

<sup>①</sup> Please refer to *Fan Han He Shi Zhang Zhong Zhu* of GuleMaocai, Literature of Blackwater City of Russia compiled by St Petersburg Oriental Research Institute of Russia, National Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Shanghai Ancient Books Press, volume 10, published by Shanghai Ancient Books Press in 1999 on page 214–218, 685 and 4777; the fragmental ages of *Fan Han He Shi Zhang Zhong Zhu* (carving copy in Tangru) collected at Museum of NingxiHui Autonomous Region, N11. 001 (09299); the fragmental ages of *Fan Han He Shi Zhang Zhong Zhu* (carving copy in Tangru) collected at Dunhuang Institute G11: 181 (B184: 9) 241, refer to Xixia Literature of China by Shi Jinbo and Chen Yuning, published by Gansu People's Press and Dunhuang Art Press in 2005.

fresh new and valuable materials for the research of the disciplines of ancient Central Asia like language, character, nationality, religion, history, geography, and art. In these regions, the Russian D.A. Klementz and S.F. Oldenburg, German A. Grünwedel and A. von Le Coq, British M.A. Stein and Japanese Otani expeditions once excavated a substantial number of relics and documents. From 1959 to 1975, people even unearthed documents in the Chinese language in the period from the Eastern Jin Dynasty (Gaochang Prefecture) to the Tang Dynasty (Xizhou), in the ancient tomb areas. Later, there were many excavated relics by the archaeological units in Turpan areas. The Chinese documents unearthed and published include *Chinese Literature Excavated in the Third Archaeological Studies of Stein in Central Asia (Non-Buddhist Scriptures)* by Sha Zhi and Wu Fangsi (Shanghai Dictionary Publishing House, Edition), *Collective Documents of Otani by Oda Yoshiku* (4 volumes, 1984–2010 edition of the French National Museum), *The Unearthed Documents in Turpan* by Tang Changru (text books and ancient augural books, Cultural Relics Publishing House edition 1992–1996), and *The Newly Unearthed Turpan Documents and Their Studies* by Liu Hongliang (Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 1997). *Chinese Buddhist Classics Unearthed in the Bezeklik Rock Cave of Turpan* (Cultural Relics Publishing House, 2007) by the Turpan Institute of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and Research Institute from the 3rd Century to the 9th Century of Wuhan University, and *Newly Unearthed Turpan Documents* (Zhonghua Book Company, 2008) by Rong Xinjiang.

The sites for the unearthed documents cover regions like Kuqa, Hetian and Turpan, namely the Turutul Asl Site, the Ancient city of Lou Lan Site, and the Dandan Urik Site in Kuqa, the Bala Chwast Site, the Yingpan Site, the Mazar Tagh and Damago Site in Hetian, and the Astana Cemetery, the ancient city of

Gaochang, the ancient city of Jiaohe, the Moutougou Site, the Bezeklik Rock Cave, the Tuyugou Site, the Badam Tombs, the Munal Tombs, the Taizang Tower, and the Yankhi in Turpan. The unearthed documents provide proof of the spread of the Chinese language and Chinese classics in these regions.

#### 4. The remains of Chinese literature along the Chinese section of the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty

The unearthed Chinese literature along the Chinese section of the Silk Road by different countries since the 19th century was distributed throughout three regions, namely Gaochang (Turpan region), Qiuzi (Kuqa region) and Khotan (Hetian region).

##### 4.1 Gaochang

In ancient times, the Turpan region was named Gaochang, an important ancient road of east-west traffic. The history of Gaochang can be roughly divided into three periods. First, before Gaochang was destroyed and the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century–771 BC) was established in the 14th year of Zhenguan in the Tang Dynasty (640). Second, during the regime of the Tang Dynasty (640–755). Third, after the founding of the Uighur Khanate (803).

Before Xiyu was connected to the Han Dynasty, Gushi was founded here. In the second year of Shenjue (60 B.C.) the Han emperor defeated Xiongnu and Gushi. Gushi became a part of Cheshi and a garrison commander was set up, which was changed to the Wuji commander in the first year of Chuyuan of the Hanyuan Emperor (48 B.C.), and soon its local government was moved to Gaochangbi. The Wuji commander was still existed here in the dynasties of the Eastern Han, Wei and Jin, namely Gaochangbi Period.

Zhang Jun of the Former Liang set up Gaochang Prefecture in the second year of the Eastern Jin

Dynasty (327), with Gaochang City under the governance of the prefecture seat. Later, the Western Liang and Northern Liang adopted this seat. In the 8th year of Chengping Northern Liang (460), the remaining forces of Juqu destroyed by Rouran and Kanbozhou were proclaimed the king of Gaochang. Later, the Kings with the surnames of Zhang, Ma and Qu were proclaimed kings of Gaochang successively, which was named the times of the “Gaochang State.”

Gaochang was destroyed in the 14th year of Zhenguan of the Tang Dynasty, and Xizhou was set up in the region of Gaochang. Gaochang City became the governor's office of the Western Zhou Dynasty. Gaochang was ruled by the Han people in that period. There were diversified ethnic groups. Besides the aborigines, there were mainly the Han and Sogdian nationalities. The languages they spoke and wrote included Chinese, Turkic and Sogdian. People believed in Buddhism and Gaochang was an important Buddhist city. It was under the control of Uighur Khanate after the forces of the Tang Dynasty withdrew in 803. The Gaochang Uyghur Kingdom was founded in the end of the 9th century (namely the so-called Xizhou Uyghur), people changed their belief from Buddhism to Islamism, and Buddhist belief fade away.

Chinese culture played a leading role in the Kingdom of Gaochang, with the majority of the population the Han people. It is recorded in *Zhou Book Commentaries on Gaochang*, “They used the same characters as the Central Plains, and the Hu language was adopted as well. There were Chinese classics like *Mao Poetry*, *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Book of Filial Piety* as teaching materials. The students learned and read these books in the Hu language” (Linghu Defen et al., 1971, p. 915). “The Hu language was adopted” indicates that people spoke different languages, focusing on Chinese. Writing in the Hu language was adopted by temples

and foreign businessmen. Since Chinese characters were official characters, the non-Han nationality people, who spoke the Hu language, had to learn Chinese characters and Chinese classics when they took positions as officials. A substantial number of Chinese documents excavated in Turpan were produced at that time, suggesting that Chinese characters were indeed the main characters for learning and reading.

With the mass migration of the Han people to Xizhou (Gaochang) under the ruling of the Tang Dynasty, there were frequent personnel exchanges, so the popularization of Chinese characters was largely enhanced, which was also reflected in the quantity of Chinese documents of the Tang Dynasty unearthed in Turpan in modern times. In the late 19th and the early 20th century, explorers from different countries excavated a large number of relics. The newly unearthed literature in Turpan was mainly produced from the 3rd to the 8th century in the dynasties of Jin and Tang, with a majority written in Chinese characters, as well as other languages like Qocho Uyghur, Karasahr, Kuchean, ancient Turkic, Sanskrit, Sogdian, and Tibetan. There were a variety of documents, like imperial rescripts, legal instruments, account books, official documents and correspondence of civil and military authorities, argument of cases, business contracts, employment agreements and private letters. The unearthed Chinese classics included Confucian classics, historical records, poetry, and traditional children enlightenment books, as well as lots of Buddhist classics in Chinese. The books represented all the aspects of the Tang Dynasty and the period before locally, namely politics, economics, military, religion, ideology, culture and more, of significant value for historical research.

Official documents included registration books, account books, *Fu* (Books on the art of war), *Die* (an official document or note), *Biao* (a document



for the ministers to submit statements, request or suggestion to the emperor), *Qi* (similar to Biao) and others. It suggests that Chinese characters were the official language at that time. Different types of documents of temples were written in Chinese characters, including internal registration books and texts, and correspondence. There were private folk documents like loan agreements, rent agreements, sales agreements for slaves and maid-servants, letters and commercial activity documents, with a huge quantity of Chinese characters, indicating that Chinese characters were extensively adopted by the public as well. Meanwhile, there were a great quantity of remaining papers for writing practice, as well as traditional children enlightenment books like *Thousand Character Classic*, *Important Admonition for Enlightenment*, and *Domestic Discipline of Grandfather*, and relics of schoolchildren for literacy and exercises in calligraphy. These suggest that Chinese characters were widely adopted in that region with a profound influence of Chinese culture.

#### 4.2 Qiuci

Qiuci was the most important oasis kingdom on the north route of the Silk Road in the dynasties of Han and Tang. Located on the Tianshan Mountain in the north, it was adjacent to the Taklimakan Desert in the south. The residents used Sanskrit and the Tocharian language of the Indo-European language family, which let Qiuci become the natural gateway for Buddhism into China. In that region, Buddhism was highly developed, with a multitude of rock caves and temples. Kumarajiva, the great master of Chinese Buddhism, was born in the kingdom of Qiuci, and was proficient in many languages namely Kuchean, Chinese, Sanskrit, and Gandhari. Before the Western Regions were unified by the Tang Dynasty, Qiuci and Yanqi (Karasahr) used the Karasahr language, which was a kind of character written in the Central Asia italics of India Brahmi to record Kuchean, also named Tocharian.

In the first century B.C., Qiuci had frequent contacts with the Central Plains Dynasty. In the 60th year BC, the Western Regions were formally controlled by the Han Dynasty. In the 3rd year of Xianqing of the Tang Dynasty (658), the West Turks State was destroyed, and the Frontier Duhu Command in Anxi was moved from Jiaohe City of Xizhou to the capital of Qiuci, with jurisdiction over four townships namely Anxi(Qiuci), Khotan, Shule (Kashgar) and Yanqi (Karasahr). Qiuci became the military and political center for the regime of the ruling of the Tang Dynasty over the Western Regions.

After a complete military defense system was formed in the four townships of Anxi in the Tang Dynasty, the system of "Long March Fighters" under the system of Jiedushi (governor of one or more provinces) was implemented, so that soldiers did not have to be replaced regularly, but just guarded all the year round in the Western Regions. As a result, their family members had the opportunity to live together with the army. By this change, there arose the demand for reading by generals, sergeants, and family members, and books in Chinese were introduced to the Western Regions.

In the early 20th century, expedition teams from different countries made a multitude of excavations in Kuqa, the old state of Qiuci. In 1903, Watanabe Tetsunobu and Hori Kenyu of the Japanese Otani expedition team excavated documents and books in Chinese and Hu languages in Kizil and Kumutula, later they unearthed documents and books in Chinese language again in Doyle DuallAhuer. It was estimated that they unearthed about 56 pieces of documents and books in Chinese. In 1907, the French Paul Pelliot expedition team excavated many documents including more than 20 pieces of documents in Chinese in Kuqa. In 1928, Huang Wenbi unearthed 3 pieces of documents in Chinese in the ancient Tunguska bashkortostan city in Xinhe County of Xinjiang. In general, the Chinese

documents unearthed in Kuqa mostly were social instruments except a small number of fragments of Buddhist scriptures.

Qiuci was the location of the Anxi Frontier Command, where Chinese characters were employed widely, under the influence of the Tang Culture. There were documents from the Khotan military depot in the Tang Dynasty discovered here in modern times, which were official documents. It suggested that Chinese characters were employed by the army organization of the Tang Dynasty. There were also folk loan documents unearthed, which were private documents. It indicated that Chinese characters were employed by the public as well. Rong Xinjiang discovered that there was literature written in Chinese in Qiuci during the Tang Dynasty exhibited in the “Turpan Collections” of the German National Library, which were regarded as literature written in the Turpan language, therefore, he wrote particularly to state that most of the Chinese literature was originally classics collected at libraries or temples or were official documents, and were introduced to Qiuci by the forces of the Tang Dynasty, including legal instruments, rhythmic dictionaries, historical records, and Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures (Rong, 2010, pp. 161–172).

### 4.3 Khotan

Khotan was an ancient state in the Western Regions, one of the oasis kingdoms there. Khotan language and Khotan characters were employed, and the characters are Alphabetic writing. Khotan had been directly or indirectly under the ruling of Xiongnu, the Han Dynasty, Kushan, the Wei State of the Three-Kingdoms Period, the Western Jin Dynasty, Rouran, Hephthalites, and Western Turks.

Khotan was under the jurisdiction of the Anxi Frontier Command, after the Western Han Dynasty ruled the Western Regions. In the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Khotan maintained close

contacts with every dynasty of the Central Plains. In the last year of Zhenguan of the Tang Dynasty, Khotan Township was founded, becoming one of the “Four Townships of Anxi” in the Tang Dynasty. In the second year of Shangyuan (675), the governor’s office of Pisha was established, under the jurisdiction of the Anxi Frontier Commander. In the late 8th century, Turpan was magnificently situated in the Western Regions with Khotan as its dependency. In the 3rd year of Tianfu of the Later Jin Dynasty, the head of Khotan was proclaimed the King of DabaoKhotan. In 1006, Khotan was destroyed by the King of the West Uighur Kara Khan.

Khotan employed the Kharosthi language in the Period of Wei, Jin and the Southern and Northern Dynasties, and started to adopt Khotan characters created from the Central Asia italics of India Brahmi, which were popular until the late 9th and early 10th century. It was quite early when Chinese characters were introduced to Khotan. The Chinese-Kharosthi bilingual coins of the Eastern Han Dynasty discovered in Hetian in the late 19th century are evidence for this.

The Khotan people believed in Buddhism, and Khotan was an ancient state of Buddhism along the Silk Road. Around the 2nd Century, Buddhism was introduced to Khotan, and Khotan quickly became an important township of translation and research of Buddhist Scriptures. There were diversified religions here, namely Buddhism from India and Central Asia, religions of local characteristics, and Chinese Buddhism. There were 14 large Buddhist temples and many small temples in Khotan, which was the cultural center of Mahayana Buddhism of the Western Regions. In the 18th year of Zhenguan of the Tang Dynasty (644), Monk Xuan Zang stopped over here and expounded the texts of Buddhism when he returned from India to China. In 1006, after Khotan was conquered by the West Uighur Kara Khan Dynasty, Khotan changed the religion belief



Monk Xuan Zang

from Buddhism to Islam, and residents gradually gave up the original Khotanese language and started to learn Uyghur. Buddhism gradually disappeared.

In the modern times, the main relics excavated in Hetian include Sampula, Niya, Rawak, Charkhlik, Malik Watt, Yotkan, DandanOilik, and Damago (V. Hansen, 2015). Rawak is a spectacular temple ruins. Buddhist literature in languages of Khotanese, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan were excavated as well as *Prajna Paramita* in the Chinese language, reflecting a thriving scene of Mahayana Buddhism. During the reign of Wu Zetian, Sikshananda and Devapraja, the eminent monks of Khotan went to the Central Plains for translation of Buddhist Scriptures to develop and expand Mahayana Buddhism. In the first year of

Zhenyuan (785–790), Sila dharma, the Exorcist from Khotan hosted translation at Beiting, to translate *Ten Stages Sutra* and *Hui Xiang Lun Jing* from Sanskrit to Chinese. The Dunhuang version P. 3918 of *Vast and Quiet Dharani of Steel Altar* was translated by the monk with the surname of Liu (Tanqian) of Anxi (Qiuci), based on the version in Sanskrit collected at the Buddhist temple of Khotan (Rong, 1991, pp28–38). Stein discovered the fragments of a writing practice book of *Orchid Pavilion in DandanOilik*, in which it says, “Student Li Zhongya copied this article and presented to your respected (E. Chavannes, 1913). It was a relic of a local student’s learning of Chinese characters.

## 5. The phenomenon of the spread of Chinese-character culture and the speculation of its rise and decline

The Chinese documents, the archaeological relics of the Chinese section of the Silk Road, are valuable material for the observation of the spread of Chinese characters and the development of Chinese-character culture during the Tang Dynasty. The documents are mainly collected at the British National Museum, the French National Museum, the German National Museum, the St. Petersburg Oriental Research Institute of Russia, the East Asia Library of Princeton University, as well as the Omiya Library of Kyoto Ryukoku University, the Tokyo Calligraphy Museum, the Osaka Four Heavenly Temple and the Nara Ningle Art Museum of Japan. Please see details in the Euro-American collected volume and Japan collected volume of Turpan Documents.<sup>①</sup>

Gulinuer Hanmudu and Li Yadong (2013, pp, 196–198), of the Information Center of the Turpan

① Chen Guocan and Liu Anzhi compiled *Turpan Documents* published by Wuhan University Press in 2005; Rong xinjing compiled *Turpan Documents (the Euro-American collected volume)*, published by Wuhan University Press in 2007.

Studies Institute made statistics in *The Quantity and Languages of Turpan Unearthed Documents* that there were nearly 150,000 documents unearthed in Turpan in 21 languages. Among these documents, there were nearly 9,000 pieces of Chinese documents, including 3,768 pieces publicly and privately collected in Japan, 2,140 pieces in the German National Museum, 455 pieces in the St. Petersburg Oriental Research Institute of Russia, 525 pieces in the British National Museum, 2,704 pieces of archaeological excavations in Xinjiang of China (1,633 pieces in Astana, 152 pieces in Khara-Khoja, 530 pieces of Chinese documents at the Buddhist Caves of Bezeklik China, and 389 pieces of newly unearthed Chinese documents). The similarities and differences of the spread of Chinese-character culture will be analyzed in the three major regions of the Tang Dynasty namely Gaochang (Turpan), Qiuci(Kuqa) and Khotan (Hetian).

### 5.1 The differences of the spread of Chinese-character culture

Gaochang, Qiuci and Khotan were under the influence of the Chinese-character culture of the Central Plains when a substantial number of Han people immigrated there as early as the Han Dynasty. However, there were several marked differences between these regions. The popularity of Chinese characters of Gaochang (Xizhou) was significantly higher than that of Qiuci and Khotan during the Tang Dynasty, with proof of a greater quantity and a larger variety of Chinese documents of the Tang Dynasty unearthed in Turpan than that of Kuqa and Hetian.

In these unearthed literature remains, the proportion of Chinese is different from that of non-Chinese (namely Khotanese, Tocharian, Qocho Uyghur, Persian, Syrian, Sogdian, Tibetan and

others), suggesting the difference of popularity of Chinese characters between different ethnic groups. Under the reign of the Tang Dynasty, Chinese was the universal language in the operation of administrative systems, so it was natural the Chinese was employed in the correspondence between army organizations and local authorities and bilingual documents were presented when necessary, like Chinese-Khotanese bilingual official documents. For the public, each nation employed local languages and characters, namely a parallel application of Chinese language and characters and non-Chinese languages and characters. For business transactions, agreements and legal proceedings, people sought help from translators for oral interpretation or literal translation.

From the presently published related Chinese literature, Buddhist Scriptures are the most in quantity, followed by social and economic documents as well as official and private documents, with the fewest being traditional Chinese classics. Preliminary statistics show that the expedition team of Xinjiang Museum had 13 excavations in Astana and Khara-Khoja at 465 ancient tombs. There were 1,844 Chinese documents unearthed at 118 tombs.<sup>①</sup> These documents were mostly made into funeral objects like shoes, hats and clothes in the forms of official documents like Die, Zhuang, Ci and Tie as well as agreements and letters. Most were private letters and a few were Buddhist Scriptures, Confucian classics, history, philosophy, literature, and poetic prose. In addition, there were about 516 pieces of social and economic documents and official and private documents, 317 pieces of Buddhist Scriptures, and 30 pieces of other Chinese classics collected and now at the British National Museum. There were about 224 pieces of social

① *The Unearthed Documents in Turpan* volume 10, by Tang Changru published by Relics Press, in 1991; *The Unearthed Documents in Turpan* volume 4, published by Relics Press, in 1992–1996.

and economic documents and official and private documents, 8 pieces of Buddhist Scriptures, and 2 pieces of other Chinese classics collected and now at the French National Museum. There were about 4,537 pieces of Buddhist Scriptures, 119 pieces of social and economic documents and official and private documents, and 99 pieces of other Chinese classics collected and now at the German National Museum. There were 112 pieces of Buddhist Scriptures of Gaochang Chinese documents which are now in the Osaka Four Heavenly Temple in Japan, including 7 pieces of social and economic documents and 4 pieces of other Chinese classics. There were 128 pieces of Turpan Chinese documents collected which are now at the Neiaku Museum and all of these are social and economic documents.

Official documents cover different aspects like land, household, taxes and corvee, military affairs, legal proceedings, courier stations, and more, presenting the real situation of the employment of Chinese characters under the long-term reign of the Tang Dynasty in Gaochang. Private documents are mostly related to folk economic activities like private loans and sales agreements, also indicating the employment of Chinese characters by the Han people, the main body of Gaochang people. Despite the quantity of traditional Chinese classics and poetic proses being relatively small, the situation of the spread and learning of poetic proses locally can be documented. This suggests that the literary development of Gaochang was corresponding to that of the Central Plains during the Tang Dynasty. Indeed it is like what Zhu Yuqi said (2010, pp.182–194), this phenomenon, “is closely associated with the factors like the spread of inland immigrants, the security of cultural systems and the welcome of literary fashion, presenting a unique scene of the

acceptance and spread of Han culture to frontier regions”

The remains of a multitude of Chinese Buddhist Scriptures suggest the prevalence of Buddhism in the Chinese section of the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty, and Hu monks for preaching sermons from the East and Han monks for bringing back the sacred Buddhist scrolls from India, shuttled back and forth in the Chinese section. Most of the Hu monks from Gaochang, Qiuci, and Khotan were proficient in Chinese and were able to read Chinese characters. They held the Buddhist Scriptures in the Hu language in hand, and recited Scriptures in Chinese, presenting a relatively high cultural level of Chinese characters.

There are many records of the long history of Buddhism in the Kingdom of Gaochang, namely *Wei Book*, *On the Translation of the Tripitaka* and *Biographies of Eminent Monks*. “The former kingdom of Cheshi,” the Gaochang region held Buddhism as its state religion during the Eastern Jin Dynasty. After the founding of the Kingdom of Gaochang in the late 4th century, the translation of Buddhist scriptures was popular and Buddha Dharma was thriving. There were temples standing in great numbers and many eminent monks. The great number of classic Buddhist Scriptures unearthed in Turpan is the real reflection of this spectacular phenomenon. In 840, Uighurlars migrated to the West and believed in Manichaeism, and founded the Kingdom of Turpan, where the Han monks still continued to preach Buddhist Scriptures soundly in Chinese. There are examples in the Scriptures S. 6551 left in the Xizhou region.<sup>①</sup>

Qiuci, the oasis kingdom of the Silk Road, was the natural gateway for Buddhism to China. Although the specific time of the introduction of

① Chinese Literature of Dunhuang About Uyghur Xizhou—S. 6551 Historical Study of Scriptures, published on *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, issue 2 in 1989 on page 24–36, Differentiation and Study of Uyghur S. 6551, published on *Xinjiang Social Sciences* issue 4 in 1989 on page 88–97.



Buddhism to Qiuci is not clear, it can be shown that Buddhism was highly developed with a number of Buddhist temples before the Tang Dynasty from the Kizil, Kumu Tula, SenmuSimu, KeziNaiha, MazhaBoha, Tuohulake Aiken, Taitaier, Wenbashi and Yatuer Grottoes. Hu and Han people dwelled together unsegregated, and Buddhist Scriptures were widely translated. The eminent monk translators with the surname of Bai and Bo were mostly from Qiuci. The famous Kumarajiva was a translation master of the Kingdom of Qiuci. Although there were a limited number of Chinese Buddhist Scriptures excavated in Qiuci (Kuqa) today, the thriving scene of Buddhism can still be seen from the relics of literature and historical records and scriptures at the temples.

Khotan is geographically related with India. As early as the 2nd century B.C., Buddhism was introduced from Kasmira to Khotan. Khotan quickly developed into the largest kingdom of Buddhism in the southwest of Xinjiang. There were large and small temples in great numbers. It is easy to imagine what a spectacular scene it was from the unearthed sites. In 644, the monk Xuan Zang stopped at Khotan on his return from India to China after seeking Buddhist Scriptures, and preached here. There are many records about the legends of the founding, folk customs and the prosperous Buddhism of Khotan in the *Records of the Western Regions of the Tang Dynasty*. The Buddhist world of Khotan can be observed as well. The Chinese Buddhist Scriptures of Gaochang (Turpan), Qiuci (Kuqa) and Khotan (Hetian) are the basis and hot spot of the research of Buddhist development process on the Silk Road (Fang, 1992, pp.115–123).

Gaochang, Qiuci and Khotan are basins or oasis kingdoms. They are both traffic arteries of the Silk Road and trading cities for business transactions between East and West. There were many Han and Hu merchants with frequent transactions. A large number of various economic letters of business activities and official and private documents and letters of social activities<sup>①</sup> have reflected the active market and numerous economic activities.

In the thriving period of the Tang Dynasty, Gaochang, Qiuci and Khotan were under the jurisdiction of the Tang Dynasty, with state and fu seats. Chinese characters can be seen in the business documents of the official administrative systems. In the dependencies of the Tang Dynasty with increasing Han immigrants, the correspondence between common people and the government were written in Chinese. Because other ethnic groups had their own language for writing, there were bilingual documents when it came to legal proceedings and agreements. This is consistent with the content and quantity of excavated documents from the Tang Dynasty.

The quantity of Chinese classics is comparatively fewer than that of Buddhist Scriptures and social and economic, official and private documents, focusing on the Confucian classics like *Analects of Confucius*, *the Book of Filial Piety*, *Mao Poetry*, *Shang Shu*, and *the Book of Rites*, and enlightenment literary teaching materials of the Tang Dynasty like *Thousand Character Classic* and *Important Admonition for Enlightenment*, as well as *Family Education of Grandfather*. This indicates that the education of Chinese language in these regions during the Tang Dynasty was basically consistent with that

① There were frequent traffic on the eastern section of Silk Road, and southern and northern part of Tarim Basin, and a lot of letters were discovered. The Chinese bamboo documents unearthed along the Great Wall, letters take a large proportion. Many letters were maintained in the documents of Dunhuang. It is not accidental, proving indirectly that Chinese played an important role in the interaction of multiple nations in the Chinese-character cultural circle. The most famous document is letter in ancient Sogdian language by Stein, as well as two letters in Persian language of the late 8th century. One was discovered in 1901, collected at British National Museum Or. 8212/ 166, the other was collected by Beijing National Museum. Please refer to *Silk Road and Economy of the Western Regions* of Yin Qing published by Zhonghua Book Company in 2007.

of the Central Plains. Limited to environment, the characteristics were adaptive, simple and practical. <sup>①</sup>

## 5.2 Speculation for the development and decline of Chinese-character culture on the Silk Road

There were many factors for the development and decline of Chinese-character culture on the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty. Besides external forces like political power and economic activities, the most critical ones were the nations, languages, characters and beliefs. The nationalities, languages, characters and religious beliefs of Gaochang (Turpan), Qiuci (Kuqa) and Khotan (Hetian) along the Chinese section of the Silk Road are listed below (table 1), for reference to the reasons of the development and the rise and decline law of Chinese-character culture. In addition, Turpan, the Western Xia Regime and Liao are also included for reference.

The cultural inheritance and development can be long-lasting and profound if it is proactive and

internally requested. It will be short lived if it is passive and externally requested. The development history of Chinese-character culture during the Tang Dynasty is consistent with this principle. Chinese characters have their own nationality and region, so they have different results compared to those without.

Despite of official promotion, the former one is passive and externally requested, with a parallel development of Chinese characters and non-Chinese characters, under the control of political power of the Han people. So, Chinese characters are only employed when people communicate with the government, and it is hard to take root and the general people still stick to their own language, understand a bit of Chinese at most. They are incapable of reading and writing in Chinese. The universality of Chinese characters depends largely on political power. Once it declines, Chinese language and characters will vanish together. It was so with the development of Gaochang, Qiuci and

Table 1 Nationalities, languages, characters and religions of Gaochang, Qiuci, and Khotan

Kingdom/ Region	Nationality	Language	Character	Belief
Gaochang (Turpan)	Mainly Han nationality, multiple nationalities (Uyghur)	Mainly Chinese, multiple languages (Uyghur)	Mainly Chinese, Turkic, Qocho Uyghur, Sogdian	Buddhism (Islamism)
Qiuci (Kuqa)	Kuchean (Uygur)	Tocharian, Chinese, Sanskrit (Uygur)	Tocharian, Chinese (Uyghur)	Buddhism (Islamism)
Khotan (Hetian)	Serbs (Uygur)	Serbian, Qocho Uyghur (Uyghur)	Khotanese, Qocho Uyghur, Chinese (Uyghur)	Buddhism (Islamism)
Turpan	Turpan (Tibetan) people	Turpan (Tibetan)	Turpan (Tibetan)	Buddhism
The Western Xia Regime	Tangut, Chinese people	Tang Gus, Chinese	Chinese, Tangut	Buddhism
Liao	Khitan and Chinese people	Khitan, Chinese	Chinese, Khitan	Buddhism

<sup>①</sup> For the Chinese classics and enlightenment materials, please refer to Studies on the Basis of the Unearthed Documents of the Western Regions published on *Jigu Academy* in 2006; The Spread and Acceptance of Chinese Literature in the Turpan Region of the Middle Ancient Times by Zhu Yuqi, published on the *Chinese Social Sciences* issue 6 in 2010 on page 182– 194.

Khotan.

In the latter case, people did not have their own characters before the introduction of Chinese characters, which were borrowed as a reading and writing tool. They learn Chinese language and characters out of real demand, which is proactive and internally requested. Therefore, they not only read and communicate using Chinese for a long term, but also record and inherit culture and civilization in Chinese. Later, when they have their native characters, which are created based on Chinese characters, when native characters replace original Chinese characters and language, Chinese-character culture is still deeply rooted in the cultural core and becomes an indispensable part of its national culture. In the history of China, it is so with Turpan, Xixia and Liao during the Tang and Song dynasties, and Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

Turpan did not originally have native characters. SongzanGanbu (?–650) dispatched TunmiSangbu to learn Sanskrit and Buddhism in the 7th century. After he completed his studies, he returned to Turpan and created the Turpan language based on Sanskrit under the requirements of SongzanGanbu. Li Yuanhao, of the Xixia Dynasty, imitated the Han system and proclaimed to be emperor in 1038, and required YeliRenrong(?–1042) to create Tangut based on Chinese characters in the first year of Daqing (1036). The creation of Khitan script was started in the 5th year of Shence, of the first founder of the Liao Dynasty, and was finished on lunar September 14th (October 28th, 920). The emperor issued for enforcement, and the writing style was similar to Chinese characters.

The nations of the Korean Peninsula and the Islands of Japan in Northeast Asia have earlier cultural exchanges with China, which were with the help of Chinese characters in the early years, as these nations had a late creation of characters. This can be proved by the early Shih-Wen Chin left

by three Korean states namely Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla (Inoue Naoki, 2009, pp.29–56). Korea did not have a native language before the 15th century, and adopted Chinese as its official characters. The national classics, decrees and regulations, and files were written in Chinese. Shizong, Emperor of the Li Dynasty, set up the onmun bureau, and required Zheng Linzhi and Cheng Sanwen to create onmun. Since the publishing of *Xun Min Zheng Yin* (Korean Script) in 1446, Korea has had its native characters.

Despite its old culture, the creation of native characters in Japan was also rather late. In the ancient times, the Japanese borrowed Chinese characters as their early-stage characters. The remaining Shih-Wen Chin is proof. (MorishitaShoJi, 2009, pp. 57–68). For a long period, Chinese characters were regarded as the carrier for thoughts and emotion expressions, and were called “true name.” At the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the “kana” appeared in Japan, which borrowed the phonetic Chinese characters. Ultimately, the creation was completed by KibiMakibi(692–775) and Kukai (774–835) successively. Since the 10th century, Kana characters went popular in Japan, but Chinese characters were not abolished.

Chinese characters had been employed as the written language nationwide in Vietnam from ancient times to the early 20th century. Even though the new character Chu Nom was created in Vietnam, Chinese characters are still the mainstream of written languages there. Based on Chinese characters, chu nom expresses Vietnamese language in the methods of echoism, phonetic loan and associative compound. The specific time for the generation of these characters is unknown. In the two short dynasties of the Hu Dynasty (1400–1407) and the Xishan Dynasty (1786–1802), Chu Nom failed to replace Chinese characters. It went parallel in importance at most. People must understand Chinese characters before they can employ chu nom,

therefore, Chinese characters are still regarded as the orthodox characters. From the late 19th to the early 20th century, Vietnam was captured by France, and Latinization of Vietnamese was promoted. Chinese characters officially stopped being employed, but general scholars still wrote in Chinese. The employment of Chinese characters was completely ended after the Second World War.

Chinese characters were employed for writing by Korea, Japan, and Vietnam for a long period. They wrote classics in Chinese and left a large quantity of poetic prosed and classics. In recent years, great importance has been gradually attached to the Chinese language, and there has formed a newly thriving Sinology field of “overseas Chinese culture” and “overseas Chinese classics.”

For the spread and development of Chinese characters for different nations and under different context of languages and characters, the realistic demand is a major impetus for learning, particularly for commercial activities. The reasons for translators of different nations to be shuttling back and forth along the Silk Road of the Tang Dynasty remain the same for foreign trade today. Moreover, the sacred charm of religion is an important support for the spread of Chinese-character culture. The Chinese Buddhist classics are the largest quantity among the unearthed documents along the Chinese section of the Silk Road. This suggests the efforts of monks from different places and different nations in the spread of Chinese Buddhism, particularly in the translation, lecturing and copying of scriptures. The eminent monks who were proficient in several languages including Chinese were a strong force in the development of Chinese character development. After the Tang Dynasty, there were major changes in the religious beliefs in different places and Chinese Buddhist Scriptures with Chinese characters as carrier disappeared. These are phenomena worth considering.

## 6. Conclusion

Chinese characters are the carrier of Chinese culture, and the spread of Chinese characters and culture plays a major role for the export and inheritance of Chinese culture. The state of the spread of Chinese characters and classics on the Silk Road in the Tang Dynasty is closely associated with the systems, characteristics, and development processes of each nation’s language and characters, the opportunity of the spread of Chinese characters and classics as well as the economic, political, religious, cultural and living environments. Over time and space, there was a development process of acceptance and rise and decline. Compared with the cultural circle of East Asia characters, we can understand the laws of the rise and decline, success and failure, and its influence in the spreading process of Chinese-character culture.

The degree of the formation, existence and development of the Chinese-character culture circle is proportional to the demands for Chinese characters and classics by the real environments in the different regions. Before native languages were created by the nations and countries with late development of character creation, they had to borrow characters of other countries or nations as a tool for cultural exchange and inheritance. Chinese characters were introduced to Gaochang, Qiuci, Khotan, Korea, Japan and Vietnam as early as the Han Dynasty, and had different results of development over a long period. The spread of Chinese characters and classics and the development process of Chinese-character culture present the following laws, to provide reference and enlightenment to cultural exchanges and development of Silk Road culture.

First, regions with a native language and characters, promoted the development of culture and education through administrative systems, to enable the spread of Chinese characters and classics, under

the control of the regimes of the Han people. Due to the incompatibility of the systems of native language and characters and that of Chinese language and characters, the large number of Chinese documents were mostly official and private documents in the aspects of economy, law, and society, like agreements, legal proceedings, and letters, followed by Buddhist Scriptures, and few classics of Chinese culture, focused on Confucian classics as teaching materials. The content and proportion of unearthed Chinese documents rightly reflect the real situation in these regions. The documents unearthed in Gaochang, Qiuci and Khotan are mainly related to trade, followed by religious spread and military affairs, and administrative influence of the government of the Tang Dynasty. Therefore, the real Chinese-character culture did not penetrate into the culture of these nations, and could not take root. Because of the disappearance of the political power of the Tang Dynasty, the employment of Chinese characters and classics quickly disappeared.

Second, the nations, with late development of character creation, employed Chinese characters as their character system for reading and writing for a long period, like Turpan, the Western Xia Regime, Korea, Japan and Vietnam. In these countries and regions, Chinese classics were widely popular, whose decrees and regulations, systems, education and ideology had been deeply affected by Chinese culture. Chinese culture penetrated extensively into local culture. Even though characters of their own were generated, they were mostly created by borrowing Chinese characters. After the newly created characters of these nations became popular, the employment of Chinese characters was reduced

but the Chinese-character culture still went deep into the daily life. Besides language and characters, the connection of religious belief, particularly the prosperity of Chinese Buddhism, even the nature of an agricultural society or a semi-agricultural society, all of which are impetus for the development of a Chinese-character culture.

Third, large-scale population immigration and contact promotes exchange of different cultures, mainly represented in aspects like language and characters, religious beliefs and dietetic culture. Language and characters are the most important factors in population immigration, contact and interaction, which develop most quickly and have significant and profound influence.

Fourth, when we observe the spread of Chinese-character culture, we can find that there is a potential law, namely official language and characters can spread and form a certain culture and become long-lasting like the Western Xia Regime, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam when there is consistency between the official language and characters and the local national language and characters. Conversely, a culture by the spread of official language and characters is not easy to form nor will it last long. Once political influence disappears, there will be a replacement of the official language and characters, and alterations in religious beliefs. The spread culture of the official and religious language and characters will gradually decline and vanish. In the late Tang and Five Dynasties, as the central power declined in the frontier regions, the Chinese-character culture circle gradually disappeared. As long as there were the Han people, they will maintain the use of Chinese characters.

(Translator: Huang Yan; Editor: Yan Yuting)

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