

READING TWO

Liu Xinru, "Migration and Settlement of the Yuezhi-Kushan: Interaction and Interdependence of Nomadic and Sedentary Societies," *Journal of World History* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 261-92.

Abstract: Interactions and interdependence between nomadic and agricultural peoples are important topics of world history. This article seeks to track the migration and transformation of the Yuezhi-Kushan from a nomadic people residing on the borders of agricultural China to the ruling elite of an empire embracing much of central Asia and south Asia. Interactions between nomadic and sedentary peoples had impacts on both Yuezhi-Kushan society and the agricultural societies that traded with the nomads (such as China) or those that were ruled by nomads (such as India).

Our general image of ancient civilizations is formed by the great agricultural empires of Eurasia. Nomadic pastoralists are most often regarded as predators to the sedentary-agricultural societies. Histories of many modern countries, however, not only retain signs of conflicts with the encroaching nomads, but also of "barbarian" impact on their culture. The interactions and interdependence between nomads and agriculturalists is an important topic of world history. Our knowledge of the phenomenon, though, is very much hindered by the dearth of information on nomads, especially those in early history, who left few literary sources and often very shallow archaeological remains for historians to explore. Luckily, neighboring sedentary societies did provide information about them, as those agricultural empires or states constantly engaged in military conflicts as well as diplomatic, commercial, marital, and other interactions with them. The Yuezhi people, who early resided near the border of the agricultural part of China and later migrated on the Eurasian steppe all the way to north India, eventually becoming the rulers of the vast agricultural-trading Kushan empire, comprised one of the nomadic groups better known by the sedentary societies of that time. Thus, to trace the migration and settlement of the Yuezhi-Kushan people may be [End Page 261] productive in understanding the contributions of nomadic people to world civilizations, or more specifically, the civilizations of China, India, the Eurasian steppe, and to a certain extent, that of West Asia and Europe.

An easy approach to studying the phenomenon of interdependence of nomads and sedentary societies is to examine the modern societies that emerged from ancient civilizations. Nowadays, the first stop of many tourists to China after their arrival at Beijing is often the Great Wall, so close to the capital of modern and medieval China; it is only a short drive to the ancient demarcation of agricultural lands from those of nomads. As a matter of fact,

the very location of the capital was determined by the two different ecological zones. Similarly, in South Asia, in particular in Islamic Pakistan, one can easily perceive the extent of Turkish impact on architecture and clothing, for example. Even in Hindu-dominated India, the first tourist attraction is often the Taj Mahal, which is definitely non-Hindu but also definitely Indian, culturally. One might claim that both Chinese culture and Indian culture were created by the interactions of nomadic and sedentary cultures. This is also true for Iran, Turkey, and many parts of Europe.

Most visible influences of nomads on modern Indian and Chinese societies have been dated to the middle ages. But the story started long before then. At least on the Eurasian landscape, north of the ecological zone of agriculture, between mountains and deserts, the vast steppe was probably the earliest highway of communications. Nomads, or pastoralists who lived on stock raising, had better means of transportation than did agriculturalists. The dynamics of communication and transportation, however, was derived from the need and urge to exchange goods and ideas. In studying cultural and material exchanges in pre-modern Eurasia, the emphasis is often on east-west communications, whereas the centers of communications were major agricultural empires. Even when nomads entered the scene, they played the role of facilitating communications between east and west. While moving along the east-west routes in the region north of the agricultural zone, however, nomadic pastoralists frequently interacted with neighboring sedentary societies to the south. To a certain extent, the north-south dimension of the exchanges provided the dynamics for the movements of goods and ideas along the east-west routes; therefore it also must be introduced into the picture of the encounters of the old world.

From antiquity, on the vast grassland of Central Asia, many nomadic peoples migrated and conflicted. Those tribes that gained strength after absorbing other tribes through conquest or alliance rose **[End Page 262]** to great confederacies or empires, and some of the defeated were forced to migrate away. Both conquerors and defeated might impose themselves on more vulnerable agricultural neighbors. While incursions into agricultural areas were a constant phenomenon along the borders of the two ecological zones, exploding nomadic empires occasionally flooded into agricultural lands and caused great damage. The most vivid memory in human history of fierce nomadic conquerors is that of the Mongols, whose conquest wiped out many states and changed demographic and economic patterns of ancient countries of Eurasia. Ironically, with all their deep resentment of agriculture, conquerors such as the Mongols started to adopt religions and other cultural features of their sedentary subjects soon after they established political power there. On the other hand, in spite of the damage they inflicted on agricultural

peoples, the Mongols left little cultural legacy after their political power collapsed.

Invasions of less severe form frequently took place in north China and northwest India. Nomadic invaders there almost always lost their own languages, religions, and other cultural attributes within a few generations after their settlement. Good examples are the Xianbei, the Qidan, the Jerchen, and the Manchu, who became rulers of China, and the Sakas, the Kushans, and the Ephthalites, who invaded South Asia. After their regimes dissolved, the new residents of South Asia often formed new Ksatriya castes, thus becoming legitimate components of the Hindu caste hierarchy. Though losing their identity, those invaders still influenced the cultures of the societies they ruled. The nature of this sort of impact on agricultural societies is one of the major issues explored in this study of the Yuezhi people.

Migration in a more or less peaceful manner probably brought fundamental changes to the countries that nomadic peoples entered. One example is speakers of Indo-European languages who entered South Asia in the second millennium B.C.E. The waves of migration brought a new linguistic family, which became the dominant language system in the sub-continent.

Meanwhile, not all nomadic groups were willing to occupy agricultural lands and settle there. The Xiongnu who infested the northern border of China during the Qin and the Han dynasties did not intend to occupy farming lands but only to loot or extract booty from Han rulers. The Yuezhi, who were defeated by the Xiongnu and later themselves invaded India, had no intention of invading China when they resided near its border, and continued to maintain a trading relationship with China even after they moved away.

The career of involuntary migration on the steppe followed by voluntary [End Page 263] invasion and occupation of an agricultural society was not unique to the Yuezhi-Kushans. The Sakas who entered South Asia just ahead of the Kushans had similar experiences. Even the cosmopolitanism of the Kushan empire was common for empires built by nomadic rulers. The Yuezhi-Kushan career, however, from a friendly trading relationship with one agricultural society, to a military humiliation and migration on the steppe, followed then by an invasion and occupation of another agricultural society, and finally to the rise as cosmopolitan broker of Eurasian trade, displayed the various forms of interactions between sedentary and nomadic peoples.

To study the complicated experiences of the Yuezhi-Kushans, one may start with their individual encounters with other peoples and observe how the encounters changed both the Yuezhi-Kushans and other parties. In his classic study of the cultural interfaces of the old world, Jerry Bentley suggests that encounters between various peoples brought both social conversion and

resistance in the interacting societies. He names three forms of conversion, namely conversion through voluntary associations, conversion induced by political, social, or economic pressure, and conversion brought about by assimilation. ¹ In the centuries when the Yuezhi-Kushan people lived on the steppe north of agricultural China, migrated in Central Asia, and settled in South Asia, that is, in the process of moving from the east to the west, they encountered many other peoples and faiths and probably experienced all three forms of conversion. Their interactions with the peoples to the south, beginning with their invasion and occupation, not only involved their own conversion to the faiths and ideologies of the sedentary peoples, but also the conversion of peoples there to some of their values. Their encounter with agricultural China took yet another form. On the borders between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary agriculturists, that is, the borders of different styles of life and production, the urges and needs for economic exchanges were strong, and interactions were frequent. The penetration of values on both sides took place more often than invasions or occupations. The Yuezhi people happened to be one of the nomadic peoples who lived on the border of agricultural China, possibly as early as the beginning of the historical period of Chinese civilizations, and thus provide a good example for examining the impact of encounters of both long-term trading relationships and invasions in the context of both north-south interactions and the east-west flow of peoples, goods, and ideas. [End Page 264]

Migration of the Yuezhi People

The Yuezhi resided on the border of agricultural China even earlier than the Xiongnu. While the Xiongnu were famous in history because of their conflicts with Chinese empires, the Yuezhi were better known to the Chinese for their role in long-distance trade. Ancient economist Guan Zhong (645 B.C.E.) referred to the Yuezhi, or Niuzhi, as a people who supplied jade to the Chinese. ² It is well known that ancient Chinese rulers had a strong attachment to jade. All of the jade items excavated from the tomb of Fuhao of the Shang dynasty, more than 750 pieces, were from Khotan in modern Xinjiang. ³ As early as the mid-first millennium B.C.E. the Yuezhi engaged in the jade trade, of which the major consumers were rulers of agricultural China.

The Yuezhi continued to be one of the strongest tribes to the north of China until the early Han dynasty in the early second century B.C.E. ⁴ Due to conflicts with another nomadic tribe, the aggressive Xiongnu, the Yuezhi migrated to the west in the following century. By the late second century B.C.E., according to the Han envoy Zhang Qian who visited the Yuezhi court in 129 B.C.E., the Yuezhi tribe conquered the region called Daxia, probably Hellenistic Bactria in modern Afghanistan, and ruled this territory from a city

on the Oxus. This story is well known and frequently quoted. Identifying the Yuezhi and tracing the routes that they traveled, from the border of agricultural China to the border of agricultural India, though, has demanded much research. The name Yuezhi and its variations – such as Yuzhi, Wuzhi, or Yanzhi – were known only to Chinese literature. The great tribe that settled in Bactria in the later second century B.C.E. and then conquered a large part of North India called itself *Kushana*. Contemporary Indian literature referred to the people who invaded and ruled them during the period as *Tukhara* or *Tushara*. Nowadays, most scholars agree that the Tukhara, Kushana, and Yuezhi were different names for the same people.⁵ These names were, nevertheless, quite different linguistically. The different appellations for the same people reflect not only changes of residential locations, but also the cultural identifications and even the composition of the people referred to by the names. [End Page 265]

Yuezhi, the name known in pre-Qin Chinese documents, continued to be used in Chinese historical literature. Immigrants, traders, or priests from that tribe carried the surname of “Zhi” in China for several centuries. Chinese literature clearly recorded the settlement of Yuezhi, the establishment of the Kushan empire, and even the names of the early Kushan kings. But Chinese literature continued to call the people from that tribe or state Yuezhi or Zhi. Indian literature referred to neither Kushan nor Yuezhi, rather Tushara or Tukhara. As Bactria was a region occupied by many different regimes and tribes, it is very difficult to identify the Yuezhi-Kushan with the Tushara or Tukhara.

In addition to Indian literary references to the people who ruled them as Tushara or Tukhara, Greek literature also referred to a people in Central Asia as “Tocharoi,” who, among other nomads, took Bactria away from the Greeks.⁶ In the second century B.C.E. the Hellenistic Bactrian kingdom was actually destroyed by a nomadic people. The rich Hellenistic city Ai-Khanoum on the Oxus was conquered around 145 B.C.E., according to the archaeologist who excavated the site.⁷ Lyonnet suggests that the invaders of Ai-Khanoum were the Yuezhi, that is, the Tuharans, and he addresses archaeological evidence around the region to support his argument.⁸ Calculations based on the Chinese records, provided by Zhang Qian the envoy to the Yuezhi court, however, suggest that the very same Yuezhi tribe, which was chased westward by the Xiongnu, migrated from the Ili River and Chu River regions as late as 130 B.C.E.⁹

The gap between Zhang Qian’s reference, that is, 130 B.C.E., and the archaeological date for the destruction of Ai-Khanoum, that is, 145 B.C.E., causes difficulties in identifying the Yuezhi or Tuharans as the invaders of Ai-Khanoum and Bactria south of the Oxus. Considering [End Page 266] the nature of nomadic states and their expansion, however, this difference should

not be a big problem. The Indian name Tukharan and the Greek name Tocharoi might indicate a large linguistic group who resided and migrated around a vast area of Central Asia; some of them may have invaded Bactria even before the Yuezhi tribe arrived there. When the region was conquered by the Yuezhi, it was already called *Daxia*, according to Zhang Qian, as recorded in the *History* by Sima Qian.¹⁰ *Daxia* was a Chinese rendering of *Tuhara*. Now “Bactria,” the place name given by the Greeks, had changed to *Tuhara*, indicating the masters of the place were no longer Greeks, but Tuharan speakers. Yuezhi might have been Tuharans, but only a branch of them. Kushan, according to Chinese literature, was the name of one of the five tribes that occupied Bactria. After the Kushans conquered the other four tribes, perhaps Tuharans or Scythians, who had entered into South Asia even before the Tuharans, the place and people under their rule then were called Kushanas by themselves.

The name Tuhara left many traces on the migration in Central Asia. When nomadic peoples migrated, their tribal names migrated with them, but the names often remained in their homelands even after they moved away. Many geographical names in Central Asia were variations of “Tuhara,” indicating that the places were associated with people who called themselves Tuhara. According to Sima Qian’s *History*, the Yuezhi originally lived in a place between Dunhuang and Qilian.¹¹ Linguistically Dunhuang is a variation of Tuharan. The modern city of Dunhuang in Gansu Province was a well-known Han dynasty garrison town. But the town was established around 111 B.C.E., that is, after Zhang Qian went back to the Han court to inform the emperor about the Yuezhi in 126 B.C.E. Therefore, the Dunhuang of early Han records was located somewhere other than the present Dunhuang, which was established after Zhang Qian’s mission. Among the many scholars who have sought the “original” land of Yuezhi, Professor Lin Meicun draws attention to the steppe north of the conventional Silk Road. He points out that the Yuezhi were nomads and famous for their horses. Instead of traveling across the deserts and stopping at oases as camel caravans did in later history, the large stock of Yuezhi galloped on the pastures north of the Tianshan Mountains. Therefore, the Dunhuang where the Yuezhi used to raise their horses **[End Page 267]** should be near Dunhong Mountain. Dunhong mountain was a part of the Tianshan mountain range, according to an ancient Chinese geography text, the *Shanhaijing*.¹² Meanwhile, the other place name mentioned together with Dunhuang by Zhang Qian, Qilian, was not Qilian Mountain in modern Gansu Province either. He argues that the name Qilian has an Indo-European, or more specifically Tuharan etymology, by which it is associated with “heaven,” as is the Chinese name Tianshan, “mountain of heaven.” So the Qilian Mountain of Zhang Qian was actually the Tianshan mountain range.¹³ All this indicates that the location of Dunhuang, the homeland of the Yuezhi people, should be near the modern oasis town Turfan.

The toponym Turfan is also a variation of Tuharan. Along the routes of Eurasia there are many other place names recorded in various Chinese forms that are actually variations of Tuharan. A tiny settlement of twenty-seven households named Danhuan as recorded in the *Hanshu* was probably not too far from Qilian Mountain. ¹⁴ Further to the west the Chinese name for Ferghana, "Dawan," and that for Bactria, "Daxia," were also variations of Tuhara. ¹⁵ Bactria, a name given by the Greeks to northern Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, was known as the "land of Tuharans" as late as the seventh century C.E., according to the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang. ¹⁶

In modern linguistics, Tuharan is the name for a branch of Indo-European languages. Tuharan diverges from other Indo-European languages that prevailed in Central Asia at various periods by its affiliation with Hittite, thus it belonged to the western branch of the language family. The presence of Tuharan speakers in Central Asia is testified by documents found in parts of Central Asia. The fact that Tuharan speakers lived in the geographically eastern part of the language group, yet the linguistic affiliation of Tuharan is with the western branch of Indo-European languages, has caused a great deal of [End Page 268] speculation as to the origins of Tuharan speakers. ¹⁷ One theory is that the people who spoke Tuharan might have come from the western part of the Eurasian continent. Another is that the speakers of the western branch of Indo-European languages originally came from Central Asia. The spread of languages did not necessarily only follow the migrations of a whole population, however. The fact is that a language could conquer a large area in a short period of time, as has often been shown in later and better recorded historical periods, for example, the spread of Persian and Turkish languages in Central Asia and West Asia. The vehicle of language spread could be military occupation, cultural or ideological dominance, or trade. Tracing the place names related to Tuhara during the first millennium B.C.E., and Tuharan documents dated to the first millennium C.E. in Central Asia, one cannot help thinking that Tuharan speakers were once very powerful and wide spread, and that the spread of the language could have taken all the forms mentioned above.

So far archaeological excavations have not found a clearly defined Yuezhi, Kushan, or Tuharan culture. As a matter of fact, material cultures of the steppe show strong similarities between different linguistic groups. Ancient Indian and Chinese scholars who recorded the Tuharans or Yuezhi, however, seemed clear about the differences between nomadic peoples, whether Yuezhi, Scythians (Saka in Sanskrit and Sai in Chinese), Xiongnu, or Wusun. These nomadic peoples formed their own political and cultural entities, and their differences were more linguistic than physical or material.

At the height of their power Tuharan speakers were all over Central Asia. Yuezhi was probably just one tribe of Tuharan-speaking people. Profuse

references of the surnames Yuezhi or Zhi in Chinese literature and in Chinese documents found in Central Asia suggest that Chinese people called not only people from the Yuezhi tribe by the name Yuezhi or Zhi, but also other Tuharan speakers or subjects of the [End Page 269] Kushan empire. Even as late as the late third century C.E. when the Kushan empire was already in decline, and the core region of its political power was under Sassanian rule, Chinese authorities still issued passports to those who identified themselves with the Kushans or Tuharans with the surname of Zhi.¹⁸

From the time of the Han dynasty Chinese people were aware of the physical diversity of the horse-riding peoples in the north. Their artistic depictions of those peoples vary from images resembling themselves to those with very high noses; pointed hats were often a feature they had in common.¹⁹ This information is likely reliable as Chinese people at that time had frequent interactions with the nomads in the north. This was even more so the case in later history. Three Chinese passports issued in the years around 266-74 C.E., which were discovered by Aurel Stein in Niya in Chinese Central Asia, give the physical descriptions of three travelers whose Chinese surname was Zhi. One of them was "49 in age, medium stature, black color...." Another was "30, medium stature, black color, big eyes, with moustache and beard...." The third was "56 in age, second name 'Nu,' with moustache and beard, white color, wearing trousers and boots...."²⁰ These passports show that by the late Kushan period, the empire could have embraced many different peoples. Their physical features might vary, but they somehow identified themselves as Kushan or Yuezhi culturally, and probably linguistically. These three people might not have even come from the Kushan territory.

One may remember that not all the Yuezhi people followed the migration of the main tribe to the west. A tribe called "Little Yuezhi" remained in their original land in the foothills of the Tianshan mountains. In other words, the Yuezhi tribe did not include all the Tuharan speakers. As mentioned above, Yuezhi tribes were nomadic, so their migrations might have taken the routes of the steppe in the north. In the early seventh century, however, at the southern edge of the Takla Makan, not far from Khotan, the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang paid respect to the ruins of an oasis town called "the original land of Tuharans." It was possible, as with the Sogdhians and Turks in later history, [End Page 270] that some of the Tuharan speakers in Central Asia became sedentary cultivators of the oases.²¹

The wide spread of a language system in such a vast area could have several meanings. If the Yuezhi were the dominant force in Central Asia, as reported in the Chinese literature, and if the Yuezhi were Tuharan speakers, it could mean that many groups of people who originally were neither Yuezhi nor Tuharan speakers were incorporated into the Kushan regime, and thus became Tuharan speakers. One may expect, therefore, that the Yuezhi, or

more generally, Tuharan speakers in Central Asia, were not ethnically homogeneous. Their physical features may actually have varied from region to region from the time they lived on the border of agricultural China, to the time of their settlement in Bactria and then India. Their economic and social contacts with Chinese and Indians, their battles with the Xiongnu, Wusun, Sakas, and other nomadic peoples, and eventually with the Hellenistic states invariably resulted in demographic exchanges.

The Kushan regime left many stone sculptures, though few literary records of its history. Most of the stone sculptures of Kushan rulers found in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India are headless. A few complete stone figures with Kushan-style clothing – with nomadic robes and boots – show that their physical features did not differ from sculptures whose clothing is Indian in style. In other words, the artwork of the Kushan period does not reveal Kushan physical characteristics. One may assume that when the Yuezhi-Kushan people settled in Bactria, and when they established their powerful empire, they were already a physically heterogeneous people. They might, however, have looked roughly similar to the locals, as the region had a fluid population with different peoples coming, settling, and moving away. With the passing of time some Kushan or Yuezhi might have had dark skin like the Indians to the south, while others might have been a lighter color similar to the nomads on the Russian steppe. Moreover, some of them might have had higher noses than the Chinese and nomads to [End Page 271] their east, as is evident from the third-century Chinese passports. In short, their physical features and their material culture were not very much different from the other peoples who went back and forth on the Central Asian steppe. Their identification as Yuezhi-Kushan was due partially to political affiliation, and partially to a common language, both of which embraced a population even larger than that in the territory of the Kushan empire. Tuharan, as a name for a language and a people, followed the migration and expansion of the Yuezhi-Kushan people all the way from the border of agricultural China to the border of India.

Nevertheless, once they settled in Bactria, the Tuharan speakers faced a new linguistic environment. Greek speakers were still around, other steppe people such as Scythians or Sakas had their own dialects, and the indigenous people spoke their own languages. To become rulers of people who had a strong literary tradition the Yuezhi-Kushan, who so far as we know did not have a written language when they arrived at Bactria, had to make adjustments and even compromises with this linguistic environment when ruling and trading with other peoples.

The Yuezhi-Kushan People as Traders

The Yuezhi maintained a long trading relationship with agricultural China, which may explain their role on the Silk Roads in later periods. They were known to the Chinese as suppliers of jade in the first millennium B.C.E. By the third century B.C.E., when the Xiongnu became a real threat to the border of the Chinese empire, the Yuezhi were better known as suppliers of horses. Chinese rulers treasured horses from antiquity. The chariot revolution brought horse-drawn chariots to China in the mid- to late second millennium B.C.E. Horses attached to chariots are found buried in many Shang dynasty tombs. Conflicts among the warring states were mostly fought using chariots. The cavalry revolution spread from the steppe to China in the mid-first millennium B.C.E. By the time the First Emperor unified China in the late third century B.C.E., the cavalry had become a major armed force. In dealing with incursions of horse-riding nomads from the north, mainly the Xiongnu, the cavalry was even more important. Securing a supply of horses was a major concern of the First Emperor.

Good horses, however, came from the steppe, which provided the environment for breeding and training. Sedentary agricultural societies that needed horses and other draft animals had to obtain them from the pastoral peoples. How the Shang and Zhou rulers obtained [End Page 272] their horses is not clear. As for the Qin dynasty, the conflicts with the Xiongnu that stimulated the building of defensive walls created a demand for horses rather than a supply. The Yuezhi tribe, which was still powerful on the steppe and kept a friendly trading relationship with Chinese rulers, was naturally the provider of horses. According to Sima Qian, a chief named Lou of the “Wuzhi” was the major horse supplier of the First Emperor. “Wuzhi” was another variation of Yuezhi in archaic Chinese. The chief traded horses and cattle for silk, and then resold the silk to other chiefs on the steppe. It was said that Lou made a ten-fold profit from his investment in this trade and became very rich. Greatly pleased with his services, the First Emperor granted him very high status, which allowed him to join the ministers of the court for an audience with the emperor.²²

If we trust Sima Qian, who is a very reliable historian, we may consider the Yuezhi to have been the very people who initiated the Silk Road trade. Around the third century B.C.E. their role in distributing silk to tribes on the steppe stimulated the silk-for-horse transactions, and also spread the fame of Chinese silk products such as yarn, floss, and textiles.

The Yuezhi became well known for their horses, probably not only in China. A later Chinese source quoted a third century C.E. geographical book by a Soghdian as saying that “while China is famous for its numerous population, and Rome is famous for its numerous treasures, the Yuezhi is famous for its

numerous horses.”²³ Bearing this reputation of the Yuezhi in mind, it is no mystery that the ruler of the Han dynasty, Wudi, sent Zhang Qian to the west to seek a military alliance with Yuezhi against the Xiongnu. When the Xiongnu made Chinese pay them in silk, food, grain, and other products of the agricultural society, the news of the animosity between the Xiongnu and the Yuezhi spread to the Han court. Meanwhile, the memory of more friendly transactions between the Yuezhi and Chinese certainly made them natural allies against the Xiongnu. Even though Zhang Qian could not convince the Yuezhi, who had already settled in fertile Bactria, to fight with the Xiongnu again, China and the Yuezhi resumed an exchange of goods.

Recent research has produced more information on the continued exchange between the Yuezhi and China after the failed mission of Zhang Qian. At the newly discovered site of a border fortress near [End Page 273] Dunhuang, archaeologists have found a document recording the transfer of a supply of food to the envoys of Yuezhi.²⁴ The document (DQ. C:39) is dated from around the later first century B.C.E. when China was under the Former Han empire, and the Kushan was already a powerful sedentary state around Bactria. Among the many wood slip inscriptions collected by Aurel Stein from Chinese Central Asia and preserved in the British Museum, Professor Lin Meicun discovered a slip from the Niya site dated to the Former Han. The Chinese inscription on the wood slip refers to the king of Dawan helping an envoy from the Great Yuezhi write the letter. Some of the characters are illegible, but the remaining characters tell us that the Great Yuezhi wanted to receive an ambassador from the Han court, and complained that they were being harassed by other peoples (the Xiongnu?).²⁵

These communications took place before the Yuezhi-Kushan invaded northern India and established their vast empire in the mid-first century C.E., but they had already settled in Bactria. The reason they continued to correspond with the Han court, though they rejected the military alliance against the Xiongnu, was probably to continue the trading relationship. Chinese rulers had been following the politics of Central Asia, and the progress of the settlement of the Yuezhi kingdom. They knew that after the Yuezhi conquered Bactria the region was under the control of five “Xihou,” or princes. One of them unified the five parts into a single kingdom, which developed into a powerful and affluent empire. The rulers of this kingdom called themselves “Kushana,” but Chinese writers and travelers, according to the *History of the Later Han*, continued to call them Yuezhi in the traditional way.²⁶ Though the main tribes of the Yuezhi migrated to Bactria, many former subjects or members remained along the routes, living in various colonies. As those who stayed in their homeland called themselves the Little Yuezhi, other Tuhuran-speaking peoples might also have been related to the Yuezhi.

The powerful state of Dawan in modern Ferghana was similar to the Yuezhi in custom and style, according to the description in the *History of the Han Dynasty*.²⁷ Dawan was famous for its grape wine and for its horses. Grape wine might be one of the legacies of Hellenistic [End Page 274] influence or Hellenization of the region before the Tuharan speakers took over. The name Dawan, as mentioned above, was a variation of Tuharan. The horses of Dawan were so famous that Wudi sent two major military expeditions to defeat the king and obtain the horses. As for the Yuezhi, who lived further west now, their major trading item with the Han was probably no longer horses. Now they controlled the resources not only of Central Asia, but also those of South Asia and even the Mediterranean. When they descended on the fertile agricultural land of Bactria, they were not poor nomads in tatters, but rich, proud horse-riding people skillful at trade.

Excavations at Tillya-tepe, a site in modern Afghanistan dated from around the first century B.C.E. to the first century C.E., have revealed the fabulously rich tombs of Kushan royalty.²⁸ The six excavated tombs were probably burial sites for princes and princesses of the Yuezhi-Kushan. Unlike the dry climate around the Takla Makan Desert, which preserved many ancient silk textiles and other artifacts, the poor conditions at Tillya-tepe preserved intact only gold items. The more than 20,000 gold pieces include vessels, plates, buckles, and small decorative pieces of clothing. The Kushan tomb items show that the new rulers of Bactria maintained many nomadic customs. Most of the golden artwork, except for the small clothing studs, shows either steppe animal designs or the Bactrian Hellenistic style. A bronze mirror, though, is obviously Chinese,²⁹ and some ivory carvings are of obvious Indian origin.³⁰ While a single bronze mirror might not be sufficient archaeological evidence to demonstrate a trading relationship with China, more revealing items such as silk textiles were not found at this site due to the environmental conditions. The most numerous golden remains are small decorative pieces of clothing. In other words, these small pieces of gold were parts of textiles found on the bodies. Unfortunately, all of the cloth material had rotted away. The excavators traced the shapes of robes and trousers based on the golden studs, so that the style of their clothing shows. The buried individuals were [End Page 275] undoubtedly handsomely dressed, but there is no way to investigate the textiles themselves. Considering the long relationship of the Yuezhi with the Chinese, and their role in distributing silk on the steppe as clearly recorded in the Chinese literature, the tomb occupants of Tillya-tepe, if they were indeed Yuezhi-Kushan, probably wore robes of Chinese silk textiles when buried. This hypothesis cannot serve as conclusive evidence that the Kushan were carriers of Chinese silk, but it would also be difficult to exclude the possibility.

After the Kushan rulers crossed the Hindu Kush and occupied the north Indian plain, they controlled the crucial sector of the Silk Roads, benefiting tremendously from the commercial traffic. The excavation at Begram – site of the ancient city Kapisa, the summer palace of the Kushan empire occupied for 150 years, from the first century C.E. – has revealed much more diverse wealth than that of Tillya-tepe. Artistic works from the Mediterranean, South Asia, and East Asia were gathered under the roof of the imperial treasury.³¹ The trading skills of the Yuezhi-Kushan that developed from their days of wandering on the steppe was now in full bloom.

The Yuezhi-Kushan as Rulers of a Sedentary Society

The Kushan empire, powerful and vast, lasted two to three centuries. Due to the lack of information available, however, the position of the Kushan empire in world history is not clearly defined in textbooks. In some ways, the cosmopolitan features of the empire have made it a difficult job to classify the Kushan into a certain fixed pattern of civilization. Nevertheless, considering that steppe nomads commonly entered into agricultural societies and established their own regimes, that most nomads in early times did not leave records about their own history, and that information about the Yuezhi-Kushan is not that scarce, studying the transition from Yuezhi to Kushan will provide a good example of the transition from nomads to rulers of sedentary societies in early world history. The Yuezhi transition may not be as well recorded as, for example, that of the Turks, but some of it was recorded in Chinese historical records and in South Asian literature, and can also be traced linguistically along the Central Asian routes as demonstrated in the above analysis of the migration of the Yuezhi. [End Page 276]

The period from the mid-second century B.C.E., when the Yuezhi tribe began conquering Bactria, to c. 50 C.E. when the Kushan king Kujula Kadaphises crossed the Hindu Kush to conquer north India, was the time that the Yuezhi was transformed from a nomadic tribe into a sedentary society. As conquerors of Bactria, the Yuezhi encountered many different traditions. Bactria, in present north Afghanistan, was a territory under Achaemenid Persia from the mid-sixth century B.C.E., and later was conquered by Alexander in the late fourth century B.C.E. Many Hellenistic states survived in that region after the retreat of Alexander from India. Other nomadic groups, such as the Scythians or the Sakas, also entered this region before the Yuezhi-Kushans.

The presence of the Sakas and Scythians in Bactria was obvious even under the rule of the Kushan. Yu Taishan argued that the five tribes, or *Xihou* as recorded in Chinese history, unified by the Kushan were not necessarily from the Yuezhi, because the *Xihou* was not a known institution in the Yuezhi structure before they entered Bactria. The *Xihou* were probably tribal chiefs in Bactria before the Yuezhi and were assigned by the Yuezhi ruler to maintain

order there.³² While those tribes were probably Tuharan speakers, there is also the possibility that they were Sakas, who spoke another Indo-European language. It is difficult to distinguish the material cultures of the Sakas and the Kushans, as they both had the background of steppe life. Differences between the two groups before they were absorbed into the sedentary population, however, were clearly discerned by both the Chinese and the Indians, probably through the differences in language.

As for Bactria's Hellenistic period, Indian literature only vaguely refers to "Yavana," that is, Greeks, in northwest India.³³ Yet, historians should be grateful for what is available from India, as "the Indian material has been far better prepared for the Greek historian than the Greek material has ever been for the Indian"; . . . "had China made the acquaintance of the 'western countries' a couple of generations earlier than she did, how thankful we should be," Tarn laments.³⁴ A careful reading of Chinese sources shows that the transition of the Yuezhi-Kushan into an agricultural society, and the encounters of the [End Page 277] Yuezhi-Kushan with Hellenistic Bactria, might not have been as sudden and as violent as one might to imagine. When the Yuezhi set up court on the north bank of the Oxus, Bactria was already called Daxia by Zhang Qian, an indication that Tuharans were already there. Furthermore, the land of Daxia was very much an agricultural country: "They were sedentary people, living in walled cities and houses. Their customs are similar to the Dawan. There is no great sovereign, but cities and towns have their own chiefs."³⁵ At this point the Greek kingdom no longer dominated Bactria, but the city-states in the region were quite Hellenistic in nature. The coexistence of Hellenistic tradition might have continued after the Yuezhi-Kushan entered into Daxia. One Tang dynasty scholar, who also annotated Sima Qian's *History*, quoted a now-lost text as saying:

The Great Yuezhi is located about seven thousand *li* north of India. Their land is at a high altitude; the climate is dry; the region is remote. The king of the state calls himself "son of the heaven." There are so many riding horses in that country that the number often reaches several hundred thousand. City layouts and palaces are quite similar to those of the Daqin (the Roman empire). The skin of people there is reddish white. People are skillful at horse archery. Local products, rarities, treasures, clothing, and upholstery are very good, and even India cannot compare with it.³⁶

It is difficult to verify the sources of this record about the Kushan, since the quoted book is perhaps lost.³⁷ The descriptions, however, accord very well with the horse-riding Kushan who ruled a formerly Hellenistic country. The climate and location sound like Bactria; the kings of the Kushan did indeed call themselves *devaputra*, meaning "son of heaven" or "son of god." They owned numerous good horses and cultivated nomadic skills and cultures. Yet they ruled a country with a population of Greeks and other immigrants from

the Mediterranean, so that the architecture of the country combined Greco-Roman style with local materials and flavor.³⁸ At least it looked similar **[End Page 278]** to the Roman style in Chinese eyes, and the people looked fairer than Indians and some other Central Asian populations.

In recent decades archaeology has revealed the significance and extent of Hellenistic culture in north Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan before and after the Kushan invasion. Before the Yuezhi entered Bactria, they perhaps had already encountered Hellenistic influence. French and Russian scholars are working on the Hellenistic remains at the lowest level of Samarkand, in the territory of ancient Soghdiana.³⁹ Further east, in Ferghana, ancient Dawan was famous for its grapes and grape wine, an indication of Hellenistic influence. When Sima Qian recorded the events of Central Asia, mostly told by Zhang Qian, Dawan was a pastoral-agricultural country known both for its agricultural products and for its horses. There were also seventy cities whose combined population reached several hundred thousand.⁴⁰ Here one sees another community engaged in both the pastoral and agricultural economies. The fact that Ferghana was called Dawan, just as Bactria was called Daxia, in the second century B.C.E. by a Chinese historian, indicates that the agricultural society was already populated with Tuhuran speakers of nomadic origin.

Excavations at Ai-Khanoum, a site on the southern side of the Amu River or the Oxus of the Greeks, provide a comprehensive picture of Greek life – there are a theater, a gymnasium, temples, and a palace. The palace functioned as the residence of the ruler, the administrative center, and treasury.⁴¹ The very presence of a palace means that the city was the capital of a sovereign state, or at least a city-state. Based on a Greek inscription, the excavator Paul Bernard has dated the fall of the city at the end of the last ruler Eucratides's reign, that is, 145 B.C.E.⁴² Studies of cemeteries in Bactria show that people of diverse anthropological types and different funeral customs were buried from the end of the second century to the beginning of the first century B.C.E.⁴³ This was obviously a period of population movements. **[End Page 279]**

The beautiful city goddess excavated from Charsada⁴⁴ – the site of Purushapura, one of the Kushan capitals near modern Peshawa in Pakistan – demonstrates that Hellenistic influence persisted even under Kushan rule. Not only the artistic style of the sculpture, but also the city-wall crown of the goddess, the symbol of the patron deity of a city, provide evidence of Hellenistic influence in the city. The persistence of Hellenistic culture in Ferghana, Bactria, and Gandhara indicates that the invasions of nomads were not totally sudden and destructive. A relatively mild form of invasion might also explain the long-lasting Kushan legacy in these regions.

The Yuezhi-Kushan also encountered the Persian traditions of that region, as it was once under the Achaemenid rule. Persian religious traditions survived or even flourished during the Hellenistic period. Even in the typically Hellenistic site of Ai-Khanoum, while the official deities on the coins were Greek, all three temples in the vicinity were not Hellenistic but perhaps altars for fire worship.⁴⁵ Greek religion was not monotheistic, so Hellenistic cities might have tolerated other deities in the pantheon while maintaining a Greek style. In other words, Zoroastrian cults did not disappear in Hellenistic Bactria after the Yuezhi-Kushan or other nomadic people arrived. The Kushan, like other nomads in Central Asia, tended to change objects of worship, or even embrace other religions through interactions with other peoples, especially sedentary peoples. Religious tolerance and the diversity of Bactrian religion itself also encouraged the Kushan to adopt the various religious cults they encountered.

A variety of gods and cults were documented on Kushan coins – the Sumerian goddess Nana on her lion, the Persian gods Oado and Atash, and the Indian cults of Buddha and Shiva. Zoroastrian fire worship has also left many remains. When the Kushan entered South Asia they encountered both Brahmanism and Buddhism, and the cults of both religions appear on Kushan coins. Hellenistic inspiration for, or one may even say the Hellenistic origin of, the famous Gandharan Buddhist art is well known.⁴⁶ The artwork, however, and the Buddhist institutions that supervised the execution of the works, developed mostly under the patronage of the Kushan who came from the steppe. **[End Page 280]**

To pin down the state religion or the true faith of the Kushan is difficult and unnecessary. Various rulers favored different cults displayed on the coins of the patron rulers. Yet it is necessary to see the crucial function of religious institutions under Kushan rule. The Kushan rulers patronized religious cults to claim their legitimacy of ruling the conquered sedentary societies – Central Asian territory influenced by Persian religions, Hellenistic Bactria, and Brahmanical and Buddhist South Asia. Surely the foremost source of their legitimacy was the claim of divinity for their kingship. Kushan rulers called themselves the “Son of the God” or the “Son of the Heaven.” The translation of this term in Chinese was the same as the appellation of a Chinese emperor, which has caused speculation about the Yuezhi-Kushan relationship with the Chinese. While belief in the divine origin of their kingship was never shaken, the Kushan rulers might have changed the name of their divine father. The Kushan royal family’s temple (*devakula* in Sanskrit) was where the Kushan patron deities should have been worshipped. For a long time it was assumed by scholars, including myself, that the *devakula* was an altar for the ancestors of the Kushan rulers, or even the rulers themselves. But the evidence from the two *devakulas* so far discovered, one at Surkh Kotal in southern Bactria

(Afghanistan), and another one at Mat near Mathura in northern India, does not prove this assumption.

The *devakulas* contained sculptures of Kushan rulers, Kanishka among them. The statues of Kanishka from Mat and Surkh Kotal are very similar. The temple at Surkh Kotal was built by Kanishka, as testified by an inscription found there (sk4). Two other statues have not been identified, but one inscription (sk2) refers to an earlier king named Vima Kadphises.⁴⁷ Among the statues from Mat there was probably a statue of Vima Kadphises and one of Huvishka, a king who ruled sometime after Kanishka, so that the two *devakulas* might have existed in the same time frame. No detail of architecture is available from the excavations of Mat. The temple at Surkh Kotal is Bactrian Hellenistic in style.⁴⁸ Six of the seven inscriptions are written with Greek letters, but in a local Prakrit dialect.⁴⁹ The inscriptions from Mat are, like other inscriptions in Mathura, written in the Karoshthi script and Prakrit language of that region. With the statues of Kushan [End Page 281] rulers in the temples, the question is whether they were objects of worship, as we used to think, or rather representing the patrons of the temple, which was also a common religious practice in Central Asia and South Asia. Based on the excavations, Fussman has argued that the deities worshipped in the Surkh Kotal temple were not the Kushan rulers themselves. The temples were called *devakula* because they served the Kushan royal family.⁵⁰ A more recently discovered inscription of the Kushan ruler Kanishka may shed light on the function of *devakula*. The inscription was found at Rabatak, not far from Surkh Kotal. It was about the building of a temple that housed both deities and kings. The deities in this case were two Zoroastrian gods, Sroshard and Narasa, and the kings were the three ancestors and Kanishka himself. The presence of statues of Kushan rulers in the temple signified special patronage and the legitimacy claimed by the ruling clan.⁵¹

The special interest displayed by Kushan rulers for Buddhist monasteries is even more in evidence. References in inscriptions to Buddhist monasteries named after Kushan rulers, such as “Kanishka’s monastery,” “Huvishka’s Monastery,” and so forth, remind us that Kushan rulers were famous for their patronage of Buddhism and Jainism.⁵² Buddhist literature eulogized Kanishka as a royal patron second to the Mauryan king Ashoka. Although the legend that Kanishka sponsored the fourth conference of the Buddhist *sangha* has not been verified by royal inscriptions, the fact that Buddhism and Buddhist art flourished under the Kushan regime demonstrates the popularity of the religion. Gandharan Buddhist art is no doubt Hellenistic in style, but one should not neglect the impact of nomadic culture. Statues of the Buddha in Kushan times often stand with two feet pointing outward, a typical posture of horse-riding peoples. The well-known Kushan coin of Kanishka from the reliquary deposit of the stupa of Ahin-Posh near Jalalabad

is another example. The image of Buddha on the obverse is a typical nomadic Buddha. Numerous votive inscriptions under the Kushan regime name Kushan rulers as beneficiaries of the merits from the donation. Under Kushan rule the center of Buddhist activities moved from the mid- and lower Ganges plain to the northwest region of the South Asian subcontinent. The legend of the begging bowl of the Buddha and numerous other objects attracting pilgrims appeared **[End Page 282]** in the northwest during the Kushan period. It was also during the Kushan period that Buddhist missionaries with the surname “Zhi” appeared in Luoyang and other major cities of China. The images of the Buddha and Buddhist patrons, with strong Bactrian-nomadic Kushan flavor, were carved on boulders at Kongwangshan on the east coast of China around the end of the second century C.E.⁵³

In previous studies I have analyzed the relationship between commercial activities and Buddhist propagation under the Kushan. Here I want to point out the significance of the nomadic origins of the Kushans. It happens that the Yuezhi-Kushan people were also nomads who had long been familiar with trade. With a background of steppe life and long-distance trade the Kushan controlled a strategic position on the major trade routes of Eurasia during the early centuries C.E. The ruling elite, traders, Buddhists, Jains, and followers of other religions benefited greatly from the trade through Kushan territory. There is little data, however, on how the Kushan ruled the South Asia agricultural society. All we know is that Kushan rulers were religiously tolerant. All religious sects, including Brahmanism, which was more rural-based than either Buddhism or Jainism, were flourishing. It might be the case that the Kushan administrative structure did not penetrate into the basic fabric of South Asian society, but rather left the administration of local affairs to local institutions such as guilds, castes, and religions. Dynastic and religious remains of the Kushan in Bactria show their tolerance of Hellenistic art and agricultural traditions. Remains in Mathura show the flourishing of Buddhism and Jainism, both of which moved into the region from the east Ganges, as well as the Krishna-Vasudeva tradition of Brahmanism-Hinduism. The artistic expression of religious patrons clothed in nomadic style or semi-nomadic style – leaving the upper part of the body bare or depicting feet without boots due to the hot climate – appear in remains of religious institutions.⁵⁴ Therefore, one may suggest that religious patronage was a major way for the Kushan to rule sedentary societies. The coexistence of nomadic and Indian styles in religious art is another indication that the Kushan invasion was relatively mild in form, ultimately beneficial for the continuity of Indian culture and the introduction of new elements. **[End Page 283]**

Cultural Impact on a Sedentary Society—China

The Kushan, like many other nomadic groups that migrated into sedentary agricultural societies, eventually settled, contributing to the societies they traded with, fought, invaded, and ruled. Most of the Yuezhi-Kushan blended with the populations of Central Asia and South Asia. Their experience in China was rather different, however. The Yuezhi tribe used to live on the border of agricultural China. After they migrated away, people with the surname Zhi often came back to China. While obtaining silk and other trade goods, they also made their contributions to Chinese culture. Early Buddhist preachers in China and Buddhist lay societies were often of Kushan origin. The Buddhism preached by Kushans, however, was not the same pristine Buddhism of the Buddha. In my previous work I discussed in detail the development of Mahayana Buddhism under the Kushan.⁵⁵ Here one needs to point out that this Buddhism, including its theology, institutions, and art, had gone through centuries of social and economic change in India, was influenced by Hellenism, and was under Kushan patronage. Therefore, the impact of the Yuezhi-Kushan on Chinese culture was not brought in by invasion, but rather by a gradual penetration based on long-term material and cultural exchanges.

In order to appreciate the background of the impact of the Yuezhi-Kushan let us consider earlier history to illustrate the impact of nomads on agricultural societies in general. Neolithic agriculture in China started with hoe cultivation. Even after the invention of the plow, draft animals were still not in use.⁵⁶ During the Shang dynasty, bovine bones were widely used as “oracle bones” for divination and for writing. Shang rulers were very concerned with cattle raising, but there is no evidence showing that cattle were used as draft animals for cultivation.⁵⁷ As discussed above, the sudden appearance of horse chariots in Shang times, a few hundred years after the “chariot revolution,” might have been inspired by the interactions with the pastoral peoples living outside the pale of agricultural society. It is hard to say whether the development of draft-animal plow cultivation was also inspired by [End Page 284] the idea of using animal power for drawing. The invention of horse riding first gave an advantage to the nomads, and then brought equestrian culture into sedentary societies, including China, in the mid-first millennium B.C.E.

In addition to the jade trade, silk and horse trade had been major concerns of Chinese dynasties. A supply of horses was not only necessary for cavalry fighting with nomads, but also for an elite equestrian culture. Though horse chariots appeared in the Shang period and were buried along with the nobles, horse riding became popular among Chinese rulers only after the conflicts on the northern border with nomads during the Warring States period. When the nomads who raided agricultural lands rode on horses, King Wuling of the

Zhao state (325-299 B.C.E.) made military reforms in order to deal with the problem of the northern border. Understanding the military superiority of his adversaries, Wuling not only trained his army to practice archery on horses, but also changed the outfits of soldiers and nobles to suit equestrian life.⁵⁸ Ritual or routine outfits of the elite in Chinese antiquity included an upper blouse called *yi* and a lower skirt called *shang*. The sleeves of the blouse, especially for the elite, were very wide and loose. There were no trousers or pants. The word for pants in later times, *kua*, meant a kind of pseudo-pants during the mid-first millennium B.C.E. There was a split between the two breeches on the pseudo-pants as found on *kua* excavated from the site of Mawangdui in south China dated to the end of the first millennium B.C.E.⁵⁹ During the Warring States period, a kind of long robe called *shenyi* was popular, as depicted on some bronze vessels and the robes from Mawangdui.⁶⁰ The long robe, donned by both male and female aristocrats, was so long that it covered the entire body, including the feet, with no splits on the sides. We know little about the outfits of farmers and other working people, as they were rarely shown on artwork. But this aristocratic clothing was not fit for a horse-riding life. In military conflicts with nomads, and later on during the Warring States period, changing the equipment of commanders and of the elite of the society, and perhaps also that of soldiers, became imperative.

The Zhao king faced a dilemma later also faced by many other Chinese rulers. In order to fight the enemies on the steppe, they needed **[End Page 285]** horses. But horses came from the steppe. The nomads with whom the Zhao state fought were the Linhu and Loufan. In order to fight them the Zhao state needed horses from some other more friendly nomadic groups and did get them. There are no records about suppliers of horses to the Zhao, but an anecdote after King Wuling suggests that the suppliers, or at least some of them, were probably Yuezhi. In a court discussion on whether the Zhao state should make allies with the Qin to the west, or the Qi state to the east, one counselor of the Zhao king pointed out the dangers posed by the Qin state: should the Qin occupy the northern frontier, supplies of horses and dogs from the northwest and jade from the Kunshan would be cut off.⁶¹ As the Yuezhi were known as suppliers of jade at that time, the Zhao state was very possibly dealing with the Yuezhi for their horses. By the late third century when the Qin Dynasty consolidated the northern frontier, the Yuezhi were established as the major suppliers of horses, as discussed in the section on Yuezhi trade.

The reform of clothing styles that started with military commanders and staff took centuries to spread to other parts of Chinese society. While the Zhao king, and probably rulers of other warring states, wore outfits with tight-sleeved robes and boots for fighting, the old *yi* and *shang* styles continued to be the costumes for official and ritual occasions until the Han dynasty. Robes

with narrow sleeves and splits on both sides of the lower hem covering a pair of trousers was in “barbarian” style, incompatible with the civilized rulers of the “land under heaven.” The change in style had to wait for the time that horse riding and a related equestrian culture became part of the elite culture in China. Only then did the robe and pants replace the *yi* and *shang* styles as official and routine attire, first for the elite, and later for commoners.

The transition was complete by the Sui and Tang dynasties in the late sixth century and later, after many groups of nomads occupied north China and became rulers of agricultural societies, and when horse riding became fashionable among both male and female members of royal family and the court elite. Murals and figurines in tombs of the elite and paintings from the Tang show that horse riding, hunting, touring, and polo games were favorite forms of entertainment among the elite. Women wearing hats with hanging veils along with an attire that combined a tight-sleeved blouse with riding pants was a common scene on the streets of the capital at Chang’an. Males at this [End Page 286] time, from the emperor to officials and foreigners, wore a kind of robe with a round neckline and splits on the lower sides with long boots over the pants. This kind of apparel was certainly not steppe attire, but resulted from a combination of nomadic style and that of traditional Chinese.

This transition in clothing style, a basic expression of culture, took place during the many waves of invasion by the nomads from the steppe. The Yuezhi-Kushan, however, made their contribution in the sense of establishing equestrian culture as high culture in a sedentary society. Their engagement in the horse and silk trade might have been the very factor that initiated the equestrian culture fad and led to the changes in clothing styles. During the early Han dynasty, the country was so devastated by dynastic warfare that even the emperor could not afford a chariot with four horses of the same color. Many ministers had to ride on bullock carts.⁶² By the time of Wudi, when the Han empire felt strong enough to fight with the Xiongnu, the cavalry was a branch of the military force. Lin Meicun argued that the “dragon-horse” of the Yuezhi or the Tuhara was actually the primary motif for the very symbol of Chinese culture, the dragon.⁶³ Yuezhi influence on this transition brought out the association between the heavenly horse and the dragon, and between divinity and superb horses.

Han Wudi’s obsession with the heavenly horses of Dawan, in all likelihood a Tuharan-speaking region, and the expeditions conducted by the general Li Guangli, brought the value of horses to the fore. Statues of horses favored by the rulers were accompanied by statues of ministers standing in line in front of royal tombs. It did take quite a few centuries, with waves of invasions and settlement of nomads into north China, for the Chinese elite to fully appreciate the equestrian culture. In this long process, the changing style of

clothing was not necessarily under the direct influence of the Yuezhi, but the horse trade with the Yuezhi initiated the equestrian fashion.

The spread of Buddhism to China under Kushan patronage also enhanced the value of horses and the prestige of horse riding. Legends of early Buddhist missionaries often include horses. Actually Buddhism, which flourished under Kushan rule, was already associated with equestrian culture before starting its journey to China from northwest India. [End Page 287]

Cultural Impact on a Sedentary Society—India

No one doubts the Greek and Roman influence on Gandharan Buddhist art. The Hellenistic and Roman styles were nevertheless developed under the rule and patronage of the Kushan, a people of nomadic origin. The Yuezhi-Kushan regime never gained prestige in the Brahmanical tradition, but its impact on the material and cultural life of South Asia is evident everywhere. Change in clothing style is a good example. As in China, this change of basic cultural expression was based on the values of equestrian culture.

On religious monuments built during the early centuries C.E., many statues and reliefs of donors and patrons of Buddhism and Jainism appear in the apparel of the steppe; that is, hats, trousers, boots, belts with metal plates, and wide lower-hemmed gowns. Some modifications, however, were mandatory, as the climate of South Asia was quite different from that of the steppe. A statue of a female donor from Mathura wears a gown very much in the style of the Kushan tombs of Tillya-tepe in Afghanistan.⁶⁴ At Sanchi, a Buddhist site in central India, figures of musicians on the north gate of the great stupa, executed in the first century C.E., are dressed in typical “Scythian” fashion, wearing conic caps, skirts, and boots, but are unclothed on the upper parts.⁶⁵

While Kushan rulers had their image in steppe style cast on their golden coins, the robe and boots became standard for royal images in the following ages. In the centuries after the fall of the Kushan empire, the Gupta kings appeared on their gold coins in a similar style and posture.⁶⁶ The Guptas claimed that they were the orthodox inheritors of the Maurya empire and mostly patronized the Brahmanical priesthood, but they evidently felt comfortable with the Kushan style for the royal image. This change of style of Indian monarchies, similar to that in northern China at about the same time, was associated with the prestige of equestrian culture.

India, like China and many other agricultural societies, is a land unfit for horse breeding and training. Though a pastoral economy [End Page 288] coexisted with agriculture in many places, draft animals were limited to bulls, buffalo, camels, and elephants. The Harappan civilization might have not known horses. The Vedic people who came from Central Asia brought in

horses and chariots. This took place at about the same time horses and chariots appeared in north China.⁶⁷

It is difficult to decide exactly when and how horse riding became a prestigious privilege of the elite. As early as the Maurya period horses were controlled as a government monopoly. According to Kautiliya, the superintendent of horses was to have had all horses registered whether they came as a gift, were purchased, were captured as booty, were rewarded for help, were exchanged through treaties, or were received on temporary loan.⁶⁸ The Mauryas (c. 321-185 B.C.E.), like the First Emperor of China (221-10 B.C.E.), had to obtain horses from Central Asia, probably via nomads. Down through the middle ages, the sophistication of warfare of Rajput knights was evidently based on the value of equestrian culture, which must have taken centuries to reach maturity. Between the age of early development and final maturity, the Kushan might have been the agents who made the equestrian culture a high culture in India. The legend of Shakyamuni departing from home riding a horse was depicted in early Buddhist art, the art of the Kushan period, and was elaborated on by Ashvaghosha, a Buddhist writer of the Kushan age. The Kushan rulers insisted on wearing boots and trousers, at least in official poses, probably necessitated by horse riding. The patron images in Kushan style were not necessarily newcomers to the agricultural world, but rather long-term residents. When the Kushan ruling center moved from Purushapura to Mathura, the Kushan already had some two hundred years of sedentary living experience, from Bactria to Gandhara. It was the prestige and privilege of horse riding that kept the ruling elite wearing steppe-style clothing despite the extremely hot South Asia climate.

Horses had always figured high in Buddhist tradition. In the early Buddhist concept of state, seven treasures were the basic elements of an ideal Buddhist state. Horses ranked as the second treasure after the wheel of Dharma. Horse riding appeared later in Buddhist literature. During Kushan times, the Buddhist teacher under the patronage of King Kanishka had a legendary name: Ashvaghosha, literally “the neigh of horses,” meaning that even horses were moved by his teaching. **[End Page 289]** In the work the *Buddhacarita*, attributed to Ashvaghosha, the young prince of the Shakya republic rode a horse when leaving home.⁶⁹ The empty saddle on a depressed horse thus became the symbol of the Buddha’s departure from secular life, a scene depicted on many Buddhist works of art in India, China, and other parts of Asia.

The legend of the first Buddhist missionary to China is also associated with a horse. It is said that a white horse carrying Buddhist sutras arrived at Luoyang. Even now a monastery named after the white horse is still standing on the edge of modern Luoyang to commemorate this legend. Considering that the early Buddhist missionaries to China were mostly from the Kushan territory, and that the Yuezhi-Kushan had a reputation for possessing numerous “heavenly”

horses, the background of this legend is quite clear. The earliest artistic representation of Buddhism on a large scale appeared in relief on the rock face of a hill on the east coast of China, at Kongwangshan near the city of Lianyungang in Jiangsu province. The sculptures on the boulders commemorate the scene of *mahaparinirvana* – the passing away of the Buddha – and scenes of preaching. The posture and apparel of both the Buddha and lay worshippers are strikingly Kushan in style. Similar to the earliest image of the Buddha on the Kushan coins, the Buddha at this site stands with two feet pointing outward, a typical posture of horse-riding people. One figure with a conical hat and boots stoops in a riding posture, although the horse is missing underneath his legs.⁷⁰ One may conclude that the association of Buddhism with the Kushan and horses, and the spread of Buddhism from India to China under the patronage of the Kushan, contributed to the prestige of horse-riding culture in both East Asia and South Asia. The prestige of equestrian styles remained in the sedentary agricultural societies, engendering changes in clothing and other material aspects of culture.

Conclusion

The Yuezhi-Kushan transformation from a nomadic, tribal society into the ruling elite of agricultural societies, and their eventual absorption into the latter is only one of many examples of a similar process in [End Page 290] Eurasian history. Several years ago when reading *The Centrality of Central Asia* by André Gunder Frank,⁷¹ I saw the truth in his argument. But I also sensed that more research was necessary in order to understand how the changes that took place in Central Asian oases or the steppe actually affected great events in world history.

Several studies on Central Asia in recent years, including articles published in the *Journal of World History*, have made valuable contributions. In “State Formation and Periodization in Inner Asian History,” Nicola di Cosmo periodizes states originating in the steppe according to their interactions with sedentary societies.⁷² In this framework the Yuezhi-Kushan state would be in the first phase, which di Cosmo calls “tribute empires” (209 B.C.E. to 551 C.E.), although it is not included in his narrative. Di Cosmo also feels reluctant to include the Northern Wei dynasty in this category since the Northern Wei made a structural alliance with the Chinese, thus deviating from the Central Asian political tradition.⁷³ While in total agreement with di Cosmo’s approach to the political structure of Central Asian states, I think the Yuezhi-Kushan and the Northern Wei states may represent another track of Inner Asian nomad state formation and transition.

In a more recent article in the *Journal of World History*, David Christian brings trans-ecological transactions to the fore, enlarging the field of vision of Central Asia and the Silk Roads to three ecological zones – agricultural lands,

the steppe, and the forest to the north.⁷⁴ This framework offers a good opportunity to explore the many enigmatic appearances and disappearances of peoples and goods on the steppe. Both the Yuezhi-Kushan and the Northern Wei states fit into the picture neatly.

The current study seeks to complement these essays on Central Asia and make a world-history case by tracing the actual historical process of the trans-ecological transactions and their political and cultural consequences on both nomads and agriculturalists. In other words, among the various kinds of residents of Central Asia, nomads were not merely predators of agriculture. The two major forms of subsistence, pastoralism and agriculture, were not totally separated and fixed, but interchangeable and interacting. In the case of the Turks [End Page 291] and Mongols, the process of their expansion and transformation are better documented and studied. One example is the study of the Khazar economy by Thomas S. Noonan. Literary and archaeological evidence shows that the Khazar economy in medieval times was far from uniform nomadic pastoralism. During the Khazar khaganate, many nomadic, semi-sedentary, and sedentary peoples carried out production in stock raising, as well as agriculture, including viticulture and crafts.⁷⁵ Early nomads such as the Xiongnu, the Scythians, and the Yuezhi are less understood, as our knowledge of them relies mostly on the records of the sedentary peoples who interacted with them. The inference from later history, such as that of the Khazars, makes the sketchy picture of earlier steppe life more vivid. This effort of tracking down the migration and transformation of the Yuezhi-Kushan by using archaeological, inscriptional, and literary sources, and linguistic analysis could help us understand the causes and processes of some great historical changes in the world, which started as either big waves or small ripples from the little understood land of Central Asia.

Notes

- * Professor Thomas Allsen of the College of New Jersey kindly read the first draft of the paper and provided criticism on both the writing and the contents. Mrs. Kezia Knauer from Haverford read one of the drafts and offered much information from the angle of art history.
- 1. Jerry Bentley, *Old World Encounters, Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 9ff.
- 2. Guan Zhong, *Guanzi* (Beijing: Yanshan Chubanshe, 1995), 73/476, 77/503, 78/507, 512, 80/531.
- 3. Lin Meicun, *The Serindian Civilization: New Studies on Archaeology, Ethnology, Languages and Religions* (in Chinese) (Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1995), p. 5.

4. Sima Qian, *Shiji* (The History) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), 110/2887.
5. Many scholars have discussed the language of the Yuezhi. A recent summary of the issue can be found in Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "Why Tocharians," *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 23, nos. 3 & 4, Fall and Winter 1995: 415–30.
6. Strabo XI. 8, 2, *The Geography of Strabo*, English trans. by H. L. Jones, London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1917.
7. Paul Bernard, "An Ancient Greek City in Central Asia," *Scientific American*, vol. 246, no. 1 (1982): 148. In the main report of the excavation, however, the same author points out that the process of the disintegration of the Greek domain was much longer and more complex than first believed. Ai-Khanoum might have suffered a second invasion during the first century B.C.E. Paul Bernard et al., *Fouilles d'Ai-Khanoum, Memoires de la Delegation archeologique Française en Afghanistan*, vols. xxi, xxii (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1973), pp. 110–11.
8. Bertille Lyonnet, "Les nomades et la chute du royaume greco-bactrien: quelques nouveaux indices en provenance de l'Asie centrale orientale. Vers l'identification des Tokhares – Yueh-Chi?" *Histoire et cultes de l'Asie centrale pre-islamique* (Paris: Editions de CNRS, 1991), pp. 153–61.
9. Yu Taishan, *A Study of Saka History* (in Chinese) (Beijing: Chinese Publisher of Social Sciences, 1992), p. 58.
10. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 123/3158.
11. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 123/3162. Victor Mair, "Reflections on the Origins of the Modern Standard Name 'Dunhuang,'" in Li Zheng et al., eds., *Ji Xianlin Jiaoshou Huadan Jinian Wenji* (Essays for the eightieth birthday of Professor Ji Xianlin), vol. 2, p. 933.
12. *Shanghai Jing*, eds. Yang Fan, Qiu Xiaojin, Hefei (Anhui Renmin Chubanshe, 1999), p. 112. Lin Meicun, *The Western Region of the Han-Tang Dynasties and the Chinese Civilization* (in Chinese) (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1998), p. 78.
13. Lin Meicun, *The Western Region of the Han-Tang Dynasties and the Chinese Civilization*, pp. 64–67.
14. Ban Gu, *Hanshu* (History of the Han Dynasty) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1964), 96/3919. Quoted in Lin Meicun, *The Western Region of the Han-Tang Dynasties and the Chinese Civilization*, p. 77.
15. Yu Taishan, *A Study of Saka History*, p. 72.

16. Ji Xianlin, *Da Tang Xiyuji Jiaozhu* (An Edited Edition of the Travelogue of the Western Region by Xuanzang of the Great Tang Dynasty) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985), p. 100.
17. Cultural and racial identification of the Yuezhi and other Central Asian peoples has been explored. As we all know, race science is a failed science. Starting from categorizing people by language, by skin color, by bone measurement, and eventually by DNA using the most advanced technologies, the more data accumulated for the research, the more convincing the results were that the differences within a “race” always exceeded the standards set by researchers to distinguish races. Therefore, explorations of the racial origins of different linguistic groups, especially those in Central Asia, is meaningless. For analyses of the genesis and development of modern race science, one may refer to Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1997; Barbara K. Rothman, *Genetic Maps and Human Imaginations*, New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998.
18. Lin Meicun, *The Serindian Civilization: New Studies on Archaeology, Ethnology, Languages and Religions*, p. 48.
19. See Sheng Congwen, *Zhongguo Gudai Fushi Yanjiu* (Studies of clothing in Ancient China), revised edition (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1992), plate 29, illustration 48.
20. Lin Meicun, *The Serindian Civilization: New Studies on Archaeology, Ethnology, Languages and Religions*, p. 48; *Loulan Niya Chutu Wenshu* (Documents Excavated from Loulan and Niya) (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1985), pp. 86–87.
21. The image of Sogdian traders loomed so large since the seventh century in the Tang dynasty that one tends to forget their nomadic origin. According to Sima Qian, the Sogdians (Kangju) were similar to the Yuezhi, only their tribe was smaller. There were 80,000 to 90,000 horse-riding archers in that tribe (*Shiji*, 123/3161). A later Chinese historian gave two entries of Sogdian people with the same origin in his text. *Sute* was the name of a people who constantly went to Liangzhou to trade, and *Kangguo* was a tribe of nomads who moved around (Li Yanshou, *Beishi* [History of the Northern Dynasties], [Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974], 97/3221, 3233). It seems that by the seventh century, when some Sogdians had settled as farmers and traders, others still lived as nomads.
22. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, Chapter on Trade and Traders, 129/3260.
23. The whereabouts of the original Sogdian text is unknown. This saying was quoted by a Tang scholar when annotating Sima Qian, *Shiji* (The History), 123/3162.

24. Lin Meicun, *The Western Region of the Han-Tang Dynasties and the Chinese Civilization*, p. 256.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
26. Fan Ye, *Hou Hanshu* (History of the Later Han) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965), 88/2921.
27. Ban Gu, *Hanshu* (History of the Han Dynasty) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1964), 96a/3894.
28. V. I. Sarianidi, "The Treasure of Golden Hill," *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 84, no. 2, 1980: 125–32, plates 17–21.
29. Victor Sarianidi, *The Golden Hoard of Bactria* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc. and Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1985), plate 203, catalog no. 2.34. Whereas the excavators of Tillya-tepe consider that the buried ones were Kushan princes, not all scholars are convinced. Based on the artifacts in the tombs and Greek records of invading nomads, Paul Bernard thinks they were Scythians, instead of the Yuezhi named in Chinese sources (Paul Bernard, "Les nomades conquérants de l'empire greco-bactrien, réflexions sur leur identité ethnique et culturelle," *Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres, Comptes Rendus*, November–December 1987: 758–68).
30. Victor Sarianidi, *The Golden Hoard of Bactria*, plate 200, catalog no. 3.56.
31. Joseph Hackin, *Recherches archéologiques à Begram, chantier no. 2 (1937)*, Paris: Les Éditions d'art et d'histoire, 1939; *Nouvelles recherches archéologiques à Begram (ancienne Kapici, 1939–40)*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, Presses Universitaires, 1954.
32. Yu Taishan, *A Study of Saka History*, p. 30, footnote 33.
33. *Yavana* was a Sanskritization of Ionia, meaning Ionian Greeks, who were the first group of Greeks who had contacts with India. The *Yavana* thus represented Greeks living in the northwest region in Sanskrit literature. Later, however, the *Yavana* also include Romans and others who came from the Mediterranean. See Himanshu Ray, "The *Yavana* Presence in Ancient India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 1989, vol. xxxi: 311–25.
34. W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, 2d edition, Cambridge University Press, 1951, p. xxii.
35. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 123/3164.
36. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 123/3162.
37. The book entitled *Nanzhouzhi*, literally "the history of southern states," authored by Wan Zhen, was available to Zhang Shoujie, the Tang scholar who annotated the *History* by Sima Qian, as it was listed in the

- bibliographies of the *Tang History* with the title of *Nanzhou Yiwuzhi*, meaning “history of exotic things in the south states.” However, it did not appear in bibliographies of later official histories.
38. See the report on the architecture of Ai-Khanoum, Bernard 1973, chapter 7.
 39. Paul Bernard, Frantz Grenet, and Muxammedzon Isamidinoy, “Fouilles de la mission Franco-Sovietique a l’ancienne Samarkand (Afrasiab): première campagne, 1989,” *Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres, Comptes rendus des séances de l’année 1990*, pp. 356–80; Paul Bernard, “Maracanda-Afrasiab colonie grecque,” *La Persia e L’Asia Centrale da Alessandro al X Secolo* (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1996), pp. 331–365.
 40. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 123/3160.
 41. Paul Bernard, “An Ancient Greek City in Central Asia.”
 42. Bertille Lyonnet, “Les nomades et la chute du royaume greco-bactrien: quelques nouveaux indices en provenance de l’Asie centrale orientale. Vers l’identification des Tokhares – Yueh-Chi?” p. 155.
 43. *Ibid.*, 153–54.
 44. See plate XXXII, Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, New York: Grove Press Inc., 1954.
 45. Paul Bernard, “An Ancient Greek City in Central Asia,” pp. 158–59.
 46. There has been a debate, however, on the iconographic origin of Gandharan Buddhist art. A summary of the discussion is provided by W. Zwalf, *A Catalogue of Gandhara Sculptures in the British Museum* (British Museum Press, 1996), vol. 1, p. 41.
 47. Gerard Fussman “The Mat *devakula*: A New Approach to its Understanding,” in Doris Meth Srinivasan, ed., *Mathura: The Cultural Heritage* (New Delhi, 1989), p. 196.
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. *Ibid.*
 50. Gerard Fussman “The Mat *devakula*: A New Approach to its Understanding,” p. 199.
 51. M. Nicholas Sims-Williams, “Nouveaux documents sur l’histoire et la langue de la Bactriane” (635–37), *Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres, Comptes Rendus, April–June, 1996*, pp. 633–49.
 52. Xinru Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China, Trade and Religious Exchanges, ad 1–600* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 110.
 53. Wenwu Correspondent, “A Symposium on Stone Statues in Mt. Kongwangshan, Held in Beijing,” *Wenwu*, 1981: vii, 20.

54. E.g., many figures on the inside panel of the west pillar of the north gate of the great stupa at Sanchi, wear pointed steppe hats and boots, but leave the upper body naked (Heinrich Zimmer, completed and edited by Joseph Campbell, *The Art of Indian Asia*, [New York: Pantheon Books, 1960], plate 10).
55. Xinru Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China, Trade and Religious Exchanges, ad 1-600* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 88ff.
56. Fan Chuyu, "Some Notes on the Developmental Stages of the Primitive Agriculture in China," *Agricultural Archaeology* (Jiangxi, China), 1983, no. 2: 145-50.
57. Peng Minghan, "Shangdai Yangniuye Jianlun" (A Brief Discussion of the Cattle Raising Endeavor in the Shang Period), *Agricultural Archaeology* (Jiangxi, China), 1991, no. 3: 324-26, 331.
58. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 43/1806-11.
59. Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo Gudai Fushi Yanjiu* (Studies of clothing in Ancient China), p. 94.
60. Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo Gudai Fushi Yanjiu* (Studies of clothing in Ancient China), p. 72, plate 31.
61. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 43/1817-18.
62. Ban Gu, *Hanshu*, 24a/1126.
63. Lin Meicun, *The Western Region of the Han-Tang Dynasties and the Chinese Civilization*, pp. 70ff.
64. Those styles of clothing were traced from the golden decorative pieces that remained in situ while both the clothes and bodies have rotted away. Lucknow Museum, no. B 84, Moti Chandra, *Costumes, Textiles, Cosmetics & Coiffure in Ancient and Medieval India*, (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1973), fig. 81; Victor Sarianidi, *The Golden Hoard of Bactria*, p. 254.
65. Heinrich Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, plate 10.
66. Moti Chandra, *Costumes, Textiles, Cosmetics & Coiffure in Ancient and Medieval India*, p. 101.
67. The Vedic period in India was around 1500 to 800 B.C.E., while the Shang dynasty in China was c. the sixteenth through the eleventh centuries B.C.E.
68. R. P. Kangle, *The Kautiliya Arthasastra* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1965-72), 2.30.1.
69. Asvaghosa, *Buddhacarita*, ed. & trans. Edward B. Cowell, 1893, included in *Buddhist Mahayana Texts*, Oxford University Press, 1894 (reprint Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), pp. viii, 3-7.

70. *Wenwu*, Beijing, 1981, no. 7: 2.
71. Andre Gunder Frank, *The Centrality of Central Asia*, Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Press, 1992.
72. *Journal of World History*, Spring 1999, vol. 10, no. 1: 1-40.
73. *Ibid.*, 30.
74. "Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World History," *Journal of World History*, Spring 2000, vol. 11, no. 1: 1-26.
75. Thomas S. Noonan, "The Khazar Economy," *Archivum Eurasiae medii aevi*, vol. 9: 253-318.