Research on the History of the Western Regions: A Retrospective and Prospects

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I

The term "Xiyu" or the "Western Regions" first appeared as the title of a chapter in Ban Gu's History of the Han Dynasty (Han shu), published in the early years of the Eastern Han dynasty. It was defined in the book as an area "lying to the west of the Xiongnu and south of the Wusun peoples; an area flanked by large mountains on its northern and southern sides, with a river flowing through its heart; an area measuring more than six thousand li from west to east and over one thousand li from north to south; an area that adjoins the Han at Yumen Pass and Yangguan Pass in the east, and ends at the Congling Mountains in the west." According to this definition, the Western Regions roughly corresponded to modern southern Xinjiang, although it extended in his account considerably beyond this area, and embraced the Wusun north of the Tianshan Mountains and many kingdoms west of the Congling Mountains. Following the example of History of the Han Dynasty, every official history of later dynasties included a section on the Western Regions, the territory of which varied with the times. The term "Western Regions" has had both a narrow and a broad definition. In a narrow sense, the Western Regions was limited to the land between Tianshan to the north and Kunlun to the south, between Congling in the west and the Yumen Pass to the east. In a broad sense the Western Regions referred to any area from the western end of the Chinese Empire westwards, including the area covered by the narrow definition of the "Western Regions," South Asia, western Asia and even North Africa and Europe.

In terms of modern geography, the narrow definition represents the core area of Central Asia, and the broad definition also includes Central Asia and a much broader area. Chinese scholars often equate the Western Regions with Central Asia, and when they talk about the history of Central Asia, they mean the history of the Western Regions. Most
Chinese students of Central Asiatic history are actually only interested in the Western Regions in a narrow sense. However, the two are not the same according to the internationally accepted disciplinary classification. Therefore, in this essay the author will focus on historical research on the Western Regions in its narrow sense, but also look at the history of the whole of Central Asia.

The ancient definition of the Western Regions gradually disappeared when the area according to the narrow concept became a province in the Qing dynasty, and national borders became more clearly delineated. The history of the Western Regions discussed in this article will thus end at 1840, the first year of modern China according to the accepted periodization.

II

Research on the history of the Western Regions in China can be traced back to the so-called “territorial history of the Northwest” in the mid to late Qing dynasty. There are several reasons for the emergence of such studies. Firstly, the Qing conquest in the Qianlong reign period of the Dzungar and Muslims living on the northern and southern sides of the Tianshan Mountains, and the attendant establishment of Xinjiang as a province, aroused great interest in the area. Information on the physical and political, ethnic and religious situation in the area found its way into Qing official documents and maps, and scholars in the interior acquired their earliest knowledge. Secondly, the Opium War that raised alarm about the eastward expansion of European colonialism directed intellectual attention to China’s frontiers and beyond. Thirdly, the discipline of the Qian-Jia School and the newly introduced cartography provided such studies with effective tools. Finally, some good scholars stayed in Xinjiang for different reasons, which resulted in the creation of a batch of important works: *Huangchao fanbu yaolue* (A Brief Account of Frontier Peoples of the Empire) by Qi Yunshi (1751-1815), *Mengyu youmu ji* (An Account of Mongolian Nomads) by Zhang Mu (1805-1849), *Xiyu shuidao ji* (Rivers of the Western Regions) by Xu Song (1781-1848), *Suofang beisheng* (A Pocket History of Suofang) by He Qiutao (1824-1862), and *Xinmao shixing ji* (Travels in Xinjiang with My Father in the Xinmao Year) by Tao Baolian. Of these *Xiyu shuidao ji* and *Xinmao Shixing ji* were the most influential.

Xu Song was sent to Ili in 1812 where he served his sentence for a civil examination scandal. He compiled the 12-volume *Xinjiang shilue* (A Brief Account of Xinjiang) based on Qi Yunshi’s *Ili zongtong shilue* (An Overall Account of Ili) which he revised. During his stay in Xinjiang, Xu travelled and surveyed many places. In 1821, he finished the five-volume *Xiyu shuidao ji* after the style of *Shui jing zhu*. In this book, he gave an account of rivers west of the Jiayu Pass, particularly those within
Xinjiang, focusing on eleven major lakes including Kara-nor and Lop-nor. Xu combined literature with his immediate observations along the rivers and described cities, villages, garrison stations, karon, factories, mines, communications, ancient sites, ethnic groups, and historical events. The book also includes local stele inscriptions. Xu also wrote two volumes of *Poetry in Xinjiang*, which record details of the local geography, people and so on. His two-volume *Supplementary Notes to the Chapter on the Western Regions in “Han shu”* is impressive not just for the textual analysis, but also for his fieldwork.

Tao Baoliang went to Xinjiang in 1891 with his father, who was to take up an official position in the area. Father and son departed from Shandong and travelled through Tianjin, Beijing, Shaanxi and Gansu to Xinjiang. Before reaching their final destination at Dihua (modern Ürumqi) they visited Hami and Turfan. Tao’s *Xinmao shixing ji* contains a description of the places and peoples they saw on their way. Their opinions on the ancient and modern names of some places are interesting.

Geographical works sponsored by the Qing government at different levels illustrate how popular the history of the Northwest was at this time. I would like to cite two of these works; *Huangyu Xiyu tuzhi* in fifty-two volumes which took twenty-six years from 1756 to 1782 to complete, and *Xinjiang tongzhi* in one hundred and sixty volumes, compiled by Wang Shu’nan and Yuan Dahua between 1909 and 1911. Both combined literary information with field surveys, and provided rich materials for students of the history of the Western Regions, especially Xinjiang.

The “territorial history of the Northwest” represented by the above-mentioned works pioneered research on the history of the Western Regions. Most early researchers of the history of the Western Regions only dealt with Mongolian history - hence their enthusiasm for rewriting the history of the Yuan dynasty. What is more, their works are little more than narratives. Writers such as Xu Song, however, were able to combine rigorous textual research with field surveys. Together with their efforts to incorporate stele inscriptions, these factors pointed to the new direction to be taken in historical research.

During the same period, Sinologists, as distinct from missionaries or colonialists, came to the fore in Europe. Information on the Western Regions was one of their major scholarly concerns. Let us take France as an example. J. P. A. Remusat, the author of *Histoire de la ville de Khotan* (Paris, 1820), studied Khotanese history on the basis of *Bianyi dian* (Books of Frontier Aliens) in *Gujin tushu jicheng* (The Complete Collection of Books of the Past and Present). He also translated the monk Fa Xian’s *Foguo ji* (Paris, 1836). His student S. Julien was the translator of Xuan Zang’s *Datang Xiyu ji* (Paris, 1857-1858) and *Daci ‘ensi sanzang fashi zhuan* (Paris, 1853) by Hui Li and Yan Zong. In 1893, E. Chavannes took over the post once occupied by Julien at the
Collège de France. His area of research was the history of the Western
Regions, and he both translated and investigated important literature
from different periods, including “Les pays d’occident d’apres de Wei
Lio” (T’oung Pao, II. 6, 1905) (The Chapter on the “Western Rong
people”), and Song Yunxingji jianzhu (“Voyage de Song Yuan dans
ludyana et le Gandhana, BEFO, 3, 1903). However, Chavannes’ most
impressive work is his Documents sur les Tou-kioue occidentaux (St.
Petersburg, 1903) in which he translates a great deal of Chinese
material, comparing it with information in European languages, and
closely examines the western Turks who occupied a large part of the
Western Regions during the Sui-Tang period. He also discusses their role
in historical East-West communications.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the arrival of Western
archaeologists in the far west of China, an event of real importance for
research on the history of the Western Regions. Since little local
literature had survived the frequent migrations, wars and ethnic
assimilation, the above-cited academic achievements were made mainly
on the basis of documentary materials from the major neighboring
civilizations of the Chinese, Arabs, Persians, Greeks and Romans. The
acquisition of Sanskrit documents in Kucha by the British lieutenant H.
Bower triggered off an international race for Chinese antiquities. British
and Russian diplomats came first, and various European countries vied to
send expeditions to Xinjiang, Gansu, Mongolia and Tibet, where they
headed for ruins of ancient cities, shrines, grottoes and tombs. The most
productive expeditions included three to Central Asia led by Aurel Stein,
four to Turfan led by A. Grünwedel and A. von Le Coq, three to Central
Asia by Ōtani Kōzui, and those by the Frenchman Paul Pelliot and the
Russians P. K. Kozlov and S. F. Oldenburg.

Works of art from Khotan, Loulan, Kucha, Karashahr and Turfan
offered a picture of the pre-Islamic culture in Xinjiang. Documentary
materials in different languages unearthed from various sites, especially
from the Dunhuang caves, Turfan grottoes and tombs, provided totally
new materials for historical, linguistic, religious and ethnic research of
the area.

Local scholars had access to these materials prior to the advent of
Western expeditions. For example, one poem entitled “Qiuji” (Kucha)
by Qi Yunshi refers to the Tang dynasty writing of Buddhist sutras from
Kucha. However, Qi and his fellow literati found them interesting only
in terms of their calligraphy, not in terms of scholarship. In the period
bridging the Qing and Republican period when Westerners came in
droves looking for antiquities, many local officials added a number of
relics to their collections, but only Wang Shunan wrote about what he
saw and possessed in a two-volume work A Visit to Antiquities in
Xinjiang. At a time when archaeology was unknown in China, it is no
surprise that few could appreciate the academic value of these survivals
from the remote past.

III

In its final years, the Qing court was unable even to protect the palace in the capital from foreign plunderers, let alone the relics in border areas. The loss of a huge amount of Western Regions documents and relics was sad and inevitable. In an impotent country academia did not prosper. The Qianlong emperor's conquest of the Western Regions was followed by the flourishing of territorial history of the region. The loss of relics from Xinjiang in the final years of the Qing dynasty stripped China of her competence in the area of Western Regions studies for a considerable time during the 20th century. For example, Ding Qian's textual criticism of the literature on the geography of the Western Regions from the pre-Qin period to the Ming and Qing is of little scholarly value simply because it lacks any comparison with unearthed document and information from field surveys.

At the same time, the well-organized Western academics were all ready for the crates of new materials on the Western Regions that they had transported home. It is noteworthy that almost all of the established scholars in Oriental studies devoted themselves to materials from Xinjiang. Aurel Stein produced one archaeological report after another. His *Ancient Khotan* in two volumes (Oxford, 1907), *Serindia* in four volumes (Oxford, 1921), and *Innermost Asia* in five volumes (Oxford, 1928) contain a good deal of research and analysis as well as detailed archaeological descriptions, and overshadow Xu Song's *Rivers in the Western Regions*, which was nevertheless held in high esteem by Western Orientalists. The strength of the European scholarly community as a whole is well demonstrated by the fact that each of Stein's three works includes the results of other scholars' research. The most eminent Sinologists rushed to decipher the linguistic information from the Western Regions. Research related to the history of the region includes that by Chavannes and H. Maspero on Chinese documents, H. Lüders' work on Sanskrit documents, that by E. Sieg, W. Siegling and S. Lévi on Tocharian documents, F. W. K. Müller's examination of Uighur and Sogdian documents, and S. Konow's work on the Khotanses language among Xinjiang and Dunhuang documents. These scholars resolved many questions related to the history of the Western Regions, and their works have become essential reading for every student working in this field today.

Chinese scholars have never ignored the fruitful work by Western researchers. In 1909, on seeing the Chinese documents uncovered by Pelliot, Luo Zhenyu immediately had the documents hand-copied and photographed. Luo compiled *Dunhuang shishi yishu* (Ancient Documents from the Dunhuang Stone Chamber, 1909) and *Mingsha shishi yishu*
(Ancient Documents from the Stone Chamber in the Sounding Sands, 1913). He also published some of the Dunhuang documents related to the Western Regions, including Shazhou tujing, Xizhou tujing, Huichao wan Wutianzhu zhuan, Jingjiao sanwei mengdu zan and fragments of the Manichaean sutras. Shazhou wenlu (1909) compiled by Jiang Fu includes official and private documents related to the history and geography of the Western Regions. The stele inscriptions that appear in this book were missed in Xu Song’s Rivers in the Western Regions. Jiang is also the author of “Studies on the Spread of Manichaeism in China” (in Dun-huang shishi yishu), the first essay published on the subject.

Wang Guowei (1877-1927) was a leading scholar in the area during this period. On receiving Chinese documents found by Stein at the ruined watch-towers near Dunhuang and mailed from Chavannes, he started to work on slips of the Han-Jin period from Dunhuang, Lop-nor and Niya. His research culminated in the publication of Liusha zhijian. He also published a number of short articles on Dunhuang documents, and, under the influence of Chavannes and Pelliot’s Manichaean studies, a paper on the spread of Manichaeism in China, which corrected the mistakes made in previous research. Wang applied his “double evidence” approach to these new materials, and wrote some important essays on the history of the region, including “A Study on the Western Hu” (1919), “Wells and Canals in the Western Regions” (1919), “Remarks on the Capital Gus Ordo of the Western Liao” (1925), “A Study of the Tartars” (1925), and “A Study of the Mongols in the Liao-Jin Period” (1925). He is also the author of Annotations to Travels to the West (1925) and Annotations to Four Mongolian Sources (1926). Wang touched on almost all of the important issues related to the history of the Western Regions from the Han to the Ming dynasty. His work combined the tradition of the “territorial history of the northwest” that developed in the Qing dynasty with the archaeological discoveries made by Europeans in Xinjiang and Gansu. This put Wang above Qing scholars such as Xu Song. His works are not just read locally as classics, but are also thought of highly by international students of Central Asia.

Another prominent figure is Chen Yinque (1890-1969). Chen studied in Europe and America when young, and as a polyglot knew numerous modern Western languages as well as several Oriental languages related to China. His language skills, together with his close familiarity with ancient Chinese texts, gave Chen the ability to engage in historical studies of the Western Regions after his return to China in 1926. From 1926 to 1930, he published articles, which, although short in length, were rich in content. All of these articles are included in his collection of essays Jinmingguan congiao (volumes 1 and 2). Although studies of the Western Regions constituted only part of Wang and Chen’s scholarly work, their influence was strong.

Modern Chinese a cademic development reached its peak in the
1920s and 30s, and a number of important achievements were made in research on the history of the Western Regions. An exploration of the history of communications between China and the West undertaken by Chen Yuan (1880-1971), especially his discussions on the imported religions, resolved some questions about the spread of these religions in the Western Regions, and about those from this region who lived in China. Chen's major works include *Inquiries into the Rekhabian of the Yuan Dynasty*, *The Introduction of Zoroastrianism into China*, *The Introduction of Manichaeism into China*, and *A Brief History of the Introduction of Islam into China*. Another expert in the field of Sino-Western communication, Zhang Xinglang (1888-1951) compiled a six-volume work *Zhongxi jiaotong shiliao huibian* (Furen University Library, 1930), which classified the materials on Sino-Western communications that he had gleaned from various Chinese and foreign historical sources. The volume on Central Asia consisted of systematic research on historical information on the Western Regions. Feng Chengjun (1887-1946) appended much of his own research to the French work he translated. He also wrote essays on the history of the Shanshan and Gaochang kingdoms and tribes on the northern frontiers during the Liao and Jin dynasties, which provided a database for research in the area. Xiang Da (1900-1966) inquired into the influence of the civilizations of the Western Regions on Central Plains culture in his *Chang'an and the Civilizations of the Western Regions in the Tang Dynasty*. His digest of *Old Texts Related to the Geography of the Western Regions and Countries South of China* was the first of its kind in the study of the historical texts related to the region. Zhang Feng in his *Inscribed Wooden Slips from the Western Frontiers* (The Youzheng Press, 1931) studied the documents Aurel Stein acquired at Dunhuang and Niya during his third Central Asian expedition. Zeng Wenwu's *A History of the Chinese Construction of the Western Regions* (Commercial Press, 1936) offers a panoramic view of the history of the Western Regions from the perspective of the Central Plains empire, however, the emphasis is on modern history. Shao Xunzheng (1909-1973) translated several chapters of *Histoire generale du monde* by Fadl Allah Rashid ed-Din and conducted his own textual research (included in Shao's *Essays on History*). Unfortunately, his work did not continue.

In general, in spite of the achievements made, many important works of this period focused on the communications between China and the West, and the history of the Western Regions was only touched on peripherally. Scholars edited some literature written in Chinese, but made little use of the unearthed documents. Academic disciplines of the day were not fairly defined, hence research on the history of the Western Regions failed to be systematic and multi-dimensional. Nonetheless, their classification of Chinese historical materials is to be commended.

Mention should also be made of Huang Wenbi (1893-1966), who was
one of the Chinese members of the Sino-Swedish Expedition to Northwest China. His three archaeological tours in Xinjiang between 1927 and 1935 covered all of the important sites around the Tarim Basin. The focus of his work was the Lop-nor area, the Turfan Basin, Kucha and Khotan, where he excavated tombs, ruins of a city, temples and cave temples. In the years that followed, Huang worked on the materials he had uncovered, and wrote Gaochang (China Association of Academic Organizations and the Expedition to Northwest China, 1931), and Archaeological Expeditions in Lop-nor (The Institute of History and Linguistics of the National Beiping Academy, and the Board of Directors of the Expedition to Northwest China, 1948). However, for some reason his major discoveries only became public after the founding of the Peoples Republic of China, for example, Archaeological Expeditions in Turfan (Chinese Academy of Science) was published in 1954, and Archaeological Expeditions in the Tarim Basin (Scientific Press) in 1958. Huang's achievements thus did not enter the field of Western Regions studies at that time, although he did produce papers based on his fieldwork, which focus on a comparative study of the archaeological sites and literary references. All these essays were later brought together under the title Essays on the History and Geography of Northwest China (Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1981) and Archaeological and Historical Essays (Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1989).

Studies on the history of the Western Regions were rather dull in the late 1930s and the 1940s due to the Sino-Japanese and civil wars. However, important research was published in Europe, North America and Japan, including W. Barthold's Zwölf Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Turken Mittelasien (Berlin, 1935), The Regions of the World translated and annotated by V. Minorsky (1937), Iranian documents from Turfan translated and annotated by W. B. Henning, ancient Tibetan documents from Dunhuang and Xinjiang catalogued by F. W. Thomas, and Kuwahara Jitsuzō, Fujita Toyohachi and Haneda Tōru's works.

IV

Research on the history of the Western Regions was fruitful during the period from the founding of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949 to the eve of the “cultural revolution” in 1966, especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Those who were previously engaged in research on the history of the Western Regions published their monographs, for example, Feng Chengjun's Collection of Research on the History and Geography of the Western Regions and Countries South of China (Zhonghua Press, 1957), Xiang Da's collection of essays Chang'an and the History of the Civilizations of the Western Regions in the Tang Dynasty (Sanlian Bookstore, 1957), and Huang Wenbi’s reports on his
archaeological work in Xinjiang. Cen Zhongmian (1886-1961) brought together his essays under the title Historical Materials on the Western Turks: Supplement and Textual Research (Zhonghua Press, 1958), providing what was lacking in Chavannes’ Documents sur les Toukouïe Occidentaux, and investigating related questions. Cen also compiled the two-volume Turk jishi (Zhonghua Press, 1958), which brought together materials on the eastern Turks in Chinese literature and included transcriptions of stele inscriptions in archaic Turkic languages in Western translation. Ma Changshou published The Turks and the Turkic Khanate (Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 1957), On the Turks and Social Change in the Turkic Khanate (Scientific Press, 1958), The Wuhuan and the Xianbei (Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 1962), and The Northern Di and the Xiongnu (Sanlian Bookstore, 1962). Ma systematically explored these northern peoples who were important in the history of the Western Regions. These books represent the level reached in research on the history of the Western Regions at that time, while articles in various scholarly journals indicate the expansion of the scope of research.

Somewhat related to the popular interests of the day, a considerable proportion of research in the 1950s on the history of the Western Regions was related to the relationship between China and the history of the Western Regions or Central Asian nations. Examples include Ancient Communications in the Western Regions and Fa Xian’s Pilgrimage to India (Hubei People’s Publishing House, 1956) by He Changqun (1903-1973), Essays on the History of Sino-Indian Cultural Relations (People’s Publishing House, 1957) by Ji Xianlin, Economic and Cultural Exchanges between the Western and Eastern Han Dynasties and the Western Regions and Other Areas (Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 1957) by Chen Zhutong, and A History of the Relationship between the Western and Eastern Han Dynasties and the Western Regions (Shandong People’s Publishing House, 1959) by An Zuozhang. All of these constituted an important part of studies on the history of the Western Regions.

Relatively speaking, research in the 1950s was not very impressive, partly because the social turmoil before Liberation allowed little preparation, and partly because the political movements after Liberation involved too much of the strength of many scholars.

Improved transportation in northwest China after Liberation made it much easier for scholars to travel in the area. In the early years of New China, the government sent numerous scholars to frontier areas to obtain knowledge of the distribution of ethnic minority groups. Brief histories of various minority peoples were written on the basis of these comprehensive surveys, but their publication was delayed until after the “cultural revolution.” However, some preliminary research results appeared in the 1950s in the wake of the extensive ethnic surveys. A good example is provided by A Brief Account of Uighur History co-authored by

In addition to ethnic surveys, post-Liberation archaeological excavations, often hot on the heels of capital construction, also provided material for research after the “cultural revolution.” Of the numerous excavations, I would like to cite in particular those conducted at Niya and Turfan. Beautiful photographs of relics from these excavations were published in the pages of Relics Unearthed during the Cultural Revolution (Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1972), Along the Silk Road: Textiles from the Han and Tang Dynasties (Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1973) and Relics Unearthed in Xinjiang (Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1975). However, with the exception of a few published essays, on the whole, research on the history of the Western Regions came to a halt during the “cultural revolution.”

All scholars in all countries suffered during World War II in the 1940s, but the times that followed did not mean the same to all of them. European and Japanese scholarship on the history of the Western Regions, which had re-emerged in the 1950s, advanced rapidly in the following two decades while its Chinese counterpart was left out in the cold. During this period, Europe and North America boasted A. von Gabain’s studies on the Turks and Uighurs, H. W. Bailey’s decipherment of Khotanese script, G. Uray’s research on ancient Tibetan, and O. Pritsak’s work on the Karakhanid dynasty, while in Japan achievements were made by scholars such as Egami Namio, Mori Masao, Yamada Nobuo, Shimasaki Akira, Enoki Kazuo and Yamaguchi Zuihō. As they struggled out of the “cultural revolution,” Chinese scholars found themselves far behind their foreign colleagues.

V

After the “cultural revolution,” research on the history of the Western Regions, as in any other area, went through a process of recovery in the late 1970s and early 1980s. From the mid-1980s onwards, it rapidly developed as an independent discipline, and achieved unparalleled depth and breadth. This prosperity was partly due to the large output of experts from some universities and CASS, and partly to the discovery of a great deal of new material as a result of the development of related areas, such as various dynastic histories, special histories, for example, that of Sino-Western communications, Dunhuang
and Turfan studies, and archaeology. Another reason was China's policy of opening up, which allowed Chinese scholars to go abroad to gather information and exchange opinions with their colleagues abroad. The final drive was organizational: The Association of Central Asiatic Studies and the Society for Dunhuang and Turfan Studies were founded, and conferences were held each year on the history of the Western Regions, Dunhuang and Turfan, the Silk Road, and the history of Sino-foreign relations. Periodicals such as the *Journal of Central Asia* and *Research on the Western Regions*, as well as collections of essays, for example, *Essays in Memory of Professor Xiang Da* were circulated. All these combined to give a forceful push to developments in this area. We will now look chronologically at what was achieved during this period in each sub-area.

Let us begin with the prehistoric era. Sites belonging to the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and Bronze and Iron Ages have been discovered across Xinjiang. However, scholars are divided over their dating and nature. For representative opinions we should look at Wang Binghua's "An Anatomy of Archaeological Cultures of the Bronze Age in Xinjiang" (*Social Sciences in Xinjiang*, 1985:4), An Zhimin's "The Neolithic Age in Western China" (*Kao gu xue bao*, 1987:2), Chen Ge's "New Thoughts on the Neolithic Age in the Xinjiang Region" (*Kao gu*, 1990:4), and Shui Tao's "A Comparative Study of Different Bronze Age Cultures in Xinjiang" (*Guoxue yanjiu*, 1993:1). The ideas drawn from numerous archaeological materials have provided us with a basis for the reconstruction of the prehistory of the Western Regions.

An area long inhabited by numerous ethnic groups, the Western Regions represents a jigsaw of racial existence. Knowledge of the various races in the Western Regions can help in the interpretation of archaeological and literary information. Han Kangxin examined most of the human skeletal remains unearthed in Xinjiang, on the basis of which he reconstructed the ancient racial distribution in the Western Regions. The results of his research have been brought together under the title *An Anthropological Perspective on the Races of the Ancient Inhabitants on the Silk Road* (Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 1993). DNA testing has been recommended for research on ancient corpses, and Xu Wenkan's "New Discovery of Ancient Corpses in Xinjiang and Exploration of the Origin of the Tokharians" (*Xueshu jilin*, vol. 5, 1995) illustrates the value of this method in resolving long-debated questions about the Tokharians.

Achievements have also been made in the employment of archaeological data in research on ancient peoples recorded in literary sources. Examples include Ma Yong and Wang Binghua's "The Xinjiang Area from the 7th to the 2nd Century BC" (*Journal of Central Asia*, vol. 3, 1990), Wang Mingzhe and Wang Binghua's *Studies on the Wusun* (Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 1983), Wang Binghua's "Recover-
ing the Lost History of the Ancient Saka of Xinjiang” (Social Sciences in Xinjiang, 1985:1, also included in An Archaeological Exploration of the Silk Road, 1993), and Wang Mingzhe’s “A Preliminary Inquiry into the Saka in the Ilı Valley” (Social Sciences in Xinjiang, 1985:1). Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang in their “The Saka Inhabitants of Khotan in Prehistoric Times” (Studies on Peoples of the Northwest, 1989:1) combined archaeological and linguistic data in their inquiry. Yu Taishan’s Studies on the History of the Saka (China Social Sciences Publishing House, 1992) is a comprehensive exploration using Oriental and Western literature. Major Central Asian peoples prior to the rise of the Kushan are discussed in this work.

In relation to studies on the Yuezhi, founders of the Kushan dynasty which was important in the history of the Western Regions, I would like to cite Huang Jing’s “The Western Migration of the Great Yuezhi and Their influence” (The Journal of Xinjiang University, 1985:2) and “The Chronology of the Kushan Empire” (Journal of Central Asia, vol. 2, 1987), and Yu Taishan’s “Some Remarks on the First Kushan” (Journal of Central Asia, vol. 4, 1995).

As rulers of the Western Regions for a long period of time, the Xiongnu influenced the oasis kingdoms both institutionally and culturally. Lin Gan’s A General History of the Xiongnu (People’s Publishing House, 1986) and The Historical Annals of the Xiongnu (Zhonghua Press, 1984) include a comprehensive account of Xiongnu rule in the Western Regions. Lin also compiled the two-volume A Collection of Historical Materials on the Xiongnu (Zhonghua Bookstore Company, 1988), which contained extensive information from Chinese literary sources and is of great help to scholars.

The relationship between the Western Regions and the Central Plains became closer as a result of the intermittent domination of the oasis kingdoms by the Chinese government from the time of the Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty. In the first half of his book The Relationship between China and the Western Regions during the Han, Wei-Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties (China Social Sciences Publishing House, 1995), Yu Taishan takes a new look at the history of this relationship. In the second half he discusses related questions, such as Zhang Qian and Gan Ying’s missions to the Western Regions as well as questions of geography, official organization, and dating. The inscribed Han dynasty slips unearthed at Dunhuang since the 1980s have provided new materials on the history of the relationship between the Western Regions and the Central Plain during the Han-Jin period. The slips from Majuanwan are discussed by Wu Rengxiang in his “Information Related to the Western Regions in the Newly Found Slips at Majuanwan near Dunhuang” (Northwestern History and Geography, 1991:1), and by Hu Pingsheng in his “Discussion on the Materials Related to the Western Regions in the Slips from Majuanwan near Dunhuang” (Journal of the
Since the beginning of this century, Niya and Loulan have yielded large numbers of documents in Chinese and Kharosthi scripts, which provide local rather than Central Plain, materials for studying the Shanshan. Chinese and overseas students have done excellent work in this area. In the late 1950s and 1980s, new materials found at Niya and Loulan refuelled the tank for research. Hou Can researched this group of slips in the Chinese language, and discussed related questions. His research is included in Essays on Gaochang and Loulan (Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 1990). Lin Meicun retranslated some of the Kharosthi documents published abroad, and used these materials in his reconstruction of the genealogy of the Shanshan kingdom (his essays on this subject are included in The Civilization of the Western Regions, Dongfang Publishing House, 1995). Meng Fanren produced A New History of Loulan (Guangming Daily Publishing House, 1990). and A Chronological Approach to the Inscribed Slips of the Shanshan Kingdom at Loulan (Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 1995), in which he makes proposals that differ from those of the two above-mentioned scholars. Other sporadic essays have been brought together in the Collection of Essays on Loulan Culture (Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 1995).

From the 4th to the 6th century, the Central Plain was divided into the Southern and Northern Dynasties. The impotence of these dynasties was in sharp contrast to the animation of the nomadic peoples in the western and northern areas of the Western Regions. The Hephthalites, one of these peoples, had barely been discussed in the past. Yu Taishan's essays, brought together under the title Studies on the History of the Hephthalites (Qilu Publishing House, 1986) fills this gap. Zhou Weizhou's The Chile and the Rouran (Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1983) is a general account of the two nomadic groups that once ruled the Western Regions. Duan Lianqin's The Dingling, Gaoche and Tiele (Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1988) is a comprehensive account of the evolution of these three peoples. Jiang Boqin's Dunhuang and Turfan Documents and the Silk Road (Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1994) represents an all-round exploration of the relationship between Gaochang governed by the Qu family and the western and eastern Turks and Tiele.

From the Northern Dynasties period to the Sui and Tang, the Qinghai-based Tuyuhun expanded their influence to the southern part of the Western Regions. Zhou Weizhou's A History of the Tuyuhun (Ningxia People's Publishing House, 1985) represents the first systematic exploration undertaken by a Chinese scholar. Zhou also discusses the
epitaphs and relics of the Tuyuhun and related references to be found in Tibetan literature (included in the author’s *History of the Peoples of the Northwest* (Zhongzhou Ancient Documents Publishing House, 1994), and has compiled *A Collection of Materials on the Tuyuhun* (Qinghai People’s Publishing House, 1992).

A large number of documents on Gaochang, either as a prefecture or a state, unearthed at Turfan have greatly enriched our knowledge of Gaochang in the Wei-Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties periods. Tang Zhangru’s study of the military and political systems of Gaochang Prefecture is included in his *Essays from the Mountain Hut* (Zhonghua Press, 1989). Other scholars who have joined him in filling this gap include Chen Zhong’an, Wu Zhen, Chen Guocan, Zhu Lei, Lu Kaiwan, Wang Su, and Meng Xianshi with their in-depth exploration of the politics, economy, religion and culture of Gaochang under the Qu family.

From the Wei-Jin period onwards, large numbers from the nine Zhaowu families of Sogdian merchants came to China from Sogdiana in Central Asia. They brought the culture of western Asia to the Western Regions and even to the Central Plain. Cai Hongsheng has inquired deeply into the relationship between the Kang state around Samarkand ruled by the largest of the nine Zhaowu families, as recorded in the *History of the Sui Dynasty*, the Tang regime and Sogdiana. Ma Xiaohoe has studied Sogdiana during the Tang dynasty, and Jiang Boqin has examined the Sogdians living in the Gaochang kingdom in the light of newly unearthed documents from Turfan. Rong Xinjiang has also discussed the extensive presence of the Sogdians in the oasis kingdoms of the Tarim basin.

Among the northern nomads of the Northern Dynasties and Sui-Tang periods, the Turks had a relatively close relationship with the Western Regions. Lin Gan’s *A History of the Turks* (Neimenggu People’s Publishing House, 1988) is a little too brief, but the new translation of ancient Turkish stele inscriptions provided by Geng Shimin as an appendix to the book are relatively inclusive. Rui Chuanming’s *Annotations and Research on the Stele Inscriptions of the Later Turkic Khanate* (doctoral dissertation at Fudan University, 1990) includes not only his own translations and annotations on the basis of translations by Geng and research by Western scholars, but also discusses several events including the military expeditions of the eastern Turks to the Western Regions. It is a pity that the whole of this dissertation has yet to be published. A great deal of work still needs to be done in relation to Chinese language materials, in spite of *A Collection of Materials on the Turks*. Yang Shengmin’s *Materials on the Uighurs and Turks in “Zizhi tongjian” with Textual Research and Annotations* (Tianjin Guji Publishing House, 1992) is of great help to researchers. In relation to research on Turkic history, Xue Zongzheng has published *A History of
the Turks (China Social Sciences Publishing House, 1992). Wu Yugui has also explored the history of the western Turks, and Wu Jingshan’s Research on Turkic Society (Zhongyang Minzu University press, 1994) provides an analysis of the society of the eastern Turks.

The Tang dynasty saw direct Chinese control of a large part of the Western Regions. A great deal of work was done on this important period in the past, but recent progress is due to the publication of new materials included in the ten-volume Documents Unearthed at Turfan (Cultural Relics Publishing House, from 1981 to 1992) compiled by Tang Zhangru. Tang, Zhang Guangda, Huang Huixian, Jiang Boqin, Rong Xinjiang and Chen Guocan have all produced important research work using these materials. Newly unearthed epitaphs provide another source of information, which has been employed by Chen Guocan, Guo Pingliang, Lu Caiquan and Wu Zhen in their research on events in the history of the Western Regions. Wang Xiaofu’s A History of the Political Relationships between the Tang, Tibet and the Arabs (Beijing University Press, 1992), based on Moriyasu Takao and C. I. Beckwith’s recent studies, discusses every aspect of the struggle between the Tang, Tibet and the Arabs for Central Asia. The book is notable for its systematic introduction of Tibetan language materials to historical research on the Western Regions during the Tang. Wang’s “Tibet’s Path to the Western Regions in the 7th and 8th Centuries” (Essays in Honour of the 90th Birthday of Professor Deng Guanguying, Hebei Jiaoyu Publishing House) adds what is lacking in the former work.

Progress has been made in case studies of the four garrisons of Anxi. The great interest in the relationship between the Suiye and Yanshi garrisons in the late 1970s and early 1980s can be traced back to the Sino-Russian border dispute and the search for the birth place of the Tang poet Li Bai. The question of the location of Suiye has been completely resolved by Zhang Guangda in his “The Modern Location of the City of Suiye” (Journal of Beijing University, 1979: 5). In his “On the Alternative Use of Yanshi and Suiye” (included in the same journal) Wang Xiaofu proposes the sensible hypothesis that Suiye and Yanshi were different places at different times as one of the four garrisons. Official and private documents dated to the Tang dynasty unearthed at Khotan since modern times have been used by Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang in their Research on the History of Khotan (Shanghai Bookstore, 1993). Rong Xinjiang and Yin Qing combined old annals and unearthed documents in their exploration of the history of Khotan, and the same approach was adopted by Wang Binhua in his “Questions Related to the Site of the Touque Pass in Anxi during the Tang Dynasty” which also makes use of the documents from Kucha.

Like Anxi, Beiting also served as a base for the Tang empire’s control of its northwestern region, although it has received little attention from scholars. Meng Fanren’s Research on the History and
Geography of Beiting (Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 1985) deals with communications, geography, official organizations, dating, interpretation of historical materials as well as the history of Beiting. Meng's book is based largely on his experiences as an excavator of a Buddhist temple in the city of Beiting. The shrine was once magnificent and served the Uighur royal family in their religious activities. It is therefore an extremely important site outside the Uighur kingdom in Xizhou in the Turfan Basin. An archaeological report of the excavation of the site of The Uighur Buddhist Shrine of Gaochang in Beiting (Liaoning Meishu Publishing House, 1991) has been published, but unfortunately has failed to arouse wide interest.

The Tibetan kingdom arose on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau during the first half of the 7th century as a rival to the Tang dynasty for control of the Western Regions. It even seized a large part of the Western Regions in the late 8th and 9th centuries, when Tang influence in the area declined as a result of the An Lushan rebellion. The records of Tibetan presence in the Western Regions are difficult to bring together since they are scattered over the voluminous historical literature. Works such as Su Jinren and Xiao Lianzi's Historical Information on Tibet in "Cefuyuangui" with Textual Criticism (Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1981) and Su Jinren's Historical Information on Tibet in Zizhitongjian (Tibet People's Publishing House, 1981), and Tang Kaijian and Liu Jianli's two-volume A Collection of Information on Tibet in the Song Dynasty (Sichuan Minzu Publishing House, 1986) have thus been very helpful to scholars working in this area. Wang Yao and Chen Jian's Transcriptions of the Tibetan Wooden Documents (Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1986) covers the Tibetan documents found by Aurel Stein, and those discovered after Liberation at Khotan and Shanshan. Yang Ming, Rong Xinjiang, Zhang Yun and Yin Qing used other scholars' translations of these documents in their study of Tibetan rule in the Western Regions.

To the north of Tibet were the Uighurs, a force that controlled the northern part of the Western Regions from the mid Tang dynasty. The Uighur state to the north of Mongolia was annexed in 840, and those in the remainder of the state moved westward to the eastern Tianshan Mountains where they established their local kingdom in Turfan, which was referred to as the Uighur Kingdom during the Yuan dynasty. Earlier scholars did a great deal of work in this area, for example, Feng Jiasheng, Cheng Suoluo and Mu Guangwen's A Brief Collection of Information on the Uighurs (revised edition, Minzu Publishing House, 1981), and newly discovered information on the Uighurs published by Feng (included in his Major Essays, Zhonghua Press, 1987). Cheng also investigated the royal genealogy and the relationship between the Uighurs and the government of the Central Plains using Chinese language sources (Essays on the History of the Uighurs in the Tang and Song Dynasties,
People’s Publishing House, 1993). Yang Shengmin produced *A History of the Uighurs* (Jilin Jiaoyu Publishing House, 1991), based on his *Materials on the Uighurs and Turks in “Zizhitongjian” with Textual Research and Annotations*. Lin Gan and Gao Zihou’s *A History of the Uighurs* (Neimenggu People’s Publishing House, 1994), like *A Brief History of the Uighur People* (Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1991) by the Writing Group on Uighur History, is a general history of the people from ancient times down to the Qing dynasty. In addition, Feng Zhiwen and Wu Pingfan produced *A Chronicle History of the Uighurs* (Xinjiang University Press, 1992). Liu Meisong carefully analyzed Chinese language sources on the Uighurs in his *Textual Criticism of the Chapters on the Uighurs in the Old and New Books of the Tang Dynasty* (Central College of Ethnology Press, 1988). Chen Gaohua’s *A Collection of Information on the Uighurs and Karluks in the Yuan Dynasty* (Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1991) divided related literature according to the time, individuals and various other categories, which was of considerable help to scholars. In their “A Fragment of a Chinese Document from Dunhuang Concerning the Uighurs of Xizhou” (included in *Journal of Beijing University*, 1989:2), Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang took a new look at the official and ecclesiastical systems, religious beliefs and different tribes of the Xizhou Uighurs in the 10th century, using a fragment of a document from Dunhuang. Rong Xinjiang’s *Research on the History of the Guiyi Army* (Shanghai Guji Publishing House, 1996) is a systematic account of the war and exchanges that occurred between the Uighurs of Xizhou and the Guiyi Army of Shazhou (Dunhuang) in the 9th and 10th centuries, something little touched on in historical records. A more important source of information on the Xizhou Uighurs is the large quantity of documents in the Uighur language brought to light since the early years of the 20th century. Geng Shimin has published numerous transcriptions and translations of the newly found Uighur documents. His essays are closely related to Uighur history and include “Decipherment of the Uighur Documents of the Manichaean Monastery” (*Thirty Years of Archaeology in Xinjiang*, Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1983), and “On a Tablet in the Uighur Script Related to the Meritorious Service of the Princes of Gaochang” (*Kaogu xuebao*, 1980:4), both providing important local materials for research on the area. The former is indispensable for research on the Manichaecism of the Xizhou Uighurs, while the latter is essential for reconstructing the royal genealogy of the Uighur kingdom of Xizhou. Research on socio-economic documents has been fruitful. Examples include Zhang Chengzhi’s “Inside the Uighurs of the Yuan Dynasty” (*Minzu Yanjiu*, 1983:5), Shang Yanbin’s “A Peep into the Socio-economic Life of the Uighur Area in the Yuan Dynasty” (*Minda shixue*, vol. 1, 1996), and Liu Yingsheng’s “Social and Economic Studies of Central Asia in the Mongolian Yuan Dynasty,” which not only deals
with the Uighur area, but also covers Transoxania and the Tarim Basin.

The westward migration of the Uighurs had far-reaching consequences. Based on his doctoral dissertation (Nanjing University Press, 1989), Hua Tao has published a number of essays based on the comparative use of Arabic and Chinese sources. Hua explores the ethnic and religious changes brought about by the migration in the Western Regions. He also discusses the question of the territory of the Xizhou Uighurs. In his “Inquiries into the Long Tribe” (Journal of Central Asia, vol. 4, 1995), Rong Xinjiang discusses the ethnic migration in the Yanshi area resulting from the westward movement of the Uighur, on the basis of information from Dunhuang. The westward migration of the Uighurs began a process of gradual conversion of the areas around Tarim to Turkish influence. However, Khotan in the southwest of the basin remained independent of this influence for a century between the end of Tibetan rule in the mid 9th century and the end of Khotan itself at the hands of the Karakhanid dynasty in 1006. Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang studied the Khotan data in Dunhuang documents in their Studies on the History of Khotan, and dealt with the royal genealogy of the Khotan kingdom and the activities of the Khotanese at Dunhuang.

A new page opened in the history of the Western Regions in the 10th century when the Karakhanid dynasty with its capital at Kashghar converted to Islam. Zhang Guangda’s “Remarks on Diwan Lughat al-Turk by Mahmud al-Kashghari and the Round Map included in this Book” (Journal of the Central College of Ethnology, 1978:2), discusses this Karakhanid scholar and references in his work to the Western Regions, and especially to the Karakhanid dynasty. The essay aroused great interest among scholars and was responsible for the academic fever for Mahmud al-Kashghari and his work. Wei Liangtao produced A Manuscript of the History of the Karakhanid Empire (Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1986) on the basis of his series of essays. Jiang Qixiang’s The Karakhanid Coinage Unearthed in Xinjiang (Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1990) provided missing links in the history of the empire using the monetary materials newly found in Xinjiang.

The Liao dynasty had close relations with the northwestern peoples. Chen Dezhi, Huang Shijian, Zhou Liangxiao, Wang Zhilai and Yu Dajun are all impressive for their work in this area. Wei Liangtao’s Studies on the History of the Western Liao (Ningxia People’s Publishing House, 1987) investigates various aspects of the Western Liao, including their politics, territory, nation, society, economy, religion, culture, and calendar. Wei is also the author of An Outline History of the Western Liao (People’s Publishing House, 1991), which focuses on the historical development and general situation of the Western Liao.

The rise of the Mongols and their westward expansion greatly influenced the Western Regions. All the Western Regions kingdoms, except that of the Uighurs, were replaced by the Chaghadai and Ogodei
or directly by the Yuan dynasty. The Chaghadai seized the largest portion of Central Asia. The struggles between these khanates for the Western Regions was a major chapter in the history of the region during the Mongolian Yuan period. In addition to collecting materials, Chen Gaohua explored the history of the Western Regions kingdoms such as those of the Uighurs, Hami and Karluks and their relationship with the Central Plains. Yang Zhijiu's *Three Points on the History of the Yuan Dynasty* and other essays deal with parts of the history of the peoples of the Western Regions. Liu Yingsheng’s essays and his book *Research on the Histories of the Northwestern Peoples and the Chaghadai Khanate* (Nanjing University Press, 1994) detail the Chaghadai rule of the Western Regions and its relationship with the Yuan dynasty and the Ogodei khanate.

The enormous amount of literature from the Ming dynasty reveals little relationship between the dynasty and the Western Regions. Chen Gaohua’s *Collection of Information on Hami and Turfan in the Ming Dynasty* brings together a total of thirty-five literary sources, including biographies and chronicles, which is of great help to students in this area. Chen’s essay “Several Questions Concerning Turfan in the Ming Dynasty” (*Minzu yanjiu*, 1983:2) inquires into the land and population of Turfan, the sultan’s genealogy, and Turfan’s relationship with the Ming dynasty. In 1514, the Yarkand khanate was founded by the Sa’id Khan, a descendent of Tughluk Timur of the eastern Chaghadai khanate, with the capital at Yarkand. The kingdom covered the majority of the Western Regions area, and was incorporated into the Dzungarian khanate in 1680. Because of a lack of literary sources, scholars have done little research in this area. Wei Liangtao’s *An Outline History of Yarkand* (Heilongjiang Education Publishing House, 1994) was the first systematic exploration of the history of this khanate from its establishment through growth and prosperity to its fall. In this book Wei also analyzes the internal system, official organization, economy, and culture.

The western Mongolian tribes who grazed their animals to the north of the Tianshan Mountains founded powerful regimes such as the Oirat and Dzungar during the Ming-Qing period. At one time the latter seized the land on both sides of the Tianshan Mountains. The different tribes that made up the regime now came together, now drew apart. Guo Pingliang and Ji Dachun compiled the twelve-volume *Collection of Xinjiang Materials in the Qing Shilu* (Xinjiang Institute of Ethnology, 1978). The writing group of *A Brief History of Dzungar* compiled *Selection of Oirat Materials from the Qing Shilu* (Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1982) and *Selection of Oirat Materials from the Ming Shilu* (Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1987), providing scholars with very convenient tools. A great deal of work has been done on the western Mongolian tribes. Examples include *The Tuerhute’s Return to the Motherland* (Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1980) by the

Prior to the rise of the Dzungar, the divided descendants of the Chaghadai slipped gradually under the control of the Aq-taghlyq Khwajas and Qara-taghlyq Khwajas. After the rise of the Dzungar, the Aq-taghlyq Khwajas became a dependency of the Dzungarians, whom they induced into southern Xinjiang. Liu Zhengyin has explored the antecedents and genealogy of the Khwajas families in an essay. When the Qing dynasty waged war against Dzungar in the Qianlong reign period, both large and small Khwajas rose in rebellion but were quashed. Cheng Suoluo discusses this event in his “The Large and Small Khwajas” (*Journal of the Central College of Ethnology*, 1987:1).

After the unification of Xinjiang, the Qing government established official positions and proposed a system of military farming to reinforce their rule. Wang Xilong’s *Military Farming in the Northwest during the Qing Dynasty* (University of Lanzhou Press, 1990) examines each subtype of military farming, which the author divides into military, league, criminal, civil, Islamic and graze-field types. Hua Li and Qi Qingshun have also studied this subject.

The invasion of Xinjiang by the Kokhand was an important page in the mid 19th century history of the Western Regions. Pan Zhiping presents a wide ranging investigation of the Kokhand in his *Central Asian Kokhand and the Xinjiang of the Qing Dynasty* (China Social Sciences Publishing House, 1991). Zuo Zongtang, the eminent general who led the triumphant war against the Kokhand, is the subject of *Zuo Zongtang and Xinjiang* (Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1983) by Du Jingguo. The Russian invasion of the area is dealt with in the following: *A History of the Tsarist Russian Invasion and Expansion* (People’s Publishing House, 1979) by the History Department of Beijing University, *The Tsarist Russian Invasion of the Northwest Frontiers of China* (People’s Publishing House, 1979) edited by Guo Shengwu, and the third volume of *The History of the Tsarist Russian Invasion* (People’s Publishing House, 1981).

In comparison to research on specific topics, research on general history appears rather bleak. The first volume of *A Brief History of Xinjiang* (Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1980) by the Xinjiang
Institute of Ethnology devoted some, but not nearly enough, space to the ancient history of the region. Only the first volume of Wang Zhilai’s *A History of Central Asia* has been published (China Social Sciences Publishing House, 1980), but the scope of this work, from the primitive age to the Arabic invasion, appears richer than the previously mentioned work. Wang later published *An Outline History of Central Asia* (Hunan Education Publishing House, 1986) and *The Modern History of Central Asia from the 16th to the 19th Century* (University of Lanzhou Press, 1989). Xiang Yingjie’s *Central Asia: Culture on Horseback* (Zhejiang People’s Publishing House, 1993) focuses on the cultural aspect of these nomadic peoples. *A General History of the Western Regions* (Zhongzhou Ancient Documents Publishing House, 1996), with Yu Taishan as the chief editor, is the best general history by a group I have read so far. Yu is also the editor of *A Cultural History of the Western Regions* (China Friendship Publishing House, 1995), which can be read as the companion volume to the former.

Since the history of the Western Regions is a discipline of international dimensions, some essays by Chinese scholars have made their way into Western scholarly journals. As far as my limited reading goes, the scholars that have written for foreign journals include Geng Shimin (*Turcica*, XIII, 1981; *ZDMG*, 137. 1, 1987; *ZDMG*, 139. 2, 1989; *Central Asiatic Journal*, 35. 3-4, 1991), Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang (*Contributions aux etudes de Touen-houang*, 3, Paris, 1984; *Cahiers d’Extreme-Asie*, 3, 1987), Ma Yong (*Journal of Central Asia*, VIII. 1, 1985; *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan, Reports and Studies*, 1, Mainz, 1989), Liu Yingsheng (*Central Asiatic Journal*, 33. 1-2, 1989), Lin Meicun (*BSOAS*, LIII. 2, 1990), Rong Xinjiang (*Monumenta Serica*, 39, 1990-91), Lin Wushu (*Zentralasiatische Studien*, 23, 1992-93), Hua Tao (*Journal of Asian History*, 27. 2, 1993), Niu Ruji (*Journal Asiatique*, 282. 1, 1994), Xu Wenkan (*The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 23. 3-4, 1995), and Chao Huashan (*Monumenta Serica*, 44, 1996). In addition, the first three volumes of the UNESCO-sponsored *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia* include chapters written by Chinese scholars, including Lu Zun’e, An Zhimin, Ma Yong, Wang Binghua, Sun Yutang, Zhang Guangda, Mu Shunying and Wang Yao; Zhang Guangda also served as one of the two chief editors of the third volume. This indicates the fact that research by Chinese scholars has attracted attention from their international colleagues.

In short, research on the history of the Western Regions made tremendous progress from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s. Research is being conducted in every sub-area, and goes deeper into certain issues than ever before, for example, the racial characteristics of the ancient inhabitants of the Western Regions, the history of the Gaochang kingdom, Sogdian settlements in the area, the four garrisons of Anxi, and the khanates of Chaghanai and Yarkand. New topics are being
approached, such as the Saka, the Tocharians and the Hephthalites from an archaeological perspective. New archaeological discoveries and the development of related disciplines such as Dunhuang studies have all given an added impetus to research on the history of the Western Regions. Increasing exchanges with the international community of scholars have also helped to accelerate China's absorption of the results of overseas scholars' studies.

VI

The narrow definition of the Western Regions is both good and bad for Chinese students of its history. On the one hand, they can quickly and easily make use of the abundant references in Chinese literature and new archaeological discoveries made within this area. On the other hand, Chinese scholars appear out of place when standing outside the area. For example, we cannot compete with our Western colleagues in terms of research on the Kushan dynasty, which played a major role in Central Asiatic history. We are not even at the point of fully assimilating their achievements.

Familiarity with Chinese information is responsible for Chinese achievements in certain sub-areas of the history of the Western Regions. The younger generation of Western and Japanese Sinologists do not have the same Chinese language skills as their predecessors such as Pelliot. We need to take advantage of this, but also to be aware of the importance of non-Chinese sources in many sub-areas of the history of the Western Regions. Most contemporary Chinese scholars in the area know a couple of modern foreign languages, but few can read, as Chen Yinque did, the ancient languages of the area. Of course, the accumulation of information written in each language no longer anticipates the appearance of multilingual scholars like Pelliot and Chen. But in comparison with Europe, North America and Japan, China lacks scholars who can skillfully use information written in various ancient Central Asian languages.

Increasing international scholarly exchanges have made it possible for Chinese scholars to know what their foreign colleagues have done. Their visits to academic centers abroad and discussions with their hosts have encouraged local research on the history of the Western Regions. However, one problem is that there are too many scholars working on the history of the Western Regions in China, including those without adequate academic qualifications. We hear now and then that some of them have plagiarized the results of their foreign colleagues' research. Even accomplished scholars are sometimes involved in this or that scandal, either due to their academic negligence, or because editors of their essays remove their notes or references acknowledging other scholars' work. Strict scholarly guidelines are therefore essential for
sound development in this area, and for the expansion of international exchanges.

The endless discovery of archaeological information provides a forceful impetus for research on the history of the Western Regions. Since Chinese literature contains clear records of the history of the pre-Islamic period, a greater number of scholars have chosen to study this period rather than that following it. There has been some change recently, but not enough. We need more historians of the Islamic period and later, not just for the full development of the area, but for the service the discipline could offer for contemporary China’s social and economic goals.

—Translated by Lin Yi
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Revised by Su Xuetao