

China's Silk Road Originates from Nanchong and Develops across the Whole World

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Abstract: The following views regarding the Southern Silk Road are presented and discussed. First, primitive wild mulberry trees were transplanted from Nanchong to the world. Second, primitive wild silkworms immigrated from Nanchong to the world. Third, the ancient silk of China originated in Nanchong and spread across the world. Fourth, Sichuan silk arrived in Afghanistan and ancient Egypt one thousand years earlier than Zhang Qian's arrival. Fifth, the appearance of the Southern Silk Road precedes the appearance of the Northern Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road by hundreds of years. This article supports the belief that as the headstream of the Southern and Northern Silk Road, Nanchong is the intersection of "the Belt and Road" as well as the Yangtze River Economic Belt.

Keywords: Nanchong; Silk Road; the Belt and Road

As we gather at Nanchong to study the headstream of the Silk Road, we muse over the remote past and search for the mysteries of the old years. We should think of reform from the bottom. In this regard, I would like to share several views with you. First, primitive wild mulberry trees were transplanted from Nanchong to the world. Second, primitive wild silkworms immigrated from Nanchong to the world. Third, the ancient silk of China originated in Nanchong and spread across the world. Fourth, Sichuan silk arrived in Afghanistan and ancient Egypt one thousand years earlier than Zhang Qian's arrival. Fifth, the appearance of the Southern Silk Road precedes the appearance of the Northern Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road by hundreds of years. Undoubtedly, Nanchong is the headstream of the Southern and Northern Silk Road as well as the intersection of "the Belt and Road" and the Yangtze River Economic Belt.

First is the relationship between silk and China. The world started to know about China through silk. In the archaisms of the Indian language, "seres" and "Cina"

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How ancient Chinese make silk

are addresses of Ancient China used in Ancient India. They appeared in Sanskrit scriptures much earlier than the appearance of the word china. Both mean silk. The original meaning of seres is “something related to silk”. Generally, it is believed that the Indian word seres originated from the Chinese character *si*(丝). In the early 2nd century A.D., it was recorded in the western literature that Macedonian businessmen sent out an envoy to Sera (Luoyang, the capital of the Eastern Han Dynasty). The record has been well preserved in *Geology*, the monumental work of the great geologist Claudius Ptolemaeus (about 90–168 A.D.). In March 1993, a number of media, including the *New York Times*, reported that a piece of silk was found in the hair of a female mummy (a pharaoh of the 21st Dynasty) by Austrian scientists, which proved to be from Sichuan Province, China. This was also reported by the Chinese magazine *Silk Road*, 1994, Issue 1. The 21st Dynasty of Ancient Egypt lasted from 1090 B.C. to 945 B.C. Silk from Sichuan was brought into Egypt and other countries along the Silk Road like Burma, India, Afghanistan and Turkey as early as 1000 B.C. There are signs of silk in the ancient cities and sculptures in India. It is recorded in *Dawan Records* (which records the historical facts of countries in the Western Regions of and to China), *Volume 123 of Records of the Historian*, that Zhang Qian saw Shu cloth and Qiongzhang (a kind of walking stick)

in Daxia (Afghanistan today) when he served as an envoy to the Western Regions, which is not surprising. It shows that Sichuan products, especially silk from Nanchong, had been brought to South Asia before Zhang Qian’s arrival there. It is recorded in *Economic Life Section of Records of Human Civilization* (China Translation and Publishing Corporation, 1992) that an Egyptian Ambassador came to China just for silk in 1110 B.C. Recently it was discovered that statues of Terra Cotta Warriors and Sanxingdui Ruins have traces of silk. The ancient Chinese silk is available in the museums of India, Turkey, Egypt, and Africa. In short, Sichuan silk arrived in the West three thousand years ago, more than one thousand years earlier than the time discussed by scholars today.

Second, only one place can be regarded as the headstream of the Silk Road when it is simultaneously supported by six essential facts. In ancient times, everything was in its natural state, without the equipment made possible by modern science and technology, things like air conditioning and plastic greenhouses, airplanes and automobiles, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. It makes no sense to investigate the mode of production in ancient times with today’s way of thinking. Productivity at that time relied on manpower and good weather. Of the six essential facts, the first is the natural environment, namely conditions suitable for the

growth of high-quality wild mulberry trees. These conditions included altitude, soil acidity, temperature and humidity. Second, was the biological factor, namely climatic conditions suitable for the growth of high-quality wild silkworms, and silkworm eggs are available locally. Third, was the technical factor, namely equipment and personnel for silk processing. Fourth, was the traffic factor, namely water routes and land routes providing convenient transportation. Fifth, was the trading demand, namely the silk market and business atmosphere, and business should be in a moderate state instead of overdeveloped or underdeveloped. Sixth, was the people. There was a good balance between population and the realistic scale for silk production which encouraged the development of farming and the people's enthusiasm for production. A place can only be regarded as the headstream of Silk Road when it meets the six essential factors as Nanchong clearly did. The following conditions are required for mulberry's growth, namely an altitude below 1200 meters, temperature ranging from 5°C to 30°C (25°C–30°C preferred), moisture ranging from 60% to 85% (65% preferred), fertile soil and acidity ranging from pH4.5 to pH9.0 (pH6.0 to pH7.5 preferred), with more than 1.5% organic matter and full sunshine. The following conditions are required for the growth of silkworm eggs, namely subtropical and tropical areas, feeding temperature ranging from 20°C to 30°C, development temperature ranging from 7°C to 40°C, moisture ranging from 70% to 85%, and soft light. Special attention should be paid to disease prevention for mulberry trees and silkworms, especially fungal diseases such as powdery mildew, mulberry rust, violet root rot and sclerotinia blight of mulberry, and bacterial diseases such as bacterial wilt and mulberry bacterial blight. It is proved by local residents that wild mulberry trees and silkworms exist in some mountains of Nanchong today. Silkworm eggs and mulberry trees

were spread throughout the Silk Road in ancient times. Nanchong belonged to Liangzhou, later it was renamed Anhan. In the Xia Dynasty, it was called the land of "You Guo Shi", and was renamed "guo zhou", the State of Fruit, implying a great variety of plants and high level of farming.

Third, the development of Nanchong Silk should be reviewed from six dimensions. The first dimension is geology. Nanchong is at the second geographic ladder of China, the transitional zone between the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the Sichuan Basin. It is to the east of the Kunlun Mountains and next to Qinba Mountain. There are a variety of transitional animals and plants. Nanchong is at a latitude ranging from 30° 35' to 31° 51' north and longitude ranging from 105° 21' to 106° 58' east. It is a hilly region from 256 meters to 889 meters above sea level with an average temperature of 17°C. Temperature decreases with altitude. Gaoping District of Nanchong City is at the latitude of 30° 7' north and the longitude of 106° east, and is 269 meters above sea level. The four ancient civilizations in the world are close to the latitude of 30° North. The longitude of 100° east is a mysterious geographic line with rich meaning. Moist air is brought by as many as 1,409 rivers in the Sichuan Basin and 9 rivers in the territory of Nanchong. There are unequalled natural conditions in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the Sichuan Basin like fresh water and a closed geographical environment respectively. The Jialing River Basin covers an area of 39,000 square kilometers, and is 1,345 kilometers in length. With two sources, the river runs down from north to south. The gradient variation in temperature is most suitable for growth of silkworms and mulberry trees. The second dimension is ancient city. It is believed by scholars that the ancient Silk Road started from Chang'an in the Western Han Dynasty and started from Luoyang in the Eastern Han Dynasty. Both Chang'an and Luoyang are

ancient capital cities while Nanchong is not. The Silk Road is a national road instead of a provincial or city road. Nanchong has not been included as an option of the headstream of the Silk Road due to political considerations, which is convincing as well. This is “the effect of capital city”. Nanchong is not an ancient city, but it is qualified to be listed as one of the options of the headstream. The third dimension is time. In the Song Dynasty, the compass was used for navigation which leads to the development of the Maritime Silk Road, but this was after the Silk Road on land was developed. The Southern Silk Road is several hundred years, maybe even one thousand years earlier than the Northern Silk Road because it was much easier to travel from Sichuan to Yunnan, and then further on to Burma and India than to travel in the hot, windy, dusty desert, wasteland, icy and snowy road in the north. There are abundant forests and rich resources in Southern China with favorable climate. The southern road was more convenient for the trade of Nanchong silk in Southern Asia and the West because of shorter travel distance than Jiangsu and Zhejiang. The fourth dimension is biology. There is a lush growth of original wild mulberry in the Jialing River of Nanchong, and people transplanted and cultivated mulberry trees to other places. Two ebonies were found in the Jialing River by people in Dujing Street Gaoping District of Nanchong City. One is about 15 meters in length and weighs about 10 tons, with maximum diameter of approximately 1.5 meters with intact trunk and branch. The other is about 10 meters in length, weighs about 5 tons, with a maximum diameter of 0.8 meters. Both roots are intact and their trunks have branches. They can be identified as mulberry trees from their shape. Ebonies have been found time and time again in the river course of the Jialing River, which proves that there were huge original mulberry forests in ancient times in Gaoping District. In May 2013, people found a

wild mulberry tree in Shuangbai County, Chuxiong City of Yunnan Province. The tree ages around one thousand years. It is 20 meters in height with a diameter of 3.5 meters. There are still lots of old, living mulberry trees in the territory of Nanchong. The formation of ebony usually takes at least ten thousand years so it is understandable that silkworm feeding and spinning appeared three thousand years ago in Nanchong. The fifth dimension is economy. Due to the underdeveloped economy of Nanchong, compared with Xi'an and Chengdu, it attached great importance to agriculture and the development of silkworm feeding and mulberry tree growing instead of an urban economy, which was the major force for economic development at that time. Chengdu enjoyed the reputation that “Yangzhou is the most developed city in China and Chengdu is the second” (Yangzhou and Chengdu were the two centers for commercial development along the Yangtze River in the Tang Dynasty due to developed industry and commerce in Yangzhou and rich natural resources in Chengdu. Commerce was flourishing and there was even a paper currency, *Jiaozi*, in the Northern Song Dynasty. As a result, it was less profitable to feed silkworms and grow mulberry trees. Chengdu relied on sales and fine processing. The Fuhe River became Jinjiang (described as a bright and beautiful river) due to yarn washing. As capital cities, both Xi'an and Luoyang were big markets for the sale of silk rather than its production. The sixth dimension is culture. There are records about silkworm feeding and mulberry tree growing in *Shui Jing Zhu* (*Commentary on the Waterways Classic*), *Chronicles of Huayang*, poetry, folklore, legends, folk songs, and place and road names. In Yanting County, Mianyang City (of Sichuan Province), Lei Zu, titled Yuan Fei (a concubine of the Yellow Emperor), fed silkworms and spun silk. She made efforts in technology development and talent cultivation, and made the production of Nanchong silk to earlier period. It says

in *Perilous Journey to the Land of Shu*, a well-known poem of Li Bai, that “Cancong (Silkworm Goddess, the first emperor of the ancient Shu Kingdom) and Yufu (the third emperor of the ancient Shu Kingdom) founded the Shu Kingdom as legend goes, long forgotten in that land, unknown for thousands of years to the outside world.” The rulers in ancient times were even named after silkworms and mulberry trees. The Moon Gorge of Guangyuan City, Sichuan Province, is a “Museum of Transport” in the world. Both Jianmen Pass and Shu Roads are the way to the North. In addition to the Jialing River, there are five or six roads in south-north direction out of Nanchong. To be sure, as the headstream of the Silk Road, Nanchong is the major production place for ancient silk. In the four Chinese characters “Ba Shan Shu Shui”, “Shu” refers to wild silkworm, while “Ba” stands for “large snake” namely dragon, which are applied to describe the shapes of the Jialing River and the Qinba Mountains. It was after the Qin and Han dynasties, especially after the Tang Dynasty, when the rise of silk could be observed in other areas in China. At that time, technology was more advanced and mulberry trees and silkworm eggs were largely improved, which had nothing to do with the ancient mulberry trees and silk. In *Records of Dawan*, there are unique symbols of Sichuan recorded like Shugu (businessmen of Sichuan), Qiangren (the ancient name for Tibetan nationality), Qiongbo (Qionglai and Yibin of Sichuan), Qianwei (Shu Prefecture in the Qin Dynasty) and Shuyi. The silk culture should be included in the ancient Shu culture, and the relation of Nanchong silk with Sanxingdui Ruins and Jinsha Ruins should be studied.

Fourth, I put forward ten suggestions for your reference. First, an international Silk Road Headstream Park and a Silk Road Museum should

be built, where a memorial tablet is to be erected, characters are to be engraved, statues are to be built, and a variety of mulberry trees are to be grown. Second, a Sichuan European Industrial Cooperation Park should be constructed and joined together with “the Belt and Road”. Third, innovation and reform of the silk industry should be strengthened to cope with fading, corrugation and design of new products. Fourth, a China Europe Silk Training Institute should be established to reserve talents for the construction of “the Belt and Road”. Fifth, a “Forum on the Headstream of the Silk Road” should be set up and take place annually in Dujing Town Gaoping District. Sixth, an exchange platform like a website, WeChat group or periodicals should be built for the Silk Road headstream. Seventh, international tourist destinations for the Silk Road headstream should be developed to present an overall view of sections like growing and feeding (of silkworm and mulberry trees), processing (of silk), sales and uses (of silk products). Eighth, Nanchong City should develop and hold exhibitions and meetings along “the Belt and Road” and conclude friendship cities of the Silk Road. Ninth, Dujing Town should be packaged in a comprehensive way with the culture of silkworms and mulberry trees, like sculptures of silkworm cocoons, exceptionally big mulberry trees, workshops, houses, clothes, and trains in the model of silkworms and mulberry trees. Tenth, mulberry trees should be grown along the Jialing River and further chosen as the official tree of Nanchong. In a word, for the construction of the Silk Road headstream, we should think and plan in a systematic and comprehensive way, to make our contribution to the development strategy of “the Belt and Road”.

(Translator: Huang Yan; Editor: Yan Yuting)

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