

# India and the SCO: Bound by Buddhism

by **Sifra Lentin**, Fellow, Bombay History Studies Programme





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Paper No. 25 | November 2020







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Printed in India by Airolite Printers

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*In November this year, India will be hosting the Shanghai Cooperation Council (SCO) exhibition “Shared Buddhist Heritage” to coincide with the SCO Council of Heads of Government Meeting and two Ministerial Level Meetings. This paper recommends a theme on India’s Buddhist legacy in the SCO, which ties together three important Buddhist historical narratives (based on archaeological evidence), that can add heft to India’s leadership in reviving people-to-people ties through Buddhism amongst the eight member nations*

The Shanghai Cooperation Council’s (SCO) member countries – India, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan – are bound together by Buddhism’s two-millennia-old religious and cultural legacy. In China, India and Russia, Buddhists make up a significant minority of the population (See Appendix 1<sup>1</sup>). Even among the Muslim majority Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Pakistan, there is a residual Buddhist presence and a strong cultural legacy through the influence of the Graeco-Buddhist<sup>2</sup> Gandhara School of Art on the artistic traditions and architecture in these regions.

The history of this living religious and cultural legacy, when combined with Buddhism’s outsized archaeological imprint in the SCO region, is seen in the hundreds of monastic grottoes, stupas, and temples. Many of these are UNESCO world heritage sites and make both the contemporary and archaeological, together, a compelling narrative for India’s soft diplomacy outreach in the SCO.

The Buddhist temple in Elista, the capital city of the Republic of Kalmykia, Russia, is considered the largest Buddhist temple in Europe. The present culture of Kalmykia is closely connected with that of the Kalmyk people – the only people in Europe traditionally professing Buddhism.



This can work because of India's centrality to Buddhist history in the numerous oasis towns and fortified cities that mark the ancient Eurasian caravan trade routes — also known as the Old Silk Route. India's importance lies not just in it being the Buddhist Holy Land *but in its role of introducing Buddhism across the region of the SCO and then continuously disseminating new ideas into this network* for circulation, assimilation and, at times, transformation.

An outstanding example of this process is the spread of Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism (based on the concept of 'mindfulness' or Dhyana) founded in India, which became the foundation for Chan (Chinese), Zen (Japanese) and Tibetan Buddhism. In turn it is largely Tibetan Buddhism that travelled into Russian provinces bordering Mongolia<sup>3</sup> – Buryatia, Zabaykalsky Krai and Tuva — and the only European region where Buddhism is practiced by a majority of people, Russia's Republic of Kalmykia.<sup>4</sup> Often, it is the reframing of original Indian beliefs and knowledge into locally acceptable idioms that popularised Indian Buddhist beliefs abroad. This ability of the Buddhist faith to assimilate foreign cultural influences and local beliefs was enabled by the development of Mahayana Buddhism – a school of Buddhism that contrasted sharply with the older, austere Hinayana one. It also permitted representation of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas<sup>5</sup> in human form. The early development of Mahayana Buddhism in the 1st century CE coincided with the flowering of the Gandhara and the Mathura schools of art in the Indian subcontinent, under the patronage of the great Kushan king, Kanishka. It was Mahayana Buddhism that spread across the SCO region.

### Ruins of the ancient Buddhist University of Nalanda in Bihar state, India



India's influence in this region is, therefore, visible everywhere. It is visible on the gravestones of numerous Indian monks<sup>6</sup> who dedicated themselves to the development of Buddhist institutions in Central and East Asia. It is visible in the popular Indian Buddhist iconography – the Jataka tales and the Avadana or cause-effect stories that dominate Buddhist art – across its religious sites. It is manifest in the vast influence of the world-renowned Buddhist University<sup>7</sup> – Nalanda – which was active from the 5th to 13th century and hosted the famous Chinese monks Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) and Yijin (I-Tsing), among many other foreign students.

Given this vast, complex, and nuanced historical, geographical, multi-ethnic, and cultural canvas of Buddhism in the SCO region, India's soft diplomacy outreach through the "Shared Buddhist Heritage" virtual exhibition in November should focus on three connected narratives:

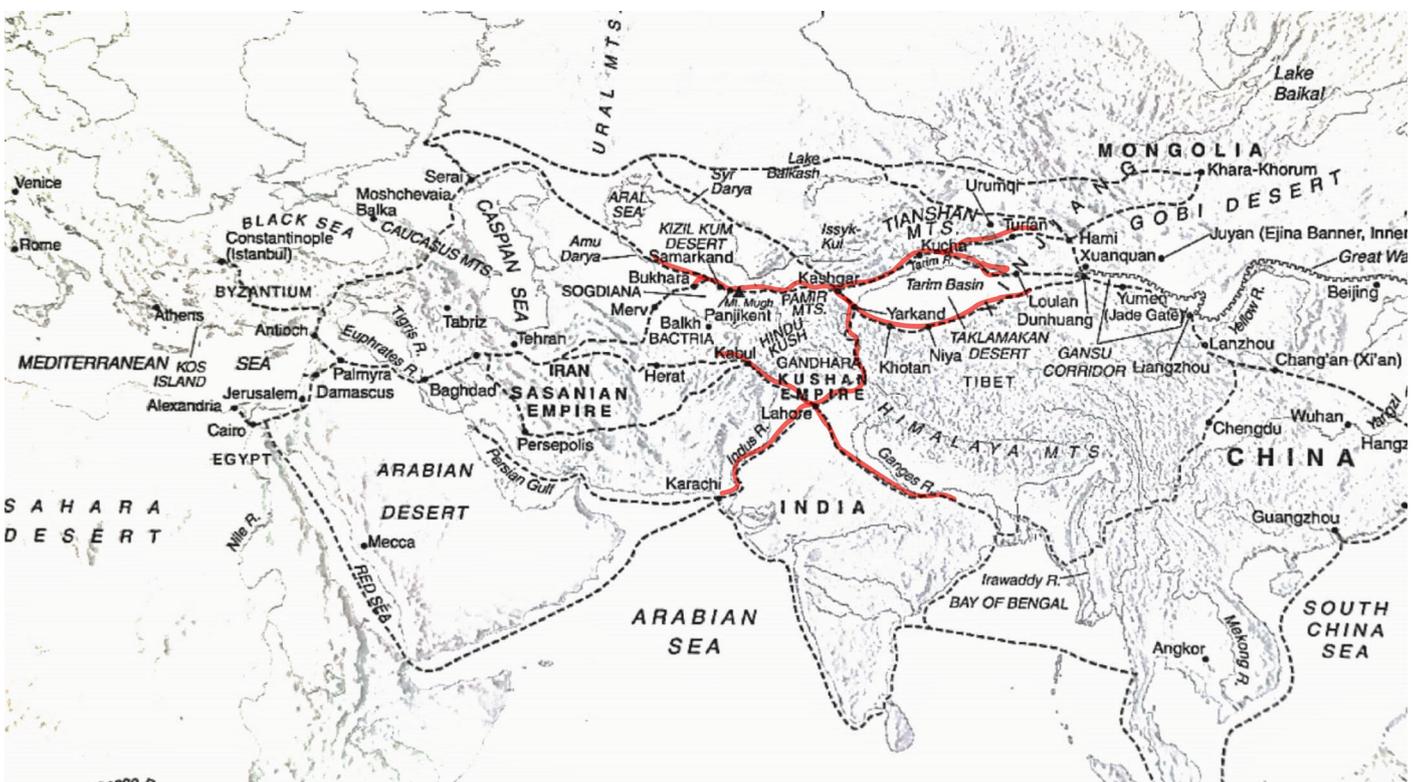
1. The circulation of Indian Buddhist religious and cultural knowledge through Buddhist Kingdoms, oasis polities, Buddhist monks, monasteries, and temples across SCO nations.
2. The transmission of secular technical knowledge from the Indian subcontinent – like traditional medicine (Indian Aayush), manufacturing and astro-sciences – into these countries through Buddhist channels.<sup>8</sup>
3. Tracing back Buddhism's living legacy and its archaeological sites across the SCO nations, to its roots in the Indian subcontinent. This will tie-up the narrative nicely to Buddhism's holy sites in India, all of which are part of the Indian government's Buddhist Circuit.<sup>9</sup>

# 1. Circulation

During the lifetime of the Buddha (sometime between 4 to 6 BCE), the religion that he founded was confined to the region of the eastern Gangetic plains, where it co-existed with Jainism and early Hinduism. This is where the core beliefs of the faith were enunciated by the Buddha.

Buddhist monks then were itinerant travelers, spreading their faith dutifully by ceaselessly moving from place to place. The actual work of writing down the Buddha's sermons (Sutras) by his disciples took place almost a century after the Buddha's death, and was contemporaneous with the early beginnings of monastic Buddhism in India.<sup>10</sup>

A detailed Map of the Eurasian trade routes during the 1st to 2nd century CE. The Kushan emperors controlled the key crossroads (central section) of the Eurasian trade roads as marked in red.



Map courtesy: Oxford University Press-Academic (UK/USA). Taken from Valerie Hansen's 'The Silk Road: A New History with Documents' (2017)

The story of Indian Buddhism in the SCO region begins in the first century CE<sup>11</sup> – a period that coincides with a vigorous intra-regional caravan trade<sup>12</sup> made possible by four powerful contemporaneous empires. One of these, the Kushan Empire in the Indian subcontinent under Emperor Kanishka (r. 78-101 CE)<sup>13</sup> controlled a strategic segment (see map) of the Eurasian caravan network – the southern and central Asian roads. Notably, his territories in Central Asia covered southern Uzbekistan (Termez is a key Buddhist site) and Tajikistan – regions crossed by the Amu Darya River – and continued

eastward to key oasis towns like Kashgar, Khotan, Yarkhand and Niya in today's Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. Kanishka's contemporaries in keeping the caravan routes secure were the Early Han in Inner China and the Parthian Empire (a Persian dynasty).<sup>14</sup> In the west, it was anchored by the ancient Roman Empire (1st to 4th CE). These empires also controlled smaller tributary polities along the routes ensuring the smooth transit of goods, making the first and second centuries CE the golden era of Eurasian trade.

Though active dissemination of Buddhism in the SCO region only began under Emperor Kanishka, it had already made an inroad into the former East Turkistan oasis town Khotan (see map) – deemed Indian in its early history – soon after or during the reign of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka (r. 269-232 BCE). A fact that is little known is<sup>15</sup> Khotan (in today's Xinjiang, China) was founded by Ashoka's son, and it was Ashoka's grandson who introduced Buddhism as a state religion in Khotan. Khotan even as late as the 7th century, was described by Xuangzang as a predominantly Indian settlement with a strong Buddhist presence.

Emperor Ashoka's reign was also a period of great development and consolidation of Buddhist teachings, its monastic codes and its folk tales. According to Historian Tansen Sen in his article 'The Travel Records of Chinese Pilgrims Faxian, Xuangzang, and Yijing', Buddhism first travelled into Central Asia sometime either during or after Mauryan Emperor Ashoka's reign, the first major historical figure to convert to Buddhism. It is acknowledged that not only did Ashoka send missionaries across his vast kingdom and abroad (Sri Lanka, South East Asia) to propagate his new faith, but that the Ashokan stone engraved edicts are also the earliest known Buddhist texts in the world.

These early forays by Indian Buddhism into Central Asia were given a major fillip during the rule of the Kushan Emperor Kanishka and his son Huvishka. Kanishka became an active and liberal patron of Buddhism in his kingdom. This is evident from the fact that he convened the fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir (part of his kingdom) to settle disputed questions of Buddhist faith and practice.

### Stupa at Fayaz Tepe Buddhist archaeological site in Termez, Uzbekistan.



The vigorous dissemination and popularity of Buddhism in Central Asia was effected through territorial expansion into this region by Kanishka. He established his suzerainty over small oasis kingdoms like Khotan, Kashgar and Yarkand – by leading his army over the Pamir mountains.<sup>16</sup> His control of this strategic crossroads between the Indian subcontinent, Central Asian kingdoms (Parthia, Bactria) and Han China, relayed Buddhism across – what is today – the SCO region.

## 2. Transmission

The caravan trade not only carried goods, merchants and emissaries, but also Indian, Central Asian and Chinese Buddhist monks and pilgrims. A sizeable number of these sojourners who settled down at their destinations or at monasteries mid-point, never returning home – were also carriers of knowledge of Indian medicine, astrology, astronomy and even manufacturing. This assumes importance as monasteries offered not just lodgings for travelers but also medical help much of it drawn from traditional Indian medicine (Ayurveda and Yoga).

Nanda the cowherd in a fresco from the Kizil Caves near Kucha. Kucha was the hometown of the famous monk-translator Kumarajiva and it is believed that some of the early frescoes in the Kizil Caves were painted by Kumarajiva's father.



### 2.1 Trade

By the time the first known Han envoy Zhang Qian (d.113 BCE) was sent on a mission into Central Asia<sup>17</sup> he discovered that Chinese cloth and bamboo were sold as far west in the markets of Samarkand and Bukhara (in today's Uzbekistan),<sup>18</sup> having made their way there via India (Shendu).<sup>19</sup>

Although Zhang Qian was sent on a subsequent mission into Central Asia by the Early Han Emperor Wu (r.140-87 BCE), his knowledge of Shendu and her people was gathered in the bazaars of Central Asian oasis towns. In these ancient times Central Asian bazaars and her merchants were the interface between South and East Asia. Indian trade with Central Asia was active. Parthians, Sogdians, merchants from Bactria, Yuezhi horse traders from the Fergana Valley (a region mainly in eastern Uzbekistan and partly in adjoining Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), and even Chinese merchants, all interacted with their Indian counterparts — like the Kashmiri traders from the Subcontinent's north — in Central Asian oasis towns.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.2 Art

Parallel to its dissemination into Central Asia in the 1st century CE, Indian Buddhism's artistic imprint through Gandharan Buddhist art was carried along the meandering networks of Eurasian trade. The Indian influence is evident everywhere – in the architecture and layout of the cave temples, the style of drawing and painting of *Jataka* and *Avadana* themed frescos, the rock cut sculptures, and even in the rituals used, like circumambulating around a *stupa*.<sup>21</sup> This is probably because most of these Buddhist institutions were founded and steered in their early years by Indian monks. This influence was particularly strong in towns that were once considered Indian culturally. Oasis kingdoms like Kucha – home to the exquisite Kizil Buddhist Caves – Niya, Agnidesa (Karashahr), Torpan (Gaochang) and Aksu (Bharuka), were all once part of East Turkistan, today China's Autonomous Region of Xinjiang.

A 9th C fresco showing a Caucasian Central Asian monk (left) teaching an East Asian monk (right). This fresco is from the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves near Turfan, Xinjiang, China.



## 2.3 Institutions

The development of Buddhist institutions in these oasis market towns resulted in many Central Asian and Chinese Buddhist monks opting to study at Kucha or at Khotan. The latter housed a famous Buddhist college or Vihara. Both towns already had a sizeable population of Indian Buddhist monks and teachers, so rather than undertaking the arduous journey into the Buddhist heartland in North India, they preferred studying closer to home. These Central Asian oasis polities helped transmit the Buddhist canon and its associated literature, into Inner China (broadly the Han Chinese homeland) in the 2nd century CE. Various Chinese dynasties adopted Buddhism – in addition to existing beliefs in Daoism, Confucianism and local folk beliefs. This kind of syncretism between Buddhism and other competing faiths (Zoroastrianism, Nestorian Christianity, Manichaeism) and local beliefs, is also evident in archaeological sites across the Central Asian republics (including the four SCO ones) till the advent of Islam in this region from the 9th century onwards.

## 2.4 Technology and more

The Indian technology of making crystallised sugar by boiling cane juice, was shared with monks accompanying a Tang mission to King Harsha's court, subsequent to Xuanzang's return to China in 644 CE.<sup>22</sup>

Other valuable secular knowledge transmitted through Buddhist monks into the SCO region and translated by Central Asian and Chinese monks were Indian treatises on medicine<sup>23</sup> – especially those of Jivaka and Nagarjuna, who wrote on ophthalmology -- astrology, astronomy, mathematics, and calendar-making

### 3. Living & Cultural Legacies

State support was key throughout Buddhism's history in popularising it both in India and across the SCO region. But even more critical to its acceptance abroad was the agency of teams of translators and charismatic Indian, Central Asian and Chinese Buddhist monks, who made its religious and secular knowledge accessible to king and commoner alike.

One way of tying together the three narratives of Circulation, Transmission and the Living & Cultural Legacies of Buddhism in the SCO region to its country of origin – India – is through the fascinating centuries-old history of translation of Buddhist texts from their original Sanskrit written in Brahmi and Pali scripts, into the Central Asian languages (like Khotanese) and Chinese.

The earliest translations of the Buddhist canon were undertaken by teams of Central Asian monks. Their works were full of inaccuracies. Therefore, the first truly popular – and still used – translations were those of the multi-lingual Kumarajiva<sup>24</sup> (344 to 413 CE), a native of the oasis kingdom of Kucha, whose parents hailed from Gandhara (today in north western Pakistan). Kumarajiva was not only a polyglot but also steeped in the knowledge of the Hindu Vedas, occult sciences, astronomy, and the canons of both branches of Buddhism – Hinayana and Mahayana. Kucha then had a strong South Asian presence and influence. Kumarajiva was summoned to the Chinese Court in 401 CE, expressly for the purpose of translating Buddhist manuscripts from their original Sanskrit into Chinese, including the famous Lotus Sutra. His success in translating 300 manuscripts (with his team) effectively opened the doors of China to Buddhist teachings.

Kumarajiva's efforts were taken forward two centuries later, when the Chinese monk Xuanzang travelled to India – from 629-644 CE -- using the overland Central Asian route. The purpose of Xuanzang's pilgrimage, was to study Sanskrit to translate Buddhism's original manuscripts into Chinese, especially its monastic rules. Xuanzang studied at the ancient Nalanda Buddhist University in India for eleven years, and on his return home carried back with him 657 Buddhist texts, which he and his team of scholars meticulously translated into Chinese.<sup>25</sup> Notably, Xuanzang was a self-appointed monk-diplomat who had not been permitted to leave China. He reasoned that if he could meet with important rulers enroute and report back to the Tang Emperor Taizong (r. 626-649 CE) when he returned, he would be forgiven. The most important bilateral relation he established for the Tang court was with King Harsha's (r. 606-647 CE) kingdom in the northern Gangetic plains.<sup>26</sup>

## 4. Recommendations

As the most influential years of Buddhism in the SCO region were undoubtedly the 1st to the 7th centuries (Kanishka's empire to King Harsha's kingdom) the focus of the forthcoming Shared Buddhist Heritage Exhibition should only be on these seven hundred years. This should be done by tracing back to the Indian subcontinent the Circulations, Transformations and ways in which Indian Buddhist beliefs and even secular knowledge were assimilated. The idea of common cultural roots between peoples from these eight nations should be the bedrock of any future planned institutions, like the proposed SCO University.

In developing this idea of a Shared Buddhist Heritage further, some concrete suggestions are:

- Exchanges on traditional Indian Aayush, which is of great interest to the CARs.
- Student exchanges for the study of Sanskrit and its ancient scripts; research on the history and practice of ancient Buddhist art, architecture and religion; the study of traditional medicine and science; classical literature and the art of translation. The nodal agency for this could be the new Nalanda University.
- Greater awareness and pride among the predominantly Muslim locals in the CAR member nations, in the archaeological and cultural legacy of Buddhism in their region (like the restoration of the Fayaz Tepe Buddhist monastery in Termez, Uzbekistan) bodes well for India's soft diplomacy outreach. This can be leveraged by a combination of project finance and knowledge inputs – like historians, archaeologists, project managers, conservationists and curators for on-site museums.
- A focus on Buddhist tourism by developing a narrative of linkages as suggested in this paper.

## Endnotes

### 1. Appendix 1: Buddhist Population in the seven SCO member countries

COUNTRY	POPULATION
India	9.75 million approx..
Pakistan	20,000 approx.
Russia	1.5 million approx..
Uzbekistan	27,780
Tajikistan	7,076
Kyrgystan	18,610
Kazakhstan	81,843
China	244 million approx..

Source: Pews Research & Worldpopulationreview.com

- The term Graeco-Buddhist is used to describe the Gandhara School of Art to highlight the strong Hellenistic artistic style that was used on Buddhist subjects, whether in paintings or rock sculptures. It was this style that traversed and was modified by local artistic traditions in the SCO region. The Graeco-Buddhist also had elements of Indian and Persian influences. In terms of periodization, its artists drew inspiration from the art of Roman Empire in Asia Minor, which had its roots in classical Greek art. Contemporaneous to the Gandhara School was the equally important Mathura School of art, which was also patronised by Kushan emperors, in particular Kanishka and Huvishka. Mathura was territorially within the Kushan Empire.
- Buddhism first entered Russia in the 7th CE through its easternmost region – the Kingdom of Balhae that existed from 698 to 926 CE. It spread into adjoining regions of Russia that are geographically and culturally adjacent to Mongolia and inhabited by Mongolian ethnic groups. Buddhism reached this region through China. In the case of Kalmykia, it came through Kazakhstan.
- The Kalmyks took their religion – Buddhism—with them when they left the eastern and south eastern regions of Kazakhstan. They formed the Republic of Kalmykia on the Caspian Sea, the only European region in the world where the majority of the population (about 95%) are Buddhists.
- In early Indian Buddhism and in some later traditions—including Theravada, at present the major form of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and other parts of Southeast Asia—the term bodhisattva was used primarily to refer to the Buddha Shakyamuni (as Gautama Siddhartha is known) in his former lives. The stories of his lives, the Jatakas, portray the efforts of the bodhisattva to cultivate the qualities, including morality, self-sacrifice, and wisdom, which will define him as a buddha. Later, and especially in the Mahayana tradition—the major form of Buddhism in Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan—it was thought that anyone who made the aspiration to awakening (bodhicittotpada)—vowing, often in a communal ritual context, to become a buddha—is therefore a bodhisattva. For more details:<https://www.britannica.com/topic/bodhisattva>
- Most Buddhist temples and monasteries have gravestones within or close to the Complex, like that of Huili, the Indian monk who founded the famous Lingyin Buddhist monastic and temple complex in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China. Huili's grave lies at the entry gate of this famous temple-monastic complex, indicating that Indian monks, who were priests or religious scholars had settled there and made important contributions to the development of Buddhism in the region.

7. The Government of India's Ministry of Tourism, state governments of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, along with the private sector and various Buddhist monasteries and sects participated in an International Finance Corporation (World Bank) project report (2014-2018) on the holistic development of the Buddhist Circuit. The key highlights of the Circuit are: Lumbini in Nepal (Buddha's birthplace), Bodhgaya in Bihar (where he attained enlightenment), Sarnath in UP (delivered his first sermon), Nalanda and Rajgir (where he lived and taught), Kushinagar in UP (where he died), Kapilavastu on the Indo-Nepal border (early years), Vaishali in Bihar (where the Buddha delivered his last lecture), Sravasti in UP (where Buddha spent 24 rainy seasons at the Jetavan monastery), and Kausambi in UP (where he lived and preached). See <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/2bdd4697-6d7f-4f78-bca0-269aa100b25a/Buddhist+Circuit+Tourism+Strategy+Final.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=kC1uny1>
8. When referring to ancient India one is referring to the geographical region of the Indian subcontinent (which includes Pakistan a member nation of the SCO). Also, the ongoing Chinese attempt to Sinicize the Buddhist narrative not just in the Maritime Belt & Road Initiative countries – like Sri Lanka-- but also in Himalayan border monasteries in the Indian Union Territory of Leh and the State of Arunachal Pradesh (see <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/china-targets-indias-ladakh/>) does not take away from the fact that India was the lodestone for all things Buddhist from the first till the 12th century CE. Himalayan Buddhism took root among the various tribes of this region from the 7th century CE, and the transmission was from the Subcontinent.
9. The IRCTC runs special 'Buddhist Circuit' trains for tourists and Buddhist pilgrims. See endnote (iii) above.
10. The Code of Conduct for a monastic life – one of the three Tripikas (Baskets) of the Buddhist religion -- is important, as the two most famous Chinese Buddhist monks who travelled to India by the overland route through Central Asia – Faxian (tr. 395 to 414 CE) and Xuanzang (tr. 629 to 644 CE) -- wanted to carry home not just original manuscripts of Buddhist Sutras but authentic monastic rules, which they could translate into Chinese. This was to dispense with earlier Central Asian translations that had then been translated to Chinese and were discovered to be inaccurate. This indicates the importance of Central Asia to the transmission of Buddhism.
11. The abbreviation CE stands for Common Era and BCE is Before the Common Era.
12. For a more details on the old land-based caravan routes read Gateway House article <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/interweaving-the-old-cotton-and-silk-routes/>
13. The dating of the Kushan kings has not been determined. The year 78 CE is taken as the first year of Kanishka's reign as the Shaka Era is believed to begin with the first year of his reign BUT it is speculated that he could have ascended the throne anytime between 78 and 144 CE. See: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kaniska>
14. Ancient Parthia is the territory lying south east of the Caspian Sea. It was founded about 248 BCE by Arsakes – hence known as the Arsakidian dynasty of Persia – and lasted till 226 CE, when it was overthrown by the Sassanian dynasty. The Kingdoms of Parthia and Bactria broke away at about the same time from the Hellenistic Seleukidian Empire, founded by Nikator Seleukos.
15. According to tradition, Emperor Ashoka's son founded the oasis kingdom of Khotan (in today's Xinjiang Province in China), and whose grandson made Buddhism Khotan's state religion. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Buddhism/Central-Asia-and-China#ref888583> (Accessed on 10 August 2020). Also, Tansen Sen, *The Travel Records of Chinese Pilgrims Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing: Sources for cross-cultural encounters between ancient China and ancient India*, Volume 11 No.3, Education About Asia, Winter 2006, p.26.

16. Spear Percival, Edited, *The Oxford History of India: By The Late Vincent A. Smith* ( Delhi, OUP, 1981), p. 149.
17. Zhang Qian was sent by the Early Han Emperor Wu to win the support of the Yuezhi tribes of the Fergana Valley (in modern day Uzbekistan) against its enemy -- the northern Xiongnu. Zhang Xian's missions to Central Asia are celebrated by China by making him a narrative figure central to all Silk Route tourist sites developed by them.
18. Samarkand and Bukhara then were oasis towns in ancient Bactria, a kingdom that approximates to northern Afghanistan and southern Uzbekistan.
19. This is the first ever reference to India and the north east route, which connects Early Han China (206 BCE to 220 CE) with North India (specifically the eastern Indo Gangetic plains) through today's Yunnan and Sichuan provinces. It is noteworthy that this region was where Buddhism thrived in India.
20. At the Museum in Niya (once an oasis town on the southern bifurcation of the Silk Route around the Taklamakan Desert) are displayed archaeological finds of preserved Chinese dumplings and the North Indian flatbread Naan. Hansen, Valerie, *The Silk Road: A New History with Documents* (New York, OUP-Academic,2017), p.9.
21. Circumambulating around a Buddhist stupa, whether in a Chaitya hall or an external one has its roots in India. This ritual is also common to Hinduism. Sen, Tansen, *India, China and the World: A Connected History* (USA, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), p. 99.
22. This transmission of sugar-making from South Asia to Tang China is noted in a document in the Silk Route town of Dunhuang, which also suggests that the knowledge gained had an impact on sugarcane cultivation in China.
23. During the powerful Tang and Sui dynasties, Indian physicians (longevity drugs were in great demand!), mathematician-astronomers to predict the lunar and solar eclipse, astrologers, calendar-makers, were procured from India and employed by the royal courts. An influential figure who served several Tang rulers was the South Asian Tantric monk Amoghavajra, an astrologer, a translator of Sanskrit works and the author of several books on horoscopic astrology. For more information: Sen, Tansen, *India, China and the World: A Connected History*(USA, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), pp 82-89.
24. Kumarajiva was an unusually talented linguist with a command over not just Sanskrit, Chinese and the local Kuchean, but a range of Silk Route languages ranging from Kharosthi, Gandhari, Sogdian to Agnean. Hansen, Valerie, *The Silk Road: A New History with Documents* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017), pp 94-95.
25. Today, these manuscripts are stored at the Great Wild Goose Pagoda in Xian, which was expressly built for this purpose by the Tang Emperor. Tansen Sen, *The Travel Records of Chinese Pilgrims Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing: Sources for cross-cultural encounters between ancient China and ancient India*, Volume 11 No.3, *Education About Asia*, Winter 2006, p.29.
26. The Chinese monk Xuanzang also penned a detailed travelogue of all the towns he visited along the Silk Route, while on his way to the Indian Subcontinent. His 'The Records of the Western Regions' is even today a source book for historians and archaeologists.

